

1 Her outward appearance

1.1 Phases of life

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The half-el as a measurement of height here is equivalent to 20–25 cm, the same as a span.⁸ The height of child-slaves was also usually measured in half-els.⁹ Using the word ‘pupil’ as a category of age is at first sight surprising, but a related word (*limmūdim*) occurs in later Hebrew literature¹⁰ also apparently to denote someone about to become an adult. It was, of course, always applied to boys.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

12 ARM I 64:7–12

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

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

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

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

1.2 The girl

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I never knew the play of maidens, I never knew the romping of children.²²

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³⁰ YOS 11 11:8–9, 19:9–10.

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

³² S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 110.

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

1.3 The virgin

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

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

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

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

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

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

38 M. Roth, CSSH 29, 743f.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An exhaustive study by J. S. Cooper has concluded that Sumerian and Akkadian had no specific word to indicate a virgin.⁵³ What happened in practice was that every girl was supposed to be a virgin before her marriage, and therefore there is some confusion in translating the word *batūltu*, ‘marriageable girl’. In this connection it must not be overlooked that there is no word for ‘virgin’ in ancient Egyptian⁵⁴ but that does not lead to the conclusion that they attached no value to the idea.⁵⁵ While seeking to answer the question of why a woman should enter into marriage as a virgin Cooper suggests that there may be two logical motives for such behaviour in a patriarchal society. One would be to prevent young people looking for a partner and experimenting together. The other would be that enforced chastity is good practice for chaste behaviour later in marriage. This in turn ensures that a husband can be sure that the children his wife bears are his own.⁵⁶ This reasoning is a little far-fetched. According to Cooper (supported by two feminists), there is an oppressive reality behind this, in that the man by his demand for virginity wished to exert his control over the woman.⁵⁷ More subtly J.-J. Glassner sees that authority is expected from the man and purity from the woman. This is symbolised by her wearing the veil, receiving the death penalty for adultery, and the role of the virgin in magic rituals.⁵⁸

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

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

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

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

55 Cooper, 105.

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

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

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

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

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

61 ‘Familiengründung’, 216 n. 1.

62 SpbTU I 39:7 f.

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

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

1.4 Women's clothing

1.4.1 Dress

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

70 AbB 11 106:5–7.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In Ugarit a similar threat is directed to men:

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

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

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

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

87 E. Cassin, RA 63 (1969) 136–139.

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

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

90 Malul, 122–138.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

97 Stol, 62.

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

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

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

1.4.2 The veil

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

106 T. Abusch, *op. cit.*, 1–14.

Now, landlady, I have seen your face.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

112 J. Pasquali, 173–176.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

133 AEM 1/1 530 no. 251:15–18.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.4.3 Symbols

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the woman holds spindles and needles, wandering on whatever roads they wish.¹⁵⁰

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

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

In Turkey,

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

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

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

In the Talmud, Rabbi Eliezer records a Jewish tradition that

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A false accuser rolls his eyes like a spindle.¹⁵⁴

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

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

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

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

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

153 SAA II 56 no. 6:616 f.

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.4.4 Jewellery

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

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

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

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

162 Ornan, 472 fig. 16.

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

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

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

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

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

1.4.4.1 Bracelets and anklets

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.4.4.2 Earrings

In a letter a girl complains that

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

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

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

182 ARM 10 114.

183 EA 17:41–45.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

1.4.4.3 Nose-rings

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

194 Thus also Durand, 405.

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

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

The word for 'bangles' in Hebrew is *š^emīdīm*, and they are often mentioned in the same breath as nose-rings:

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

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

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

1.4.4.4 Finger-rings

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

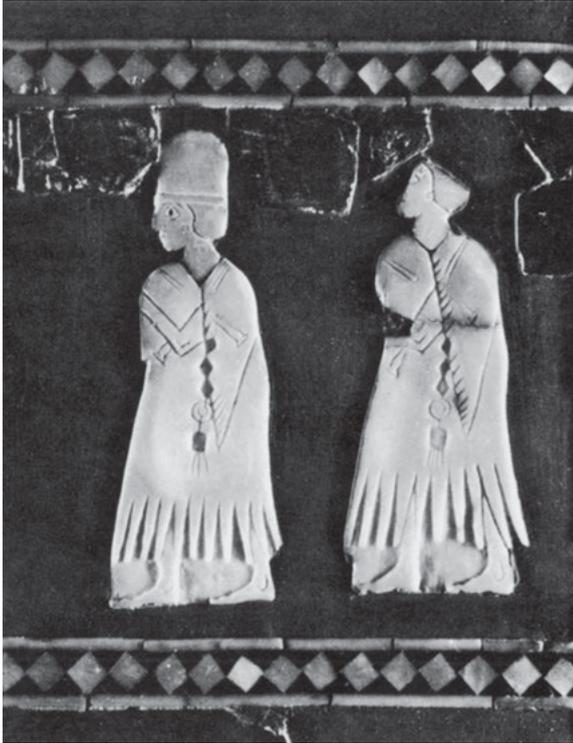


Fig. 3: A toggle-pin can be seen on women's garments in the early periods. This frieze from Mari shows two women wearing toggle-pins, and many such pins with an eye have actually been found. 2500 BC. Mother of pearl, schist, ivory. Height 52,6 cm. National Museum, Damascus.

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

1.4.4.5 Toggle-pin

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.4.4.6 Necklaces

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

1.4.4.7 Diadems

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

1.4.4.8 Gifts

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

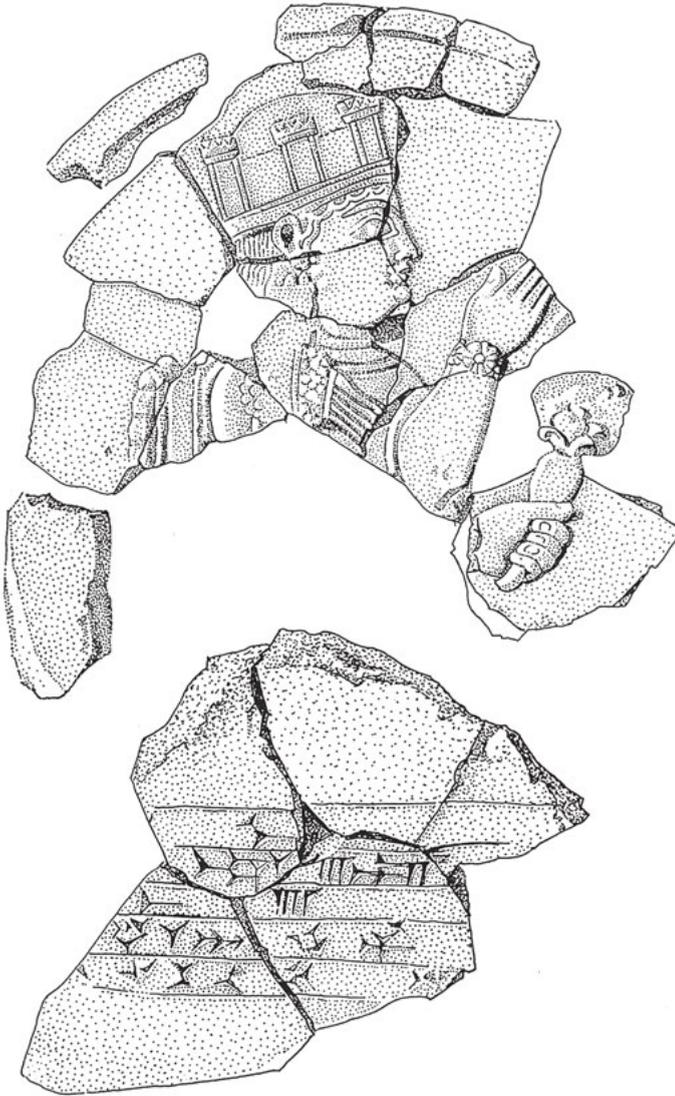


Fig. 4: Assyrian queens wore a crown shaped like a crenellated city wall, a style of diadem later worn by Aramaean goddesses. Here Libbali-šarrat, the spouse of King Ashurbanipal, as portrayed on her stela from the royal city of Assur, is wearing one. Ca. 650 BC. Limestone. Height 56 cm. *Vorderasiatisches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

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

1.4.4.9 Jewellery of princesses

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

220 ARMT 25 353.

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

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

1.4.4.10 Archaeological finds

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

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

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

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

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

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

226 Woolley, 75, 77.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

1.5 Cosmetics and beauty

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

²³⁶ U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin* (1983) 305 f.

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

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

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

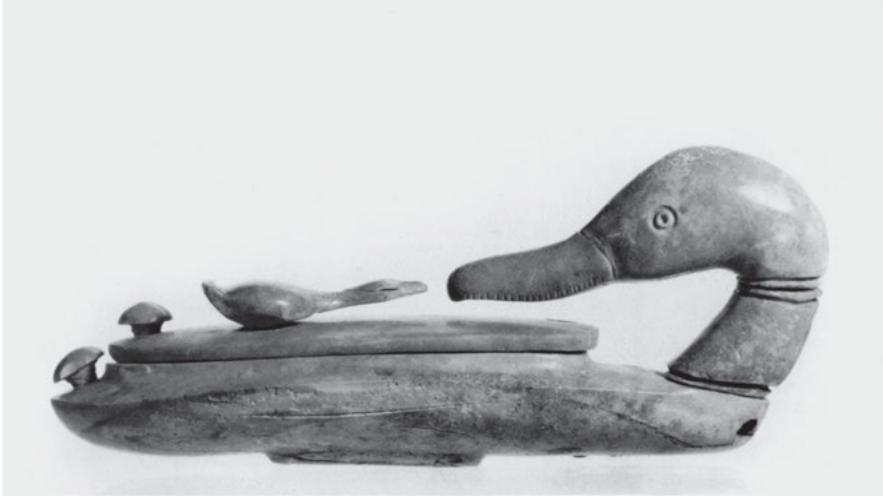


Fig. 6: In Western Asia they kept ointments and cosmetics in containers shaped like a backwards looking duck, in Egyptian style. They are made of ivory. Sometimes the duck has one or two young on its back. In Babylonia such ducks were used as weight stones. Kamil el Loz, Lebanon. Length 16,1 cm. *Institut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

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

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

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

²⁴¹ Cassin, 217 f.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

246 J. van Dijk, HSAO (1967) 253 f.

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

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



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

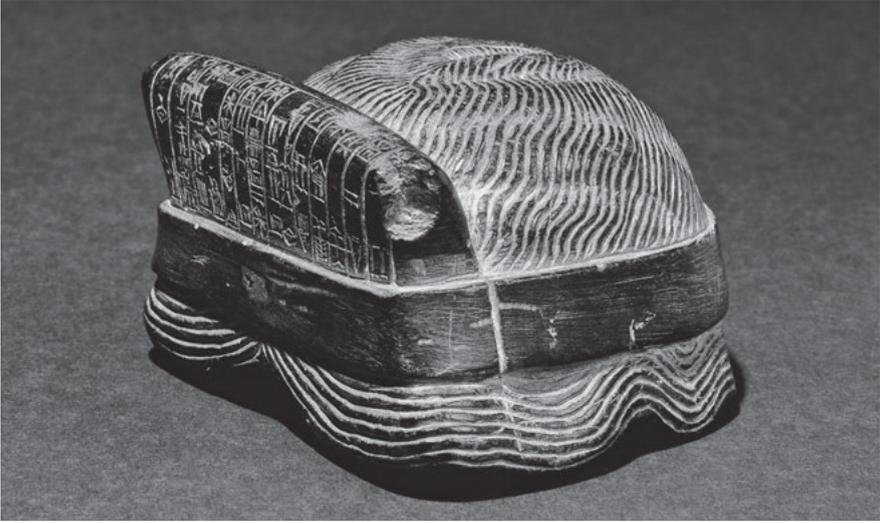


Fig. 9: Inscription on model of a wig: 'For the protective goddess (*lamassu*), his mistress, for the life of Šulgi, the mighty man, the king of Ur, Bau-ninam, the cupbearer of Ur-Ningirsu, the beloved priest, *en* of Nanše, has made the jewel for her womanhood.' Rear view. 2000 BC. Steatite. Dimensions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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁵⁹ J. van Dijk, HSAO (1967) 253.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

1.6 The language of women

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

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

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

276 Schretter, 74–76.

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

278 Schretter, 92 ff.

279 Schretter, 6.

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

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

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

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

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

283 Despite Schretter, 122f.

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

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

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

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

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

1.7 Women's names

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

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

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

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

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

²⁹⁰ H. Limet, *L'anthroponymie sumérienne* (1968) 62.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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