

23 The court and the harem before 1500 BC

One of the most interesting institutions of the traditional Middle East is the harem. European gentlemen have long been deadly curious about the life styles that sheikhs and pashas adopted in that secret domain. That was how they found the opportunity to get to know those 1001 erotic stories emanating from the harem.¹ The Persian king was said to have had at his disposal 360 concubines for his bed, enough to occupy him afresh for a whole year.² In the Bible we are granted a peep into the Persian ‘house of women’ in the second chapter of the book of Esther. But Joan Goodnick Westenholz has now poured a bucket of cold water over extending those ideas of such European gentlemen to ancient Babylonia. She has demonstrated that their concept of the harem has been coloured by Islamic practices and European fantasies, whereas in Babylonia and Assyria the women were not so strictly isolated. Even so, excavations at a palace in Mari have revealed an area which has been identified as the women’s quarters and could be referred to as ‘the corner’ (*tubqu*).³ This chapter and the next will show, in the words of S. Parpola writing on the Assyrian harem, that the harem ‘in every essential respect resembled later oriental (Sassanian, Abbasid and Ottoman) royal harems’.

According to the condemnatory narrative in 1 Kings 11:3, King Solomon is reputed to have had 700 ‘princesses’ (*šārôt*) and 300 ‘concubines’ (*pilagšim*). Most of Solomon’s marriages to these princesses will have been political alliances, for in the Ancient Near East it was normal for a king to marry off his daughter to a friendly monarch for political advantage. Some such alliances were so important that a king would commemorate the event with a year name. Before 1500 BC Babylonian years were not numbered consecutively, but named by a formula commemorating an event in that year or the one preceding.⁴ Such a name appears in the Syrian city of Alalakh:

The year of Ammi-takum the king, when he chose (*hiāru*) the daughter of the ‘man’ of Ebla to marry his son.⁵

1 Read the phantasies in Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes* (Amsterdam, 1721).

2 D. Lenfant, *Les Histoires perses de Dinon et d'Héraclide* (2009) 270 ff.

3 J. G. Westenholz in her review of the book J.-M. Durand, *La Femme* (1987), in *JAOS* 110 (1990) 513–516; with N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimrî-Lîm* (1999) 5–8; M. van de Mieroop, *Cuneiform texts and the writing of history* (1999) 146–151.

4 Surveyed by W. Röllig, ‘Politische Heiraten im Alten Orient’, *Saeculum* 25 (1974) 11–23; also ‘Heirat, politische’ in *RIA IV/4–5* (1975) 282–287. More in notes 168, 190, 302.

5 D. J. Wiseman, *The Alalakh Tablets* (1953) no. 35:8–12.

From time to time a short reference to such a marriage appears in routine administrative documents concerning the receipt and despatch of gifts.⁶ A list of household goods from Isin includes a ‘present to Libur-niaš, daughter of the king, when Išdum-kin, son of Ḫuba-simti, the vizier [of Elam] married her’.⁷ Old Babylonian letters suggest that a familial relationship arose between states through these marriages. In Šušarra the king said,

Either give me your daughter or let me give my daughter to you. Give now your daughter to my son, for the family relationship (*salūtu*) must not be broken off.⁸

Another letter says that ‘Uruk and Babylon are one house’, a situation which was confirmed with a marriage.⁹

Until recently the earliest evidence for this custom was in documents from the Ur III period, but we now have earlier evidence in the Ebla texts. Smaller states in particular needed to secure a more powerful ally to which they could bind themselves in this way. Even a large kingdom like Egypt did not shy away from the practice in the time of expanding international contacts (1500–1200 BC), but they included the proviso that Egypt must never marry off one of its own princesses.¹⁰ According to W. A. Ward,¹¹ there would hardly have been a harem in Egypt, because the kings normally had a monogamous marriage, and women had the same rights as men. Even so we know from a depiction in a grave at Amarna that one area in the palace was naturally reserved for women.¹² The Assyrian king who claimed to have abducted ‘the daughter’ of King Ḫadi’ani at Damascus from his palace ‘with her extensive dowry’¹³ appears to have embarked on a forced marriage.

6 For Ebla see M. G. Biga in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 45–47.

7 BIN 9 438 with M. Van de Mieroop, *Crafts in the early Isin period* (1987) 108 ff.

8 J. Eidem, *The Shemshara Archives 1. The letters* (2001) 131 no. 74:31–38.

9 Röllig, *Saeculum* 25, 14.

10 Röllig, 19 (explicit in EA 4:6).

11 W. A. Ward, ‘Reflections on some Egyptian terms presumed to mean “harem, harem-woman, concubine”’, *Berytus* 31 (1983) 67–74; cf. Ward in: B. S. Lesko, *Women’s earliest records* (1989) 40–43.

12 ‘Harim’, ‘Harimsdame’, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* II/6 (1976) 982–987. The depiction: O. Keel, *Das Hohelied* (1986) 255 Abb. 145.

13 RIMA 3 (1996) 240 Shalmanezer IV no. 1:8–9.

23.1 The Sumerians

In Sumerian the expression meaning ‘the house of women’, *hay-mi*,¹⁴ appears to indicate an entire complex of rooms. These may be the ‘private rooms for mothers and young children’.¹⁵ As such it is different from the *maštaku*, the equivalent word in Akkadian, which rather means a room for a woman. Goddesses lived there as well as ordinary mortals. In literary texts we find passages showing that a ‘girl’ (*ki.sikil*, *ardatu*) who lived in this room could be dragged out of it as well as being subject to other barbarities.¹⁶ Sometimes there is a reference to a girl in the bedroom (*uršu*). That meant the place for young girls as well as married ones, a room associated with weddings.¹⁷ But the same word is also used for the marital bedroom.¹⁸ Middle Babylonian letters speak of repairs to the ‘houses of the women’, meaning the rooms where they lived.¹⁹

There are indications that even in the earliest times a separate ‘women’s house’ would have existed. In the Old Babylonian period it could function as a house of refuge, though we know no more details.²⁰ It has been suggested that in the third millennium a distinction was made between ‘the house of the wife’ (*é.dam*) and ‘the big house’ (*é.gal*), which was for the man,²¹ but again we know very little more. The male official who supervised the women’s house was known as the *rá.gab*.²² But at the end of the prologue to the laws of Lipit-Ištar we encounter the ‘house of the father’ and ‘the house of the brothers’, who had to perform a corvée.²³

14 Written *é.mi*; sometimes *a.mi*; *ama*-. J. Krecher, *Sumerische Kultlyrik* (1966) 110–112; WdO 18 (1987) 13 n. 26; J. Bauer, AfO 36–37 (1989–90) 84b; to be pronounced as *hajmi* according to Bram Jagersma, *A descriptive grammar of Sumerian* (2010) 48.

15 P. Michalowski, *The Lamentation over the destruction of Sumer and Ur* (1989) 76–78. Later on the word also means ‘storage room’. See also J.-M. Durand, *Journal des Savants* 1980, 254 n. 3.

16 S. N. Kramer in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 107 ff. (*ki.sikil* and *dumu.bandā*); CAD M/1 393a.

17 Erra IV 111 (young girls are killed there); W. G. Lambert, MIO 12 (1966) 54 rev. 12f. (‘the *maštaku* laments, the bedroom weeps, where we used to do the bridal work’). In the ‘Descent of Ištar’ the young man is desolate in his room, *kummu*, and the woman lies on her side (CT 15 46 rev. 9f.). The *éušbar* = *bit emūti* of the man corresponds to the *maštaku*; Krecher, *Sumerische Kultlyrik*, 111.

18 K. Watanabe, Baghd. Mitt., Beiheft 3 (1987) 42, sub 11 (*uršu bit ḥammūti*).

19 BE 17 66:23, PBS 1/2 44:3.

20 Cf. M. Stol, *Studies in Old Babylonian history* (1976) 10 n. 3; CAD S 292b.

21 J.-J. Glassner in Lesko, *Women’s earliest records* (1989) 87 ff.

22 M. Stol in *Studies Pascal Attinger* (2012) 332f.

23 D. O. Edzard, ZZB (1957) 96 n. 469.

The inhabitants of the house, the women of court, can be traced back in history as far as the legends of prehistoric times. In ‘The Death of Gilgamesh’, a Sumerian myth, not only are ‘beloved’ women from his harem mentioned, but also other personnel, including his ‘wife, children, favourite wife (*dam.tam*), little wife, singer, cupbearer.’²⁴ In the Sumerian King List, which was drawn up in 1850 BC, where history is divided into successive dynasties (‘kingships’), Queen Kubaba from the city of Kish, a legendary female figure occurs.

The kingship was transferred to Kish. In Kish Kubaba, the beer-brewer, she who laid the foundations of Kish, became king. She reigned for a hundred years.

Later ‘Kish was beaten by the weapon’. It was normal to have a king, and the tradition that Kubaba exceptionally became the queen was perpetuated in some associated predictions in liver divination. It was thought that certain configurations on the sheep’s liver could be linked to events from her time, and her later descendants could draw lessons from this for their own time. The earliest such omen is from the Old Babylonian period, more than a thousand years after the time when Kubaba was reputed to have been queen.

Omen of Kubaba, ‘Arise, O corpse! Accept the [bow (?)]’.

In time the meaning of the original text was not immediately clear, so another thousand years later in a commentary we find explanatory glosses.

Omen of Kubaba, the beer-brewer, ‘Arise (and) accept the bow of battle’.

Kubaba was evidently known as a brave warrior. There are also other ‘omens of Kubaba’ giving her different epithets, such as ‘she who rules the country’, or ‘she who seized the kingship’.²⁵ Her omen is connected with the birth of a hermaphrodite, an inauspicious event.

If an androgyne is born, with both rod and vagina, omen of Kubaba, who ruled the country. The country of the king shall be ruined.

24 A. Cavigneaux, F. N. H. al-Rawi, *Gilgameš et la mort* (2000) 22 N3:1–3 (= S. N. Kramer, BASOR 94 [1944] 8, B:1–3); 35, 59 M:262f. For Sumerian *dam.tam.ma*, see M. Civil, JAOS 103 (1983) 63, on 139.

25 I. Starr, JCS 29 (1977) 159; U. Koch-Westenholz, *Babylonian liver omens* (2000) 401ff. n. 925.

Possibly the uncertain sexuality of the baby was seen as opening the possibility of a woman becoming king.²⁶ The next omen derives from the fact that a scrotum was missing in an androgyne, and this predicts that ‘a courtier shall rule the land.’ The courtier, literally ‘the son of the palace’, may well have been a eunuch. Eunuchs could rise to become powerful. In Assyria and Persia some even attained kingship.²⁷ One chronicle states that Kubaba received the kingship of the world from Marduk, but this is clearly anachronistic since Marduk was a much later god in Babylon.²⁸ Historically speaking all this can be treated as rubbish, the result of a millennium of rambling about old folk-stories.

Ur-Nanše, ruler of the city of Lagash (ca. 2500 BC), is depicted on a relief with his fine family, a wife and eight children, with everyone’s name recorded, including the girl Abda. Some high functionaries are included in the group.²⁹ Here at this time we find nothing suggesting polygamy or a harem. We also have a stele of Ur-Nanše, dedicated to the mother goddess (?), with the king in the upper register and two women sitting opposite each other in the lower register. One is his wife and the other his daughter, and their names are inscribed on their clothing. They will have had some function in some ritual or other.³⁰ Even so, we may make the general observation that in the third millennium BC women were often portrayed, leading one art historian to describe this period as ‘the golden century of women’.³¹

We become much better informed about the ‘house of women’ with the last city rulers of Lagash (ca. 2370–2350 BC).³² In this period the expression certainly does not mean a harem, but rather the location for a large business enterprise, including the real estate managed by the wife of the city ruler. Two of the women who fulfilled this function were named Dimtur and Baranamtara, and there are about 1800 texts on the subject written over a period of about thirteen years.³³

26 SAA VIII 241 with K. Radner, *Festschrift M. K. Schretter* (2005) 551.

27 C. Ambos, *Studies S. Parpola* (= StudOr 106) (2009) 5 ff.

28 A. K. Grayson, ABC (1975) 148 Chronicle 19:42–45; Iraq 52 (1990) 9 rev. 9–13.

29 Ur-Nammu no. 20. E. A. Braun-Holzinger, *Mesopotamische Weihgaben* (1991) 308, W1 (lit.); J. S. Cooper, SARI I (1986) 22 ff. See Chapter 4, Figure 16.

30 Ur-Nammu no. 50. Photo in W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (1975) plate 85; drawing and discussion by J. Asher-Greve in: S. Schroer, *Images and gender* (2006) 60 fig. 8.

31 J. Asher-Greve; in Schroer, 41–81.

32 We follow the summary by M. van de Mierop in: Lesko, *Women’s earliest records* (1989) 54 ff.; cf. 63 (the workers); idem, *Cuneiform texts and the writing of history* (1999) 155–157 (the land area here comprises 4583 hectares. A. Deimel computed ‘almost 4500 ha’; J. Bauer, *Annäherungen* 1 (= OBO 160/1) [1998] 534).

33 *Annäherungen* 1, 532–555.

Originally only fifty people were working there but it grew and grew until in the time of Urukagina about 700 individuals were employed.³⁴

It has been calculated that the country, in which agriculture dominated the economy, comprised a land area of 4465.5 hectares. Documents relating to barley stretch from the time it was sown to the time it was used for processing flour and beer. Canals were dug for irrigation and transport, and there was also a fishery. Women worked as weavers in weaving sheds. Goods were imported from abroad. These achievements had all been made under the leadership of the queen. A sweeping change took place in the second year of Urukagina. Quite suddenly he began to refer to himself as the king, rather than *ensí*, ‘the city ruler’, and he referred to the House of Women as the ‘House of Bau’. Bau was the patron goddess of Lagash. This reflected the religious reforms he had introduced, for he wanted to give back to the city gods the land held by the city ruler, his wife, and his children. Many texts from this period have led scholars to think of Lagash as a ‘temple city’. In fact the ruler (and his wife) always remained in authority. After his reforms nothing changed in what work had to be done each day.

23.2 Ebla

The archives found at Ebla, in Syria, south of Aleppo, date from 2300 BC, when it was at the zenith of its political strength. All these documents had been stored in the palace archives. They cover the reigns of four kings during the last fifty years of the kingdom. Išar-Damu was the last king and he reigned for 36 years. We know what happened at Ebla from undated lists of payments of clothing and precious metal objects often made for important people. Sometimes a list records why the gift was made. The efforts of Italian scholars engaged in studying the original tablets in the museum of Idlib (Syria), combining texts and finding matching fragments, are slowly creating a more complete picture.³⁵ We can distinguish between the characteristic Sumerian terminology for men (*guruš*) and women (*dam*). Everyone received their rations on a monthly basis, usually as barley and oil, but women never received any beer or other alcoholic drink.³⁶ According to one text there could have been as many as 1200 or 1500 people employed in the palace, of whom 330 were women. Another text names a total of 200 people at

³⁴ K. Maekawa in: K. R. Veenhof, *Houses and households in ancient Mesopotamia* (1996) 171.

³⁵ M. G. Biga, *Amurru* 1 (1996) 43 ff.; Or. NS 72 (2003) 345–367. Women in Ebla: A. Archi, ‘The role of women in the society of Ebla’, *CRRAI* 47/1 (2000) 1–9.

³⁶ L. Milano, *ARET IX* (1990) 323–343, esp. 340.

court.³⁷ By linking these figures to the highest numbers attested, 5716 people (*nase*), 3037 of whom lived in Ebla itself and the rest in surrounding communities, it has been estimated that the total number of inhabitants was between 14,000 and 17,000.³⁸ Often ladies (*dam-en*) are mentioned, meaning women at the court of the ruler (*en*).³⁹ These are mostly named in lists of allowances of barley and textiles, and we assume that the size of a woman's allowance reflected her rank in society. From one list we can extract the following data.⁴⁰ The queen mother and the queen are followed by 23 ladies who received the *zara*, an expensive woven cloth; 19 of them lived in the palace at Ebla and the rest in two other cities. Then there were four sisters of the queen mother and Princess Ma'ud. Fourteen 'old women and wet-nurses' received simpler clothing. The wet-nurses were often old themselves, and would have lived at court for their whole lives. The highest-ranking women received gold and silver pendant earrings as well as the *zara*-cloth.⁴¹ There are two other lists which can be used for comparison. In the one 26 women receive an allowance of *zara*-cloth, while a group of 20 and another group of 51 women and two 'youngest sons' receive ordinary cloth. In the other text, 53 women receive good ordinary cloth and 108 women ordinary cloth. Among this last group are two temple women, a female cupbearer, some daughters of the king, 23 wet-nurses, and 15 ointment-makers.⁴²

The queen held the highest position. Among the other women at court were the concubines, each called *dam-en* 'a lady for the monarch'. Lists show three classes of high ranking women: the queen, a group of 20 concubines and another group of 22 concubines.⁴³ Other wives lived in palaces outside Ebla. When one of them was transferred outside Ebla she was given materials and clothes to take with her.⁴⁴ Calculations show that over a period of four or five years the king fathered ten sons by his concubines and one by his queen.⁴⁵ The wet-nurse (*ga.du₃*) also had a significant position at the court and she is sometimes men-

37 Milano, 333.

38 A. Archi in: H. Waetzoldt, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft von Ebla* (1988) 137.

39 H. Waetzoldt, 'Frauen (*dam*) in Ebla', in: *Ebla 1975–1985* (1987) 365–377 (for the figures see p. 373 ff.); M. G. Biga, 'Femmes de la famille royale d'Ebla', in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 41–47; M. G. Biga, 'Donne alla corte di Ebla', *La Parola del Passato* 46 (1991) 285–303. Cf. P. Mander, *Oriens Antiquus* 27 (1988) 1–73; Biga and F. Pomponio, *JCS* 42 (1990) 179–201, *passim*.

40 Biga, *Ktama* 22 (1997) 39 (TM.75.G.10150).

41 Biga in: *La Femme*, 42; 'Donne', 299, 301.

42 A. Archi, *Amurru* 1 (1996) 101.

43 Waetzoldt, 376 with 368 n. 14; A. Archi in: *Eblaite personal names and Semitic name-giving* (1988) 245.

44 Biga, 'Donne', 296.

45 Biga, 297; *Ktama* 22 (1997) 42.

tioned together with the midwife.⁴⁶ Eight wet-nurses are said to have fed three boys and five girls.⁴⁷ The activities of Kišadu, the wet-nurse of the last king, can be traced in administrative texts for twenty years. To mark the occasion of the marriage of the boy she had suckled she received an allowance of *zara*-cloth and a silver earring weighing twenty shekels. But when she died she received only a simple shroud,⁴⁸ although later she was given the special title ‘wet-nurse of the king’. She also had a son herself, and he was once given an allowance of cloth. The names of the wet-nurses of the earlier kings are also recorded. They all lived their whole life at the court.⁴⁹ In the Old Akkadian period holding such a position entitled them to possess a cylinder-seal.⁵⁰

The word for queen in Eblaite is *maliktu*, clearly linked to the West Semitic word for king, *malku*. Like the queen mother she naturally had her own house.⁵¹ The texts show her busy dispatching goods and offering gifts made of metal to the gods.⁵² She brings offerings to all the important gods in Ebla and neighbouring locations and participates in the cult of the dead.⁵³

We know of two protocols for a marriage of a king who was already on the throne. Foreign guests arriving from Emar joined the celebration lasting several days. There was a procession to the temples and the queen participated in certain cultic duties.⁵⁴ Once this ritual had been completed her name could be recorded in official documents. Tabur-Damu was listed only then by name with the title *maliktu*, more often being referred to simply by her title.⁵⁵

A marriage was an occasion for distributing presents.⁵⁶ First precious items (always the same) were given to the bride herself. A princess who became a priestess also received such gifts.⁵⁷ Some scholars claim to have identified with certainty what these precious items were. At her wedding Princess Itimud received many precious items as a ‘gift’ as well as objects of practical use. Gifts of clothing

46 M. G. Biga, ‘Enfants et nourrices à Ebla’, *Ktema* 22 (1997) 35–44.

47 F. Pomponio, *Vicino Oriente* 5 (1982) 207–209; Biga, *Ktema* 22, 42.

48 *Ktema* 22, 40.

49 Biga, ‘Donne’, 297 ff.; *Ktema* 22, 38–40; Archi, *Amurru* 1 (1996) 79 ff.

50 A. Westenholz, *Annäherungen* 3 (= OBO 160/3) (1999) 72 ff., fig. 8, b (Daguna).

51 Biga, ‘Donne’, 286.

52 P. Mander, ‘The function of the *Maliktum*’, in: *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft von Ebla* (1988) 261–266. F. Weiershäuser, *Die königliche Frauen der III. Dynastie von Ur* (2008), discusses the court at Ebla in separate excursuses.

53 Biga, ‘Donne’, 290–294.

54 Weiershäuser, 191 ff.

55 Biga, *Or. NS* 72 (2003) 356, 358; *Amurru* 1 (1996) 48.

56 For presents and occasions see A. Archi, ‘Jewels for the ladies of Ebla’, *ZA* 92 (2002) 161–199.

57 J. Pasquali, *Il lessico dell’artigianato nei testi di Ebla* (2005) 15–20.

were given to the ten concubines of the king, a princess and nine princes.⁵⁸ The birth of her first son was celebrated lavishly and commemorated in a year name. The queen and her female personnel all received presents on this occasion, as did the little infant himself.⁵⁹ When, a few years later, a daughter was born a considerable number of presents were similarly distributed to important people within the court and beyond.⁶⁰ In general every important birth was an occasion for presents, even when a princess who had been married off to a friendly monarch produced a child.⁶¹ We know that the queen owned land and she possibly managed the textile industry. At her death she received similar gifts to those she had been given at her marriage, including clothing, jewels, spinning utensils, combs, mirrors, and ointment.⁶² During her funeral, gifts were offered at the graves of others who had died before her.⁶³

The queen mother (*ama.gal.en*) also seems to have played a role in these ceremonies, for the name of Dusigu recurs in the lists referred to above over a period of twenty years.⁶⁴ She maintained international contacts, possessed her own chariot with its team of donkeys, travelled around and gave presents in her own right. She was in charge of the cult of the dead. Dusigu began her life at court as a girl in the harem (*dam-en*). Although she had never been queen herself she succeeded in securing the kingship for her son. She saw her chance when the king's first wife died young and probably childless, by arranging for her son to be next in line. Once he acceded to the throne she was automatically given the title 'mother of the king'. She may well have been the one who arranged for her son to marry Tabur-Damu, who at that time was still a young woman.⁶⁵ Once the marriage was finally arranged she consulted a diviner and received a favourable omen from the liver he had examined.

Dusigu as queen mother was a powerful woman. She always seemed to be playing a central part in the administration of the court, so much so that it was only after her death that the actual queen, her son's wife, was named first in administrative lists.⁶⁶ The clothes and precious metal objects which were sent as

58 ARET II 31 with A. Archi, ZA 92 (2002) 162, followed by translation and discussion.

59 Biga, Amurru 1, 50; ARET IV no. 7 §1–32.

60 Biga, 62; Weiershäuser, 187, 189.

61 Biga, 66, 69 ff.

62 Archi, ZA 92 (2002) 173–178; Biga, Or. NS 72 (2003) 350.

63 Biga, 353.

64 JCS 42 (1990) 188.

65 Archi; Biga, Amurru 1, 24, 40, 76. For new discoveries in the museum see Biga, NABU 2010/23.

66 Biga, 'Donne', 287 ff.

gifts to her grave are listed in detail.⁶⁷ When two statues of women were found beside each other in 2007, one a small seated woman and the other a larger woman standing opposite her, it was supposed that the seated figure represented Dusigu, the queen mother, now deceased, and the standing figure her daughter-in-law, the queen, doing obeisance to her.⁶⁸

When princesses were married off to rulers of important cities abroad they took with them their own personnel. On one occasion 17 or 22 ladies accompanied a princess as she left.⁶⁹ A few years before its demise, Ebla, aided by the kings of Nagar in north-eastern Syria and Kish in southern Iraq, had been victorious over the kingdom of Mari. Afterwards Princess Tagriš-Damu was sent to be the wife of the crown prince of Nagar, and similarly Princess Kešdut to be the wife of the crown prince of Kish. The list of the presents given within the court on the marriage of Kešdut has survived,⁷⁰ but only clothing is mentioned, with the women receiving *zara*-cloth. These presents were given to the members of the royal house of Ebla, including the powerful minister Ibbi-Zikir, who had led the campaigns against Mari. The concubines in palaces in the six cities were also allocated their share. Despite all this, Ebla fell a little later as a result of actions precipitated by the kingdom of Mari.

The fortunes of the princesses after they had left Ebla were recorded and presents were sent whenever news was received of births, marriages and deaths.⁷¹ One princess was married off to a country named Burman, where she became queen (*maliktu*) and later bore a daughter.⁷² Presents were sent to the king and queen of Mari, Iblul-II and Paba, who had indigenous Sumerian titles (*lugal* and *nin*), different from those in Ebla.⁷³ When the queen of Manuwat died Ebla sent clothing and gold objects there.⁷⁴ We have corresponding texts recording marriages in Ebla of foreign princesses who had been sent there.⁷⁵ A number of women from 'abroad' lived in the palace.

Twenty of the musicians resident at court are denoted as top-class men and between ten and twenty as ordinary musicians. Of the women twenty were top-class and twenty ordinary. Mari was known for producing a special style of

67 A. Archi, ZA 92 (2002) 178 (no. 11); Biga, Amurru 1, 49; Or. NS 72 (2003) 357, 363.

68 P. Matthiae, ZA 99 (2009) 270–311; F. Pinnock, JCS 67 (2015) 4 f., 'The Queen's standard'.

69 Biga in Waetzoldt, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft von Ebla*, 169 ff.

70 A. Archi, *Studies Jeremy A. Black* (2010) 1–9.

71 Biga, Amurru 1, 63–72; Weiershäuser, 266–268.

72 Biga and Pomponio, JCS 42, 180 n. 4.

73 F. Pomponio, NABU 1989/114.

74 Biga, Amurru 1, 45.

75 Biga in Durand, *La Femme*, 45–47; Mander, *Oriens Antiquus* 27, 32 ff.

music, and performers proficient in that style were brought from there to Ebla.⁷⁶ Twenty dancers are listed.⁷⁷ Much information about the women who worked in the palace comes from ration lists. One concerned with the distribution of wool shows that the quality and colour of the wool was correlated with the rank of the worker. The supervisor ('the big woman') received better wool than the ordinary ('small') women and girls, and slave-girls were seldom mentioned. The occupations of these women were indicated but not all of them can be identified.⁷⁸ A female cook and a baker (*apîtu*) are easy to identify but the function of an *asiratu* remains a mystery. Other lists sometimes speak of weavers (including weavers of linen) and women employed in grinding grain in the town of Buzuga.⁷⁹

23.2.1 A royal ritual from Ebla

Not all the texts found at Ebla were administrative ones, such as those listing goods. The incantation for the success of a difficult birth can be described as more or less literary. There are three important rituals in which the king and queen played the main roles. They are written in a curt, telegraphic style, in a difficult mix of Sumerian and the native Semitic language of Ebla, so decipherment is difficult. Nevertheless the main sequence of events is clear.⁸⁰ The first ritual centres on King Irkab-Damu, the second on King Išar-Damu and Tabur-Damu, his wife. We can understand this last ritual best because the expenses relating to it are recorded in the administrative lists, where some names are also mentioned.⁸¹ That ritual took place in the fifth month, and was rather complex since it concerned the marriage of the king and queen and their 'accession' (*mallugu*).⁸² This

76 M. G. Biga, 'La musique à Ebla', in: *La musique au Proche-Orient ancien* (= Dossiers Archéologie 310, février 2006) 24–31; A. Archi, *Eblaïte personal names and Semitic name-giving* (1988) 271.

77 Biga, 'Donne', 301 ff.

78 Biga, 'Frauen in der Wirtschaft von Ebla', in: Waetzoldt, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft von Ebla*, 159–171.

79 L. Milano, ARET IX (1990) nos. 44, 57, with p. 338, 347 f.

80 P. Fronzaroli, ARET XI (1993). Important comments were made by A. Archi in Amurru 1, and by M. V. Tonietti in *Memoriae Igor M. Diakonoff* (2005) 251–261. The same ritual was published at about the same time by G. Pettinato, *Il rituale per la successione al trono ad Ebla* (1992), with an extensive commentary and a chapter by P. Pisi on the religious aspects; see also Pettinato, *La città sepolta. I misteri di Ebla* (1999) 316–327, 363–367. His opinions differ from those of P. Fronzaroli and others.

81 Notably TM.75.G.1730; M. G. Biga, *Vicino Oriente* 8/2 (1992) 3–11.

82 For this Semitic word see P. Fronzaroli, *Mélanges H. Limet* (1996) 54 n. 13.

king married her only in the tenth year of his reign, possibly because she had only then reached adulthood. She did not take the title *maliktu*, ‘queen’ until after this marriage ceremony.⁸³

The ritual began (according to the oldest version) with him collecting her from her father’s house and she followed instructions about what she should wear ‘on the day of her wedding (*nimusa*)’. Sacrifices were brought in sequence to the gods, to the sun goddess first. Then oil was poured over her head, a bridal anointing. She offered clothing, jewels and costly vases to various gods. Together they made an offering to Kura and Barama, the god and goddess of Ebla, and then they travelled through various cities in the kingdom, accompanied by Kura and Barama. The four black oxen hauling their waggons are described in detail. Much time was spent in the city of Binaš, the site of the mausoleum of the ancestors, the ‘house of the dead’ (*bīt mâtim*), and probably to be identified with the modern village of Binish. A ritual purification of the site involved selecting a male goat, setting a silver ring round its neck and driving it off to the plain of Alini (§57). That ceremony closely resembles what was done to the scapegoat in Leviticus 16:21.⁸⁴ Offerings were presented to the local god and three ancestors. The couple would spend the night there together, but in separate rooms (§61–2, 86). On the following morning ‘the king and queen would come out and sit on the thrones of their ancestors’. The expenses associated with these events is listed as ‘in Binaš, on the day of the accession to the throne (*mullugu*) by the king and queen’.⁸⁵ The mother goddess Nintu ‘shows off a new Kura, a new Barama, a new king, a new queen’ (§68). Then ‘the dressing assistant pronounces the blessing, she clothes the queen with a veil: her face and hands’. This veil will have covered the whole of the upper body, and an illustration of a woman dressed like this has been preserved.⁸⁶ She, ‘the woman of Binaš’, covered the queen seven times, while the king and queen were seated (§82–84). Over a period of seven days three rituals were carried out for the three ancestors. The word used for this period of seven days, *sapatu*, is derived from the numeral seven; that word may perhaps be linked with the Hebrew word *šabbāt*, ‘sabbath’, although the Hebrew word is not derived from the numeral seven. After all this the royal couple returned to Ebla where the

⁸³ A. Archi, *Amurru 1* (1996) 26 (with n. 7), 76.

⁸⁴ Fronzaroli, *Mélanges H. Limet*, 54 ff.; Tonietti, 258 n. 67.

⁸⁵ Archi, note 7.

⁸⁶ J. Pasquali in: C. Michel, M.-L. Nosch, *Textile terminologies in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean from the third to the first millennia BC* (2010) 176 ff. A photo is in the catalogue *Ebla. Alle origini della civiltà urbana* (1995) 317 no. 95. On the Bitik vase (see Chapter 1, The Veil) the veil covers the entire body.

king and queen spent the night apart in the temple of Kura (§ 118–119).⁸⁷ Sacrifices were brought, and blessings pronounced, and two new statues of the gods were brought to the temple. A banquet followed.

It is noticeable that in this ritual combining marriage with kingship most attention is paid to the queen. She received beautiful new, red clothes to mark her change of status, making it a kind of investiture. A later ritual for the dedication of a priestess from Emar has her similarly wearing red garments.⁸⁸ So this ritual, attested in Syria a thousand years later, can be traced back to Ebla, even though Ebla had no such priestesses. Other cities had them, as we shall see, but at Ebla possibly the queen fulfilled that role. In Chapter 30 about sacred marriage we shall come back to this subject.

23.3 Funerals

The exciting discoveries in the so-called Royal Tombs of Ur, from around 2600 BC, tell us much about the funerals of queens from this early period. According to their tradition, the first dynasty of Ur began with King Mesanepada. A seal belonging to his wife was found here, inscribed ‘Ninbanda, the queen, wife of Mesanepada’, and we also have an imprint in clay of his own seal.⁸⁹ These graves are famous for their rich contents, but equally infamous for the evidence they show of human sacrifice, which merits further discussion.⁹⁰

What was found were the bodily remains of many individuals who must all have died at the time of the principal burial. Some archaeologists assumed they were poisoned, pointing fancifully to a bowl from which they were supposed to have drunk the poison. Recently, two skulls were subjected to CT scans and forensic analysis. A blunt force trauma could be observed which had produced circular holes 30 mm in diameter. The victims had been felled with a sharp instrument, probably a copper battle axe. Their corpses were subsequently heated, embalmed with mercury sulphide (cinnabar), dressed and laid ceremonially in rows. Cin-

87 The basis is the third ritual, § 28–29. Pettinato thinks that both of them sleep together (see § 60).

88 J. Pasquali, M. V. Tonietti, in: *Memoriae Igor M. Diakonoff* (2005) 172–174, 260 ff.

89 R. L. Zettler, L. Horne, *Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur* (1998) 21, 76, 82.

90 For a fresh evaluation see L. Marchesi, ‘Who was buried in the royal tombs of Ur? The epigraphic and textual data’, *Or. NS* 73 (2004) 153–197. For a survey of the finds see J. M. Asher-Greve, *Frauen in altsumerischer Zeit* (1985) 139–145, ‘Frauengräber’; see also J. Bauer, *Annäherungen* 1 (1998) 561–563. An earlier, popular, survey was given by G. Roux, ‘La grande énigme du cimetière d’Ur’, in: J. Bottéro, *Initiation à l’Orient ancien* (1992) 60–78.

nabar was a known preservative in other ancient cultures and the practice of preserving corpses by heating them was known at the royal tombs in Qatna and Calah (Nimrud). 'At some time following the death of Ur's king or queen, perhaps days or weeks after the royal entombment, which probably took place on the third day after death, the attendants were killed, preserved and dressed, and their bodies purposefully arranged in a *tableau mort* in the royal tomb to continue their service in the netherworld'.⁹¹ Two types of grave can be distinguished: a 'tomb' made of brick with a few skeletons, and a 'pit' with many skeletons. For Grave PG 789 the tomb had been plundered but the pit was undisturbed. In it were the skeletons of six men, with their copper helmets, and two waggons with their two drivers. Further along there were 54 skeletons, mostly women, two of whom had a lyre. Many books reconstruct the scene just before the mass killing in a drawing.⁹² In Grave PG 1237, 'The Great Death Pit', there were five men, 68 women, and many grave goods. The only parallel known, where human sacrifice accompanied a funeral, is from 2700 BC at Kish, a grave with five human skeletons, with waggons and draught animals. A similar custom is known in Egypt, but only during the First Dynasty. Herodotus states that the same custom was practised at the funerals of Scythian kings (IV 71–2), a statement confirmed from a grave in Ukraine dating to the fourth century BC. The ritual can be regarded as widespread, for we know that such ghastly interments occurred in Nubia, Sudan, Central and West Africa, China, Panama and the Andes.⁹³ What is striking is that this is the only time when this custom was known in Mesopotamia. Earlier we discussed the harem of Gilgamesh in the Sumerian myth 'The Death of Gilgamesh', and the context shows that his tomb was in the bed of the Euphrates. It is now thought that his whole court may have been buried with him,⁹⁴ but not all agree with this explanation of that passage.⁹⁵

In Ur seventeen large graves were found with many costly grave goods. These included a liberal scattering of exotic materials, including lapis lazuli from northern Afghanistan, cornelian from Iran or the Indus valley, calcite from eastern Iran and Afghanistan, obsidian, copper and silver from Asia Minor, and gold from

91 A. Baadsgaard a. o., 'Human sacrifice and intentional corpse preservation in the Royal Cemetery of Ur', *Antiquity* 85 (2011) 27–42.

92 Zettler, Horne, 23, 33–38.

93 Zettler, Horne, 29 ff.

94 A. Cavigneaux, F. al-Rawi, *Gilgameš et la mort* (2000) 7; C. J. Gadd, 'The spirit of living sacrifices in tombs', *Iraq* 22 (1960) 51–58; Ph. Abrahams, *Ktama* 30 (2005) 96 f.

95 Marchesi, 156–161. He also refutes the theory that priestesses of the moon god (*en*) were buried here as well.



Fig. 37: Three cylinder seals were found in the grave of Queen Pu-abi, PG 800, all depicting a banquet scene. One, found on her right arm, had the inscription, 'Pu-abi, Qu Ur, 2600 BC. Lapis lazuli. Height 5 cm. *British Museum, London.*

Egypt,⁹⁶ all fashioned into splendid objects. The most significant find was from Grave PG 800,⁹⁷ where a woman of around forty years old had been bedecked with much golden jewellery around her head and over her thorax. The garland of golden leaves on her head was surrounded by gold and silver bowls (Figure 38). Her seal identifies her as Pu-abi, the 'queen' (*nin*).⁹⁸ On the seal she has three companions for a banquet scene in which food and drink are depicted (Figure 37). Further laboratory studies in museums on the remains of her diadem show that there had been worked into it 10,506 very small stones of lapis lazuli, a task that would have taken about 2500 hours. Much lapis lazuli was found in this grave.⁹⁹ In the pit there were 21 skeletons, a sledge with oxen, and a chest, perhaps containing clothes. Ten women with musical instruments, including the famous lyre,¹⁰⁰ had been laid out in two rows. Sir Leonard Wooley, the excavator, when he discovered this treasure in 1928, decided to telegraph the news to America in Latin, possibly to avoid drawing the attention of the local mafia:

TUMULUM SAXIS EXSTRUCTUM LATERICIA ARCATUM INTEGRUM INVENI REGINAE SHUBAD, VESTE GEMMATA, CORONIS FLORIBUS ... ISQUE INTENTIS DECORAE MONILIBUS POCULIS AURI SUMPTUOSAE. WOOLLEY.

⁹⁶ Zettler, Horne, 5.

⁹⁷ Zettler, Horne, 34 ff., 66 (cosmetic box), 89–102 (jewels), 127–134 (bowls).

⁹⁸ M. Roaf, *A cultural atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East* (1966) 84 ff.; E. Klen-gel-Brandt, *Mit sieben Siegeln versehen* (1997) plate 19 (in colour).

⁹⁹ M. Casanova in: *Studies Jean Bottéro* (2009) 295.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. [T. C. Mitchell], *Sumerian Art. Illustrated by objects from Ur and Al-Ubaid* (1969) 14–18.



Fig. 38: Headdress and jewellery of Queen Pu-abi, according to the most recent reconstruction (2009). *University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia.*

The original telegram is now kept in the archives of the museum of the University of Pennsylvania to which a handwritten translation has been added:

I found the intact tomb, stone built and vaulted over with bricks of queen Shubad adorned with a dress, in which gems, flower crowns and animal figures¹ are woven, and some magnificent with jewels and golden cups.¹⁰¹

Texts dated a few centuries later from Lagash provide more information about the burials of important women. P. Steinkeller noticed that Urtarsirsira, the son of the city ruler Lugalanda, had made an inventory of the grave gifts for his wife Nineniše,¹⁰² with costly items including beautiful household articles. It is striking

¹⁰¹ Zettler, Horne, 17.

¹⁰² DPM 75 with J. Zarins in: R. H. Meadow, *Equids in the Ancient World* (1986) 183; P. Steinkeller, *Iraq* 52 (1990) 21 n. 29; D. T. Potts, *Mesopotamian civilization. The material foundations* (1997) 222, in the chapter 'Mortuary practices'.

that it lists ‘one slave-girl, one sledge of boxwood and one pair of she-asses’. This is directly comparable with the sledge of Pu-abi. The slave-girl was perhaps a human sacrifice. There are other texts that show that mules were presented as grave gifts in these early times.¹⁰³ In the much later Gilgamesh Epic, Ištar promised Gilgamesh:

I shall hitch up for you a waggon of lapis lazuli and gold (...). You shall harness the storm demons as powerful mules (VI 10–12).

This sounds a delightful promise, but it refers to his burial, and is therefore an invitation to attend his own funeral. Gilgamesh was wise enough to realise her intent and rejected the offer.¹⁰⁴ The funeral of Baranamtarra, the wife of the city ruler Lugalanda, involved 177 slave-girls, 92 lamentation singers, and 48 ‘wives of elders (?)’, who participated on two consecutive days at the ‘place of mourning’ (*ki.ḫul*).¹⁰⁵

23.4 The Old Akkadian period

Not much is known about the court in the Old Akkadian period (2300–2100 BC). Sargon conquered Sumer from his city of Akkad and established the dynasty that followed.¹⁰⁶ Usually the queen of Akkad had the title *nin*, Sumerian for ‘mistress’, but once the Akkadian word *rubātu* ‘sovereign’s wife’ is used. We know most about a queen who had been given the delightful name of Tuta-šar-libbiš, ‘She has found the king of her heart’. A group of texts describes a journey by members of the court who were possibly going to Nippur to take part in the dedication of the princess Tuta-*napšum* (‘She has found life’) to be a priestess (*en*) of Enlil. On the seals of her servants, the scribe and the head of the ‘house’, she is shown as seated with the servant standing respectfully facing her. Her usual title was ‘queen’, but once she was called ‘the beloved of the king’¹⁰⁷ Princess En-ḫedu-ana,

103 Zarins, 164–193.

104 This is the interpretation of T. Abusch, *History of Religions* 26 (1986) 153 ff., who gives thoughtful footnotes.

105 VAS 14 137 (= AWL 66) and TSA 9; see Y. Rosengarten, *Le concept sumérien de consommation* (1960) 184 ff., n. 3; J. Bauer, *Annäherungen* 1 (1998) 558–560; A. C. Cohen, *Death rituals, ideology, and the development of early Mesopotamian kingship. Toward a new understanding of Iraq’s Royal Cemetery of Ur* (2005) 157–162; M. Maiocchi in: L. Milano, *Mangiare divinamente* (2012) 15, 26 f.

106 Weiershäuser, 195–199, 256–259.

107 FAOS 7 (1990) 44; RIME 2 (1993) 198–200. For illustrations of the seal of Dada see P. Amiet, *L’art d’Agade* (1976) 35; S. Schroer, *Image and gender* (2006) 68 fig. 16.

the daughter of King Sargon, was a significant personage at this time.¹⁰⁸ She was a priestess (*en*) of the moon god of Ur and also a poetess. In her poems the goddess Inanna/Ištar is praised. There is some suspicion that such praise was politically motivated, since Ištar was the goddess of the kingdom of Akkad that had eclipsed old Sumer, now subject to Akkad. The hymns of this princess attempted to give a theological foundation to the prominent position of the goddess. Ištar was the daughter of the Sumerian moon god and had now become the goddess of the kingdom of Akkad. One hymn begins with the meaningful invocation, ‘Sovereign Lady of the World’. When riots broke out this princess had to flee, even though she had a right to her office, as she explained in a poem. We have a picture of her and the poems attributed to her were recopied until the Old Babylonian period. Princess En-ḫedu-ana will reappear in Chapter 25, about the High Priestesses.

Excavations in Eastern Syria at the city of Urkiš have produced seal impressions of Queen Uqnītum and her staff. On the seals, which have inscriptions as well as iconography, the queen is seen accompanied by lyre players or with a little boy on her lap. The wet-nurse Zamena has a little boy on her lap and the cook is busy in the kitchen.¹⁰⁹ It is surprising to have found in that place a seal impression naming Taram-Agade, the daughter of Naram-Sin, king of Akkad: ‘Naram-Sin, king of Agade. Taram-Agade, his daughter.’ Since her name means ‘She loves Akkad’, when Akkad is far away from Urkiš, she had perhaps been married off to this distant northern state.¹¹⁰

23.5 The kingdom of Ur III

Between 2100 and 2000 the capital city of Ur was teeming with ‘queens’ and princesses.¹¹¹ In 1990 the general consensus was that there were more than ninety princes and princesses, but by 2008 this had risen to closer to a hundred.¹¹² King Šulgi had more than twenty sons who held important posts. It is useful first to

108 Weiershäuser, 249–254.

109 G. Buccellati, M. Kelly-Buccellati, *AfO* 42–43 (1995–96) 10, 15, 20, 22; S. Schroer, *Images and gender*, 65 ff. See Figure 29 in Chapter 18.

110 G. Buccellati, *Studies David Oates* (2002) 11–31.

111 F. Weiershäuser, *Die königlichen Frauen der III. Dynastie von Ur* (2008). For earlier surveys see M. Van de Mieroop in: Lesko, *Women’s earliest records*, 58–60; M. Sigrist, *Drehem* (1992) 357–363; W. Sallaberger, ‘Die Königsfamilie: Frauen und Kinder’, in: *Mesopotamien. Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit* (= *Annäherungen* 3) (= OBO 160/3) (1999) 182–186.

112 D. I. Owen in J. Klein, *ZA* 80 (1990) 26 n. 37; cf. D. I. Owen, *BiOr* 49 (1992) 443. E. Sollberger in 1955 knew of only 54 princesses.

establish the names of the kings from this dynasty. Ur-Nammu's son was Šulgi, and his sons were Amar-Sîn, Šu-Sîn and Ibbi-Sîn. The relationship between Amar-Sîn and Šu-Sîn is complicated and the latter seems to have been jointly reigning with his brother from an early stage.¹¹³ All the information about this royal house comes from the administration documents of the kingdom, about 100,000 texts consisting of receipts and expenditures. There are occasional short notes to indicate the reason for a particular transaction. These clues are currently being systematically categorised and compared with each other in order slowly to build up a more complete picture. Many texts concern animals used as sacrifices. Others mention gifts which the women at court received or distributed on particular occasions.¹¹⁴ Whenever they had to go on journeys to perform religious duties the associated costs were documented. There was much more going on there at the time.

We get an impression of the unbelievable wealth at court from the administrative documents of the bureau where income was redistributed.¹¹⁵ This was the royal treasury, found not far from Nippur, where basic materials such as metals, hides, gemstones, and broken objects were brought. In workshops valuable artistic objects were made, and then distributed by messenger to high-ranking men (such as military or foreign delegates) and women (those resident at court). Men would usually receive hand rings and shoes and women golden signet rings and vessels (for the queen) or jewelry (for the *lukur*).¹¹⁶ To goddesses pairs of silver rings of ten shekels each or vases and ornaments were dedicated.¹¹⁷ Often the queen was instrumental in all this. On one occasion she remunerated a messenger who had conveyed her greetings (*silima*) with two silver rings as an audience gift.¹¹⁸ Among the presents dedicated to deities many were given to the goddesses of healing, Gula at Umma, Nin-Isina at Isin, and Nintinuga at Nippur.¹¹⁹ The texts suggest that this goddess undertook ceremonial boat trips and sometimes there is a reference to a diseased person. Most probably when a member of the royal family became ill they hurriedly gave these goddesses a votive object to ensure

113 F. Pomponio, 'Le sventure di Amar-Suena', SEL 7 (1990) 3–14. However, see also H. Waetzoldt, BiOr 30 (1973) 68.

114 Weiershäuser, 116 ff., 161 ff.

115 W. Sallaberger in: *Annäherungen* 3 (1999) 240–252; P. Paoletti, *Der König und sein Kreis. Das staatliche Schatzarchiv der III. Dynastie von Ur* (2012).

116 Paoletti, 305–311, 'Die geschlechtsspezifische Verteilung der königlichen Geschenke'.

117 Paoletti, 238 ff., 345.

118 The queens: Paoletti, 276–279; the rings: 411; JCS 10 (1956) 30 no. 10.

119 Paoletti, 251–256.

recuperation. Queen Abi-simti was involved.¹²⁰ The royal house maintained a special devotion of the health goddesses.¹²¹ An object made of obsidian (*šurru*) was part of the equipment of the goddess. It was a stone with sharp edges to be used when she practised surgery and is referred to in an incantation as ‘obsidian, the blade of Gula’.¹²² In the Bible circumcision was performed with obsidian (*šor*) (Exodus 4:25).

Originally in these documents the queen was simply called ‘the wife’ (*dam*) of the king. But after the 21st year of his reign Šulgi assumed for himself a divine status. Then she was given the title *nin*, ‘mistress, queen’, possibly pronounced as *ereš*, and this continued.¹²³ Sometimes in texts from Ur ‘the place of the queen’ (*ki.nin*) is referred to as well as ‘the place of the king’. It used to be thought that this indicated that she had a separate dwelling in Uruk, the old patriarchal city of the kings of Ur, but on closer examination we see that it may also refer to other towns where the queen might happen to be.¹²⁴ After a king had died, his widow could still retain her title, as when Abi-simti kept the title *nin* during the reign of her son Šu-Sin. A wife of a king also held the title *lukur*,¹²⁵ something that began after King Šulgi’s year when he considered himself divine.¹²⁶ He had four or five women with the title *lukur*, which is actually the title of the second wife of a deity. Why the king would call his wife *lukur* is difficult to understand. Perhaps it was to draw a parallel between himself and the deity, whose first wife beside him was divine, but who also had a series of ‘second wives’ on earth, in convents. The words *lukur* in Sumerian and *nadîtu* in Akkadian refer to such a nun. One supposes that the divine Šulgi saw the goddess Inanna of Uruk as his primary wife, an idea to be derived from the sacred marriage ceremony, so that any earthly spouse was appropriately referred to as his *lukur*.¹²⁷ What is difficult to understand is that private persons also had a *lukur*.¹²⁸ Sometimes administrative texts distributed barley from ‘the house of the great *lukur*’.¹²⁹ A recent discussion

120 Paoletti, 255

121 Paoletti, 346.

122 SAT 3 1277 with Paoletti, 252, 254 f., 345 f. The incantation: YOS 11 14 rev. 5, with p. 23.

123 P. Michalowski, JCS 28 (1976) 169–172; P. Steinkeller, ASJ 3 (1981) 81.

124 J. Renger, RIA IV/6–7 (1975) 442, ‘Hofstaat’, § 24; J. van Dijk, SGI II (1960) 49. For other cities see Weiershäuser, 169–176.

125 J. L. Dahl, *The ruling family of Ur III Umma* (2007) 17–19.

126 W. Sallaberger, *Annäherungen* 3 (1999) 182; T. M. Sharlach, *Studies M. Sigrist* (2008) 178 ff. Cf. M. Such-Güterriez, CRRAI 54 [Würzburg] (2012) 327–345.

127 Steinkeller, ASJ 3 (1981) 81, with n. 47.

128 Sallaberger, 182 ff.; Sharlach, 179 n. 11.

129 JCS 23 (1970) 97, on no. 5:2; JCS 46 (1994) 19. All are dated to Šulgi years 32–33.

understands *nin* to mean the status of being the queen, and *lukur* to mean the personal relationship between the king and his wife.¹³⁰ It has been thought that *lukur* referred to concubines, but that was wrong, since any wife of the king might be entitled *lukur*. A more elaborate title was ‘the *lukur* of the journey’ referring to a wife whom the king was so fond of that she was allowed to go with him on his official travels.¹³¹ The king of Ur’s travels included many ceremonial boat journeys to sanctuaries. We have already pointed out in Chapter 5 that Old Assyrian merchants took a ‘journey woman’ with them for their pleasure.

The king of Ur was identified with Dumuzi, the herdsman and lover of the goddess Inanna, who was identified with the planet Venus. When the king died, as Dumuzi he was supposed to ascend to heaven where he shone like a star, just like Venus.¹³² Geštinana was Dumuzi’s sister. They had a strong bond because she had been willing to take her brother’s place in the netherworld where he was confined for six months of every year. Waqartum, the first queen of Ur, was associated with Geštinana to whom she probably turned to pray for her family. During her life she revered a statue in the temple named Geštinana-Waqartum, and after she died at about the age of seventy the cult was continued by a younger generation.¹³³ Her husband was King Ur-Nammu who is said to have died suddenly according to the lament over the sudden death of Ur-Nammu, a text which could well have been written by her, since the tone is deeply personal and the emphasis is placed on the misfortune of a widow.¹³⁴ Another woman in the house of Ur-Nammu arrived as a result of his diplomatic marriage to the daughter of Apil-ken of Mari. She lived at court as his ‘bride’ and at that time received a new name, Taram-Uram, ‘She loves Ur’, which was clearly politically motivated.¹³⁵ She was later given in marriage to Šulgi and became the mother of Amar-Sîn. In the throne-room of Amar-Sîn libations were poured for four kings, his ancestors, the line beginning with Ur-Nammu and this king of Mari, as grandfather.¹³⁶

130 Weiershäuser, 240. The *lukur* addresses Šulgi as *mudna*; M. Civil, Or. NS 54 (1985) 41 iii 12.

131 Weiershäuser, 239; G. Leick, *Sex and eroticism in Mesopotamian literature* (1994) 147 ff.

132 P. Steinkeller, ‘How did Šulgi and Išbi-Erra ascend to heaven?’, in: *Studies P. Machinist* (2013) 459–476.

133 F. Weiershäuser, CRRAI 54 [Würzburg] (2012) 347–355. The cult had its origins in Lagash.

134 CRRAI 17 [Brussels] (1969) 86.

135 M. Civil, Or. NS 54 (1985) 41 vii; earlier see M. Civil in RA 56, 213; J.-M. Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 156.

136 J. Boese, W. Sallaberger, ‘Apil-kin von Mari und die Könige der III. Dynastie von Ur’, AOF 23 (1996) 24–39.

Šulgi was his successor, and his wife was proclaimed as *Šulgi-simti*, meaning ‘Šulgi is my jewel’, for the last years of his reign, from his 32nd to his 48th regnal year.¹³⁷ She must have died soon after him, for in the first year of Amar-Sîn, his successor, she is given ‘a place, where they pour out water’. That would mean a place where libations were made for the dead.¹³⁸ She was addressed as Queen (*nin*) and My Lady (*nin.ga*) as well as *lukur*. Šulgi-simti supported the cult of Belat-Šuḥnir and Belat-Terraban, a pair of goddesses otherwise hardly known in the cult but honoured far away from Ur, in Ešnunna, to the east of Baghdad. It seems obvious that Šulgi-simti herself originated from there and brought her goddesses with her when she left. She would have been a foreign princess whom the king married in the interests of international diplomacy.

In one particular group of texts, labelled by M. Sigrist as ‘La “Fondation” Šulgi-simti’, she figures large.¹³⁹ These texts concern the deliveries of livestock, pigs and birds, which she had authorised to be despatched to her by high officials in the kingdom, and more surprisingly by the wives of some of these officials. At least 20% of those supplying the goods were women from the royal family. The ducks and pigeons were intended for Šulgi-simti herself for her meals, but cattle were designated as sacrifices for her two deities as well as other gods, mostly female ones. This business activity seems to be like that at Puzriš-Dagan, which was the centre of a national network for distributing of goods (chiefly animal sacrifices) and had been set up by Šulgi in year 39 of his reign. That there were so many sacrifices was because the king and queen wished to honour the gods liberally, hoping in this way to secure the pleasure of the gods and to guarantee the well-being of the country. Within the cult of the important gods the concubines had no such part to play.

We see that Queen Šulgi-simti industriously played her part in the female side of this pious business. She joined in a celebration for women for the goddess Inanna, called ‘The boat of heaven’,¹⁴⁰ and she also had many other tasks within the cult, such as celebrating rituals for the moon god on the first, seventh and fifteenth days of every month, with mourning rituals at the end of every month.¹⁴¹

137 Weiershäuser, 31–105.

138 W. Sallaberger, *Der kultische Kalender der Ur III-Zeit* 1 (1993) 18 ff., 25; 42–48. P. Steinkeller, *ASJ* 3 (1981) 78 f.; S. T. Kang, *SETDA* I (1972) 263–267 (= *BIN* 3 3–5); M. Sigrist, *Drehem* (1992) 222–246. Her predecessor must have been Geme-Sîn, wife (dam) of Šulgi (P. Michalowski, *JCS* 28 [1976] 169–172).

139 Sigrist, *Drehem* (1992) 222–246; Sallaberger, *Annäherungen* 3 (1999) 253–260.

140 Weiershäuser, 66–68, 206.

141 We note that her successor, Queen, participated in a ritual on the last day of the month, not on the first day; Weiershäuser, 181; Wu Yuhong, *JAC* 27 (2012) 120–124.

Ceremonial bathing was part of this ritual. It was intended to protect the king from catastrophe during the inter-mensual moonless nights, traditionally considered to be dangerous.¹⁴²

A remarkable circumstance at the death of Šulgi has been established. When he died three of his wives, including the most prominent, Šulgi-simti, disappeared at the same time, and in the first year of his successor they received offerings for the dead. In the ‘grave of Šulgi’ at Ur excavators found seven bodies. It has been suggested that they might have been murdered, or died from an infectious disease, or it was accepted that royal women would die at the same time as their husbands.¹⁴³ The latest theory is that there must have been a bloody rebellion around the time of the death of Šulgi in which his wives and sons perished and a side branch of the royal family took over power. His successor, Amar-Sîn, an outsider, married Šulgi’s widow Abi-simti. The next two kings were sons of Šulgi whom he had fathered with his wives: Ibbi-Sîn with Šulgi-simti and Šu-Sîn with Abi-simti.¹⁴⁴ An original and radical proposal is that Šulgi-simti and Abi-simti are two names for the same wife, who was renamed after the death of Šulgi.¹⁴⁵

The relationship between the next queens and Amar-Sîn and Šu-Sîn was complicated. That affected their wives, *Abi-simti* in particular,¹⁴⁶ who was the wife of Amar-Sîn and survived him. Babati, the brother of Abi-simti, held three high positions, including that of general of Maškan-šarrum and governor of the province of Awal, both of which are places in Iran. Abi-simti called herself ‘the mother of Šu-Sîn’, so her brother Babati would have been the uncle of King Šu-Sîn.¹⁴⁷ The kingdom under Amar-Sîn and Šu-Sîn possibly owed much to this evidently powerful woman, according to the opinion of R. M. Whiting.

Because her own gods, Dagan, Išhara and Ḫaburitung, came from Syria, we assume that Abi-simti herself came from there. But that does not fit in with any link with Iran. Half of her ritual texts concern rites at the end of every month, designed to ward off the possible bad effects of the disappearance of the moon for the three unlucky inter-mensual moonless nights. This short period was the time

142 Weiershäuser in: S. Schroer, *Images and gender* (2006) 270 ff.

143 P. Michalowski, ‘The death of Šulgi’, *Or. NS* 46 (1977) 220–225; cf. *JCS* 31 (1979) 171–176 (on Geme-Ninlila); critical observations were made by W. W. Hallo, *Studies H. Tadmor* (1991) 157 ff.

144 P. Michalowski, *Studies P. Machinist* (2013) 289–320.

145 Wu Yuhong, Wang Junna, ‘The identifications of Šulgi-simti, wife of Šulgi, with Abi-simti, mother of Amar-Sin and Šu-Sin, and of Ur-Sin, the crown prince, with Amar-Sin’, *JAC* 27 (2012) 99–130.

146 Weiershäuser, 105–150.

147 R. M. Whiting, *JCS* 28 (1976) 178–182; cf. the seal inscription PDT II 1200. A later corrupt copy: C. B. F. Walker, *JCS* 35 (1983) 91–96.

when the spirits of the ancestors were venerated,¹⁴⁸ a task which could be undertaken by women (see further Chapter 29 where the woman in divine worship is discussed). Abi-simti was also the mother of Šu-Sîn, the successor to Amar-Sîn, and she conducted this ritual during his nine-year reign. When this son of hers died she also disappeared, directly gaining ‘the place where water is poured out’. So she also died at the same time. Afterwards Geme-Enlila, the wife of Ibbi-Sîn, his successor, assumed her role in the ritual.¹⁴⁹ It is important to remember that two powerful queens evidently disappeared at the same time as their kings, Šulgi-simti at the death of Šulgi, and Abi-simti at the death of her son Šu-Sîn.¹⁵⁰

The wife of Šu-Sîn, *Kubatum*, has become a well-documented figure in scholarly research.¹⁵¹ On an agate stone set in a chain was an inscription dedicating it to her and describing her as ‘the beloved wife of Šu-Sîn’.¹⁵² Elsewhere she is called *nin* ‘the queen’. During her lifetime offerings were made to her statue.¹⁵³ Unusually, we even have a Sumerian song alluding to the birth of a child to Šu-Sîn, which may possibly have been composed by one of his wives. It begins like this:

She is clear, she has given birth! She is clear, she has given birth!
The queen is clear, she has given birth! Abi-simti is clear, she has given birth!
The queen is clear, she has given birth!
My clothbeam which, as it aspired to,
made a good job of the cloth, my Abi-simti,
And my warpbeam which, as it aspired to,
got warp on, my queen Kubatum.¹⁵⁴

From the text of the song it is not clear who is actually speaking, the king or a woman of the palace. Perhaps in the first lines it is Abi-simti who announces the birth of the child of the king and Kubatum. Some parts are composed in *eme.sal*, women’s language. What it possibly means to say is that Abi-simti had indeed given birth to Šu-Sîn earlier, and now Kubatum presented him with a child.

148 Weiershäuser, 120–125.

149 Sallaberger, ‘Abi-simti und Geme-Enlila: Schwarzmontag’, *Der kultische Kalender der Ur-III-Zeit* 1 (1993) 60–63.

150 Whiting, 182; Sallaberger, 61.

151 Weiershäuser, 153–164.

152 E. A. Braun-Holzinger, *Mesopotamische Weihgaben*, 368, P (= Perle) 17; H. Steible, *Die neu-sumerischen Bau- und Weihinschriften* 2 (1991) 273 no. 23.

153 Steinkeller, *ASJ* 3 (1981) 80.

154 See Y. Sefati, *Love songs in Sumerian literature* (1998) 344–352 (‘The ideal lover’); cf. Th. Jacobsen in: *Essays M. H. Pope* (1987) 57–60; idem, *The harps that once* (1987) 95–96 (‘The First Child’); B. Alster, *RA* 79 (1985) 138–142; and the interpretation of G. Leick, *Sex and eroticism* (1994) 113–116. The most recent interpretation was given by M. Widell, *JNES* 70 (2011) 289–302.

The verses about the loom and the weaver's beams with the warp and weft are unclear, but perhaps refer metaphorically to weaving together the developing child. A similar metaphor is found in Psalm 139:15, where the poet claims to have been 'embroidered' in his mother's womb. What then follows in the song is somewhat clearer. The young mother says she is happy with the golden pin, the seal made of lapis lazuli, and the rings which she had received from 'the lord, my Šu-Sîn' and she speaks enthusiastically about him and his attractiveness in the last lines of the song:

My Šu-Sîn, who made me happy, my Šu-Sîn, beloved of the god Enlil, my king, the god of his country.

We know of a woman named Kubatum who was the 'nanny of the king', and scholars have concluded that she is the same young mother in this song. They have reconstructed a fine career for her, progressing from a children's maid to the queen.¹⁵⁵

The wife of Ibbi-Sîn was called *Geme-Enlila*. Someone with the same name, the *lukur* of Ninurta, was called the daughter of Šu-Sîn and Kubatum. If, as has been assumed, both names refer to the same person, it would mean that Ibbi-Sîn was married to his sister. A better solution is to assume that two different women had the same name.¹⁵⁶

In some religious festivals the wives of kings or governors took a leading role.¹⁵⁷ Inasmuch as queens and concubines could own landed estates, manage weaving centres, and have their own private staff, they could become so important that men viewed them as their 'brother'.¹⁵⁸

A king had several wives,¹⁵⁹ as many as six according to one text.¹⁶⁰ On a stone of red agate belonging to Ea-niša she identifies herself as the *lukur* of King Šulgi. Seals and other inscriptions also describe her as the 'lukur-of-the-journey'

155 Weiershäuser, 154 ff. Earlier see M. Sigrist, RA 80 (1986) 185. B. R. Foster, SEL 2 (1985) 37–42, could not have known that the ladies Rabbatum and Kubatum (in his lines 4–5) were probably wet-nurses. Date: Šu-Sîn 4. Note that the translations of Sigrist and Weiershäuser, with their 'nourrice' and 'Amme', are wrong; this woman does not breast-feed. UM+ME(.ga.lá) = 'wet-nurse', UM.ME.da (emeda) = 'nurse'.

156 Michalowski, ASJ 4 (1982) 136 ff.; W. Sallaberger, ZA 82 (1992) 134, on PDT II 1056; Weiershäuser, 165.

157 W. Sallaberger, *Annäherungen* 3 (1999) 185.

158 Weiershäuser, 103, 148 (textiles), 208 (staff), 209 ('brother').

159 Weiershäuser, 'Nebenfrauen', 201–240. For the scheme king – queen – *lukur* see p. 201; also Sallaberger, *Annäherungen* 3, 183.

160 Michalowski, ASJ 4, 133–136; M. van de Mieroop, Or. NS 50 (1986) 148.

of Šulgi, and on one seal she is depicted as paying homage to Šulgi,¹⁶¹ with an inscription saying she was given it by the king:

Šulgi, the strong man, king of Ur, king of the four corners of the world, gave (this) to Ea-niša, his *lukur*-of-the-journey.

A necklace found during the excavations in Uruk, had 22 stones of cornelian and 13 of agate strung on a silver wire and set in gold (Figure 39). On one of the agate stones was an inscription showing that a wife of Šu-Sîn had owned the necklace:¹⁶²

Tiamat-bašti, the beloved *lukur* of Šu-Sîn, the king of Ur.

She came from far-off Nineveh, with her own goddess Šawuška, and therefore her marriage had also fostered a political alliance. Beside it lay another necklace strung on golden wire, with a stone inscribed with the name of Queen Kubatum, ‘the beloved *lukur* of Šu-Sîn’.¹⁶³

A stone in the shape of an eye, made of agate, dates to the time of the last king of Ur. On it is a dedication to the goddess Bau on behalf of the king by the wife of a provincial ruler:

To Bau, her mistress, for the life of Ibbi-Sîn, Aman-ili, the wife of Ir-Nanna, the governor of Lagash, has dedicated (this).

Bau was the goddess of the city of Lagash.¹⁶⁴

161 For the agate stone see A. Pohl, *Or. NS 16 (1947) 464 ff.*, Plate XXXIII. For seals see P. Steinkeller, *RA 73 (1979) 190*, with J.-P. Grégoire, 190 f.; R. H. Mayr, D. I. Owen, *Festschrift G. Pettinato (2004) 149 no. 1, 152 ff.*, 167; for lit. see Weiershäuser, 207 n. 901. For a copy of an inscription see M. Civil, *Or. NS 54 (1985) 41 iii 7–9*; see further Weiershäuser, 206–211.

162 J. Boese in: W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient (1974) plate 123, b*, with p. 212 ff.; *Mesopotamische Weihgaben (1991) 368 P 16*; Steible, *Die neusumerischen Bau- und Weihinschriften 2 (1991) 272 no. 22*. Studied by C. Wilcke, *Drevnij Vostok 3 (Jerevan 1988) 21–26, 225–227*; NABU 1990/36; Weierhäuser, 226–228. For the inscriptions see A. Cavigneaux, *Uruk (1996) 209 nos. 315–317*.

163 *Mesopotamische Weihgaben (1991) 368 P 17*. Both necklaces P 16 and 17 are extensively covered by K. Limper, *Uruk. Perlen. Ketten. Anhänger. Grabungen 1912–1985 (= AUWE 2) (1988) nos. 140 (Kubatum), 141 (Tiamat-bašti)*.

164 W. G. Lambert, *Iraq 41 (1979) 44* with plate XIV, bottom right.



Fig. 39: Necklace of Queen Tiamat-bašti with an inscription: 'Tiamat-bašti, beloved consort (*lukur*) of Šu-Sîn, the king of Ur'. Thirteen pearls of agate are mounted in gold, and twenty-two of cornelian are strung on a silver thread. This necklace was found intertwined with that of Queen Kubatum. 2000 BC. Maximum length 4.1 cm. *Iraq Museum, Baghdad.*

23.5.1 Princesses from Ur

The birth of a child (a son?) was greeted at court with presents and offerings.¹⁶⁵ A particularly informative text from the time of King Amar-Sîn (year 4) lists twelve princesses, undoubtedly including some who would have been daughters of his predecessor Šulgi. Some are referred to as ‘the wife’ of a prominent official. Their names are followed by the names Kinat-Nunu and Kubatum, two royal nannies,¹⁶⁶ a court position which is often mentioned. These women all had Akkadian names. Often we find an ayah of a named princess, and sometimes of ‘the king’. Rabbatum progressed from being the wet-nurse of Simat-Ištaran to her ayah, one year later.¹⁶⁷

Princesses were to be married off to foreign monarchs, generals and high priests or officials.¹⁶⁸ King Šu-Sîn married off his daughter (‘he gave her as a bride’) to someone in the land of Simanum. He then relates how these regions revolted and ‘drove his daughter away from her residence (*é.ki.tuš*)’. In the war that followed he subjected Simanum, Ḫabura and their territories and had his daughter return to her residence.¹⁶⁹ The year name for his third year commemorated this campaign. His daughter was given the domineering name, Kunši-matum, ‘Submit, O land!’, a name also given later to a princess in Mari. A later king of Isin married off his daughter to Anšan (Persia) and she had a name with similar political overtones, Matum-niattum, ‘The land is ours’.¹⁷⁰ Administrative texts dated to year 1 of Šu-Sîn name this Princess Kunši-matum as the ‘bride’ of Arib-atal, the ‘man’ of the land of Simanum. But she had gone there years earlier with his father Pušam and had evidently been living as ‘the bride’ before Arib-atal was the monarch. She lived there with this title for twelve years, and is last mentioned in year 2 of Šu-Sîn. Princess Tabur-ḫattum, ‘May the sceptre endure’, was ‘the bride’ of Ur-Iškur, the ruler of Ḫamazi for at least seven years.¹⁷¹ So a princess who was married off retained this title of ‘bride’, as we saw earlier with the bride

¹⁶⁵ Sallaberger, *Annäherungen* 3, 185.

¹⁶⁶ CTMMA I 17 ii 5–55 with M. Sigrist, RA 80 (1986) 185; H. Neumann, JNES 53 (1994) 62.

¹⁶⁷ Steinkeller, ASJ 3 (1981) 90; M. Sigrist, *Drehem* (1992) 361: the nurse of the king; see also P. J. Watson, *Birmingham* I no. 77:2. On ME (Simat)-Ištaran, see Sallaberger, 59 ff.

¹⁶⁸ P. Michalowski in: M. Gibson, R. D. Biggs, *The organization of power* (1987) 58 ff.; W. Sallaberger, *Annäherungen* 3, 159–161, ‘Heiratspolitik zur Ur III-Zeit’; Weiershäuser, ‘Politische Ehen’, 260–266.

¹⁶⁹ M. Civil, JCS 21 (1967) 29–31; Wilcke, NABU 1990/33.

¹⁷⁰ F. Vallat, NABU 1996/87.

¹⁷¹ Weiershäuser, 263 ff.; P. Michalowski, ‘The Bride of Simanum’, JAOS 95 (1975) 716–719. For the situation in Simanum, see J. Klein, ZA 80 (1990) 22.

of Ur-Nammu. In the Old Babylonian period a seal of a princess married off in this fashion would describe her as ‘the bride’.¹⁷² Princesses were married off to foreign monarchs. But in the Ur III period many married high officials, such as chancellors and generals in the provinces, a subject we will not elaborate on here.¹⁷³

Princess Šat-Sîn, a daughter of Šulgi, owned estates. In the time of Šu-Sîn we find her in Kakkulatam, but her land was in the province of Girsu, far away from that city. At this time she appears to have taken a new name, Šat-Šu-Sîn, ‘the one belonging to Šu-Sîn’.¹⁷⁴ Another woman in Šulgi’s court, Ninkala, also owned land, and on one occasion had the title *nin* ‘queen’.¹⁷⁵ A town near Sippar in the Old Babylonian period is called ‘House of the Daughter of Šulgi’, suggesting that an estate here had belonged to a princess.¹⁷⁶ Princess Simat-Ištaran from Garšana had estates in or near three major Sumerian cities and a village was named after her. She was married to a general.¹⁷⁷ Some princesses are known only by their names, names without a face or biography.¹⁷⁸

What life was like for women at court we do not know. The musicians and singers produced songs for celebrations, at the dedication of a statue or at the appearance of the new moon. Their names are often Akkadian, such as the singer Šî-šarrat, ‘She is the queen’, referring to the goddess Šara. We read this name in a document which can be taken to be her death certificate, for such documents did then exist.¹⁷⁹

23.6 The Old Babylonian period

We know little of the harems of the major empires in the Old Babylonian period, Larsa, Isin, and Babylon (2000–1500 BC).¹⁸⁰ We have the cylinder seal of a wife of King Rim-Sîn with the simple inscription: ‘Beltani, daughter of Ḫabannum, wife

172 OECT 13 nos. 7 and 12; Šat-Sîn, the daughter of Sumu-El, king of Larsa, married to Ibni-šadû.

173 Weiershäuser, ‘Der innenpolitische Bereich’, 264–266; P. Michalowski in: *The organization of power* (1987) 58 ff. For a prince who marries into the family of a temple official see R. Kutscher, *Tel Aviv* 11 (1984) 184.

174 Kutscher, 183–187; K. Maekawa, *ASJ* 14 (1992) 200 ff.; Michalowski in: *The organization of power*, 59 n. 18; it is not discussed by Weiershäuser.

175 Weiershäuser, 211–226; K. Maekawa, *ASJ* 9 (1987) 102 ff.; 104–109.

176 *RGTC* 3 (1980) 66.

177 M. Such-Gutiérrez, *RIA* XII/7–8 (2011) 505.

178 R. Pruzsinszki, *WZKM* 97 (2007) 342–349, ‘Die Sängerinnen des Königs’.

179 R. Pruzsinszki, *WZKM* 97 (2007) 342–349, ‘Die Sängerinnen des Königs’.

180 Life at the Old Babylonian court: D. Charpin in *Mesopotamien. Die altbabylonische Zeit* (= *OBO* 160/4) (2004) 248–258.

of Rim-Sîn, the king of Larsa'. On the seal he is depicted in the usual devout pose of a king in the presence of his guardian goddess.¹⁸¹ The laws of Hammurabi refer to the *sekretu* (written *zikrum*), a harem woman, in connection with the eunuch, both of whom were allowed to adopt a son (§ 192–193). In another text a *sekretu* is associated with 'the house of the eldest son', probably the crown prince.¹⁸² In two Sumerian tales the king seeks the advice of a *sekretu* who clearly lives at the court.¹⁸³ Elsewhere she is mentioned among palace personnel as 'the woman providing shadow' for the king,¹⁸⁴ An omen prediction links the word *sekretu* with an unusual term *sikru*. Since both words are cognate with the verb *sekēru*, 'to enclose', here *sikru* must have been the harem, the place where the women were enclosed:

Nanaya will let the *sekretu*, the darling of the king, go outside from the *sikru*.

In a variant it is the king who ousts the *sekretu* from the *sikru*.¹⁸⁵ Omens predicted unexpected situations, and here we see the lascivious goddess Nanaya sending the most striking of these ladies out on the street. In Neo-Assyrian inscriptions she was named after the queen, sometimes again with the formal designation 'the darling of the king'.¹⁸⁶ By definition 'the darling of the king' is the lady in the palace who was his favourite concubine. She may have been a lady of means because one omen prediction says 'a *sekretu* will die and her heritage will devolve on the palace'.¹⁸⁷ Generally, a *sekretu* was any woman confined to the harem.¹⁸⁸ In the court of Mari she had a low status within the personnel. She can hardly have been more than a servant.¹⁸⁹

There were foreign princesses in the harem as a consequence of political marriages.¹⁹⁰ A daughter of Hammurabi was married off to the king of Ešnunna,

181 Photo: E. Klengel-Brandt, *Mit sieben Siegeln versehen* (1997) 74 Abb. 64. Inscription: RIME 4 (1990) 301 ff.

182 CUSAS 29 no. 139; cf. M. Gallery, *Afo* 27 (1980) 11 n. 53.

183 In 'The Old Man and the Girl' (mentioned in the discussion of impotence in Chapter 4) and 'The three ox-drivers from Adab'; A. Gadotti in: M. W. Chavalas, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (2014) 65–68.

184 Sumerian SAL an-dùl; *Mélanges H. Limet* (1996) 118 ii 11, with p. 125 (= *sekretu*).

185 YOS 10 46 iv 49 f.; variant in JCS 63 (2011) 73:1. Cf. CAD N/1 342b.

186 A. Fadhil, *Baghd. Mitt.* 21 (1990) 461:6, with p. 467. A combination frequent in astrological omens.

187 YOS 10 26 iii 31 (variant *sekertu*), CUSAS 18 (2013) 160:12b, with p. 165a.

188 S. Parpola, *Studies F. M. Fales* (2012) 614 f.

189 N. Ziegler, *Le Harem* (1999) 83–86.

190 B. Lafont, *Amurru* 2 (2001) 312–315, 'Les alliances matrimoniales', with surveys and discussion.

but a few years later Hammurabi conquered that region and flooded the city. We know more about the two opposing northern powers, Assyria (which then had its capital at Ekallatum) and Mari. First we note that there were marriages between equals in this power struggle, on the one axis between Ekallatum and Qatna (in the West, Syria), and on the other between Mari and Aleppo. Then there were often marriages between unequal partners, as when King Zimri-Lim of Mari married his daughters and sisters off to various kings of territories in the north, to keep whatever power they exerted under his own control. But he did not arrange marriages with the superpowers in the south, such as Babylonia, even though Hammurabi was his ally. This was possibly because the Babylonians belonged to a different group of tribes, the Benjaminites, Sons of the South, whereas Zimri-Lim was a Son of the North.¹⁹¹

A letter from Šušarra includes some apprehensive concerns that the Assyrian king Samsi-Addu was once able to include a clause in a state treaty saying that he would give their whole land to a foreign princess as a bride-price. He had written to the father of the princess:

I want to make a golden statue of you and of me, where the one is holding the neck of the other tightly. I want to give you my daughter and as the bride-price for my daughter (*šarrākūtu*) I want to give you the land of Šušarra.¹⁹²

It is interesting that a statue seals this pact. Possibly such a statue was found in Ebla. A later historical-literary text tells us that an evil king of Babylon offered his harem women to two foreign lands as a gift.¹⁹³

23.6.1 Mari

The Old Babylonian kingdom of Mari, between 1800 and 1760 BC, needs to be discussed separately, for from there we have so much information on the harem, dating from the last twenty years of independence before Hammurabi conquered

¹⁹¹ D. Charpin, J.-M. Durand, RA 80 (1986) 171 ff.; Lafont, 314.

¹⁹² J. Eidem, *The Shemshara archives*. 1. *The letters* (2001) no. 71 (= SH. 891), with B. Lafont, Amurru 2 (2001) 313 n. 415. Here the special word for 'dowry' (*šarrākūtu*) which is used elsewhere to describe female slaves as part of the dowry; M. Stol, *Studies A. Skaist* (2012) 163.

¹⁹³ RIMB 2 (1995) 121 iii 44: 'He adorns his harem lady (SAL.ŠĀ.Ē.GAL-šu) and gives (her) as a present (*ana šalmanūti*) to the land Ḫatti (= Syria) and Elam.' Cf. S. W. Cole, ZA 84 (1994) 220–252.

the city.¹⁹⁴ During the excavations of the palace an area called by the excavators ‘La Seconde Maison’, was the harem.¹⁹⁵ It was in an isolated corner, which possibly explains why it was called *tubqu* ‘the corner’, although more formally it was referred to as ‘The house of the women’. It had its own entrance door, which was guarded by females inside and by males outside. These functionaries are named in ration lists. The meaning of the names of the men include ‘Let there be order’, ‘Keep the word of the king’, ‘Support them more than the gods’, where ‘them’ refers to the women in the harem.¹⁹⁶ A letter gives instructions for assigning rooms to men and women. The king’s women are referred to generally as ‘the slave-girls of my lord’ and they had rooms deep inside the palace, an area known as ‘guarded’ or ‘secret’. Such a designation makes it explicit that the harem was a closed area, corresponding semantically to the Arabic term *ḥarīm*.¹⁹⁷

Those living there were provided with regular allowances of sesame oil, and on occasions also wool. For some reason barley is not mentioned, though this was certainly distributed in other harems. The women at Mari may simply have been issued with prepared food directly from the kitchens.¹⁹⁸ Ration lists in the archives of the harem of Ašnakku record only beer, showing how one-sided the available documentation can be.¹⁹⁹ The order in which the names are listed and the quantity of oil allowed indicate the relative positions of the women in the harem. We have lists from the harems of three successive kings. The list of King Yaḥdun-Lim is short but includes the names of the women’s fathers, probably kings or sheikhs.²⁰⁰ One of the royal daughters would later marry a high official, the diviner Asqudum. We see a similar marriage between a diviner and a princess in the town of Karanâ, also from this period.²⁰¹ There are 22 lists from the time of Yasmaḥ-Addu, the Assyrian viceroy, from which we can see how in the course of time the order of precedence among the women changed. From the time of King Zimri-Lim we have a long list of allocations of oil and wool.²⁰² These last two

194 For the harems of all the kings of Mari see J.-M. Durand, ‘Les dames du Palais de Mari à l’époque du royaume de Haute-Mésopotamie’, *MARI* 4 (1985) 385–436. Zimri-Lim: N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimrî-Lîm* (= *Florilegium Marianum* IV) (1999). For a popular survey see B. Lafont in: J. Bottéro, *Initiation à l’Orient ancien* (1992) 170–183.

195 Durand in: E. Levy, *Le système palatial* (1987) 80–89; Durand, Margueron, *Journal des Savants* 1980, 253–280.

196 Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 16, 110–116.

197 Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum* IX (2007) 32–35 no. 3 with note (8).

198 Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 25–27. The other harems are those of Ebla and Arrapha.

199 A. Millet Albà in: *Chagar Bazar (Syrie)* III (2008) 44–61, 238–279, ‘Le harem de Sin-iqīšam’.

200 Durand, 431.

201 D. Charpin in: G. D. Young, *Mari in retrospect* (1992) 62; cf. *MARI* 4 (1985) 456.

202 Edited by N. Ziegler, *Le Harem* (1999).

kings, viceroy Yasmaḥ-Addu and Zimri-Lim, were enemies, but it is striking that their lists are very similar in structure and have the same names in them.²⁰³ We now know that all three kings simply took over the harems of their predecessor. This happened also in the conquered city of Ašlakkâ, where Zimri-Lim discovered three harems previously conquered by its king.²⁰⁴ To take possession of the harem was an important symbol of having seized power over a city, as is shown in the Old Testament when rebellious Absalom was given such advice, which he immediately followed:

Absalom said to Ahitophel, ‘Give us your advice: how shall we act?’ Ahitophel answered, ‘Lie with your father’s concubines whom he left in charge of the palace. Then all Israel will come to hear that you have given great cause of offence to your father, and this will confirm the resolution of your followers.’ So they set up a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he lay with his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel (2 Samuel 16:20–23; REB).

We can follow in texts from Mari how the conquered harem with its personnel was integrated. The names of a few women listed can be linked to letters saying what happened to them.²⁰⁵ The women from the conquered harem were kept together as a group,²⁰⁶ but captured priestesses were treated more carefully.²⁰⁷ The career of Dam-ḥuraši was typical. She was a princess from Qatna, to the west near Damascus, and the daughter of King Amud-pi-El. His name has been equated with that of ‘Amraphel, king of Shinar’, one of the kings in conflict with Abraham (see Genesis 14:1). She became the wife of the Assyrian Yasmaḥ-Addu and at court was referred to as *Bēltum* ‘the Mistress’. Zimri-Lim drove Yasmaḥ-Addu from Mari and took over Dam-ḥuraši as his first wife, thus maintaining a good diplomatic relationship with Qatna. As king you had to think of everything. He also married Šibtum, the daughter of the king of Aleppo to the north, who was similarly referred to as Beltum. By her energy she became increasingly important and gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl.²⁰⁸

If we examine the lists of the names under Yasmaḥ-Addu and Zimri-Lim more closely, we see that both begin with deities whose statues were evidently in the

203 For a survey see Ziegler, 33–38.

204 Durand, 389. This custom, with new data, was discussed by N. Ziegler, ‘Le harem du vaincu’, RA 93 (1999) 1–26. See also Durand, CRRAI 38 [Paris] (1992) 109. Ašlakkâ: B. Lion, Amurru 3 (2004) 218.

205 P. Marelli, ‘Esclaves et reines’, Florilegium Marianum II (1994) 115–129.

206 Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 36–38.

207 Durand, LAPO 18 (2000) 347 ff.

208 Durand, LAPO 18, 264 ff., 295–299. He now identifies the *bēltum* from Qatna with Dam-ḥuraši. Cf. Ziegler, RA 93 (1999) 8 ff.

harem and were worshipped there. For Zimri-Lim there are two female deities, and for Yasmaḥ-Addu first of all the god Dagan and then four goddesses. Only after this are the women listed. We note here that women who had come from abroad, and now had become queens in Mari, could bring their own gods with them and honour them. In the Hebrew Bible Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, did the same, bringing with her her Baal idols.²⁰⁹ This was the reason that a king from the North wrote to Zimri-Lim,

You have given a bride to this house and now I have installed your gods.²¹⁰

23.6.2 The harem of Yasmaḥ-Addu

Among the leading women of the Assyrian viceroy Yasmaḥ-Addu was a group of three, which included the queen. The first woman was *Kunši-matum*, a priestess. She was not always mentioned in the lists, for she lived away in the city of Terqa, where she would pray in the temple of Dagan for the welfare of the family. This she did as the daughter of King Samsi-Addu and the sister of Yasmaḥ-Addu, fulfilling a religious obligation placed on certain royal daughters. It is noteworthy that after his conquest of Mari Zimri-Lim retained her as a priestess.²¹¹ The second wife, the queen, was referred to as *Bēltum*, which was not her personal name but her title, literally ‘Mistress’. This was the usual designation for a queen in the Old Babylonian period, and the Sumerian word *nin*, ‘queen’, could also mean ‘mistress’.²¹² This *Dam-ḥuraši*, queen of Yasmaḥ-Addu, was certainly foreign, a princess from far-off Qatna. From a number of letters we can trace how this marriage was arranged by the respective fathers of the bride and the groom. Other texts document how the bride made the long journey, travelling through the northern regions to reach Mari.²¹³ The third woman in the group was *Ama-duga*, a Sumerian name meaning ‘Good mother’. She was the wife of King Samsu-Addu of Assyria and the mother of Yasmaḥ-Addu. She came to Mari with two other women to live with her son as queen mother, and she continued to live there as the head of the household after Zimri-Lim took control.²¹⁴ From her seal impressions we learn

²⁰⁹ Ziegler, 6 ff.; *Le Harem*, 40 ff.

²¹⁰ ARM 28 27:4–9 with p. 35 (on Šibtum).

²¹¹ Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 389 ff., 396–398.

²¹² Durand, 402. *Dam-ḥuraši* and Šibtum were also called Beltum at the time of Zimri-Lim.

²¹³ Durand, 398–407; also in MARI 6 (1990) 276–295; N. Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IX* (2007) 149–151.

²¹⁴ Durand, 395, 408–412; Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 98 ff.

that one of her titles was ‘the slave-girl of Samsi-Addu’, and another ‘the slave-girl of Zimri-Lim’, the conqueror who had kept her on in service.²¹⁵

A second group of three women may have been concubines, according to J.-M. Durand, for the real wife, the queen, was Beltum. All three were probably from noble families and were transferred from the harem of the earlier king, Yaḥ-dun-Lim.²¹⁶ The first of these was Izamu, who dedicated a statue to Ištar. In the inscription she identifies herself as ‘the musician, who embellishes the prayer of her lord Yasmaḥ-Addu’. These words may mean that she ‘embellishes’ the prayer with music or singing. As the wife of Yasmaḥ-Addu she led a choir, and continued to do so in the harem of Zimri-Lim.²¹⁷ The list does not indicate the positions each woman held. All we have are their names preceded by the amount of oil they were allowed. Nevertheless, the identification of the women is reasonably certain, and in the harem texts of Zimri-Lim the function of each group is indicated.

The most important woman at court may well have been *Adad-duri*, most probably the queen mother, the mother of Zimri-Lim.²¹⁸ After her death Queen *Šibtum* assumed that position. She is named in letters and in administrative texts, from which we learn that her duties extended to arranging for deliveries of oil for the lamps in her house. She employed a large staff, and from her estates she granted loans of great quantities of barley for food. Because some of these loans had not been paid back when she died they were passed over to Princess Inibšina, who herself had many similar claims. Debtors who still had debts to repay included a merchant and two goldsmiths, important members of society, and also cities in the countryside. After some years the palace took action and sent in the bailiff to recover the debts.²¹⁹ Princesses seem not to have owned property in their own right. What property there was consisted of agricultural land (from various provinces), gardens, livestock, domestic goods, barley and personnel.²²⁰

Adad-duri was responsible for the production of costly crockery for the temples. A receipt for oil for the ‘offering for the dead of the kings’ is authenticated with her seal,²²¹ and she herself brought offerings. She also reported to the king prophetic dreams she had had and told him about the visions other people

215 D. Charpin in: G. D. Young, *Mari in retrospect* (1992) 64 ff., 67.

216 Durand, 412 ff.; cf. 393.

217 Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 76–78. ‘Embellishing (*mudammīqatu*) the prayer’ occurs in MARI 3 (1984) 56 no. 7:5. See Chapter 29, note 28.

218 Ziegler, 50 ff.; J.-M. Durand, LAPO 18, 273–295.

219 D. Charpin, CRRAI 51 [Chicago] (2008) 3–16.

220 For surveys see F. van Koppen, *Florilegium Marianum VI* (2002) 324–327.

221 *Florilegium Marianum III* (1997) 207, 220 no. 30.

had had (see Chapter 28). That she followed political developments with care and concern can be seen from this cautious warning she gave to the king:

Previously my lord spoke to me like this: 'I always set out in accordance with omens favourable to me'. Must my lord now again set out in accordance with omens favourable to him? Let my lord not fail to take care of himself.²²²

She is worried about her son the king setting out on a military campaign relying on the good omens. She wanted him nevertheless to be cautious. His confidence in her ability to get things done is shown in a letter asking her to get some new stables built.

To Adad-duri: thus says your lord. I hear more and more about the white horses of Qatna: these horses are good! Have a stable built on the day that you peruse this letter, in the yard of the Coloured House, near the gate (...), so that there is shade to shelter from the heat of the day (?). Have them cut (reeds) so that the horses can lie on it and feed them with barley.²²³

At this time horses from the high north, used chiefly for the speedy transmission of messages, were still a curiosity. White horses provoked considerable interest and a central part of the palace was rebuilt to house them.

23.6.3 The harem of Zimri-Lim

Living in the harem of Zimri-Lim were the women of the royal family and their young children, singing girls, domestic staff, and the male and female guards. In the list of women who had sworn allegiance are nine princesses, eight wives of the king, singing girls, domestic staff, sentinels and other personnel.²²⁴ After the names of the two goddesses we find those of three ladies from the house of Zimri-Lim, Inibšina, Adad-duri and Dam-ḥuraši. Adad-duri was the mother of the king but, since she no longer appears in the later, larger list, she may have left to live on her own.²²⁵ Dam-ḥuraši was the wife of Zimri-Lim. Then come the names of eight daughters and five wives, followed by those of the singing girls.²²⁶

²²² ARM 10 54:8–18 with LAPO 18 (2000) 280 no. 1097.

²²³ ARM 10 147 with LAPO 18, 290 ff. no. 1110; for the location see D. Charpin, *Hammurabi de Babylone* (2003) 146 ff.

²²⁴ N. Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 8, 19 (no. 31).

²²⁵ Thus Durand in E. Levy, *Le système palatial* (1987) 87. For her death, see note 218. For the wives of Zimri-Lim, see Ziegler, 44 ff., 52–59.

²²⁶ Ziegler, 125 ff. no. 1; earlier T. 313, with Durand, 409.

A later text is fuller, listing the function of the women after each group of names.²²⁷ It begins similarly with two goddesses followed by Inibšina, here called ‘the priestess of Adad’. Like Kunši-matum in the harem of Yasmaḥ-Addu, the first woman is again a priestess. There then follow the names of eight ‘daughters of the king’, the princesses. These princesses must have been adults. Three come from the harem of Yasmaḥ-Addu. It is interesting to note what was ahead for these princesses, for they were mostly married off to petty kings in the land of Ida-maraš to the north.²²⁸ This is a subject which will be more fully discussed later. This list continues with six names with no further description, but in fact we know that they were all royal wives.²²⁹ We have a seal impression of one of them, Yataraya, where she calls herself the ‘slave-girl of Zimri-Lim’, but does not give the name of her father. This short identification contrasts with the fuller titles on the seal of Queen Šibtum, ‘Šibtum, daughter of Yarim-Lim, wife of Zimri-Lim’. This shows her to be a higher-ranking ‘spouse’, leaving the epithet ‘the slave-girl’ for a lower wife.²³⁰ Some ‘slave-girls of the king’ were high-ranking concubines, entitled to receive a sheep from the food offerings as food. The musician Izamu held this title.²³¹

After these we find the names of ‘greater’ and ‘lesser’ *musicians*. The word *nāru*, ‘musician’, can mean an instrumentalist (as it did at Mari) or a singer.²³² At one time there were 600 women in the harem, each named, recipients of oil, with about 200 of them musicians. They had the status of slaves.²³³ In the ‘house for lyre players’ there were 36 women. Only women played the lyre.²³⁴ The women belonging to the harem of Yasmaḥ-Addu were chiefly musicians. He enjoyed music and his music teacher called himself his ‘friend’.²³⁵ The lists of women were frequently followed by ‘female teachers’ (*mušaḥizātu*), who probably gave music lessons. A music teacher also had the job of selecting women

227 Ziegler no. 3; earlier M. Birot, RA 50 (1956) 57–72 (‘TEM IV’); cf. Durand, MARI 4, 390.

228 B. Lafont, ‘Les filles du roi de Mari’, in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 113–123; B. F. Batto, *Studies on women at Mari* (1994) 37 ff.

229 Durand indicates that they were occasionally qualified as *kallatu*; MARI 4 (1985) 156 n. 45; MARI 6 (1990) 291 n. 52; Ziegler, 45 ff.

230 Charpin in G. D. Young, *Mari in retrospect* (1992) 73. On Yataraya: Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 56 ff.; Durand, LAPO 18, 356.

231 ARMT 23 251:4, 302:2, with p. 248 ff.; MARI 4 (1985) 412 n. 172 (Izamu).

232 Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IX* (2007) 17. Cf. Chapter 18, ‘Musicians’.

233 Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 173 ff. no. 13; N. Ziegler in: *La musique au Proche-Orient ancien* (= *Dossiers Archéologie* 310, février 2006) 33 ff.

234 Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 94–96; *Florilegium Marianum IX* (2007) 49, 79.

235 Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 125 ff. nos. 1–2, etc.; Durand, MARI 4, 390.

for the harem.²³⁶ Some of them were blind.²³⁷ It seems from a letter that people deliberately ‘made the eyes go to sleep’ for them to perform. There is more on this subject in chapter 18 on women and work. Occasionally clothing was given to female musicians.²³⁸ Captured women could become musicians or weavers, and the queen, Beltum, sometimes selected them.²³⁹ We have two letters concerning such selection. In one Zimri-Lim instructs Queen Šibtum to examine the women from top to toe, to ensure that there is not a single blemish on anyone selected, before passing them on to the music teacher.

Choose thirty weavers from them, good ones, who have no blemishes (?) from their nails to the hair of their heads, and entrust them to Warad-ilišu. Warad-ilišu must teach them to become a Subarean music group. Furthermore their location must be changed. Watch how they are fed so that their features do not change!²⁴⁰

First and foremost then these musicians had to look beautiful and not necessarily to have a good singing voice. This is confirmed in letters from Warad-ilišu, their director, who reported to the king thus:²⁴¹

As for the musicians, about whom my lord wrote to me, their work is not being neglected. Constantly, from dawn till the time of the evening meal they carry out their work in my presence. For every woman [...] one instructor.
Among them are beautiful young girls and also first-class musicians.

Captured musicians would be brought to the palace by boat.²⁴²

Let my lord bring a boat to that place and assign a trusted eunuch to lead them here. If this does not work, then I have seen in the house of Išar-Lim a ... and that is secured as a workplace. Let them stay there. Moreover there are instructors in the area and there are also small lyres for them.

Our director took a pride in his work and disliked it if one of his pupils was hauled out of the class by the king.²⁴³

236 Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IX* (2007) 207.

237 Ziegler, 21, ‘Musiciens aveugles et voyants’. For example p.109 no.17:10, 21 (16 girls and 2 blind girls).

238 Ziegler, *Le Harem*, nos. 22–24 (p. 193–195).

239 N. Ziegler, RA 93 (1999) 19; Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IX* (2007) 42 ff., ‘Les musiciennes comme butin de guerre’.

240 ARM 10 126:11–21; cf. no. 125; Ziegler, *Florilegium Marianum IX*, 169.

241 *Florilegium Marianum IX*, 183 nos. 39, 42, with p. 168 ff.

242 No. 38.

243 No. 41.

‘[Of the musicians who] are learning to play the small lyre, there are three whom my lord has promised to (the king of) Hazor. If they recruit [these] from those girls, then the ensemble shall be broken up’.

Ensembles (*šitru*) could consist of anything from seven to thirty musicians.²⁴⁴ Those from Mari must have been especially talented, for a friendly king sent 30 shekels of silver to Zimri-Lim to have one sent to him:

‘Let my father provide me with a beautiful, competent singing girl, whom I can keep with me.’

Since the going price for a slave-girl was just 15 shekels, he was willing to pay twice as much for a good musician.²⁴⁵ Listed in the harem of the ruler of an Assyrian city were, in addition to family members, two groups of female musicians, 10 accomplished singers and 23 ordinary ones.²⁴⁶

The lower-ranking personnel worked chiefly in the kitchens as cooks, chefs (some for pastry), and flour-grinders.²⁴⁷ When one kitchen princess died this was noted precisely on a clay tablet, with the date and the name of her supervisor and the impression of a seal. It amounts to an official death certificate, and such documents were quite common and were necessary for good administration.²⁴⁸ Other personnel were ‘the sweepers of the yard’ (actually lady’s maids), water-carriers, and the women called *sekertu* (meaning ‘locked up’) and *kezertu* (who had a special way of curling their hair).²⁴⁹ There were also female scribes, two of whom wrote the lists of items of food in the kitchen for ‘the king’s table’. Their two different styles of handwriting are distinguishable on the clay tablets they wrote.²⁵⁰ Each of the two queens of this period (Dam-ḥuraši and Šibtum) had more than fifteen female servants in the harem.²⁵¹

Excavations in *Isin* have produced ration lists of barley for the personnel of the harem, including for those ‘women who swept the yard’, who washed the

244 Florilegium Marianum IX, 13 f.

245 ARM 28 86:24–28. More Mari letters show that foreign kings wished to have female singers; AEM 1/1 (1988) 98 no. 9:17–34; Ziegler, 37–42, nos. 4 f.

246 A. Millet Albà in *Chagar Bazar (Syrie)* III (2008) 46 no. 65.

247 Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 101–104, 136 ff.

248 Ziegler no. 43 (p. 223).

249 Ziegler, 83–91.

250 Ziegler, 91 ff., 106.

251 Ziegler, 92–94, 96–98; no. 3 (p. 135).

hands, who cared for the body ('the hairdressers'), and who played the lyre, and for their infants and older children.²⁵²

We also know about a harem in the city of *Ašnakku*, modern Chagar Bazar, in north-eastern Syria, which was excavated by a British and Belgian team.²⁵³ On his cylinder seal the ruler of the city, *Sîn-iqīšam*, is denoted as 'the servant of Samsi-Addu', who was the king of Assyria. The city ruler had two wives and a harem, which is documented on lists of those living there eligible to receive an allowance of beer. His first wife is named first, and his second wife occurs in a sequence of lists over several years. She had started as a girl, placed towards the bottom of an early list, but later we see her in the middle of the list and finally in second place. By that time she had given birth to two sons, and this may possibly have justified her high status.²⁵⁴ In this harem there were also accomplished and ordinary ('greater' and 'lesser') female singers. Some of the names show they were boys or men and the editor of those lists suggested that anyone in a harem could be described as a 'female singer'. We should also consider the possibility that *castrati* were involved.²⁵⁵

There may have been *eunuchs* in the harem, suggested at Mari by the term *gerseqqû*, meaning a menial servant often present at court.²⁵⁶ The literal meaning of this word in Sumerian could indicate someone 'with a beaten foot', with foot being a euphemism for the penis and testicles. But this is speculation. Perhaps the singers described thus were *castrati*.²⁵⁷ J.-M. Durand proposed that they were servants, who had been sired by the king to the women in his harem, and subsequently castrated.²⁵⁸ A modern novelist similarly assumed this about the eunuchs of the Assyrian court.²⁵⁹ Certainly there were eunuchs in the later Assyrian courts, a subject to which we shall return when we discuss the court of the Middle Assyrian period (Chapter 24).

After children were born in the harem of Mari,²⁶⁰ five litres of best-quality oil was given to the mother. Normally she was allowed two litres of ordinary oil each month. The mothers were the 'slave-girls' of the king or 'singers' and one takes it

252 C. Wilcke, 'Personal eines Enlil-bāni-Palastes in Isin', *Festschrift B. Hrouda* (1994) 303–314.

253 Millet Albà in *Chagar Bazar*, 238–279, 'Le harem de Sîn-iqīšam'.

254 Millet Albà, 251–254.

255 Millet Albà, 244.

256 Ziegler, 9–11; *Florilegium Marianum IX* (2007) 23.

257 Ziegler, nos. 9:17, 10:5.

258 Ziegler, 20, 23.

259 N. Guild, *The Assyrian* (1988) 17–23; mentioned and approved by J. Reade, *Studies S. Parpola* (2009) 252.

260 Ziegler, 29.

for granted that the king was the father. In a few cases it can be shown that he was resident in the palace 39 weeks before the birth.²⁶¹ No wet-nurses were found in the harem but children's nannies are named, who could have been the children's wet-nurses when they were younger. Many names of the children give a positive message about their father: 'May my father increase'; 'My father is my light'; 'May my father live long'.²⁶² Names given to women could possibly refer to their function as midwives. In the harem of Yasmaḥ-Addu we encounter Ištar-šuklulim, 'O Ištar, make perfect'. The name Rubaya is reminiscent of the midwife Rabbatum from the Ur III period.²⁶³ We would add further that the most recent harem text from Mari also gave the names of three young princes: Yagid-Lim, Ḫadni-Addu, and Yaḫdun-Lim.²⁶⁴

According to these lists there were 44 women in the harem of Yasmaḥ-Addu, but those in the harem of Zimri-Lim towards the end numbered 232, though earlier there had been even 260 or 381. The highest number recorded is 515.²⁶⁵ The enormous growth in numbers could be the result of taking in women who were the spoils of war, such as those listed as 'brought here from Kaḫat'. At the conquest of this town they were taken and brought into the harem. Over five years the population of the harem doubled. It was full to overflowing.

23.6.4 Predicaments

Disease could spread rapidly in such a densely inhabited environment.²⁶⁶ Letters from women speak of infectious diseases, for which patients had to stay in a separate room, without any contact with other inmates.²⁶⁷ We repeat here the following instructions given by King Zimri-Lim to Queen Šibtu.²⁶⁸

²⁶¹ N. Ziegler, *Ktama* 22 (1997) 46–49.

²⁶² Ziegler, 108 ff.

²⁶³ In the list of occupants of the harem, MARI 4, 388, they are nos. 24–26; see pp. 395, 418 ff.

²⁶⁴ Ziegler, 68 ff.; no. 13 i 25–27 (p. 174); earlier D. Charpin, MARI 4, 338 with n. 227 (T. 408). They were clearly named after their royal ancestors.

²⁶⁵ Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 19.

²⁶⁶ Durand, 86; Ziegler, 28 ff.

²⁶⁷ Ziegler, 28 ff., 'Les maladies'; Durand, MARI 3 (1984) 143–149, 'Maladies'. A list of quantities of oil distributed to twelve 'ill' harem ladies is ARMT 23 606 = Ziegler no. 19 (p. 190–192).

²⁶⁸ ARM 10 129 with Durand, 143–145; AEM 1/1 (1988) 547 ff.; LAPO 18 (2000) 345 no. 1164; cf. E. Neufeld, 'The earliest document of a case of contagious disease in Mesopotamia (Mari Tablet ARM X, 129)', *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 18 (1986) 53–66.

Speak to Šibtu, thus says your lord: 'I have heard that Nanna is sick from a wound, but lives in close contact with the palace and mixes with the other women. Now you must give some strict orders, that nobody shall drink from the cup from which she drinks, nobody shall sit on the chair she sat on, and nobody shall lie on the bed she lies on. She may not mix with the other women. This wound is infectious.

The word translated as 'infectious' at the end of the letter literally means 'to catch', suggesting the outbreak of fire. Other letters from Mari give similar sorts of instructions for women in this position. One adds that the woman had to live in a separate room into which no-one could enter. To know 'whether she will die or live', an extispicy of a liver had to be performed, which resulted in the warning that 'other women one by one will fall ill with this wound, so let only this woman die alone.' Perhaps they were sometimes killed.²⁶⁹ Another letter, from a courtier to the king, reads as follows.²⁷⁰

Speak to my lord; thus says Tillani-ḥesud, your servant: 'Attazur, the slave-girl of Ḫuššutum, has become full with the wrath of the god, so I have had this woman leave the palace. Have the lamentation priests come here and purify the palace.'

One assumes that 'the wrath of the god' was an expression for a dreadful illness that made the palace unclean. A small group of Middle Babylonian letters from Nippur speaks of all sorts of illnesses of the 'singing girls'. However there was no harem there and the girls would certainly have been attached to the temple.²⁷¹

How did the king manage this reservoir of penned-up femininity? A few nice passages in letters tell us something about exceptional situations. The young petty king Yasmaḥ-Addu was warned by his father not to behave like the earlier king Yaḥdun-Lim. 'Yaḥdun-Lim thought so much of his girlfriends, that he set his wives apart and let them live outside the palace. And hopefully you will not let the daughter of (King) Išḫi-Addu live outside like that. If her father were to get to hear of it, then he would become embittered.'²⁷² In another letter he wrote that this royal daughter must live in the palace and be well supplied with oil and meat. He puts it like this: 'Yaḥdun-Lim loved his singing girls; therefore he had his wives Gabêtum and Yamḥad live outside.'²⁷³ So singers were his girlfriends.

²⁶⁹ ARM 10 130 with AEM 1/1, 547 ff. Cf. also ARM 10 14.

²⁷⁰ AEM 1/1 (1988) 579 no. 279 with p. 548.

²⁷¹ S. Parpola, LAS, Commentary (1983) 492–494.

²⁷² Durand, MARI 4, 406. Earlier in: *Receuil G. Dossin* (1983) 325 (A. 2548).

²⁷³ Durand, MARI 6 (1990) 290–294.

The warning to Yasmaḥ-Addu must have been necessary, for as viceroy he regularly received a lecture from his father about his behaviour, with this recrimination:

You are a youngster, you are no real man (*eṭlu*). Is there really no hair on your cheek? How long have you not been managing your household?

We have a rough version of the text with which his son made a plaintive response.²⁷⁴ One recrimination is of special interest:

Your brother has won a military victory here, but you, you lie there among the women. But now, whenever you go with the troops to Qatanu, be a man (*awīlu*) then. You too should make a great name for yourself in the campaign for Qatanu, as your brother has made a great name for himself.²⁷⁵

Must we take the statement that he was lying among women literally? It has been said that it simply means general laxity rather than actively exploiting the harem. That would be the reason for the call to be a ‘man’.²⁷⁶ It is also possible that by women is meant the musicians, showing that he was more interested in the music than the women themselves. However, in one letter a brother of Yasmaḥ-Addu reproaches him:

The hot wind and the cold had never struck your face (...) and as soon as father and mother saw your face and you fell out of the vagina, another vagina received you here.²⁷⁷

These coarse remarks of his brother imply that his escapades began directly after he was born, rolling from the one vagina into the other. Possibly he was alluding to some proverbial expression. In our remarks about sexuality we pointed out that in love songs sentiments could also be expressed extremely explicitly. Yet another letter concerns Yasmaḥ-Addu’s decadence, including a propensity to ‘mix’.

Together with the courtiers you began to be extravagant and to squander goods. But you are not small any more. (...) They came to you to ‘mix’, to go to the premises of the woman innkeeper to play.²⁷⁸

274 ARM 1 73:43–45 to which ARM 1 108, 113 is a response; cf. Durand, MARI 5 (1987) 173–177.

275 ARM 1 69 rev. 8–16; cf. MARI 4 (1985) 313:35 ff. for an improved treatment.

276 B. F. Batto, *Studies on women at Mari* (1974) 34 n. 81.

277 P. Marelli, *Mélanges Michel Fleury* (= Florilegium Marianum I) (1992) 117:32–37; TUAT NF 3 (2006) 58 ff.

278 ARM 1 28:11–19 with LAPO 16 (1997) 65 ff.; I. L. Finkel, *Ancient board games* (2007) 23 (n. 16).

It is not hard to imagine that the games they played when mixing involved some promiscuous behaviour.

What was life like for these women? We know a considerable amount about it thanks to the letters they wrote. Some concerned matters of organisation, but others could also turn to political questions and become emotional. This happens particularly in letters from princesses who had been married off to foreign kings. Later we will describe the sad case of Princess Kîrûm. In principle two possibilities awaited a king's daughter. She could be married off by their father, or be dedicated to a god as a priestess, a subject to be discussed later in Chapter 25.²⁷⁹ Much is written about women in the first category and their correspondence is available in translation.²⁸⁰

Queen Dam-ḥuraši, also called Beltum, 'the Lady', came from Qatna, near Damascus. Her father wrote amicably to her future husband, Yasmaḥ-Addu: 'I have given my flesh and loins into your bosom and this house has become your house; the house of Mari has become my house'.²⁸¹ She made a long detour along the northern fringe of the Syrian desert, going first to Emar. There barques were made for her and her retinue which drifted down to Terqa, not far from Mari,²⁸² to be met by her bridegroom. He had earlier had a nasty dream and told it to her escort: 'The dream which I saw was unsettling; we must be afraid that the Suteans will seize Dam-ḥuraši and you and say "We will not let them go (...)". The liver diviners were called to give an independent judgement.²⁸³ The texts concerning arrangements for the final leg of the journey describe the meals to be eaten on the way. It is striking that such a large group, around seventy women (called *nîru*), belonged to the retinue, and it is thought that these were the travelling companions of the bride.²⁸⁴ With them was her royal nanny, and that went down badly in the court of Mari. The king received a letter: 'The nanny of the Lady, who has come from Qatna: yes, that woman has reared the Lady since she was small and she knows her habits. They would surely have had to separate her from the Lady on the day that the Lady left Qatna. They sent her along with the Madame

279 Durand, MARI 4, 397, 400 (Erišti-Aja), 415; Batto, *Women*, 79 ff. For Baḥlatum, daughter of Zimri-Lim, see Lafont in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 120. The kings of Mari and Karanâ had a daughter who was a nun (*nadîtu*) in the cloister of Sippar; S. Dalley, *Mari and Karana* (1984) 104–106.

280 J.-M. Durand, 'La correspondance féminine', in his *Documents épistolaires du palais de Mari* (= LAPO 18) (2000) 259–504.

281 J.-M. Durand, MARI 6 (1990) 282 A. 3158:9–12.

282 Durand, MARI 6, 285 ff.; AEM 1/1 (1988) 116 no. 16.

283 AEM 1/1, 466 no. 225 with Florilegium Marianum IX (2007) 149 ff.

284 B. Lafont, *Mélanges M. Birot* (1985) 163, 167.

to Mari, but she has no idea of the customs of the palace. Through the agency of this unreliable woman, who is assisting my Lady, while the bolts of the palace were shut, she (the young queen) let out the singers to go to the temple of Ištar. In the courtyard of the Coloured House the heat struck her and since that day she has been ill. But my lord must not worry, for her illness has become milder than before.’ The advice which followed was for the king to send in ladies of some standing (*puršumtu*) to assist her.²⁸⁵

Indeed the evidence from Mari shows that the nurse was well-known there. Her title was ‘mother’ (*ummu*), which we have translated as ‘nanny’.²⁸⁶ It is not certain whether this was always the woman who had looked after a princess from her childhood. Princess Naramtum was married off by Zimri-Lim to a petty king and had a nursemaid assigned to her.²⁸⁷ The ties sometimes appear closer, as when Princess Aḥassunu complained to Yasmaḥ-Addu that they wanted to give away her ‘mother’.²⁸⁸ Another princess raised the point that they were detaining her nurse.²⁸⁹ In one case it can be proved that the wet-nurse of Prince Yagid-Lim later became his nursemaid and was called ‘mother’.²⁹⁰ We have seen just such a development in the career of Rabbatum from the Ur III period.

Much can be said about the *queen* in Mari. It was normal in high circles for a married man to have two wives and this also applied to the king.²⁹¹ As far as Zimri-Lim was concerned, we hear first about Dam-ḥuraši, and later much more about Šibtum.²⁹² The first wife was taken over from his predecessor Yasmaḥ-Addu. The latter, Šibtum, achieved a high position and her name, ‘The old woman’ appears to have been an honorary title.²⁹³ She was the daughter of Yarim-Lim, the king of the allied territory of Yamḥad, with Ḥalab (Aleppo) as its capital.

285 AEM 1/2 (1988) 26 no. 298, with MARI 6 (1990) 276; TUAT NF 3 (2006) 72. For a photo of the tablet see M. al-Maqdisi, *Schätze des alten Syrien: die Entdeckung des Königreichs Qatna* (2009) 67. Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 419 (top), gives suggestions for the identities of the women whom Beltum had brought along.

286 Discovered by Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 414 ff.; for details see G. Bardet, ARMT 23 (1984) 72–74.

287 ARMT 23 no. 84, dupl. no. 423. ‘B., from the women of the House of Yarim-Lim, for the ‘motherhood’ of Naramtum, daughter of the king, who was given (in marriage) to Šarriya, king of Eluḫtum.’

288 ARM 10 97 with MARI 4, 413 ff. Von Soden’s correction of ‘old age’ has not been seen or accepted; he reads in line 22 *ša šu-ši-ša lipuš* (Or. NS 49 [1980] 211).

289 ARM 10 no. 105.

290 N. Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 68.

291 Durand, LAPO 18 (2000) 263; A. Millet Albà in: *Chagar Bazar (Syrie)* III (2008) 242 ff.

292 N. Ziegler, ‘Šibtum’, RIA XII/5–6 (2010) 441–443.

293 Durand, MARI 3 (1984) 164 n. 20. He suggests that the birth of a son gave her this status; up till then Zimri-Lim had only daughters.

A group of letters casts light on how this marriage was arranged.²⁹⁴ In Chapter 2 about betrothal and marriage we referred to them, and here we look at the letter in which the father of the bride requires ‘that the household utensils of my daughter be deposited in her house, that my daughter live with her husband, but that she may go out for five or six days to pay attention to her house’.²⁹⁵ Evidently the queen had her own ‘house’. Ama-duga and ‘The Mistress’ also had their own house, such as the remains of a small palace found on the site Chantier A. J.-M. Durand has suggested that this is where she regularly stayed during the five or six days of menstruation.²⁹⁶ Whenever Zimri-Lim was away, Šibtum was in control and corresponded with him. Many letters from her have been preserved concerning domestic and economic affairs.²⁹⁷ She also made official visits throughout the kingdom, but she did not go with him when Zimri-Lim made the long journey to far-off Ugarit, for which he preferred to take his wife Yataraya.²⁹⁸

It has been noted that in the West (Syria and Palestine) the role of the queen was great. We saw this when we considered the ritual surrounding the marriage of the king and queen in Ebla. Mari and the small kingdoms to the north and west of it all belonged to one cultural circle and the same applied there. A princess, the daughter of Zimri-Lim, went to Karanâ to practise her ‘royalty’, but did not automatically become ‘queen’ (*šarratu*). It is conceivable that that title was only awarded on the birth of a prince.²⁹⁹ It was the secret wish of Princess Kirûm, who had been married off, to have this status too, as she wrote to her father in Mari.

I am sending you the lady Alla along with this letter. May my Star, my father and my lord, pay good attention to her report, but do not tell anybody else. May my father and my lord allow me to take my place on the seat of a queen. Do not cause me sorrow. I trust in you alone.³⁰⁰

A similar situation is revealed by the palace archives from Karanâ (or Qatṭara), the site of a much smaller kingdom which was excavated by the British. The queen there was Iltani and her correspondence reveals her concerns about the burdensome details of daily organisation. Because everything was on a relatively smaller scale the lines of command were shorter, and she also had the respon-

294 Durand, AEM 1/1 (1988) 95–117, ‘La mission matrimoniale’.

295 AEM 1/1, 111 no. 13:14–19.

296 AEM 1/1, 104 ff.

297 Ziegler, *Le Harem*, 54–56; Durand, LAPO 18 (2000) 166, 298 ff., 304–356.

298 Ziegler, 30–32, ‘Voyages de femmes du harem’.

299 Durand, MARI 3 (1984) 164; MARI 6 (1990) 277; LAPO 18 (2000) 262 ff.

300 ARM 10 34 rev., with LAPO 18, 437 no. 1224.

sibility for the production of woven goods. We shall have more to say about her later. A letter from the city of Andariq in the far north shows that a queen once took over the reins of state when her husband was absent.³⁰¹ The caravans of the Assyrian merchants passed this city; we discussed the wives of the merchants in Chapter 18, about women and work. Merchants enjoyed free passage, but they had to announce their journeys beforehand. A caravan of 300 people and 300 donkeys moved from Assur, via Ekallatum (on the Tigris), to Karanâ, where thirty people and sixty donkeys split off and went to Andariq. There they were detained, because they had not announced that they were coming. When ‘the lady, the wife of (King) Atamrum’ was requested to release them, she replied: ‘When the message came from the city of Assur to you, that these men would travel through the interior of your country, why did I not get this message? Or why did you not yourself write to me about their passage to the north? I want to know (things like this). Today Atamrum, the king of this country, is not at home. He is staying in Babylon. But this country belongs to Zimri-Lim, my lord. When I held the men, I wrote to Zimri-Lim. Is it proper to release the men over the head of my lord, Zimri-Lim? As long as no decision about the men comes from my lord, those men will not pass through the gates.’ We see here that the small kingdom of Andariq was subservient to Zimri-Lim of Mari. The queen was wise not to take the decision herself, for the merchants were Assyrians, who at that time were hostile.

23.6.5 Princesses who were married off

Daughters of Zimri-Lim were married off to foreign rulers.³⁰² The preparations for marriages like this can be traced from the other side in the case of Šibtum from Aleppo, who became the wife of Zimri-Lim.³⁰³ Intermediaries travelled back and forth and at a certain point in that foreign land far away they covered the girl with a veil. These officials were called ‘messengers of the wedding’ (*mār šipri ḥadāši*).³⁰⁴ The exchange of the dowry by the father of the bride for the bride-price paid by the bridegroom was an important occasion. We have letters from King Zimri-Lim in which the preparations for the marriage to Šibtum are recorded.

301 AEM 1/2 (1988) 333–336 nos. 432f. For a discussion, see note 309.

302 J.-M. Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 335; ‘Les alliances matrimoniales’, MARI 6 (1990) 276–301; ‘Les marriages’, LAPO 18 (2000) 165–184. Earlier see B. Lafont in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 113–120; S. Dalley, *Mari and Karana* (1984) 151–153.

303 F. Abdallah in: Durand, *La Femme*, 13–15; Durand, AEM 1/1 (1988) 95–117; P. Villard, MARI 7 (1993) 315 ff., 325–328; *Florilegium Marianum V* (2003) 191 ff.

304 Lafont, 116 ff.; Durand, AEM 1/1, 112.

She was referred to as the ‘daughter of the king’ without mentioning her name. The chief choir master and the liver diviner of the court travelled backwards and forwards to Aleppo, where the princess lived with her father and mother. They brought the bride-price with them, which is described on a separate tablet as blocks of lapis lazuli and many jewels, with hundreds of heads of cattle.

In Aleppo the veil was laid on her, but then her grandmother, the queen mother,³⁰⁵ died there, and this meant a delay of fifteen days. The journey to Mari did not go well. A letter records that ‘Many women will go with the Lady and the women who go are delicate. But (as for) the route taken on this journey, the desert is harsh, not to be negotiated at this time (...). In the spring or in the autumn they must take this route (...). In the coming month there will still be ten or five days of cold weather and the Euphrates will be full of water.’³⁰⁶ By the following year she had reached Mari and then her father sent large presents, probably the dowry.

These princesses expected to become the *šarratu*, ‘the queen’ in the foreign country, a title that was unusual in Babylonia.³⁰⁷ Some minor states were close by and others far away, and the lot of the women in their courts can be followed from the letters they wrote home. The sister of Zimri-Lim reported enthusiastically: ‘Adal-šenni, my lord, is fine. He has put his large palace at my disposal and treats me reasonably well. Two hundred women, singers or weavers or kitchen staff work for me and do what I say.’ It seems as if this is the total workforce for the whole harem. We suspect that the ‘singers’ functioned also as concubines. In the harem were two daughters of conquered kings, who were very annoying. ‘They irritate me by saying: “Your brother, your flesh and blood, is doing well, but [he sends you] nothing”. They keep coming back to it. I say to them: “Both of you will see all of what my brother provides for me”. Now, because of their insults provide me with a present that pleases me; humiliate [them]’. The queen and the harem came to a bad end when another king conquered their kingdom and the two princesses were forced to transfer to a new location, for a second time.³⁰⁸

Some of these princesses who were married off were allowed to be fully in control of the palace, in particular when the king, their husband, was away on a journey.³⁰⁹ One named Tizpatum was able to demand political or military requests. But in the letters from women who had to content themselves with an

305 AEM 1/1, 105 no. 10 = TUAT NF 3 (2006) 73 f.

306 AEM 1/1, 113 no. 14:7–11, 19 f., 24–27.

307 Durand, MARI 6, 277.

308 P. Marelli, MARI 8 (1997) 455–459; TUAT NF 3 (2006) 74 f.; Ziegler, 42.

309 Ibbatum, wife of Atamrum of Andariq: Durand, LAPO 18, 445–454. Cf. note 301.

inferior position, there was much complaining.³¹⁰ ‘He is not kind to me and has not given me a single slave-girl to wash my feet.’³¹¹

Inib-šarri was first married off by the father of Zimri-Lim to an old king who died two years later. Directly after this it was to Ibal-Addu, the king of Ašlakkâ, who promptly paid her bride-price. It was clearly a political marriage, that would only last for five years. The man was a rebel, which she reported to her father, and her husband banished her to the city of Naḥur.³¹² Zimri-Lim mediated: ‘Go! Take the road to your house. It is certainly not proper. Cover your head and go away’.³¹³ She does this and in Ašlakkâ she meets another queen of his. Then we hear the following cry of distress: ‘The wife of Ibal-Addu, she is the queen and that woman still gets all the contributions from the city of Ašlakkâ and (other) cities. But he lets me live in a corner and lets me grab my cheeks like a mad woman. He eats and drinks in the company of that woman.’ However her husband reacted reassuringly: ‘I shall send away the other woman to the city of H. and she (Inib-šarri) may fully take over her throne and her country.’³¹⁴ Later Zimri-Lim would take over the city and his texts record the booty he pillaged.

Tizpatum was married off to Ili-Ištar, the king of Šunâ, and the dowry was paid in two instalments.³¹⁵ She had a worrying time there when the enemy invaded. She wrote home:

If my lord really loves the city of Šunâ and his servant Ili-Ištar, send quickly a hundred men here and a trusted man and save the city and your servant. Otherwise the enemy will take over the city. Now they are paying attention to my husband and think about me “How now? He is married to a daughter of Zimri-Lim and his attention is directed to Zimri-Lim”. May my father and lord be mindful of this.

Later she had to write another letter about what had happened:

When I was given (in marriage) in the land of Šunâ and after the enemy had carried me away as captive to Ekallatum, I [wrote] twice to [my lord] that he [should let] me [leave] Ekallatum. I am writing now for the third time to my lord with my complaint. [...].

310 Naramtum, wife of Šarraya, king of Eluḫut: J.-M. Durand, LAPO 18, 454–457.

311 ARM 10 29:15 ff.; Durand, LAPO 18, 451.

312 M. Guichard, ‘Le remariage d’une princesse et la politique de Zimri-Lim dans la région du Haut Habur’, RA 103 (1999, not published until 2011) 17–30.

313 ARM 10 74 with Ziegler, 43 ff., 76; ARM 2 113; Guichard, 26 n. 46.

314 Ašlakkâ: ARM 28 68:9–13. For the whole affair see J.-M. Durand, LAPO 18, 462–471.

315 Durand, LAPO 18, 457–462 (the letters nos. 1239, 1240); L. Marti, NABU 2003/40 (the dowry).

One solution in such a case would have been to give a ransom, but on this occasion we do not know the outcome.

The experiences of Princess *Kirûm* in the city of *Ilan-şurâ* were very unpleasant.³¹⁶ She had been given in marriage there to the king, *Ḥaya-sumû*, two years after her sister. This was regarded as an honour, as stated in a letter:

Since Samsi-Addu died, there are four strong kings. But a daughter of *Yaḥdun-Lim*, two women, they did not marry. And now you have married a daughter of my lord, two women!³¹⁷

After a few years internal rows and political changes led to Princess *Kirûm* going home. The letters that their father *Zimri-Lim* received show that there was tension, eventually leading to a divorce from *Kirûm*, his second daughter. Her story gives us the opportunity of a peep into the private rooms of the palaces and see the way things panned out.³¹⁸

It was like this. At the beginning of his reign *Zimri-Lim* had married off his daughter *Šimatum* to this king. We have a list of the items in her dowry. One of his intentions, though unacknowledged, was that she should act as a kind of spy, for we see her passing on important information to her father. About two years later his daughter *Kirûm* followed. The reason why is not clear. It is thought that the first daughter may have been infertile, which gave him the right to her sister, although it is questionable if this obligation pertained in political marriages. Rather it would have been an important diplomatic gesture for one to give a second daughter after the first. Or *Ḥaya-sumû* was given this second daughter to thank him for his military aid to *Zimri-Lim* during the conquest of the important city of *Ašlakkâ* in the region. The latest opinion is that ‘*Zimri-Lim* gave his second daughter to the same vassal in order to get a better grip on his politically volatile son-in-law’.³¹⁹ *Kirûm* writes to her father as ‘My Star, my father, my lord’. This is an unusual form of address. Perhaps this daughter played a special role in their family life. She writes also that she will bring offerings to ‘the gods of my father’. *Kirûm* seems to have been quite a character, for she asked her father to let her sit ‘as queen on the throne’.³²⁰ Her letters show how her relationship with her sister and her husband deteriorated. It is thought there may have been friction because

316 Durand, *LPO* 18, 427–445; Ziegler, 64; D. Bodi in: L. Marti, *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (2014) 275–289.

317 *AEM* 1/2 (1988) 57 no. 303:20–24.

318 J.-M. Durand, ‘Les femmes de *Ḥaya-sumu*’, *MARI* 3 (1984) 162–180; D. Charpin, *AEM* 1/2 (1988) 43–46.

319 Bodi, 277.

320 *ARM* 10 113:21–22 and 34 rev. 9–10.

of the childlessness of the older sister. In addition to these supposed growing tensions there were differences in political opinions.

The arrival of the army of the kingdom of Elam into the area gave rise to contrasting opinions in the palace, with two parties divided about being for or against Elam. It is thought that Šimatum was for and Kirûm was against. Kirûm was supported in this opinion by the ‘ambassador’ from Zimri-Lim, Yamšûm, whose letters on the subject were found at Mari. He describes Šimatum plainly as a witch:

‘As regards the herbs for black magic, Šimatum had these brought to my lord. This matter is correct. It is not untrue.’³²¹ This woman also slandered Zimri-Lim and for this reason suffered from epileptic fits: ‘the god of my father has “reached” her and made her gnaw at her fingers, she has regular fits of epilepsy’.³²² Kirûm repeats in two letters how she was spoken to first by her husband and then by her sister, and contemplated suicide, which Yamšûm reiterated, ‘I am going to jump from the roof’.³²³ Kirûm had staff and they were taken away. She wanted to go home to Mari. All these letters were written on unusually shaped clay tablets and appear to be in a local vernacular.³²⁴ Kirûm seems to be deliberately avoiding having her messages written by the official scribes preferring in her own style to send out secret messages. She was helped in this by a confidant Yarim-Dagan, who reported orally back to Mari. Then there followed a huge row, described in a letter³²⁵ according to which she inveighed against her husband Ḫaya-sumû, eliciting from him this vehement response: ‘in the presence of the kings (sheikhs?) I will cut through my hem.’ That action was a symbolic act indicating that he was divorcing her. There followed some correspondence about how she would have to be brought back to Mari. It seems that Zimri-Lim and his wife Yataraya wanted to come themselves to get her.

23.7 Queen Iltani

Another queen from the same period was called Iltani, and she was the wife of Aqba-ḫammu, the king of Karanâ (or Qaṭṭara) in the north. The inscription on her seal reads:

321 AEM 1/2, 76 no. 314:26–29.

322 AEM 1/2, 71 no. 312:36–39.

323 Charpin, AEM 1/2, 46 n. 114; M. Stol, NABU 2007/13, on suicide.

324 Charpin, *Mélanges A. Finet* (1989) 31–40; cf. J.-R. Kupper, NABU 1992/105.

325 ARM 10 33 with Durand, MARI 3, 169 ff.; cf. the letter on p. 178 ff.

Iltani, daughter of Samu-Addu, wife of Aqba-ḥammu.

They were subservient to Hammurabi of Babylon and for that reason invoked blessings in the name of his god Marduk. When her archive was excavated it showed that her court was considerably smaller than the one in Mari.³²⁶ She wrote about her house-keeping, how to manage slaves, and buy in supplies of garlic, beer, wine, oil, and fish. A particularly interesting letter from this dossier shows that they used ice to keep drinks and other products cool. Snow was transported in the night from the mountains and stored in a special building, about which other Mari letters give more details.³²⁷ The king reported to Iltani: 'Have them open (the cellar of) ice of Qaṭṭara and the Goddess. You and Belassunu must regularly drink from it. And have them carry out good checks on the ice.'³²⁸ It is possible that this refers to a ritual for women, where cool wine (?) was ceremonially drunk.

The most important responsibility for the queen was her weaving shed. She received the wool from an agent from which cloth would be produced. Fifteen women and ten men spun and wove there. When her husband wanted some clothes he wrote to her:

'Many clothes (...) I want to have brought to Babylon. Send me clothing quickly, first or second quality (...) as many as there are. The clothing here, as many items as there are, I have collected and they are not sufficient'.³²⁹

He could be remarkably grumpy as can be seen from her reaction in this letter:³³⁰

To my lord. thus says your slave-girl Iltani:

About the letting go of the cattle, sheep and donkeys belonging to T., my lord wrote thus to me: 'If you cannot let go the cattle, sheep and donkeys belonging to T. I shall cut you down twelve times'. That is what my lord wrote to me. Why did my lord write my death sentence to me? Yesterday I spoke to my lord: 'His cattle and his sheep are being grazed in Yašibatum by his own herdsman, who had kept them earlier'. I said this to my lord. Now, may my lord command that they take his cattle and sheep out of Yašibatum. If I have taken anything whatever of the cattle and sheep, then let my lord punish me. Would I ever lay my hand on anything at all and take it without the consent of my lord? Why did my lord write my death sentence to me?

³²⁶ S. Dalley, *Mari and Karana* (1984) 101–104.

³²⁷ J.-M. Durand, *LAP0 16* (1997) 289–295, 'La construction de la glacière'; 313–315, 'La glace'.

³²⁸ S. Dalley, *OBTR 79*.

³²⁹ *OBTR 70*. Cf. S. Dalley, 'Old Babylonian trade in textiles at Tell al Rimah', *Iraq 39* (1977) 155–159; Dalley, *Mari and Karana* (1984) 51–54.

³³⁰ *OBTR 158*.

She received letters from two sons. The first reported:

All is going well for me. I arrived safely in Babylon. Hammurabi turned a friendly face to me. After this letter (back again) to Karanâ! Be happy!³³¹

The second son begins with loving words, but wants something done:³³²

To my mother Itani. Thus says Yasitna-abum your son. May Šamaš and Marduk for my sake let my mother live forever! My mother thought of me and my heart revived. Now, [send me] a letter about your well-being. Revive my heart. As soon as I see your letter, the storms of Adad will be forgotten and my heart will revive! The boy that my mother had sent to me is very young. This boy will not (be able) to support me; I have to support him! If I go on a journey, scarcely two litres of bread as my daily food is brought after me. Let my mother send a boy to me, who can bring ten litres of bread behind me and who really helps me (literally: takes my hand).

She had a sister who lived in Assur and thanks to the caravans they had contact with each other. Her sister keeps looking out for a necklace of lapis lazuli for her, but she has not found anything. Then she complains about her food:

Do you know that I receive a limited ration of food? In Assur barley and oil are dear. Your son S. comes here regularly but never brings me a little present. You do not honour me in the house where I stay. As you know, I receive a limited daily ration of food. Provide me with barley and oil.³³³

One wonders in which ‘house’ the sister was residing.

Other people wrote begging letters to the queen.³³⁴

You have lived in Ešnunna and have never thought of me nor cheered my heart. Now you live in Karanâ and among all my brothers there is no-one, whom you have not thought of. Never have you ever thought of me with one trifle or cheered my heart. I am not writing this to you lightly, I am writing because you have never thought of me. Ask around and they will say that my lord has certainly thought of me.

331 OBTR 135.

332 OBTR 152.

333 OBTR 120.

334 OBTR 119.