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CUNEIFORM MONOGRAPHS

BIRTH IN BABYLONIA AND THE BIBLE

ITS MEDITERRANEAN SETTING

M. Stoll

With a Chapter by

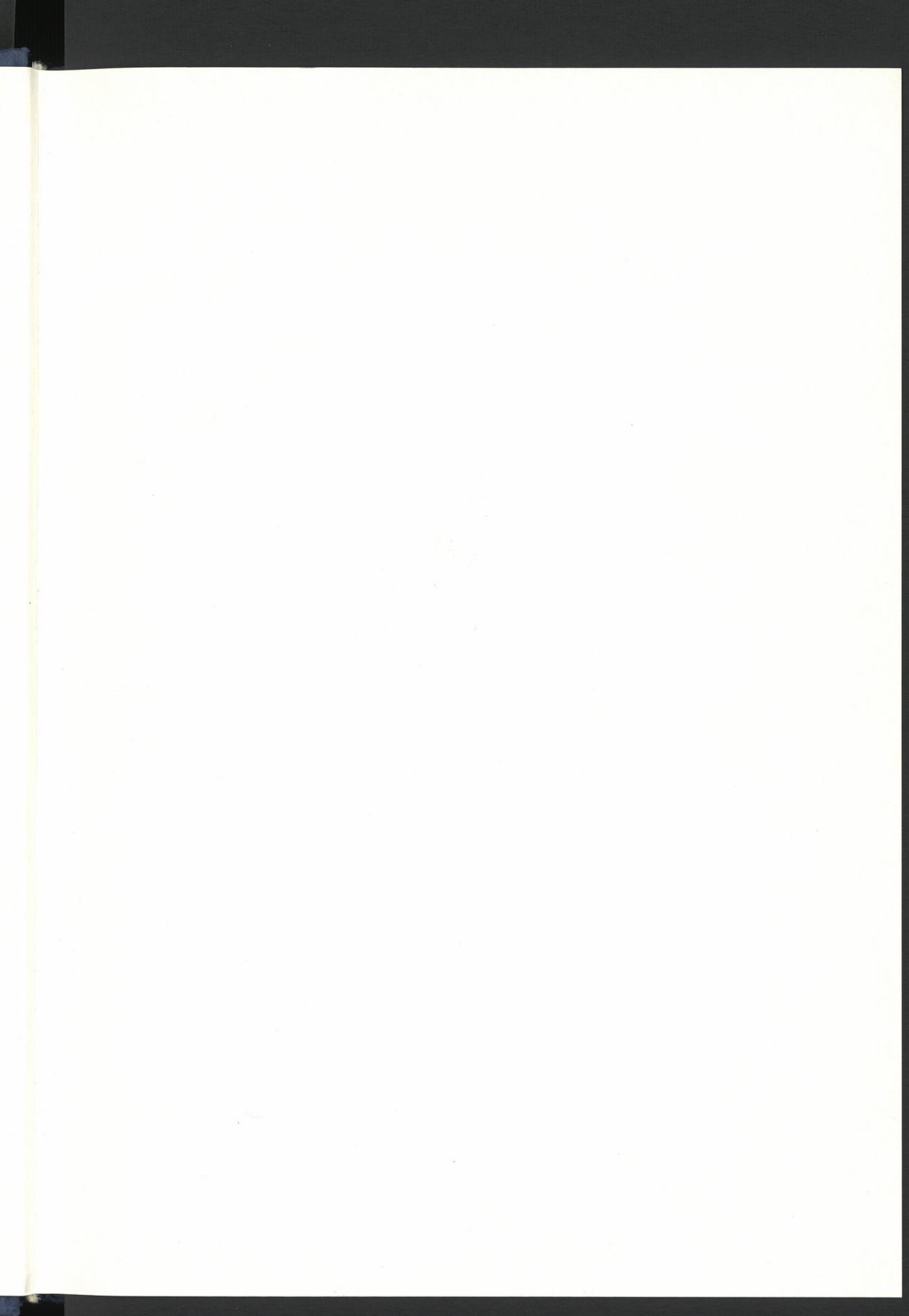
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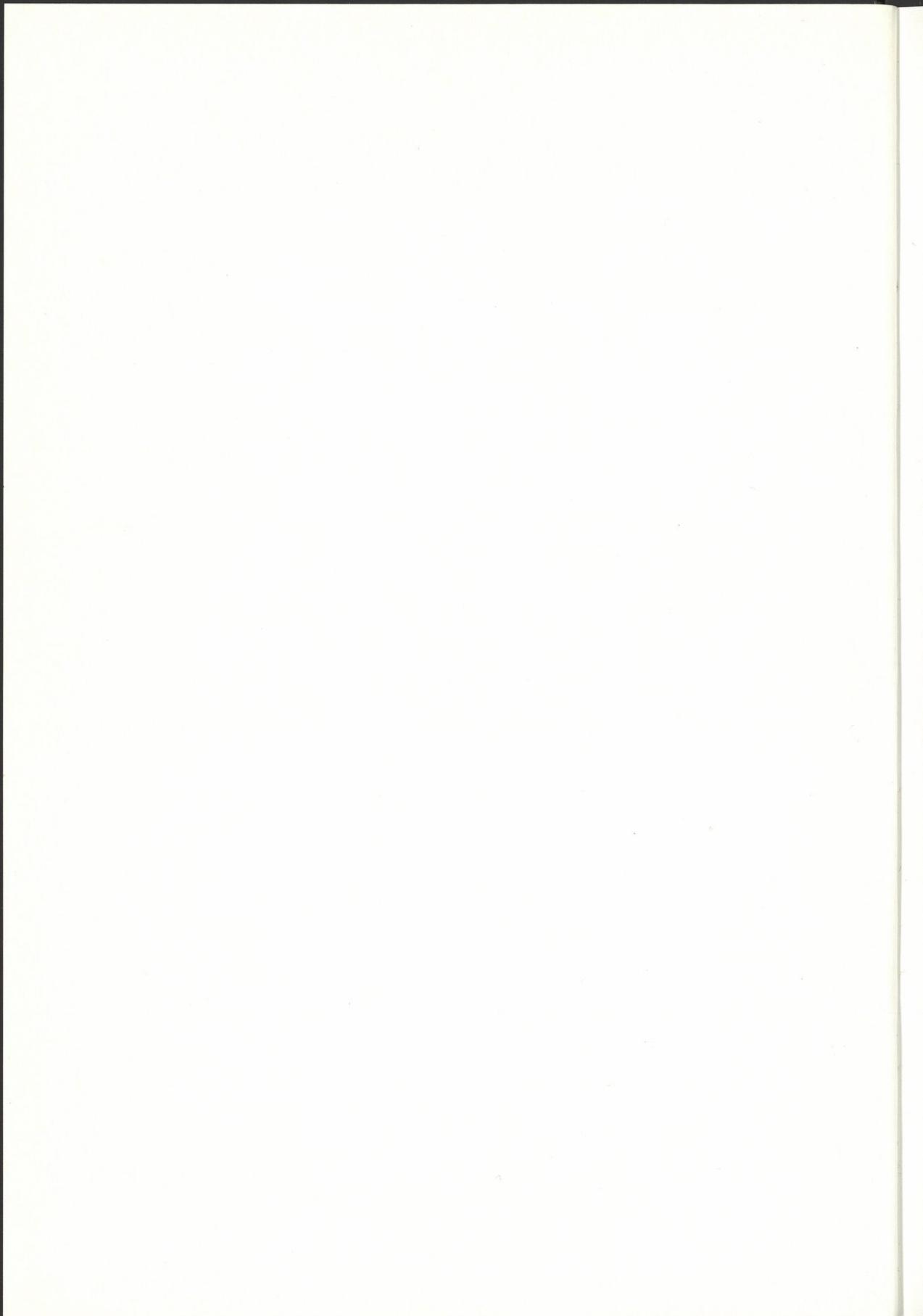


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BIRTH IN BABYLONIA AND THE BIBLE

CUNEIFORM MONOGRAPHS 14

Edited by

T. Abusch, M. J. Geller, Th. P. J. van den Hout
S. M. Maul and F. A. M. Wiggermann

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Introduction

The travails of pregnancy and birth have always been woman's lot. The Bible begins with the creation of the world and recounts the carefree life of the first two human beings in Paradise. This blissful state was soon to come to an end and Adam and Eve were driven from Paradise. The woman, Eve, was told, "In pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband". "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord" (Genesis 4, verse 1). An unbroken chain of birth giving followed, a mixed story full of joy and sorrow. This book gives the anthropology of birth after Adam and Eve, as it was experienced at the dawn of written history in Babylonia, the land of the lost Paradise, and in the land of the Bible.

For early humans, wanting any rational medicine, the surrounding world was full of dark, demonic powers and an ever present threat to mother and child. The help of the Lord was essential and this is the central focus of Biblical sources. Warding off these dangers is the main concern of the textual material from Babylonia and Assyria.

The Babylonian and Assyrian texts were written on clay tablets, in the cuneiform script. In the earliest period, from 3,000 to 2,000 B.C., the inhabitants of Mesopotamia (modern Iraq and eastern Syria) wrote mainly in the Sumerian language. This is the oldest known language of the world and is not related to any linguistic family. Sumerian became extinct in about 2,000 B.C. but lived on as a literary or scientific language, just as Latin in the European Middle Ages. Many incantations were still recited in this venerable ancient tongue at the time when the two main dialects of "Akkadian", Babylonian and Assyrian, had become the spoken languages. These dialects are very much alike and belong to the "Semitic" language family, like Hebrew and Arabic.

Hundreds of thousands of clay tablets have been found, covering a span of time from 3,000 B.C. to the beginning of the Christian Era. Most were part of archives or libraries which included incantations, mythical tales, hymns, medical handbooks, letters, law books, and nursing contracts. So many aspects of life are reflected in these tablets, including secrets of Babylonian midwifery, but it is not an easy task to find the data in the immense mass of scattered texts. Many of them are not even available in any reliable translation. This book draws on this rich textual source and presents material much of which was not previously accessible to a general reader.

This book, completely rewritten from the Dutch edition of 1983, includes new material and many more translations of ancient texts, allowing the reader to have a more direct access to the sources. It is intended for the general reader. The abbreviations are those common in Assyriology; see R. Borger, *Handbuch der Keilschriftbibliographie I* (1967), II (1975).

The author of this book is an Assyriologist. From his early years he was immersed in the Bible, and learned Latin and Greek in school. These subjects remained life long interests and indeed, were an advantage in the present context. Some beliefs or customs are found in the entire Mediterranean world and in this way some data can be supplemented or even elucidated by other. The author utilizes Biblical sources and,

where appropriate, Greek and Roman materials as well. He refers to Jewish traditions from the Talmud and provides an occasional glance to Arab sources. The author of the last chapter, on the demon *Lamaštu*, is another Assyriologist. Both work at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.

The existing literature on pregnancy and birth in the Mediterranean world – ancient and modern – is enormous. This book attempts to be more or less exhaustive as far as ancient Mesopotamia concerns. We can only hope that no important expositions in other areas have been overlooked. Below (p. 215) I give a short, somewhat arbitrary bibliography of reliable surveys on birth in Babylonia and Assyria, the Hittite empire, Israel, the Greek and Roman world, and among the Arabs.

The Bible is cited after the Revised Standard Version (Oxford), the (Babylonian) Talmud after the edition of the Soncino Press (London).

The manuscript of this book was edited by Ann K. Guinan. I owe a great debt to her meticulous work from which the book has benefitted so much. Her sensitivity as a native speaker of English and her expertise as an Assyriologist were both invaluable to me.

Chapter I CONCEPTION AND EMBRYOLOGY

The beginnings

The average adult reader of this book will be aware of the facts of beginning life. So were the Babylonians. They knew that pregnancy (*mērū*) is caused by intercourse; a bilingual Sumerian-Babylonian proverb says: “Has she become pregnant without intercourse? Has she become fat without eating?”.¹ Contrasting with the transports of love-making is the burden of bearing children; in the “Dialogue of Pessimism” the servant gives his master this advice: “Do not make loans, Sir, do not make loans. Making loans is like loving; getting them back is like having children”.² The natural division of the labour in these activities is as follows: “My father begot me (*rehū*), my mother bore me (*walādu*)”.³

The metaphor of the woman as a fertile field to be worked by the man is ubiquitous. “That woman is a ploughed field is indeed familiar to the poetry of all ages and regions”.⁴ In Sumerian and Babylonian erotic lyrics, one can come across invitations like “Farmer, plough (my) field!”,⁵ or the declaration “Let me plough the field”.⁶ The goddess Inanna asks her lover “Plough the gemstones”; the stones symbolize sexuality and fecundity.⁷ In later songs, the “seeder plough” (*ittū*) is the metaphor for the male’s rod. This type of plough, typical of Babylonia, turned the soil and sowed at the same time; a literary text calls it “Fertilizer of the Plains”.⁸ Some of its parts have names with sexual connotations.⁹ When the Phoenician king Rib-Addi of Byblos (ca. 1350 B.C.) writes about the impact of enemy activity, the following phrase occurs no less than four times: “My field, for lack of ploughing, is like a woman without a husband”. Clearly, this simile reflects a

¹ W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (1960) 241 II 40-42.

² Lambert, 148, 66 f. – My compatriote Desiderius Erasmus thought it funny to phrase this contrast easy (intercourse) vs. hard (birth) as follows in a good wish for expecting mothers: “May the burden that you are carrying slip out as easily as it has slipped in” (*velint superi, ut non maiore molestia elabatur, quam illapsum est, quidquid est hoc oneris, quod gestas*); at the beginning of his *Colloquia familiaria* (edition 1522; now *Opera omnia* I-3 [1972] 127, lines 77-8).

³ Lambert, JNES 33 (1974) 274:3; B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* II (1996) 549. In three Old Babylonian passages the man “makes give birth” to a child; verb *walādu* D. See Å.W. Sjöberg, JAOS 103 (1983) 319, Elegy I:107, gloss; C. Wilcke, ZA 75 (1985) 189, in the letter IB 1541:6; BAP 96:18, variant on case (*10 ma-ri PN li-wa-li-id*).

⁴ Thus G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in essence and manifestation* (1938) 95 (§ 10, 2); cf. M. Eliade, *Traité d’histoire des religions* (1964) 223 f. (§ 93, “Femme et sillon”). Among the Greeks: Helen King in G.R. Dunstan, *The Human Embryo* (1990) 17. Page duBois, *Sowing the body. Psychoanalysis and ancient representations of women* (1988), Chapters 3 (“Field”) and 4 (“Furrow”), discovers in this an estrangement from the spontaneously generating earth (parthenogenesis), due to the development of the polis.

⁵ Å.W. Sjöberg, JCS 29 (1977) 24, on line 22; he gives more and other examples.

⁶ B. Alster, ASJ 14 (1992) 3, with 43, note 10.

⁷ W.G. Lambert in M. Mindlin, *Figurative language in the Ancient Near East* (1987) 31, 33; Joan G. Westenholz in D. Charpin, F. Joannès, *La circulation des biens, des personnes et des idées dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (1992) 386 f.

⁸ Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (1960) 178:32 with p. 332.

⁹ C. Wilcke in M. Mindlin, *Figurative language in the Ancient Near East* (1987) 77, 92; A. Livingstone, NABU 1991/6 sub 2.

I. Conception and Embryology

local proverbial expression about woman and field.¹⁰ This same image can be found in Jewish literature. In an addition to the chapter on women in the Wisdom of Sirach, woman is called a plot of field meant to yield noble offspring: "Single out from all the land a goodly field and there with confidence sow the seed of your increase – so shall you have your offspring around you" (Sir. 26:20–21). The later Jewish book *Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer* adduces as example the statement "For man is the tree of the field" in Deuteronomy 20:19 (Chapter 21). The commentary *Genesis Rabbah* says that the remark "Esau came in from the field" in Genesis 25:29 means that he had had sexual relations with a betrothed girl, cf. Deuteronomy 22:25 (Chapter 63:12). According to the Talmud, Esther by conversing with a gentile did not transgress because "Esther was merely natural soil" (Sanhedrin 74b). The Coran calls the wife the "tillage" (*hartun*) of her man (2, 223).

Women without children were compared to an infertile field: "abandoned (field)" is the literal meaning of the Akkadian word indicating a cloistered woman who was not to have children, *nadītu*. The Hebrew word for an infertile woman, *galmūdā*, means in Arabic "stony (field)". In English, "barren" is said both of fields and women.

Of the large Babylonian handbook of forecasts (omens), *Šumma ālu*, Tablet 104 belongs to its last section that studies the predictive meaning of human behaviour. This tablet begins with a lengthy survey of behaviour in sexual intercourse – mostly abnormal.¹¹ Some of the situations described have a bearing on pregnancy, birth, and the child. Those omens that interest us are not easy to interpret. A first problem is, what the Sumerogram "situation of (being) a woman" (NAM.SAL.A), means; we translate "pregnancy" but others have suggested "intercourse".¹²

Omen 3 runs as follows: "If a man approaches a woman while standing up, that behaviour is not good: a disease of the muscles / veins (*sakikku*) will be his share. Idem: that man will suddenly be (sexually) aroused and fall ill afterward. Moreover, the 'water' of 'pregnancy' will be deficient".

Omen 3 has a parallel in the Talmud: "If a man has sexual intercourse standing, he will be liable to convulsions; if sitting, to spasms; if she is above and he below, he will be subject to *delaria* (= diarrhoea ?)" (Gittin 70a).

Omen 4 envisages the problem at what time of day or night intercourse should take place if pregnancy is desired. Siesta time (*muslalu*) is deemed favourable; but "the bed of the night is troubled", i.e., confusing, hard to interpret. This "bed" undoubtedly concerns the majority of cases. The omen is followed by an explanation which certainly was made up by some Babylonian scholar. Translation: "If a man desires 'to do' the 'pregnancy' of his woman, (everything) being propitious and all-right (?): 'doing' 'pregnancy' during

¹⁰ EA 74:17–19, etc.; see D. Marcus, JAMES 5 (1973) 281–6. Cf. the note by W.L. Moran in the English translation of the Amarna Letters (1992), p. 144.

¹¹ CT 39 44. See J.C. Pangas, *Aula Orientalis* 6 (1988) 211–226. Discussions by Ann K. Guinan, *Phoenix* 25–1979 (1980) 68–81; J. Bottéro, *Initiation à l'Orient ancien* (1992) 140–2; Ann K. Guinan, "Auguries of hegemony: The sex omens of Mesopotamia", in *Gender and History* 9 (1997) 462–479. – One can view the drinking test organised by Gideon in the light of the behavioural omens; Judges 7:4–7.

¹² See CAD S 293b s.v. *sinnišūtu*. The Sumerian word probably means "pregnancy" in the myth "Enki and Ninhursag", lines 85, 105, 124 (BASOR Suppl. Study 1 [1945] 14). P. Attinger, ZA 74 (1984) 15: "le neuvième mois, c'est le mois de l'enfantement". W.H.Ph. Römer, TUAT III/3 (1993) 373: "ihre neun Monate, es waren die Monate der Weiblichkeit".

The Beginnings

siesta time is good; the bed of the night is troubled. Joy from the god for the man and a wide belly for the pregnant woman. – During siesta time it is good: (because) the gods make the decisions for the land during the day. Idem: they decide the fates of all men”.

Note that most of the Jewish sages forbid coitus in the day-time (Niddah 17a).¹³

Omen 5 says “If a man goes regularly to a tavern: one year (long) his heart (mood?) will change (?); his wife will have a difficult birth”.

Omens 23 and 24: “If a man approaches on waste ground, his wife will bear girls. If a man approaches in the middle of a field or a garden, his wife will bear boys”. The message is: a fertile underground is better and so boys are born.¹⁴

The Talmud does not care much about the ways a man invades his spouse. A woman complained about her man’s unusual way of approaching her with these words: “Rabbi! I set a table before my husband, but he overturned it”. One answer of Rabbi Judah the Prince was: “Wherein does it differ from a fish?”; the other answer recorded in the Talmud is more subtle: “My daughter, the Torah has permitted you to him, and I, what can I do for you?”.¹⁵ A modern commentator discovers in this answer some disgust: “In his reluctance to intervene, Judah confirms that the law does not restrict the sexual privileges of men, but by symbolically throwing up his hands, he also implicitly criticizes such practices”.¹⁶ We learn from what precedes that people were afraid of getting lame children when the table had been overturned. They feared dumb children when “that place” had been kissed; blind when the same had been looked at; deaf when the couple had talked when busy. One may see moral warnings in these prognostications; this conduct is not proper, they suggest.¹⁷

The Coran has the verse “Your wives are a tillage for you; go therefore in your tillage how you wish” (2, 223). The words “how you wish” (i.e., in any manner you may wish) can also be translated as “when you wish” – whenever you wish (*‘annā ši’tum*). “How” is generally preferred.

The Roman poet Lucretius feels that intercourse from the rear is most conducive to conception: “And in what ways the soothing pleasure itself is performed, this also is of very great importance; for wives are generally thought to conceive more readily in the manner of wild beasts and the fashion of quadrupeds, since in this way the proper parts can take the seeds, with chests laid down and loins raised up” (*De rerum natura* IV 1263–67; translation Robert D. Brown). Although he assures us that this is “generally thought”, the modern commentator cannot find ancient parallels, and remarks “Evidently

¹³ More possibilities are discussed there. “No living creature is supposed to witness the act, and especially holy men such as Abaye are said to have chased away even flies”; D. Biale, *Eros and the Jews* (1992) 51 f. See D. Boyarin, *Carnal Israel. Reading sex in Talmudic culture* (1993) 127 f.

¹⁴ Some philological notes. Omen 3: I owe the interpretation of *katātu* Št as referring to “the general physiology of arousal” to Ann K. Guinan; see her article in *Gender and History* 9 (1997) 474 Omen 11. A new reference is found in a text where a bird “is standing” (*izziz*), followed by *uš-tak-ti-it*; F. Reschid, *Sumer* 34 (1978) Arabic section p. 61:5–6. Omen 4: we read *DIŠ NA e-peš NAM.SAL.A SAL-šú ha-ših šal-mu (!) u ki-nu i-piš NAM.SAL.A mu-uš-la-la SIG₅ KI.NÁ mu-ši da-li-ḥa-di TA DINGIR ana LÚ u ŠA.DAGAL ana SAL.PEŠ₄ mu-uš-la-la S[I]G₅ ina u₄-mi DINGIR.MEŠ GALGA KUR GALGA.MEŠ KLMIN NAM.LÚ.ULU_x.LU DÙ.A.BI TAR-su.*

¹⁵ Nedarim 20b, with Boyarin, 110. On “overturning the table”, see Boyarin, 118 f.

¹⁶ D. Biale, 51.

¹⁷ Nedarim 20b, with D.M. Feldman, *Marital relations, birth control and abortion in Jewish Law* (1974) 155 ff.; also Biale, *Eros and the Jews* 50 f.; Boyarin, *Carnal Israel* 109 ff.

I. Conception and Embryology

the posterior position with the buttocks raised was thought to assist insemination in some way, probably because it is well suited to the retention of the semen and restricts the woman's mobility". This position is often shown in art, be it Mesopotamian, or on Greek vases and Pompeian wall paintings.¹⁸

The semen

In Hebrew, the word "seed" (*zēra'*) is primarily the seed of plants, particularly of cultivated crops sown by the farmer. It can also stand for "offspring", but it seldom denotes the semen of man. A notable exception in which *zēra'* means "semen" occurs in Genesis 38:9 when Onan spills his "seed" on the ground. Another can be found in the laws on purity (Leviticus 15:16). Very often "seed" in the Hebrew Bible stands for "offspring".

The Akkadian word for seed (*zēru*) hardly ever means "semen".¹⁹ Wherever "seed" is mentioned in a context of pregnancy, it means "offspring" – a well-known metaphor in the Babylonian world as well as the Bible. We will see in the chapter on Plants of Birth that the herb recommended "for acquiring seed" is used to get children, not simply to achieve conception. However, when a literary text says of the god Sîn, "Without you, the barren woman does not 'seize' seed and pregnancy", one still could think of the receiving of semen, of conception.²⁰ Another prayer in the same text names this god "Sîn, the lord of seed", or "the giver of the seed of the peoples"; here, it means "offspring".²¹ Even if "seed" in the line just quoted stands for male semen, it cannot be seen as the normal word. That word is, without any doubt, Akkadian *rihūtu*. This word conveys the idea of a fluid coming down and is derived from the verb *rehū* "to pour out", but used often to mean "to impregnate, fertilize, beget". An unusual word for "wife", *marhītu*, is also derived from this verb.²² Akkadian *rihūtu* often means "offspring".²³

The more literary word *nīlu* "fluid" also refers to semen. In a passage from the sex omens of *Šumma ālu* we find the man soiled by this moisture.²⁴

The Sumerians used the sign A "water" for semen; they may have pronounced it as *e*.²⁵ Again, the word can also stand for "offspring".²⁶ In Akkadian, the word "water"

¹⁸ Robert D. Brown, *Lucretius on love and sex* (1987) 360 f.; D. Gourevitch, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* Teil II, Band 37/3 (1996) 2102 ("la position dans le coït"). In Mesopotamian art: J.S. Cooper, RIA IV/4–5 (1975) 260 ff. (esp. § 14).

¹⁹ In this, I disagree with both dictionaries; CAD Z 93b, 3; AHw III 1521b, C 1.

²⁰ STT 1 57:65 and dupl. 58:33, *la ālittu ina balika NUMUN u mērē ul iṣṣabat* [sic]; text edition: W. Mayer, UFBG (1976) 497:47. Cf. M.-J. Seux, *Hymnes et prières aux dieux de Babylone et d'Assyrie* (1976) 281 with note 15 ("l'inféconde sans toi ne conçoit pas, ne devient pas enceinte").

²¹ STT 1 57:37–8, dupl. 58:10–12; cf. W. Farber, *Schlaf Kindchen Schlaf* (1989) 118.

²² Note that the word for bride-price, *terhātu*, has nothing to do with *rehū*.

²³ Even in an Old Babylonian legal text, where it means "(physical) offspring of NN"; PBS 5 100 II 25, etc., see E. Leichty, *Studies Å.W. Sjöberg* (1989) 351.

²⁴ CT 39 44:9, "If a man approaches (her) in the night and (afterwards) in his dream he is soiled with his fluids (*nīlu* *bullul*), that man will experience (financial) losses"; 45:26, "If a man has a pollution in his dream and he is soiled with his fluids, that man will find good things (?), he will gain in strength".

²⁵ As in writings like ^d*E-nun-na-ki* for the Anunnaki, Sum. ^d*a.nun.na*, "Same des Fürsten", "die füristlichen Samens sind"; see B. Kienast, *Studies B. Landsberger* (1965) 143a; A. Falkenstein, AnOr 30 (1966) 59. See also B. Landsberger, *Symbolae M. David II* (1968) 47.

²⁶ W.H.Ph. Römer, SKIZ (1965) 249; PSD A/1 (1992) 22–24, under (9), "semen", "seed", "offspring". –

means “bodily fluid(s)”, never “semen”. This is why the lexical texts, when explaining the Sumerian sign A “water”, have to be more explicit: “it (also) is *nīlu*, said of begetting”.²⁷ One exception is “water of life”, a unique expression for “semen” used in a handbook against black magic, *Maqlū*. We read here that the witches “have chosen me as a dead man, they have laid my water of life in a grave” (I 107 f.). This means that they have married him and thus got hold of his sperma. Depositing human sperma (*rihūtu*) in a grave was a well-known technique in black magic.²⁸

The conception

The semen (“water”) flows in the inside of the woman and she “takes” it.²⁹ Thus conceiving is expressed by a verb meaning “to take”. This is also the case in Akkadian terminology where the phrase “to seize (*sabātu*) the seed” occurs in the prayer to Sîn discussed above. In Greek, conception is also described as “to take, to seize” (*sullambánō*); as in Latin *con-cipere*.

Another expression is “to accept” (*mahāru*) the seed, it refers to the womb getting hold of the semen. This usage is attested in the following medical text:

– If a woman – her innards accept the semen and [...] a son: favour of the god.

If a woman: her innards accept the semen but she does not give birth: wrath of the god; not feeling well. If a woman having hold of (it) in the belly (?) cannot retain (it), in order to acquiesce the woman (you shall ...).³⁰

Therapeutical texts like this one rarely give the favour or wrath of a god as the cause of a medical problem; it is found more commonly in diagnostic texts with their “theological” outlook. That we find such an explanation in a therapeutic text suggests a widespread, popular, opinion.³¹

Sumerian literary texts relish in telling that the seed is planted in the womb. The texts are never very precise about the place where the seed arrives. The medical text spoke of “innards”, a rare word (*qerbītu*). An Old Babylonian hymn says that god Enlil “left his semen in her belly”; here a word is used that means “stomach” in other

There is one instance, however, where not “water” (A) but “seed” (numun) is deposited (ri) in the belly of a woman; in the Sumerian incantation that we will study below (VAS 17 33:3).

²⁷ MSL 14 (1979) 204 Aa I 40 (see now CAD N/2 234a). Note that it occurs in this row: water (*mū*) – semen (*rihūtu*) – ‘mounting’ (*rikibtu*) – ‘bed’ (*majālu*) – fluid of begetting (*nīlu Šārahē*) – flood (*nīlu*). Read perhaps in MSL 13 (1971) 73 Proto-Kagal 234–238, A = [mu]-u₄, [ni]-lu (!), [ri]-ti-ib-tum, [ri]-ki-ib-tum, [ri]-hu-tum. Otherwise PSD A/1 (1992) 25a (2).

²⁸ CAD N/1 206 a; S. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (1994) 78 (“Sperma”).

²⁹ Sumerian a “water”, ri “flow”, šā.ga “in the inside, belly”, šu-ti or šu-du₁₁ “to take”. A welcome, exhaustive study of this terminology was given by H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil* (1978) 133–8. Th. Jacobsen, however, takes šu-du₁₁ (Behrens, 135 note 269) to mean “to insert, implant”; *Kramer Anniversary Volume* (= AOAT 25) (1976) 251 note 15 (as in Gudea Cyl. A III 8). Doubts on its literal meaning in P. Attinger, *Éléments de linguistique sumérienne. La construction de du₁₁/e/di “dire”* (1993) 699; cf. ZA 85 (1995) 131 f. – Male animals “release” (šā.ba šu.ba) in the females, so we learn from D.A. Foxvog, *Or NS* 44 (1975) 409, in a note to “The Journey of Nanna-Suen to Nippur”, line 187. However, D.O. Edzard feels (with A. Ferrara) that šu-ba means “to mount”; ZA 63 (1974) 298.

³⁰ BAM 3 240:69–71: (69) DIŠ SAL *qer-bi-sa re-hu-tú im-hur-ma* IBILA x [x] x *gi-mil-li* DI[NGIR] (70) DIŠ SAL *qer-bi-sa re-hu-tú im-hur-ma* NU Ū.TU *šib-sat* DINGIR NU DÙG-ub [ŠA] (71) DIŠ SAL *ina* (?) ŠÀ TUKU-at ka-la-a la i-le-’-e ana SAL *nu-uh-hi* (...). Line 71 is discussed below, p. 28. We will compare this with Greek *rhūsis*.

³¹ M. Stol, *JEOL* 32 (1991–1992) 46 f., “Human sin”.

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instances (*karšu*).³² According to an incantation in a medical text, the semen that does not beget, is dry: “May your semen (*nilu*) dry up like (that of) a eunuch who does not beget”.³³ “To be pregnant” is *erû* in Akkadian; *hārā* in Hebrew.³⁴ In Hebrew, passive forms of the common verb “to be pregnant” are used for conception or fertilization; one could translate them as “to become pregnant” (*hārā Nif.*). In several instances, the simple active form of this verb has the ingressive meaning “to become pregnant”.³⁵ In Akkadian, an example for exactly the same use of the cognate verb *erû* occurs in a wisdom text discovered at Emar: “Where are the great kings, those from the former days until now? They are no more conceived, they are no more born”. Literally: “one does not get pregnant of them (any more)”.³⁶ A verse in Hoseah gives the development of pregnancy in reverse order, using a word derived from *hārā* for “conception” (*herājōn*): “Ephraim’s glory shall fly away like a bird – no birth, no pregnancy, no conception” (Hos. 9:11). The word translated “pregnancy” literally means “belly” (*bētēn*).

The whole process, from love-making to birth, is described in an Ugaritic myth, as follows:³⁷

– He stooped and kissed their lips; behold, their lips were sweet, were sweet as pomegranates. By kissing, there was pregnancy, by embracing “heating”. They crouched, they gave birth to Šahar and Šalim.

The problematical word is “heating”: *hm̥hmt* certainly refers to “heat” (Semitic *hm̥*) but what does it mean here? A related word was used by David in Psalm 51:5, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me”. “Conceive” is here Hebrew *jhm* which usually refers to animals in sexual excitement (“heat”, “rut”). We can translate the Ugaritic word *hm̥hmt* as “heat” and assume that, according to those people, a female in this state easily gets pregnant.

The remarks about Sarah’s barrenness in the Bible indicate the conditions for conception in a negative way: “It had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women” (menstruation is meant); “Shall I have pleasure?” (Genesis 18:11–12). The Talmud has the expression “blood of lust” (*dam himmūd*) and the most telling passage runs as follows. “A woman once brought some blood before R. Eleazar when R. Ammi sat in his presence. Having smelt it he told her, ‘This is blood of lust’. After she went out R. Ammi

³² CT 15 5 II 2, with W.H.Ph. Römer, JAOS 86 (1966) 138, ^dEn.lfl i-zi-ib ri-ḥi-is-sú ik-kar-ši.

³³ CT 23 10:14, GIM šu-ut re-e-ši la a-li-di ni-il-ka li-bal. – Cf. Isaiah 56:3, “Let not the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree”. The Assyrian word *ša rēši* “eunuch” has been adopted as a loanword in Hebrew: *sārīs*; see S. Parpoli, OLZ 74 (1979) 33.

³⁴ Now *hrj* also in Old South Arabic; H. Preissler, AOF VI (1979) 273–4. W. von Soden sees in the verbal forms *tu-a-di* and *ma-di-ja* in Neo-Babylonian contracts the influence of the Aramaic verb ‘*dj* (pa’el) “to be pregnant”; see his AHw s.v. *uddū* III, and Or NS 35 (1966) 15. His opinion that Akkadian *šuhhū* III means “schwängern” is not correct. W. Mayer could show that *šuhhū* does not mean “schwängern”; he prefers “to pollute (by sexual intercourse)”; Or NS 57 (1988) 155–7. A passage in an incantation not seen by him suggests the meaning “to pour (down)”: “Rain down like dew, flow down (*šu-uh-ha-ni*) like tears”; W.G. Lambert, AFO 23 (1970) 43 III 30 f. This means that the meaning of this verb is akin to that of *relyū*, “to pour down, to impregnate”.

³⁵ Ottoson, in article *hārā*, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* II/4 (1975) 495 f.

³⁶ D. Arnaud, *Emar* VI/4 (1978) 361 no. 767:18 (*erû* N). The text is bilingual: nu.peš.ša.me.en nu.da.da.am. m[e.en] (var. nu.tu.tu.mìn) // ul in-né-ru-ma ul im-m[al-al-du].

³⁷ KTU 1.23:49–52, with D.T. Tsumura, U.-F. 10 (1978) 387–395; cf. TUAT II/3 (1988) 355. See also M.I. Gruber, *Aspects of nonverbal communication in the Ancient Near East* (1980) I 320–5, in the section “To kiss and embrace”. Other aspects of these lines will be discussed elsewhere in this book.

The Conception

joined her and she told him, 'My husband was away on a journey but I felt an intense longing for him'. So the nasal sensitivity of R. Eleazar had been correct, the Talmud then concludes. Small wonder that the mother of king Shapur once exclaimed "O, you Jews, you seem to live in the inner chamber of one's heart" (Niddah 20b). This drop of blood may have been discharged at the ovulation, one of the natural peaks of desire in a woman's cycle.³⁸

It was commonly believed that the period after the menstrual flow is ideal for conception.³⁹ As Hippocrates knew, at that time, the mouth of the uterus is still open.⁴⁰ A remark in the David and Bathsheba story could show that the ancient Israelites had similar ideas about the moment of maximum fertility of the woman. We read: "So David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. And the woman conceived; and she sent and told David, 'I am with child'" (2 Samuel 11:4–5). The seemingly irrelevant remark on her purification (*w^ehī mitqaddēšēt mittūm'ātāh*) is meaningful. In the first place because it wishes to prove that Bathsheba was at that moment not pregnant from her husband. But it also makes Bathsheba's immediate conception understandable.⁴¹ We now know that the best moment is one week later.⁴² Jewish law requires that the married woman adds seven "clean" days after the end of her days of menstruation. "Modern observers have repeatedly noted that the extension of the menstrual taboo to nearly two weeks means that resumption of sexual activity coincides with the greatest moment of fertility: the laws of *niddah* seem almost tailor-made to promote procreation".⁴³

Two passages show that the Bible does not consider the woman to be just a passive vessel in which the male semen develops. She actively contributes her own "seed". The literal translation of Leviticus 12:2 is: "If a woman gives seed (*zāra* Hif.) and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days". The old official Dutch translation of the Bible, completed in 1637 (the "Statenvertaling"), indeed gives this translation. In the seventeenth century, they still believed in the existence of "the female seed". It

³⁸ Thus T. Meacham, "Dam himud – Blood of Desire", *Korot* 11 (1995) 82*–89*. "In the above context [Niddah 20b], if the woman was longing for her spouse, for sexual connection with him, it was most likely to be an ovulation, and some women have a very small discharge of blood around ovulation" (p. 88*).

³⁹ Jews: "R. Hiyya b. Abba said: A woman absorbs [semen] only after her menstrual period, indeed shortly after, particularly if it is to be a male child", Leviticus Rabbah XIV, 5. See D. Biale, *Eros and the Jews* (1992) 251 note 141. Greeks: Hippocrates: L. Dean-Jones, *Women's bodies in classical Greek science* (1994) 170 f.; Aristotle, *Gen. Animalium*, I 19, end (727 b), II 4 (739 B); *Hist. Animalium*, VII 2 (582 B); Oribasius, *Coll. Medicinae* XXII, 14 (= CMG VI 2, 2, p. 102). Arabs: W. Robertson Smith, *Kinship and marriage in early Arabia* (1885) 275 f., Note 2, p. 110.

⁴⁰ Hippocrates, *Morb. Mul.* I, cap. 24, 2; see H. Grensemann, *Hippokratische Gynäkologie* (1982) 114 f.; B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* I (1963) 37, 50, citaten 138, 170.

⁴¹ The commentary by Hugo Grotius was: *hoc ideo additum ne mirareremur illico eam concepisse.*

⁴² Recently, it has been suggested that the prescriptions in Leviticus 15 declare the woman unclean for another week; one arrives at this conclusion by assuming that verse 28 takes up verse 19: "(19) When a woman has a discharge of blood which is her regular discharge from her body, she shall be in her impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening. (28) But if she is cleansed of her discharge, she shall count for herself seven days, and after that she shall be clean". This is the interpretation by M. Krause, "II Sam 11:4 und das Konzeptionsoptimum", *ZAW* 95 (1983) 434–437.

⁴³ D. Biale, *Eros and the Jews* (1992) 55, with 250 note 139; 241 note 62. In the case of Bathsheba, Biale hesitates.

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is stored in the ovaries which were considered to be the *testes mulieris*.⁴⁴ Those Bible translators had the same in mind when they rendered a difficult passage in the letter to the Hebrews as follows: "By faith also Sarah herself has received the strength to *give seed* . . ." (Hebr. 11:11). The Greek expression is here *katabolē tou spérmatos*, lit. "deposition of seed". It was Sarah who literally did this depositing. The commentary given with the "Statenvertaling" explained that Sarah "has given her own seed, as happens in every physical conception". It is remarkable that this insight has been lost over the centuries, only a few have thought of the possibility of "female seed" in this verse. Perhaps due to its veiled terminology.⁴⁵

The Bible translators of 1637 based their translations on a two thousand years old scientific insight. Anybody who has studied the Greek gynaecological texts will soon come across the general idea of the female seed; it is also common knowledge in the Talmud and later.⁴⁶

According to Jewish scholarship the child engendered by the female seed is male. This is striking since one would expect a girl. Indeed, the Greeks and the Romans were of the opinion that the child likens to the parent who happens to contribute the most powerful seed. To quote Lucretius: "And when at the mingling of the seed the female has happened to conquer the force of the male with sudden force and seize upon it, then children are made like their mothers by the mother's seed, as they are like their fathers by the father's seed" (IV 1208–1212). The gender of the child is also determined by the prevailing seed (*epikráteia*).⁴⁷ The deviating Jewish opinion derives from Leviticus 12:2, "If a woman gives seed and bears a male child . . .". Female seed engenders a boy. Clearly, the Word of God forced the Rabbis to reverse this accepted rule; the Talmud discusses this point (Niddah 31a, end).⁴⁸

It is possible that the Babylonians, too, had some idea about female seed. On a few occasions the word *rihūtu* "semen" is said of women.⁴⁹ Furthermore, a woman is "to beget" (*reḥū*) a male or female child. This is the normal terminology used for the male contribution to procreation. We will study the passage in its context, that of the Diagnostic Handbook, in Chapter VIII, p. 200. It is attested in Tablet 36, lines 100–102.

⁴⁴ G.A. Lindeboom, *Reinier de Graaf. Leven en werken* (1973) 94 ff.

⁴⁵ H.J. Cadbury (1924), C. Spicq (1953) and, independently, this author, in the Dutch edition of this book (1983) (p. 5). Recently, P.W. van der Horst has taken all this up in his article "Sarah's seminal emission. Hebrews 11:11 in the light of ancient embryology", in: D.L. Balch, E. Ferguson, W.A. Meeks, *Greeks, Romans, and Christians (Essays in honor of Abraham J. Malherbe)* (1990) 287–302. Reprinted in P.W. van der Horst, *Hellenism – Judaism – Christianity. Essays on their interaction* (1994) 203–223.

⁴⁶ B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus II* (1968) 125 ff. § 36; Feldman, *Marital relations* (1974) 135–140, "The meaning of Tazria"; G.E.R. Lloyd, "Alternative theories of the female seed", in his *Science, folklore and ideology* (1983) 86–93; D. Nickel, *Untersuchungen zur Embryologie Galens* (1989) 40–49; P. Manuli, "Il seme femminile", in: S. Campese, *Matre materia. Sociologia e biologia della donna greca* (1983) 189–192; the article by P.W. van der Horst.

⁴⁷ See also R.D. Brown, *Lucretius on love and sex* (1987) 320 f.

⁴⁸ See van der Horst, 300 ("the theory of cross-wise sex determination"); Fred Rosner, "Sex determination as described in the Talmud", in his *Medicine in the Bible and the Talmud* (1977) 173–178; Ron Barkai, *Les infortunes de Dinah* (1991) 62 f.; R. Fontaine, "The facts of life. The nature of the female contribution to generation according to Judah ha-Cohen's *Midrash ha-Hokhma* and contemporary texts", *Medizinhistorisches Journal* 29 (1994) 333–362.

⁴⁹ BAM 205:40'; R.D. Biggs, TCS II (1967) 68a; R. Labat, BiOr 25 (1968) 357a. The difficult word *su-’u-su* is now explained as "bed" (*suhsu*) by CAD S 349.

Embryology

Physical relationship between persons can be expressed by the Babylonian expression “flesh and blood”. In letters one can find the exclamation “I am no stranger; I am your flesh and blood”.⁵⁰ In the Patriarchal narratives of the Bible, family relationship is expressed as follows: “Surely you are my bone and my flesh!” (Genesis 29:14). In the Mari letters, we read this phrase with the same implication: “The sons of Ekallātum are your brothers; they are your flesh and race (?)”. The literal meaning of word translated as “race” (*lipištu*) is far from clear; it seems to be a membranous substance in the body which can also mean “offspring”.⁵¹ Perhaps we can relate the Akkadian word *lipištu* with Sumerian *libiš* which means “heart, inside”. This reminds me of “the loins” from which humans originate, a phrase that commonly occurs in the Old Testament (*me‘im*).⁵² Does *libiš* / *lipištu* mean “loins”, as the site of the male generative fluids?

The child is developing in the womb, Akkadian *rēmu*, Hebrew *rēhēm*. Both words can also have the metaphorical meaning “compassion, commiseration”. Thus in the New Testament Greek *splánchna* literally means “intestines”.⁵³ In Hebrew the word “belly” often is used for the womb. The *earth* can also be seen as the womb to which we all return.⁵⁴ Psalm 139:15 said, “Intricately I was wrought in the depths of the earth”, and Job complained his fate in these words, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return” (Job 1:21). Mishnaic and Talmudic literature speaks of the uterus with child as “the opened grave (*qēbēr*)”. The unborn child “is living in darkness”, Babylonian incantations say, and the “House of Darkness” will be our ultimate destination. The unborn demon *kūbu* lives in the underworld, as we will see in the section on Miscarriage. The earth has a “womb” which, according to the Atra-hasīs myth, is the source of fertility. When it rebels (*nabalkutu*), vegetation disappears.

Now we turn to the development of the seed in the womb. According to a Sumerian incantation, the semen is clotting while the woman bites and eats the water plant “Sweet Herb” (*ú.làl*):

“He has poured the true seed of humanity in her innards; the seed that has been poured into the innards, is clotting (*ka.kešda*, gloss *ki-ši*), is giving a child (?) to the man, it made the woman put her teeth in the Sweet Herb. She sated herself with it, she put her teeth in the Sweet Herb, her favourite food; she sated herself with it”.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ K. van Lerberghe, MHET I (1991) 116 ad 29. – In the Bible, “flesh and blood” has another connotation: it describes the fragility of a human being, in contrast to God; see Sirach 14:18, or Matthew 16:17, with the commentaries.

⁵¹ J.-M. Durand, MARI 6 (1990) 282-3; P. Marello, *Florilegium Marianum* (Mélanges M. Fleury) (1992) 119, note h; W. von Soden, OLZ 72 (1977) 29.

⁵² There is one difficult passage where we find this word followed by “seed” and “extract”; Å.W. Sjöberg, JCS 25 (1973) 110, “Der Vater und sein missratener Sohn”, 52, *libiš numun zé*. Not translated by Sjöberg, or Römer, TUAT III/1 (1990) 81. B. Alster, RA 69 (1975) 83: “(after) you have been left without issue”; Th. Jacobsen, *Raphael Kutscher Memorial Volume* (1993) 71 f., note: “Oh heart of (such) bitter issue!”

⁵³ Unusual words for “womb” are Akkadian *gerbītu* and *rubšu* (cf. Syriac *marb’ā*), or the literary words *šassūru* (Sumerian *šā.tūr*), *agarinnu* (Sumerian *agarin*).

⁵⁴ M. Krebernik, RIA VIII/7-8 (1997) 516 § 7.12 (the mother goddess Mami is an underworld deity).

⁵⁵ Two versions: UM 29-15-367:3-8 (= 20-24), published by J. van Dijk, Or NS 44 (1975) 53-62, with Römer, TUAT II/2 (1987) 204-7; VAT 8381:3-6 (with glosses), published by van Dijk, VAS 17 33, with Or NS 44 (1975) 62-65, cf. Å.W. Sjöberg, JCS 25 (1973) 139 n. 17.

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The plant “Sweet Herb” is well known from Sumerian literary texts: it is a water plant of which a fish (*suhūr*) is particularly fond; he eats it.⁵⁶ Thus, the foetus is in his mother’s belly like a fish and needs food and this is why she craves the Sweet Herb.⁵⁷ Later on, we will see that incantations facilitating birth visualize the foetus as a boat. That is no more than a metaphor. If our interpretation of the passage just translated is correct, the foetus really has the properties of a fish: he needs fish food. Further evidence that the foetus was visualized as a fish (*dadum*) derives from an Akkadian incantation translated below. One name of the mother goddess is Nin-zizna, “Lady of the Brood”; “brood” is specifically fish roe (*binītu*).⁵⁸

Another passage suggests that the child was coiled up (*kanānu*) like a snake but the comparison with a snake is more apt when the child is born; an incantation says “Let him come forth like a snake, let him slither like a serpent”.⁵⁹

The normal word for “embryo” is in Akkadian *ša libbiša*, literally “that of her belly”. Similar expressions exist in Sumerian and Hittite. Unique is the word “fruit”, attested in an Assyrian elegy (Chapter V). The word “baby” (*šerru*) is also used. More technical expressions are used for beings that are miscarried or still-born; they will be studied in the section on miscarriage.

Greek medical writers distinguish four stages in the development of the fruit: *gonè* (semen) – *kúèma* (flesh and blood; days 7–40) – *émbruon* (articulation of body parts) – *paidíon* (“child”: a moving human being).⁶⁰ As we will see later, boys are supposed to be quicker in developing than girls. Modern embryology distinguishes three periods: pre-embryonic (two weeks), embryonic (six weeks of organogenesis; weeks 3–8), foetal (thirty weeks; grows in size and its basic pattern of organ systems matures; weeks 9–38). Birth takes place in the 38th week of development (40 weeks from the last menstrual period). By the end of the seventh week the embryo is almost 2 cm long and has a more humanoid appearance with distinct fingers present. Rudimentary genitalia are present but the sex of the embryo is not yet distinguishable anatomically.⁶¹

Babylonian incantations, in fact literary texts, name the unborn child “sitting in darkness” (*āšib ekleti*); when born, it “sees the light of the sun”.⁶² A beautiful Old Babylonian incantation addresses the child as follows.⁶³

⁵⁶ A. Falkenstein, ZA 56 (1964) 62 f.; G. Gragg, AfO 24 (1973) 69b.

⁵⁷ Parenthetically, the well-known cravings of the pregnant (Greek *kíssa*, Latin *pica*) are hardly known in Babylonian and Jewish literature; cf. Yoma 82b, beginning. Cf. D. Gourevitch, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* Teil II, Band 37/3 (1996) 2110–12 (“Le pica”).

⁵⁸ CT 24 12:19 and 25:84 (AN = Anum II 22); cf. Th. Jacobsen, *The treasures of darkness* (1976) 107 (“Lady of the embryo”). For fish roe, see B. Landsberger, MSL 8/2 (1962) 105; Sh. Sanati-Müller, *Baghd. Mitt.* 20 (1989) 238 f.

⁵⁹ BAM 3 248 III 44 with W.G. Lambert, JNES 33 (1974) 294; cf. Lambert, 274, line 4 (B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* [1993] 554). The passage on the coiled snake, discussed by Lambert, is CT 16 23:333, cf. CAD § 148a (“corrupt”).

⁶⁰ E. Nardi, *Procurato aborto nel mondo greco-romano* (1971) 95 ff. Compare the distinctions made by Galen, in B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* III (1975) 246, 253, 274, citaten 818, 852, 935.

⁶¹ Based on the contribution by P.R. Braude and Martin H. Johnson to G.R. Dunstan, *The human embryo. Aristotle and the Arabic and European traditions* (1990) 208–227.

⁶² Examples are BAM 3 248 II 56, KAR 114:1–2, LKA 9 rev. III 16; see now Farber, *Schlaf* . . . 34–6, 98, 110, 161–4; Foster, *Muses* 137, 896.

⁶³ J. van Dijk, Or NS 42 (1973) 503 YBC 4603 (= YOS 11 86). Our translation follows Foster, *Muses* 136, with a few modifications.

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In the waters of intercourse, the bone was created;
in the flesh of muscles, the baby (*lillidum*) was created.
In the ocean waters, fearsome, raging,
in the far-off waters of the sea:
where the little one (*sehrum*) is – his arms are bound!
inside which the eye of the sun does not bring light.
Asalluhi, the son of Enki, saw him.
He loosed his tight-bound bonds,
he made him a path, he opened him a way:
‘Opened are the paths for you, the ways are . . . for you.
The . . . is sitting for you,
she who creates . . ., she who creates us all.
She has spoken to the doorbolt: You are released’.
Removed are the locks, the doors are thrown aside.
Let him strike [. . .]; like a *dadum*, bring yourself out!

We see here the mythical picture of the child moving over a dark ocean; other incantations speak of a ship going from the “quay of death” to the “quay of life”. Later, in our full discussion of incantations, we will say more on this. It is possible that an Ugaritic text, too, describes the foetus as floating in the amniotic ocean.⁶⁴ In our text, Asalluhi, the god of magic, steps in to help; he promises the assistance of a woman who is to “sit” by the child’s side. This woman must be the mother goddess, acting as a midwife. Likewise, in the Atra-hasis myth she was “sitting” (*wašbat*) with the mother.

The last three lines are difficult. The word *dadum* has two meanings, “darling” and “(a fish)”. We prefer the fish, for the reasons given above.

Not much is known of how the ancient Mesopotamians understood the growth of the child. Zimri-Lim, king of Mari, addressed his subjects as follows: “A womb (*šassūrum*) has created you; a mother has borne me – just like you”.⁶⁵ We will see that Psalm 139 says that God “weaves” the baby in its mother’s womb. Now, in the Babylonian myth on the creation of the world and man, Marduk says “Let me knot (*kasāru*) blood, let me bring about bones, let me set up a human being – ‘man’ be its name” (*En. El.* VI 5–6). Many scholars take the verb *kasāru* to mean “to coagulate” (or “to organize”). This proposal is too general. It appears attractive at first because of the reference to blood. However, with this meaning (the blood itself would coagulate) the verb should be intransitive. Moreover, what is the purpose of coagulated blood? Another passage in this myth shows that “blood” can be used here for “blood vessels” (“they sliced open his blood”, VI 32) and this gives us the solution: “Arteries I will knot and bring bones into being”.⁶⁶ The blood vessels are seen as a network knitted by the god.

⁶⁴ W. Watson, U.-F. 9 (1977) 280 f., on Šahar and Šalim, called “the splitters of the sea” (‘*gzrym*), or “sons of the sea” (*bn ym*) (SS 23, 58 f.).

⁶⁵ “L’Epopee de Zimri-Lim”, 75 f., cited in *Florilegium Marianum* (Mélanges M. Fleury) (1992) 119 note 3, *ša-as-sú-ru-um ib-ni-ku-nu-tí* (76) *um-mu-um ki-ma ku-nu-ti-ma ul-da-an-ni*.

⁶⁶ So Th. Jacobsen, *The treasures of darkness* (1976) 180. Also R. Labat, *Les religions du Proche-Orient asiatique* (1970) 59: “Je veux faire un réseau de sang, former une ossature”. We reject the opinion that the coagulated blood results in flesh; thus J. Bottéro, *Mythes et rites de Babylone* (1985) 139; J.-M. Durand, MARI 7 (1993) 52.

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The little that actually is known about the growth of the embryo is found in the middle of a mathematical text of the Seleucid period.⁶⁷ This context implies that we have here an example of abstract speculation but even then, its ideas are interesting enough. The measures used are the “barleycorn” (2,7 mm), “finger” (5 barleycorns; 1,66 cm),⁶⁸ “cubit” (30 fingers; 50 cm). The first lines run as follows. “The child, on the day that it is formed (*banū*) in the belly of its mother, has grown half a barleycorn. On the second day, it is has grown one barleycorn. On the third day it has grown one and a half barleycorn”. The text goes on with this, assigning to the child one-half barleycorn of increase per day; that is to say, 1,4 mm. After the tenth day, with 5 barleycorns, the text jumps to one month of 30 days; the child is now three “fingers” high, 5 cm. Then follows the last line: “In the tenth month it has grown one cubit high” (50 cm).

It was common belief in Antiquity that boys are on the right side in the womb, and girls on the left. In general, the right was associated with male and the left with female. The same obtains for Babylonian beliefs. There are some indications in the Diagnostic Handbook, chapter 36, that this was also true for the position of the child in the womb; we will study these cases in the section “A boy or a girl?” (p. 207).

In the Old Testament, the foetus is named “fruit”, or “fruit of the belly” (*p̄rī* or *p̄rī bētēn*). The Talmud uses the words *ubbār* or *šelīl* for foetus. There are a few famous passages in the Bible from which we can glean ideas about the growth of the child in its mother.

Job exclaims: “Remember that thou hast made me of clay; and wilt thou turn me to dust again? Didst thou not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? (*w̄kagḡ binnā taqpī ēnī*) Thou didst clothe me with skin and flesh, and knit (*skk*) me together with bones and sinews (*gīdīm*)” (Job 10:9–11). Perhaps behind this simile lurks the idea that the male seed acts like the rennet which makes the milk curdle: it is the clotting agent.⁶⁹ This is how Leviticus Rabbah sees the conception: “A woman’s womb is full of blood, some of which goes out by way of her menstrual flow, and by the favour of the Holy One, blessed be He, a drop of white matter goes and falls into it and immediately the foetus begins to form. It may be compared to milk in a basin; if one puts rennet (*mesō*) into it, it congeals and becomes consistent, if not, it continues to ‘tremble’” (XIV, 9). This indeed is how Aristotle explained the process of conception, within his theory of the female seed: “The material secreted by the female in the uterus has been fixed by the semen of the male: this acts in the same way as rennet (*puetía*) acts upon milk, for rennet is a kind of milk containing vital heat, which brings into one mass and fixes the similar material . . .” (*De Generatione Animalium* II, 4 739B). Latin authors like to use the word “coagulate”⁷⁰ and Pliny speaks in fact of *coagulum* in the meaning “rennet” in his remark that “the semen from the males, acting like rennet,

⁶⁷ SpbTU IV 173 II 2–9; as explained by H. Hunger, “Wachstum eines Kindes vor der Geburt”, NABU 1994/34. Later, he discovered a similar passage in the contemporaneous text SpbTU II 43:13–17; Hunger, NABU 1996/39. It also reckons with ten months. Summarized by F. Joannès, KTEMA 22 (1997) 120.

⁶⁸ It is a problem that normally one “finger” consists of six barleycorns; see Hunger. cf. M.A. Powell, RIA VII/7–8 (1990) 458–461.

⁶⁹ S. Kottek, *Journal of the History of Biology* 14 (1981) 301.

⁷⁰ J.H. Waszink, *Q.S. Florentis Tertulliani De Anima*, edited with introduction and commentary (1947) 343 (*coagulari*). The comparison with cheese and rennet is explicit in Tertullianus, *De carne Christi* XIX, 1, 4.

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collects this substance within it, which thereupon immediately is inspired with life and endowed with body" (VII, 15, 66).

The image of the embryo curdling like cheese is found in a few other texts. In the Wisdom of Solomon the word "curdle" (Greek *pègnumi*) is used again: "curdled in blood from / by the seed of a man" (Sap. 7:2). Mani, founder of the Manichaean movement, tells in his autobiography with disgust how man is fashioned: "through foulness it (the body) was made into cheese (*turōthè*) and, built, came into existence".⁷¹ There is a village in the Pyrenees where the image of the embryo as cheese is still alive in people's thought and language.⁷²

Most famous is this passage in the Book of Psalms: "For thou didst form my inward parts (*kiljāh*), thou didst knit (*skk*) me together in my mother's womb (*bètèn*). I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are thy works! Thou knowest me right well; my frame (*‘èṣèm*) was not hidden from thee, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought (*rqm*) in the depths of the earth. Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance (*golèm*); in thy book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them" (Psalm 139:13–16).

This translation in the Revised Standard Version is a little free. Hebrew *kiljōt*, rendered as "inward parts", specifically means "the reins". For "womb" stands the word "belly". "Frame" is literally "bone(s)" in Hebrew. "Intricately wrought" is literally "weaved / stitched in variegated colours" (*m^{er}uqqām*). The Mishnah uses this word when discussing the miscarriage called "sac" (*s^{er}fīr*, German "Eiblase"): in its first stage it is full of water or coloured materials; when more developed, it is *m^{er}uqqām* (Niddah III 3). One can recognise a human being in it. That the child is being wrought "in the depths of the earth" is a surprising metaphor which gives God's creation a cosmic dimension.⁷³ We are reminded of the earth as the mother in which the seed has been sown. The word "unformed substance" (*golèm*) is attested only here; it is probably to be derived from a root of a verb once meaning "to fold up (a garment)" (2 Kings 2:8). Does the Psalmist think of a foetus as "folded up"? The Talmud compares the child with "folded writing tablets" (see below).

This concept "Golem" has a long and complicated history in Jewish mysticism; in the end, it came to be considered an artificial human being. The scholar who assigned the original meaning "unformed substance", that now has entered the new English Bible, was Gershom Scholem. In a recent book, it has been shown that its meaning in Midrashic literature is quite different. The passage in the Psalm is taken to refer to the creation of Adam on New Year's Day: "In the first hour, he (Adam) ascended in the thought (of God). In the second (hour) He discussed (the creation of man) with the ministering angels. In the third, He collected his dust. In the fourth, He kneaded (*gbl*) him. In the

⁷¹ L. Koenen, C. Römer, *Der Kölner Mani-Kodex* (1988) 58 (85.9–12). Latest discussion of this passage: B. Visotzky, ZPE 52 (1983) 300.

⁷² S. Ott, "Aristotle among the Basques: the 'cheese analogy' of conception", *Man* N.S. 14 (1979) 699–711, writing on the French Basque village Sainte-Engrâce. Her starting point is an anticonception plant recorded in chapters X and XXVI of the famous book by E. le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (1975) 248 f., 580 f. The herb "is the one the cowherds hang over a cauldron of milk in which they have put some rennet, to stop the milk from curdling so long as the herb is over the cauldron". What cow's milk and man's semen have in common is that they curdle and there is a herb to prevent both from solidifying. In Ott's formula: rennet – milk – cheese = the father's semen – the mother's red blood – the infant (p. 704, 707).

⁷³ F.M.Th. de Liagre Böhl, H.A. Brongers, *Persica* 7 (1975–78) 99 f.; G. Pettinato, *Das altorientalische Menschenbild* (1971) 61 f.; J. van Dijk, *Or NS* 42 (1973) 506 ("sacramentalité").

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fifth, He formed (*rqm*) him. In the sixth, He made him a Golem ('āsa'ō *golēm*). In the seventh, He blew in him his soul. In the eighth, He put him in the Garden of Eden". This and other passages show that the *golēm* is not an amorphous lump but a fully structured creation, lifeless and waiting for the infusion of the soul.⁷⁴ The Aramaic translation of the word in the Psalm suggests that here, too, it means "body".⁷⁵

In the book Ecclesiastes, the word "bones" stands for the foetus: "As you do not know how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb (*bētēn*) of a woman with child (lit. *mēlē'āh*, "the full one"), so you do not know the work of God who makes everything" (Eccl. 11:5).⁷⁶

In the apocryphal book Wisdom of Solomon this king says "I too, indeed, am a mortal like all the rest, descended from the first-molded man, earthborn, and in my mother's womb (*koilía*) I was sculptured (*glúphō*) into flesh during a ten-month's space, curdled from / by the seed of a man and the pleasure that is joined with sleep" (Sap. 7:1–2). We have discussed the background of "curdled" and in a later chapter we will explain the "ten months".

The Gospel according to St. John speaks of the believers as those "who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of (a) man, but of God" (John 1:13). The text does not offer "blood" in the singular but, exceptionally, in the plural. It has been suggested that the crucial role of blood in both the Wisdom of Solomon and John reflects Aristotle's embryological theory: it is the menstrual blood. Among the Greeks, roughly three theories were adhered to; we summarize the description given by P.W. van der Horst.⁷⁷ (1) The encephalo-myelogenic doctrine. Male semen is identical with brains and spinal marrow. It unites with the female seed and the child comes into being. (2) The pangenesis doctrine. Male semen is formed from all parts of the body, as is the female seed. (3) The haematogenic doctrine of Aristotle. Male semen is coagulated blood and the woman feeds the embryo with her menstrual blood.

We turn now to the Talmud.⁷⁸

The Ancients wrestled with the problem where the embryo begins its development: the head, or the navel? According to the Talmud, it is the head.⁷⁹ The Sages distinguished between the shares of the three to whom the child owes his existence, as follows. "There are three partners in man, the Holy One, blessed be He, his father and his mother. His father supplies the semen of the white substance out of which are formed the child's bones, sinews, nails, the brain in his head and the white in his eye. His mother supplies the semen of the red substance out of which is formed his skin, flesh, hair, blood and the black of his eye. And the Holy One, blessed be He, gives him the spirit and the breath,

⁷⁴ Leviticus Rabbah XXIX, 1; with M. Idel, *Golem. Jewish magical and mystical traditions on the artificial anthropoid* (1990) 34–38.

⁷⁵ Idel, 296–305, Appendix B: "Golem: some semantic remarks". He does not speak of Biblical *glm* "to fold". Note that Wisdom was "knitted" (*nsk*) before the beginning of creation, Proverbs 8:23.

⁷⁶ Alternative translation of the first words: "As you do not know how the wind is, nor how the bones grow . . .".

⁷⁷ P.W. van der Horst, *Essays Abraham Malherbe* (see note 45) 290–295. Cf. M.D. Grmek, "Ideas on heredity in Greek and Roman Antiquity", *Physis* 28 (1991) 11–34.

⁷⁸ Samuel S. Kottek, "Embryology in Talmudic and Midrashic literature", *Journal of the History of Biology* 14 (1981) 299–315.

⁷⁹ S. Kottek, *Journal of the History of Biology* 14 (1981) 308; S.T. Newmyer, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* Teil II, Band 37/3 (1996) 2906.

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beauty of features, eyesight, the power of hearing and the ability to speak and to walk, understanding and discernment. When his time to depart from the world approaches the Holy One, blessed be He, takes away his share and leaves the shares of his father and his mother with them. R. Papa observed: It is this that people have in mind when they say, 'Shake off the salt (= soul) and cast the flesh to the dog' " (Niddah 31a).⁸⁰

Elsewhere in the Talmud we encounter some vivid descriptions of the unborn child. R. Eleazar stated: "What does an embryo resemble when it is in its mother's bowels? A nut floating in a bowl of water. Should someone put his finger upon it, it would sink on the one side or on the other" (Niddah 31a). Rabbi Simlai said: "Folded writing tablets (*pinqes*, Greek *pínax*). Its hands rest on its two temples respectively, its two elbows on its two legs and its two heels against its buttocks. Its head lies between its knees, its mouth is closed and its navel is open, and it eats what its mother eats and drinks what its mother drinks, but produces no excrements because otherwise it might kill its mother. As soon, however, as it sees the light the closed organ (= the mouth) opens and the open one (= the navel) closes, for if that had not happened the embryo could not live even one single hour". God teaches the foetus the whole of the Torah but as soon as it comes into the world, an angel arrives and slaps it on the mouth so as to forget everything (Niddah 30b).⁸¹

For one Jewish sage, to be reminded of one's first physical origin is a reason for humility. We read in the Mishnah tractate Aboth: "Consider three things and thou wilt not fall into the hands of transgression. Know whence thou art come and whither thou art going and before whom thou art about to give account and reckoning. Whence thou art come – from a putrid drop (*tippā s'ruhā*). And whither thou art going – to the place of dust, worm, and maggot (*rimmā w'tolē'ā*). And before whom thou art about to give account and reckoning – before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is He" (III 1). It is not necessary to look for a scientific background of the remark on the putrid drop. Any wise man could have thought of this.⁸² The Coran displays a similar humility in telling man that he comes "from vile water" (*min mā'in mahinīn*) (32:8 and 77:20). Similarly, Pope Innocentius III (1160–1216) liked it to point out that we are generated from "the dirtiest seed" (*de spurcissimo spermate*) but more important to him was that this happens "in itching of the flesh" (*in pruritu carnis*).⁸³ The Babylonians, heathens as they were, did not have any misgivings about their watery origins.

⁸⁰ Rudolf Meyer, *Hellenistisches in der rabbinischen Anthropologie* (= BWANT, 4. Folge, Heft 22) (1937) 17. Cf. E.E. Urbach, *The Sages. Their concepts and beliefs* (1975) 218. Similarly, the Basques believe that the man contributes "white blood", the woman "red blood" (S. Ott, *Man NS* 14 [1979] 704, 707). "Galen thought that blood vessels, nerves, tendons, bones, and cartilage derived from the male seed, while the uterine membranes originated from the female. As for the muscles, liver, and other viscera, they were generated directly from the blood"; S. Kottek, *Journal of the History of Biology* 14 (1981) 302, referring to Galen, ed. Kühn, IV, 188 ff. B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* IV (1982) 454 f.

⁸¹ Cf. Urbach, *The Sages* (1975) 246–8, who denies any dependence of Plato's myth of *anamnēsis*. See also M. Idel, *Golem* (1990) 36.

⁸² Meyer, *Hellenistisches in der rabbinischen Anthropologie* (1937) 33–39; Urbach, *The Sages* (1975) 224–6.

⁸³ J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia, Series Latina* 217 (1890) columns 702–6; 1058–9.

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The origin of man is the topic of 29 verses in the Coran. We can observe in them a certain development.⁸⁴ The oldest verses, of the first Meccan period, say that man is created “out of a drop (*nutfa*)”, “out of clots (*‘alaq*)”, “out of water” (80, 18; 96, 1; 86,5). Later, clay (*tīn* and *salsāl*) and a drop are given as the basic elements.⁸⁵ Gradually, in response to disbelievers, the “drop” and the “clay” were united into one coherent vision; we cite two examples: “Men! If you are in doubt about the Resurrection, (remember that) We have created you out of dust (*turāb*), then out of a drop, then out of a blood clot (*‘alaq*), then out of a fleshy cud (*mudgā*), proportioned and disproportioned, that We may make it clear for you. And We make to rest in wombs what We wish, up to an appointed term; then We will bring you forth as a baby; then (We conserve you) that you may reach your prime” (22, 5). “We created man out of an extract (*sulāla*) from clay. Then We put him as a drop in a secure resting place. Then We moulded the drop into a blood clot. Next We moulded the blood clot into a fleshy cud; then We moulded the fleshy cud into bones; then We clothed the bones with flesh; then We produced him – another creation. So blessed be God, the best of creators” (23, 12–14).

The Muslim Tradition (*hadīth*) allots to each of these stages forty days: drop (*nutfa*), blood clot (*‘alaq*), flesh cud (*mudgā*). The words “Then we produced him – a second creation”, means that God gives man a soul after these 120 days.⁸⁶ In popular Egyptian thought: “The phase of development is said to differ from the earlier phase which spans the period from conception through the third month. During this earlier phase, ‘the piece (*nutfa*) is just a piece of blood’. By the third month of pregnancy, midwives describe differential development of male and female embryos”.⁸⁷

Basic to all these descriptions of the prenatal development of man – whether Jewish or Muslim – is that God is the Creator steering the process in every stage. To put it in the words of a mother in the Book of the Maccabees, reassuring her sons about the reality of a future Resurrection: “I do not know how you came to be in my womb (*koilia*). It was not I who gave you spirit (*pneūma*) and life (*zōē*), nor did I determine the order (*diarruthmīzō*) of the elements (*stoicheiōsis*) of each of you. Surely, then, the Creator of the Universe, Who shaped man’s coming into being and fathomed the fashioning of everything, with mercy will restore spirit and life to you” (2 Macc. 7:22–3). Indeed, God’s ability to make man born is the guarantee that He equally has the power to resurrect him; this was also one point in the Coran texts studied above: “On that day, when We shall roll up the heaven like the rolling up of the books by a recorder, as We originated the first creation, so will We restore it” (21, 104).⁸⁸

⁸⁴ We follow Th.J. O’Shaughnessy, *Creation and the teaching of the Qur’ān* (1985), 10–29, Chapter II, “Man’s creation from clay and from seed”. – See also Th. Lohmann, “Sure 96 und die Berufung Muhammads”, MIO 14 (1968) 249–302, spec. 265–8; K. Opitz, *Die Medizin im Koran* (1906) 12. The commentary by Al-Razi (1149–1209) on these verses betrays influence of Hippocrates; see S. Belguedj, “La Collection hippocratique et l’embryologie coranique”, in *La Collection hippocratique et son rôle dans l’histoire de la médecine*, Colloque de Strasbourg (1975) 321–333.

⁸⁵ O’Shaughnessy, 17–9. One of those passages (38, 71–72) betrays strong influences from Syrian Christians in its wording.

⁸⁶ B. Musallam, “The human embryo in Arabic scientific and religious thought”, in: G.R. Dunstan, *The human embryo* (1990) 32–46, esp. 38–40. Cf. U. Weisser, *Zeugung, Vererbung und pränatale Entwicklung in der Medizin des arabisch-islamischen Mittelalters* (1993) 356.

⁸⁷ S. Morsy, “Childbirth in an Egyptian village”, in: M. Artschwager Kay, *Anthropology of Human Birth* (1982) 154.

⁸⁸ Cf. O’Shaughnessy, 70–89 (“Resurrection as a new creation”). Also L.E. Goodman in G.R. Dunstan, *The human embryo* (1990) 83 f.

Phasing and duration of a pregnancy

The first forty days

According to an influential and generally accepted ancient theory, the embryo reached a new stage in its development after the fortieth day. Girls, however, took a longer time to fully develop. We give a long quotation from Aristotle:⁸⁹

"In the case of male children the first movement usually occurs on the right-hand side of the womb and about the fortieth day, but if the child be a female then on the left-hand side and about the ninetieth day. However, we must by no means assume this to be an accurate statement of fact, for there are many cases in which the movement is manifested on the right-hand side though a female child be coming, and on the left-hand side though the infant be a male. (...) About this period the embryo begins to resolve into distinct parts, it having hitherto consisted of a fleshlike substance without distinction of parts.

What is called effluxion is a destruction of the embryo within the first week, while abortion occurs up to the fortieth day; and the greater number of such embryos as perish do so within the space of these forty days.

In the case of a male embryo aborted at the fortieth day, if it be placed in cold water it holds together in a sort of membrane, but if placed in any other fluid it dissolves and disappears. If the membrane be pulled to bits the embryo is revealed, as big as one of the large kind of ants; and all the limbs are plain to see, including the penis, and the eyes also, which as in other animals are of great size. But the female embryo, if it suffer abortion during the first three months, is as a rule found to be undifferentiated; if however it reaches the fourth month it becomes to be subdivided and quickly attains further differentiation. In short, while within the womb, the female infant accomplishes the whole development of its parts more slowly than the male, and more frequently than the man-child takes ten months to come to perfection. But after birth, the females pass more quickly than the males through youth and maturity and age".

What Aristotle writes here can be traced back to the Pre-Socratic philosophers. It is also proposed by Hippocrates.⁹⁰ The concept of the forty days may ultimately be older and derive from folk-medicine.⁹¹ Speculations working with the number "seven" led to figures like 42 or 49.⁹² The great philosopher's prejudice about gender differences occurs elsewhere. Further on, he assures us that "as a general rule women who are pregnant of a male child escape comparatively easily and retain a comparatively healthy look, but it is otherwise with those whose infant is a female; for these latter look as a rule paler and suffer more pain (...)" This theory about the difference between boys and girls was

⁸⁹ *Hist. Anim.* VII, 3 (583B); transl. Jonathan Barnes.

⁹⁰ Forty days: B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* III (1975) 251–257; I. Jakobovits, *Jewish Medical Ethics* (1959) 174. Forty days, slower development of the female: U. Weisser, *Zeugung* ..., 322–332. For some graphs, see Weisser, 339 ff., S. Kottek, *Journal of the History of Biology* 14 (1981) 306 f.

⁹¹ I.M. Lonie, *The Hippocratic Treatises "On Generation", "On the Nature of the Child", "Diseases IV"* (1981) 193.

⁹² L. Bourgey, *Observation et expérience chez les médecins de la Collection Hippocratique* (1953) 133 ff.

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widely subscribed to.⁹³ It is still current in rural Egypt.⁹⁴

When we read in the Talmud the following suggestions about prayers to be uttered during pregnancy, we realise that the Jews shared the convictions of their gentile neighbours: "Within the first three days a man should pray that the seed should not putrify; from the third to the fortieth day he should pray that the child should be a male; from the fortieth day to three months he should pray that it should not be a *sandal*;⁹⁵ from three months to six months he should pray that it should not be still-born; from six months to nine months he should pray for a safe delivery" (Berakoth 60a).

During the first forty days "the semen is only a mere fluid" (lit. water), a Rabbi once said, implying that the woman is hardly pregnant.⁹⁶ The writers have known that there was more than water and we therefor assume that the Talmud is consciously exaggerating in order to make this point. According to the Greeks the stage of a watery "semen" (*gonè*) lasted only the first seven days. Another tradition says that, just as the Torah was given in forty days, so the soul is formed in forty days. So "whosoever keeps the Torah, his soul is kept". This means that the soul is implanted in the embryo forty days after conception (Menahoth 99b). Days 40-41 are a turning point.⁹⁷ The Mishnah tractate Niddah, concerning menstruant women, devotes a chapter to various miscarriages and the ensuing gradations of uncleanness. We cannot summarize its contents but wish to single out the problem of the so-called "sac" (*sēfir*) (III 3): "If the abortion is a sac filled with water or filled with blood or filled with variegated matter (*gēnīnīm*), she need not take thought for it as for (human) young. But if its (human) parts were fashioned (*mēruqqām*), she must continue (unclean the numbers of days prescribed) both for a male and for a female". The "sac" filled with water, etc., reminds us of an abortion described by Hippocrates. "It was as though someone had removed the shell from a raw egg, so that the fluid inside showed through the inner membrane (etc.)". This description remained a famous classic in Greek medical literature for centuries and elicited much discussion.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, it is improbable that the authors of the Mishnah knew of it. The Mishnah refers to the more developed "sac" as "fashioned", a clear reference to

⁹³ E. Nardi, *Procurato aborto nel mondo greco-romano* (1971) 101 ff. – Professor Luc van Rompay (Leiden) draws my attention to another example, in a Bible commentary in Syriac: Moses was on the mountain, in the cloud, forty days and forty nights (Exodus 24:18); the commentary says: "Il pénètre dans la nuée (et y resta d'abord) six jours, tel un embryon à l'intérieur du sein (...). Et il demeura là pendant quarante (jours), jour et nuit; c'était la représentation du séjour d'Israël dans le désert, et du séjour du mâle inanimé dans le sein; mais parce que la femelle achève d'être formée dans un espace de quarante-vingt jours, (Moïse) retourna doubler les (quarante jours)"; C. van den Eynde, *Commentaire d'Iso² dad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament. II. Exode - Deutéronome* (= CSCO 179/ Scriptores Syri 81) (1958) 59 f.

⁹⁴ Soheir Morsy, "Childbirth in an Egyptian village", in: M. Artschwager Kay, *Anthropology of Human Birth* (1982) 154 f., 156 f. "At three months a boy is white and you can identify his limbs and his head and everything. But a girl, she is just a clot of blood. I see them when I go with women who have miscarriages". "The mother of a boy is said to be comfortable, his movement is near her heart. The mother of a girl, by contrast, is said to suffer from great discomfort".

⁹⁵ *Sandal*: a kind of abortion resembling a flat-shaped fish (*foetus compressus*); according to Yebamoth 12b the result of superfoetation.

⁹⁶ Yebamoth 69b, with J. David Bleich, *Judaism and healing. Halakhic perspectives* (1981) 97 f.

⁹⁷ D.M. Feldman, *Marital relations, birth control, and abortion in Jewish Law* (1968) 266 note 81, 271 note 20.

⁹⁸ Hipp., *On the nature of the Child* 13, 3; ed. I.M. Lonie (1981) 7; also B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus III* (1975) 245 cit. 809. Cf. comm. Lonie 158 ff. Hippocrates claims that this abortion was only six days old. This is impossible; see Lonie 160 f., and Helen King in: G.R. Dunstan, *The human embryo* (1990) 10 f., 18 note 5 (A. Hanson).

The First Forty Days

Psalm 139:15. The Rabbis of the Talmud attempted to explain this term “fashioned”:⁹⁹ – What is meant by a sac the limbs of which are fashioned? Abba Saul explained: A foetus which in its primary stage resembles a locust (?), and its two eyes are like two drippings of a fly. R. Hiyya taught: They are far removed from one another. Its two nostrils are like two drippings of a fly. R. Hiyya taught: They are near one to another. Its mouth is as narrow as a stretched hair; its membrum is of the size of a lentil and in case of a female (the organ) has the appearance of the longitudinal (slit) of a barley grain; but it has no shaped hands or feet (i.e., fingers and toes are not yet articulated).¹⁰⁰

The last section of this chapter in the tractate Niddah begins as follows (III 7): “If she suffered a miscarriage on the fortieth day, she need not take thought for it as for (human) young; if on the forty-first day, she must continue (unclean days prescribed) both for a male and for a female, and also for a menstruant”. This means that in the last case she has to act as if a male or female child were born. The Mishnah now adds the opinion of R. Ishmael who – in line with the Greek scholars – distinguished between boy and girl: “R. Ishmael says: If (she suffered a miscarriage) on the forty-first day, she must continue (unclean days prescribed) for a male and a menstruant; but if on the eighty-first day, she must continue (unclean days prescribed) both for a male and for a female, and for a menstruant, since a male is fully fashioned (*gmr*) after forty-one days, but a female only after eighty-one days”. The Mishnah then comments: “But the Sages say: The creation of a male and the creation of a female are alike: each (is fully fashioned) after forty-one days”.¹⁰¹

The Talmud tells us that R. Ishmael saw an analogy with the two periods of uncleanness after the birth of a boy (7+33 days) or a girl (14+66 days) as laid down in Leviticus 12:1–5. The Sages did not follow this analogy.¹⁰² We suppose that he picked up the basic idea from the Greeks. It is striking that we find a similar argument in the Hippocratic writing *On the Nature of the Child*, Chapter 18: “By now the foetus is formed. This stage is reached, for the female foetus, in 42 days at maximum, and for the male, in 30 days at maximum. This is the period for articulation in most cases, take or give a little. And the lochial discharge too after birth is usually completed within 42 days, if the child is a girl. (...) If the child is a boy, the discharge takes 30 days” (Etc.).¹⁰³

The Talmud continues with this objection: “Furthermore, they said to R. Ishmael, A story is told of Cleopatra the queen of Alexandria that when her handmaids were sentenced to death by royal decree they were subjected to a test and it was found that both (a male and a female embryo) were fully fashioned on the forty-first day”.

⁹⁹ Niddah 25a; cf. Tos. IV 10 with the comments by E. Schereschewsky in: *Rabbinische Texte: Die Tosefta. Toharot*, Band 6,2 (1965) 193–4.

¹⁰⁰ Maimonides takes this up: “At the beginning of the formation of a human being, the body resembles a lentil; the two eyes are like the two eyeballs of a fly, widely spaced; the two nostrils are like two eyeballs of a fly placed closely to one another; and the mouth is open like a fine hair. The foetus has no clear-cut hands or feet. After its form has become more clearly defined than this but before its sex can be determined . . . one takes a chip of wood with a smooth tip and passes it from the top downwards over the place of the genitals. If the chip gets caught, it is certain that the embryo is male. If the place of the genitals looks like a split barley corn, the embryo is female”, *Forbidden Intercourse* 10:3, after F. Rosner, *Medicine in the Mishneh Torah of Maimonides* (1984) 166.

¹⁰¹ A survey of R. Ishmael’s opinions in this matter can be found in G.G. Porton, *The traditions of Rabbi Ishmael. Part One, The non-exegetical materials* (1976) 213–218. Cf. S. Kottek, *Journal of the History of Biology* 14 (1981) 305 f.

¹⁰² Niddah 30b (beginning), cf. B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* III (1975) 252 cit. 839–842.

¹⁰³ See the edition by I.M. Lonie (1981) 9–11, with 192, comm.

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Whereupon the Rabbi retorts: “I bring you proof from the Torah and you bring proof from some fools!” (Niddah 30b). A discussion follows and the Rabbi has also a very similar story about the handmaids of “Cleopatra the Grecian queen”, and “it was found that a male embryo was fully fashioned on the forty-first day and a female embryo on the eighty-first day”. We find this story already in the Tosefta (IV 17). The Sages now give various reasons how this could have happened: stealthy intercourse with the handmaids – perhaps by the warden – had taken place forty days later and a girl was born. The reader of the Talmud is amused by both conflicting stories on Cleopatra and the ways the Sages respond. It is up to modern scholars to find out who was the first to tell *his* story.¹⁰⁴

It is interesting to note that in Alexandria dissection of human beings was practised in the third century B.C. It is possible that the test could have taken place, but it hardly could have occurred under Cleopatra’s reign.¹⁰⁵

The length of gestation is counted in months. An Egyptian text says that a child is born “after your months”, and the verb “to be / make pregnant” in Hittite literally means “to go through the months”.¹⁰⁶ We suggest with some hesitation that the Akkadian word *aruhtu* in the title of an incantation to facilitate childbirth relates to (*w*)*arhu* “month”; if this is the case, it means “she who is in her months”.¹⁰⁷

Seven months

The first chapter of the Gospel of Luke tells us how two expectant mothers (Elizabeth and Mary) met. The author takes care to note at what month of their pregnancies both women were. If we look at the time frame given in Jewish literature the reason for the author’s precision becomes clear. There, the nine months of pregnancy are divided in three phases of three months each.¹⁰⁸ A phase is referred to as a *t^o qūfā* “turn”: four times in a year the sun makes a turn. The Old Testament is still vague in this; so vague that modern translators have problems in rendering the word: “And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her; and in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel . . .” (1 Samuel 1:19–20). For “in due time”, the Hebrew text reads “and it happened at the turns of the days that” (*waj^hhī litqufōt hajjāmīm wa-*).¹⁰⁹ Are *three* “turns” meant? Perhaps it is *two*, if Samuel was a seven months child. It is clear that a first phase of three months is meant in Genesis 38:24,

¹⁰⁴ The older Tosefta has R. Ishmael’s story (IV 17). See also Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* III (1975) 255 cit. 875. We have seen that Rabbi Ishmael was open to Gentile scholarship, so his version of the story may be the original one.

¹⁰⁵ H. von Staden, *Herophilus. The art of medicine in early Alexandria* (1989).

¹⁰⁶ Egypt: H. Grapow, *Kranker, Krankheit und Arzt* (1956) 11, with note b. Hittite *armalh-*: G. Beckman, *Hittite Birth Rituals* (1983) 150; F. Starke, *Die keilschriftlich-luwischen Texte in Umschrift* (= StBoT 30) (1985) 204 note 4, “in den (Schwangerschafts-)Monaten sein”.

¹⁰⁷ The incantation title is *inim.inim.ma a-ru-ūh-tum*, VAS 17 33:28, with J. van Dijk, HSAO (1967) 238 note 20; Or NS 44 (1975) 63; CAD A/2 259a, sub *arhu* “fast”.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* III (1975) 273–6. – Note that, according to the Coran, God made us in the womb (*batn*) of our mother, “in threefold darkness” (39:6). Man was created by stages (*atwāran*, 71:13); see Th. J. O’Shaughnessy, *Creation and the teaching of the Qur’ān* (1985) 16.

¹⁰⁹ *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament* (= HAL) IV (1990) 1641–42: “zwei Möglichkeiten: a) um die Jahreswende, zu Beginn des neuen Jahres, b) an der Wende = am Ende der Tage der Schwangerschaft”. “Seven full years, eight turns of time (*nqpt* ‘d’ in Ugaritic shows that not a moment but a time-span is meant; KTU 1.23:66–7, cited in HAL IV 1604 b.

Seven Months

“About three months later Judah was told, Tamar has played the harlot; and moreover she is with child by harlotry”. This was the moment she was aware of the child in her. This is also why the Talmud asks, “At what stage is the embryo discernable? – Symmachus citing R. Meir replied: Three months after conception. And although there is no actual proof for this statement there is an allusion to it, for it is said in Scripture, ‘About three months later’, etc.” (Niddah 8b).

The Mishnah sees in the womb three “chambers”; the child passes from one chamber to the other, the Talmud says: “During the first three months the embryo occupies the lowest chamber, during the middle ones it occupies the middle chamber and during the last months it occupies the uppermost chamber; and when its time to emerge arrives it turns over and then emerges, and this is the cause of the woman’s pains”.¹¹⁰ The moment that the child had completed two phases, six months, is important: the foetus is viable and can be born.

This frame lies behind the chronology of Elizabeth’s pregnancy given in Luke 1. Verse 36 notes “and this is the sixth month with her”. Then Mary, hearing of this, “arose and went with haste into the hill country (...) and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, Blessed are you among women ...” (39–42). Mary stayed with her for three months – the third phase – and then Elizabeth’s son, John the Baptist, was born (56). When the two women met, John had just entered his seventh month. He is now viable, understands what is going on, and jumps up¹¹¹ from joy.

Did the Babylonians also have this division in periods of three months? There may be one indication. In their medical Diagnostic Handbook we read about a pregnant woman who is sick; according to one interpretation, the problem is whether sexual intercourse is desirable from month 3 to months 9 or 10 (Tablet 37).¹¹² Does this mean that the first two or three months are the first phase when there is not yet any problem?

In Greek mythology, some gods and heroes were born as seven month’s children. In these circumstances, they had been engendered by gods and under such favourable conditions a pregnancy had to last only six months. A very old Sumerian myth also speaks of seven months in such a case.¹¹³ Similar stories were told about Isaac, Moses, Samuel, Maria and Jesus.¹¹⁴ As to Jesus, however, the Church celebrated the annunciation of His birth on 25 March, nine months before Christmas.¹¹⁵ It was an accepted opinion among Jews,

¹¹⁰ M. Niddah II 5; Bab. Talmud, Niddah 31a, which adds an observation on the desirability of intercourse during the three phases: “During the first three months marital intercourse is injurious to the woman and it is also injurious to the child. During the middle ones it is injurious to the woman but beneficial for the child. During the last months it is beneficial for both the woman and the child, since on account of it the child becomes well-formed and of strong vitality”. Cf. Feldman, 185 f.; F. Rosner, *Medicine in the Mishneh Torah of Maimonides* (1984) 138 f.

¹¹¹ Greek *skirtáō*; cf. Genesis 25:22 (LXX): “and the children (Jacob and Esau) leaped within her”. – More on pious behaviour of unborn children in R. Mach, *Der Zaddik in Talmud und Midrasch* (1957) 60 f.

¹¹² TDP 212:1–7; for the problems in philology and an alternative interpretation, see below, p. 201 f.

¹¹³ H. Heimpel in RIA VIII/7–8 (1997) 546 a, “Mythologie”, § 5.2, “Birth”.

¹¹⁴ P.W. van der Horst, “Seven months’ children in Jewish and Christian literature from Antiquity”, in: *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 54 (1978) 346–360.

¹¹⁵ For the implications of these dates, see R. Mach, *Der Zaddik in Talmud und Midrasch* (1957) 77–85, in the chapter “Der Geburtstag Isaaks”.

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Greeks and Romans that the vitality of children born in the seventh month (*heptámēnon*) is far better than that of an eight months' child.¹¹⁶ The Midrash has a playful conversation on this axioma: 'R. Abbahu was asked: 'How do we know that when the foetus is fully developed at seven months it is viable?' 'From your own [language] I will prove it to you', replied he: 'Live, seven – Go, eight'" (Genesis Rabbah XIV, 2). In Greek, *zītō* (*zētō*) means "Live"; moreover, the letter *zēta* has the numerical value 6. At the end of month six, the child lives. "Go" means here "die"; in Greek *ītō*, associated with the letter *ēta*, pronounced *īta* (number 7).

This belief was rationalized in several ways; for example:

- 1) When half of a solar year has passed, the child is viable, i.e., after 182 days and 15 hours;¹¹⁷
- 2) The prospects for a child born in its eighth month are extremely bad due to changes in its constitution and position during that final period.¹¹⁸

When a child is born prematurely, in Jewish law the newborn is not considered fully viable until it has survived thirty days following birth.¹¹⁹

The full term of gestation is 280 days, that is to say, nine months and one week (40 weeks). To be more precise: birth normally takes place in the 38th week of development, 40 weeks since the last menstrual period. A Babylonian horoscope, based on the moment of conception, presupposes 273, or, according to some scholars, 279 days.¹²⁰ Other astrological texts reckon 277 days.¹²¹ As to Jewish belief, we quote E. Wiesenbergs:¹²² – Conception does not necessarily take place at the moment of intercourse. Its maximum delay, held to be three days, is based on the three day's abstention prescribed in Exodus 19:15, as interpreted in the Mishnah, Sabbath 9:3. Hence, the duration of gestation is held to vary between 270 to 274 days as calculated from the time of intercourse; that is, from the mother's return from the ritual bath.¹²³ This discrepancy with modern

¹¹⁶ B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* III (1975) 247 and 283 § 71. Jews: Midrash, Numbers IV, 3 (a seven months child is viable and may be delivered on Sabbath, an eight months child not); S. Kottek, *Journal of the History of Biology* 14 (1981) 313 f..

¹¹⁷ The best exposition will be found in Galen, "On Seven Months' Children", known to us in an Arabic translation; see R. Walzer, RSO 15 (1935) 232–357 (text and translation). Cf. Ursula Weisser, "Die hippokratische Lehre von den Siebenmonatskindern bei Galen und Tabit ibn Qurra", *Sudhoffs Archiv* 63 (1979) 209–238; her *Zeugung, Vererbung und pränatale Entwicklung in der Medizin des arabisch-islamischen Mittelalters* (1983) 367 f.

¹¹⁸ Hippocrates, etc.; Ron Barkai, *Les infortunes de Dinah* (1991) 80 f. A. Hanson, "The eight months' child and the etiquette of birth: *Obsit omen!*", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 61 (1987) 589–602. Arab authors added an astrological motivation: the child is now under the bad influence of Saturn. See M. Ullmann, *Die Medizin im Islam* (1970) 255 f.; also in his *Islamic Medicine* (1978) 112 f.; U. Weisser, 390 ff., Barkai, 81. See also the chapter by C.S.F. Burnett, "The Planets and the development of the embryo", in G.R. Dunstan, *The Human Embryo* (1990) 95–112.

¹¹⁹ Sabbath 135b, Yebamoth 36b. See D.M. Feldman, *Marital relations, birth control, and abortion in Jewish Law* (1968) 254; F. Rosner, *Modern Medicine and Jewish Ethics* (1991) 139 f.

¹²⁰ A. Sachs, JCS 6 (1952) 59b: 273 days "which happens to be virtually the mean value of 273 1/3 days proposed in Greek astrological compositions". Note that other scholars computed 279 days for these horoscopes; F.X. Kugler, *Sternkunde und Sterndienst in Babel* II (1924) 558 f.; B.L. van der Waerden, *Anfänge der Astronomie* (1968) 249.

¹²¹ E. Reiner, *Astral Magic in Babylonia* (1995) 115; H. Hunger, WZKM 86 (1996) 192–195.

¹²² E. Wiesenbergs, "Some aspects of conception and pregnancy . . .", *Koroth* 8/5–6 (Fall 1982) 272 (abstract).

¹²³ Pal. Talmud Yebamoth 4:11, and Bab. Talmud Niddah 38a.

Ten Months

gynaecology (280 days) is but apparent, since it is calculated from the last menses.

We read in the Talmud: "The pious men of old performed their marital duty on a Wednesday only, in order that their wives should not be led to a desecration of the Sabbath" (Niddah 38a-b). Childbirth on a Sabbath necessitated work and the pious avoided that day by a computation presupposing a pregnancy of 271, 272, or 273 days: Wednesday means birth on Sunday, Monday, or Tuesday. In modern terms: this was a form of birth control. After this discussion, Mar Zutra remarks that the numerical value of the Hebrew word for pregnancy, *herajon*, is in fact 271.¹²⁴

Ten months

Classical and ancient Near Eastern sources often speak of *ten* months; from Virgil's famous fourth Eclogue on the birth of the child: "Ten months have brought to your mother long qualms" (*matri longa decem tulerunt fastidia menses*, IV 61). Or the verse in the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon, quoted already, "and in my mother's womb (*koilía*) I was sculptured (*glúphō*) into flesh during a ten-month's space" (Sap. 7:2).¹²⁵ An interesting discussion can be found in the book *Noctes Atticae* by the Roman author Aulus Gellius (III 16).¹²⁶

The Sumerian myth "Enki and Ninhursag" presupposes a duration of nine months¹²⁷ whereas the Old Babylonian Atra-*hasis* myth speaks of ten months: "And Nintu [sat rec]koning the months. [At the] destined [time] they summoned the tenth month. The tenth month arrived; . . . opened the womb".¹²⁸ The chapter on pregnant women in the medical Diagnostic Handbook apparently has a section describing the desirability of sexual intercourse during the third to the ninth or tenth month; at least according to one interpretation.¹²⁹ The handbook on malformed babies says nothing about a woman giving birth in months I-X but does deal with months XI and XII, the unusual ones.¹³⁰ A Hittite myth says that the sons of Appu were born when the tenth month had arrived and the Hittite Tale of the Cow and Fisherman has a similar formula.¹³¹ The Hittite Laws see the fifth and the tenth months as turning points in the gestation period (§ 17 B). The fifth and the tenth months are also turning points in an Ugaritic myth: "By kissing there is pregnancy, by embracing there is 'heat'. He sat down and counted to five, for ..[; to

¹²⁴ The Palestine Talmud, Niddah I, 3 (49b), transl. J. Neusner (1982) 156, as VII, W: "R. Berekiyah in the name of Samuel: A woman gives birth only on the 271st, 272nd, 273rd, or 274th day of her pregnancy".

¹²⁵ The evidence for ten months has been collected by Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* III (1975) 283 § 71 (cf. 247), and by David Winston in his commentary on Wisdom of Solomon (Sap. Sal.) (Anchor Bible [1979] 163 f.). Egypt: J. Bergman in *Ex orbe religionum. Studia Geo Widengren* I (1972) 340–2.

¹²⁶ D. Gourevitch, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* Teil II, Band 37/3 (1996) 2114.

¹²⁷ S.N. Kramer, *BASOR Suppl. Studies* 1 (1945) 12 ff., lines 75–85. Line 85: *itu.9.a.ni itu nam.munus.a.ka.* Now P. Attinger, *ZA* 74 (1984) 14.

¹²⁸ W.G. Lambert, A.R. Millard, *Atra-*hasis** (1969) 62, I 281; B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* I (1969) 169. Cf. Sumerian "After ten months, at the time when rivers were filled with water", *CT* 58 20 III 8–9.

¹²⁹ R. Labat, *TDP* 210:106–113, 212:1–7. The text as the tradition has it must be a corrupted version of an Old Babylonian original. F.R. Kraus read in it intercourse from three to nine or ten times "per month"; *Im Bannkreis des Alten Orients. Studien Karl Oberhuber gewidmet* (1986) 131 f. But it is hardly a coincidence that the highest number is 9 or 10. Note "eleven months" in an obscure context; *SpbTU* V 254:18 f. The Talmud on the same topic: Niddah 31a, translated above, in note 110.

¹³⁰ E. Leichty, *The Omen series Šumma Izbu* (1970) 70, Tablet IV 46.

¹³¹ H.A. Hoffner, *JNES* 27 (1968) 199. Latest translations by F. Pecchioli Daddi and A.M. Polvani, *La mitologia ittita* (1990) 163–176 (Appu, III 1–5; The Cow, III 17–20). It has been suggested that both myths are interrelated.

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t]en, the total completion (?). They crouched and gave birth to the lovely [gods]".¹³²

Why ten months? It has been suggested that these are ten lunar months of 28 days each, yielding the expected 280 days.¹³³ Otto Neugebauer has a more refined proposal. He distinguishes between three different "months": a *schematic* month of 30 days, a *synodic* month of 29 1/2 days (between two New Moons), and a *sidereal* month of 27 1/2 days (the period between the disappearance and return of the moon in a constellation, especially of the Zodiac). This means that a pregnancy lasts nine schematic or synodic, and ten sidereal months. At first glance it may be surprising that the ancient Mesopotamians counted in sidereal months. Nevertheless Neugebauer says: "This latter concept is the natural analogue to the original concept of 'year' as the return of the sun to the same constellation, as well as to the 'sidereal periods' of the planets. Everywhere in ancient astrology one distinguishes between positions with respect to stars, i.e., positions in the zodiac, and 'aspects' of the movable celestial bodies with respect to each other, in particular, their conjunctions. For the moon the first case defines the sidereal months, the latter the synodic months. All this is common astrological knowledge in Antiquity, not caused by but reflected in everyday astrological practice".¹³⁴ One is inclined to think that this explanation is far too sophisticated for something that could be easily observed. In everyday experience synodic, not sidereal months appear more natural. "Lunar months" occur throughout ancient texts and they are still observed in the Muslim world.

A pregnancy actually lasts more than nine months and to fix the gestation period to nine months is not according to fact. Herodotus tells us that in one case they counted the months with their fingers in order to be sure: they were the normal ten months (VI 63). An ancient comment (scholion) to a comedy of Aristophanes is explicit in its discussion of the line "Yes, I have borne it during ten months": "But women are not ten months pregnant, but nine. – But they are wont, thus to use the full number instead of 'nine months'" ("Thesmophoriazousai 741). The child that has entered its tenth prenatal month is called a "ten months' child" in Greek (*dekámènon*). Hippocrates speaks of "so-called ten month's children" and adds that they are brought to completion within seven periods of 40 days each.¹³⁵ Women in the southern hemisphere still reckon with ten months. Women on Madagascar know that they are about to give birth when the month is in

¹³² KTU 1.23:56-58. We owe the correct interpretation of these lines to D.T. Tsumura, "A problem of myth and ritual relationship – CTA 23 (UT 52):56–57 reconsidered", U.-F. 10 (1978) 387–395. All others see in the central lines a ritual prescription; however, this would be a blunt interruption in the story. See T.L. Hettema, JEOL 31 (1989–90) 85 note 29.

¹³³ For example R. Barnett and F. Imparati, see Hoffner, 199. Ancient explanations: U. Weisser, 337 ff.

¹³⁴ O. Neugebauer, *The American Journal of Philology* 84 (1963) 64 f.

¹³⁵ Hipp., *De Octimestri Partu* X, 1. The discussion follows in XIII, 1–3. H. Fasbender, *Entwicklungslehre, Geburtshilfe und Gynäkologie in den hippokratischen Schriften* (1897) 105: "Der griechische Monat beginnt mit dem Neumond. Tritt nun die Conception um die Zeit des Vollmondes oder darüber hinaus ein, so muss am Ende der Frist von 280 Tagen nach der Zahl der Mondwechsel in den 11. Monat fallen". Literally repeated by P. Diepgen, *Die Frauenheilkunde der Alten Welt* (1937) 163. The best commentary was given by H. Grensemann, *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* I 2, 1 (1968) 112 ad 88, 3: "Die Zeit von der Konzeption bis zum nächsten Neumond gilt als ganzer Monat. Setzen wir den Fall, daß dieser erste Monat 10 Tage dauert, so fallen auf den zweiten bis zehnten Monat einschließlich 265,5 Tage (den Monat zu rund 29,5 Tagen gerechnet) [= 9 lunar months], insgesamt ergeben sich für die ersten zehn Monate demnach 275,5 Tage". There was a belief in Antiquity that the menstruation tends to take place at the end of the month, and conception in the middle; see D. Gourevitch, "La lune et les règles des femmes", in: B. Bakhouche, *Les astres. Les correspondances entre le ciel, la terre et l'homme. Les survivances de l'astrologie antique* II (1996) 85–99. She cites Aristotle and our passage in Hippocrates (p. 93–95).

One Year and More

the same position as that at her last menstruation.¹³⁶ A German scholar reported that, “The Samoan woman looks at the moon and expects the beginning of menstruation at a quite different position of that planet (*bei einem ganz bestimmten Stande desselben*), each woman naturally having a different position of the moon in view. If menstruation does not take place then, she perceives that she is pregnant (*so nimmt sie an, daß sie schwanger sei*), and expects her confinement after ten moon-months”¹³⁷.

One year, and more

In two instances in the Old Testament, a woman is promised a child after *one year*. At His momentous visit to Abraham, God promised him a son: “I will surely return to you at the time of life, and Sarah your wife shall have a son” (Genesis 18:10). After Sarah had voiced her doubts, the Lord assured again, “At the appointed time I will return to you, at the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son” (14). The modern Revised Standard Version has rendered “at the time of life” as “in the spring”. In 2 Kings 4:16 Elisha foretells, “At this season (*mō‘ēd*), at the time of life, you shall embrace a son”. In this case, that modern translation offers “when the time comes around”. “At the time of life” (*kā‘ēt hajjā*) means “after one year”; more precise is “in the next year”. One expects nine or ten, not twelve months (a year). It is possible that this is a solemn oracular phrase. Indeed, very similar wording is found in Homer’s Odyssey: “When the year has come round (*periploménou d’ eniautoū*), you shall bear glorious children” (XI, 248). However, it seems more reasonable to connect the expression “at the time of life” to the Akkadian word for “life” (*balātu*) which has the special meaning “next year”. “In the next year” makes good sense for both Old Testament passages.

The Jews and Arabs hold the conviction that it is possible to delay birth for quite some time. We read in the Babylonian Talmud that according to “the majority” this is possible; an example is given of a woman who gave birth twelve months after her husband had gone to a country beyond the sea: the child is declared legitimate (Yebamoth 80b).¹³⁸ Among Arab women of Northern Africa, there is the widespread belief that the child can stay in his mother’s body for years; this child is called “the sleeping one” (*rāqed*). This is an ancient belief firmly rooted in Islamic tradition and law, and is said to go back to pre-Islamic times.¹³⁹ It came as a surprise to me to discover this same belief in two entries from the chapter on pregnant women in the Babylonian Diagnostic Handbook:¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ L. Schomerus-Gernböck, *Die Mahafaly. Eine ethnische Gruppe im Süd-Westen Madagaskars* (1981) 152. “Wenn der Mond zum zehnten Mal an der gleichen Stelle am Himmel steht, an der er zur Zeit der letzten Menstruation war, weiß die werdende Mutter, daß sie vor der Entbindung steht. Nur Frauen, die nicht intelligent sind, sagen die Mahafaly, werden von den einsetzenden Wehen überrascht”.

¹³⁷ As rendered by Martin P. Nilsson, *Primitive time-reckoning* (1920) 149. It is an almost literal translation of W. von Bülow, *Globus* 93 (1908) 251 a.

¹³⁸ St.T. Newmyer, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* Teil II, Band 37/3 (1996) 2908 f. (with data on long gestation periods taken from Hippocrates and Aristotle).

¹³⁹ O. Verberkmoes, R. Kruk, “Rākid”, *Encyclopédie de l’Islam* VIII (1995) 421; Joel Colin, *L’enfant endormi dans le ventre de sa mère. Etude ethnologique et juridique d’une croyance au Maghreb* (1994); Willy Jansen, “Het slapende kind. De maatschappelijke betekenis van een oud geloof”, in: Ed de Moor, *Vrouwen in het Midden-Oosten* (1982) 113–133; E. Bartels, *Eén dochter is beter dan duizend zonen. Arabische vrouwen, symbolen en machtsverhoudingen tussen de性en* (1993) 154–160.

¹⁴⁰ See below Chapter VIII for a complete translation and discussion of Tablet 36.

I. Conception and Embryology

(5) "If a fertile woman is pregnant and the top of her forehead is multicoloured; variant: *ba-ru-um*: her foetus sleeps (*salil*)".

(94) "If a fertile woman, in the middle of her 'sickness', steps to the right: she is pregnant of a sleeping (foetus)".

The "sleeping foetus" is an unborn child who does not make its presence known and stays in its mother for a long time. The meaning of "in the middle of her sickness" (*ina ŠÀ ma-ru-uš-ti-šá*) can now be explained as "in her menstrual period": the woman has her period without knowing that she is bearing a child. The uncommon experience of "stepping to the right" (94) makes her realize that she is carrying some burden. Undoubtedly, she warned her husband and he awakens the child by having intercourse with her.

Inscriptions of grateful patients in the temple of Asclepios in Greek Epidavros testify of pregnancies lasting three or five years. Patients spend the night in a special dormitory where they have a dream in which the god of healing appears to them ("incubation"). We present them here.¹⁴¹

1. *Cleo had been pregnant for five years.* When she had been pregnant for five years she turned to the god for help and slept in the inner sanctum. As soon as she came out of there and left the sanctuary she gave birth to a boy who, as soon as he was born, washed himself in the spring and walked around with his mother. After this happened to her, she had an inscription set up:

"It is not the size of the tablet that should be admired, but the divine intervention.

Cleo bore her burden in her womb for five years,

Until she slept here and he made her well".

2. *A pregnancy of three years.* Ithmonika of Pella (?) came to the sanctuary and slept in the inner sanctum to find out about her child. She had a vision: In her dream she asked the god to give her a baby girl. The god told her that she was pregnant and that he would grant her any other wish she might have, but she said that she had no further demands. She became pregnant and remained pregnant for three years, until she approached the god, asking for help in giving birth. As she slept in the inner sanctum she had a dream. She dreamed that the god asked her whether she had not gotten everything she had wanted and whether she was not pregnant, but about the baby he said nothing. But when he asked her whether she needed anything else, he said he would do this, too. Since she had come to him for help in this situation, he said he would grant her that, too. After this she quickly left the inner sanctum and as she came out of the sanctuary she gave birth to a baby girl.

¹⁴¹ We follow Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi. Magic and the occult in the Greek and Roman worlds* (1985) 142 f. The text is *Inscriptiones Graecae* IV/1 (1902) no. 951, the first two cases (= W. Dittenberger, *Sylloge inscriptionum Graecarum* III [1920] no. 1168).

Chapter II PROBLEMS DURING PREGNANCY

Miscarriage

The nine months are beset with a variety of dangers. Most common among them is miscarriage. Sorcery can be its cause.¹ A Babylonian ritual from Assur is to be performed in order to ward off this danger; “that sorcery does not come near to a pregnant woman (and) she not loses her foetus”.² The ritual also speaks of the eventuality that something has been “shown” to the future mother; this may refer to maternal vision which we will explain later (Chapter VI). Humans and animals can drop their foetus prematurely in times of war and violence, another cause of miscarriage. For this eventuality the verb “to throw” is used in Sumerian and Babylonian.³ A famous Sumerian hymn extolling Enlil has this passage, referring to miscarriage caused among the living by the birth goddess (!) Nintu: “Without Enlil, the great mountain, Nintu does not let die, does not kill; the cow in the cattle pen does not ‘throw’ its calf, the ewe in the sheepfold does not deliver a malformed lamb”.⁴ We read in Psalm 29:9 (according to the Revised Standard Version) that the thunder, “the voice of the Lord”, makes the oaks to whirl, and strips forests bare. Another interpretation, better but requiring an emendation, is that “it makes hinds to calve (*j^eholel*), and makes goats to give birth (too) quickly (*j^ehaššef*)”.⁵ The Roman author Pliny indeed tells us in his “Natural History” that “claps of thunder cause sheep to miscarry when solitary” (VIII, 188). A bilingual lamentation in Mesopotamia speaks of females “throwing” their offspring. Can one think of miscarriage? The case is uncertain because the verb “to throw” can equally mean “to abandon”: “Father Enlil, you have smitten the land until you have (completely) destroyed it. Lord of the nation, the ewe has ‘thrown’ the lamb, the goat has ‘thrown’ the kid, (...) the true bearing mother has ‘thrown’ her child, the wife of the warrior has ‘thrown’ the little child, her child; ... has ‘thrown’ her spouse”. In the last case, miscarriage of the spouse is impossible; the humans clearly “abandon” their loved ones.⁶

The first five months were considered dangerous: Elizabeth “hid herself for five months” (Luke 1:24).⁷ In Jericho, the bad water was the reason why “the land was causing miscarrying” (*m^csakkelet*) and by throwing salt into its spring, the prophet

¹ M.-L. Thomsen, *Zauberdiagnose und schwarze Magie in Mesopotamien* (1987) 53 f. (“Symptome bei Frauen und kleinen Kindern”); W. Farber, *Schlaf Kindchen Schlaf* (1989) 143; J.A. Scurlock, *Incognita* 2 (1991) 138.

² LKA 9 rev. I (= III) 7-15; cf. SpbTU III 118 no. 84:56 f. Translated by E. Reiner in *Le monde du sorcier* (= Sources orientales 7) (1966) 93; Farber, *Schlaf* ... , 110 f. For the structure of the entire text LKA 9, see Farber, *Schlaf* ... , 22-3. – Also in BAM 3 244:48 (*rinzu, kišpū*, etc.).

³ Sumerian ūb, see MSL 8/1 (1960) 85, note on 118; Babylonian *nadū*, Assyrian *šalā'u*. – In Hebrew *škl*, “to make childless”; in the Talmud the related *tkl*, or *nfl* (hif./af.) “to drop”.

⁴ A. Falkenstein *Sumerische Götterlieder* I (1959) 17:124-126 (“Enlilsuraše”), with the corrections in MSL 8/1 (1960) 85, note on 118. See now Jacobsen, *The harps that once...* (1987) 109. “Malformed lamb”: *sila₄ gá.gig*; but contrast *sila₄ gá.zu* (?) in the new manuscript W.H.Ph. Römer, BiOr 47 (1990) 388.

⁵ With G.R. Driver, *Journal of Theological Studies* 32 (1931) 255.

⁶ M.E. Cohen, CLAM I (1988) 155, 166, “The Bull in his Fold”, 30-34 (“has abandoned”); in SANE 1/2 (1974) 17: “has cast out”.

⁷ David T. Tsumura, U.-F. 10 (1978) 394 f. In modern Egypt: “During the early months, the event is a

II. Problems during Pregnancy

Elisha made the water wholesome (2 Kings 2:19–22). Such a cause of spontaneous abortion is possible. Hippocrates tells that the surface water in a district exposed to warm, southern, winds is brackish, warm in the summer and cold in the winter. “The local diseases are these. The women are sickly and liable to vaginal discharges; many of them are sterile, not by nature but as the result of disease. Miscarriages are common”.⁸

A medical text from Assur has prescriptions for the case that “a woman having acquired (something) in her belly cannot retain (it)”; the prescription starts with “in order to assuage the woman”; a magical medication based on animal bones is prepared and introduced into her vagina.⁹ The preceding line (studied above p. 5) speaks of the situation that a woman “accepts” the male seed, or not. Our prescription could be a reference to what the Greeks called “flow” (*rhūsis, ékrhusis*). This occurs during the first seven days of pregnancy and it is distinguished from “miscarriage” (*trōsmos*) which only occurs after the seventh day.¹⁰ “Acquiring” seed is something different in Babylonia.¹¹ In a late medical text of the Seleucid period which lists various diseases, “infertility” (*la ālidūtu*) is followed by an obscure line on an affliction of the womb: either “the womb that <does not acquire> the seed”, or “the womb that is twisted (?)”.¹² An unpublished prescription reads: “If a woman is (about) to lose her foetus in either the first, or the second, or the third month, you dry a *hulū* mouse, crush and grind it up, (add) water three times, and mix it with oil; add *alluharu* (a mineral). You give it her to drink, and she will not loose her foetus”.¹³

In an emotional Old Babylonian letter, a woman writes to her “lord” telling him – and skipping the usual polite introductory phrases – that her child is dead. This is her interpretation of the situation, of course:¹⁴

– Speak to my lord: Thus says Dabītum, your slave-girl. What I had told you, has now happened to me. For seven months, this child (*šerrum*) having been in my belly, the child is dead in my belly since one month and nobody takes care of me. If this is the mood of my lord: let me not die. Look after me and let me see the face of my lord [break]. But if I have to die, let me see the face of my lord and (then) I may die.

Babylonian words for the product of a premature birth are *nīd libbi*, *kūbu*, *edamukku*, *kirṣu*. The most common expression is *nīd libbi*, “what has been thrown from the belly”. A late lexical text on abortions in all stages, from “clot” (*kirṣu*) to “foetus” (*kūbu*), equates them with *nīd libbi*.¹⁵ “Bone” (?) (*eṣmu*) may be another word for an unborn

closely guarded secret which is shared only with the closest of family members to avoid the harm of the Evil Eye”; S. Morsy, “Childbirth in an Egyptian village”, in: M. Artschwager Kay, *Anthropology of Human Birth* (1982) 153.

⁸ Hippocrates, *Airs, Waters, Places* 3 (transl. J. Chadwick, J.N. Mann).

⁹ DIŠ SAL *ina ŠÀ* (?) TUKU-at *ka-la-a la i-le-’e ana* SAL *nu-uh-hi*, BAM 3 240:71.

¹⁰ D. Nickel, *NTM. Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften, Technik und Medizin* 9,1 (1972) 78; Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* III (1975) 245 § 59.

¹¹ In the section on Plants of Birth, we shall say that “seed” means here “offspring, posterity”.

¹² SpbTU I 43:31, ARHUŠ *šá zi-i-ri*. The first explanation implies an emendation and the unusual writing of the word “seed” in syllabic Akkadian (*zēru*); it follows F. Köcher, in *Festschrift für Heinz Goerke* (1978) 25, “Mutterleib, der unfruchtbar ist (?)”. The second explanation takes *zi-i-ri* to be *zīr* “twisted” (verb *zāru*), said of the pouch-like intestine *karšu* in medical texts, as in BAM 6 574 IV 20.

¹³ Courtesy I.L. Finkel. We follow his translation of lines 1–4 (DIŠ SAL *lu 1* [IT]U *lu 2* ITU *lu 3* ITU *ŠÀ.ŠÀ.ŠÀ Š[UB].ŠUB-a*).

¹⁴ TIM 1 15; A.L. Oppenheim, *Letters from Mesopotamia* (1967) 85 no. 17. “Child”: the writing *ši-ru-um* also allows for “flesh”.

¹⁵ MSL 9 (1967) 34 Hargud B IV 27–29, with F. Thureau-Dangin, RA 19 (1922) 81–3. See also MSL 9

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child.¹⁶ An incantation has this line: “Just as a child of a miscarrying woman does not persist, just as an abortion (*nīd libbi*) does not take its mother’s breast”.¹⁷ Of these terms *kūbu* is the most well-known and is also considered to be a supernatural being.¹⁸ He is not a still-born child but must be a foetus that already has clear human features. One of its Sumerian equivalents literally means “situated in its water” (*a.ba.gar.ra*); another “who does not complete the month(s)”,¹⁹ and an incantation characterizes it as “not sucking the milk of his mother”.²⁰ The normal Sumerian word for an unborn foetus is *nigīn* but it is never found outside the lexical texts. Temples of the goddesses Inanna and Ninisina sometimes have a chapel named *Nigar* (written *nigin.gar*)²¹ and a passage in honour of Ninisina, goddess of medicine, links this room with birth: there, she “deals rightly with the afterbirth, she cuts the (umbilical) cord with a reed, she determines the fate (of the child), she puts her hand on the door of the *Nigar*, she makes the malformed birth come out (?)”.²² The *Nigar* is a metaphor of the womb. Th. Jacobsen has suggested that *Nigar* (“Nigingar”) was a temple which served as a cemetery for still-born or premature babies and as a depository for afterbirths.²³ We add that the birth goddess is associated with the god *Pap-nigīn.gar.ra*.²⁴ In temples, there was a chapel “House of the Nigingara”.²⁵

Terracottas representing emaciated males have been identified with the *kūbu*.²⁶ They are crouching, their elbows resting on their raised knees, their hands on the temples. One can count their ribs. They look like the foetus in the womb in an advanced stage of development and one is reminded of the depiction of the foetus as folded writing board,

(1967) 29 f., VAT 12929, with comm.; D. Arnaud, *Emar* VI/4 (1987) 119 no. 552:85–93.

¹⁶ AEM 1/1 (1988) 14 no. 1:8: omina based on *uzu izbum* and *uzu eṣmum* (?). See the discussion by J.-M. Durand, p. 20, who sees in “*iz-mi-im*” an equivalent of *kūbu*, and see p. 159.

¹⁷ H. Hunger, SpbTU I no. 44:67, and dupls.; see also W.R. Mayer, Or NS 61 (1992) 376–7 [12]. We interpret DUMU SAL.ME as *mār nādīti*, taking *nādīti* as a feminine participle meaning “throwing”, i.e., “having a miscarriage”.

¹⁸ R. Labat, art. “Fötus”, RIA III/2 (1960) 98–9; CAD K s.v.; W.H.Ph. Römer, “Einige Bemerkungen zum dämonischen Gotte ^dKūbu(m)”, in *Symbolae Biblicae et Mesopotamicae F.M.Th. de Liagre Böhl dedicatae* (1973) 310–319; J.A. Scurlock, *Incognita* 2 (1991) 149 f.

¹⁹ Sumerian *sag.itu.nu.til.la*; R. Borger, *Festschrift W. von Soden* (= AOAT 1) (1969) 4 § III; B. Landsberger, MSL 9 (1967) 29 f. Note that a child born too early is called *élitomēnos* in Homer, “missing the (correct) month”; Iliad XIX 118.

²⁰ CT 23 10:16; context: W.R. Mayer, Or NS 61 (1992) 376 [9]. More examples: Mayer, [13], [14], BAM 6 537 rev. 5. See also W.G. Lambert, Ao 23 (1970) 41:30, with note.

²¹ J. Krecher, *Sumerische Kultlyrik* (1966) 128–131; Å.W. Sjöberg, E. Bergmann, *The collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns* (1969) 92 f.; J.A. Black, ASJ 7 (1985) 43. Reading *nigīn.gar*: Krecher, 128, *Festschrift Lubor Matouš* II (1978) 52 f.; H. Waetzoldt, BiOr 32 (1975) 383b. The temples: A.R. George, *House Most High* (1993) 133 nos. 885–7.

²² ŠRT 6 III 3, with W.H.Ph. Römer, *Festschrift W. von Soden* (= AOAT 1) (1969) 296 ad 76; Th. Jacobsen, Or NS 42 (1973) 290 n. 59; J.G. Westenholz, *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989) 259. – More in the section on birth in myths.

²³ Th. Jacobsen, *The harps that once...* (1987) 475 note 1.

²⁴ In the greeting formulas of two Old Babylonian letters: Dingirmah and Papnigingara (TCL 18 94:4), and Nintu and Papnigingara (G. Boyer, CHJ 25 HE. 107:1,4). For the foetus and this god, see M. Krebernik, RIA VIII/7–8 (1997) 509, 516, art. “Muttergöttin”, § 4.3.6 and 7.12.

²⁵ Å.W. Sjöberg, E. Bergmann, *The collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns* (1969) 92–3; J.A. Black, ASJ 7 (1985) 43.

²⁶ D.O. Edzard, in the article by E. Porada, “An emaciated male figure of bronze in the Cincinnati Art Museum”, in *Studies A. Leo Oppenheim* (1964) 159 ff., esp. 164 f; with photos. More illustrations: P.R.S. Moorey, *Iraq* 37 (1975) 87 Group XI, “Goddess with crouching figures”; L. de Meyer, *Tell ed Dēr* II (1978) Plate 27,1; Y. Tomabechi, *Bibliotheca Mesopotamica* 15 (1984) 18 f., with III plate 14; A. Green, in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* III (1995) 1846 Fig. 4. Criticisms by W.H.Ph. Römer in *Symbolae F.M.Th. de Liagre Böhl* (1973) 318, and Th. Jacobsen, Or NS 42 (1973) 286 note 39.

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Fig. 1 An emaciated male figure representing the foetus in the womb in an advanced stage of development (*kūbu*). From Larsa. Bronze, height 14,9 cm. Cincinnati Art Museum.

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in the Talmud (see p. 15). In the myth Enki and Ninmah the being “Umul” is depicted in dark colours and is probably an unborn child.²⁷ The *kūbu* is associated with the netherworld deities (*Anunnakū*).²⁸ We learn from a prayer that they are “the offspring of the Queen of the Nether World”.²⁹ Babies and adults can suffer from the “seizure” or the “hand” of this supernatural being.³⁰ Although they can cause affliction and are associated with netherworld beings, they have benificent aspects. They are often attested in personal names in a position where one expects deities;³¹ in earlier periods they frequently acted as the divine supporter of the name-bearer.³² They had shrines in temples.³³ According to a dream retold in a letter from Mari, they had the power to ensure the harvest: “Tell your *kūbu*(s) that Zimri-Lim may have a peaceful harvest”.³⁴ The god Papnigingara certainly was not associated with the dead but rather with the living, developing foetus. A distant parallel from Roman religion may suggest a reason for these attributes. The three goddesses of birth, the *Parcae*, had the names *Nona* (of the ninth month), *Decima* (of the tenth month), *Morta* (of death). The Romans offered prayers and sacrifices to them in order to ease the coming childbirth. Perhaps (the male) *Kūbu* played a role similar to *Morta*: he was asked to prevent still-birth and when he did, in a critical situation, he was thanked in the name given to the child. A Babylonian proverb – which may be relevant – says: “Fear of the gods creates kindness; fear of the infernal gods returns life”.³⁵

In the Sumerian composition “Gilgameš, Enkidu and the Nether World”, Enkidu answers questions about the lot of dead people that he has seen below. One of them concerns still-born (?) children (*nigīn.gar*):³⁶

²⁷ See below, p. 109 f., for a discussion of this passage. Others have thought of an old decrepit man. Th. Jacobsen’s theory appears to combine both ideas. He assumes that both *kūbu* and Umul are “a representation of aged dead and buried people awaiting rebirth in the earth”; JBL 100 (1981) 514 note 5. Note, however, that such a rebirth is not known in the texts.

²⁸ W.G. Lambert, BWL 126:31, cited in CAD K 487b; CT 51 136:3–8, comm. on TDP 32:1–3; in CT 39 35:76 (dupl. K. 11811) in the row *Anunnaku*, ^d*malku*, *etemmu*, *kūbu*, *Maštabba*. In CT 51 142:27 after the *Anunnaku*.

²⁹ KBo 36 29 I 18 f., with G. Wilhelm in: *Uluslararası 1. Hititoloji Kongresi Bildirileri (19–21 Temmuz 1990) Çorum* (1990) 85, 92 note 19; D. Schwemer, *Akkadische Rituale aus Hattuša* (1998) 87, with commentary on p. 55–57.

³⁰ The examples have been collected by W.H.Ph. Römer in his article in *Symbolae Biblicae et Mesopotamicae F.M.Th. de Liagre Böhl dedicatae* (1973) 311 f. Add now *qāt* ^d*Kū-bi*, SpbTU III 133 no. 88 II 9; *qāt* ^d*Ku-bi*, R. Labat, MDP 57 (1974) 241 no. XI:10–20; *sibit* (MĀŠ) ^d*Kū-bu*, R. Caplice, Or NS 40 (1971) 169 no. 66 rev. 10. Note that CAD K 488a is probably wrong in its opinion that the patient suffering from “Hand of Kūbu” in TDP 166:87–89 is “an infant”: the text does not discuss children.

³¹ J.A. Scurlock, *Incognita* 2 (1991) 150: “It seems likely, although there is obviously no way to prove it, that persons with such names as ‘My Kūbu is my strength’ and ‘Servant of Kūbu’ were born to women whose previous attempt at having a child had resulted in a stillbirth or malformed foetus. In this way, the unhappy ghost could be made to feel a desired part of the family, rather than being left to inflict ‘Hand of Kūbu-illness’ on its normal sibling”.

³² Cf. the names collected by Römer, 316–8.

³³ A.R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts* (1992) 370, on Tintir V 87. The prototype was their “house” in the Nether World; Schwemer 56.

³⁴ AEM 1/1 (1988) 467 no. 227:15, *ana ku-bi-ki-na qibēma ebūr šulmim Zimri-Lim līpuš*. KBo 36 29 offers another example of a prayer to them, in the Nether World (see above).

³⁵ LAS 132 = SAA X 188 rev. 9–10 (*palāh Anunnaki balātu utar*), with S. Parpola, LAS, Commentary, p. 120.

³⁶ A. Shaffer, *Sumerian sources of Tablet XII of the Epic of Gilgameš* (1963) 95, lines 300–1, cf. p. 97, rev. 1–2 (“stillborn children who never knew existence”, *nī.ba nu.zu*). Now W.H.Ph. Römer, TUAT II/1 (1986) 44 (“Missgeburten, die sich selbst nicht gekannt haben”).

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- Did you see my little still-born children who never knew themselves?
- I saw.
- How do they fare?
- They play at a table of gold and silver, (laden with) ghee and honey”.

This passage was not included in the later Babylonian edition of the Gilgamesh Epic. Although we have rejected a meaning “still-born child” for *kūbu*; we admit that this context must be understood as children that have come to full term. Note, again, that the *kūbu* is here not an evil demon.

Thanks to Mircea Eliade the *Kūbu* is known outside the narrow circle of Assyriologists. In the secret process of making glass they are put next to the kiln and given libation offerings,³⁷ and Eliade associated them with metallurgy. According to him, the ores in the earth are fashioned into metal in a process of growing and birth.³⁸ This was compared with a deed of Marduk: after having slain the monster Tiāmat, “he inspects her corpse, he divides the abortion (UZU *kūbu*), he creates ingenious things” (*En.EI.* IV 136). Eliade wrote: “The body of Tiāmat was, in the hands of Marduk, a foetus. And as all creation and all construction reproduced the cosmogonic model, man, in constructing or creating, imitated the work of the demiurge”. “In texts dealing with metallurgy *ku-bu* may therefore mean ores, the primal ‘embryonic’ material which will take shape in the furnaces”. Although Eliade did not know that the texts deal with glass – not metallurgy, our discovery that *kūbu* is in the earth, as an underworld deity, gives new fuel to his fascinating speculation. The Greeks sometimes thought of the womb as an oven, where bread is baked, or a hearth; it generates heat.³⁹ Is the kiln of the glassmaker visualized as the oven where the foetus is baked?

In the Old Testament, a being born by miscarriage is named *nēfēl* “what has fallen”. This word is derived from a well-known verb meaning “to fall”. In one passage in Biblical Hebrew it seems to stand for “to be born / give birth”.⁴⁰ In the Mishnah its causative form means that the pregnant woman “drops” what is in her womb: she has a miscarriage. The Psalmist wishes of the wicked: “Let them be like the snail which dissolves into slime, like the miscarriage of a woman that never sees the sun” (Psalm 58:8 [Hebr. 9]). Never seeing the sun is also characteristic of a *nēfēl*. As Job exclaims: “Or was I not as a hidden miscarriage, as infants that never see the light?” (3:16). Here, one could think of a still-born child, a dead “infant”. The Greek translators interpreted “hidden miscarriage” as: “a miscarriage (*éktroûma*) coming forth from the mother’s womb”. It would appear that the translators wished to give a meaning to the Hebrew addition “hidden”. Contrast “never seeing the light / sun” in Israel with “not sucking its mother’s

³⁷ The texts have been reedited by A.L. Oppenheim, *Glass and glassmaking in Ancient Mesopotamia* (1970) 32 ff. Remarks on this god: p. 33, 52 f.

³⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The forge and the crucible. The origins and structures of alchemy* (Harper Torchbook 1971), Chapter 7, “Babylonian symbolisms and metallurgical rituals”.

³⁹ Helen King in: G.R. Dunstan, *Human embryology* (1990) 16, commenting on Hippocrates, *On the Nature of the Child* 12,6. See also A. Ellis Hanson, in Ph.J. van der Eijk, *Ancient medicine in its socio-cultural context I* (1995) 302–304 (“metaphors derived from cooking”). A pregnant woman compares herself with an oven (*atunu*) in SpbTU V 248:26–32. See below, p 133.

⁴⁰ Isaiah 26:18–19, following the dictionary HAL. Note this stark expression in an Old Babylonian letter: “And when father and mother saw your face as you fell out of the vagina”, P. Marello, *Florilegium Marianum*. (*Mélanges Michel Fleury*) (1992) 117:35–6 (see p. 127).

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“milk” in Babylonia. Aaron’s sister Miriam is leprous and, likening her to an untimely born foetus, he beseeches Moses, “Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother’s womb” (Numbers 12:12).⁴¹ We have already seen that Mishnah and Talmud discuss the difference between just a clot (*ḥaṭikā*), a “sac” (*ḥeṭir*), or a human foetus. Once its status is decided, the proper measures about uncleanness can be applied.⁴²

The word “abortion” is also attested in the New Testament (*ékrōma*). The apostle Paul, speaking of the resurrection of Christ, says about himself: “Last of all, as to an untimely born, He appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Corinthians 15:8–9). It is not clear why Paul conjures up this stark image; probably it is a way of expressing modesty by one who feels that he is a latecomer.⁴³

In the Babylonian Talmud one can read that a righteous or pious man buries or burns his cut nails; should a pregnant woman step over the nails she is in danger of miscarrying.⁴⁴ A superstition that indeed sounds Babylonian.⁴⁵

Infertility

Having children was a blessing. The first page of the Bible tells man and woman, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28) This value is still upheld in the traditional Near East. The prosperous life under his rule is described to king Assurbanipal as follows: “The old men dance, the young men sing, the women and girls are merry and rejoice; women are married and provided with earrings; boys and girls are brought forth, the births thrive (*tālittu ašrat*)”.⁴⁶ From the private sphere comes a man’s remark to his sister, in a letter: “My heart rejoiced about your being pregnant”.⁴⁷

It is not easy for a woman to be barren (Hebrew “*qārā*”). All births stop when “the womb is closed”, like a door, as the Old Testament has it (*sgr*); elsewhere, the word “to block” is used (*‘sr*): Sarai and the wives in the palace of Abimelech had this experience (Genesis 16:2, 20:18). It is God who had closed the womb of Hannah (1 Samuel 1:5–6) and He is able to open that of Leah and Rachel (Genesis 29:31, 30:22).⁴⁸ After Boaz had gone into his wife Ruth, “the Lord gave her conception (*herājōn*), and she bore a son” (Ruth 4:13). The prophet Hosea invites God to do the reverse, in these words: “Give them, O Lord – what wilt thou give? Give them a miscarrying womb (*rēhēm maškīl*) and dry breasts”, i.e., miscarriage and infertility (Hos. 9:14). “The key of the womb is in the hands of the Lord”, the Talmud says (Ta’anith 2a).

⁴¹ On the appearance of this leprosy, see E. V. Hulse, PEQ 107 (1975) 93.

⁴² Niddah III, 3, with J. Preuss, *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin* (1911) 482 f.

⁴³ C. Spicq, *Notes de lexicographie néo-testamentaire* I (1978) 237–9 (*ekrōma*). He agrees with Th. Boman: “Paul exprimerait le caractère anormal et soudain de sa naissance à la foi chrétienne et au ministère apostolique. Son cas est bien différent de celui des Douze”.

⁴⁴ Niddah 17a; Mo’ed Qatan 18a.

⁴⁵ Cf. W.W. Hallo, “Biblical abominations and Sumerian taboos”, JQR 76 (1985) 21–40.

⁴⁶ S. Parpola, LAS 121 = SAA X 226:16–21.

⁴⁷ CT 22 40:6–7 (*libbū'a ilši kī ta-ri-'-en-na*); A.L. Oppenheim, *Letters from Mesopotamia* (1967) 193 no. 147.

⁴⁸ L. Köhler, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1966) 135 § 48, 1. For animals, the word “to break through” is used; Job 39:4 (Hebrew text 39:3).

II. Problems during Pregnancy

It is a cause of joy when God gives offspring to the barren wife: “Sing, O barren one (‘*qārā*), who did not bear, break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in travail (*lō-hālā*)! For the children of the desolate one (*šōmemā*) will be more than the children of her that is married (*b^e ‘ūlā*), says the Lord” (Isaiah 54:1). A recurrent motif in the Bible is the barrenness of a pious woman, the preferred wife in polygamous marriage. They receive a son from God. “This repeated pattern of infertility, especially of the preferred wife, suggests that we are not dealing with real gynaecological histories but with a theological archetype. As opposed to the norm, barrenness in these stories opens the way for divine favor. By rendering the Israelite matriarchs barren and then have them miraculously conceive, the Biblical authors reinforce the theology of divine election: just as God chooses the younger son and allows other violations of legal norms to establish the Israelite nation, so there is divine intervention in procreation to provide the nation’s heroes”.⁴⁹

Having no children was considered a disgrace, a reason for reproach, as Rachel remarked in Genesis 30:23. After the Old Testament had been canonized, in sophisticated circles another set of values was adopted: “It is better to be childless, provided one is virtuous, for in virtue’s remembrance there is immortality, since it wins recognition both from God and from men” (Sap. Solomonis 4;1; transl. D. Winston). The mood in which this is said is outright ascetic: “Blessed indeed is the barren woman who is unstained, who has not gone to bed in sin, she shall be fruitful at the great assize of souls. And the eunuch who has not acted unlawfully or meditated wickedness against the Lord will receive the exquisite gift of grace in return for his steadfastness (...)” (Sap. Sol. 3:13 f.).

“Fertile” is the word “giving birth” (*ālittu*) in Babylonian. A slave girl with a child is qualified as such.⁵⁰ Babylonian physiognomic omnia related a woman’s ability to get pregnant and to give birth to the appearance of her breasts or her navel; the expressions are “she is child-bearing” (= fertile) (*ālidat*), “she is bringing to term” (*mušallimat*). On the breasts: “If a woman’s breasts are pointed, she cannot bear children. If a woman’s breasts are sunken on (?) her chest, she cannot bear children. If a woman’s right breast is long, she cannot bear children. If a woman’s left breast is long, she can bear children. If the nipples of a woman’s breasts are white, she does not bring to term. If the nipples of a woman’s breasts are green, she does not bring to term”. She has the same bad prospect when the nipples are black or dark. One of the three manuscripts omits the word “not” in the omen on the white nipple which would mean that she will bring to term.⁵¹ On the navel: “If the navel of a woman is soft, she can bring to term. If it is knotted, she cannot bring to term. If on the right side it is bent, she cannot bring to term. If on the left side it is bent, she can bring to term. If it is low, she can bear children. If it is balled (var. is wide), she can bear children. If it is sunk towards her lower belly, she can bear children. If it lies high, she cannot bear children”.⁵²

⁴⁹ D. Biale, *Eros and the Jews* (1992) 25. The mothers in the Old Testament are Sarah, Rachel, Hannah. The example from the New Testament is Elizabeth; Luke 1.

⁵⁰ YOS 12 185:33 (1 sag.geme *wa-li-tum* ù *dumu*.SAL.ni).

⁵¹ KAR 472 II 3–5, 8–10, dupl. TBP 11 b VII 9–15, SpbTU IV 149 III 7–10 (not: *musallimat*, “sie ist eine Versöhnerin”). We have omitted the two omnia on a woman with the breasts of the goddesses Bēlet-ili and Bēlet-balātī which is given by one manuscript, clearly as an addition. The apodosis is different: “she will get pregnant and not bring to term (*ul ušaklal*)”, KAR 472 II 6–7.

⁵² TBP 11 c VII 9–16, dupl. KAR 466:1–5, SpbTU IV 149 III 30–35.

Infertility

Infertility is also a topic in myths. In the Hittite “Story of Appu”, his wife says that it is his fault, “You have never taken (me correctly)”, and he reacts “You are (only) [a woman] of the usual female sort and (consequently) don’t know anything”.⁵³ Keret, the legendary king of Ugarit, does not get a son and the legend describes how he gets one, with divine help. All infertility was ascribed to the women but it is the man who is disgraced by it. The English word “barren” is for that reason quite appropriate and reflects the same prejudice; or rather: antiquated medical opinion. The male’s fault was impotency and the Babylonians and Hittites cured this by rituals and incantations.⁵⁴

Infertility is situated inside the belly.⁵⁵ Thus we read in the Atra-hasīs myth, “the womb is open and creates a child”.⁵⁶ Elsewhere it speaks of the reverse, “the womb is knotted” (*kašāru*): “The womb was ‘knotted’ and did not deliver a child”.⁵⁷ From a prayer to Ištar, we quote this line: “Grant me a child and heir, let my womb be my afterbirth (?).” She wishes to have offspring and we learn from the ritual that a “knot” (*kisru*) is to be loosened.⁵⁸ A liver omen runs as follows: “If its interior (i.e., of the liver) is like a womb, the womb in the land will be hard (*danānu*)”. Is infertility meant by “hard”?⁵⁹ Being blessed with children ultimately depends on the gods. In a prayer to the god of the moon, Sîn, it is said “Who has no son, you make acquire a son; without you a woman who does not bear (*la ălittu*) will not get seed (*zēru*) or pregnancy (*mērû*)”.⁶⁰ On the other hand, it lies in the power of the Mother Goddess to stop (*parāsu*) all births.⁶¹ Terrible is the witch who is able “to gag the mouth of the gods, to bind the womb of the goddesses”.⁶²

Humans try to remedy barrenness by herbs, amulets, and magic.⁶³ In the chapter on the plants of birth we will say more about the herbs. One short text on amulets is known; it runs as follows: “Silver, gold, iron, copper, in total 21 (amulet) stones, in order that a woman who is not pregnant becomes pregnant: you string it on a linen yarn, you put it on her neck”.⁶⁴ The rubric of a text from Nippur which remains unpublished reads, “Incantation for making pregnant a woman who does not bear (children)”.⁶⁵ In

⁵³ Appu I 33–37, with G. Beckman, *Hittite Birth Rituals* (1983) 2–3.

⁵⁴ R.D. Biggs, *Šà.zi.ga. Ancient Mesopotamian potency incantations* (= TCS II) (1967); add SpbTU I nos. 9–10, 20; IV no. 135. G. Beckman, *Hittite Birth Rituals* (1983) 18 f.; H.A. Hoffner, “Paskuwatti’s ritual against sexual impotence (CTH 406)”, *Aula Orientalis* 5 (1987) 271–287 (Hittite).

⁵⁵ In the late medical text SpbTU I 43:30: *la a-li-du-ti*, among problems originating in the kidneys.

⁵⁶ A.R. George, F.N.H. al-Rawi, *Iraq* 58 (1996) 176:42 (*rēmu peti ibanni šerru*).

⁵⁷ Atram-hasīs S iv 61 (p. 110) (*rēmu kuşsurma ul ušēšer šerra*). Cf. D.T. Tsumura, U.-F. 19 (1987) 313–5.

⁵⁸ BMS 30:14, with M.-J. Seux, *Hymnes et prières...* (1976) 326 with note to 15. He read in line 28 *kışru ippattar* and he discovered that this is a prayer for a woman for acquiring offspring (“pour obtenir une descendance”). – In a prayer to the god Šamaš he is asked that the “knot” affecting a woman when giving birth is loosened (*paṭāru*). This does not refer to barrenness, of course. For the text, see R. Borger, *Or NS* 54 (1985) 14–18 (lines 29–30). See below, in the section “Difficult labour”.

⁵⁹ BRM 4 13:10.

⁶⁰ STT 1 57 and dupl.; see W.R. Mayer, *UFBG* (1976) 497, lines 46 f.; M.-J. Seux, *Hymnes et prières...* (1976) 281, with notes 14 and 15. “Will not get”: *ul is-sab-bat* [sic].

⁶¹ K. Watanabe, *Assur* 3/4 (July 1983) 164–6. See below, p. 78.

⁶² Maqlū III 51, *kāmītu ša pi ilī kāsītu ša birki ištarāti*. Context: M.I. Gruber, U.-F. 18 (1986) 145.

⁶³ Herbs and amulets will be discussed below. Fragmentary medical prescriptions: BAM 3 241 III 7 ff., 244:8 ff., 4 408 I 1–5, with E. Reiner, *ZA* 72 (1982) 128 and 131 note 24. Magic in Ugarit: KTU 1.13, in the interpretation of J.C. de Moor, “An incantation against infertility (KTU 1.13)”, U.-F. 12 (1980) 305–310. Now in TUAT II/3 (1988) 339–342, and *Textes ougaritiques* II (1989) 19–27.

⁶⁴ BAM 3 250 (SAL NU.PEŠ₄ ana PEŠ₄).

⁶⁵ N 4001, inim.inim.ma SAL nu.ù.tu *a-na ur-ri-i*. This text was shown to me by Ann Guinan in 1982.

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the catalogue of incantations there is a reference to an incantation for “A woman who is bound in being pregnant”; it is followed by another that is meant for a woman who is in hard labour. A gloss written above it in one manuscript offers “not bearing” which could mean: infertile.⁶⁶ It was a pious act to arrange a “banquet” or “party” (*qarētu*) in a temple in order to get children. Among the many complaints of a melancholic man is this one: “I have visited the Kidmuru temple and arranged a banquet, (yet) my wife has troubled me; for five years (she has been) neither dead nor alive, and I have no son”.⁶⁷ A fragment of a ritual for such a banquet shows that its purpose could be to pray for “life, a name, seed”. The latter means “children”.⁶⁸

We have an oracular request directed to the gods Šamaš and Adad in which a man asks whether his wife will get pregnant. The queries are listed in the following order: Will the father-in-law be happy with the marriage gift? Will a male child be born to the second wife, after the many girls that are already there? Will the wife get pregnant? Will the sick woman in confinement give birth to a baby?⁶⁹ The section that interests runs as follows:⁷⁰

– O Šamaš, lord of the decision, O Adad, lord of divination: NN, who since [many] days lives [...] and does [not ...] in pregnancy so that the heart of NN her husband is sore: [with your divine help], knowing (everything): will she draw (*sâbu*) (the semen), will she get pregnant from this day until [...], as many as there will be, whether (in) [nearby] days or faraway days? Will human offspring [...], will a bone not her own into her innards [...], of the full time of a woman

According to a late (Seleucid) speculative medical text, the origin of barrenness lies in “the kidneys – a stricture”.⁷¹ But there are cases where it is a congenital defect; the myth “Enki and Ninmah” tells how the gods try to create human beings, with poor success. One result is “the woman who does not give birth”. Enki makes the best of her by assigning her a place in the House of Women, under a weaver. This means that such women make garments in the queen’s palace.⁷² In the Nether World one can stumble over her:⁷³

- Did you see the woman who never gave birth?
- I saw.
- How does she fare?
- Like a pot she is cast down violently, she gives no man joy.

The sad lot of an unmarried man or woman follows: they weep.

⁶⁶ KAR 44:15, with J. Bottéro, *Mythes et rites de Babylone* (1985) 75, SAL NU *al-du* SAL.PEŠ₄.KÉŠ.DA; after M.J. Geller, in *Studies W.G. Lambert* (forthcoming).

⁶⁷ ABL 1285 rev. 23–25 (= SAA X 294). We follow this translation, and the explanation by S. Parpola in *Studies Erica Reiner* (1987) 277 f. Parpola in LAS, Commentary (1983) 81 f.: “These parties were more modest than the public ones; the giver of the party, assisted by a priest, was expected to offer a relatively limited inventory of food and drinks to the god(s) of a single temple and to perform a sheep sacrifice; in return, he was promised ‘life, name (and) seed’ ”.

⁶⁸ B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* II (1981) T 106 no. 49 A 6–7 (TI.LA MU NUMUN).

⁶⁹ J.A. Craig, ABRT 14, with a new fragment K. 10322 joining Craig, Rev. Col. III, occasionally cited by CAD. The text is not complete and our identifications could require some modifications.

⁷⁰ Craig, Col. II 4–14, with CAD M/2 27b, 315b, CAD S 10a. Our interpretation is based on the end of line 10, *i-sa-ab ir-re*; see CAD S 10a (“obscure”). See also p. 131.

⁷¹ SpbTU I no. 43:30: the *la a-li-du-ti* begins *ul-tu* BIR.MEŠ *hi-niq-ti*.

⁷² Enki and Ninmah 72–74, with W.H.Ph. Römer, TUAT III/3 (1993) 395.

⁷³ A. Shaffer, *Sumerian sources of Tablet XII of the Epic of Gilgameš* (1963) 91,118, lines 273–274; Römer, TUAT II/1 (1986) 40 f.

Contraception

The Egyptians knew methods to establish a woman's ability to become pregnant. This was done by having her urinate on barley or wheat (a modern test has shown that it works when it is done on barley).⁷⁴ Even the gender of the child could be known; we give one passage:⁷⁵

– You shall put wheat and barley into purses of cloth. The woman shall urinate on it, every day. If both sprout, she will bear. If the wheat sprouts, she will bear a boy. If the barley sprouts, she will bear a girl. If neither sprouts, she will not bear at all.

We now quote this prescription from a magical papyrus in Demotic:⁷⁶

– The way to know it of a woman whether she will be pregnant: You should make the woman urinate on this plant, above, again, at night. When morning comes, if you find the plant scorched, she will not conceive. If you find it green, she will conceive.

We find similar methods in Greek medical literature, and the West-European world came to know them by way of the Byzantines. A woman's ability to conceive could be established by fumigating or inserting some stuff in her, below, and when its scent was exhalated in the breath, the road was open, the way was free. If not, there apparently was a blockage and pregnancy was impossible.⁷⁷ Erica Reiner has identified passages of a similar nature in one Babylonian text. The text considers whether the woman "will be pregnant", or not.⁷⁸ A wad of wool (*itqu*) containing or saturated with medications is placed into the vagina and is removed after a certain time (three days, for example). It is then checked to see if it had changed colour (they also performed an obscure water test). One example: "If the wad is red or spotted with blood, she will be pregnant; if it is green, she will not". The text is not easy to read.

Contraception

On birth control in Babylonia almost nothing is known. The only passage which speaks of avoiding pregnancy is an omen based on the appearance of the liver, "A nun will permit anal intercourse in order that she not become pregnant".⁷⁹ In the Babylonian "Love Lyrics" the women of Babylon are told, "Will they not give her a rag to wipe her vulva, to wipe (*kapāru*) her vagina?".⁸⁰ What is the purpose of this rag, actually

⁷⁴ Renate Germer, *Untersuchungen über Arzneimittelpflanzen im Alten Ägypten* (1979) 143–146.

⁷⁵ W. Wreszinski, *Der grosse medizinische Papyrus des Berliner Museums* (Pap. Berl. 3038) (1909) 110 no. 199; R.M. and J.J. Janssen, *Growing up in ancient Egypt* (1990) 2.

⁷⁶ H. Betz, *The Greek magical papyri in translation* (1985) 242 PDM XIV 956–960 (transl. Janet H. Johnson).

⁷⁷ B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* I (1963) 57–60 § 21 (Hippocrates, Aristotle, Diocles); R.J. Littman, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* Teil II, Band 37/3 (1996) 2690 f. ("Egyptian influence in Alexandrian gynaecology?"); and Erica Reiner, 126 (see the next note). Note that in the Talmud virginity was established by a similar method: the woman had to sit on a wine barrel and was proved to be no virgin if she exhalated the wine fumes; Kethuboth 10b and Yebamoth 60b, with Preuss, 559 f.

⁷⁸ E. Reiner, "Babylonian Birth Prognoses", ZA 72 (1982) 124–138. The text is UET 7 123. In her translation, E. Reiner offers always "the woman is / is not / pregnant". But she admits that the other possibility is "the woman can / cannot / get pregnant" (p. 127 f.; "the woman can conceive", p. 131). Short summary in E. Reiner, *Astral magic in Babylonia* (1995) 41. For another possible test in the Diagnostic Handbook, see p. 200 (Tablet 36:100–102).

⁷⁹ [IN]JIN.DINGIR.RA (= *entu?*) MU (= *aššum*) la e-re-šá *qi-na-as-sa uš-nak*, A. Boissier, DA (1894) 220 K. 4030:10, dupl. BRM 4 12: 32; also CT 31 44 obv. (!) 10. Context: below, p. 103.

⁸⁰ W.G. Lambert in H. Goedicke, J.J.M. Roberts, *Unity and Diversity* (1975) 122, Group IV:4–7; also Foster,

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a tuft of wool (*singu*)? Could it be postcoital birth control? Another example of birth control may be found in the lexical tradition: a “plant for giving birth”, and a “plant for not giving birth”. The former is a treatment for infertility. Could the latter, once called “the killer” (*dā’iku*), be an abortifacient?⁸¹ A legend tells us that the mother of Sargon, king of Akkad, was an *entu* priestess who was not supposed to bear children. Sargon speaks: “My city is Azupirānu, which lies on the bank of the Euphrates. My mother, a high priestess (*entu*), conceived me, in secret she bore me”. She lived in the otherwise unknown city Azupirānu, literally “saffron”. And saffron is a plant used for contraception.⁸²

More is known of prevention of conception from Egyptian sources. To this end, materials like crocodile dung, honey and gum were inserted. Some efficacy is ascribed to them even now. Postcoital fumigation was another method.⁸³

Jewish tradition takes the famous Biblical story of Onan who “spilled the semen on the ground, lest he should give offspring to his brother” (Genesis 38:9) to be *coitus interruptus*. The Midrash to this verse speaks of Onan “threshing inside and winnowing outside” – this remains the standard expression for *coitus interruptus* in the Hebrew tradition. By “spilling the seed” this way Onan disobeyed the law of levirate. But it was also a sin with wider implications: this method was condemned by God. There has been much discussion about this. The Talmud permitted “threshing inside and winnowing outside” during the time that the wife was nursing a baby: presumably to safeguard a newborn child whose mother might cease to lactate if she conceived again.⁸⁴

The Talmud knows the method of inserting wool of low quality (*mūk*) but allows it as a contraceptive device in three cases only: if a minor girl, a pregnant woman, or a nursing mother are involved.⁸⁵ The minor girl is a child bride in her twelfth year and in danger to die due to pregnancy; the expecting mother is in danger of getting a compressed foetus (*sandal*); the nursing mother has to stop feeding her baby and it will die. The view of contraception based on this famous *Baraita* is a matter of controversy in Judaism.⁸⁶ On the other hand, taking orally “the cup of roots” (*kōs šel ‘iqqārīn*) was permitted to any woman wishing to avoid or terminate (early) pregnancy. That this potion could have a sterilizing effect is another problem.⁸⁷

In the minds of late Antique and early Medieval theologians, the deliberate attempt

Before the Muses II (1996) 811 f., (a) and (d)

⁸¹ K. Watanabe, *Baghd. Mitt.* 25 (1995) 587 f., § 8.

⁸² B. Lewis, *The Sargon Legend* (1980) 24, 44 f. For saffron, see below, after the discussion of MA Laws § 53 (p. 42).

⁸³ A.T. Sandison, art. “Empfängnisverhütung, in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* I (1975) 1227 f.; W. Westendorf, *Erwachen der Heilkunst. Die Medizin im Alten Ägypten* (1992) 208 f.; Riddle, *Contraception*, 66–73, Chapter 7, “Egyptian papyrus sources”. Modern: “Finally, a traditional method of contraception practiced by a few village women is known as *arfa* (literally, disgust). According to this procedure, women, during their menstruation, on two consecutive months, insert human excreta into their vagina ‘as far as the finger can reach’”; S. Morsy, “Childbirth in an Egyptian village”, in: M. Artschwager Kay, *Anthropology of Human Birth* (1982) 153.

⁸⁴ Yebamoth 34b, with J. Cohen, “*Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it*”. *The ancient and medieval career of a Biblical text* (1989) 136 ff.

⁸⁵ Yebamoth 12b. See Feldman, 169–193. For the wool, see J. Preuss, *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin* (1911) 479; also 448, 471, and S. Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie* II (1911) 425 note 12; Feldman, 170–5. The Babylonian etymological equivalent is *mukku*; Sumerian mug.

⁸⁶ J. David Bleich, *Judaism and healing. Halakhic perspectives* (1981) 56–64.

⁸⁷ Jakobovits, 162–6; Feldman, 235 ff.

Abortion

to avoid conception was intimately tied with abortion. The difference between them was more in degree than in kind. Herbs were said to either produce abortion or, if conception had not yet occurred, to prevent it from taking place.⁸⁸ The persistence with which those herbs continued to be used has led to an investigation of the biological effects of some of the oral contraceptives (“potions”) and indeed, “we have good reasons to accept the claims that these agents affected fertility”. The plants investigated by a modern author are ferula, pomegranate, juniper, rue, pennyroyal, squirting cucumber, Queen Anne’s lace (*Daucus carota* L.).⁸⁹

Abortion

Ancient Near Eastern lawbooks discuss the case of someone hitting a pregnant woman causing her to loose her foetus.⁹⁰ It is remarkable that almost all those law books, from Sumer to Exodus, have regulations about this, a fact that points to a common legal “culture”. It has been said that a mishap like this “is exceedingly rare in the practice of legal medicine” and is an atypical, “bizarre”, occurrence. Perhaps an actual event entered the legal tradition as an unusual but interesting case.⁹¹ However, a papyrus from Egypt speaks about exactly this as a real problem.⁹²

The oldest example is from a Sumerian legal textbook:⁹³

- If (a man accidentally) pushed (zà an.úš) the daughter of a (free) man and caused her to have a miscarriage (níg.šà.ga.ni a im.šub.šub), he shall pay 10 shekels of silver.
- If (a man deliberately) struck (ba.an.síg) the daughter of a (free) man and caused her to have a miscarriage, he shall pay 20 shekels of silver.

Another collection of Sumerian laws says this:⁹⁴

- If [...] has (deliberately) beaten (i.ni.in.ra) the daughter of a (free) man and she has suffered a miscarriage (níg.šà.ga.na šu mu.un.da.an.lá), he shall pay 30 shekels of silver.

⁸⁸ Monica H. Green, in Dunstan, 54, based on John T. Noonan, *Contraception. A history of its treatment by the Catholic theologians and Canonists* (1965, 1986), Chapter V, “The Lessons of the Monks”.

⁸⁹ J.M. Riddle, “Oral contraceptives and early-term abortifacients during Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages”, *Past and Present* 132 (August 1991) 3–32; and his book *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (1992). J.M. Riddle, “Birth control in the Ancient World”, *Archaeology* 47/2 (March/April 1994) 29–35. See also the remarks by J.T. Noonan, *Contraception* (1965, 1986) 12.

⁹⁰ E. Otto wrote a book on the subject, *Körperverletzungen in den Keilschriftrechten und im Alten Testament. Studien zum Rechtstransfer im Alten Orient* (1991). See also C. Saporetti, *Abolire le nascite. Il problema nella Mesopotamia antica* (1993) 37–64 (Chapter II); J.C. Pangas, “Notas sobre el aborto en la antigua Mesopotamia”, *Aula Orientalis* 8 (1990) 213–218. S. Lafont takes “miscarriage” in the different lawbooks as a case study in her article “Ancient Near Eastern laws: continuity and pluralism”, in: B.M. Levinson, *Theory and method in Biblical and Cuneiform Law* (1994) 108–118. Now S. Lafont, *Femmes, droit et justice dans l’Antiquité orientale* (1999) 345–382 (Chapitre 8: L’avortement).

⁹¹ M. Civil, *Studies B. Landsberger* (1965) 6b; J.J. Finkelstein, *The ox that gored* (1981) 19, with note 11. But note what G.R. Driver and J.C. Miles wrote, *The Babylonian Laws I* (1956) 416: “they all deal with a type of assault that is nowadays most unusual; but in the East pregnant women continue their ordinary occupations even to-day with great freedom, so that this injury may often occur”.

⁹² O. Montevercchi, ZPE 34 (1979) 115, on P. Mich. V 228 (= SB X 10239); cf. M. Vandoni, *Testi per il corso di papirologia. I documenti di Trifone (dai papiri di Ossirinco)* (1974) no. 7.

⁹³ YOS 1 28 rev. IV 1–10, cf. J.J. Finkelstein, ANET (1969) 525b, § 1–2 (instead of “the daughter of a man” he offers “a woman of the free citizen class”. With an eye on the laws of Hammurabi). New translation by M. Roth, *Law collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (1995) 43.

⁹⁴ M. Civil, *Studies B. Landsberger* (1965) 4–5, UM 55–21–71, col. III; cf. H. Lutzmann, TUAT I/1 (1982) 25 f. (Lipit-Ištar?).

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If she died, that man shall be [put to death].

- If [...] has (deliberately) beaten the slave-girl of a (free) man and she has suffered a miscarriage, he shall pay 5 shekels of silver.

The Laws of Hammurabi has the following stipulations about miscarriage, lit. “causing her to ‘throw’ that of her belly”. The lawbook carefully distinguishes between three “classes” in society, the free citizens (an elite connected with the Palace or State), the privates, and the slaves:

- If a man strikes the daughter of a (free) man (and) causes her to have a miscarriage, he shall pay 10 shekels of silver for her foetus (§ 209).
- If that woman dies, they shall put his daughter to death (§ 210).
- If he causes the daughter of a private citizen to have a miscarriage by striking (her), he shall pay 5 shekels of silver (§ 211).
- If that woman dies, he shall pay 30 shekels of silver (§ 212).
- If he strikes the slave-girl of a (free) man and causes her to have a miscarriage, he shall pay 2 shekels of silver (§ 213).
- If that slave-girl dies, he shall pay 20 shekels of silver (§ 214).

The Middle Assyrian lawbook has similar dispositions but the punishments are more complex. It has a group of articles about wives and whores suffering abortion (A § 50–53). It is remarkable that in another context we find an isolated case of the same: the assault on “the daughter of a man” resulting in abortion (A § 21). We will first study section 21.

In the articles of the earlier law books translated above we have tacitly assumed that “the daughter of a man” is any married free woman and there is no reason to doubt this. Here, in § 21, she must have had another status, or so some scholars think. A woman not under the authority of a husband, for example.⁹⁵ This would lead us into insurmountable problems. Here, in the context of offences, the old well-known qualification “daughter of a free man” is used; later on, in the detailed group of special laws, the women will be distinguished in categories.

- If a man hits the daughter of a (free) man and causes her to have a miscarriage, (and) they have established the truth about him, he shall give two talents thirty minas of lead; they shall flog him fifty (times) with rods (and) he shall do the labour of the king for one full month (A § 21).

The man not only has to pay a fine, he also is to be flogged and to do corvée work. What is new in § 21 is the “public” character of the punishment that the perpetrator has to undergo: this means that he has also offended the community by causing a miscarriage. This provision is isolated from other laws dealing with abortion. This is because the laws in this section § 18–21 are arranged according to type of punishment.

We now turn to the group of laws on abortion (A § 50–53). In the first two sections, “the wife of a man” is the victim. In § 50 the foetus or the wife herself dies and the *jus talionis* is applied. Translation:

- [If a man] hits the wi[fe of a (free) man] and causes [her to have a miscarriage], they shall tre[at the wife of the man] who caused the wife of the (free) man to mis[carry] just

⁹⁵ G. Cardascia, *Les lois assyriennes* (1969) 136–8. He applies this explanation also to the articles of the earlier lawbooks. Driver and Miles, *The Assyrian Laws* (1936) 108, contrasted “the ordinary wife of a man” to “the daughter of a man” as “a person of higher social standing”.

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as he [treated] her; [as the penalty for] her fruit he shall compensate life. But if that woman dies, they shall kill the man; as the penalty for her fruit he shall compensate life. But when the husband of that woman has no son, if he (!) has hit his wife and caused her to miscarry, they shall kill the hitter as the penalty for her fruit. If her fruit is a girl, he shall compensate the life.

We cannot comment on everything in this text. The most important point to note is that the man ("he") has to compensate life but that the community ("they") takes care of the revenge: they "treat" the man's wife in a similar way as he had done to the pregnant woman, or they "kill" him. This means that the *jus talionis* is taken out of private hands, although the offence is of a private nature. Thus, § 50 is a complement to § 21. We owe insights like these to E. Otto who has studied the fine texture of the lawbook. He concludes that the Middle Assyrian Laws are the work of a scholar attempting to replace private settlements by public justice.⁹⁶

§ 50 on *jus talionis* ends with two additional dispositions, the first dealing with a man having no son and heir, the second when the unborn child is a girl, a lesser crime. This leads the lawgiver in § 51 to another lighter case: a man who strikes and causes a woman "who does not raise (children)" to abort. Is she unable to have children because of an illness? He only has to pay a fine of two talents of lead. As to a man who does this to a whore: "they shall impose on him a blow for a blow; he shall compensate the life" (§ 52). This man has bereft the woman of her only support for her old age, so we suppose, and therefore he has to compensate her adequately by giving another child.⁹⁷

A woman aborting herself is the theme of § 53:

– If a woman has caused an abortion at her own (initiative) (and) they have established the truth about her, they shall impale her on stakes, they shall not bury her. If she has died in aborting, they shall impale her on stakes, they shall not bury her.

Behind the harsh punishment, with a religious tinge in that the woman is not buried, lies the idea that a woman has no exclusive right to her offspring. Not only is her husband the owner, but she also has committed a crime against the community.⁹⁸ In the Sumerian literary text "The Curse of Agade", sacred but perverted midwives abort (?) the children.⁹⁹ We are reminded of Flavius Josephus who summarized the Jewish opinion as follows: "The Law orders all the offspring to be brought up, and forbids women either to cause abortion or to make away with the foetus (*mèt' ambloûn to sparen mète diaphtheirein*); a woman convicted of this is regarded as an infanticide, because she destroys a soul and diminishes the race" (*Contra Apionem* II 202).

How did the woman of the Middle Assyrian Laws provoke abortion? There is only one medical prescription known to us used "to make a pregnant woman abort her fruit": she

⁹⁶ E. Otto, *Körperverletzungen in den Keilschriftrechten und im Alten Testament* (1991) 85–95; E. Otto, "Die Einschränkung des Privatstrafrechts durch öffentliches Strafrecht in der Redaktion der Paragraphen 1–24, 50–59 des Mittelassyrischen Kodex der Tafel A (KAV 1)", in *Biblische Welten, Festschrift für Martin Metzger* (1993) 131–166, esp. 138 (§ 50), 156 (§ 21), 165 f. (character of the lawbook).

⁹⁷ G. Cardascia, 244.

⁹⁸ Cardascia, 245 ff. Already Driver and Miles, *The Assyrian Laws* (1936) 117 note 3, compared being denied a burial with the punishment of suicide in Greece and England. See also their remarks on women aborting themselves in ancient Rome, p. 116 note 5.

⁹⁹ J.G. Westenholz, *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989) 256 (dumu *hē.en.gi4.gi4*, line 241).

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has to crush eight plant products and drink it with wine on an empty stomach.¹⁰⁰ In the section on Plants of Birth we will show that some of the plants are also recommended to promote the growth and birth of the child; they certainly are not the cause of abortion. One of the few other plants in this prescription may be saffron (*azupirānu*) and indeed, known to be an abortifacient.¹⁰¹ But the identification of *azupirānu* as "saffron" is by no means certain. It is followed by "the wick" (*businnu*). This is the only time that we find this wick in the medical corpus; obviously, this was the most effective ingredient. Wicks were made of flax, the willow or the poplar.¹⁰² Now, it is intriguing that the bark of the white willow and the white poplar in Antiquity were contraceptives; especially the *Salix babylonica* L. ("Weeping Willow", rare in Iraq).¹⁰³ Contraceptives; not abortifacients! The borderline between them was thin in Antiquity.

The Hittite Laws – older than the Middle Assyrian lawbook and from quite another culture – distinguishes the age of the foetus:

– If anyone causes a free woman to miscarry – if (it is) the tenth month, he shall give 10 shekels of silver. If (it is) the fifth month, he shall give 5 shekels of silver and pledge his estate as security (§ 17).

Later version: "If anyone causes a free woman to miscarry, he shall give 20 shekels of silver".

– If anyone causes a slave-woman to miscarry – if (it is) the tenth month, he shall give 5 shekels of silver (§ 18).

In a later version: "If anyone causes a slave-woman to miscarry, he shall give 20 shekels of silver".

These provisions connect value to the age of the foetus. At first sight, the penalty is 5 shekels when the embryo is 1–5 months old, and 10 shekels when in month 6–10. This is the most likely interpretation, but it is possible that these amounts are examples: the fine was always to be of the same number of shekels as the month of pregnancy in which the miscarriage occurred.¹⁰⁴

A foetus of five months is worth less than one that has come to term. The ancient interpretation of the Biblical law on abortion, current among the Greek Jews and the Christians, makes a similar distinction. We first present the text, Exodus 21:22–25:

– When men have a fight, and hurt a pregnant woman, and that her child (*jēlēd*) goes out, and there is no *'āsōn*, he shall certainly be fined, according as the woman's husband shall lay upon him; and he shall give (it) in *pēlīlīm*, But if there is *'āsōn*, you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

¹⁰⁰ BAM 3 246:1, with J.C. Pangas, *Aula Orientalis* 8 (1990) 215–6: [SAL.Š]À×A ŠÀ.ŠÀ.ŠÀ ana ŠUB-di. Cf. G. Beckman, B.R. Foster, *Studies Abraham Sachs* (1988) 12 no. 9b rev. 14.

¹⁰¹ Pangas, 216 with note 29. In J.M. Riddle, *Contraception and abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (1992), 244, Index: one of the many plants.

¹⁰² I. Löw, *Die Flora der Juden* III (1924) 331–334. The starting point in Jewish discussions on the wick is the Mishnah, Sabbath 2,1.

¹⁰³ From Dioscurides on; full discussion by J.M. Riddle, *Contraception* (1992) 31–33. Cf. *Flora of Iraq* IV/1 (1980) 25 ff.

¹⁰⁴ G. Beckman, *Hittite Birth Rituals* (1983) 10.

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Before explaining the original meaning of this text according to modern scholarship, we will first follow its interpretation in ancient times.

The Greek translation of these verses in the Septuagint, originating in Egypt, sees in *'āsōn* a word meaning “the formed one” (*exeikonisménon*). Thus, the law distinguishes between an “unformed” and a “formed” foetus. In the first case, a fine suffices, in the second, *jus talionis* applies. Philo the Alexandrian worked this out.¹⁰⁵ In this distinction, the Septuagint follows Greek and Roman ideas: only when the foetus is distinctly felt to be alive, is it treated as a human being. Philosophers and doctors did their best to determine the exact moment.¹⁰⁶ This interpretation of the passage in Exodus played an important role in the discussions of the Church Fathers.¹⁰⁷ Tertullian wrote: “The foetus becomes man from the moment, that (its) form is completed”. Before that moment he is *animal*, a living being with a soul, *anima*.¹⁰⁸ Only Jerome in his new Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate, returned to the original Hebrew text (*sed ipsa vixerit* and *sin autem mors eius fuerit subsecuta*). But its predecessor, the Old Latin version, derived from the Greek of the Septuagint, still was quoted by moralists throughout the Middle Ages and became the basis of the relevant penitential and canon law.¹⁰⁹ One Medieval Frisian lawbook, dealing with provoked abortion, indicates how the foetus is developing month by month; a second lawbook assigns the penalties (*wergild*), increasing in value.¹¹⁰

Interestingly, a Greek inscription from North Africa (Cyrene; 331–326 B.C.) distinguishes two degrees of contamination from miscarriage, depending on the foetus being formed (*diádēlon*, “quite clear”) or not. The first is considered a human being. This is one of the “sacred laws” on ritual practices, given by an oracle of Apollo:¹¹¹

– If a woman suffers a miscarriage (*ekbállō*), if it is quite clear, they are defiled as from one who has died; but if it is not quite clear, the household itself is defiled as from childbirth (*léchos*).

¹⁰⁵ I. Jakobovits, *Jewish Medical Ethics* (1959) 179; D.M. Feldman, *Marital relations, birth control, and abortion in Jewish Law* (1968) 256 f.

¹⁰⁶ F. Kudlien, art. “Geburt I”, in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (1973) 38 f.; E. Nardi, *Procurato aborto nel mondo greco romano* (1971) 93–115 (“embriologia dell’epoca”); B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* III (1975) 251–262. For the juristic assessment of abortion, see Stricker, 267–9 § 65; E. Nardi, “Aborto e omicidio nella civiltà classica”, in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II, *Principat*, 13, *Recht* (1980) 366–385.

¹⁰⁷ E. Nardi, *Aborto procurato*, 160–181.

¹⁰⁸ Tertullianus, *De anima* 37,2, *ex eo igitur fetus in utero homo, a quo forma completa est*. Tertullian was the first who clearly stated that the soul is given at the moment of conception: this is the doctrine of traducianism. See P.F. Beatrice, *Tradux peccati* (1978) 260 ff.

¹⁰⁹ G.R. Dunstan, *The human embryo* (1990) 4 f.

¹¹⁰ The law of Emsigo is the most detailed; we add the month between brackets: blood (1), body (2), sinews and blood vessels (3), formation of the child (4), soul, upright stature, breath (5), marrow and skin (6), guts (7), hair and nails (8), separation from the mother (9). See W.J. Buma, W. Ebel, *Das Emsinger Recht* (1967) 48 ff. (V.19); 186 f. (Dritte Handschrift, I.199); discussion by G. Bary, “Augustinus en het ongeboren kind in het Oudfries”, in: *Kleine geschiedenis. Een bundel essays aangeboden aan Adelbert Davids* (Nijmegen 1995) 46–52. The Fivelgo lawbook, less detailed, gives the penalties; see B. Sjölin, *Die Fivelgoer Handschrift* II (1970) 330 (XII.1–2) The pattern is said to go back to “Augustine, the holy bishop”. Monthly phases are also found in the earlier *Gynaecia* by Vindicianus (Africa, fourth century A.D.): *umbilicus* (1), *expressio corporis* (2), *anima* (3), *ungulae, capillus, motus* (4), *caracterem patris aut matris, aut adulterium demonstrat* (5), *nervi* (6), *medulla* (7), *ossa dura* (8), *maturus* (9), *ad lucem* (10). Text in M. Wellmann, *Fragmentesammlung der griechischen Ärzte* I (1901) 218 f., Ch. 16. See B.H. Hill, “Frisian law and the foetus”, *Janus* 50 (1962) 55–59.

¹¹¹ F. Sokolowski, *Les lois sacrées des cités grecques* (Paris 1962) 189 no. 115, B 24–27. Cf. J.M. Riddle, *Contraception* 23, 177 note 43.

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Within Jewry, outside Egypt, another interpretation of the Exodus text prevailed. It is reflected in the Aramaic translation, the Targum, and in the writings of Flavius Josephus. In his books for the Greek public, Flavius Josephus speaks about abortion twice. In his version of the Exodus text he does not know anything of "formed" or "unformed" and thus he stands in the Palestinian Halakhic tradition.¹¹² Translation:

– He that kicks a woman with child, if the woman miscarries (*examblōō*), shall be fined by the judges for having diminished the population by the destruction of the fruit of her womb, and a further sum shall be presented by him to the woman's husband. If she dies of the blow, he also shall die, the law claiming as its due the sacrifice of life for life.

A recent study of this law more or less follows Josephus.¹¹³ The death of the foetus cannot be considered homicide but is damage done to the woman's husband and a compensation for the dead foetus ("possibly" the meaning of *p^elilim*) is necessary. In the case of the woman's death, we have to do with a fatal accident ("certainly" the meaning of *'āsōn*), with homicide, and something similar should happen within the family of the offender, "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth".

Raymond Westbrook has proposed a new interpretation of this Exodus law.¹¹⁴ We summarize his findings. The text starts with a vague plural: an undetermined number of men are fighting. Then, a woman becomes involved: apparently, she happened to be there and she is hurt by a push or so. As a consequence, she loses her unborn child. At this moment we, as readers, pause and ponder over the first juridical problem that arises now: which of those men gave the push and is the guilty one? The problem of damages, brought about by an unknown perpetrator, is a well known problem in any discussion on a skirmish where people are wounded. Now, Westbrook sees this problem formulated in the obscure remark "and there is no *'āsōn*". What does this word mean? "Harm", "mischief" are the usual translations. Westbrook understands the word to mean: "damage caused by an unknown perpetrator", he sees this confirmed by the three other passages in the Old Testament where the word occurs. All three are found in the Joseph story. Jacob is not willing to send Benjamin down to Egypt because he fears that *'āsōn* will happen to Benjamin (Genesis 42:4, 38; cf. 44:29). Not "harm", but Jacob fears damages for which none of the brothers can be held liable. This indeed had been his experience when he tried to find out who was responsible for the "death" of Joseph!

Let us return to Exodus. "There is no *'āsōn*", so here the perpetrator is known. Understandably, the law now switches to the singular, referring to the man who had done it: "he shall certainly be fined, according as the woman's husband shall lay upon him". A private arrangement is made, the amount of the fine probably depending on the financial possibilities of the guilty person. It must have been something like the "ransom" (*kofēr*) of verse 30.

Now follows the short remark "and he shall give (it) in *p^elilim*", often translated as "he shall pay as the judges (determine)"; so already the Targum and Jerome (*arbitri*). Nobody knows what *p^elilim* means and Westbrook, in line with his interpretation of *'āsōn*, proposes

¹¹² *Antiqu. Jud.* IV 278; see Jakobovits, 180; Feldman, 259. – The other passage has been quoted above, at the end of our discussion of MA laws, A § 53.

¹¹³ C. Houtman, *Das Bundesbuch. Ein Kommentar* (1997) 154–168; earlier Houtman in M. Vervenne, *Studies in the Book of Exodus* (1996) 381–397.

¹¹⁴ R. Westbrook, "Lex talionis and Exodus 21, 22–25", *Revue biblique* 93 (1986) 52–69. This interpretation was rejected in a few words by C. Houtman (with others), 158 f., 167. S. Lafont pointed out that only Exodus 21:22–25 speaks of miscarriage by an accident (not entirely true; see YOS 1 28 § 1–2) and accepted Westbrook's interpretation of *'āsōn* ("responsibility, liability"); S. Lafont in: B.M. Levinson, *Theory and method in Biblical and Cuneiform Law* (1994) 112–4. J.R. Ziskind, "When two men fight: Legal implications of brawling in the Ancient Near East", *Revue internationale des droits de l'Antiquité* 3–44 (1997) 13–42 (particularly 26–30), is not aware of Westbrook's explanation.

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“he alone”. Only he, the man identified as guilty, has to pay; not the other fighters. In the few other passages where we find this obscure word *p^elilim*, “alone” is a possible translation. Here, it expresses the idea of sole responsibility.

In the second part of this law, the alternative is taken into consideration, that there is no identifiable perpetrator; in Hebrew, “there is *'āsōn*”. Ancient Near Eastern lawbooks pay much attention to similar situations. The common opinion is that in such cases the community is responsible for damages inflicted in its territory. The local public authority, “city and mayor”, is obliged to pay the injured party a money penalty. In cases of homicide this compensation was named “life”, a fixed amount of silver. We read in Exodus 21:23: “But if there is *'āsōn*, you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, wound for wound, stripe for stripe”. “You” stands for the community, “life” is the compensation in silver, “for” (*tahat*) does not mean “instead of” but “as the penalty for”. The latter is clear from verse 26, where a man has to set free his slave “as penalty for” destroying his eye.

The new translation of Exodus 21:22–25 by Westbrook is as follows:

— If men fight and a pregnant woman is pushed and has a miscarriage, if it is not a case of perpetrator unknown, he (the perpetrator) shall surely be punished as the woman's husband shall impose (ransom) upon him, and he shall pay alone. If it is a case of perpetrator unknown, you (the community) shall pay a life as the penalty for a life, an eye as the penalty for an eye, a tooth as the penalty for a tooth, an arm as the penalty for an arm, a leg as the penalty for a leg, a burn as the penalty for a burn, a wound as the penalty for a wound, a bruise as the penalty for a bruise.

Note that a general rule is illustrated by a particular – if not peculiar – case. The rule that the community is responsible for the safety in the streets. It is possible that the formulaic end of the text wishes to express that in other cases, too, they are responsible; for instance, when an innocent by-passers loses his eye or tooth due to an unknown villain.

We now turn to the attitude to abortion in post-Biblical Jewish law.¹¹⁵ The contemporary philosophers and Christians considered the problem of the “animation” or “ensouling” of the foetus: does the soul enter the body at the moment of conception, or later? This played a role in the interesting discussion on the body and the soul by the Roman emperor Antoninus and the compiler of the Mishnah; Talmudic literature has preserved this exchange of ideas.¹¹⁶ It is often referred to in modern literature¹¹⁷ but the whole issue remains “mainly of academic interest and quite irrelevant to the legal rights and status of unborn children”, wrote I. Jakobovits in his book on Jewish medical ethics.¹¹⁸ The Rabbis saw the unborn as “the tigh” of the mother, i.e., as an integral part of her

¹¹⁵ Fullest discussion: V. Aptowitzer, “Observations on the criminal law of the Jews”, JQR NS 15 (1924) 55–118 (V, “The status of the embryo in criminal law”, p. 85–118).

¹¹⁶ The discussion in the Talmud is as follows. Antoninus: “When is the soul placed in man; as soon as it is decreed (*p^e qīdā*) [that the sperm shall be male or female, etc.], or when [the embryo] is actually formed (*q^e sīrā*)?” Rabbi: “From the moment of formation.” Antoninus: “Can a piece of meat be unsalted for three days without becoming putrid? But it must be the moment that [God] decrees [its destiny]”. Rabbi now agrees and points to Job 10:12, “And thy decree (*p^e quddā*) hath preserved my spirit [i.e., my soul]” (Sanhedrin 91a-b).

¹¹⁷ See R. Meyer, *Hellenistisches in der rabbinischen Anthropologie: rabbinische Vorstellungen vom Werden des Menschen* (1937) 25–6; E.E. Urbach, *The Sages. Their concepts and beliefs* (1975) 223, 242; D.M. Feldman, *Marital relations, birth control, and abortion in Jewish Law* (1968) 271 f.

¹¹⁸ *Jewish Medical Ethics* (1959) 182–3. For J.D. Bleich, however, “the Gemara (= Talmud) concludes (here) that the embryo is endowed with a soul at the moment of conception”; *Judaism and healing* (1981) 97.

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body.¹¹⁹ Roman law is of the same opinion¹²⁰ Modern authors stress that this is just a legal definition: "It could hardly be sufficient for determining the morality of abortion. It merely defines the legal status of the foetus".¹²¹

What is the basis for Jewish discussion? The Mishnah has these two rulings:

- If a woman was condemned to be put to death they may not wait until she has given birth, but if she had already sat on the birth-stool they wait until she has given birth (Arakhin I, 4).¹²²
- If a woman was in hard travail, the child must be cut up while it is in the womb and brought out member by member, since the life of the mother has priority over the life of the child. But if the greater part of it was already born, it may not be touched, since the claim of one life cannot override the claim of another life (Oholoth VII, 6).

Rashi summarized the underlying principle: "Whatever has not come forth into the light of the world is not a human life (lit. soul, *nēfēš*)".¹²³ The first case is what we would call "therapeutic abortion"; in the later tradition the foetus is likened to one who "pursues" (*rōdef*) the mother with evil intentions; the life of the mother prevails.¹²⁴ However, the undesirability of abortion in general is accepted among the Jews. One can discern two schools of thought deriving from two different principles, one strict, the other lenient : (a) abortion is akin to homicide; (b) there is no real prohibition against abortion.¹²⁵ The first school adduces the rule for all mankind as laid down in Genesis 9:6, interpreting this verse as "Whoever sheds the blood of man *in man*, his blood shall be shed". R. Ishmael asked: "What is 'man in man'? It refers to the foetus in its mother's womb".¹²⁶ Another argument can be found in the fact that a woman who loses her fruit when it is more than forty days old, has to observe the period of uncleanness as if a child was born¹²⁷ And how about the pious children in the womb singing Psalm 103:1 or learning the entire Torah?¹²⁸ Let them live! Generally speaking, abortion is rejected;¹²⁹ but an embryo is during its first forty days not considered "a soul" and abortion can be permitted.¹³⁰ This seems to have been the common attitude in Antiquity.¹³¹

We discussed embryology in the previous chapter. The following passage from the

¹¹⁹ Urbach, 242, 245; II 794 note 93; Feldman, 253; F. Rosner, *Modern medicine and Jewish ethics* (1991) 138. – The community at Qumran regarded the foetus as a distinct being; J.M. Baumgarten, "A fragment on fetal life and pregnancy in 4Q270", in *Pomegranates and golden bells. Studies in honor of Jacob Milgrom* (1995) 445–8.

¹²⁰ *Digesta Iustiniani* XXV, 4, 1 (*partus enim antequam edatur, mulieris portio est vel viscerum*); cited by Urbach, II 794 (note 93, end).

¹²¹ Feldman, 254. See also Jos op 't Root, "De status van de foetus en de richtlijnen voor abortus in de joodse traditie", *Ter Herkenning* 17 (1989) 225–247.

¹²² Feldman, 289 f.

¹²³ Jakobovits 184; Feldman 254 f.

¹²⁴ Jakobovits, 184–7; Feldman, 275–284; Rosner, 140 f.; L.E. Goodman on Maimonides' opinion, in: G.R. Dunstan, *The human embryo* (1990) 88–91; F. Rosner, *Medicine in the Mishneh Torah of Maimonides* (1984) 170 f.

¹²⁵ Feldman, 284.

¹²⁶ Sanhedrin 57b; Jakobovits 180; Feldman, 259; Rosner, *Modern medicine and Jewish ethics* (1991) 142 f.

¹²⁷ Rosner, 138.

¹²⁸ R. Meyer, *Hellenistisches in der rabbinischen Anthropologie* (1937) 82–88.

¹²⁹ As the oaths of medieval Jewish physicians show; Rosner, 139. – Urbach writes that with the Amora R. Johanan the opinion that the unborn child is a person gained the day.

¹³⁰ Rosner, 159.

¹³¹ J.M. Riddle, *Contraception* 22 f., citing Marie-Thérèse Fontanille, *Avortement et contraception dans la médecine gréco-romaine* (Paris 1977) 194 (not available to me).

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Talmud is significant in this context: “But if the abortion was a compressed one (*sandal*), a placenta (*še’lijā’*), or a “sac” with some articulated shape (*še’fir m’ruqqām*), or a child issued cut up in pieces (*jōṣē’ m’ḥuttāk*)” (Niddah 23a, end).

The Christians rejected abortion at any stage of pregnancy. The oldest stricture is found in the Doctrine of the Apostles, written at the end of the first century A.D., “You shall not murder a child by abortion (*en phthorāi*), nor kill it when born” (*Didache* II, 2). Later, Tertullian forcefully stresses this point with an array of arguments.¹³² Reality was different, however. In Christian Europe, abortion was tacitly allowed during the first forty days until in 1869 Pope IX declared excommunication for all who procured abortion, regardless whether the foetus was formed or unformed, animate or inanimate. Prior to this, the woman herself could procure a miscarriage up to the moment of the quickening of the fruit, in about the fourth month. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, doctors, clergymen and the government could no longer accept this situation.¹³³

Among civilised people there always has been an aversion towards abortion.¹³⁴ This is already reflected by the famous “Oath of Hippocrates”: it forbids abortion: “I will not give a fatal draught to anyone if I am asked, nor will I suggest any such thing. Neither will I give a woman means to procure an abortion” (*homoīōs dē oudē gunaikī pessōn phthórion dōsō*). The spiritual background of the Oath is a matter of endless scholarly discussion.¹³⁵ G. Edelstein’s analysis of the oath in terms of the Pythagorean attitude toward life has been influential.¹³⁶ Indeed, that sect taught that the soul infuses the body from its conception.¹³⁷ Edelstein regarded the Oath as an isolated, esoteric, monument in the Greek medical world. New fuel for his views came from a temple inscription telling the holy visitors “that they will neither turn to nor recommend to others nor have a hand in love-charms (*philt̄ron*), abortives (*phthorēion*), contraceptives (*[a]tokēion*)”.¹³⁸ F. Kudlien saw in the aversion against abortion the odium of the “uncleanness” that a miscarriage had to the Greeks. To him, the author of the Oath was “a religious-minded man with a particular weakness for cult-rules and institutions” but he has little supporting evidence.¹³⁹ Modern scholarship is of the opinion that the Oath fits the social ethics of the fifth century B.C. quite well and the rejection of abortion which was common to the time is one example.¹⁴⁰ It has been said that within the Hippocratic works many means

¹³² E. Nardi, *Procurato aborto* 406–412.

¹³³ A. McLaren, “Policing pregnancies: changes in nineteenth-century criminal and canon law”, in: Dunstan, 187–207.

¹³⁴ W. den Boer, *Private morality in Greece and Rome* (1979) 272–6.

¹³⁵ Ch. Lichtenhaeler, *Der Eid des Hippokrates: Ursprung und Bedeutung* (= Hippokratische Studien, 12) (1984).

¹³⁶ G. Edelstein, *Der hippokratische Eid* (Artemis Verlag, 1969); originally in English (1943). Cf. P.A. Meijer, *Hermeneus* 53 (1981) 172.

¹³⁷ Jakobovits, 174.

¹³⁸ Dittenberger, SIG³ no. 985:18; cf. M.P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* II (1961) 290 f. From Philadelphia (Lydia), about 100 B.C.

¹³⁹ F. Kudlien, “Medical ethics and popular ethics in Greece and Rome”, *Clio Medica* 5 (1970) 91–121, esp. 109 f. People in a state of ritual purity have to keep away from abortion (*phthoreion*, *diaphthorā*); see F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées des cités grecques* (1969) no. 139:12, with earlier lit.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. C. Triebel-Schubert, “Bemerkungen zum Hippokratischen Eid”, *Medizinhistorisches Journal* 20 (1985) 253–260 (with earlier lit.). As to abortion (p. 258–260), her point is that insights in biology made people cautious; her example is Aristotle, *Politica* VII 1335b 23–5: “And if couples have children in excess, let abortion (*ambłōsis*) be procured before sense and life (*aisthēsis kai zōē*) have begun; what may or may

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to elicit abortion (*ekbólia*) are given but this always is done for a “therapeutic abortion”, i.e., done for the mother’s health.¹⁴¹ The famous story of the prostitute who provoked abortion “after six days” is atypical and not an abortion at all.¹⁴² In short, the attention is now more directed to social ethics than to religious taboos.

One should be aware of the fact that the Oath does not speak of abortion in general, but it mentions only one technique: giving the woman “an abortive *pessós*”. This is wool wrapped around a stick or feather. They dipped this into a medication and the *pessós* was inserted.¹⁴³ It is perhaps not necessary to look for a specific reason to reject this method (the danger of poisoning the mother). In the Oath, it is subsumed under the theme “poisons” and one should not read too much into it.¹⁴⁴

The Oath has greatly impressed Christians, Jews and Muslims. They made translations and created their own oaths. This subject goes beyond the parameters of the present discussion.¹⁴⁵

We have already seen that Muslim tradition assumes that the soul is given after three phases of forty days each. Consequently, abortion was by the majority of jurists tolerated up to day 120, the end of the fourth month.¹⁴⁶

not be lawfully done in these cases depends on the question of life and sensation”. Plato was less careful. See also J. Oppenheimer, “When sense and life begin: background for a remark in Aristotle’s *Politics*”, *Arethusa* 8 (1975) 331–344.

R. Bernier, “Embryogenèse et avortement chez les auteurs hippocratiques”, in *La maladie et les maladies dans la collection hippocratique. Actes du VIe Colloque International Hippocratique* (1990) 363–380 (the author is not aware of literature written in German).

¹⁴¹ Ruth Hähnle, *Sudhoffs Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 29 (1936) 235 f., in her article “Der künstliche Abortus im Altertum”. Note J.M. Riddle, *Contraception and abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (1992) 74–82.

¹⁴² D. Nickel, *HTM. Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften, Technik und Medizin* 9,1 (1972) 75–77, in his article “Ärztliche Ethik und Schwangerschaftsunterbrechung bei den Hippokratikern”. For this story, see also Nardi, 66 ff. (“I salti della cantante”).

¹⁴³ E. Nardi, *Procurato aborto*, 60 f., note 58. J.M. Riddle, *Conception*, 7–10, follows the interpretation of (or disregard for) the *pessos* of Hippocrates in Antiquity.

¹⁴⁴ Thus Nickel, 73.

¹⁴⁵ Some recent lit.: G. Strohmaier, “Hunayn Ibn Ishaq et le Serment hippocratique”, *Arabica* 21 (1975) 318–323; S. Newmyer in: Irene and Walter Jacob, *The healing past* (1993) 108 note 6 (literature on the Oath of Asaph).

¹⁴⁶ B. Musallam in: G.R. Dunstan, *The human embryo* (1990) 39.

Chapter III MAGIC AND THE DIVINE

Amulets

The gravest danger affecting pregnancy is losing the foetus, miscarriage. A number of coloured stones were thought to have a protective power against this danger. We assume that these amulet stones are meant when the Babylonian texts speak of “stone of being pregnant”, or, rather: “stone of staying pregnant” (*aban erê*).¹ We have some “rituals” which specify the stones to be used and explain how a woman has to tie them, in order to prevent miscarriage. The first line or the full text of an incantation to be recited follows the ritual prescription. An important ritual begins with a section which prescribes stones that a woman is to place on her neck (the “seal *haltu*” comes first), other stones are placed on the right and left hands and feet, and on the hips. They are bound in wool using a “knot” (*takširu*).² Another text lists 130 stones, strings of coloured wool, and other ingredients for a “knot (*kusaru*) of a pregnant woman”.³ A fuller magical rite is to be performed when witchcraft is the cause of a possible miscarriage.⁴ The most important stone in the second section of the important ritual text is the stone *ittamir*. Together with other stones and two leather-bags filled with herbs it is to be hung on the neck. The incantation to be recited is directed against “the seven witches”.⁵ It is remarkable that here the conjurer is forbidden to “see the woman during the first month of her giving birth”; a prescription on the reverse of this tablet tells him “since the day that her ‘bandage’ has passed until one hundred days you shall not handle (?) the stones of the ‘knot’ of the pregnant woman”. This seems to mean: during the first 100 days after her last menstruation nothing is to be done.⁶

Among the amulets two stand out. The first, “the seal *haltu*”, is infrequently attested and occurs almost exclusively in the context of pregnancy magic.⁷ For this reason, we may identify the title “The seal *haltu*” in a library catalogue from Nineveh as the title of “a collection of medical rituals and incantations pertaining to pregnant women”.⁸ The

¹ MSL 10 (1970) 31, Hargud Rec. B IV 72–3. In medical texts, specific stones are always mentioned. NA₄.PEŠ₄ is the shell *išqillatu*; BAM 3 240:30, 32; etc.

² F. Thureau-Dangin, RA 18 (1921) 164, AO 6473:1–7. The text is TCL 6 49. For the *takširu*, see F.R. Kraus, RA 64 (1970) 59–61.

³ BAM 4 363, with S. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (1994) 32 b (note 49). Rev. line 13: *ku-ṣa-ri šá SAL.PEŠ₄*.

⁴ LKA 9 rev. 7–21, with Farber, *Schlaf* . . ., 110 § 39; cf. § 39A.

⁵ RA 18 164 f., 8–25. Lines 13–14 are hard to interpret; the dictionaries remain silent.

⁶ Obv. 14 (1-en ITU šá ū.TU-šú NU IGI-šú); rev. 12 (TA *u₄-mu šá qa-ni-šú DIB-iq-šú* EN 1 ME *u₄-mu* NA₄.MEŠ šá *tak-ṣir šá SAL.ŠA* × A ul DIB-bat; see CAD E 388a). – The following incantation, against Lamaštu (rev. 13–29), has been translated by B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* II (1996) 849 f.

⁷ BAM 4 363:8 (2 NA₄ KIŠIB *hal-ti*), BAM 3 237 I 4 (on the hips); IV 39; BAM 4 346:9, 19 (on the neck). This text deals with women, as F. Köcher has seen. See also H. Limet, *Orientalia J. Duchesne-Guillemin emerito oblata* (1984) 332 f. In the context of an angry god and goddess: BAM 4 376 I 17, III 20; SpbTU II 112 no. 22 III 40 (not the “seal”). The Old Babylonian form of the stone’s name is *haštum*; see AHw III 1558b. Also in BAM 3 237 I 47, NA₄.AN.BAR NA₄ *háš-tum* NA₄.SAG.LI.MUD? Elsewhere in this text *hal-tu*. Description of the stone: “Like the neck of a turtle” (GIM GÚ BAL.GI KU₆ NA₄ *hal-[tú MU.NI]*), STT 1 108:44, dupl. 109:47.

⁸ Thus S. Parpola, JNES 42 (1983) 21, commenting on what is now SAA VII no. 49 I 2.

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Babylonians must have associated the stone's name with the verb *hâlu* "to be in labour".

The second amulet stone is *ittamir*. A lexical text identifies it as "the stone of giving birth" (*na₄.ù.tu = aban alâdi*) in the group of amulets: "the stone of being pregnant", "the stone of not being "pregnant", "the stone of giving birth", "the stone of not giving birth", "the stone of loving", "the stone of not loving".⁹ "The stone of giving birth" is identified as the *ittamir* stone; that of "not giving birth" has the telling name "killer" (*dâ'iku*): its effect must be miscarriage. The *ittamir* plays a central role in the second section of the important ritual text mentioned above where it is characterised as the stone "which loosens the witchcraft of the seven witches".¹⁰ The Akkadian word *ittamir* (also: *ittemir*, *ittiamir*) reminded the Babylonians of the verb *amâru* "to see" and they may have thought of a meaning "it was seen", "became visible", "appeared", referring to the newborn child. Similarly, they associated the stone *hâltu* with the verb *hâlu* "to be in labour". The Babylonians were not averse to "etymologies" such as this one. A handbook that describes magical stones in detail has a passage on this amulet: "It is like the stone *sâbu* but it is flecked with iron".¹¹ Another text identifies it as the stone *arzallu* of which the "male" and the "female" are distinguished. It is said of the male: "*ittemir* – not good"; and of the female: "*ittemir* – good".¹²

Stones to prevent miscarriage and to facilitate birth are known from many cultures. In German folklore there is the "Adlerstein" or "Klapperstein".¹³ The expression "eagle-stone" is already known in the Classical world. Authors on medicine or physics refer to this stone, *lithos aetites*, which is said to aid birth (Theophrastus, Dioscurides), or both pregnancy and birth (Pliny).¹⁴ Elsewhere, we read that it serves both to forestall miscarriage and to make delivery easy.¹⁵ Dioscurides writes that the stone is to be tied to the left arm in order to protect the foetus. At the time of birth, it is fastened to the hips in order to make a painless delivery possible (V 160). Pliny says that the *aetites*, attached to women or sacrificial animals, impede birthing and should be removed because otherwise delivery is impossible (NH 36 § 151). This stone "is found in the eagle's nest and protects parturition from all plots of abortion", he wrote (HN 30 § 130). As one sees, the line

⁹ MSL 10 (1970) 31, Hargud Rec. B IV 72–77.

¹⁰ RA 18 (1921) 164, AO 6473:8–14; 23. On the *ittamir* stone, see J.A. Scurlock, *Incognita* 2 (1991) 139, 146 note 46.

¹¹ STT 1 108:35, GIM NA₄ *sa-bi-ma* AN.BAR *tuk-kup* – NA₄ *it-t[a-mir]*. The preceding lines 33 f. describe that stone *sâbu*. See B. Landsberger, JCS 21 (1967) 153. Otherwise CAD I/I 302 b ("the tavern keeper's stone"; wrong). The stone *im.m[a.an]*, used at the cutting of the umbilical cord, follows (36); see p. 111. Note that the next section of this handbook offers the description of a stone named "stone of giving birth" (42; preserved as [NA₄] MUD MU-šú in BAM 4 378 III 11). "It is . . . (*sepú*) like a lump of salt" (CAD K 403b). Does this mean that the *itt[amir]* here is not the "stone of giving birth"?

¹² KADP 12 II 66 f.

¹³ C.N. Bromehead, "Aetites or the Eagle-Stone", *Antiquity* 21 (1947) 16–22; additions by A.A. Barb in *Journal of the Wartburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13 (1950) 316–8.

¹⁴ Article "Aetites", in PW 1 (1894) 704 f. (by Nies); M. Wellmann, *Die Stein- und Gemmenbücher der Antike* (= Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften und der Medizin, Band 4, Heft 4) (1935) 127–130. See also M. Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam* (Leiden 1972) 98 f.; in *Medizinhistorisches Journal* 7 (1972) 53–5 (Xenocrates of Ephesus). Also, B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* IV (1982) 396.

¹⁵ *Ne vel abortivum faciant partuwe laborent*, in a Medieval book quoted by H. Ploss, *Das Weib* I (1899) 737; full description in II, 259–260 § 346. Sir Thomas Browne tended to believe this but had his doubts about the story that this stone was found in eagle's nests; *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1672) II, v, 9 (ed. Robin Robbins, p. 138).

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between the stone's uses for pregnancy and birth is thin.¹⁶

What kind of stone is this? The eagle-stone is hollow and contains a smaller stone inside which rattles.¹⁷ The symbolism is clear and such stones do exist.¹⁸

In the Talmud we read of the “preserving stone” (*èbèn t^r qūmā*) which is the amulet stone that protects a woman from miscarriage.¹⁹ She is allowed to carry it even during the Sabbath (Sabbath 66b). Later traditions identify it as the eagle-stone. We quote Trachtenberg: “A Talmudic amulet which was widely employed in medieval times – it was well known to non-Jews also – was the so-called *even tekumah*, the ‘preserving stone’, which was believed to prevent miscarriage. The Talmud does not tell us what sort of stone this was. Several Medieval writers were more informative, but unfortunately they employed one or perhaps several French equivalents whose meanings in Hebrew transliteration are not altogether clear, but which show that these were in common use. One writer went to some detail: ‘This stone is pierced through the middle, and is round, about as large and heavy as a medium sized egg, glassy in appearance, and is to be found in the fields’, he explained. The French term seems to indicate a hollow stone in which is a smaller one, a sort of rattle (perhaps the eaglestone or aetites); a later commentator calls it a *Sternschoss* (meteorid)”.²⁰

Did the Babylonians have a stone comparable to the *aetites*, “eagle-stone”? One Assyriologist has wondered whether we can discover a word-play between the verb *erû* “to be pregnant” and the substantive *erû* “eagle”.²¹ Another scholar saw a connection with the word for “copper” (again *erû*) and the Euphrates, *Uruttu*.²² These speculations cannot be the basis for assuming the existence of the eagle-stone in Babylonia. Furthermore, the descriptions of the *ittamir* stone or “the stone of giving birth” hardly fit that stone.

Another “stone” which was associated with pregnancy is the *shell*. The Sumerian

¹⁶ A medieval book in Arabic summarizes what they knew as follows:

– *Hägar al-baht* – Adlerstein. Das ist ein rötlicher Stein. Wenn du ihn bewegst, hörst du in ihm ein Klingeln wie von einem Glöckchen, aber wenn er zerbrochen wird, bemerkst du nichts in ihm. Er ist der “Adlerstein” (*hağar an-nasr*), welcher der Wöchnerin die Geburt erleichtert, wenn er bei schwerer Entbindung auf ihren Oberschenkel gelegt wird. Dies ist seine ständige sympathetische Eigenschaft. Aristoteles sagt: “Wenn einem Adlerweibchen das Eierlegen schwerfällt, fliegt das Männchen fort, bringt den Stein und legt ihn ins Nest. Dann legt das Weibchen sofort das Ei, und das Männchen nimmt den (Stein) und wirft ihn weg. Dann wird er gefunden”; Albert Dietrich, *Die Ergänzung Ibn Ǧulǧul's zur Materia medica des Dioskurides* (1993) 62 no. 48 (with notes). This passage does not speak of the “preserving” qualities of the stone. We suppose that the author rejected this as mere magic. He selected the use for which a rational explanation could be given (“sympathy”).

¹⁷ Lucanus, *Pharsalia* VI 676 (*quaeque sonant feta tepefacta sub alite saxa*).

¹⁸ “The commonest are limonite nodules with a detached core”, D.E. Eichholz, *Theophrastus De Lapidibus* (1965) 91 ad § 5. “Es handelt sich um einen durch Ton verunreinigten Braun- oder Roteisenstein mit Höhlungen, in denen sich abgelöste Teilchen befinden, die beim Schütteln das ‘Klingeln’ verursachen” (Albert Dietrich). See also J. Berendes, *Des Pedianos Dioskurides ... Arzneimittellehre* (1902) 552, ad V 160; D. Goltz, *Studien zur Geschichte der Mineralnamen in Pharmazie, Chemie und Medizin von den Anfängen bis Paracelsus* (1972) 97 f.

¹⁹ H.L. Strack, P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* IV/1 (1928) 531 f., in the excursus “Altjüdische Dämonologie”. Infertile women wore the blood-stone *himōs* (Greek *haematites*) in order to get pregnant.

²⁰ Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish magic and superstition. A study in folk religion* (New York 1939, reprinted by Meridian Books, 1961, or Temple Books 1979) 133 f.; cf. 295 note 3.

²¹ R.C. Thompson, *DAC* (1936) 105. Repeated by Erica Reiner, *Astral magic in Babylonia* (1995) 123 f. According to her, the Sumerogram *NA₄.Ā.MUŠEN* “stone of the eagle” occurs frequently in Akkadian contexts as a writing for *aban erē*. I cannot find this writing in the birth texts.

²² G. Dossin, “L'Euphrate au secours des parturientes”, *AIPHOS* 20 (1968–1972) 213–221. The link is an emended passage in Pseudo-Plutarch, *De Flaviis*.

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ideogram for pregnancy is the sign “inside of the body” with the sign “water” inscribed in it (ŠÀ×A, pronounced *peš*⁴). The combination sign for “shell” is identical: a body with water in it. The Sumerian word is *iškilla*; Akkadian *išqillatu*.²³ The Babylonians saw this shell as a symbol of the pregnant woman. The word “shell” appears to have occurred in a lost passage on a well-known tablet of birth rituals. We can surmise this because a commentary on the text discusses the word. First, the commented line is quoted: “Let him / her bring to light the one in the body of the shell”. Then: “About a pregnant (*peš*⁴) woman he has spoken; the stone of pregnancy (*na₄.peš*⁴) – *si-il-la-tum*”.²⁴ The last word is a by-form of *išqillatum* “shell”. The style is extremely succinct, but the message is clear.²⁵ The Greeks and Romans had similar associations: the cowrie shell was named “Cyprian”, after the goddess Venus of Cyprus, and the Latin word for it was *matriculus*. Clearly, this shell reminded ancient man of the womb.²⁶

There is no proof that the shell served the same magical “preserving” purposes as the eagle-stone.²⁷

Plants of Birth

Plants were thought to promote pregnancy and birth in the Babylonian sources. We have a pharmaceutic “vademecum” written in three columns. The text gives the name of the plant in the first column, the patient’s problem in the second, and the preparation and application of the drug in the third. The section on women is the one that interests us and is presented below. Ruled lines on the clay tablet mark this section as a separate group. The subject of the next group is male impotency. We have omitted the third column which is broken away, but the few remaining signs suggest that the drug was taken in a potion based on beer, the normal alcoholic drink. When a plant is listed twice and specifies the same affliction, the third column must have had a second and different application. The text appears to follow a chronological order, from conception to birth.²⁸

Seed of the <i>atkam</i>	Plant for acquiring ‘seed’
Seed of the <i>kamantu</i>	Plant for acquiring ‘seed’

²³ A.L. Oppenheim in his article “Mesopotamian Conchology”, *Or NS* 32 (1963) 407–412; W. Röllig, “Muschele”, *RIA* VIII/5–6 (1995) 451, § 5. Note “sea shell”, written *na₄ ši-ki-il-lam ša te-a-am-ti*, LB 1002:1 (unpubl.), [*iš-qí-il-la-at ta-am-ti*, KUB 37 46:6; *na₄.LAM* = *aš-qí-la-tum*, *na₄.LAM a.ab.ba* = *u aš-qí-la-at x ki im*, M. Tanret, *Mélanges M.-J. Stève* (1986) 149 TS. B ex. 166; *síl-[a-at tam-ti]*, *MSL* 10 (1970) 12 H₁ XVI 293; cf. *is-síl-la-tú*, 33 *Hargud B IV* 107. – An etymological relation with English “shell” is possible.

²⁴ M. Civil, *JNES* 33 (1974) 332:38–39 (šá ŠÀ *iš-qil-la-tum li-kal-lim nu-ú-rum ana SAL.PEŠ₄ iq-ta-bi*: *NA₄.PEŠ₄: si-il-la-tum*). Cf. *CAD N/2* 349b (2').

²⁵ See also A. Cavigneaux, *Aula Orientalis* 5 (1987) 254 f.

²⁶ Oppenheim, 408 f., sees the tertium comparationis in “the characteristic ventral slit”. The Babylonian shell *ajartu* was a symbol of fertility; W. Sladek and S. Maul in V. Haas, *Außenseiter und Randgruppen* (1992) 161.

²⁷ E. Ebeling suggested that the *šalilu* in a medical text is “das Embryo aus einem Schwangerschaftsstein” and related the word to Talmudic *šalil* “embryo”; *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 13 (1921) 11, on line 17. Accepted by B. Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien* II (1925) 316. However, the word is *dalilu* and it is “the mollusk inhabiting the shell”, as Oppenheim, *Or NS* 32 (1963) 410, saw.

²⁸ *BAM* 4 380 rev. 25–41; dupl. 381 III 17–36. Remnants of the third column are visible in 381 III 18, 20, 21, 22 (beer); 30 (“you shall repeatedly salve her and as soon as . . .”).

Plants

<i>Imhur-lim</i>	Plant for a woman who does not bear
<i>Ankinutu</i>	Plant for a woman who does not get pregnant
Seed of <i>haluppu</i>	Plant for a woman who does not get pregnant
<i>Puquttu, maštakal, . . .</i>	Plant for a woman who suffers of hemorrhage
Dog's tongue	Plant for a woman in hard [labour]
Seed of Dog's tongue	The same
Fox grape	The same
Fox grape	The same
Fox grape	On the day the child is born, . . . ²⁹
<i>Ata'išu</i>	Plant for a woman in hard labour
<i>Ata'išu</i>	The same, and lying down . . .
<i>Arantu</i>	Plant for a woman who is . . . (<i>šalputtu</i>)
The Lonely (AŠ)	The same
<i>nabraqu (namraqu)</i>	The same
<i>Ata'išu (Amīlānu ?)</i>	The plant of [. . .]

The expression “plant for acquiring seed” (Ú NUMUN TUKU [x]) in the first two lines, rather than referring to “conception”, has the more general meaning of “plant for acquiring offspring”. As we have seen, “seed” (*zēru*) always has this metaphorical meaning “offspring” in Akkadian. A passage from a medical text gives another metaphor for offspring, “name”: “That woman will become [pregnant] and she will acquire a name”, that is to say: offspring.³⁰ Our text concerns the whole process of conceiving and bearing healthy children. This may be why another vademecum copied only these two lines; they encompass all.³¹ Nothing can be said about the identity of both plants, *atkam* and *kamantu*. To the Babylonian, they were related in sound and, consequently, in virtues.

The third plant is “plant for a woman who does not bear” (Ú SAL.NU.Ù.TU, *šammu la ālitti*). “Bearing (children)” means here the whole process, not just the delivery. The woman is barren; she needs “the plant of bearing (children)” (*šammu ša alādi*), the “Plant of Birth” known from the Etana Myth. The name of the plant is in this text *imhur-lim*. This is one of the three plants always used in magical rituals. Its literal meaning is “It can face a thousand (diseases)” and it certainly was not the plant renowned for its power for making women conceive. Pharmacologic compendia name other plants, “good for a woman who does not bear”.³² An unpublished text gives this advice: “To make a not child-bearing woman pregnant: You flay an edible mouse, open it up, and fill it with myrrh; you dry it in the shade, crush and grind it up, and mix it with fat; you place it in her vagina, and she will become pregnant”.³³

The next problem is “a woman who does not get pregnant” (SAL.NU.PEŠ₄, *la ērīti*). We assume that this is not a barren woman who needs the “plant of bearing (children)”, but a woman who wishes to have another child. Tablets with prescriptions for such

²⁹ 380 rev. 35, Ú GIŠ GEŠTIN KA₅.A *u₄-um* LÚ.TUR Ù.TU [. . .]; dupl. 381 III 29–30, Ú GIŠ [GEŠTIN K]A₅.A Ú [. . .] EŠ.MEŠ-su-ma GIM L[Ú] (?) . . .].

³⁰ BAM 3 244:40, SAL.BI [PEŠ₄]-ma MU TUKU-ši; with E. Reiner, ZA 72 (1982) 128. The phrase is unique in medical texts.

³¹ BAM 1 1 I 18–19 (applications fully preserved in the third column).

³² KADP 2 V 48 (“field . . .”, *ana* SAL *la a-lit-ti* SIG₅); 4:37 (“dog's tongue”, *ana* SAL NU Ù.TU *da-me-eq*). “Plant of birth / non-birth” in the lexical texts: K. Watanabe, *Baghd. Mitt.* 25 (1995) 586–8, § 8.

³³ Courtesy I.L. Finkel. We follow his translation of lines 12–16 (SAL *la a-lit ana šu-ri-i*).

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women are known to us.³⁴ According to our text, she needs either the plant *ankinutu* or seeds of the *haluppu* tree. We cannot say anything about the latter. The plant *ankinutu* is intriguing, however, because it is often associated with a water plant, the *ašqulalu*.³⁵ The unpublished text mentioned above prescribes other plants; “she will open and will become pregnant and the water will fall”.³⁶

Our text now turns to the problems that can arise, once a woman is pregnant. In the first place losing blood, hemorrhage (*nahšātu*). There are incantations, rituals and therapies which treat this.³⁷ Our text recommends the plants *puquttu* (a thorny plant), *maštakal* (a soap plant with magical cleansing properties), and another plant. It is remarkable that we do not find these plants in the other texts.

The next problem, if we have given the correct suppletion of the signs in the text, is difficult childbirth, hard labour (Ú SAL.LA.[RA.AH], *šammu mušapsiqti*). The plant Dog’s tongue (*lisān kalbi*) or its root, and then Fox grape (*karān šelibi*), with three different applications (broken away), are recommended. Now, these plants are attested in almost every medical text, as is the magical herb *imhur-lim*. But we duly note that they are recommended both together and separately in the “therapeutic” section of a compendium on difficult childbirth.³⁸ The other plant for hard labour, six lines later, is the *ata’išu*. This is confirmed by another handbook.³⁹

The next affliction is *šalputtum* but we do not know what it means. The word sounds Assyrian (Babylonian would be *šulputtum*). The word is derived from the verb *lapātu* “to touch” and demons can “touch” humans.⁴⁰ It is possible that another text sheds light on this problem: “If a woman has been ‘touched’ by a ‘touch’, the child (foetus) is [...] in her belly”.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the chronological order of our list makes us think that it is a problem which occurs during birth. The text recommends three plants. The first is a grass (*arantu*). A description of the plant is given in another text: “It looks like Dog’s tongue in a watered field”.⁴² The second is the seed of a plant named “Lonely” and the

³⁴ BAM 3 244; STT 1 98 obv. (Reiner, ZA 72 137 f.).

³⁵ The Sumerograms for *ašqulalu* are AN.KI.NU.DI and Ú.LAL. See simply the full translations of descriptive texts in CAD A/2 453a, with c), examples of the association of both plants. Both plants grow in the swamps; CAD A/2 123 f. (with discussion). Confirmed by an inscription of Tiglath-Pileser III: among the booty from Sea Land were the plants Ú LAL and *amēlānu*; ed. H. Tadmor (1994) 164, line 28. – In my earlier Dutch edition, p. 24, I identified this Ú.LAL (= *ašqulalu*) with Ú.LAL, “Sweet Herb”, the plant that is eaten by a pregnant woman, as food for her child who was visualised as a fish. This occurs in a Sumerian incantation treated by J. van Dijk in Or NS 44 (1975) 57; see above p. 9 f. Here, the *ašqulalu* plant is good for pregnancy. J.A. Scurlock, *Incognita* 2 (1991) 171 note 112, criticized this identification and she may be right in that.

³⁶ Courtesy I.L. Finkel. Line 5: DIŠ SAL NU.PEŠ₄ *a-na šu-ri-i*. Line 11: BAD-ma ir-re u A.MEŠ ŠUB.ŠUB-ma.

³⁷ BAM 3 237, with I.L. Finkel, AfO 27 (1980) 50 f.

³⁸ Difficult childbirth: BAM 3 248 IV 13 (dupl. 249:8; both), 21 (as alternatives), 22, 24; STT 1 98 rev.; ZA 72 138; cf. AMT 66,4 II 5 (only Fox grape); pain in the lower abdomen: BAM 3 240:18–19.

³⁹ BAM 4 379 III 9, Ú SAL.LA.RA.AH RAD *ina īgiš šeš-su*. The other two uses of the plant are here: love and sex (Ú *ra-mi u su-hi*), and (against) fears (Ú *gi-lit-ti*). Many other plants in this list are also against fear. Again for a woman in labour, but plant-name broken: III 14.

⁴⁰ W. von Soden, StOr 46 (1975) 328, with StOr 48 (1977) 6 (“umgestürzt” als Attribut zu “Frau”). Cf. CAD Š/1 262a, *šalputtu* disc. Note that an obscure *šalputtu* in another medical text on women follows.

⁴¹ KADP 22 II 2, DIŠ SAL TAG TAG-āt TUR.DIŠ *ina ša.bi* [...]. Sumerian TAG is Akkadian *lapātu*, *liptu*.

⁴² BAM 4 379 IV 3.

Plants

third is the *namruqqu*. This plant is thought to bring about pregnancy in one text.⁴³ The plant *hašraqu* is recommended for the *šalputtu*-woman by another pharmaceutic text.⁴⁴

The last entry in our section appears to return to the *ata’išu* plant, but the signs seem to be slightly different and we are at a loss.⁴⁵ Most likely, the plant was also prescribed for the *šalputtu*-woman.

We have only one recipe for provoking abortion. It is remarkable that some of the plants which promote birth, such as the seed of the Lonely plant, the *ašqulalu*, and *nabruqqu*, are also found in this context.⁴⁶ Ann Guinan remarks: “The fact that plants to ease childbirth could also be used to cause abortion does not seem remarkable to me – in both cases the goal is to expel the foetus. I wonder if the plants are used to cause uterine contractions. Perhaps *šalputtu* refers to a woman whose labour has started and then her contractions have become weak or cease”.

We turn from this systematic handbook to a discussion of other contexts where such plants are found. The Babylonian lexical texts speak of “the plant of becoming (being) pregnant / not pregnant”; and “the plant of giving birth”, and “the plant of not giving birth”.⁴⁷ “The plant of giving birth” (*šammu alādi*) is best known to us; its quality undoubtedly is to end infertility and to promote pregnancy. It was not a plant used during the delivery; there was another plant for this: “the plant for a woman who has a difficult labour”.⁴⁸ We suppose that the plant of birth was taken orally. The famous example is the myth of Etana.⁴⁹ Etana, king of Kiš, could not father children and wished to get hold of this plant (*šammu ša alādi*). He had saved an eagle from a snake and in return he asked the eagle, to procure him the plant of birth from heaven. Etana flew with the bird on its wings – a scene often represented in art.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, we do not know how the story ended but, to be sure, Etana must have begotten a son because we know his name: Balih⁵¹ This is also the name of a river in North-West Mesopotamia, an

⁴³ BAM 3 244:31, 33. Also attested as an important ingredient in a gynaecological text, SpbTU V 253:4 (three loaves of *nam-rug*).

⁴⁴ BAM 5 421 I 27; 422 III 4, with W. von Soden, StOr 48 (1977) 6.

⁴⁵ In 380 rev. 41 a damaged U KUR.KUR ; in 381 II 36 we see perhaps U LÚ.LÚ (= *amīlānu*?).

⁴⁶ BAM 3 246:1-5, [SAL.P]JEŠ₄ ŠA.ŠA ana ŠUB-de-e (?) [EME.D]IR IZ.ZI GÙN.A NUMUN Ú.AŠ [Ú A]N.KI.NU.DI U a-zu-pi-a-ra-nu U nab-ruq-qu SUHUŠ bu-ši-ni [KA]Š (?) LÚ.DIN.NA 8 Ú.HI.A. The *nabruqqu* again in line 11. “Lizard’s tongue” (EME.DIR) is also an ingredient in helping a woman in hard labour; BAM 3 248 IV 13.

⁴⁷ MSL 10 (1970) 90, Hb XVII 209–212. The “plant of becoming (being) pregnant / not pregnant” and the following “plant of loving / not loving” are not attested in the Old Babylonian Forerunners: 118:35; 122, Section B:8 f.

⁴⁸ MSL 10 118:35c (OB) (ú SAL.la.ra.ah). In context: BAM 4 379 III 9, 14. Note the existence of a “stone” for this purpose, in SpbTU II 113 no. 22 IV 24.

⁴⁹ Edition: J.V. Kinnier Wilson, *The Legend of Etana. A new edition* (1985). Translations: R. Labat, *Les religions du Proche-Orient asiatique* (1970) 294–305; B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses I* (1996) 437–457. Discussion on the plant of birth passages: K. Watanabe, *Baghd. Mitt.* 25 (1995) 584 f., § 7.

⁵⁰ Most attention of scholars goes to the eagle and the snake; see W. Röllig in K. Hecker, W. Sommerfeld, eds., *Keilschriftliche Literaturen* (1986) 82 f. An eagle also plays a role in the birth legend on Gilgameš according to Aelianus; see Brian Lewis, *The Sargon Legend* (1980) 169–170. One is reminded of the child-bringing stork in European folklore. Unorthodox is the explanation by S. Parpola, *JNES* 52 (1993) 195–199. To him, the eagle and the snake are conflicting aspects of man’s soul, the one capable of carrying him to heaven, the other pulling him down to sin and earth. Etana’s barren wife is the feminine, spiritual half of his soul; the desired “son” is Etana’s “fruit”, the deeds by which he will be judged. He prays for a “plant of birth” (that is, a chance for spiritual rebirth) and is guided to the path that will take him there.

⁵¹ J. Bottéro is of the opinion that the plant of birth in this myth facilitates the delivery and that it is not

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affluent of the Euphrates. It has been suggested that Etana found the plant in that region. We can perhaps identify the plant with the Hebrew *dūdā'īm*, the so-called “love apples”, probably *mandrakes*. Mandrakes occur in the Biblical story of Leah and Rachel which takes place in Harran. This city lies 40 km from Urfa on the Balih.⁵²

The part of the story concerning mandrakes runs as follows (Genesis 30:14–17).

– In the days of the wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, “Give me, I pray, some of your son’s mandrakes”. But she said to her, “Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son’s mandrakes also?” Rachel said, “Then he may lie with you tonight for your son’s mandrakes”. When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him, and said, “You must come in to me; for I have hired you with my son’s mandrakes”. So he lay with her that night. And God hearkened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son.

There is an opinion that the power of these “apples” was not to enhance fertility, but to elicit love, as they do in Song of Songs 7:14: certainly an etymology of the word *dūdā'īm* points to “love”.⁵³ Moreover, by stating at the end that it was God who “hearkened to Leah”, the story seems to ignore the effect of the mandrakes on fertility. Still, it must be said that the entire Chapter 30 of Genesis is concerned with fertility of man and animal, all of which ultimately depends on God’s blessing, as any believer knows. An Arabic story reflects the belief from the (heretical) Harran area, that a child could be born from the mandrake (*jabrūh*). A story of the nineteenth century also associates the mandrake with this region.⁵⁴ These fruits are also attested in the Ugaritic texts; an Ugaritic myth reads, “put *ddjm* in the dust”.⁵⁵

Much has been written about the identity of the *dūdā'īm*. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, offers “apples of the mandragoras” and the Aramaic Targum has *jabruhā*, “mandragoras”, or “mandrake”. It is the accepted opinion that *dūdā'īm* is, indeed, the renowned mandrake, a magical plant having roots looking like a human form, either male or female.⁵⁶ To the Greeks and Romans, its virtues were primarily aphrodisiac and narcotic and we do hear virtually nothing about its effects on

a stimulant for fertility; *Annuaire EPHE IVe Section* (1969/70) 117. I cannot agree; see also *Akkadica* 23 (mei-augustus 1981) 18 f.

⁵² E.I. Gordon, *JCS* 21 (1967) 80 note 27.

⁵³ J. Preuss, *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin* (1911) 539 f. “The two lovers”, I. Löw, *Die Flora der Juden* III (1924) 364.

⁵⁴ The Arabic story: N.P. Joosse, *JSS* 38 (1993) 286 f.; the modern story: see below, note 61, George Smith, writing on Orfa.

⁵⁵ KTU 1.3 C II 12 (“The Palace of Baal”). The meaning of the passage is not clear. J.C. de Moor wrote: “Thus it would seem that the act of putting the fruit into the earth is a rite to stimulate fertility of Mother Earth just before and during the season of early rains and ploughing”; *The seasonal pattern in the Ugaritic myth of Ba’lu* (1971) 105. Others cannot accept that *ddjm* here are the mandrakes; *Textes ougaritiques* I (1974) 164.

⁵⁶ The literature is abundant. Books: C.J.S. Thompson, *The mystic mandrake* (London 1934; New York 1968); Adolf Taylor Starck, *Der Alraun. Ein Beitrag zur Pflanzensagenkunde* (Berlin 1986) (reprint of a book of 1917, with an additional chapter and bibliography by C. Rätsch, “Die Alraune heute”). Recent articles: W. Schmidtbauer, “Die magische Mandragora”, *Antaios* 10 (1969) 274–286; M. Eliade, “Gayōmart et la mandragore”, *Ex orbe religionum. Studia Geo Widengren oblati* II (1972) 65–74, esp. 69–73; M.H. Pope in his *Song of Songs* (Anchor Bible 7C, 1977) 647–650; K. Bosse-Griffiths, “The fruit of the mandrake”, in *Fontes atque pontes. Eine Festgabe für Hellmut Brunner* (1983) 62–74; O. Keel, *Das Hohelied* (= Zürcher Bibelkommentare AT 18) (1986) 235–239. Older lit. in L. Fonck, *Streifzüge durch die biblische Flora* (Freiburg im Breisgau 1900) 134 note 1; Fr. Tuch, *Kommentar über die Genesis* (Halle 1838) 446–449.

The Mandrake

fertility.⁵⁷ According to a Greek work written in the second century A.D., *Physiologus*, elephants get sexually excited when eating from a tree, “Mandragoras”, which is found in the East, near Paradise. The female offers its fruit to the male, and they mate.⁵⁸ One easily detects here one more explanation of the Fall of Man as a seduction by the serpent or by the woman, which was current in Hellenistic Judaism. One modern scholar who drew our attention to this story believes that a similar dark story could lie behind Genesis 3: by eating the fruit, the man became sexually interested, “knowing good and evil”.⁵⁹

Modern commentaries on Genesis 30:14 are vague about the effects of the *dūdā’īm*. The context strongly suggests that they serve fertility but there are few parallels, either ancient or modern, for this virtue of the plant, a fact glossed over by the commentaries. We must admit that the evidence from Palestine about the power of the mandrake to make barren women conceive is meagre.⁶⁰

Did the Babylonians know the mandrake? The plant *pillū* is assumed to be mandrake. The references are usually for the “male” plant only.⁶¹ The word has no known etymology and

⁵⁷ Steier, art. “Mandragoras”, PW, 27. Halbband (1928) 1028–1037. There was a comedy by Alexis, *Mandragorizomenē* “The woman drugged with the mandrake”. One name of the goddess of love, Aphrodite, was Mandragoritis (Hesychius, s.v.). Note that the pharmacologist Dioscurides stresses its narcotic effects and that he only makes the short remark “the root seems to be aphrodisiac” (IV 75). – Ibn al Baitar does not say a word on effects of the mandrake on pregnancy (ed. Leclerc, nos. 1177 and 2300).

⁵⁸ D.O. Rottzoll, “... ihr werdet sein wie Gott, indem ihr ‘Gut und Böse’ kennt”, ZAW 102 (1990) 385–391. He offers a critical edition of *Physiologus*, Chapter 43.

⁵⁹ Rottzoll, 390 f.

⁶⁰ I traced the origin of this “fact”, communicated in commentaries of Genesis and Song of Songs. “In Gaza sagte man von ihnen: ‘Die Alrauenäpfel bringen Schwangerschaft’”, G. Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina I/1* (1928) 250. His source, Stephan, is also quoted by M.H. Pope, 649. On the other hand, Stephan adds: “The leaves green cut and mixed with other vegetables, cooked in a pie, and given to a woman are said, however, to be a sure way to make her sterile. This is one of the secret recipes said to be used by women against each other”; see St.H. Stephan, “Studies in Palestinian customs and folklore. III. Modern Palestinian parallels to the Song of Songs”, JPOS 2 (1923) 223 (p. 24 of the offspring). The oldest is the story told to the traveller H. Maundrell by a Samaritan priest in Nablus, in 1697. It is remarkable that J.G. Frazer quotes only this passage in his long discussion of the mandrake; J.G. Frazer, *Folk-lore in the Old Testament. Studies in comparative religion, legend and law II* (1919) 372–397, Chapter VII, “Jacob and the mandrakes” (p. 374 f.). His other source is H.B. Tristam, *The natural history of the Bible*, 9th ed. (1898) 468. It appears that Maundrell is the original source and only authority for this information. We quote from the sixth edition, H. Maundrell, *A Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem at Easter, A.D. 1692* (Oxford 1740) 61: “He said they were Plants of a large leaf, bearing a certain sort of Fruit, in shape resembling an Apple, growing ripe in Harvest, but of an ill savour, and not wholesome. But the virtue of them was to help Conception, being laid under the Genial Bed. That the Women were often wont so to apply it, at this day, out of an opinion of its prolific virtue. Of these Plants I saw several afterwards in the way to Jerusalem”.

There is a German translation, given by H.E.G. Paulus, *Sammlung der merkwürdigsten Reisen in den Orient I* (Jena 1792) 80. It renders “Genial Bed” as “Ehebett” and “Harvest” as “Herbst”.

The idea that the mandrake promotes pregnancy, despite the lack of evidence, derives from Frazer, as follows: “The Greeks ascribed to the mandrake the power of exciting the passion of love, and, perhaps, though this is not directly stated, of promoting conception in women” (p. 375).

⁶¹ R.C. Thompson, *DAB* (1949) 217–9. Sumerogram NAM.TAR (NITA). Thompson saw an etymological relation between the Sumerogram and our word “mandragoras” which is fanciful; see also his article in *The Classical Review* 38 (1924) 148. Perhaps this was the reason he identified *pillū* as “mandrake”. We follow Thompson in some other points. For this plant, see also B. Landsberger, *The date palm and its by-products according to the cuneiform sources* (1967) 51, 52. Here, he quotes Uruanna I 578–583, where we read that the “male” plant has no fruit (now CTN IV 192 III 57). In note 183 he remarks that the mandrake does not exist in Iraq and Syria. This is not true: Dalman and George Smith saw it; the latter without realising this: “The pacha told me of a curiosity to be seen at Orfa, about which they relate a story worthy of the days of Herodotus. This curiosity consisted of two small figures, made of a peculiar shrub, partly trained and twisted, and partly cut into the form of a man and woman, very rudely done, and stained to give them

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we cannot identify the plant with certainty. Its Sumerogram is **Ú NAM.TAR**. The element **NAM.TAR** “demon of Death” suggests that the plant has dark properties; note that an Arabic name for the mandrake is “Devil’s eggs / testicles”. In the Botanical Handbook Uruanna the plant is given the explanatory names (?) “black spot on the leg of a donkey” and “claw of a black dog”.⁶² We are reminded of the black dog which was used to draw out dangerous plants like the mandrake and peony; during the night. Jewish tradition also speaks of a donkey doing this.⁶³ A medical text from Emar speaks of the root of “the namtar-plant dug up when the sun was not seen”.⁶⁴ There is no evidence that the *pillû* plant was used to enhance love or fertility.⁶⁵ It is not mentioned at all in the incantations or rituals which promote virility. In contrast, we read in such texts that the goddess Inanna “loves apples and pomegranates, has brought forth potency”; and the juices of those plants are indeed used in the pertaining ritual which promotes virility. Furthermore, apples were associated with love.⁶⁶

In one attestation, this plant is used to help a woman in childbirth; see below, p. 70.

We continue our search for plants of birth in the Ancient Near East.

An Ugaritic myth says that the goddesses of birth “descend in the ‘rgzm’. It is commonly assumed that these are plants or fruits; possibly nuts.⁶⁷ They are then used as a “plant of birth”, in some way.

The correspondence between Pharaoh Rameses II and the Hittite king has a fascinating passage about plants with the power “to give birth”.⁶⁸ The Hittite king Ḥattušili had asked Rameses to send him “herbs” (**Ú.MEŠ**) for his sister Matanazi, so that she could give birth (*ana alādiša*). Clearly, the herbs were not meant for easy delivery but to make the princess pregnant. In his response, Rameses exclaims that the woman is far too

the appearance of having grown in that shape. The man who sold these articles declared that they grew in a field far away from there, and that anyone trying to draw one out of the ground would be killed by the noise they made, so the inhabitants, in order to obtain them, tied a dog by a string to each figure, and then went a long distance off. As soon as the dog pulled the string and drew the creature out of the ground the noise it made killed the dog, and the men coming up secured the curiosity. It is a sign of the intellectual state of this country that men who object to schools and Christian influence, believe such rubbish as this”; George Smith, *Assyrian Discoveries* (1875) 161 (Thompson, 219, saw the mandrake root in this description). Two English ladies in Palestine studied the mandrake with much care. The problem was, how to get the root out. “It really is a difficult matter to get a root out unbroken, as we found out at a picnic party, whose members went, armed with pick, hoe and knives, to seek for the mandrake in the valley of the Convent of the Cross”; G.M. Crowfoot, L. Baldensperger, *From cedar to hyssop. A study in the folklore of plants in Palestine* (1932) 114–119.

⁶² Uruanna III 42–43; in CT 14 44 K.4152:5–6, and KADP 17:8–9. The next plant, *hašû*, has the same names.

⁶³ Dog: found everywhere; my note 61. Donkey: I. Löw, *Die Flora der Juden* III (1924) 365; G. Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte* 1/1 (1928) 251. Mandragoras and peony: M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 125 note 41. Most of Chapter VII, The Mandrake, in Frazer’s *Folk-lore* (see note 60) is about this superstition.

⁶⁴ A. Tsukimoto in K. Wanatabe, *Priests and officials in the Ancient Near East* (1999) 193, line 46. Cited by Erica Reiner, *Astral Magic in Babylonia* (1995) 37 note 150.

⁶⁵ The root is used against jaundice (*amurriqānu*), STT 1 92 II 1.

⁶⁶ KAR 61:1–10, with R.D. Biggs, *Ša.zi.ga. Ancient Mesopotamian potency incantations* (1967) 70. Full discussion by W.G. Lambert in M. Mindlin, *Figurative language in the Ancient Near East* (1987) 27 ff. He notes that in the myth Enki and Ninhursag the woman Uttu receives cucumbers, apples and grapes before agreeing to have intercourse.

⁶⁷ KTU 1.24:43 (Nikkal and the Kotharati), with D. Pardee, *Les textes hippiaires* (1985) 53 f.

⁶⁸ We owe the reconstitution of the letters to E. Edel, *Ägyptische Ärzte und ägyptische Medizin am hethitischen Königshof. Neufunde von Keilschriftbriefen Ramses’ II. aus Boghazköy* (1976) 53 f., 67–75. Brief 652/f + 28/n + 127/r; photos in the rear of the book. Now Edel, *Die ägyptisch-hethitische Korrespondenz aus Boghazköi in babylonischer und hethitischer Sprache* I (1994) 178 f., no. 75 (G 1), with commentary in II, 268–272. See also G. Beckman, *Hittite Birth Rituals* (1983) 253–5. We have adopted Beckman’s translation.

old: "It is said (in your letter) that she is a fifty-year old. No, she is a sixty-year old! (...) No, for a woman who has completed sixty years, it is not possible to prepare medicines for her, so that she might still be caused to give birth". For such persons the Egyptians cannot prepare herbs (*epēši* Ú.MEŠ). But Pharao is willing to despatch a knowledgeable conjurer (*āšipu*) and [a physician] (the word is broken away!) and they can prepare the herbs; "may the Sungod and the Stormgod give order that this enterprise succeeds". What Rameses means is: Maybe a miracle will happen. One is astonished at the naivety of these Hittites. What little the Hittites knew of official medicine they had copied from Sumero-Akkadian sources.⁶⁹ Egypt, on the other hand, was famous for its medical expertise and, indeed, the Egyptian texts demonstrate this. This is why the Hittites hoped that the solution could come from Egypt. On other occasions, such as for an ophthalmological problem, king Hattušili looked to Egypt for help.⁷⁰

We have seen that a Sumerian incantation tells a pregnant woman to eat the "sweet herb" and we have suggested that this is food for the growing embryo, visualised as a fish.⁷¹

There is a Neo-Assyrian letter written by the physician Urad-Nanâ to king Esarhadon (680–669 B.C.). At its end he appraises two herbs:⁷²

– The herbs which I am sending to the king are of two kinds; they are called "long plant" and "staff of life" and are different from each other. The one which looks like a base of an (ear)ring is important and very rare. Perhaps the king will say: "What are they good for?" They are good for counter-spells, and they are good for a woman in labour (?).

The term, "woman in labour" (SAL *ša ta-l[it-te]*), has been reasonably reconstructed and is acceptable. The translation "labour" is too narrow. If the word *alādu* in *tālittu* can be equated to that in *šammu ša alādi* "the plant of bearing (children)", then *tālittu* must refer to fertility and pregnancy. The combination of "counter-spells" and "birth" reminds us of the prescriptions against miscarriage by sorcery.⁷³ The names of the two plants are a real problem: they are unknown in the medical texts and the current translations assume that they are Sumerograms.⁷⁴

Incantations

We have a sizeable number of incantations that could be recited before or at birth. In a complete ancient "catalogue" of all magical works in the "library" of a conjurer, comes a group of rituals: "To bind the pregnant woman – The woman who is in hard labour – Lamaštu, and Pacifying the baby".⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Edel, 38. See now Cornelia Burde, *Heithitische medizinische Texte* (1974).

⁷⁰ Edel, 40, 44 f. – Edel, 43 f., adduces a parallel from the Arabic world: their doctors claimed that they had a concoction to get elderly women pregnant – admittedly in *shah Allah*.

⁷¹ See above, p. 10.

⁷² LAS 247 = SAA X 316 rev. 15–23; translation by Simo Parpola.

⁷³ Farber, *Schlaf* ..., 110–112.

⁷⁴ The text offers BU and PA.TI. Commentary by Parpola, LAS Commentary (1983) 243. "Long plant": one expects Ú GÍD.DA. "Staff of life" (reading *hatti balāti*) is an interesting suggestion because in the instructions for difficult childbirth "the plant of life" is especially recommended (Ú šá TI, BAM 3 248 IV 34; N. Veldhuis, ASJ 11 [1989] 253).

⁷⁵ KAR 44:15, with J. Bottéro, *Mythes et rites de Babylone* (1985) 75 (SAL.PEŠ₄ KÉŠ.DA [gloss]:

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The purpose of the ritual “To bind the pregnant woman” is not clear. One could think of the “knots” that prevent miscarriage, but texts with this or similar titles suggest a ritual against bleeding. The texts are written in Sumerian and are extremely difficult.⁷⁶ We understand that terms like “canal”, “flood”, “water”, “source”, “blood” describe medical problems. The titles name them “Incantation for binding the source / the woman”. One of them is quoted by its first lines in a much later text that has the title “Incantation for a woman who suffers of bleedings (*nahšātu*)”.⁷⁷

A second group is for “The woman who is in hard labour”; we will study them in some detail. Later chapters of this book will deal with *Lamaštu* and pacifying the baby.

1. Sumerian incantations

The Sumerian incantations on women in hard labour are notoriously difficult and we in general we follow J.J.A. van Dijk who has edited many of them. Although there are no duplicates they share similar phraseology and imagery. According to van Dijk, the differences between them may even reflect changing ideologies of kingship.⁷⁸

The oldest of the Sumerian incantations dates to the Fara period and is written in a short-hand writing. It can only be understood thanks to later, fuller, parallels from the Ur III period. It has been deciphered, as follows.⁷⁹

– Incantation – The ... bulls of Enlil go ... into the holy stable of Enlil. The great midwife from Kullab came in order to inflict the incantation in the water, in the ... chamber. If it is female, let her bring out of it the spindle and the pin; if it is a male, let her bring out of it the throwing stick and the weapon. May Ningirima pronounce (?) the magic formula (and) may the blood like milk ... , like milk ... the blood comes out. After it has come out, like the water of a ditch that fills the canal, like water entering a lake, it increases.

This later Ur III incantation clarifies passages in that early incantation:⁸⁰

– Incantation – The fecund bull has mounted the [cow / woman] in the stable, the holy cattle compound. He has poured into the belly the fecund seed of mankind. The fluids poured into the belly, coagulating, giving the man a child, the woman put her teeth in the Sweet Herb; she sated herself with it. She put her teeth in the Sweet Herb, her beloved food; she sated herself with it. The moment (?) of childbirth was there: she crouched to the earth, her cries reached the sky, her cries reached the earth, all cries (= echo?)

SAL.NU.「KUD.DA」] SAL.LA.RA.AH^dDÌM.ME u LÚ.TUR HUN.GÁ.

⁷⁶ I.L. Finkel, “The Crescent Fertile”, *AfO* 27 (1980) 37–52 (his YBC 5636 = *YOS* 11 40). Finkel, 41, is not aware of the gloss to KAR 44:15. K. Butz largely agrees with Finkel but thinks that the incantation intends to release the amniotic water that is “seized”, presumably by sorcery; K. Butz, “Altbabylonische Beschwörungen um den ‘Blasensprung’ bei Graviden herbeizuführen”, *Oriens Antiquus* 21 (1982) 221–226. J. van Dijk, *YOS* 11 (1985) p. 32, on no. 40, sees the retelling of the primordial separation of heaven and earth in the incantation.

⁷⁷ BAM 3 237 II 30–33, with Finkel, 41b.

⁷⁸ Or *NS* 44 (1975) 71.

⁷⁹ We follow M. Krebernik, *Die Beschwörungen aus Fara und Ebla* (1984) 36–47, no. 6, A.

⁸⁰ UM 29–15–367, published by van Dijk, Or *NS* 44 (1975) 53–62; cf. Krebernik. See now W.H. Ph. Römer, *TUAT* II/2 (1987) 204–207. Note the different translation of lines 1–8, according to the later version VAS 17 33:1–7, by Th. Jacobsen, Or *NS* 42 (1973) 279 f.; *The treasures of darkness* (1976) 250 note 130. Read in lines 4 and 21 *dumu*, “child”, not *isim*; N. Veldhuis, *BiOr* 55 (1998) 851. A new edition was given by G. Cunningham, *Deliver me from Evil. Mesopotamian incantations 2500–1500 B.C.* (1997) 69–75 (Text 62).

covered the base of heaven (= horizon) like a garment. Like the boat of the *en*, she deployed the linen (sail), she filled the boat of the king with goods, she filled the ... boat with cornelian, lapis lazuli. In the vulva of the travailing person ... thread(s).

(The god) Asalluhi saw it, he entered the house of his father Enki, he spoke to him: "My father, in the stable, the holy compound, the fecund bull has mounted, he has poured the fecund seed of mankind in the belly. The fluids poured into the belly, coagulating, giving the man a child, the woman put her teeth in the Sweet Herb; she sated herself with it. She put her teeth in the Sweet Herb, her beloved food; she sated herself with it. The moment (?) of childbirth [was there: she crouched to the earth], her cries reached the sky, [her cries reached the earth, all cries (= echo?) covered the base of heaven (= horizon) like a garment. Like the boat of the *en*, she deployed the linen (sail), she filled the boat of the king with goods, she filled] the ... boat [with cornelian, lapis lazuli]. In the vulva of the [travailing person ...] thread(s). What I should say about this, I do not know; nor what I should do in return".

Enki answered his son Asalluhi: "My son, what do you not know, what should I do more for you? Asalluhi, what do you not know, what should I do more for you? That what I know, you too know, and [what you know, I too know]. After you have taken the fat of a holy cow, the cream of a mother cow, standing in the holy chamber, [...] the vulva of the [travailing] person ... thread(s), after you have [pronounced] the incantation of Eridu over her, may it be released like the showers of heaven, may it run like the waters of the gutter of the roof, may it [stream] like a canal pouring into a lake, may it be broken like a broken pot.

If it is a male, let him take a weapon, an axe, the force of his manliness. If it is a female, let the spindle and the pin be in her hand. Let (the goddess) Gula, the faithful steward with the able hands, determine its fate when cutting the umbilical cord. – Incantation formula.

In the discussion of this incantation which follows, we will also draw on parallel texts. Some of these texts have sometimes interesting variants.⁸¹

The Bull

The incantation begins with what appears to be a deliberate fusing of the animal and the human world. A bull has impregnated the woman in the cattle compound. This probably means that the Moongod himself has descended from heaven. The ideological context for this idea derives from the Ur III period: the moongod Nanna (Sîn) herds in the heaven his cattle, the stars.⁸² As a bull he was the god of Ur and the kings of Ur considered themselves to be related to him; one of them had the name Amar-Sîn, "Calf of Sîn". The

⁸¹ Survey: Krebernik, 38 (MLC 1207 = YOS 11 85). Important articles on the Sumerian material: J. van Dijk, "Une variante de 'L'Esclave de la Lune'", *Or* NS 41 (1972) 339–348; "Incantations accompagnant la naissance de l'homme", *Or* NS 44 (1975) 52–79; M.E. Cohen, "Literary texts from the Andrews University Archaeological Museum", *RA* 70 (1976) 129–144 (no. 2, AUAM 73.3094, p. 133–140; in syllabic Sumerian, with an Akkadian translation); M. Sigrist, "Une tablette d'incantations sumériennes", *ASJ* 2 (1980) 153–167; G. Farber, "Another Old Babylonian childbirth incantation", *JNES* 43 (1984) 311–316 (in syllabic Sumerian). Related topics are treated by I.L. Finkel, "The Crescent Fertile", *AfO* 27 (1980) 37–52 (YBC 5636 = YOS 11 40).

⁸² W. Heimpel, "The Babylonian background of the term 'Milky Way'", in *Studies Å. W. Sjöberg* (1989) 249–252.

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woman of our incantation is a member of the royal family, we may suppose; she is the prototype of any woman on earth.⁸³ Below, we will suggest that the famous Akkadian incantation “The Cow of Sîn” can be situated in the same context: at the Ur III court. In that incantation, princess Geme-Sîn is giving birth and the moongod was responsible for her pregnancy. Other incantations omit the motif of the bull and the cow, concentrating instead on “ships”.⁸⁴

The woman in our incantation eats “the Sweet Herb” (ú.lâl). We already have explained this as food for the “fish” in her womb. The child moves in water, according to another incantation translated in Chapter I: “In the ocean waters, fearsome, raging, in the far-off waters of the sea”.

The Boat

When her difficult hour comes, she screams. She now deploys the sail: with her child she is seen as a boat moving over the water. The image of a pregnant woman as a fully loaded boat is paralleled in the apodosis of a liver omen: “The full(y loaded) boat will sink; or: the pregnant woman will die in her giving birth”.⁸⁵ One incantation says that the boat leaves the quay, journeying to the quay of joy.⁸⁶ The boat is loaded with cornelian, lapis lazuli; perhaps it is better to see these cargoes as alternatives: cornelian or lapis lazuli. If so, it means that the child is either a boy or a girl. Indeed, other incantations say explicitly that the woman does not know which it is. Because the gender of these words are in Akkadian feminine and masculine, respectively (*sāmtu* and *uqnū*), it is possible that cornelian (red) stands for a girl, and lapis lazuli (blue) for a boy.⁸⁷ Three other incantations refer to more extensive cargoes. At least two of them forgoe the introductory passages on the bull or the Sweet Herb referring only to boats and their cargoes. According to one title, the incantation is meant for a woman having a difficult labour (*muštapšiqtu*):⁸⁸

— The woman who was about to give birth steered the gi-boat through the water, pure Inanna steered the gi-boat through the water, Ninhursag steered the gi-boat through the water. As on a boat carrying perfume, perfume has been loaded, as on a boat carrying cedar wood, cedar wood has been loaded, on the boat (for) cornelian / lapis lazuli she loaded cornelian / lapis lazuli. The woman .. vulva ... Asalluhi saw her (...).

It is possible that later conjurers replaced the three boats of the Ur III incantation – the use of which they no longer understood – with a more elaborate description of the “goods”.

⁸³ Van Dijk, Or 44 71 f. To van Dijk, the incantation actualizes the primordial creation of man; he names this “sacramentalité”; Or NS 42 (1973) 506, with note 18.

⁸⁴ Another interpretation of the association of the moon with childbirth was given by J.A. Scurlock, *Incognita* 2 (1991) 170 note 106.

⁸⁵ U. Jeyes, *Old Babylonian Extispicy. Omen Texts in the British Museum* (1989) 97 no. 1:6 (*eleppum malitum iṭebbu u ēritum ina alādiša imātī*).

⁸⁶ Cohen, 136:22 f.

⁸⁷ Cohen, 133; Farber, 311 note 4, 312 note 6. Also van Dijk, Or NS 44 (1975) 66 (MLC 1207:9 = YOS 11 85), Wilcke, AfO 24 (1973) 13 no. 4:7. In the late commentary Civil, JNES 33 (1974) 331:1–4, with a wrong explanation; see A. Cavigneaux, *Aula Orientalis* 5 (1987) 252 f.

⁸⁸ The text published by G. Farber; we follow her translation. Similar passages in Sigrist, 157 (col. III); Cohen 136, lines 12–21. Note van Dijk’s suggestions as to the origin of some goods and the route of the boat; in Or NS 44 (1975) 73–5.

It is unfortunate that the last line which mentions the “vulva” and gives the nature of the woman’s ailment is so hard to understand.⁸⁹

The Treatment

Then, the poor woman is seen by the god of magic, Asalluhi. The dialogue between him and his father Enki is standard, found in a large group of incantations, and need not concern us. The divine prescription follows: the woman is to be anointed with cow fats. In two texts, we find more detailed instructions in a “ritual” written in Akkadian appended to the end.⁹⁰ The shoulders are to be anointed with oil and ghee. In other texts the god of magic specifies that the opening of the vulva is to be rubbed with it.⁹¹ In this connection some texts contain an obscure remark about taking a reed from the swamp.⁹²

An incantation is to be recited. Several images of streaming water clearly evoke the amniotic water and the child that should come out, after “the pot has been broken”.

In the last section of the text the child is assigned its future: he or she receives his or her gender attributes. There is some variation in the objects. Our incantation speaks of the weapon and axe for a boy, the spindle and pin for a girl. They are also known from Sumerian literary texts as typical of men / women.⁹³ They are shown to the child, as one text clearly states.⁹⁴ The cutting of the umbilical cord is the final deed; in doing this, Gula, goddess of medicine, fixes the child’s fate.

2. Akkadian incantations

We now turn to the Akkadian incantations. The corpus contains only a few Old Babylonian incantations. The bilingual Sumero-Akkadian text previously discussed is also Old Babylonian.⁹⁵ In Chapter One we presented a translation of an Old Babylonian incantation. The child is depicted as bound. The gods open a path, release the bolts, and the child is born.⁹⁶ In the following text the Sumerian motif of the god caring for a cow is still alive, but recast in Akkadian:⁹⁷

⁸⁹ The line in question is fully preserved in Wilcke, AfO 24 13 no. 4:4 (gal₄.la lú.ùlu.pap.hal.la.ke₄ gú [var. gu] ba.da.ab.lá). Translations: “Um den Scham der rüstigen Frau hat er es [cornelian and lapis lazuli] gelegt”; van Dijk: “de la vulva de la femme en travail . . . pendaient”; Römer: “aus der Vulva der beweglichen Frau hingen Fäden herunter”. Sumerian pap.hal = pušqu.

⁹⁰ VAS 17 33:28–30, with van Dijk, Or NS 44 63 (in line with line 18 in the Sumerian incantation); G. Farber, 314. See G. Cunningham, *Deliver me from Evil. Mesopotamian incantations 2500–1500 B.C.* (1997) 86 f. Translation of the first passage: “The aruhtum-woman; her ritual: (sesame) oil and ghee you shall mix and you shall anoint (it) on the shoulder (*budum*), her both sides (*bamtum*) (?), and it will come out”. The Sumerian in line 18 offers the body parts murgu, sa.sa.al, ti.ti.

⁹¹ Wilcke, AfO 24 13 no. 4:13; and more, see the discussion by Finkel, 47 f.; Butz, *Oriens Antiquus* 21 (1982) 225 note 23. But note Krebernik, 42: “reibe ihre Augen, Mund, Kopf und Scham damit ein”.

⁹² Van Dijk, Or NS 44 67 MLC 1207:23 (= YOS 11 85); Cohen, 138:42 f. In the later tradition: Civil, JNES 33 (1974) 332:8.

⁹³ Van Dijk, Or NS 41 (1972) 346–8. On these attributes also M. Civil, JNES 33 (1974) 333 f., Å.W. Sjöberg, ZA 65 (1975) 224 note 15; Krebernik, 44 f. For “the pin” (*kirissu*), see W. Farber, *Studies Erica Reiner* (1987) 98 f.

⁹⁴ Cohen, 138, lines 54–56. Here, the boy has to look at his weapon (*tukul.a.ni*; penis?), the girl at her crucible (*ga.ri.im.ma.a.ni*; vagina?).

⁹⁵ AUAM 73.3094, published by M.E. Cohen.

⁹⁶ Chapter I, p. 11.

⁹⁷ VAS 17 34, with J. van Dijk, Or NS 41 (1972) 343–348; W. Farber, JNES 49 (1990) 308; B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* I (1996) 137.

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The cow was pregnant, the cow was to give birth.
In the cattle compound of Šamaš, the pen of Šakkan,
he saw her, Šamaš, and he cried;
he saw her, the Pure of Water, and his tears were running.
Why is Šamaš crying, why are the tears of the Pure of Water running?
“Because of my cow who has never been breeched,
my kid who has never given birth.
Whom should I send with orders to the seven and seven daughters of Anum?
[May . . .], may they cause her to give birth to the baby (*šerrum*) easily.
If it is a male, like a wild ram, if it is a female, like a wild cow (?),
may it fall down on the ground”.

Here it is not the moongod, but the sungod Šamaš who takes care of the cow in the cattle compound; the text was used in Larsa, the city of the sungod.⁹⁸ The “weeping” god could imply that a solar eclipse takes place; the epithet Pure of Water, used for the moongod when there is a lunar eclipse, points in that direction.⁹⁹

The born children are compared to wild animals, a pair known from literary texts.¹⁰⁰

3. The compendium from Assur

This incantation has survived the ages: in a changed form it was incorporated into a compendium from Assur and it is attested in far-away Anatolia, where it was found in the palace archives of the Hittite kings.¹⁰¹

That compendium written on a four columns tablet is a collection of incantations and rituals for “the woman who is in hard labour”; ending with a few prescriptions for the protection of the newborn child.¹⁰² The text was so important that the Babylonians wrote an explanatory “commentary” on it, full of speculative digressions.¹⁰³

Column I is badly broken but the late commentary text helps a little in reconstructing some of the lines.¹⁰⁴ The first incantation is about a ship with an unknown cargo, the second about the cow seen by the god; when the text becomes readable, the child is compared with a ship that is “held back” and god Marduk (= Asalluhi) is beseeched so that, like a snake, “the baby may fall and see the light”.¹⁰⁵ Further on in this compendium,

⁹⁸ Discussion by van Dijk, Or NS 41 343; 44 70 f.

⁹⁹ M. Stol in: D.J.W. Meijer, *Natural phenomena. Their meaning, depiction and description in the Ancient Near East* (1992) 257 f.

¹⁰⁰ Male: *a-tu-da-ni*; female: *na-ap-[t]a-ar-ta-ni* (“cow on the lose”?). Collated by J. Marzahn and explained by C. Michel and N. Wasserman, NABU 1997/64, using an unpublished Old Assyrian incantation. That offers “If it is a male, like a wild ram (*e-tū-da-ni*), if it is a female, like a wild cow (*ša-pá-ra-ni*)”. Farber thinks of the rare suffix *-āni* “like”. W. von Soden, BiOr 35 (1978) 208 ad AbB 7 127:14: *naptartum* “eine Frauenklasse”.

¹⁰¹ BAM 3 248 I 36 ff.; see N. Veldhuis, ASJ 11 (1989) 242 f., 259 f.; Veldhuis, *A Cow of Sîn* (1991) 65, and KUB IV 13:15–22.

¹⁰² BAM 3 248 and dupls. See the study by N. Veldhuis, “The New Assyrian compendium for a woman in childbirth”, ASJ 11 (1989) 239–260.

¹⁰³ M. Civil, “Medical commentaries from Nippur”, JNES 33 (1974) 329–338 (no. 2); cf. OIC 22 (1975) 131 f. no. 20. More remarks on this text: A. Cavigneaux, *Aula Orientalis* 5 (1987) 252–255; Veldhuis, ASJ 11 240–248.

¹⁰⁴ For I 1–43, see Veldhuis, ASJ 11 241–3.

¹⁰⁵ I 49–50, [..] GJIM MUŠ *ni-šel-pa-a ki-ma ni-ra-hi* [..] . . . -ma *šēr-ru lim-qu-ut-ma* ZALAG IGI (= *nūra līmur*; not *līb-ši* as in AHw I 335b, *hašū* VI “sich verdunkeln”).

Incantations

the ship is pictured to be at “the quay of death”, “the quay of hardship”.¹⁰⁶ Short incantations – one of which contains lines of *abacadabra* – follow. The major part of column II is lost; when we are able to read it again, we are in the middle of a beautiful incantation about the ship:¹⁰⁷

May the ship (arrive) well in the . . .,
 may the barge (arrive) felicitously in the . . .
 May her taut mooring rope be slackened,
 and her closed door be opened,
 the mooring rope of the boat for the quay of well-being,
 the mooring rope of the barge for the quay of health.
 May the limbs be relaxed, the muscles loosen,
 may the sealed one ease, may the creature come forth.
 The separate bone, the human form,
 may it come forth soon and see the sunlight!
 Like rainfall from heaven, may it not turn back,
 like what has fallen from the wall, may it not return,
 like a streaming gutter, may its waters not stay behind.
 When Asalluhi heard this,
 he became anxious, he worried for her life,
 on the word of Ea he exalted his name;
 he threw the incantation of life, the formula of well-being.
 He loosened the mooring rope, he untied her k[not].
 The closed doors were o[pened].
 The sealed were eased, [the creature came forth]
 The separate bone, the human form,
 may it come forth soon and see the sunlight!

The following lines identify this incantation as “Incantation of Asalluhi, secret of Eri[du]; the approval of Ea . . ., the incantation which Mami, the wise one, as medication . . . gave to Nisaba in order to make the vagina give birth well”.¹⁰⁸

The ritual which follows reinforces the magic words on the irreversibility of events in the incantation:¹⁰⁹

– Stones dripping from heaven, dust fallen from the top of a wall, dust from a streaming gutter you shall mix in oil-from-the-jar, you shall rub her (with it) from top to bottom, and that woman will give birth easily.

One wonders how they procured “stones dripping from heaven” (*abnu tīk šamē*);

¹⁰⁶ I 62 f. The same image returns in another incantation, below, III 58 f.

¹⁰⁷ We translate II 47–69. See also R. Albertz, *Persönliche Frömmigkeit und offizielle Religion* (1978) 52; Foster, *Before the Muses* II (1996) 878; E. Reiner in: W. Röllig, *Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft. Altorientalische Literaturen* (1978) 192. Note that line II 46 (*an-nu-ú me-ḥu-ú ḥa-ma-ku kul-dan-ni*) is paralleled by W.G. Lambert, Iraq 31 (1969) 31:47 (*an-nu-ú te-šu-ú la-a-ma-ku-ma ku-ul-da-a-ni*).

¹⁰⁸ III 3–5, with dupl. K. 3485 (+10443): (3) ÉN šá^dASAR.LÚ.HI ni-sir-tu šá URU-[DÙG^{ki}] (4) *an-nu-ke-nu šá^dé-a i di tum* ÉN šá^dMa-mi i-ri-šú [sic] *ana bu-lu* (?) (5) ^dNidaba id-di-nu *ana šu-te-šur* ŠA.TÜR. Cf. N. Veldhuis, 247 f. Collated by M.J. Geller.

¹⁰⁹ III 7–9; cf. Veldhuis, 211. For the correct interpretation of the irreversibility in II 58 and III 45, see W. Mayer, *Or NS* 53 (1984) 112.

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even if these are hailstones, it would not be an easy task. Collecting the “dust” falling down from the wall or the gutter also has problems. Is this prescription realistic? A similar prescription later in the text seems to be easier to execute and looks like a more practicable alternative.¹¹⁰

4. The Cow of Sîn

The next section of the compendium is a text of the well-known incantation “The Cow of Sîn”. This is the fullest version of the incantation and it represents the last phase of a long development which began with the Old Sumerian Fara incantation. This version was known to Thomas Mann when he wrote *Joseph und seine Brüder*.¹¹¹ We have five versions in Akkadian, two of which date to the Middle Assyrian period. The text history is complicated and it shows us how an incantation could “wear out” over the ages: there are omissions, errors leading to corruptions, words which are no longer understood, et cetera. Two studies of this text have appeared. W. Röllig approaches the incantation diachronically. He analyzes the various versions isolating the errors that were introduced during the process of transmission. His study includes extensive philological commentary.¹¹² The second study, by N. Veldhuis, takes a synchronic point of view: every version has its own literary merits and its texture and structure are laid bare. Sound play and double entendre, sound association, recurring sound patterns, rhyme and sound parallelism are discovered. The composition of the text shows, then, that “the structural line governing the narrative is the mediation of magic between heaven and earth as the solution of the paradox of birth”.¹¹³ We will now present the translation of the version from the Assur compendium, largely following that by Veldhuis.¹¹⁴

Incantation – There was a cow of Sîn, Geme-Sîn by name.
With ornaments decorated, tempting of shape she was.
Sîn saw her and fell in love with her.
The brilliance (?) of Sîn . . . he laid upon her.
He appointed her at the head of the herd, the herdsmen followed her.
In the lushest grasses he pastured her, at the abundant well they watered her.
Hidden from the herd boys, not seen by the herdsman, the wild bull mounted the
cow, he lifted (?) her tail.
When her days came to an end, her months were finished,

¹¹⁰ III 46–53. Are the incantations insertions?

¹¹¹ “Laban und Adina, da ihre Tränke, Salbungen und Streichungen nichts hatten fruchten wollen, zählten in tiefer Betretenheit Beschwörungen auf und erinnerten unter dem Schreien der Kreissenden in rythmischen Worten Sin, den Mondgott, daran, dass er einst eine Kuh bei der Geburt unterstützt habe: so möge er auch lösen die Verschlingung dieser Frau und beistehen der Magd in Kindesnöten”. In *Fischer Taschenbuch*, Band 1 (1971) 239.

¹¹² W. Röllig, “Der Mondgott und die Kuh. Ein Lehrstück zur Problematik der Textüberlieferung im Alten Orient”, *Or NS* 54 (1985) 260–273.

¹¹³ N. Veldhuis, *A Cow of Sîn* (1991). Example: *ar̥hu* means both “cow” and “month”. He even discovers associations with words not in the text: *littu* (cow) refers to *ālittu* (child-bearing woman); the “angels” (Lamassu) are contrasted with the demon *Lamaštu*. The present author must confess that after having read Veldhuis’ book in a mood of reservation, he was impressed by the cumulative effect of all those examples, although individually in themselves they perhaps were less convincing.

¹¹⁴ BAM 3 248 III 10–35; Veldhuis, 8–9; cf. 61–3. Other new translations: W. Farber, *TUAT* II/2 (1987) 274–6; Foster, *Before the Muses* II (1996) 876–7.

The Cow of Sîn

the cow trembled and terrified her herdsman.
His head was bowed, all the herd boys lamented with him.
At her crying, at her screaming in labour, Nannaru was downcast.
Sîn heard the screaming in heaven and lifted high his hand.
Two Lamassus descended from heaven.
One of them carried “oil-from-the jar”, the other brought “water of labour”.
With “oil-from-the jar” she touched her forehead,
with “water of labour” she sprinkled her whole body.
Once again she touched her forehead with “oil-from-the jar”,
with “water of labour” she sprinkled her whole body.
When she touched for the third time,
the calf fell down on the ground like a gazelle’s young.
Amar-ga (“Milk-calf”) she called the calf.
Just as Geme-Sîn gave birth normally,
may also the young woman in labour give birth.
Let the midwife not be held back,
let the pregnant one be all right.

There are two important variants in the older versions. First, line 10 reads “the cow trembled and terrified her herdsman”. The equivalent line in the Middle Assyrian texts reads something like “the cow crouched, she had birth pangs”.¹¹⁵ A cow does not crouch or squat (*kamāsu*) when giving birth – as a woman does – but in mythic thought cow is also the woman and the contradiction is not necessarily a problem. Nevertheless, the later version seems to have rejected the existing text (already corrupted?) and replaced it by something new. It is interesting to compare the differing approaches of Röllig and Veldhuis. Röllig sees the main text as completely corrupted and does not dare accept the reading which yields the translation “the cow trembled”. The verbal form *igallit* is not grammatically correct according to Röllig, the signs are hopeless. Veldhuis takes the late version as correct, in its own right, and according to his understanding the text exploits the sound pattern of the verbal form *igallit* which can be compared with *littu* “cow”.¹¹⁶

The second variant concerns the two Lamassus. They are female protecting spirits, and function here like “angels”. One Middle Assyrian version of the incantation speaks of “the two Daughters of Anum”. This indeed sounds familiar; in Old Babylonian and later incantations these Daughters bring down health-producing water. For some reason they were replaced by Lamassus in the later version. It could be that the title “protecting spirit” (*lamassu*) fits the goddesses Narundi and Nahundi who are attested in other birth incantations and are then identified with the angels. We shall return to the two goddesses presently.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ GUD.ÁB *ik-ta-mi-si i-ha-al ar-hu* and *ta-ah-ti-me-iš* [sic] *ta-ha-al bu-ur-tu ina x* [. . .]; see Röllig, 262, C 26 and D 57.

¹¹⁶ Röllig, 266; Veldhuis, 36 f.

¹¹⁷ In the discussion of III 36–45. Perhaps the two angels are spoken to in BAM 3 248 I 64–66: (66) *ul-tu šamê u[r-da]-ni* (?) (65) *ana^dBe-let-i-lí be-let re-e-me qí-bí-ma (?)* (66) *ur-hu li-ši-ir ina* (!) ŠÁ [e-ri]-ti *li-ṣa-a* Z[ALAG] ^dUTU IGI. “Descend from heaven, speak to Bēlet-ili, mistress of the womb, that the road may be straight, he may go out from the belly of the pregnant one, (and) see the light of the sun”. The words *be-let re-e-me* are preserved in KAR 196.

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Two names are given in the text. The name of the cow is Geme-Sîn and the calf is named Amar-ga. Geme-Sîn also is a well-known woman's name.¹¹⁸ The fact that it means "Slave-girl of Sîn" is the reason why most scholars view the name as purely mythical: a cow who is the slave-girl of the moongod Sîn, the bull.¹¹⁹ This author has another suggestion. One of king Šulgi's wives had this name and the text could refer to her.¹²⁰ Let us assume that she was in the midst of a terrible delivery and that the conjurers made this incantation for her. The imagery, with its "thériomorphisme rebutant" (van Dijk), fits the royal ideology of her time, the Ur III period, perfectly.¹²¹ Bull Šulgi has impregnated Geme-Sîn and the god of Ur, Nanna / Sîn, now comes to help. The son who is born receives the name Amar-ga, "milk-calf", which is in accord with the Ur III ideology and is also a good Sumerian name ("Vitellus").

There is a Hittite myth in which a cow also plays a role in problems related to birth.¹²² This myth, "The Sun God and the Cow", tells how the god contracted a sexual desire for a cow and united with her. When the "calf" is born, the cow is angry because it has only two, not four, legs, and she tries to kill the creature. The god rescues the child and leaves it in the mountains under the protection of animals. The child is found by a childless fisherman. He tells his barren wife to withdraw to a room and scream, feigning birth. We do not know how the story ends. This myth has a few motifs in common with "The Cow of Sîn"; but there is little more we can say.¹²³

After a ruled line, the incantation "The Cow of Sîn" is followed, not by a ritual, as one would expect, but rather by a second, related, incantation. Here, the names of the "angels" are given:¹²⁴

Incantation – Narundi Nahundi nanamgišir.
There was a cow of Sîn, Geme-Sîn by name.
At her crying, at her screaming in labour
Nannaru-Sîn heard her screaming.
"Who is it, Narundi, who is it Nahundi?"
"A cow, O lord, she has trouble in delivery!"
O lord, sprinkle water from your . . . -bucket over her!"
Let the 'face' of the cow Egi-Sîn be opened.
May he come out like a snake, may he glide out like a little snake.
Like someone falling from the wall,
May he not throw his cheek to his back.

¹¹⁸ In our incantations, the name has been corrupted in various ways. The late commentary says: *E-gi-zi-ni-ti* = GEME ^d30; JNES 33 (1974) 332:37.

¹¹⁹ J. van Dijk, *Or NS* 41 (1972) 340 f.

¹²⁰ P. Michalowski, *JCS* 28 (1976) 169–172.

¹²¹ Van Dijk, *Or NS* 44 (1975) 71. Gudea pictures the goddess Ninsun as a good cow giving birth; Cyl. B XXIII 21. More in Å.W. Sjöberg, *Orientalia Suecana* 21 (1973) 99 f.; J. Klein, *The royal hymns of Shulgi King of Ur: Man's quest for immortal fame* (= TAPS 71, 7) (1981) 26 note 135.

¹²² Latest translation: F. Pecchioli Daddi, A.M. Polvani, *La mitologia ittita* (1990) 172–176; with lit. Add V. Haas in *Hurriter und Hurritisch* (1988) 134 (ritual context).

¹²³ A fragmentary line in Ugarit speaks of "the slave-girl of the moon" ('*mt jrḥ*), KTU 1.12 I 15; *Textes ougaritiques I* (1974) 337.

¹²⁴ III 36–45; Farber, *TUAT* II/2 276; Veldhuis, *Cow* 14.

The Cow of Sîn

The names Narundi and Nahundi are Elamite, just as the foreign words at the end of the first line seem to be. The late commentary identifies them with Sun and Moon.¹²⁵ There are other birth incantations entirely or partly written in Elamite.¹²⁶ The magical lore of Elam seems to have been renowned, especially in matters of childbirth and for the protection of the babies from the demon *Lamaštu*.¹²⁷ The last lines of this incantation most likely refer to normal birth. If this is the case, the line “Let the ‘face’ of the cow *Egi-Sîn* be opened” means that her vagina opens and there is dilatation. The calf should come out straight and easy like a snake and should not be in an abnormal position with his cheek thrown to his back like that of a man who broke his neck.¹²⁸

A ritual follows. Dust from the roadcrossing, a doorsill, the gutters, and the door is to be collected, mixed in oil and put into a large reed tube. Reciting the incantation seven times, one rubs the “bulging belly” from top to bottom.¹²⁹

Another incantation about the cow follows:¹³⁰

Incantation – The big cow of Sîn I am.
I am pregnant and I am butting all the time.
With my horns I root up the soil,
with my tail I whirl dust clouds.
At the quay of death the ship is held back,
at the quay of distress the barge is held back.
[Give order], Ea, lord of incantation,
that [at the quay of death] they loosen the ship,
that [at the quay of distress] they relax the barge.
(about four lines broken)
Let the child come out quickly and see the light of the sun.

This short incantation, addressed to the unborn child, immediately follows:¹³¹

Incantation – Run hither to me like a gazelle,
Slip out to me like a little snake.
I, Asalluhi, am the midwife, I will receive you.

A ritual relating to the incantation follows: “You take over the cornel staff from the hand of a herdsman, you recite the incantation over it, seven times. You move (the staff) cross-wise (*parāku*) over her belly, and she will give birth quickly”. Note that the staff evokes the familiar imagery of the cow in the meadow. Clearly, the symbolism of the

¹²⁵ JNES 33 (1974) 332:27. This is new; is it correct? On Narundi, see F. Vallat in D.T. Potts, *Dilmun* (1983) 95 note 4. I.L. Finkel found three similar “angels” in Aramaic incantations; NABU 1997/22, 1.

¹²⁶ YBC 5630 = YOS 11 17; YBC 5624 = YOS 11 18, dupl. OECT XI 5. Cf. the Elamite passage in our compendium, BAM 3 248 I 54–61.

¹²⁷ J. van Dijk, “Fremdsprachige Beschwörungstexte in der südmesopotamischen literarischen Überlieferung”, in: H.J. Nissen, J. Renger, *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn* (1982) 97–110; esp. 104 f. – Narundi is attested in the incantation LB 1003:3, as the first word; F.M.Th. Böhl, *Mededeelingen* II (1934) 8 [30].

¹²⁸ Thus W. Farber, TUAT II/2 276 note to 45; “in ganz verkrümmter Haltung, etwa Steißlage”.

¹²⁹ III 46–53, with Farber, 276; Veldhuis, 14. Her “bulging” belly, III 52: ŠA-šá *qu-pi* (Farber: *quppi* “gewölbt”), or *zaq* (!)-*pi*.

¹³⁰ III 54–IV 1; Farber, 276–7; Veldhuis, 14 f. Compare 58–62 with I 44–48.

¹³¹ IV 2–3; Farber, 277 (incantation and ritual); Foster, *Before the Muses* II (1996) 877 (incantation); Veldhuis, 252 (ritual).

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cow was well-known. The cornel wood of which the staff is made, has magic power.¹³²

This incantation and ritual are paralleled by another one that comes now; here, god Asalluhi / Marduk again is invoked, by his name Šazu (not written well), “He who knows the Inside”¹³³:

The woman in hard labour, she with the sealed womb:
You, Šazu, are her midwife; help her to give birth,
and now the herdman’s staff is to be rolled (*garāru Š*) over her belly from its top to its bottom.

The last incantation is one line of *abacadabra*. The remainder of the text gives only therapeutic prescriptions without incantations. It is interesting to note that the incantations become shorter and shorter, and the therapeutical section follows at the end. This order is often seen in large medical compendia.

5. Therapies in the compendium from Assur

“Therapy” follows “magic”. The Babylonians discerned between the “magic” performed by the conjurer and the “therapy” done by the physician. Either the woman has to drink composite potions in order to give birth easily or quickly, or she is to be anointed. The pharmaceutical handbooks (“vademecum”) studied at the beginning of the chapter give only brief notations indicating the plants for “a woman in hard labour”. The compendium gives a fuller description of their use. To be sure, many ingredients and procedures are still heavily magical according to our standards. We give some examples.

- If a woman is giving birth and is in hard labour, you shall pound the dust dug out by a dog, ‘beat’ it in oil, anoint her belly, and she will give birth quickly.¹³⁴
- If a woman is giving birth and is in hard labour, you shall pound the root of the male mandrake (?) (which has grown) on the north side, mix it in oil, you shall anoint (with it) the top (?) of her belly, ‘going downstream’ (*ana muqqalpīti*), and she will give birth quickly.¹³⁵

The “mandrake” continues to intrigue us: is this not the plant that promotes love and pregnancy? We have seen that the identification of the plant *pillû* with the mandrake is a problem. It was not the plant of love. The mandrake of our text is from “the north side”. We learn from another medical text that a “mandrake” growing on the north side bears no fruits.¹³⁶ Having no fruit is also characteristic of the “male” plant.¹³⁷ Now that the child is about to be born, love and pregnancy are a problem no longer and thus, a plant with exactly the reverse property is chosen.

¹³² F.A.M. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian protective spirits. The ritual texts* (1992) 65 f., with 79 ff.

¹³³ IV 6–9, dupl. AMT 67,1 IV 1–2. Cf. CAD A/1 293a; Veldhuis, 252 (ritual).

¹³⁴ IV 17. The dust “dug out” by a dog is unique in medical literature. This *nipilti kalbi* (verb *napālu*; CAD N/2 167b is the wrong place) has a parallel in *sipihti litti* (M. Stol apud R. Borger, BiOr 48 [1991] 157 ad S. 299). The following prescription speaks of pounding the nest of a swallow (IV 18).

¹³⁵ IV 19–20, dupl. AMT 67,1 IV 12–13.

¹³⁶ BAM 6 578 III 9, SUHUŠ GIŠ.NAM.TAR NITA šá IM.SI.SÁ šá GURUN NU ÍL. See already R.C. Thompson, *DAB* (1949) 218 f.

¹³⁷ Uruanna I 582, as cited by B. Landsberger, *The date palm* (1967) 52, note.

Therapies

The movement “going downstream” is a unique expression and, maybe, it wishes to remind us of the child coming down like a boat.

Recommendations about eating the meat of a turtle, a white pig, or a female fox are followed by an elaborate ritual which is evoked:

– If a woman is giving birth and is in hard labour, you shall collect shoots, you shall spread (them) under a camelthorn that grows on a mud wall, and speak like this; thus: “You have received my present for you; give me the Plant of Life, so that Mrs. X, daughter of Y, may have an easy delivery”. This you shall say and its root and its top you shall tear off, but you shall not look behind you, nor shall you speak with any person. You shall twist a thread, you shall tie (it), you shall bind (it) to her left thigh, and she will be healthy.¹³⁸

This elementary ritual, including a short magic formula to be pronounced, is not expected in the therapeutic context and its wording is most unusual. Perhaps the scribe viewed it as a category “sundry matters” and assigned it a place at the very end. We assume that the root and top of the thornbush are first removed and that this plant is used; the shoots are offered to it as a compensation. “Plant of Life” is a well-known and very general term. In medical texts, it is an identifiable but inconspicuous herb.¹³⁹ The outcome, “she will be healthy” (*iballut*, var. *ina'eš*) is also exceptional in this compendium.

After this unusual prescription, there is a ruled line and the compendium turns to a new subject matter, two afflictions of the newborn baby: the two prescriptions tell what to do in order to ward off when “Hand of a God” or a Succubus come near the baby.¹⁴⁰ This is the end of the text. A colophon gives the first line of the next tablet in the series, an unidentified Sumerian incantation.¹⁴¹

In summary, the main motifs of the Assur compendium are (a) the child as a boat; (b) the mother as a pregnant cow. One line spoke of “closed doors”. This seems to be all that remains of the bolts and locks imagery of the older compositions.¹⁴²

The gods that are invoked to assist are Sîn, Asalluhi / Marduk and Šamaš. We first note that the old Sumerian incantations also spoke of the god Enlil, the goddess Inanna, and the mother goddesses Nintu, Aruru, or Ninhursag who steered the boat.¹⁴³ In our compendium we find only male gods, one of whom even acts as “midwife”. This is in accord with the diminishing importance of the third millennium female deities which occurs over time.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ IV 31–38, dupl. AMT 67,1 IV 24–31. See Veldhuis, 253; E. Reiner, *Astral magic in Babylonia* (1995) 37 f. “Camelthorn” (*asāgu*) is *Prosopis farcta*, “acacia shrub” in Reiner’s translation.

¹³⁹ Sumerogram Ú NAM.TI.LA. See K. Watanabe, *Baghd. Mitt.* 25 (1995) 590.

¹⁴⁰ Demonic diseases akin to stupor or epilepsy; see M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 34 f., 48.

¹⁴¹ Cf. I.L. Finkel, *AfO* 27 (1980) 43b. Haemorrhage? But see J. van Dijk, *YOS* 11 (1985) p. 32.

¹⁴² II 65, *edlēti bābāti*. The passages on bolts and locks are *YOS* 11 86:21–24 (OB; translated in Chapter I, p. 11); W.G. Lambert, *Iraq* 31 (1969) 31:35 f., (MA; translated in Chapter V, p. 130 “Difficult labour”) and 31:52 f. (MA version of “The Cow of Sîn”). It looks as if it is an inapt intrusion in “The Cow of Sîn”: in lines 51–53, lines 34–36 of the preceding incantation were just copied. See also Veldhuis, 51 f.

¹⁴³ M. Krebernik, *Die Beschwörungen aus Fara und Ebla* (1984) 36–47, no. 6 (Fara; Enlil and a midwife); M. Sigrist, *ASJ* 2 (1980) 157 (Nintu, Aruru); G. Farber, *JNES* 43 (1984) 314 (Inanna, Ninhursag).—Note that Inanna plays a role in the Ur III incantation for a woman, *NATN* 8; see P. Michalowski, *JNES* 45 (1986) 327.

¹⁴⁴ T. Frymer-Kensky, *In the wake of the goddess. Women, culture and the Biblical transformation of pagan myth* (1992) 70–80 (Chapter 7, “The marginalization of the goddesses”).

III. Magic and the Divine

The reason why the moongod *Sîn* is qualified to help is given by the incantations themselves; we have commented on this – he is the god of the kings of Ur. *Asalluhi* is the god of magic; he was identified with the god of Babylon, *Marduk*. He is called “the midwife” (*šabsūtu*), and bears, among his many names, the Sumerian name *Šà.zu*, “who knows the inside”; “wise”.¹⁴⁵ We will see in the section dealing with her that the midwife is named “the wise one” (*erîstu*). It is one of his many powers in the long list in a ritual handbook, “to keep the pregnant woman, together with her foetus, well; to make (her) give birth, to make (her) get posterity”.¹⁴⁶ In an Old Babylonian incantation, where we would expect *Sîn*, the sungod *Šamaš* was found to help the cow in distress. In a prayer he is asked to “loosen the knot” of a woman so that she may give birth with success and her child may be well.¹⁴⁷ It appears from that text that “the knot” (*kîsru*) was caused by sorcery. A badly broken incantation from Assur meant for a woman in hard labour also speaks of sorceries.¹⁴⁸

There are some more incantations for women having a difficult childbirth. They are discussed elsewhere in this book: one of the Old Babylonian period has been presented in Chapter I; a Middle Assyrian text with a vivid description of the poor woman will be given in the section on Difficult labour.

A cylinder seal

A cylinder seal from Telloh, the ancient Sumerian city *Lagaš*, contains unusual images as well as an inscription of the physician Ur-Lugal-edena who lived during the time of Ur-Ningirsu, son of Gudea of *Lagaš*. We have another attestation of his name on a plaque dedicated to *Bau*, the goddess of *Lagaš*, who also was a goddess of medicine.¹⁴⁹ The cylinder seal can be considered a votive object: it is too large to be a normal seal and the script is not in reversed writing. The inscription runs as follows: “O Eden-mugi, vizier of *Šamkan*, (god) of the mothers with young: Ur-Lugal-edena, the physician, (is) your servant”.¹⁵⁰ *Šamkan* (*Šakkan*) is the god of cattle (*bûlu*) and the “mothers with young”

¹⁴⁵ BAM 3 248 IV 7, ^dŠÀ(!).ZU *ša-ab-su-ta-ša-ma at-ta šum-li-is-si*. Cf. W. Sommerfeld, *Der Aufstieg Marduks* (1982) 159 f., who cites CT 24 42:100, ^dŠà.zu = MIN (= ^dMarduk) *šá re-e-mi*, “the Marduk of the womb”. The meaning(s) of the name *Šà.zu* was (were) based on Babylonian speculations; see W.G. Lambert, “Etymology, Ancient near Eastern”, in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (1990) 215 f.

¹⁴⁶ Šurpu IV 24 f., *erîtu gadu ša libbiša šullumu šu'ludu šunu šuršû*.

¹⁴⁷ Th. Meek, BA 10/1 (1913) no.1, with R. Borger, Or NS 54 (1985) 14–18.

¹⁴⁸ BAM 3 244:41–71 (71: [INI]M.[IN]IM.MA ÉN SAL.LA.[RA.AH]). Line 48: *kiš-pu ru-hu-ú up-šá-[šu-ú]*. The incantation has several elements in common with SpbTU II 130 no. 25; cf. W. Farber, WdO 18 (1987) 40. There, the canals loose their water and the breeches are to be dammed; the ditches are to be filled with water, so that the young one can descend. Untimely loss of amniotic water?

¹⁴⁹ YOS 1 8; IRS 1 (1971) 118 II C 4f. On *Bau* as “the great physician of the black-headed / the land”, see A. Falkenstein, AnOr 30 (1966) 65 note 10; Å.W. Sjöberg, E. Bergmann, *The collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns* (1969) 105 and 153, on line 268.

¹⁵⁰ F. Thureau-Dangin, RA 11 (1914) 103; in R. Borger, HKL I (1967) 75 and II (1973) 42, under Delaporte, CCL T 98. Cf. H.E. Sigerist, *A history of medicine* I (1951) 497 note 77. Latest discussions of the inscription: J. van Dijk, Or NS 41 (1972) 343; see also the next note. Photos or drawings: J. Ménant, *Recherches sur la glyptique orientale* I (1883) 220; G. Contenau, *La médecine en Assyrie et Babylone* (1938) 40–42; A.S. Lyons, R.J. Petrucci, *Medicine. An illustrated history* (1978) 66 no. 101; H. Sauren, *Der Genius der Sonne und der Stab des Asklepios* (1979) 26; D. Collon, *First impressions. Cylinder seals in the Ancient Near East* (1987) 147 no. 638, with this explanation: “Seal 638 belonged to a doctor who specialised in midwifery and the tools of his trade are depicted” (p. 148b).

A Cylinder Seal

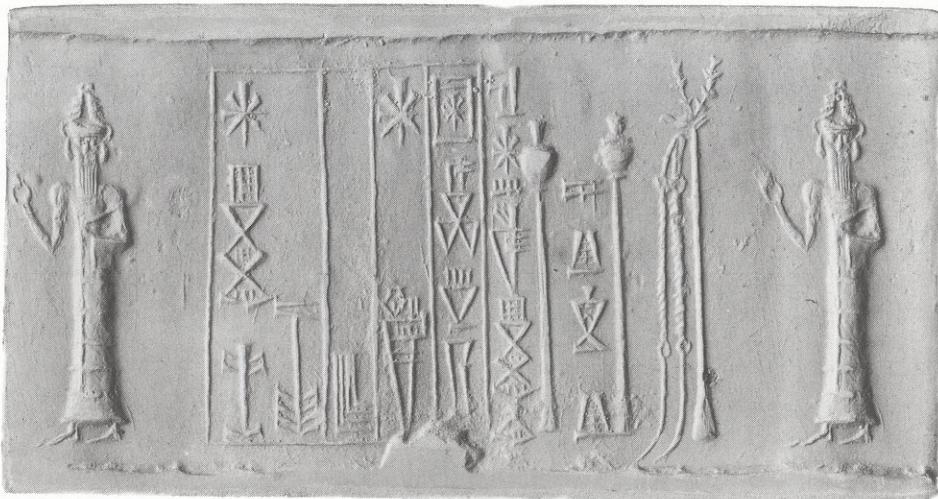


Fig. 2 Cylinder seal from Lagaš, possibly dedicated by a veterinarian. Hanging from the trees are the chains used in delivering calves. Greyish-brown veined stone. 6,1 × 4,5 cm. Musée du Louvre.

must refer to animals, pregnant or suckling their young.¹⁵¹ This relates to the imagery of the seal. Hanging from the trees are what a modern expert has identified as chains used in delivering calves. Along the expanse of the chain is a larger link which enables the veterinarian to bind the calf's legs in such a way that the feet come together and the calf can be extracted.¹⁵² Next to the chains two salve pots sit on top of poles.¹⁵³ Indeed, we have seen that in the rituals accompanying the incantations for human birth oil as a salve is applied. Is the man of this seal a veterinarian? Although it is not abundant there is evidence for an occupation known as "physician of the cattle / donkey". One might be tempted to take the iconography as a reference to the Cow of Sîn and thus symbolic for human birth. However, this would mean that the Sumerian or Babylonian physicians delivered babies, and this is not the case. Midwives, helped by conjurers, functioned in that capacity. It seems best, therefore, to see Ur-Lugaledena a high-placed official, as a veterinarian who was responsible for the state herds of Lagaš, which roamed the surrounding steppe. In his name we detect the divine name Lugal-edena, "King of the Steppe"; and the name of his divine patron, Eden-mugi, also refers to the steppe.

¹⁵¹ In the inscription AMA.GAN.ŠA.DU. A monumental body of literature has developed on this and related sign combinations: W.G. Lambert, ASJ 3 (1981) 32, 34; F. Pomponio, Or NS 53 (1984) 4; Lambert, Or NS 55 (1986) 156. B. Alster, ASJ 5 (1983) 7 f.: "the mother who gave birth"; J. Krecher, WdO 18 (1987) 11: "female who . . ."; J. Bauer, AfO 36–37 (1989–90) 82b, on no. 13 IV 5. The cattle god Šamagan: M. Bonechi, MARI 8 (1997) 511; A. Cavigneaux in: T. Abusch, K. van der Toorn, *Mesopotamian Magic. Textual, historical, and interpretative perspectives* (1999) 261–4. Note the translation by B.R. Foster of this line in an Old Babylonian incantation, *ki-ma bu-lu e-li ša-am-ka-ni ha-ab-ra-at*, "As wild beasts are stronger than cattle" (*Before the Muses I* [1996] 119). He interpreted the difficult word *šamkanum* as "cattle"; obviously, he thought of Šakkan, Šamagan.

¹⁵² Ilse Fuhr, "Ein sumerischer Tierarzt", *Archiv Orientální* 34 (1966) 570–3.

¹⁵³ According to B. Meissner, BuA II (1925) 285.

III. Magic and the Divine

Goddesses present during birth

The Mother Goddess is the most important goddess present at birth. She had a high position in the pantheon. We quote the short survey of the pantheon given by W.G. Lambert. "From the end of the third millennium to the end of the second millennium there was a committee of top gods who exercised power, in a sequence which also illustrates their concept of the physical universe. An (Sumerian) or Anu (Babylonian) bore as name the Sumerian noun "sky", and that was his sphere. He was a kind of president of a socialist state: nominal head but not wielding day-to-day power except in emergencies. Between heaven and earth there was a gap in which human activity took place. The god of this space was Enlil. He lived on earth in his town Nippur and so concerned himself with human activity, being the most important god for the human race. The earth itself was considered female, presumably as the recipient of the fertilizing rain sent down by father heaven, and a third member of this committee was the Mother Goddess, known by a variety of names: Ninhursag, Nintu, Aruru, and Bēlet-ilī. Her position in the top committee is not invariable – she can be lacking – but the reason for her position is clear. She occurs below the space in the universe in which humans operate. The final member of the committee was Enki (Sumerian) or Ea (Babylonian). He was god of the subterranean lake, called Apsū, from which all springs and rivers draw water".¹⁵⁴

The Mother Goddess lives in Sumerian religion under many names.¹⁵⁵ Lists of gods record various names, but often we do not know whether these manifestations of the goddess were venerated, or where.¹⁵⁶ The literal meanings of a number of names indicates that one of the tasks of the mother goddess is the moulding of human beings. The following names are taken from the second tablet of the large gods list "An = Anum".¹⁵⁷

"Lady Potter", "Sculptor of the Land / Gods", "Midwife of the Gods", "Carpenter of Mankind", "Carpenter of the Inside" (26–31), "The Expert Hand", "High Priestess: Fashioning Womb", "Fashioner (of) all things in which is breath of life", "Blood Stauncher", "Birth-giving Mother", "Mother Spreading the Legs", "Expert Knower of the Amniotic Water" (34–40).¹⁵⁸ Another name, ^dNin-mena, means "Lady of the

¹⁵⁴ W.G. Lambert, in his article "Ancient Mesopotamian gods. Superstition, philosophy, theology", RHR 207 (1990) 115–130, esp. 122.

¹⁵⁵ M. Krebernik, "Muttergöttin. A. I. In Mesopotamien", RIA VIII/5–6 (1995) 502–516.

¹⁵⁶ A late text assigns the most important of them to cities: "Aruru is the Bēlet-ilī of Sippur; Nintu is the Bēlet-ilī of Delti; Ninnmah of Emah; Ninhursag of Keš; Ninmena of Udab; Šasurra of Urrak; Erua of Babylon. The Mistress of Goddesses (Bēlet-ilāti) is Zarpānitum"; Th.G. Pinches, PSBA 33 (1911) 94; cf. KAR 142 rev. III 35 – IV 3 (E. Reiner, JNES 33 [1974] 221).

¹⁵⁷ R. Litke, *A reconstruction of the Assyro-Babylonian god-lists*, AN: ^dAnu-um and AN: Anu šá amēli (1998) 69 ff. For Tablet II, see also CT 24 12–17, and dupls.; survey in K. Tallqvist, *Akkadische Götterepitheta* (1938) 273 f.

¹⁵⁸ AN=Anum II 36–40, complete: ^dNin-bahar (26), ^dTibira-kalam.ma (27), ^dTibira-dingir.re.e.ne (28), ^dŠà.zu-dingir.e.ne (29), ^dNagar-nam.lú.u.x.lu (30), ^dNagar-šá.ga (31), ^dZi-gu.la (32), ^dLú-gu.la (33), ^dŠu-gal.an.zu (34), ^dEn-arhuš-dím (35), ^dNig-zi.gál-dím.dím.ma (36), ^dMud-kéš.da (37), ^dAma-ù.tu.da (38), ^dAma-du₁₀-bad (39), ^dLál.hur-gal.zu (40). We have followed the interpretations of Th. Jacobsen, Or NS 42 (1973) 287 f., 289, 292. With this exception: he sees in lál.hur, "the honey comb", the placenta; better is an association with *lalgar* "cosmic subterranean water" (CAD). Krebernik, "Muttergöttin" § 3.8: "Die sich gut mit Wachs auskenn" (RIA VIII/7–8, 504). ^dŠu-gal.an.zu (34): Krebernik § 3.38 translates "Töpferin". Names not translated above: ^dZi-gu.la (32): "(Deren) Leben gross (ist)", Krebernik, § 3.40. ^dLú-gu.la (33):

Birth Goddesses

Headgear".¹⁵⁹ According to the Atram-hasīs myth, the midwife put on her head a special gear. This may have had a specific purpose: in modern Palestine "the midwife folds a thick cloth, puts it on her head, presses her head against the stomach and the afterbirth comes down".¹⁶⁰ In a Sumerian myth the birth goddess Nintu under the name Ninmema "sets birth-giving going".¹⁶¹

We will now give a selection of the names and functions of the mother goddess as attested in religious texts, such as hymns and prayers.

Nintu(r) is the best known name of the Sumerian goddess. She is "the mother, mistress of creating, who performs her task in the belly, the place of darkness".¹⁶² She is "the mother of the land",¹⁶³ and as King Ur-Nammu says in a hymn, she was present when he was born.¹⁶⁴ On the other hand, according to a Sumerian proverb, "A man whose knees are paralyzed, Nintu has not conceived him, as they say".¹⁶⁵ Her name means "Lady Birth-Hut" (*tu* = *tür*). The birth-hut (*tür*) is known from early Sumerian art: we see newborn calves emerging from a hut which is situated in sheepfolds and cowpens. Metaphorically, the human baby is also seen as coming from a sheltered place like the birth-hut. This is why the Sumerian signs combination for "womb" can be "inside the cowpen" (*šà.tür*).¹⁶⁶ According to one theory, in myth Nintu(r) is the goddess who supervises the birth of the domesticated animals (cows, etc.), whereas the goddess *Ninhursaga*, with whom she is later identified, was originally the goddess of the wild animals on the foothills (*hur.sag*). Another theory says that in the name *Ninhursaga* we find the Neolithic goddess of man and animal alike, the *potnia theron*, the "great goddess of life, death and regeneration".¹⁶⁷ According to the myth detailing about his exploits, the god *Ninurta* assigned this honorific name to his mother *Ninmah*.¹⁶⁸ In mythical primordial times, she acted as "stand-in" for the god *Enki*. He had eaten plants which he had fertilised with his semen and then became pregnant. "Ninhursaga made Enki sit in her vagina"; she asked him what was wrong, and then she gave birth to the one god after another.¹⁶⁹ In an Old Babylonian bilingual text we find *Nintur* in the Sumerian line and

Jacobsen reads *Dingir-lú-gu.la*, "The great personal deity of the man" (p. 297); Krebernik: "Die Grosse". Tibira: H. Waetzoldt, NABU 1997/96 ("Schnitzer, Bildhauer und Intarsien-Macher").

¹⁵⁹ II 21, with the Akkadian translation *be-let me-a-am-mi* (var. *ma-a-mi*); CT 24 12:18 and 25:83.

¹⁶⁰ Atram-hasīs I 284 (*apāru*); H. Granqvist, *Birth and childhood among the Arabs* (1947) 71.

¹⁶¹ Myth on the Creation of the Pickaxe 27, ^d*Nin-men.na.ke*₄ *dú.dú al.gá.gá*; as interpreted by Th. Jacobsen, Or NS 42 (1973) 288, cf. J. Klein in J.-M. Durand, *La femme dans le Proche-Orient antique* (1987) 97 note 4. Jacobsen, 290: "Before beginning her task the midwife covered her hair with a headdress which may be reflected in the name ^d*Nin-men.na* "Lady of the Headdress" for the birthgoddess". T. Frymer-Kensky, *In the wake of the goddess* (1992) 238 f., thinks that the men is here – as it is elsewhere – the crown of a king.

¹⁶² Sumerian Temple Hymns, 500 f., *ama* ^d*Nin.tu nin.ulutim.ma* *šà ki.kukkú.ga kin.ak.e*; with J. Klein in *La femme* ... (1987) 97. See his footnotes for more references to Nintu.

¹⁶³ H. Sauren, *Genava* NS 16 (1968) 113.

¹⁶⁴ TCL 15 12:47, with G. Castellino, ZA 53 (1959) 119, who refers the reader to what is now *Enki* and *Ninmah* 36.

¹⁶⁵ B. Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer* I (1997) 203 (SP 12 Section C 9).

¹⁶⁶ We follow the famous article by Th. Jacobsen, "Notes on Nintur", Or NS 42 (1973) 274–298; also, *The treasures of darkness* (1976) 107.

¹⁶⁷ For the identity of Nintu and Ninhursaga, see Sjöberg and Bergmann, *The collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns* (1969) 72 f. Th. Jacobsen, 281–286, presented the theory of domesticated versus wild animals; he proposed the second theory in JBL 100 (1981) 515 note 5. Krebernik, "Muttergöttin", § 3.20 and 6.2, does not repeat the theories of Jacobsen. The goddess could be Mountain, or even Earth.

¹⁶⁸ *Lugale* 396 (ed. J. van Dijk, Leiden 1983); Th. Jacobsen, *The harps that once* ... (1987) 254.

¹⁶⁹ *Enki* and *Ninhursag*, lines 250 ff. The line "she gave birth to god NN" can also be translated "God NN

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Ninḫursaga in its Akkadian translation: “Nintu / Ninḫursaga, the great mother, mistress of the lands, fashioner of god and man”.¹⁷⁰ Princess Me-Sataran of Ur gave two silver rings as a dedication to “Ninḫursaga, the Lady of (the city of) Keš”.¹⁷¹ An Old Akkadian curse formula distinguishes both goddesses: “May Ninḫursag and Nintu not give him male (offspring) and a name”.¹⁷²

In the city Keš (not: Kiš!) was the main sanctuary of the goddess of birth. Hymns celebrating Keš and the temple of its birth goddess praise the city as “Keš, the brick that gives birth”.¹⁷³ Darkness characterizes this temple; its inner cella is named Nigìn.gar, i.e., the place where the foetus is, and according to the last lines of one hymn, “No man shall approach it”. There was even a mother goddess named “Lady Silencer”.¹⁷⁴ The descriptions of Keš and its temple evoke an atmosphere of mystery.¹⁷⁵ The female priestesses officiating in the temple, according to one hymn, deal with midwifery, the first two priestesses are probably assistants which are called “wombs”.¹⁷⁶ They tie on the ritual gowns.¹⁷⁷ The third priestess holds a staff, and the fourth brings water, the fifth is a “midwife” as we know from another late source. It is hard to understand the literal meaning of their titles.¹⁷⁸ In a later temple list, they appear to be deities with their own chapels.¹⁷⁹

As Aruru, “the exalted Lady of Keš”, Nintu hears the bellowing of the cow because of her calf.¹⁸⁰ Aruru is “the exalted midwife”.¹⁸¹ The myth “Enki and the World Order” describes what exactly she, Aruru / Nintu, does.¹⁸² Another name is *Dingirmah*, “The Exalted Goddess”. She is “the great mother who moulds the creature”.¹⁸³ She is identical with Nintu.¹⁸⁴ Among the blessings for King Agum we read: “May Dingirmah, Mistress of the Great Mountains, bring for him the pure seed to perfection”.¹⁸⁵ An Old Babylonian

has been born to you”; P. Attinger, ZA 74 (1984) 27, 46.

¹⁷⁰ D. Charpin in M. deJong Ellis, *Nippur at the Centennial* (1992) 9:7.

¹⁷¹ J.-M. Durand, *Documents cunéiformes de la IVe Section de l'EPHE* (1982) Pl. 18 no. 217. Ninḫursag resides in Keš; RIME 2 (1993) 114, 35 f. (Naram-Sin).

¹⁷² D.R. Frayne, RIME 2 (1993) 98 f., rev. 29–35. Also 102 III 17–22 (Naram-Sin).

¹⁷³ Å.W. Sjöberg, E. Bergmann, *The collection of Sumerian Temple Hymns* (1969) 22 TH No. 7 (= lines 87–100); G.B. Gragg, “The Keš Temple Hymn”, ibidem, 155–188, with D.O. Edzard, “Zur sumerischen Hymne auf das Heiligtum Keš”, Or NS 43 (1974) 103–113; R.D. Biggs, “An archaic Sumerian version of the Kesh Temple Hymn from Tell Abu Salabikh”, ZA 61 (1971) 193–207; G. Conti, MARI 7 (1993) 344. Cf. S.N. Kramer, “Kesh and its fate: laments, blessings, omens”, in *Gratz College Anniversary Volume* (1971) 165–175 (edition of CT 36 47–49).

¹⁷⁴ Temple Hymn no. 7; Jacobsen, Or NS 42 (1973) 292, thinks of the moment of cutting the cord. Krebernik, “Muttergöttin”, § 6.8: “möglicherweise galt das Heiligtum als Repräsentation des Mutterleibs”.

¹⁷⁵ D.O. Edzard, Or NS 43 (1974) 111 (the meaning of lines 126–9), 112 f. (Keš).

¹⁷⁶ For a discussion of this term see below p. 80f.

¹⁷⁷ W.L. Moran, “The Keš Temple Hymn and the Canonical Temple List”, in *Kramer Anniversary Volume* (= AOAT 25) (1976) 335–342, on Gragg, 174 lines 108–111. Line 108, the “wombs”, in Moran, note 1, following Th. Jacobsen: “The *entu* and *HE* priestesses, the wombs (*šag₄.tur₇*), tied on the ritual gowns (ME)”.

¹⁷⁸ Titles: a.tu (109), tu (110), lāl (111) = lāl.a.ša.ga = lāl-šá-ga-ku = šabsūtum (Malku I 128); see Moran, 339 f.

¹⁷⁹ W.L. Moran, in *Kramer Anniversary Volume* (1976) 335–342.

¹⁸⁰ C. Wilcke, AS 20 (1976) 237, E; cf. W.W. Hallo, *Studies Å.W. Sjöberg* (1989) 240–246.

¹⁸¹ CT 36 47:3 (*ša.zu mah*), with S.N. Kramer, “Keš and its fate: laments, blessings, omens”, *Gratz College Anniversary Volume* (1971) 165–175.

¹⁸² We shall discuss that passage later, in the section on Birth in myths.

¹⁸³ F. Rashid, Sumer 35 (1979) 178:10–11, *ummi rabīti pātiqat nabnīti* (kudurru; ca. 1050 B.C.).

¹⁸⁴ As a pair of gods in parallel greeting formulas in two Old Babylonian letters suggest: Nintu and Panigingara, Dingirmah and Panigingara; G. Boyer, CHJ (1928) 25 HE. 107, and TCL 18 94.

¹⁸⁵ 5 R 33 VII 45–VIII 2, with W.G. Lambert apud B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* I (1996) 278, (45)

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hymn gives instructions for the king: “Let him set out commemorative pegs, let him cause a cloister to be built for Ištarān, let him make a womb for Dingirmah”.¹⁸⁶ The “wombs” (*rēmu*) that he is to make are votive objects made of precious metal. They are occasionally listed in inventories of temples.¹⁸⁷ Dingirmah and Panigingara receive offerings on day 21 of month IX.¹⁸⁸ As do the other mother goddesses, Dingirmah can prevent birth. We read in a curse: “May Dingirmah, the great mother, make him not acquire male (offspring) and a name”.¹⁸⁹ Curses could revert the specific blessings of a deity into its counterpart.¹⁹⁰ Another name for Dingirmah is *Ninmah*, “The Exalted Lady”.¹⁹¹ Again, she is the creatress of god and man.¹⁹² *Ninmah* is “the lady who creates everything, who cuts the umbilical cord, decides the fate for mankind”.¹⁹³ She created and elevated Rim-Sîn II as king of Larsa in her temple at Keš.¹⁹⁴ In his dedication of her temple *Emah* (“Exalted House”), King Nebuchadnezzar prays to her: “O *Ninmah*, merciful mother, look joyfully! May words in my favour be on your lips. Multiply my descent, make numerous my posterity, administer in safety childbirth among my descendants”.¹⁹⁵

Mama (*Ma-ma*, *Ma-mi*) is the oldest Akkadian name for the mother goddess and must mean the same as “mom, mama”. In a period when Sumerian was still widely spoken, we find it as an element of Akkadian personal names.¹⁹⁶ A Babylonian had the name “Mammi gave birth to me”.¹⁹⁷ She is active in the creation of man in the Atram-hasîs myth. This name may have been far more common than most of the learned Sumerian names studied above.

Bēlet-ilī, literally “Mistress of the Gods”, is the best known Akkadian name of the mother goddess. An Old Babylonian hymn to her begins as follows: “A song about *Bēlet-ilī* I will sing; friends, hark, heroes, listen! This song about Mama is sweeter than honey and wine, sweeter than honey and wine”.¹⁹⁸ She is the “Lady of the womb” and as

DINGIR.MAH ^d*Be-let* KUR.GAL.GAL (1) [NUM]UN *el-la* (2) *li-šak-lil-šu*. The epithet “Mistress of the Great Mountains” reminds one of the literal meaning of the name *Ninhursag*.

¹⁸⁶ Th. G. Pinches, JRAS Centenary Volume 1924, Plate IX, col. VI:21; see M.-J. Seux, *Hymnes et prières* (1976) 49 with note 58; Foster, *Muses* I 76 with note 2 (lines 66–68).

¹⁸⁷ OBTI 90, 91. Note the sequence “4 fruits (*in-bu*) (made of) gold; 8 female pudenda (SALLA) (made of) silver; 1 womb (ARHUS; so!) (made of silver”, TLB 1 69:25–27 (=LB 1090), with W.F. Leemans, *Ishtar of Lagaba and her dress* (1952); also in *I ri-im kù.babbar gal, I ú-ru-um an.na gar.ra*, F.N.H. al-Rawi, J.A. Black, *Sumer* 39 (1983) 139 III 1–2 (so!). The “wombs” could be the “omega” symbols, the female pudenda the well known “pubic triangles” mentioned by Foster, note 2.

¹⁸⁸ E.C. Kingsbury, HUCA 34 (1963) 3, below; col. IX 1–2; with J.G. Westenholz, *Ancient Shevat Celebrations* (1994) 26.

¹⁸⁹ R. Borger, AFO 23 (1970) 3 III 4–5 (MB).

¹⁹⁰ K. Watanabe, *Baghd. Mitt.* 25 (1995) 595.

¹⁹¹ BAM 6 579 IV 42 (*Ninmah*), par. BAM 1 49:42, 50 rev. 21 (Dingirmah); A.K. Grayson, RIMA I (1987) 134, note (variants in an inscription of Adad-nirari I).

¹⁹² S. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (1994) 490:82 (*Ninmah bānāt DINGIR u LÚ*).

¹⁹³ B. Alster, ASJ 13 (1991) 47, Incantation to Utu, 57.

¹⁹⁴ K. van der Toorn, *Family religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel* (1996) 104 f. S. Tinney identifies the mother goddess in Adab with *Ninmah*; *The Nippur Lament* (1996) 167, on line 218.

¹⁹⁵ VAB 4 (1912) 84 Nr. 6 II 5–19, following the translation by B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* II (1996) 730 (h). Last lines: *ina qerbet pir'ya šalmiš šutēširi tālitti*.

¹⁹⁶ J.J.M. Roberts, *The earliest Semitic pantheon* (1972) 44; Krebernik, “Muttergötter”, § 3.10 and 7.10.

¹⁹⁷ ^d*Ma-am-mi-tu-li-da-an-ni*, Riftin 130:2, 134:4 (OB).

¹⁹⁸ CT 15 1 I 1–4, with W.H.Ph. Römer, WdO 4 (1967) 12. A short discussion on the names *Bēlet-ilī* and *Mama* on p. 21.

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such she is the one who “moulds the creature” (*pātiqat nabnītē*).¹⁹⁹ She is the “creator” (*bānītu*) of gods and man, the mother; she looks upon the king of Assyria with favour when he is still in the womb.²⁰⁰ She, “creatress of everything”, perfected the features of king Nabonidus.²⁰¹ Under her name “the wise Mami” she was the midwife of the gods,²⁰² but the Atram-hasīs myth informs us that, after having created man, she received this honorific title: “Formerly we used to call you Mami, now let your name be Mistress-of-all-the-Gods” (I 246 f.). The bilingual myth Lugale offers “Bēlet-ilī” everywhere as the Akkadian name for the Sumerian goddesses Ninmah, Ninhursag, Nintu, Aruru.²⁰³ In a later theological text “The Seven Bēlet-ilī’s” are identified as ancient goddesses of several old cities in Babylonia: “Aruru is the Bēlet-ilī of Sippar-Aruru, Nintu is the Bēlet-ilī of Delti, Ninmah is the Bēlet-ilī of Emah, Ninhursaga is the Bēlet-ilī of Keš, Ninmena is the Bēlet-ilī of Udab, Šasura is the Bēlet-ilī of Urrak, Erua is the Bēlet-ilī of Babylon. The Bēlet-ilī’s are Zarpanītum”. The last remark identifies them all with the divine spouse of Marduk, the god of Babylon.²⁰⁴ The first lines of an incantation associate her with the cattlepen of Ninegal: “In Bēlet-ilī’s own temple, in Ninegal’s own cattlepen, the pregnant ones are pregnant, those in labour are in labour”.²⁰⁵ Are the women pictured as cows and do we have here a reflection of the story of the Cow of Sîn?²⁰⁶ As “mistress of creating” (*bēlet nabnītē*) Bēlet-ilī is also able to stop birth-giving (*tālītu*) in the land.²⁰⁷ A curse runs as follows: “Bēlet-ilī must not descend to his house, but let her put a stop to the births of cattle, sheep, donkeys, man”.²⁰⁸ *Erua*, one of the names of Zarpanītum, the goddess of Babylon, has similar epithets.²⁰⁹

The mother goddess was able to mould a human being out of clay. According to the Atram-hasīs myth Nintu “mixed the clay with the flesh and blood” of a slain god (I 226). In another creation myth Bēlet-ilī “pinched off the clay” and “mixed his clay”,²¹⁰ and in the Gilgamesh Epic we read, “Aruru washed her hands, pinched off a piece of clay”, and “created Enkidu, the warrior” (*Enkidu ibtani qurādu*; I ii 33–35). Under her name, Aruru, she is best known for this feat: in a wisdom text we humans are designated as “those whom Aruru had pinched off as lumps of clay”.²¹¹ The well known Babylonian “Creation Epic” *Enūma eliš*, presents another theology. The gods dispensed of such services of a mother goddess and god Ea creates man by himself (VI 31–34). In this

¹⁹⁹ BAM 3 248 I 65 (*bēlet rēme*; visible on the copy KAR 196); Lamaštu I ii 10.

²⁰⁰ K. Tallqvist, *Akkadische Götterepitheta* (1938) 275; CAD Š/2 146a (*šassūru* A).

²⁰¹ CT 36 21:9, cited CAD B 318 b (*ušaklilu bunnannēšu*)

²⁰² Atram-hasīs I 193 (*tabṣūt ilī erištam Mami*).

²⁰³ F.H.N. al-Rawi, *Iraq* 57 (1995) 216 f., lines 388, 391, 396, 409, 413. R. Borger proved the identity of Bēlet-ilī and Ninmah; BiOr 55 (1998) 847.

²⁰⁴ Th.G. Pinches, *PSBA* 33 (1911) 94, lines 18 – rev. 14. KAR 142 III 35 ff., has another list.

²⁰⁵ ABRT 2 19 rev. 1–2, with A. Livingstone, *Court poetry and literary miscellanea* (= SAA III) (1989) 118 no. 48.

²⁰⁶ Ningal (not: Ninegal!) is the spouse of Sîn.

²⁰⁷ Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon, 437 f., with K. Watanabe, *Assur* 3/4 (July 1983) 28–30 [= 164–6]; L. Cagni, *L'Epopea di Erra* (1969) 92 III A:16 with commentary (god's name damaged); cf. Ninhursaga in the Cruciform Monument 372–5; E. Sollberger, *JEOL* 20 (1967–68) 62.

²⁰⁸ D. Arnaud, *RA* 66 (1972) 166:40 (*kudurru*).

²⁰⁹ Tallqvist, 286; Krebernik, “Muttergöttin”, § 7.11.

²¹⁰ VAS 24 92:14, 16, with W.R. Mayer, *Or NS* 56 (1987) 56, 59. The result is “man” (*lullū-amēlu*). For an evaluation of these myths, see H.-P. Müller, *Or NS* 58 (1989) 61–85. Bēlet-ilī acts in a similar way in a “fire incantation”; W.G. Lambert, *AfO* 23 (1970) 43:26. For *karāšu* – *walādu*, see *RA* 88 (1994) 155:5 f.

²¹¹ W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (1960) 59, *Ludlul* IV 40 (*šūt Aruru ikrušu kirissin*).

enlightened speculative thought, the mother goddess has disappeared.²¹²

Nin-isina, “the Lady of Isin” (also: *Gula*), is neither a birth nor a mother goddess. But as the goddess of medicine she is “the midwife of the mothers of the land, the great physician of the dark-headed (= mankind)”.²¹³ She is “the great physician of the land, *Nin-isina*, the mother, the ‘womb’ of the land”. Here, “womb” means “midwife”.²¹⁴ She even can be equated with *Bēlet-ilī*.²¹⁵ A letter informs us that a pregnant woman is brought to her temple.²¹⁶

An interesting piece of creative “theology” on the birth goddess is given in the Sumerian myth on the marriage of the god Enlil with Sud. Here, Sud is identified with the goddess *Ninlil*, Enlil’s spouse, and she is given the role of birth goddess. Sud was a goddess from Šuruppak who is elevated to the rank of *Ninlil*. This is a form of syncretism. At the end of the text, the god decrees her fate:²¹⁷

– He gives her the name *Nintu*, the Lady Who Gives Birth and the Lady Spreading the Legs. He makes beautiful the face of “High priestess: … Copper-caster” (?) …, the status of the ‘sacred woman’, everything pertaining to women that no man must see. He gives to her a place set for her, honour, and a favourable protective spirit. From now on, let a woman be the …, let a foreign woman be the mistress of the House.

The “sacred woman” (*nu.nig*; *qadištu*) is indeed known to be actively involved in midwifery, as we shall see later. Interestingly, the presence of males at birth is tabooed in this divine decree.

It is less clear why a hymn praises *Nisaba* as follows: “You place good semen in the womb, you enlarge (peš) the birthling (ù.tu.da) in the womb, in order that a mother may love her son”.²¹⁸ Elsewhere, she is named “the Aruru of the land, …ing with clay”.²¹⁹ *Nisaba* was the daughter of Enlil and Sud. Although *Ištar*, the goddess of love, is never a birth goddess, under the name *Išhara* she is one. A line in astrological literature indicates that under her manifestation as the planet Venus, when seen in the East, she is “The Star of Women for taking a wife [...] for giving birth to males”.²²⁰

In the late Babylonian period we find in Sippar a goddess *Ālittu*, “She who gives birth”. The fuller Assyrian name may be *Ittalad-ilāni*, “She has given birth to the gods”.²²¹ Among the Hittites, *Hannahanna* is the mother and birth goddess: “Hannahanna is one of a long series of Anatolian fertility deities, a series which stretches from (at least) the goddess depicted by the figurines of Çatal Hüyük to Cybele of Phrygian times and the Ephesian Artemis of the Hellenistic period”.²²²

²¹² T. Frymer-Kensky, *In the wake of the goddess* (1992) 74 f.; Krebernik, “Muttergöttin”, § 6.1.

²¹³ SRT 6 / 7:22 f., with W.H.Ph. Römer, *Festschrift W. von Soden* (= AOAT 1) (1969) 284.

²¹⁴ CT 23 2:15, with E. Ritter, *Studies B. Landsberger* (1965) 311b (AMA ARHÜŠ.KALAM.MA).

²¹⁵ K. Watanabe, ASJ 12 (1990) 328, III (1) (in duplicating prayers). *Gula* “makes the offspring perfect” (*mušaklilat tālitti*), C. Mullo Weir, JRAS 1929 12, Text d, K. 232:23.

²¹⁶ SAA X 293:14 ff.

²¹⁷ M. Civil, “Enlil and *Ninlil*: the marriage of Sud”, JAOS 103 (1983) 43–66. Lines 152–156, with comments by W.G. Lambert, 65 f., on the mother goddess as midwife.

²¹⁸ D. Reisman, *Kramer Anniversary Volume* (= AOAT 25) (1976) 360:49–51.

²¹⁹ W.W. Hallo, CRRAI XVII (Brussels 1970) 124:8, with p. 134.

²²⁰ E. Reiner, *Enūma Anu Enlil, Tablets 50–51* (= BPO, 2) (1981) 46 Text IV 7, with parallels in the note.

²²¹ *Ālittu*: CT 55 469:12, etc.; see A.C.V.M. Bongenaar, *The Neo-Babylonian Ebabbar Temple at Sippar* (1997) 230 note 201. *Ittalad-ilāni*: 3 R 66 IX 5; see B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel II* (1981) T 122, Nr. 54.

²²² G. Beckman, *Hittite Birth Rituals* (1983) 239–241. Her helpers are the DINGIR.MAH.MEŠ / HI.A. G. Frantz-Szabó, “Muttergöttin. A. II. In Anatolien”, RIA VIII/7–8 (1997) 516–519.

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The so-called *Göttertypentext* describes how divine beings (including demons) look. The passage on the Mother Goddess is as follows:²²³

– The head: a cap with a horn in front. She has hair at the nape of the neck, she has ‘dust flies’. She has wiry hair, her hands are human. She has a girdle, her chest is open. She carries a baby in her left (arm), and it ‘eats’ her breast; she greets with her right hand. From her head to her girdle, the naked body of a woman. From her girdle to her foot-stand she appears (?) with scales like a snake; waves are drawn over the . . . of her belly. Her name: *Nintu*; (of) those of *Dingirmah*.

There is a number of terracottas representing the birth goddess. Sometimes, we see her surrounded by emaciated, crouching little men. They have been identified as foetuses (*kūbu*); discussed previously in the section on miscarriage. Another symbol accompanying the goddess is something shaped like the Greek letter “omega” which must represent the womb of a cow (as it does in Egyptian art). Egyptian women, when faced with the dangers of childbirth, still wear spiral pendants of wire.²²⁴ On the relief of a Babylonian boundary stone, we see a knife lying underneath the “omega”; it has been suggested that this is the knife for cutting the umbilical cord.²²⁵ The goddess can be seen feeding a baby. Many terracottas or figurines of a woman feeding a baby have been found in the Near East.²²⁶ Often, this must be a goddess; according to one hypothesis, she is the mother goddess *Nintu* of the *Göttertypentext*.²²⁷

Summarizing: the mother goddess, under whatever name she is invoked, guides the child in the dark inside of its mother’s womb, during birth, and after it is born she feeds it. Most of these activities are known from inscriptions of kings who like to boast of this divine interest in their well-being from the inception.

This goddess is helped by a number of assistants called “wombs” in both Sumerian and Akkadian. There are seven of them. The Sumerian word must have sounded like *Sensur*, *Sansur* or the like;²²⁸ the Akkadian *šassūru* was a loanword. The Sumerian myth “Enki and Ninmah” tells us in complex writing and language how they were set to work.²²⁹ The gods were tired of doing work and Enki devised the plan to create man and

²²³ CT 17 42:1–14, with F. Köcher, MIO 1 (1953) 70–73 III 38–51. Cf. Th. Jacobsen, Or NS 42 (1973) 285 note 39; F.A.M. Wiggermann, RIA VIII/3–4 (1994) 242a § 6 (on the scales).

²²⁴ H.J. Frankfort, “A note on the Lady of Birth”, JNES 3 (1944) 198–200; U. Seidl, *Baghd. Mitt.* 4 (1968) 202 f.; RIA III/7 (1969) 489 § 10 (Ninhursaga); Jacobsen, Or NS 42 280 f.; O. Keel, *Akkadica* 49 (sept.–oct. 1986) 4–9.

²²⁵ Frankfort, 198b; Jacobsen, 291; cf. Seidl, 132. Top register, right side; see W.J. Hinke, *A new boundary stone of Nebuchadrezzar I from Nippur* (1907) 28, fig. 11 (no. 7 is the “omega”); Frankfort, 199 fig.2; Seidl, Tafel 15a (Nr. 32).

²²⁶ R. Opificius, *Das altbabylonische Terrakottarelief* (1961) 210; M.-Th. Barrelet, *Figurines et reliefs en terre cuite de la Mésopotamie antique* I (1968) 409 no. 819.

²²⁷ H. Kühne, “Das Motiv der nährenden Frau oder Göttin in Vorderasien”, in: *Studien zur Religion und Kultur Kleinasiens. Festschrift für Friedrich Karl Dörner* II (1978) 514 f., with plates; F.A.M. Wiggermann, “Nackte Göttin. A”, § 7, Nintur, RIA IX/1–2 (1998) 51.

²²⁸ As stressed by W.G. Lambert in various articles. The texts are: za-an-sur LAGAB×EŠ šá-as-su[ru], MSL 14 (1979) 182 Ea I 117; ^dŠEN-sú-ru-um, later dupl. ^dša-sú-[ru-um], J.-M. Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 162 f. (line 10); se₁₂-en-^{sa₇}sár, later dupl. šá-tür, “Enki and Ninmah” 26, 32, with Lambert in *La circulation des biens . . . 132* (SIG₇ = se₁₂ and sa₇). Note the Eme-sal form of Nintur: Šen-tur; Krebernik, “Muttergöttin”, § 3.31.

²²⁹ We follow W.G. Lambert, “The relationship of Sumerian and Babylonian myth as seen in accounts of creation”, in: D. Charpin, F. Joannès, *La circulation des biens, des personnes et des idées dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (1992) 129–135.

Birth Goddesses



Fig. 3 The Mother Goddess. At each shoulder appears a child's head, two naked embryonic figures appear on either side, with the symbol of the goddess above them. This symbol, shaped like the Greek letter omega, represents the womb. Baked clay, 10cm. Baghdad Museum.

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impose the corvée of the gods on him. To this end, “he produced skill of blood, bodies and creativity, the birth goddesses”,²³⁰ and he said to his mother Nammu: “My mother, there is my / the blood which you set aside, impose on it the corvée of the gods. When you have mixed in it the clay from above the Apsû (= the primordial ocean), the birth goddesses will nip off the clay and you must fashion bodies. Your companion Ninmah will act and Ninimma, Šuzianna, Ninnada, Ninšar, Nimmug, Mumudu, and Ninnigina will assist you as you bring to birth”.

Ever since this first time that the mother goddess Ninmah and her divine assistants were called to their task, they do this work every time that a child is born. Other goddesses could also help. Nungal says of herself: “I assist Nintu at the place of child-quickeing, for severing the umbilical cord and determining he destiny (of the child) I know the favourable word”.²³¹

The story on the origin of mankind in the Old Babylonian *Atram-ħasīs* myth is very similar to that told in “Enki and Ninmah”. At the conception, “the ‘wombs’ were assembled, and Nintu [sat rec]koning the months”.²³² During birth, Nintu acted as the midwife. The mother goddess, herself, under her names Bēlet-ilī, Nintu, and Mami is also referred to as a ‘womb’; here and elsewhere.²³³ The later, Neo-Assyrian, version of this myth gives their number and is, therefore, closer to “Enki and Ninmah”: “The wise and the knowing (females), seven and seven wombs (*šassūrātu*): seven created males, seven created females”.²³⁴ Before this, Bēlet-ilī had moulded fourteen pieces of clay, putting seven on the right and seven on the left. In those days of creation, the first seven pairs of men and women were made out of them.

The canonical Babylonian gods list gives the names of “the fourteen children of Dingirmah”; variants speak of sixteen. Some of these names relate to birth, but the gender of these children – male and female – is not clear.²³⁵ A much earlier Old Sumerian literary text says that Ninhursaga was pregnant with “seven twins”.²³⁶ A hemerology characterises day 24 of the month as “the announcement of the seven shadows (?) of Ninmah”; day 26 is “placing the brick of Ninmah”. The brick of birth?²³⁷ Everyone of the seven ‘wombs’ in the myth “Enki and Ninmah” has a Sumerian name, suggesting a specific expertise. A late and isolated example of goddesses specialised in delivering babies may be found in Bēlat-palē, “Mistress of the Pin”, and Pāšertu, “The Loosener”

²³⁰ Line 26, nam.kù.zu mud me.dím níg.nam.ma se₁₂-en-^{sa}₇sár (W.G. Lambert).

²³¹ Å.W. Sjöberg, AFO 24 (1973) 32 f., 71–72.

²³² I 277–8, [šas]surātūm puhurāma [waš]at Nintu [im]annu arhī. Later parallels K. 9884 and K. 11236 are cited in CAD Š/2 146b.

²³³ Bēlet-ilī : I 189 f. (OB), with K. 6634:1–2 (SB), in the remarkable verse: “While the womb Bēlet-ilī is present, let the womb ‘throw’ and let (it) create” (*wašbat Bēlet-ilī šassuru li-id-di-a li-ib-ni-ma*; coll. W. von Soden, Or NS 39 [1970] 314). Nintu: I 295, III vi 43, 46. Mami: I 194. They are all one and the same goddess; see Lambert and Millard, *Atram-ħasīs* (1969) p. 9. See now CAD Š/2 146.

²³⁴ *Atram-ħasīs* 62 K. 3399+ :8–10; cf. B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* I (1996) 190. “Seven created (*ubannā*)”: CAD Š/2 146a translates *šassurunu Belet-ilī ubanni* in the Cuthean Legend as “Bēlet-ilī, their creatress, gave (them) a fine stature”.

²³⁵ CT 24 13–14 II 12 (AN = Anum II 123); see K. Tallqvist, *Akkadische Götterepitheta* (1938) 121 f. Full investigation by Krebernik, “Muttergöttin”, § 4.3 Note ama dim.me.er.7.bi in 5 R 52:1, cited in MSL 4 (1956) 6 note.

²³⁶ G. Barton, MBI 1, 1 “XI” = II 5–8; with Krebernik, 508, § 4.3, introduction (animals in the earth?); B. Alster, ASJ 16 (1994) 18, 27 f. Ninhursag is indeed “the mother of the gods”; RIME 2 (1993) 264 (Lu-Utu).

²³⁷ D.J. Wiseman, *Iraq* 31 (1969) 178 f., šu-du-ut 7 GIŠ.MI^dNin.mah; na-de-e SIG₄ šá^dNin.mah.

who reside in the temple of Gula, the goddess of medicine in Assur.²³⁸ The “pin” (?) (*paltû*) was used in the Atram-ḥasīs myth for opening the uterine membranes (*silītu*; I 282).

The Ugaritic goddesses *Ktrt* have been known since the discovery of Ugaritic myths. The publication of a lexical text in 1968 which reads ⁴Ša-sú-ra-tum = *Kt[rt]* revealed their identity as the birth goddesses (*šassūrātu*) of Ugarit. The word *Ktrt* is a feminine plural of a word that may have had the pronunciation *Kōtaru* which probably means “wise, cunning” – an adjective characterising midwives, as we shall see later.²³⁹ Two myths call them “the swallows, daughters of the New Moon (*hll*), Lord of the Curved Staff (*b’l gml*)”.²⁴⁰ According to the myth Aqhat they were feasted during seven days after a son is born and according to a second myth, they were invoked after the moongod Yarib and Nikkal had married. This later myth may record seven names of the birth goddesses.²⁴¹

Kings engendered by gods

Many kings boast in their inscriptions that either they had been engendered by god X and brought to world by goddess Y, or they simply name deities their “father” or “mother”.²⁴² The Old Sumerian inscriptions from Lagaš are the most literal accounts on divine origins: they explicitly state that the seed of the god was deposited in the womb of the goddess. According to the “Vultures Stela” of prince Eannatum (ca. 2450 B.C.): “Ningirsu implanted the [semen] for Eannatum in the [wom]b (...) Inanna accompanied him, named him Eana-Inanna-Ibgalakakatum, and set him on the right lap of Ninhursag. Ninhursag [offered him] her right breast. Ningirsu rejoiced over Eannatum, semen implanted in the womb by Ningirsu. Ningirsu laid his span upon him, for (a length of) five forearms he set his forearms upon him: (he measured) five forearms (= cubits), one span! Ningirsu, with great joy, gave him] the kin[gship of Lagaš]”.²⁴³ The divine mother

²³⁸ 3 R 66 III 18–19 and KAR 214 II 29–30, with R. Frankena, *Tākultu* (1954) 6, 25; B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* II (1981) T 116, 140.

²³⁹ A. Caquot, M. Sznycer, A. Herdner, *Textes ougaritiques* I (1974) 384–7; D. Pardee, “Kosharoth”, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (1995) 915–7. Pronunciation: *Katiratu* is commonly assumed. But note in personal names in Akkadian cuneiform the theophorous element *ku-ša-ri*, *ku-šar* (pointed out by W.G. Lambert). Furthermore, the sequence ⁴ša-sú-[ru-um], ⁴ku-ša-[ra-tum (?)] in the list “Nouveau Panthéon de Mari (Ph.Talon)”, J.-M. Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 162 f. See W.G. Lambert, *Vetus Testamentum Suppl.* 40 (1988) 141–3 (he does accept the identification of the ⁴Kā-ma-šu-ra-tum with the ⁴ku-ša-[ra-tum (?)] in Mari). In Emar dingir.meš *Ka-ša-ra-ti ša i-ši-ki*, D. Arnaud, *Emar* VI/3 372 no. 378 II 18.

²⁴⁰ KTU 1.17 II 26 f., etc.; KTU 1.24:40–42 (here the addition Lord of the Curved Staff). There is much discussion on the *hll* and the *gml*.

²⁴¹ KTU 1.24:47–50: *Tl̄hw, Ml̄gh, Yltqt, ‘mh, Bq’t, Tq’t, Prbht, Dmqt*. Cf. *Textes ougaritiques* I (1974), and see W.G.E. Watson, SEL 10 (1993) 52; G. del Olmo Lete, *Aula Orientalis* 9 (1991) 74 f. – H. Kühne, *Festschrift F.K. Dörner* II (1978) 507 f. discusses a relief from Tell Huēra where we see seven women, two of whom have a child at the breast. Are they not the *Sebettu* (as Kühne assumes) but the seven birth goddesses?

²⁴² W.W. Hallo, *Early Mesopotamian Royal Titles* (1957) 135 f.; M.-J. Seux, *Epithètes royales akkadiennes et sumériennes* (1967) 151 f. (*lipit qāti*), 159 f. (*māru*), 392–5 (*dumu*), 451 f. (*šu.du₁₁*); Å.W. Sjöberg, “Die göttliche Abstammung der sumerisch-babylonischen Herrscher”, *Orientalia Suecana* 21 (1971) 87–112; S.N. Kramer in *Le palais et la royauté* (1974) 163–166; M.-J. Seux, “Königtum” § 101, RIA VI/3–4 (1981) 170; D. Parayre, *KTEMA* 22 (1997) 76 ff.

²⁴³ Ean. 1 iv 9–12, 18–v 17; H. Steible, *FAOS* 5/1 (1982) 122 f. We followed J.S. Cooper, *Sumerian and*

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of Eannatum probably is Baba, wife of Ningirsu, and the mother goddess Ninhursag nurses him. Another prince, Enanatum, names himself “son begotten by (the god) Lugalurub, son of Akurgal, ruler of Lagas”.²⁴⁴ A later prince of Lagash, the well known Gudea, says in a temple hymn: “I have no mother – you are my mother; I have no father – you are my father, you received my semen in the womb, you gave birth to me in the sanctuary. Sweet, O Gutumdug, is your holy name!”.²⁴⁵ The declaration “You are my mother – you are my father” is reminiscent of a solemn declaration of adoption and it has been suggested that the statements about divine descent actually reflect a formal adoption of the king by the gods.²⁴⁶ That physical birth is portrayed as metaphysical reality, may surprise us and the only parallel is remote: Psalm 2:7, “I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you’”. Following this line of thought, the appropriate moment of adoption would be the enthronement of the king (as it is in Psalm 2). Indeed, in a Sumerian hymn on the mother goddess Nintu we read: “She has given birth to the en-priest, she has given birth to the lagar-priest, Nintu has given birth to the king on the holy dais”.²⁴⁷ The dais is a throne. In another hymn, “mother Nintu” binds the head-gear around the head of “the (new)born king”, puts the crown on “the (new)born king”, as an act of coronation.²⁴⁸ The usurper king Rim-Sin II states in a year name that the mother goddess Ninmah has raised him to kingship in her temple of birth, at Keš: birth and enthronement are one act.²⁴⁹ The theological construction in hymn G of king Šulgi is unusual: at the request of the moongod Nanna of Ur, the god of Nippur, Enlil, agrees that Šulgi is born from the union of his father Ur-Nammu (‘the faithful man’) and an en-priestess: “The en-priestess gave birth to a ‘faithful man’ from (the semen) which had been placed in her womb. Enlil, the powerful shepherd, caused the young man to emerge; a child, most suitable for kingship (and) throne-dais – it was king Šulgi”. Upon Šulgi’s birth, Enlil proclaims him as the king of Ur and gives him a long throne-name.²⁵⁰ Once again, birth and enthronement are a single act. J. Klein comments: “The oracle and the miraculous and semi-mythological narrative, recounting Šulgi’s conception and birth in the Ekur, seem to be a legend, invented by Šulgi’s poets or by the Nippur theologians, to prove Šulgi’s legitimate right to the throne. This religio-political propaganda was probably necessitated by the grave

Akkadian Royal Inscriptions I (1986) 34. A proposal for the badly broken lines iv 4–17 has been made by Th. Jacobsen, *Kramer Anniversary Volume* (= AOAT 25) (1976) 251: “The lord Ningirsu, the warrior of Enlil, decided to make (marital) demands in the bedroom. Ningirsu inserted the germ of Eannatum into the womb. Baba gave birth to him through the vulva. At Eannatum Mother Baba rejoiced”. Cf. Sjöberg, *Orientalia Suecana* 21 (1972) 88 f.; Steible, FAOS 5/II (1982) 33 f. (note 19); Römer, TUAT I/4 (1984) 299 f.

²⁴⁴ Enan. 21–22, II 1–3; H. Steible, FAOS 5/1 (1982) 208; Cooper, 49, La 4.5. “Son begotten” is Sumerian *dumu.tu.da*.

²⁴⁵ Cyl. A III 6–9, with A. Falkenstein, AnOr 28 (1949) 161 note 1; Sjöberg, *Orientalia Suecana* 21 (1972) 107; Th. Jacobsen, *Kramer Anniversary Volume* (1976) 251 note 15, and *The harps that once . . .* (1987) 391. Jacobsen interprets *unu* (8) as “vulva” and translates “You implanted in the womb the germ of me, gave birth to me from out the vulva (too)”.

²⁴⁶ Sjöberg, 105 f.; J. Klein, TAPS 71/7 (1981) 27a.

²⁴⁷ TuM NF IV 86:8–9 (and dupls.), with C. Wilcke, AS 20 (1976) 235.

²⁴⁸ TCS 3 (1969) 46 TH 39:502–3. Sjöberg: *lugal ù.tu* = “the (new)born king”; Klein: “To cause the king to be born” (in *La femme dans le Proche-Orient antique* [1987] 97, with an informative footnote). Cf. M. Krebernik, “Muttergöttin” § 6.5, in RIA VIII/7–8 (1997) 514.

²⁴⁹ Rim-Sin II, year b; see M. Stol, *Studies in Old Babylonian History* (1976) 54.

²⁵⁰ Šulgi G 18–20, following the interpretation by J. Klein, “The birth of a crownprince in the temple: a Neo-Sumerian literary *topos*”, in J.-M. Durand, *La femme dans le Proche-Orient antique* (1987) 97–106. Full edition by Klein in *Ah, Assyria . . . Studies presented to Hayim Tadmor* (1991) 292–313.

political crisis that arose with the abrupt and untimely death of Ur-Nammu, and also by Šulgi's young age when he ascended the throne of his father".²⁵¹

From time to time, a theory linking divine birth with divine kingship emerges: some kings claimed divine status for themselves and, consequently, elaborated on the divine nature of their physical origins. One variant of this theory is that the crownprince was the issue of the union of the king and a priestess which occurred at the New Year festival, in the Sacred Marriage ritual.²⁵² The latter theory creates many new problems; the general theory cannot account for the many god-born kings who do not claim a divine status. The simplest explanation is this: "The Mesopotamian kings of nearly all periods use similar figures of speech, to express both intimacy with, and dependence upon the gods".²⁵³

To complicate matters, kings often claim different gods as their parents. In one hymn Gudea says that Nanše is his mother, in another his mother is said to be Ninsun.²⁵⁴ Similarly, the kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur and their successors in Isin, Larsa and Babylon have a variety of parents. In each case we have to look for a specific theological motivation. For example: the kings were crowned in each one of the venerable ancient cities in their realm and in every case they were proclaimed to be the issue of the local gods. Šulgi named himself the son of Enlil, Nanna and An who are the gods of Nippur, Ur and Uruk, respectively.²⁵⁵ Rim-Sîn I is "the son engendered by the god Nergal with greatness from the womb on"; and Nergal was the god of his second royal city, Maškan-šapir.²⁵⁶ Political events provide another background: king Hammurabi of Babylon is named not only the son of Marduk, the god of Babylon, but also the son of the moongod Sîn after he had won his city, Ur, and son of Dagan after he had conquered Mari and Tuttul.²⁵⁷ Why Gudea said that Gutumdu is his real father and mother, remains a mystery to us.²⁵⁸

One of these gods was the "personal" god of the king to whom he was particularly attached.²⁵⁹ The kings of Isin named themselves sons of Enlil, Anu, Adad or Dagan and some texts show that Dagan was a personal god: Iddin-Dagan speaks of "Enlil, my king, Ninlil, my queen, Dagan, my god".²⁶⁰ Dagan has the simple epithet "my

²⁵¹ Ah, *Assyria* ... 297 f.

²⁵² W.W. Hallo, "The birth of kings", in *Love and death in the Ancient Near East. Essays in honor of Marvin H. Pope* (1987) 46–52. Cf. J. Klein in *La femme* ... 104.

²⁵³ Klein, *Three Šulgi Hymns* (1981) 31 note 44. Similarly, M. Weippert sees in Gudea's statement about his divine origins a "Vertrauensaussage"; *Beiträge zur prophetischen Bildersprache in Israel und Assyrien* (1985) 73.

²⁵⁴ Sjöberg, 92 f.

²⁵⁵ Sjöberg, 109–110; W.H. Ph. Römer, *Studies J.P.M. van der Ploeg* (1982) 423 f. But note J. Klein, *Three Šulgi Hymns* (1981) 130 note 218 ("the evidence is not compelling").

²⁵⁶ W.W. Hallo, *Etudes Paul Garelli* (1991) 387:14.

²⁵⁷ Sjöberg, 107 f.; W.G. Lambert in *Le palais et la royauté* (1974) 429. The context CH IV 24–31 shows that Dagan is here god of Mari and Tuttul, not the god of the kings of Isin (thus Sjöberg).

²⁵⁸ A. Falkenstein, *AnOr* 30 (1966) 2 f. (his mother was a nin.dingir priestess of Gutumdug); Th. Jacobsen, *JNES* 2 (1943) 120 note 13; otherwise in his *The harps that once...* (1987) 391 note 16 ("he relies on her love and help as does a child on that of his parents") W.W. Hallo, *Essays M.H. Pope* (1987) 48 (adopted as son-in-law by Ur-Baba).

²⁵⁹ D.O. Edzard in E. Matsushima, ed., *Official cult and popular religion in the Ancient Near East* (1993) 203–208; M. Stol, *SEL* 8 (1991) 205.

²⁶⁰ D. Loding, *AfO* 24 (1973) 48; now *RIME* 4 (1990) 25 no. 3:36 f. – Already Išbi-Erra speaks of Enlil as

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god". Lugalzagesi says that he is born from his personal goddess, Nisaba; Gudea names Ningišida and Ninsun "my god". Lugalbanda is the god of Šulgi, and Ninsun is the goddess / mother of Ur-Nammu, Šulgi and Sin-kašid.²⁶¹

An average human being also had a personal god who was believed to have "fashioned" (dím), "created" (banū) him.²⁶² This is abundantly evident from personal names like "Sîn is my creator" (Sîn-bânî) and some Sumerian proverbs show that the personal god's creativity is complementary to the birthgiving by the mother: "A perverse child – his mother should never have given birth to him, his god should never have fashioned him".²⁶³ Man is even "the son of his god", according to incantations.²⁶⁴ A scribe names himself the "creation" of Enki, god of wisdom who is his personal god; a schoolboy says "I am the creation of Nisaba", i.e., the goddess of writing.²⁶⁵ Th. Jacobsen assumed that the relation between man and his god was thought to be physical, as in kings: "Thus it was the personal god and goddess, incarnate in the father and mother, who engendered the child and brought it into being". On the other hand, J. Klein commented that the sonship is, rather, "a mere metaphor for the intimate relationship, expressing dependence and closeness of the man to his personal god". This is what sets the drastic terminology of royal ideology apart; and no common man would make his divine mother make statements, as king Šulgi made Ninsun do, like this: "O Šulgi, you are a pure calf born to me; you are a good seed of Lugalbanda. I raised you upon my own pure lap, and I gave you my blessing in my pure bosom".²⁶⁶

Over the millennia, we can observe a change in the imagery of divine birth among humans. The Sumerians spoke of "semen" implanted in "the inside" of the mother; but after 2000 B.C., the Babylonians and their successors avoided this usage and had vaguer words, like "creation (by the hands of)", or "handiwork".²⁶⁷ Samsu-iluna of Babylon (ca.

"my king", and Dagan as "my god"; Sum. Letters, Coll. A 3:7, 16 (ms. B), with C. Wilcke, ZA 60 (1969) 59; W.H.Ph. Römer, TUAT I/4 (1984) 349 f.

²⁶¹ Sjöberg, 91 (Lugalzagesi), 93, 99 (Gudea); J. Klein, *Three Šulgi Hymns* (1981) 94, C. Wilcke, "Lugalbanda", § 4.2, in RIA VII/1–2 (1987) 131 (Lugalbanda and Ninsun). Ninsun as mother of Ur-Nammu: also in "The Death of Ur-Nammu", 15 f., 63. Ningišida and Gudea: also R.A. da Vito, *Studies in Third Millennium Sumerian and Akkadian personal names* (1993) 100.

²⁶² J.J. Stamm, *Die akkadische Namengebung* (1939) 139 ff. Note the rare name *Ili-uldanni* "My god begot me", TLB I 209:1–2. R.A. da Vito, *Studies in Third Millennium Sumerian and Akkadian personal names* (1993) shows that since the earliest times every man had a god with whom he had a personal, "familial", relationship. So, the common man did not follow the example of the king in claiming a god for himself, starting from the early second millennium; W.W. Hallo, *Essays M.H. Pope* (1987) 52.

²⁶³ E.I. Gordon, *Sumerian Proverbs* (1959) 124, SP 1.157, with reference to 1.145 and 1.161.

²⁶⁴ In the last line of an incantation: "May Utu give life to man, son of his god (lú.úlu dumu dingir.ra.na)", A. Cavigneaux, F.N.H. al-Rawi, ZA 83 (1993) 181:67. Variant: dumu.dingir.e.ne. Later refs. in CAD I/J 100 f.

²⁶⁵ W.W. Hallo, JAOS 88 (1968) 82:10, cf. 54 (Enki); SLTNi 114 with Sjöberg, 98 (Nisaba). 'Creation' is in both cases šu.dug₄.ga.

²⁶⁶ Th. Jacobsen, *The treasures of darkness* (1976) 158, with J. Klein, AfO Beiheft 19 (1982) 296 f. Cf. R. da Vito, *Studies in Third Millennium Sumerian and Akkadian personal names* (1993) 96 f.

²⁶⁷ M.-J. Seux, *Epithètes royales* (1969) 61–64 (*binūtu*), 151 f. (*liptu*), 451 (*šu-du₁₁*). Sumerian a ša.ga šu dug₄.ga is explained as "to receive the semen in the womb", interpreting šu dug₄.ga as a variant of šu ti.a "taken"; see A. Falkenstein, AnOr 28 (1949) 161 note 1 (but compare 123 note 7); H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil* (1978) 135 note 269. Another approach had Th. Jacobsen, JNES 2 (1943) 120 note 13, and P. Attinger, *Éléments de linguistique sumérienne* (1993) 699, confesses: "engendrer", mais le sens littéral de l'expression m'échappe". It is hardly a coincidence that the Sumerian equivalent for later *lipit qāti* 'handiwork' is the same expression, omitting the semen and the womb: šu dug₄.ga. One expects šu.tag.ga. See Sjöberg, 97 f.

1730 B.C.) named himself “handiwork of Šamaš”, Tukulti-Ninurta I of Assur (1244–1208) “handiwork of Adad”.²⁶⁸ Later kings boasted that they were the “creation” of the mother goddess Ninmenna.²⁶⁹ Other royal inscriptions abound with similar expressions. For these later kings, divine guidance from conception on was more essential.²⁷⁰ Another element is the election by the gods. A number of times it is stressed that specific gods desired the king when still in the womb (*agarinna, šassūru*); they looked favourably upon him, called his name, and decreed his rule.²⁷¹ In a supplication to his “lord” a man praises him as follows: “In accordance to his name he has been given an exalted name, a good decree has been decreed for him from ‘his’ womb (*ištu šassūrišu*)”.²⁷² Assurbanipal goes even further: “Before my father was born (*immaldu*), before my mother who bore me had been formed in her mother’s belly (*bānāt ina libbi ummiša*), Sîn has called my name in order to build (the temple) Ēhulhul”.²⁷³ This is profound theology. In a hymn to the goddesses of Nineveh and Arbela, Assurbanipal even returns to Sumerian ideology: “I knew no father or mother, I grew up in the lap of my goddesses. As a child the great gods guided me, going with me on the right and the left (. . .) The Lady of Nineveh, the mother who bore me, endowed me with unparalleled kingship; the Lady of Arbela, my creator, ordered everlasting life (for me)”.²⁷⁴ His court poets knew their classics!

These flowery circumlocutions show the position of the king to be god-willed and legitimate.

It is important that human fate was decided before birth and what is often said of kings, is sometimes also said of common human beings.²⁷⁵ A name for a nun is

²⁶⁸ Samsu-iluna: Sjöberg, 97; Tukulti-Ninurta I: E. Weidner, *Die Inschriften Tukulti-Ninurtas I.* (1959) no. 16:17 (= RIMA 1 [1987] 272 no. 23:17). – Note this line in the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic, “By the decree of the Lord of the Lands his forming (*šipku*) proceeded smoothly (*ešēru*) in the canal of the divine womb (*ina rāt šassūri ilāni*)”; this is the imagery of casting metal. See W.G. Lambert, AFO 18 (1957–58) 50:17, and CAD Š/2 146a, and compare SpbTU III 59:19, *ina ra-a-tu LÚ.SIMUG*.

²⁶⁹ H. Tadmor, *The inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III, king of Assyria* (1994) 41 (Tiglath-Pileser III, Nabopolassar, Nabonidus).

²⁷⁰ R. Labat, *Le caractère religieux de la royauté assyro-babylonienne* (1939) 60: “Le roi n’était pas, en réalité, procréé par un dieu ni conçu par une déesse, mais, fils de parents mortels, il était avant sa naissance formé par la divinité dans le sein de sa mère. Les dieux entouraient de leurs soins cet embryon précieux, le façonnaient de leurs propres mains, favorisaient sa croissance, de façon que l’enfant prédestiné naquit parfait pour son destin”. Cf. K. van der Toorn, *Family religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel* (1996) 96–98.

²⁷¹ A. Poebel, JNES 2 (1943) 81 f., note 296; M.-J. Seux, *Epithètes royales* (1969) 292 note 154; W. Schramm, *Historia* 21 (1972) 519; G. Frame, RIMB 2 (1995) 250, note (6).

²⁷² F.R. Kraus, JAOS 103 (1983) 205:8–10.

²⁷³ Passages of Aššur-rēš-iši, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, Assurbanipal, Šamas-šum-ukin, Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus, collected by Sh.M. Paul, JAOS 88 (1968) 184 f. The Assurbanipal passage is R.C. Thompson, *The prisms of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal* (1931) Plate 15 ii 28–32, with R. Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals* (1996) 141 f., 207 (Prismas C and T). The emendation in CAD A/1 294a is not necessary. – Sh.M. Paul compares these passages with prophecies of Deutero-Isaiah (Is. 40–48). The Servant of the Lord is also called by his name (p. 181 f.) and God created him in the womb (p. 185). Paul admits that Isaiah was more influenced by Jeremiah 1:5 than by the Mesopotamian royal inscriptions.

²⁷⁴ A. Livingstone, *Court poetry and literary miscellanea* (= SAA III) (1989) 10–13 no. 3:13–15, rev. 14–16. Another example is this line in a hymn of Assurbanipal to Ninlil: “I am Assurbanipal, your servant whom your hands have created; without father or mother you have raised me, o exalted Lady”; OECT VI Plate XIII:15 f., with M.-J. Seux, *Hymnes et prières* (1976) 503. – Note that Adad-apla-iddina of Isin (1067–1047 B.C.) still claims a precise family relationship with two gods; UET 1 166:3–6 (= 167:2–5), with CAD E 156a, J.A. Brinkman, AnOr 43 (1968) 137 note 821, and Å.W. Sjöberg, *Orientalia Suecana* 21 (1973) 96; M.-J. Seux, RIA VI/3–4 (1981) 170 § 101.

²⁷⁵ Another stark example is the perfect bull whose hide will be used for the holy kettle drum: this bull was preformed in heaven; KAR 50, with *Rituels Accadiens* (1924) 22 ff.; ANET (1969) 336, Text C.

III. Magic and the Divine

Ullum-eršet, “Who was desired in remote times”, i.e., long before birth, or *Ina-libbi-eršet*, “Who was desired in the womb”. She was desired by the deity, so we suppose.²⁷⁶ Another name is *Ina-šamē-wussum*, “Made beautiful in heaven”.²⁷⁷ In a prayer it is said of the goddess Ištar: “You are the one who, in the womb (*šassūru*) of humankind, establishes poverty and wealth”.²⁷⁸

We have already hinted at one Old Testament passage where God begets (*jld*) a son, Psalm 2:7, “I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you’ ”. The Greek translation of Psalm 110:3 [109:3] renders the difficult last words of the verse as follows: “I have begotten you from the womb before the Morning Star (appeared)”. Modern scholars understand these Psalms to be songs celebrating the ascension of the king to the throne.²⁷⁹ The king is adopted as God’s son; in regards to Solomon God indeed announced, “He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son” (2 Samuel 8:13–14). In the Christian tradition, however, the two Psalms are said to refer to the Messiah (Acts 13:33, Hebrews 5:5–10).

The involvement of the gods continues after the prince has been born. A god gives him a resounding throne-name²⁸⁰ and the goddesses bestow upon him their tender cares: they take him on their lap and nurse him. We have already seen that Eannatum had the privilege of enjoying the milk of the mother goddess Ninhursag. Often the Old Sumerian texts speak of kings “fed with the right milk of Ninhursag”.²⁸¹ In the epic tale Enmerkar and Ensuhkešdanna, the prince of Aratta tells, “Aruru, the sister of Enlil, tied me to her right breast, tied me to her left breast” (94 f.). Indeed, the breasts of the mother goddess Bēlet-ilī seem to have been conspicuous.²⁸² In later traditions we encounter the same metaphor for the king’s closeness to the gods. Esarhaddon hears in an oracle from Ištar of Arbela, “I am your great midwife, your good wet-nurse”.²⁸³ Again in an oracle, Assurbanipal is offered the four nipples (*zīzu*) of Ištar, Queen of Nineveh; god Nabū speaks, “Small you were, Assurbanipal, when I left you to the Queen of Nineveh, you were weak when you were sitting on the knees of the Queen of Nineveh. Four nipples were put into your mouth; two you were sucking, two you were milking”.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁶ CAD E 284 b; J. Renger, ZA 58 (1967) 153.

²⁷⁷ CAD A/2 329 b; M. Stol, SEL 8 (1991) 198 (in Sumerian *An.né-ba.ab.du₇*).

²⁷⁸ B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* II (1996) 580, line 13; cf. K.R. Veenhof, RA 79 (1985) 94 f.

²⁷⁹ H. Ringgren, *Israelitische Religion* (1963) 206; G. von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* I (1969) 332; H. Donner, *Oriens Antiquus* 8 (1969) 114.

²⁸⁰ Sjöberg, 112.

²⁸¹ Sjöberg, 88.

²⁸² In two physiognomic omens, cited by E. Reiner, JNES 33 (1974) 233, “If a woman has breasts like those of Bēlet-ilī / Bēlet-balātī”, both with an obscure addition “her breasts are . . . (*tu-la-a-šá SUH KU AN*)” (KAR 472 II 6–7; not in dupls. TBP 11b VII, SpbTU IV 149 III). Unrelated is the line in the hymn published by E. Reiner, “I am a hierodoule in Uruk, I have heavy breasts in Daduni”; this refers to Nanaja, goddess of erotic love.

²⁸³ IV R² 61 iii 24–25 (*sabsuttu, mušeniqtu*), with R.D. Biggs, ANET (1969) 605; K. Hecker, TUAT II/1 (1986) 58. – Ištar is the midwife (*tabšūtu*) of king Sin-šar-iškun; A.K. Grayson, *Studies in the ancient Palestinian world presented to Professor F.V. Winnett* (1972) 161 Cyl. C:4, with p. 167.

²⁸⁴ J.A. Craig, ABRT 1 (1985) p. 6 rev. 6–8; see M. Streck, VAB VII/2 (1916) 348; K. Hecker, TUAT II/1 (1986) 64. – It appears as though the goddess is visualised as a cow. “To milk”: Assyrian *halāpu*.

Engendered by Gods

The suggestion that these passages imply an “adoption by the milk” goes too far.²⁸⁵

Goddesses nursing kings is also known from other Near Eastern cultures. In an Ugaritic legend, king Keret is promised a son: “She (the queen) shall bear Yašib, the lad, he will suck the milk of Athiratu, he will suck the breast of the virgin [Anat]”.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ R. Labat, *Le caractère religieux de la royauté assyro-babylonienne* (1939) 69 (“l’adoption par le lait”); rejected by Th. Jacobsen, *JNES* 2 (1943) 119 f. See also W.W. Hallo, *Early Mesopotamian Royal Titles* (1957) 136 note 12.

²⁸⁶ KTU 1.15 II 25–27, with W.G.E. Watson, U.–F. 11 (1979) 807–809. “To suck”, *mṣṣ*, see M. Held, *Studies Samuel Iwry* (1985) 97 f., contrasting this verb with *mīṣ* “to churn milk”.

Chapter IV WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN? PROGNOSTICS

Hemerologies

The Babylonians distinguished auspicious and inauspicious days. We have numerous handbooks which indicated which day of the month or month of the year is good or bad; often the activities of such a day or month together with their ominous meaning are added. We call these texts “hemerologies” (for the days) and “menologies” (for the months). One could say that they are like our European almanacs.¹

The day of copulation can bode ill for birth. Thus, it is not propitious to “approach” a woman (sexually) on 15.V or 3.VII. In the last case, it is added “she will take away his virility”.² The hemerologies pay marked attention to the first seven days of the seventh month which were full of abstention and prohibitions. This is probably because the seventh month, *Tašritu*, was the first month of the cultic year.³ Day 8, however, is a festival day and full of joy: “Day 8: day of joy; of (god) Ea. The king, the patrician, the prince, they shall clean themselves. He (an average man) shall wash his hands, he shall be cleaned. Let him fill his house with fruits of the garden, let them make merry. He shall not go to a strange (*ahītu*) woman, let him go to his own wife: on that (same) day, that woman will become pregnant of a male (child)”.⁴ Could one infer that the man was not allowed to “approach” his own wife during the seven days of taboo and that he could turn to another woman during this period? Another hemerological text promises for day 15 of an unknown month: “He will approach his woman, on that (same) day his woman will become pregnant”.⁵ Elsewhere, we read: “On day 25 of month X he should make a woman of the street pregnant; Ištar will look at him with favour for the game”.⁶

The day or month on which a child is born can be auspicious or inauspicious.⁷ A number of menologies deal with the development of a happy family: we find the following sequence of forecasts: ‘If (in a specific month) a man ‘acquires’ a wife – If a

¹ R. Labat, “Hemerologien”, in RIA IV/4–5 (1975) 317–323.

² On 15.V according to Ch. Viroolleaud, *Babyloniac* IV (1911) 104, 119 K. 3769:10 // STT 303 rev. 23 // CT 51 161:4. On 3.VII according to CT 51 161 rev. 17; P. Hulin, *Iraq* 21 (1959) 47:18, and dupls.

³ R. Labat, “Hemerologien”, § 5, in RIA IV 320; HMA 27 note 79 (VII beginning of the year).

⁴ We follow P. Hulin, *Iraq* 21 (1959) 51, lines 53–55 (end: *ūmu šuatu SAL.BI NITA ir-re*) Dupl. KAR 147 rev. 24–26; KAR 177 rev., col. II from the left, 41–46, with R. Labat, *Hémérologies* (= HMA) (1939) 174–6 (with some errors).

⁵ III R 56 no. 6 K. 3765:16, with Ch. Viroolleaud, *Babyloniac* IV (1911) 108 (*ana ḫ SAL-šú ḫ TE UD šu-a-tum SAL-šú ir-re*). Also in SAA VIII no. 204 (misunderstood).

⁶ CT 51 161 rev. 1, with A. Livingstone in: I.L. Finkel, M.J. Geller, *Sumerian gods and their representations* (1997) 218.

⁷ R. Labat, *Un calendrier babylonien des travaux des signes et des mois* (Séries iqqrū ipuš) (1965) 132 ff., has collected them as § 64 but one always has to turn to the originals. Then, one discovers that manuscripts c and d (p. 45) are texts on babies that were “seized” (epileptic fits?); see Ch. Viroolleaud, *Babyloniac* I (1907) 194 K. 7938:6 (DIŠ *ina ITU.KIN TA UD.1.KAM EN UD.30.KAM LÚ.TUR DIB* [...]]; CAD Š/2 320a, e), *Ū* [TU] at the end of line 4 is unfounded; also DIB in Viroolleaud, 193 K. 11029:5. We suspect that manuscript b (Viroolleaud, 193 K. 11179) also belongs to another group. Note this “first line” in a colophon: (36) DIŠ *ina ITU.BÁR TA UD.1.KAM EN UD.30.KAM LÚ.TUR lu-u ina kal u₄-mu* (37) *lu-ú ina kal mu-ši nen-tu EGIR-šú*, SpbTU IV 143:36 f.

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man brings his wife into his house – If a baby is born”. The good or bad consequences are described.⁸ Almost nothing is left of these particular forecasts but we have a fragment of the beginning.⁹

“If a baby is born in month I, the house of his father will be disrupted by his feet.
If in month II: quick[ly . . .]”

Thus, to be born in the first month is bad for the family (we shall return to this in the next section).

A child born in month VIII will fare well in future days, another fragment seems to say. The only other intelligible omen reads: “If a baby is born (in month . . .), Ištar will chase him when he is in his prime”.¹⁰ In other omen texts we find the same forecast for month VI when one does something – like building a house – and it is no coincidence that month VI is the month of the goddess Ištar.¹¹ That must be the reason why she is mentioned in the prediction. We may safely assume that the child is here born in month VI; but what it means to be chased by Ištar we do not know.¹²

There was a special menology for the king, where we have the same sequence of family life, and the line that interests us offers: “If the wife of the king gives birth to a baby in month VIII, that baby will grow old”.¹³ In a calendar from Assur we come across the following laconic passage: “A child being born: . . ., month III, month V, month VII, month VIII, month IX, month XI, month XII: favourable”.¹⁴

As the reader sees, the material is not particularly rich. There is more, however.

The following “calendar text” from the archives of Hattuša, the capital of the Hittites, is certainly a translation of a Babylonian original; note that birth in month I means disruption (“scattering”) of the family. Like the Babylonian material, it considers the second half of the year to be more propitious. This menology probably goes back to the Old Babylonian period. The first ten lines present the months and what it means for the child to be born in that month.¹⁵ We give the text in the translation by G. Beckman:

[If in the first month a child is bor]n, this ch[il]d will scatter the house of (his) fath[er], but in the future he will recover it.
[If in the second month a child] is born, this child will lack inner vitality.
(If) in the third month a child is born, this child will experience justice.
[(If) in the fourth month a child] is born, this child will become ill.
(If) in the fifth month a child is born, his days will be short.

⁸ Labat, manuscripts e, i (see p. 45).

⁹ Viroilleaud, 192 K. 11082:13–16. Months III and IV badly broken; remainder gone.

¹⁰ Labat § 64, end; manuscript i (K. 8737 II 10; Plate XL with p. 236), ⁴Ištar ina la-le-šú UŠ.[MEŠ-šú]. We assume that the “mois non identifié” of K. 8737 (p. 236) is month VI.

¹¹ Labat 196 § 105:6 (VI as month “of Ištar, mistress of the lands”; explanation in HMA 28). House building: Labat, § 1:7, § 5:6 (CT 38 10:9, 11:19). Note Labat 106 § 41:13, “If a man makes a tomb on day 12 (of any month), Ištar will chase him when he is in his prime”.

¹² Labat, 58 f. note 8; W. von Soden, AHw 966b *redūm* 4, end “(zum Tode?)”.

¹³ Labat, § 64: 8b; manuscript f (K. 3269 IV 15, Plate XLIV; new copy of IV R 33* iv 15, cited CAD A/1 289b). Manuscript g is also about the Queen (§ 64:10).

¹⁴ KAR 177 III 30-32, with R. Labat, HMA 160.

¹⁵ KUB VIII 35, with K.K. Riemenschneider, *Babylonische Geburtsomina in hethitischer Übersetzung* (= StBoT, 9) (1970) 44 note 39. Translations: R. Lebrun in *L'enfant dans les civilisations orientales. Het kind in de oosterse beschavingen* (= Acta Orientalia Belgica, II) (1980) 53 f.; G. Beckman, *Hittite Birth Rituals* (= StBoT, 29) (1983) 13–17 (with full discussion).

(If) in the sixth [mon]th a child is born, the father and mother to (= of?) this child will come (?) into the cold; the child (himself) from the river, from [w]ind (?), from fire, (and) from the hot iron (?) will escape.

(If) in the seventh month a child is born, a god will single out this child.

(If) in the eighth month a child is born, this child will procure grain and silver.

(If) in the ninth month a child is born, this child will die; if he does not die, then his father (and) mother will experience fear.

(If) in the tenth month a child is born, in whatever house he is born – (that) <hou>se will become empty.

(If) in the eleventh month a child is born, this child will become strong.

(If) in the twelfth month a child is born, this child will grow old [and] produce many children.

(If) in the thirteenth (= intercalary) month a child is born, there is no (omen).

The French excavations in ancient Emar have yielded fragments of menologies that are roughly contemporaneous with the Hittite text. They are written in Akkadian and also belong to the Babylonian tradition. One would expect, therefore, that the Emar forecasts would be the same as those recorded in the Hittite text. However, the few fully preserved forecasts that we have from Emar, are different. Month III: "That man will acquire property". Month VIII: "He will experience distress; the king of his land will revolt to (?) him". Month IX: "Property will leave him; the son . . .".¹⁶

Birth in the first month

According to the Babylonians and Assyrians, birth in the first month (Nisannu) is a bad omen: "If a baby is born in Nisannu, by his feet his father's house (= family) will be disrupted".¹⁷ The "by his feet" is an unexplained expression only used to indicate an "initiative" of newborn children; we find the same forecast in medical texts about newborn babies suffering epileptic attacks.¹⁸ One should avoid childbirth during this month. There is a ritual from Assur for postponing birth from the first month to the second month, Ajāru.¹⁹ Ajāru is in all respects a favourable month.²⁰ The first, not fully preserved, line seems to say, "After the month of the woman's birthgiving has begun: it is Nisannu".²¹ In the ritual, the woman first turns to Sīn, god of the moon (and the

¹⁶ D. Arnaud, *Emar VI.4* (1987) 222 no. 611:82 (month III), 210 no. 610:121, 142 (months VIII, IX). The other omens on childbirth are broken; no. 610:35, 83, no. 611:122, no. 612:3, no. 631:5.

¹⁷ R. Labat, *Un calendrier babylonien des travaux des signes et des mois (Séries iqqur ipuš)* (1965) 132 § 64:1, based on K. 11082:13. Now also in a catalogue of "first lines" of *namburbi*, SpbTU I 6:12 (no forecast); S.M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (1994) 192. The fullest text of the omen is given by the *namburbi* in its first line; see below. – Note that E. Leichty based his reconstruction of *Šumma izbu* IV 62' on this hemerology; TCS IV (1970) 72.

¹⁸ M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 89.

¹⁹ KAR 223, with E. Ebeling, MAOG 5/3 (1931) 3–8. It looks as if K. 8666, cited by E. Reiner, JNES 26 (1967) 191 note 15, is a duplicate. Note that the last line of this text envisages the birth of a girl (SAL.TUR) in Nisannu!

²⁰ K. 738, after A. Livingstone, in E. Matsushima, *Official cult and popular religion in the Ancient Near East* (1993) 103–105.

²¹ Line 1, CAD A/1 289a (cf. E 266b) reads TU-ma (= *īrubma*) and translates "(if) the month in which

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months, we may add); the second ritual is directed to the god of the sun (and the days, we add). We translate the first ritual:

– You string sixty spindle whorls – 30 made of tamarisk wood, 30 made of sissoo wood – on a multicoloured thread. You tie sixty knots and string in between them thirty seeds of sissoo on a red wool (thread). Thirty ... knots, fourteen pieces of cornel wood you string on a red wool (thread). [...] you tie together with them stones worn around the waist by a woman who does not give birth easily [and] you bind this on her [...]. From day 1 of Nisannu until day 30 of Ajāru the [...] shall cut off one spindle whorl per day and throw it away. [In the ...] you set up an offering table before Sîn, you make ready a censer (burning) juniper wood, you libate beer. She raises the curtain (?) from the ground and draws (it closed) and through (?) the staircase she ascends to the roof, and [...] they consent and she washes her hands. She speaks to Sîn as follows: “From day 1 of Nisannu until day 30 of Ajāru, [...] let me prosper before you. [Then,] o giver of light, I want to glorify your greatness and praise you”. She [...] and descends to the ground, and you anoint her with (the plants) *aktam*, *imhur-lim*, mixed in oil. You fumigate her with [...], cress, combings and flax seed until she gives birth.

The meaning of the ritual is clear: the sixty whorls, magically bound together, also bind the woman. The amulet stones normally used by a woman who does not give birth easily (*la mušteširtu*) help to identify our woman with one that does not give birth. The prayer takes place at night, on the roof, in sight of the Moon.²² The meaning of drawing a curtain and the staircase is not clear to us.

The text now turns to a ritual directed to Šamaš, the Sungod. Like the previous ritual, it contains instructions for an offering table, censer and a libation. The woman is made to recite a prayer three times in which she asks Šamaš, “Make this [month of] my birthgiving pass by for me.²³ (Then), I want to glorify your greatness and praise you”. The woman prostrates herself on the ground, is made to sit, and one fills her ears with flour (?), clads her in [...], and anoints her, “until she has let the month of birthgiving pass by, and she must not push her [...]. She will complete the month Nisannu and give birth”.

If a child actually is born in the first month, it is bad. A ritual known as a *nam.búr.bi*, literally “undoing”, is performed in order to undo the evil of “disruption”, “scattering” (*sapāhu*) that now threatens the family. Copies of this *nam.búr.bi* ritual have been found in various cities which shows that it was widely known. Recently, it has been edited for

a woman is to give birth comes, and it is Nisannu”. This fits the duplicate (?) K. 8666:1, *e-nu-ma* ITU šá Ū.TU-ša *i-ru-ba-am-ma* ITU.BÁR x x *ki*, cited by E. Reiner. We have thought of other possibilities: [TA] *be-et* SAL ITU šá Ū.TU-šá *tu-ma-[nu]* ITU.BÁR *šu-[u]*, “after a woman has counted the months of her birthgiving”. Another possibility is *tu-ma-[lu]* “After a woman has completed the month(s) of her birthgiving” (Assyrianisms).

²² The meaning of line 12 is not clear. The text is: [*ana-k]u* (?) *lu-uš-te-šir* IGI-ka. At first sight, this means “möge ich [...] vor dir eine leichte Geburt haben”; W. Mayer, *UFBG* (1976) 295, below. But Nisannu is not good. “May I prosper” fits the situation better. The prayer is listed by Mayer, 409, as Sîn 12.

²³ KAR 223 rev. 6, [...] ITU šá] 『Ū』.TU.MU *an-ni-e šu-ti-qa-an-ni-[ma]*. Otherwise W. Mayer, 259: ‘bei diesem meinen Gebären lass mich (am Bösen) vorbeikommen!’, reading [...] *ina* Ū].TU.MU. His interpretation is in line with *šu-tu-qí* [...] (3), and [...] *HUL-tim šu-tu-qu ki-šir lum-ni pa-ṭa-ri* (5) (see his p. 276 f., 291); mine with *a-di* ITU šá Ū.TU ú-še-et-te-qu-ma (11).

Birth in the first Month

the first time.²⁴ The translation of the essential sections, based mainly on the copy from Assur, follows.

“If a baby is born in Nisannu, between day 1 and day 30, by his feet his father’s house will be disrupted – either the Hand of his god, or the Hand of the king will reach his father and his mother.²⁵ As to that baby: it will fare well in future days. *Namburbi*, in order that the evil of that baby does not reach his father and mother, in order to make that disaster go by, that that evil goes away, elsewhere, and not comes near to his father and his mother.

Its ritual: In the morning, in a secluded place on the plain, you wipe the ground, you sprinkle holy water, you set up three offering tables for (the gods) Ea, Šamaš, and Asalluhi, you strew dates, flour, you put (there) honey-cake, date syrup, ghee. You set up a cultic water vessel, you libate beer. Behind the apparatus, you strew garden plants. You sacrifice a sheep, you draw a curtain, you pour down a heap of flour. That man shall stand behind the apparatus, and speak like this”.

The man must be the father and the garden plants that he obviously is standing upon are supposed to take over the evil *miasma*. The father now directs a prayer of 18 lines to the three gods Ea, Šamaš, and Asalluhi. Firstly, he tries to please them; using conventional laudatory phrases he praises their divine power. Then, he says, “Because of the baby that was born in the month Nisannu, I am in fear, I am frightened, yes, very much frightened; let that evil not come near to me!” He continues by beseeching the gods to take it away from him, that he be cleansed, and that the days of joy come back. He recites this prayer three times, and now turns to the River with another prayer, asking to accept from him “the evil that the baby was born in Nisannu”. In Babylonian religion, the River is a goddess, the main cleansing agent whose flowing waters take away all manner of evil. Below, we will see that a malformed birth was also ritually disposed of in the holy River. Although it is not specified in our ritual, one has to assume that the man throws the contaminated garden plants into the river as well. The last line of our text is a short instruction: “He shall recite this incantation prayer before the river and he shall go straight home; that evil has been undone”.

Horoscopes

The Greek author Strabo wrote in his *Geography*: “In Babylonia a settlement is set apart for the local philosophers, the Chaldaeans, as they are called, who are concerned mostly with astronomy; but some of these, who are not approved of by the others, profess to be genethliologists” (*Geogr.* XVI.1.6). The word *genethlios* means “relating to birth”, and the lore *genethliología* is the art of casting nativities, that is, personal predictions from celestial phenomena at the time of birth. This is a far more sophisticated technique than deriving a forecast from birth in a specific month. These horoscopes appear in Babylonia shortly after 500 B.C., after the “invention” of the Zodiac.²⁶ In the following exposition,

²⁴ S.M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (1994) 400–408. Cf. the earlier remarks by E. Reiner, JNES 26 (1967) 191.

²⁵ Misunderstood by Maul; to be read BE-ma (= šumma), not ÚŠ-ma. Also in SpbTU III 186 no. 99:8, and cf. ABL 385 = LAS 15 = SAA X 33 rev. 10 (lū - lū).

²⁶ B. Meissner, “Über Genethliologie bei den Babylonern”, *Klio* 19 (1925) 432–4 (starting from some

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we summarize the findings by A. Sachs and F. Rochberg-Halton.

We have 33 texts, "horoscopes", including four birth-notes, the oldest of which dates to 409 B.C., and the youngest to 68 B.C. Most of them are dated to Seleucid and Arsacid kings. A horoscope has the following structure. First, the date of birth is given; sometimes the (seasonal) hour is indicated. The name of the child is given in only two horoscopes and in both cases the names are Greek. Then, the positions in the Zodiac of the moon, the sun, and the planets are given. The astrologer had to compute the moment of birth to the degree within a sign. The planets are recorded in a sequence which has astrological significance: the benefic pair Jupiter and Venus first, then the ambiguous Mercury, and as the last the malific pair Saturn and Mars. The planets retained the same character in Greek astrology. Other astronomical events of the month or even the year are frequently appended: lunar phenomena, eclipses, equinoxes.

Most Babylonian horoscopes end at this point; they just describe the situation at the moment of birth. For the prediction, the astrologer consulted a handbook of omnia. We quote three passages: "If a child is born when the Moon comes forth, (his situation will be) bright, good, stable, and long". "If a child is born when Jupiter comes forth, (his situation will be) regular, well; he will become rich, he will grow old, a long life". "If a child is born and Saturn comes forth, (his situation will be) dark, troubled, sick, and constrained".²⁷ The reader will have no difficulty in recognizing here the omnia of the older Mesopotamian traditions: those of the menologies and related texts.

What is really striking is the discovery by modern scholars, that the horoscopes are not based on any actual celestial observation at all! The planetary and lunar data given were the results of computations using the Zodiac as a system of reference and this obtains for a good number of astronomical texts as well. The Babylonian astronomers continuously computed the dates and zodiacal longitudes of certain cyclically returning phases of the planets, and were able to predict eclipses. Their calculations were accurate. By consulting the modern "Tuckerman Tables" a reader today can pinpoint the exact moment referred to in the ancient text. What sources did the ancient scholar use when to compose a horoscope? A. Sachs had thought that they were based on the "ephemerides", but F. Rochberg-Halton now shows that the monthly astronomical "almanacs" are, in most cases, a far better candidate. They have largely the same structure and she is able to demonstrate her theory by juxtaposing an almanac with a horoscope.

There is one exception to this: the oldest horoscope known, dated to the Persian king Darius II, was written at that moment of an actual event. It belongs to a family archive from Nippur and it was written when a son was born in the family.²⁸

predictions on adulterous women cited by Bardesanes); A. Sachs, "Babylonian horoscopes", JCS 6 (1952) 49–75; Sachs, "Naissance de l'astrologie horoscopique en Babylone", *Archeologia* 15 (mars-avril 1967) 13–19; B.L. van der Waerden, *Anfänge der Astronomie* (1968) 247–9; F. Rochberg-Halton, "Babylonian horoscopes and their sources", Or NS 58 (1989) 102–123; U. Koch-Westenholz, "Personal astrology", *Mesopotamian astrology* (1995) 171–176; P.A. Beaulieu, F. Rochberg, "The horoscope of Anu-bēlšunu", JCS 48 (1996) 89–94.

²⁷ TCL 6 14:27, 29, 33, with A. Sachs, JCS 6 (1952) 66, 68. See also F. Rochberg-Halton, 109 f. – Note SpbTU II 178 f. no. 43, with D.A. Foxvog, *Studies W.W. Hallo* (1993) 107, and W. Farber, WdO 18 (1987) 40. Also in R.D. Biggs, "An esoteric Babylonian commentary", RA 62 (1968) 51–58, lines 7, 10.

²⁸ AO 17649, according to F. Joannès, in: *Nippur at the Centennial* (1992) 95. The text was translated by F. Rochberg-Halton, Or NS 58 (1989) 111 f. (see also NABU 1994/24).

Horoscopes

We give one horoscope in translation. This horoscope is unusual since the name of the child is given and the predictions are added. We can establish the date of birth as June 3, 235 B.C., probably at 4 hours A.M.²⁹

“Year 77 (of the Seleucid Era), month III, on the 4th day until the last part of the night of the 5th, Aristuggirate (= Aristokrates) was born. That day: Moon in Leo. Sun in 12,5° in Gemini. The moon sets its face from the middle toward the top; (the corresponding omen is:) “If, from the middle toward the top, (the moon) sets its face, (there will be) destruction”. Jupiter is stationary in 18° Sagittarius. The place of Jupiter (means): “(His situation will be) regular, well; he will become rich, he will grow old, long life”. Venus in 4° Taurus. The place of Venus (means): “Wherever he may go, it will be favourable; he will have sons and daughters”. Mercury in Gemini, with the sun (i.e., not visible). The place of Mercury (means): “The brave one will be first in rank, he will be more important than his brothers, . . .”. Saturn in 6° Cancer. Mars in 24° Cancer; . . . [obscure]”.

A text, completely forgotten by Assyriologists, relates the future of the child to the zodiacal sign in which it was born. Examples: “He is born in the sign Sagittarius: (this means) shooting with the bow, riding on a horse, submerging in the river, gathering of riches. He is born in the sign Capricornus: (this means) epilepsy, incubus, migraine will seize him”.³⁰

Some texts show that the moment of conception was also thought to be relevant for the child’s future. An early example which dates long before the rise of horoscopy, is a forecast based on sexual behaviour found in another handbook (*Šumma ālu*): “If a man ‘approaches’ his wife at the rising of the Yoke star (= Boötes), he will get a son with a pleasant spirit”.³¹ As to the horoscopes, one clay tablet gives one horoscope date on its obverse, another on its reverse. The difference is 273 days, so we have here the day of conception (only the position of the moon in Aries is given), followed by the day of birth (the position of the moon and the planets are given).³² Other texts are more explicit: “A child is conceived (*rehū*) (when) the Sun stands in 5° Leo, the Moon in 5° Aries, Jupiter and Mars stand in 5° Sagittarius – that child (will be) king”. This is the “ideal” situation, when the sun, moon, and planets Jupiter and Mars all stand in 5° of the zodiacal signs which make up the first “triplicity”.³³ This boy will be king; it is much worse when a child is conceived during a lunar eclipse: “If the moon becomes eclipsed in the area of

²⁹ MLC 2190, Sachs, 60; K. Hecker, TUAT II/1 (1986) 78 f.; F. Rochberg-Halton, *Canadian Society of Mesopotamian Studies, Bulletin* 19 (May 1990) 30, Text 2.

³⁰ LBAT 1593 rev. 8–10. This text has not been excerpted by the dictionaries; it contains some hapax legomena. A related text is SpbTU V 265.

³¹ CT 39 45:38, DIŠ NA *ina ni-pi-il* MUL.ŠUDUN *ana* DAM-šú TE DUMU ŠÀ.DÙG.GA TUKU-ši. E. Weidner, *Gestirn-Darstellungen auf babylonischen Tontafeln* (1967) 14: “Jupiter”; and “so wird das Kind geistiges Wohlbefinden haben” (in that case, on expects DUMU.BI). The Bedouins avoid disaster caused by stars: “Die Beduinen in manchen nordwestlichen Randgebieten unterlassen zu bestimmten Zeiten den ehelichen Verkehr, in denen nach dem Stand der Sterne minderwertige Kinder zu erwarten sind (Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte* I/1, 14; Musil, *Arabia Petraea* III 208)”; J. Henniger, *Die Familie bei den heutigen Beduinen Arabiens und seiner Randgebiete* (1943) 102 note 241.

³² Rm IV 224, Sachs, 58 f.; B.L. van der Waerden, *Anfänge der Astronomie* (1968) 248 f. (“279 days”).

³³ BM 32488:8–9, as rendered and commented by F. Rochberg-Halton, Or NS 58 (1989) 102–123. Triplicity: Aries, Leo, Sagittarius, each 120° from one another in the Zodiac. Cf. Rochberg-Halton, JNES 43 (1984) 121–125; JAOS 108 (1988) 60–62.

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Aries, (and) a child is conceived, incubus will seize that child (right) from his mother's womb". The Hand of the God will seize the child, when the moon was in the Pleiades.³⁴

Babylonia was the cradle of astronomy and astrology and it is certain that the horoscopes originated in the centers of learning between the Two Rivers. "Magi" arrived in Greece and were said to have prophesied Socrates' death; a "Chaldaean" predicted the bright future of Euripides. The structure of the Greek horoscopes give immediate proof of their Babylonian origins. A pupil of the Babylonian Berossos bases a prediction on the moment of conception.³⁵ Horoscopes lived on in the Jewish communities. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain two of the earliest, one is written in a cryptic variety of scripts, while the other is written in Aramaic. In the first one a man's physical characteristics are determined by 'the foot' of Taurus.³⁶ It goes without saying that the Syrians and Mandaeans also practised astrology.³⁷

But Greece had its own *Tageswählerei* which included the meaning of the day of birth. The poet Hesiod, at the end of his *Works and Days*, has a number of recommendations for daily life, ending with good and bad days. Here, one reads, "The sixth of the mid-month is very unfavourable for plants, but it is good for the birth of males, though unfavourable for a girl either to be born at all or to be married. Nor is the first sixth a fit day for a girl to be born" (782–786). "On the great twentieth, in full day, a wise man should be born. Such an one is very sound-witted. The tenth is favourable for a male to be born; but, for a girl, the fourth day of the mid-month" (792–795). "The ninth of mid-month improves towards evening; but the first ninth of all is quite harmless for men. It is a good day on which to beget or to be born both for a male and a female: it is never an wholly evil day" (810–813). A modern commentary says on the whole section: "In early Greek literature the Hesiodic document stands quite alone. There is some Classical evidence for days associated with particular gods or generally holy, and for others of inauspicious character; hardly any for significance attached to birthdays, none for days held good or bad for particular tasks. Only in and after the Hellenistic period did a hemerological literature spring up again". Herodotus found this belief among the Egyptians (II, 82,1) but the modern commentator sees more correspondences to Babylonian texts.³⁸ In the early Babylonian speculations on birth, the month rather than the day seems to have been crucial.

³⁴ E. Weidner, *Gestirn-Darstellungen auf babylonischen Tontafeln* (1967) 14. The incubus and Hand of the God may have to do with stupor or epilepsy; see M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 35, 48.

³⁵ Here, we have summarised B.L. van der Waerden, 247–9. See also E.M. Yamauchi, in: *Chronos, Kairos, Christos. Nativity and chronological studies presented to Jack Finegan* (1989) 32–35, "The diffusion of astrology to the West". Modern, broad and original surveys on the development of the theories are F. Rochberg-Halton, "New evidence for the history of astrology", JNES 34 (1984) 115–140; and her "Elements of the Babylonian contribution to Hellenistic astrology", JAOS 108 (1988) 51–62.

³⁶ F. García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated* (1994) 456. J.H. Charlesworth, "Jewish interest in astrology during the Hellenistic and Roman period", in: *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* Teil II, Band 20.2 (1987) 926–950. On the Qumran horoscopes: 938–940. A new important document is "The Treatise of Shem" to which Charlesworth devotes a separate chapter. See also Yamauchi, *Studies Finegan* 35–39, "Astrology among the Jews" (the horoscopes on p. 37).

³⁷ See J.C. Greenfield, M. Sokoloff, "Astrological and related omen texts in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic", JNES 48 (1989) 201–214, esp. 210–211 (on birth).

³⁸ M.L. West, *Hesiod. Works & Days. Edited with prolegomena and commentary* (1978) 348 f. The "correspondences" are lines 770, 772, 803 f., 826. Cf. M.L. West, *The East Face of Helicon* (1997) 328–332.

The Star of Bethlehem

Chapter 2 of the Gospel according to Matthew begins as follows: ‘Now, after the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, Magi (*magoi*) from the East (*hai anatolai*, plural) came to Jerusalem asking, ‘Where is the newborn King of the Jews? For we have seen his star at its rising (*anatolè*) and have come to pay him homage (...). Then Herod summoned the Magi secretly and ascertained from them the exact time when the star had appeared (...) Obeying the king, they set out; and behold, the star which they had seen at its rising went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were greatly overjoyed’ (Matthew 2:1–2, 7, 9–10).³⁹

The recent discoveries of early Jewish astrological texts (like the two horoscopes) have given an historical background to the story of the Wise Men.⁴⁰ Even when literary criticism assumes that a pre-Matthean story was modelled after the narrative on Balaam and Balak in Numbers 22–24, it can be said that there is nothing unusual for the Jews of that time to interpret a striking celestial phenomenon astrologically. That a star heralded the birth of an important person is well attested in antiquity. An oracle of Balaam refers to the coming Messiah, “A star will come forth from Jacob, and a scepter will rise from Israel” (Numbers 24:17). For this reason, the revolutionary Simon ben Kosibah was named “Bar Kochba”, i.e., Son of the Star (132–135 A.D.).⁴¹ It is remarkable that Matthew does not cite this verse in Numbers as a *testimonium* from the Old Testament. Perhaps he consciously avoided this because the text had been applied so often to “false” messiahs.⁴² Or perhaps his silence implies a refusal to set any value upon astrology.⁴³ There seems to be another reference to Numbers implied in the Gospel story: according to a recent article, the movement of the star was modelled after that of the cloud-fire in Numbers 9:15–23.⁴⁴

There have been essentially three attempts to account for the appearance of this star.⁴⁵ The theory that the star a *comet* is highly unlikely. A comet is not a star; moreover, a

³⁹ We followed the translation given by R.E. Brown, in his standard work *The Birth of the Messiah. A commentary on the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke* (1977) 164.

⁴⁰ Cf. G. Mussies, “Some astrological presuppositions of Matthew 2: Oriental, Classical and Rabbinical parallels”, in: P.W. van der Horst, *Aspects of religious contact and conflict in the Ancient world* (1995) 25–44. His main point is that the magi were Babylonian, not Persian, astrologers.

⁴¹ Brown, 170 f., 195; A. Strobel, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* Teil II, Band 20.2 (1987) 1068–70, 1103–8. As Brown points out, the Greek version of Numbers 24:17 is: “I will point to him, though not now; I bless him, though he has not drawn near; a star will rise from Jacob, and a man will stand forth from Israel”.

⁴² Thus M. Stol, “De Ster uit Jakob”, in *Hervormd Weekblad*, 22 January 1987. As a reaction to the false Simon bar Kochba, Rabbinic literature avoided this verse as evidence for the Messiah, too. M. Hengel, *Die Zeloten* (1961) 243–6, sees in this verse the “ambiguous oracle” that caused the uprising leading to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. For this oracle, see Josephus, *The Jewish War* VI, 312; see the commentary by O. Michel and O. Bauernfeind in their edition *Flavius Josephus De Bello Judaico. Der jüdische Krieg*, Band II, 2 (1969) 190–192, “Exkurs XV”.

⁴³ Thus G. Dorival, “L’astre de Balaam et l’étoile des Mages”, in: R. Gyselen, *La science des cieux, sages, mages, astrologues* (= *Res Orientales* XII) (1999) 93–111 (particularly p. 104 f., the “démessianisation” of Balaam’s oracle).

⁴⁴ B.T. Viviano, “The movement of the star, Matt 2:9 and Num 9:17”, *Revue biblique* 103 (1996) 58–64.

⁴⁵ Recent surveys are Brown (1977) 171–173; no significant additions in the New Updated Edition of 1993, 610–613; K. Ferrari d’Occhieppo, *Der Stern der Weisen. Geschichte oder Legende?* (2. Auflage, Wien – München 1977), summarized in his contribution “The star of the Magi and Babylonian astronomy”, in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos. Nativity and chronological studies presented to Jack Finegan* (1989) 41–53;

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comet was thought to herald a catastrophe.⁴⁶ We add that it was not Halley's Comet which was observed in 12 B.C. The second theory assumes that it was a *supernova* star.⁴⁷ In 1604–5 when a supernova appeared in the neighbourhood of the planets Jupiter, Saturn and Mars, Johannes Kepler thought of this possibility. In the preceding year, he had witnessed "the great conjunction" of Jupiter and Saturn, and he calculated that a similar conjunction with Mars moving into the vicinity had occurred in the year 7 B.C. The conjunction in combination with the appearance of a supernova in his time and, supposedly, in 7 and 5 B.C. (the year of Christ's birth, as Kepler knew), made him think: the conjunction announced the birth and the star marked it. It is problematic that we have no report of a supernova in 5 or 4 B.C., Chinese sources could refer to one in 5 B.C. – or was this a comet?⁴⁸

Much has been written about the third possibility, a *conjunction* of Jupiter and Saturn in the sign Pisces in 7 B.C. What is so special about this event is that it happened three times (a "triple conjunction").⁴⁹ The Babylonians were able to calculate and predict this conjunction. We have four copies of the "almanac" for year 305 of the Seleucid Era (= 7/6 B.C.) which probably had been composed in Babylon in the year before. Although the almanac's terse style does not highlight the conjunction, the "Magi" could know it was going to happen. A new edition has been given by A. Sachs and C.B.F. Walker, and we give here their translation of the section on the first conjunction; that at the end of the Babylonian month IV. The full text is:

"[Month IV, the 1st of which will follow the 29th (?) of the previous month. Jupiter and Saturn in Pisces, Venus in Leo, Mars in Libra. On the 14th, Venus will reach Virgo. On the 14th, moonset after sunrise. On the 16th, Mercury will be visible for the first time in the east [...] On the 20th, Sirius will be visible for the first time. On the 22nd, Jupiter will reach its (first) stationary point in the end of Pisces. On the 28th, last lunar visibility before sunrise. On the 29th, Saturn will reach its (first) stationary point in the end of Pisces".

The second conjunction must have been conspicuous. The almanac simply says on month VI: "On the 21st, Jupiter's acronychal rising (...) On the 21st, Jupiter's acronychal rising". This rising took place on the same evening and both planets moved along the sky through the whole night, only one degree apart, Jupiter being particularly bright.⁵⁰ At

Ferrari d'Occhieppo, *Der Stern von Bethlehem in astronomischer Sicht. Legende oder Tatsache?* (Brunnen Verlag, Giessen 1994). Charlesworth in *Aufstieg* ... 961–4; A. Strobel, in his article in the same volume, "Weltenjahr, große Konjunktion und Messiasstern. Ein themageschichtlicher Überblick", 988–1187, esp. 993, 1001–1007, 1075 f., 1083 (*chrónos* in verse 7 is "Zeitraum, nicht Zeitpunkt"); R.H. van Gent, "Het raadsel van de Ster van Bethlehem. Oude en nieuwe sterrenkundige verklaringen", *Zenith* 23 no. 12 (December 1996) 510–514.

⁴⁶ Brown, 172. P.R. Berger, in: H. Galter, *Die Rolle der Astronomie in den Kulturen Mesopotamiens* (1993) 282–4, pleads for a comet – Halley's Comet.

⁴⁷ We now closely follow A.J. Sachs, C.B.F. Walker, "Kepler's view of the Star of Bethlehem and the Babylonian Almanac for 7/6 B.C.", *Iraq* 46 (1984) 43–55.

⁴⁸ Strobel, 997 f. note 11; 1168 f.; Sachs and Walker, 45 note 28.

⁴⁹ During the days 29 May – 8 June, 26 September – 6 October, 5 December – 15 December, according to Strobel, 1006, 1162–1166 (drawings).

⁵⁰ Ferrari d'Occhieppo, 56 f.: "Aber daß beide am selben Abend, dem 21. Ululu (= 15. September 747 ab Urbe condita) ihren Abendaufgang haben sollten und, wie die rekonstruierte babylonische Rechnung in übrigens guter Übereinstimmung mit den wirklichen Verhältnissen zeigt, mit nur einem Grad Längenunterschied vom Abend bis zum Morgen gemeinsam über den Himmel zogen, war schon ein Ereignis von ungewöhnlichem Seltenheitswert. Dabei zeigte sich Jupiter – das wissen wir auf Grund seiner Sonnennähe in der räumlichen

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the third conjunction, they were only three minutes apart, during two evenings (12 and 13 November). For the end of month VIII, the almanac reads: “[On the 1]9th, Jupiter will reach its stationary point in Pisces. On the 21st, Saturn will reach its stationary point in Pisces. On the 28th, last lunar visibility before sunrise”. To a modern scholar, this was the “star” above Bethlehem.⁵¹

A. Strobel has shown in an article of book-length how important a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn was to the Ancients; all the more a triple conjunction taking place in Pisces, at that time the vernal equinox.⁵² The ideology of the Roman Empire was full of astrological meanings. Others have pointed out that in later Jewish and Christian astrology Jupiter stood for the King, Saturn for Israel (Palestine), and Pisces for the end of time.⁵³ This brings us too far from the earlier and contemporary Jewish conviction that a star heralds the Messiah.

Matthew speaks of one “star” and it dampens one’s enthusiasm to read that Jupiter and Saturn “did not approach sufficiently close to each other to give the appearance of a single star but by-passed each other at a distance approximately equal to twice the moon’s diameter”.⁵⁴ At this disconcerting moment, K. Ferrari d’Occhieppo stepped in with a solution and a suggestion as to how the star “went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was”. He assumes that the zodiacal light made it all appear like this.⁵⁵ We quote:

“They must have recalled that in this very night the two planets were to become stationary in the Zodiac. When the sky grew darker, Saturn became visible near Jupiter. About half an hour later, the diffuse cone of the zodiacal light appeared, with Jupiter being close to its top. One could imagine that it was the star that sent a broad light beam toward the earth. Marvellously enough, notwithstanding the sky’s turning around its pole as usual, the bright axis of the cone of light persistently pointed to the same place, the northwestern hill of Bethlehem (which was seen in the direction of southwest by the Magi, who approached Jerusalem). Thus, it appeared as if the star stood still, not only with respect to the Zodiac (as had been calculated by the Magi), but also above a certain place on the earth (...).”

The latest two books on the Star of Bethlehem have differing identifications. One identifies it as a supernova in Coma Berenices (= *Erua*, Babylonian Virgo), appearing in the year 2 B.C., in the evening of 30 August (= 1 *Tišri*).⁵⁶ The second takes the star to be a conjunction of Jupiter and Venus, when Jupiter remained stationary in the abdomen

Bahn – als strahlender Herrscher in höchstmöglichen Glanze neben dem – infolge schmaler Ringstellung – ziemlich blassen Saturn”. See also p. 87.

⁵¹ Ferrari d’Occhieppo (1977) 57, 94 f.

⁵² Strobel is programmatic on p. 1000 f.

⁵³ Charlesworth, 963 f.; E. Stauffer, *Jesus. Gestalt und Geschichte* (Delp Taschenbuch) (1957) 34–6; R.A. Rosenberg, *Biblica* 53 (1972) 105–9.

⁵⁴ Sachs and Walker, 45.

⁵⁵ *Der Stern* (1977) 95; in his article in English in *Studies Finegan*, 48 f. Supported by Strobel, 1075 f., 1165 (drawings). “Bei dem Zodiakallicht handelt es sich um ein eigenartiges Helligkeitsphänomen am Abendhimmel, bedingt durch die Sonnenbestrahlung der interstellaren Materie. Dieser vor allem im Süden zur Äquatornähe hin auffallende Leuchtstreifen ließ die Planetenkonjunktion zu einem ungewöhnlichen Vorgang werden”. Critical is D. Hughes, *The Star of Bethlehem Mystery* (1979) 175 f.: zodiacal light lacks astrological significance. He is in favour of the triple conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter.

⁵⁶ Werner Papke, *Das Zeichen des Messias. Ein Wissenschaftler identifiziert den Stern von Bethlehem* (1995) 47–55, 104.

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of Virgo, which occurred again in the year 2 B.C., exactly on 25 December.⁵⁷ The latest article on the star identifies it as the Dog-Star (Sirius) in its heliacal rising on July 25th.⁵⁸

Birth in omina

For the Babylonians it was of prime importance to know what the future had in store for them. If something bad was coming up, apotropaic measures were taken by magical means. Almost everything had a predictive meaning: physiognomy, the lizard that runs over the wall (this in the series *Šumma ālu*), or dreams, of course. Man can purposefully look for portents or even deliberately provoke and organize them. The first, for example by inspecting the abnormalities of the liver of a young sheep and the second by pouring oil over water and observing the resulting configuration. We name all this "omens", *omina* (plural of Latin *omen*). An omen consists of two parts: the phenomenon is described in the first part, in our modern terminology, the *protasis*, while the second part, the *apodosis*, gives the forecast. The forecasts are of two types: public and personal. The public ones concern the commonwealth, including the king and his house; the private apodes are about the individual who requests an oracle. Astrological omina are almost exclusively public; others are mixed. Voluminous "handbooks" were composed and they are preserved in large quantities. This is particularly true of the liver, "extispicy" (Latin *exta* "entrails"). There is one handbook that deals with abnormal, malformed, births of humans and animals (*Šumma izbu*). Since the subject is birth we shall discuss that handbook in more detail later. Here, we will give a selection of forecasts on pregnancy and birth, taken from the handbooks. Some of them are "public" in that they affect the whole country.⁵⁹

There is one small philological problem: two words are used for bringing the foetus to term. The first is the verb *šullumu* "to bring to completion", the second is *šuklulu* "to bring to perfection". Does the latter word imply that the baby is healthy and beautiful?⁶⁰

Liver omina and similar omina

"If the Blinker is placed cross-wise and faces the Yoke, a woman who does not give birth will give birth; a canal which has not been (re)dug, will be (re)dug, its bank will have a settlement".⁶¹

"If the gall bladder has a bifurcation, the wife of the king will bear a male".⁶²

"If the Increase is like the stone of a bird (= ?), [the wife of a man] will bear a male".⁶³

"If the right kidney is (unusually) long and is approaching on the right side, she who does not give birth will give birth. If it is approaching on that right side but it is not dark,

⁵⁷ Ernest L. Martin, *The star that astonished the world* (1996) 59.

⁵⁸ O. Ricoux, "Les mages à l'aube du chien", in: R. Gyselen, *La science des cieux, sages, mages, astrologues* (= *Res Orientales* XII) (1999) 219-232, following *Calcidius*.

⁵⁹ An initial survey was given by A.L. Oppenheim, *Or NS* 5 (1936) 215 f.

⁶⁰ CAD Š/3 225a sub g, "to carry to term", gives very few references. Add some of those quoted below and 5 R 33 VIII 2 (Agum-kakrime).

⁶¹ YOS 10 17:40. *Naplastum*, "Blinker", and "Yoke" are parts of the liver.

⁶² YOS 10 11 V 12 f.

⁶³ U. Jeyes, *Old Babylonian Extispicy. Omen Texts in the British Museum* (1989) 137 no. 10:27-29.

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she will give birth and she will die".⁶⁴

"[If a Hole . . .], the full(y loaded) boat will sink; or: the pregnant woman will die in her giving birth".⁶⁵

"If to the left of the centre of the diaphragm, in its middle, flesh (shaped) like (a cluster of) *kikkilānu*-berries is situated, one covered with warts (*šullānu*) will be born".⁶⁶

These omina date to the Old Babylonian period. Words like Blinker (*naplastum*), Increase, or Yoke are technical terms for parts of the liver; below, we will meet with expressions like Palace and Finger. In most cases, the surrounding forecasts are not on pregnancy or birth. One text gives a series of four unique liver omina on pregnancy resulting from illicit sexual contacts:⁶⁷

"If in the Palace of the Finger two Designs are drawn together and between them lies a Cross(-shaped mark), the high priestess will permit intercourse *per anum* in order to avoid her becoming pregnant.

If, ditto, and between them lies a Hole, the wife of a man will again and again send word to her secret lover: 'Kill my husband and marry me!'

If, ditto, and between them a Fissure is open, the wife of a man has become pregnant by another (man).

If, ditto, and between them lies the (mark) Request, the wife of a man has become pregnant by another (man) and she will constantly pray to Ištar while looking at her husband all the time: 'I shall what is inside my belly make look like my husband'".

It is rare to discover a rational relation between protasis and apodosis, but here the causality seems to be clear: when the protasis describes something "in between", it indicates the severing of a normal relationship. This principle is not as clear in the first omen as it is in the subsequent ones; the background of the first apodosis is that the high priestess is not supposed to bear children. Other omina run like this: "The temple head / a frequent visitor to the temple / will repeatedly have intercourse with the high priestess";⁶⁸ this was in omina a standard example of an abomination. The Hole and the Fissure in the following omina are easier to understand: they mark the separation between husband and wife and a secret lover steps in.⁶⁹ The Request-mark foretells that the woman will request that her child looks like her husband. The subject of omina with a Request in the protasis often means that a request will be made according to the apodosis.⁷⁰ She looks intently at her husband because she hopes that, at the very moment of concentrated watching, the foetus will assume his features. We shall discuss the belief about "maternal imagination" later.⁷¹

Physiognomic omina

"If (on his forehead) there is the (cuneiform) sign TAB, var. UB, she who does not give

⁶⁴ YOS 10 41:69–71.

⁶⁵ U. Jeyes, 97 no. 1:6 (*eleppum malītum iṭebbu u ērītum ina alādiša imāt*).

⁶⁶ U. Jeyes, 158 no. 14 rev. 6.

⁶⁷ BRM 4 12:31–37; dupl. A. Boissier, DA 220 K. 4030. For the features of the liver, see I. Starr, SAA IV (1990) p. LII, LV.

⁶⁸ Cited in CAD N/1 198a, *nāku* I/3. "High priestess" is NIN.DINGIR.RA, often read *entu* in Akkadian.

⁶⁹ Holes in the liver are bad; I. Starr, *The rituals of the diviner* (1983) 99 f.

⁷⁰ J. Nougayrol, RA 40 (1945–6) 76.

⁷¹ Chapter VI, p. 156. Note the collection of omina on a bad woman in SpbTU IV 149 IV 14–22 (physiognomic).

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birth will give birth, she who does not give birth easily will give birth easily".⁷²

In chapter II, on (In)fertility, we quoted passages from a physiognomic text where the appearance of a woman's breasts and navel were used to predict her ability to get children or to bring them to term (*šullumu*) (p. 34).

Medical omina

There is a Diagnostic Handbook in which symptoms of the patient are described in the protasis, and his prospects are given in the apodosis. Only the omina on the future of pregnant women are relevant here. The outer appearance and behaviour of the women are indications of how she and her foetus will fare in the remaining months, and also, whether a boy or a girl will be born. Chapter VIII with a complete translation is devoted to this. Here one example may suffice: "If a fertile woman's feet are small: she is pregnant and is coming to term" (99).

Flour / incense omina

"If I strew seven heaps of flour / incense and the middle one sticks out, a pregnant woman will not live 'in' her foetus".⁷³

Malformed births

"If a woman gives birth, and (the child) has both a penis and a vulva, the land will experience unhappiness; a pregnant woman together with her unborn child will die.

If a woman gives birth, and (the child) has neither vulva nor testicles, pregnant women will miscarry".⁷⁴

Šumma ālu

"If the foundations of a house are laid in month V, that house will have sons".⁷⁵

"[If a gecko ...] climbs [upon a woman (?)], that woman will become pregnant, give birth, and be happy".⁷⁶

"If a skink walks to and fro on a pregnant woman, that woman will give birth to a male".⁷⁷

Dreams

The Assyrian Dream Book has a section on dreams of urinating. It is both striking and telling that only in this part of the Dream Book forecasts about a man's progeny occur so often. Urine and offspring are associated. We give a few examples.⁷⁸

⁷² TBP 6 rev. 32 (NU Ù.TU Ù.TU NU SI.SÁ SI.[SÁ]). – The same apodosis in the liver omen CT 30 30 K. 1454:5, dupl. Boissier, DA 96:25 (*la a-lit-ti ul-lad la muš-te-šir-tú uš-te-šir*) (protasis broken off).

⁷³ J. Nougayrol, Or NS 32 (1963) 384:34–5, (34) DIŠ 7 ZÍD <*as-ru-uq*>-ma qá-ab-lu iš-te-eh e-ri-tu i-na ša (35) *li-bi-ša ú-ul i-ba-lu-uṭ* (OB). CAD reads KU or qú<*trinnu*> "incense" instead of ZÍD "flour". "In her foetus" does not mean "together with", cf. Nougayrol, 386 note 1 (the same problem in TDP 206:77, cf. 82, 104).

⁷⁴ E. Leichty, *The omen series Šumma izbu* (1970) 61, Tablet III 70–71.

⁷⁵ CT 38 10 Tablet V 8; with R. Labat, *Calendrier* 58 § 1:6.

⁷⁶ R. Borger, BiOr 11 (1954) 88:30, dupl. CT 38 41:30.

⁷⁷ CT 38 43 Tablet XXXI 71; coll. S. Moren, Dissertation, 325 (UGU SAL.PEŠ₄ DU.DU-*ak*). The next line offers: "If a skink (*šakkadirru*) walks to and fro on a virgin, an important man will marry that woman".

⁷⁸ A.L. Oppenheim, *The interpretation of dreams in the Ancient Near East* (1956) 265, 310. We give Tablet VII lines I x+17–18, II x+ 10–12, I x+13–16. See also J. Bottéro, KTEMA 7 (1982) 12, reprinted in his

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“If he urinates against the wall, and on [...], he will have sons”.

“If he directs his urine towards the sky, the son of this man whom he will beget will become important; his (own) days will be short”.

“If his urine flows in front of his penis and he bows down in front of his urine, he will beget a son and (the son) will exercise kingship”.

The second and third omen remind one of a dream seen by a Median king, as told by Herodotus: “Astyages had a daughter called Mandane, and he dreamed one night that she urinated in such enormous quantities that it filled his city and swamped the whole of Asia. He told his dream to the Magi, whose business it was to interpret such things, and was much alarmed by what they said it meant. Consequently when Mandane was old enough to marry, he did not give her to some Mede of suitable rank, but was induced by his fear of the dream’s significance to marry her to a Persian named Cambyses, a man he knew to be of good family and quiet habits – though he considered him much below a Mede even of middle rank” (*Hist.* I 107; translation by A. de Sélincourt). After she had been married to this Cambyses, Astyages dreamed that a vine grew from his daughter’s private parts and spread over Asia, and the Magi said that her son would usurp the throne. Cyrus was born and eventually he indeed became the ruler of Medians and Persians.

The Moon

“If (an eclipse) occurs on the 21th day of month III and sets during its eclipse, the pregnant women will . . . their foetuses”.⁷⁹

“If (an eclipse) occurs on the 14th, 15th, 16th, 20th day of month IV and sets during its eclipse, there will be fish produce in the sea, the pregnant women will bring their foetuses to perfection; Mars will set and destroy the herds”.⁸⁰

“If an eclipse occurs on the 16th day (of month IV), pregnant women will not carry their foetuses full term”.⁸¹

“If an eclipse occurs on the 20th day (of month VII), there will be an epidemic of the *li’bu* disease in the land; pregnant women will not carry their foetuses full term”.⁸²

“If the 16th day (of month V), pregnant women will miscarry”.⁸³

Now some quotations from astrological handbooks as they are quoted in astrological reports:

“If the moon is surrounded by a halo and the Pleiades stand in it, in that year, women will give birth to male children”.⁸⁴

Mésopotamie. L’écriture, la raison et les dieux (1987) 145 f.

⁷⁹ F. Rochberg-Halton, *Aspects of Babylonian celestial divination: the lunar eclipse tablets of Enūma Anu Enlil* (1988) 169, EAE Section III 6. Apodosis: SAL.PEŠ₄.MEŠ šá ŠÀ-ši-na ú-šad-ma-^a. Can we see a causative of the Aramaic word “to be alike” (*dmj*) in the verbal form? Below, in Chapter VI, we will show that in an ideal situation the children were exactly like their parents. Then, “the pregnant women will make their foetuses similar”. The ancient commentary seems to explain this word first as “to miscarry”, then as *šuklulu* “to bring to perfection”. See Rochberg-Halton, 169 note; Text 285 rev. 16 f.

⁸⁰ Ibidem, 170 EAE XIX Section III 7 (ŠU.DU₇.ME, dupls. ú-šak-[la-al]).

⁸¹ Ibidem, 238 EAE XXI § IV 3 (= ACh Sin XXXIII:23).

⁸² Ibidem, 243 EAE XXI § VII 4 (= ACh Sin XXXIII:52).

⁸³ Ibidem, 257 EAE XXII § V:3 (= ACh Sin XXXIV:25). The way of writing of this tablet has an Old Babylonian flavour; the same omen in RA 44 (1950) 117 AO. 12960:21 (from Qatna; Middle Babylonian), see now Rochberg-Halton, 272 rev. 5.

⁸⁴ SAA VIII 5 rev. 2-3; also 273 rev. 3-4, 529:3-4, 531:1-3. Variant in 376:6-7: “In month II pregnant

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“If the moon is surrounded by a halo, and Regulus stands in it, in that year pregnant women will give birth to male children”.⁸⁵

“If the moon is surrounded by a halo, and Scorpius stands in it, high priestesses will be made pregnant”.⁸⁶

The Sun

“If (there is a solar eclipse in month IX), day 16, pregnant women, when giving birth, will not bring to term their foetuses; the trade of the land will expand”.⁸⁷

Venus

“If Venus when rising is dark (*adāru*), grief; the women when giving birth will have great difficulties (*pašāqu* Š), [at that time] women will die”.⁸⁸

“If Venus has a dark corona, the women together with their foetuses will die. If Venus is dark on its right side, the women when giving birth will have great difficulties. If Venus is dark on its left side, the women when giving birth will have an easy delivery”.⁸⁹

“If Venus is seen in month XI and its right side is dotted with red spots, the pregnant women together with their foetuses will die”.⁹⁰

“If Venus (rises in month XII) and her right side is dotted with red, an evil wind will rise; pregnant women will die”.⁹¹

From astrological reports:

“[If] Venus wea[rs] a black crown, [(pregnant) women] will give birt[h to male child]ren”.⁹²

“If the Goat Star comes close to Cancer, there will be reconciliation and peace in the land; the gods will have mercy on the land; empty storage bins will become full; the harvest of the land will prosper; there will be recoveries from illness in the land; pregnant women will carry their foetuses to perfection; the great gods will abandon the sanctuaries of the land; the temples of the great gods will be restored. – The Goat Star is (equivalent to) Venus”.⁹³

It is remarkable that the so-called “astronomical diaries” for the year 248 B.C. record, “In that month, pregnant women died when giving birth and ...”.⁹⁴

Some information on Jewish lore is in order here. Although omnia are unknown, there were traditions about what one can expect after certain events. The Babylonian Talmud

women will give birth to male children”.

⁸⁵ SAA VIII 41 rev. 1–3 (with glosses); also 205:4–6, 278, 299:5–6. “In that year” omitted in 181:5–6, 301:7–8, 302 rev. 8–9, 494:5–6.

⁸⁶ SAA VIII 147 rev. 2–3 (NIN.DINGIR.RA.MEŠ *uš-tah-ḥa-a*); also 307, 480:7–8.

⁸⁷ ACh Šamaš IX 14 (K. 11293).

⁸⁸ ACh Suppl. II L Verso II 10–11 (K. 7629).

⁸⁹ ACh Suppl. II CXIX:22–24. For the last apodosis (SALMEŠ *ina Ù.TU SI.SÁ.MEŠ*), see also E. Reiner, BPO 2 (1981) 50 Text VIII:5.

⁹⁰ ACh Ishtar VI:24 (K. 42). The next line 25 comments on the obscure word *ši-pa*; see CAD Š/3 72 *šippu* “red spot”. It is only of Venus said that it is “dotted” (always with red; *sūma takpat*).

⁹¹ ACh Suppl. II LV:12 (82–5–22, 577a; collated CAD S 382b). End of apodosis also in ACh Ishtar I:68.

⁹² SAA VIII 51 rev. 1–2 (with glosses).

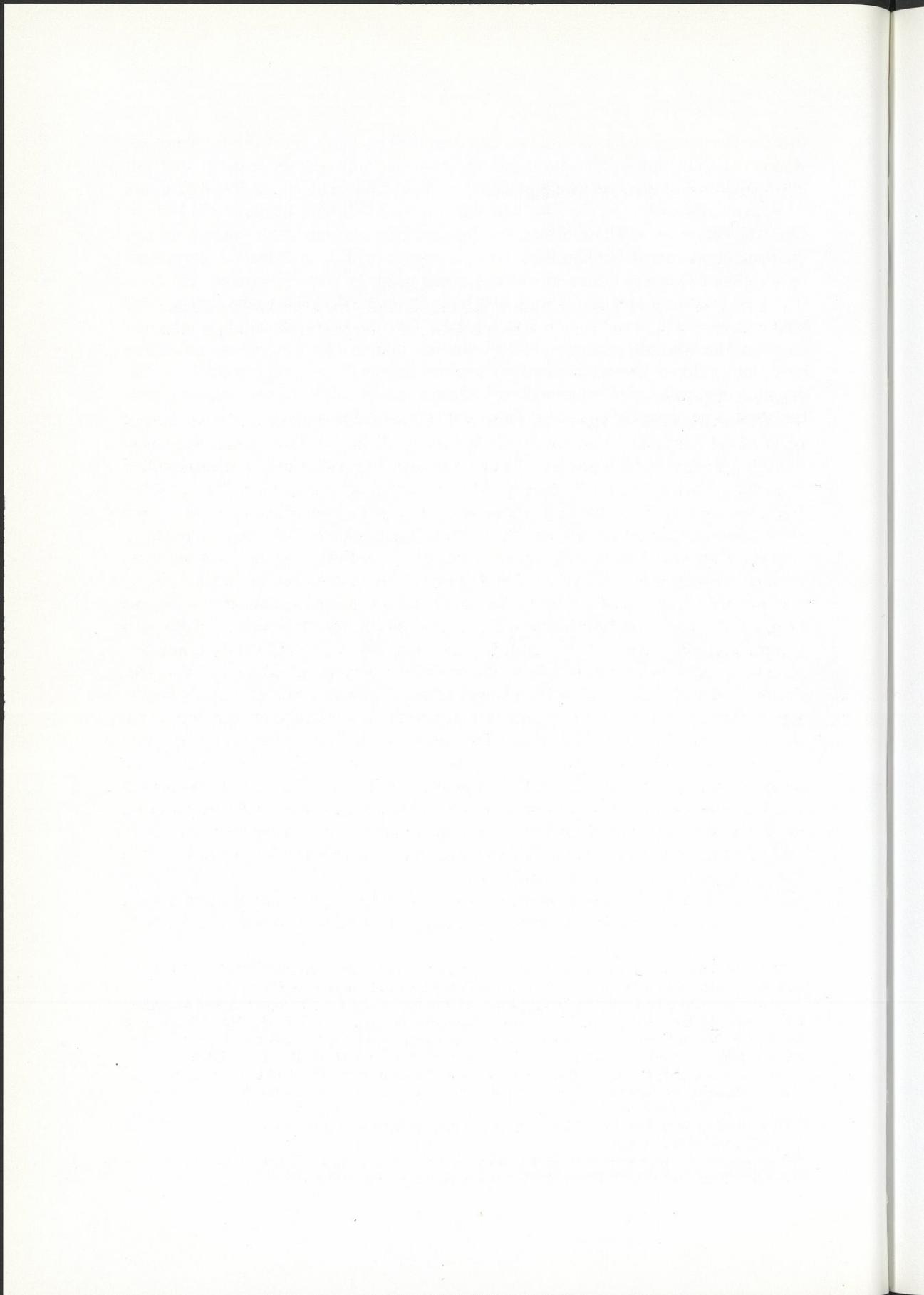
⁹³ SAA VIII 175 rev. 1–7.

⁹⁴ A. Sachs, H. Hunger, *Astronomical Diaries and related texts from Babylonia II* (1989) no. –248 rev. 4.

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lists the consequences for the children based on their mother's behaviour.⁹⁵ "A woman who couples in a mill will have epileptic children. One who couples on the ground will have children with long necks. [A pregnant woman] who treads on the blood of an ass will have scabby (?) children. One who eats mustard will have intemperate children. One who eats cress will have blear-eyed children. One who eats small fish in brine (?), will have children with blinking eyes. One who eats (a reddish medicinal) clay will have ugly children. One who drinks intoxicating liquor will have black (=ungainly) children. One who eats meat and drinks wine will have children of a robust constitution. One who eats eggs will have children with big eyes. One who eats fish will have graceful children. One who eats parsley will have beautiful children. One who eats coriander will have stout children. One who eats *ethrog* (a citrus fruit) will have fragrant children. The daughter of King Shapur, whose mother had eaten *ethrog* (while she was pregnant) with her, used to be presented before her father as his principal perfume".

⁹⁵ Ketubboth 60b-61a. An unexpected insertion in a discussion on the nutrition of suckling mothers.



Chapter V GIVING BIRTH

Birth in myths

There are myths which focus on birth in that they describe the birth that is the beginning of the history of man and the one which is to remain the primordial example for all of us.¹

Enki and Ninmah

The first myth, *Enki and Ninmah*, assigns to birth its position in the gradual development of mankind.² In the section on the Goddesses of Birth, we have already seen how according to this myth the goddess Nammu was helped by a number of assistants, called “wombs” (*Sensur, Sansur*). With the goddess of birth as her companion, Enki’s mother Nammu mixes in blood the clay from above the Apsû (= the primordial ocean), the seven assistants nip off the clay and she fashions bodies. Afterwards, they celebrate the results by drinking beer at which point Ninmah says to Enki: “On the form (me.dím) of man, whether it is good or bad, I will decree a fate that is good or bad, whichever way my heart turns” (54 f.). Ninmah then takes clay and models a number of imperfect beings, but in each case Enki is able to assign them an appropriate position in the human community; for example, the blind one became singer – if we understand the language.³ Enki then challenges Ninmah: “(Now) it is me who will create (dím) for you; and you, decree its fate at its birth” (82). Enki makes a “form” in whose inside is ... (?), and he says, “The semen made by the penis, poured into the inside of the woman, will make that woman give birth in her inside”. Clearly, he creates the first woman who is equipped to give birth.⁴ Before, there were only clay prototypes, but now the beings are given the means to multiply by themselves. Sexual procreation begins. This event demonstrates that Enki cannot do it alone, the expertise of the birth goddess Ninmah is indispensable. However, something terrible happens: the woman suffers a miscarriage when the baby is almost full-term.⁵ An elaborate description of the creature, named *Umul*, follows; the Sumerian is often hard to understand (88–91):

“The first one, *Umul*, its head is sick, its ... is sore, its eye is sore, its neck is sore, the throat is closed, the ribs are twisted. The lungs are sore, the inside is sore, the belly

¹ Cf. H. Heimpel, “Mythologie”, § 5.2 “Birth”, § 5.3 “Creation, including procreation”, RIA VIII/7–8 (1997) 546–7; “Creation of humans according to Atram-hasīs and Enki and Ninmah”, p. 558, fig. 5.

² Translations with discussion: C.A. Benito, *Enki and Ninmah, and Enki and the World Order*. Dissertation University of Pennsylvania (1969); Th. Jacobsen, *The harps that once ...* (1987) 151–166 (“The Birth of Man”); J. Bottéro, S.N. Kramer, *Lorsque les dieux faisaient le monde* (1989) 188–198; S.N. Kramer, J. Maier, *Myths of Enki, the crafty god* (1987) 31–37, 211–215; W.H.Ph. Römer, TUAT III/3 (1993) 386–401.

³ Line 63, giš.nu₁₁.gi₄.gi₄ lú.u₆ e igi.[dug.a.ni.ta]. The first element means “bereft of light”; compare igi.gi₄ “blind”, said of an ox in Nikolski II 514:3 (igi.bi ba.gi₄), and of a wife in the Laws of Lipit-Ištar, § 28, M. Civil, *Studies B. Landsberger* (1965) 2 (igi.ni ba.ab.gi₄).

⁴ Discovered by Anne D. Kilmer, “Speculations on *Umul*, the First Baby”, in *Kramer Anniversary Volume* (= AOAT 25) (1976) 265–270.

⁵ Line 87, munus.bi u₄.bi [nu.sù].ga.ăš x KA šà.ba i.in.ăb (var. [ba.r]a.an.ă). Römer supplies [nu.sù].ga.ăš and translates this as “um seine Tage [nicht voll] zu machen” (p. 396).

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is sore. Its hand is bound to the head, it does not bring bread to his mouth, the back . . . Its side is weak, its feet are weak, it does not walk on the field”.

Ninmah approaches the creature and indeed, it cannot do anything: “She asked him (something) and he did not know to speak; she brought him bread to eat and he did not stretch out his hand to it; she laid down a . . . and he could not lie. When standing, he could not sit, he could not lie down, he could not . . ., he could not eat bread” (96–99). She concludes, “The man that you made with your hands, is neither a living nor a dead man; I cannot take care of it”. Enki now reminds her how he had succeeded in taking care of her defective beings. Unfortunately, after this conversation there is a long section that has not been preserved and when the text becomes readable again, Ninmah reproaches Enki for something that had happened in the past. His answer, which concludes this myth, is full of appreciation for her but its full meaning remains obscure to us. One expects that Ninmah now takes it upon herself to bring an unborn baby to full term, causing a healthy baby to be born. This is what Th. Jacobsen seems to mean by these words: “He tells her to put Udmu’ul [= Umul] down off her lap and points out what is wrong with him is precisely that he lacked what only she could contribute. He will serve, thus, as a reminder of the need of her work during gestation whenever Enki’s member is praised”. The following translation of these lines follows this interpretation (129–134):⁶

“Enki replied to it, to Ninmah: Who can alter a word coming from your mouth? (But) hand (down) Umul clasped to your bosom from your lap! He certainly is lacking your work, Ninmah; was born to me incomplete, who could challenge that? May men to the end of days in awe pay respect to him. Let now my penis be praised, and be a reminder to you!”

In this last line, Enki praises his penis which is in line with his sexual prowess;⁷ here, its merit is to have initiated sexual propagation.

Who is Umul? To some scholars the description of his features and defects has suggested an old man. A better explanation can be based on his name, interpreted as “My day is far off”, i.e., the day of death is far off. Ann Kilmer interpreted Umul as a baby and she adds that the first baby probably also was the hero of the Deluge in Sumerian tradition. The lurid depiction of Umul does not fit the description of a baby.⁸ As we have already indicated, our opinion differs slightly from Kilmer – we propose that Umul is a foetus about to be born.

Enki and the World Order

In the Sumerian myth *Enki and the World Order* we have an interesting description of the creation and the organisation of the world (?) by Enki, god of wisdom. He gives the various gods their specific roles but when he has completed his task of providing for the world and mankind, the goddess Inanna protests because she feels neglected. Five other goddesses were given their assignments, but she has none. Enki answers that she

⁶ The difficult but important line is 132, ^dnin.mah kin.gá.zu hé.bí.lá.lá šu.nu.du₇ ma.dfb a.ba.am sag mu.un.gá.gá. Römer: “Ninmach, dein Werk ist fürwahr in Bezug darauf (?) mangelhaft: Als Unvollkommener ist er mir geboren; wer wird dagegen angehen?”

⁷ J.S. Cooper, “Enki’s member: eros and irrigation in Sumerian literature”, *Studies Å.W. Sjöberg* (1989) 87–89.

⁸ Bottéro and Kramer, 197; Jacobsen, 153.

should be proud of herself because of her powers and deeds. One of those five goddesses interests us, the goddess of birth, Aruru (Nintu), of whom Inanna complains:⁹

“Aruru, the sister of Enlil, Nintu, the Lady of Birth, she has received the pure brick of birthgiving, sign of her office as *en*-priestess, she took with her the reed that cuts off the (umbilical) cord, the stone *imman*, her leeks. She has received the greenish lapis lazuli (vessel) for the afterbirth, she took with her the pure, consecrated vessel *ala*. She certainly is the midwife of the land”.

A woman squatted on a brick when delivering;¹⁰ we shall return to this in a section devoted to the brick of birth. Indeed, the city of the birth goddess, Kesh, is named “Kesh, the brick of birthgiving, the temple”.¹¹ We can deduce from this passage and parallels that the umbilical cord was cut by a sharp reed. In an incantation to Utu we read of the mother goddess: “Utu, without you Ninmah, the lady who creates everything, who cuts the navel cord, could not decide the fate for mankind”.¹² Literary passages tell us that other female goddesses also knew how to use this reed. Thus, the goddess of medicine, Ninisina, is able “to deal rightly with the pot of the deposited afterbirth, to cut the cord and to determine the fate”.¹³ We will say more about this in the section Cutting the umbilical cord.

Not much can be said on the stone *im.ma.an*, in Akkadian *immanakku* or *amnakku*. It was an ingredient in glass making – probably a silicate which was pounded. An incantation for a man who has been seized by a ghost runs as follows: “Ea created the *Kirduh* (=?). Take the *immanakku*; let the stone curse him, let the stone overturn him, let the stone . . . him, let the stone efface him”.¹⁴ In a list of medicinal stones or amulets, the stone *im.m[a.an]* seems to come right after the birth stone *ittamir*.¹⁵ In the ancient world the only important activity following the cutting of the umbilical cord was rinsing the baby with salt. Soap is made from the alkali plant, also used in glassmaking; we learn from records of Sumerian laundries that they used a white clay (*im*) together with alkali soap.¹⁶ Does the reference to the stone *imman* indicate a type of soap?

⁹ Lines 393–400 in the first edition; now lines 394–401. Translations with discussion: A. Falkenstein, ZA 56 (1964) 90, 111; Benito, 108 f., 156 f.; Th. Jacobsen, Or NS 42 (1973) 289 f.; Bottéro and Kramer, 178 f.; Kramer and Maier, 54, 221; Römer, 414 f.

¹⁰ Line 395, *sig₄.tu.tu.kù*. The first sign in the Jena manuscript is damaged but its beginning fits *sig₄* (why *tu*?)¹⁷; we assume that it is fully preserved in the unpublished manuscript V (= N 6288).

¹¹ R.D. Biggs, ZA 61 (1971) 195 f. (*kèš sig₄.tu.tu*) (Early Sumerian). Jacobsen translates the entire passage as follows: “Kesh! brick (structure) causing birthgiving, house (which is) a productive (gùn) young dove – Praise be Mother Nintu(r)!”; Or NS 42 (1973) 288. Cf. *é.kèš sig₄.zu tu.tu.zu* in line 94 of the later Temple Hymns (Biggs, note 13).

¹² B. Alster, ASJ 13 (1991) 47, 73 line 57. Only here, the word “navel” (*li*; cf. *li.dur* = *abunnatu*) is explicitly given (*gi.li ku₅.ku₅.da*). This will remove Sjöberg’s last doubt (AfO 24 43b). Note *gi.duru₅ ku₅.du*, B. Alster, JNES 35 (1976) 264 V 2; otherwise M. Civil, *Aula Orientalis* 5 (1987) 27 f.

¹³ ŠRT 6 III 2, after Jacobsen, 290 note 59; see also W.H.Ph. Römer, *Festschrift W. von Soden* (= AOAT 1) (1969) 295 f. (line 75).

¹⁴ BAM 5 503 I 22–23 (= AMT 33,1); cf. CAD N/2 139b; S 70b. Duplicate BAM 506:22–23 is slightly different; it adds “may the stone tear him out”. The *NA₄ lis-pi-šú* (23), not translated, allows us to read this in 503 I 22, end. Not in the dictionaries. Compare this incantation with that of 503 II 6, “[Ea cre]ated the *sinduh*”.

¹⁵ STT I 108:36, “The appearance of the stone: it is like mud (*terutu*) of a river but is flecked with stone (*NA₄ tukkup*): *NA₄ IM.M[A.AN]* is its name”.

¹⁶ H. Waetzoldt, *Untersuchungen zur neusumerischen Textilindustrie* (1972) 173. – Or is *im.ma.an* a sand after all? A report about Libyan customs: “Die Nabelschnur wird von der Hebamme entweder durchgebissen oder mit einem Messer durchschnitten. Sie wird dabei sehr lang gelassen und mit einem Band aus dem nicht

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The use of leeks (*garaš*) remains a mystery. The afterbirth and its disposal will be discussed later. The vessel *ala* was “consecrated” according to the interpretation of Jacobsen; the Sumerian literally means “instructed”.¹⁷ It may have contained holy water, consecrated by a magical formula, and was to be used to wash the mother or baby, or for a lustration rite.

Hymn to Ninisina

A passage not found in a myth but taken from a Sumerian hymn to Ninisina, goddess of medicine, says that one task of the goddess is “to establish fertility for thousands of girls; to deal rightly with the pot of the deposited afterbirth, to cut the (umbilical) cord by a reed, to determine the fate; to put the hands on the door of the (chapel) Nigar, to . . . a malformed birth; the human child, after it has been received in the lap: to make it cry loudly, to put the belly downwards, to turn it upside down, to . . . the office of nu.gig-priestess”¹⁸ The first lines are more or less traditional and clear. The line about the chapel Nigar and the malformed births fits Jacobsen’s idea that this chapel was “a cemetery for still-born or premature babies and as a depository for afterbirths”. The goddesses Inanna and Ninisina reside in this chapel (as far as we know), not the goddess of birth.¹⁹ Following the line on the disposal of dead births, the hymn returns to the healthy baby who is made to cry by turning it upside down.²⁰ All this is the office of a priestess whose title nu.gig is in Akkadian *qadištu*. We will see later that this woman indeed acted as midwife or wet-nurse.

Atram-ħasīs

At the beginning of the Old Babylonian myth *Atram-ħasīs* myth, written in Akkadian, the gods wrestle with the problem that they had to “bear the hard work, to carry out the corvée” on earth all by themselves. The solution is the creation of man to take over the toil. To this end, a god was slaughtered, and “with his flesh and blood Nintu mixed clay”, as had been planned, “so that god and man be mixed together in clay” (I 212 f.,

sterilen Haar der Mutter unterbunden. In Ermangelung von Puder werden die Nabelschnur und der Nabel mit Sand bestreut. Die Nabelschnur stellt sich oft nach wenigen Tagen als ein stinkender schwarzer Strang dar”. W. Föllmer, in W. Schiefenhöfel, *Gebären – Ethnomedizinische Perspektiven und neue Wege* (3. Auflage, 1995) 140.

¹⁷ Line 399, a.lá.kù.na.ri.ga.ni, with Jacobsen, *Or NS* 42 (1973) 290 note 60. Note that Jacobsen opens his article with Gudea Statue A, a dedication of “the holy (copper) water pail” to the goddess of birth, Ninhursaga. Jacobsen identified this pail (urudu.alal) with our vessel *alá* which is wrong: the signs are now read DUB.ŠEN (REC 429), not a vessel for water. Cf. P. Steinkeller, *Oriens Antiquus* 20 (1981) 244; not translated by H. Steible, *FAOS* 9/2 (1991) 4 note 5.

¹⁸ ŠRT 6 III 1–6, dupl. 7:11–17, with S.N. Kramer, *ZA* 52 (1957) 79 f. (collations); W.H.Ph. Römer, *Festschrift W. von Soden* (1969) 296 (lines “74–79”); Th. Jacobsen, *Or NS* 42 (1973) 290 n. 59; J.G. Westenholz, *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989) 259.

¹⁹ This and more in our discussion of *kūbu*, p. 29 Line 3: giš.ig NIGÌN.GAR.ra.ke₄ šu ús.ù.dè (var. DI ús.ù.dè) UM.ki.ra.ra.dè. “To put the hands on the door” (giš.ig šu ús.ù.dè, var. DI ús.ù.dè) means “to open”, see Römer, 296, and TCS III 93a. Römer discovered that UM.ki.ra.ra is Akkadian *izbu* (not *ezbu* as the dictionaries have it).

²⁰ Line 5 (= Römer 78), šà ki.še gá.gá.dè sag šu.bal.aka.dè. This interpretation was suggested to me by Th.J.H. Krispijn (Leiden); see p. 177. M. Civil, *JCS* 28 (1976) 79 f. (šu-bal, šu-bal-ak), does not discuss this passage. – For úr.ra da an.ri.ri (4), cf. J. van Dijk, *Acta Orientalia* 28 (1964) 51 (da ri = *hatānu* “prendre sous sa protection” an unreliable late interpretation).

225 f.). The clay received a “spirit (of the dead)” (*etemmu*) and all gods spat their spittle on the clay. Then the mother goddess – now named Mami – exclaims:²¹

You told me to do a work and I brought it to completion;
 you slaughtered a god together with his mentality (*tēmu*).
 I have removed your heavy hard work,
 I have imposed your corvée on man.
 You have presented mankind with the call (to work) (*rīgmu*).
 I have loosened the ring, I have restored the original situation.

The reaction of the gods shows how much they appreciated her work:²²

They heard this speech of hers,
 they had returned to the original situation and they kissed her feet.
 “Previously, we used to call you Mami,
 now, let your name be Mistress of All of the Gods”.

This pronouncement vests her with the power to do her formative work with the clay. But she cannot do this well without the help of god Ea (= Enki):²³

They entered the House of Destiny,
 the Prince Ea, the *sage-femme* Mama.
 While the Wombs were gathered,
 he was treading the clay before her.
 She was applying the incantation formula –
 Ea, sitting before her, was making her recite it.

The following passage has been preserved in two manuscripts from the library of Assurbanipal, of the much later Assyrian period:²⁴

²¹ W.G. Lambert, A.R. Millard, *Atra-hasīs. The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (1969) 58 ff., Tablet I 237–243. Note the new edition by W. von Soden, ZA 68 (1978) 66 (ms. A), 92 (ms. P), and W. von Soden, TUAT III/4 (1994) 624. More new translations: Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia* (1989) 16; J. Bottéro, S.N. Kramer, *Lorsque les dieux faisaient le monde* (1989) 538; B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* I (1996) 168. Notes on these lines: the verb in 242 is *šahādu*, a West-Semitic word (W. von Soden); *rīgmu* is the call to do corvée (not: “complaints”) (M. Stol); *anduraru* in 243 is the situation of leisure before the gods had to work on the earth; see D. Charpin, AfO 34 (1987) 37 f.

²² Lambert, Millard, *Atra-hasīs* 60 Tablet I 244–247. The new name is in Akkadian *Be-le-[et] ka-la i-li*. Note that this passage has been imitated in SB Anzū: W.W. Hallo, W.L. Moran, JCS 31 (1979) 88 Tablet I, III 122 f. (name *Bēlet kulla[ti]*).

²³ Lambert, Millard, 60 Tablet I 249–254. Notes: in the section on midwives, we will explain *erīštu* (250) later as “wise woman”, “midwife”. W. von Soden reads in 252 *i-ka-ab-ba-sa-am-ma iħ-ri-ša* (Or NS 38 [1969] 425 n. 1), verb *ħarāšu* “im Kindbett liegen”, but has problems with its subject (see also his translation in ZA 68 92). We prefer *ma-ah-ri-ša* (Lambert, Millard). The cooperation between Ea and Mami is a theological issue; see W.G. Lambert in *Etudes Paul Garelli* (1991) 412 f.

²⁴ Lambert, Millard, *Atra-hasīs* 60 f. For manuscript P, they continue the lines-count of the Old Babylonian main manuscript A, Tablet I 255–260 (= CT 46 13 obv. 17–22). Manuscript S is CT 15 49 IV 3–7, completed by the new fragment K 10097, see Lambert, Millard, p. xi–xii. B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* I (1996) 190, translates this “Late Assyrian version” separately. Notes: “She spat spittle on her clay” only in ms. S, Lambert, Millard, p. xii K 10097+ III 4. Th. Jacobsen, Or NS 42 (1973) 291 note 67, reads in 7 (see p. xi) *lu-ṭa-ap-pa-ri* which we follow (not seen by B.R. Foster). The *luṭū* is a knife in the form of a sharp reed; see now J.-R. Kupper, ARMT 22/2 p. 617 ad no. 322:38, GIR.GI.ZU UD.KA.BAR; also Ph. Talon, ARMT 24 85:13

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After she had completed her incantation,
she spat spittle on her clay.
She pinched off fourteen lumps,
seven she put to the right,
seven she put to the left;
between them she laid the brick.
The reed-sliver of the cane-brake, cutter of the umbilical (cord), she opened.
While the experted *sage-femmes* are gathered,
the seven and seven Wombs,
seven (of them) produce (?) males,
seven (of them) produce (?) females.
While the Womb is creating destiny,
each of the two (groups) veils, they (?),
each of the two (groups) veils (?) before her;
Mami is drawing the blueprint of mankind.

Unlike in other Mesopotamian myths about the creation of man, in this myth attention is paid to the two sexes. The assistants of the mother goddess, the “Wombs”, mould two groups of seven. These first men and women will multiply and quickly breed the many workers needed by the gods.²⁵ The brick in between is the brick of birth to which we shall return. The end of this passage is not easy to translate. It jumps into the present form. The verbal forms are obscure: instead of “seven (of them) produce (?) males / females” one also can translate “seven (of them) make beautiful males / females” (verb *banū* D). In the next passage, the verb means “to wear a crown / veil” (*kullulu*). Does this refer to the head-gear of midwives? Or does the veiling refer to future marriage of the children? One could also be tempted to correct the passage, reading “they bring to perfection” the foetuses (*šuklulu*). Anyhow, the text must be corrupted in one or more places because the “they” at the end of line 12 makes no sense.

The blueprint for mankind (*uṣurāte ša nīši*) follows in the next passage:

In the house of the child-bearing woman in confinement (*ālitti harišti*),
let the brick be laid, seven days.
Let Dingirmah be honoured, the *sage-femme* Mami,
let the midwife rejoice in the house of she in confinement.
Whenever a child-bearing woman will give birth,
let the mother make . . . a baby by herself.
A male . . .

with note; 92:11, 213:7; GÍR.ZU UD.KA.[BAR], ARM 7 242:1–2 with D. Charpin, MARI 2 (1983) 95. For lines 8–21, our only source is CT 15 49 IV. The translation “the experted *sage-femmes*” (*er-še-te mu-te-ti*) (8) takes *erištu* as substantive, “midwife”. The idea that the veiling in 12 f. foretells marriage, is Foster’s. Is there a verb *kullulu* “to pair”, cf. *kilallān* “both”?

²⁵ The Bible speaks of the creation of the woman Eve out of Adam’s rib. Scholars saw in this “rib” a word play, each drawing on his own language: V. Scheil and S.N. Kramer pointed out that Sumerian *ti* means both “rib” and “life”; H. Goedicke adduces Egyptian *imw* “rib” and “clay”. See S.N. Kramer, *History begins at Sumer* (1956) Chapter 19, “The first Biblical parallels”; H. Goedicke, “Adam’s rib”, in A. Kort, S. Morschauer, *Biblical and related studies presented to Samuel Ivry* (1985) 73–76 (he is not aware of the other theory).

The remainder is broken and after a lacuna the Old Babylonian text becomes readable again. A modern scholar assumes that “the moulded clay figurines spent a gestation period of nine months in some kind of womb”; the continuation shows that they were born in the tenth month.²⁶ However, the text picks up again with remarks about a man and a woman making love, followed by the birth of a child. We stress that the fourteen lumps of clay is known only from late manuscripts and it is possible that the myth was adapted to the ritual purposes of laying the brick of birth.

We now turn to the continuation of the text, attested in Old Babylonian manuscripts.²⁷ A man and a woman make love and the goddess of birth supervises the coming of the child. This was the first couple.²⁸ The first half runs as follows.

..... her breast.
A beard [was seen on] the cheek of the young man,
in [garden]s and on the street, wife and husband choose each other.
While the Wombs were gathered,
Nintu was [sitting], she counts the months.
[In the House] of Destinies they called the tenth month;
the tenth month arrived and she slipped into (?) the *palū*, opened the membranes.
While her face was beaming and full of joy,
her head covered, she performed the midwifery,
she girded her loins, she blesses.
She drew (a pattern of) flour, then she laid the brick.

The mother goddess is sitting and counts the months. Counting the months for the future mother is a well known *topos* in Hittite and Ugaritic myths.²⁹ As we have seen above, ten months pregnancy is a well known alternative expression for nine months. The line “and the tenth month arrived and she slipped into (?) the *palū*, opened the membranes” contains unsurmountable problems. We cannot read the first verbal form, and we do not know what *palū* means: a garment, or a stick? If it is a stick, she opens the membranes, that is to say, the womb, with it.³⁰ The word “membranes” (*siliṭu*) normally means “afterbirth”. In the section on the midwife we will make some remarks on puncturing the amniotic sac by the midwife. When we read in a later line “she girded her loins, she blesses”, it appears at first glance that the midwife girds herself and pronounces a

²⁶ W.G. Lambert, JSS 13 (1968) 105.

²⁷ Lambert, Millard, *Atra-hasīs* p. 62 Tablet I 271 (= CT 46 IV 1'; ms. E). We first translate lines 271–288. See for the following W. von Soden, ZA 68 (1978) 66 E IV 1; TUAT III/4 (1994) 625 f.; C. Wilcke in: E.W. Müller, *Geschlechtsreife und Legitimation zur Zeugung* (1985) 295–8; B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* I (1996) 169.

²⁸ Stressed by W. von Soden, *Mésopotamie et Elam* (= CRRAI 36) (1991) 49 f.

²⁹ W.L. Moran in *Studies Erica Reiner* (1987) 250.

³⁰ Line 282, *x-lu-up pa-le-e si-li-tam ip-te* (ms. A. CT 46 1 VI 2 with new copies by Lambert, *Atra-hasīs* plate (11), Or NS 40 [1971] 98, D; Wilcke, 296; ms. E, CT 46 4 IV 12). W. von Soden retained his *iq-lu-up* “da schälte sie die Stangen ab”; see Or NS 38 (1969) 425 f. note; 39 (1970) 314; 40 (1971) 100 ad D. Th. Jacobsen, Or NS 42 (1973) 290 note 63: *「hu-lu-up pa-le-e* “the insertion of the *palū*”, according to him a pointed implement like a spindle (Sumerian *bala*). In our translation we followed Wilcke, 297 note 123, end (*ih-lu-up palē*), although *ih* is by no means certain. The word *palū* is one of the royal attributes, possibly a garment, in En. Eliš IV 29 (GIŠ.PA GIŠ.GU.ZA u BAL-a); also in omina; see J. Krecher, RIA V/1–2 (1976) 111 f.; H. Waetzoldt, RIA VI/1–2 (1980) 26 § 10e; CAD Š/2 82b (“mantle”). Jacobsen’s opinion “the insertion of the *palū* (a sharp stick?)”, remains attractive.

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blessing for the future mother. However, it is possible that she girds the woman in labour with a string of amulet stones which she blesses. We know of such stones around the hips of a woman who does not give birth easily, and a text says that the god Ninurta “blessed” specific amulet stones.³¹ Nothing can be said about the “drawing of flour”, it must have functioned as a magical circle.

Now Nintu proudly exclaims:³²

“I have created myself, my hands have made (it),
let the midwife rejoice in the house of the “sacred” woman!
Where a child-bearing woman will give birth,
the mother of the baby will . . . herself,
let the brick be laid nine days;
let the Womb Nintu (var.: Bēlet-ilī) be honoured!”

This must be the original version that was modified in the Assyrian version. The “sacred” woman (*qadištu*) is a priestess who had children and had much to do with childbirth and breast-feeding.³³ The scribe of the Assyrian version no longer understood this meaning of “the sacred woman” and offers simply “the house of the woman in confinement (*harištu*)”. The “house”, or “room”, suggests that the delivery takes place in a special room. We have no further evidence for this form of isolation, so well-known in Egypt.³⁴ The verbal form rendered by dots is obscure; the meaning was already dark to the Assyrian scribe who gave another interpretation.³⁵ One surmises that the reference to

³¹ Line 286, [q]á-ab-li-ša i-te-zi-iḥ i-ka-ar-ra-ab. We admit that *rakāsu* would be a better verb than *ezēhu*, but the language in our text is poetry. Stones on the hips: NA₄.MEŠ MURUB₄.MEŠ šá SAL.NU.SLSA (*la mušteširtu*), KAR 223:5. Ninurta’s blessing: PAP 30 NA₄.MEŠ šá ^dNIN.URTA *ik-ru-ub-šú-nu-ti*, CT 51 88 rev. 4.

³² Lambert, Millard, p. 62–4, Tablet I 289–295.

³³ An attractive suggestion by Th. Jacobsen is offered apud W.L. Moran, *Biblica* 52 (1971) 58 note 3: in this passage *qadištu* means “the mother after childbirth”, considered to be “the tabooed one” (*qadšu* means “holy”). In Jacobsen’s own words: “The use of *qadištum* here has clearly overtones of ‘sacred’, ‘set apart’, ‘taboo’, and it must seem likely that the woman after birth was considered surrounded by dangerous powers, a belief well attested to in folklore elsewhere”; Or NS 42 (1973) 292 note 73. – This meaning would fit only our passage.

³⁴ *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* art. “Geburtshaus”; R.M. and J.J. Janssen, *Growing up in ancient Egypt* (1990) 4–7.

³⁵ Lines 292–3, *um-mi še-er-ri ú-ha-[ar]-ru-ú* (and vars.) *ra-ma-an-ša*; in the Assyrian version *lu-har-ri-šá* (19) (CT 46 I VI 12–13; 4 IV 22; 13 rev. 5; AFO 27 75 K. 17752; cf. CAD Š/2 320a). Interpretations: (1) *hurrú* “to cut off, severe” (a guess). “And the mother of the babe severs herself” (Lambert, Millard); (2) *erú* V D “entblößen”; hier offenbar die Spezialbedeutung “(Kind) entbinden”. “Wo immer eine Gebärende gebiert, eine Mutter von Kindern selbst entbindet” (W. von Soden, ZA 68 82; cf. AHw 1433b *urrú* IV); (3) *herú* D literally, “to hollow oneself”. “And the mother of the baby is delivered” (B.R. Foster, *Muses* I [1996] 202 on I 292). (4) A good candidate is the verb *wurrúm* “to cut off”: the mother separates herself from her child as if it were the branch of a tree (*harú*) (M. Stol). AHw 1497a *wurrúm* gives two refs. for “abnabeln (?)” of newborn babies. The first is found in an Old Babylonian hymn to Bēlet-ilī, “Mama gave birth to the first, and he wears a bristle; she cut off the baby” (?) ([z]a-ap-pa-a-am na-ši ú-wa-ri šar-ra-am, CT 15 1 I 9, with W.H.Ph. Römer, WdO 4 (1967) 12, 22. In Old Assyrian we find the form *šarrum* for *šerrum* “baby”. The second passage is Theodicy 259, on Aruru’s handiwork: *li-il-li-du mìn-su ka-liš la HAR ri*. W. von Soden translated “(Bei den Geschöpfen der Aruru, allen, die leben,) warum ist da allenthalben ein Abkömmling nicht (richtig) abgenabelt?”, and his comment is: “Lies *la mur-ri*. Wer nicht richtig abgenabelt wurde, wurde bei der Geburt nicht angemessen versorgt und war daher im späteren Leben oft kränklich” (TUAT III/1 [1990] 156 f.).

nine days represents the period when the mother and child remained isolated. We know that in other cultures, too, the first week after birth was a special period for mother and child. The Assyrian version speaks of seven days. We will return to this presently, when discussing the wedding that lasted nine or seven days, and we refer the reader to the section on Uncleanes.

The praise of Nintu establishes at once and for all time that the brick referred to is the brick of birth. A well known “ritual” is given a supernatural explanation in this “myth”. We quote W.G. Lambert: “Clearly at the time of this epic’s composition it was normal practice to put this ‘brick’ where the birth would take place. The specification that it had to be there for nine days proves what we would have conjectured without this information, that birth was considered not simply as a biological process, but also as a magic rite. Here, then, the author of the epic has combined myth and ritual, but they are very unhappily connected. In the belief that human births continue at least elements of the original creation of the human race, the ‘brick’ that was used in actual births has been dragged into a myth which has no real use for it. It was simply put between the two rows of seven lumps of clay and served no practical purpose in the mixing of clay and moulding of figurines. There is every reason to hold that in this case myth and ritual were originally separate. No doubt the rite of using a ‘brick’ at births and the basic elements of the myth were centuries old, and the introduction of the ‘brick’ into myth would seem to be a secondary development”³⁶

The following passage is not well preserved and has verbal forms that have been explained in different ways.³⁷

Call the name of Mami, their [sister],
 Pra[ise] (?) the Womb, pra[ise] (?) Keš!
 In [their] ho[use], when setting up the bed,
 let the wife and her husband choose each other.
 At the moment of (their) marriage,
 let Ištar rejoice in the House of
 Nine days let there be made merry,
 let them name Ištar “Išhara”.
 In ... the right moment of destiny
 (remainder broken)

The mother goddess is the sister of the other gods.³⁸ A number of authors render the second line (line 297) as follows: “... the Womb, lay down (?) a reed mat / linen cloth”. They read the verb “to lay down” (*nadū*) instead of “to praise” (*nādu*), and they interpret “reed mat” (*kītu*), or “linen cloth” (*kitū*) instead of Keš (*Kešam*), the city of

³⁶ W.G. Lambert, “Myth and ritual as conceived by the Babylonians”, JSS 13 (1968) 105. In other words repeated in *Atra-hasīs* (1969) 23, “... the epic concentrates on those matters of local custom which might easily be forgotten: the need to have the birth ‘brick’ in place for nine days, the marriage celebration of the same length, and the invoking of Ištar (goddess of love) under the name Išhara during this period”.

³⁷ Lambert, Millard, *Atra-hasīs* 64 Tablet I 296–305.

³⁸ W.W. Hallo, W.L. Moran, JCS 31 (1979) 88, Anzū I III 112.

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the mother goddess.³⁹ The lay-out of the lines in manuscript A suggests a parallelism⁴⁰ and demands the translation given above (which follows Lambert and Millard). The praise of Mami introduces the institution of marriage, the wedding which is to last nine days.⁴¹ It appears that these nine days of carnal union will eventually result in nine days of confinement at birth.⁴² The Assyrian version refers to seven days of confinement which would fit a wedding of seven days. There is indirect evidence that a wedding in Babylonia lasted one week – as elsewhere in the traditional Near East.⁴³ We know from other texts that Ištar, the goddess of love, in marriage has the name Išhara.⁴⁴ Incantations show that she was a married goddess under this name: “What Ištar does for Dumuzi, what Nanaja does for her mate, what Išhara does for her husband”.⁴⁵ The animal of Išhara is the scorpion. In a number of “bed-scenes” we also see a scorpion; we assume that in these scenes the couple thus indicated is to be married.⁴⁶ Her temple has the name “House of the womb (*šassuru*)”.⁴⁷

The episode began with wife and husband choosing each other in [garden]s and on the street. This first union took place in the open. The story ends with the mother goddess instituting formal marriage: now they choose each other “in [their] ho[use], when setting up the bed”. Sexuality and childbearing has been regulated, domesticated by the wise Mami.

The brick of birth

We have seen that the mother goddess sometimes was associated with “the brick of giving birth”. According to the myth “Enki and the World Order” she took this brick together with other materials in performing midwifery. We learn from the Old Babylonian Atram-*hasīs* myth that this brick should be placed in the house where a woman gives birth. In a ritual, the mother goddess Dingirmah is associated with “the brick”.⁴⁸ A hemerology

³⁹ Line 298, CT 46 1 VI 18, *i t[a ...] ki ta am Diš*; 4 IV 26, [...] *sú-ra i ta ad d[i] x x* (*x x = [k]i-tam*, or *ke-ša*); CT 46 13 rev. 11, [...] *ke-e-šá*. W. von Soden, *Or NS* 38 (1969) 426 note; W.G. Lambert, *Or NS* 38 (1969) 537; 40 (1971) 97 f., F, L (copies); W. von Soden, *Or NS* 40 (1971) 100 f. ad F, L. “Reed mat”: W. von Soden, C. Wilcke (*i ta-ad-di ki-tam*). “Linen cloth”: Stephanie Dalley (*kitūm*). They disregard *Ke-e-šá* in the Neo-Assyrian manuscript P.

⁴⁰ (297) (VI 17) *i t[a ...]a-as-su-ra* (298) (VI 18) *i t[a ...] ki ša /ta am Diš*.

⁴¹ We do not agree with W.L. Moran, *Biblica* 52 (1971) 58 note 3: “in lines 299 ff. resumption of sexual relations”. The mythical foundation of marriage is the point.

⁴² Another interpretation: after the nine days of the brick, husband and wife resume intercourse.

⁴³ Indirect Mesopotamian evidence: Enkidu and the woman are together seven days and nights (Gilg. I iv 21); the statues of Nabû and Tašmētum are together from day 5 to day 10, six days (ABL 366). Modern: W. Heffening, “Zur Geschichte der Hochzeitsbräuche im Islam. Ein Beitrag zur Volkskunde der islamischen Länder”, in: R. Hartmann, H. Scheel, *Beiträge zur Arabistik, Semitistik und Islamwissenschaft* (1944) 386–422, esp. 413–6; J. Morgenstern, *Rites of birth, marriage, death and kindred occasions among the Semites* (1966) 107–111.

⁴⁴ Gilg. OB P v 22, Nin. II 11 44, with W. von Soden, *ZA* 71 (1981) 104. See A.R. George, *Babylonian topographical texts* (1992) 315.

⁴⁵ R.D. Biggs, *Ša.zi.ga. Ancient Mesopotamian potency incantations* (1967) 44, with the text communicated by F. Köcher; see B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* II (1996) 870. New dupl. SpbTU IV 135:5–7.

⁴⁶ Scorpion: RIA III/7 (1969) 488, § 7k. Bed-scenes: Urs Winter, *Frau und Göttin* (1983) 355. The scorpion on sealings symbolized the administration of the Assyrian queen; see S. Herboldt in H. Waetzoldt, H. Hauptmann, *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten* (1997) 282.

⁴⁷ D. Prechel, *Die Göttin Išhara* (1996) 161.

⁴⁸ S. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (1994) 379, 382, lines 5, 21. Maul sees in it just a brick (*libittu*).



Fig. 4 A Persian women giving birth, crouching on bricks. Drawing by J.E. Polak, ca. 1860.

characterizes day 26 of the month as that of “laying down the brick of Ninmah / Ea (and) Dingirmah”.⁴⁹ It has been thought that this refers to the brick of foundation but in view of the name of the mother goddess, it is probably the brick of birth that is meant. Why day 26? W.L. Moran pointed out that according to the Atram-*hasīs* myth the gods purified themselves on days 1, 7 and 15; after this the clay was moulded by Ea and Mami. Ten days (!) of gestation pass by and one arrives at day 26.⁵⁰ We add that the second half of the month, during the waning moon, may have been a propitious time to deliver a child. Day 24 is the day of “the proclamation of Mami, Ninmah”; we do not know what this implies.⁵¹ A Neo-Assyrian letter refers to the ritual *mudarriktu* on day 19; “Ištar will go to the house of Gula of the steppe (and) she will sit (?) on the brick”. Since Gula is the goddess of medicine this may well be a birth ritual.⁵² The Sumerian personal name *Sig₄.gá-tu* means “Born on my brick”.⁵³

This is all we know of the brick of birth in Mesopotamia.⁵⁴ This brick, now “stone”, is also mentioned in the Bible, in the story of the birth of Moses which begins as follows:

⁴⁹ J. Nougayrol, JCS 1 (1947) 331, 333 rev. 9; repeated by D.J. Wiseman, *Iraq* 31 (1969) 179:85, ud.26.kam *lip-šur na-de-e* SIG₄ šá ^dNin.mah. In 4 R 33 III 26: ud.26.kam ŠUB-e SIG₄ šá ^dé-a DINGIR.MAH. The Assur version deviates in offering: ud.28.kam *na-an-di* é.SIG₄ (= *igaru*; error?) šá Dingir.mah.

⁵⁰ W.L. Moran, BASOR 200 (Dec. 1970) 51 note 9.

⁵¹ Nougayrol, 331 rev. 7, after CAD Š/3 195b, *šu-du-tú šá* (!) ^dMa (!)-*mi* ^dNin.mah (Nougayrol: *šu-du-ut* 7 *giš.mi* ^dNin.mah).

⁵² CT 53 965 rev. 7–9, with S. Parpola, OLZ 74 (1979) 26 (below) and K. Deller, Or NS 53 (1984) 87. The text runs as follows: (7) ud.19.kam *mu-da-ri-ik-t[u]* (8) ^dXV É ^d*Gu-la ša se-e-[ri]* (9) *ta-al-lak ina UGU* SIG₄ *tu-š[ab]* (S. Parpola); SAA XIII no. 135. – J.A. Scurlock, *Incognita* 2 (1991) 150 f., reconstructs a “birth brick’s ritual” which does not take account of these data.

⁵³ J. Bauer, AfO 36–37 (1989–90) 80 f. He explains the name *Sig₄.gá-na.gi₄* as “Auf meine Ziegel ist (es, das Kind) zurückgekehrt”.

⁵⁴ A.D. Kilmer, “The brick of birth”, JNES 46 (1987) 211–213, saw a symbolic meaning of the brick, as placenta: “I believe that we have overlooked a deeper meaning and significance of the unbaked clay brick, in that it appears to have been likened to placental material. That is, the fetus may have been thought of as the product that developed in and from the malleable, clay-like placenta”. Is it true that the ancient or

V. Giving Birth

"Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Siprah, and the other Puah, 'When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the birth-stool, if it is a son, you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, she shall live' " (Exodus 1:15 f.). What is rendered here as "the birth-stool" by the Revised Standard Version, and as "the stools" by the King James Version, is in Hebrew "both stones" (*hā'obnājim*). We will not follow here the interpretation of this expression in later tradition, but simply repeat the opinion that two bricks of birth are meant.⁵⁵ The mother sits on them to give birth. That this is still practised is evident from ethnographical literature.⁵⁶ We cite a few reports about birth in Palestine: "They bring her the stone and some earth and rags, and the midwife before her and her mother and sister behind her. – They bring her some earth and a fine stone. They put rags on the stone. The midwife sits before the woman. – They bring a stone which is placed on the floor and scatter a little earth in front of it".⁵⁷ In Egypt: "The midwife sat A in the usual squatting position with her feet on two building blocks. As A sat supported by her cousin, the midwife inserted her index finger 'to check if the water bag which is over the head is near' ".⁵⁸ In Persia: "Beim Beginn der Treibwehen muß sie das Bett verlassen und in hockender Stellung – *ita ut in defecatione* – auf je drei parallel übereinander gelegten Ziegelsteinen Platz nehmen, wobei sie sich mit den Händen an die Umstehenden klammert. In dieser Stellung verharrt sie so lange, bis das Kind ausgetrieben ist".⁵⁹

The brick of birth was also known in ancient Egypt.⁶⁰ In a hymn, the god of birth Khnum is praised as follows: "Respect Khnum, pregnant women who have passed their term. For he is the god Shu of the House of Birth who opens the lips of the vagina and makes firm the birth brick (...)"⁶¹ An Egyptian incantation speaks of "the two bricks"

modern birth brick is unbaked, unformed? Elsewhere we have criticized her identification of the brick with the placenta; see p. 161 note 93.

⁵⁵ H.A. Brongers, "Wat is de betekenis van 'ābnāyim in Exodus 1:16?", *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 20 (1965–66) 241–254 (with a critical note by A.S. van der Woude); S. Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie* II (1911) 429 f., note 53; Ch. Fontinoy, in his article "La naissance de l'enfant chez les Israélites de l'Ancien Testament", in A. Théodoridès, *L'enfant dans les civilisations orientales. Het kind in de oosterse beschavingen* (= *Acta Orientalia Belgica*, II) (1980) 115 f.

⁵⁶ Some literature is mentioned by Brongers, 246 f. (Egypt); Fontinoy, 115 note 89 (Tunis); E.S. Drower, *Iraq* 5 (1938) 109 f., note 1 (Iraq); J. Bauer, *AfO* 36–37 (1989–90) 81a (Persia); A. Kilmer, *JNES* 46 (1987) 213 (Persia; ancient Egypt); W. Eilers, *Die Mundart von Chunsar* (1976) 300 (Persia) who notes: "mehrere Ziegel; sonnengetrocknete Luftziegel, nicht gebrannte Backsteine, die in einem Dorfe selten und teuer sind".

⁵⁷ H. Granqvist, *Birth and childhood among the Arabs. Studies in a Muhammadan village in Palestine* (1947) 61. The village is Artas. Additional information in note 13 (p. 233 f.): "Dr. T. Canaan told me: 'Orientals, while giving birth to a child used to sit on an elevated object – in cities, a chair with a large hole in the centre was used. In villages the woman sits during the procedure on one or two stones. The space between the ground and the body is called "pit" (*jôra*) (...) In Palestine of to-day the following expressions are used: 'When she came to the pit', for 'when she gave birth to a child', and 'when the mother arises from the pit', for 'she has been delivered' ".

⁵⁸ S. Morsy, "Childbirth in an Egyptian village", in: M. Artschwager Kay, *Anthropology of Human Birth* (1982) 164.

⁵⁹ J.E. Polak, *Persien. Das Land und seine Bewohner. Ethnographische Schilderungen* I (1865) 219. More information was obtained by H. Ploss, *Über die Lage und Stellung der Frau während der Geburt bei verschiedenen Völkern. Eine anthropologische Studie* (1872) 42 f. He offers two drawings based on this information. The drawings were reproduced in H. Ploss, *Das Weib in der Natur- und Völkerkunde* II (3. Auflage) (1891) 161, Fig. 123 ("Nach einer Zeichnung Polak's", p. 634). See p. 119, Fig. 4.

⁶⁰ W. Spiegelberg, "Zu Exodus I, 16", *ZA* 14 (1899) 269–276; id., *Ägyptologische Randglossen zum Alten Testament* (1904) 19–25, "Zu Exodus I, 16".

⁶¹ Cited by R.K. Ritner, *JNES* 43 (1984) 215.

The Brick

in connection with birth,⁶² a man suffering from divine punishment exclaims "I was sitting on the brick like a woman giving birth".⁶³ The Apocalypse of Elijah, written in Coptic, uses the same Egyptian word *db*, Coptic *tōbe*, for "brick" in this passage: "The midwife of the land will mourn then, and she who has given birth will look heavenward, and say, 'Why did I sit on the brick to bring a child into the world? '".⁶⁴ The goddess of birth, Meskhenet, is associated with the brick. In a tale of the birth of three future kings, the function of the brick is not so clear, however. The text says that the deliveries took place in a closed room: "Isis placed herself in front of her (the mother), Nephthys behind her, and Heket hastened the childbirth. (...) This child slipped forth upon her hands as a child of one cubit long, whose bones were firm, the covering of whose limbs was of gold, and whose headdress was of real lapis lazuli. They washed him, his umbilical cord was cut, and he was placed on a cushion on bricks. Then Meskhenet approached him, and she said: A king who will exercise the kingship of this entire land! Khnum caused his limbs to move".⁶⁵ It appears that here the newborn child is put upon the brick and then his fate is solemnly pronounced.⁶⁶ The future of the child was inscribed on the brick of birth.⁶⁷

In very difficult language, in a myth from Ugarit, two women are told by god El to give birth; J.C. de Moor has suggested that the text speaks of the brick of birth. Provisional translation: "You, o Tališ, slavegirl of Yariḥ, go out; you, o Damgay, slavegirl of Athirat, go out. Take your chair (*ks'n*), your 'saddle' (*hdg*), your swaddling cloth (*hlt*), and go out. At the oak . . . , in the steppe dust . . . Place the bricks (*jd 'ugrm*), go into labour (*hl*) and bear (*jld*) the Eaters, let her kneel (*brk*), and bear the Devourers".⁶⁸ As are many of the words in this passage, the word interpreted as "bricks" is attested only here (*'ugrm*). In Akkadian the *agurru* is a kiln-fired brick, of higher quality than the avarage brick of birth (*libittu*). Others have related the word to Akkadian *ugaru* "fields" and saw in it a parallel to the "dust" that preceded. Most scholars interpret the "chair" as the chair of birth, the birth-stool. If this is true, the alternative way of giving birth on bricks is ruled out here.

Birth-stools indeed were known; the earliest references are found in the Hittite "Birth Rituals" dating to the latter part of the second millennium B.C. This stool (*harnau*) seems to have consisted of a "bowl" upon which the mother sat, two pegs which the woman grasped during her delivery, and possibly several boards placed under the

⁶² A. Erman, *Zauber sprüche für Mutter und Kind* (1901) 26, Spruch F (= Pap. Berl. 3027, 6, 5); reprinted in A. Erman, *Akademieschriften* (1880–1928) I (1986) 478.

⁶³ M. Tosi, A. Roccati, *Stele e altre epigrafi di Deir el Medina, n. 50001–n. 50262* (Torino 1972) 95, Stele No. 50058, line 5. In earlier lit. "Turin Stele 102"; cf. A. Erman, *Akademieschriften* (1880–1928) II (1986) 48 (= 1098).

⁶⁴ *Die Elia-Apokalypse* p. 28:11, in *Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit* V/3 (1980) 246; A. Pietersma and S. Turner Comstock, *The Apocalypse of Elijah based on P. Chester Beatty 2018* (1979) 39, p. 10:3.

⁶⁵ R.O. Faulkner, *The literature of Ancient Egypt. An anthology of stories, instructions, and poetry* (1972) 27 f. (Pap. Westcar 10, 9 ff.).

⁶⁶ It has been suggested that the umbilical cord rather than the child was wrapped in linen and deposited on the brick; H. Grapow, *Kranker, Krankheit und Arzt* (= *Grundriß der Medizin der alten Ägypter*, III) (1956) 14 f.

⁶⁷ Grapow, 13.

⁶⁸ KTU 1.12 I 14–27, with *Textes ougaritiques* I (1974) 337–341, and J.C. de Moor, *BiOr* 32 (1975) 191b. He derives the form *jd* from a verb *jdj* "to throw down, to place" (cf. Akkadian *libitta nadū*), and sees in *tbrkk* a jussive qtl-stem.

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“bowl”.⁶⁹ It was purified before being used and it was a bad omen if it turned out to be defective when employed.⁷⁰ One ritual begins as follows:⁷¹

– [When] a woman is giving birth, then the midwife prepares the following: [two stools] (and) three cushions. On each stool is placed one cushion. And one spreads [on]e cushion between the stools on the ground. When the child begins to fall (i.e., to be born), [then] the woman seats herself on the stools. And the midwife holds the receiving blanket with (her) [ha]nd. [And] you shall repeatedly conjure as [fol]ows: (...).

In Jewish tradition, “both stones” of Exodus 1:16 have been interpreted as birth-stool (Middle Hebrew *mašbēr*; Aramaic *mitbērā*).⁷² In the world of the Greeks and Romans – including Egypt – the birth-stool was widely known (Greek *diphrōs maieutikós*). A famous relief from Ostia shows how a woman sitting in it is delivered of a baby by the midwives.⁷³ Soranus in his handbook on gynaecology gives elaborate instructions on its manufacture and use (II 3).⁷⁴

The delivery

After nine months, “the days” or “the months” of the woman “are full” (Akkadian *malū*; Hebrew *mālē*),⁷⁵ she has brought her child to term (Akkadian *šalāmu* D) or, perhaps, to perfection (*šuklulu*),⁷⁶ and she gives birth. “Her ‘days’ have neared quickly” (*arhiš qurrubū ūmūša*).⁷⁷ “The woman, it is her day, it is her month”, a Sumerian incantation says.⁷⁸ In the Semitic languages “to give birth” is based on the verbal root *wld*; in Akkadian (*w)alādūm*, in Hebrew *jālad*. It is a general word for the whole process. For the delivery itself, a verb *hiālu*, *hālu* literally meaning “to flow out” was used by the

⁶⁹ G. Beckman, *Hittite Birth Rituals* (1983) 102. – Note C. Zinko, “Hethitische und vedische Geburtsrituale”, *Studia Iranica Mesopotamica* 1 (1994) 119–148; “Hethitische Geburtsrituale im Vergleich mit altindischen Rituale”, in *Atti del II Congresso Internazionale di Hittitologia* (1995) 389 ff.

⁷⁰ Beckman, 116.

⁷¹ Beckman, 22 f., Text A § 1–2; also G. Beckman, *Hittite birth rituals: an introduction* (= SANE 1,4) (1978) 8 [128] Text 1.

⁷² H. Fasbender, *Entwicklungslehre, Geburtshilfe und Gynäkologie in den hippokratischen Schriften* (1897) 38–40; J. Preuss, *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin* (1911) 459; S. Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie* II (1911) 6 f. The Hebrew word stands in the Hebrew Bible for “mouth of the birth canal”, in: “Children have come to the mouth of the womb, and there is no strength to bring them forth” (2 Kings 19:3, Isaiah 37:3); and: “The pangs of childbirth come for him (Ephraim), but he is an unwise son; for now he does not present himself at the mouth of the womb” (Hosea 13:13). The word derives from the verb *šbr* “to break”, with once the special meaning “to bring to the birth” (*hif.*), in “Shall I bring to the birth and not cause to bring forth (*jld, hif.*)? says the Lord” (Isaiah 66:9).

⁷³ D. Gourevitch, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* Teil II, Band 37/3 (1996) 2116–7 (“Le siège obstétrical”).

⁷⁴ *Soranus d’Éphèse. Maladies des femmes*. Tome II, Livre II, ed. P. Burgière, D. Gourevitch, Y. Malinas (1990) 4–6, with p. 68–70, commentary and literature, and p. 123–131, illustrations. In difficult cases one used the *lásanon*; see A.E. Hanson in the journal *Thamyris. Mythmaking from past to present* 1 (1994) 163–168.

⁷⁵ “To make the days full” is an expression widely attested in the Semitic languages; CAD M/1 186–7; Genesis 25:24; Luke 2:6. Said of months in Job 39:5 (Hebrew text 39:2). Note a baby “before the moment” (*lām adanni*), J.V. Kinnier Wilson, *Iraq* 31 (1969) 15, Sm 157:2.

⁷⁶ W.R. Mayer, *Or NS* 63 (1994) 115 f. (*šalāmu, mušallimat*).

⁷⁷ B. Groneberg, *Lob der Istar* (1997) 112, Istar-Baghdad 73.

⁷⁸ J. van Dijk, *Or NS* 44 (1975) 62 ff., line 7 (with note 27).

The Delivery

Babylonians; this refers to the discharge of the amniotic water.⁷⁹ The Hebrew verb *hīl* also means “to be in labour”.⁸⁰ Both in Akkadian and Hebrew this word for delivery is widely used as a metaphor for hardship. Old Babylonian uses the word *šalāmu* (G) for a successfull delivery; it either means literally “to become healthy”, or “to complete”, “to make full”.⁸¹

The woman in childbed is called *harištu* in Akkadian; its etymology is not clear.⁸² We will say more about her in the section on Uncleanliness. Another expression for a woman giving birth, Akkadian *aruhtum*, is attested only once, in the title of an incantation and has been related to a verb meaning “to hurry”.⁸³ In literary Hebrew there also is a verb “to give birth” that is etymologically related to Arabic “to give birth speedily”.⁸⁴ We will see below, in the discussion of difficult birth, that “to give birth speedily” follows hard labour. It sounds strange to name the woman after the expected result. In the section on the months of gestation we have suggested that *aruhtum* could mean “woman who goes through the months”, as in Hittite (*arhu* “month”).

As we have already seen in the discussion of the brick of birth, bringing a child into the world is generally done in a crouching or squatting position (Akkadian *kamāsu*, Hebrew *kāra*).⁸⁵

Lady Drower wrote about the women in Iraq giving birth this way.⁸⁶ In the nineteenth

⁷⁹ B. Landsberger, MSL 9 (1967) 84 f. In CAD H 54 f. reigns confusion. Derivations are *hīlū* “birth pangs”; *hajjāltu* “woman in labour”. In an ancient Sumerian – Akkadian – Hittite “dictionary” the verb is identified with a Hittite word meaning “the crier out” (= woman in labour); [] x x *hul* = *ha-a-lu* = *ú-i-wí-iš-kat-tal-la-aš*, KBo XIII 1 I 40, with H. Otten, W. von Soden, StBoT 7 (1968) 10, with G. Beckman, *Hittite Birth Rituals* (1983) 37. The verb in its literal meaning is now attested in a text on gynaecology, SAL Šá 1 *u4-mu 2 u4-mu i-hi-lu*, SpbTU IV 153:19.

⁸⁰ A. Scharbert, *Der Schmerz im Alten Testament* (1955) 21–26; Baumann, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* II/8 (1976) 898–902. They are not aware of the etymology of the Akkadian cognate. Scharbert, 26: “die Grundbedeutung ‘bebēn’ oder ‘zittern’ wird allen Stellen ohne Schwierigkeiten gerecht”. – In Ugaritic and Phoenician *hl*, in *hl ld* and *hl wld* (KTU 1.12 I 25; KAI 27:27).

⁸¹ Meaning discovered by Charpin and Durand; see AEM 1/2 (1988) 125 no. 352:24 f., with note (b), “Another matter: Kirūm has delivered a son (dumu.nitā *išlim*); let my lord rejoice!” Cf. W.R. Mayer, Or NS 63 (1994) 115, on CAD Š/1 211 b; N. Ziegler, KTEMA 22 (1997) 46.

⁸² Landsberger, MSL 9 (1967) 84, on 109. For the verb *harāšu* in Nabnitu XX (= XXI) 205–217, see MSL 16 (1982) 183. The ref. Thompson, *Gilg. Epic Plate 54 Sm 157:6*, is now in a new copy available; J.V. Kinnier Wilson, *Iraq* 31 (1969) 15, Plate III. This is probably not a part of the Etana myth; see W.G. Lambert, JNES 39 (1980) 74 note 1. Landsberger, MSL 9 84 f.: “premature birth”.

⁸³ VAS 17 33:28 (= VAT 8381), *inim.inim.ma a-ru-úh-tum*; see J. van Dijk, Or NS 44 (1975) 63; CAD A/2 259a, *arhu* (b). Can we explain Sumerian *la.ra.ah* “woman in difficult labour” as a loanword, Akkadian *la aruhtu*?

⁸⁴ Hebrew *hīf* in Psalm 29:9 (Arabic *hašafa* “protrusit in pariendo celeriter”), according to G.R. Driver, *The Journal of Theological Studies* 32 (1931) 255. He reads instead of “The voice of the Lord makes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forests bare”: “The voice of the Lord makes the hinds to calve (*hīl*), and causes bleating kids to be brought hastily to birth (*hīf*)”. In HAL I (1967) 345b this is accepted but with the translation “zu vorzeitigem Gebären bringen”. Driver sees in the hapax *hašifē* ‘izzim of 1 Kings 20:27 “two hastily-born of she-goats”; HAL: “verfrüh geworfene Zicklein”. – Note that the traditional translation “The voice of the Lord strips the forests bare” of Psalm 29:9 has a parallel in the Erra myth, “Make your voice strong (...); the tree-trunks in the thicket will be stripped (*kapāru* Dt)”, Erra I 61, 71 (in others words in IV 144).

⁸⁵ Cf. H.H. Ploss, *Über die Lage und Stellung der Frau während der Geburt bei verschiedenen Völkern* (1872); also H.H. Ploss, *Das Weib* II (1899) 155–162 § 294–296; E. Shorter, *Women's bodies. A social history of women's encounter with health, ill-health, and medicine* (1982) 56 f. Ch. Fontenoy, in *L'enfant* ... (1980) 115. Greek women went on their knees; E. Samter, *Geburt, Hochzeit und Tod* (1911) 6–15.

⁸⁶ Drower, *Iraq* 5 (1938) 109 f., note 1, “The normal situation is to crouch or sit. The Jewish woman supports her heels on bricks, and clings to the *jidda* (midwife), or to a stool, when the *jidda* goes behind her to deliver the child. Moslem and Christian women crouch and cling to a woman, and marsh-dwellers and Mandean

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century the German physician to the Shah wrote that this was the normal position for Persian women – but impossible for Europeans.⁸⁷ In the Babylonian incantation “The Cow of Sîn”: “The cow crouched (*kamāsu*), she went into labour (*hâlu*)”.⁸⁸ In one Ugaritic myth: “Place the bricks (*jd 'ugrm*), go into labour (*hl*) and bear (*jld*) the Eaters, let her kneel (*brk*), and bear the Devourers”.⁸⁹ A passage in another myth describes the whole process, from love-making to birth, and runs as follows: “He stooped and kissed their lips; behold, their lips were sweet, were sweet as pomegranates. By kissing, there was pregnancy, by embracing ‘heating’. They crouched (*qns*), they gave birth to Šahar and Šalim”.⁹⁰ In the Bible: “She bowed (*kâra*) and gave birth; for her pains (*sirîm*) came upon her” (1 Samuel 4:19).⁹¹

The woman was anointed, as rituals which follow some of the incantations show: “The *aruhtum*-woman; her ritual: (sesame) oil and ghee you shall mix and you shall anoint (it) on the shoulder (*budum*), her both sides (*bamtum*) (?), and it will come out”.⁹² Anointing these parts of the body appears to be more of a magical practice than rational midwifery. A cylinder seal (discussed above) displays an image of a pot with an ointment. In ancient Egypt, the oil was preserved in special anthropomorphous containers shaped like a naked, child-bearing figure, either standing or squatting. She rubs her abdomen with both hands.⁹³ In fact, oil has always been a very important ingredient in easing deliveries.⁹⁴

women hold on by the reed bundle which supports the roof, while the *jidda* takes the child from behind. The Nestorian sits on the knees of the midwife, who straddles somewhat in sitting, and a woman crouches before them to receive the child when it comes into the world”.

⁸⁷ J.E. Polak, *Persien I* (1865) 219: “Die Perserin findet diese hockende Stellung, weil sie von Kindheit auf an eine ähnliche Art des Sitzens gewöhnt ist, nicht besonders lästig; den Europäerinnen aber, welche im Lande gebären, ist sie äusserst qualvoll und fast unerträglich”.

⁸⁸ GUD.ÁB *ik-ta-mi-si i-ha-al ar-hu*, W.G. Lambert, *Studies B. Landsberger* (1965) 286:26; *ta-ah-ti-me-iš ta-ha-al bu-ur-tu ina x[...]*, Lambert, *Iraq* 31 (1969) 31:57. See Röllig, *Or NS* 54 (1985) 262, C 26 and D 57. Cf. *ina kinsi kamāsu*, CAD K 375a (c'); L. Oppenheim, *Anthropos* 31 (1936) 475 (squatting when pronouncing the prayer *śigū*).

⁸⁹ KTU 1.12 I 24–27. Discussed above, p. 121.

⁹⁰ KTU 1.23:49–52, with D.T. Tsumura, U.-F. 10 (1978) 387–395; cf. TUAT II/3 (1988) 355.

⁹¹ Note the elaborate description of the birth of animals in Job 39:1–3: “Do you know when the mountain goats bring forth (‘et lèdèt)? Do you observe the calving (*hil*) of the hinds? Can you number the months that they fulfil, and do you know the time when they bring forth, when they crouch (*kâra*), bring forth (*pilleh*) their offspring, and are delivered of their young (*hèb^elehem t^ešallahnâh*)?”

⁹² VAS 17 33:28–30, with van Dijk, *Or* 44 63. Cf. G. Farber, *JNES* 43 (1984) 314 rev. 7–8: “A woman who has difficulty in birth: ritual: reed and ghee; cornelian and lapis lazuli”. See also J.A. Scurlock, *Incognita* 2 (1991) 142 f. For other references to anointing in incantations, see p. 63.

⁹³ R.M. and J.J. Janssen, *Growing up in ancient Egypt* (1990) 3 f.; fig. 3.

⁹⁴ Preuss, 462: “Zu jeder Entbindung gehört Öl, das man für die Kreissende sogar am Sabbath beschaffen darf. Wahrscheinlich wurde es von der Hebammme zum Einschmieren der Geburtsweg benutzt, wie es die antiken Geburtshelfer ausdrücklich vorschreiben und wie es noch bis in unsere Zeit auch die wissenschaftliche Geburtshilfe verlangte”. ‘Arib ibn Sa‘id (ca. 965 A.D.) wrote: “Si la femme a des tissus fermes et durs, l'accoucheuse devra frictionner et ramollir ces parties avec l'huile et de l'eau dans laquelle on fera cuire du fénugré, des graines de chauvre ou de guimauve qui ramollissent la chair”; *Le livre de la génération du foetus et le traitement des femmes enceintes et des nouveau-nés*, ed. H. Jahier, N. Abdelkader (Algiers 1956) 53, on top. The handbook of the sixteenth century by Jacob Rueff recommends that “obstetrix ipsa prona assideat, et manus suas uterumque parturientis, oleo liliorum, amygdalorum dulcium et adipe gallinæ mixto perunguat (. . .) His et albumen ovi miscuisse contulerit”; *De conceptu et generatione hominis* (Frankfurt am Main, 1580) 20. See also H.H. Ploss, *Das Weib II* (1899) 176 § 301. – Van Dijk, *Or* 44 76–79, looks for a “ritual” explanation for “l'huile et encore l'huile” in his incantations. See J.A. Scurlock, *Incognita* 2 (1991) 142 f.

Water and blood

As we have seen, the ancient Semites apparently named the delivery after the flowing of the amniotic water. In the incantation “The Cow of Sîn” this water is actually called “water of delivery” (*mê hâli*) and a Sumerian incantation compares the woman with a jug that is to be broken.⁹⁵ A line from an Akkadian incantation pictures the woman as “filled like a waterskin”.⁹⁶ One of the goddesses of birth has the Sumerian name ^d*Lâl.har.gal.zu*, meaning “Expert knower of the *lâl.har*”. This *lâl.har* can be interpreted as a variant of *lâl.gar*, a word for the subterranean waters where god Ea resides (*apsû*).⁹⁷ Can we say that it is here a mythological name for the water in the womb? We have seen that in an Old Babylonian incantation this water was visualised as a cosmic ocean (*Ajabba; tiāmtum*).⁹⁸ The Sumerogram for “pregnant” is the sign “belly” (*ŠÀ*) with “water” (A) written inside it. The *Atram-hasīs* myth said that the mother goddess “opened the membranes (*silītu*)”, she perhaps did this in order to make the amniotic water flow for the first time in history.⁹⁹

In Old Babylonian legal terminology, “water and blood” refers to physical birth.¹⁰⁰ We find this in the context of adoption: a child is adopted “in his water”, that is to say, immediately after birth.¹⁰¹ Thus, the Hammurabi Code § 185: “If a man adopts a child in his water and raises him, that raised child shall not be reclaimed (by its parents)”. An adoption contract from contemporaneous Elam speaks of “in his water and his blood”.¹⁰² Birth is indeed associated not only with water but also with blood. The “Lamentation on the Destruction of Ur” compares men killed by various weapons with their mother, “in her blood”, “when she was in childbed” (*harištu*).¹⁰³ A legend about king Sargon of Akkad has this dark picture of disaster: “A festival of death is celebrated; the women in

⁹⁵ M.E. Cohen, RA 70 (1976) 134. – C. Michel has suggested that *mê bišri* in a *Lamaštu* incantation is the amniotic water; Or NS 66 (1997) 63 f.

⁹⁶ K. 8210 I 10, with N. Veldhuis, ASJ 11 (1989) 243 (line 37), collated by M.J. Geller: *ma-la-at* GIM *na-a-di*.

⁹⁷ A.R. George, *House most high. The temples of ancient Mesopotamia* (1993) 26, on 187. We admit that AN = Anum II 39 glosses *har* / *bur* as *hu-ur*; RIA s.v. *Lalhurgalzu*.

⁹⁸ YOS 11 86.1–10, with J. van Dijk, Or NS 42 (1973) 503; see also above, Chapter I. Note that Th. Jacobsen, Or NS 42 (1973) 292, gave a different explanation of the name of this birth goddess: “Expert knower of the honeycomb (*lâl.hur*)” where the honeycomb is the placenta.

⁹⁹ *Atram-hasīs*, 62, I 282. We suggest that after this primordial act the membranes know to break automatically when the time has arrived. Pathological is “das künstliche Sprengen der bei dem Geburtsakte in den Muttermund hervorgedrängten Fruchtblase”; H.H. Ploss, *Das Weib* II (1899) 253 § 343.

¹⁰⁰ A word on water and blood in Old Babylonian incantations. They are I.L. Finkel, “The Crescent Fertile”, AfO 27 (1980) 37–52; cf. J. van Dijk, YOS 11 (1985) p. 32 (on no. 40). The “water” in these texts is a metaphor of blood. Just like the overflowing water in the canals, the blood is to be contained. Otherwise K. Butz, “Altbabylonische Beschwörungen um den ‘Blasensprung’ bei Gravidem herbeizuführen”, *Oriens Antiquus* 21 (1982) 221–226. He thinks that “water”, not blood, is meant and understands the incantations to be addressing the problem of retention of the amniotic fluid. He explains the multivalent Sumerogram BAD as “to open”. The Akkadian incantations suggest a reading *sekeru*, “to dam”, for BAD. This is said of stopping (menstrual) bleeding in BAM 3 236 rev. 4, 244:41, 49. This is more convincing.

¹⁰¹ Discovered independently by CAD D 77a citing MDP 23 288, R. Borger apud W. von Soden, AHw 665a, and R. Yaron, *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology* XV (1965) 171–173. Yaron compares *a / ex sanguine* “out of the blood” in late Roman legal texts.

¹⁰² See now CAD M/2 154b. Cf. C. Wilcke, ZA 71 (1981) 90 (YOS 12 331), 93 (“Adoption *ina mēšu*”, with a new ref. in Abb 7 103); M. Malul, JSOT 46 (1990) 106–111; R. Westbrook, *Raphael Kutscher Memorial Volume* (1993) 196.

¹⁰³ S.N. Kramer, *Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur* (1940) 40:222. The Akkadian word *harištum* occurs here in Sumerian context. A. Falkenstein, SAHG (1953) 202, “als wären sie am Ort, an dem ihre Mutter sie gebar, liegen sie in ihrem Blut”. C. Wilcke, JNES 27 (1968) 235 no. 16, “Gleichsam im Kindbett ihrer Mutter liegend, lagen sie in ihrem Blute”, cf. 236 no. 20.

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travail are in labour, the two women giving birth bathe themselves in blood".¹⁰⁴ A letter from Mari contains the following difficult passage: "I have taken the sons of Muḥaddūm under my protection (?), I taught them to sing. I 'tied' the blood at the separation (?) [and] I raised them".¹⁰⁵ This is reminiscent of section 185 of the Hammurabi Code, translated above. It could be that the man had adopted the children at birth, "at the separation", and had raised them to be singers. The word interpreted as "separation" (*pursu*) is derived from the same verb that is used for weaning a child, separating it from the breast (*parāsu*). Here, however, separation at birth seems to be meant. The same verb can also mean "to stop bleeding". Does "to tie (the blood)" refer to the binding off of the umbilical cord? This knot is called "tie" (*riksu*).

The combination "water and blood" is found in the New Testament, in the writings of the apostle John. In a difficult pericope in his first letter he writes that Jesus "came by water and blood". We quote the passage. "This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth."¹⁰⁶ There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree" (1 John 5:6–8). It is possible that Chapter 5 intends to say that the testimony "by water" is baptism, that "by blood" is a reference to dying as a martyr, while "the Spirit" is the witness of truth. A Christian can experience these three *martyria* on his way to victory (verse 5).¹⁰⁷ One could also view the going through (*diá*) water and blood as a colourful expression for Christ experiencing all kinds of hardship.¹⁰⁸ There may be a third explanation, more down to earth, and which we prefer. We think that the coming "by water and blood" refers to the physical life of Jesus, in that it refers to His birth. And indeed, elsewhere John polemizes against those who doubt Jesus' physical origins (the heresy "docetism") by a declaration like this: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the *flesh* is of God" (1 John 4:2). Further confirmation comes from the Gospel of John where being born "of water", "of the flesh", is physical birth, and being born "of the Spirit" is being born again, the spiritual rebirth.¹⁰⁹ In this Gospel Jesus says to the Pharisee Nicodemus: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God". Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew'" (John 3:3–7).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ J. Nougayrol, RA 45 (1951) 172:20, with W. von Soden, Or NS 26 (1957) 320, [e]-*si-nu-um ša mu-ti in-ni-pu-uš i-hi-il-la ha-HI-la-tum ur-ta-am-ma-ka da-ma a-li-ta-an*.

¹⁰⁵ J.-M. Durand, MARI 7 (1993) 52 (= ARMT XXVI/3 no. 558:5–10; still unpublished), *da-ma-am i-na pu-ur-si-im ak-šú-ur* [ù] *ú-ra-bi-šu-nu-ti*.

¹⁰⁶ Here, we find verse 7 of the King James Version; it has been omitted in modern editions. This verse is the famous *comma Johanneum*, a later addition introducing the dogma of the Trinity: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one".

¹⁰⁷ M. Miguens, in his "Tres testigos: espíritu, agua, sangre", *Studii Biblici Franciscani Liber Annus* XXII (1972) 87–94.

¹⁰⁸ Miguens, 85–87. He compares this with going through water, rivers and fire in Isaiah 43:2 and Psalm 66:12.

¹⁰⁹ M. Pamment, short note on John 3:5, in *Novum Testamentum* 25 (1983) 189 f.

¹¹⁰ B. Witherington III, "The waters of birth: John 3:5 and 1 John 5:6–8", *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989)

Extraction

To fall

Sometimes, the verb “to fall” is used in Babylonia for being born. The last line of an incantation says “May the baby fall and see the light”.¹¹¹ ‘Let the ‘fallen’ stand up’ (*Maqtum-lizziz*) is a personal name. In a letter found in Mari, the decadent prince Yasmah-Addu is reproached for his unmanliness and debauchery in unusual and rude words: “Never did the hot or the cold wind hit your face and you have an unseemly mentality. Moreover, where your father and your mother got to see your face and you fell out of the vagina: here a vagina has received you”. The point seems to be that he, hardly born, turned to womanfolk.¹¹² The Hittite birth ritual translated above speaks of the child about to be born as follows: “When the child begins to fall, [then] the woman sets herself on the stools”.¹¹³ Isaiah wrote: “The inhabitants of the world have not fallen”; in the next verse “and on the land of the shades thou wilt let it fall” (Isaiah 26:18, 19). Many interpreters think this refers to birth; in later Hebrew “to fall” refers to miscarriage and abortion.¹¹⁴

Birth as extraction

Birth could also be described as an “extraction”. The newborn is sometimes named “who was pulled out from the womb” (*šilip rēmim*). When this expression appeared in a newly published Old Babylonian contract from a collection in Geneva, an article was written with the exciting title “A Caesarian Section in the Second Millennium B.C.”.¹¹⁵ In this text a child was adopted from its mother who seemed to be dead. The article commented: “At the stage of the development of obstetrics that one is allowed to presume for Mesopotamia in the second millennium B.C., *forceps* could have been used only at the cost of the child’s life in a last effort to save the mother, and the Caesarian section to save the child”. In the past twenty years, more adoptions of these “extractions” became known and in several the mother appears to be alive, this ruling out a Caesarian section.¹¹⁶ But why is this rude expression “pulled out from the womb” used? Scholars have thought that perhaps the children were born out of wedlock, or were illegal children born to supposedly chaste nuns. The most recent suggestion, hesitating, offered by K.R. Veenhof is that the child has lost its mother prematurely, either in consequence of her death or because she was forced to give it away – to dispose of it since it was unwanted or illegal. The key remains the text in Geneva, available only in a bad copy and a partial

155-160, agrees with my “non-sacramental” explanation. A full study, with a similar conclusion, is G. Richter, “Blut und Wasser aus der durchbohrten Seite Jesu (Joh 19, 34b)”, *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 21 (1970) 1–21.

¹¹¹ BAM 3 248 I 50. Another possible case is “let it fall on the ground” (*limqutam qaqqaršum*) in the Old Babylonian incantation VAS 17 34:18, with J. van Dijk, Or NS 41 (1972) 344; W. Farber apud B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* I (1996) 137 note 4.

¹¹² P. Marello, *Florilegium Marianum* (Mélanges M. Fleury) (1992) 117:32–37, *ù ašar abu ú ummum panika itt̄aplasu ú ištu bišurim tamqutamma anñānum bišurum imhurka*.

¹¹³ Beckman, 22 Text A:5, with comm. (“to fall” in Hittite also refers to miscarriage).

¹¹⁴ Whitley, ZAW 84 (1972) 215 f.

¹¹⁵ A.L. Oppenheim, *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 15 (1960) 292–294.

¹¹⁶ J.J. Finkelstein, “*šilip rēmim* and related matters”, *Kramer Anniversary Volume* (= AOAT 25) (1976) 187–194; C. Wilcke, “Noch einmal: *šilip rēmim* und die Adoption *ina mēšu*. Neue und alte einschlägige Texte”, ZA 71 (1981) 87–94; K.R. Veenhof, “Two *šilip rēmim* adoptions from Sippar”, *Cinquante-deux reflexions sur le Proche-Orient ancien, offertes en hommage à Leon de Meyer* (1994) 143–157. Cf. CAD Š/2 (1992) 447 f.

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photo. We give a provisional translation.¹¹⁷

“The (baby) boy, one pulled from the womb, a son of Atkalšim, the slave girl (?) of Šamaš-nāṣir, the . . ., and Tariš-mātum, his wife: Ipiq-Antum, son of Sin-māgir, adopted him as son. One shekel of silver and the nursing-fee for two years, rations of barley, oil (and) wool, Ipiq-Antum gave to Šamaš-nāṣir and Tariš-mātum; they have received (it) and are satisfied. Šamaš-nāṣir and Tariš-mātum shall not come back (on this matter) and shall not file a complaint against Ipiq-Antum. Even if he (Ipiq-Antum) gets ten children, Mār-Ištar alone is his eldest son”.

In my interpretation, the mother Atkalšim is not dead but rather is a slave girl. The name Atkalšim is common among slave girls. The wording of the text is unusual which makes us accept some abnormalities; for example that the name of the baby, Mār-Ištar, is mentioned only at the end. C. Wilcke notes that the nursing period in this text is two, not the normal three years, which could mean that the child is already one year old. He now distinguishes two kinds of adoption, that of a child “in its water and blood”, right after birth, and that of one “pulled from the womb”, here a baby already one year old. The first, newborn, child was not accepted as such by its parents and left alone in its water and blood. Washing the newborn means acceptance according to Wilcke. The second child, “pulled from the womb”, had been accepted, it has a name, but there is something wrong with it.

All scholars admit that we do not know what “pulled from the womb” really means. The expression is only known from Old Babylonian Sippar, and then only during a limited time span.

Boys, girls, puppies

In the Talmud we come across the observation that girls are born with the face upwards: “Why are the pains of a female birth greater than those of a male birth? – The female emerges in the position she assumes during intercourse and the male emerges in the position he assumes during intercourse. The former, therefore, turns her face upwards while the latter need not turn his face” (Niddah 31a). This belief still exists in Palestine and Egypt: “A boy comes with the face downwards and a girl with the face upwards”.¹¹⁸ It was commonly believed in Antiquity that giving birth to a daughter was much harder than being delivered of a son.

We have an Old Babylonian incantation in which we read, “let it return to the day that it was born”. According to me, this is an incantation for a rabid dog to change back into the innocent puppy that he once was. From the same collection we have an incantation directed against a rabid dog. It is similar to the first even in the form and dimensions of the clay tablets. “He is long of legs, he is swift to run, he has little to eat, he craves (?) food. In his teeth his semen is bound; where he has bitten, he has left his

¹¹⁷ MAH 15951, copy by E. Szlechter, photo in Oppenheim’s article. Text A in Veenhof’s article.

¹¹⁸ Granqvist, 70. An explanation is: “The boy comes out on his face for fear of seeing his mother’s shame and the girl comes on her back. She is like her mother and is not ashamed” (71). A midwife from Nablus denied this: “Almost all children both boys and girls come with their faces turned down” (p. 235 note 24). Egypt: “According to the midwives in the village, a male is usually born face downwards (‘because he is ashamed of his mother’) while a girl is born face up”; S. Morsy, “Childbirth in an Egyptian village”, in: M. Artschwager Kay, *Anthropology of Human Birth* (1982) 163. Europe: “Dass die Knaben mit dem Gesicht *ad podicem matris conversi*, die Mädchen facie *ad partes obscoenas* geboren würden, haben noch im 17. Jhd. deutsche Ärzte geglaubt”, J. Preuss, *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin* (1911) 461.

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son".¹¹⁹ The semen is the foam on the rabid dog's mouth and the "son" is the infection that he leaves when biting. The first text, the one that interests us more, reads as follows: "Let him eat his rage like thyme (?), let his placenta fall, let him cover his face, let his mouth 'return' to the day that he was born".¹²⁰ We suppose that the thyme is thrown to the dog for eating; it has magical qualities. The day of birth is characterized by the falling out of the placenta (or membranes); the word (*silītum*) stands in the Atram-hasīs myth for the membrane that is "opened" by the midwife. The "covered face" refers to the puppy's initial blindness. The foaming mouth should turn back into the snout of that original sweet doggy.

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Among Babylonians

The delivery could be normal and even easy; the Babylonians indicated this by a verb meaning "to move straightforwardly", with the connotation "in the right way" (*ešēru* Št; Sumerian *si.sá*). However, women's history is full of appalling examples about what can go wrong.¹²¹ Hard labour in Babylonia (*pušqu*) was derived from a verb meaning "to be in straits" (*pašāqu* Š(t); Sumerian *la.ra.ah*). An expectant mother complains in an incantation: "I have become pregnant, I did not give birth after having completed (the term), I did not bear. Let one who has completed (the term) take (this) from me, let one who has borne, diminish (it) for me. Let me fare well and let me make fare well in the house where I live".¹²²

Incantations to help the mother in this situation speak of the "sealed womb" (*rēmi kangātu*) of a woman in travail (*šupšuqtu*):¹²³

The woman in hard labour, the sealed womb:
You, Šazu, are her midwife; help her to give birth.

We have studied and translated the incantations facilitating childbirth and have seen that the large tablet from Assur has several for a woman in hard labour. Those give graphic descriptions of the child who has problems in "seeing the light of the sun".¹²⁴ It is a

¹¹⁹ F.M.Th. de Liagre Böhl, "Zwei altbabylonische Beschwörungstexte: LB 2001 und 1001", *BiOr* 11 (1954) 81–83. Our text is LB 2001. Böhl's obverse actually is the reverse. Modern translation by B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* I (1996) 127. A new variant offers: "Where he has bitten, he has left a whelp (*[m]erānam ̪ib*)", OECT 11 4:7.

¹²⁰ Böhl, LB 1001; Foster, 120. Text: (1) *li-ku-ul uz-za-šu* (2) *ki-ma ha-šu-tim* (3) *si-li-is-sú* (4) *li-im-qi-ut* (5) *pa-ni-šu* (6) *li-ih-ri-im* (7) *pí-šu li-tu-úr* (8) *a-na u4-mi-im* (9) *ša i-wa-al-du* (10) *tu-en.nu.ri*.

¹²¹ E. Shorter, *Women's bodies. A social history of women's encounter with health, ill-health, and medicine* (1982), Part Two, "A history of the birth experience". Read also M. Bruins Allison, *Doctor Mary in Arabia* (1994) 162–168.

¹²² SpbTU III 116 no. 84:10–11.

¹²³ BAM 3 248 IV 6–9, dupl. AMT 67,1 IV 1–2. cf. CAD A/1 293a; Veldhuis, 252 (ritual).

¹²⁴ Subscription INIM.INIM.MA SAL.LA.RA.AH.A.KAM, "Incantation for a woman in hard labour (*muštapšiqtu*)", BAM 3 248 I 51, 67, III 6, IV 11. Commentary: M. Civil, *JNES* 33 (1974) 332:26 f., LA.RA.AH = *pu-uš-qa dan-na-ti*. – Cf. the subscription *mu-ú mu-ša-ap-ši-iq-tum*, G. Farber, *JNES* 43 (1984) 314 rev. 6. A wooden writing board (*le'u*) was inscribed with instructions for a woman "not doing well" in childbirth; GIŠ.DA šá SAL NU SI.SÁ (CT 55 411:4).

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special category of incantations, listed in the catalogue of the manuals of conjurers.¹²⁵ We present here a translation of an older incantation which poignantly pictures the sad state of the mother whose “door is blocked”.¹²⁶ The Middle Assyrian writing and language are difficult and the translation given here is provisional in some respects.¹²⁷

The woman in travail has great difficulty in giving birth,
 she has great difficulty in giving birth, she is stuck with the baby.
 She is stuck with the baby to the point of ending her life.
 The bolt is lowered, the door is closed for the suckling,
 the opening of the womb is blocked.
 The mother is enveloped in the dust of death,
 like a chariot, she is enveloped in the dust of battle,
 like a plough, she is enveloped in the dust of the yokes,
 like a fighting warrior, she is cast down in her blood.
 Her eyes being darkened, she does not see,
 her lips being closed, she does not open (them).
 Her eyes are . . . by the mark of death and . . .
 The woe of her mouth keeps covering her.
 Her ears do not hear, her breast is not . . ., her headband is loosened,
 not being veiled, she has no dignity.
 Stand by and speak, o merciful Marduk:
 Here is confusion, I am surrounded, reach for me!
 Bring forth that sealed one, a creation of the gods,
 a creation of man. Let it come out and see the light!

A difficult text has recently been published which deals with problems encountered during childbirth. The text begins with vaginal bleeding for which tampons (*maššītu*) are used. In the interesting passage birth is imminent and the midwife is consulted. The following translation is very provisional.¹²⁸

“If the month when the birth is due has approached (*qerēbu*) but she did not yet give birth [and the baby did not yet] emerge, until [...] you should make boil the powder from the *hurru*-bird and cumin and apply it, together with potions [of] fox-vine and soap-plant (which) you have her drink, and you make her walk about (?) (*tušašgeš*). As her baby (*lillidu*) approaches (*qerēbu*), you see the midwife and she says to you thus, ‘The birth is near!’ (*alādu qerub*). After a tampon of powder from the *hurru*-bird and cumin is administered to her, the powder from the *hurru*-bird or cumin will dilate (lit. “open”, *petū*) her considerably. When [she is] heavy (*kabātu*?), give them to her. (If)

¹²⁵ KAR 44:15, SAL.LA.RA.AH. See J. Bottéro, *Mythes et rites de Babylone* (1985) 75.

¹²⁶ An isolated line in a commentary promises help for this situation: “her vagina is set free” (*uš-šu-rat hur-da-at-su*); M. Civil, JNES 33 (1974) 332:40, with A. Cavigneaux, *Aula Orientalis* 5 (1987) 255.

¹²⁷ W.G. Lambert, *Iraq* 31 (1969) 31:33–49; R. Albertz, *Persönliche Frömmigkeit und offizielle Religion* (1978) 52, with 230 (notes); B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* II (1996) 875. Some notes: (34 f.) *še-er-ra ku-na-at*: CAD Q 178b otherwise. (35) *šu.ra*: CAD S 140a, 258b emends to *aš-ru*. (36), end: *ka* (!)-*lu-ú pi-it ARHUŠ-mu*; Albertz, 230 note 256. (39), end: NIR.MEŠ. (41) *ú-ṭa-a*, AHw 1555b s.v. *etū* II D. (42) See CAD Š/1 489b, Š/2 11a. (43) *ú-ja KA-šá ik-ṭa-na-at-tam*, Albertz, 230 note 260; AHw 982b reads KA as *rigmu*. (47) Par. BAM 3 248 II 46, but *mehū* instead of *tēšū*. (48) *kak-ka* = *kanka* (Lambert).

¹²⁸ E. von Weiher, SpbTU IV 153:21–31, with I.L. Finkel, NABU 1994/69, and M.J. Geller, AfO 42–43 (1995–96) 246 f. We largely follow Geller’s translation.

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she lets her ‘waters’ flow (*šarāku?*), the baby dies. You should bray and filter fox-vine, soap-plant, and dog’s tongue one at a time (with?) bread in new barley-beer, and leave them out overnight. In the morning, you should dry (?) their juices.

You ... and give it to her to drink and make her walk about (?). As for whatever she eats, whether fish or onion, you pour it in. On the second day, you should pound up one *gar* of roasted barley flour, one *gar* of unheated pressed oil, together with one litre of crushed (?) dates, [x] *gar* of ... dodder in the mouth of a beer-jug and have her drink it and make her walk about (?). Do not pound (them) up either at night or during midday. Make her get up, let her walk around, and have her ride (?) in a cart”.

According to the second half of the text the dead child is stuck in the mother and medication and movements are prescribed to help expel it.

A second text on the difficult birth of a baby (*šerru*) remains fragmentary.¹²⁹

Jewish sources speak of a child “going out through the abdominal wall” (*jōsē’ dōfān*). Some see this as Caesarian section. J. Preuss, however, thinks it is a laparotomy.¹³⁰ This is the basis for the translation “born from the side (Greek *lapáre*)”.

People having problems may worry about their future and may ask for an oracle from the gods. We have about one hundred such oracle requests directed to the gods Šamaš and Adad.¹³¹ One group follows marital problems in chronological order.¹³² This group begins with a question about bringing a present to the other family at the wedding. The next problem concerns a woman giving birth only to daughters. Then follows “a request of a woman in childbed” (*tamīt harišti*). Only half of the text is preserved, but seems to say that “she scoops [water] (?), as much as there is, whether in [nearby] or far off days, she gets pre[gnant]”.¹³³ Scooping (*sābu*) appears to be a metaphor. The words “alien bone” (*ešemtu ahiṭu*) are used; there is talk of a difficult childbirth, sickness and blood.¹³⁴

Some personal names serve to remind the family of the problems surrounding the birth of its bearer. One such name is *Ūsi-ina-pušqi*, “He came out from difficulty”.¹³⁵ An artificially constructed name from a school text is *Šamaš-ina-pušqi-u-dannati-qātī-šabat* “O Šamaš, seize my hand in difficulty and hardship”. It is preceded by its translation into

¹²⁹ Sm 157+1134; see J.V. Kinnier Wilson, *Iraq* 31 (1969) 15. It is not a part of the Etana myth.

¹³⁰ Preuss, 492–8. Cf. S. Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie* II (1911) 5 with note 36 (p. 428); J. Snowman, *A short history of Talmudic medicine* (1935) 71 f.; B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* III (1975) 266 f. J. Boss, “The antiquity of Caesarean section with maternal survival: the Jewish tradition”, *Medical History* 5 (1961) 117–131, is adventurous: the technique, used in the second century A.D., possibly learned in Babylonia, was forgotten in the Middle Ages. – Note that embryotomy is well known in Jewish literature (*hittēk*, S. Krauss; J. Preuss, 488–490).

¹³¹ W.G. Lambert, “Questions addressed to the Babylonian oracle. The *Tamītu* texts”, in: J.G. Heintz, *Oracles et prophéties dans l’Antiquité* (1997) 85–98. Lambert is preparing an edition.

¹³² J.A. Craig, ABRT I 4, with K. 10322 joined to the beginning of Col. III. Often cited in the CAD. Cf. the summary by Lambert, 90 f.; also in Lambert in: *La divination en Mésopotamie ancienne et dans les régions voisines* (1966) 122 f.

¹³³ II 8–10, [A.MEŠ] (?) *ma-la ibaššū šumma ina ūme* [qerbūte] *šumma ina ūme ruqūte i-sa-ab ir-r[e]*. Cf. CAD S 10 a. Full translation above p. 36.

¹³⁴ See CAD A/1 212 b; S 96 b (*pašāqu Š, katāmu, salā’u A*); Š/1 206 a; Š/2 320 a. In Col. III 5: IM šá (or: *em-šá*) ŠĀ *da-ma* Ū.TU [...].

¹³⁵ CAD A/2 369b, m. Also: *I-pu-uš-qí-im-ú-sí*, TIM 7 59:7; *Ū-sí-pu-uš-qí*, A.K. Muhamed, *Old Babylonian cuneiform texts from the Hamrin Basin. Tell Haddad* (1992) no. 11:18; *Ū-sí-pu-uš-qám*, D.O. Edzard, WdO 8 (1976) 160:1, 14, 28.

V. Giving Birth

Sumerian.¹³⁶ “Difficulty” (Sumerian *la.ra.ah*) refers to a difficult birth. An inscription of a wife of king Rim-Sin of Larsa praises the goddess Inanna as “She who knows how to take by the hand those in difficulty and hardship”; elements of the artificial Sumerian name recur in this phrase.¹³⁷ One gets the impression that these words, pronounced by a mother, refer to Inanna’s help at birth.

Some names are more specific. “His nose arrived” (*Ikšud-appašu*) or “Your face came out” (*Uši-bunuki*; a girl) probably indicating that the child was born in an abnormal way.¹³⁸ “In perhaps one half of 1 percent of births, the child’s *face* presents at the vagina, its head severely extended backward rather than flexed forward. As long as it stays in that position, it cannot be born. In fact some four fifths of the face presentations did in the past correct themselves sooner or later, permitting a spontaneous delivery. But this delivery often entailed agonizing delays for the mother and lacerations of the muscles of her ‘pelvic floor’ ”.¹³⁹ The handbook on the ominous meaning of births speaks of a woman giving birth to two boys or girls “feet-first” (*šēpānum*).¹⁴⁰ In the large text with magical birth prescriptions we read the line, “May he not throw his cheek to his back” which could refer to breech presentation.¹⁴¹ “Sometimes, not the head at all but the infant’s buttocks are the first part to engage in the pelvis, so that the buttocks themselves, or the feet or knees, are the first part to be born. Although this kind of *breech* presentation sounds ominous, it actually has little impact on the speed of labour, but the infant’s head becomes the last part to be born and is especially at risk of injury. Breech presentation occurred then, as it does now, in about 3.5 percent of all labours”.¹⁴² The name “The dry one” (*Šābulu*) must refer to the condition of the baby at birth.¹⁴³

Twelve amulet stones helping a woman who does not give birth easily (*la mušteširtu*) are to be tied to parts of the body: both hands, both feet, the hips. These same body parts receive amulets during pregnancy when there is a danger of miscarriage. In addition, “a sherd from the street” was to be fastened to the navel. However the stones for a woman who does not give birth easily are different from those that protect a woman during the months of pregnancy.¹⁴⁴ We learn the names of “the stones on the hips of a woman who

¹³⁶ 5 R 44 III 26, with W.G. Lambert, JCS 11 (1957) 13, lines 58-9. Sumerian: x.nu-la.ra.ah-SAL.kalag.ga-šu.mu-al.dib.ba

¹³⁷ Rim-Sin inscr. 18 (according to the count of W.W. Hallo); now D.R. Frayne, RIME 4 (1990) 302 no. 23.6-7, *la.ra.ah níg.gig.ga šu.dab₅.bé gal.zu.a.áš*. We assume that *níg.gig.ga* = *maruštu* “hardship” (cf. *dannatu*), not “the sick”.

¹³⁸ J.J. Stamm, *Die akkadiische Namengebung* (1939) 127 f.: “Da das Geschlecht des Kindes erkannt ist, muß es sich um eine gegenüber der normalen Kopfgeburt ungewöhnliche (sehr seltene) Fußgeburt handeln. Der Name drückt dann die Freude darüber aus, daß das Kind ganz da ist”. In a footnote he adds: “Nach Auskunft von medizinischer Seite ist in einem solchen Falle mit dem Erscheinen der Nase die Geburt beendet; in der Zeit vom Beginn der Geburt bis zum Erscheinen der Nase läßt sich das Geschlecht des Kindes sicher feststellen”. – A girl’s name in ARM 9 253 III 7, 25.

¹³⁹ E. Shorter, *Women’s bodies* (1982) 73.

¹⁴⁰ *Šumma izbu* I 85, 103; CAD Š/2 299b; LKU 126:24-26 with the reviews by W. von Soden, OLZ 36 (1933) 518; B. Meissner, AfO 8 (1932-33) 62 (“wohl Fussgeburt”). Granqvist, 70: “Some children come feet first. This is made known at once. All the village know it”.

¹⁴¹ BAM 3 248 III 45 with the note by W. Farber, TUAT II/2 (1987) 276.

¹⁴² E. Shorter, *Women’s bodies* (1982) 73.

¹⁴³ AbB 2 161:2, CAD Š/1 20a (“The-Withered-One”). Other names describing the baby: Stamm, 267 (“Short”; “Fat”; etc.).

¹⁴⁴ STT 2 241:7 (PAP 12 NA₄.MEŠ ša SAL NU.SI.SÁ.KAM). Compare this list with F. Thureau-Dangin, RA 18 (1921) 164. It is not clear what the following incantation is referring to; the first line of the incantation

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does not give birth easily" from a ritual to avoid birth in month Nisan.¹⁴⁵ A stone used for a woman having a hard labour is the *turminû*, another text says.¹⁴⁶

Plants helping the woman in this situation are better known. These plants, *atā'išu* and Dog's Tongue, are discussed above in the section "Plants of Birth".¹⁴⁷ A recipe runs as follows: "If a woman gives birth and has hard labour, you crush Fox Wine, Dog's Tongue, *tuhlu*, you fill a jug with brewer's beer, and you stir these herbs in it. She shall drink it on an empty stomach and she will give birth quickly".¹⁴⁸ Many alternative prescriptions follow; Dog's Tongue remains an important ingredient. The promise "she will give birth quickly" is for a woman in hard labour.¹⁴⁹

We now have a ritual for a woman who has a difficult delivery (*sinništu la mušešertu*). Her body is first shaven, she is washed and the prescriptions intend to transmit her problems to an oven, a palm tree, a pregnant ewe or donkey. She first clings to the oven, extolling its capacity to be filled, to be burning, and to become empty again after the process. "Give me your capacity to finish without problems (*šalmānūtu*) and take mine of not being able to do so (*la šalmānūtu*)". The palm tree who is able to bring forth fruits all the time, be they early or late in the season, is asked to take care of her. The ewe and the donkey who easily become pregnant and give birth so smoothly, are by magical means forced to exchange their pregnancy (*mērû*) for her difficult delivery (*la mušešerūtu*). Incantations recited by the woman stress that she suffers from the consequences of sins and (or) the machinations of sorcerers.¹⁵⁰

Gods are helpers at birth. At the end of our discussion of the incantations we have seen that in the Akkadian texts the gods Sîn, Asalluhi / Marduk and Šamaš act as helpers. We find them again in prayers. Marduk takes care of the future mother who is having problems.¹⁵¹ In a praise of the god Marduk we read "He becomes merciful (?) and as soon as the woman giving birth is in labour, he hastens to care for her womb, and he turns around her like a cow (around) the calf".¹⁵²

In a bilingual prayer to the god Utu / Šamaš he is asked that the "knot" (*kisru*) affecting a woman when giving birth be loosened (*patāru*); this knot was caused by sorcery.¹⁵³ After praising the god in general terms, the text comes to the point:¹⁵⁴

runs: "He who strikes my skull, who dries my palate, who dries my head, and eats my sinews" (cf. CAD L 206a, *liq pi*). The newborn baby?

¹⁴⁵ KAR 223:5; in STT 2 241:5 the stones are NA₄ šu-bu-u and NA₄ KUR-nu DIB.BA (*šadānu šabitu* in CAD Š/1 37 f.).

¹⁴⁶ SpbTU II 113 no. 22 IV 24, NA₄.DÚR.MI.NA NA₄ SAL.LA.RA.AH (= *mušapšiqtu*).

¹⁴⁷ Above, p. 54. Note Ú LA.RA.AH *sà-ku ina* [...], KADP 1 V 8, 12.

¹⁴⁸ BAM 3 248 IV 13–15. For the context, see p. 70 ff.

¹⁴⁹ BAM 3 249:2, 4,10; STT I 98 rev. 5 (*arhiš ulla*). Not preserved in BAM 4 408 II 4–10 (DIŠ SAL Ú.TU-ma *u[š]-lap-šiq*, etc.). – A group of Egyptian incantations are "the spells for the acceleration of birthgiving"; J.F. Borghouts, OMRO 51 (1970) 12 f., § 10; 28 ff., Spells 28–34.

¹⁵⁰ SpbTU V 248.

¹⁵¹ BMS 16+42:15, see E. Ebeling, *Die akkadische Gebetsserie "Handerhebung"* (1953) 90. The word *mušapšiqtu* in broken context.

¹⁵² Ludlul I 18–20, in the interpretation of W. von Soden, TUAT III/1 (1990) 115 f. Text: D.J. Wiseman, AnSt 30 (1980) 101 f. Otherwise B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* I (1996) 308 f.

¹⁵³ J.A. Scullock, *Incognita* 2 (1991) 141 f.; on sorcery in childbirth.

¹⁵⁴ R. Borger, Or NS 54 (1985) 14–18 (lines 27–52); M.-J. Seux, *Hymnes et prières* (1976) 216 f., "Pour une parturiente". – The metaphor "knot(ted)" is also used to indicate infertility, in "the womb is knotted (*rēmu kuşsur*) and does not give birth to a baby", Atramhasis S iv 61 (p. 110).

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This woman [...], daughter of her god,
may her knot before your godhead be loosened,
may this woman give birth safely.
May she give birth, may she live, may her foetus fare well;
may she walk before your divine might safely.
If she gives birth safely, she may proclaim your glory.
Let the sorcery and witchcraft be loosened before your godhead,
let it be loosened like a twisted thread,
let it be peeled off like garlic.
If that woman lives, she may extoll your greatness as long as she lives.
let the people praise the greatness of Ea (?) and Marduk,
and let me, the conjurer, your servant, proclaim your glory.

Most of the descriptions given above are metaphors. As to reality, inadequate diets, deficiency disease and osteomalacia must have contributed to a deformed pelvis.¹⁵⁵

Among the Hebrews

In Hebrew the verb “to be hard, difficult” is used for difficult birth (*qāšā*). Hard labour is a metaphor in the Old Testament: “This is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to birth (*bā’ū bānīm ‘ad-mašbēr*), and there is no strength to bring them forth” (2 Kings 19:3). “The pangs of childbirth come for him, but he is an unwise son; for now he does not present himself at the mouth of the womb (*b’mišbar bānīm*)” (Hosea 13:13).

Rachel died in childbed: “Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour (*wattēlēd Rāhēl watt’ qaš belidtāh*). And when she was in hard labour, the midwife said to her: ‘Fear not; for now you will have another son’. And as her soul was departing (for she died), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called his name Benjamin. So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), and Jacob set up a pillar (*mašebā*) upon her grave; it is the pillar of Rachel’s tomb which is there to this day” (Genesis 35:16–20). Indeed, a name like Ben-oni, “Son of my sorrow”, would be inauspicious whereas Benjamin, “Son of the right (hand)” is propitious.¹⁵⁶

Two abnormal deliveries, both involving twins, are described in the Bible. The first story is about the birth of Esau and Jacob: “And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived (*hārā*). The children struggled together within her; and she said, ‘If it is thus, why do I live?’ So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb (*bētēn*), and two peoples, born of you [lit., from your loins, *mē’im*], shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger’. When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. The first came forth, red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came forth, and his hand had taken hold of Esau’s heel (*āqēb*); so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them” (Genesis 25:21–26).

¹⁵⁵ Alex Tulsky, cited by J.V. Kinnier Wilson, *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 89 (1996) 137 a.

¹⁵⁶ This story is not related to Rachel’s weeping for her children; Jeremiah 31:15 (and Matthew 2:18). See for an interpretation T. Frymer-Kensky, *In the wake of the goddesses* (1992) 166 f.

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Rebekah when pregnant felt uncomfortable and turned to God who gave oracular answer (see p. 209). The story explains the name Jacob by relating it to Hebrew ‘āqēb “heel”. The name “Esau” itself is not explained but the names of his future land, Edom / Seir are. Esau is covered by red hair; now, Edom is taken to mean “red” (*‘admōnī*) and Seir means “hairy” (*šē‘ār*). This, however, is folk-etymology. Hosea reminded Israel of this story, “In the womb he took his brother by the heel” (12:3).

Julius Preuss explained this birth as follows.¹⁵⁷

“Im Geburtsbericht hat man den Ausdruck vom “Festhalten der Ferse” für so merkwürdig gefunden, daß man ihn nicht wörtlich fassen zu dürfen glaubte. Er sollte in demselben Sinne stehen wie unser “jemandem auf den Fersen sein”, d.h. ihn verfolgen. Diese Bedeutung kann man Gen. 27, 36 und Jer. 9, 3 finden. An unserer Stelle ist aber wohl eine wörtliche Auffassung möglich, wenn man annimmt, das erste Kind sei in normaler Kopflage geboren und unmittelbar nach dem Austritt der Füße sei eine Hand des zweiten Zwillings vorgefallen, so daß diese die Ferse des ersten Kindes festzuhalten schien. Es müßte also schon während der Geburt des ersten Kindes die Blase des zweiten gesprungen sein, was Ibn Ezra für ‘eine große Merkwürdigkeit’ erklärt. Indessen ist diese Annahme gar nicht nötig: es kommen auch Zwillinge in *einem* Amnion vor; ein gemeinsames Chorion ist, wenn beide Kinder aus einem Ei stammen, nichts Auffallendes, so daß sogar das Wort des Hosea vom “Festhalten im Mutterleibe (*ba-béten*) wörtlich zutreffen kann”.

The second story tells us how Tamar was delivered of the twins engendered by Judah: “When the time of her delivery came, there were twins in her womb. And when she was in labour, one put out a hand; and the midwife took and bound on his hand a scarlet thread, saying, ‘This came out first’. But as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out; and she said, ‘What a breach you have made for yourself!’ Therefore his name was called Perez. Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread upon his hand; and his name was Zerah” (Genesis 38:27–30). It is important to know who is the first-born and that is why the midwife bound a scarlet thread on the hand of the first to arrive. It was her responsibility to establish the truth about the identity of the first-born.¹⁵⁸ This story is very similar to that of Esau and Jacob in the reversal and in the explanation of the names. The name Perez is related to Hebrew *pārāṣ* “to break through (a wall)”. We are reminded of a passage in a Mandean incantation according to which a demon “makes dry during breaking through (*prṣ’*) and birthing (*mwł’d’*)”.¹⁵⁹ There is no obvious connection between “scarlet (thread)” (*šānī*) and the name Zerah and we do not know what the author of Genesis 38 meant.

¹⁵⁷ *Zeitschrift für Geburtshilfe und Gynäkologie* 54 (1905) 477; repeated in *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin* (1911) 501. Earlier opinions in H. Fasbender, *Entwicklungslehre, Geburtshilfe und Gynäkologie in den hippokratischen Schriften* (1897) 36.

¹⁵⁸ Talmud, *Qiddušin* 74a: “A midwife is believed when she states, This one issued first and this one issued second”.

¹⁵⁹ C. Müller-Kessler, *BASOR* 311 (1998) 85, lines 27 f.

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Julius Preuss explained this birth as follows:¹⁶⁰

“Diese Geburt verläuft also zunächst umgekehrt wie die der Rahel, indem gleich zu Beginn ein Arm vorfällt, das erste Kind also in Schulterlage liegt. Dann aber drängt der zweite Zwilling vor, so daß der erste mitsamt seiner vorgefallenen Hand in den Uterus zurücktritt, wird geboren und danach erfolgt die Ausstoßung des ersten Zwilling. Es hat also eine Selbstwendung dieses Zwilling stattgefunden, oder er ist in der ursprünglichen Lage conduplicato corpore geboren. Letzteres wäre umso leichter denkbar, wenn man mit dem Talmud annimt, die Niederkunft der Thamar sei schon vor dem normalen Ende der Schwangerschaft erfolgt, so daß es sich also um nicht ausgetragene Kinder gehandelt hätte. Der Talmud folgert dies daraus, daß bei der Entbindung der Rebekka ausdrücklich bemerkt wird, daß ‘ihre Tage voll waren zum Gebären’, während hier nur allgemein von der ‘Zeit der Geburt’ geredet wird (Genesis Rabbah 63, 8)“.

In a fourth century A.D. grave, west of Jerusalem, a remarkable archaeological discovery was made. The body of a young woman of 14 years old was found with a full term foetus in her pelvic area. She must have died together with her child. “In the abdominal area of the skeleton 6.97 gm of a grey carbonized material was recovered”, and the material was identified as hashish, *Cannabis sativa*. It had been burned in a glass vessel – also found on the spot – and must have been inhaled by the woman. Hashish is said to have the power of “increasing the force of uterine contractions, concomitant with a significant reduction of labour pain”. The report is tantalizing and one wishes to know more.¹⁶¹

Birth and pain

It is woman’s lot is to bear children in pain.

The Sumerian myth “Enki and Ninhursag” tells of the incestuous relationships of the god Enki with his daughters; each of them gives birth in nine days which suggests an easy process. Then, he turns to his fifth-generation daughter Uttu, the goddess of weaving. She has been warned about him and she formally demands garden fruits as a gift for the bride. These he brings to Uttu’s house, and he unites with her. Now she cries “Woe, my thigh, woe, my outsides, woe, my innards!” Her mother Ninhursaga rushes to her and removes the semen from the thigh.¹⁶² While this looks like rape, T.

¹⁶⁰ *Zeitschrift für Geburtshilfe und Gynäkologie* 54 (1905) 478; repeated in *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin* (1911) 502, second explanation. Earlier opinions in H. Fasbender, *Entwicklungslehre, Geburtshilfe und Gynäkologie in den hippokratischen Schriften* (1897) 36 f.

¹⁶¹ J. Zias and others, “Early medical use of Cannabis”, *Nature* 363 (1993) 215; J. Zias, “*Cannabis sativa* (hashish) as an effective medication in Antiquity: the anthropological evidence”, in: S. Campbell, A. Green, *The archaeology of death in the Ancient Near East* (1995) 232-234. – Another find of a dead foetus was discussed by D. Gourevitch and Y. Malinas, “Présentation de l’épaule négligée. Expertise d’un squelette de foetus à terme découvert dans une nécropole du IVe siècle à Poundbury (Dorset - UK)”, *Revue française de Gynécologie et d’Obstétrique* 91 (1996) 291–303.

¹⁶² Th. Jacobsen, *The harps that once . . .* (1987) 199 f. The central passage is P. Attinger, ZA 74 (1984) 22, lines 179–187. – Note that this motif has a close parallel in Hephaestus’ attempted rape of Pallas Athena: as she tore herself away, he ejaculated against her thigh, a little above the knee. She wiped off the seed with a handful of wool, which she threw away in disgust; it fell on the ground near Athens, and accidentally fertilized Mother Earth, who was on visit there. The infant that was born was named Erichthonius. R. Graves, *The Greek Myths* 1 (1960) 97 § 25.b. Sources: Hyginus, *Poetic Astronomy* II 13; Apollodorus III.14.6; Hyginus, *Fabula* 166.

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Frymer-Kensky has written that Uttu is the model of the housewife, in being properly married to Enki, and that the woes refer to her giving birth. "The story of Uttu connects marriage and domesticity with difficulty in childbirth. This combination might seem strange, but a similar juxtaposition of marriage and difficult childbearing is known to us from the story of Adam and Eve." (...) "The domestication of women makes them more 'civilized', farther removed from animals and nature, and as a result they no longer are able to perform the 'natural' function of childbirth with ease".¹⁶³

The Bible sees pain in childbirth as God's punishment after the Fall. We quote the famous verses at the end of the Paradise Story where God says to the first mother, Eve (Genesis 3:16):

I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children,
yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you.

A new interpretation of this verse has been proposed by Carol L. Meyers in her influential book *Discovering Eve*.¹⁶⁴ She considers the usual English translations (like the one given above) as "egregiously disruptive of the original meaning" and using powerful arguments she arrives at another understanding. She is correct in pointing out that in the first line not "childbearing" but "pregnancy" is the meaning of Hebrew *hērōn*,¹⁶⁵ and the word rendered as "pain" ('*ıṣṣābōn*) indeed has a much wider meaning, covering physical and emotional distress. She sees no direct connection between this distress and the pregnancy and it is her idea that the distress refers to the hard work that a woman had to do. She situates the oracle in the early history of Israel, when hard work and many children were required of the peasant women in order to survive in the isolated central hill country. She translates: "I will greatly increase your toil and your pregnancies". Consequently, the next line, "in pain you shall bring forth children", is in her interpretation: "(Along) with travail shall you beget children". The travail is the hard work that the Israelite woman had to do besides her being with child. Here, we become suspicious: the translation "along with" instead of simple "in" surprises, and the word "travail" ('*èṣèb*) actually is the "pain" at birth elsewhere in the Bible: "His mother called his name Jabez, saying, 'Because I bore him in pain' ('*oṣèb*)" (1 Chronicles 4:9).¹⁶⁶ It is better to see a direct relationship between the "distress" and pregnancy, and the "pain" and childbirth.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ T. Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses* (1992) 22 f., 72.

¹⁶⁴ C. L. Meyers, *Discovering Eve. Ancient Israelite women in context* (1988), Chapter 5, "The Genesis paradigms for female roles, Part II: Genesis 3:16" (p. 95–121). See also C.L. Meyers, "Gender roles and Genesis 3:16 revisited", in *The word of the Lord shall go forth. Essays in honor of David Noel Freedman* (1983) 337–354. Her translation is: "I will greatly increase your toil and your pregnancies, (Along) with travail shall you beget children, For to your man is your desire, And he shall predominate over you".

¹⁶⁵ Meyers, 102. The new etymology proposed by D.T. Tsumura, *Biblica* 75 (1994) 398–400, is not necessary.

¹⁶⁶ This explanation of the name *Ja'bez* is forced. Meyers, 107 with 203, note 20, dismisses this prime witness, as follows: "Another passage (1 Chron 4:9) is clearly based on an interpretation of the present verse and therefore cannot be used to interpret it". We assume that bearing children "in '*oṣèb*' was living language; note the use of this later by-form of older '*èṣèb*'.

¹⁶⁷ Carol Meyers' observation that pregnancy cannot be associated with pain was entirely correct. Our deduction is now that '*ıṣṣābōn*' is a milder suffering than '*èṣèb*'; at least, this is what the author of Genesis

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Birth and pain go together; we have seen and will see that this is an association made in many cultures, even a metaphor. Genesis is no exception.

One can imagine that in this situation of hardship a woman would be reluctant to bear children – also part of Meyers' interpretation – but the third line of the oracle, “yet your desire shall be for your husband”, imposes the natural sexual desire for her husband on her. As to him, the oracle concludes by remarking: “And he shall rule over you”. This does not refer to male domination in general but to his dominance in the sexual relationship.¹⁶⁸ As the New Testament expresses it, in passing: we are “born of the will of man” (John 1:13). These lines on female desire and male dominance give the aetiological foundation of passion, of lust.¹⁶⁹

The oracle states anthropological truths obtaining for all humans, and it is not a charter for early Israel. A woman suffers from distress during her nine months and has pain when her child is born; this cannot be avoided: sexual drive rules human beings.

The main punishment of the Fall in Paradise is banishment from Paradise (Eden) and death. The curses for Adam and Eve are secondary and concomitant to it.¹⁷⁰ In the New Testament, the curse of Eve is given a new meaning. St. Paul gives Timothy the following admonishment: “Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty” (1 Timothy 2:11–15). This was written in a spiritual world full of distrust of women; woman was seen as a temptress who had to be curbed.¹⁷¹ Actually, the word in our text translated as “deceived” (*exapataō*) also has the meaning “seduced” and Jewish tradition knew that the Serpent had succeeded in luring Eve into sexual congress. The idea that this intercourse was punished by a painful birth may seem to follow from this line of thought, but theologians deny that this is what

¹⁶⁸ 3:16 wishes to express by using two different but etymologically related words. One of these words, see A. Scharbert, *Der Schmerz im Alten Testament* (1955) 27–32; Th. Struys, *Ziekte en genezing in het Oude Testament* (1968) 214–217 (“we see the difference as one between objective and subjective”).

¹⁶⁹ Meyers, *Discovering Eve* (1988) 113 f., in line with Jewish commentators. The study by E. Ullendorf, “The bawdy Bible” (1978), has been published in BSOAS 42 (1979) 425–456.

¹⁷⁰ Differently Carol Meyers. She sees in the dominance of the man a (rational) decision to produce children because the situation in early Israel needed them. “The solution to the need for an increased birthrate in early Israel took the form of a divine ruling that gave men the power to overcome female reluctance” (p. 116). “Women have to work hard and have many children, as lines 1 and 2 proclaim; their reluctance to conform, which is not explicitly stated but can be reconstructed by looking at the biological and socioeconomic realities of ancient Palestine, had to be overcome. Lines 3 and 4 tell us how: female reluctance is overcome by the passion they feel toward their men, and that allows them to accede to the male’s sexual advances even though they realize that undesired pregnancies (with the accompanying risks) might be the consequence” (p. 117).

¹⁷¹ Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve* (1988) 87 f. (and others), sees no sin and punishment in Genesis 1–3 (sin is introduced in 4:7) and considers the “curses” as aetiological oracles explaining gender roles in Palestine (92 f.). “Even critics adhering to traditional sin-punishment readings of the text recognize the discrete character of the oracles. The oracles have an independent etiological force. Hence, the prescriptions in them become penalties only in their canonical position within the prose framework” (119).

¹⁷² M. Küchler, *Schweigen, Schmuck und Schleier. Drei neutestamentliche Vorschriften zur Verdrängung der Frauen auf dem Hintergrund einer fraueneindlichen Exegese des Alten Testaments im antiken Judentum* (1986).

Birth and Pain

Paul meant – and certainly this is not what is meant in Genesis. Woman's pain at birth provides a way to work her salvation.¹⁷²

The Bible often refers to the pains of childbirth as a token of hardship (*h^abālīm, sirīm*, Greek *ōdīnes*); we quote only a few passages.¹⁷³ “Pangs and agony (*sirīm waḥ^abālīm*) will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in travail (*hīl*)” (Isaiah 13:8). “Hearts faint and knees tremble, anguish (*halhālā*) is in all loins” (Nahum 2:10). “Like a woman with child, who writhes (*hīl*) and cries out in her pangs (*h^abālīm*), when she is near in her time, so were we because of thee, O Lord; we were with child, we writhed, we have as it were brought forth wind. We have wrought no deliverance in the earth, and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen (= been born)” (Isaiah 26:17–18). “Has your counselor perished, that pangs have seized you like a woman in travail? Writhe and groan, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail” (Micah 4:9–10). One of the hymns found in the caves of Qumran uses the entire array of words and images of hard labour.¹⁷⁴ Giving birth for the first time is particularly painful: “For I heard a cry as of a woman in travail, anguish as of one bringing forth her first child (*mabkīrāh*), the cry of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands” (Jeremiah 4:31). In Egypt, too, giving birth is associated with pain and suffering.¹⁷⁵

Even Nature, metaphorically, can be in labour. The Assyrian king Shalmaneser III boasts that at his rise to battle “the world regions are in hard travail (*pašāqu Š*), the mountains writhe (*hiālu*)”; at the presence of god Assur “heaven and earth are in hard travail, and mountains and sea writhe”.¹⁷⁶ Hebrew “to writhe” (*hīl*) is also used for people, cities and mountains.¹⁷⁷ In the New Testament in St. Paul's letter to the Romans there is the famous passage, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning (*sustenázō*) in travail together (*sunōdínō*) until now; and not only the creation but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan (*stenázō*) inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:22 f.).

¹⁷² Küchler, 40: “Gleichzeitig würde jedoch in 1 Tim 2, 14f die urgeschichtliche Strafbestimmung von Gen 3, 16 zu einer soteriologischen Wende benutzt: Die Schmerzen der Geburt sind nicht mehr nur Strafe, sondern die den Frauen angebotene Möglichkeit, ihr Heil zu wirken. Jetzt heißt es: ‘Quo quis peccat, eo – salvatur’. Gewiss sind gedankliche Beziehungen zwischen 1 Tim 2, 14f und Gen 3, 16 vorhanden, denn in 1 Tim ist unverkennbar eine theologische Bewältigung der Strafbestimmung von Gen 3, 16. Gebären wird aber weder in Gen noch in 1 Tim unter dem Aspekt des Geschlechtlichen genannt, sondern – parallel zur Arbeit des Mannes – als zentraler Lebensbereich und -vollzug der Frau, in welchem diese ihre *condition humaine* (Gen und 1 Tim) und ihr Heil (nur 1 Tim) erfährt”.

¹⁷³ Much more in A. Scharbert, *Der Schmerz im Alten Testament* (1955) 17–27, “Geburtsschmerz und Angst”; Th. Struys, *Ziekte en genezing in het Oude Testament* (1968) 213–228, “Aanhangesel: Het geboorteproces”; Baumann, art. *hīl*, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* II/8 (1976) 898–902; Fabry, art. *hebēl*, ibidem, II/5–6 (1975) 716–720; Ch. Fontenoy, *L'enfant* . . . (1980) 114.

¹⁷⁴ Hodayoth III 7–12; now F. García Martínez, *The Dead Sea scrolls translated* (1994) 331, Col. XI 7–12. New is here *kōr h^arājāh* “the source of the pregnant one” (the birth canal); cf. OT Hebrew *m^ekūrā* (p. 142). – A positive appreciation of birth is found in Isaiah 66:7–9, John 16:21.

¹⁷⁵ H. Grapow, *Kranker, Krankheit und Arzt* (1956) 12.

¹⁷⁶ See CAD H 55a *ḥālu* B, citing 3 R 7 I 8–9 (Shalm. III) and H. Winckler, *Sammlung* 2 1:5 (Sargon II); this is the Assur Charter, now H.W.F. Saggs, *Iraq* 37 (1975) 12, Plate IX. The third ref. in CAD is now RIMA 2 (1991) 41 no. 4.9 (Tiglath-Pileser I). A similar passage is CTN III 214:10 (ND 411), [...] x-a-te i-*hi-il-lu-ki-ma* [...].

¹⁷⁷ Scharbert, 22, “Gemeint ist überall ein Erdbeben”.

V. Giving Birth

Death of mother and child

It is sad when all the prayers, magic and medicine cannot help and the mother dies. The midwife said to Rachel when she was in hard labour: “Fear not; for now you will have another son”. “And as her soul was departing (for she died)” – the Bible tells us – “she called his name Ben-oni (‘Son of my sorrow’); but his father called his name Benjamin (‘Son of the right hand’). So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), and Jacob set up a pillar upon her grave; it is the pillar of Rachel’s tomb, which is there to this day” (Genesis 35:17–20). The comforting remark “Fear not, for you have a son” by the by-stander was meant to be a consolation. The wife of Pinehas was not comforted by this. She was about to give birth, “And when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed (*kāra*) and gave birth; for her pains came upon her. And about the time of her death women attending her said to her, ‘Fear not, for you have borne a son’. But she did not answer or give heed. And she named the child Ichabod [“No glory”], saying, ‘The glory has departed from Israel!’ because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband” (1 Samuel 4:19–21).

There is an elegy from Mesopotamia uttered by a woman who has died in childbed.¹⁷⁸ The text is unique in Assyrian and Babylonian literature and we do not know to what purpose it was composed. It has the form of a dialogue. Some vowels are written lengthened which suggests a wailing tone. The woman is pictured as a ship, adrift on the water.¹⁷⁹ This is the reverse of the image of a woman and her child as a ship reaching safe haven, known from incantations.

Why are you cast adrift like a boat midstream?
Your crossbars broken, your tows cut ?
With your face veiled, you cross the river of the city Assur.

How could I not be cast adrift, how could my tows not be cut!
On the day I bore fruit (*inbu*), how happy I was,
Happy was I, happy my husband.
On the day of my labour pains (*hīlū*), my face became overcast,
On the day I gave birth, my eyes became cloudy.
I prayed to Bēlet-ilī with my hands opened:
“You are the mother of those who give birth, save my life!”
When Bēlet-ilī heared this, she veiled her face:
“You [...] why do you keep praying to me?”
[My husband, who lov]ed me, uttered a cry:
“[...] my charming wife!”
(three partly broken lines)

¹⁷⁸ Several modern translations exist; the latest is B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* II (1996) 890. Discussed by Erica Reiner, *Your thwarts in pieces, your mooring rope cut. Poetry from Babylonia and Assyria* (1985) 85–93. Exactly the title of her book, “Your thwarts in pieces, your mooring rope cut”, is the second line of our text, in Reiner’s translation.

¹⁷⁹ Reiner, 90 f. (long vowels), 91 f. (ship).

Cutting the Cord

[...] those days I was with my husband,
I was living with him who was my lover,
When death crept stealthily into my bedroom.
It brought me out of my house,
It separated me from my husband,
It set my feet on the ground from which I shall not return.

In Mari, the Queen has given birth to a daughter and a letter informs a lady at court about what has happened.¹⁸⁰ Ecstatic prophets had announced the death of the little girl – thus we understand the damaged obverse of the letter. On the reverse we read: ‘Before the king reaches Mari, tell him that that little girl has died and let him know (this). Heaven forbid that (only) when entering Mari the king hears of the death of that little girl, and he takes (it to him) (?) and becomes annoyed with me’.

A human being in utter despair can express the wish, never to have been born or to have died before, or at birth. Job cried out, “Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire?” (Job 3:10); “Why didst thou bring me forth from the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me, and were as though I had not been, carried from the womb to the grave. Are not the days of my life few?” (Job 10:18–20). The vexed prophet Jeremiah exclaimed, “Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, ‘A son is born to you’, making him very glad. Let that man be like cities which the Lord overthrew without pity; let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noon, because he did not kill me in the womb; so my mother would have been my grave, and her womb for ever great. Why did I come forth from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?” (Jeremiah 20:14–18). The Babylonian Erra myth, carefully composed by a late poet, has similar lines. Amidst the ravages worked by the god Erra, a city governor says to his mother, “Would that I had been obstructed in your womb on the day you bore me, would that our life had ended and that we had died together”.¹⁸¹

Cutting the umbilical cord

The languages of the ancient Near East, Egypt, Greece and Rome, have one word for both the navel and the umbilical cord.¹⁸² After birth, the cord is cut. A passage in a letter from Mari appears to call this “the separation” (*pursu*): “I ‘tied’ the blood at the separation (?) [and] I raised them”.¹⁸³ We have already quoted and discussed the following passage in the Sumerian myth “Enki and the World Order”:

“Aruru, the sister of Enlil, Nintu, the Lady of Birth, she has received the pure brick of birthgiving sign of her office as *en*-priestess, she took with her the reed that cuts off

¹⁸⁰ ARM 10 106 = AEM 1/1 451 no. 222, with Durand, p. 398, 403 note 124. Cf. A. Malamat, NABU 1989/88.

¹⁸¹ Erra IV 89–90 (translation St. Dalley). Line 89: *ina ūmu tūlidanni lū apparik ina libbiki*.

¹⁸² B. Alster, JCS 28 (1976) 122, explains the name of the holy city Nippur, Dur.an.ki, “Bond of Heaven and Earth”, as the navel of the world.

¹⁸³ J.-M. Durand, MARI 7 (1993) 52 (= ARMT XXVI/3 no. 558:5–10; still unpublished), *da-ma-am i-na pu-ur-si-im ak-sú-ur* [ù] *ú-ra-bi-šu-nu-ti*. We have already made comments on this passage (p. 126).

V. Giving Birth

the (umbilical) cord, the stone *imman*, her leeks (...) She certainly is the midwife of the land".

We have given evidence, all from literary texts, that the umbilical cord was cut by a sharp reed.¹⁸⁴ Such a "clipper for severing the umbilical cord" made of silver is now attested in a Sumerian administrative list; its weight is 1/2 shekel (4 grams).¹⁸⁵ A commentary to the large magico-medical text containing many childbirth incantations has this line: "Above his navel he is broken: because of the reed that cuts the navel. Navel: that is the bond of man".¹⁸⁶ The commentator explains the ambiguous word "navel" (*abbunnatu*) as "cord" (*riksu*, "knot, bond"). Not the navel but the cord is cut. In ancient Egypt they used a knife with magical properties to do this.¹⁸⁷

In the Bible, Ezekiel describes Jerusalem as an abandoned baby taken up by God (Ez. 16:3-7).¹⁸⁸ Its cord was not yet cut. "Your origin (*mēkūrā*) and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite. And as for your birth, on the day you were born your navel string (*šor*) was not cut (*kārat*), nor were you washed with water to cleanse (?) (*mīš’i*), nor salted with salt, nor swathed with swaddling-clothes (*hātal*). No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you; but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born. And when I passed by you, and saw you weltering in your blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live and grow up like a plant of the field'. And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full maidenhood".

We have here a description of normal birth: cutting the cord, washing, salting, swaddling, cast in negative terms.¹⁸⁹

Birth on Sabbath is not convenient, but cannot be postponed. The Mishnah says: "They may deliver a woman on the Sabbath and summon a midwife for her from anywhere, and they may profane the Sabbath for the mother's sake and tie up the navel-string (*qāšar ’et-tabbūr*). Rabbi Jose says: They may also cut (*hatak*) it." (Sabbath XVIII, 3). Tying and cutting are two of the thirty-nine works not to be done on Sabbath.

We hear of the following practices in the traditional Near East.

"When the navel cord is to be cut, a thread is bound round it firmly, quite close to the body. Then three finger-breadths are measured from there and at this place the navel cord is cut. On the portion thus left on the child, a pad with salt is placed, and it is bound tightly with the same thread as was used earlier".¹⁹⁰

"After the severing of the cord the baby's navel is tied with a woollen thread and anointed with a little *kohl* (antimony) or black from the cooking-pot mixed with a little

¹⁸⁴ See above, p. 111 (396, *gi.dur.ku*₅ *im.ma.an* *garāšSAR.a.ni*). The Neo-Assyrian version of Atramhasīs speaks of "The reed-slicer of the cane-brake, cutter of the umbilical (cord)"; ed. Lambert and Millard, *Atra-hasīs* (1969) 60 K. 3399+3943:7. Cf. W.R. Mayer, *Or NS* 58 (1989) 270.

¹⁸⁵ M. Hilgert, *Drehem administrative documents from the reign of Šulgi* (= OIP 115) (1998) no. 483:5 (p. 19).

¹⁸⁶ M. Civil, *JNES* 33 (1974) 332:12-13, *e-li* *LI.DUR-šú* *he-pi-ma aš-šum* *GI* (13) *na-ki-is ab-bu-un-na-ti: ab-bu-un-na-tú ri-ik-si šá* *LÚ ši-i*. Sumerian DUR means "thread". – The passage in the incantation explained here is not preserved.

¹⁸⁷ Named "Zaubermesser"; *WdO* 14 (1983) 35 f.

¹⁸⁸ Adoption "in blood" according to M. Malul, *Journal for the Society of the Old Testament* 46 (1990) 97-126.

¹⁸⁹ Preuss, 467 f. Sabbath 129b: exactly the reverse is permitted when a child is born on Sabbath.

¹⁹⁰ Granqvist, 95.

Cutting the Cord

oil and salt. Jews use sesame oil, ashes, and salt as an ointment for the navel".¹⁹¹

Cutting the cord is a meaningful moment: the child is severed from its mother and becomes an independent human being. The Sumerian goddess Nungal says: "I assist Nintu at the place of bringing children to life, I know the good word for cutting the cord by a reed, decreeing the fate". The "good word" must be propitious phrases that are pronounced. No inauspicious sound should be made and silence is the best.¹⁹² A hymn to Ninisina, goddess of medicine, says that one task of the goddess is "to deal rightly with the pot of the deposited afterbirth, to cut the (umbilical) cord by a reed, to determine the fate".¹⁹³ The child's fate is determined at the moment that its last bond with the mother is severed. A hymn praises king Išme-Dagan of Isin: "In the pure city (Enlil) has decreed for me a good fate, at my conception did he endow me with a good fate. Nintu even stood by at the birth, as my umbilical cord was cut did he establish mastery for me. Enlil, the god who is my vanguard, gave me the shepherdship of Sumer as a gift".¹⁹⁴

In an Old Babylonian version of the Gilgamesh Epic we read about the sexual prerogatives of the hero and the poet adds that this was the will of the gods: "He cohabits with the betrothed bride; he comes first, the husband later. It has been said in the command of the god(s); it has been determined for him at the cutting of his navel (cord)".¹⁹⁵

Cutting the cord may have been the moment to recite an incantation meant to ward off all kinds of diseases which might afflict the newborn. We may identify a lengthy Old Babylonian incantation as such, LB 1000.¹⁹⁶ Lines 12–15 list a number of ten diseases, beginning with the demon Lamaštum and three kindred terrors for babies, followed by the wish "that they may not come near to your fate". By "fate" the child's whole life is meant, rather than an imminent death. In the middle of the incantation, an obscure phrase which reads "year after year" (*šattīšam*) may refer to the child's later life. At the end the author looks back on the successful delivery of the baby. We give a provisional translation of these lines (30-39). "... [...] god]dess (?) of his father, [...] you gave birth to him, Ištar, his mother – the creatresses of goddesses. The god of his maternal uncle, the merciful one, has saved him in the difficulty. The fierce (?) Ninkarrak made 'alive' the pinched intestines, the top of the dark of the belly; the deity of life".¹⁹⁷

¹⁹¹ E.S. Drower, *Iraq* 5 (1938) 110.

¹⁹² Å.W. Sjöberg, AfO 24 (1973) 32:71–72, with comm. (43b); simultaneously Jacobsen, Or NS 42 (1973) 291 f.; earlier in PAPS 107 (1963) 475b note 6. "At the place of bringing children to life (zi)" is *ki.nam.dumu.zi.ka*. Jacobsen: "the place of extraction of the child", or "lifting up of the child" (cf. German *Hebamme* "midwife") (zi.g). Line 72: *gi.dur.ku5.da nam.tar.re.da inim.ša6.ge.bi mu.zu*.

¹⁹³ ŠRT 6 III 1–6, dupl. 7:11–17; J.G. Westenholz, *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989) 259. Discussed above, p. 112.

¹⁹⁴ Išme-Dagan, hymn A 43–48, following S. Tinney, *The Nippur Lament* (1996) 37.

¹⁹⁵ Gilg. P IV 24–29. Lines 28–29: *i-na bi-ti-iq a-bu-un-na-ti-šu* (29) *ši-ma-as-siūm*.

¹⁹⁶ Published in transliteration by F.M.Th. Böhl, in *Mededeelingen uit de Leidsche Verzameling van spijkerschrift-inscripties* II (1934) 2–6. Collations by W. von Soden, BiOr 18 (1961) 71–73. I was allowed to use a hand-copy made by F.A.M. Wiggemann. A partial duplicate is CT 42 32. See W. Farber, ZA 71 (1981) 53, sub C. 4.

¹⁹⁷ LB 1000, (30) *e x[x x x i-]a-at a-bi-šu* (31) *[x x x]x tu-ul-di-šu* (32) *Ištar um-mi-[š]u ba-ni-a-at i-la-tim* (33) *i-li ha-li-šu re-mé-nu-um e-te4-er-šu* (34) *i-na pu-uš-qí-im* (35) *ir-ra-am ša-ap-ra-am re-eš ku-uk* (36) *li-ib-bi-im* (37) *ez-zu* ^d*Nin-kar.ra.ak* (38) *ú-ba-li-iṭ* *dingir din.na*. For *kuk libbim*, see M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 32. Ninkarrak is the female deity Gula, goddess of medicine, and the masculine form *ez-zu*

V. Giving Birth

People in Palestine believe that the gate of heaven stands open at birth and again when the cord is cut. The women can express their wishes at these moments.¹⁹⁸

Sometime the cutting of the cord could be delayed. Of the abandoned girl in Ezekiel 16 the cord was not yet cut. And we have this report on a village in Palestine: “The cutting of the navel cord is delayed, and the reason given is chiefly that mother and child shall first rest and that the new-born child is so wretched and tired that it shall first ‘drink power’ from the afterbirth which is also called a comrade or a sister”.¹⁹⁹

Afterbirth

The large purplish organ named “afterbirth” (*placenta*) is rarely mentioned in the ancient texts. The words for afterbirth in Hebrew and Aramaic, *šiljā* and *siljētā*,²⁰⁰ undoubtedly are etymologically related to Akkadian *silītu* but the latter has a wider meaning (as does Greek *chórión*).²⁰¹ We have seen that in the Atram-hasīs myth the mother goddess “opens” this *silītu* when initiating birth; it must be a membrane. Again, in the incantation against the rabid dog the word refers to the membranes in which it was born.²⁰² A similar uncertainty exists in Greek terminology: *tā hústera* is afterbirth, *hustéra* is womb and its etymology creates problems.²⁰³ The Greek translation of Deuteronomy 28:57 offers *tō chórion*; in the line, “her afterbirth (*šiljā*) that comes out from between her feet”.²⁰⁴ Babylonian *silītu* clearly is the afterbirth when we read in omen texts that a mother animal eats her young or the afterbirth.²⁰⁵

In the Arab world, the afterbirth can be called “sister” and the midwife addresses it as such with soothing words.²⁰⁶ In Iraq, the words “companion”, “neighbour” are also used.²⁰⁷ The baby is laid to rest together with the afterbirth from which it can drink strengthening blood.²⁰⁸

(“fierce”) is very disturbing. At the end seemingly *an-ni-na*; we owe the reading *din* to a collation by K.R. Veenhof.

¹⁹⁸ Granqvist, 94.

¹⁹⁹ Granqvist, 93.

²⁰⁰ J. Preuss, *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin* (1911) 462–4.

²⁰¹ Sumerian *a.silā.gar.ra*; see PSD A/1 165 b. In Hittite texts Akkadian *hakurratu*. The wider meaning: *še-li-tú* “uterine membrane”, in Izbu I 35; see the section on abnormal births; contra A.D. Kilmer, JNES 46 (1987) 212.

²⁰² LB 1001, translated at the end of the section “The delivery” (p. 129).

²⁰³ Cf. F. Kudlien, *Sudhoffs Archiv* 48 (1964) 86–88. For both words, see Plato, *Timaeus* 91c. As to the etymology, compare Latin *uterus* and *secundae* (afterbirth).

²⁰⁴ On the Greek terminology, and more, see B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* III (1975) 227, 240. The normal word for “womb” is *mētra* in Greek and cannot mean “afterbirth”, see Herodotus, *Hist.* III 108.

²⁰⁵ See simply CAD S 264b s.v. *silītu*. Under meaning 2, (“a poetic word for womb”), one finds this line from a prayer to Ištar, “Grant me a child and heir (*šuma u zēra*), let my womb be my *silītu* (*lu ARHŪŠ si-li-ti*)” (BMS 30:14). What is ARHŪŠ SAL *pa-kar-ti*, BAM 5 469 rev. 13?

²⁰⁶ Granqvist, 71 (Palestine). In Iraq “brother”; E.S. Drower, *Iraq* 5 (1938) 109, in her article “Woman and Taboo in Iraq”.

²⁰⁷ Drower, 108: “People of all religions in Iraq call the placenta the *jāra* (‘female neighbour’), but it is also called the *rafiqa* (female companion), and the *mšīma* or *bšīma* (meaning?). In lower Iraq, especially in the marshes, it is spoken of as the *uht* (‘the sister’). Assyrians (Nestorians) call it the *jimma* (‘twin’) or the *hawarta* (‘female likeness’ or ‘double’). Mandaean use the word ‘sister’, ‘neighbour’, like the rest, but also *juft* (‘pair, partner’) and *uṣṭun* (‘support’). Cf. Iranian *joft*, A.D. Kilmer, JNES 46 (1987) 213 (note 15).

²⁰⁸ Granqvist, 75, 93 (Palestine); Drower, 109 (at premature birth in Bahrain).

The Afterbirth

Retention of the afterbirth can be a problem.²⁰⁹ Babylonian pharmacology mentions a plant “for throwing (out) the afterbirth”; its name is lost.²¹⁰ Other post partum problems are discussed in the section on Gynaecology. The afterbirth is disposed of in various ways.²¹¹ Burying is normal, but sometimes it is preserved in a jar or hung in a tree or at the doorpost to ward off evil. We have seen that the goddess Ninisinna deposits it in a jar.²¹² The Jews buried it.²¹³ “We cut the navel-string and we hide the after-birth, so that the infant may be kept warm. R. Simeon b. Gamaliel said: Princesses hide [it] (*tāman*) in bowls of oil, wealthy women in wool fleeces, and poor women in soft rags”.²¹⁴ In Iraq, it was thrown into the river or into running water – we will see that the Babylonians disposed of malformed births in the same way.²¹⁵

²⁰⁹ Soranus II 2, with the notes in the Budé edition (1990) p. 76. Cf. E. Shorter, *Women's bodies* (1982) 63–65, “Retrieving the Placenta”.

²¹⁰ CT 14 36 79–7–8, 22 rev. II 5 = BAM 5 422 III 5, Ú šá-mi ARHUŠ ŠUB-e (= *siliti nadē*). Note the disease “womb of twisting (?)”, ARHUŠ šá zi-i-ri, SpbTU I 43:31 (after infertility).

²¹¹ In Europe: Jacques Gélis, *L'arbre et le fruit. La naissance dans l'Occident moderne* (XVI^e–XIX^e siècle) (1984) 282–291; J.J. Voskuil, “Begraven of in de boom?”, *Mededelingen van de centrale commissie voor onderzoek van het Nederlandse volkseigen*, no. 11 (december 1959) 13–22; idem, *Het Bureau I. Meneer Beerta* (1996) 245 ff. Cf. H.H. Ploss, *Das Weib* II (1899) 234–241 § 333–335.

²¹² ŠRT 6 III 2, dupl. 7:12, dug.silā.gar.ra.ke₄ si.sá.e.dē.

²¹³ Tosefta Sabbath 15, 3: “They bury the afterbirth, so that the offspring may not be chilled, for example with dishes of oil, a garment, or a basket of straw”. Cf. Midrash, Numbers IV, 3, “his navel-string may be cut and his after-birth buried, so that the child may not catch cold, and he may be moved about from place to place”. Moving from place to place is another forbidden work on Sabbath.

²¹⁴ Sabbath 129b.

²¹⁵ Granqvist, 97 f. (Palestine); Drower, 108 f. (Iraq).



Chapter VI THE APPEARANCE OF THE BABY

Children in the image of their parents

Children resembling their parents are a sign of happiness and bliss. This is the ideal situation, reflecting the world of the gods. The Babylonian Epic of Creation contains such a description about the offspring of the primordial gods Anšar and Kišar (*En. el. I* 13–16):

They grew lengthy of days, added years to years.
Anu their firstborn (*aplu*) was like (*šānīnu*) his forebears,
Anšar made Anu, his offspring (*bukru*), his equal (*mašālu* D).
Then Anu begot his likeness (*tamšīlu*) Nudimmud.

Similarly, the god of the protective night light, Nusku, is called “born from (*ilittu*) Anu, likeness of the father, offspring of Enlil” (*Maqlū I* 122 f.).

In the image of a god

It is possible that the god Nudimmud (= Enki) created humans in his image (me.dím).¹ The representatives of the gods on earth, king and conjurer, can also be called their “image” (*salmu*). This “image” normally is the word for “statue”, “cult statue”.

King Tukulti-Ninurta I of Assyria is called “the image of Enlil” in the “epic” extolling his deeds: “By the fate (determined) by Nudimmud, his limbs (?) are reckoned with the flesh of the gods; by the decree of the Lord of the Lands his forming went smoothly in the canal of the divine womb. He alone is the eternal image of Enlil, listening to the voice of the people, to the counsel of the land. (...) Enlil raised him like a natural father, after his first-born son (*māru bukru*) (= Ninurta).² Peter Machinist has observed that the metaphor of man as the “image” of a god is exclusively Assyrian. As in older Sumerian and Babylonian hymnal praise, the king has a divine status; yet, the word “image” and the qualification of Enlil as “like a natural father” in this “epic” show a “certain hesitation about the divine-royal relationship”.³ It has been suggested that the idea of the king as image of the god was taken over from Egypt where this was an accepted creed, some centuries earlier.⁴ The king as the image of a god became a by-word in later

¹ A.D. Kilmer, *Kramer Anniversary Volume* (= AOAT 25) (1976) 266, with note 6 (based on line 133 in the myth “Enki and Ninmah”). Accepted by W. Heimpel, *Festschrift W.H.Ph. Römer* (1998) 140, who even speaks of Enki’s anthropomorphic physical appearance. The interpretation of me.dím by Jacobsen and Römer is very different; TUAT III/3 (1993) 401 (“ehrfürchtig”).

² Tukulti-Ninurta Epic, A, col. I 16–18, 20; also F col. Y 8–10, 12; W.G. Lambert, AfO 18 (1957–58) 50; B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* I (1996) 214 f. See already Chapter III, p. 87, note 268. – Note that *bukru* does not mean here “offspring” but probably “first-born”, as in West-Semitic.

³ P. Machinist, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 38 (1976) 467 f.

⁴ P.-E. Dion, in his article “Ressemblance et image de dieu”, in *Dictionnaire de la Bible. Supplément X* (1985) 374 f.

VI. The Appearance of the Baby

Neo-Assyrian letters. Specifically, he was the image of Šamaš, god of justice and patron of kings. Other texts simply call the king “the sun”.⁵ He can also be the image of Bēl, i.e., Marduk: “The father of the king, my lord, was the image of Bēl, and the king, my lord, is likewise the image of Bēl”.⁶ The following passage helps us understand what this means: “The wise sage, the merciful Bēl, the hero Marduk, became angry at night, but relented in the morning. King of the world, you are the image of Marduk: when you were enraged with your servants, we suffered the rage of the king our lord, but we saw the reconciliation of the king”.⁷ First seen in the poem “Babylonian Job”, the polarity in the god Marduk – now angry, then merciful – becomes an important dogma in people’s faith; and man trusts that Marduk will soon become merciful again. The same is hoped of the king: “The king, my lord, is merciful (*rēmēnū*)”.⁸

In the following letter the word “likeness” (*muššulu*, cf. *tamšilu*) rather than “image” is used. “The king, my lord, is the chosen one (*amru*) of the great gods; the shadow of the king, my lord, is pleasant for everything. Let them come and run around in the sweet and pleasant shadow of the king, my lord. May the king, my lord, see them prosper, and may their grandchildren in like manner run around in the presence of the king, my lord! The well-known proverb says: “Man is a shadow of God”. [But] is man a shadow of man too? The king is the perfect likeness (*muššulu*) of the god”.⁹ So man is “the shadow” of the god. There are also personal names describing a person as “Shadow of (the god) Sîn”. We know from other passages that man lives “in the shadow” of his earthly lord.¹⁰ The lord, in his turn, is the image of the god. In being their “likeness”, the king is much closer to the gods.

The creation of the king as a special being echoes the creation of common man.¹¹ The myth begins by repeating the well-known Babylonian creation story: the gods are tired of their work and the goddess of birth Bēlet-ilī makes man, named *lullū amēlu*, out of clay. Then, Ea tells her to create the king, named *šarru māliku amēlu*, “king, source of wisdom, human”. He has beautiful features and the gods give him the *regalia*. Although the myth does not speak of this king as an “image of god”, it does give us the mythological background of the ideology.

A conjurer (*āšipu*) represents the gods of magic (Enki / Ea, Asalluhi / Marduk) on earth. This is why he so often ends his incantation with the words “This incantation is not mine, it is Ea’s / Marduk’s”, and it is also why he is often seen clad in a fish-garment,

⁵ ABL 5 rev. 4 f. = LAS 143 = SAA X 196, with S. Parpolo, LAS, Commentary (1983) 130.

⁶ ABL 6:18 f. = LAS 125 = SAA X 228. The kings, father and son, probably are Sennacherib and Esarhaddon; P. Villard, NABU 1994/75.

⁷ RMA 170 obv. 4 - rev. 6 = SAA VIII 333.

⁸ S. Parpolo, LAS, Commentary (1983) 58.

⁹ ABL 652 obv. 18 - rev. 13 = LAS 145 = SAA X 207; F.M. Fales, *Lettere della corte assira* (1992) no. 28. The letter comments on the proverbial “Man is a shadow of God”. We followed S. Parpolo, in SAA X. Cf. Parpolo, LAS, Commentary (1983) 132. Otherwise Fales, *Rendiconti Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* 29 (1974) 489 f., note 40: “[But] man is (just) the shadow of man; (on the other hand) the king is the perfect likeness (*muššulu*) of the god”. See also R.M. Jas, JAOS 118 (1998) 447; Dion, *Dictionnaire de la Bible. Supplément X* (1985) 370.

¹⁰ AHw III 1101b, *sillum* B “Schutz”; 7 vom König; 8 von Höhergestellten. Add “And I want to be happy in his shadow”, ARM 10 3 rev. 22.

¹¹ W.R. Mayer, “Ein Mythos von der Erschaffung des Menschen und des Königs”, Or NS 56 (1987) 55–68. Evaluation by H.-P. Müller, “Eine neue babylonische Menschenschöpfungserzählung im Licht keilschriftlicher und biblischer Parallelen. Zur Wirklichkeitsauffassung im Mythos”, Or NS 58 (1989) 61–85. He discusses the special position of the king, p. 73–77.

In the Image of a Parent

symbolising the subterranean waters of Ea's abode, the *apsû*. We now understand why he is once called "the image of Marduk".¹² Another Babylonian "priest", the ideal diviner (*bārû*), has similar qualities. He is said to be "without blemish in body or limbs" and is called "the likeness of Ninhursaga".¹³ The background is not clear. Since Ninhursaga, the mother goddess, does indeed "fashion" man, the word "likeness" (*bunnannû*) has been translated "fashioned by"; any man indeed has been fashioned by this goddess. But this word, literally "features", does not have this meaning.¹⁴ Here, "the likeness of Ninhursaga" may mean that the priest is a physically perfect human being.¹⁵

In the image of a parent

There is no direct evidence from the Babylonian world showing that children ideally look like their parents.¹⁶ Such evidence comes from the Bible and the Classical world. To begin with the latter: the early Greek poet Hesiod, in his *Works and Days*, describes the Golden Age (232–235):

The earth bears them victual in plenty, and on the mountains the oak
bears acorns upon the top and bees in the midst.
Their woolly sheep are laden with fleeces;
their women bear children like their parents (*eoikóta tékna goneūsin*).

Modern commentaries on the last line give parallel passages from Classical literature; and children can also be similar to their parents in character.¹⁷ In oaths children resembling their parents are considered a sign of bliss and are contrasted with the birth of "monsters" (*téras*), considered a curse. Indeed, Aristotle came to this scientific conclusion: "For even he who does not resemble his parents is already in a certain sense a monstrosity (*téras*); for in these cases nature has in a way departed from the type".¹⁸

¹² G. Meier, AfO 14 (1941–44) 150:225 f. (*Bīt mēseri II*), lú.KA.PIRIG alam ^dAsar.lú.hi / *a-ši-pu ṣa-lam* Marduk. Discussed by S. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (1994) 41b.

¹³ H. Zimmern, BBR no. 24:26, with W.G. Lambert, JCS 21 (1967) 132 ("as fashioned by Ninhursagga"), and *Festschrift R. Borger* (1998) 152 ("a creature of Ninhursag"). R. Labat, *Les religions du Proche-Orient asiatique* (1970) 275 ("à l'apparence physique (due) à la déesse Ninhoursag"). – "Likeness of Dingirmah" (Dingirmah is another name of the mother goddess) seems to be a description of a priest in the omen, "If (someone) raises his hand (?) to the likeness of Dingirmah, he will be impoverished"; S.M. Moren, JCS 29 (1977) 66:11.

¹⁴ Note *bunnannû la išārūtu* "irregular features" as undesirable in another description of an ideal priest; R. Borger, BiOr 30 (1973) 165 I 42.

¹⁵ As is suggested by the royal inscription cited in CAD B 318b: "Bēlet-ilī, the creator of everything, [the Mother goddess] perfected his features" (Nabonidus).

¹⁶ Note, however, my suggestion on p. 105, note 79 (*damû Š*). – The birth of two / three identical (*šutāḥû*, "matching") girls is a good omen: "The land of the prince will expand, the hand of the king will conquer his enemies"; E. Leichty, *The Omen Series Šumma Izbu* (1970) 42, Izbu I 101 (three girls), dupl. SpbTU III 145 no. 90 rev. 20 (two girls). Normally, male twins are a bad omen, but "If a woman gives birth to two identical (*mitħurtu*) boys, the woman will be happy; the king will have no opponent", Leichty, 71, Izbu IV 52.

¹⁷ Commentary by M.L. West (1978) p. 215. One example: Horatius, *Carmina* IV.5, 23, *laudantur simili prole puerperae*.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *De generatione animalium* IV, 3 767B. Cf. Jean Céard, *La nature et les prodiges* (1977) 4–6; J.H. Tigay in *Studies* Moshe Greenberg (1997) 141 f.

VI. The Appearance of the Baby

Man in the image of God in the Bible

The first chapter of the Bible contains the famous lines about the creation of Man (Genesis 1:26–27):

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image (*sèlèm*), after our likeness (*dēmūt*); and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth’.

So God created man in his own image (*sèlèm*), in the image of God he created him; male and female he created him”.

Later, Genesis 9:6 offers: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image”. The word “image” (*sèlèm*) is etymologically related to Akkadian *salmu* and we have here a fine semantic parallel between the two. The other word, “likeness” (*dēmūt*), is rare in Hebrew; actually, it is rather an Aramaic word having about the same meaning. A statue from the ninth century B.C. says in its bilingual inscription that it is the “statue” of the prince of Guzana (Gozan), using the words *salmu* (in Akkadian; written NU), *dmwt*, or *slm* (in Aramaic).¹⁹ It has been suggested that these words are not synonyms in this inscription: *dmwt* pictures or reproduces somebody or something, and *slm* is the object representing him or it. This distinction could also apply to the passages in Genesis.²⁰

Many uplifting thoughts have been expressed about the creation of man as *imago Dei*; sometimes distinguishing between “image” (*imago*) and “likeness” (*similitudo*).²¹ To say that the first human being looked like God, his Maker, in the physical sense, is in keeping with the understanding of the Greeks – an observation that has been half forgotten.²² And indeed, Genesis 5:3 remarks that Adam’s son Seth looked just like him, thus continuing his resemblance to God. We give the full passage (Genesis 5:1–3):

“When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth”.

Seth belonged to the pious branch of Adam’s offspring and this is why he still retained the features of Adam and God.²³

¹⁹ Ali Abou-Assaf, Pierre Bordreuil, Alan R. Millard, *La statue de Tell Fekherye et son inscription bilingue assyro-araméenne* (1982) 61 A 1 (-/1); 64 B 1 (19/12), 2 (23/15), 3 (26/16). Akkadian text only: A.K. Grayson, RIMA 2 (1991) 391.

²⁰ C. Dohmen, “Die Statue von Tell Fehrije und die Gottebenbildlichkeit des Menschen. Ein Beitrag zur Bilderterminologie”, *Biblische Notizen* 22 (1983) 91–106. His main points are: *dmwt* is “wiedergebend”; “das Dargestellte, das Abgebildete”; *slm* is “funktional”: “verweisend, vertretend”; “der Gegenstand: Statue, Stele, etc.”. In Genesis 1:26 *slm* is “verweisend, d.h. der Mensch vertritt Gott in einem bestimmten Rahmen auf der Welt [verse 26b: dominion over the animals]; *dmwt* is “wiedergebend, d.h. der Mensch erhält zur Ausübung dieser Funktion quasi (Hebrew *kē*) göttliche Qualitäten” (p. 100).

²¹ For example in Calvinist theology: Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics. Set out and illustrated from the sources* (1950) 232–240. The book by Gunnlaugur A. Jónsson, *The Image of God. Genesis 1:26–28 in a century of Old Testament research* (1988), reads like a history of modern ideas. Man as the image of God in Jewish thought: E. Stiegman, in his article “Rabbinic anthropology”, in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, II, Band 19.2 (1979) 502 f., 520; A.A. Gottstein, “The body as image of God in Rabbinic literature”, *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994) 171–195. – The best modern discussion is P.-E. Dion, “Ressemblance et image de dieu”, in *Dictionnaire de la Bible. Supplément X* (1985) 365–403.

²² P.-E. Dion, DBS X (1985) 376 f., “Une ressemblance physique avec Dieu”; 392.

²³ J.H. Tigay, “He begot a son in his likeness after His image (Genesis 5:3)”, *Studies Moshe Greenberg*

In the Image of God

Genesis 1 has been seen by modern scholars as a conscious rewriting of a Babylonian creation myth. By claiming that man is the “image” of God the author of Genesis 1 could be commenting on the Babylonian appraisal of the king and conjurer as “image” of specific gods. A kind of “democratization” has taken place – now every human being, not just the king and priest, are considered the image of God.²⁴ This is the reason why this title of honour of man is repeated in Genesis 9: “Thou shalt not kill the image of God!”.²⁵

In Babylonia, being the “image” of a god does not point to physical resemblance but to abilities (justice, magic) or character (“fierce but merciful”). Most likely, Genesis also transcends the primitive idea of physical resemblance and sees the first human being(s) in terms of their spiritual resemblance to God. Modern scholarship interprets the divine likeness in Genesis 1 as indicating man’s “dominion over the animal world, exercised by him as God’s representative”, and indeed this is how verse 26 explains it.²⁶ Note that this particular Genesis theology is no more than one interpretation for the general fact that in *Urzeit* children resembled their parents, and when Seth is said to be “after the image” of his father Adam, it refers to his godlike qualities in general. Dominion over animals is not meant.

The New Testament takes up the idea that man is the image of God but Paul remarks that the female is in this respect second to the male: “For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory (*eikōn kai dōxa*) of God; but woman is the glory (*dōxa*) of man” (1 Corinthians 11:7). Modern interpreters point out that in this chapter “glory”, not “image”, is central to Paul’s interest, and therefore we should not overemphasize the secondary position of woman in this passage. Paul must have fully accepted Genesis 1:27, “In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them”.

Children unlike their parents: maternal imagination

One can observe that children are often not like their parents and differ from their siblings. In contrast, the young of animals have no such individual traits. How to explain this? In Antiquity there were sophisticated theories about the strength of the seed of father and mother, their qualities and their origins in various parts of the body.²⁷ The belief that strong psychological impressions exerted on the mother bring about changes in the foetus is ubiquitous.²⁸ Theories were created to account for what is essentially folklore.

We give a few examples of such theories. Aristotle: Animals are so absorbed by

(1997) 139–147, following another line of thought, comes to the conclusion: “Gen. 5:3 means that Adam fathered a normal child with a human appearance”; not a monster.

²⁴ P.-E. Dion, DBS X (1985) 396. Similar “democratizations” are the divine election (see p. 86, 87 f.) and a beatific afterlife for everybody (not only for the king).

²⁵ Cf. Dion, 393 “vues universalistes”.

²⁶ H. Ringgren, as cited by Jónsson, 220.

²⁷ Erna Lesky, *Die Zeugungs- und Vererbungslehren der Antike und ihr Nachwirken* (1950) 103–105 [= 1327–1329]. More in Ursula Weisser, *Zeugung, Vererbung und pränatale Entwicklung in der Medizin des arabisch-islamischen Mittelalters* (1983) 302–313, § 13.1 “Übertragung durch Samen”.

²⁸ U. Weisser, 313–318, § 13.2 “Übertragung auf psychischem Wege”. H.H. Ploss, *Das Weib I* (1899) 712–714 § 195, “Das Versehen der Schwangeren”.

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their mating that they pay no attention to the outside world; human beings are so easily distracted during the act. "Why is it that the young of all other animals resemble their parents in nature more closely than do those of man? Is it because man's mental condition is more varied at the moment of sexual intercourse, and so the offspring varies according to the condition of the male and female parents? The other animals, or most of them, are wholly absorbed in the sexual act; further, owing to this avidity, impregnation does not usually take place".²⁹ D. Gourevitch suspects that this ancient belief was rationalised by a "corpuscular theory of vision" (which was rejected by Galen).³⁰ B.H. Stricker suggests that this explanation derives from the theory of the Ancients that the eye functions as a microcosmos.³¹

This external influence is called "imagination maternelle", "das Versehen", "Einbildungskraft", "vis imaginativa", "imaginatio gravidarum" (rarely "phantasia"), and in the eighteenth century it was still common place accepted knowledge. Doubts about it were only first raised in 1727 by James Blondell; and in the twentieth century the theory still had its adherents.³² In European literature one regularly comes across this belief.³³ Montaigne refers to it in his *Essais* (1595);³⁴ in Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), knowledge of it is assumed and examples are given without further explana-

²⁹ Aristotle, *Problemata physica* X, 10; transl. J. Barnes (1984). See also Pliny, *N.H.* VII, XII § 52; B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* V (1989) 653 cit. 1662.

³⁰ D. Gourevitch, *L'évolution psychiatrique* 52 (1987) 561 f. (see note 61).

³¹ *De geboorte van Horus* V (1989) 655-659. "De ogen zijn spermatisch, het is de conclusie, die zich uit dit alles trekken laat".

³² M. Stol, *Zwangerschap en geboorte* (1983) 73 (believers were J. Preuss, D. Kövendi, Frederik van Eeden; etc.). Note also the discussion by Otto Weininger, in his (notorious) book, *Geschlecht und Charakter*, 15. Auflage (1916) 285 f. (in 2. Teil, X. Kapitel), with 557-563 ("Zusätze und Nachweise"); also p. 309, about the female: "Ein Wesen, das überall und von allen Dingen koitiert wird, kann auch überall und von allen Dingen befruchtet werden: die Mutter ist empfänglich überhaupt. In ihr gewinnt alles Leben, denn alles macht auf sie physiologischen Eindruck und geht in ihr Kind als dessen Bildner ein". – First protests by Jacob Blondel MD, *The strength of the imagination of pregnant woman examin'd, and the opinion, that marks and deformities are from them, demonstrated to be a vulgar error* (London 1727); summarized by Preuss, 23 ff. Cf. S. Kottek, "La force de l'imagination chez les femmes enceintes. A propos d'un texte biblique apporté par J. Blondel à ce thème controversé", *Revue d'histoire de la médecine hébraïque* 27, no. 107 (juin 1974) 43-48.

³³ P.-G. Boucé, "Imagination, pregnant women, and monsters, in eighteenth century England and France", in: G.S. Rousseau, R. Porter, *Sexual underworlds of the Enlightenment* (1988) 86-101; Jacques Gélis, *L'arbre et le fruit: la naissance dans l'Occident moderne (XVIIe-XIXe siècle)* (1984) 118-124 "Imagination et envies" (Part I, 2, Chap. I), gives examples from French books. Translations of this book in Dutch (1987) and English (1991) exist. – We cite from Boucé's article: "The concept of *imagination* was never defined precisely. It covers such widely different phenomena as the sequels of an affective trauma (joy, terror, surprise), cravings for strange foodstuffs which are manifestations of a pica (for instance, the depraved longings some women experience for earth, chalk and coal, diagnosed by modern medicine as caused by deficiencies in vitamins or metals), wild fantasising, psychosomatic effects, and the imaginative faculty every (supposedly) rational being is endowed with" (p. 88).

³⁴ Montaigne, *Essais* I, XXI ("De la force de l'imagination"): "Tant y a que nous voyons par experience les femmes envoyer aux corps des enfans qu'elles portent au ventre des marques de leurs fantaisies, tesmoign celle qui engendra le more. Et il fut presenté à Charles Roy de Boheme et Empereur une fille d'aupres de Pise, toute velue et herissée, que sa mere disait avoir esté ainsi conceue, à cause d'un image de Saint Jean Baptiste pendue en son lit. Des animaux il en est de mesmes, temoign les brebis de Jacob, et les perdris et les lievres, que la neige blanchit aux montaignes".

Maternal Imagination

tion.³⁵ Skipping Dutch literature,³⁶ we only mention Goethe, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (1809): the child born from Eduard and Charlotte has the features of the persons each of them was thinking of when joined in carnal union: "... und so verwebten, wundersam genug, sich Abwesendes und Gegenwärtiges reizend und wonnevoll durcheinander".³⁷ Here, maternal – and paternal! – impression occurs at the moment of union / conception. There are also stories in which the expectant mother is influenced in the later days or months of her pregnancy. According to Arab sources this period is limited to the formative period of the first forty days.³⁸ Rumour has it that maternal vision was used as a pretext even in our century. In 1945, about nine months after D-Day, some blond Norman women held that they were delivered of a black child solely because they had been "frightened" by the first Negro-soldiers they had ever seen.³⁹ This is in accord with the following Scottish account: "I have known a lady, John, who was delivered of a blackamoor child, merely from the circumstance of having got a start by the sudden entrance of her negro servant, and not being able to forget him for several hours".⁴⁰

Classical and Rabbinic literatures offer many examples of this belief. At least two modern scholars have collected them with a vivid interest.⁴¹ We will give some examples from their work. The oldest reference is from Empedocles, as summarized by Aetius: "How is it that those born come to resemble others and not their parents? Empedocles: That the babies are formed according to the phantasy (*phantasía*) of the woman at the conception. For often women fell in love with statues or portraits and they gave birth to beings resembling them".⁴² A famous story in Antiquity illustrates this: Persinna, the black Ethiopian queen, bore a white daughter and she realised that this was due to the white Andromeda pictured in the conjugal bedroom. She told her daughter: "After I had

³⁵ In *Everyman's Library*, ed. 1932, I p. 254 f. (Part I, Section 2, Memb. 3, Subs. 2, "Of the force of imagination"). "And if we may believe Bale, one of Pope Nicholas the Third's concubines, by seeing of a bear, was brought to bed of a monster. 'If a woman' (saith Lemnius), 'at the time of her conception think of another man present or absent, the child will be like him'. Great-bellied women, when they long, yield prodigious examples in this kind, as moles, warts, scars, harelips, monsters, especially caused in their children by force of a depraved phantasy in them. *ipsam speciem quam animo effigiat, foetui inducit*: she imprints that stamp upon her child which she conceives unto herself". Also on p. 215 (Mem. 1, Subs. 6), "If a great-bellied woman see a hare, her child will often have an hare-lip"; and more ghastly examples seen in Brandenburg or Wittenberg.

³⁶ See M. Stol, *Zwangerschap en geboorte* (1983) 73 f.; C. Naaktgeboren, "Over waarneming en verklaring in de verloskunde. Deel II: Het Verzien", *Tijdschrift voor verloskundigen* 10 (1985) 329–341.

³⁷ Part I, Chapter 11; cf. Part II, Chapters 8, 11, 13.

³⁸ U. Weisser, 314 (al-Baladī). Ambroise Paré: there is only a danger as long as the child has not yet been formed: during the first 30 / 35 (boys) or 40 / 42 (girls) days; following Hippocrates. See *Des monstres*, Ch. IX (my note 41).

³⁹ P.-G. Boucé (my note 33), 99 f., note 8.

⁴⁰ [James Hogg], *The private memoirs and confessions of a justified sinner, written by himself, with a detail of curious traditional facts, and other evidence, by the author* (1824); on p. 101 in the edition Köln 1999.

⁴¹ An early summary was given by Ambroise Paré, *Des monstres et prodiges*, Edition critique et commentée par Jean Céard (1971) 35–38, Chap. IX, "Exemple des monstres qui se font par imagination" (originally 1573, 1585). The best is the article by J. Preuss, "Vom Versehen der Schwangeren. Eine historisch-kritische Studie", in: *Berliner Klinik*, October 1892 (Heft 51), 50 pp. Max Küchler, *Schweigen, Schmuck und Schleier* (1986) 444–455, gives a new survey. His interpretation of Gideon's birth in Fl. Josephus, *Antiqu.* V § 276–284, is new (p. 447 f.). He is not aware of Preuss' work. See B.H. Stricker, *De Geboorte van Horus* V (1989) 651–660 § 122, "De gelijkenis" (with citaten 1646–1669).

⁴² H. Diels, W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Vorsokratiker* I (1951) 300, Empedokles A 81. Schmucker, 445 f.; Stricker, citaat 1646; H. Daiber, *Aetius Arabus* (1980) 227, 495 (Aetius V 12.2). Cf. Jean Bollack, *Empédocle* I (1965) 211 ("Le désir"; theoretical context); II (1969) 253 no. 654 (A 81); III/2 (1969) 562 f. (commentary; nothing is relevant to us).

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given birth to you, white, a shining skin not indigenous to the Ethiopians, I recognized the reason: that during the union with my husband a painting showed Andromeda to look at, totally nude, while Perseus was taking her down from the rocks, and, unfortunately, it gave the seed a form resembling her".⁴³

In its comments on Numbers 5:19, the Jewish Midrash tells a similar story: "The king of the Arabs put this question to R. Akiba: 'I am a black and my wife is a black, yet she gave birth to a white son. Shall I kill her for having played the harlot while lying with me?' Said the other: 'Are the figures painted in your house black or white?' 'White', said he. The other assured him: 'When you had intercourse with her she fixed her eyes upon the white figures and bore a child like them. If you are surprised at such a possibility, study the case of our father Jacob's flock, which were influenced in their conception by the rods; as it says, *And the flocks conceived at the sight of the rods* (Genesis 30:39)'. The king of the Arabs acknowledged the justice of R. Akiba's argument".⁴⁴ A similar story is told of an Ethiopian in the Midrash to Genesis 30:37.⁴⁵

The contrast between black and white made this story famous. References to these "Ethiopians" are found in the ancient texts, and the "pictures in de bedroom" are a recurrent motif.⁴⁶ The white / black woman with a black / white child, accused of adultery, seems to have been a standard topic in the rhetoric of the bench (*controversia*); the commentary by Jerome on Genesis says this explicitly and that by Augustine speaks about an imminent punishment.⁴⁷ One of the *controversiae* may have been the source of the story. Anyone in the ancient world with a good rhetorical training must have been familiar with it.⁴⁸

Men also had to take care not to be subject to strong impressions while engaged in the act of begetting offspring. In the Babylonian Talmud the husband of Imma Shalom was careful to avoid such impressions by having intercourse at midnight. "And when I asked him, What is the reason for this?, he replied, So that I may not think of another woman, lest my children be as bastards". No other women were seen in the dead of night, this answer implies.⁴⁹

When women think of other men during cohabitation it can be considered a "mental" adultery. It was commonly believed that the child would be like the person who preoccupied its mother's mind at that essential moment. "The children a woman bears resemble the man who loves her. If her husband loves her, then they resemble her husband. If it is an adulterer, then they resemble the adulterer. Frequently, if a woman sleeps with her

⁴³ Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* IV.8.5. Schmucker, 450 ff.; Stricker, citaat 1664.

⁴⁴ Midrash Rabbah, Numbers IX, 34 (transl. J.J. Slotki). Stricker, citaat 1669.

⁴⁵ Midrash Rabbah, Genesis LXXIII, 10 (not in the manuscripts). Schmucker, 452 f.; Stricker, citaat 1669. The blackness of Ethiopians (Cushites) is their main distinctive feature; Talmud, *Moed qatan* 16b.

⁴⁶ Quintilianus, Hieronymus, an Armenian commentary on Aristoteles, mentioned by Küchler. Also St Augustine, *Quaestiones et locutiones in Heptateuchum I* (Genesis), XCIII (a woman with a beautiful baby and quite unlike its parents was accused of adultery; the explanation was found "in books of the very old and most expert doctor Hippocrates").

⁴⁷ Hieronymus, *Hebraicae Quaestiones in Genesim*, on Gen. 30, 32. 33 (= *Corpus Christi*., Series Latina LXXII, Pars I, 1 [1959] 38): *et Quintilianus in ea controversia, in qua accusabatur matrona, quod Aethiopem pepererit*. Cf. Küchler, 447, 454. Augustine, *In Heptateuchum: suspicione adulterii fuerat punienda*. – Other aspects of this story were discussed by A. Billault, "Le mythe de Persée et les Éthiopiques d'Héliodore: légendes, représentations et fiction littéraire", *Revue des études grecques* 94 (1981) 63–75.

⁴⁸ More examples of *controversiae* of medical importance were given by K.-D. Fischer, *Sudhoffs Archiv* 68 (1984) 110; G.B. Ferngren, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 59 (1985) 496 f.

⁴⁹ Nedarim 20b (at the beginning).

husband out of necessity, while her heart is with the adulterer with whom she usually has intercourse, the child she will bear is born resembling the adulterer".⁵⁰

In the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, we find a story which is an elaboration on the union of "the sons of God" and "the daughters of men" as told in Genesis 6, "The Nephilim (= Giants) were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown" (Genesis 6:4). The Testament of Reuben modifies the ancient tale in this sense, that the daughters of men take the initiative – typical of the then current idea that all women are dangerous seducers. By sorcery, they made the divine beings lust for them and those appeared to them in the shape of giant human beings. While conversing sexually with their earthly husbands, the women conceived in their minds the images of the sons of God ("Watchers"), and as a result they became pregnant of the Giants.⁵¹ The text runs as follows:

"For thus they bewitched the Watchers before the Flood: as these (masc.) looked at them (fem.) continually, they lusted after one another (*en epithumíai allēlōn*), and they conceived the act in their mind (*sunélabon teî dianoíai tēn prâxin*), and they changed themselves into the shape of men, and they appeared to them (fem.) when they were together with their husbands. And they (fem.), lusting in their mind after their appearances (*teî dianoíai tás phantasías*), bore giants; for the Watchers appeared to them (fem.) as reaching unto heaven".⁵²

Mental adultery is the explanation of Ezekiel 16:32 in Rabbinic literature. "Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband" is the common translation of his verse. "Instead of her husband": the Hebrew text offers literally "under her husband". The following explanation is given. "Our Rabbis said: When a woman is secluded with her husband and is engaged in intercourse with him, and at the same time her heart is with another man whom she has seen on the road, there is no adultery greater than this; for it says *Adulterous wife, who receives strangers under her husband* (Ezek. 16:32). Can there be a woman who commits adultery while *Under her husband*? It is this one, who has met another man and set her eyes upon him, and while she carries on intercourse with her husband, her heart is with him". The Midrash continues by giving as an example the problem of the Arab with his white son, discussed above.⁵³

⁵⁰ The Gospel of Philip; we followed W.W. Isenberg, in: J.M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (1988) 156 (78, 12–20). Also B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (1987) 349 (95, 12–20); or G.P. Luttikhuizen, *Gnostische Geschriften I* (1986) 104 (78, 112). See M. Küchler, 450; E. Reiner, *Festschrift O. Loretz* (1998) 653 f. – Later generations were aware of this danger and reckon with the possibility that an adulterous woman, precisely for this reason, was thinking of her husband while in the act; in *Aristotle's Masterpieces* (23rd edition, 1749), cited by P.-G. Bouc   (see note 33) 94.

⁵¹ Studied and explained by M. Küchler, 441–445, § 19.3 "Test. Ruben 5,1–7: Die Frauen (der W  chter) als Zauberinnen und Ehebrecherinnen"; 445–460, § 19.4 "Zum Ehebruch 'unter dem Mann' – Zeitgen  ssische Vergleichstexte". – Küchler, 444: "Die verzauberten W  chter sind nicht realiter in den sexuellen Akt einbezogen, sondern 'erscheinen' als 超dimensionale M  nner, die nur den Frauen sichtbar sind, sozusagen als stimulierende Kulissenbilder (*phantas  ai*). Als Objekt der weiblichen Begierde beeinflussen sie dadurch die Gestalt der Kinder, ohne selbst sexuell aktiv zu werden. Sie dimensionieren nur, was die Frauen von ihren M  nnern empfangen".

⁵² After H.W. Hollander, M. de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. A Commentary* (1985) 101 f. (T. Reuben 5, 6–7).

⁵³ Midrash Numbers, IX.34; Küchler, 453 f.

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Did the Babylonians have similar ideas about maternal vision? A few passages point in this direction.

The first passage is in a text that gives prescriptions to ward off evil machinations, like sorceries.⁵⁴ We read: “Poultice (*mēlu*) of a woman, pregnant or in childbed, to whom has been shown (something), in order to undo (it): you shall put (the poultice) on her neck, and if they (then) show (something) to her, it will not come near to her”⁵⁵ There follows a second prescription: to put on her neck a leather bag filled with the stone *arzallu* and yellow and red ochre. A long prescription against sorcery and miscarriage comes next. What does “to whom has been shown (something)” mean? It is possible that the thing shown to the woman frightened her and in doing so has had a bad impact on her child. On the other hand, the text next turns to miscarriage caused by sorcery, suggesting that miscarriage, not necessarily maternal vision, could be the result of having been “shown” something.⁵⁶

The following passage in liver omina, already referred to in our discussion of the omina, is a clear example of the belief in maternal vision (Chapter IV): “If, ditto, and between them lies the (mark) Request, the wife of a man has become pregnant by another (man) and she will constantly pray to Ištar while looking at her husband all the time: ‘I shall what is inside my belly make look like my husband’”⁵⁷

We assume that the Request-mark on the liver foretells that the woman “requests” that her child looks like her husband. As we have seen a request mark in the protasis of liver omina usually means that a request will be made according to the apodosis.⁵⁸ The adulterous woman looks intently at her husband because she hopes that the foetus at the moment of pious concentration will assume his features (maternal imagination). Note that the Babylonians held that the features of the foetus could change at any point during pregnancy while all references from Classical Antiquity mention only the moment of cohabitation.⁵⁹ A line from a text dealing with the physiognomy and behaviour of women can now be explained: “If a woman looks at her husband all the time: the wife of a man has (illicit) intercourse repeatedly”⁶⁰ We understand why she looks at her husband so intensely. She tries to change the effects of her physical adultery by a “mental” union with him.

⁵⁴ LKA 9, rev. I (= III). For the form and organisation of this tablet, see W. Farber, *Schlaf Kindchen Schlaf* (1989) 22 f. Obv. I duplicates UET 7 121 II (not seen by Farber).

⁵⁵ Rev. 2–4, (2) *me-e-lu šá SAL.PEŠ₄ u SAL ha-riš-t[i o] (3) šá kul-lu-ma-tu₄ pa-šá-ri ina GÚ-šá GAR-an-m[a o] (4) ú-kal-la-mu-ši-ma NU TE-ši [x]*. Similar translations were given by E. Reiner, AfO 19 (1959–1960) 150b; CAD K 521a.

⁵⁶ This is the opinion of J.A. Scurlock, *Incognita* 2 (1991) 164 f., note 50.

⁵⁷ BRM 4 12:36 f., DAM LÚ *ana MAN-ma e-rat-ma* (37) ^dXV *us-sa-nap!-pé-e* DAM-šá *id-da-nag-gal* šá ŠÀ.MU *a-na* DAM.MU *a-ma!-šal*; dupl. A. Boissier, DA 221:15. See CAD D 21, M/1 357a (*a-ma-áš (!)-šal* for *umašsal*); CAD S 395a, following dupl. ([u]s-sá-nap-pa IGI (!) *mutiša iddanaggal*).

⁵⁸ J. Nougayrol, RA 40 (1945–6) 76.

⁵⁹ U. Weisser, 314: “Der neuzeitliche Volksglaube auf der anderen Seite zieht überwiegend erst die Zeit nach der Konzeption in Betracht; zumeist wird angenommen, daß die Mißbildung bzw. Zeichnung der Frucht durch ein mal aufgrund traumatischer Erlebnisse der Mutter in jeder beliebigen Phase der Gravidität eintreten kann”.

⁶⁰ SpbTU IV 149 IV 21, DIŠ *it-ta-nap-la-as* DAM-su DAM NA *it-ta-na-a-a-ak*.

The production of beautiful children

Maternal impression could also be used as a technique to produce beautiful children.⁶¹ Medical writers mention this but do not directly recommend it. The gynaecologist Soranus, writing about the bad influence of drunkenness, inserted this comment:

“I also have to tell that a particular state of the mind brings about some changes in the features (*túpoi*) of those conceived. Thus, some women looking at apes while cohabitating, became pregnant of apelikes. But a tyrant of the Cypriotes, himself being ugly, became the father of well-formed children by forcing his wife to watch beautiful statues while they were together. And the horsebreeders let thoroughbred (*eugenēs*) horses stand before the mares during the mating”.⁶²

Galen: “Some old story informed me that a powerful man, ugly, wishing to beget a beautiful child, had make a painting of another goodlooking (*eueidēs*) baby, and he told his wife to watch that painted image (*túpos tēs graphēs*) while embracing him. She, then, continually looking and, so to say, having her entire mind (on it), delivered the baby, not similar to the begetter but to the painted one; I am of the opinion that her vision transmitted the features (*túpoi*) of the painted one by nature, not by some particles”.⁶³

It is said that the Spartans (Laconians) used this technique to breed beautiful children.⁶⁴ These are all curiosities and no normal practice. Normally, a woman took care to avoid bad encounters or influences. Aristotle wrote the following about women with child: “Their minds, however, unlike their bodies, they ought to keep quiet, for the offspring derive their nature from their mothers as plants do from the earth”.⁶⁵ This is why already the early Greek poet Hesiod said: “Do not sow children when you are come back from a burial with its unauispuicous sounds, but after a festival of the gods”.⁶⁶

This trick for breeding beautiful animals was already mentioned by Soranus. The Old Testament has the most famous example. Jacob wished to have the speckled and spotted animals from Laban’s flock and he proceeded as follows (Genesis 30:37–39):

“Then Jacob took fresh rods of poplar and almond and plane, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the rods. He set the rods which he had peeled in front of the flocks in the runnels, that is, the watering troughs, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, the flocks bred in front of the rods and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted”.

As St. Jerome wrote in his commentary, Jacob acted *contra naturam* by *naturali*

⁶¹ D. Gourevitch, “Se mettre à trois pour faire un bel enfant, ou l’impregnation par le regard”, *L’évolution psychiatrique* 52 (1987) 559–563. – In Classical literature occasionally named *eupaidía* (*technē eupaidías* in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, cited Küchler, 446). A combination of Greek *kállos* and *páis* in later Europe: Claude Quillet, *Callipaedia sive de pulchrae prolis habendae ratione* (1655), translated as *La Callipédie ou l’art de faire de beaux enfants* (Paris 1749); *Callipaedia. A poem in four books* (London 1761). Many editions.

⁶² Soranus, I 39 (ed. Budé I, Livre I 12, p. 36). Küchler, 448; Stricker, 651 cit. 1651.

⁶³ Galenus, *De theriaca ad Pisonem* XI (ed. C.G. Kühn, XIV 253 f.). Küchler, 449; Stricker, 652 cit. 1652. “By nature” (*teī phusei*): Stricker: “Naar ik meen, doordat de blik de vorm van het geschilderde aan de natuur (dwz. aan de baarmoeder) doorgaf, en niet door (overdracht van) zekere (materiële) partikels”.

⁶⁴ Oppianus, *Cynegetica* I 358–367; Küchler, 449; Stricker, 652 cit. 1656.

⁶⁵ Aristotle, *Politica* VII 16 (transl. J. Barnes).

⁶⁶ *Works and Days* 735–6. Plato wishes to see at funerals only “girls” and “women who have passed the age of child-bearing”; *Leges* 947D.

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arte, a trick taken from nature. “They conceived such young out of a double desire, by drinking avidly and by being covered by the males”. As to the unusual technique, it reminds one of Oppianus’ advice to display before the couple of doves garments in specific colours in order to obtain fledglings in those colours. Or one paints the stallion the desired colour of the foal.⁶⁷ Early Christian commentaries to this passage in Genesis contain many references to such breeding techniques.⁶⁸ They speak of confronting the mating female animals with excellent specimens of their race. This way, in Egypt a perfect bull with the desired features was bred to be the future Apis bull.⁶⁹

Abnormal births: the science of teratology

Teratology is the study of malformations and monstrosities in animal or human newborns.⁷⁰ In Babylonia, abnormal births – ranging from abhorrent monsters to babies with inconsequential birth marks – were a matter of great concern because they could mean benefit or harm. The birth of any handicapped child was considered a disaster for the family, and the forecast is “the house will be disrupted”.⁷¹ We have a first millennium Babylonian handbook which records forecasts and the meaning of various types of malformed births. An excellent edition of this text was published over twenty-five years ago.⁷² Two early versions of the handbook are attested from the Old Babylonian period. One text is a detailed description of the features of a lamb.⁷³ The other is an extract from a larger text containing only two omnia: in one a baby’s (*šerrum*) nose is “black

⁶⁷ Oppianus, *Cynegetica* I 352–357, 333–348; Stricker, cit. 1654, 1655; cf. 1657 (Africanus), 1659 (Apsyrtus); and more.

⁶⁸ A collection of earlier literature in Samuel Bochartus, *Hierozoicon sive bipartitum opus de animalibus S. Scripturae*, editio tertia ex recensione Johannis van Leusden (Leiden - Utrecht 1692) col. 544–547 (in Liber II, cap. 49); in the later edition by E.F.C. Rosenmüller (Leipzig 1793) Tomus primus, p. 619–623. The passages are Oppianus, *Cynegetica* I 316–367 (mares, doves, Laconian women); Isidorus, *Etymologiae* XII, I § 58–60 (Jacob’s trick; mares, doves; a warning for pregnant women). Bochartus also discusses the moral rightness of Jacob’s action. – See also M. Wellmann, *Der Physiologos* (= *Philologus*, Suppl. 22) (1931) 42 f. (horses).

⁶⁹ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* XVIII, V: *phantasiam talis tauri, quam sola cerneret, ostentare vaccae concipienti atque pregnanti, unde libido matris adtraheret, quod in eius fetu iam corporaliter appareret; sicut Iacob de virginis variatis, ut oves et caprae variae nascerentur, effecit*. The note in the French edition by P. Agaësse and J. Moingt (*Oeuvres de Saint Augustin* 16 [1955] 496 f.) gives more refs. for maternal vision in Augustine: *Contra Julian. Pelag.* V, XIV, 51; *P.L.* XLIV, 813; *Retract.* II, 62; *P.L.* XXXII, 655; and *Quaest. in Hept.*, quoted here in note 46.

⁷⁰ J.N. Neumann, “Die Mißgestalt des Menschen – ihre Deutung im Weltbild von Antike und Frühmittelalter”, *Sudhoffs Archiv* 76 (1992) 214–231 (in the Hippocratic writings, Aristotle, Pliny, Augustine). Malformed babies in the Talmud: J.H. Tigay in *Studies Moshe Greenberg* (1997) 143 f. Cf. Jean Céard, *La nature et les prodiges. L’insolite au XVI^e siècle, en France* (1977). Mainly about the meaning of monsters.

⁷¹ M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 146.

⁷² E. Leichty, *The Omen Series Šumma Izbu* (= *Texts from Cuneiform Sources*, IV) (1970). Reviews in: *BiOr* 28 (1971) 361–3 (R. Labat), *ZA* 62 (1972) 131–4 (J. Aro), *WdO* 9 (1978) 295–7 (W. Schramm), *JAOS* 93 (1973) 585–587 (W. Heimpel).

Discussion: J. Bottéro, *Annuaire EPHE, IVe Section* 1972/73 (1973) 104–131. Some large new texts: E. von Weiher, *SpbTU* III p. 142–177 Nos. 90 (Tablet I), 91 (Tablet V), 92 (VI), 93 (XIV ?), 94 (XXII). Idem, *SpbTU* IV nos. 142–144; S.M. Moren, *AfO* 27 (1980) 53–70 (XIX). The “forgotten” text LKU 126 is considered to be part of Izbu IV; see W. von Soden, *ZA* 50 (1952) 185; *CAD* E 353b, on *TCS* IV 217:152. But it may be one of the last chapters in the Diagnostic Handbook; we will discuss it in Chapter VIII. A late sophisticated commentary combining abnormal births, medical diagnosis and physiognomy with astrology was published by R.D. Biggs, *RA* 62 (1968) 51–59.

⁷³ YOS 10 56, with Leichty, 201–207.

like bitumen", in the other "the buttocks divided on the right side".⁷⁴ Officials living in this period had to swear to the king that they would not hide anything ominous, and the oath they took refers to what is seen "in an anomaly (*izbum*) and / or a ... (*izmum*)".⁷⁵ The first word is the well-known term for an anomalous birth, used in the handbook, but the second word is new to us. This latter word can be compared to Hebrew *èṣèm*, "bone", and read *esymum* in Akkadian. We suggest that in this period "anomaly" (*izbum*) is a being come to term, and the "bone" refers to an abortion. In later periods the "bone" disappeared from the technical language and the word *izbu* came to refer to all abnormal births. In the oaths both words are preceded by the determinative "flesh" which would indicate that they are considered as lifeless.⁷⁶

After the Old Babylonian period, we see similar handbooks in use among the Hittites and in Ugarit.⁷⁷ A late text phrases a malformed birth in these general terms: "There will be an anomaly (*izbu*), and the baby that will be born is defective (*mati*)".⁷⁸

The first millennium, "canonical", handbook consists of many chapters, "tablets". Chapters I-IV deal with human births, V-XVII with sheep, XVIII-XXIV with goats, cows and other animals. The technical language made an ancient "commentary" on difficult words necessary; of which large portions are preserved.⁷⁹ There are letters which describe such births and reports made by experts who consulted the handbook in order to find the meaning.⁸⁰ Almost all of these reports are about animals and our concern here is with human birth.⁸¹ The forecasts recorded in the handbook are meant either for the individual ("private") or for the country ("public"). The rationale which connects the anomaly to the forecast is difficult to determine and beyond the scope of this book.⁸² As far as we see, most of them are unfavourable. Often, however, the right side of the clay tablet which contains the forecasts is broken away and the meaning of the anomaly is not available to us.

The sequence of the omens is not always logical. One reason is that the scribe used more than one tradition when composing his text and included duplicating sets of omens; others have been added. Another reason is that omens are sometimes organized on the basis of sound alone, "brick" (*libittu*) follows "scrotum" (*libištu*); this process is known as "attraction".⁸³

Most anomalies are horrifying but some are no more than healthy babies which

⁷⁴ YOS 10 12, with Leichty, 207; see CAD A/2 185a and Q 255a.

⁷⁵ J.-M. Durand, AEM 1/1 (1988) 13 no. 1:8, with p. 19 f.

⁷⁶ H. Holma, OLZ 1912 442 f., saw in Arabic *'izb* "monstrum, Mißgestalt", a loan from Akkadian. The Akkadian word is explained by him to some extent by connecting it with the word *ezēbum* "to leave", in: "Enlil left (*ezēbum*) his seed in her belly" (CT 15 5 II 2); see below, p. 176, note 25. – Cf. the related Akkadian *uzzubu* in lexical texts, J.J. Stamm, *Die akkadische Namengebung* (1939) 49 note 3. But W. von Soden, AHw 1449b: "etwa 'vernachlässigt, verkommen' (Mensch, Tier)".

⁷⁷ Hittites: K.K. Riemschneider, *Babylonische Geburtsomina in hethitischer Übersetzung* (= StBoT 9) (1970); Ugarit: M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, *Mantik in Ugarit* (1990) 87–165; TUAT II/1 (1986) 95–99.

⁷⁸ R.D. Biggs, RA 62 (1968) 53:6f.

⁷⁹ Already letters written by Assyrian scholars admit that this handbook is not easy; SAA X nos. 60, 276. – It has not been seen that M. Jastrow, ZA 4 (1889) 157 K. 4159, is a fragment of a commentary; compare its duplicate SpbTU II 161 no. 37:93–105.

⁸⁰ Leichty, 7–12; AEM 1/1 497 no. 241, with p. 487 f. Cf. H. Hunger, SAA VIII nos. 237–242, 287. Note the story told in Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, Ch. 57; his death was announced by a malformed birth.

⁸¹ Note that some Akkadian fragments from the Hittite capital are about human births: Leichty, 207 f.

⁸² Leichty, 3–4 ("private or public"), 6–7 ("associations"); Bottéro, 127 f.

⁸³ J. Bottéro, *Annuaire* 113–114 (various sources), 115–116 (attraction).

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display some striking features. Omens of this type are treated in Chapter IV. They are complementary to omens from another Babylonian handbook which deals with the physiognomy of basically healthy grown men and women. Personal names given to children can attest to their unusual features: "The Halt", "The Bent", "The Black", "The Fat", etc.⁸⁴

Chapter I begins with four omens about the child making noises while still inside the mother. "If, while a woman is pregnant, her foetus weeps (*bakû*): the land will experience hardship". A foetus that is hissing (*hazû*) is not good either; a moaning (*damāmu*) foetus means that the Palace will confiscate the "house". A foetus that is crying out (*šasû*) and is heard (= understood) by someone forecasts destruction of the land by the enemy (a "public" omen) and ruin of the house (a "private" omen) (Tablet I 1–4).

In the omens which follow a woman gives birth to "a lion", "a wolf", "a dog", etc. In these cases the child looks like this animal. Omens from the Old Babylonian version describe the baby in terms of its resemblance to various animals like these.⁸⁵ The animals are: lion, wolf, dog, pig, bull, the mythical Bull-Man, wild bull, elephant, ass, ram, cat, snake, head of a turtle, tortoise (I 5–18).

The nature of the association by which the following omens were added is not wholly clear (I 19–25). A woman gives birth to a [...] egg, a [...] egg, and ..., an egg, and white and black fluids⁸⁶, fish roe, a bird, "a god who has / has not / a face".⁸⁷ To the Babylonian composer, the egg and the fish link the turtle (17) with the bird (23). Births looking like body parts follow: a woman gives birth to a finger, a bull's scrotum, a membrane, a membrane filled with flesh (and) blood, an *Apišalian* (I 26–30). An *Apišalian* is the inhabitant of an ancient Sumerian city, and in popular speech they may have stood for a bodily abnormality.⁸⁸ However, we do not expect a grown, living person listed here among the products of an unfinished pregnancy. This seemingly intrusive omen is included because "Apišalian" sounds like the "membrane (filled) with" in the preceding line (*ipu ša*). This is a case of "attraction" observed frequently in this handbook.

It now continues with a woman giving birth to "a scrotum", "two or three scrotums", "a brick", "two or three bricks", "an afterbirth" (I 31–35). The brick (*libittu*) is unexpected and its presence is due to a sound association with the scrotum (*libištu*). The "afterbirth" is not normal, it is a membrane which looks like an afterbirth and comes instead of the child. Clearly, these are all products of an abortion in early pregnancy.⁸⁹

The text continues now by listing the birth of body parts rather than the complete

⁸⁴ J.J. Stamm, *Die akkadische Namengebung* (1939) 264–267, 1. "Bezeichnung nach Körperfehlern", 2.

⁸⁵ As Bottéro, 113, has shown, there is (meaningless?) variation between the words for "like(ness)" in this text: *kīma*, *tamšilu*, *binītu* which suggests derivation from various sources.

⁸⁶ I 19–21. Sources: CT 28 34 K. 8274:7–9 (ms. A); CTN IV 31:7–8 (ms. i).

⁸⁷ I 19–25; dupl. SpbTU III 142 no. 90. The contents of the egg are probably described in I 21. As to I 22: Bottéro, *Annuaire* 117 note 1: *binīt nūni* "form of a fish"; not *binīt nūni* "fish roe". Seems to be wrong. Is "a god who has / has not / a face" a still-born, *kūbu*?

⁸⁸ E. Leichty, "Apišalū", *Studies B. Landsberger* (1965) 327. A man is "ill of *apišlā*", AMT 78,6:5 (a diagnostic or physiognomic text). Not to be confused with "Apislat"; see D. Goltz, *Studien zur altorientalischen und griechischen Heilkunde* (1974) 328, Anhang II; W. von Soden, OLZ 67 (1972) 348.

⁸⁹ See the remarks of Bottéro, 119 f. – In the Talmud: "But if the abortion was a *sandal*, an afterbirth, or a foetus with some articulated shape (*šēfir m'ruqām*), or if a child issued cut up in pieces (*m'ħuttēk*)" (Niddah 23a, end).

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child: head, hand and fist,⁹⁰ foot, a blood-vessel covered with hair,⁹¹ one or two horns of a goat, horn of a gazelle (I 36–43). The head, hand, etc., do not refer to the body part appearing first in a more or less normal delivery. These are abortions which produce material which merely looks like the shape of a real head, hand, etc.

“If a woman gives birth to a cut millstone, the house of the man will be disrupted”⁹² “If a woman gives birth to clay, the house of the man will be disrupted” (I 44–45). This would have been the proper place for the omen about the birth of a “brick” that had already been preempted by the process of “attraction” (33). Bricks are made of clay and both are associated in a later chapter on human births (IV 39). Omina about the births of pigs use “millstone” and “brick” together.⁹³ The “millstone” must refer to a “mole”, a calcified stone which could remain in a woman’s body for many years. Greek *mūlē* “millstone”, in Latin *mola uteri*, in modern medical terminology *lithopaedion*.⁹⁴ Could “brick” be a vesicular mole?⁹⁵

The following section (I 46–51) records seemingly unconnected omnia: birth of “unkempt hair”, “an anomaly”, “an anomaly and a second anomaly is (still) in her belly”, “wind”, “she became pregnant with wind and gave birth to wind”, “a body”. In this section, an “anomaly” (*izbu*) – an abnormal but full-term birth – is distinguished from a “body” (*pagru*) – a normal but still-born child.⁹⁶ The topic is: foetuses that have come to term, but they are deficient. The first case, that of a woman giving birth to “unkempt hair” (*malū*), still belongs to the group of malformed embryos but at the same time it introduces the new section because the Akkadian word *malū* can also mean “to become full”, specifically “to come to term”, said of a pregnancy. A woman conceiving wind and bearing wind is intriguing. Note that Gilgameš is said to be the son of “wind”

⁹⁰ Or: arm and hand? The words are *qātu* and *rittu* (I 37–38).

⁹¹ We know from a new manuscript that the forecast is: “that woman will die” (SpbTU III 143 no. 90:38). – P.B. Adamson, JRAS 1984, 5 with note 22: “But *ušultu* may also refer to a thick body liquid which may, or may not, be the colour of blood”; a *dermoid cyst*. “Dermoid cysts can be present at birth, and may be found on the forehead of the baby”. Adamson is not aware that no growth on a baby is meant here, but some form of embryo.

⁹² An anomaly of a sheep is “compact (*kupput*) and hard like a cut millstone”, YOS 10 56 II 27. Cut millstone: *muqqaru*; see M. Stol, *On trees, mountains, and millstones in the Ancient Near East* (1979) 90. Not accepted by CAD but confirmed by the observations made here and the sequence *muqqaru* – *libittu* in the omnia about pigs; see next note.

⁹³ SpbTU III 168 no. 94:83 f. Read SIG₄ = *libittu*, not MURGU = *būdu*. With CAD B 305a ad CT 28 34 K. 8274:21 = Izbu I 33 f., contra AHw and W. Schramm, WdO 9 (1978) 296. The “attraction” to *libištu*, seen by Bottéro, *Annuaire* 115, 120, proves this. Note “If an anomaly is like a brick”, YOS 10 56 I 8 (Leichty, 202). A.D. Kilmer, JNES 46 (1987) 212, sees in the “brick” of Izbu I 33–34 an unbaked, freely formed, brick, here meaning “aborted placental matter”. This opinion is inspired by *še-li-tú* in the next line, I 35. However, here a membrane, not the placenta, is meant.

⁹⁴ Aristotle, *De generatione animalium* IV, 7 775b–176a (“not in animals”); *Historia animalium* X, 7 638a. See also Hippocrates, *Mul.* I, 71 (ed. Littré VIII p. 148–151); Oribasius, *Coll. Med.* XXII, 6 (CMG VI, 2, 2 [1933] p. 100–102); F. Skoda, *Médecine ancienne et métaphore* (1988) 297–300 (“Les mèles”); P. Diepgen, *Die Frauenheilkunde der alten Welt (= Handbuch der Gynäkologie)*³, ed. W. Stoeckel, XII/1, 1937) 227 f.; D. Gourevitch, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* Teil II, Band 37/3 (1996) 2109–10 (“La môle”).

⁹⁵ M. Bruins Allison, *Doctor Mary in Arabia* (1994) 162: “There was a fair amount of abnormal obstetrics. Vesicular mole, for example, is said to be five or fifteen times more prevalent in Asia and Africa than in the West. In these unusual pregnancies the fetus is lost and the placenta becomes a mass of grape-like vesicles. These cases bleed a little and the uterus is at least the size of a five-month pregnancy”.

⁹⁶ I 47–48, 51. The omens in between are about the child born from wind (I 49–50). “Dead body” (*pagru*) is a likely reading since the forecast says “That man will die before his time”. But *pagru* can also mean “trunk” in medical texts, i.e., a body lacking arms and legs. Cf. Bottéro, 121.

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(*lil*).⁹⁷ The next section of our text opens with a woman giving birth to a “windy” person, an idiot (*lillû*). The forecast is: strife within the family.⁹⁸ Therefore, the omen about the child born from wind is a prelude to the section which follows: living beings.

Now follows a section on congenital disorders some of which are quite common. We assume that this child is born and remains alive. One reads about the birth of: an idiot (*lillû*) (male and female), a halt (*pessû*) (male and female), a crippled / weak (*akû*) (male and female),⁹⁹ “the form (*binîtu*) of a male” and “the form of a female” (perhaps beautiful babies), a blind person, a . . .-bellied one, a spastic (?) child (*kubbulu*), a deaf (*sukkuku*), one with warts (?) (*sullânu*), a “crushed” (*huššulu*), a “swollen” (*hubbušu*), a lame (?) (*hummu*), a severely epileptic child (*rihût Šulpaea*), a madman / ecstatic (*šehânu*), a . . . (*mussuku*), spittle (= ?) (*ru’tu*), a squinting one (*sudduru*) (I 52–72).¹⁰⁰

Then, the series of deficiencies is interrupted by “If a woman gives birth a second time” (I 73). Does this refer to a second child who is squinting or does it mean the birth of twins?¹⁰¹ If it refers to twins, then the second list of deficiencies which follows must be a later addition. Originally, our line about the second birth would be followed by male twins (I 83). Erica Reiner has suggested “superfoetation” (Greek *epikuësis*) as an explanation for giving birth “a second time”. A later ovum is fertilized during pregnancy and the foetus resulting from it is born some time later.¹⁰² In the Talmud a “compressed” foetus, a *sandal*, probably indicates such births.¹⁰³ Modern science considers superfoetation as a phantom of the ancient midwives and doctors.¹⁰⁴

A “second time” suggested to the composer of our handbook the “doubling” which is of faces; the first item in another series of defects: a child with two faces (*usmû*), an

⁹⁷ Th. Jacobsen, *Studies Å.W. Sjöberg* (1989) 275. “The idea of impregnation by a *lil* may have arisen from sexual dreams considered as in some sense real”.

⁹⁸ Bearing wind occurs in Isaiah 26:18 but is only a metaphor for “no results”: “We were with child, we writhed, we have as it were brought forth wind”. For “wind” in the Babylonian Talmud, see J. Preuss, *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin* (1911) 487 (*ruah*, “Winde”). The Talmud gives this name to an embryo in a very early stage, “an inflated object (*ruah*) or any other object which had no existence” (Niddah 8b, end); contrast the developed *nêfîl* (Niddah 16a, beginning). In the Jerusalem Talmud, *Jebam.* IV, 11; see J. Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel*, vol. 21, *Yebamot* (1987) 158. – The Greeks thought that mares could be impregnated by wind; this is visible through *hippomanes*; Aristotle, *Hist. Animalium* VI, 18 572a.

⁹⁹ “Weak” is a good alternative translation for *akû*; the more or less parallel passage in *Šumma alu* speaks of “weaklings” (*rabbîtu*, CT 38 4:69), and the Talmud knows of weak babies (*wittêq* Gittin 70a).

¹⁰⁰ Some remarks on this section: males and females in halt persons and idiots are also distinguished in CT 38 3–4 (*Šumma Alu* I 65–68). – A parallel to I 52 is: “If a not understanding idiot is born in the house of a man, that house will be disrupted”, W. von Soden, ZA 71 (1981) 114 A III 24 (physiognomic). – For *sullânu* see D. Lacambre, *Florilegium Marianum* II (1994) 276; for *šehânu* (“ecstatic”, CAD Š/2 263) and *rihût Šulpaea*, see M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 14–16, 50.

¹⁰¹ This is the opinion of Bottéro, for this case (p. 123 top, “un enfant également bigleux”) and for *Izbu I* 90 (p. 127, “une femme qui donne au moins deux fois de suite naissance à deux enfants ensemble”). CAD Š/1 402b: “If a woman gives birth again (at a less than normal interval?)”. This addition was inspired by Erica Reiner; see presently.

¹⁰² E. Reiner, ZA 73 (1983) 133. “I would suggest that *uštašnîma ūlid* refers to a birth occurring soon after the birth of the child from the original pregnancy and thus is the Akkadian term for superfetation, especially since the first of these two protases (I 70) occurs in a sequence in which non-anthropomorphic fetuses are described”. The latter is not true, as we have shown: they are living people with deficiencies. We prefer the idea that twins are meant.

¹⁰³ Full discussion in the Talmud, Niddah 25b–26a. See J. Preuss, *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin* (1911) 486 f.; doubts in David M. Feldman, *Marital relations, birth control, and abortion in Jewish Law* (1974) 182–5.

¹⁰⁴ C. Lienau, “Die Behandlung und Erwähnung von Superfetation in der Antike”, *Clio Medica* 6 (1971) 275–285; introduction to the Budé edition of Soranus, *Livre I* (1988) p. XCVI.

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albino (?) (*damqam īnim*), one half human, a Humbaba-animal (*humbabītu*; a gecko ?), one in the image of the mythical monster Humbaba (sound attraction by *humbabītu!*), the likeness of a shepherd's staff, the likeness of a turtle, a "Tigrilian" (I 74–81). The latter must be a dwarf because the text adds: "whose height is one half cubit", and the next omen is again about a dwarf: "If a woman gives birth, and its height is one half cubit, it is bearded, it talks, walks, and its teeth have come out: Tigrilū is its name" (I 82).¹⁰⁵ This second list of defects describes rare freaks of nature.

Chapter I of the handbook continues with the topic of twins (I 83 ff.). Two boys, two boys with one belly, two boys feet-first, one boy and one girl. They are all bad signs. Two children holding each other like the mythical Bull-Man is good: the king will conquer his enemies. Two children joined back to back, or lacking nose and feet. The following nine omens explicitly use the word "twins" (instead of the previous "two" children): "If a woman gives birth to twins for a second time: that land will disappear; the house of the man will be disrupted" (I 90). It has been suggested that these omens are an insertion from another source.¹⁰⁶ The twins are described as joined at the ribs in various ways, they lack one hand, etc. Whatever the original text, Siamese twins are discussed here.

The remainder of the chapter treats the various permutations of two or more children. Male twins are bad, girls as twins or triplets are basically good. The following are good omens: two living girls, three identical (*śutahātu*) girls, four girls which die, and "four or five", "five or six" girls, or six children. Boys and girls in triplets are discussed, in two and four children a distinction is made whether they are born alive or dead (I 100, 117–122). The text continues listing numbers up to an improbable "eight or nine". The first "chapter" ends here.¹⁰⁷ One gets the impression that all births of this chapter, beginning with the "idiot" (I 52), are living creatures, unless stated otherwise.

Many of the cases discussed in Chapter II (not fully preserved) are about births that are not viable. Children with the head of an animal, or missing parts, or having two heads, one eye, etc. Chapter III continues in the same style, also discussing children with six fingers or toes.¹⁰⁸ Chapter II begins with the head and Chapter III ends with the feet. Here, as in Chapter IV, we discover the rule that the left side can be good; the right side never is.¹⁰⁹ Some aberrations are not life-threatening and have a bearing on the future of the child: "If a woman gives birth and its ears are contracted (?): he is a liar" (III 22). When the child has no right nostril, he will have a life of worry; if he has no left nostril, he will be happy (III 30 f.). Six fingers on the right hand means poverty for the family; six on the left prosperity. Six toes on the right foot means worry for the child, six on the left means [happiness] for him (III 54–59). Chapter IV describes the physiognomy of living and healthy babies, so it seems. Marks, coloured spots or bumps on the skin, premature growth of teeth or abnormal hair. Some additional lines give information on

¹⁰⁵ M. deJong Ellis, JCS 29 (1977) 136 f.: Tigrilum is also a personal name (nickname); a birth like this was reported from Zambia.

¹⁰⁶ Bottéro, 113 (and 125 f.), on MAŠ.TAB.BA

¹⁰⁷ In the Susa version (see below), two girls are good, and in the birth of four boys a distinction between alive or dead is made (rev. 38, 40 f.).

¹⁰⁸ Leichty, 18–20, has related the phenomena of this chapter with modern medicine. Six fingers / toes: III 54–63, cf. IV 57–61. The Bible knows of a "man of great stature, who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number; and he also was descended from the giants" (2 Samuel 21:20).

¹⁰⁹ Cf. the earlier fragment KUB 37 184 (TCS IV 207 f.).

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the meaning of the behaviour of mother and child after birth; similar information is given elsewhere on a ewe giving birth to a lamb (IV 40–46, cf. XVIII 1–6). The chapter concludes by discussing births by women of the Palace. Identical (*mithartu*) male twins are good (IV 52).

There is a shorter, earlier version of the handbook, found in Susa.¹¹⁰ Its organisation is different but the themes are already familiar to us. It opens with skin marks, the first one being the red spot *pindû*. As in the main handbook (IV 8), this is a good sign. The text continues with freaks: “If a woman gives birth <and> it is all black: ‘Meluhhean’ is its name; a strong enemy will arise; the house where it was born will impoverish”. Obviously, a Negro is meant. In later periods Meluhha is Nubia and this makes it possible for us to date the text in to 1500 B.C. or later.¹¹¹ “If a woman gives birth and there is one eye in its forehead: One-Eyed (*igidalû*) is its name; the reign of the king will end; a king of the world will be in the country; arising of evil; the land will diminish; the house of the man will be disrupted”. “If a woman gives birth and there is no eye on the right: the house of the man will be disrupted”. “If a woman gives birth and there is no eye on the left: . . . (dím.ma) is its name”.¹¹² The rest of the text (its major part) is about eyes, ears, hair, teeth, two heads, etc.

Do we find descriptions or discussions of abnormal human births outside the handbook? The letters and reports on anomalies deal with animals.¹¹³ We have one report which quotes two omens from a handbook about the birth of what appears to be a hermaphrodite. The report provides useful information to the person who must interpret an abnormal birth such as this. We give the translation of the report.¹¹⁴

“If an anomaly is provided with a penis and a vulva: the omen of Ku-Baba who ruled the land; the land of the king will go to ruin. – If an anomaly is provided with a penis and a vulva and has no testicles: a courtier (*mār ekalli*) will command the land; variant: will revolt against the king”.

Ku-Baba was a legendary queen of the Sumerians. She combined male function with female gender; to the Babylonians the omen is bad. One is reminded of this omen in the handbook: “If a woman gives birth to a pig: a woman will seize the throne” (I 8). The handbook contains the first omen of the report, with a different forecast: “If a woman gives birth, and (the child) has both a penis and a vulva: the land will experience unhappiness; a pregnant woman together with her foetus will die” (III 70). Perhaps our report refers to the birth of a hermaphrodite sheep? The second omen is not known from the handbook but this tells us little since Chapter II as we have it is not complete,¹¹⁵ Courtiers called *ša rēši* could be eunuchs but our text uses *mār ekalli* not *ša rēši* for courtier.

¹¹⁰ R. Labat, *Textes littéraires de Susa* (= MDAI = “MDP” 57) (1974) 195–216 no. IX.

¹¹¹ W. Farber, BiOr 34 (1977) 340, sub 2.d.

¹¹² Labat, no. IX:15 (DÍM.MA = **dimmû*); “son nom est ‘maléfice’ (?)”; see Labat, 191 on line 3. Again in no. IX rev. 5, 34 f.; no. X obv. 8, 18, 22 (one eye), rev. 5, 13

¹¹³ As do some passages in the “astronomical diaries”; see A. Sachs, H. Hunger, *Astronomical Diaries I* (1988) 64 rev. 9 f. (sheep), 98 C rev. 2 (dog); 198 B rev. 6–7 (goat). A text summing up portents that have taken place in Babylon describes a calf with the trunk (*kutû*) of an elephant, and other aberrations; CT 29 49:23–26. That a calf (not a human being) is meant is now clear from the word *ju-ru-pa* in line 25 (with unpubl. dupl. S. 1918); *guruppû* is “Hüftschale des Rindes” (AHw).

¹¹⁴ CT 28 6 K. 766, with LAS 327, SAA VIII 241; Leichty, p. 8.

¹¹⁵ On hermaphrodites in the Talmud, see J. Preuss, *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin* (1911) 262–4.

In European folklore, children born with a caul (German: *mit der Haube geboren*; French *la peau d'enfance*) have a good repute.¹¹⁶ A caul protected David Copperfield from drowning. The Arab women of Palestine named the caul a *burnus*.¹¹⁷ Do we find such a child in the Babylonian texts? When dealing with abnormalities of the head, the handbook says that a woman can give birth to a child, “and on top of his head is situated flesh like a helmet”; more physical aberrations follow (II 19). It is possible that the preceding lines, now lost to us, spoke of the simplest case, that of a child with flesh like a helmet (*kubšu*) on his head. A caul? There is a rare personal name, literally meaning “The veiled one” (*Pussunum*). Was this person born with a caul?¹¹⁸

When monsters are born: the ritual

In most cases, the birth of a malformed baby or animal spells doom. What can one do once it is born? The Babylonians developed a ritual to rid a person of the evil that was forecasted by the anomaly. The sungod Šamaš and the Rivergod were invoked,¹¹⁹ the owner of the anomaly was cleansed and at the end a necklace of amulet stones was prescribed in order to ward off any future evil. Ultimately the anomaly was thrown into the river and disposed of. We have this ritual in various manuscripts. The name of the owner is indicated by the anonymous “NN”, but one manuscript is “personalised” in giving a real name. The ritual has been republished recently and we rely on that edition.¹²⁰

“If there was an anomaly in a man’s house – whether (born) of cattle, sheep, ox (sic!), (goat,) horse, dog, pig, or a human being – in order to avert that evil, [that it may not approach] the man and his house (you perform the following ritual).

You go to the river and construct a reed hut. [You scatter] garden plants. You set up a reed altar. Upon the reed altar you pour out seven food offerings (variant: twelve loaves of emmer-barley). You scatter dates and fine flour. [You set out] a censer of juniper. You fill three jugs with beer, and you [...] *pannigu*-loaves, ‘ear-shaped’ (loaves), one grain of silver, one grain of gold as a present to the River. You place a golden city on the head

¹¹⁶ Jacques Gélis, *L’arbre et le fruit. La naissance dans l’Occident moderne* (XVI^e – XIX^e siècle) (1984) 276–278 “Né coiffé” (Part I, 3, Chap. IV). See also H.H. Ploss, *Das Weib* II (1899) 241 § 336; B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* III (1975) 227 f.

¹¹⁷ H. Granqvist, *Birth and childhood among the Arabs* (1947) 71: “Sometimes the newborn child is enveloped in a thin membrane (*burnus*). The midwife tears it from the head and it comes away like thin muslin”.

¹¹⁸ I.J. Gelb, MAD 3 (1957) 218 (Ur III), TIM 5 34:4 (Old Bab.). The “veiled” newborn piglets in CT 38 48:63 (*pu-us-sú-nu-tú*, in AHw) are actually piglets “whose foreheads (*pūtu*) are white” (SAG.KI-su-nu BA[BBAR]), see the new duplicate SpbTU III 166 no. 94:28 (cf. 94:32). – I cannot trace the source of Jacques Gélis’ remark “Un texte chaldéen soulignait déjà que ‘si une femme met au monde un enfant qui a sur la tête une coiffe, le bon augure entrera dans la maison’” (p. 276). Probably an omen from our handbook that was misunderstood.

¹¹⁹ M.-J. Seux, *Hymnes et prières aux dieux de Babylone et d’Assyrie* (1976) 365 (“À Shamash, contre le mal présagé par un avortement”), 366 f., with note 1 (“À la rivière”).

¹²⁰ S.M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (1994) 336–343; cf. 22, 62 f., 167 f. Our translation follows largely that by R.I. Caplice, *The Akkadian namburbi texts: an introduction* (= SANE 1, 1) (1974) 16, Text 6, “Ritual for the evil of a monstrous birth”.

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of the anomaly.¹²¹ You attach a gold breastplate to the thread of red wool. You cast that anomaly on (the) garden plants. That man kneels and you have him speak as follows:

‘Incantation – Šamaš, judge of heaven and earth, lord of justice and equity, director of the upper and lower regions! Šamaš, it is in your power to bring the dead to life, to release the captive. Šamaš, I have approached you, Šamaš, I have sought you out, Šamaš, I have turned to you! Avert from me the evil of this anomaly. May it not reach me. May its evil be far from my person, so that I may daily bless you (and) that those who see me may forever sing your praise!'

You have him speak [this] incantation three times and the conjurer will take the hand of the man and make speak him before the River as follows:

‘Incantation – You, River, are the creator of everything. When the great gods dug you, they [put] the grace at your side, Ea, lord of the depths, created his abode in you, he gave you wrath, splendour, frightening. You are a Flood that cannot be resisted [...]. Ea and Asalluhi gave you wisdom so that you pass judgment over mankind.

I, NN, son of NN, whose god is X, whose goddess is Y, who is beset by an anomaly: I am frightened (and) terrified. Avert from me the evil of this anomaly! May the evil not approach, may it not draw near, may it not reach me. May that evil go away from my person, so that I may daily bless you (and) that those who see me may forever sing your praise! By the command of Ea and Asalluhi, remove that evil. May your banks release it. Take it down to your depths. Extract that evil. You, (full of) laughter, grant me life!'

You speak this three times and you purify the man with water. You throw tamarisk, soap plant, *šalālu*-reed, a date-palm shoot, the anomaly, together with its food provisions and gifts, into the river (variant adds: That man takes off his garment and is shaved), and you undo the offering arrangement and prostrate yourself, and that man goes to his house.

[You string] cornelian, lapis lazuli, serpentine, *pappardilû*-stone, *papparminû*-stone, bright obsidian, *hilibû*-stone, *turmina*-stone, *turminabanda*-stone, on a [linen] thread. You place it around his neck for seven days [...]. The evil of that anomaly will no (more) draw near to the man or his house”.

The anomaly sits on “garden plants” during the first part of the ritual, all are thrown into the river and the plants are named: the tamarisk, soap plant, etc. These are the well-known cleansing plants used in many purifications.¹²² In Babylonia the River is the place where unclean matter is ritually disposed of.

Why abnormal children are born

An interesting problem that has beset the minds is the cause of such abnormalities or of outright monsters. Our handbook only gives forecasts as “prognosis” and never diagnoses the cause. There is one exception, however.

“If a woman gives birth to a madman / ecstatic, male or female: that woman, someone who has a sin has fertilised her on the street” (I 69). The ancient commentary explains that this man must have been one suffering of the disease *garabu* (a *garbānu*) or of dropsy

¹²¹ Read AŠ GUR as URU (*ālu*), a diadem in the form of a city wall, mainly known from art; J. Börker-Klähn, “Mauerkrönenträgerinnen”, in H. Watzoldt, H. Hauptmann, *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten* (1997) 227–234.

¹²² Discovered by S.M. Maul, 62 ff. (“Exkurs: Die ‘Gartenkräuter’ ”).

Why Abnormal Birth

(“one full of water”). These diseases probably were incurable and the implication is that the sufferer is a sinner.¹²³

According to medical texts, the birth of an abnormal child can have a divine cause: a severely epileptic child is named “Spawn of Šulpea”; the latter is an astral god, the planet Jupiter.¹²⁴ We can only speculate about the background of this expression; the wording suggests that the mother had been impregnated by an evil star / planet.

Another cause may have been sorcery which, as we have seen, can be a cause of miscarriage among humans. In a text about abnormal births from pigs we read that “a woman has done sorcery”.¹²⁵

The Sumerian saying “His mother was lame, (his) arms are paralyzed” may at first glance appear to be a theory of heredity but it must be a metaphor: “like parents, like children”.¹²⁶

The last example comes from a proverb about an animal birth. A letter from Old Babylonian Mari quotes a proverb about hasty dogs bearing blind offspring: “Heaven forbid that you now will act thus, like the ancient proverb which runs as follows: ‘A bitch gives birth to blind (puppies) when she is hurrying’ ”.¹²⁷ Indeed this ancient proverb is also known from early Greek: “The hasty bitch bore blind puppies” and we find it in later literature, such as the *Adagia* of Erasmus, *canis festinans caecos parit catulos*, as well as in modern Iraq.¹²⁸

The Babylonian Talmud gives the following reasons for abnormal births. “If a man lets blood and then has marital intercourse, his children (born therefrom) will be weaklings (*wittēq*)” (Gittin 70a). The same happens when the man has intercourse immediately on returning from a journey. When man and wife have had blood-letting, the child will suffer from the disease *ra'tān*. Furthermore, “The Rabbis taught: On coming from a privy a man should not have sexual intercourse till he has waited long enough to walk half a *mil*, because the demon of the privy is with him for that time; if he does, his children will be epileptic”. This wisdom is the heritage of the Babylonians: the Babylonian demon of the privy, Šulak, “hits” man with a disease akin to epilepsy, “stroke” (*mišittu*).¹²⁹

¹²³ The first, *garabu*, is often identified as leprosy; M. Stol sees in it a skin disease becoming manifest on the head; BiOr 46 (1989) 129 f. (favus?). As to dropsy, see K. van der Toorn, *Sin and sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia* (1985) 75 f. with notes 263–265 on p. 197; p. 82. Bottéro’s explanation is based on the unfounded translation “giant” instead of madman / ecstatic; *Annuaire* 122 note 3.

¹²⁴ M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 14–16.

¹²⁵ R. Labat, MDP 57 222 no. X: 19, 23, 25, etc.

¹²⁶ B. Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer I* (1997) 337 (MDP 27, 211).

¹²⁷ ARM 1 5:10–14. There has been much discussion on the meaning of the verb translated as “to hurry” (*Šutēpurum*); see W.R. Mayer, *Or NS* 61 (1992) 392; M.P. Streck, *ZA* 84 (1994) 171 f.; *Zahl und Zeit* (1995) 147 note 324 (dissenting). The meaning “to hurry” is now assured by a new manuscript of *Lugale III 90*; see F.N.H. al-Rawi, *Iraq* 57 (1995) 205 (gir im.ma.ab.ul₄.e = *uš-te-ep-pi-ir*).

¹²⁸ W.L. Moran, “Puppies in proverbs – From Šamši-Adad I to Archilochus”, *Eretz Israel* 14 (1978) 32–37; also in *RA* 71 (1977) 191; Moran, “An Assyriological gloss on the new Archilochus fragment”, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 82 (1978) 17–19; B. Alster, “An Akkadian and a Greek proverb. A comparative study”, *WdO* 10 (1979) 1–5; Y. Avishur, “Additional parallels of an Akkadian proverb found in the Iraqi vernacular Arabic”, *WdO* 12 (1981) 37 f. See also B. Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer I* (1997) 142 (SP 5.118).

¹²⁹ M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 76 f.

VI. The Appearance of the Baby

Children doomed by sin

We return to the abnormal birth cited above: "If a woman gives birth to a madman / ecstatic, male or female: that woman, someone who has a sin has fertilised her on the street" (I 69). Sin (or: guilt, *arnu*) is given as the cause. It is the sin of the biological father in the first place, and to some extent the sin of the mother: a decent woman should not appear in the streets without protection. Personal names attest to the same idea, that parental sin determines the newborn's fate. Best known are the names of the type "In what respect have I sinned, o God?", "I do not know my sin", "What did I do wrong?".¹³⁰ Or the rare name "Who is perfect?".¹³¹ One can explain these names by assuming that they were given to children born with defects. They indicate that the exact cause and nature of the sin was unknown.

A child owes its defect to a sin committed by its parent. This fits the Old Testament rule that God, as the Ten Commandments have it, "visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me" (Exodus 20:5, with Deuteronomy 5:9). It indeed was a proverb in Israel, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge".¹³² The Babylonians had similar opinions. A man could be seized by "the oath of father and mother, his father's father, his mother's mother, of his brother or sister, of seven generations (*līpu*) of his father's house".¹³³ We read in a prayer to an angered god: "Drive out from my body illness from known and unknown iniquity, the iniquity of my father, my father's father, my mother, my mother's mother, the iniquity of my elder brother and elder sister, the iniquity of clan, kith and kin, which has come upon me because of the raging wrath of my god and my goddess".¹³⁴

In the well-known story from the Gospel of John about the man who had been blind from birth, the disciples ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answers, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him", and He subsequently cured the blind man (John 9). The belief that the sins of the parents were visited by handicaps on their children, seems to have been the accepted opinion.¹³⁵

It was common wisdom in the entire Near East that man is a sinner from the

¹³⁰ M. Stol, SEL 8 (1991) 200 f. (more examples); K. Watanabe, Baghd. Mitt. 24 (1993) 290-301; S.M. Maul, NABU 1994/40 (already in Sumerian names).

¹³¹ *Mannum-šuklul*, J.E. Gautier, *Archives d'une famille de Dilbat* (1908) no. 33:7, 10.

¹³² The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, in the name of God, protest against this proverb. Every one shall die for his own sin! (Jeremiah 31:29-30; Ezekiel 18:1-4). Cf. "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deuteronomy 24:16).

¹³³ Šurpu III 3-6, with parallels in the commentary by E. Reiner in her edition (1958).

¹³⁴ W.G. Lambert, JNES 33 (1974) 280, lines 114-118.

¹³⁵ J. Jeremias, *Neutestamentliche Theologie. I. Die Verkündigung Jesu* (1973) 179. "Jedes Leid ist Strafe für eine bestimmte Einzelsünde. Das ist die feste Überzeugung der Zeit (vgl. Joh 9,2). Gott wacht darüber, daß Schuld und Strafe sich genau nach dem Grundsatz Maß für Maß entsprechen. Wenn man einem Verstümmelten, Lahmen, Blinden oder Aussätzigen begegnet, ist es fromme Pflicht, zu murmeln: 'Gewünscht sei der zuverlässige Richter'. Wenn ein Kleinkind stirbt, müssen bestimmte Sünden der Eltern vorliegen, die Gott bestraft. So sieht man im Leid die Geißel Gottes. Jesus lehnt es scharf ab, daß man solche Rechenempel stellt". – Jeremias used Strack-Billerbeck (see my note 139) II 193-197, 444-446, II 194 f.; Tos. Ber. VII, 3.

beginning of his life.¹³⁶ Sins committed in one's youth were done out of ignorance, so Babylonian prayers stress.¹³⁷ They certainly held no concept of original sin, known from Christian dogmatics.¹³⁸ Jewish thought supposes that man is driven both by an evil and a good inclination.¹³⁹ The evil inclination (*jēser hāra'*) prevails until the child reaches maturity at thirteen years and has learned the Torah. After the Flood, God said, "For the imagination (*jēser*) of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Genesis 8:21). Mainstream Jewish tradition holds that man becomes sinful at birth; God said to Cain, "Sin is couching at the door", i.e., it lies in wait for the baby on entering this world (Genesis 4:7). There is, nevertheless, David's cry in Psalm 51:5, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me". Here, the sexual act is already tinged by an evil drive.¹⁴⁰ "How can a man keep far away from the evil inclination which is in his body? For the first drop which a man injects into a woman is the evil inclination".¹⁴¹ This seems to be an older opinion that was given up later. In a famous discussion recorded by the Talmud, the Roman emperor Antoninus objects to the idea that the evil inclination holds sway over man from the moment of the formation (*jēsīrā*) of the embryo. "If so, it would rebel in its mother's womb and go forth. But it is from when it issues (*jēsī'ā*)". "Rabbi" said: "This thing Antoninus taught me, and Scripture supports him, for it is said, 'At the door sin lieth in wait'" (Sanhedrin 91b).¹⁴²

We do not wish to say much about original sin in Christian theology. David's expression in Psalm 51 is one important testimony for this dogma. It shows that sin was inherited "like the gout (*podagra*)", as Augustine explained, and newborn children are

¹³⁶ G.L. Mattingly, "The Pious Sufferer: Mesopotamian traditional theodicy and Job's counselors", *Scripture in Context* III (1990) 305–348, esp. 315–8. Cf. the prayer "Who has not sinned?", in B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* II (1996) 630 f. Cf. B.H. Stricker, OMRO 64, Supplement (1983) 31–35.

¹³⁷ K. van der Toorn, *Sin and sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia* (1985) 96, with notes 20–23 (p. 209).

¹³⁸ Note, however, the prayer named by its translator "Against congenital guilt", B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* II (1996) 549 f.

¹³⁹ S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (1909) 242–263 ("The Evil *Yezer*: the source of rebellion"); H.L. Strack, P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* IV (1928) 466–483 ("Der gute und der böse Trieb (zu Gal. 5, 16 ff.)"); R. Mach, *Der Zaddik in Talmud und Midrasch* (1957) 26–31 ("Der Kampf gegen den bösen Trieb"); E.E. Urbach, *The Sages. Their concepts and beliefs* I (1975) 471–483 ("The two Inclinations"); G.H. Cohen Stuart, *The struggle in man between Good and Evil. An inquiry into the origin of the Rabbinic concept of *Yezer Hara** (1984). On the origin of the evil inclination, see Schechter, 252–4; Strack-Billerbeck, 468–470; Mach, 26 note 3; Urbach, 220; Cohen Stuart, 14 f., 177 f. Strack-Billerbeck, 468: "Der gute und der böse Trieb sind beide dem Menschen von Gottes Hand anerschaffen worden. Soweit man das Anstößige des Gedankens empfand, daß Gott als Schöpfer des bösen Triebes zugleich Urheber von Bösem sei, hat man den Begriff *jēser hāra'* enger gefaßt und darunter lediglich die sittlich indifferennten Naturtriebe im Menschen, wie den Selbsterhaltungs- und Fortpflanzungstrieb, verstanden, so daß es erst der Mensch ist, der durch den falschen Gebrauch den natürlichen Trieb hinterher zu einem bösen Trieb macht. Dergleichen feinere Unterscheidungen treten jedoch nur selten hervor; meist hat man den sinnlichen Naturtrieb so genommen, wie er sich in der erfahrungsmäßigen Wirklichkeit zeigt, und so als *jēser hāra'* einfach auf das Konto der göttlichen Schöpfertätigkeit gesetzt".

¹⁴⁰ Leviticus Rabbah XIV, 5. "David said before the Holy one, blessed be He: 'O Lord of the Universe! Did my father Jesse have the intention of bringing me into the world?' – Why, his intention was his own enjoyment". This enjoyment was sinful. See Urbach, 478 f., with 898 note 53.

¹⁴¹ Abot de-Rabbi Nathan, version A, 16, 3 (24b); transl. A. Cohen, *The Minor Tractates of the Talmud* I (1965) 96 f. In this late text, Genesis 4:7 serves as an extra argument for man's sinfulness: "Moreover, the evil inclination dwells at the entrances of the heart, as is stated, 'Sin coucheth at the door'. It already speaks to the human being while he is an infant in the cot, saying, 'That man seeks to kill you', and [in consequence the infant] is ready to pluck out his hair".

¹⁴² A discussion with Antoninus about the beginnings of the soul in man precedes. Cohen Stuart, 222: "The soul is given at the moment of conception, the evil inclination is entering human life at the moment of birth".

VI. The Appearance of the Baby

baptized in order to wash off this sin.¹⁴³ Augustine characterized this sin as *concupiscentia*, “desire”, “craving”.¹⁴⁴ Thanks to the immaculate birth of his mother, Christ had no part in it. In Protestant thought: Christ’s sacrificial death on the Cross saves us from actual sins and through his conception and birth from the Virgin Mary He saves us from our original sin.¹⁴⁵ It is not easy to find this doctrine in the New Testament; it has been said that the first epistle of Peter possibly polemizes against it: “Baptism (...) now saves you, not as a removal of dirt (*rúpos*) from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Christ” (1 Peter 3:21). This “dirt” is the essential word in one of the testimonies for original sin, Job 14:4 in its Greek translation, “Who will be clean out of dirt? But nobody”.¹⁴⁶ Greek Church Fathers remain reticent about all it. They could not not accept that young unbaptized children inherit sin and are damned. The dogma of original sin is an accepted creed in orthodox Roman-Catholic and Protestant theology.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ The gout has intemperance as cause and as such it “often” goes from father to son; original sin is similar. Augustine, *Opus Imperfectum* II 177 (CSEL 85/1 296 f.), cited by P.F. Beatrice, *Tradux peccati. Alle fonti della dottrina agostiniana del peccato originale* (1978) 95.

¹⁴⁴ Julius Gross, *Geschichte des Erbsündendogmas I, Entstehungsgeschichte des Erbsündendogmas. Von der Bibel bis Augustin* (1960) 319–333 (“Wesen der Erbsünde”). The Reformation took *concupiscentia* in a wide sense; Joh. Calvin, *Institutio* II, 1, 8 (end); 9.

¹⁴⁵ T.F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology. From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (1996) 49, cf. 56 f., 270.

¹⁴⁶ So Beatrice, *Tradux peccati*, 230 f.

¹⁴⁷ P.F. Beatrice, *Tradux peccati. Alle fonti della dottrina agostiniana del peccato originale* (1978) looks for the origins of the dogma in the Jewish-Christian sect of the Encratites with their ideal of celibacy (and not in the writings of Paul, Gnostics, or Manichaeans). Reviews of this book: A. Trapé, *Augustinianum* 19 (1979) 531–538; J. den Boeft, *Vigiliae Christianae* 35 (1981) 307–311. – For Augustine, the sexual drive is the typical example, with an “immense symbolic power”, from which we can learn everything else on human condition. See Peter Brown, *The body and society. Men, women, and sexual renunciation in early Christianity* (1989) 416–418. “The *concupiscentia carnis*, indeed, was a peculiarly tragic affliction to Augustine precisely because it had so little to do with the body. It originated in a lasting distortion of the soul itself. With Adam’s Fall, the soul lost the ability to summon up all of itself, in an undivided act of will, to love and praise God in all created things. Concupiscence was a dark drive to control, to appropriate, and to turn to one’s private ends, all the good things that had been created by God to be accepted and shared with others. It lay at the root of the inescapable misery that afflicted mankind. Sexual drive was no more tainted with this tragic, faceless concupiscence than was any form of human activity. But the very incongruities associated with sexual feelings used the human body as a tiny mirror, in which men and women could catch a glimpse of themselves”.

Chapter VII MIDWIFERY AND NURSING

The midwife

“Sage-femme”

We have already met with the Babylonian midwife. The most important information on her work comes from literary passages in myths which describe goddesses as midwife.¹ Scattered over this book one finds other activities of the midwife.² We summarize. She makes the woman sit on the bricks of birth, she may have punctured the amniotic sac, she delivers the child, cuts the umbilical cord, disposes of the afterbirth.³ She applies ointments to the mother and rubs the newborn. In this section we will first study the words for “midwife”, then make remarks on religious women acting as midwife, and finally try to gather the little information that we can get about midwives in daily life in Babylonia.

The Akkadian word for “midwife” *šabsūtu* was only recognized in 1957. It must be a loan from the Sumerian word *šà.zu*, “knowing the inside (of the body)”.⁴ The fuller term “midwife of the womb” (*šabsūt rēmim*) leaves no doubt about the meaning. The very old texts from Ebla, a city in Syria south of Aleppo, yielded a genuine Semitic word: *muwallitum* “she who makes give birth”.⁵ This is the etymological and semantic equivalent of Hebrew (and Aramaic) *m'jallēdēt*.

It is interesting to note that in many languages the midwife is indicated by an expression literally meaning “the wise woman”. Examples are French *sage-femme*, Dutch *vroedvrouw*, and allow me to suggest that English *midwife* goes back to **wid-wife*, “the knowing woman”. In Hebrew (and Aramaic) we have the word *ḥ̄kāmā* “the wise one” with this special meaning.⁶ The Babylonian mother goddess Mama is called *erīštu*, a literary word meaning “wise” and in the Old Babylonian Atra-*hasīs* myth “the wise, Mama” acts as “midwife of the gods” (I 193). The word cannot be a simple adjective: it precedes the name Mama and it has the status of a substantive, “the wise one”, the *sage-femme* Mama. This literary word disappeared in later periods and should not be confused with the other *erīštu*, possibly “expecting (mother)”.⁷ The latter is known

¹ W.G. Lambert, JAOS 103 (1983) 65 f.

² The exciting interpretation of Rm 398 and K. 9610 which appear to describe a difficult birth has no textual basis. The fragments do not join. See J.V. Kinnier Wilson, JNES 33 (1974) 237–241.

³ Puncturing: Atram-*hasīs* myth, I 281–2, “[In the House] of Destinies they called the tenth month; the tenth month arrived and she slipped into (?) the *palū*, opened the womb (?); by interpreting the last words differently: “She slipped in the sharp stick, opened the membrane (*silitu*)”. History of human birth shows that midwives were always impatient. “The midwife might first of all ‘break the waters’, which means puncturing the sac of amniotic fluid that surrounds the infant in the uterus with a fingernail or pointed thimble. The midwives did this to speed up birth”. E. Shorter, *Women's bodies* (1982) 58–60.

⁴ W. von Soden, “Die Hebamme in Babylonien und Assyrien”, AfO 18 (1957–58) 119–121. Cf. Å.W. Sjöberg, TCS III (1969) 142 f. (in Sumerian myths).

⁵ F. Pomponio, *Vicino Oriente* 5 (1982) 209; P. Fronzaroli, *Studi Eblaiti* VII (1984) 174, cf. 185 (another word, *wallāttum*?). A similar Akkadian word for “midwife”, *mušālittu*, is attested only in the lexical tradition.

⁶ J.J. Finkelstein, YOS 13 (1972) p. 9 note 38.

⁷ W. von Soden is on the same track: *erīštu* 3, “Wunsch nach dem Kind”, von Frauen in LL; AHw 242 a. My interpretation suggests a participle *erīštu* “desiring (woman)”.

VII. Midwifery and Nursing

from the lexical lists: this woman has a special clothings, shoes, a flask (*šikkatu*).⁸ It is certain that the “basket of an *erištu*” could be part of a dowry in the Old Babylonian period.⁹ Was this a basket filled with goods needed by an expectant mother?

A later fragment on difficult childbirth mentions the *la-mit-tum* “she who learns” which is again reminiscent of the *sage-femme*.¹⁰

It is remarkable that lexical texts associate the midwife with Sumerian words meaning “shaver”.¹¹ This probably does not mean that she shaved the pudenda of the woman in labour. I see a parallel in the *‘aqīqa* ceremony practised on the seventh day after birth by Muslims in the Near East and in Northern Africa and which involves the cutting of hair on the head of the newborns. This rite that goes back to pre-Islamic times. The hair is considered not to be clean. After this act, the name is given.¹² Philological arguments are also in favour of explaining the Sumerian words as shaving the hair on the head.¹³

Nuns acting as midwives

A late literary text suggests that religious women (like “nuns”) acted as midwives. A hymn extolling the free citizens of Babylon, records these lines about the three well known classes of religious women: “Women who have learned insight at their work: the *entu*-votaries (*nin.dingir.ra*) who are faithful (?) to their husbands, the *nadītu*-women who give the womb life by wisdom, the *qadištū*-women who .. in purification water. They respect the taboo, they observe the interdict, they pray ... They are reverent, observant, minding the good. Daughters of the gods ...”.¹⁴ The second and third classes of these women are here involved in childbirth.

This passage may go back to an earlier, Old Babylonian original. In later periods the Old Babylonian nun *nadītu* ceased to exist, the scribe found the Sumerogram in an old text and added an explanatory gloss in the margin (*na-da-te*). We have no evidence that the Old Babylonian nun *nadītu* in Sippar could function as a midwife, but maybe she could in Babylon. There is one other religious person (a *kezertu*?) having the title “midwife”.¹⁵ It is said that the nuns *nadītu* “give the womb life”, an idiom for midwifery also found in the incantation studied in the section Cutting the umbilical cord: the goddess of medicine, Ninkarrak “gave life to the pinched intestines”.¹⁶

⁸ W.L. Moran, JCS 31 (1979) 248; NABU 1988/36, 3. See CAD A/2 268 b (*arištu*), K 157a (*kannu ša erišti*, var. *ḥarišti*); MSL 7 (1959) 82 Hh X:108 (*šikkatu*); 129 XI:127 (*šēnu*); MSL 16 (1982) 85 Nabn. IV:226–8 (*subāt arišti*).

⁹ CT 45 75 rev. 16 (2 *gi.pisan e-ri-iš-tim*), M. Birot, TEBA 35:11. Written *gi.pisan šu.kam.ma* in TCL 1 199:13, YOS 13 91:16, St. Dalley, Edinburgh 15:9, K. van Lerberghe, OLA 21 no. 72:5.

¹⁰ Sm 157+9–12; see J.V. Kinnier Wilson, *Iraq* 31 (1969) 15.

¹¹ Von Soden, Ao 18 120 b; J. van Dijk, ZA 55 (1963) 77. Now in MSL 12 (1969) 124 Can. Lu III ii 23–25, [SAL x] *mu-zé-er*MUNSUB, [SAL z]ig.túm.túm, [SAL b]jar.šu.gál = *šab-slu-tu*. Cf. the similar Sumerian words for “shaver”, *gallābu*, in MSL 12 100 Can. Lu I 152–153.

¹² Julian Morgenstern, *Rites of birth, marriage, death, and kindred occasions among the Semites* (1966) 36–47. Another rite is the *tahmīk*, rubbing a child’s palate with a chewed date; A. Gil’adi, JNES 47 (1988) 175–179; A. Gil’adi, *Children of Islam. Concepts of childhood in Medieval Muslim society* (1992) 35–41 (p. 35 f. on *‘aqīqa*).

¹³ One of the words is *bar.šu.gál* = *šabsūtu*, *mumassū*, *gallābu*. A head shaven in a particular way makes it possible to identify (*mussū*) the status of a person. Furthermore, MUNSUB is in later traditions read as SÍG.SUHUR, and SUHUR is *qimmatu*, cf. SUHUR.LÁ = *kezēru*.

¹⁴ KAR 321:6–9, with B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* II (1996) 756.

¹⁵ J.J. Finkelstein, YOS 13 (1972) p. 8 f.

¹⁶ LB 1000:36–39. Note that the Talmud has the word *hajjā* for “midwife” in which we recognize the Hebrew

The Midwife

As we will see below, the *qadištu* was a “priestess” who took care of the breastfeeding of babies. In Sumerian hymns this title *qadištu* (now *nu.gig*) often is the epithet of the goddesses Aruru/Ninmah (the mother goddess), Nin-isina (the goddess of medicine), and Inanna (the goddess of love).¹⁷ The association of midwife and *qadištu* is also known from the later Assyrian “Harem Edicts”.¹⁸ In the Old Babylonian Elamite city Susa, the midwife and the *ištaritu*-woman make a statement about a newborn child, ceded by another *ištaritu*. This woman may have had a role comparable with that of the *qadištu*.¹⁹ These expert women also seem to have had the power to bring about abortions.²⁰

The Atra-*hasīs* myth refers to the house of the *qadištu*: “Let the midwife rejoice in the house of the *qadištu*” (I 290).²¹ A few scholars are of the opinion that *qadištu* here refers to the “mother after childbirth” who, for this reason, is “sacred” (the verb *qadāšu*) and, instead of the well-known title of a religious woman, they translate “tabooed (woman)”.²² It is only this line from Atra-*hasīs* that is amenable to such an interpretation, but it should be noted that the lines from our literary text deal with the general context of taboo. The closing lines stress strict observance of divine rules. We will suggest below that “the house of the *qadištu*” may, perhaps, have been a nursery.

Daily practice

We now turn to ordinary people who assist in the delivery. In the Bible we meet the famous midwives Shiphrah and Puah who told Pharaoh: “Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous (*hājēh*) and are delivered before the midwife comes to them” (Exodus 1:19). The Babylonian Talmud has a story about a man asking Hillel all kinds of questions. “Why are the heads of the Babylonians round?” “My son, you have asked a great question”, replied Hillel – a Babylonian himself. “Because they have no skilful midwives (*hajjōt piqqēhōt*)” (Sabbath 31a).

There is a unique text dating to the Old Babylonian period in which a man whose mother is dead and whose father died before he was born succeeds in establishing his parentage. Six years ago his paternal uncles had tried to expel him from the family (that is to disinherit him) by telling the Assembly of Nippur that he was not the son of the deceased couple. They now renew their allegations and the Assembly orders the officials and judges to collect all evidence from those who have witnessed this pregnancy and birth. Those present at birth – among them midwives – testify. They all confirm that the man indeed is “the seed” (*rihūtu*), the offspring, of his father Enlil-*bāni*. An important element in the testimonies given in this text is that the grandmother Ḥabannatum always had “kept a close eye” upon the mother and the delivery (verb *našārum*; lit. “to guard”) meaning that the baby was really born to her / him and that no other baby had been smuggled in. She had also taken care to call up several people to be present at the delivery. Clearly, she foresaw trouble from the family of the father who had died already. These people now give their testimony. The grandmother Ḥabannatum must now be dead

word for “life”.

¹⁷ J. Renger, ZA 58 (1967) 183 § 117.

¹⁸ E. Weidner, AFO 17 (1954–56) 268 Satzung 1:11 (Assur-uballit I); A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* I (1972) 47 § 305–6 (bibliography).

¹⁹ MDP 23 288, with C. Wilcke, ZA 71 (1981) 88 note 3.

²⁰ A. Cavigneaux, F.N.H. al-Rawi, ZA 85 (1995) 193 f.

²¹ The later Assyrian version no longer understood this and replaced *qadištu* by *harištu*, “woman in childbed”.

²² Th. Jacobsen, Or NS 42 (1973) 292 note 73; W.L. Moran, *Biblica* 52 (1971) 58 note 3.

VII. Midwifery and Nursing

because the last to testify is the assistant of the judges who gives information about her deposition six years ago at the earlier litigation. The text is written in four columns. We give a full translation.²³

“(I) Ninurta-rā’im-zērim, the son of Enlil-bāni, turned to (and) approached the officials and judges of Nippur, and “Enlil-bāni, my father, the son of Ahi-šagiš, died when I was situated in the body of Sin-nada, my mother. Before my being born, Ḥabannatum, the mother of my father, informed Lugā, the herdsman, and Sin-gāmil, the judge. She brought one midwife and she made me be born. After I had grown up, in Samsu-iluna year 20 [...]”, he said.

[Ninurta-ereš and Ili]-išmeanni, [the sons of Ahi-šagiš], and Ḥabannatum [...] approached them, and [“As to Ninurta-rā’im-zērim, [the son of] Enlil-bāni: when [a clay tablet] was drawn up before the divine (symbol) Ubanuila to the effect that he is the son of Enlil-bāni, it was written without witnesses (who) confirmed (this) with an oath. Let now witnesses confirm this with an oath”, they said.

The officials and the judges looked into their case, they heard the earlier clay tablet with the oath, they questioned their witnesses, they discussed their testimony and, (II) because the witnesses spoke as follows, “We know that Ninurta-rā’im-zērim is the son of Enlil-bāni”, they ordered the divine (symbol) Ubanuila to be present and the witnesses to confirm by an oath what they know about the status as son of Ninurta-rā’im-zērim, and to report back to the Assembly.

The divine (symbol) Ubanuila was present at the Gate of the Hill of Heroes and Lipit-Enlil, the son of Nabi-Enlil, spoke as follows: “When Enlil-bāni, the son of Ahi-šagiš, had ‘left’ Ninurta-rā’im-zērim, his son, in the body of Sin-nada, his wife, he left (= abandoned) her after she had become pregnant. [Until her giving] birth, Ḥabannatum, [her mother-in-law, kept a close eye upon her].

Lugā, the herdsman, and Sin-gāmil, the judge, “Ḥabannatum brought Šumum-libši, [the soldier (?) ...], a midwife and made her give birth. Ninurta-rā’im-zērim is certainly the seed of Enlil-bāni. Until she gave birth, Ḥabannatum certainly kept a close eye upon her. Certainly he is the seed of Enlil-bāni”, he (!) said.

Ummī-waqrat, the wife of Iddin-Ilabrat, and Šāt-Sin, the en-na-woman, daughter of Sin-išmeanni – they spoke as follows: “When Sin-nada gave birth to Ninurta-rā’im-zērim, the son of Enlil-bāni, Ḥabannatum, her mother-in-law, informed Lugā, the herdsman, and Sin-gāmil, the judge. They sent over a soldier and the midwife of Ḥabannatum made her give birth; until she gave birth, ... they kept a close eye upon her. We know that Ninurta-rā’im-zērim is the seed of Enlil-bāni”.

(III) Etel-pi-Ištar, the son of Šēp-S[in], the friend of Enlil-bāni, spoke as follows: “When Sin-nada, the wife of Enlil-bāni, saw ‘I am pregnant!’ (lit. ‘My belly!’) (?) because of Enlil-bāni, her husband, he / she repeatedly fell ill, and Enlil-bāni, her

²³ Text: PBS 5 100. Discussions: A. Walther, *Das altbabylonische Gerichtswesen* (1917) 161–168; F.R. Kraus, JCS 3 (1949) 161 ff. (Text B). Translations: HG 6 no. 1760; E. Leichty, in *Studies Å.W. Sjöberg* (1989) 349–354. Some corrections to the transliteration by Leichty: I 28 [aš-šum^dNin.urta-ra]-i-im-ze-ri-im; I 29 [dumu^d]En.lil-ba-ni; II 15 iš⁷-tu; II 20 [PŠ]u-mu-um- li-ib-š[i ..] (with Walther); II 37, end i[q-bi-a]; III 11 hašhur, not Še.ba; III 18 dam⁷, not dumu; III 19 i-nu-ma; III 36 it-ru-du-š[i] ma-har]; IV 6 ki-ma⁷; IV 13 a-wi-il- Ištar; for the first witness in this line, see F.R. Kraus, JEOL 29 (1985–86) 38. IV 16, end: not so on the copy; not clear to me. Note that Leichty gives the *burgul* seal impressions on the edges; not in PBS 5 100.

The Midwife

husband, said: "Let me send her to her father's house until she gives birth". Thus I said: "The belly shall be sick (?) in your (plur.) (own) house". Just like I had told him, he did not send her. He gave me 180 litres of apples, to be available for her. Sin-nada did not go to their (own) house. Until she gave birth I was present mys[elf]. Ḥabannatum came here, together with one midwife, and made her give birth. I know that Ninurta-rā'im-zērim is the seed of Enlil-bāni".

[...] . . . wife of Ninurta-ereš . . . "When [Sin-nada, the wife of Enlil-bāni], gave birth to Ninurta-rā'im-zērim, Ḥabannatum took to (her place) one midwife, a soldier, Lugā, the herdsman, and Sin-gāmil, the judge. She kept a close eye upon her and as soon as Ninurta-rā'im-zērim was born, they took him in a reed basket and they brought him to the house of Sin-gāmil, the judge", they (fem.) said.

Sin-ereš, the lieutenant, son of Sin-māgir, and Adad-tajjār, the lieutenant, son of Ḥummurum, spoke as follows: "We know that Ninurta-rā'im-zērim is the seed of Enlil-bāni". Ennugi-ināja, the assistant of the judges, spoke as follows: "When Ninurta-ereš and Ilī-išmeanni, the sons of Ahī-šagiš, informed the Assembly about Ninurta-rā'im-zērim, they (= Assembly) sent her with them, (IV) they sat down [in front of] (?) the divine (symbol) Ubanuila. Ḥabannatum has said this: '(As to) Ninurta-rā'im-zērim, the son of Enlil-bāni, my son: the brothers of his father shall not expel him'. Ḥabannatum gave me one shekel of silver in order to draw up their clay tablet, to the effect that (they) do not expel him".

Clay tablet (documenting) the confirmation by the male and female witnesses, that in front of the divine (symbol) Ubanuila, of Ninurta-rā'im-zērim the status as the son of Enlil-bāni has been confirmed".

Witnesses and date (Samsu-iluna, year 26) follow.

In Roman law, ascertaining the birth by witnesses also is a carefully staged situation. A praetorian edict on witnessing the delivery (*de inspiciendo ventre custodiendoque partu*) prescribed what is to be done and who are to be present. We give a quotation from the *Digests* (25,4.1.10).²⁴

"The woman must give birth in the house of a woman of excellent reputation who will be appointed by me. Thirty days before she believes she is due for delivery the pregnant woman must notify the interested parties, or their representatives, inviting them, if they wish, to send persons to witness the delivery (*qui ventrem custodiant*). The room (*conclave*) in which the birth is to take place must have no more than one entry; if there are more they must be boarded up, inside and out. At the entrance to this room, three men and three women of free status must keep watch with a pair of companions. Whenever the woman enters that room or any other, or goes to the bath, those keeping watch may, if they wish, inspect that place first and search those who enter it. (...) When the woman goes into labour, she must notify the interested parties, or their representatives, to send persons to witness the birth. Women of free status, up to the number of five, should be sent, so that in addition to two midwives (*obstetrices*) there are no more than ten free women in the delivery room and no more than six slave women. Those women who are going to be present in the room should all be searched to ensure that none is pregnant. There should be no fewer than three lights in the room

²⁴ Taken from B. Rawson, *Marriage, divorce and children in ancient Rome* (1991) 11 f.

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(a gloss adds: obviously because darkness is more suitable for substituting a child). The newborn child should be shown to the interested parties, or their representatives, if they wish to inspect it (*si inspicere volent, ostendatur*”).

We are interested in the biological, rather than legal, information of the Old Babylonian text. The father has “left” (*ezēbum*) his son in the body of his mother. Conception is indicated by this (II 15). A line from an Old Babylonian myth is another example for this idiom: “they were lying in bed, Enlil left his seed in the belly”.²⁵ The testimony of Etel-pi-Ištar, the “friend of the husband” (*ku.li; ibrum*), is the most interesting but it is also very difficult.²⁶ We know that “friend of the husband” could refer to the best-man (*paranymph*) at a wedding. In that case our text would show that he had the authority to give advice to the couple about what to do, and that he could be asked to take care of the pregnant woman. He first says that the woman was pregnant “because of (*ana*) Enlil-bāni, her husband”, in one interpretation (III 4). The same idiom is found in an omen, discussed in the section on maternal vision.²⁷ It is not clear, who is repeatedly ill: the husband who will die soon, or the expecting mother? Nor what the sick “belly” (*libbum*) means here: is the sick belly / heart to be taken literally, or is it a well known metaphor, “to be concerned”, “to be displeased” (III 9).²⁸ We have already learned from an earlier deposition that the husband has “left” (abandoned) his pregnant wife (II 16); our passage is too obscure to understand why. The main point is here not so much the sad story but rather the friend who remained present until the birth; his testimony is valuable. The friend received 180 litres of apples which were to be given to the expecting mother. Did the Babylonians believe that apples were good for women in this condition?

It does not come as a surprise that a midwife (*SAL.šā.zu*) assists at the delivery (literally: “she makes her give birth”) and it is interesting to note that the baby was transported in a reed basket (*masabbum*) (III 28). To a safe house – we assume that nothing good was expected from the uncles.

First care of the newborn baby

The Akkadian word for newborn is *šerru*; *la’u (lakū)* is another more literary term. The newborn baby could also be called “the little one” (*šeħru*) and Old Babylonian contracts speak of “(baby) boy / girl” (*ṣuhāru / suhārtu*).²⁹

²⁵ CT 15 5 II 2, with W.H.Ph. Römer, JAOS 86 (1966) 138. – Note *mārašu ibrī*, “he left (behind) his child”, in Old Babylonian incantations against dog bite; R.M. Whiting, ZA 75 (1985) 182 f.; LB 2001:9, A. 704 rev. 8, VAS 17 8:6.

²⁶ The most problematic lines are III 3–5: (3) *ki-ma* ^{pd}*EN.ZU-na-da* *dam* ^d*En.lil-ba-ni* (4) *li-ib-bi a-na* ^d*En.lil-ba-ni mu-ti-ša* (5) *i-mu-ru it-ta-na-ás-la-ah-ma*.

²⁷ Chapter VI p. 156.

²⁸ III 9: *i-na bi-ti-ku-nu li-ib-bu-um i-ma-ar-[r]a-as*. CAD M/1 272b (“be concerned”), 274a (“to become angry, displeased”). Our passage: “there is bickering in your house”. C. Wilcke, in: E.W. Müller, *Geschlechtsreife und Legitimation zur Zeugung* (1985) 278 note 97, wrestles with our III 1–17 and sees in *libbum* a metaphor, also in III 4: “Als³ Sin-nada, die Ehefrau des Enlil-bāni, ‘mein Herz für ihren Ehemann Enlil-bāni sah’, wurde er (*/sie?*) immer wieder …” (III 3–5); “So (sprach) ich: ‘In eurem Haus wird man sich ärgern’” (III 8–9). Another discussion by B. Kienast, *Die altassyrischen Texte des Oriental. Seminars der Univ. Heidelberg und der Sammlung Erlenmeyer - Basel* (1960) 58 f.; “Als Sin-nada, die Ehefrau des Enlil-bāni, meine Sorge (eig.: mein Inneres) um Enlil-bāni, ihren Gatten, sah, wurde sie angesteckt” (= unruhig werden?); “In eurem Hause wird ihr Herz krank sein”.

²⁹ W. Farber, *Schlaf Kindchen Schlaf* (1989) 132–144, studied “Das Wortfeld ‘Kleinkind, Baby’”. Also C.

First Care of the Baby

The female demon Lamaštu is pictured in negative terms as an anti-midwife. From this we can learn what a real midwife does at and after birth: "She is no physician in bandaging [...], she is no midwife in wiping off (*kapāru* D) the baby. She keeps counting the months of the pregnant women, she always blocks the 'door' of a woman when giving birth".³⁰ A good midwife counts the months, opens the "door", and wipes off the baby.

At the end of an Assyrian incantation the mother prays: "May the phlegm (?) (*niṣu*) keep on falling on the ground like flash of fire from the heavens!" and this instruction follows: "She massages its chest with oil. She puts her finger in its mouth, and it will put down the phlegm (?)".³¹ Is this the mother acting or the midwife?

A Sumerian hymn on the goddess of medicine, Ninisina, extolls her qualities as a helper in a delivery, as a *qadištu* (nu.u₈.gig). We have seen that this title is used for sacred women with similar tasks. After the passage on disposing of the afterbirth, we read that it is her task "The human child, after it has been received in the lap – to make it cry loudly, to put the belly downwards, to turn it upside down".³² This means that the child is turned over in order to make it breathe by crying. I owe this interpretation to Th.J.H. Krispijn. In fact, there is another reference to this manipulation, in the Diagnostic Handbook, in its chapter on babies: "If a child, when you hold it dangling by the neck (*kišadānuššu tušqallalšu*), neither quivers nor stretches out its arms: overpowering by dust". Death seems to be the meaning of the diagnosis or prognosis in this case of an inert child.³³

Ezekiel gives a description in negative terms on what is done right after birth: "And as for your birth, on the day you were born your navel string was not cut, nor were you washed (*rāhaṣ*) with water to cleanse (*miš‘i*) you, nor rubbed with salt, nor swathed (*hatal*) with bands" (Ezekiel 16:4). This was the normal procedure in the Mediterranean world. In the traditional Near East, the baby is washed and rubbed with salt and oil.³⁴ Salt was thought to harden the skin.³⁵ Around the eyes kohl is applied.³⁶ Swaddling is mentioned in a famous passage in the New Testament, on the birth of Jesus. "And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths" (Luke 2:7).³⁷ Until recent times swaddling was widely practised (Greek *spargánōsis*; in the Talmud *lāfaf*).³⁸ It was a way to give form to the child.

Michel, KTEMA 22 (1997) 92–5.

³⁰ YOS 11 19:3–6, with p. 25, and B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* I (1996) 133. For the meaning of "wiping off" (*kuppuru*), see S.M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (1994) 80.

³¹ ABRT 2 19:13–17, after A. Livingstone, SAA III no. 48.

³² ŠRT 6/7:77–78, with W.H.Ph.Römer, *Festschrift W. von Soden* (= AOAT 1) (1969) 295. Text: (77) *dumu lú úr.ra da an.ri.ri gù.nun.sù.sù.dè* (78) *sà ki.še gá.gá.dè sag šu.bal.ak.dè*. See also p. 112.

³³ TDP 216:3. We discuss that section on babies in Chapter VIII (p. 210).

³⁴ Granqvist, *Birth and childhood among the Arabs. Studies in a Muhammedan village in Palestine* (1974) 242 f. (lit.); J. Morgenstern, *Rites of birth, marriage, death and kindred occasions among the Semites* (1966) 8, 196. Among Greeks and Romans: P. Burgière, D. Gourevitch, *Soranos d'éphèse. Maladies des femmes*. Tome II, Livre II (Budé edition) (1990) p. 88 note 111 (salt), p. 90 note 120 (swaddling).

³⁵ The Budé edition of Soranus comments: "Le sel a effectivement des vertus resserrantes et desséchantes: il extrait l'eau des tissus de la peau et l'irrite. On comprend donc bien que les Anciens lui attribuent le pouvoir de rendre la peau plus ferme et plus dense" (p. 88).

³⁶ E.S. Drower, *Iraq* 5 (1938) 110: "The child's body is cleansed, and some *kohl* or cooking-pot black mixed with oil is placed round the lids of its eyes".

³⁷ R.E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (1977) 399.

³⁸ J. Preuss, *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin* (1911) 467–9; H. Granqvist, *Birth and childhood among the*

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The child received a name. This happened quite soon but for Mesopotamia we do not know when exactly.³⁹ Sometimes, the name refers to the day or month the child is born, often a festival: "Son-of-day-20" (*Mār-ešrē*), "Born-in-Nisan" (*Nisanûm*), "Of-the-Harvest" (*Eburîtum*).⁴⁰ In ancient Rome, the name was given after the seventh day (*dies lustricus*). We quote an instructive passage from Plutarchus. "Why do they name boys when they are nine days old, but girls when they are eight days old? (...) As for the days, they take those that follow the seventh; for the seventh day is dangerous for newly-born children in various ways and in the matter of the umbilical cord; for in most cases this comes away on the seventh day; but until it comes off, the child is more like a plant than an animal".⁴¹

We may now understand why in Israel the circumcision had to take place on the eighth day after birth (Leviticus 12:3). The Atra-hasîs myth has the line "Let the brick be laid nine days"; the later Assyrian version has seven days (I 294): again the first week after birth, and possibly a period of isolation. The Hittites also had a ceremony on the seventh day.⁴² Jewish boys were circumcised on the eighth day. The Babylonians did not practice circumcision.

According to a Hittite myth the child is put on the knees of its father who gives the name.⁴³ The nurse gives him the baby and taking the child on the knees is a recognition and legitimization by the father. The Roman father took up a newborn child from the ground (*suscipio, tollo*), thereby acknowledging it as his own.

According to some scholars, the token of recognition in Babylonia was the washing of the newborn child. If this had not happened, the child could be left to others who could adopt it "in his water and blood".⁴⁴ This can only be indirectly inferred. Is washing the baby not the midwife's work? Other indirect evidence points rather to putting the baby on its father's knee.⁴⁵ Some passages in the Old Testament speak of adoption "on the knees". Ephraim and Manasseh were the sons born to Joseph in Egypt. Grandfather Jacob had them brought to him, "and he kissed them and embraced them". After this "Joseph removed them from his knees" (Genesis 48:12). Having been taken on the

Arabs (1947) 74 (full description), 98–102, 242–3; J. Morgenstern, *Rites of birth, marriage, death* (1966) 8, 15; A. Gil 'adi, *Children of Islam. Concepts of childhood in Medieval Muslim society* (1992) 27 f. H.F.M. Peeters, *Kind en jeugdige in het begin van de moderne tijd* (1966) 36 f., 62, writes that this wrapping is not as bad as one might think.

³⁹ H. Limet, *L'Anthroponymie sumérienne* (1968) 30–32; C. Wilcke, in E.W. Müller, *Geschlechtsreife und Legitimation zur Zeugung* (1985) 302; J.J. Stamm, *Die akkadische Namengebung* (1939) 8–10; N. Ziegler, KTEMA 22 (1997) 49 (in Mari).

⁴⁰ Stamm, 271 f. Mār-ešrē: day 20 is that of the god Šamaš, see M. Birot, ARMT 14 (1974) 215; Nisanûm in YOS 8 123:14; Eburîtum: CAD E 20 b. More: E. Lipinski in H. Waetzoldt, H. Hauptmann, *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten* (1997) 91–93; M.E. Cohen, *The cultic calendars of the Ancient Near East* (1993) 298.

⁴¹ Plutarchus, *Quaestiones Romanae*, § 102 (*Moralia*, 288 C).

⁴² G. Beckman, *Hittite Birth Rituals* (1983) 157 f.: "Here we encounter a ceremony performed on the seventh day after birth. In many cultures rituals are carried out for an infant several days after he or she is born. The Hebrew boy was circumcised on the eighth day (cf. Lev. 12:3), and in ancient Greece the *amphidromia* ceremony in which a child was repeatedly carried around the house of his parents was performed on the seventh day (...)".

⁴³ Beckman, 48; H.A. Hoffner, "Birth and name-giving in Hittite texts", JNES 27 (1968) 198–203, esp. 201. Also in Iliad IX 455.

⁴⁴ C. Wilcke, ZA 71 (1981) 94; M. Malul, JSOT 46 (1990) 109. R. Westbrook: the child "in water and blood", in Babylonia and in Ezekiel 16:4–6, is a foundling; *Raphael Kutscher Memorial Volume* (1993) 196.

⁴⁵ Cf. Job 3:11–12, "Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire? Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breasts, that I should suck?" The knees of the father, or the mother?

knees obviously has a legal meaning here. We read in Genesis 50:23, “And Joseph saw Ephraim’s children of the third generation; the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were born upon Joseph’s knees”. Elsewhere in the book Genesis the childless Rachel tells her husband Jacob: “Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, that she may bear upon my knees, and even I may have children through her” (Genesis 30:3). Clearly, a child born “on the knees” is recognized as one’s own child.⁴⁶ One cannot call this adoption; it is acceptance of a child within the family in a direct line.⁴⁷ An unusual Old Babylonian contract from Nippur has the line “Because Ipquša had ‘thrown’ the boy, the son of his daughter, from his knees”.⁴⁸ Is this a grandfather who rescinds the acceptance of his grandchild? Or the reverse: does he put the child on his knees?⁴⁹ In any case, we have here the same institution as in the book Genesis.

Birth certificates were unknown, of course. There is evidence, however, that the city or state kept registers of their citizens.⁵⁰ An abundance of these documents have been excavated at Mari. The following text is no birth certificate but remains interesting enough to translate here. “On day 8 of month V of Samsu-ditana, year 5, Amat-Bau, her mother, gave birth to Amat-eššeši in the New House on the Street of Nanaja. She (the mother) is a slave girl to Ruttija, nun of Zamama, her mistress; she shall fulfill her obligations towards Nanaja. She shall not provoke to rage Ruttija, her mistress. Date: 8.V, Samsu-ditana 5”.⁵¹ The mother must have been the second wife of a man married to a nun. A second wife can by contract be “wife” to her husband, but “slave girl” to the first wife. The nun is not supposed to bear children, and the second wife gives birth to a girl. This document confirms her secondary status on the day of birth. It was known throughout the Ancient Near East that a second woman with a child could become impudent: Hagar vs. Sarai (Genesis 16:5), or Peninnah vs. Hannah (1 Samuel 1:6). A contractual clause is included to preclude this possibility.

Children born to a deceased father can perhaps be identified by names such as *Abam-la-ide* “I do not know father”.⁵² It has been suggested that the unique expression “son of a spirit (of the dead)” indicates such a child.⁵³ In the section on the midwife we have seen what legal problems can arise around such a posthumous child. The Assyrian laws discuss what will happen in case his mother remarries. If he has not been adopted by

⁴⁶ Naomi accepts Ruth’s child as follows: “Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse (‘ōmēnēt). And the women of the neighbourhood gave him a name, saying, ‘A son has been born to Naomi’ ” (Ruth 4:16–17).

⁴⁷ R. de Vaux, *Les institutions de l’Ancien Testament I* (1961) 86.

⁴⁸ Aššum ūharam māri mārtišu Ipquša i-na bi-ir-ki-šu id-du-ú, E.C. Stone, *Nippur neighborhoods* (1987) Plate 58, Text 40:6–9. Discussions: K.R. Veenhof, *Mélanges A. Finet* (1989) 186 a; K. van Lerberghe, MHET I (1991) 105, commenting on the line in a letter, “As for the slave, he is my knee” (aššum sag.ir bi-ir-ki šū).

⁴⁹ In HG 96:10–13, an amount of silver is “thrown to (ana) the knee” of a father which sounds as a positive act; ⁵⁰ a-na ⁵¹ bi-ir-ki PN a-bi-šu [dum]u (?) PN₂ id-di; D. Charpin, RA 82 (1988) 29. Or is PN₂ put on the knees of PN?

⁵⁰ Cf. R. Harris, JCS 24 (1972) 104 b (Sippar). Short documents like death certificates were known; E. Sollberger, *Kramer Anniversary Volume* (= AOAT 25) (1976) 448 f. (Ur III); C.H. Gordon, SCT no. 45; St. Dalley, *Edinburgh* no. 21 (OB).

⁵¹ YOS 13 no. 192, with p. 14 f.

⁵² This explanation is not certain; J.J. Stamm, *Die akkadische Namengebung* (1939) 321. One could think of “I do not yet know father”; for *la* “not yet” in main clauses, see M. Stol, *Studies in Old Babylonian History* (1976) 53 note 30.

⁵³ St. Dalley, OBTR 138 and 150, with W.R. Mayer, Or NS 53 (1984) 113. Otherwise B.R. Foster, *Studies W.W. Hallo* (1993) 98 f. – The Assyrian word is *hurdu*.

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her new husband, he remains a member of his father's family (A § 28).

The Babylonian expression "son of a widow" (*mār almatti*) may indicate a bastard son.

Third millennium texts mention birth as a festive occasion celebrated among the higher classes by dining and giving presents to the mother.⁵⁴ Old Babylonian texts list gifts of oil or garments to women who have given birth (*šalāmu*).⁵⁵ Among the Sumerian court poetry is a song sung after the birth of a prince. It is a duet between king Šu-Sin and queen Abī-simtī / Kubātum. He is happy with his newborn son; she thanks him for the beautiful presents he has given her. We give the translation of the first part.⁵⁶

His Majesty:

"She is clear: she has given birth! She is clear: she has given birth!
The queen is clear: she has given birth! Abī-simtī is clear: she has given birth!
The queen is clear: she has given birth!
My clothbeam which, as it aspired to, made a good job of the cloth, my Abī-simtī,
and my warpbeam which, as it aspired to, got warp on, my queen Kubātum!"

The Queen:

"O my one (so) seemly of locks, my one on whom my eyes are riveted, my lord,
Šu-Sin,
my one planned by Enlil, my Šulgi son!
Because I hailed it, because I hailed it, the lord gave me things!
Because I hailed it with a cry of exultation, the lord gave me things!
A gold pin and a cylinder seal of lapis lazuli! – The lord gave me things!
A gold ring and a ring silver inwrought! The lord gave me things!
O lord! Make your gifts full of allure, that you may lift your eyes to me!
Šu-Sin! Make your gifts full of allure, that you may lift your eyes to me!"

How many children were born in a nuclear family? We don't have statistics, of course, but we do know that inheritance divisions and similar archival texts often record from five, to seven adult children; there may have been more children who had died young. A Sumerian version of Tablet XII of the Gilgameš Epic describes the situation in the Netherworld of a father of one, two, three, and up to seven sons. The more sons, the happier he is.⁵⁷

The position of the eldest son must have been special. The Bible names him the one "who breaks through the womb" (*pètèr rēhèm*).⁵⁸ In several areas he was entitled to

⁵⁴ C. Wilcke, in: E.W. Müller, *Geschlechtsreife und Legitimation zur Zeugung* (1985) 293–5. Also in Ebla; ARET III 801; M.G. Biga, *Amurru* 1 (1996) 37–39 (birth of prince Ir'ak-Damu).

⁵⁵ MARI 2 (1983) 77; MARI 4 (1985) 391; N. Ziegler, KTEMA 22 (1997) 46 f. (in Mari no less than 5 liters of oil). Note the first line in an unpublished docket from Sippar, "Sixty litres of barley when the wife gave birth" (0.1.0 še *i-nu-ma* *dam ul-du*), BM 97971:1 (by courtesy of Bram Jagersma).

⁵⁶ ŠRT 23. Latest translations: B. Alster, RA 79 (1985) 138–142; Th. Jacobsen, *The harps that once ...* (1987) 95 f. (reproduced here).

⁵⁷ Gilg. XII 255–268; W.H.Ph. Römer, TUAT II/1 (1986) 39–40.

⁵⁸ Some scholars have explained the name "Petrus" as first-born; consult the book by O. Cullmann about this apostle. – A similar metaphorical use is attested for the verb *pālah* in Job 39:4 (Hebrew text 39:3) and

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a preferential share in the inheritance. But there may have been more to this position. Adoptions of a boy by childless couples in Sippar make sure that “only he is the eldest heir (*aplu rabû*), even if they will acquire ten (more) sons”. The eldest son in Sippar did not have an extra share in the inheritance and it is not clear what his special position meant.

Babylonians seem to have believed that the second child is stronger than the first-born. A theological discussion gives a partial explanation of this belief: “The first-born of the cow is lowly while the later offspring is twice as big; a first child is born an idiot, while the second is called able and brave”.⁵⁹ That the younger son is preferred above the older is a well known motif in story-telling.⁶⁰

Wet-nursing

Paying a fee

The newborn child needs breast-feeding.⁶¹ According to the local Mesopotamian idiom, the baby is “tied” to the breast and “eats” it.⁶² Most often used, however, is the normal word “to suck (the milk)”, Akkadian *enēqu*; cf. Hebrew *jānaq*. There is abundant evidence in the ancient and traditional modern Near East that children were nursed for two or three years.⁶³ Nursing a baby makes the mother less susceptible of becoming pregnant again and it serves as a natural birth-control.⁶⁴ The prophet Hosea’s wife got pregnant only after having weaned her first child Lo-ruhamah (Hosea 1:8).

It costs money to have a baby fed by someone other than the mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said of Moses, “Take this child away, and nurse him for me, and I will give you wages” (Exodus 2:9). In the Old Babylonian period there is plenty of evidence that the nursing was done by professional “wet-nurses” (*mušēniqtu*) who were paid for the period which was usually three years.⁶⁵ The remuneration is named “the suckling-

in the Targum.

⁵⁹ W.G. Lambert, BWL (1960) 86, Theodicy, 260–3, with S. Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature* (1992) 148.

⁶⁰ Cf. R. Syrén, *The forsaken first-born. A study of a recurrent motif in the Patriarchal narratives* (=JSOT, Suppl. Series, 133) (1993); F.E. Greenspahn, *When brothers dwell together: the preeminence of younger siblings in the Hebrew Bible* (1994).

⁶¹ A “suckling” is “Child of the breast” (*dumu.gaba*) in Old Babylonian, AHw III 1551 *dumugabûm*, K.R. Veenhof, *Studies Léon de Meyer* (1994) 153 note 17, B. Lion, KTEMA 22 (1997) 116. In Assyrian “He of the milk” (*ša zizibi*), K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden als Quelle für Mensch und Umwelt* (=SAAS VI) (1997) 128 f. In Neo-Babylonian “He on the breast” (*ša muhhi tulē*), F. Joannès, KTEMA 22 (1997) 122.

⁶² “To tie”, Sumerian *lá*, Akkadian *rakāsu*; see Å.W. Sjöberg, TCS III (1969) 143, on 502 f., with note 94a; Hammurabi Code, § 194. “To eat” the breast: AbB 10 3:14–16, “he is no stranger to me: together we have eaten the breast” (OB letter); F. Köcher, MIO 1 (1953) 70 III 44 (UBUR-*šá ik-kal*; the “Göttertypen” text).

⁶³ G.R. Driver, J.C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws* I (1956) 406; H. Granqvist, *Birth and childhood* ..., 247 f. Important examples are 2 Maccabees 7:27 (3 years); the Coran, II 233, 31, 14 (2 years); Bab. Talmud Ketuboth 60a (V, 5) (2 years as a rule). An Old Babylonian example is BM 16950.

⁶⁴ M.I. Gruber, “Breast-feeding practices in Biblical Israel and in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia”, JNES 19 (1989) 61–83. This was also the belief of the Ancients; see L. Dean-Jones, *Women’s bodies in classical Greek science* (1994) 223 f. (Aristotle).

⁶⁵ Sumerian UM.ME (.ga.lá/kú). Cf. P. Steinkeller, ASJ 3 (1981) 88–90; J. Krecher, WdO 18 (1987) 12: “éme (UM.ME) ‘Amme’ (verkürzt aus éme-ga-gu₇, -ga-lá) und éme-da ‘Kinderfrau’ (wörtlich vielleicht ‘die zur Amme gehört’”).

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fee" (*tēniqu*) or "the rearing" (*tarbītu*).⁶⁶ It consists of rations of barley, oil and wool; sometimes silver.⁶⁷ It is hard to discover a standard amount, or to be certain whether payment was made upfront, in instalments, or when the child was weaned.⁶⁸

The wet-nurse must have been a woman from the lower classes and more than once she has a "simple" name fitting this status. When she is married, the contract is made with the man and woman; when she is a slave girl, with her owner.⁶⁹ Among the items of an inheritance share two named couples are mentioned; "they have been given for the rearing of the small ones". We understand that they were more or less slaves, given to nurse and rear babies.⁷⁰ We have a number of Old Babylonian quittances about their payment. One example: "...Šubula and Waqartum had given Ili-idnanni to Warad-ilišu (the man) and Bau-tukulti (the woman), for suckling. Warad-ilišu and Bau-tukulti have received 1.. shekels of silver, the suckling-fee for Ili-idnanni".⁷¹ Very special is a docket found in Isin with the notation of a wet-nurse "entering" on day 11 of month III.⁷² The name of a wet-nurse from Old Babylonian Susa is Tūši-damqat, "She came out (and) was good". Was this name given to her when born, or did she adopt this name later, as a recommendation of her trade?⁷³

Texts later than 1600 B.C. tell us little about the doings of a wet-nurse. A nursing contract dated to the Neo-Babylonian period (551 B.C.) remains unique:⁷⁴ "Urki-šarrat, daughter of Nabū-nakuttu-alsi, the wet-nurse, shall feed the daughter of Ardija, until weaning (*parāsu*). Ardija shall give to Nabū-nakuttu-alsi one-third of a shekel of silver, monthly. Urki-šarrat shall not leave the daughter of Ardija alone. Until the end of month VI of year 6, she shall not go elsewhere. From [day 1 of] month VII of year 5, Urki-šarrat shall feed [the daughter of Ar]dija (...). Date: Babylon, day 28 of month VI, year 5 of Nabonidus the king of Babylon. In the presence of Equbuta, wife of Nabū-nakuttu-alsi, mother of Urki-šarrat. [On day] 1 of month I, Nabū-nakuttu-alsi has received from Ardija 2 shekels of silver".

So a young girl is hired out as wet-nurse for one year, the last year before weaning. Her father receives the monthly fees and her mother consents to this agreement by being present. Is the girl a young widow?

⁶⁶ Some passages make clear that the "rearing" falls within the three years of suckling. It is concomitant with it. See Laws of Ešnunna § 32 (to be cited below), or C.H. Gordon, SCT no. 42 (with p. 33). The Hurrian equivalent for *tarbītu* in Nuzi is *tehambašhe*; J. Fincke, SCCNH 7 (1995) 6–12; for *tēniqu* it is *šuharampašha*; K. Deller, Or NS 53 (1984) 107.

⁶⁷ K.R. Veenhof, *Studies L. de Meyer* (1994) 148. Perhaps a "basket" (*pišannum*) as addition to the suckling-fee in TIM 5 6:7, [...] gín] kù.babbar *ti-ni-iq-ša* 1 *pí-ša-a-nu-um it-ti Sin-ma-gir ma-ah-ra-at*. One expects here the name of the wet-nurse.

⁶⁸ Veenhof, 151.

⁶⁹ A couple involved in wet-nursing is reflected by Isaiah 49:23, "Kings shall be your foster fathers ('ōmen), and their queens your nursing mothers (*mēnēqēt*)".

⁷⁰ M. deJong Ellis, JCS 26 (1974) 142 f., Text D:8–10 (*Naḥmija, Ištar-bulliti, Habil-abum u Ali-waqartum ana tarbīt sehherūtim nadnāma*).

⁷¹ OECT 13 214. Another quittance for a couple is CT 47 46, with J.J. Finkelstein, *Kramer Anniversary Volume* (= AOAT 25) (1976) 190 f. (4 shekels). Also BM 78398. There were problems with "Ahāt-ahhi, the wife of Ili-imnanni, who suckles the girl, your daughter", AbB 10 140.

⁷² D.O. Edzard, C. Wilcke, *Isin - Išān Bahriyāt* 1 (1977) 89 IB 669 (UM+ME.ga.lá *i-ru-ba-am*). Other references from Isin: M. Krebernik, *Isin - Išān Bahriyāt* IV (1992) 131, second and third lines.

⁷³ MDP 23 288:10.

⁷⁴ BE 8 47, with M. San Nicolò, *Archiv Orientální* 7 (1935) 22–25.

Nursing in adoption

Returning to the Old Babylonian period, when infants were adopted the costs of suckling and rearing were taken into account. The unmarried priestess *nadītu* could adopt an infant and pay for its suckling by another woman. The quittance over the payment threatens the wet-nurse with a fine of 20 shekels of silver, if she later claims that she has not been satisfied.⁷⁵

When a couple did not produce natural children, they could adopt, of course, but the adoptive mother was not able to feed the new baby. When such infants are adopted after their second or third year, the adopters pay for the suckling and rearing. We give a text on such an adoption:⁷⁶

“Gimil-ili (is the) son of Šamaš-muštēšer, and Kinunitum. They gave him for a suckling-fee to Iballu and Erištum. Iballu and Erištum have taken its total suckling-fee and they are satisfied. Even if Šamaš-muštēšer, his father, and Kinunitum, his mother, acquire ten sons, only Gimil-ili is their eldest heir. If Gimil-ili says to Šamaš-muštēšer, his father, and Kinunitum, his mother, “You are not my father; you are not my mother”, they shall shave him and sell him. If Šamaš-muštēšer, his father, and Kinunitum, his mother, say to Gimil-ili, their son. “You are not my son”, they shall make them lose house and furniture”.

It is not said who the natural parents of the baby were; the case of Moses in the first chapter of Exodus might make one think that they are the “suckling couple”. This document was kept by the adoptive parents and the adopted son; it was found among documents dated fifty years later. It was the precious proof of the son’s status as free citizen and heir.

Poor people often resorted to having their children adopted. A man and his wife, *nadītum* of Marduk, adopt a child from his mother, her daughter and her son, and they assure that he always remains “their eldest brother”, even when ten children will be born. At the end it is said that the natural mother and her two children “have received the suckling-fee of three (?) years; they are satisfied”.⁷⁷ So a widow cannot support a third child but sees to it that his status as free person and heir is preserved.

Later texts from Nuzi show that the child is “reared from the breast of its mother” or “given into adoption from the breast”; a Neo-Assyrian text has this phraseology on the adoption of two baby boys by a man from his sister: “he has taken them from the teat (*zīzu*) and reared them”.⁷⁸ In this later period, “to rear” (*rabū* D) means bringing up after the moment of weaning.

One can imagine that infants were adopted only when they were three years old. They had survived a dangerous period full of diseases and hidden defects had come to light.

⁷⁵ CT 4 13b (VAB 5 242) (a daughter).

⁷⁶ F.N.H. al-Rawi, *Sumer* 35 (1979) 196 f.

⁷⁷ VAS 8 127 (VAB 5 8).

⁷⁸ The Nuzi texts are HSS 19 134:7-8, with J. Fincke, SCCNH 7 (1995) 8 ff., and K. Deller, *Or NS* 53 (1984) 106 (*ina tuli ummišu* (!); HSS 19 86:4 (*ina tu-le-e* (!) *ana martūti ittadin*; reading by courtesy of G. van Driel and R.M. Jas. They saw that both texts concern the same case). The Neo-Assyrian text is ND 5463, B. Parker, *Iraq* 19 (1957) 133, with K. Deller; J.N. Postgate, FNAD (1976) 111; B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* II (1981) T 167 no. 65; cf. 124 (3.).

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Problems of wet-nurses

Legal texts attest to the problems that could arise when children are given to another woman to suckle.

1. The first problem is the health of the wet-nurse. A letter writer is worried about a baby boy and advises: "If you observe that her breast is not good, give the boy to another wet-nurse".⁷⁹ An entry in chapter 40 of the Diagnostic Handbook is a case in point: "If a baby's flesh wastes away (*šahāhu*) while it is suckled (*tēniqu*) and the breast of its wet-nurse is thin, it does not 'eat' when the breast is 'brought up' to it: that breast has bitterness (*murru*), you shall move it over to a 'new' breast, and it will recover".⁸⁰ We learn what can be wrong with a breast from a literary text called by its modern translator: "Against nurses harmful to children":

"O wet-nurse! Wet-nurse, whose breast is (too) sweet (*ṭābu*), whose breast is (too) bitter (*marru*), whose breast is 'hit' (*māhsu*), who died from a 'hit' of the breast".⁸¹

A Sumerian incantation ascribes lactation problems to an evil "tongue" that spoils the milk of the wet-nurse.⁸² A curse formula in an Aramaic royal inscription warns that "one hundred women suckle a baby ('ulajm) but he is not satisfied"; a curse in an Aramaic treaty adds that the women "anoint" (*mšh*) their breasts. Why?⁸³

A wet-nurse is expected to follow a specific code of behaviour. The well-known section among the laws of Hammurabi speaks about a wet-nurse taking a second child: "If a man gives his son to a wet-nurse and that son dies in the hand of the wet-nurse: had the wet-nurse another child 'tied' (to her breast) without his father or mother (knowing this), they shall confirm this and, because she had 'tied' another child, without his father or mother (knowing this), they shall cut off her breast" (§ 194). The real meaning of this article was discovered not so long ago. It is not that the woman covers up the death of the first child or that she stealthily takes another baby as substitute, but rather that she nurses a second child without the consent of the parents. She is *la nourrice cumularde*. Greek papyri in Egypt forbid this "nursing on the side" (*parathēlazō*) and it is prohibited also in later French law.⁸⁴

Sexual intercourse is a danger when women are nursing. A Sumero-Akkadian proverb has this wisdom: "A wet-nurse who has had sexual intercourse loses (her ability to) suckle" (Sumerian), "To have intercourse makes (the ability to) suckle disappear" (Akkadian).⁸⁵ The Greek papyri, which mostly deal with foundlings to be raised as slaves, stipulate that the wet-nurse should not "spoil" the milk, not have intercourse, not get pregnant, not take a second baby, and not stop the nursing before it is time.⁸⁶ Why

⁷⁹ AbB 1 31 rev. 7–9. The rest of the letter may deal with baby girls and a suckling couple.

⁸⁰ R. Labat, TDP 221 f., lines 36–37. Note the next entry: "If the baby is seized by (the diseases) *ašū* and *samānu*, you shall move it over to a 'new' breast; moreover, you shall recite an incantation over it, and it will recover" (38).

⁸¹ B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* (1996) 854; R. Borger, *Festschrift W. von Soden* (= AOAT 1) (1969) 5 § VII.

⁸² A. Cavigneaux, ZA 85 (1995) 181–4 (MAH 16003).

⁸³ A. Abou-Assaf a.o., *La statue de Tell Fekherye* (1982) 66:34/21, with p. 77; J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic inscriptions of Sefire* (1967) 14 A 21–22, with p. 42.

⁸⁴ G. Cardascia, "La nourrice coupable. § 194 du Code de Hammurabi", in: *Mélanges à la mémoire de Marcel-Henri Prévost* (1982) 67–84. Reprinted in "Revue de l'association Méditerranées" no. 3 ("Hommage à Guillaume Cardascia") (1995) 209–230. This view is little known among Assyriologists.

⁸⁵ W.G. Lambert, BWL (1960) 241 and 247, II 43–44, following CAD E 165a; AHw 217b: "Begattung zwingt, das Säugen aufzugeben".

⁸⁶ P.W.A.Th. van der Laan, "Vondelingen en voedsters in Graeco-Romeins Egypte", *Hermeneus* 52 (1980)

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does she have to refrain from sexual intercourse? One contract clearly says that this will spoil the milk and the famous Roman gynaecologist Soranus also advises against intercourse for this reason.⁸⁷ Professional handbooks of our sixteenth century tell that a wet-nurse should avoid carnal conversation with men because it makes the blood and the milk drift; the milk becomes warmer, unsavory and diminishes in quantity.⁸⁸ Prussian land law permitted a nursing woman to refuse her husband his conjugal rights.⁸⁹ There certainly are more examples for this taboo.⁹⁰

2. Another problem is that the baby can lose its status as a free citizen. A cowherd has "taken" a girl from "her wetnurse" Kullupat; this was done at the city gate of Larsa, in an official adoption. The cowherd has died, and the real father finds the girl in his house. Obviously, the wetnurse did not have the right to dispose of the baby in this fashion and the father turns to the head of the country of Larsa. The cowherd's widow now claims the girl: "She is not your daughter; she is the daughter of a slave girl of my husband's family". The father responds: "She is my daughter, she is not a slave girl. I had given her to Kullupat, a slave girl of your husband's family, for suckling". He swears an oath to this and the verdict is that the widow and her son shall not sue him. The reader sees how deviously the cowherd and his slave girl have acted: the cowherd acquired a dependent minor by official adoption and thereby altered the status of the baby.⁹¹ Another text opens as follows: "As to the (baby) boy, the son of Taribum whom Ittamir suckled, and Taribatum had said: 'He is the son of my slave girl'". Again, the owner of a wet-nursing slave girl tries to appropriate a baby. The real father and his boy have to appear "at the gate of the judges" within ten days and the wet-nurse is put into custody with a soldier: "She will show the face of him who has authority over the boy (šāpiru)"; i.e., identify him.⁹² In a third case a wet-nurse has sold a free female citizen (*awiltu*) during a raid by the Elamites. Her city establishes the woman's identity and status and she is to be set free by her owner.⁹³

3. A third problem is the payment of the wet-nurse. The case in which the baby's grandfather pays the fees is illustrative; later on, the parents reburse him 12 kor of barley

317–331, 343–348 (the texts). Cf. M. Manca Masciadri and O. Montevercchi, *I contratti di baliatico* (=Corpus Papyrorum Graecarum, 1) (1984).

⁸⁷ B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* II (1968) 134 citaat 550 (Soranus, *Gynaec.* I 88). Also in J. Raeder, *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* VI 2, 2 (= "Oribasius", vol. IV) (1933) 123 § 19 (the author is in fact Rufus of Ephesus, as Arabists could prove). – For a lengthy discussion of wet-nursing in the Greek and Roman world, see P. Burgière, D. Gourevitch, *Soranos d'éphèse. Maladies des femmes*. Tome II, Livre II (Budé édition) (1990) p. XIII–XVI (introduction), 93–97 (notes). S. Vilatte, "La nourrice grecque", *L'Antiquité Classique* 60 (1991) 5–28, is mainly concerned with literary texts. Not available to me is: A. Aly Abou, "The wet nurse: a study in ancient medicine and Greek papyri", *Vesalius. Revue officielle de la Société internationale d'histoire de la médecine* II/2 (Dec. 1996) 86–97.

⁸⁸ H.F.M. Peeters, *Kind en jeugdige in het begin van de moderne tijd* (1966) 20.

⁸⁹ J. Preuss, *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin* (1911) 472.

⁹⁰ A. Gil 'adi, *Children of Islam. Concepts of childhood in Medieval Muslim society* (1992) 25: "Muslim doctors, accepting the old theory that breast milk was formed from the menstrual blood which was not shed during pregnancy, categorically denounced sexual activity, warning against the great damage which might be caused to the infant, particularly if the nurse were pregnant".

⁹¹ The text is HE 143, first published by V. Scheil in RA 11 (1914) (HG 6 1759), later by G. Boyer, CHJ (1928) 70 f., pl. XVI. We understand the text by assuming that the cowherd Dadā is dead and by reading in line 29 not *di-i-ni* but *ù dumu.ni*, "(Ahatum) and her son".

⁹² D. Charpin, J.-M. Durand, DCS 116 (= C. Frank, StrKt no. 37).

⁹³ AbB 6 80, with H. Klengel, AOF V (1977) 69; D. Charpin, AfO 34 (1987) 43 f.

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“for the rearing and the wet-nurse”.⁹⁴ More than once, we find a complaint of a wet-nurse who was not paid at all. “Sabitum, wife of Warad-Kubi, had suckled a (baby) boy for two (?) years; two years he lived with her. Sabitum spoke to Pirhi-ilišu, her provider (*ēmiqu*), as follows: “I have not received the rations of [barley], wool and oil. The boy that I rear I will take away”, she said to him. The (town’s) [gentle]men sat down and looked into their case and they made a computation (?). ... kor of barley, 12 minas of wool, 48 litres of oil and 5 shekels of silver, the ... for the boy who had lived with her, she has received; she is satisfied”.⁹⁵ That a wet-nurse in this situation could threaten “to take away” (*tabālu*) the baby is also clear from another text: “Suhuntum is her name; the wife of Ilum-kēnum; she had given her son to Iltani, the *qadištu*, for suckling, but she was not able to give the suckling-fee for three years, rations of barley, oil and wool, and Suhuntum said to Iltani, the *qadištu*: “Take away the boy; let him be your son”; and because she had spoken to her like this, Iltani shall add for Suhuntum three shekels of silver, on top of the suckling-fee for three years which she had not received. Suhuntum swore not to file any complaint to Iltani in the future”.⁹⁶ The desperate remark “Take away the boy” is encountered by a better and more rational deal: the baby is “bought” for the value of the suckling-fee, plus (the case adds *u* “also”) 3 shekels of silver. According to B.L. Eichler, “In addition to waiving the outstanding compensation, the wet-nurse gives three shekels of silver to the mother in order to gain full and irrevocable rights over the child”.⁹⁷ The law-giver must have been aware of such situations and the Laws of Ešnunna wish to preclude this forced selling; § 32 runs as follows: “If a man gives his son for suckling (and) for rearing but does not give the rations of barley, oil and wool, for three years, he shall pay ten shekels of silver for the rearing of his son and he shall take his son with him”.⁹⁸

Nuns in wet-nursing

A class of priestesses, the *qadištu*, seems to have had the special task of wet-nurse. We quote these lines from an Old Babylonian letter: “Let them provide for the (baby) boy right here. If you like this, let me look for a *qadištu* so that she may suckle him”.⁹⁹ We have seen this in the text where the *qadištu*, involved in nursing, is asked to “take away” the child. In another text from the same city (Dilbat) we read: “Marduk-nāṣir and Šat-Marduk had given their son for suckling, to Waqartum; Waqartum and Habil-kēnum had received the suckling-fee of two years; they were satisfied. Waqartum turned to the judges because of her suckling-fee and the judges called the *qadištu*-women, and she has received the suckling-fee”.¹⁰⁰ Waqartum and Habil-kēnum are a couple and it is clear that these priestesses supervised the suckling-business. A third text must come from

⁹⁴ Gordon, SCT no. 42.

⁹⁵ E. Szlechter, TJA (1963) 127 f., UMM H 24. Corrections: *ma-ah>-ri-ša* (4), *ma-ah-ra-ku* (7), [*a-ta*] *ab-ba-al* (9), [*nig.ši*] *d-šu-nu* (?) ([*te-e*] *m-šu-nu* remains possible) (11), *x še.gur še.ba* (12), *ba-an-ba* (*ku*?) *-le-e sú-ha-ri* [*ša*] *ma-ah-ri-ša uš-bu* (14–15).

⁹⁶ VAS 7 10 / 11 (VAB 5 78).

⁹⁷ *Studies Erica Reiner* (1987) 78 note 27.

⁹⁸ Otherwise B.L. Eichler, *Studies Erica Reiner* (1987) 78. His point is that the “special relationship” between baby and wet-nurse creates some rights over the child for her. These “concomitant rights can be abrogated only with payment to the nurse by the natural parent, thereby indicating that he was ultimately responsible for the child’s sustenance”.

⁹⁹ AbB 7 130 rev. 6–11.

¹⁰⁰ VAS 7 37 (VAB 5 241).

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the far Northern parts of Mesopotamia: Jabliatum has given Alanitum, her daughter, to Samidum, the *qadištu* of (the god) Adad, daughter of Aškur-Adad, as her daughter. Jabliatum, her mother, has received the suckling-fee for three years. If in the future Alanitum says to Samidum, her (new!) mother: "You are not my mother", she will shave her and sell her".¹⁰¹ Why did she adopt the little girl? Either with a view on her own old age; the daughter will take care of her. Or the girl will serve as wet-nurse under supervision of her mother the *qadištu*. The status of the adopted girl is low. It is possible that the *qadištu* had a "stable" of slave girls or even daughters in her service to do this. In a text parents give a slave girl to her daughter, a *qadištu*, at her dedication. After ten years, when the slave girl has given birth to a daughter, her cousins and brothers claim the girl and her daughter.¹⁰² The slave girl was given "instead of a field or house". Was the nursing slave-girl the working capital of this *qadištu*?

Tarmaja, the *qadištu*, adopted a girl from a man, "Ištar-milki is her name"; the latter words point to a low status. The texts seems to say that the man had clothed her. "If she does never (?) give Ištar-milki to a husband, Tarmaja, the *qadištu*, shall pay 20 (?) shekels of silver".¹⁰³ Will this be a marriage in which the wife will serve as wet-nurse?

Did the *qadištu* feed the babies herself? We have the impression that she rather manages the wet-nurses in her service. Nevertheless, the lines in the Old Babylonian letter say that she suckles the baby. The same is true on the level of myth. The dreaded female demon Lamaštu feeds babies with deadly milk and in that capacity she is said to be "the *qadištu* among her divine brothers; Daughter of Anu".¹⁰⁴ Indeed, we learn from an astrological text that "the children of the breast will die at the word of the Daughter of Anu".¹⁰⁵

That a *qadištu* is not of a high status is clear from the following sequence of events told in an Old Babylonian textbook of legal phrases. A man has divorced his wife. "Later on, he took a *qadištu* from the street, out of love for her he married her (although) in her status of *qadištu*. That *qadištu* had taken a son of the street, milk of the breast she had . . ., he knew his father nor his mother. She cared for him, did not slap his cheek, reared him, made him learn the art of the scribe. When he became grown she made him marry a wife. Whenever the son says to his father, You are not my father, he shall shave him, put the slave mark upon him and shall sell him. Whenever the son says to his mother, You are not my mother, they shall shave half of his hair and take him round the city; moreover, they shall make him leave the house".¹⁰⁶ This interesting anecdote about a foundling treated by the *qadištu* like a free person, educated as a scribe, and happily married, was a case devised as an example for use in a school for scribes! If the last section, with the statements, You are not my father / mother, really continue the story, we learn that the boy was adopted by his step-father. But this section with legal stock phrases may have been appended. Our point is the status of the *qadištu*. After an earlier marriage she is a second choice for the man. She picks a foundling from the streets and

¹⁰¹ TCL 1 146 (VAB 5 83) (Samsu-iluna year 33). The text is from the North in view of the personal names; and note the adoption *a-na dumu.sai-ša* instead of *ana marūtim* (5). Not from Sippar; contrast R. Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (1975) 331 with note 114.

¹⁰² CT 48 2, cf. VAS 8 69–70 (VAS 5 211), with C. Wilcke, *Studies F.R. Kraus* (1982) 442.

¹⁰³ YOS 14 121, with S. Simmons, JCS 15 (1961) 56 no. 131. Read *Ta-ar-ma-ja nu.gig*.

¹⁰⁴ BM 120022:9, translated by W. Farber, TUAT II/2 (1987) 257.

¹⁰⁵ ACh Suppl. Ištar 45:13 with dupl.; see CAD T sub *tulū*.

¹⁰⁶ B. Landsberger, MSL 1 (1937) 10 ff., *Ana ittišu* VII, iii, 7–33.

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feeds him. Nurses in Egypt did this and their children became slaves. This may have been customary in Babylonia, too, but our anecdote takes an unexpected turn: she cares for him and does not “slap his cheek”.¹⁰⁷

In Assyria, the *qadištu*, when unmarried, had to veil herself on the street; when married, she was the second wife of a man.

The role of the *qadištu* remains obscure. We remind the reader of the “house / room of the *qadištu*” in the myth of Atra-hasīs where the first human being was born. We have noted in the section on the midwife that it has been interpreted by some as “house of the tabooed woman”. Everything we have learned about the *qadištu* suggests another possibility: this house may have been a nursery.

Some wet-nurses

Wet-nurses along with other women who took care of royal children lived in the palace of Ebla. The wet-nurse (*ga.du₈*) was an important person in court.¹⁰⁸ Our only information about her comes from lists recording rations or (regular) gifts. We follow the summary given by Mrs. Biga.¹⁰⁹

At the court of Ebla, just as in the secondary residences of the king, there was a permanent and conspicuous group of wet-nurses for the sons of the queen, for the second wives, and for other ladies of high rank. Some texts record that there were eight nurses who fed three daughters and five sons of the king, living in the palace of Ebla, and two more nurses for the sons living in the palace of the city Azan. Considering that the period of breast-feeding must have been approximately three years, Mrs. Biga deduces that the last king of Ebla had in a time span of 4 to 5 years ten sons from secondary wives and one son from the queen. In that last period of Ebla eleven nurses lived in the palace and received food rations. Wet-nurses could also receive wool or garments of a certain type. The nurse of the queen received a more precious garment (*zara₆*) when the queen gave birth to her first-born son. We know that the wet-nurse of the king was named Gišadu. She occasionally receives the same precious garments. After her “milk son” becomes king, she is listed among the ladies of the highest ranks in court. Apparently, she was allowed to live in the palace in an honoured position, probably until her death. Natural sons of wet-nurses are also mentioned; they probably lived with their mothers at court.

We know other wet-nurses by name. A third millennium cylinder seal, probably from the Hurrian city Urkiš, has this inscription: “Dimmuzi, the female steward: Daguna, wet-nurse, daughter of Tiša”.¹¹⁰ The title “wet-nurse” has here the literal meaning “a mother feeding milk” (*ama.ga.kú*). During recent excavations in Urkiš, several imprints of another seal with the inscription “Seal of Zamena, the nurse of Uqnītum” were found.¹¹¹ Uqnītum is the queen. On the seal she is a seated person holding a child in her lap,

¹⁰⁷ Adoption of foundlings followed by three years of nursing is known from the same legal textbook; MSL 1 (1937) 44 f., *Ana ittišu III*, iii, 28–57.

¹⁰⁸ F. Pomponio, *Vicino Oriente* 5 (1982) 207–209. Cf. JCS 42 (1990) 189.

¹⁰⁹ M.G. Biga, “Donne alla corte di Ebla”, *La parola del passato* 46 (1991) 297 f. (“Le nutrici”); also Biga in L. Milano, *Drinking in ancient societies* (1994) 340; or in *Amurru* 1 (1996) 38, note; now M.G. Biga, “Les nourrices et les enfants à Ebla”, *KTEMA* 22 (1997) 35–44.

¹¹⁰ J. Nougayrol, *Syria* 37 (1960) 209–214, with W.G. Lambert, in: R. Merhav, *Treasures of the Bible Lands* (1987) no. 24; *Oriens Antiquus* 26 (1987) 13–16; NABU 1988/83. Contra P. Steinkeller, *ASJ* 3 (1981) 90; NABU 1988/48, “Timmuzi, the female steward: Daguna is the wet-nurse of her daughter”.

¹¹¹ G. Buccellati, M. Kelly-Buccellati, *AfO* 42–43 (1995–1996) 21–23; D. Parayre, *KTEMA* 22 (1997) 70 f.

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and the nurse is standing before them. Zamena's title is here éme.da which stands for a nurse, not a wet-nurse.

From the Ur III period, we have an informative text dating to year 4 of king Amar-Sin. It gives a list of twelve princesses, many of them doubtlessly the daughters of the earlier king Šulgi. Then follow the names of two "nurses of the king" (éme.da lugal.me), Kinat-Nunu and Kubatum.¹¹² These ladies and their colleagues are attested more often.¹¹³ In other texts we meet the nurse of a princess; sometimes of the king. Rabbatum first was wet-nurse of princess Me-Sataran, a year later she is her nurse.¹¹⁴ It is remarkable that in a world stamped by the Sumerian language the nurses have Akkadian names.

The royal archives of Old Babylonian Mari sometimes use the word "mother" (*ummu*) in the special meaning "nurse"; clearly an endearing allocution.¹¹⁵ Queen "Bēltum", just married to a prince in Mari, had brought this "mother" with her from her hometown Qatna in the far West and that woman was a nuisance to the courtiers.¹¹⁶ One is reminded of Rebekah who makes the reverse journey, taking her wet-nurse with her (Genesis 24:59). Is this "mother" the woman who had guided the princess from the craddle? Not always. An administrative text says, "B., from the women of the House of Jarim-Lim, for the 'motherhood' of Naramtum, daughter of the king, who was given to Šarrija, king of Eluhtum".¹¹⁷ The princess Naramtum had been married off to a kinglet by Zimri-Lim of Mari and a "mother" is assigned to her. Is the princess still so young that she needs a "mother"? Close was the bond with her nurse for princess Ahassunu who complained to Jasmah-Addu that one intends to give a way her "mother" because of old age.¹¹⁸ Another princess protests because her "mother" is retained.¹¹⁹ A comparable plea, under tears, is known about another nurse, now called *tārītu*.¹²⁰ In one case one can prove that the wet-nurse (*mušēniqtu*) of prince Jagid-Lim later is his nurse, "mother" (*ummu*).¹²¹ We have seen a similar "career" in the life of Rabbatum in the Ur III period. Rebekah kept her wet-nurse with her; "And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel; so the name of it was called Allon-bacuth ['Oak of weeping']" (Genesis 35:8).

¹¹² CTMMA I 17 II 5–55, with M. Sigrist, RA 80 (1986) 185. Also in B.R. Foster, SEL 2 (1985) 38, lines 4–5. Sigrist translates the word *um.me.da* here and in his book on Drehem (p. 361) as "nourrice", "nurse". *UM+ME.(ga.lá)* = "wet-nurse"; *UM.ME.da* (*emeda*) = "nurse".

¹¹³ See the survey by M. Sigrist, *Drehem* (1992) 361; H. Waetzoldt, AOF 15 (1988) 32, with H. Neumann, AOF 16 (1989) 222 f., note 12. Add Rabatum *UM.ME.ga.kú* ME-İştaran, L.J. Krušina-Cerny, *Archiv Orientální* 27 (1959) 366 f. (with a pioneering discussion); the *UM.ME.da* of the daughter of prince Etel-pi-Dagan, D.I. Owen, OLZ 87 (1992) 247, on no. 32.

¹¹⁴ P. Steinkeller, ASJ 3 (1981) 90. Nurse of the king: also P.J. Watson, *Catalogue of Cuneiform texts in Birmingham City Museum I* (1986) no. 77:2. On ME-İştaran, see W. Sallaberger, *Der kultische Kalender der Ur-III-Zeit* (1993) 59 f.

¹¹⁵ Seen by J.-M. Durand, MARI 4 (1985) 414 f.; extensively Bardet, ARMT 23 (1984) 72–74; N. Ziegler, KTEMA 22 (1997) 52; *Florilegium Marianum IV* (1999) 108 f.

¹¹⁶ AEM 1/2 26 no. 298, with MARI 6 (1990) 276.

¹¹⁷ ARMT 23 nos. 84, 423.

¹¹⁸ ARM 10 97, with MARI 4 413 f. Von Soden read in 22 *ša šu-sí-ka līpuš* (Or NS 49 [1980] 211).

¹¹⁹ ARM 10 105.

¹²⁰ ARM 10 92, with MARI 4 415.

¹²¹ Durand, MARI 4 415. The texts remain unpublished. In one text both "mother" (*ummu*) and "nurse" (*tārītu*) seem to be mentioned. Is it possible that the "mother" here is the woman who gives the child the breast? (thus Durand, MARI 4 432).

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In an isolated case, a thousand years later, the Persian princess Ittahšah had a wet-nurse, Artim, who received 6 kor of barley in Bīt Ṣaḥirān.¹²²

The bond between the nursing mother and the child is strong. Clay figurines of a mother suckling her baby visualize this.¹²³ It serves as a metaphor when a king in royal inscriptions and a goddess in prophecies express their close relationship as that between the suckling, caring mother and the beloved child. We will give some examples at the end of this chapter. A special intimacy exists between men that have been nursed by the same woman; they are foster-brothers. The Englishman H.R.P. Dickson was trusted by the Arabs because he had been fed by an Anizah woman. He gave us a very informative book about his Arab background.¹²⁴ In an Old Babylonian letter it is a woman, a high class nun of Marduk, who writes that a man “is no stranger to me; together we have ‘eaten’ the breast”.¹²⁵ A similar remark is made in a Neo-Babylonian letter: “He is the ‘son’ of my wet-nurse (. . .) Me and he, we have ‘eaten’ from one breast”.¹²⁶ The Greek word *súntrophos* is attested in the New Testament (Acts 13:1) but here it rather means “intimate friend of the king and of the same age”; it is idiom of the Hellenistic court.¹²⁷

The weaned child, the nurse-maid

After two or three years the child is weaned. “And the child grew, and was weaned (*gāmal*); and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned” (Genesis 21:8). After this, the child eats curds (*leben*) and honey.¹²⁸ In Babylonia, the word *pirsu*, literally “the separated one”, indicates a weaned child. Middle Assyrian lists of persons give these age classes, in ascending order: “(child) of the breast” (*ša irti*), “weaned” (*pirsu*), “guided” (*tarû*), “pupil” (*talmidu*).¹²⁹ Cattle lists speak of weaned calves or lambs (*parsu*, Aramaic *heslu*).

The weaned child is taken care of by a woman called a *tarītu*, literally “she who is taking (the child) with her”, “who guides”.¹³⁰ This age child is called “the guided one” (*tarû*, fem. *tarītu*, with a short a). One may call this woman a dry-nurse or nurse-maid (or even “nanny”) and she may already have been active when the child still is nursed; who knows?

¹²² B.T.A. Evertts, *Evil-Merodach* (1892), Appendix no. 2.

¹²³ *Das Vorderasiatische Museum, Berlin* (1992) no. 53. And many more; cf. R. Opificius, *Das altbabylonische Terrakottarelief* (1961) 77–80, “Göttin oder Frau mit Kind”.

¹²⁴ H.R.P. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert* (1949); see p. 7, 27, 163.

¹²⁵ AbB 10 3:13-16.

¹²⁶ ABL 920 rev. 6, 8–10.

¹²⁷ As in 2 Maccabees 9:27; cf. *sunéktrophos* in 1 Maccabees 1:6.

¹²⁸ Isaiah 7:15, with M.I. Gruber, JANES 19 (1989) 68 f.

¹²⁹ As in KAJ 180:3–6; see J.N. Postgate, *The archive of Urad-Šerūa and his family* (1988) 170 no. 70. Also H. Freydank, MARV III 80 rev. 5–7; P. Garelli, in: H. Klengel, *Gesellschaft und Kultur im alten Vorderasien* (1982) 69 f., with 71. H. Freydank, AOF VII (1980) 103: *pirsu* “Junge oder Mädchen einer Altersklasse zwischen 3 und 5/6 Jahren (?)”; *tarītu* (*tarītu*) “Junge und Mädchen einer Altersklasse zwischen 5/6 und 10 Jahren (?)”. Cf. K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden als Quelle für Mensch und Umwelt* (= SAAS VI) (1997) 130 f. (*pirsu*).

¹³⁰ Sumerian UM.ME.da (éme.da); see note 65, and W.H.Ph. Römer, BiOr 49 (1992) 671. Note the equation with Sumerian “female guard” (SAL en.nu.un), MSL 12 (1969) 104 Can. Lu Exc. II:21.

A mother or a nurse-maid holds the child in a special shawl (*kirimmu*).¹³¹ Another cloth of the nurse-maid is the *kuzippu*.¹³² Disease makes “the little ones burn with fever at the shoulder (?) of the nurse-maid”.¹³³ A Neo-Assyrian prophecy comforts the king in these words: “Fear not, you whose nurse-maid is the Lady of Arbela; like a nurse-maid I carry you on my hip (*gilšu*)”.¹³⁴

The creation myth says about the birth of god Marduk: “His father Ea begot him (*banū*), Damkina, his mother, delivered him (*haršassu*); he suckled the teat of goddesses (*šerret ištarāti*), the nurse-maid guarded him (*tārūtu itarrūšu*), she filled him with awesomeness” (*Enūma eliš* I 83–86).

The nurse-maid takes care of the “baby and infant” (?), *šerru u la’û (lakû)*.¹³⁵ This word pair reminds us of the Bible subsuming babies under the word pair “infants and sucklings” (‘ōlē lim we jōnē qim); in the New Testament *nēpīoi kai thēlázontes*.

Persons in high places had sweet memories of their nurse-maid. In a letter from Mari, Šewrum-parati writes to the king: “I have been wronged but wipe away my tears. Sîn-mušallim has wronged me by taking my nurse-maid and now she is living in his house. (...) Now, since you have put the light to the land, put also the light to me. Give me my nurse-maid and I will pray for you to (the gods) Tešub and Ḥebat. Now, my lord should not retain that woman”.¹³⁶ Above, we have examined the title “mother” used in Mari (*ummu*). She can very well be a nurse-maid. In a Middle Assyrian text from Assur we read the following, showing that the nurse was not forgotten by the king. Together with the wife of the head of the Palace, *Hihhi*, nurse-maid of the king, receives five homers of barley “at the order of the king, as a gift”.¹³⁷

We repeat that the nursing and caring mother always has the connotation of loving dedication.¹³⁸ This is how kings express their trustful relationship with goddesses. We give some of those passages from Neo-Assyrian prophecies in translation.¹³⁹

The goddess Ištar of Arbela speaks as follows: “I am your great midwife, I am your good wet-nurse”.¹⁴⁰

“You were a little one, Assurbanipal, when I left you to the Queen of Nineveh, you were an infant, Assurbanipal, when you sat on the knee of the Queen of Nineveh.

¹³¹ It is a cloth, as the determinative “cloth” in an Old Babylonian letter from Ebla shows; J.-R. Kupper, *Studi Eblaiti* II/4–5 (1980) 51. See M. Malul, *BiOr* 43 (1986) 27 f. Not “Armbeuge”, nor “armclasp”.

¹³² ABL 553 = Parpola, *SAA* X no. 275 rev. 4: worn by the king in a ritual.

¹³³ YOS 11 7:7 (*ina bûd tārūtum*), with A. Goetze, *JCS* 9 (1955) 14 a (variants!); B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* (1996) 136. “Shoulder (?) of the nurse-maid” also in YOS 11 19:11 (p. 25).

¹³⁴ ABRT 1 27 rev. 6–7; see K. Hecker, *TUAT* II/1 (1986) 63.

¹³⁵ Erra III:17 and Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon, 438, in the curse “Bēlet-ilī deprives the nurse-maid of the crying (*ikkilu*) of baby and infant”. See K. Watanabe, *Assur* 3/4 (July 1983) 28–30.

¹³⁶ ARM 10 92, with Durand, *MARI* 4 (1985) 415; Charpin, *MARI* 6 (1990) 267 note 47 (on “to put the light”).

¹³⁷ VAS 19 40:5–6, 15–18 (*kâ rimûte*).

¹³⁸ U. Winter, “Mutterschaft”, *Frau und Göttin. Exegetische und ikonographische Studien zum weiblichen Gottesbild im Alten Israel und in dessen Umwelt* (1983) 385–413.

¹³⁹ See the discussion by M. Weippert, in: Helga Weippert a.o., *Beiträge zur prophetischen Bildsprache in Israel und Assyrien* (1985) 62–64, 71–78, “Mutter- und Ammenbilder”. With illustrations. Note N.H. Walls, *The goddess Anat in Ugaritic myth* (1992) 152–4 (Anat as wet-nurse).

¹⁴⁰ IV R 61 III 23–26; cf. B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* (1996) 696.

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Her four teats (*zīzu*) are placed in your mouth, two you suck (*enēqu*), two you 'milk' (*halāpu*) to your face".¹⁴¹

"Fear not, you whose mother is (the goddess) Mulissu, fear not, you whose nurse-maid is the Lady of Arbela; like a nurse-maid I carry you on my hip. I put you between my breasts (like) a lance (?). At night I am awake and guard you, all day I give you milk. In the early morning I ... you, I do to you 'hush, hush!' (?) (*usur usur uppaška*)".¹⁴²

"I am your father, your mother, I have raised you between my wings (*agappu*), I will see you prosperous. Do not fear, Esarhaddon, I will place you between my upper arm (*iziru*) and elbow (*ammatu*)".¹⁴³

It is interesting to compare this raising by the mother with a prophecy on the raising by the divine father, in an Old Babylonian letter: "Am I not (god) Adad, Lord of (the city) Kallassu, who raised him between my thighs (?) (*pahallu*) and made him return to the throne of his dynasty?". "Am I not Adad, Lord of Aleppo, who raised you in my lap (*suhatu*) and made you return to the throne of his dynasty?".¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ A. Livingstone, SAA III no. 13 rev. 6–8; cf. K. Hecker, TUAT II/1 (1986) 64; B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* (1996) 713.

¹⁴² ABRT 1 27 rev. 6–10, cf. K. Hecker, TUAT II/1 (1986) 63; A. Ivantchik, NABU 1993/49, 2; CAD E 232 b.

¹⁴³ S. Langdon, *Tammuz and Ishtar* (1914) Plate III, K. 12033 III 26–31. New edition by S. Parpola, *Assyrian prophecies* (= SAA IX) (1997) 18.

¹⁴⁴ B. Lafont, RA 78 (1984) 8 f., lines 14–17, 49–51. See M. Dietrich, TUAT II/1 (1986) 86 f.

Chapter VIII BIRTH IN MEDICAL TEXTS

The Diagnostic Handbook on pregnant women

The Diagnostic Handbook of the Babylonian conjurer describes symptoms of disease and gives for every case its cause or outcome. The cause can be a divine "Hand", or an "Oath" (probably a curse). The outcome is often given in terms of recovery or death. The last part of the handbook, Tablets 36–39, studies women and is followed by the very last tablet, about illnesses of newborn babies (40). Tablet 36 begins with a "chapter" on pregnant women and it is clear that these women are pregnant but healthy. Cases of pregnant women who are ill begin with Tablet 37. Of Tablet 38 only the first words are preserved, "If a woman's water three days [...]"; can the amniotic fluid be meant? Again, of Tablet 39 we only have the first line, but with an ancient commentary on it, "If a woman in childbed is swollen and she belches, she will die". Tablet 40, on the newborn babies, follows and it is fully preserved.¹

So Tablet 36 is an exception in this Diagnostic Handbook because it concerns healthy persons. This is also clear from the "diagnosis" or "prognosis" made for the expectant mother: they reveal the gender of the unborn child or give its prospects in later life: death, life, social status. They are very much like the omens of the so-called Physiognomic Handbook, describing the features of healthy people. Indeed, the physiognomy of the healthy – but pregnant – woman is the basis of diagnosis and prognosis.²

The woman is called "the one that gives birth" (*ālittu*, written TU). In the chapter on (in)fertility we have seen that this expression indicates a fertile woman and the translation "a woman who has once given birth" is less apt here. The fertile woman is pregnant and translating *ālittu* as "pregnant woman" in this chapter present in most cases no problem. However, some cases require the translation "fertile woman" and that is why we retain this "literal" translation (lines 94, 99 ff.). Moreover, the earlier version from Hattuša opens every section thus: "If a fertile woman is pregnant . . . (TU *e-ra-at*)"; our chapter retains this only in line 1. In general, we prefer literal translations even at the cost of fluency. The chapter was published by R. Labat (1951)³ and it has only one good manuscript with some surprising variant writings of Sumerian words (Sumerograms) like "male" and "pregnant".⁴ We read both "her foetus is male" (1, etc.), and "she is pregnant of a male" (28, etc.; both together in 45–46). This points to the use of diverging manuscript traditions by the compiler of this chapter. Sometimes the syllabic writing is the same as that used in the Old Babylonian period.⁵ Clearly, Tablet 36 has a long

¹ We know the sequence thanks to the ancient catalogue that gives the first words; see I.L. Finkel, *Studies Abraham Sachs* (1988) 147, A 44–48. The commentary on Tablet 39 is H. Hunger, SpbTU I 40.

² Opinions among the Greeks have been collected by B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* V (1989) 626 f.

³ R. Labat, TDP (1951) 200–212, "Tablette no. 35".

⁴ Sumerograms for "male" (*zikaru*) are UŠ (line 4, and passim), MU.TIN (59–60) (Emesal), MU.PA (58), ARAD (51). An abnormal Sumerogram for "pregnant" is PEŠ (not PEŠ₄) in 57–76.

⁵ Old Babylonian are *eb-ṣù* (66), *qá-du* (80, 83), *ul* (81) and, perhaps, syllabic writings like *ma-lu-ú* (79), *pa-ṣi-ir* (85 f.), *e-ra-at u mu-ṣal-li-mat* (99 f.), *sa-a-mu* (100). The section lines 106–113 and Tablet 37:1–9 look Old Babylonian. The signs combination in "her foetus" is artificial and unusual: ŠÀ.ŠÀ.ŠÀ = *ša libbiša*.

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history behind it. As we noticed, one earlier tradition is attested in a manuscript from the Hittite capital Ḫattuša.⁶ Later Babylonian scholars wrote a commentary on selected words.⁷

Tablet 36

The chapter consists of several sections. Lines 1–8: the appearance of the top of the forehead; 9–14: veins on the forehead; 15–23: the nose; 24–15: the face (?); 26–48: the nipples; 49–55: veins of the breast; 56: veins on the forehead; 57–71: intestines. The body is followed from the head to the lower abdomen which is in accord with the best Babylonian scientific tradition. Lines 72–105 have no clear structure. We suggest that it is an interesting collection of folk wisdom known among midwives. Lines 106–113 deal with the effects of sexual intercourse during pregnancy; they are like the behavioural omens at the end of the omen handbook *Šumma ālu*. The chapter concludes with two omens on twins, excerpts from *Šumma izbu*, the handbook on malformed births.

We now offer a translation. Some entries are followed by a few general remarks and philological notes.

(1) If a fertile woman is pregnant and the top of her forehead is yellow / green (livid?): her foetus is a male; variant: it will ...

“It will ...” (*ikarriš*). The verb *karāšu* means “to break off” and the cognate word *kiršu* means “abortion”. Is this an abortion by cutting up the foetus, embryotomy (Hebrew *hātak*)? Then, “He will be cut up” is the translation (*ikkarriš*).

(2) If a fertile woman’s top of the forehead is bright with a white spot: her foetus is female; variant: it will be rich.

The colour white is more often associated with female; red with male. Cf. 9–10, but there are many exceptions. Read *pūša* (BABBAR) *na-mir*.

(3) If it is black, her foetus is female; variant: it will live in peace.

The same forecast in 103.

(4) If it is red: her foetus is male; variant: it will die.

(5) If it is multicoloured; variant: *ba-ru-um*: her foetus sleeps (*salil*, NÁ).

This refers to the unborn child, sleeping a considerable time, maybe years, as known from Arab folk wisdom. Also in line 94. See p. 25 f. The variant *ba-ru-um* is a gloss to GÙN.A “multicoloured” (Labat and CAD B 103 read SU₉). The skin of the panther (*nimru*) is GÙN = *barāmu*, “speckled”, SpbTU I 27:27.

(6) If it is full of “grains”: her foetus is male; variant: wealth.

(7) If it is full of red “grains”: her foetus is male: her foetus will be rich.

“Grains” on the mother’s forehead, here warts or the like, forecast real grain for the son, “wealth”. Note the cryptic writing *HI HI AŠ* for *i₁₁-šár-rù* “he will be rich”. This writing is quite normal in physiognomic texts.

Note the unusual dual sign AŠ.AŠ (13, 14, 71, 80).

⁶ KUB 37 189, with G. Wilhelm, *Medizinische Omnia aus Ḫattuša in akkadischer Sprache* (= StBoT 36) (1994) 69–72 (Fragment M).

⁷ H. Hunger, SpbTU I 39.

(8) If (the forehead) is multicoloured: her foetus is male.

The subject of *bar-mat* must be the forehead (*putum*, fem.). A physiognomic text also speaks of a multicoloured forehead.

(9) If a fertile woman's vein of the forehead is red: her foetus is male.

(10) If it is white: her foetus is female.

(11) If it is standing up, below on the right side: her foetus is female.

(12) If it is standing up, below on the left side: her foetus is male.

“Standing up” (*tebû*, *zî*) veins are an important diagnostic feature in Babylonian medical texts. Right is often associated with male, left with female. In an abnormal situation like here the reverse?

(13) If a fertile woman's both ...s of her forehead are red: her foetus is male.

(14) If (those) of her forehead are white: her foetus is f[emale].

(15) If a fertile woman's nose is pinched, variant: pointed ...: her foetus is male [...].

(16) If a fertile woman's tip (?) of the nose stands up on the right side and also is black (dark): her foetus [will] d[ie] (?) .

(17) If it stands up on the left side and also is black (dark): her foetus will die; variant: will live.

(18) [If a fertile woman's ...] of the nose is red below, on the right side: her foetus will die.

(19) [If] it is red, below, on the left side: her foetus is male.

(20) [If] it is multicoloured, below, on the right side: her foetus will live.

(21) [If] it is multicoloured, below, on the left side: her foetus will die.

(22) If it is standing up, below, on the right side: her foetus is male.

(23) If it is standing up, below, on the left side: her foetus is female.

(24) If a fertile woman's pocks (?) have been peeled off and her face is yellow / green (livid?): her foetus is male.

Peeling off boils (*bubu'ta qalāpu*) is known from a medical text. What is peeled off here is not clear; the sign is slightly damaged. Can one think of a pock-pitted face?

(25) If (a fertile woman's pocks (?)) have been peeled off and her face is red: her foetus is female.

(26) If a fertile woman's nipple of her breast is twisted: her foetus will not be all right / she will not give birth to her foetus easily.

Here begins the section on the female breast, its nipples and veins. We have an earlier version in a fragment from Hattuša, “If a fertile woman is pregnant (and the nipple of her breast (...)). In physiognomic texts the state of the breasts and the colours of the nipples are indicative for fertility or the course of a pregnancy.⁸ They speak of the future of the woman; in our text for the future of the child.

“(Her foetus) will not be all right / she will not give birth (to her foetus) easily” are attempts to render the NU SLSÁ of the text. Also in 27, 39, 55, 56. Technically, both interpretations are possible; a pregnant woman prays, “Let me be all right and let me give birth easily”, using two forms of the verb *ešēru* (SLSÁ).⁹

⁸ KAR 472. G. Wilhelm, *Medizinische Omina*, 71, gives a transliteration of the lines on the nipples. A new passage is SpbTU IV 149 III 5-17.

⁹ SpbTU III 116 no. 84:11, *anāku lūšir u lūšēšir ina bīt ašbāku*.

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(27) If it is loose: her foetus will not be all right / she will not give birth to her foetus easily.

(28) If it is black, she is pregnant of a male.

(29) If it is red, she is pregnant of a female.

(30) If it is white, she is pregnant of a normal one (?).

“A normal one”: based on the interpretation of *SI.SÁ* as *išaru*, “normal”. Also in 33, 34, 54, 92, 102. This means that there is no relation with the verbal form *NU SI.SÁ* in this same text. R. Labat interprets *išariš*, “(she is pregnant) in a normal way”. Both Akkadian dictionaries remain silent.

(31) If it is full of . . . : she is pregnant of a male.

This is an addition; the earlier text speaks only of a white, black, red and yellow / green nipple. The signs look like *MÁŠ DIRIG*.

(32) If it is yellow / green: her foetus will be aborted (*nadû*).

(33) If it is full of white moles: she is pregnant of a normal one (?).

(34) If it is full of red moles: she is pregnant of an abnormal one (?).

(35) If it is full of black moles: she is pregnant of a male.

(36) If it has three holes: her foetus will be poor.

The earlier version has also this section about the “holes” (verb *palāšu*, lit. “to pierce”). R. Labat: “Il désigne vraisemblablement l’orifice des vaisseaux galactophores qui, venant de la glande mammaire, s’ouvrent isolément à la surface du mamelon. Ils sont généralement au nombre de quinze à dix-huit”. G. Wilhelm: Öffnungen der Milchkanäle”. One can be surprised at the detailed knowledge of the Babylonians.

(37) If it has four holes: her foetus will be poor.

(38) If it has five holes: her foetus will die.

(39) If it has six holes: her foetus will not be all right / she will not give birth to her foetus easily.

(40) If it has seven holes: her foetus will live.

(41) If it has eight holes: her foetus will live.

(42) If it has nine holes: her sons / children will estrange (?) from her; variant: they will go (away).

(43) If it has ten holes: she will bring her sons / children to term.

The association may be with the ten months of a full pregnancy.

(44) If it has fourteen holes: she will not bring her sons / children to term.

(45) If it has fifteen holes and its their . . . is red: she is pregnant of a male.

“Their . . . is red”: the large sign(s) cannot be read.

(46) If it has fifteen holes and ditto is black: her foetus is female.

(47) If it has five holes and ditto is red: her foetus is male.

(48) If it has five holes and ditto is black: her foetus is female.

(49) If a fertile woman’s veins of the breast are straight: she is pregnant of a female.

“Straight”: *šú-šú-ru*. Its contrast is *purrukū*, “transverse, lying cross-wise”, as in 52, 54 (CAD Š/3 388a).

(50) If they are “seized” by “threads” (capillaries?): she is pregnant of a male.

Some attempts in the CAD: “If the veins on a pregnant woman’s breast are surrounded by capillary vessels (she will give birth to a male)” (CAD Š 37a); “If the veins (?) on a pregnant woman’s breast are linked by capillaries” (CAD

Q 288b). Text: *qê subbutu*, written GU.MEŠ DIB.DIB.

- (51) If they are red: she is pregnant of a male.
- (52) If on a fertile woman's top of the breast red veins lie cross-wise: she is pregnant of a female.
- (53) If black (veins) lie cross-wise: she is pregnant of a male.
- (54) If white (veins) lie cross-wise: she is pregnant of an abnormal one.
- (55) If yellow / green (veins) lie cross-wise: her foetus will not be all right / she will not give birth to her foetus easily.
- (56) If a fertile woman's epigastric region is covered with yellow / green veins: her foetus will be all right / she will give birth to her foetus easily.
- (57) If a fertile woman's intestines (= belly?) are loose (?): she is pregnant of a male.

Here begins the section on the “intestines” (*qerbû*, written ŠÀ.MEŠ). One cannot see the intestines themselves, only their impact, and the translation “belly” has been suggested for some cases (CAD Q 226b). “Loose(?)”: emending *pat-ri* into *paṭ-ru*. Difficult. From this line on, the text uses the Sumerogram PEŠ instead of normal PEŠ₄ for “to be pregnant”.

- (58) If they are pointed; variant: are hanging down (?): she is pregnant of a male (?).
- (59) If a fertile woman's intestines are hanging down (?) towards her lower abdomen: she is pregnant of a male.
- (60) If they are pointed towards her lower abdomen; variant: to the crotch of the belly: she is pregnant of a male.

“To the crotch of the belly”: *ana ḫaš₄* (ZUM) ŠÀ. See B. Alster, *Dumuzi's Dream* (1972) 102 (cf. 121). He reads Akkadian *hallu*. Other possibilities for ZUM will be found in SpbTU II 209 no. 54:30–33.

- (61) If they are “placed” towards her lower abdomen: she will give birth to a deaf one.
- (62) If they are “thrown” towards her lower abdomen: the same.
- (63) If they are “thrown” towards her lower abdomen, on the right side: she is pregnant of a male.

The diagnostician distinguishes between the intestines being “placed” (*šakānu*) and being “thrown” (*nadû*).

- (64) If they are pointed towards her lower abdomen, above: she is pregnant of a female.
- (65) If they are pointed towards her lower abdomen, below; variant: are turned: she is pregnant of a male.
- (66) If they are cramped (?): she is pregnant of a male.

The writing *eb-tù*, “cramped (?),” is unusual and *tù* (DU) is southern Old Babylonian.

- (67) If they are swollen: she is pregnant of a female.
- (68) If they are many: she is pregnant of a female.
- (69) If they are covered with yellow / green (spots): she will carry her foetus full term.

The verb *šuklulu* also implies that the baby is perfect.

- (70) If it (the belly?) is pointed like a nose: she is pregnant of a female.

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(71) If they are many and her feet and ankles are swollen, she steps to the right and to the left: she is pregnant of twins.

The woman is heavy on both sides due to twins and her feet and ankles have to carry the weight. This is an unusually rational entry. Lines 96 and 98 have a similar observation. The word “to step” (*kabāsu*, written ZUKUM) here (and in lines 94–98) was discovered by Erica Reiner, RA 65 (1971) 180 f. Confirmed by SpbTU V 249:4.

(72) If a fertile woman’s hands hold her intestines (belly): she is pregnant of a male.
 (73) If a fertile woman’s veins are pointed towards her epigastric region: she is pregnant of a female.
 (74) If they are pointed towards her lower abdomen: she is pregnant of a male.
 (75) If they are many: she is pregnant of a female.
 (76) If a fertile woman’s intestines are swollen: she is pregnant of a male.
 (77) If a fertile woman’s face has changed: she will die with her foetus.

“With (*ina*) her foetus” is not entirely clear. Cf. 82, “she will not stay alive in her pregnancy” (*ina PEŠ₄-šú NU DIN*), or J. Nougayrol, Or NS 32 (1963) 384:34 f., “a pregnant woman will not live with (*ina*) her foetus” (*e-ri-tu i-na ša li-bi-ša ú-ul i-ba-lu-ut*; Old Bab.). Nougayrol, inspired by our lines: “la prégnante, en sa grossesse (?), ne vivra pas”.

(78) If a fertile woman’s face is still: she bring her foetus to term.
 A “changing” (*nakāru*) face is bad, a “still” (*náhu*, “quiet”) face is good. Cancel the erroneously repeated *ina* in view of 85; with CAD Š/1 226a.
 (79) If a fertile woman’s . . . are full of . . .: she will die with her foetus.
 (80) If a fertile woman’s . . . are full of . . ., her eyes are suffused (?): she will die, together with her foetus.

We cannot interpret the beginning of these two lines, DIŠ TU SU TAB IGI šá ma-lu-ú (in 80: DIRIG). Another manuscript offers [.. šá KUŠ.TAB *ma-lu-ú* (TDP II Pl. LXVI W. 17360 f, 6–7). KUŠ.TAB.BA is “plucked wool” (*qerdu*), or “ox-hide”; M. Stol, RIA VI/7–8 (1983) 528a, § 3.

(81) If a fertile woman vomits, time and again: she will not bring to term.
 (82) If from the nose of a fertile woman flows dark blood: she will not stay alive in her pregnancy.
 (83) If a fertile woman throws light blood (or: pus) from her mouth, time and again: she will die, together with her foetus.

The sign combination “white blood” normally indicates pus (LUGUD, šarku). Our translation “light blood” creates a contrast with the “dark blood” (MUD, *da’mu*) in line 82.¹⁰ The Babylonians also distinguished “black blood” (ÚŠ GE₆, *adamatu*). Blood “flows” (*alāku*) from the nose or nostrils (87 f.) and is “ejected” (lit. “thrown”, *nadū*) from the mouth. This difference is often neglected in Assyriology because the Sumerogram KA does not distinguish “nose” from “mouth”.

(84) If a fertile woman’s feet and hands are lamed (?), time and again: . . .
 The diagnosis / prognosis was deliberately written in cryptic signs which we

¹⁰ CAD N/1 89b seems to be of the same opinion: “If a pregnant woman constantly discharges “white blood” (šarku!) from her mouth” (as against CAD Š/2 64a, “pus”).

cannot decipher: U U DIŠ (or: "21") PA.AN. In line 7, we came across another cryptic writing of the same structure as U U DIŠ: HI HI AŠ, which could be read: *i₁₁-šár-rù* "he will be rich". We suggest that PA.AN at the end of the line is a gloss to DIŠ, *pa-an*.¹¹ We need a verbal form ending in *-pan* or a substantive ending in *-ānu*: (-)pān. Professor W.G. Lambert wonders whether we can read 20+1, *ešrā-ēdu*, a writing for *ešeret*, with *pāni* following. Meaning unknown.

- (85) If a fertile woman's top of the navel is "loose": she will bring her foetus to term.
- (86) If it is twisted; variant: "loose": her foetus will not live.

What is to be avoided in pregnancy is "binding" or "knots", all that prevent the child from freeing itself in the delivery. Therefore, a "loose" navel is a good sign. The word "loose" in 85 f., *pašir*, is unusual and we translated it as if it were *pāfir*. That verb is often used to describe a condition of body parts.

- (87) If from the right nostril of a fertile woman flows dark blood: her foetus will die.
- (88) If from the left nostril of a fertile woman flows dark blood: her foetus will die.

Another manuscript has simple "blood" (ÚŠ, *damu*) in these two lines, TDP II Pl. LXVI W. 17360 f, 8-9.

- (89) If a fertile woman's eyes roll back (?): she bears the guilt of her father; her foetus will die.

We follow CAD A/2 296b in reading *ar-na AB.BA ÁL*, with its translation "She bears the guilt (for the wrongdoing of her) father, her unborn child will die".

- (90) If a fertile woman's ankle veins [...]: she is pregnant of a female.
- (91) If they are [...]: she is pregnant of a male.
- (92) If a fertile woman's ankle veins [...]: she is pregnant of abnormal twins.

This line was skipped by Labat and inadvertently replaced by line 94. It runs as follows: DIŠ TU SA ki-[*sil-li-šá* ... M]AŠ.TAB.BA NU SI.SÁ PEŠ₄-at. For the uncertain translation "abnormal", see on line 30.

- (93) If a fertile woman's ankle veins are full of blood: she is pregnant of a male.
- (94) If a fertile woman, in the middle of her sickness, steps to the right: she is pregnant of a sleeping (foetus).

The "sleeping foetus" is an unborn child who does not make his presence known and stays in its mother for a long time, sometimes years; see the note on line 5. The meaning of "in the middle of her sickness" (*ina šá ma-ru-uš-ti-šá*) is not immediately clear. The mention of the sleeping child may give the solution. We think of "her menstrual period" for "in the middle of her sickness": the woman has her period without knowing that she is bearing a child. The ancient commentary on this line is fragmentary (SpbTU I 39:3). For "to step", see note on line 71.

- (95) If she steps to the left: she is pregnant of a female.
The left side is normally associated with female.
- (96) If a fertile woman steps to the right but her foot is heavy: she is pregnant of a male and a female.
- (97) If she steps to the left but ditto: she is pregnant of a female.
- (98) If a fertile woman steps to the right and the left: she is pregnant of twins.

¹¹ B. Landsberger, WdO 1 (1947-1952) 373-6; cf. MSL 14 (1979) 262.

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(99) If a fertile woman's feet are small: she is pregnant and is coming to term.

This is in the style of the chapter on women in the physiognomic handbook.¹² The text as is stands is contradictory because of the introductory “If a fertile woman”, here automatically repeated. The original source must have offered: “If a woman's feet are small: she is (able to be) pregnant and coming to term (*erat u mušallimat*)”. The ancient commentary indeed speaks of a “woman” with one small foot. We now are in a group of omens taken from a variety of sources.

(100) If a fertile woman's .. are red: she has begotten a male.

(101) If a fertile woman's ... are light red (?): she has begotten a male.

(102) If a fertile woman's ... are bright: she has begotten an abnormal one.

These three lines have two problems: DIŠ TU ŠÀ KU SA *sa-a-mu* UŠ *ir-hi*. First we cannot identify the signs ŠÀ KU SA, and second the use of the verb *rehû* is problematic: a woman does not “beget” (*rehû*) a child; this is the role of the man.

The second problem can perhaps be solved by reminding the reader of the “female seed” widely known in Antiquity and studied above, Chapter I. Rabbinic exegesis of Leviticus 12:2 points out that a boy is born when the woman “gives seed”. Lines 100–101 are in line with this belief. In any case, no girl is conceived when it is the woman who “begets”.

As to the first problem, the simple solution is to take KU as DÚR, *šuburru*, “rectum, anus”: “If a fertile woman's veins inside (her) rectum are red”. SA meaning “veins” is indeed a few times put in the singular in our text (49, 93). There are a few problems, however. We miss the “her”, otherwise attested in every line. The word order is unusual; one expects SA(MEŠ) ŠÀ DÚR. Veins (*šer'ānu*) never have (these) colours; consult the dictionaries. Veins of the rectum are hardly mentioned in medical or physiognomic texts. I suggest that we read KU as TÚG “textile”. In that case, we have a “pregnancy test”: a textile is inserted into the vagina the colouring of which establishes pregnancy and gender. Pregnancy tests existed and we admit that the two prescriptions known to us do not have the terminology of our three lines.¹³ Our provisional translation of line 100 is: “If a fertile woman's inside(s) of the ...-textile is (are) red”.

The second and the third of the three colours “red” (*sāmu*), “light red (?)” (*pelū*), and “bright” (*namru*) are not common in medical texts. However, “red” and “light red (?)” are known as colours of blood which corroborates my interpretation.¹⁴

The ancient commentary devotes seven lines to the signs KU SA (SpbTU I 39:6–12). It begins (?) with the word *sa-gu-u*, according to CAD S 27a *sagû* B “flow of blood (?).” This opinion is based on our commentary that continues with short remarks on menstrual and other blood of a woman. That is why W. von Soden explained *sagû* in this passage as “menstrual bandage”. The word

¹² The same diagnosis in a physiognomic text on women, SpbTU IV 149 IV 15 (PEŠ₄-*at u mu-šal-li-mat*). Cf. CAD M/2 256 b.

¹³ E. Reiner, “Babylonian Birth Prognoses”, ZA 72 (1982) 124–138. See above p. 37.

¹⁴ B. Landsberger, JCS 21 (1967) 144b (colours of blood; see also our remarks on line 83), 145 (*pelū* “hellrot”).

sagû, however is only attested here and “menstrual bandage” is *ulāpu, sinbu* in Akkadian.¹⁵ It is possible that the commentary just gives the signs SA GÚ Ú, reverting the order of KU SA; later on, it indeed explains GÚ.S.A.A. It now explains SA as *damu* “blood”, an equation known from the lexical traditions.¹⁶ We assume that the commentator did not understand the meaning of KU SA.

(103) If a fertile woman fears pregnancy: she will live in peace with her foetus.

This sounds like a comforting remark for a fearful young woman, made by the wise midwife.

(104) If a fertile woman enjoys pregnancy: she will die with her foetus.

This is a warning for self-assured expecting mothers. The word “to enjoy” (*hēlū*) is rare.

(105) If a fertile woman’s [intestines] are troubled, time and again: she will die with her foetus.

(A ruling on the tablet).

(106) If a fertile woman is pregnant and one approaches her (sexually) on three days per <<5>> month: life.

This line is paralleled by the first line of Tablet 37, on a sick pregnant woman having sexual intercourse (see below). In the Arab world one is of the opinion that the man’s sperma is beneficial for the growing foetus.¹⁷ Intercourse in most cases means “life” (an unusual word in this text) indicating that the Babylonians had a similar view. Life for the foetus, one presumes, not the mother. F.R. Kraus showed that we have to delete the “five” in our line: interpret šá ITU 3.KAM in Tablet 37:1 as “per month three times”.¹⁸ The Sumerograms NAM.TI.LA “life” (106, 107, 110) and BA.ÚŠ, *imāt*, “she will die” (112) in this section are unusual in Tablet 36 and point to another source for lines 106–113. The rulings set them apart.

(107) If a fertile woman is pregnant and, ditto, on four days per month: life.

(108) If a fertile woman is pregnant and, ditto, on five days per month: ...

(109) If a fertile woman is pregnant and, ditto, on six days per month: ditto.

(110) If a fertile woman is pregnant and, ditto, on seven days per month: life.

(111) If a fertile woman is pregnant and, ditto, on eight days per month: an Oath has seized him in an evil way.

The number eight is ill-omened.¹⁹

(112) If a fertile woman is pregnant and, ditto, on nine days per month: he will die.

¹⁵ The other ref. in von Soden, AHw, is *sa-gu-u* = MIN (= *qablu*), after *šibbu, hanšatu* (CT 18 31 rev. 4–6, = Malku VIII 150–152). This means “hip, girdle” and we have to reject “Monatsbinde der Frau” (AHw 1003a). Note the well known *sāgu* “(a piece of clothing)”, also used as “penitential garb” (CAD S 27 f.). Is there any relation with *sangu* in the birth-text Sm 157+4–5? See J.V. Kinnier Wilson, *Iraq* 31 (1969) 15. I.L. Finkel communicated to me this line from a medical text on women: *ana SAL sa-gu-šá ana kul-lu-mu*, BM 38624+ II 25; cf. *sa-gu-šá im-mar*, II 27.

¹⁶ MSL 13 (1971) 104 Nigga 298; MSL 14 (1979) 375 Ea IV/2:12.

¹⁷ Jewish and Christian opinions on intercourse during pregnancy were discussed by D.M. Feldman, *Marital relations, birth control, and abortion in Jewish law* (1968) 180–185. “Our Sages taught: The first three months, intercourse is harmful both for the woman and the child. During the middle months it is harmful for the woman, but good for the child. In the last months it is good both for the woman and the child, for as a result the child is made bright and active” (Niddah 31a). Superfoetation and *foetus compressus* (*sandal*) were some of its dangers.

¹⁸ F.R. Kraus, *Im Bannkreis des Alten Orients. Studien Karl Oberhuber gewidmet* (1986) 131 f.

¹⁹ M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 58:6.

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- (113) If a fertile woman is pregnant and, ditto, on ten days per month: he will live.
(A ruling on the tablet)
- (114) If a woman gives birth to two males: the country will experience famine.
- (115) If a woman gives birth to two females: his (the husband's) house will prosper.

These two lines are in the style of the handbook *Šumma izbu* and line 115 in fact is a quotation of *Šumma izbu* I 110. Male twins are bad; *Šumma izbu* I 83: "If a woman gives birth to two males: there will be hardship in the land so that the land experiences unhappiness; evil will arise for their father's house".

Tablet 37

The first nine lines of this tablet look like a direct continuation of Tablet 36, but unlike Tablet 36, Tablet 37 studies ill women.

- (1) If a pregnant woman is ill and in case one continues with her; variant: one approaches her (sexually), three times per month: that woman will live.

At first glance the line appears to read "of the third month", or "of three months". The CAD Q 233b, basically following R. Labat: "If a pregnant woman is sick and if one continues with her, variant: has relations with her during (her) third month". The highest number is indeed 9 and 10, the maximum duration of a pregnancy. In Chapter I, Phasing and duration of a pregnancy, we came with a theory of dividing Babylonian pregnancy into periods of three months, assuming that in this text indeed months 1–3 (line 1), and 4–10 (lines 2–7) are meant (p. 21).

However, we follow the daring interpretation of F.R. Kraus; see on Tablet 36 line 106, and translate šá ITU 3.KAM "per month three times".

This line is the catch-line in SpbTU I 39:13.

- (2) In case one continues with her four times per month: that woman will live.
- (3) In case one continues with her five times per month: that woman is in critical condition.
- (4) In case one continues with her six times per month: that woman is in critical condition.
- (5) In case one continues with her seven times per month: that woman will live.
- (6) In case one continues with her eight times per month: that woman will live; variant: an Oath of her father has seized her.
- (7) In case one continues with her nine or ten times per month: that woman will not live at all (?); variant: she will not give birth.

From this point on, the text continues with "If a woman is ill and ...". Pregnant women are no longer the concern and we leave the Diagnostic Handbook at this point.

There is a third omen text on pregnant women which is not incorporated in Labat's edition of medical omens, and was never treated by an Assyriologist.²⁰ It is only a fragment and the right side, containing the forecasts, is broken away. We cannot at the present time assign it a place in any handbook. When the text becomes more or less readable, it gives the times of the delivery: during the night, the morning, day-time. The

²⁰ LKU 126, "Geburtsomen".

Gynaecology

next lines describe the colour of “his” flesh (19–21). Abnormal births follow: a dead child (?); a child of six months (?); “feet-first” (*šēpānuššu*), boys and girls; twins, boys and girls. The rest is largely lost.²¹

Gynaecology

A Sumerian proverb says: “To be sick is (relatively) good, to be pregnant is bad, to be pregnant and sick is too much”.²² We have already seen many examples of adversities encountered by the Babylonian woman. Here we give information on therapies taken from medical texts. We have already examined the important pharmaceutic “vademecum” which lists plants used against infertility and other problems.

There is a number of medical texts dealing with specific diseases of women; in them we may see short “handbooks” of Babylonian gynaecology.²³ Infertility and abnormal menstruation are one theme, problems during and after pregnancy another. There is much attention to hemorrhage and if we may believe a Babylonian commentary, there was a special word for hemorrhage during pregnancy (the word *nahšātu*); a woman can be “ill from it”.²⁴ In one case, the navel and opening of the vagina are anointed, or amulet stones are hung around her hips, or she goes through a magical ritual in a secluded place, where she pronounces a wailing prayer, three times. All this is accompanied by the recitation of an incantation to the goddess Ištar.²⁵ The text continues with practical advice such as inserting *materia medica*.²⁶

After the delivery other problems may arise. A therapeutic text discusses such cases, introducing every line with the words “If a woman, after having given birth, is (...)”, and the symptoms follow.²⁷ We give one example. “If a woman, after having given birth, is constipated and is filled with wind: you shall make her sniff dust of a copper bell and she will recover”.²⁸ This prescription is rather unique in the medical corpus and has the flavour of folk-medicine. The same is to be done during pregnancy, “If a woman is pregnant and is filled with wind: (the demon) Lamaštu has seized her; you shall make her sniff dust of a copper bell”.²⁹ This same text has another prescription in non-technical language, and even explains that this is “hear-say” (*šum’uttu*), an oral

²¹ “Dead child”, DIŠ SAL Ù.TU-ma BA.BAD [...] (22), “a child of six months”, DIŠ SAL ša 6 ITU Ù.TU [...] (23). I do not understand line 18, DIŠ SAL Ù.TU-ma GIG i-HI [...].

²² SP 1.193 and 1.194, as rendered by B. Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer I* (1997) 38. Earlier edition: E.I. Gordon, *Sumerian Proverbs* (1959) 516 (UET 6 303).

²³ Most of them were published in AMT 66–67 and BAM 3 235–251.

²⁴ SpbTU I 39:7–8. This ancient explanation looks allright; see I.L. Finkel, AfO 27 (1980) 41 f.; K. Butz, *Oriens Antiquus* 21 (1982) 221 f. BAM 3 237 gives the symptoms and prescriptions. We now know that the word *nahšātu* can mean “haemorrhagia” in general: somebody falling from the city wall broke his nose and got it (*nahšum*); D. Charpin, *Tell Mohammed Diyab. Campagnes 1987 et 1988* (Paris 1990) 120 f. A. 350+20.

²⁵ BAM 3 237 I 1–21, with Finkel, AfO 27 50.

²⁶ More on “profuse vaginal bleeding during pregnancy”: J.A. Scurlock, *Incognita* 2 (1991) 136 f.

²⁷ BAM 3 240. A similar interpretation of this text was given by J.A. Scurlock, *Incognita* 2 (1991) 148, with notes 139–146.

²⁸ BAM 3 240:26, with MSL 9 (1967) 86. – BAM 4 408 is like 240.

²⁹ BAM 3 240:28 (DIŠ SAL ‘e-re-et-ma u šāra ud-du-pat). This line is an insertion between those on women who already have given birth.

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tradition.³⁰ We now give a summary of the problems. Pains in the abdomen (17–19), “wind” (20–28), anus prolapse (29), a “loose navel” with continuing sweating (30–32), kinds of diarrhea (33–38), fever, pus and other irregularities during the delivery; hard to identify (39–66). At the end come some products of a pregnancy: abortion (?), a son, no delivery, miscarriage (?) (67–74). This looks like an addition from another source.

A Middle Assyrian text seems to discuss similar post partum problems: “If a woman, after having given birth, is constipated, [...] her intestines are stopped up (*esēlu*), her water and blood [...] return”. A mixture of plants is fumigated, put into a jar above which the woman is made sit down. Another mixture is inserted into her vagina. The treatment may be continued on the next day.³¹

Another therapeutic text seems to treat the following. To staunch bleeding in a woman (1–6), the same in a pregnant woman (7–18), problems with the amniotic fluid (19–20), difficult childbirth (21–31). The text is difficult and a daring translation of the last passage, on birth, has been given.³²

The Diagnostic Handbook seems to have devoted a chapter to post partum problems. Of this Tablet 39 we only have the first line, “If a woman in childbed is swollen and she belches, she will die”.³³ There is a Neo-Assyrian letter in which the king is informed about an ailing pregnant woman; unfortunately it is very fragmentary.³⁵

³⁰ Lines 11–16, with M. Stol, JEOL 32 (1991–92) 60 f. More examples of folk-medicine are given there.

³¹ W.G. Lambert, *Iraq* 31 (1969) 29:1–26; following J.A. Scurlock, *Incognita* 2 (1991) 148 (note 141). Her “CT 14 36” is now BAM 5 422 III 5.

³² SpbTU IV 153, with M.J. Geller, AfO 42–43 (1995–96) 246 f. See p. 130 f.

³³ SpbTU I 40, followed by an ancient commentary.

³⁵ LAS 339+ = SAA X 293, with the remarks by S. Parpola, LAS, Commentary, p. 355 f.

Chapter IX WORRIES AFTER BIRTH

Uncleanness

Both a menstruating woman and one in childbed are considered to be unclean. Leviticus 12:2 says so explicitly; “If a woman conceives, and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean”. When the child is male, she is unclean for these seven plus an additional 33 days; when the child is female, it doubles; she is unclean for fourteen plus an additional 66 days; so the text continues. The second period are “the days of her purifying”.¹ In modern Egypt, the woman after childbirth is considered polluting and it is said that “a woman’s grave is open until the fortieth day”.² Babylonian texts call unclean women “tabooed” (*musukkatum*) or “dirty” (*urruštu*). The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary comments on “tabooed” as follows: “The term *musukku* refers to a woman in the period after she has given birth when she is in a tabooed state until she has taken a ritual bath; it may also refer to a menstruating woman”.³

We learn from an incantation that the woman in childbed (*harištu*) was considered polluting: “May they draw water from Ajabba, the wide sea, into which a *harištu* has not descended, in which a tabooed woman has not washed her hands”.⁴ The second, tabooed, woman (*musukkatum*) can be a menstruant. Can we conclude from this passage that a woman who has given birth has to bathe herself, and that the menstruant only has to wash her hands? A similar passage in another incantation speaks of “the water of Ajabba, the wide sea, where the ‘dirty woman’ has not washed her hands, the tabooed woman has not washed her clothes”.⁵ Comparing both passages, one could conclude that the “dirty woman” is identical with the *harištu* and therefore a special meaning “menstruating woman” has been proposed for the word *harištu* in incantations like these.⁶ This would be unusual. Moreover, note that the “dirty woman” washes her hands, as the menstruant did. A passage in a third incantation offers: “May they draw water from the Ajabba, the wide sea, water from the Tigris, water from the Euphrates, into which a dirty woman has not descended and a tabooed woman has not washed [her hands / clothes]”.⁷ Here, the “dirty woman” descends (*šurrū*); as the *harištu* is said to

¹ W.H. Roscher, “Unreinheit der Wöchnerinnen”, in *Die Zahl 40 im Glauben, Brauch und Schrifttum der Semiten. Ein Beitrag zur vergleichenden Religionswissenschaft, Volkskunde und Zahlenmystik* (= Abhandlungen der kön. sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, philol.-hist. Klasse, 27 Nr. 4) (1909) 100–105, remains interesting. Most recent are the articles by R. Whitekettle, ZAW 107 (1995) 393–408; *Vetus Testamentum* 46 (1996) 376–391.

² S. Morsy, “Childbirth in an Egyptian village”, in: M. Artschwager Kay, *Anthropology of Human Birth* (1982) 171.

³ A survey on the Sumerian tabooed woman (and man) *ú.zuh* was given by H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil* (1978) 150–7. On menstrual uncleanness, see K. van der Toorn, RHR 206 (1989) 348–351.

⁴ AMT 10,1 rev. III 2 = BAM 6 510 III 2, and dupl.; see the edition by W. Farber, JNES 49 (1990) 312 f.

⁵ SpbTU I 44:72–73, with Farber, JNES 49 315:6–8.

⁶ Thus CAD H 104a *harištu* B. Von Soden, AHw 326a, one word: “Frau im Kindbett”. Farber, 313: “an unclean woman”.

⁷ CT 23 2–3 K. 2473:6–8, with Farber, 311 f.

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do (*arādu*) in the first incantation. Clearly, “dirty woman” is a general word for both the woman in childbed and one who is having her period.⁸

That the woman in confinement was considered unclean is also suggested by an omen based on the appearance of the liver: “A birthgiving woman (*harištu*) will come before my gate”; obviously, this is not normal.⁹ Her clothing (*kannu*) is dirty, as is that of a menstruant.¹⁰ The period of uncleanness may have lasted thirty days.¹¹ This was inferred from this instruction for the exorcist: “(During) one month in which she gives birth, you shall not see her”.¹²

There are indications that the child was born in a secluded place. The Atra-*hasīs* myth refers to *bū qadišti*, “house / room of the *qadištu*”. An incantation speaks of “the door of the baby”, “the door of women giving birth” which may point to a special room.¹³ A Sumerian saying seems to speak of wet-nurses working in the “women’s house”.¹⁴

A boy or a girl?

Every couple will be interested in the gender of the child to be born. In the patriarchal society of the Ancient Near East the economic value of a son resulted in a marked preference of male offspring. A daughter was married off and the son took care of his parents in their old age. The prevalent belief of the ancients that girls were slower to develop before birth is prejudice, of course, but also reflects a girl’s lesser economic value. It was good and safe to have sons. The omen handbooks contain predictions about this. That boys were preferred is clear from this omen based on the behaviour of oil on water: “If I have thrown oil on water and two films go out from the middle of the oil, the one large, the other small: the wife of a man will give birth to a male (*zikaru*); as to a sick person: he will recover”. Both predictions are positive.¹⁵ The Babylonian language discerns “son” (*māru*) and “male heir” (*aplu*) and other omnia speak of this male heir, as in “If the left ear of a malformed birth is near its cheek: there will be a legitimate heir (*aplu kēnu*) in the house of a man”.¹⁶ The following omen is negative, “If a house is supported by supports of beams, that man will not get a heir; the owner of that house will forfeit (?) his work”.¹⁷ In the Physiognomic Handbook we come across

⁸ “Dirty woman” is *urruštu* in Akkadian. It cannot be related etymologically to *harištu* because its root is *wrš*. For modern Iraq, consult E.S. Drower, “Woman and taboo in Iraq”, *Iraq* 5 (1938) 105–117.

⁹ R. Labat, *Textes littéraires de Suse* (1974) 94 no. 4 rev. 5 (*ha-ri-iš-tu* ÉŠ IGI KÁ.GAL-a i-sā-ni-qa); cf. 134 no. 6 I 18.

¹⁰ Å.W. Sjöberg, *JCS* 25 (1973) 140.

¹¹ R. Labat, “Geburt”, *RIA* III/3 (1964) 179 a. Based on RA 18 (1921) 162, 165 AO 6473:14, 1-en ITU šá Ú.TU-ŠÚ NU IGI-ŠÚ.

¹² The mother is unclean; in Egypt during 14 days. See R.O. Faulkner, *The literature of Ancient Egypt. An anthology of stories, instructions, and poetry* (1972) 29 (Pap. Westcar 11, 19).

¹³ W. Farber, *ZA* 71 (1981) 61–3, lines 4, 6, with K. van der Toorn, *Family religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel* (1996) 122 f.; *Mesopotamian Magic. Textual, historical, and interpretive perspectives* (1999) 142.

¹⁴ Instructions of Šuruppak 257, after C. Wilcke, *ZA* 68 (1978) 230; W.H.Ph. Römer, *TUAT* III/1 (1990) 66 (255). A father enters the woman’s house after a birth: DPM 218 with C. Wilcke, in: E.W. Müller, *Geschlechtsreife und Legitimation zur Zeugung* (1985) 294, 302.

¹⁵ CT 5:4, with G. Pettinato, *Die Öhlwahrsagung bei den Babylonern* II (1966) 13; cf. vol. I 202 note 218 (lit.).

¹⁶ E. Leichty, *The Omen Series Šumma izbu* (1970) 133, XI:21.

¹⁷ CT 38 13:88.

A Boy or a Girl

these omens: "If a man's penis is long and thick: that man will beget sons". "If the nose of a woman is symmetrical: [she will give birth to] sons".¹⁸

In the Diagnostic Handbook we indeed have seen that the outer appearance of a pregnant woman can indicate the gender of the child that she is bearing. Colours appeared to be a very important criterium.¹⁹ We also observe here the well-known association of the right side with "male", and the left with "female".²⁰ Examples are: "If (a part of her nose) is standing up, below, on the right side: her foetus is male. If it is standing up, below, on the left side: her foetus is female" (22 f.). Another belief is that boys are on the right side in the womb, and girls left; this was also assumed by Greeks, Romans, and Europeans, until the seventeenth century.²¹ The Diagnostic Handbook says of the "sleeping foetus": "If a fertile woman, in the middle of her sickness, steps to the right: she is pregnant of a sleeping (foetus). If she steps to the left: she is pregnant of a female" (94 f.). The text continues: "If a fertile woman steps to the right but her foot is heavy: she is pregnant of a male and a female. If she steps to the left but ditto: she is pregnant of a female" (96 f.).²²

A "behavioural omen" studies sexual intercourse: "If a man 'approaches' on waste ground, his wife will bear girls. If a man 'approaches' in the middle of a field or a garden, his wife will bear boys". The message is: a fertile underground is better and so boys are born. Waste land which does not sound positive is here associated with women.²³ We indeed have a complaint by a woman who bears only girls. It is formulated as a prayer asking an oracle (*tamītu*):²⁴ "O Šamaš, lord of judgment, Adad, lord of extispicy! The wife of NN who lives in his shadow, is living (there) a long time and she gives birth to females all the time, and there is no male, and his heart is sore". In the following broken lines an oracle is asked for. We indeed have a prayer to the mother goddess Ninmah, followed by a ritual, asking "to provide (me) with a son".²⁵ Or is it a child in general? When a boy was born, at last, this name could be given to him: "He-has-joined-them". "Them" is feminine and refers to the older sisters.²⁶

That boys are better than girls appears to be implied by the different periods of uncleanness after the birth of a boy or a girl, in the Old Testament: in case of a boy only $7+33 = 40$ days, in case of a girl $14+66 = 80$ days (Leviticus 12:1–5). Greeks and

¹⁸ BRM 4 22:27, and TBP 13:30 (with W. von Soden, ZA 71 [1981] 112).

¹⁹ Colours as criterium in Tablet 36 of the Diagnostic Handbook: lines 1, 2, 4, 6–15, 19, 24, 25, 28, 29, 45–49, 51–53, 100, 101. Other criteria: lines 31, 35, 50, 57–60, 63–68, 70, 72–76, 90, 91, 93, 95–97.

²⁰ Right - left: H. Limet, *Akkadica* 26 (jan.–febr. 1982) 26 f., 33 f.; M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 36 (also remarks on colours); B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* I (1963) 31–41.

²¹ E. Lesky, *Die Zeugungs- und Vererbungslehren der Antike und ihr Nachwirken* (1950) 39–69 (= 1263–1293). Also in animals: "It is said that if the bulls after coupling go away towards the right hand side the offspring will be males, and if toward the left, females" (Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* VIII 176). More authors; see B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* I (1963) 33, citaat 130; and note 221. In the Arab world: U. Weisser, *Zeugung, Vererbung und pränatale Entwicklung in der Medizin des arabisch-islamischen Mittelalters* (1993) 273–279 ("Rechts-Links-Theorie").

²² Sir Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1672) IV, v (ed. Robin Robbins, p. 305), was the first to express doubts: "That a woman upon a masculine conception advanceth her right leg, will not be found to answer strict observation. That males are conceived in the right side of the womb, females in the left, though generally delivered, and supported by ancient testimony, will make no fallible account".

²³ CT 39 45:23–4.

²⁴ J.A. Craig, ABRT I 4, col. I:11 – II:3. More on this text in the section on Difficult labour (p. 131).

²⁵ CTN IV 105 (line 13: *ana DUMU ūršē*).

²⁶ Old Akkadian *Ikšussināt*; according to CAD K 273 a.

IX. Worries after Birth

Romans believed that a girl develops before birth slower than a boy; after birth, however, she is the first in reaching maturity.²⁷

Still, girls were welcome, as the personal name meaning “We rejoiced over her” (*Nihdūšim*) may show.²⁸

Twins

The presence of twins in the expectant mother can be surmised by looking at her behaviour. “If a fertile woman steps to the right but her foot is heavy: she is pregnant of a male and a female. If she steps to the left but ditto: she is pregnant of a female. If a fertile woman steps to the right and the left: she is pregnant of twins”.²⁹

Twins could be welcomed as a blessing; a Sumerian proverb says, “May you become a household built up by means of twin sons!”.³⁰ Liver omina have the undoubtedly favourable prediction, “the wife of a man will give birth to twins (*māšu*)”; a later version differentiates between male and female twins.³¹ The birth of male twins may be inauspicious for the community. “If twins are frequent in a town, (this means) abandonment of that city”, another omen says.³² Male twins are not good. This is reflected by two omen traditions. The Diagnostic Handbook predicts, “If a woman gives birth to two males: the country will experience famine. If a woman gives birth to two females: his (the husband’s) house will prosper”.³³ In an entry from the handbook about malformed births the birth of male twins is bad for both the land and the father’s house: “If a woman gives birth to two males: there will be hardship in the land so that the land experiences unhappiness; evil will arise for their father’s house” (I 83). The two boys are rivals and detrimental to family life, as can be inferred from this Middle Babylonian prediction: “If a woman gives birth to twins, the (one) king will humiliate the (other) king, his rival; the house of a man will be dispersed”.³⁴ History indeed is full of stories about twin brothers who cannot get along; remember Jacob and Esau, or Remus and Romulus. The struggle between them can sometimes be seen as a struggle between good and evil.³⁵ Of Jacob and Esau, Genesis 25:22 says, “The children struggled together within her”. Her mother Rebekah went to inquire of the Lord, the text continues. And the Lord said to her,

²⁷ B.H. Stricker, *De geboorte van Horus* III (1975) 251–7 § 60; R. Joly, *Hippocrate*, tome XI (Budé, 1970) 30 f. (“un a priori tyannique”).

²⁸ CT 48 19:1, 9, 22; L. Speleers, *Catalogue des intailles et empreintes orientales des Musées Royaux du Cinquantenaire* (1917) 86, 159 No. 543. Cf. *Na-ah-du-ši*, AbB 7 182:2 (Kraus: “Man ist um sie besorgt”), YOS 13 112:23.

²⁹ TDP 208 ff., 96–98. See Chapter VIII.

³⁰ SP 2.160, with E.I. Gordon, *Sumerian Proverbs* (1959) 282. A variant has only “sons”; not “twin sons” (*dumu.tab*). B. Alster translates: “May you be (a member) of a house built by twin sons”.

³¹ YOS 10 44:37 (*māši*) with CT 30 8 Rm 115 rev. 10 f. (*māšē*, *māšāti*).

³² CT 38 3:64 (MAŠ.TAB.BA.MEŠ; *nadē āli*).

³³ TDP 212:114–5. See p. 202.

³⁴ R. Labat, *Textes littéraires de Suse* (1974) 202 no. IX rev. 28 (*māšu*).

³⁵ S. Maul, *Zukunftsbevältigung* (1994) 99 b, on fighting twins in Babylonian art and literature.

“Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples, born of you,
shall be divided;
the one shall be stronger than the other,
the elder shall serve the younger”.

In “Jacob and Esau”, “Remus and Romulus”, the younger twin is mentioned first reflecting the idea that the younger is “supplanting” the older; Hebrew ‘āqab, as in the name “Jacob”.³⁶

Babylonian texts about daily life do not often speak about twins. A nice short letter from Mari has this message: “I gave birth to twins, one boy and one girl. Let my lord rejoice!”.³⁷ This letter uses the normal word for “twin”, *tu’amu*, also known in other Semitic languages. As in the Biblical name “Thomas” which is explained by the Gospel of John: “Thomas, called the Twin (Greek *Didymus*)” (John 11:16, 21:2). There was a man named *Tū’imū* living in an Old Assyrian colony in Asia Minor.³⁸ The other word for “twins” in Akkadian is *māšu* and we know the male and female personal names *Māšu* and *Māštu*. Are identical twins meant?³⁹

In chapter V on Difficult labour we have examined the stories about the complicated birth of twins.

Triplets (*takšū*) in goats is a sign of prosperity. “Your goats shall bear triplets, your ewes twins”.⁴⁰ Triplets in humans is not a good sign: “If a woman gives birth to triplets, the owner of the house will die”. This line is from the handbook on malformed births (I 113) which also discusses all kinds of combinations of twins and triplets, including Siamese, and continues with quadruplets, and higher. This is Babylonian theoretical science.

Problems with newborn babies

Babies can fall ill.⁴¹ A tuft of wool full of *materia magica*, hung around baby’s neck, can give it protection against sorcery during forty days or remove evil.⁴² Ointments, amulets, and much more are prescribed. We have seen that an incantation, probably recited at the cutting of the cord, was recited against children’s diseases. Some of them were ascribed to the female monster *Lamaštu* and her kin; Chapter X studies her workings and discusses what can be done to protect against them. Her evil eye spies for mother and child, sees

³⁶ M. Malul, “‘āqēb ‘heel’ and ‘āqab ‘to supplant’ and the concept of succession in the Jacob-Esau narratives”, *Vetus Testamentum* 46 (1996) 190–212.

³⁷ ARM 10 26. Cf. J.-M. Durand, *MARI* 3 (1984) 166: the mother may be princess *Kirūm*. An identification of the twins: N. Ziegler, *KTEMA* 22 (1997) 55.

³⁸ In CCT 6 1a written as [dumu *T*]ù-i-mi-im on the case (4); Sumerogram MAŠ on the tablet (8). This was pointed out to me by K.R. Veenhof.

³⁹ N. Ziegler, “Jumelles d’Admatum”, *NABU* 1999/73.

⁴⁰ Gilg. VI i 18. More examples from literary texts in W.G.E. Watson, *NABU* 1996/5.

⁴¹ Two excellent articles are now available: D. Cadelli, “Lorsque l’enfant paraît . . . malade”, *KTEMA* 22 (1997) 11–33 (appeared at the end of 1998); K. Volk, “Kinderkrankheiten nach der Darstellung babylonisch-assyrischer Keilschrifttexte”, *Or NS* 68 (1999) 1–30. See also above, p. 91 note 7.

⁴² W. Farber, *Schlaf Kindchen Schlaf! Mesopotamische Baby-Beschwörungen und -Rituale* (1989) 66 (220).

IX. Worries after Birth

them, and she enters the house.⁴³ She can cause the child to become yellow which must refer to the jaundice *icterus gravis neonatorum* – the source of which became clear only in 1940 when the rhesus factor became known. The Babylonian name *It(a)raq-ilī*, “He became yellow, my god!”, seems to refer to this.⁴⁴ *Lamaštu* is also a danger to the mother and indeed an expectant mother can contract jaundice in her fifth month.⁴⁵ Another problem in newborn babies are stupors or epileptic fits.⁴⁶

The Diagnostic Handbook has a long chapter on the symptoms of an ill baby and its prospects; some of the cases are close enough to birth to warrant attention here, but in general the subject matter falls outside the theme of this book.⁴⁷ We give the first four lines in translation. They deal with breast-feeding and all give the malefic diagnosis / prognosis “overpowering by dust” (*kišid epēri*), an obscure expression attested only here.⁴⁸

(1–2) “If a child, a baby, as soon as it is born, sucks the teat (*sertu*) (but the milk) does not reach its belly (variant: “it pours . . .”), and its flesh diminishes: overpowering by dust”.

(3) “If a child, when you hold it dangling by the neck (*kišadānuššu tušqallalšu*), neither quivers (*galātu*) nor stretches out its arms: overpowering by dust”.

(4) “If a child has been suckled for three months and its flesh diminishes, its hands and feet become more and more contorted (*kanānu*): overpowering by dust”.

The second group that we single out is found after the section on “the bitter breast”.⁴⁹ Here, some omnia are followed by prescriptions. Prescriptions are very rare in this handbook and it is possible that we have here examples of folk-medicine.

(39–40) “If a child is sick from coughing: you shall crush red ochre, mix (it) in honey and ghee; he shall suck (*našābu*) it on an empty stomach. If he (can) not (do this) by himself, you shall put him at the nipple of the breast of his mother and he shall drink it together with the milk, and he will recover”.

(41) “If the ligaments (?) of a . . . child are ‘loose’ from its neck to its spine, it will die”.

The qualification of the child in the last case is obscure (*šap-pu*, *sab-bu*, or the like). The word translated as “ligaments (?)” (*kās-lu*) remains unclear to us. The CAD gave

⁴³ B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* I (1996) 134, with K. van der Toorn, *Family religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel* (1996) 121–124, and N. Wasserman, NABU 1995/70.

⁴⁴ Otherwise AHw 1325 b, *tarāqu*: “Es (das Neugeborene) wurde blau, mein Gott!”. On the jaundice of newborn, see D. Cadelli, KTEMA 22 (1997) 31; K. Volk, Or NS 68 (1999) 22–4.

⁴⁵ M. Bruins Allison, *Doctor Mary in Arabia* (1994) 256, 285. “One was about five months pregnant and jaundiced – we had many such cases”. “A young mother had delivered her premature baby in the village and then went into a toxic hepatitis with jaundice and coma. Such cases were described in our medical books as a footnote, as they don’t see them anymore in America. They have many of them in Oman. All of them die”.

⁴⁶ M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 89, 131 f., 153, “Babies”; D. Cadelli, KTEMA 22 (1997) 23; K. Volk, Or NS 68 (1999) 16–8.

⁴⁷ Chapter 40. R. Labat, TDP 216–231, remains the reliable edition. Ancient commentaries are SpbTU I 41, 42. For “Hand of the God / Goddess” affecting babies, see M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* (1993) 34–38. “Redness” (*samānu*) seizes the suckling child; I.L. Finkel, *Festschrift R. Borger* (1998) 90 note 32; D. Cadelli, KTEMA 22 (1997) 32.

⁴⁸ See p. 177. AHw 223a, 490 b (*kišdu*): “das kranke Kind ist Beute der Erde (d.h. todgeweiht)”; CAD E 187 a: “the sick child belongs to the soil (i.e., will die)”; K 453 a (*kišittu*): “overpowering by ‘dust’ (i.e., the nether world)”. Cf. K. Volk, Or NS 68 (1999) 14 f. The ancient commentary SpbTU I 41:1–5 seems to be at a loss. It sees a relation between this and the *kišadānuššu* in the following omen. This looks like an “attraction” based on sound only (*kišittu* and *kišadu*).

⁴⁹ Cf. D. Cadelli, KTEMA 22 (1997) 21 f., note 74; K. Volk, Or NS 68 (1999) 16.

a daring translation and interpretation: “(If a baby) has *spina bifida* (lit. its transverse processes are open from the neck to the spine)”. This may be correct, despite criticisms.⁵⁰

(42–43) “If the intestines of a child are disturbed (*parādu*) by a “blow of Sin” (*nikipti Sîn*), and he wastes away (*qatû*): in order to heal him, you char the plant *nikiptu*, you crush (the aromatics) balsam (?), turpentine (?), juniper, mint, saffron when fresh, you mix (this) in galbanum oil, you anoint him regularly, and he will recover”.

The “blow of Sin” is attested only here and must be a specific childhood disease. The terminology “blow” (*nikiptu*), “disturbed” (*parādu*) and “waste away” (*qatûmma iqatti*, lit. “will certainly end”) is not the terminology of medical texts. This is surely folk-medicine. The first plant that is used is well-known from the medical corpus and its name *nikiptu* is homonymous with the “blow” of Sin.

(44) “If the suture of the skull of the child is ‘loose’, and the top of its skull widens but he does not sleep: he will be ill seven, eight days, and he will die”.

(45) “If the suture of the skull of the child is ‘loose’, and the top of its skull widens: he will die”. The “suture” (*šibîtu*) is the sagittal fontanelle of a baby which under normal conditions gradually closes.⁵¹

Diseases and defects of newborn babies are also discussed in the Babylonian Talmud. There is a number of instructions or remedies given by the mother of Abaye (Sabbath 134a, at the end). We only repeat her advice in case of jaundice: “Abaye also said: Mother told me, If he is yellow, so that he is deficient in blood, we must wait until he is full-blooded and then circumcise him”.⁵²

Crying babies

Babies cry. A Sumerian nurse-maid tried to sooth the baby by saying “ooa, ooa” to him (*u₅.a, u₅.a*).⁵³ We have a lullaby written in Sumerian and beginning with this “ooa, ooa”.⁵⁴ It is in fact a highly literary text, and was probably composed at the court of Ur to assuage a young prince(ss) wailing in the cradle. Of course, lullabies still exist in the Near East.⁵⁵ The Diagnostic Handbook sometimes gives crying as one of the symptoms of an ill infant.⁵⁶

We have a number of incantations intending to stop the crying of babies. In an ancient catalogue of the works of the conjurer they are listed together with birth incantations and with those against the demon *Lamaštu*. A new and complete edition was published

⁵⁰ CAD K 425 a, under *kislu*. Accepted by D. Cadelli, KTEMA 22 (1997) 16; K. Volk, Or NS 68 (1999) 20. Other opinions on *kaslu* / *kislu*: J. Nougayrol, RA 66 (1972) 94 f. (6) (“muscle ou tendon”); I. Starr, *The rituals of the diviner* (1983) 66 f.

⁵¹ D. Cadelli, KTEMA 22 (1997) 16 note 41 (with the new reference YOS 11 5:13); K. Volk, Or NS 68 (1999) 19.

⁵² J.O. Leibowitz, *Some aspects of Biblical and Talmudic Medicine* (1969) 21–23, studies related cases in this section of the Talmud.

⁵³ C. Wilcke, JNES 27 (1968) 233 note 13.

⁵⁴ S.N. Kramer, “*u₅.a a-ù-a*: A Sumerian Lullaby”, *Studi in onore di Edoardo Volterra VI* (1969) 191–205 (with an Appendix by Th. Jacobsen); ANET (1969) 651 f., with B. Alster, RA 65 (1971) 170.

⁵⁵ R.C. Thompson, PSBA 30 (1908) 32 f.; H. Grandqvist, *Birth and childhood among the Arabs. Studies in a Muhammadan village in Palestine* (1947) 262.

⁵⁶ TDP 220 ff., Tablet 40, lines 20, 24 f., 28, 46, 106–108.

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a few years ago by W. Farber who gave this book the title *Schlaf Kindchen, Schlaf!*⁵⁷ The intent of these compositions is far more serious than those of lullabies. It is not the parents but the ghosts of the house who are annoyed by the constant weeping of infants: the deceased ancestors of the family wake up and are enraged.⁵⁸ Gods hate noise, as we will see in the next section, on overpopulation. This divine anger is dangerous for the well-being of the entire family. Rituals accompany the recitation of these baby incantations. It has been shown that these incantations use stock phrases taken from existing lullabies. The earlier Old Babylonian incantations have a simple style and can easily be memorized. They are one of the rare examples of oral folk poetry in Akkadian literature.⁵⁹ The baby is asked to fall asleep like a drunk in the tavern. Does this mean that alcohol was administered to him? These texts are beautiful and the best are available in a fresh translation in English, made by B.R. Foster. We give three of them here.⁶⁰

Little one who dwelt in the dark chamber,
You really did come out here, you have seen the [sunlig]ht.
Why are you crying? Why are you [fretting]?
Why did you not cry in there?
You have disturbed the household god,
 the bison(-monster) is astir, (saying),
“Who disturbed me? Who startled me?”
The little one disturbed you, the little one startled you.
Like wine tipplers, like a barmaid’s child,
Let sleep fall upon him!

[Baby, who has aggravated his father],
[Who has brought tears into his mother’s eyes],
[At whose uproar, at the clamour of whose crying],
The hairy hero-men were frightened,
Ištar got no sleep in her bedchamber,
May sleep, life, and release (from care) befall you!
Burp like a drunkard, wheeze (?) like a barmaid’s boy!
Till your mother comes, touches you, and takes you up,
Be placid as a pond,
Be still as a pool!
May sleep befall you, like an oxherd in repose.
Listen to me, child, you infant,
You should be asleep, he who sleeps is released (from care).

⁵⁷ W. Farber, *Schlaf Kindchen, Schlaf! Mesopotamische Baby-Beschwörungen und -Rituale* (1989). Cf. K. van der Toorn, *Family religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel* (1996) 119–125.

⁵⁸ Thus K. van der Toorn, “Magic at the craddle: a reassessment”, in T. Abusch, K. van der Toorn, *Mesopotamian Magic. Textual, historical, and interpretative perspectives* (1999) 139–147.

⁵⁹ W. Farber, “Magic at the Craddle. Babylonian and Assyrian Lullabies”, *Anthropos* 85 (1990) 139–148. Also in his *Schlaf Kindchen, Schlaf!* 148 ff., Kapitel 5.

⁶⁰ B.R. Foster, *Before the Muses* I (1996) 139 (Farber, 34 f., Vorläufer 1; Old Babylonian); II 879 (Farber, 84 ff., § 25); 880 (Farber, 90, § 30).

Overpopulation

Dwel[ler] in darkness, who had not seen the sunrise,
You 've come out, [you 've seen the sunlight].
Be still as swamp [water],
Sleep like a ba[by gazelle].
Like a boundary stone (protected by) the gods,
May there be no one to disturb you!

Overpopulation

The Atra-*hasīs* myth describes how the gods, tired by working, had man made out of clay to do the work. Mankind grew and grew creating a great “noise” (*huburu, rigmu*) on earth which the gods did not like. This aversion is still reflected in the omen literature: noisy cities mean doom, but “If the noise of a city is always low, that city will continually prosper”.⁶¹ Some scholars see the noise as human rebellion against the gods, the Erra myth has this connotation. Others are of the opinion that the noise is a sign of overpopulation and they may be correct.⁶² It has been suggested that this reflects the situation when the first cities emerged in the lowlands of Sumer, shortly after 3000 B.C. The lost Homeric work *Cypria* explains the Trojan war as a method to empty the over-burdened earth of people.⁶³

Atra-*hasīs* tells how the gods tried pestilence, famine, the Flood, to diminish the population, but of no avail. In the end they resorted to the ultimate solution of natural death. While death of this type was a great discovery, it was still not enough to contain mankind.⁶⁴ New methods were devised: barrenness, a female child-killing demon, and the installation of classes of sacred women, “nuns” who could not bear children. In the following passage the “nuns” referred to are those of the “holy” city of Nippur, known only in the Old Babylonian period, thereby giving us a tool to locate the myth in history.⁶⁵ God Enlil spoke: “Moreover, let there be one-third among the people. Among the people one who bears and one who does not bear. Let there be a *pāsītu* demon among the people, let her seize the baby from the knees of the bearing (mother). Install nuns (*ugbabtu*), high-priestesses (*entu*), and priestesses (*egisītu*); let them be taboo and stop birthgiving”.⁶⁶ Mankind was reduced to one-third, according to plan, while in the Bible after the Flood: “God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1).⁶⁷

⁶¹ CT 38 1:13, DIŠ URU KA-šú *kajjāmana nēh* URU.BI *isaddirma* DU. The inauspicious city noises are *labū, damāmu, ramāmu, šasū* (8–11).

⁶² A.D. Kilmer, “The Mesopotamian concept of overpopulation and its solution as reflected in the mythology”, Or NS 41 (1972) 160–177. Discovered independently by J. Bottéro and W.L. Moran (Kilmer, 173, 175 f.). See also W.L. Moran, *Studies Erica Reiner* (1987) 254.

⁶³ Kilmer, 174 f.; M. L. West, *The East Face of Helicon* (1997) 480–2.

⁶⁴ W.G. Lambert, “The theology of death”, in: B. Alster, *Death in Mesopotamia* (1980) 53–66, esp. 57 f. “Thus the institution of death in Atra-*hasīs* is similar to that in the Garden of Eden. In each case man was first created without any limit being fixed on his life-span. As a result of misdeemeanour death was laid upon him”.

⁶⁵ M. Stol, “Altbabylonische Klosterfrauen”, *Studies J. Oelsner* (2000).

⁶⁶ W.G. Lambert, A.R. Millard, *Atra-*hasīs** (1969) 102 III vii 1–8. Cf. W. von Soden, TUAT III/4 (1994) 644.

⁶⁷ Tikva Frymer sees in this instruction a polemic against our myth; *Biblical Archaeologist* 40/4 (Dec. 1977) 150, 152 a. It reiterates the commandment of Genesis 1:28.

IX. Worries after Birth

Too many babies can be a burden for a family. Did the Babylonians have such feelings? The rather common personal name *Adi-anniam* could mean “Until this one”. The grammar of the name is not entirely clear.⁶⁸ The girl’s name *Adi-annītim* “Until this one (fem.)” is, however, convincing.⁶⁹ The Old Akkadian name *Imtīdam* “It has become too much for me” suggests the pain of childbirth or that it was time to stop having more children.⁷⁰ A name like *Masiām-ilī* may have had a more general meaning: “Enough for me, my god!”

⁶⁸ CAD A/1 119 b. Note *Ha-du-an-ni-a-am*, CT 47 25:24, S. Greengus, OBTI 74:2. The same man is named *A-du-an-ni-a* and *A-di-an-ni-a-am*, VAS 9 130:20 and 143:30. Note *A-di-an-nu-um*, VAS 13 32 rev. 11.

⁶⁹ TCL 1 23:1. Note the woman’s name *Ha-di-an-ni-[x]*, BM 22521, given in the printed Catalogue of the British Museum. J.J. Stamm, *Die akkadische Namengebung* (1939) 162, explains these names as a more general complaint, “Bis hierher (und nicht weiter)!”.

⁷⁰ Thus W.W. Hallo, *Studies Jacob Milgrom* (1995) 767.

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Chapter X LAMAŠTU, DAUGHTER OF ANU. A PROFILE

F.A.M. Wiggermann

Introduction and sources

Outstanding among all supernatural evils defined by the ancient Mesopotamians is the child snatching demoness called Dimme in Sumerian, and Lamaštu in Akkadian.¹ Whereas all other demons remain vague entities often operating in groups and hardly distinct from each other, Dimme/Lamaštu has become a definite personality, with a mythology, an iconography, and a recognizable pattern of destructive action. The fear she obviously inspired gave rise to a varied set of counter measures, involving incantation-rituals, herbs and stones, amulets, and the support of benevolent gods and spirits. These counter measures have left their traces in the archaeological record, the written and figurative sources from which a profile of the demoness can be reconstructed.

Often the name of a demon or god gives a valuable clue to his (original) nature, but both Dimme and Lamaštu have resisted interpretation. The reading of the Sumerian logogram ^dDÌM(ME) as Dim(m)e is indicated by graphemics: the ME which is usually (but not always) added to the base ^dDÌM does not change the meaning, and must be a phonetic indicator. The presumed gloss *g a b a š k u (YOS 11 90:4, see Tonietti 1979:308) has been collated and reinterpreted (A. Cavigneaux, ZA 85 [1995] 170). The word may be identical with the Sumerian word for “corpse”, “figurine”, but this is far from certain, and does not clarify the behaviour of the demoness. Lamaštu should be and could be a Semitic word, but the Akkadian lexicon does not offer a suitable root to derive it from. It remains possible that Lamaštu is an irregular (and specialized) by-form of *lamassu*, and consequently a loan from Sumerian l a m a ū, “(lower) goddess”, “figurine”. In fact the regular form *lamassu* occurs as a variant of *Lamaštu* in some SB sources (MSL 10 105:221, M.J. Geller, *Iraq* 42 [1980] 31:178' with var.); an unpublished Babylonian duplicate to *KAR* 44:13 has *Lamma-sa* instead of ^dDÌM.ME (Rm 717+, to be published by M.J. Geller). If this derivation holds true, “figurine” would be the common denominator of the Sumerian and Akkadian names. This tallies with the fact that ^(d)DÌM.ME denoting a supernatural being may be supplied with the determinative for wooden objects (*UET* 7 93 r. 18, OB Lex., gloss damaged; MSL 6 142:177, 143:194a, SB Lex., cf. *UHF* 433; see also Cavigneaux, ZA 85 [1995] 38f.).

The earliest evidence for rituals specifically against Dimme/Lamaštu stems from the early second millennium (Middle Bronze Age), when we find her described or addressed

¹ This chapter is not a literal translation of the original chapter in Dutch, but a completely rewritten and updated new version. A final study of the Lamaštu material must await W. Farber's re-edition of the texts, and a detailed assessment of the amulets. The canonical text (abbreviated Lam.) is cited after Farber's aforementioned reconstruction, and I owe him gratitude for letting me use his text before publication. The literature is cited according to Assyriological customs; items cited as AUTHOR DATE appear in the bibliography at the end of the chapter. An important review of all material is Farber 1980–83.

X. *Lamaštu, Daughter of Anu. A Profile*

in incantations written in the Sumerian,² Old Babylonian,³ and Old Assyrian⁴ languages. Although some of the material in these early incantations does not recur in the later tradition, there is little or no difference in content, and the image of the demoness appears fully formed, defined by fixed epithets and descriptive phrases. That these texts stem from an oral rather than a written tradition is shown by the many minor variations between essentially identical texts. Dimme occurs in Sumerian incantations of the late third millennium, but the contexts are fairly unspecific,⁵ and do not allow a reconstruction of her early history. It has been suggested that *Lamaštu* originates in Elam, not in Sumer, and that her history goes back at least to the Proto-Elamite Period, when a supposedly *Lamaštu*-like lion figure appears in Elamite art (van Dijk 1982:104ff., following E. Porada, JAOS 70 [1975] 223ff.).⁶ The relation between the Elamite lion figure and the *Lamaštu* of Mesopotamian iconography is extremely tenous, however, and since without this relation the theory of *Lamaštu*'s Elamite origin loses its main support, it must be rejected.⁷

The most complete source of information on *Lamaštu* is a first millennium text (SB) on three tablets, describing the progress of an incantation ritual (*agenda* and *dicenda*) against *Lamaštu*. The text comprises some 600 lines, of which only 30 are missing or incompletely preserved. On account of its standardized form this series is called the “canonical”; manuscripts have come to light from Nineveh (library of Ashurbanipal), Sultantepe (ancient Huzirina), Aššur, and southern Mesopotamia.⁸ The Middle Babylo-

² *TIM* 9 63 (cf. Tonietti 1979, with duplicates) contains a sequence of incantations in Sumerian and Akkadian (Left edge: *a-a-i-tu-^{ra}*); *YOS* 11 88; Cl. Wilcke, *AfO* 24 [1973] 14f. no. 5:8 (incipit only).

³ *BIN* 2 72 (von Soden 1954; collations Farber 1981:72; translation B. Foster, *Before the Muses* [1993] 130); BM 122691 (Farber 1981:60ff.), with duplicate Cavigneaux, al-Rawi 1994:85f. (Wasserman 1994; van der Toorn 1999; translation Foster, *Before the Muses* 132); BM 120022 (Farber 1981:60 h, translation *TUAT* II/2 257f.); CBS 10455 (Cavigneaux, al-Rawi 1994:88f.); *YOS* 11 19 (translation Foster, *Before the Muses* 131; in the first line read *nam-ra-^a[t]* instead of *bi-ša-at*); *YOS* 11 20; *YOS* 11 21 (against a *Lamaštu*-like demoness).

⁴ *BIN* 4 126 (von Soden 1956; collations Farber 1981:72; translation Foster, *Before the Muses* 59); Michel 1997.

⁵ SN-T42:9 *ki-si-ki-l-dim-me i min-na* (unpub.), “the seven Dimme damsels”; HS 1552:2 *dim gig-de eš ba-an-dib lú i-ta-g* (unpub., ref. courtesy M.J. Geller), “Dimme, in order to cause illness, passed through the house and touched the person”; HS 1600 i 7 *dim a-dingir-re-ne-kam lú i-ur-ur-e* (unpub., ref. courtesy M.J. Geller), “Dimme, who is the offspring of gods, sweeps over the person”. In *UHF*, an OB series of third millennium descent, Dimme occurs in lists besides Dimme-a and Dimme-LAGAB (Geller, *FAOS* 12 152).

⁶ For this figure see P. Amiet, *La Glyptique Mésopotamienne Archaique*² [1980] nos. 576–589.

⁷ Although the Elamite lion figure is in certain respects similar to *Lamaštu* (masters animals, travels by boat), she is not an evil demon. Iconography expresses the difference by the position of the jaws: those of *Lamaštu* are always aggressively opened, those of the Elamite figure are always peacefully shut. Rather than an evil demon the Elamite figure is some sort of cosmic deity (matched by a similar bull figure), who together with her peers carries the earth (Amiet, *GMA* nos. 577f.). The ibex-demon adduced by van Dijk 1982:106 (see now E. von der Osten-Sacken, *Der Ziegen-‘Dämon’* [1992]) is just another early master of the animals, and does not belong in the genealogy of *Lamaštu*. More relevant for the early history of *Lamaštu* is S. Dunham’s attempt to reconstruct a *Lamaštu*-type ritual from the MBA child burials at Tell al-Raqā‘i (Dunham 1993); an image of *Lamaštu* herself, however, is not present, unless she is represented by the dog figurine (we will return to the dog below in connection with the mythology of *Lamaštu*; in Mesopotamia proper clay dog figurines occur as grave gifts in III millennium Ur, see E. Stronmenger, *RIA* 3 [1957–1971] 606).

⁸ Large parts of the canonical series were published in 1891 by Th.G. Pinches, *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, Vol. IV² nos. 55, 56, and 58. A first edition, with some additional material, was made by Myhrmam 1902. Much new material (in part already available to F. Köcher for his unpublished edition of the 1960s) will be published by W. Farber in his forthcoming edition of all *Lamaštu* texts.

Introduction and Sources

nian (Late Bronze Age) forerunner from Ugarit has essentially the same incantations, but lacks a description of the ritual (Nougayrol 1969). One of the incantations (Inc. 10) of the canonical series appears occasionally on Middle Babylonian amulets; the first millennium amulets are inscribed with a similar incantation, or with a variety of others chosen partly from the Lamaštu series, and partly from elsewhere.

Outside of the canonical series directed specifically against the child snatching demoness, similar or identical incantation-rituals occur here and there in the context of other apotropaic or exorcistic manuals, for instance in a collection of rituals accompanying pregnancy and birth (Thureau-Dangin 1921 = *TCL* 6 49),⁹ and in one against (unnaturally) excited babies (Farber 1989a). A collection of alternative rituals stems from LB Uruk (*SBTU* 3 84), where manuscripts of the canonical series have not come to light (cf. Farber 1989b, and p. 240).¹⁰

Lamaštu is the only evil demon with an iconography. Textual clues enabled Thureau-Dangin to identify the demon on a group of figurative amulets, which by now has grown to 85 items (Thureau-Dangin 1921).¹¹ The amulets have received a fair amount of attention, especially from philological side,¹² but a full scale archaeological and art-historical study is still wanting. The corpus needs to be ridded of (possible) fakes (Nougayrol 1965, 1966, Farber 1989) and other types of amulets (no. 26), and related material, amulets¹³ as well as seals and wall reliefs, should be taken into consideration. Such a study cannot be undertaken here, but a provisional classification of the amulets is essential for the history of the demoness.

Towards a classification of the amulets

On the basis of provenance, paleography, choice of texts, and iconographical details the amulets can be distributed over four groups:

- Group A. In as far as provenanced, all amulets of this group stem from southern

⁹ With duplicate *SBTU* 3 118:121ff., cf. Farber 1989a § 39A, 1989b:229f., translation Foster, *Before the Muses* 864f.

¹⁰ For further Lamaštu-texts see Farber 1980–83 § 2, 1998, I.J. Finkel, *AuOr* 9 [1991] 92 (large tablet of Lamaštu incantations from the Hellenistic library of Tanittu-Bēl), *CTN* 4 104. An unknown Lamaštu incantation occurs in the catalogue VAT 13723+ iv 25f.: én u₄ - bi u₄ - kal a g - ga kin - na m / k a - i n i m - m a - d i m - m e - k a m n u - g i g; the canonical series is cited in the same text (iv 1f.). In the catalogue *KAR* 44:15 the series is adduced between those concerning women in childbirth and crying babies. Contrary to Nougayrol 1965:230², 1969 notes 7, 91, 92 (and B. Landsberger, *AfOB* 17 [1967] 52) *KUB* 37 61+ does not belong to the corpus (see now D. Schwemer, *Akkadische Rituale aus Hattuša* [1998] with an edition).

¹¹ The amulets are numbered as follows: 1–5 (Klengel 1960, 1961), 51–63 (Farber 1980–83:441), 64–67 (Wiggermann 1992:xxii), 68–70 (Farber 1989c), 71–78 (Farber 1997, 1998:63f.), 79 (Green 1997:152, 157 Fig. 19), 80–83 (*Auction Catalogue Sotheby's, Antiquities Erlenmeyer Collection, Part II, Thursday, June 12 1997*), 84 (*Auction Catalogue Christie's, Wensday, December 13, 1995*, ref. courtesy R. de Maaijer), 85 (LB, no number; Photo in: M.A. Beek, *De Wereld van de Bijbel. Tentoonstelling ter gelegenheid van het honderdvijftig jarig bestaan van het Nederlandsch Bijbelgenootschap, 1964–1965*, no. 18, Zutphen, Drukkerij Tesink, n. d.; below Fig. 1). A provisionally published amulet from Emar can be found in St. Dalle, B. Teissier, *Iraq* 54 [1992] 109 no. 8.

¹² Besides the works cited in the previous note see Frank 1908, 1941, Wiggermann 1983, Farber 1987.

¹³ Stone amulets (R.M. Boehmer, *BaM* 16 [1985] 101 no. 81, from Uruk, date uncertain); OB clay plaque with lion-demoness (?) brandishing dagger (F.M.Th. Böhl, *JEOL* 4 [1936] 266 Tf. 24h, A.R. Green, *BaM* 17 [1986] 172 no. 13); NA “stamp seal” representing Pazuzu, with incised Lamaštu on broken under-surface (S. Lloyd, *AnSt* 4 [1954] 104. Fig. 2). For possibly related foreign material see D.T. Potts, *Further Excavations at Tell Abraq. The 1990 Season* [1991] 93, Patzek 1988. For the Arslan Tash amulet see below note 79.

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sources (including Elam), with the exception of two from Aššur (nos. 11 and 48), and one from Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta (no. 72). The inscriptions (including the pseudo-inscriptions)¹⁴ are paleographically Old or Middle Babylonian; the attested incantations are from the Lamaštu series (Inc. no. 10; see note 37), or from the series Ḫulbazizi, "The Evil is Eradicated".¹⁵ The incantations of this collection are not specifically against Lamaštu, but against evil in general (*mimma lemnu*, "Any Evil"), which in the Akkadian versions is always addressed with masculine forms. Except on amulets featuring an image of Lamaštu, the same incantations occur on non-figurative objects, and on seals that date to the Kassite period.¹⁶ A (Late) Bronze Age date for the group is also indicated by the archaeological contexts of the provenanced pieces; the one exception (no. 73, from a LB grave) can be considered coincidental.¹⁷

Most pieces are cursorily executed, with lightly incised figures and signs (Figs. 1 and 2). Three amulets are well worked (nos. 18, Fig. 5; 39, 67), with the figures in deep relief. Unless holding something the demoness is depicted with outstretched arms and opened hands, the fingers widely spread. She has talons for feet, which may be cursorily executed (no. 22), or altogether omitted (nos. 12, 13, 40, 65, 69). Female characteristics are usually not expressed, but there seem to be pudenda on nos. 25 and 74, and breasts on no. 67. Twice the figure is dressed (nos. 40, 74). The most variable part of the demoness is the head, to which we will return below (Fig. 3); sometimes she is supplied with a tail (Fig. 3).

Scattered in the field are the objects that mark the figure as Lamaštu: practically always a comb and a spindle (never held in the hands), often a puppy and a piglet, rarely a scorpion, a snake, a donkey's leg, and other objects,¹⁸ such as the toggle pin which

¹⁴ The many "PAP", "GAG" and "DINGIR" like signs show the pseudo-inscriptions to be imitating Babylonian models; such inscriptions occur on provenanced (nos. 11, 16, 17, 21, 28, 42, 48, 57, 73, 74) and unprovenanced (51, 71, 85) pieces, as well as occasionally on Middle Babylonian (G. Loud, *Megiddo II* [1948] Pl. 160/6) and later (B. Parker, *Iraq* 24 [1962] Pl. XII/1) seals. The inscription on no. 66 from LBA Tchoga Zanbil is apparently copied from an OB schooltablet (Syllable Alphabet B 12–14, M.S. Ciğ, B. Landsberger, *Zwei Altbabylonische Schulbücher aus Nippur* [1959] 66). Pseudo-inscriptions imitating Assyrian paleographic models are very rare: no. 47 (apparently from Sam'al; see Farber, *N.A.B.U.* 1998/91, W. Schramm, *OrNS* 52 [1983] 45ff., with an interpretation), no. 52 (unprovenanced).

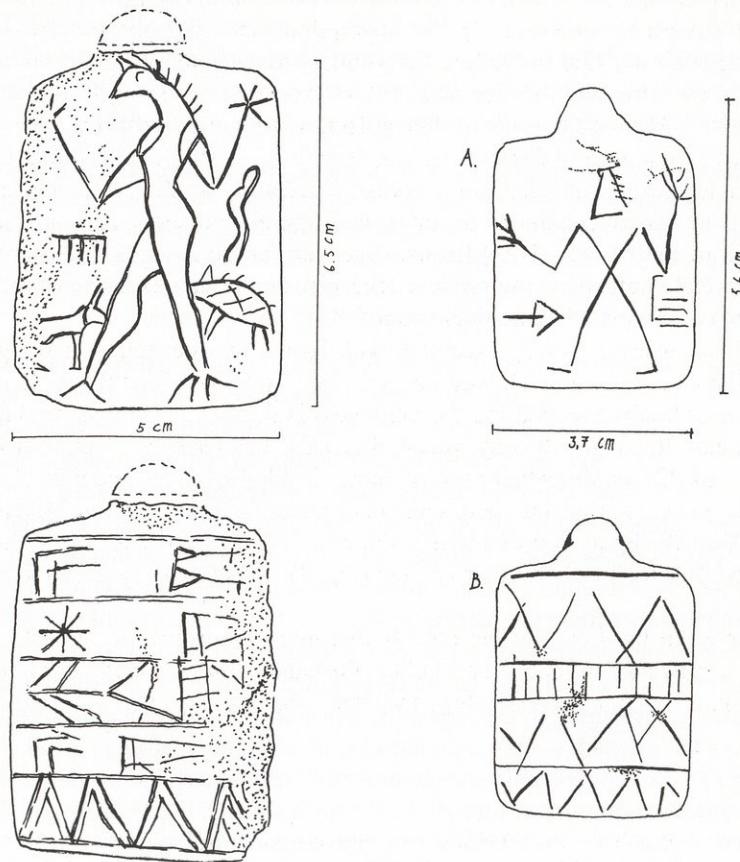
¹⁵ The series is to be edited by I.J. Finkel; see provisionally E. Ebeling, *ArOr* 21 [1953] 357ff., E. von Weiher, *SBTU* 2 105ff., A. Cavigneaux, B.K. Ismail, *BaM* 21 [1990] 44ff.

¹⁶ The incantation *zi-zi-ig* (Ḫulbazizi no. 36ff., amulets nos. 13, 78, 82) occurs on D.M. Matthews, *Principles of Composition in Near Eastern Glyptic of the Later Second Millennium B.C.* [1991] nos. 65, 70, 144, 168, the incantations *sil₆-lá lú-érim-ma* (Ḫulbazizi no. 2, amulet no. 15) on *ibid.* no. 143. Its is certainly no coincidence that two of the three first appearances of the fish-sage (*apkallu*) in Mesopotamian iconography (*ibid.* 180) occur on seals with these incantations (*ibid.* nos. 143, 144, and see below); the themes of the other seals do not have an obvious relation to magic. The incantation concerning the "seven heavens, seven earths" (Cavigneaux, al-Rawi 1994:73ff., W. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* [1998] 208ff., 366f.) is another Ḫulbazizi incantation (*SBTU* 2 83:15f.), adapted for use against various evils, among them Lamaštu (*TIM* 9 63, see Tonietti 1979). It occurs regularly on (non-figurative) stone amulets, but also on clay tablets, some of which are amulets too (*YOS* 11 66 has a hole for suspension), rather than the products of ancient scholarship. A further Ḫulbazizi incantation (*ša maldi eršija*) is found on first millennium amulets (see below not 30).

¹⁷ Such coincidences are less uncommon than they may seem. At Tell Sabi Abyad, for instance, the expedition of the RMO Leyden found Halaf Pottery and third/second millennium seals and sealings in good Late Bronze Age contexts.

¹⁸ Some of the other objects are discussed below in connection with amulet no. 18 (Fig. 5).

Towards a Classification of the Amulets



Figs. 1 and 2. Bronze Age amulets nos. 85 (left) and 22 (right) belonging to Group A. *Lamaštu* is shown in a stance which is typical for this group, with in the field a comb, a spindle, a dog, a pig, and the lower leg of a donkey; on the reverse a pseudo-inscription and magical triangles. (Drawn from the original objects by F. Wiggermann).

helps to date the group to the Bronze Age.¹⁹ Sometimes *Lamaštu* holds a dagger (nos. 25, 79), or a dagger in one hand, and a snake in the other (nos. 28, 66).²⁰

Limited to this group are the triangles, which may occur in a square surrounding the demoness (nos. 12, 17), or as fill on either side of the amulet, sometimes replacing an inscription (nos. 22, 25, 43; Figs. 1, 2). The triangles (often in groups of seven) probably have a magical meaning, at which we can make an educated guess. Starting point are the two elaborate pieces of this group (nos. 18, 67), on which instead by triangles the demoness is squared in by *zipa*-formulas ("be conjured by . . ."). During

¹⁹ After the Bronze Age the toggle pin is replaced by the fibula, which appears on amulets of groups C and D, see Wiggermann 1983:113⁷⁶, Farber 1987:96ff., H. Klein, ZA 73 [1983] 255ff.

²⁰ On the OB clay plaque (note 13) the figure seems to have breasts, and holds a dagger in her right hand, and a quadruped in her left. These details distinguish the figure from the contemporary lion-demon.

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the performance of an exorcistic ritual the utterance of these formulas is accompanied by drawing a circle of flour around (a figure of) the evil to be exorcized. The purpose of the *z i p a*-formulas is to bring the evil force under obligation of the addressed gods; the circle visualizes the boundary it is not to transgress,²¹ and it is more than likely that the triangles replacing the spoken word are a rendering of this circle.

The triangles on the inscription side of the amulets are probably related to the cancellation crosses that are sometimes encountered on OB clay tablets with incantations,²² and on OB and later amulets.²³ As is shown by the inscriptions on the later amulets, these crosses denote the presence of gods.²⁴ The triangles replacing an inscription can be viewed as variants of the pseudo-inscriptions that adorn so many amulets of this group; they could well be the visual counter-part of the abacadabra incantations that are common in the magical corpus.

– Group B. All provenanced items in this group originate in Assyria: Aššur (no. 9), Nineveh (no. 10), and Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta (unpublished, see K. Bastert, R. Dittmann, *AoF* 22 [1995] 29⁵⁸). The ones from Aššur and Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta are dated to the Late Bronze Age,²⁵ the one from Nineveh occurs on a stone mould together with a variety of trinkets that cannot be closely dated, but are consistent with a date in the same period. The *Lamaštu* of this group differs markedly from the one of group A; it is the fully developed canonical one, with heavy breasts, a lion's head, and donkey's ears. One detail, however, distinguishes this *Lamaštu* from that of groups C and D: she always holds comb and spindle in her hands, the later (and earlier) *Lamaštu*'s never do (Fig. 4). On the basis of this observation a few items of dubious date and origin can be added to the group: no. 44, and probably no. 68 (Fig. 4, head different). The attribution of no. 44 to this group is confirmed by paleography, especially by the deviant form of ÉN (written “BAR/MAŠ+AN”), which is MA and occurs on other amulets of this period (nos. 27, and 9 writing AN+BAR).²⁶ The only incantation attested is the one from the *Lamaštu*-series (Inc. no. 10) that was current already in Group A (nos. 9, 44; cf. also nos. 27, and 35); the Sumerian *Hulbazizi* incantations from this time on disappear.

Thus, in Late Bronze Age Assyria, there were two images of *Lamaštu* current: the sketchy one without female characteristics of group A (nos. 11, 48, 72), and the modern one of group B. It has been proposed (Farber 1980–83:444, E.A. Braun-Holzinger, *RLA* 7 [1987] 97) to recognize yet a third *Lamaštu* figure (Fig. 4, no. 34) on amulets inscribed with *Lamaštu* incantations, and originating from the same place and period. The figure in question, however, has a long and well known history as an associate of Adad, Nergal, or Ninurta, and has nothing to do with *Lamaštu*. Since elsewhere it appears in apotropaic functions, it is probably as such that it appears on the *Lamaštu* amulets (Wiggermann 1992:185). On amulets of groups C and D it is replaced in this function by Pazuzu, an apotropaic figure that did not yet exist in the Bronze Age (Wiggermann forthc.).

²¹ See provisionally K. van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia* [1985] 51f., Lam. III 106ff.

²² *TIME* 9 68, *YOS* 11 66 (cf. Cavigneaux, al-Rawi 1994:79¹³; no empty spaces on this amulet), *YOS* 11 17.

²³ N. Wassermann, *RA* 88 [1994] 54 (OB); S.M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* [1994] 175ff. (SB, on clay amulets). See also Dalley, Teissier, *Iraq* 54, 109:8 (MB).

²⁴ The SB examples are uninscribed (rarely), or contain a prayer for the protection of the house.

²⁵ The finds from Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta belong in the Late Bronze Age; for the date of the Aššur piece see O. Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries in the City of Assur*, Part I [1985] 120, 125 (M 14:35).

²⁶ The same spelling (“BAR/MAŠ+AN”), occurs on no. 24, which seems to be a later Assyrian amulet, with a more developed iconography.

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That the exorcistic rituals involving this type of amulets enjoyed a certain popularity is shown by the mass production implied by the existence of a mould (no. 10). The actual metal amulets have not come to light.²⁷

Since they are fairly well known, and of less importance for the history of *Lamaštu*, the next two groups will not be treated in detail here. Group C comprises the Assyrian amulets of the Iron Age, Group D the Babylonian ones. The amulets of Group C (including Fig. 6) are related in style (and subject matter) to other products of Neo-Assyrian art, especially the palace reliefs, which eventually will allow a narrower dating. The style of the Babylonian amulets (nos. 6, 7, 8, 20², 33, 49, 53, 54, 61, 77, 80², 84) is sometimes comparable to that of the Assyrian ones (no. 77), and sometimes quite different, with less sturdy figures and a *Lamaštu* that could be called fair, if it were not for her head (no. 61). The most common incantation on amulets of both groups is an Akkadian one from the series *Hulbazizi*,²⁸ which just as the other incantations of this series is not specifically against *Lamaštu*. Further incantations stem from the *Lamaštu* series, or concern the apotropaic demon *Pazuzu* (19, 63).²⁹

A themically and stylistically related group of Iron Age amulets is conveniently treated in association with the *Lamaštu* amulets groups C and D. A demon to be exorcised is absent on these amulets, and all themes are protective or apotropaic. The two main actors are the protective figures *Big-Day* (*Ugallu*) and *Lulal* (Fig. 8), often assisted by *Pazuzu*, and once by a series of animal-headed spirits; divine supervision is denoted by the presence of the symbols of the main gods. The same iconographic elements recur on the *Lamaštu* amulets, and they will receive proper attention below in connection with the exorcistic rituals. If the amulet bears a text, it is either the same general *Hulbazizi* incantation as on the *Lamaštu* amulets,³⁰ or, on an amulet featuring *Pazuzu*, the self-introductory statement of this protective demon: "I am *Pazuzu*, the son of *Hanbu* ...".³¹

The scope of this type of amulets can be deduced from the scope of the figurative and inscriptional elements: the *Ugallu* and *Lulal* are very general protective figures,³² *Pazuzu* is occupied mainly, but not exclusively, with *Lamaštu*,³³ and the *Hulbazizi* incantation is directed against everything scary that hides below one's bed at night. Thus these amulets are not specifically against *Lamaštu*, but against various evils, including *Lamaštu*.³⁴

²⁷ The amulet of the mould shows *Lamaštu* standing on a boat, a common element on amulets of groups C and D, which here appears for the first time (also on no. 68; on donkey: no. 24).

²⁸ The incantation *ša maldi eršija* (*Hulbazizi* no. 60); see Wilhelm 1979, and the translation below p. 246.

²⁹ A few peripheral amulets are not discussed here: those from Sam'al (nos. 31, 46, 47, the former two with alphabetic inscriptions), one from Byblos (no. 60, with a deviant *Lamaštu* holding a quadruped), one from Tell Burate in the Judean Shephelah (no. 76, deviant *Lamaštu* with tail). Deviant members of groups A are nos. 14 and 24 (see note 37). The NB amulet from Suju (Cavigneaux, Ismail, *BaM* 21 [1990] 406f.) has an unusual concentration of incantations (one from the *Lamaštu* series, and four from *Hulbazizi*, including *ša maldi eršija*).

³⁰ The incantation *ša maldi eršija* occurs on the amulets Ass 4850 (Klengel 1960 no. 40c) and MAH 19228 (E. Sollberger, *Bulletin mensuel des musées et collections de la ville de Genève* 8/2 [1951] 2).

³¹ H.W.F. Saggs, *AfO* 19 [1960] 124ff. (= Klengel 1960 no. 40b).

³² Employed against a variety of evils in the ritual "To prevent Evil from Entering Someone's House" (Wiggermann 1992:7, 1ff.).

³³ Some of the evils against which *Pazuzu* is employed are enumerated in the *Pazuzu* ritual (Borger 1987:24, 97ff.; see also W.G. Lambert, *FuB* 12 [1970] 46f.: "Any Evil").

³⁴ All amulets of this group can be found together in A. Green, *BaM* 17 [1986] nos. 106–109, 111, 134 (Fig. 8). For other occurrences of the *Ugallu* and *Lulal* on (presumably) apotropaic objects see E.A. Braun-Holzinger, *Figürliche Bronzen aus Mesopotamien* [1984] 84f., Wiggermann 1992:173, 217, 220.

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An inspired variant of this more general type of amulets occurs in LB Uruk.³⁵ The upper register shows two *Ugallu*'s brandishing maces in order to keep intruding evil at a distance. The lower register visualizes the theme of the *Hulbazizi* incantation: the scared sufferer is sitting straight up in his bed, from under which crawls a little dragon, attacked by someone with a spear. The incantation on the other side is unreadable, at least on the published photograph.

The classification of the amulets reveals three major points: in the first place that typology and chronology are firmly connected, in the second place that the Bronze Age *Lamaštu* does not yet have a definite image, and in the third place that the canonical *Lamaštu* was developed on the threshold of the Iron Age in the Middle Assyrian north. The Middle Assyrian Empire is in many ways transitional between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, and it is during this period that Middle Assyrian artists created the compositional and iconographic canons that lie at the root of later Neo-Assyrian art.³⁶ Viewed in this perspective the Assyrian origin of *Lamaštu*'s canonical image³⁷ becomes acceptable, although the possibility remains that future finds from Babylonia will change the picture.

In comparision to other demons *Lamaštu*'s presence in the sources, written as well as figurative, is overwhelming. Her singular position is confirmed and defined by native demonology, to which we will now turn our attention.

Demonology and pathogenic activities³⁸

Lamaštu's specialty is killing babies. In order to understand the demonic, not to say satanic quality of her nature, the place of man in the cosmic order must be briefly reviewed. According to Mesopotamian mythology man was created to serve the gods, to build their temples, to feed and cloth them. Satisfactory service was rewarded with prosperity and a (long) life, failure (sin) was punished with adversity, disease, and untimely death. In the dominant theistic view of the universe (van Binsbergen, Wiggermann 1999) demons and ghosts implement divine rule. To be sure, demons tend to operate on their own, but they could be called to order as soon as the innocent human sufferer brings their insubordination to the attention of the gods. Babies are not yet employed in the service of the gods, and cannot yet have failed at it (sinned); in the absence of original sin, their innocence is exemplary. *Lamaštu*'s specialty runs squarely against the divinely ordained order: by killing off innocent beings she interferes with the use of demonic punishment as an instrument of divine rule, by preventing potentially useful humans from reaching

³⁵ A. Becker, *Uruk. Kleinfunde I. Stein* [1993] 5 no. 7. A row of six similar (and slightly deviant) *ugallu*'s execute the orders of the gods named in the incantation on a NA amulet (Farber 1989:103ff.).

³⁶ For a review see D. Stein, *Mittelassyrische Kunstperiode*, *RIA* 9 299–308.

³⁷ The only element added to her image in the Iron Age is the “*Knielau*” stance, to which we will return below. The incantation “*Lamaštu, daughter of Anu, is her first name*” occurs only on amulets of the Iron Age (nos. 5, 6, 16; Lam. Inc. 1), and seems to replace the incantation “*Lamaštu, daughter of Anu, named by the gods*” (Lam. Inc. 10; once on a badly broken Iron Age amulet no. 55) of the Bronze Age series (nos. 18, 24, 32, 67; on amulets with apotropaic *Anzû*: nos. 27, 34², 35²).

³⁸ For general background on the subjects discussed in this paragraph see W.G. Lambert (1825ff., *Myth and Mythmaking*), F.A.M. Wiggermann (1857ff., *Theologies, Priests, and Worship*), J. Scurlock (1883ff., *Death and the After-life*), W. Farber (1895ff., *Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination*), R.D. Biggs (1911ff., *Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*) in J.M. Sasson ed., *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* [1995].

maturity she overrules the cosmic order in which the gods need man just as much as he needs them. Lamaštu must be thoroughly evil, the counterpart of exemplary innocence.³⁹

It is against this general cosmic background that the evidence for Lamaštu's position must be judged. Lamaštu is a daughter of Anu, the god of heaven,⁴⁰ and the sister of Inanna/Ištar and as such a high-ranking goddess. The incantations repeatedly stress her divinity,⁴¹ which is exceptional for demons. She is "singular" (*ištiat*) among the gods, however, and more like an evil spirit (*utukkat*); then, on account of her "bad disposition" (*tēmu la damqu*) and her "disrespectful/insubordinate proposal" (*malku parru'ul/saḥ'ū*), Anu expels her from heaven.⁴² The occasion for this irreversible measure was her request to have human flesh (babies) for dinner.⁴³

Lamaštu in this view is something unplanned, the occasional bad apple that is thrown out. Her presence on earth is only the consequence of her expulsion from heaven, not part of the divinely ordained cosmos, and it is for this reason that man can call upon the gods for help against her, which in fact he does in the exorcistic rituals. A different view is presented by the Arta-hasis myth, which attempts a grand scheme for human history, and comes up with a version of original sin. In this myth man is created from clay mixed with the blood of an executed rebel god, whose nature continues in the human taste for unruly behaviour. The noise gets so bad that Enlil is disturbed in his sleep, which forces him to radical measures, a flood that all but wipes out mankind. After the flood, the human cosmos is reorganized, on a less liberal basis in order to prevent a repetition of the events which led to the flood. To keep population growth in check certain types of women are not allowed to bear children, and *Pašittu*, the "Exterminator" (a name of Lamaštu), is called up to "snatch the baby from the lap of her who bore it".⁴⁴ This Lamaštu is part of the divine order, she kills off innocent beings because they are overcomplete. Obviously it is not possible to solicit the help of the

³⁹ Innocent beings (women, servants, children) can become the victims of justified divine punishment only if they are viewed as extensions of their owner, at whose sins the punishment is directed. This derived construction occurs not only in the magical corpus (Wiggermann 1992:93 ad *KAR* 74; *SBTU* 3 84:37ff. involving Lamaštu), but also in the interpretation of history, when the nation is seen to suffer on account of an impious king. A related principle occurs in the laws, for instance in *CH* § 230, where an innocent child is put to death in order to punish his failing father.

⁴⁰ *BIN* 2 72:1, and *passim* the epithet *d u m u - a n - n a* (Farber 1998). Sometimes Enlil or Enki/Ea is her father (Farber 1980–83:439). In the godlists Lamaštu is rare: *SLT* 122 v 18, dupl. 124 vii 22 (OB, context unrevealing), *An* = *Anu ša amēli* 153 (SB, followed by the other Dimme demons *Labašu*, *Ahhāzu*, *Bibitu*, *Lilitu*).

⁴¹ E.g. *YOS* 11 20:3, *BIN* 4 126:1, Michel 1997:59f., 2, all with *ilat*, "she is a goddess"; see also note 185.

⁴² Quotations from *BIN* 4 126 (OA). For the later texts see *Lam. I* 112f., II 141ff., Thureau-Dangin 1921:16, 21ff. and duplicates.

⁴³ *Lam. I* 187ff., II 92ff.

⁴⁴ W.G. Lambert, A.R. Millard, Atra-Hasīs. *The Babylonian Story of the Flood* [1969] 102 vi 3f. *Pašittu* (var. *pišittu*, *Emar* VI. 3 no. 282:21), more explicitly *marty pašittu*, "exterminating bile" (cf. *BAM* 6 578 ii 39, in an incantation against bile), denotes the poison (*marty* = *imtu*) with which Lamaštu kills her victims, as well as a related but independent (note *CT* 4 3:12, 28 and duplicates, OB Sumerian inc.) demonic disease, perhaps biliary colic (F. Köcher, in C. Habrich et al eds., *Medizinische Diagnostik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* [1978] 35 f.⁵⁹), or a form of jaundice (see note 151). The reading of the Sumerian word for *Pašittu*, *zú-mu-š-i-kú-a*, is ascertained by an OB syllabic spelling (*zu-mu-še-ga*, *Iraq* 55 [1993] 102:18f.), and by a RS variant (W) of *Hh XVI* (KA-mu-še-ga-na, *MSL* 10 44:179). In *UET* 7 93:23f. (OB) *pašittu* is equated with Sumerian *līl-līl-ú s-s-a* and *KA-ba-i-n-ši-ma-k-u*, probably a corruption. The meaning of the Sumerian word can only be "consumed by the worm" (translated *ana tultim maruš* in *Iraq* 55 102:19, cf. *zú-mu-š = tultu*), which should denote the same symptoms; the RS recension of *Hh XVI* translates *ma-na-šim-te* (*MSL* 10 44:179, 111:114, unclear). For an incantation against *zú-mu-š-* see *YOS* 11 36.

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gods against a demoness that operates on divine assignment; but since in fact the gods do help against her, this legalized version of *Lamaštu* must represent a minority view, or at least not the one that informs the exorcistic rituals.

Although the evidence for the third millennium history of *Lamaštu* is limited, there are clear indications that in origin she was not the individual mythological figure of later tradition. In the Ur III period her Sumerian name, *Dimme*, is not spelled with the divine determinative, even though she is called the “offspring of gods”. A text of the same period reveals the early existence of the “seven *Dimme* damsels” (note 5), a feature which persists through time,⁴⁵ and adheres to the individualized *Lamaštu* in the form of her seven names.⁴⁶ Other early demons, specifically the *u d u g* and the *a s a g*, usually operate in vaguely defined groups of seven, and the *Dimme* damsels probably are just such a group, from which the later individual *Dimme* was singled out. The same happens to *A s a g*, who gets to play the part of the individualized evil demon “Disorder” in the Sumerian myth *Lugal-e*.⁴⁷

After her expulsion from heaven, the deity becomes a demon, a sister of the seven evil *utukku*-spirits, the “gods of the street”.⁴⁸ The defining characteristic of all evil spirits, demons as well as ghosts (souls of dead people) is that, unlike the gods, they do not have a cult, that they do not have temples where they are fed and clothed by their human servants. Rooflessly they roam the earth, and take by force what they do not get by right; mankind is useless to them, and therefore preyed on without restraint. Man counts on the gods for help against these illegal forces, but also places his hope in their selfish nature: instead of preying on him the demons may choose to take refuge with their father *Enlil*,⁴⁹ who apparently runs a home for the homeless members of the spiritual cosmos. The incantation concerning the “seven heavens and seven earths” (note 16) contains a clear expression of this exorcistic theme:⁵⁰ “as long as the man, the son of his god, is not well, may you (the demon) not eat food, may you not drink water, may you not sit on a chair, may you not lie in a bed . . . , may your hand not reach out to the table of your father *Enlil*”.⁵¹

⁴⁵ In *CT* 16 13 iii 21f. (*UH* V) the “seven evil *Dimme/Lamaštu*” (between other groups of sevenfold demons) are followed by a reference to the “seven heavens and seven earths”, which recur in an incantation against *Lamaštu* (and other sevenfold demons), see note 16. Her activities can be described as sevenfold (*BIN* 2 72:9, OB), as well as the measures taken against her (*BM* 120022:32f., *SBTU* 3 84:37ff., OB and SB). That the original *Dimme* is a type rather than an individual appears from the fact that with various additions (- *a*/LAGAB/*t a b/g i₄*) the names of various individual demons result (see the dictionaries for *Labašu*, *Ahhāzu*, *Bibītu*, and *Lifītu*). These are referred to as “all *Lamaštu*’s” (DIM.ME *gab-bi*) in a first millennium prescription (stones and plants) against various evils (*CT* 14 16, *BM* 93084). *DIM.ME* becomes a noun meaning “*Lamaštu*-type being” when it is used in the plural (A.R. George, *RA* 85 [1991] 148:156b, Commentary to *TDP* I; see also Lambert, *NABU* 1992/129:1), a usage that is attested also for the names of gods, e.g. in *KAR* 142 (seven “*Enlils*”, “*Ninurta*’s” etc.).

⁴⁶ Attested from the early second millennium onwards (*TIME* 9 63, Sumerian inc.), see Tonietti 1979:314ff.

⁴⁷ See J.J.A. van Dijk, *RIA* 7 [1987] 134ff., art. *Lugal-e*. An individualized cosmic version of the *ki-si-ki-lí-lá* lives in the trunk of the *yluppu* tree, where she represents the “air” (*líl*) in between Heaven (*Anzû* in the crown) and Earth (the snake at the roots), cf. V. Haas, *Geschichte der Hethitischen Religion* [1994] 145f. ad *EG* XII.

⁴⁸ See Tonietti 1979 315:3 (one of *Lamaštu*’s seven names).

⁴⁹ For the demonic quality of *Enlil* see provisionally van Binsbergen, Wiggermann 1999:26. A clear signal of *Enlil*’s quasi-demonic disinterest in man is the fact that the noise which leads him to ordain a flood recurs in *Enūma Eliš* as the motif of the primordial gods of chaos to act against the younger generation of cosmic gods.

⁵⁰ Also attested in the *Lamaštu* incantation *YOS* 11 88:34ff. and in *CT* 16 13:55ff. (*UH* V).

⁵¹ This passage lists the basic ingredients of a cult (food and shelter), and is the closest native formulation of the opinion expressed here, that demons do not have one.

Demonology and Pathogenic Activities

Lamaštu stands out among the demons not only because of the severity of her destructive operations, but also because she, and she alone, is in origin fully divine. The *utukku* and their like are the “the brood of Heaven and Earth”,⁵² a by-product of creation without fixed place in the universe.⁵³ Ghosts (*etemmu*) are the souls of dead people, which would normally be taken care of and fed in the context of the domestic cult; only those that remain hungry or otherwise dissatisfied exhibit demonic behaviour and become carriers of disorder and disease.⁵⁴ Although in theory the evils can be distinguished according to descent, their choice of victims and aggressive arsenal is fairly unspecific, so that in practice there is much overlap between the members of the various classes, and a large pool of shared epithets and motifs.⁵⁵

An example of overlapping traits is supplied by Lamaštu and *Lilītu*. *Lilītu* (also *Ardat Lilī*), the “Spectre(-Damsel)”,⁵⁶ and her male counterpart *Lilū*, “Spectre”, form a sub-class of dissatisfied ghosts, the souls of those who died in a state of virginity and never knew the pleasures of love-making and family life.⁵⁷ Trying to make up for their unsatisfactory lives, they visit the living at night, and select a mate: *Lilītu* is a succuba, and *Lilū* an incubus.⁵⁸ Although *Lilītu*’s interest in babies is explicit in an OB incantation,⁵⁹ it is so far only her male counterpart who is attested in the medical corpus as a threat for the newly born.⁶⁰ According to an OB Sumerian prayer to the goddess of healing, Lamaštu prefers the cover of the night for her operations,⁶¹ just like the *lil-* spirits,⁶² so that the two different demonic types can be seen to converge in their timing (night) and victims (babies, but not exclusively). The observed convergence is made explicit in a SB explanatory god list, in which “Lamaštu of the night” (^dDÌ m - m e - ġ i₆) is equated with *Lilītu* (*An = Anu ša amēli* 157).⁶³ The equation is based on a popular etymology, which derives *Lilītu* from Semitic **yl*, “night”, instead of from Sumerian

⁵² UHF 247, and passim. The biographies of the various demons are not yet written, but see provisionally Frank 1908:14ff.

⁵³ For the relation between the primordial past and the demonic present see Wiggermann 1996:210ff.

⁵⁴ Although Lamaštu stands out among the demons, she does not become cosmic Evil (Satan) in a dualistic universe founded on the antimony of Good and Evil; for the development of these ideas see N. Forsyth, *The Old Enemy. Statan and the Combat Myth* [1987].

⁵⁵ The description of “Fire” (fever) for instance shows similarities to that of Lamaštu; it descends from Heaven, attacks people and animals, and “extirpates [the baby] from its breast” (W.G. Lambert, *AfO* 23 [1970] 44, see also *STT* 136 iii 32’ff. with comparable statements concerning *išat pē muttaripštu*, the “flying fire of (burning) chaff”). The disease *antašubba* (a form of epilepsy), literally “Fallen-down-from-Heaven” (*migit šamē*), is, like Lamaštu, surnamed “Daughter of Anu” (*CT* 14 16 BM 93084:21, listed separate from ^dDIM.ME in the same text 22).

⁵⁶ Both Akkadian terms translate Sumerian *ki-si-kil-líl-lá*, which is comparable to *ki-si-kil-dímm-e* (note 5) and probably in origin not a genitive construction (cf. the loanword *kiskililu*, and Lackenbacher 1971 ii 3), although occasionally construed as such (*EG* XII 44/142). Akkadian *Ardat Lilī* literally means “*Lilū*’s girl”, but solely on this basis it cannot be concluded that the term denotes the souls of young women who by life were chosen by a *lilū*, and thereby missed out on a real husband (Scurlock 1991:181¹⁹²).

⁵⁷ For the basic texts see Farber 1989, M.J. Geller, *AfO* 35 [1988] 7ff., Lackenbacher 1971.

⁵⁸ The demoness is discussed by W. Farber, *RIA* 7 [1987] 23f., W. Fauth, *Lilītu und die Eulen von Pylos*, 53–64 in J. Tischler ed., *Serta Indogermanica* (Fs. G. Neumann) [1982], Scurlock 1991:153ff., M. Stol, *Epilepsy in Babylonia* [1993] 46ff., Ribichini 1978. For English translations of the basic texts see Foster, *Before the Muses* 870ff., Scurlock 1991:153ff.

⁵⁹ *YOS* 11 92:15f., Farber 1989:14ff. (edition): “she did not kiss the soft lips of a baby”.

⁶⁰ Passage cited by Stol, *Epilepsy* (note 58) 48, Volk 1999, 4⁺²⁰, Farber *RIA* 7 23 § 2.

⁶¹ Ninisina A. r. 47, cf. W.H.Ph. Römer, *AOAT* 1 [1969] 285: “Dimme and Dimme-a, who enter at night (*ku4 - ra ġ i₆ - ù - na*)”.

⁶² Lam. I 114f., cf. Farber *RIA* 7 23 § 2.

⁶³ Perhaps related is the Anatolian DINGIR(-*lim*) *GI₆(-ši)*, “Deity of the Night”, a demonic figure only partly

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līl, “wind, spirit, spectre”, the true etymon.⁶⁴ When she “picks” (*hiāru*) the nation in order to select a victim, Lamaštu’s “fury” (*uzzu*) is compared to that of a *lilū*; the verb *hiāru* usually means “to select a mate”, and typically describes the activities of demons of the “spectre”-class.⁶⁵ Lamaštu is included in this class when she is chased off by the apotropaic demon Pazuzu, whom the accompanying incantations call “king of the evil *lilū*-demons”.⁶⁶ In a late variant version of the old incantation concerned with her names, Lamaštu is actually identified as *Ardat Līlī*.⁶⁷

In later Aramaic⁶⁸ and Jewish sources the Mesopotamian *Lilītu* survives as Lilith,⁶⁹ who is both a succuba and a child snatching demoness. She appears under the form of a woman with long hair and wings; men sleeping alone are in danger of being seized by her,⁷⁰ and she was Adam’s wife before Eve.⁷¹ In Aramaic and Syrian incantations she is the one who carries off, assaults, and strangles children,⁷² in later Jewish magic she enters the house of the woman in childbirth, to “kill and take away her son, to drink his blood, to suck the marrow of his bones and to eat his flesh”.⁷³

Hellenistic and later sources from Palestine, Babylonia, Ethiopia, and Greece (medieval) preserve a curious etiological historiola concerning the apotropaic measures to be taken against a baby-snatching demon(ess) variously called “Iron” (Sideros, Werzelya) in the Aramaic and Ethiopian versions, and Gyllou in the Greek one.⁷⁴ The “childloving” (*paidophilōtēra*) Gyllou

anthropomorphic (partly woman, partly wolf or lion, wings; attribute animal lion or wolf) and receiving cultic attention in Šamuha, Parnašša, and Lahurama, see A. Ünal, The Nature and Iconographical Traits of “Goddess of Darkness”, 639–644 in M.J. Mellink et al. eds., *Aspects of Art and Iconography. Anatolia and its Neighbors* (Fs. N. Özgüç) [1993]. The meaning of *Arad Līlī*’s epithet *u₄-da-kar-ra* (UHF 223 and passim) is in doubt (A. Üngnad, *AfO* 14 [1941–44] 267: “Lichtraüberin”, Wiggermann 1983:100⁷: “Girl, who has been snatched away from the light”). A late Akkadian translation has *ardat ša U₄-ma ihišu*, “Girl, whom the storm-demon chose” (Geller, *AfO* 35 7f. ad 1, differently Farber 1989e), which, however, would require *u₄-dē-* in Sumerian, instead of consequent *u₄-da-*. Ignoring the late (and not necessarily true) Akkadian translation, and in accordance with grammar and demonology, I would prefer: “(Girl), who missed out on (her) day”.

⁶⁴ Discussed by Th. Jacobsen 1989.

⁶⁵ *YOS* 11 19:8f. For the phrase *ina uzzu ša līlī* see also B. Groneberg, *Lob der Ištar. Gebet und Ritual an die altbabylonische Venusgöttin* [1997] 26 ii 18 with comments.

⁶⁶ K. Frank, *RA* 7 [1909] 25:2f., W.G. Lambert, *FuB* 12 [1970] 41ff., Text F (and duplicates), and note 189.

⁶⁷ *STT* 144:19/ff., duplicated by the text on a clay cylinder from a Hellinistic grave in Ugarit, Nouayrol 1969:404 D, *RA* 61 [1967] 95. On the amulets Lamaštu is never winged, once in an incantation she is adhortated to “fly away with the birds of the sky” (*Lam.* I 8, cf. forerunner Tonietti 1979:305, 23). The only time she is “supplied with wings” (*Lam.* I 114) occurs in a comparision with *lilū*-spectres, which unequivocally points to the existence of a winged *Lilītu/Ardat līlī* (cf. Wiggermann, *RIA* 8 [1994] 239ff. for wings on beings doing their work in the skies). Groneberg *o. c.* (note 65) 125ff. recognizes *Lilītu* in the winged goddess of the Burney relief (and other plaques), against which the objections of Jacobsen (cf. Wiggerman, *RIA* 8 240f.) and H. Frankfort (*AfO* 12 [1937–39] 128ff. concerning a cult of *Lilītu* still hold.

⁶⁸ The occurrence *līlī* on the amulet from Arslan Tash (note 79) is epigraphically uncertain (cf. C. Butterweck, *TUAT* II/3 [1988] 437, reading *ll wym*, “day and night”).

⁶⁹ Cf. L.K. Handy, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* [1992] IV 324f., M. Hutter, in K. van der Toorn et al. eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*² [1999] s.v. Lilith. In the Hebrew Bible Lilith appears between other demonic beings in Isa 34:14. The Greek (LXX) and Latin (Vulgate) translations use (besides *onokéntauros*) *Lamia*, the name of a well attested Greek demoness perhaps of foreign origin (daughter of Belos and Libyē), who killed her own children, and sleeplessly roams the earth to steal those of other mothers.

⁷⁰ See Handy, *o. c.* (note 69) 325, with reference to Talmudic sources.

⁷¹ Krebs 1975.

⁷² Th.H. Gaster, A Canaanite Magical Text, *OrNS* 11 [1942] 41–79, esp. 51f. for strangling Liliths and related demons; J. Naveh, S. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls. Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* [1985] 118, with reference to the *Qarīna al-Tāb* ‘ia of Arabic Islamic charms.

⁷³ Quoted from the late Jewish amulet adduced by Naveh, Shaked, *o. c.* (note 72) 118f.

⁷⁴ The text of a Palestinian Aramaic amulet on a sheet of silver is published and discussed with the parallels

(Gellō), “who, according to tradition, robs women from their newly born children” (Hesychios), has a venerable ancestry in Greece,⁷⁵ and seems to derive her name from Babylonia.⁷⁶ At the end of the historiola the demon(ess) swears that: “wherever the name of *s'wny wss'wny wsngrw w'ntyq* is mentioned, I shall not kill or strangle”.⁷⁷ The apotropaic (supernatural) helpers are usually three, and their names vary somewhat, the most stable being that of *ss'wny*, who appears in the other sources as *swwny* (Palestinian Aramaic), *Sisinios* (Greek), *Susneyos* (Ethiopic), and *snsnwy* (Jewish magic).⁷⁸ This protective figure makes its first appearance in the West-Semitic sources in the VII century B.C. on a Phoenician amulet from Arslan Tash,⁷⁹ in which he is called to help against the “flying (demoness)” (represented by a sphinx), and against *hnqt' mr*, “she who strangles the lamb” (represented by a wolf devouring a child), obviously a version of the Mesopotamian *Lamaštu*.⁸⁰ In this early source the protective figure is called *Ssm bn Pdr*,⁸¹ who in its turn is a version of the Mesopotamian protective demon *Pazuzu*, son of *Hambi*.⁸² *Pazuzu*'s apotropaic quality lies not only in his deterring appearance, but also, like that of *Ssn/Ssm*, in the mention of his name.⁸³

by Naveh, Shaked, *o. c.* (note 72) 104–117. For general background see W. Fauth, *Lilits und Astarten in aramäischen, mandäischen und syrischen Zaubertexten*, *WdO* 17 [1986] 66–94.

⁷⁵ West 1991, K. Krämer, *MAOG* 4 [1929] 113 (Syriac).

⁷⁶ Babylonian *gallū* denotes a death dealing being in the service of a god. As such he kills people when it is their time (cf. Lam. I 156: “without being a *gallū*, she (*Lamaštu*) has ended his life”), or corrects demons who transgress divine rules (Lam. II 7, where *Asalluhī* acts as *gallū* against *Lamaštu*). The black dog who is *Lamaštu*'s *gallū* in Lam. I 14 executes her deadly orders, and can be called a manifestation of the demoness. It is this *gallū* which is the possible etymon for Greek *Gellō*, see K. Frank, *ZA* 24 [1910] 161, West 1991.

⁷⁷ Cited from an Aramaic incantation bowl from Mesopotamia, Naveh, Shaked *o. c.* (note 72) 191:12 (at the end the text refers to the demoness as *Lilith*).

⁷⁸ For the same figure as *martyr* in an Arabic source based on a coptic rite, see Naveh, Shaked *o. c.* (note 72) 117: St. *Sūsnīyūs*, the son of *Suspatros*. The patronym reminds of *Ssm*'s father *Pdr* (note 81).

⁷⁹ For recent literature and a translation with comments see C. Butterweck, *TUAT* II/3 [1988] 435ff. (largely ignoring the remarks of A. Caquot, *JANES* 5 [1975] 45ff.). See also J. Teixidor, *Les tablettes d'Arslan Tash au Musée d'Alep, AuOr* 1 [1983] 105–109, J. van Dijk, *The Authenticity of the Arslan Tash Amulets, Iraq* 54 [1992] 65–68.

⁸⁰ For strangling *Litiths* and other baby snatching demons see the literature cited in note 72, for *Lamaštu* strangling her victims see *YOS* 11 20:10f., Farber 1981 BM 122691:7' (both OB), Lam. I 157, and especially *SBTU* 3 84, in which a strangled lamb, dressed up as a child, functions as replacement of the threatened baby (Farber 1989b). The wolf (or dog) of the amulet has a scorpion's sting, which marks it as supernatural. *Lamaštu* is imagined both as a dog and a wolf (see below), but rarely as tailed (see Fig. 3 for amulets of Group A; for a first millennium amulet from Israel see no. 76). See Fig. 4.

⁸¹ For this figure see W. Fauth, *SSM BN PDRŠŠA, ZDMG* 120 [1970] 229–256, for the variant *ssn* *ibid.* 252f.; according to Caquot's collation (from a mould) the reading is *ssm bn pdr* (*JANES* 5 47). The nature of this figure as a protective god (rather than as a demon) is based on Fauth's assessment of the parallels; the amulet is ambiguous on this point.

⁸² If indeed *Ssm* is a protective figure, and not a demon, he must be a protective figure as well in the Aramaic inscription on a bronze *Pazuzu* from Egypt (P.R.S. Moorey, *Iraq* 27 [1965] 33ff.): *lssm br pdr* . . ., “Oh, *SSM*, son of *PDR*”. Since in this case only *Pazuzu* (the statue) is present, since *Pazuzu* is like *Ssm* almost exclusively employed against baby-snatching demons, and since figures of *Pazuzu* are usually inscribed with their own name (note 83), we may conclude that *Ssm bn/br pdr* is the West-Semitic name of *Pazuzu*. This leaves open the identity of the axe wielding figure on the reverse of the Arslan Tash amulet. From a Mesopotamian point of view the “smiting god” can only be apotropaic, probably *Nergal/Meslamtaea* (Wiggermann, *RIA* 9 [1999] *Nergal* A § 6, B § 2). The only apotropaic figure of the text which fits is the chthonic god *Hauron* (see differently van Dijk, *Iraq* 54 66f., where the decisive Mesopotamian material is ignored; *id.*, *The Canaanite God Hauron and his Cult in Egypt, GM* 107 [1989] 59ff., esp. 61ff. for his apotropaic role).

⁸³ The *Pazuzu* incantations inscribed on heads and figures of this demon relate immediately to the speech situation, the exorcistic act. In one *Pazuzu* introduces himself (“I am *Pazuzu*”), in the other he is directly addressed (“you, mighty one”). *Pazuzu*'s presence in the room is reinforced by the analysis of the amulets (see below p. 243f.).

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The Greek version of the historiola (featuring Gyllou) preserves another trait that has its roots in Mesopotamia: the importance of knowing the names of the demoness. After a flogging⁸⁴ by Saint Sisinios and his compaginons, the demoness swears that: “wherever your name is written . . . , and my twelve and a half names, I shall not dare approach that house”: then, requested to do so, she discloses her names.⁸⁵ The mesopotamian rituals against *Lamaštu* specifically prescribe that *Lamaštu*’s seven names be written on a cylinder seal of clay to be worn on the body (Lam. I 1ff.), and in fact incantations concerning her names (Lam. Inc. 1 or 10) are a persistent feature of the actual amulets.⁸⁶

Like demons, ghosts, and anti-social elements in general, *Lamaštu* seeks refuge beyond the edges of the oikumene, in the deserts, swamps and mountains where she makes home with the animals.⁸⁷ From there, with divine autocracy and stubborn fury,⁸⁸ she pursues her destructive goals: “she is furious, splendid, [frighten]ning, thoroughly independable, a goddess; though no physician, she bandages, though no midwife she wipes of the baby; she counts the months of those pregnant one by one, and blocks the gate of the one who gives birth”.⁸⁹

Her favorite trick is to pose as midwife: “Bring me your sons, that I may suckle them, and your daughters, that I may nurse them, let me put my breasts⁹⁰ in your daughters’ mouths.”⁹¹ Presumably she learned this trade while still in heaven, where, according to an OB incantation, “Ea educated her”.⁹² Once she gets hold of her victim, she kills it,

⁸⁴ On one first millennium amulet Pazuzu is replaced by a lion-man holding a whip and chasing *Lamaštu* (amulet no. 2; for identification with Latarak see Wiggermann, 1992:64).

⁸⁵ Naveh, Shaked, *o. c.* (note 72) 114, and see note 188.

⁸⁶ Other foreign deities which show similarities with *Lamaštu* are the Hittite goddesses “Deity of the Night” (note 63), “Mama” (^dIM.NUN.ME), a mother goddess with demonic traits at home in SO Anatolia (V. Haas, *OrAnt* 27 [1988] 85–104), and the “evil woman” *Wišuriānt*, the “Strangler”, a Mother Earth type goddess with demonic traits (O. Carruba, *Das Beschwörungsritual für die Göttin Wišuriyanza*, *StBo* 2 [1966], V. Haas, *Geschichte der Hethitischen Religion* [1994] 156, 312, 642). The Turkish baby snatching demoness *Alb/masty* (U. Johansen, *ZDMG* 109, 303–316) is probably etymologically connected with *Lamaštu* (E. Reiner, *Le Monde du Sorcier, Sources Orientales* 7 [1966] 80, differently W. Eilers, *Die Al, ein Persisches Kindbettgespenst* [1979] 58, with a Turkish etymology).

⁸⁷ Lam. I 195 (“climb your mountain like a wild ass”), II 41, W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* [1960] 40:55, 52:8 (mountain); Lam. I 104, II 85 (*apu*, “canebrake”); *YOS* 11 20:5, Michel 1997:5 (*sassu*, “grass”, *elpetu*, “reed”); in BM 120022:47ff. (OB) // Lam. II 188ff. *Lamaštu* is exhorted to go back to the mountain where she came from (behind seven and seven streams and mountain chains), and there play midwife (*wulludu*) for the animals of the steppe. For the uninhabited fringes of the earth as a netherworld see Wiggermann 1996; this horizontal netherworld is also the destination of *Lamaštu* in the rituals (discussions Thureau-Dangin 1921:183, *RA* 31 [1934] 120, B. Meissner, *MAOG* 8, 1/2 [1934] 14ff., *AfO* 10 [1935–36] 161²).

⁸⁸ Lam. I 37ff., and passim.

⁸⁹ *YOS* 11 19 (OB). In another incantation *Lamaštu* keeps a record of the passing months on the wall (Lam. I 119), a human interpretation of the ominous mud (see note 96).

⁹⁰ BM 120022:10 uses for breasts the word *kakku*, “weapon”, a rare metaphor attested only in a late hymn to Nanaya (E. Reiner, *JNES* 33 [1974] 233, citing Lam. II 159).

⁹¹ Lam. I 120ff., B. Foster, *Before the Muses* 684f., with further references and translation.

⁹² *BIN* 2 72:1 (OB). Ea is the god of white magic and the art of healing. Babylonian *qadištu* usually denotes adult women living alone, who for their upkeep act (among other) as midwife. That in the case of *Lamaštu* the epithet “*qadištu* of her divine brothers” (Lam. I 160) denotes midwifery is made entirely clear by the context of the OB parallel BM 120022:7ff. (for *kakku*, “breast” see note 90), with its reversal (play midwife, *ullidī*, for the animals) in *ibid.* 50.

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either with her venomous milk,⁹³ or by strangulation.⁹⁴

The demoness lies in wait for her victims like a wolf, and sniffs out their trail.⁹⁵ Her evil being shows its presence by disturbing regularity: when she comes along, roads become impassable, she tears branches and fruit from the trees, churns up water, and leaves mud behind on the walls of houses.⁹⁶ Her destructive action is likened to the poison of a snake or scorpion,⁹⁷ to heat and cold;⁹⁸ she weakens muscles and limbs, turns the face yellow, and changes the features;⁹⁹ she is a “dagger that splits the skull”, a headache.¹⁰⁰

Although babies and young children are her favorite victims,¹⁰¹ adolescents, adults, and old people are not excluded. This wider range of activities is acknowledged by the incantations against the demoness,¹⁰² by the diagnostic omens (next paragraph), and by the first millennium amulets, on which the ritual is performed for a bearded man.¹⁰³ Pregnant women are pursued because of their unborn babies.¹⁰⁴

The appearance of *Lamaštu* matches the terror she inspires.¹⁰⁵ On the Bronze Age amulets (Figs. 1, 2, 5) she usually spreads out her arms and stretches her fingers: “her hands are a net, her grip means death”,¹⁰⁶ “furious, and with very long hands, very long fingers and nails, . . . she entered the house through the front door, . . . spotted the baby,

⁹³ She spatters her victim with poison (*UHF* 649, 685 and duplicates), or kills him with the venom of a snake or scorpion (Lam. I 127); for her bile (= venom) see note 44. The enigmatic *mē pišri*, “water of deliverance” (*YOS* 11 20:12, Michel 1997:16, with comments) or *mē pušqi*, “water of anxiety” (Lam. I 43, II 125) denotes the fluids produced during birth giving, on which the baby may choke. *Lamaštu* uses it to kill babies as well as the elderly (Michel 1997:15), and it is probably one of the activities that make her a strangler.

⁹⁴ See notes 80, 93.

⁹⁵ Lam. I 38f., II 121ff. (and forerunner *YOS* 11 20).

⁹⁶ Lam. I 181ff. On this kind of traces left behind by a passing demon the omen specialist (*barū*) bases his interpretations (see above note 89).

⁹⁷ See note 93.

⁹⁸ Denoting fever, see Lam. I 4 (“who kindles the fire”), 62 (clad in heat and cold), 75 (burns the body like fire), 123 (carries heat and cold in her hand), 178 (brings sun stroke), II 10 (heat and cold). In the diagnostic omens fever is one of the elements leading up to the identification of *Lamaštu* as the evil agent: *TDP* 3:36, 82, 13:11, 12, 26:13f. (cf. *SBTU* 1 37:14f.), 40:30, 51, 52f., 53, (54), (59), (106); when the child does not run a fever, this is specifically observed (*TDP* 40:59, 106), and may alter the diagnosis (59: hand of the *Aḥhāzu*, a *Lamaštu* like figure). Two canonical *Lamaštu* incantations are noted to be against *ummu lazzu*, “persistent fever”, in their subscripts (Lam. I 22, II 209).

⁹⁹ *BIN* 4 126:20ff. (OA), Lam. I 71ff.

¹⁰⁰ Lam. I 3. In *CT* 17 25:5 *Lamaštu pašittu* is in apposition to *SAG.GIG*.

¹⁰¹ Lam. I 45ff., 132ff., II 88ff., *SBTU* 1 138ff., Thureau-Dangin 1921:163, 17, and passim in the forerunners (e.g. *BIN* II 72 6ff.); under the name *pašittu*: see note 44, and *YOS* 10 23:8, 25:69 (OB omens). The canonical *Lamaštu* ritual is specifically for the protection of babies and young children.

¹⁰² That adolescents (*etlu, ardatu*) are attacked is partly due to identification with *lilâ/lilîtu* (note especially *YOS* 11 19:8ff., also *BM* 120022:21, and passim, e.g. Lam. I 128f.). In Lam. I 67ff. the demoness has different names depending on her victims: the elderly (*Pasūsatu*, the “Cripple”, see Wiggermann forthc.), young men (*Anqullu*, the “Heat Wave”), young women (*Lamaštu*), children (*Dimme*). The artificial character of this passage – *Dimme* and *Lamaštu* are normally not differentiated, *Pasūsatu* is a hapax based on *Pazuzu* – reveals the intention to acknowledge adult victims on a mythological level. For the elderly (*šibütum*) see also Michel 1997:15 (OA).

¹⁰³ Amulets 1, 5, 37, etc. Note that amulet 60 (from Byblos) was owned by an adult, Ili-ittiya, an officer of Šamši-Adad V and eponym of the year 804 (J.A. Brinkman, *JNES* 32 [1973] 46).

¹⁰⁴ For instance Farber 1989a § 39A, Thureau-Dangin 1921 (*Lamaštu* set on pregnant women and their babies by sorcery); *SBTU* 3 84:1ff. (*Lamaštu* causing miscarriage); cf. *Maqlû* IV 45 (witch sets up *Lamaštu* against someone).

¹⁰⁵ *palhat*, “feared” (*YOS* 11 20:1, *pulħar* in Michel 1997:1); she inspires fear like *Huwawa* (*melammūša kima Hūmbaba*, Farber 1998:17).

¹⁰⁶ *BM* 120022:3, Lam. II 153; Farber 1981 *BM* 122691:1'ff.

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and grasped him in his belly seven times".¹⁰⁷ According to the texts her head is that of a dog¹⁰⁸ or a lion,¹⁰⁹ her face that of an Anzû;¹¹⁰ her teeth are donkey's teeth,¹¹¹ her hair hangs loose, her breasts are bared,¹¹² she is spotted like a leopard¹¹³ or a fish;¹¹⁴ sometimes she is winged,¹¹⁵ rarely tailed.¹¹⁶ The evil eye of Lamaštu seems to operate as an independent entity, flying around in the house, causing quarrels among the tots, and destroying peaceful family life.¹¹⁷

Textually the image of Lamaštu is fully formed in the early second millennium, while iconographically it remains in flux until the Iron Age. On one point text and image agree from the start: like the other beings that are somewhere between god and man she is not completely anthropomorphic, she is a *Mischwesen* (monster), a hybrid composed out of human and animal parts. A clear verbal expression of Lamaštu's hybrid image occurs in an OB incantation: "Anu created her, Ea educated her, and Enlil allotted her the face of a bitch".¹¹⁸ The Lamaštu of the Bronze Age amulets (Group A) shows much variation, especially in the head, which may be that of a dog (wolf, or lion),¹¹⁹ a bird of prey,¹²⁰ a snake,¹²¹ or an *ugallu* (lion-demon).¹²² For feet she usually has the talons of a bird of prey, but her hands are human, on one amulet she has an excess of fingers corresponding to her sevenfold grasp (no. 18, Fig. 5).

The rest of Lamaštu's body is in most cases fully human, though without any sexual characteristics.¹²³ On an amulet from Ur (no. 42) and one from Thchoga Zanbil (no. 66, Fig. 3) she is practically all dog. Lamaštu's canine image survives, but only in the

¹⁰⁷ *BIN* 2 72:3f. (OB, reading *i-za-at* for *ezzat* with *CAD* E 433a).

¹⁰⁸ Cavigneaux, al-Rawi 1994 88f.:5' *qaqqassa qaqqad ka-[al-ba-tim* (text broken, name of Lamaštu not preserved); the reading of *BIN* 2 72:2 *pa-ni KAL-ba-tim* remains uncertain (W. von Soden. *OrNS* 23 240 prefers *kal-* above *lab-*), see also Farber 1998:18 (*KAL-^{he-pf} re-e-e[s-sa]*).

¹⁰⁹ Lam. II 36, II 61 (and forerunner BM 120022:11), Thureau-Dangin 1921, 163:14 *qaqqad/pān nēši dapini*, "the head/face of a ferocious lion".

¹¹⁰ Farber 1998:18.

¹¹¹ BM 120022:11, Lam. II 161.

¹¹² *BIN* 4 126:16f., Lam. I 143, Thureau-Dangin 1921:163 rev. 20.

¹¹³ Lam. II 37 (the usual translation of *nimru* is "panther").

¹¹⁴ Cavigneaux, al-Rawi 1994 88f.:3 (implying scales).

¹¹⁵ See note 67, and *itruš kappēša* in the incantation against Lamaštu's evil eye, in which her name is not mentioned, however.

¹¹⁶ See note 80, and Michel 1997:13.

¹¹⁷ Farber 1971 BM 122691:1ff., Cavigneaux, al-Rawi 1994:85, cf. Wasserman 1995, van der Toorn 1999. Note that Lamaštu is not named in these incantations. A reminiscence of Lamaštu's evil eye occurs in *BIN* 2 72:17ff.: "they will fill your eyes with finely ground cress seeds".

¹¹⁸ *BIN* 2 72:1f.

¹¹⁹ According to native classification dog (UR.GI₇), wolf (UR.BAR.RA), and lion (UR.MAH) belong to the same family of UR-beings. In the Near East dogs are often half wild scavengers, and not very different from wolves. For examples see Fig. 3 (nos. 42, 66).

¹²⁰ Nos. 18 (Fig. 5), 32, 71 (not available to me), 74 (?), 78, 83. The bird's head is probably the visual expression of the "face of an Anzû" (note 110).

¹²¹ No. 69.

¹²² Nos. 13, 25, 79; 14 (divergent).

¹²³ It may be argued that this lack of sexual characteristics is due to the fact that demons in general (*utukku*) have bodies that are "neither male nor female" (*UHF* 405, 426, 428 with comments, *CT* 16 15 v 36f.). In that case the permanence of comb and spindle (e.g. Figs. 2, 5, 6) gets a natural explanation (express femininity, as in the texts); the incantations list comb and spindle among the gifts to Lamaštu, but they clearly differ from the other gifts, which have an utilitarian nature and serve to support her travel to the netherworld.

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Fig. 3 On amulets of the Bronze Age (Group A) the image of Lamaštu shows much variability, especially in the head. The body is usually formed as on Figs. 1 and 2, but there are a number of exceptions.

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periphery, where *hnqt mr*, “She who strangles the lamb” is represented by a wolf (or dog) devouring a child.¹²⁴

On two peripheral amulets dating to the Late Bronze Age (nos. 28, 66; Fig. 3) *Lamaštu* holds in one hand a dagger, and in the other a snake. “Dagger that splits the skull” is one of her names (note 100), and the snake too must be understood as an instrument of death, the carrier of the poison with which she kills.¹²⁵ A snake and a scorpion, another of her deadly “weapons”, regularly appear in the field of the Bronze Age amulets from Mesopotamia,¹²⁶ and on the Iron Age amulets *Lamaštu* invariably holds one or two snakes in either hand, while often a scorpion is depicted between her legs (Fig. 6).¹²⁷

According to the canonical text the black dog is *Lamaštu*’s companion/manifestation,¹²⁸ and something similar is implied by an OB ritual for the protection of mother and child, in which a *Lamaštu* incantation and one to calm a baby are followed by an incantation against a dog,¹²⁹ a black dog in a partially duplicating text.¹³⁰ That this dog is a demonic agent of disease, and not some nasty shepherd’s dog running loose in the fields, is made clear by the impossible environment where such a dog is said to have attacked his victim: “between Qutiu and Barahši”.¹³¹ A snake, presumably just as little real as the dog, is combatted in conjunction with *Lamaštu* in another OB magical text.¹³²

Dog, snake, and scorpion are in origin certainly independent evil agents, and, to judge from the relatively large number of preserved incantations, a serious source of worry in the third and early second millennia.¹³³ After that time they practically disappear as independent evil agents, but linger on in the mythology of *Lamaštu* as instruments/manifestations of her evil will. The connection between *Lamaštu* and the once independent evil agents is manifested by an amulet of the Bronze Age group (no. 79), which devotes one side to *Lamaštu*, and the other to (from top to bottom) scorpion, dog, and snake.¹³⁵

Lamaštu’s mastery over these demonic beings in animal shape is not an isolated feature of her mythology, but belongs to the imagery of her mountainous homeland,

¹²⁴ For the amulet from Arslan Tash see note 79 and discussion.

¹²⁵ A similar image with a different interpretation (Adad with defeated dragon) is shown on the cover of CM 16 and other books of this series.

¹²⁶ E.g. nos. 25, 79 (*Lamaštu* side); scorpion alone: no. 65, snake alone: no 32, *Lamaštu* herself with scorpion’s sting: no. 21.

¹²⁷ A scorpion and the snakes in her hands belong to the image of *Lamaštu* as described in Lam. III 5ff.

¹²⁸ See note 76 and below for her ritual marriage to a black dog.

¹²⁹ Farber 1981, BM 122691.

¹³⁰ K.R. Veenhof, An Old Assyrian Incantation against a Black Dog (kt a/k 611), *WZKM* 86 [1996] 425–433.

¹³¹ M. Sigrist, On the Bite of a Dog, 85–88 in J.H. Marks, R.M. Good eds., *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East* [1987]. In 1f. we read (with the unrecognized duplicate form Ugarit, *Ug.* V 32 g-i): [bi]-ri-it *Ku-ti-²i-¹ im ù Pa-ra-ah-ši-im.*

¹³² *YOS* 11 19.

¹³³ Collected and discussed by I.L. Finkel, On Some Dog, Snake and Scorpion Incantations, 213–250 in T. Abusch, K. van der Toorn eds., *Mesopotamian Magic. Textual, Historical, and Interpretative Perspectives* [1999].

¹³⁵ The amulet L. Legrain, *PBS* 15 [1925] Pl. XLIX no. 1052 shows on one side a dog, and on the other a scorpion. Since amulets against the independent evils dog, snake, and scorpion do not seem to exist, the dog may well be an image of *Lamaštu*. A connection between *Lamaštu* and the dog incantations was suggested already by van Dijk 1982:100, 104¹⁴; Dunham 1993:246 suspects that the dog figurine from a grave in third millennium Tell al-Raqā‘i represents *Lamaštu* (note 7). The sitting dog on the reverse of no. 42 may be apotropaic just as well as evil.

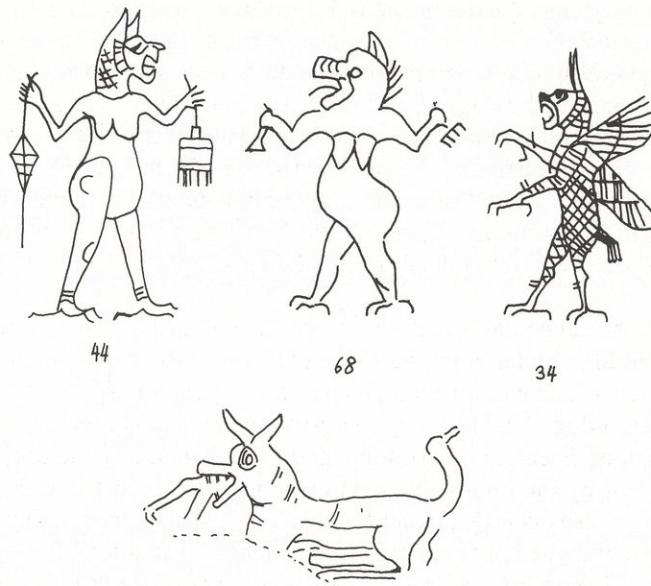


Fig. 4 A fully formed *Lamaštu* (no. 44) first appears in Assyria at the end of the Bronze Age, but not all variation (no. 68) has disappeared (Group B). *Anzû*, *Ninurta*'s mount, appears on amulets of this group as an apotropaic being. Locally the wolf or dog image of the child-snatching demoness continues into the Iron Age (amulet from Arslan Tash).

where she acts as a kind of mistress of the animals.¹³⁵

Fully formed, with bared breasts and holding comb and spindle (Fig. 4), *Lamaštu* appears for the first time in Late Bronze Age Assyria. The only important addition to *Lamaštu*'s image in the Iron Age is her “*Knielauf*” stance.¹³⁶ With *Huwawa* this stance signals defeat, but with *Lamaštu*, who is not involved in any combats, it might mean something else, such as the speed of her hoped for departure. The incantation accompanying the drawing of her image on the wall of the house indicates, however, that it signifies something akin to defeat: weakness induced by divine counteraction.¹³⁷

The mythology of demons in general, and of *Lamaštu* in particular, is informed by two themes, fear and guilt. The adversities and diseases which the demons embody are real enough, and feared with reason. More subtle, and at the heart of the whole religious structure, is the operation of guilt. As explained above, the arrival of misfortune is viewed as the consequence of human failure (sin), of neglected obligations towards one's fellow men (*lilû*-ghosts), ancestors (*eṭemmu*), demons (*utukku* e.a.), and gods, especially the personal god.¹³⁸ This negligence reveals the existence of a wide web of obligations, naturally rooted in the human world, but extended to include what

¹³⁵ BM 120022:47ff. Lam. II 41ff., II 87, Farber 1998:60, 11f.

¹³⁶ See provisionally P. Calmeyer, *RIA* 6 1980–83 38f. An inspired half “*Knielauf*” occurs on no. 52.

¹³⁷ Lam. II 40: “by his expert operations he (Asaluhi) weakened her muscles”.

¹³⁸ The *bēl lā ilim*, “he who does not have a (personal) god” is *Lamaštu*'s victim in *BIN* 4 126:18. See in general T. Abusch, Witchcraft and the Anger of the Personal God, 83–121 in T. Abusch, K. van der Toorn eds., *Mesopotamian Magic. Textual, Historical, and Interpretative Perspectives* [1999].

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we would call nature. Demons, supernatural beings without a cult and therefore permanently neglected, are the mythological expression of permanent human failure, of an inborn inability to meet these obligations. Evil is justified cosmic retaliation, demons spring from irreparable human guilt.

More generally speaking it appears that Mesopotamian mythology is based on an anthropomorphic view of the universe, in which the relations between man and “nature” follow a human model, and are regulated by the type of mutual obligations that inform contemporary society. “Nature” becomes an active but silent partner, whose intentions can be guessed at on the basis of its supposed human mentality. “Nature” communicates with its human partner not only by way of retaliating demons, but also by leaving written messages about its position: omens.

Diagnosis and counter measures

The correct diagnosis of any individual case of misfortune or disease is a problem: the activities of demons and ghosts overlap, and the ultimate cause may lie in the dissatisfaction of gods about someone’s performance. In order to identify the correct source of evil among the many possible ones,¹³⁹ the conjuror (*āšipu*) searches for clues on the body of the patient, as well as in his environment. The omens of the Diagnostic Handbook¹⁴⁰ give an impression of his methods, which in detail are still largely opaque, and even in antiquity did not always lead to a definite diagnosis.¹⁴¹

Before making a house call the conjuror protects himself with prayers and incantations against the evils he will encounter: “I am the messenger of the great gods, Enki and Asaluhi have given me their exalted orders”.¹⁴² Immediately after his departure for the house of the patient, he starts reading the signs: “If he sees a dappled ox: that patient is afflicted by the demon Lamaštu; (or), a curse; he will die soon.”¹⁴³ A different diagnosis follows when he sees a black ox or a white ox. Fortunately in this case we know what association connects a “dappled ox” with Lamaštu; a commentary to the omen in question reads: Lamaštu (^dD̄i m - m e): fever (*ummu*), daughter of Anu; m e = “fever” (*ummu*); “he will die of her [curse (n a m - é r i m)]”, n a m = “death”, é r i m = “wicked” . . . : he will die [the death of the] wicked; g ùn = “to be dappled”, as was said “[Her kidneys] are spotted like a leopard”: Lamaštu demons; g i š - h u r, s a g - b a, s a g - d i n g i r, [m u - d i n g i r - r a = “engraving”], “curse”, “river-ordeal”, “by the life of the gods”.¹⁴⁴

Such commentaries supply condensed versions of a more ample oral tradition supporting the interpretation of omens, but the basic association is clear: the dappled ox denotes Lamaštu because her kidneys are spotted, which the commentator proves by citing a line from the canonical Lamaštu series (Lam. II 37).

Arriving at the home of the patient, the conjuror examines his complaints, and questions him or his environment on their course. The contents of certain omens with the diagnosis Lamaštu show that not only babies are involved: “if his head gives him

¹³⁹ Other demons threatening children are listed and discussed by Cadelli 1998, Scurlock 1991, Volk 1999.

¹⁴⁰ R. Labat, *Traité Akkadien de Diagnostics et Prognostics Médicaux* [1951] (henceforth TDP).

¹⁴¹ E.g. *BWL* 44:108ff.

¹⁴² *KAR* 31:1ff.

¹⁴³ A.R. George, Babylonian Texts from the Folios of Sidney Smith. Part Two: Prognostic and Diagnostic Omens. Tablet I, *RA* 85 [1991] 137–163.

¹⁴⁴ George, *RA* 85 148:15.

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continually complaints, while at the same time the fever . . . and his sickness recedes, if he gets dizzy and his eye-sight diminishes, if he loses his mind and wanders about aimlessly: (it looks) as if he were grasped by a ghost, but (in fact) *Lamaštu* . . . on him".¹⁴⁵

A separate tablet of the Diagnostic Handbook is devoted to babies and small children.¹⁴⁶ The diagnosis *Lamaštu* appears a number of times, and the symptoms leading to this diagnosis are consistent with a specific disease, namely typhoid fever, a prominent cause of infant deaths in contemporary Iraq.¹⁴⁷ That fever is a decisive symptom of *Lamaštu*'s presence is born out not only by the incantations (note 98), but also by the fanciful etymology of *Lamaštu*'s Sumerian name in the commentary cited above: "fever, daughter of Anu." In fact many, but not all,¹⁴⁸ omens with the diagnosis *Lamaštu* list fever among the symptoms. Further a loss of appetite may occur, and abdominal distensions or diarrhea: "if the child, when he is born, goes two or three days and does not take milk and he has an attack similar to 'hand of a god', it is called 'hand of a goddess', the Snatcher (*Lamaštu*)",¹⁴⁹ and: "if the child's bowels are inflated and he cries continually, it is the hand of the daughter of Anu; (alternatively) it is the hand of a god (and) he will get well".¹⁵⁰ Jaundice as a consequence of *Lamaštu*'s activities is described by the incantations,¹⁵¹ as well as the maculopapular rash, which at the onset of the disease consists of six to ten 'rose-spots'.¹⁵²

Besides fever and other medical symptoms it is regularly the crying of the infant which indicates the presence of *Lamaštu*: "if the child shivers and cries all the time at his mother's breast, or if he is unsettled, wriggles on his mother's lap, and cries a lot: the daughter of Anu (*Lamaštu*) has chosen him".¹⁵³ Crying babies are calmed by means of incantation-rituals and magically charged apotropaic substances.¹⁵⁴ A text devoted to this subject contains a prescription for such a substance, which according to the subscript applies to a constantly fearful and shivering baby.¹⁵⁵ The canonical *Lamaštu* text contains a nearly identical prescription against *Lamaštu*,¹⁵⁶ and generally speaking these texts

¹⁴⁵ *TDP* 3:36f.

¹⁴⁶ *TDP* 40. The children treated in this tablet are infants from their birth up to at least their fourth year (cf. *TDP* 40 21 and 26).

¹⁴⁷ The brief discussion here leans on Scurlock 1991:157f. "Abdominal typhus" was identified as connected with the diagnosis *Lamaštu* by J.V. Kinnier Wilson, Gleanings from the Iraqi Medical Journals, *JNES* 27 [1968] 243–247 (on the basis of the text cited in note 151).

¹⁴⁸ When the absence of fever is specifically mentioned among the symptoms, this must be because the other symptoms suggest the presence of fever; in *TDP* 40:106 these are crying and abdominal cramps, which lead, even without fever, to the diagnosis *Lamaštu*. Most omens in which fever is not mentioned list crying among the symptoms.

¹⁴⁹ *TDP* 40:26. Snatcher (*Ekkemu*) is a designation of *Lamaštu*.

¹⁵⁰ *TDP* 40:30.

¹⁵¹ Lam. I 74, *zīmī turraqī*, "you (*Lamaštu*) turn (the victim's) face yellow"; "when his face is yellow: *Lamaštu* has grasped him" (*TDP* 9:11). F. Köcher identified *martu pašittu* (a name of *Lamaštu*) as biliary colic (note 44), but it may just as well denote (a form of) jaundice, or designate its supposed source in the liver. When *pašittu* threatens small children (Lambert, *Atra-Hasīs* 102:3, *YOS* 10 23:8) biliary colic is an unlikely option.

¹⁵² *BIN* 2 72:9: "and she grasped him (the baby) in his belly seven times", cited above in connection with *Lamaštu*'s death dealing hands (and nails).

¹⁵³ *TDP* 40:24f.

¹⁵⁴ Farber 1989a.

¹⁵⁵ Farber 1989a § 19.

¹⁵⁶ Lam. III 61ff.

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tend to overlap when the crying is understood as indicating demonic threats.¹⁵⁷

In conclusion it may be observed that the conjuror bases his diagnosis not only on medical symptoms like fever, but also on psychosomatic (crying) and circumstantial (dappled ox) indications, so that a one to one correspondance with a modern “scientific” disease is not to be expected. Even if, as is likely, typhoid fever underlies some of the diagnoses, it must be expected that, by lack of a “scientific” definition, other, superficially similar diseases contributed to the differently defined pathogenic *Lamaštu*.

The etymological explanation of *Lamaštu*’s Sumerian name (^dDÌ m - m e) as “fever, daughter of Anu” is based on a wideley spread method of verbal analysis, in which the meaning of the isolated elements reveals the hidden nature of the named phenomenon.¹⁵⁸ A version of this method may have served to unify *Lamaštu*’s mythological and pathogenic roles: as a mythological figure she is the (frustrated) mother (*ummu*), who poisons instead of natures, and the (rejected) daughter (*martu*) of Anu, who rebels instead of obeys. As a pathogenic agent *Lamaštu* is fever (*ummu*) and bile (*martu*), the reversed evil variants of what she is not, a good mother and a good daughter.¹⁵⁹

Once the conjuror has identified *Lamaštu* as the source of the infants problems, he initiates the proceedings which must lead to her expulsion (exorcistic) and insure the house and its inhabitants against future demonic threats (apotropaic).¹⁶⁰ The proceedings are completely described in the first millennium (canonical) *Lamaštu* series, but are in essence traditional in Mesopotamian magic, and attested for the second millennium in OB *Lamaštu* incantations and on amulets of Group A. None of the prescribed treatments can be called medical in any sense, although the choice of some of the ingredients in the salves may be based on observed healing properties. Medically inspired recipes against *Lamaštu* occur elsewhere in the Mesopotamian tradition.¹⁶¹

The expulsion of the demoness is brought about by installing and then removing three figurines representing her under her three most common names, *Lamaštu*, Daughter of Anu, and Dimme. The activities (*agenda*) are supported by incantations (*dicenda*). The first figurine is married¹⁶² to a black dog, and buried in a corner of the city wall; the second figurine is provided with food, items of personal care (a comb, a spindle, an oil jar), and means of transportation, and then sent through the desert and across the river Ulaya to her mountainous netherworld home;¹⁶³ the third figurine is stabbed to death with a thorn, and again buried in a corner of the city wall.¹⁶⁴ Meanwhile the

¹⁵⁷ Farber 1989a:142ff.

¹⁵⁸ The sign group AN:DÌM:ME is reversed, giving m e (*ummu*) - d i m e_x - a n (for d u m u - a n - n a).

¹⁵⁹ The cited commentary practically proves the point, if it is translated “mother, daughter of Anu”, which combines *Lamaštu*’s relevant mythological properties with the explanation of her pathogenic role. Since m e, “mother” is rooted in Sumerian (< a m a, e m e₄), while m e, “fever” is not, the only remaining objection would be that “mother” is not attested as an epithet of *Lamaštu*.

¹⁶⁰ For the sources see above paragraphs one (texts) and two (amulets).

¹⁶¹ A “*Lamaštu*-plant” occurs regurlarly in the lexical lists, in the pharmaceutical handbook, and (among other ingredients) in the medical texts, cf, e.g. *MSL* 10 111:113, 103:182, 105:221, *KADP* 1 v 3, *BAM* 4 379 ii 8/f., *BAM* 5 423 i 18, 438 r. 10 (among other herbs in a recipe against witchcraft); herbs and stones against various demons, including *Lamaštu*: *RA* 54 [1960] 175 r. 12.

¹⁶² Giving dissatisfied demons in marriage is common, cf. D. Schwemer, *Akkadische Rituale aus Hattuša* [1998] 59ff. for parallels.

¹⁶³ For the horizontal netherworld see above notes 87, 135, and (differently) Schwemer, *o. c.* (note 162) 70f. In incantation 6 she travells to the sea by way of Eridu, where her passage is observed by the sage Adapa (Lam. II 21 ff.).

¹⁶⁴ Farber 1987:94f. proposes to recognize the object (a pot with ashes and a dagger stuck into it) accompa-

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house is smoked out with fumigations, and the demoness adjured by the great gods, lest she returns.¹⁶⁵ Complex amuletic salves drive the demoness from the child's body, and protect him against her return; ingredients such as "ship's tar" and "dust of quay and ferry" have a symbolic (Lamaštu's journey home) rather than a medical value, but the associations are not always obvious.

A more permanent protection of the child is provided by chains of amuletic stones and other substances, which are hung around his neck and bound to his hands and feet.¹⁶⁶ Also on his neck was a cylinder seal of clay inscribed with the seven names of Lamaštu.¹⁶⁷ At the head of the patient's bed an amulet was hung, on it the symbols of the gods: the crescent moon of Sin, the star of Ištar, the sun disc of Šamaš, and the crook of Amurru.¹⁶⁸ The incantation prescribed to be written on this amulet orders Lamaštu back to the netherworld, and adjures her: "may you not approach the door (of the bedroom), whose bolt is Justice, whose pole is Anu, whose gate keeper is Papsukkal, – one adjured by him does not return".¹⁶⁹ The entrance to the bedroom and the other entrances in the house are guarded by clay models of watch dogs,¹⁷⁰ with their names, or rather assignments, written on their flanks: "chase away the daughter of Anu", "stand watch during the night", "don't fail at your watch", "Sin is the shepherd of the dogs", etc.

Like the amulet and the watch dogs, and covered by the same incantation (Lam. Inc. 7), the drawings opposite the entrance to the bedroom and to the left and right of the gate serve both an exorcistic and an apotropaic purposes. The text¹⁷¹ prescribes a Daughter of Anu with snakes in her hands, and a number of further items whose relation to the main figure are not spelled out. Since the prescriptions of the text add up to the image of the demoness as known from the amulets (Fig. 6. IV), these two sources will be discussed here as one. On the amulets Lamaštu is depicted in the "Knielauf" stance, which according to the incantation covering the drawing signifies weakness induced by the god of white magic, Asaluhi (note 137). The snakes in her hands and the scorpion between her legs represent the poison with which she kills; the dog and the pig suckle her breasts, and are supposed to replace the infants she wants to poison with her milk;¹⁷² a comb, a spindle, and a *mušālu*¹⁷³ symbolize her doubtful femininity; a lamp represents the light god Nuska, who guards the gate at night;¹⁷⁴ the "lower leg of a donkey" (*kursinni*

nying Dimme in this exorcism with the object to the left of the demoness on no. 6.

¹⁶⁵ Lam. III 74f., I 60, II 31ff.

¹⁶⁶ Necklaces of various stones to expel Lamaštu and prevent "Any Evil" from approaching occur in various collections (Farber 1989a § 16, 16A, *STT* 275 ii 10'). See note 177 for necklaces found in graves together with amulets.

¹⁶⁷ Lam. I 1ff.

¹⁶⁸ Lam. III 13. The crook of Amurru is rare in the first millennium, but not unattested (cf. J. Reade, *IrAnt* 12 [1974] 40). It does not occur among the divine symbols on the amulets; Lamaštu is adjured by Amurru once, see St. Dalley, B. Teissier, *Iraq* 54 [1992] 109, no. 8:21f.

¹⁶⁹ Lam. II Inc. 7.

¹⁷⁰ Lam. III 15ff., II 68ff. Clay dogs are common guardians of private houses and palaces (Wiggermann 1992:215 s.v. *kalbu*).

¹⁷¹ Lam. III 2ff.

¹⁷² In the Sumerian incantation Tonietti 1979: 305 (*TIM* 9 36:28f.) a black dog and a white dog replace the dog and the pig. Cf. Nougayrol 1969 iv 9' "may she suckle the puppies of the bitch", and in general BM 120022:47ff., where Lamaštu is advised to go home and be midwife of the animals.

¹⁷³ Farber 1987:94, meaning uncertain.

¹⁷⁴ The names of the watch dogs and the presence of Nuska indicate that demonic attacks were expected

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imēri) draws the angry glare of passers-by,¹⁷⁵ and thus supports Lamaštu's dismissal.¹⁷⁶

Alternative rituals against Lamaštu occur in a LB text from Uruk (SBTU 3 84, see Farber 1989b) with ritual instructions for the protection of parents and children against demonic and divine threats. Lamaštu, induced by witchcraft or not, is made responsible for miscarriages (see note 104), or (in another section) kills off the children of someone who has lost the support of the gods because of sinful behaviour. The counter measures involve not only the dismissal (by boat or burial) of the demoness, but also replacement (*pūlu*) rituals, which are not represented in the canonical text. The most explicit one replaces the threatened baby by a strangled lamb dressed up as a child and cuddled by the worried mother between her breasts.

A passage in one of the canonical Lamaštu incantations (Lam. II 97ff.) points to the existence of a preventive ritual against Lamaštu, to be performed by the young bride. In this incantation Enlil denies Lamaštu her wish to eat human flesh with the following words: "because you have requested this of me, may people build you a temple (literally house) of clods of earth, and may the young bride bring you a broken comb, a broken spindle, and hot soup which is cooked over coals". The young bride, a potential victim, honors the demoness with a sort of mock cult in a mock temple, which is all she will ever have. The spot where such rituals were performed may have occasioned the street name *sila la-ma-aš-tim* (Lamaštu-street) in OB Sippar (CT 2 27:6, cf. Farber 1999:142¹¹).

From the early second millennium onwards¹⁷⁷ the exorcistic and apotropaic rituals of the canonical and earlier¹⁷⁸ texts are reflected by amulets, inscribed as well as uninscribed, figurative as well as non-figurative. The Iron Age amulets are much more elaborate than those of the Bronze Age, and represent full versions of exorcisms that in the ritual text are performed on figurines and (miniature) objects. A reason for the expanded scope of the late amulets may lie in the duration of the prescribed rituals, which take up 7 or more days; if, which is likely, the figurative version of a ritual is not just a commemoration of its actual performance, but a performance by itself, the expanded amulets would shorten the duration of the ritual considerably. Since many of the Bronze Age pieces of group C and D are well worked and undoubtedly expensive, the amulets may not have lowered

especially during the night. On the amulets there is a lamp in the bedroom of the patient, rarely (no. 2) there is one both next to the patient and next to Lamaštu. The prescription, in which the demoness is drawn opposite the entrance of the bedroom, indicates that the scenes which are separate on many amulets, the bedroom and the demoness (no. 1; Fig. 6. III/IV), are in reality belonging together, and in fact some amulets combine the two scenes in one register (cf. nos. 37, 58, 61, 54).

¹⁷⁵ The symbolic meaning of the donkey's lower leg is revealed by *Maqlū* V 45: "may the passer-by look angrily upon her (the witch), as upon a donkey's lower leg" (cf. AfO 21:77), the context of which is the expulsion of witches.

¹⁷⁶ Five general incantations that serve the protection of house and patient are mentioned in Lam. III 105ff. Since they belong to the basic stock of the conjuror, they are not written out in this series (cf. Abusch, *JNES* 33 [1974] 253f., Wiggermann 1992 16:258, Geller, *AfO* 35 [1988] 6:47'ff.).

¹⁷⁷ A still earlier version of a Lamaštu ritual is reconstructed by Dunham 1993 from Early Bronze (ED III) grave gifts in a child burial from Tell al-Raqā'i; figurines of a dog (Lamaštu) and an ugly faced figure (a kind of proto-Pazuzu or Huwawa); travel theme represented by figurines of a boat, fishes, a shoe, a vessel; divine supervision by the figurine of Anzū (Enlil), see also note 7. Lamaštu amulets are regularly found in graves, but it is more likely that they were simply among the personal possessions of the child when it died (undoubtedly of the pathogenic Lamaštu), than that they served to protect it against the demoness in the afterlife (nos. 9, 27⁷, 28, 35, 40, 45, 57, 59, 73). Two amulets (57, 73) were found together with complicated necklaces, undoubtedly apotropaic (see note 166).

¹⁷⁸ The basic exorcistic themes are represented for the OB period by *TIME* 9 63 (Tonietti 1979) and especially by BM 120022, the forerunner of Lam. Inc. 12.



Fig. 5 A well worked example (no. 18) of Group A, showing Lamaštu with the head of an eagle, and on the reverse the incantation with her seven names. Musée du Louvre.

the price of an exorcism, unless they were somehow on loan.¹⁷⁹

The way in which the exorcistic and apotropaic themes of the canonical ritual are reflected by the amulets can be demonstrated by a closer look at representatives of each of the two more important groups, Group A (Bronze Age) and Group C (Iron Age, Assyria).

A good representative of the Bronze Age Group A is the well worked amulet no. 18, reproduced here as Fig. 5. The execution in deep relief contrasts with that of most other pieces of this group, which are lightly incised with primitive figures, but the subject matter is not influenced by the different styles of execution. The Lamaštu of no. 18 has claws with 6/7 nails, widely spread and ready for her deadly sevenfold grasp. The lower part of the amulet is broken away, but undoubtedly she had the talons of a bird of prey, as practically all other Lamaštu's. Her head is that of an eagle with manes (Anzû ?), unusual, but not unattested elsewhere in this group (Fig. 3). To her left and right are a comb and a (double) spindle, in the upper left a toggle pin; a dog and a pig, still just visible along the lower edge, jump up at her breasts, which are not shown. The lower leg of a donkey supports her expulsion, the pot to the left is probably an oil jar.¹⁸⁰ Other amulets of this group may show a scorpion and/or a snake.

The figurative elements found on amulets of Group A correspond with those prescribed for the drawings on the bedroom wall in the canonical ritual. The travel theme

¹⁷⁹ The subscript of the very well worked amulet no 77 (Farber 1997) records the owner (maker ?) of the piece, and continues: "whoever takes it out, and does not return it, may Nabû order his destruction". Contrary to the *editio principis* I read the beginning of the line as šá TÙM! rather than as šá UD.Ú.ŠÚ. Presumably this amulet was a library piece, on loan for instruction or use. Privately owned is the amulet of Ilī-ittija (no. 60).

¹⁸⁰ Most of the objects surrounding Lamaštu (gifts and travel necessities) have been discussed by Farber 1987.

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is completely absent on the amulets, but since it is attested in the contemporary incantations (BM 120022) it presumably existed in another form; if the grave goods from Tell al-Raqā'i can be taken as evidence, the corresponding rituals were enacted with figurines and miniatur objects (note 177), just as prescribed by the canonical ritual.

Lamaštu is squared in by *zi p a*-formulas, "be adjured by god so-or-so", which, as was seen above (p. 221f.), are replaced elsewhere in this group by triangles. In the canonical ritual the drawing on the wall is accompanied by an incantation in which Lamaštu is adjured by various gods; meanwhile the exorcist encloses her in a circle of flour (note 21).¹⁸¹ The triangles replacing the adjuration formulas probably represent this circle of flour, and thus denote the presence of the gods by which Lamaštu is adjured. The canonical text makes the presence of the gods explicit by prescribing an amulet figuring divine symbols and inscribed with the incantation in which she is adjured by various gods.¹⁸² The contemporary amulets of groups C and D practically always show divine symbols, never triangles; on amulets of group A divine symbols are essentially non-existent.¹⁸³

The incantation on the reverse of amulet 18 is the Bronze Age version of the incantation with Lamaštu's seven names, which the canonical ritual prescribes for a cylinder seal to be worn on a necklace:¹⁸⁴

Oh, 'Dimme', 'Daughter of Anu',
'Who was named by the gods',
'Victoria, heroine among ladies',
'Dimme (or: Lamaštu) the exalted',
'Who holds the evil Asaku in a tight grip',
'South Wind weighing heavily on mankind',
you must not approach (this) person,
(followed by *zi p a*-formulas)¹⁸⁵

That in this period amulets depicting Lamaštu could have a wider scope than just Lamaštu is shown by the occurrence of Ḫulbazizi incantations on these amulets (note 16). Such incantations are against evil in general, and in addition may serve to identify the bearer of the amulet as someone protected by the gods. The Ḫulbazizi incantation on amulet 15 runs as follows:¹⁸⁶

Incantation: make yourself scarce, accursed one, let off, evil being, for fear of Ninurta, the leader of the pack; me, being a follower of Ninurta, Oh 'Any Evil', you should not approach me. Be adjured by Heaven, be adjured by Earth.

¹⁸¹ Lam. II 48ff.

¹⁸² Lam. Inc. 7.

¹⁸³ Divine symbols are very rare on Group A amulets, but cf. no. 65 (moon and star as symbols ?), no. 79 (lion-scimitar of a warrior god, and another symbol).

¹⁸⁴ Lam. Inc. 10 becomes rare or non-existent in the Iron Age, but cf. no. 55 (badly broken), no. 59 (variant), no. 24 (difficult to date); it is well attested (though with much variation) on amulets of groups A (18, 32, 29, 67, 69) and B (9, 27, 34, 35, 44, partly unpublished or uncertain). Inc. 2 occurs only on amulets of groups C and D (nos. 5, 6, 61).

¹⁸⁵ The contemporary amulet no. 67 has a different version of this incantation, in which 'Dimme, daughter of Anu' is a single name, followed by the epithet "who was named by the gods". Lamaštu is addressed in part as a goddess, and has some of her epithets on loan from Inanna; note in no. 67: 'Dimme, august lady' and 'Dimme, who answers prayer', and cf. note 41.

¹⁸⁶ See note 16 for references.

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On Kassite seals the two *Hulbazizi* incantations of the Bronze Age *Lamaštu* amulets are associated with representations of the fish-sage (note 16). In a magical context this sage legitimizes the ritual proceedings, and as such he appears in action on the *Lamaštu* amulets of the Iron Age.

Thus the Bronze Age amulets in general, and no 18 (Fig. 5) in particular, show a fairly close correspondence to the canonical ritual. The figurative elements correspond to the elements prescribed for the bedroom wall, the incantation with the seven names to its later counterpart prescribed for an amuletic seal. The incantation may be omitted, however, or replaced by other incantations against evil in general. One figurative element of the canonical ritual is only alluded to, the divine symbols. The patient, prominently present on the later amulets, makes himself heard in the *Hulbazizi* incantation cited above, but is never depicted; the sage legitimizing the proceedings can be shown to have existed in the final stage of group A, but never makes his appearance on the amulets. Depictions of the travel theme, a boat underneath the demoness, first appear at the very end of the Bronze Age on Middle Assyrian amulets (Group B).¹⁸⁷ In the same period the image of *Lamaštu* loses most of its variability, and develops a definite form (Fig. 4).

The amulets of Group C belong to the Assyrian Iron Age, and are contemporary with the canonical ritual. The group is represented here by no. 1 (Fig. 6), an amulet of bronze, with holes for suspension and a ridge to stand on. Presumably it hung or stood somewhere in the house, since it is too big (13.5 cm.) and too heavy to carry around comfortably. One would expect it in the bedroom of the patient, on which both the ritual and the scenes on the amulet converge. The excellent workmanship, the well balanced composition, and the stylistic links to the palace reliefs indicate a patient with access to the best Assyria had to offer.

The obverse (here depicted) is subdivided in five registers (I-V), each with its own theme: I divine symbols; II apotropaic figures; III bedroom of the patient; IV *Lamaštu* and her expulsion; V line of communication with the netherworld. The three lead-players stand out immediately: Pazuzu, *Lamaštu*, and the patient. We will discuss these elements one by one, starting with Pazuzu.

Pazuzu takes a peculiar position in the composition, which sets him apart from the other players. His head, fully modelled, sticks out above the scenes, and belongs to a body that is depicted on the other side of the amulet (not reproduced). He has wings, the talons of a bird of prey, and a scorpion's sting for tail (Fig. 7). The position of his hands, just visible on the upper edge of the amulet, shows that he is holding it, or in other words, that he does not partake in the scenes below, but somehow forms part of the reality of the patient's bedroom. The difference between Pazuzu and the scenes below him is manifested most emphatically in his full frontality: he is the only figure that looks straight into the room, reviewing the proceedings. The main object of his glare is undoubtedly *Lamaštu* herself, the other supernatural guest.

Above we have already commented on the fact that the more common Pazuzu incantations are in direct speech, and presuppose a speech situation, the here and now of the exorcistic act, with all actors present. In one incantation the conjurer first addresses Pazuzu as a match for all winds, then continues with a description of the combatted evil

¹⁸⁷ Amulets no. 10, 68. The authenticity of no. 68 is proved by the coherence of the details which place it in the Middle Assyrian Group B, previously unidentified.

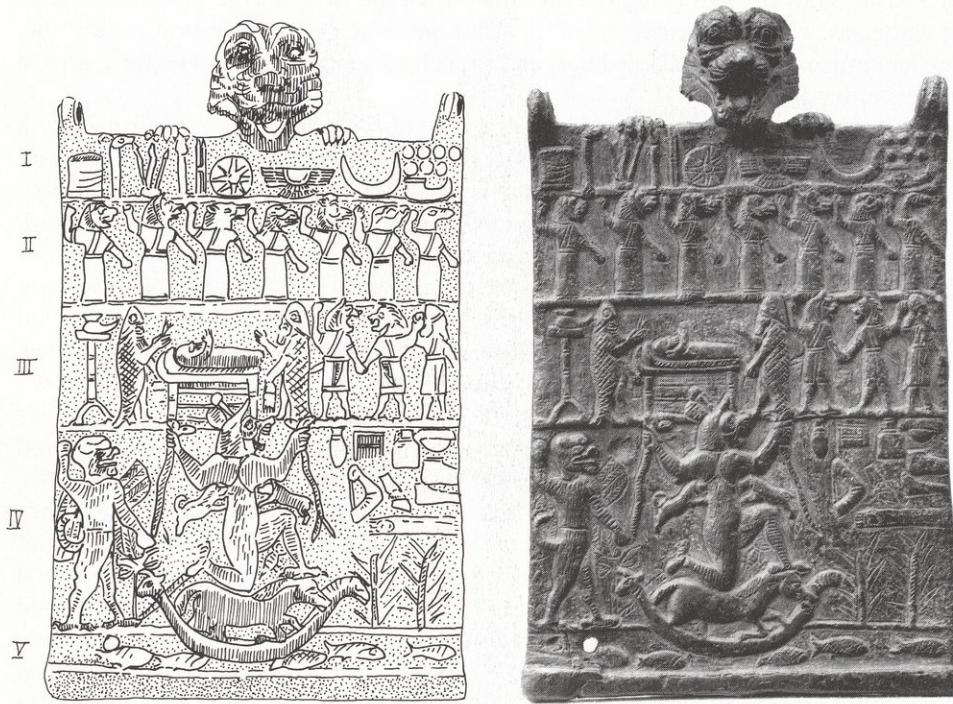


Fig. 6 Bronze amulet (no. 1), 13.5 cm high, dating to the Neo-Assyrian period (Group C). The amulets of this group show a number of innovations: divine symbols (I), apotropaic spirits (II), the bedroom of the patient (III), and the travel necessities and means of transportation of Lamaštu (IV). The reverse, not reproduced, shows the body of Pazuzu, whose head is visible on top of the amulet. Pazuzu is seen in action on the left of Lamaštu (IV), chasing her out. Musée du Louvre, Collection de Clercq (drawing F. Wiggemann).

presented as a destructive storm, and finally again addresses Pazuzu: “the house which you enter, may it (the destructive storm) not enter it, the house which you approach, may it not approach it”.¹⁸⁸ In the other incantation Pazuzu introduces himself as “king of the evil wind (*lilû*) demons”, thus legitimizing himself in the face of his adversaries, among whom Lamaštu.¹⁸⁹ In IV Pazuzu is encountered again, but now in action. With one fist raised, he drives Lamaštu out and back to the netherworld. On amulet no. 2 the god Latarak replaces Pazuzu in this function.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ For this incantation see Borger 1987:19, 31ff. The description of the destructive storm is similar to that of Lamaštu in Lam. I 181ff. The translation of the final lines, ambiguous in their logographic writing, is based on the assumption that it is Pazuzu rather than the exorcist who prevents the demon from entering the house. Foreign but related parallels concerning Pazuzu’s functional double *Ssm* (Saint Sisinius) occur in the Arslan Tash amulet (5ff., but uncertain), and in the magical historiola treated above (p. 228ff.).

¹⁸⁹ See Borger 1987:24ff. (incantation), Wiggemann forhtc. (origin of Pazuzu).

¹⁹⁰ The four dogs which accompany Lamaštu on her trip to the netherworld may have the same function (Lam. II 45). Farber 1987:102ff. identifies a centipede on certain Lamaštu amulets (102⁵²), who as an assistant of the divine court probably stands on the side of the victim.



Fig. 7 Neo-Assyrian bronze figure of the demon Pazuzu, who plays an important part in the expulsion of Lamaštu and other evils. Figures or heads of Pazuzu are often inscribed with his self-introduction: "I am Pazuzu, the king of the evil *lil*-spirits". Musée du Louvre.

The other lead-player of supernatural origin is Lamaštu, whose position in the middle of the amulet matches her importance. Basically the image of Lamaštu is that prescribed by the canonical ritual for the bedroom wall; the additional elements in register IV derive from exorcistic activities described in the ritual text as performed with a figurine of Lamaštu and miniature objects. The figurine is provided with food, items of personal care, and means of transportation, and then sent through the desert and across the river Ulaya to her mountainous netherworld home, the "travel theme" as we have called it above.¹⁹¹ To the right of Lamaštu are first the items of personal care: an oil jar, a comb, and a fibula, which replaces the toggle pin of the older amulets;¹⁹² then, further to the right, the travel necessities: a jug, a bowl, a boot, a shoe, and under that a travel blanket. Lamaštu is standing on a donkey, which has to bring her through the desert, and the donkey is standing on a boat, which has to carry both across the Ulaya and to the

¹⁹¹ The evidence of the incantations can be matched with the miniature objects as depicted on the amulets, see Farber 1987, with full discussions.

¹⁹² Depending on the interpretation of the texts, the oil jar could be the expected spindle. The interpretation of the sack fixed with a nail to Lamaštu's head is still uncertain, but it may be the purse (*qanu*) given to Lamaštu by the merchant (Wiggermann 1983 note 67, Farber 1989b:230).

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netherworld. The waterway is shown in the Vth register, reeds growing along the bank, and fishes swimming in the direction of Lamaštu's travel. Lamaštu's right foot is fixed to a tree on the bank, which is curious because it prevents her from proceeding in the intended direction. The image is covered by the ritual text, however, where it occurs in connection with Lamaštu's journey: "I will tie your feet to a solitary tamarisk, and to a single stalk of reed" (Lam. II 47, 146). The contradiction remains unresolved.¹⁹³

The ritual prescribes an amulet to be hung at the head of the bed of the patient. It should show the symbols of certain gods, and be inscribed with the incantation founding the travel theme and adjuring Lamaštu by various deities (Lam. Inc. 7). The symbols of the gods occur on most amulets of groups C and D, and more or less in the position prescribed by the ritual, above the bed or bedroom of the patient, and looking down on Lamaštu's expulsion. The choice of symbols varies, and does never correspond exactly with the ritual or the incantation. On no. 1 the following gods are represented by their symbols (I), from left to right: the feathered and horned crown of Anu, the ram's staff of Ea, the lightning bolt of Adad, the shovel of Marduk, the double stylus of his son and administrator Nabû, the eight-pointed star of Ištar, the winged sun-disc of Šamaš, the crescent moon of Sin, the seven stars of the Seven-God (Pleiades), and the lamp of Nuska, the vizier and messenger of Enlil.

The most decisive innovation of the Iron Age amulets is the introduction of the patient himself, lying in his sick-bed (III). Although the image of the patient gives focus and unity to the composition of the amulets, it is superfluous for the progress of an exorcism performed on a real patient. Possibly the addition of the patient, always bearded, has to do with the widened scope of the Lamaštu ritual, the progressive introduction of beneficiaries other than babies (and their mothers).¹⁹⁴ That the amulets of groups C and D (like those of Group A discussed above) combat other evils besides Lamaštu is made perfectly clear by the inscribed incantations. The most common incantation, sometimes combined with one against Lamaštu (no. 61), is actually spoken by an adult patient from his bed:¹⁹⁵

Incantation: something that comes from under my bed made me shrink for fear, and gave me terrible dreams; on the command of Ninurta, the foremost son, the beloved son, and on the command of Marduk, who lives in the Esangil in Babylon, it must be handed over to Pedu, the chief gate-keeper of the netherworld. You, door and bolt, you must know: I now fall under the protection of (these) two (divine) lords.

In the Lamaštu ritual the entrance to the bedroom is guarded by clay models of watch dogs, and in the accompanying incantation door and bolt are placed under the protection of the gods. The amulets pick up this theme with the two lion-demons and the god at the right of register III, the bedroom. Lion-demons (*ugallu*) execute divine commands, which is here, as shown by their attitude, the protection of the entrance to the bedroom. That it looks as if they are attacking each other is a consequence of the flat world of ancient art; they are supposed to face an intruder, at whom they raise their fists while

¹⁹³ Farber 1987:90, 1989b:228.

¹⁹⁴ In the incantations Lamaštu attacks babies, as well as other people, see note 102. According to the introduction no. 60 is against Lamaštu, Labasu, and Ahhāzu.

¹⁹⁵ See note 28. This incantation is limited to amulets of groups C and D. See note 35 for an amulet showing the evil under the bed (a little dragon).

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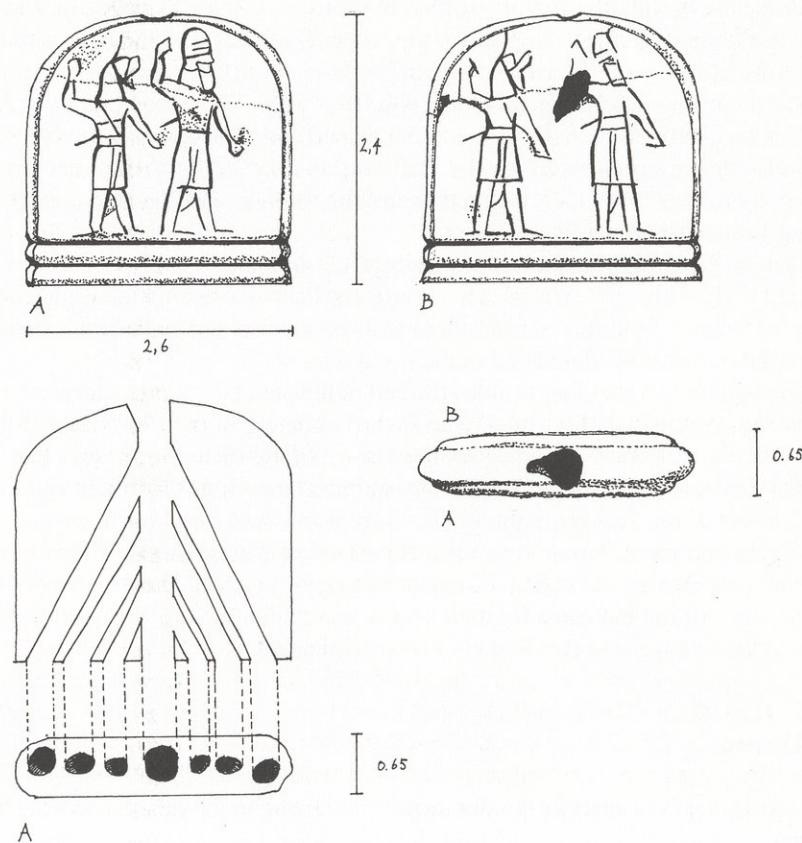


Fig. 8 Neo-Assyrian amulet showing the Ugallu and Lulal, the same apotropaic spirits which guard the bedroom of the patient on contemporary Lamaštu amulets (Fig. 6 III). These spirits operate on divine assignment, according to an incantation found on such amulets “on the command of Ninurta . . . and Marduk . . .”. The amulet is bored through to accommodate strings with apotropaic stones. A.R. Green, *BaM* 17 [1986] no. 134 (drawing F. Wiggermann).

barring the passage with their other hands.¹⁹⁶ The god to their right is Lulal, a warrior god with the same assignment as the lion-demon.¹⁹⁷ Protective amulets with just the Ugallu and Lulal may carry the general incantation cited above, and be combined with chains of magical stones such as prescribed for the child threatened by Lamaštu (Fig. 8).¹⁹⁸ The Anzû that adorns some Lamaštu amulets of Group B is probably apotropaic as well (Fig. 4).

The function of the seven (sometimes six) animal-headed figures in II is not completely certain. They all raise their fists, and depending on the object of their aggression

¹⁹⁶ For the *ugallu* see Wiggermann 1992:64, 169ff.

¹⁹⁷ For this god see Wiggermann 1992:64.

¹⁹⁸ This group of amulets was treated above p. 223f.

X. *Lamaštu, Daughter of Anu. A Profile*

they could be either evil demons, or protective spirits. Other than *Lamaštu* not one evil demon has been identified in art, so that the former solution is unlikely, while there is some textual and pictorial support for the latter. The beings, as they are usually shown, with arms and legs, can be viewed as activated versions of the animal-headed staffs that replace them on some other amulets (nos. 19,¹⁹⁹ 61, 77). As potentially active staffs they can be identified with the individually named and apotropaically active “standards” (*urigallu*) that are prescribed for the walls and the corners of the patient’s bedroom in other magical texts.²⁰⁰ Such a function fits the attitude and the position of the seven animal-headed figures in II very well.

The patient in his bed makes a gesture of supplication, of prayer. His prayer is directed to the lamp god *Nuska*, who guards the bedroom during the night, when evil is prone to attack.²⁰¹ On one amulet there is a censer next to the patient’s bed (no. 3); it serves the fumigations described in the ritual text.²⁰²

The two figures standing besides the bed of the patient²⁰³ are primeval sages, mythological beings half-fish, half-man, who in the beginning of time came out of the Persian Gulf and taught man everything he needed to know, including magic and medicine. In their left hands they hold buckets containing holy water, in their right a sprig to sprinkle the water over the patient. The holy water will free him from sin, one of the underlying causes of demonic attacks. As a kind of patron saints of the conjuror, they play the part that in the actual exorcism is played by their human successor.²⁰⁴ Thus the presence of the fish-sage legitimizes the manipulations of the conjuror, and fits his magical knowledge into the divinely ordained cosmos.

Conclusion

Lamaštu is firmly rooted in the domestic sphere: she embodies the worries of parents concerning their offspring, and both her image on the amulets and the incantations against her initially show the kind of variation that would be associated with folklore (Farber 1990), rather than with the codified knowledge of official religion.

At the end of the Bronze Age the *Lamaštu* material changes in character. The visual image of the demoness becomes fixed, and the texts are being reworked and edited to reach their final unchanging form. The *Lamaštu* of the Iron Age is a product of the more general process of canonization, a scholarly version of the Bronze Age folk demoness.

¹⁹⁹ The staffs on this amulet were seen by H.H. von der Osten, *AfO* 4 [1927] 90 (“vier postamentartige Gegenstände”).

²⁰⁰ See Wiggermann 1992:71f.

²⁰¹ See Wiggermann 1992:112 and *SBTU* 2 9:8ff., where the incantation to *Nuska* appears in association with the *Pazuzu* incantation *atta dannu* (r. 9ff.).

²⁰² A seal which shows a number of remarkable similarities to the *Lamaštu* amulets has in its second register seven animal-headed figures approaching a censer. The register above it has divine symbols, the one below it a patient on a bed attacked by a demonic figure with a spear. The lowest register shows a quite deviant *Lamaštu*, and the object may be a fake, see B. Meissner, *AfO* 10 [1935–36] 160f., B. Buchanan, *Catalogue of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in the Ashmolean Museum* [1966] 111f. ad no. 612. The censers are treated by Invernizzi 1997.

²⁰³ That the figures seem to stand at the head and foot of the bed is probably again a consequence of the flatness of Assyrian art.

²⁰⁴ On the fish-sage see Wiggermann 1992:76f. On some amulets an anthropomorphic sage (or the conjuror) appears alone or together with the fish-sage, see Wiggermann 1992:74.

Conclusion

More so than a myth or a ritual in the temple an exorcism ties daily life and theology into an integrated whole: the behaviour of the individual is assessed, his fate clarified, and the role of gods and demons defined. The conjuror makes house calls, and deploys his oral and visual finesse at a moment that his clients are sensitized by worry, and anxious to grasp the hope that is offered. The willingness to accept what is in the conjuror's bag, and the prolonged exposure to his theology, provide an excellent opportunity to confront the public with the products of scholarship.

How much of the public the exorcist could educate in this way remains an open question. The expensive execution of the Iron Age amulets, however, gives the impression that it was only an elite segment that could afford his services. It may be guessed that the population at large clinged to a folk version of the child snatching demoness, the one that resurfaces in the later traditions of the eastern Mediterranean.

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INDICES

WORDS

Sumerian

a(/e₄)
water, semen, offspring, 4

a.b.a.gar.ra
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a.dingir.re.ne.k
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a·šu·du₁₁
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agarin
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gù.nu.nu-sù
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nám-mu-nus-a
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ní.bánu.zu
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ní.g.ig.gá
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níg.šá.gá.na-šu-lá
to suffer a miscarriage, 39

níg.šá.gá.ni-šub
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níg.(NÍGIN).gar
cemetery for still-born or premature babies; depository of afterbirths; metaphor for the womb; chapel in temples of Inanna and Ninsisna, 29, 76, 112 in netherworld, 32f.

nígin
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nín-dingir
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sag.itinu.tila
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SIG₄(.tu.tu)
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suhur
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šá.zu.máh

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šu - d u₁₁ s. a - š u - d u₁₁

šu - ú s
to open (with *gišig*, 'door'), 112¹⁹

šu b
to throw (the foetus), miscarry, 27, 39

tu
priestess of mother goddess; a deity, 76

tu.d, ù.tu
to give birth, 6³⁶

tukul
weapon, penis (?), 63⁹⁴

tùr/tur
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ú.làl/Ú.LÀL
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u₄ - s ù . g
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u₅ . a
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u d u g
a demon, 226

UM.k i . r a . r a
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UM.ME(.g a . l á / k ú)
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UM.ME(é m e).da
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ú r . r a - d a - r i
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z a r a₆
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z é
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SALzig.túm.túm

midwife, shaver (*gallābu*), 172¹¹

z i z n a
brood, fish roe, 10

z ú . m u š
worm, 225⁴⁴

Akkadian

abālu
to dry up (said of semen), 6³³

aban alādi
stone of giving birth (*ittamir*), 50

aban erē
stone of staying pregnant, 49, 51; spelled NA₄.Á.MUŠEN (?), 51²¹

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agappu
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agarinnu
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agurru
kiln-fired, brick, Ugaritic 'ugrm, 'bricks (of birth)', 121

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a shell (symbol of fertility), 52²⁶

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alāku
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ālu
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ammatu
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amru
chosen one (king), 148

amurriqānu seed of the *a.* plant (promotes pregnancy), 52f., 94

jaundice (root of *pillū* plant against *a.*), 58⁶⁵

ú *AN.KI.NU.DI* *atūdu* wild ram, 64¹⁰⁰

Sumerogram for *ašqulalu*, 54³⁵ *awiltu* free female citizen, 185

anduraru situation of leisure, 113²¹ (in *Atram-hasīs* I 243) *azupirānu* saffron, used for contraception; name of a city, 38; as abortifacient, 42

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arḥu fast, 20¹⁰⁷ to be multicoloured (*barum/GÙN.A*), 194, 195 (subj. *pūtum*)

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dadum
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dā'iku
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dalilu
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damāmu
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damū
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N: to become pregnant, 6;
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huburu noise (of mankind), 213, 225

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ibrum friend of husband, paronymph, 176

igidalū one-eyed, 164

ikkilu crying (of baby), 191¹³⁵

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izru
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kabasu
to step, 198 (wr. ZUKUM), 199

akkku
weapon (denotes breasts), 230⁹⁰

kalītu
kidney (stricture origin of barrenness), 36

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seed of the *k.* plant (promotes pregnancy), 52f.

kamāsu
to crouch or squat (when giving birth), var. *hamāšu*, 67, 67¹¹⁵, 123f.

kanānu
to coil up (said of child), 10, 210

kannu
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to wipe (vagina; birth control?), 37f.; obj. baby, 177

kappu
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karāšu
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karšu
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kaslu
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kasāru
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lullû amēlu
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lujû
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Meluhhū Meluhhean (Negro), 164

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papparminū a stone, 166 (in ritual)

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qarētu banquet (arranged in temple to get children), 36

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qerbitu innards, womb, 5, 9⁵³

qerbū intestines, 197 (wr. ŠA.MEŠ)

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rakāsu to tie (baby to the breast), 181

rātu

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rāt šassūri ilāni
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rehū
to pour out, impregnate, fertilize, beget, 1, 4; subj. woman: 8, 200

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rikibtu
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sagû
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suhsu
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salālu
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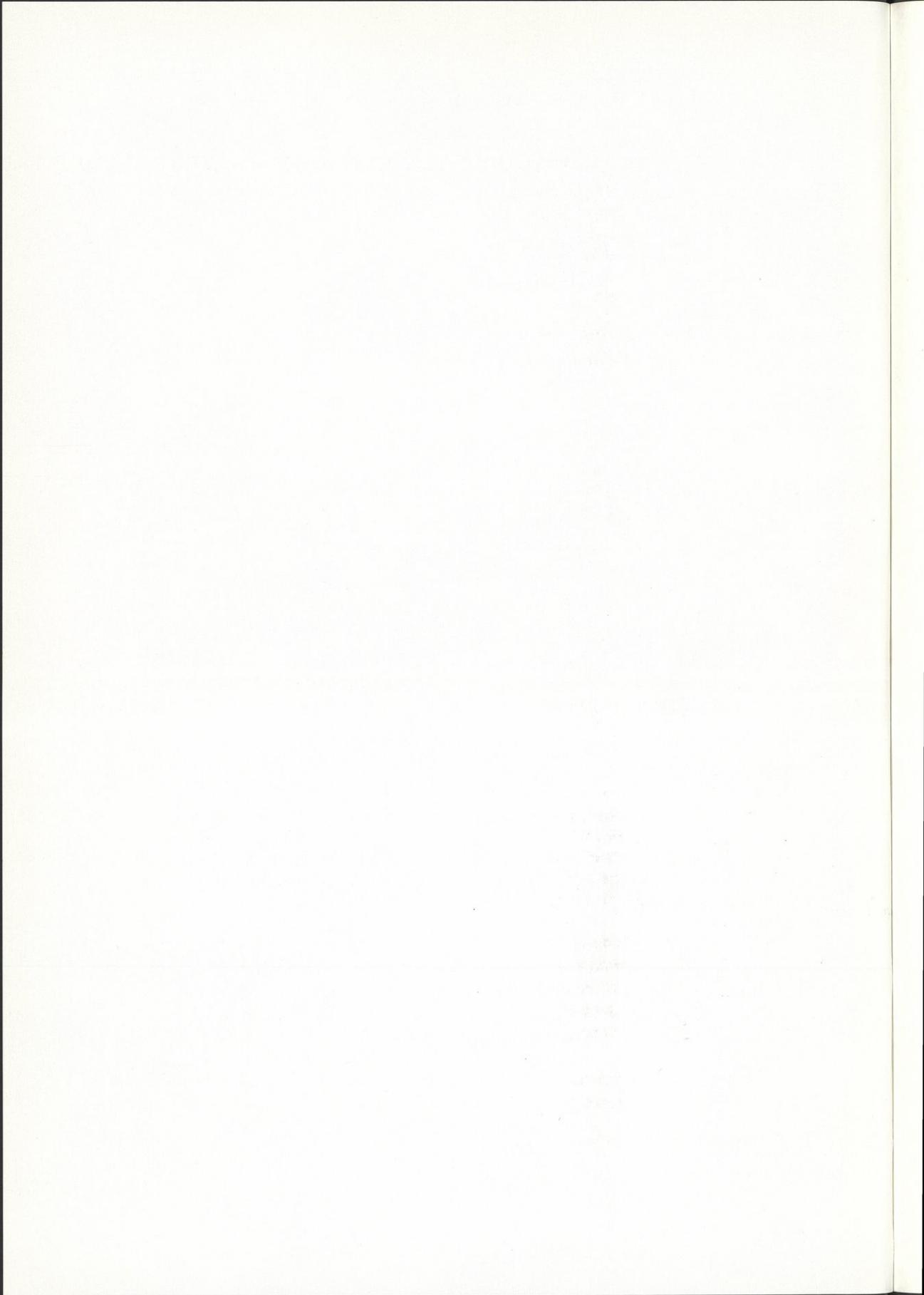
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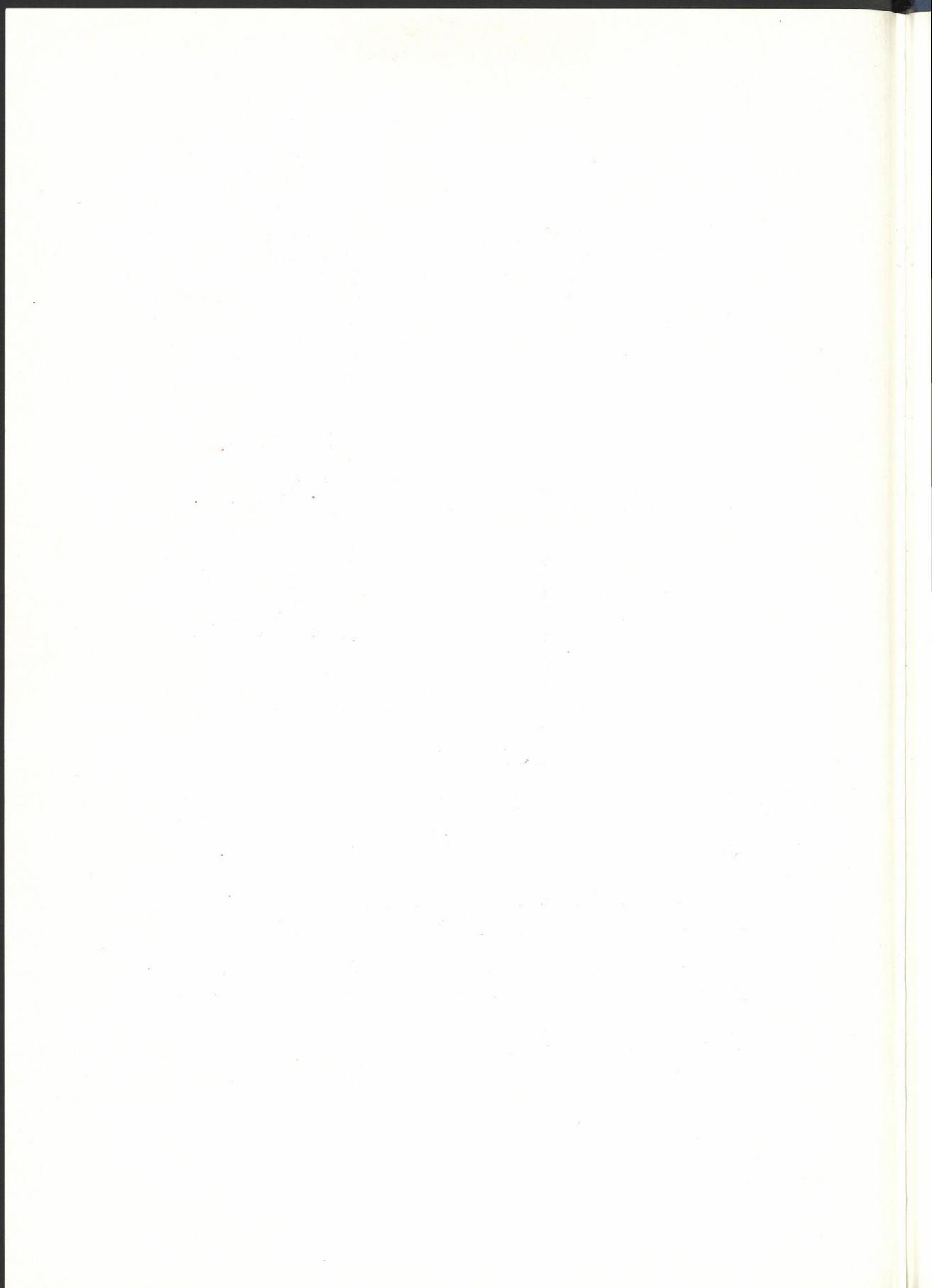
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