Agency of Women in Mesopotamian Religion of the Second Millennium BC

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I. INTRODUCTION

I.1 AIM OF THE STUDY

I this dissertation I will try to explore and analyze women's religious agency in ancient Mesopotamian religion, how it influenced the status of women inside the society they lived in and to answer a main question: is there a relation of interdependency between the visibility of women in the epoch's written sources, religious involvement and the power and prestige certain women achieved? Trying to answer this main question I will use *religion* and *agency* as tools for studying women history and, to my knowledge, there is no other similar attempt focusing on women from all the social strata in second millennium Mesopotamia. Considering the long period under survey, the variety of sources, and the fact that the subject itself appears to be an intriguing one, my approach will be an interdisciplinary one, combining specific concepts from the field of religious studies with those coming from women and gender studies areas, such as patriarchy and kyriarchy, all of them passing through the filter of *agency*.

The sources under analysis, conventionally classified as letters, laws, ritual and cultic texts, prophetic texts, magic and medical texts, incantations, prayers and hymns, provide an interesting insight into second millennium religion in Mesopotamia. Although the amount of data is very rich, it is not an easy task to depict women's role in the realm of religion, their relation with the gods and their cult, their ritual gestures. Besides the main topic already stated, this thesis will develop around some fundamental questions:

1. *Which were the religious actions or gestures that women were able to perform?*

2. *Are there specific religious prerogatives that only women are supposed to perform and if so, what are the privileges they acquired after performing their tasks?*

3. *Are wealth and noble birth factors that facilitate religious agency?*

4. Is it possible for non-aristocratic women to be actively involved in the religious life? If so, what are the consequences of their agency and how was their involvement received by society?

5. Is female religious agency a constant in second millennium Mesopotamia or are there variations and trends specific for certain times and regions?

Considering the above topics I believe that my first task and perhaps the most difficult one will be to identify those documents that mention women in cultic or cultic related contexts. Nonetheless, my thesis will not focus on a philological analysis of the texts and their translation, but more on the relation between the content of the text and the wider socio-cultural context that produced them.

Ancient Mesopotamians appreciated distinguished human qualities and respected their deities hoping for a good and long life. Perhaps, the best description of the how man should behave in relation with the gods and his fellow citizen is offered by the Poem of the Righteous Sufferer (*Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*), even though we must eliminate the negative stance used by the plaintiff:

12 Like one who has not made libations to his god,

13 Nor invoked his goddess at table,

14 Does not engage in prostration, nor takes cognizance of bowing down;

15 From whose mouth supplication and prayer is lacking,

16 Who has done nothing on holy days, and despised sabbaths,

17 Who in his negligence has despised the gods' rites,

18 Has not taught his people reverence and worship,

19 But has eaten his food without invoking his god,

20 And abandoned his goddess by not bringing a flour offering,

21 Like one who has grown torpid and forgotten his lord,

22 Has frivolously sworn a solemn oath by his god,

(like such an one) do I appear.

23 For myself, I gave attention to supplication and prayer:

24 To me prayer was discretion, sacrifice my rule.

25 The day for reverencing the god was a joy to my heart;

26 The day of the goddess's procession was profit and gain to me.[1]

The question to be discussed further in this thesis is whether all those virtues and cultic involvement were required for both men and women?

Law codes reveal that the social behavior of women was strictly regulated and women seemed to be included in the following legal categories: daughter, wife, widow and single woman, categories also reflected in literary and wisdom literature. In a hymn, the goddess Gula describes three stages/roles of a woman's life: "*I am a daughter, I am a spouse, I am a housekeeper*."[2]

I distinguish between widow and single woman because there is a matter of choice considering that under the last category we encounter women that practice a profession that required them not to marry.

Mesopotamian women status changed through time and geographical area. Second millennium codes which deal with this subject such as The Laws of Ešnunna, Hammurabi Code and Middle Assyrian Laws, reveal some of those changes in women's status. A close study of such texts uncover how gradually men's superior legal and social status was created and consolidated over time taking into consideration specific social, and geo-political situations and it would be interesting to see whether the involvement of women in the cultic life followed the same trend. The most complete of the three, Codex Hammurabi and tablet A from the Middle Assyrian Corpus are a solid base for the analysis of continuity, change, or

[1] W.G Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1960, p.39

[2] M. Stol, " *Private life in Ancient Mesopotamia*" in CANE, vol.3, ed.by J.Sasson, Charles Scribner and Sons, New York, !995, p.486

transformation of women's legal status[3], and the situation seems to be paralleled in other type of sources.

In the Old Babylonian period, under Hammurabi a woman could divorce her husbands, but not without putting her own life on the line. She had to proof her behavior was beyond doubt in order to receive this right and also men could not divorce without a solid ground and heavy pecuniary punishment:

> *"If a woman repudiates her husband, and declares, "You will not have marital relations with me"-her circumstances shall be investigated by the authorities her city quarter, and if she is circumspect and without fault, but her husband is wayward and disparages her greatly, that woman will not be subject to any penalty; she shall take her dowry and she shall depart for her father's house"*[4]

Women could inherit property, but they could only manage their entitlement, like the dowry and the *nudunnu.* Furthermore, women needed a written contract in order to be able to inherit a share of the paternal estate.[5] The priestesses of the time experienced autonomy similar to men, but their small numbers compared to the vast numbers of regular women render *nadītu* and the like, an exception[6]. Women's situation in Middle Assyrian society requires a mere adjective to describe it: "oppressive."[7] The laws of Tiglath-pileser I sanctioned a harsher regime than the one experienced by women during the Old Babylonian period. A woman was not allowed to ask for divorce and had to endure any punishment her husband decided she deserved. On the other hand, the man could divorce without any serious motive without any consequences: *"If a man intends to divorce his wife, if it is his wish, he*

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[3] Judith M. Bennett, "Theoretical Issues: Confronting Continuity," in *Journal of Women's History*, Volume 9 (1997),pp. 73-94 In this essay, using the framework of European history, she suggests a critical distinction between change in women's experiences and transformation in women's status. She argues that although women have experienced "change" throughout their historical experience, their status has rarely "transformed" (p 74)

[4] CH 142

[5] CH 150

[6] CH 144-146, 178-182

[7] Beth Troy, A Study of Women's Legal Status in the Ancient Near East, p. 52 www.ohiolink.edu

shall give her something; if that is not his wish, he shall not give her anything, and she shall leave empty-handed."[8]

Furthermore, in Assyria the levirated law was institutionalized. If the eldest son dies, the father in law has the right to marry the woman with another of his sons. Neither the second son, his fiancée, nor his older brother's wife have any control over the marriage arrangements in this instance. The authority solely rests on the son's father. The people of Middle Assyria obviously respected this custom, since the father of the groom can break the pre-existing betrothal without much financial loss to himself, unlike the Babylonian case when he was submitted to a pecuniary punishment for broking the engagement.

After the law codes were published a large variety of studies referring to the social and family status of women saw daylight.[9] The access to the main juridical sources facilitates the study of female behavior and position in the ancient Near East and offer us a clear image about what a women should do, and what a women was required to avoid.

Generally texts indicate that women had freedom of movement, and the ability to buy and sell, attend to legal matters for their absent men, own their own property, borrow and lend, and engage in business for themselves. The corpus of letters that belongs to the merchants of Kaniš present Assyrian women highly involved in economic life, able to make their own decisions, hardworking ladies that were demanding their pecuniary rights and run

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[8] MAL 37

[9] Nemet-Nejat, Karen Rhea,"Women in Ancient Mesopotamia." In *Women's Roles in Ancient Civlizations: A Reference Guide*, edited by Bella Vivante, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999, pp.85-106; Joan Goodnick Westenholz, "Towards a New Conceptualization of the Female Role in Mesopotamian Society" in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 110, No. 3 , Jul. - Sep., 1990, pp. 510-521; Claudio Saporetti, *The Status Sf Women In The Middle Assyrian Period*, Monographs On The Ancient Near East Volume 2, Fascicle I, 1979; J. N. Postgate, "On Some Assyrian Ladies" in Iraq, Vol. 41, No. 2 Autumn, 1979, pp. 89-103;, Cooper, S.Jerrold, *Virginity in Ancient Mesopotamia*, www.jhu.edu; J.J, Finkelstein, "Sex Offenses in Sumerian Law" in J*AOS*, vol.86, no.4, Oct.-Dec, 1966; Sophie Lafont, *Inheritance Law of and through Women in the Middle Assyrian Period*, www.zeus.chsdc.org; Mathews H.Victor, *Marriage and Family in Ancient Near East*, www.ivepress.com; Marten Stol, *Women in Mesopotamia*, www.learning.sec.hccs.edu; Vittoria Maria Tonietti, *< O stabilito mia moglie padre i madre della mia casa>.Invechiamento e diritti delle donne nell'Antica Mesopotamia*, ejour-fup.unifi.it

their own business. Although they were legally dependent on their husbands, fathers or brothers they did enjoy a certain level of freedom and authority of their own.

High status women, such as priestesses and members of royal families had considerable administrative authority with their own seals (such as that of Tara'am Agade, daughter of Naram-Sim found at Urkeš where she married with the local king[10]) and employees. Sargon appointed his capable and charismatic daughter Enheduanna in the office of high-priestess of the temple of Moon-God in the city of Ur. She is the first known woman poet in history and her poems were widely copied and circulated throughout the kingdom. Her high status was well illustrated by her votary disc depicting her taller than the other characters pointing out her prestige and the important role she played in the public sphere. The practice of appointing royal priestesses to manage major temples was followed for hundreds of years after Sargon and existed in the Sumerian period as well. Such women normally remained unmarried. Mari letters and the administrative documents from the temples archives reveal some similar cases of daughters or sisters of kings appointed as priestesses in some important religious centers.

Those women not only played an important role in religious ceremonial but they were constantly present in economic life being considered true business women, concerned with land and property selling and renting but also highly involved in temple industry activities.The official reports from Lagash and Nippur as well as the temple records from other religious centers (mainly Sippar) include certain information concerning the life, work and interests of those particular ladies.

Prophet women held a high status and enjoyed great prestige in Ancient Mesopotamia acting as mediators between the Gods and the human world, although they did not have direct access to power. Mari letters reveal the role those ladies played when the king had to take important decisions about the state and how their messages and interpretations influenced political issues.

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[10] Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati," Tar'am-Agade, Daughter of Naram-Sin, at Urkesh" http://www.urkesh.org/EL-MZ/Buccellati_and_Kelly-Buccellati_2002_Taram_Agade_Daughter_-_MDOG_133.pdf

Queens and their activity are well attested in the archive documents excavated from Mari and Drehem, from the last centuries of the third millennium and the first half of the second. Šibtu, wife of Zimri-Lim and queen of Mari, was one of her husband's main collaborators. A rich correspondence shows that she is the one that supervises officials (both men and women) in the king's absence. She is also entrusted with the palace management and cultic activities but also with keeping in touch and solving, if possible the problems and requests sent by local governors. Prior to her ascension to power, and perhaps even after, Addu-duri, the mother of the king was the one in charge with all the above activities. Earlier, in the time of Ur III Dynasty, the Drehem archive was recording incoming and outgoing goods associated with the activities coordinated by the queen Šulgi-simti, one of the wives of king Šulgi.

Other royal women had their own independent administration and functioned as priestesses, diviners and prophetesses. Political marriages were important and in one occasion King Zimri-Lim married his daughter Kirum to a local ruler Ḫaya-sumu and at the same time appointed her as the mayor of her husband's city. A certain change in the royal women status is observed in the Middle Assyrian Palace Decrees that consist in a number of rules concerning the behavior of the ladies living in the inner quarters of the palace and the women officials working there. Their freedom is not restricted but is highly supervised. Those rules seem to follow the descendent trend of female action in public area encountered also in the Middle Assyrian laws.

In my survey I will try to identify the cultic involvement and the agency of those ladies in the realm of religion considering that they appeared to be very active in the social, economic or political sphere. I will also try to analyze the evolution of their status from the beginning to the end of the second millennium, with a few intrusions in the previous and the following periods for a better understanding of certain phenomena and their development.

I have chosen the second millennium B.C because this is not only a time with impressive textual documentation, but the collections are also of a large diversity and include impressive information about women, their status and agency in all the social and cultural aspects at all the social levels.

Second millennium B.C. Mesopotamia is also interesting from political and cultural point of view. The four centuries that followed the collapse of the third Dynasty of Ur were

one of the most impressive periods in Ancient Near Eastern history and perhaps one of the best documented ages (approx. 2003-1595). It was characterized by a great cohesion in spite of the absence of political unity. There were vast political constructions such as those created by Šamši-Adad and Hammurabi which did not survive their creators. In all capital cities of the period-Qatna, Aleppo, Mari, Babylon, Ešnunna, Larsa-the throne was occupied by an Amorite dynasty.

After the fall of the Old Babylonian Dynasty, this region was gradually submitted to the Kassite rule that lasted until 1158. The most important documents of this period are the Amarna Letters that bring us some sketchy information about the royal ladies. Assyria emerged on the international scene under Assur-uballit I (1366-1330) and continued to be a political factor in the region also in the next millennium.[11] This region is important because here originated the exceptional collection of Middle Assyrian Laws[12] and also the Palace Decrees that bring an insight into the life of women during the second half of second millennium Mesopotamia, considering that those two corpuses are the only consistent data concerning them, although they might not be especially revealing for an analysis centered on female agency in religion.

I.2 MATERIAL AND METHOD

Perhaps the most important problem with the material of this thesis is the varied and random nature of the sources that I had to use. They range from royal inscription compendia, to letters, cultic or ritual texts, incantation compendia, medical and legal texts, lexical lists[13], wisdom literature, dream or prophetic reports.

[11] I followed the description of second millennium Mesopotamia offered by Dominique Charpin in "The History of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Overview'' in *CANE*, pp. 812, 817-821

[12] The Middle Assyrian Laws, A, http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/doku.php?id=middle_assyrian_laws_a

[13] Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/index.html

For this study the most important corpus of royal inscriptions that I used was the fourth volume of *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Old Babylonian Period*, published by Douglas Frayne and also a couple of online inscription corpora[14] that offer clear information about the religious agency of royal women, high priestesses and other female cultic officials that might have held a position important enough for being recorded in this type of sources.

The epistolary corpora that I used include letters sent or received from women belonging to a variety of social classes and profession: queens, princesses, dowagers, priestesses, palace women, wife, sisters or daughters of a man. The most problematic corpus was *Altbabylonische Briefe* because, although it is an impressive collection that numbers until now 14 volumes of letters from collections all over the word, the documents are not organized considering different topics, and furthermore the collection does not have and index or a resume of the letters, making it difficult to use. All the others epistolary corpora, were easier to survey because they follow a certain topic or belong to the same archive. J.M. Durand, published *Archives épistolaires de Mari I/3* (the women correspondence is partly rendered according to different topics) and *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari*, tome III, both containing the feminine correspondence with transliterations, translation and commentaries, or just the last two of them. Concerning the Mari archive and other Old Babylonian texts, another important source is the online database Archibab: Babylonian Archives (20th-17th centuries B.C.) .[15] S.Dalley, C.B.F. Walker and J.D Hawkins edited the

[14] There are two online inscriptions corpora that helped me to compare the presence of women in inscriptions in general, and inscription with religious content in particular allowing me to observe the evolution of their visibility in the sources that relate to the upper strata of society:

Royal Inscriptions from the Kassite Period, CKST, http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/ckst/sux

The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Royal Inscriptions http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/etcsri/corpus

[15] The database was developed by Dominique Charpin and Antoine Jacquet. The current members of the project ARCHIBAB are Lucile Barberon, Dominique Charpin (dir.), Michaël Guichard, Antoine Jacquet, Lionel Marti, Hervé Reculeau, and Nele Ziegler, to which are added the regular collaborators Boris Alexandrov, Ilya Arkhipov, Marine Béranger, Rients de Boer, Baptiste Fiette, Firas Hammoush, Anne-Isabelle Langlois and Francesca Nebiolo. www.archibab.fr

Archive of queen Iltani of Karana, found at Tell Al-Rimah that consisted in an exchange of letters between the ruler and his wife, but also between the queen and various officials, a trait that is also well represented in the Mari archive. The third epistolary corpus is the one found in Anatolia and published by Cécile Michel under the title "*La correspondence des marchands assyriens de Kaniš au début du II*^{e} *millénaire avant J.C*". Unfortunately, this edition contains only translations and commentaries, although transliteration might have been useful for identifying female professionals.

Ritual texts, although we may have expected to be useful research tools for women's agency in religion and to reveal important information about the relation between the female official and the gods they serve, are more encrypted that we might have expected them to be. This situation might be a consequence of the fact that ritual texts were not descriptive like the literary works. They focus on gestures and sacrifices but do not give any clarification about why someone should do this or that during a ceremony, letting thus space for speculations. Even when the rituals are rendered with more specificity, such as the one of the sacred marriage, the role of the female participant is overlooked, the goddess being the main female character, so scholars still argue about the identity of the human embodiment of the divine lady.

The incantation compendia and medical texts bring to our attention the woman as victim of certain affliction, and her specific problems related to pregnancy and childbirth, but speak also about the knowledgeable women, that might be involved in healing, midwifery but, more often in illicit magical practices, the witch.[16] Wisdom literature offers scarce information about the proper conduit of women, although the male point of view is strongly represented in this type of sapiential works[17]. Even so, the image of women in this kind of sources is a dualistic one, presenting points of view both misogynistic and affectionate.[18]

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[16] T.Abusch, Daniel Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals*, 2011; Ross' translation of *"The Nine Tablets of the Ritual Maqlu*" http://enenuru.net/html/cuneiform_magic/maqluexpl.html; Robert D.Biggs, *SÀ.ZI.GA. Ancient Mesopotamian Potency Incantations*, J.J. Augustin Publisher, 1967; Erica Reiner, *Surpu*. A Collections of Sumerian and Akkadian incantations , Graz 1958,

[17] W.G Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1960

[18] Brigitte Lion," La notion de genre en assyriologie" in *Problèmes Du Genre En Grèce Ancienne*, ed by Violaine Sehillotre Cuchet and Nathalie Ernoul, Publications de la Sorbonne 2007, p.52

Last but not least, there are the prophetic and dream reports that were first published in a French edition by J.M Durand in Archives épistolaires de Mari I/3, and there is also an English edition edited by M.Nissinen "*Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*".

As I have stated before, my thesis will not focus on a philological analysis of the texts and their translation, because the vast majority of the documents revealing women in various contexts was already translated. Nonetheless, I would not exclude this type of approach if it serves to support my point of view or when it is used to differentiate between male and female activities or professions. I am more interested to survey the relation between the content of the text and the wider socio-cultural context that produced them and how the religious agency of women is reflected in various types of sources. For my texts analysis I would use an interdisciplinary approach using as axis for my study the two main concepts of religion and agency, supported from the background by the idea of patriarchy and kyriarchy, specific to the field of women and gender studies. At the same time I will use quantitative and comparative methods in order to identify the role of women in the religious environment and to establish the areas that were, in one way or another, dominated by the feminine population. Using statistical survey I will not only compare male and female activities, but also the evolution of female cultic agency in time and space during the second millennium B.C.

I.3 BACKGROUND

Even though gender studies ceased to be of a fringe interest among Assyrologist long, the agency of women in Mesopotamian religious is still not fully explored. The vast majority of the works that do approach this problem, tend to compare the religious life of Mesopotamian ladies with that of those from Israel. Actually there are very few studies that do not use this comparison when proceeding to a lengthy analysis.

One of the best known works concerning women religious role is the study of Karel van der Toorn "*From the Cradle to her Grave*". This book is an overview of the most significant religious experiences of ancient Near Eastern women: birth rites, festivals, purity laws, betrothals, funerals, prophecy and many other facets of life. The findings are distributed

between five periods: infancy, youth, puberty, married life and widowhood, thus offering an interesting picture of a lesser known side of the world of the Bible.

The ample study of Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel. Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East*, touches among many other topics, the problem of women in religious context and provides an analysis of their role as religious specialists and as worshippers, a distinction that I will adopt in my research. Unfortunately, Mesopotamian ladies are not the focus of her work, and their investigation is just a tool in order to support her comparative analysis concerning the position of women in monotheistic and polytheistic societies.

R.A. Henshaw in *Female and Male: The Cultic Personnel: the Bible and the Rest of the Ancient Near East* offers what I would call a dictionary of cultic officials from those regions. Although it is a difficult work because it relies on philological analysis, it is nevertheless the best starting point for the study of cultic offices because he points the vast majority of primary sources involving a certain cultic professional, no matter how broken and difficult to understand the said text or fragment might have been. In this case the Mesopotamian material takes precedence because in this area the cultic officials have in many cases a female counterpart. In his study he divides the cultic personnel in five categories: 1 chief functionary, 2 singers, lamenters, musicians and dancers, 3 incantation experts, diviners, ecstatic, prophets, magicians, witches and wizards, seers, healers, 4 officials related to sexuality and 5 auxiliary officials.

Although I do largely agree with his division, for my thesis it is useful to differentiate also between specialist related to the temple and those that perform their profession outside the temple area with or without the consent of the authorities.

There are various studies addressing different types of female cultic personnel that address also some religious aspects of their office. Rivkah Harris in a series of studies analyzes the role of the *nadītu* women from Sippar[19] discussing also their installation

[19] Rivkah Harris, "*Biographical Notes on the Naditu women of Sippar*", Journal of Cuneiform Studies, JCS, Vol. 16. Chicago, III, U.S.A. 1962; "*The organization and Administration of the Cloister in Ancient Babylonia*", Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, JESHO, Vol. VI. Leiden-The Netherlands: Ed. Board, 1962 " The Nadîtum Women" in *Studies presented to A.Leo Oppenheim*, June 7, 1964, The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois "*Ancient Sippar. Demographic*

ceremony and the special relation developed between the women from this religious community and the divine couple they serve. Although there are many other articles addressing the subject of the *nadītu* they address more other aspect of their life. Nonetheless, those studies are rewarding because they bring into discussion a large variety of primary sources concerning this category of women.[20]

L. Barberon in her ample study "*Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone"* approaches a variety of aspect from the life of a *naditu* of Marduk. In the third part of her research, she studies the religious and family life of the *naditu*. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the documents are legal and economic one. Nonetheless, there is certain information concerning their consecration ceremony although it covers more the practical aspects than the religious ones.

Besides the above mentioned works, there are few studies addressing a more controverted cultic character: the *qadištu*. This woman was on the centers of some studies carried out by Joan Goodnick Westenholz, *'Tamar, Qedesha, Qadishtu and Sacred Prostitution in Mesopotamia*" and J. Assante, "*The kar.kid/harimtu, Prostitute or Single Woman?"*

To my knowledge, there is no study addressing the particular religious agency of royal women during the second millennium B.C. All the studies involving them address their political and economic status, their cultic involvement being treated as a secondary matter. There are three articles addressing the problem of female prophets, two authored by Jonathan Stökl, *Female Prophets In The Ancient Near East; The Role of Women in the Prophetical Process in Mari.A Critique of Merry Keller's Theory of Agency*, and one to M.Nissinen, *Gender and Prophetic Agency in the Ancient Near East and in Greece*. Concerning women

Study of an Old-Babylonian City (1894-1595 B.C)", Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch.Istanbul: Instituut the Istanbul, 1975

[20] Maria Ros Ilivares , *Indagacion sobre la construccion de espacios femininos en los intersticios del mandato masulino en la Mesopotamia Paleobabilonica* in La Aljaba Secunda época, Volumen XI, 200; Elisabeth Stone, "*The Social Role Of The Naditu Women In Old Babylonian Nippur*" in Journal of the Economic and social History of the Orient, vol. XXV, Part I; Tyborowsky Witold, Aspects of the Economic and Family Life of the Nadîtu Women In the Old Babylonian Period in Palamedes 3, 2008; Jeyes U.. "The Naditu Women of Sippar." in *Images of women in antiquity*, 1983,pp. 260–72;

witches the study of Tzvi Abusch, *The Demonic Image of the Witch in Standard Babylonian Literature*, should be mentioned.

As we may see from this survey, the religious involvement of women is a subject that received certain attention from scholars. Nonetheless, I am trying to bring all the aforementioned aspect together, and give them a new interpretation using the concept of religious agency, with an emphasis on the impact that women's cultic involvement may have had in Mesopotamian society.

I.4 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is divided in two main parts following H.J Marsman's classification of women involved in cultic matters: women religious specialists and women worshipers.

The first chapter of the first section addresses the women cultic personnel affiliated to a temple. In Mesopotamia we encounter a large variety of female cultic titles but unfortunately, not all of them are well enough documented. Although those titles may be approached from a philological point of view, an analysis of the social and religious functions of those ladies is still out of reach. The main female cultic functionaries I am going to address are the *entu, ugbabtum, naditum, kezertum and qadištum*, those being the best attested offices that existed in the second millennium BC.

In the next two chapters I will address the phenomena of prophecy and dream, but the information in those chapters comes exclusively from the archive of Mari. In the next chapter (4) I debated the agency of women religious specialist that were not affiliated with the temple, and therefore they were not submitted to the same rules, or enjoyed the same privileges as their female contemporaries that were involved in the official cult: the midwife, wet-nurse and female healers but also the witch, the wicked, out of the norm knowledgeable woman.

In the second section of my thesis I will discuss the two types of women worshipers: royal women and commoners and their religious agency.

Royal women are largely present in the religious life of the second millennium Mesopotamia. They appear to be involved in a large variety of cultic activities but their agency should be regarded with caution because the sources tend to address only the beginning of this period, until the fall of the first Dynasty of Babylon. Furthermore, the available data are concentrated in the north-western regions, more precisely in the kingdom of Mari during the reign of Zimri-Lim so, even though we could draw an almost complete portrait of the cultic activities and the religious agency of royal women at Mari, we may not consider this an all-encompassing picture.

The last chapter of my study is an overview of the most significant religious experiences of ancient Near Eastern women as they were classified by Karel van der Toorn: birth rites, festivals, betrothals, funerals, and many other facets of life are brought into question from the perspective of religious agency.

After analyzing a large variety of written materials I shall try to draw a parallel between female religious agency, they visibility in the sources and the way in which their cultic involvement helped them to gain power and prestige in the society they lived in.

II. RELIGION, AGENCY AND GENDER. A THEORETICAL APPROACH

II.1 WHAT IS RELIGION?

Religion is one of the main ideas my thesis gravitates around and, perhaps the most difficult concept to define. Over the time, many famous scholars have attempted to provide their own definitions, narrow or broad, with a certain degree of generality or strictly related to their area of research.

The article providing information about this matter included in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* concludes that "*religion is the organization of life around the depth dimensions of existence – varied in form, completeness and clarity in accordance with the environing culture*"[21].

This type of broad, vague definition tries to be all inclusive, attempting not to let any religious tradition outside its area of concern. Encyclopedia Britannica states that:

> "Religion is human beings' relation to that which they regard as holy, sacred, absolute, spiritual, divine, or worthy of special reverence. It is also commonly regarded as consisting of the way people deal with ultimate concerns about their lives and their fate after death"[22].

This definition, though it is also vague, includes a terminology usually identified with what we are used to consider the realm of religion and dissociate it from other areas of life.

Those are just two concise dictionary definitions, but there is a vast amount of theories offered by scholars, much more complex and liable to discussion. I will try to explore some of the most influential explanations provided by researchers involved in different areas

[21] *Encyclopedia of Religions*, vol.11, edited by Linsday Jones, Thomson Gale, p.7695

[22] *Encyclopedia Britannica*, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/497082/religion

of study, and see whether it is convenient or not to use them for an analysis of Ancient Near East.

In his work from 1917, *The Idea of the Holy*, the theologian Rudof Otto defined religion as an experience of the numinous, experience that may be described as a "*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*". After stating that in religion the non-rational has to be given its due importance, he defines the numinous as being" *the Holy*" minus its moral factor or "moment", and as we can now add, minus its "rational" aspect.[23] In his theistic view, the human beings, the ones who are created, in their relation with the "Holy Other", are both frightened and fascinated by the overwhelming experience encountered. Even though Otto's theory was embraced by Assyriologists such as T. Jacobson when analyzing Mesopotamian religion, I find it difficult to adhere to this kind of emotional approach when studying the religious involvement of the ancient ladies because in this patriarchal society the vast majority of the written evidence presents a male perspective of the World.

Emile Durkheim, the French sociologist, suggests an approach that fits with his area of interest. From his point of view "*a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them*"[24] It is a complex system of parts which is divided into beliefs- collective representations or systems of representation of sacred things- and rites-models of action whose characteristics are determined by certain beliefs. [25]As we may see, Durkheim's definition distinguishes between the *sacred*, the very core of religious development and the profane, the *mundane* reality. This sharp line drawn between the two spheres makes me wonder whether it would be counterproductive to use such a theory for my research, considering the complexity of ancient traditions.

One of the most prominent definitions of our concept is the one brought into discussion by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz who calls it simply: a cultural system. He defines the religion as:

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[23] *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto, p.6

[24] Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse, Livre premier, Emile Durkheim, p.51, classiques.uqac.ca

[25] Idem, p.42

> "1.a system of symbols which act 2. to establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men by 3.formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and 4. clothing this conceptions with such an aura of factuality that 5. the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."[26]

At first glance, this definition seems to be rather complex and complicate, so it needs to be developed in order have a clear view of the matter. First of all, we should clarify the meaning of the term *symbol* as Geertz states that religion is a system of symbols that are the main cause *for* or *of* something. He defines it as "*the embodiment of ideas, attitudes, judgments, longings, or beliefs*"[27] in other words a vehicle for a conception, anything that conveys some meaning to someone. Their main purpose is to offer us a picture of the World, and how the things are in the World. On the other hand, religious symbols are those particular symbols that try to persuade us that there is a tight connection between the way the world is, and how people live or should live.

Further he states that those symbols establish powerful, pervasive and long lasting moods and motivations. The moods represent the way people respond to that system of symbols that shapes our world, and the motives are all that we aspire to, they are "*neither acts, nor feelings, but liabilities to perform particular classes of acts or have particular classes of feelings.*"[28]So, if we put Geertz statement in other words, symbols show how reality is constructed and therefore we should react in a certain way and pursue certain values in accordance with the way the world is. Between all those elements exists a state of harmony that must not be disturbed. When that happens we are encountered with times of crisis and we find ourselves unable to explain the events that occur around us. Whilst we are unable to "deal with chaos"[29], order brings meaning to our lives. Religious symbols do not prevent crisis situations but they help us to overcome the moment by making us believe that the meaningless situations do have a meaning inside the cosmic order. Therefore, to reinforce the strength of a symbol, to enhance its capacity of helping us to overcome crisis, people created

[26] "Religion as a Cultural System "in The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Esseys, pp.87-125, Clifford Geertz, Fontana Press, 1993, p.90

[27] Idem, p.91

[28] Idem, p.97

[29] Idem, p.99

rituals as a way of acting out a symbol, bringing it closer to human society, and reiterating it. Ultimately, religion has the role of shaping our daily existence so that our way of life converges with the way the world is, with the cosmic order so, it may be stated that religious symbols and their enactments are the foundation of what we may call simply: *common sense*.

All the aforementioned definitions, either affective, intellectual, functional, religious or naturalistic, essentialist or not, they all have one common element: a western, modern, post Enlightenment bias strongly criticized by scholars nowadays, such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith in "*The Meaning and End of Religion*" and Daniel Dubuisson in "*The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology"* .After reviewing the theories submitted by the western school of thought over the centuries, Dubuisson outlines the hindrances in defining religion:

> "If the search for a rigorous, coherent definition of religion meets with powerful intellectual prejudices stemming from the Christian tradition and, in a certain way, from the banality of all those that have been proposed for more than a century, one could think that this failure resulted from several factors, foremost among which we see the absence of any systematic thought aimed at determining satisfactory analytical criteria capable of winning unanimity among scholars, simply (and even if this seems surprising) because we have witnessed no true effort aimed at defining what should be the status and function of these criteria. However, for such a sensitive question, it would have been, and still remains, indispensable to ask (beyond the illusory comfort offered by superficial comparisons limited to summary statements or misleading schematizations), what kinds of criteria should have been chosen for this purpose. But the determination of such criteria presupposes that we have defined an exact protocol for research, which then would have reviewed and carefully examined the different options available (conventional, heuristic, empirical, logistics, deductive, and others), that would have distinguished different possible levels of intervention (factual, structural, functional, symbolic, formal, transcendental, etc.), that would have tried to excise or at least call attention to its most operative presuppositions, and that finally would

have specified where the epistemological conditions and limitations for their use are situated."[30]

He goes further criticizing the fact that in the name of universalism we tend to attribute a religion to each and every culture even to those tradition that do not show any of the traits by which a religion is usually defined.[31] Even though, it might happen that more than one modern criteria on analyzing religion could be useful when studying the Ancient Near Eastern societies, doing so we must always be aware of the fact that before the Enlightenment, as still occurs in many societies nowadays, there was not a sharp line between religious and secular, or as Dubuisson states "*the distinction we make between political, religious, social and civic ceremonies scarcely have any meaning*".[32] Economic and religious practices were intertwined in antiquity, the temple serving both as a cult place with its specific activities, and as a treasury under the patronage of the god or even as a sort of charitable institution that provided loans for people in need. It was also the core of some other so called secular occupations such as trade, agriculture, and craftsmanship, all of them being in a tight connection with the temple and its daily routine. In the same way, justice or government were not mere secular products in the Ancient Near Eastern world. The rulers were provided with kingship, power, fame and glory in wars by the great gods in whose name they commanded the land and promulgated norms for a the well-being of their people as we may see from the prologues of some Mesopotamian law codes: Ur Nammu, Lipit-Ištar, and Hammurabi[33].

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[30] The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology, Daniel Dubuisson, translated by William Sayers, John Hopkins University Press, 2003, pp.63-64

[31] Idem, p.43

[32] Ibidem

[33](*i 27 - 49) inūmišu Ḫammurabi rubâm na'dan pālih īli jâti mišaram ina mātim ana šūpîm raggam u ṣēnam ana ḫulluqim dannum enšam ana la ḫabālim kīma Šamaš ana ṣalmāt qaqqadim waṣêmma mātim nuwwurim Anum u Enlil ana šir niṣi ṭubbim šumī ibbû.*

"At that time the Gods Anu and Enlil for the enhancement of the well-being of the people, named me by my name Hammurabi, the pious prince, who venerates the gods, to make justice prevail in the land, to abolish the wicked and the evil, to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak, to rise like the Sun-God Šamaš over the humankind, and illuminate the land.

Considering the aforementioned difficulties in understanding religion, and particularly "non-western" ones, raises the question whether we should, or should we not, apply modern theories when analyzing ancient societies. Should we even employ the term religion, and more important, is it adequate to use this concept when discussing ancient Mesopotamian civilization? What tools and further concepts would be appropriate for approaching the subject?

I find useful, even though it is a modern theory, Ninian Smart's approach concerning the *seven dimensions of religion*:

> I. *The ritual or practical dimension* that involves actions such as worship, sacrifices, sacramental rites (passage rites, seasonal ones), healing activities, prayers.
>
> II. *The doctrinal and philosophical dimension* comprising the intellectual components of religion, theologies developed by the scholarly tradition, the fruit of the scribal milieu in Ancient Mesopotamia.
>
> III. *The mythic and narrative dimension* including all kinds of sacred stories: historical narratives, creation myths, cosmogonies, divine narratives, eschatological ones.
>
> IV. *The experimental and emotional dimension* is the subjective component of what we call religion, the expression of the humans experience of the numinous.
>
> V. *The ethical and legal dimension* concerns the way people live, right and wrong, and the punishments that ought to be imposed when a mischievous behavior is adopted. This type of rules for a good living are circumscribed in myths, juridical and cultic text, but also in the wisdom literature of the Ancient Near East.
>
> VI. *The organizational and social component*. Under this category lies the temple and its personnel, but also aspects that denote their influence in society and the way how people's interactions are organized as part of a cult and its specific activities.

Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor, Second edition, Martha T. Roth , Volume editor Piotr Michalowski, Society of Biblical Literature, Writings from the Ancient World Series, Scholars press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1997, pp.76-77

VII. *The material and artistic dimension* representing the embodiment of the religious ideas in a material form: temples, deities' statues, cultic objects.[34]

It is obvious that, excepting the experimental and emotional component, all the other dimensions identified by Smart are observable facts of religion. For an ancient society, I find it difficult to draw a portrait of the inner life of the believers and to make some coherent and well-documented statements about their faith. The expression of this subjective dimension may be as diverse as human beings are, but the other components described may prove themselves to be effective tools in my attempt to analyze the lives of the Mesopotamian ladies and their relation with their gods.

II.2 MESOPOTAMIAN RELIGION

If it is difficult to define the concept of religion without being influenced by the Western, modern perspective, deeply rooted in our European culture, the matter becomes even more complicated when studying ancient religions. Concerning the Mesopotamian one, assyriologists do not share the same opinion, and before analyzing its components and make some statements, I find it appropriate to present some of the most relevant theories proposed by scholars that are a reference point for the study of this concept in the Ancient Near East[35].

In his work "*La plus vieille religion: en Mésopotamie*", Jean Bottéro follows the trend inaugurated by the Babel and Bible controversy and the quest for the origins.

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[34] *Dimensions of the Sacred. Anatomy of the World's Beliefs*, Ninian Smart, Fontana Press, 1997, London, pp.10-11. In this overview of the seven dimensions I tried to introduce the aspects of Mesopotamian religious life that fit into a specific sphere of analysis.

[35] Rich bibliographical data concerning the topic of religion in Mesopotamia are offered in *No religion before or without 'religion'? Introducing the conference, with an attempt to investigate ways of locating religion in ancient Western Asia (or the 'Ancient Near East'),* the presentation of Professor Christoph Uehlinger during the International Symposium, Concepts of Religion between Asia and Europe, November 1–3, 2012, University of Zurich. After reviewing the extensive works regarding the topic, some aspects of what may appear to form a system of mental representations, and ritual practices are pinpointed making this talk a good starting point for any discussion regarding Mesopotamian religion.

At the very beginning of his book's introduction, the French assyriologist presents his statement:

> "La religion la plus vieille dont nous ayons une connaissance authentique et suffisamment explicite, par quantité de ses monuments exhumés, même en ruines - lieux, images et objets du culte -, et surtout par un dossier prodigieux, de quelques centaines de milliers de documents indigènes, intelligibles et souvent détaillés, c'est le système religieux de l'antique Mésopotamie, entre le lVe millénaire et les alentours de notre ère. Autre privilège exceptionnel, que seul lui pourrait aussi disputer l'Égypte ancienne, elle n'est pas moins celle dont il nous est donné de suivre le développement sur trois bons millénaires - jusqu'à sa mort. Ce double avantage, qu'on chercherait en vain ailleurs, pour l'heure, ne devrait pas seulement, par la visite d'un aussi monumental édifice, en partie reconstruit, nous introduire dans le cadre de la vie quotidienne, de la réflexion et du coeur de ces antiques Mésopotamiens évanouis, en qui l'on a fini par reconnaître, aujourd'hui, nos plus vieux parents, discernables et fréquentables dans notre passé le plus reculé, les premiers édificateurs de la civilisation qui nous soutient encore et que nous avons largement diffusée par le monde."[36]

Bottéro stresses the importance of material and written sources in the effort of reconstructing ancient Mesopotamian religion. His approach of the issue may be easily represented graphically on the axis us ⟶ them: what we understand by a certain religious concept and what the ancient Near Eastern people might have understood in the light of the written evidence. Before launching into his analysis, Bottéro classifies religions in two main categories: prehistoric, traditional, primitive, popular religions that foreshadow in time and structure the historical religions, those who have a founder, disciples and sacred books such as Christianity, Islam or Buddhism.

The actions and behavior under the label of the first category are just reflections of the society that gave them birth, a response to what is unknown, inexplicable. They were passed from generation to generation without constraints or an authority that would supervise those hereditary habits. If all those characteristics fit the pattern of a popular religion is it right to use it when studying the religion of the elites, the official cult, all those aspects described by the vast amount of sources under scrutiny?

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[36] *La plus vieille religion : en Mésopotamie*, Jean Bottéro, Paris, Gallimard, 1998, p.9

Bottéro himself gives an answer to this question in "*Writing, Reasoning and the Gods"*. Considering that reading and writing activities were reserved to a socially restricted group of professionals, one might think that the clay tablets present their "*own religious conceptions and habits but not those of the rest of the population whether of higher or lower class, because they were all illiterate.*"[37] After presenting this hypothesis, he explains that Ancient Near Eastern scholars were not a secluded category, isolated from the rest of the Mesopotamian society. All those people have a family background, and at a certain moment in their lives they were exposed to and assimilated some features of the popular belief. Besides, temples were public buildings and contacts, interactions with the outside world were common events. W.G.Lambert in his article "*Myth and Mythmaking in Sumer and Akkad*" goes further and states that "*in Ancient Near East, however, authorship was less significant and many texts of anonymous origin were often handed down orally as well as in writing, and one must conjuncture that oral myths existed before writing was invented*."[38]

We may consider those ancient professionals to have written down and adapted preexistent practices to new social, political, economic and ethical contexts. This trend can be easily observed when analyzing the evolution of myths or the development of the central concerns of ancient Mesopotamians, those metaphors identified by Thorkild Jacobson, a clear reflection of the changes that a civilization might undergo: the metaphor of the spiritual cores in phenomena, mostly natural ones of primary economic importance alluding to the struggle for survival, the metaphor of the ruler that protects against the enemies and brings peace and prosperity, and that of the parents when the God is expected to protect his believer and reward his loyalty with fortune and long life.

After an ample analysis of the extended cultic, mythic and ritual data the French assyriologist concludes that Mesopotamian religion is a rational, intelligent and open one. In his quest for the origins, he tries to outline the influence exercised on other western religions, including the Hebrew Bible, and all the other cults derived from it.

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[37] *Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*, Jean Bottero, translation Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van De Mieroop, Uiversity of Chicago Press, 1992, p.208

[38] W.G.Lambert, *Myth and Mythmaking in Sumer and Akkad*, in Civilization of Ancient Near East, Vol. III, Coord. Jack Sasson, Simon and Schuster McMillan, p.1823

On the other hand, another famous assyriologist, Leo Oppenheim from the Oriental Institute of Chicago, in his "*Ancient Mesopotamia. Portrait of a Civilization*", adopts a skeptical position considering that scholars should not focus that much on the aforementioned topic.

In the chapter entitled suggestively "*Why a Mesopotamian religion should not be written*" he states that the reasons for this "*are of two orders-the nature of the available evidence, and the problem of comprehension across the barriers of conceptual conditioning.*"[39]

The importance of the sources, heavily stresses by Bottéro, is regarded by Oppenheim with a more critical eye. Concerning material data he considers that we do not know the purpose of those edifices, we do not know what they were for [40]and that:

> "the monuments of a forgotten cult, of a cult we know only through a few written documents, can reveal, even if perfectly preserved, only a fraction, a din reflection, of the cultic activities which they served. Their mechanics and functioning, and the meanings which motivated the enactment of the cult, remain removed from us, as if pertaining to another dimension."[41]

The cuneiform tablets are also problematic for the scholar who divides them in three categories (prayers, mythological and ritual texts), but asks himself:

> "To what extent and with what degree of reliability can written sources impart to us that accumulation of cult practices, of tradition bound individual and group reactions to things considered sacred, to such existential facts as death, disease, and misfortune; in short, how truthfully do they reveal what is commonly meant by religion?"[42]

He considers that analyzing the ancient documents applying the concept of religion or any other modern principle would mean to alter their original sense because they were not

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[39] Leo Oppenheim*, Ancient Mesopotamia. Portrait of a Civilization,* University of Chicago Press, p.172

[40] *Ibidem*

[41] *Idem, p.173*

[42] *Idem*, p.175

written for us, a civilization that has nothing in common with the ancient Mesopotamian way of life and thinking, the gap between the two being almost impossible to fill in:

> "I would like to establish what those tablets meant to those who wrote them. I do not want to assign them importance, meaning ant literary qualities derived, consciously or not, from our own culture conditioned preferences."[43]

After a short survey of the evidence provided by the ancient Mesopotamian world, Oppenheim comes to the conclusion that [44]what is to be called religion in this area is not an unique and uniform phenomenon but a "*complex, multilayered accumulation*"[45] and we must discern between royal and commoners religion, and that of the priests in order to obtain "*something approaching an unobstructed vista*" [46]He doesn't discourage the study of sources of a so called religious facture, but they must not be interpreted from the perspective of nowadays concepts and terminology. When focusing on such aspects, we must be fully aware of the fact that ancient Mesopotamians did not possess a term that could lead us towards a translation, at least partially synonymous with *religion.*

Recently, there were some researchers who studied words or lexemes associated with divinity, with the gods – DINGIR, *ilum/ilatum*. Anette Zgol , Elena Cassin and even Leo Oppenheim discussed terms such as *melammû* (CAD, M, vol.II, radiance, supernatural awe-inspiring sheen, glow of good health) and *puluhtu* (CAD, P, awesomeness, fearsomeness, terrifying quality, fear, panic, terror, reverence, respect, awe) that appear frequently in mythological and cultic texts in connection with the supernatural beings, things and humans blessed with divine grace. The gods are usually described as radiant and awe inspiring, their *melammû* being directly proportional with their personal force.

The theories of the two scholars and the analysis of the semantic field of the word DINGIR/*ilum* doesn't seem to answer completely to the question whether there is or not a specific realm of religion in Mesopotamian society. The temple had both cultic and secular

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[43] *Idem*, P.12

[45] *Idem*, p.180

[46] Idem, p.181

functions, it was the house of the god, a place of worship, but in the same time the core of a fervent commercial and industrial activity put under the patronage of the its owner- the deity himself (herself).

Kingship, military victory, prosperity, longevity were considered a gift for the proper behavior of the ruler or any other human being. In this case we may think that anything in Mesopotamian society was in one way or another related to religion. Alan Lenzi considers that the insider-outsider perspective is very important when studying religion because "those who engage in a practice or believe a particular idea view it differently from those who do not engage or who are not inclined to believe"[47] so, even though it is not usual for us to consider religion an aspect deeply rooted in our daily life, it was not the same for the ancient Mesopotamians who knew no distinction between sacred and secular. For them, there seems to be no difference between religious belief and common-sense, a common-sense supervised somehow by the superhuman, brilliant and awe-inspiring entities that shaped the mental environment of the Ancient Near Eastern inhabitants.

II.3 AGENCY, RELIGIOUS AGENCY AND GENDER

Agency is one of the two main concepts of my thesis and I will analyze it in relation with the concepts of religion and gender. On a general level *agency* is understood as the basic human capacity to act on conscious level, the make choices and to act according to certain purposes. Action is motivated, but not caused, by intentions. These intentions give actions their meaning. To understand agency, action, and actors, we need to comprehend and interpret the meanings and intentions that actions have for their actors but also for the community they live in.[48]The interdependency between individual and society brings out another fundamental sociological concept, that of *structure*. Structures are typically seen as the more fixed and enduring aspects of the social landscape. According to Durkheim and

[47] Alan Lenzi, *Dead Religion and Contemporary Perspectives: Commending Mesopotamian Data to the Religious Studies Classroom*, in "Method and Theory in the Study of Religion", 19 (2007), 121-133, pp.129-130

[48] The Blackwell Encyclopedia Of Sociology, ed. by George Ritzer, Blackweel Publishing, 2007, pp.60-61

many other sociologists, society has primacy over the individual person. They believe that social structure sets the limits to what we can do as individuals. Considering the fact that religion is in itself a structure, this type of sociological approach would be appropriate for my research.

Bourdieu and Giddens tried to come up with theories that would combine the two concepts in a nuanced and more permissive way, so that we may exclude clear-cut limitations. The key mediating concepts are *habitus* for Bourdieu, practical *consciousness* for Giddens. Social structures are seen as having entered the agent[49]they are nor a barrier for agency, but are very much involved in its production.[50]Although contemporary theorists acknowledge the separate treatment of structures and agents using a methodological approach and treat agents as important components of the very makeup of structures who contribute to the reproduction or transformation of structures, a theory focusing on the agent appears to be quite difficult to apply for the study of women agency within the limits of very specific structures like religion and patriarchal society. A theory like that of Bourdieu seems more appropriate for the Mesopotamian environment. The agents are the means by which society reproduces itself and social practices cannot be defined and redefined at will. They establish a *sense of facticity and normalcy* over an abyss of uncertainty, contingency, and anxiety.[51] Bourdieu defines habitus as the way in which actors calculate and determine future actions based on existing norms, rules, and values representing existing conditions that were already embedded in their reference system[52].This is only a general framework concerning agency but I consider it appropriate for the study of women's religious agency in Mesopotamia.

In her study about *Women's Agency in Gender-Traditional Religions*, Kelsy C. Burke proposes four models of approaching women agency in religion:

1. *Resistance agency*-women do not passively accept religious doctrine. Women may challenge male-dominated institutions in creative ways

[49] Ibidem, pp. 4871

[50] A. Giddens, *Central problems in social theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979, p.70,

[51] The Blackwell Encyclopedia Of Sociology, p.62

[52] Ibidem, p.2044

2. *Empowerment agency*-women do not passively accept religious doctrine. Women may experience religion in positive ways.

3. *Instrumental agency*-positive outcomes may result from women's religious participation. Religion interacts with other factors in women's lives and women are able to achieve some goals by their involvement in religious activities.

4. *Compliant agency*-women do not passively accept religious doctrine. Women are compliant in multiple ways, depending on their circumstances. Compliant agency seeks to identify the multiple ways in which religious women comply with religious instruction in their everyday lives and their choice to act, or not to act should be considered a full-fledged proof of agency.[53]

If the first two types of agency do not fit into the ancient Near Eastern context, instrumental and compliant agency appears to be a offering tool for the analysis of female presence in religious practices.

Two other concepts should be further defined in order to have a complete methodological framework for the present study: gender and kyriarchy

The concept of *gender* was introduced into the area of women and feminist studies during the early 1970s. The concept of gender is a socially constructed one and needs to be understood clearly as a cross-cutting socio-cultural variable that can also be applied to all other cross-cutting variables such as race, class, age, ethnic group, etc. Gender systems are established in different socio-cultural contexts which determine what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman/man and girl/boy in the specific contexts of a certain cultural[54] or religious system in the case of the present research. Gender systems are institutionalized through education systems, political and economic systems, legislation, culture, traditions and religion. In utilizing a gender approach the focus is not on individual women and men but on

[53] Kelsy C. Burke, Women's Agency in Gender-Traditional Religions, Sociology Compass 6/2 (2012), pp.124-129

[54] http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/factsheet2.pdf

the system which determines gender roles and responsibilities, a system that would provide access to power, prestige, and resources. Commonsense beliefs about men and women and their socially role are not arbitrary and in many cases they have been presented under the form of religious truths.[55]

In the ancient Near Eastern field, women studies are no longer a novelty but gender studies are an area not fully explored yet. Z.Bahnrani traced an outline of women and gender studies in Mesopotamia dividing them into three waves.

The *first wave* was a consequence of the insight that earlier research had overlooked the activities of half of the population and only studied the accomplishments of men. In the 1960s feminist scholarship started to write women "into" history[56] and the importance of this approach in Assyriology was recognized at the 33 Rencontre assyriologique internationale whose works developed around the interesting theme of women in Ancient Near East- "*La femme dans le Proche-Orient antique*"[57]

The *second wave* of feminist scholarship began roughly in the late 1970s. One of its chief achievements was the development of the notion of gender. The Second Wave feminists considered gender roles a socially constructed identity imposed upon biological sex and attempt to find the cause for the subordination of female gender. [58] According to Bahrani, the weak point in all of the matriarchy theories that tried to explain this phenomenon is that they were set out to expose the nature of patriarchy and female oppression and to establish women's (only) spaces and followed the assumption that patriarchy in universal.[59]

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[55] *Sex and Gender*, ed. by John Archer and Barbara B.Lloyd, Cambridge University Press, 2nd Edition, 2002, p.3

[56] Z.Bahrani, *Women of Babylon: Gender and Representation in Mesopotamia*, London, Routledge, 2001, pp.14-15

[57] Van De Mieroop, *Cuneiform Texts and the Writing of History*. London, Routledge, 1999, pp.139-140; Brigitte Lion, "La notion de genre en assyriologie" in *Problèmes du genre en Grèce ancienne* ed. by Violaine Sehillotre Cuchet and Nathalie Ernoulr, Publication de Sobone, p. 52

[58] Z.Bahrani, Women of Babylon: Gender and Representation in Mesopotamia, p. 15

[59] Ibidem, p.16

The *third wave* of feminism proposed a new interpretation of the basic concepts involved in this area of research. Zainab Bahrani considers that the engendered separation of home and work, in which the family, marriage, and so on were analyzed as the domain of women, is not enough for understanding the complexity of gender relations, but also tends to perpetuate the binary structure of male/female hierarchies[60].

In this context, I find interesting the concept introduced in the early 1990s by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: the concept of kyriarchy (from Grk. kyrios = lord, slave master, father, husband, elite propertied man) used as a substitute for the concept of patriarchy, a somehow reductionist one because it stresses the parallelism between the dominant male and subordinated females, public and private as environment where each of the two performed their agency.

A second reason for substituting patriarchy with kyriarchy in the study of women or gender is to underscore the complex inter-structuring of domination.[61] When studying women's lives in ancient Mesopotamia, their agency and relation with the society they live in, one should consider not only the male/female dichotomy but also social class, age or ethnicity. All the above, at least in Ancient Near Eastern context, are factors that clearly influence someone's status of subordination. Laws such as Codex Hammurabi differentiate between three different social classes that are clearly not equal: the *awilum* is above the *muškenum* whom, at his turn, is above the *wardum* (slave). An Old Babylonian letter, AbB 3, 33, underlines the distinction among the two classes of free people "*I am the son of an* ***awilum*** *whereas he is the son of a* ***muškenum****: how could he possibly return my favor?"* [62] Women from the upper strata of society appear to have enjoyed more rights and their agency is more visible than that of a lower strata man, even though he is man. She is subordinated to those of the same social standing, but she may very well surpass the others. Older women or men whose social function is diminished or foreigners, especially those from foreign or

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[60] Ibidem, p.18

[61] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Method in Women's Studies in Religion. A Critical Feminist Hermeneutics in Methodology in Religious Studies. The Interface with Women's Studies* ed.by Arvind Sharma, State University Of New York Press, 2002 p.210

[62] Karel van deer Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel. Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life,* Brill, 1996, p. 26

hostile regions, established in a certain area, may receive a different treatment and be considered inferiors without having anything to do with gender subordination. On the other hand we may find older women from the ruling classes whose authority took preeminence even above that of high ranking officials being second only to the king. All those situations will be examined in this research.

Considering that the present research deals with women's religious agency using the broad framework of gender and kyriarchy, I would consider this work, in Bahrani's terms, a third feminist wave study. My main focus is not to identify the women in cultic ritual, this task having been performed before by many other scholars, but to reinterpret the available data in order to have a wider view upon the lives of women, their social and religious status and its development all along the second millennium B.C. I am also interested in the relations between male and female cultic officials and worshipers but also in the interaction of people from different social environments on the field of religion.

III. WOMEN RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS

In ancient Near Eastern texts there is no specific word that would denote ritual experts or a religious leader similar to what we nowadays understand through the concept of "priest". In one way or another, everyone employed by the temple to carry out its tasks may be called a priest because there is a certain connection between those persons and the household of the gods they serve.[63]As we are dealing with a polytheistic religion we must be aware of the existence of a large variety of "priests" both male and female, and as there was less to no difference between sacred and profane, magic and religion, we must remember not to exclude categories of personnel that nowadays would seem to have nothing in common with the divine service.

For the Old Babylonian Period, J. Renger identified three main categories of priests: cult priests, speakers of wisdom and incantation priests.[64] Even with this classification, the term "priest" exceeds our understanding, so I prefer the formula proposed by R.A Henshaw of cultic personnel or cultic functionaries. This phrasing cover not only the ritualic aspects of the office but also the secular ones, and it is far more appropriate when we are dealing with the female personnel affiliated to the temple because, with certain exceptions, they were not allowed to perform rituals without being supervised by a superior.

Mesopotamia provides us with a large variety of titles revealing women involved in religious activities, but it is a real challenge to identify the cultic role of those women and to answer questions regarding their active involvement in the cult:

1. Were they entitled to perform rituals by themselves or to present offering to the deities without an intermediary?

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[63] F.A.M Wiggerman, *Theologies, Priests and Worship in Ancient Mesopotamia*, in CANE, p.1864

[64] J.Renger apud R.A Henshaw, Female and Male: The Cultic Personnel: The Bible and the Rest of the Ancient Near East, Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 1994, p.9

2. What was the degree of their involvement in cultic issues? What liturgical actions could they perform? Were they allowed to utter incantations, prayers or to perform ritual actions on behalf of a third person?

3. Were there classes of cultic female officials that could supervise temple activity or were they all subdued to a higher male authority?

III.1 THE OFFICE OF NIN.DINGIR (ENTU, UGBABTUM)

The most important female cultic official in Mesopotamia was the *entu* which translated the Sumerian **nin.dingir,** lady who is a deity, ideogram that also designates the Akkadian *ugbabtum*. Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, volume E brings some light into the matter stating that "*it has been assumed that whenever* **nin.dingir** *refers to a priestess of high social standing who is mentioned without reference to a specific deity, it should be rendered by entu (high priestess)*", the only exception being the references from Old Assyrian and Mari texts. When both female figures appear in the same text, the *ugbabtum* is in a lower rank than the *entu*. Both of them were supposed to live in chastity as it was decided by the gods. A fragment from Atra-ḫasis is revealing for this matter: "*Establish ugbabtu women, entu women, and igisītu women/ And let them be taboo and so stop childbirth.*"[65] Unlike the *entu*, the *ugbabtum* served both major and minor deities, male and female. Hanshaw, after a detailed discussion about the meaning of the **nin.dingir** and its evolution during the time states that:

> "One may note that in Neo-Assyrian times the two offices the two offices of *entu* and *ugbabtum* were mixed up purposely. The two are intertwined that there is the possibility that they merge into one rank from an original two, or are two words for the same, or are two officials who perform almost identical duties(…) An Old Babylonian omen says that when an *entu* dies, an *ugbabtum*

[65] *Atra-ḫasis. The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, by W.G.Lambert and A.R.Millard with The Sumerian Flood Story by M.Civil, Oxford, Clarendon Press, p.103

will be installed showing that the two had similar levels of authority and their offices were alike"[66]

III.1.a ENTU

The high priestess, *entu* is present in Mesopotamia from Sumerian until Old Babylonian times then it disappears with the sole exception of the **nin.dingir ^{d}IM** from Emar. In the Neo-Babylonian period, during the time of Nabonidus, the *giparu* at Ur is renovated and the king revives the tradition by installing his daughter as high priestess of the god Nanna: "*along the side of Egipar the house of Ennigaldi-Nanna, my daughter, entu-priestess of Sin, I built new*" [67] The *entu*, as her male counterpart, the *en* priest, served a major deity of opposite sex, but it seems that the rule was not a strict one, considering that there were mentions of *entu* of some female deities such as Bau, Inanna and it appears that they were not the only ones. Two archival texts from the time of Lipit-Ištar deal with the rations for Hala-Ningal[68], an *entu* of Inanna at Ur, and an inscription from the reign of Išme-Dagan seems to deal with the enthronement of the said official:" Eštar asked him for Taki[l]tum and he brought her into her Etilmum. He chose Hala-Ningal for her and elevated her to office in Ur"[69]

The *entu*, as human wife (**dam**) of the god was regarded as the head of the deity's household, and in this quality she was supervising all the economic and cult activities related to the temple. They were designated by omens and they gave the name of the year of their enthronement "*The year the entu of Nanna was chosen by omen", "The year Ninzianna , the daughter of the king, was chosen by omen*."[70]

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[66] R.A Henshaw, *Female and Male: The Cultic Personnel*, p. 204-205

[67] Penelope N. Weadock, "The Giparu at Ur" *in Iraq*, Vol. 37, No. 2 , Autumn, 1975, p.113

[68] Douglas Frayne, RIME, Old Babylonian Period, vol.IV, p.39

[69] Ibidem, p. 41

[70] Douglas Frayne, Notes on the Sacred Marriage in *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 42, 1985(pp. 5-22), pp.17-18

The only text concerning the installation ritual of the high priestess comes from Emar, an Amorite city on the great bend in the mid-Euphrates in northeastern Syria, a region that suffered both Mesopotamian and Hittite influence. Concerning the literary tradition it seems to have developed from the Mesopotamian canons with a stronger northern, Assyrian influence and concerning religion and ritual, Daniel E.Fleming states that they:

> "may have developed from Mesopotamian practices transmitted to Syria in the more distant past. The **nin.dingir** herself may come from such a heritage. In spite of the absence of substantial direct influence on Emar material culture for the period and the relative interdependence of the indigenous religious traditions, we should not underestimate the magnitude of the impact on Emar society produced by Mesopotamian writing in the realms of law, economic life and religion."[71]

Even so we must not assume that this installation ritual is identical with those practiced in Mesopotamia, but nonetheless certain ritual elements may have been similar. We may also confront those texts with the few ones concerning the installation and purification of priests in Old Babylonian and Neo-Babylonian times.

The Emar festival of the installation of the **nin.dingir** covers 9 days and consists in a series of rituals that precede the enthronement. Those ceremonies may be determined by the death of the previous priestess and the necessity of electing a new one.[72] The chosen one can be any daughter of a son of Emar who is identified through some kind of divination:" *will take the lots from the temple of* ^{d}*NIN.URTA (and) manipulate them before* ^{d}*IM* "[73]and then she is anointed with fine oil from the temple and NIN.KUR. The last ritual gesture remind a similar gesture performed during the wedding ceremony in Middle Assyrian Laws 42 "*If a man pours oil on the head of a woman of the awilu class on the occasion of a holiday or brings dishes on the occasion of a banquet, no return (of gifts) shall be made.* " Although this law does not clearly refer to marriage, this can be deduced from the next one which begins in

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[71] Daniel E.Fleming, *The Installation of Baal's High Priestess at Emar*, Altlanta Scholar Press, 1992, p 281

[72] *Ibidem*, p.65

[73] *Ibidem,* p.49

a similar way and gives afterwards information about what should be done in case the groom dies and appears to be imposing the rule of levirate[74].

The three days of festival are fully animated. The procession has two focus points: the temple of the god IM and the house of the girl's father where she returns at the end of each day until the actual enthronement took place. In my analysis, I will focus on the rituals that directly involve the girl even though she seems to be rather passive during the ceremonies. In the second day of the festival, the **nin.dingir** is shaved before being properly installed. The same ritual is described in first millennium Babylonian texts. CAD G describes one of the meanings of the term *gullubum* as the consecration of a priest or craftsman connected to the temple by shaving the hair of his head and body. This shaving of the cultic personnel is also met in other religious traditions and for other social categories. Raymond Firth described the meaning of this type of ritual as follows:

> Deliberate shaving of the head, or close cutting of the hair, has taken on a ritual quality, intended to mark a transition from one social state to another, and in particular to imply a modification of the status of the social condition of the person whose hair is so treated…in the most general terms shaving the head is a sign of *tristitia* (sadness)….of diminution of the self.[75]

The *gullubu* indicates indeed the transition to another status by changing the tutelary authority: the girl ceases to be only the daughter of her father, she becomes now a cultic official, considered perhaps a consort of the god and thus her status is elevated becoming a remarkable member of the society she lived in. Fleming considers that this ritual is one of *segregation*, following van Gennep's scheme of "rites of passage". The **nin.dingir** is shaved at the opening of the gate of the courtyard of ^{d}IM and the gate is an obvious symbol for a threshold, one of the symbols of a passage. Therefore, this ritual is actually a *separation act of the* **nin.dingir** *from her old life*, with corresponding emphasis on her submission as she enters the service and domain of the storm god.[76]Even though this ceremony is only schematically rendered, it appears to have a certain similarity with the rituals involving

[74] MAL 43

[75] Raymond Firth*, Symbols: Public and Private*, 1973, pp 288-290 apud Mari Womack, *Symbols and Meaning: A Concise Introduction*, Rowman Altamira, 2005, p.93

[76] Daniel E. Fleming, *The Installation of Baal's High Priestess at Emar*, pp.181-182

Babylonian priests, so considering those texts, the ritual might also concern a purification act, a common practice in the ancient Near East. Those texts reveal that the *gullubu* was performed in a bath-house, before the future priest entered for the first time in the sacred area of the temple, so this ritual served as both access regulation to the sanctuary and the cultic office.[77] The central role played by the concept of purity in this ceremony is emphasized by the concern regarding the purity of the priest and his lineage and both of them should be spotless in order to please the gods as revealed by the following frangment of a Neo-Assyrian text:

> *Furthermore, concerning the priest of the cook's house, the priest of the confectioner's and the chief baker, (...), they were originally shaved. (...)Sennacherib shaved the priest of the little cook's house, but Aššur-zēru iddina,* ***a šangû-priest from Nineveh, denounced him and he was flogged with leather whips****. (Nevertheless,) he received his kubšu-headgear, (since) he had committed no serious crime. (...) This one (i.e. the priest of the confectioner's house) — your father (i.e. Sennacherib) appointed him.* ***He is son of an owner of the kubšu-headgear****. Due to an oversight he has not been shaved.*[78]

Returning to the installation of the Emar priestess, we don't find any details that would reveal such a concern for her lineage. She might not be a daughter or sister of a king as was common for the *entu* in Mesopotamia but she surely belonged to a wealthy, respectable family considering the impressive amount of gifts and offerings provided by the girl's father. Unfortunately, the text mentions only the shaving ritual, but it does not describe it in detail so we are not sure whether all her body should be shaved in order to be purified or only the hair from her head. Even so, in the case of women this ritual might imply only the cutting of the hair in a haircut specific for the **nin.dingir**. From the third millennium representation we know that the entu had a special hairstyle, letting her long hair hang lose on the back and

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[77]Anne Löhnert, "Reconsidering the consecration of priests in ancient Mesopotamia" in *Your praise is sweet. A memorial volume presented to Jeremy Allen Black by colleagues, students, and friends*, ed. by H.D. Baker, E. Robson, G. Zólyomi British Institute for the Study of Iraq London(183–191) p. 183-184. See also Anne Löhnert, *The Installation Of Priests According To Neo-Assyrian Documents*, State Archives of Assyria Bulletin Volume XVI, 2007

[78] Anne Löhnert, The Installation Of Priests According To Neo-Assyrian Documents, pg. 282

using a typical head accessory, the **aga** crown.[79] In the day of her installation she receives gifts from her brothers and the elders of Emar:

> *They will seat the nin.dingir on her throne and set up before her a new table of her father's house (and) placed bread on it. They will put on her ears two golden earrings, on her father's house, put on her right hand the(?) gold ring of ^{d}IM, (and) wrap her head with a red wool headdress. They will offer fine oil of ^{d}IM"*[80]

Fleming considers that the throne belonged to the office; it is not a personal belonging of the new priestess. By sitting on that chair the woman assumed her new status. There are also other representations of seated women identified as entu so the seat should be one of the symbols of their office taking into consideration that the other characters represented on a sitting position were either god and goddesses, or kings.[81]The garment and jewelries that she received are also, undoubtedly, marks of her new status, particular habits, if we may use this term that made her a recognizable and distinguished figure. In her work dealing with the analysis of visual representations of high priestesses, C. Suter states that they adopted the clothing and hairstyle from goddesses. Nonetheless, goddesses were usually depicted in a typical flounced robe and they had their hair tided up while the entu wore her hair lose and the **aga** crown[82] and even though they changed during the time they still have attached the meaning of their office. In this instance we may interpret the red wool garment wrapped around her head as a distinctive mark of her office along with the gold ring of ^{d}IM.

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[79] For the visual sources concerning the *entu* see the works of Claudia Sutter *Who Are The Women In Mesopotamian Art from Ca. 2334-1763 Bce?*, KASKAL Rivista di storia, ambienti e culture del Vicino Oriente Antico Volume 5 (2008), p.8 ; "Between Human and Divine: High Priestesses in Images from the Akkad to the Isin-Larsa Period " in *Ancient Near Eastern Art in Context Studies in Honor of Irene J. Winter* by Her Students Edited by Jack Cheng Marian H. Feldman, Brill, 2007; Irene Winter, *Women in Public: The Disk of Enheduanna, the Beginning of the Office of En-priestess, and the Weight of Visual Evidence,* Editions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1987

[80]Daniel E Fleming, *The Installation of Baal's High Priestess at Emar*, p.53

[81]Claudia Suter, *Who Are The Women In Mesopotamian Art from Ca. 2334-1763 Bce*?, pp.5-7

[82] Claudia Suter, *Between Human and Divine: High Priestesses in Images from the Akkad to the Isin-Larsa Period*, p.339

In the last day of the festival the **nin.dingir** has to move from her father's house to the temple of ^{d}IM in the area reserved for her. The rituals accompanying this process are those typical for the departing bride: "*When the* **nin.dingir** *leaves the house, they will cover her head as a bride (...) her two maids will embrace her as a bride*"[83] As in the case of a normal marriage this stage pinpoints the definitive separation from her past, childhood, friends and family in order of moving forwards, towards her new status.

At the end of the last day of festival, after the chamber and bed are prepared, the **nin.dingir** is ready for the first night outside her father's house, in her new home. Before going to sleep she must have her feet cleaned, a ritual performed by her own sister. In Fleming's opinion this cleansing ritual is nothing more than a reiteration of the appropriate thing to do before going to bed and has nothing to do with a supposes ritual bath that would precede a union with the god. The text only mentioned the washing of the feet and the priestess going to sleep, no perfumes and adornments, no sweet calls that might point to a ritual with sexual connotation as we encounter in Sumerian lyrics and the sacred marriage ritual. Fleming concludes that: "the rites from the last day include nothing that is evidently erotic…Rather the rites seem to deal more with the reality of changing homes. They are centered on the room with the bed not because the groom is to come there but because this will be the personal domain of the priestess."[84]

Now that we have a glimpse on the enthronement ritual we may ask ourselves what are the qualities a woman should possess in order to become an *entu* priestess and what were the cultic actions she performed. Did she need certain inborn qualities, physical perfection, and wisdom or was just the high status in society the access key for receiving the honor of serving the god from this respected office? Resourceful for this issue is the Mesopotamian Royal Inscription corpus and I will be focusing on the Old Babylonian one.

On a cone inscription from Ur dealing with the restoration of the Giparu, Enanedu, daughter of Kudur-mabuk and sister of Rîm-Sin proclaims herself:

> "*en priestess of the god Nanna (predestined) from the holy womb (for) the great fate of the office of an en (and) the nobility of heaven, beloved of the*

[83] Daniel E. Fleming, *The Installation of Baal's High Priestess at Emar*, p.56

[84] Ibidem, pg.192

heart, on whose body the goddess Ningal by (her own) hand has put the radiance of the office of en, ornament of Ekisnugal, who rivals high heaven, ornament of the agrun, bright light coming forth for the nation, holy suited for the tiara of the office of en."[85]

From the *entu*'s self-praising in the inscription, and considering the fact that they were chosen through divination, a procedure whose purpose was to reveal the wish of the god it appears that their destiny was decided before their birth so their virtues were beyond question. Attributes such as radiance and bright light hold a strong symbolic meaning. In Ancient Mesopotamian mentality all form of intense vitality such as beauty, youthfulness, power, vigor, everything that is perfectly pure and whole, integral emanates a dazzling, intense light.[86] So, the *entu* who was seen as the human wife of a divine being should be spotless both physically and mantally in order to please her supernatural husband thus the Sumerian designation, **nin.dingir** "lady who is a deity" seems to perfectly fit to this office.

A high priestess had some cultic duties and many of them are mentioned on a large tablet discovered by Sir Leonard Wooley at Ur that appears to deal with the installation of the same Enanedu. Considering the usefulness of the said tablet for the present study I will cite a large paragraph dealing with the said cultic attribution of a high priestess:

Frgm. 3) ... I, who am pleasing to [the goddess Ninga]1, who [perfectly executes the me s and ri]tes for [Ekišn]uga1, ...(...)

Frgm. 4) ... I established as regular offerings] for each [mon]th. I, En-ane-du, (for my) life ... as far as the distant future, more than ..., surpassing what [came before], the god [as I made a] pra[yer] (for) Ekiš[nugal]

Frgm. 10) ... ordered [m]e to put in ord[er] the [1us]tration rites, the small which was favourable to my [p]rayer, ...

Frgm. 13) ... I ...-ed there. The field ..., ... votive gift of the goddess Ningal, the field of the bi[g] tract, which had not been irrigated] and which [did not yield] a reliable income, I ...

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[85] D.Frayne, RIME 4, Old Babylonian Period, p. 300

[86] Eléna Cassin, *La splendeur divine: Introduction à l'étude de la mentalité mésopotamienne*, Mouton & CO, 1968, p.121

Frgm. 17) ... [gra]nted, [so many] gur grain, as regular of[fe]rings each month I established I fas[hio]ned a statue with ... fo[rm], whose face was inlaid with [... si]1ver and [g]old, a ... work, [and I established] there [as] re[gu1ar offerings] one jug of mixed [beer], five sila of [offering] flour, two sila of two sila of bread [mixed with] oil, one portion meat, one the god five sila of ...[87]

Considering the above description, we see that a high priestess is presumed to perform lustration rites or at least to supervise them, she can bring offerings and gifts to the gods but also establishes monthly offerings. The *entu* could ask for a statue to be fashioned and considering the donations established for it we may easily assume that the statue belonged to the god or goddess of the temple, perhaps Ningal for whom Enanedu provided before a bed and a throne. The priestess could proceed to rehabilitations of parts of the temple. She made a brick wall to be repaired, extended the sacred area. She took care of the graveyard of the former high priestesses, reestablished it, built a new wall around it, established a strong watch and purified the ruined place.[88] As we may observe from the above mentioned, she had almost royal attributes concerning temple building, rehabilitation and ordering cult statues. Anyway, this should not be surprising considering that they were daughters and sisters of kings. In the Babylonian Inscription corpora I could not find any *entu* that would belong to any other social category than royalty, unlike the case of Emar where the **nin.dingir** is said that she could be any daughter of a son of Emar. Considering that the priestess is supposedly chosen by divination, it is difficult not to observe the fact that the royal family was supported by gods also by asking for a priestess that was raised up among its members. So this office was not only about religious responsibility but one that was also used as a political tool in order to enhance, through cultic means, the prestige and authority of the royal family and to retain its control over the major temples.

Visual sources such as *Enheduanna disk* reveal us a ritual scene in which the *entu* of *Nanna* supervises a libation. The one who actually pours is a male naked figure. Even if other categories of cultic female officials and the common women are mentioned or represented when they are pouring libations, the *entu* is only shown to supervise this kind of ritual but we

[87] D.Frayne, RIME 4, Old Babylonian Period, pp.225-229; see also Dominique Charpin, *Le Clerge d'Ur au Siecle d'Hammurabi (XIXe - XVIIIe Siecles av. J.-C.)*, Droz Librairie, 1986 pg.201

[88] D.Frayne, *RIME 4, Old Babylonian Period*, p.301

are not to think because of this that they are not performing any direct ritual. One of their primary tasks was *to pray*: for their own lives and for that of the king or other members of the royal family:"*the one suited for true words of supplication. Who stays (making) prayers for him in the Gabura temple*"[89] and she is entitled with making offerings and donations to the gods on behalf of other persons. A cone inscription from Ur mentions the construction by En-ana-tumma, daughter of Išme-Dagan and *zirru* of the god Nanna of Ur of a temple for the god Utu, which was dedicated for the life of Gungunum, king of Ur.[90]

The most important and highly discussed ritual involving the *entu* is the so-called sacred marriage in which she seems to have played an important role although the theories about this ceremony and her active involvement in it are numerous and diverse.[91] Up to this point, it is not certain whether the ceremony was really enacted or only recited on behalf of the actors that should incarnate Dumuzi and Inanna.[92] The vast majority of the scholars nowadays tend to consider to more a symbolical ritual rather than a truly enacted one. There are scholars that question any involvement of the *entu* in the sacred marriage ritual. B.Alster suggested that the role of Inanna was played by a **lagar** priestess, second in rank to the first one. Another suggestion that appears to befit the context of the third Dynasty of Ur, was that offered by S.N Kramer. He stated that the **lukur** priestess played the goddess while Dummuzi was enacted by the king. There are several inscriptions from this period mentioning the **lukur**

[89] *Ibidem,* p.58

[90] Ibidem, p.116

[91] Cooper, Jerrold S. 1993. "Sacred Marriage and Popular Cult in Early Mesopotamia," 81-96 in *Official Cult and Popular Religion in the Ancient Near East: Papers of the First Colloquium on the Ancient Near East -- The City and its Life held at the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan (*Mitake, Tokyo) March 20-22, ed. by E. Matushima, Heidelberg Winter, 1992; Frayne, Douglas. "Notes on the Sacred Marriage Rite," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 42:5-22, 1985; Kramer, Samuel N. *The Sacred Marriage: Aspects of Faith, Myth and Ritual in Ancient Sumer*, Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University 1969; Lapinkivi, Pirjo, *The Sumerian Sacred Marriage in the Light of Comparative Evidence. Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Projec*t, University of Helsinki, 2004; Sefati, Yitschak , *Love Songs in Sumerian Literature: Critical Edition of the Dumuzi-Inanna Songs,* Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University, 1998; B.Posngratz Leisten, Sacred Marriage and the transfer of Divine Knowledge: Alliances between the Gods and the King in ancient Mesopotamia in Sacred Marriages. The Divine-Human Sexual Metaphor from Sumer to Early Christianity, Ed.by M.Nissinen and Risto Uro, Eisenbroun, Winona Lake, Indiana 2008

[92] Lapinkivi, Pirjo, *The Sumerian Sacred Marriage in the Light of Comparative Evidence*, p.69

of certain kings, but it should be remembered that in this period this word could be also translated as junior wife of a deified king.

Y.Sefati came with the suggestion that Inanna was ncarnated by a **nu.gig** (*qadištu/ ištaritu*) , a woman engaged theoretically in sacred prostitution, the goddess herself being described as the **nu.gig** of An or **nu.gig** of heaven.

After reviewing the main theories regarding Sacred marriage ritual, Lapinkiwi concludes that:

> I find the evidence for a ritualistic copulation between a Sumerian king and a priestess of Inanna unconvincing. Therefore, it is equally possible to believe that no actual intercourse ever occurred, but the union was truly a union between the goddess and the king, and thus possible to achieve only symbolically- even a mere recitation of a text as part of a liturgy, could have been enough, or maybe it could have been aided by mimic actions.[93]

Even so, we might find some transgressions from the rule. Besides the legends related to the secret birth of Sargon by an *entu*, there is also an Old Babylonian Inscription mentioning a son of an *entu "A-ab-ba, son of Enantuma, en of the god Nanna."*[94]

As we may see from the passage from Atra-ḫasis that forbade those women to bear children and the secrecy surrounding Sargon's birth, we may conclude that the *entu* should remain childless. But, as in the case of the *nadītum* of Sippar sometimes appeared transgressions from that rule.[95]Even so, it would have been interesting to have more information about the way those children were conceived and born, who was their father and what was their social status. The aforementioned seal impression is particularly interesting because it does not deal, or so it seems, with a royal heir that might have been the result of a ritual union between the king and the *entu*. The child is only identified as the son of the *entu* of Nanna. We have to admit that the concept of son in relation with a priestess that falls under

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[93] Ibidem, pp. 76-77

[94] F.Frayne, *RIME* 4, Old Babylonian Period, p.45

[95] Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State Evolution of the Earliest Cities, States, and Civilizations*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 117

the interdictions of bearing children, is rather ambiguous because we may not exclude neither the possibility of a natural son nor that of an adopted one. Another interesting observation concerned the gods the *entu* served: Nanna, so we don't have to deal with a character involved in the cult of Inanna. Her son possesses a seal so we may admit that he played a certain role in society, he was not isolated or rejected in any way. In case we are not dealing with an adoption, this only implies that *entu* could have occasional intercourse and get pregnant, but that does not require ritual intercourse.

Considering all the above, the secrecy of Sargon's birth serves to underline two ideas: the uniqueness of the king and to reinforce the custom concerning the moral and bodily purity of the *entu*, so we should read between the lines that the exception should not become the rule under any circumstances. Nevertheless, when a transgression did happen, there is no punishment infringed upon the priestess and, even if there was any, a fact seems to prevail: the child was not abandoned or outcast and the priestess still maintained her office.

Her high rank and importance in Mesopotamia society is also revealed by the attention her resting place and her funerary offerings received: "*1 royal ban of crushed flour, 1 ban of fine isquqa flour, as the offering with sheep sacrifice to the libation place of Geme-Lamma, high-priestess of Baba*"[96] but also by the attention her administration received during her lifetime.

Although the *entu* appears to be the most important female cultic official, she complete vanishes from the sources after the first centuries of the second millennium B.C and the restauration of this office during the following millennium was not successful considering all the changes the Mesopotamian society had undergone and almost a millennium of inexistence of the title outside lexical lists and omen compendia.

[96] Wu Yuhong, *19 Years' Finance Of The Household Of Geme-Lamma, The High Priestess Of Baba In Girsu Of Ur Iii (Š 31 – As 1=2065 – 2046 B.C), JAC 26 2011, p.14,* www.academia.edu,

III.1.b UGBABTUM

As I have mentioned before, the Sumerogram **nin.dingir**, designates both the *entu* and the *ugbabtum*, but CAD, vol. E sheds light into the matter stating that it has been assumed that "*whenever* **nin.dingir** *refers to a priestess of high social standing who is mentioned without reference to a specific deity, it should be rendered by entu (high priestess*)", the only exception being the references from Old Assyrian and Mari texts. Another similarity besides being a high ranking cultic official is that in both cases they are chosen through liver omens and enthroned by the king, but the slight inferiority of the *ugbabtu* is revealed when both of them are mentioned in the same text. An Old Babylonian liver omen says that when an *entu* dies, an *ugbabtu* will be installed[97] so we may consider the fact that the next *entu* might be selected from among the *ugbabtum* women. Besides, while the entu is a singular priestess, we may encounter more than one *ugbabtu* serving the same male deity, and they also have a supervisor as it appears from the archive of Sippar.[98]

The role of the *ugbabtu* seems to have changed during space and time. Assyriologists consider them to be a different type of priestesses, more prestigious than the common *naditus* but lately this opinion started to be contested by some researchers. Marten Stol does not deny the first definition given to the term **nin.dingir** and the closeness of the two titles, *entu* and *ugbabtu*, but h considers that *ugbabtu* may also be considered as a synonym for *naditu*.[99]While supporting this theory, Barberon states that the materials referring to *ugbabtu* discovered in Sippar or Kiš are revealing for the matter, especially the last ones when the title seems to be interchangeable as appears in the transcript of a process:

> *"Humaṭ-Sîn, fille de Šamaš-kima-ilîya: au sujet de son ugbabûtum, Bêl-ahîšu, fonctionnaire du roi et les Anciens de sa ville se sont rendu à la porte de DN et (dans?) le temple d'Inanna?, Ilî-puṭram, le maire, Nurâtum, KURšânu, Rabût-*

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[97] Henshaw, *Male and Female Cultic Personnel*, p 204; Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, p.491

[98] See R.Harris, *Ancient Sippar*, the section concerning the *ugbabtu*. In the texts concerning land property are mentioned 2 ugbabtu of Marduk from Babylon, Belitum and Geme-Asalluhi (VAT 6676) and Beltani(VAT 5799); Beletum, nin.dingir of Zababa from Kiš)

[99]M.Stol, Mel.Oeslner, 2000, pp .457-466 apud *L.Barberon, Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk*,p.109

Sîn et Dumâqum dirent qu'elle est une ugbabtum.Ils seront responsables envers le palais pour toute offense (commise envers) une nadîtum résidant dans leur ville. Ils ont juré par Marduk et Samsu-iluna."[100]

As it appears from the text, the woman is an *ugbabtu* and is recognized as one by the authorities of the city who are responsible for her wellbeing. The equivalence of the two titles, *ugbabtu* and *naditu*, is explicitly rendered in the text. The same authorities that called her an *ugbabtu*, suggest that they are going to protect a *nadītu* residing in their city without drawing a clear cut difference between the two. At the same time the two classes of cultic personnel are mentioned together in CH 110. As we can see, neither of them are confirmed to be cloistered and do not possess a special living place like the *gipar* of the *entu*. They are free to go wherever they need to, but should be careful not to become unclean by entering in contact with polluting substances. Analyzing the sources at hand, Barberon concludes that the term *ugababtu*, at least in the second millennium was used as a generic one, designating a larger category of women that share the common status of consecrated women/ votaries.

This emblem of consecrated woman seems to fit well the Old Assyrian context, where the daughters were placed under the protection of a deity. Considering that no specific religious functions transpires from the available data, it wouldn't be recommended to consider the Assyrian *ugbabtu* a priestess. They may be discussed by comparison with the Old Babylonian *naditu*, but they are not to be identified with the last ones. Unfortunately, there is not much information concerning the cultic role of those votaries. The letters they exchange with the members of their family are reflecting only their economic and legal affairs nothing of their role as votaries being implied.

As the cloistered *naditu*, the Old Assyrian *ugbabtu* should remain unmarried and childless. She was consecrated to a god by her family but the reasons for this act are less clear than in the case of the *naditu*. The dossier of Lamassī, wife of Pūšu-kēn contains a series of letters concerning the future of their daughter of Ahaha who should be placed under the protection of the god Aššur:

"La petite a grandi, montre-toi un homme d'honneur, viens et place-la sous la protection du dieu Aššur. "

[100] L.Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk*,p. 110

"Tu entends comme le genre humain est (maintenant) pervers, chacun est prêt à avaler son voisin ! Montre-toi un homme d'honneur, viens et romps tes obligations. Place (notre) petite sous la protection du dieu Aššur ! "

"Comme la fillette avait grandi, j'ai dû faire une paire d'étoffes épaisses pour la carriole… La petite a beaucoup grandi, mets-toi en route, viens la placer sous la protection du dieu Aššur, et saisir le pied de ton dieu ! "[101]

As we may deduce from those excerpts, the girl should be consecrated when she reaches the age of marriage and the presence of the father is required for the event. He is the one who contracts a marriage for his daughter and provides her with a dowry, so it is only natural for him to be present at the consecration ceremony. Unfortunately, the documents offer no other information concerning the event. Later letters reveal that Lamassī's obstinate efforts were fruitful and Ahaha became an *ugbabtu* of the god Aššur. Besides being an act of pure piety, she considered the consecration of her daughter as a way of securing her a prosperous future, protecting her from all malevolent intentions. A consecrated woman should be treated with respect, protected from any harm because injuring the god's property was considered a serious offence, and a votary definitely belonged to the deity she was consecrated to. Even though the data concerning Old Assyrian *ugbabtu* is scarce we may conclude that she held an important position in the society she lived in and she enjoyed far more privileges than the other ladies who lived in the same time and area.

The status of the *ugbabtu* from Mari seems to be even more ambiguous than that of their counterparts from Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian sources because it appears to be a slight difference between the votaries of various gods. F.Batto states that:

"…the Mari evidence may be grouped into three categories: 1.The *ugbabtum* of Dagan in Terqa and matters of her house; 2. The *ugbabtum*

[101] Cecile Michel, Les lles consacrées des marchands assyriens, Topoi Suppléments, 2009, 10 (pp.145-163) , p. 154 https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00644209 For the integral text, translated in French see the dossier of Lamassī in C.Michel, *La correspondence des marchands de Kaniš au début du IIe millénaire avant J.C*, Les Éditions du CERF, Paris, 2001,

(**NIN.DINGIR.RA.MEŠ**) of Adad of Kulmiš; 3. *ugbabtum* mentioned by name."[102]

The *ugbabtu* of Dagan of Terqa seems to be higher in rank than the other votaries mentioned in those letters. This elevated status may be owed to the fact that Zimri-Lim appeared to have a predilection towards the cult of this particular god to whom he made various offerings during his reign. From the correspondence exchanged between the king and governor of Terqa we find out that the last one was charged with finding a suitable place for the *ugbabtu*' s dwelling. It seems to be an important matter considering that they required an answer from the god Dagan himself, and even with a favorable answer from the deity concerning the settlement of the house were still problems to be solved.[103] The two inconveniences signaled by Kibri Dagan to the king are revealing for the status the *ugbabtu* of Dagan of Terqa held in the Mariote society. She was not to be living with the women involved in tissue industry inside the palace of Terqa. This area, even though it was inhabited by the previous *ugbabtu* of Dagan sheltered now working women that had no other place to move in. The governor mentions another good settlement for the priestess's house approved by the god, but he points out that it is close to the residence of a woman that made *mirsum*-pastries and asks the king to think about the matter and to decide the location of the *ugbabtu*'s residence. F.Batto considered that "*apparently, ugbabātum had to maintain a certain dignity, perhaps even a certain distance from profane activities"*[104] The king must have agreed with the last proposed emplacement, because a third letter speaks about bringing the *ugbabtu* in her new residence.[105] This series of letters reveals that the *ugbabtu* of Dagan appears to be the highest priestess of the god in the city of Terqa, a status similar with that of the *entu* in the southern regions. The fact that the king himself is being asked to come and escort the ugbabtu to her new residence reinforces her prestige : " *May my Lord, out of the goodness of his heart, come up and himself kiss the feet of Dagan, the one who loves him"* [106]

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[102] Bernard Frank Batto, *Studies on Women at Mari*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, p.79

[103] *Ibidem*, pp.80-81

[104] *Ibidem*, p.80

[105] F.Batto, *op.cit*, p.80

[106] I*bidem*, p.81

Sometimes, the *ugbabtu* came from inside the royal family such as the case of Inib-Šina, daughter of the king serving the god Adad. N. Ziegler points out, after finding imprints of her seal, that she was the daughter of the former king and sister of Zimri-Lim:

i-ni-ib-ši-na **dam** ^{d}*IM*

dumu-munus *ia-ah-du-li-im*[107]

She is named **dam** ^{d}IM and not **nin.dingir** IM, and she is mentioned in the same way also in the ration lists: 1 ½ *qa i-ni-ib-ši-na* **dam** ^{d}IM[108]. Another payment list involving royal women mentions her as *i-ni-ib-ši-na* **nin.dingir-[ra]**[109].We may observe that N.Ziegler added the syllable **[ra]** underlining the fact that she does not see her as a simple *ugbabtu*. Considering the data about her and her position as head of the list in the ration documents, we may imply that her status resembles a lot with that of the southern Mesopotamian *entu*. In light of all the above, I prefer to read her title as spouse of Adad rather than *ugbabtu* of Adad. Her correspondence is scarce and it doesn't bring any information about her cultic duties referring only to administrative matters and the transmission of a prophecy.[110]

Another group of texts present the particular situation of a group of priestesses that were taken as war booty. The letters exchanged by Zimri-Lim and his wife Šibtu reveal the special treatment the consecrated women received even in those circumstances and we may have a glimpse into the ancient Mesopotamian imagery: "*Now I have sent you some female weavers; there are some ugbabātum among them. Pick out the ugbabātum and assign the others to the textile factory*"[111]

Priestesses were highly regarded even when they were held captive as war booty. They were treated with respect and spared the shame of being sent with the ordinary women to the weaving house. The most consistent letter refers to some *ugbabātum* of Adad from

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[107] Ziegler, N., Le Harem de Zimrî-Lîm, Florilegium marianum IV., Mémoires de NABU 5, 1999, p.47

[108]Ibidem, ARM XXII 55, p.128

[109] Ibidem, M 12200, p.224

[110] J.M Durand, Documents épistolaires du Palais de Mari, Tome III, pp.404-407.

[111] F.Batto, Studies on Women at Mari, ARM X 126, p. 83

Kulmiš that were sent to Mari and asked to be brought back in order to be reinstalled in their late office. All these turmoil seems to have been caused by some minor problems that Zimri-Lim had during his campaign. Perhaps, all those events happened around the same time and the king was prone to believe that his misfortune was caused because the god Adad was displeased because he removed his *ugbabātum* from the temple of Kulmiš. In order to fix his mistake and get on the good side of the god, Zimri-Lim asked his queen to provide the *ugbabātum* with new clothing (perhaps as a compensation for the humiliation of being taken as war booty) and send them back with two chariots with mules for he to reinstall them and appease the deity. This attitude might be a perfect example for the ancient Mesopotamian belief that any adversity is caused by sins that might have angered the gods and as a punishment those "*turned their face*" from the sinner.

As we have seen from the above cases, the *ugbabtu* is a versatile category of votaries and her role changes during time and space going from an official that is second in rank only to the *entu* to a status similar with that of the *naditu* in the Old Assyrian regions, and an even more ambiguous position in the region of neighboring Syria where her role was tightly linked to the prestige of the god she served.

III.2 NADITU WOMEN

The second millennium B.C brings into attention a new type of cultic female personnel, the *nadītu*. The CAD defines them as women dedicated to a god, usually unmarried, not allowed to have children, frequently living in a *gagûm*[112]. The *nadītu* were mostly members of the elite and were consecrated to the patron god of a city: Šamaš in Sippar, Marduk in Babylon or Ninurta in Nippur. Rivkah Harris, one of the pioneers of this research topic extended considered that "*the nadītum women belonged to a special class; they were women who were ranked together possessing certain common features and having the same status and function in society. It was a class not limited to one city, but was found in*

[112] CAD vol.E, pg.63

many cities during the Old Babylonian Period.[113]" They could be daughters or sisters of kings or members of important families of priests, militaries, scribes or rich merchants.

The questions which rises is why would all those wealthy people decide to make their daughters enter the *gagûm* and live a childless life in a society that was gravitating around concepts such as family, lineage and inheritance? Harris considers this a method used by the father to preserve untouched the paternal estate within the family. The institution was created in a period of distress and economical change inside the Mesopotamian society at the beginning of the second millennium B.C when people accumulated considerable wealth and were looking for different ways to preserve it.

Even though the *naditu* received her dowry in the moment of her consecration, those goods should be returned to the male members of her family after her death. Moreover, the cloister's administration paid the *terhatum* (bride's price) and offered the *biblum* as an engagement gift which consisted mostly in edibles and beverages, but also in some presents for the young girl.[114]

Even though economic advantages seemed to have priority, we must not neglect the religious aspect of such a choice. As we may notice from the numerous letters exchanged between the *naditus* and their families, they are constantly addressing prayers on behalf of their families, but also for themselves. They are, as states by Erišti-Aja in a letter sent to her father Zimri-Lim of Mari "*the praying emblem of my paternal family*[115]" (ARM X 36).

This class of cultic officials was well attested and a very important role was played by the community of Sippar that left us a resourceful amount of written documents. Even though the vast majority are related to economic issues we still can figure out some religious activities, and discuss the particular status those women enjoyed in Old Babylonian period, a status that other women would hardly attain.

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[113] Rivkah Harris, "The Naditu Women" in *Studies presented to A.Leo Oppenheim*, June 7, 1964, The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, p. 108

[114] Idem, p.109

[115] Jean-Marie DURAND, *Documents épistolaires du Palais de Mari*, Tome III, Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient 18, Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2000 , p 394 "Moi, ne sus-je pas l'emblème en prière de la famille paternelle?"

When we discuss the status of *nadītus* we must consider the fact that there were attested two types of such votaries: the ones that lived in the *gagûm* (*naditus* of Šamaš and Ninurta) and the ones that were allowed to marry but found themselves under the interdiction of bearing children so, I will discuss the two categories separately because each one has its one interesting particularities.

I will try to discuss first the situation and cultic activities of the *nadītu* women living in the *gagûm* in view of the vast Sippar evidence, and considering the rank of certain female votaries consecrated to the god Šamaš[116].As it was already said, those votaries were usually members of the elite but, in the same time, there were members of the cloister community, the *gagûm*, of the God of Sun and Justice. Their double identity is also obvious when it comes to analyze the inscription contained by the cylinder seals they were using. Lucille Barberon who studied and classified this kind of objects states that "*le simple fait de posséder un sceau-cylindre est déjà, en soi, la marque d'un certain rang dans la société. Peu de femmes en détenaient en comparaison des hommes; or quand c'était le cas, il s'agissait avant tout de religieuses*[117]".

In her opinion we may distinguish three main patterns:

1.Name, daughter of X, nadîtum of the god Y

„Niš-îni[šu], daughter d'Ab[îyatum], nadîtum of Šamaš" (CT 47.40)

2.Name, daughter of X, servant woman of the god Y/his consort

„Lammasî, daughter of Sîn-ennam, servant woman of Šamaš and Aja" (Blocher, MVS 10 no.260)

3.Combination of the two patterns : Name, nadîtum of the god Y, daughter of X, servant woman of the god Y/his consort

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[116] Iltani, daughter of Sin-mubalit and sister of Hammurabi of Babylone, and Erišti-Aja, daughter of Zimri-Lim, king of Mari are the most prominent examples of princesses devoted to Samas

[117] Lucille Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone*, Mémoire de NABU 14, SEPOA, p.16

„Iltani, nadîtum of Šamaš, daughter Sîn-mubalit, [servant woman] of Šamaš andt Aja"(VS 13/16)[118]

This double identification of *nadītum* votaries is really interesting. They are still members of their original family, daughters of their fathers but also servants of the god Šamaš, a particular situation if we consider that a woman is either the daughter of her father or the wife of her husband, but not both of them. After she gets married, the woman doesn't belong anymore to her paternal family, and as a consequence of this fact, she is no more identified as its member. In contrast, after their consecration, the *nadītus* were still playing a prominent role in the life of their family as full righted members and held also an important position in the social life being active agents in the public area. Their privileged status is revealed by the documents of the time.

Paragraphs 178-182 of Hammurabi's Code establish the inheritance rights of some categories of female cultic personnel including the *nadītus*. They should receive a dowry consisting in both movable and immovable assets, the last ones taking the form of the so called "ring money" that could be used by the votaries as they pleased without any restrictions. Besides these assets, they were entitled with receiving food supplies from their kinsmen regardless the circumstances if not, they received a share of the paternal estate equal with that of a male heir. As they were not allowed to alienate any inherited property, they used the ring money to enhance their income and were involved in various types of economic activities, usually involving selling and lending of the land or houses that they were able to purchase with the money earned as a result of their investments.

Difficulties appeared when the *nadītus* relied only on the supplies received from their families and the vast Sippar correspondence is relevant when it comes to tensioned and conflictual relation between them and their close relatives:

> *"Speak to Lipit-Tišpak: thus says Munawwirtum. May my Lord and my Lady keep you in good health! Did I tell you that I am starving, and then you told me: <I will send you barley and sesame!> And speak to Sîn-remēni and Tišpak-gāmil: thus says Munawwirtum:< May my Lord and my Mistress*

[118] Idem, p.17-18

grant you good health! It is for your sake that I am starving! Send me each, 1 kor of barley, and I will pray for you!"[119]

Even if we can see that the letter was addressed only to one of her brothers, probably the older one, they were all responsible to provide her with supplies. It would have been more interesting if we had known the amount of goods demanded from the older brother, to see whether his responsibilities as head of the family surpassed those of the younger siblings. She required her fair share in order to live a carefree life that would allow her to pray peacefully for the sake of her family and her own. If the situation doesn't change the *nadītum* is legally entitled to take full property of her immovable goods, to become independent and break the ties with her family, a situation that is often attested by the documents of the time. Moreover, as I have already mentioned, the votaries could dispose of their movable assets as they pleased, and as the land they received was usually not enough for her and her slaves' daily living, she could use those goods in order to buy more land and houses that she could rent out in exchange for supplies, and other advantages such as providing meat, beer or flour that the *nadītu* needed for the *piqitum* offering she had to present for the Samas festival up to six times a year.

Sometimes, nadītuship became a true family business and we encounter a tradition concerning the adoption by an older *nadītum* of a daughter of her brother who usually was a votary of Šamaš herself. Discussing this phenomenon Rivkah Harris compiled a list consisting in the names of aunts and nieces that she could find while studying the documents from Sippar and she was able to identify 10 such adoption contracts[120]. In this situation, all the assets, both inherited and attained through her own means will return, after her death, in the property of the paternal family. Even though this was a solution in order to ensure her old age, she was not constrained to only adopt a female member of her family, and she could dispose as she pleased of her own income. Since their consecration up to their final hour the *nadītus* were bent to establish tight relations, and to manifest a strong type of class solidarity, untouched by external male rules. So, in this secluded environment established by men in order to defend their own interests and organized around male created laws, we may observe the development of female solidarity, the solidarity of a particular group, and why not a

[119] *Letters in the Louvre*, transliterated and translated by K.R. Veenhof, Brill-Leiden Boston, 2005, p.23.

[120] Rivkah Harris, *op.cit*., p.126

solidarity that may reveal a gender conscience that was sometimes stronger than family ties. An economical text from Sippar[121] mentions the involvement of the votaries during the commemoration of late *nadītus* during the š*ebut šattim* festival.

Those interdependence relations between the cloistered women may become formal once an adoption contract is written down. Albeit such an action isn't usually welcome, and the reaction of the family might not be a friendly one, the laws and public authorities strictly defended the rights of those women. Pertinent in this case is the long contract CT 40 42[122] concerning the adoption of a young *nadītu*, an undoubtedly interesting text that intrigued the Assyriologists after its publication.

Belesunnu, *nadītu* of Šamaš adopted Amat-Mamu, also a *nadītu* of Šamaš, and she made her sole beneficiary of all her goods (a house and land inside the cloister area, land inside and uotside the city, and three slaves). Albeit the vast majority of the properties she provided Amat-Mamu with after her death were earn by her own investments, Belesunnu got into conflict with two of her cousins, nieces of her father, who claimed a field that she received as a part of her dot.

The names of those women, Nīs-inišu and Amat-Šamaš, show clearly that they were both *nadītu* of Šamaš. Their attempt to enter into the possession of Belesunnu's field failed. The case was brought into attention before the gate of Šamaš, and the judges and the *rabianum* of Sippar, and they reinforce Amat-Mamu's rights as heiress and caretaker of the old *nadītu.* Moreover, the two women that unjustly brought claim against her have to undergo a punishment and they promised through a clay tablet that they will not insist on asking property of the land. After those tense events, the *nadītu* is confronted with the problem of losing her adoption and inheritance documents but the authorities were prompt in solving this situation defending her against any further abuse.

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[121] See Harris, *op.cit*, p.110-111

[122] See *Order, Legitimacy, and Wealth in Ancient States*, edited by Janet Richards,Mary Van Buren, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.60-63 and Dominique Charpin, "Lettres et process paléo-babylonien", in *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie.Archives judiciaires du Proche-Orint Ancien*, sous la direction de Joannès Francis, Presse Universitaire de Vincenne, p.75-76

Their allegedly safe and comfortable life in the *gagum,* the perspective of preserving the integrity of paternal estate, and the desire of having a votary that would pray constantly for the wellbeing of the family, seemed to be really attractive for the people of the time. All the attention this institution was receiving destabilized it for a short period during the reign of Samsu-iluna. The king tried to limit the afflux of young girls entering cloister through a *mišarum* edict which obliged the father to provide his daughter dowry. The tempting alternative to marriage led many families to consecrate a girl without providing her the means of living giving birth to a particular phenomenon that C.Janssen renders through the phrase "hungry *nadītus*"[123]. In order to save the institution, the king reformed it on economic basis, rendering it more difficult for others than the members of the elite to enter the cloister turning it to an environment accessible only to a restricted group of privileged women.

After discussing the particular social status of the cloistered *nadītum*, I will try to discuss their cultic involvement even though the sources concerning this issue are very scarce and difficult to interpret from this point of view. Studying specific fragments from contract, letters, laws and the particular names they sometimes adopt, we may have a glimpse in their daily cultic life, but the image is far from being the most accurate and complete one. Even so, the sources raise questions concerning the rites and rituals they are attending or partaking in, about their daily prayer duty of their relation with the gods.

First of all, we must not forget that the *naditus* were not fully entitled priestesses because they were not allowed to perform rituals by themselves, and they don't seem to follow any strict code or religious prescription.[124]Anyway, we must always remember that those ladies were women of religion, cultic personnel, even though the aspects concerning their cultic service are difficult to reveal and the majority of the documents concerning this type of priestesses refer to those of Šamaš, from Sippar and those of Marduk.

Nowadays we dispose of a handful of texts concerning their consecration ceremony, *nīšîtum*, but unfortunately, those are mostly lists of goods that the young girl is offered when

[123] D.Charpin, *Lettres et procès paléo-babyloniens*, p. 87-88

[124] R.Harris, *The Naditu Women*, p.108

she enters the cloister and don't bring information about any cultic activity.[125]A pale glimpse into the religious aspects is offered by the vast correspondence of the *nadītus* and by two administrative texts concerning the consecration of Sippar votaries, documents published and amply discussed by R.Harris in her study of the *nadītu* women (PBS 8/2 and CT4 18b).[126]

The first text deals with a series of expenditures incurred by the cloister for the festival of *šebut šattim*, a festival held in honor of the patron deity of the city, Šamaš during the month of AB.È.A, December-January.[127]It appears that this festival hosted at least two events as involving the *nadītu* community of the city: the memorial day of the deceased *naditus* and probably the *nišītum* ceremony. Although the text does not speak clearly about the consecration of the young girl, we may assume that the ceremony was held during the festival. The cloister present Awāt-Aja and her mother Mār-erṣetim with a series of goods that seems to describe the *biblum*, betrothal gift, also mentioned in CH 156-161, *"The betrothal gift (biblu) which for Awāt-Aja / And Mār-erṣetim, the children of Warād-Irra, was taken."*[128] It consisted in some presents for the bride and her brother: 1 shekel of silver and a belt for the man and 1 shekel of silver for two rings for the future votary. The other entries concerning this matter list a series of vessels and consumables. There is also an enumeration of goods that entered the cloister specifically for the future *nadītum,*" *was brought for Awāt-Aja*."[129] The other text debated by Harris, CT4 18b, contains also references to the marriage customs of the time. In the day when she enters the cloister, the officials of the institution bring the bridal gift/price, *terhatum* that is handed out to her family's representative (father or elder brother). Even though the two texts are not related, they seem to approach the same issue- the consecration of the young girl as a votary.

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[125] Lucille Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk*, pp.186-192. The author presents and discusses a series of consecration ceremonies

[126] R.Harris, *The Naditu Women*, PBS 8/2, pp.110-112 and CT4 18b, pp.114-115

[127] *Ibidem*, p.112 and Mark E.Cohen, *The Cultic Calendars of the Ancient Near East*, CDL Press Bethesda, Maryland 1993 p.276

[128] R.Harris, *The Naditu Women*, 110

[129] *Ibidem*, pp.110-111

One of the most interesting information brought up by this text is the one concerning the placement of the "rope of Šamaš" on the hand of the girl by an official of the cloister.[130]Harris interprets this as a ritual that the *nadītu* must undergo for her consecration, even though the mention of the rope of Šamaš seems to be singular in Old Babylonian sources. This object/gesture might symbolize that the destiny of the girl is tied up with that of her god, the cloister and the service she has to provide for the divine couple.

There has been a tight dispute concerning the relationship between the votary, the Sun god and his consort, Aja. In my opinion, this controversy is amplified by the contextual meaning of the word *kallatum* that may be translated either as bride, daughter in law or even wife, and by the fact that the *terhatum* may be offered by both the future father-in-law and the bridegroom himself (CH 155, 156).

The *kallatum* was a young girl from the betrothal until the consumption of her marriage, who lived in the house of the father in law and was expected to remain virgin for her husband.[131]Harris suggested that the *naditu* has to be regarded as a daughter in law of the god. The consecration ceremony is not to be compared with marriage, but rather with an initiation of the girl into the household of her father in law during the festival of *šebut-šattim*, and the rope that is placed on her arm must be interpreted as a sign of adoption. She considers that the cloister paid the *terhatum* on behalf of the father in law, Šamaš.[132]In this case the girl enters the institution as a *kallatum* and she seems to receive all the rights and responsibilities incurred by this status; she is being protected by her current family, she is offered a new position within the Mesopotamian society but she is expected to humbly and faithfully serve her father and mother in law. From Harris' theory we may deduce that the *naditu* is a perpetual *kallatum* because all similarity with a normal wedding ends here considering that there is no son she will be married with. This status of a virgin wife to be, might also explain why the *nadītus* of Sippar must remain chaste even though the interdiction from Atra-ḫasis refers only to the prohibition of giving birth. On the other hand, Westbrook criticizes this theory. Even though the comparison with a wedding seems to be a valid point because the *biblum* and *terhatum* are mentioned, he rejects the hypothesis of the *nadītu* as a daughter in

[130] *Ibidem*, p.115

[131] CAD, vol K, pp.79-80, CH 155, 156, R Westbrook, Old Babylonian Marriage Law, pp.17-18

[132] R.Harris, *The Naditu Women*, pp.113, 116

law of the god. The *biblum*, as shown in CH 159-161 is a gift made by the groom to the family of the bride on the occasion of the wedding and the *terhatum* is the brideweath that the future husband has to pay before taking a girl as his wife. Only when the son is under age the prospective father in law is presenting the contribution to the family of the young woman, but in the case of a *nadītu* of Šamaš there is no under age son, and if we are to accept Harris' theory, there is no son at all. Considering all the above, we may assume that the god himself is the bridegroom.[133]The *nadītu* is a secondary wife and her status is akin that of a *šugitum*, with the goddess Aja as principal wife. This situation resembles more with a marriage involving a naditum of Marduk and a second wife as a provider of children. Furthermore, the god and the goddess are referred to as"*belī and beltīja*" (my lord and my mistress) and not as *ummum, abum, emum, emītum* (mother, father, father in law, mother in law). Studying the correspondence of the time, it might be observed that the wives, especially those from the royal family addressed their husbands as *belum*.[134]The ladies of higher status were addresses as *bēletum*[135] in order to underlines the status of mistress and servant. On the other hand, a *nadītu* of Marduk has to be seen by the *šugitum* as her mistress, follow her wherever she desires, obey her orders and serve her in the best way she could: "*Whenever she is angry, she shall be angry; whenever she is friendly, she has to be friendly; she has to carry her chair in the temple of Marduk*"[136]

Whether the relationship between the divine couple and the votary is that of daughter in law or a secondary wife, her attachment towards her master and mistress is undeniable. The *nadītu* from Sippar may be easily recognized by their name because it seems that those women used to adopt theophoric names when they entered the cloister, but it appears to be a restricted phenomenon specific to this particular community.[137] Harris and Barberon in their studies addressing the *nadītus* were able to identify a variety of names worn by the votaries

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[133] R Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, p.66

[134] See S. Dalley, *Old Babylonian Tablets from Tell Al Rimah* and J.M. Durand, *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari,* tome 3

[135] *Ana beltīja qibbima* = speak to my lady

[136] R Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, p.127

[137] R.Harris, *The Naditu Women*, p.127

reflecting the devotion towards the divine couple they served.[138] Even though the change of names is not attested for other communities, it might still be present, albeit on a smaller scale. Barberon identified some particular names worn by the priestesses of Marduk, Ninurta and Adad. The change of name of those ladies, although it was not compulsory, did happen in certain cases as revealed by a reproachful letter sent by a votary of Adad to her father: *"Why am I offering sacrifices again and again in a city and under a name that aren't mine?*"[139] A name that is not mine might imply that the woman had to leave behind her own name when she enter the cultic office and adopt a new one, more appropriate for her new status. Barberon identified a few theophoric names belonging to priestesses of Ninurta and Adad.[140] For the *nadītu* of Marduk, when a change of name occurs they usually took up naophoric names, evoking the god's main sanctuary in Babylon, Esagil. Even so the variety of names for the *nadītu* of the Sun god has no parallel.[141]

As mentioned before, taking a religious name might be interpreted as a mark o piety, but in the same time as a professional name, and this tells a lot about its bearer's status in the Mesopotamian society, with all the rights and responsibilities incurred. The class solidarity is reflected during the *šebut*-consecration of the new *nadītus*, and the third was devoted to the sacrifices for the gods, the second day was a memorial day for the deceased votaries. Having no children of their own flesh and blood, those women needed to know that they would be remembered and honored after their death. Being deprived from the normal life of an ancient Mesopotamian woman these priestesses reinforce their gender and class relations through this kind of ceremonies that seem to be reflecting their life cycle from the moment they enter the

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[138] I*bidem,pp. 116-117,* and Lucille Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone*, pp.9-12; Amat-Šamaš, Amat-Aja, Amat-Šerda, Amat-Mammu, Amat-Ningal, Erišti-Šamaš, Erišti-aja, Šat-Šamaš, Šat-Aja, Taddin-Ningal, Awat-Aja, Awat-Šamaš, Ibbi-Šamaš are just a few of the names worn by the *nadītu* of Šamaš

[139] *Letters in the British Museum.* AbB 12, BM 97239, p.75

[140] Geme-Nanna, Bau-hegalli, Sât-Ninurta, Šat Ištar, Erišti Adad, Šat-Adad, Humti-Adad, Šala-Šarrat, Taram-Adad, Adad-Nûri in Lucille Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone*, p.9

[141] Eriš-Esagil, Inuh-Esagil, Liwwir-Esagil, Taram-(E)sagil, Tab-Esagil in Lucille Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone*, p.12

cloister until the gods are calling them, an expression that reflect their closeness to the gods they serve.[142]

The religious role of the *nadītu* does not resume to those annual ceremonies during the festival. Their involvement in this ceremony is both spiritual and pecuniary. As it transpires from the *nadītu* contracts, they were obliged to provide for the festivals. For living under the protection of the temple, the votaries and the cloister officials were compelled to bring offering called *piqittum* to the Ebabbar for the festivals of Šamaš, oblations consisting in food, mostly meat and flour.[143] Usually this charge was passed over to other people through the lease contracts. The lessee had to provide *the nadītu* with the products for *piqittum* for a number of at least three festivals, but the demand could be extended up to six of them.[144] The archive of Sippar priestesses abounds of such requests[145] but they are not mentioned for votaries from other communities. Nevertheless, we may not dismiss the idea of these women having some sort of pecuniary obligations towards the temple of the gods they serve.

Despite the fact that the obligations of the *nadītus* are fully attested, the rituals (*parşum*) they attended are a complete mystery. It is sure that they were not allowed to perform those rituals alone, being supervised and simple executants of some cultic actions or gestures required by their superiors. Barberon was able to depict some of the rituals they took part in, but only the names remained:" *Des rites eux-mêmes, seuls les noms nous sont connus. Leur contenu et leur motivaions demeurent encore bien mystérieux*"[146]and even the participation of the *nadītus* is purely hypothetical.

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[142] R.Harris, *The Nadītu Women*, p.120

[143] Ib*idem,* p.129

[144] *Ibidem*, p.130

[145] Földi Zsombor József, Rībatum. The Archive of a Priestess from Old Babylonian Sippar, 2009, pp. 54-95 (transliterations and translations of contracts) https://www.academia.edu/531594/R%C4%ABbatum. The Archive of a Priestess from Old Babylonian Sippar

[146] Lucille Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone*, p.203

On the other hand, paleo-babylonian documents, especially the letters, render quite clearly another preoccupation of the consecrated women: they are constantly praying before the god and goddess. Their close connection to the deities, appear to give more power to their prayers, so many families decided to devote more than one daughter to the gods considering that this intimate relationship between the votary and the deity would bring health and prosperity for all the members of the household.[147]Harris even launched the hypothesis of the *nadītu*s replacing the votive statues.

Considering that we know two types of *nadītu*s, the cloistered ones and the ones living outside the *gagum*, we should approach the subject of prayer differently. We know that the *naditu* of Marduk were required to be present in the temple at certain times because of the clause concerning the obligation of a secondary wife to carry the chair of the priestess to the temple, clause present in almost all of the contracts involving a *nadītu* and a *sugetum*: "*she has to carry her chair in the temple of the god*"[148] A *nadītu* of Marduk is seen as serving and addressing prayers to other gods, not only the one she was devoted to. In the absence of a secondary wife, the chair was perhaps carried by the *nadītu* herself of by a trustworthy servant, but unfortunately there is no information concerning this kind of situation. There is also no data about the frequency of those journeys to the temple. The *nadītu* presence might be required once or twice a day for the morning and evening prayers like in the case of Sippar. Nonetheless, in their case the presence might have been required when someone asked her to offer prayers of sacrifices on their behalf. Barberon analyses the dowry of a certain Taram-(E)sagil, daughter of Sû-Amurum, that includes two statuettes , suggesting that the prayers could be addressed in front of a personal shrine, set up inside her own house.[149] Considering this statement, we may interpret these statuettes as symbols of the divine couple Marduk and Zapanitum present in the temple. The same author points out that is difficult to identify the relatives a *nadītu* of Marduk is praying for, because they are married women who theoretically entered the family of her husband, thus adopting the gods of her new family,

[147] I*bidem*, p.205

[148] I*bidem*, CT 2 44, BAP 89, CT 4 8 57

[149] *Ibidem,* p.205

making the primal role of intercessor between the god and her father's household counterintuitive.[150]

The portrait of a votary in prayer is much more complex in the case of Sippar community due to the vast amount of letters describing this cultic activity. The naditus of Šamaš seem to be praying at least twice a day, revealing their constant presence inside the temple, in the presence of the divine couple:"*I wish to pray constantly for you at the morning and evening offerings for your health before my lord and my lady*"[151] Another priestess writes to a member of her family, showing her concern for the poor state of his health, as follows:

> *"At the morning and evening offerings I always pray in front of my Lord and my Mistress for your health. I have heard about your illness and I am worried. May my Lord and My Mistress not fail to protect you on the right and on the left. Everyday and night I pray for you before the queen of Sippar."*[152]

This epistolary excerpt is in itself a beautiful prayer, and a way of expressing the *naditu*'s allegiance towards her family and god. In both letters the votaries mention that they are praying at the morning and evening offerings. A text from the Seleucid period, even though it is a late document, states that the divine statues were served two meals a day, one at the opening of the temple, and one in the evening, after the temple is closed.[153]The daily cult ritual involves two primary elements: the care and feeding of the deities which were the main responsibilities of the Mesopotamian clergy.[154]*Nadītus* are not full fledge priestesses, just votaries, so we may assume that they were not allowed to touch the deity's food or serve the divine table, but from the content of the letters we may assume that they were allowed in the presence of the divine couple during these daily offerings and sacrifices. In any situation, the presence before the divine couple required ritual cleansing as it is shown in another letter

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[150] Ibidem. P206

[151] *Letters in the British Museum*, p.89

[152] *Letters in Philadephia* , CBS 1364

[153] Karen Rhea Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia,* Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998, p 186

[154] See Leo Oppenheim, *Mesopotamia. Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, pp.187-196; Karen Rhea Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*, p.187; Nancy Guevara, *Before Art: The Fusion of Religion, Sexuality, and Aesthetics in Agrarian Mesopotamia*, UMI Microform, 2008, pp.190-191

written by a *nadītum*, AbB11 60 "*I do not cease to pray before my Lord and my Lady with my two hands cleansed/ washed*"[155]

In the same note we may interpret CH 110 "*If a nadîtu or an ugbabtum who does not reside within the cloister should open (the door to?) a tavern or enter a tavern for some beer, they shall burn that woman*".[156]Over the time this law has been understood in at least three different ways. Martha T.Roth considers it a measure of protection for the tavern keeper. Considering the background of the vast majority of the *nadītus* it would have been considered dishonest for them to compete in a business that supports the living of a particular category of women.[157] This opinion was highly contested considering that there are at least two documents attesting that *nadītus* did own a tavern, fully or just partially.[158]Most scholars have seen this prohibition as a way of preventing the votaries from mixing with the tavern life and being mistaken for a prostitute and thus being involved or submitted to sexual offences.[159] Either way, the death punishment by burning seems to be too harsh for merely mingling into the tavern business unauthorized or for being involved in prostitution. Actually, there are really just a few cases when the death penalty by burning is implied and they are stated also in Codex Hammurabi; CH 25 concerning theft during a fire, when the thief is thrown into the burning house, and CH 157 concerning the incest between mother and son after the father's death. An Old Babylonian omen mentions the burning of an *entu* that stole a taboo offering" *The high priestess will steal the taboo offering, but she will be captured and burned*" [160]Also

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[155] Lucille Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone*, p.204, note 1158

[156] M.T Roth, *Law Collection of Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, p.101

[157] See M.T Roth, "The Priestess, the Prostitute, and the Tavern" in *Munuscula Mesopotamica, Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 267, ed. B. B&oumlck, E. Cancik-Kirschbaum, T. Richter , Kevelaer: Butzon und Bercker, 1999, pp. 445–464.

[158] Julia Assante, "The kar.kid/harimtu, Prostitute or Single Woman? A Critical Review of the Evidence. In *Ugarit-Forschungen 30* , 1998,(pp. 5–96), p.67; Brigitte Lion, "Les cabarets a l'époque paléo-babylonienne," in *Cahier de Themes X*, p.397, http://www.mae.u-paris10.fr/arscan/IMG/pdf/Cahier_des_ThemesXI_Th_9_Lion.pdf

[159] Julia Assante, "*The kar.kid*" p.67 and Henshaw, *Male and Female cultic Personnel*, p.194

[160] Paul-Alain Beaulieu, The Babylonian Background of the Motif of the Fiery Furnace in Daniel in *JBL* 128, no. 2, 2009,(pp.273–290) p.281,

a Mari letter alludes to death by burning when treachery was being implied.[161] All the above cases present grave offences so why such a hard punishment for just entering a tavern?

I tend to agree with S Maul's interpretation of this particular law. He considers that such a powerful prohibition rets on issues of ritual purity. The tavern could be considered a magically charged placed: the threshold, the fermenting beer, the vats containing this liquid are all charged with supernatural powers. If a votary or priestess enters in contact with such an environment she becomes impure. Purity, perfection, cleanness, both physical and spiritual, were essential when being in contact with the gods, otherwise they would be offended and insulting a deity is the most serious delict someone could commit. In such a case the interdiction and the cruel punishment seem to fit the Mesopotamian cultural and religious context.[162]

Besides being *"l'emblème en prière de la famille paternelle" et"l'adjuvante de ta prière dans l'Ebabbar*"[163] how Erišti-Aja describes herself in the letters sent to her father, the *naditus* are also seen offering sacrifices on behalf of their household. With a reproachful tone a *nadītu* writes to her brother: "*why am I offering sacrifices again and again*?"[164] meaning that this activity was expected to be performed on a regular basis, and also, as often as the difficult situations required.

The exchange of letters between Zimri-Lim and his daughter gives some detail about the sacrifices and offering the *nadītu* has to perform, either directly or with the help of another cultic official. From the Ebabbar, Erišti-Aja writes to her father that she offered a

https://www.academia.edu/1581259/The_Babylonian_Background_of_the_Motif_of_the_Fiery_Furnace_in_Daniel_3

[161] J.M.Durand placed this letter under the category" Tabou.Espionnage"-"*Autre chose a propos de l'affaire de la ville de Samanum, sujet d'un courier de mon Seigneur, je me suis déplacé et j'ai fait des reproches aux Anciens de la ville et au chef du districten disant< Celui qui a pensé cela ou en est (simplement) au courant, devrait être brûlé, lui et sa famille, par le feu"* in *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari*, Tome III, LAPO, 2000, p 242

[162] S.Maul apud Assante, *Kar.Kid*, p.67 and B.Lion, *Le cabaret a l'époque paléo-babylonienne, p.398*

[163] J.M. Durand, *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari*, Tome III, pp. 294-295

[164] W. H. Van Soldt , *Letters in the British Museum: Transliterated and Translated*, Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift Und Ubersetzung, Part 1, 1989, BM 97239, p.75

solar disk and rings on behalf of his life. She handed the object to a certain Irmi-Ilum, perhaps an intendent of the cloister.[165]As stated by both R.Harris and F.Batto the *nadītus* seem to have a more personal relationship with the goddess Aja than with the god Šamaš himself.[166] There are two letters in which Erišti-Aja clearly speaks about the offerings she made to her Lady on behalf of her father:

> *Moi-même, ne suis-je pas ton emblème en priéres, qui dans l'Ebabbar est l'adjuvate de tes demandes? Porquoi as-tu retranché les 2 esclaves-femmes qui m'avaient été promises? Et, du fait que tu m'as fait porter des anneaux, tu as retranché une servant! Voici que maintenant, tu dois me faire porter les 2 servantes qui m'ont été promises et l'étoffe pour moi! Or, l'étoffe et le plat que tu m'as fait porter, je les ai amenés par devant le ministre des courriers pour l'offrir à ma Dame qui est celle qui te garde de la maladie.*[167]

> *Fais-moi porter un trousseau equivalent à celui de l'année dernière et, cette année-ci, de l'huile de sesame! J'en oindrai le verrou de ma Dame et prierai pour que tu ne sois pas malade.*[168]

Through her letters, she requires provisions in order to be able to accomplish her role as an emblem in prayer of her father's household. She is offering food, garments, and anointments for her lady and prays the goddess for the life and wellbeing of the king. Zimri-Lim seems to be sending annual gifts[169] for the lady of Sippar, but also continuous goods included in rations his daughter had to receive from her family such as consumables and clothing.

We may deduce from those excerpts that the *nadītu* was allowed to enter the presence of the divine statue and perform its anointment in sign of appreciation and respect

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[165] For Erišti-Aja's letters I am relying on the French translation of J.M.Durand "*Pour ta vie, j'ai fait present au temple, vrai, du disque solaire et des anneaux. Les anneaux et le disque solaire, Irmi-Ilum les a pris et les a donnés au nom de sa servant*", *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari*, Tome III, p.397

[166] Bernard Frank Batto, *Studies on Women at Mari*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, p.98

[167] J.M Durand, *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari*, Tome III, p.392

[168] *Ibidem*, p.399

[169] *Šubultum* cf. CAD Š, vol 3, can be translated as gift.

for the holy being. In this way, the woman shows her gratitude towards the gods for the protection they are offering to her beloved ones. This action might be, besides praying, one of the few cultic actions a *nadītu* was allowed to perform herself, without requiring assistance or surveillance from another cultic official, usually male superior.

To summarize, as I have already mentioned, we can speak of a dual identity of the *nadītu*, a status both desired and fragile. They were women with real agency in public life, true business women of their age who created tight solidarity relation within their own communities. On the other hand, they were not allowed to have biological children so they were obliged to adopt, or in the case of Marduk's votaries to provide a second wife for her husband in case the idea of the adoption was rejected, in order to secure their old days. Although their relationship with the god and the cloister was a close one and perhaps envied by some contemporaries, it was not their choice to become votaries. It was a decision made for the father or any other male representative of the family, with major benefits for the household the woman belonged to before consecration, both economic and spiritual ones.

III.3 KEZERTU, QADIŠTU, IŠTARITU, KULMAŠITU

In the ancient Mesopotamian literary sources are mentioned some categories of women that were thought for a long time to be involved in the so called cultic prostitution: *kezertu, qadištu, ištaritu and kulmašitu.* This view began to be contested more and more nowadays. Criticizing the classical perspective, M.Gruber remarks:"Tragically scholarship suffered from scholars being unable to imagine any cultic role for women in antiquity that did not involve sexual intercourse."[170] Researchers such as Henshaw and Harris in their studies concerning women involved in the religious life did not find solid evidence to support this theory of cultic prostitution. Furthermore Julia Assante ran an extensive research concerning the **kar.kid/** *harimtum*, the so called common harlot with whom some categories of cultic women were equated in some literary, sapiential and first millennium texts. She states that :

[170] Assante, Julia. "The kar.kid/harimtu, Prostitute or Single Woman?" in Ugarit Forschungen 30, 1998 (pp 5-96), p.9

> "The **kar.kid/** *harimtu* is more than this, she is a legal category all of her own. When a woman, **sal** in Sumerian or *sinništum* in Akkadian, came of age in Mesopotamia, there were two routes she could take: she could either marry and become the "wife of a man", **dam munus lu/** *aššat awili*, or remain single. If she did not marry, she either stayed at home with her father as the "daughter of a man", **dumu munus lu/** *mārat awili*, or left home to become the **kar.kid/***harimtu*, or in modern parlance"the single woman."[171]

The author emphasizes that the *harimtu* should be understood strictly as a legal category and not as a professional one. Because of this confusion some categories of single women involved in the cult of various deities "*became tainted solely by their proximity to (the harimtu) in lexical lists and other texts further obscuring our view of ancient society and sustaining erroneous idea of sacred prostitution."* [172]Even though the *harimtu* may refer to single women outside the patriarchal authority, it must be remembered that the *entu, nadītu, ugbabtu*, unmarried *qadištu* and *kulmašitu* were considered members of their father household even after their consecration,[173] albeit becoming economically independent. Considering the legal basis we may rely on, Assante makes the assumption that" the kar.kid/ *harimtu* could be anything from a virgin to a prostitute."[174]In my analysis I will not focus on cultic prostitution as the central cultic element involving those categories of women. Although I might not exclude their role as "officiants who interpret fertility and sexuality",[175]I don't think that overemphasizing their erotic side is the best way to approach their cultic duties. Furthermore the lack of consistency of ritual texts does not allow drawing clear conclusions concerning this matter.

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[171] *Ibidem*, p.10

[172] Ibidem, p.11

[173] CH 118

[174] J.Assante, *Kar.Kid*, p.13

[175] Henshaw, *Male and Female cultic Personnel*, p.19

III.3.a KEZERTU

This category is probably the most problematic, because of all the women mentioned above is the only one rendered by CAD also as a "prostitute."[176] The *Kezertu* is one of the ladies usually associated with the *harimūtum* but Assante states that it is not clear whether this category is legal, professional or purely descriptive.[177] Considering that *kezertum* comes from the root *kzr* (*kezeru* – to curl hair) it might depict a woman with a special curled hair-do, perhaps an alluring one.[178] J.J Finkelstein suggested that this term might designate a professional category such as a hairdresser. In the late lexical lists, in the standard Babylonian Gilgameš Epic and the Epic of Erra, the *kezertu* is associated with the *harimtu* and *šamhatu*. In neo- Assyrian times, she took part in the cult of Ištar with whom she was affiliated also in the before mentioned literary works. Henshaw points out that in a penalty clause, the one who disregards the terms of the contract has to give seven LU.SUHUR.LA.MEŠ and seven MI. SUHUR.LA.MEŠ to Ištar of Arbela[179] so we may conclude that both the male and female SUHUR.LA(*kezeru/kezertu*) might have been one way or another, involved in the cult of the named goddess.

In the epic of Erra, Uruk was the city of the goddess Ištar, was also the city of *harimtu, šamhatu and kezertu*[180] and in the Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgameš the deity calls them to mourn the bull of heaven.[181]

Their affiliation with the goddess Ištar appears clearly in the above fragments but unfortunately there is no ritual text supporting it and offering further information concerning

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[176] CAD vol.K, p.314

[177] J. Assante, *Kar.Kid*, p.39

[178] Hanshaw, *Male and Female cultic Personnel* , p.197; Assante , *Kar.Kid* , p.41

[179] *Ibidem*, p.198

[180] J.Assante, *Kar.Kid*, p.39

[181]"*Ištar assembled the kezertu, šamhatu and harimtu*" see Tablet VI, 158 *The Babylonian Gilgameš Epic. Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, vol.I, ed by A.R.George, Oxford University Press, p.692

their duties. From those sources it seems that those categories of women should stay unmarried but other Old Babylonian texts show that *kezertus* could marry if they so decided, live away from their home or work[182] and even have children.[183]

Some texts from Kish speak about the *kezerum* or *kezertum* silver that certain persons have to pay to the supervisor of the *kezertum* women for the *parşu*/ritual they performed on behalf of the individual. Most of those texts followed the pattern rendered by Norman Yoffee in "*The Economics of the Ritual."*[184] Actually, those texts don't even mention the *kezertu* but are only alluding to certain rituals they performed.

A particularly interesting document is YOS 13 111 which registers the assignment of *kezertu* to certain women that might have hired them in order to perform a ritual on their behalf.[185] Regrettably, the data from Kish doesn't describe the rituals performed by the *kezertus*.

M Gallery analyzed some texts from Sippar, and came to the conclusion that the texts mentioned by them: "*can be understood as a coherent sequence of utensils which might have been used in some grooming services performed by the women as part of their parşu obligations[...]*[186]She states that the *entu, nadītu, ugbabtu* and *qadištu* have to be excluded from *parşu* rites because they were performed for goddesses and those women were votaries of male deities in which case the only category that seems to fulfill all the requirements for this kind of cultic activity is the *kezertu*.

Even though her deduction seems logical we must not overlook the fact that the Sippar texts do not mention the *kezertus* performing some kind of ritual and furthermore a

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[182] J.Assante, Kar.Kid,p.43

[183] Henshaw, *Male and Female cultic Personnel*, p.199 in a neo-Assyrian text are listed *kezertus* and DUMU.MEŠ SAL.SUHUR.LA.MEŠ. The author question is whether it has to be translated literary as "sons of the *kezertus*" or it should be interpreted as apprentice *kezertus*.

[184] Norman Yoffee in "The Economics of the Ritual at Late Old Babylonian Kish" in *JESHO* 41 3, Brill NV, Leiden 1998, pp 321-322

[185] Ibidem, pp.328-329

[186] Gallery, Maureen,"Service Obligations of the *kezertu*-Women"in Orientalia 49, 1980 (333-339), p.337

study of Tarent and Lerberghe concerning the *harimūtu* rites at Sippar were performed by men and they do not involve any kind of sexual activity.[187] Besides, M.Gallery relies only on later, first millennium literary sources that associate them with prostitution, texts that might not depict their real status in the Old Babylonian Period.

The archive of Ur Utu, chief lamentation priest at the temple of Ištar- Annunītum in Sippar includes records of payments for *harimūtum* and *redūtum* rites(prostitution and escortship) required by men and women. The text brought into discussion by many researchers and which received a special attention from M.Gallery, in her study " *Service obligations of the kezertu women*" is CT 48 45:

> *"Amount of money, the parţu benefice of...prostitution and escortship symbolised by the axe sealed (?) bronze of Iltani, wife of Warad-Marduk, son of Ibni-Marduk and jugglers of Warad-Marduk, son of Ibni-Marduk, together with their bred offerings, which Huzālum, son of Inanna-mansum, assigned to them. Against any claim which might arise, Huzālum, son of Inanna-mansum, will not be responsible to Marduk-muballiţ, the lamentation priest of Annunītum."*[188]

M. Gallery correlates this text speaking about *harimūtum and redūtum* rites with other document from the same time and place. She states that *harimutum parşu* could be demanded by both men and women, but the text does not present the ritual actions by themselves but states only that somebody payed a certain amount of money for the accomplishment of the aforementioned rites.[189]Also we cannot state whether this *harimūtu parşu* involved actual sexual intercourse or was just something symbolic. Either way, the textual information concerning rituals involving prostitution are not consistent enough to support a theory or another, so until more concluding data are brought to light we may not exclude neither of them. Even if the affiliation of *kezertum* with prostitution and the cult of Ištar only appear in literary works, it must be remembered that this kind of documents reflected traditions and attitudes of the time and space they belonged to.

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[187] J.Assante, Kar.Kid, p.42, note 103.

[188] Norman Yoffee in "*The Economics of the Ritual*", p.331

[189] Silver Morris, Temple/Sacred Prostitutionin Ancient Mesopotamia Revisited p.655, https://www.academia.edu/2360254/Temple_Sacred_Prostitution_in_Ancient_Mesopotamia_Revisited

The *kezertu* also appears in the Mari archive but being a member of the "harem" makes it less probable for her to be associated with prostitution, at least in this later context. N Ziegler states that:

> *"Une telle traduction est impossible dans le context du harem royale. Il est en revanche plus probable de les identifier comme une catégorie particulière de musiciennes: en effet dans une récapitulatif des personnes au service du chef de musiques. Ilšu-Ibbîšu, 44 femmes kezertum sont énumerées."*[190]

Furthermore two of the *kezertus* mentioned during the reign of Zimri-Lim, Eštar-putrî and Šerat-umar, received five *qa* of fine oil when they gave birth to a child of the king, so they seem to perform also sexual services for the king, besides their normal role of some kind of musicians.

The *kezertum* are also mentioned in the letter ARM X 140 sent by Zimri-Lim to Liqtum in response to a letter sent previously by the woman. She asks her brother for some *kezertu*, but he asks her to wait because for the moment he does not have any fine *kezertu* to send her until he will get new war booty.[191]Unfortunately, we are not revealed how this woman is going to serve her new mistress. Is she going to sing for her entertainment fulfilling the role of a musician or is she going to be involved in other types of activities such as hair dressing?

To summarize, the evidence we have is not sufficient to draw a clear role of the *kezertu* either as priestess involved or not in cultic prostitution or as a woman belonging to the royal harem of Mari. L Barberon, analyzing both the Kish and Mari data comes to the conclusion that:

> *"le kezertum étaient des femmes formées à touts sortes d'arts et expertes en divertissement (sans pour autant être nécessairement des prostituées) qui*

[190] N.Ziegler, *Le harem de Zimri-Lim*, p.87

[191] N.Ziegler, Les musiciens et la musique d'apres les archives de Mari, Florilegium marianum IX , p.40

seraient dans le cadre de culte rendu à Ištar embauchées pour égayer de leurs chants et leurs musique des festivités religieuses."[192]

This view of *kezertum* being some kind of artists seems to be supported also by a short Sumerian record that says that a daughter of a man acted like a kezertum, singing songs, and playing games.[193] So this category of women are imagined, at least, in the earlier record, as joyfull characters that use their artistic abilities for entertainment in royal or cultic context, and makes Budin compare them with the Japanese *geisha*,[194]understood as artists and entertainers and not courtesans and prostitutes.

III.3.b QADIŠTU, IŠTARITU, KULMAŠITU

Among the most controverted cultic officials in Mesopotamia is the *qadištu* who for a long time has been compared and even equated with her Hebrew counterpart the *qedešâ* that was originally translated as "sacred prostitute". Although this view was contested over time because there is again no sufficient data to support such an assertion, there may have been times and places when the sources portray her in a negative way. *Ištaritu* are sharing the sumerogram **nu.gig**, a title that could point to a human cultic official but is also considered an epithet for certain godesses[195]like Inanna, Aruru, Ninmah, Ninisina, Nanaia. During the time, the **nu.gig** sumerogram was translated as "hierodule", "cult prostitute", "tabooed woman", "interdicted womb", all those expressions suggesting her supposed role in sexual related rituals. Analyzing the Sumerian literary texts however, Westenholz discards this opinion and pinpoints that:

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[192] L.Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone*, p.58

[193] Henshaw, *Male and Female Cultic Personnel*, p.196

[194] Stephanie Lynn Budin, *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press, 2008,p.30

[195] Henshaw, *Male and Female Cultic Personnel*,pp.207-208; Budin, The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity, p.23; Joan Goodnick Westenholz, Tamar, *Qĕdēšā, Qadištu*, and Sacred Prostitution in Mesopotamia in *The Harvard Theological Review* , Vol. 82, No. 3 Jul., 1989(pp. 245-265), p.225

> "…she performed a public service by taking part in women's rites related to the birthing when the epithet **nu.gig** is used in reference to the goddesses, it describes them in their nurturing and procreative roles. There is as yet no evidence of a Sumerian clerical office of a **nu.gig**."[196]

The *qadištu* appears in the sources since Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian times. In CH 181 a father can dedicate his daughter to a male deity as a *nadītu, kulmašitu* or *qadištu,* so those women didn't choose by themselves to be involved in a cultic office, but it was something decided by their family according to their own interests. The father has to award a consecrated daughter with a dowry, if not she is entitled with 1/3 of the paternal estate after his death, but she only enjoys the usufruct right of her inherited property.

The *nišîtum* documents concerning the *qadištu* respect the prescriptions of the laws. It seems that the presence of the father is a requirement for the act of consecration to take place because he is the only one who can make a decision concerning the members of the family, be they sons or daughters.

The contract of the *qadištum* Bêltani although briefly recorded is revealing from this point of view*:" La dénommée Bêltani, Ibni-Adad, son père (l')a consacrée à Adad, son dieu (à lui), en tant que qadištum"*[197]From this text we may deduce that the girl was dedicated to this god as a personal choice of her father, the god Adad being his personal deity as revealed also by his theophoric name (Ibni-Addad, Adad has created[198]). Albeit this apparent coincidence the vast majority of the *qadištu* women seemed to be related with the cult of this particular god, with the exception of those from Mari, who were attached to the cult of Anunnitum.[199] Even though the later title is attested but once in ARM 59, so it should rather be seen as an exception considering that the *qadištu* was usually serving a male deity. L. Barberon was able to identify 25 *qadištu* attested in the archive of Sippar and apparently all

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[196] Westenholz, *Tamar, Qĕdēšā, Qadištu*, p.260

[197] L.Barberon, Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone, p.185

[198] Alpin Wendell Bowes, A Theological Study of Old Babylonian Personal Names, Vol.II, A Dissertation, Marion Pennsylvania, April, 1987

[199] L.Barberon, Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone, p.78, F.Batto, Stidies on Women of Mari, p. 111

of them were affiliated to the cult of the god Adad. A seal from Kish is proof that also in other cities they were affiliated with this particular deity:" *Ilša-hegalli, fille d'Ea-tillassu servante d'Adad et de Šala.*"[200] Despite the fact that this seal does not mention any title we may deduce that she was a *qadištu* because considering the aforementioned data from Sippar those women were usually associated with the cult of the god Adad more tha any other female cultic personnel. Unfortunately, there are no blessing formulas in the letters written by those women that could bring more information about the deity they are serving or about the reasons a father would consecrate a daughter for this office (religious reasons). Analyzing the list of 25 *qadištu* identified at Sippar, 16 of them are theophoric names containing the name of the god (Geme-Nanna, Bau-hegalli, Sât-Ninurta, Šat Ištar, Erišti Adad, Humti-Adad, Taram-Adad,)[201]but there are also other theophoric names that refer to this particular god or his wife that are nor attested in this list, Šala-Šarrat, Adad-Nûri, Šat-Adad, names that were found in Documents from areas such as Isin or Kish.[202]In the list of *qadištu* from Sippar, 5 of them bear the name Ilša-hegalli (her god is abundance) a name that seems to connect them with the storm god since he is also called the Lord of abundance and the rain controlled by this deity, bring prosperity to the people by nurturing the earth and helping the crops to grow.[203]Although they have theophoric names the data we have does not allow us to conclude that those women changed their names during the consecration ceremony. It appears that Ilša-hegalli was a name only used by this category of women, but the others, even those containing the name of the god Adad could be worn by commoners and even slaves.[204]

In the *nišîtum* contract of *qadištu* are listed among the witnesses certain ranks of male priets such as SANGA ^{d}IŠKUR[205]and Ina-pališu, $GUDU_4$ (*pašîšum* priests) both of them high rank officials within the Mesopotamian temple holding administrative and cultic functions (the SANGA usually perceived as administrator has also a ritual role. The two

[200] Ibidem, p.18

[201] Ibidem, p.9

[202] Ibidem, pp.9-11

[203] Ibidem, p.78; R.Harris, *Ancient Sippar*, 329

[204] Barberon, *op.cit*, p.78, note 441

[205] *Ibidem*, p.186

officials are seen sometimes acting together in rituals[206]). Albeit those two priests are mentioned it may not be stated for sure that the contracts were written down during a ceremony held on the temple ground and that the priests were in charge of certain rituals or sacrifices related to this.

Returning to the legal sources we observe that the *qadištu* could be both married or celibate, either way her sexuality is regulated by the codes: she is either a votary of a deity or the wife of a man that also serves a god, so she is to be separated from other classes such as *kezertu* that were related with the cult of goddesses (usually Ištar) or the *harimtu* and *šamhatu* whose sexuality appears to be unrestricted denoting common harlots.[207] There are differences, at least in the Assyrian territories, between married and unmarried *qadištu*.LMA 40 states that" *a married qadištu woman is to be veiled (when she goes about) in the main thoroughfare, but an unmarried one is to leave her head bare in the main thoroughfare, she shall not veil herself*". It seems that in this space and time a *qadištu* could marry and raise her status, but the question that is at hand is why an unmarried one is treated as the prostitute and slave women that are not allowed to be veiled. Perhaps, single women whom were not forbidden to bear children appear as a potential danger for the social stability. A late second millennium text, *Ana Ittišu*, used as a legal training exercise also speaks about the social status of those women:

"Afterwards he took a qadištu in from the street.

Because of his love for her, he married her even though she was a qadištu

This qadištu took in a child from the street.

At her breast with human milk [she nursed him]"[208]

According to Westenholz the location of the *qadištu* is the street, because in the social structure of Akkadian society there is the place where the people that are not members

[206] Henshaw, *Male and Female Cultic Personnel*, p .29

[207] Westenholz, *Tamar, Qĕdēšā, Qadištu*, p,251

[208] Ibidem, p.251

of an organized household, belonged to. This text seems to underline a decrease of her status during the second millennium B.C. She is regarded as a woman without a family, but in CH is clearly rendered as a full-fledged member of her father's household and she is even entitled to 1/3 of the paternal estate in case she does not received her dowry. Those legal texts show the fickle status of the *qadištu* during space and time. If in the first half of the second millennium B.C she was a respected votary, in the northern regions of Assyria, she held a lower and uncertain status, if she was not married. It appears that the flow of time affected her deeply because at the end of the same millennium she wasn't considered the best option for a wife. The fragment from *ana ittišu* says that the man "married her even though she was a *qadištu*".The "even though" phrase makes it clear that, for certain reasons, she would not make the ideal spouse, perhaps because of some cultic duties, we may assume that in spite of the fact that there is no proof for her to be regarded as a sacred prostitute thus making the paternity her children uncertain.

If her social status turned out to be an unstable one, her cultic duties are even less clear. Apparently, the only constant, when we analyze her functions, is her involvement in childbirth, albeit her actions are not clearly described.

We have little information on the qadištu's functions. In a ritual text she is described participating to a ceremony along the SANGU, exalting the god Adad, partaking in the procession and singing a certain song but no other information is offered.

"The qadištu the imhu song before Adad recited, the imhu song they prolong

The purification SANGA does the purification, the qadištu exalts the god

The SANGA and the qadištu go out of the temple of Adad"[209]

In another text, *'The Contest between the Tamarisk and the Palm*", the *qadištu* is described as sprinkling water. Perhaps considering the ritual mentioned before, we may assume that the *qadištu* participated in some sort of purification or exorcist ritual.

Unfortunately, those texts are not specific enough to allow us to form an opinion concerning the religious agency, or cultic role of the qadištu and the situation is worse for the

[209] Henshaw, Male and Female.Cultic Personnel, p.271

other female cultic personnel, *ištaritu* and *kulmašitu*, whose cultic activities are totally unknown.

To summarize, in Mesopotamia we encounter a large variety of female cultic titles but unfortunately, not all of them are documented well enough to enable an analysis. I have discussed the major priestly functions of women in Mesopotamia. The most important activity of a female cultic official was to pray on behalf of herself and on behalf of the members of her family as well as for other members of the society. They were able to perform libations, offerings and in the case of the high priestesses, they were involved in more complex religious activities such as reconstruction of temples or parts of the temples, establishing offerings for the goods and performing different rituals.

Although priestesses were highly visible in Mesopotamia during the first half of the second millennium mostly because they were members of the royalty or the gentry, after this period they ceased to appear in the written sources without any particular explanation that could be pointed out. When they do appear, from this time on, they are usually associated with witchcraft and evil-doing so we observe clearly from this particular case that female status degraded constantly and drastically even among the high status women.

III.4 WOMEN AND DIVINATION IN SECOND MILLENNIUM B.C

The art of divination is as old as civilization itself and has its roots in the Ancient Near East. Our knowledge of the practice of divination in Mesopotamia is based on astrological and omen collections that served as handbooks for the correct interpretation of divine signs. Besides those canonical sources, the reports and letters sent by different officials provides important data concerning this phenomenon and are a reflection of the impact of the diviners had in the Near Eastern society.

Before reviewing the various forms or types of divination, a definition of the named practice is required. Leo Oppenheim in“Ancient Mesopotamia. Portrait of a Dead Civilization” states that:

> Divination represents a technique of communication with the supernatural forces that are supposed to shape the history of the individual as well as that of the group. It presupposes the belief that these powers are able and, at times, willing to communicate their intentions and that they are interested in the wellbeing of the individual or the group - in other words, that if evil is predicted or threatened, it can be averted through appropriate means. [210]

Jean Bottéro points out that in Mesopotamia we may encounter two types of divination: "*one by the revelation of the gods, inspired divination, the other by a mental activity of the people, by a type of deduction, deductive divination*.[211]" Nissinen, to describe the same phenomena, uses the terms "*inductive divination*" that is usually understood to refer to forms of divination in which no skill is necessary in order to decipher divine message, such as prophetic oracles, or clear dreams which do not need an interpretation and "*technical divination*" which refers to all forms of divination where some form of a sign needs interpreting, such as reading livers, the way smoke rises, oil moves on water and others[212]. J.Stökl choses to use the term diviner for people who received divine messages by both technical and intuitive means, but he makes a clear distinction between the two types of cultic officials. 'Technical diviner' refers exclusively to non-intuitive ones such as the *barûm* or the dream interpreters. On the other hand, the intuitive diviner refers to those that receive their messages from a god without using learned skills to interpret a message.[213] Under this category fall also the lay prophets that sometimes may be chosen to speak in the name of the gods. Anyways, the most interesting case is that of the *apilum.* This title appears mostly in the archive of Mari and was usually translated as "answerer" from the majority of the scholars

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[210] Leo Oppenheim, Ancient Mesopotamia. Portrait of a Dead Civilization, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1977, p.207

[211] Jean Bottéro, Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods, translated by Zainab Bahrani and Marc van de Mieerop, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992, p.125 (The same idea was also debated in Bottéro, La plus vieille religion.En Mesopotamie, Gallimard, 1998, pp.328-329)

[212] 'What is Prophecy? An Ancient Near Eastern Perspective', in Inspired Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East. Essays in Honour of Herbert B. Huffmon, ed. By J. Kaltner and L. Stulman , T & T Clark International, London 17–37, pp. 21-22

[213] Jonathan Stökl, Prophecy in the Ancient Near East.A Philological and Sociological Comparison, Brill, 2012, p.10

that studied the prophetic phenomenon at the court of Zimri–Lim. Either way, lately this translation started to be contested and J.Stökl bring important arguments in favor of his theory. To begin with, the *apilum* is never described to have answered a question. At this I would add the fact that this kind of diviner might show sometimes a predisposition toward the intuitive practices because in some letters from Mari they are said to rise and utter a message from the gods (ARM 26 195, ARM 26 204, for details concerning the content of the letters, the *apilum* and senders see the appendix "Male and female Prophets in second millennium sources"). Stökl invokes some recent studies concerning the religion of Ebla and also some previous attempts to find another interpretation for the meaning of *apilum*:

> Based on Fronzaroli's initial suggestion to translate Mari *āpilum* as "portavoce" o "interprete" delle parole del dio', Merlo translates āpilum as 'interpreter'. In his opinion, there is one exception to this general rule: the attestations from Nuzi. Here he suggests '*spokesperson*' instead, as the word *āpilum* is followed by a personal and not a divine name. The two translations are very similar, but carry slightly different nuances. A 'spokesperson' is sent out by someone—in our case a deity—and works as their emissary. The 'translator' is more likely to work on behalf of the person who is receiving the message, which would most likely be the king, but could theoretically be anybody. The expression *āpilum ša DN* would suggest that 'spokesperson' is the more natural translation. Further, Durand's argument that 'tout devin est, par sa fonction, interprête, d'un message divin' should be taken seriously.The common translation 'answerer' can now be abandoned in view of the Eblaite lexical list; the translation 'spokesperson' conforms better to the actions and role of the *āpilum* as portrayed in the texts available to us.[214]

I do believe that the translation "spokesperson" is more appropriate at least in the Mariote context. Considering Durand's statement that the *āpilum* could provoke his trances in order to receive more specific information than the divine 'yes' or 'no' that had been acquired by hepatoscopy[215] I would say that this specific category of diviner finds himself at the intersection of inductive/intuitive and deductive/technical type of divination. By means of knowledge he/she can respond with "yes or no" by interpreting the sign when performing

[214] Jonathan Stökl, op cit., p. 42-43

[215] Archives épistolaires de Mari I (ARM 26/I) Edition Recherche sur les Civilisations, Paris 1988, p.386

hepatoscopy, but they can also receive messages from the gods from time to time, but considering the available data, in this last situation they seem to act more like a *muhhûm* although they maintain their slightly higher status. Considering all the above I will treat the female counterpart of the *apilum* along with the other prophetesses.

III.4.a WOMEN AND PROPHECY

Prophecy is a phenomenon, first known in the Ancient Near East from biblical sources but in the past few decades since the discovery and publication[216] of the material from Mari it attracted a lot of attention from both Assyriologists and Old Testament scholars. This enthusiasm led to a wave of scholarly literature and for several decades the Mari letters formed the basis for the study of extra biblical prophecy in the Ancient Near East[217] until the prophecies from the Neo-Assyrian palace of Niniveh were publishes by Simo Parpola[218].Thus having a sufficient amount of primary data about the prophetic phenomenon, scholars have

[216] The prophetic letters from Mari ware first translated in French by Jean-Marie Durand, *Archives épistolaires de Mari I (ARM 26/I*) Edition Recherche sur les Civilisations, Paris 1988, 377-452; *Documents épistolaires du Palais de Mar*i, Tome III, Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient , Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2000, 74-91; English translation was provided in M. Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 2003, pp.17-83

[217] This should be mentioned the impressive amount of articles and comparative studies concerning either the Mariote prophetic phenomenon by itself or in comparison with the Biblical prophetic literature. In order to underline the wave of interest generated among the academic community I will mention a few authors that have shown a particular interest for prophecy and whose articles were of certain interest for this particular study: D.Charpin: 1992, 2002; G.Dossin 1966; J.M Durand 1997 *Les prophéties*,2012; J.M Sasson, 1994, 2006; Kerel van der Toorn 1998, *Old Babylonian* ; 2000 A. Malamat 1998; Huffmon 1968, 2000.To these articles we may add the multitudes of studies by J.Stökl and M. Nissinen whom brought new insights in this area of research focusing in their recent studies also on the social role and the gendered agency of the prophets.

[218] Simo Parpola, Assyrian Prophecies , SAA 9, Helsinki University Press, Helsinki, 1997

written on the subject of prophecy in the Ancient Near East from a variety of perspectives and lately, a few book length studies or collections of studies were published.[219]

For my research I will use as a starting point the definition offered by M.Nissinen as I consider it specific enough, and includes all the elements required for my further analysis:

> Prophecy, as understood in this volume, is human transmission of allegedly divine messages. As a method of revealing the divine will to humans, prophecy is to be seen as another, yet distinctive branch of the consultation of the divine that is generally called "divination." Among the forms of divination, prophecy clearly belongs to the noninductive kind. That is to say, prophets—like dreamers and unlike astrologers or haruspices— do not employ methods based on systematic observations and their scholarly interpretations, but act as direct mouthpieces of gods whose messages they communicate.[220]

Considering the above definition I will discuss here only those types of divination that do not require particular knowledge for deciphering the signs. I will include in this section the *apilum/ apiltum* whom (as I explained before) I view as a character that lays on the border between the technical and intuitive divination, and also the lay prophets although they are not included among the temple personnel of a certain deity. I will not debate in this section the problem of dreams and dream interpretation because they are not always taken into consideration without further interpretation of performing some type of oracle inquiry concerning the message shown in it. The exception is represented by the so called "incubation dreams" that could be seen as a type of prophecy because the message is transmitted in the temple of a certain god.

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[219] *Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*, ed.by Ehud Ben Zvi and Michael H. Floyd, SBL 10, 2000; *Inspired Speech Prophecy in the Ancient Near East Essays in Honor of Herbert B. Huffmon*, JSOT Supplement Series, ed.by John Kaltner, Louis Stulman 2004; *Prophecy in its ancient Near Eastern context Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives*, SBL 13, ed.by Martti Nissinen, 2000; *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East,* SBL. 12, ed.by Martti Nissinen, Robert Kriech Ritner, Choon Leong Seow, Peter Machinist 2003; *PROPHETS MALE AND FEMALE Gender and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Ancient Near East*, SBL 15, ed. By J.Stökl, 2013

[220] M. Nissinen, Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East, 2003, p .1

Unfortunately, although thousands of pages have been written about prophecy in Ancient Near East, there are very few studies concerning the role the women played in this particular phenomenon. Batto in his study concerning the ladies from Mari approached this matter, but lately his analysis was being contested. Anyways, only a few studies address the problem of female prophetism including also the second millennium data, and trying to approach the issues from a different angle[221]. Jonathan Stökl took upon himself to try an analysis of the role of women in the prophetical process in Mari using as a starting point Merry Keller's theory concerning the role of women in cult possession[222], an approach that I consider particularly interesting also for my research.

In her work "The Hammer and the Flute" Keller offer a new framework that might help to better understand phenomena like what we defines before as intuitive or inspired divination:

> Two issues required new theoretical footing. First, receptivity needed to be revalued outside of dualistic notions such as active-passive or agent-victim because it is receptivity that makes the possessed body powerful. Second, in contrast to the phenomenologist's strategy of bracketing belief, I propose the creation of a discursive space in which the agency of the possessing ancestors, deities, or spirits is preserved.[223]

After identifying those problems concerning the theoretical framework for interpreting the possession cults, she offers the following hypothesis:

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[221] Jonathan Stökl, *Female Prophets In The Ancient Near East*, In Prophecy and Prophets in "Ancient Israel Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar", ed. By John Day, T&T Clark, New York-London, pp.47-61 and M.Nissinen*, Gender and Prophetic Agency in the Ancient Near East and in Greece*, in " Prophets Male And Female Gender and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Ancient Near East", SBL 15, , ed by Jonathan Stökl and Corrine L. Carvalho, 2013, pp. 27-59

[222] Jonathan Stökl, *The Role of Women in the Prophetical Process in Mari.A Critique of Merry Keller's Theory of Agency* in Thinking Toward New Horizons ed.by Matthias Augustin and Hermann Michael Niemann, Peter Lang Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, pp.173-188

[223] M. KELLER, *The Hammer and the Flute. Women, Power, and Spirit Possession* , Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2002, p.9

> I propose the concept of instrumental agency as a corrective framework for interpreting the agency of possessed bodies, which are not conscious agents but instead are functioning as instrumental agencies for the ancestors, deities, or spirits that possess them.[224]

She underlines that through instrumentality we should understand the power of receptivity.[225]Although considering her theory, the possessed person, be it male or female, appears to me as mere vessel of a supernatural being that had no control over his/her mind and body, Stökl argues that using this theory we are allowed to attribute a certain person the power of allowing a certain agent to possess her. Considering that the possessing agent was a deity it is easy to understand why the possessed body enjoys a high status and prestige disregarding the actual social status of the individual, and apparently ignoring also the gender that in most patriarchal societies represent an impediment for the access of power and prestige[226].

However, despite the fact that this framework is offering quite a variety of interpretations for the data available concerning prophecy, I do not consider it sufficient and I agree with A. Hollywood who states that "*ascription of agency to bodies, used as instruments by gods or spirits, potentially simplifies rather than highlights the complexity of these practices and the structures of power in which they are performed*."[227] We must not neglect the fact that by agency we usually understand the capacity to act, and that action is not an instinctual one, but an intended one, so we might take into consideration the capacity of the agent to choose to do, or not to do something[228]. I do not deny the usefulness of her framework, but during my analysis of the prophecy and other intuitive divinatory methods I will also consider the intentionality of the agent, his/her capacity to choose to act a way or

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[224] *Ibidem*, p 22

[225]*Ibdem*, p 9

[226] Jonathan Stökl, *The Role of Women*… p. 176

[227] Amy Hollywood, *Gender, Agency, and the Divine in Religious Historiography*, The Journal of Religion, Vol. 84, No. 4 (October 2004),

[228] See http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/agency/#AgeIntAct and also The Blackwell Encyclopedia Of Sociology, ed.by George Ritzer, Blakcwell Publishing, 2007, p.60, *Jonathan Stökl*, The Role of Women… p. 176

another. This type of approach seems to have been preferred also by M.Nissinen who defines the prophetic agency as followes:

> Prophetic agency, therefore, can be understood as instrumental (silenced subjectivity: prophets as passive intermediaries) as well as independent (endorsed subjectivity: prophets as active agents). The types of agency are neither gender-specific nor mutually exclusive, because prophetic agency is ultimately defined by audience. The agency of the same prophet can be interpreted simultaneously as both instrumental and independent (…) When interpreted as passive intermediaries, the actual agency is ascribed to the divinity, whose authority the transmissive action of the human prophet does not threaten. When seen as active agents, the prophets, both male and non-male, are not merely regarded as instruments of the divine agents but also acting on their own.[229]

L.Grabbe, offers an interesting anthropological description of the prophetic behavior that, in my view, fits perfectly in the framework of cult possessing theories:

> Both the āpilum and muḫḫûtm appear in many cases to have received messages involuntary. When prophets speak openly in a temple, this looks like spontaneous spirit possession: the spirit comes upon them, and they become a mouthpiece for the deity. However, sometimes the prophetic figure simply delivers an official message, while, on few occasions, the king or official makes inquiry of the prophet .In the last two cases, some prophet, especially those responding to questions, possibly were able to control the spirit, to obtain a message. If so, they would compare well with the shamans of other cultures. We should be careful, since the texts are not clear: some prophetic figures may have taken the initiative to seek out and take charge of spirits. The immediate impression, though., is that the Mari prophets, were mainly spirit mediums.(…) The shaman differs from a spirit medium in that the shaman actively employs the spirits rather than serving as a passive vehicle for the spirit.[230]

The question that arises from this description is whether the spirit medium could also be seen as an active agent considering that after receiving the divine message the prophet

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[229] M.Nissinen, *Gender and Prophetic Agency*, 2013, p.37

[230] Lester L. Grabbe, *Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy from an Anthropological Perspective*, 2003, p.18

transmits the information to the king or other official, and sometimes they also give an interpretation to the words of the god or advice the king to protect himself.

Before processing to an analysis of the prophetic phenomenon from the Mari archive and its gender particularities I will first perform a short survey of the available data concerning female prophets, professional or not. Despite the fact that this kind of approach was largely used by scholars during the time[231], I consider it useful for my approach to also have an insight of the types of messages that were transmitted through prophecy.

The first title I am going to refer to is that of *qammatum* because of its singularity both in Mari sources and in Ancient Near Eastern ones. Considering that the only documents that contain it are the three letters concerning her prophecy, there is not a clear cut answer concerning the meaning of this title. Nonetheless, scholars have included it in all the studies concerning the Mariote prophecy. Considering her affiliation with the god Dagan I would rather associate her with a professional of the temple considering that she only appears once in a prophetic context.[232] There are three letters involving this unnamed *qammatum* of Dagan and it appears that they are all written and sent to the king during the period of the negotiations for peace with the kingdom of Ešnunna.

[231] Jonathan Stökl, *The Role of Women*, 2007 pp.178-181; *Female Prophets*, 2010, pp.50-54; Herbert B.Huffman, *Official Attitudes*, 1968, pp.108-109 and 112-114, *A Company of Prophets*, 2000, pp.49-58; D. Charpin*, Le context,* 1992, pp. 21-22 and 24-25; J.M.Durand,*Archives*, 1988, pp.386-388 are just a few of the researchers that approached the titles of the prophets and tried to summarize their activity and some of them brought in also a gender perspective in their survey.

[232] Jonathan Stökl in *Female Prophets*, 2010, p.50 states that "*She may have been a professional prophet, but it seems more likely that she fulfilled a similar role to the muḫḫūtum. Possibly she was a temple functionary Whose prophecy was incidental".*

ARM 26 197

Sender: Inib-šina

... a qammatum of Dagan of Terqa came and spoke to me. She said: "The peacemaking of the man of Ešnunna is false:" beneath straw water runs! I will gather him into the net that I knot. I will destroy his city and I will ruin his wealth, which comes from time immemorial."

She counsels the king not to engage in any action without consulting the Gods.

ARM 26 199

Sender: Sammetar

Afterwards, on the following day, a qammatum of Dagan of Terqa came and spoke to me:"Beneath straw water runs. They keep on sending to you messages of friendship, they even send their gods to you, but in their hearts they are planning something else. The king should not take an oath without consulting God".

Besides those two there is yet another letter mentioning the *qammatum,* a document sent by an anonymous person to the king informing him about the presents that the women received, and this third person sent also the hair and fringe of the said prophetess, this detail pointing the fact that it might imply a third person that would play the role of an intermediary. Unfortunately, the text of the letter is badly preserved and the prophecy is not readable but it does mention the fact that the woman received some presents for the prophecy she delivered. Actually the same situation is encountered in the letter sent by Sammetar. After delivering the words of the god she was offered the *laḫarûm*- garment and the nose ring she asked for, then she left to the temple of Bēlet-Ekallim to pass the prophecy to Inib-šina.

The two letters I rendered in the columns above reveal some interesting facts about this mysterious character that is the *qammatum*. Apparently, she was allowed to travel in order to deliver a message and she considered it of utmost importance because she took upon herself to deliver it personally, thus undertaking a journey from Terqa, where she is said to have served the god Dagan, to Mari. Not only that, but she goes to meet various persons that held high ranking position inside the kingdom as officials or cultic personnel, Inib- šina being

not only a close relative of the king but also *ugbabtum/* nin.dingir of the god Adad. Unfortunately, the content of the letters says nothing about where and how she received the divine message. What can be analyzed is the content of those prophetic messages that center upon a well-known Mesopotamian quote "under the straw the water run" alluding to the fact that appearances can be deceiving. The rest of the message, although it takes different forms depending on its mediator, it ultimately transmits the same information: the king should not trust his counterpart from Ešnunna because his intention of conclude peace is not sincere, and although he acts friendly, he is plotting against Mari. We cannot be certain whether the form of the message was changed by the sender of the letter or whether the *qammatum* herself offered her prophecy a note that would seem more adequate for each one of her mediators. We can easily observe that the message sent by Sammetar uses a mundane approach, the king is being deceited, he must not conclude peace with the enemy kingdom without asking the counsel of the gods. On the other hand, Inib-šina's message includes also reassurances from the deity himself that his enemy will be delivered to his hand if he is patient and listens to what the gods order him to do. If the two letters contain indeed the unaltered words of the *qammatum*, this serves only to highlight the social and political intelligence of the woman, who is able to change her discourse considering her interlocutor in order to attain her goal, which in this case is a certain delivery of her message. So, those being said, although she might have been only an instrumental agent submitted to an intuitive form of divination that would imply an ecstatic state or possession, the woman proved, by her later actions, that she was aware of the importance of the message that she received and at the same time by the relevance of her further actions. Her choice to undertake the trip to Mari and the efforts of making herself listened, demonstrates that her strength does not rely only on her power of letting herself be used by the supernatural forces, but she is actually acting on her own accord.

Another title that designates a prophetic agent is *āpiltum*, the feminine counterpart of the more numerous *āpilum.* As I states before this specific category of diviner finds itself at the intersection of inductive/intuitive and deductive/technical type of divination. By means of knowledge he/she can respond with "yes or no" by interpreting the sign when performing hepatoscopy, but they can also receive messages from the gods from time to time, but considering the available data, in this last situation they seem to act more like a *muhhûm,* entering some sort of trans, although they maintain their higher status. Although it appears the role both the *āpilum* and the *āpiltum* perform similar duties, when it comes to numbers there

is a huge discrepancy between the two sexes, the parity being actually of 1 to 15. The *āpiltum/ āpilum* held a relatively high status in the Mariote society considering that they could contact the king by themselves. Inibana, is the only female spokesperson of the gods registered in the Mari archive, but regrettably, she is not the one who transmits her own prophecy to the king. Nonetheless, this letter sustains the theory concerning the fact that sometimes those prophets did entered in a trans like state or were possessed by the god in order to communicate their will: "*4.Innibana āpiltum /5.itbīma kīam idbub* "(4-5 Innibana, the prophetess, arose and spoke as follows)[233] The important difference in number among the male and female members of this professional prophets category might be explained by the fact that the primary function of an *āpilum* was apparently the use of hepatoscopy in order to read signs and in this might have required a certain degree of education in order to perform this type of divinatory art. Also Durand states that they were able to control their trans state so, considering his theory we may not speak of full possession here acknowledging that the agent induced himself a state that might have invited a deity to enter his/her body in order to respond to certain inquiries made in the name of the king. So, in this context the possession takes place with the consent of the person that will serve as a vessel in order to transmit an important message so, I would not see the *āpilum/ āpiltum* as a mere instrumental agent, an unconscious body that that has no choice in relation with the divine agent.

Another interesting character in the world of prophets was the *muḫḫûm* and his female counterpart, the *muḫḫūtum* who were usually understood as ecstatics. As for the other prophets, the information concerning this category of cultic officials involved with prophecy comes from Mari. The *muḫḫûm* seems to have been of a lower status than the *āpilum* because there is not a single example of them writing to the king directly as the professional prophets did. J.Stökl argues that although this situation could be due to an accident of preservation, it also fits with the interpretation of the *muḫḫûm* as someone who dictates his message orally to the king's administration and entrusts his divine message into their hands[234]. On the other hand, Durand tried to explain this lower status by looking at their relationship with the divine: the *āpilum* had a close relationship with a deity, while the *muḫḫûm* was bound to a temple, which he was not supposed to leave. He implies that being bond to the temple would require

[233] M. Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 2003, p 36

[234] J.Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East. A Philological and Sociological Comparison*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2012, p.55

the presence of a scribe to write down and deliver the message. [235]Despite his statement, there is no text which would give any indication that the *muḫḫûm* was not supposed to leave the temple. A counterargument for this would be ARM 26 206 in which the writer mentions that a prophet of Dagan came to him: "*ištēm muḫḫûm ša Dagan illikamma"*[236]This letter is particularly interesting not just because it shows that this category was free to leave the temple when it was required, but it also describes an unusual behavior of the ecstatic. After finding the official he wanted to address, he asked for a lamb that he devoured raw, and then gathered the elders in front of the city gate in order to deliver his prophecy. The official mentions that it was uttered in public, perhaps in order to enforce the power of the message and informs the king he had offered the *muḫḫûm* the garment that he asked for. It is interesting why the ecstatic adopted such an extreme behavior. It is revealed from other text that this category did exhibit a raving attitude, but devouring a raw animal appears not to be a common thing to do, not even during a ceremonial. I do believe that the author of the text mentioned this situation because of its particularity. Although his conduct was extreme it might have been expected from an ecstatic to act unexpectedly. His behavior appears to be tightly connected with the content of his prophecy that foretells an *ukultum, devouring* that will take place if the tabooed goods are not returned. Charpin underlines that this word also means plague[237]so in other words the city or kingdom might be menaced by a plague if the sacred goods are not given back so the *muḫḫûm* might have used this extreme behavior in order to strengthen the impact of his message. Considering all the above I do not believe that the ingestion of the raw animal was a consequence of an ecstatic state but a gesture of his own volition in order to attain his goal.

Considering that apparently, there is no difference in behavior and attributions between the male and female ecstatic I will consider that the description for one gender would denote also the characteristics of the other. Unfortunately, there are only two texts that might reveal the cultic activity of the muḫḫûm/muḫḫūtum, and in those sources they appear in a plural form so they could prophesize either individual or as a group. In *Ritual of Ištar, Text 2*,

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[235] J.M.Durand, *Les documents*, p. 75-76, *Archives*, 1988, pp.386-388

[236] M. Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 2003, p. 38

[237] D.Charpin, Le context, 1992, p.22

A. 3165 describes a monthly ceremony in which the ecstatic take part and are expected to enter a trance in order to receive a message from the gods:

> *If by the end of the month the prophet maintains his equilibrium and is not able to prophesy when it is time for the chant "mà-e ú-re-mén"e the temple officials let the musicians go. If he prophesies,they strike up "mà-e ú-re-mén".*[238]

What the ritualic text says is that the ecstatic was expected to prophesize during the ceremony and if this happens the musician will start to sing a specific song, but if not they were dismissed. It seems that during a cultic ceremony the rave, trance of the ecstatic was accompanied by music but we do not know whether during this phase the *muḫḫûm* or the *muḫḫūtum* performed some kind of dance or chaotic movements that would require accompaniment. The other text referring to a ritual for the Goddess mentions a group of female esctatics but it is badly preserved. Anyway, it seems that they were expected to act similarly to their male counterparts in the previous description:

> *(do/does)] not enter [. . .] the prophe[t . . .] who arise(s) [. . .] .When the musicians have entered before her, the prophetesses [. . .] and the mu[sicians]. Whe[n the prophetesses] main- [tain their equilibrium], two m[usicians . . . enter] the [. . .] . [They sing] an eršemmakkum before [the goddess for Enlil.*[239]

Those two texts indicate that an ecstatic could not enter a trans whenever he or she wanted and it appears that they were not using any other means or methods in order to induce the said state so we may not consider them professional prophets such as the *āpilum* .In this situation the prophecy was a spontaneous and the agency of the prophet lies in this case in the willingness to share the message transmitted by the deity. A similar situation is that of the lay prophets. Even so, male representants of this cultic category definitely outnumbers that of the females. In the Mari correspondence 12 *muḫḫûm* can be identified (a group of five plus other seven, named and unnamed) and only 2 female plus another one in a list of distribution.[240] From those three 2 of them are referred to by their own names, Ḫubatum and Annu-tabni, and

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[238] M. Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 2003, p.81

[239] *Ibidem*, p.82

[240] ARM 26 200, ARM 26 337, ARM 26 326

about the third it is mentioned that she served in the temple of Anunnitum. The prophecies they transmit are nothing special: one of them addresses the problem of the harvest and the Yaminite tribe (ARM 26 200), the other one is an advice for Zimri-Lim not to leave Mari and was transmitted by Addu-duri in the same letter with her ominous dream, as a mean to determine the king to not venture into dangerous missions (ARM 26 337). The two Letters bring no further information concerning the role of the muḫḫūtum in the Mariote religious cult and society.

The sector where the women were more prominent is that of the lay prophecy. The Mariote correspondence includes 7 prophets who act in other domains of activity and were not affiliated to a temple. Out of those seven we may count 1 man and 6 women, three of them being given also their names: Aḫatum, Kakka-lidi and Timlû. In letter ARM 26 207 Šibtu informs her husband that she gave some sort of drink to male and female persons in order to provoke a prophecy. She justified her action by stating that she wanted to know what the signs say about the campaign the king was planning. The oracle being a positive one she inquired also about the situation of Išme-Dagan, one of Zimri-Lim's prominent enemies, and the answer was again, a positive one. Considering that the two persons that were expected to deliver an oracle didn't appear to be related with the cultic or prophetic personnel, and ingested some sort of psychedelic or intoxicating substances offered by the queen herself, the validity of the oracles may be questioned so she sends him reassurances of its genuineness*:" Perhaps my lord would say this: "She has made them speak by fraudulent means." But I did not make them speak anything. They speak voluntarily — they could resist as well*."[241] What is interesting about this letters is that although she insists upon the validity of the oracle she does not send the hair and hem of the man and woman so that a diviner could examine its authenticity.

ARM 26 210 mentions a free woman, spouse of a man (*aššat awīlim*) came to deliver an oracle, stating clearly that she was sent by Dagan, *Dagan išpuranni*, so she considers herself a messenger of the god and is her duty to convey the information in order to be transmitted to the king.

ARM 26 214, is also a letters sent by the queen to Zimri-Lim informing him that Aḫatum, a servant girl of Dagan-Malik, delivered a positive oracle concerning a campaign of

[241] M. Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 2003, p.40

the king while entering a trance state. Stökl indicates that the verb *maḫû*, "to rave" used here, is never used for the professional prophets, and it might have been here chosen in order to strengthen the idea that the message was indeed sent by the gods[242]. In order to be verified the hair and a fringe of garment belonging to the girl was sent to the king.

In ARM 26 217 an unnamed god requires his offerings from the king and the deity promises to deliver his enemies in his hands and to bring prosperity for his land. What is really interesting about this letter is the fact that the message is transmitted to the official by an unnamed woman, and also the fragmentary description of where the prophecy was delivered to this lady: *"[. . .] inside my temple [. . .] he gave. The door of [. . .] send t[o me]. [. . .]"*. From those lines we see that the divine message was passed to the women while she was inside the temple, but unfortunately, there is no further information concerning her visit and any other action she might have performed during her stay inside the sacred area.

Kakka-lidi, in ARM 26 236, had an intriguing vision in the temple of Itur-Mer about two cargo ships. The king and his entourage were on board but the people from the two boats were quarelling. "*The kingship, the scepter, the throne, the dynasty, and the Upper and Lower land are given to Zimri-Lim!' And the whol[e] entourage answered: 'It is given to Zimri-Lim!' Then, those c[a]rgo ships [dockedd] at the [g]ate of the palace*"[243] Perhaps the prophecy refers to the attempt of Zimri-Lim to pacify the kingdom. What is of relevance for this study is the fact that the women had a vision inside a temple, so either if the message was delivered during an awakened state or not, the deity choose to reveal his will through visual means, not through bodily possession or speaking directly to the prophet. Afterwards, the women went to deliver her message to the authorities.

The last letter involving a lay prophetess is ARM 26 240. Timlû, servant women of Addu-duri, sent a letter to her mistress informing her about a divine message she received, but the prophecy is badly preserved. What is of utmost importance is the setting of the said prophecy and the way it was acquired:"*I had a [dre]am in your behalf,c [and in] my [dr]eam Belet-ekallim [se]nt me to say(...)"*[244]If we are to translate this following the interpretation

[242] J.Stökl, *Female Prophets*, 2010, p. 51

[243] M. Nissinen, Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East, 2003, p.67

[244] *Ibidem,* p.71

offerent in Nissinen's Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East, we may say that this is an incubation dream and it should be included among the prophecies, because the place of its delivery is a temple. Durand on the other hand translates the phrase *"9.[šutt]am āmurrakki[m"* as "I had a dream concerning you"[245]so, if we are to follow this translation, the letter should be placed under the category of dreams[246].

For a better understanding of the gender distribution of the Mariote prophetic phenomenon, and in order to have a solid starting point for my analysis a graphical illustration of the situation is required in order to have a clear image of the distribution of the divine messages according to gender and the function he or she occupies in relation with the temple or the palace. I should state that for the table and graphic I used only the letters that contained or transmitted prophetic messages from Mari, those that provide information about the types of prophets that presented both male and female counterparts, thus excluding the *qammatum* (that I will treat separately), *assinnum* and the prophets that had neither name nor title rendered in the document. I did not consider the prophets that are mentioned to have appeared in the dream of certain persons or the cultic personnel that might prophecy although their primary function is a different one. Those exclusions might bring also a different number of prophets than identified by other researchers and I also count the group of *muḫḫûm/muḫḫūtum* as individuals when the number is mentioned.

	Gendered prophecy in Mari Correspondence				
Āpilum	Āpiltum	Muḫḫûm	Muḫḫūtum	Male lay prophet	Female lay Prophet
Āpilū + Āpilum ša	Innibana āpiltum	muḫḫûm ARM 26 202	Ḫubatum muḫḫūtum	No title ARM 26 207	No title ARM 26 207

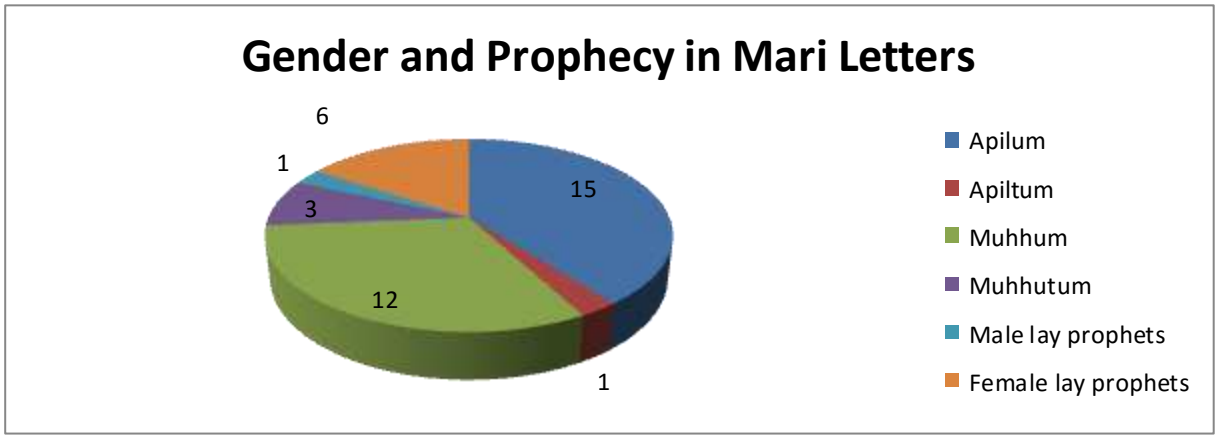
[245] Durand, *Archives epistolaires de Mari* , 1988, p.482

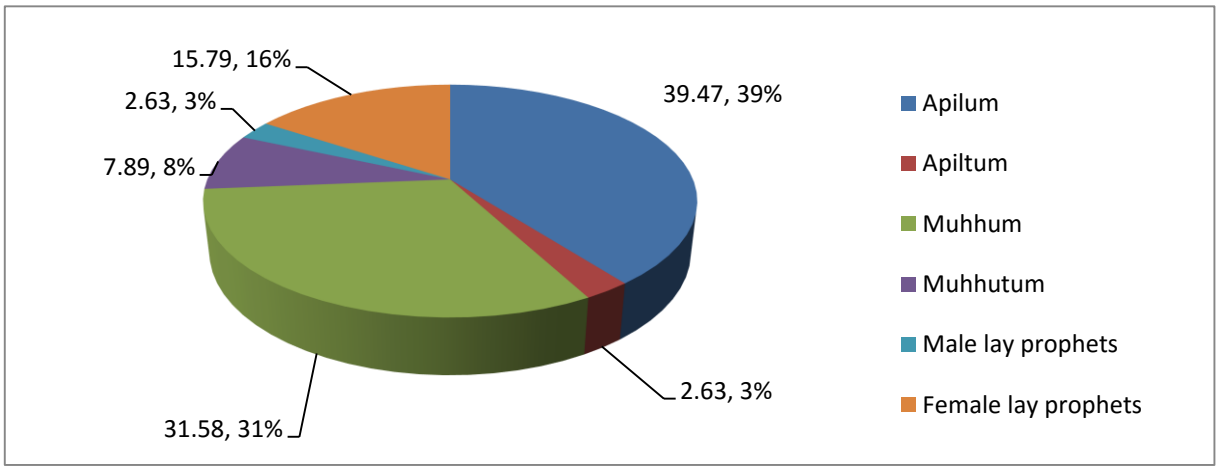
[246] Durands includes it under the label of dreams so I will include it along with Kakka-lidi 's vision in the statistics concerning dreams in the archive of Mari, because they are at the limit of prophecies and dreams

Addi bēl Kallasu A1121 + A. 2731	ARM 26 204		ARM 26 200		
Abīya, āpilum ša Addi bēl Ḫalab A. 1968		muḫḫûm ša Dagan ARM 26 206	muḫḫūtum in the temple of Annunitum ARM 26 237		Spouse of a awilum ARM 26 210
Āpilum A.3760		muḫḫûm ARM 26 215	Annu-tabni muḫûūtum ARM 22 326		A servant girl Of Dagan-Malik, Aḫatum ARM 26 214
Āpilum ša Šamši ARM 26 194		muḫḫûm ša Dagan ARM 26 220			A woman ARM 26 217
Āpilum Iṣi-aḫu ARM 26 195		muḫḫûm ša Dagan			Kakka-lidi ARM 26 236

		ARM 26 221			
Lupaḫum, āpilum ša Dagan ARM 26 199		muḫḫûm ARM 26 221 bis			Timlû ARM 26 240
Qišti-Diritim, āpilum ša Dīrītim ARM 26 208		muḫḫû ša Dagan ARM 26 243			
aplûm ša Dagan ša Tuttul + aplûm ša Bēlet-ekallim ARM 26 209		Ḫamšat(5) muḫḫû ša Addi M.9451			
āpilum ša Ninḫursagga ARM26 219					
Āpilum					

ARM 26 223					
Āpilum ša Marduk ARM 26 371					
Atamrum āpilum ša Šamši ARM 26 414					
Lupâhum āpilum M.11436					





The table and diagrams from above speak for themselves: the male professional prophets highly outnumber that of the females the percentage being of 1 to 14 in the case of the *āpilum*. The same discrepancy can be observed also in the case of the ecstatics, the letters of Mari mentioning 12 *muḫḫûm* and only 2 *muḫḫātum*, plus another one mentioned in a ration list. This situation turns upside down when it comes to female lay prophets. In this situation the percentage is definitely in the women's favor, being mention 1 male lay prophet and 6 (7 if we consider Timlû's message a prophecy) ladies.

Before drawing some conclusion regarding the gendered distribution of prophets we should also acknowledge the verification of divine messages considering a gender biased scrutiny. There has been considerable attention to the function of the hair and fringe and it is generally understood at this point that the items were used for ritual verification of the prophecy in question.[247]Over the time, scholars offered various explanations for the sending of the hair and fringe only in certain situations. Finet argued that the pertinent factor was neither the professional status of the prophet, cleric or layperson, nor the content of the message, but rather the social rank of the individual[248] but his point is not valid when we

[247] Dominique Charpin, *Prophètes et roi dans le Proche-Orient amorrite: Nouvellesdonnées, nouvelles perspectives;* 2002, p.25; Herbert B. Huffmon, *A Company of Prophets: Mari, Assyria, Israel*, 2000, p.50; Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 2003, p.16; Lester L. Grabbe, *Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy from an Anthropological Perspective*, 2003, p.23; Abraham Malamat, Mari and the Bible, 1998, p.78, 100

[248] Finet, "*Les symboles du cheveu, du bord du vêtement et de l'ongle en Mésopotamie*," 110–124.

consider that both Inib-šina and Addu-duri sent their hair and fringes to the king in order to perform purification or verification of the message sent[249]. Moran considers that in the cases of prophetic oracles "communicated privately," the hair and fringe were not required, but "it seems they had to be handed over if the message was announced publicly, that is, in the temple and presumably in the presence of worshipers."[250] Although this issue was largely discussed, scholars did not get to a clear-cut conclusion and they still did not took into consideration the gender distribution of prophets in Mariote sources.

Analyzing the data from the above table the situation of the prophetic authentication would be the following one:

No hair and fringe enclosed

1. Āpilum : A 1121+ A 2731 ; A 3760; ARM 26 194; ARM 26 195; ARM 26 199; ARM 26 208; ARM 26 223; ARM 26 371; ARM 26 414
2. Āpiltum: ARM 26 204
3. Muḫḫûm: ARM 26 203, ARM 26 206, ARM 26 243
4. Muḫḫûtum: ARM 26 237 (Addu-duri sends her own hair and fringe, and not the one belonging to the female ecstatic of Anunnitum)
5. Male lay prophets: ARM 26 207
6. Female lay prophets: ARM 26 207; ARM 26 210; ARM 26 236; ARM 26 240

Enclosure of hair and fringe

1. Āpilum: A. 1968; ARM 26 219
2. Muḫḫûm: ARM 26 215, ARM 26 220, ARM 26 221, ARM 26 221 bis
3. Muḫḫātum: ARM 26 200
4. Female lay prophets: ARM 26 214, ARM 26 217

As we can easily observe there appears not to be a strict rule concerning gender verification of prophecy in the Mariote letters. Out of 9 entries involving women prophecies only 3 of them are seen to enclose the hair and fringe of the person so this 1/3 does not imply a higher trust placed into male prophecy. When a god chose a spokesperson all that matters is the message itself and not the status or office of the messenger.

[249] ARM 26 204, ARM 26 237

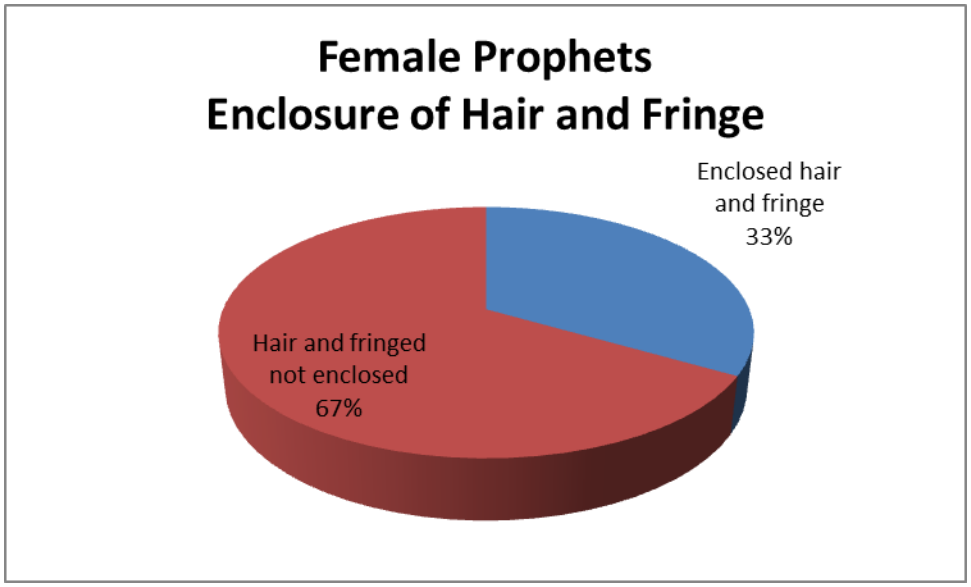
[250] William L. Moran, "*New Evidence from Mari on the History of Prophecy*", 1969, p.19-23

Esther J. Hamori in her study "Gender and the Verification of Prophecy at Mari", after an ample statistical survey concludes that:

> Under Zimri-Lim, then, we see the reference to ritual verification of prophecy through the submission of *šartum u sissiktum* quite disproportionately in the cases of female prophets and *assinnū*. This may be unexpected, given the relative esteem apparently afforded women in the palace at Mari. It is not necessary to posit a particular form of social stratification based on this data (nor would it be possible or responsible). What is evident in this discrepancy is a certain hierarchy of confidence. In the letters to *Zimri-Lim*, the women and *assinnū* – that is, the "not-men" – offer prophecy which is seen as both meriting an official report and disproportionately warranting verification. It is not as "reliable" as the prophecy of men, but still something to write home about.[251]

Although her conclusion is correct considering her documentation and statistics, she does not take into consideration that the number of female prophets, as they appear in the sources, is obviously smaller than that of the male prophets. Anyway she count the dreams among the prophecies and included in her study the prophetic figures that do not have an opposite gender counterpart such as the *qammatum* and *assunum*. I think that it will be better to compare the total number of female prophets whose messages are verified with the total number of the prophecies uttered by women in order to come up with a more appropriate conclusion. I maintain my opinion that a percentage of 33% of verified prophecies to 67% messages that do not require authentication seem to imply that female prophecy was regarded with the same trustworthiness as that of their male counterparts.

[251]Esther J. Hamori, Gender and the Verification of Prophecy at Mari, 2012, www.academia.edu, p.22



As we may see, the study of the gender verification of prophecy doesn't bring any new data into the equation. The salient feature of my analysis points to the fact that in the official sphere of prophecy the males outnumber the females but the situation is totally different when it comes to lay prophets that have no liaison with a deity or temple. As we have seen from the divine messages analyzed before, the prophets were not instrumental agents, when their bodies were used as a medium to transmit a divine message, but also agents of their own volition when they choose to report, directly or indirectly the message to the authorities. They sometimes undertook long voyages in order to deliver personally the divine information, and to make sure it will be transmitted to the king, they contacted more than one influent person, such as in the case of the *qammatum* of Dagan. Returning to the disproportional gender distribution between lay prophets and those affiliated to a god or deity, I have no choice but to agree with Lewis' point of view, who sees the involvement of women in ecstatic practices a way to escape the restriction imposed upon them by a patriarchal and stratified society. He also states that "if the possessive cult is linked to the central religion and its central cult-place, either the mediums tend to be male or the utterings of a female medium are interpreted by a man. Thus, women are prevalent in so-called marginal cults, which are not linked to the central ethical system based on the society's central religion"[252]. Considering that gods did not awknowledge gender and class when they needed to transmit a message, it

[252] I.M. LEWIS, Ecstatic Religion. A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession' (London: Routledge), 2003 apud. Jonathan Stökl, The Role of Women in the Prophetical Process in Mari. A Critique of Merry Keller's Theory of Agency, 2007, p.175

appears that women might have tried go gain some attention and a higher status using the pretext of prophecy, but even so their number is really small by comparison with that of their male counterparts.

We may conclude that prophecy was another religious sphere dominated by men, but women were by no means excluded. Despite their small number, their prophetic words held, in the eyes of the authorities the same value as the divine information delivered by male professional or lay prophets.

III.4.b DREAMS, WOMEN AND ONEIROMANCY

Dreams were part of the ancient people's everyday life, though unlike nowadays they were not perceived as a personal psychological experience, but as a special type of reality, and the impressions offered by oneiric experiences was no less genuine that that those acquired during an awaken state.[253]Moreover, dreams were considered as an attempt of a supernatural being (a deity, spirit, demon, ghosts) to communicate with the mortals in order to transmit a certain message. Apparently, the ancient really believed that the gods are deciding over each and every aspect of their lives and the only free will of mortals appears to have had was to lead a pious life, either hoping the gods will hear one's prayers, and relent, or to seek indication as to the future by divination, and to perform the appropriate rituals to prevent the evil predicted. The recipient can ignore the message but it would have been to his disadvantage.[254]Considering that dreams were sometimes a form of communication between two different realms (human-divine; the world of the dead- human world) and also a personal experience that required no technical knowledge we may consider them as a form of

[253] H.and H.A Frankfort, "Myth and Reality" in The Intellectual Adventure of the Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in Ancient Near East, Chicago University Press, 1946, p.12; T. Jakobsen, The Graven Image in Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross, ed.by Patrick Muller, Paul Hanson and Dean McBride, Fotress, Philadelphia, 1987, pp.18-19.

[254]Sally A Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams and Dream Rituals*, Ugarit-Ferlang, Munster, 1998, p.3

inductive, inspired divination. This aspect along with the different methods of deciphering the content of dreams received lately considerable attention from scholars.[255]

Dreams were experienced in Mesopotamia in various ways. In one of her studies of the oneiric phenomenon, Annette Zgoll states that a phenomenological approach of the Mesopotamian sources allows the establishment of five points of analysis:

> 1. Dreams exist independently from people. A dream takes place in a distinct "space- time realm" on the same level as waking.
>
> 2. During the dream, the dreamer can be visited by a god, or can be transported to another place
>
> 3. The dream-sender either participates actively, or sends a message
>
> 4. During the time in which the dream takes place, the person dreaming can meet gods, demons, or other human beings, be them living or dead
>
> 5. During the time in which the dream takes place, the god can give the human being insight into divine decision about the future [256]

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[255] Benjamin Kilborne," On Classifying Dreams"in Dreaming: *Anthropological and Psychological Interpretations* ed.by Barbara Tedlock, Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp.171-191; Robert Karl Gnuse, *Dreams and Dream Reports in the Writings of Josephus*: A Traditio-Historical Analysis, Brill, 1996, Chapter 2, Dreams in the Ancient World, pp 34-68; J.Bottero, *MESOPOTAMIA Writing, Reasoning, And The Gods*, Trans. Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van De Mieroop, The University Of Chicago Press, 1992, pp.105-125; Curtiss Hoffman, "Dumuzi's Dream: Dream Analysis in Ancient Mesopotamia" in *Dreaming*, Educational Publishing Foundation 2004, Vol. 14, No. 4, 240–251; Jean-Marie Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World*, 1999, pp.27-52; Kelly Bulkley, *Dreaming in World religions.A Comparative Study*, New York University Press, 2002, pp.110-138; Kelly Bulkeley, "The Evil Dream of Golgamesh: Interpreting Myths in Mythological Texts" in Visions of the Night: Dreams, Religion, and Psychology, Sunny Press, 1999, pp. 77-93; Scott Noegel, "*Dream and Dream Interpreters in Mesopotamia and Hebrew Bible*" in *Dreaming. A Reader in Religious, Cultural, and Psychological Dimenstion Of Dreaming*, ed.by Kelly Bulkeley, Palgrave, 2001, pp. 39-54

[256] Annette Zgoll, "Dream as Gods and Gods in Dreams. Dream-realities in Ancient Mesopotamia from 3rd to 1st millennium B.C" in *He has opened Nisaba's house of learning : studies in honor of Åke Waldemar Sjöberg on the occasion of his 89th birthday on August 1st 2013*, ed by Åke W Sjöberg; Leonhard Sassmannshausen; Georg Neumann Publisher:Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2014, p.307

This framework proposed by Zgoll is focusing upon the experience of the dreamer, the sender of the message and offers also information about the milieu in which this exchange of divine knowledge takes place. This model of analysis is relevant for this study because it focusses on the agent be they human or supernatural and their actions. Other scholars, taking as starting point Oppenheim's classification of dreams focus more on interpreting the message than on the actors of this nocturnal experience.

Oppenheim considers that dream experiences were recorded on three differentiated levels: dreams as revelation from a deity that do not require any interpretation and are taken as granted because the one who sends the message is the supernatural being him/herself, symbolic dreams that might reflect a state of mind or the physical condition of the dreamer that are never recorded but seem to have been deciphered according to some interpretation manuals as the Dream Book, and mantic dreams in which forthcoming evets are prognosticated, and consist usually in fragmentary images that need to be interpreted too.[257] In her work concerning dreams and dream rituals Sally A. Butler provides a new interpretation of Oppenheim's classification:

> 1. Message dreams that contain a clear statement and don't require any type of interpretation.
>
> 2. Symbolic-message dreams that have to be recorded (prefers this label instead of simply symbolic (Oppenheim) because consider them a subcategory of the first type. They usually appear in literary sources)
>
> 3. Dream-omens that are interpreted using a Dream Book [258]

A message dream comes from a deity and offer advice or warning concerning different matters, usually religious or political ones hence generally the recipient of message and symbolic dreams are high ranking persons, for the most part kings and priests, rarely

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[257] Leo Oppenheim, *Dream and their Interpretation in Ancient Near East with an Interpretation of the Assyrian Dream-Book,* TAPS 63, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1956, p.184

[258] Sally A Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams and Dream Rituals, p.15*

queens as in the Hittite texts.[259] Alice Mouton prefers to integrate the symbolic dreams under the typology of message dreams, because although they need interpretation, they are nonetheless, transmitted by the gods themselves, the dreamer being a simple spectator that can not interfere and change the course of the dream; the other category of dreams are the bad *dreams* that had a variety of causes, [260].

Although, as we have seen, many attempts were made to analyze dream and interpretation of dreams, there are still very few studies approaching the subject of dream interpreters and their gendered distribution or even an analysis that considers the male/female distribution of dreams in the second millennium archives. Regrettably, we cannot include in a study concerning the agency of women's dreams that stay under the label of mantic or omen dreams and whose interpretation depends on specialist and omen series or are included only in literary works. In the Neo-Assyrian period all the recorded dreams are experienced by men. An exception from this apparent rule is the kingdom of Mari where, the vast majority of message dreams, with a clear political message, where reported to have been experienced by commoners, rarely somebody from the royal family[261]. There are also in this archive of some symbolic dreams belonging to Addu-duri and Kakkadili.

The collection of dreams from Mari, although not very extensive, offers a sound ground for the study of this human experience, and because the majority of the reports include the name or gender of the dreamer and sender, it is really offering for a gendered biased analysis. It is not usual for the dreamer to send a direct report of his oneiric experience to the king if it not a member of the royal family. Besides the dreams of Addu-durri, the queen mother and Šîmatum, a daughter of Zimri-Lim married to the king of Ilân-Šûra, the other reports are sent by different local officials. J.M Durands underlines that the dreams come from a large variety of persons, from simple commoners to royal ladies and palace women, to officials, priests/priestesses[262]. Among those reports, there are 8 dreams that

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[259] For Hittite dreams see see Alice Mouton, *Rêves hittites Contribution à une histoire et une anthropologie du rêve en Anatolie ancienne*, Brill, 2007

[260] *Ibidem*, pp.29-30

[261] Sally A Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams and Dream Rituals*, p.17

[262] J.M.Durand, *Archives epistolaires de Mari* , p.455

belong to female dreamers. In order to proceed to an analysis of women oneiric experiences and their messages a survey of the available data is necessary.

Addu-duri writes to the king about the dream a certain lady whose name could not be restored. The woman dreamed about two deceased ecstatics whom spoke before the goddess Adda, a popular deity in Mari[263]but the message transmitted is just a fragmentary and slight ambiguous one. Following Durand's translation all that remained from the dreams reduces to the following phrase: "Parlez aux fantômes de vos nourrissons mort-nés afin que Zimri-Lim fasse une moisson de bien-être."[264]the rest of the message being broken. This oneiric experience contains more than one element that makes it a message dream or I might also label it as a prophetic dream: the reference to the two dead ecstatics, the goddess Abba, the advice to talk to the ghosts of the stillborn infants and their unexpected connection with a good harvest. As it appears from the short lines preserved this dream might have required further interpretation considering its complexity if an explanation was not offered in the broken paragraphs.

Another interesting dream is the one experience by lady Ayala who sees two women quarrelling at the gate of Annunītum. One of the women was from Mari and the other from Šehrum, a locality neighbouring the Mariote district. J.Sasson interprets the struggle between the two ladies as an allegoric, even a parabolic one. The phrase "*Return my utensil! Either , you sit! Or, I myself shall sit*" shows that the women/city of Šehrum claimed something from the woman/city of Mari but it is not clear what. It was implied that the misunderstanding between the two could have been caused by the desire to be the host city for the residence of a certain female deity[265]although this interpretation is just a speculative one. Whatever meaning this dream might have had it was confirmed as genuine by performing some sort of technical divination.

The next dream, designated in J.M. Durand corpus "*Archives epistolaires de Mari*" by the indicative A 1902 offers no name and title for the dreamer or sender. The only clue that it is indeed experienced by a woman is the structure "*ina šutiša*" which translates by "in

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[263] Stephen Bertman, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*, OUP USA, 2005, p.116

[264] J.M.Durand, *Archives epistolaires de Mari*, p.467

[265] J.Sasson, "Mari Dreams" in *JAO*S, 103.1, 1983, p.291

her dream". This dream is rendered like a dialogue between the god Itûr-Mêr and an old man that complains about the fact that the deities seem not to be touched by his prayers. In response the god asks him to listen to Dagan and Ninhursagga and to pay attention to the words of the gods, because the gods themselves listen to the prayers of humans, and this ambiguous message seems to satisfy the old man. This dream appears to address nobody in particular. It might be considered a reminder for the mortals that they should be paying attention to the messages sent by the deities although they are not clear and the response to their prayers does not come always on time. Also the statement that an old man values as much as two young ones might allude to the wisdom an elder person acquired during their lifetime, an asset that is useful for preserving the social order.

Another dream report mentions Zunâna, servant woman of the king, who writes to the Zimri-Lim in order to relate him a dream she had concerning one of her servants that was taken away. The dream is actually a dialogue between the woman and the god Dagan who informs her that the servant will be free only after an intervention of Zimri-Lim so the woman follows the deity's advice and pleads to the king for her liberation. We have here a dream concerning a personal matter, reflecting the dreamer's state of mind and her concern for the servant girl she was deprived of. The woman is not just a passive spectator in this case. She communicates to the deity her problems and then, she acts in order to attain her goal, justifying her request using the divine message so, in this particular situation, the oneiric experience becomes an utensil that helps her to get her servant-girl back.

The dreams of Kakka-lidi and Tilmû were also discussed as prophetic message because, as I have argued before, they could be easily placed at the border line between dream and prophecy. About Kakka-lidi we know that she had a vision in the temple of Itûr-Mêr but we are not sure whether this vision appeared during a dream or in trance and concerning Tilmû's experience there are still controversies whether her message refers to a simple dream about the queen mother or it implies that the woman performed an incubation dream on behalf of Addu-duri.

The next two dreams belong to the royal ladies Addu-duri and Šîmatum, the mother and one of the daughters of the king. The dowager reveals to her son the frightening oneiric experience she had and instructs him to be careful and not leave the city considering that her dream was doubled by a grim prophecy. This ominous dreams skillfully described in the manner specific to a city lament, may just be a reflection of her motherly concern during a

time of crisis for the king and kingdom. Šîmatum's dream concern the name giving for the baby girl of one of the king's concubines, and it appears to have a veiled political content considering that the name of the girl Tanûh-Nawûm would translate as "the steppe is appeased" and might have a premonitory value.[266]

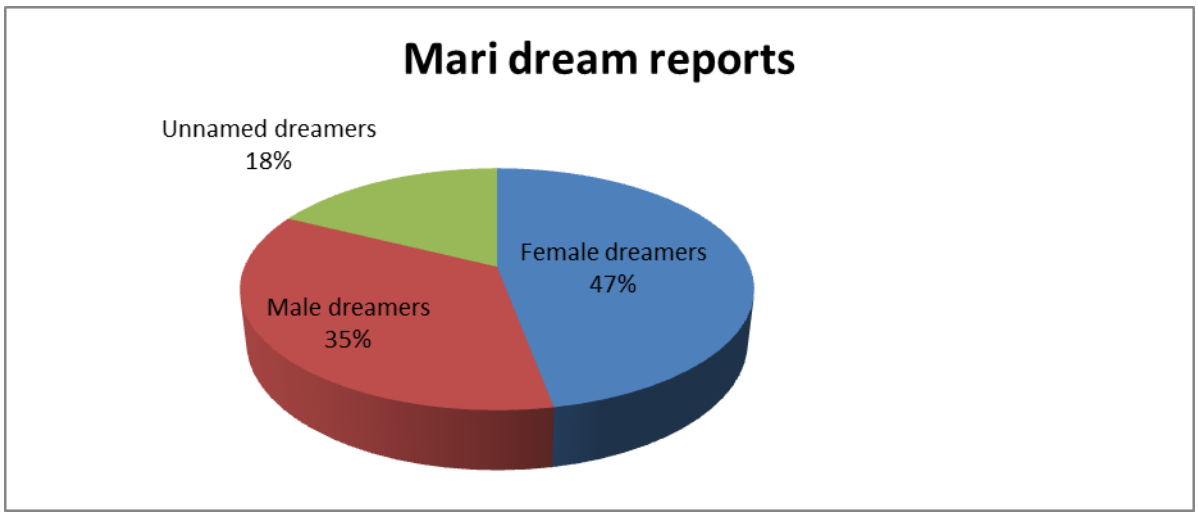
After analyzing the content of dreams I can state that their messages are more varied than those of the prophecies and they extend from political, religious and administrative subjects to more personal ones such as missing servants, and individual concerns.

Mari dream reports		
Male dreamers	Female dreamers	Unnamed dreamers
M.5704/Zimri-Lim's dream mentioned/ Anonymous sender/ no hair and fringe	M.9576/Dreamer: Lady Bi-la'u(?)/ Sender: Addu-duri/ no hair and fringe	A.2559/Sender:Sûmû/no hair and fringe
M.9034/ Anonymous male dreamer/Anonymous sender/ no hair and fringe	A.222/ Dreamer:Lady Ayala/Anonymous sender/ the hair and fringe are sent	A.2448/ Sender: Sammêtar/ no hair and fringe
M.13637/ Dreamer: Nanna-li-til, a servant of the king/ Sender: Iddyatum/ no hair and fringe	A.902/ Anonymous female dreamer[267]/ Anonymous sender/ no hair and fringe	M.13841/Sender:Kibri Dagan/the hair and fringe are sent
A.15/ Dreamer:Malik-Dagan/ Sender:Itûr-Asdû/ no hair and fringe	A.907/ dreamer and sender Zunâna/ no hair and fringe	

[266] Durand, *Archives epistolaires de Mari*, p.457

[267] Although the text does not clearly states that the dreamer is a woman, this may by deduced from the construction *"ina šutiša*", an expression that can be translated as "in her dream";preposition *ina+ šuti* (substantive in genitive) +-*ša*, possessive pronominal suffix, 3rd person, feminine

M.13842/ Anonymous male dreamer/ Sender;Kibri Dagan/ no hair and fringe	A.2437/Dreamer:Kakka-lîdî[268]/ Sender:Šibtu/ no hair and fringe	
A.122/ Dreamer: sanga of Itûr-Mêr/ Sender: Addu-duri/ no hair and fringe	A.994/Dreamer and sender Addu-duri/the hair and fringe are sent	
	A.2859/ Dreamer and sender Šîmatum/no hair and fringe	
	A.3424. Dreamer and sender Timlû/no hair and hem	



Considering the above table and statistic graphic, it is obvious that dreams were experienced by both male and female, and they were reported when they contained divine messages that did not addresses specifically to the dreamer and his/her daily life. As we can see out of 17 dreams compiled by J.M Durand in "*Archives epistolaires de Mari*", 3 belong to

[268] This dream was included by Nissinen in *Prophets and Prophecy in Ancient Near East* under the category of prophecy because it is said that Kakka-lidi had a vision, and this might imply an awaken state (ARM 26 236).On the other hand Sally A.Butler in *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams and Dream Rituals* includes it under the label of symbolic dreams, p.19

unnamed dreamers whose gender does not appear clearly, 6 are reported to have been experienced by men and 8 to women. What is remarkable here is the fact that there are more women whose identity is known than men: out of 8 female dreamers there are 6 with complete names, one whose name was not completely restored and another one unnamed. On the other hand from a number of 6 male dreamers, 4 are rendered by name and 2 are anonymous. The verification through technical means by sending the hair and fringe doesn't bring important information that would place women dreamers at Mari on a secondary place. It is true that women are much more present in the oneiric environment than in prophetic contexts, and considering that dreaming does not imply any technical knowledge, such an important presence of the ladies would only come to support the idea that women were much more present in the unofficial areas of religion. Even though the dream was considered to be a message from a supernatural being, and the dreamer was just a passive receiver of the named message, he/she manifested his agency through their decision of letting the authorities know about those dreams that seemed to contain information that concern different public affairs, mostly political and religious ones.

Concerning their oneiric experiences people might have felt sometimes competent to interpret their own dream or those of their acquaintances as revealed by an Old Babylonian letter(AbB 6, no.263)

"Speack to Banum; Thus (speaks) Nur-Sin

Buy one ram and sacrifice it in the….of Adad

Because this is why you saw the dream

And, also please open the dike outlet adjacent to the field[269]

However, oneiric experiences being sometimes difficult to understand for the ordinary people, needed technical personnel in order to decipher them and come up with the suitable interpretation. Unfortunately, there is no evidence of a specialist solely devoted to dream interpretation. The *šū'ilu, bārû* and their female counterparts were basically seers, divination priests that were also active in the area of dream interpretation. J.M.Husser considers that the *bārû* is a divination priest proficient in scholarly divination. On the other

[269] Sally A.Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams and Dream Rituals*, p.7

hand the *šū'ilu* appears to be more inclined toward less technical form of divination such as the libanomancy, necromancy and oneiromancy, and among them the female counterparts seem to have been more numerous than in the case of the *bārû.*[270] This distinction between the two categories of seers seems to be in complete accord with the distinction made by Bottéro between deductive and intuitive oneiromancy that he himself associated with these types of diviners.[271]

The *bārû* first appear as an office in sources during the Early Dynastic period under the Sumerian title **máš-šu-gíd-gíd** (apparently meaning "toward the sacrificial animal the hand stretched out/ was made long) and he exercised his attributions almost unchanged during the millennia, until the Neo-Assyrian times[272]. It appears that they worked for the palace or the temple, and it is possible that those affiliated with a temple to be exercising their knowledge for the wellbeing of the common people whom may come and ask for their help in times of crisis such as the protagonist of *Ludlul Bêl Nêmeqi.* There are not many things that would point to the techniques used by the diviners when interpreting dreams. Usually their analysis of signs or the results of the inspection of the entrails of an animal are interpreted using some kind of scholarly interpretation compendia.[273]I will not extend the discussion about this category considering that, during the second millennium B.C there is just one female bārû *(bārîtu*) mentioned. She appears in an Old Assyrian letters from the archive of Kaneš (TC1, 5)[274]. Here, two women, Tarām-Kubi and Šimat-Aššur write to a third, male person, Imdīlum as follows: "*Here, (in Aššur), we have consulted the ša'īltu priestesses and the bārîtu priestesses and the spirits of the dead*"[275] Unfortunately, the texts say nothing about

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[270] Jean-Marie Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World*, p.28

[271] J. Bottéro, *Writing, Reasoning and the Gods*, pp. 109-113

[272] R.A. Henshaw, *Male and Female Cultic Personnel*, pp.136-137

[273] Ibidem, p.138; Scott Noegel, *Dream and Dream Interpreters in Mesopotamia and Hebrew Bible*, p.54, p.66, note 96

[274] C.Michel, *La correspondence des marchands de Kaniš au début du II^e millénaire avant* J.C, Les Éditions du CERF, Paris, 2001, p.470

[275] For the translation of the letter see C.Michel, *op.cit, loc.cit* and Oppenheim, *Dreams in the Ancient Near East*, p.223

the rituals practiced by the two female interprets, and the reason why two ladies decided to visit them is not mentioned. Perhaps they experienced some bad dreams that would require interpretation and adequate countermeasures considering that the motif of ominous dreams that are hunted by the evil spirits and ghosts is a recurrent one in this corpus.

The *ša'īltu/ša'īlu* were also involved in dream interpretation but the means were less technical than those of the *bārû*. Considering that they are considered to be of lower status than the diviners, because their methods were more intuitive than deductive, it is not surprising that the number of female practitioners is higher among this category. Nonetheless Bottéro considers them specialist in dream exegesis. He states further that, although their methods are not known to us, there were cases when they have to appeal to "objective information of deductive divination", it seems that their profession centers above all upon personal gifts, a certain temperament and a particular wisdom and inspiration[276]. Those assets might helps him/her to give an interpretation of the dream based on their ability to have a quick insight into the personality of the dreamer and a certain knowledge acquired during the lifetime through direct experience. Although many scholars have mentioned in their works this kind of dream interpreters, Oppeheim's analysis is by far the most complex one. Studying literary and cultic text he encountered passages that mention certain tool *muššakku* that refers to the incense used for libanomancy.[277]

The *šū'ilu,* and *bārû* appear together in situation resembling the following one*:" the bārû-priest through his divining cannot put him on the correct road, the šū'ilu priest through his muššakku cannot instruct him"*[278]The same passage is also reported in a passage of *Ludlul Bêl Nêmeqi*[279] and Etana Epos. This last literary work is particularly interesting because it mentions a female specialist: "*I have honored the gods, I revered the spirits of the departed,*

[276] J. Bottéro, *Writing, Reasoning and the God*, p. 111.

[277] CAD, M2, p.279, Oppenheim, *Dreams in the Ancient Near East*, p.222, Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, p.288

[278] Leo Oppenheim, *Dreams in the Ancient Near East*, p.222

[279] Lambert, Babylonian Wisdom Literature, p.38

the SAL. e n s i -priestesses have completely performed the massakku for me[280]*/has used all the incense for me*[281]"

During the time, the role of the dream interpreter varied and he was associated also with other professional categories such as witches, prophets an even purification offices. The female ensi (SAL. ensi) is first mentioned in the Old Babylonian Proto-Lu (MSL XII 41) lexical list where she is listed among the purification offices[282]. She appear to be equated with the *ša'iltu* under the category of "askers" in the Lu=ša series but nevertheless, this is a much older office that seems to have its origins during the Sumerian period considering that the dream interpreters appeared in a ration list from that time[283]. Literary works have induced the idea that women dream interpreters outnumber the male ones. Dumuzi has his dream interpreted by his sister Geštinanna[284] and Gilgameš by his mother, the goddess Ninsun, the clever and wise, versed in everything goddess.[285] In an Old Babylonian lamentation the goddess Gula complains that nobody goes to the dream interpretess, suggesting that her role might have been an important one in deciphering the divine messages that were sent to humans during their sleep.[286]Not only the gods and heroes consulted women dream interpreters, but also the kings. After having a dream, Gudea goes to the goddess Nanše, his mother, in order to have his dream interpreted.

24-32. "Well, I have to tell her about this! Well, I have to tell her about this! I will ask her to stand by me in this matter. Profound things (?) came

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[280] Leo Oppenheim, Dreams in the Ancient Near East, p.222

[281] CAD, M2, p.279

[282] R.A. Henshaw, *Male and Female Cultic Personnel*, p.139

[283] *Ibidem*, p.140

[284] Dumuzi's Dream, http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section1/tr143.htm, Curtiss Hoffman, *Dumuzi's Dream: Dream Analysis in Ancient Mesopotamia*, pp. 241-243

[285] George Andrew, *The Epic of Gilgameš .A New Translation*, Standard Babylonian Version, Tablet I, Lines: 260-274 and 285-294, pp.10-11

[286] I.M. Asher-Greve, "The Oldest Female Oneiromancer" in *La femme dans le Proche-Orient antique. Compte rendu de la xxxiii rencontre assyriologique internationale (Paris, 7-10 juillet 1986*), ed. by J.M Durand, Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, Paris 1987 p. 31

suddenly to me, the shepherd, but the meaning of what the nocturnal vision brought to me I do not understand. So I will take my dream to my mother and I will ask my dream-interpreter, an expert on her own, my divine sister from Sirara, Nanše, to reveal its meaning to me."

33-38. He stepped aboard his boat, directed it on the canal Id-Niĝin-dua towards her city Niĝin, and merrily cut through the waves of the river. After he had reached Bagara, the house extending as far as the river, he offered bread, poured cold water and went to the master of Bagara to pray to him.[287]

As we may see the procedure involves rituals of offerings and prayers, and the actual dream interpretation was probably performed by a priestess of Nanše, functioning as *ensi*.[288] This would not be the first time when a priestess held also the office of ensi. Enḫeduanna, daughter of Sargon of Akkad, and *entu* of the moon god Nanna in Ur, is the only female of the 3rdmillennium who alludes to her function as oneiromancer[289]:"*118.My hand are no longer folded on the ritual couch 119.I may no longer reveal the pronouncements of Ninegal to man*"[290] The mention of the couch might allude to the fact that the *entu* was actually performing some kind of incubation, and that opinion appears to be sustained also by a cylinder seal from the late Early Dynastic Period amply described and studied by Julia Asher Greve. The seal portraits a ritualistic scene in which the central character appears to be a woman that lays on a bed. After excluding the possibilities of a sacred marriage ritual or a birth scene, Asher-Greve concludes:

Textual references to recumbent postures are, aside from hieros gamos, exclusively associated with dreams. The dreamer is lying down in sleep (so described in the texts of Eannatum and Gudea), sometimes with a dream inducer as alluded in one of Gudea's dreams. Dream inducers, professional dreamers (Sumerian: lu_2 sag-$še_3$ na) or deities are described as lying or standing at the head of or near by the actual dreamer. One would expect a visual depiction of either a

[287] http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.2.1.7#

[288] J.M. Asher-Greve, *The Oldest Female Oneiromancer*, p.31

[289] I*bidem*, p. 32

[290] W.W.Hallo, J.J.vanDijk, *The Exaltalion of Inanna*, Yale Near Eastern Researches, Vol. 3, New Haven and London 1968, p.31

> dreamer alone or of two persons laying near each other (dreamer and dream inducer) or one supine dreamer and a standing figure (deity or dream inducer) near the dreamer.[291]

Considering that the main character had her eyes wide open, Greve implied that it is actually a dream interpretation scene rather than a properly dream so the woman in cause may be a professional dream interpreter, SAL.ensi, or a high priestess that also held this type of office, during a specific ritual.

Although the female dream interpreters were really popular in the literary texts from the 3rd millennium onwards, this situation seems not to be paralleled in other type of sources that would reflect the daily life of the ordinary humans. The *šā'iltu* only appear once in Old Babylonian documents and four times in the Old Assyrian archive from Kanesh.

Šā'iltu	
AbB 6 22	Because of you I went to the haruspex and the *šā'iltu*
BIN6 93:20	Make an inquiry to the woman diviner(*šā-il-tam*) there , and send me the report
KTS 25a:7	We went to the woman diviner *(šā-il-tam*), and the god said as follows
TCL 4 5:4	Here, (in Aššur), we have consulted the *ša'īltu* priestesses and the *bārîtu* priestesses and the spirits of the dead.
ATHE 54:3	X silver and a sheep are with the old woman, the diviner of (*ša-i-la-at*)

Although the literary sources give the impression that women really dominated the dream interpretation sphere, their actual number is relatively small and this might be a consequence of the fact that their means, being mostly inductive, non-technical ones did not incite the interest of the contemporary scribes outside the mythological/epic area. Anyways,

[291] J.A.Greve, *The Oldest Female Oneiromancer*, p.30

the number of *šā'iltu* whom seems to also be active as *mušēlītu*, 'necromancer' (but of this profession little is known because it is only mentioned in a lexical list[292] but it appears to be a divinatory activity that is usually associated with the illicit, the witchacraft) exceeds that of the *bārîtu* so we find this situation similar with the one concerning technical and intuitive prophecy analyzed before, so I might conclude that women's agency in the field of divination and dream interpretation increases proportionally with the remoteness from the official cult, so obviously dominated by men.

III.5 WICKED WOMEN, WISE WOMEN

WOMEN RELIGIOUS SPECIALIST OUTSIDE THE TEMPLE

In this chapter I will debate the agency of women religious specialist that were not affiliated with the temple, and therefore they were not submitted to the same rules, and did not enjoy the same privileges as their female contemporaries that were involved in the official cult. The two categories of female specialist could work together in certain circumstances, when the wellbeing of certain people was in danger, the most eloquent example for such a situation being the apparent collaboration of the midwife and the *qadištu*, although it might not be a constant one.

When I refer to women religious specialists that function outside the temple I am inclined to associate them with magical and healing practices so, a short survey is required in order to establish the official position towards those two forms of manifestation of female agency.

There has been much discussion on the relationship between magic and religion. Frazer in *The Golden Bough* offers an evolutionary framework, considering that all along

[292] R.A. Henshaw, *Male and Female Cultic Personnel*, p.153, 3.7.8; K. van der Toorn, *From her Craddle to her Grave*, p.124.

human history magic was replaced by religion, and religion was replaced by science.[293] Like science, magic presumes the existence of universal laws of nature and the magician knows that using the proper ritual and spell he/she could attain specific ends.[294] By contrast, religion according to Frazer involves humble submission to the divine and worship of the divine forces that are beyond human understanding or control.[295] Although magic does sometimes resemble religion in its use of spiritual beings, it distinguishes by the fact that the magician attempts to coerce or constrain the deity, to manipulate he/she through rites and sacrifices in order to achieve his goals.[296] Considering this it may be state that magic resembled religion because it relies on supernatural forces that are invoked and persuaded to act according the magician's wish, on the other hand it approaches science by the fact that it also inclined toward practical aspects and a close observation of the laws of nature. On the other hand, Malinowski grouped magic with religion as sacred activities:

> "that are not merely a doctrine or philosophy, not merely an intellectual body of opinion, but a special mode of behavior, a pragmatic attitude built up on reason, feelings, and will alike. It is a mode of action as well as a system of belief, and a sociological phenomenon as well as a personal experience"[297]

Although both deal with the supernatural, crisis situation and their solution, magic is characterized by her pragmatic nature, the belief that humans, through rituals and spells, are indeed able to produce a difference, it is an art with specific ends, while religion focuses on worship and its goals are far more broader.[298]

M.Sigrist, in an article entitled *Magic and Human Reason* states that magic analyses the universe and creates suitable tools to transform the world or achieve the desired goals.

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[293] Kimberly B. Stratton, *Naming the Witch: Magic, Ideology, and Stereotype in the Ancient World*, Columbia University Press, 2013, p. 5

[294] James G. Frazer, *The golden bough. A study of Magic and Religion*, Macmillan Company, 1925, p.49

[295] *Ibidem, p.50*

[296] *Ibidem*, p.48-49

[297] B.Malinovski, *Magic*, *Science and Religion and Other Essays*, The Free Press, Glencoe, 1948, p. 8

[298] I*bidem*, pp.67-69

One should in this perspective never connect religion, the sacred or even the tabu to magic even if historically they very often appear connected. Magic is technology, the act of doing and not of saying.[299]

Mischa Titiev offers a very general distinction between the two concepts that appears to be more appropriate to the Mesopotamian reality. She states that religious rites are calendrical and communal, whereas magical rites deal with emergencies and often treat the crises of an individual.[300]

The attempt to separate religion, magic and science is not appropriate for the study of ancient Mesopotamia considering that all those domains are interlinked. A priest can be, at the same time a cultic official, scholar, pharmacologist, healer, exorcist or diviner, and all those roles seem not to be in conflict one with the other.[301] I think that a more proper distinction should be made between official and unofficial magic and their practitioners, between ritual practices that are used for healing people and those that are supposedly harmful and ill intentioned. Abusch, considering that the ancient Mesopotamian civilization was a highly institutionalized one, and that what it is known about its religion comes from texts that are the work of scholars, proposes another framework. He considers that the "*distinction between magic and religion must be sometimes understood in terms of a distinction between popular and learned belief*"[302]

The legitimate practitioner of magic was the *āšipu,* an office well attested since Sumerian times when it appears in an Early Dynastic List (ED Lu E MSL XII 18) under the title of **maš-maš** (position 117 in the list) and continues to function until Neo-Assyrian and

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[299] M.Sigrist, "Magic and Human Reason" in *Officina Magica: Essays on the Practice of Magic in Antiquity*; edited by Shaul Shaked. Leiden, Brill, 2005 (IJS Studies in Judaica, 4), p.295

[300] M.Titiev, *Fresh Approaches*, pp.316-319 apud, Tzvi Abusch, "The Demonic Image of the Witch in Standard Babylonian Literature. The Reworking of Popular Conceptions by Learned Exorcists" in *Mesopotamian Witchcraft. Towards a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature*, ed. by Abusch, Ancient Magic and Divination V, Brill-Styx, 2002

[301] W.Faber, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Mesopotamia*, CANE, vol.III, p. 1895

[302] Tzvi Abusch, *The Demonic Image of the Witch in Standard Babylonian Literature, 2002,* p.3-4

Neo-Babylonian period.[303]. He was an exorcist and incantation priest, someone who was dealing with the supernatural forces on behalf of his clients and his activities comprised both theological knowledge and practical skill because the spells he was uttering were accompanied by some ritual practices.[304] He functioned as both doctor and magician and dealt mostly with afflicted persons who needed both physical and psychological support so his techniques are varied an comprise different actions and tools such as incantations, drugs, figurines, libations, anointing, magic circles made of flour, the use of salt or water sprinkling in certain rituals.[305] Although the *āšipu* is an important figure in the socio-religious life of the Mesopotamian communities, his female counterpart, the *āšiptu*, only appears as epithet for the goddesses[306] and, as a human is mentioned only once in the *Maqlu* ritual[307], but she is mentioned along with other females that might have engaged in illicit magic practices:

40. Incantation. Sorceress, murderess,

nightmare, naršindatu,

ašiputu, magic priestess,

snake-charmers, agugiltu,

prostitute, hierodule,

45 Ištar devotee, zermašitu[308]

Considering the lack of information about female exorcist Harris concluded that "*Women remained outside the ranks of the exorcists (āšipu), who required lengthy training in*

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[303] R.A Henshaw, *Male and Female Cultic Personnel*, p.143

[304] Tzvi Abusch, *The Demonic Image of the Witch in Standard Babylonian Literature*, 2002, p. 5

[305] R.A Henshaw, Male and Female Cultic Personnel, p.145

[306] *Ibidem*

[307] CAD, A 2, p.431

[308] The Nine Tablets of the Ritual Maqlu, Translation from the edition and translation into German of Gerhard Meier (1937), by Marie-Hélène Hoffmann and Ross G.R. Caldwell, 1995, Tablet III, Lines 40-45, http://enenuru.net/html/cuneiform_magic/maqluexpl.html

difficult texts" so the ladies were not befitting this highly technical and literate context. Abusch concludes his analysis of the role of the *āšipu* by stating that he is the official, legitimate practitioner of magic incantations and rituals. More than that, considering the scholarly texts, the exorcist could be defined as follows:

> "He operates constructively and destructively on behalf of his clients. He attempts to free his client from malevolent forces that grip him, and occasionally he provides protective devices against future attacks. He is regarded as well intentioned, certainly not malicious. On a cosmic level, the main enemies of the exorcist are demons. On a human level, he contends with the witch or sorcerer."[309]

Considering the denouement of his survey, it is obvious that the practitioners of illegitimate magic, witchcraft, are the main human villains in the story told by the scholarly exorcism compendia. The witch appears for the first time in a lexical list in OB Proto-Lu and Lu series under the Sumerian title **SAL. uš$_7$.zu/ SAL. uh-zu**[310] but it seems that no title for the witch survived from the third millennium. In the second and first millennium B.C the witch appears in the lexical lists under a large variety of appellatives *kaššāptu (m/f), mušelitum(m/f)* (raiser of ghosts, necromancer), *muppišanu(m/f)* (practitioner of sorcery) *sahhirtum(M/f), ēpištu(m/f)* (sorceress) to which we can add many other epithets and names that she receives in the incantation texts: *nērtānītu* (murderess*), elēnitu* (sorceress*), naršindatu* (witch), *eššeb/putu* (witch), *mušlahhatu* (snake charmer), *agugiltu* (sorceress), *āšiputu* (exorcist)[311]. Sefati and Klein, reviewing all the appellatives for illicit practitioner of magic in the first millennium B.C concluded that male and female sorcerer and sorceresses shared 15 epithets, but women alone are referred to with other 19 different epithets. Although there is a large variety of epithets that can describe the witch or wizard, the most used pairs of denominators in incantation texts are *kaššāpu u kaššāptu* (warlock and witch), and *ēpišu u ēpištu* (sorcerer and sorceress).

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[309] Tzvi Abusch, *The Demonic Image of the Witch in Standard Babylonian Literature*, 2002, p. 6

[310] R.Henshaw, *Male and Female Cutic Personnel*, p.152-153, Y.Sefati and J.Klein, T"he Role of Women in Mesopotamian Witchcraft", in *CRRA*I, 47 Ed.by Simo Parpola and R.M.Whitning, Helsinki, 2002, p. 571, see also n.11

[311] R.Henshaw, *Male and Female Cutic Personnel*, p. 152-153 and 162-166; T.Abusch, Daniel Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals*. Volume One, Brill, 2011, p.5

Witchcraft and women's agency in this field aroused a lot of interest among scholars not only in the field of Assyriology. All over the world, the stereotype of women as witches is quite well attested[312] and the legitimate question that arises is why this widespread association of the female population with illicit magical practices. Many opinions have been exposed and argued since the subject is one that did not only intrigue the ancient scholars, but it is an offering research territory for nowadays intellectuals too. Witchcraft is usually associated with harmful magic[313] performed by people of low social status and it is not typically a learned discipline that would involve long study and highly developed ritual expertise. It is commonly believed that it implies a close alliance or worship of the evil supernatural forces, and that its practitioners were more often women, although men appear to be also involved in illegitimate magical practices.[314]

In her cross-cultural study "*Naming the Witch. Magic, Ideology and Stereotype in the Ancient World*" Kimberly B. Stratton concludes that:

> While, to a certain extent, stereotypes of the magician and witch crossed social boundaries in the ancient world, the specific details of a community's magic

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[312] Simcha Fishbane, "Most Women Engage in Sorcery": An Analysis of Sorceresses in the Babylonian Talmud, In *Jewish History*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Spring, 1993), pp. 27-42; Clarke Garrett, "Women and Witches: Patterns of Analysis" in *Sign*s, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Winter, 1977), pp. 461-470; Rebecca Lesses, *Exe(o)rcisting Powers. Women as Sorceresses, Exorcists, and Demonesses in Babylonian Jewish Society of Late Antiquity*, http://jaar.oxfordjournals.org/, *Women, Witchcraft and Society*. Vol.10, Ed.by Brian P.Levack, Garland Publishing, 1992 is a collection of useful essays that address the involvement of women in witchcraft in a variety of cultures and ages.

[313] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, Clarendon Press· Oxford 1976. Some traits of the witch identified by him among the members of the Azande are also useful for the study of the Mesopotamian witch: the witches are to be found among the strangers, the enemies that want to bring misfortune and their actions are intently evil one. Furthermore, witchcraft becomes an issue only when its effects are reflected on the everyday life of a certain individual, or that of the society in general (Ch. 3).The witch is the bringer of illness and death but there is also a witch –doctor whose purpose in to eliminate the evil doing of witchcraft (Ch. 5). If the Mesopotamian witch is herself a bringer or misfortune and illness, there is no way to draw a parallel between the witchdoctor and the Mesopotamian exorcist who was a highly literate person and its art was not a purely empirical one.

[314] Michael D.Bailey, "The Meaning of Magic" in *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, Volume 1, Number 1, Summer 2006, pp. 1-23, p.19

> representations emerged out of and reflected local factors and concerns. For this reason, magic discourse varied from period to period and location to location, evolving and adapting to the ideological exigencies of each situation. As a constellation of terms and ideas designating Otherness, illegitimacy, and danger, magic constituted a key element in the construction of notions about legitimate and illegitimate authority in the formative period of Western thought.[315]

Considering the above framework I will try to analyze the phenomenon of witchcraft in a way that befits the purposes of this study:

1. To underline the specific agency of women in those illicit ritual situations
2. Why were the magical activities of women seen as dangerous?
3. How is reflected the agency of women in witchcraft related rituals in the legal system? Does the omnipresent image of the witch from the ritual texts finds a solid ground of comparison in real life?
4. What does the evolution of the concept of witchcraft tell about the status of women in the social and religious life of ancient Mesopotamia?

Mesopotamian witches and the anti-witchcraft rituals used to counter their evil deeds have been extensively studied during the time, so I apparently have no other option than to rearrange and reinterpret the existent data and studies[316] in a way that will help me to attain the aim of this research following the ideas I pointed out before.

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[315] Kimberly B. Stratton, *Naming the Witch.* Epub format, www.bookfi.org

[316] The primary sources used in my investigation are the afore mentioned works of T.Abusch, Daniel Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals* , 2011; Ross' translation of "The Nine Tablets of the Ritual Maqlu" http://enenuru.net/html/cuneiform_magic/maqluexpl.html; Robert D.Biggs, SÀ.ZI.GA. Ancient Mesopotamian Potency Incantations, J.J. Augustin Publisher, 1967; Erica Reiner, *Surpu. A Collecfion of Sumerian and Akkadian lncantations* , Graz 1958.The main secondary sources consist in the works of T.Abusch, published in the volume *Mesopotamian Witchcraft. Towards a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature,* Brill, 2002; I will focus on the studies that approach the situation of the witches (Chapters 1, 2, 3 4, 5, and 11) and less on those debating the ritualistic context and ritualic language. Other useful studies are: Y.Sefati and J.Klein, "The Role of Women in Mesopotamian Witchcraft", in *CRRAI*, 47 Ed.by Simo Parpola and R.M.Whitning, Helsinki, 2002, pp. 569-587; Rollin, 'Women and Witchcraft in Ancient Assyria" in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. by Averil Cameron, Amélie Kuhrt, Routledge, 2013, pp. 34-45

In Mesopotamia the witch was not always seen as a frightening creature whose sole purpose was to bring distress and misfortune. As a representative of popular religion and its practices, she might have served at the beginning as someone who was dealing with the supernatural on behalf of the people that came and asked for their help, and acted as a healer and counsellor when needed to so we may state without exaggerating that she was a women that possessed a certain knowledge, acquired usually during her lifetime, through direct experience. She learns from her interaction with the people and their problems, through practice and the information she received or transmitted was not written and included in scholarly, official compendia but instead it was passed out orally, through interaction with the members of the community. Although it may be believed that this type of folk, popular magic was characteristic for the rural areas, where the influence of the central, official cult was not as strong as in the urban regions, witchcraft is a phenomenon also encountered in the important city centers and their neighboring areas that were under a closer supervision of the temple and palace than the remote rural countryside regions[317].

As I mentioned before, there is no attestation of a witch during the third millennium B.C, but they started to appear in the scholarly writing during the second millennium and became a constant issue from then onwards, perhaps as a consequence of the centralization process of the great city centers that imposed a closer survey on the rural areas and the interference of the public sphere in domestic domain where they tried to impose the same kind of hierarchy encountered in the palace and temple, starting with the king and ending with the smaller cultic or public officials[318]. In this way the authorities tried to gain control over more vaster regions and sectors of life but they encountered some difficulties that may be summarized as follows:

> The domestic (preponderantly feminine) domain of the production and processing of raw materials (grain, oil,wool) for the immediate family, is also the domain of biological and (as far as socialization in early childhood is concerned) cultural reproduction. As a mode of production and reproduction, the domestic

[317] T. Abusch, *Witchcraft and the Anger of the Personal God*, p.56 and *Consideration when Killing the Witch*, p.66

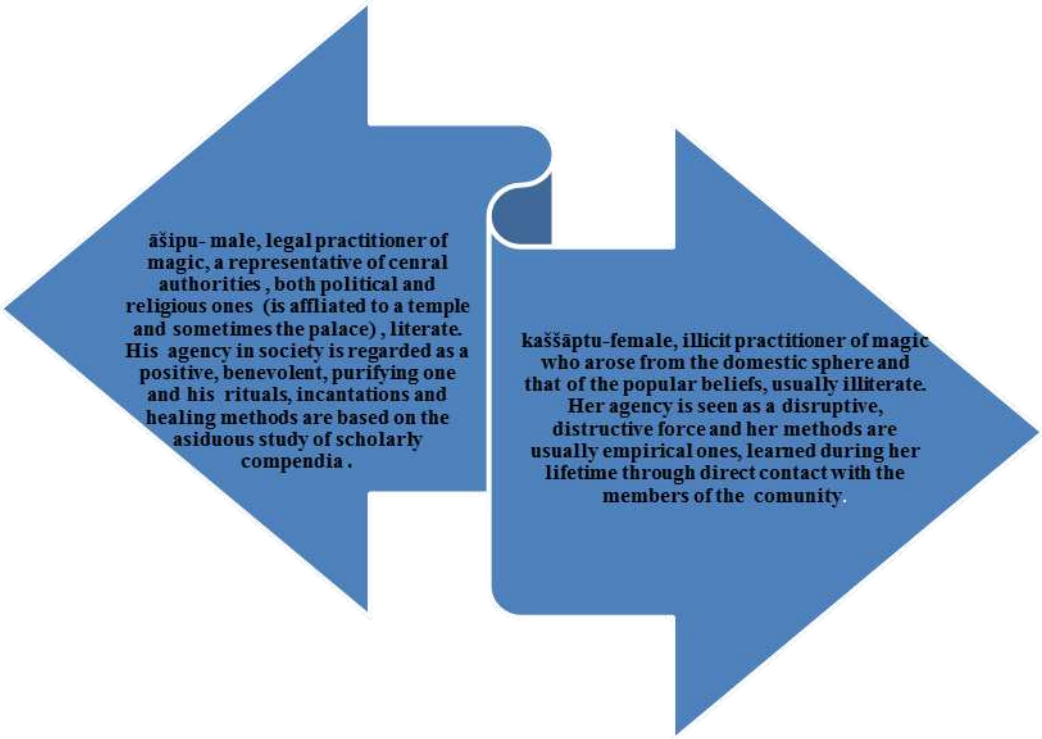
[318] Wim van Binsbergen and Franz Wiggermann, "Magic in History. A theoretical Perspective, and its Application to Ancient Mesopotamia" in *Mesopotamian Magic. Textual, Historical, and Interpretative Perspective*, ed.by Tzvi Abusch and Karel van der Toorn, Styx Publication, Groningen, 1999, p 19.

> domain is highly resilient in itself, as well as highly resistant to effective hegemony from the political and economic center.[319]

Abusch considered that the increasing antagonism between the *āšipu* and the witch was indeed the aftermath of the expansion of centralization and stratification of the Mesopotamian territory and society[320], which might be a consequence of the Amorrite influence, but also an effect of the struggle for supremacy between the various kingdoms until the reign of Hammurabi. In this complex context it seems that the witch and wizard made their way in the urban environment becoming the main antagonists of the exorcist whose primal enemies were supernatural forces such as demons, ghosts or evil spirits. To this we may add the clash between two spheres of influence: the public and the domestic domains, caused by the attempts of the authorities "*to generalize their own order*", and as the private areas of life seem to have been dominated by women, their activities and the empirical knowledge they possessed being essential for the wellbeing of the family or clan members, they became the main opponents of the scholars that represented the centralized, official government. If we could render all this discussion schematically the situation would appear cleared, but also the distinction would seem more drastically that it really is considering that this villainous presence of the witch seems to animate mostly the scholarly incantation compendia.

[319] *Ibidem*, p.17

[320] T.Abusch, *Consideration when Killing the Witch*, p.66



Furthermore, if we pay attention to the constant decaying status of women in the legal sources during the second millennium B.C this antagonism seems not only to reflect the opposition between official religion and popular cults, between urban and rural, public and private, but also a deeper segregation of man and women in the literate, scholarly area, and also in the religious environment. If in the third millennium women appear to have held important cultic offices and were active agents in the Mesopotamian society, after the Old Babylonian period they were less and less present in the religious and public life, and in the first millennium B.C, many of the female cultic officials, that enjoyed power and prestige during the previous millennia, lost their status and were considered now to be involved in illegitimate magic rituals (*naditum, qadištum, ištaritum, kezertum*). Considering all the above, I find Abusch assumption concerning women and exorcists to be legitimate: ”perhaps, because the witch was often a woman who possessed power and knowledge, the female witch eventually became a focus of interest and even a treat to the prerogatives of the male exorcist”[321] whose status in the healing profession seems to have expanded on the expense of the other specialists.

[321] Ibidem

This marginalization of women in public life and the idea that a socially active woman, that possesses knowledge, power and prestige might be harmful for the community starts to be embedded also in mythological works such as Enuma Eliš. In this Babylonian creation myth, Tiamat, the mother of gods, the old and wise women, becomes the primal enemy of the younger gods and her image changes, drawing the portrait of a villainous woman whose sole purpose is to bring pain and misfortune:

Mother Hubur, who creates everything,

She added weapons that could not be withstood, giving birth to "monstrous" serpents

With pointed tooth and merciless fang,

She filled their bodies with poisonous foam for blood,

She clothed (the) furious dragons with fearsomeness,

Causing them to bear awe-inspiring radiance, she made them similar to gods

(She said) "The one who sees them, let him collapse impotently;

Let them keep attacking and not turn their breast.[322]

Tiamat's conversion from mother of gods to progenitor of monsters coincides with her transition from passive to active female force, and illustrates the author's view of the masculine and feminine contributions to reproduction and creation.[323] Enuma Eliš is a male myth, exalting male order, male rule, male relationships, male power and creativity "*however strong a woman's strength, it is not equal to a man's*" (Enuma Eliš, tablet II, 94). There was no place for a powerful, assertive, old goddess[324].

Anyway, it appears that the sources concerning female witchcraft do not spread uniformly in space and time and the vast majority of the written sources concerning this

[322] Stephanie Dalley , *Myths from Mesopotamia*, Oxford 1989, (Tablet I, lines 133-140)

[323] Karen Sonik, "Gender Matters in Enūma eliš." in *In the Wake of Tikva Frymer-Kensky*, edited by Richard H. Beal, Steven W. Holloway, and JoAnn Scurlock, 85–101. Gorgias Précis Portfolios 4. Piscataway, Gorgias Press, 2009, p

[324] R.Harris, *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia*, p.87

phenomenon date from the first millennium B.C. Although some practices seem to have been older, but not written down until then, we may not consider this an unfailing rule. Sefati and Klein, referring to this particular matter, pointed out an interesting situation that appears to sustain the idea of an increasing name of witches directly proportional with the decreasing women agency in public sphere. The role of women in witchcraft in the third millennium B.C cannot be determined, especially because the Sumerian language was not gender specific. Anyways, although female status seems to be declining after the Old Babylonian they were able to identify only 5 texts mentioning the witch: 2 incantations in Sumerian (CT 58 79, and VS 17 31-an unedited text), 1 bilingual Marduk-Ea incantation type (CBS 11933) and two letters referring to witch accusation between the members of a family[325] and I was able to identify another texts published by Durand in Archives épistolaires de Mari, a report concerning the trial of a witch. On the other hand, for the first millennium B.C, the situation is strikingly different. There are nowadays, two integrally published corpuses of anti-witchcraft literature: Maqlû, Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals, and also the Šurpu series.[326] In Maqlû the two authors were able to identify out of almost 91 incantations, 34 address solely women because they contain only terms that point towards a female practitioner[327], resulting that 37% of the tents definitely identified women as witches. The survey I made using the data from the Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals brought the following result after I tried to identify all the references in the texts containing expressions such as *kaššāpu u kaššāptu* (warlock and witch), *ēpišu u ēpištu* (sorcerer and sorceress), and *lū zikaru, lū sinništum* (be it a man or a woman), both together and individually: 29 mention both men and women, 19 only women. There is no mention of a man practicing illegal magic without being accompanied by a woman.

The text of Šurpu has come down to us in late copies. They date to the reign of Assurbanipal or, in the case of those of Assur, a few to the reign of Tiglathpileser I but some parts can be dated to the Old Babylonian period of in the Kassite period. Anyway, even

[325] Stanley D. Walters," The Sorceress and Her Apprentice: A Case Study of an Accusation" in *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 2 , 1970 (pp. 27-38), p.30, 32 and Dominique Charpin, " Lettres et procès paleo-babylonienne" in *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie. Archives judiciaires du Proche-Orient Ancien (III-I milénnaire avant J.C),* ed.by Joannes Francis, Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, p.103

[326] Erica Reiner, *Šurpu*, Graz 1958, p.2

[327] Y.Sefati and J.Klein, "*The Role of Women in Mesopotamian Witchcraft*", pp.571-574; 580-581

though the origins of the texts are not known with certainty, there is no mention in this corpus of a female witch. Furthermore, female cultic officials seem to be involved in rituals concerning the releasing of the patient from an oath, so we may consider those insertions second millennium composition: *Together with the 'oath' of the 'daughters of the god', ...-priest, high priestess, naditu-ptiestess, qadištu-womart or kulmašitu-woman*[328](Tablet VIII, 69).

Although the majority of the anti-witchcraft compendia are first millennium scholastic works, I will use them to draw a portrait of the witch and offer a short survey of her activities, means and methods.

The incantations and prayers that were uttered during anti-witchcraft rituals provide interesting and detailed descriptions of those who are accused of having practiced witchcraft against the patient/accuser. These descriptions, of course, must not be read as accounts of the doings of individual persons, but represent the conventional ideas associated with the agents of witchcraft, the stereotype of the witch as she was perceived by the Babylonians and Assyrians of the first millennium. It is also important to reinforce the idea that this opinion was first of all a reflection of the male elite literate culture, but we may not exclude the influence it might have among the masses.

The texts describe the evil activities of the witches in a variety of ways. They bewitch the patient and recite their evil spell against him, chase him, torment him, bind and sully the victim and cause him to suffer all kinds of diseases. Because the witch seems to be acting the same rituals as the *ašipu* in order to perform her witchcraft, she may be regarded as an evil herbalist[329] or wicked doctor that brings illness, and not health to the people they are targeting. Through their work they induce paralysis of the mouth, change of heart, glowing of the face, weaken the strength of the victim, rob the virility of the young man and attractiveness of the young girl, bound the knees with paralysis. The sorceress and sorcerer scheme against their victims, they are angry, they slander their victim before gods and men, and they make the personal god to turn his face from his worshipper. They transfer their sorceries to the victim by means of food, drink, bathwater, ointments and presents. As we

[328] Ibidem, p.43

[329] Erica Couto-Ferreira, Aetiology of Illness in Ancient Mesopotamia: On Supernatural Causes , p.17, www.academia.edu

may see, food and drink are especially dangerous substances, usually associated with women, because, in their role of housekeepers, is their role to prepare food and take care of the beverages, and for this very reason, it appears to be easier for women to manipulate those necessities for their evildoing.[330] The witch fashions figurines and identifies them with the patient by pronouncing his name and by using materials that have been in contact with him. They gag the figurines, dirty them, pierce them, burn and dissolve them in different ways. They inter them in a grave, symbolizing the death of the victim, or under a launderer's mat so that dirty laundry water constantly runs over the figurine, polluting the targeted person[331] they bury them under a threshold, in a gate, on a bridge or under a crossroads, places where people constantly trample over them, and as we may clearly observe, liminal places, symbols of a change, in this case a negative change in the life of the victim. They make funerary offerings for the patient by pouring out water; they perform evil rituals before the stars or other deities, including Šamaš himself.[332] As we may see, the witch manifests her agency on two different levels:

1. *Direct agency*, on a physical level by manipulation objects, herbs, substances, and uttering spells in order to attain the particular purpose she has in mind either on her own behalf, a cause of her wickedness, but I might imply the fact that the witch was, in one way or another, a specialist of her field that worked outside the law, and her/his services might have been required by clients that came from certain social classes (mostly lower classes that did not afford the services of an *āšipu*)

2. *Indirect agency*, on a supernatural level by inducing her witchcraft upon her victim, manipulating and twisting the goodwill of supernatural being to act on her behalf. The symptoms of the victim are the reflection of the witch's agency, who made her way into his life, and is changing it in concordance with her own agenda.

The *Maqlû ritual tablets* offer also information about the social categories from which the sorcerer and sorceress might rise. From this point of view we may distinguish between foreigners, practitioners of unusual professions and marginals. In Maqlû we may

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[330] Kimberly B. Stratton, *Naming the Witch*, see "Women, Food, and Magic " in Chapter 5 Caution in the Kosher Kitchen: Magic, Identity, and Authority in Rabbinic Literature, epub format

[331] About cleansing with clear water see Karel van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, p. 32-33

[332] T. Abusch, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals*, p. 6; *Demonic Image of the Witch*, pp.15-20

read that: *" the witch is a Sutite whose attack is strong/ The nightmare is an Elamite whose hit means death*" (Tablet III, 80-81).The foreigners are seen as dangerous, the Mesopotamians consider the a threat because they come from peripheral regions, uncivilized areas, remote from their religious centers. Profession such as snake-charmers, god-smith, metal-worker or outdated religious offices made the person that practice them susceptible of witchcraft, because their arts and crafts might have been interpreted as requiring some kind of knowledge and practical abilities that would represent a danger if used in an inadequate way. A certain fragment from this ritual might actually imply that witchcraft was some kind of family business, and the skill was transmitted from generation to generation "*My sorceress' mother was a našindatu-priestess*" (Maqlû, Tablet VI, 4), this kind of cultic official being mention among the witches in various instances (Tablet IV, 84, 126). The witch appears also to be a person that has no recognized or stable profession and is seen wandering around all day long, a marginal that targets innocent victims without any apparent reason:

1.*The witch, who goes on the roads,*

2.Who invades the houses,

3.Who walks in the alleys,

4.Who hunts over the square;

5. She turns around, front and back,

6.She stays standing in the street, and turns her feet [333]

Analyzing the status of the witch in Mesopotamian sources Sue Rollin identified five types of witches, some of them coinciding with those that I was able to underline from the Maqlû ritual. After justifying her typologies, she draws a useful conclusion concerning the preponderant position of women in Neo-Assyrian incantations compendia:

> Women hold a particularly prominent place in the witchcraft myth, a fact which can only be fully explained by reference to the position of women within society itself. This has not yet been adequately analyzed, but women generally were clearly at a disadvantage in the sense that their social and political options

[333] Maqlû, Tablet III

were fewer than those of men. This combined with the fact that after marriage they presumably entered their husband's household, where they were outsiders and therefore easily suspect accounts in general terms for their position in the witchcraft beliefs. Therefore, although both men and women, particularly those in peripheral social groups, could be suspected of witchcraft, women could be said to hold a doubly anomalous position.[334]

If we have now a clear image of the wicked image of the witch I would like to proceed to a survey of the data that might reflect the real agency of witches in second millennium Mesopotamia, haw they influenced life on a more mundane way, they presence in sources such as laws, letters, trial reports, and not just scholarly works that may be very well considered a way of veiled propaganda.

Witchcraft was treated as a delict in Mesopotamia, and it might have been encountered in certain situation considering that it was introduced in two law codes from the second millennium B.C., Codex Hammurabi and Middle Assyrian Laws:

CH.2 *lf a man charges another man (awīlim) with practicing witchcraft (kišpī) but cannot bring proof against him, he who is charged with witchcraft shall go to the divine River Ordeal, he shall indeed submit to the divine River Ordeal; if the divine River Ordeal should overwhelm him, his accuser shall take full legal possession of his estate, if the divine River Ordeal should clear that man and should he survive, he who made the charge of witchcraft against him shall be killed; he who submitted to the divine River Ordeal shall take full legal possession of his accuser's estate.*

MAL 47 *If either a man or a woman should be discovered practicing witchcraft, and should they prove the charges against them and find them guilty, they shall kill the practitioner of witchcraft. The man who heard from an eyewitness to the witchcraft that he witnessed the practice of the witchcraft, who said to him, "I myself saw it," that hearsay-witness shall go and inform the king. (vii 14) If the eyewitness should deny what he (i,e,, the hearsay-witness) reports to the king, he (i.e,, the hearsay-witness) shall declare before the divine Bull the- Son-of-the-Sun-God,*

[334] Rollin, *'Women and Witchcraft in Ancient Assyria*", p. 44

> *"He surely told me"-and thus he is clear. As for the eyewitness who spoke (of witnessing the deed to his comrade) and then denied (it to the king), the king shall interrogate him as he sees fit, in order to determine his intentions; an exorcist shall have the man make a declaration when they make a purification, and then he himself (i.e., the exorcist) shall say as follows, "No one shall release any of you from the oath you swore by the king and by his son; you are bound by oath to the stipulations of the agreement to which you swore by the king and by his son."* [335]

As we may see, there are clear differences between the laws concerning witchcraft between the two regions. If the Babylonians considered that this kind of offence should be judges and punished, in the first place, by the gods, a practice also encountered in the Neo-Sumerian code of Ur-Nammu. The Assyrians appeared to more pragmatic and they were trying to judge this type of misdeed by using the testimony of an eye-witness that was obliged to report what he/she saw or they may also rely on what someone heard about a third person practicing witchcraft. It is true that the witnesses were making their statements after they took an oath before the gods in order to assure they were telling the truth, but the final decision belonged to a human judge, apparently the king under whose jurisdiction witchcraft seems to have been placed. The divine trial of the River God from Babylon, moves to the mundane level, and it appears that this dispute between the witch and the victim would reflect itself in the anti-witchcraft rituals from the first millennium.[336]

Two Mariote letter (A. 4371 and A.4187)[337] presents the case of judgment of witchcraft by ordeal. In the first one, the queen of Zalmaqqum is charged for adultery, treason and for practicing witchcraft against the king. Nonetheless, it was not she herself who undertook the ordeal, but certain servants that were chosen for this mission. A more interesting text is the report sent to the king by Meptûm, who informs Zimri-Lim about an accusation of witchcraft concerning a young woman. The mother of the girl decided to go to ordeal instead her daughter and she swore that the girl was not guilty of any of the accusation

[335][335] Martha T.Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, Second Edition, Society for Biblical Literature, 1997

[336] T.Abusch, "Divine Judges on Earth and in Heaven" in *The Divine Courtroom in Comparative Perspective*, ed.by Ari Mirmelstein, E.Shalom Holtz, p.20, www.books.google.ro

[337] J.M Durand, Archives épistolaires de Mari, pp. 528, 532

because she did not offer to Hammi-Epuh, son of Dadiya any food or drink that contained bewitched ingredients. Furthermore, it appears that the girl did not prepare them herself. We may consider that the charges were pressed because the man fell ill somehow, and it was considered a witchcraft induced disease. Considering that the girl might have offered food and drink to the said man, items that are usually related to the feminine domestic space, which could be easily manipulated by her in order to bewitched them, her gesture made her the prime target for the accusation. Durand pointed out that the girl might be the daughter of o widow or of an unmarried woman because no father appeared during the trial, the mother being the one that responded in the name of her child.[338] The fact that they were two women not under a male's authority would have made them even more suspicious; they were marginal and therefore a potential danger for the society. On the other hand, it wouldn't be too much to assume that we may face a love dispute in which the relation is not approved by the man's family who is ready to press this kind of charges when he gets ill apparently because of the girl. The dénouement is a tragic one because the mother dies after immerging into the waters of the river, but the girl is afterwards free of charges.

There are other two letters from the Old Babylonian period that provide information about witchcraft charges. Those relate the conflictual relation between a father and a son, the first one accusing the wife and mother in law of the other for having estranged him of his family and naming them witches. On the other hand, the son reacts and tell that" *I will cause your witch to be detained*" but it is hard to assume that the man would accuse his own mother. My hypothesis is that the woman he refers to might be a secondary wife or more accurately a woman the man married after the dead of his son's mother. In this case we see that the women are the scapegoat for the misunderstandings between the members of the family. Considering that the woman was the one who entered the family of the man after her marriage, she was the outsider, the other who could be blamed for any disturbance, because she was the one that came and brought in the disruptive forces, and attitudes that do not fit the context of her new home.

As we have seen from those sources, the demonized image of the witch from the first millennium B.C doesn't have correspondence during earlier periods. It is true that the concept of witchcraft and witches did exist, and that in all the above cases they were women, but they

[338] Ibidem, p.514, n.33

were only one type of delinquents among many others. Probably, the Ordeal trial, a trial of the Gods, the strict surveillance and interrogation of the witnesses and the harsh punishment for dishonest accusation of witchcraft, discouraged the people to press false charges against their fellow countrymen.

Even though the relation of women and magic in Ancient Near East was a rough one, we are not to assume that all the women that practiced arts and crafts that required a certain level of knowledge were malevolent witches. In this category we may include the so called wise women such as healers, midwives, wet-nurses, prophetesses or dream interpreters. As I discussed the later one under the label of professional cultic officials, it only remains to approach the first two ones.

Most of the data concerning Mesopotamian medicine comes from medical texts comprising prescriptions, letters, literary texts, and law codes.[339]Unfortunately, those texts don't make any kind of differentiation between male and female healers. The only contrast underlined in those is the one made between various categories of healers: the *asû* and the *āšipu.* Scholars have identified the *asû* with the physician and sometimes with the pharmacist or even the nurse[340], and the *āšipu* with the exorcist or magician. The *āšipu* was a cultic official that acted in order to maintain the equilibrium between the human and the divine, and acted when this state was perturbed by some third influence to restore the balance using incantations, ritual practices, and when the situation required it, medical prescriptions. He was more a doctor of the soul, a counselor, whose profession required a high level of

[339] For a better understanding of Mesopotamian medicine, medical practitioners and their art, illnesses, disease induced by evil spirits, ghost, demons, the evil eye, the anger of the personal god see: Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia. Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, pp. 289- 305; The works of Erica Couto-Ferreira on https://uni-heidelberg.academia.edu/MEricaCoutoFerreira that focus also on women health problems and difficulties encountered during pregnancy and birth (*Dossier: Childbirth and women's healthcare in pre-Modern Societies: an assessment; Conceptos de transmisión de la enfermedad en Mesopotamia: algunas reflexiones; Los espectros furiosos como causa de enfermedad en Mesopotamia; The circulation of medical practitioners in the Ancient Near East. The Mesopotamian Perspective)* Irving L. Finkel and Markham J. Geller *Disease in Babylonia,* Cuneiform Monographs, Brill, 2007; JoAnn Scurlock, *Magico-Medical Means of Treating Ghost-Induced Illness in Ancient Mesopotamia* , Brill-Styx, 2006; Marie-Louise Thomsen , " The evil eye in Mesopotamia" in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 1 , Jan., 1992, pp. 19-32

[340] Erica Couto-Ferreira, *The circulation of medical practitioners in the Ancient Near East. The Mesopotamian Perspective*, p. 406

technical knowledge. On the other hand, the *asû,* operated on the immediate, practical level, he had a more immediate influence on the patient's body, since he manipulated it and physically interacted with it in the treatment of wounds, broken bones (CH.221), hemorages, abscesses[341], and sometimes even performed surgeries (CH. 215, 218).

Codex Hammurabi includes a couple of laws referring to the profession of the *asû*, the fees they may charge considering the social category they are treating, and the punishment they might be submitted to in case of mal-praxis, as well taking into consideration the social class the patient was coming from[342]. Unfortunately the sources referring to this profession do not inform about the existence of female practitioners, and the female *asû* is mentioned in only two documents: one appears in the palace at Larsa in the Old Babylonian period, and the other mentions an unnamed female physician in charge of one of Zimri-Lim's secondary wife, being perhaps a female doctor whose job is to take care of the women from the royal harem.[343] R.Harris, in her study concerning the *Female Sage,* states that in the case of the kingdom of Mari, the *asâtu* as the female scribe, might have functioned to curtail the access of male non-kin to women of the harem and did not serve male members of the court. We do not have other information concerning female healers that functioned in the high levels of society, but they might have been common among the lower strata for which we do not have any kind of written evidence in order to reconstruct their agency. Harris, following Oppenheim, states that the two medical traditions and schools of Mesopotamia can be divided into the "*scientific*" and the "*practical*." Women may safely be assigned only to the latter because the former presupposes a certain level of literacy and the use of difficult incantation and prescription compendia.[344]We may not assume that female healers from the lower strata were highly knowledgeable in all kind of medical practices such as surgery, infections or fractures, but they might have some information concerning herbal healing, transmitted from generation to generation. Considering that the primal function of women was to take care of the house and prepare the food and beverages that might bring along an elementary knowledge of the proprieties and use of the plants, even though the knowledge is an empirical

[341] Ibidem, p.408

[342] See CH 215-223

[343] R.Harris, Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia, p. 154

[344] Idibem

one, obtained during years of practice, and not learned from scholarly compendia. The fact that women might have practiced healing unofficially, outside their domestic space, interfering in this way with the work of the specialists, must be taken into consideration and it may be regarded as a source of witchcraft charges, clearly reflected in a fragment from the Maqlû ritual "*My sorceress, my medicine-maker"* (Tablet VI, 128). Considering that this profession may be a dangerous one for women, making them susceptible of sorcery, especially the type of witchcraft involving plants, foods and drinks, it is understandable why the female healer is not a highly active agent in the public sphere of Mesopotamian society.

Anyway, there are two categories of female specialists that are very present in the everyday life of their community, and even though they are not members of the elite or the upper classes, they might enjoy a certain freedom and advantages: the modwofe and the wet-nurse.

The *midwife* (Akkadian *šabsūtu*, Sumerian **SAL.ŠÀ.ZU**)[345] was included between the categories of so called sage women in Mesopotamia, but despite this fact, very few things are known about her profession because there are no written compendia describing her practice. We may assume that that it was a job that was transmitted from a person to another, through practical experience, and might have been sometimes a family business considering that a certain women received as part of her dowry something called "the basket of the *erištu"*. We may not state with certainty that this last word should be translated as expectant [346], pregnant woman, but if this translation should be considered a valid one, then it may be stated that this basket contained the things that a midwife would require in order to practice her profession. It is nonetheless regrettable that the content of the basket is not described, and there is no further information about the utensils used by this professional. The role and practices used by the midwife seem to be described in literary sources only. When she is being mentioned in other type of written materials, she usually appears as a witness, or as a woman who practices a certain profession, but nothing else is said about her. In a process report concerning the paternity of a child, denied by his uncles because the child was born after his father's death, it is said that the mother in law of the women sent a soldier after the

[345] See CAD, volume Shin 1, p 16.

[346] See CAD E, erītu (pregnant woman), M.Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible. Its Mediterranean Setting*, Brill-Styx, Groningen, 2000, p.171

midwife, and the midwife made her give birth, but nothing else about her skills in delivering the baby is said, even though it was said that the pregnant lady suffered of a certain disease or distress caused by the death of her husband.

In literature, the most complex description of the midwife and her practice is encountered in the Babyloninan Flood Story, Atra-ḫasis (S. 15-21, I.280-292)[347]

15.In the house of the pregnant woman in confinement

Let the bricks be in place for seven days

16.That Bēlet-ilī, the wise Mami, may be honored.

17.Let the midwife rejoice in the house of the woman in confinement,

18.And when the pregnant woman gives birth

19.Let the mother of the bae serve herself

281. The tenth moth arrived

282.And the elapsed of the period opened the womb

283.With a beaming, joyful face

284. And covered head she performed midwifery (šabsutam)

286. She girded her loins as she pronounced the blessing,

288.She drew a pattern in meal and place the brick,

289.I have created, my hands have made it.

290.Let the midwife rejoice in the house of the qadištu

291. Where the pregnant woman gives birth

292. And the mother of the babe serves her(self)

[347] Atra-ḫasis. The Babylonian Story of the Flood, by W.G.Lambert and A.R.Millard with The Sumerian Flood Story by M.Civil, Oxford, Clarendon Press, p.64 ; B.R.Foster, Before the Muses, p.169

As described in the myth, the midwife is the one who physically helps the woman to give birth and in certain situation she might have even punctured the amniotic sac in order to speed up the delivery.[348] The midwife places the bricks of birth in their place and covers her head. I am not certain if I should interpret this as a ritual gesture or as a simple hygienic measure considering that the covering of the head of Mesopotamian women was not a symbolic one, but one that pointed out the social status of the lady. The midwife not only supports the birthing woman physically, by facilitating her delivery using oils and pressing her womb but she is performing also some ritual acts: drawing a circle, pronouncing the blessing, and we may consider that in case of difficult birth she was the one that uttered the incantations for releasing the baby and a safe delivery, common in Mesopotamian literature. We see from those fragments that cultic women are also involved with birth and midwifery. The house of the *qadištu* is the place where theoretically a women should give birth, so this process needed the help of a specialist, but also a specific environment, a secluded one considering that the birthing women was under taboo and she needed to be separated from the other members of her family. The father was informed by a third unpolluted person of the birth of his child.[349]

This is not the only context when this type of priestess appears along the midwife. In the Middle Assyrian Palace Decrees the first laws states as follows:

> *[If ...] the locks(?) which are before the palace personnel [...] he shall not reside; the locks(?) [...] and ... is made [...] or anyone from the palace area [... who] enters and sees them, [...] the locks(?), without asking the permission of the palace commander [...] the provincial governor to the [...]; they shall plaster the roof of the palace; [... he who] goes up to the roof of the palace is held responsible for a punishable offence [...] according to the building plans [...] the midwife and the qadiltu-woman [...] shall not go in or go out.*[350]

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[348] M.Stol, Birth in Babylonia and the Bible, p171, n.3

[349] Karel van der Toorn, *From the cradle to her Grave*, p.85

[350] Martha.T Roth, "Middle Assyrian Palace Decrees" in *Law Collections from Mesopotam¡a and Asia Minor, p.197*

This interdiction for the two women to go to the roof of the palace might be caused by the fact that they were impure, tabooed women, due to their role in childbirth. In some literary works, the roof was a place where incense was offered to the gods along with prayers[351], so the interdiction might just imply the fact that the king performed such activities there and the place should not be spoiled by the presence of the two women.

Midwifery is also associated in later texts with other priestly categories such as the *nadītu* who seem to be working along with the *qadištu*: "*the naditu that give the womb life by wisdom, the qadištu who…with purification water*"[352]This is as far as I know the sole mention of a *nadītu* involved in childbirth, and it is an intriguing text considering that those women were usually cloistered, and when married, they were forbidden to bear children. Furthermore, they were expected to offer prayers or to be in the presence of the deity they serve daily so it is hard to believe that they were allowed in the presence of the god or goddess after attending in childbirth Perhaps, with the passing of time and the corrosion of their status, they began to use their knowledge also for other purposes. This texts appears to be relevant also for the role played by the *qadištu*, who is shown sprinkling water, perhaps as a part of a purification ritual.

Considering the magic and ritual gestures performed by the midwife, their interdictions, and the involvement of priestesses with their profession, Karel van der Toorn proposed a new interpretation for both the midwife and also for wet-nurses:

> "Perhaps the separate status is connected to the ambivalence characteristic of any taboo, which of course also pertains to the woman giving birth: as one who brought forth life she inspired a holy awe, as one impure she was avoided as leper. Whoever associated with such a person on an equal footing must

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[351] Andrew George,*The Epic of Gilgameš*. A new Translation, Penguin Books, 2000, Tablet III 45,p.24

"She climbed the staircase and went up on the roof

On the roof she set up a censer to Šamaš

Scattering incense she lifted her arms in appeal to the Sun God"

[352] B.R.Foster, *Before the Muses*, p.756; M.Stol, *Birth in Babylone and the Bible*, p.172

> have something holy about herself in a certain sense. In any case the maternity nurses were responsible for many ritual activities that were to take place during delivery. Hence, we can assume that they had a special relation with the divine world and the temple."[353]

We may ask ourselves why is the *wet-nurse* included in a section about sage women considering that her role is to breast-feed the child and a large variety of sources are proof that was a common practice in Mesopotamia and her attributions were regulated in the legal codes (CH 194) being hired by the parents of the child through a contract and payed for her services[354]. Although, she has to offer her milk, her role does not stop here because she is the one that must take care of the child for the following two or three years, so she is also in charged with the health of the baby and his /hers daily care. In this situation she must have been able to utter some incantation to appease the crying baby, and to keep away malevolent spirits. We may also assume that she was knowledgeable in the matters concerning the health and healthcare of babies and young children who have a higher predisposition towards the different diseases than older children or adults. She might have been, up to a certain level, a sort of healer specialized in small children. Considering all the above, I find it legitimate to list the wet-nurse among the female sages because she is a specialist in childcare.

The wet-nurse appears to be under certain restrictions. In Sumero-Akkadian proverbs, this woman was not allowed to have sexual intercourse because her lactation would stop.[355] This interdiction is surprising considering that Mesopotamians did not perceive legitimate intercourse as something sinful that would bring impurity. M. Stol tries to find an explanation by comparing this interdiction with similar ones from other time and space, and he finds various responses, but we do not have an answer for the Mesopotamian area. The common believe was that the milk will be spoiled, lose its quality or the interesting Arabic opinion that sustains the fact that the

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[353] Karel van der Toorn, *From Her Cradle to Her Grave*, p.86

[354] CAD, M2, pp. 265-266

[355] M.Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, p.184; Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, p.247, II 43-44

maternal milk was formed from the menstrual blood, and that a new pregnancy would stop lactation as it stops menstruation, and thus harming the child.[356]

Wet-nurses, as well as the midwives seem to have a special relation with the *qadištu*. There is a fragment from an Old Babylonian letter that says" *Let them provide for the baby boy right here. If you like this let me look for a qadištu to suckle him*"[357]and this documents is not singular. Even though the cultic officials may have feed the children themselves, considering that they were women allowed to marry and to bear children, they may have also be intermediaries that facilitate the contact between the family and the wet-nurse acting perhaps as a sort of supervisor. Perhaps, being a cultic official involved in anti-witchcraft rituals that sprinkled the pure water, she might have also been a person that may help to protect the wet-nurse against curses that might spoil the milk but also to help the child against any malevolent intention, either human or supernatural. Unfortunately I was not able to find any text to support this kind of interpretation.

As we have seen, the knowledgeable woman, the sage, was an active member of the society, someone that influenced the daily life of their contemporaries. As the wise woman inspired both respect and fear, in a man ruled society, she was seen through the mirror of opposition. While the man was the practitioner of good magic, the woman was the wicked witch that brings misfortune, and her image is denigrated. The knowledgeable women who does not fit into the gendered pattern of the Mesopotamian society, becomes a scapegoat, the portent of all evil, at least at the level of scholarly discourse.

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[356] Ibidem, pp.184-185, n. 90

[357] Ibidem p.186

IV. WOMEN AS WORSHIPPERS

IV.1 ROYAL WOMEN AND THEIR RELIGIOUS AGENCY

High ranking women were well attested during the second millennium BC, especially in the first half, and the most important women of a kingdom, besides the *entu* were the royal ladies and those who might have held an important office inside the palace. The questions that lay before us are the following ones:

1. *Who were the royal women in the second millennium Mesopotamia?*
2. *Where did they live and what was their relation to the king?*
3. *What kind of written evidence provides information about the lives of those ladies?*
4. *What was the cultic role of the queen, and what was the involvement of other royal women in what we may refer to as religious activities (prayers, offerings, sacrifices, divination).*

The main categories of royal women in ancient Mesopotamia were the mother of the king, his wives, daughters and sisters. Elna K. Solvang[358] observes that in ancient Near Eastern culture *"the lack of consistency with which administrative titles are applied to women"* is striking and the royal women are no exception. If in the administrative documents from the archive of Puzriš-Dagan, during the third Dynasty of Ur, the queen could be identified by the titles they held, the situation is a lot different for the queens of the second millennium Mesopotamia (**nin**-queen, **nin-gâr**-dowager, **lukur** translated either as priestess wife of a king, especially in the case of the kings that where considered gods or as junior wife[359]). A short

[358] Elna K Solvang, *A Woman's Place in the House,* p.16

[359] Wang Junna and Wu Yuhong, *A Research On The Incoming (Mu-Túm) Archive Of Queen Šulgi-Simti's Animal Institution*, IHAC (JAC 26 2011), pp.43-45; Wu Yuhong and Wang Junna, *The Identifications of Šulgi-simti, Wife of Šulgi, with Abi-simti, Mother of Amar-Sin and Šu-Sin, and of Ur-Sin, the Crown Prince, with Amar-Sin,*

survey of the inscriptions and seals published in RIME 4, Old Babylonian period, reveals that royal women were identified in relation with their male relatives, be they father, husband or son (s*ee appendix concerning the titles of queens*). As we may see from the Corpus of Old Babylonian Inscriptions, royal women were identified as: **ama lugal** (mother of king), **dam lugal** (wife of the king), **géme lugal** (servant woman of the king), **lukur lugal** (escort, concubine of the king)[360] and **DUMUS.MUNUS LUGAL** (female child of the king). If the status of princesses and that of the mother of the king are clear, we may not state the same concerning the queen. There is no mention of **nin** or *Šarratum,* neither in the inscriptions and seals mentioned before nor in the correspondence from Mari and Karana. The Mari archive referred to the wives of the king as **dam** or *kallatum*[361] and it seems that they call each other "sister"[362]. The seal of Šibtu identifies her as **dam,** but another of Zimri-Lim's wives, Yatarāia is called **GÉME**, servant woman. She is though listed among the wives of the king[363] but her title must not mislead us considering that both the mother (Addu-duri) and his consort addressed him as my lord and they are his servants. "Say to my lord. Thus speaks X, your servant". Iltani, the queen of Karana addressed her husband, Aqba-ḫammu in a similar way "*ana belija, qibima: umma Iltani,* ***GEMÉ*** *k-a-ma"*[364].

Considering the above titles, the women whose religious agency I'll be studying further are those closely related to the king: his mother, daughters (queens), wives and concubines. The

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IHAC (JAC 27 2012), pp.2-4, Tables 2 and 3, www.academia.edu; TOHRU GOMI, Shulgi –Sinti and her Libation Place (KI-A-NAG), https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/orient1960/12/0/12_0_1/_pdf; Markus Hilgert, *Drehem Administrative Documents from the Time of Šulgi*, The Oriental Institute of Chicago Press, 1998, pp.68-122

[360] Lukur=priestess, junior wife of a deified king (cf. psd. museum.upenn.edu) or it might be translated as chaste priestess, nun or courtesan according to sumerianlexikon.org)

[361] N. Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IV. Le Harem de Zimri-Lim*, Memoire de NABU, 1999, p.45-46

[362] J.M. Durand, Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari, tome 3, LAPO, 2000, p.263

[363] N. Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IV. Le Harem de Zimri-Lim*, p.52

[364] S. Dalley, Old Babylonian Tablets from Tell Al Rimah, letters no. 156 – 158, p. 129

sources revealing their religious agency are quite diverse extending from inscriptions to letters and accounting lists[365] (*see the Appendix : The Religious Agency of Royal Women*).

What should be noted is that the religious activities registered by the sources date from the first half of the second millennium BC, more specifically until the fall of the northern Syrian Kingdoms under Hammurabi's domination and the destruction of Mari. It is true that royal women still appear in documents during the time, but only in relation with political marriages between the monarchs of the region[366]. Consistent data about cultic agency of women begins to be registered during the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian times, in the first millennium BC[367]. Although we dispose of considerable data from the Old Babylonian period including those belonging to women, the life of royal wives, dowagers and princesses is not very well attested in southern Mesopotamia and this led some researches to think that women there did not hold political office[368]. The only Babylonian princesses I was able to identify belonging to the first dynasty are Šallatum, daughter of the second King of Babylon, Sūmû-la-Il and beloved wife of

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[365] Douglas Frayne, RIME 4, Old Babylonian Period, J.M.Durand, Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari, tome 3, www.archibab.fr, J.Cooper , Biographical Notices on some Royal Ladies from Mari in *JCS*, S.Dalley, *The Old Babylonian Tablets from Tell Al Rimah*

[366] In the corpus of Kassite inscription (CKST www.oracc.museum.upenn.edu) there is not only one inscription mentioning a woman. They do appear in the Amarna corpus of letters http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/contrib/amarna/corpus

[367] Sammuramat wife of Šamši-Adad V was regent during her son's childhood; Naqia/Zakutu wife of Sennacherib and mother of Esarhaddon; Tašmetu-šarrat wife of Sennacherib, Ešara-Hamat wife of Esarhaddon; Libbali-šarrat wife of Aššurbanipal see Sarah C.Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, NATCP, 1999, pp 96-122; Sherry Lou Mcgregor, *Beyond Heart and Home. Women in the Public Sphere in Neo-Assyrian Society*, NATCP, 2012, pp.67-94, Saana Svard, *Power and Women in the Neo-Assyrian Palace*, Department of World Cultures, Helsinki University Press, 2012 Addad-guppi mother of the Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, p.348

[368] Elisabeth Meier Tetlow, Women, Crime and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society, Volume 1: The Ancient Near East, A&C Black, 2004, pg.75

Sîn-Kašid, the King of Uruk[369] and three *nadītu* priestesses from Sippar: Ayalatum, also daughter of Sumu-la-El, Iltani daughter of Sin-muballit and sister of Hammurabi, and a second Iltani, daughter[370] of Abi-ešum. Unfortunately there is no inscription or letter or any other record that could provide us information about Babylonian queen. Even though from the reign of Hammurabi we have substantial records[371], until now we know nothing about his wives[372]. The records situation is not better for the other important centers from the central and southern regions of Mesopotamia at the beginnings of the second millennium BC. There are only a few inscriptions and seals belonging to royal women. The seals impressions are usually discovered in places, different from those of origin of the woman, and they are a proof of interdynastic marriage, a wide spread phenomenon during this era[373]. Fortunately, though few in number, the inscriptions belong to the royal women from this region deal mostly with religious matters so we may have an insight into their cultic duties[374]. On the other hand, in the northwestern regions,

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[369] D. Frayne, RIME 4 Old Babylonian Period, seal inscription, p. 464

[370] R.Harris " Independent Women in Ancient Mesopotamia?" in *Women's Earliest Records: from Egypt and Asia Minor*, ed by Barbara S. Lesko, Atlanta Scholar Press, 1989, p.151, Witold Tyborowski, "The daughters of the kings of Babylon and their role in the Old Babylonian economy and society" in *Who was king ? who was not king ? : the rulers and the ruled in the ancient Near East*, ed.by Petr Charvát , Petra Maříková Vlčková Prague , Institute of archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 2010, p.59-71

[371] Codex Hammurabi, D. Frayne, RIME 4, Old Bsbylonisn Period

[372] D. Charpin, *Hammurabi of Babylon*, p.92

[373] Šallurtum in the palace of Uruk; Inibšina daughter of Daduša of Ešnnuna RIME 4, p. 563, her weight which bears an inscription stating her ancestry was discovered in Aššur, attesting perhaps an interdynastic marriage between the daughter of the king of Ešnnuna and Išme-Dagan, ruler of Aššur son of Šamši-Adad; see Luca Peyrowel "Guerre e alleanze in epoca paleobabilonese: il peso di Inibšina, figlia di Daduša di Ešnnuna" in Vicino Oriente XIV (2008) p.149

[374] The corpus of letters from Ešnnuna contains only two letters where women are agents of a certain activity but they don't refer to any cultic duties: 1931T298 Number 12 Bilalama's mother in law request him to release a slave (51-52) 1930T230 Number 28 – Išur-Adad informs his mother that he was sold (perhaps as a prisoner) and instructs her what to do in order to obtain his release, p.82, Old Babylonian Letters from Tell Asmar, Robert M. Whiting Jr., Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Assyrialogical Studies Number 22, Chicago, Illinois, 1987

kingdoms such as Mari and Karana provided an impressing amount of letters sent by or addressed to royal women. The archive of queen Itani found at *Al Rimah* offers information about her activity as supervisor of the textile business and her relations with the king and family members but also brings some data about her cultic activities. Regrettably, Itani is the only royal woman highly documented in the kingdom of Karana. A particularly interesting case is that of the royal women from Mari during the time of Zimri-Lim. Even though we have some information about high ranking ladies during the third millennium BC[375] the letters received and sent by women date from time of the last King of Lim dynasty. This rich correspondence between the Mariote ruler the ladies of his family is extremely interesting and it gave birth to controversies between researchers because it numbers a large variety of female relatives: not only the queen mother and the queen, but also daughters, sisters and other wives of the king. The close and sometimes obviously affectionate relationship of Zimri-Lim and Šibtu might be a consequence of his days of exile in Aleppo that might have helped him to deeply understand the customs of this kingdom, and we must also consider the help that Yarim-Lim provided him in order to reclaim the throne of Mari. Although their marriage took place after Zimri-Lim return to Mari[376]. Šibtu became the prominent female figure after the death of the queen mother although the principal wife and it seems that also the mother of the crown prince Yagîd-Lim. Albeit she maintains her preeminence in ration lists, her political, administrative and even cultic role is overstrained by the Alepian princess[377]. Perhaps her fulminant ascension and investment with powers was a result of her father position as ruler of the powerful Kingdom of Yamḫad. If that is

[375] Baba, wife of Iblu-Il, King (Lugal) of Mari around 2380, during the second kingdom of Mari that forced Ebla to pay tribute in Mario Livelani, Mari and Ebla: of Time and Rulers (371-372) and the Assyrian interregnum (Belētum – wife of Yasmah-Addu and Akkatiya his mother – see M5566, A.4471, A.2548, ARM X 171, 172, 178, ARM I 77, ARM I 46; Yahdum-Lim's wives, Gabetum and an unnamed one from Yamhad, probably Izamu A.4771 RIME E4.6.11.4

[376] The mission Asqudun and Risiya - Les femmes dans le Rayome d'Alep (13-14) Fayssal Abdallah in FPOA, ed. J.M. Durand

[377] N. Ziegler , *Florilegium Marianum IV. Le harem de Zimri-Lim*, p.52-54, , J.M. Durand, *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari* , p.95-299

true we may observe that Zimri-Lim followed the same principle when contracting political marriage for his daughters as pointed out by F. Batto:

> The difference between Zimri-Lim and his contemporaries in the use of the dynastic marriage to secure alliances, to judge from the available evidence, is that Zimri-Lim additionally invests his daughter queens with real authority in their respective states. Sometimes, as in the case of Inib-šarri and Kiru, these marriages turned out to be unhappy ventures..[378]

R. Harris brings another perspective upon the relationship of Zimri-Lim and his lady relatives and states that the authority of Šibtu and his queen daughters is a delegated one, the women being just agents of the king, instruments of his policy, but his ability to invest then with authority was extended only on the small vassal kingdoms[379]. Although I agree with Harris' idea of delegated authority, I do find interesting the particular relation between a man and the female members of his family, a connection paralleled from my point of view only by the correspondence of the merchants of Kaneš with their wives, sisters and daughters from Aššur. If the particularity of the last situation might have been required by the good development of trade activities, for Mari it is difficult to find an explanation. It might be a Syrian influence considering that at least two of the main wives of Zimri-Lim originated to the West. It is believed that this kind of marriages brought to Mari customs, etiquette and a life-style inspired from those encountered in those particular regions. Abraham Malamat assumed that those marriages were a form of clan or tribal relationship between Mari and the West, because all these areas were inhabited during the beginning of the second millennium by Amorite tribes whom tried to tighten their liaisons through marriage[380]. Although Amorite Kings ruled all the important centers of Mesopotamia, it appears that the tribal tradition was stronger in the neighboring regions of Syria. Considering the unbalanced diffusion of data concerning royal women during the second millennium between Southern and Northwestern Mesopotamia, I will try to analyze the religious

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[378] B.F Batto, *Studies On Women At Mar*i, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore-London, p.53

[379] R.Harris, Independent Women in Ancient Mesopotamia, p.146-147

[380] Abraham Malamat, *Mari and the Bible*, p.14-15

agency of those ladies as revealed by the information and I was able to synthetize using the text corpora at hand.

Evaluating the available data I would try portraying the religious life of royal women in the second millennium Mesopotamia, although the information is neither homogeneous nor descriptive. Nevertheless, those ladies seem to have been involved in a large variety of cultic activities. They may bring offerings, make sacrifices, transmit prophetic messages and the content of dreams, inquire oracles (Mari). As we may see the appartenance to the royal family offers access to a multitude of resources and sometimes the pious gesture of those ladies are also an indicator of their power and prestige at a certain time of their life. The inscriptions they left behind reveal that royal women could dedicate to a deity valuable objects but also storehouses or build temples for a particular god or goddess in order to safeguard their lives and those of the king and children. Although the number of dedicatory inscriptions is incredibly limited[381] we may underline some ideas but, due to the inconsistency of data, we may not generalize those conclusions. The main question here is who were the royal ladies entitled with the authority of building temples and storehouses for a deity? Lamassatum, mother of Lipit-Eštar of Larsa built a storehouse for the goddess Inanna of Murtum and Nutaptum, **lukur** of Sîn-Māgir also from Isin built a storehouse for the goddess Aktuppîtum of Kiritab. In this situation we have to do with a dowager queen and a future dowager considering that the **lukur** is the mother of the king's first son, the crown prince of Isin. Simat-Eštar, wife of Rîm-Sîm of Larsa, and Me-Kûbi, daughter of the **ensi** of Ešumma and wife of the **ensi** of Susa, both built a temple that was dedicated to a goddess (Ninegal respectively Inanna). Both of those ladies wear the tile of **dam** (wife), and considering the richness and prestige of their votive offerings we may assume that the two ladies were the principal wives, and those who held the title of queen. Building and maintaining temples was a chief responsibility of ancient Mesopotamia king as revealed by the multitude of

[381] There are 6 inscriptions mentioning royal women that are not high ranking cultic officials, especially entu for the first half of second millennium with the exception of Izamu, Kezertu and wife of Yasmaḫ-Addu of Mari, RIME 4, Old Babylonian period. After this period I could not find any other votive inscription mentioning a royal woman

inscriptions concerning the matter[382] and there is no doubt that the royal women had their fair share of participation in decorating and maintaining the temple buildings and cult statues[383]. Nevertheless, temple building, besides being an extremely important pious act, befitting a king and royalty in general, might imply also secondary aims so I consider women involvement in this kind of religious activity a particular one. Besides the genuine concern for the wellbeing of the gods I do imply that those queens, through their implication in temple building tried legitimating their status and enhancing their authority and prestige by attracting the deity benevolence and support. Other types of offerings such as plates (vessel objects), statues, jewelers, garments or silver payments are more common gifts that royal women presented either themselves (E4.1.73, E4.6.11.4) or through their relatives that held a cultic office (see the section about *naditum*).

Unfortunately, apart from scarce inscriptions the vast majority of the data concerning royal women's agency in religion comes from the archive of Mari, excepting a few entries from Karana. We get a better picture from the cultic account lists that offer sufficient information for drawing an almost complete picture. The letters with religious content exchanged between Zimri-Lim and his female relatives present a salient feature: a deep concern for the political situation of the kingdom. The most significant prophetic messages are sent to Zimri-Lim by his mother Addu-duri and his queen Šibtu. All those messages reflect the concern of the royal ladies for the King's safety and they inquire the oracles about the course of his campaigns and gives to him advices about how he should act in certain situations. The queen of Mari is not the only one entitled with reporting this kind of messages to the king. The ruler receives letters concerning the activity of prophets and diviners from his governors but also from his daughters married with vassal rulers. Kirûm, one of the two daughters married with the King of Ilan Šura, writes to her father[384], "*And now, even if I am a woman, may my father and lord listen to my message. I constantly send the words of the gods to my father. (So), go up and stay in Naḫur and do all that*

[382] See CANE, Michael Roaf, *Palaces and Temples in Ancient Mesopotamia*, p.431 and Satterfield Bruce, *Ancient Mesopotamia Temple Building in Historical Texts and Building Inscriptions*, Brigham Young University – Idaho, emp.byui.edu

[383] Elna K Solvang, *A Woman's Place in the House,* p.41

[384] ARM X 31

the gods tell (show) you".[385] I find this text particularly interesting because it appears that the one who received the words of the gods was Kirûm herself, and as she mentioned in her letter this is not singular situation. She stresses that her advices should be considered despite the fact that she is a woman. The words of gods transcend gender and status and they must be considered under any circumstances. Kirûm advises her father in what appears to be a conflictual situation even though women are not sought as counselor in matters concerning war or other crucial political decision-making situations , and asks him to follow her advice and then to act according to the guidance of the gods. It is not sure whether she counsels him to inquire oracles before making an important decision or he should try to follow the instructions that the gods might send him through her. If she is indeed a prophetess it would be interesting to know how she entered in contact with the gods. Another possibility would be that this particular daughter was really involved in the political life of the time. Her father invested her with the office of *hazannum* that might have granted her certain authority and power of decision considering that her husband found it upsetting enough to threaten her life.[386] In this case she was making constant inquire to oracle concerning her father's campaigns being perfectly conscient that her status as queen and invested official were tightly linked with the success and political superiority of Zimri-Lim in the region. Nonetheless the involvement of royal women of Mari is prophetic and divinatory activities are in close connection with the politico-military situation of the kingdom. All the reports sent to the king regard inquiries and messages concerning his campaigns and his wellbeing but they never mention private affairs of the royal family.

The Mariote ladies appear to also be prolific in transmitting reports concerning ominous dreams, be then their own dreams or oneiric experiences of a third person that considered it relevant enough to be made known to the ruler. As observed in the case of the prophetic messages, the dream reports also concern the political situation of the kingdom although apparently they might point to more personal matters such as name giving. I will debate here only those dreams experienced by the royal ladies. Concerning the dream reports published by

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[385] J.M. Sasson, *Biographical Notices*, JCS, Vol. XXV, April 1973, Number 2, p.68

[386] ARM X 32

J.M. Durand in AEM I / ARM XXVI [387] we may outline the following information: from the fifth dream reports sent to the king from the women belonging to his family three of them are reports from Addu-duri one from Šibtu and one from Šimatum but only two of those dream present a personal oneiric experience and I will refer to this two in particular. The first dream I am going to discuss is the one experienced by Zimri-Lim's mother, Addu-duri, an experience that J.M. Sasson considers to be the most remarkable manifestation of oneiric imagination yet available[388]. The dowager reports to her son a frightening dream she had during the evening time of the night, dream that she might have ignored if it haven't been reinforced by another one at a certain time of the same night[389]. She states from the beginning that she did not experience such a dreadful dream since the "*Šutum of your father's house*". The first problem imposed by the text consists in the meaning of the term "*Šulmum*" itself. Sasson underlines that the same word, in Old Babylonian times might refer to both the destruction and restauration of a royal line.[390] J.M. Durand[391] translates the phrase "*ištu šulum É abīka*" as after the fall/ruin of your family. I will follow his translation of "*ištu šulumé*" but I prefer to render *É abika* as your father's house, because it seems to make more sense in this context. Being the dowager it is obvious that Addu-duri witnessed the fall of the Lim house, the Assyrian interregnum, and Zimri-Lim's asylum to the court of Yamḫad. After stressing her anxiety she begins to narrate her oneiric experience. In her dream the queens enters the chapel of Belet-Ekallim but she gets frightened and starts to cry uncontrollably when she realizes that the goddess and the other statues representing perhaps the royal ancestors were no more in their residence. She wakes up very disturbed and after falling asleep the dreadful dream continues. She meets the priest Dada, perhaps a dead official, who was standing in the door of Belet-Ekallim's chapel imploring the god Dagan to return. What should

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[387] J.M. Durand, *Archives Épistolaires de Mari I / ARM XXVI*, 1988, pp. 465 – 481

[388] D.Charpin, *Mari dreams*, p.286

[389] J.M. Durand, *Archives Épistolaires de Mari I / ARM XXVI* ,1988, p.456; *La correspondence feminine*, p.279,

[390] .CAD, Š, vol. 3, offers the following translations" 1. well-being, health, completeness, 2.ceremony of greeting, court audience) 3. peace, safety, 4. end, completion, p. 247

[391] J.M. Durand, *Archives Épistolaires de Mari I / ARM XXVI*, p.478

be pointed out is that her dream bears a striking resemblance with the so called city, laments[392]. In this type of literary work the gods are abandoning the ruined city. In Ancient Mesopotamia, the deity was considered present in his/her cult image[393] so the absence of the statues is a clear sign of the absence of the deity. The presence of the cultic statue in the altar was "prima facie" evidence of the deity's benevolent oversight of the city. Thus the first thing conquering kings frequently did was to remove the cult statue. It had a deterious effect on morale, thus making the conquering easier[394]. In the second dream it is suggested that also Dagan left the city thus the high priest implored him to return. The absence of the deities from the city or palace temple may foretell a hard time for the king and kingdom if not the complete downfall. The circumstances in which, the queen mother had this ominous dream are not known. Considering the oracle of Annunitum that she intermediates advising the king not to leave Mari, we may assume that the political situation was highly instable, and the life of the king and his rule were in danger; otherwise the dowager wouldn't be so disturb by this apocalyptic oneiric experience. Either if we interpret this dream as a message from the gods that try to worn her of a future danger or as a result of her motherly concerns for the wellbeing of her son, it is a wonderful insight into the religious imagery of ancient Mesopotamia, revealing a tight connection between the human and supernatural world and their interaction. The queen wrote about her dream because she genuinely believed that it should be seen as a warning in order to prevent fateful events. The oneiric experience was perceived by the ancients as real as any other activity and not just a product of an over-excited imagination.

The second dream I intend to address is the one reported by Šîmatum, one of Zimri-Lim's daughter, married to Haya-sumu the ruler of Ilan-Sura, apparently a day after she left Mari. She states that she had a nocturnal revelation in which a man kept repeating the name that should be given to the new born baby girl of a court lady, probably one of the king concubines. Apparently, this dream is a strictly personal dream concerning family issues, stressing the

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[392] See Foster, *Before the Muses*, vo l. I, 94 and Lamentation over the city of Ur, http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.2.2.3#

[393]L. Oppenheim, *Mesopotamia. Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, p.184

[394] Nick Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Near East*, A&C Black, 2001, p.277

relationship between Zimri-Lim as a father, his children and the liaisons established between the royal siblings. However, there are scholars such as Durand that are stressing that the choice of name was not random:

> L'imposition de ce nom Tanûh-Nauvîm signifiant << La Steppe s'est apaisée >> avait valeur prémonitoire. La fillette proclamerait désormais, sa vie durant, par son appellation, que le roi de Mari s'était réconcilié avec le nauwûm, le monde turbulent des nomads. Si les dieux recommandaient qu'on lui donne une tel nom , c'est qu'en fait, ils anticipaient que cet évémenent particulièrement heureux allait se produire[395]

Besides prophecy and oneiric experiences the women of the royal family were involved in a lot of different religious activities.

Addu-duri, Šibtu and also Iltani of Katara are mentioned to perform sacrifices. They are listed in cultic accounts as recipients of certain amounts of animals (sheep and lambs) for sacrifices. It seems that during her lifetime, in the absence of the king, the queen mother was in charge to perform the sacrifices for the deities of the palace but also for other gods. In two letters sent by Zimri-Lim to his mother[396] the king asks her to personally "*stand before the gods"* implying that it was important to be seen in person by the gods, not just to arrange for offerings[397] preparations for some future festivals, such as Dêritium festival. It is not revealed whether he would himself attend the ceremonies or not. She is not the only one the king charges with this kind of cultic responsibility. In ARM X 128 Zimri-Lim instructs his queen Šibtu to go to Hišamta and bring a certain Hišamîtum to Mari perhaps for the Dêrîtum festival. He also asks her to make some offerings during her stay, perhaps to the city diety. As stated in this letter, the royal ladies were not confined to the women's quarters inside the palace. The queen, at least, could travel in order to make preparation for festivals or offer cultic activities. In the letters sent by the daughters of Zimri-Lim it may be observed that they did return to Mari from time to time

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[395] J.M. Durand, *Archives Épistolaires de Mari I / ARM XXVI*, p.458

[396] ARM X 142, X144

[397] S. Dalley, *Mari and Karana*, p.119

for religious reasons. Šimatum asks for a wagon and a traveling bed to be sent in order to come to Mari to sacrifice to the gods of her father[398]. When she writes about the name a new born baby girl should receive she states that she left Mari a short time ago, so perhaps she had been there in a visit. Another queen that receives instruction to prepare for sacrifice and festivals is Iltani. In T64 and 110 from Karana, Aqba-ḫammu writes to his wife to make plans for *elunnum* and *kinunum* festivals that he is going to attend or to make the required arrangements for *abrûm* offerings. He gives the queen full authority for planning and attending cultic activities during his travels and campaigns and gets really upset when her actions are disregarded by his subordinates:

> "Hammu-şuri told me that you have celebrated a festival and that nobody took notice of you. What is this? I myself should certainly take notice of you. Let nobody take notice of you; (then) certainly I shall come myself and you will see what I shall do to whoever does not take any notice of you […] I shall arrive there in time for the (monthly) essēsum". [399]

The tone of the letter is harsh and reflects his indignation that the queen efforts were disregarded. He seems to consider his subordinates' attitude towards Iltani both as a personal offence and most of all as a proof of disrespect towards the gods that should be punished in order to settle an example.

Those entire epistolary documents reveal one clear fact: royal women, be them mother or wives of the king had a limited religious authority. Their freedom of decision, their control over the administrative aspects of the cult and temple are delegated by the king. Thus their agency in the official cult although is it fully confirmed, is also submitted to some restrictions, but those limitations are only imposed by the king himself. When he is the one who invested his mother, wife, daughter and sister with the power to act within the realm of the official cult, a disrespect of their authority may be seen as an affront to the king and gods. Anyway, the royal ladies seem to have been more involved in the religious action concerning the wellbeing of the

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[398] J. Cooper, *Biographical notices*, p.69.

[399] S.Dalley, *The Old Babylonian Tablets from Tell al Rimah*, p.60

palace and subsequently the king's family[400]. Although they are actively involved in the official cult, royal women are able to perform their own sacrifices to different deities as seen from the expenses concerning their cultic activities. Addu-duri is the character for whom we have the most sacrifices registered, she received various animal deliveries for specific occasions. In one instance the dowager sacrifices two sheep to Ninḫursaga[401] and there are also various situations in which the deity is not mentioned. Perhaps she was making animal offerings to her personal god / goddess and other deities, she was particularly devoted to. For each of those occasions she was attributed one or two sheep, but there is a document listing the delivery of six sheep for the sacrifices deed to Belet-Ekallim so I incline to believe that this animal supply was supposed to be used not for personal sacrifices but for those that should maintain the wellbeing of the palace, cultic actions that were closely supervised or attended by the dowager. Šibtu is also attested to offer sacrifices for Ninḫursaga and also for a certain Ištar of Tuba. Iltani performs also a series of sacrifices consisting in one goat for Išhara of Aritanaya and Ištar of Ninet and a lamb for Ištar of Qatara and Sîn. The question that rises is whether the royal ladies were performing the sacrifices themselves or were just supervising or praying while a specialized official was accomplishing the ritual. Claudia Suter [402] states that seals from Akkadian and Ur III Dynasty times depict both the ruler and their wives as protagonists of adoration scenes:" *they not only follow into the presence of deity, but are also seen as protagonists in the worship of goddess and can pour libations, like kings"*[403]. Regular offerings were considered in Mesopotamia as food of the gods; being performed for the wellbeing and contentment of the divine being, but there are also occasional sacrifices which were made for the benefit of the worshiper. Regular sacrifices were

[400] ARM X 142, 144, 6 sheep sacrifice from Addu -duri for Belet -ekallium whose chapel was placed inside the palace ARM 21 43

[401] ARM 21 27

[402] C. Suter," Kings and Queens: Representation and Reality" in *The Sumerian World*, ed. by H.Crawford , Rotledge Tylor and Francis Group, 2012, p.211

[403] Ibidem

most probably performed by specialized personnel that were trained for his specific activity[404]. Even though the actual killing of the animal brought as offering was performed by a professional we must differentiate this particular act from the actual sacrifice and Tzvi Abusch stresses upon this misunderstanding:

> When we think of sacrifice we tend to think of slauthering animals or consuming an offering by means of fire. But we must imagine sacrifice a bit differently when we approach the topic in Mesopotamia. For our Mesopotamian religious sources emphasize neither the slaughter of animals nor the process of consumption. Rather they usually focus on presentation. To understand the Mesopotamia view of sacrifice, it is important that we constantly keep this perspective in mind[405].

Considering this last statement it may be assumed that the worshiper, be it man or woman, might have at first presented in person to the deity the animal he/she is going to offer and afterwards it was handed out to the personnel in charge of performing different cultic actions in order to fulfill the ritual offering.

An interesting question that deserves attention concerns the deities the royal women used to turn to, addressing them prayers and providing them with offering. Is there a gender pattern concerning their preferences? A short survey of the data concerning the religious activities of those ladies during the second millennium B.C brings out the following situation:

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[404] JoAnn Surlock, *The Techniques of the Sacrifice of Animals in Ancient Israel and Ancient Mesopotamia: New Insights Through Comparison*, Part 2, 253; *The Techniques of the Sacrifice of Animals in Ancient Israel and Ancient Mesopotamia: New Insights Through Comparison*, Part 1 - apparently for ocassional and regular sacrifices, after the dispatching of the animal, the carcass was cooked. JoAnn Surlock writes about this information that appears in what appears to be an butcher manual from OB TIME, p.32

[405] Tzvi Abusch, "Sacrifice in Mesopotamia" in *Sacrifice in Religious Experience* edited by Albert Baumgarten, Brill, 2002, p. 39, 49

Female deities	Male deities
1. Inanna of Murtum 2. Nanāia 3. Akktuppītum 4. Ninegal 5. Inanna 6. Ištar 7. Annunitum 8. Ištar of Tuba 9. Eštar of Radana 10. Eštar the Queen 11. Belet-Ekallim 12. Nin-ḫursaga/Ninḫursag 13. Ištar of Ninet 14. Ištar of Qatara 15. Išhara of Aritanaya (?)	1.Dagan 2.Dagan of Terqa 3.Itûr-Mêr 4.Šamaš 5.Sin

This short survey underlines the fact that goddesses were favored by the ladies belonging to the royal family, but this result is not a puzzling one because women have the tendency of relying on deities that share their own gender. Julia Asher-Greve and Joan G.Westenholz in their studies about the Mesopotamian goddesses pinpoint that:

> "The tradition of women's special affinity for goddesses dates back to the Early Dynastic Period and is still evident in Old Babylonian seal inscriptions: eighteen

> out of twenty one women owning inscribed seals are servants of a deity so-and-so, and out of these, ten are servants of a goddess, six of a god and a goddess, and only one calls herself "servant of a god".[406]

Not only the seals, mostly belonging to *nadītus* reflect this affinity, but also the names that women receive. In Old Babylonian Mari theophoric names there were some goddesses that were preeminent: *Annu, Ištar, Eštar, Išhara* followed by *Mamma, Admu* and *Kakka*[407].As it can be easily observed, some deities were popular for both name giving, and also appeared in the ladies' prayers and sacrifices more often than the others: *Ištar/Eštar*.

Ištar seems to be the most popular deity among the royal ladies, but she was also held in high esteem and worshipped by the kings throughout Mesopotamian history. From the fifteen entries listed above only four of them do not refer to this particular goddess either if she is worshipped under one of her regional aspects or under one of her epithets or specific names. Inanna/ Ištar (Eštar) goddess of love, fertility and warfare, was honored during the time under different designations, and before trying to analyze the affinity of the royal families for this deity, all her aspects and epithets must be brought together. Annunitum, Ninelag and Belet-Ekallin seem to be only other names used to designate the goddess.

Annunitum was, at first, just an epithet that appears to indicate her aspects as a warrior goddess as revealed in the Epic of Naram-Sin[408], but later it was used by itself as shown in a multitude of documents from Mari and Sippar where she was the chief deity of Sippar-Amnanum. The Sumerian Ninegal (^{d}NIN.É.GAL) "lady of the great house/of the palace" in the Akkadian sources appears under the title of Belet-Ekallim. Ninegal/Belet-ekallim was honored in temples and even in the royal palace where she fulfilled the role of '*Protectress of the Royal*

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[406] Julia M. Asher-Greve and Joan Goodnick Westenholz, *Goddesses in Context, On Divine Powers, Roles, Relationships and Gender in Mesopotamian Textual and Visual Sources*, Orbis Biblicus Et Orientalis, Academic Press Fribourg, 2013, p.273

[407]Ichiro Nakata, *A Study of Women's Theophoric Personal Names in Old Babylonian Texts from Mari* in "Orient" vol. XXX-XXXI, 1995, pp.235-236

[408] Gwendolyn Leick, *A Dictionary of Ancient Near Eastern Mythology, Routledge, 1991, p. 7 and*

Sa-Moon Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East*, Walter de Gruyere& Co., Berlin, 1984 p.34

Dynasty'. Her cult can be examined through texts listing numerous sacrifices, cult participants, her own administration, and worship during particular festivals[409]. Belet-Ekallim as an epithet was also used as a title for other goddesses. The specific use of this name as a title in connection with Ištar is testified by Sumerian literary texts, where she is called Ninegala: *"Inana, you are the lady of all the divine powers, and no deity can compete with you. Here is your dwelling, Ninegala; let me tell of your grandeur!"*[410]

In Old Babylonian Mari, Belet-Ekallim appears as the patron deity of the royal family[411] and she has her own chapel inside the royal palace were her sacrifices and rituals are being performed[412].That explains the rich offerings she is receiving and perhaps the so called sacrifices for the wellbeing of the palace were intended for her.

The affinity of royal women for the goddess Inanna/Ištar is tightly linked to her significance for the royal cult because it was she who bestowed sovereignty:

> This goddess not only controlled the fertility of plants and animals, as well as humans, and thus was ultimately responsible for all wealth and offspring, but, in addition, she stabilized the king's power allowing him to protect his realm also by destroying his enemies[413].

If this goddess has a close link with kingship and the royal family what can be said about the other deities to whom royal ladies offered prayers and sacrifices? On the one hand we have mother and love goddesses such as Nanaya, Išhara and Ninhursah, and on the other hand there are the male deities. The three goddesses (and perhaps not the only ones with those attributes that the women appeal at) respond to the needs of a mother and wife, embodying the

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[409]Geeta de Clercq, *Die Göttin Ninegal/Belet-ekallim nach den altorientalischen Quellen des 3. und 2. Jt. v.Chr. : mit einer Zusammenfassung der hethitischen Belegstellen sowie der des 1. Jt. v. Chr.* http://www.etana.org/node/12075

[410] Hymn to Inana as Ninegala (Inana D), lines 9-10, http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section4/tr4074.htm

[411] Gwendolyn Leick, *A Dictionary*,1991, p.25

[412] J.M.Durand, L'organization de l'espace dans le palais de Mari.Le témoignage des textes in "Le système palatial en Orient, en Grèce et à Rome.Actes du colloque de Strasbourg, 11-15 Juin 1983", ed.by Edmond Lévy, Brill, 1987

[413] Brigitte Groneberg, *The Role And Function Of Goddesses In* Mesopotamia in "The Babylonian World ed by Gwendolyn Leick", Routledge, 2007, p.322

characteristics of femininity that every woman, royal or not, should possess or aspires to from an ancient Mesopotamian perspective: sex appeal (*kuzbu*-charm, sensuality, luxuriance), capacity to procreate, and last but not the least, to be a good mother. Anyway, those goddesses seem to have also some involvement in the royal cult. Many Mesopotamian kings called themselves "beloved of Ninhursag"[414] and built temples for her and some Old Babylonian composition stress the connection between Nanaya and kingship.[415]

The gods that appear to be worshiped by the royal ladies fall into two categories: Sin and Šamaš, the gods of the moon and sun, are the so called supra-regional deities that under an aspect or another were worshiped throughout the entire ancient Near East.[416]On the other hand there are the gods that prevailed in a specific region or city. Dam-ḫuraši, the first wife of Zimri-Lim and perhaps the mother of the crown prince kept writing to her husband that she prays and offers sacrifices to Dagan and Itûr-Mêr. In her function of first wife and queen, although later her role is surpassed by Šibtu, she might have felt that it was her duty to maintain a good relation with the patron deity of the city of Mari, Itûr-Mêr, and with Dagan, an important god of the region of the Middle Euphrates, a weather deity that had his temple in Terqa, a religious center of the kingdom.[417]The importance of this god is also reflected in the concern displayed towards the settlement of a dwelling for his *ugbabtum* in Terqa that made the subject of an intense exchange of letters between the King and the governor of the city. An interesting fact that should be underlined is that Dam-ḫuraši appears to be the only royal lady that invokes those two particular male deities in her letters, but it is difficult to interpret this particular choice. It might have something to do with her status at the court of Mari or as implied by J.M Durand and J.Sasson, she might be living in the palace of Terqa or she was named priestess of Dagan by the king.[418]

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[414] Gwendolyn Leick, A Dictionary,1991, p.132

[415] Paul-Alain Beaulieu, The Pantheon of Uruk During the Neo-Babylonian Period, Cuneiform Monographs, Brill-Styx, 2003, p.184

[416] Beate Pongratz-Leisten, *Comments on the Translatability of Divinity: Cultic and Theological Responses to the Presence of the Other in Ancient Near East* in "Supplemento a Mythos" 2, 2011,pp.83-111, p.89

[417] Stephanie Dalley, *Mari and Karana: Two Old Babylonian Cities*, Gorgias Press LLC, 2002, p. 112

[418]Neile Ziegler, *Le harem de Zimri-Lim*, Florilegium Marianum IV , Paris, SEPOA, 1999, p 53

Another aspect that requires attention is the cult of foreign gods or local forms of a deity introduced by royal women in the kingdoms they came to live after their marriages. So, in the correspondence from Mari we may find deities such as Ištar of Radana. She was worshiped by the mother of Yasmah-Addu, and introduced to the court of Mari during the Assyrian interregnum, this being a deity from Ekallatum who protected Samši-Addu and the Upper Mesopotamia Dynasty[419]. In a letter addressed to her brother-in-law, Lamassî-Aššur, wife of Išme-Dagan mentiones this particular deity in a blessing revealing the close relation the royal family had with the goddess while the members lived in different places, be it Mari, Ekallatum or Šubat-Enlil.

Ištar of Tuba is also an imported deity that originates in the kingdom of Aleppo. Šibtu is the one that introduced her to Mari and she is seen making sacrifices for this goddess various times. The texts M 15109 and M15077 mention that sheep were delivered to the queen with the occasion of the sacrifice of the "*sappum -bol*"of Ištar of Tuba.[420] Neile Ziegler offers the interpretation of *lance sappum* and considers that through this symbol the cult of the deity from Aleppo was introduced to Mari when the new queen arrived. The high status of the god Adad might also be a reflection of the power of her father, the king of Yamḫad, who helped Zimri-Lim to regain his throne, so the last one might have felt obliged to rise in status the gods of his wife's mother land. A similar situation is described in ARMT 28 27, where Sibkuna-addu, king of Šuda and husband of one of Zimri-Lim's daughters writes to the king that, as a consequence of his marriage with Hazala, he installed in his kingdom the Gods of Mari so the local pantheon expanded by including some foreign deities brought in by the new queen[421].

A foreign princess not only brings new gods, but also foreign customs as revealed by a letter concerning the wife of Yasmah-Addu, a princess from Qatara, Bēltum. Uṣur-Awassu wrote to the king that the princess is sick because, against Mari custom, she wanted to oficiate the *šurārum* ritual by going to the temple of Ištar, accompanied by a court singer, during the hottest

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[419] Trevor Bryce, *The Routledge Handbook of the People and Places of Ancient western Asia from the Early Bronze Age to the Fall*, of Persian Empire, Routledge, 2009, p.216

[420] www.archibab.fr

[421] Neile Ziegler, *Le harem du vaincu* in „Revue d'assyriologie et archéologie orientale", vol.XCIII, 1999, p.7

hours of the day, when the doors of the palace are closed.[422]It appears that the princess was in charge of performing or supervising the ritual personally, but she might have tried to accomplish it according to the Qatnean customs despite the interdiction to stay outside during the hot hours of the day, revealing that in this city, this particular ritual might have been performed at a different time of the day if it was practiced at all.

Another matter that should be addressed concerning royal women is the one of their impurity during menstruation and childbirth[423] and the restriction they are imposed during this period. Lately, there are voices that rise against this already classical theory inspired by certain fragments of Leviticus that women had a predisposition towards impurity because of their specific physiology considering that in Mesopotamia the evidence is not sufficient to make such an assertion[424].

Even so, the archive of Mari and the Middle Assyrian Palace decrees provide some evidence about women having to respect some rules during certain periods of time, even though the reasons are not stated.

ARM 26 13 a letter written by an official of Aleppo concerning the arrival of Šibtu, daughter of Yarim-Lim to Mari bring the following information:

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[422] Cinzia Pappi, The Religious Landscape of Qatna during the Mari Period in Urban And Natural Landscapes

Of An Ancient Syrian Capital Settlement And Environment At Tell Mishrifeh/Qatna And In Central-Western Syria Ed. By Daniele Morandi Bonacossi Proceedings of the International Conference held in Udine 9-11 December 2004, p.324

[423] The Idea of female impurity during period, childbirth and a certain period after, and them being regarded as factors of contamination for another person appears clearly in Leviticus 12:2-5, 15:19-27 and is interpreted by many scholars interested in Israel and Mesopotamia that appear to have considered this rule to be valid also in the Mesopotamian context: Karel Van der Toorn , *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia. A Comparative Study*, p.31 and *From her cradle to her grave*, p 51-55, M Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, p.140.

[424] Érica Couto-Ferreira and Agnès Garcia-Ventura, ''Engendering Purity and Impurity in Assyriological Studies: A Historiographical Overview'' in Sex, Gender and the Sacred: Reconfiguring Religion in Gender History, ed by. Joanna de Groot,Sue Morgan, epub format, www.books.google.ro

> Il a dit: Que les affaires de ma fille soient donc déposées dans sa demeure, (mais) ma fille réside chez son époux et que 5 ou 6 jours elle quitte (le palais) et qu'elle s'occupe de sa demeure."

Durand[425] deduced that she was supposed to leave the palace for 5 or 6 days each month because during her period she was considered impure. He bases his argument on a study published by Bertrand Lafont "A propos de l'absence cyclique des femmes", where he states that women were being restrained from going to certain places or continue their usual activities during their menses because they were considered impure.[426] Érica Couto-Ferreira and Agnès Garcia-Ventura contest his theory considering that, at a closer insight, it is not sustainable because the actual number of free days that women and men received during Ur III Dynasty period was similar. The men received 3 free days and they count also other three days in connection with festivals. They go further stating that this letter from Mari:

> …has been the sole evidence quoted by scholars in over twenty years of academic literature in order to asset that in the 18th century BCE, Mari women were rendered impure due to menstruation, and that because of this they were required to leave the palace once a month even when no word for impurity and uncleanness, no explicit mention of women heaving to leave the palace periodically, and no direct allusion to menstruation are made in the sources.[427]

The *Middle Assyrian Palace Decrees* forbid a menstruating/ unapproachable woman to enter the presence of the king during the period of sacrifice[428] thus pointing to the fact that women were indeed considered impure during the menstruation, and being in the presence of the

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[425] Durand, J.-M. (1987)" L'organisation de l'espace dans le palais de Mari. Le temoignage des textes" in *Le système palatial en Orient, en Grèce et à Rome. Actes du colloque de Strasbourg 19 - 22 juin 1985* ed.by E. Lévy pp.102-105

[426] Bertrand Lafont " A propos de l'absence cyclique des femmes", in NABU, 1987, Part II, pg.24

[427] Érica Couto-Ferreira and Agnès Garcia-Ventura, ''Engendering Purity and Impurity in Assyriological Studies: A Historiographical Overview, epub format, www.books.google.ro

[428] MAPD 7

king would render the last one impure as well by her contaminant presence. An unclean person could not enter the presence of the god without the risk of offending the deity and, as the presence of the king was required during the ritual he has to be clean, unsoiled by any contact or action.

Considering this piece of evidence we may not assume that women were really forced to leave the palace, but only not to enter in contact with the king, and we may deduce, also with other cult personnel or officials that might have afterwards contact with the king. Although if we consider the fact that "*Mesopotamian palaces were not just residential, ceremonial, and administrative centers, but also might include temples, storehouses and factories,*" [429]the inclusion of a temple inside the palace area might imply that women whom were not pure during their menstruation should leave the palace so that their proximity would not offend the gods.

The correspondence from Mari includes an interesting letter that speaks about a woman who comes back to the palace. M 11343 mentions that a servant of the king became pure again and came back to the palace.[430] This letter might imply that, at least at Mari, women might leave the palace while they are impure but unfortunately there is no mention about what kind of impurity is implied: menstruation, childbirth or violating a taboo, rendering the person impure. Until new, more specific tablets will be discovered, all the above should remain on the ground of speculation considering the fact that Mesopotamian data are not specific enough when addressing the impurity rules imposed to royal women.

Royal women are present in the religious life of the second millennium Mesopotamia, but their agency should be regarded with a certain restrain because the sources tend to address only the beginning of this period, until the fall of the first Dynasty of Babylon. Furthermore, the available data are concentrated in the Northwestern regions, more precisely in the kingdom of Mari during the reign of Zimri-Lim so, even though we could draw an almost complete portrait of the cultic activities and the religious agency of royal women, we may not consider this an all-encompassing picture. We are to assume that royal women did have a certain degree of

[429] Michael Roaf, Palaces and Temples in Ancient Mesopotamia, CANE, p.433

[430] N.Ziegler, Florilegium Marianum IV. Le Harem de Zimri-Lim, p.233

implication in the religious life, but not being mentioned in the sources might imply that their agency was on a lower level, that of the daily life of every Mesopotamian women and it needed not a special attention because it was a trait shared by all their contemporaries. The visibility of royal ladies in cultic activities might be a sign of their personal prestige, of special family relation, foreign influences, or simply, a higher status of women in certain regions and periods of Mesopotamian history, status that appears to be deteriorating all along the second millennium B.C.

IV.2 RELIGION, WOMEN AND DAILY LIFE

In ancient Mesopotamia, as we have seen before, there are two major categories of females who were involved in religious activities: *women religious specialists and women worshipers.*[431] Unfortunately, the *andro-kyriocentric* nature of textual evidence does not allow us to draw clear conclusions concerning the status and agency of female worshipers in Mesopotamia. If we have a certain degree of clarity regarding the religious agency of royal women, the image becomes more and more obstructed when it comes to women from any other category. Wealth may render a woman more visible on social and cultic level, but this situation is more an exception than a rule.

Despite the paucity of written material, I will try to sketch the religious portrait of Mesopotamian women during the second millennium B.C, using when needed, sources from the third and first millennium B.C, in order to draw a more complete picture of the situation. I will investigate their agency using *two levels of analysis*. First, I will try to uncover and discuss female cultic action such as *vows, prayers, offerings, participation to festivals*. The second level refers to the way women deal, from a religious point of view, with the three major life experiences that directly regard them: *birth, marriage and death*.

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[431] Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near Eas*t, Brill, 2003, p. 476

Despite the fact that women religious activities are not considered important or particular enough to be mentioned in the written sources, this does not mean that they were not active religious agents in Mesopotamia. Women's religiosity seems to be exceeding the one of men even though they did not held an important place in the cultic life. A Sumerian proverb alludes in an amusing way, to the female devotion that sometimes appears to be exaggerated:

Since my wife is at the outdoor shrine,

And my mother is at the River

I shall die of hunger.[432]

In view of this text we may state that women were not only actively involved in the religious life but, more than this, their devotion appears to take preeminence above their family life. The women are worshipping deities that are not related to the ancestor cult and the household god because they are heading towards the outside shrine and the river banks. In this situation the man is left alone, hungry and desolate. We are not certain whether this abandonment of the central male figure of the family would also mean negligence toward the house deities in favor of the great Gods. The fact that women visited different sanctuaries whenever they needed to is also reflecting in a law concerning the grave accusation of theft from a temple:

> *MAL A 1 If a woman, either a man's wife or a man's daughter, should enter into a temple and steal something from the sanctuary in the temples and either it is discovered in her possession or they prove the charges against her and find her guilty, [they shall perform (?)] a divination (?), they shall inquire of the deity; they shall treat her as the deity instructs them.*[433]

Considering that the temple was the house of the god, the one deprived of his/her property should be the one deciding the punishment. The god communicated his will through

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[432] E.I. Gordon, *Sumerian Proverbs: Glimpses of Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*; Philadelphia 1959, no.1.141 apud Karel van der Toorn, *From her Craddle to her Grave*, p.94

[433]M.T. Roth, *Law Collection from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, MAL A 1, p. 155

divination and it appears that the sentence was carries out by the priests of the temple.[434] Despite E.M Tetleow's argument that women who entered the temple could only be female personnel or servants, I tend to believe that women did visit the gods' dwellings from time to time, albeit their presence seems to be more common in the smaller public shrines, a fact revealed also by the Sumerian proverb mentioned above. Karel van der Toorn mentions that Sir Leonard Wooley uncovered at Ur a number of such shrines and they consist in an open area, court and a covered one hosting the divine statue. This complex also possessed an altar and a libation place, and officials were coming here on fix days to perform ceremonies.[435]

Royal women were supposed not to enter the presence of the king during their menstruation and there is a possibility that they even went outside the palace during this period, because the compound comprised also temples and shrines and their impurity during this period would have been offending for the gods. Although there are no documents from the Mesopotamian area clearly stating this interdiction, considering the case of palace ladies, I am inclined to believe that women were required to avoid temples during the few days of menstruation so that their uncleanness would not offend the gods.

Female worshippers are present in the cultic life as earlu as the third millennium B.C when they appear among the groups of statues that depict praying people found in the temple area such as the hoard from Tell Asmar, the ancient Ešnunna. Women, as well as men, prayed for health, family, well-being, children, love and many others. Unfortunately, the written prayers that reached us are recorded in a way that is either not gender specific because prayers are usually addresses in the first person singular that says nothing about the gender, or they present a male action reflected by the use of pronouns and pronominal suffixes.[436] There are very few texts

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[434] Elisabeth Meier Tetlow, *Women, Crime and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society: Volume 1: The Ancient Near East*, A&C Black, 2004, p.134

[435] Karel van der Toorn, From her Craddle to her Grave, p.95

[436] I came to this conclusion after a survey of Alan Lenzi's volume R*eading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns. An Introduction*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 2011. The first person singular prefix used with the verbs is not a successful indicative of gender considering that it might refer to both man and female, and the situation is the same for the third person singular. Considering the verb alone we may differentiate among male or female actions when

that specifically speak about a woman's action. A particular type of prayer in Old Babylonian period were the so called letters to the Gods, epistolary prayers addressed by a certain individual in a particular situation to a deity, perhaps the personal god.[437] It must be stated that this kind of works were not a novelty and that they originated in the Sumerian and Neo-Sumerian traditions.[438] Those letter prayers, in contrast with the standard ones [439]that are general and I assume could be used by both women and man, were more personal, addressed a specific problem and from a more intimate point of view, and it is easier to identify the author because the name is being mentioned in the formula "*ana DN qibī-ma umma PN-ma*" (*To DN, thus says PN*)[440]. In case the name is missing, it is almost impossible to have a letter without any kind of pronouns and pronominal suffixes that would reveal the gender of the author.

There is only one such letter belonging to a woman, a letter addressed by Inannakam to the goddess Nintinugga, although this epistolary work seems to be of an earlier date, perhaps the late third millennium during the Neo-sumerian period:[441]

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the verb is either in the second person singular (the suffix - *ī* being an indicative the feminine) or third person plural (the variation of sufixes: - *ū* for masculine and *–ā* for feminine). The situation becomes clear when pronouns and pronominal suffixes that are gender specific appear. See Richard Caplice, *Introduction to Akkadian*, Fourth Edition, Editrice Pontificio Intituto Biblico, Rome, 2002 p.21, 25, 47

[437] Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel*, E.J. Brill, 1996, p.130, n.64 and Alan Lenzi , *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns*, p. 54

[438] William W. Hallo, *The World's Oldest Literature Studies in Sumerian Belles-Lettres*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2010, pg. 289-290

[439] The so called incantation prayers (šuillas, the namburbi-prayers and the dingirshadibba-prayers) were usually uttered by specialists such as incantation priests or exorcist on behalf of the worshipper so they present a general character, certain patterns that would fit or adapt to different kinds of situations. This type of prayers and their caracteristics were largely discussed by Alan Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns*, pp. 24-43

[440] Alan Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns,* pp. 54-55

[441] See William W. Hallo, *The World's Oldest Literature Studies in Sumerian Belles-Lettres*, pg.284, Inannakam to Nintinugga Texts: PBS 1/2:94; 134; UET 6:173 i-l'-4'; ib. 174e; ib. 180.

1-11. Say to Nintinuga, the reliable stewardess of the E-kur, the physician of the Land; repeat to the lady, whose incantation heals the multitude of people, whose spells make the people recover, to {my}{(1 ms. has instead:) the} relenting lady, who loves to revive the people and loves supplications, the merciful and compassionate one who listens to prayers. You are the caretaker of the living and the dead; you are the great healer of all the crippled ones. This is what Inanaka, the daughter of Enlil-a-mah, your maidservant says:

12-18. I have fallen ill {for a second time}{(1 ms. has instead:) twice (?)}, but I do not yet know the divine oracle concerning {my being in agonies}{(1 ms. has instead:) these agonies}. {(1 ms. adds:) …..} My lady, a house has been built for me, but I have to sit there with longing eyes. My valued acquaintances {keep}{(1 ms. has instead:) stay} away from me. I have no one who would take care of me. Since this is full, too full for me, I am distressed.

19-25. If it pleases my lady, {and the asag demon which is in my body leaves my body, and thus}{(some mss. have instead:) may the asag demon which is in my body leave my body, so that} {it (the asag demon) allows me}{(1 ms. has instead:) I can} step again on the {path}{(1 ms. has instead:) ground} of life with my feet. {I will then be your maidservant, the courtyard sweeper of your temple, and will serve you. Furthermore after I have recovered, I will name you, my lady, as "the healer of the crippled"} {(some mss. have instead:) I will then be her maidservant, the courtyard sweeper of her temple, and will serve her. Furthermore after I have recovered, I will name her, my lady, as "the healer of the crippled"}.[442]

The first part of the letter is a praise addressed to the goddess followed afterwards, in lines 12-18, by the description of the affliction that disturbs Inannaka. Her suffering appears to have both physical and social repercussions and she considers that responsible for her disease is the malevolence of the *asag* demon so she decided to ask for the help of the goddesses. As a way of expressing her gratitude for the help the deity is going to give her, the woman promises to publicly praise the goddess and to become her maidservant, to serve her and sweep her temple. The OB letter-prayers appear to have been placed before of the god in a shrine on behalf of

[442] http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi- in/etcsl.cgi?text=t.3.3.10&display=Crit&charenc=gcirc&lineid=t3310.p1#t3310.p1

someone and seem to have served a function similar with that of the votive statues from the previous millennium.[443] If we generalize the information offered by AbB 6, no.135, we may believe that the content of the letter was read to the deity before being deposited. It appears that the reader was not to be identified with the petitioner.[444] The letter was perhaps read by a temple official and then, the tablet would become a physical reminder before the deity of the supplicant's concerns and petitions.

Considering all the above, we may assume that Inannaka was a wealthy women. William Hallo, in his study of the letter-prayers genre, places this epistolary fragment under the label of royal correspondence but we have no information whether the woman was a member of the royalty, an official or an employee of the palace. Anyway, this is the sole letter-prayer discovered until now that belonged to a woman. As we may clearly observe she is acting in her own interest, in order to regain her health and the promises she makes to the goddess are the kind that she can keep. I am not certain what "maidservant" of the deity would imply. Is she considering entering the service of the temple as a cultic official of the goddess Nintinugga or would she perform some sort of community service in order to repay the kindness of the deity? We see that Inannaka sends a letter to a female deity, and considering the problem she was confronted with, a healing deity.[445] Considering all the above, we may state without restrain, that in this particular situation the women acted on her own accord, following her own interest and using the means she had at her disposal. She did not promise to bring offerings that she could not afford or that would cause her to be in debt with somebody else, be it family or a third party. She can only reward the favor of the gods with her own work so she is willingly offering her services to the deity along with her gratitude transformed in public ovations.

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[443] Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel*, p.130, n.64

[444] Alan Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns*, p.55

[445] http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/amgg/listofdeities/baba/, see also Mark E. Cohen, "The Name Nintinugga with a Note on the Possible Identification of Tell Abu Salābīkh" in *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* Vol. 28, No. 2, Apr., 1976 pp. 82-92

There are a number of prayers that address the marital problems the women are confronted with. Although they are not numerous, they were identified and published in the same volume by Karel van der Toorn. The majority of those invocations follow a specific pattern: that of the angry husband.

"I call upon you, o Ištar, companion of the great gods.

In heaven, there you live, in your divine residence.

O Ištar, he is angry with me,

Do bring the wrathful one back to me!

Even if he is angry, let him come back to me.

Even if he is incensed, make him speak to me again!"[446]

We do not know why the man is upset and apparently left his home, but it is a source of real concern and unhappiness for the woman. Either if her pregnancy is delaying or they had a fight the woman fells helpless and appeals to the goddess for help. She is willingly accepting her husband's wrath only to see him coming back home. She is afraid that a prolonged absence would estrange the man from her and their marriage would be at risk. In this situation the woman takes action and appeals to the mercy of the gods in order to regain her husband and reestablish the order in her family life.

When a woman is not successful in getting pregnant she becomes anxious, fearing her fate and she might interpret this as a punishment from the gods from a sin that she has committed but was not aware of it. There is a type of prayers from Mesopotamia that address this particular problem:

I have strewn for you a mixture of [pure] aromatic herbs

And [fra]grant incense.

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[446] Karel Van der Toorn, *From her Cradle to her Grave*, p.75

Eat what is good. Drink what is [sweet]!

May your heart come down, your mind [relax]

I am So- and So, descendant of So-and So.

Something dreadful had befallen me…

You are the judge, procure me justice!

You bring order, inform me of a ruling!

May my God who is enraged with me turn back to me.

May my transgression be forgiven and my guilt remitted.

May the disease be snatched out of my body

And the sluggishness be expelled from my blood!

May the worries disappear from my heart,

Give me a name and descendant!

May my womb be fruitfull…[447]

The absence of children or the delay of pregnancy are threatening events for the woman's future because she might risk being repudiated by her husband, or this one could bring a second wife. This one might menace her position, if not legally, at least in the eyes of the man she is married with because he would certainly favor the mother of his children. As we may see from this prayer, the woman treats the gods with respect. She first presents them her offerings, apparently standard ones: incense, food and drinks. After treating the deities adequately, she exposes her case, her misfortune, and pleads to the gods to release her from her sins and give her the chance of becoming a mother. In certain occasions, the prayer is accompanied by a vow in order to strengthen its message and to make it more appealing to the gods.

[447] *Ibidem*, p.79-80

Vows are another religious practice common in Mesopotamia and they can be found in a large variety of texts, temple records, formal prayers, omen literature and building inscriptions. There is not a specific word for vow in this area. Both the noun *ikribū* and the verb *karābu* belong to the semantic field of prayer and can be used also, in certain situation, with the meaning of vow.[448] Promises to the gods were made from various reasons and they were usually accompanied by prayers. The fulfilment of a vow was compulsory. If they were not respected or even delayed, the consequences for the worshipper or even for those close to him could be dreadful. The anger of the gods could bring disease and misfortune and problems with the supernatural forces.

Some letters from Kaniš reveal this kind of situation, TC 3, 35, KTS 1, 24 and KTS 1, 25. In a fist letter Lamassī writes to her husband Pušu-ken and she insist that he pays back the *ikribū*-debt that he contacted through vow from the goddess Tašmētum. Considering that he delayed the reimbursement, his debt augmented and it appears that the goddess was displeased so his wife asks him either to bring the loan himself or to send the amount with the next convoy.[449]

Two other women, Tariš-matum and Belatum, perhaps relatives of Pušu-ken, write and inform him about being afflicted by disease and hunted by demons and ghosts, all these being a consequence of an unfulfilled vow. The god is displeased because the man did not send the promised silver. Furthermore they also speak about a statue of the god that caused the anger of the god. We may believe that the merchant promised to offer the god/goddess a statue or adornments in order for the deity to comply with his requests, but failed to accomplish his duties towards the divine being, causing the last one to bring misfortune upon the man's house.[450]

It appears that the situation perpetuates. The two women might have been hunted by terrifying dreams, and considering the situation they take action and go to see female dream

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[448] Tony W. Cartledge, Vows in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East, p.76

[449] C.Michel, *La correspondence des marchands de Kaniš au début du IIe millénaire avant J.C*, Les Éditions du CERF, Paris, 2001, p. 438

[450] *Ibidem*, p.450

interpreter. The answers they receive reveal that the deities were angry because they did not receive their promised offerings, and they claim them through different means. [451]

As we may see, albeit the vows are not made by the women themselves, they may become victims of the divine wrath in case the worshipper fails to keep the promise. They are pious, involved in the religious life, they know the moral rules and respect them, but it appears that they are not just passive followers of those norms, they ask the same thing from their fathers, brothers or husbands, because they do not tolerate the thought of being innocent victims. In a letter sent to Imdīlum by Tarām-kūbi and Šīmat-Aššur, the two women admonish their brother and husband for disregarding the god Aššur. They visited a female dream interpreter and diviner perhaps as a consequence of some unpleasant events and then, the two ladies transmit the message of the god to the merchant. He is asked to come and pay his respect to the god of the city and is being strongly criticized because he loves money more than life.[452] To love life would mean to pay much more attention to the cultic duties in order to keep the gods satisfied and have a long, healthy and lucky life.

After discussing this text I may infer that women, even though they appear to be passive agents in the religious life, must not be overlooked. Although they comply with the religious instructions in their everyday lives, they ask their male relatives to do the same. They act inside the very system that subordinates them and require their counterparts to do their duty, and comply with what is demanded of them in the same way they themselves do.

Women were also involved in spells and the accompanying rituals. Those spells are either prescriptions of an exorcist or healer, either an impulsive action which lays at the limit of legality such as love spells. A corpus of incantation in which women play a substantial role is the **ŠÀ.ZI.GA**. An important point is that only men are said to be afflicted by **ŠÀ.ZI.GA**. The incantations are apparently recited by a woman, often addressing a man in the second person, to

[451] *Ibidem*, p.451

[452] *Ibidem*, p.470

enable him to make love.[453] Women are never addressed in this type of incantations and this helps us to distinguish love incantations, usually recited by men in order to attract a certain woman[454], from potency incantation. While discussing love incantations, Gwendolyn Leick was able to identify one that was clearly destined to be used by a woman:

With the saliva of a dog…[ ]

With a slap in the face, with rolling of eyes,

I hit you on the head, disturbed your understanding.

Give your understanding to me (lit. my understanding),

Give your advice to me (lit. my advice),

I hold you like Ištar held Dumuzi,

(And) Zeraš binds her drinker

I have bound you with my breathing (lit. breath-laden) mouth,

I have bound you with my urinating (lit. urine-yielding) genitals,

With my salivating (lit. spittle-laden) mouth,

With my urinating genitals.

The (female) rival shall not go near you,

The dog is lying down,

The boar is lying down.

You, lie down again and again on my thighs!

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[453] Robert D. Biggs, *ŠÀ.ZI.GA Ancient Mesopotamian Potency Incantations*, J.J. Augustin Publisher. Locust Valley, New York, 1967, p. 2

[454] Gwendolyn Leick, *Sex And Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature*, Routledge, 2003, Chapter 17, Love Magic and Potency Incantations, p. 193-210 and particularly p.204

Whatever is on the green fish, is to be added to the oil, it will

be rubbed on.

Look at me and rejoice like a (bow)-string!

May your heart grow light as (inspired by) Zeraš

Keep shining upon me like the Šamaš!

Renew yourself to me like Sîn!

[. .] …and may your love renew itself!

[.....] anointing with oil.[455]

This incantation finds its inspiration in the love lyrics that revolve around the story of Inanna/Ištar and Dummuzi/Tammuz. The woman uttering it desires that the one whom she loves to respond her in the same way the god does with the goddess and to have on him the same effect the beer deity Zeraš has on the drunkard.[456]The woman appeals to her mouth and vulva in order to capture his attention and their fluids appear to have the magical power to bind them together. As every misfortune must have a cause, a girl that is not able to enchant the man she loves finds a scapegoat for her bad luck in the person of a female rival that should be kept at distance or even repressed in order for her to attain the desired happiness. After introducing the love rival, the magical means that would bring back the lover are introduced. In order for the man to return she has to anoint him or herself with oil and green fish, and the incantation alludes to some animals whose sexual behavior was appealing to the ancient Mesopotamian, animals that appear also in other incantation regarding love and potency.[457] Using this kind of enchantment, the

[455] *Ibidem*, p. 198-199. This text was also published, translated and discussed by Wilcke „Familiengründung im Alten Babylonien" in *Geschlechtsreife und Legitimation zur Zeugung* ed.by Müller, E.W, Freiburg, Munich, 1985, p.199 and JoAnn Scurlock 'Was there a 'Love-Hungry' Entu Priestess named Etirtum?' *in Archiv für Orientforschung* 36/7 (pp.107–112), 1989–90, p.108

[456] Gwendolyn Leick, *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature*, p. 199

[457] *Ibidem*

woman acts by her own free will, in order to obtain something she desires. She uses incantations and spells as a tool for bringing back her lover in order to secure her future and her own happiness.

Women appear to be active in the so called potency rituals. They were active in both reciting incantations and in performing the ritual prescribed probably by a specialist. Robert D. Biggs in **ŠÀ.ZI.GA** published a number of 35 incantations out of which almost half are clearly recited by women[458]. The others are either utter by a specialist, presenting a more formal style, or by the man himself considering that all the actions are presented in first person singular. An incantation recited by a woman can be easily identified because it presents certain particularities. The invocation is direct and highly animated. The woman's involvement is vivid; she tries to stir up the interest of her partner, because in the case of **ŠÀ.ZI.GA** we deal mostly with married woman, whose husband may experience some difficulties in their intimate life so she is mostly interested in helping the man to overcome his affliction. Her "pro-active" attitude is well reflected in the incantations and rituals she must accomplish:

Perhaps the most complex and revealing incantation and ritual published by Biggs is no.14:

Incantation: Let the wind blow! Let the mountains quake!

Let the clouds gather! Let the moisture fall!

Let the ass swell up! Let him mount the jenny!

Let the buck get an erection! Let him again and again mount the young she-goat!

At the head of my bed is tied (var. I have indeed tied) a buck!

At the foot of my bed is tied (var. I have indeed tied) a ram!

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[458] The incantations no. 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 19, 20, 22, 24, and 26 are most probably recited by a woman. No. 17-18 are badly broken so I could not figure out with certainty whether the one who utters them is a man or a woman. No. 27 is a prescription for diagnosing a potency problem caused by witchcraft. The other text, no.28-35, are not well preserved or are really succinct, and it is very difficult to say who was the person that pronounced them.

The one at the head of my bed, get an erection, make love to me:

The one at the foot of my bed, get an erection, make love to me!

My vagina is the vagina of a bitch! His penis is the penis of a dog!

As the vagina of a bitch holds fast the penis of a dog, (so may

My vagina hold fast his penis)!

The vocabulary of those incantations is appealing, arousing. Firstly, the woman using an imagery invoking natural elements creates an inviting atmosphere recalling the tension and moistness that precedes intercourse. Then using the metaphor of animals that were famous for their sexual behavior, she tries to stimulated the man, first mentally, seducing him with this erotic imagery and then, comparing herself with such a beast she invites him to make love. Of course, the incantation is accompanied by specific ritual actions whose purpose is to physically arouse the man in order to be able to perform. While uttering the appealing incantation, the women should put pulverized iron in oil and recite a spell upon it seven times. The metal was probably chosen because of its hardness[459]. But the things do not end here and the ritual becomes more and more suggestive. The woman must anoint the man's penis and her own genitalia with this oil, an extremely erotic gesture meant to inflame the two partners and lead them to intercourse. If this text provokes through his bestial imagery, other incantations are much more direct: *Get excited ! Get excited ! Get an erection ! Get an erection(…) Make love to me! Make love to me! Because I am young*![460] The **ŠÀ.ZI.GA** incantation texts are considered magico-medical ones because the man's affliction is sometimes considered to have supernatural causes. As religion was present in their everyday life, the ancient Mesopotamians appear to have not perceived those problems as simple couple matters, and believed that their afflictions might have been caused by transgression or witchcraft. This corpus presents the case of men being touched by the evil-deeds of a witch" *(if) the pig does not approach the figurines], (it means) that man*

[459] Gwendolyn Leick, *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature*, p.207

[460] Biggs*, ŠÀ.ZI.GA*, No.6, 8,9, 12 display such direct invitations

has been affected by sorcery."[461] One of the incantations, no.4, is uttered by the man himself against his female witch, presumably a woman that wanted revenge.

Women were also allowed to *attend public festivals*. MAL 55, although is a law concerning rape, is also relevant for the women participation in religious celebration. The girl cannot be accused that she acted improper if she is attacked during this kind of events because those were public festivities in honor of the gods, and the woman had the right, and why not, the moral obligation of being there.

Women seem to have a particular role in the *cult of Dumuzi-Tammuz*. The prevalent role of women in ritual mourning is something found in many ancient cultures and is attested in the Bible, in Ezekiel 8:7-16 which mentions the weeping for Tammuz.[462] The women seem to be reiterating the lamentations with wailing accompanied by the search of the god that involved in the myth, his wife Inanna, his sister and mother. T.Jacobson interprets the affinity of women for this festival as follows:

> The cult was primarily, perhaps exclusively, a women's cult. We can see this from the whole structure of its ritual and mythology. The great events celebrated are the great events from a woman's life: the weeding, which, (…) must be see through the eyes of the bride; and death which is the dead of a husband, son or brother. And, as the participation of the community of worshippers in the weeding was expressed through the figure of the bride, so it finds expression in the laments through the figure of the mother, sister or widow.[463]

This festival appears to have been celebrated officially only during the Old Babylonian period, in the kingdom of Mari and information about its celebrations is brought by M.E Cohen and R. Kutscher. During the fourth month *abum*, that in the Assyrian calendar was associated

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[461] *Ibidem,* No.27

[462] Karel van der Toorn, *From her Craddle to her Grave*, p117; Mark Lamarre, *Inanna - Dumuzi Mythos - A Comparative Study*, https://www.academia.edu/1031863/Inanna_-_Dumuzi_Mythos_-_A_Comparative_Study p.11,

[463] Thorkild Jacobsen, "Toward the Image of Tammuz" in *History of Religions* Vol. 1, No. 2 , Winter, 1962 (pp. 189-213), p.204

with Dumuzi, a text from Mari mentions the caring (washing with oil) of the statues of Inanna and Dumuzi. Another text dating from the same month, mentions the payment of a large amount of grain to female mourners[464] who were probably expected to perform a *kispum* ceremony during the festival.[465] Raphael Kutscher proposes that wailing rites were performed during this month with the statues of Dumuzi/ Tammuz and Inanna/ Ištar.[466] He also stresses that besides a small cella in Assur, no temples of Dumuzi are found after the old Babylonian period, and offerings and gifts to the god are no longer attested in textual evidence. Although the god no longer played a role in the official cult, this does not mean that he completely disappeared from the cultic life. He remained popular among women and he was worshipped and mourned outside the official sphere of the temple becoming a part of the so called popular religion.[467]

Prayers, incantations, vows, participation to festivals are just a few of the cultic practices women were involved in during the second millennium B.C. Nonetheless, those are the religious fields were women could manifest their agency directly, following their own will. Without doubting their genuine devotion, we may underline the fact that women usually expected something in change for their devotion, something that would make their lives better: They prayed for their health and pregnancy in order to strengthen their status inside the family and please the husband. Women used magic and incantation, practiced rituals and prepared potions that were recommended by specialists in order to get the beloved one or to cure her husband's sexual dysfunctions. If those were religious actions that could be practiced by both men and women, it appears that the festival of the lamentation of Dumuzi/Tammuz was a

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[464] Mark E. Cohen, *The Cultic Calendars of the Ancient Near East*, CDL Press Bethesda, Maryland 1993, p.289

[465] Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection "Dying and Rising Gods" in the Ancient Near East*, Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm 2001, p.200

[466] R. Kutscher, "The Cult of Dumuzi/Tammuz," in J. Klein ed., *Bar-Ilan Studies in Assyriologie Dedicated to Pinhas Artzi* , Ramat Gan, 1990, (pp. 29-44), p. 40

[467]Idibem, pp. 42-44

celebration specific to women as pointed out by Jacobsen who suggest that no fatherly or brotherly figure is implied.[468]

The major events in a woman's life, marriage, birth and death, bring along particular changes but, in those situations, the woman is not asked to choose, she has to comply with the new social and religious norms that are imposed to her, and has to comply with their requirements.

Ancient Mesopotamian laws and other juridical documents present marriage as a purely civil matter. This was an agreement between the families of the groom and bride, and the consent of the girl was not required in order to complete marriage. The wedding party consisted in a series of public feasts that seem to have lasted for six or seven days but there is no mention of a religious ceremony inside the temple or of a blessing ritual performed by a cultic official. The two fiancés do not make vows to each other, but it appears that they did use some verba solemnia. A formula of words was spoken by the husband or the wife in the second person asserting that the other was his/her spouse: *You are my wife/ you are my husband*. Unfortunately, there is no mention in a legal text of such a phrase in the affirmative stance; they are only mentioned in relation with divorce, but S. Greengus considers that it should be also a marriage formula considering that they do appear in literary works, although they should be regarded with reserve.[469] R. Westbrooks disagrees with this statement considering that there is no sufficient data to sustain such an argument.[470]

MAL 42, 43 states that if a man pours oil on the head of a woman during a holiday and also brings dishes for a banquet, he does not receive those goods back, but in case something happens to the son he designated for this girl, another one of his sons could marry her. I am not certain whether in this situation, pouring oil on someone's head should be interpreted as a ritual

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[468] Thorkild Jacobsen, "Toward the Image of Tammuz", p.204

[469] Samuel Greengus, "The Old Babylonian Marriage Contracts" in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* Vol. 89, No. 3 Jul. - Sep., 1969 (pp. 505-532), pp. 514-523 and Raymond Westrbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, 1988, pp. 48-50

[470] Raymond Westrbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, p.50

act, or just as a social act; the man chooses a wife for his son and marks her as *kallatum* and future daughter in law. The data approaching the problem of marriage do not refer to this event as a major religious experience. Karel van der Toorn does not see the situation in the same way and considers that it "*had a place in the religious world-view that the woman had absorbed from her youth."*[471] His main arguments for supporting his theory are the stories and love songs revolving around Inanna and Dummuzi and a certain fragment form the Atra-ḫasis myth:

299. When […] the bed is laid

300. Let the wife and her husband lie together.

……

302. They heed Ištar in the house of the father in law,

303. Let there be rejoicing for nine days,

304. Let them call Ištar Išḫara.[472]

If we regard the things through the mirror of this text, we may certainly agree with the fact that marriage is an institution established by the gods, and getting married was one of the duties a human being should be accomplishing in order to maintain the order instituted by the divine beings. Nonetheless, we have no data concerning any particular rituals performed during the wedding ceremony. The story of the marriage of Enlil and Sud is revealing from this point of view because it relates, step by step, the stages of marriage. After finding out that the girl he mistook for a prostitute was a member of the royal family from Ereš, the god is ready to repair his mistake and sends his messenger, Nuska, to the city, along with certain gifts, *qištum*, in order to present a marriage proposal to the girl's family, a custom encountered also in the case of other royal families.[473]When he reaches the city of Ereš, the messenger presents the proposal of his

[471] Karel van der Toorn, *From the Cradle to her Grave*, p.60

[472]W.G Lambert, A.R. Millard*, Atra-ḫasis. The Babylonian story of the Flood*, p.65

[473] J.M Durand, *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari*, Tome III, LAPO, 2000, pp. 169-184

master to the mother of the girl, a particular situation considering that this is a situation usually discussed with the father.

When Enlil's messengers along with his sister Aruru return to the city to take the bride, they bring along extensive wedding gifts and we are to suppose that a feat with a communal table took place in the house of the father-in-law, although this one is not presented in this myth. Van der Toorn considers that by sharing the same food and drink, the two families were knot together.[474]Before leaving her parent's home, the bride receives some useful advices from her mother and also, the older woman transmits her, her best wishes:

"May you be Enlil's favorite wife, may he treat you well.

May he embrace you, the most beautiful of all, may he tell you: "Beloved, open wide!"

Never forget charms and pleasure, make them last a long time.

You two make love on the hill, have children afterwards.

Entering the House and living there, may abundance precede you, may joy follow you![475]

Although usually the consumation of the marriage takes place in the house of the father of the bride as stated in Atra-ḫasis, we may observe that in the case of royalty this rule might have undertook some changes. After the first night spent together, Enlil decides the fate of his wife and invest her with her new attributes acquired through marriage. She becomes the lady of her new household, "*a foreign woman shall be the mistress of the house*" and from her new status she is going to be supervising a variety of domains both public and private. Enlil also gives her the name of Nintu and epithets such as *Lady who gives birth* and *Lady of the open legs* are going to be used for her, revealing that, although she might have been invested with certain authority, her primary attribute was motherhood.

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[474] Karel vand der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylon, Syria and Israel*,p. 43

[475] Miguel Civil, Enlil and Ninlil: the Marriage of Sud in JAOS, vol.103, nr.1, Jan-Mar.1983, p.60; see also http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section1/tr122.htm,

As we have seen, marriage ceremonies are used to mark the transfer of authority upon the woman from her father to her new husband, and to invest her with her new responsibilities. Van der Toorn, considers the veiling of the bride an important ritual during the marriage ceremony although this customs appears clearly stated as a legal act only in the northern regions of Mesopotamia: Assyria, Mari. This gesture is also a symbol, a visible one, of the transfer of authority between the two male representatives of the girl. The woman belongs now to her husband, she should humbly serve him and, from now on, the spouse is the sole responsible for the wellbeing of his wife. By veiling her, he accepted her and incorporated her in his family.[476]

In my opinion one of the most important consequences of marriage in the religious sphere, consists in the fact that the women should adopt the gods of her husband's household and pay respects to his ancestors. As we have seen from the letters sent by the Mariote princesses, this passage was a difficult one. Kirum for example constantly demanded Zimri-Lim to help her visit Mari in order to pray and sacrifice for the gods of their father.

Ancient Mesopotamian women did not have a personal god if they were not cultic officials. They were worshipping first the gods of her father's household, and then she is introduced to those of her husband's and his family. A passage from the Inanna-Dumuzi cycle is revealing for this particular situation:

"I want to bring you in the house of my god

I want to lie down with you before of my god,

You must sit with me in my god's shrine."[477]

In view of this text, the woman is introduced to the family god by her husband. By lying down with her in front of the gods, he accepts her in front of the deity and presents her as his wife, the woman who will praise the gods in the household shrine along with him. We do not know what were the cultic actions undertook by a wife inside her new home. She may have

[476] Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylon, Syria and Israel*,p. 45

[477] Karel van der Toorn, *From her Cradle to her Grave*, p.67

prayed to those gods and took care of their meal in the same way she cared for the food and drink required by the human members of the family, alive or deceased. Besides the letters of the women cultic officials, there is no mention from the second millennium of a woman's personal god. The family god was passed along the male members of the family as can be observed from seals belonging to different persons of the same household. Women referred them in their letters as the gods of my father or husband and they do not appropriate those deities by calling them "my god/gods"[478]

Another important moment, both social and religious, in a woman's life was birth, either if we talk about her own birth or the moment she is giving birth. From the moment she was born, the destiny of the girl was fixed. She came in this world as a woman by the will of the gods so she must accept her fate and behave in the way she was expected to. Von Soden states that during the birth and immediately after the birth of a baby, a large variety of magical and religious rituals took place even though we do not know very much about them.[479]

From the moment of her birth the girl became the center of certain rituals, but those practices had much more meaning for the mother and midwife. The baby girl receives the attributes of her gender, a distaff, spindle and a wooden hair clasp. Those objects are symbols of her femininity and some researches[480] spoke about the child's consecration to her future gender specific roles.

There is a wider variety of rituals revolving around the birthing woman in distress. Rituals surrounding birth are combinations of actions and words that focus on the moment of delivery and can include elements such as symbolic objects, necessary performed actions by

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[478] Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylon, Syria and Israel*,pp.71-76

[479] W. von Soden, " Die Hebamme in Babylonien und Assyrien", in AfO 18, 1957-1958, p.121 apud Karel van der Toorn, *From her Cradle to her Grave*, p.19.

[480][480] J. van Dijk, "Une variante du thème de « l'Esclave de la Lune »" in *Orientalia Nova Series*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 1972

(pp. 339-348), pp.346-348

either the mother or a birth practitioner, and words to be recited or read.[481]In the case of ancient Mesopotamia, women, both mother and midwife, used incantations and prayers in order to enable a quick and easy delivery. Those cultic rituals took place during the birthing process. This moment was a crucial one in the life of a woman and a very dangerous one considering that women frequently died during this act or soon after. Those magic ritual texts are destined for the use of professionals assisting the birth, but they were written in a way that allowed them to be used also by the expectant mother, although there is no consistent evidence for such a presumption[482]. Scurlock points out that "*men seem as a rule, to have been banned from the birth room, perhaps on the grounds that their presence there would mean disaster*." She notes that birth was generally attended by a midwife or *qadištu*, but "*if there were complications, a male exorcist had to be called in*."[483]Anyways, the vast majority of the incantations for enabling childbirth were probably uttered by the midwife when she observed that the woman was experiencing a difficult time. The texts they used followed a generic pattern: they may contain a description of the problem, the appeal to a deity to help the mother and the child followed by the praise of the said god or goddess, and in the end, a magico-medical ritual prescription is presented and should be used to facilitate birth. Usually this ritual consisted in rubbing the women's belly and birthing channel with oil, sprinkle pure water, the water of wellbeing, or the use of some lubricants consisting in reeds, fat caw milk and dust.[484]

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[481] Lauren Dundes, "Introduction," in *The Manner Born: Birth Rites in Cross Cultural Perspective* ed. by Lauren Dundes; Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2003, p.3

[482] Claudia D. Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis. Evidence from the Ancient Near East, the Hebrew Bible,* and 1QH XI, 1-18, Walter de Gruyere, 2008, p.17

[483] JoAnn Scurlock, "*Baby-Snatching Demons*,"pp.142- 144

[484] See "Steering the Boat" in M.Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, p. 62; "The Baby is Stuck" in W. G. Lambert, "A Middle Assyrian Medical Text," in I*raq* 31.1 Spring 1969, pp.28-39; Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, 3rd ed.; Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 2005, p.715 and Meredith Burke Hammons, *Before Joan Of Arc: Gender Identity And Heroism In Ancient Mesopotamian Birth Rituals* , PhD Dissertation, May, 2008 Nashville, Tennessee, pp.100-101; The Cow of Sîn in Niek Veldhius., *A Cow of Sîn*, Groningen: Styx Publications, 1991 , 7-17 and Claudia D. Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis*, pp. 25-28; Meredith Burke Hammons, Before Joan Of Arc, pp.66-72

Despite the fact the majority of those incantations are composed for the use of birth specialists, there are a few prayers/incantations uttered in the first person, as a plea to the gods of the birthing woman for her life and the life of her baby. These kinds of supplications are far too personal for being spoken by another person and they reveal the fact that women turn towards the gods in their most difficult moments:

> *"I have become pregnant, I did not give birth after having completed (the term), I did not bear. Let one who has completed (the term) take (this) from me, let one who has borne, diminish (it) for me. Let me fare well and let me make fare well in the house where I live"*[485]

The delay of the birth is something that concerned the woman because she knows that it was abnormal. She is not feeling well, is afraid for her life and that of her child, and feels that her charge became too heavy for her to bear. Overwhelmed by the situation, she is asking for the help of those who have experienced the same condition and expresses her wish for a positive outcome. When the process becomes unbearable, and the woman has trouble giving birth, she appeals again to the mercy of the gods. There are incantations that combine the invocation of the midwife with that of the woman. The agonizing woman asks the god Marduk (but we may suppose that it could be any other god or goddess that is related, one way or another with birth) to help her and "*Pull out the sealed one, the creature of the gods*"[486] so that her distress comes to an end. Unfortunately, the outcome was not always a favorable one, and death was imminent in certain cases. A unique elegy uttered by a woman present the tragic death of the mother and her baby.

On the day I bore fruit, how happy was I,

Happy was I, happy my husband.

On the day on my labor pains, my face became overcast,

On the day I gave birth, my eyes became cloudy,

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[485] M.Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, p.129

[486] Karel van der Toorn, *From her Cradle to her Grave*, p.89 and M.Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* p.130

I prayed to Belet-ili with my hands opened:

"You are the mother of those who give birth, save my life!"

When Belet-ili heard this, she veiled her face:

"You[…] why do you keep praying to me?"

[my husband who lov]ed me, uttered a cry:

"[…] my charming wife!

……

When death crept stealthily into my bedroom,

It brought me out from my house,

It separated me from my husband,

It set my feet on the ground from which I shall not return.[487]

This text demonstrates that the events don't have always a happy ending. The gods can be merciless and turn their face from the distressed woman and the end result is the death of the both mother, and presumably her child. The failure of the incantations and the inability of the midwife to deal with the complications let to this fateful event. Anyway, burial statistics in Ancient Near East reveals a high rate of premature death among children and women[488]. If they did not die during birth, they could be afflicted with post-partum diseases and infections that were sometimes lethal. A large variety of incantations concerning baby protection are proof for the many dangers that threatened children during their infancy.

Death is the last major event the woman is confronted with. Despite the fact that death and the view of the afterlife were considered challenging subjects for researchers, and a few

[487] Karel van der Toorn, *From her Cradle to her Grave*, p.91; M.Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* p.140

[488] Elisabeth Ann R. Willet, "Infant Mortality and Family Religion in Biblical Period" in DavarLogos 1.1, 2002 (pp.27-42) p.42

volumes and articles were devoted to this subject, little is known[489] and discussed about the involvement of women in this matter. About the death of a woman very little is known from the Ancient Mesopotamian contexts, but what is really interesting is the way women perceive the death of those close to them and their agency in the cult of the ancestors.

Death is a traumatizing experience for every human being. The ancient Mesopotamians feared it and, trying to live a rightful life, they hoped to postpone as much as they could the fateful encounter. When death can no longer be prevented, it produces dramatic changes for the close ones, who express their feelings according to their sex, age and their ability to comprehend life and death as something that surpasses their knowledge, as a given from the gods. The tavern keeper reminded Gilgameš that when the gods created humankind, they kept immortality for themselves and dispatched death to the humans so his search for eternity is futile.[490] His refuse to accept death resembles the one of a female child confronted with the death of her brother. In the

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[489] T. Jacobsen, "Death in ancient Mesopotamia" and Jean Bottéro ," La mythologie de la mort en mésopotamie ancienne" in *Death in Mesopotamia: Papers Read at the XXVIe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* ed. by B. ALSTER Copenhagen, Akademisk Forlag, pp. 19-24; Miranda Bayliss, "The Cult of Dead Kin in Assyria and Babylonia" in *Iraq*, Vol. 35, No. 2, Autumn, 1973, pp. 115-125; Dina Katz, "Sumerian Funerary Rituals In Context"; Seth Richardson, "Death And Dismemberment In Mesopotamia: Discorporation Between The Body And Body Politic"; Susan Pollock," Death Of A Household" the last three articles were published in *Performing Death Social Analyses Of Funerary Traditions In The Ancient Near East And Mediterranean* ed. by NICOLA LANERI; T.Abusch, "Gilgamesh's Request and Siduri's Denial. Part II: An Analysis and Interpretation of an Old Babylonian Fragment about. Mourning and Celebration" in J*ANES* 22, 1993, pp.3-17; Andrew C. Cohen, *Death rituals, Ideology and the development Of Early Mesopotamian Kingship Toward a New Understanding of Iraq's Royal Cemetery of Ur*, Brill, 2005; JoAnn Scurlock, "Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamian Thought" in *CANE*, vol. III, pp.1883-1893; John William David McMaster, *Ancient Mesopotamian Concepts of Death and The Netherworld According to Ancient Literary Texts*, 1988, Theses and Dissertations, http://scholars.wlu.ca/etd

[490] Dina Katz, Death They Dispensed to Mankind. The Funerary World of Ancient Mesopotamia in Historiae, 2, 2005, (pp. 55-90), p. 56, https://www.academia.edu/235218/Death_They_Dispensed_to_Mankind._The_Funerary_World_of_Ancient_Mesopotamia A series of articles approaching the subject of death and afterlife of the same author are uploaded on https://independent.academia.edu/DinaKatz

lament over Lullil, his younger sister admonishes him for the grief the dead god causes to his mother and to herself. In another text, a little girl, unable to understand death, is decided to give up everything she has in order to bring back her deceased brother "*With my silver animal-man trinket, my cylinder seal of lapis lazuli, my treasures (…)I am going to redeem him*!"[491]

In ancient Mesopotamia, the cycle of death rituals included a period of mourning in which the grief was expressed through lamentations and particular attire. The same behavior seems to have been required from both men and women. Before descending the Netherworld, Inanna calls her vizier and instructs her of what she has to do when she dies:

> *32-36"On this day I will descend to the underworld. When I have arrived in the underworld, make a lament for me on the ruin mounds. Beat the drum for me in the sanctuary. Make the rounds of the houses of the gods for me."*
>
> *37-40"Lacerate your eyes for me, lacerate your nose for me. (1 ms. adds the line: Lacerate your ears for me, in public.) In private, lacerate your buttocks for me. Like a pauper, clothe yourself in a single garment and all alone set your foot in the E-kur, the house of Enlil."*[492]

Gilgameš, is presented in a disheveled state after the death of Enkidu and as we observe from the goddesses' instruction, such an appearance was required also from her second in command during her mourning. Perhaps such comportment was a sing of solidarity with the deceased.

In preparation for the burial, the body was washed, and the mouth was tied. Then it was anointed, perfumed, dressed up in clean clothes and offered a series of goods that would accompany he/she in the grave.[493] After the usual seven days of mourning the corpse has to be buried. If this period is prolonged, like in the Epic of Gilgameš, the corpse might start decompose and offers a grotesque view:

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[491] T. Jacobsen, *Death in ancient Mesopotamia*, p.22

[492] Inana's descent to the nether world, http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section1/tr141.htm

[493] JoAnn Scurlock, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamian Thought*, p.1884

"For six days and seven nights I wept over him

I did not give him up for burial

Until a worm dropt up to me from his nose"[494]

After the spirit of the deceased is thought to have entered the Netherworld, it starts to be commemorated periodically[495] in the so called cult of the ancestors, along with the other predecessors of the family.

During the mourning period, women are mentioned in relation with lamentation practices. Female professional mourners do appear in literary works but are also among the temple personnel despite the fact that we do not have consistent information about the practice of this type of office. R.Harris alludes to the fact that older women could become professional mourners. Perhaps those ones were practicing their art outside the temple but the data we have is not sufficient to support such an assertion.[496]

J. Cooper in *Genre, Gender, and The Sumerian Lamentation* points out that songs and laments share the paradigmatic couple, Inanna and Dumuzi, lovers in the first case but mourner and corpse in the latter. We should also note that the prevalent voice in the literature surrounding the divine couple is the one of the woman. The courtship and weding are seen through her eyes, and she is also shown mourning her husband, brother and son. Cooper also explains that the origin of the **balag** and ritual laments can be sought in women's funerary lament[497] and this statement allows me to believe that women wailers could be encountered both at the official level of religion but also in the lower strata of popular cults. If his statement is correct, lamentations bring an insight into the female imagery of the death, or at least in what was thought to be female imagery considering that those works were compiled and written down by

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[494] T.Abusch, *Gilgamesh's Request and Siduri's Denial. Part II*, p. 7. See also p.10 for an analysis of the text.

[495] Andrew C. Cohen, *Death rituals*, 2005, p.15

[496] R.Harris, *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia*, p.100

[497] Jerrold S. Cooper," Genre, Gender, and The Sumerian Lamentation" in JCS 58 , 2006 (39-47), p. 44

male professional, whom might have included their own perspective. Even so, they may have retained their feminine touch.

The role of female mourners, professional or occasional (when a fateful even took place inside their family) is not clearly revealed by the texts. As we saw from Inanna's instruction, the woman should not contain her pain the grief should be seen by everyone: she was expected to lacerate herself, wear shabby attire, and express herself loudly through cries and utter lamentation.

It is difficult to depict the role of women during the funerary rituals. The situation is equally problematic when it comes to the role women had in the so called cult of the ancestors because the one in charge of this cult was a son, usually the older one, who inherited the gods of the household and the responsibility for taking care of the spirits of the ancestors. A text concerning the so called "strange ghost" gives an extensive list of all the persons that are allowed to perform inside the family cult:" *Whether (you be) one who has no brother or sister, or one who has no family or relatives, or one who has no son or daughter, or one who has no heir to make libations of water.*"[498]

The situations when women were officials of the household shrine are very few. There are two legal documents from Emar that raise a daughter to the title of son and she is made responsible for the household gods and the cult of the ancestors.

> *Text 1.* ***Unara****, my daughter, I have established as female and male. May she call upon (invoke) my gods and my dead.*
>
> *Text 2.* ***Al-ḫati****, my daughter, I have established as female and male. May she call upon (invoke) my gods and my dead*.[499]

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[498] Miranda Bayliss, *The Cult of Dead Kin in Assyria and Babylonia*, pp.118-119

[499] J. Huehnergard, Five tablets from the vicinity of Emar. Revue d'Assyriologie, 77, 1983 (11-43) apud Renata MacDougal, Remembrance and the Dead in Second Millennium BC Mesopotamia, Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Leicester, 2014, p. 120-121, https://lra.le.ac.uk/handle/2381/29251

Through this written document, the father invests his daughter with the authority to act as an official of the household shrine by caring for the family deities. In one of the Nuzi texts, the father invests his three daughters with the status of sons and gives them his entire property and his gods. In the second one, the daughter receives his entire property and is appointed a son. The gods are not mentioned in this case. In both texts the father had brothers.[500] Perhaps the actions of those men are justified by the fact that they didn't have any male descendant, so they authorized their daughters to care for them after death because the wellbeing of the spirits is tightly related to the offering he is receiving from the living descendants.

The fact that women didn't usually perform in the cult of the ancestors transpires from the letters the women from Assur sent to their male relatives from the *karûm* of Kaneš. The women are concerned by the good name of the family and the respect their predecessor should receive, so they pressure their male relatives to come and pay their debts in order to clear the name of their ancestors. When the forefathers are neglected, they become furious, malevolent and they start to haunt their descendants and, as the women were those in charge with the household management in Assur, they became their victims. Considering that they write to their, fathers, husbands and brothers residing in Kaneš insisting for them to come home and resolve the problem by appeasing the gods, I am inclined to believe that they were not allowed to perform all the ritual and offering implied by the ancestor's cult, or in certain cases, they did not possess the material means to do so. In the last case, they were asking for goods or money to be sent in order to accomplish what was required. I will cite here fragments from two letters, revealing for the matter at hand, using the translation offered by Cecil Michel:

> *Ici, Bēlātum est malade à cause de l'argent des offrandes-ikribū ! Nous sommes maltraitées par les démons et par les esprits des morts ! Tu (es) notre père, tu (es) notre maître. À cause de la statuette divine, le dieu met à mal la maison de notre père ! Je t'en prie, si tu (es) notre père, démène-toi du mieux que tu peux et fais-toi un nom afin que les serviteurs soient traités ainsi par rapport aux offrandes-ikribū, je t'en prie, aucun des serviteurs ne doit prendre de son propre chef de l'argent, ne fût-ce qu'un sicle ! (...) Lorsque tu auras vendu les étoffes,*

[500] Grosz Katarzyna, Daughters Adopted as Sons at Mari , in LFPOA, ed.by J.M Durand, p. 83

scelle l'argent, envoie-le-moi, et sauve notre vie par la même occasion. Tu (es) notre père, nous n'avons personne d'autre que toi ![501]

As we can see the disease that afflicted the women appears to have a supernatural cause. The gods are angry because the man did not accomplish his promise and the female inhabitants of the household are suffering the consequences because they are the ones who remained in Assur to live under the same roof with the ghost of the ancestors. It appears that those spirits were solidary with the household god and also with the deity of the city considering that an offence against those divine beings was punished with ancestors and demons haunting the dreams of the women until they got sick. The ladies are scared and try to find out the cause of their discontentment by appealing to the services of diviners and dream interpreters. They admonish and try to persuade their male relative to do their duty so that the order could be reestablished and their lives spared.

As we have seen, in certain situations the actions and devotion of women are not powerful enough to appease the angry gods. An old Mesopotamian proverb appears to support this view. It says that a woman performed for the gods the rituals of the king but the god Enlil despised them, but we do not know the reasons for this attitude. Anyways, it is clear that the rituals performed by women in the official area of religion did not hold the same prestige as those performed by their male counterparts.

To conclude this chapter, I would say that religion was omnipresent in a woman's everyday life. As I stated before, although they do comply with the religious instructions in their daily activities, they should not be regarded as mere passive agents. They act inside the very system that subordinates them in order to accomplish their goals and they truly believe that a pious life could help them acquire a long and happy life. Furthermore, they require from their male counterparts to do their duty, and comply with what the gods and the society ask of them in order to maintain the balance and to bring prosperity for their families.

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[501] Cecile Michel, "Femmes et ancêtres. Le cas des femmes d'Assur" in *Topoi, Supplément 10, Femmes, cultures et sociétés dans les civilisations méditerranéennes et proche-orientales de l'Antiquité* ed by. Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, Saba Farès, Brigitte Lion et Cécile MichelRA 59, 165, 8-24, P.33

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The main research topic of this dissertation was to explore and analyze women's religious agency in Mesopotamian religion and how it influenced the status of women inside the society they lived in. Using a large variety of sources such as letters, laws, ritual and cultic texts, prophetic texts, magic and medical texts, incantations, prayers and hymns, I firstl tried to depict religious actions or gestures that women were able to perform. After identifying their actions, be them specific or common with those of men, be them individually or supervised, consciously enacted or under possession, I approached them using an interdisciplinary approach, combining specific concepts from the field of religious studies with those coming from women and gender studies areas, such as patriarchy and kyriarchy, all of them passing through the filter of agency.

All those concepts were amply discussed and settled in the context of Ancient Near East in the 1st chapter of the present study. After reviewing the main theories concerning religion and trying to establish their utility for the study of ancient Mesopotamia, I proceeded to an analysis of this difficult concept in the case of Mesopotamia, surveying the secondary sources concerning this matter. The available data reveal that kingship, military victory, prosperity, longevity were considered a gift for the proper behavior of the ruler or any other human being. In this case we may think that anything in Mesopotamian society was, in one way or another, related to religion. Even though it is not usual for us to consider religion an aspect deeply rooted in our daily life, it was not the same for the ancient Mesopotamians who knew no distinction between sacred and secular. For them, seems to be no difference between religious belief and common-sense, a common-sense supervised somehow by the superhuman, brilliant and awe-inspiring entities that shaped the mental environment of the Ancient Near Eastern inhabitants.

Agency is one of the two main concepts of my thesis and I will analyze it in relation with the concepts of religion and gender. On a general level agency is understood as the basic human capacity to act on conscious level, the make choices and to act according to certain purposes. In this large framework of agency I found that instrumental and compliant agency were offering tool for the analysis of female presence in religious practices because there are situation when women acted purposely in order to obtain certain benefices, be them material or

spiritual. The *qammatum* from Mari visited various officials and an *ugbabtum* in order to transmit her message to the king, but she received also some gifts in exchange for her prophecy. A Mariote lady uses the pretext of a mantic dream in order to obtain the return of a female slave. Sometimes, the religious agency of royal women may have a double meaning: we may not deny the genuine concern for the king to whom they are related, but considering that their status, power and prestige was tightly linked by the fate of the ruler, they acted also in order to maintain their privileges and to obtain personal benefices. I find that women made "use" of the so called compliant agency when they choose to abide by religious instructions in their everyday lives such as the precepts regarding purity and impurity that were clearly disadvantageous.

I analyzed women's religious agency using tools concepts as gender, patriarchy and kyriarchy, elements that place this study in the third wave of feminist research. I have chosen to conceive gender not only in the light of the dualistic patriarchal model but I also used Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza kyriarchal model because when studying women's lives in ancient Mesopotamia, their agency and relations with the society they live in, one should also be aware of social class, age or ethnicity, considering that all the above, at least in Ancient Near Eastern context, are factors that clearly influence someone's status of subordination. Codex Hammurabi differentiate between three different social classes that are clearly not equal: the *awilum* is above the *muškenum* whom, at his turn, is above the *wardum* (slave). Women from the upper strata of society appear to have enjoyed more rights and their agency is more visible than that of a lower strata man. She is subordinated to those of the same social standing, but she may very well surpass the others. Older women or men whose social function is diminished or foreigners, especially those from hostile regions, established in a certain area, may receive a different treatment and be considered inferiors without having anything to do with gender subordination. On the other hand we may find older women from the ruling classes whose authority took preeminence even above that of high ranking officials being overruled only by king.

In the second chapter I performed a survey of the social status of women, their juridical personality, their rights and obligations as they were revealed in the second millennium sources: law codes, letters, contracts. I observed a continuous deterioration of the status of women from the beginning to the end of the period under observation. The same trend appears also in mythological works, and the best example to support this idea is the evolution of the myth of

Nergal and Ereškigal during the second millennium. From sole ruler of the Netherworlds, the goddess loses step by step her authority, ending by being surpassed by Nergal, her husband.

The thesis is divided in two main sections according to H.J Marsman classification of women involved in cultic matters: women religious specialists and women worshipers.

Under the umbrella of women religious specialists I included a large variety of cultic personnel, but also persons outside the temple that perform rituals on behalf of their fellow citizen.

The first chapter of this section addresses the women cultic personnel affiliated to the temple. In Mesopotamia we encounter a large variety of female cultic titles but unfortunately, not all of them are well enough documented to enable an analysis. I have discussed the major priestly functions of women in Mesopotamia. The most important activity of a female cultic official was to pray on behalf of herself and on behalf of the members of her family as well as for other members of the society. They were able to perform libations, offerings and in the case of the high priestesses, they were involved in more complex religious activities such as reconstruction of temples or parts of the temples, establishing offerings for the gods and performing different rituals.

Although priestesses were highly visible in Mesopotamia during the first half of the second millennium, after this period they ceased to appear in the written sources without being able to draw any particular explanation. When they do appear, from this time on, they are usually associated with witchcraft and evil-doing, so we may consider that female status degraded constantly and drastically even among the high status women.

In the next two chapters I studied the phenomena of prophecy and dream, but the information in this chapter comes exclusively from the archive of Mari. The salient feature of my analysis points to the fact that in the official sphere of prophecy the males outnumbered the females, but the situation is totally different when it comes to lay prophets that have no liaison with a deity or temple. The prophets were not only instrumental agents, when their bodies were used as a medium to transmit a divine message, but also agents of their own volition when they choose to report, directly or indirectly, the message to the authorities. They sometimes undertook

long voyages in order to deliver personally the divine information, and to make sure it will be transmitted to the king, they contacted more than one influent person, such as in the case of the *qammatum* of Dagan. Considering that gods did not awknowledge gender and class when they needed to transmit a message, it appears that women might have tried go gain some attention and a higher status using the pretext of prophecy, but even so their number is really small by comparison with that of their male counterparts.

We may conclude that prophecy was another religious sphere dominated by men, but women were by no means excluded. Despite their small number, their prophetic words held, in the eyes of the authorities the same value as the divine information delivered by male professional or lay prophets.

Women are much more present in the oneiric environment than in prophetic contexts, and considering that dreaming does not imply any technical knowledge, such an important presence of the ladies would only come to support the idea that women were much more present in the unofficial areas of religion. Even though the dream was considered to be a message from a supernatural being, and the dreamer was just a passive receiver of the named message, he/she manifested his agency through their decision of letting the authorities know about those dreams that seemed to contain information conceringn different public affairs, mostly political and religious.

The literary sources give the impression that women dominated the dream interpretation sphere, but their actual number is relatively small and this might be a consequence of the fact that their means, being mostly inductive, non-technical ones, did not incite the interest of the contemporary scribes outside the mythological/epic environment. Anyway, the number of *šā'iltu* who seem to also be active as *mušēlītu*, 'necromancer' exceeds that of the *bārîtu*. I find this situation similar to the one concerning technical and intuitive prophecy, so I might conclude that women's agency in the field of divination and dream interpretation increases proportionally with the remoteness from the official cult, so obviously dominated by men.

In the next chapter (4) I debated the agency of women religious specialist that were not affiliated with the temple, and therefore they were not submitted to the same rules, or enjoyed the same privileges as their female contemporaries that were involved in the official cult.

Nonetheless, the two categories of female specialist may work together in certain circumstances, when the wellbeing of certain people may be in danger, and the most eloquent example for such a situation is the apparent collaboration of the midwife and the *qadištu*, although it might not be a constant one. I have discussed those women under the label of the" female sage" because in order to perform their profession they possessed a certain level of knowledge about the job they are performing (herbal heales, midwives, nurse). The knowledgeable woman was an active member of the society, someone who influenced the daily life of their contemporaries. As the wise woman inspired both respect and fear, in a man ruled society, she was seen through the mirror of opposition. While the man was the practitioner of good magic, the woman was the wicked witch that brings misfortune, and her image is denigrated. The knowledgeable woman who does not fit into the gendered pattern of the Mesopotamian society, becomes a scapegoat, the portent of all evil, at least at the level of scholarly discourse.

In the second section of my thesis I will discuss the two types of women worshipers: royal women and commoners and their religious agency.

Royal women are present in the religious life of the second millennium Mesopotamia. They may bring offerings, make sacrifices, transmit prophetic messages and the content of dreams, inquire oracles, and the inscriptions reveal that royal ladies could build temples or storehouses for the gods as a sign of their piety. Nonetheless their agency should be regarded with a certain restrain because the sources tend to address only the beginning of this period, until the fall of the first Dynasty of Babylon. Furthermore, the available data are concentrated in the Northwestern regions, more precisely in the kingdom of Mari during the reign of Zimri-Lim so, even though we could draw an almost complete portrait of the cultic activities and the religious agency of royal women, we may not consider this an all-encompassing picture. We are to assume that royal women did have a certain degree of implication in the religious life, but not being mentioned in the sources might imply that their agency was on a lower level, that of the daily life of every Mesopotamian women. The visibility of royal ladies in cultic activities might be a sign of their personal prestige, of special family relation, foreign influences, or simply, a higher status of women in certain regions and periods of Mesopotamian history, status that appears to be deteriorating all along the second millennium B.C.

The last chapter of my study is an overview of the most significant religious experiences of ancient Near Eastern women: birth rites, festivals, betrothals, funerals, and many other facets of life are brought into question from the perspective of religious agency. Women worshipped their deities primarily by praying to them. These prayers could be expressions of lament, requests for intercession, and expressions of praise and thanksgivings. The prayers are usually accompanied by vows and offerings that have the role to enhance the power of the supplications.

Even though women were present the in religious life, usually the data we have concerning their activities is not coming from a specific corpus. The information comes from a large variety of sources and they reveal the involvement of women in the so called family religion. Unmarried girls appeal sometimes to love magic, or become its victims, a pregnant woman prays for a safe delivery, a wife may utter an incantation and perform specific gesture in order to cure the impotence of her husband. These women are not very present in first hand sourced such as letters, contract or inscriptions so I cannot make an assertion about the evolution of their status. We do not know whether they lost from their religious prerogatives inside the domestic cult during the time.

To conclude, I would say that women in Mesopotamia were active in the religious environment either if they act in order to attain a certain purpose, or are just complying with the religious rules that were imposed upon them. Even though women from all social categories participate or perform cultic activities, the access to higher offices such as the *entu* or even *nadītu* was more difficult for those not belonging to wealthy families. There is no mention of an *entu* from Mesopotamia that would not be a member of the royal family, with the exception of the **nin.dingir** from Emar. The degrading status of women reflected in legally and literary texts is parallel by a similar phenomenon including women from all social strata, and the most striking feature is the disappearance from all kind of sources of the royal women and female cultic personnel that held important offices (*entu, nadītu*), whom in the first millennium sapiential and ant witchcraft incantations were mentioned among the witches. Anyway, be them god or evil, visible in the public sphere or related to the domestic or unofficial cults, we could not deny the fact that women had indeed their fair share of agency in the religious life of ancient Mesopotamian.

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III. ELECTRONIC SOURCES

• www.archibab.fr The database was developed by Dominique Charpin and Antoine Jacquet. The current members of the project ARCHIBAB are Lucile Barberon, Dominique Charpin (dir.), Michaël Guichard, Antoine Jacquet, Lionel Marti, Hervé Reculeau, and Nele Ziegler, to which are added the regular collaborators Boris Alexandrov, Ilya Arkhipov, Marine Béranger, Rients de Boer, Baptiste Fiette, Firas Hammoush, Anne-Isabelle Langlois and Francesca Nebiolo.

- Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/index.html

- Encyclopedia Britannica, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/497082/religion

- Royal Inscriptions from the Kassite Period, CKST, http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/ckst/sux

- The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Royal Inscriptions http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/etcsri/corpus

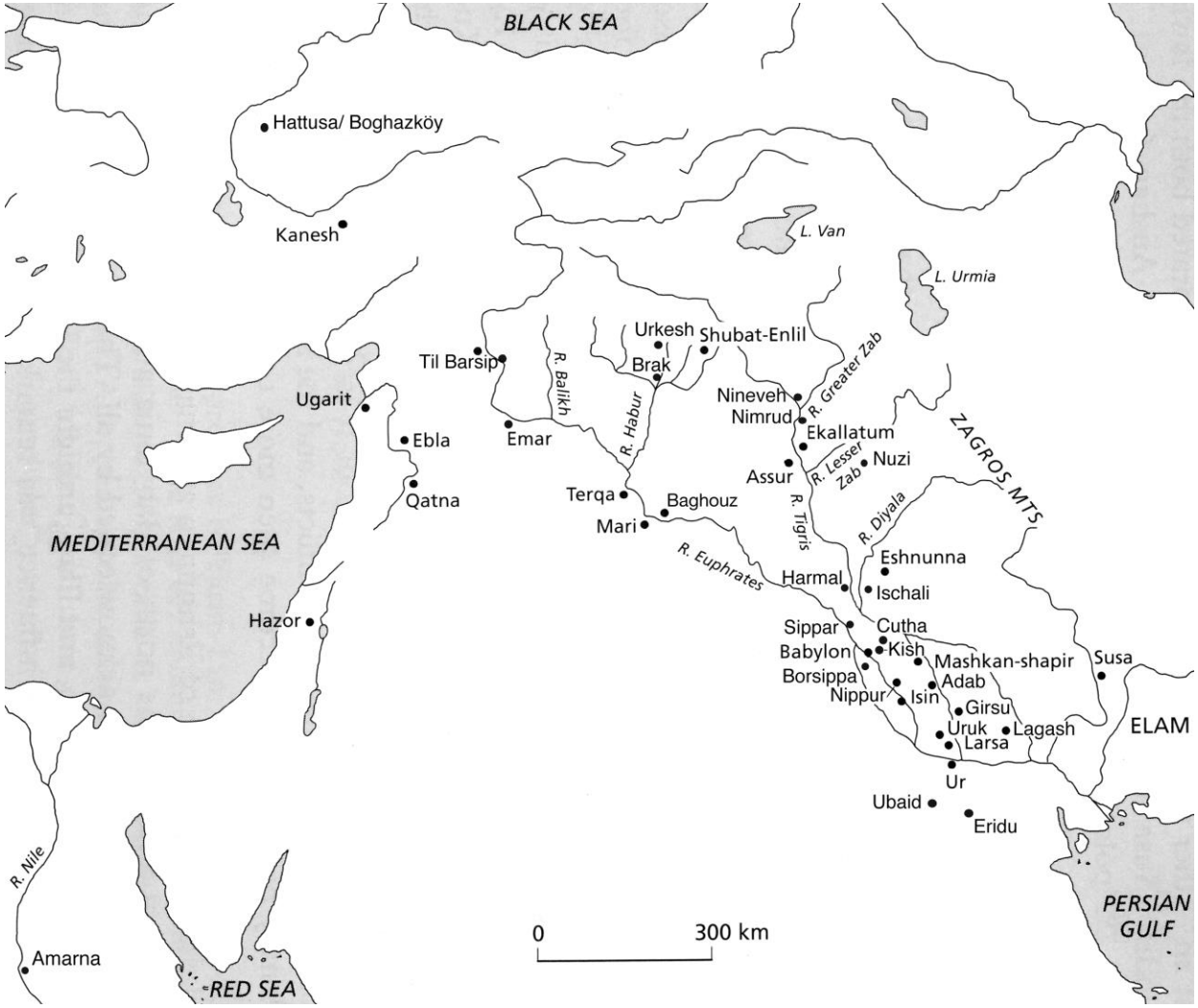
- The Middle Assyrian Laws, A, http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/doku.php?id=middle_assyrian_laws_a

- The Nine Tablets of the Ritual Maqlu, http://enenuru.net/html/cuneiform_magic/maqluexpl.html;

- The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL) http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/

- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/agency/#AgeIntAct

Appendix I



Second Millennium Mesopotamia

Map after Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East: ca. 3000--323 BC. 2nd Edition*, Blackwell, 2007, p. 103

Appendix II

Male and female Prophets in second millennium sources[1]

No.	Source and City	Name and title of the prophet	Content of the prophetic message	The transmitter and recipient of the message	Authentication of the prophecy transmitted
1.	A. 1121 + A. 2731; Mari	*Āpilū* *Āpilum ša Addi bēl Kallasu* Āpilum ša Addi bēl Ḫalab	The prophecy contains a series of repeated requests of the god Adad of Kallasu. The God Adad of Aleppo transmits Zîmri-Līm through his prophet that all he requires in exchange for helping him to regain the throne is to be a righteous king.	Nur-Sîn to Zimri-Līm	No hair and hem mentioned
2.	A. 1968. Mari	Abīya, āpilum ša Addi bēl Ḫalab	The God Adad of Aleppo reminds Zîmri-Līm (through his prophet)that all he requires in exchange for helping him to regain the throne of his father is to be a righteous king. The deity also advices him to consult an oracle before going to war, and never start a conflict if he does not receive a sign from Adad himself.	Nur-Sîn to Zimri-Līm	The hair and fringe of the prophet are sent to the king.
3.	A. 3760. Mari	āpilum	An short message concerning some ships of Dagan, perhaps with silver, that should head to Tuttul	La'ûm to Yasmaḫ-Addu	No hair and hem mentioned
4.	ARM 26 194 Mari	Āpilum of Šamaš	The god is asking for a throne and the daughter of the king that was promised to him (perhaps in order to become a nadītum) but also remind the king to fulfil his obligations toward other deities (Adad,	Āpilum of Šamaš to Zimri-Līm	No hair and hem mentioned

[1] This table contains only the prophetic messages and incubation dreams but not the oneiric experiences of royal ladies, officials or other person. The female prophets or senders are rendered in bold characters and for citations I used italisc. For this appendix I used the works of of M. Nissinen, Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East, 2003, pp.17-83, and J.M Durand, Archives épistolaires de Mari I/1, 1988, pp.377-452-452

			Dagan), and informs him about the activities of some king.		
5.	ARM 26 195 Mari	Āpilum Iṣi-aḫu	The prophet Iṣi-aḫu rises in the temple of the goddess Ḫišamitum and utters and advertisement concerning the enemies the king has/might have in Mari.	**Addu-duri to Zimri-Lim**	No hair and hem mentioned
6.	ARM 26 196 Mari	No name or title mentioned	The prophecy speaks about the judgement that Dagan passes upon Tišpak, the god of Ešnunna	Šamaš-naṣir to Zimri-Lim	No hair and hem mentioned
7.	ARM 26 197 Mari	**qammatum of Dagan**	"Beneath the straw, water runs"-The god warns the king against the treacherous intentions of the man of Ešnunna. Inib-šina advices him not to take action without consulting an oracle.	**Inib-šina to Zimri-Lim**	No hair and hem mentioned
8.	ARM 26 198 Mari	šelebum, the assinnu	Complains from Anunnitum concerning her offerings.	? to Zimri-Lim	The hair and fringe of the assinnu were sent
9.	ARM 26 199	Lupaḫum, āpilum ša Dagan **qammatum of Dagan**	The god warns the king against the treacherous intentions of the man of Ešnunna	Sammetar to Zimri-Lim	No hair and hem mentioned
10.	ARM 26 200	**Ḫubatum muḫḫūtum**	A prophecy concerning the Yamminites	Aḫum, sangûm of Anunnitum to Zimri-Lim	The hair and fringe of the prophetess were sent
11.	ARM 26 202	muḫḫûm	"Beneath the straw, water runs"	Kanisan to Zimri-Lim	No hair and hem mentioned
12.	ARM 26 203	qammatum	A report concerning some garments offered to a qammatum.It does not mention whether it is the same women that appeared in the letter sent by the king's sister.	? to Zimri-Lim	

13.	ARM 26 204	Innibana āpiltum	Innibana arises and utters a warning gainst his enemies, and an advice to perform oracle inquiries before acting.	**Inib-šina to Zimri-Lim**	She sent her own fringe and hair to the king
14.	ARM 26 205	No name and title	A military prophecy	? (perhaps the prophet himself) to Zimri-Lim	No hair and hem mentioned
15.	ARM 26 206	muḫḫûm ša Dagan	After devouring a raw lamb and being offered clothing the muḫḫûm uttered a prophecy in front of the assembly of the elders.	Yaqqim-Addu(?) to Zimri-Lim	No hair and hem mentioned
16.	ARM 26 207	**Male and female** No names, no titles	Male and female, without mentioning a title or name, were offered by the queen a certain drink in order to utter an oracle concerning the campaign against Išme-Dagan. She reassures her husband that the oracles were not uttered under any kind of pressure.	**Šibtu to Zimri-Lim**	No hair and hem mentioned
17.	ARM 26 208	Qišti-Diritim, āpilum ša Dīrītim	The goddess Diritum assures the king that nobody will rise against his throne, and that he will solve the Elamite problem.	**Šibtu to Zimri-Lim**	No hair and hem mentioned
18.	ARM 26 209	aplûm ša Dagan ša Tuttul/aplûm ša Bēlet-ekallim	An oracle predicting a victory against Babylone	Mukannišum to Zimri-Lim	Broken end
19.	ARM 26 210	Spouse of a awilum	Prophecy concerning Babylon	Kibri-Dagan to Zimri-Lim	No hair and hem mentioned
20.	ARM 26 211	? ša Bēlet-ekallim	He will catch his ill-wisher.	**Šibtu to Zimri-Lim**	No hair and hem mentioned
21.	ARM 26 212	Ili-Ḫaznaya, assinnu of Annunitum	As a result of a previous requirement of the queen the assinnu utters a positive oracle concerning the conflict with Hammurabi's Babylone.	**Šibtu to Zimri-Lim**	No hair and hem mentioned
22.	ARM 26 213	Šelebum, assinnu of the temple of Annunitum	An oracle concerning an upcoming revolt	Šibtu to Zimri-Lim	His hair and hem of the were sent to the king

23.	ARM 26 214	A servant girl of Dagan-Malik, Aḫatum	Aḫatum entered in a trance in the temple of Annunitum and delivered a favorable oracle concerning Zimri-Lim's enemies.	Šibtu to Zimri-Lim	The hair and hem of the girl were sent
24.	ARM 26 215	muḫḫûm	Through this prophetic message Dagan is asking for libations.	Lanasûm to Zimri-Lim	His hair and hem were sent
25.	ARM 26 216	Nabûs	Oracle query concerning the safety of the king during the ablution ritual outside the city, in the temple of Annunitum	Tebi-gerišu to Zimri-Lim	No hair and hem recorded
26.	ARM 26 217	A woman	The god asks for his offerings, and promises his protection to the king.	Itur-Asdu to Zimri-Lim	The hair and fringe of the women were sent to the king
27.	ARM 26 218	No name or title	Oracle concerning the delivery of a *saparrum.*	? to Zimri-Lim	No hair and hem recorded
28.	ARM 26 219	āpilum ša Ninḫursagga	The goddess is asking for offerings	? to Zimri-Lim	The hair and fringe were sent to the king
29.	ARM 26 220	muḫḫûm ša Dagan	The god requires the king not to neglect the *pagrā'um* offerings.	Kibri-Dagan to Zimri-Lim	No hair and hem recorded
30.	ARM 26 221	muḫḫûm ša Dagan	The god informs the king that *kispum* offerings should be performed for the spirit of Yaḫdun-Lim.	Kibri-Dagan to Zimri-Lim	No hair and hem recorded
31.	ARM 26 221bis	muḫḫûm	Omen concerning the construction of a city gate	Kibri-Dagan to Zimri-Lim	No hair and hem recorded
32.	ARM 26 222	Irra-gamil /no title	A message concerning the death of a princess.	Ušareš-ḫetil to Dariš-libur	No hair and hem recorded
33.	ARM 26 223	āpilum	Concerning some ships of Dagan	La'ūm to Yasmaḫ-Addu	No hair and hem recorded

34.	ARM 26 227	**Ḫadnu-El and Iddin-Kubi, muḫḫûm appeared in the dream of a woman**	An omen difficult to interpret that seems to allude to a god harvest	**Addu-Duri to Zimri-Lim**	No hair and hem recorded
35.	ARM 26 236	Kakka-lidi/ female	She had a vision in the temple of Itur-Mer about two cargo ships. The king and his entourage were on board but the people from the two boats were quarelling. "*The kingship, the scepter, the throne, the dynasty,and the Upper and Lower land are given to Zimri-Lim!' And the whol[e] entourage answered: 'It is given to Zimri-Lim!' Then, those c[a]rgo ships [dockedd] at the [g]ate of the palace"*[2]	**Šibtu to Zimri-Lim**	No hair and hem recorded
36.	ARM 26 237	**muḫḫûtum in the temple of Annunitum**	After reporting her ominous dream Addu-duri transmits to the king an oracle advising him not to leave Mari.	**Addu-duri to Zimri-Lim**	Addu-duri sents her own hair and fringe
37.	ARM 26 238	Iddin-ili, the priest of Itur-Mer	In a dream he sees the goddess Belet-biri, the Lady of Divination who transmits the king to protect himself.	**Addu-duri to Zimri-Lim**	No hair and hem recorded
38.	ARM 26 240	**Timlû**	She had a dream in behalf of the queen mother (this statement in my opinion might indicate an incubation dream).In her dream she receives a message from Belet- Ekallim	**Addu-duri to Zimri-Lim**	No hair and hem recorded
39.	ARM 26 243	muḫḫû ša Dagan	A prophecy concerning the course placed by the gods upon the bricks of a house that should be rebuit. The sender is asking the king to reflect upon the matter.	? to Zimri-Lim	No hair and hem recorded
40.	ARM 26 371	Āpilum ša Marduk	A prophecy informing about Išme-Dagan of Ekallatum who, at the time, was in asylum in Babilon.	Yarim-Addu to Zimri-Lim	No hair and hem recorded
41	ARM 26 414	Atamrum āpilum ša Šamši	He asks for a scribe in order to record an oracle	Yasim-El to Zimri-Lim	No hair and hem recorded

[2] I followed the translation of M. Nissinen in Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East, 2003, pg 67.

42.	M. 9451.	Ḫamšat(5) muḫḫû ša Addi	The oracle of the five prophets is broken	Manatan to Zimri-Lim	?
43.	Ritual of Ištar, Text 2 A. 3165.	muḫḫû	*If by the end of the month the prophet maintains his equilibrium* *and is not able to prophesy when it is time for the chant "mà-e* *ú-re-mén "e the temple officials let the musicians go. If he* *prophesies,they strike up "mà-e ú-re-mén".* …… *Water in a container and four meḫsû jarsg are installed; they are always at the disposal of the prophets*[3]		
44.	Ritual of Ištar, Text 3 A. 1249b + S. 142 75 + M.	**muḫḫûtum**	[*do/does)] not enter [. . .] the prophe[t . . .] who arise(s) [. . .] .When the musicians have entered before her, the prophetesses [. . .] and the mu[sicians]. Whe[n the prophetesses] main- [tain their quilibrium], two m[usicians . . . enter] the [. . .] . [They sing] an eršemmakkum before [the goddess for Enlil.*[4]		

[3] *Idem*, p.81

[4] *Idem*, p.82

Appendix III

Is there a title for queen?[1]

No.	Ruler and city	Text	Transliteration	Translation
1.	Lipit-Eštar Isin	E4.1.5.7 Inscription	10)la-ma-sà-tum 11)ama-ni	10)Lamassatum 11)his mother
2.	Būr-Sîn Isin	E4.1.7.3 Inscription	8)na-na-a-íb-sá 9) lukur-ki-ág-kaskal-la-ka-né	8-9) Nanāia-ibsa, his beloved travelling escort
3.	Sîn-māgir Isin	E4.1.14.2 Inscription	9) nu-tù-up-tum 10) Lukur-ki-ág-[kaskal-l]a-ka-ni 11) [ama-ibi]la-na-ke$_4$	9-11) Nutuptum, his beloved [travelling escort, [mother] of his [first] born
4.	Rīm-Sîn Larsa	E.4.2.14.16 Inscription	12) si-ma-at-^{d}INANNA 13) dam-ki-ág- 14) ^{d}ri-im-^{d}EN.ZU	12-14) Simat-Eštar, beloved wife of Rīm-Sîn
5.	Sîn-kāšid Uruk	E4.4.1.16 Seal impression	1) ša-lu-ur-tum 2) DUMU.MUNUS su-mu-la-ìl LUGAL 3) DAM EN.Zu-kà-ši-id LUGAL	1) Šallurtum, 2) daughter of Sūmû-la-Il, the king, 3) wife of Sîn-kāšid, the king,

[1] For this appendix I used the inscriptions, seals, and seal impression collected by Douglas Frayne in his work" Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia. Old Babylonian Period (2003-1595 BC)", vol.4, Toronto University Press, 1990

			4) KI.ÁG.A.NI	4) his beloved.
6.	Bilalama Ešnunna	E4.5.3.4 Brick inscription	4) me-ku-bi 5) dumu-munus-bil-la-ma 6) énsi 7) áš-nun.Ki 8) dam-ki-á[g]- 9) tan-áru-hu-ra-ti-ir 10) énsi 11) MÙŠ.EREN.KI	4-8) Mê-Kūbi, daughter of Bilalama, governor of Esnunna, 9-11) belove[d] wife of Tan-ruhuratir, governor of Susa
7.	Zimri-Lim Mari	E.4.6.12.7 Seal	1.ši-ib-[tu] 2.DUMU.MUNUS ia-ri-im-li-im 3.DAM zi-im-ri-li-im	1.Šib[tu] 2.daughter of Iarim-Lim 3.Wife of Zimri-Lim
8.	Zimri-Lim Mari	E4.6.12.8 Seal impression	1.ia-ta-ra-i[a] 2.GEME zi-im-ri-li-im	1.Iatarāi[a] 2.female servant of Zimri-Lim
9.	Aplaḫada Carchemish	E.4.32.1.2004	2. [GEME a]p-li-ḫa-d[u] 3.[D]AM LUG[AL]	2. [female servant of A]plaḫad[a] 3.[w]ife of the ki[ng]

Appendix IV [1]

Royal women religious agency

No.	Text /Place	Royal woman	Cultic activity	Description of the cultic activity
1.	E4.1.5.7 Inscription/Isin	Lamassatum **ama lugal**	Storehouse building	Lamassatum, mother of Lipit-Eštar, built a storehouse for the goddess Inanna of Murtum, her personal deity, and dedicated it for her life, and for the one of her son.
2.	E4.1.7.3 Inscription/Isin	Nanāia-ibsa **lukur**	Dedication of a small plate	Nanāia-ibsa, lukur, dedicated a plate to her personal goddess Nanāia for her life and the life of the king Būr-Sîn.
3.	E4.1.14.2 Inscription/Isin	Nutuptum **lukur**	Storehouse building	Nutuptum, likur and mother of the firs son of the king Sîn-māgir, built a storehouse for the goddess Aktuppitum of Kiritab, for the life of the king and her own.
4.	E.4.2.14.16 Inscription/Larsa	Simat-Eštar **dam**	Temple building	Simat-Eštar, wife of Rīm-Sîn, built a temple for the goddess Ninegal for the life of the king and her own.

[1] In order to compile this appendix I used the following works and sites:

Douglas Frayne , " Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia. Old Babylonian Period (2003-1595 BC)", vol.4, Toronto University Press, 1990

Jean-Marie DURAND, Documents épistolaires du Palais de Mari, Tome III, Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient , Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2000
http://www.archibab.fr/

The Old Babylonian Tablets from Tell al Rimah, ed.by Stephaney Dalley, C.B.F. Walker, J.D Howkins, British School of archeology in Iraq, 1976

5.	E4.5.3.4 Inscriptions on bricks/Ešnunna	Mê-Kūbi **dam**	Temple building	Mê-Kūbi, daughter of Bilalama, governor of Esnunna, wife of the governor of Susa, built in Susa a temple for her goddess Inanna (her lady).
6.	E4.6.11.4 Inscription on clay tablet	Izamu Secondary wife of Iasmah-addu	Votive statue Prayer	The kezertu Izamu dedicates a statue to the goddess Ištar, her lady, for the life of her lord and prays to the deity on behalf of the king.
7.	ARM X 55	Addu-duri Mother of Zimri-Lim	Sacrifices (royal sacrifices) Transmits omens	She writes to her son about accomplishing the sacrifices for the throne of Annunitum, and that during the ritual some ominous signs were shown. She asks the king to be careful.
8.	ARM X 50	Addu-duri	Ominous dream Transmits prophetic message	She relates an ominous dream to the king. In her dream the goddess Bêlet-Ekallim was no more on her throne, the statues were missing and the great priest Dâdâ was pleading with tears for Dagan to return. This kind of dream might imply that something bad will happen with the king and kingdom. Moreover an ecstatic from the temple of Annunitum advices the king not to leave Mari.
9.	ARM X 51	Addu-duri	Transmits an ominous dream	She transmits her son a dream experienced by the great priest of Bêlet-Bîri in which the goddess requests the king to protect himself.
10.	ARM X 53	Addu-duri	Oracle inquiry	She asks foe an oracle concerning a certain issue and then she transmits the answer to the king. She asks him to be careful around his enemies.

11.	ARM X 142	Addu-duri	Sacrifices	Zimri-Lim wrote to his mother concerning the sacrifices due for the wellbeing of the palace that she should attend and preside (perhaps in his place). She is also instructed to prepare everything for the sacrifices required during the Dêrītum festival.
12	ARM X 144	Addu-duri	Sacrifices	Zimri-Lim writes to his mother that he did not neglect the temple sacrifices and requires her not to disregard those of the palace.
13.	ARM X117	Addu-duri	Dream report	She receives a dream report from a woman named Timlû
14.	ARM 21 27	Addu-duri	Sacrifice	2 sheep, sacrifice of Addu-duri for Ninḫursag
15.	ARM 21 43	Addu-duri	Sacrifice	6 sheep, sacrifice of Addu-duri for Belet-ekallim
16.	ARM 23 248	Addu-duri	Sacrifice	Sheep for the sacrifices of Addu-duri
17.	ARM 23 277	Addu-duri	Sacrifice	1 sheep for the sacrifice of Addu-duri
18.	ARM 23 279	Addu-duri	Sacrifice	2 sheep for various sacrifices of Addu-duri
19	ARM 23 282 ARM 23 283	Addu-duri	Sacrifice	Sheep for Addu-duri sacrifices
20.	ARM 23 252	Unnamed sister of the king	Sacrifice	Sheep for the sacrifices of the king's sister
21.	ARM X 72	Dâm-ḫuraṣi	Prayer	She prays to the gods of the city, Dagan and Itûr-Mêr, whom received *pagrum* sacrifices, to help the king defeat his enemies.
22.	ARM X 66	Dâm-ḫuraṣi	Prayer/Blessing	Blessing formula "May Dagan of Terqa and Itûr-Mêr of Mari stay at your right and left.

23.	ARM X 62	Dâm-ḫuraṣi	Prayer	She prays that Zimri-Lim defeats his enemies, and counsels him to come and kiss the feet of his god Dagan
24.	ARM X70	Dâm-ḫuraṣi	Oracle inquiry	She reports a favorable oracle to the king
25.	ARM X 128	Šibtu	Sacrifice/cultic travel	Zimri-Lim requires to the queen to go from Mari to Hišamta in order to bring a certain Hišamîtum, perhaps for the Dêrîtum festival.He also instructs her to offer sacrifices.
26.	ARM X 126 ARM X 125 ARM X 138 ARM X 123 ARM X 124	Šibtu	Administrative involvement	The queen's involvement in the affair of the *ugbabātum* of Kulmiš
28.	ARM X 6 ARM X 120 ARM X 11 ARM X 4 ARM X 7	Šibtu	Oracle inquiry	She asks for omens to be taken concerning different political issues, and then she sends reports to the king asking him to act accordingly.
28.	M 15109 M15077	Šibtu	Sacrifices	Sheep were delivered to the queen with the occasion of the sacrifice of the "*sappum -bol*"of Ištar of Tuba
29.	M. 7529/ARM 26/1 185	Šibtu	Sacrifices	The queen informs her husband that she accomplished the sacrifices for the descent of Nin-ḫursagga and tells him about the omens that were registered during the sacrifices.

30.	ARM X 102	Daughters living in the palace	Prayer	They pray to Šamaš for the health of the king
31.	ARM X 103	Daughters living in the palace	Blessing	May Eštar the queen keep you in good health
32.	ARM X 112	Daughters living in the palace	Prayer	They pray to the goddess of the palace for the good health of the king
33.	ARM X 94	Šimatum	Dream report	She reports her father about a dream she had concerning the name that the daughter of a certain Tepahum, probably a concubine, should bear (Tagîd-Nawûm). She advices him to consult an oracle concerning this subject.
34.	ARM X 34 ARM X 113	Kirû		She asks her father to help her come back to Mari in order to make sacrifices for the gods of her father.
35.	ARM X 31	Kirû	Prophecy report	She is constantly sending prophetic messages to her father and counsels him to act accordingly.
37.	Text 64	Iltani	Festival preparation	Aqba-ḫammu instructs his queen to make preparation for the elunnum festival that he will attend
38.	Text 110	Iltani	Festival preparation	The queen has to make some preparations for the nabrûm offerings, and kinunum festivalthat the king will attend
40	Text 200	Iltani	Offerings	A list of offerings made by Iltani: 1 goat to Išhara of Aritanaya

				1goat for Ištar of Ninet 1 spring lamb for Ištar of Qatara and 1 lamb for Sîn