Prostitution certainly cannot be shown to be Mesopotamia’s “oldest profession,” but it is attested quite early, from at least the mid-third millennium. It is an occupation that, in its practice, as Brigitte Lion has noted (2013: 398), “has left practically no written trace,” and involved, again in her words, a “transaction (...) payable in cash, which made it unnecessary to document on a tablet.” Of course, as Lion implies, this lack of documentation is not a peculiar feature of prostitution, but rather is just one example of the absence of documentation for all small-scale private transactions. People bought vegetables, had their shoes repaired, got haircuts, and satisfied their sexual needs, all without leaving a trace in the great mountain of cuneiform documentation.

In their call for papers, the conference organizers reminded us that most women’s work was in and around the home, and thus unmentioned and unremerated. When women worked outside the home, in the great institutions, palace or temple, they were most likely to be found in the textile or grain mills, that is, working in sectors that specialized in just one of the tasks that were part of the traditional chores women did in the home. Might prostitution also be so considered? Was the prostitute earning her livelihood by merely commodifying a single task that other women performed only at home with their husbands? Can we speak of sex workers in ancient Mesopotamia? I ask this question knowing that the terms “sex work” and “sex worker” have become controversial among feminist theorists and activists (Howell 2008). Some seek to support and protect women who satisfy sexual desire for money, and understand the term “sex worker” to be more dignified than “prostitute.” Others are outraged at any attempt to dignify activity that involves the objectification and commodification of women’s bodies, and insist that such activity be called prostitution, with all of the opprobrium that the term connotes. A more academic version of this dispute exists in the field of classics, where some scholars

1 For a detailed discussion of Mesopotamian prostitution, see Cooper 2006, where can be found philological details and references that may have been omitted from this paper. See also Roth 2006.
2 E.g. Jursa 2010: 31. Note that Brunke 2011: 221–222, maintains that in Ur III, at least, fruits and vegetables were delicacies and not part of normal diets.

Jerrold S. Cooper, Johns Hopkins University; anzu@jhu.edu
insist that we moderns need to shed our hang-ups and realize that prostitution was just an occupation like any other, whereas other scholars would say that it may have been legal, but for its ancient practitioners, it was degrading.\(^3\)

In Mesopotamia, as in much of the world even today, most occupations involved, in some sense, selling one’s body, since they were physically very taxing, whether involving working in the fields, clearing canals, hauling, construction, or grinding grain. One of the most depressing glimpses of the life of ancient women is afforded by Fig. 1, a room at Ebla in which, ca. 1700 BC, a group of women, probably captives, spent their days at hard, monotonous labor turning grain into flour. Yet, the kind of physical labor performed by prostitutes is different, more fraught, and was so perceived by the ancients. It may

\(^3\) Contrast McGinn 2014 with Cohen 2014.
not have been considered sinful (in the religious sense) for a single woman to express her sexuality outside of marriage (Cooper 2009), but prostitution was degrading and “prostitute” was used as an insult (Cooper 2006: 13–14). The unfavorable omen apodosis “the man’s wife will become a prostitute” is preceded by “the man’s wife will get her husband killed” and followed by “the man’s wife will cast a spell on her husband” (Koch 2005: 108–109), all rather dire projections of male anxiety.4

At the end of the last century, there was an attempt to show that the word for prostitute in Akkadian, ḫarimtu, didn’t mean prostitute at all, but rather signified a woman independent of male authority, who was free to enjoy her sexuality as she pleased (Assante 1998, also 2003). As important and interesting as this attempt was, I believe I have shown elsewhere that it was wrong (Cooper 2006: 20), and I was unexpectedly gratified to note that in his broadcast inaugural lecture, the current occupant of the chair in Mesopotamian civilization at the Collège de France enthusiastically supported the existence of prostitution in ancient Mesopotamia.5

Why prostitution?6 It is nearly universal, especially in traditional urban societies. Demand for extra-marital sex existed in Mesopotamia and elsewhere due to, ironically, the centrality of marriage and the emphasis on women’s pre-marital chastity and marital fidelity, in part to ensure the legitimacy of offspring (Cooper 2002).7 Males in Mesopotamia married relatively later than females, resulting in a pool of young single men, and there were male travelers, military personnel, and workers away from home, yet most women – other men’s wives and daughters, and religious celibates – were not sexually available. Demand was there. On the supply side, there were destitute vulnerable women – the widows and orphan girls whom rulers traditionally claimed to protect – as well, no doubt, as wives and daughters from impoverished families who saw no other alternative,8 and dependent women whose parents or own-

4 It is this type of negative apodosis that is found in the oft cited “the entu-priestess will have anal intercourse to avoid pregnancy” (CAD E: 325), which should not be taken to mean that the priestess could have sexual relations as long as she didn’t conceive, but, rather, that she will become so depraved that she will have illicit intercourse while cleverly concealing the fact. See similar apodoses which imagine the entu-priestess stealing sacred property, having intercourse with a temple administrator or fornicating in general (CAD E: 179).

5 But, in fairness to Assante, she denied only that the word ḥarimtu means “prostitute,” but not the existence of prostitution in ancient Mesopotamia.

6 For a brief general survey of the question, see Howell 2008.

7 See also the discussion of Engels on the origin of monogamy and the importance of pre-marital chastity and female marital fidelity in Lerner 1986: 22–23.

8 In 18th century Europe, prostitution might be part of a poor family’s economic survival strategy (Hufton 1995: 163). See below for the adoption of girls for the purpose of prostituting them in Mesopotamia.
ers might earn income from their sale of sexual favors. A socially sanctioned outlet for male desire was necessary to protect proper wives and daughters from improper advances or attacks; hence, the Middle Assyrian Laws required that married women appear veiled in public, but forbade prostitutes from doing so, visually marking the sexually approachable and the unapproachable (Roth 1997: 167–169). Sumptuary laws in medieval Europe accomplished a similar purpose.

The *locus classicus* for prostitutes and prostitution in Mesopotamia is the address of Enkidu to the prostitute in the Akkadian *Gilgamesh Epic*. Near the beginning of the epic, the wild man Enkidu was seduced by a prostitute who effected his transit from nature to culture, and to friendship with Gilgamesh. In tablet VII, when Enkidu realizes that he is about to die as punishment for offenses against the gods committed in the course of his adventures with Gilgamesh, he turns against the prostitute and curses her. She will never have a normal household or family life, and furthermore, he says,

“The bed you delight in shall be a *bench*! The crossroads shall be where you sit! A field of ruins shall be where you sleep! The shadow of the city-wall shall be where you stand! Thorn and briar shall scratch your feet! Drunk and sober shall strike your cheek!”

The very picture of the classic street whore, plying her trade on the city’s outskirts, vulnerable to male violence. And it is precisely “to the shadow of the city-wall,” that Ištar, the divine harlot, beckons young men to appease her insatiable desire according to an Old Babylonian song: “Seven for her midriff, seven for her loins (...), Sixty and sixty satisfy themselves in turn upon her vulva (...) The young men have tired, yet Ištar never tires.” (Foster 2005: 678)

---

9 Lerner 1986: 133–134 sees the origin of prostitution in Mesopotamia 1. in exploitation of slaves by owners as prostitutes, and 2. in “the pauperization of farmers (...) which led to debt slavery. Children of both sexes were given up for debt pledges or sold for ‘adoption.’ Out of such practices, the prostitution of female family members for the benefit of the head of the family could readily develop. Women might end up as prostitutes because their parents had to sell them into slavery or their impoverished husbands might so use them. Or they might become self-employed as a last alternative to enslavement.” See also her summary of the theories of Engels, who viewed “the institutionalization of prostitution (...) as an indispensable prop for monogamous marriage” (1986: 23).

10 See Cooper 2006: 14 for other distinguishing marks of a prostitute. Lerner 1986: 134–140 has a very insightful, if flawed, discussion of the MAL veiling regulations.


12 George 2003: 640, 115–119 and the more literary translation in George 1999: 58; cf. the MB version of the curse in George 2003: 298, where, in a fragmentary line, Enkidu mentions the prostitute’s tavern (for which see below), and cf. Maul 2005: 104, utilizing unpublished Assur manuscripts.
But, returning to the Epic, when the sun-god reminds Enkidu that thanks to the prostitute, he has enjoyed the friendship of his beloved companion, Gilgamesh, Enkidu has a change of heart:

“My mouth that cursed you shall bless you as well! Governors shall love you and noblemen too! At one league off men shall slap their thighs, at two leagues off they shall shake out their hair! No soldier shall be slow to drop his belt for you, obsidian he shall give you, lapis lazuli and gold! Ornate earrings shall be your gift! Ištar, the ablest of gods, shall gain you entrance to the man whose home is established and wealth heaped high! For you the wife shall be deserted, though mother of seven!”

In contrast to the street whore of Enkidu’s curse, we have the image of the high-class prostitute or courtesan, plied with precious metals and jewelry, patronized by nobles and high officials, and a threat to established marriages. Significantly, Enkidu’s curse had been “a fate not to end for all eternity,” (George 2003: 638, 103) so it must persist alongside the subsequent blessing. Enkidu’s curse and blessing thus comprise an etiology for the two faces of prostitution, the street whore and the courtesan.

The only explicit Mesopotamian evidence for actual payment for sex is in a Sumerian literary text where Inana, the Sumerian equivalent of Ištar, advertises that her fee when standing against a wall is one shekel, but bending over it is one and a half shekels – a not inconsiderate sum if we realize that a hired man’s salary in the Old Babylonian period was one shekel per month. However, Inana doesn’t tell us if the wall she leans against is interior or exterior. The ordinary prostitute might well ply her trade at crossroads, the city’s outskirts, on the street (Steinert 2014: 144–145), or, as the etymology of the Sumerian equivalent of ḫarimtu, kar-kid, reveals, dockside (Civil 1976: 190). Lexical texts imagine prostitutes working in fields, prowling the banks of watercourses and haunting ruin hills. The only indoor venue listed is the tavern (eš₂-dam = Akk. aštammu), and it is probably a tavern wall that Inana would lean against when selling her favors. Two Sumerian texts imagine Inana’s appearance as the evening star to be like a prostitute entering a tavern in the evening, and in a third text, Inana identifies herself as a prostitute sitting at the tavern gate. The tavern gate is associated with an earthly prostitute in the Sumerian composition Curse of Akkade, where one result of the gods’ curse is that “the prostitute will hang herself at her tavern’s gate,” and taverns and prostitutes are associated in Akkadian texts as well.14

14 For documentation for this paragraph, see Cooper 2006.
The reason for the association is, of course, the nexus of inebriation and sexuality that was recognized and exploited in ancient times as in our own. The images (Fig. 2) on early second millennium terra cotta plaques showing standing heterosexual coitus from behind while the female, bending forward, imbibes beer through a drinking tube, are not to be taken literally, but, rather, are emblematic of the link between the consumption of alcohol and sexual activity. In the same way, a 17th century Dutch tavern or brothel scene (Fig. 3) places copulating canines next to a man being served alcohol by a woman, to make a similar point. On the interior of ancient Greek wine cups, couples are shown in poses similar to the Mesopotamian plaques (Fig. 4), and in other sexual postures as well, but since the medium is an actual wine cup, references to alcohol are unnecessary, hence absent, in the scenes themselves.

The Mesopotamian tavern, where beer was brewed and dispensed, and, probably, lodgers accommodated, was presided over by a sābū “innkeeper” or sābitu “alewife” as his female equivalent has been rendered since the early

---

15 A somewhat outdated catalog of such plaques can be found in Cooper 1975: 262–263.
days of Gilgamesh translations – remember, it is Siduri (or Šiduri), the alewife at the end of the world, who wisely tries to discourage Gilgamesh from pursuing his quest for immortality (George 2003: 148–149).

Fig. 3: Tavern or Brothel Scene, Frans van Mieris the Elder, 1658. Courtesy of Mauritshuis, The Hague.
Archeological evidence for taverns has been discussed recently by Xavier Faivre (2013), who called our attention to a wonderful illustration from Africa (Fig. 5) demonstrating that, yes, you can drink from such very long tubes, as did our Babylonian women (Fig. 2) and as did Early Dynastic banqueters (Fig. 6) as well. Brigitte Lion (2013: 395) has drawn attention to something very peculiar in the distribution of references to male (sābûm) and female (sābītum) proprietors of taverns: whereas the male proprietors predominate by far in archival texts, nearly all references to women proprietors are to be found in the

---

16 Breniquet 2013 insists that most Early Dynastic representations of a vessel with what have been interpreted as drinking tubes projecting from it be reinterpreted as representations of wool processing, but she herself (363 n. 12) admits that our Fig. 5 is indeed a drinking scene, and I believe that, contrary to Breniquet, most of the ED representations are as well, while not excluding the possibility that some may be what she claims. See also the possible drinking tube in the mouth of a figure in the Gunduk banquet scene (Reade et al. 2013: 88–89).
Fig. 5: Tiriki men in Kenya drinking through tubes. Katz and Voigt 1986: 28.

Fig. 6: Early Dynastic stone plaque with drinking scene, Nippur, Inana Temple. 7N 408 (IM 66151). Excavation photo courtesy R. Zettler; cf. Hansen 1963: pl. 5; Boese 1971: 182, N3.
Old Babylonian law codes and decrees, where the male proprietor is absent. The women are responsible for any criminal conspiracies hatched at their establishments, and their activities as creditors are stringently regulated. Even though their male counterparts are known to have engaged in similar financial transactions, and taverns run by males could just as well be frequented by criminals, it is only the women that come under legal scrutiny.

It may be that these alewives had special dispensations from the authorities to operate their establishments, and hence were subject to special regulation. Glassner (1991: 141) has discussed African women who, no longer benefitting from male support, open taverns, and in England and colonial America, licenses to operate inns were given to women without other means of support to prevent them from becoming burdens on the community. Or it may be simply a question of regulating women more strictly than men. But it may also be the case that establishments run by women could differ in some fundamental way from those run by men. One of the only references to a tavern as a *bit sābitim* “house of an alewife” and not simply a *bit sābîm* or *aštammu*, is in a famous Mari letter where Šamši-Adad claims that deserters from his palace have gone to Mari “for partying, for the *bit sābitim*, and for carousing.” Did the *bit sābitim* promise special pleasures that a tavern run by a male might not? A Neo-Babylonian slave girl who opened a tavern, one Ishunnatu (Joannès 1992, Tolini 2013), acquired equipment and materials to make beer, as well as tables and beds – more beds than tables! We have no smoking gun here, but it is possible, given the association of prostitutes with taverns, that taverns run by women, in some cases, at least, were brothels.

---

17 A less likely possibility is that “female tavern keeper” implied male tavern keepers as well: “If (even) a *female* tavern keeper (...)” A support for special legal status of the *sābitum* could be the use of *bit sābitim* in FM 5 3, where a list of witnesses in a legal document is followed by this statement: “These persons [were present] in the [bit] *sābitim* [for the writing of this] tablet” (restorations by the editors based on another, unpublished, tablet).

18 ARM 1, 28, now LAPO 16, 2. The translation is very tentative, since it is not clear whether the verbs *bitallulum* and *mēlulum* refer to activities that the deserters want to observe or participate in. For the former possibility, note that *mēlulum* is the verb used to describe the performance of the ḫuppû acrobats or dancers (male only) at Mari (Ziegler 2007: 262).

19 Tolini 2013 follows Assante 2002: 32, who asserts that female figure in the scene on plaques like our Fig. 2 is Inana-Ištar, and thus the plaques have nothing to do with prostitution, nor do they link taverns and prostitution. But there is no evidence whatsoever that the figure is a goddess, nor is there evidence for the divinity of any of the figures on other types of sexual scenes on OB molded clay plaques. Deities on OB plaques are always portrayed with horned crowns, and one would not expect otherwise for a major deity like Inana-Ištar.
of sorts. This could make men especially liable to become indebted to the sābitum as opposed to the sābû, which might then explain the focus on the former – the sābitum – in the law codes and decrees. (This last paragraph is bristling with modals: should, could, may, might. Our documentation is tantalizing, but unspecific on precisely those details that we are interested in uncovering. We can’t avoid speculation, but we should not build too much on it).

A major attraction of the Mari court was its music (Ziegler 2007), and the harem included large numbers of female musicians, many of whom were royal concubines. We know that Zimrî-Lîm paid close attention to the physical appearance of the captive girls chosen to be instructed in music: they must be without blemish from the tips of their toes to the tops of their heads; all others should be sent to work in the textile mills (Ziegler 2007: 169). The association of music and musicians with sexuality is ubiquitous; in many cultures, women musicians have turned tricks, and, more relevant to our topic, prostitutes of the better sort and courtesans have cultivated music (and other arts) for the entertainment of their patrons. In 18th century Paris, a parent whose ambition for her daughter was for her to become the mistress of a wealthy or noble patron, would enroll that daughter in the school of the Opéra (Kushner 2013: 80–82). In Mesopotamia, the association of music and sexuality was expressed in the portrayal of musicians, male and female alike, playing nude and even having sexual relations while playing their instruments (Fig. 7).

The women usually play drums and the men lutes; both shapes are suggestive. Note, too, the touches of eroticism, which may be linked to the cap-
Fig. 8: Molded clay plaque, Old Babylonian, uncertain provenance. Louvre AO 12457. Author’s photo. Cf. Barrelet 1968: No. 772.

tive origins of some musicians: the nude male lutenist in Fig. 8 has a shaved head but for four long braids, and in a set of Middle Assyrian lead inlays from Assur (Assante 2007), which include copulating musicians, the male in at least two sexual scenes (though not the male musician) is wearing a so-called Phoenician cap (Assante 2007: 370, Cooper 1975: 264). In the improbably posed Fig. 7, the long, unusually patterned hair of the woman has led Ziegler (2007: 50 n. 202) to suggest – correctly I think – that this might be a kezertu, a class of women whom I believe to be prostitutes as well (Cooper 2006: 19), alongside the harimtu.20 If the representations we have of nude musicians on Old Babylonian plaques or Middle Assyrian inlays portray actual performance practice and are not simply emblematic of the sensuality of music, then it is difficult to imagine that the musicians were not also available for sexual services.

Was there entertainment in the tavern, provided by women musicians, singers accompanying themselves on the frame drum, who were also available to minister to the customers’ physical desires? A mid-first millennium docu-
ment from Uruk describing a raucous nighttime tavern scene that resulted in the arrest of several men and two female singers suggests a positive answer (Kessler 2005: 274–275). Was there lascivious entertainment in the palace at Mari, performances with sex and music so alluring that it tempted functionaries to desert their posts at a more austere court and join Yasmah-Adad’s entourage? We don’t have much textual evidence for secular musical performance at Mari or anyplace else, no indication of where concerts or performances took place and how they were received, other than that they were supposed to bring pleasure to the monarch. According to Assante (2007: 384), the scenes on the Assur lead inlays may depict a live sex show with music put on by captive foreign performers for the male Assyrian elite, in the palace of Tukulti-Ninurta I. If so, perhaps similar entertainment was provided a half-millennium earlier by Yasmah-Adad’s captives at Mari as well.

Beautiful captive musician-concubines were objects of desire at Mari, and could be requested by and granted to other rulers (Ziegler 2007: 37–40). High officials also had harems, and they, too, desired and acquired beautiful women (Ziegler 2007: 40–42), as did, probably, other wealthy elite. The trafficking of captive women and girls was a not unimportant element in what Liverani (1990) might call the system of “prestige and interest” in the “époque Amorite,” and certainly, though without the same richness of epistolary documentation, in other ancient Mesopotamian epochs as well.

I would imagine that outside of the royal circle, a beautiful, talented concubine of a wealthy Mesopotamian man need not have been a captive, but may have been the ḫarimtu of Enkidu’s blessing, the courtesan kept by high officials and wealthy men. But of such courtesans we hear little or nothing. There is an echo of Enkidu’s blessing – “for you his wife shall be deserted” – in the worry or the fact that a king would be so captivated by his musician-concubines that he would send his legitimate wives to live outside the palace (Ziegler 2007: 36–37). We find more than just an echo in paragraph 30 of the Laws of Lipit-Ištar

21 Cf. Shehata 2007, to which add the just mentioned Kessler 2005 text.
22 E.g. Ziegler 2007 84 with n. 9: The king will hear (šemû) the music and rejoice (ḫadû), ARM 22 139 (= Durand 2009 p. 195) from the reign of Yahdun-Lîm records gifts of garments for two musicians (LÚ.NAR.MEŠ) when they performed for the king (inûma zamâram šarram ušesmû), while the king was entertaining an emissary from Ešnunna. This is to be kept apart from the inûma za-mi-ri(-im) notations from the reign of Zimri-Lîm, which most likely refer to a mid-summer festival (Jacquet 2011: 66–67).
(Roth 1997: 32) which reads: “If a young married man takes up with a prostitute from the street, and the judges forbid him from going back to that prostitute, but afterwards he divorces his legitimate wife, even after he has paid her divorce settlement to her, he may not marry that prostitute.” Archival documents attest to two other cases of married men whose love for another woman threatens their marriages, and in which the authorities enjoin the woman from having further contact with the man. These women are not prostitutes, but as with the law concerning the young married man and the prostitute, these cases testify to the danger that love can pose to marriage (Roth 2006: 29–32; cf. Westbrook 1984). Roth (2006: 35) is certainly correct to insist that the law as well as the actions of the authorities in the two other cases have nothing to do with sexual morality, and everything to do with the other woman’s “threat to the economic integrity of marriage and inheritance and to the stability of the social fabric.”

But prostitution might also serve to bolster the integrity of marriage and inheritance (Roth 2006: 33–34). The Laws of Lipit-Ištar (Roth 1997: 31) describe a case in which a man’s wife is barren but a prostitute “from the street” bears him a child, who becomes the man’s lawful heir. The man is required to support the prostitute, but she may not live in his house as long as his legitimate wife is alive. At Nuzi, a woman married off her prostitute granddaughter in hopes of producing a legitimate heir for her property. Yet also at Nuzi, what Westbrook would have called a “wicked uncle” claimed that his deceased brother’s son was not a legitimate heir because his mother was not a legitimate wife, but a prostitute. Illegitimacy, nonetheless, could cut both ways: At Old Babylonian Sippar, a man’s maternal aunt and uncle insist that the man is not liable for his purported father’s service obligations, because their sister had not been married to the man, and she slept with many other men in addition to the purported father, so their nephew’s paternity is therefore unknown. Other documents show that prostitutes’ children could be put up for adoption or raised by the prostitutes’ family members.

Prostitution was a survival strategy not only for impoverished women. A woman who was uncertain about her means of support in old age, or simply wanted to augment her income, might adopt a girl who would be bound to support her later on. In an Old Babylonian adoption contract it is specifically

---

24 Barberon (2012: 26–28) interprets one of the documents (BM 13912 = RA 69: 122) very differently: the woman is possibly a nadītum of Marduk who is trying to maintain her independence vis-à-vis a too eager suitor. See there for further bibliography.

25 For the cases in this paragraph, see the documentation in Cooper 2006: 15–16; Roth 2006: 33–34.
stated that the adopted girl will be made a prostitute and support her adoptive mother. In a Nuzi contract and a Middle Babylonian contract from Nippur, the adoptive mother may marry the girl off (and collect bride wealth in the process) or prostitute her. These transactions benefitted the birth parents as well, who received payment at the time of adoption, and perhaps were more needy than the adopting mothers. The latter, after all, could afford the initial investment. Again, at Nuzi, a palace decree forbids personnel from having their daughters practice “beggary and prostitution” (ekūti u ḫarīmūti) without the king’s permission. The palace wants to insure that the royal purse, and not just the parents’ pockets, benefit from the income of these activities. Sex work may have been a survival strategy for the very poor, but could also be an investment for the better off.26

Finally there is the question of prostitution and cult. I have recently argued (Cooper 2013) that the rites involving “prostitution” ḫarīmūtum and women whose activities I believe also involved sexual practices, the kezertum-women, at Old Babylonian Sippar and Kiš, show not that sex was performed in the cult, but, rather, that the temple might benefit from sexual activity overseen by temple personnel. Shehata (2009: 101–103) has, in the meantime, studied these rites in great detail, and stressed that the one specific activity that we know the kezertum performed was music, and that even the ḫarīmūtum may have been – also – a temple musician. Barberon (2012: 56–58) also emphasizes the role of the kezertum as entertainer, insisting that she is not necessarily a prostitute, and in her discussion of the Sippar and Kiš rituals seems to reject the idea that they involved sexual acts (Barberon 2012: 191–204).27

Nevertheless, I maintain my speculative conclusion that sexuality was not foreign to the temple. Note in the seal impressions in Fig. 9 from Early Dynastic Ur, the sexual activity above a temple entrance at the upper left. The scene at lower right is one of many that seem to play on the special hair-do of the kezertum, and at the upper right we find, again, the nexus of music and sexuality. The use of images from 2700 BC to interpret texts from 1700 BC is not entirely unproblematic (Cooper 2008), but the images are nonetheless very suggestive, if not wholly convincing.

26 See the documentation in Cooper 2006: 15–16. The historiola of the man who marries a prostitute and possibly profits from her tavern (MSL 1: 96–97) will be discussed in a forthcoming article. Cornelia Wunsch kindly informs me that the references given in Dandamaev 1984: 132–136 for NB slaves hired out as sex workers by their owners have been improperly interpreted by him.

27 Until the Ur-Utu archives from Sippar are published in their entirety, the rituals accounted for in these texts will remain more mysterious than they need be.
In conclusion, the social role of prostitution was to protect respectable wives and daughters by providing readily available outlets for male sexual desire. To the extent that prostitution was part of tavern life, it contributed, together with alcohol and music, to creating a convivial atmosphere for those men who socialized there. The economic role of prostitution was to provide a means of survival for women and even families with little other recourse, perhaps also providing the extra resources that made pursuing a career in music or dance feasible. If the alewife – sābitu – was really a brothel madam, then the institution of prostitution seems to have played some as yet difficult to define role in providing credit during the Old Babylonian period. And prostituting an adopted daughter or a slave was the source of an extra income stream for those with the resources to acquire the girl or slave in the first place.
Bibliography


Roth, Martha T. 1997. Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. 2nd ed. SBL Writings from the Ancient World 6. Atlanta: Scholars Press.


The Role of Women in Work and Society in the Ancient Near East
Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records

General Editor:
Gonzalo Rubio

Editors:
Nicole Brisch, Petra Goedegebuure, Markus Hilgert, Amélie Kuhrt, Peter Machinist, Piotr Michalowski, Cécile Michel, Beate Pongratz-Leisten, D. T. Potts, Kim Ryholt

Volume 13
The Role of Women in Work and Society in the Ancient Near East

Edited by
Brigitte Lion and Cécile Michel