

## 26 Old Babylonian convents

Up to this point we have repeatedly spoken of one highly placed priestess who was often a princess. Usually she had the Sumerian title *en*, but frequently *ereš.dingir* was used. In the Old Babylonian period we find instead a plethora of other women devoted to religion. Most conspicuous are those who lived as a group in convents, each in her own house. Such a woman was called in Sumerian a *lukur*, Akkadian *nadītu*, for which we shall use the term ‘nun’. Much of what we know about these women comes from sections of their archives found mainly in Sippar, but where this sort of institution originated we are not sure.<sup>1</sup> In the early Sumerian period we see a group of nine important women, each a *lukur*, and all married with children.<sup>2</sup> In the Ur III period they were the concubines of a king or another dignitary. At the same time in Umma several *lukurs* were occupied in the service of the goddess Šara. These may have been destitute women.<sup>3</sup> One list divides them into two groups, one of 33 and the other of 21, with one woman leading each group. A note on one of the women named says ‘fled’. Probably they were unmarried, but they were not slave-girls. In contrast to these poor nuns in the ‘holy city’ of Nippur in the same period we know of a ‘house’ belonging to Geme-Enlila, the daughter of the king. She was obviously upper class and was a *lukur* of the local god Ninurta, an office to which she may have been dedicated shortly after birth.<sup>4</sup> Every temple will have had its own *lukur*. It was the kings of the First Dynasty of Babylon who first instituted a convent with nuns, putting an end to the thousand-year old Sumerian tradition of appointing a princess as *ereš.dingir*. The kings of Babylon and of other kingdoms sent their daughter to the convent at Sippar.

Other religious women, to be discussed later in Chapter 27, did not live in convents and were not constrained to remain unmarried. One had the title ‘*nadītu* of Marduk of Babylon’, where the translation ‘nun’ can be misleading, for she was married but not allowed to have a child. We know that the *nadītu* of the god

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<sup>1</sup> T. M. Sharlach, ‘Priestesses, concubines, and the daughters of men: disentangling the meaning of the word *lukur* in Ur III times’, *Studies Marcel Sigrist* (2008) 177–183.

<sup>2</sup> P. Steinkeller, *ASJ* 3 (1981) 85; Sharlach, 178; M. Such-Gutiérrez, *CRRAI* 54 [Würzburg] (2012) 328 n. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Sharlach, 180–183; A. L. Oppenheim, *AOS* 32 (1948) 76–78; I. J. Gelb, *JNES* 32 (1973) 75 f., 92 (as booty of Amar-Sin given to the god); A. Uchitel, *Historia* 33 (1984) 270–272; T. Scharlach in: H. Crawford, *Regime change in the Ancient Near East and Egypt* (2007) 69; L. Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk* (2012) 95 n. 564.

<sup>4</sup> M. Such-Gutiérrez, *Beiträge zum Pantheon von Nippur im 3. Jahrtausend* 1 (2003) 164–166, cf. idem, *CRRAI* 54, 328 f.; Sharlach, 179.

Marduk, a married woman, could arrange for a surrogate mother (*šugîtu*) to bear children for her. In the Code of Hammurabi we read that this option was open to any *nadîtu*. Although earlier scholars accepted that such a *nadîtu* was married,<sup>5</sup> in fact we do not have a single marriage contract for a *nadîtu* of Šamaš, so most scholars now assume that these sections in the Code of Hammurabi refer only to the *nadîtu* of Marduk.<sup>6</sup> However there we know of one *nadîtu* of Šamaš who gave her inheritance to a nephew, and she further specified that a portion should be given to two women named as Šat-Aya and Ana-yašim-damqat ‘and her children, those she has borne or shall bear’. Šat-Aya is frequently attested as the name of a *nadîtu* of Šamaš, and Ana-yašim-damqat is a slave’s name meaning ‘She is good to me’ (referring to her mistress or to the goddess Aya). This means that we have here a *nadîtu* of Šamaš and her slave-girl who is expected to bear children.<sup>7</sup> This situation gives rise to an unexpected problem and here we tread on new ground. Furthermore, in two texts a second wife (once described as a *šugîtu*) is associated with a *nadîtu* of Šamaš, not Marduk.<sup>8</sup> In the first, the *nadîtu* had obviously died and her husband had ‘taken’ her house, her inheritance, and given this, together with two slaves and household utensils, to 𒀭., ‘the *šu-gi*, his wife’. Her two sons were at the same time appointed as her heirs.<sup>9</sup> This conflicts with L. Barberon’s thesis that the *šugîtu* is associated with only the *nadîtu* of Marduk. In some texts that mention a *šugîtu* it is not certain that a *nadîtu* of Marduk is involved.<sup>10</sup> There is more evidence. Some mothers are known to have been *nadîtus* of Šamaš, and their babies can be said to have been ‘torn from the womb’, meaning an abnormal birth (see Chapter 25, under the heading ‘Flawless’).<sup>11</sup> The full implications of

5 G. R. Driver, J. C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws I* (1956) 293–296, 366 f.; J. Renger, ZA 58 (1967) 160 f.

6 R. Westbrook, OBML, 107 f.; Barberon, 146 f.

7 CT 47 47:23–26 with M. Stol, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 99 f. For Šat-Aya as a *nadîtu* of Šamaš see Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 11 note 11.

8 BE 6/1 95 (VAB 5 203) and K. R. Veenhof, *Mélanges A. Finet* (1989) 181 f., Text A (correct ‘Marduk’ to ‘Šamaš’ in the translation). Here a brother plays a role, as in the related text BM 96998, published by Veenhof in *Festschrift C. Wilcke* (2003) 313–332. Cf. M. Stol, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 82; *Studies A. Skaist* (2011) 160.

9 Note these two corrections to BE 6/1 95: [*ap*]-*lu-ut Amat-Mamu* ... [*ša*] by F. R. Kraus in lines 8–9, and [*mu-u*]-*s-šà* ‘her husband’ in line 10 by Veenhof; both recorded in *Mélanges Finet*, 181 n. 2.

10 OLA 21 no. 73 with Barberon, 24.

11 J. J. Finkelstein, ‘*šilip rēmim* and related matters’, *Studies S. N. Kramer* (1978) 187–194, does not accept that the *nadîtu* was chaste; see also Chapter 25, at the end of the section ‘Flawless’. For the alleged vow of chastity, S. J. van Wyk wrote, ‘Attributing to the *nadîātu* sexual acts or abstinence from sexual acts does not add to our understanding of their role and position in society, but rather reveals biased presumptions and the superimposing of present-day sexual taboos and

these facts still need to be worked out.<sup>12</sup> The child born to a *šugîtu* may have been adopted by the *nadîtu* or by someone else, such as her brother, which happened in one of the texts.

## 26.1 Words for a ‘nun’

In the Old Babylonian period far and away the most common word used for a nun was *lukur* in Sumerian or *nadîtu* in Akkadian. In the preceding Ur III period the *lukur* was the second wife of a king or of a high-ranking official, but now it had taken on a new meaning. The Sumerian sign for *lukur* can be interpreted as a combination of ‘woman’ and ‘rite’ (*me*).<sup>13</sup> The Akkadian word *nadîtu* is explained as a woman who could not have or was not allowed to have children. We find the title mostly in Sippar and Nippur, where they served Šamaš and Ninurta, the gods of those cities. Other titles occasionally used for the very same woman were *dam*, ‘the wife of a god, *ereš.dingir*, ‘the lady is a god’ or ‘the lady of a god’, and *ugbabbu*, ‘the woman under taboo’, which we discussed in the last chapter.<sup>14</sup> The most general term for a woman dedicated to a male god was *ereš.dingir*, which could always be used. The title *dam* ‘wife’ is a variant of this. Intrinsically they both indicate the close link with the god. The title *lukur*, originally ‘second wife’, was perhaps used if a god as well as a goddess was involved. In Sippar when a young woman entered (*erēbu*) a convent this would have been interpreted as a sort of marriage to the god. She was to be the second wife of Šamaš, whose first wife, the ‘bride’ (*kallatu*), was the goddess Aya. It would also explain why this nun was given the Sumerian title *lukur*.<sup>15</sup> This explanation may not apply to wives of Ninurta and Nergal. In some places only the title *ugbabbu* occurs.

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sexual behaviour onto classes of women who did not fit the mould of the wife/mother’; in her ‘Prostitute, nun, or “man-woman”: revisiting the position of the Old Babylonian *nadiātu* priestesses’, *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 41 (2015) 95–122, esp. 113.

<sup>12</sup> K. R. Veenhof, ‘Two *šilip rēmim* adoptions from Sippar’, *Studies L. de Meyer* (1994) 143–157; cf. M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonian and the Bible* (2000) 127 f.

<sup>13</sup> Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 199 (n. 1131). A nun is involved in ‘the rite (*me*) of Ištar, the Queen of Sippar’ in AbB 1 72:12; note the word *paršū* in line 18.

<sup>14</sup> M. Stol, ‘Titel altbabylonischer Klosterfrauen’, *Festschrift J. Oelsner* (2000) 457–466. Confusion reigns in R. Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 313 f.

<sup>15</sup> According to the reasoning of P. Steinkeller, *ASJ* 3 (1981) 84 f., n. 47. R. Westbrook reaches the same conclusion following other lines of argument; *OBML* (1988) 66a.

## 26.2 The *nadītu*

The best documentation for these nuns comes from the archives of Šamaš in Sippar, an ancient city on the Euphrates 30 km. south of Baghdad. At the end of the nineteenth century the convent of Sippar was first imperfectly excavated by Rassam, and then later more thoroughly by Scheil. The result of those digs and subsequent illegal excavations were that a mass of texts from the ancient archives came into the possession of the museums of today.<sup>16</sup> The site of Sippar can be split into two cities, distinct but quite close to one another, which are now called Tell Abu Habbah and Tell ed-Der. In ancient times various names were given to these two cities.<sup>17</sup> Both ‘Sippar of Šamaš’, the local god, and ‘Sippar of Yaḥrurum’, the local tribe, refer to Abu Habbah. Texts locate the convent in Sippar-Yaḥrurum.<sup>18</sup> It had an international reputation, for letters from Mari mention ‘Sippar with the convent’.<sup>19</sup> The complex of buildings was surrounded by a wall, within which each nun had her own small house. There they lived and acted independently.<sup>20</sup> We have a round clay tablet on which the ground floor plan of one of these houses, ‘the house in the convent [of Lam]assatum, [daughter of Bele]ssunu’, is drawn schematically. The plan would have been drawn for an occasion when the property was the subject of a sale or a legacy. Precise measurements are given (Figure 44) for the two rooms, one larger than the other, occupying a total surface area of 52½ square metres. From other texts we know that houses in the convent varied in size from 12 to 72 square metres.<sup>21</sup> Often we read in deeds of inheritance that a woman may have had two houses, one within and one outside the convent, for example in ‘Great Sippar’.<sup>22</sup>

The gate-keepers of the convent, possibly an honorary function, are often named as witnesses in contracts of sale, hire or lease.<sup>23</sup> A number of these contracts were drafted by female scribes, appointed specifically to the convent, and

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**16** Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 303 f., 306; Renger, *ZA* 58, 156–158. Many texts on nuns were found in the archives of their families living outside the convent; L. Barberon in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 273–288.

**17** D. Charpin, ‘Sippar: deux villes jumelles’, *RA* 82 (1988) 13–32.

**18** Charpin, 20 f. (citing BE 6/1 109).

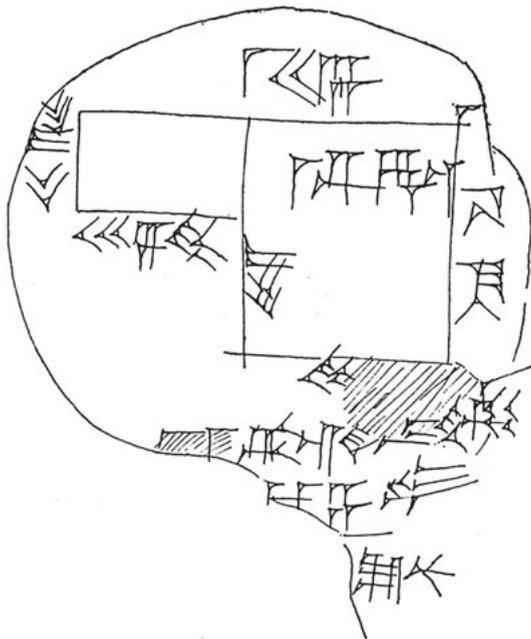
**19** Charpin, 18 n. 25.

**20** H. Waetzoldt in: K. R. Veenhof, *Houses and households in Ancient Mesopotamia* (1996) 147 n. 10, end.

**21** J. Nougayrol, *RA* 73 (1979) 79 AO 20339, with D. Charpin, J.-M. Durand, *RA* 75 (1981) 102.

**22** Great Sippar: CT 47 63:17 and 19; E. Szlechter, *TJDB* (1958) 11 MAH 15.913:11 and 14. See also R. Harris, *Studies A. L. Oppenheim*, 131; Charpin, *RA* 82, 20 f.

**23** B. Lion, *RA* 95 (2001) 28 f.



**Fig. 44:** The ground floor plan of a house in the convent of Sippar drawn on a clay tablet. The lengths of the walls of the two rooms are aggregated in *el*-units. The top line reads  $60 + 20 + 5 = 85$ . The total area is noted in *sar*-units (1 *sar* = 36 sq.m.) plus subdivided *gin*-units (8 *gin* = 1 *sar*). With the large room being  $1\frac{1}{3}$  *sar*,  $7\frac{1}{2}$  *gin*, the surface area amounts to  $52\frac{1}{2}$  sq. m. At the bottom of the tablet the diagram is described as ‘a house of the convent ...’, and it would have been used for the official documentation of a transaction involving sale, gift or inheritance. *Musée du Louvre, Paris*.

they appear as the final witness.<sup>24</sup> The most important functionary was the overseer of the *nadītus*.<sup>25</sup> On occasions two or three overseers were in office at the same time, so perhaps the women were divided into different groups. In the early period a woman could be the overseer (until Hammurabi put a stop to it) and we know the names of five female overseers. The male overseer sometimes shared his task with his sister. It was a position to be kept in the family and some successive members of one family can be traced as holders of that office.<sup>26</sup> A similar

<sup>24</sup> B. Lion, ‘Les femmes scribes de Sippar’, in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 289–303.

<sup>25</sup> In the early period *ugula níg lukur/na-di-tum*, e.g., JCS 30 (1978) 235, 245 Text E:32. On cylinder seal inscriptions PN ir níg DN; VAS 8 85; M. Anbar, M. Stol, RA 85 (1991) 36, on 10.

<sup>26</sup> The cylinder seal of the first overseer, the ancestor, is unusual in that the king is present; M. Tanret, *The seal of the sanga* (2010) 85–87. The seal of the ancestor Bur-Nunu: 159 f., 186b; two

organisation obtained in the convent of Zababa at Kish.<sup>27</sup> The convent in Nippur had a Sumerian name, ‘the place of the *lukur*’. Nippur was the ancient Sumerian ‘holy city’ and was a special case. Although some of the personnel there had different titles the ‘gate-keeper’ was named.<sup>28</sup>

We know of two lists of guests attending a ritual feast at Nippur. The person in highest authority over the city (*gú.en.na*) is named first. Directly after him are the names of thirty or forty nuns, which may have been all the nuns in Nippur or just one group of them. One of the lists continues with the high priestesses of three gods and the priestesses of the mother goddess. Women seemed to play the chief role in this ritual feast. It is possible that the *gú.en.na* named first had authority over the nuns and he was the one who would receive important guests at the feast.<sup>29</sup>

In Sippar there was a close bond between the convent and Ebabbar, the ‘White House’, the temple of Šamaš and Aya. The nuns there identified themselves as ‘servant of Šamaš’ or ‘servant of Aya’, or of both deities.<sup>30</sup> In Sippar the king of Babylon seems gradually to have assumed more and more control over the convent. One indication of this is that the heads of the convent used to identify themselves on their cylinder seals as ‘servant of Ebabbar’, but during the reign of Hammurabi they became a ‘servant of Hammurabi’.<sup>31</sup> The same went for the heads of the temples. Later we shall see how Samsu-iluna, Hammurabi’s successor, dealt with the convent.

People aimed to keep their real estate within the family. That may have been one reason why housing unmarried daughters in convents arose as an institution.<sup>32</sup> It would have been a matter of great importance for rich families to ensure that property did not pass on to their in-laws. Any property of a daughter in the convent would pass generally to her brothers, or a woman would name the daughter of her brother as the heiress.<sup>33</sup> But this is a one-sided

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overseers: CT 45 28 rev. 14–15; 92 iv 1; three overseers: CT 8 37a:16–18. For the personnel of the convent see in general Harris, *Ancient Sippar*, 189–199.

**27** VAS 18 32, where the witnesses are two overseers and a gate-keeper; see H. Klengel, JCS 23 (1970) 129; the same persons are named in YOS 13 325:31–35.

**28** Renger, ZA 58, 170 §90; F. Huber Vulliet, *Studies Jeremy Black* (2010) 137.

**29** Huber Vulliet, 127 f., 130, 132, 145.

**30** Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 16–18.

**31** R. Harris, ‘On the process of secularisation under Hammurabi’, JCS 15 (1961) 117–120.

**32** R. Harris, *Studies A. L. Oppenheim* (1967) 109; *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 307; in: B. S. Lesko, *Women’s earliest records* (1989) 152 f.; Renger, ZA 58, 161.

**33** Harris, 124 f. (‘aunts and nieces’). Her strongest example is CT 47 63 where we follow three generations. See also the summaries by F. R. Kraus in: *Essays on the Oriental laws of succession* (1969) 13–17; C. Janssen, Northern Akkad Project Reports 5 (1991) 10.

view.<sup>34</sup> It is abundantly clear that the prime motivation for sending a daughter in the family to the convent was religious. She was there to pray for the family, to intercede and intermeditate with the gods, as we shall show a little later in this chapter.

The religious title by which a family referred to a daughter could be *nadītu*, *kulmašītu*, or *qadištu*,<sup>35</sup> but the significance of these differences is unclear.<sup>36</sup> Daughters in one particular family were known either as a *nadītu* or a *kulmašītu*, and the daughters of the son as a *nadītu* of Šamaš or a *nadītu* of Marduk.<sup>37</sup> The pedigree of a family of lamentation priests from Sippar has daughters who became a *nadītu* of either Šamaš or Marduk, while their brother was the overseer of the *nadītus* of Šamaš. In other branches of the family we see lamentation priests with their sister as a *nadītu*. The head of the lamentation priests was married to a *qadištu*.<sup>38</sup>

### 26.3 Inauguration

The ritual at which a *nadītu* was dedicated was called *nišītu*, ‘dedication’.<sup>39</sup> On two occasions we find that a diviner was a witness to the occasion, which could mean that he was there to perform an extispicy, as was done in Sumerian times when the *eresš.dingir* was selected.<sup>40</sup> The *nadītu* received a large dowry (*nudunnû*) from her father or family,<sup>41</sup> and she was generally given a special name connecting her to Šamaš and Aya, such as ‘Gift of Aya’, ‘Wish of Šamaš’, ‘His favourite’,

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**34** Barberon, 179 f., who notes ‘l’importance de la prière’ when writing on the *nadītu* of Marduk, 204–206. Contrast S. J. van Wyck, ‘The *nadītu*’s economic functions refute the emphasis on the religiously-destined life as the sole purpose for the institution’, in her ‘Prostitute, nun, or “man-woman”: revisiting the position of the Old Babylonian *nadīātu* priestesses’, *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 41 (2015) 95–122, esp. 116.

**35** All three occur in CT 48 3:9–10.

**36** Harris, 126; Renger, ZA 58, 152 n. 291. The *ugbaltu* mentioned by him is a ‘wife (dam) of Šamaš’. J. J. Finkelstein, *Studies S. N. Kramer* (1976) 191 f., n. 9; see now L. Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 143–145.

**37** R. Harris, Or. NS 38 (1969) 135, 137. Gurrudum had two daughters, one a *nadītu* and the other a *kulmašītu*, and a son; see CT 48 5.

**38** L. Dekiere, *Studies L. de Meyer* (1994) 139.

**39** As noted by C. Wilcke, *Studies F. R. Kraus* (1982) 439, 441, 447, and mainly attested in the dedication of a *nadītu* of Marduk; see Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 189–199. Not dedicated ‘shortly after her birth’ as was said by some scholars; Barberon, 195–197.

**40** Barberon, 193. The diviner is Ibni-Šamaš, in CT 8 2a rev. 8 (= 35), BE 6/1 84:46.

**41** Wilcke, 445 ff. The much older texts from Ebla also refer to a ‘present’ for ‘the wife of the god’ in the city Luban, see *Memoriae Igor M. Diakonoff* (2005) 178. In Mari it was a ‘bridal gift’ (*nidittu*), ARM 30 (2009) 304 (ARM 22 154).



**Fig. 45:** Statue of a woman praying. Found in a temple at Tell Asmar (Ešnunna). Limestone, 37 cm high. 2900–2600 BC. *The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.*

or ‘Our mistress’.<sup>42</sup> One was called ‘She loves my convent’.<sup>43</sup> The cylinder seal of a *nadītu* usually identifies her as the ‘slave-girl of Šamaš and Aya’,<sup>44</sup> a typical epithet for a *nadītu*. A name like Lamassani, ‘Our Guardian Deity’ implied that she would pray for her family,<sup>45</sup> since that name is cognate with the word *lamassātu*, the statues placed in the temple to intercede with the temple god or goddess (Figure 45).<sup>46</sup> The word ‘wish’ often occurs in these names. It was a key word in the inscription of Nabonidus, where the god Sîn wished for an *entu*

<sup>42</sup> Harris, 116 f.; 126–128; Renger, ZA 58, 153 § 64.

<sup>43</sup> J.-M. Durand in: *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux I* (2008) 405.

<sup>44</sup> In the inscriptions on their cylinder seals; see also AbB 1 34:4.

<sup>45</sup> K. R. Veenhof, BiOr 25 (1968) 197 f.

<sup>46</sup> K. van der Toorn, *Family religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel* (1996) 114, as can clearly be seen in the year name 29 of Ammi-ditana; see B. F. Batto, *Studies on women at Mari* (1974) 105 n. 32.

(see Chapter 25). A unique passage concerning the *nadītus* in Sippar occurs in an unusual letter from Mari, where the god wishes for a throne and a nun. It is a letter written by an ‘answerer of Šamaš’, the sun god, to Zimri-Lim, the king of Mari. The ‘answerer’ was someone recognised as having the status of a prophet. In this letter he seeks to communicate the will of the gods, and his first prophecy is particularly interesting.

Thus says Šamaš, ‘I am the lord of the land. As quickly as possible have them bring to Sippar, the city of life, a large seat for my glorious dwelling and your daughter, whom I desired from you’.<sup>47</sup>

Sippar was subject to the king of Babylon, and not Mari, so the convent must have been an international institution. A *nadītu* from Kish remembered her inauguration as a day of joy.

When I saw you, I was delighted by your arrival ... just as I was when I entered the convent and got to see the face of my mistress.<sup>48</sup>

We have a report of the expenditure incurred when such a young girl (*ṣuḫartu*) entered the convent.<sup>49</sup> The heading states that it concerned the ‘gift’ (*biblu*), here the gift taken to a brother and his sister, that is to say the father and the aunt of the girl. We see how the father’s line is followed. The aunt was certainly a *nadītu* herself who already lived in a convent. She will have had a special relationship with the girl and it is obvious that years later she would name the girl as her heiress on condition that her niece would look after her in her old age. That was the custom. There follows a list of the various gifts, but although we can transcribe the words we do not understand precisely what they were or who gave them. Possibly they came from the convent.<sup>50</sup> Every gift had its value calculated in terms of silver, amounting to a total value of 4 2/3 shekels and 15 grains of silver. That was why the text was written. Some expenses directly related to her

<sup>47</sup> A. 4260, now AEM 1/1 (1988) 417 no. 194. See Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 194.

<sup>48</sup> AbB 10 4:7–12.

<sup>49</sup> PBS 8/2 183 (obverse and reverse should be changed) with Harris, *Studies A. L. Oppenheim* (1967) 110–114; R. Westbrook, OBML (1988) 65 f.; C. Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 262. See also Renger, ZA 58, 153 f. § 65; Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 200 f., 308. Some discussions about ceremonies associated with *nadītus* mention ‘sprinkling’ (*issalḫu*, JCS 2 [1948] 77 no. 6:8), but in fact the verb is *salā’u*, ‘to suffer from a chronic disease’. Another error which is often repeated is referring to ‘the thread (*qū*) of Šamaš’ in CT 4 18b:1, whereas a better reading is <un>-*qā-am*, ‘the ring of Šamaš’.

<sup>50</sup> Thus, with hesitation, Wilcke, ‘Familiengründung’, 262 f.

inauguration, ‘the day that the girl entered’ the convent, including the barrels and the fish.<sup>51</sup>

We know of three evidently religious occasions in the convent or temple when expenses were incurred. The first ceremony was for ‘the seven days of *sebūt šatti*’, an autumnal feast in the seventh month. It can be seen as a counterpart to the Jewish days of feasting and atonement which was also observed in the seventh month.<sup>52</sup> The second ceremony was ‘the day of destiny of the *nadītus*’. This could well be the occasion when offerings were presented to the dead, and as such would be a counterpart to All Souls’ Day for the convent women. It would also fit in with the observance of remembrance of the dead held in the fifth month, *Abum*.<sup>53</sup> The third ceremony was held in the tenth month, *Ṭebetum*, and was known as ‘the day of *Ṭebetum* of the *nadītus*’, evidently a festival in which the women took part.<sup>54</sup>

A nun would receive extra gifts at a festival. Some contracts stipulated that they should be provided with food at three or as many as six ceremonies per year.<sup>55</sup> In older texts the three festivals are specified by name.<sup>56</sup> Six festivals would mean one every two months. One text suggests that these gifts were seen as a payment for their services for *Šamaš*.

In the temple of *Šamaš* at six festivals [a leaseholder] shall provide her with twenty litres of ‘fat flour’ and a piece of meat.<sup>57</sup>

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51 Another text suggests that the woman was given ‘the ring of *Šamaš*’ and that the bride price was paid, perhaps to the convent (CT 4 18b; see note 49, end). Another possibility is that here we have expenses for a normal wedding; see the discussion on the passage in Chapter 2, under ‘Expenses’.

52 A. Cavigneaux, V. Donbaz, ‘Le mythe du 7.VII. Les jours fatidiques et le Kippour mésopotamiens’, *Or. NS* 76 (2007) 293–335.

53 C. Wilcke, *Isin–Išān Baḫrīyāt* III (1987) 105 n. 1; K. Radner, *Die Macht des Namens* (2005) 86 (n. 406).

54 MHET II/4 470:12: ‘three festivals of *Šamaš* in the month *Ṭebetum* (= month X)’. For rituals for the dead in the tenth month see M. Stol, *NABU* 2008/1.

55 There is no evidence that she handed on to the temple what had been given to her, as suggested by A. L. Oppenheim, R. Harris, F. Pomponio; cf. J. Renger, *ZA* 58, 159 f. §73.

56 Harris, *Studies Oppenheim*, 130, *Ancient Sippar*, 199, 229–231. Six festivals are rare; in CT 45 11:27, Riffin 39:10–12; see also G. Mauer, *Das Formular der altbabylonischen Bodenpachtverträge* (1980) 116–121. The only named festivals attested in the early texts are *elūlu*, *nabrū*, and *ayāru*. The Neo-Babylonian ‘Cruciform Monument’, a forgery, also names three festivals for the god: *ḫumṭu*; the fifth month (*Abum*); the eighth month; *JEOL* 20 (1967–68) 65:323–326. Two transactions of nuns mention ‘the month of the festival, the month *Abu*’, see *VAS* 8 28:8, 47:9.

57 Riffin 39:10–12.

## 26.4 High status

These women were recruited from distinguished circles and were often rich.<sup>58</sup> Some were even princesses: daughters of the king of Babylon; a daughter of a king of Mari; and Ruttum, a daughter of Hammurabi, probably the king of Kurda.<sup>59</sup> They lived in the convent in Sippar, like Amat-Šamaš, the sister of the future king of Karanâ. She is possibly the second witness in a transaction, named immediately after Iltani, the daughter of King Šin-muballit of Babylon.<sup>60</sup> Some nuns came from other cities, including one from Dilbat, though the convent of Zababa in Kish was closer.<sup>61</sup>

Nuns bought property, hired out houses or slaves, leased out fields and date plantations, and gave out silver on loan.<sup>62</sup> Some had their estates managed by a steward. Princess Iltani had shepherds working for her to look after her flocks. Like all wealthy women she also had her weaving mills.<sup>63</sup> A *nadîtu* had to perform her own corvée, but we do not know much about this.<sup>64</sup> She quite often paid with silver ‘from her hand ring’, meaning her own money, possibly in the form of rings of a standard weight.<sup>65</sup>

Women could not in general act as witnesses, though within the convent that did happen whenever they were making internal agreements. At the end of a document men (often officials of the convent) would appear as the first witnesses followed by the women, occasionally demarcated by a line on the tablet. Now and again a female scribe wrote these documents. A group of school texts was found

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**58** Renger, *ZA* 58, 150–153; S. Lahtinen, *The nadîtu as business woman* (2011).

**59** W. Tyborowski, ‘The daughters of the kings of Babylon and their role in the Old Babylonian economy and society’, in: P. Charvát, P. M. Vlčková, *Who was king? Who was not king?* (2010) 59–70; Harris, 123; Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 66 f. It is possible that there was only one princess Iltani, the daughter of Šin-muballit, and that her estate was continued after her death; M. Stol, ‘Prinzessin Iltani’, *SEL* 4 (1987) 3–7. For Princess Ruttum see Tyborowski, 60; also MHET II/2 204, 209, cf. 441.

**60** M. Stol, *Festschrift J. Oelsner* (2000) 461 n. 27.

**61** Coming from Dilbat: Renger, *ZA* 58, 169 § 84; from Mankisum: MHET II/4 493:4; Karanâ (Qaṭṭara): OBTR 134; Marad: Šat-Aya, daughter of Ḫalum-biumu, F. N. H. al Rawi, S. Dalley, *Old Babylonian texts from the private houses at Abu Habbah, Ancient Sippar* (2000) 119 no. 113:8; cf. p. 126; see also Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 175 n. 1033.

**62** Harris, *Ancient Sippar*, 310–312.

**63** Harris, *Studies Oppenheim*, 132–134; Renger, *ZA* 58, 161–166 (who later withdrew the calculation he gave on p. 162). There was also Adad-mušallim, ‘steward of the convent’, ensi ša é gá.gi4.a (CT 45 60:2).

**64** CH § 40 with Renger, *ZA* 58, 166 § 81.

**65** *ZA* 58, 161; Harris, *Ancient Sippar*, 316.

which had come from the house of a nun. From this C. Wilcke concluded that the nuns could read and write (see Chapter 18, under ‘Scribes’).<sup>66</sup>

It was expected that the nuns would be looked after by their families but that did not always happen. A letter from a *nadītu* from Kish includes a veiled threat in an effort to ameliorate her situation.

A *nadītu* who is not supported by her brothers in her awkward position may give her legacy to whomsoever she will.

Without such a clause the brothers would have been the legatees.<sup>67</sup> In practice this rule of inheritance applied to any unmarried daughter. A *nadītu* writing from the city of Lagaba threatens to go to the king because she is hungry, recourse to which she would certainly have been entitled in the reign of Samsu-iluna.<sup>68</sup>

Erišti-Aya wrote from Sippar a series of emotive letters to her father, the king of Mari, addressing him as ‘my star’, ‘my sun’, and saying that, although she prayed constantly in the temple of Ebabbar, she had received nothing from him. She called herself an ‘emblem’, thus comparing herself to a sacred item in the temple, and implying that she had a function like that of the *lamassātu*, the interceding statues. She begins her letter by praying for him in the name of her Lord and Mistress, Šamaš and Aya in Sippar.<sup>69</sup> She had even dedicated a golden sun-disk and rings ‘for his life’.<sup>70</sup>

To my Star, thus says Erišti-Aya:

May my Lord and my Mistress protect you for my sake, as if you were the heaven and the earth! You have just sent to me a slave and a slave-girl. The slave-girl died here. In the family am I not the emblem that prays? Why am I not cared for? Why do I get no food and clothes from your house? My food and clothing, what my father and my brothers gave me, let them give that (again). I must not suffer hunger.<sup>71</sup>

In Karanâ, Aqba-ḥammu was the king and Iltani was the queen. She received a letter from her sister from the convent at Sippar to say that she had to be cared for by those supporting her.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>66</sup> D. Charpin, *Reading and writing in Babylon* (2010) 41 with 271 n. 39, with a reference to Wilcke.

<sup>67</sup> AbB 10 6:28–32.

<sup>68</sup> AbB 3 19.

<sup>69</sup> See the informative chapter ‘Erišti-Aya, a *nadītum*’ by B. F. Batto, *Studies on women at Mari*, 93–107. For the letters by Erišti-Aya (ARM 10 nos. 36–43) see J.-M. Durand, ‘Le dossier d’Erišti-Aya’, LAPO 18 (2000) 390–402.

<sup>70</sup> For the dedication of the sun-disk and rings see ARM 10 40 rev. 7–10 (Durand, 397 no. 1198).

<sup>71</sup> ARM 10 36 with Durand, 394 f. no. 1196.

<sup>72</sup> OBTR 134.

To Iltani, my sister, thus says Amat-Šamaš, your sister:

May my Lord and my Mistress grant you eternal life for my sake! Earlier when Aqba-ḥammu came here to Sippar, I esteemed him highly, as was fitting for my status as a *nadītu*, and he too esteemed me especially highly. He also said this to me. 'After I have gone back to Karanâ, write to me and I will have anything you need sent to you in a fully laden ship. Pray for me to your Lord.' Well, I wrote and he entrusted two boys to me. But you, you never think of me. You never have a jar of good oil sent to me and you never say to me, 'Offer it to your Mistress and pray for me.' That is how you are. What do you take me for? Does not a slave-girl, who daily washes the feet of her lord, care for her sister? But you do not.

Furthermore, the slaves that my father gave me have grown old. I am sending thirty shekels of silver with this letter to the king ... Have him bring me slaves, who have recently been captured and are tough. I am also sending to you as a present ... minas of first quality white wool for a wig and a basket of shrimps.

Princess Erišti-Aya, whose earlier letter showed that she had a poor relationship with her father in Mari, also evidently had a difficult relationship with her mother.<sup>73</sup> She had sent her mother a gown as a present but then her mother sent it back to her. She writes rather beratingly to 'the Lady, my mother'.

Why have you not put on my gown but sent it back to me? You have heaped abuse and scorn on me. I am the daughter of a king. You are the wife of a king. You and your husband (apart from ...) put me in the convent. You treat soldiers well with what they receive of the booty. So then treat me well too, so that my Lord and my Mistress will respect you in the eyes of the city and its inhabitants.

Her remark 'you and your husband put me in the convent' may not have been casual and gives pause for thought. She possibly was not a willing entrant into the convent. Referring to her father as 'your husband' could also be taken as a disrespectful remark. In any case, she appears to be reproaching them for what they had done.

All these women were not rich. Some had run up debts and surrendered their possessions to a rich colleague in exchange for an agreed lifetime allowance of food, oil and wool. Such an agreement was usual, but when it was concluded *in extremis* the correlation of the promised allowance and the value of the inherited property was disproportionate. Other texts refer explicitly to the 'interest-bearing debt' of a woman who needed such an allowance.<sup>74</sup> According to one text from the time of Hammurabi a destitute conventual who became chronically ill was

<sup>73</sup> ARM 10 43 with Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 400; contrast LAPO 18 (2000) 400–402 no. 1202. On lines 12–20, see Durand, MARI 3 (1984) 170 n. 58; K. R. Veenhof, RA 76 (1982) 133–135; M. Stol, ZA 76 (1986) 123 n. 7. In line 14 perhaps read *ezub la n[īdittim]*, collated by Durand.

<sup>74</sup> M. Stol, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1996) 69 f.

handed over to a carer, with the convent providing the necessary finance from her property.<sup>75</sup>

Lamassi, the daughter of Yapuḫum, became ill, and Ḫuzalatum supported her in her illness, and the convent had pity on Lamassi and gave her to Ḫuzalatum to care for: 1 millstone for ‘fat flour’; 2 ship’s chairs; 1 bed; 1 basket. All this Lamassi, the daughter of Yapuḫum, gave to Ḫuzalatum, the daughter of Sumu-araḫ. They swore an oath before Šamaš, Aya, Marduk and Hammurabi.

The agreement was authenticated by three witnesses.

## 26.5 Duties

What were the religious duties expected of a *nadītu*? When discussing the subject of ‘Inauguration’ we saw that she was expected to participate in a number of ceremonies. The introductions and the conclusions in letters suggest that her dominant occupations consisted of pious activities and making intercessions. A daughter writing to her father speaks about her prayers to Šamaš and Aya, her Lord and Mistress:

I still pray to my Lord and my Mistress for you with washed hands.<sup>76</sup>

Another example follows the same lines.

I always pray to my Lord and my Mistress for your life at the morning and the evening sacrifices. I have heard of your illness and I am worried. May my lord and my mistress not cease to protect you on the left hand and on the right. Every day by the lamp (?) I pray for you to the Queen of Sippar. To whom else but you should I direct my attention? My attention is directed towards you as it is to my Lord and my Mistress.<sup>77</sup>

Again in another letter a daughter assures her father that she is praying for him to ‘the Queen of Sippar’, alluding to Ištar or Annunitum.

May your good health be lasting before Šamaš and Ištar, the Queen of Sippar.

<sup>75</sup> L. Waterman, BDHP 42 (HG 6 1735); R. Harris, JESHO 6 (1963) 155. This Ḫuzalatum is also attested in AbB 7 20:6f.

<sup>76</sup> AbB 11 60:25–28.

<sup>77</sup> AbB 11 106:1–3. Cf. AbB 13 96:8–10. There was also a *man* who promised ‘to pray for you to Šamaš, in the evening and the morning’, AbB 3 22:10–11.

She follows this with a request for provision to be made for a ceremony for that goddess.<sup>78</sup> Although the last eight lines of another letter are lost, what has been preserved demonstrates a particularly pious tone of voice.<sup>79</sup>

Speak to my father, thus says Lamassani:  
 May my Lord and Mistress always keep you alive for my sake. May things go well for you. May you be healthy. May your guardian deity want for nothing. May your prosperity be lasting before my Lord and my Mistress. May you never lack a guard for your prosperity and life. May the city where you live protect you because of the glory (?) of my Lord and my Mistress. My attention is directed towards you as it is towards my Lord and my Mistress.

Earlier we gave a translation of the letter of Amat-Šamaš to her sister, Queen Iltani, in which she said the king had asked her to ‘pray to your Lord’. The queen expected that she would ‘bring an offering to your Mistress and pray for me’.<sup>80</sup> From this we may conclude that she would pray to a god for a man and to a goddess for a woman.

Most letters like this show that in exchange for their prayers pious women were provided with what is termed a *piqittu*, ‘provisions’, food and slaves, and they could expect some special extra gifts on the three festivals of Šamaš.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, complaints about being ‘hungry’ were common, as we read in the letter of Erišti-Aya to ‘my Star’.<sup>82</sup> In a letter from Sippar two *nadītu*s complained that they were ‘hungry’. The solution was to give them a field, ‘so that they will pray for me’. That was evidently their reward.<sup>83</sup>

The onset of illness produced special needs. One *nadītu* who was ill sent a letter with some silver to pay for sheep she needed to have an extispicy performed.

May Ištar, my Mistress, let you grow old for my sake. They sent me here sick and I did not have any sheep for the liver extispicy. With this letter I am sending three shekels of silver to you with my servant Ibni-Marduk. Find three *šuppu*-sheep and send them to me. I will pray to Ištar for you.<sup>84</sup>

**78** AbB 1 72:10 f.

**79** AbB 11 105. Harris, *Studies Oppenheim*, 120–122, gives more prayers by nuns.

**80** OBTR 134:15, 21.

**81** The verb *paqādu* ‘to take care of, to provide with food’ is attested with this meaning in ARM 10 nos. 36, 39, 40, discussed by Batto, *Studies on women at Mari*, 96; OBTR 134:17, 26.

**82** Batto, 106 n. 44; ARM 10 36.

**83** AbB 7 59.

**84** AbB 7 166.

She supposed her illness would be explained by resorting to an extispicy with a sheep's liver, but for this a special type of sheep was required. By acquiring these for her the addressee would benefit from her intercessions. A nun from Mari requested sheep from 'my lord' for an offering, for it was now her turn to perform that duty.<sup>85</sup> A letter from a nun of Nergal to her father suggests that she had been dedicated so that her father could have good health, but since entering the convent she herself had not felt well. She begins her letter with the standard greeting and then continues about feeling unwell.

Regarding me, may Nergal keep you alive for ever. Since the day that you presented me to Nergal for your life, I have not felt well for one single day.

She pressed for some material help, and threatened that if it did not come a bailiff would appropriate her property and oust her from her house and she could never return there.

He will take my house and make me leave through the door. I shall not have a god to let me go back. Ur and Larsa will hear of it and jeer at you.<sup>86</sup>

After the death of King Yaḥdun-Lim his second wife had been taken into the harem of his successor, the Assyrian Yasmaḥ-Addu. Her letter to him is so overflowing with pious intercessions that J.-M. Durand thinks he had placed her in the convent of the god Dagan.<sup>87</sup>

I always pray for you to Šamaš and Dagan. May Dagan take away your cares. Leave for Mari in good health. May Ištarat, your mother, your goddess, give you the government and the throne. On my behalf, be healthy and well. Come to Mari in good health. I myself want to pray for you always and be glad.

The mother of Yasmaḥ-Addu had written to him that this 'king's daughter' should not be without luxuries (*šukuttu*) and he responded to say that he had given her five slave-girls, two sheep, four large lambs and household goods. Possibly when a woman entered the convent she would bring such a gift for the god.

Some letters refer to ceremonial tasks a *nadītu* was required to perform, one of which involved sacrifices.

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**85** ARM 10 15 with LAPO 18 (2000) 408 no. 1208 and J.-M. Durand in: G. del Olmo Lete, *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux I* (2008) 404 f.

**86** AbB 6 140 with L. Barberon, *Les religieuses* (2012) 197.

**87** ARM 10 1 with LAPO 18 (2000) 421 no. 1216; J.-M. Durand in *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux I* (2008) 400 f.; the correct citation is M. 7420 (MARI 6, p. 296); see further Durand, MARI 6 (1990) 295.

Give three lambs of yours so that they can lay down my food-offering in the ‘house’ of my Mistress and the ‘house’ of the family gods. I am now sending thirty litres of flour. They should then be able to feed the ‘house’ of my Mistress and the ‘house’ of my family gods.<sup>88</sup>

In a related letter someone who can be assumed to be a nun was responsible for ‘the sacrifice for the dead at the end of the month, of your family, throughout the whole year’.<sup>89</sup> In other letters in that group we read about the ‘hearth of Marduk’, which suggests that this may have been a domestic ritual.<sup>90</sup>

## 26.6 Care in old age

Nuns could live to a ripe old age, and from archives we can follow the lives of some of them for periods of 25 or even 50 years.<sup>91</sup> Such longevity may be attributed to a good diet, childlessness, or protection within the convent from epidemics outside. Strangely no-one has yet thought of attributing it to the effectiveness of their prayers.

The duties of looking after a woman in the convent in the evening of her life naturally fell first on her close family. In general her fathers and her brothers were primarily responsible until she died, and then commemorated her afterwards. A prayer for the ancestors shows that the nuns were the only women mentioned in the family tree.<sup>92</sup> Some nuns organised care themselves for their old age through their ‘children’, even though a *nadītu* of Šamaš was not allowed to have children herself, and there were no indications that she had a husband, and one assumes that she led a chaste life. In fact in earlier times she was known as the wife (*dam*) of Šamaš, and she was regarded as married to him.<sup>93</sup> In this situation she could adopt children, particularly girls who were already adult, with the intention of having them look after her in her old age.

<sup>88</sup> AbB 2 116:7–11. ‘Feeding’ the gods is also mentioned in the related letter AbB 1 106:27.

<sup>89</sup> AbB 1 106:17–19.

<sup>90</sup> The theme in other related letters is the ritual of ‘the hearth’ (KI.NE) in Babylon (AbB 1 113, AbB 5 267, AbB 7 154–160). For a possible significance of the hearth see K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 40. In view of the many personal names with the element Marduk the writer seems to have been a *nadītu* of Marduk, possibly living in Babylon and writing to someone in Sippar.

<sup>91</sup> Harris, 122 f.; Renger, ZA 58, 166–168. In an example from Kish we can follow Dan-eressa over fifty years; M. Stol, SEL 4 (1987) 6 n. 7.

<sup>92</sup> K. Radner, *Die Macht des Namens* (2005) 86.

<sup>93</sup> R. Westbrook, OBML (1988) 65 f.

A *nadītu* of Šamaš often chose to adopt a niece who was also in the convent as her daughter, and then this niece had the duty of caring for her new mother. A nephew who was adopted became the nun's heir, but she kept for herself the usufruct of her estates.<sup>94</sup> There are dozens of texts describing these procedures, all carefully stored in the family archives.

A more unusual procedure was to arrange a marriage between two dependants, so that the married couple would take on the responsibility of caring for a nun in the final years of her life. The relevant texts sometimes include the verb 'to purify' to mean to give freedom to the intended bride so that she could marry.

Ana-Aya-uzni is the daughter of Salimatum. Salimatum purified her and married her to Belšunu, the son of Nemelum. Ana-Aya-uzni is pure (= free). No-one has any claim on Ana-Aya-uzni.<sup>95</sup>

The name Ana-Aya-uzni means 'My ear is (directed) towards Aya' and was a typical name for the slave-girl of a nun. Only a nun could be so persistently attentive to Aya. From the start of this short text it is made clear that this slave-girl was freed by her owner Salimatum and adopted as a daughter. Her owner, certainly a nun, now arranged for her to marry a man called Belšunu. According to common law the new couple were obliged to look after their parents, in this case the mother. The ones who could no longer lay any claims against the bride were certainly the brothers of the nun who had freed her slave. After all, they were the men who would inherit from their sister and official documentation forestalled any objection from them that a slave-girl had disappeared from the list of chattels in their sister's estate.

## 26.7 The demise of the convent

Eventually the convent came to an end. From a survey of the texts from Sippar known in 2012 calculations show that there were 230 nuns there before Hammurabi came to the throne, 300 during his reign, and 140 subsequently. The documentation available for this period is abundant and clearly shows a decline.<sup>96</sup> A letter to the authorities of the city of Sippar from King Samsu-iluna, Hammu-

<sup>94</sup> M. Stol, *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 84–109, 'Unmarried women: nuns'.

<sup>95</sup> CT 2 33 (VAB 5 31).

<sup>96</sup> Barberon, 62–68. Data on the decline under the last kings were collected by S. Richardson, *Studies B. R. Foster* (2010) 329–339.

rabi's successor, mentions abuses. We know of that letter from transcripts made fifty years after it was originally written. It must have been regarded as setting an important precedent to stop abuse recurring.<sup>97</sup> Possibly it amounted to a royal decree that was to remain valid for Samsu-iluna's successors, which is why later transcripts were made.<sup>98</sup>

The letter mentions two abuses, followed by instructions from the king himself. The first abuse was this.

The people of Sippar had allowed their daughters to enter the convent but had given them no food. They became hungry and rations were provided from the storehouses of 'my lord' (i.e. by the king himself). Even now those people from Sippar allow their daughters to enter the convent.

The king orders,

I decree that a *nadītu* without any provision may not enter the convent. Furthermore, if a *nadītu* of Šamaš lives in the convent without her father and her brother giving her any food or making a written declaration for her, I decree that pressure should be placed on her father and brother to make a written declaration before allowing her to enter the convent.

The king added that the declaration had to be written down in the presence of the authorities of the city and of the convent. Evidently the situation was regarded as an emergency and the State took action by opening the royal storehouses. The instructions of the king compelled the authorities to set down in writing the duties of the father and the brothers and to have the document witnessed.

The second problem involves a *nadītu* of Šamaš whose family had fallen into debt and their creditors sought recompense from her.

Mar-Šamaš, a man from Sippar, owed a debt of silver to the judge Awil-Sîn. Because he did not pay back the silver, he seized Mar-Šamaš and said to him, 'If you hold on to your possessions and I receive nothing from you, then I shall take the slave from your daughter, the *nadītu*, who lives in the convent.'

The king decreed that the *nadītu* bore no responsibility for such a debt.

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<sup>97</sup> C. Janssen, 'Samsu-iluna and the hungry *nadītums*', Northern Akkad Project Reports 5 (1991) 3–39; D. Charpin in: F. Joannès, *Rendre la justice en Mésopotamie* (2000) 86–88 no. 43; M. T. Roth in: E. Lévy, *La codification des lois dans l'Antiquité* (2000) 23–27.

<sup>98</sup> S. Lafont in: B. M. Levinson, *Theory and method in Biblical and Cuneiform law. Revision, interpolation and development* (1994) 97–100.

A *nadītu* of Šamaš, to whom her father and her brother give food, and about whom they have made a written declaration, and who lives in the convent, is not [responsible] for interest-bearing debts or the corvée of her family. Her father and her brothers [shall carry out] their own corvée. (...) As for a creditor who seizes a *nadītu* of Šamaš on account of the interest-bearing debt or corvée of her father or brothers, that man is an enemy of Šamaš.

The case of the debt of silver was a single occurrence and was followed by a general word of instruction: a *nadītu* in a convent is not responsible for debts and is not required to perform the corvée.

Here we see the specific circumstances which gave rise to two laws. Similar specific events must have triggered many of the laws of Hammurabi.<sup>99</sup> In both these cases the *nadītu* was granted a new status in law and became an independent woman, if it could be proved that she had received her inheritance when she entered the convent.<sup>100</sup> We know from another letter that taking over the slave of a nun provoked a protest from the head of the *nadītus* who complained to the chief of the canal district.

Why do you detain Liwwira-ana-ilim, the slave of a *nadītu* of Šamaš? He is not a citizen of the city of Kullizum. He is not the son of a citizen. He is the slave of a *nadītu* of Šamaš. Let him go free, so that the *nadītu* of Šamaš does not address herself to the king. (...) Is the convent there to be plundered?<sup>101</sup>

The head was working in this function during the reign of Samsu-iluna.<sup>102</sup>

Such cases are evidence for the declining importance of the convent. For centuries it had been accepted that the father, and after his death the brothers, would look after a conventual. That was set out in the laws of Hammurabi, but now it seems it did not always happen. Ultimately, at the end of the Old Babylonian period, after the fall of Babylon, the institution of ‘nuns’ and a ‘convent’ had disappeared for good. The discovery of the letter referring to nuns who were left hungry has prompted an investigation into the later history of the convent, with the suggestion that the convent and its officials practically never appear again after Samsu-iluna.<sup>103</sup> In fact that is incorrect. The institution did disappear for good but only after another hundred years. It is noteworthy that the convent as an

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<sup>99</sup> C. Janssen, 10 f.

<sup>100</sup> S. Lafont, 99.

<sup>101</sup> AbB 1 129.

<sup>102</sup> The same head of the *nadītus* wrote a letter about women who were hungry, and that fits in with Samsu-iluna’s letter; AbB 10 25.

<sup>103</sup> Richardson in *Studies B. R. Foster*, 329–346.

institution sprang up in the Old Babylonian period and flourished only for a few centuries under the benevolence of royal supervision.

Shortly after the Old Babylonian period we hear of a convent and *nadītu* in Uruk<sup>104</sup> and much later a *nadītu* plays a role in a Neo-Babylonian ritual.<sup>105</sup> Although words for nuns were preserved in the literary tradition the real meaning of the words was not properly understood. This can be seen in a gloss to the word *nin.dingir* (*ereš.dingir*) in a dream omen.

If he approaches a *nin.dingir* = if he approaches the daughter of his god.<sup>106</sup>

In Chapter 20 we mentioned the devaluation of old honorific titles. The *nadītu* is mentioned in a much later hymn where she is associated with midwifery. At that time, she herself was supposed to be the mother of dead children, an unexpected idea given her reputation for chastity in the Old Babylonian period.<sup>107</sup> In a fictitious bawdy letter a *nadītu* and a *kulmašītu* are portrayed offering themselves to a man with a particularly lewd invitation.

I have opened for you my vulva. Strike my clitoris!<sup>108</sup>

The *nadītu* and her holy colleagues even appear as a group of witches in late anti-witchcraft texts.<sup>109</sup> Much later in Syriac we find the word *ggwh*, a cognate of *gagû* ‘convent’, meaning ‘whore’. In Neo-Babylonian Sippar we read that the ‘Daughters of Ebabbar’ were venerated, a phrase which could refer to statues of *nadītus* from some thousand years earlier which were still standing in the temple. That is certainly possible, for we know that a statue of King Sargon continued to be venerated there.<sup>110</sup>

**104** S. Dalley, CUSAS 9 (2009) p. 6; in nos. 29 and 54 (lukur *šimri*).

**105** JCS 43–45 (1991–93) 98 iii 101, with Barberon, *Les religieuses*, 204.

**106** A. L. Oppenheim, *The interpretation of dreams in the Ancient Near East* (1956) 291a, 334 × + 7–8. The sign UM stands for Akkadian *teḥû*, ‘to approach’, here ‘to approach sexually’; J.-M. Durand in J. Bottéro, *RIA* IV/6–7 (1975) 460 § 4.

**107** For her as a midwife see M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia* (2000) 172. For her stillborn children (*kūbu*) see W. Farber, *Lamaštu* (2014) 266 Ug III:8, 295:11 f., 328; SpbTU I 44:67 and parallels.

**108** A. K. Grayson, *JAOS* 103 (1983) 145 f.

**109** D. Schwemer, *Abwehrzauber und Behexung* (2007) 76 f.

**110** J. N. Postgate and J. Oates in: J. MacGinnis, *Letter orders from Sippar* (1995) 152 n. 61.