29 Women and worship

The texts do not say very much about the daily home life of the average Babylonian, and nothing at all about the day-to-day affairs of the housewife. Letters were mostly about important affairs and so there were no pressing reasons for her to be involved. It remains unclear what role the ordinary woman would have played in religious worship since whatever she did was taken for granted. We know little about how a woman experienced her belief and the rituals.[1]

But occasionally we do hear something about a woman's personal religious tasks and devotions. In answer to the question, 'Why does she go outside?' in an Old Babylonian letter we read,

> She is going out to the house of some god or other.

Such behaviour was not approved of, for 'outside' may have been a reference to outside the city.[2] Through the streets of the city of Ur archaeologists identified what they called little 'chapels', places where women may have brought offerings or where they prayed.[3] In a Sumerian proverb a man complains about being neglected by his particularly pious wife and his mother.

> My wife is surely in the chapel, my mother by the river, and I shall die of hunger.[4]

One woman expressed her gratitude in devotional terms.

> Both my hands should be full of incense for the god who let me see your face.[5]

We know of only one prayer formulated by a woman, in which a mother prayed ceaselessly to Šamaš for her son who had been taken captive.[6]

1 A good survey was given by Karel van der Toorn in his book *From her cradle to her grave. The role of religion in the life of the Israelite and the Babylonian woman* (1994), reviewed by J. M. Asher-Greve, NIN 1 (2000) 119–124. The original Dutch edition was *Van haar wieg tot haar graf. De rol van de godsdienst in het leven van de Israëlitische en de Babylonische vrouw* (1987), reviewed by D. C. Snell, BiOr 46 (1989) 125 f.
2 AbB 9 225:17–27.
3 Van der Toorn, *From her cradle,* 95.
4 SP 1.142 with van der Toorn, 94.
5 AbB 9 228:7–10 with CAD Q 324b.
6 *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* 134 Šamaš Hymn 134.

29.1 Offerings for the dead

This is a subject about which we know somewhat more. In some wills the testator stipulated that a woman was obliged to bring offerings for the dead after his death. One man from Susa solemnised the obligation he was placing on his daughter by presenting her with two clods of earth from the front and the back of the land he owned.

> Before his death he broke a clod of earth from in front and from behind and gave it to Narubtu his daughter. 'As long as I am alive, you will feed me, and when I am dead, you will bring offerings for the dead (*kispu*) for me.'[7]

In a later period in a deed for the adoption of a daughter in Nippur we read,

> As long as Ina-Uruk-rešat remains alive, Eṭirtum shall serve her. Whenever Ina-Uruk-rešat dies, Eṭirtum, her daughter, shall pour out water for her.

This expression similarly indicates making an offering for the dead.[8] Here it applied to a ritual at home, because the dead were generally buried under the house. At the end of every month water was poured down into the earth through a tube, but there is no suggestion that this was a task specifically for women. It so happens that this was the case for the two examples we know of, but that was because the woman was the beneficiary. We see the same ritual also in Nuzi.[9] Similarly in a will from Emar in Syria a father, having named his daughter as 'woman and man', meaning that she would be the heir with all the associated rights and obligations, follows this with an obligation for her to venerate him and his family after death.

> She shall call to my gods and my dead.[10]

But normally it was a man's sons who 'would look after the gods and the dead of their father'.[11]

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7 MDP 23 285 with A. Tsukimoto, *Untersuchungen zur Totenpflege* (kispum) *im alten Mesopotamien* (1985) 53; A. Skaist in B. Alster, *Death in Mesopotamia* (1980) 124.

8 BE 14 40:11–15 with Tsukimoto, 79.

9 J. Paradise, SCCNH 2 (1987) 210 f., on YBC 5142: 'She (= the heiress) shall venerate my gods and my spirits of the dead'. For a broad discussion see K. van der Toorn, ZA 84 (1994) 42–47 (the son), 53 (sometimes a daughter).

10 J. Huehnergard, RA 77 (1983) 13 Text 1:8, with p. 27 f.

11 M. Sigrist, JCS 34 (1982) 243:25–27. K. Radner also stresses that the role of women in taking care of the dead in these texts may be due to special situations. But she holds out the posssi-

We have some evidence that princesses and queens brought offerings for the dead. This happened as early as 2500–2300 BC at Lagash, where Baranamtarra, the wife of the city ruler, made a journey (or joined something like a formal procession) lasting several days to make offerings to the gods and to her male and female ancestors.[12] Performing this ritual was an important element of religious ceremonial. Another example, from the Ur III period, is more uncertain. There a group of texts was found which register the times when Abi-simti contributed her offerings for the days at the end of each month when there was no moon. Abi-simti was the wife of King Amar-Sîn and the mother of his successor Šu-Sîn. A princess would bring her offerings on the 15th day of every month, but Abi-simti brought hers on the 28th and 29th days. It has been assumed that misfortune could be expected in these dark, moonless nights and by bringing her offerings at this time she would make the gods favourably disposed.[13] But we must bear in mind another possibility, that she was making offerings for the dead. Yet another example comes from the Old Babylonian period. On the 16th day a princess received a milk product 'for the washing ceremony, the offering to the dead of the steppe and the water of Šamaš'.[14] What these expressions really mean is not at all clear. The Ur III texts mentioned earlier connected offerings on the 15th day and also those on the 28th and 29th days with this washing. At Mari, a delivery of oil for an offering to the dead on the first and sixteenth day every month was confirmed by the seal impression of the queen mother Addu-duri. She played a role in the cult of the goddess Deritum, probably the family god of her tribe, the Ben-Sim'al, the 'Sons of the North'. Evidently it was she who took care of the ancestors.[15]

In Old Assyrian letters the spirits of the dead are mentioned. Half of those letters came from the wives or sisters of merchants.[16] They had remained at home

bility that women in the periphery of Babylonia had this role; *Die Macht des Namens* (2005) 76 n. 354.

12 J. Bauer, ZDMG Suppl. I/1 (1969) 112; more extensively see T. Kobayashi, Orient 20 (1984) 45 f.

13 W. Sallaberger, *Der kultische Kalender der Ur III-Zeit* 1 (1993) 60 f. The texts: Yuhong Wu, Junna Wang, Journal of Ancient Civilizations 27 (2012) 120–124, with another interpretation (farewell and welcome ceremonies for the moon god, 121).

14 TIM 5 68 with J. van Dijk in *Studies A. Falkenstein* (HSAO) (1968) 240 f.; Tsukimoto, *Totenpflege*, 143–145.

15 D. Duponchel, Florilegium Marianum III (1997) 207, with 220 no. 30. For Dēritum, see p. 39. A letter from Uruk shows that a woman was supposed to take care of the offerings for the dead (*kispu*) for her father; A. Cavigneaux, *Uruk. Altbabylonische Texte* (1996) 43 f. no. 82:6 (= AbB 8 88); Tsukimoto, 54.

16 C. Michel, 'Femmes et ancêtres: le cas des femmes d'Aššur', in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 27–39.

in Assur where the corpses of their ancestors, interred under the floor of the family houses, had to be honoured. The power attributed to them can be seen from the fact that 'our gods and the spirits of our fathers' are invoked as witnesses together in the same breath in their letters. Veneration of one's ancestors was widely practised in the Ancient Near East. The women would have been apprehensive, for neglecting to give enough attention to those spirits could provoke them to wrath and as a consequence illnesses would be spread.[17] Because their husbands travelled for such a long time so far away in Asia Minor, staying on friendly terms with the spirits became a priority. Even so, there is no evidence that the task of venerating the dead was only for women.

The mother of King Nabonidus in her autobiography recounted that she had always honoured the kings of Babylonia during her long life.

> Later fate took them away. No-one among their children or their families or the magnates (in the kingdom) (...) arranged anything for them, not even an incense offering. However without fail and wearing my beautiful garment I bring for them each month cows, fat sheep, loaves, beer, wine, oil, honey and all sorts of garden fruits as offerings to the dead. Abundant wave-offerings of good fragrance I have been arranging and setting down for them.[18]

Here a woman is making offerings to the dead, but apparently in exceptional circumstances. We also know that in ancient Rome it was usual for the daughter of the house to assist her father in making offerings to the family gods.[19]

Did women who had died also receive offerings? Princesses certainly did. A prayer made when commemorating the ancestors concludes with a general invitation for everyone who had died to share in the offerings.

> The soldier who fell during the campaign of his lord, the sons of kings, the daughters of kings, all people from the rising to the setting sun who had no-one to care for them or take an interest in them, come here and eat this and drink this! (This is) the blessing of Ammiṣaduqa, the son of Ammi-ditana, the king of Babylon.[20]

From Sippar we have a similar sort of prayer.[21]

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17 C. Michel, 'Les Assyriens et les esprits de leur morts', in: *Old Assyrian studies in memory of Paul Garelli* (2008) 181–197, especially 'Femmes et fantômes', 196 f.

18 H. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon* (2001) 507, 512 iii 11–23. The text distinguishes the incense offering (*qutrinnu*) from the wave-offering (*surqinnu*).

19 Virgil, *Aeneid* VI 72; Tibullus I 10:24. A peasant woman brings offerings to the gods of the family at New Moon; Horace, *Odes*, III 23.

20 J. J. Finkelstein, JCS 20 (1966) 96 f.

21 C. Wilcke, ZA 73 (1983) 49–54; K. van der Toorn, *Family religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel* (1996) 52–55.

> For thee, O Sîn, god of heaven and earth, I pour out water in libation freely for the family of Sîn-naṣir, the son of Ipiq-Annunitum, so that they may eat their bread and drink their water.

The list of ancestors which then follows includes women: five *nadîtu*s, two wives, and a wife who had apparently remained childless. There was a principle that the family was responsible for the welfare of these women who had died. But a woman who had married and had left the family was disregarded.[22]

A queen from the Old Sumerian period had a statue of 'refined silver' made for her during her lifetime. We know this from an administrative text which notes the payments to the craftsmen who made it.[23] She was the wife of the city ruler Urukagina. Elsewhere we read that the statues of her and Baranamtara, the wife of the earlier city ruler, received offerings just after they were presented to the city goddess Bau. This could be taken to imply that she had been given the status of a goddess, to mediate with the gods on behalf of those who brought offerings to that statue of her, which was made in Year 2 of Urukagina. A little later, in Year 5, monthly offerings were brought for the statues of the daughters of his predecessor. These could have been offerings for the dead.

This is all that can been said, from which we conclude that we know very little about the duties of the housewife concerning rituals.[24]

29.2 Making intercession

We have already seen that priestesses and nuns prayed for their family, so it might be thought that this was also a duty for the ordinary woman at home. Now and again we indeed hear in letters about women who pray for others, but men also offered such prayers.[25] One man wrote to his mother begging her to pray for him to have a prosperous business trip abroad.[26]

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22 K. Radner, *Die Macht des Namens* (2005) 85 f.; B. Lion in *Jean Bottéro et la Mésopotamie* (2009) 285–287. For the historical context see F. van Koppen in: K. Radner, E. Robson, *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (2011) 153–155.

23 G. J. Selz, 'Eine Kultstatue der Herrschergemahlin Šaša: ein Beitrag zum Problem der Vergöttlichung', ASJ 14 (1992) 245–268.

24 Van der Toorn, *From her cradle to her grave* (1994) 94 f., collected the little evidence we have.

25 We follow B. F. Batto, 'Women in sacrifice and prayer', *Studies on women at Mari* (1974) 128–134.

26 AbB 3 60. The title and exact role of the mother (and 'sister'?) remain mysterious.

> To Šunutum, my mother and my mistress, and sister: Thus says Š.: I am well. I am in Awal, I plan to go to Assur soon. Pray for me in order that he (= the god) will make my financial losses little. As for you, may you be well for my sake. As for me, may I be well for your sake. Pray for me in front of your lord.

It often happened that a request was made in a letter to provide some kind of service and that the writer, whether male or female, promised to pray in exchange for providing it. Praying here signified gratitude. The prayer was formulated 'for the life' of the other person. Formal introductions to letters often wished 'an eternal life' for the addressee, to be supported by the guardian deity. The envelope of an Old Babylonian letter is stamped with the seal of Princess Annabum, who wrote the letter. This same seal impression is seen on receipts and there Annabum is called 'the daughter of the king'.[27] She begins her letter to her father praying that he will be blessed with good health and a long life.

> May the guardian deities of my ... you, my father, and let you become old with your full strength and with a good name, in the palace where you go about. You, my father, may you be well and healthy. May the guardian deity of my ... protect you.

In her letter she asks her father for a favour in connection with some business affair, and promises to continue to pray for him in return.

> Then I wish to keep on praying for you, my father.

Although the letter was found in Sippar, Annabum was probably not a nun in the convent there. After all, every daughter was expected to pray for her father's welfare.

We read that the well-known concubine of King Yasmaḫ-Addu of Mari, Izamu, 'makes the prayer of her lord with raised hands to find favour'. His prayer would find a favourable reception because she had prayed.[28]

As well as making prayers women brought offerings. We read of ladies from Mari who brought offerings to 'the god of my father', or to 'the gods of my city'. Princess Kirûm wanted her father to arrange for her to be collected in a carriage and promised that she would then 'bring an offering for the gods of my father'. A ruler was asked to 'bring your daughter here so that she can placate the gods of

27 AbB 1 15 with the envelope CT 52 187; R. Pientka, *Die spätaltbabylonische Zeit* (1998) 207 (the seal), 311 f. (the king is Ammi-ṣaduqa).

28 Thus RIME 4 (1990) 618. Or: 'she who embellishes the prayer'; Chapter 23, note 217.

her city and then I want to give her many gifts'.[29] When the word 'offerings' (*nīqu*, verb *naqû*) is used it could mean slaughtering an animal to be sacrificed, or more simply pouring out a drink as a libation. Offerings in these cases were presented to achieve some form of mediation. Therefore they are closely linked to making intercession.

Men may have made their offerings, but in Babylonian religious thought it was a woman who was seen as exceptionally successful in making intercession.[30] This task was assigned to the nuns in the convent, and it is also mirrored in the world of the gods.[31] When one god was asked to put in a good word to another god, one who was more highly exalted, it was often the wife of the great god who intervened. Similarly, the male personal god of a supplicant was called on to be a mediator. This procedure could reflect what happened in the palace, where a supplicant always needed an intermediary to approach the king.

The expressions used by the king of Isin in his prayer to Ninurta are typical.

> May your wife, the true Lady of Nippur, whenever she embraces you, put in a good word for Lipit-Ištar daily.[32]

From a later period we have a plea for Tašmetum to mediate with Nabû her husband.

> O Tašmetum, mediate for me with your husband, so that he may hear my words.[33]

There is also a most evocative inscription on a Cassite cylinder seal.

> O Ninlil, ruler of the lands, put in a good word for me, on your marriage bed, in your bed chamber of pleasure, with Enlil, your beloved.[34]

Sometimes a curse was used to secure the opposite effect.

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29 ARM 10 113:17–22; ARM 2 51:18–22.

30 K. van der Toorn wrote that it was a widow, particularly a pious widow, who interceded in ancient Israel, and cites Judith and Adda-guppi. This cannot be shown to have happened in Babylonia. See K. van der Toorn, 'Torn between vice and virtue: stereotypes of the widow in Israel and Mesopotamia', in: R. Kloppenborg, W. Hanegraaff, *Female stereotypes in religious traditions* (1995) 1–13, esp. 8 f.

31 R. Harris, *Gender and aging in Mesopotamia* (2000) 98 f.

32 J. S. Cooper, *The return of Ninurta to Nippur* (1978) 136 f., with other examples from Sumerian literature. For Akkadian see K. van der Toorn, *Family religion*, 137 f.

33 W. R. Mayer, UFBG (1976) 231 ff.

34 J. A. Brinkman, AfO 28 (1981) 75 no. 32; cf. Watanabe, 325 (7).

> May Aya, the bride, the great woman, speak bad words about him in the presence of Šamaš, for ever.[35]
> May Zarpanitum in the bedroom, in the chamber of marriage, utter his doom.[36]

A colophon at the end of a text of instructions on how to make glass ends with a benediction to Nabû for King Ashurbanipal, who had established the library where the document was kept.

> May Tašmetum, your great wife, your beloved, who makes intercession for me, when together with you in the luxuriant bedroom, ask you for my life, daily without ceasing.[37]

This could perhaps be an allusion to the Assyrian sacred marriage, where the statues of both these gods were brought together in a chapel.

A goddess could also be a guarantor to avert punishment for sin. A man addressed a letter to 'my mistress, Ninmug' to intercede with the god Išum and probably had this letter deposited in her temple.

> Išum listens to your speaking. Stand as guarantor for me with Išum for this sin, which I committed. If you will really stand as guarantor, then with a happy face I shall bring an offering and bring a sheep to you. Whenever I praise my Išum, I shall praise you too.[38]

In our discussion of the prayer of *nadîtu*s we saw that a small statue (*lamassatu*) in the temple of the god could intercede (Chapter 26, Figure 45). There is a beautiful necklace from Dilbat on which golden praying dolls are attached who would do just that (Figure 47). They had their arms raised crosswise in front of their chests.[39] The verb *karābu* was used for 'to make intercession', meaning also 'to pray to' and 'to bless'. So the statue was recognised as 'the praying one'.[40] This is stated explicitly in a Sumerian inscription. A female family member, perhaps the mother, dedicated a statue to 'my mistress', Bau the goddess of Lagash, for the

35 Inscription of Yaḫdun-Lim v 25–28; RIME 4 (1990) 608:149–152. Later such curses are also found in Assyrian contracts; B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* II (1981) T 168 no. 65:18–20.
36 E. Matsushima, ASJ 10 (1988) 101 K. 2411 i 28 (= M. Streck, *Asb*. 302 f. iv 28); Menzel, *Tempel*, II T 169–172 nos. 66:26 f., 67: 11 ff. All such curses by goddesses were collected by K. Watanabe, Baghd. Mitt., Beiheft 3 (1987) 41 f.
37 H. Hunger, *Babylonische und assyrische Kolophone* (1968) 106 no. 338:21–24.
38 AbB 13 164.
39 Catalogue *Babylon. Wahrheit* (2008) 282 Abb. 195, c, with 315 Kat 315; cf. 316 Abb. 235. Also in the catalogue *Babylone* (Paris 2008) 82 no. 39.
40 Van der Toorn, *Family religion*, 113 f.

Fig. 47: Small golden puppets representing protective deities (*lamassatu*) which could be strung on a necklace. These, which have their arms raised crosswise in front of their chests, would have been suspended on the ears. 1800 BC. Gold. Height 2.5 cm. *Musée du Louvre, Paris*.

life of Prince Nammaḫani. The statue was called the 'guardian deity' (*lamma*) and was expected to pray for her.

> Here may my mistress lend her ear so that this statue may say my prayer to her.

It has been suggested that the statue was positioned literally close to the ear of Bau, but the expression 'to lend an ear' can also be an idiom meaning 'to pay attention'.[41] In the literary Message to the Mother, which we spoke of in Chapter 4 with regard to the family, one of her good characteristics was that she was a 'statue of ivory'. Probably that meant that she was a guardian deity.[42]

The daughter of a god could also be invoked to try to mediate with her father,

41 H. Steible, FAOS 9,1 (1991) 374 Nammaḫni 1; E. Braun-Holzinger, *Mesopotamische Weihgaben* (1991) 271, St 141 (with lit.); cf. W. Heimpel, RlA VI/5–6 (1983) 449 § 5.
42 F. A. M. Wiggermann, RlA IX/1–2 (1998) 47 § 3.

> Put in a good word for me with the god, your father.[43]

That happens in a Sumerian hymn of Šulgi when Ninsumun, on the insistence of her husband, the god Lugalbanda, addressed An, her father and god of the heavens. She praised her protegé Šulgi, likening him to a tree with deep roots and in full blossom, and asked An to give him the kingship. By contrast the goddess Geštinana, with a lower status, for her part prayed to Ninsumun on behalf of King Šulgi.[44] Various expressions were used for such mediation, including 'to put in a good word'. The literal meaning of one expression is 'to seize fatherhood' (*abbūta ṣabātu*), where 'to seize' probably referred literally to seizing the hem of the garment of a person, a subservient, imploring gesture.[45] Originally the reference will have been to the mother in a family seizing the garment of the father to appeal to him. This fits the distinction made in Sumerian proverbs where the mother is juxtaposed to 'the god', which in that context must mean the father.[46] This idiom was taken over in Aramaic and Hebrew and it also figures in the name of Abbutanitu, 'Intercessor', a little known Babylonian goddess.[47]

Women mediating to resolve a situation also appear in the art of the period. In the so-called 'introduction scene' on Sumerian and Old Babylonian cylinder seals the owner of the seal stands respectfully at the back and is led by a female goddess to the mighty god (Figure 48).[48] Such an introduction or presentation occurs in the Old Babylonian version of the Gilgamesh Epic, when the wench took the human Enkidu by the hand and 'led him to the deity'. She went in front of

43 J. A. Brinkman, AfO 28 (1981) 75 no. 29. See further Watanabe, ASJ 12, 328 f. (III). The moon god Nanna pleads for Šulgi before his parents, see J. Klein in Durand, *La Femme* (1987) 102.

44 J. Klein, *The royal hymns of Šulgi, king of Ur: Man's quest for immortal fame* (1981) (= TAPS 71,7) 21 ff. (Šulgi P). For the prayer of Geštinana see p. 24b. For more on intercession see Klein, n. 131. D. R. Frayne, BiOr 40 (1983) 103, calls the text Šulgi P a 'petitioning hymn', in which the 'petitioning deity' turns to a 'senior deity'.

45 K. Watanabe, '*abbūta(m)/abbuttu ṣabātu(m)*. Zur immanenten und transzendenten Interzession', ASJ 12 (1990) 319–338; see further E. Cassin, *Le semblable et le différent* (1987) 256 n. 58. Examples were collected by W. R. Mayer, UFBG (1976) 230–239. 'To seize motherhood' in AbB 7 151 seems to have another meaning; see G. Bardet, ARMT 23 (1984) 72 f.

46 SP 1.145, 157 with van der Toorn, *Family religion*, 57 (n. 77). See Chapter 4, note 32.

47 For Aramaic and Hebrew see Watanabe, 335 f. For the goddess see Watanabe, NABU 1990/94 ('Fürsprecherin').

48 A. Moortgat, *The art of ancient Mesopotamia* (1969) 68 f.; Watanabe, 336 (VIII). A. Spycket identifies the female goddess with the guardian deity Lamma/Lamassu; see RlA VI/5–6 (1983) s.v., B. (but see *ibidem*, in A, § 10 for criticisms). See also M. Haussperger, *Die Einführungsszene: Entwicklung eines mesopotamischen Motivs von der altakkadischen bis zum Ende der altbabylonischen Zeit* (1991).

Fig. 48: On this cylinder seal the scribe Inim-Šara is introduced to the king by his goddess. The king looks like a god. The inscription: 'Šu-Sîn, the mighty king, the king of Ur, the king of the four quarters of the world: Inim-Šara, scribe, son of Bašaga'. 2030 BC. Haematite. Height 2,4 cm. *Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin*.

him, like the goddess on the cylinder seals, while he followed.[49] On one cylinder seal the interceding goddess is wearing the typical garment for an *entu* priestess.[50] Sumerian lamentations are full of pleas with goddesses to intercede in disastrous events, and they are often addressed as 'mother'. They can also be capricious and turn away.[51] That a woman was an effective mediator is of course found in early Christian theology, when Mary, the mother of Jesus, is asked to intercede. We also note that the Holy Spirit, known as the Paraclete, an advocate, was often represented in unorthodox circles as female.

We draw attention finally to a remarkable Sumerian literary text emphasising the grace and mercy of the goddess Nungal. In a song of praise to her she is said to be in control of a prison, where she saved from his fate one of the prisoners who had been sentenced to death by arranging for him to be re-educated in the prison. It is no coincidence that Nungal is female.[52]

49 Seen by J. Renger, RA 66 (1972) 190, on Gilgamesh P. ii 32f. (= lines 73f. in ed. A. R. George, p. 174), cf. Gilgamesh II 36.

50 M. Tanret, *The seal of the sanga* (2010) 145.

51 A. Löhnert in: M. Jaques, *Klagetraditionen* (2011) 49–56.

52 M. Civil, 'On Mesopotamian jails and their Lady Warden', *Studies W. W. Hallo* (1993) 72–78; for a new edition see P. Attinger in *Festschrift C. Wilcke* (2003) 15–34.

29.3 The woman and her goddess

A woman's personal god before her marriage was the god of her father, actually the family god. Since some letters refer to 'the god of your husband' that was her god after her marriage.[53] A man will begin his letter with a salutation asking for a blessing on the person addressed, first from his city god and then from his personal guardian deity. Women invoked their own gods to bring well-being and blessing.[54] One letter describes a nun praying 'to my Lord' for a man and 'to my Mistress' for a woman. In Sippar Šamaš was the Lord and Aya the Mistress.[55] A letter found in Nippur to a woman includes the salutation,

> May Belet-ili keep you in good health.[56]

Belet-ili was the mother goddess, one well able to look after a woman. A supplicant pleads to her,

> Accept from me the grain offering. Hear my prayer.

The grain offering was a proverbial expression for what poor women, widows in particular, used to offer. The same prayer could also be directed to the goddess Gula.[57] The formulation of this prayer shows that it belongs to a group of prayers that the king would utter and which sometimes accompanied this humble offering.

In the region of modern Aleppo Old Babylonian court women named themselves 'the beloved' (*narāmtu*) of a goddess.[58] In dedications women preferred to direct their prayers to female deities, in particular to Inanna/Ištar.[59] On the cylinder seal of Princess Annabum mentioned earlier the pious inscription is written in Sumerian as a prayer to Inanna. There are more indications that women worshipped Ištar/Inanna. Most clear is this wish in a lullaby:

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53 Van der Toorn, *Family religion*, 75.

54 Thus R. Frankena; see K. R. Veenhof, Phoenix 39 (1993) 180.

55 OBTR 134:15, 21.

56 AbB 11 15:18.

57 BMS 7:17 = W. R. Mayer, UFBG (1976) 452 Gula 1a:80. This interpretation of the prayer was given by K. van der Toorn, *From her cradle* (1994) 138, but he is not aware of its use by the king.

58 Seal impression on *Alalakh Texts* no. 7 with Ugarit-Forschungen 36 (2004) 56–62; cf. SAL *Ḫa-si-am–ja-pa-ḫa-at na-ra-am-ti* ^{d}*A-ši-ir-tum* [the spouse of the god Amurru] on a seal, D. Collon, *Studies E. Porada* (1986) 59, 67 no. 12. Kings in this 'Amorite' area and in Assyria named themselves 'the beloved' (*narāmu*) of a male god.

59 G. Gadaut in F. Briquel-Chatonnet, *Femmes* (2009) 236 f., 246.

> May Inanna, the lady of women, look at me with her good eye![60]

One example comes from Old Babylonian reports of the results of liver extispicy, which give precise details about how the liver looked. Sometimes these reports were introduced with a passage giving the reason for performing the extispicy. One introduction shows that it was usual for a woman to give a present to the goddess Inanna/Ištar before a journey. It relates to a lady who had not actually given a present before setting out on her journey and she was anxious to know whether she should still depart and give the present en route. Perhaps she had previously requested a liver extispicy and received an 'unfavourable' report, but for some reason or other she wanted to stick with her plan.

> (Concerning) the daughter of Asu, because she has not had a present brought to Inanna, can she go to the place where she wanted to go? And can she have the present brought to Inanna during the journey northwards?[61]

Another example from an Old Babylonian letter concerns a man's wife who wants to travel.

> My wife wants to go to Kisurra (?), behind Ištar. Give her half a litre of oil and barley, as much as she asks you for.

After that a couch is also mentioned.[62] A third example concerns Princess Beltum, who commissioned musicians or singers in Mari to take part in a ritual in the temple of Ištar.[63] In Chapter 4, on the family, we saw that an Assyrian woman made a votive offering (a genital triangle in lead) to Ištar of Assur for the benefit of her husband and young children. In the temple of Ištar at Assur a great variety of votive objects was found, including thirteen scorpions, suggesting that the quest for love was a central aim of the Assyrian woman[64].

If women swore an oath by a female goddess it was usually by Ištar.[65] On an Assyrian cylinder a woman is depicted standing in the temple in an attitude of worship before a goddess, probably Ištar, with male guardian deities standing in

60 M. Jaques, *Studies Å. W. Sjöberg* (2014) 67:28 f.
61 F. R. Kraus, JCS 37 (1985) 146, 160 no. 17.
62 A. Goddeeris, *Tablets from Kisurra* (2009) 187 no. 158:4–10.
63 AEM 1/2 (1988) 26 no. 298:44 with Florilegium Marianum XII (2011) 63 f. (the *šurāru* ritual).
64 W. Meinhold, 'Ištar und die Bevölkerung', *Ištar in Aššur* (2009) 245–262.
65 M. Stol, *Annäherungen* 4 (= OBO 160/4) (2004) 661 (Old Assyrian).

front and behind the two figures.[66] The downside to this devotion, as we saw in Chapter 22 about her diseases, was that women at the court suffered under the Hand of Ištar.

29.4 The mourning for Tammuz

Women participated communally in the ceremonial mourning for Tammuz, an annual feast for those who had died.[67] Every modern description of this ceremony begins by citing how it was condemned by the prophet Ezekiel.

> Next he brought me to the gateway of the Lord's house which faces north; and there sat women wailing for Tammuz. 'O man, do you see that?' he asked me. 'But you will see greater abominations than these' (Ezekiel 8:14 f.).

This heathen horror is attested in Babylonian texts, with Tammuz as a Babylonian god, a name to be identified with Sumerian Dumuzi. It was a mourning ceremony which could be thought of as the Babylonian equivalent of All Souls' Day. It was held at the end of the month of Tammuz, the month named after the god, the fourth month of the year. This month name is still preserved today in the Islamic world where it was adopted from Aramaic.[68] In Babylonia in this month Tammuz was thought to arise from the underworld to the earth. In this ritual he had died and was placed on a bier and a ritual mourning was performed for him and for all the family members who had died, for they were also believed to be present. This was considered the right moment to let Tammuz remove any illnesses from the assembled company and take them back down with him into the earth. This idea is found also in a medical diagnosis.

> If a dead spirit or a demon has seized a man, or whatever evil power has seized him and keeps following him, this is its ritual. In the month of Tammuz, whenever Ištar has the people of the land mourn for Tammuz her lover, while the family of the man has gathered, Ištar takes a stand and chooses out men's concerns. She takes disease away and she causes disease.

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66 E. Klengel-Brandt, *Mit sieben Siegeln versehen* (1997) 79 Abb. 73.

67 Van der Toorn, 116 ff.; M. Stol, 'De dood van Adonis in Mesopotamië', in: E. Ibsch, *De literaire dood* (1998) 1–7.

68 Cf. 'The weeping (*bikîtu*) in Tammuz is for Dumuzi', ZA 6 (1891) 256:33, with A. Livingstone, *Mystical and mythological explanatory works* (1986) 256; also J. Bottéro in: S. N. Kramer, *Le mariage sacré* (1983) 178.

After many incantations and ritual actions the patient had to go and lie under the bed where Tammuz was laid out, and then the last rite was administered.[69] This ritual was performed as early as the Middle Assyrian period. There it is said to have been fixed 'in the month of Tammuz, on day 2[8], when Ištar had the people of the land mourn'.[70] We should realise that these texts describe a magic healing ritual for the sick that would be carried out during the mourning ceremony. This was the theme for the last days of the month rather than the mourning of Tammuz itself. On the 29th day a bed was placed for Tammuz to indicate that he was being laid out on a bier. There are indications that the whole ceremony which lasted for three days was called *taklimtu*, literally meaning 'display', or what we would call 'lying in state'. In Egypt in the Greek period, where Adonis was similarly laid out, it was called *deiktèrion*, showing that the Greeks had adopted this ancient Middle Eastern ritual for themselves. In his dialogue *Adoniazousai* the Greek poet Theocritus describes this women's festival as 'those who celebrate the Adonis ritual'.[71]

When we were describing the court in Chapter 24 we mentioned what some consider to be an Assyrian ritual text describing the burial of Ešarra-ḫammat, the wife of King Esarhaddon, but others think that it concerns the burial of a prince. Scholars now think that in this text it was not really a prince but Tammuz who was being laid out. The prince was the one who needed to be healed. Two women played the chief roles in the ritual, the 'daughter' and the 'daughter-in-law' or bride. The 'daughter' would have represented the sister of Tammuz, who on the 28th day of the fourth month descended to the underworld, and in this ritual the sister of the prince played that self-sacrificial role. The daughter-in-law was the wife of the prince. A woman had to be used as a substitute and according to the

69 W. Farber, *Beschwörungsrituale an Ištar und Dumuzi* (= BID) (1977) 140:3–7 with J. Scurlock in: M. Meyer, P. Mirecki, *Ancient magic and ritual power* (1995) 97 f.; TUAT NF 4 (2008) 116–122; J. Bottéro, ZA 73 (1983) 193–196. – It is remarkable that Tablet XII of the Gilgamesh Epic (about Enkidu in the Netherworld) according to the colophon was written on the 27th day of the fourth month, in 705 BC. This was shortly after King Sargon II had died in battle, a time of worry for the Assyrians. This dating is hardly a coincidence according to E. Frahm, NABU 2005/5; for further speculations see A. R. George, *The Gilgamesh Epic* I (2003) 53 f.

70 Farber, 188. There is no mourning of Tammuz attested in ARM 9 175; see M. Ghouti, NABU 1991/27 (contra R. Kutscher and B. Alster in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* [1999] 831a).

71 For the Babylonian ritual see Farber, 123; Th. Jacobsen in H. Goedicke, J. J. M. Roberts, *Unity and Diversity* (1975) 72. For Adonis see M. Stol, 'Greek *deiktèrion*: the lying-in-state of Adonis', in: *Studies M. S. H. G. Heerma van Voss* (1988) 127 f. (with lit.); cf. J. A. Scurlock, NABU 1991/3; Mettinger 123. Recently, *taklimtu* has been interpreted as 'display of grave goods'; J. N. Postgate in J. E. Curtis, *New light on Nimrud* (2008) 179; A. Zgoll, *Festschrift J. Krecher* (2014) 628 f.

rules of the Tammuz ceremony she had to be burdened with the disease and take it down with her. The patient was indeed a man. It was 'his bed' that was put in position. We know that the time to allow diseases to disappear into the underworld was during the ceremonies of the cult of Tammuz in the fourth month.[72]

The background to the whole ritual is an Akkadian myth about the death of Tammuz, often called 'the Descent of Ištar into Hades', a title devised by German scholars but now to be regarded as out-dated and inappropriate. A late Assyrian version of the text has a wish at the end for the dead spirits to arise and enjoy the smell of incense, suggesting that they burned incense during the performance of the ritual.[73] The myth describes how Ištar was humiliated as she descended into the underworld before she was liberated. This late version of the myth can be traced back to an old story, known from a fuller Sumerian version, 'The Descent of Inanna'. The Akkadian version has been abbreviated in some parts but also has a few additions. This shorter text adopts a lofty style of language but the progression of the narrative is sometimes unclear and the end is abrupt. This myth and ritual was sustained as an integral feature of the religious year, since the death of Tammuz was regarded as the reason for the arid, unfruitful summer season that began with the month of Tammuz. Furthermore, it mentioned the origins of certain priests in Ištar's service and the annual lying in state of Tammuz. Modern exponents get little out of the piecemeal text,[74] giving rise to an abundance of modern literature with ingenious explanations. This applies in particular to the Sumerian version, but that would not interest the Babylonian participant in All Souls' Day. For those worshippers the myth was a sort of lament for the dead, a short preamble to a most important ritual.[75]

Dumuzi/Tammuz, a shepherd, was the lover of the goddess Inanna/Ištar. According to the original myth he had been obliged to become a substitute for the goddess in the underworld on account of his misbehaviour. The Akkadian version is silent about any lapses of Tammuz and makes no mention of any guilt to be

72 W. von Soden, ZA 45 (1939) 42–61, with J. Scurlock, 'New light on the mourning rites for Dumuzi?', RA 86 (1992) 53–67. See Chapter 24, note 165.

73 R. Labat, *Les religions du Proche-orient* (1970) 265.

74 The explanation by W. Burkert in: J. Assmann, *Funktionen und Leistungen des Mythos* (1982) 66–68, is not correct. J. Bottéro, *Annuaire 1971–72,* École pratique des Hautes Études, IVe section, p. 79–97, is more realistic. The interpretation of the myth as the journey of the soul, descending into the material world and returning purified, a Gnostic belief, is speculative. See S. Parpola, *Assyrian prophecies* (1997) p. XXXI–IV; P. Lapinkivi, *Ištar's descent and resurrection* (2010) 38, and passim.

75 E. Reiner, *Your thwarts in pieces, your mooring rope cut. Poetry from Babylonia and Assyria* (1985) 48.

attributed to him. His death was viewed as a tragedy, something which provoked the arrival of the summer drought when all vegetation withered.[76] It must date back to an old myth about nature. It was also an element in folklore, alluded to in an Old Babylonian letter by a man who had often escaped death

> Now then, why am [I not] like Dumuzi? They killed him at a fixed time (?) in the year [and in the spring (?)] he always came back to the temple of Annunitum.[77]

The myth was taken over in Phoenicia, where the dying god was identified as Baal in Ugarit, Melqart in Tyre and Adonis in Byblos. In the latter half of the twentieth century it was contended that Tammuz would not rise from the dead after the summer, as J. G. Frazer and others had thought earlier. It is now thought that in the Ancient Near East there were no dying gods, only gods who disappeared.[78] But T. Mettinger has argued strongly that the god really did die and came back again after the hot summer.[79] Sometimes he returned after an interval of only three days according to the way that early Christian authors retold the myth.[80]

The lamentations for Dumuzi/Tammuz were handed down from generation to generation. They existed as early as the Old Babylonian period and were often written in *emesal*, the Sumerian woman's dialect.[81] In this early period cheerful love songs about Inanna and Dumuzi were composed, as well as the laments, but they later fell out of circulation. These laments did not belong to the canon of literature, and the worship of Dumuzi/Tammuz in the temples was of marginal importance.[82] In the Sumerian dirges about Dumuzi he was mourned by women:

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76 B. Alster s.v. 'Tammuz', in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, first edition (1995) 1575; second edition (1999) 831 f. He pays little attention to Tammuz in the first millennium B. C.

77 P. Marello, Florilegium Marianum I (1992) 117 A.1146:42–44; TUAT NF 3 (2006) 59; D. Katz, *The image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian sources* (2003) 165 f.

78 Th. Podella, *Ṣôm – Fasten* (1989) 35–37. For Adonis see P. Lambrechts, *Over Griekse en Oosterse mysteriëngodsdiensten; de zgn. Adonismysteries* (1954) ('Lucian, *De Dea Syria* 6, confuses Osiris with Adonis'); Lambrechts, 'La 'résurrection' d'Adonis', Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves 13 (1953) 208–240.

79 T. N. D. Mettinger, *The riddle of resurrection. 'Dying and Rising Gods' in the Ancient Near East* (2001); idem, 'The Dying and Rising God: the perigrinations of a mytheme', in: W. H. van Soldt, *Ethnicity in Ancient Mesopotamia* (2005) 198–210.

80 J. L. Lightfoot, *Lucian On the Syrian Goddess* (2003) 310.

81 M. M. Fritz, *... und weinten um Tammuz. Die Götter Dumuzi-Ama'ušumgal'anna und Damu* (2003). For example M. E. Cohen, *Sumerian hymnology: The Eršemma* (1981) 70–93; W. H. Ph. Römer, TUAT II/5 (1989) 693–700.

82 B. Alster in 'Tammuz'. For an Akkadian lament from the late period see W. G. Lambert, JAOS 103 (1983) 211–215, where Marduk is supposed to have killed Tammuz; see now B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses* II (1993) 838 f.

by Inanna/Ištar, by his sister and by his mother. Everything points to the fact that the congregation at the end of the month of Tammuz was just for women. They expressed their own emotions in this ceremony in commemorating the sudden death of a young friend as its central motif.[83] The grieving women identified themselves with Ištar. The similar mourning ceremonies in the cult for the young Adonis in Phoenicia were taken over by the Greeks and spread into other regions, including Athens and Alexandria. We read in the Bible that Jephthah, as a consequence of his solemn vow, had to see his daughter tragically put to death as a sacrifice. This was traditionally commemorated every year by subsequent generations of women observing a four-day mourning ritual (see Judges 11:29–40).[84]

The ceremony surrounding Tammuz took place at the end of the fourth month, the time the spirits of the dead were honoured with incense by their families. A variant of the late myth records that the spirits of the dead also appeared in the presence of the sun god Šamaš and Gilgamesh, at the end of the fifth month. After his death Gilgamesh became the judge of the underworld.[85] Certainly the fifth month, Abu, was the month for caring for the spirits of the dead.[86] Perhaps the end of the month of Tammuz was reserved for women, but the month Abu was for everyone, especially for fathers and for other men. When we were discussing the convent in Chapter 26, we saw that the *nadîtu*s in the convent seemed to celebrate All Souls' Day at the end of Abu.

83 M. M. Fritz, 353–359, 'Damu und Dumuzi als Fokus: Grunderfahrungen im Leben einer Frau?'. He also thinks of the sorrow of a woman over her unfaithful husband, or over her 'egoistic brother' (= Dumuzi).

84 Van der Toorn, *From the cradle*, 117. He also refers to 'the lamentation for Hadad-Rimmon in the valley of Megiddo', Zechariah 12:11. See also the article of Mettinger mentioned earlier; p. 207.

85 Tsukimoto, *Totenpflege*, 161–167. For rituals at the end of the fourth and fifth months see W. Farber, BID (1977) 123 f., 207 f.

86 For a new instance in Emar see D. E. Fleming, *The installation of Baal's high priestess at Emar* (1992) 295–301 (*Emar* VI/3 no. 452).