

JERROLD S. COOPER Baltimore

## Virginity in Ancient Mesopotamia\*

### 1. Virginity, Ours and Theirs

“A virgin body has the freshness of secret springs, the morning sheen of an unopened flower, the orient luster of a pearl on which the sun has never shone. Grotto, temple, sanctuary, secret garden – man, like the child, is fascinated by enclosed and shadowy places not yet animated by any consciousness, which wait to be given a soul: what he alone is to take and to penetrate seems to be in truth created by him.”<sup>1</sup> What a pity that neither Sumerian nor Akkadian has a proper word for a young woman whose flesh is capable of inspiring such marvel! At least since the foundational articles of Finkelstein and Landsberger,<sup>2</sup> Assyriologists have recognized that Sumerian *ki-sikil-tur* and *ki-sikil*,<sup>3</sup> Akkadian *batultu* and *ardatu*, are age-grades, covering the period between the onset of puberty and marriage.<sup>4</sup> Both Finkelstein and Landsberger, influenced, no doubt, by the Sumerian, considered the *batultu* to be the younger of the two, *ki-sikil-tur*, the barely nubile to young adolescent, whereas *ardatu*

would be an older adolescent girl. But in actual Akkadian usage, *ardatu* is confined to literary texts, whereas *batultu*, attested only after the Old Babylonian period, is the word that would be used for adolescent girls in royal enumerations of booty, and in personnel lists and legal texts.<sup>5</sup> The Sumerian terms are restricted entirely to literary texts; the only case where a girl seems to progress from *ki-sikil-tur* to *ki-sikil* is in *Enlil and Ninlil*, where Ninlil first appears as *ki-sikil-tur* (1. 11) alongside Enlil as *guruš-tur*, but subsequently is called *ki-sikil*.<sup>6</sup>

In western languages, too, there is no word that originally designated virgin. *Parthenos*,<sup>7</sup> *virgo*, *Jungfrau* – all designate nubile girls before marriage, *maidens*, and like that word, came by extension either to denote or to connote sexually innocent girls because of the expectation that respectable girls would refrain from sexual intercourse until marriage: A *Jungfrau* should be sexually innocent, as well as a young woman; “in principal, a nubile young woman does not make love.”<sup>8</sup>

\* Abbreviations follow those of *CAD* (*Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*) and *PSD* (*Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary*). I would like to thank John Baldwin, Toby Ditz, Deborah Lyons, Ellen Robbins, Gabrielle Spiegel, Ray Westbrook and Joan Westenholz for their help and/or suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> de Beauvoir 1989: 155.

<sup>2</sup> Finkelstein 1966; Landsberger 1968.

<sup>3</sup> In Pre-Sargonic Sumerian, *sikil* alone is used for (unmarried) “adolescent girl.” See the Early Dynastic proverbs published by Alster 1991/92 and note the use of *SIKIL* with the same meaning in the Ebla-“Abarsal” treaty (Edzard 1992: §§41f). For the various meanings of *SIKIL* at Ebla, see now Archi 2000, who cites one unpublished reference to a *DUMU.MUNUS.SIKIL* alongside a *DUMU.*

*NITA.SIKIL*, so, adolescent girl and boy, as well as one reference to *KL.SIKIL* in a context in which it can only mean a piece of land.

<sup>4</sup> For Sumerian and Akkadian age grade terminology in greater detail, see Wilcke 1985: 213-17, 241-43.

<sup>5</sup> Roth 1987: 38f; Radner 1997: 148, 153f. In light of Radner, the Akkadian normalization of the *MUNUS.TUR* who are the female counterparts of the *GURUŠ.TUR* (= *batūlu*) in the MB labor rosters (Brinkman 1982), should be *batultu*. See, too, *MUNUS.TUR* (also *batultum?*) used for young nubile girls at Mari (Durand 2000: 422).

<sup>6</sup> Cooper 1980: 184; cf. Leick 1994: 47.

<sup>7</sup> For Greek *parthenos*, see Sissa 1990: 76.

<sup>8</sup> Sissa 1990: 90.

However, the abstract nouns derived from these words – *parthenia*, *virginitas*, *Jungfräulichkeit* – will never simply mean adolescent girlhood, but, rather, refer specifically to sexual innocence. In Sumerian and Akkadian, no such abstracts are

formed: there is no \**nam-ki-sikil* or \**batūlūtu*. To refer to a girl's sexual inexperience, the ancient Mesopotamians could only tell us what she was not and had not done, as in the case of the succubus Ardat-lilī:<sup>9</sup>

A maiden who has never had intercourse like a woman,  
 A maiden who has never been deflowered like a woman,  
 A maiden who has never felt sensuality in her husband's lap,  
 A maiden who never stripped off her clothes in her husband's lap,  
 A maiden whose (garment-)pin no handsome lad has loosened,  
 A maiden in whose breasts there was never milk—bitter liquid came forth,  
 A maiden who never had her fill of sensuality nor satisfied her desire in a lad's lap,  
 A maiden who never had a bedroom, who (was?) never called the name of mother  
 ....  
 A maiden who never had fun with the (other) maidens,  
 A maiden who was never seen at her city's festivals, upon whom no one looked desirously,  
 A maiden who was deprived of a husband in her boudoir,  
 A maiden who had no husband, has born no child,  
 A maiden who had no husband, has raised no child,  
 A maiden who had no husband, had no child,  
 A maiden who was deprived of husband, deprived of child,  
 A maiden who was expelled from her marriage chamber.

Or, in the more concise language of the *Middle Assyrian Laws* §55, “a maiden who is residing in her father's house ... who is not spoken for, whose ... is not opened, who is not married,”<sup>10</sup> or, more concise still, in the *Laws of Hammurabi*, “who has not known a man.”<sup>11</sup>

The Sumerian legal texts use the least tractable term for virgin, *a/é-nu-gi<sub>4</sub>-a* “undeflowered,” translated into Akkadian as *la naqbat*, as the Sumerian verb *a/é—gi<sub>4</sub>* is rendered by Akkadian *naqābu* “to deflower.”<sup>12</sup> Another nominalized Sumerian negative verbal form may be considered a word for virginity: *nu-mu-un-zu-a* “her not having known (a man),” or perhaps just

“her inexperience.” It occurs in a legal text in which a man swears that he unfastened the pin of his wife's *nu-mu-un-zu(-a)*, which reminds us of the pin never unfastened for Ardat-lilī.<sup>13</sup> In a slightly different and more explicit formulation, it appears in the *Laws of Lipit-Ishtar*, where a slandered virgin proves *gìš* (or *nita?*) *nu-un-zu-a* “her not having known a penis” (or, rather, “man”),<sup>14</sup> and it may perhaps occur as an Akkadian loanword, *nunzû*, in an Old Babylonian court record (see below).<sup>15</sup>

Despite the availability of such very explicit negative phrases to express virginity, the words *ardatu* and *batultu*, underwent the same semantic extension as the Greek,

<sup>9</sup> Following Geller 1988: 14-17, translating mainly from the Akkadian.

<sup>10</sup> Roth 1995: 174.

<sup>11</sup> Roth 1995: 106 §130.

<sup>12</sup> See Finkelstein 1966; Landsberger 1968; *CAD* s.v. *naqbu*. For the Sumerian, see *PSD* s.v. *a—gi<sub>4</sub>*; the addition there of the definition “to rape” beside “to deflower” is not justified. I would not care to venture beyond Lands-

berger's speculations on the term's etymology (p. 47).

<sup>13</sup> See the lengthy discussion by Malul 1991/92, and most recently Lafont 1999: 247.

<sup>14</sup> Roth 1995: 33 §33. For the question of penis or man, see n. 77.

<sup>15</sup> For *ki-sikil nu-un-zu-àm = ardatu la lamittu* in a late incantation, see Excursus B.

Latin and German words mentioned earlier, developing in themselves the connotation “virgin,” because, again, an unmarried girl was expected to be sexually innocent.<sup>16</sup> As we shall see later, expectations of virginity before marriage correlate strongly with patrilineal inheritance and descent, and patriarchal family structure, and these expectations were certainly abroad in ancient Mesopotamia, even though, in Malul’s words, “nowhere in Mesopotamian sources is there a clear and unequivocal reference to ... the bride’s virginity as the *conditio sine qua non* for her to be acceptable for marriage.”<sup>17</sup> Many texts do suggest this, however equivocally;<sup>18</sup> the least equivocal is §33 of the *Laws of Lipit-Ishtar*, which deals with the defamation of an *é-nu-gi<sub>4</sub>-a*, a “virgin.”<sup>19</sup> Were virginity not expected and valued, it would hardly be a crime to cast doubt on a girl’s maidenhood.

Thus, when Neo-Babylonian marriage agreements designate the bride as *batultu*, they mean she is a young woman who has not been married previously and is sexually innocent, i.e. a virgin.<sup>20</sup> That this is worthy of mention could be because, as in other Near Eastern cultures, as well as in China and India, a woman’s first marriage may have been in some sense considered different than subsequent marriages.<sup>21</sup> Marriage is the proper destiny of the *batultu* or *ardatu*, as the Ardat-lilî text cited earlier makes abundantly clear. Similarly, Mieke Bal has characterized the *b<sup>e</sup>tûlot* in *Judges* 11 as “young women in transition,”<sup>22</sup> and for Giulia Sissa the Greek *parthenos* “denoted the expectant hiatus between childhood and

*gamos*.”<sup>23</sup> That the *telos* of the nubile virgin is marriage is made explicit in Sumerian: the negative *a/é-nu-gi<sub>4</sub>-a* means “virgin,” literally “undeflowered,” but if the negative *nu-* is deleted, *é-gi<sub>4</sub>-a* means not just (or not even) “deflowered,” but rather “bride” or “daughter-in-law.”

So Marten Stol is both right and wrong about *batultu* when he says that the word had earlier been understood to mean “virgin,” but “a meaning ‘teenager’ has been proposed and ... found wide acceptance. The pendulum is now swinging back – rightly so,” and *batultu* is “a special word for virgin.”<sup>24</sup> The basic meaning of *batultu* remains “unmarried adolescent girl,” but because such girls are assumed to be virgins, the word can be used specifically in that sense, as it surely is in the Neo-Babylonian marriage agreements.

Were, then, Babylonian virgins just like our own? Despite the biological universals we all share, societies construct sexuality in vastly different ways.<sup>25</sup> The following request for advice appeared in North American newspapers in the 1990s:

Dear Abby:

I am a twenty-six-year-old woman who is about to be married. I have never had sex, but when I was 24 years old, I agreed to be artificially inseminated and gave birth to a child for a couple who wanted one, but the woman was not able to have a child .... Am I still a virgin? My husband-to-be is well aware that I want to wait until our wedding night to make love, so he has never pressured me. I need to know if I am still a virgin.

The answer:

<sup>16</sup> E.g. Cassin 1987: 340.

<sup>17</sup> Malul 1991/92: 73.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, the evidence cited by Locher 1986: Chap. 3 and Lafont 1999: 247-49, though I would not agree with their interpretations in each and every case. For exceptions to the virginity of an *ardatu* or *batultu*, one can always point to Inana/Ishtar, and see, too, the examples cited by Radner 1997: 147f.

<sup>19</sup> Roth 1995: 33.

<sup>20</sup> See Roth 1987: 743-45; Lafont 1999: 96.

<sup>21</sup> Goody 1990: 40. Cf. Westbrook 1988: 60-63; Stol 1995: 133.

<sup>22</sup> Bal 1987: 71.

<sup>23</sup> Sissa 1990: 76.

<sup>24</sup> Stol 1995: 128.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the survey of Frayser 1985.

Since you have never had sexual intercourse, you are still a virgin. If your fiancé is not aware that you have given birth to a child, I suggest that you tell him.<sup>26</sup>

Also in the 1990s, a Palestinian teenage girl was raped and became pregnant, but because she had been only partially penetrated, her hymen was intact. When the girl's mother learned that her daughter was "still a virgin," she insisted that the doctor

perform an abortion by cesarean section to preserve the hymen and the daughter's virginity.<sup>27</sup> The American construction of virginity depends solely on whether or not sexual intercourse had taken place; for the Palestinian, as in much of contemporary Near East, virginity rests in the intact hymen. What, exactly, was virginity in ancient Mesopotamia?

## 2. Signs of Virginity, Tests of Virginity

If virginity meant the absence of sexual experience, what were the signs that announced to the ancient Mesopotamians the presence of this absence? Was there a test that could verify a woman's sexual innocence. In the medieval romance *Floris and Blancheflur*, the Emir of Babylon possesses a magic fountain, and "if an unchaste woman comes down to the fountain in order to wash her hands clean, the water will scream out ... and become red as blood." The Emir marries anew at the end of every year, and "uses the magical fountain to weed out unsuitable brides. This fountain, which runs with blood and screams, is thus capable, apparently, of impersonating the young woman at the precise moment of penetration" when she was deflowered.<sup>28</sup> Did women in the real Babylon feel pain and bleed when they lost their virginity?

Israelite women most probably did, if we follow the accepted opinion that the cloth with the bride's signs of virginity, her *b<sup>e</sup>tûlim*, in *Deuteronomy* 22 is the infamous bloody cloth known so well in later Near Eastern and other cultures.<sup>29</sup> Let it be said at the outset that the only Mesopotamian text dealing in detail with bridal linens is without blood or stain.<sup>30</sup>

We do not know how the slandered virgin of the *Laws of Lipit-Ishtar* §33 proved her innocence; other contexts that demand proof of chastity or its absence rely on oaths or declarations in court. Thus, under the Third Dynasty of Ur, a man swears that despite a marriage agreement, his bride refused to "lie with him as wife;" a woman swears that she has slept with no one besides her husband; but another woman refuses to take

<sup>26</sup> Kelly 2000: 136.

<sup>27</sup> Shaloub 1999: 163.

<sup>28</sup> Kelly 2000: 8f.

<sup>29</sup> See, exhaustively, Locher 1986; also Lafont 1999: 249-52.

<sup>30</sup> *Dumuzi-Inanna A* (Sefati 1998: 121-31). Because these are Inana's bridal linens, and Inana manages her sexuality and marriage without the inconveniences experienced by mortal women (see Cooper 1997: 94-96), her sheets may not be representative of Mesopotamian bridal linen. Malul 1989 attempts to make an indirect case for the bloody cloth by deriving Akk. *susapinnu* "paranymp" from *šusuppu* "towel," and connecting the

latter to the bloody proof of virginity because its Aramaic derivative, *šusippā* is used in the Targum to translate the Hebrew word for the cloth showing the *b<sup>e</sup>tûlim* in *Deuteronomy* 22. He thus would connect the *susapinnu* to later Near Eastern customs in which a paranymp is witness to the defloration and custodian of the stained linen. However, although the Akkadian *šusuppu* can be used to wipe the genitals as well as the hands, it is never attested with brides or marriage. More importantly, *šusuppu* is a Sumerian loan in Akkadian, from *šu—su—ub* "to wipe the hands," whereas *susapinnu*, to judge from the *-innu* suffix, was borrowed from Anatolia (see Kaufman 1974: 94 n. 324).

an oath to the effect that she had not slept with another man unbeknownst to her husband.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in the Old Babylonian period, a man affirms that he “unfastened the pin of her [his wife’s] virginity,” but we don’t learn what makes him so certain.<sup>32</sup> Another swears he did not deflower a slave, but witnesses confirm the owner’s charge that he did.<sup>33</sup> How they determined this is not made clear. In TCL 1 10,<sup>34</sup> a woman is asked to swear over and over that a certain man did not “know” her. Although the man is said to have deflowered two other women, we do not know if the woman being interrogated is accused of losing her virginity, or of adultery. At the text’s end the interrogator says to her, “If you don’t want to die, prove (your innocence) to me!” Death is never the penalty for premarital sexual relations, but only for adultery or consensual sexual relations of a betrothed girl with someone other than her fiancé.<sup>35</sup> So if virginity is at stake in TCL 1 10, it is the virginity of a fiancée.<sup>36</sup> The proof demanded would be in her repeated oaths of innocence, easy proof to provide, we might think, but in reality, the ancients were loathe to swear falsely; remember the Ur III woman who refused to take an oath that she had been chaste, preferring instead to risk a

disadvantageous divorce.

Another Old Babylonian legal text has sometimes been said to imply a physical test for virginity. BE 6/2 58 is the last of three documents comprising the dossier of what could be called either the case of the repulsive bride or the case of the extortionary bridegroom.<sup>37</sup> In the year Samsu-iluna 13 the woman Ama-sukkal paid Enlil-issu 19 shekels of silver to marry her. Four years later she added another 5 shekels to the sum. In Samsu-iluna 23, ten years after the initial contract, Enlil-issu has still not completed the marriage! Female witnesses (*šībātu*) come forward to attest that Ama-sukkal has not insulted Enlil-issi, to attest to *nu-un-zu-ša*, her *nunzû*, and to attest that Enlil-issi has been pressuring her for more money. Despite this damning testimony, Enlil-issu declares: “Should you testify even worse things about me than this, I will not marry her! They can even hang me – I prefer to pay (back) the money!”<sup>38</sup>

The form *nu-un-zu(-ša)* has been interpreted as a loanword *nunzû* deriving from Sumerian *nu-un-zu* “she did not know (a man),” as used in the passages cited earlier to designate a girl without sexual experience, so here *nunzûša* would mean “her virginity.”<sup>39</sup> It may be argued that female

<sup>31</sup> Falkenstein *Gerichtsurkunden* 22, 24 and 205: 18-25. In only the first case is it certain that the text is dealing with newlyweds; in the second and third, the issue may be an extramarital affair.

<sup>32</sup> TIM 4 48; see Malul 1991/92.

<sup>33</sup> 3N-T273+ = UM 55-21-426; see, most recently, Lafont 1999: 497.

<sup>34</sup> See Landsberger 1968: 45.

<sup>35</sup> Here and throughout I use “betrothed” to designate what Westbrook (1988) and others call “inchoate marriage,” wherein the marital agreement has been made and prestations delivered, but the marriage has not been consummated. Cf. Lafont 1999: 58f.

<sup>36</sup> FLP 1340 (Owen and Westbrook 1992) records the assertion of a betrothed man that he will not complete the inchoate marriage, telling his fiancée’s father “I will not marry your daughter! Tie her up and throw her in the river!” The only grounds to demand that a fiancée be drowned would be illicit sexual conduct, and the laws of Hammurabi §129 prescribe that an adulterous couple be

bound and thrown in the water, exactly the punishment demanded in FLP 1340.

<sup>37</sup> See the exposition of this case in Westbrook 1988: 43f.

<sup>38</sup> *eli inanna tubarraninnima ul aḥḥassi / liḥluluninnima kaspam lušqul*. Owen and Westbrook 1992: 203 n. 7 correct Westbrook 1988: 116, preferring to follow CAD and interpret *liḥluluninnima* as a form of *ḥalālu* C “to detain,” rather than of (*h*)*alālu* “to hang.” But the correctness of the latter is proven by the case of another reluctant Old Babylonian bridegroom, who exclaims *ina sikkatim ullanninnima mešrētiya purrisa ul aḥḥaz*. “Hang me on a stake or tear me limb from limb – I will not marry (her)!”

<sup>39</sup> According to Landsberger 1968: 92 n. 1 this was first proposed in CAD s.v. *bazā’u*, and is followed by Westbrook 1988. Landsberger himself, however, preferred to derive the form from an otherwise unattested *nezû*, and is followed by Lafont 1999: 497f.

witnesses were brought in this case because it was through their physical examination that they established that the bride had remained *nunzû*. Two objections may be raised to this interpretation: 1) The women were attesting to more than the state of her *nunzû*; they were testifying to the way she treated Enlil-issu and how he was treating her. In a homosocial culture, it would naturally be other women to whom the bride would speak confidentially about her marital problems, and it is from these intimate conversations that the female witnesses derived their information. Their testimony about her sex life would no more have to rely on physical examination than their testimony about the groom's financial pressure would depend on actually observing him put the squeeze on her. 2) The bride, Ama-sukkal, was probably not a virgin in any case. She had contracted this marriage herself and expended considerable financial resources trying to bring it to pass. Probably she was an older widow or divorcee, and *nunzûša* means not "her virginity" but rather denotes the fact that her bridegroom has not yet slept with her.

A final quasi-legal text that has been adduced as evidence for a physical sign of virginity is ARM 26 488, a letter from Buqāqum to Zimrilim, in which, following an intelligence report on the activities of Hammurabi and Ibalpiel, he adds:

Furthermore, the wife of Sin-iddinam revealed the following: "Before Sin-iddinam married me, I had come to an agreement (about the marriage) with father and son. When Sin-iddinam left his house, the son of Asqudum sent to me saying, 'Let me marry you!' He kissed my lips and touched my vagina, (but) his penis did not enter my vagina. I said, 'I will not behave improperly toward Sin-iddinam!' In my house, I did nothing that should not be done against my husband. His ... is well/safe."<sup>40</sup>

This text certainly defines the limits of illicit sexual conduct, or presents us with the earliest example of the rationalization of succumbing to an illicit impulse, the familiar spectacle of a betrothed or married person justifying the enjoyment of a forbidden embrace and intimate carress because she didn't, after all, "go all the way." But what can this have to do with virginity? The woman tells us that she herself negotiated her marriage with her father-in-law and husband,<sup>41</sup> so, like the spurned bride in BE 6/2 58, she was probably not a young adolescent, and this was probably not her first marriage.<sup>42</sup> The editor of the text suggested that the final line, x x x-š[u š]a-al-ma-at be understood "s[on épouse] est intacte," and is followed by Lafont, who explicitly connects this statement with the woman's virginity.<sup>43</sup> But "son épouse et intacte" would be *aššassu šalmat*, and here we must rather restore a word that would take the unassimi-

<sup>40</sup> It is not clear whether the final sentence belongs within the wife's statement, or is a concluding remark of Buqāqum.

<sup>41</sup> Another possible interpretation is that father and son are Asqudum and the son who later tries to seduce her, which would explain why he said "Let me marry you!" That is, she had earlier agreed to marry the son of Asqudum, but then subsequently married Sin-iddinam instead. Cf. Lackenbacher 1988: 424.

<sup>42</sup> Durand 2000: 239 thinks she was a former prostitute, probably because he understands *abam u māram amgur* not as "I had come to an agreement (about the marriage) with father and son," but "I was obliging (sexually) both father and son," interpreting *magāru* as used in BM 13192 (Anbar 1975: 120ff), where a sexually independ-

ent woman is made to say *šaptiya la inaššiquma ša zikarim u sinništīm la amaggarušuma* "I promise that he will not kiss my lips and I will not agree to have sexual intercourse with him!" This is a much less likely interpretation, I think, but if valid, makes it even more certain that she is no virgin.

<sup>43</sup> Lackenbacher 1988: 425; Lafont 1999: 248 and 498. L. Marti (Marti 2001) has recently published collations of ARM 26 488. Most importantly he has established that there is nothing after *ša-al-ma-at* in the last line. His restoration of that line as *'āš-ša-tu'ša-al-ma-at* "the wife is safe" seems very conjectural, to judge from the accompanying photo, and would assume the omission of mimation in letters that otherwise are pretty consistent in using it. But his idea that "safe" here refers to the use of *šalāmu*

lated suffix *-šu*, thus excluding *aššatu* “wife.” In fact, the woman in question is probably the betrothed or newly married wife of Sin-iddinam, who is denying having had sexual relations with another man during his absence, and the text gives no evidence for a physical sign of virginity.

If law and legal testimony provide no evidence for signs or tests of virginity, what about the descriptions of first intercourse found in Sumerian and Akkadian literature? The young Inana of the Sumerian love songs seems to have no difficulties. Newly

My vagina is small and has not learned to stretch!  
My lips are small and have not learned to kiss!  
My mother will learn of it and slap my hand!  
My father will learn of it and lay hold of me!  
And then, when I tell my girl friend, ... !

But when Enlil abducts and rapes her, there is no mention of blood or pain despite her small size. Pregnant, but nevertheless called *ki-sikil*, she follows her ravager into exile, tricked into having sex with him three more times. An entirely different version of

In the bed chamber, on the flowered bed (whose fragrance is) pleasant as the cedar forest,  
Enlil copulated with his wife, feeling great pleasure.

The god Enki deflowers an entire series of daughters born of his daughters in *Enki and Ninḥursag*, all called *lú-tur ša<sub>6</sub>-ga* “beautiful child” until they are pregnant, whereupon they become *munus* “woman.” Even though they are described as “child-

nubile, she eagerly anticipates making love to her man in *Dumuzi-Inana C*, which love-making she describes in the deliciously erotic *Dumuzi-Inana D*. No pain or difficulty here, but perhaps this was not the first time for the courting couple, and in any case, in this corpus Inana’s experience of love, sex and marriage is one of uncomplicated pleasure.<sup>44</sup>

Quite different is the case of the young Ninlil in *Enlil and Ninlil*, who resists Enlil’s blandishments because of her youth and for reasons of propriety:<sup>45</sup>

Enlil and Ninlil’s courtship is found in *Enlil and Sud*, where, after a rude false start, Enlil properly courts Ninlil and negotiates marriage with her mother. Their first night together is one of rapture, at least for Enlil.<sup>46</sup>

ren,” sexual intercourse itself seems as easy as their miraculous nine-day pregnancies and labor-free births. Only the last of these daughters, Uttu, the textile goddess, has agency and resists, and only she is called *munus* “woman” from the moment of her

to indicate the successful completion of the river ordeal is excellent, since an accusation of adultery should have been decided by ordeal, and Buqāqum, whose district was downstream of Mari, would have been well placed to hear news from the site of the ordeal at Hit. The other collations and suggested restorations don’t affect my interpretation of the text. Marti follows Durand in seeing the accused as a woman of questionable repute. Even if this is the same unnamed “wife of Sin-iddinam” who undergoes the ordeal in ARM 26 252, that ordeal was to discover the name of her husband’s female traveling companion, and not related to her own marital fidelity.

<sup>44</sup> See n. 30 above. Contrary to, e.g., Sefati 1998: III.3.f, I do not believe that Dumuzi and Inana waited until marriage to have sexual intercourse, but rather, if we are interpreting the collection of songs as a corpus with a story line, they were sexually intimate already during courtship. In fact, the oath that Inana makes Dumuzi swear in *Dumuzi-Inana B*, placing his hand on her genitals, suggests a possible tradition of sexual liberties allowed to couples once they were betrothed.

<sup>45</sup> Lines 30-34; see Cooper 1980: 185.

<sup>46</sup> Lines 148-149.

birth.<sup>47</sup> When Enki finally gains access to her by a ruse, he is so excited that he ejaculates on her abdomen as well as within her, and in a difficult line she seems to cry out in pain or dismay, “O my abdomen, O my body, O my womb!”<sup>48</sup> This may be the pain we are seeking, but her mother’s response is to wipe the semen off her abdomen, suggesting that it may have been the sting of divine seed rather than the pain of first intercourse that provoked her cries.

The god Sin’s defloration of Ningal without her father’s permission, that is, without

Since I was a young girl,  
I have not known the play of maidens (*ardāti*),  
Nor have I known the frolic of little girls (*šehrēti*).  
That god whom you sent, he has had intercourse with me, so let him lie with me.  
Send me that god that he be my husband and spend the night with me.

If Nergal does not return, she threatens to “raise up the dead to devour the living.”<sup>51</sup> Another fully adult virgin, a male, Enkidu, has a similarly spectacular initiation in the Gilgamesh Epic,<sup>52</sup> but his experience will tell us even less than Ereshkigal’s about the virginity of adolescent girls.

Something that has never occurred since time immemorial:  
A nubile girl was never (before) flatulent in her husband’s lap!

In this proverb transmitted in both Sumerian and Akkadian, the nubile girl is ki-

negotiating a marriage agreement, is mentioned in a somewhat lurid Akkadian mythological fragment,<sup>49</sup> but the tablet breaks off before we can learn if Ningal’s feelings are described (unlikely). The queen of the Netherworld, Ereshkigal, was a self-described virgin until she seduced a visitor from heaven, the god Nergal. The experience, as related in Nergal and Ereshkigal, was one of intense pleasure – “They embraced one another, passionately they went to bed”<sup>50</sup> – lasting for seven days, and when he left her, she demanded his return:

If, in our search for the signs of virginity, we scan Mesopotamian literature for examples of the widespread folkloric theme of the wedding night, either tragic or humorous, we find a single brief, but telling, example:<sup>53</sup>

sikil-turin Sumerian, but the Akkadian, rather than translating *batultu*, the normal

<sup>47</sup> Line 127. At the moment Enki finally makes love to her, she, like the others, is called *lú-tur*, but this is because the line from the previous sexual encounters is repeated verbatim (line 183). Immediately afterward, she is *munus ša<sub>6</sub>-ga* “beautiful woman.”

<sup>48</sup> Line 186.

<sup>49</sup> CT 15 5 ii, ed. Römer 1966: 138-47, interpreted following Greengus 1969: 521: [a]na Ningal ištan uzunšu / [S]in igruš ana hiāriš iqrab / [iqqi]b’ šima ul išāl abaša “He set his sights on Ningal; Sin came near and approached to wed her, he deflowered<sup>9</sup> her but had not asked for the consent of her father.” Both authors note the resemblance to the *Laws of Eshnuna* §27: “If a man marries the daughter of another man without the consent of her father and mother” (*balum šāl abiša u ummiša*; Roth 1995: 63); cf. Lafont 1999: 113. Ningal then, is an unmarried adolescent living in her parent’s house, and

presumed to be sexually innocent. This passage is preceded by the continual lovemaking of Enlil and Ninlil that led to Sin’s birth, and in col. vii we learn that “Ninlil bore Ishum to Shamash, but already having been married, she left him in the street.” That is, Ninlil had been impregnated by her own grandson!

<sup>50</sup> Foster 1996: 423.

<sup>51</sup> Foster 1996: 425.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. n. 84. There are some striking parallels between the two stories: Ereshkigal seduces Nergal by exposing her nude body, as Shamkhat does Enkidu, and both couples copulate for seven days. Afterwards, both Ereshkigal and Enkidu are profoundly changed: Ereshkigal can no longer interact as before with the Netherworld gods, and Enkidu is estranged from his animal friends.

<sup>53</sup> Alster 1997: Coll. 1.12.



lexical equivalent, translates word for word: *ardatum sehertum*, “young maiden.” The choice emphasizes the bride’s youth, suggesting inexperience and awkwardness, but these manifest themselves not through problems in the performance of the sex act itself, but due to the embarrassment of flatulence at an intimate moment.<sup>54</sup>

From the evidence examined, we can only conclude that defloration was not perceived by the ancient Mesopotamians as a physical

trauma, and that there was no sign that marked a virgin, nor were there physical tests to determine virginity’s presence or absence. The magic fountain of the Emir of Babylon was quite at home in the European Middle Ages, but would have been strange and indecipherable to the Babylonians themselves. For them, the loss of virginity was detectable only through pregnancy or catching a girl *in flagrante delicto*.<sup>55</sup>

### 3. The Unstable Hymen

From the preceding, it is clear that the concept of an “intact” virgin, the idea of “wholeness” that is the only way we can describe virginity without using negative phrases, did not exist in ancient Mesopotamia, despite some hints that intercourse may have been difficult for young nubile girls. This ambiguity was even more pronounced in the Classical world, whose “maidenhood without maidenhead” has been scrutinized in Giulia Sissa’s 1990 monograph *Greek Virginity*.<sup>56</sup> Neither the Hippocratic corpus nor Aristotle was aware of the hymen, and, in fact, both saw an unobstructed vagina as crucial to feminine health. Nor does Galen mention a hymen in his detailed analysis of female genitalia, and Soranus mentions it only to explicitly deny its existence. Rather, he says, a virgin’s “vagina is depressed and narrower ... because it contains ridges ... when defloration occurs, these ridges unfold, causing pain ... resulting in the excretion of blood

... In fact, the belief that a thin membrane grows in the middle of the vagina, and that it is this membrane that tears in defloration ... is an error.”<sup>57</sup> Doubt regarding the existence of the hymen can be found as late as Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*;<sup>58</sup> only in the modern period has the hymen emerged as an uncontested physical structure, the culmination of the “medicalization of virginity.”<sup>59</sup>

“How could this be?” one wonders, or at least I wondered, when I first encountered what has been called the “archeology of virginity.”<sup>60</sup> Ideas, concepts, values, even emotions may be socially constructed, but an organ or body part – the eye, the liver, the foot – should either be there or not. How was it possible for physicians and anatomists to argue about the existence of the hymen for 2,000 years? It was only when I saw an illustration showing the great morphological variety in the membrane surrounding the vaginal opening that the prob-

<sup>54</sup> Flatulence embarrassed the Mesopotamians even in somewhat less intimate circumstances, as shown in the so-called *Love Lyrics of Ishtar of Babylon*: “Why were you flatulent, embarrassing yourself? Why did you cause a ... smell in the coach of her lord?” (Lambert *Love Lyrics* 120:11f).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Sissa 1990: 105: “Penetration by a male organ deflowered a virgin, yet the event existed only if it was

found out ... or revealed by its consequences.”

<sup>56</sup> Kelly 2000 carries the investigation on into the European Middle Ages.

<sup>57</sup> Sissa 1990: 113.

<sup>58</sup> Sissa 1990: 177.

<sup>59</sup> See Kelly 2000: Chap. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Kelly 2000: 18.

lem became clear. As Kathleen Coyne Kelly describes it:

...the size, shape, and thickness of the hymen can vary remarkably from girl to girl, woman to woman. It may be barely discernible, simply a thin ridge of tissue that edges the vaginal opening, or a more obvious tissue with one or more perforations. In rare cases, a woman may be found to have an imperforate hymen, a condition that requires surgical attention. Given the pronounced variations in size and shape from woman to woman, perhaps it would be more accurate to identify the hymen as a *site* than as an anatomical *part*.<sup>61</sup>

And it is a site so variable that no test could reliably determine that it had not been breached, and certainly not whether by intercourse or other causes. Clearly, also, initial intercourse might cause little or no trauma, or serious and painful trauma, depending on the variation that presented itself.

The ambiguity of ancient Mesopotamian sources about first intercourse, then, nicely mirrors the variability of the physical evidence. And this is why in cultures where a blood-stained textile is demanded of the bride, there are well-known repertoires of tricks to simulate virginity as constructed by the particular culture, the most obvious being the use of animal blood to stain a sheet or undergarment. In New York City

and around the world, there are lucrative medical practices that specialize in the reconstruction of hymens, a practice referred to already centuries ago by Cervantes.<sup>62</sup> These tricks are necessary both to protect brides who don't conform physiologically to a specific virginal ideal, and to accommodate the very real possibility of male impotence on the wedding night (is the latter why the practice of faking virginal blood is winked at in so many cultures?).

There is no trace of any of this in ancient Mesopotamia. But did the ancient Mesopotamians nevertheless recognize, without fetishizing, what we call the hymen? In the anatomical inventory of *ur<sub>3</sub>-ra* (Hh.) 15: 205ff, the male genitalia are quickly disposed of in only five entries, perhaps because they are relatively straightforward; the following twenty-one entries are devoted to female reproductive organs, beginning with the external genitalia (see Excursus A) before moving on to the vagina and uterus. Among the internal parts, Akk. *šišītu*, which the dictionaries translate "membrane," is repeated five times with Sumerian equivalents of varying degrees of opacity. None of the other internal genitalia merit so many entries; perhaps this membrane is indeed the hymen, and the various entries reflect the actual variation known to occur in it.<sup>63</sup>

#### 4. Virginity's Value

Mesopotamian law and legal records leave no doubt that a girl's virginity was considered an asset to her father or her owner, and defloration was the implicit prerogative

of a husband secured through the marriage agreement. Violation of a betrothed girl's chastity was very serious, punishable as adultery in most cases. Rape or seduction of

<sup>61</sup> Kelly 2000: 10 (emphasis in original).

<sup>62</sup> Kelly 2000: Chap. 4. A search of the World Wide Web turns up doctors from Sri Lanka to Morocco who perform hymenal reconstruction.

<sup>63</sup> More likely, however, is that the five Sumerian equivalents of *šišītu* represent slang terms for the hymen, as do the five Sumerian terms for *lipiššatu* "labia" (see Excursus A).

a virgin slave girl was punished by compensation to the owner;<sup>64</sup> a free virgin's father was compensated for her rape or seduction, and in the former case, the *Middle Assyrian Laws* include talionic penalties.<sup>65</sup> To paraphrase Elena Cassin, a woman's virginity was a matter for men that was dealt with by men.<sup>66</sup> But the loss of virginity had consequences for women, too. Virginity was not just a material or practical matter; it had a moral dimension as well.<sup>67</sup> We have seen that casting unsubstantiated doubt on a girl's virginity was slander punishable by compensation payable to the girl's father, which suggests that the girl's father was harmed by the damage to the girl's reputation. The harm should be that a girl whose reputation is sullied would command a smaller bride-price, and this explains, too, the compensation paid to the father in case of rape or seduction. The term *šim batulte* "price of a maiden" in the *Middle Assyrian Laws*, corresponding to the *mohar habb<sup>e</sup>tûlot* in the Pentateuch, suggests that a premium was paid for a girl of unsullied repute.

Of more direct concern to the girl herself would be the diminished chances of making a good match, as well as the provision that her father could marry her to the man who deflowered her.<sup>68</sup> This provision, found in the *Middle Assyrian Laws* but also in a difficult Old Babylonian Sume-

rian legal exercise and in a much earlier provision in the treaty between Ebla and "Abarsal," as well as in the Pentateuch,<sup>69</sup> has been characterized as part of "a discourse of male power" which "places a woman even more securely in the grip of the man who assaulted her."<sup>70</sup> The father receives the full bride-price, but the girl might find satisfaction only in knowing that in her fallen state a better match was unlikely. But the provision also provides an opening for a girl either to avoid a proposed marriage that was odious to her, and/or to initiate a love match of her choosing, by arranging her own abduction or simply eloping.<sup>71</sup> In many societies where, as in ancient Mesopotamia, the choice of a mate for a daughter was a social and economic decision reserved for her parents, daughters are betrothed as soon after puberty as possible, or even before, precisely to preclude self-selection of a spouse through elopement.<sup>72</sup> The provision could also be used to force the deflowerer to take responsibility for any pregnancy that might ensue.

If virginity was an asset both to a girl and to her father in Mesopotamia, there is no indication that there existed anything like the much-discussed "honor and shame" complex of the Circum-Mediterranean region, in which the honor of a man and his family is to a very great extent determined by the chastity of the family's women.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Roth 1995: LU §8, LE §31; 3N-T273+ = UM 55-21-426 (*PSD* A/1 83; Finkelstein 1966: 359f; Landsberger 1968: 47-49; Lafont 1999: 497). See Westbrook 1998; Lafont 1999: 100-103.

<sup>65</sup> Roth 1995: MAL §§55-56.

<sup>66</sup> Cassin 1987: 345.

<sup>67</sup> Lafont 1999: 97, 131f.

<sup>68</sup> This possibility is foreseen only if the girl is free. Westbrook points out that LE §31 explicitly states that the deflowered slave girl remains with her owner; her deflowerer has no claim on her.

<sup>69</sup> Roth 1995: MAL §55, SLEx §7' (= YOS 1 28; see Lafont 1999: 104-21); Edzard 1992: §41; Ex. 22:15f; Dt. 22:28f.

<sup>70</sup> Washington 1998: 211-13.

<sup>71</sup> See, e. g., Van der Toorn 1994: 57f.

<sup>72</sup> Finkelstein 1966: 368 notes that if Mesopotamian cases of illicit sexual relations are mapped on a grid with married/betrothed and single on one axis, and coercive (rape) vs. consensual sex on the other, we see that the most concern is with consensual sex by married woman (for which there were more motives and opportunities) and rape of single girls, since the latter are usually too young to be expected to seek out sexual experience on their own. This would point to a relatively young age of betrothal and marriage for Mesopotamian women (cf. Roth 1987).

<sup>73</sup> See, e.g., the studies in Peristany 1966, Pitt-Rivers 1977, and Stewart 1994. There are definite aspects of this complex in the society of ancient Israel (Matthews 1998),

This is not to say that honor and shame had no function in ancient Mesopotamia, but only that there is no evidence of such a narrowly defined “honor” governing all social interaction, and the concomitant perception of women, and especially unmarried girls, as the greatest threat to men’s standing in the community. There are no stories or proverbs about men coming to ruin because of their women’s indiscretions; the closest expression of virgin daughters as a danger may be the isolated omen apodosis *mārātu bīt abišina uḥallaqa* “daughters will destroy the house of their father.”<sup>74</sup> Of course, men had great anxiety about women’s sexuality, as evidenced by an apodosis like *aššat amēli ittanajjak* “the man’s wife will fornicate over and over

again,” which is not at all isolated;<sup>75</sup> yet, the seclusion and ferocious surveillance of women known in other cultures was probably not a feature of the Mesopotamian social landscape, apart from the Assyrian royal palace.<sup>76</sup>

Virginity also had a ritual value, both for offerings of animals which are characterized as *la petītu* (NITA NU.ZU) “unopened” (Sum. “not having known a male”)<sup>77</sup> or, in the case of male animals, MUNUS NU.ZU “not having known a female,”<sup>78</sup> and when human hair “of a young man who has not known a woman” and “of an adolescent girl (*ardatu*)” is used for ritual purposes.<sup>79</sup> But the pursuit of the relationship of sexual activity to pollution and ritual purity must be deferred to another place.

## 5. The Male Virgin

If an unmarried young woman was expected to be sexually innocent, the same can hardly be said of the unmarried young man. Therefore, the masculine pendants to *batultu*

(*ki-sikil-tur*, MUNUS.GURUŠ.TUR, MUNUS.TUR) and *ardatu* (*ki-sikil*), *batūlu* (*guruš-tur*), *eḫlu* (*guruš*) and *šaḫurtu*<sup>80</sup> never connote an absence of sexual experience. But

---

as evidenced by Dt. 22, which unlike any Mesopotamian text, decrees that a girl found out to have not been a virgin when she married should be put to death at her father’s door, tying the whole concept of virginity to notions of individual and national honor. But contrary to Locher 1986: 237, this is probably not due to a desire to set Israel apart from surrounding peoples, but rather ought reflect the values of Israel’s closer neighbors and rural-pastoral tradition.

<sup>74</sup> Böck 2000: 35. There may be some additional material in early Sumerian proverbs about daughters and adolescent girls (*sikil*, for later *ki-sikil*; see n. 3) published in Alster 1991/92, but they are quite difficult.

<sup>75</sup> Böck 2000: 35, and cf. *najjakat* “she is a fornicator” (37), as well as the references in *CAD* s.v. *aššatu* n) and *nāku*.

<sup>76</sup> There is no monographic treatment of the Assyrian harem. The *Middle Assyrian Palace Decrees* (Roth 1995: Chap. 11) argue for an almost pathologically strict seclusion and surveillance of the palace women, but Garelli 1998 points out that the more important royal women, at least, were active economically and had authority even over male employees who were not eunuchs.

<sup>77</sup> The Sumerian is usually rendered *Giš* NU.ZU “not having known a penis,” but in view of *Laws of Hammurabi* §130 (Roth 1995: 106) *ša zikaram la idū* “who has

not known a male,” NITA should be preferable to *Giš*, and provides a better parallel to the male counterpart, MUNUS NU.ZU (which cannot be *GAL*<sub>4</sub> NU.ZU because the logogram for *ūru* “vulva” is always *GAL*<sub>4</sub>.LA).

<sup>78</sup> Maul 1994: 54, discusses the criteria for animals used in ritual offerings. But unlike the use of terms denoting virginity in humans, the use of such terms for animals probably implies sexual immaturity.

<sup>79</sup> *CAD* s.v. *ardatu*. Note, too, the ritual use of “the pubic hair of an old woman” (like the *ardatu*, the old woman would be assumed to be sexually inactive) (*CAD* s.v. *šārtu*). For the use of a virgin (*batūltu*) in a royal ritual, see n. 91.

<sup>80</sup> See Radner 1997: 147f and the dictionaries. The equations *guruš-tab*, *guruš-tab nu-zu* = *ba-du-lu*, preceded by *guruš* = *eḫlum*, *guruš-dili* = *ēdu*, found only in Lu III iii 81f (MSL 12 126), probably have nothing to do with the Ur III worker designation *guruš-tab*, but rather originated in a scribal restoration of a broken *guruš-tur*, where the TUR was damaged so that all that was visible were two parallel horizontal strokes. Or, the OB Lu 313-15 sequence *guruš*, *guruš-dili*, *guruš-AŠ* (= *GE*<sub>23</sub>) was altered or misread/misreconstructed into the sequence *guruš*, *guruš-dili*, *guruš-tab*.

although adolescent boys weren't required to remain chaste until marriage, neither did they necessarily plunge headlong into sexual adventures as soon as they were able. There certainly were adolescent males who were virgin, that is, sexually inexperienced, even if this male virginity lacked the moral character of female virginity. When male virginity was desired for purposes of ritual purity, it had to be specified, as in the citation above calling for "the hair of an *ardatu*

(and) the hair of an *eṭlu* who has not [known] a woman." The word *ardatu* implies virginity, but *eṭlu* has no such connotation and must be modified to indicate it.

Because virginity *per se* was not expected of the unmarried young man, there is no mention of sexual innocence in the case of the Eṭel-lilî, incubus, the male counterpart of the Ardat-lilî discussed at this paper's beginning:<sup>81</sup>

A lad who married no wife, who raised no child,  
A lad who has never felt sensuality in his wife's lap,  
A lad who has never stripped off the/(his) clothes in his wife's lap,  
A lad who was expelled from his wedding chamber,  
A lad who [ (text breaks off) ]

This is a lad who has never experienced the joys of marriage and fatherhood, but whether or not he has had sexual intercourse is not worthy of mention, unlike the description of Ardat-lilî, which begins by telling us she died a virgin.<sup>82</sup> For another, highly abbreviated, description of adolescents cut down before enjoying the pleasures of mature life, see Excursus B, and note, too, the *guruš-tur* and *ki-sikil-tur* "who never stripped off a garment in his/her spouse's lap," prematurely dead and seen by Enkidu in the netherworld.<sup>83</sup> The only explicitly virgin male in Mesopotamian *belles lettres* is Enkidu in the Akkadian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, whose sexual initiation as a fully mature adult is an erotic masterpiece.<sup>84</sup> Just as the transition from sexual innocence to sexual experience was an important part

of the transition from adolescence to adulthood for the *eṭlu*, so Enkidu's initiation began his transition from the animal world to human society.

If there is no special moral value attached to male virginity, it, like female virginity, still has ritual value. Thus, in the rituals of STT 73<sup>85</sup> LÚ.TUR *ša* MUNUS NU ZU "a boy who has not known a woman" is required to grind grain, light incense and draw water. In CT 39 24:30 grain is ground by a GURUŠ.TUR, a *batūlu*, without further specification. If, as seems probable, what is meant is a virgin male, then *batūlu* could, after all, connote sexual inexperience, at least in a ritual context.<sup>86</sup> And, like their female counterparts, virgin male animals, or rather, sexually immature male animals, are specified for some offerings (see above).

<sup>81</sup> Lackenbacher 1971: 124 i 15-23.

<sup>82</sup> The Eṭel-lilî passage begins by describing the lad's miserable fate, before telling of his unmarried state. The lines in the break are unlikely to have mentioned his sexual experience; in the Ardat-lilî incantation, the lines after the "expulsion from the wedding chamber" tell of her premature death and phantom existence, and the Eṭel-lilî description probably did the same.

<sup>83</sup> *Gilgameš and the Netherworld* 275 and 277.

<sup>84</sup> The most recent translations are George 1999 and Foster 2001, and see the sensitive interpretation of Leick

1994: 255f. See n. 52 for the resemblance of Enkidu's initiation to that of Ereshkigal, also as a fully mature adult.

<sup>85</sup> Studied and transliterated in Reiner 1960.

<sup>86</sup> Is it also possible that the use of LÚ.TUR in STT 73 and GURUŠ.TUR in CT 39 24 means that LÚ.TUR can sometimes be used to write *batūlu*, as MUNUS.TUR is sometimes used instead of MUNUS.GURUŠ.TUR for *batūlu*? Cf. AMT 61 5:12 (CAD s.v. *idû* 2b) *šumma* LÚ.TUR *ša* MUNUS NU ZU *miqit irri irši* "If a boy who has not known a woman has a prolapse of the rectum." Here and

## 6. Why Virginity?

The virginity of a girl at the time of her first marriage is not a universal expectation. The broad range of attitudes toward premarital sexual activity can be represented by two extreme cases: For the Nuku Hiva in Eastern Polynesia, premarital sexual encounters begin before puberty and are numerous and frequent in adolescence; rural Egyptians cover girls in shapeless garments and veil their faces, practice clitoral excision, and marry daughters soon after puberty, allowing no time for any possible deviation from the chaste norm.<sup>87</sup> The Egyptian extreme typifies the Circum-Mediterranean region, which “diverges sharply from other world areas ... in its emphasis on prohibiting sex during the premarital period.”<sup>88</sup> If the Mediterranean area has particularly strong sanctions and safeguards against the sexual activity of unmarried girls, the virginity of a bride as an ideal is hardly confined to that region, but rather seems to be characteristic of most patriarchal societies, correlating closely with patrilineal kinship and inheritance, and patrilocal residence.<sup>89</sup>

Why do men want their brides to be virgin?<sup>90</sup> The most common reason offered, to insure that their children are their own, can be readily dismissed. A wife’s marital fidelity may be essential to be certain that any

child she bears is her husband’s, but a bride-to-be needs to be guarded only in the time between her last menstrual period and the consummation of her marriage. Prior sexual activity is irrelevant to the paternity of children born in her marriage.<sup>91</sup>

Another reason often given is that when men acquire a wife, they want her to be new, not used, like a suit of clothes,<sup>92</sup> but men hardly demand that the real estate they buy be unused. If difficulty in sexual penetration and a bride’s inexperience and pain heighten erotic pleasure for a bridegroom, it can only be in response to the cultural value already placed on virginity. The defloration of a virgin bride becomes the assertion of the very patriarchal domination that causes virginity to be prized in the first place.<sup>93</sup> Thus, Gilgamesh’s defloration of newlywed brides in the Akkadian *Epic of Gilgamesh* demonstrates to the populace that the authority of the king, at the apex of the patriarchal male power structure, can supersede the patriarchal authority of any other male in the hierarchy. Once again, women’s virginity is an object of male contention; Gilgamesh’s *droit de seigneur* has little to do with the joys of deflowering virgins, and much to do with assuring that their husbands know who’s the biggest patriarch of all.<sup>94</sup>

---

in STT 73, it makes little sense to talk about a “boy” *ṣehru* who has not had sexual relations, since by definition a *ṣehru* becomes a *batūlu* once he has matured sexually. Or, perhaps these passages want to be very specific and are telling us they mean “a boy, (that is,) one who cannot yet have sexual relations.”

<sup>87</sup> Frayser 1985: 202f.

<sup>88</sup> Frayser 1985: 203. See Frymer-Kensky 1998 for a discussion of various anthropological theories that attempt to explain this areal emphasis on virginity, and see also Mitterauer 1985.

<sup>89</sup> Frayser 1985: 338-54, Mitterauer 1985, Goody 1976.

<sup>90</sup> The answers to this question discussed in what follows ignore that aspect of virginity which has become a spiritual ideal in Christianity, with Mary and Christ himself as models, or in Buddhism and other belief systems which preach asceticism and renunciation.

<sup>91</sup> See Frymer-Kensky 1998: 81. The *batultu* who has intercourse with the king in a royal ritual is selected only just before the ritual, so her virginity insures that her child will be the king’s, and thus a vector for eliminating the king’s pollution (see Cooper 1996: 53).

<sup>92</sup> E.g. de Beauvoir 1989: 154, but especially to the point is Pitt-Rivers 1977:27 on Andalusia: “honor requires that one marry a virgin since otherwise one becomes a retroactive cuckold.”

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Frymer-Kensky 1998: 81f.

<sup>94</sup> Cassin 1987: 353, certainly influenced by Freud’s 1918 essay “Taboo of Virginity” (Freud 1963: 60-76), thinks Gilgamesh’s prerogative goes back to the chief’s obligation to perform an act – defloration – that was originally considered to be fraught with danger. Cf. also Lambert 1960: 339f, who also seems to assume that defloration was a dangerous act that the bridegroom

There are at least two logical reasons for a patriarchal society to restrict women's premarital sexual experience.<sup>95</sup> The first, mentioned earlier, is to prevent the self-selection of marriage partners, both by young women, and by young men who may seek economic advantage by seducing a girl from a wealthy family.<sup>96</sup> The second reason is that pre-marital chastity is excellent training for marital chastity, and a woman's marital chastity is essential if her husband wants to have confidence in the paternity of his children.<sup>97</sup> Best to confine women's sexuality from its very beginning, so that virginity and an unsullied reputation become an indicator of potential marital fidelity. This is the "fence around the law" logic that leads to the veiling and seclusion of women, because the danger of illicit intercourse is greater outside the home. A potentially promiscuous woman in the *Laws of Hammurabi* is described as *wašiat* "a woman who goes out,"<sup>98</sup> and the potential places where a young woman might have a sexual encounter are defined in the Middle Assyrian Laws as "within the city or in the countryside, at night in the main thoroughfare, or in a granary, or during the city festival."<sup>99</sup> The eponymous 14-year old Virginia is described thusly by Chaucer:<sup>100</sup>

And of hir owene vertu, unconstreyned,  
She hath ful ofte tyme syk hire feyned,  
For that she wolde fleen the compaignye  
Where likly was to treten of folye,  
As is at feestes, revels, and at daunces,  
That been occasions of daliaunces.  
Swich thynges maken children for to be  
To soone rype and boold, as men may se,  
Which is ful perilous, and hath been  
yoore.<sup>101</sup>

Carried to the extreme, the same logic leads to excision and infibulation,<sup>102</sup> but not in Ancient Mesopotamia.

When preparing this paper, I happened to have dinner with the sex educator at my daughter's school, and mentioned to her that I was struggling with virginity. She looked up and said, "It's all about control." Tikva Frymer-Kensky has said the same thing: Virginity is prized because it provides "a specific purpose towards which the patriarchal urge to dominate can be directed, and a way in which it can be measured."<sup>103</sup> I would have to agree. The only two good reasons for valuing virginity that I have been able to discover – the prevention of self-selection of mates and training for marital fidelity – make sense only within a system of patriarchal domination like the one that was firmly in place in ancient Mesopotamia.

---

originally arranged for someone else to perform. While most Assyriologists today would accept, correctly, I believe, that Gilgamesh was exercising the *droit de seigneur* in ancient Uruk, medievalists have deemed the *droit de seigneur* in Europe to be pure myth (like Gilgamesh!); see Boureau 1998.

<sup>95</sup> Another reason is peculiar to the extreme form of patrilineal descent and ancestor veneration in China: an illegitimate child born to an unmarried woman would not be part of a patrilineage, and hence could not be integrated into society. See Linck-Kesting 1985, and other essays in Müller 1985 that deal with the social problems caused (or not) by illegitimacy. The question of illegitimacy in Mesopotamia is not well-investigated; for children of prostitutes being donated to a temple or adopted, see SAA 12 92, and Joannès 1997: 125f.

<sup>96</sup> E.g. Wyatt-Brown 1982: 233.

<sup>97</sup> But there are other than rational reasons that made adultery the capital crime that it was in the Ancient Near East; see Westbrook 1990: 564.

<sup>98</sup> Roth 1995: 108 §143.

<sup>99</sup> Roth 1995: MAL §55.

<sup>100</sup> Chaucer 1985: vol. 3 pp. 4f.

<sup>101</sup> Moved by her native virtue, unconstrained,  
She'd often pretend illness to avoid  
All company where there was likelihood  
Of indecorum, as there is in places  
Where people go to flirt: feasts, dances, parties.  
Such things make children brazen and mature  
Too early on, which is the great danger,  
As we all know; and so it's always been.

<sup>102</sup> See, e.g., Cloudsley 1984.

<sup>103</sup> Frymer-Kensky 1998: 85, and for a very different time and place, cf. Wyatt-Brown 1982: 234, according to whom the purpose of the stereotype of Southern ladyhood, "the glorification of motherhood, the sanctity of virginity, and the noble self-sacrifice of the matron," was to insure submission to male will. By turning handicaps into virtues, it "made the ascriptive disadvantages of the gender more bearable."

## Excursus A: A Note on Some Terms for Female Genitalia

In section 3 above, it was suggested that Akkadian *šišītu* “membrane” in Hh. 15: 224-28 (MSL 9 12f) could designate the hymen. Although the second millennium forerunners of Hh. 15 inventory cuts of meat and animal body parts,<sup>104</sup> the first millennium canonical tablet 15 has been expanded to include body part terms used only for humans (e.g. l. 203 *háš-gal* = *šapūlu* “groin, inner thigh”) and in a greatly expanded section on the genitals has Sumerian terms which seem to be the equivalent of the slang or pet names humans use for their own or their lovers’ genitalia (e.g. l. 206 *lugal si-sá* “upright king” = *išāru* “penis;” l. 211 *kur pa-paḥ* “sanctuary mound” = *lipiššati* “vulva”).<sup>105</sup>

Most surprising in Hh. 15 is the absence of *gal<sub>4</sub>-la* = *ūru* “vulva” (i.e. the labia together with the vagina), the most common designation for female genitalia in Sumerian, with the Akkadian attested already in the Old Akkadian love incantation,<sup>106</sup> and the word used in incantations and medical texts of all periods. In Old Babylonian letters, legal documents, and one proverb, the same role is played by *biššūru*,<sup>107</sup> also not in Hh. 15, unless both *ūru* and *biššūru* were in Gap B after l. 217 (MSL 9 12), which is unlikely, since the transition from external to internal organs lies between 216 *DIŠ.UR*

(<sup>diš</sup>téš?) = *ḥanduttu* “clitoris”<sup>108</sup> and *adumu* = *edamukku* “amniotic fluid, amniotic sac.”<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, the presence of *gal<sub>4</sub>-la* = *ūru* in Hg. 4:23 (MSL 9 34), between *lipiššatu* and *ḥanduttu* (all three explained in the third column by *biššūru*) suggests that this word may turn up in an as yet undiscovered Hh. 15 manuscript tradition.<sup>110</sup>

The place of both *ūru* and *biššūru* is taken in Hh. 15:210-214 (MSL 9 12) by *lipiššatu*, whose Sumerian “equivalents” include *kur-pa-paḥ* “sanctuary mound,” *pa-paḥ* “sanctuary,” and *mìn-é* “twin temple,” suggesting the labia together with the vagina. It may have originally referred to the labia, if it derives from *lipištu*, which CAD defines as “an abnormal fleshy or membranous substance.” In the so-called *Love Lyrics for Ishtar of Babylon*,<sup>111</sup> Group I uses *rēmu* “womb” as a general term for female genitalia, whereas in Group IV, *biššūru* is the most frequent term, supplemented by *rēmu* and *lipiššatu*. In the Manungal letter published by Grayson (1983), the goddess<sup>?</sup> opens her *lipiššatu*, asks that her *ḥanduttu* “clitoris” be stroked, and compares her *biššūru* to a colocynth, a plant known for its bitter, smelly fruit. This would support a more specific meaning “labia” for *lipiššatu* and “vagina” for *biššūru*.

<sup>104</sup> Civil 1989: 17; Veldhuis 1997: 68f with n. 218.

<sup>105</sup> The Old Babylonian list of human body parts, *ugumu* (MSL 9 49-73), is not very forthcoming for our purposes. The section covering genitalia is in the gap before l. 260 (MSL 9 58), and has been reconstructed by M. Civil and J. Westenholz, who have kindly shared their reconstruction with me.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Foster 1996: 59f.

<sup>107</sup> E.g. AbB 12 181:7'; ARM 26/2 488:34-37 (see above); *Flor. Marianum* 1 117:35-37; PBS 5 156:2-4; Alster 1991/92: 10:3

<sup>108</sup> Correctly identified by Grayson 1983 on the basis of its only occurrence in context *maḥaš ḥandutti* “stroke my clitoris!” (Grayson 1983 146:5').

<sup>109</sup> Etymologically the word should designate a fluid, but the only reference in context is in a first millennium ritual in which the *edamukku* covers a drum, and hence is a membrane (CAD s.v.).

<sup>110</sup> But note that it is not in the NB Kish ms. published by Gurney, MSL SS 1 pl. VIII.

<sup>111</sup> Lambert 1975.



## Excursus B: guruš á nu-lá

The ghosts of young women and men who died before they had experienced sexual fulfillment and/or family life were among the malevolent spirits to be warded off or exorcized, as we have seen in the elaborate descriptions of the Ardat-lilî and Eṭel-lilî cited above from incantations and rituals directed specifically against them. The sexually unfulfilled also appear in broader lists of demons in incantations eventually incorporated into the series known as *udug-ḫul* “Malevolent Demons.” An Old Babylonian forerunner to the series cites the following:<sup>112</sup>

ki-sikil dam nu-un-tuk-a  
guruš dam nu-un-tuk-a  
ki-sikil šu nu-du<sub>7</sub>-a  
guruš á nu-lá-a  
ki-sikil šeš-a ak-a  
guruš šeš-gal du<sub>11</sub>-ga

The first pair are the young women and young man who never married. The last pair is puzzling and without parallel.<sup>113</sup> The middle pair, found as well in another forerunner,<sup>114</sup> occurs with Akkadian translations in an unpublished first millennium incantation cited by Falkenstein.<sup>115</sup> There, ki-sikil šu nu-du<sub>7</sub>-a is rendered *ardatum la šuk[lultu]* and guruš á nu-lá-a is translated *eṭlu la šum[mudu]*. Falkenstein, and following him Geller, understood the first as “nicht gereift,” and the second, based on the parallelism, as “nicht mannbar.”<sup>116</sup>

A slightly different version of the pair is found in CT 16 10 iv 45f. // 50 18-21:

ki-sikil nu-un-zu-àm = *ardatu la lamittum*  
guruš á nu-lá-e = *eṭlu la muš-te-en-nu-ú*

The young woman here is “inexperienced” or “innocent.” Falkenstein understood *eṭlu la muš-te-en-nu-ú* as *la muštēnû* (from *enû*), meaning “unchanged,” that is, pre-pubescent,<sup>117</sup> and this meaning has been accepted by the dictionaries and subsequent scholars.<sup>118</sup>

However, since ki-sikil/*ardatu* and guruš/*eṭlu* refer precisely to post-pubescent young women and men (section 1, above), Falkenstein’s interpretation is oxymoronic. There can be no such thing as an *ardatu* or *eṭlu* who is not sexually mature. The *ardatu la suklultu* is not “immature,” but rather “incomplete” in the sense of “unfulfilled,” that is, bereft of sexual and family experience, an almost exact parallel to the *ardatu la lamittu*. But what is the guruš á nu-lá-a?

In a fragmentary passage of a Sumerian love song, we read that before going to a festival

ki-sikil tur-ra SUḪ m[u<sup>2</sup>-un<sup>2</sup>-kés<sup>2</sup>?]  
guruš tur-ra <sup>túg</sup>níg-lá mu-[un-lá]<sup>119</sup>

Young maidens adorned themselves,  
Young lads fastened on their sword belts.

Likewise, in the grand parade before Inana in the Iddindagan sacred marriage hymn,<sup>120</sup> there are “fine men” and “proud ladies” marching with spindles (for the ladies) and <sup>túg</sup>níg-lá á mē da-da-ra-šē mu-du<sub>11</sub> “they (the men) gird themselves with sword belt and battle arms.” The <sup>túg</sup>níg-lá (= *šimdu*) is

<sup>112</sup> Geller 1985: 142:75’-80’.

<sup>113</sup> Falkenstein 1931: 38 n. 2 suggests they are involved in “unnatürlicher Geschlechtsverkehr;” Geller 1985: 147 suggests for the last “a lad ordered (to be) ‘tutor’(?)”

<sup>114</sup> Geller 1985: 36:313f.

<sup>115</sup> Falkenstein 1931: 38 n. 2.

<sup>116</sup> Falkenstein 1931: 38f with n. 2; Geller 103, where the ki-sikil šu nu-du<sub>7</sub>-a (and the guruš, too) is pre-pubescent, but cf. 36 where he translates “virgo intacta!”

For *la šummudu*, Geller refers to the use of *šummudu* for yoking oxen to the seeder plow; hence, the *eṭlu* here would not yet be capable of insemination.

<sup>117</sup> Falkenstein 1931: 38 n. 2.

<sup>118</sup> Geller 1985: 103; Böck 2000: 153, where a woman said to be *muštēnât* is “heiratsfähig.”

<sup>119</sup> Sefati 1998: 312:17f.

<sup>120</sup> Römer 1965: 128ff; Reisman 1973.

a belt which holds a sword or other weapon.<sup>121</sup> Our *guruš á nu-lá-a* is “a lad who has never strapped on (*šummudu*) arms.” As such, he has never fulfilled his destiny as a young man; according to childbirth incantations from as early as 2600 BC, a newborn girl’s destiny was symbolized by a spindle and garment pin, a boy’s by his weapons.<sup>122</sup>

The meaning of *eḫlu la muš-te-en-nu-ú* is more difficult, but if it is to reflect the martial meaning of the Sumerian, it must be a participle of *šanû B* Gtn “to be in conflict” (cf. *CAD muštannû* “enemy”), which would also better account for the doubled *n*.<sup>123</sup> So, we would have “a lad who has never been in combat,” but how this Akkadian translation for *guruš á nu-lá* was arrived at remains a mystery. All, then, that is left of *CAD*’s *muštēnû* “having reached puberty, nubile” are the occurrences from three consecutive lines in the physiognomic omens. A series of four apodoses reads:<sup>124</sup>

*muššālat mupahḫirat*  
*muš-te-na-at musappiḫat*

*muš-te-na-at tarṣat*  
*muš-te-na-at u musappiḫat*

The first is clearly “she is quarrelsome but an accumulator.” What she accumulates is unclear, but it is certainly positive, the opposite of the *musappiḫat*, “one who scatters, squanders, a wastrel.” The second terms of the next three apodoses contrast *musappiḫat* “wastrel” with *tarṣat* “honest.” The first term, *muš-te-na-at*, would be a perfect parallel to *muššālat* if it were also understood as a Gtn participle of *šanû B*, *muštennât* “she is contentious.” We would then have on the one hand a woman “who is contentious and a wastrel,” and on the other one “who is contentious but honest,” much like the one “who is quarrelsome but an accumulator.” The previous suggestions, “nubile and a wastrel/honest” make little sense, especially because apodoses in the physiognomic omens never contain visible physical states, which are found only in the protases.

<sup>121</sup> Klein 1993: 99; Durand 1984: 154 n. 30.

<sup>122</sup> See most recently Cunningham 1997: 74, 107; Krebernik 1984: 44f.

<sup>123</sup> For *muštannû muštennû*, cf. Lambert *BWL* 132:123 *muš-ten-nu-ú šaplâti* “who always relates his innermost

thoughts,” from *šanû A* Dtn, not *enû* or *šanû B* (as apparently *CAD* s.v. *šaplâtu*). The text is describing an honest man in this line; cf. Foster 1996: 536, 539.

<sup>124</sup> Böck 2000: 152:3-6.

## WORKS CITED

- Alster, B.  
1991/92 “Early Dynastic Proverbs,” *Afo* 38/39, 1-51.  
1997 *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, Bethesda.
- Anbar, M.  
1975 “Textes de l’époque babylonienne ancienne,” *RA* 69, 109-36.

- Bal, M.  
1987 "Virginity: Toward a Feminist Philology," *Dispositio* 12, Nos. 30-32, 65-82.
- de Beauvoir, S.  
1989[1952] *The Second Sex*, New York.
- Böck, B.  
2000 *Die babylonisch-assyrische Morphoskopie*, AfO Bei. 27, Vienna.
- Boureau, A.  
1998 *The Lord's First Night*, Chicago.
- Cassin, E.  
1987 *Le semblable et le différent*, Paris.
- Chaucer, G.  
1985 *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. F. Robinson, tr. D. Wright, London.
- Civil, M.  
1989 "The Texts from Meskene-Emar," *Aula Orientalis* 7, 5-25.
- Cloudsley, A.  
1984 *Women of Omdurman. Life, Love and the Cult of Virginity*, New York.
- Cooper, J.  
1980 Review of H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil*, *JCS* 32, 175-88.  
1996 "Magic and M(is)use: Poetic Promiscuity in Mesopotamian Ritual," in M. Vogelzang and H. Vanstiphout (eds.), *Mesopotamian Poetic Language: Sumerian and Akkadian*, Groningen, 47-57.  
1997 "Gendered Sexuality in Sumerian Love Poetry," in I. Finkel and M. Geller (eds.), *Sumerian Gods and Their Representations*, Groningen, 85-97.
- Cunningham, G.  
1997 'Deliver Me from Evil.' *Mesopotamian Incantations 2500-1500 BC*, Studia Pohl SM 17, Rome.
- Durand, J.-M.  
1984 "Trois études sur Mari," *M.A.R.I.* 3, 127-80.  
2000 *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari*, vol. 3, Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient 18, Paris.
- Edzard, D.  
1992 "Der Vertrag von Ebla mit A-bar-QA," in P. Fronzaroli (ed.), *Literature and Literary Language at Ebla*, Florence, 187-218.
- Finkelstein, J.  
1966 "Sex Offenses in Sumerian Laws," *JAOS* 86, 355-72.
- Foster, B.  
1996 *Before the Muses. An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, Bethesda.  
2001 *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, New York.
- Frayser, S.  
1985 *Varieties of Sexual Experience. An Anthropological Perspective on Human Sexuality*, New Haven.
- Freud, S.  
1963 *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, New York.

- Frymer-Kensky, T.  
 1992 *In the Wake of the Goddesses. Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth*, New York.  
 1998 "Virginity in the Bible," in Matthews 1998: 79-96.
- Garelli, P.  
 1998 "Les dames de l'empire assyrien," in J. Prosecký (ed.), *Intellectual Life of the Ancient Near East*, CRRAI 43, Prague, 175-81.
- Geller, M.  
 1985 *Forerunners to Udu-g-Hul. Sumerian Exorcistic Incantations*, FAOS 12, Stuttgart.  
 1988 "New Duplicates to SBTU II," *AfO* 35, 1-23.
- George, A.  
 1999 *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, London.
- Goody, J.  
 1976 *Production and Reproduction. A Comparative Study of the Domestic Domain*, Cambridge.  
 1990 *The Oriental, the Ancient and the Primitive. Systems of Marriage and the Family in the Pre-Industrial Societies of Eurasia*, Cambridge.
- Grayson, A. K.  
 1983 "Literary Letters from Deities and Diviners. More Fragments," *JAOS* 103, 143-48.
- Greengus, S.  
 1969 "The Old Babylonian Marriage Contract," *JAOS* 89, 505-32.
- Joannès, F.  
 1997 "La mention des enfants dans les textes néo-babyloniens," in B. Lion et al. (eds.), *Enfance et éducation dans le Proch-Orient ancien*, *Ktéma* 22, 119-33.
- Kaufman, S.  
 1974 *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic*, AS 19, Chicago.
- Kelly, K.  
 2000 *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages*, London.
- Klein, J.  
 1993 "Additional Notes to 'The Marriage of Martu,'" in A. Rainey (ed.), *Raphael Kutscher Memorial Volume*, Tel Aviv.
- Krebernik, M.  
 1984 *Die Beschwörungen aus Fara und Ebla*, Hildesheim.
- Lackenbacher, S.  
 1971 "Note sur l'ardat-lili," *RA* 65, 119-54.  
 1988 "Les lettres de Buqāqum" in D. Charpin et al., *Archives épistolaires de Mari* 1/2, ARM 26/2, Paris, 401-39.
- Lafont, S.  
 1999 *Femmes, droit et justice dans l'antiquité orientale*, OBO 165, Fribourg.
- Lambert, W.  
 1960 *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, Oxford.  
 1975 "The Problem of the Love Lyrics," in H. Goedicke and J. Roberts (eds.), *Unity and Diversity*, Baltimore, 98-135.

- Landsberger, B.  
1968 "Jungfräulichkeit: Ein Beitrag zum Thema 'Beilager und Eheschliessung,'" in J. Ankum et al. (eds.), *Symbolae iuridicae et historicae Martino David dedicatae*, vol. 1, 41-105.
- Leick, G.  
1994 *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature*, London.
- Linck-Kesting, G.  
1985 "China: Geschlechtsreife und Legitimation zur Zeugung," in Müller 1985: 85-176.
- Locher, C.  
1986 *Die Ehre einer Frau in Israel. Exegetische und rechtsvergleichende Studien zu Deuteronomium 22, 13-21*, OBO 70, Fribourg.
- Malul, M.  
1989 "Susapinnu. The Mesopotamian Paranymp and His Role," *JESHO* 32, 241-78.  
1991/92 "Šillam Paṭārum 'To Unfasten the Pin,'" *JEOL* 32, 66-86.
- Marti, L.  
2001 "'C'est le facteur!'" *N.A.B.U.* 2001, No. 76.
- Matthews, V.  
1998 "Honor and Shame in Gender-Related Legal Situations in the Hebrew Bible," in Matthews et al. 1998: 97-112.
- Matthews, V. et al. (eds.)  
1998 *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, JSOT SS 262, Sheffield.
- Maul, S.  
1994 *Zukunftsbewältigung. Eine Untersuchung alorientalischen Denkens anhand der babylonisch-assyrischen Löseerrituale (Namburbi)*, Mainz.
- Mitterauer, M.  
1985 "Illegitimität in Europa. Historische Bedingungen in Familienverfassung, Wertsystem und Arbeitsorganisation," in Müller 1985: 551-682.
- Müller, E. (ed.)  
1985 *Geschechtsreife und Legitimation zur Zeugung*, Freiburg/Munich.
- Owen, D. and R. Westbrook  
1992 "Tie Her Up and Throw Her Into River! An Old Babylonian Inchoate Marriage on the Rocks," *ZA* 82, 202-207.
- Peristany, J. (ed.)  
1966 *Honour and Shame. The Values of Mediterranean Society*, Chicago.
- Pitt-Rivers, J.  
1977 *The Fate of Shechem, or The Politics of Sex. Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean*, Cambridge.
- Radner, K.  
1997 *Die Neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden als Quelle für Mensch und Umwelt*, SAAS 6, Helsinki.
- Reiner, E.  
1960 "Fortune-Telling in Mesopotamia," *JNES* 19, 23-35.
- Reisman, D.  
1973 "Iddin-Dagan's Sacred Marriage Hymn," *JCS* 25, 185-202.

- Römer, W.  
 1965 *Sumerische 'Königshymnen' der Isin-Zeit*, Leiden.  
 1966 "Studien zu altbabylonischen hymnisch-epischen Texten (2). Ein Lied über die Jugendjahre der Götter Sîn und Išum," *JAOS* 86, 138-47.
- Roth, M.  
 1987 "Age at Marriage and the Household: A Study of Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian Forms," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29, 715-47.  
 1995 *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, Writings from the Ancient World 6, Atlanta.
- Sefati, Y.  
 1998 *Love Songs in Sumerian Literature*, Ramat Gan.
- Shaloub, N.  
 1999 "Towards a Cultural Definition of Rape: Dilemmas in Dealing with Rape Victims in Palestinian Society," *Womens Studies International Forum* 22/2, 157-73.
- Sissa, G.  
 1990 *Greek Virginit*y, Cambridge.
- Stewart, F.  
 1994 *Honor*, Chicago.
- Stol, M.  
 1995 "Women in Mesopotamia," *JESHO* 38, 123-44.
- Van der Toorn, K.  
 1994 *From Her Cradle to Her Grave. The Role of Religion in the Life of the Israelite and the Babylonian Woman*, Sheffield.
- Veldhuis, N.  
 1997 *Elementary Education at Nippur*, Groningen.
- Washington, H.  
 1998 "'Lest He Die in Battle and Another Man Take Her': Violence and the Construction of Gender in the Laws of Deuteronomy 20-22," in Matthews et al. 1998: 185-213.
- Westbrook, R.  
 1988 *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, *AfO* Bei. 23, Vienna.  
 1990 "Adultery in Ancient Near Eastern Law," *RB* 97, 542-80.  
 1998 "The Female Slave," in Matthews et al. 1998: 214-38.
- Wilcke, C.  
 1985 "Familiengründung im alten Babylonien," in Müller 1985: 213-317.
- Wyatt-Brown, B.  
 1982 *Southern Honor. Ethics and Behaviour in the Old South*, New York.