

20 Prostitution

In the New Testament the city of Babylon is personified as the mother of whores.

Written on her head was a name with a secret meaning: ‘Babylon the great, the mother of whores and of every obscenity on earth’ (Revelation 17:5).¹

When discussing the Right of the First Night at the end of Chapter 11, we saw that Herodotus also contributed to this idea. But at this point let us see whether in reality it is one that can still be considered reasonable to maintain.²

In Sumerian the usual word for prostitute has two elements, *kar.kid*, a combination of ‘harbour’ and ‘to work’.³ In Akkadian the word that is used is *ḫarīmtu*, which literally means ‘a woman who is separated’. It is derived from a root etymologically related to that of Hebrew *ḫerem* ‘excommunication’ and Arabic *ḫarīm* ‘harem’. The idea of her being separated should be understood as referring to her social isolation, although prostitutes were an accepted fact of life.

20.1 Where she worked

The significance of the Sumerian term suggests that a woman involved in *kar.kid* would go to the harbour to work. A prostitute was often described as the one ‘standing on the street’, but in lists we find other descriptions for ladies of that profession, including those ‘standing on the quayside’, ‘walking over the quay’, ‘walking through the city’, ‘walking across the bank’, ‘walking through the (irrigated) fields’, and ‘with a pointed sandal’.⁴ All of these indicate behaviour demonstrated outdoors. According to the Nuzi texts a woman who stood on the street was there because she had no family ties.⁵ In Sumer and Babylonia the woman on the street would easily be taken for a prostitute. This is demonstrated in a myth where the god Enlil treated young Sud as such when he saw her stand-

1 In Revelation 17:5 the Greek accent determines whether *pornōn* denotes a female or a male prostitute. The Vulgate avoids the problem by translating it with the Latin word meaning ‘fornications’; see R. Borger, *Theologische Rundschau* 52 (1987) 48–50.

2 J. S. Cooper, ‘Prostitution’, *RIA* XI/1–2 (2006) 12–21.

3 M. Civil, *RA* 70 (1976) 198–190; M. A. Powell, *Studies I. M. Diakonoff* (1982) 317; W. G. Lambert, ‘Prostitution’, in: V. Haas, *Außenseiter und Randgruppen* (1992) 138, 157.

4 J. Taylor, *Or. NS* 70 (2001) 217 f., 29–36 (cf. *Proto-Lu* 713–724; *MSL* 12 [1969] 59). See Cooper, ‘Prostitution’, 15a.

5 S. Greengus, *HUCA* 46 (1975) 20 f.

ing there.⁶ Being on the street would have been a factor when judging allegations of rape, for we saw in Chapter 11 that the relevant laws attached importance to establishing the place where such an incident took place. In the Bible Tamar is described as standing by the wayside to wait for customers (Genesis 38:14) and in the Book of Proverbs the same location is mentioned as typical (Proverbs 7:6–23). We also note that the fact that prostitutes received their takings in the city squares was seen as sufficiently ignominious to use as a curse against a vassal king who dared to break a treaty.

May Mati-ilu become a whore, his soldiers women. Let them receive [their wages] in their city square like a whore.⁷

Particular features of the physiognomy of the liver of a sacrificial sheep would persuade the diviners to interpret them as predicting that even a princess might have to live as a prostitute:

If the small bones of the *singangurītu*, the right side, are perforated, then the daughter of the king shall go whoring.⁸

As yet we are not able to identify what part of the sheep was being examined, but it was explained by the Babylonians themselves as the *ḥamurītu*, a word which sounds like *ḥarīmūtu* ‘whoring’. The Babylonians took associations based on assonance very seriously indeed. The perforations may have suggested to the diviners that a way had been opened for the princess to go outside.

According to a manual on human behaviour there were various consequences for a man who chanced to meet a prostitute on the street.⁹

If a man comes across whores, his wish shall be fulfilled.

If an unclean whore encounters him, his wish shall not be fulfilled.

If he touches her breast, he is free.

Some of these expressions need some further comment. That ‘his wish shall be fulfilled’ is a standard phrase widely used in predictions. ‘An unclean whore’ refers to a woman who is menstruating, a situation that does not bode well for the

⁶ M. Civil, JAOS 103 (1983) 46b.

⁷ For the curse in the treaty see SAA II 12 no. 2 v 9 f.

⁸ YOS 10 47:69. In line 65 it is a married woman who is ‘going out for harlotry’; for the context see J.-J. Glassner, CRRAI 47/1 (2002) 163a.

⁹ F. Köcher, A. L. Oppenheim, AfO 18 (1957–58) 76 Text B:25–6. Cf. J. Bottéro, *Annuaire* 1973–74, 99.

man. But ‘if he touches her breast’, apparently a primitive ritual, it means that he will ward off any evil that may come his way. The first line implies that a chance meeting with an easy woman was to be considered to be a favourable omen. A similarly favourable omen is found in a handbook of divinations about sicknesses, which predicts that a man who has been ill for a long time will eventually recover if he ‘sees’ his daughter or a prostitute.¹⁰ Possibly he saw the woman in his dreams. Of course, this was all matter for ancient scholarly speculation rather than wisdom shared by the masses.

Passages in literary texts stereotype the prostitute as a woman loitering at the city wall, not an area regarded as respectable.¹¹ It fits in well with the Biblical story of Rahab the whore who, having taken in the spies at the walls of Jericho allowed them to escape.

She then let them down through a window by a rope, for the house where she lived was on an angle of the wall (Joshua 2:15).

We have seen that an inn where beer was flowing was not a respectable place for ‘nuns’ to enter. There must have been a thin line separating it from a brothel. The Sumerian word for a brothel literally means ‘the abode of the lady’ (*éš.dam, bīt aštammī*) but is often translated as ‘tavern’.¹² A Sumerian epic includes the line ‘the harlot who goes to the brothel, who makes the bedroom a delight.’¹³ The Sumerian proverb ‘A princess cannot avoid a whorehouse’ must be a joke (SP 6.5). We find the whore and the drinking-house often mentioned in the same breath. In a Sumerian-Eblaite dictionary the Sumerian word for whore is translated in two different ways, first as ‘a brewer of beer’ (*sābītu*) and then as ‘a gorgeous woman’.¹⁴ The goddess Ištar knew that that was the place to go to get a man’s attention.

If I sit in the door of the drinking-house, I am the whore who knows the man.¹⁵

¹⁰ N. Heeßel, *Babylonisch-assyrische Diagnostik* (2000) 311 Tafel 28:36 f.

¹¹ Gilg. VII 117, etc.; CAD M/1 237a; MSL 12 (1969) 83 Fragment IV:5 (*ša manzāzi*).

¹² In syllabic Sumerian ka-ki-da-aš-ta-am (= kar.kid é éš.dam), ZA 83 (1994) 180:47. In general see V. Haas, ‘Schenken und Dirnenhäuser’, *Babylonischer Liebesgarten* (1999) 93–110.

¹³ H. Vanstiphout, *Epics of Sumerian kings* (2004) 114, ‘Lugalbanda in the Wilderness’, 174.

¹⁴ Å. W. Sjöberg, *Festschrift J. Renger* (1999) 545. It is also possible to read the signs as *za-ne-tum*, cognate with Hebrew *zōnēh*, ‘whoring’, but this is not likely.

¹⁵ K. Volk, FAOS 18 (1989) 196 Tafel 21:25 f., with comm., p. 219 f.; Old Babylonian, *ibidem*; also M. E. Cohen, JAOS 96 (1986) 606; CLAM II (1988) 581 c+443 f. with 597.



Fig. 32: Eroticism in the tavern. Many terracotta objects have been found with this scene of a man approaching a woman from behind, while she drinks her beer from a pot by sucking it through a straw. Ca. 1700 BC. Terracotta. Height 8,9 cm. *British Museum, London.*

It was also the place where transsexuals and the like could be found.¹⁶ Some scenes on terracotta objects show a woman sipping beer from a jug through a reed straw while a man copulates with her from behind, something that could easily have happened in a drinking-house (Figure 32).¹⁷ This may be why Hammurabi prohibited highly placed religious persons from entering a ‘beer-house’ (§ 110). According to a model contract a prostitute could get her drinking-house back if a man married her.¹⁸ What may have been such a drinking-house was excavated outside the city of Susa. It measured 28 × 16 metres and had a central courtyard surrounded by many rooms, all of which contained a clay beer vat placed centrally or in a corner of the room. The plastered walls of the rooms may all have been decorated with depictions in clay of naked women, of which no less than two hundred were found.¹⁹

Music and dancing took place here, as seen on Old Babylonian terracottas. One shows a woman with a lyre and a man with a tambourine which may be an

¹⁶ M. Malul, *Aula Orientalis* 10 (1992) 54 n. 38.

¹⁷ J. Assante, *CRAAI* 47/II (2002) 29–36. A photo in *Phoenix* 56,1 (2010) 45.

¹⁸ *MSL* 1 (1937) 97 Tafel VII ii 25.

¹⁹ L. Trümpelmann, ‘Eine Kneipe in Susa’, *Iranica Antiqua* 16 (1981) 43; V. Haas, *Babylonischer Liebesgarten* (1999) 97–99. The obscene terracotta objects: U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin* (1983) 346–354; there are many illustrations in the back of the book; M. Silver, *UF* 38 (2006) 649–652; F. A. M. Wiggermann, *RIA* IX/1–2 (1998) 49 f.

innocent scene,²⁰ but another is a real display of a woman with a tambourine and a man with a lute leaping up and down. She firmly grasps his penis as they look at each other over their shoulders mischievously.²¹ There are some bawdy songs on a clay tablet which were called ‘ballads’ by the editor, or ‘a new genre’, while others refer to them as ‘lovesongs’. In such lyrics the goddess Ištar is sometimes praised.²² This Sumerian saying (or joke) with its allusion to a musical instrument called the *tigidla* seems to fit the atmosphere:

The jester’s bitch: bread rations (are) for her mouth,
but the shaft of the *tigidla* (is) for his anus.²³

A late story written in Sumerian concerns a man who ‘had no god’, perhaps ‘an unlucky chap’, who married a manumitted slave-girl of ill repute. He, together with his daughter, a temple prostitute, joined the girl in making music and chanting. This lasted only for six months and fifteen days, by which time he had lost everything, wandering the streets, having been ‘plucked’. That is what one could expect of slave-girls.²⁴

In three different Neo-Babylonian economic texts we read of an investor offering to provide a woman with the contents for a drinking-house, including the beds, in return for an annual interest payment of 20 %. One text lists ‘four beds, two chairs, a table, and a vat of beer’. The woman involved, the dependant of a rich family, is named in two of the texts as Išhunnatu, a really luscious name meaning ‘bunch of grapes’, one which seems to suit her wonderfully.²⁵

A prostitute could ply her trade most easily at night, a time when it was known that respectable women such as housewives would not allow themselves to frequent the streets

20 Catalogue *Das Vorderasiatische Museum* (1992) 103 no. 47; R. Opificius, *Das altbabylonische Terrakottarelieft* (1961) no. 581. Drawings: RA 48 (1954) 174 fig. 76, and J. Bottéro in: P. Grimal, *Histoire mondiale de la femme I* (1965) 209; H. Klengel, *Kulturgeschichte des alten Vorderasien* (1989) 207 fig. 82.

21 M. Barrelet, *Figurines et reliefs en terre cuite*, no. 591; M. Schuol, *Hethitische Kultmusik*, Tafel 32 no. 77.

22 J. A. Black, *JAOS* 103 (1983) 25–34. Cf. *TUAT NF* 7 (2013) 63–65.

23 SP 5.124 with P. Michalowski in: R. Prusinzski, D. Shehata, *Musik und Tradierung. Studien zur Rolle von Musikern bei der Verschriftung und Tradierung von literarischen Werken* (2010) 223 f.

24 M. T. Roth, ‘The slave and the scoundrel’, *JAOS* 103 (1983) 275–282; B. Alster, *ZA* 82 (1992) 195–201. Cf. D. Shehata, *WZKM* 97 (2007) 521–529. Unreliable slave-girls: W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (1960) 102 f.

25 F. Joannès, *NABU* 1992/64, 89. The name: J. Hackl, *WZKM* 103 (2013) 161.

At night there are no housewives (*emiqtu*), at night no married woman impedes you.²⁶

J.-J. Glassner portrays the qualities that mark a good housewife in her home but not a whore on the street rather sagaciously.

The wife is known not for her beauty or femininity but rather for her faithfulness and fertility.²⁷

In a Sumerian incantation we find a complicated and curious procedure to obtain the favours of a girl by magic, although after reading it we are left to wonder if simpler ways could not have been found.²⁸ The love-struck man would take fat from cows, put it into a bowl, and then throw it on the ribcage of the woman. He did this so that ‘the girl does not block the opened door for me, not thrust away her wailing child, but chase after me.’ The girl is identified as ‘the daughter of Inanna’, the goddess of love, who seems to have been her guardian deity, and she is described in most glowing terms.

The beautiful girl, who stands in the street, the girl, the whore, the daughter of Inanna, the girl, the daughter of Inanna, who stands in the drinking-house, she is a cow brimming with fat, brimming with cream, the cow, the abundant vulva of Inanna, the mighty barn of Enki. When she is sitting the girl is a luxuriant garden of apple trees. When she is lying she casts a shadow by ... joy. She casts a shadow by the branch of a cedar.

The text goes on to mention that the man is left with a problem that will not simply be solved by the gods of magic, as noted by M. J. Geller. His problem is that ‘she strikes the breast of the young man as if with a reed’, which refers to his pangs of love, a well attested ‘illness’ in the ancient world. It can be cured only if she ‘does not block the opened door’ for him, the ultimate purpose of the procedure.²⁹ A landlord in Assur used an Akkadian incantation to bring prosperity to his drinking-house. In the second part of that text the goddess Ištar (= Inanna) is invited to participate in voluptuous practices.³⁰

²⁶ W. G. Lambert in: H. Goedicke, *Unity and diversity* (1975) 108 Section 1:6–8.

²⁷ J.-J. Glassner, *CRRAI 47/I* (2002) 162a.

²⁸ A. Falkenstein, *ZA 56* (1964) 113–129; W. H. Ph. Römer, *TUAT II/2* (1987) 208–210; M. J. Geller, *CRRAI 47/II* (2002) 135–139.

²⁹ Geller, 129–139.

³⁰ KAR 144 with W. Farber, *TUAT II/2* (1987) 280. New edition by S. V. Panayotov, ‘A ritual for a flourishing bordello’, *BiOr 70* (2013) 286–309.

20.2 Dressed for work

The Middle Assyrian laws (§ 40), as we saw in Chapter 1, prohibited whores from being veiled. They may have worn a kind of scarf as worn by the goddess Ištar (*aguḥḥu*).³¹ Lexical lists state that a prostitute was recognisable by her ‘pointed sandal’.³² She also wore the necklace of Ištar, which may have been like some necklaces found during Dutch excavations in Syria. On those reconstructed necklaces are threaded shells, representing female genitals, and models of penises.

Now the necklace chains themselves used suggestive shells, with little models of penises swinging at the sides. This conveyed unmistakably a signal about any woman tarted-up in this way, not to say ‘I am a married woman’, but rather ‘I am available for anyone’. Men did not wear necklaces, certainly not ones like these.³³

The jewellery of the prostitute in the Middle Assyrian laws (§ 40) could well have included something similar.

The woman known as a *kezertu* was almost certainly a prostitute. She was noted for her distinctive hairstyle and functioned as a hierodule, a servant in the temple of Ištar (temple prostitution is a subject reserved for Chapter 21). When ‘the virgin daughter of Babylon’ is addressed in Isaiah 47 she is invited to ‘remove your veil, strip off your skirt, bare your thighs’.

In the Gilgamesh Epic we are given an erotic glimpse into a prostitute stripping herself for action. Her name was Šamḥat, meaning a provocative or gorgeous woman, and in fact a nickname for a prostitute. The passage describing Enkidu’s encounter with her is the only one we have from cuneiform literature describing such a woman at work. In his English translation of the epic published in 1946, A. Heidel, a Lutheran cleric from Chicago, resorted to Latin for a particularly racy passage, but nowadays less modesty is demanded.

Šamḥat let loose her skirts.
 She bared her sex, and he took in her charms.
 She showed no fear, she took in his scent.
 She spread her clothing, and he lay upon her.
 She treated the man to the work of a woman.

³¹ M. Malul, *Aula Orientalis* 10 (1992) 56 n. 52; W. G. Lambert in: M. Mindlin, *Figurative language* (1987) 29.

³² MSL 12 (1969) 59 Proto-Lu 715; 83 Fragment IV:6, ‘whose shoes ...’ (Bogh.).

³³ F. A. M. Wiggermann, *Phoenix* 56 (2010) 51 f.; with photos. For a woman wearing a necklace with her hands beneath her breasts see p. 54.

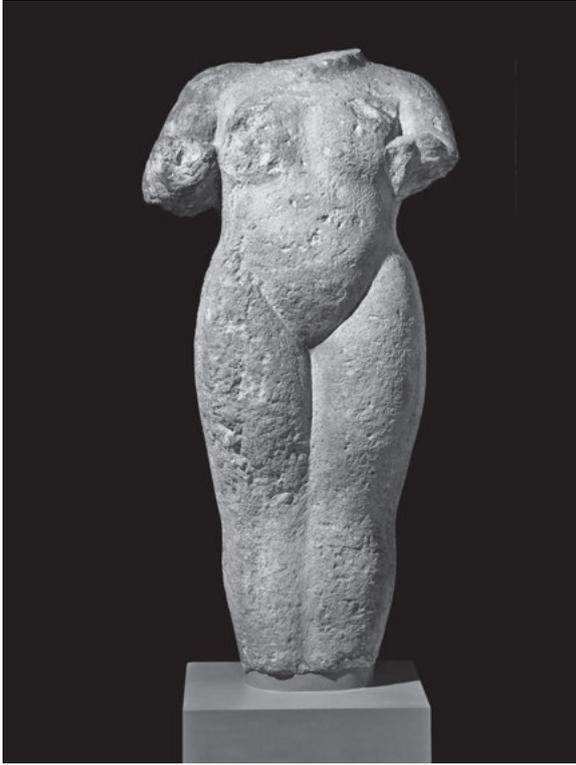


Fig. 33: Statue of a nude woman, inscribed on the back by King Aššur-bel-kala (1073–1056 BC): 'I have made these statues in the provinces, cities, and guesthouses for laughter'. Limestone. Height 94 cm. *British Museum, London.*

His 'love' caressed and embraced her.

For six days and seven nights Enkidu, erect, did couple with Šamḫat.
(Gilgamesh I 188–194)

The statue of a naked woman found in the temple of Ištar in Nineveh, made of basalt and 94cm in height, is a torso something like the Venus de Milo (Figure 33). On it is a curious inscription stating that it had been commissioned by King Aššur-bel-kala (1073–1056 BC) to be sited in the provinces, cities and guest houses (*ubruṭe*) 'for the sake of laughter'.³⁴ The word 'laughter' implies sexual pleasure in Akkadian. The same is true for Biblical Hebrew, where the verb 'to laugh' is closely connected etymologically with the name Isaac. Now while Isaac

³⁴ RIMA 2 (1991) 108 no.10 with R. Da Riva, E. Frahm, AfO 46–47 (1999–2000) 177b; Wiggermann, Phoenix 56, 47 f. (photo and translation). For illustrations see, e.g., W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (1975) Abb. 170; with p. 295. For a similar statue from the Ištar temple in Nineveh see Iraq 55 (1993) 47 fig. 10.

was living in Gerar it is clear that he was doing more than laughing with his wife Rebecca when King Abimelech managed to peep at the pair of them.

But when they had been there some considerable time, Abimelech the Philistine king looked down from his window, and there was Isaac caressing his wife Rebecca (Genesis 26:8).

In the Authorized Version he was said to be ‘sporting’ with her and more recent translations using different words usually take a similar view. One modern version that prefers to translate literally is the New English Bible, but more often than not a more explicit verb is chosen, e.g. ‘fondling’ (New Revised Standard Version, Jewish Publication Society) or ‘caressing’ (The Revised English Bible). Knowing this wider semantic range of the verb ‘to laugh’ leads naturally to the conclusion that King Aššur-bel-kala wanted his statue to stimulate not just ‘laughing’, but also sporting, and fondling, and caressing, and all that goes with it. She could be taken for an ancient pin-up girl in stone, and similar suggestive statues may have been positioned in other temples of Ištar throughout the kingdom.³⁵

Because prostitutes are named in lists of food rations from the same Middle Assyrian period, F. A. M. Wiggermann has proposed that prostitution flourished then as a state institution.³⁶ After all, it was the same in a much earlier period, for now and again prostitutes are named in Sumerian lists of food rations, showing that they were palace employees in ancient Šuruppak. Also at that time prostitutes were associated with drinking-houses.³⁷

A few texts speak about the fees a prostitute could expect for her services. The lascivious goddess Nanaya is mentioned in a Sumerian song positioning herself against a wall, apparently preparing for *coitus a tergo*.

If I stand against the wall, it is a shekel.
 If I bend over, it is one and a half shekels of silver.
 Don't dig a canal! I am your canal.
 Don't plough a field! I am your field.
 Don't look for moist ground! I am your moist ground.

Those who know about these things consider the higher fee for her second position very expensive, even though she was a goddess.³⁸ The phrase ‘to dig a canal’

³⁵ F. A. M. Wiggermann, ‘Nackte Göttin. A’, RIA IX/1–2 (1998) 48 § 4.

³⁶ Phoenix 56 (2010) 47, 54. More evidence gave J. Llop in: L. Marti, *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (2014) 450 (prostitutes ‘of working age’ mentioned with their child or fathers or brothers), cf. 446 (MVA 10:8–10).

³⁷ J.-J. Glassner, CRRAI 47/I (2002) 154–157.

³⁸ Å. W. Sjöberg, JCS 29 (1977) 17 a:17–20, with p. 24, and B. Alster, *Studies W. W. Hallo* (1993) 15, with a correction by P. Attinger, NABU 1998/40.

is here used metaphorically for to copulate. Some scholars allow their imagination to run along these lines when reading hymns of praise for kings who boast about the canals they dug.³⁹ For a prostitute at Nuzi, who did her work in her parents' house and figured in a lawsuit, a piece of pork meat (*kurkuzannu*) was said to be a reasonable recompense.⁴⁰ But, in another superficially similar circumstance, but one which is not necessarily fundamentally related, the goddess Ištar is insulted when Enkidu throws her a piece of meat from the Bull of Heaven (Gilgamesh VI 161). In the Bible Judah pays Tamar with a kid (Genesis 38:17), and a proverb speaks of paying with a round loaf (Proverbs 6:26).⁴¹ Enkidu wished that the whore should be rewarded with riches.⁴²

A proverb about an effeminate man addressing a woman presents us something of a puzzle.

When an effeminate man came into the drinking-house, after he had raised his hands, he said, 'The payment for the matchmaker (?), let it be like this: You [feminine] the half, I the half'.⁴³

Raising one's hands can indicate an attitude of prayerfulness but here it has been suggested that it is a gesture of submission. The effeminate man could be a homosexual, a male prostitute or a eunuch. The woman to whom he speaks and who receives half the fee may be a prostitute or the goddess Ištar, and a fifty-fifty split may allude to bisexuality.

Some prostitutes would have had quite a reasonable position in society. In the Sumerian period we know that they were officially entitled to food rations from a state institution and that they received just as much barley as other recipients.⁴⁴ One was even given a field from which to support herself. In lists of professions we find after the lamentation priest the holy woman, the midwife and the prostitute in sequence.⁴⁵ In the Middle Assyrian period their names and pro-

39 S. Tinney, 'Ur-Namma, the canal-digger', JCS 51 (1999) 31–54.

40 JEN 397 with A. Fadhil, *Studien zur Topographie Arrapḫe* (1983) 250b; cf. 236 and D. O. Edzard, ZA 75 (1985) 141 f.

41 P.-R. Berger, ZAW 99 (1987) 101.

42 Gilgamesh VII 157 f.

43 W. G. Lambert, BWL (1960) 218 iv 3–5; 339 f.; W. Röllig, *Das Bier im Alten Mesopotamien* (1970) 56; M. I. Gruber, UF 18 (1986) 146; C. Saporetto, *Abolire le nascite* (1993) 95 f. – W. Burkert, *Kleine Schriften*. II. *Orientalia* (2003) 125, is garbled and wrong.

44 F. Pomponio, 'gēme-kar-kìd: The Sumerian word for 'prostitute'', *Oikumene* 5 (1986) 63–66; C. Wilcke, *Early Ancient Near Eastern law* (2003) 53 n. 143.

45 F. Pomponio, G. Visicato, *Early Dynastic administrative tablets of Šuruppak* (1994) 62 no. 6 vii (WF 74), with p. 29, 244. The last person (sa.ḫur, *saḫurum*) appears in a lexical text after the prostitute and the landlady; MEE 4 (1982) 430 VE 1430.

fessions are recorded in the lists of institutions which distributed food rations to their workers. Some of the prostitutes were denoted as ‘palace workers’.⁴⁶ In the Neo-Assyrian period to be a prostitute was a recognised profession.⁴⁷

From as early as the Old Sumerian period we have a text saying that a prostitute also performed as a singer.⁴⁸ A Middle Assyrian list for a brothel names twelve ‘singers (*zammārtu*) from the house of prostitutes’ who sang to the king and received 29 litres of barley apiece as a gift, and that was a generous wage.⁴⁹ A woman in the Neo-Babylonian period, who had a child while she held the position of a singer (*nārūtu*), has been regarded as a prostitute,⁵⁰ but the word could also mean that she was just a girl.

20.3 Slave-girls

It is assumed that slave-girls could be set to work as prostitutes, for we know that in the Old Sumerian period lists of payees include those known as ‘slave-prostitutes’.⁵¹ We have a text about a man who adopts the son of such a ‘slave-prostitute’ from what will have been a local palace.⁵² It should be remembered that at this time the word ‘slave-girl’ can indicate any dependent woman, not necessarily a slave. A wisdom text from that same period warns against buying a prostitute, for ‘she has a mouth with sharpened teeth’.⁵³ The alleged examples cited from the Neo-Babylonian period are obscure.⁵⁴ In Ugarit a slave-girl E. was freed from prostitution (*kid.kar*) by an official from the house of the queen. To free her he poured

⁴⁶ S. Jakob, *Mittelassyrische Verwaltung* (2003) 559–561, followed by a discussion about her as described in the Middle Assyrian laws.

⁴⁷ SAA XII 83 rev. 12. Deported in SAA V 24:11.

⁴⁸ J. S. Cooper, *RIA XI/1–2* (2006) 16; Pomponio, *Oikumene* 5 (1986) 66.

⁴⁹ MARV IV 59:15–20 with J. Lopp, *BiOr* 60 (2003) 405; in Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta. Wiggermann, *Phoenix* 56 (2010) 43 ff., discusses ‘travelling *carabetières*’, with illustrations.

⁵⁰ BM 64026 with G. van Driel in: M. Stol, S. P. Vleeming, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 192 (n. 59).

⁵¹ Pomponio, *Oikumene* 5 (1986) 63 f.

⁵² MVN 11 16 with W. H. Ph. Römer, *BiOr* 41 (1984) 412.

⁵³ B. Alster, *Wisdom of ancient Sumer* (2005) 83 Instr. Šur. 154. In the oldest version she is a ‘slave-prostitute’; RA 70 (1976) 189.

⁵⁴ M. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia* (1984) 132–136. The central passages in Nabn. 679, 682, Nebk. 409 (= BRL III [= IV!]:28!) are problematical; the other texts are too general. The explanations of A. Kurth in B. S. Lesko, *Women’s earliest records* (1989) 232 f., 235, should be corrected. Dandamaev’s story about temple prostitution (p. 132–136) does not fit; see AfO 46–47 (1999–2000) 180 n. 173.

oil on her head in the presence of witnesses, and then ceremonially declared that she was ‘as pure as the pure sun’. Anointing always signified a change of status. The same text tells us that she was married off to a man for twenty shekels of silver.⁵⁵

Far removed from Babylonia and Assyria was a man in Carchemish who drew up his will in front of the king, naming his daughter D., a whore (*ḥarīmtu*), as ‘the father and mother of his house’. She duly received clothing, jewellery, and two slave girls. He adopted his two other daughters as ‘sons’, which might mean that they could be treated as sons when it came to dividing the inheritance. Both would be responsible for caring for his daughter D., ‘their father and mother’.⁵⁶ This woman must have had a high status in view of the riches bequeathed to her, so it is surprising to see her referred to as a whore. Perhaps here the word should be translated differently. It may be that far away from Babylonia the word *ḥarīmtu* retained its literal meaning, ‘a woman set apart’. In Biblical Hebrew a ‘devoted woman’ (*qedesā*) is also called a ‘whore’ (*zōnā*) in the story of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38). This is a subject to which we shall return in Chapter 27 when discussing the Babylonian ‘holy’ woman, *qadištu*.

20.4 The risk of pregnancy

Becoming pregnant was the most probable risk factor in this line of business, but it may not always have been a misfortune. The Middle Assyrian laws about *abortus provocatus* include a severe punishment (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth) for a man who beats a whore so that she has a miscarriage: ‘He will be beaten, stroke for stroke, and he will compensate her for the child she has lost’ (§ 52). It seems that a child was one of the few possessions this woman could expect to have, someone to look after her in her old age, and it is not unusual to find a son or a daughter of a whore mentioned in a document.⁵⁷

A related text comes from the Old Babylonian period about a woman who ‘went out on the town’, an expression describing morally loose behaviour. The child she had conceived should have been conscripted by the state and forced to

⁵⁵ PRU III 110f. with S. Lackenbacher, LAPO 20 (2002) 332f., TUAT NF I (2004) 113, W. H. van Soldt in: S. Lafont, *Trois millénaires de formulaires juridiques* (2010) 117. – J. J. Finkelstein, ANET (1969) 546 no. 16, is no more up to date.

⁵⁶ *Emar VI/3* no. 33 with Th. Kämmerer, UF 26 (1994) 187–190.

⁵⁷ Sumerian: M. Civil, RA 70 (1976) 190; Old and Middle Babylonian: VAS 9 192:21 (VAB 5 36); TIM 4 33:16, ‘the daughter of the prostitute’, with no proper name mentioned; I. M. Diakonoff, ZA 75 (1985) 54, on social decline; J. A. Brinkman, *Studies E. V. Leichty* (2006) 32.

do the labour imposed on the family of his father. But in this case, the woman's family claimed that his paternity could not be proved now that she had died.

We did not give Š., our sister, to a husband. She went out on the town and NN had intercourse with her as well as many others. But he did not make any contract concerning her, he did not enter into any binding agreement with her, and we received no bride price for her.⁵⁸

The judge pronounced a verdict in their favour.

One married couple adopted 'a male infant' from a single woman, who may perhaps also have gone 'out on the town'.⁵⁹ A text from the Assyrian period relates how the brothers of a fallen woman raised such a child and presented the child to the temple.

As for D., the child of N., their sister, that she brought into the world by her whoring, they reared and presented to Ninurta, their lord, as a gift.

They added that the child would be 'available for service and obligatory duties in the temple of Ninurta'.⁶⁰ It is likely that many of the children of single mothers thus dedicated could have come from such a background. The formula for a dedication like this was given in Chapter 17, concerning women robbed of their freedom. One child, born to a prostitute, was transferred by his grandfather for adoption for ten shekels of silver. Another text shows that this woman was subordinated to her father and brothers.⁶¹

From the Neo-Babylonian period we have two deeds of settlement for rearing such a baby. In the first a grandparent is again involved. It concerned a three-month-old child entrusted to the care of the two highest authorities of the temple of Ebabbar at Sippar, and they in turn passed him over to his grandmother.⁶²

With regard to Š₂, the 'son of three [months]', whom Š₁, the daughter of N. brought into the world as a whore, Š₃, the administrator of the temple Ebabbar, and M., the highest priest [of Sippar], have bro[ught] [him] to Š₄, the mother of his mother. He shall grow up before her face.

58 K. R. Veenhof, *Festschrift C. Wilcke* (2003) 315f., lines 28–34.

59 UET 5 93. I. M. Diakonoff sees her as a prostitute; *JESHO* 38 (1995) 92.

60 Child of a prostitute: Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* I, 24 no. 2; 28; II, T 173 no. 68; *SAA* XII 92.

61 TIM 11 15:4. Cf. K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 140 (n. 707), 148 n. 746. A father refers to his daughter as a prostitute; *StAT* 3 (2007) 168 no. 111:8.

62 CT 55 154 with F. Joannès, *Ktema* 22 (1999) 125 f.

This intervention by the authorities is food for thought. The woman could not have been a slave since the name of her father is given, so we think that she was employed in the temple.

The second baby had already been given a name, Dannu-aḥḥe-ibni. He was also the son of a whore, but he was entrusted to the care of his uncle. This deed of adoption came from Uruk,⁶³ and it included this request from the brother of the child's mother.

Give me your seventeen-day-old son and I will rear him! Let him be my son!

That means he adopted the boy and then, since he had a son already, he 'registered' him as his second son. Both boys would serve Ištar 'the Lady of Uruk' and the king. While we do not know what that would have entailed, it is reminiscent of the first text, in which the authority over the child devolved to the temple of Sippar. Some further provisions were made for his future, dependent on whether or not his mother Baltâ remained a prostitute.

Dannu-aḥḥe-ibni shall grow up before his face, as long as Baltâ practises prostitution. On the day that Baltâ enters the house of a free citizen (= 'marries someone'), he shall give one third of a shekel of silver in exchange for the feeding and rearing of Dannu-aḥḥe-ibni; bread, beer, salt, watercress, oil, clothing for Baltâ.

The phrase 'grow up before the face' also occurred in the Sippar text, where a grandmother was to look after the child. Here the adoptive parent was the child's maternal uncle and he was expected to look after him. The other explanation could be that the child would grow up with his mother and that the adoptive parent would reimburse her for her expenses if she married. Only then would he have his son at home with him. M. T. Roth thinks that the brother was a pimp, and the free citizen was another pimp. Recently someone argued that the person to pay the compensation was the free citizen. He did not necessarily marry the woman but simply acquires the mother and her son. Then the stipulation about serving the goddess and the king would not make sense. What is clear from this is that it was possible for a prostitute to marry.

⁶³ AnOr 8 14 with M. San Nicolò, *ArOr* 7 (1935) 16–22, and *Babylonische Rechtsurkunden des 6. Jahrhunderts* (1960) no. 4; Dandamaev, *Slavery* (1984) 132; Joannès, *Ktéma* 22 (1999) 125. An alternative explanation is given by M. Roth, *RA* 82 (1988) 132–134; see also A. Kuhrt in: *Women's earliest records* (1989) 235 f. (n. 93). Lastly C. Wunsch, *AfO* 50 (2003–04) 195 f.

20.5 Forced into prostitution

When looking for the factors that drove women into prostitution we come to realise that some girls were forced into it. In a contract from Old Babylonian Nippur a lady adopted the girl Apirtum from her father and mother and paid one and a third shekels of silver ‘to bring her up’. The girl would work as a prostitute and provide bread for her new mother. That woman was clearly planning care for her old age. If the girl were ever to say, ‘You are not my mother’, the woman could sell her, and if the woman were to say, ‘You are not my daughter’, then she would have to pay ten shekels of silver, thus losing what she would have been paid for bringing her up. It could also mean that she was annulling her adoption and that she would have no right to any repayment for what she had spent.⁶⁴

A comparable transaction comes from the Middle Babylonian period when gold was used as currency.⁶⁵ A lady, I., paid seven shekels of gold to adopt Eṭirtum, and then ‘she shall either give her to a husband, or make her a prostitute’. She could not make her a slave, but if she did, the girl could return to her family. Clauses follow concerning the girl’s obligation to care for the woman in her old age and for making funeral offerings after she had died.

As long as I. lives, Eṭirtum must honour (= ‘care for’) her. When I. dies, Eṭirtum, her daughter, must pour out water for her.

The following clauses list the sanctions if this agreement is broken.

In Nuzi there was a similar kind of adoption. A brother gave his sister to a woman, who was allowed to marry her off to a slave or to some other unidentifiable person. Alternatively she could force her to become a prostitute. It is also stated that ‘even if ten of her husbands die, she will marry the eleventh’.⁶⁶ We know of other girls who married after first being prostitutes. This unusual edict from Nuzi is particularly remarkable.

This is the old edict concerning the personnel, the palace slaves and the palace dependants. Thus: – No one, whether a servant or dependant of the palace, may without permission from the king force his daughter to serve as a beggar (?) or a prostitute. Whoever forces his daughter (to do this), they shall take him into the palace.

⁶⁴ BE 6/2 4; see E. C. Stone, D. I. Owen, *Adoption in Old Babylonian Nippur* (1991) 54 no. 20.

⁶⁵ BE 14 40 with W. G. Lambert in V. Haas, *Außenseiter*, 134 f.

⁶⁶ AASOR 16 23 with TUAT NF 1 (2004) 60 f. and G. Wilhelm, *Studies W. L. Moran* (1990) 519. Wilhelm discussed here everything known to him about prostitution at Nuzi.

It is generally agreed that no moral judgement lay behind this provision, but rather the crime is thought to be withdrawing one's labour from the palace.⁶⁷ Girls who were dedicated to the goddess Ištar (the subject of temple prostitution will come later) could also end up as prostitutes.

20.6 Marriage

That it was possible to marry a prostitute we know from two parts of formulas in a legal handbook for notaries:

He lifted her from her status as a prostitute from the street. He married her in her status as a prostitute. He returned her drinking-house to her. He let her enter his house.⁶⁸

After that he took a holy woman from the street. He married her in her status as a holy woman out of love for her.⁶⁹

Subsequently the latter happy couple adopted a foundling baby together, brought him up and let him learn the trade of a scribe. But pleasant outcomes like this would not have been frequent occurrences, and so this may be just a fanciful and romantic story, thought up at school as a witty text for practising writing.

After dealing with the marriage of a slave-girl who has children in § 26, the Laws of Lipit-Ištar move on to the subject of this chapter:

§ 27. If the wife of a man does not bear him sons, but a prostitute on the street does bear him sons, then he shall give this prostitute rations of barley, oil and wool. The son borne by the prostitute to him is his son and heir. The prostitute shall not live together in the house with the first wife while his wife is alive.

By contrast the slave girl in § 26 could have lived with her child in the house. Another clause in this law-book shows how people should be cautious about such relationships.

⁶⁷ AASOR 16 51 with Wilhelm, 519 f.; M. T. Roth, *Law collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (1995) 195 f. Cf. CAD E 73 s.v. *ekûtu*. Wilhelm explains *ekûtu* as 'Bettlerei(?)'; for an alternative view see B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel I* (1981) 30 f. (*êqûtu*: the woman may reside in the *bit êqi*).

⁶⁸ MSL 1 (1937) 96 f. Cf. S. Greengus, *HUCA* 46 (1975) 21, note.

⁶⁹ MSL 1, 99 f.

§ 30. If a man, who has a wife, is married by⁷⁰ a prostitute on the street and the judges have told him not to return to the prostitute, but afterwards he leaves his first-ranking wife, he shall pay her the divorce settlement. He may not marry that prostitute.

One assumes that in this case no children had been born, but that there may have been a complaint by the wife about the man's escapades and the community recognised that she was an injured party. Earlier we showed that gaining a divorce was easier for a man, but here moral limitations come into play.⁷¹

Two legal verdicts from a later period shed some light on this matter. One is an Old Babylonian lawsuit in which a Šat-Marduk, apparently a prostitute, swears under oath to have no more sexual relations with an ex-partner.

As regards Aḫuni, given that I am not retaining him, nor am I bound to him under oath, he shall not return (to me), and he shall not say [= suggest] to me 'the man and woman's thing', and he shall not kiss my lips, and I shall not allow him 'the man and woman's thing'. If he invites me to lie in his bosom, then I shall surely report it to the elders and the mayor. If people should see me near (him), then they shall surely treat me as if I had shown contempt for (this) oath by (the name of) the king.

Then the man swore an oath confirming his agreement.

I shall not go to her and I shall not say to her 'the man and woman's thing'.

Here the focus is only on the sexual act. It is not a case of divorce, but gives another example of how the community supervised its members.⁷² A very different explanation for this litigation has been proposed by J. M. Sasson. He sees Šat-Marduk as an independent woman who does not wish to engage in a sexual relationship. L. Barberon has subsequently pointed out that in view of her name she could be a nun (*nadîtu*) of Marduk. We shall return to this holy woman in Chapter 27 and see there that nuns took great care to guard their chastity.⁷³

The second verdict is a Middle Babylonian text and more difficult to understand. A man, who appears to have been seduced by a woman in an inn, contin-

70 Following C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 596 n. 410 (§f40).

71 C. Wilcke, *WdO* 4 (1968) 161 f., 'Treuepflicht'. More: R. Westbrook, 'The enforcement of morals in Mesopotamian Law', *JAOS* 104 (1984) 753–756.

72 M. Anbar, *RA* 69 (1975) 120–125 (BM 13912), according to the interpretation of Westbrook, 754; also translated in F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2006) 95 f. no. 50; *TUAT NF* 1 (2004) 38.

73 L. Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk dans le royaume de Babylone* (2012) 27 f., 110 f.

ued going around with her so much that it led to a divorce. His brother stepped in and brought the woman before the judge, and she promised that the man would no longer pass ‘the corners of her bed’. Evidently the brother was standing up for the honour of the family.⁷⁴ The prostitute may have actually imprisoned the man’s wife to force her to divorce him.⁷⁵ From the Neo-Babylonian period we know of a marriage contract where the bride was instructed to terminate any previous relationship she may have had with the words, ‘Block the foot of a man and be my wife’.⁷⁶ In the Gilgamesh Epic Enkidu addresses Šamḥat with words to show that a relationship with a prostitute could lead to divorce.

May a married woman, a mother of seven, be deserted [on your account!]⁷⁷

20.7 Social esteem

To have an insight into how prostitutes were generally regarded in society we should remember that popular sayings quoted in wisdom literature frown on any contact with them.

Never marry a prostitute; her husbands are legion! Neither an *ištaritu*, called after a goddess (?), nor a *kulmašitu*, who is approached by many, will support you in your difficulties, but will make fun of you in your quarrels. With her there is no respect or modesty.

The word ‘legion’ is used to express an impossibly high number, for what is written is actually the sign for the numeral 3600, the highest number of the Babylonian sexagesimal system. A variant text includes a supplementary sentence.

The house that she entered will be scattered. Whoever marries her has no stable life.

The ‘scattering of the house’ was also something to be feared if you married a slave.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ UET 7 8, according to Westbrook, 755f. See C. Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 229 n. 18; K. E. Slanski in: Westbrook, *A history of Ancient Near Eastern law* 1 (2003) 503f., 516.

⁷⁵ Thus Slanski.

⁷⁶ M. T. Roth, *Babylonian marriage agreements* (1989) 39 no. 2, with Roth, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29 (1987) 743f.

⁷⁷ Gilgamesh VII 161 with Lambert, 131.

⁷⁸ *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* 102:72–77 with Lambert in: *Außenseiter*, 132f.; W. von Soden, TUAT III/1 166. The variant: line 80, after W. von Soden with G. Steiner in his article ‘Die *femme fatale* im alten Orient’, in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 147–153, esp. 149.

Even so, prostitution was an accepted phenomenon, and the experiences of Enkidu with Šamḫat can be taken as archetypes. It was she, the whore *par excellence*, who taught him about sex. Once accomplished, he was transformed from his customary behaviour as a wild animal into a specimen of humanity. To acquire knowledge, both sexually and educationally, was something expected of everyone, and morality had no role to play in this story. Later, when Enkidu had to face death, he cursed the one who had humanised him.

She shall live in filth and haunt the slums, surrounded by drunkards.

The god Šamaš stepped in to show Enkidu that this was an unreasonable attitude. Although that curse could never be undone there was some counterbalancing blessing which would follow. It would be that high-ranking people shall love her and she shall richly receive their gifts, so in fact this would make her more like a courtesan.⁷⁹ In this way the advantages and disadvantages of the world's oldest profession were being traced back through mythology far into prehistoric times.

Today, on the one hand, it is supposed that an ancient Babylonian would have had nothing against prostitution and may even have thought that it had a cultural value. The idea is based on a Sumerian myth in which the oldest profession was included in a list of the cultural elements (*me*) belonging to the goddess of love, 'sexual intercourse, kissing, whoring.'⁸⁰ On the other hand, according to standard phraseology in literary texts, whores and transsexuals lived on the margins of society. The main purpose of sex was to raise children, and that was far from the intentions of these lasses.⁸¹

In general it is assumed that the Sumerian term *kar.kid* (Babylonian *ḫarimtu*) indicated a prostitute, but J. Assante, whose view is shared by many others, holds a totally different opinion.⁸² She sees the terms as a title for a woman who stands outside the patriarchal milieu and goes her own way, alone and self-sufficient.

⁷⁹ Lambert in Haas, *Außenseiter*, 127–131. Curses: Gilg. VII 102–132. Blessings: VII 151–161. Cf. K. van de Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 105.

⁸⁰ G. Farber-Flügge, *Der Mythos Inanna und Enki* (1973) 57, 107f., nos. 37–39; J.-J. Glassner in: *Nippur at the Centennial* (1992) 63.

⁸¹ J. Bottéro, 'L'amour libre et ses désavantages', in his *Mésopotamie* (1987) 224–240. Bottéro is too optimistic about prostitution ('amour libre') as a cherished cultural heritage (p. 233). He is also too positive about the appreciation of homosexuality; cf. Lambert in *Außenseiter*, 146f., on de Middle Assyrian laws A § 19–20, and M. Stol, *Studies R. D. Biggs* (2007) 236 n. 21.

⁸² J. Assante, 'The *kar.kid* / *ḫarimtu*, prostitute or single woman? A reconsideration of the evidence', UF 30 (1998) 5–96. A similar approach is found in I. M. Diakonoff, 'Women in Old Babylonia not under patriarchal authority', JESHO 29 (1986) 225–238.

The word *ḥarīmūtu* indicates the status of an independent woman, her class within society, and not her profession. Any woman, whether virgin or whore, could attain this status. On many occasions she acquired it through her mother, meaning that her mother was also independent, a divorcee or a widow.⁸³ Her sexuality was thereby liberated, not channelled as it would have been with married women or priestesses. Literary texts emphasise this freedom, so that there the word whore is appropriate. But when ordinary people are called *ḥarīmtu* the word whore is not appropriate. An ordinary woman who ‘goes out’ is no whore, but she is simply leaving her family to be free. If she is ‘on the street’ it is not for any ulterior motive. All kinds of people went on the street, for it was a fun place to be and afforded an opportunity to enjoy the freedom of the day. The drinking-house was the place where people could relax with a beer under the surveillance of the landlady, a place where single women in particular liked to go.⁸⁴ But after the Old Babylonian period Assante agrees that things changed and there was a ‘radical shift in attitudes towards independent women’. She develops her theme using data only from literary texts, and the texts we have cited in this chapter are much more wide-ranging.⁸⁵ Assante gives a good survey of the material she has selected and her argument, as far as it goes, is forceful. But her opinion needs to be reconciled with what has been said above. It would be great if she were right.⁸⁶

83 How did you become a *ḥarīmtu*? See Assante, 15–21, 25, 28 f., 35, 82 f.

84 Assante, 24, 48–50 (going out), 27, 47 f., 50, 52 (the street), 67–73 (the drinking-house).

85 Assante, 53 ff.; 57, 63 (‘social intolerance’), 84.

86 She was criticised by M. Silver, ‘Temple/sacred prostitution in Ancient Mesopotamia revisited’, *UF* 38 (2006) 631–663. He is mainly concerned with temple prostitution and shows how Greek temples earned money by this.