



Love in Mesopotamia

Mesopotamian written and pictorial sources offer abundant evidence for the pleasure and pains of love, from tender portrayals of romantic and familial affection to explicit celebrations of sexual passion. Recently on display in Sterling Memorial Library, objects and clay tablets from the Yale Babylonian Collection bore eloquent witness to what ancient Mesopotamians thought and wrote about love 2,500 to 4,000 years ago.

Love in Mesopotamia included spells to drive away temptress demons and to attract lovers; erotic objects; courtship, dowry, marriage, and divorce negotiations; love and bereavement poetry; family correspondence; and proverbs on love and happiness.

Among the tablets was an excerpt from a poem celebrating the goddess of love and fertility written by Enheduanna, a Mesopotamian princess around 2300 BCE, the first author in history whose name is known and who can be plausibly identified with a surviving literary work.

Founded in 1910 by a gift from J. Pierpont Morgan, the Yale Babylonian Collection is the largest collection of documents, seals, and other artifacts from ancient Mesopotamia in the United States and is one of the leading collections of cuneiform tablets in the world. It comprises about 45,000 items, ranging in date from around 3000 BCE to early in the Christian era. —KAH



This clay figurine of a nude female holding a tambourine or drum from the late second millennium BCE (YBC 10002) was recently on display in the exhibit *Love in Mesopotamia* in Sterling Memorial Library