



Women  
AT THE  
Dawn of  
History

EDITED BY  
Agnete W. Lassen  
Klaus Wagensohner



Engraved shell inlays with seated male and female  
(left: YPM BC 038782, YBC 10176; right: YPM BC 038783, YBC 10177),  
Early Dynastic period (mid-third millennium BCE)

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Yale Babylonian Collection,  
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## *Contributors*

**Jonathan Beltz**

*Yale University*

**Eli Tadmor**

*Yale University*

**Eckart Frahm**

*Yale University*

**Sergio Tang**

*Yale University*

**Amy Rebecca Gansell**

*St. John's University*

**Klaus Wagensohner**

*Yale University*

**Elizabeth Knott**

*Yale University*

**Ronald Wallenfels**

*New York University*

**Evelyne Koubková**

*Yale University*

**Katherine Werwie**

*Yale University*

**Agnete W. Lassen**

*Yale University*

**Jana Matuszak**

*School of Oriental and African  
Studies, University of London*



# 1 Introduction

Agnete W. Lassen and Klaus Wagensonner

The academic year 2019–2020 marks the 50th anniversary for undergraduate women at Yale University—a momentous milestone, still within living memory. This volume—and the exhibition it accompanies—celebrates women and highlights their contributions to society and experiences at the dawn of history. It aims to give the women of Mesopotamia a voice by exploring their social and economic roles in one of the earliest cultures of human history. The exhibition “Women at the Dawn of History” is on view in the Babylonian Collection in the Sterling Memorial Library beginning February 29th, 2020. Some fifty artifacts from Mesopotamia, mostly seals, clay tablets inscribed in cuneiform, terracotta plaques, and figurines, are presented in the catalogue section of this book. All derive from the holdings of the Babylonian Collection, operating under the umbrella of the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History since 2017. The Babylonian Collection, founded in 1911, is a center for research and learning for the Yale community and scholars from across the world. With generous funding from the National Endowment of the Humanities and the Council on Library and Information Resources, the Collection has been digitizing its holdings since 2019, working towards making images of every single artifact available online.

Ancient Mesopotamia, the “land between the rivers,” was the birthplace of writing, urban culture, the state, and many other technologies, concepts, and institutions that shape our world to this day. Hundreds of thousands of cuneiform documents, art works, and archaeological remains survive from the area that nowadays corresponds to the modern states of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. The textual sources, ranging from simple receipts to mathematical problems, from letters to literature, were written by scribes, both male and female, from the mid-fourth millennium BCE up to the first century CE (see [Figure 1.5](#) and [1.6](#) for a map and timeline). Architecture, sculpture, seals, terracottas, pottery, and more tell the stories of the long lost cultures and peoples of ancient Mesopotamia. The *long durée* of Mesopotamia was home to complex societies, whose sources, both textual and archaeological, have shaped the modern fields of Assyriology and Near Eastern Archaeology since the first objects were unearthed in the mid-nineteenth century CE and made accessible to scholars.

Our sources from Mesopotamia are heavily biased toward men and male-dominated activities. Women and their place in history, by contrast, have largely been neglected in modern research (see [Chapter 2](#), “Women’s Lives in the Ancient Near East”).

**Fig. 1.1** Objects and mounts for the “Women at the Dawn of History” exhibit, on view in the Babylonian Collection.

**Fig. 1.2**  
Representations  
of women  
from the Yale  
Babylonian  
Collection.



In fact, women do feature prominently in the textual and artistic records, in a variety of roles. Elite women had the economic power as well as the opportunity to commission their own inscriptions and monuments (see [Nos. 25](#) and [34](#)). It was also not uncommon for women to engage directly in business affairs. Rich correspondence dating to the early nineteenth century BCE, for example, left behind by the merchant community in the city of Kanesh in Anatolia, shows that women sometimes oversaw the family business affairs and participated with their male family members in the mercantile activities (see [No. 2](#)). Slightly later in Babylonia, a great number of documents inform us about the lives of secluded priestesses, the *naditum*, who could not marry or have children, but bought and sold property and amassed significant wealth, at the envy of their brothers (see [No. 4](#)). Women, like men, owned seals, which were essential for maneuvering through economic and legal systems in Mesopotamia. The iconography of seals belonging to women—often identical to those belonging to men—demonstrates the potency of women as equal members of society in certain settings (see [Chapter 3](#), “Women and Seals”). Although the number of seals that can be identified as belonging to women is far lower than those belonging to men, their presence nevertheless elucidates the public role of women in society.

Letters of Anatolian merchants represent an example of women with economic power who did not necessarily belong to the elite (see [No. 2](#)). Still, most of our knowledge and images of Mesopotamian women derive from those members of the highest echelons of society. Beginning in the third millennium BCE, textual and visual records provide information about women and their roles at the royal court. The wives of the rulers of Lagash, for instance, wielded enormous power. In the

second and first millennia BCE, princesses were married off to foreign kings in order to secure diplomatic ties. These women could hold considerable power in their new home courts, advising their husbands and playing roles in cultic ceremonies. Royal daughters elevated to the rank of high-priestess controlled large temple estates. In these positions, the women fulfilled not only a cultic role, but more importantly linked the royal court to the greater religious and economic landscape. One of the most prominent of such women was Enheduana (about 24th century BCE), the daughter of the Akkadian king Sargon (reigned about 2334–2279 BCE), who is considered to be the earliest known author in world literature (see [Chapter 4](#), “Between History and Fiction,” and [No. 44](#)).

Motherhood was, of course, an important part of life for women in Mesopotamia. This aspect of female identity is emphasized in ancient art and literature, and our sources provide many details about the care for children and the dangers, joys, and sorrows of motherhood. One of the wives of king Rim-Sin of Larsa (reigned about 1822–1763 BCE) left not one, but two, inscriptions, in which she prays for the life of the king and their sick daughter (see [No. 34](#)). One of the most feared demons in ancient Mesopotamia, Lamashtu, was herself a mother to a pig and a dog, and used poisonous milk or her long claw-like fingers to kill infants. Magical spells and amulets were used to ward off this fearsome female demon (see [Nos. 26–28](#)). In the patriarchal world of ancient Mesopotamia, women were often represented in relation to men—as mothers, daughters, or wives—giving the impression that a woman’s place was in the home. But, as we explore in this volume, they were also authors and scholars, astute business-women, sources of expressions of eroticism, priestesses with access to major gods and

goddesses, and regents who exercised power on behalf of kingdoms, states, and empires.

### Acknowledgements

The “Women at the Dawn of History” exhibition could never have happened were it not for the Yale Peabody Museum exhibition team. We are grateful to Laura Friedman for designing the exhibition (Figure 1.3) and to Sally Pallatto for the graphic layout (Figure 1.4). We are indebted to Aliza Taft for conservation work on individual objects; Walter Brenckle for the construction and refurbishment of the Collection’s display cases; Maishe Dickman for creating object mounts (Figure 1.1). We thank Ron Wallenfels and Elizabeth Knott for copy-editing the book and Miko McGinty for valuable pointers on book design and publication management.

Last but not least, we thank the contributors who wrote essays and catalogue entries to this book and accommodated our tight schedule, but also those who provided us with scholarly insight on objects—such as Laura Battini, who discussed a number of the terracotta plaques that appear in the catalogue with us, Ron Wallenfels for valuable suggestions regarding some of the late seals depicted in this catalogue as well as Ran Zadok for insights into foreign prosopography. Several scholars provided us with images, including Paul Collins, Zoltán Niederreiter, and Tracy Spurrier.

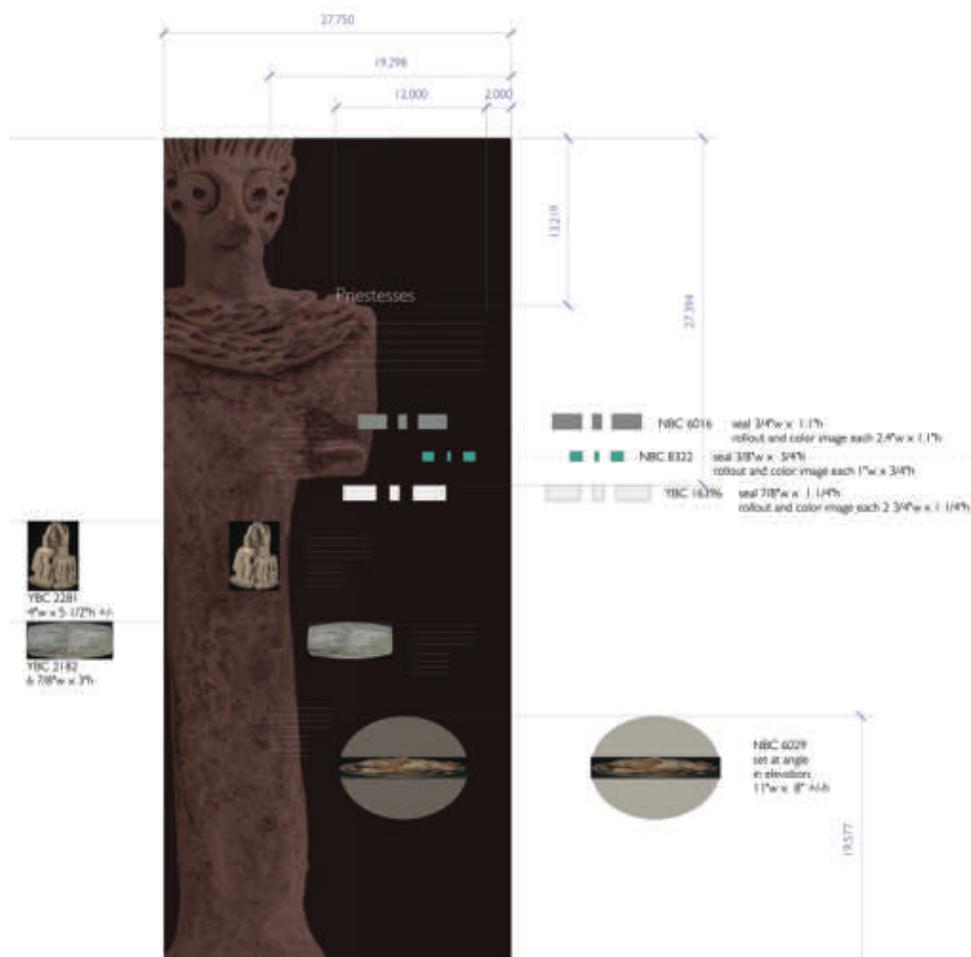


Fig. 1.3 Elevations for Case 2, section “Priestesses,” drawn by Laura Friedman.

Fig. 1.4 Case graphics by Sally Pallatto.

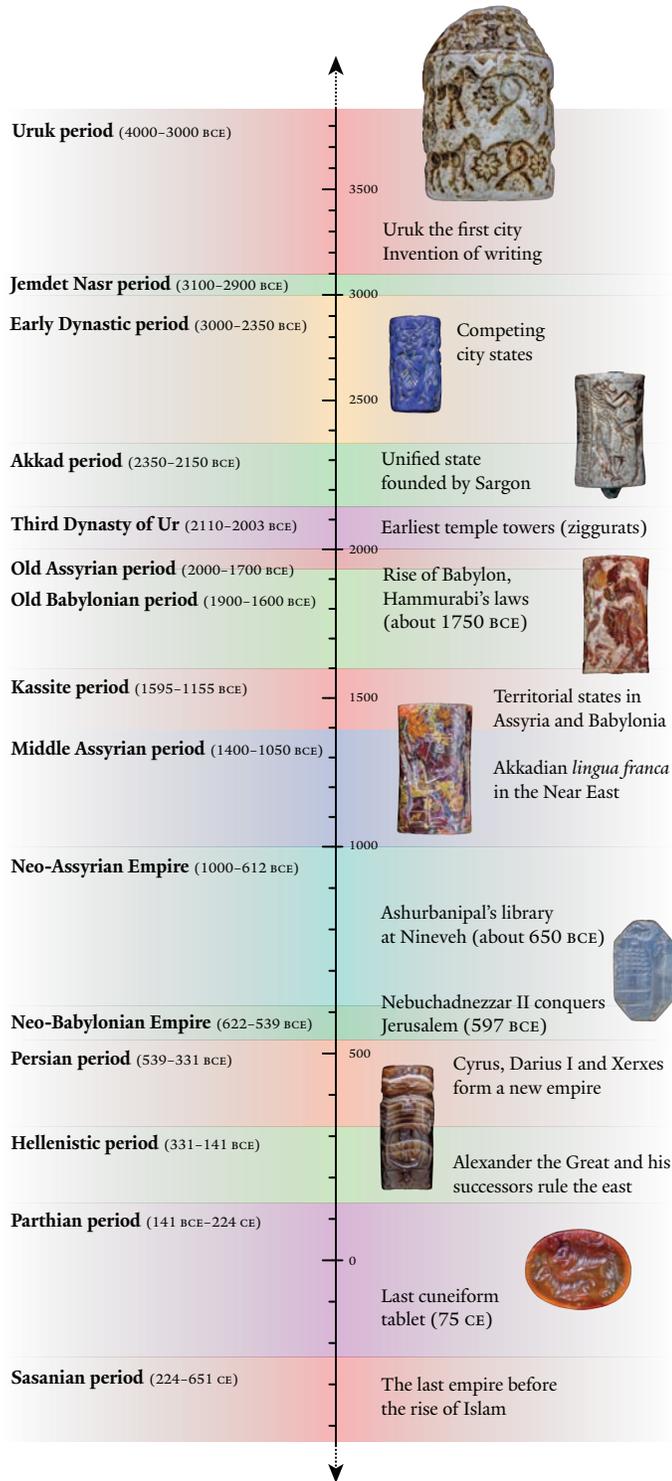


Fig. 1.5 A timeline of the major periods and events in Mesopotamian history.



Fig. 1.6 A map of Mesopotamia and surrounding areas.





## 2

# *Women's Lives in the Ancient Near East and Facets of Ancient Near Eastern Womanhood*

Amy Rebecca Gansell

In today's world of social media and e-networking, we document our lives for others to see. Meanwhile, multi-mass media sends us commercial advertisements, political propaganda, news, entertainment, and more. Besides our art, songs, prayers, texts, doodles, diagrams, grocery lists, and invoices, our doctors, banks, schools, and professions generate additional streams of documentation that fill our file boxes. Amidst such a dizzying variety of words and images that indeed comprise the record of our early twenty-first century society, we tend to operate on the premise that what we see is what is going on, and what we do not see must not be happening.

Of course, with a moment's pause, we realize that this is not true. What we see are selective, edited, personalized, and sometimes idealized, dramatized, and/or biased glimpses of humanity. What we see is also what we choose to value—to consume, collect, and remember. This manner of processing the world also underlies our relationship to the ancient record, the diverse composition and dynamics of which were not so different from our own.

With an understanding of the human construction of the past, present, and future through record-making and record-keeping, let us consider the ancient Near East. In particular, and at stake in this exhibition, let us attempt to untangle a historical monolith that we have created: women in the ancient Near East. In so doing, we must recognize that the original ancient record—left by both intention and accident—was itself highly variable, diverse, complex, and often skewed. What we see of this record are mere fragments, filtered through the double happenstance of preservation and discovery (**Figure 2.1**). Moreover, what we have done—and continue to do—with this record is to tell our own stories, through our own perspectives, for our own society. Recent efforts in scholarship and curating, such as those at the Yale Babylonian Collection, however, seek to let the past speak for itself (for example, Lassen, Frahm, and Wagensonner 2019). Thus, free from assumption, let us approach women in the ancient Near East as humans in the context—albeit fragmentary—of their own societies. But, first, we should take stock of the conventional narrative.

When introducing the topic of women in the ancient Near East, the initial issue at hand is the scarcity of their records (Winter 1987). Their perceived lack of representation motivates the corollary interpretation of women's lesser significance or oppression (Bahrani 2001). As an antidote to this bleak story, examples of elite women

**Fig. 2.1** A terracotta plaque depicting a woman *en face* (YPM BC 007418, NBC 4442), Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE).

are presented as rare exceptions of female power (Winter 1987; Melville 1999; Ornan 2002; Gansell 2012). And, in an effort to balance the picture through a broader view of the female population, we refer to types of women (Budin and Turfa 2016; Stol 2016), such as priestess/wife/mother and other, which risks setting up a false dichotomy rooted in conventional Western classifications of good and bad.

Through generations of accretion, this narration and its well-marked, predefined entry points has constructed a monolithic entity that we refer to as “women in the ancient Near East.” Though there is some truth in this grand narrative, it obscures a rich and vast range of female lives. We are left asking what “women in the ancient Near East” is (a segregating category and history of the other), not who women in the ancient Near East were (millennia of individuals

living within a multiplicity of cultures). The answer to “Who?” however, is already in our hands, in our museum collections, waiting to be seen and heard. Indeed, it is the ancient texts and images, themselves, and the objects that bear them, that can challenge generalizations and enliven the highly diverse and complex world of antiquity. Approaching women in the ancient Near East with interests lying outside of the traditional narrative, we find that the ancient record is ripe with individual voices and lives and with evidence for myriad facets of womanhood.

### *The Perceived Scarcity of Women’s Records*

Evidence for ancient Near Eastern women is not as scarce as it might seem, but it is hidden behind



**Fig. 2.2** Queen Libballi-sharrat feasting opposite king Ashurbanipal with servants and attendants behind. Bas-relief from the North Palace at Nineveh (British Museum, BM 124920).

the curtain of the canon—those iconic objects and monuments, such as cylinder seals (glyptic), cuneiform tablets, the stelae of Naram-Sin and Hammurabi's Law Code, sculptures of Gudea, Assyrian *lamassu* and palace reliefs, and the Gates of Babylon, which have become the public face of the ancient Near East, and on which women are scarce (Gansell and Shafer 2020). Just scratching the surface of these icons (which themselves were born from nineteenth-century Orientalist values), though, we find robust evidence for women. For example, they are represented throughout the glyptic and cuneiform records, as seen in many examples in this exhibition, as well as in the laws covering Hammurabi's stela; on Assyrian reliefs they appear in a range of contexts, including as queen (**Figure 2.2**); and facets of womanhood may even be interpreted through the depiction of lions representing the goddess Ishtar

on the gates and walls embracing Babylon. Digging deeper into our collections, as “Women at the Dawn of History” showcases, the resources for studying women also include a variety of other inscribed objects, as well as sculptures and figurines portraying women, and amulets, jewelry, and other goods found in female burials.

The example of burial goods raises an important point: many objects found in graves are uninscribed and only recognized as having been associated with women because they were found with female skeletons. So, just because a woman is not named or depicted on an artifact, does not mean it was not part of her life (or afterlife) or did not represent her. Therefore, when we, for example, consider quantifications of seal or text corpora that disproportionately represent men versus women, we should also account for the items in the



corpus that do not cite or preserve the name of either a man or a woman. Among these could very likely be the seals and communications of women, but we tend to “count” only the smaller number of artifacts on which women are named as evidence of women’s lives. Also lost to us, but which we should not dismiss, is the potential for women as agents behind the historically documented activities of men. In addition, there is the likelihood that significant records, such as the archives of priestesses, queens, and businesswomen, lie yet undiscovered underground, and other records, on small-scale artifacts of non-canonical types, may sit unrecognized in museum storerooms. While appreciating possible cases of the now-invisible or yet-unknown presence of women, it is our primary agenda to illuminate the rich abundance and value of women’s

known but often overlooked, superficially treated, and under-integrated records.

### *Integrating the Lives of “Exceptional” Women*

Since the nineteenth-century rediscovery of the ancient Near East, when the now-canonical monuments, ziggurats, palaces, and texts, including king lists and royal inscriptions, came to light, an image has been assembled of the ancient Near East as a man’s world. Exceptional women, the daughters and wives of kings, provided rare examples of women in this world of men. One of the earliest such women is the daughter of king Sargon of Agade (reigned about 2334–2279 BCE), Enheduana, who was an *en*-priestess and poet, best

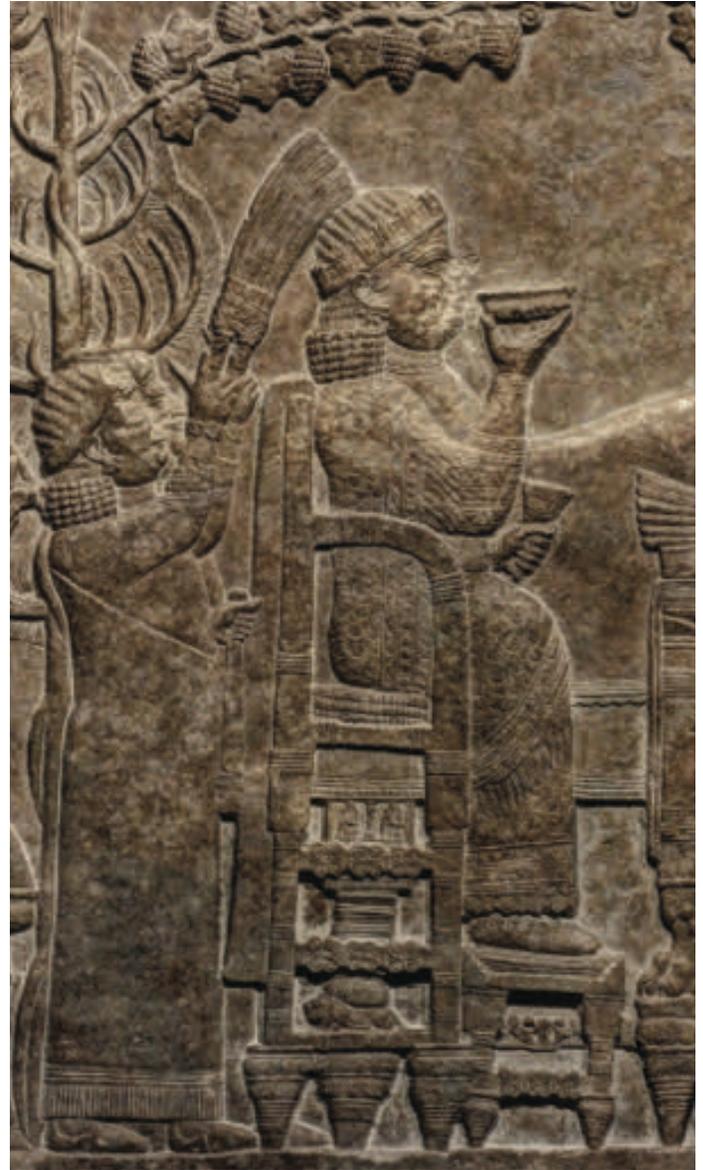


**Fig. 2.3** Disk of Enheduana (University of Pennsylvania Museum, B16665).

known to us through her depiction and inscription on a ceremonial stone disk from Ur dated to around 2300 BCE (**Figure 2.3**). More significant within ancient Near Eastern culture, but less frequently discussed, is the long-term significance and role of her hymns in Sumero-Akkadian religion: they were copied for centuries, as exemplified by a manuscript of one of her works dating to the Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE) in this exhibition (**No. 44**). Indeed, Enheduana was not just an exceptional woman (and female image), but she was also an exceptional person (see also **Chapter 4**, “Between History and Fiction”).

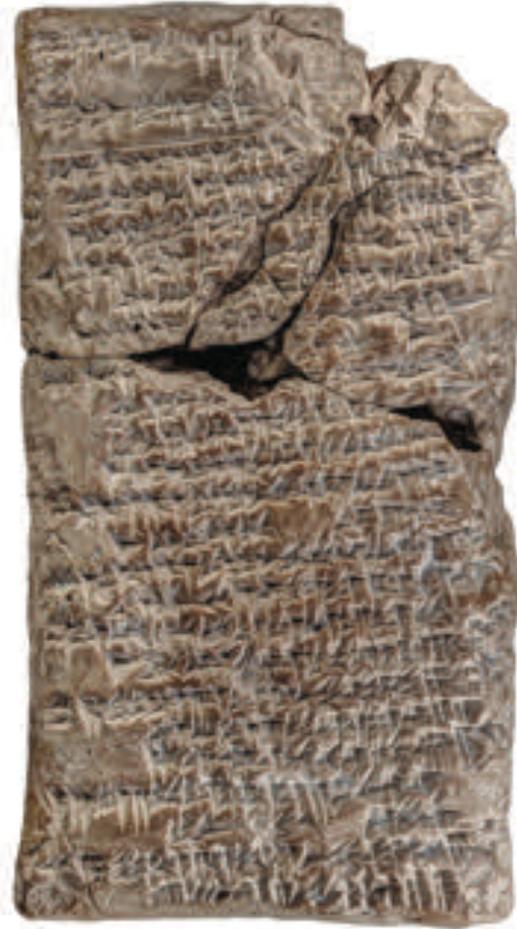
Perhaps the most famous image of an ancient Near Eastern woman is the late Neo-Assyrian palace relief depicting king Ashurbanipal (reigned 668–631/627 BCE) and his queen, probably Libbali-sharrat—though the figure is not named—partaking in a victory banquet (**Figures 2.2** and **2.4**). Much has been written about this exceptional artwork—the only known Assyrian relief to depict a queen—and recent work has recuperated the power and agency of Neo-Assyrian queens (Melville 1999; Svärd 2015). However, because Libbali-sharrat’s textual record is minimal and her broken stela is not aesthetically appealing, she is best known through the palace relief, and is therefore often presented as an icon of Assyrian queenship rather than as a historical figure in her own right. Libbali-sharrat, thereby, presents another case in which an exceptional female figure, like Enheduana, is better known as an art-historical spectacle than as a part of ancient Near Eastern history.

It is notable that even across the millennia and lands of the ancient Near East, as historians, we have elevated only a few women to fame. This is due not only to the spotty nature of the ancient record, but also to the limited place for women in the nineteenth-century perspective we have inherited. But enticing evidence does survive for the agency and significance of other elite women. One example is found on a pedestal for a stone water basin (**No. 34**), which is on display in this exhibition. The inscription reveals that it was dedicated by Rim-Sin-Shala-bashtashu, one of the queens of the ruler Rim-Sin I (reigned about 1822–1763 BCE), with a plea to restore the health of their daughter Lirish-gamlum. Here we see not only Rim-Sin-Shala-bashtashu’s ability to dedicate, and possibly commission, a votive object, but also her concern as a



**Fig. 2.4** Queen Libbali-sharrat. Detail from a bas-relief from the North Palace at Nineveh (British Museum, BM 124920; see **Figure 2.2**).

mother and the value of a royal daughter’s future. This object and the text it bears offers a glimpse of multiple facets of Rim-Sin-Shala-bashtashu’s womanhood through her political, religious, familial, and possibly economic engagements. Although exceptionally privileged as the wife of a ruler, she was also a woman with a multifaceted life, resonating, in some dimensions, with those of other women of her time, and across time.



### *Types of Women and Facets of Womanhood*

Just as we do among ourselves today, we classify people in the ancient world based on criteria such as their social stratum, wealth, education, profession, marital status, and family position. We cannot be certain that our categorizations would have been meaningful in antiquity, but these aspects of identity are among those that are evident and, in some cases, stated or depicted in the ancient record. However, because the ancient record provides only partial information, we must be cautious in categorizing, and thereby simplifying and potentially distorting, a person's identity based on what we do know. Nonetheless, it is productive to highlight some of the apparently most prominent roles of ancient

Near Eastern women: in business, as priestesses, and as mothers. A second-millennium BCE tablet included in this exhibition demonstrates a woman's capacity in business as the owner of plots of land (No. 4, Figure 2.5). She is also a *naditu*-priestess, and, although it is unknown whether or how she may have identified as a mother, *naditus* did not marry but were able to adopt. Clearly her identity was multifaceted and may have shifted in relation to the activity in which she engaged. Through this example we are reminded that by “typing” a person or by categorizing women into “type-casting” we may miss the bigger—and more realistic—picture of women's complex and fluid identities.

Beyond types of women, figurines provide another medium through which we might access facets of



**Fig. 2.5** Four documents dealing with real estate of *naditu*-women (from left to right: YPM BC 019044, YBC 4980 = **No. 4**; YPM BC 019047, YBC 4983; YPM BC 019039, YBC 4975; YPM BC 019040, YBC 4976), late Old Babylonian period.

ancient Near Eastern womanhood as ideals embodied in the figure itself. Figurines of various materials occur in archaeological contexts across social strata in the ancient Near East, and they demonstrate bodily and iconographic consistency within their periods of production (**Figures 2.1** and **2.6**). Take, for example, two nude terracotta figurines in this exhibition dating to the end of the third or early second millennium BCE (**Nos. 37** and **38**). The accentuation of their hips, breasts, pubic areas, and adornment evokes both sexuality and fertility, feminine attributes that are also emphasized in ancient Near Eastern literature. As hand-shaped, portable objects that made palpable these intangible aspects of womanhood, female figurines may have been used by men and women. For women,

in particular, they may have offered special protection and inspiration. As material evidence for the value and delight of the female body, and its sexual and reproductive capacities, figurines add further facets to our perspectives on ancient Near Eastern womanhood.

Mothers were also represented as figurines (see **No. 30**). Maternity, along with its perils of labor and parturition, was another facet of womanhood shared by women across boundaries including social class, region, and time. Demonstrating profuse anxiety over birthing women and newborns, this exhibition presents a cuneiform tablet bearing an incantation for a woman in labor (**No. 33**), another tablet with an incantation against the baby-snatching demoness Lamashtu (**No. 26**), and two amulets onto which

Lamashtu's beastly image was carved (Nos. 27 and 28). The opposition between mothers and Lamashtu underscores the significance of motherhood, but it can also be read as a dichotomy between good (mother) and bad (anti-mother) types of women. In the category of "bad" women would fall sorceresses (as condemned in a Late Babylonian period incantation text, No. 29, on display here) and prostitutes, but both could also be mothers. Again, we find womanhood to be multidimensional, defying types and consequently our expectations.

### *Reflection*

Perhaps we, as moderns, have been writing ancient women out of history in our facile efforts to include them. We do this, in particular, by emphasizing the absence of women in history, focusing superficially on exceptional images of women, and simplifying women into types that reflect our own expectations and values, and this approach obscures the complexities of ancient Near Eastern womanhood. However, by affording the ancient record its own voice, the



**Fig. 2.6** Terracotta representations of women, third millennium to late first millennium BCE.

individuality and complexity of women's lives and facets of womanhood emerges to replace, rather than reiterate, the conventional grand narrative on "women" and to remind us that the ancient Near East was not as much of a man's world as we have made it out to be. As we move forward, both as members of the public and the academy, may we seek and preserve the presence and voices of women embedded in the records of the past, and untangled as much as possible from our own modern history and habits.





### 3 *Women and Seals in the Ancient Near East*

Agnete W. Lassen

“Every man has a seal” noted Herodotus (1. 195) about the Babylonians. Seals were, indeed, omnipresent in the ancient Near East, but owned not just by men, but also women. Seals represent the most abundant and continuous record of art from the ancient Near East and serve as a crucial source for its history, culture, and religion. The seal played several different roles. It was an essential tool for anyone engaging in commercial, legal, or administrative affairs. Functioning much like a modern signature, the impressed seal proved presence and acknowledgement by the seal owner. Seals were frequently used to prevent tampering with locked doors and closed containers. At the same time, they were also prestige objects, often crafted from valuable semi-precious stones, which were imported over great distances (**Figure 3.1**). The stones were engraved with culturally and religiously charged imagery and had a powerful symbolic meaning. In this way, they were simultaneously tools, amulets, and jewelry. Most seals from ancient Mesopotamia were cylindrical in shape—a type in use for some three millennia, from the middle of the fourth millennium BCE until the end of the Persian period, around 300 BCE. In the first millennium BCE, stamp seals and signet rings also gained popularity in Mesopotamia and continued in use throughout its history and beyond (see **No. 1**).

Mesopotamian cylinder seals depict a wide range of scenes, many with ritual or mythological content, involving mortal men and women, gods, demons and monsters, animals, plants, landscape, tools, pottery, ritual implements, and much more. Gods and goddesses are by far the most frequently depicted actors. Deities can usually be identified by their horned headdresses, although they are sometimes only recognizable by context—that is, by their poses and attitudes. When mortal men and women appear on seals, they are typically either members of the royal family or generic types, such as priests or heroes. Except in some special cases, men are depicted with beards (Yalcin 2016). Women often have a distinctive hair style, as shown in **No. 35**. Women appear most frequently and in the broadest range of roles on seals from the third millennium BCE. In seals dating to the Jemdet Nasr period (about 3100–2900 BCE), they do menial work, such as textile and pottery production. During the Early Dynastic and Old Akkadian periods, queens are shown banqueting with the king, participating in the official cult, engaging in worship and receiving subordinates in audience. There are also examples of quintessentially gendered activities, such as women giving birth (**No. 31**

**Fig. 3.1** Mesopotamian seals were made of a rich variety of materials.



**Fig. 3.2** Seal showing a woman giving birth (Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago, OIM A 27902), Early Dynastic period.

and **Figure 3.2**), as well as erotic scenes (**Figure 3.16**).

The end of the third and the first half of the second millennium BCE saw a substantial drop in the number of representations of women in art, and great significance about women's agency and social roles has been inferred from this reduced visibility (Asher-Greve 2013; Otto 2016; Suter 2017). However, it must be noted that except for the ruler-with-mace motif, which may or may not represent a ruling king, mortal men also experienced reduced visibility in the second millennium, in favor of depictions of divine beings. Claudia Suter (2016, 2017) and Frauke Weiershäuser (2008) therefore argue that the reduced visibility of women in art was not the product of a lack of agency in Old Babylonian society, but rather a reconfiguration of royal power. The scarcity of depictions of women on seals persists throughout the second and first millennium BCE, an exception being the portrayal of the queen in the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods. Recent in-depth analyses have explored

depictions of women (Otto 2016; Suter 2008, 2016, 2017; Radner 2012; Asher-Greve 2013); the following overview of seal imagery, as well as the imagery of seals owned by women, does not represent a comprehensive study.

### *Working Women*

Women depicted on seals were usually members of the elite: royal women and their attendants, unidentified participants in ritual scenes interacting with deities or the king, and priestesses. A significant exception is the so-called "pig-tailed women" found on Jemdet Nasr seals, dating to around 3000 BCE. Seals dating to this period are generally small and squat in shape, and crudely carved.

It has been suggested that seals depicting women working textile implements, throwing pottery, and possibly other tasks (**Figure 3.3**) were used by the members of predominantly female institutions, rather



**Fig. 3.3** Women engaged in pottery production (YPM BC 038221, NBC 12137), Jemdet Nasr period.



Fig. 3.4 Seal with two registers. The top register shows a seated couple enjoying a drink (YPM BC 008968, NBC 5987).

than male individuals (Collon 2005: 16). After the Jemdet Nasr period, the pig-tailed women disappear from Mesopotamian art and working-class women—if that is what the pig-tailed women represent—do not appear on seals again.

### *Banquet Scenes*

In the Early Dynastic period, from about 2900 BCE to 2350 BCE, the artistic record introduces elite women in the form of the banqueting royal couple served by male and female attendants (Figure 3.4). The banquet scene, also found on votive door plaques and monumental art from the same period, provides a reference to actual banquets celebrated by the royal family and possibly other high officials during recurring religious festivals, military victories, and temple inaugurations. The banquets probably included large fractions, if not all, of the population and thereby cemented the social role

played by the royal family, and the king in particular, as the provider for his subjects.

One of the best-known banquet scenes is the one found on the personal seal of queen Puabi, discovered in the Royal Tombs of Ur next to the queen's right arm (Figure 3.5). This seal shows a seated woman, presumably Puabi herself, holding a cup and attended by two female servants. A seated male, probably the king, faces his wife. He is attended by two male servants. Whereas the queen's attendants in the uninscribed seal in Figure 3.4 are male, the female servants in Puabi's seals were probably her personal entourage—her “ladies-in-waiting.” Apart from their standing positions, the attendants are otherwise not distinguished from the royal couple. Both royal and non-royal figures wear the same clothes and are shown with the same hair styles.

The banquet scene survives into the Old Akkadian period (around 2350–2150 BCE) where it continues to be an important locus for the representation of women in seals. Some seals show a seated divine couple holding drinking vessels. In Figure 3.6, on the top, for example, a divine couple is attended by a mortal female. The seal on the bottom in Figure 3.6 is an exact parallel, but showing the royal couple attended by a female.

Parallelisms between divine and mortal worlds could be expressed directly in the art of the seal. Divided into two registers, seals like NBC 5991 in Figure 3.7 demonstrate the mirroring of the divine and mortal worlds. The upper register of the seal shows a divine banquet and the lower the same scene set with the



Fig. 3.5 Seal of queen Puabi of Ur (British Museum, London, 1928,1010.235).



Fig. 3.6 Divine and earthly banquet scenes (top: YPM BC 008993, NBC 6012; bottom: YPM BC 008998, NBC 6017).

royal couple. A date palm in the lower earthly realm is mirrored by a mythological tree set in the realm of the gods. The imagery underlines the understood parallelism between the ruling couple and the gods, and in this way elevates the royals to a stage closer to the divine, setting them apart from ordinary humans.

Date palms appear frequently alongside images of women. The female attendant in the lower register of the seal in [Figure 3.7](#), for example, is shown holding a date fruit in her right hand, while another woman is picking dates from a date palm. A similar scene unfolds in the seal NBC 9345 in [Figure 3.8](#), which shows

exclusively women. This seal is also divided into two registers, featuring a set of scenes that unfold in the mortal world. The upper register shows four women in long garbs each holding a ritual bucket in one hand while approaching a stalk of grain. The lower register shows three women, two grasping the date fruit of a palm tree. The date and the palm tree were associated with female fecundity and fertility and the goddess Ishtar in particular (Porter 2003: 18; Collins 2006). The association between women and fertility as evoked through the date palm was thus not restricted to the queen, but a trope that applied to women in general.



Fig. 3.7 A seal divided in two registers showing a divine and earthly banquet (YPM BC 008972, NBC 5991).



**Fig. 3.8** Seal showing only women. Both registers of the seal evoke agrarian fertility (YPM BC 012340, NBC 9345).

### Women in Ritual Scenes

The queen, frequently accompanied by the ruler, also appears engaging in rituals and acts of worship in Old Akkadian period art. The seal in **Figure 3.9**, for example, shows a couple being led by the two-faced god Usmu toward Ea, the god of wisdom. According to Mesopotamian mythology, Ea resides in the *Apsû*, the realm of the underground freshwater. In this seal, he is seated on a stylized temple façade with streams of water emanating from his body. A carp is placed above Ea's raised right hand (**No. 7**). Carp bones were excavated in the temple dedicated to Ea in Eridu and carps were consumed as part of his cult. Both the man and the woman are carrying offering gifts: the man is holding a kid in his right arm and the woman a *banduddû*-bucket, presumably containing a liquid for a libation. While not explicitly labeled, they represent the royal couple and the scene shows them participating in the cult of Ea, the



**Fig. 3.9** A seal showing the royal couple participating in the cult of the god Ea (YPM BC 037565, NCBS 668).

patron god of the city Eridu.

YBC 16396 (**No. 22**) also shows the royal couple, depicted in the same pose and with the same dress, hair style and offerings as in **No. 7** (**Figure 3.9**). The only difference is that the king's left hand, which in **No. 7** was held by the god Usmu, is now raised in front of his face. A ritual practitioner, a priest wearing a long, hemmed robe, pours a libation onto an altar. Represented by a series of dots, the liquid is spilling over the edge of the altar. This liquid offering is presented to a pair of male deities, each holding two staffs. The deities are depicted *en face*, facing the viewer of the seal imagery. The identity of the divine pair is unknown, but as they are shown here being worshipped by the royal couple, it seems that they were part of the official cult. A final example, the worn seal NBC 4953 (not shown) shows a royal couple approaching a god dispatching another god, possibly representing a smiting god or a reference to the god-killing-god motif—a well-established but poorly understood theme on Old Akkadian cylinder seals. The exact role of the ruling couple in this context is unknown.

NBC 12224 (**Figure 3.10, No. 8**), published here for the first time, shows three women in long, hemmed robes, approaching two male deities. The woman closest to the gods raises her hand in greeting or worship. The two women behind her carry *banduddû*-buckets. The god on the left is holding out his upward-facing hands towards another standing god, who is holding a staff. An offering table stands between the two gods, and a mace is placed in the visual field behind them. These and other seals, such as YBC 12630



Fig. 3.10 Seal showing three women in a worship scene (YPM BC 038123, NBC 12224).

and YBC 12764, show how cultic activities for both gods and goddesses could be performed by women in the Old Akkadian period.

Although uninscribed and more crudely carved than other Old Akkadian seals presented above, NBC 6016 (Figure 3.11, No. 20) also shows the royal couple. Whereas scenes like this one were conventionally carved so that the seated deity faces left, this seal has a seated figure facing right. The unconventional layout of the scene, together with the crude carving, may indicate the local imitation of a formal style, carved outside the heartland of the Akkadian state. To the right of the seated figure, the royal couple carries an offering kid and a bucket. The miniature female figure with clasped hand placed in front of the royal couple may represent their child. If so, this would be one of the few depictions of a royal family. An eight-pointed star in front of the seated female figure may suggest that she is the goddess Ishtar. However, she does not seem to wear the horned headdress, which is the conventional attribute of deities. There is a slight chip in the seal in



Fig. 3.11 The royal family in worship (YPM BC 008997, NBC 6016).

exactly that spot, leaving the identification uncertain. Assuming that the seated female is a deity, the seal may allude to the role of young royal women in the official cult. Princesses, such as the famed author Enheduana (see Chapter 4, “Between History and Fiction”), could be elevated to the rank of high-priestess in important temple households, thus gaining significant power and importance in the cult, as well as cementing good relations between the crown and the priesthood (Foster 2016: 303).

Representations of the king and the queen engaging in cultic activities are very consistent: they always wear the same clothing and hair styles, stand in the same pose, and carry the same offerings. Such seals, including those discussed here, clearly show the importance of the royal couple in the official cult in Old Akkadian society. There are examples of the king performing cultic activities on his own, however, the multitude of examples of the couple



Fig. 3.12 A tag carrying the impression of the seal of the scribe and majordomo of queen Tuta-shar-libbish (YPM BC 007117, NBC 4142).

appearing together and the consistency with which they are represented indicate that the king and the queen were conceived of—together—as a focal point of the official cult. Textual evidence also attests to the economic importance of the queens in this period, running vast households with both male and female staff (Sallaberger and Westenholz 1999: 70–73). The majordomos of the queens were some of the most powerful people in the Akkadian kingdom, owning seals of the highest quality. The seal impressed on the tag in **Figure 3.12** belonged to a man, Ishkun-Dagan, who was the scribe and majordomo of Tuta-shar-libbish, queen of Shar-kali-sharri, the last king of the Akkadian empire (reigned about 2217–2193 BCE).

Already by the end of the Old Akkadian period queens stopped appearing on seals as active participants in the official cult, indicating significant changes to the configuration of royal power. While women shown in seals from the later Ur III period (about 2112–2003 BCE) still engaged in worship and rituals, they are depicted on their own and not together with the king. Only in the Neo-Assyrian period were queens again represented participating with their husbands in the religious affairs of the country.

### *The Ur III Period: Women in Diverse Roles*

While queens remained of significant importance to the Ur III economy (Lafont 2016: 164, Paoletti 2012), their role in the official cult seems to have changed. They are no longer shown along with the king in ritual



**Fig. 3.13** The embracing ruling couple. Ur III period cylinder seal reused by a merchant in the Old Assyrian period (CS 106).

scenes. Instead, the ruling couple appears together in a unique and unexpected representation: a royal embrace. In this pose, the king and queen, dressed in long hemmed robes, stand gazing into each other's eyes, arms wrapped around one another (**Figure 3.13**). The embracing royal couple appears as a self-contained unit, never as the object of worship or as part of ritual or narrative scenes. Suter (2017: 354) suggests that this image alludes to the royal couple representing the gods in ritual festival celebrations of the Ur III period. This explanation, however, fails to account for the apparent intimacy of the couple's embrace and their face-to-face gaze, otherwise rare in Mesopotamian art. They stand as equals in the scene, both actively embracing each other. It has been suggested that from the Ur III period onward, queens are no longer depicted as on an equal footing with their husbands (Suter 2017: 353). This motif, known both from seals and plaques, is certainly an exception.

Parallel to the earlier Akkadian representations of the queen and possibly other elite women (for instance, the seals in **Figures 3.10** and **3.11**), NCBS 118 (**Figure 3.14**) shows a seated woman, presumably the queen,



**Fig. 3.14** The queen receiving a woman in audience above a series of swans (YPM BC 037015, NCBS 118).



**Fig. 3.15** The seal NBC 12254 (YPM BC 038329) showing a scene similar to NCBS 118.

in an introduction scene. Two female figures approach the seated queen, one introducing the other. Three horizontal lines separate this introduction scene from a lower register showing four waterfowl, possibly swans or geese, swimming in water, represented by wavy lines. The same configuration, including both the female introduction and the water birds, recurs on several other seals, such as NBC 12254 (Figure 3.15), and appears to be an established type. Though the exact significance of these scenes is unknown to us, this imagery would have carried meaning for an ancient viewer. The inclusion of the queen in the scene could suggest that anyone using such a seal would have been affiliated with the queen's household. Ur III queens, such as Shulgi-simti, the wife of Shulgi (reigned about 2094–2047 BCE), ran large estates and oversaw parts of the official cult (Sharlach 2017). The seal here, which is made of the prestigious Afghan material lapis lazuli, is inscribed in Sumerian cuneiform with the name “Kasa son of Lugalbi”—an otherwise unknown individual.

A unique composition appears on a recarved Ur III period seal (Figure 3.16). The main visual field of the seal shows a contest scene, while a much smaller set of motifs is placed in a second area that originally may have contained an inscription. Here, in very tiny carving, two erotic scenes have been placed one above the other and between the two lines of a new cuneiform inscription. The imagery shows a standing man having intercourse with a woman leaning forward. Her upper body is placed just above the second line in the inscription. The man is holding his penis in one hand and the hand of the woman in his other hand. The other scene, placed below, shows a woman squatting on top of a man lying horizontally. This man also holds his penis in one hand. The Sumerian inscription, which was added to the seal at the same time as the two erotic scenes, reads “Nigmu son of Abba.” While the latter of the two erotic scenes, showing the woman on top, is attested in the glyptic sources (MNB 1465, Louvre; Battini 2006: 6, Fig. 6), the first erotic scene, with the woman bending over, is not. It is, however, a well-known motif from Ur III and Old Babylonian terracotta plaques and Middle Assyrian lead plaques. The plaques are usually interpreted as charms for fertility and/or erotic wellbeing (Assante 2002). If this interpretation is correct, Nigmu may have had these scenes carved on his seal in the hopes of ensuring his own erotic wellbeing.

Another unique seal from the Ur III period is NCBS 158 (Figure 3.17). This seal shows a contest scene, a very well-attested scene type in Mesopotamian glyptic, albeit here featuring a woman—rather than a male hero—battling two lions. The woman has long hair and is wearing a long robe. Her hands are clutched on her chest. A scorpion, a symbol of women



**Fig. 3.16** Seal with contest scene. Two erotic scenes were added to the seal after it was first carved (YPM BC 039029, YBC 12637).



**Fig. 3.17** A seal showing a woman in a contest scene (YPM BC 037055, NCBS 158).

throughout Mesopotamian history, is placed next to her (Zernecke 2008). A standard topped by a bird, another symbol of womanhood, is placed next to the participants in the battle. The contest scene is usually interpreted as the battle between the forces of chaos (represented by rampant and dangerous animals) and good (represented by the hero and the heroic bull-man)—quintessentially male forces (Rakic 2014). This seal, however, clearly shows a woman in combat, whose female identity is supported by not just one, but two, emblems of womanhood. There can be no doubt as to the intentionality of this unique rendition of the contest scene. The seal is uninscribed and no attestations of its use on tablets or bullae are known, making it difficult to approach further an interpretation of the imagery.

Whereas the Old Akkadian seals display a fairly consistent iconography of women, the Ur III period seals feature several idiosyncrasies. The differences may relate to the wider use of seals in Ur III society outside of elite circles. NCBS 158 and YBC 12637 are both examples of this. At the same time, some higher quality seals such as CS 106 and NCBS 118, both showing the queen and standardized imagery, seem to reflect elite users and the output of elite workshops or palace-affiliated craftspeople.

### *The Early Second Millennium: Women Owning Seals*

By the beginning of the second millennium BCE, images of women in seals continue to be prevalent in Syrian art, but become much rarer in Babylonia (Otto 2016; Pinnock 2008). Contemporary seals from Assur

(attested mostly as impressions on envelopes discovered in central Anatolia) also depict very few females, mortal or divine. While the goddess Ishtar was an important deity for the people of Assur, representations of her in the Old Assyrian seal style are exceedingly rare. A fully frontal female wearing a long robe may represent a particular Assyrian version of Ishtar but she is never depicted with attributes that would confirm this identification. Two of the most commonly depicted female deities in third- and second-millennium glyptic art, the interceding or suppliant goddess, Lama, and the nude goddess with a long ponytail or braid, do, however, play important roles in the Old Assyrian seal style. In contrast to the imagery of Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian seals, Syrian seals of the early second millennium BCE, both those known from impressions in Anatolia and seals found in Syria, show women as ritual practitioners. Examples include NCBS 312 (Figure 3.18) and NCBS 164, where a standing woman in a long robe and with long, loose hair raises one hand in salute before a standard with two superposed heads (Pinnock 2008).

While women may be rare in the glyptic art of the early second millennium BCE, the number of seals that were demonstrably used and owned by women is the highest of any period in Mesopotamian history. The ownership of these seals is attested by inscriptions on the seals with the name of the owner or by notations accompanying the seals on clay envelopes or tablets. Sometimes, nothing is known about these women except what is revealed by the seal inscriptions. What characterizes many of these seals is that they did not belong to royal or even elite women.



**Fig. 3.18** A seal showing a female ritual practitioner in front of a double-headed standard (YPM BC 037209, NCBS 312).

Often, more is known about Old Assyrian women and their seals, due, in part, to the survival of sealed documents. This is the case for a *gubabtu*-priestess, by the name of Lamassi. Lamassi lived in Assur, while most of her closest family members spent the majority of their time in Anatolia involved in the caravan trade. Our knowledge of Lamassi derives especially from the documentation surrounding the court case that followed her father's death. Lamassi's seal, known from this documentation, shows a presentation scene with a clean-shaven worshipper in audience with a king (Figure 3.19). Nothing in the seal's imagery betrays the gender or the status of its owner within the cult. The seal may have been an heirloom piece in Lamassi's family and used by other family members before her.

Figure 3.20 shows the drawing of the seal belonging to Annanna, an Anatolian woman married to an Assyrian merchant. The seal is uninscribed, but its owner can be identified on the basis of notations on envelopes where the seal was impressed. It shows a presentation scene in which a human male, accompanied by two interceding gods, approaches a seated ruler holding a cup. Once again, the imagery of the seal gives no clue as to the gender of its owner. A terminal motif, divided into two registers, shows the god Assur represented as the so-called bull-altar above a dividing line and below it is a scorpion. A burning brazier on a stand is placed in front of the bull-altar. In seals belonging to both men and women, the juxtaposition of the bull-altar and the scorpion is common. While the scorpion generally symbolizes womanhood and female fertility in Mesopotamian art, the function of this motif in this context is uncertain. It does not seem to relate to the gender of the seal owner, nor is it clear how it relates to the bull-altar in the iconography.

There are many attestations of female seal use and ownership in the Old Assyrian period, but the gender of the seal owner was not related through seal iconography. If queens played a ritual or social role in Old Assyrian society, they were either not represented in art, or circumstances of discovery have excluded them from the surviving record. Indeed, almost all of the glyptic material from the period has been recovered in Anatolia—far from Assur—and clearly does not represent all of Assur society.

### *Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian Queens*

During the latter half of the second millennium BCE, when Kassite Babylonian seal styles feature only very few women (Nijhowne 1999), the contemporary Middle Assyrian tradition gives prominence to the Assyrian queen, sometimes wearing a mural crown, receiving a female or male figure in audience. In several examples, the central scene is framed by a palm tree.

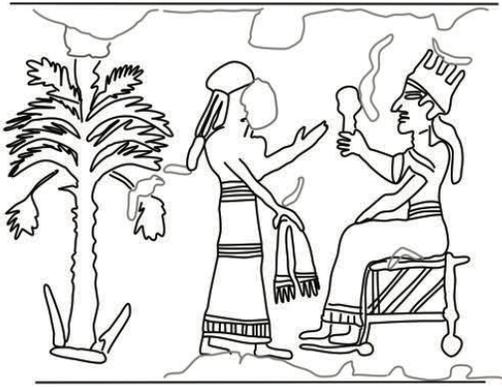
Figure 3.21, a seal held in the British Museum, shows a female attendant in a long dress, holding a fringed cloth, in audience with a seated queen, who also wears a long dress as well as a mural crown. The queen holds a mirror in her right hand. Mirrors appear in Mesopotamian ritual texts and art as symbols of womanhood and fertility and are associated with elite women in particular (Albenda 1985). Clothing is also an important marker of status, and the cloth shown in the arms of the female attendant may represent the queen's royal dress (Porada and Collon 2016: 128). The queen's



Fig. 3.19 Seal belonging to Lamassi, daughter of Shalim-Assur and priestess in Assur (CS 1308), Old Assyrian period.



Fig. 3.20 Seal belonging to an Anatolian woman (CS 1269), Old Assyrian period.



**Fig. 3.21** Seal showing a person in a long robe, holding a piece of cloth, in audience with a queen wearing a mural crown (BM 132979; Porada and Collon 2016, MA 17), Middle Assyrian period.

elevated status is further indicated by her seated, enthroned position—a pose associated with importance and reverence in Mesopotamian art (Winter 1992). Two seals at the Louvre Museum also show the seated queen holding a mirror and attendants carrying the fringed royal cloth (Delaporte 1923, Plate 90, 15 [A.780] and 16 [A.781]). On a similar seal in the Adana Museum (Tunça 1979, no. 60) the queen’s attendant, a palm tree, and an offering table are placed in a boat. Behind the seated queen (who again holds a mirror) is a vessel in a stand. This vessel is similar to those found on some seals showing women giving birth, possibly containing oil used to ease birth (No. 31). All of these iconographic elements recur in the seals portraying Middle Assyrian queens, probably emphasizing the queen’s role as the mother of the crown prince and the one securing the continuation of the royal line.

It is frequently argued that there initially was no iconography for early first millennium BCE, Neo-Assyrian queens (Börker-Klähn 1997) and that such imagery was invented under the Sargonid kings during the mid-eighth century BCE (Ornan 2002; May 2018). However, as we have seen, the image of the queen in Middle Assyrian glyptic was well-established and may have served as the model for the later Neo-Assyrian royal women. Many of the attributes of the Middle Assyrian queens reappear in the Neo-Assyrian period, including the mirror, the mural crown, and the enthroned posture (see [Figure 2.4](#) on p. 19). On an

inscribed bronze plaque kept in the Louvre Museum (AO 20.185), Naqi’a, queen of Sennacherib and mother of Esarhaddon, is depicted holding a mirror, and several mirrors were found in the Queens’ Tombs at Nimrud, including one buried with Atalia, queen of Sargon II, which had an inscription and a scorpion embossed on its handle (Hussein 2016, IM 115468). An important attribute of the Neo-Assyrian queen, the mural crown also can be traced back to Middle Assyrian seals. Different origins for the mural crown have been suggested, including the thirteenth-century BCE relief of the Hittite goddess Hebat at Yazılıkaya, images of the Syrian Goddess on Old Syrian style seals, and the iconography of the Neo-Assyrian king (Börker-Klähn 1997; Ornan 2002; Maier 2012; May 2018: 262). Whatever the source, the Middle Assyrian seals clearly show that the mural crown was an element in the iconography of the Assyrian queen already in the Middle Assyrian period.

The seal in [Figure 3.22](#), found in Grave III of the Queens’ Tombs at Nimrud, shows the queen wearing a mural crown, with a headband that trails down her back, and a long, fringed dress. She and the king (who wears a long dress, a fringed shawl, and a tall, flat-topped headdress) are shown standing on either side of a stylized tree, which is often referred to as the “Sacred Tree,” here topped by a winged disc. The scene reproduces the central theme of one of the throne room reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II (reigned about 883–859 BCE), in which the duplicated king, flanked by two winged genies, stands antithetically around the Sacred Tree. This theme recurs on seals from



**Fig. 3.22** Carnelian seal with a gold cap from Grave III of the Queen’s Tombs at Nimrud (ND 1989.332; Hussein 2016, pl. 133).

the ninth to the seventh centuries BCE. In the seal in [Figure 3.22](#), a beardless eunuch, wearing the same dress as the king and with a ribbon trailing down the back, is shown standing behind the king. A faint outline across the top of his head is probably a diadem to which the ribbons were attached. This iconography is usually reserved for the crown prince (Kertai 2017), but it has been suggested that the figure here, who may represent the owner of the seal, could have been the powerful *turtanu*-official, Shamshi-ilu (Reade 2009: 253). A gold bowl from Nimrud (ND 1989.255) inscribed with the name of Shamshi-ilu found in Coffin I in Grave III (Hussein 2016: 29), may support Reade's suggestion. However, the seal was found in Coffin II of Grave III, near the head of the skeletal remains of a single individual. It has recently been argued this sole inhabitant of Coffin II was Hama, queen of Shalmaneser IV, who reigned about 782–773 BCE (Spurrier 2017; see also Hussein 2016: 33). The seal would thus presumably have belonged to her and the queen depicted in the seal would represent Hama. Both suggestions would date the seal to the eighth century BCE, a dating that is consistent with the carving style.

The scene showing two figures placed symmetrically on either side of the Sacred Tree is a common one, but usually features the duplicated king, the so-called *apkallus* and/or other divine characters. According to Collon, a seal in Berlin may show the king and the crown prince flanking the tree (Collon 2001: 94, Klengel-Brandt 2014, no. 190). The seal in question here replaces the second image of the king with the image of the queen. The symmetry of the scene places the king and the queen on equal terms, much like the banquet scenes of the Early Dynastic period. Reade (1987), Radner (2012), and Frahm (2014) have all argued that the Assyrian king Sennacherib (reigned about 705–681 BCE), in particular, promoted the position of Assyrian queen(s) at court. This seal, which seems to predate Sennacherib, may reflect the general importance of the Assyrian queens in the cult during the Neo-Assyrian period more generally and offers a possible preamble to Sennacherib's efforts.

A stamp seal recovered from the Queens' Tombs at Nimrud also attests to the role of the Neo-Assyrian queen in the official cult ([Figure 3.23](#)). Found in the same coffin as the carnelian cylinder seal described



**Fig. 3.23** Gold stamp seal of Hama.

above, Hama's golden stamp seal is inscribed on the edge with her name and title (al-Rawi 2008; Hussein 2016: 28; Spurrier 2017). It shows a queen wearing a long dress and a diadem with a ribbon trailing down her back. With both hands raised, she approaches the goddess Ishtar/Mullissu, who is seated on a high-backed and star-studded throne, that is placed on top of a lion. Behind the goddess is a scorpion. The whole scene is encircled by a guilloche.

Finally, a stamp seal showing the Assyrian ruling couple together in a scene of worship is attested both as a seal and through three surviving ancient impressions ([Figure 3.24](#)). The seal, made of chalcedony, was purchased by the British Museum in 2002. The same museum also holds two clay sealings and a so-called docket carrying impressions of the seal, all excavated at Nineveh in the mid-nineteenth century by Henry Austen Layard. Out of the many thousands of seals and impressions preserved in the archaeological record, only a handful of seals can be matched with a seal impression made in antiquity, making this a very rare case. The seal is not inscribed, but the docket is dated to the ninth month of 681 BCE—a time just



Fig. 3.24 Seal of a queen of Sennacherib.

before Sennacherib was murdered and Esarhaddon became king (reigned about 681–669 BCE). The seal, therefore, belonged to one of Sennacherib's wives, either Tashmetum-sharrat, as argued by Radner (2012), or Naqi'a, Sennacherib's second (or third) wife and the mother of Esarhaddon, who, according to Frahm, may very well also have held the title of queen (Frahm 2014: 191–92). As was the case with Hama's stamp seal, the imagery on this seal is encircled by a guilloché and includes a prominently featured scorpion. The ruling couple, the king shown taller than the queen, approaches a seated goddess. The queen is wearing a mural crown and a long, fringed dress with a shawl over it. A ribbon trails down her back. The king is wearing a tall conical hat with a point, and a ribbon hangs down his back. He is wearing a short-sleeved tunic, and a fringed shawl is wrapped around his body. The goddess, Ishtar/Mullissu, is sitting on a star-studded throne on top of a striding lion. The goddess is holding the lion on a leash. While the queen is worshipping along with her husband on this seal, her smaller size and position behind the king clearly mark her as secondary in relation to her consort.

### Conclusions

Representations of women occur on seals throughout Mesopotamian history, although far more often and in more varied contexts in the third millennium BCE. Only among the very elite was the seal imagery tailored to fit the seal owner. Such seals show queens and their female attendants banqueting or participating in the cult. They attest to the importance of the ruling couple, together or apart, in official religion and manifest their social superiority. In non-elite contexts, seals were reused, carrying the old imagery of a former owner, or acquired with generic imagery. An identifying inscription, however, could be added to a blank inscription panel or an old inscription changed or deleted. In these cases, the imagery of the seal does little to communicate the gender of the seal owner and both men and women used the same generic imagery (see, for instance, **No. 6**). The identification of the owner, and thereby their gender, can be notoriously difficult to pin down. In addition to physical seals—tens of thousands of which are nowadays kept in collections worldwide—there is also an unknown number of ancient impressions of both cylinder and stamp seals, many of which can be identified as seals belonging to women (see, for instance, **Nos. 1** and **3**). Sealed documents with identifying inscriptions help us understand the complex relationship between owner and imagery. More broadly, the use of these seals demonstrate the important roles women played in the ancient economy as witnesses, trading goods or selling land. From the representation of elite women to the participation of women in the Mesopotamian economy, seals offer an important record of ancient society. These few pages offer a glimpse of the ways in which the identities, status, and lives of women in Mesopotamia can be witnessed in the glyptic arts.



# 4 *Between History and Fiction – Enheduana, the First Poet in World Literature*

Klaus Wagensonner

*I, Enheduana, will recite a prayer to you.  
To you, holy Inana, I shall give vent  
to my tears like sweet beer.  
("Lady of All Divine Powers," ll. 81–83)*

The esteemed scribal profession is most often linked to the male domain. The scarcity of sources in the textual record pertaining to female scribes is indeed telling (Stol 2016: 367–71). Nonetheless, the patron of this profession, at least up to about the mid-second millennium BCE, was not a god but rather a goddess named Nisaba (Lion 2011: 91–92; [Figure 4.2](#)). Literary compositions and other scholarly texts were frequently devoted to this goddess. It is also noteworthy that the earliest-named author in world literature is, as it happens, a woman. The following aims to highlight the historical facts about this remarkable individual and later scholarly fiction behind her persona.

The stage is set. King Sargon of Agade, or Sharrum-kinum, “the just king” (reigned about 2334–2279 BCE), ruled over a vast territory after having defeated one city-state after another in both Sumer to the south and Syria to the north. This new elite Akkadian-speaking dynasty brought about a number of significant changes, especially in language, cult, and, of course, art (see the cylinder seals dating to this period featured in this catalogue). Among the urban centers conquered by Sargon was Ur, located to the far south on the Mesopotamian alluvium, the city of the moon god Nanna, in Sumerian, or Sin, in Akkadian. There Sargon installed his daughter into the office of high-priestess (Sumerian *en*) of the moon god. Her name was Enheduana (“The high-priestess is the Ornament of Heaven”)—a programmatic name which she must have taken upon entering this important office.

Enheduana was certainly not the first *en*-priestess installed at Ur, and she would not be the last. Evidence from the preceding centuries, the so-called Early Dynastic period, shows that at that time the moon god also had “spouses” in the form of *en*-priestesses (Winter 1987: 201; Marchesi 2004: 170). How far this custom reached back in time remains unknown. A later woman of this rank, the daughter of the Old Babylonian king Kudur-Mabuk and sister of the Larsa kings Rim-Sin I and Warad-Sin, named Enanedu (“The high-priestess suitable for Heaven”), left a now-fragmentary clay cone, today housed in the British Museum, commemorating her construction of an architectural complex that is conventionally translated as “cloister” (Sumerian *gi-pa-r*), the “residence of the office of high-priestess” (Frayne 1990, E4.2.14.20, l. 26). This office eventually disappeared but was revived more than a millennium later when the Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus (reigned 557–539 BCE) promoted the moon god to the highest rank in the Babylonian pantheon. According to a clay cylinder ([No. 24](#)), the

**Fig. 4.1** The hymn “Lady of All Divine Powers” on a series of three tablets, (from left to right: YPM BC 018721, YBC 4656; YPM BC 021234, YBC 7169; YPM BC 021231, YBC 7167), Old Babylonian period.

king elevated his daughter to the office of high-priestess (Akkadian *entu*) and named her En-nigaldi-Nanna (“The high-priestess: Desire of the Moon god”; col. ii, l. 13; [Figure 4.3](#)).

### *The Historical Figure Enheduana*

Let us, for the time being, return to Enheduana in about the 23rd century BCE. An extraordinary monument survives from her time which puts us face to face with this high-priestess. A disk-shaped alabaster plaque approximately 25 cm (slightly less than 10 inches) in diameter, was found by excavators at Ur in the area of the *gipar* (Winter 1987: 192, n. 15). The object was unearthed next to a statue of a later high-priestess named Enanetuma, who might have had the inscription on the disk copied onto a clay tablet in the early second millennium BCE (McHale-Moore 2000: 74; Stol 2016: 563). The object was only partially



**Fig. 4.2** Two objects with dedications to Nisaba, the divine patron of scribes: a fragmentary mace-head (above: YPM BC 005499, NBC 2526), Old Akkadian period; a clay jar-rim with inscription on top (below: YPM BC 001820, MLC 1823), about late third or early second millennium BCE.



**Fig. 4.3** Detail from Nabonidus's clay cylinder where he states that he found an inscription of the former *en*-priestess Enanetu (YPM BC 016810, YBC 2182), Neo-Babylonian period.

preserved and is heavily reconstructed. The main side of the disk bears a central frieze with several figures carved in relief (for a depiction of the disk, see [Figure 2.3](#) on p. 18). In the center are two figures, a nude male, probably a priest, who pours a liquid from a spouted vessel into a plant-stand that is set up in front of a now-mutilated element originally reconstructed as a temple-tower with four steps, but possibly the remains of a seated god wearing a flounced garment (personal communication by Ronald Wallenfels). Behind the nude male appears a woman with turban and flounced garment followed by two beardless male attendants. Thanks to an inscription carved into the backside of the disk, the woman in the flounced garment can be securely identified as the *en*-priestess Enheduana. Apart from her name, this inscription also gives her title, function, and patronym. She is referred to as the moon god's *zirru*, a term that is also used for the moon god's spouse, Ningal. The high-priestess was thus the representative of the moon goddess on earth (Stol 2016: 558). It is noteworthy that the high-priestess does not perform the ritual act herself, but rather oversees it (Winter 1987: 192; Bahrani 2001: 115).

The contemporaneous textual record does not offer any more information on Enheduana. No economic record of the period informs us of her activities in Ur or in the *gipar*. This is quite different from the situation in previous periods when the wives of the city-rulers of the Sumerian city-state of Lagash seem to have wielded enormous economic power and were intimately associated with the temple economy ([Figure 4.4](#)).

There are, however, a few cylinder seals whose inscriptions relate to Enheduana. One seal, made

of lapis lazuli, names her hairdresser (Frayne 1990, E2.1.1.2003), another names the overseer of her estate (Frayne 1990, E2.1.1.2004). As noted above, the names of high-priestesses known to date suggest that these women were either given or took a new name upon entering the office. The Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus explicitly states that he gave his daughter a new name (No. 24). Enheduana was likely no exception, but nothing further is known about her prior to her installation as *en*-priestess. We shall therefore focus in the following on her role as the first known author in world literature, which is indeed a matter of both history and fiction.

### *The Author Enheduana*

While it seems likely that elite women such as Enheduana were well-educated (Cancik-Kirschbaum and Kahl 2018: 80), only Sargon’s daughter left us a substantial body of high literature. As the quote at the beginning of this essay—a passage from one of the compositions attributed to her—shows, the mention of Enheduana’s name may serve as an indicator for her authorship. Before we go any further, it is important to define and distinguish the role in the ancient Near

East of author or composer—the role usually assigned to Enheduana—from those of editor and scribe. The activities of scribes, both male and female, could vary broadly, ranging from serving as administrative personnel to guardians of the written lore. Many scribes are known by name from scholarly texts dating from the third through the first millennium BCE, but these scribes were hardly authors. They copied—directly from an earlier written source, by dictation, or from memory—scribal lore that was already established. Editors, by contrast, take written lore, sometimes deriving from different sources, and build a new authoritative edition. Enheduana appears in this role, as we shall see, for a collection of hymns to temples. Lastly, authors and composers may also derive parts of their work from already-extant written lore (Helle 2019: 124). Mesopotamian literature is largely anonymous apart from the names of those scribes who preserved copies of compositions throughout the millennia (Foster 1991; Foster 2019: 17–18). The few known names of authors appear either in much later scholarly tradition or were incorporated within a given composition itself. While some doubt may be cast on the former, which may derive from a later invented tradition, there may be some level of authenticity in texts that actually refer to the alleged author by name.



**Fig. 4.4** A number of economic documents pertaining to the “Woman’s Household” supervised by the wives of the rulers of the city-state of Lagash, Early Dynastic III period (about 26th century BCE).

The kings of the Old Akkadian period, who ruled during Enheduana's time, had a profound impact on later generations, and their lives and deeds triggered the composition of a number of legends in the more than two millennia that followed (Westenholz 1997; [Figure 4.5](#)).

Enheduana does not feature in any of these late legends. Her persona, however, is entangled with a number of Sumerian-language literary compositions. Nowadays, some scholars tend to attribute six such texts to her authorship (Westenholz 1989: 540), based on the “highly individual style, autobiographical and historical content, certain spellings and usages, and ancient subscripts to manuscripts of her works naming her as author” (Foster 2019: 13).

None of these texts have come down to us in manuscripts dating to her lifetime, although one of the sources, a song of praise dedicated to the moon god that mentions her name, dates to sometime in about the last third of the third millennium BCE (Westenholz 1989: 555–56). All other compositions are known from manuscripts of the Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE), when they were copied as part of the curriculum employed to teach the art of writing at scribal centers (Sumerian *e<sub>2</sub>-dub-ba-a*) in such cities as Nippur, Ur, and Larsa.

Three of these texts show Enheduana's deep devotion to Inana, the goddess of love and war, which is certainly surprising considering her role as high-priestess of the moon god in Ur. According to their incipits (the initial few words of the respective works), these compositions are known as “Lady of All Divine Powers” (*Ninmeshara*) or the “Exaltation of Inana”, “The Great-Hearted Mistress” (*Innin shagura*), and “Mistress of the fearsome Divine Powers” (*Innin mehusha*) or “Inana and Ebih” ([Figure 4.6](#))—the first two refer explicitly to the high-priestess by name (ll. 67 and 219, respectively).

The poem “Inana and Ebih,” a text glorifying Inana's war-like features ([Figure 4.7](#)) and her defeat of the mountain Ebih, does not mention the priestess at all. Stylistic features and the reference to this combat in some of the other texts, however, have led scholars to include it in Enheduana's oeuvre. But are these small hints really enough to ascribe them to Enheduana's stylus?



**Fig. 4.5** The obverse of a composition with the incipit “I, Sargon” (YPM BC 000646, MLC 641), Old Babylonian period.

Some scholars also see Enheduana as the compiler of a collection of forty-two short hymns to temples. Her role as, literally “someone who binds the tablet(s) together” (Sumerian *lu<sub>2</sub>-dub-ka-keš<sub>2</sub>-da*) is explicitly stated in the last of these hymns (ll. 543–44):

*The compiler of the tablet is Enheduana.  
My king, something was created, that no one has  
created before.*

There remain, however, persuasive doubts as to what extent the priestess actually compiled this collection, since two of the temples invoked by the hymns were reportedly built long after her lifetime (Black 2002; Glassner 2009: 224). It is important to bear in mind

**Fig. 4.6** Three manuscripts of texts said to have been composed by Enheduana, a manuscript of *Innin shagura* (left: YPM BC 000088, MLC 85), one of *Innin mehusha* (center: YPM BC 021233, YBC 7168B), and one of *Ninmeshara* (right: YPM BC 018736, YBC 4671; see **No. 44**).



that such scholarly literary texts were rather fluid and not yet fossilized nor canonized as in later periods. A list of incipits (basically the titles of the compositions) in the Yale Babylonian Collection dating to the end of the third millennium (**Figure 4.8**) shows quite vividly how little we actually know about the literary corpus in earlier periods and how different that corpus must have been compared to the Old Babylonian period, since hardly any of its entries can be identified with known

literary compositions. It is therefore also not unlikely that texts originally compiled by Enheduana may have changed significantly over the centuries and may have been appended, altered, and updated as in the case of the Temple Hymns.

The hymn “Lady of All Divine Powers” portrays events in Enheduana’s life (**Figure 4.1, No. 44**). The high-priestess addresses the goddess Inana with a plea in which she accuses a certain Lugalane of disrupting



**Fig. 4.7** Representation on a cylinder seal of the goddess Inana on the left (YPM BC 037115, NCBS 218), Old Babylonian period.



**Fig. 4.8** An early list of text incipits (YPM BC 017719, YBC 3654), Ur III period.

the theological fabric of the city of Uruk (ll. 81–89):

*I, Enheduana, want to recite a prayer for you.  
To you, holy Inana, I shall give free vent to my tears like  
sweet beer!  
Do not be anxious about Dilimbabbar (i.e., the moon  
god Nanna)!  
In connection with the purification rites of holy An,  
(Lugalane) has altered everything of his,  
and has stripped An of the Eana.  
He has not stood in awe of the greatest deity.  
He has turned that temple, whose attractions were  
inexhaustible,  
whose beauty was endless, into a destroyed temple.*

This Lugalane is no stranger. He is likely a ruler of Ur by the same name, who, together with two other kings, led a revolt against Sargon's eventual successor, Naram-Sin (Haul 2009: 38), in whose reign Enheduana must still have been high-priestess of the moon god at Ur. Why did the priestess not ask the moon god for help? The text makes clear that Enheduana

would not receive a final verdict from the moon god, probably because of his close relationship to Lugalane. Enheduana was desperate about her situation and explained (ll. 139–41):

*Since it was full and overwhelming, I bore (this composition) for you, Exalted Lady.  
That which I told you in the dark of the night,  
a singer may perform for you in the bright of day!*

Like the Temple Hymns, this composition also links Enheduana directly to the process of compilation.

### *Other Female Poets*

Sargon's daughter, however, was not the only female "author" in cuneiform literature. It is assumed that elite women at the court of the Ur III kings (about 2112–2003 BCE) composed some of the literature that pertains to them (Lion 2011, 97). Another woman author appears in the Old Babylonian period. Ninshatapada, the

daughter of the king of Uruk, Sin-kashid, calls herself a woman scribe (l. 16: *m u n u s d u b - s a r*) in a letter-prayer to the king of Larsa, Rim-Sin I (reigned about 1822–1763 BCE). This catalogue contains two objects dedicated to this king by women: a flat limestone dish (No. 25) and a base for a vessel made of basalt (No. 34). The latter object, at least, quite certainly dates to a mature stage in Rim-Sin’s reign, after Larsa had added a number of other southern Mesopotamian cities into its realm. In about 1803, Rim-Sin put an end to the dynasty of Sin-kashid in Uruk. Sin-kashid’s daughter, the afore-mentioned Ninshatapada, was high-priestess of the god Meslamtaea at his sanctuary in the nearby city of Durum. In her letter to the king, written in a highly poetic style—which has come down to us in a number of manuscripts—the princess congratulates the king for the mercy he has shown the population in Uruk, and prays that she might again someday return to her post.

### Conclusions

Enheduana was demonstrably a historical figure. Deriving from the royal family, the high-priestess wielded important cultic power. She and other high-priestesses restored their residence at Ur, the *gipar*, and left inscriptions and representations of their likenesses. Enheduana’s memory must still have been alive hundreds of years after her death, as the inscription on her disk was carefully copied onto a later clay tablet. It can also be stated with some confidence that these women were literate and Enheduana may very well have been the author of the fine Sumerian literature claimed by the later evidence. Scholarship is divided as to whether she herself authored all of these texts or a later author during the early second millennium BCE included her name, and thus the memory of her, in a few of them.

In the end it might not matter too much whether Enheduana, high-priestess of Nanna, was indeed author of all the compositions we assume were composed by her, or at least in the form we know them from the manuscripts at hand that date long after her lifetime. Certainly, the tradition of Sargon’s daughter was still alive among the Old Babylonian period literati.

That these scholars considered this woman, a high-priestess, to be a venerable author offers one line of evidence for the status of women (Bahrani 2001, 116). One of her compositions, “Lady of All Divine Powers,” which actually mentions her name, has come down to us in roughly a hundred manuscripts alone. And new manuscripts still come to light, adding knowledge about her texts. For some time a small fragment of a tablet housed in the Yale Babylonian Collection was considered an economic record “of uncertain nature,” but now can be securely identified as a new source of “Lady of All Divine Powers” (Figure 4.9).



Fig. 4.9 A new source of “Lady of All Divine Powers” (YPM BC 020382, YBC 6316), Old Babylonian period.



# 5 *From Sammu-ramat to Semiramis and Beyond: Metamorphoses of an Assyrian Queen*

Eckart Frahm

Beginning in Greek and Roman times and throughout much of Western history, catalogues of famous women infallibly included a legendary eastern queen: the powerful and sensuous Semiramis, empress of Assyria. “The most renowned of all women” is how the first century BCE Roman historian Diodorus described her, drawing on the work of Ctesias of Cnidus, who had acquired his knowledge of Assyrian history when serving as personal physician to the Persian king Artaxerxes II (404–358 BCE).

The story that Diodorus (II 1–20) and other classical historians tell about Semiramis is full of drama and unexpected turns. Semiramis is born in Ashkelon, on the eastern Mediterranean, to the Syrian goddess Derceto, who had indulged in an affair with a good-looking Syrian youth. Ashamed of her union with a mortal man, Derceto exposes her daughter in the wilderness and then throws herself into a lake, assuming the body of a fish with a human head. Nurtured by doves, the now-motherless little girl survives and is eventually recovered by a group of shepherds, whose headman calls her Semiramis, “after the word which, in the language of the Syrians, means ‘dove’” (II 4.6). Semiramis grows up among the shepherds and becomes a great beauty. When the Assyrian officer Onnes, on business in the Levant, gets to see her, he immediately falls in love with her and takes her as his wife. But his happiness is not to last. During the siege of Bactra far east of Assyria, the young woman shows great strategical brilliance when devising a plan to capture the city. She thus catches the eye of the Assyrian king Ninus, who prompts Onnes to commit suicide and marries Semiramis himself. Following Ninus’s death, Semiramis becomes the sole ruler of the great Assyrian empire. She expands her realm through campaigns in all directions and engages in an intense love life—the thousands of artificial mounds found throughout the Near East are allegedly tombs of her lovers, all killed after spending a night with the queen. Eventually, Semiramis dies and rises to heaven in the shape of a dove.

The story of Semiramis resonated through the centuries. A Greek novel celebrates her courtship with Ninus; Dante placed her in his *Divine Comedy* among the lustful in the Second Circle of Hell; Boccaccio’s treatise on famous women (*De mulieribus claris*) includes a biography of the queen; Guido Reni depicted her power and beauty (**Figure 5.1**); and an opera by Metastasio featuring Semiramis was performed on the occasion of the coronation of the Austrian empress Maria Theresa (Asher-Greve 2006).

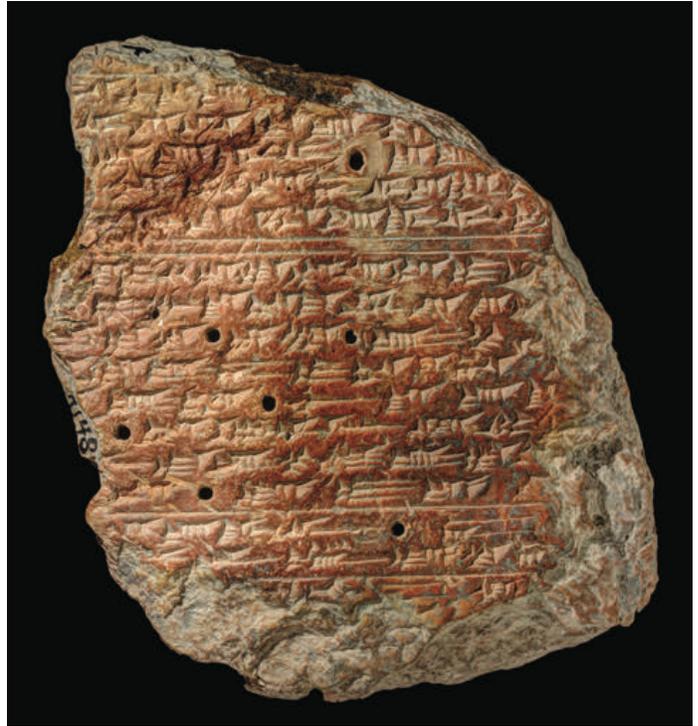
In the mid-nineteenth century, when archaeologists began to unearth the lost cities

**Fig. 5.1** Semiramis receives the Assyrian crown from Ninus. Print after Guido Reni (1575–1642). Dresden, Galerie Alte Meister.

of Assyria in northern Iraq, and philologists, after deciphering the cuneiform writing system, slowly succeeded in reading texts from Assyrian times, scholars started to realize that the old Greek accounts of Ninus and Semiramis were to a significant extent fabricated—that they were stories rather than history. With the rise of feminist and postcolonial studies in the 1970s, the Semiramis legend, in previous decades considered historically inaccurate but harmless, was increasingly interpreted by many as a western “orientalist fantasy,” aimed at reinforcing stereotypes about an effeminate, despotic, and violent east. At best, it was argued, Semiramis could serve as a model of exceptionalism: a woman gaining absolute power in a society otherwise dominated by a thoroughly patriarchal order. Similar criticism was levelled against Herodotus’s stories about Babylonian women—who were allegedly forced to prostitute themselves once in their lifetimes in the “temple of Aphrodite” (1. 199), and ostensibly found husbands through a bizarre mechanism, the “Babylonian marriage market,” where rich men, in a scheme worthy of a modern trash TV format, would pay substantial sums of money to buy the most beautiful brides, before the money thus raised was given to poorer men as an incentive for them to marry the less attractive women (1. 196).

There is no question that not only Herodotus’s accounts of the lives of Babylonian women, but also many aspects of the Semiramis story are indeed fictitious—they reflect the sexual fantasies of Greek and later western authors, as well as ideas about “oriental despotism” that were needed to justify the putative superiority of Greco-Roman political models. But at the same time, it cannot be denied that the Semiramis legend, despite its exaggerations and distortions, had actual roots in Assyrian history.

Formally, Assyria, throughout the 1400 years of its existence, was always ruled by kings. On a few occasions, however, wives and mothers of Assyrian monarchs acquired an extraordinary amount of power (Svärd 2015; [Figure 5.2](#)). The first of these exceptional female leaders was a woman called Sammu-ramat—a name hard to explain etymologically, but clearly very similar to that of Semiramis. Sammu-ramat was the wife of the Assyrian king Shamshi-Adad V (reigned 823–811 BCE) and the mother of his successor Adad-



**Fig. 5.2** Fragment of a clay tablet with palace decrees regulating the lives of Assyrian royal women (YPM BC 021212, YBC 7148), about 1100 BCE.

narari III (reigned 810–783 BCE), who may have ascended the throne as a minor (Pettinato 1985). It seems that during his early years as king it was Sammu-ramat who was really in charge. No image of her is known, but four inscribed monuments document her involvement in religious, political, and military affairs. Two limestone statues of the god Nabu, put on display in the temple of this deity in the Assyrian capital Kalhu (modern Nimrud), honor both Sammu-ramat and her son Adad-narari III ([Figure 5.3](#)). A large stela from Assur, Assyria’s religious center, is dedicated to Sammu-ramat; it was found together with some 140 other stelae memorializing the highest officials of the kingdom of Assyria as well as several of its rulers over a period of some 700 years ([Figure 5.4](#)). And an inscription on a stela uncovered in southern Turkey near Pazarcık records how Adad-narari and Sammu-ramat, together with the Assyrian army, crossed the Euphrates, fought a pitched battle, and reestablished the border between the Assyrian client states of Kummuhu and Gurgum (Grayson 1996: 204–05, 226–27).

Especially this last text, the only Assyrian inscription known so far to mention an Assyrian royal woman engaged in warfare, indicates that Sammu-ramat possessed unprecedented power and influence. This must have intrigued her contemporaries, and it seems feasible that already during her lifetime, popular stories about the queen began to circulate and to be enhanced and embellished (Frahm 2016: 439–49). The name “Sammu-ramat” must have prompted associations with the Assyro-Babylonian word for “dove,” *summu*, which



Fig. 5.3 Statue of the god Nabu, with an inscription mentioning Adad-narari III and Sammu-ramat (London, British Museum, BM 118888).

may have led to the emergence of a tradition that linked the queen to doves.

Sammu-ramat may also have been compared to a much earlier Mesopotamian queen, a presumably largely legendary figure by the name of Kubaba. The “Sumerian King List” describes Kubaba as a “barmaid” or “alewife” who reigned for 100 years in the city of Kish in central Babylonia, presumably at some point in the mid-third millennium BCE (Glassner 2004: 122–23; Figure 5.5). A pseudepigraphic letter known as the “Weidner Chronicle” claims that this Kubaba had restored the regular deliveries of fish for the Esagil temple of the god Marduk in Babylon, who, in return, “favored her” and “entrusted to Kubaba, the alewife, sovereignty over all the lands” (al-Rawi 1990: 5, 9). Both the notion of world domination and Kubaba’s association with fish are reminiscent of Semiramis, the empress born of a divine mermaid.

There are other piscine connections as well. The Mesopotamian model of Onnes, Semiramis’s first husband, was a legendary antediluvian sage (*apkallu*) by the name of Uanna, who was imagined as a human-headed fish-creature. The outer gate of the Nabu temple that housed the aforementioned statues inscribed in the

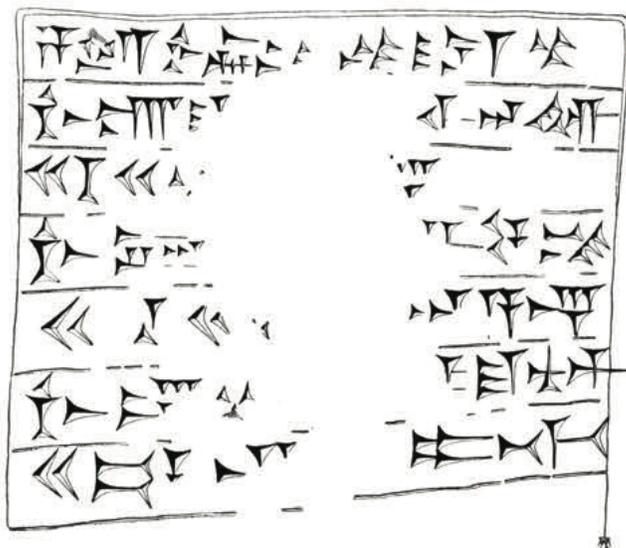


Fig. 5.4 An inscription on a stela from Assur commemorating Sammu-ramat (Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum, Ass. 15712).



**Fig. 5.5** A clay prism inscribed with the “Sumerian King List” (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, AN 1923-444), early Old Babylonian period.

names of Sammu-ramat and Adad-narari was flanked by two statues of mermaids or mermen (**Figures 5.6 and 5.7**), while gold-leaf-covered sculptures of a fish-man and a fish-woman, the latter set up in a bed-chamber, are reported to have been installed in the temple’s interior (Green 1986). Finally, an Assyro-Babylonian text about various monsters and deities claims that the upper body of the goddess Nintu(r)—whose name can mean “lady of birth-giving,” but also “lady of doves”—was that of a naked female, while her

lower body resembled that of a fish, and that she was breastfeeding a baby—all of which is reminiscent of Semiramis’s mother Derceto (Frahm 2016: 446).

Another deity, Kubaba—who shared her name with the legendary queen of Kish—may have played an important role in the emergence and dissemination of the Semiramis legend as well. Worshipped in Carchemish and various other places in southern Turkey and northern Syria, the goddess had strong links with both doves and fish (Radner 2005). It seems possible that Sammu-ramat was first compared to Kubaba the queen and then, by extension, also to Kubaba the goddess, and that some of the qualities of the latter were projected onto her, while qualities associated with Sammu-ramat/Semiramis were in turn ascribed to the goddess.

In a treatise written in Greek, but known under the Latin title *De Dea Syria* (Lightfoot 2003), the second-century CE rhetorician and satirist Lucian of Samosata describes in great detail the cult of a great “Syrian Goddess,” whom he calls Atargatis and by a number of additional names. Her most prominent sanctuary was in the “holy city” of Hierapolis in northeastern Syria, a place known to the Greeks also as Bambyke, in Syriac sources as Mabbug, and today as Manbij. The city was



**Fig. 5.6** Ramp leading up to the “Fish Gate” of the Nabu Temple in Kalhu (Nimrud), with a poorly preserved sculpture of a mermaid or merman on the upper right.

famous for its water springs with fish in them. Some aspects of Lucian's account are bizarre and fantastic, but others seem credible and realistic. Lucian stresses the important role that fish and doves played in the cult of the goddess (*Syr. d.* §14); claims that this cult was run by eunuch priests who castrated themselves for the sake of their divine patroness (*Syr. d.* §15); argues that it had once been founded by Semiramis (*Syr. d.* §14); and refers to various statues of Semiramis and Sardanapallus, the effeminate "last king" of Assyria, that were set up outside the sanctuary (*Syr. d.* §§39–40).

It has been argued that the connection between Hierapolis and the Semiramis tradition was not established prior to the Hellenistic or Roman period (Lightfoot 2003: 354), but this is far from certain. The city of Hierapolis-Bambyke, then known as Nampigi, was conquered in 856 BCE by the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III, Sammu-ramat's father-in-law, and settled by him with Assyrians. Most likely, Nampigi was at that time home to a temple dedicated to an early avatar of the Syrian goddess, possibly called Kubaba, and when a few decades later priests of this temple heard of the mighty deeds of Sammu-ramat, they amalgamated the qualities of their goddess with those of the queen, whose man-like exercise of power

was very much in line with the sexual confusion that characterized the cult of Nampigi's leading deity. Sammu-ramat might even have passed Nampigi in person when she undertook her aforementioned western campaign.

In contrast to the cities of the Assyrian heartland, Nampigi was not destroyed when the Babylonians and Medes wiped out the Assyrian empire between 616 and 609 BCE, and Assyrian traditions probably continued to be passed on there. Nampigi may thus have been one of the nuclei, albeit hardly the only one, from where the legend of Semiramis—most likely primarily in Aramaic, the new *lingua franca* of the region—spread throughout the Levant. As time went by, the legend was adapted to reflect the literary tastes of later generations as well as new political realities: the far-flung conquests, for example, that Ctesias and Diodorus ascribe to Semiramis mirror the scale of the Achaemenid rather than the Assyrian empire.

Apparently, the legend also circulated along the eastern Mediterranean, including the coastal city of Ashkelon, where a female deity similar to the Syrian goddess was worshipped. "Derceto," the name of Semiramis's divine Ashkelonian mother, is probably a distorted form of "Atargatis," the primary name ascribed by Lucian to the Syrian goddess (Figure 5.8).

Some forty kilometers north of Ashkelon, and at one point belonging to its territory, lies the harbor city of Jaffa, where the Biblical prophet Jonah allegedly embarked on his futile quest to escape God's command to go to Nineveh and preach to its people. The Bible reports that when the boat that was supposed to bring him to the city of Tarshish in the far west got caught in a violent storm, the sailors threw Jonah into the sea, whereupon he was swallowed by a large fish and thus saved. After three days in the fish's belly, Jonah was spewed out upon the dry land, after which he did travel to Nineveh.

At first glance, the book of Jonah, probably composed at some point between the sixth and the third century BCE, does not seem to have much in common with the Semiramis legend. Yet upon closer inspection, several links between the two narratives can be detected (Frahm 2016: 432–39). "Jonah the son of Amittai," as the prophet is called, got his name from an eighth-century BCE war prophet mentioned in



Fig. 5.7 Impression of a Babylonian stamp seal showing a merman holding a vase (YPM BC 026643, YBC 13158), early fifth century BCE.



**Fig. 5.8** Limestone relief from Dura Europos showing the head of a goddess, probably Atargatis, with an Assyrian style mural crown and doves (Yale University Art Gallery, YUAG 1935.46), first century CE.

2 Kings 14:25, but it is noteworthy that this name means “dove,” the bird closely associated with Semiramis. Jonah’s three-day-long sojourn in the belly of the fish, the most mysterious episode of his story, later interpreted as a prefiguration of Jesus’s three days in the tomb, brings to mind Semiramis’s mermaid-like mother Derceto. And the life-journeys of both Jonah and Semiramis end in Nineveh—whose name sounds similar to *nunya*, the Aramaic word for “fish.” The two stories also share a “global” setting and a cosmopolitan, imperial world view, quite different from the inward-looking one underlying other prophetic books. In light of these parallels, it seems reasonable to assume that the author of the book of Jonah knew some local version of the Semiramis legend and, for purposes difficult to

uncover, used central elements of it for his own story, in which he transformed the semi-divine Assyrian queen into a male prophet. Such fluidity is perhaps not so utterly surprising if one considers the many metamorphoses found in the Semiramis legend itself.

Exploring the historical and literary dimensions of a figure like Semiramis might seem like a relapse into “first wave” feminist scholarship, with its emphasis on the recuperation of what were often highly privileged women. It also seems to privilege western accounts of eastern history. But the fact is that the story of the Assyrian queen Sammu-ramat/Semiramis fascinated not only Greco-Roman audiences and their European heirs, but also (as shown as well by an Armenian adaptation of the legend) the people of the ancient Near

East. That these people's own versions of the Semiramis legend are unknown to us is due to the fact that they were apparently recorded, not on clay tablets inscribed in cuneiform, but on perishable materials such as leather and papyrus inscribed in Aramaic.

One indirect clue pointing to the popularity of the Semiramis legend in ancient Mesopotamia is provided by a cuneiform document housed in the Yale Babylonian Collection (**Figure 5.9**). Written between 189 and 187 BCE in Uruk in southern Iraq, the tablet records the donation of three slaves to Uruk's temples by a woman of Greek descent called "Šamê-rammata, whose second name is Krato, daughter of Artemidoros" (YOS 20, no. 62). "Šamê-rammata" most likely stands for "Semiramis," the name of the legendary queen—who was apparently considered a positive role model at the time. A fragmentary impression of Šamê-rammata's seal found on the tablet shows the lower portion of the head of a woman (Wallenfels 1994, no. 23; **Figure 5.10**)—and may be the earliest preserved depiction of Semiramis, even though older ones are mentioned by classical authors (Asher-Greve 2006: 326–27).

All things considered, then, it is not exaggerated to claim that legends about the Assyrian queen Semiramis shaped ideas about female agency both in the east and the west for over two and a half millennia.



**Fig. 5.9** Tablet recording the donation of three slaves by "Šamê-rammata (Semiramis), whose second name is Krato," to temples in Uruk (YPM BC 025428, YBC 11633), Hellenistic period.



**Fig. 5.10** Fragmentary impression of the seal of Šamê-rammata, showing the lower portion of a woman's head (perhaps of Semiramis?) with the hair worn in a bun at the back (YPM BC 025428, YBC 11633).



## 6 “... and in a woman, almost unique”

Agnete W. Lassen and Klaus Wagensonner

The academic year 2019/2020 marks the 50th anniversary of co-education in Yale College and the 150th anniversary of women students at Yale University. Here, we commemorate one of the early female pioneers of ancient Near Eastern studies: Ettalene Mears Grice (1887–1927).

Grice received her B.A. degree from Western College for Women, Oxford, Ohio, in 1911 and enrolled the year after in the graduate department at Bryn Mawr under George Aaron Barton, Professor of Semitic Languages. She transferred to Yale University in 1914 and received her doctoral degree in 1917 under the supervision of Albert T. Clay, the inaugural Laffan Professor of Assyriology and Babylonian Literature at Yale University. Grice (Figure 6.1) was among his first cohort and the only woman he ever trained. Clay was also the founder and first curator of the Yale Babylonian Collection, where Grice seems to have spent most of her waking hours. The Babylonian Collection found its first home in Edwards Hall at the Yale Divinity School at College and Elm Streets in New Haven (Figure 6.2). Soon after Grice’s graduation, the Collection moved from the Divinity School to room 202 of the Osborn Zoological Laboratories on the corners of Sachem and Prospect Streets (Figure 6.3), where it remained until its final move to the Sterling Memorial Library in 1931. During Clay’s absences and after his death in 1925, Grice was responsible for the Collection and its wellbeing (Figure 6.4). Archival files and correspondence left by Grice, now housed in the Babylonian Collection Archives, attest to how seriously Grice took this task. There was great concern about how the humidity of the New Haven summers would affect the sensitive clay tablets and a wood stove was installed in the tablet room at the Osborn Zoological Laboratories. Grice notes again and again in her letters to Clay that the stove is going, and the room is warm and dry. On one occasion, though, the heat became so excessive that the glue used to adhere the fragments of an inscribed stone monument melted and the piece fell apart (letter from E. Grice to A. Clay, September 11th, 1922). For a while, Grice also spent her Sundays keeping the Collection open to visitors.

Based on her dissertation work, Grice published two books: *Records from Ur and Larsa Dated in the Larsa Dynasty*, volume five of the Yale Oriental Series (Grice 1919a), and *Chronology of the Larsa Dynasty*, volume 4/1 of the Yale Oriental Series, Researches (Grice 1919b).

**Fig. 6.1** Portrait of Ettalene Grice after her graduation, one of the rare photographs of her (Yale Babylonian Collection Archives).



**Fig. 6.2** The collection rooms at Yale Divinity School before 1918 (Yale Babylonian Collection Archives).



**Fig. 6.3** The collection rooms at Osborn Zoological Laboratory between 1918 and 1931 (Yale Babylonian Collection Archives).

After receiving her degree, Grice worked as Clay's assistant and dedicated all of her time to his grandiose projects (Foster 2006: 66–67). Her academic work almost exclusively relied on gathering vast amounts of data, filling index cards with endless attestations and books with her neat and minute hand-written annotations (**Figure 6.6**). Her major project was a *List of Cuneiform Signs and Sign Groups*, which she had not yet completed when she died. After Clay's sudden death in 1925, Grice was appointed to the rank of Assistant Professor

of Assyriology and Babylonian Literature and Acting Curator of the Babylonian Collection. However, she held this position for only one year. In 1927, she had to ask for teaching leave due to illness and she passed away at the end of the year.

After her death, the Dean of the Graduate School noted in his letter of condolence to Grice's father: "Miss Grice had rare gifts of scholarship—her mastery of semitic languages and literature was very unusual, and in a woman, almost unique" (**Figure 6.5**).

For: Dr. Ettalene M. Grice,  
202 Osborn Zoological Laboratory.

"Voted, to promote Ettalene Mears Grice, Ph.D., to be Assistant Professor of Assyriology and Babylonian Literature and Acting Curator of the Babylonian Collection, beginning October 1, 1925, for the remainder of the academic year 1925-26, with a salary at the rate of \$3,000 per year, as covered by the budget, on the understanding that she will relinquish the Alexander Kohut Research Fellowship in Semitics, with assignment to the Graduate School, subject to formal approval by the Board of Permanent Officers of the Graduate School."

September 29th, 1925.

Fig. 6.4 A letter dated September 29th, 1925 dealing with Ettalene Grice's promotion to Assistant Professor of Assyriology (Yale Manuscripts and Archives).

Mr. William B. Grice,  
26 Philip Street,  
New Haven, Connecticut

My dear Mr. Grice:

Professor Torrey has just told me of your great bereavement and I want to express to you my deep sympathy.

Mrs Grice had rare gifts of scholarship - her mastery of semitic languages and literature was very unusual, and in a woman, almost unique. The work which she has done in her years of research and teaching at Yale will be of lasting value. Her loss is a very great one to that field of knowledge and research, to the Graduate School and to the University. To those of us who were fortunate enough to know her, there is also a great personal loss.

Very sincerely yours,

*Heenan*  
Executive Secretary

Fig. 6.5 A letter by Dean Wilbur L. Cross to Grice's father praising her scholarly abilities (Yale Manuscripts and Archives).

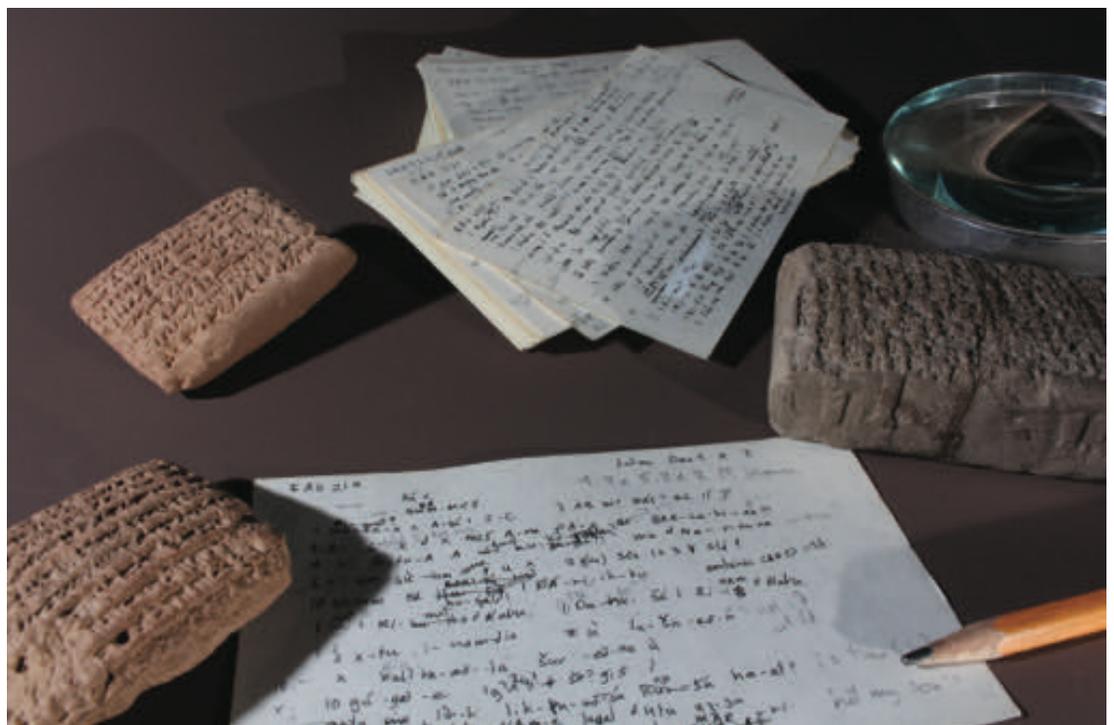


Fig. 6.6 A stack of Ettalene Grice's file cards with editions of cuneiform tablets in the E. A. Hoffman Collection located at the Yale Babylonian Collection.



# *Catalogue of Objects*



No. 1

## *Women in Business*

Men dominated the public sphere in ancient Mesopotamia, but women held the same rights as economic agents, and were active in the buying and selling of land, slaves, craft products, and luxury goods. The artifacts presented here provide a few glimpses into the many important roles women played in business matters. **No. 1** is a legal document where a mother gives her daughter a female slave. The property of women and that of priestesses, in particular, is addressed in two documents from the first half of the second millennium BCE (**Nos. 3** and **4**). **No. 2** is a letter from an Assyrian woman living in Assur and managing the family business there. The letter was sent to her husband, who was undertaking trading ventures in Anatolia.

### *Contributors*

AL	Agnete W. Lassen
EAK	Elizabeth Knott
EK	Evelyne Koubková
ET	Eli Tadmor
JB	Jonathan Beltz
JM	Jana Matuszak
KAW	Katherine Werwie
KW	Klaus Wagensooner
RW	Ron Wallenfels
ST	Sergio Tang

## No. 1 Gift of a female slave

YPM BC 002049

Accession no. MLC 2105

Hellenistic period, year 31 of the Seleucid Era  
(281 BCE); Uruk

77 × 86 × 32 mm; clay

*Bibliography:* BRM 2, no. 5 (copy);

Lewenton 1970: A102–A103 (edition)

This cuneiform tablet records the gift of a female slave, given by a mother to her daughter as part of her dowry (*ana nudunnû*). The tablet was written at Uruk and is dated the 10th day of month IX of year 31 of the Seleucid Era, which

corresponds to December 2nd, 281 BCE.

The slave, named Ana-rabutishu, bore on her right hand the mark of the bride's mother, the donor Ina-banat-Nanaya, daughter of Anu-mukin-apli, son of Ubar, descendent of Kuri.

The donor's seal (Wallenfels 1994, no. 903) was impressed on the tablet's right edge and captioned in cuneiform so as to positively identify her. The impression of her seal, an engraved metal finger-ring (Figure C.1), depicts a long-eared quadruped standing in profile right beneath a horizontal

crescent moon. The bride is identified as Belessunu, daughter of Anu-balassu-iqbi, son of Ina-qibit-Anu. There were thirteen witnesses to the transaction, all male, whose seals are impressed on the remaining tablet edges; these include three of the donor's brothers, La-bashi, Nidintu-Anu, and Ubar, and two of her brothers-in-law, Anu-bel-zeri and Anu-ab-usur. The fact that the dowry came from the bride's mother rather than her father, and that the donor is not specifically identified as the wife of so-and-so in the introductory clause—his name only occurs in the bride's patronymic—suggests that the donor was in fact a widow at the time of the conclusion of this contract.

As evidenced by the full corpus of published contemporary cuneiform private documents from Seleucid Uruk, which record some 450 distinct transactions, women might assume nearly any of the roles men might, although in fact women overall represent fewer than three in a hundred participants. RW



C. 1

## No. 2 Letter concerning the production and shipment of textiles

YPM BC 004651

Accession no. NBC 1678

Old Assyrian period, first half of the nineteenth century BCE; Kültepe (ancient Kanesh), central Anatolia

71 × 63 × 28 mm; clay

*Bibliography:* BIN 4, no. 10 (copy); Garelli 1965: 156, 158; Veenhof 1972: 111–12; Michel 2001: 430–32, no. 303 (translation)

This letter was sent by a woman named Lamassi to her husband, Pushu-ken.



No. 1

**No. 2**

Lamassi lived in the city of Assur in northern Mesopotamia where she and her household wove textiles to send to central Anatolia where Pushu-ken worked as a merchant.

While focused on practicalities, the letter also reveals a good deal about the couple's personal relationship. Lamassi complains that Pushu-ken has not confirmed that he has received her latest shipment of cloth. She then rebukes him for his fickle expectations for her work. In response to his criticism that her textiles are too small, she points out that Pushu-ken himself had requested a decrease in their size. This does not seem to be the first time that Pushu-ken sent conflicting requests, as Lamassi exasperatedly comments that she tries her very best to follow his wishes.

Lamassi's situation was not unique. During the Old Assyrian period, many men from Assur left their families behind in order to work in Anatolia. Lamassi represents a group of women

who served as suppliers, representatives, and administrators for their husbands' businesses at home. If the couple had divorced—as some did—Lamassi would have been entitled to half of their shared assets, but within the bounds of marriage, she worked to advance what was understood to be her husband's estate. KAW

**No. 3 The sale of land belonging to a priestess**

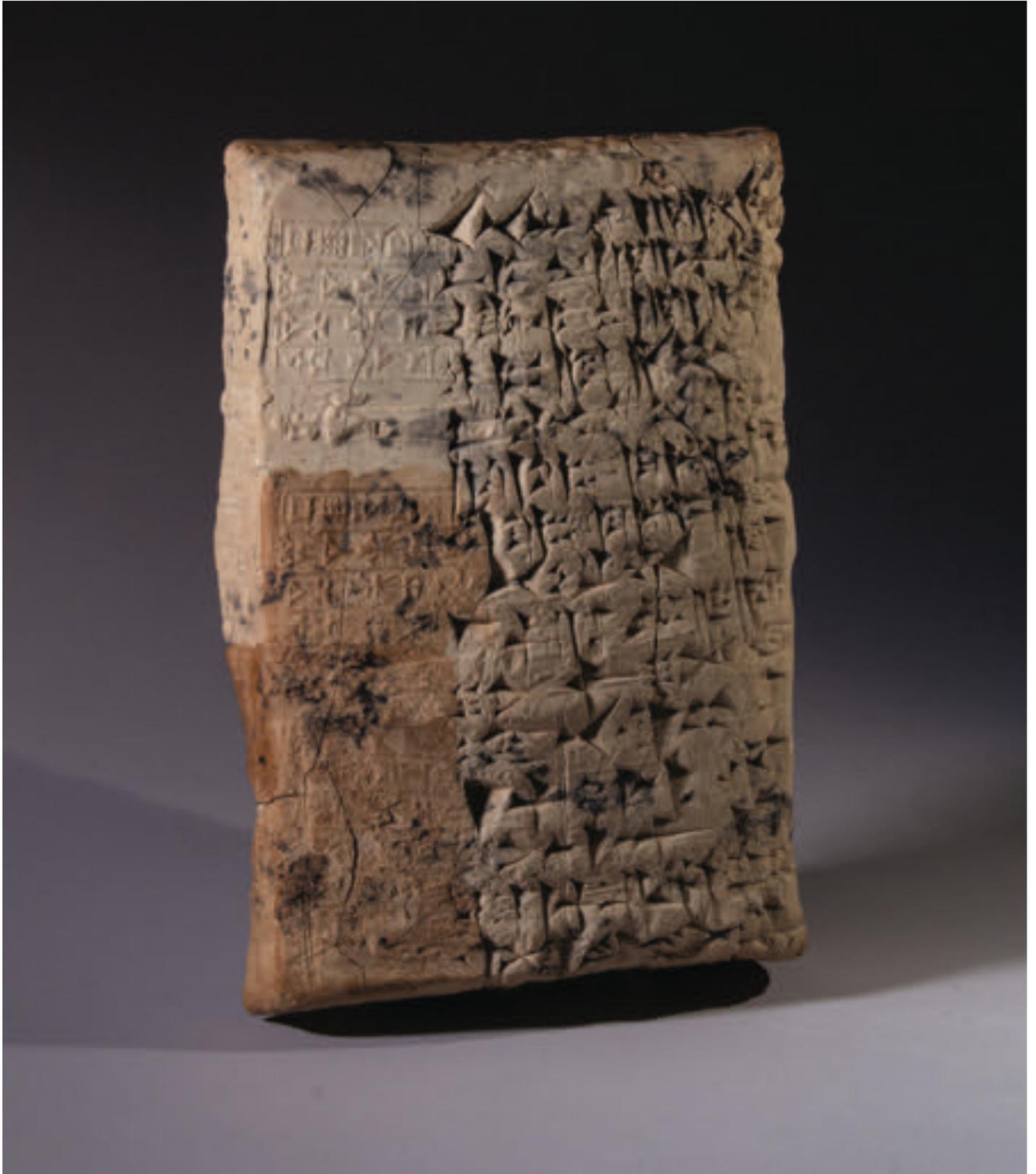
YPM BC 001225  
Accession no. MLC 1220  
Old Babylonian period, year 14 of  
Hammurabi (about 1779 BCE); Kish  
107 × 72 × 46 mm; clay  
*Bibliography*: unpublished

The present text is a legal document dating to the fourteenth year of king Hammurabi of Babylon (reigned about 1792–1750 BCE; Horsnell 1999: 121–22). Due to its thickness and the placement of the seal impressions, this tablet appears

to be a closed clay envelope, containing a clay cuneiform legal document. It belongs, however, to a group of legal documents usually referred to in German as *Quasi-Hüllentafeln*, “quasi-envelope tablets,” which mimic encased tablets (Wilcke 1982: 450–83). Such tablets are particularly well-attested in the late Old Babylonian period.

What was thought to be the earliest example, deriving from the ancient city of Sippar, dates to the reign of Samsuiluna, Hammurabi's successor (Wilcke 1983: 59–64; Voet and Van Lerberghe 2014: 261–62). These massive tablets often deal with “problems related to old titles of property which, after a certain time period (often several decades) are requested to be transferred from the old proprietor to the new when that property was sold, inherited, divided, given as part of a marriage agreement, at the occasion of an adoption etc.” (Voet and Van Lerberghe 2014: 262).

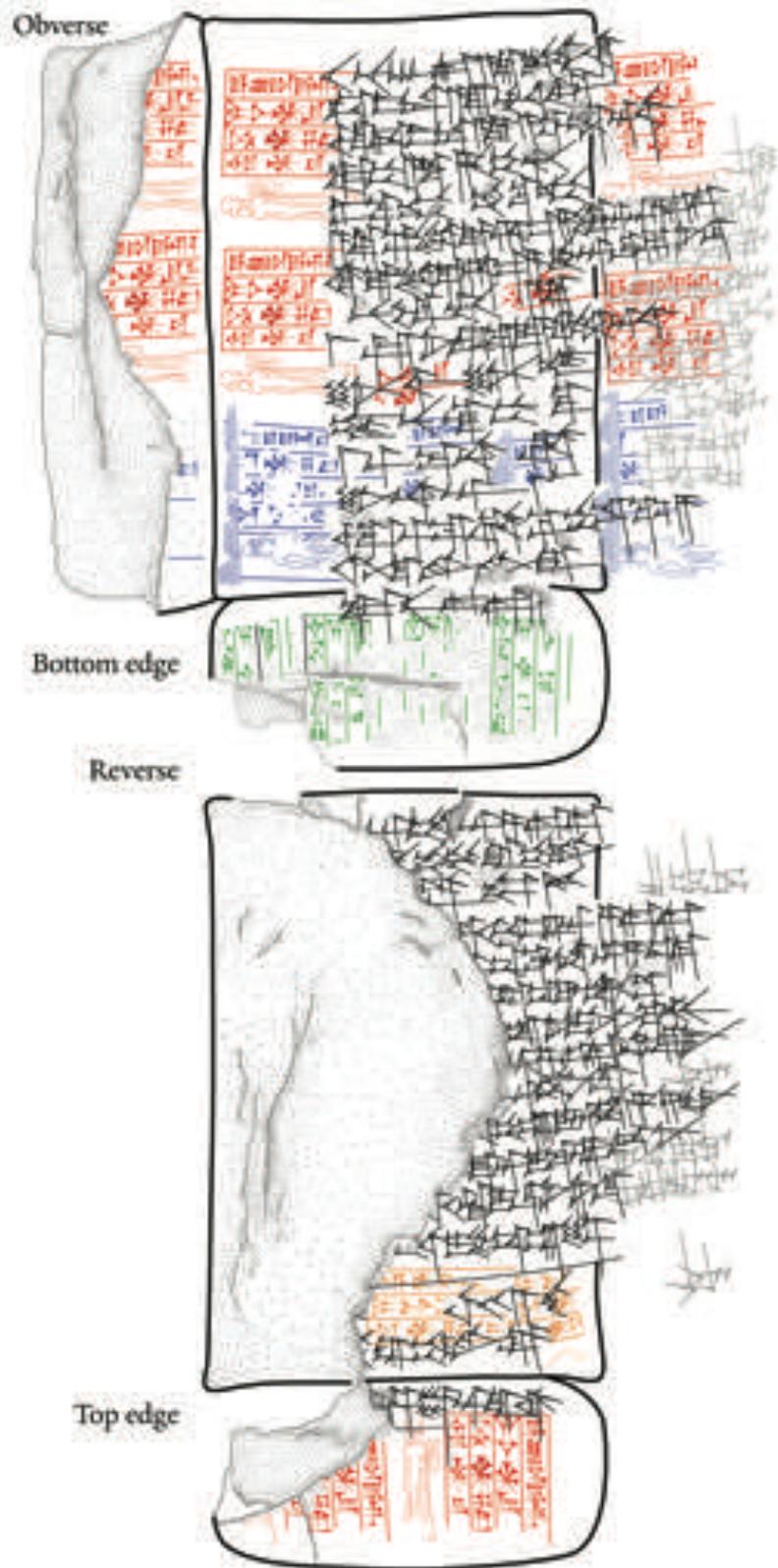
While the majority of such tablets



No. 3

originate from Sippar-Amnanum (modern Tell ed-Der), the present example was most likely drawn up at Kish. This is already indicated in the document's initial line that names a "field of 1 *bur*, 1 *eshe* and 3 *iku* (in area) in Kish (ca. 97,200 m<sup>2</sup>).” The field is specified as the property of a certain Eli-erissa, an *ugbatum*-priestess of the temple of Zababa, the principal deity of Kish (l. 6; compare No. 4). Line 8 of the document specifically refers to her as the “owner of the field” (*bēlti eqlim*). The document further states in ll. 9–14 that a certain Ibni-Sin bought the field according to its full price of ninety sheqels of silver. This purchase formula is followed by the usual legal clauses (for instance, that none of the parties shall bring a claim against each other), an oath, and a number of witnesses whose names are, unfortunately, partially lost in the break on the reverse.

All sides of this Quasi-Hüllentafel are covered with impressions of different cylinder seals. Typical of this type of tablet, but also of some clay envelopes, is an area on both the obverse and reverse spanning roughly a third of the tablet's width reserved for seal impressions. The most prominent seal on the tablet is that of Eli-erissa, the *ugbatum*-priestess herself (marked red in Figure C.2). The seal inscription spans four lines: “Eli-erissa, daughter of Ilshu-ibnishu, maid-servant of (the gods) Zababa and Baba.” Before the inscription stands a suppliant deity lifting both hands. Another seal impressed on the tablet (marked blue) was equipped with a granulated metal seal cap, which appears to have been slightly loose and thus obstructed parts of the first sign in each line in some of the impressions. This seal belonged to Ikun-pi-Ishtar, the *šangûm*-priest of Zababa. Two further seals (marked green and orange) are present on the tablet's bottom edge and the lower part of the tablet's reverse. Imprints of the remaining seals are now lost due to the damage of the tablet. κw



C. 2 Drawing of No. 3.

#### No. 4 Real estate of the priestesses

YPM BC 019044

Accession no. YBC 4980

Late Old Babylonian period, day 8, month

VI, year 15 of Ammi-ditana (about 1669

BCE); Sippar

133 × 71 × 31 mm; clay

*Bibliography:* YOS 13, no. 12 (copy)

This tablet records an exchange of fields located in the irrigation district Shut-sha-Aya near the city of Sippar (Harris 1975b: 294). The fields are exchanged between religious personnel of the temple of the sun god, many of whom were “cloistered women.” During the Old

Babylonian period, there existed a class of so-called cloistered women (*nadītum*) who lived within the walls of temples. Although forbidden to marry, many owned large amounts of property (see No. 3). They were drawn from families in the upper echelons of society and were given their share of the family wealth when they entered the temple. With land, money, and (sometimes) slaves at their disposal, these women engaged in business transactions, especially real estate and money-lending, and found much success financially—sometimes to the envy of their brothers. They lived long and comfortable lives and adopted

other cloistered women, who were to look after them in their advanced age and in return receive an inheritance (Harris 1975a: 302–32). As a salient reminder of the cloistered women’s high status in Old Babylonian society, one of the fields listed on this tablet still bore the name of its original owner, a cloistered woman named Amat-Shamash, over a hundred years after her death (Van Koppen and Lacambre 2009: 169). ST



No. 4



C. 3

## Women's Seals

Seals had a function similar to today's signatures and were necessary for anyone involved in legal or financial transactions. Women owned and used seals, just like men (**Figure C.3**, see also **Chapter 3**, "Women and Seals"). Seals used by members of the elite were often designed specifically for their owner, showing him or her in ritual, audience, or banquet scenes. Usually, however, seal imagery was not personalized or indicative of gender, and the identity of the owner was revealed by the seal inscription. Depictions of women—sometimes the seal owner herself—appear regularly on seals from the third millennium BCE, and on seals from the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods.

### No. 5 Women at work

YPM BC 036928  
 Accession no. NCBS 31  
 Jemdet Nasr period (about 3100–2900 BCE);  
 provenience unknown  
 17 × 19 mm; serpentine  
*Bibliography:* von der Osten 1934, no. 31;  
 Amiet 1961, no. 319; Buchanan 1981, no. 153

Mortal women are not shown often on Mesopotamian cylinder seals. Queens and elite women occur in some number, on seals dating to the third millennium BCE, in particular during the Early Dynastic and the Old Akkadian periods. Non-elite women appear on a group of squat, often convex, seals from the preceding Jemdet Nasr period (about

3100–2900 BCE). Here, the women are shown seated facing left with their hair gathered in a long ponytail or pig-tail, and are therefore often referred to as “pig-tailed women” in the literature. They often appear engaged in craft activities, such as pottery making and textile production. The present seal shows three women operating a device with two horizontal pegs. Two of the women are holding a thick thread or threads wound around the pegs. It is unclear if the women are weaving or preparing the warp for a loom. A third woman is holding what may be a skein of thread. AL



No. 5

### No. 6 The king with mace and two suppliant goddesses

YPM BC 037163

Accession no. NCBS 266

Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE); provenience unknown

30 × 15.5 mm; hematite

*Bibliography:* von der Osten 1934, no. 266; Buchanan 1981, no. 919

This cylinder seal features a combination of two different scenes: (1) the king with mace faced by a suppliant goddess (with a disk and crescent overhead); and (2) a god facing an inscription panel. The former scene consists of a male figure with a mace in his belt facing a goddess with her arms raised in prayer, and the latter scene contains a divine figure facing the frame in which an inscription is carved. Both scenes are common to

Old Babylonian seals, and are sometimes combined on the same seal (Collon 1986, nos. 148–49, 151; Buchanan 1981, nos. 910–11, 943), as on this seal.

This seal also contains a number of filling motifs, i.e., small iconographic elements which appear in the open spaces in the field of the scene. These are quite common on Old Babylonian seals (Collon 2005: 44), but their exact usage or meaning is uncertain (for one proposal, see Collon 1995). Into the space between the god facing the inscription and the king with mace is a standard topped by the upper body of a mongoose or monkey and some kind of insect. In the space between the king with mace and the attendant goddess there is a porcupine, a goatfish, a small figure holding a vase, and an even smaller

man on a pedestal in the so-called knielauf pose (i.e., a kneeling-running representation).

This seal is known to have belonged to a woman because her name is found in the inscription. While her personal name, Ahatum, is quite clear, the name of her father is not. One reading was proposed in von der Osten 1934: 266, but in the more recent publication in Buchanan 1981, the final two signs of his name are marked as uncertain, and the reading of the father's name remains unknown: *a-ḥa-tum* / DUMU.MUNUS *nu-ur<sub>2</sub>-ša-gal-li* (or *ša × ×*) / GEME<sub>2</sub> <sup>4</sup>NE<sub>3</sub>. ERI<sub>11</sub>.GAL, “Ahatum, daughter of Nursha..., maid-servant of Nergal.” JB



No. 6



No. 7

### No. 7 The royal couple before the god of wisdom

YPM BC 037565 (see also [Fig. 3.9](#) on p. 29)  
 Accession no. NCBS 668  
 Old Akkadian period (about 2350–2150 BCE);  
 provenience unknown  
 34 × 19 mm; serpentine  
*Bibliography:* von der Osten 1934, no. 668;  
 Boehmer 1965, no. 1164; Buchanan 1981,  
 no. 472; Suter 2008, no. 80

According to its inscription, this cylinder seal seems to have belonged to a groom (Sumerian *k u š 7*), although this is not entirely clear. The possible occupation is written in a second line. The seal owner's name, written in Sumerian, is rather enigmatic and cannot be easily translated: *š e š - b i - m u - s i - g a*.

Depicted is a characteristic introductory scene with Ea, the god of wisdom, seated on a throne. Roughly a dozen such seals are known thus far (Rohn 2011: 66). He wears a horned crown and long flounced skirt. Streams of water emerge from his body and a

fish is depicted above his raised right hand. He is approached by his vizier Isimu or Usmu, a janus-headed deity. Isimu takes a worshipper who is holding a kid in his right arm, leading him before Ea. The worshipper is followed by a woman in a long garb and the typical hair style (compare [No. 35](#)). She is carrying a *banduddû*-bucket in her right hand. KW

### No. 8 Three women introduced to a god

YPM BC 038123 (see also [Fig. 3.10](#) on p. 30)  
 Accession no. NBC 12224  
 Old Akkadian period (about 2350–2150 BCE);  
 provenience unknown  
 33 × 20 mm; serpentine  
*Bibliography:* unpublished

This cylinder seal shows a presentation scene with two male deities standing opposite each other. They are recognizable as such by their horned crowns symbolizing divinity (Black and Green

1992: 102; for types, see Collon 1982: 30–31). In between them stands an altar. The deity on the right raises his right arm and holds a mace or staff in his left hand; a mace is shown behind him. The deity on the left is pouring a libation and is followed by three women each wearing a fringed robe and a hairdo typical for women (compare [Nos. 35](#) and [37](#)). Two of the women are holding *banduddû*-buckets in their lowered hand. The identity of the individual gods on this seal is unknown. While Old Akkadian glyptic art contains a rich and varied repertoire of motifs concerning the divine world, often clearly referring to mythological narratives, identifying individual gods and scenes can be difficult (Steinkeller 1992; Foster 2016: 139, 203; ). There is frequently no direct correlation between the narratives referenced in seal imagery and mythologies known from the textual record. ET, KW



No. 8



Nos. 9 and 10

### No. 9 Cylinder seal showing a goddess and a man

YPM BC 038431  
 Accession no. NBC 12356  
 Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE); provenience unknown  
 22 × 9 mm; rock crystal  
*Bibliography*: unpublished

This small seal is inscribed with the name of its owner, a woman named Shat-Marduk. It is carved on a piece of rock crystal, a hard stone which is used in a number of seals from the Old

Babylonian period (see Collon 1986: 5–6 for a list of comparable seals from the British Museum collections; compare **No. 13**). The scene on the seal may be a variation of the “king with mace and suppliant goddess,” very prevalent in the Old Babylonian period (Collon 1986: 100–01), and also quite common on rock crystal seals from the same time (Collon 1986: 10). The scene consists of a male figure with one hand raised facing a suppliant goddess (Sumerian *la ma*) with her arms raised in prayer.

It is noteworthy that this seal uses the same iconography as seals belonging to men. The only indication that it belonged to a woman is the name carved in the seal inscription (see Collon 1986, no. 172, for a rock crystal seal with a man's name, and no. 175 for one with a woman's name). See also the tablet presented in **No. 3**, which bears the impression of a cylinder seal belonging to a woman.

This seal is inscribed with the following text: *ša-at-d*AMAR.UTU / DUMU.MUNUS DUMU-*er-še-tim* / GEME<sub>2</sub> *d*AMAR.UTU / *u<sub>3</sub>* *d*zar-*pa-ni-tum*, “Shat-Marduk, daughter of Mar-er-setim, maid-servant of Marduk and Zarpanitum.”

Parallel to seals belonging to men, women frequently refer to themselves as maid-servants (Sumerian *g e m e<sub>2</sub>*) of deities or kings. The phrase probably indicates the seal owner's institutional affiliation. JB

### No. 10 Cylinder seal showing a ritual scene

YPM BC 039014  
 Accession no. YBC 12822  
 Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE); provenience unknown  
 18 × 9 mm; brown mottled buff limestone  
*Bibliography*: Buchanan 1981, no. 716

This seal, whose bottom end is slightly chipped, shows a presentation scene in which a female suppliant on the left, is led by an intercessor; both figures, wearing full-length garments, stand before either a god or a king on the right, who wears a short kilt and a wide-brimmed cap. Both the suppliant and intercessor hold their right hands before their noses in a gesture of piety known as *appa labānu* in Akkadian. This gesture is, for instance, also known from terracotta plaques depicting the ruler or, more famously, from the top of Hammurabi's Law stele (**Figure C.4**). The long-haired intercessor figure in the center of the scene was tentatively identified by Briggs Buchanan as a



C.4 A terracotta plaque depicting the king in a greeting gesture (left: YPM BC 017065, YBC 2999) and the top of Hammurabi's Law Stela, showing the king before the sun god (Louvre Museum, Sb 8, detail).

goddess, though the iconography is unclear (Buchanan 1981: 270). The male figure in front of the intercessor, possibly the king, holds his right hand out with thumb and fingers pointed upwards supporting a shallow bowl, not unlike (seated) divinized kings depicted on cylinder seals during the Ur III period

(for oil as the possible content of these bowls, see Winter 1986: 260–62).

Although the correct reading of the personal name of the seal owner is uncertain, she is identified in the two-line inscription panel as the daughter (DUMU.MUNUS) of one Bur-Adad (Buchanan 1981: 455). ET

## No. 11 Qishti-Enlil's seal

YPM BC 038374

Accession no. NBC 12298

Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE); Nippur (?)

30 × 14.5 mm; hematite

*Bibliography:* unpublished

The present cylinder seal depicts a common motif of seal iconography in the Old Babylonian period (compare **No. 6**): The ruler dressed in a kilt and a round cap faces a suppliant goddess, who wears a long garb and the horned crown. Usually, the ruler holds a mace in his bent arm, but in this case, the mace was not indicated by the seal cutter. In between the two figures appear three symbols stacked on top of each other: a sun disk in a crescent moon, a spade, and a naked woman facing towards the ruler. The whole scene is placed on a base line. Most of the blank space behind the suppliant goddess is used for a three-line inscription. This inscription was clearly cut by either an inexperienced seal cutter or an illiterate one, since the sign forms are crude and idiosyncratic. It seems that the seal cutter, with difficulty, attempted to imitate a draft for the inscription prepared on a piece of clay. Such a draft is the tablet NBC 6257 (YPM BC 009239), whose scribe also attempted to doodle some signs in mirror script (**Figure C.5**; Beckman 1988). According to the present inscription, the seal belonged to a woman named Qishti-Enlil, literally “gift of Enlil.” She was





the daughter of a certain Ali-tillati. The third line indicates her affiliation or devotion: “maid-servant of Enlil.” The presence of Enlil in both her name and devotion may indicate that this seal originates from Nippur. kw

### No. 12 Cylinder seal belonging to Nin-pa wife of Ur-mes

YPM BC 005989

Accession no. NBC 3016

Ur III to early Old Babylonian period (about 2100–1900 BCE); provenience unknown  
29 × 15 mm; limestone

*Bibliography:* Buchanan 1981, no. 701

This cylinder seal shows a worshipper introduced to a seated beardless deity by an interceding goddess. Behind them is a rampant lion-griffin. The seal is generally crudely carved in a simple linear style. The lion-griffin is cut in deeper relief than the rest of the imagery and especially its body shows clear marks of the cutting wheel. A two-line cuneiform inscription placed vertically to either side of the worshipper reads, Nin-pa wife of Ur-mes, designating the seal owner. Traces of an earlier engraving in the seal stone indicate that the seal was recarved. The lion-griffin may have been placed in the area of an earlier inscription. AL

### No. 13 Cylinder seal with nude woman

YPM BC 038962

Accession no. NBC 10992

Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE); provenience unknown  
25 × 11 mm; rock crystal

*Bibliography:* Buchanan 1981, no. 876

According to the seal legend this seal belonged to a certain Iltani, daughter of Ili-imaguranni. For this common female name and its probable association with temple offices, see further [No. 25](#). The area apart from the vertical four-line cuneiform-inscription panel is blank except for a nude female in full front-facing view with her hands held beneath

C.5



Nos. 12 and 13



Nos. 14, 15, and 16

her breasts; she stands on a pedestal-like base line consisting of two stacked horizontal lines, the shorter lower line centered beneath the upper. The nude's frontality portrays a "sign of the erotic allure of these figures" (Bahrani 2001: 88). Handmade clay figurines of nude females are attested in Mesopotamia since prehistoric times, and early second millennium seals and figurines commonly show such figures. The woman may represent a goddess, though she is not wearing the horned cap of divinity. If so, she may be the goddess of love and war, Inana/Ishtar, or the goddess Shala (Black and Green 1992: 144). ET

### No. 14 Cylinder seal belonging to Nin-kalla

YPM BC 037021

Accession no. NCBS 124

Ur III period (about 2110–2000 BCE); provenience unknown

33 × 16 mm; steatite

*Bibliography:* von der Osten 1934, no. 124; Buchanan 1981, no. 565 (not shown)

This seal shows a worshipper led by a goddess toward a seated female deity. Between the worshipper and the goddess is a snake, and between the two deities appear an eagle with outspread wings, a bird, and a scorpion. At the end of the scene is an encased inscription panel with the name of the seal owner,

Nin-kalla. There was not enough space for the last sign of the second line, which was placed on a third half-line interrupting the panel. The second line of the inscription, difficult to decipher entirely, reads the name of Nin-kalla's husband. The scorpion was associated with fertility throughout Mesopotamian history and from the late second millennium BCE with the goddess Ishara, a goddess of love (Zerneck 2008). AL

### No. 15 Cylinder seal belonging to Tab-qibitum

YPM BC 039015  
 Accession no. YBC 12818  
 Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE); provenience unknown  
 23 × 12 mm; limonite  
*Bibliography:* Buchanan 1981, no. 892

This seal shows a male worshipper in full-length dress in front of the storm god Adad or Ishkur, holding a double lightning rod and wearing a kilt. Between them is a spade, the symbol of the god Marduk. An encased vertical three-line inscription reads: Tab-qibitum, maid-servant of Adad/Ishkur and Shala. Nonetheless, nothing in the imagery specifically indicates that the seal was owned by a woman. While there were some significant differences in how a seal was paired with its owner, there was a production of “anonymous” mid-range seals with standardized imagery in the Old Babylonian period. There would be an open space for an inscription, sometimes even with two or

three encased—but blank—lines. When the seal was acquired by its owner, his or her name would be written in the inscription panel. AL

### No. 16 Cylinder seal belonging to Shalimniash

YPM BC 009004  
 Accession no. NBC 6023  
 Ur III period (about 2100–2000 BCE); provenience unknown  
 26 × 15 mm; limestone  
*Bibliography:* Buchanan 1981, no. 675

This seal contains an image of a goddess leading a male human worshipper towards a bull with a goose above it, while a crescent moon hovers over the scene. The carving on the seal is crude compared to many of the official seals from the Ur III period. Presentation scenes in which a goddess leads a worshipper to a seated god or king are common in this period, but the combination with the goose and bull on this seal is unusual. Nevertheless, each

of the elements can be found on other contemporary seals. The seal's two-line inscription panel gives the name and title of its owner, a woman named “Shalimniash, maid-servant of the queen” (see Gelb 1961: 131). This name is also attested in a few other texts from the period, including one that mentions a “Shalimniash, priestess (Sumerian *l u k u r*) of the king” (Yıldız and Ozaki 2001, no. 3800). It is unknown, however, if these two women are the same person. JB

### No. 17 Cylinder seal belonging to Shat-Amurrum

YPM BC 039017  
 Accession no. YBC 12834  
 Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE); provenience unknown (Elam?)  
 20 × 11 mm; hematite  
*Bibliography:* Buchanan 1981, no. 1092

This seal shows a presentation scene: a bearded worshipper, hands clasped at his chest, is led by an interceding



Nos. 17 and 18

goddess with both hands raised before her to face the sun god who stands with his left foot on a short base line and right leg bared to mid-thigh. The divine figures are recognizable by their horned crowns, symbols of divinity used throughout Mesopotamian history (Black and Green 1992: 102). While the owner of the seal was a woman, the worshipper in the seal is a man; this is not unusual, as the scenes on most seals were standardized, and did not reflect the individual identity of the owner. The carving may have Elamite influences (Buchanan 1981: 385). Interestingly, the seal seems to have been recut around the central figures (Buchanan 1981: 385); a vertical fish, head down, was placed between the suppliant goddess and the worshipper while additional crudely formed cuneiform signs(?) occupy the space above the fish and between the worshipper and the main deity. The vertical three-line cuneiform inscription panel, whose sign-forms are also crudely carved, identifies a woman named Shat-Amurru, her patronym, and affiliation with the goddess Urash. ET

### No. 18 Cylinder seal belonging to Hishatum

YPM BC 039016  
Accession no. YBC 12766  
Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE); provenience unknown  
23 × 11 mm; limonite  
*Bibliography:* Buchanan 1981, no. 910

This Old Babylonian seal, carved in a beautiful red stone, features a king, recognizable by his round brimmed cap, mace, and typical posture in profile. He is facing a suppliant goddess, who is wearing a horned crown of divinity and a flounced dress, and he performs a gesture of reverence. The third figure is the so-called six-curved hero whose naked body is shown in profile while his bearded face is turned fully towards the observer. The three-line vertical inscription panel identifies the female owner of the seal as “Hishatum,

daughter of Sin-iribam, maid-servant of Nergal” (*hi-iš<sup>1</sup>-ša-tum* / DUMU <sup>d</sup>EN.ZU-*i-ri<sup>2</sup>-ba-am* / GEME<sub>2</sub> <sup>d</sup>NE<sub>3</sub>.ERI<sub>11</sub>.GAL). EK

### No. 19 Worship of a goddess

YPM BC 039019  
Accession no. YBC 9692  
Neo-Babylonian period (626–539 BCE);  
provenience unknown  
22 × 17 × 7 mm; chalcedony  
*Bibliography:* unpublished

This scaraboid stamp seal shows a worshipper in a long, fringed dress with one raised hand approaching a goddess holding a double-ringed nimbus with rays. The goddess is wearing a tall headdress with a single pair of horns and a long, fringed robe. She has her left arm

raised and is grasping the nimbus with her right hand. Collon has tentatively suggested that the nimbus originated as a globe-decorated shield, which developed into a representation of the god’s divine aura or *melammu*, as it was known in Akkadian (Collon 2001: 138). While texts indicate that all gods had a divine aura, the representation of the nimbus in art is restricted to a goddess. The seal also shows two symbols: in the upper space appears a crescent, the divine symbol of the moon god, Sin. In the lower space is a rhomb or lozenge with a line in the middle. The exact interpretation of this symbol is still not settled, but it may represent a vulva (Black and Green 1992: 153). AL



No. 19



No. 20

## Priestesses

Women of elite families frequently held high positions in the religious institutions. Some women of royal birth were installed as high-priestesses (No. 24) in charge of large temple households. One of these women, Enheduana, is considered the first author in world literature (see No. 44 and Chapter 4, “Between History and Fiction”). Some classes of women lived in segregated complexes close to a temple, sometimes translated as “cloister.” Many of these women were very wealthy, owning large tracts of land, slaves and silver (see No. 4). Priestesses would also place statues of themselves and other objects in certain temples, forever showing devotion to their god (Nos. 23 and 25).

### No. 20 Worshippers, including three females, before a seated goddess

YPM BC 008997 (see also Fig. 3.11 on p. 30)  
Accession no. NBC 6016  
Old Akkadian period (about 2350–2150 BCE);  
provenience unknown  
30 × 18 mm; mottled limestone  
*Bibliography:* Buchanan 1981, no. 475

This seal shows a presentation scene with a seated female figure on the left wearing a fringed robe being approached from the right by a bearded worshipper; he is flanked by two female attendants, and a third, half-height female. The area on the cylinder where the head of the seated figure is

carved is slightly worn, but it appears that she did not wear a horned crown of divinity. In his discussion of this seal, Buchanan assumed that the star appearing immediately to the right of the figure, and beneath a horizontal crescent moon, marks the figure as a goddess. In fact, the “star,” rendered here by four intersecting linear cuts, is indistinguishable from contemporary lapidary renderings of the cuneiform sign DINGIR, “god.” Each of the two female attendants wearing fringed robes hold *banduddû*-buckets, vessels used in rituals, in their lowered right hands. Between them, a male worshipper, also wearing a fringed robe, holds a kid in

his left arm and lifts his right arm in a gesture of greeting. Beneath his right elbow stands another smaller woman (or female child) clasping her hands in front of her. The male worshipper and the woman behind him have been interpreted as a royal couple (Suter 2016: 40–41; see also No. 22). Similar seals date to the late Akkadian period (“Akkadisch III,” according to Boehmer 1965). KW

### No. 21 The seal of a priestess

YPM BC 011318  
Accession no. NBC 8322  
Second millennium BCE; provenience unknown  
19 × 9 mm; turquoise  
*Bibliography:* Buchanan 1981, no. 1283

This handsome green turquoise seal features four standing women depicted completely frontally, dressed in tight fringed skirts. Their upper bodies are naked, and their long hair ends in an up-turned curl at the shoulders. This iconography is unique. There is a three-line inscription—each line is located vertically between each successive pair of the women; the whole scene is bounded above and below by a single incised line. The inscription is difficult and tentatively reads: “Seal of the priestess Shambi, woman of the city(?) of Hamban.” The place-name probably refers to (Bit) Hamban, located on

**No. 21**

the border between Iraq and Iran and attested from the Kassite period onwards (Levine 1989). The closest parallel to the personal name is Sambi, a Kassite name, which is also attested in the Neo-Assyrian period (Balkan 1954: 12; Ambos and Zadok 2002: 1082). Except for the so-called nude female, and in explicitly erotic scenes, women were not

depicted naked in Mesopotamian art and never semi-nude. The *en face* pose was usually reserved for specific deities and mythological beings (Sonik 2013). The women on the seal are more or less identical and may represent the same woman or class of women, presumably a specific type of priestess or Shambi herself. AL, ST

**No. 22 Cylinder seal with a ritual scene**

YPM BC 029653  
Accession no. YBC 16396  
Old Akkadian period (about 2350–2150 BCE);  
provenience unknown  
32 × 22 mm; dark green mottled  
serpentine  
*Bibliography:* Buchanan 1981, no. 455

This Old Akkadian seal of dark green serpentine bears a scene of ritual activities performed by three figures approaching a pair of identical bearded figures, both depicted completely frontally. Each member of the divine pair is holding two long staves and wearing a long flounced skirt and a flat cap. Their identity is unknown, but although they lack the horns of divinity, they are the recipients of offerings and worship and seem to be supernatural. The figure closest to the pair, a priest, is pouring a libation into an offering stand with a detailed depiction of the liquid flowing down and sprinkling around the vase. He is followed by another bearded figure carrying a kid for sacrifice while at the same time covering his mouth in a reverent gesture. The last figure in the row is female, wearing a long dress and an elaborate hair style (see [No. 35](#)). In her right hand she holds a *banduddû*-bucket, possibly a liquid offering or for purification (see also [No. 20](#)). The male and the female worshipper represent the royal couple (Suter 2016: 40–41). The style of the well-modelled figures corresponds to the first half of the Old Akkadian period (“Akkadisch

**No. 22**



## No. 23

I,” according to Boehmer 1965). A short vertical one-line inscription separated by a single ruling on either side consists of just two crudely shaped cuneiform signs, giving the name of the owner, Daqum (*da-qum*). EK

### No. 23 Headless statue of a female priestess

YPM BC 016892

Accession no. YBC 2281

Late third millennium BCE; provenience unknown (Babylonia)

140 × 103 × 115 mm; limestone

*Bibliography:* Van Buren 1931, pl. XIV;

Spycket 1981: 172–73, fig. 56; Suter 2007: 333–34

This fine example of a sculpture shows a seated female figure wearing a flounced dress. Her hands are clasped in front of her chest. The statue’s head is missing

but long hair falls far down the woman’s back. Based on similar depictions, it is likely that she would have worn a circlet on her head. The statue bears no inscription. Van Buren interpreted this sculpture as a goddess, but it is more likely to be identified as a priestess, as this statue closely resembles other sculpture representing high-priestesses, identified by inscriptions (Suter 2007: 335). Thirteen statues, including the present example, fall thus far into this group. Provenienced examples originate from Ur, Uruk, Tello, Nippur, and Adab, and date to the late third and early second millennium BCE (Suter 2007: 333–34).

The most intriguing feature of this statue are the vessels carved on three sides of the otherwise undecorated, cube-like seat. While the two jars on the right and left sides of the seat each stand

directly on the floor line, the backside shows two jars on a low table (left) and two further spoon-like utensils on another type of table (right).

Apart from the present statue, two further examples in this group are parallel in terms of having vessels carved on the seat (Spycket 1981: 172–73). A comparatively crudely executed piece originating from Nippur (UM L-29-214; see Suter 2007: 358, fig. 12, and [Figure C.6](#)) shows similar vessels carved on two sides of the throne. The right-hand side is partially covered with a rectangular design resembling basketwork. The other parallel originates from Tello (AO 13211; Spycket 1981, pl. 117) and is executed in a style similar to the piece from Nippur.

One could entertain the possibility that the vessels depict containers for offerings to the deity and thus refer to



C.6

the priestess's responsibility to prepare them (Westenholz 1989: 546–47). Unfortunately, we do not know anything about her individual identity or which god she served. KW

### No. 24 Cylinder of Nabonidus's daughter, the *entu*-priestess of Egipar

YPM BC 016810

Accession no. YBC 2182

Neo-Babylonian period, reign of Nabonidus, 554 BCE; possibly from Ur

174 × 76 mm; clay

*Bibliography*: YOS 1, no. 45 (copy and edition); Schaudig 2001, 373–77, no. 2.7 (edition); Weiershäuser and Novotny (forthcoming)

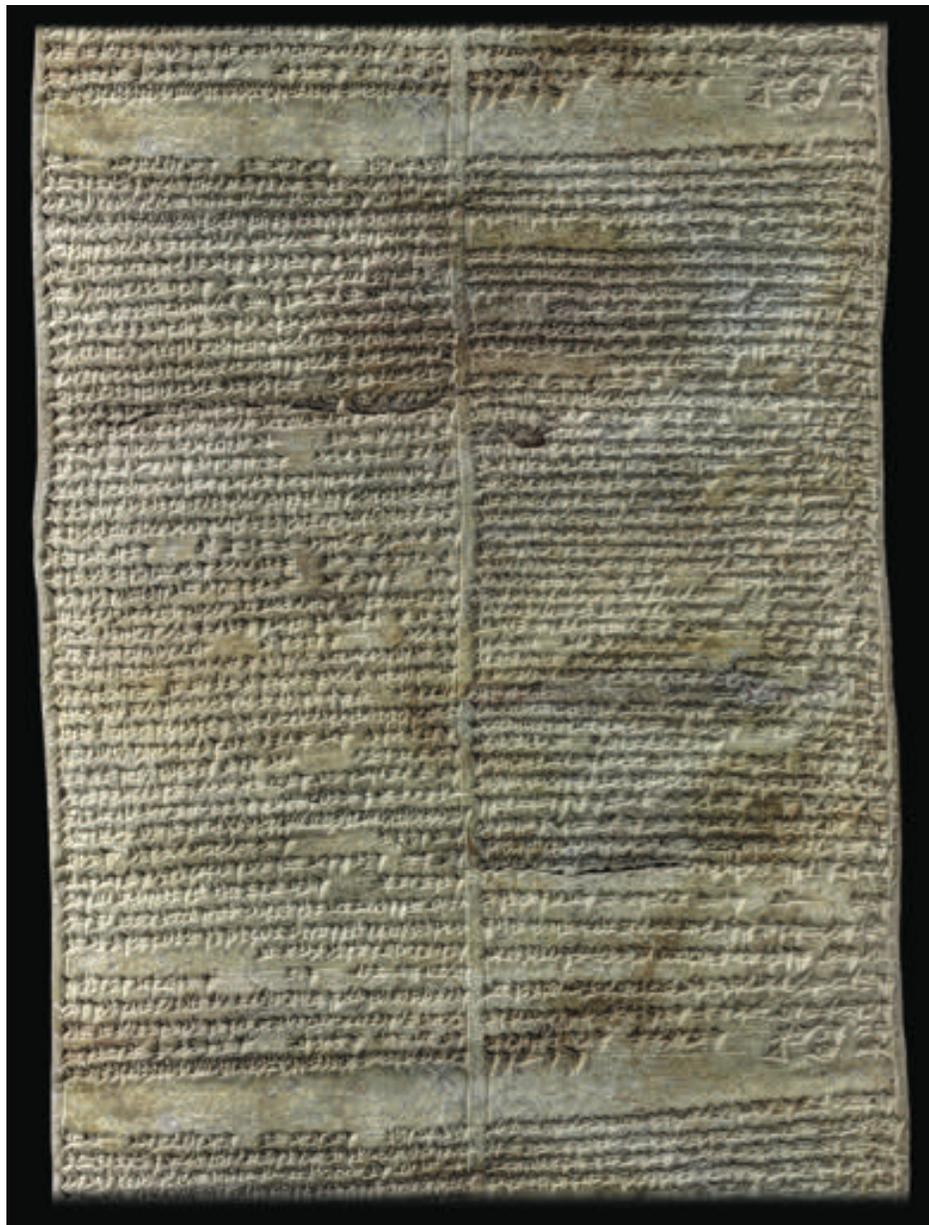
This beautifully preserved clay cylinder bears a cuneiform inscription, divided into two columns, describing some remarkable events from the second regnal year of the Neo-Babylonian king

Nabonidus (554/3 BCE) (Beaulieu 1989: 5, 23). Although the same events are reported in other inscriptions as well, this particular text is preserved only in this one manuscript, reportedly found at Ur (Beaulieu 1989: 23). King Nabonidus undertook religious reforms in which he elevated the moon god Sin (Sumerian Nanna) to the top of the pantheon. To lend his undertaking legitimacy, he reintroduced (and even invented) ancient and long-lost traditions. These included the office of a high-priestess (Sumerian *en*, Akkadian *entu*) of the moon god in the city of Ur in southern Babylonia. He drew inspiration from the activities of kings as far back as the end of the third millennium BCE, especially of the Old Akkadian dynasty. This antiquarianism manifests itself several times throughout this inscription (Beaulieu 2013: 132–33).

The text offers an account of the appointment of Nabonidus's daughter to the revived office of the high-priestess



No. 24



C.7 Digital unwrapping of **No. 24**.

of the moon god which was originally established by Sargon of Akkad for his daughter Enheduana and continued until the middle of the Old Babylonian period (see **Chapter 4**, “Between History and Fiction”). The high-priestess was appointed from the royal family, had access to good education, and enjoyed much prestige. However, by the time of Nabonidus this office had been non-existent for more than a millennium

(Stol 2016: 557). Justification for the revitalization of the position was provided by an ominous sign, a lunar eclipse which was interpreted as the moon god’s own wish for a high-priestess. Further investigation by means of extispicy confirmed the intention to appoint Nabonidus’s daughter who was, upon entering the office, given a new, archaizing name: En-nigaldi-Nanna, literally, “the high-priestess, the Desire

of the Moon god.” Further details were supposedly provided by an old, miraculously discovered, stela of king Nebuchadnezzar I (reigned about 1125–1104 BCE) with a depiction of a high-priestess, as well as through Nabonidus’s thorough study of ancient tablets. Next, the inscription reports on the necessary rebuilding of the sacred precinct in Ur connected with this office, the Egipar, which had become completely dilapidated. During its reconstruction, another discovery was made, this time of an inscription of En-ane-du, daughter of king Kudur-Mabuk of Larsa and sister of king Rim-Sin I (reigned about 1822–1763 BCE), who once held the office of the high-priestess. Nabonidus concluded the account of his pious deeds with a list of desired blessings he was hoping to receive from the moon god in return. It is not clear what exactly En-nigaldi-Nanna was supposed to do, but her office must have been of great importance, especially since she now served the highest god of the pantheon. Although much of the account sounds invented for the purpose, it might be more faithful than previously acknowledged. The precinct of Egipar has been excavated and identified and a stela of En-ane-du, remarkably similar to the one described by Nabonidus, has been recovered (Stol 2016: 576). In the end, the religious reforms of Nabonidus did not last, and after his reign the renewed office of the high-priestess seems to have come to its final end. EK

### **No. 25 Iltani’s votive dish for king Rim-Sin I**

YPM BC 009010  
 Accession no. NBC 6029  
 Old Babylonian period, reign of Rim-Sin I  
 (about 1822–1763 BCE); Larsa  
 43 × 262 × 12 mm; limestone  
*Bibliography*: YOS 9, no. 38 (copy); RIME  
 4.2.14.2001 (edition)

Throughout the history of ancient Mesopotamia, votive objects, especially of stone, were made for the gods and



No. 25

goddesses. Cuneiform inscriptions relating the identities of the venerated and the devotee were sometimes carved on these objects, which range from tiny beads to large stelae and statues. Women dedicated many of these votive objects, and royal women feature prominently as the dedicant in a good number of votive inscriptions (Lion 2009). This large limestone dish was dedicated by a woman named Iltani to the goddess Inana of Zabalam. The finely-carved inscription reads:

To Inana of Zabalam, her lady,  
for the life of Rim-Sin (I), king of Larsa,  
(and) for her life,  
Iltani, daughter of Ilum-bani, offered  
(this) dish.

The identity of the Iltani in this inscription is unknown. Probably not of royal birth, she nevertheless must have been part of the royal circle. Many women are known in the textual record bearing the name Iltani, “Our goddess,” and many of them have a clear connection to a temple office, for

instance, as *naditu*-priestesses (compare No. 4) (Richardson 2017: 80).

The inscription refers to the object itself as a dish or bowl (Sumerian *d i l i m ₂*), which—possibly not by chance—allows for a connection to the

moon god Nanna or Suen/Sin and one of his epithets: *d i l i m ₂ - b a b b a r*, the “shining bowl” (Alster 2004; Steinkeller 2016). ST



## *Anti-Mother and Dangerous Women*

Embodying the fear of losing newborns and women in childbirth, Lamashtu was one of the most despised demons in ancient Mesopotamia. Expelled from the Heavens because of her terrible behavior, she sneaked into houses and snatched babies from their mother's womb with her long, clawing fingers. She was a mother herself—to a piglet and a dog, whom she would nurse with venomous milk—truly an anti-mother. Spells against this demon, describing her terrible features, are attested in the second and first millennia BCE (**No. 26**). People would also protect themselves against her with amulets depicting Lamashtu in all her terror (**Nos. 27 and 28**). Characteristic of this demon-mother is that she did not have a husband, and her father, the god Anu, had disowned her. Similarly unaffiliated females in the human realm also posed a threat. Witches and sorceresses were particularly dangerous and anti-witchcraft spells were used against them (**No. 29**).



No. 26

### **No. 26 Incantation against the baby-snatching demon Lamashtu**

YPM BC 004237  
Accession no. NBC 1265  
Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE); provenience unknown  
66 × 42 × 29 mm; clay  
*Bibliography:* BIN 2, no. 72 (copy); von Soden 1954; Farber 2014: 260, 280 (edition)

### **No. 27 An amulet against Lamashtu**

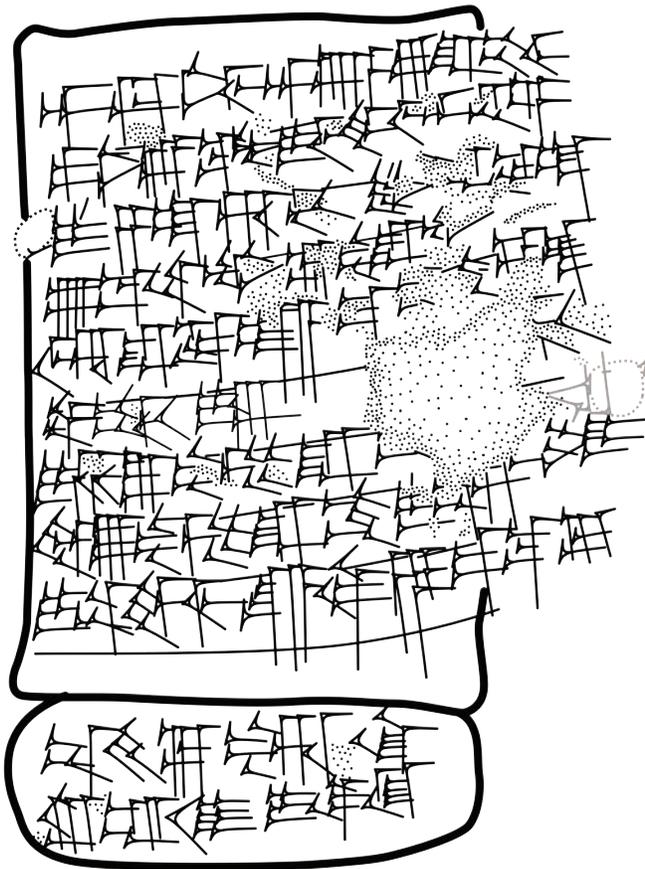
YPM BC 027014  
Accession no. YBC 13600  
Neo-Assyrian period (934–612 BCE); provenience unknown  
42 × 36 × 9 mm; granite  
*Bibliography:* Farber 1989

### **No. 28 An amulet against Lamashtu**

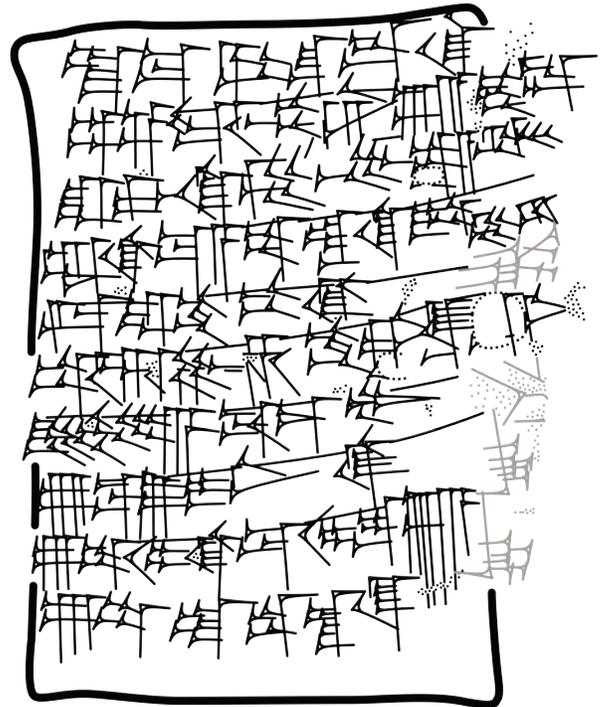
YPM BC 023992  
Accession no. YBC 10196  
Middle Babylonian period (?) (about 1400–1000 BCE); allegedly from Uruk  
27 × 24 × 5 mm; steatite  
*Bibliography:* Dougherty 1926–1927; Farber 1989

The ancient Mesopotamians believed that the world was full of supernatural forces—some good, some malevolent. One of the most prominent and fearsome beings was Lamashtu, a female demon who was thought to attack mothers in childbirth and newborns, whom she clawed to death, strangled, or poisoned with her lethal milk. Lamashtu embodied the deep-seated fear and anxiety of the loss of an infant child, and represented a way of conceptualizing or explaining the high mortality rates among newborns and women giving birth. Lamashtu was herself a mother, but her babies were a pig and a dog, often shown in images suckling her breast milk, which was pure poison. She was in this way an anti-mother for the Mesopotamians. She turned the life-giving process of birth into

## Obverse



## Reverse



C.9 Drawing of No. 26.

death, and she snuffed out the life of a newborn, instead of nurturing it (Wiggermann 2000: 230–31). As one of the most feared demons, she is also one of the most frequently depicted, and she is referred to in texts regularly. A way of warding off this ferocious denizen of the supernatural world was through incantations—that is, magic spells which were thought to have an effect on such beings. **No. 26** is an example of an incantation against her from the Old Babylonian period. Its exact provenience is unknown, though it has been suggested that it may have originated from either Mari or the region of Eshnunna, based on a feature of its orthography (von Soden 1954: 338). The text begins with a description of

Lamashtu and her attack on an infant (ll. 1–9; translation after Farber 2014: 281; **Figure C.9**):

Anum begot her, Ea raised her,  
Enlil fitted her with a dog's face.  
She has hardly any palms (but) long  
fingers  
(and) very long claws, her forearms (?)  
are “binders demons.”  
She enters the house through the door,  
[...?], slithers in like a snake.  
After slithering in by the pivot, she saw  
the baby:  
She grabbed him at his belly seven  
times...

Lamashtu was created by the gods, but, as we know from other incantations telling parts of her story, she was expelled from heaven due to

her practice of consuming human flesh and blood (Wiggermann 2000: 225; see also incantations from the later first millennium series *Lamaštu* I: 187–203, II: 92–100 in Farber 2014: 158–59 and 172–73, respectively). This tradition about her origins began very early and was widespread, as it is also attested in an Old Assyrian incantation against her (first half of the nineteenth century BCE; see Farber 2014: 281 and **Figure C.10**). The spell continues with a physical description of Lamashtu. She is one of the few Mesopotamian demons to have a clear iconography, recognizable in both texts and visual imagery (Wiggermann 2000: 219). The text of this incantation displays poetic features, including word play (Veldhuis 1999: 45–46). After the



## No. 27

terrifying description quoted above, the text commands the demon to flee before divine help arrives, and it speaks of placing dirt and dust in her face and eyes. It is possible (though impossible to prove) that these lines may have accompanied ritual actions performed on an effigy of Lamashtu (Veldhuis 1999: 45).

Another way of keeping Lamashtu at bay was through the use of protective amulets (Nos. 27 and 28). They typically depict Lamashtu on one side and have part of an incantation (either real or “pseudo-writing”) on the other side. Lamashtu has a standardized and recognizable iconography. She typically appears in mixed profile,

with arms outstretched, either with claws extended or holding a comb and spindle (Wiggermann 2000: 222). Like most Mesopotamian hybrid demons, she is an animal-human hybrid: her head is usually that of a dog, lion or other predatory animal, and her legs are usually bird’s legs (Wiggermann 2000: 220, 222). Small dogs or pigs often



**C.10** An Old Assyrian incantation against Lamashtu (YPM BC 006647, NBC 3672).

appear by her side or suckle from her breasts. In some cases, such as one of our two amulets here, she grasps two venomous snakes. Amulets protecting against Lamashtu often also contain an incantation, like the one above. These spells are known from longer collections of magical texts such as *Lamaštu* (Farber 2014) or *Hul-bazizi* (Finkel 1976), which have been excerpted onto the amulets (Wiggermann 2000: 219, 223). In the case of our two amulets, one contains an abbreviated incantation from the second tablet of the series *Lamaštu*

(**No. 27**; Farber 1989: 95), while the other has only pseudo-writing on it, meant to look like an incantation. On some amulets, she is pictured along with a comb and a spindle, two items symbolizing Mesopotamian conceptions of femininity. In one of the spells in the collection *Lamaštu*, these two items are given to her along with provisions to take her on a journey away from the afflicted (*Lamaštu* II: 173; Farber 2014: 178–79). As for the dating of these two amulets, the style of the cuneiform script in the inscription carved on the

first one (**No. 27**) indicates that it was made in the Neo-Assyrian period. The second is harder to date, but it fits the criteria for a type of Lamashtu amulet common to sites in Babylonia in the late second millennium BCE (“Group A” in Wiggermann 2000: 219–22). JB

### **No. 29 Incantation against a witch**

YPM BC 002556

Accession no. MLC 2609

Late Babylonian period (c. 5th–3rd centuries BCE); Babylon

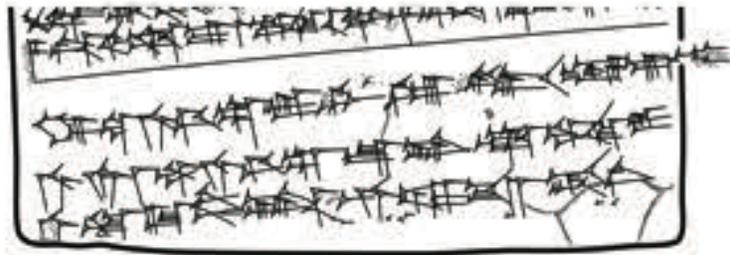
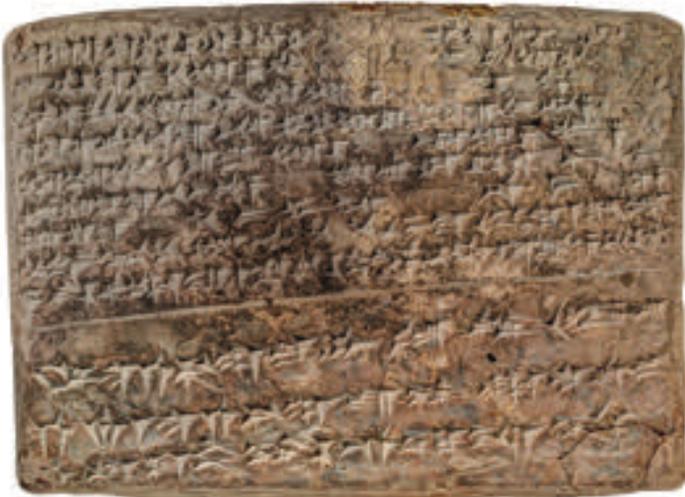
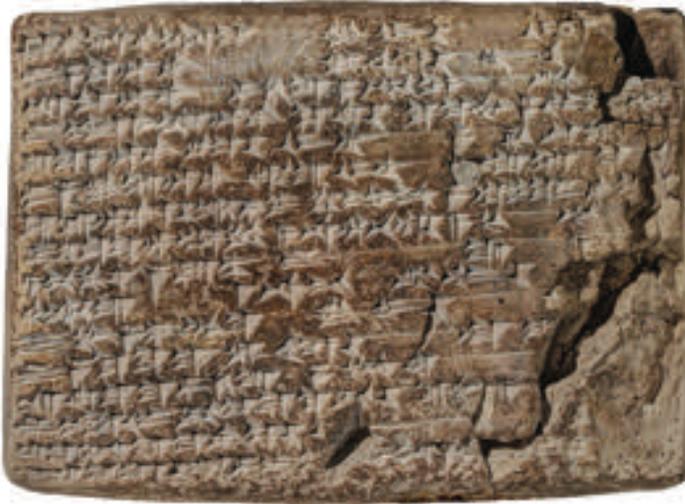
64 × 89 × 19 mm; clay

*Bibliography*: BRM 4, no. 18 (copy); Abusch and Schwemer 2016: 48–63, text 7.11; pl. 9 (edition and copy)

This single-column tablet in landscape format written in Late Babylonian cuneiform script was inscribed with a single anti-witchcraft incantation called after its Akkadian incipit *Īpuša kaššāptu kišpīša lemnūti*, “The witch performed her evil witchcraft against me.” Although the incantation includes typical motifs associated with bewitchment, it is remarkable as “one of the few Akkadian anti-witchcraft incantations modeled on the Sumerian Marduk-Ea type incantation format” (Abusch and Schwemer 2016: 48; compare **No. 33**). In this ancient Sumerian incantation type, Marduk or Asaluhi (originally an independent deity of magic that merged with the figure of Marduk already in the Old Babylonian period) has a conversation with his father, the god of wisdom, Ea. Marduk notices a patient whose suffering is described and asks his father for help. Ea assures Marduk that he has all the knowledge he will need for the cure and sends him off to heal the patient. This divine dialogue, taking place on the mythical plane, directly parallels actual events with human participants involved. Marduk on his way to heal the patient is embodied by the exorcist reciting this very incantation and thus empowering himself with divine legitimation for



**No. 27**



## No. 29

his healing practices. This incantation formula has been adapted here for healing a person afflicted by witchcraft. A fourfold means of attacking the patient through ingestion or direct contact with his body is described: the witch has made him absorb her evil

power through food, drink, bath water and anointment. As a consequence, the patient is exposed to illness, curse and a wandering evil ghost. After Marduk's conversation with his father he proceeds to cure the patient through exactly the same sequence of actions that reverse

the original evil effect (Schwemer and Abusch 2007: 162–63). This mirroring of actions between the evil machinations of a (predominantly female) witch and the beneficial procedure of the (male) exorcist shows clearly the ambiguous status of similar activities that could either be imbued with authority and divine legitimation or feared as an illegitimate and threatening power. This ambiguity often, although not necessarily always, split along gender lines—at least in the available written record (Abusch 2002: 84–85). The Akkadian incantation on this tablet appears on three other manuscripts from Nineveh together with another Sumerian or bilingual anti-witchcraft incantation, as well as on its own on a fragment from early Hellenistic Uruk (about 4th–3rd centuries BCE). Apart from the text itself, the colophon deserves a few considerations. It reads: “Tablet of Anum-ushallam, the young apprentice, son of Anum-rabi, of Der. He wrote it quickly for his *well-being*,” i.e., the tablet was written as part of his specialist training (Gabbay 2014: 230, n. 11). In contrast to the main text the colophon is written in archaizing sign forms. The reference to the city of Der in the colophon of this text is noteworthy. This important city lay in the border region between Babylonia and Elam in the east on one of the most important conduits between the two regions. Only a few archaeological finds including inscribed artifacts were unearthed at the site of Der, modern Tell Aqar (Frahm 2009: 51). Two of the six tablets mentioning Der were unearthed in Uruk in southern Babylonia and belonged to the scholarly manuscript collection of Iqishaya. The remaining tablets likely also derive from this collection. The interest in texts from Der may have been due to the fact that the names of the main deity of Der, Anurabu, “the great Anu,” and Ishtaran, are reminiscent of Uruk’s main deities, Anu and Ishtar (Frahm 2002: 94–95; Frahm 2009: 64). EK, KW

## Motherhood

Motherhood for a married woman was a blessing and highly desired (No. 30). Infertility was treated with plants and incantations (No. 33). Childless couples could also adopt, or the husband could take a second wife to bear the family a child. The transition into motherhood—pregnancy and childbirth—was dangerous and potentially lethal for both mother and baby. Midwives assisted during delivery and magic spells were used as remedies for the dangers of childbirth. Babies were nursed for two to three years.



No. 30

### No. 30 Clay mold for figurine of a woman nursing an infant

YPM BC 016856

Accession no. YBC 2233

Second or first millennium BCE; provenience unknown

141 × 69 × 41 mm; terracotta

*Bibliography:* Van Buren 1930, no. 393, fig. 100

This mold represents a technological innovation first used during the Old Akkadian period (about 2350–2150 BCE), allowing unspecialized potters to produce large numbers of inexpensive figurines. The mold itself was likely formed by impressing a model—carved from a hard material like stone, bone, or ivory—into wet clay. The figurines produced from this mold represent a seated female nursing a young child that she cradles in the crook of her left arm. The woman wears a heavy necklace, bracelets on each wrist, an elaborately curled hairdo, and a dress that falls to her ankles. The dating of terracotta plaques and their molds—which often lack archaeological provenience—remains a challenge in modern scholarship. Because of their maternal subject matter, such objects promote the fertility and health of members of the household.

KAW, EAK

### No. 31 Cylinder seal showing women on birthing bed

YPM BC 011950

Accession no. NBC 8956

Early Old Akkadian period (about 2350 BCE); provenience unknown

61 × 22 mm; shell

*Bibliography:* Buchanan 1960: 26; Boehmer 1965: 690; Buchanan 1981, no. 458; Otto 2016: 136–37

Often interpreted as a so-called *hieros gamos* scene—the consummation of the sacred marriage between the king and the goddess—the central motif on this seal is a naked woman lying on a bed



No. 31

or divan with the legs of a bull. Below the bed is a scorpion. Four vessels of different types are standing or hanging next to the bed. The seal is divided into two registers with the upper level showing the women on the bed and the lower a goat or deer prancing into a pomegranate shrubbery or tree. There is also an architectural element, probably

a shrine and an incense burner placed next to it. Pointing to several parallels, including examples where a baby clearly emerges from its mother, Battini (2002, 2006) and Otto (2016) have convincingly argued that the central scene shows a woman on a birthing bed, not a sexual encounter. The vessels would have contained oils used during birth to ease

delivery (Stol 2000: 124). The scorpion, which carries its offspring around on its back, was a symbol of women and motherhood throughout Mesopotamian history (Zernecke 2008). AL



No. 32

### No. 32 Dedication of two children into slavery

YPM BC 021008

Accession no. YBC 6942

Neo-Babylonian period, 11th year of Nabonidus, 545 BCE; Uruk

60 × 86 × 28 mm; clay

*Bibliography:* YOS 6, no. 154 (copy), Dougherty 1923: 33–34 (edition); Beaulieu 1989: 202 (partial edition); Dandamaev 1984: 484 (translation); Gressman 1926: 326 (translation); Oppenheim 1955: 72

This cuneiform tablet records the words of Banat-Innina, a desperate mother who gave up two sons to slavery in a temple to save them from starvation. She testified in the assembly in front of various officials (ll. 5–10):

Nabu-zer-ukin, my husband, died. There is famine in the country, and I have (therefore) marked my two young sons with (the brand in the form of) a star (of Ishtar), and dedicated them to the Lady of Uruk. Keep them alive! They shall be temple slaves (*širku*) of the Lady of Uruk.

Slaves of the temple of Ishtar were branded with her symbol, the star. This made it more difficult for them to run away and could also be used as evidence in court cases where the identity of a slave's owner was disputed (Holtz 2009: 57–59). As slaves of the temple, the sons could expect to be given rations to sustain themselves during the famine. In losing their freedom, they may have been saved from hunger, or worse.

The text is witnessed and dated. The blank space in the lower part of the reverse bears four seal impressions, two impressions of cylinder seals (left) and two of stamp seals (right) (see [Figure C.11](#)). The cylinder seal impressions each show a worshipper in front of (one and three, respectively) divine symbols on pedestals; each of the stamp seals also depicts a worshipper in front of a divine symbol. ET, KW



C.11



No. 33

### No. 33 Incantation for a woman in labor

YPM BC 001212

Accession no. MLC 1207

Old Babylonian period, year 7 of Samsu-iluna (about 1742 BCE); provenience unknown  
85 × 55 × 25 mm; clay

*Bibliography:* YOS 11, no. 85 (copy); van Dijk 1975: 65–69 (edition)

Sumerian incantations for women in labor were never standardized.

Nevertheless, despite their abundant variety, a shared stock of motifs can be traced as far back as the earliest Early Dynastic examples from the site of Fara (Stol 2000: 60–61). The date formula on this tablet dates it to the 25th day of month I (Nisannu) in the seventh year of king Samsu-iluna (reigned about 1749–1712 BCE). About one fourth of the tablet is broken off, but its contents can be understood relatively well.



No. 34



C.12 Digital unwrapping of the inscription on **No. 34**.

The incantation follows a classical Marduk-Ea type formula (compare **No. 29**) in which the suffering of the patient—in this case the pregnant woman—is first described, then noticed by Marduk (Asaluhi) and reported to his father Ea with a request for help. The pregnant woman is described as a boat laden with cedar, carnelian and lapis lazuli—all precious cargo brought from far-away places (Hätinen 2017). She sets out on her dangerous journey to give birth, like a boat departing from the quay. The woman is said not to know if her cargo consists of carnelian or lapis, a metaphor describing the unknown gender of the unborn child. After Marduk notices her dire situation, his father Ea persuades him that he is able to help the woman. The instructions he gives are partly lost but include manipulations with a reed which is known to have been used for cutting of the umbilical cord (Stol 2000: 111) as well as with ghee which is usually spread

on the woman's body to evoke the ease of a successful birth (Stol 2000: 63). The delivery is compared to the untying of a knot and the breaking(?) of a jug. What follows seems to be an abbreviated reference to the determination of the child's gender by means of typical attributes: a weapon for a boy, a spindle for a girl. However, these are not given to the child or shown to it as usual but clearly seem to be taken away from the child's hands without mentioning the previous giving of these attributes (for a possible parallel, see Krebernik 1984: 44–45). The motif becomes clear in the next, and last, line: the child can now stretch out its hands, freed from those attributes, towards the sun—its first action in this world is an act of religious devotion. EK

### **No. 34 For the life of the king and his daughter**

YPM BC 016870  
 Accession no. YBC 2247  
 Old Babylonian period, reign of Rim-Sin I  
 (about 1822–1763 BCE); Larsa  
 380 × 150 mm; basalt  
*Bibliography:* YOS 9, no. 31 (copy); RIME  
 4.2.14.23 (edition)

King Rim-Sin of Larsa reigned over sixty years (Pientka-Hinz 2006–2008: 367). In his lifetime, the kingdom of Larsa saw a great deal of expansion and prosperity. In about 1794 BCE, well into his reign, the king conquered Isin, whose patron deity was the goddess of healing, Gula (see **No. 42**). Kings had not been deified during their lifetime since the end of the third millennium BCE, but after Rim-Sin's twentieth regnal year, his name was written with a divine determinative, indicating his deification. His name would be used as a theophoric element in names of high-ranking officials and family members



(Pientka-Hinz 2006–2008: 370). The king had several wives. One of his wives was the daughter of king Sin-magir of Isin (reigned about 1827–1817 BCE), who changed her name when she married Rim-Sin to Rim-Sin-Shala-bashtashu, “Rim-Sin: goddess Shala is his dignity.” This queen is known from two votive inscriptions. In both inscriptions, she dedicates vessels to a deity. The present object is, according to its Sumerian inscription (Figure C.12), a “vessel of *ushu*-stone, suitable for clean water and adornment, a thing that previously no queen who preceded me had fashioned” (ll. 22–25), and was dedicated to the goddess Inana. What remains of this votive object is a round column that would have supported a bowl. The surface of the column is divided into eight, curved facets. The inscription spans a little more than five facets. The second inscription by this queen is known from a copy on a clay tablet (CUSAS 17, no. 53), according to which

she dedicated nine bronze milk-cups to the sky-god An. That text would have been inscribed on one of these cups or on an object associated with them. A sad detail in both inscriptions is that their daughter, princess Lirish-gamlum, was of poor health. In the present inscription, the queen addresses the good qualities of Inana, “whose compassion is good, (with) patient mercy, who knows how to take by the hand those in dire straits and the sick” (ll. 5–7). These words are chosen carefully, since the queen pleaded for her daughter’s life later on (ll. 30–35):

in order to save Lirish-gamlum from the hand of evil-doers and brigands, to hand over the *asakku*- and *di’u*-diseases that are in her body to [a demon] who fears nothing, to expel the...something that is in her eye, to protect her life.

The *di’u*-disease is characterized by fever and headache and may be a form of malaria (Stol 2007: 15–18). A Sumerian song of praise to the goddess of healing,

Nin-Isina (YOS 22, no. 34; Wagensooner 2019: 77), states:

After that day, my virility was not all right anymore, his *di’u*-disease had seized me. (...) My sickness is like a darkness that never becomes light; no-one can see it. The physician cannot diagnose it, no bandage can provide relief (Brisch 2007: 143).

The mention of evil-doers and brigands in the votive inscription may indicate that the princess was sent to Isin in order to be healed, and that no harm should come to her on the way there and back (see George 2011: 113). KW

## The Female Body

Women were mostly anonymous in Mesopotamian art, shown engaged in worship or in a stereotypical role as queen, mother, laborer or erotic object. Sometimes gender must be gleaned from a garment, hair style (No. 35), or the lack of a beard. In a few cases gender was deliberately ambiguous. Female nudity was prominently used to denote eroticism (Nos. 36 and 37), whereas the naked male body signified ritual purity or total humiliation.



No. 35

### No. 35 Coiffure for a statue of a lady

YPM BC 016966  
 Accession no. YBC 2371  
 Ur III period (about 2100–2004 BCE);  
 provenience unknown  
 49 × 40 × 35 mm; diorite  
*Bibliography:* unpublished

Composite figurines assembled from different materials such as wood, ivory, stone, and metal are attested as early as the Late Uruk period, about the end of fourth millennium BCE, and were particularly popular in the Early Dynastic period, around the middle of the third millennium BCE. The present object is a hair piece made of diorite, originally affixed to a statue of a woman. Composite statues lacking hair are attested in the archaeological record. The head of a limestone statue of a woman from Ur, for instance, has a flat top with three holes in its back (Wiseman 1960: 168, with pl. XXIIc). The face of this statue was likely carved from a lighter-colored stone, such as limestone or marble, which would have made the present hair piece stand out dramatically.

A similar, but somewhat larger, hair piece dedicated to a protective goddess (BM 91075, British Museum) bears an inscription dating it to the reign of Shulgi (reigned about 2092–2045 BCE). This inscription, which runs across the backside of the hair piece, refers to the object as a “ladylike wig” (Sumerian *ḫi-li na m-mu-nu-s-ka-ni*). The term *ḫili* is enigmatic but is used in the Sumerian poem “Enki and the World Order” to describe how a young woman has *ḫili* on her head (l. 34; Stol 2016: 49). Accordingly, this hair style might be associated with youthful femininity. The same hair style is also shown in two-dimensional art, such as seals and votive plaques, worn by elite women banqueting or engaged in worship (compare No. 22). KW

### No. 36 Goddess Ishtar astride two crouching lions

YPM BC 038639

Accession no. YBC 10006

Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE); provenience unknown

121 × 89 × 19 mm; terracotta

*Bibliography:* Van Buren 1930, no. 464, fig. 130; Albenda 2005: 180

This small rectangular terracotta relief-plaque made from a single mold depicts a female deity astride two addorsed overlapping recumbent lions with jaws agape. The goddess wears a long pleated dress with a belt around her waist; her right leg is covered to the ankle while her left leg extends forward,

bared to mid-thigh and suggesting a striding step. Upon her head sits a high headdress with stacks of horns, the archetypal marker of divinity in ancient Mesopotamia. Her chest is crossed by a diagonal pair of broad straps each holding a quiver of arrows at her back. In her left hand, extended forward, she holds an upright bow and single arrow, and behind her, a sickle-sword in her lowered right hand. The goddess is depicted with her upper body and horned headdress shown frontally, whereas the remainder of her body is rendered in profile. She rests her feet on the necks of the lions beneath her. The hairy tuft of the tail of the lion on the

right dips below the base line. Together, her attire and pose indicate that this goddess is associated with war, features that are particularly indicative of Ishtar, whose animal attribute is the lion.

On the basis of dated comparanda (for instance, Barrelet 1968, no. 623), this plaque is usually dated to the Old Babylonian period. However, Pauline Albenda (2005) has proposed a substantially later Neo-Assyrian date for this plaque (8th or 7th century BCE), based on the goddess's weapons and their specific manner of display. KW

### No. 37 Nude female figurine

YPM BC 038685

Accession no. YBC 10061

Ur III or Old Babylonian period (about 2100–1600 BCE); provenience unknown

85 × 26 × 15 mm; terracotta

*Bibliography:* Van Buren 1930, no. 140, fig. 37

### No. 38 Nude female figurine

YPM BC 007442

Accession no. NBC 4466

Ur III or Old Babylonian period (about 2100–1600 BCE), provenience unknown

158 × 64 × 28 mm; terracotta with dark-brown glaze

*Bibliography:* Buchanan 1962: 270

These figurines take the forms of nude women—with prominent noses, round eyes, incised pubic triangles, broad hips tapering down to tiny feet, and elaborate hair styles and jewelry. **No. 37** wears a necklace and a girdle around her waist (compare Barrelet 1968, no. 93 from Tello). Her eyes are barely visible under the deep fringes of her hair, parted in the middle. Her arms are bent at the elbow and her hands are cupping her breasts. Fingers are indicated by incised lines.

The later and more-orately bejeweled **No. 38** wears an elaborate headdress, boat-shaped earrings, and necklaces piled so high they cover the lower part of her face; both her arms are broken off below the shoulders. The hair of her pubic triangle is carefully indicated by series of short vertical lines.



No. 36



No. 37

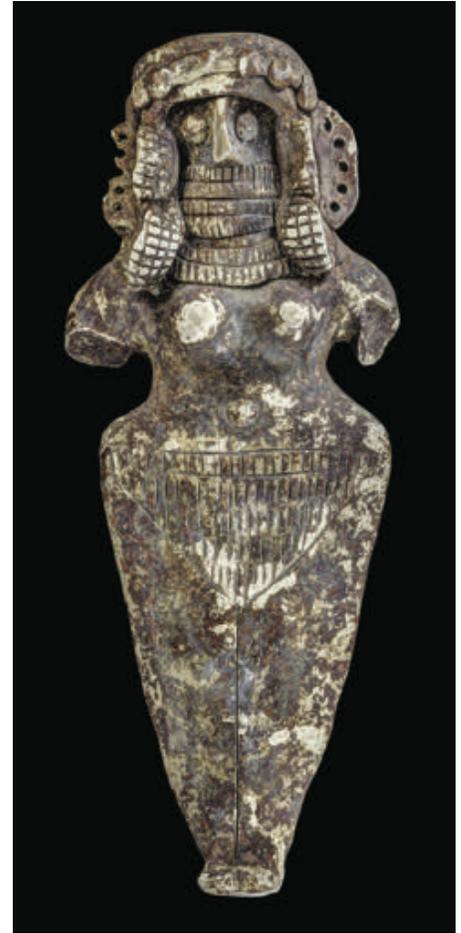
The statuettes' backs are undecorated and they do not stand upright, so it seems likely that they were held when used and, indeed, they are perfectly sized to fit in the palm of a hand.

Some scholars have interpreted statuettes of nude women as communicating either fecundity or sexual allure. But these two ideas were not opposed in ancient Near Eastern ideology where both were understood as fundamental aspects of femininity. In Babylonia, images of nude women were often associated with Inana/Ishtar—a goddess to whom both men and women appealed for intervention in matters of sex and attraction. It is possible that these figures represent worshippers or votives to the goddess. KAW

### No. 39 Female pillar-figurine

YPM BC 038165  
Accession no. YBC 2444  
third millennium BCE; Syria  
151 × 45 × 31 mm; terracotta  
*Bibliography:* unpublished

The head of this figurine of a woman has circular, applied eyes, an exaggerated nose, a striking neck ornament, and an elaborate hair style combed back from the forehead into a low chignon. The three holes to either side of her face may be curls or possibly earring holes. In contrast to the attention paid to her face and head, her lower body is schematic. Short arms extend from a columnar body with flared circular base that allows the statuette to stand upright. Though we do not know the original context in which this object was



No. 38

used, such statuettes have been found buried under the floors and thresholds of homes. With its hands raised in prayer, the sculpture could function as a votive worshipper in a household ancestor cult, concretizing family identity and protecting the home. KAW

### No. 40 A goddess in a cloak

YPM BC 016837  
Accession no. YBC 2209  
Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE); provenience unknown  
123 × 65 × 18 mm; terracotta  
*Bibliography:* Van Buren 1930: 84, no. 432, fig. 114

This single-mold-made terracotta plaque (depicted in the center) represents a standing goddess in frontal view, who



No. 38



No. 39

wears a cloak that completely covers her body. The unidentified goddess is wearing a headgear featuring two pronounced horns. The edges of the cloak widen towards the bottom of the plaque giving the whole representation a triangular outline. Along the right and left edges of the cloak runs a decorative row of raised circles (maybe rosettes; compare Barrelet 1968, no. 786). The goddess's hands bulge through the fabric of the cloak, and her breasts are faintly indicated above. A barely visible vertical band runs down centrally starting at the goddess's chest. This feature can be better seen on another similar example (YPM BC 038680, YBC 10055; depicted in the figure on the right side). The goddess wears a heavy necklace with tassels reaching down onto the goddess's chest. Beneath the hands appears a cluster of wedge-like impressions—perhaps done with a finger nail—arranged in a circle. Somewhat similar impressions occur on another plaque of this type (YPM BC 016835, YBC 2007; depicted in the figure on the left side). In contrast to the molded front side of the plaque, the reverse is completely flat and undecorated. Two tiny holes, present on the plaque's lower edge, may indicate that the plaque was affixed to something in antiquity. Indeed, the flat reverse would have allowed the plaque to lay flush against a wall or other surface.



No. 39

This feature occurs on the two other examples shown here, in one case with two larger holes puncturing the bottom corners of the plaque.

This type of representation belongs to a wider grouping of terracotta plaques known as the “goddess in a structure” (Roßberger 2018a), originating from various sites in Mesopotamia and the Diyala region in particular. Such plaques, including the present example, feature a goddess adorned with a heavy necklace whose body is completely covered by a garment. These plaques are usually made of low quality clay that shows many inclusions. Pigment traces on some of the known examples suggest that they were originally painted (personal communication by Laura Battini). KW

#### No. 41 Plaque with a nude woman

YPM BC 016752  
Accession no. YBC 2119  
Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE); provenience unknown  
119 × 49 × 30 mm; terracotta  
*Bibliography*: unpublished

The earliest mold-made plaques produced in Mesopotamia featured images of nude women with their hands clasped beneath their chests or cupping their breasts, as shown here. By the Old Babylonian period, terracotta plaques were mass-produced and likely inexpensive, with vernacular (even humorous) imagery that appealed to a broad, urban public. At the same time, representations of nude female figures, in a variety of poses, remained popular. The women shown in these plaques wear no clothing, but are adorned with jewelry. In the example here, the figure wears a heavy necklace and bracelets.

This object is distinguished from other plaques by being pierced with a hole at the top, which would have allowed it to be affixed to a wall or suspended by a cord and worn on the body. If we interpret the mass on the



#### No. 40

figure’s head as a crown, this might even be one of several similar plaques representing a cult statue of a nude goddess standing upon a plinth. As such, it could have functioned as a particularly potent amulet promoting love and sexual well-being (for interpretations, see Assante 2006 and Roßberger 2018b).

KAW

#### No. 42 A “boundary stone” with goddess Gula as witness

YPM BC 012497  
Accession no. NBC 9502  
Middle Babylonian period, reign of Marduk-apla-iddina I (about 1171–1159 BCE); provenience unknown  
373 × 335 × 135 mm; limestone  
*Bibliography*: Paulus 2014: 471–76, MAI I 7; pls. 21–27

The so-called *kudurrus*, “boundary stones” or “entitlement monuments,” are irregularly shaped stone stelae placed in



temples that memorialized the grant of land or an office, originally recorded on a clay tablet. Documented from about the 14th to the mid-7th centuries BCE (if not later) these monuments combine cuneiform inscriptions written with archaizing signs with various prominent relief-carved images of divine symbols, deities, kings, and/or other notables. After stipulating the conditions of the grant, the *kudurru*-texts outline powerful curses invoking various gods. The gods called upon in the curses do not coincide with the gods represented in the relief images. Some of the *kudurrus* have cuneiform captions labelling the

symbols with the names of the gods they represent.

In addition to this *kudurru*, eight other examples are known to date to the reign of the Babylonian king Marduk-apla-iddina I. Four were found in Susa in neighboring Iran, where they were brought in antiquity by Elamite rulers as booty. One example comes from the Iranian site of Sarpol-e Zohab, another one from the vicinity of Baghdad. The remainder, including the present example, are without archaeological provenience. The inscription on the sides and back of this stone is in a poor state of preservation. In the first

column, the plots adjacent to the land given by the king are described. The size of the plot given to the beneficiary, Adad-alsi, however, is not preserved. The inscription ends in the typical curse formulas.

This *kudurru* preserves three tiers of relief images showing divine symbols. One divinity, the goddess Gula, is represented in her anthropomorphic form, sitting on a throne, accompanied by her dog, who reclines by her feet (Figure C.13). She has long flowing hair and wears a horned headdress, an attribute of divinity in ancient Mesopotamia. Gula was the god of healing and is referred to in texts as the “Lady of Health” and “The Great Healer.” People would dedicate figurines of dogs to her, pleading for the health of themselves or others. However, Gula was not unequivocally benevolent, and also had a violent side. Her anger makes “heaven tremble and earth quake” (Avalos 1995: 106–07). She is often referred to in curses and appears prominently in anthropomorphic form on other *kudurrus* as well. Perhaps her ambiguous nature made her all the more powerful in curses and blessings.

AL, KW



C.13 Drawing of Gula on No. 42.



C.14 Detail of No. 43.

## Voices of Women

Voices of women speak throughout the Mesopotamian textual record: in letters, in ritual performances, in literary compositions, in prayers, and in autobiographies. There was even a dialect of written Sumerian, called *emesal*, primarily reserved for women. Sometimes, as in the dialogue between two women (No. 43), the words were attributed to women even though they were actually written by men. This may also have been the case for some of the works attributed to Enheduana, the world's first named author (see Chapter 4, "Between History and Fiction"). Enheduana is best known for her dedicatory poem, "The Exaltation of Inana" (No. 44), in which she praises the goddess Inana for her more violent qualities.

### No. 43 "And you, you are a woman?!"

YPM BC 010900

Accession no. NBC 7913

Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE); provenience unknown

116 × 56 × 21 mm; clay

*Bibliography*: Matuszak 2016; Matuszak (forthcoming)

NBC 7913 is one of sixty-one currently-known manuscripts of a literary debate between two women, written

in Sumerian at some point in the early second millennium BCE, and given the modern titles, "Two Women B" (henceforth 2WB) or "Dialogue 5." Two female protagonists enter what seems to be initially a playful verbal contest about who is the more competent housewife. Soon, however, the quarrel develops into a nasty fight culminating in a fateful slander, and the ensuing conflict can only be resolved at court. NBC 7913 originally contained the first part of the

lawsuit (2WB, ll. 158–96). While the accusatory speech of one of the women is largely lost, the reverse preserves her rival's speech in her own defense, and the passing of the verdict.

The text is unusual in several respects: outside of 2WB and a few related fragments, ordinary housewives are almost invisible in the textual record of Mesopotamia, and are in fact never attested as protagonists of important literary texts. 2WB thus constitutes the longest non-cultic text composed in *emesal*, a variety of Sumerian reserved for female speakers in literary texts and for cultic texts belonging to the corpus of the lamentation priest. Further, within the corpus of Sumerian literary debates, which encompasses disputations between personified animals, plants, tools, etc., as well as contests between human representatives of different professions, 2WB is the only text that is partially preserved in a bilingual Sumerian–Akkadian version. Its popularity in antiquity is evidenced by the fact that almost every major site has produced at least one manuscript of the text: excerpts of 2WB have even been discovered in cities such as Kisurra and Mari, where Sumerian literature otherwise is comparatively rare. The relatively large number of manuscripts

as well as their wide spatial distribution can probably be explained by the fact that the text fulfilled several pedagogical functions within the scribal curriculum. It may seem strange at first sight that pupils—predominantly boys—had to study texts concerned with the mundane chores of housewives. However, they could learn several lessons from 2WB.

Apart from teaching them *emesal*, the dialectic nature of the verbal contest showcased several rhetorical techniques that could be successfully employed to win an argument in any given context, in any given language. The lawsuit, which comprises roughly the last third of the 230 line-long text, taught them procedural law and, more

specifically, how to investigate slander concerning the alleged adultery of a woman—one of the chief female offenses in Mesopotamian law collections. Finally, the text indirectly conveyed the characteristics of an ideal (future) wife, which may (or may not) have been of interest to the teenage boys who read it. Sumerian disputations between human protagonists commonly propagate and perpetuate gender roles and stereotypes. According to the authors, most likely male teachers at the scribal school, boys were supposed to graduate as successful scribes and girls were expected to become competent housewives. If they failed, they lost their right to be counted among their peers. In 2WB this is most threateningly expressed in the recurring rhetorical question, “And you, you are a woman?!” which voices the skepticism of the speaker, who evidently did not consider her rival as a worthy representative of womanhood. But was that her own opinion? The strong likelihood of male authorship suggests that we are in fact presented with an exclusively male perspective on ideal femininity. Therefore, despite witnessing two women quarrelling, we do not hear their own voices.

A short passage from this text, which is partly preserved on the reverse of NBC 7913, reads as follows:

(The Judge to Ninkuzu)

Are you the one whose name is Ninkuzu?” (Ninkuzu makes an affirmative gesture.) “Why did you call your equal a ‘whore’ and why did you cause her husband to divorce her?”

(Ninkuzu to the Judge)

“My lord! Me and her, we quarreled. We exchanged insult with insult. She spoke to me, but I didn’t take it to heart. I spoke to her: she was dumbstruck, she took it to heart. She took herself a witness, she took extreme measures. Grant me a fair verdict!”



### No. 44 The first authored writing: Enheduana's "Exaltation of Inana"

YPM BC 018736

Accession no. YBC 4671

Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE); provenience unknown

98 × 57 × 31 mm, clay

*Bibliography:* Hallo and van Dijk 1968; Zgoll 1997

In early Mesopotamia, literary works were anonymous compositions and did not have a single, named author. A notable exception are the poems or hymns composed by Enheduana, daughter of the Akkadian king Sargon (about 2334–2279 BCE). Enheduana was the high-priestess of the moon god Nanna in the city of Ur, where she seems to have written many of the compositions ascribed to her. None of her works survive from the time of her life, but were written down in the

Ur III and Old Babylonian periods, hundreds of years after her death, when her compositions were now a part of the scribal curriculum.

The tablet here preserves lines 31–66 of a Sumerian hymn to the goddess Inana, known in ancient times by its opening line: *n i n - m e - š a r<sub>2</sub> - r a*, "Lady of All Divine Powers." The hymn, in which Enheduana describes how she was removed from her temple in Ur and later reinstated, is her personal devotion to Inana and it praises the goddess's power and warrior-like qualities at great length:

With your strength, my lady, teeth can crush flint. You charge forward like a charging storm. You roar with the roaring storm, you continually thunder with Ishkur. You spread exhaustion with the storm winds, while your own feet remain tireless. With the lamenting *balag*-drum a lament is struck up. My

lady, the great Anuna gods fly from you to the ruin mounds like scudding bats. They dare not stand before your terrible gaze. They dare not confront your terrible countenance. Who can cool your raging heart? Your malevolent anger is too great to cool. Lady, can your mood be soothed? Lady, can your heart be gladdened? Eldest daughter of Suen, your rage cannot be cooled! (translation from ETCSL).

In addition to this composition, Enheduana composed more than forty hymns addressed to temples in Babylonia, collectively known as the "Sumerian Temple Hymns." Variations in style indicate that some of the hymns could have been composed by other authors, but were nevertheless attributed to Enheduana (see [Chapter 4](#), "Between History and Fiction"). AL





No. 45

### No. 45 A sister thanks her brother

YPM BC 008345  
 Accession no. NBC 5345  
 Old Babylonian period (about 1900–1600 BCE); possibly Nippur  
 69 × 49 × 29 mm; clay  
*Bibliography:* BIN 7, no. 41 (copy); Stol 1981, no. 228 (edition)

Women are frequently correspondents in letters in all major periods of Mesopotamian history (for a letter from a woman in the Old Assyrian period see [No. 2](#)). The present letter dates to the Old Babylonian period. Thousands of letters are known from this period alone. This particular one was sent by a woman named Akatiya. Although the tablet itself looks a bit clumsy, the script is clear and neat. The letter's blessing invokes the gods Enlil, Ninurta, and Ninimma, which seem to support a provenience of the tablet in Nippur. Apart from Enlil and his son Ninurta, the rare presence of Ninimma is noteworthy. She is known as Ninurta's sister and as a deity of scribes (Focke 1999: 384–85). It is likely

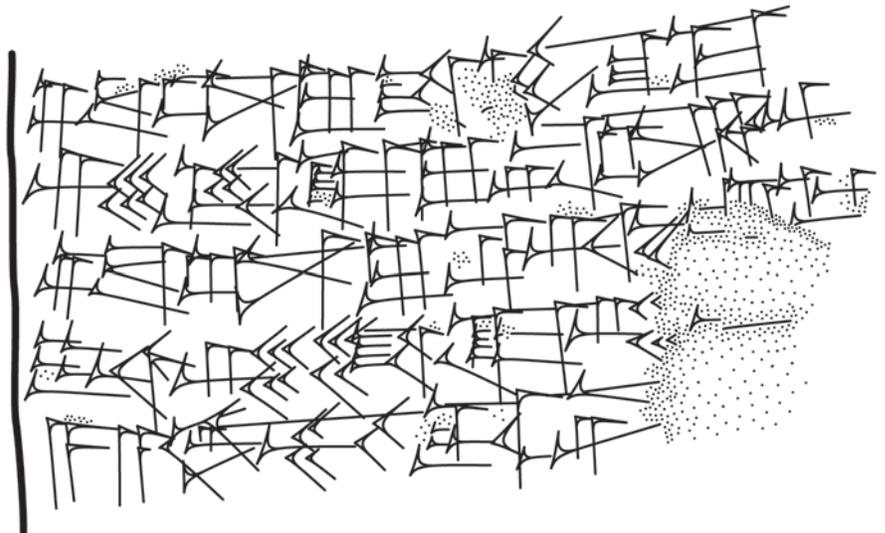
that she was closely associated with the cultic establishment of the city, and was probably a priestess (*naditum*) there (compare [No. 4](#)). This becomes clearer in the following statement by her (ll. 7–10; Stol 2016: 627): “Both my hands should

be full of incense for the god, who let me see your face.” The mention of Ninimma may also suggest that the letter sender Akatiya had been educated in the art of writing and penned the letter herself.

Akatiya writes her brother that the field that produces her food is yielding a good crop. It seems that her brother may have provided her with that field or helped her in the past. There follows a remarkable sentiment in which Akatiya expresses her thanks to her benefactor (ll. 16–19; [Figure C.15](#)):

“You truly are the sun,  
 so let me warm myself in your heat!  
 You truly are a cedar tree,  
 so let the heat not burn me in your shadow!”

Her situation, however, was not entirely positive. Towards the end of the letter she continues (ll. 24–28): “And I raised one young boy, thinking: He may grow up so that he can bury me.” However, a merchant not receiving the money that is owed to him appears to thwart her plans. The letter stops here, but it may be assumed that Akatiya goes on to petition her brother to help her in this dire situation. KW

C.15 Drawing of [No. 45](#), ll. 16–19.

## No. 46 The rituals of Anniwiyani, the wise woman

YPM BC 005479

Accession no. NBC 2506

Hittite New Kingdom (about 1430–1180 BCE); Boghazköy(?)

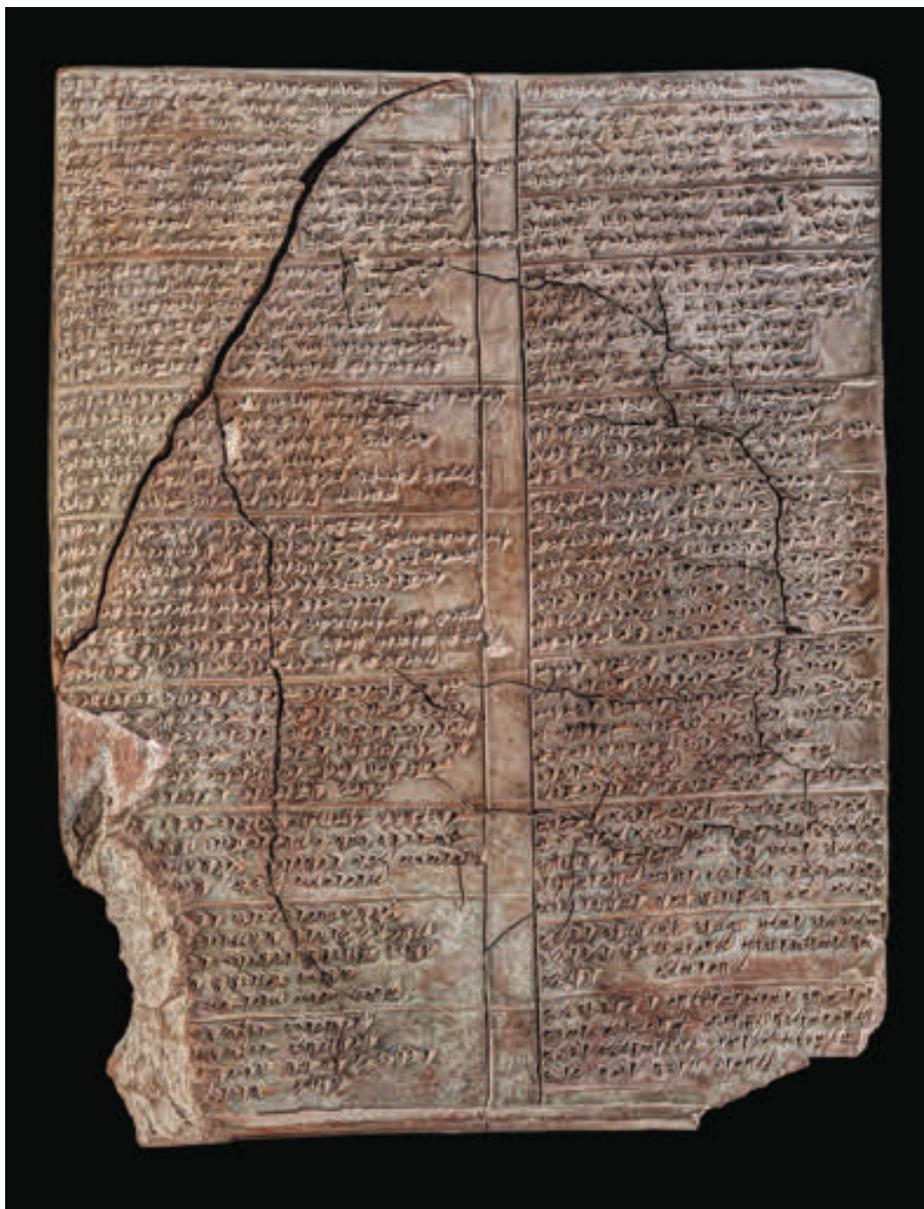
260 × 204 × 47 mm; clay

*Bibliography:* Goetze 1930, no. 24;

Bawanypeck 2005: 51–70

This large, thick cuneiform tablet (referred to as CTH 393) outlines in detail two complicated rituals, each lasting several days. According to the tablet, the words were recited by a female ritual specialist named Anniwiyani, and committed to writing by a scribe. The script implies a Late Hittite date, whereas the language appears to be Middle Hittite, indicating that this text was copied from an earlier original (Bawanypeck 2005: 70). Another fragment with a different copy of the rituals was excavated in Boghazköy (ancient Hattusha), possibly in a school setting (Bawanypeck 2005: 51–52, Beckman 2009: 223).

The first ritual serves to expel a *lulimi*-protective deity from a man, and to invite in an *innarawant*-protective deity. Neither of these terms is well understood. The latter seems to be a Luwian term referring to being “active” or “hearty.” The former may be derived from Akkadian *lulimu* “deer,” or perhaps a Luwian word (Bawanypeck 2005: 183–85, Peled 2010: 73–75). The *innarawant*-protective deity is associated with some aspect of the patient’s manliness, and the *lulimi*-protective deity is its opposite. The ritual acts involve placing a series of objects under the bed of the patient and tying blue and red strings to him and his war weapons. The patient then sleeps in his bed, and in the morning a young woman meets him at the door and orders the *lulimi*-protective deity out and invites the *innarawant*-protective deity in. Then the patient, the young women, and several others go out into the mountains, build a doorway out of sticks, and place the offerings on the other side of the doorway to attract the



No. 46

*lulimi*-protective deity through. Then they break the doorway and run away, ritually destroying their path as they go. Afterwards everyone parties to celebrate the *innarawant*-protective deity.

The second ritual on the tablet is intended to summon and placate an angry *kuršaš*-protective deity. The god is summoned with offerings and urged with further offerings and ritual gestures to cool its anger. This is done

for several days and is followed with an offering of gratitude to the *kuršaš*-protective deity and a party attended by the ritual participants. The relationship between the two rituals on the tablet is uncertain (but see Bawanypeck 2005: 207–08).

The exact purpose of these rituals, the first in particular, is much debated (Peled 2010: 71–72). It has been suggested that it restored the sexual



potency of the patient (Bawanypeck 2005: 194), or perhaps that it restored the “proper” manly sexuality to a patient who was the passive partner in a homosexual relationship (Peled 2010).

Another Hittite ritual text (CTH 406) does seem to be aimed at restoring a man’s sexual potency (Hoffner 1987). It is also attributed to a female ritual specialist named Pashkuwatti. It uses many of the same ritual objects

and actors, but there are significant differences, which mean that in comparison, the goals of this ritual and those on Anniwiyani’s tablet might not be the same (Hoffner 1987: 281–82, Bawanypeck 2005: 193–94). One of these differences, which also sheds some light on the construction of gender among the Hittites, is in the gendered objects used. CTH 406 has an act in which the male patient takes up a spindle and distaff,

while the ritual specialist takes up a bow and arrows. She hands him the weapons, and takes the spindle and distaff from him, saying that she is taking his “femininity” and giving him his “masculinity” (Hoffner 1987: 277). Our text, CTH 393, on the other hand, only utilizes a group of “masculine” objects.

Both of these rituals, involving restoring aspects of manhood, are given their authority from female ritual specialists. Anniwiyani and Pashkuwatti both have Luwian names (Bawanypeck 2005: 187; Hoffner 1987: 281), and the two types of protective gods in CTH 393 may also derive from Luwian (Bawanypeck 2005: 184–85). Female ritual specialists were far more common in Anatolia than in Mesopotamia, where female magic practitioners typically appear in the role of “witches” (*kaššāptu*) serving as antagonists (Sefati and Klein 2002; compare No. 29); a notable exception is the old woman who is the hero of the “magicians’ contest” in the Sumerian-language composition, “Enmerkar and Enshukeshdana” (Vanstiphout 2003: 42–45).

The following are two short passages from the text:

When day breaks, the blue wool and the red wool will be cut for the ritual performer. She (that is, Anniwiyani) places it into a basket. Then a girl is led into the house and she is made to sit down in the doorway. She holds in her hand a bird made of dough. Now the girl cries out: “Come out, *Lamma* the effeminate, (then) *Lamma* the manly will come in!”

(The girl) cries out to summon (the deity) and utters as follows: “Come in, *Lamma* of the Fleece, be mild to us and be favorably inclined towards us! Release anger, rage, and wrath! And as this chaff get lost for the ploughman, so for you, *Lamma* of the Fleece, also shall anger, rage, and wrath get lost!”



# Abbreviations

AAA	Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology	CM	Cuneiform Monographs	RIA	Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie
AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research	ETCSL	Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature	SAAS	State Archives of Assyria, Studies
AbB	Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung (for AbB 9, see Stol 1981)	GBAO	Göttinger Beiträge zum Alten Orient	SANER	Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records
AION	Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli	HdO	Handbuch der Orientalistik	SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization
AMD	Ancient Medicine and Divination	JANER	Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religion	StOr	Studia Orientalia
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament	JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society	THeth	Texte der Hethiter
AOS	American Oriental Series	JCS	Journal of Cuneiform Studies	UAVA	Untersuchungen zur Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie
AuOr	Aula Orientalis	JEOL	Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap Ex Oriente Lux	WAS	Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum. Cylinder Seals
AUWE	Ausgrabungen in Uruk-Warka Endberichte (for AUWE 19, s. Wallenfels 1994)	JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies	WVDOG	Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft
BAR	British Archaeological Reports	MAD	Materials for the Assyrian Dictionary	YOS	Yale Oriental Series (for YOS 1, see Clay 1915; YOS 3, see Dougherty 1920; YOS 9, see Stephens 1937; YOS 11, see van Dijk et al. 1985; YOS 13, see Finkelstein 1972; YOS 22, see Hallo 2018)
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research	MC	Mesopotamian Civilizations	YOSR	Yale Oriental Series, Researches
BIN	Babylonian Inscriptions in the Collection of James Buchanan Nies (for BIN 2, see Nies and Kaiser 1920; BIN 4, see Clay 1927; BIN 7, see Alexander 1943)	N.A.B.U.	Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires	YNER	Yale Near Eastern Researches
BMO	Barcino Monographica Orientalia	OBO (SA)	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis (Series Archaeologica)	ZA	Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie
BPOA	Biblioteca del Próximo Oriente Antiguo	OIP	Oriental Institute Publications	ZDPV	Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins
BRM	Babylonian Records in the Library of J. Pierpont Morgan (for BRM 2, see Clay 1920; BRM 4, see Clay 1923)	OPSNKF	Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund		
CS	Cylinder Seals from Kültepe	OrNS	Orientalia, Nova Series		
CTH	Catalogue des textes hittites	PIHANS	Publications de l'Institut historique-archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul		
CUSAS	Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology (for CUSAS 17, see George 2011)	RA	Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale		
		RIMA	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods		
		RIME	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods (for RIME 4, see Frayne 1990)		

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