

## 24 The court and the harem after 1500 BC

### 24.1 Babylonia

For the Late Bronze Age (1500–1200 BC), which follows the Old Babylonian period, the documentation available within Babylonia is scant. We know much more about Assyria, the kingdom of the Hitittes, the cities of Syria such as Ugarit and Emar, and the city of Nuzi in the mountainous countryside east of the Tigris. From those places much can be said about women at the court.

Kassite kings were now living in Babylonia. They made gifts of land to princes and high-ranking persons which are recorded on beautiful black ‘boundary stones’ decorated with reliefs. One states that a woman, Ḫunnubat-Nanaya, received from her father, King Meli-šipak (1186–1172), 320 hectares of arable land and 24 hectares of land suitable for gardens, together with three villages, which enjoyed tax-free status. At the end of the text we read that the king bought extra land for his daughter from the governor of the Sealand. On the relief above the text the goddess Nanaya is shown seated grandly on a throne. In front of the goddess the king stands holding the hand of his daughter, a smaller figure standing behind him and carrying a harp (or lyre), being introduced to the goddess. An incense burner stands between these two people and the goddess. Perhaps the daughter was in the service of Nanaya and the income from the land she had been given accrued to her temple.<sup>1</sup>

We mention here in passing a kind gesture shown by the king of Elam, the largest kingdom to the east of Babylonia, at about this time.<sup>2</sup> We have a precious stone he gave to his daughter bearing the inscription *yaspu*, ‘jasper’. But modern experts have identified the mineral as chalcedon, which could be the material described by Pliny as the ‘heavenly blue jasper’ from Persia (XXXVIII 37 §115). The iconography shows the enthroned king holding the stone in his hand and facing a much smaller girl. The inscriptions says,

I, Šilḫak-Inšušinak, enlarger of the kingdom, brought this stone from Purališi. I had it wrought with care, placed it here and gave it to Baruli, my beloved daughter.

---

<sup>1</sup> MDP 10 (1908) 87–94, pl. 11–13; photo in the catalogue *Babylon. Wahrheit* (2008) 221 Abb. 149 with 227 Kat. 142; I. Seibert, *La femme dans l'Orient ancien* (1974) plate 51. See K. E. Slanski, *The Babylonian entitlement narûs (kudurrus)* (2003) 43 (photo), 48, 174, 258.

<sup>2</sup> E. Sollberger, JCS 19 (1965) 31 f.; P. Amiet, *Elam* (1966) 445 no. 340; I. Seibert, *La femme*, plate 42. With W. Henkelman, RIA XII/5–6 (2010) 494 § 1.4.

Kassite kings often married off their daughters to the pharaoh in Egypt. In Chapter 2 we saw that messengers mediated such a contract and that the girl could be anointed in Babylon as a token of her betrothal. In far-off Armenia a curious carnelian cylinder seal was found in a grave. It was inscribed with Egyptian hieroglyphs identifying the owner as ‘the great one from the land of Sangar, Kurigalzu’.<sup>3</sup> Kurigalzu II was a Kassite king, and Sangar was the word Egyptians used to mean Babylonia. That name resembles Shinar as used in the Hebrew Bible, also to mean Babylonia. The seal depicts a seated ruler with a young woman standing in front of him. The two are offering something to each other. Stylistically it is a Syrian imitation of an Egyptian artistic style, apparently to represent the marriage of the Babylonian king to a princess from the West. Similarly Egyptian in style is a fragment of an alabaster vase from Ugarit showing King Niqmaddu with a woman. How could the cylinder seal of Kurigalzu II have reached Armenia? Probably it was a precious item of booty that became an object for trade. That was probably also how a Babylonian cylinder seal came to be found in a grave in Etruria, Italy, where it would surely have been seen as possessing magical power.

During the long period following the Kassite kings a handbook about abnormal births and their meaning for the future, based on earlier sources, was compiled. A special section concerned ‘a woman of the king who has given birth’, detailing the significance of features to be observed on babies born at court.<sup>4</sup> The birth of a child with severe defects (*izbu*), a deaf or mentally retarded child, one who had teeth at birth, or a beard, predicted doom for the royal family. Twins, whether identical twins or a boy and a girl or even two girls, were a good sign. There would be happiness for the mother, no opponents for the king, and a quiet and undisturbed life for the people. The handbook is less positive about common people having twins. A queen of Mari was overjoyed, in line with the handbook, and she wrote to the father,

I gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl. Let my lord rejoice!<sup>5</sup>

When a snake was born or a child with a face like a lion good news would follow: no adversaries and the king would be strong. At the end of the section there is a long passage about a child born with six fingers or six toes. If they occurred on the right hand or right foot the prospects for king and country would be bad. But on the left it meant the enemy would be defeated or the royal family would survive

<sup>3</sup> D. Collon, ‘The Metsamor Seal’, *Studies D.J. W. Meijer* (2011) 27–37.

<sup>4</sup> E. Leichty, *The omen series Šumma izbu* (1970) 70–72, Tablet IV 47–61.

<sup>5</sup> Twins: M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* (2000) 208 f.

until they were old. These predictions follow a rule that if two negative features concur (six digits, and on the left) there would be a positive outcome. The predictions about such features in common births follow the same rule.<sup>6</sup> The last line refers to a baby with six fingers and six toes, which leads to the prediction, ‘the prince will conquer the land of an unknown enemy’. The Bible also refers to a man with such a deformity.

In yet another campaign in Gath there appeared a giant with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in all. He too was descended from the Rephaim (2 Samuel 21:20).

## 24.2 Assyria

### 24.2.1 The Middle Assyrian period

The so-called harem edicts from Assyria are a rich source of information about women in the Ancient Near East. Rather than edicts they are in fact instructions for conduct in the harem of the palace at Assur. These instructions (*riksu*) had been formulated by successive kings and then Tiglath-Pileser I (1114–1076 BC) made a compilation of them, beginning with Assur-uballit I (1365–1330). They comprise some 23 instructions preserved on four specimen texts. All the tablets are badly damaged, especially the sections for the older edicts.<sup>7</sup> Infringing these regulations incurred severe punishment, including the death penalty. Corporal punishment could amount to mutilation. The male officials include the courtier (*mazziz pānī*), the ‘eunuch of the king’ (*ša rēš šarri*), and the ‘doctor of the inner quarters’ (*asû ša bētānu*), who was in charge of the eunuchs.

Unfortunately much of the text of these edicts has been lost and we cannot really understand them fully. G. Cardascia has provided a summary of them.<sup>8</sup> The

---

<sup>6</sup> A comparison of royal and common births: the births of retarded or deaf children is always negative (Leichty, I 52f., 63; IV 48f.), the birth of a snake is a bad sign for a commoner (I 16). Six fingers or toes: III 54–60 (commoners), IV 57–61 (royals).

<sup>7</sup> Edition: E. F. Weidner, ‘Hof- und Harems-Erlasse assyrischer Könige aus dem 2. Jahrtausend f. Chr.’, AfO 17 (1954–56) 257–293. Cf. A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions I* (1972) 46 ff., §§ 304–306, §§ 335–341 (on deaths in the royal household), § 517, §§ 681–683 (prohibition on giving presents), §§ 850–859, §§ 905–912 (quarreling and cursing), §§ 928, 989; vol. II (1976) §§ 184–193 (access and contacting). A full English translation will be found in M. T. Roth, *Law collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (1995) 195–209. She does not mention the translations by A. K. Grayson.

<sup>8</sup> In ‘Gesetze’, RIA III/4 (1966) 287b. We add here the § number used by Grayson.

harem was where the queen mother, the wives of the king (*aššāt šarri*), known as the ‘ladies of the palace’ (*sinnišātu ša ekallim*), the ‘other women’ (*sinnišātu mādātu*), and the simple servant girls lived. It was the subject of countless regulations and instructions. This confined world was often prey to tensions, even leading to disputes and quarrels.<sup>9</sup> Curses<sup>10</sup> uttered while scolding someone were severely punished (edicts 10–15; § 911–912) and witnesses to these scenes were obliged to tell (edict 21; § 189, 192). Eunuchs who were permitted entrance to the apartments of the women were not able to have a conversation with them, in the course of duty, unless under the supervision of the head of the palace (edict 9; § 906–910). That could only take place at a distance of seven paces from the female they were talking to, who had to be suitably dressed (edict 21; § 191). Culpable relations with a woman from the harem would lead to the punishment of the guilty party and his helpers (edict 19; § 989). The women of the palace were forbidden to give their slaves gold, silver or precious stones (edict 5; § 682–683). The wives were allowed to punish their servants, but this freedom, under the supervision of the king, did not extend to granting life or condemning to death (edict 18; § 928). Married women in the service of the palace could not leave the building, not even on their days off, without the permission of the king (edict 3; § 517).

Martha T. Roth has translated these edicts, some of which will be quoted here:<sup>11</sup>

Edict 7: When the time for making sacrifices draws near, a palace woman who is menstruating (lit.: unapproachable) shall not enter into the presence of the king.

Edict 19: If a palace woman [and a ... (man)] are standing by themselves, with no third person with them, whether [they are behaving] in a flirtatious manner [or in a serious manner (?)], they shall kill them.

<sup>9</sup> Thus Weidner and Cardascia. M. van de Mieroop, *Cuneiform texts and the writing of history* (1999) 148 f., sees in ‘these peculiar views on the group behaviour of women’ the reflection of a modern wrong stereotype of the harem. This is not correct. One observes in the laws indeed suspicion, spying, eavesdropping, etc. This reflects the mistrust of women by the Assyrians.

<sup>10</sup> *Šum ili ana masikti zakāru*, ‘to invoke the name of a god for blasphemy’, means ‘to curse’, reminiscent of the third commandment in the Decalogue, ‘You must not make wrong use of (*nāšā laššāw*) the name of the Lord your God’, Exodus 20:7. Cf. M. Stol, *Studies R. D. Biggs* (2007) 240 f. (*šum ili šūlū*).

<sup>11</sup> Concordance of the edicts translated here: Edict 7 = Grayson I § 856, Edict 19 = § 989 (summarised), Edict 21 = Grayson II §§ 189–191.

The next section says that anyone witnessing the event and failing to declare what they saw will also be punished, by being thrown into an oven, which the Bible says Daniel was subjected to in Babylon (Daniel 3:20 f).<sup>12</sup>

Edict 21: Either royal eunuchs or court attendants or dedicatees (*širku*) – if a palace woman sings, or quarrels with her colleague, and he stands by and eavesdrops, he shall be struck 100 blows, they shall cut off one of his ears.

[If] a woman of the palace has bared her shoulders and is not covered with (even) a *kindabašše*-garment, and she summons a court attendant, [saying: ‘... come] hither, I wish to give you an order’, and he turns around to speak with her – he shall be struck 100 blows. The eyewitness who denounces him shall take his clothing; and as for him, they shall tie (only) sackcloth (*sāgu*) around his waist.

If a court attendant wishes to speak with a palace woman, he shall approach no closer to her than seven paces.

The edicts tell us most of what we know about life in the harem. In a few letters we see the queen travelling with an entourage of different women in six coaches.<sup>13</sup> We should note that in astronomical texts a particular constellation of six stars is denoted as ‘The women in the palace’.<sup>14</sup>

We also encounter the following strange story. Once a slave-girl of a lady of the court called Kuršiptu, ‘Butterfly’, found a baby in the river and called it ‘Monkey’ (*paḡû*).<sup>15</sup>

H., the slave-girl of Kuršiptu, the lady of the palace of Assur-iddin, lifted up Naru-eriba, ‘Monkey’, out of the river and brought him up. He is her son. Anyone who resorts to law with complaints against him shall give six sons (and) let him go. By the command of the gods, people cannot take Monkey with violence (*puāgu*).

The name Naru-eriba means ‘The river has given (a child) as a replacement’. That name was given to the foundling as a formal declaration establishing that the child was hers and would remain hers. Four gods were invoked as witnesses to

<sup>12</sup> This punishment is mentioned in an Old Babylonian letter, AbB 9 197; comments by M. T. Roth in: E. Lévy, *La codification des lois dans l'Antiquité* (2000) 15 f. For Neo-Babylonian evidence, see F. Joannès, *Festschrift J. Oelsner* (2000) 206–209; S. Lafont, *Ktéma* 30 (2005) 107–116; the article ‘Feuertod’ in *RIA III/1* (1957).

<sup>13</sup> E. Cancik-Kirschbaum, *Die mittelasyrischen Briefe aus Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad* (1996) no. 10, with J. N. Postgate, “Queen” in Middle Assyrian, *NABU* 2001/40.

<sup>14</sup> E. F. Weidner, *RIA III* (1957) 81a, e. (SAL.ŠĀ.É.GAL.MEŠ). A Sumerogram used at the time of Nebuchadnezzar (Neo-Babylonian), to be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>15</sup> S. Franke, G. Wilhelm, ‘Eine mittelasyrische fiktive Urkunde zur Wahrung des Anspruchs auf ein Findelkind’, *Jahrbuch des Museums für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg* 4 (1985) 19–26; K. Volk in: R. Lux, *Schaffe mir Kinder* (2006) 52 f.

this (dated) document, and there was no obvious opponent to the decision. The child was subsequently renamed Monkey, an unusual type of personal name. The whole affair is most unusual. Finding a child by chance in the river is a motif which appears in the story of Moses, who was found by the daughter of the pharaoh. It also appears with Sargon, who was fished up as a baby by the water-carrier Aqqi. We shall return to this story in Chapter 25, about priestesses, since his mother was a high priestess. This event is recorded again on a clay model of a leg which is to be compared with clay models of the feet of newborn babies. This was discussed in Chapter 17, about women who were deprived of their freedom resulting in children having to be sold. According to an adoption text a foundling was grasped by the foot which was measured and its size recorded. The content of our text is particularly remarkable in the reference to divine witnesses, the strange meaning of the two personal names, as well as the legendary motif. It would be easy to take it as fictitious. A similar ostensible fantasy of a legal document is a Neo-Assyrian sale-contract for a piece of barren ground at the entrance to the underworld made between birds.<sup>16</sup>

### 24.2.2 Eunuchs

Courtiers and eunuchs require further discussion. The literal meaning of the title for the courtier, *mazziz pāni*, is ‘one standing at the face’, i.e. in the presence of the king. The title *ša rēši* literally means ‘one of the head’, simply indicating that he stood by the head of the king. In Assyriological circles there has been a dogged struggle going on about whether he was really a eunuch. He must have been a eunuch according to an incantation to curse a demon:

May your seed dry up like (the seed of) a *šut rēši* who does not father children.

Furthermore, the Hebrew word for eunuch, *sarīs*, is derived from *ša rēši*, and Isaiah compares him to ‘a barren tree’ (Isaiah 56:3). In Aramaic the word is *srs*, and an Aramaic seal inscription identifies Pan-Aššur-lamur as the *srs* of Sargon.<sup>17</sup> Assyrian texts sometimes make a contrast between our official and ‘the one with the beard’, i.e. someone who has not been castrated. A seal impression shows a man without a beard standing before the king, and on reliefs from the royal palace there are similar attendants. In the edicts ‘courtier’ and ‘eunuch’ are used

<sup>16</sup> ADD 469, SAA VI 288; B. R. Foster, *From distant days* (1995) 375.

<sup>17</sup> A. Fadhil, *Baghd. Mitt.* 21 (1990) 481, bottom.

almost interchangeably.<sup>18</sup> Eunuchs were high-ranking officials. The Bible records a meeting between the apostle Philip and a high ranking official from the royal court of Ethiopia who had been visiting Jerusalem (Acts 8:26–40).

This man was a eunuch, a high official of the Kandake, or queen, of Ethiopia, in charge of all her treasure (Acts 8:27).

While sitting in his chariot he had been intent on reading Isaiah 53, but he may not have read as far as Isaiah 56:3, quoted above.

### 24.3 Nuzi

From this same period come texts from the kingdom of Arrapha, a kingdom in Eastern Assyria, near modern Kirkuk.<sup>19</sup> The king was a vassal of the great kingdom of Mitanni out on the western border. The archives from the city of Nuzi, covering the years 1450 till about 1330 BC, show that in various cities the king had a palace and a harem and various queens.<sup>20</sup> Those queens would have been women owning large estates producing income for themselves. Judging from the land allocated to the queen in Arrapha, she was more important than the queen in Nuzi.<sup>21</sup> In one harem there were 31 women, and in another there were 35, and possibly there were many more. Earlier in this book we called these harem women ‘concubines’ (*esirtu*). Their names occur in lists of singers and they are sometimes explicitly designated as ‘female harem-singers’ (*esrētu nu’ārātu*).<sup>22</sup> One list begins with female singers associated with two foreign countries, Akkad and Ḫanigalbat, and those from Akkad (= Babylonia) have native Hurrian names from which we can surmise that they sang in a foreign style.<sup>23</sup> Earlier we saw that in the women’s quarters at Mari professional singing and instrumental music were an ongoing occupation. Some singers worked with flax.<sup>24</sup> The two young princes and four princesses, probably born from the concubines, grew up in the

---

**18** For eunuchs at the time of the harem edicts see S. Jakob, *Mittelassyrische Verwaltung und Sozialstruktur* (2003) 82–92 (beardless in the illustration on p. 87).

**19** W. Mayer, ‘Die königliche Familie’, *Nuzi-Studien I* (1978) 104–120.

**20** Cf. E. Cassin, ‘Les reines’, in: P. Garelli, *Le palais et la royauté* (1974) 378–381, 390.

**21** Mayer, 110 f.

**22** B. Lion, *SCCNH 18* (2009) 677–679.

**23** Lion, *CRRAI 54* [Würzburg] (2012) 537 f.

**24** R. Pruzsinszki, *WZKM 97* (2007) 343 n. 43.

harem, and some princesses became priestesses (*entu, ereš.dingir.ra*), and were appointed to various cities in this role.<sup>25</sup>

The archive of the crown prince Šilwa-Tešub shows that he had one wife and seven harem women. The wife conducted her own business affairs and possessed herds of livestock. The sister and the mother of the prince also lived in the palace. His son Tatip-Tilla was already married. His other sons were probably the offspring of the harem women.<sup>26</sup> In Nuzi there was a ‘house of the harem women’ (*bīt esrēti*).<sup>27</sup>

As for the household of the queen we know that she owned large estates, and that she conducted trade through her merchants, issuing loans of grain and sometimes large quantities of bronze. She owned her own granaries, from which were issued month by month considerable quantities of grain to be used for all kinds of purposes. Chiefly it was used to feed the people in the palace, from young princes to slaves, and in addition to that the manual staff in the workshops. The smaller your food ration the lower your position on the social ladder. The horses, the fowl and the dogs were given barley. Grain was also issued for offerings at religious ceremonies. Seed-grain was loaned to the farmers.<sup>28</sup>

Very little of interest can be said about the harem personnel. One man was known as the *taluhlu*, a mysterious Hurrian term thought to mean a eunuch.<sup>29</sup>

## 24.4 The Hittites and Egypt

Of the women in the courts of the west in the period 1400–1200 BC in Syria and Anatolia much can be said. Pieces of correspondence mention the marrying-off of princesses in this region, extending from the kingdoms of Mitanni and the Hittites (in Turkey) to Egypt. Political marriages were important, particularly during the time of international contacts between the great kingdoms of the time, the Hittites, Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria and Mitanni. For our purposes the relations between the Hittites and Egypt are most relevant,<sup>30</sup> when the Hittite queen mother *Puduhepa* played a great role.<sup>31</sup> In a letter to Pharaoh Ramesses II she boasts of

<sup>25</sup> K. Deller, A. Fadhil, *Mesopotamia VII* (1972) 193–213; cf. Mayer, 119, *Lion*, 539.

<sup>26</sup> M. A. Morrison, ‘The family of Šilwa-Tešub *mār šarri*’, *JCS* 31 (1979) 3–29.

<sup>27</sup> HSS 14 153:26 (left edge).

<sup>28</sup> We follow Cassin in P. Garelli, *Le palais et la royauté* (1974) 379.

<sup>29</sup> C. Zaccagnini, *OLZ* 85 (1990) 41 f.; the man is accompanied by dogs.

<sup>30</sup> P. J. H. Houwink ten Cate, ‘The Hittite dynastic marriages of the period between 1258 and 1244 BC’, *AOF* 23 (1996) 40–75.

<sup>31</sup> J.-L. Cunchillos in *Textes ougaritiques II* (1989) 376 f.



her successes, and even claims high status because ‘I receive every daughter of a great king as a daughter-in-law.’<sup>32</sup> Who was this powerful woman?<sup>33</sup> She grew up in Cilicia, a Hurrian environment, as the daughter of a priest of Ištar. She was later discovered by King Hattušili III, when he was returning from the battle near Qadeš (1275) during his campaign against Egypt. He fondly recalls the event thus:

At the behest of the goddess I took Puduḫepa, the daughter of P., the priest, for my wife: we joined (in matrimony) [and] the goddess gave us the love of husband (and) wife. We made ourselves sons (and) daughters.

On another occasion he says:

I took her not just hoping for the best, but at the instigation of the goddess I chose her. The goddess pointed her out to me in a dream.<sup>34</sup>

They are depicted together on a large relief on a rock face near Firaktin (Cilicia) with captions in hieroglyphs. They are making libation offerings, he to the storm god and she to his consort Ḫepat.<sup>35</sup> After Hattušili III had seized the throne from his cousin U. his cousin fled to Egypt. Describing her first experiences as queen Puduḫepa says

When I entered the royal household, the princesses I found in the household also gave birth under my care. I [raised] them and I also [raised] those whom I found already born. I made them military officers.<sup>36</sup>

Were these the offspring of concubines? Despite his weak health her husband reached the age of 74, a fact we may attribute to his dear wife: we know of her prayers and vows to the gods on his behalf. She was very innovative in the style of composition of her religious texts. Her seal impressions occur frequently on state documents, which are almost always sealed by both the king and the

**32** G. Beckman, *Hittite diplomatic texts*. Second edition (1999) 131–135 no. 22E, § 9.

**33** Puduḫepa: J.-L. Cunchillos, *Textes ougaritiques* II, 363–421; H. Otten, *Puduḫepa. Eine hethitische Königin in ihren Textzeugnissen* (1975); H. Müller-Karpe, ‘Puduḫepa, Königin von Ḫatti’, in: *Frauen des 13. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* (1985) 56–70; ‘Puduḫepa’, *RIA* XI/1–2 (2006) 106–110. For her titles see M.-J. Seux, *RIA* VI/1–2 (1980) 159 f. § 65.

**34** Th.P.J. van den Hout in: W. W. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture* I (1997) 202 § 9. In a dream: A. Mouton, *Rêves hittites* (2007) 92 (KBo VI 29 i 18–21).

**35** W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (1975) plate XLI with p. 428; *RIA* XI/1–2 (2006) 108 f. Drawing: Müller-Karpe, 57 Abb. 25.

**36** Beckman 134, § 11.

queen.<sup>37</sup> She negotiated for the exchange of princesses with neighbouring rulers and with the kings of Babylonia, Assyria and Egypt. Two daughters were married off to Pharaoh Ramesses II, who would write to the king and queen addressing them as ‘my brother’ and ‘my sister’. His wife Naptera (Nefertari) wrote a letter describing the presents she had given, a gold necklace with twelve strings weighing 88 shekels, two garments of fine linen (*byssus*) and ten linen gowns.<sup>38</sup> In a letter to Ramesses the writer (either the king or the queen of the Hittites) lamented the fact that the pharaoh had ‘not begotten a son for me’. Possibly their daughter had only produced a girl.<sup>39</sup> Egypt once complained that a princess they had expected had not come so Puduḥepa had to explain why in a long letter. She said the assembling of the dowry had been delayed because of a fire in the treasury and because the evil cousin U. had given the remaining goods to the temple. To confirm her story she says:

Because U. is with you, just ask him if this is true.

She wonders if Egypt is not being greedy, sarcastically pointing to its relative wealth.

Does my brother then possess absolutely nothing? Only if the Son of the Sun god and the Son of the Storm god, the Sea, possess nothing, will you also (possess nothing). My brother, I could enrich you at my own cost, but that is unworthy.

Once the caravan had been drawn up, there was still no barley to feed man and beast on the journey to Egypt,<sup>40</sup> which would last a whole month. Ramesses was so proud at taking in his Hittite princess that he had the marriage depicted in five separate places, Karnak, Elephantine, Abu Simbel and two sites in Nubia.<sup>41</sup> He let it appear as if ‘the great ruler of Ḫatti’ (meaning the king of the Hittites) had been cantankerous before finally deciding to allow her to go:

---

**37** M. E. Balza in: M. Liverani, *I diritti del mondo cuneiforme* (2008) 396 f., 399; Müller-Karpe, 60 Abb. 29.

**38** Beckman 129, no. 22B.

**39** E. Edel, *Die ägyptisch-hethitische Korrespondenz aus Boghazköi I* (1994) 230 no. 110 rev. 5 f.

**40** Beckman, 131–137, with M. van de Mierop, *The Eastern Mediterranean in the age of Ramesses II* (2007) 223–226.

**41** J. F. Borghouts, ‘Ramses II en de Hittieten. Stèles over een huwelijksalliantie in de 13<sup>e</sup> eeuw voor Chr.’, in: K. R. Veenhof, *Schrijvend verleden* (1973) 16–24. For the historical context see M. Liverani, *Or. NS* 59 (1996) 211–217.

The sky gives no water in our area. All the countries are disposed to be hostile and challenge us together. Let us get rid of our possessions, in which my eldest daughter takes the lead.

Events on the journey are also described.

They passed many mountains, and difficult ravines. (...) Then His Majesty became aware of how beautiful her face was, a first among women. (...) [They] fixed [her name] as the Royal Lady, Ma'at-Nefroe-Re. (...) They let her live in the palace of the king and she accompanied the ruler daily.

Her new name meant 'She who has seen the beauty of the god Re'. Later there followed a second princess and people looked back proudly at this glorious event. A depiction of the princess on a relief at Abu Simbel includes her father in Hittite dress behind her as he approaches the pharaoh.<sup>42</sup> The event became a legend, and a thousand years later a story is told of a king of the land of 'Bachtan' giving his daughter to Ramesses in tribute,<sup>43</sup> which included an almost literal copy of the old royal inscription

She was extraordinarily beautiful, according to how the king felt, more than anyone. In this way her title was fixed as 'Great spouse of the king, Nefroe-Re'. As soon as His Majesty arrived in Egypt, everything was done for her that would always have been done for a royal spouse.

Later the second daughter of the king of Bachtan, called Bentreš, became ill and he asked for an Egyptian doctor. Other letters refer to Hittites asking for medical help from Egypt.

After the death of her husband Puduḥepa was active for another twenty years, and then she placed her seal beside that of his successor.<sup>44</sup>

Marriages with princesses also occur in other correspondence between the Egyptian pharaoh and friendly rulers from 1356–1333. These are the Tell el Amarna letters which were found in that village in Egypt. They were written in Akkadian, the *lingua franca* of the day, a little like English is today, on clay tablets. From these we can reconstruct the procedures observed.<sup>45</sup> First the hand of the princess

---

<sup>42</sup> C. Desroches Noblecourt, *Ramses II. La véritable histoire* (1996) 339; photo: M. van de Mierop, 227.

<sup>43</sup> M. Lichtheim, 'The legend of the possessed princess ("Bentresh Stela")', in: W. W. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture I* (1997) 134–136.

<sup>44</sup> Müller-Karpe (note 34), 69 Abb. 33.

<sup>45</sup> Following P. Artzi in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 23–26. For an extensive discussion see F. Pin-tore, *Il matrimonio interdinastico nel Vicino Oriente durante i secoli XV-XIII* (1978).

was asked for. Then, often after much shilly-shallying, it was agreed that the princess be given. Negotiating the bride-price, dowry and other gifts followed. Finally a representative of the bridegroom (the pharaoh) would come to pour oil over the head of the princess before setting out with her on the journey to Egypt. There she would be received with acclamation and presents would be distributed.<sup>46</sup>

A letter from the pharaoh to the king of Arzawa says:

With this letter I send you my messenger I. (to say), ‘Show me the daughter that they are offering to My Majesty in marriage’. And he shall pour out oil on her head. Also with this man I am sending a substantial purse with gold of exceptional quality.

That was his first present, and he promised to send ceremonial garments and the bride-price later:

We will come again to you and bring the bride-price for your daughter.<sup>47</sup>

A scarab from Egypt has this inscription concerning Keluḫepa the daughter of Šuttarna II, ruler of Naharina, that is the Land of the Two Rivers, Mesopotamia:

The wonder that was brought to His Majesty, the daughter of Šuttarna, the ruler of Naharina, Keluḫepa, (and) the women of the harem, 317 women.<sup>48</sup>

That was a long journey with a long caravan that they undertook in 1381, going all the way from Mesopotamia to Egypt.

The Amarna archives include the dossier on *Tušratta*, king of Mitanni. He married off his daughter Taduḫepa to Pharaoh Amenophis III (1403–1364), whose throne name Neb-ma’at-Re was transcribed into cuneiform as Nimmuriya.<sup>49</sup> The excessively polite style of his letters can easily make him seem longwinded. Almost every present he sent is described in his letter, but the pharaoh speaks about his own generosity rather differently:

These things which I had brought to you are nothing and my brother must not be annoyed. I have had nothing brought. These things which I have had brought I had brought without any problem. But if my brother gives the woman whom I want and has (her) brought here and I see (her), then I shall have this all brought to you tenfold (EA 27:14–18).

---

<sup>46</sup> EA 29:28 ff.

<sup>47</sup> EA 31:11–16, 22 with H. A. Hoffner, *Letters from the Hittite kingdom* (2009) 273–277 no. 95.

<sup>48</sup> C. Blankenberg-van Delden, *The large commemorative scarabs of Amenhotep III* (1969) 18, 129–133 (D 1); A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East I* (1995) 217; A. H. Podany, *Brotherhood of kings* (2010) 196 f. (with photo).

<sup>49</sup> Podany, *Brotherhood*, 217–231.

The marriage was arranged by representatives of both rulers, who travelled to and fro. We saw such travelling also in the negotiations for the marriage of Zimri-Lim in Mari to Šibtum in Aleppo. In his last letter (EA 29) Tušratta seems to look back on the past. His father had refused six times before he gave a princess, but he himself had immediately agreed to the request. The princess was received joyfully in Egypt and looked splendid.

As soon as Nimmuriya saw her he was delighted (...) and he made this day a feast for his country.

In many a way the letter expresses the natural wish of the father:

May Ištar and Amon make her like what my brother wishes.

Of course it was expected that the girl would be beautiful. One pharaoh complains to a Babylonian king that ‘the girl that he gave me is not beautiful’ but his reproach was refuted. In addition the young woman should be ‘adult and nubile’.<sup>50</sup>

According to one letter the goddess Ištar wished to travel from Mitanni to Egypt.

Thus spoke Ištar of Nineveh, the ruler of every land: I wish to go to Egypt, to the land that I hold dear, and I wish to come back.

As her statue began its journey, the pharaoh was exhorted to receive her well, and Tušratta justifies making these arrangements.

Ištar is my deity for me. Should she not be the deity for you?’

He suggested in another letter:

We are one. The Hurrian land and the Egyptian land are one together and support each other.

Ištar may have given her blessing to this political move.<sup>51</sup> Tušratta, of course, wants to receive gold from Egypt, much gold, even a statue of solid gold repre-

---

<sup>50</sup> EA 1:80, 3:8.

<sup>51</sup> EA 23 with EA 24 § 15. Photo: M. van de Mieroop, 109 (showing additional lines in Egyptian script in ink). Podany opens her book with an interesting fantasy on the journey of the goddess, with photo (p. 3–9).

senting himself and the princess. He had already worked out a fine dedicatory inscription for his daughter's statue. What he actually received eventually were wooden statues overlaid with gold leaf, and that he felt was inadequate.<sup>52</sup> One letter composed in Hurrian, his mother tongue, was 495 lines long and is most revealing.<sup>53</sup> He claims to have given ten times more than his father (§ 24) and regrets that he had received so little back from Egypt.

My brother has not made it equal (§ 25).

Then he gives a reassurance about the princess:

The wife of my brother whom I gave is pure, and my brother should know this (§ 32).

The presents, described in detail on separate clay tablets, included weapons for the pharaoh (EA 22) and the dowry (*mulūgu*). There were 1500 objects, some destined for the personnel, 270 women and 30 men, which she evidently took along (EA 25). Other princesses were transported in five wagons and once we read of an escort of three thousand men (EA 11:22, 24).

When the pharaoh refused in principle to give away a daughter himself it elicited this reaction from the king of Babylon:

My brother, when I wrote about marrying your daughter, you wrote to me: 'Since time immemorial no daughter of the king of Egypt has ever been given to anyone whomsoever'. Why not? You are after all a king! You can do what you want. Who could say anything to you if you were to give away a princess? When I heard the report, I wrote: 'There must surely be grown-up daughters, beautiful women, to be found. Just send me then a beautiful woman as if she were your own daughter. Who is to say, 'She is not the daughter of the king'?<sup>54</sup>

Once when the Egyptian kingdom had sunk very low the queen sent a messenger to the Hittites saying:

My husband is dead and I have no sons. But according to reports you have many sons. If you give one of your sons, he will become my husband. I shall never choose one of my servants to be my husband ... I am afraid.

<sup>52</sup> EA 29:136–147, EA 27:32–34, EA 24 § 25, end (89–106).

<sup>53</sup> EA 24 with G. Wilhelm, TUAT NF 3 (2006) 180–190.

<sup>54</sup> EA 4 with W. H. van Soldt, Phoenix 47 (2001) 63.

A Hittite prince indeed set off but never arrived. It has been supposed that he was murdered on the journey.<sup>55</sup> A legendary story from around 1300 fits into this context. It concerned an Egyptian prince who fled to Nahrin, the Land of the Two Rivers, and married a princess who was shut up in a tower.<sup>56</sup> He had fled because a prediction had been made that he would be killed by three animals. When they duly appeared the princess fended off the threat of death by a snake. But then came a crocodile ... Here the record of the narrative is lost. Could his fate yet be altered? We shall never know.

When the daughter of the Hittite king was married off to the king of Mitanni, the official treaty makes it clear that the status of the daughter was clearly delineated.

Prince Šattiwaza shall be king in the land of Mitanni and the daughter of the king of the Hittites shall be queen in the land of Mitanni. Concubines (*ešrētu*) are permitted for you, Šattiwaza, but no other woman shall be greater than my daughter. You shall not permit any other woman to be her equal and no-one shall sit beside her. And you shall not demote my daughter to second place. In the land of Mitanni she shall have the position of queen.<sup>57</sup>

## 24.5 Ugarit

The queens of Ugarit owned land and were active in business life (1200 BC).<sup>58</sup> Queen Šarelli conducted extensive official international correspondence, with men as well as women.<sup>59</sup> A list of the personal possessions of Queen Aḥat-Milku includes her jewels, vases, cloth, furniture, and more.<sup>60</sup> In addition there was a 'city of gold' weighing 215 shekels. Possibly this was a crown with crenellations, which was also worn much later in Assyria by the queens of Ashurnasirpal II,

---

55 Van Soldt, 63 f.

56 'The Doomed Prince', W. K. Simpson, *The literature of ancient Egypt. An anthology of stories* (2003) 75–79.

57 E. F. Weidner, *Politische Dokumente aus Kleinasien* (1923) 18:59–62; G. Beckman, *Hittite diplomatic texts*. Second edition (1999) 44 § 7.

58 W. H. van Soldt, 'The queens of Ugarit', *JEOL* 29 (1985–86) 68–73; idem, *Studies in the Akkadian of Ugarit. Dating and grammar* (1991) 12–19. For queens in the West, see also the footnotes in P. Bordreuil, *CRAIBL* 1984, 420–422 (Ugarit, Mari, Hittites, Egypt). W. von Soden suggested that the word *zubultu* in the Mari texts corresponds to Ugaritic *zblt* 'queen', but collation showed that the word does not exist, see *MARI* 2 (1983) 119 f., on nos. 30:4, 32:4.

59 W. G. E. Watson, *Handbook of Ugaritic studies* (1999) 696–700.

60 J. Nougayrol, *PRU* 3 (1955) 182–186.

Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal.<sup>61</sup> It was also typical of the crown of ‘the Syrian Goddess’, a feature which we mentioned in Chapter 1, speaking about diadems.

### 24.5.1 The queen mother

That the queen mother was often influential at court<sup>62</sup> is a particularly striking recurring phenomenon in the history of the Ancient Near East.<sup>63</sup> It is not just a phenomenon of the West. She was able to retain her title after her husband’s death. In ancient Israel she was known as the *gēbīrā*. She can often be seen working behind scenes and at times even in front of them.<sup>64</sup> More than once she acted to the detriment of the oldest son of the king, who was first in the line of succession, but may have been another mother’s son. Solomon as the son of Bathsheba managed to secure the kingship, displacing the first son Adonijah. In Assyria similarly the younger son Esarhaddon was helped by his mother Naqi’a to be the successor of his father. This is just one of the examples known from cuneiform texts. Sometimes the queen mother acted as regent for a time. Later evaluations could offer religious or other grounds to legitimate what had happened. S. C. Melville concluded that ‘a woman was only important if she produced an heir and he became king. Strong women in Assyria were therefore the queen mothers rather than the wives of the king.’<sup>65</sup> More modern mothers of the court have also fought for their children and grandchildren,<sup>66</sup> as in the Netherlands when Amalia van Solms exerted herself on behalf of Willem II and Willem III, who later became the glorious king of England.<sup>67</sup>

**61** PRU 3, 183 on Ligne 4. For Ashurnasirpal see J. E. Reade in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 139 f. (fig. 1); cf. SAA VI (1991) 70 (uncertain); for Sennacherib see ‘Naqi’a’ in Parrot, *Syria* 33 (1956) 149 f.; for Ashurbanipal see ‘Aššur-šarrat’ in M. Streck, VAB 7/1 (1916) p. CCXVIII, J. E. Reade, *Iraq* 34 (1972) 92 (perhaps also worn by a king). See Figure 4 in Chapter 1.

**62** For the queen mother see M. V. Tonietti, ‘De *l’ama-gal* en d’Ebla à la *Valide Sultan* ottomane. L’importance de la “mère du roi” dans le Proche-Orient depuis la plus haute antiquité’, in: X. Faivre, *Jean Bottéro et la Mésopotamie* (2009) 261–274; G. Pettinato, *Semiramis. Herrin über Assur und Babylon* (1988) 211–214; Durand, *LAPO* 18 (2000) 266.

**63** Z. Ben-Barak, ‘The Queen consort and the struggle for succession to the throne’, in: Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 33–40; S. C. Melville, *JAOS* 124 (2004) 53–55.

**64** In general see H. Donner in: *Festschrift J. Friedrich* (1959) 105–145; Z. Ben-Barak, ‘The status and right of the Gebira’, *JBL* 110 (1991) 23–34.

**65** Ben-Barak in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 36.

**66** B. Otzen, ‘The promoting mother. A literary motif in the Ugaritic texts and the Bible’, *Vetus Testamentum, Suppl.* 50 (1993) 104–114.

**67** E. M. Kloek in: H. M. Beliën, *Gestalten van de Gouden Eeuw* (2005) 265 f.



From as far back as the third millennium we can read about Dusigu, a queen mother in Ebla. She was always named first in the lists, and when the young queen (*maliktu*) died she herself assumed control. The boy who became king was only between three and seven years old, so she took charge with the support of her minister Ibrium. She used the title ‘Great mother of the ruler’ for twenty years and had her own ‘house’.<sup>68</sup> The queen of Ur, Abi-simti, who had possibly come from Syria, also remained in the public eye.<sup>69</sup> Queen Gašera in Old Babylonian Aleppo kept her title of queen after the death of King Yarim-Lim, and the new king named Hammurabi (not the more famous Hammurabi of Babylon) had to take serious note of the decisions she made.<sup>70</sup> The mother of King Zimri-Lim of Mari, Adad-duri, had a ‘house’ and possessions,<sup>71</sup> and it was she who also cared for the ancestors.<sup>72</sup>

Among the Hittites the queen mother was called the *tawananna*.<sup>73</sup> It is interesting to observe the career of a Babylonian princess who was allowed to marry Šuppiluliumaš I (1350–1322), the Hittite king.<sup>74</sup> The kingdom of Mitanni in Syria lay between his kingdom and Babylonia and he wanted to conquer that territory. To cover his back he courted the friendship of the Babylonians by organising this marriage. The Babylonians made a condition that she should become his principal wife, and that the wife he already had, the mother of his five sons, was to be relegated into second place. The new wife took on the title *tawananna*. On documents her seal is placed beside that of the king in Ugarit with the caption:

The seal of Šuppiluliumaš, the great king, king of the land of the Hittites, loved by the Storm god. The seal of the *tawananna*, the great queen, daughter of the king of Babylon.

After her husband’s death from plague she continued to reign and held all power. When Muršili, one of the five sons, later became king he recorded the story, looking back with rancour at her domineering actions. He attributed the death of his wife to witchcraft on the part of his jealous and wicked mother-in-law. A modern commentator from Australia thinks Muršili was right. The *tawananna* was formally exiled, but nobody dared to do away with this princess from Babylonia.

---

**68** M. V. Tonietti concentrates on Dusigu.

**69** F. Weiershäuser, ‘Exkurs 1: Die Mutter des Königs in Ebla’, in: *Die königliche Frauen der III. Dynastie von Ur* (2008) 150–153, cf. 182, 186 f., 271 f.

**70** D. Charpin, *Akkadica* 78 (mei-augustus 1992) 8.

**71** N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimri-Lîm* (1999) 50 f.

**72** D. Duponchel, *Florilegium Marianum III* (1997) 207.

**73** Sh.R. Bin-Nun, *The tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom* (= THeth. 5) (1975); G. Beckman, ‘Tawan(n)anna’, *RIA XIII/5–6* (2012) 488–490.

**74** T. Bryce in G. Leick, *The Babylonian world* (2007) 505–507. See Figure 4 in Chapter 1.

I gave her a house. She wants for nothing. She has water and bread. Everything is on hand for her. She lacks nothing. She is alive. She looks with her own eyes at the Sun of the heavens.<sup>75</sup>

Another example was Puduḥepa, who remained at the Hittite court as a formidable matron, not just while her husband Hattušili III was alive but also twenty years after his death. We spoke of her earlier. In Carchemish the queen mother busied herself with a lawsuit.<sup>76</sup> In Ugarit the queen mother was called queen till her death, and that may also have been the custom elsewhere.<sup>77</sup> We shall discuss at some length later how the the Assyrian queen Naqi'a acted in favour of her son and grandson.

## 24.6 The Neo-Assyrian period

As we step into the first millennium we return to Assyria. Information flows in rich streams from the archives of the Assyrian courts at Calah and Nineveh in modern Northern Iraq.<sup>78</sup> The women here at court do not necessarily belong to the harem of the king. They might have been part of the household of the queen or of the crown prince, who resided in the 'House of Succession', together with his wife, 'the Lady of the House'. Among his personnel he had a 'supervisor of the women of the crown prince'.<sup>79</sup> We find that the women in the Assyrian women's residences are categorised in various ways: older women who had lived with an earlier king; female family members of the king, including his aunts and widows who had no male guardian; women from the court of a conquered king; attendants on a foreign princess who had been sent to Assyria to be a bride; dependants of foreign hostages; women who were placed by their families in the palace in the hope of securing favour.<sup>80</sup> At this time marriages with foreign princesses were

<sup>75</sup> H. A. Hoffner, 'A prayer of Muršili II about his stepmother', *JAOS* 103 (1983) 187–193.

<sup>76</sup> D. I. Owen, *Studies J. C. Greenfield* (1995) 573–584.

<sup>77</sup> W. H. van Soldt, *JEOL* 29 (1985–86) 72; J.-M. Durand, *MARI* 6 (1990) 277.

<sup>78</sup> S. Parpola, 'The Neo-Assyrian royal harem', *Studies F. M. Fales* (2012) 613–626; S. L. MacGregor, *Beyond hearth and home. Women in the public sphere in Neo-Assyrian society* (= SAAS 21) (2012), Chapter III, 'Palace women'; S. Teppo, 'The agency of the Neo-Assyrian women in the palace', *Studia Orientalia* 101 (2006) 381–240; S. Svärd (the same person as S. Teppo), *Women and power in Neo-Assyrian palaces* (= SAAS 23) (2015).

<sup>79</sup> Svärd, *Women and power*, 90 f. The supervisor: F. M. Fales, *ZA* 83 (1983) 243 Text 11:6, after the collation in AfO 42–43 (1995–96) 95b.

<sup>80</sup> S. C. Melville on p. 40 in her article 'Neo-Assyrian royal women and male identity: status as a social tool', *JAOS* 124 (2004) 37–57.

again negotiated as a political expedient.<sup>81</sup> S. Dalley has proposed the striking idea that Assyria and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah (Jerusalem) enjoyed many years of friendship through such arrangements made with King Uzziah and King Manasseh.<sup>82</sup> She thinks that Queen Yabâ would have come from Jerusalem for Tiglath-Pileser III, and similarly Queen Athaliah for Sargon II. They were both buried in one sarcophagus, a subject to which we shall return. We read in the Bible of a woman named Athaliah, the daughter of Omri the king of Israel, who was married off to the king of Judah. If S. Dalley is correct, then Athaliah, the wife of Sargon, could have been the mother of King Sennacherib, and Hebrew would have been spoken in the court of Sennacherib. She thinks that perhaps that is how the general of his army was able to speak at the walls of Jerusalem to the people in Hebrew (Isaiah 36:11). Others find this difficult to believe.

#### 24.6.1 The women of the harem

We can now examine the court in greater detail.<sup>83</sup> In this period the harem was called ‘the house of women’, as it was in Mari a long time before. In the Assyrian dialect it is called *bēt isâte*, a reconstructed phrase. The Assyrian palace at Calah has been excavated but no separate building for the women (a ‘harem’) can be identified, leading to the statement in modern sociological terminology that ‘There is no indication that the (Assyrian) palaces were organized along gender lines’.<sup>84</sup> A most respectable woman in the harem was denoted as SAL.Ē.GAL, a Sumerogram meaning ‘woman of the palace’. In Assyrian the word would have sounded something like *issi ekalli* or *issēkalli* (or *ša ekalli*). In Hebrew it appears as a loanword *šēgāl* ‘queen’, a shortened form of *sēgallu*.<sup>85</sup> One assumes that this term denotes the queen, about whom we shall have more to say later. All other women in the harem were named *sekretu*, Sumerian SAL.ERĒN.Ē.GAL ‘female

<sup>81</sup> SAA II (1988) p. XIX f.; Macgregor, *Beyond the hearth and home*, 69 f.; Svärd, *Women*, 88.

<sup>82</sup> S. Dalley, ‘Yabâ, Atalyâ and the foreign policy of late Assyrian kings’, SAAB 12 (1998) 84–98; ‘The identity of the princesses in Tomb II and a new analysis of the events in 701 BC’, in: J. E. Curtis, *New light on Nimrud* (2008) 171–175.

<sup>83</sup> In 1996 P. Garelli perused the Neo-Assyrian texts in vols. I–XII of ‘State Archives of Assyria’ (SAA) and summarised the data on women in his ‘Les dames de l’empire assyrien’, in: J. Prosecký, *Intellectual life of the Ancient Near East* (1998) 175–181. More recently see S. Teppo, ‘The agency’ (see note 79) and her *Women*.

<sup>84</sup> D. Kertai, *The architecture of Late Assyrian royal palaces* (2015) 247, cf. 7 f., 45 f., 245. S. Svärd drew similar conclusions for Calah; see her *Women*, 111–118; it was no Ottoman harem: 91, 110.

<sup>85</sup> J. N. Postgate; S. Parpola, ‘The Neo-Assyrian word for “Queen”’, SAAB 2 (1988) 73–76; R. Borger, *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon* (2004) 346–348.

personnel of the palace'. The Akkadian word *sekretu* means literally 'a closed up woman' (i.e. one closed up in the palace), similar to the literal meaning of the Assyrian *esirtu* 'concubine'. It has been translated as 'harem woman', but a broader meaning, 'palace woman', is better. S. Svärd in her recent book studies the *sekretus* as the higher ranking 'court women', distinguishing them from the other palace women.<sup>86</sup> This word for a lady of the harem, *sekretu* comes from the Babylonian dialect, and we have seen that she is attested in the Old Babylonian period (Chapter 23).

Whenever women from foreign palaces were taken captive, they were spoken of as 'his palace women'. The carrying off of harem women is a common theme in Assyrian accounts of conquests, and it is also mentioned in predictions. About the defeat of the enemy we read in a letter:<sup>87</sup>

The king, my lord, will reduce his country, and his concubines will enter into the possession of the king, my lord. The king, my lord, can be glad.

Ashurbanipal (668–627) defeated his rebellious brother in Babylon and his reliefs show him proudly leading away fourteen men and nine women as prisoners. The captions mention 'his palace women (*sekretu*), his eunuchs, and his battle troops.'<sup>88</sup> These women, 'wives, daughters, palace women' came from very different places, with other languages and cultures.<sup>89</sup> King Sennacherib reported on Hezekiah of Jerusalem:

His daughters and his palace women, male and female singers, I had brought to Nineveh behind me.<sup>90</sup>

In Isaiah 37 no mention is made about whether this actually happened as a result of his siege of the city.

At the court of Sargon II (721–705) the members of the royal family were symbolically represented. The king was a lion or a bull; the grand vizier, his brother, a dromedary or the sign omega; the king's wife Atalia was a scorpion, and she was

<sup>86</sup> S. Teppo, *Stud. Or.* 101 (2006) 405 f.; Svärd, *Women*, 105–109.

<sup>87</sup> SAA X 351 rev. 9–11.

<sup>88</sup> In general see the survey in Svärd, *Women*, 127–130, cf. CAD S 216a.

<sup>89</sup> J. Novotny, 'Daughters and sisters of Neo-Hittite and Aramaean rulers in the Assyrian harem', *Bulletin of the Canadian Society of Mesopotamian Studies* 36 (2001) 175–184. Ashurbanipal: J. Novotny, C. E. Watanabe, *Iraq* 70 (2008) 110 fig. 9, 119 with n. 30 (their clothing), 123–125.

<sup>90</sup> E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften* (1997) 57:8, 59:58. In general see S. Teppo, *SAAB* 16 (2007) 265.

thus associated with the constellation Scorpio and the goddess Išhara.<sup>91</sup> During the reigns of his successors the stamp-seal of the king shows him attacking a lion. That of the queen shows her with her husband and a scorpion; a simplified bureau seal was used in the office of the queen's textile factory, also with a scorpion.<sup>92</sup> On the seal of the crown prince he is symbolized by a Y-shaped marking. Other members of the harem also had the scorpion as a symbol. The scorpion appears on their vases, mirrors and cylinder seals. Two alabaster vases from Egypt, belonging to Queen Tašmetum-šarrat, have the scorpion symbol with an inscription (see below). K. Radner has suggested that the reason why the scorpion was the symbol of the harem and chiefly of the queen is that it is known to carry its young on its back and defend them fanatically, an ideal image for motherhood. More probably the scorpion is to be associated with the goddess Išhara, the goddess of marital love, who had the scorpion as her symbol. For this reason H. D. Galter sees the scorpion representing the queen as 'the Mother of the Land'.<sup>93</sup>

Lists of names of women and their duties from Nineveh include 107 singers. One list mentions singers from distant lands: Aramaic women, women from Ethiopia and Tyre, and from Arpad and Ḫatti (Syria).<sup>94</sup> It has been suspected that some women became involved in intrigue at court. We will see later that according to modern scholarship Queen Tašmetu-šarrat has become a prime suspect when they were investigating the murder of Sennacherib. Some letters in the archives of Nineveh show women involved in intrigue, but we can say little more. Certainly some were witches.<sup>95</sup>

### 24.6.2 The management

A high-ranking male official of the queen at the court of Assyria and later Babylonia was known as 'the *mašennu* of the house of the queen'.<sup>96</sup> In Babylonia he

<sup>91</sup> Z. Niederreiter, *Iraq* 70 (2008) 59–62, 65, 82, 85. The scorpion: Macgregor, *Beyond the hearth and home*, 73–77; Svärd, *Women*, 67 f., 74 f.; W. Meinhold, *Ištar in Aššur* (2009) 242 f., 251.

<sup>92</sup> K. Radner in: P. Briant, *L'archive des fortifications de Persépolis* (2008) 487–506. Cf. S. Herbordt, *Neuassyrische Glyptik des 8.-7. Jh. v. Chr.* (1992) 137 f. The Y-shaped cross was called an *išpallurtu* (SAA X 30:3 f.).

<sup>93</sup> *Tydskrif vir Semitistiek/Journal for Semitics* 16/3 (= CRRAI 50) (2007) 646–671.

<sup>94</sup> SAA VII no. 24 with Svärd, *Women*, 121–123; earlier B. Landsberger, *Festschrift W. Baumgartner* (1967) 202 f. In art: S. L. Macgregor, 'Foreign musicians in Neo-Assyrian royal courts', *Studies Anne D. Kilmer* (2011) 137–159.

<sup>95</sup> Svärd, *Women*, 137 f., 139, 168 (intrigues), 138 n. 654, 169 (witches).

<sup>96</sup> Assyria: Gabbī-ilāni-Assur LÚ.IGI.DUB šá É SAL.É.GAL in Calah; Baghd. Mitt. 24 (1993) 244. For Babylonia, see below.

came high on the list of the great functionaries of the realm. Perhaps he was the treasurer controlling all the finance. Far better known is the *šakintu*, ‘the governess’, the woman supervising the Assyrian harem.<sup>97</sup> She had her own administrative staff and her own wagon pulled by draught animals with drivers. As head of the household she was chiefly occupied with financial matters (lending and borrowing) and buying in slaves and slave-girls. One woman with this title, Aḫi-ṭalli, had previously been a court woman (*sekretu*), but was now ‘the governess of the Central City (harem) of Nineveh’.<sup>98</sup> Another, Amat-Aštarti, had a West Semitic name and independently married off her daughter to the chief tailor (?) with conditions that she herself dictated.<sup>99</sup> The Assyrian kings had many palaces, sometimes two in one city. They had 23 different royal harems in five cities. One text lists the monthly rations of bread and beer for women in those at Arbela (50 women), Kalizi (144 women), Adian and Kasappa. Each woman received nine litres per day.<sup>100</sup> Some of their governesses came from far-away from the heartland, and there was more than one in the major cities.<sup>101</sup> One text identifies three palaces where 13 women held such appointments and 145 weavers were working.<sup>102</sup> On average there would have been fifty to a hundred women there, including twenty weavers.<sup>103</sup> We can deduce their tasks from what had been brought in, wool, flax and goat hair. Of course there were also dozens of singers.<sup>104</sup>

At modern Nimrud the British excavated the archive of ‘the governess of the house of the queen of the Review Palace at Calah’.<sup>105</sup> It was in a closed-off wing of the palace, denoted by the excavators as Area S. She functioned there as the housekeeper for the queen and she had her own secretary. Other texts speak of a governess in the women’s residence in the city of Kilizi, near modern Kirkuk. A letter reports the rebuilding of this ‘house of the queen’.<sup>106</sup> These governesses

**97** S. Teppo, ‘The role and the duties of the Neo-Assyrian *šakintu*’, SAAB 16 (2007) 257–272; Stud. Or. 101 (2006) 395–400; Svärd, *Women*, 91–104, 232–239, Appendix C.

**98** In SAA VI no. 93 rev. 3f. In no. 88 she is *sekretu* (see the note). A full title in Calah was ‘the governess of the house of the queen of the Review Palace of Calah’; Svärd, *Women*, 94 (CTN 3 34:5–7).

**99** Svärd, 104 f., 164 f. Discussed here in Chapter 7, on marriage between equals.

**100** ND 2803; S. Parpola, SAAB 17 (2008) 71.

**101** Svärd, 92–94. In each of four provincial capitals there were between 50 and 100 women and 20 weavers working; Parpola, *Studies Fales*, 618, with Svärd, 101 n. 495, 234 no. 14 with n. 864 (the text is ND 2803).

**102** SAA VII 23, with p. XIX.

**103** Teppo, SAAB 16, 267. More in Svärd, *Women*, 100–102. Cf. S. Parpola, *Studies Fales*, 618 f.

**104** Macgregor, *Beyond the hearth and home*, 30 f.; Svärd, *Women*, 121–123.

**105** S. M. Dalley, J. N. Postgate, *The Tablets from Fort Shalmaneser* (= CTN 3) (1984) 9–14; CAD Š/1 165 f.; cf. M. Heltzer in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 87–89.

**106** J. N. Postgate in art. ‘Kilizu’ in RIA V/7–8 (1980) 592 f. The letter is SAA XVI 111.

were chiefly engaged in financial affairs.<sup>107</sup> On account of their high status distinguished ladies of court also had a governess in their service who had the title 'slave-girl of the king'.<sup>108</sup> This lady of the court was so important that a prince wrote to his father:

B., the 'slave-girl of the king', is very sick. She does not eat a bite. Let my lord the king give the command that a doctor may come here and look at her.<sup>109</sup>

This title *šakintu* 'the appointed one', the governess, can possibly be traced in the Hebrew word *sōkenet* describing Abishag, the Shunamite, a young girl who was appointed to the task of keeping King David warm in his old age. She may well have been intended as a concubine for David, for she was said to have been extraordinarily beautiful. Moreover, David's wicked son Adoniah wanted Abishag as his wife (1 Kings 2:17), which was a trick to seize control of the harem and thereby the throne. However, perhaps this function and its title was not taken over from Assyria but was a native, western institution, possibly found in Ugarit.<sup>110</sup> It is also possible that a later Bible writer projected an Assyrian loanword from his own time back to the time of David. It is striking to think that in the terminology of the harem three Assyrian loanwords may have existed in Hebrew, governess (as outlined here), the word for eunuch (*sarīs*), and the word for queen (*šēgāl*).

### 24.6.3 The queen

Now to the queen herself. We have already seen that in earlier periods she was referred to as the mistress (Beltum). The word for queen that might have been expected is *šarratu*, the feminine form of *šarru*, 'king'. But that title is reserved for foreign queens and goddesses.<sup>111</sup> We saw earlier that the general term 'the woman of the palace' in the Assyrian dialect (*sēgallu*) was always used for 'queen'.<sup>112</sup> Another Sumerian title for the queen was SAL.KUR, 'the woman of the palace'.<sup>113</sup>

**107** Dalley, 13; Pečirkova, ArOr 63 (1995) 11; SAA VI nos. 81–95.

**108** Svärd, *Studies V. Donbaz*, 250–260; *Women*, 102f. (she is named 'the maid of the king', 104, 167f.).

**109** SAA XVI 26 with F. M. Fales, *Lettere dalla corte assira* (1992) 130 f., 166 f. (no. 51).

**110** Heltzer in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 89 f.

**111** M.-J. Seux, RIA VI/1–2 (1980) 160 § 66.

**112** J. N. Postgate, S. Parpola, 'The Neo-Assyrian word for "Queen"', SAAB 2 (1988) 73–76.

**113** S. C. Melville, JAOS 124 (2004) 47, 52, does not translate the word as 'queen' but as 'consort'. Svärd, *Studies V. Donbaz*, 251f., argues that SAL.KUR refers to the queen only.

One assumes that the son of the queen was also the designated successor to the throne.<sup>114</sup> Palaces of the queen are attested in the cities Ekallate, Kilizi and possibly in Arbail (Erbil). Households of her governesses are found in many more places.<sup>115</sup> We have a letter describing the distribution of some revenues in sequence among palace dwellers. The queen received as tribute 3 mines of silver, 2 tunics, and 3 togas, and as a gift 10 mines of silver, 5 linen garments, and 5 togas. The tribute for the crown prince, recorded after that, is the same. The queen was immensely rich.<sup>116</sup>

Depictions of queens are rarely found.<sup>117</sup> When referring to the queen of Ugarit we noted that the crown of the Assyrian queen was sometimes shaped like a city wall with crenellations. The wife of Ashurbanipal is depicted like this, both on a stela and on the famous drinking scene in a garden (Figure 40).<sup>118</sup> There King Ashurbanipal is depicted lying high up on a couch with his spouse sitting low down on a chair and gazing at him while raising a goblet. The queen has all the attributes of a lady in her position.<sup>119</sup> Behind her is the garden and almost hidden in the trees hang the heads of the conquered Elamites. Before this time no queen had been depicted with the king. The Assyrians may have adopted the idea of portraying them together from seeing such portraits in Egypt when engaged in military activity there.<sup>120</sup> A few Assyrian queens became powerful personalities and we will treat them individually.

---

**114** M. Streck, VAB 7/1 (1916) p. CCXX; Dalley, CTN 3 (1984) 11; M. Liverani, CRRAI 19 [Paris] (1974) 336.

**115** Svärd, *Women*, 71. Arbail in CTN 3 87: Svärd, 97 n. 474, 110 n. 541.

**116** SAA I 34:14–17. The wealth of the queen: Macgregor, *Beyond the hearth and home*, 58–61, 67.

**117** Svärd, *Women*, 74–80, ‘The Queen’s image’. T. Ornan, ‘The Queen in public: royal women in Neo-Assyrian art’, CRRAI 47/II (2002) 461–477, with earlier examples.

**118** For the head on a stela see W. Andrae, *Das wiedererstandene Assur* (1977) 83. For the drinking scene see SAA VII (1992) p. 109. Note that serious doubts have been raised about the identities of the two royal women. The stela was too damaged to warrant an identification. The woman in the drinking scene must be Naqi’a, according to A. Roobaert in *Festschrift Karel van Lerberghe* (2012) 499–506. For a full reconstruction of the garden scene see D. Collon in S. Emerit, *Le statut du musicien dans la Méditerranée ancienne* (2013) 29.

**119** Macgregor, *Beyond the hearth and home*, 88–93; B. Musche, ‘Ashurbanipal banqueting with his queen?’, NABU 1999/10.

**120** S. Dalley, *Esther’s revenge at Susa* (2007) 106–108.





**Fig. 40:** Ashurbanipal and his wife celebrate victory over the Elamites (646 BC)

On this relief the queen is wearing the crenallated diadem representing a city. In the trees behind them (not visible here) hang the heads of the vanquished. Relief in the palace at Nineveh. *British Museum, London.*

#### 24.6.4 Queen Semiramis

The most famous name of a queen for the modern layman is Semiramis, a name transferred into Greek from Aramaic Sammu-ramat. She lived in the eighth century BC,<sup>121</sup> a time when Assyrian kings had to reckon with powerful governors in the provinces, whose spheres of influence were not well delineated. As queen mother Semiramis was an accomplished player in the games of politics. But first let us see what the Greeks had to say about her. Herodotus speaks of two famous queens, Semiramis and Nitokris. The only comment he makes on Semiramis is that she had been responsible for the installation of dikes (I 184). According to later stories Semiramis was born from a union between a mortal man and the goddess Derketo from Ashkelon. Her first husband was a general with strategic insight, who conquered a town in far-off Bactria. Later she was married to the Assyrian king Ninus and bore their son named Ninias. After Ninus died she reigned alone for 42 years. She founded Babylon and adopted a lascivious lifestyle, even practising incest. She selected lovers for a one-night stand and directly afterwards had them murdered. Such libertine behaviour was regarded in Greek and Roman eyes as typical of the effeminate East. A modern French writer

<sup>121</sup> L. R. Siddall, *The reign of Adad-nirāri III* (2013) 86–100; R. Rollinger, ‘Semiramis’, *RIA* XII/5–6 (2010) 383–386; R. J. L. Lightfoot, *Lucian On the Syrian Goddess* (2003) 351–357 (on chapter 14); G. E. E. De Breucker, *De Babyloniaca van Berossos van Babylon* (2012) 405 f.

takes her to be an archetype of the femininity associated with Ištar of Nineveh, in whom love and aggression were combined. He began his essay by characterising her Greek name as ‘four syllables, both sweet and sharp, cherished in memory’.<sup>122</sup> But nowadays it is clear that nothing in these stories makes sense.

What is the truth behind these stories? The book which G. Pettinato dedicated to her was derided in German as fanciful (*romanhaft*). That was an unjust assessment of an excellent book, fluently written and without footnotes. Pettinato was very much inclined to attribute the initiative for all the most important changes to Semiramis, such as spreading the worship of the god Nabû, and encouraging sympathy for Babylonia in Assyria.<sup>123</sup> She clearly had a special bond with her son Adad-nirari III (830–783). First she was a mother concerned for her young son,<sup>124</sup> and then the strong woman behind his achievements.<sup>125</sup> Royal inscriptions mention mother and son together. The beginning of a stela found in Turkey explicitly links her with Adad-nirari III and Shalmaneser III.

Boundary stone of Adad-nirari, the king of Assyria, of Sammu-ramat, queen of Šamši-Adad (V), king of Assyria, mother of Adad-nirari (III), the strong king, the king of Assyria, daughter-in-law of Shalmaneser (III), king of the four corners of the world.<sup>126</sup>

That stela narrates that she and her son crossed the Euphrates, at the request of the king of Commagene, to establish the border between his kingdom (Kummuḫ) and Gurgum in Cilicia. The mother was here called ‘a daughter-in-law’, and we shall see later that Queen Naqi’a also called herself the daughter-in-law of the father of Sennacherib. In this way these women legitimated their position in controlling the succession. The boundary stone states that the mother and her son served together. This was also suggested by the inscription of the governor of Calah who dedicated statues

for the life of Adad-nirari, king of Assyria, his lord, and for the life of Sammu-ramat, the lady of the palace, his mistress.

---

**122** ‘Quatre syllables à la fois douces et piquantes, amies de la mémoire’, Roux, 198–202 (see the next note), who seems to follow W. Eilers.

**123** G. Pettinato, *Semiramis. Herrin über Assur und Babylon. Biographie* (1988); he was criticised by S. Timm. Cf. also G. Roux, ‘Sémiramis, reine mystérieuse d’Orient’, in: J. Bottéro, *Initiation à l’Orient ancien* (1992) 184–204.

**124** L. R. Siddall in L. Marti, *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (2014) 497–504.

**125** Svärd, *Women*, 49–51.

**126** ‘The Pazarcik Stela’, now RIMA 3 (1996) 205 no. 3.

In Assur two rows of steles, some belonging to earlier queens, were found. One of them was hers.<sup>127</sup> She called herself ‘the wife of Šamši-Adad’ on an agate jewel.<sup>128</sup> It was earlier established that Semiramis acted as regent for the then very young Adad-nirari III. The Greek sources support this although Berossos, the most important source, formulated it rather vaguely. Eusebius, transcribing the tradition, records that

After these years Berossos also reported on the rule of Semiramis over Assyria.<sup>129</sup>

Opinions have changed. Even though it is still possible to believe that Semiramis held power in the first years, more dated texts containing forms of address are needed for proof.<sup>130</sup>

#### 24.6.5 Queen Naqi’a

Sennacherib (704–681) had at least three wives and seven children. He was murdered by his sons, presumably those of his first wife, which is possibly why on her stele in Assur her name has been made unrecognisable.<sup>131</sup> His second wife was the powerful Naqi’a, the mother of Esarhaddon (680–669), his successor.<sup>132</sup> The third wife, Tašmetum-šarrat, seems to have been a late love.<sup>133</sup> In her inscriptions Naqi’a refers to herself as ‘the daughter-in-law of Sargon’, who was, as the father of Sennacherib, indeed her father-in-law. Naqi’a is an Aramaic name meaning ‘the Pure’ (cf. Latin *Clara*), but she often acted using her second name Zakûtu, an Akkadian translation of ‘pure’. This second name implied that her son had a

**127** RIMA 3, 226f. nos. 2001–2. Photo: J. Marzahn, B. Salje, *Wiedererstehendes Assur* (2003) 21 Abb. 2.

**128** Catalogue *Babylon. Myth and reality* (2008) 104 fig. 83.

**129** F. Jacoby, FGH IIIC (1958) 384 (25), De Breucker, *De Babyloniaca*, 246, F 5a (only in an Armenian translation); cf. P. Schnabel, *Berosos* (1923) 186–188, 194 ff.

**130** W. Schramm, ‘War Semiramis assyrische Regentin?’, *Historia* 21 (1972) 513–521; contra: Pettinato, 39–42, 230 f; cf. J. Bonquet in A. Théridès, *Archéologie et philologie* (1986) 183 f.; S. Timm, *WdO* 24 (1993) 56 f., 62 f.

**131** Frahm, *Einleitung Sanherib-Inschriften*, 3 f.; S. C. Melville, *The role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid politics* (1999) 17–19; J. E. Reade, *Studies M. T. Larsen* (2004) 463.

**132** S. C. Melville, *op. cit.*; M. P. Streck, ‘Naqi’a’, in *RIA IX/3–4* (1999) 165; *PNA 2/II* (2001) 929 f.; A. K. Grayson, *Cambridge Ancient History*, second edition, III/2 (1991) 138 f.; Macgregor, *Beyond the hearth and home*, 95–122; Svärd, *Women*, 53–60.

**133** Melville, 18.

pure, unblemished pedigree.<sup>134</sup> Her sister also had an Aramaic name, Abi-rami.<sup>135</sup> It may be significant that all three kings, Sargon II, Sennacherib and Esarhaddon, maintained such tender contacts with the Aramaeans and it is thought that they may have originated from there, perhaps from the city of Haran.<sup>136</sup>

Naqi'a is often mentioned along with King Esarhaddon, her son. When Sennacherib was murdered, Naqi'a advanced the accession of her son, although he was not the eldest. When, after a war, this aim had been achieved, Naqi'a showed her influence again by building a palace for her son and having him take up residence there.<sup>137</sup> It was not usual for a woman to have a secular building erected. She then acquired the title of 'queen mother', which in her case meant much more than the words themselves. In two inscriptions where she is dedicating objects on behalf of her son, she speaks confidently of 'my reign'.<sup>138</sup> It is clear that at this time she was acting on her own initiative and it is probable that she and her son wanted to rebuild good relations with Babylon, after its devastation by an infuriated Sennacherib.<sup>139</sup>

What lay behind the building of the palace was a desire for continuity, chiefly to ensure that the correct son was accepted as the successor. Naqi'a was shocked at the murder of Sennacherib. It had been initiated by a son who had been passed over. Her son Esarhaddon had to flee to Haran. She herself sought comfort by consulting Aḥat-abiša, a prophetess of Ištar of Arbela, for an oracle.<sup>140</sup>

I am the mistress of Arbela. Because you turned to me with the words 'People to the right and left thou hast taken to thy bosom, but my own family, the fruit of my belly, thou lettest wander over the steppe'. Now do not fear! The kingship is yours. Power is yours. – From the mouth of Aḥat-abiša, from Arbela.

King Esarhaddon regularly had his servants and vassals swear an oath in which they assented to his son and successor, Ashurbanipal. Naqi'a herself was involved in this succession. In a treaty she compelled Esarhaddon's brothers to support the succession of her grandson, Ashurbanipal. One assumes that this duty was immediately forced upon them after the death of Esarhaddon and that the text

**134** S. C. Melville, *JAOS* 124 (2004) 56, who points at the 'righteousness' (*kēnūtu*) of a deceased queen in SAA X 188 rev. 3; see S. Svärd, *Women*, 45, 59, 84.

**135** SAA VI 252.

**136** E. Leichty, *Studies R. D. Biggs* (2007) 189–191.

**137** R. Borger, *Asarhaddon* (1956) 115 f. § 86, with dupl.; now RINAP 4 (2011) 316.

**138** ADD 645 with K. Deller, *Oriens Antiquus* 22 (1983) 20–22. Queen Libbali-šarrat also spoke of her 'reign' (*palū*); Svärd, *Women*, 81 f.

**139** R. Borger, *ARRIM* 6 (1988) 6 f. She was Esarhaddon's deputy or proxy in Babylon; Svärd, *Women*, 58.

**140** K. Hecker, *TUAT* II/1 (1986) 59 K. 4310 v 12–25; S. Parpola, *SAA IX* (1997) 9 no. 1; Melville, 28.

was composed in this short time frame. The mother of Ashurbanipal was already dead, so his grandmother had to step in.<sup>141</sup> A letter from this period appears to say that the spirit of the mother who had recently died ‘blessed’ the affair.<sup>142</sup> The importance of Naqi’a can be seen in this short passage,

[the decision of the mother of the king] is as steadfast as that of the gods. What you bless is blessed, what you curse is cursed.<sup>143</sup>

Elsewhere there is also the remark,

The mother of the king is as wise as Adapa.

Adapa, a mythical character, was renowned for his wisdom.<sup>144</sup> It is peculiar that Naqi’a was sometimes addressed as ‘my lord’ as if she were a man.<sup>145</sup> She had a statue of herself made in Haran.<sup>146</sup> A letter states that gold had to be delivered ‘for the statue of the king (and) for the statue of the mother of the king’.<sup>147</sup> In the archives we have found no letters to the queen, only to her, the queen mother. Lists of personnel give a little insight into her extensive household.<sup>148</sup> From the reference to ‘the city ruler of Laḫīru, of the house of the queen mother’ we conclude that she had property in the city of Laḫīru, on the border with Elam. Elsewhere we read of ‘the mayor of the village of the queen, the man of Laḫīru’.<sup>149</sup> The queens had landed estates and the income from these probably defrayed the cost of the court. It goes without saying that she, like queens in other times, had her own textile industry.<sup>150</sup>

**141** ABL 1239 with S. Parpola, JCS 39 (1987) 163–170; now SAA II no. 8.

**142** LAS 132 rev. 7 = SAA X 188. According to Parpola, LAS, Commentary, 120.

**143** LAS 230 = SAA X 17; Melville, 32 f., 75.

**144** LAS 184 rev. 7–9 = SAA X 244; Melville, *ibidem*.

**145** Svärd, *Women*, 82 f.

**146** SAA XIII 188 rev. 8–13 with p. XIV.

**147** SAA XIII 61 rev. 3–4 with B. Menzel, *Mesopotamia XXI* (1986) 223 f.; Svärd, *Women*, 54 f.

**148** Boncquet, 193 f.; SAA VII 5; etc.

**149** ADD 301 = SAA VI 255 (year 678) and ADD 472 rev. 15 = ARU 101:34 f. (year 668). For the location of Laḫīru see K. Deller, JESHO 30 (1987) 26–28; J. MacGinnis, *Festschrift C. B. F. Walker* (2002) 179 f.; R. da Riva, *Der Ebabbar-Tempel in Sippar* (2002) 80–84. There may have been more cities or countries with this name. – In 2 Kings 19:13 and Isaiah 37:13, instead of the traditional translation ‘the kings of ... the city of Sepharvaim ...’ more modern versions have ‘the kings of ... Lahir, Sepharvaim ...’ (cf. REB) where ‘of the city’ (*lā-īr*) is interpreted as this toponym. Many scholars identify that Biblical name with Laḫīru.

**150** Svärd, *Women*, 100–102; Radner, *Studies Fales*, 693 (Nineveh); in P. Briant, *L'archive des fortifications de Persépolis* (2008) 501 (dockets).



**Fig. 41:** Bronze relief showing Naqi'a, the queen mother, holding a mirror in her left hand, standing behind her son King Esarhaddon or her grandson Ashurbanipal. She was the powerful woman at court. Her name and the mirror are Aramaean. Ca. 670 BC. Bronze. Height 33 cm. *Musée du Louvre, Paris.*

A relief in bronze shows Naqi'a standing in an attitude of prayer behind Esarhaddon (Figure 41). She is participating in a dedication ceremony in Babylon when the gods were being returned. Normally the mother of the king would not have taken such a prominent position.<sup>151</sup> She holds a mirror which from the Aramaic

<sup>151</sup> For the bronze relief see A. Parrot, J. Nougayrol, 'Asarhaddon et Naqi'a sur un bronze du Louvre (AO. 20.185)', *Syria* 33 (1956) 147–160; J. Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen* (1982) 213f. no. 220; Melville, 15, 25f., 47–52; Borger, *ARRIM* 6 (1988) 6f.; Macgregor, *Beyond the hearth and home*, 109–118; Svärd, *Women*, 77, 79.

West is a typical symbol for a woman.<sup>152</sup> Furthermore a seal impression possibly shows her standing behind the king, who is honouring a goddess.<sup>153</sup>

### 24.6.6 Other queens

We turn to Sennacherib's wife, Tašmetu-šarrat, whom he describes as

the queen, my dear wife (*hīrtu*), and whom the mother goddess has made above all other women with a perfectly beautiful figure.

He built for her a 'palace of love (*ru'āmu*), joy and rejoicing'. Behind the veil of this formulaic language some detect a young, beautiful woman, one with whom Sennacherib fell madly in love in his old age.<sup>154</sup> Others ascribe this praise as befitting the eminent status a queen of Assyria had with this king. Her stamp seal which has been found shows a scorpion hovering over her and the king.<sup>155</sup> Egyptian alabaster vases inscribed with her name are now in museums at Istanbul and Berlin.<sup>156</sup> We lose all trace of her after the murder of her husband. It has been suggested that she was the mother of the two brothers who murdered Sennacherib. The three of them had been bypassed by Naqi'a and wished to intervene in her machinations. But they failed, and the deliberately damaged stela of a queen was in fact hers, a victim of a *damnatio memoriae*, so is the suggestion.<sup>157</sup> Naqi'a must have been the driving force behind the concentration of power to her own family. She, like the crown prince, even had her own standing army.<sup>158</sup> The magnates of the empire must also have resented such changes and they must have rebelled against Sennacherib and Esarhaddon.<sup>159</sup>

---

**152** Parrot, Syria 33, 149. For the mirror as typical among Aramaean women see Chapter 1, 'Symbols', at the end. S. Svärd sees in the mirror a symbol of femininity referring to the goddess Ištar (Mulissu); *Women*, 77, 79.

**153** For the seal impression see J. E. Reade in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 144 f., with S. Herbordt, *Neuassyrische Glyptik des 8.-7. Jh. v. Chr.* (1992) 138.

**154** R. Borger, 'König Sanheribs Eheglück', *ARRIM* 6 (1988) 5 f.; cf. p. 10:32–33; now RINAP 3/2 (2014) no. 40:44; and Melville in M. W. Chavalas, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (2014) 233 f.

**155** K. Radner, 'The seal of Tašmetum-šarrat, Sennacherib's queen, and its impressions', *Studies F. M. Fales* (2012) 687–698, esp. 692 f. For a drawing of the seal see Iraq 70 (2008) 61 fig. 10.

**156** The vases of Tašmetum-šarrat: W. Andrae, *Das wiederstandene Assur* (1977) 231 Abb. 207; J. Marzahn, B. Salje, *Wiedererstehendes Assur* (2003) 141, Abb. 2, 3, with Frahm, *Einleitung Sanherib-Inschriften*, 184; OIP 2 (1924) 152, XVI; now RINAP 3/2 no. 2002.

**157** Radner, *Studies Fales*, 694 f.; Svärd, *Women*, 52 f.

**158** Macgregor, *Beyond hearth and home*, 66; Svärd, 63.

**159** Radner, 692 f., followed by Svärd, 67, 73.

From this period we have a lively letter from the eldest daughter of Esarhaddon to the wife of her brother Ashurbanipal, written when he was still awaiting his future in the House of Succession. She regrets that the young woman had not learned industriously to read and write.<sup>160</sup>

Message from the king's daughter to Libbali-šarrat:

Why don't you write your tablet and do your homework? If you do not, they will say, 'Is this the sister of Šerua-eṭerat, the oldest daughter of the House of Succession of Aššur-etel-ilani-mukinni, the great king, mighty king, king of the world, king of Assyria?' And you are the daughter-in-law, the lady of the house of Assurbanipal, the great crown prince of the House of Succession of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria!

This long royal name is the official name of Esarhaddon that he was given by his father Sennacherib. By using it in this letter the writer wants to make an impression. By quoting long titles the addressee is alerted to her high status as 'the Lady of the House' and the intention is that this obliged her to make an effort.

Finally we must recall the wife of Ashurbanipal.<sup>161</sup> As we have mentioned, she appears with him on a relief, toasting the victory over the king of Elam. Despite all these attractive achievements of the women at court, we are brought back to reality when we hear that people could pray only for men, 'for the king, the crown prince and all his brothers, as many sons as there are'.<sup>162</sup>

#### 24.6.7 The queen and burial in Assyria

One queen died during her husband's reign, Ešarra-ḫammat, the wife of Esarhaddon. The event was considered significant for her death and was even included in the official chronicle for the last month of 672 BC, but without recording her name. The king made a mausoleum for her in the royal city of Assur and a rota for presenting regular offerings was established. It is thought that she was the mother of Ashurbanipal and his rebellious brother.<sup>163</sup> From a letter we are led

<sup>160</sup> SAA XVI 28, TUAT NF 3 (2006) 145 f.; A. Livingstone, *ZA* 97 (2007) 103–105, who claims that 'there is no evidence for rivalry and court intrigue'; P. Villard in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 313–315; Svärd, *Women*, 88 f.

<sup>161</sup> J. Novotny, J. Singletary, 'Family ties: Assurbanipal's family revisited', *Studies S. Parpola* (= *Stud. Or.* 106) (2009) 167–177.

<sup>162</sup> SAA X 246 rev. 3–6.

<sup>163</sup> K. Radner, 'Ešarra-ḫammat', *PNA* 1/II (1999) 406 f. Novotny, Singletary, *Studies Parpola*, 174–176, are more cautious. There exists an eye-stone inscribed with her name, although normally only the names of kings are displayed on them; W. G. Lambert, *RA* 63 (1969) 65 f.



to understand that her spirit, grateful for the honour that she had received from Ashurbanipal, appeared to him and blessed him, saying, ‘May his descendants rule Assyria.’ It continues, ‘Honouring the gods brings forth good. Honouring the gods of the Netherworld gives back life.’<sup>164</sup>

Other letters have possible allusions to this funeral, and a ritual for the dead where women played the leading role may have taken place at the burial of this queen.<sup>165</sup> The corpse was displayed before the cremation ceremony began. Palace women shouted to each other ‘Come here, you will bury the palace woman, your daughter’. The day of the cremation was later. Possibly there followed still later a three-day-long purification ritual for the king in the ‘House of Mourning’.<sup>166</sup> Other scholars prefer an earlier interpretation, that the ritual was for a prince to be healed. We will come back to this in Chapter 29, about the mourning of Tammuz by women. Both theories assume it has funerary associations, either with the queen or with Tammuz, which explains the academic confusion.

Traditionally kings and their loved ones were buried in the ancient royal city of Assur, in the ‘House of the Kings’.<sup>167</sup> There several monuments were found: 137 stelae, set in two long rows, with the name of an important person chiselled into each of them. They were found in 1903 at the fortification wall of Assur and are known in German as the *Stelenreihen aus Assur*. The row to the north has the names of kings, the one to the south those of high-ranking officials, covering 700 years, from the fourteenth to the seventh century. Three stelae with the names of women on them continue the row of kings. After the last king, Ashurnasir-pal II, come Sammu-ramat (Semiramis), an unknown wife of Sennacherib (the inscription was effaced), and the last in the row was Libbali-šarrat, the wife of Ashurbanipal.<sup>168</sup> Here (and elsewhere) the queen wears a crenellated diadem on

**164** SAA X 188 rev. 7–10; Novotny, *Studies S. Parpola*, 174 f.; Svärd, *Women*, 46 f.

**165** K. 164, first edited by W. von Soden, ZA 45 (1939) 42–61; S. Parpola, SAA XX 34 with Svärd, *Women and power* (2015) 45 f., 226 no. 11. Cf. Parpola, LAS, Commentary (1983) 7 (commenting on what is now SAA X 9), 120 (on SAA X 188 rev., the appearance of the ghost), 190 f. (on SAA X 233, the ritual), 194 (on SAA X 234), but K. Radner, ‘Ešarra-ḫammāt’, PNA 1/II (1999) 406 f., does not mention this connection. K. Deller and A. R. Millard agree with Parpola in Baghd. Mitt. 24 (1993) 232. Another explanation of the ritual was given by J. Scurllock, RA 86 (1992) 53–67 (see Chapter 29, on Tammuz).

**166** Parpola, LAS, Commentary, 194 (on SAA X 234, combined with the chronicle), combined with Commentary, 191.

**167** Cf. J. McGinnis, SAAB 1 (1987) 8, for the scant data. For ‘House of Kings’ see V. Donbaz, *Studies Sedat Alp* (1992) 119–125; K. Deller, A. R. Millard, Baghd. Mitt. 24 (1993) 232.

**168** W. Andrae, *Das wiedererstandene Assur* (1977) 81–84, 145–151; Pettinato, *Semiramis*, 33–38; J. E. Reade, ‘The historical status of the Assur stelae’, *Studies M. T. Larsen* (2004) 455–473, esp. 463 f.

her head, modelled on the city wall. It is unclear why these three women merited a stela. The stelae seem not to be grave monuments but were erected during the lifetime of the men and women. According to the latest theory, the monuments were removed from temples and transferred to be near the city wall.<sup>169</sup> The stelae are not decorated and not all are inscribed. Still, a depiction of Queen Libbali-šarrat can be seen on her stela,<sup>170</sup> with the inscription:

Statue of Libbi-ali-šarrat, queen of Ashurbanipal, the king of the world, the king of Assyria.<sup>171</sup>

To our surprise the graves of two queens were found not in Assur but in Calah (modern Nimrud). That city was founded by Ashurnasirpal II (883–859) and lay some 30 km south of Mosul on the Tigris. When it was constructed as the new capital, the city wall, a palace and temples had to be built. Both graves were found under the floor of rooms in the living quarters of what is called the Northern Palace, underneath Room 57 of the queen's palace. These graves were undisturbed and contained splendid golden objects.<sup>172</sup> In April 1989 the tomb under room 49 was opened (Tomb II). In the antechamber was a stone plate (35 × 35 × 20 cm) with an inscription of Queen Yabâ:

By the name of Šamaš, Ereškigal (and) the Anunnaki, the great gods of the Netherworld! Yabâ, the queen: destiny overtook her in death and she went to the path of her ancestors. Whoever, in the future, be it a queen who sits on the throne, or a palace lady, the favourite of the king, removes me from my tomb, or puts anybody else with me, who lays his hand upon my jewellery with evil intent, who breaks open the seal of that tomb:

Above (on earth), under the rays of the sun, let his spirit roam outside in thirst. Below in the Netherworld, when libations of water are offered, let him not receive any beer, wine or meal together with the Anunnaki as a funerary offering. May Ningišzida (and) Bidu, the great door-keeper, the great gods of the Netherworld, afflict his corpse with a restless soul, in all eternity.

**169** P. A. Miglus, *ZA* 74 (1984) 133–140.

**170** Andrae, 83 Abb. 59.

**171** Not 'Aššur-šarrat', as one frequently sees. K. Radner, *Die Macht des Namens* (2005) 124; J. Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen* (1982) 55 f. § 191, 60 § 211, 217 no. 227. See Figure 4 in Chapter 1. For another image on a relief see SAA XVI (2002) p. 22 (with the crenellated crown).

**172** J. and D. Oates, 'Tombs, wells and riches', Ch. 3 in *Nimrud. An Assyrian imperial city revealed* (1981) 78–104; Macgregor, *Beyond the hearth and home*, 78–82. For the rich grave gifts see several chapters in J. E. Curtis, *New light on Nimrud* (2008). For the inscriptions see F. N. H. al-Rawi, 'Inscriptions from the tombs of the queens of Assyria', *ibidem*, p. 119–138; for an older edition see A. Fadhil, *Baghd. Mitt.* 21 (1990) 461–482; see also B. Lion in X. Faivre, *Jean Bottéro et la Mésopotamie* (2009) 282–285.

The chamber itself (275 × 230 × 140 cm) was dominated by a stone sarcophagus (230 × 90 × 100 cm) containing two skeletons, one smaller than the other. Yabâ's curse had proved ineffective in preventing what she had feared may happen: actually her successor (Atalia) had been placed beside her in death. Both women were between 30 and 35 years old, but the one was laid in the sarcophagus a long time after the other, probably between 20 and 50 years later. Golden bowls buried with them have the names of Yabâ, Banîtu and Atalia. One of the skeletons is probably that of Yabâ (IIB), and the other (IIa) of Atalia. That skeleton shows that the bones had been heated over a prolonged period to a temperature of 150–250° C, possibly as a temporary measure to conserve the corpse. On the skeletons were fragments of the dark blue garments, embossed with several gold rosettes and beads, from the funerary garb. An impressive amount of gold jewellery was also found there, including a solid gold crown set with rosettes, a diadem of woven gold thread with filigree work inset with semi-precious stones, a few pairs of golden cloissoné bracelets and anklets inlaid with turquoise, and a few chains with pendants and ear ornaments, all examples of perfect workmanship.

The names of the three queens, Yabâ, the wife of Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727),<sup>173</sup> Banîtu, the wife of Salmaneser V (726–722), and Atalia, the wife of Sargon II (721–705), are found on four golden bowls, a box keeping cosmetics, and a mirror. They are all given the title 'lady of the palace'. On a bowl of Yabâ is added 'spouse' (*altu*).<sup>174</sup> What are all these objects belonging to three women doing in this coffin? S. Dalley pointed out that Banîtu means 'the beautiful one' in Akkadian and she assumes that in Western Semitic the name Yabâ means the same. In fact it should really be read as Yapâ, like the Jewish family name Jaffé and the city of Jaffa or Joppe. If she is correct both names refer to the same woman, in the way that Naqi'a and Zakûtu both meant 'the pure one', two names for one queen. Dalley sees Yabâ and Atalia as princesses married off from Jerusalem, as we mentioned earlier. She says that a few of the grave gifts look like Jewish *tefillin*, so may have been part of a dowry.<sup>175</sup>

Perhaps the team of German scholars who were to examine those skeletons were struck with the curse of Yabâ. Before they left for Iraq Professor K. suffered twice from a heart attack. In addition the mother of Dr. W., who was expected to

---

173 On a bowl from Phoenicia with Egyptian motifs. It was dated to the tenth century, so at the time it was already antique; D. Wicke, 'Die Goldschale der Jabâ – eine levantinische Antiquität', ZA 100 (2010) 109–141.

174 Curtis, 136–138, 244 f. ('carinated bowls').

175 S. Dalley, SAAB 12 (1998) 83–98 (the *tefillin*: 95 f.); Dalley in Curtis, 171–175; Melville, JAOS 124 (2004) 45. The identification of Yabâ with Banîtu has been accepted by S. Parpola; *Studies F. M. Fales* (2012) 621 f.; similarly Svärd, *Women*, 40 f.

look after her children, fell down the stairs and broke her leg. If that were not enough, the wife of S. became so seriously ill that she had to undergo an operation, recovering just in time for S. to leave for Iraq.<sup>176</sup> Curses or not, they overcame these setbacks and once they had reached Iraq their examinations revealed that in the cranial cavity of the bodies there were signs of inflammation. That could indicate suffering from migraine or meningitis. Among the gifts were amulets inscribed with incantations against a disease, one that 'seizes the temple/forehead'. Inflammation of the frontal cavity or sinusitis has been diagnosed in other remains and can be regarded as a common illness in such cold, draughty palaces.<sup>177</sup>

The second tomb (Tomb III) was found under the floor of room 57, to the south of the first one. It was a vaulted brick crypt with an antechamber and a grave chamber. In the antechamber was a treasure trove of more than four hundred objects, including many made of gold and encrusted with jewels, and a golden crown.<sup>178</sup> Of special interest is the golden seal of an otherwise unknown woman, Ḥamâ. The inscription reads,

Belonging to Ḥamâ, the palace lady of Shalmaneser (III), king of the land of Assyria (858–824), daughter-in-law of Adad-nirari (II) (911–891).

This was another woman of the harem with an Aramaic name, like those of Samu-ramat and Naqi'a. She is shown praying to the goddess of healing. Behind the figures a scorpion can be seen, the symbol of the harem.<sup>179</sup> In the antechamber were three bronze coffins shaped like a bath. In two of them there were skeletons of women with children (one was a foetus). There were grave gifts with the skeleton in the third coffin. As well as the cylinder seal of a eunuch there was a golden bowl belonging to the powerful governor Šamši-ilu, so possibly the skeleton, of a man of between 55 and 65, was his. It is thought that these coffins were deposited in the antechamber much later than the date of death.<sup>180</sup> The grave chamber contained a large sarcophagus (238 × 132 × 125 cm). There were no human remains, but some fragments of cloth, three small bronze coffins with human remains and gifts were found. Two largely identical texts were inscribed on the lid of the stone sarcophagus and on a stone tablet, which was slightly damaged round the edges. The text on the tablet (26 short lines) extends the text on the sarcophagus by nine lines, with a second curse and a wish for the protection of the deceased.

---

**176** Curtis, 141.

**177** Curtis, 132–134, 147 f.

**178** Curtis, 105 f.

**179** Curtis, 136, 155 f.

**180** Curtis, 144–147, 161–169.

Of Mulissu-mukannišat-Ninua, queen of Ashurbanipal II, king of Assyria (858–824), (and) of Shalmaneser III, king of Assyria (858–824). In future no-one shall bury here a concubine or queen (and) remove this sarcophagus (*arānu*) from its place.

The curses are then followed by,

The daughter of Aššur-nirka-da'in, chief cupbearer of Ashurnasirpal II, king of Assyria. Anyone who later removes my seat from in front of the spirits of the dead, may his spirit receive no food. Let someone later clothe me in a garment, anoint me with oil, offer sheep.<sup>181</sup>

This sarcophagus was clearly intended for the queen of Ashurnasirpal II. She survived her husband and kept her title of queen under his son and successor. So it would have been during his reign that her burial took place. This is indicated by a brick inscription found in the tomb, copying the words used by Shalmaneser III when speaking about the building of the temple tower (*ziggurat*) of Calah.<sup>182</sup> Therefore this brick inscription was not written specifically for this grave chamber. The sarcophagus was empty which suggests that neither any taboo nor the powerful curses prevented tomb robbers from intruding. The bronze coffins there show that the burial chamber was used later, because the stylistic elements are typical of the eighth century and should be dated as such. We should add that much earlier a grave was found at Calah of someone who must have been a princess. Beside her skeleton a famous jewel was found, the Nimrud Jewel. In this same setting a marriage contract was found which K. Deller linked with this high-born lady.<sup>183</sup>

## 24.7 The Neo-Babylonian period

Not much is known about princesses and queens in the Neo-Babylonian period except for the mother of King Nabonidus. His predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562), had three daughters living in Uruk to the south, possibly the city where the dynasty originated. The eldest was Kaššaya, who possessed landed estates and was probably married to the aristocrat Neriglissar. He later became king. The details we glean from cuneiform texts confirm the information given by Berossos, who relates in Greek how King Neriglissar (559–556), the son-in-law

---

<sup>181</sup> Curtis, 124.

<sup>182</sup> Curtis, 126.

<sup>183</sup> M. E. Mallowan, *Nimrud and its remains* I (1966) 114 f. (grave DD), with Iraq 33 (1971) 102–105; Macgregor, *Beyond hearth and home*, 77 f. The marriage contract is CTN 2 247 with K. Deller, NABU 1991/105. Deller's suggestion was rejected by Svärd, *Women*, 87 n. 418.

of Nebuchadnezzar, had murdered the rightful successor and seized the crown himself.<sup>184</sup> This first successor, Amil-Marduk, known in the Bible as Evil-Merodach, reigned for only one year. Neriglissar married off his daughter Gigitu to the head of the temple in Borsippa, a town with links to Babylon. This man was the son of the earlier governor of the city. The marriage took place on the first day of Nisan, the first month, and in the first year of the reign of the king. Neriglissar had violently usurped the throne and in this way wished to secure the support of the grandees of Borsippa. Perhaps the marriage was a reward for their support.<sup>185</sup> In any case, the king used a marriage to oblige powerful families and clans.

A list of the most important office-holders in the household of Nebuchadnezzar speaks of ‘Ardiya, the chief (*mašennu*) of the harem’ and ‘Bel-uballit, the scribe of the harem’. The word harem is written as a Sumerogram with the literal meaning ‘the house of the woman in the palace’.<sup>186</sup> Nebuchadnezzar is famous for the ‘*Hanging Gardens of Babylon*’, which the Greeks counted among the Seven Wonders of the World.<sup>187</sup> He constructed sloping terraces planted with trees for his princess Amytis. She was a Mede, and homesick for the green countryside of her native land. We do not know anything of her background, and everything in this story is legendary. A more restrained narrative comes from the Babylonian scholar Berossos, transcribed by Flavius Josephus.<sup>188</sup> Later explanations are detailed and chiefly tell us the technical details of constructing the gardens. The pillars on which the terraces rested were hollow and filled with earth, so that the roots of the large trees would not become stunted. All these stories come from the time of Alexander the Great or shortly afterwards, so it is possible that they were first told by his companions who would have been able to see them for themselves. A problem arises when we note that Herodotus, writing earlier, made no mention of these gardens in his description of Babylon. When Babylon was excavated archaeologists had difficulty in identifying any construction with them with any degree of certainty. We do know that Assyrian and Babylonian kings had

---

**184** P.-A. Beaulieu, ‘Ba’u-asitu and Kaššaya, daughters of Nebuchadnezzar II’, *Or. NS* 67 (1998) 173–201.

**185** *Nerigl.* 13 with R. Sack, *ZA* 68 (1978) 136; M. T. Roth, *Babylonian marriage agreements* (1989) 49 no. 7; C. Waerzeggers, *The Ezida temple of Borsippa* (2010) 72.

**186** M. Jursa in B. Jacobs, *Der Achämenidenhof* (2010) 70. The main source is R. Da Riva, *ZA* 103 (2013) 203, 213 vi 4–6 (= E. Unger, *Babylon* [1931] 285 iv 5–6) (É SAL.ŠĀ.É.GAL). Unpublished texts mention the governess, *šakintu*; Jursa, 70 f. n. 22. In a literary text: SAA III 84 no. 34:40–45.

**187** R. J. van der Spek, *Studies M. Stol* (2008) 302–313 (in ancient traditions, including Berossos); G. E. E. de Breucker, *De Babyloniaca van Berossos van Babylon* (2012) 517–522, comm. on F 9a-H; S. Dalley, *The mystery of the Hanging Garden of Babylon* (2013).

**188** ‘The so-called *kremastos paradeisos*’; Josephus, *Contra Apionem* I 141; De Breucker, 258 f.

a penchant for laying out great parks, and for one such a project Sennacherib dammed a river, built an aqueduct and collected unusual plants. Perhaps the tradition of fine parks which he established in Nineveh became transformed into the descriptions of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.<sup>189</sup>

The aged mother of the last king of Babylon, Nabonidus (555–539), had an Aramaic name, *Adda-guppi*. A cuneiform inscription, which was later built into the paving of the great mosque at Haran in southern Turkey, purports to be her autobiography. It focuses on her persistent devotion to the moon god Sîn in Haran.<sup>190</sup> She claims to have reached the age of 104 and to have moved in the court circles of the last kings of Assyria and the kings of Babylon who came after them. We assume that she was a lady of court in the time of Nebuchadnezzar and that her son must have been aged around 60 when he became king. He claimed to have been elevated to this position in spite of himself. Possibly his son Belshazzar was the true usurper, once he had obtained prominence. It seems significant that mother and son were both involved in the worship of the moon god Sîn in the city of Haran, which remained as the cult-centre for the moon god.<sup>191</sup> In her inscription Adda-guppi says that in the 16th year of Nabopolassar the moon god left his city, meaning that his temple was destroyed, and that she had placated the angry god by mourning, ‘clad in a torn garment’. Sîn had called Nabonidus to the throne, and he undertook the rebuilding of the temple of Sîn in Haran. In gratitude Sîn gave the mother a very long life:

From the time of Ashurbanipal, the king of Assyria, to the ninth year of Nabonidus, the king of Babylon, the son who came forth from my loins, for 104 years Sîn kept me alive with the fear that he had placed in my heart. As for me, the sight of my eye was clear, my understanding was excellent, my hand and foot were healthy, my words were precise, my food and drink pleased me, I felt good and my heart was lively. I saw my grandchildren as far as the fourth generation and I was satisfied with old age (Column ii 26–34).

After a break in Column iii the inscription goes on to speak of Nabonidus himself. His mother died in the ninth year of his reign and her funeral was most elaborate. Guests came from all corners of the kingdom for seven days of mourning, after which everyone shaved their heads and headed homewards. This fits in more or less with a passage in the Chronicle of Nabonidus about his ninth year:

---

**189** This is the thesis of Dalley, *The mystery of the Hanging Garden of Babylon*. (2013); cf. her earlier articles in: *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten* (1997) 19–24; *Iraq* 56 (1994) 45–58. Her theory was rejected by A. M. Bagg, *BiOr* 71 (2014) 487–492; cf. Bagg, *Assyrische Wasserbauten* (2000) 198–207.

**190** H. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon* (2001) 500–513; A. L. Oppenheim, *ANET* (1969) 560–562; K. Hecker, *TUAT* II/4 (1988) 479–485.

**191** T. M. Green, *The city of the Moon God. Religious traditions of Harran* (1992).

On the fifth day of the first month the mother of the king died at Dur-karašu on the banks of the Euphrates, above Sippar. The Crown Prince and his army were three days in mourning. A wailing ceremony (*bikîtu*) was organised. In the third month there was a wailing ceremony for the queen mother in Babylon.<sup>192</sup>

Where she was buried was a secret.

What should we make of this pseudo-autobiography? We know that Nabonidus worshipped the moon god which gave him problems with the priests of Marduk, the god of Babylon. His mother must have come from Haran, the cult-centre of the moon god, and she would have been brought up in that tradition of worship. She claims to have been at court with successive kings of Assyria and Babylon, where Nabonidus must have lived. The mother does not name the father of her son, which has given rise to the theory that she was an unmarried priestess (*entu*). Some then deduce that she was indeed an Assyrian princess, since princesses of the Assyrian court functioned in the role of priestesses.<sup>193</sup> She claimed to have been successful at court, but how exactly her son rose to power we have absolutely no idea.

Herodotus provides much information about *Nitocris*, a Babylonian queen who is supposed to have lived five generations after Semiramis (I 185–187). She diverted the Euphrates, constructed a reservoir and built a bridge in Babylon, building works accomplished by Nebuchadnezzar II.<sup>194</sup> She was called the mother of Labynetos, a name which could perhaps refer to Nabonidus. This, with the intervening five generations, would fit with her being Adda-guppi, according to W. Röllig.<sup>195</sup> We are also told that King Darius opened the grave of Nitocris, which fits with the fact that the grave of Adda-guppi was concealed. The folk memories conveyed by Herodotus must necessarily be treated as confused, for the name Nitocris occurs elsewhere in his writing as that of an Egyptian queen (II 100). His stories are hopelessly muddled. Today the Greek traditions about Semiramis, the hanging gardens, and Nitocris are not to be treated at face value for establishing historical facts. The reconstruction of the possible backgrounds to the traditions is best left to the specialists.

---

192 A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian chronicles* (1975) 107, Chron. 7:13–15.

193 This is the theory of W. Mayer, 'Nabonids Herkunft', *Festschrift W.H.Ph. Römer* (1998) 245–261. But it was rejected by H. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften*, 10 n. 21. For the mother see also P.-A. Beaulieu, *The reign of Nabonidus* (1989) 67–79.

194 Cf. J. A. Black, Northern Akkadian Project Reports I (1987) 24 f.

195 W. Röllig, 'Nitokris von Babylon', *Festschrift Franz Altheim I* (1969) 127–135; M. P. Streck, 'Nitokris', *RIA IX/7–8* (2001) 590 f.



## 24.8 The Persian period and later

According to the Greeks Persian queens lived in immeasurable luxury. We need not here retell their stories,<sup>196</sup> but we must mention indigenous contemporary sources, in particular the official administration documents on clay tablets from Persepolis from the time of Darius (522–486) written in Elamite. They are often duplicate copies of orders that had been issued. Four women of the royal family are shown to have owned palaces with landed estates, and what is noted most is their expenses for food and wine provided for their official journeys. Once we find the expenses incurred for a reception for 2000 guests.<sup>197</sup> The income to defray these outgoings came from the royal revenues. Their workshops had anything from 20 to 489 employees producing manufactured goods for these queens. The Persian kings toured through their empire. They had palaces in several cities where luxurious banquets were served, as we know from Greek sources. The subjugated countries had to take care of the catering, as some archives in Babylonia demonstrate. In 528 BC King Cambyses visited Abanu in southern Iraq where the temple of Eanna in Uruk had to take care of the food. From their ‘house of flour’ the women who used to grind the barley and the cumin were sent to Abanu to do this work in the local palace.<sup>198</sup> Another archive sheds light on the corvée work done in Borsippa and Babylon (named *upiyāta*): the ingredients were collected, processed and sent by boat to Susa, one of the Persian capitals in nearby Elam. A member of the business house Egibi organised and financed all this and women did the milling in Babylon.<sup>199</sup>

Herodotus, Plato and later Greek writers mention land in conquered territory that was given to these women, and the profit accruing was for the ladies, for their ‘belts, veils and shoes’.<sup>200</sup> The belt is referred to in another text, when Xenophon reported that his army north of Aleppo had reached the River Chalos (Qoweik), which was

---

**196** P. Briant, *Histoire de l'empire perse de Cyrus à Alexandre* (1996) 289–297, in the chapter ‘Gens et vie de cour’. Much about women at court can be found in M. Brosius, *Women in ancient Persia 559–331 BC* (1996).

**197** H. Koch, ‘Frauen im Achämenidenreich’, *Studies O. Klíma* (1994) 134–141.

**198** G. Tolini, ‘Les repas du grand roi en Babylonie: Cambyse et le palais d’Abanu’, in: X. Faivre, *Et il y eut un esprit dans l’homme. Jean Bottéro et la Mésopotamie* (2009) 237–254. The milling: 240, 245f.

**199** G. Tolini, ‘Les ressources de la Babylonie et la table de Darius le Grand (522–486)’, in: C. Grandjean, *Le banquet du monarque dans le monde antique* (2013) 145–162. The milling: 161.

**200** Briant, 474–476, 1040f. (lit.).

full of large tame fish, which the Syrians regarded as gods, and they did not allow anyone to harm them, nor the doves. The villages where they lived belonged to Parysatis, given for the belt (*eis zōnen*) (*Anabasis* 1.4.9).

One modern scholar accounts for the name by proposing that the villages had been given to the woman as a ‘morning gift’, a present given to the bride after her belt had been undone on the wedding night.<sup>201</sup> That the estates were used for producing veils and shoes must have been Greek imagination based on a misunderstanding. At Nippur in Babylonia we also know there were fields and gardens belonging to Parysatis. Recently it was shown that she owned other land near Babylon, and we can follow her fortunes through the archives for about thirty years.<sup>202</sup> A member of a family of merchants called Murašu was in charge of daily administration and settled the accounts with her representative, a Jew named ‘Mattanya (Mattani-Yāma), the servant (or slave) of Ea-bullissu, the employee of Parysatis (Purušatu)’ (between 420–419).<sup>203</sup> On his return journey in 401 Xenophon travelled through ‘the villages of Parysatis, of the mother of Cyrus (the Younger) and of the king (Darius II)’. These were on the Tigris near Assur (*Anabasis* II.4.27), so she had villages there also.

The energetic leadership of Alexander the Great heralded the arrival of the Greeks to follow the Persians. But unexpectedly he died in Babylon in 323 BC. Afterwards the Seleucid Dynasty took power in this area. One cuneiform text from 236 mentions the queen of Seleucus IV, Laodice. She and her sons gave land in the vicinity of Babylon to the cities of Babylon, Borsippa, and Cutha. A tithe of the revenues (10 %) was to go to their temples.<sup>204</sup> Her death is recorded in an official almanac listing daily observations of the moon and planets and recording unusual events. Babylonian scholars had been keeping such records since 740 BC. For the seventh and ninth days of the fourth month of the year 181 we read:

A rumour about Laodice (*Ludiqê*), the wife of Seleucus (*Seluku*) in Babylon: Fate has dragged off the queen. Mourning and lamentation have been organised.<sup>205</sup>

**201** G. Cardascia, ‘La ceinture de Parysatis: un *Morgengabe* chez les Achéménides?’, *Études P. Garelli* (1991) 363–369; repeated in *Hommage à Guillaume Cardascia* (1995) 137–146; see also H. Koch, 138 f.

**202** M. Jursa, M. W. Stolper, ‘Parysatis’, *RIA* X/5–6 (2004) 351; Stolper, *Studies E. V. Leichty* (2008) 463–472.

**203** Cardascia, ‘La ceinture’, 364 (A), 368 f.; Briant, *Histoire*, 476.

**204** CTMMA IV (2014) 213–227 no. 148.

**205** A. J. Sachs, H. Hunger, *Astronomical diaries* II (1989) 385 no. -181 rev. 7–12; G. F. del Monte, *Testi dalla Babilonia Ellenistica* I (1997) 70.

## 24.9 Arab queens

The earliest of the ancient records mentioning the queens of the Arabs is the Biblical story about the queen of Sheba, who visited Solomon (1 Kings 10:1–13), but others are regularly mentioned in Assyrian royal inscriptions.<sup>206</sup> One queen, Telḥunu, was carried off to Nineveh and her daughter who grew up there was later appointed as queen by King Esarhaddon.<sup>207</sup> The Assyrians reckoned that such a woman had remarkable abilities and could become a priestess (*kumirtu*) or a wise woman (*apkallatu*).<sup>208</sup> We know from other sources that the Arabs did have queens from time to time, including the famous Zenobia, the queen of Palmyra (267–271 AD). The queens of some Arsacid kings (250 BC–AD 224) are mentioned in the date formulas which may reflect their important position.<sup>209</sup> For a period of sixteen centuries we know the names of about twenty Arab queens, but why that institution should have been established is unclear.<sup>210</sup> It certainly had nothing to do with the daughter of a sheikh, who is reported to have taken a leading role in the struggle against the Bedouin.<sup>211</sup>

---

**206** S. W. Cole, OIP 114 (1996) 54; I. Eph'al, *The ancient Arabs. Nomads on the borders of the Fertile Crescent 9<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> centuries B. C.* (1982) 249b, in the Index under 'Arabs: queens'.

**207** Eph'al, 127 f.

**208** M. Cogan, *Imperialism and religion* (1974) 18; R. Borger, Or. NS 26 (1957) 9 f.

**209** J. Huijs, 'Images of Parthian queens', in: L. Marti, *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (2014) 605–642.

**210** N. Abbott, 'Pre-Islamic Arab Queens', AJSL 58 (1941) 1–22; E. A. Knauf, *Ismael* (1989) 4 f., 24 f. n. 105.

**211** U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin* (1983) 238; e.g., A. Jaussen, *Coutumes des Arabes au pays de Moab* (1907, 1948) 174 f.