

17 Women robbed of their freedom

On several occasions we read of women who lost their freedom for one reason or another. It could be because a man had incurred debts and pledged the woman as a security, or because a crime had been committed and she acted as a surety, standing bail for him. In times of need daughters were sold as slaves.

17.1 Security for a man's debts

A woman could stipulate before her marriage that she would never have to be responsible for the debts of her husband. One of Hammurabi's laws facilitates this (§ 151) and an Old Assyrian marriage agreement arranges this.¹ It occurs similarly in Neo-Assyrian agreements.

If PN borrows silver, then his wife shall not be responsible for it.

If there is a creditor or a litigant, he shall not have control (of her) or approach her.²

A man would prefer to start his marriage without debts, even if he had to take out a loan from a third party. An Old Babylonian literary prayer to the moon god on this subject begins as follows:

O Nanna, king of heaven and earth, you, in you do I trust. E., the son of G., has robbed me. Pronounce judgement for me! He had no silver and he approached me and with my silver he paid off his interest-bearing loan. He married (literally, 'he called to the house of his father-in-law'), he had a son and daughter. He did not satisfy me because he never completely paid back my silver.

Some assume that this loan was intended to pay the bride-price, because afterwards he started his family.³ However, this case seems rather too serious for a bride-price (which moreover was generally paid by the father) and it looks like the repayment of a debt which he had contracted before his marriage.

If a man took out a loan he could offer the women and children of his house as collateral.⁴ This sad custom had always existed and we cannot begin here

1 AKT I 77:10–17 with R. Rems, WZKM 86 (1996) 357 f.

2 CTN II 247:12 f.; ND 2316:7–10, cited in CAD Š/1 239a; J. N. Postgate, FNALD (1976) 107; K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 158 f.; Radner in R. Westbrook, *Security for debt* (2001) 280 n. 65.

3 UET 6/2 402 with D. Charpin, *Le clergé d'Ur* (1986) 326–328.

4 G. Furlani, 'Familienhaftung', RIA III/1 (1957) 16–19. Only 'F. bei den Hettitern' is relevant, but will not be discussed here.

to describe its history over the course of the three thousand years of cuneiform textual evidence. There are a variety of legal complications, which make this subject a popular one with lawyers. We do not want to deal with this. Even the wife could be a security. In this book we will restrict our study to the women, even though it gives a certain bias in the description of guarantees and securities. The following selections from the rich material available only serve to give an impression. We also take the extreme cases here, which led to the sale of those individuals who were used as securities.⁵

17.1.1 Sumerian period

Some orders appear in short letters, either to detain a wife as a security,

Tell H., (and) let him give to A. the wife of U. as a security.

or to release her,

Tell B., (and) let him release the wife of G. One should not come back to this.⁶

A whole family was sold by a judge in Akkad to the city ruler of Lagash, comprising the father (a professional lamentation singer), his wife, his two daughters, and also his brothers.⁷ A mother and sisters tried to redeem a girl who had become a slave. The judges refused permission because there was ‘no royal decree’ (to abolish debts). The woman, Damqat, had been a slave for twenty years and the judges decided that she must remain a slave.⁸

The problems of officials who had for years produced deficits in the state finances were very distinctive. They were held personally responsible and were made bankrupt. An inventory was then made of their possessions. We know of a summary of the possessions of ten defaulting officials. The lists give a wonderful insight into what could be expected to be in a private house, and women were part of that. These are the possessions of the tenth man, described in this order.

⁵ The main source for this theme is R. Westbrook, *Security for debt in Ancient Near Eastern law* (2001), in which specialists wrote chapters on various periods and countries (including Egypt and Israel). See also the article ‘Pfand’ in *RIA X/5–6* (2004) 439–455.

⁶ TCS 1 nos. 46, 74. For women as ‘Schuldhaftlinge’ see H. Waetzoldt, *AOF* 15 (1988) 38 f.

⁷ D. O. Edzard, *Sumerische Rechtsurkunden* (1968) no. 46, with C. Wilcke, *Early Ancient Near Eastern law* (2003) 56 f.

⁸ M. Molina, *Studies G. Pettinato* (2004) 176 f., 179.

Debt: almost 49 *kor* of barley. Possessions: a house, two beds, five chairs, two mill-stones, a wife, three daughters, a mortar.

Most inventories read like this, and we assume that all would have been sold.⁹

We know from merchants' archives that some of them specialised in buying up children, often perhaps from widowed mothers.¹⁰

17.1.2 Old Babylonian period

Wives, slave-girls and children were all sold. The king of Mari wanted to collect a debt to the state from the dike bailiff and the governor of the province mediated in this. The king said,

If he does not want to be put to death, let him pay five minas as ransom money for his life, and then set him free.

Then came the answer.

Let them take away my house and possessions for the palace.

But the house was not enough, so the man came up with the idea of selling his wife.

Let me sell my wife, my slave, and my slave-girl to a merchant's house, and then I will get two minas.

If the value of his cattle were added to this he hoped he would have enough.¹¹

In another example a time limit is fixed before the wife is to be sold.

R. guaranteed the payment of six and a half shekels of silver by Y. A., the wife of Y. was given as a security (*mazzazānu*). If he does not pay the silver within two months, then A. the wife of Y. will be sold.¹²

⁹ H. Waetzoldt, M. Sigris, 'Haftung mit Privatvermögen bei Nicht-Erfüllung von Dienstverpflichtungen', *Studies W. W. Hallo* (1993) 271–280. More in ASJ 19 (1997) 81; NABU 2005/74.

¹⁰ H. Neumann in: C. Wilcke, *Das geistige Erfassen der Welt im Alten Orient* (2007) 289 f. (Old Akkadian).

¹¹ ARM 14 17+ with LAPO 17 (1998) 640–642 no. 829.

¹² ARM 8 71 with TUAT NF 1 (2004) 40.

Evidently there was a long previous history leading to this. R., the guarantor, took over the debt and now the debtor was gaining two months extension from him.

A woman wrote,

I brought up a boy and I thought, ‘Let him grow up to bury me’. Now a creditor (literally, ‘a merchant’) has me in his grasp and says: ‘He has crossed the pestle (of the mortar)’.

This was a symbolic step taken at a sale.¹³ It was a pity as the boy had been adopted by the woman with the guarantee that he would look after her later. In the worst case a man could ‘set himself up as a security’ and be sold as a slave.¹⁴

17.1.3 Old Assyrian period

Wives, sons, daughters, and small children, slaves, slave-girls, houses and fields were all ‘bound’ as security for anyone entering into a debt.¹⁵ But a woman could avoid any possibility of this happening by having a clause inserted into her marriage contract.¹⁶ If the wife of a merchant had not done that, she would have had to pay the debts of her husband by ‘scraping together’ all her possessions.¹⁷ If it was not all paid off, then the whole family would have to ‘enter’ (*erēbu*) the house of the creditor as a security (*šapartu*) and ‘he would keep them alive’.¹⁸ A decision made by the body that regulated commerce in Anatolia obligated the husband, if his wife were detained in these circumstances, to maintain her with a monthly sum in copper to buy ‘her food, oil and wood (= firewood)’ and a new garment once a year.¹⁹ There are letters about negotiations for redeeming whole families.²⁰ From the various accounts it seems that it was mostly slaves and slave-girls who served as securities for debt, though sometimes it was a wife with a daughter or young child.²¹

13 AbB 9 228:24–32.

14 *Security for debt*, 73 f. A person sells himself: VAS 13 96; ‘Edict of Ammi-šaduqa’ § 20.

15 K. R. Veenhof in *Security for debt* (2001) 130 f. (kt f/k 171). On the treatment of the indigenous Anatolians, see C. Michel in: J. G. Dercksen, *Anatolia and the Jazira during the Old Assyrian period* (2008) 222.

16 Michel in Dercksen, 222 n. 68.

17 K. R. Veenhof, *Mesopotamia. The Old Assyrian period* (2008) 109.

18 K. Balkan, *Studies H. G. Güterbock* (1974) 30 f.

19 *Archivum Anatolicum* 1 (1995) 11 f. no. 5 (= 57 f.); Veenhof, *Mesopotamia*, 109.

20 J. G. Dercksen, *Studies K. R. Veenhof* (2001) 54 f.

21 Veenhof, 134–136, Tables 1 (*erubbātu*) and 2 (*šapartu*); C. Michel, *Ktama* 22 (1997) 104 f., ‘Les enfants, garantie d’une dette’.

Hatti and her daughter are the security (*erubbātu*). As long as he does not pay the silver in full back to me, no-one shall come near them.²²

If the debt was not paid off, they would have been sold.²³ When H. went bankrupt, they 'gave H. his wife and his little children to the creditors'.²⁴

People later were well aware that a slave-girl like this had once been a free woman and that it was possible that she would still be redeemed.²⁵ Redemption could sometimes already have been provided for when a loan was entered into.²⁶ A mother sold her daughter and would be able for double the price to take (literally 'to seize') her back again. If the girl misbehaved, then she could be sold on.²⁷ A 'slave-girl' (a second wife?) was sold on for around twenty shekels of silver and a woman and her son stood as guarantors for any claims. K. R. Veenhof assumes that these guarantors were the mother and brother of the slave-girl. They were responsible for what had happened previously. They could 'seize her', or in other words redeem her, for sixty shekels of silver.²⁸ A text kept in Leiden tells about a man who sold himself and his daughter. The selling price may have been the same amount as the debt. They could be free again if anyone repaid the selling price or if they were badly treated. In those circumstances the amount of the selling price would be given to them. This fits in with the Middle Assyrian law § 39 which states that a girl pledged as a security was kept alive by the creditor and that she would be freed if 'she lived in bad conditions'.²⁹ We see the same principle applied to a woman (it was always a woman) in the Laws of Hammurabi.

§ 116. If a woman, distrained on account of debt, dies from beating or maltreatment in the house of her captor, then the owner of the distrained woman shall prove this about the creditor. If a free citizen is concerned, they shall kill his son. If a slave of a citizen is concerned, then he shall pay twenty shekels of silver.

22 AKT I 44:7–11.

23 Veenhof, 143. For children sold see K. Balkan, *Studies H. G. Güterbock* (1974) 30 f. n. 13.

24 S. Bayram, K. R. Veenhof, *JEOL* 32 (1991–92) 89 f. (kt 88/k 1050).

25 B. Kienast, *Das altassyrische Kaufvertragsrecht* (1984) 151 f. no. 32.

26 Westbrook in: *Security for debt* (2001) 73 f.

27 Kienast, 117–119 no. 10.

28 K. R. Veenhof, *Festschrift L. Matouš* II (1978) 307 n. 32. The text ICK I 19 is now Kienast, 144–146 no. 28.

29 *Festschrift L. Matouš* II (1978) 292–295 (LB 1218). We follow his explanation of the Assyrian law. Otherwise M. T. Roth: 'if she has been saved from a catastrophe'.

17.1.4 Middle Assyrian period

Often it was the wife or the children who were pledged, which are mentioned also in the laws from this period.³⁰ In Assur Y. lent a homer of barley and an unspecified quantity of lead for twelve months to S.

The wife of S. shall live in the house of Y. as a security. On the day that he hands over the barley, the lead and the interest, he shall have his wife freed.³¹

A quote from another text:

He had his sister (?) arrive, along with the children (*līdānu*).³²

Once a man sold his wife and daughter to a well-known merchant.³³

Because of poverty an Assyrian free citizen was obliged to place his daughter in the household of Aššur-rešuya who undertook to support her. Such a situation is envisaged in § 39 of the Middle Assyrian laws. The daughter was allowed to enter a contract of marriage with a slave of Amurru-našir. The couple will be his ‘villagers’ and liable to perform a state service (*ilku*). The marriage contract was deposited in the archive of Amurru-našir but he or his sons could never claim them as slaves. The woman is allowed some extent of freedom.³⁴ Another Middle Assyrian law discusses the problem of what to do with the marriageable daughter of a debtor who remained in the house of the creditor. If he wants to marry her off, that is allowed only with the permission of her father. Was it the case that the creditor wanted through this marriage to receive the bride-price? If the father was dead, then her brothers could redeem her within the fixed period of one month (§ 48).

30 C. Saporetti, *Mesopotamia XIII–XIV (1978–79)* 18–20, 23, 38, 72, 77–81. The law is C+G § 2: a creditor keeps in his house ‘the son or daughter of a man’. He is not allowed to sell them.

31 KAJ 70; C. Saporetti, *The status of women in the Middle Assyrian period (1979)* 10.

32 Iraq 30 (1968) 184 TR 3021:12 (Plate LXIII).

33 E. F. Weidner, AfO 20 (1963) 123 f. (VAT 9034), with C. Saporetti, *Assur 14446: la famiglia A (1979)* 79 f., 130 f. Explained by S. Démare-Lafont in: J. Renger, *Assur – Gott, Stadt und Land (2011)* 244 n. 14.

34 KAJ 7 combined with KAJ 167, following J. N. Postgate, *Bronze Age bureaucracy (2013)* 15–17.

17.1.5 Emar

The creditors of a man 'seized his wife and sold her as a slave to B.' for a price of seventy shekels. 'Dead (or) alive, she is the slave-girl of B.'³⁵ A woman was 'unable to pay off her interest-bearing loans'. She and her daughter entered the creditor's household and there they remained, 'dead (or) alive'.³⁶ A man, his brother with his wife and daughter became the slaves of M. for seventy shekels.

If anyone in the future comes forward to redeem them, he must give four 'good' women.³⁷

A man sold his 'bride' as a slave-girl. What was meant by 'bride'? Perhaps it was his newly married wife without children.³⁸

17.1.6 Ugarit

In an international treaty about the relations between the merchants of Ura and Ugarit, Ḫattušili III, king of the Hittites, says to Niqmepa, king of Ugarit,

If the silver of the merchants of Ura is a charge on the sons of Ugarit and they cannot pay it back completely, then the king of Ugarit shall give him (the debtor), together with his wives and children, to the merchants of Ura, but the merchants of Ura will have no claim to the houses and fields of the king of Ugarit.

This document was sealed by King Ḫattušili and Queen Puduḫepa.³⁹

17.1.7 Neo-Assyrian period

When a man contracted a loan it was not unusual for his wife and daughter to become pledges in case the loan were not repaid.⁴⁰ A girl, one cubit in height

³⁵ D. Arnaud, *Aula Orientalis – Supplementa* 1 (1991) no. 26.

³⁶ A. Tsukimoto, *ASJ* 13 (1991) 300 no. 36. Cf. M. Sigrist, *Studies R. Kutscher* (1993) 167 no. 1 (man, wife and son for a debt of 83 shekels). For more examples of a forced sale of family members see C. Zaccagnini, *Or. NS* 64 (1995) 103 f.

³⁷ D. Arnaud, *Aula Orientalis* 5 (1987) 229–231 no. 11 ME 120.

³⁸ Arnaud, 231 no. 12 ME 117.

³⁹ S. Lackenbacher, *Textes akkadiens d'Ugarit* (2002) 154 f.

⁴⁰ B. Faist, *Alltagstexte aus neuassyrischen Bibliotheken der Stadt Assur* (2007) nos. 64 (*maškanūtu*), 67, 84, 107 with note (*šapartu*).

(no-one is ever said to have been smaller) guaranteed a debt of ten shekels of silver. She was not the daughter of the debtor.⁴¹ Some family members were required to stay in the house of the creditor as security for the debt, as what is called in German *Besitzpfand*.⁴² On another occasion it was a woman and her daughter who had to stay in the house of the creditor for three years.⁴³ In other situations the debt had to be paid within ten days before the woman could be ‘acquired and taken away’. This looks like the last phase after protracted legal proceedings.⁴⁴ A man and his wife were ransomed, but afterwards had to serve their ‘benefactor’ for their whole lives in exchange for a debt of seventy shekels. In a similar ‘redemption’ document there was a man, his wife and daughter who had to serve the benefactor ‘instead of the interest on the silver’. A widow’s debt was taken over and her son and three daughters would have to serve the new creditor.⁴⁵ It is always stated at the end of the document that it was left open for a third party to ‘let them go’ by paying the debt or the interest. In this way a family could pass from hand to hand, but the possibility of redemption suggests that they were not ordinary slaves.⁴⁶ The debts of a father who had died had to be paid by the next-of-kin and we see a widow with children being taken into slavery for this reason.⁴⁷

17.1.8 Neo-Babylonian period

If a man did not deliver an outstanding debt of barley to the head of the grain silo of the temple of Eanna within seven days,

the woman N. and her child would belong to the possessions of Eanna instead of the barley.

41 SAAB IX (1995) 68 no. 92 (VAT 9686). According to K. Radner they were sold; *Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 144 f.

42 Radner, 368–383. Photos of the obverse sides of two contracts from Assur in which a man gives his wife as a pledge were published by J. Marzahn, B. Salje, *Wiedererstehendes Assur* (2003) 154 Abb. 5 (= StAT 3 nos. 41, 42).

43 Radner, 369 VAT 19500; and in *Security for debt*, 270 n. 31. Also StAT 3 107.

44 SAA VI 272.

45 P. Villard in: F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 184 f. no. 134; G. Galil, *The lower stratum families in the Neo-Assyrian period* (2007) 89 f.

46 *Security for debt*, 282 f. (ADD 77 and 85). A full discussion of all pledged families in this period can be found in Galil, 86–94.

47 VAS 1 96 with Radner, *Privatrechtsurkunden*, 162 n. 838.

N. was not his own wife, so she must have been his slave-girl.⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that at this time we no longer see wives used as a security, though children are.⁴⁹ Evidently it was no longer acceptable to dispose of your wife to this extent. It fits in with another custom of that period, when a house and property would be sold ‘while the wife was present’, meaning with her permission. The debtor himself was also not sold in this period.⁵⁰

A slave-girl could be used as security for borrowing money, and would also be physically transferred to the creditor. But the text clarifies that she was not being hired,

There is no question of hiring the slave-girl, there is no interest on the silver.

Instead, the value of her work compensated the creditor for the interest due on the debt. This arrangement, where the provision of a service counts instead of interest, is called *antichresis* (from *chresis* meaning ‘interest’).⁵¹

17.1.9 Greek period

When a man who had a debt of five minas to the ‘people’ of Uruk, he himself, his two brothers, his wife and three daughters of a brother had to serve fifty years (an inordinately long time) and be provided with food and clothing. This debt to the ‘people’ is unique and it has been suggested that this arrangement consists of a promise to fulfil a *leitourgia* on behalf of the community.⁵²

17.2 The woman as guarantor

If a man had a debt, a woman in his family could guarantee that he would not take flight. She is standing bail (*qātātu*). This seems to have been the oldest form of surety which is known in German as *Gestellungsbürgschaft*. It is clear

48 YOS 7 171 with F. Joannès in: P. Briant, *L'archive des Fortifications de Persépolis* (2008) 475.

49 H. Petschow, *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis* 19 (1951) 51–57; *Neubabylonisches Pfandrecht* (1956) 62–64; M. A. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia* (1984) 168 f.

50 C. Wunsch in: M. Hudson, M. van de Mieroop, *Debt and economic renewal in the Ancient Near East* (2002) 238, 244.

51 TuM 2–3 115 with F. Joannès, *Archives de Borsippa* (1989) 142. In Assyria: K. Radner, *Privatrechtsurkunden*, 377 f. Two women ‘instead of the interest’ (*kūm rubê*), StAT 2 287.

52 OECT 9 2 with M. Jursa, RIA X/5–6 (2004) 454 ‘Pfand’ G, § 4.

that people of the same household were the ones eligible to stand bail. In the Sumerian period the mother and sister of a slave guaranteed that he would not run away. A married woman did this for her son (?).⁵³ Women could also guarantee that someone would turn up for work.⁵⁴ A man and woman guaranteed that someone would be at the gate of Nippur.⁵⁵ An ox at the plough was missing and the wife of the responsible person was arrested.⁵⁶ We also see this guarantee in Old Babylonian Uruk and Alalāḫ. The guarantor could have been the mother, the sister or the wife, but a brother could also be the surety and stand bail. The agreement was confirmed by a document sealed by them.⁵⁷ One time, the work to be performed was the collecting of lumps of salt in the desert. According to a letter, the salt was not delivered and the wife of the worker was imprisoned.⁵⁸ In Nuzi a sister often acted as surety for her brother, seemingly on her own initiative.⁵⁹ In Nuzi a man who had to work for ten years in the house of his creditor to pay off a loan promised that in his absence his sons, daughters and wife could be ‘seized’ in order to pay off the debt.⁶⁰ In Emar a man was taken as a slave (valued at 47 shekels) and his wife with her son were the surety, which must have been connected with his presence there.⁶¹

17.2.1 As prisoners

Imprisoning women and children was a means of putting pressure on a man to pay a debt. This amounted to putting someone into a debtor’s prison. In the Old Babylonian period this happened frequently and is generally referred to as ‘to distraint’ (*nepû*) someone.⁶² The laws of Hammurabi and Ešnunna deal with the

⁵³ *Security for debt*, 50 f. n. 10; H. Sauren, ZA 60 (1970) 72 f.

⁵⁴ Sauren, 76, 78, with 84 f.; H. Waetzoldt, AOF 15 (1988) 39.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ C. Wilcke, *Studies T. Abusch* (2010) 354 n. 12, 357 n. 26, on 368 viii 7.

⁵⁷ Uruk: S. Sanati-Müller, Baghd. Mitt. 20 (1989) 276–305, with D. Charpin, J.-M. Durand, MARI 7 (1993) 367 f. Alalāḫ: AT 21 with B. L. Eichler, *Indenture at Nuzi* (1973) 67 f.

⁵⁸ ARM 10 160 = Florilegium Marianum III (1997) 173 no. 16. The woman is a *nipûtum*; see below, under ‘Prisoners’.

⁵⁹ B.Kh. Ismail, M. Müller, WdO 9 (1977) 27 f.

⁶⁰ Eichler, *Indenture at Nuzi*, 127 f., with *Security for debt*, 233.

⁶¹ J. Huehnergard, RA 77 (1983) 25 Text 5, with *Security for debt*, 244 f. (‘ASJ 35’). For the Neo-Assyrian period see Radner, *Privatrechtsurkunden*, 357–367 (‘Bürge’), who does not refer to this type of security.

⁶² Westbrook in: *Security for debt* (2001) 84–90; M. Stol, *Een Babylonier maakt schulden* (1983) 12, 14.

situation which might arise if the person distrained were to die in the house of the creditor (§ 116; § 23 f.). In a few instances the word ‘milling house’ was mentioned as the place where the person was kept,⁶³ which explains a reference in a Sumerian hymn about the goddess Nanše.

She knows the orphan. She knows the widow. She knows that one person oppresses another. She, the mother of the orphan, Nanše, who cares for the widow, is the one who procures justice (?) in the milling house.⁶⁴

Formulating letters about such situations was one of the exercises for young scribes at school. These exercises assumed that the debt had been paid and that the people must be freed from ‘the prison’.⁶⁵

After your departure on the day that you left for your trade journey, I. came here and spoke thus: ‘I have a claim of twenty shekels of silver on him.’ He distrained your wife and your daughter. Come here and let your wife and daughter come out, before your wife and daughter die in prison through the milling. Please!⁶⁶

In the Old Assyrian period the people imprisoned as sureties were called *kutu’ātu*, a feminine word for good reason. One letter clearly wants to intimidate the debtor with this possibility.

He made the house afraid and took the slave-girls prisoner.⁶⁷

A Sumerian text states that women could be released from imprisonment if they married or became a widow.⁶⁸

If a debt could not be paid, and the imprisonment lasted a long time, it came to be called *kiššatu*, ‘servitude’. This letter is to a man from a woman who calls herself ‘the girl’ and who seems to be his sister.

63 Samson ‘ground at the mill in the prison’. See K. van der Toorn, ‘Judges XVI 21 in the light of the Akkadian sources’, *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986) 248–253.

64 W. Heimpel, *JCS* 33 (1981) 82:20–23. The milling house is a prison for distrained persons (probably women) in the letter AbB 1 137:10.

65 F. R. Kraus, *JEOL* 16 (1967) 26–29.

66 UET 5 9 with Kraus, 28 f.; cf. AbB 14 128.

67 CCT 3 24:41 f. with C. Michel, CMK no. 344. In general see K. R. Veenhof in *Security for debt*, 154 f.

68 H. Sauren, *ZA* 60 (1970) 75, 85 f.

Since the day that you abandoned me and went away, I work in the house of the creditor for ten shekels of silver. Cold and drought eat my bones. This is servitude. My creditor ... is the master over me. Because of you I have been sold (literally, 'given for silver') and she who looked after your house, your mother, is dead. If you are really my brother and lord, send me two shekels of silver so that I can give it to my creditor and your house will not be lost. Your brothers too must not be lost. Let me care for them.⁶⁹

From the Neo-Assyrian period we have a short text, in which the guarantor ('he who slapped hands', a sign of making a promise) 'seized' the wife of the debtor, and 'brought her into the house of the creditor'. If she were to die or escape, the guarantor was responsible. The text adds at the end that the creditor had legally nothing to do with the seizing. According to the editor of the text, the intention of the action was to put pressure on the debtor.⁷⁰

It was considered deplorable if free citizens fell into slavery and kings took action to put the matter right. When Entemena, an early Sumerian city ruler of Lagash (2400 BC), proclaimed the 'freedom' of his city,

he allowed the mother to go back to her child, he allowed the child to go back to his mother, he brought freedom from interest-bearing loans of barley.⁷¹

The word freedom here and later means literally 'going back to mother'.

Hammurabi set a maximum period of three years for a 'wife, son or daughter' to work in captivity (§ 117), and he also regulated the fate of slaves (§ 118 f.). A king could step in to 'bring justice', which meant introducing a ruling to cancel debts. A woman was in prison 'on account of her father', meaning on account of his debts, but she was released when 'the king brought justice to the country'. When she discovered that in the meantime her husband had taken another wife and had squandered her dowry, she took action to regain her dowry and her marriage was dissolved.⁷² Such a pardoning of debts is attested also in the Greek tradition as *seisachtheia*. In Babylonia it is attested, in Nuzi among the Hurrians, and possibly also under King Darius II of Persia.⁷³

⁶⁹ AbB 8 100 with F. R. Kraus, *Königliche Verfügungen* (1984) 268.

⁷⁰ FNALD no. 49; Radner, *Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 364.

⁷¹ Ent. 79 iii 10–iv 5; C. Wilcke, *Early Ancient Near Eastern law* (2003) 21.

⁷² M. Jursa, RA 91 (2004) 135–145; D. Charpin in F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 93–95.

⁷³ M. Hudson, M. van de Mierop, *Debt and economic renewal in the Ancient Near East* (2002) 181–189, 212f., 245–247.

17.3 Imprisoned for murder

Debts were not the only reason for taking people hostage, for if a crime had been committed, the family members of the perpetrator could be deprived of freedom. C. Wilcke assumes that the word ‘servitude’ (*kiššatu*) refers to this.⁷⁴ Two such cases come to mind. In the first, from the Ur III period, the wife and daughters of a murderer were imprisoned. They and what was left of his possessions were handed over to the relatives of the victim. Five years later the women fled, were arrested and claimed that they were not slaves. But the judge harshly said that indeed they were.⁷⁵

The second instance was much later, in the Neo-Assyrian period. People were able to claim financial compensation for a murder victim. If that went wrong, the murderer’s ‘people and his fields’ could be taken as collateral security.⁷⁶ An exceptional instance within this system was the delivering up of a woman as compensation for the murder of Samaku. The judges gave the following suggestion:

He shall give the woman K. to Š., the son of Samaku, instead of the blood. He shall wash away the blood in this fashion. If he does not give his wife, they shall kill him on the grave of Samaku.

This woman must have been a free citizen and was possibly the sister of the murderer. The following sentence says that if anyone shall contravene this arrangement, then he shall pay ten minas of silver.⁷⁷ In Neo-Babylonian Uruk the mother and sisters of a thief were made temple slaves because of a theft of goats from a temple.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ C. Wilcke, NABU 1991/16: ‘(deliktisch begründeter) Schuldsklaven-Stand’; *Early Ancient Near Eastern law* (2003) 109: ‘debt-bondage caused by an offence’.

⁷⁵ B. Lafont in *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 64 f. no. 26; C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 516 f.

⁷⁶ ADD 164:7 with SAA VI 264 and M. T. Roth, ‘Homicide in the Neo-Assyrian period’, *Studies Erica Reiner* (1987) 351–365, esp. 356.

⁷⁷ ADD 321 with Roth, 357 f.; Remko Jas, *Neo-Assyrian judicial procedures* (1996) no. 42; P. Villard in *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 193 no. 142.

⁷⁸ M. Jursa, *Iraq* 59 (1997) 99 f. no. 1.

17.4 The sale of children in time of need

When a city was under siege a woman may have had to sell her children, usually her daughters.⁷⁹ Contracts from Emar, a city on the northern Euphrates, show that this actually happened in the thirteenth century BC. It also happened in the seventh century BC according to texts from Nippur and Babylon.⁸⁰ In the contracts from Emar we read that it happened when there was ‘hunger and disaster’ and when ‘the gate was shut’.

Then hunger and disaster overcame the country and the mother did not open the door to her daughter. Then the enemy lay outside the city and hunger arose in the country and three litres of barley became the price for a shekel of silver, sold in secret.⁸¹

Such high prices when calamity struck were often mentioned in texts from Emar. An Assyrian text refers to a slave-girl saying that she was bought ‘in the year that there was no food, when a litre of barley cost one and a half minas of copper’.⁸² Possibly this fact was stated so that in better times the sale could be reversed, or the seller could be protected against later complaints about the abnormally low price. The intention is sometimes implied: ‘Take (the child with you) and keep it alive; she is (now) your girl’.⁸³ The texts from Emar come from the time of King Pilsu-Dagan and the high prices mentioned also seem to accord with the harsh reality of the time.⁸⁴

A woman from Emar explained that she could not support her children. She had given up her eldest daughter for adoption to a woman called A. and in this way she was able to keep the little ones alive ‘in the year of the disaster’. But A. did not pay the thirty shekels required, so the mother was later forced to sell the four little children, one of whom was still an infant, for sixty shekels. They were named and their feet were impressed in clay for identification. The lumps of clay

79 K. Volk, ‘Von Findel-, Waisen-, verkauften und deportierten Kindern. Notizen aus Babylonien und Assyrien’, in: A. Künz-Lübcke, R. Lux, “*Schaffe mir Kinder ...*”. *Beiträge zur Kindheit im alten Israel und in seinen Nachbarkulturen* (2006) 47–87.

80 C. Zaccagnini, ‘War and famine at Emar’, *Or. NS* 64 (1995) 92–109; A. L. Oppenheim, ‘Siege documents from Nippur’, *Iraq* 17 (1955) 69–89; G. Frame, *JCS* 51 (1999) 101–106 (Babylon).

81 Frame, 105f. (Babylon). In Nippur a price of 6 litres of barley for 1 shekel is mentioned; Oppenheim, 89, 2 NT 300:6–7, 301:11.

82 J. N. Postgate, *FNALD* 92 no. 8, with Zaccagnini, 95.

83 Oppenheim, *Iraq* 17 (1955) 87, 2 NT 293:4, 297:8.

84 S. A. Divon, ‘A survey of the textual evidence for ‘food shortage’ from the Late Hittite Empire’, in: L. d’Alfonso (etc.), *The city of Emar among the Late Bronze Age empires* (2008) 101–109.

with the impressions of their feet were found together with the dossier.⁸⁵ Years later their names appear in text colophons, as scribes, but those are different people.⁸⁶ Alternatively, in times of need a child could be placed as a foundling, as when ‘in the year of enemies and war, children were thrown on to the square’ and were taken in by other people and adopted.⁸⁷ We will not investigate the existence of foundlings any further.⁸⁸

A mother who closes the door on her daughter became a literary motif in descriptions of times of adversity. It occurs in a prophecy and also in a prediction about a woman who is described as ‘pregnant with wind and gives birth to wind’.⁸⁹ In the fifth year of the famine described in the myth of Atram-ḥasis

a mother does not open the door to her daughter. The daughter sees the scales of her mother.
The mother sees the scales of her daughter.

This meant that she had been sold as a slave, which involved weighing the silver paid for her. In the sixth year hunger was so rife that her daughter and her son had to be eaten.⁹⁰ Our horror at such a thing should not hide our eyes from the fact that the narration of the episode focuses on the mother and the daughter. Some omens predict cannibalism and eating one’s own children was considered to be a sign of madness.

God Enlil will hang the people’s good sense on a peg and people will devour their infant children.⁹¹

Hunger could also lead to children being dedicated as oblates (*širku*) of the temple in the Neo-Babylonian period. A widow had to turn to this to solve her problems:

85 *Emar* VI/3 nos. 216, 217, 218–220 (for the footprints), with RA 97 (2003) 180 and TUAT NF 1 (2004) 151 f. In view of the dimensions of the impressions it must have been a baby no more than three months old, a twin of one year (10 cm), and a two years old child (12.5 cm); C. Zaccagnini, *Or. NS* 63 (1994) 1–4. For photos see O. Rouault, *L’Eufrate e il tempo* (1993) 366 f.; for drawings, *Emar* VI/2 p. 670, 747 f.

86 Y. Cohen, *The scribes and scholars of the city of Emar in the Late Bronze Age* (2009) 132.

87 *Emar* VI/3 256 with TUAT NF 1 (2004) 147 f.

88 C. Wunsch, ‘Findelkinder und Adoption nach neubabylonischen Quellen’, *AfO* 50 (2003–04) 174–244.

89 The prophecy: A. K. Grayson, *JCS* 18 (1964) 20 Text C iii 15 = R. Borger, *BiOr* 28 (1971) 15 iv 15. The prediction: E. Leichty, *The omen series Šumma izbu* (1970) 36, Tablet I 50.

90 Atram-ḥasis, late version S vi 8–13 (ed. W. G. Lambert, A. R. Millard, p. 112); B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses* (1996) 194 f.

91 A. R. George, *CUSAS* 18 (2013) 235 rev. 42, with p. 246.

My husband N. has died. When there was famine in the country I branded my sons S. and S. with a star and gave them to the Lady of Uruk. Keep (them) alive and they shall be oblates of the Lady of Uruk.

The authorities were informed of what she had done and they established food rations for them both from the temple of Eanna, with the official confirmation that they would become ‘oblates of the Lady of Uruk’.⁹² The branding of slaves was usual. The star that was imprinted on this occasion is a direct reference to the Lady of Uruk, Ištar the goddess of love, later to be equated with Venus, the evening star. We read in the Bible that an Israelite ‘will write the Lord’s name on his hand’ (Isaiah 44:5).

17.5 Dedicated to a temple

From most ancient times people have dedicated property and people to temples, but not always in times of hunger. The verb used by the Assyrians to make such a dedication literally meant ‘to allow to go up’, and the word for the dedicated object, in Babylonian *šūlūtu* and in Assyrian *šēlūtu*, was derived from it. Sometimes the word ‘to present’ was used, which was usual in the subsequent Neo-Babylonian period, and then someone who had been dedicated to the temple and had spent his life in service there was called a *širku*, ‘the one presented’, an ‘oblate’.⁹³ Jars of wine, clothes or crockery were dedicated to the gods in Old Babylonian Mari, as well as women, all part of the booty from conquered cities.⁹⁴ At that time old people too were dedicated to the temple, as we shall see in the section of Chapter 22 concerning old women. Why were the temples chosen? They were centres of compassion according to many a hymn to a god or goddess. The temples were also large centres for business, where free labour would always be welcome.

This was being done as early as in the Sumerian period, for we have three long lists of people given as votive offerings (*arua*) to temples from that time.⁹⁵ It

⁹² YOS 6 154 with Oppenheim, 72, M. A. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia* (1984) 484 f.; P.-A. Beaulieu, *The reign of Nabonidus* (1989) 202. For more on the selling of children see M. Stol, *Een Babyloniër maakt schulden* (1983) 15; M. A. Dandamaev, *Slavery*, 170–175.

⁹³ ‘To present’, in Assyrian *šarāku*, in B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* II (1981) T 173, 176 nos. 68:11, 69:9. Once *šrkn* in an Aramaic epigraph, Menzel, T 179 no. 71.

⁹⁴ Wine, clothes, crockery: CAD Š/3 264b; ARM 21 97; 23 535, 536; 31 243. Women: ARM 22 64.

⁹⁵ I. J. Gelb, ‘The *arua* institution’, RA 66 (1972) 1–31. For a new list see RA 80 (1986) 19–29.

was the richer members of society who offered people, animals and objects, and probably the king who offered captives. 113 women and 59 children, pillaged from a foreign city to the east of the Tigris, were offered to the temple of the goddess Šara in Umma,⁹⁶ under the supervision of the governor of Umma. Poor people handed over women in particular to the temple. A shepherd is said to have offered a ‘daughter without a mother’. The temple took in everyone who was offered, young and old and sometimes those who were sick, and set them to work. Possibly a sizeable proportion of the temple personnel consisted of such people, but it would be incorrect to call them slaves. Nothing more can be said on the subject, since all we know is from those lists.

We know much about dedications in the Neo-Assyrian period,⁹⁷ when it was usual to offer the temples land, buildings, statues, jewels, livestock as well as people, with the aim of achieving a good and successful life. Women were offered to a female deity. In Neo-Babylonian texts we sometimes see it explicitly mentioned that the offering had been made to the deity, ‘for the well-being of their lives’ (*ana balāṭ napšātišunu*), meaning to secure good health.⁹⁸ In Assyrian dedications it happened that the child of a prostitute or a single mother was offered by one or more people.⁹⁹ The child was taken after it was weaned, as we see in the following dedication on a clay tablet found in the temple of Nabû at Calah.¹⁰⁰

To U. and N., the two sons of L., his sister, he gave bread to eat, and he kept them alive. He took them from the breast, brought them up and gave them, free from any claims, to his lord Nabû in Calah. Whoever wants to claim rights to them or snatch them with force from Nabû, may Nabû, the scribe of the world, make his name and descendants disappear from the country, may he curse him with a bitter irrevocable curse, may he command that he does not live one day longer. May the bride Tašmetu, in the presence of Nabû, her consort, say a bad word for him, may she determine for him an unfavourable fate, may she command that he will not feel well mentally or physically.

(All the names of the witnesses are functionaries of the temple, and they include a man who was ‘the head of the dedicated ones’).

⁹⁶ I. J. Gelb, *JNES* 32 (1973) 75 f.

⁹⁷ Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* I, 23–33; K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 207–211.

⁹⁸ YOS 7 17 with Dandamaev, *Slavery*, 472 f.

⁹⁹ For the child of a prostitute see Menzel I, 24, no. 2; 28; II T 173 no. 68; SAA XII 92. For the child of a single mother see Menzel I, 24 f., nos. 3–4; II T 167 ff., nos. 65–66; SAA XII 95 f.

¹⁰⁰ SAA XII 95.

Female devotees were known to be in the service of the temple. Those of Ištar of Arbela are the best known, and some of them, men and women, fulfilled the role of prophets. They were dedicated by the kings and will feature again in Chapter 29, about women in divine service.¹⁰¹ All dedicated offerings had to be bought in, which may imply that these children were sold by their mother. Twice women were implicated in these sales. One was a daughter, who was sold by her father to a woman from the harem of the ‘Old Palace’ as a future votive offering to the goddess Mulissu.¹⁰² The other was a palace lady, who dedicated to Mulissu a woman who was married to a weaver (surely an arranged marriage) with the stipulation that

No creditor of her husband or winner of a lawsuit against him shall be able to assert his right to her. He shall not go near her.¹⁰³

We note that more dedicated women got married and their dowry was described.¹⁰⁴ In a contract for a marriage between Egyptians in Nineveh, divorce cost the woman money, and it was added that ‘the woman and her children would be given as a votive offering to Ištar of Arbela’. Possibly she was a slave who already had children.¹⁰⁵ Our knowledge of Neo-Assyrian marriage is skewed because it is almost limited to these cases.

In the Neo-Babylonian period the major temples had ‘presented ones’ (*širku*) in their service.¹⁰⁶ Dedication to the temple was linked at that time with branding on the underarm. This was also done to animals from the temple herds. The mark of the goddess Ištar in Uruk was a star, to be identified with the planet Venus.

He placed the star (*kakkabtu*) and the brand mark (*arratu*) on her underarm and gave her as *širku* to the Lady of Uruk.

101 Menzel, 25 f.

102 Menzel II, T 177 f. no. 70.

103 B. Parker, *Iraq* 16 (1954) 40 ND 2316, with Menzel I, 25, II 23* (254); Radner, *Privatrechtsurkunden*, 170 f. (edition), 210 (e); S. L. Macgregor, *Beyond hearth and home* (2012) 9; S. Svärd, *Studies V. Donbaz* (2010) 253, 258.

104 Menzel, 25 no. 8, 26; Radner, 158, 209 n. 1136 (A. 310 = StAT 2 184, A. 2527 = StAT 2 164).

105 J. N. Postgate, *TIM* 11 27–30 no. 14 = SAA XIV 443; *Iraq* 41 (1979) 98 f.

106 M. A. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia* (1984) 469–557, ‘Temple slavery’.

Later the woman was sold illegally.¹⁰⁷ One can imagine that the ‘presented one’ may already have been advanced in years at her dedication, when his or her owners had died. If so, the temple could make little use of her labour.¹⁰⁸ Temples possibly took pity on needy old people.

Many a *širku* was ‘presented’ to the temple, but another word could also be used. When referring to a woman she could be called *zakîtu*, ‘clean’. That was meant to convey that nobody could claim any right of ownership to her. It is noteworthy that this title was reserved for women only and that men were sometimes called ‘the son of NN, a clean one’.¹⁰⁹ Who were these women? Here is an example.¹¹⁰

I. of his own free will has given to K., his wife, in a sealed legal document, his slave-girl N. and her children. As long as K. shall live, N. and her children shall serve K. On the day that K. according to fate goes to her fathers (= dies), the governor, the chief, the head of ten and the head of fifty shall have no rights to N. and her children. She is the ‘clean one’ of the Lady of Uruk and Nanaya. You, whoever you may be, who change this arrangement (or) alter it, may Ištar and Nanaya command your demise.

(Witnessed by the highest authorities of Uruk and the temple of Eanna).

Any descendants of a *širku* or a *zakîtu* were given the same low status. The temple slaves did simple work, but some of them were able to hold positions of responsibility. We see most of them working in the fields and in the gardens with their family or alone. Sometimes a temple would hire out a whole family. It is noticeable that there were fewer women than men in service in the temples of Sippar and Uruk. Possibly the women were working on the royal estates.¹¹¹

There was every possibility of things going wrong for these temple slaves, in particular if they fled or disappeared.¹¹² N., the slave-girl of N., declared,

My lord N. dedicated me to the Lady of Uruk and branded me with a star. My lord N. died and his brother Š., who was the heir, took me from the house of N. and did not give me to Ištar of Uruk. I bore my sons, S. I., and N. in the house of Š.

107 YOS 6 79 with Dandamaev, 475 f.

108 G. van Driel in: M. Stol, S. P. Vleeming, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 165.

109 F. Joannès in: P. Briant, *L'archive des Fortifications de Persépolis* (2008) 469; cf. 466 n. 5.

110 TCL 12 36.

111 Joannès, 466 f., 474, 478 f.

112 Joannès, 476 f.

Then the leaders of the temple ‘saw the star on her underarm’ and ‘entrusted the woman and her children to Š.’ She had to serve him as long as he lived. He could neither desire her nor sell her nor marry her off to a slave. After the death of Š. she became the property of the Lady of Uruk. It is supposed that the owner had arranged in his will that the woman would look after him and his brother. However one reconstructs the situation, the woman was claimed by the temple and also protected.¹¹³

From pronouncements and lawsuits it would appear that the temple enforced the rights of ownership strictly on these people. Children of devotees gained the same status as their parents through birth and became the property of the temple.¹¹⁴ These devotees could not to be sold.

N., the daughter of E. the coppersmith, a devotee of Ištar of Uruk, her father E. has had a text by an alphabet-writer written on her underarm and has sold her in Babylon to an Arab. The said N. was given by the chief judge and the mayor to A. with these words: ‘Give (her) to the authorities of (the temple of) Eanna’. A. received N. in Eanna (and) N. was led before B.

This all took place in the presence of the most important persons in Eanna,¹¹⁵ and the background needs to be explained. The daughter of the coppersmith was herself also a devotee and was branded with a star. One supposes that the coppersmith had tattooed the name of a fictitious owner in Aramaic, possibly over the star. He then travelled some distance away to Babylon and sold the woman to some Arab whose name is not given. When she was found in Babylon the authorities there took action and put her in the hands of A., an official from Uruk to be returned to where she had come from.

Another case is also relevant.¹¹⁶ In Babylon there was a slave-girl who had a private owner, and who bore the mark of the goddess of Uruk. How could this be? The owner declared that twenty years earlier she had put the mark on herself. The woman said that her first owner had dedicated her to Nanaya and yet even so had sold her to her present owner. Now the judges had an alphabet-writer come to inspect the underarm, as it appeared to have a tattooed text in alphabetic Aramaic.

113 YOS 7 66 with P. Koschaker, GRÖR (1931) 78 f., Dandamaev, 478 f., A. Kuhrt in: B. Lesko, *Womens's earliest records* (1989) 231 f.

114 Joannès, 477.

115 AnOr 8 74 with Dandamaev 537–539, 697 f.

116 D. Arnaud, RA 67 (1973) 147–156, with F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 223–225 no. 166.

He deciphered the underarm of N. and said, 'According to an old text, written long ago on her underarm, it was 'Of Nanaya'. But a second text under the first text said 'Of Ištar'.

The judges questioned the owner.

How has it come about that you bought a slave who was dedicated to Ištar, and branded with a star, but on her underarm is written 'Of Ištar of Uruk' and 'Of Nanaya'?

They reproached him for not having let the judges look into the matter earlier. They decided that the woman and her son should be enrolled with the *corvée* workers of the temple of Eanna and advised the owner to seek redress from the person who had stood as guarantor for the sale.

We have seen earlier that hunger was the reason that children were given over to the temple, with the result that they were dedicated to the Lady of Uruk.¹¹⁷

The final case in cuneiform comes from the time of the Arsacids (after 170 BC).¹¹⁸ Someone with the Greek name Nicanor, the son of Democrates, dedicated a slave-girl of five years old to the gods of Uruk 'to carry out work with clay'. He did this 'for the life of the king, for his own life, the life of the people (of Uruk)'. This case belongs to a group of five dedications of children between five and ten years old (once together with the child's mother) to do this sort of work.¹¹⁹ Clauses at the end of these dedications prohibit the person presenting the children from selling a child or giving it to someone. This ensured that the devoted child would stay at home and only later, when he had grown up, would go and do heavy work.¹²⁰

17.6 Prisoners of war

Kings from the Old Akkadian period (2300–2100 BC) proudly reported their conquests of cities and gave precise numbers of the dead and prisoners of war. From Ur and Lagash there were 8040 dead and 5460 captured, and from Kazalla

117 YOS 6 154.

118 BRM 2 53 with J. Oelsner in: M. J. Geller, *Legal documents of the Hellenistic period* (1995) 122, 147 f.

119 G. C. Sarkisian, 'Von der Tempelklaverei im hellenistischen Babylonien', *Iraq* 45 (1983) 131–135. Cf. J. Huijs in: L. Marti, *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (2014) 613 f.

120 Koschaker, GRÖR, 80 f.; Sarkisian.

12052 dead and 5864 captured.¹²¹ What happened to the captives in practice is documented in the subsequent Ur III period.¹²² When we come to the section of Chapter 18 on weavers we shall see that only women and children were mentioned and that their death rate was high. Some assume that wars were also waged to supplement the workforce.¹²³ The Mari letters (1800–1760 BC) are very informative about this.¹²⁴ They cover a period of continuous conflicts between large and small states.

His troops have conquered the country of Muti-abal. Men, women, boys and girls [they have captured, and their houses] they have torn down and burned with fire.¹²⁵

A prince was reproached by his father, King Samsu-Addu.

You have sent thirty men to bring the booty safely home. Is that really enough? Thirty men to bring back a thousand prisoners of war safely! Let the local workforce take food for fifteen days.

Yes, the prisoners also had to be fed.¹²⁶ We have thirty clay tablets from the last two years of the reign of Zimri-Lim of Mari, which deal with the administration of the deportation of 1500 captives from six different places. These are long lists of often foreign names. The families (two to five persons) stayed together. On the basis of these lists it is thought that the quantity of food necessary was estimated, and sometimes the assignment of captives to the control of certain persons or services was documented.¹²⁷

In letters from Mari we can follow the fates of some highly placed women who were living in captivity. It was possible for them to be ransomed from the

121 A. Archi mentions much higher figures in Ebla (like ‘a total of 20,309 dead’); *Studies D. I. Owen* (2010) 29–33.

122 Cf. G. Ventura, ‘Women, work and war during the Neo-Sumerian period’, in: H. Neumann, *Krieg und Frieden im Alten Vorderasien* (= CRRAI 52) (2014) 345–352.

123 B. Lafont, ‘Guerres et déplacements de populations en Mésopotamie aux époques sumérienne et amorrite (IIIe-IIe millénaires avant notre ère)’, in: C. Moatti, *La mobilité des personnes en Méditerranée de l’Antiquité à l’époque moderne* (2004) 453–479, esp. 455–458, 473 f. (translations).

124 N. Ziegler, ‘Kriege und ihre Folgen. Frauenschicksale anhand der Archive aus Mari’, in: H. Neumann, *Krieg und Frieden*, 885–907.

125 AEM 1/2 (1988) 169 no. 365-bis, rev. 3–5.

126 ARM 1 43:3–8 with MARI 6 (1990) 568.

127 Lafont, 465.



Fig. 18: After the conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib (701 BC) women with girls were driven away on a wagon. Relief in the palace at Nineveh. *British Museum, London.*

enemy, using merchants as intermediaries. Some treaties allowed merchants to travel abroad.¹²⁸

On reliefs in the Assyrian palaces, a thousand years later, many scenes of military victories are depicted, and there we often see captive women and children being led away, sometimes pursued by soldiers.¹²⁹ On a wagon piled high with

¹²⁸ For the adventures of captured women, see N. Ziegler, 'Kriege und ihre Folgen. Frauenschicksale anhand der Archive aus Mari' (note 124). The role of merchants: C. Michel, *Amurru* 1 (1996) 410f.; D. Charpin, *MARI* 8 (1997) 376–381.

¹²⁹ B. Oded, *Mass deportations and deportees in the Neo-Assyrian empire* (1979) 34, 35 n. 19, with some photos in the rear of the book; P. Albenda, 'Woman, child, and family: their imagery in Assyrian art', in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 17–21. There are many illustrations in the series *State Archives of Assyria* (SAA), esp. in volume XI (1995) (see note 144). – Children in booty scenes: Volk in: A. Künz-Lübcke, R. Lux, *Schaffe mir Kinder* (see note 79), 75–81. Children were sold: M. Jursa, *Aspects of the economic history of Babylonia in the first millennium BC* (2010) 226 n. 1316.

loot sat a grandmother, her daughter and grandson.¹³⁰ Adult women and younger women are shown piled on to wagons.¹³¹ The relief in his palace showing Sennacherib conquering the city of Lachish during his campaign against Jerusalem has two such scenes (Figure 18).¹³² On another relief we see two women, taken as booty from the city of Saḫrina, riding on a donkey, and immediately in front of them are soldiers picking up the severed heads of men. This juxtaposition of scenes suggests that the men may have been slaughtered and that some of their womenfolk captured for the victor's own purposes.¹³³

Elsewhere older boys are shown walking along beside adult men, and girls beside adult women. Little children often trudged along beside their parents during the long journey. The infants who could not walk were held tight in their parents' arms or rode on their shoulders.¹³⁴ In one scene mothers suckled their children during the long march. One mother was pressing a kiss on the lips of her child. Another was leaning over to give her child a drink from a waterskin (Figure 19).¹³⁵ Some scenes show them sitting down and eating.¹³⁶ It is as though the artist wanted to produce a variety of snapshots. Quite often the clothing of the captive's own country was portrayed. Women who were taken from Syria all seem

130 R. D. Barnett, M. Falkner, *The sculptures of Assurnasirpal II, Tiglath-Pileser III, Esarhaddon* (1962) plates III–IV with p. 11, Slab 9a, 8a (Tiglath-Pileser III; from Nimrud). The same motif again occurs with Tiglath-Pileser III: see Barnett, plates V–VI; W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (1975) 318 fig. 99, b. Both slabs join; B. Schmitz, *Waren sie nur schön? Frauen im Spiegel der Jahrtausende* (1989) 146 fig. 61; J. M. Russell, *The writing on the wall* (1999) 91 fig. 30 ('unnamed city'); SAA XI (1995) 96; G. Leick, *The Babylonian world* (2007) 534.

131 SAA XVII (1995) p. 146.

132 Scène 1: Oded, *Mass deportations* (1979) plate III; J. E. Reade, *Assyrian sculpture* (1983) 50 fig. 80, with an old drawing p. 47 fig. 66, right side (a small part is visible); J. M. Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace Without Rival at Nineveh* (1991) 164 fig. 84. Scène 2: I. Seibert, *La femme dans l'Orient ancien* (1974) plate 71; O. Keel, *Das Hohelied* (= Zürcher Bibelkommentare AT 18) (1986) 179 Abb. 105 (drawing). Old drawings in J. E. Reade, *Assyrian sculpture* (1983) 48 fig. 68, and Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 206 fig. 111. A drawing of both scenes following each other is in T. C. Mitchell, *The Bible in the British Museum* (1988) 60–63.

133 Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 126 fig. 67; SAA XVII (2003) p. 124. For them being transported on an animal see SAA V (1990) p. 16; XI (1995) p. 109; S. Parpola, R. M. Whiting, *Assyria 1995* (1997) 297.

134 SAA VII (1991) p. 33; XI (1995) 143.

135 Albenda in Durand, *La Femme*, 18f., refers to 'an animal skin' which would have been a waterskin; see J. E. Reade, *Assyrian sculpture* (1983) 42; P. Bienkowski, A. R. Millard, *Dictionary of the Ancient Near East* (2000) 92 (Sennacherib).

136 R. D. Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh (668–627 B. C.)* (1976) plate LXIX; SAA V (1990) p. 10, p. 174 fig. 34; P. Bordreuil, *Les débuts de l'histoire* (2008) 211 (photos) = SAA XI (1995) p. 119 (drawing); SAA XI p. 110.



Fig. 19: A Chaldaean woman, captured as a prisoner-of-war, gives her child a drink from a leather waterskin. Relief in the palace at Nineveh. 620 BC. *British Museum, London.*

to be lifting the front of their garments with their right hands.¹³⁷ It is said that they did that when crossing a river, as stated in one of Isaiah's prophecies about the 'daughter of Babylon', in which he also emphasizes her lewd reputation.

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 47:2–3).¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Twice on the bronze-faced doors of the palace; A. Schachner, *Subartu* 20 (2007) 296 Tafel 4, with 322 Tafel 30a (Bildstreifen IV nos. 70–73, from Dabigu), 301, with 337 Tafel 45b (Bildstreifen IX nos. 39–36, from Qarqar); cf. 100, Abb. 23 'Merkmal Gefang(ene)5'; descriptions on p. 43, 55. Also in R. D. Barnett, *The Balawat Gates of Ashurnasirpal II* (2008) fig. 6, 38 (R8), 18 (L6), 22 (L8), 24 (R1).

¹³⁸ S. M. Paul in: E. B. Firmage, *Religion and law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic perspectives* (1990) 340f.

The soldiers of Ashurbanipal appear in a gruesome scene forcing their way into the tents of Arabs and apparently cutting open the bellies of pregnant women.¹³⁹ This madness can perhaps be understood if one reads the description of their dreadful campaign in the desert.¹⁴⁰ In the Bible the slaughter of infants and the disembowelling of pregnant women occurs as a literary motif.¹⁴¹ We find it also in a song about the campaign of an Assyrian king, which is generally accepted as a parody:

He ripped open pregnant women, he made little children blind.¹⁴²

Administrative texts also refer to deportations.¹⁴³ Lists of people originating from different locations have been published in *State Archives of Assyria*, Vol. XI, together with many illustrations of deported people from Assyrian palace reliefs.¹⁴⁴ A list of people from Que (= Cilicia), punctiliously subdivided, includes women and children.

334 strong men; 38 children five half-cubits tall; 41 children four half-cubits tall; 40 children three half-cubits tall; 28 weaned children; 25 infants. In total: 172 boys.

349 women; 8 women five half-cubits tall; 22 women four half-cubits tall; 49 women three half-cubits tall; 17 weaned female children; 25 female sucklings. In total: 121 girls.

In all: 977 individuals from Que.¹⁴⁵

Despite the attention to detail, there is an error of 1 in the final total. Perhaps someone was accidentally omitted from one of the subtotals.

When considering what would have happened to these women we need to anticipate Chapter 18, about woman and work, where we shall read about the

139 P. Dubovsky, 'Ripping open pregnant Arab women: reliefs in Room L of Ashurbanipal's North Palace', *Or. NS* 78 (2009) 394–419. Photo: R. D. Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace* (1976) plate XXXIII. Other scholars suggested a scene of rape; *SAA II* (1988) p. 47.

140 M. Weippert, *WdO* 7 (1973) 39–85; R. Borger, *BIWA* (1996) 247 §73. Other suggestions by Dubovsky, 416.

141 2 Kings 8:12, 15:16; Amos 1:13, Hosea 14:1. See M. Cogan, *JAOS* 103 (1983) 755–757.

142 *LKA* 62 rev. 3 with D. O. Edzard, *Studies A. K. Grayson* (2004) 81–87.

143 A survey of women taken prisoner in the booty lists gives S. Svärd, *Women and power* (2015) 127–130.

144 Illustrations: *SAA XI* p. 90, 96, 99, 109, 110, 119, 143, 146. Furthermore, see vols. IV p. 17, 99, 117, 249; V p. 16, 36, 65, 118, 157, 170, 174; VII p. 33; XV p. 2, 10, 104; XVII p. 124; XVIII p. 38, 131, 142.

145 *SAA XI* 167. A relief shows how the prisoners from Que (Cilicia) had to work in quarries; *SAA IV* (1990) p. 17; M. T. Larsen, *Power and propaganda* (1979) after p. 336 fig. 9.

sort of forced labour imposed on them, such as weaving and milling flour. An Egyptian slave-girl with her three-months-old daughter was sold, possibly captured during Cambyses' campaign in Egypt, one year earlier (525 BC).¹⁴⁶ Unskilled labourers were deployed in building new cities and palaces. In Mari women were identified as accompanying the forced male labourers to prepare their food. One woman had to cook for five men.¹⁴⁷ Some would have a future career as singers and instrumentalists, as we shall see in Chapter 23 when looking at the royal palace of Mari. Reliefs in Assyrian palaces show men and women with musical instruments in their hands. Sennacherib was proud of the fact that he had taken captives from the land of Judah ruled by King Hezekiah and that he had brought to Nineveh 'his daughters, his harem women, his male and female musicians', all actually depicted on his relief.¹⁴⁸ Reliefs in the palace of Ashurbanipal depicting his campaign against the Elamites (653 BC) show that after the conquest of the city of Madaktu Elamite musicians, male and female, accompanied by women and children, greet the Assyrian victors (Figure 25).¹⁴⁹ (For the musical instruments see Chapter 18 where musicians are discussed). Music was exactly what was demanded by the captors of the Judaeans abducted to 'the rivers of Babylon':

On the willow trees there we hung up our lyres,
For there those who had carried us captive asked us to sing them a song,
Our captors called on us to be joyful (Psalm 137:2–3).

The Bible refers to the Assyrian and Babylonian strategy of deporting entire populations from their native land and resettling them in designated locations in their own territory. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel suffered this treatment. As early as in the letters from Mari we read of the king commissioning such an action.

Bring the deportees from A. to the city of B. and intermingle (*balātu*) them with the people of the city.¹⁵⁰

146 *Cambyses* 334 (524 BC), with M. Dandamacy, *Slavery in Babylonia* (1984) 107 f.

147 N. Ziegler in: J. Andreau, *La guerre dans les économies antiques* (2000) 24 (A. 562) (*mušākiltu*).

148 R. Borger, *Babylonisch-assyrische Lesestücke I* (1979) 75 iii 46, with TUAT I/4 (1984) 390. For the male musicians as prisoners on the relief see the catalogue *Babylon* (London 2008) 143 fig. 126.

149 S. Macgregor, *Beyond hearth and home*, 36–41; eadem, 'Foreign musicians in Neo-Assyrian royal courts', *Studies Anne D. Kilmer* (2011) 137–159, esp. 148–152.

150 J.-M. Durand, *LAPO* 17 (1998) 312 (A. 4513).

Two Assyrian letters show that such integration had to be achieved by mixed marriages. King Tiglath-Pileser III commanded a group of deported Aramaic men to go and be married to women, but it did not go as easily as envisaged. He was informed that

We have found women, but their fathers will not give them, before they are given silver. Have the men give them silver, so that they may marry.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ SAA XIX 18 with TUAT NF 3 (2006) 124 f. (Nimrud Letters no. 26).