22 Her physical life

In the first chapter we saw how a young girl grew up, played, and reached an age when she had to accompany her mother to work. Now it is time to see what happened to her in adulthood, the beginning of her periods, her child-bearing years, and her old age. Physical risks were always threatening, especially diseases and death. How to deal with illness was a big problem in the ancient world, both for men and women. We shall concentrate on gynaecological matters, beginning with girls about to be married and ending with women's funeral arrangements.

22.1 Physiology

The Babylonian handbook of 'physiological omens' was a compilation of physiological observations and their significance for a person's life, for it was thought that distinctive features of the human body predicted a particular outcome.[1] It describes the whole body, from top to toe, and we are spared no abnormalities of colour or texture. All the details listed could be found on people in good health, and none are seen as symptomatic of an illness. One of the two chapters devoted to women[2] begins with 'If the head of the woman is large', and the other with 'If the ... of her head turns to the right'.[3] Another text speaks of 'a grain' appearing all over her body, which might be a way of indicating freckles.[4] These omens primarily predict one's prospects of becoming rich or poor, especially for men. For women the predictions relate to their future husbands, their behaviour within a new family, and domestic happiness. Much attention is given to a woman's fertility and her potential for child bearing on the basis of features of her navel. One omen says,

> If her navel lies deep, she is fertile.

1 It has been said that a pale face and dark lips are female physical features of rage and fear; D. Schwemer, WdO 41 (2011) 185:5 f. with p. 187. But in fact these are proverbial expressions for fear in men and women; A. R. George, *The Gilgamesh Epic* I (1983) 240.

2 B. Böck, *Die babylonisch-assyrische Morphoskopie* (2000) 148–173. Summaries: p. 27 f., 38a ('Idealbild'). The fragment CT 20 22, 82-3-23,115 is lacking. For a new translation of Böck, 152, 156–170 (lines 4–7, 90–261), see TUAT NF 4 (2008) 41–47.

3 Known only from the catalogue in I. L. Finkel, *Studies A. Sachs* (1988) 152, A 82–84.

4 Böck, 230–233.

The literal meaning of the word translated 'fertile' is 'someone who bears'.[5] Characteristics of personality could also be determined on the basis of a woman's physiology[6] Often these were related to her behaviour within the family, that she would be honest, active, bright and cheerful, or unreliable, disruptive, depressive, unfaithful; she might even be a witch. When choosing a girl to marry it was advisable to know facts like these, and those we mentioned in Chapter 2 about marriage, under the heading, 'Preparations', can be supplemented here.

> If the lines on her hand are interwoven, whoever marries her shall ...
> If the lines on her hand are open, this woman [will be] bright and cheerful.
> If the lines on her hand are many, she will impoverish anyone who marries her.
> If the lines on her hand on the right are open and on the left sunken (?), whoever marries her shall have grievous cares.[7]
> If there is a grain on the right of her neck, she will become depressed.
> If there is a grain on the left of her neck, a guardian deity shall [bestow] wealth and well-being on her.[8]

It seems to have been good for a woman's distinctive feature to be 'on the left'. Normally, 'left' is associated with 'not good' and with 'woman', but here it seems that by combining two ostensibly negative ideas, 'left' and 'woman', they reached a positive outcome. In another handbook the physical abnormalities of women from a city presage national disaster.

> If in a city the women have beards, then calamity shall seize the land.[9]

Old, ugly women were not liked if we are to believe the remark of an overseer in the harem at Mari about nomad women who had been captured.

> The Benjaminite woman, your gift, is old. What (use is she)?
> The Amorite women that S. brought here are all cold and old. There is not a single (suitable) woman among them.[10]

5 Böck, 164:193.
6 U. Koch-Westenholz, CRRAI 47/II (2002) 308b.
7 Böck, 156:106, 108, 109, 113.
8 Böck, 232:30 f.
9 S. Freedman, *If a city is set on a height* I (1998) 36 Tablet I 153.
10 N. Ziegler, Florilegium Marianum IX (2007) 215 no. 51:28 f.; 218 no. 52 rev. 8–11; cf. IV (1999) 118, 216 (Amorite singers).

22.2 Menstruation

Before discussing women who really are ill, something needs to be said about the relevance attached to a woman's monthly periods.[11] According to the myth of Enki and Ninḫursag, in the ideal mythical dawn of time there was no illness or old age, and menstruation was apparently unknown. The idea is expressed indirectly in the sentence 'The girl (*ki.sikil*) did not wash' (line 26). It could possibly also be referred to in Babylonian medical texts when a woman is said to be 'stricken by a (or 'the') weapon'.[12] Once in the handbook of 'physiognomy' we find, 'This woman shall die the death by the weapon'.[13] Men who were ill and began to bleed are also sometimes said to have been struck by the weapon. An incantation from the Sumerian period tells us that the demon Samana ('The Red One') apparently prevented a girl from 'loosening her months', while he prevented a young man from doing something else (the text is broken).[14] The words used in Biblical Hebrew for a sanitary towel are *dāwā* and *bègèd 'iddīm*.[15] Among the Akkadian words are *sagû* and *ulāpu*, sometimes identified as 'cloth for one day'.[16] The Sumerian expression, 'grimy clothing', stands figuratively for anything eliciting feelings of disgust.[17] A more explicit term for sanitary towel was *kannu*. It is found in a ritual for a pregnant woman, who is instructed to 'wear the amulet a hundred days after her towel has passed from her (?)'.[18]

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11 K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 51–55.

12 See CAD K 53a; for other instances, see R. D. Biggs in: L. Vattini and P. Villard, *Médecine et médecins au Proche-Orient ancien* (2006) 42 f., 'Menstruation'. A liver omen has 'A woman shall die (?) by the weapon', TIM 9 80 rev. 29 ('shall die': *i*-UD-*ma-at*). Note that BAM 1 99:19, 27, 42 distinguishes bleeding in a woman who is 'struck by the weapon' from a woman who is affected by *naḫšātu*. – 'Her illness' may refer to menstruation; see below, 23.3.1.

13 Böck, 155:46.

14 J. Nougayrol, ArOr 17/3–4 (1949) 213:12 f. (du_8 ITU.ITU); for the man: ZAG.ŠÚ.ŠÚ); now I. L. Finkel, *Festschrift R. Borger* (1998) 73 f.

15 *Dāwā* (Isaiah 30:22, REB: 'foul discharge'; NRSV: 'filthy rags'), *bègèd 'iddīm* (Isaiah 64:5, REB: 'filthy rag' (verse 6); NRSV: 'filthy cloth'), but these modern translations delicately mask the real meaning.

16 M. Malul, BiOr 43 (1986) 28 n. 53, 31; K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 53. Cloth for one day: W. Farber, ZA 91 (2001) 258 n. 10; idem, *Lamaštu* (2014) 76, I 48.

17 Å. W. Sjöberg, JCS 25 (1973) 140, on 163; K. Volk, *Inanna und Šukalletuda* (1995) 185 f. (a bandage). 'Sanitary towel' is too modern; see A. Garcia, 'Sanitary towels in Ur III administrative texts?', Aula Orientalis 31 (2013) 235–248. She does not discuss the Sumerian word níg.dará in literary contexts.

18 F. Thureau-Dangin, RA 18 (1921) 165 rev. 12, as explained in CAD E 388a (*ša qa-ni-šú ittiqšu*). For *kannu*, see CAD K 157a, (d), 'bandage used by women'; also in LKA 9 rev. 13.

A menstruating woman could be referred to as someone who was *musukkatu*, 'unclean', an adjective echoing the noun *asakku*, 'taboo',[19] and menstrual blood was regarded as dangerous.[20] To avoid any danger when preparing magical prescriptions using the body hair of a woman, she must either 'never have known a man' or have passed the menopause[21]. The word *musukkatu* also refers to a woman after childbirth.[22] The 'milk of an unclean woman', meaning a mother's milk shortly after she had given birth,[23] was sometimes used as a medicine. The urine of an 'unclean woman who had borne a son' was also used.[24] From a letter we learn that a woman had to keep away from her husband for five to six days after giving birth, probably the time when she was regarded as 'unclean'.[25] Menstruating women in the archives of Mari had to leave the palace and live elsewhere for five or six days, because 'the gods were strong in the palace'. This phrase could recall that the palace had originally been a temple.[26] After that time she would be clean again.

> Today the slave-girl of the king (a concubine) has become clean and has entered the palace.[27]

A regulation in an Assyrian harem also stipulates temporary exclusion.

> When the offerings arrive, the court-lady 'who may not be approached' may not come in before the face of the king.[28]

At the end of a ritual intended 'to obtain the favour of a god or goddess for a man', a man was prohibited from touching an unclean woman.[29]

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19 K. van der Toorn, 'La pureté rituelle au Proche-Orient ancien', Revue de l'histoire des religions 206 (1989) 339–356, notably 348–351.

20 J. Milgrom, JANES 22 (1993) 107.

21 AMT 46, 5, cited CAD A/2 243a; STT 1 57:18 (a virgin, male or female); BAM 6 575, cited CAD Š/2 126a (pubic hair of an old woman).

22 H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil* (1978) 150–157, 170 (the city gate).

23 N. Wasserman, RA 90 (1996) 3:5 (together with the milk of a female donkey).

24 BAM 5 476:11.

25 AEM 1/1 (1988) 111 no. 13:17, with 105 (n. 59).

26 J.-M. Durand in: G. del Olmo Lete, *Mythologie et religion des Sémites occidentaux* I (2008) 561–563.

27 Ziegler, *Le Harem* (1999) 232 no. 59:4 f., with p. 18 n. 103.

28 M. T. Roth, *Law collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (1995) 200 § 7; E. F. Weidner, AfO 17 (1954–56) 276 Satzung 7:47.

29 R. Labat, Semitica 3 (1950) 11 ii 13.

According to an omen text, if 'prostitutes' crossed the path of a man, 'his wish shall be fulfilled'. The text then continues by saying that if there is a prostitute who is 'unclean' (*musukkatu*), his wish shall not be fulfilled, but if he touches her breast, 'he is free'. The reasoning here may be that the man would have become unclean through contact with the menstrual blood, and that breast-milk would remove any stain of guilt.[30] A man who only touched an unclean woman in passing would become unclean himself for six days.[31] A priest who had to carry out a ritual should not defile himself with dirty water on the street, and he would also become unclean 'if he met a woman whose hands were not good', or 'if he saw a young girl with unwashed hands'.[32] Similarly pious, law-abiding Jews or Muslims are careful not take the hand of a woman. Women were not allowed to work on temple constructions lest they menstruate and pollute the building.[33] Records from the Ur III period calculating how many days women actually worked include 'days of sitting', allowing for an absence of six days per month. Men had only three days a month free.[34] Egyptian documents also appear to take this into account, though there is some difficulty in associating the Egyptian word *ḥsmn* with the same general meaning as Akkadian *naḫšātu*, 'bleeding'.[35]

A myth describes how the young girl Ninlil, when asking a wise old woman for advice, is told,

> The river is purifying, every woman bathes in it.

The girl had evidently begun to have periods showing she had become nubile. In Nippur the name of the 'pure (= purifying) river' was Isalla.[36] We have a map of the city of Nippur, drawn on a clay tablet, where one of the gates is labelled 'Gate of the Unclean Women'. It opened on to the Euphrates and it could have been the place where ritual washing took place.[37] An Old Babylonian text, referring to 'the regular service' of this gate, mentions 'the copper vessel'. That may have been

30 AfO 18 (1957–58) 76b, Text B 25 f., with J. Bottéro, RlA VII/3–4 (1988) 208.
31 KAR 300 rev. 6 = KAL 1 114 no. 39 rev. 6; restore: *ul* [KÙ] (= *elil*).
32 K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 51 f.; now C. Walker, M. Dick, *The induction of the cult image in Ancient Mesopotamia* (2001) 211, 224:8 f.
33 This is Th. Jacobsen's interpretation of Gudea, Statue B iv 5; see *Studies W. L. Moran* (1990) 235 n. 7.
34 B. Lafont, NABU 1987/45; H. Waetzoldt, AOF 15 (1988) 36 f.
35 Y. Koenig, Journal asiatique 273 (1985) 7 f.; J. Toivari-Viitala, *Women at Deir El-Medina* (2001) 162–168. P. J. Frandsen has no doubts, see 'The menstrual taboo in ancient Egypt', JNES 66 (2007) 81–105.
36 H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil* (1978) 65, on lines 4, 15.
37 M. Stol in: *Annäherungen* 4 (= OBO 160/4) (2004) 672.

a basin for washing onself.[38] Later texts record that in Nippur 'unclean women went out' on the second day of the second month.[39]

It can be noted in passing that Biblical law regarded a mother as unclean after giving birth,[40] but she was unclean longer after producing a daughter than a boy (Leviticus 12: 1–5). The Hittites, for unexplained reasons, purified a baby boy at the beginning of his third month, and a girl at the beginning of her fourth.[41] Where that idea arose may lead to suspicions.

I have discussed elsewhere the difficulties a woman may have in bearing children.[42] A mother in the intertestamental period is driven to remind her son of how much she had done for him.

> Son, take pity on me, who carried you nine months in the womb, nursed you for three years, reared you and brought you up to your present age (2 Maccabees 7: 27).

Another woman, who produced three children in nine years, may have avoided other pregnancies through two or three years of breastfeeding.[43]

22.3 Diseases

Women's illnesses are sometimes described in some detail.[44] A slave-girl became ill after she had been hired.

> For six days her insides were in order and for two days she was sick as a dog.[45]

Letters from Nippur describe singers suffering from coughs and discuss what to do about them.[46] In recent scholarship these women are regarded simply as

38 ARN 103 iv 32, bala.gub.ba ká.gal ú.zú.e.ne urudu.šen. See also PBS 8/1 99 iii 16 f. Compare A. Cavigneaux, *Uruk* (1996) 32 no. 59.

39 A. R. George, *Babylonian topographical texts* (1992) 154:19, with p. 448, and OECT 11 69+70 i 23 § 7, with George, ZA 80 (1990) 158, and F. Reynolds, BiOr 53 (1996) 91, on 313.

40 M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* (2000) 205 f.

41 TUAT NF 5 (2009) 186.

42 M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* (2000).

43 M. T. Roth, *Studies Å. W. Sjöberg* (1989) 481 ff., line 21 (= OIP 122 no. 38).

44 R. Labat, 'Frauenkrankheiten', RlA III (1957) 109.

45 AbB 13 66:8 f.

46 M. Worthington in: A. Attia, *Advances in Mesopotamian medicine from Hammurabi to Hippocrates* (2009) 58 f. For the latest translations see E. Ritter, *Studies B. Landsberger* (1965) 317 f. (a selection); S. Parpola, LAS, Commentary (1983) 492–496 (all). The name of the physician is not Mukallim, but Šumu-libši.

girls, but that is not right, a subject already broached in connection with music in Chapter 18. Perhaps they suffered from vomiting, abscesses (lit. 'fire') on the chest, and fever (lit. 'heat'). A provisional translation for some of these passages can now be given. In one the physician Šumu-libši describes treating a girl with a fever.

> In the evening fever gripped the daughter of Muštalu and in the morning I made her drink a remedy. Her fever is evenly distributed, but both her feet are cold. Earlier she was coughing, but now [no longer].[47]

Another letter records how a physician changed his remedies as a girl's symptoms developed. He was concerned lest her illness change to 'the Hand of the Curse', one that was no longer acute but chronic, one regarded as caused by supernatural power.

> The daughter of Muštalu is coughing without vomiting. After I had given her a mixture ... to drink, she coughed up phlegm and ... Now she always gets colic. After I had [given] her a mixture for colic [to drink], she drinks it regularly. What is missing is the ... -plant and grape-juice. Let my lord bring [her] to me so that I can regularly give her mixtures. It must not change to the Hand of the Curse.[48]

A similar 'hand' afflicted a woman in the harem at Mari, which meant a prominent diviner had to announce to the king the results of an extispicy.

> According to the command of my lord, I have carried out an extispicy concerning Šattam-kiyazi. The extispicy which I carried out (revealed) the Hand of Ištar of Radana, with regard to Ekallatum. The goddess is bringing pressure to bear on her. As long as she is going to Ekallatum her illness will not pass.[49]

Here the extispicy identified the 'Hand' which was causing the sickness and gave a prognosis of how to make it pass. The woman herself wrote a letter to the king about her illness.

> I have offered a sheep to Ištar of Radana and the liver omens were bad. Today I went off to Saggaratum and have been sick from the day that I set out. Once, twice, I made the (offertory) prayer. It is the Hand of Ištar of Radana. My lord knows that the Hand of Ištar of Radana rests heavily upon me. Today, if it is the wish of my lord, let him have this illness examined by extispicy.

47 BE 17 32:7–14 with Ritter, 318 b (not: PBS I 2, no. 32), Parpola, 493.
48 PBS 1/2 72:18–26 with Ritter, 317 f., Parpola, 495 f.
49 AEM 1/1 (1988) 222 no. 83.

> There is another matter. If it is the wish of my lord, allow me to go and bring a sacrifice to Ištar of Radana and let me see her face, (...) kiss her feet.'[50]

The Hand of Ištar occurs in another letter to the king from around the same time.

> But Š., your slave-girl, has become ill and I have carried out the extispicy and I have removed the Hand of Ištar. Now she has become peaceful. All is well with her. And with the boys, your sons, all is well too.[51]

It seems that women were especially susceptible to the Hand of Ištar, and in Chapter 29, about women and divine worship, we shall see that they had a special bond with this goddess.

Kibri-Dagan wrote two letters to his master, the king of Mari, reporting that a princess, a high priestess of the god Dagan, had recovered from an illness. In one he said,

> Kunši-matum has become sick but she has recovered. I had an extispicy done about her state of health. The predictions were good. My lord must not trouble himself in any way.[52]

In the other he said,

> Kunši-matum has been ill for four days and I myself (thought), 'It could be the (harmless) illness *ḫašû* which has overtaken her for one or two days. So until today I have not written to my lord. Now [my lord should know this].[53]

Such references identify particular women who fell ill. From Mari we also know that an epidemic broke out there in the harem, and more will be said about this in Chapter 23 under the heading, 'Predicaments'. If one's wife became chronically sick that could constitute a legitimate reason for a divorce, as we saw at the end of Chapter 5 about the second wife.

When the mother of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, was sick, it was established by extispicy that it was the hand of the god Iqbi-damiq that was responsible. This god is otherwise unknown but his name means 'He spoke and it was good', which explains why the outcome was favourable.[54] A scholar at the court, who had carried out ten rituals from handbooks, including one against 'being

50 ARM 10 87 with J.-M. Durand, LAPO 18 (2000) 491.
51 J. Eidem, *The Shemshara Archives*. 1, *The letters* (2001) 104 no. 34:14–20.
52 ARM 3 63 with LAPO 16 (1997) 309 no. 176.
53 ARM 3 64 with *ibidem*, no. 175.
54 SAA IV 190 with M. Worthington in: Attia, Buisson, *Advances in Mesopotamian Medicine*, 66 f.

cursed', reported that, after the queen had undergone ten healing rituals, all was now well.[55] Several letters from this period show that women were treated by the court doctor.[56]

Medical texts ostensibly deal with men, but tacitly also with women.[57] The only circumstances when a difference was made between men and women concerned the therapy for treating loss of hair. This was probably because women were expected to have a profuse growth of hair.[58] On rare occasions different treatments are prescribed for a man and a woman.[59] When the demon called The Weakener had caused an illness, a man would have to be anointed nine times and a woman seven times.[60] On the odd occasion we are told that similar symptoms in men and women arose from different causes. A man who 'places his hands on the head and cannot get them down again' was afflicted by the Hand of Lugal-irra and Meslamtaea. But for a woman suffering the same it was the Hand of the Lord of the Roof, the one causing epilepsy.[61] Some diagnoses and prognoses are followed by an explicit instruction that 'for a man or a woman this means the same'. These involved the development of sexual diseases, which were ascribed to the Hand of Ištar. We note that much later in Europe Venus was thought to be responsible for inflicting venereal desease.[62]

A Sumerian letter in a literary format was supposedly sent by a woman to Nin-tin-uga, the goddess of healing.[63]

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55 ABL 549, SAA X 201 with S. M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (1994) 30. There are more letters about her illness. For further description and the historical context see S. C. Melville, *The role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid politics* (1999) 82–85.

56 N. P. Heeßel in: B. Heininger, R. Lindner, *Krankheit und Heilung. Gender–Religion–Medizin* (2006) 13 (SAA X 200 f., 244, 293; SAA XVI 26 f.).

57 N. P. Heeßel, 'Der verschwiegene Unterschied. Die Geschlechtsdifferenz in medizinischen Texten aus dem Alten Mesopotamien', in: B. Heininger, T. Lindner, *Krankheit und Heilung* (2006) 9–24.

58 BAM 5 498 iii 1, 499 ii 7 ('Incantation: a woman's hair is falling out').

59 BAM 6 555 ii 15 (lung disease); STT 2 285:25 (disease unknown).

60 J. V. Kinnier Wilson, *Iraq* 19 (1957) 41 ND 4368 vi 7 (= CTN IV 72).

61 TDP 214:11 and 90:24 with Heeßel in Heininger, 19.

62 TDP 170:9, 178:7, 9 ('disease by love'); 172:30 ('Hand of Ištar'); to be contrasted with the older version of this handbook: STT 1 89:203 f. with M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1983) 97 ('curse'), 214 (sun-heat). In general see V. Haas, 'Venerische Krankheiten', *Babylonischer Liebesgarten* (1999) 110 f.

63 Sumerian Letters, Coll. B:17 with W. H. Ph. Römer, TUAT II/5 (1989) 715–717; B. Böck, AOF 23 (1996) 3–23. We follow the latest edition by A. Kleinerman, *Education in early 2nd millennium BC Babylonia* (= SEpM 19) (2011) 171–173.

> Say to Nin-tin-uga, efficacious steward of the Ekur, physician of the homeland; repeat to the lady whose incantations cure the populace, whose spell has healed the people, to the compassionate lady, reviver of persons, lover of prayer; to the relenting, the merciful, who hears my petitions: You care for the living and the dead, great healer of cripples. Thus says Inannakam, daughter of Enlil-amaḫ, your servant:
> Having taken to bed for the second time, I went through much woe and I do not know its course. My lady, someone built a house for me, but I can only sit furtively. My acquaintances and dear ones have abandoned me. I have no one who enquires about me. Since it is enough for me, too much for me, I am truly desperate.
> If it is my lady's will, may she cause the Azag demon that is in my body to be torn out of my flesh. May she stand my feet on the path of life. Furthermore, as I am her servant (and) the courtyard sweeper of her temple, I will serve her, (and) as soon as I am well, I will name my lady, 'Healer of Cripples'.

This name for the goddess of healing, Nin-tin-uga, means 'the mistress who makes the dead live', but she is finally addressed as the healer of cripples.[64] The reference to 'the dead' means those threatened with a terminal illness. This patient was a woman with muscle problems which she attributes to the demon Azag (*á.zág*), a name meaning 'to strike the side'. Cattle are also known to have suffered from this disease. Azag is mentioned again when the queen of Larsa dedicated a stone water-font to the goddess Inanna, for the life of her husband, the king, but chiefly for her daughter. On another occasion she dedicated nine bronze milk cups,

> in order to make the *šaḫal*-disease leave her eyes, to banish the dangers of sickness, to pass on the Azag demon that is in her body to one who does not revere him, and to preserve her life.[65]

Azag may refer to an illness prevalent among women,[66] and one that justified taking a second wife.[67] Even so, according to a Sumerian proverb a profligate woman was considered to be a worse affliction than this illness (SP 1.154). A dedicatory inscription has a similar type of praise for the goddess.[68] In the Gospels we read of a woman

64 'Great healer of cripples' (10) is a free translation. An alternative is 'binds up (the cripple)'. The god Damu does this to the 'muscle' of the 'crippled', according to a bilingual text which refers to 'Damu, who knots the broken muscle'; DT 48:7–8; E. Ebeling, *Tod und Leben* (1931) 156. Medical texts also mention this (*šer'ānu batqa kaṣāru*).

65 RIME 4 (1990) 303 no. 23 and A. R. George, CUSAS 17 (2011) 113 f. no. 53.

66 M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 143, with n. 99.

67 A. Falkenstein, NSGU II (1956) 8–10 no. 6.

68 Bur-Sîn, RIME 4 (1990) 72 no. 2001:3.

> possessed by a spirit that had crippled her for for eighteen years. She was bent double and quite unable to stand up straight (Luke 13:11).

That woman seems to have had similar muscle problems, which were similarly attributed to a supernatural cause. The most striking thing is that social alienation is an important element in these complaints. People shunned the handicapped. Illness led to isolation and could drag a person down emotionally. The patient felt deserted by gods and men. Some of these complaints may have been psychosomatic, but let us leave that matter alone for the moment.[69]

22.3.1 Gynaecology

A few Babylonian medical texts are specifically dedicated to diseases which typically affect women,[70] and they are covered in separate chapters of the Diagnostic Handbook (see below). The final lines of a chapter in a therapeutic handbook concern a woman who did not 'see' 'her illness' and give a prescription of medicinal herbs to stop the illness becoming worse. It may have been concerned with a girl's first menstruation. The following chapter begins with the problem of an adult woman whose 'blood is blocked and her blood is not seen'.[71] In an Old Sumerian incantation the demon Samana ('The Red One') is made responsible for the absence of 'the months'.[72] A much more common problem featured in these texts was how to stop unwanted bleeding, and there are many prescriptions for staunching the blood. Medical texts deal with bleeding from the nose as well as the vagina. In the latter situation a tampon composed of *materia medica* had to be inserted into the vagina.[73] One incantation for staunching bleeding in women makes a comparison with damming fast flowing irrigation water in the channels

69 M. Stol, 'Psychomatic suffering in ancient Mesopotamia', in: T. Abusch, K. van der Toorn, *Mesopotamian Magic* (1999) 57–68.

70 M. Stol, 'Gynaecology', in his *Birth in Mesopotamia and the Bible* (2000) 203 f. Translations: B. Böck, 'Konzeption, Kontrazeption, Geburt, Frauenkrankheiten', TUAT NF 5 (2009) 107–114; J. Scurlock, 'Obstetrics and gynecology', *Sourcebook for Ancient Mesopotamian medicine* (2014) 245–257, 571–619; 'Medicine and healing magic', in: M. W. Chavalas, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (2014) 101–143. Bleeding: U. Steinert, Sudhoffs Archiv 96 (2012) 64–94.

71 SpbTU I 59:12–14 with F. Köcher in: *Festschrift Heinz Goerke* (1978) 33 n. 20; TUAT NF 5 (2009) 110.

72 J. Nougayrol, ArOr 17/3–4 (1949) 213:12, with A. Falkenstein, SAHG (1953) 214 ('da er der Jungfrau die Monatsblutung behindert hat'). See above, note 14.

73 As in BAM 3 236:15–17.

between field plots.[74] The same image is used elsewhere for bleeding 'from the nose of a young man, from the vagina of a young woman', which is

> like a channel not contained by its dykes, like a brewing barrel whose bung [has burst], like a water-skin whose cords are not strong (and) fastenings not reliable.[75]

Older Sumerian incantations appear to employ the same imagery.[76] After 450 BC, when the signs of the zodiac began to be used, astrologers identified particular signs as the best time for treating an illness. When the sun was standing in Capricorn was a favourable period in which 'to staunch the blood of a woman'.[77] The same principle was applied by Greek astrologers.

The first medical problems a newly married girl would encounter were linked to infertility and pregnancy.[78] Medical texts referring to 'a woman who does not bear a child' prescribe a herbal remedy.[79] To determine whether a girl was pregnant involved inserting a prepared tampon and examining the colour it later acquired.[80] A Babylonian commentary uses the word *naḫšātu* for a woman's condition to cover the separate theme of bleeding in pregnancy. To cure this the navel and the opening of the vagina were anointed, or amulet stones were hung around her hips, or she underwent a magic ritual in a secluded place and she recited a penitential prayer three times. All this was linked with the recitation of an incantation to Ištar. The text continues with more practical instructions, including applying *materia medica*.[81] Treatments for other problems during pregnancy are also given. One therapeutic text considers a variety of symptoms that may ensue after a woman becomes pregnant or gives birth, including attributing blame to the demon Lamaštu.

> If a woman is pregnant and is distended by wind, Lamaštu has seized her. You shall let her sniff the dust of a copper bell.

74 Badly preserved; BAM 3 235:10–13, dupl. 236 rev. 1–9; is reminiscent of SpbTU II 130 no. 25.
75 SpbTU IV 32 no. 129 iv 11–27, with BAM 3 244:41–43.
76 Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, 125 n. 100.
77 BRM 4 19:18, 20:27, with A. Ungnad, AfO 14 (1944) 274 and 259; survey on top of p. 280. See for these texts E. Reiner, *Astral magic in Babylonia* (1995) 108–110; M. J. Geller, *Melothesia in Babylonia* (2014) 27–46.
78 Stol, 'Infertility', in his *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, 33–37; J. Scurlock in Chavalas, *Women*, 121–135.
79 KADP 2 v 47 f. Cf. STT 2 284 rev. 2, 7.
80 E. Reiner, 'Babylonian birth prognoses', ZA 72 (1982) 124–138; Stol, *Birth*, 37; Scurlock, 119 f.
81 Stol, *Birth*, 203. For herbal remedies for problems during pregnancy see Stol, 'Plants of Birth', in his *Birth*, 52–55.

> If a woman gives birth and her body is full of pockmarks, her anus has 'fallen', so you shall anoint a twig of willow in oil, and you shall have her drink (it) in beer.[82]

Making a sick person sniff copper dust appears to be an element of popular folklore, for elsewhere in this text a prescription for a pregnant woman was said to be vernacular, that it was orally transmitted (*šum'ūtu*), suggesting that it was a 'hearsay' remedy.

A text which is known only from a photograph is the 'Manual of gynaecology' (Figure 36). It is a collection of many prescriptions, forming a compendium of medical complications known to afflict pregnant women and women in confinement. It was drawn up by someone who was clearly a master of his art and passages from it would have been dictated. The subjects covered include infertility, miscarriage, and much else. There is even a pregnancy test involving urinating on barley seeds, a technique attested in Egyptian, Greek and later sources. It also deals with an internal illness, as yet unidentified, called *alluttu*, 'crab'. That is the same word that is used for 'Cancer' as a sign of the zodiac, and could possibly be the origin of the name cancer.[83] There are other medical texts which give advice about a difficult birth.[84] We also have a prescription for inducing an abortion.[85] It is little wonder that there is a Sumerian proverb which says,

> To be sick is good; to be pregnant is bad; to be pregnant and sick is very bad (SP 1.193 f.).

22.3.2 Venereal disease

Gossip among modern scholars is the chief reason for interpreting some implicit references in this way. Often omens give diagnoses that are unusual or unexpected, such as one concerning a chaste priestess:

> The *entu* shall die because of the sickness of intercourse (*nīktu*).

In a handbook of predictions from liver omens we read that a massive number of deaths, an epidemic affecting large groups of men and women, will occur:

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82 Stol, *ibidem*; cf. Scurlock, 110 f. (Bloating'). For the demon Lamaštu attacking mother and child see W. Farber, *Lamaštu* (2014) 153 I 69 f.; 179 II 156–158; Scurlock, 114–119, 126 f.

83 I. L. Finkel in: *Babylon. Myth and reality* (2008) 200 fig. 189 (BM 42313+). Parts are cited by I. L. Finkel in *Studies W. G. Lambert* (2000) 171 n. 32.

84 Stol, 'Difficult labour', in his *Birth*, 129–134; Scurlock, 128–135.

85 Stol, *Birth*, 41 f.

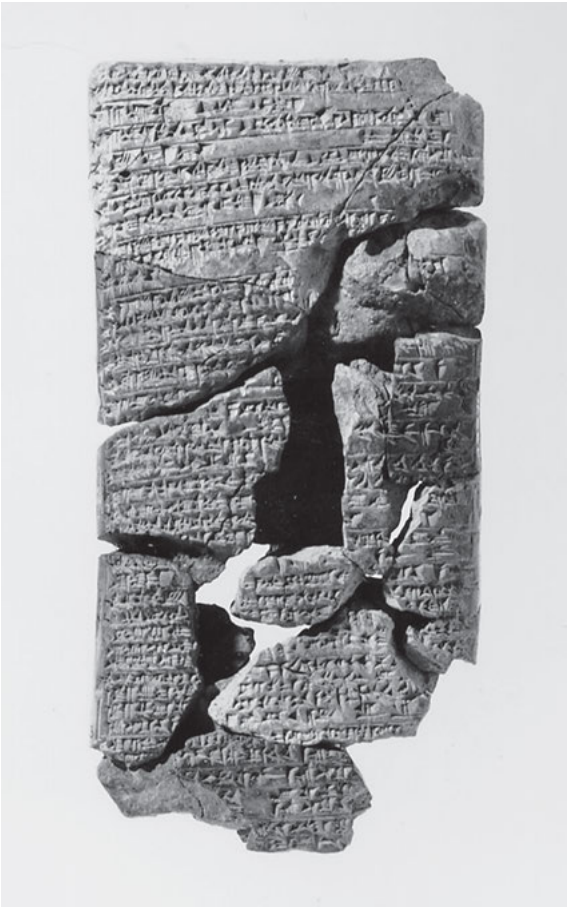

Fig. 36: Clay tablet, a compendium of medical complications in pregnancy and childbirth, including infertility, miscarriage, pregnancy testing and a disease called 'crab' (as yet unidentified). The fragments have been assembled I. L. Finkel. Babylon, 500 BC. *British Museum, London*.

Dying in the army. Dying in the convent.

By amalgamating these two communities a scholar from Berlin proposed that venereal disease broke out with the army in the convent. This is how a rumour can spread.[86] A Czech scholar considered a magic ritual to combat various diseases which affected the head, the eyes, the muscles, the teeth, and stomach cramp. According to the text these afflictions were brought around by the wind. But he noted that unexpectedly two priestesses were affected and imagined that they

86 The liver omen YOS 10 17:88 with V. Haas, *Babylonischer Liebesgarten. Erotik und Sexualität im Alten Orient* (1999) 64.

were probably engaged in sacred prostitution and this had led to an outbreak of venereal disease. A Swiss scholar discussing the same text later expressed surprise at the appearance of the nuns, but he was unaware of the views of the Czech scholar. What is true is that on two other occasions priestesses were mentioned in connection with miscarriages.[87]

22.3.3 Prognoses from the Diagnostic Handbook

The details mentioned above come from therapeutic handbooks, which can be compared with details from the Diagnostic Handbook. It gives diagnoses and prognoses for those who are sick based on particular symptoms. These statements are known as 'medical omens'. The handbook ends with chapters on pregnant women (36–40) and on babies (41). I have already published elsewhere a translation of chapters 36 and 37, which are well-preserved.[88] Chapter 36 clearly deals with the healthy pregnancies and chiefly concerns whether the woman can expect to give birth to a boy or a girl. It begins by noting a seemingly pallid appearance on the forehead.

> If the upper side of the forehead of a pregnant woman is pallid (literally, greenish yellow), then her offspring is male; he will ...

What will happen to this boy we do not know because we cannot translate the verb in the apodosis. By contrast, if the upper side of the forehead is bright we are told that 'her offspring is female' and, according to a variant reading, that 'she shall become rich'.

The text then proceeds to note the complexion of the point of the nose, and then attention is paid to the breasts. First we learn that the colour of her nipples can predict whether or not the woman will have a normal pregnancy. The 'openings' that are referred to in §§ 3–10, 14, and 15 are explained by specialists as 'die Öffnungen der Milchkanäle', but this supposes that the Babylonian gynaecologist examined the woman with a microscope. After this, features on the gastric region and the belly are listed. At last the legs and feet are discussed but they are treated rather differently.

87 J. Prosecký, *Šulmu* (1988) 287–299 (see p. 616); A. Cavigneaux, ZA 85 (1995) 184–195, esp. 193 f.
88 M. Stol, 'The Diagnostic Handbook on pregnant women', in his *Birth*, 194–203.

> If a pregnant woman steps to the right, she is pregnant with a male (child).
> If she steps to the left, with a female (child).
> (...) If to the right and the left, there are twins' (94–95, 98).

It could be that they thought, as the Greeks also thought, that a boy lay on the right of the mother's womb and a girl on the left. The ordered progress of featuring the body from the top down is interrupted by noting abnormal phenomena.

> If a pregnant woman keeps on vomiting, then she will not complete her pregnancy.
> If dark blood flows out of her nose, then she shall not stay alive during her pregnancy.
> If she throws light blood out of her mouth, then she shall die together with her foetus (81–83).

At the end of chapter 36 and the beginning of chapter 37 the subject of sexual relations during the ten (!) months of pregnancy is raised, with most of the predictions relating to whether the woman will live or die. The train of thought at this point is not clear. The subject of a sick pregnant woman is raised in chapter 37. Often demons were thought to be responsible, and we are regularly told that 'she shall die'. Only the first line of chapter 38 is preserved. The mention of 'her water' here certainly means the amniotic fluid. All that remains of chapter 39 is the commentary on its first lines, showing that the text was now concerned with what happened during childbirth. It begins,

> If a woman is distended during labour and belches, she shall die.[89]

The final chapter, which is well preserved, considers paediatric illnesses, with various symptoms, various supernatural causes (including sorcery), and various outcomes.

22.4 The old woman

We have already broached the subject of old age at the beginning of this book when we described the different stages to be marked in someone's life on earth. The maximum lifespan of 120 years recorded in Genesis 6:3 can be compared with what was foreseen in Mesopotamian culture. This idea occurs also in a Sumerian myth, according to a later bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian version found in Emar (Syria), which includes further observations.

89 SpbTU I 40.

> The days of a human being come closer. Indeed, day by day they become fewer. Indeed, month by month they become fewer. Indeed, year by year they become fewer. Indeed, the 120 years of a human being is 'taboo', from the beginning of humanity until now, as long as a human being lives.[90]

The Akkadian expression for an approaching death is 'the days are nearby'. The meaning of 'taboo' is not immediately obvious, but it seems to mean the absolute maximum number of years. Moses is said to have reached the age of 120 in fine fettle before he died, 'his sight undimmed, his vigour unimpaired' (Deuteronomy 34:7). The ancient Egyptians thought 100, or ideally 110, was the most one could hope for, and Joseph in Egypt reached 110.[91] That 120 years was a maximum in Sumerian thought could well be linked to their using 60 as a base for counting higher numbers. Whether anyone actually reached such an age is doubtful, even if we consider evidence from ancient Greece and Rome.

> In fact the average age at death, assuming that the person had escaped the dance of death in childhood, was considerably higher than twenty or thirty. T. W. Gallant demonstrated that research on skeletons in Attica showed that the average age at death in that area was around 40. By contrast R. Duncan-Jones arrived at a life expectancy of between 50 and 55 for those aged 20 and 35 respectively in the city of Rome.[92]

An examination of the bones of ordinary Hittite skeletons show that they died before reaching 35, while those from the upper classes of society reached from 60 to 80 years old. King Ḫattušili III lived to be over 70 and the age of his wife Puduḫepa when she died has been estimated as between 82 and 90.[93] The queen mother Aḫat-milki of Ugarit died when she was about 90.[94] The wife of a ruler in Anatolia (ca. 1100 BC) claims on her stela

> On account of my justice I lived one hundred years.[95]

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90 D. Arnaud, *Emar* VI/4 (1987) 368 no. 771:21–26, with J. Klein, 'The "bane" of humanity: a lifespan of one hundred twenty years', ASJ 12 (1990) 57–70. J. S. Cooper: 'Rather than translating níg-gig = *ikkibu* as "bane" (Klein) or "abomination" (Alster), I prefer to understand it in this context as an absolute limit, beyond which a human life is not allowed to extend'; *Studies A. D. Kilmer* (2011) 42 n. 11.

91 Klein, 69 n. 45. More precisely A. Malamat, AfO Beiheft 19 (1982) 222 n. 6, end.

92 H. W. Pleket in: H. F. J. Horstmanshoff, *Pijn en balsem, troost en smart* (1994) 147 f. Based on T. W. Gallant, *Risk and survival in ancient Greece* (1991) 20 f.; R. Duncan-Jones, *Structure and scale in the Roman economy* (1990) 96–99.

93 L. Cunchillos, *Textes ougaritiques* II (1989) 382 f. (in 1215 BC she was 82 years old); Th. P. J. van den Hout in: J. M. Bremer, *Hidden futures* (1994) 55 (ca. 90 years).

94 W. H. van Soldt, JEOL 29 (1985–86) 70; *Handbook of Ugaritic studies* (1999) 641 f.

95 J. Klinger, TUAT NF 6 (2011) 76 (in Hittite Luwian, country Watasatini).

We are able to follow the career of one man for over forty years,[96] and we know that women could reach a similar age. Some of the nuns in the convent at Sippar were active for a period of 25 or even 55 years.[97] Within families there were many widows, suggesting that women lived longer than men. It is a known biological fact that women in general live longer than men, so husbands usually die before their wives.[98] It has been observed, however, that this naturally happens because men were older than women when they married.

Among the Greeks any woman over 40 was considered to be old and this may well have been the Mesopotamian view.[99] The Greeks rather cuttingly defined a woman as old

> if she could no longer be described as fertile or erotic, if she had stopped having children, and thus ceased to be of any interest to the men of the household.[100]

We can follow the story of an Assyrian slavegirl from the moment she was sold as a child, just 4½ cubits tall, until she was sold as a *paršuntu*, an old woman. By then she would have been only 30 years old, and she must have had a hard life.[101]

In Sumerian *abba* means 'old man', and *umma* means 'old woman'.[102] That word sounds very similar to *ummu*, the Common Semitic word for 'mother', found in Akkadian and Arabic. Any woman 'who has ceased bearing children' was certainly considered to be old. A letter from Pharaoh Ramesses II to the king of the Hittites refers to a woman of 50 or perhaps 60 years old, for whom no-one could concoct herbs to make her conceive and bear children.[103] When referring to the menopause a woman is said to have 'stopped bearing children', or more concisely, she is a *pāristu*, 'a woman who has stopped'.[104] At that time of life she would be asked to conduct magical rituals on the sick, probably because there was no longer any risk of uncleanness.[105] This is hinted at in a Sumerian proverb.

96 D. Charpin, *Le clergé d'Ur* (1986) 242 (Lu-Dumuzida, the *ababdû*).
97 R. Harris, *Studies A. L. Oppenheim* (1964) 122 f.; J. Renger, ZA 58 (1967) 166–168.
98 R. Harris, *Gender and aging* (2000) 213 n. 19.
99 Harris, 212 n. 7.
100 Cited by Harris, 88.
101 K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden* (1997) 172 f.
102 B. Alster, *Dumuzi's Dream* (1972) 90; H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil* (1978) 74 f.; I. J. Gelb, JNES 43 (1984) 272.
103 M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* (2000) 58 f.
104 E. Reiner, ZA 72 (1982) 129; R. Harris, *Gender and aging* (2000) 88 f.
105 MDP 57 246 vi 21; AMT 66,9:2; more in CAD P 167b.

> The goat speaks in the manner of a (wise) old woman, but behaves in the manner of an unclean one.[106]

Old women were regarded as wise, and *umma* often carries those overtones in Sumerian. It is she who gives advice in myths.[107] A prominent old woman had the title of *puršumtu*, a word to be traced back to Sumerian showing that she was presumed to be wise.[108] In Sumerian literature old women interpreted dreams,[109] a skill the mother of Gilgamesh possessed. In an Old Assyrian text from Kaniš an old woman is also known as an interpreter of dreams.[110] They could be expected to know more about the supernatural world than younger folk. Such a Hittite Old Woman knew all the techniques for oracles and played a big role in performing magical rituals for others, a service for which she was paid. In Chapter 28 we shall show that women were often regarded as clairvoyant.

At this advanced age it seems that it was preferable for them not to consider sexual activity. A woman speaking in a Sumerian proverb makes the point pathetically.

> My vessel is good, but according to my family it is all over as far as I am concerned.[111]

This old woman may well be looking back on a life of 'easy virtue'. To have sex with an old woman was thought to be ominous, and you 'would have daily quarrels'.[112] You should only kiss an old woman if the ritual for the eclipse of the moon in the fifth month prescribed it.[113]

The care of the old devolved to their children. This was a duty inculcated in the fifth commandment,

> Honour your father and your mother so that you may enjoy long life in the land which the Lord your God is giving you (Exodus 20:12).

But if there were no children someone else would have to do it, and regularly we see that a slave (or slave-girl) had been adopted on condition that they would serve their master and his wife until they died. The Greeks called such a regu-

106 SP 1.153 with H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil* (1978) 153 f.
107 Behrens, 74 f.
108 R. Harris, 100–103; PSD B 188 f. (*puršumti ṭēmi*).
109 'Dumuzi's Dream', 24; TUAT II/1 (1986) 28.
110 ATHE 57:2 f.; H. Hirsch, AfO Beiheft 13/14 (1972) *29, on p. 72.
111 W. G. Lambert, BWL (1960) 242, 248 iii 14–16; B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses* (1996) 341.
112 CT 39 43 K. 3134:6 (= Tablet 104:1).
113 CT 4 5:19. Also in the calendar text CT 51 161:25.

lation *paramonè*.[114] In Mesopotamia from time immemorial the word literally meaning 'to fear, honour' was used for serving one's parents, which implied 'to take care of' them. As early as in the Old Babylonian period even a single woman could have such an ancillary supporter. The woman who 'cleansed' two women before the god Šamaš did so to ensure that after her death they would obtain their freedom.[115] The two women were referred to as her 'daughters', but one of them clearly had the name of a slave-girl. From this we assume that after they had been procured they were adopted as daughters. They were required to look after their 'mother' as long as she lived, and the document expressly states at the end that no family member can make claims on them later. It is interesting to note that this 'mother' had also adopted another woman to look after her, but the woman had been married off. That was another contingency plan for old age, for a young married couple would be able to look after an old woman.[116] In Emar a married couple stipulated that their slave-girl would 'fear' them, and that after their death she would be 'freed before Šamaš'. Their own son was denied any claim to her, but she would not be allowed any inheritance herself.[117]

It was also possible for an elderly woman to be dedicated to a temple. In a letter from Mari a lady expressed her concern about what would happen to the woman who had been caring for her, as a nurse. She does not want her to be treated as a 'gift', but would prefer that she be dedicated. What would be involved in treating an old person as a gift is obscure.

> Speak to my lord, These are the words of Aḫassunu, your servant. 'May my lord be attentive to the case of my old nurse ... I have heard, "Your old nurse has been noted down as a gift". I became fearful and watchful about this. I say this to my lord, "I hope they will not give her away as a gift." Furthermore, "Does she not do the work required of her?" May my lord be attentive and do whatever is suitable for her old age. Yes, my old nurse spoke to me. "I hope they will not give me away as a gift. Pay attention to this and write to your lord so that they let me walk away." If my lord is going to dedicate my old nurse, may my lord then send me a duplicate of the clay tablet, and I shall have peace of mind. In any case, may my lord write to me, "I have dedicated your old nurse. Do not be worried!", then I shall be very happy.'[118]

114 P. Koschaker, GRÖR (1931) 74–83, discusses Neo-Babylonian examples.

115 J.-M. Durand correctly observes that being freed before Šamaš expresses full freedom; in his words 'être libre comme l'air'; RA 97 (2003) 172–176. Otherwise M. Stol, who thought that they were going into the cloister of the god and pointed out the contrast between 'she belongs to Šamaš' and 'she belongs to herself'; *The care of the elderly in the Ancient Near East* (1998) 84, compare 94, 111.

116 CT 8 29a. The other text is CT 6 26a, with Stol, *The care of the elderly*, 111 f.

117 G. Beckman, *Texts from the vicinity of Emar* (1996) 45 RE 27.

118 ARM 10 97 with LAPO 18 (2000) 419 no. 1215. An old man as 'gift' may not be desired, see ARM 10 57 with LAPO 18, 284 no. 1102.

Old women working in the Ur III period were less fortunate. In a list of food rations we find a woman needing enough for her six daughters and a grandchild. These old women received rations for only half a period of work.[119]

22.5 Dead and buried

As now so then, old age was inevitably followed by death. For this subject our chief evidence comes from burials, in particular the funerary artifacts found in graves. In Chapters 23 and 24 about the court and the harem we shall discuss the royal graves of Ur and those of the Assyrian queens from Calah (Nimrud), but here we shall consider the graves of less important people. Lists of expenses and an occasional letter show that mourning rituals were carried out for two days after someone died.

The expenses incurred for the funeral of a distinguished woman from the Ur III period are found in a number of lists. She was Geme-Lama, the wife of the governor of the province of Lagash and also a priestess of the goddess Bau.[120] Carpenters were paid for making her coffin and a new wheel for the bier was required. Two meals were offered on each of the two days of mourning, first at home, and later in a chapel, accompanied by lamentations. On the third day her last meal was offered to her in her tomb. Then the 'spirit of the dead one' passed to the underworld. The record of the funeral costs of a princess of the same time has a note suggesting that in those first two days she still had 'wind', before becoming 'the spirit of the dead one'.[121] After her funeral such a highly placed individual continued to be well looked after. The chapel built at the site of her grave was known as 'the place for the drinking of water'. Every month she was given an offering of food and drink. After her death, at new moon and full moon, a priestess of Bau deceased earlier received regular monthly deliveries from a beer brewer, and on three other occasions in the year, at the feasts for the gods Lisin, Dumuzi and Bau. At the feast of Dumuzi, in the sixth month, the 'chair' of the deceased was carried on a five-day journey to the city of Urub.

The only letters we have about a funeral are Old Assyrian. They concern the widow of Kunilum, her first husband. After he died she married a native Anato-

119 H. Waetzoldt in: M. A. Powell, *Labor in the Ancient Near East* (1987) 137 n. 140, 141.

120 B. Jagersma, 'The calendar of the funerary cult in ancient Lagash', BiOr 64 (2007) 289–307. The sources: Wu Yuhong, JAC 26 (2011) 36–39.

121 D. Katz, 'The naked soul', *Studies T. Abusch* (2010) 107–120.

lian, and he paid the costs of her funeral.[122] She had two sons and a daughter from her first marriage to Kunilum, and the daughter had become a priestess in Assur. With the Anatolian she had no children. It was a relationship that seems to have been less important. Her adult sons died at the same time as their mother, which may be explained by assuming that there was a serious epidemic in Kaniš. At the time of her death a female relative of the widow wrote a letter to the widow's daughter in Assur.[123]

> Alas! Your mother and both my nephews have died. Just before your mother's death we sent for three merchants and we visited your mother. While she was still alive your mother opened her money chest in the presence of the three merchants and they saw every shekel of silver, the money that was there. She gave you 2¼ shekels of gold and 8 shekels of silver. She gave 37 shekels to Iliya, my nephew. She gave 20 shekels of silver to Ilabrat-bani. While your mother was still alive Iliya was thrown into prison. After he had paid out all his ready money, the Anatolian who had married your mother and to whose daughter Iliya was married, paid the costs of the funeral. After the Anatolian had received his expenses, for the mourning ceremonies for both your mother and your brothers, 27 shekels had been spent.

Iliya had probably been imprisoned because of debt.

The mother's will confirms the bequests referred to in that letter. It is the only Old Assyrian will we have made by a woman. After Kunilum died she must have taken his place as the head of her family. Her Anatolian husband had advanced a considerable amount for her funeral and after these costs had been settled, the daughter in Assur would receive the rest as her inheritance. The letter is part of a large dossier devoted to this funeral. It shows that the main costs were for the lamentations performed by professional women for the mourning rituals, and also for transporting the 'chair' on which the corpse was seated. Additional expenses were for the meals and the beer. Another letter tells us more.[124]

> After the sons of Kunilum had died, people came in, both to mourn them and to transport the chair of their mother and the chair of our 'nephews'. 19½ shekels of silver were paid both for their mourning and for the chair of their mother and also to the Anatolian on account of Iliya for his debt of 7½ shekels. The rest of the silver shall go to his sister, the daughter of Kunilum, to the City.

122 K. R. Veenhof, 'The death and burial of Ishtar-lamassi in Karum Kanish', in: *Studies M. Stol* (2008) 97–119.
123 Veenhof, 107 f., text B.
124 Veenhof, 113, text F.

Usually in the Ancient Near East the dead were buried under the floor of their house. According to an Old Babylonian letter a woman was buried in this way by her sister.

> Her sister took her and buried her in her house.[125]

Small Old Babylonian texts recording the death of a member of the personnel sometimes refer to a woman. One such document is precisely dated to the second year of Samsu-iluna, day 13 month 3:

> After day 12 month 3 Bettâ died. She was buried on day 13 month 3.[126]

Other documents concern a slave-girl, a woman who had been captured, and a cook.[127] Some documents simply list the names of those who had died, and others those of personnel who had fled. All this typified good administrative practice.

125 AbB 1 140:23–25.
126 S. Dalley, *Edinburgh* no. 21, with TUAT NF 1 (2004) 38.
127 ARMT 22 75; ARMT 23 551; Florilegium Marianum IV (1999) 223 no. 43.