18 Women and work

A modern writer has summarised the daily activities of a woman in the Old Akkadian period comprehensively.

> Grinding barley for flour and baking bread in the courtyard oven, going to the river for water balancing the pot on her head, washing clothes in the same river, chatting with neighbors, cooking food over the dung fire, spinning and weaving, nursing her baby (...), taking care of the sick, wailing for the dead, looking around for a suitable wife for her son, preparing for her daughter's wedding (...), and, in old age, giving sage counsel while her daughter-in-law took care of the rest.

But that picture was drawn while acknowledging that there was scarcely any evidence of these activities to be found in the texts. Although the sketch fits in with what is generally imagined about a woman's life in ancient Mesopotamia,[1] I have not yet seen evidence of a jug balanced on the head, and clothes would more often be washed in a canal than in a river. It was always a woman who prepared the food.

Not much is said in the texts about the daily work of a woman. It was the task of the man to provide the raw materials for the housekeeping, the grain, the wool, and the rest. The woman's role was to process this material by grinding, baking, spinning, weaving, or some other appropriate skill.[2] A good woman was described as follows:

> The house where there is beer, it is her stand.
> The house where the cooking pot is, her jug is there.
> The house where there is food, she is the great cook.[3]

This can be contrasted with a reproach for a degenerate woman.

> She cannot card wool, she cannot spin with the spindle.
> Her hand is no good for working.
> She is lax about going in and going out.[4]

1 A. Westenholz in: P. Attinger, M. Wäfler, *Mesopotamien. Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit* (= OBO 160/3) (1999) 71.

2 Th. Jacobsen, *Studies R. Kutscher* (1993) 73.

3 J. J. A. van Dijk, *La sagesse suméro-accadienne* (1953) 90 f.

4 'Dialogue of Two Women' B 68 f., cited by K. Volk, Saeculum 47 (1996) 191, ZA 90 (2000) 19; Å. W. Sjöberg, *Studies E. Leichty* (2006) 415 n. 29.

How different from the virtuous woman in the book of Proverbs:

> She chooses wool and flax and with a will she sets about her work.
> She holds the distaff in her hand, and her fingers grasp the spindle
> (Proverbs 31:13, 19).

The goddess Inanna tells Dumuzi in a love song that she does not feel like doing housework, which is then followed by a detailed description of how one makes linen cloth, beginning with the flax, and then how to do the carding, the spinning, and the weaving. This sequence is technologically interesting.[5] At the beginning of this book, in Chapter 1, we saw how the spindle was characteristically a woman's work. One text illustrates how easy it must have been for her to prick herself nastily when using it.

> A woman who has pricked herself begins to scream. The spindle has stabbed her and stuck in her hand. She goes into all the houses, she appears in all the streets, she shouts, 'Pull it out!'.[6]

Collecting water was also part of her work and at the court in Mari certain women were allocated to this task.[7] Wood was collected by women, or by girls, or by a slave-girl.[8] A store of firewood was always a concern for the housewife, and she needed to be guaranteed her store of wood. An Assyrian merchant had to give his Anatolian wife 'eight minas of copper every month for her food, her oil, and her wood'. A woman from Mari cried for help because she did not have enough, complaining, 'Since I left my husband, I have not enough food or firewood.'[9] In the Bible we read that Joshua required the inhabitants of the city of Gibeon to provide this.

> From that day he assigned them to cut wood and draw water (Joshua 9:27).

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5 Y. Sefati, *Sumerian love songs* (1998) 120–127 ('The Bridal Sheets'); 290, 293 iv 14–16 ('Dumuzi's Wedding'). See T. Frymer-Kensky, *Studies Å. W. Sjöberg* (1989) 189.

6 B. Alster, *Wisdom of ancient Sumer* (2005) 94 Instr. Šur. 226–232; TUAT III/1 (1990) 64; M. W. Chavalas, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (2014) 63.

7 SAA II 11 no. 2 iv 21; N. Ziegler, *Le Harem* (1999) 105, 112 f.

8 AbB 7 116:21; L. Waterman, BDHP 25:9. In A. Goetze, Sumer 14 (1958) no. 15:4–9, women are obliged to deliver wood.

9 J. G. Dercksen, *The Old Assyrian copper trade in Anatolia* (1996) 42 n. 142; now Archivum Anatolicum 1 (1995) 11, 57, 59; ARM 2 113:18 (*šuruptu* 'fuel'); Ziegler, *Le Harem* (1999) 233 no. 59:18 (*šurpu*).

This must have been a humiliation, for we now understand that this was typically women's work, and the menfolk would not like to be doing that. An invading enemy would first encounter 'the women scooping water at the river bank', a circumstance dramatically elaborated in the poetry of the Ugaritic legend of King Keret.

> The women gathering wood fled from the fields,
> from the threshing-floors,
> The women gathering straw,
> The women drawing water from the spring,
> from the fountains,
> The women filling (jugs).[10]

18.1 Working outside the home

What women did outside the home we learn from the administration archives of the large organisations which had existed in Mesopotamia since the beginning of history. These were concerned chiefly with the businesses of the temple, the king, the matters of state and also of rich individuals. Many women had to do heavy work there, in particular weaving cloth and grinding flour. We can even calculate comparable statistics, mainly from third-millennium Sumerian texts, because the documentation is very detailed regarding the work they did and where they did it. Anything that cost time and money was always accounted for in writing (what we mean by 'money' is 'payments in barley or silver'). Labour costs were calculated per working day or per part of a working day (pro rata); the rate varied according to the age of the worker.[11] This letter outlining monthly rates of pay in litres of barley may represent the norm.

> 20 working women: thirty litres each; 15 working women: half a day each; 3 boys: twenty litres each; 1 boy: fifteen litres; 3 boys: ten litres each; 4 elderly working women: twenty litres each; 1 elderly worker, the gatekeeper: thirty litres. Total barley for them: 1265 litres.[12]

10 AbB 5 232:10; Keret, KTU 14 ii ff. (and par.); D. Pardee in *The Context of Scripture* I (1997) 335a.
11 A. Uchitel, 'Women at work. Pylos and Knossos, Lagash and Ur', Historia 33 (1984) 257–282 (esp. 264–274); H. Waetzoldt, 'Die Situation der Frauen und Kinder anhand ihrer Einkommensverhältnisse zur Zeit der III. Dynastie von Ur', AOF 15 (1988) 30–44; idem, CUSAS 6 (2011) 418 n. 45, 442b (in Girsu); H. Scheyhing, 'Frauen-Kinder-Arbeitsgruppen im é.munus des altsumerischen Lagaš. Eine Statistik ihrer Lebensdaten nach den še.ba-Listen', WdO 42 (2012) 187–209.
12 TCS 1 no. 335.

A modern nutritionist states that an adult man, between 20 and 30 years old and weighing 62 kilos, needs 3337 calories daily. That would correspond to a Babylonian payment of 45 litres of barley per month. A woman of the same age, weighing 52 kilos, needs 2434 calories, corresponding to 33 litres of barley per month.[13] Others suggest other figures, with the calories for a man varying from 2400 to 3822. We should also remember the uncertain factors in converting their measures of capacity into our metric units of weight.[14] Usually men received sixty litres of barley per month and women thirty litres.[15] Of course there are variations, with the lowest quantities attested in Assyria, at Nuzi and Ḫarbu.[16] A woman in Assur wrote to a merchant in Asia Minor:

> By paying me twenty litres, they have reduced me to a slave. Slave-girls eat twenty litres and I also eat twenty litres, not to mention the children.[17]

We see that in times of crisis weavers received ten litres of barley and five litres of dates, so any deficit in the barley was made up with dates.[18] The normal ration of 2:: 1 for men to women (60 litres:: 30 litres) was generally maintained in all periods except in Middle Babylonian Nippur where it was 3:: 2 (60 litres:: 40 litres).[19] The fact that women need fewer calories than men only partly justifies the different allowances. In Ebla wages were paid out in silver. There women received only three shekels per month while men received five or six. From that allowance they may have had to buy basic necessities, such as barley, sesame oil and wool.[20] A clause in the Hittite laws (§ 158) recommends a lower rate of pay for a woman working at the harvest.

> If a man hires himself out at harvest time for wages, to bind up the stooks, to load them on to wagons, to stack them in the barn, and to clean the threshing-floor, then his wage shall be thirty bushels of barley for three months. If a woman hires herself out at harvest time, then her wage shall be twelve bushels of barley for three months.[21]

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13 G. G. Aperghis in: J. Andreau, *La guerre dans les économies antiques* (2000) 132, 141.

14 R. J. van der Spek; see B. Jankóvic in: P. Briant, *L'archive des Fortifications de Persépolis* (2008) 440 f.

15 M. Stol, 'Ration', RlA XI/3–4 (2007) 264–269.

16 C. Kühne in: H. Klengel, J. Renger, *Landwirtschaft im Alten Orient* (1999) 186. See, however, note 23. Variations in Ur III: Waetzoldt, 34 f.

17 C. Michel, Ktema 22 (1997) 101, 103 f.; CMK no. 375.

18 Waetzoldt, 43. We observe the same in Lagaba; A. Vandewalle apud D. Charpin in: K. R. Veenhof, *Houses and households in Ancient Mesopotamia* (1996) 226.

19 H. Torczyner; M. Jursa in Briant, *L'archive* (2008) 388.

20 A. Archi, CRRAI 47/I (2002) 1 f.

21 R. Haase, 'Zur Stellung der Frau im Spiegel der hethitischen Rechtssammlung', AOF 22 (1995) 277–281, at the end. 1 bushel (*parisu*) = a half *kor* = 150 litres.

This difference between the wages of the man and the woman in terms of silver shows that she earned one shekel while he earned three and three-quarters of a shekel. With so much heavy work to be done we can suppose that the women were given lighter tasks and consequently paid less. The Sumerian laws of Ur-Nammu show that female weavers could be hired to do work at harvest time or in winter; for wages of 30 litres in summer and 20 litres in winter.[22]

Barley was only one of the elements needed for sustenance, and processed materials such as flour and bread were also given as payments.[23] Sometimes they were given meat, for there was always an abundant supply of sheep carcasses, or soup.[24] The principal ingredients of soup were groats, bran, meat, salt and herbs.[25] In Egypt workers in the royal tombs were paid with wheat, barley, leavened and unleavened bread, vegetables, fruit and firewood. On special occasions they also received wine, honey, milk, fish, meat, and clothing. In Babylonia apart from food a monthly allowance of sesame oil and an annual allowance of wool could be given. In the Neo-Babylonian period a man is said to have received the generous quantity of 180 litres (one *kor*) of barley a month, which would be a 'ration' of six litres every day. One assumes that 'ration' here amounts to his wages, a payment in natural products with which he could trade,[26] and from which his whole family could live.[27] Women were given five or six days every month free from work, but men were given only two or three,[28] a subject to be discussed further in Chapter 22.

Most of the women are said to be occupied with spinning, weaving or grinding flour, but some were also pressing oil and moving items of equipment including bricks.[29] Sumer was a country full of irrigation canals and women were employed in their upkeep. 'Slave-girls' and weavers used to dig, dredge, repair the dikes, and open the sluices for the irrigation channels. They were also busy in the fields, digging furrows, carrying straw, grass or barley, tying up the sheaves and setting them up vertically, several at a time, as stooks, and winnowing on the thresh-

22 C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 519 f., 564 (§d7a-b).

23 W. Heimpel, *Workers and construction work at Garšana* (2009) 95; B. Jankóvic in Briant, *L'archive* (2008) 442–444. That workers consumed only barley is improbable. They must also have eaten other foodstuff as well, so the appallingly low number of calories computed by C. Kühne (p. 187) cannot be correct.

24 I. J. Gelb, JNES 32 (1973) 82 f.; Heimpel, 91b.

25 Heimpel, 100, 107 f.

26 Jursa and Jankóvic in Briant, *L'archive* (2008) 411 f., 441.

27 Jursa in P. Briant, 390 n. 17, 408 f., 411, 416, 441.

28 Waetzoldt, 36 f.

29 Heimpel, 47.

ing-floor.[30] Their husbands are not mentioned in these records because the activities of men and women were registered separately. One text from the Ur III period mentions sixteen little workers (perhaps they were children) and nineteen wives of workers.[31] Another text may perhaps indicate that free women could be obliged to work, when they would be called 'slave-girls'. As for their menfolk, they may or may not have received a piece of land from which to sustain themselves.[32]

18.2 Weavers

Cloth, clothing, garments and even carpets were woven throughout the region bordering the Mediterranean Sea.[33] This took place in large workshops, but probably work was also carried out in the home on commission. We know this from the administration archives from Pylos in Greece, from representations and models in clay from Egypt, and from Babylonian records. It is obvious to the historian that women were the weavers at that time, though in later periods it was the men who did the weaving and the women who did the spinning (Figure 21). Sumerian weavers were involved in the whole process, and they were chiefly women.[34]

The goddess of weaving was called Uttu, a name possibly related to the word *ettutu*, 'spider'. She appears towards the end of the important myth of 'Enki and the World Order'. First Enki created the two rivers and the water systems, then the clouds and the rain, agriculture and cattle, building bricks, meadows and sheep, the distribution of land and finally the law. Then came Uttu, the goddess of weaving. In the 'Debate between Sheep and Grain', closely associated with sheep and wool is 'the thread of Uttu and the handloom'. M. Tanret drew attention to the fact that in that myth 'nature' was transformed into 'culture', thanks to the art of weaving. The production of clothing was a factor in humanising people. In the Gilgamesh epic primitive Enkidu discovered that only by wearing clothes and covering one's nakedness did one become human.[35]

30 'The Farmer's Almanac' 78–80, ed. M. Civil (1994) 32, 90 f.; A. Salonen, *Agricultura Mesopotamica* (1968) 302–305. Cf. H. Sauren, *Topographie der Provinz Umma* (1966) 73–83. Certain other tasks they did not perform; p. 75, 79.

31 T. Gomi, ASJ 3 (1981) 173 no. 169, with A. Uchitel, CRRAI 47/II (2002) 621a.

32 Uchitel, 621–624.

33 A broad exposition on the manufacture of textiles in the Late Bronze Age is offered by M. van de Mieroop, *The Eastern Mediterranean in the age of Ramesses II* (2007) 153–166.

34 H. Waetzoldt, *Untersuchungen zur neusumerischen Textilindustrie* (1972) 92 n. 9, 94.

35 M. Tanret, 'The fruit of the loom. Spinning a yarn about the Sumerian goddess Uttu', *Studies Julian Klener* (2004) 175–197.

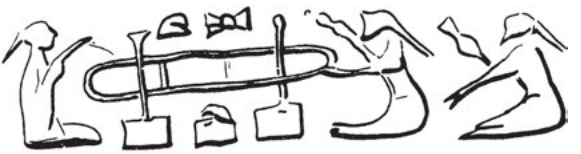

Fig. 21: A cylinder seal showing a woman spinning on the right, and weaving on the left. 2600 BC. Serpentine, 18 × 20 cm. *The Newell Collection*, Yale University.

What did Uttu actually do? She was mentioned in rituals involving the spinning of thread, a necessary process for making clothing, such as the headdress a priest received on the occasion of his investiture, a sort of turban.

> Uttu took a thread in her hand, Ištar put in order the thread of Uttu, a clever woman perfected the cloth, an old wise woman (*puršumtu*) put it in order ... Uttu, the good woman, the daughter of Enlil who begot her, the beloved daughter of Ea, spun the white wool with her hand, the [thread] which she had made from it, she made into a pure turban, while praying for purity. She handed it over to the fuller of the land and he cleansed the turban with pure water.[36]

In a ritual it was Uttu who spun a black and white magic thread to ward off a curse, though of course that thread was actually woven on earth by mortal women. It had to be wound round the head, hands and feet of the sufferer.[37] Possibly this honourable task was assigned to the elite group of 'wise old women' who held a special position as part of their temple income, their benefice.

For the mortal weavers here on earth any heavenly reflections on their cultural task would have lain far beyond their horizons. Their lives were wretched, and their work fit for prisoners-of-war. When King Šu-Sîn announced that he was returning home with rich booty from a campaign, he boasted about doing this and much more.

> He blinded the young men in their cities which he had conquered, and he put them to work in the date garden of Enlil and Ninlil and the date garden of the great gods.[38] And the young women he had conquered in their cities he dedicated to the weaving shops of Enlil and Ninlil and the great gods.[39]

36 R. Borger, BiOr 30 (1973) 173 ii 41 ff.; M. J. Geller, BSOAS 63 (2000) 332–334; A. Löhnert, *Studies Jeremy Black* (2010) 187.

37 Šurpu V-VI 144–161.

38 For blind people see I. J. Gelb, JNES 32 (1973) 87; Heimpel, 94.

39 R. Kutscher, *The Brockmon tablets at the University of Haifa. Royal inscriptions* (1989) 78, 90 iv 15–31. Now RIME 3/2 (1997) 304.

From two consecutive lists of captives who received rations of food dated in the fifth year of his successor Amar-Sîn we see how many failed to survive. From an original total of 197 named captives we see that most had died. Of the 167 women on the first list, only 121 were still alive, 46 had died; of 28 children, only 5 were still alive, 23 had died; but two old women were still alive. Among the 121 women who had survived 23 were sick. The second list is dated five months later, and by that time only 39 of the women were still alive. These lists record food distributions, so since they were being given flour and beer, something other than malnourishment was the cause of illness and death.[40]

In addition to the women who had been deported, there were free women working in these workshops as 'slave-girls', probably under duress. A survey of all the weavers working in the five cities of the Sumerian province of Lagash records 6423 women, 109 men, 3141 children and 198 old women. The men acted as workers or fullers to wash the textiles, and they succeeded their fathers into that job.[41]

Many lists of male and female weavers record the food distributed to them. Half the workers attached to 'The Woman's House' in the province of Lagash were weavers. In one establishment there were 4272 weavers and around 1800 children working with them. When the other personnel, the fullers, the porters and the scribes, are added we arrive at a total of about 6200 people.[42] The women worked in groups of twenty, with either a male or a female overseer. They wove wool and sometimes also flax. For high-quality textiles the team consisted of six people.[43] In later years the personnel of the weaving sector of the House increased. There were more rations for the women than the men, fluctuating according to productivity, and women from outside were attached to the workforce. This was a labour market in embryo.[44] We have a large Old Akkadian tablet formatted in more than ten columns recording the wages for personnel over a period of one month. There are 240 textile workers at the top of that list of 585 female and 105 regular male workers. It seems that the women did the main work and the men provided ancil-

40 TCL V 6039, with Gelb, JNES 32 (1973) 74 f.; B. Lafont in: C. Moatti, *La mobilité des personnes en Méditerranée de l'Antiquité à l'époque moderne* (2004) 457, 473 f. (translation).

41 A. Uchitel, 'Women at work: weavers of Lagash and spinners of San Luis Gonzaga', CRRAI 47/II (2002) 621–631; K. Maekawa, ASJ 2 (1980) 112.

42 Waetzoldt, 94.

43 K. Maekawa, 'Female weavers and their children in Lagash – Pre-Sargonic and Ur III', ASJ 2 (1980) 81–125, especially 87, 101 (a 'gang' of twenty women), 89 f. (flax), 109–111 (high-quality textiles).

44 R. Prentice, *The exchange of goods and services in Pre-Sargonic Lagash* (2010) 54 f., 63, 66, 68, 92 f., 117 (goods for export).

lary labour. Children are not mentioned on this list, so it could have been a record of labourers in some sort of convent.[45] Where children are listed as helpers it is noticeable that most of them were girls, probably the daughters of the weavers. The sons had probably been taken away. They were called 'the cut-off young of a weaver', giving the impression that they had been castrated, though this is not certain. They were put to unskilled work, such as pulling boats on the canals from Lagash to Nippur.[46]

There were different ranks of weavers. In Old Babylonian Chagar Bazar, of the two women with some responsibility for management, one received 100 litres of barley per month, and the other 60 litres. The individual allowance for the main group of 64 women and 9 men was 40 litres, but five women had only 30 litres, two girls had 20 litres, and four children had 10 litres. In another location we see 174 women and 27 men in the main group. There were almost 1000 people in total who worked in producing textiles.[47] Some women who were weavers received a bonus at sheep-shearing time and at New Year.[48] In Mari and other cities the wives of patricians directed big textile workshops at their homes.[49] In an inventory of the personnel of the house of the 'Amorite scribe' at Mari, we find 32 weavers and 2 flour-grinders with two children.[50] The weavers must have worked in a workshop and what they produced must have been sold. The two flour-grinders only worked for the needs of the house. A king who removed a weaver, promising two as replacements but did not keep his promise, was confronted with the plea, 'My house is being ruined; there is no-one to make the clothes'.[51]

In the Middle Assyrian period deported women were again put to work as weavers. A list has all their names (including foreign ones), and the amounts of wool they were given and the clothes they were expected to manufacture. Simple people wore a certain sort of garment, which was mass-produced by specialised weavers. Some weavers were expected to produce two garments a day, but for others it could be up to six. One woman made cloth for tents.[52]

45 MAD 1 163 with I. J. Gelb, RA 66 (1972) 3 f., G. Visicato, ASJ 19 (1997) 238 ff. (Group 1).

46 Maekawa, ASJ 2, 81, 112. 'Castrated' is unlikely according to D. O. Edzard and J. Bauer, AfO 36–37 (1989–90) 88b (rather 'absondern').

47 Ph. Talon, *Old Babylonian texts from Chagar Bazar* (1997) 17–24. In Mari female weavers also received different quantities, depending on their ages: 50, 40, 30 litres; ARMT 23 (1984) p. 554.

48 Waetzoldt, 35 f.

49 D. Charpin in: K. R. Veenhof, *Houses and households in Ancient Mesopotamia* (1996) 223.

50 B. Lion, Amurru 2 (2001) 127:22, 24.

51 Lion, 105.

52 S. Jakob, *Mittelassyrische Verwaltung und Sozialstruktur* (2003) 412–425.

From the Neo-Babylonian period we know that women wove in the temples.[53] Widows worked there and they were forbidden 'to go and live with a citizen', meaning that they could not marry and leave. We see that weaving was also carried out at home, for wool was delivered to a person's house.

> Five minas of woven cloth, worth ten minas of wool, the property of the Lady of Uruk and Nanaya, accounted to T. the daughter of B. She shall give the cloth in month 4.

The names of witnesses follow. It is dated in month 10, so that was enough material to last them for six months.[54] In the Apocryphal book of Tobit we see Anna doing the work at home.

> At that time Anna my wife used to earn money by women's work, spinning and weaving (*érithos*), and her employers (*kurioi*) would pay her when she took them what she had done. One day (...) they not only paid her wages in full, but also gave her a kid from their herd of goats to take home (Tobit 2:11–12).

In the Persian period, according to the administration archives from Persepolis from the time of Darius, the quantity of food distributed to men and women did not differ much in the textile industry.[55] Often they received equal quantities, but that could depend on rank. A leading woman received fifty litres of barley plus thirty litres of wine and one-third of a beast from the small livestock. However men mostly received thirty litres of barley a month and women twenty, and in addition they might receive wine and meat. After the birth of a child a woman would receive an increased allowance for five months: twenty litres of grain and ten litres of wine or beer if the baby was a boy, but half that if it was a girl.[56] This fits in with the observation made by Herodotus.

> I, 136. After bravery in battle what ranks next as particularly courageous is when someone begets many children, and the one who can point to the greatest number of children, receives presents from the king.

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53 F. Joannès in P. Briant, *L'archive* (2008) 472 f.

54 M. Jursa, Iraq 59 (1997) 108 no. 13; F. Joannès in: C. Michel, M.-L. Nosch, *Textile terminologies in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean from the third to the first millennia BC* (2010) 404. Note 'one roll (*kirku*) of home-made cloth', M. T. Roth, *Babylonian marriage agreements* (1989) 108 no. 34:16.

55 H. Koch, 'Frauen im Achämenidenreich', *Studies O. Klíma* (1994) 125–141; P. Briant, *Histoire de l'empire perse de Cyrus à Alexandre* I 1996) 444 f.

56 Briant, 448. For this, see also G. G. Aperghis in: J. Andreau, *La guerre dans les économies antiques* (2000) 133.

The loom was positioned horizontally above the ground, kept securely in place with stakes in the ground. Weaving was certainly a profession. In Old Babylonian letters there is at least one request for slave-girls who were weavers.

> My girls have died. Have one slave-girl brought to me, and whatever else she may be let her be a weaver.[57]

The administration archives give us an insight into the sequence of tasks necessary to produce the finished cloth.[58] The raw material was wool from the flocks on the grasslands, and the end-product garments known to have been produced in Babylonia. In the Bible we find a reference to that as a stamp of quality, when a man took 'a coat from Shinar (the name for Babylonia), a beautiful garment' from the spoils of Jericho (Joshua 7:21). Beautiful robes were the ultimate luxury and were exchanged as gifts between kings.[59] The weaving shops mainly produced cloth from which clothes could be made, but clothes could also be produced there. More than once differentiating cloth from clothes in a text is hard.[60] In the Neo-Babylonian period we find some specialist weavers, such as those who wove multicoloured cloth, and one woman who produced linen garments.[61]

In the weaving workshops where the wool was processed they reckoned to get wool weighing two minas from one fleece of a sheep. The cloth was woven to standard measurements: in the Ur III period a standard length was no bigger than 7 × 8 els (= cubits), in the Old Assyrian period 9 × 8 els, and in Nuzi 15 × 5 els. The weight of a standard length of cloth was six minas overall.[62] Among the mathematical problems set for schoolboys was how long it would take to weave a length of cloth 48 els long, given that a weaver would normally weave a third of an el in a day. The solution was that the work would last for 144 days. That is longer than has been proposed from calculations based on actual practice.[63]

57 OBTR 122:21–24; A. al-Zeebari, ABIM 20:80 f.; AbB 6 4:26, 156:6.

58 H. Waetzoldt, *Untersuchungen zur neusumerischen Textilindustrie* (1972); idem, 'Die Textilproduktion von Garšana', CUSAS 6 (2011) 405–454; M. Stol, *Mesopotamien. Die altbabylonische Zeit* (= OBO 160/4) (2004) 965–970.

59 Van de Mieroop, *The Eastern Mediterranean* (2007) 164.

60 Cloths: Michel, Nosch, *Textile terminologies*, 150 (Ebla), 230, 261–264 (Old Assyrian), 406 (Neo-Babylonian).

61 CAD I/J 253 f.

62 C. Zaccagnini, SCCNH 1 (1981) 360 f. Ur III: lengths of three to six metres are attested; Waetzoldt, CUSAS 6 (2011) 411–413.

63 Waetzoldt, *Untersuchungen*, 139.

Fig. 22: The grinding room in the palace of Ebla. Barley was ground between a large lower millstone and a cylinder-like upper millstone. Ebla. 2000 BC.

18.3 Grinding flour

To grind flour a person had to kneel on the ground and rotate the upper millstone over the lower flat millstone. Excavators at Ebla discovered many millstones in one room, meaning that many women would have all been working there together (Figure 22). One text mentions ninety millers.[64] We also find an account with 950 people in a workshop, but that may include some weavers. The monthly ration could vary slightly.[65] Much information can be gathered from texts concern-

64 M. G. Biga, La Parola del Passato 46 (1991) 302 f.
65 Survey: L. Milano, 'Mühle', RlA VIII/5–6 (1995) 397–399, § 4, 'Work at the mill'.

ing the processing of barley to make flour from the Ur III period.[66] First we have the working time made available by the state, expressed in terms of working days, and the amount of barley to be processed. Then we have an overview of the work actually carried out, in which we see how many workers were actually employed. Calculations show that there were fixed times for processing the barley into specific sorts of flour. The coarser the flour the less time taken to produce it: twenty litres of groats could be ground in a day, but only ten litres of 'fat flour', and the rate of production of finer types of flour ranged from 6.66 to 8 litres per day. A particular type of millstone was required to produce a particular type of flour.[67] At the bottom of the tablet we find how many days of work were in deficit or in surplus when compared to the standard production expected. The time needed to produce a given amount of flour could be calibrated in terms of silver, the means of payment used by the merchants. One shekel of silver equated to ninety days of work. It is difficult to track down the fixed exchange values which pertained. These uniform standards were linked to the introduction of weights and the new law-book written by King Šulgi, the so-called 'Laws of Ur-Nammu'. Converting the rates and calculating them according to fixed standards led to the study of applied mathematics in scribal schools. Later we see the almost proverbial standard of flour to be ground per day equated with an amount of ten litres, one *sūtu* in Akkadian (one *seah* in Hebrew).[68]

According to the administration archives of the temple of Inanna of Nippur it seemed that female flour-grinders worked in 'the women's house', where they received payment in various commodities including wool. Each person was referred to by name and after the name we regularly find the gloss 'infant boy' or 'infant girl'.[69] Outside Nippur on three occasions we find a blind woman grinding barley.[70] It is known that people could be deliberately blinded and then put to work as a flour-grinder or as a weaver or a singer. The blind singer will be discussed later in this chapter.[71] Samson was blinded and then made to grind grain.

> Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes (...) and he was set to grinding grain in the prison (Judges 16:21).

66 H. J. Nissen, *Frühe Schrift und Techniken der Wirtschaftsverwaltung im alten Vorderen Orient* (1990) 86–89, 125–130; R. K. Englund, *Organisation und Verwaltung der Ur III-Fischerei* (1990) 79–90; JNES 50 (1991) 255–280.

67 AbB 7 19:24.

68 Milano, 398a; M. Stol, JCS 34 (1982) 154 f.; idem, *Mesopotamien* (note 58), 757 f.

69 R. Zettler, *The Ur III temple of Inanna at Nippur* (1992) 261, 4 NT 213 i 1–20, with p. 174 f.

70 W. Farber, ZA 75 (1985) 223 (35) (Chagar Bazar); B. Lion, Amurru 3 (2004) 223 (Mari).

71 Lion, 223. In general see W. Heimpel, Kaskal 6 (2009) 45 f. (Ur III).

A letter from Mari reads:

> Do not sell those men. Have their eyes 'touched' and put them to work grinding barley, or have their tongues [cut off], so that no word gets out.

That seems to us barbaric,[72] but perhaps these people were not totally blinded. An Assyrian king made this improbable boast.

> I slaughtered their hordes. I blinded 14,000 survivors and took them as booty.[73]

These survivors may have been blinded in just one eye.

In the epilogue to the laws of Ur-Nammu youths are cursed with blindness:

> May the young men of his town be blind,
> may the young women of his town be infertile.[74]

In the Neo-Babylonian period we sometimes find women grinding in the 'flour house',[75] a house which according to one letter measured 10 × 7.5 metres. Another place where flour was ground was the prison, and there from as early as the Sumerian period it was men who did this.[76] There is some evidence to say that women ground the special types of flour. In this later period women were also put to work to fatten poultry, ducks, geese and pigeons.[77]

One Sumerian text may have been a fragment of a song sung by the grinders as they worked.[78] This work-song is called an *elalu* in Sumerian, and would be comparable with the *alala*, a similar song sung while ploughing and harvesting. In Assyrian royal inscriptions we read that whenever the *alala* rang out over the fields prosperity abounded. By contrast, a proverb shows that it would be preferable not to have to sing the song because there was no millstone available.

> As they say, 'I do not know the work song. If it (the millstone) gets lost, I will not suffer.'

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72 ARM 14 78, end, with J.-M. Durand, LAPO 18 (2000) 66–68. Cruelty in Mari: D. Bonneterre, MARI 8 (1997) 537–561.

73 RIMA 1 (1987) 184, Shalmaneser I no. 1:73–5, with P. Machinist, Assur 3/2 (1982) 18. Cf. H. Freydank, OLZ 80 (1985) 233 f. (poor eyesight, 'sehschwach').

74 CUSAS 17 (2011) 246 g 16 f., 252b.

75 F. Joannès in: P. Briant, *L'archive des Fortifications de Persépolis* (2008) 470–472.

76 F. N. H. al-Rawi, Nisaba 24 (2009) no. 5.

77 Jursa and Joannès in Briant, *L'archive* (2008) 390 n. 16, 474.

78 M. Civil, 'The Song of the Millstone', *Studies J. Sanmartín* (2006) 121–138.

The Sumerian song pictures the need to create friction between the millstone and the harder stone on which it has to be rotated, and both are needed. Both appear again in a myth about stones, where they are given their place in life in primaeval times. The god Ninurta decreed that 'an insignificant, weak person' (that was the woman flour-grinder) would be given to the stone 'to fight the hunger in the land'.[79]

18.4 Women as musicians and singers

Female musicians include both singers and instrumentalists. The singers were called *zammiru*, derived from the Semitic word *zamāru*, 'to sing', and the instrumentalists were called *nāru*, derived from the Sumerian word *nar*. We group these musicians together since the instrumentalists are also regularly depicted singing.[80] A Sumerian proverb says,

> A musician (*nar*) with good breathing — that is a real musician (SP 2.57).

There are also illustrations of singers without an instrument.[81] On one side of the Standard of Ur found in the royal tombs of Ur are scenes of life in times of peace, and on the other side there are wartime scenes. On the right of the top row of the peacetime section is a man standing with a lyre, and behind him we can make out a woman who is perhaps a singer (Figure 23).[82] On two Old Sumerian reliefs we see a woman with a lyre and a man with a harp.[83] In the royal tombs of Ur the women were holding lyres. It seems that women played the lyre and men the harp (Figure 24). A seated, beardless man (though it could be a woman) is playing a

79 The proverb: CUSAS 2 (2007) 29 f. with Civil, 122; M. W. Chavalas, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (2014) 86. The myth is *Lugale*, lines 448–462 (Civil, 133 f.).

80 D. Shehata, *Musiker und ihr vokales Repertoire. Untersuchungen zu Inhalt und Organisation von Musikerberufen und Liedgattungen in altbabylonischer Zeit* (2009) 30.

81 'Sänger, Sängerin', in der Bildkunst, RlA XI/7–8 (2008) 503–506. For a singer visibly singing see Joan Rimmer, *Ancient musical instruments of Western Asia* (1969) plate XIV, b; M. Schuol, *Hethitische Kultmusik* (2004) Tafel 35 no. 84 (in the middle, with his hand at his throat).

82 Rimmer, *Ancient musical instruments*, frontispiece; J. Reade, *Mesopotamia* (1991) 52 fig. 51; D. P. Hansen in: R. Zettler, L. Horne, *Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur* (1998) 44–47, 54 (grave PG 779). Drawing in A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East* I (1995) 35 fig. 2.

83 W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (1975), plates 82, 83 ('Weihplatte'); Schuol, *Hethitische Kultmusik*, Tafel 27 nos. 67, 68.

Fig. 23: A scene which represents peacetime. A man is playing a lyre with eleven strings; the woman behind him must be a singer. She has the same hairstyle as the singer Ur-Nanše from Mari. The 'Standard of Ur'. Ur. 2600 BC. Mosaic made of shells, lapis lazuli and limestone. Height 5 cm. *British Museum, London*.

Fig. 24: A votive plaque showing a woman playing a lyre. A similar plaque shows a man playing a harp. Gypsum. Height 24.6 cm. Nippur. *Iraq Museum*, *Baghdad*.

Fig. 25: After being beaten by the Assyrians in 653 BC, the Elamites greet their new viceroy. Their rulers bow before him. The men and women parading behind include eight playing an upright harp, two a double flute, and one a tambourine. They are followed by fifteen women and children clapping in accompaniment. In the river below the corpses of those killed in the battle can be seen floating along. Nineveh palace relief. *British Museum, London*.

vertical harp.[84] This type of harp was held in the lap, the string arm horizontal, the box upright in front of the player's chest.[85] Reliefs in the Assyrian palaces show women with such a harp and men plucking a horizontal harp with a plectrum.[86] A palace relief of King Ashurbanipal shows subjugated Elamites greeting

84 H. Frankfort, *The art and architecture of the Ancient Orient* (1954) plate 59, B; Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient*, plate 185, a; Schuol, *Hethitische Kultmusik*, Tafel 30 no. 74; S. N. Kramer, *Le mariage sacré* (1983) 101. On an Old Babylonian terracotta a man is playing the horizontal harp; Kramer, 192.

85 Rimmer, *Ancient musical instruments*, 21; the horizontal harp is described on p. 30 f.

86 Reliefs: A. Moortgat, *The art of ancient Mesopotamia* (1969) plates 287, 288; SAA III (1989) 15 fig. 4 (= Rimmer, *Ancient musical instruments*, plate XII).

him while playing musical instruments and singing (Figure 25). We follow the description of the scene by S. Macgregor.[87]

> Five male instrumentalists, six female instrumentalists, and then six women and nine children who appear to be clapping to the music. Seven of the eleven instruments played by the male and female musicians are vertical harps. Vertical harps were clearly a popular instrument throughout the centuries in the ancient Near East, perhaps because they had the largest pitch-range of any musical instrument. The other musical instruments in the Elamite procession are one horizontal harp, two divergent double pipes and one cylindrical drum. The horizontal harp appears to be a gender-specific musical instrument and is only played by male musicians.

Men, often accompanied by the harp, sang the laments which were part of the cult liturgies. Many terracottas show a woman playing a tambourine, holding it with both hands across her chest.[88] Women often danced to the accompaniment of a tambourine or framed drum. An ivory ointment box (*pyxis*) from the palace of Calah shows three women with a double flute, tambourine and a sort of zither (Figure 26).[89] In third-millennium art we sometimes see a drum, almost the size of man, a kettledrum, being played either by a man or by a woman.[90] Old Babylonian texts associate women with the instrument *tigi*, a drum or tambourine.[91] From a Sumerian song about Dumuzi and Inanna:

> My girlfriend was dancing with me in the square, she ran around with me, playing the tambourine (*ùb*) and the recorder (*giš* PA), her chants, being sweet, she sang for me.

87 S. L. Macgregor, 'Foreign musicians in Neo-Assyrian royal courts', *Studies Anne D. Kilmer* (2011) 137–159, esp. 148–152 (good photos with an old drawing of the scene). Neo-Assyrian music: S. L. MacGregor, *Beyond hearth and home. Women in the public sphere in Neo-Assyrian society* (= SAAS 21) (2012) 29–54; this scene: p. 36–41.

88 M.-Th. Barrelet, *Figurines et reliefs en terre cuite de la Mésopotamie antique* (1968) nos. 340–364; *Sumer–Assur–Babylon* (Hildesheim 1978) no. 108.

89 J. E. Curtis, J. E. Reade, *Art and Empire* (1995) 150 no. 121; Rimmer, *Ancient musical instruments*, plate VII, a. Drawing in S. Emerit, *Le statut du musicien dans la Méditerranée ancienne* (2013) 26.

90 N. Ziegler, Florilegium Marianum IX (2007) 74 (the *alû*); Moortgat, *The art of ancient Mesopotamia*, plates 199 (drawing: Schuol, *Hethitische Kultmusik*, Tafel 30 no. 73), 200.

91 D. Shehata, *Musiker*, 40–44.

Fig. 26: Ivory ointment box (*pyxis*) from the Assyrian palace at Calah
Three women are playing a double flute, a tambourine and a sort of zither.
British Museum, London.

These verses suggest that the girl is playing the instrument *uppu* and the boy is dancing (*mēlulu*).[92] This scene is known from terracottas where a woman is playing and a boy is squatting or dancing (Figure 27).[93]

The lute was played only by men on joyful and informal occasions. On an earthenware disc two female dancers are depicted with two smaller men with a lute in between them, and behind them are three seated monkeys.[94]

It is not easy to distinguish beardless men from women. On a relief of Sennacherib we see two priests, without beards and wearing pointed hats, holding horizontal harps, parading from left to right, and three figures who could be women. One of these three holds a tambourine, another a cymbal (?) and another a tambourine.[95]

92 Y. Sefati, *Sumerian love songs* (1998) 186 f., lines 15–17.

93 Catalogue *Das vorderasiatische Museum Berlin* (1992) 103 no. 47.

94 Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient*, plate 186, b with p. 303; *Sumer–Assur–Babylon*, no. 109; Schuol, *Hethitische Kultmusik*, Tafel 32 no. 78.

95 A relief in two parts: D. Collon in: K. Watanabe, *Priests and officials in the Ancient Near East* (1999) 24, 41 f., figs. 28 f. Drawings: C. J. Gadd, *The Stones of Assyria* (1936) Pl. 22 (after p. 104, with p. 176); Moortgat, *The art of ancient Mesopotamia*, 154 fig. 109.

Fig. 27: A terracotta showing a woman with lyre on the left and a man with a tambourine on the right. 1800 BC. Terracotta. Height 13.7 cm; width 10.4 cm. *Vorderasiatisches Museum*, *Berlin*.

A statue from the court of King Iblul-Il of Mari (2500 BC) shows the leader of the musicians[96] with the inscription,

> For Iblul-Il, king of Mari, Ur-Nanše, the great musician, has dedicated his statue to the goddess Inanna- ...[97]

96 Moortgat, plate 68 f.; Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient*, plate 24 with p. 165 f.
97 J. S. Cooper, *Sumerian and Akkadian royal inscriptions* I (1986) 88 f., Ma 5.2.

Fig. 28: Statue of the prominent singer and musician in Mari Ur-Nanše, looking like a woman. 2350 BC. Gypsum. Height 26 cm. *National Museum*, *Damascus*.

He is sitting on a reed hassock and holds his arms stretched out in front of him, so probably he was once holding an instrument (Figure 28). He has a man's name and refers to the statue as 'his', but it has to be said that the depiction of his face and chest is extremely effeminate. How should this be explained? In the temples those singing the laments sang in what was called in Sumerian 'women's language' (*emesal*, see Chapter 1) and there was uncertainty about their gender. Sometimes they were married and had children. This depiction may reflect that situation.[98] Instrumentalists had a higher status than singers, as seen in a letter from Mari:

98 N. Ziegler, Florilegium Marianum IX (2007) 7–9; F. N. H. al-Rawi, ZA 82 (1992) 180–185 (a direct connection with music).

> Out of 42 young women there are 24 young women who stand in the great orchestra, and the rest, 18 young women, are singers.[99]

At the courts of Ebla, Ur and Mari male musicians were highly regarded, and possibly they were also composers.[100] However much their performances may have been appreciated, musicians did not enjoy high status in society.[101] In the court of Mari the females were slaves and in the Ur III period they could be made to work as weavers. We shall refer again to this in Chapter 23, about the harem of Zimri-Lim. King Samsi-Addu instructed his son, the viceroy of Mari, that the female servants of a king subjugated earlier, who had in the meanwhile grown up, should be brought to the harems of the two palaces of the viceroy, where they should receive music lessons.[102] In Mari female musicians were selected from the women taken captive. In the time of King Zimri-Lim a confidant of the king supervised them. He selected them and in addition mediated in attracting foreign princesses to be brides. He was obviously a connoisseur of fine women. Women chiefly played the lyre, and the men performed in the music academy (*mummu*). In a letter we read that they learned to sing 'incantations which were good for the health of the king'.[103] Learning to play music was not easy. King Šulgi boasted that he had mastered all the techniques, but for us it is not easy to appreciate what specifically he would have had to learn.[104] We know of two contracts to ensure that a young person receives a musical education.[105] Only men could perform in the cult worship.[106]

In returning to the parts played by women we quote from a royal inscription in which a king proudly states how he honoured a goddess with musicians.

> I installed in the temple two hundred *tigi* players, a great orchestra, melodious music (lit. 'sound') which is in keeping with her great divine status.[107]

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99 Ziegler, 109 no. 17:16–18.

100 W. Sallaberger, JEOL 38 (2003–04) 56 (Ur III); Ziegler, 77 f.; R. Pruzsinszky, WZKM 97 (2007) 342 n. 42.

101 Pruzsinszky, 343 n. 43; eadem, in Emerit, *Les statut du musicien*, 42 f.

102 ARM 1 64 with LAPO 16 (1997) 91 no. 15.

103 Ziegler, 215 no. 51:19–21.

104 Th.J. H. Krispijn, Akkadica 70 (1990) 1–27.

105 BE 8 98 with H. Petschow, RlA VI/7–8 (1983) 570 § 6 (a girl?); M. J. Geller, 'Music lessons', *Festschrift B. Kienast* (2003) 109–111 (a man).

106 J.-M. Durand in: G. del Olmo Lete, *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux* I (2008) 387 f.

107 Takil-ilussu of Malgium, on the temple of Ulmašitum; Ziegler, 13 n. 37.

It is likely that singers would have been there too. Whenever women captured in the North are mentioned, they had to be trained to become a 'Subarean ensemble', which could certainly mean that they sang in Hurrian, their local language.[108] Amorite musicians are also mentioned. Teaching instrumental and vocal skills at school was not always crowned with success, and one student was given a bad report.

> Even though he had the lyre with him, he knew no music. He lags behind his classmates and does not know how to sing softly and loudly.[109]

A Sumerian ritual at the beginning of the building of a house prescribes that seven bricks must be put in place and that seven boys and girls must sing a special song.

> O brick, may a good future be ordained! May the deity show his good favour towards you! Brick, bring joy! Brick, bring well-being![110]

From Middle Babylonian Nippur we have a group of texts about the treatment of sick singers, which we will discuss later (see Chapter 22). It appears from one of the letters that the girls 'had to go and sit for instruction'. In the letters from Mari this indicated a music lesson, and so we assume instrumentalists and singers are referred to here.[111]

A girl could marry or become trained as a musician. On the left edge at the end of letter from Palestine written in bad Akkadian we find such a request.

> Regarding your daughter, we are well informed about her well-being and that she is growing up. Will you let her be trained as a singer, or give her to a man?[112]

A Canaanite word is used here for 'singer', *šārūtu* (cf. Hebrew *šīr* 'song'), and the word for 'man' is *bēlu*, literally 'lord' (cf. Hebrew *ba'al*, the same word used by Sarah to speak of Abraham, traditionally translated as 'my lord', cf. KJV). While the two prospects outlined here for the future of the young woman may be appealing, modern scholars have looked more closely at the signs on the clay tablet for 'singer'. Now they prefer to interpret them as meaning 'silver' which could be used to pay a ransom, and translate the girl's options differently.

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108 ARM 10 126:17; LAPO 18 (2000) 349–351 no. 1166.

109 Dialogue 2:94–6 with Th.J. H. Krispijn, Phoenix 38,3 (1992) 26.

110 A. Cavigneaux, *Uruk. Altbabylonische Texte* (1996) 63 f. no. 122.

111 Not just 'girls'. See I. Sibbing Plantholt, ZA 104 (2014) 172a. The letter is BE 17 31:10, with TUAT NF 3 (2006) 114.

112 Ta'annek Letter 2; ANET (1969) 490; CAD Š/2 144 s.v. *šārūtu*.

> Let him give her for a ransom or give her to a man.[113]

It is a pity that the old explanation which sounded so intriguing has gone.

An Old Babylonian note refers to a blind candidate for a music teacher.[114]

> After the 18th day of the tenth month they brought before me the woman Šinunutum, who was blind, so that I could teach her music.

We know of an occasion when a girl with this same name from the far North was sold.[115] This name is different from others in her own language, and we may suppose that she received it in Babylonia, where it would be the name of a bird, possibly a swallow. Were the eyes of a swallow blinded to stimulate her song? Was this the reason for giving the singer this new name?

We know of blind musicians as well as blind weavers from lists of names from earlier times.[116] In Nuzi blind people and musicians are listed together in the same list.[117] Blind boys and girls were trained as musicians and in Mari they are included in lists of musicians who had special teachers.[118] From the same city we know of a letter in which a command is given to 'let the eyes fall asleep', referring to ugly (?) children. Apparently the intention was to blind them and these children may then have been trained as singers or musicians.[119] It is common to find references to singers and musicians who were blind elsewhere. In the Odyssey Demodocus performed when he was blind (VIII 44) and Homer himself was also blind. It is also said that 'in ancient China musicians were commonly blind.'[120] According to the myth of Enki and Ninmaḫ, being a singer was the destiny of those born blind. The gods Enki and Ninmaḫ happened to be drunk, and they created out of the clay by mistake seven people with a defect. They challenged each other nevertheless to find a purpose for these freaks and they succeeded. The second person was born blind and he was given the destiny of becoming

113 W. Horowitz, T. Oshima, *Cuneiform in Canaan* (2006) 130 f. (new copy on p. 218).

114 E. Szlechter, TJA (1963) 151; cited in CAD A/1 177b.

115 YOS 13 382.

116 MAD 1 253 = W. Sommerfeld, *Die Texte der Akkade-Zeit*. 1. *Das Dijala-Gebiet: Tutub* (1999) 66 f. no. 14; W. Heimpel, Kaskal 6 (2009) 46 n. 6 (Ur III).

117 W. Farber, ZA 75 (1985) 218 (26).

118 Mari: N. Ziegler, *Les musiciens et la musique d'après les archives de Mari* (= Florilegium Marianum IX) (2007); eadem in: *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (2011) 306. For girls taken prisoner see B. Lion, Amurru 3 (2004) 223, bottom. In general see J. C. Fincke, *Augenleiden nach keilschriftlichen Quellen* (2000) 67.

119 Ziegler, 21–23. The letter (Ziegler, 22 f.) is AEM 1/2 no. 297.

120 I. J. Gelb, Studia Orientalia 46 (1975) 59 f.

a musician.[121] The sixth person to emerge from their fingers was a woman who could not bear children, and they decided that she should go and work in the women's house as a weaver. The seventh had 'neither penis, nor womb' and so became a eunuch, assuming we have deciphered the cuneiform correctly.[122]

18.5 The female innkeeper

A Babylonian dictionary in which professions were listed mentions women functioning as doctors, scribes, hairdressers, and bakers; one is said to prepare fish sauces (*garum*) and another is a perfumer. A second list includes an old woman, someone who sweeps the courtyard, a hairdresser, a cook, a scribe, and a brewer.[123] But in practice things were different.[124] The laws of Hammurabi dealt with women in 'free professions' such as an innkeeper, the landlady (*sābîtu*), a wet-nurse, and there were still more. It is noticeable that female cooks rarely occur in the texts.

The woman as a brewer or landlady, sometimes referred to as an innkeeper or an ale-wife, deserves special attention. Women often brewed beer at home, and we have examples from the Old Assyrian, the Sumerian and the Neo-Babylonian periods.[125] In Sippar a father gave his daughter, who was a nun, various items including 'a large house, half a brewery, and a shop'.[126] A Sumerian myth tells that in idyllic times of yore

> the widow would spread the beer-malt out on the roof, without any bird in the sky pecking at it.[127]

In the Neo-Babylonian period a slave-girl received enough raw materials to start a brewery.[128] A dealer in date beer at that time wrote this to his brother and sister.[129]

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121 'Enki and Ninmaḫ' 63–65 with W. H. Ph. Römer, TUAT III/3 (1993) 393 f.; D. Shehata, 'Der blinde Musiker', *Musiker*, 36–39.

122 'Enki and Ninmaḫ' 72–78 with Römer, 395.

123 MSL 12 (1969) 58, OB Proto-Lu 705–708; 66, MDP 27 194. The occupations of women in another list are not clear, see p. 65 f.

124 R. Harris, *Gender and aging* (2000) 105–108.

125 C. Michel in: J. G. Dercksen, *Anatolia and the Jazira during the Old Assyrian period* (2008) 218; M. Stol in: L. Milano, *Drinking in ancient societies* (1994) 179 n. 240.

126 R. Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 20 f.

127 'Enki and Ninḫursag' 19 f.; P. Attinger, ZA 74 (1984) 8.

128 Stol in Milano, 179 f.

129 CT 22 40 with M. Jursa, NABU 2006/1, TUAT NF 3 (2006) 161 f.

First he addresses the woman:

> My heart rejoiced because you are pregnant. (...) Sell beer for a mina of silver. Furthermore it is the command of the king that no marked silver can be given. Accept (only) refined silver.

The brother gets instructions about brewing beer, specifically on adding the hop used at that time. We see here that while the man is in charge of brewing the woman is in charge of sales. Occasionally things went wrong in such an establishment.

> 'I shall bring someone for you who makes good beer.' He brought a woman with him who had spoiled ten jugs of mixed beer. Moreover she brewed beer that was as sour as mandrake root.[130]

The art of brewing had a patron goddess called Ninkasi, 'the mistress who fills the mouth', and in a hymn to her the brewing process is described.

There were male and female professional brewers. The woman was known as a *sābîtu*, the feminine form of *sābû*, the man's title.[131] She acted chiefly as the landlady selling it at the front of the house, while he was probably brewing the beer at the back. People would become intoxicated there, and a lullaby uses such a simile to picture a little baby drowsing off

> Little one, let sleep fall on you as it does to the drinker of wine, as it does to the 'son' of the landlady (= her regular customer).[132]

There was a low level of morality on those premises,[133] and in Chapter 20 about prostitution we will discuss the kind of person who carried on their profession there. A medical text attributed problems of the head, neck, breast and stomach to visiting such taverns,[134] and Hammurabi took measures to stifle the spread of crime there.

> § 109. If there should be a woman innkeeper in whose house criminals congregate, and she does not seize those criminals and lead them off to the palace authorities, that woman innkeeper shall be killed.

130 JCS 9 (1955) 105 no. 111; TUAT NF 3 (2006) 35 f.
131 M. Worthington, 'Schankwirtin', RlA XII/1–2 (2009) 132–134.
132 W. Farber, *Schlaf, Kindchen, schlaf!* (1989) 34:8–11.
133 J.-J. Glassner, CRRAI 47/I (2002) 158.
134 TDP 20:32 f. (the terminology is obscure).

Another reason for giving the tavern a bad reputation is that some magic rituals require contaminated material to be deposited in or at the door of a tavern, and other rituals say how a demon is to be shaped and the model placed under an overturned brewing vat. Moreover, Hammurabi wrote,

> If a *nadîtu* or an *ugbabtu* (*ereš.dingir*) who does not reside within the convent should open a tavern or enter a tavern for some beer, they shall burn that woman.

Traditional scholarly opinion has supposed that these women were forbidden from entering a tavern because the tavern was a place with a bad reputation, and I agree with that supposition. An alternative modern view is that this law prohibits rich nuns, those living outside the convent, from investing their money in 'opening' a tavern, and in particular they should not profit from the sale of beer. This law has its place between others dealing with economic offences, which would mean that competition with the poor, especially single women who were trying to earn a little as a landlady, was regarded as fraudulent.[135] This is an original thought, but because the death penalty by burning applied in particular to those who broke a religious taboo, that fits in better with the earlier explanation.[136]

An amulet used to hang in an Assyrian tavern, with an incantation to the goddess Ištar. The landlord asked her to grant that his business should profit.[137] An old woman is said to be in a tavern 'settled near the beer'.[138] Ištar preferred to be in this environment, as we shall see in a later chapter. In a Sumerian song she is referred to as Inanna, with the Akkadian title *sābîtu*, 'landlady'.

> She is a landlady, her beer is good! Just as good as her beer is her vessel! How good is her beer! Thinned with water — how good is her beer![139]

You can almost hear the rowdy crowd bawling out this drinking song, especially if you remember that we are using the word 'vessel' in our translation in an attempt to maintain some decency in this book. In fact the word does not allude to any vessel for beer. In the word lists from Ebla the landlady is identified as a prosti-

135 M. T. Roth, *Festschrift J. Renger* (1999) 445–464.

136 S. Franke, ZABR 6 (2005) 4–6; L. Barberon, *Les religieuses et le culte de Marduk* (2012) 112 n. 667.

137 S. M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (1994) 101–106.

138 Th. Jacobsen, *Toward the image of Tammuz* (1970) 349 (= SAHG no. 15).

139 Y. Sefati, *Love songs in Sumerian literature* (1998) 345 (ŠRT 23:19–22). In another song she says, 'My vessel is wet' (CT 58 13:3, according to B. Alster).

tute,[140] so it is not surprising that the hero Gilgamesh was advised by Siduri the 'landlady' to enjoy life.[141]

A clay tablet marked out with twenty squares is a Babylonian board game. On the reverse side the meanings of landing on different squares is explained. Two of them concern a woman in the beer-house:

> If the throw "Swallow" lands on a square marked with a rosette, a woman will love those who linger in a tavern. Regarding their team, well-being falls to them.

But if the throw does not land there,

> A woman will reject those who linger in a tavern. Regarding their team, as a group well-being will not fall to them.[142]

There are five possible areas where the outcomes may be good or bad, which can be summarised as follows: success with women and general well-being, or not; sufficient supplies of food, or starvation; sufficient supplies of fine beer, or a lack of it; sufficient supplies of meat, or a lack of it. It has been suggested that this is 'a game being played in a tavern by freebooting soldiers who placed bets to see who was to pay for the food and drink and any warmer entertainment that might be on offer in the establishment'.[143]

Another aspect of the landlady's business was to procure barley to brew her beer. Hammurabi states:

> § 108. If a woman innkeeper should refuse to accept grain for the price of beer but accepts silver measured by the large weight, thereby reducing the value of beer in relation to the value of grain, they shall charge and convict that woman innkeeper and they shall cast her into the water.

Some sort of cheating was going on here, but we know too little about the techniques to be able to judge what sort of offence it really was.[144] The landlady also used to lend out jars of beer. Hammurabi (§ 111) fixed the amount of barley to be repaid after the harvest to cover the debt, which implies that it was possible

140 Å. W. Sjöberg, *Festschrift J. Renger* (1999) 545.
141 R. Harris, *Studies W. L. Moran* (1990) 224 f.
142 I. L. Finkel, *Ancient board games in perspective* (2007) 21a, 29a, lines 11–15.
143 Finkel, 23b.
144 For the latest attempts see G. W. W. Müller, *Festschrift R. Haaße* (2006) 21–26, with the reaction of R. Haasse, WdO 37 (2007) 31–35, whom we follow here. See on CH § 108–109 also S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 418–424, 'La cabaretière'.

to fiddle the books.[145] In the Old Babylonian period the landlady was also the person appointed to issue small loans,[146] but after that time she is not mentioned in the texts.

18.6 Scribes

There are almost 600 cuneiform signs adapted from the older Sumerian writing system. Any sign may indicate more than one concept, a syllable from the sound of the word, or a whole word or word phrase. To write this script demanded special skills and the system is admittedly difficult to understand for someone used to reading and writing an alphabet. An astrologer recognised this in a letter to the king of Assyria when he said,

> In the marketplace one hears nothing about the art of writing.[147]

It has long been thought that only a few people had mastered this script, but that idea must now be reconsidered.[148] Of course there were many who could not read, even among the leading figures in society, and the text of an Old Babylonian letter was often said to be 'heard', in other words to be read aloud. Other letters were to be 'seen', and C. Wilcke has shown that those were read by the addressee. Estimates suggest that of the almost 600 cuneiform signs known, in the Old Babylonian period it was enough to know 82 signs, and in the Old Assyrian period 68 would have been enough. In the first millennium the script became more complex and an Assyrian had to know at least 112 signs to indicate 79 different syllables and 33 logograms.[149]

Could women write?[150] Many of the Old Assyrian merchants could write themselves and their wives also. Their wives would archive and access tablets

145 Already King Ur-Nammu of Ur issued similar rulings; M. Civil, CUSAS 17 (2011) 251 §D9; C. Wilcke, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 566.

146 F. R. Kraus, *Königliche Verfügungen in altbabylonischer Zeit* (1984) 178–181 § 16–18, with p. 249, 256. – A woman issues beer for harvesters; K. van Lerberghe, CUSAS 29 no. 111.

147 SAA VIII 338:7.

148 C. Wilcke, *Wer las und schrieb in Babylonien und Assyrien* (2000); D. Charpin, *Lire et écrire à Babylone* (2008) = *Reading and writing in Babylon* (2010).

149 D. O. Edzard, 'Keilschrift', RlA V/7–8 (1980) 561b; S. Parpola, *Festschrift W. Röllig* (1997) 321 n. 17.

150 R. Harris, 'The female "sage" in Mesopotamian literature (with an appendix on Egypt)' in: J. G. Gammie, L. G. Perdue, *The sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (1990) 3–17, especially 5–10. That article discusses mainly female intellectuals.

and sometimes wrote letters in their own hand. Twice women made mistakes in an emotional letter, and then corrected it before the clay hardened, but female professional scribes are not mentioned.[151] One imagines that Babylonian nuns in the convent could write but there is no direct evidence for this.[152] An archive of a 'holy woman' and her brother found in a ceramic container included school texts.[153] A letter written by Princess Kirûm was a cry for help in a personal style. It was written in her own hand or by someone close to her and not from the chancellery and it was full of mistakes (more about her in Chapter 23).[154] We also know of an Old Assyrian cry for help from a woman in an unusual script saying:

> I. has thrown me out of the house and I am sitting outside. If you do not care for me, then who else will? You are my brother. I. has treated me badly.[155]

A Neo-Assyrian letter reproaches a princess for not being more diligent in learning to read and write.

> The word of the daughter of the king to Libbali-šarrat: Why do you not write your clay tablets and why do you not read your texts?[156]

We will see later that Princess Enḫeduana wrote poems and Princess Ninšatapada wrote literary letters,[157] giving herself her full title, 'female scribe (?), priestess of Meslamtaea, daughter of Sîn-kašid, the king of Uruk.'[158] It is thought that there were other Sumerian women who were authors. Among these were Kubatum, who addressed a love song to King Šu-Sîn, Waqartum, who composed a lament for her husband Ur-Nammu, and the wife of Šulgi, who crooned a lullaby to her little son.[159] In the Ur III period there were only two women with the title 'female scribe'

151 K. R. Veenhof, Phoenix 51,2 (2005) 118 f.; G. Kryszat, AOF 34 (2007) 217 f.; R. D. Biggs, WZKM 86 (1996) 47; C. Michel in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 262–269.
152 Wilcke, *Wer las und schrieb*, 29 f.
153 F. N. H. al-Rawi, S. Dalley, *Old Babylonian texts from Sippir* (2000) 5 f., with L. Barberon in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 279 f.
154 J.-M. Durand, MARI 3 (1984) 167–169.
155 R. D. Biggs, 'A woman's plaint in an Old Assyrian letter', WZKM 86 (1996) 47–52.
156 SAA XVI 28, TUAT NF 3 (2006) 145 f.; A. Livingstone, ZA 97 (2007) 103–105.
157 R. Harris, *Gender and aging* (2000) 103–105.
158 W. W. Hallo in *Études P. Garelli* (1991) 383:16–18.
159 Hallo, *Origins* (1996) 266 f.

(not: 'author'). The meaning of one personal name is 'The queen is a scribe'. But is this queen a goddess?[160]

In mythology Geštinana, the sister of Dumuzi, is said to 'know the clay', meaning that she knew how to write. Dumuzi had a dream and on awakening asked,

> Bring me Geštinanna, bring me my sister, my scribe who knows the clay, my singer who knows the songs, my young lady who knows the meaning of words, my wise woman who knows the meaning of dreams. I want to tell her this dream.[161]

In Old Babylonian legal agreements someone said to be a professional scribe is often mentioned at the end of the list of witnesses and just occasionally we come across the name of a woman with the title 'woman-scribe'.[162] These transactions concern women in the convent of Sippar and there was regularly a female scribe present there. We now know the names of eighteen of them, one of whom may have been the daughter of a scribe.[163] In another community of women, the harem of Mari, we encounter seven to nine female scribes. In the same way as male scribes they were given scholarly Sumerian names, which in practice were often garbled.[164] One scribe was part of the dowry of a princess.[165] We know of a few Old Babylonian school texts at the end of which we find written, 'the hand of the female scribe'. Most of these were lists of Sumerian syllabic or logographic signs to be learned, but one was a difficult Sumerian didactic poem, evidently written by a woman who had had a broad education.[166]

In the Assyrian period some scribes were given the title A.BA, which S. Parpola translated as an 'ABC-man', meaning someone who could write alphabetically. The Aramaic alphabet began with the same letters as the Greek alphabet (and as such was like our own alphabet), and Aramaic had become the language for

160 H. Waetzoldt, RlA XII/3–4 (2009) 263, 'Schreiberinnen'.

161 'Dumuzi's Dream' 20–25 with TUAT II/1 (1986) 28.

162 D. Charpin, RlA XII/3–4 (2009) 267 f., 'Les femmes-scribes'.

163 J. Renger, ZA 58 (1967) 157 f.; B. Lion, 'Dame Inanna-ama-mu, scribe à Sippar', RA 95 (2001) 7–32. In this early period the title 'scribe' was not yet preceded by the sign 'woman'. In general see Lion, 'Les femmes scribes à Sippar', in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 289–303.

164 N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimrî-Lîm* (1999) 91 f.

165 Šima-ilat, female servant of Šimatum; ARM 22 322:58. Cf. ARM 30 433, M. 5723:27. Cf. 'toggle-pins for the female scribes of the young woman', ARM 25 442:13 with ARM 30 142. It has been suggested that the princess from Qatna brought with her her own female scribe, Ištar-šamši; J.-M. Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 419. A female scribe in the harem bore this name.

166 B. Lion, E. Robson, 'Quelques textes scolaires paléo-babyloniens rédigés par des femmes', JCS 57 (2005) 37–54.

international communication. We know of a female A.BA with the Aramaic name Attar-palṭi, who was linked to the palace of the queen in the Assyrian capital Calah.[167] From a list of the personnel of a harem we also know of a writer designated as 'Ar[...]'. Whether this means she was 'Aramaic' or 'from Arpad' remains in doubt.[168] From the first millennium these are the only two female writers discovered. Two Assyrian requests were laid before the gods calling for a liver inspection to be carried out to answer the question of whether or not an uprising was planned against King Ashurbanipal. These requests added this sentence:

> Pay no attention to the fact that a woman has written it and put it before you.[169]

The phrase 'pay no attention ...' seeks to remove any irregularity from the ritual. In this case the precaution taken shows us that women could certainly write this sort of text, but that only men, i.e. priests, were allowed to carry it out.

Two thousand scribes from the Neo-Babylonian period are known by name, but there are no women among them. Whether they wrote on parchment or papyrus is guess work, since no parchment has survived.

The patron deity of writers was the Babylonian god Nabû, but in the Sumerian period it was Nisaba, a goddess, who had this function. Sumerian literary texts often end with the eulogy *Nisaba zà.mí*, 'Praise be to Nisaba'. This goddess was often called 'the surveyor (*šassukatu*) of heaven and earth', and a hymn refers to 'the faithful woman, mighty scribe of the heavens, surveyor of Enlil'.[170] A Sumerian myth says that she had the measuring sticks and rulers in her hand.

> She must demarcate the limits, draw the borders. She is truly the scribe of the land of Sumer.[171]

This is understandable when one realises that surveying the land was an important subject at school. An outline of the school syllabus asks a series of questions.

> Can you multiply and divide? Do you know the reciprocal numbers and coefficients? Can you make balances and computations? Can you calculate payments and total working hours, shares of an inheritance, and demarcate fields?[172]

167 CTN III nos. 39, 40; CAD Ṭ 151a.

168 SAA VII 24 rev. 2 with B. Landsberger, *Festschrift W. Baumgartner* (= Vetus Testamentum, Suppl. 16) (1967) 203.

169 SAA IV nos. 321 f. with S. Svärd, *Women and power* (2015) 125 f.

170 W. W. Hallo, CRRAI 17 [Brussels] (1970) 124:12.

171 'Enki and the World Order' 411–415; TUAT III/3 (1993) 416.

172 Å. W. Sjöberg, ZA 64 (1975) 144 Examenstext A 27; Th.J. H. Krispijn, Phoenix 38,3 (1992) 29.

From the archives of King Lipit-Ištar a hymn states that Nisaba 'led his finger across the clay' and gave him the instruments of the surveyor.[173] As a divine scribe Nisaba also figures in the underworld.[174] We will not go further into this subject now, but simply draw attention to the fact that in the later period there is no longer any mention of the goddess as a female scribe. Other goddesses also disappear, a subject to which we shall return in Chapter 30, at the end of the discussion of sacred marriage.

18.7 The female doctor

Two professional experts are referred to in Babylonian medical texts. One was the *āšipu*, a scholarly man from a prominent family, who mediated between the sick person and the enraged god. His professional title is best translated as 'conjurer'. He performed rituals, reciting incantations often in the defunct but time-honoured Sumerian. A female conjurer is an unthinkable idea. Then there was the doctor (*asû*), who must have been a man of practical experience, familiar with healing herbs and folk medicine, and on a few occasions we come across a female doctor.[175] In the Ur III period the doctor Ubartum has a female name,[176] and in Ebla a female doctor attends to the needs of the ladies there together with her assistant (*dam*).[177] At the court of Mari we see two such women listed as servants of the queen-mother or of a priestess. Undoubtedly they were occupied solely with the care of women, and as such can be considered the world's first recorded gynaecologists.[178] In an Old Babylonian list a woman doctor receives the barley purchased for the 'women's house' in the land of Larsa, and she is followed by a midwife.[179] Both these people will have been working in a feminine environment. Among the Hittites we also find mention of a female doctor.[180]

173 Lipit-Ištar hymn B:20–24; TUAT II/5 (1989) 683.

174 A. R. George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* II (2003) 851 f., on Gilg. VII 204.

175 Proto-Lu 705, MSL 12 (1969) 58.

176 M. Sigrist, *Texts from the Yale Babylonian Collection; Sumerian archival texts* III (2000) no. 1316, with JCS 52 (2000) 134b.

177 Ebla: *Thesaurus Inscriptionum Eblaicarum* A/1, 1 (1995) 45 f. (a.zu$_5$.mí); H. Waetzoldt in *Ebla 1975–1985* (1987) 368; F. d'Agostino, *Studies P. Fronzaroli* (2004) 139 f.

178 N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimrî-Lîm* (1999) 29.

179 TCL 10 107:26–30.

180 H. Otten, 'Ärztin im hethitischen Schrifttum', in: H. Otten, C. Rüster, *Studies Nimet Özgüç* (1993) 539–541.

The goddess of medicine, Gula, was a woman, accompanied by a dog. Sometimes she was called Ba'u, who in Sumerian literature had the epithet 'the great doctor of the people (literally, 'the black-headed ones')'.[181] Some personal names include her name, such as Gula-asaut, 'Gula is the doctor', Ba'u-asitu, 'Ba'u is the doctor', and Ummi-asuti, 'My mother is my doctor' (where the reference may be to her divine mother).[182] In a hymn by Gula, she says of herself,

> I am the daughter, I am the bride, I am the wife and I am the head of the household.[183]

These phases of the life of the growing woman may indicate that women were intended to take on the role of helping the sick, as Gula did.

18.8 Wailing women

It is shown in myths that women cry more readily than men and this is also because of their greater compassion.[184] There is evidence that in Sumerian literary texts two different words are used for the weeping of women.[185] One is what we could call sobbing, and the other suggests the rolling of tears over the cheeks which stain the face. Possibly this meant that their tears made their make-up run. The woman 'whose cheeks looked bad' because of 'running' was someone who was not married and unhappy.[186]

At any time of sorrow a woman was expected to break into a lamentation, mostly intoning sounds like Ooh! Ooh!.[187] 'Anyone who has heard a traditional ululation in an Arab village called *walwala* will understand something of the repugnance of the prophet Ezekiel to the sound. It is usually a bloodcurdling moaning, alternating with heart-rending cries, such as 'O, my husband! O my

181 W. H. Ph. Römer, SKIZ (1965) 236:6 (hymn B of Išme-Dagan); Å. W. Sjöberg, TCS 3 (1969) 105, on 268 (temple hymn to Bau).
182 A. Rositani, *Rīm-Anum* (2003) 120 no. II, 10:9; P.-A. Beaulieu, Or. NS 67 (1998) 173 ff.; H. Limet, *Mélanges A. Finet* (1989) 110 f. no. 14:1,10.
183 W. G. Lambert, Or. NS 36 (1967) 120:65; B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses* II (1993) 494.
184 T. Frymer-Kensky, *In the wake of the goddess* (1992) 36–38; R. Harris, *Gender and aging* (2002) 99 f.
185 A. R. George, 'How women weep?', CRRAI 47/I (2002) 141–150.
186 SpbTU II (1983) 45 no. 7:4 with M. J. Geller, AfO 35 (1988) 15, line 37. The meaning 'running (down)' (*qiddatu*) has not been recognised before.
187 D. O. Edzard, 'Exclamations', *Sumerian grammar* (2003) 167–170; H. Vanstiphout, *Epics of Sumerian kings. The matter of Aratta* (2004) 141, 'The Return of Lugalbanda' 79, 81; TUAT III/3 (1993) 515. The Sumerian word for lamentation is *a.nir*.

father! O my son! O my glory! Ah! That husband! Ah! That boy!'. M. Dijkstra commenting on Ezekiel 8:14 says that 'these cries were repeated ceaselessly, accompanied by rhythmical drumming and often carried out by professional wailing women.' It is no wonder that in Sumerian myths it is the goddesses who perform the wailing laments. In songs accompanied by the *balag* instrument (lyre?) they bewail the temples that had been destroyed.[188] Even the male wailers who participated in cult worship had female traits and regularly lamented in the women's language *emesal*.[189] The Sumerian lament in the women's language harks back to this custom.[190] Others could also join in a lamentation, such as the one for a suffering man which was sung by 'the wise one, his friend, companion, mother, sister, wife and the skilful singer'.[191]

In Ebla wailing women, denoted by combining the cuneiform signs for eye and for water, in Sumerian the verb for 'to weep', performed at funerals. In Eblaite they were called *rāzimātu*, cognate with the Arabic root *r-z-m* in the verb 'to weep' or 'to howl (of animals)'.[192] A Sumerian wailing woman was called 'a mother of crying' (*ama.ér*).[193] When the head of their company had died, the weavers working in his shops 'beat their breasts' during nine and half days.[194] At the court of Mari mourning lasted for three days. It was reported, following the death of King Samsi-Addu, that

> the land has been mourning for three days; they weep and you have made them shout loudly.[195]

When a young prince died, the wailing women received a great deal of barley, possibly because the period for mourning would last for three months.[196] The word *bakkîtu*, 'wailing woman', means literally 'she who weeps', but an onomatopoeic alternative *lallaritu*, 'spluttering', also occurs. Gilgamesh said,

> I shall weep for my friend Enkidu myself, I shall complain bitterly like a *lallaritu* (VIII 45).

188 D. Shehata, *Musiker und ihr vokales Repertoire* (2009) 247 f.
189 Frymer-Kensky, *In the wake of the goddesses*, 36–38, 43 f.
190 J. S. Cooper, JCS 58 (2006) 39–45.
191 'Man and his god' 60–67; S. N. Kramer, Vetus Testamentum, Suppl. 3 (1955) 174–179.
192 J. Pasquali, P. Mangiarotti, NABU 1999/7. Also *munabbîtu*, A. Archi, ZA 92 (2002) 184–186.
193 U. Gabbay, CUSAS 6 (2011) 68–70; A. Löhnert in: M. Jaques, *Klagetraditionen* (2011) 48 f. Wailing women in Assyrian art: S. Schroer, *ibidem*, 95 n. 48.
194 H. Waetzoldt, CUSAS 6 (2011) 406b, 443b.
195 ARM 4 61:5–8 with D. Charpin, *Studies M. Stol* (2008) 83.
196 ARM 9 175 with M. Ghouti, NABU 1991/27, Charpin, *Studies Stol*, 84.

A lament sounded like *ulili* in Sumerian and *lallarati* in Akkadian.[197] A Sumerian word for a female singer is *ulili*, Akkadian *zammirtu*. The Middle Assyrian harem regulations say that when someone dies the women had to 'weep according to the royal rule'.[198] Professional wailing women are well attested in the Near East and are referred to in a legend from Ugarit.

> The wailing women enter his palace, mourning women his courtyard. Those who slash their skin bemoan Aqhat the hero.[199]

Mourning customs also included tearing out the hair, scratching the eyes, nose, ears and hips until they bled, and flinging off or rending one's garments. This was chiefly done by women, but Gilgamesh did the same when he mourned for Enkidu (VIII 61–64).[200] In the book of Jeremiah 'wailing women' and 'wise women' were summoned to raise a lamentation (Jeremiah 9:17–22) which includes the line,

> Death has climbed in through our windows and entered our palaces (verse 21).

Usually the Semitic word for wailing women is derived from the verb 'to wail', but here Biblical Hebrew uses a word which indicates the singing of a dirge (*qina*), so it is a controlled chant, not wild screaming. We know of female singers of laments from the third millennium who sang to the accompaniment of the lyre and were high-ranking individuals.[201] Cult liturgies were sung by men, who exhibited a certain deviant behaviour and expressed themselves in the dialect known as women's language, and this persisted for the next two millennia. It is possible that we can see such a man in the remarkable statue of Ur-Nanše from Mari. He had feminine features and was possibly a *castrato*, as was mentioned earlier.[202] Male and female singers of laments performed at a funeral accompanied by a lyre.[203] A catalogue of lamentations, entitled '37 clay tablets of the art of lamenta-

197 M. E. Cohen, *The canonical lamentations of Ancient Mesopotamia* I (1988) 179 b+73. Cf. A. Shaffer, *Studies W. W. Hallo* (1993) 209 f.

198 M. T. Roth, *Law collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (1995) 197 f. (Enlil-narari).

199 'Danel and Aqhat' 172 f.

200 B. Alster, 'The mythology of mourning', ASJ 5 (1983) 1–16; M. M. Fritz, *Die Götter Dumuzi-Ama'ušumgal'anna und Damu* (2003) 344 f.; P. Lapinkivi, *Ištar's descent and resurrection* (2010) 71 (n. 202).

201 J. G. Westenholz, *Legends of the kings of Akkade* (1997) 236; A. Westenholz, *Mesopotamien. Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit* (see note 1), 72 n. 344. Sumerian SAL.BALAG.DI, Akkadian *ṣarrīḫtu*. See also M. M. Martos, Aula Orientalis 9 (1991) 143 f.

202 N. Ziegler, *Les musiciens et la musique d'après les archives de Mari* (2007) 8.

203 Gudea, Statue B v 1–4; D. Shehata, 104–106, 'Die Klagefrau: ama-er$_2$-ra'.

tion of (the goddess) Belet-ili', lists the titles by their first lines. Among them are songs which were sung by wailing women in the service of the mother goddess, such as 'Woe! Her temple!', '"Woe!" they said, "Woe!" they said', and 'The labour of the house'.[204] Naming compositions by their first words was a common practice in the ancient Near East. In the Hebrew Bible the names of the books follow this pattern, so Genesis is called *b^{e}rēšīyt*, 'in the beginning'.

One text says that at the inauguration of priestesses in Emar a wailing woman (*nugagtu*) would perform.[205] There are no known illustrations of wailing women from Babylonia. However, those depicted on the sarcophagus of King Ahiram of Byblos constructed in around 1200 BC have bare upper bodies. Some of them are touching their breasts and others have their hands in their hair.[206] In 1930 C. A. Ariëns Kappers, a Dutch brain specialist travelling in the Middle East, was allowed to perform a craniometry on that king![207]

18.9 Women involved in childbirth

Women were called on when children were born. At the court in Ebla, the woman known as the 'milk-breast', meaning a wet-nurse, together with the midwife (*muwallidu*) are mentioned.[208] The midwife has the title *šabsutu*, a word derived from Sumerian (*šà.zu*) which possibly meant 'who knows the inner parts'.[209] The mother goddess Mama was called 'the wise one' (cf. French *sage-femme*, Dutch *vroed-vrouw*) to indicate that she was a midwife. The Sumerian midwife (*nu.gig*) had 'duties not limited to parturition but extending all through the pregnancy, administering the physical preparations and care given to pregnant women in traditional societies'. A myth says 'Her activities and everything pertaining to women is something that no man should see'.[210] From literary texts we know

204 A. Shaffer, *Studies W. W. Hallo* (1993) 209, with Shehata, 335 f. A song of this genre remains unpublished.

205 D. E. Fleming, *The installation of Baal's high priestess at Emar* (1992) 20:48, with p. 104, 173.

206 The reliefs on its short sides; E. Porada, JANES 5 (1973) 368 f.; E. Rehm, *Der Ahiram-Sarkophag* Teil 1.1 (2004) 49–51, 'Schmalseiten'; photos in Teil 1.2 (2005) Tafel 1, 4.

207 C. A. Ariëns Kappers, *Reiziger in breinen. Herinneringen van een hersenonderzoeker* (2001) 166 f.; more in the Dutch version of this book (2012) 464, note 193. For the full description see his *An introduction to the anthropology of the Near East in ancient and recent times* (1934) 50, with the more cautious identification 'the male skull from Byblos'.

208 F. Pomponio, Vicino Oriente 5 (1982) 207–209. Cf. JCS 42 (1990) 189.

209 Much in 'Midwifery and nursing', M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible. Its Mediterranean setting* (2000) 171–192.

210 M. Civil, CUSAS 17 (2011) 281–284. The myth is 'The marriage of Sud', 154; JAOS 103 (1983) 57.

that it was she who 'counted the months', 'opened the womb', and 'wiped down the baby'. In an Assyrian ritual performed by men, unexpectedly a female singer exclaims, 'The goddess Šeru'a has just given birth!'. She will represent a midwife, who would in everyday life announce a birth by shouting aloud.[211]

The babies could be fed with breast milk from women other than their mother (Figure 29a). These were the wet-nurses, called in Akkadian *mušēniqtu*, 'she who suckles', from the verb *enēqu*, cognate with Hebrew *yānaq*, 'to suck'.[212] They were paid a 'suckling wage', lasting for between two and three years. Usually it was paid in barley, oil and wool, though sometimes in silver.[213] This woman was often mentioned together with her husband, who together must have been a poor couple. Sometimes it was a slave-girl. In Alalaḫ wet-nurses are often noted as being in receipt of 'the allocation of barley from the king'. They were therefore on the 'payroll'.[214] In Ebla the court wet-nurses received cloth and wool, and a shroud when they died. The wet-nurses of the king and of the queen held this honourable title for their whole lives.[215] It must have been a distinction to have been a wet-nurse at this time. One was named on an Old Akkadian cylinder seal.

> Timmuzi, head of the household, and Daguna, the wet-nurse of her daughter.

The signs meaning 'wet-nurse' were 'mother-milk-eat', and she probably received that cylinder seal as a present. The seal is illustrated with two women being led by a goddess to a greater goddess sitting on a mountain, probably the mother goddess Ninḫursag.[216] A Sumerian saying seems to exaggerate their importance.

> The wet-nurses determine the lot of her kings in the women's quarters.[217]

211 B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* II (1981) T 35, 37 no. 24 v 24; misunderstood by S. Svärd, *Women and power* (2015) 121 n. 603; TUAT NF 4 (2008) 91:23–25. This shouting: Civil, 282 n. 138.
212 H. Schneider-Ludorff, 'Die Amme nach den Texten aus Nuzi', SCCNH 18 (2009) 479–489, with an informative general introduction.
213 Stol, *Birth*, 181–190; K. R. Veenhof, *Studies L. de Meyer* (1994) 148.
214 F. Zeeb, *Die Palastwirtschaft in Altsyrien* (2001) 506–511.
215 M.-G. Biga, 'Les nourrices et les enfants à Ebla', Ktema 22 (1997) 35–44.
216 J. Nougayrol, Syria 37 (1960) 209–214; W. G. Lambert in: R. Merkav, *Treasures of the Bible lands* (1987), Hebrew section, no. 24; A. Westenholz, *Mesopotamien. Akkade-Zeit* (see note 1), 72 f., fig. 8, b.
217 B. Alster, *Wisdom of ancient Sumer* (2005) 98 Instr. Šur. 264.

Fig. 29a: A woman feeding her child. *Louvre*, *Paris*.

There are indications that a 'holy woman' (*qadištu*) or her servants could feed babies, since they were regarded as professional (Chapter 27). In the Middle Babylonian period we see a young woman acting at least twice as a wet-nurse for a low wage. She was probably a slave-girl.[218] A Neo-Babylonian contract describes a father hiring out his own daughter as a wet-nurse, or she hires herself out for her services and he is the witness.[219] We can only guess at the status of the girl. She suckled the child at her own home. Once a baby of three months was delivered to her. The contract states:[220]

218 L. Sassmannshausen, *Beiträge zur Verwaltung und Gesellschaft Babyloniens in der Kassitenzeit* (2001) 100a.

219 C. Wunsch, AfO 50 (2003–04) 211–214, 'Exkurs: Ammenverträge', 221 Text 5, 237–240 nos. 19–21. The father: BE 8 47; also BM 27960, according to the catalogue of the British Museum (vol. III p. 163).

220 Wunsch, 238 no. 20.

> N., the daughter of NN, for a period of two years shall have the daughter of A., from the Egibi family, to live with her for suckling. A. shall give N.: each year 1 garment, 1 shekel of silver; each month 1 litre of salt, 1 litre of water cress (= the ingredient for red mustard), 1 jar of oil; each day 2 litres of flour, 4 loaves, 1 litre of date beer.

The first witness was the father of N. The scribe was a cousin of A.; both belonged to the rich Egibi family. The payment was comparatively generous.

Medical texts discuss problems arising when the breast is 'thin', 'has bitterness', and 'has been struck (by some supernatural cause)'. A wet-nurse was forbidden to have sexual intercourse since it was seen as detrimental for the child. According to Greek papyri it would sour the milk, an idea perpetuated for centuries. It even occurs in handbooks from the sixteenth century and in Prussian laws. Hammurabi (§ 194) speaks of other difficulties that could arise in the three years of employing a wet-nurse.

> If a man gives his son to a wet-nurse and that child then dies while in the care of the wet-nurse, and the wet-nurse had contracted to care for another child without the consent of his (= the dead child's) father and mother, they shall charge and convict her, and, because she contracted to care for another child without the consent of his father and mother, they shall cut off her breast.

People thought earlier that the wet-nurse secretly substituted another baby for the dead one. It is more likely that feeding two babies at the same time was forbidden. In Greek papyri we also see that it was forbidden to 'nurse at the breast at the same time as nursing another child' (*parathèlazō*). French law also opposed *la nourrice cumularde*, 'the accumulating wet-nurse'.[221] Boys who had had the same wet-nurse (in Akkadian described as those who 'had eaten the same breast') had a special bond and were known as 'suckling brothers'.[222]

Another problem was that the baby could be exchanged for another and so obtain the status of a slave. We know of lawsuits about this. If the wage for feeding was not paid, the wet-nurse might take away the baby and the laws of Ešnunna (§ 32) sought to prevent this:

> If a man gives his son to be suckled, to be brought up, but he does not give the barley, oil, and clothing for three years, then he shall pay ten shekels of silver for the rearing of his son and take his son away with him.

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221 G. Cardascia, 'La nourrice coupable. § 194 du Code de Hammurabi', Revue de l'association *Méditerranées* 3 (1995) 209–230; S. Lafont, *Femmes* (1999) 415–417, 424–427.
222 Stol, *Birth*, 190.

In the royal palace of Mari people had other concerns.[223] The wet-nurses of the little princes lived mostly outside the palace and received their ration of oil separately. In a letter we read:

> The son of (Sheikh) S. must be suckled in his house, but the son of (Sheikh) D. must be suckled in the house of a private individual.

Wet-nurses travelled with their charges, and we know what food they were given for the journey.

> I thought to myself: 'It is not suitable to have babies travelling on a litter, in a bed, without their wet-nurses travelling with them. How do you keep them under control? Will they not take to crying?' (...) Therefore I thought, 'I will have them ride in a wagon and have their wet-nurses travel with them. Five oxen must pull the wagon.'[224]

Whenever the child was weaned and no longer needed to be suckled it was cared for by a children's maid (*tarîtu*, 'she who takes it with her').[225] What was characteristic of this children's maid was that she carried the child in a special cloth. There was always the fear that the dreaded demon Lamaštu might 'seize the young man on the street, the young woman at play, the little one on the shoulder of the nursemaid'.[226] Another characteristic of this woman was that she 'sang a lullaby'. The word for lullaby in Sumerian is *oo-ah*, the sound intended to make the child go to sleep. We know a Sumerian lullaby, intended for a little prince, in a lofty style, with benedictions for his later life, including the following passage:

> Come then, O sleep! Come then, O sleep! Come then to my little son, O sleep! Let his eyes fall shut! Stroke your hand over his shining little eyes and his chattering little tongue! Do not let the chatter disturb his sleep![227]

Crying children made the demons angry, so therefore there were incantations to quieten them.[228]

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223 N. Ziegler, 'Nourrices et sevrage', Ktema 22 (1997) 51–53.

224 J.-M. Durand, AEM 1/1 (1988) 123 n. 20 (A. 3892); I. Arkhipov, CRRAI 53/1 (2010) 414 f.

225 Stol, *Birth*, 190–192.

226 YOS 11 19:9–11 (p. 25 f.).

227 P. Michalowski, *The lamentation over the destruction of Sumer and Ur* (1989) 72, on 16 (literature; his 'wetnurse' is wrong); Stol, *Birth*, 211. The Sumerian lullaby: ANET (1969) 651 f.; H. Vanstiphout, *Eduba. Schrijven en lezen in Sumer* (2004) 265–269. Two more lullabies: M. Jaques, *Studies Å. W. Sjöberg* (2014) 61–72.

228 Stol, *Birth*, 211–213.

Fig. 29b: Cylinder seal with an inscription: 'Seal of Zamena, nurse of Uqnîtum'. Queen Uqnîtum, seated, has a child on her lap which Zamena holds both by the hand and the wrist Urkiš, 2300 BC.

The nursemaid of the queen at the court of Urkiš had two cylinder seals with the inscription 'Zamena, the nursemaid of Uqnîtum (the queen)'. We know this from the seal impressions (Figure 29b). The queen is depicted seated and has a child on her lap. In front of her stands Zamena, who is holding the child by the wrist.[229] In Mari this nursemaid of the little princes had the intimate title of 'mother' and a princess from Qatna who had been married off, took her 'mother' with her to far-off Mari. We shall say more about this in Chapter 23 about the court in Mari. A princess from Mari, married off to a king, was allowed to take a woman with her 'for motherhood'. In letters princesses were concerned about the welfare of their 'mother'.[230] Tabura was first the wet-nurse of a little prince and then later his 'mother'.[231] People maintained the bond with her in later life, and we know of a letter to the king in which a priestess complains:

> I have been injured here. Do wipe my tears away. S. has injured me in that he has taken away my nursemaid and now she lives in his house. If my lord had taken her, and if she but lived in the house of my lord, I should be satisfied. Now S. has injured me. Well then, if you indeed have brought light to the whole country, bring light for me also. Give me my nursemaid, and I will pray for you before Addu and Ḫebat.[232]

229 G. Buccellati, M. Kelly-Buccellati, AfO 42–43 (1995–96) 21–23.
230 G. Bardet, ARMT 23 (1984) 72–74 (nos. 84, 423).
231 Ziegler, *Le Harem* (1999) 68.
232 ARM 10 92:7–23.

In Emar a child was assigned a 'mother' like this.[233]

The names of the nursemaids at the court of Mari often began with 'My father', as in 'My father is my happiness' (or 'my light'), and 'May my father live for ever'. The father here meant the king himself, and so whenever the children called their nursemaids at the same time they pronounced a blessing on the king.[234] A happy thought! In the Middle Assyrian period 'Ḫiḫḫi, the king's nursemaid' received barley as a gift.[235]

18.10 Business women

We know more about the rich people of society because their family archives were preserved for posterity. The women in these circles had a superior position and were addressed as 'Madam'. It all began very early on. A woman appeared as a trader in two of the oldest written texts from Mesopotamia (ca. 3000 BC).[236] The script is archaic and beside the text there are illustrations of the main characters, a man and a woman. There are several other people present and possibly they are receiving food. A ceremonial meal was normal in those ancient times when transferring immovable property, and also at a wedding. Most scholars think it is a sale transaction illustrated here, but C. Wilcke thinks it is a wedding. Let us take a closer look at these two documents.

The first document is a pair of stones from the collection of Mr. Blau, comprising an obelisk and a flat stone (the 'plaque') (Figure 30). On the flat stone a man and woman look at each other, with the man holding a staff. Some experts are of the opinion that this staff takes the form of a phallus, and indeed the upper part looks uncannily like that if you look at it for long enough. So this may have been a wedding scene.[237] A series of foodstuffs and objects are listed and these would

233 *Emar* VI/3 nos. 186, 187, with NABU 1989/8.

234 Ziegler, Ktema 22, 52; *Le Harem* (1999) 108 f. The child of a slave-girl was given the name 'May my father live long', which will have referred to her owner; D. Charpin, NABU 2003/2.

235 VAS 19 40:6, 16.

236 On the legal entitlement of women in these very old texts, see J.-J. Glassner, BiOr 52 (1995) 12 f.; C. Wilcke, *Early Ancient Near Eastern law* (2003) 64 f. In later Old Sumerian texts: Glassner in: B. Lesko, *Women's earliest records* (1987) 83–86.

237 'Blau monuments': photos in W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (1985) plate 74a, with p. 184; I. J. Gelb, *Earliest land tenure systems in the Near East* (1989) nos. 10–11, plates 11–12 (also drawings), with C. Wilcke, *Early Ancient Near Eastern law* (2003) 64. He does not discover in it a phallus but a pestle in ZA 86 (1996) 31. Cf. L. Milano in: M. Liverani, *I diritti del mondo cuneiforme* (2008) 91–102. See also J. Asher-Greve in: S. Schroer, *Images and gender. Contributions to the hermeneutics of reading ancient art* (2006) 45–47.

Fig. 30: An inscribed stone (from the private collection of Mr Blau). A man holding a staff faces a woman. It has been suggested that they are making a marriage agreement, but probably they are transferring property. 3000 BC. Slate, 16 cm. *British Museum, London*.

have been appropriate for a wedding feast. The current interpretation sees the man as the purchaser and the woman as the seller.[238] She is the one to whom the man hands the so-called phallus and commentators see in that a pestle handed over as the symbol of the completion of the sale, symbolised in later times by a pestle. There is reference to five *bur* of land (around 31 hectares) on the obelisk with an illustration of a man offering a goat on the reverse. On the reverse of the flat stone we see a large man standing opposite two crouching fellows with the pestle. It is thought that he was a public figure who was ratifying the sale. The two fellows could be those who were buying the land and the larger man was in charge.

The second document, the obelisk of Ušumgal, has four sides and if one compares the left side with the right a man and woman can be seen looking at each other. The main character is Ušumgal, and so far as the text is decipherable Wilcke reads the words 'bride's attendant', 'oath', 'deflower'. Evidently oaths were being taken that everything was in order as regards the woman's honour – if

238 We follow L. Milano in Liverani, 92–102.

Wilcke has deciphered correctly.[239] Again other scholars see in her the seller and in him the buyer. The man is standing opposite a building and possibly has a clay nail in his hand. He apparently wants to stick this into the wall, an action which had also been a symbol of a completed sale from ancient times. The fields are described as having a total circumference of 160 hectares.

What was the conclusion? The readings 'bride's attendant' and 'deflower' are contested. We who are not experts stick to the idea that we see women here playing a leading role, probably selling large pieces of land. In these illustrations the women are crouching plump figures. That image is at any rate corrected by a splendid portrait of a distinguished lady from that time, which was found in Uruk. It is a mask made of marble.[240]

There is abundant material available to prove that in all periods some women among the elite were legally entitled to enter into a contract themselves. Even in an early period, around 2500 BC, a woman sold a house to another woman including 57 m^2 of land.[241] We shall write later about the royal courts, and then it will be clear how independent and rich the queen was. Of women in the Old Akkadian period it is said that 'women did not have to lead secluded lives. From the queen down to ordinary citizenry, women, whether married or unmarried, Sumerian or Akkadian, were free to participate in public life on a par with men and mingling freely with men. (...) Roughly 5 percent of the cylinder seals belonged to women. Could women do the things men did, and on an equal basis? – our current definition of the emancipated woman. The answer is: yes, but few did. The rest are mostly invisible in our sources.'[242] We know of the archive of a wealthy married couple where the lady managed the income from extensive estates and dealt in wool and metal, while the gentleman managed the herds of animals, taken out to graze by the herdsmen. Other women invested under their own names.[243]

In the Old Assyrian period (1890–1850 BC) we see women managing businesses in the home base of Assur. Their activities are well documented in the

239 Ušumgal stela: Orthmann, plate 74 b-c; Gelb, no. 12, plates 13–17; A. Moortgat, *The art of ancient Mesopotamia* (1969) plates 31–34 with C. Wilcke, *Early law*, 63; cf. Wilcke in: K. Volk, *Erzählungen aus dem Land Sumer* (2015) 204 n. 5 ('Ehegelöbnis am Tor'). Also J. Asher-Greve in Schroer, *Images*, 47 f.

240 H. Frankfort, *The art and architecture of the Ancient Orient* (1954) plate 7; Moortgat, *The art of ancient Mesopotamia*, plate 26 with p. 16a. In this book Figure 10, in Chapter 1.

241 J. Krecher in: W. Fikentscher, *Entstehung und Wandel rechtlicher Traditionen* (1980) 336 (D. O. Edzard, *Sumerische Rechtsurkunden* no. 29). 'Women participate very frequently in sale transactions, both as buyers and sellers'; I. J. Gelb, OIP 104 (1991) 17b.

242 A. Westenholz, *Mesopotamien. Akkade-Zeit* (see note 1), 70–73, 'Women'.

243 B. R. Foster, *Umma in the Sargonic period* (1982) 77 f.; Foster in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 54.

correspondence with her husband and others in the Assyrian trade colony of Anatolia.[244] In chapter 5 we described the background to this when we examined the second wife of the man in Anatolia. Such women stayed at home and contributed to the family trade by themselves producing cloth, which they sent to their husbands, brothers and sons in exchange for precious metal and jewels. Take for example Šimat-Ištar, who stayed at home with children and slaves and led the work in the textile industry, to export cloth to Anatolia. In addition she invested in houses.[245] Weaving of cloth took place at home, with all the women of the household, including children and slave-girls, in the workshop. A merchant gives precise instructions from Anatolia in a letter.[246]

> Puzur-Aššur spoke thus to Waqqurtum: A. is on his way to you with a mina of silver under my seal. The tax has been added; the duties paid. The fine cloth which you sent to me – you must make cloth like this and send it to me with A., then I intend to send you half a mina of silver (= as the payment for each length of cloth). Have them comb one side of the cloth, but not shave it smooth. The weave must be close (= with a nap). In contrast to the previous cloth that you sent me, for this cloth you must use an extra mina of wool per length, but it must remain thin. The other side should be only lightly (?) combed; if it is still hairy, it should be shaved, like the cloth for a chiton. As regards the Abarnian cloth which you sent me, you must not send it to me again. If you want to make one, make it like the one I wore over there. If you cannot manage to make fine cloths, I assume they can be bought plentifully over there, so buy and send them to me. A finished length of cloth, if you are going to make one, should measure nine cubits in length and eight cubits in breadth.

This business woman had her own work capital and was careful with it. She represented her husband in carrying out business transactions in Assur. Sometimes her husband made an agreement with a customer and sent the duplicate of this to his wife as a check. She paid taxes or debts and collected payments due. She also complained about lack of money, as we can see from what is written about the business of Innaya, the merchant. His wife stayed in Assur and deputised in the business. She was the mother of his five sons, who were also in the trade. Rings served as money there. She wrote this letter to her husband, and in it she possibly exaggerates:[247]

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244 We follow C. Michel, CMK (2001) 421–425. The correspondence of women: p. 419–511.

245 J. G. Dercksen, *The Old Assyrian copper trade in Anatolia* (1996) 108 f.; K. R. Veenhof, 'Houses in the ancient city of Assur', *Studies D. J. W. Meijer* (2011) 211–231.

246 TCL 19 17 with K. R. Veenhof, *Schrijvend verleden* (1983) 84; C. Michel, CMK (2001) 444 no. 318.

247 Michel, CMK 466 no. 344.

> Speak to Innaya: thus says Taram-Kubi.
> You had written to me, 'The hand and finger-rings which are there you must have guarded. They have to be used for your food.' In reality you sent me thirty shekels of gold brought by I. Where are the rings you were going to leave for me? When you left you did not leave one shekel of silver for me. You plundered the house and took (everything) out of it. After you left there was a severe famine in Assur. You did not leave me a single litre of barley. I had repeatedly to buy barley for our food (...). What sort of demands are those that you repeatedly write to me? We have nothing to eat. Really, we too could repeatedly make demands. What I have in hand I have scraped together and sent to you and today I live in an empty house. Now is the season. Take care that you send me the amount that my cloths are worth, the silver that you have available, and then I can buy ten measures of barley.

In order to send cloth to Asia Minor, they had to make contracts with several carriers, who often added extra lengths of cloth to their convoy and would not accept a small consignment of goods. On many occasions women would complain that they could not find a carrier. Some women entrusted their cloth to a merchant as a *tadmiqtu*, 'on loan to get the best price possible'. He would sell it in Asia Minor and keep the profit for himself, while the women could be sure of the sale price. Sometimes women could not satisfy the requests of their husbands in Asia Minor. Their complaints concern the putting together of the shipments, the measurements of the cloth and its quality. In addition the correspondence concerned sending objects needed in the various offices in Asia Minor. Beautiful presents were sometimes sent to Assur. Of course the woman had to care for the house and its inhabitants. She paid much attention to serving the gods correctly and was afraid of the angry spirits of the dead. These women must have had strong personalities.

But the men had their own concerns too.

> Protect the second wife ('slave-girl') and the child; pay heed to the wife and have the expenses refunded.
> I do not know whether my second wife and the little girl are dead or not. You are my brothers. If they are alive, I will refund you their expenses.
> You are our brother; protect our slave-girls and your children.[248]

A merchant is reproached by his wife and reacts:

> Why has your heart changed so much and why do you belittle me? As if I (only) loved money and not our family, you and my brother![249]

248 C. Michel, Ktema 22 (1997) 100.

249 KTK 18 with M. T. Larsen, *Studies K. R. Veenhof* (2001) 279 n. 24, and more references to the emotions of women on p. 285.

It was a hard world and a woman sighs in a business letter:

> You have heard that mankind is bad. One stands ready to swallow up the other.[250]

One wonders what this international trade would have been without these women. Dutch women also had such a special status according to Hugo de Groot in his *Vergelijking der gemeenebesten* (1603):

> Women carried on business with just as much perspicacity as men. It was not enough for them just to look after the children and do the housework. No, if their husband was away, they managed his money, they sold wares, they kept the books and travelled from one city to another.[251]

No specific business women of the Neo-Assyrian period, a thousand years later, are known to us, but we see that women could initiate litigation at that time.[252]

The administration of an estate with 164 personnel near Mari shows that Madam was possibly the wife of a well-known merchant. She controlled two female cooks, two women supervising the household, two water carriers, three personal assistants, 35 weavers, two women without a title, two men, and various girls and infants.[253] Of course, managing the weaving of the cloth was her most important activity. There were now and then problems. The ambassador of Mari to the court of King Hammurabi in Babylon wrote to his wife:

> Regarding the cloth for my garments, which you are making, I have said to you once, twice, the lengths of cloth must be one cubit longer than now. With the cloths you make I am shabby. With this letter I am sending you the cloth from this country and you will see.[254]

Was the 'long' fashion in Babylon different and nicer?

Within the Neo-Babylonian Egibi family we can follow the fortunes of the woman called Ina-Esagila-ramat for 64 years.[255] She was the wife of Iddin-Marduk and her texts belong to his archive. She must have reached the age of more than eighty years and remained active into her final years, when she took out a lawsuit against a grandson and favoured a granddaughter. She herself was from a well-off family and brought with her a considerable dowry, consisting of slaves and

250 Michel, CMK (2001) 433 no. 306:3–6. Cf. 'mankind has become bad', no. 187:20.
251 E. M. Kloek in: H. M. Beliën, *Gestalten van de Gouden Eeuw* (2005) 250.
252 B. Faist in: J. Renger, *Assur – Gott, Stadt und Land* (2011) 255 n. 29 ('prozessfähig').
253 ARM 9 27 with N. Ziegler, *Le Harem* (1999) 19 f.
254 ARM 10 173:11–18 with LAPO 18 (2000) 411 no. 1210.
255 C. Wunsch, *Die Urkunden des babylonischen Geschäftsmannes Iddin-Marduk.* (1993) 66–72.

household utensils and ten minas of silver, three of which were her own nest egg ('the basket'). One assumes that her husband had profited from it. She transacted business for her husband, but also independently extended considerable credit. Her father-in-law had emancipated a slave on condition that he gave him food and clothing, which meant that he would support him in his old age. Directly after the contract was drawn up, the man fled. The daughter-in-law stepped in, with her daughter:

> She honoured him; she respected him; she cared for him and regularly gave him food, oil and clothing.

The emancipation was reversed and the slave became the property of the ladies. Evidently he had been caught.[256] We have recounted more about the women of the Egibi family in Chapter 3 about marriage gifts. Another lady from this time specialised in buying slaves.[257]

In the myths we see the goddesses at home as competent managers bearing the title *agrig*, 'head of the housekeeping'.[258] Although the book of Proverbs has many warnings about strange women, everything comes right in the end with Chapter 31 about the 'virtuous woman' (literally 'the woman of strength'), who manages an estate.

18.11 Women's seals

Two more aspects of the public role of the woman remain to be discussed of which the first is their use of seals. Herodotus (I 195) wrote about Babylonia in the Persian period that 'everyone has a signet ring'. In the earlier periods people had seals in the shape of a little cylinder, which could be rolled against the wet clay of the freshly written clay tablet, a cylinder seal. There was a representation carved into it and quite often the inscription gave the name of the owner. These were almost always men, but high-ranking women also had their own seals, sometimes with female figures depicted on them. To judge if a seal belonged to a woman depends on it having an inscription.[259] Queen Šibtum of Mari received a letter from her husband in which he asked her to seal goods 'with your seal, that

256 Wunsch, no. 211.
257 C. Waerzeggers, 'The records of Inṣabtu from the Naggāru family', AfO 46–47 (1999–2000) 183–200.
258 T. Frymer-Kensky, *In the wake of the goddesses* (1992) 35 f.
259 G. Gadaut in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 234–236.

is engraved with the words "Šibtum, daughter of Yarim-Lim, wife of Zimri-Lim".' It is conceivable that she had several seals and that he was asking her to use the one on which he himself was named.[260] How goods could be sealed with her seal we read in a surprising letter from the king to her about storing garlic. It is also surprising because we see some of the minor details with which the king was busying himself. Garlic was the normal food in the south, grown in the date orchard, so perhaps it was rarer in Mari.[261]

> I keep hearing that the right time for garlic has come. Alert S. to this and get him to harvest the garlic. I want to receive ten homer of garlic in a dried state. When the garlic is dry, get it from him and have it stored in thirty-litre jars and seal them with your seal. However if the garlic is not dry, have them dry it on the roof of the sanctuary, but have the roof sealed off with your seal.

In Mari and Karanâ the wives of highly-placed diviners had their own businesses and so needed a cylinder seal. One from Mari reads, 'Yamama, the daughter of Yaḫdun-Lim, wife of Asqudum'; another, from Karanâ, reads 'Iltani, the daughter of Samu-Addu, wife of Aqba-ḫammu'. Both were daughters of a king.[262] In Chapter 23 about the court and the harem we give further examples of princesses with inscribed cylinder seals.

We regularly see seal impressions on clay tablets which have no inscription, but the name of the owner is written beside the impression; sometimes this is a woman's name. If anyone had no seal they could impress their finger nail on the tablet, and alongside such an impression on a Neo-Assyrian tablet we read, 'fingerprint of A., the wife of B., the third man (on the war chariot), the bearer of a shield'. She is identified as one of those who were selling a house.[263] In the Sumerian period the style of women's seals was no different from that of men's.[264] The only exception was that of the wife of a governor, which showed two women standing in a reverential position opposite a goddess. The inscription reads, 'Ninḫilia, the wife of Akalla, the governor of Umma'.[265]

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260 ARM 10 119 with D. Charpin, NABU 1998/78. Her seal in a repair shop: ARM 32 (2012) 268 M. 18472:12.

261 ARM 10 136 with LAPO 18 (2000) 336 f. no. 1157.

262 D. Charpin in: G. D. Young, *Mari in retrospect* (1992) 62.

263 SAA VI 142. In general see P. Villard in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 311 n. 57.

264 G. Gadaut; R. Mayr, 'The depiction of ordinary men and women on the seals of the Ur III kingdom', CRRAI 47/II (2002) 359–366; otherwise I. Winter in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 190. See also F. Weiershäuser, 'Die bildliche Darstellung königlicher Frauen der III. Dynastie von Ur und ihre sozialpolitische Aussage', in: S. Schroer, *Images and gender* (2006) 263–279.

265 JCS 26 (1974) 111 Seal B; Schroer, *Images and gender*, 70 fig. 17.

In the Old Assyrian period women closely involved in a transaction would seal the envelopes enclosing contracts or letters.[266] In most cases their names were not mentioned on the envelope and there was no difference in their style of sealing from that of men.[267] From the Old Babylonian period we know of cylinder seals belonging to nuns (*nadîtu*) from Sippar and elsewhere. In the inscriptions on them sometimes after the name of the woman comes the title '*nadîtu* of Šamaš' and always the words 'servant of (the gods) Šamaš and Aya'. They are not different in style from men's seals.[268] Two letters from Mari concern a princess asking her father for a seal.

> Let my lord, the Star, have sent to me a cylinder seal of lapis lazuli with my name on it. Every time I write, no one will despise me and will say, 'There is no impression of her seal'.[269]

18.12 Women as witnesses

Women could give evidence in lawsuits, in particular those alleging the ill-treatment of a woman by a man or transactions within a convent.[270] It is noteworthy that women almost never appear on the list of witnesses at the end of a written contract. This is not surprising. The word 'witness' (*šību*) means primarily 'old man', 'the elder', and suggests the 'elders' sitting at the city gates. They were the ones who formally dealt with lawsuits, one imagines, and women were not present there.

In the Old Akkadian period a woman is hardly ever a witness, even when only women were active.[271] In Old Babylonian Sippar women witness only documents drawn up in the convent. On two documents we find a blank space between the names of the men and the women. One has seven male witnesses and fifteen female witnesses; the other six male, five female, and a female scribe. In both cases a woman is marrying off her adopted daughter.[272] The men, mostly the authorities of the temple or the convent, come first, but on two occasions the list was headed by two king's daughters, who were in the convent at Sippar, and they

266 K. R. Veenhof, *Mesopotamia. The Old Assyrian period* (2008) 109 f.
267 C. Michel in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 258–262.
268 G. Colbow, CRRAI 47/I (2002) 88–90.
269 ARM 10 96 rev. 7–12 with LAPO 18 (2000) 438 no. 1225, with no. 1226.
270 BE 6/2 58; the quotes in CAD Š/2 396a.
271 A. Westenholz, *Mesopotamien. Akkade-Zeit* (see note 1), 70.
272 CT 6 26a; CT 48 52.

impressed their seals.[273] When a slave-girl (*kazirtu*) was sold, five women, two men and a scribe witnessed the event.[274] A nun dedicated to Ninurta in Nippur carried out some business transactions and here too women were the witnesses.[275] Outside Sippar there are only a few instances of a woman as a witness. When a woman hired out her son for three months, the first witness was a merchant and the third a woman, 'NN, wife of NN'. An infant belonging to a single mother was adopted and the penultimate witness was a woman.[276]

In Kaniš it is the wife, the daughter (a priestess) and a son of one of the partners to the contract who once are listed as witnesses.[277] No female witnesses are known in Middle Assyrian times.[278] In a few Neo-Assyrian contracts a woman appears as a witness.[279] Some contracts from the Neo-Babylonian period, after the description of the transaction and before the list of witnesses, state 'in the presence of the woman NN', or 'with the consent of his wife NN', showing that she had been present and had agreed to the terms of the contract.[280]

273 CT 47 47 (with seal 1 and 2); PBS 8/2 207 (with only female witnesses). See M. Stol, *Festschrift J. Oelsner* (2000) 461 n. 27.
274 CT 48 28.
275 TIM 4 10:25–29.
276 Riftin 35:13; UET 5 93:29.
277 M. T. Larsen, *Kültepe Tabletler*n VI-a (2010) no. 207:29–32.
278 N. Bellotto, *Studies F. M. Fales* (2012) 67.
279 B. Faist in: J. Renger, *Assur – Gott, Stadt und Land* (2011) 255 n. 30.
280 P. Koschaker, *Babylonisch-assyrisches Bürgschaftsrecht* (1911) 201–207; *ina ašābi*, CAD A/2 391b, 408b (lit.), *ina milki*, CAD M/2 69 (3).