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The World of the Sumerian Mother Goddess

An Interpretation of Her Myths

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Abstract

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The present study is an interpretation of the two myths copied in the Old Babylonian period in which the Sumerian mother goddess is one of the main actors. The first myth is commonly called “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”, and the second “Enki and Ninmaḥ”. The theoretical point of departure is that myths have society as their referents, i.e. they are “talking about” society, and that this is done in an ideological way. This study aims at investigating on the one hand which contexts in the Mesopotamian society each section of the myths refers to, and on the other hand which ideological aspects that the myths express in terms of power relations.

The myths are contextualized in relation to their historical and social setting. If the myth for example deals with working men, male work in the area during the relevant period is discussed. The same method of contextualization is used regarding marriage, geographical points of reference and so on. Also constellations of mythical ideas are contextualized, through comparison with similar constellations in other Mesopotamian myths. Besides the method of contextualization, the power relations in the myths are investigated. According to this latter method, the categories at issue, their ranking, as well as their changed ranking, are noted.

The topics of the myths is issues important for the kingship and the country, such as irrigation, trade, health and healing, birth, collective work, artisanry and rivalry. All these aspects are used in order to express what the power relations between the goddess Ninḫursaġa/Ninmaḥ and the god Enki look like. The relations are negotiated and recalibrated, which leads to the goddess getting a lowered status. Part of the negotiations and recalibrations is gender behavior, which is related to historical developments in society. The present work points to the function of these myths as tools of recalibrating not only deities, but also men and women in society.

Keywords: Sumerian mother goddess, Mesopotamia, myth, Ninḫursaġa, Ninmaḥ, Enki, kingship, midwifery, birth-giving, creation, death, sexual intercourse, gender, ideology, contextualization

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*For my mother
Inger Emma Eufrosyne Rodin*

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Preface

This thesis has evolved during a long period of time, for good and bad. I was admitted as a Ph.D. student in the History of Religions at Uppsala University already in 1996. Since my project involved reading Sumerian texts however, I made a long “tour” within Assyriology, learning both Akkadian and Sumerian, and at the same time writing as much as I could on my thesis. Already in 2002 I had a rough manuscript of the thesis, which I was able to improve while staying one year and a half studying Sumerian with Professor Pascal Attinger in Bern. Regrettably the stay in Bern ended in what would prove to be a long period of illness, and thus a long pause regarding my Ph.D. project. While working with quite other things outside the academy, I returned in 2011 to complete my thesis. I was fortunate to get the opportunity to teach part time in Religious Studies at Dalarna University from spring 2012, and from the autumn the same year I received a year’s employment as a Ph.D. student at Uppsala University for finishing my thesis.

Now something about gratitude. During my long journey through the academy I have met so many people who have contributed to my thinking and understanding of theories and sources. Those perhaps most important are those who have not agreed with my thinking. Through comments from other perspectives I have been forced to think through my lines of thought, my way to understand the material, and my theoretical standpoints. Sometimes I have modified my way of thinking, at other times I have more or less abandoned it, and in some cases I have strengthened my original lines of thought. Besides the kindly critical eyes of my teachers and co-students, their discernment of the good parts of my writing has also been valuable. Through their pointing to what they find fruitful I have been able to see it clearer myself, and also to further work on and develop these lines of thought.

Within the field of Assyriology my sincere thanks goes to Professor Olof Pedersén who introduced me to the wonderful world of cuneiform. Further, my gratitude goes to Sverrir Ólafsson, my first teacher in Akkadian. Besides five weeks in Sweden, I started my study of Sumerian in Leipzig, with Professor Claus Wilcke, and continued it with Professor Pascal Attinger in Bern. I am deeply grateful for having had the opportunity to study with both these excellent Sumerologists. My first supervisor in the History of Religions, the late Professor Jan Bergman, was very important for me in his welcoming and enthusiastic ways. He accepted my wish to write about the Sumerian mother goddess, and he was very supportive along the way. Regretfully, Professor

Bergman passed away all too early. Now I am happy to have three excellent scholars as supervisors: Professor Eva Hellman (History of Religions), Professor Mattias Gardell (History of Religions) and Senior Lecturer Jakob Andersson (Assyriology). These three supervisors have contributed greatly to my theoretical thinking as well as my approach to my material. I have had a great time when we met at our “supervision seminars”.

I have been fortunate to be part of the seminar of the History of Religions at Uppsala University. Ph.D. students Magnus Hedelind, Åsa Viridi Kroik, Paulina Partanen, Kristian Pella (now Dr. in the History of Religions) and Nisse Billing (Dr. in Egyptology and now also Dr. in the History of Religions), as well as Associate Professor Lena Roos have all contributed to a positive and stimulating scholarly environment, as have Professors Eva Hellman and Mattias Gardell. I have been glad to receive comments and suggestions when presenting material at the seminar. Since the beginning of 2012 I have also had the precious opportunity to teach at Dalarna University, and my colleagues there have been very welcoming and supportive. Professor Liselotte Frisk, Senior Lecturers Torsten Hylén, Torsten Blomkvist, Tomas Axelson, Fredrik Karlsson and Anna Sofia Hedberg, and Lecturers Hanna Trotzig and Gull Törnégren have all shown great professionalism and kindness. I am happy to have you all as role models.

Upon the completion of my writing, Associate Professor in Assyriology Nicole Brisch had the possibility to give a full text comment on my manuscript, and I have benefitted highly from her kind advice.

Outside the academics I am happy to have a supportive family and partner. My mother Inger, brother Patrik and sister Beatrice have always believed in me, even when I was ill and unable to work. I am grateful for our good relationship and our oftentimes hilarious family meetings. My partner Mats is my great love, my greatest support and best friend. My life is so much happier and worthwhile with you! Thanks also to all friends who make my life happier – Maude, Kicki, Birgitta, Gun, Zarina and all others! And last, but not least I am blessed with two wonderful pugs, Mimmi and Nappe. My life would likewise be less happy without animals, and I enjoy my life with these two precious little friends.

Uppsala in July 2014

Therese Rodin

Abbreviations

<i>AfK</i>	<i>Archiv für Keilschriftforschung</i> (Berlin)
<i>AfO</i> (Beih.)	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i> (Beiheft) (Berlin, Vienna)
<i>AHw</i>	W. von Soden. 1959–1981. <i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> (Wiesbaden)
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament (Kevelaer/Neukirchen-Vluyn, Münster)
AS	Assyriological Studies (Chicago)
<i>ASJ</i>	<i>Acta Sumerologica Japonica</i> (Hiroshima)
<i>AuOr</i>	<i>Aula Orientalis</i> (Barcelona)
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i> (New Haven)
<i>BiOr</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i> (Leiden)
BiMes	Bibliotheca Mesopotamica (Malibu)
<i>CAD</i>	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> (Chicago)
CM	Cuneiform Monographs (Groningen, Leiden Boston)
<i>ePSD</i>	<i>The Electronic Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary</i> . Project of the Babylonian Section of Anthropology and Archaeology (Philadelphia) http://psd.museum.upenn.edu/epsd
<i>ETCSL</i>	<i>The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature</i> (Oxford) http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/

FAOS	Freiburger Altorientalische Studien (Wiesbaden, Stuttgart)
HS	Signature of tablets in the Hilprecht collection, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität, Jena
IB	Signataure of tablets in the Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i> (Boston, New Haven, Ann Arbor etc.)
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i> (Boston, New Haven etc.)
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i> (Leiden)
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i> (Chicago)
KUB	Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi (Berlin)
MLC	Signature of tablets in the J. Pierpont Morgan Library collection (now Yale Babylonian Collection, Yale University, New Haven)
<i>MSL</i>	<i>Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon</i> (Rome)
<i>NABU</i>	<i>Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires</i> (Paris)
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis (Freiburg, Göttingen)
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications (Chicago)
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta (Leuven)
<i>Or NS</i>	<i>Orientalia Nova Series</i> (Rome)
<i>PSD</i>	<i>The Sumerian dictionary of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania</i> (Philadelphia)
<i>RA</i>	<i>Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale</i> (Paris)

RIME	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Early Periods (Toronto, Buffalo, NY, London)
<i>RIA</i>	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie</i> (Berlin, Leipzig)
<i>SLT</i>	E. Chiera. 1929. <i>Sumerian Lexical Texts from the Temple School of Nippur</i> (Chicago)
St Pohl (SM)	Studia Pohl: Dissertationes scientificae de rebus Orientis antiqui (Series Maior) (Rome)
TCL	Textes Cunéiformes. Musée du Louvre, Département des Antiquités Orientales (Paris)
TCS	Texts from Cuneiform Sources (Locust Valley)
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen Internationales Jahrbuch für die Altertumskunde Syrien-Palästinas</i> (Kevelaer/Neukirchen-Vluyn, Münster)
UM	Signature of tablets in the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology, Philadelphia
VAT	Signature of tablets in the Vorderasiatische Abteilung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin
VS 17	J. J. A. van Dijk. 1971. <i>Nicht-kanonische Beschwörungen und sonstige literarische Texte</i> (Berlin)
VS 24	J. J. A. van Dijk. 1987. <i>Literarische Texte aus Babylon</i> (Berlin)
<i>ZA</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie</i> (Berlin, Leipzig, Munich)

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Maps



Figure 1. Map of the Ancient Near East, Historical periods

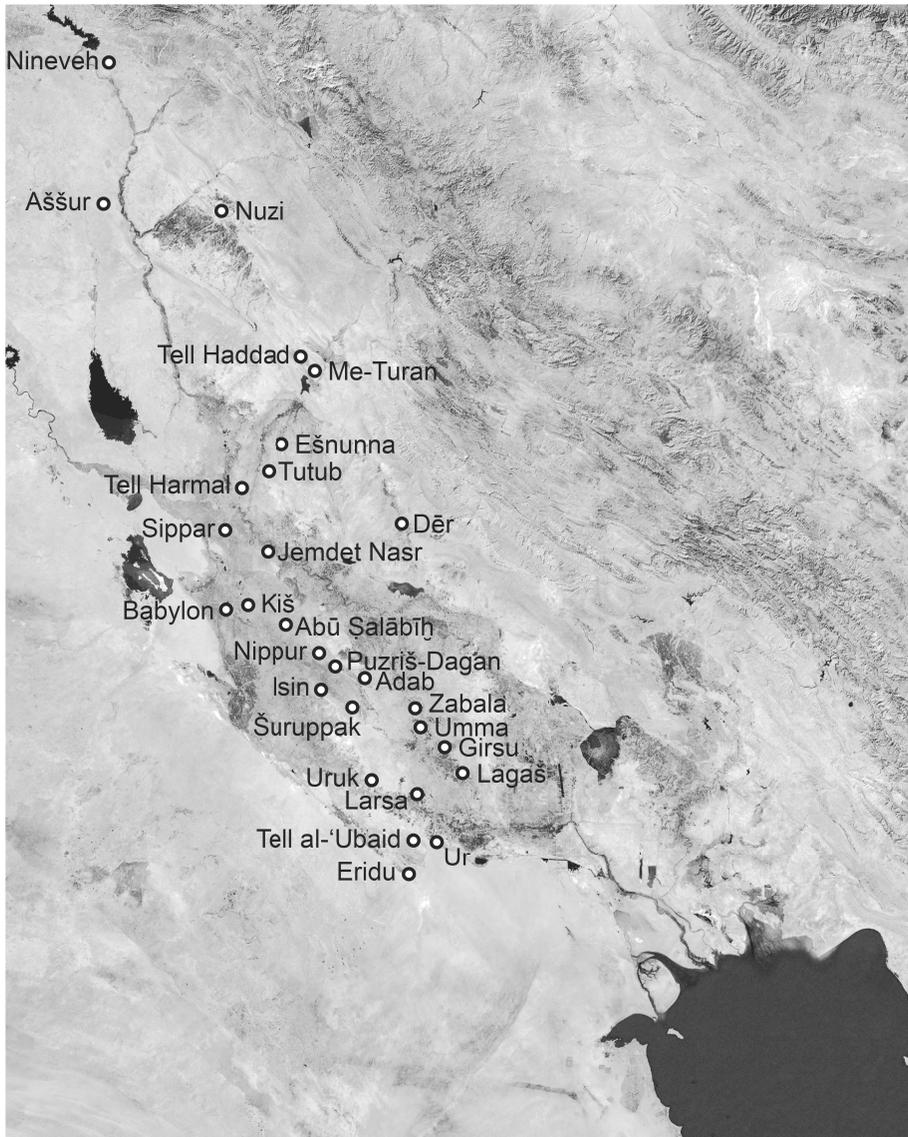


Figure 2 Map of Mesopotamia, Historical periods

Timetable

Table 1. Basic Sketch of Mesopotamian Historical Periods (adapted from Rubio 2011: 93)

3200–2900 BCE	Uruk III and Jemdet Nasr periods	
2900–2600 BCE	Early Dynastic I–II period	
2600–2450 BCE	Early Dynastic IIIa period	
2450–2340 BCE	Early Dynastic IIIb period	
2340–2150 BCE	Sargonic period	
2100–2000 BCE	Ur III period	
2000–1600 BCE	Old Babylonian period Isin-Larsa period (c. 2025–1760)	Old Assyrian period
1600–1000 BCE	Middle Babylonian period	Middle Assyrian period
1000 BCE–100 CE	Neo-Babylonian period (–539 BCE) Late Babylonian period (539 BCE – c. 100 CE)	Neo-Assyrian period (–612 BCE)

1. Introduction

In the scholarship of Sumerian texts, the category of texts called “myths” in the sense “stories with deities as actors”, are part of the larger concept “literature”.¹ The Sumerian corpus of literature is a large one, and besides myths it contains e.g. epics, hymns, prayers, laments and debate poems and other genres.² Most of these texts were written down during a short period in the history of the cuneiform culture, during the Ur III period and the early Old Babylonian period, although we also have literary texts dating to the Early Dynastic period.³ (See Table 1, Timetable)

The literary texts have been understood as representing “das ‘sprachliche Kunstwerk’”⁴ or a “corpus of *poetic* texts” (italics original).⁵ Besides this large corpus there is also a vast amount of other, more or less practical texts that are not categorized as “literary”, such as omen collections, lexical lists, medical texts, royal inscriptions, administrative documents, contracts, recipes and so on.⁶

The literary texts (as well as the lexical lists) did not only belong to a specific corpus, but also to a specific context, which was that of the scribes. According to Assyrologist Gonzalo Rubio we shall differentiate between the pantheon of the scribes, that of the state, and the pantheon of the popular religion.⁷ Thus, the deities of the myths treated here belong to a specific literary pantheon, which was shaped and transmitted by the scribes. It must be stated though, that the mother goddess under her name Ninḫursaġa, was very much related to the royal ideology of several city-states.⁸ It was com-

¹ Neither Edzard (1990: 38) nor Veldhuis (2004: 67) distinguish between “stories with deities as actors” (myths) and “stories with heroes as actors” (epics).

² Black et al. 1998–2006; Edzard 1990.

³ The Early Dynastic literary texts are enumerated by Rubio. He also mentions the Early Dynastic so-called UD.GAL.NUN texts, which are literary texts that are almost unintelligible, due to the fact that another sign system is used (2009: 34–37; id. 2011: 101–105).

⁴ Edzard 1990: 35.

⁵ Veldhuis 2004: 47.

⁶ Edzard 1990: 35.

⁷ Rubio 2011: 109. This subject will be developed below, section 1.4.2.

⁸ For the Early Dynastic IIIb period, see the relevant inscriptions of Eanatum, Enanatum I and Enmetena of Lagaš (Steible and Behrens 1982a), and Lugalzagesi of Uruk. See also the Early Dynastic IIIa kings Mesilim of Kiš and Anepada of Ur (Frayne 2008: 71, 397, 435). For the Ur III period, see the royal inscriptions 3 and 4 of Lu-Utu of Umma (Steible 1991b), of Gudea of Lagaš, Statue A and B (Steible 1991a), as well as Ur-Namma and Šulgi of Ur (Frayne 1997: 74, 125, 138).

mon for the kings of different city-states to claim a special relation to her, and it happened that she was said to have been the king's wet-nurse in the royal inscriptions.⁹ Thus, there was a close connection between the ideology of the school and that of the state.

In the enormous text corpus in the Sumerian language¹⁰ we find the two myths that are the object of this study: "Enki and Ninḫursaġa" and "Enki and Ninmaḥ". Besides one very old myth, dated to the Early Dynastic IIIb period, where we meet the mother goddess, these are the only myths where the mother goddess of the literary pantheon is one of the main actors. Since the Early Dynastic IIIb myth, called "the Barton Cylinder",¹¹ is too difficult to interpret in its entirety, I have chosen not to let it be a central part of this study, although it will be referred to on occasion.

Although the mother goddess is one of the main actors in these two myths, they are in fact not dedicated to her, but to the male actor, Enki.¹² Enki has two further myths dedicated to him, whereas the mother goddess has none as far as known.¹³ Although Ninḫursaġa/Ninmaḥ belonged to the greatest deities in the pantheon, the four leading ones being An, Enlil, Ninḫursaġa and Enki,¹⁴ this is not reflected as number of attestations in the literature. The male deities are far better attested than the mother goddess. Thus, the choice of focus of this thesis is an attempt to investigate a phenomenon that to some extent was marginalized in the written sources. In the Old Babylonian period the literary texts were reproduced in the eduba (wr. é-dub-ba-a), the school,¹⁵ and can be understood to be a reflection of the ideology of the eduba. Since the eduba was sanctioned and controlled by the state, its ideology was also in line with that of the palace.¹⁶

Besides the texts unearthed by the archaeologists, a great wealth of other material has also been excavated, as will be seen in this thesis. Near Eastern Archaeologist Susan Pollock writes that "[t]wo hundred years ago European

⁹ Eanatum in the Stele of the Vultures, and Lugalzagesi 1. King Mesilim of Kiš said that he was the son of Ninḫursaġa. For references, see the previous footnote. It will be seen below that the mother goddess was seen as the mother and wet-nurse of the king also in literary texts.

¹⁰ Robson 2008: 455; Streck 2010; Streck 2011.

¹¹ Published by Alster and Westenholz (1994).

¹² The name of the deity to whom the myth is dedicated usually comes as the last line as "praise be [deity's name]". Regarding "Enki and Ninḫursaġa" it is actually not ascertained that it is dedicated to Enki, since the last line in the myth is broken where the name of the deity is expected. Attinger restores the line as [^den-ki (?) zà-mi] (1984: 30).

¹³ However, there is a hymn dedicated to the mother goddess under her name Nintu, whereas we do not have a hymn dedicated to Enki. Enki is however attested about 2, 5 (454: 176) times more often than Ninḫursaġa/Ninmaḥ/Nintu/Aruru in the literary sources (see Black et al. 1998–2006).

¹⁴ E.g. Kramer 1976: 14.

¹⁵ Sjöberg 1975: 160.

¹⁶ This will be discussed further below, both under section 1.4.2. Pantheon, and in the part in Chapter 2 that deals with the eduba.

knowledge of the Ancient Near East was almost nil”.¹⁷ This has rapidly changed from then and up to the present time however, and although there remain large gaps in our knowledge of the Ancient Near East, the archaeologists have done an immense work in unearthing and interpreting artefacts that help us to understand the history of the area. Further, it is not only the sites of human habitations that are excavated and reconstructed by the archaeologists, but they work with reconstructing the landscape of these habitations, as well.¹⁸

1.1. Aim and questions

The aim of this study is to interpret two of the three Sumerian myths where the mother goddess of the pantheon found in literary texts and godlists is one of the main actors. Although the myths are selected with the mother goddess as a point of departure I will not focus only on her, but on the whole *context* in which she is met. The events described in the myths will be investigated in relation to their context, both on a practical and a conceptual level, in the Mesopotamian society. The context is reached through the *referential character* of the text, i.e. it refers to certain aspects of “reality” outside itself. Although investigating the whole context of the mother goddess, one intention is that this approach will enable us to reach a more comprehensive analysis of the mother goddess than would have been the case if we had only analyzed passages that obviously shall be related to her.¹⁹ Furthermore, the mother goddess, as well as the other minor goddesses in both myths, will be analyzed regarding their relations to male deities. In this respect I will look at *power relations* between the sexes. Besides the study of the society as depicted in each myth, I will also discuss whether something can be said of historic change in society regarding power relations when looking at both myths. Here, I will mainly focus on the role of women.

I will discuss three basic contexts of the mother goddess in this study; firstly, we have the referential context of the texts as described above, i.e. the texts refer to something outside themselves. The reference (the so-called “outer reality”) is not reached in itself, but we only reach it as it is conceptualized e.g. through texts and artifacts in the society under investigation. The referential context deals with ideas and their interrelatedness to more con-

¹⁷ Pollock 1999: 10.

¹⁸ See Pollock 1999: 28–44.

¹⁹ To analyze passages that we today understand as primarily connected to the mother goddess can have as result that our findings say more about the comprehension of her today than of that in the culture where she was venerated. Cf. Bruce Lincoln who maintains regarding analysis of myth that, “our task is not finished until we have considered texts, contexts, intertexts, pretexts, subtexts, and consequences” (1999: 150).

crete phenomena in the human experience.²⁰ It must be noted that it is not likely that the reference of a myth is described in a value-free way. Furthermore, there is the context given in the text itself, which is also assumed to give information on the connotations related to the mother goddess. This will be discussed below in the section on theory. A third context, the Babylonian eduba, the school transmitting the myths, will be discussed mainly in section 2.2.

In order to reach the aim of investigating the context of the myths as well as the power relations expressed in them I will discuss the following questions:

- What contexts in the Mesopotamian society does each section²¹ of the myths refer to?
- What are the ideological aspects expressed in the myths in terms of power relations?

1.2. Theoretical framework

In short, the story I would tell [...] is one that recalibrates categories and redistributes privilege, encouraging a move away from projects of ‘reconstruction’ and toward those of criticism. (Lincoln 1999: 216)

1.2.1. Myth as ideology

The analytical tool of this thesis is based upon the definition of Lincoln, that myth is “*ideology* in narrative form” (italics original).²² Lincoln thoroughly shows in his book *Theorizing Myth* that myth functions as ideology, which means that it is used to exert and legitimate power through reproduction as well as construction of a sociotaxonomic order. Individuals and groups use ideology to fulfil their desires of “being on top”, belonging to special centers and primordial origins.²³

The origins and centers are part of a narrative where roles of humans are represented as something self-evident and naturally given, although these roles are in fact ideological constructions. Individuals and groups are ordered in a taxonomic structure, which builds upon ranking, hierarchies and discrimination. The desire of centers and origins is not something innocent.

²⁰ One example of this is the idea that the sun god travels in faraway lands, whereas the concrete phenomena are the sun and the faraway lands.

²¹ Regarding the concept “section” when referring to *the content of the myths*, see my discussion in the section on method below.

²² Lincoln 1999: 147.

²³ Lincoln 1999: 94f.

Lincoln points to the fact that reconstructions of protomyths and protocivilizations have been connected to destruction. He writes that:

[t]he problem of which I speak, obviously enough, is that of violence: the violence that falls on the weaker, gentler, and more peaceful beings within creation, often with lethal force.²⁴

Since the protomyths and -societies are objects of desire, they are not based in the historical context. According to Lincoln, *historicizing* is an antidote to these objects of desire. In this respect he criticizes both Mircea Eliade who was hostile towards historic consciousness, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, who was criticized already by contemporary existentialists, Marxists and post-structuralists. These latter meant that Lévi-Strauss's scholarship was "a disengaged formalism and a synchronic orientation that drains mythic narratives [...] of their historic context and political agency". Lincoln nevertheless finds the scholarship of Lévi-Strauss to be "the best theoretical discussion of myth to date".²⁵

Throughout his book, Lincoln shows that ideology/myth is not just some ideas that are disconnected from society, but that they very much influence the social reality of individuals and groups, and often with detrimental results. Therefore he also shows how important the work of the scholar of myth is.

The ideology of myth is represented in a natural and ahistoric way; "this is the way it is and has always been", but at the same time myth is used to cause change. According to Lincoln myth is a product of unstable narratives, and likewise the relations between these narratives and their reference, i.e. the social order, are loose and dynamic.²⁶ Besides reproducing a wanted order, myth is also used to change an unwanted order by the introduction of new categories.²⁷ He calls the capacity of myth to produce societal change "the instrumentality of myth".²⁸

Lincoln gives several examples of how mythical discourses change society. One example is when he is analyzing Plato's writing as an effort to recalibrate social categories and thus establish a new social order. He states that:

[w]ithin Plato's lifetime and primarily as the result of his initiatives, philosophers did displace poets, seers, and others within the hierarchized ranks of intellect and speech [...]. Looking closely at this work helps us to understand something about the instrumentality of myth.²⁹

²⁴ Lincoln 1999: 191.

²⁵ Lincoln 1999: 146.

²⁶ Lincoln 1999: 150.

²⁷ Lincoln 1999: 150.

²⁸ Lincoln 1999: 159.

²⁹ Lincoln 1999:151–159.

In the analysis of our myths I will discuss the unstable feature of myths, related to historic change and introduction of new categories, and I will point to the reproductive function of myths as well.

As is seen in the example of Plato, an individual used myth to cause societal change. Lincoln points to the importance to identify the authors of a myth, since they are its ideologists. Besides causing change through introducing new categories, the narrator also brings about change through modifying details, and through *recalibration*, which means that the categories are charged with new value. Although we cannot identify the single authors of Mesopotamian myths, it is possible to discuss those using the myths as ideological tools.

When Lincoln investigates myths he does so mainly from the narrator's point of view, focusing on the exertion of power. However, Lincoln does point to the role of the audience of myth as well. He writes that the audience can resist the narrative and also create innovations and reinterpretations, and he further states that, "what come to be accepted as standard versions of myths [...] are collective products that have been *negotiated* between narrators and audiences over time" (italics mine).³⁰ Thus, it is not only the narrators who produce societal change; the listeners are also part of that process. The aspect of negotiation will be met with when relevant in the analysis below.

Throughout his book Lincoln points to the fact that scholarship in mythology has also been used to forward the ideology of the scholars, although perhaps not always consciously. Lincoln wants to use his own scholarship to influence society as well, and he is of the opinion that it is not only ideology that determines discourse. He writes:

I would maintain that scholarship (like other forms of speech once again) is not limited to its ideological moment. Ideology is part of scholarship but not the whole, and the other dimensions also merit some attention.³¹

For Lincoln the other dimensions are criticism, reflexivity, and those parts that are least narrative; regarding the latter they are the footnotes. He states that "[i]deally, footnotes mark the fact that a scholarly text is not a discourse of free invention, wherein ideological interests escape all control".³²

Lincoln shows that he is aware that ideology is not only the instrument of a cynic, but can also be understood as truth. In the preface of his book *Reli-*

³⁰ Lincoln 1999: 150.

³¹ Lincoln 1999: 208.

³² Lincoln 1999: 208. Lincoln forwards three ideas that the footnotes represent regarding scholars: 1. "those who enter a field that constitutes itself as one rigorous, disciplined inquiry do so in good faith"; 2. "They go beyond offering their results to an audience of consumers. They also display the processes through which they arrived at those results"; 3. "they agree that if any challenges are forthcoming to their data, methods, or results, they will consider them thoroughly, defending or revising their positions" (ibid. 209).

gion, Empire & Torture he writes regarding the legitimating ideology of rule in the Achaemenian empire that:

cynism is not the only possibility, for it is often the case that those who would persuade others are themselves most persuaded of all. They do not invent theories of legitimacy to serve their purposes, but, instead, inherit, embrace, and, occasionally, in finite measure, adapt these to their use. Such theories shape the consciousness of the theorists and help determine their actions.³³

Sometimes a person who embraces an ideology just comprehends it as truth, and does not reflect upon it at all. In this thesis this is relevant regarding the construction of gender relations in ancient Mesopotamia. I assume that very few – if any – of the people implementing the gender hierarchies, were aware of them as ideology.

There have been both positive and critical reviews of Lincoln's book *Theorizing Myth*. Professor in Religious Studies Russell McCutcheon writes a positive review of it, and he maintains that Lincoln succeeds not only in deconstructing myths, but also in deconstructing his own life in his writing in the preface, i.e. he avoids creating "mythology". Instead he means that Lincoln gives proof of "a self-reflectivity that problematizes – or better, historicizes – all meaning-making industries".³⁴ When McCutcheon refers to Lincoln's understanding that "primordial origins and perfect centers" are "objects of discourse" he points to a couple of functions of ideology; to create meaning, and to establish that life can be perfect – at least if we get to know our meaningful origins with their perfect centers. Is it unavoidable to create discourses of power which lead to inequality in order to create identity? This is a question posed by McCutcheon, and his answer is the same as that of Lincoln; by historicizing, discourses of power are exposed, and deconstructed, and the alleged eternal relation between statement and reference is shown to be anything but stable.³⁵

Contrary to McCutcheon, Professor emeritus of Sociology and Anthropology Don Handelman has criticized Lincoln regarding the possibility of his way of doing scholarship to produce societal change. In his review of Lincoln's book he writes:

Lincoln assumes that if submerged rationales for cultural productions, scholarly and otherwise, are raised into the light of reason and intellect, this will lead to the disavowal of their untoward, hidden premises of interest and ideology. [...] The exercise is admirable, yet the claim that it has force in the

³³ Lincoln 2007: xv. The same point is made by Lincoln also elsewhere (1996: 166).

³⁴ McCutcheon 2001: 81.

³⁵ McCutcheon 2001: 82, 85.

world because it is directed to our intellect is nonsense; and this is shown over and again in this world of war, massacre and suffering.³⁶

I understand Handelman to mean that Lincoln's assumption is that when ideology is deconstructed, "raised into the light of reason", it will lose its power upon people, and thus lead to change in society.³⁷ This is in fact what Lincoln assumes, since the deconstruction will shed light upon the fact that alleged "natural" categories are constructed, which will (hopefully) affect the reader's comprehension of reality.

1.2.2. Summary of the theoretical framework

Myths are seen here as ideological narratives with the aim to influence human behavior. The narratives are used both for exerting power, and for construction of identity. Further, they legitimate hierarchies and discrimination. The instrumentality of the myths means that they initiate change in society, and this is done through minor changes that recalibrate the categories dealt with. Although myths represent categories in society as natural and stable, they as well as the categories are unstable. In spite of this, myths can also be used to preserve power relations.

The construction of ideology is based upon "primordial origins" that are the desire of the ideologist, which means that a construction of history is central in this desire. At the same time, historicizing of myths deconstructs the alleged meaningfulness and naturalness of mythical history. An important part in this historicizing is to identify the author. In the case of Mesopotamia this is not possible, but it is my understanding that the same goal is achieved through identification of the users of the myths. Further, myths are also constructed in dialogue with the audience, which means that resistance and negotiation are also factors that are part of the formation of myths.

Thus, *the myths analyzed here are understood as representations of ideological meaning-making that create relations of power and identity*. They are seen as instrumental, which means that they are used to establish, reproduce and recalibrate power relations in society.

³⁶ Handelman 2002: 411.

³⁷ Cf. the critique of Professor of Religious Studies David Gordon White who writes that we should manifest ourselves as interpreters of other cultures rather than "talking about ourselves talking about ourselves". I understand it as a demand to engage in a "real debate" about "real cultures" rather than spending time discussing metanarratives. He also writes that "[w]hen outstanding scholars such as Lincoln abandon their fields of expertise to postmodernist arguments that have been made repeatedly for a generation, they retreat from the battlefields of the culture wars, both domestic and foreign, that define our global landscape" (2001: 690). This latter assumption that postmodernist arguments are not acted out "in the battlefield of culture wars" is as seen, not agreed upon by Lincoln.

1.3. Method

In this thesis I have as one primary focus the reference of the myth, i.e. what society it reflects, both on a material and a conceptual level, and this will be understood as the context of the mother goddess. Besides the contextualizing approach, the structural way of analyzing myths is also part of the method that will be used. It is important to state here that a central interest is to reach an understanding of the linear narrative, and that the structural analysis is used only when I find it elucidating. The importance to relate the myth to its reference is expressed by Lincoln when he writes that it is not only important to study myths structurally, but also in relation to their historic and social context.³⁸

When I situate the myth in the historical and social context, i.e. contextualize it, I do so by means of the scholarship on history and society within Assyriology. If the myth for example deals with working men, based upon previous scholarship, I have written about male work in the area during the relevant period, i.e. the period of and before the dating of (the copies of) the myths treated here. Through this method I try to delineate what the idea of “working men” refers to in the Mesopotamian society. I use the same method of contextualization when investigating marriage, geographical places, healing and so on. By using this method we will see that there is sometimes a discrepancy between the ideology of the myth and the picture given by the historical, practical sources.

In his book *Theorizing Myth* Lincoln is sympathetic with the structural approach of the renowned scholar of mythology, Lévi-Strauss, although, as was mentioned earlier, he criticizes the latter, who according to Lincoln, is “treating myth as a logical structure that essentially writes itself”. Lincoln further maintains that this treatment “drains agency from the act of narration”.³⁹ Lincoln wants the structural approach to be used in a more critical way, and in this respect he takes cultural theorists like Roland Barthes and Pierre Bourdieu as a point of departure. In line with these scholars, Lincoln says that, “taxonomy is hardly a neutral process, since the order [...] is hierarchic as well as categoric”. Further, he states that, “when a taxonomy is encoded in mythic form, the narrative packages a specific, contingent system of discrimination in a particularly attractive and memorable form”.⁴⁰

Lincoln shows that the structure of the myth is not a closed system, but has a relation to semantics, and therefore the method can be said to be both structural and hermeneutical/contextualizing. In line with his critical and dynamic understanding, Lincoln delineates the following method of how to investigate a myth:⁴¹

³⁸ Lincoln 1999: 150.

³⁹ Lincoln 1999: 149.

⁴⁰ Lincoln 1999: 147.

⁴¹ Lincoln 1999: 150f.

1. Establish the categories at issue [...]. Note also the relations among these categories [...] as well as their ranking [...] and the logic to justify that ranking.
2. Note whether there are any changes in the ranking of categories [...]. Ascertain the logic used to justify any such shifts.
3. Assemble a set of related materials from the same culture area: other variants of the same story, other closely related stories [...] and other texts in which the same categories are at issue. Establish any differences that exist between the categories and rankings that appear in the focal text and those in these other materials.
4. Establish any connections that exist between the categories that figure in these texts and those which condition the relations of the social groups among whom the texts circulate.
5. Establish the date and authorship of all texts considered and the circumstances of their appearance, circulation and reception.
6. Try to draw reasonable inferences about the interests that are advanced, defended, or negotiated through each act of narration. Pay particular attention to the way the categories constituting the social order are redefined and recalibrated such that certain groups move up and others move down within the extant hierarchy.
7. Remember that to treat pointed issues [...] is to acknowledge them and to open up possibilities for those with other interests to advance alternate interpretations [...].

According to the critical approach of Lincoln I will establish the categories in our myths as well as their ranking, and I will investigate whether they undergo change in our myths. I will also investigate connections between social relations represented by our categories and social relations of the social groups that use these myths. The users of the myths are here seen in a wide sense, and the main focus regarding the users is the social relations between men and women in society. The date of our myths will be established, as well as the interests represented, and how the social categories are recalibrated. Regarding the authorship of the myths, *it is not possible to establish any author*, and rather than trying to establish one or several authors, *I will focus on the users*.

When I am collecting referential and related materials (primarily texts) from the culture of the myths studied here I will collect a certain “redundancy”, where all (the parts of) the texts can elucidate one another. Lincoln uses this method primarily to reveal the ranking of categories. The ideas/categories are not always ranked however, but are understood as belonging together because of some affinity. (Regarding our goddess we have the

ideas mother goddess – mountain – door that belong together.⁴²) Inspired by Professors of Archaeology, History, Cultural studies and Religion Ingvild Sælid Gilhus and Lisbeth Mikaelsson. I call these related categories *ideas*. The affinity that they have is shown in their ordering in what these scholars call *constellations*. They write that elements from the mythical sphere are kept in the culture in a mental storehouse of symbols and ideas, and these can be used and combined in different ways. The myths carry structures of symbols and constellations of ideas that are building blocks of new narratives.⁴³ The constellations can be found as parts of several different narrative *structures* and are not necessarily arranged in a specific linear sequence. When I identify the constellations of ideas in our myths through comparison with other texts from the Mesopotamian society, the identification is made through the method of contextualization.

When we have a constellation of ideas in one myth that is made up of, let us say, three parts, we can compare this constellation with similar ones in other myths, which perhaps are made up of two, four or five parts. In this way we get a better understanding of the whole constellation of ideas, which is also probably in the composer's unconscious. Further, as was seen above, according to the method of Lincoln, analogous material is not stable, but can also show how myths are used to cause change.⁴⁴ The aspect of change will be considered in the analysis of both ranked categories and constellations of ideas. Further, changes often take place as *negotiations* between different comprehensions of the myths. As was mentioned in the section on theory, as well as under the methodological point 6., I will point to possible negotiations when analyzing the myths.

The myths treated here will be analyzed from beginning to end. Each myth will be divided into sections that basically correspond to the sections of the study. In this respect there is a trait in the study of orality that is of interest for my method. Walter Ong was Professor of English and French, working among other things with linguistics and History of Religions, studying the transition from oral to literate culture, and what implications it had on consciousness. According to him, in oral cultures short stories, or formulas, are “stitched together” to longer stories. He refers to the Slavicist David Bynum who maintains that the exactly repeated formulations appear in clusters in oral narrative. Ong writes that “[t]he clusters constitute the organizing principles of the formulas, so that the ‘essential idea’ is not subject to clear,

⁴² These ideas will be thoroughly treated below in section 5.4.1., The concept “door” as part of a constellation of ideas in Mesopotamian myths.

⁴³ Gilhus and Mikaelsson 2003: 177. Cf. the similar notion expressed by Jonathan Berkey, Professor in History, who describes the relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims in the early caliphate. He maintains that at this time there was quite a free exchange of knowledge and ideas, and that “individuals adhering to each of the three faiths drew creatively on a common pool of stories and traditions to shape their understanding of the[ir] scriptures” (2003: 96).

⁴⁴ Lincoln 1999: 151.

straightforward formulation but is rather a kind of fictional complex held together largely in the unconscious”.⁴⁵ In addition to the fact that the ideas/formulas are arranged as a longer story, it was also argued above that there are ideas that belong together because of some affinity that reoccur throughout the myth that can be studied in a structural, rather than linear way.

The “stitching together” of formulas/ideas is a feature also of Sumerian literature. It is like a “clustering” of kindred ideas/formulas/stories into one narrative. That Sumerian literature is made up of several stories has been pointed to by several scholars within Assyriology and Sumerology, and regarding “Enki and Ninḥursaġa” most recently by Assyriologist Dina Katz as well as Assyriologist Nicholas Postgate.⁴⁶ Katz maintains that the myth is made up of two separate stories, as does Sumerologist Thorkild Jacobsen.⁴⁷ Assyriologists Maurice Lambert and Jacques R. Tournay in turn divide the myth into six original ones.⁴⁸ They, as Jacobsen, write that this way of composing is found also in other Sumerian texts.⁴⁹ According to Jacobsen “Enki and Ninmah” is also composed of two original stories,⁵⁰ whereas Sumerologist Herbert Sauren subdivides this myth into five narratives.⁵¹ The sections in this study can thus be understood as corresponding to short stories/formulas that are building blocks of the larger story.

1.4. Central concepts

1.4.1. Mother goddess

This thesis deals with what I call “the Sumerian mother goddess”. The concept “mother goddess” might in some readers awaken thoughts about matriarchy or a prehistoric Great Goddess. The theory of a pre- and protohistoric matriarchy was originally formulated by Johann Jakob Bachofen, Professor of Roman law, and several other scholars have used and reworked his theory in various ways.⁵² Today most scholars agree that there has never existed a prehistoric matriarchy in the way Bachofen and his followers describe it.⁵³

⁴⁵ Ong 2001: 25; Bynum 1978: 18.

⁴⁶ Katz 2007 and 2008; Postgate 2010.

⁴⁷ Jacobsen 1987: 181.

⁴⁸ Lambert and Tournay 1949: 120–133.

⁴⁹ Lambert and Tournay 1949: 120; Jacobsen 1987: 181.

⁵⁰ Jacobsen 1987: 151.

⁵¹ Sauren 1993: 198.

⁵² See the papers published in Wagner-Hasel 1992a.

⁵³ E.g. Hultkrantz 1961; Näsström 1988; Lerner 1986: 31; Roller 1999: 11ff.; Talalay 1994; Gross 1996: 149–165. See also the Classicist Beate Wagner-Hasel, who maintains that the matriarchal theory was a product of scholars who tended to project their own experiences as

The designation “mother goddess” on the deity that will be discussed and analyzed here obviously expresses that the goddess in question has a special relation to motherhood, and she can also be comprehended as *the* Mother among the gods. This is indeed the case regarding Ninḫursaġa/Ninmaḫ who is sometimes called “the mother of the gods”.⁵⁴ The relation that our goddess has to motherhood will be seen in the myths that will be analyzed here; in the first she is the first goddess to give birth, and in the second myth our goddess is a midwife and acts as an assistant when the child to be born is formed.

Originally each Sumerian city had a mother goddess of its own, but on the level of schools and scribes, Ninḫursaġa/Ninmaḫ became a supraregional/national mother goddess. In his paper “Muttergöttin. A. I. In Mesopotamien.” Sumerologist Manfred Krebernik mainly discusses this supraregional/national mother goddess, i.e. the same goddess that is the focus of this work.

This goddess is found under several names⁵⁵ in the godlists⁵⁶ and in the literary texts. The nature of the godlists, i.e. that they are listing names of the deities, gives reason to believe that in them we find more or less all the names of each deity lined up together. Regarding our mother goddess, names that are listed are e.g. Aruru, Ninḫursaġa, Nintu, Ninmaḫ, Ninmena, Mami and Bēlet-ilī.⁵⁷ Although some of these names might have been referring to different goddesses once upon a time, they are used for the same goddess not only in the godlists, but also in the literary texts. Throughout, more than one of these names refer to the one and same mother goddess in single literary texts.⁵⁸ Regarding the name Ninmaḫ Sumerologist Gebhard Selz writes that this clearly was an epithet of Ninḫursaġa in the Early Dynastic IIIb Lagaš

well as ideas of their times onto the material. As such, it was a critique against contemporary culture and modernity during a rapid industrialization (1992b: 312).

⁵⁴ PSD, A/III, ama A, 201.

⁵⁵ The phenomenon that a goddess (as well as god) has many names is cross-cultural; cf. for example the many names of Freyja in the ancient Scandinavian religion (Näsström 1995: 85f.; id. 1999, passim).

⁵⁶ There are several traditions of godlists, but An-Anum is a list that developed into a kind of standard after the Old Babylonian period. According to Rubio this godlist, both in its Old Babylonian and later versions, “has nothing to do with a hypothetical process of syncretism”; instead it gives explanations in a column to the left of the deities’ names, or gives alternative names there. Also similarities or correspondence of two deities can be mentioned (Rubio 2011: 97f.).

⁵⁷ Cf. Sallaberger who writes that “[b]esonders vielfältig sind die Namen und damit Erscheinungsformen der Muttergöttin” (2004: 298).

⁵⁸ In “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” she is called Ninḫursaġa and Nintu (as well as Damgalnuna); in “Enki and the world order” she is called Aruru and Nintu, and perhaps also Ninḫursaġa is found as corresponding to Nintu; in “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta” she is called Ninmaḫ, Nintu and Ninḫursaġa; in “Enlil and Sud” she is called Aruru and Nintu, and so on. All these texts can be found in Black et al. (1998–2006).

sources.⁵⁹ Mami and Bēlet-ilī occur only in Akkadian literary texts,⁶⁰ Aruru and Nintu in both Akkadian and Sumerian literary texts,⁶¹ and the other names only in Sumerian literary texts.⁶² Aruru, Ninḫursaġa, Nintu, Ninmaḥ, as well as Mami, all occur as names for the mother goddess in relation to Keš, the city of which she was the patron deity.⁶³ Furthermore, the role related to each of these names is quite hard to distinguish from the roles related to the other names.⁶⁴

I assume that these different names originally referred to different but similar goddesses that were assimilated, although in some cases names of the mother goddess were by-names that referred to specific functions of hers.⁶⁵ The aspects of the mother goddess that Krebernik discusses are that she is a mother, that she is related to birth and creation of humans, to cosmogony as a mountain, and that she is related to the installation of kings.⁶⁶ These same aspects are also discussed by Jacobsen when he describes Ninḫursaġa.⁶⁷ The aspects found in the works of these two scholars are indeed a part of the traits of the mother goddess, but some traits that belong to her are absent in their descriptions or are only mentioned but not treated as central traits. I would thus like to add the following traits to the description of the mother goddess: she can bring death, she is decreeing fates,⁶⁸ and she is a healer.⁶⁹

⁵⁹ Selz 1995b: 256. Further, according to Krebernik and Cavigneaux the correct reading of Ninmaḥ might be Erešmaḥ. In one text from Ugarit the name Ninmaḥ is written syllabically as e-re-eš-ma-aḥ (Krebernik 1997b: 505), and Cavigneaux and Krebernik refer to a further syllabic writing [e]-ri-iš¹-ma¹-ḥa (2001f: 462).

⁶⁰ E.g. the Atraḫasīs myth (see Lambert and Millard 1999) and the Anzu myth (see Hallo and Moran (1979) and Saggs (1986)).

⁶¹ Sumerian texts are referred to above, in fn. 58. Nintu is found as a name of the mother goddess in the Akkadian Atraḫasīs myth, besides the names Mami and Bēlet-ilī (see Lambert and Millard 1999), and Aruru is found besides the name Bēlet-ilī (and Mammītum) in the Gilgameš epic (see George 2003).

⁶² But see the Atraḫasīs myth III: iii: 28 (Lamert and Millard 1999: 94f.) where we read ^dnintu *be-el-tum ra-bi-tum* in Akkadian; *bēltu rabītu* has the same meaning as Sumerian nin-maḥ.

⁶³ E.g. “The lament for Eridug” (Aruru); “A *tigi* to Nintur” (Aruru and Nintu) (Black et al. 1998–2006); Temple hymn no. 7 to Keš (Ninḫursaġa and Nintu) (Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969); “The Keš Temple hymn” (Ninḫursaġa and Nintu) (Gragg 1969); “The lament for Urim” (Ninmaḥ) (Black et al. 1998–2006); the Atraḫasīs myth (Mami) (Lamert and Millard 1999). See also the second of the two Old Babylonian hymns treated by Krebernik, where Bēlet-ilī, Mama and Aruru are names denoting the goddess of Keš (2003–2004: 16).

⁶⁴ The name Aruru is never used in the same text in parallel with Ninḫursaġa and Ninmaḥ though. All three are used in parallel with Nintu however. Furthermore, Aruru is not occurring among the most prominent three or four deities in the pantheon (An, Enlil, mother goddess or Enki), as are Ninḫursaġa, Ninmaḥ and Nintu. (See the table on page 93.) Nintu, Mami and Bēlet-ilī are used as names on the mother goddess in the Atraḫasīs myth in a context of the great gods An, Enlil and Enki (see Lambert and Millard 1999: 55, 57, 95, 97).

⁶⁵ Cf. the assimilation of Frigg and Freyja as well as the fact that some of Freyja’s names were related to specific functions and cultic places (Näsström 1999: 68, 70).

⁶⁶ Krebernik 1997b: 503, 512ff.

⁶⁷ Jacobsen 1976: 104–110.

⁶⁸ This trait is only mentioned by Krebernik as the epithet *nin nam-tar-tar-re* “Herrin, die die Schicksale bestimmt” (1997b: 506). Her role as decreer of fates is also seen in Gudea Statue

Moreover, although both Krebernik and Jacobsen mention the mother goddess' relation to crafts, this is mainly done by enumerating epithets referring to it, rather than calling attention to such a relation. As I understand it, the sources also show that the mother goddess is a craft goddess. This will be seen below in the chapter on "Enki and Ninmah".

Further, the mother goddess was the mistress or mother of the subsistence of her village, town or city, i.e. animals and vegetables. She was also patroness of the habitat of her village, town or city (as were other deities). Ninḫursaġa's relation to the habitat can perhaps be seen in her epithet *nin uru-da mú-a* "lady grown with the city",⁷⁰ which seems to refer to an intimate interconnection between Ninḫursaġa and her city. Other examples of mother goddesses related to the habitat are Namma who was called *ama é-ake₄/ummi bīti*, "mother of the house(hold)/dynasty",⁷¹ Nanše who was the one who founded Lagaš,⁷² and Bau who was called mother of all lands.⁷³

Not only do the mother goddesses of Mesopotamia have many traits in common, but they also differ in many respects. With this understanding as a background I believe that the discussion of a prehistoric Great Goddess is conceptually misleading. The world of those days was rather locally than globally oriented, and therefore archaeological findings must primarily be interpreted in their local context.⁷⁴ At the same time there are recurring traits in many prehistoric cultures, and it is not strange that several scholars have read a universal mother goddess into the material.⁷⁵

A, iii, 4–6: *nin an-ki-a nam tar-re-dè^dnin-tu ama diġir-re-ne-ke₄* "lady of heaven and earth, decreer of destinies, Nintu, mother of the gods". Transliteration taken from Edzard (1997).

⁶⁹ Regarding this aspect Krebernik writes: "Als Ausweitung ihrer Hebammen- und Ammenfunktion wird es zu verstehen sein, wenn die Muttergöttin auch 'Ärztin' genannt werden kann (PN *Ma-ma-A.ZU* ...)" (1997b: 514).

⁷⁰ This epithet is found e.g. in Gudea Statue A, i: 1f. and Gudea 67, l. 4 (Edzard 1997: 29, 159). There was also statue of Nintu from Early Dynastic IIIb Lagaš that was called *nin-tu ama uru-da-mú-a*, "Nintu, mother grown with the city" (Selz 1995: 267).

⁷¹ Wiggermann 2001a: 137.

⁷² Black et al. 1998–2006. "A hymn to Nanše (Nanše A)", l. 225.

⁷³ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 32.

⁷⁴ This is the view also of Archaeologist Lauren Talalay who means that the idea of a prehistoric Great Mother Goddess is too simple, ahistoric, and that it does not take the complexity of gender and change into account (1994: 172f.).

⁷⁵ The latest and most criticized at present is Archaeologist Marija Gimbutas. Some of the critique is however not correct. E.g. Professor of Art History Lynn Roller writes that Gimbutas is one of those who believe that there was a prehistoric goddess of fertility corresponding to a female feminist leader in a society where women were ruling over men (1999: 14 with fn. 20). Gimbutas does in fact herself question the designation "fertility goddess", which she sees as too narrow a description of what she calls the great goddess of prehistory. Regarding the rule of women, she sees the societies as balanced between the sexes, being neither matriarchal, nor patriarchal. She believes however, that the "Goddess-centered art [...] reflects a social order in which women as heads of clans or queen-priestesses played a central part" (1989: xx, 319).

1.4.2. Pantheon

The concept pantheon occurs now and then in this thesis, since my aim is to “interpret two of the three Sumerian myths where the mother goddess of the pantheon found in literary texts and godlists is one of the main actors”. I use the concept pantheon in the common meaning “the circle of deities” in a polytheistic culture. Important here is how the concept is used in relation to the Sumerian-Akkadian culture and the sources that I study.

Rubio writes that the pantheon of the Mesopotamian society has earlier been reconstructed through gathering all theonyms from all sorts of sources. Nowadays, since it is quite well known that each city had its own pantheon, and that this pantheon changed over time, the scholarship moves away from this way of collecting names of deities. To this Rubio also adds the panthea of different text genres; he writes that “each of these corpora (rituals, inscriptions, onomasticon, etc.) may also bear witness to a specific pantheon”.⁷⁶

According to Rubio we must differentiate between three different panthea in Mesopotamia. He writes that “[i]t is commonplace to distinguish between official cult and popular religion”, and that “[t]o these two panthea, one should add a third, the pantheon of the scribes”, although the latter also “for the most part includes practical awareness of the other two”.⁷⁷ The sources to the official cult are mainly administrative texts, royal inscriptions and ritual texts, whereas the deities in the literary texts and the godlists belong to the pantheon created by the scribes. The popular religion instead, is more probably reached through the onomasticon.⁷⁸

Thus, on the one hand we have to distinguish between the panthea of different cities and periods, and on the other between different textual genres found in each city. In spite of this picture of differentiated panthea, there is also a picture of a tendency to establish a common pantheon in the texts produced by both the state and the scribes. One example is the Old Babylonian godlist TCL 15, 10, which is not a list of local deities, but instead contains a supraregional pantheon.⁷⁹ Another example is the Sumerian Temple hymns, which both reflect the local traditions, since each god is connected to a specific city, and the supraregional comprehension, since the deities are ordered together, in a hierarchical way, just as they are in other texts. Except that An is missing, at the top we have the other deities that are counted as the highest deities; Enki, Enlil (here also followed by his family members), and Ninĥursaġa.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Rubio 2011: 91f.

⁷⁷ Rubio 2011: 109. Sallaberger comes to a similar conclusion, referring to the local panthea, the state pantheon, and the pantheon met with in mythology (Sallaberger 2004: 294).

⁷⁸ Rubio 2011: 92.

⁷⁹ Richter 2004: 13f.

⁸⁰ See Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 13.

Assyriologist Thomas Richter writes that the literary texts are sometimes dedicated to one deity that occurs in the text among other deities that are not always venerated in the same city as he or she is. He further mentions that several scholars have maintained that the literary texts show a certain Nipur-centrism.⁸¹ My personal impression is that the literary texts show interactions between the principal deities of the different cities, which can either be figurative, or as the divine journeys, reflect cultic interaction of the deities, visiting each other.⁸²

The supraregional pantheon is not only seen in the literary/scholarly texts, but also in the royal inscriptions. King Eanatum's victory stele, dating to the Early Dynastic IIIb period, is an example of a royal inscription reflecting the supraregional pantheon; here Enlil, Ninḫursaĝa, Enki, Su'en and Utu, in that order, are enumerated as those deities that will throw their nets upon the king that Eanatum has subordinated, if he breaks their agreement.⁸³ Thus, Eanatum relies on these deities that were patron deities of other cities than Eanatum's city-state Lagaš, where the god Ninĝirsu was the patron deity. The relationship to the other deities can be seen in the light of the ambition of this king, as well as other Early Dynastic IIIb kings, to expand their area of kingship to encompass also other cities and city-states. A further aspect is the fact mentioned by Selz, that these great deities neither belonged to Umma, nor to Lagaš, but were part of a supraregional pantheon, which made them appropriate as guarantors of the treaty.⁸⁴

Regarding this ambition of Early Dynastic IIIb kings, Assyriologist Aage Westenholz writes that "[Lugalzagesi] and other Early Dynastic rulers claiming 'dominion' over more than their own city are probably best seen as quite ordinary lugal ki-en-gi, the ceremonial heads of the loose confederacy of Sumerian city-states".⁸⁵

The supraregional pantheon is also reflected e.g. in the inscriptions of Ur-Namma, the first king of the Ur III dynasty, since his inscriptions were dedicated mainly to the greater deities in that pantheon.⁸⁶ They reflect the king's ambition to be present as ruler in the whole of Sumer, and several of them are foundation tablets of the deities' temples in their own cities. Ur-Namma claimed to be king of both Sumer and Akkade (lugal ki-en-gi ki-uri), as did his son and successor Šulgi.⁸⁷ Thus, here as in the Early Dynastic IIIb

⁸¹ Richter 2004: 21.

⁸² The "divine journey" is a Sumerian literary genre, which according to Heimpel is "hymnic descriptions of events of cultic importance which culminated in intercity journeys to the divine superior" (1997a: 543).

⁸³ See Steible and Behrens 1982a: 129–140.

⁸⁴ Selz 1995b: 254.

⁸⁵ Westenholz 1999: 40.

⁸⁶ Besides the moon god Nanna of Ur and his family, we meet inscriptions to Enlil (8 times), Ninlil (1 time), Enki (3 times), Ninḫursaĝa (1time), An (1 time), Ninĝirsu (1 time), and Ur-Namma's personal goddess Ninsuna (1 time) (see Frayne 1997).

⁸⁷ Sallaberger 1999: 180.

period, the supraregional pantheon can be connected to the ambition of the ruler to dominate several cities in the region.

Although we have to reckon with several panthea in the area and period discussed here, on the royal and scribal level, we often find a supraregional pantheon, and that is the pantheon that will be dealt with in this thesis. Rubio writes that the scribes were aware of the popular pantheon, and that the literary texts “may ultimately have stemmed from ancient oral traditions”,⁸⁸ but the popular level will not be reached here; instead throughout we are dealing with royal and scribal ideology.

1.4.3. Patriarchy/patriarchal society

When we label a society “patriarchal” it implies that there are also other types of societies, and thus the social structure is not comprehended as natural. In the 19th century Johann Jakob Bachofen, coined the term matriarchy, which referred to an alleged prepatriarchal global society where women ruled in the way men do in patriarchal societies. This hypothesis received great popularity during the 19th century, and even well into the 20th century.⁸⁹

Although the idea of an original matriarchy has been rejected among scholars active in the study of ancient societies, this does not mean that they reject every assumption that women had more influence in pre- and proto-history. However, what these scholars have in common is to reject any universalizing and mythologizing tendencies in favor of historicizing, asking questions of context and function.⁹⁰ Gerda Lerner, Professor emerita of History, argues for Paleolithic societies where men and women lived in more or less egalitarian relations. She does so primarily with the use of archaeological and anthropological data.⁹¹ In these societies it is theorized that men and women did different tasks, and were complementary to each other.⁹² According to Lerner, the division of labor was due to the fact that women bear and nurse children, which made it inappropriate for them to participate at hunts of big game and at warfare. Women instead hunted small game and gathered vegetables.⁹³

Regarding the Ancient Near East we shall not enter the prehistoric period. However, there are two points in the arguments of Lerner that can be used

⁸⁸ Rubio 2011: 92, 109. Cf. his statement in another publication, that “in spite of the performative rubrics [of Sumerian literary texts] discussed above, the bulk of Sumerian literary compositions were most likely mere scribal artifacts. [...] There were quite possibly folkloric traditions [...], but they belonged to an oral lore that can be neither recovered nor clearly linked to the written compositions” (Rubio 2009: 25).

⁸⁹ See Wagner-Hasel 1992a.

⁹⁰ Lerner 1986: 36f.; Gross 1996: 152ff.; Wagner-Hasel 1992b: 329.

⁹¹ Lerner 1986, chapter 2.

⁹² Gross 1996: 154.

⁹³ Lerner 1986: 39ff.

when theorizing about the Ancient Near Eastern, and in our case primarily Mesopotamian, material; the division of labor and the economic development as factors that were central in the development of the Mesopotamian patriarchal society.

In the Ancient Near East we see an economic process during the Neolithic, when the peoples living in the area of the Fertile Crescent developed intensive agriculture with the use of plough and draught animals. The intensive agricultural work became the work of the men, whereas women processed the agricultural products. Since the agriculture was labor intensive it became essential to have many children, which led to a more pronounced focus upon women as mothers. Also private ownership increased, which led to instigations of warfare.⁹⁴

Lerner describes a development where goddesses lost their importance in the pantheon, which culminated in the patriarchal, monotheistic Israelite society. She explicitly points to a relationship between pantheon and society.⁹⁵ In a similar vein, the Biblical and Assyriological scholar Tikva Frymer-Kensky argues in her book *In the Wake of the Goddesses* that the goddesses of the pantheon reflected the roles of women in society. She also relates the process when goddesses slowly disappeared, ending in a monotheistic society in Israel.⁹⁶ Frymer-Kensky writes that:

[t]he dramatic decline of women's visibility does not take place until well into the Old Babylonian period (circa 1600 B.C.E.), and may be function [sic!] of the change from city-states to larger nation-states and the changes in the social and economic systems that this entailed. The eclipse of the goddesses was undoubtedly part of the same process that witnessed a decline in the public role of women, with both reflective of fundamental changes in society, that we cannot yet specify.⁹⁷

Thus, it can be argued that the development of a patriarchal society in Mesopotamia was very much based on societal and economic changes. Further, in this process men and women were increasingly kept apart, being active in different spheres of society. It was seen in section 1.2.1. ("Myth as ideology") above that I take a relation between pantheon and myths on the one hand, and society on the other, as a point of departure. Myths can be used to change society, as well as changes in society affect myths.

The concept patriarchy has been criticized lately. Professor in Ancient History Beate Wagner-Hasel means that the theory of a universal patriarchal family cannot be maintained anymore. Just as the theory of matriarchy has been deconstructed (i.e. historicized), Wagner-Hasel proposes a deconstruc-

⁹⁴ Lerner 1986: 49ff.

⁹⁵ Lerner 1986, e.g. chapter 7 and 8.

⁹⁶ Frymer-Kensky 1992: 24f.; chapter 7, and the Biblical society of Israel in part II.

⁹⁷ Frymer-Kensky 1992: 80. Cf. Lambert who instead understands the development in ancient Mesopotamia to be due to historical chances (1986).

tion of the theory of patriarchy.⁹⁸ A similar position is taken by Zainab Bahrani, Professor in Ancient Near Eastern Art and Archaeology. She writes that First and Second Wave feminists⁹⁹ tended to universalize patriarchy both in space and time, whereas Third Wave feminists look at “variability according to specific socio-historical contexts”.¹⁰⁰ Bahrani further maintains:

Patriarchy defined as male power is not as clear cut and unproblematic as some First and Second Wave feminist theorists would have it. It is not simply a power relation between men and women, but between people and social orders involving the political, cultural, and religious structures, and all other ideological apparatuses, all of which need to be taken into consideration if we are to reformulate an account of gender as a complexity of cultural constructions.¹⁰¹

Thus, the patriarchal structures of ancient Mesopotamia shall not be understood as unproblematic and only being expressions of male power; instead they are part of relations between men and women, different social classes, different peoples and so on. There are some characteristics of these patriarchal structures of the Mesopotamian society that I would like to present.¹⁰²

1. Men are seen as heads of family and society.
2. The rule is that men possess all official power, whereas women have no rights to possess such power.
3. The rule is that inheritance goes from father to son.
4. The hierarchical relation between the sexes is relative, and also class is an important factor.
5. The society is to a large extent built upon the work of serfs, and they are foreigners taken as captives in war, or come from the poorest people in the society.
6. The society is militarized and organized around power and possessions.

The myths treated here were used and reproduced in a patriarchal society as that described above, and they must accordingly be understood in such a context. One further point to make clear is that although a society has patriarchal structures, this does not mean that women and people of the lower classes were completely without power. As far as I am concerned, the evidence of anomalies¹⁰³ and struggles is what is most interesting, since they

⁹⁸ Wagner-Hasel 1992b: 336f.

⁹⁹ First Wave feminists engaged in finding women in the historical sources, but the norms of patriarchal society were not questioned. The Second Wave feminists focused upon gender roles as well as women as victims of subjugation, Bahrani 2001: 14f.

¹⁰⁰ Bahrani 2001: 16.

¹⁰¹ Bahrani 2001: 18.

¹⁰² Cf. the general definition of Lerner (1986: 239).

¹⁰³ Lincoln 1989: 160–170.

show cracks in the surface of a monolithic, naturalized patriarchy. The gender of “men” and “women” are not as monolithic as presented either, and the same goes for other parts of identity as class, and disability. Further, these categories are not stable, as is pointed out by Bahrani.¹⁰⁴

1.4.4. Gender

In the aim and questions section it was said that I will treat the relationship between females and males in the myths analyzed here. This implies that the concept of gender is important in this thesis. Further, since I argue in the section on myth theory that myth is used for constructing identity, my theoretical section also supports the focus on gender.

As is well known, the concept of gender is understood as denoting a socially constructed identity. Bahrani writes that when the concept was introduced by the Second Wave feminists, the concept body was not problematized, but was understood as something natural.¹⁰⁵ This comprehension was changed with the Third Wave of feminism. Bahrani writes that:

[...] in Third Wave feminism it has been argued that the gender category itself, as a separate socially constructed entity superimposed upon that natural prediscursive sex, is faulty. In fact, there is no distinction to be made between socially constructed gender and biological sex, since the morphology of sexual distinction is in itself already a social construct.¹⁰⁶

Thus, just as there are no eternal gender roles, there are no eternal conceptualizations of (gendered) bodies; both gender and body are constructed in historical contexts. Bahrani refers to Professor in Rhetoric and Comparative Literature Judith Butler who maintains that gender is performative, and Bahrani specifies: “It is a process that it [sic!] is continuously repeated in day-to-day life”¹⁰⁷.

In this work neither the body nor gender will be comprehended as something given and unproblematic; both of them are constructed in different ways in different societies. How they were constructed in Mesopotamia is a matter of investigation, and the question will be discussed in this thesis.

1.4.5. Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian and Mesopotamian

Something must also be said about the use of the different terms Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian and Mesopotamian. The people(s) that most

¹⁰⁴ Bahrani 2001: 26.

¹⁰⁵ Bahrani 2001: 15.

¹⁰⁶ Bahrani 2001: 20.

¹⁰⁷ Bahrani 2001: 21.

probably founded the cuneiform culture in Mesopotamia (present Iraq) are commonly understood as Sumerian-speaking, Sumerian being an agglutinative linguistic isolate. During the third millennium peoples speaking Semitic languages slowly moved into Mesopotamia. They integrated well and soon the Semitic language Akkadian replaced Sumerian as everyday language. Sometime at the turn of the century 2000 BCE Sumerian was more or less a dead language, but it continued to be taught as a learned language in the schools. This means that those who wrote down the myths treated here were most probably speaking Akkadian as their first language. (The dates of the myths will be treated in the following section.)

The Sumerian-speaking people mainly lived in the south of Mesopotamia, whereas the Akkadian-speaking people initially lived mainly further to the north.¹⁰⁸ Also when Sumerian was no longer spoken as a first language, Mesopotamia was divided into two regions; Babylonia in the south, and Assyria in the north. Assyrian and Babylonian denote the languages of the respective areas, and they are two dialects of Akkadian.

Since the Sumerian myths were used and handed down by Akkadian-speaking people, there will not always be a correspondence between language and region referred to in this thesis. Thus, I might (hypothetically) say e.g. “the Sumerian myths of Mesopotamia”. Further, “Akkadian” can and will be used as a collective denotation of Assyrian and Babylonian. When I write “Mesopotamian myths” this refers to both Sumerian and Akkadian myths. I will return to the historical development in Chapter 2.

1.5. Sources

The focus of this thesis is the two myths “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” and “Enki and Ninmaḫ”. Internal criteria suggest that the former might have been written down earlier than the Old Babylonian period,¹⁰⁹ although the copies we have date to the Old Babylonian period.¹¹⁰ The copies of the latter myth date to the Old Babylonian period.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Westenholz 1999: 29.

¹⁰⁹ One criterium is the Rīm-Sîn interpolation, which was inserted in the text under Rīm-Sîn of Larsa, i.e. just at the beginning of the classical Old Babylonian period. This suggests that the myth was extant without the interpolation before this time. Another is the fact that Ur is posed as the seat of kingship, which points back to the importance of Ur during the Ur III period, and also during the Isin-Larsa period.

¹¹⁰ Attinger 1984: 2.

¹¹¹ According to Sauren however, “Enki and Ninmaḫ” was transformed by the Nippur scribes in the Old Babylonian period, since this version is highly Akkadized, containing several Akkadian words (1993: 198, 203 f., fn. 17). Personally I am not sure how to comprehend the Akkadisms of the myth. Lambert writes that “the Sumerian grammar of the Old Babylonian copies is faulty in places, and this raises the question of the age of the text we have. Perhaps *Enki and Ninmaḫ* was edited, or even composed, after the fall of the Third Dynasty of Ur and

The problems with these sources are primarily of an interpretative kind. For one thing, the Sumerian grammar is not understood in its entirety, and scholars sometimes differ in their readings. The meaning is also disputed regarding some single words. Further, the clay tablets on which the texts are written usually come to us either in bits or damaged, and the result is that there is very commonly gaps in the cuneiform texts. This is the case regarding the myths treated here. The Sumerian of our myths was written down by Akkadian scholars, and that possibly affected the grammar of the language; the scribe might have got some parts of the Sumerian original (probably oral) wrong. Further, above all “Enki and Ninmaḥ” is recognized as a difficult text with a lot of otherwise unknown words and expressions.¹¹² The problems mentioned here apply to all Sumerian sources, and above all to literary texts.

Another problem concerns the time in history that the myths reflect. These texts are archaizing,¹¹³ and do not only exhibit old forms of lexemes, but also reflect societal aspects from earlier times. At the same time new societal elements were introduced. The question of which society or societies the myths reflect will be discussed in the analysis of the myths.

Apart from these myths, other texts from the whole period of cuneiform culture in Mesopotamia, which deal with the mother goddess, will also be used. Important exceptions are very old Sumerian texts, which are at the present too difficult to interpret at length.¹¹⁴ They will be referred to, but not treated in their entirety. Thus, the texts used here are primarily dating from the Ur III period (which begins roughly about 2100 BCE) and later. Most of the literary texts in Sumerian were written down in the Old Babylonian period, and count “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”, “Enki and Ninmaḥ”, “Inana’s descent”,¹¹⁵ “Enki and the world order”, “Enlil and Ninlil” and the Sumerian Temple hymns among them.

Myths in Akkadian that will be used are the Atraḫasīs myth, “The Descent of Ištar” (with texts known only from the Neo-Assyrian period) and “Nergal and Ereškigal” (with texts from Middle Babylonian, Neo-Assyrian, and Late Babylonian periods).¹¹⁶ In addition to these Sumerian and Akkadian texts, other texts that also refer to the mother goddess, or in other ways

is not to be judged by the grammar of Gudea’s inscriptions. In any case the traditions are no doubt very old” (1992: 130).

¹¹² Kramer 1944: 69; Benito 1969:10; Bottéro and Kramer 1993: 188; Lambert 1992: 130.

¹¹³ Veldhuis 2004: 55, 66.

¹¹⁴ There are zami hymns, the Early Dynastic IIIa version of the Keš-hymn, and a small fragment about the mother-goddess, from Abū Šalābīḥ, dated to Early Dynastic IIIa, see Krebernik (1998: 319ff., note 800). From the following Early Dynastic IIIb period we have the Barton Cylinder (Bauer 1998: 517). For a treatment of the Barton Cylinder see Alster and Westenholz 1994: 15–46.

¹¹⁵ There is a reference to “Inana’s descent” in one Ur III incantation, and a possible reference in another Ur III incantation (Katz 2003: 251, 358; Veldhuis 2003).

¹¹⁶ For Sumerian and Akkadian literature, see Edzard (1990) and Röllig (1990).

are relevant, will be used. Examples of such texts are epics, hymns, incantations, lamentations, and in rare cases, lexical lists and law texts as well.

Regarding the literary texts¹¹⁷ I have worked throughout with philological editions of transliterations and translations. I regularly use the transliterations and translations of Sumerian literary texts supplied by Black et al. in the *Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL)*.¹¹⁸ I do this mainly because they are easily accessible for both my readers and me. In *ETCSL* we have no philological commentary, but the translation of course indicates the grammatical lines of thought. The transliterations and translations in *ETCSL* are done by renowned Sumerologists. When discussing our myths I also use the extant philological editions with commentaries. I give my own translations of the texts that are central for this thesis, and when I find it necessary I give my own translations on other occasions as well. If nothing else is noted, the translations are mine.

Besides philological editions with transliterations and commentary, I also use more “popular” translations of the myths treated here, such as those by Sumerologist Samuel Noah Kramer and Professor in Literature John Maier’s *Myths of Enki, The Crafty God*, Sumerologists Jean Bottéro and Samuel Noah Kramer’s *Lorsque les dieux faisaient l’homme: mythologie mésopotamienne*, and Thorkild Jacobsen’s *The Harps that Once...*

1.6. Previous Research

The previous research on the myths studied here is mainly philological. There is no thorough hermeneutic or structural analysis in the philological studies of these texts, but we find comments and suggestions on the connotative meaning of the myth.

Here, I will only shortly refer to the scholars who have given philological publications on the myths, and beyond that, I will discuss those scholars who are important for the interpretation of the myths.

1.6.1. “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa”

Regarding “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa”, Kramer was the first to give a reliable philological publication of the myth in 1945,¹¹⁹ and he gave a revised translation in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament 2* in 1955.¹²⁰ The next philological publication of the whole myth was done in 1984 by Sumerologist Pascal Attinger.¹²¹ Furthermore, we have the translit-

¹¹⁷ Myths, epics, hymns, debate poems etc.

¹¹⁸ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa”.

¹¹⁹ Kramer 1945.

¹²⁰ Kramer 1955.

¹²¹ Attinger 1984.

eration and translation supplied by the *Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL)*, published by Black et al.¹²²

Already in 1949 Lambert and Tournay gave interesting interpretations of “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa”. They questioned Kramer’s suggestion that it was a “paradise myth”, and meant that this was only an attempt to link the text to the Bible. They maintained instead that the passage understood as describing a paradise is in fact a negative, sleeping state before creation.¹²³ This is also suggested by Sumerologist Bendt Alster,¹²⁴ and this understanding will be adhered to here. Furthermore, Lambert and Tournay argued that the myth was made up of six separate narratives,¹²⁵ and this is likewise a theory presented by more modern scholars, and one that is accepted here.¹²⁶

A partial translation of “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa” is given by Kramer and Maier in *Myths of Enki, The Crafty God*, whereas Bottéro and Kramer in *Lorsque les dieux faisaient l’homme* give a near to complete translation. Jacobsen translates the whole myth in his book *The Harps that Once...*¹²⁷ All these books are popular publications, but they do contain philological considerations, and also short suggestions on the interpretation of the myths.

At least three scholars have interpreted the whole myth “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa”: Sumerologist Bendt Alster, Classicist G.S. Kirk, and Assyriologist Dina Katz. Kirk has identified some of the important aspects of “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa”, e.g. that it deals with irrigation, that irrigation is paralleled with human sexuality and that Ninḫursaĝa corresponds to the earth.¹²⁸ Further, although not explicitly seen in the text, Kirk’s understanding that Ninḫursaĝa goes to the netherworld,¹²⁹ is interesting, and I will give arguments to support this theory in section 4.14. called “The role of the fox”. One aspect that is a misinterpretation is Kirk’s comprehension that drought arises when Enki is spreading irrigation outside its natural limits.¹³⁰ I cannot see that this is supported in the text. The interpretation of Alster gives several new and interesting conclusions, and is closer to the text. I will therefore discuss his interpretation below, in section 4.16.1.

Katz’s interpretation is likewise interesting and relevant for an understanding of the myth. Although she writes about “literariness [...], not the historical reality and the archaeological finds”,¹³¹ i.e. the composition and

¹²² Black et al. 1998–2006.

¹²³ Lambert and Tournay 1949: 122f.

¹²⁴ Alster 1978: 16; id. 1983: 54, 58. Furthermore, see Michalowski (1991) who discusses the negation as a literary device in Mesopotamian literature.

¹²⁵ Lambert and Tournay 1949.

¹²⁶ See section 1.3. on method.

¹²⁷ Jacobsen 1987; Kramer and Maier 1989; Bottéro and Kramer 1993. Moreover, Assyriologist Willem H. Ph. Römer has given a popular translation of “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa” (1993), and Assyriologist D. O. Edzard has given a short summary of the myth (1971).

¹²⁸ Kirk 1970: 94ff.

¹²⁹ Kirk 1970: 102.

¹³⁰ Kirk 1970: 92.

¹³¹ Katz 2007: 571.

structure of the text rather than the historical references, she has some valuable interpretations of the myth, for example that “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” is made up of more than one (she understands it as two) original stories.¹³²

According to Katz, Enki marries Nintu/Ninḫursaġa in the second story,¹³³ a statement that has no support in the text (they have sex, but nothing is said about a marriage), and not outside it either. In spite of this, I understand Ninsikila and Nintu/Ninḫursaġa to correspond to each other, and Ninsikila is said to be the wife of Enki.

Katz understands the second part of the myth as dealing with a power struggle between Enki and Ninḫursaġa,¹³⁴ which is in line with the interpretation of this thesis. She further writes that the near-death of Enki represents a draught, since he is a water god,¹³⁵ which seems to be a logical interpretation. Katz concludes that “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” deals with showing that “life is impossible without Enki through his manifestation as sweet water sources”,¹³⁶ which I agree with as well.

Assyriologist Herman Vanstiphout has made a structural analysis of the courting/wedding theme in “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”, “Enlil and Ninlil” and “Enlil and Sud”.¹³⁷ I do not delve deep into this theme myself, but only refer to it when discussing male and female behavior in section 4.10. I discuss the role of the mother of the couple, though, and this is also done by Vanstiphout.

1.6.2. “Enki and Ninmah”

A partial translation of the second myth of this study, “Enki and Ninmah”, was given by Kramer already in 1944. Here Kramer refers to the creation of man in Genesis, where man likewise is made out of clay, and also to the Babylonian creation of man where humankind is made of the blood of one of the gods.¹³⁸ “Enki and Ninmah” is found transliterated and translated in its entirety by Black et al. in *ETCSL*. Further, we have the edition of the myth in the dissertation of Sumerologist Carlos Benito.¹³⁹ He includes the bilingual version from the Neo-Assyrian period, and he gives a philological commentary.¹⁴⁰ In 2013 Assyriologist W. G. Lambert published his transliteration, translation and commentaries to the myth.

¹³² Katz 2007: 568.

¹³³ Katz 2007: 575; id. 2008: 320.

¹³⁴ Katz 2007: 588; id. 2008: 322.

¹³⁵ Katz 2007: 588; 2008: 333.

¹³⁶ Katz 2008: 339.

¹³⁷ Vanstiphout 1987: 163–178.

¹³⁸ Kramer 1944: 69.

¹³⁹ Benito 1969.

¹⁴⁰ Since Benito’s thesis, several further fragments of the bilingual version have been found, and these were transliterated by Assyriologist Rykle Borger (1985), who also gave a copy of the cuneiform fragments joined to one tablet. Sauren (1993) gives a transliteration corre-

“Enki and Ninmaḥ” is further partially translated by Kramer and Maier in *Myths of Enki, The Crafty God*, more or less wholly by Bottéro and Kramer in *Lorsque les dieux faisaient l’homme*, and wholly by Jacobsen in *The Harps that Once...*¹⁴¹ As with “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” the scholars give some comments on the meaning of the myth.¹⁴²

According to Kramer and Maier the aim of “Enki and Ninmaḥ” was to show the superiority of Enki and his city Eridu over Ninḫursaġa and her city Keš.¹⁴³ I agree with Kramer and Maier that the myth expresses a conflict between Enki and Ninmaḥ, and their respective cities. Kirk has also interpreted this myth, but regrettably with partly unsuccessful results. For instance he writes that it “provides [...] striking parallels to ‘Enki and Ninḫursag’”.¹⁴⁴ This statement is probably partly due to misinterpretations¹⁴⁵ and partly to his attempt to tabulate the assumed parallels between the two myths.¹⁴⁶ It will be clear from my analysis of the two myths that they are quite dissimilar although both are dealing with the power relations between Enki on the one hand, and on the other hand Ninḫursaġa and Ninmaḥ.

A study on a part of the myth has been done by Assyriologist Giovanni Pettinato.¹⁴⁷ He has transliterated, translated, philologically commented and analyzed the passage of the background and creation of the first human being. According to Pettinato Namma creates the first man upon a model of man created by Enki.¹⁴⁸ He maintains that the model is called Sigensigšar. Regrettably, Pettinato’s transliteration and translation do not go as far as line 9, section II where we have a plural ending on this noun.¹⁴⁹ Because of the plural ending it is more likely that the Sigensigšar, now read *se₁₂-en-sa₇sár*), is a collective, and most probably refers to the collective of goddesses

sponding to col. I, ll. 1–31, 1’–8’ in Borger. Also Lambert gives a transliteration of the bilingual version (2013: 342ff.). Since this version does not add much to the understanding of the myth, it will only occasionally be used here.

¹⁴¹ Jacobsen 1987; Kramer and Maier 1989; Bottéro and Kramer 1993.

¹⁴² A popular translation of “Enki and Ninmaḥ” is also given by Assyriologist Willem H. Ph. Römer (1993). Further, we have an English popular translation with philological commentary by Assyriologist Jacob Klein (1997). In *Kindlers Literatur Lexikon* a short summary of the myth is written by Assyriologist Claus Wilcke (1971). Further, Sumerologist Yvonne Rosengarten (1971) gives a commentary of the myth.

¹⁴³ Kramer and Maier 1989: 31.

¹⁴⁴ Kirk 1970: 105.

¹⁴⁵ E.g. that Enki goes to the netherworld in “Enki and Ninmaḥ” and a suggestion (followed by a question mark) that Ninmaḥ finds cures for diseases, which leads to a revivification of Enki (Kirk 1970: 107).

¹⁴⁶ Kirk 1970: 107.

¹⁴⁷ Also Assyriologist J. J. A. van Dijk has done a study of a part of the myth (1964), and Sumerologist Margaret Green has commented “Enki and Ninmaḥ” as well as “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” in her book *Eridu in Sumerian Literature*. She underlines the aspect of conflict between the two deities in both myths, maintaining that the conflicts can be mirroring political or economic issues (1975: 126ff.).

¹⁴⁸ Pettinato 1971: 39.

¹⁴⁹ See the transliteration in Lambert (2013: 336).

that stands by at the birth by Namma. This will be discussed thoroughly below in section 5.6.2.

Another partial study has been done by Sauren who argues that lines 4–46 of “Enki and Ninmaḥ” is a separate myth that has been combined with a dispute between Enki and Ninmaḥ and a further dispute of Ninmaḥ.¹⁵⁰ I am not sure that the dispute section shall be divided into two narratives. As I understand it, the section when Enki succeeds in determining destinies for the creatures of Ninmaḥ makes less sense if it is not followed by Ninmaḥ’s inability to decree a destiny for the creature of Enki. Sauren writes that a Mesopotamian myth should generally first mention the first gods, and in this myth these should be Enki and Namma. This is however not the case; the first deities to be mentioned are the Anuna.¹⁵¹ Sauren solves this by rewriting line 4 in his transcription and translation, placing Enki and Namma there instead of the Anuna.¹⁵² Here he goes too far; instead of correcting the myth we should try to understand it as it is written in the original. Another point where I cannot agree with Sauren is when he says that when “the goddesses are taken in marriage” in l. 5, this in fact only refers to Namma, being taken in marriage by Enki.¹⁵³ Since the goddesses are a collective, the plural suffix is not needed. In the younger, bilingual version we have a plural suffix however, corresponding to a plural Akkadian verb: ([tuku]-eš-a-ba/i-*hu*-zu).¹⁵⁴ Further, no sources indicate that Namma and Enki were spouses.¹⁵⁵

1.6.3. Patriarchy and gender scholarship

Already Kramer pointed to the increasingly patriarchal outlook of the Mesopotamian pantheon, ending in the monotheistic worldview of Ancient Israel. He does not support his argument regarding the decline of the goddesses with historical references however. It is further not clear whether he understands the development in the pantheon to have an origin in or an effect on society, although he does write about a development where women seem to have lost in status.¹⁵⁶ The question of a relationship between pantheon and society was discussed by Lambert. Lambert’s interpretation of the material is that the decline of the goddesses’ importance was due to historical chances regarding decline of city-states, and he writes that “sexism does not seem to explain the decline in the number of goddesses as city patrons”.¹⁵⁷ Lambert also lists a number of goddesses and discusses their functions in order to

¹⁵⁰ Sauren 1993: 198.

¹⁵¹ Sauren 1993: 203.

¹⁵² He has the correct writing in the transliteration ([^da-nu]n-na-ke₄-ne ba-tu-u₄-da-ba), but in the transcription he instead writes u^dnammu^denki ba-tud-aba (Sauren 1993: 199).

¹⁵³ Sauren 1993: 203f.

¹⁵⁴ Benito 1969: 21.

¹⁵⁵ See the article on Nammu/a by Wiggermann in *RIA* (2001a).

¹⁵⁶ Kramer 1976: 13–17.

¹⁵⁷ Lambert 1986: 128f.

determine whether they reflected women in society. His conclusion is that some goddesses do reflect the gender of women in society, whereas others, as Nisaba, the grain and scribal goddess, and Inana, the goddess of war (and love), do not. He maintains that the tasks and roles of the goddesses do not show any discrimination against females either.¹⁵⁸

In her book *The Creation of Patriarchy* Lerner investigated the question of an increasingly patriarchal Mesopotamian society. She takes a correspondence between myth and society as a point of departure,¹⁵⁹ discussing both the marginalization of women and goddesses. The book convincingly shows that the Mesopotamian society was patriarchal, and that the goddesses were successively replaced by male deities. The book does not convincingly show however, that the Mesopotamian society got *more* patriarchal in history. Lerner writes about the active and independent queens of the Early Dynastic period, as well as about the influential queen Šibtu, spouse of the Amorite Old Babylonian king Zimri-Lim of Mari. Then she discusses the Laws of Hammurabi (LH) and the Middle Assyrian Laws (MAL). The MAL are a special case,¹⁶⁰ and to see a development, all the law collections of Mesopotamia should be considered. Lerner's delineation of an enhanced patriarchy is reached through three different sources: anthropological theorizing on prehistory, the sources from the Mesopotamian society, and sources from the Hebrew society. I hope to say something about the development in Mesopotamia in this thesis.

In her book *In the Wake of the Goddesses* Frymer-Kensky comes to conclusions similar to those of Lerner. Frymer-Kensky's book is divided into three parts; in the first she traces the process in ancient Mesopotamia where the tasks of the goddesses were transferred to male deities, in the second she deals with the monotheistic development of the Bible and how it deals with functions previously ascribed to goddesses, and in the third part she discusses some aspects that have changed in the monotheistic Western traditions after the biblical period. It is only the first part of her book that concerns us here, and I will give a short summary of her contribution to the study of the functions and changes of Sumerian goddesses.

One central argument in Frymer-Kensky's book is that the roles and functions of the goddesses (as well as the gods) reflected the roles and functions of women in society, although she states that there was not a one-to-one relationship between the two. Instead she understands the goddesses as "cultural projections" of the comprehension of how women were and were expected to be. According to Frymer-Kensky the goddesses "reinforces cultur-

¹⁵⁸ Lambert 1986: 127.

¹⁵⁹ Lerner 1986: e.g. 141.

¹⁶⁰ von Soden writes that the status of women, as well as the general harshness and cruelty in the Middle Assyrian Laws have no counterpart among the other Ancient Near Eastern laws (1994: 138).

al stereotypes about women and makes these stereotypes sacred".¹⁶¹ The comprehension of Frymer-Kensky is the same as mine; the myths refer to the world of the humans, and this reference is ideological, i.e. it expresses cultural stereotypes as if they are mirroring how things naturally "are".

It is mainly in one respect that Frymer-Kensky is relating the function of a goddess to that of women, and that is scribal activity, and Nisaba, the scribal goddess. She suggests that since women took care of the household economy, storing goods and foods, they might have been the ones who invented the art of writing.¹⁶² Otherwise Frymer-Kensky points to the development in the pantheon where functions of goddesses such as that of potter and incantation specialist were taken over by male gods in the course of time.¹⁶³ The development when women were increasingly subordinated to men, as a historical impetus to the decline of the importance of goddesses, is not investigated, but more or less assumed. Thus, her understanding of this development, as that of Lerner, remains a hypothesis.

1.6.4. My contribution

Since practically nothing has been done regarding this material, as well as any Sumerian material, within the discipline of History of Religions, this thesis is a contribution to an incipient scholarship of Historians of Religions regarding the cuneiform material in general, and the Sumerian sources in particular. Thus, the work in itself is a new contribution to the field of the History of Religions. Further, the study contributes with an interpretation of the two myths grounded in theory and methodology that are developed to interpret myths, thus bringing the interpretation of them to a new level. When disregarding purely philological earlier scholarship, the present interpretation of the two myths is also the most thorough to date.

Thus, previous scholarship has concentrated primarily on the philological aspects of the two myths treated here, since near to all previous scholarship has been done by philologists within the field of Assyriology. There are a few theoretical approaches, but none of them with a fully developed theoretical framework, and the theory seldom is systematically used as an analytical tool.

One exception to the philological work on the myths treated here is Kirk, who has done interpretations of translations of the myths. Partly because he did not know Sumerian, and partly because he used old translations, parts of his interpretations are invalid. The present work is based upon knowledge of Sumerian, but is aiming at an interpretation within the field of the History of Religions. Within this field the focus of the studies is historical processes

¹⁶¹ Frymer-Kensky 1992: 14.

¹⁶² Frymer-Kensky 1992: 42.

¹⁶³ Frymer-Kensky 1992: 33, 43, 46, 71f.

and cultural phenomena. Further, when studying within the History of Religions, the scholar of the field uses theoretical explanative approaches, as well as methods, with the aim to understand the material in a historical context. Assyriologists instead, besides using philological tools, more often focus on literary perspectives, and any historical contextualizations typically are “commonsensical”, rather than theoretical.

2. Historical setting and context of the myths

The myths analyzed in this thesis were written down in the early Old Babylonian period. Therefore they reflect that or earlier societies. Below I will shortly relate the development when cities turned into city-states, which were expanded to kingdoms and empires, up to and including the Old Babylonian period. The Old Babylonian period is interesting since our myths were written down during that period, and the earlier periods are interesting in as much as they reflect our myths. After the description of the political development on the level of the state, I will turn to a more thorough description of the status of women from the earliest through the early Old Babylonian period. This description is given so that the reader has a frame of reference regarding the general roles of women in ancient Mesopotamia when reading my analysis. It is further written to look at the common hypothesis that there was a gradual deepening of patriarchy in the Mesopotamian culture, in light of the sources as well as the relationship between myth and history. It will be seen below that the sources do suggest a gradually lowered status of women. Both the question of a deepened patriarchy and the relationship between myth and history will be discussed in Chapter 6, where I draw some conclusions of the results of the thesis.

2.1. History of early Mesopotamia

2.1.1. Development of states and script

The Ancient Near East was one of the places on earth where agriculture emerged, beginning about 12000 BCE, with cultivation of wild barley and wheat as well as other crops, developing into cultivation of domesticated crops from about 10500 BCE.¹⁶⁴ The area where the first Ancient Near Eastern agriculturalists lived is commonly called the Fertile Crescent, which is situated in a bow from Israel-Palestine, to Syria and northern Mesopotamia. Soon agriculture spread up to southern Turkey, and further down into northern Mesopotamia,¹⁶⁵ and from the early sixth millennium BCE agricultural crops were also produced in the plains of southern Mesopotamia.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Willcox 2012: 163, 170f., 174.

¹⁶⁵ Willcox 2012: 168, 175; Bagg 2012: 261.

¹⁶⁶ Pollock 1999: 78.

In the Mesopotamian plains rainfall did not coincide with the needs of the farming year, which means that the invention of irrigation was a prerequisite for agriculture in this area.¹⁶⁷ Thus, irrigation was absolutely essential for the Neolithic villages and towns in the area. Through this invention the soil of the plains got farmable, and villages could thrive and grow into towns that eventually expanded into kingdoms.

The earliest cities in Mesopotamia date to the fourth millennium, and they were centered on temples. The palaces occur later, in the middle of the third millennium,¹⁶⁸ and during the same period several temples became large economical units, being major economies of the city, and employing large work forces.¹⁶⁹ Several scholars maintain that a male king-priest was the ruler in these early political units,¹⁷⁰ but there are others who contradict this.¹⁷¹ Besides the fields of barley and wheat, the cities and city-states also owned orchards and gardens, and animals like goats, sheep, pigs and cattle were bred. Because of all the agricultural produce as well as the workers occupied with it, an administration was needed to take record of income, storage, workforces and wages. With this purpose, a script which is probably the oldest known to us, dating to about 3200 – 3000 BCE, has been found in Sumer, in the city of Uruk. The first writing here was simple pictographic signs, but because of some rare phonetic complements, we know that it was Sumerian.¹⁷²

The period from the invention of script in about 3200 BCE and up to about 2600 BCE does not give much historical information, and that period can be called proto-history.¹⁷³ From about 2600 BCE we have more texts that inform us of historical events, although initially rarely. Now we enter the period called Early Dynastic IIIa, and the texts of this period come mainly from Fāra and Abū Ṣalābīḥ. This period is followed by the Early Dynastic IIIb period with sources primarily from the first dynasty of Lagaš and also from the city of Adab. Already among the oldest texts informing us about historical events we have literary texts.¹⁷⁴ The following Sargonic period lasts from c. 2340 to about 2150 BCE. The Sargonic dynasty was as far as we know the first Akkadian speaking people to rule in Mesopotamia.¹⁷⁵ The

¹⁶⁷ Bagg 2012: 261f., 267.

¹⁶⁸ Pollock 1999: 45, 48, 51.

¹⁶⁹ See e.g. Pollock 1999: 51; Kuhrt 1997: 25, 32; Maekawa 1980.

¹⁷⁰ E.g. Nakahara apud Maekawa 1973–1974: 86f., fn. 17; Steinkeller 1999.

¹⁷¹ Kuhrt 1997: 25; Glassner 1993.

¹⁷² Michalowski 1996: 33, 35. Cf. Englund however, who writes that “[w]hether or not proto-cuneiform was used to represent a spoken language, for instance Sumerian, as many assume, or some other unknown language, is still a matter of debate” (1998: 42).

¹⁷³ Cf. Steinkeller (2013) however, who recently published a text dating to the late Early Dynastic I-II period (c. 2750–2600 BCE), which contains some historical information.

¹⁷⁴ Thomsen 2001: 28; Krebernik 1998: 237.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. the Semitic name of the queen Puabi of the Early Dynastic Royal Tombs of Ur, however.

Sumerian from the Early Dynastic III and up to the end of the Sargonic period is called Old Sumerian.¹⁷⁶

According to the legends, Sargon (Akk. *Šarru-kēn*, “the righteous king”) was the cupbearer of king Urzababa of Kiš. He superseded his master however, and became king with Akkade as his center. Now the Sargonic or Old Akkadian period begins, and for the first time a king unites the different city-states of Sumer into one kingdom. Sargon campaigned successfully against states to the west, and beyond them further up to the cedar forest of today’s Lebanon. In the east he subjugated the Elamites.¹⁷⁷ Sargon was followed on the throne by his two sons in turn. Rimuš was the first to enter the throne, and soon he was faced with rebellion in several Sumerian cities. He relentlessly put down the rebellion, and Westenholz estimates that about one third of the male citizens died, were taken captives or put into forced labor in the process. Rimuš continued warring also outside Mesopotamia. Maništušu, the brother and successor of Rimuš, walked in the footsteps of his father and brother, campaigning both in Elam and in the Persian Gulf.¹⁷⁸ The Sargonic Empire grew to even larger dimensions under Sargon’s grandson Narām-Su’en. The latter constantly campaigned, and he did not only have earthly pretensions; his name was written preceded by the divine determinative. The Sargonic Empire collapsed under Narām-Su’en’s successor, when attacked by the Gutians who were in control in the area for a period of less than a hundred years.¹⁷⁹

From the period 2200 to 2000 BCE we have Sumerian texts on the one hand from the Lagaš II dynasty, and on the other from the Ur III dynasty. The language of this period is the classical Sumerian, by some called Neo-Sumerian.¹⁸⁰ In spite of this, the Sumerian language probably died out as a first language during this very period.¹⁸¹ Gudea, one of the most prominent kings of the Sumerian Lagaš II dynasty, could go on undisturbed by the Gutians, mostly working with the rebuilding of several temples in his city-state, and primarily so with the rebuilding of Ningirsu’s temple E-ninnu.¹⁸²

After the short interlude of the Gutians, Ur-Namma, the first king of the Ur III dynasty could unite the cities of Sumer and Akkade. The Ur III kings had an ideological connection to the city of Uruk, presenting themselves as the sons of the goddess Ninsun, and accordingly, also as brothers of her semi-divine son Gilgameš, the legendary Urukean king of the Early Dynastic II period.¹⁸³ The genre of royal hymns was established during the Ur III peri-

¹⁷⁶ Thomsen 2001: 27.

¹⁷⁷ Westenholz 1999: 34–40.

¹⁷⁸ Westenholz 1999: 41f., 46.

¹⁷⁹ Gadd 1971: 454; Postgate 1992: 41.

¹⁸⁰ Thomsen 2001: 27.

¹⁸¹ Rubio 2011: 108.

¹⁸² Gadd 1971: 456f., 459f., 463; Nissen 1988: 186.

¹⁸³ Sallaberger 1999: 132, 134, 140.

od.¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, King Šulgi of Ur III, as all of his successors of the dynasty, were exalted to divinity; the divine determinative was placed before their name, and temples were erected for their individual cults.¹⁸⁵ Under the two last kings of the Ur III dynasty the state was afflicted e.g. by the Martu tribes, and the subjugated regions successively freed themselves from the Ur III rule.¹⁸⁶

From about 2000 BCE we enter the Isin-Larsa period, and now there is a shift where Mesopotamia goes from being a Sumerian speaking to an Akkadian speaking society. The Sumerian of this period is called Old Babylonian Sumerian or Post-Sumerian. It is at the beginning of this period that the main bulk of literary texts are written down as school texts.¹⁸⁷ The Sumerian cuneiform was taken over by Semitic speaking peoples already in the middle of the third millennium BCE for writing their language,¹⁸⁸ and the earliest known substantial finds of Semitic literary works come from the city of Ebla,¹⁸⁹ and date to the Early Dynastic IIIb period (c. 2450–2350 BCE).¹⁹⁰ It is however in the Old Babylonian period that Akkadian literature begins to be written down extensively. The Akkadian literature is influenced in many ways by Sumerian literary texts.¹⁹¹

The Old Babylonian period was initiated by a short period of success for in turn the Isin and the Larsa dynasties, followed by the primacy of the Amorite Ḥammurabi. Ḥammurabi's dynasty had been ruling in Babylon, and he established a large Mesopotamian empire which had Babylon as capital. Professor emerita in History, Amélie Kuhrt writes:

Hammurabi was now undisputed, sole and direct ruler of a very large territory that easily bears comparison with the Ur III empire, and commanded the routes along which precious, as well as essential, items and materials (silver, gold, lapis lazuli, carnelian, exotic woods, tin, copper, horses) were traded.¹⁹²

The Akkadian language found its classical form in the Old Babylonian dialect, which in later times was used as a basis for a constructed literary language. Besides the writing down of Sumerian literature in the early Old Babylonian period, Akkadian literature (e.g. the Anzu myth, the Atrahāsīs myth, and the Gilgameš epic) was produced in the Old Babylonian dialect.¹⁹³ The Laws of Ḥammurabi is another literary achievement of the period. It

¹⁸⁴ Klein 1981: 23; Sallaberger 1999: 140.

¹⁸⁵ Sallaberger 1999: 152ff.; Brisch 2013: 41ff.

¹⁸⁶ Sallaberger 1999: 169, 174.

¹⁸⁷ Thomsen 2001: 27.

¹⁸⁸ Cooper 1996: 37.

¹⁸⁹ Röllig 1990: 48.

¹⁹⁰ We have an Akkadian Šamaš hymn from Abū Šalābīḥ, dating to the Early Dynastic IIIa period, though (Krebernik 1998: 321).

¹⁹¹ Röllig 1990: 48.

¹⁹² Kuhrt 1997: 109.

¹⁹³ Tinney 2011: 588.

counts among the longest cuneiform inscriptions in all categories. The prologue and the epilogue are written in a poetic Babylonian language. Between the poetic beginning and end, the laws themselves are written in prose.¹⁹⁴

When Ḫammurabi died, his son Samsuiluna was installed as king. Charpin writes that Samsuiluna has become a representative for the decline of the Old Babylonian empire established by his father, but that the empire itself in fact carried the roots of its eclipse. According to Charpin the diversity of the areas in the empire, as well as the tools to keep it intact in those days, would inevitably lead to it falling apart.¹⁹⁵

In year 12 of Samsuiluna's reign, we do not have further written documents from the southern cities of Ur, Uruk and Larsa. The cause of this change is not clear, but the sources suggest that lots of people from the south emigrated to the north, some of them being scribes bringing the Sumerian literary tradition with them.¹⁹⁶ In year 28 of Samsuiluna we see that documents are no longer produced at Isin, and there are also traces of a fire in the city, followed by a long period when the site was uninhabited. Further, Samsuiluna also lost control e.g. over Nippur, the religious center of the south, a little later.¹⁹⁷ Thus, within the span of about twenty years Samsuiluna had lost the whole southern part of Mesopotamia, which was the core area of Sumerian language and literature. Now we begin to enter the late Old Babylonian period, which lies beyond the historical context of this thesis.

2.1.2. The historical change of the status of goddesses and women

2.1.2.1. The successive subordination of goddesses

As was stated in the section on the concept “patriarchy/patriarchal society” above, Lerner as well as Frymer-Kensky see a relation between several changes in economy (agriculture) and social structure (kingship, empires) and the continuous subjugation of women in the Mesopotamian society. They also relate this societal development to the changes in the pantheon, and I noted that both Lerner and Frymer-Kensky have outlined a process where the goddesses of the pantheon were slowly subordinated to the male deities in Mesopotamia. Lerner writes that from the beginning goddesses like Ištar (Sum. Inana) were venerated, and common offerings that people gave Inana/Ištar were lapis lazuli vulvas. According to Lerner people in this way “celebrated the sacredness of female sexuality and its mysterious life-giving force, which included the power to heal”,¹⁹⁸ and we further read:

¹⁹⁴ Slanski 2012: 104, 105.

¹⁹⁵ Charpin 2004: 335.

¹⁹⁶ Charpin 2004: 342f., 345.

¹⁹⁷ Charpin 2004: 360.

¹⁹⁸ Lerner 1986: 142f.

The goddess Ishtar and other goddesses like her had power in their own right. It was the kind of power men had, derived from military exploits and the ability to impose her will on the gods or to influence them. And yet Ishtar was female [...].¹⁹⁹

Lerner has a point when writing about the relative importance of the goddesses in the early history of Sumer. Nevertheless, Inana was subordinated to the purposes of the patriarchal society at the time, since her power was used to further the interests of the state.²⁰⁰ Further, Frymer-Kensky writes that “the marginalization of the goddesses” in general had begun already in the earliest sources. She points to the change in the pantheon when the goddess Ningirima is supplanted as an incantation deity by Enki and his son Asalluḫi, as well as the goddess Ninura who was incorporated in the character of Enki/Ea.²⁰¹ Another example is the goddess Gula who was the healing deity together with Damu. According to Frymer-Kensky, the latter was probably originally the daughter of Gula, but later becomes her son. Further, the role of scribe of the pantheon originally belonged to the goddess Nisaba, but is later moved to Nabû.²⁰²

Frymer-Kensky also delineates a process where the mother goddess Ninḫursaġa/Ninmaḫ is removed from her role as creatress of humans, whereas this task is moved step by step to Enki. In the Babylonian creation myth *Enūma eliš* this process is completed; the goddess is no longer part of the creation of humans – instead Ea (Akk. for Enki) creates humankind alone.²⁰³ Not only the creation of humans is moved from the mother goddess to Ea – the son of Ea, Marduk, also kills the goddess, here a monster with the name Tiāmat, and uses her body to create the world.²⁰⁴ The result of this development would eventually be that creation was moved from goddesses to gods, and similarly the relationship to the divine was moved from women to men.²⁰⁵

2.1.2.2. The status of queens and royal women over time

In the chapter “The Stand-In Wife and the Pawn” Lerner discusses evidence from the Early Dynastic II and III periods, sources on King Sargon’s daughter Enḫeduana, and evidence from the city-state of Mari under Zimri-Lim in the Old Babylonian period. The picture that Lerner gives of the wives and daughters of the kings from these sources is that they all had a prominent

¹⁹⁹ Lerner 1986: 143.

²⁰⁰ Inana is connected to royal ideology from the time of the earliest literary and historical sources.

²⁰¹ Frymer-Kensky 1997: 96; id. 1992: 70f. Frymer-Kensky writes that Ninura was the wife of the god Šara, and that she was called “the mother who counsels Enki” (1997: 96).

²⁰² Frymer-Kensky 1992: 71; id. 1997: 97.

²⁰³ Frymer-Kensky 1992: 72ff.

²⁰⁴ Lerner 1986: 152f.; Frymer-Kensky 1992: 75f.

²⁰⁵ Lerner 1986: 146, 160, 198; Frymer-Kensky 1992: 232, and part II.

status, and that of queens being almost on the same level as the kings. There seems to be slight changes over time regarding the power of the queens however.

Lerner writes that the royal tombs of Ur (Early Dynastic II period) give a picture of queens who might have been as powerful as kings.²⁰⁶ Although it is difficult to draw any conclusions from the archaeological material regarding a relationship between material wealth in graves and power, the tombs of Ur do give an impression not only of powerful men, but also of powerful women. In two cases the names of two women are inscribed, Ninbanda and Puabi, followed by *nin*, which means “queen”, but which can also denote “a high status lady”.²⁰⁷ Further, in two cases we get the names of two kings, *lugal*; *Mesanepada* and *Meskalamdu*. *Mesanepada* is called *dam nu-gig* “consort of the *nu-gig* priestess”.²⁰⁸ The word *dam* “consort” is commonly used for the less important person of the couple (and thus most often for women),²⁰⁹ which could then also support an understanding of a high standing of the queens at this time.

The tomb of Queen Puabi is especially rich, and regarding her headgear, Archaeologist Amy Rebecca Gansell writes that it was “by far the most elaborate” among the headdresses in the so-called royal tombs.²¹⁰ Besides her beautiful headgear made of gold, lapis lazuli and carnelian she was interred with other items of the same materials. Further, Queen Puabi, as those of the other royal tombs was buried together with a retinue of servants, and in her case they amounted to 54.²¹¹

From the Early Dynastic IIIb period we also know from historical sources that queens had high status. One of these queens is the wife of King *Lugalanda* of Lagaš (c. 2350 BCE), Queen *Baranamtara*. She was active in both domestic and foreign affairs, as well as in religion. She administered her own household, the *é-munus*,²¹² “the woman’s house”, and also the temple of the goddess *Bau* (*é-Bau*).²¹³ *Lugalanda* was succeeded by *Uru’inimgina* as ruler, and the latter’s wife *Šaša* likewise managed the economy of the tem-

²⁰⁶ Regarding the Early Dynastic II tombs of Ur, Lerner writes: “The royal tombs at Ur tell us that ruling queens shared in the status, power, wealth, and ascription of divinity with kings. They tell us of the wealth and high status of some women at the Sumerian courts” (1986: 61).

²⁰⁷ Pollock 1991: 175.

²⁰⁸ Renger 1967: 182f.

²⁰⁹ See the attestations of *dam* in the glossary of Black et al. (1998–2006). Cf. also Weiershäuser who writes that in the royal Ebla archives (dated to Early Dynastic IIIb) women were commonly only called *dam*, “spouse”, without a name, which makes it difficult to identify whom we are dealing with. This was the case also for married princesses of the Ur III dynasty (2008: 22, 234). See also Sauren who writes that the husband is usually the subject of the clause *nam-dam tuku* “to take a spouse” (1993: 204).

²¹⁰ Gansell 2007: 32, 39.

²¹¹ The people buried with the principal occupant of the tomb amounted to between four and 75 (Pollock 1991: 175).

²¹² Earlier referred to as the *é-mi*.

²¹³ Bauer 1998: 532f.; Lerner 1986: 62.

ple. Under Uru'inimgina the é-munus changed name to é-Bau, i.e. “the house of the goddess Bau”, and according to Assyriologist Marc van de Mieroop this expresses that the household of the queen was incorporated into the assets of the temple.²¹⁴ Lerner writes that it has been argued that the reforms of Uru'inimgina aimed at expanding his own power, and that he in fact incorporated the maintenance of Bau's temple into his own domain.²¹⁵ Lerner states that:

[f]or the ruling elite [...] security of their power depended on installing family members in important subordinate positions of power. Such family members were, in this early period, quite often women – wives, concubines, or daughters.²¹⁶

According to Lerner, the power of the queens was dependent on their respective husbands, and it was based upon their sexual services. If they did not please the king they could lose their power, and in this latter respect Lerner refers to Kunšimātum and Kirûm,²¹⁷ both of whom were married to foreign kings by their fathers. The former was the daughter of the Old Assyrian king Šamši-Adad I, and the latter was the daughter of Zimri-Lim of Mari.²¹⁸ In the Ur III period the king married daughters of rulers in adjacent states, and he likewise married his daughters to foreign rulers, mainly those in the east of the Ur III state.²¹⁹ As Assyriologist Wolfgang Röllig has pointed out, this was a political strategy to establish good relations to neighboring kings.²²⁰ Further, it was not only the relatives of the king who had to engage in political marriages, but at least in Mari, the high officials of the king also had to marry women who were relatives of the king.²²¹

The dependence on the king seems to be expressed also in the fact that in some cases royal women lived in special quarters of the palace. These wom-

²¹⁴ van de Mieroop 1989: 54f.

²¹⁵ Lerner 1986: 63. Maekawa writes that Uru'inimgina incorporated personnel from other estates into the é-munus, now with the name é-Bau. At the same time the queen, his wife Šaša, was removed as the supervisor of the é-munus/é-Bau, and he put himself in her place. This reform was unsuccessful however, and the next year an official distributed barley in the name of the queen instead. Maekawa questions the common assumption that the kings in Lagaš during the Early Dynastic period gradually expanded their power through e.g. incorporation of temples. He sees instead a complex development of kingship and the notion that it had divine support (1973–1974: 135–140).

²¹⁶ Lerner 1986: 74.

²¹⁷ Lerner 1986: 74f.

²¹⁸ Ḫaya-Sumu, the king of Ilān-Šurā had married Šimātum, another daughter of Zimri-Lim only two years earlier. The delivery of a second daughter is by Charpin interpreted as a result of politics; Ḫaya-Sumu received Kirûm's hand since he helped Zimri-Lim in a war. The divorce between Ḫaya-Sumu and Kirûm can have been due to a conflict between the two sisters, as well as political disagreements. See further Charpin's account of the events surrounding the divorce (1988: 44f.).

²¹⁹ Weiershäuser 2008: 17.

²²⁰ Röllig 1974.

²²¹ Ziegler 1999: 55ff.

en were relatives to the king or had a marriage-like or sexual relation to him. According to Assyriologists Alfonso Archi and Marten Stol the women of the women's quarters of Ebla and Mari lived in seclusion.²²² Besides Ebla and Mari, the royal houses of Hattuša and Ugarit also had such women's quarters.²²³ Some scholars call the special women's quarters *harems*, but regarding Ebla as well as Ur, this is contested by Assyriologist Frauke Weiershäuser. She maintains that there was no *harem* in the way that the women were living absolutely secluded.²²⁴ It is certain that the kings of the mentioned royal houses had several wives however, and they often lived together in a special part of the palace. It is also attested that the Ur III kings had several wives.²²⁵ Besides Ebla, regarding the Early Dynastic period there are not attestations of groups of wives of the king. We only have a literary reference of several "beloved wives" of Gilgameš in the text "The death of Gilgameš".²²⁶

The queen was not as dependent on the king as in the above mentioned cases in all of the Near East however. Stol writes that in the west the queen got an even more prominent position in case of the death of the king, since she now was the primary regent. In this respect he mentions the Hittite queen Puduḥepa.²²⁷

In the Sargonic period we know that the queen of Narām-Su'en owned land and had a private staff. Further, there is evidence that princess Tudanapšum²²⁸ engaged in business of both silver and farm products. The princesses could travel, and did so with the same entourage as princes and high officials.²²⁹ Regarding the undertakings of royal women in the Sargonic period Assyriologist Benjamin Foster concludes that:

[t]hese scant scraps of data suggest that royal ladies had access to the wealth and responsibility one would expect for them and were by no means sequestered.²³⁰

One change that appeared during the Ur III period is that the queen did not have an extensive household of her own; instead the lands and assets were part of the kingdom, with the king at the top.²³¹ However, from the Ur III

²²² Archi 2002: 3; Stol 1995: 135.

²²³ Charpin and Todd 2010: 38, 113; on Ebla, see Stol 2012: 290f. Cf. Kuhrt who refers to the wives of the Neo-Assyrian kings (1997: 526).

²²⁴ Weiershäuser 2008: 23.

²²⁵ Weiershäuser 2008.

²²⁶ Stol 2012: 288.

²²⁷ Stol 1995: 135.

²²⁸ Tudanapšum was the daughter of Narām-Su'en, and she was installed as en priestess of Enlil by her father (Leick 2002: 166; Frayne 1993: 123f.), according to the custom that was initiated by Narām-Su'en's grandfather Sargon.

²²⁹ Foster 1987: 53.

²³⁰ Foster 1987: 53.

²³¹ Bahrani 2001: 108.

period we know that the queens maintained the administration at Puzriš-Dagan, which was an important part of the economy of the state. One of these queens was Šulgi-simtī, wife of King Šulgi. She was in charge of the collection and distribution of sacrificial animals to the temples. Most of the donors of the animals were women.²³² The main bulk of the economic texts from the Ur III period that inform us of the queens deal with their cultic undertakings, but we are also informed about their role in the economy of the state.²³³

The wives of the local governors also had great impact upon the economy of the state during the Ur III period. They supervised transactions with e.g. leather, wool, cloth, grain and flour. Not only the queen, but also prominent women of the time could own orchards, fields, slaves, oxen, silver and so on.²³⁴ Although van de Mieroop writes that the documents show that women had the same juridical rights as men, he also writes that:

[t]he economic systems in which the women function may be entirely controlled by the men, and the women mentioned in administrative positions [...], may have been very unusual. It is clear that the major economic powers lay in the hands of men, and that only a small percentage of the texts preserved reflect the women's role.²³⁵

King Zimri-Lim of Mari already had two wives and several concubines when he married Šibtu, the daughter of the king of Aleppo, the latter being his benefactor and ally.²³⁶ In spite of – or perhaps because of – this arranged marriage, Šibtu was granted comprehensive roles in representation and administration of the state. She had an extensive correspondence with her husband when he was away on campaign, informing him about the maintenance of the palace as well as other estates. She also received instructions from him about e.g. the *harem* and deliveries of wine. Šibtu also corresponded with governors in the provinces, and she received military and other political reports. As Professor of Religious Studies Bernard Batto points out, all this indicates that Šibtu functioned as the deputy of her husband when he was not at home.²³⁷ According to Lerner the queens generally functioned as stand-ins for their husband when he was absent.²³⁸

²³² van de Mieroop 1989: 56f.

²³³ Weiershäuser 2008: 21.

²³⁴ van de Mieroop 1989: 62f.

²³⁵ van de Mieroop 1989: 66.

²³⁶ Margueron 2004: 441.

²³⁷ Batto 1974: 10f., 13, 15–20. Charpin comes to the same conclusion (2004: 268).

²³⁸ Lerner 1986: 68ff.

2.1.2.3. The status of priestesses over time

In this section we shall look at the most important and best attested Mesopotamian priestesses, who often were daughters of the king or other prominent people of the state.

The en priestesses of the Old Babylonian as well as earlier periods were high in rank. They were not allowed to marry, which can be due to the fact that they were called the consort (dam) of the deity whom they served.²³⁹ Assyriologist Johannes Renger maintains that the installation of an en priestess was based upon political considerations. It was common that a new king enthroned his daughter as the en priestess of a deity, and at times the presiding one continued as en priestess as well. Most known en priestesses were daughters of kings.²⁴⁰ The en priestess (and the en priest who served a goddess) lived in *ĝipar* (*ĝi₆-par_{3/4}*) which was part of the temple complex. She lived there in seclusion from the society outside the temple area her whole life.²⁴¹

One of the most famous en priestesses is Enĥeduana, the first textually attested en priestess,²⁴² and the daughter of Sargon, king of Akkade. According to Doctor of Law Elisabeth Meier Tetlow King Sargon initiated the tradition of kings to install their daughter as en priestess of the deity Nanna in Ur.²⁴³ Assyriologist Irene Winter shows with the aid of visual evidence however, that the en priestess office existed already in the Early Dynastic III period. She writes that the continuity in the visual evidence is in line with the assumption that Sargon installed his daughter as en priestess in Ur “to consolidate the Akkadian dynasty’s links with the traditional Sumerian past in the important cult and political center of Ur”.²⁴⁴

Assyriologist Joan Goodnick Westenholz writes that Enĥeduana was completely ruled by the holy identity that she got through her official position, and she as all other en priestesses had to stay in the *ĝipar* all her life.²⁴⁵ In spite of this she had some opportunities to independent activity, and allegedly mainly in the literary field. Whether she knew how to write is however not known. Enĥeduana is the first named poet in history, and she has been understood as a prominent theologian. It is said at the end of the collection of the Sumerian and Akkadian temple hymns that Enĥeduana redacted them: “the compiler of the tablet is Enĥeduana, O My King, such as I have created, no one has created before”. The compilation of the hymns has been interpreted as a part of Enĥeduana’s father Sargon’s politics.²⁴⁶ To note however,

²³⁹ Renger 1967: 131, 133f., 141.

²⁴⁰ Renger 1967: 117, 119, 121, 126.

²⁴¹ Renger 1967: 128f.; Goodnick Westenholz 1989: 545.

²⁴² Winter 1987: 195.

²⁴³ Meier Tetlow 2004: 23.

²⁴⁴ Winter 1987: 192–196, 200.

²⁴⁵ Goodnick Westenholz 1989: 545.

²⁴⁶ Goodnick Westenholz 1989: 540, 548f.

is that all the texts attributed to Enheduana date to the Old Babylonian period, and several of the temples of the temple hymn cycle were built after the Sargonic period, which may suggest that Enheduana originally compiled only the last hymn.²⁴⁷

The en priestesses seem to have had assets; at least we know that an en priestess in Nippur had a farm, and in different texts we encounter personnel working for them, such as a scribe, a tailor, a courier and a merchant.²⁴⁸ Regarding the en priestess, I have not found any evidence which points to a lowered status over time.

The institution of *nadītu* priestesses was a special phenomenon of the Old Babylonian period, not attested afterwards. These priestesses were usually living unmarried²⁴⁹ and in celibacy in a convent area.²⁵⁰ Their celibate status is also expressed in their designation which is derived from the verb *nadû*, “abandoned, uncultivated”. *nadītu* is the adjective in the feminine form of this verb.²⁵¹

The Sumerian logogram for *nadītu* is *lukur*, and it is met with as a title in pre-Old Babylonian sources. The pre-Old Babylonian *lukur* usually appear one by one, but there is an attestation of seven *lukur* at Early Dynastic IIIb Ĝirsu who are also called *nin-énsi* (“the mistress(es)/sister(s) of the governor”).²⁵² During the Early Dynastic IIIb period of Ĝirsu the *lukur* were mostly the sisters of the city governor/ruler, and they could marry and have children.²⁵³ During the Ur III period *lukur* instead referred to the wife of the king, who was also called *nin*, queen. Sumerologist Piotr Steinkeller writes that under King Šulgi *lukur* replaced *dam* as a designation of the king’s wife. He hypothesizes that this was a result of the deification of Šulgi, and he draws a parallel to the relationship between a *lukur* priestess and the god she served.²⁵⁴

It has been argued that there were economic reasons for the development of the Old Babylonian *nadītu* institution. One incitement can have been that

²⁴⁷ Lion 2011: 96f. Cf. Rubio who writes that “there can be little doubt that Enheduana started to be regarded as an author only in a tradition that begins centuries after her death: This is a case of traditional authorship, not historical” (2009: 28).

²⁴⁸ Renger 1967: 129f., 141.

²⁴⁹ The *nadītu* priestesses of Marduk in Babylon could marry, but they as the other *nadītu* had to live in celibacy. In order to provide their husband with children they either adopted a child or let him marry one of their sisters. The sister was called *šugītu*, and she was subordinated to the *nadītu* (Renger 1967: 161, 174f.; Harris 1975: 392).

²⁵⁰ Harris 1989: 152; id. 1975: 391.

²⁵¹ Stol 2000a: 261; *CAD* N/1 sub *nadītu* and *nadû*. In fact, the rule of virginity was not strictly followed; there are reports of *nadītu* priestesses in Sippar who gave birth, and a text from Nippur mentions a woman together with her sons, who on the seal impression of the same text is called *nadītu* (Stone 1982: 55f., fn. 15). Stol also refers to a text where a *nadītu* is mentioned as probably having a miscarriage (2000a: 29, fn. 17).

²⁵² Renger 1967: 175.

²⁵³ Steinkeller 1981: 84f., fn. 47.

²⁵⁴ Steinkeller 1981: 81.

tribe leaders often did not find suitable husbands for their daughters, and therefore this was a solution for these daughters' support.²⁵⁵ Unlike ordinary women, the *nadītu* priestesses had the right to inherit their father,²⁵⁶ and they also functioned as witnesses to each other's transactions.²⁵⁷

Most of the *nadītu* priestesses came from the elite of the society, but some were also daughters of wealthy scribes and artisans.²⁵⁸ They brought a considerable dowry to the convent, where they entered at the age when other girls married. During the early Old Babylonian period the *nadītu* priestesses of Sippar worked in the administration of the convent. This changed over time however, and later only men had these positions.²⁵⁹ In both Nippur and Sippar the *nadītu* priestesses could act independently in their economic and legal interests, but at the same time a lot of the influence over their property lay in the hands of men.²⁶⁰ According to Assyriologist Rivkah Harris the reason for establishing the convent institution was "to ensure the integrity of the paternal estate", since although the *nadītu* inherited, and likewise received a dowry when she left for the convent, most and sometimes all her belongings went back to her male family members at her death.²⁶¹

A part of the *nadītu* priestess' assets was called *šēwirtu*, which was money in cash. Renger refers to Koschaker who maintained that this money could have been part of the dowry, and that it was to be used freely by the *nadītu*.²⁶² I assume that Harris refers to the *šēwirtu* when she writes that this priestess could receive "ring money" (*šeweru* means ring) from her father, to be "her very own to utilize in investments and the income of which she could dispose of as she wished".²⁶³ The *nadītu* earned money e.g. by renting fields, houses, as well as through the interest of lent money and barley. In this way they had money that could be inherited by younger *nadītu* priestesses adopted by them.²⁶⁴

There are several letters that show that the *nadītu* priestesses gave offerings and prayed for their relatives. One of them is Erišti-Aya, the daughter of Zimri-Lim, who writes that she constantly prays for her father in the Ebabbar, the temple of the sun god. Batto assumes that praying for relatives was the primary cultic function of the *nadītu* priestesses.²⁶⁵

²⁵⁵ Stone 1982: 65.

²⁵⁶ Roth 1997: 30, LL §§ 22; 118, LH §181; Stol 1995: 134.

²⁵⁷ Stone 1982: 61.

²⁵⁸ Harris 1975: 392.

²⁵⁹ Harris 1989: 151, 153ff.

²⁶⁰ Harris 1989: 155; Stone 1982: 59ff. Assyriologist Elizabeth Stone refers to four documents from Nippur that indicate that the brothers of the *nadītu* priestesses controlled their assets, and/or that they could represent their sisters at court (ibid.).

²⁶¹ Harris 1989: 153, 155.

²⁶² Renger 1967: 161.

²⁶³ Harris 1989: 155.

²⁶⁴ Renger 1967: 162f.

²⁶⁵ Batto 1974: 93f., 97f.

Harris points to the contradictory gender model that the *nadītu* priestesses had: “She was a virgin, and yet a mother who can adopt a child [...] And this ‘fallow’ woman was also a ‘male’ for she received a share of the paternal estate ‘like a son (*zittam kīma aplim ištēn*)’”.²⁶⁶

One can get the impression that the transition from single *lukur* to collectives of *nadītu* priestesses led to a lowered status of this priestess. The former was met with in direct relation to the ruler, whereas the latter was at a distance from him. Moreover, several *nadītu* priestesses were daughters of the elite and wealthy families, and were thus in that respect also further away from the ruler. The change can however be seen as a “democratization” of the rights and prerogatives of the ruler; now also other well-off families could afford placing a daughter in a convent for constantly praying for the family. Of note however, is that the Old Babylonian sources give reason to believe that these priestesses were most probably means for men to make economic transactions. Moreover, the *nadītu* priestesses of Sippar lost their roles in the temple administration.

Another group of priestesses of whom we have some information are the *qadištu*, whose title means “the consecrated”. In the texts the priestess is most often denoted with the Sumerian word *nu-gig*. Just as the *nadītu* priestess, the *qadištu* priestess had a right to inherit her father. In the Laws of Lipit-Ištar (LL) (c. 1870 BCE) she, as well as the *ereš-diġir/ugbaltu*²⁶⁷ and the *lukur/nadītu*, is said to have the right to inherit the father just as the sons if she became a *qadištu* priestess when the father was still alive. In the Laws of Hammurabi (LH) (c. 1750 BCE) instead, it is said that the *qadištu* priestesses, as well as the *nadītu* and *kulmašītu*, were entitled to a third of his property if she had not received a dowry before his death. The priestesses’ brothers were to be in charge of their assets, though, and ultimately it belonged to them, which probably means that the priestesses could not sell it or let someone else inherit it.²⁶⁸

The *qadištu* priestesses could marry and have children, but they could also live unmarried and adopt children. They often appear as wet-nurses in the sources, and sometimes they are found together with a midwife. They seem to have been independent of temples and palace. The *qadištu* usually did not have large assets. The *nu-gig*, which was the Sumerian term for this priestess before the Old Babylonian period, had a much higher status than the *qadištu*. One example of the high standing of the *nu-gig* is the earlier mentioned Early Dynastic II king Mesanepada who was called *dam nu-gig*, “the consort of the *nu-gig*”. Goddesses like Inana, Ninmaḥ and Ninisina had *nu-gig* as epi-

²⁶⁶ Harris 1989: 155.

²⁶⁷ Stol argues that the translation of Sum. *ereš-diġir* (earlier read *nin-diġir*) to Akk. *ugbaltu* was practiced only in Nippur and the fringe areas of Mesopotamia; in Babylonia proper the word was understood as corresponding to Akk. *entu* or *nadītu*, depending on person and context (2000b).

²⁶⁸ Roth 1997: 30, LL § 22; 118, LH § 181.

thet, which also points to a prominent position of this priestess. Further, the jewelry *mùš* and *ùnu-šuba*, of which the former was also an attribute of the king, belonged to the *nu-gig*.²⁶⁹

Also the *kulmašītu* priestesses seem to have been independent of official institutions. They probably were related to wet-nursing, just as the *qadištu*, which is suggested by Temple hymn no. 30 for Ninisina's temple in Isin. Here this priestess appears under her Sumerian designation *nu-bar*:

Your princess, the mother *nu-gig*, who does ... on the jewelry and the *šuba* stones, [...] / who binds the *mùš* crown for the *nu-gig*, / who causes the “(vessel with) seven teats” to flow for the *nu-bar*.²⁷⁰

Although the “seven teats”, *ubur-imin*, probably refers to a jar,²⁷¹ a flowing vase with a name containing the word for female breast can allude to milk production. The passage from this temple hymn also informs us on some aspects regarding the *nu-gig/qadištu*. Ninisina as *nu-gig* is here adorned with *šuba* stones. In “Dumuzi-Inana I” these stones occur in a context of sexuality where Inana is called both *nu-gig* and *nu-bar*. Inana asks who will plough these stones²⁷² and then we read:

Amaušumgalana responds to the *nu-gig*: / “She is a *nu-gig*, my wife, she is a *nu-gig*, I will plough for her! / Pure Inana, the *nu-bar*, for her I will plough! / The one of her *šuba* stones, the one of her *šuba* stones will indeed plough the *šuba* stones.”²⁷³

Since there is such an abundant *šuba* stone imagery as a part of the imagery of intercourse²⁷⁴ they can have had a connotation of sexuality. The relation between the *qadištu* and sexuality is also found in an incantation, and regarding the *kulmašītu* Renger writes that she had “Bezug zum Sexuellen”.²⁷⁵

²⁶⁹ Renger 1967: 179ff.

²⁷⁰ 387. *nun-zu ama nu-gig ùnu-šuba-a sù-sù* [...] / 389–390. *nu-u₈-gig-ra mùš kéš-de / nu-bar-ra ubur-imin¹ si-sá-sá-e*. Transliteration taken from Sjöberg and Bergmann (1969: 39f.). My translation is influenced by both translation and commentary in Sjöberg and Bergmann.

²⁷¹ I follow the understanding of Sjöberg and Bergmann. They write that ^{du_g}*ubur-imin-bi = šuršuppu* “jar with seven teats” (1969: 123), which is also the understanding of Sallaberger, (1996: 108). Both give attestations of the word.

²⁷² 32A. ^{na₄}*šuba* [ur₁₁]-ru ^{na₄}*šuba ur₁₁-ru / a-ba-a mu-[na]-ur₁₁-ru* (Sefati 1998: 195).

²⁷³ 36–39. ^d*ama-ušumgal-an-na nu-u₈-gig-ra inim mu-ni-ib-gi₄-gi₄ / nu-u₈-gig-ga-àm dam-ĝu₁₀ nu-u₈-gig-ga-àm e-ne-er mu-na-ur₁₁-ru / kù^d inana-ke₄ nu-bar-ra e-ne-er mu-na-ur₁₁-ru / ^{na₄}*šuba-na-ke₄ ^{na₄}šuba-na-ke₄ ^{na₄}šuba na-ur₁₁-ru*. Transliteration adapted from Sefati (1998: 196).*

²⁷⁴ Sumerologist Yitschak Sefati points out that Kramer understood the ploughing of the *šuba* stones as sexual imagery, and that Alster and Lambert also “subsequently accepted” this interpretation. According to Sefati however, the ploughing of the *šuba* stones shall refer to “the stringing of a necklace of precious stones and pearls” (1998: 202, comment to ll. 25–28). I follow Kramer, Alster and Lambert, and understand the ploughing as sexual imagery.

²⁷⁵ Renger 1967: 184, 187.

2.1.2.4. Ordinary women

Assyriologist Bertrand Lafont writes that the basic structural unit in the Ur III society was the household (é, Akk. *bītu*), and that it was usually patriarchal.²⁷⁶ The same goes for the Old Babylonian as well as the Old Assyrian household (*bētu*), where the family as well as the house was called “the house of the father” (*bēt abi*).²⁷⁷ The administrative sources of the Ur III, the Old Babylonian and the Old Assyrian societies give at hand that the basic family unit was nuclear and monogamous,²⁷⁸ and “with a relatively small amount of children”,²⁷⁹ although also other persons commonly belonged to the same household.²⁸⁰

The goal for a young woman in these societies was to get married,²⁸¹ and thus to get into the female position in the patriarchal family structure. In spite of this, there were women who deviated from this pattern. They were called *gēme-kar-KID*, Akk. *ḫarimtu*, and they lived as unmarried women. These women have earlier been interpreted as prostitutes by scholars, but Assyriologist Julia Assante has convincingly argued that this is a misinterpretation. She maintains that their denotation is a legal term referring to their not living under the rule of men, neither their father, nor another man.²⁸² If we disregard the *ḫarimtu*, to get married was primarily the prerogative of free women, and the aim of the marriage was that the name and belongings of the family would stay in the same house through male progeny. The ancestor cult was also dependent on sons.²⁸³ According to Stol, the woman was called bride (*kallatu*) until she had borne her first child. When she had become a mother she attained an elevated status in the household.²⁸⁴

In the Sumerian society the parents of the groom provided bridewealth at the wedding, which consisted of food that was eaten at the wedding banquet. In the Old Babylonian period instead, the brideprice was introduced and paid in silver. Stol writes that Historian of Law Paul Koschaker’s statement that the marriage in Mesopotamia was practically no more than a sale, in his terms a *Kaufehe*, has been contested by several scholars. According to Stol no better understanding of the contract has been forwarded however, and he writes that “the Babylonian word for brideprice (*terḫatu*) means no more

²⁷⁶ Lafont 2013b.

²⁷⁷ van der Toorn 1996: 20; Michel 2013.

²⁷⁸ Lafont 2013b; van der Toorn 1996: 20; Michel 2013. When family is mentioned in the sources, we meet a man and his wife and their three to five children, see the texts referred to by Lafont (2013b) and Michel (2013).

²⁷⁹ See Lafont (2013b) regarding the Ur III family, and van der Toorn (1996: 20) regarding the Old Babylonian family. This seems applicable also on the Old Assyrian family (Michel 2013).

²⁸⁰ van der Toorn 1996: 24f.

²⁸¹ E.g. Cooper 2002: 93 and Michel 2013.

²⁸² Assante 1998; Cf. Lafont 2013b.

²⁸³ Ebeling 1971: 9; id. 1938: 281.

²⁸⁴ Stol 1995: 128.

than ‘price for a woman’”. Above all, the daughters of the poor were more or less sold into marriage.²⁸⁵

Assyriologist Jean-Jaques Glassner writes that strong control was exerted upon the sexuality of the women; they were to be virgins at marriage and the man’s honor even depended upon the behavior of his wife. He also writes that the charms of a married woman were to be concealed by a veil.²⁸⁶ According to Meier Tetlow however, it was mainly Akkadian married women in the Sargonic period who were veiled. Sumerian law as well as other Sumerian sources do not reflect this custom; women were unveiled, and they were actively taking part at all levels of society.²⁸⁷ According to Stol, the woman of the Old Babylonian society was only veiled by her father before the wedding, and the veil was later removed by her husband.²⁸⁸ I assume that in case of married women using a veil, it covered only the hair.²⁸⁹

According to Assyriologist Erich Ebeling two women of the same status could not live with the same man, but the man could take a second wife who was subordinated to the first wife.²⁹⁰ Assyriologist Gwendolyn Leick, instead, writes that the household of both king and commoner was polygynous, although she points out that there was a difference of rank between the wives.²⁹¹ In fact, among ordinary people, marriage was monogamous in Mesopotamia,²⁹² and the exception from this was in cases when the couple could not beget an heir. In that case the man could take a second woman, and she was always subordinated to the first wife.²⁹³ Men who had economic means could have more than one wife however.²⁹⁴

Glassner points to the role of women to establish contacts between men through marriages. He writes that:

she is the mediator without whose intervention no peaceful contact could take place between the outsider and the Mesopotamian as ‘every stranger is virtu-

²⁸⁵ Stol 1995: 125ff.

²⁸⁶ Glassner 1989: 76. Glassner further refers to the Akkadian expression *kallatu kuttumtu*, “the veiled spouse”. The adjective *kuttumtu* “veiled” is derived from the verb *katāmu* which means “to cover, conceal” and the like, see *CAD K* sub *katāmu*. I am not aware of any visual representation of women from ancient Mesopotamia whose faces are covered by a veil, and in art women are met both with headdresses and with uncovered hair.

²⁸⁷ Meier Tetlow 2004: 27.

²⁸⁸ Stol 1995: 128.

²⁸⁹ Cf. MAL § 40 where it is said that “women who go out in the main thoroughfare [shall not have] their heads [bare]”, and further “when they go about [...] in the main thoroughfare during the daytime, they shall be veiled” (Roth 1997: 167).

²⁹⁰ Ebeling 1971: 10; id. 1938: 284.

²⁹¹ Leick 1994: 112.

²⁹² Stol 1995: 129; Meier Tetlow 2004: 22; Lafont 2013b.

²⁹³ Roth 1997, e.g. LL §§ 27, 28; LH §§ 144, 145, 170 and MAL A § 41. In all cases the man takes a second woman in order to ensure that he gets an heir.

²⁹⁴ Stol 1995: 129.

ally an enemy'. The woman intervenes to facilitate the passage from one sphere to another [...].²⁹⁵

The different laws together give a picture of how adultery was comprehended and punished in the Old Babylonian period. Only women were counted as adulterers since men were allowed to have sexual relations outside the marriage. The man committed a crime only if he was aware of a married status of a woman he had sex with. In this case the punishment was death.²⁹⁶ As both the Laws of Ešnunna and the Laws of Ḫammurabi show, in the Old Babylonian period rape of a betrothed woman was to be punished with death.²⁹⁷ In the later Middle Assyrian Laws it is explained what happened when the woman was not betrothed: the perpetrator had to marry his victim or in the case he was already married, pay a sum of money to the girl's father. Further, if he was married his wife was to be handed over to the father of the victim to be sexually degraded and kept by him as a slave or a concubine. If the man swore that the girl seduced him however, he did not have to marry her, but only pay a sum to her father.²⁹⁸

The laws dealing with rape are in line with the patriarchal structure of this society, where the women were seen as the property of men. All abuses that were made upon a woman by men other than husband and father (and perhaps also other male relatives) were intrusions upon these men's property. Thus, the crime was committed toward the man, not toward the woman.

In Mesopotamia men had the right to divorce, but then had to pay 20 or 30 shekels²⁹⁹ of silver. However, if a woman wanted a divorce, she was to be bound and thrown into the river. This was the case also in the Laws of Ḫammurabi, but here only if the wife had made serious offense. Stol writes that it is now known that the Hammurabi law code was followed, at least when the king himself was living. He further writes that in the Levant and Assyria, women and men had equal rights regarding divorce.³⁰⁰

Assyriologist Jacob Finkelstein discusses an Old Babylonian omen text where women spending time outside their homes is an equivalent to whoring. He writes that "[i]t is quite clear that in the Mesopotamian view [...] the proper place for women was in the home". In spite of this it was expected that young, unmarried women showed off on the streets.³⁰¹ As I see it, this points to the ambivalent gender of the Old Babylonian woman; on the one hand her being in the streets made her equivalent to a whore, and in danger

²⁹⁵ Glassner 1989: 78; Cf. Röllig 1974.

²⁹⁶ San Nicolò 1938: 299; Roth 1997: 105, LH § 129.

²⁹⁷ Finkelstein 1966: 356.

²⁹⁸ Finkelstein 1966: 356f.; Lerner 1986: 117.

²⁹⁹ One shekel of silver weighs 8,33 grams (Powell 1996: 229).

³⁰⁰ Stol 1995: 123, 130f.

³⁰¹ Finkelstein 1966: 362f.

of rape, but on the other hand she had to show herself there in order to attract a husband.

In the Sargonic society women could be witnesses of legal contracts together with men,³⁰² and they could also engage in business on their own.³⁰³ If we turn to the Ur III period, Lafont writes that the property of women had three sources: dowries that they received from their father, gifts from their husbands, and things that they bought themselves.³⁰⁴ Regarding the use of land he states that “we can find some examples where women (widows?) can dispose of their land property without interference from men of their family”.³⁰⁵ The documents he discusses further show that the husband used to secure a part of the heritage to his wife in his will. He could further secure a part for his daughters,³⁰⁶ which was not common in later periods. According to Stol, besides being an heir, another legal position denied women was as being a witness of contracts³⁰⁷ established by men.

Assyriologist Gudrun Colbow writes about Old Babylonian women who did inherit and witness, acting as witnesses when only women belonged to the parties of the contract. The women Colbow discusses were part of a family where most of the men were lamentation singers or worked as officials for the convent. Further, many of the women in the family were *nadītu* priestesses.³⁰⁸ As we saw earlier, *nadītu* priestesses could inherit. Some of the women mentioned in Colbow’s sources that occur without title are mentioned as inheritors and witnesses as well.³⁰⁹ It might be then, that some of the women in Colbow’s study did inherit and were witnesses even though they were ordinary women, but in that case they did so in an unusual context involving priests and priestesses.

There are some suggestions already in the pre- and protohistorical material that women’s area of activity was delimited over time, something that also might indicate a lowered status. Assyriologist Julia Asher-Greve has identified several cases of working women in the glyptic material from the Uruk-Jemdet Nasr period. Although we have no texts that inform us of women working in orchards or with pottery, one seal impression from Susa depicts two women picking fruit, and on a seal from Tell Agrab women work with pottery.³¹⁰ This could be a hint that women had a wider area of activity in pre- and proto-history. To note though, is that on these early seals women

³⁰² Westenholz 1999: 70.

³⁰³ Foster 1987: 54; Westenholz 1999: 70.

³⁰⁴ Lafont 2013b.

³⁰⁵ Lafont 2013b, fn. 3.

³⁰⁶ Lafont 2013b.

³⁰⁷ Stol 1995: 134, 136, 140.

³⁰⁸ Colbow 2002: 85f. Cf. Michel who writes about wills of fathers and mothers (!) who let their daughter be part of the heritage. In these cases the daughter was consecrated to temple service (2013).

³⁰⁹ Colbow 2002: 87f.

³¹⁰ Asher-Greve 1985: 49ff.

are commonly depicted with men as overseers.³¹¹ Further, in the oldest sources the midwives were rather independent, and they had a certain status. Also nursemaids and wet-nurses seem to have had a high standing, or at least those working at the palace, since they received higher rations than most other palace personnel.³¹²

In the evidence found from the palace of Ebla, dating to the Early Dynastic IIIb period, women worked as wet-nurses, singers, doorkeepers and gardeners at the palace. Further, as many as about 900 women worked as weavers and millers (“grinders of grain”) there. Outside the palace, in the lower city or nearby, women worked with dying and preparing clothes, weaving baskets, preparing perfume, oil and beer, as well as bread and food. One can imagine that women also did similar work in their own households. The women in the lower city worked under male overseers. About 5000 men also worked for the palace, and the women of the palace and the lower city were according to Archi probably the wives of these men.³¹³ We see a similar activity of women in the Ur III society. In an inventory of the household of Ġirsu’s governor’s son, besides an enormous amount of livestock (3700) and cattle (250), also about 200 garments, 500 kg wool as well as “large quantities of oil, honey, wine, cheese, dates and aromatics were counted”. Lafont points out that behind these latter assets it is reasonable to see women’s daily productive work.³¹⁴

Professions attested for women during the Sargonic period are e.g. swine herder, weaver, musician and singer,³¹⁵ as well as gardener and “fisherman” (!).³¹⁶ Westenholz writes that women in the Sargonic period could work with the same tasks as men, but also writes that “few did”.³¹⁷

From the Ur III Garšana and Irisağrig archives we get information on women’s professions, and Lafont writes that three of them are otherwise rarely attested for women: physician, scribe and purification priestess. Further, there are attestations of female fullers, cooks, doorkeepers, temple sweepers and musicians. An interesting observation of Lafont is that in Garšana there were groups of women who had a profession but that were performing other tasks. Thus, grinders did agricultural work, millers construction work, oil pressers transportation, spinners flour and food processing, and weavers practiced as mourners. Lafont writes that these women probably worked outside their professions when doing *corvée* work “to which they were regularly forced part-time, at the same level as men”.³¹⁸

³¹¹ Asher-Greve 1985: 49ff., 52ff.

³¹² Asher-Greve 1985: 161f.

³¹³ Archi 2002: 2f.

³¹⁴ Lafont 2013b.

³¹⁵ Westenholz 1999: 72.

³¹⁶ Foster 1987: 54.

³¹⁷ Westenholz 1999: 71.

³¹⁸ Lafont 2013b.

In the Laws of Hammurabi as well as in wisdom literature a woman's assets were considered a threat to the prosperity of the man,³¹⁹ which indicates that ideally a woman should not work for wages. In reality however, many women had to work outside their home, and as we saw the husbands could also give gifts to their wives. Women of poor families had jobs outside their own household, but if they had a decent economy the task of the wife was to "grind the flour" at home.³²⁰ Assyriologist Cécile Michel writes about wives of merchants who stayed back in Aššur when their husbands went to Kaneš in Anatolia to trade. Besides "grinding the flour" these women produced bread and beer every day, and an important task of theirs was also to produce textiles for the need of the family. They further produced textiles that their husbands sold for them in Anatolia, and they also helped their husbands with contacts with his local agents in Aššur. Although the men and the wives helped each other with their affairs, they had separate economies.³²¹ Besides the practical undertakings of Mesopotamian women, they also had the task to pray at home to the gods for the family,³²² which we saw was also the task of the *nadītu* priestesses.

2.1.2.5. The enslaved working women

The enslaved working women were called *gēme*. They had quite another situation than the commoners, and little possibility of exerting power. They constituted a large part of the working force at temple, palace, and other large households, and many of them were foreign women.³²³ Commoners, women included, also owned slaves.³²⁴

A majority of the *gēme* worked as textile workers at the palace, and they usually worked under a male overseer. Sometimes one of the female textile workers functioned as overseer however, but this seems to have been the case only in the absence of the ordinary male overseer.³²⁵

The textile industry was the largest "labor market" for the enslaved women. Besides that, these women also worked e.g. as millers, and during the Ur III period in Lagaš quite a lot of women did so; only in the textile industry were there more women. Men also worked as millers. Initially men worked as overseers, but during the reign of Šulgi this changed and the female workers now could get female overseers.³²⁶ It seems however that the standard was that a male was overseer, and there is no evidence that women led men's

³¹⁹ Stol 1995: 133.

³²⁰ Stol 1995: 136.

³²¹ Michel 2013.

³²² Stol 1995: 139.

³²³ Lerner 1986: 66f.

³²⁴ See the texts discussed by Lafont (2013) and Michel (2013).

³²⁵ Maekawa 1980: 81f., 87ff.

³²⁶ Maekawa 1980: 96ff., 101.

work. To note is that men supervised both traditional “women’s work” and traditional “men’s work”.³²⁷

There was not a clear demarcation regarding tasks between the enslaved women called *gème* and other women who were not enslaved. This means that some of the tasks mentioned in the previous section on ordinary women might have been performed by the enslaved *gème* (as well). I will return to this ambiguous picture of the *gème* in the section below called “The wives of the minor gods”.

2.1.2.6. Conclusions on the status of goddesses and women

It was related above in section 2.1.2.1. that there was a slow development in the scribal and state pantheon where creation was moved from goddesses to gods, as well as a movement from men to women regarding the relationship between humans and the divine.

In the history of Mesopotamia, from earliest times, to the early Old Babylonian period, we partly see changes that point to a lowered status of women, but at other instances change does not necessarily imply lowered status.

In the royal tombs of Ur the material suggests that queens were as powerful as kings, and we likewise see powerful queens in the Early Dynastic IIIb period. Here we see a slight change however, when city ruler Lugalanda incorporated his queen’s assets into the temple of Bau, and at the same time tried to expand his own domains. In the Ur III period the queens do not have their own estates anymore, but they still administer large estates. The same picture is seen with elite women. The queens of Mesopotamia never had formal power independently of the king. In the Hittite kingdom this was different; the queen even became the regent of the country at the death of her husband.

Throughout time, the en priestesses had high status. They lived a very restricted life however, secluded in the temple area, unmarried and without children. Further, their position was used for the political purposes of the king, their father. We see a similar picture by the *nadītu* priestesses who likewise lived in seclusion and prayed for their family. Both these groups had more economic freedom than ordinary women, which however, cannot be said to be compensation enough for their seclusion. Further, according to Harris, the *nadītu* institution functioned to return these women’s assets to the males of their original family at their death. The *nadītu* priestesses of Sippar initially had administrative tasks that were later taken over by men, and although they acted in their own economic affairs, their male relatives were quite involved in their economy.

³²⁷ Cf. Professor in Economic History Ulla Wikander who shows that women who were working in the industry in Sweden at the end of the 19th century worked with men as overseers, regardless of whether the work had been within women’s area of competence before the industrialization (1994: 124f.).

The *qadištu* priestess was a woman who had the right to choose whether she should live on her own or get married, and the *harimtu* woman lived on her own, outside male control. These women were a minority however, since the patriarchal family was the norm. Further, the *qadištu* priestess could not control her own assets, since that was in her brothers' hands. The aim of a woman's life was to get married and give birth to children. In the Old Babylonian period the brideprice was introduced, and some scholars maintain that this was no more than a selling of the woman. This can be understood as a reduction of the status and power of women.

In the Ur III period women of the upper classes had the same economic opportunities as men, but an important difference between the sexes was that the women had received their assets from men, first as dowry, and then they could also get property as a gift from their husband. In this period men could set up a will that along with the sons, also made their wife and/or daughter(s) inheritors. From the Old Babylonian period ordinary women were not inheritors; that was only the prerogative of certain classes of priestesses. Thus, the evidence also suggests that there was a diminished economic and juridical status and power of women from the Ur III to the Old Babylonian period.

The ideological ideal of the ancient Mesopotamian society was that the woman stayed at home, and worked in her own household. In practice, however, we saw that this ideal was not applied among the commoners and slaves. Women worked independently, taking part in e.g. the trade of their husband, and they were an important workforce in the large households of the state. To some extent one can say that after the Early Dynastic period women of the highest classes were as unfree as those of the lowest classes; women of the palace were secluded, and the power of the queen was dependent on the king. The *en* priestesses and the *nadītu* priestesses were likewise secluded, and their economic power was in reality quite restricted by their male relatives.

From the Ur III period we have attestations that women with other professions worked in agriculture and with construction, two otherwise strictly male areas. Further, as was seen above, we now have attestations of female physicians and purification priestesses, which change the understanding of women's professions in ancient Mesopotamia. The enslaved women were a major workforce of temples and palace, and many of them were foreigners.

As has been seen, the Mesopotamian society had all signs of a patriarchal society according to the definition given earlier; men were at the head of the country as well as the household, and women had no formal power, and women could in general not inherit. Further, also class affected the status and power of the sexes, poor and foreign people were enslaved, and the society was militarized and organized around possessions. Moreover, the whole picture of the history described above suggests that the status of elite women was lowered over time regarding ownership and autonomy. Women of the commoner class also had lowered status regarding possibilities to ownership,

and for them it was probably economic needs that forced them to work also outside their own households. The to a large extent foreign slave women occupied a low status throughout the period, although they could advance within their area of competence.

The sources at hand offer a picture of a general trend of a lowering in status of the women through loss of economic and juridical rights, as well as a loss of a possibility to move freely in the society, and thus the conclusion is that the society got more patriarchal over time.

2.2. The context of the Sumerian myths

The place where the myths were reproduced, received and used is the historical context of the myths. This context will shortly be discussed here in order to situate our myths in the setting where they were used. Further, also the question of gender will be touched on. This is in accordance with point 4 of the method I use, which deals with identifying connections between the categories in the myths and their users.

We saw that the primary context of Sumerian literature, myth included, was the eduba, the scribal school. Sumerologist Niek Veldhuis writes that literary texts may also have been dramatized or musically performed.³²⁸ There have been arguments that literary texts were also represented in cultic contexts, i.e. places that from our point of view perhaps are more ordinary contexts of myths. Assyriologist Nicole Brisch points to the fact however, that several royal as well as other hymns earlier thought to have been performed in cultic contexts were in fact composed only for educational aims.³²⁹

The duplicate of “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa” that has a known provenience at the excavation site (text B) was found in an Old Babylonian school. Regarding “Enki and Ninmaḥ” it might be that this myth was enumerated in literary catalogues that were used in the schools.³³⁰ Within “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa” itself, there are no obvious topics that place the myth in a certain context, but “Enki and Ninmaḥ” contains a banquet and the settlement of a dispute, which could refer to an enactment at the royal court. The aspect of internal references to the immediate context will be discussed in the following section.

³²⁸ Veldhuis 1997: 132 with fn. 120.

³²⁹ Brisch 2007: 12f.

³³⁰ The provenience of the myths is discussed further in the introductions of the chapters treating the myths.

2.2.1. The physical context: evidence from the texts themselves

When discussing the internal information of the literary texts regarding context, Alster points to the variety of literary texts, and means that it suggests that they must have been used in more than one context. Further, he makes an important distinction when he writes that since all texts were used in the schools we have to count on two levels of context: “first the original scene of performance; and second, the performance in the schools”.³³¹

One context that is found in the literary texts is the banquet. Alster writes that when the oral narratives became literary, the banquet where they were to be performed was incorporated at the beginning of the text. This was also the case of the judgment scene of the performance, which could be incorporated at the end of the text. Further, when kings are mentioned in some of the disputation texts this, according to Alster, refers to the context of the royal court. Another more relational context is the “father-and-son instruction”, and Alster writes that this is one of the oldest forms of literature in the world, found also e.g. in Biblical, Arabic and Scandinavian literature.³³² As a matter of fact, we cannot be sure that the banquet and the royal court were places where the literature was enacted until we have evidence of this outside the texts.

Besides the school, the banquet and the royal court, a fourth context that has been referred to is that of temple ritual. This assumption is built upon the fact that hymns and myths almost always end with “praise be [deity’s name]”.³³³ To note however, is that this formula was also used in some lexical lists, and in Nippur it was the standard ending of such lists. The lexical lists were only used in a school setting.³³⁴ Also regarding ritual, we have some intratextual references in the hymns to King Šulgi.³³⁵ As with the other intratextual evidence, this cannot be taken as historical evidence, before it is supported by external sources.

Thus, it is difficult to relate myths and epics to a certain context³³⁶ besides the school, and regarding the Sumerian epics Assyriologist Jerrold Cooper states that when we relate them to the Ur III royal court this is “a good guess and nothing more”.³³⁷

³³¹ Alster 1992: 30f.

³³² Alster 1992: 31f.

³³³ Writing [deity’s name] zà-mí. In the oldest sources “praise” is written zà-mí (e.g. Biggs 1974).

³³⁴ Peterson 2009: 7.

³³⁵ See Black et al. 1998–2006. “A praise poem of Šulgi (Šulgi E)”.

³³⁶ Cooper 1992: 112.

³³⁷ Cooper 1992: 116.

2.2.2. Literature and performance

From one perspective it is more or less certain that the predecessors of Sumerian literary texts were oral, or as Cooper writes: “Indeed, it is tautological to claim that a given literature was oral before it was written”.³³⁸ At the same time most scholars reject a *direct* oral (i.e. nonliterate) background of most of the Mesopotamian literature that we know today.³³⁹

I believe that the oral background is important when we try to understand the use and form of Sumerian literature. In primary oral cultures there is no such thing as “to study”; here knowledge is acquired by apprenticeship. The students learn “by listening, by repeating what they hear, by mastering proverbs and ways of combining and recombining them”.³⁴⁰ The oral background of Sumerian literature is also supported by Assyriologist Paul Delnero who has written an article on how the texts were transmitted. With the aid of cognitive theories on how memory functions, he convincingly argues that most of the literary texts were written down from memory, and not by duplication of a *Vorlage*, or at dictation.³⁴¹ This means that at one point the texts must have been transmitted orally, and that they were also repeated by the pupil, to be written down at a later point in the education.

Oral narratives contain formulas or repeated expressions, and this is because they are used as a device of remembrance; oral transmission has been the only means to keep the knowledge in an oral and preliterate culture, and repetition makes it easier.³⁴² All handwritten texts are difficult to read,³⁴³ and very much so with handwritten cuneiform texts, and accordingly these were also memorized, which means that a certain amount of repetition was also needed in them.

The Assyriologists writing about orality and aurality in Mesopotamian literature all refer to the performance character of this literature. Alster writes that “[m]ost ancient literature had an ‘aural’ aspect”, since the aim of it was to be performed. He means that when one looks at Sumerian literature the first impression is that it was intended to be recited aloud.³⁴⁴ Further, according to Cooper the performance of these texts was musical. He does not assume however, that the composer and the performer was the same person. Most of the subscripts of Sumerian literature, denoting a genre, refer to musical instruments, and the expression *zami*, “praise” which is written at the

³³⁸ Cooper 1992: 104.

³³⁹ See Vogelzang and Vanstiphout (1992).

³⁴⁰ Ong 2001: 9.

³⁴¹ Delnero 2012.

³⁴² Ong 2001: 23.

³⁴³ Ong 2001: 119.

³⁴⁴ Alster writes that variations in the texts indicate this; such variations suggest that the pupils wrote down sounds they heard rather than texts they read. Further, he maintains that the common parallelisms and repetitions in Sumerian texts also point to an oral background (1992: 23f.).

end of myths, epics and hymns has been applied to, or comes from, the name of the lyre (zamin). He writes that “[w]hen we think ‘literature’ in ancient Mesopotamia, we must hear constant, surely strange, melody”.³⁴⁵ Important to note though, is that besides the use of literature in contexts of performance, as was mentioned earlier much of it was in fact purely scholarly products, with the sole aim to serve as tools in education. According to Rubio, there was most probably a discrepancy between the literature produced at the schools, and the folkloric correspondences.³⁴⁶

To sum up, I would say that Sumerian literature has an oral origin,³⁴⁷ and that the literature as we have it, depending on the individual text, more or less represents a transitional phase when an oral culture has begun to transmit knowledge through writing. As a consequence of these aspects, it is important to remember that the concept “Sumerian literature” is something completely different from modern literature. Sumerian literature was used to transmit knowledge, and it had a strong oral component. Some of it was written for performance that was often accompanied by music. The literature was however in many instances quite removed from performance in a setting with music, instead solely being tools of education.

2.2.3. The eduba and scribal education

We will now turn to the scribal education as a context of Sumerian myths. Although most of the literary texts that we have were written in the Old Babylonian period, the preceding periods are important for the understanding of the role of the scribes and the school in society. Therefore we will also look at the scribal education before the early Old Babylonian period.

2.2.3.1. The relationship between scribes and the state

The early script, dating to the Uruk and Jemdet Nasr periods, was created in order to administer assets and people, and already these first cuneiform documents show such standardization that a common assumption is that the scribes’ training was centralized.³⁴⁸ Thus, at the start of using script, this was done by a centralized elite for economic purposes. Also in the following Early Dynastic II period, the scribes, called *saġa* in this period, belonged to

³⁴⁵ Cooper 1992: 114f.; *ePSD* sub zamin; cf. Sjöberg 1975: 168ff.

³⁴⁶ E.g. Rubio 2009: 25.

³⁴⁷ The myths treated here show most of the nine criteria that Ong maintains are characteristic of stories in oral cultures: “additive rather than subordinative”, “aggregative rather than analytic”, “redundant or ‘copious’”, “conservative or traditionalist”, “close to the human life-world”, “agonistically toned”, “empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced”, “situational rather than abstract”. The ninth criterion is “homeostatic”, and I am not aware as to whether this is applicable to Sumerian literature. This is not the place to investigate this further, however, since the focus in this thesis is primarily on the world that the texts refer to, not on their oral or aural character. See Ong (2001: 37–52) on his criteria for orality.

³⁴⁸ Charpin 2010: 19.

the upper strata of society. Further, they were both administrators and compilers of administrative texts, and functioned as teachers for future scribes.³⁴⁹ From this period we have evidence from the city of Ur, which shows that the temples owned or administered fields. The temples seem to have been related to a public leader, which according to Sumerologist Giuseppe Visicato “raises the possibility that temple structures depended on institutional power”.³⁵⁰

In the Early Dynastic IIIa period the city of Šuruppag gives a picture that is similar to that from Ur; there people were working for the temple households, and the latter were administered by the énsi, the ruler. From Early Dynastic IIIb Ĝirsu we have evidence of several large households, of which some were administered by people from the royal family. In this period there seems to have been a tight relationship between the king’s and the queen’s households on the one hand, and those of the principal male and female deities Bau and Ninĝirsu on the other. A similar picture emerges from the sources on late Early Dynastic and early Sargonic Umma and Ur; the énsi, the ruler, was controlling the economy and politics of the cities.³⁵¹

The relationship between state and scribes continues also in the Sargonic period. Now we have a large state, but it was still administered under local énsi:s, these now being under the control of the king. From this period we know that many militaries, such as the nu-bànda:s, came from the scribes’ guild.³⁵²

Assyriologist Dominique Charpin writes that during the Ur III period, King Šulgi played a special role in the formation of scribal education. He writes that Šulgi “undertook major reforms toward the middle part of his reign, which resulted in a significant increase in the number of administrative tablets”.³⁵³

As has been stated earlier, the main bulk of the Sumerian literature dates to the Isin-Larsa and early Old Babylonian period. Alster writes that this was a very creative period regarding literature. Besides the enormous production of literary texts in this period, the services of the scribe was “democratized”, since now also common people had access to scribes who then obviously took assignments from private persons.³⁵⁴

The eduba, the scribal school of Old Babylonian Mesopotamia, has been understood as a private institution, since most of the Old Babylonian exercise tablets have been found in domestic areas.³⁵⁵ The temple precincts or

³⁴⁹ This conclusion is reached since names of the same scribes are found in both the administrative and the educational corpora (Visicato 2000: 233f.); see also Charpin (2010: 21).

³⁵⁰ Visicato 2000: 240.

³⁵¹ Visicato 2000: 240.

³⁵² Visicato 2000: 239f.

³⁵³ Charpin 2010: 22.

³⁵⁴ Alster 2008: 49, 52.

³⁵⁵ Assyriologist Petra Gesche writes that during the third millennium the scribal education took place in a domestic environment, and only at the end of the second millennium schools

palaces from this period have not yielded any exercise tablets, and no schools are attested from Mesopotamian royal courts.³⁵⁶ This suggests that the eduba was at least partly a private enterprise. The domestic school structures were rather small, and each class had perhaps about two to four students. The scribe used to teach his own children and sometimes some children from the neighborhood.³⁵⁷ Alster believes that it was not only children of temple and court officials from this period who underwent scribal education, but also other people in society like children of artisans and merchants. Most of the pupils did not go through all the levels of the curriculum though.³⁵⁸

Assyriologist Igor Diakonoff has argued that the Old Babylonian schools were centrally administered from Nippur on behalf of the state, and he builds his argument upon the uniformity of the eduba curriculum throughout the land. In his doctoral thesis Veldhuis argues against Diakonoff's hypothesis, writing that "[t]he stability of such genres is explained by their mnemo-technical qualities, rather than by state control".³⁵⁹ Veldhuis also problematizes the concepts "private" and "public" in his thesis, stating that the division of private and public is a recent one, and that the officials' archives contained documents that in our sense were both public and private. Thus, "[a] private school, therefore, may still have a semi-official character".³⁶⁰

Regarding the alleged relationship between state control and curriculum, Delnero has convincingly shown that texts understood as representing the curriculum were in fact inventories that listed literary texts in groups, for storage, i.e. having an archival function. The grouping of the listed texts was based upon e.g. the same initial sign(s), or theme.³⁶¹ Delnero's findings thus support Veldhuis' comprehension that the uniformity rather indicates mnemo-technical devices than state control. Although the lists studied by Delnero do not represent the curriculum, it is known that there was a basic curriculum divided in two parts, which had further subdivisions.³⁶²

During the Ur III and the Old Babylonian periods, royal hymns as well as literature expressing royal ideology were quite frequently copied at school,³⁶³ and as in other periods, scribes were needed in royal and temple administration. This indicates that there was a close connection between school and state also during these periods.

were established (2001: 14f). I assume that by this she means that schools outside the private sphere were established at the end of the second millennium.

³⁵⁶ Charpin 2010: 32.

³⁵⁷ Veldhuis 1997: 26; id.: 2004: 60.

³⁵⁸ Alster 2008: 50; Veldhuis 1997: 40.

³⁵⁹ Veldhuis 1997: 27.

³⁶⁰ Veldhuis 1997: 27f.; cf. the similar view of Charpin (2010: 101ff.).

³⁶¹ Delnero 2010b.

³⁶² Veldhuis 1997: 31–66; Delnero 2010a.

³⁶³ Veldhuis 2004: 61; Delnero 2010b: 39; Charpin 2010: 40, 45.

2.2.3.2. The teachers and their status

The schools seem accordingly to have been influenced by both private and public initiatives. Who were the teachers of the schools, then? We saw above that the teacher in a school was an educated scribe, which means that this group in general can give information on the teachers. The overwhelming majority of scribes were men, although there is evidence of female scribes from the northern sites Mari, Sippar, Tell Haddad, Me-Turan, Tell Harmal³⁶⁴ and Chagar Bazar.³⁶⁵

Most of the attestations of female scribes come from the Old Babylonian period, on the one hand from the palace archives of Mari, and on the other from the archives of the *nadītu* priestesses of Sippar. In both cases the female scribes worked for other women – those of the court and the *nadītu* priestesses respectively.³⁶⁶

Regarding a possible position of women as teachers at schools Assyriologist Brigitte Lion writes about the evidence on *nadītu* priestesses in Sippar:

Si Inanna-ama-mu et d'autres scribes [...], sont présentes dans le *gagûm* pour la période la plus anciennement documentée de l'histoire de Sippar, on pourrait imaginer aussi qu'elles ont eu un rôle dans la formation des femmes, même si cela demeure pour l'instant une pure hypothèse.³⁶⁷

Visicato's study that was referred to earlier treats the scribes from the early Early Dynastic II Ur and up to the end of the Sargonic period. He does not write anything about the sex of the scribes, but according to Assyriologist Jakob Andersson who has specialized in Early Mesopotamian onomasticon, the majority of names indicate that they were men. For those with unspecific names regarding sex, there is nothing that indicates that they were female.³⁶⁸ Visicato points to the fact that his findings regarding the role of the scribes in economy and politics correspond to the findings of two other studies on the scribes of Mari and of Ur III Sumer.³⁶⁹ This indicates that there were large similarities over several centuries of time regarding the role and status of the scribes in public administration.

In a couple of Early Dynastic profession lists the scribe is listed as the first profession,³⁷⁰ which may point to a prominent role of the scribe. This

³⁶⁴ Veldhuis 1997: 28 with fn:s.

³⁶⁵ Lion 2011: 99.

³⁶⁶ Lion 2001: 7, 25.

³⁶⁷ Lion 2001: 30. The *gagû* was the convent of the *nadītu* priestesses.

³⁶⁸ Private communication. In fact, we do not have any attestations of female scribes before the middle of the third millennium, and Lion writes that the oldest attestation of a female scribe dates to the Sargonic period (Lion 2011: 98f.).

³⁶⁹ Visicato 2000: 2.

³⁷⁰ In the Early Dynastic profession list Lú E the scribe is listed as the first profession, and in the Early Dynastic profession list from Fāra (Lú B) the *saġa* comes in first position. The Uruk Early Dynastic profession lists (Lú A-D) do not contain the term *dubsar* at all however, Visicato 2000: 2.

picture is also reflected in a study that Visicato has done on the bureaucracy of Early Dynastic Šuruppag (Fāra) as seen in the economic documents. He found that there was a pronounced hierarchy among the administrating officials in this city, and that the saġa, the official functioning as scribe before the dubsar was introduced, now being temple administrator, is ranked in second position, just after the city governor, the énsi. The dubsar maḥ comes in the fourth position in this ranking.³⁷¹

Thus, Visicato shows us that already in the very ancient period attested in Fāra/Šuruppag there was a clear hierarchical system among the scribes, and further that the scribes belonged to the highest strata of society. In fact all prominent officials in state and palace were recruited from the scribes. According to Visicato, perhaps as early as at Šuruppag, “but definitely during the Sargonic and Ur III periods, the majority of governors and kings arose from the category of the scribes”.³⁷² This does not mean that every scribe could become king, but that the scribal education was part of the education of the crown prince. Also high officials of the state, like šabra-é, šagina and nu-bànda, came from the scribes’ corporation, the two latter also being military officials.³⁷³ The need for scribes in these positions is related to their functions; a part of their work was to inspect various administrative and legal documents, sending reports to the king in the form of letters and so on.

The state administration maintained by the male scribes was well-developed, and grew even more due to demographic changes. At the end of the Uruk period the water supply from the river diminished, and this resulted in abandonment of some sites, whereas others grew rapidly. This caused problems regarding organization and stratification of the population in the growing cities. The state answered with a stronger centralization of power which implicated an immense expansion of administrative bureaucracy. Visicato writes that it was during this period that the dubsar appeared as a scribe alongside the saġa.³⁷⁴ The scribes administered all aspects of production and consumption, and had thus a great deal of control over the whole state economy. This is also seen in their own remunerations. Visicato writes about the scribes that:

[t]hese officials were certainly those who benefited most from the resources of society. In fact, they received allocations of goods considerably greater

³⁷¹ Visicato 2000: 3f.

³⁷² Visicato 2000: 2, 236.

³⁷³ Visicato 2000: 2, 239. The term nu-bànda also denoted the “oberste Verwaltungsbeamte eines Tempels” (Bauer 1972: 64).

³⁷⁴ Another word, um-mi-a, refers to the highest scribal position in the school. This title means “expert, master craftsman” (Akk. *ummānu*), and is attested from the Early Dynastic IIIb period, see *ePSD*. The title refers to the scribal teacher, and Veldhuis points out that the use of a word meaning “craftsman” to denote the profession suggests a parallel between this and other crafts (1997: 25).

than did others, being given plots of arable land together with laborers and the necessary equipment.³⁷⁵

What was the societal result of this enormous bureaucracy? According to Visicato all cases of collapse of the Mesopotamian society in the third millennium coincide with an enormous production of tablets and peaks of numbers of scribes.³⁷⁶ The exploding administration may of course be the symptom of a crisis rather than a cause.

When we turn to female scribes we get another picture regarding status. As was pointed out earlier, in most of our attestations they worked for other women, this being a restriction in itself. It shall be noted though, that letters were not signed by the scribe, and therefore we do not know anything about the scribes who wrote them,³⁷⁷ and the same goes for literary texts.³⁷⁸ The female scribes of the palaces (Mari and Chagar Bazar), were not prominent and free; they were slaves, and probably worked as scribes in order to limit the contact that the royal women had with men. In contrast to these female palace scribes, the scribes of the *gagû* in Sippar were free, but their role was the same: to limit the contact of women, in this case *naditu* priestesses, with men.³⁷⁹ Thus, at least in the area of the court and the *gagû* related to the Šamaš temple, female scribes were restricted to specific clients, and therefore it does not seem probable that it was common that female scribes belonged to the free scribes who managed the economy and bureaucracy of the state. An explanation of the relatively high amount of female scribes during the Old Babylonian period can be due to the general “democratization” of the services of the scribes that Alster suggested. More people needed to take part of these services, women included, and therefore female scribes were needed.

In the Ur III period there was a great difference in income between the scribes depending upon which education they had and where they served,³⁸⁰ and in the Old Babylonian period most of the educated scribes belonged to a middle class regarding income. The majority of the scribes did not go further in the education to learn and transmit the literature,³⁸¹ which was probably the prerogative of the upper classes. In spite of a possible democratization of the scribal profession, part of which was probably a wider stratification within the guild, there was still a difference in status between men and women, women being the more subordinate group.

³⁷⁵ Visicato 2000: 236.

³⁷⁶ Visicato 2000: 243.

³⁷⁷ Lion 2001: 7.

³⁷⁸ Lion 2011: 96.

³⁷⁹ Lion 2011: 99f.

³⁸⁰ Gesche 2001: 14.

³⁸¹ Volk 2009: 9.

The picture of male vs. female scribal status can be compared to the holders of these roles in the pantheon. As Lion writes, the goddess Nisaba ruled over writing and calculating in Sumer, and the activities of writing and calculating are more often undertaken by goddesses than gods in the mythology. It was not only Nisaba who could write and calculate but also the scribe of the netherworld, called Ninazimua, Ğeštinana or Bēlet-šēri, who was also female. Further, other goddesses like Ninlil and Inana were literate. Even the mother goddess, under her names Bēlet-ilī, Mama and Aruru, is said to be “the mistress of writing” in an Old Babylonian hymn dedicated to her.³⁸²

The male god most often connected to writing in Sumerian mythology is Nisaba’s spouse Ğaja. This mythological picture changed over time however. Lion writes that “[o]ver the course of the second millennium Nisaba was little by little replaced in her role as scribe by a male god, Nabû; by the first millennium she rarely appears at all. This loss of importance is the general lot of female divinities.” Possible explanations for this development that Lion puts forward are that on the one hand the cities of the goddesses lost in importance, and on the other, that other goddesses like Ninlil, incorporated the traits of Nisaba.³⁸³

There are no practical, non-literary sources that suggest that women once were more numerous among the scribes, which means that such an understanding remains a speculation.

2.2.3.3. The pupils and their status

Regarding the pupils, their societal class corresponded to that of their teachers, and primarily so since the occupation was mostly handed down within the family.³⁸⁴ Besides that, only rich families or families with some means had the opportunity to educate their children, which means that scribal knowledge was handed down among the well-off and the elite.³⁸⁵ Also among the students there were different denominations related to skill and rank. The šeš bàn-da, the “younger brother”, is translated by Black et al. as “assistant (of mentor)”, whereas the advanced pupil šeš-gal “elder brother”, is translated as “mentor”.³⁸⁶ The lowliest pupil was called dumu é-dub-ba-a “child of the school”, or dubsar-tur “junior scribe”.³⁸⁷

As seen, the terms referring to the assistants indicate a strong connection between the male sex and the scribal art. Presumably the different pupils were somehow subsumed into the two levels of education that were (at least) found at the eduba. The first level contained writing copies of lexical lists,

³⁸² Krebernik 2003–2004: 16, 19.

³⁸³ Lion 2011: 91f.

³⁸⁴ E.g. Charpin 2010: 17, 32.

³⁸⁵ Viscato 2000: 243; Veldhuis 1997: 145; Charpin 2010: 62, 65.

³⁸⁶ Black et al. 1998–2006. “The advice of a supervisor to a younger scribe (E-dub-ba-a C)”, l. 19.

³⁸⁷ Veldhuis 1997: 26.

model contracts and proverbs, and in the second level the students copied literary texts.³⁸⁸ As was stated earlier, not all students did both levels. In spite of the male-oriented denominations of the pupils, since there were female scribes, there must also have been female pupils. We even have four school exercises where the student noted at the end: šu^{munus} dubsar, “(written by) the hand of a female scribe”. These exercises vary from beginners’ level to the highest level of copying literary texts.³⁸⁹ Further, the term dumu eduba means “the *child* of the school”, and not as is often written, “the son of the school”. However, since the literature is an ideological representation of society, the pupils in it are most likely thought of as boys. Nevertheless, it is important to be gender conscious, not reproducing the gender biases of the sources, and that can be done, e.g., by stating that the literature represents an ideal image of society.

The so-called eduba literature can give some information on the pupils. In earlier scholarship these literary texts were understood literally, as depicting the life at the school. This comprehension has generally been abandoned, although Assyriologist Andrew George has suggested that the school situation that we meet in literary texts reflect that of the Ur III and the Isin periods.³⁹⁰

The life at the Old Babylonian school seems to have been hard for the pupils if we shall believe the eduba literature. In “The advice of a supervisor to a younger scribe (É-dub-ba-a C)” we are informed that a correct behavior at school was to be humble and do whatever is asked by the mentor. The pupil is to be subordinate to the people of the rules (lú ġárza),³⁹¹ and be zealous. The subordinate scribe seems to be highly indebted to his supervisor, since he says: “You opened my eyes like a puppy’s and you made me into a human being”.³⁹²

At school the minor pupil could be bullied by the senior one. Besides lack of skill, another reason for this seems to have been insufficient knowledge of Sumerian, since in one text the mentor says that his father speaks Sumerian whereas the junior student’s father is a barbarian. If we shall believe this text the pupils were at times beaten at school; when the teacher appears at the end and admonishes the minor pupil he says: “Even in those long gone days, when you were still beaten and [*break*], no shouting reached me (like this)! Why to him who is your ‘big brother’ [...] Why have you spoken to him so arrogantly [...]?”³⁹³

³⁸⁸ Veldhuis 1997: 40.

³⁸⁹ Lion 2011: 100.

³⁹⁰ George 2005: 132ff.

³⁹¹ The Sumerian word ġárza, Akk. *paršu*, means e.g. rite, ritual, temple office, authoritative decision (*CAD P sub paršu*).

³⁹² Black et al. 1998–2006. “The advice of a supervisor to a younger scribe (E-dub-ba-a C)”, ll. 8f., 14, 26, 33.

³⁹³ Vanstiphout 1997: 589f.

The same picture of violence is given in the eduba text called “Schooldays”. This text describes a couple of days in a schoolchild’s life.³⁹⁴ When the pupil gets up in the morning he says that he has to hurry to school, since if he is late he will be beaten. The schoolchild has a school father (ad-da é-dub-ba-a) who hits him because something is cut off; later the child is beaten by the teacher, and after that by other persons when he talks when not allowed to, when he does not keep his head high, when he stands up, when he goes out, speaking Akkadian and at other occasions as well.³⁹⁵ The pupil’s solution to this is to invite his teacher/school father to his home where he is praised, presented with drinks and gifts. Then the teacher blesses the pupil and says that he may reach the highest level of scribal art.³⁹⁶

When commenting upon the eduba literature Alster writes that, “[a]nother remarkable feature in these texts is that they do not center around scribal skills as such, but on authority, punctuality, obedience, and rank among the students”,³⁹⁷ which is a quite clear and distinct summary of the picture given in this literature, as seen above.

2.2.3.4. The function of the eduba

One question that arises about the eduba is: what was its function? We saw that besides being teachers at school, scribes worked in the administration, belonging to the higher officials of the state. According to Veldhuis the eduba was a sociological institution, “a pattern of social behavior that follows conventional rules, and is provided with moral authority”.³⁹⁸

Thus, Veldhuis indicates that the eduba did not only have practical functions of educating scribes for administrative purposes. This also becomes clear from the texts used. He writes that there is a marked incongruence between the literary texts that were copied and the needs of the students in their professional life. Literary texts were of no practical use. He further states: “It seems that handing down the Sumerian language and tradition as completely as possible was considered to be all important”,³⁹⁹ and also: “As school texts, the compositions function on the one hand as exercises in writing Sumerian, on the other hand as building blocks in the creation of a national Sumerian heritage”.⁴⁰⁰ Particularly the literary texts are connected with the complicated writing system,⁴⁰¹ and they are written in an archaizing, difficult

³⁹⁴ Kramer throughout writes “schoolboy” in his translation (1949: 205f.), but since Sumerian does not mark gender it is in fact not clear whether the pupil is a boy or a girl. The word *lú* is used here, which could refer to the masculine gender, but it can also be used as “someone”, “who” (Thomsen 2001: 242).

³⁹⁵ Cf. Volk 2009: 13.

³⁹⁶ Kramer 1949: 205f.

³⁹⁷ Alster 2008: 62.

³⁹⁸ Veldhuis 1997: 27f.

³⁹⁹ Veldhuis 1997: 83.

⁴⁰⁰ Veldhuis 2004: 3.

⁴⁰¹ Veldhuis 1997: 142f.

Sumerian.⁴⁰² A conclusion is that the scribes both wanted and created the complex educational system.

Charpin points to the fact that it was not only the Sumerian language that was important at the schools, but also royal ideology. He writes that

the importance placed on the copying of epics, legends, royal hymns, commemorative inscriptions, and so on, is surely not attributable to chance. Fidelity to a certain notion of kingship had to be inculcated in the scribes from the earliest years.⁴⁰³

Veldhuis discusses the activities and functions of the eduba in sociological terms as transmitting and producing knowledge for knowledge's own sake. He refers to Michael Young who maintains that the higher levels of knowledge are distinguished by unrelatedness, i.e. it is non-applicable to practical aims. Veldhuis writes: "the higher the status of the knowledge is, the more removed it is from daily practice". Veldhuis also discusses Pierre Bourdieu's concept "cultural capital". The cultural capital is a means to demarcate difference between social groups, i.e. a means of power,⁴⁰⁴ and this was a central function of the teachings of the eduba; "The literary heritage [...] and the curricular lexical tradition formed a cultural capital designed to distinguish the scribal elite, those who knew Sumerian, from the population at large." Through the education the scribes became a part of a Sumerian history and identity, as well as got access to the elite.⁴⁰⁵

To note is that the access to higher positions in society was primarily the prerogative of men. Women are seldom found in the sources as scribes, and never as high officials. This, besides the fact that the eduba had close connections to the state, suggests that the texts produced at the eduba basically had a male and upper-class perspective.

In the section on theory on myth I argued that a central function of myth is ideological, being a means of power and a tool to create a "seamless identity" with "perfect origins" (i.e. history) as a central building block. Here it was argued that the eduba had the same function.

⁴⁰² Veldhuis 2004: 55, 66.

⁴⁰³ Charpin 2010: 45.

⁴⁰⁴ Veldhuis 1997: 142, 144.

⁴⁰⁵ Veldhuis 2004: 46, 66, 102.

3. The protagonists of the myth

3.1. Ninḥursaĝa/Ninmaḥ

Although several of the aspects of Ninḥursaĝa/Ninmaḥ hopefully will become clearer in the following chapters, I will give an introduction to her here. First I will shortly discuss the cities where her cult was attested, as well as periods of time when the mother goddess was venerated, and then I will relate how she is met with in the literary sources. Regarding the latter sources, I will simply look at her connotations within them.

The Sumerian mother goddess had several names. The recurring Sumerian names of hers were Ninḥursaĝa, Ninmaḥ, Nintu and Aruru. In general, she will be called Ninḥursaĝa/Ninmaḥ here, but in specific cases the names occurring in the text under discussion will be used. As was pointed out in section 1.4.2., dealing with the concept “mother goddess”, the name Ninmaḥ was originally, at least in Lagaš, an epithet of Ninḥursaĝa.⁴⁰⁶ In Akkadian her name was often Bēlet-ilī, but also Aruru.⁴⁰⁷ I will primarily treat the mother goddess under her Sumerian names and appearances here, but her Akkadian form will also be met with.

3.1.1. Cultic cities, dates of attestations and godlists

As far as is known, Ninḥursaĝa/Ninmaḥ was the patron deity of the cities Keš, Adab and Tell al-‘Ubaid, as well as an unknown city with the writing 𒄩.𒍪.𒍪.𒍪. According to Krebernik, the city of Keš probably was the primary city of the mother goddess, since it is mentioned on the Stele of the Vultures, in Narām-Su’en’s Bassetki inscription, and also in the temple hymn of Adab.⁴⁰⁸

The temple of the mother goddess in Keš is praised in a hymn, the so called Keš temple hymn, of which we have one version from Abū Šalābīḥ (Early Dynastic IIIa period), and a further version dating to the Old Babylo-

⁴⁰⁶ Selz 1995b: 256.

⁴⁰⁷ The relationship between names and role as mother goddess was treated above, under “Central concepts”.

⁴⁰⁸ Krebernik 1997b: 511; Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969. Heimpel writes that Keš in fact was the temple of the city URU-saĝrig, and that this temple was situated outside the town, in the steppe. He further writes that the mother goddess was venerated under her name Diĝirmaḥ there (Heimpel 2001b: 379). Since Mesopotamian cities sometimes consisted of two cities in close vicinity to each other, this might have been the case also for URU-saĝrig and Keš.

nian period. Also in the zami hymns from Abū Ṣalābīḥ both the mother goddess and her city Keš is mentioned.⁴⁰⁹ The city of Adab is likewise attested as the cultic city of the mother goddess in the zami hymns from Abū Ṣalābīḥ.⁴¹⁰ In Adab the temple of the mother goddess was called Emaḥ (é-maḥ), whereas in Keš it was called Ekeš (é-kèš).⁴¹¹ Both Keš and Adab, as well the city with the writing ҒI.ZA are found as the cultic cities of Ninḥursaġa/Nintu in the Sumerian Temple hymns.⁴¹²

The city of Tell al-‘Ubaid was primarily inhabited during the prehistoric Ubaid period. The site is an important representative of the ceramics of this period, and therefore it has named the period. In the Early Dynastic IIIa period, King Aanepada of nearby Ur built a temple for Ninḥursaġa in this city.⁴¹³

Our goddess was also venerated in the Early Dynastic IIIb city-state of Lagaš. There was a temple of Nintu in a field belonging to Ninġirsu (the patron deity of the city), situated where the conflict between Lagaš and the neighboring city of Umma took place. The sources say that there was a temple of Ninḥursaġa in the same field, which indicates that the temple of Nintu was probably the same as that of Ninḥursaġa.⁴¹⁴ Selz writes that the oldest known construction to Ninḥursaġa in Lagaš was a cultic pedestal (bára) erected by Eanatum. This was also placed, along with cultic pedestals of Enlil, Ninġirsu and Utu, at the border between Lagaš and Umma.⁴¹⁵

Enmetena, the ruler of Lagaš after Eanatum’s successor, built the é^dnin-maḥ gi-gú-na tir-kù-ga, “The temple of Ninmaḥ, the Giguna of the pure grove”, in Lagaš. The same temple was said to belong to Ninḥursaġa in another source. According to Selz, several attestations of the name Ninmaḥ without the divine determinative suggest that it was an epithet of Ninḥursaġa in the Lagaš sources.⁴¹⁶ Besides temples of our goddess, two statues of her are also attested in the city, both of which point to an important position in the city. Further, the names of both the statues suggest an ancient cult of the mother goddess.⁴¹⁷

In the Sargonic period king Maništūšu built a temple for Ninḥursaġa at a city whose name is spelled ҒA.A KI, as written on a door-socket from the temple. This temple was located on the Tigris, and today the mound is called

⁴⁰⁹ Krebernik 1997b: 511; Biggs 1974: 48; Gragg 1969.

⁴¹⁰ Krebernik 1997b: 511; Biggs 1974: 48, ll. 72–74.

⁴¹¹ Krebernik 1997b: 511.

⁴¹² Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969.

⁴¹³ Hall and Woolley 1927; Krebernik 1997b: 512.

⁴¹⁴ Selz 1995b: 267.

⁴¹⁵ Selz 1995b: 252f.

⁴¹⁶ Selz 1995b: 252, 256.

⁴¹⁷ Selz writes that the name of one of the statues, ^dnin-tu-ama-uru-da-mú-a, “Nintu, mother grown with the city”, points to her being venerated a long time in the city. Regarding the name of the other statue, ^dnin-tu-zà-ga, “Nintu of the sanctuary”, this name is attested already in the Early Dynastic IIIa city Fāra/Šuruppāg (1995b: 267).

Kharā'ib Ghḍarīfe. The pronunciation of the name of the ancient city is not known.⁴¹⁸

Richter writes that the mother goddess was venerated in Nippur under the names Ninḥursaġa and Nintu during the Ur III period. She was venerated in the same temple as Ninlil, but also had a temple of her own. In Old Babylonian Nippur there is hardly any evidence of a cult of the mother goddess.⁴¹⁹ At Isin, the mother goddess was hardly venerated at all. Diġirmaḥ is mentioned in a text from Isin, as is a temple of Ninḥursaġa. Richter believes, though, that the latter might have been situated in Adab.⁴²⁰

There are a few attestations from Old Babylonian Larsa of the mother goddess, under the names Diġirmaḥ and Ninḥursaġa. There is an unpublished offering list where “Diġirmaḥ an durchaus prominenter Stelle – als fünfte Gottheit nach dem Sonnengott, An(um), Enlil und Enki/Ea – angeführt [wird]”. Richter writes that this indicates that her cult was not unimportant. Also a temple and five *gudu*₄ priests of Diġirmaḥ are attested in the Larsa records.⁴²¹

Regarding the cult of the mother goddess in Ur, Richter writes that “[s]elten zwar, aber seit ältesten Zeiten [= Early Dynastic IIIb period] überliefert ist die kultische Verehrung unterschiedlich benannter Muttergottheiten”.⁴²² In the Early Dynastic IIIb period the mother goddess was venerated in Ur as Ninḥursaġa, and in the Ur III period under the names Ninḥursaġa and Ninmaḥ. During the Old Babylonian period Ninḥursaġa/Ninmaḥ had a temple in the city,⁴²³ but in spite of that, the attestations of her become even rarer than before.⁴²⁴ Other places where a temple of Ninḥursaġa is attested are Umma (Ur III period), Susa (Ur III period), Mari (Ur III period), Malgium (Old Babylonian period) and Babylon.⁴²⁵ Regarding Ur III Umma Sumerologist Wolfgang Heimpel writes that Ninḥursaġa was venerated mainly in small locations in this province, such as smaller cities, villages, tells, i.e. probably ruins, and in fields.⁴²⁶ In Richter’s description of the Old Babylonian local pantheon of Uruk, he does not write about Ninḥursaġa in a separate section, as he does about the more important deities of the city, but she is mentioned as occurring in the records of the city.⁴²⁷

As has been seen above, the oldest literary sources already reflect a cult of the mother goddess at her cities, and also the Early Dynastic IIIa temple of

⁴¹⁸ al-Rawi and Black 1993: 147f.

⁴¹⁹ Richter 2004: 143f.

⁴²⁰ Richter 2004: 249.

⁴²¹ Richter 2004: 384f.

⁴²² Richter 2004: 478, 732; see also Hall 1985: 255.

⁴²³ Hall 1985: 732.

⁴²⁴ Richter 2004: 479.

⁴²⁵ Krebernik 1997b: 511f. See also the attestations of temples of Ninḥursaġa collected by George (1993).

⁴²⁶ Heimpel 2001b: 380.

⁴²⁷ Richter 2004: 282.

Tell al-‘Ubaid as well as the Early Dynastic IIIb royal inscriptions from Lagaš are evidence of a quite early cult of her. Both in Nippur and Ur she was venerated mainly before the Old Babylonian period, and most of the temples of her in other cities date to the Ur III period. Thus, when Krebernik writes that she was venerated in the third millennium, and at the beginning of the second,⁴²⁸ I would rephrase this. The sources referred to above suggest that she was primarily venerated in the third millennium, whereas her cult is hardly attested in the Old Babylonian period. Heimpel comes to a similar conclusion in his article on Ninḫursaġa in the *RIA*. He writes that, “[i]hre Wichtigkeit nahm immer mehr ab”, and he explains this with the fact that her cultic cities became unimportant or even abandoned after the Ur III period.⁴²⁹

The mother goddess is also attested in so-called godlists,⁴³⁰ where the names of the deities were simply enumerated. As far as is known, the first godlists were produced in the Early Dynastic IIIa period. In that period the names were ordered according to graphic, phonetic and semantic principles,⁴³¹ whereas from the Old Babylonian period, the deities were ordered in accordance with their family relationships.⁴³² Sometimes the gods’ names were translated into Akkadian during the Old Babylonian period, and from the post-Old Babylonian period they were regularly translated into that language. After the Early Dynastic IIIa period we do not have any godlists until the Ur III period. Then the godlists date from the early Old Babylonian period, the Middle Assyrian period, and the Neo-Assyrian period.⁴³³

Ninḫursaġa is attested both in the Early Dynastic IIIa Abū Ṣalābīḫ godlist,⁴³⁴ and in the big godlist from Fāra (SF 1) from the same period.⁴³⁵ The mother goddess is also found in an Early Dynastic IIIb riddle text. Here the riddle is which city is meant, and the clues are a canal, a deity, a fish and a snake that belong to the city. In this text several deities are mentioned, and among them Nintu, here with the epithet “lady of heaven and earth”. Regrettably the text is damaged where the name of the canal, the fish and the snake belonging to Nintu’s city had been written.⁴³⁶

Although the mother goddess was of minor importance in the cult of the Old Babylonian period, her names were still enumerated in godlists. In the Old Babylonian Nippur godlist, An is the first deity, followed by his spouse Antum, then Enlil, and his other name Nunamnir come, and thereafter En-

⁴²⁸ Krebernik 1997b: 512.

⁴²⁹ Heimpel 2001b: 381.

⁴³⁰ See Krebernik who lists godlists where the names of the mother goddess are enumerated (1997b: 502). One godlist not listed by Krebernik is VS 24, 16 Vs., which is given by Richter (2004: 145).

⁴³¹ Richter 2004: 11; Selz 1992: 197; Rubio 2011: 99.

⁴³² Richter 2004: 11.

⁴³³ Richter 2004: 12; Rubio 2011: 97.

⁴³⁴ Mander 1986: 27.

⁴³⁵ Krebernik 1986: 173, VI: 18.

⁴³⁶ Biggs 1973: 31.

lil's wife Ninlil is enumerated. After Ninlil Šulpa'e is enumerated, and thereafter Ninḫursaġa, as well as eight of her other names.⁴³⁷ It is quite clear in this list that the names following Ninḫursaġa are her names, since they all occur after Šulpa'e, Ninḫursaġa's husband, and the name Ninḫursaġa, and since they are placed between Enlil and his spouse, and Nanna-Su'en and his spouse.⁴³⁸ Richter points to one further Old Babylonian godlist besides the so-called Nippur godlist, where also nine names of the mother goddess are enumerated.⁴³⁹ There are five further Old Babylonian godlists, and two of them enumerate four names of the mother goddess.⁴⁴⁰ In an Old Babylonian godlist from Sultantepe there are five names,⁴⁴¹ and in the Isin godlist six names of the mother goddess are listed.⁴⁴² In an Old Babylonian godlist from Mari, Enlil and his retinue are listed first, followed by Enki with two of his bynames, followed by a break of two lines. Then the moon god Su'en and his wife are listed followed by Ninḫursaġa and Nintu. After these two names of the mother goddess there is a break of two or three lines.⁴⁴³ When we come down to the Neo-Assyrian period the mother goddess is mentioned in one godlist as Bēlet-ilī,⁴⁴⁴ and in another as Diġirmaḥ.⁴⁴⁵ In both cases she is enumerated in the vicinity of Enlil. The most well-known godlist is probably An-Anum, of which the canonical version dates to the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods. This godlist is a series of six tablets, with a seventh tablet being added in a later stage.⁴⁴⁶ In it more or less all the deities in the supraregional pantheon were enumerated. Here we meet the mother goddess with 45 names. The first 20 are said to correspond to Bēlet-ilī, then two

⁴³⁷ 8–16. ^dnin-ḫur-saġ-ġá, ^ddiġir-re-ne, ^dnin-maḥ, ^dnin-tu, ^dnin-men-an-na, ^da-ru-ru, diġir-maḥ, ^dma-ma, ^dbé-le-et-i-lī (Peterson 2009: 14).

⁴³⁸ Cf. Assyriologist Jeremiah Peterson though, who writes that “[d]eities possessing the approximate status of ‘mother goddess’ [...] occur together”, thus understanding the names as referring to different mother goddesses. He further refers to Lambert who has understood the names of the mother goddess as different names of the spouse of Enlil (Peterson 2009: 6). In this case Lambert's understanding is less likely, since these goddess names are found after Šulpa'e, Ninḫursaġa's spouse.

⁴³⁹ TCL 15, 10, 15–24. ^dnin-ḫur-saġ-ġá, diġir-maḥ, ^dnin-maḥ, ^da-ru-ru, ^dnin-tu, ^dnin-du₆-babbar-ra, ^dnin-ubara-ubara, ^dnin-men-an-na, ^dnin-[Š]EŠ, ^dlú-gu-la (Richter 2004: 144).

⁴⁴⁰ *A/K* 2, 4–5 VII: 1–4. ^da-ru-ru, ^dnin-la-ra, ^dnin-maḥ, ^dPAP-x. For the inclusion of the broken name as being a name of the mother goddess, see Richter (2004: 145, fn. 641). This godlist is published in its entirety (which lacunae) by Assyriologist Ernst Weidner. The previous column is broken at the end. After the names of the mother goddess several names of Nergal are enumerated (Weidner 1924–1925: 78f. with footnotes); VS 24, 16, Vs. 1–4. diġir-ma[ḥ], ^dnin-[maḥ], ^dnin-ḫur-saġ-ġá, ^dnin-diġir-[re-(e)-ne] (Richter 2004: 145).

⁴⁴¹ VS 24 19 II': 7–11'. diġir-maḥ, ^dnin-maḥ, ^dnin-tu, ^dnin-tu-maḥ, ^dnin-x x (x)-x (Richter 2004: 145).

⁴⁴² Isin Götterliste (IGL), Text A (IB 1552+) I: 21–27. diġir-[maḥ], ^da-ru-ru, ^dnin-tu, ^dnin-men-na, ^dnin-ḫur-saġ-ġá, ^dnin-x (Richter 2004: 145; Wilcke 1987: 94).

⁴⁴³ Lambert 1985: 182.

⁴⁴⁴ Pinches 1911: 81f.

⁴⁴⁵ Menzel 1981: 148 (text 64).

⁴⁴⁶ Litke 1998: 3.

names correspond to Bēlet Mami, one to Bēlet Šaqummate,⁴⁴⁷ 15 to Bēlet Šūši,⁴⁴⁸ and seven to Ummu pētiāt birkī.⁴⁴⁹ The mother goddess comes after Enlil also here, but she is found in the context of her own spouse, children, and retinue.⁴⁵⁰

3.1.2. Birth-giver, midwife, wet-nurse and nurturer

In the chapters below where the two myths of Ninḫursaġa/Ninmaḫ are analyzed, we will find the aspects of pregnancy, birth and midwifery. As is clear from the role of the goddess, the traits of being a mother are almost ubiquitous in the sources.

As was pointed out earlier, the oldest myth where the mother goddess is acting will not be thoroughly analyzed here, since it lacks many grammatical elements, and is therefore difficult to understand in its entirety.⁴⁵¹ The same goes for the two other of the earliest literary sources where we meet the mother goddess. Nevertheless, since we do get some information on her in these three texts, I will take a look at them. All three sources are dealing with birth, and one also with wet-nursing.

The oldest of the texts are two hymns belonging to the hymn collection from Abū Šalābīḫ, dating to about 2600 BCE.⁴⁵² Already in this hymn cycle Enlil is head of the literary pantheon, which is seen since the collection begins with a description of Nippur, the city of Enlil, and then Enlil is mentioned. Sixty-nine deities are praised in short hymns, and two hymns of three lines respectively are praises to the mother goddess. Besides lacking several grammatical elements, the order of the signs in these very early texts is uncertain.⁴⁵³ I will give a very tentative translation of the two hymns to illustrate which words we might deal with:

Keš, the brick of birth / The house/temple of pigeons, multicolored (and small / Praise be mother Nintu! [---] Earth, water, heaven, reed (?) / Heaven and earth giving birth to the en.⁴⁵⁴ (?) Praise be Nintu!⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁴⁷ *šaqummatu* means “(Toten)Stille” (*AHw*).

⁴⁴⁸ The word *šūšu* means liquorice (*AHw*).

⁴⁴⁹ Ummu pētiāt birkī means “mother, opener of the knees”.

⁴⁵⁰ Litke 1998: 66–83, II: 1–128.

⁴⁵¹ The myth is referred to as “the Barton Cylinder” and is published by Alster and Westenholz (1994).

⁴⁵² See Biggs (1974).

⁴⁵³ Biggs 1974: 45.

⁴⁵⁴ Cf. l. 17 in the Abū Šalābīḫ hymn to Ninirigal, en an-ki tu, which is translated by Assyriologist Giovanni Conti as “à l’en engendrée par Ciel et Terre”. Conti understands Ninirigal as being a goddess of vegetation, and as the daughter of heaven and earth (1993: 344).

⁴⁵⁵ 75–77. keš sig₄ tu-tu / é-tum₁₂^{mušen} ġun tur / ama^d(nin-)tu zà-mì / 212–214. ki a an gi / an ki en tu / ^dtu-da zà-mì. Transliteration taken from Biggs (1974: 48, 52).

Here we meet several of the traits that are characteristic of our mother goddess in the period of classical Sumerian; her city is Keš, which is related to birth, and she seems to be connected to the birth of the en,⁴⁵⁶ just as she is also in later sources.⁴⁵⁷ “The brick of birth” is a part of Ninḫursaġa/Ninmah’s midwifery utensils, and it is met with also in “Enki and the world order” as well as in the Sumerian Temple hymn no. 7 for Ninḫursaġa’s temple in the city of Keš.⁴⁵⁸ I have not found any other instances of the “house/temple of doves”,⁴⁵⁹ and cannot explain its connotations. It seems as if pigeons have a connotation of mourning and anxiety in the Sumerian literature.⁴⁶⁰ Further, doves were used to bring messages to the gods, as when Eanatum sent two adorned doves to Ninḫursaġa in Keš with a message regarding the conflict with the ruler of Umma.⁴⁶¹

On the Stele of the Vultures, which dates to around 2450 BCE, i.e. at the end of the Early Dynastic period, Ninḫursaġa is mentioned in two short – but informative – passages, of which one will be treated here, and the other in the section on destruction below (3.2.7.). The Stele of the Vultures was inscribed to commemorate the victory of King Eanatum of Lagaš over the king of Umma, but also relates his engendering, birth and nursing. The lines of interest for us here deal with the nursing of newborn Eanatum. They read as follows:

She (Inana) put him (Eanatum) on Ninḫursaġa’s right lap, and Ninḫursaġa put him onto her right breast.⁴⁶²

This role of Ninḫursaġa in relation to the king was taken over by the successor of Eanatum, Enanatum I, as well as the latter’s successor, Enmetena.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁶ Rubio writes that the word en is attested from the archaic Uruk texts, meaning “lord”, but that it later also denoted a priest(ess). The word en is used in literary texts dating to the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods, referring to Enmerkar and Gilgameš, the legendary kings of Uruk. During the Early Dynastic period there were two titles referring to rulers; lugal and énsi (Rubio 2009: 33).

⁴⁵⁷ See e.g. Gragg 1969: 176, l. 13’; George 2003: 540f., ll. 45–49 (Standard Babylonian); Black et al. 1998–2006. “A *tigi* to Nintur (Nintur A)”, and *ibid.* “A praise poem of Išme-Dagan (Išme-Dagan A + V)”, l. 45.

⁴⁵⁸ See Kilmer (1987: 212). The Temple hymn of Ninḫursaġa is found in Sjöberg and Bergmann (1969: 22), and “Enki and the world order” (l. 395f.) is published in Black et al. (1998–2006).

⁴⁵⁹ In George’s book *House Most High* (1993), which lists all the temple names of Mesopotamian temple lists, the word for pigeon (tu alt. tum₁₂) is not found.

⁴⁶⁰ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta”, l. 185 and *ibid.* “The cursing of Agade”, l. 219.

⁴⁶¹ Livingstone 2000: 383f.; Steible and Behrens 1982a: 132f.

⁴⁶² iv: 24–29. ^dnin-ḫur-saġ-ra / du₁₀ zi-da-na / mu-ni-tuš / ^dnin-ḫur-saġ-ke₄ / ubur zi-da-né / m[u-na-lá]. The transliteration. is taken from Steible (1982a: 123.).

⁴⁶³ Selz writes that the two latter kings depict this relationship in the sources in an abbreviated form; ga zi kú-a ^dnin-ḫur-saġ(-ka) (1995b: 253), “who was wet-nursed with good milk by Ninḫursaġ(a)”. See also the relevant inscriptions treated by Steible and Behrens (1982a; 1982b).

Finally, the youngest of the three early literary texts is the Barton Cylinder referred to earlier, a long myth which dates to the Sargonic period (c. 2334–2200 BCE).⁴⁶⁴ Here we read:

Enlil had intercourse with Ninḥursaĝa, he kissed her, and poured the semen of seven twins into her womb.⁴⁶⁵

Here Ninḥursaĝa gives birth to a row of deities, which is similar to what happens in “Enki and Ninḥursaĝa”. Further, the seven twins might have an echo in “Enki and Ninmaḥ” as the seven birth goddesses,⁴⁶⁶ as well as by the seven and seven birth goddesses in the Atraḥasīs myth.⁴⁶⁷ On the other hand, seven twins (or seven couples) can perhaps also be understood as a large collective,⁴⁶⁸ thus referring to Ninḥursaĝa’s general role as mother. This general role is found in expressions like “mother of all children” and “mother of the gods”. With the expression “mother of all children” Gudea refers to the goddess under her name Ninḥursaĝa,⁴⁶⁹ whereas he calls Nintu “mother of the gods”. Roughly contemporary with Gudea, the governor of Umma Lu-Utu instead gives this latter epithet to Ninḥursaĝa, and she also has this epithet in “The song of the hoe”.⁴⁷⁰ It is interesting that it is only Nintu who gets the epithet “mother” without a qualifier. I have found six instances of ama^d nin-tu “mother Nintu”,⁴⁷¹ whereas none of the other mother goddess names occur with this epithet. Ninḥursaĝa does however have a very similar epithet once: ama gal, “great mother”.⁴⁷²

The picture of the mother goddess is that she is mother in a general sense, regarding both gods and humans. Further, the sources also show that she is mother of “the blackheaded”, i.e. the Sumerians, and of all people. In Su-

⁴⁶⁴ This is a Sumerian myth, and because of its genre, age, and state of preservation it is very difficult to interpret in its entirety.

⁴⁶⁵ ii: 5–10. ^den-lil^d nin-ḥur-saĝ-ra ĝiš mu-ni-du₁₁ / ne mu-ni-sub₅ / a maš imin š[à] mu-^rna¹-ni¹-ru. Transliteration taken from Alster and Westenholz (1994: 18).

⁴⁶⁶ The names of goddesses four and five are written with the same signs, ^dnin-BÁRA, which some scholars have seen as a repetition of the same name rather than representing two goddesses, whereas others count both, and therefore count eight names. (BÁRA can also be read šar₆.) See further on these goddesses in section 5.6.2. on the womb goddesses.

⁴⁶⁷ See below, section 5.6.2.1.

⁴⁶⁸ Cf. the seven judges in the netherworld in “Inana’s descent to the nether world” in Black et al. (1998–2006, l. 167). Cf. also the Old Babylonian Bēlet-ilī song edited by Römer (1967–1968: 12ff.) where the mother goddess under her name Mama is said to have borne one, two, three [*broken*].

⁴⁶⁹ On clay cones, Steible 1991a: 334; Edzard 1997: 159; and Gudea Statue A, Steible 1991a: 154f.; Edzard 1997: 29f.

⁴⁷⁰ ama diĝir-re(-e)-ne, see Gudea Statue A (Steible 1991a: 156f.; Edzard 1997: 30); Lu-Utu 3 and 4 (Steible 1991b: 345f.); “The song of the hoe”, l. 46 (Black et al. 1998–2006).

⁴⁷¹ ama^d nin-tu is found in Temple hymns no. 29 and 39 (Sjöberg 1969); “The Keš Temple hymn”, (Gragg 1969: 169: l. 39); “A *tigi* to Nintur”, l. 4; “A *tigi* to Suen for Ibbi-Suen (Ibbi-Suen A)”, ll. 26, 29; and “A praise poem of Šulgi (Šulgi A)”, l. 43 (Black et al. 1998–2006).

⁴⁷² ama^r gal^d nin-ḥur^r-[saĝ-ĝā] is found in “A hymn to Nanna (Nanna G)”, l. 10 (Black et al. 1998–2006) and in “The Keš Temple hymn”, l. 78 (Gragg 1969: 172).

merologist Gene Gragg's publication of the Keš Temple hymn we are informed of the temple (belonging to Ninḫursaġa): "Temple, which gives birth to countless peoples, seed which has sprouts",⁴⁷³ and in the Sumerian Temple hymns we read: "E-suga, path of growing (?) of the life of the black-headed".⁴⁷⁴

The picture of the mother goddess as mother in a general sense is also found when describing her role as mother of the ruler/king. As was seen in the hymns from Abū Šalābīḥ the mother goddess seems to have been related to the birth of the en already in those days. Whether she was the one giving birth is unclear. In the Keš Temple hymn, rulers are born in her temple: "Temple, which gives birth to kings, which determines the fate of the land".⁴⁷⁵ In "Enki and the world order" she does not give birth to rulers herself, since there it is said that "she is to be the midwife of the land! The birthing of kings and lords is to be in her hands!".⁴⁷⁶ The mother goddess is however said to have given birth to Ašgi, the hero of Keš, in the Keš Temple hymn, and I assume that he is a divine representation of the earthly ruler.

In the composition "A *tigi* to Nintur" we are also informed that the goddess does herself give birth to rulers:

On the holy throne-dais, Nintu has given birth to the king [...] She has given birth to the en priest, she has given birth to the lagar priest. On the holy throne-dais, Nintu has given birth to the king.⁴⁷⁷

As is seen in these examples, the mother goddess is not pointed out as the birth-giver of a particular ruler; she is instead depicted as the mother of rulers in a general sense.⁴⁷⁸ It is however common that it is said that she has formed the limbs of a specific king,⁴⁷⁹ and that she stands by at a king's

⁴⁷³ Gragg 1969: 176, l. 12'.

⁴⁷⁴ 370. ē-sù-ga-a ġir MÚ.MÚ zi saġ ġi₆-ga. Transliteration taken from Sjöberg and Bergmann (1969: 38). Cf. Black et al. 1998–2006. "The lament for Eridug", l. 11; "A hymn to Nisaba (Nisaba A)", l. 8; "The building of Ninġirsu's temple (Gudea, cylinders A and B)", l. 450 and "An *adab* to Suen for Ibbi-Suen (Ibbi-Suen C)", ll. 48f.

⁴⁷⁵ Gragg 1969: 176, l. 13'. In Black et al. 1998–2006. "The Keš temple hymn", l. 79, we read of this temple that "Nintur the great mother assists at births there". I am not sure that this is the correct reading. The verb translated as "assist" is ġá-ġá (*marū* of ġar). In other places with assistance at birth the verb is gub, see Black et al. 1998–2006. "A praise poem of Ur-Namma (Ur-Namma C)", l. 47; "A hymn to Nungal (Nungal A)", l. 71; "Enki and Ninmah", l. 36. I therefore see it as probable that the line of the Keš Temple hymn shall be understood as something like "Nintu, the great mother, brings about births there".

⁴⁷⁶ Black et al. 1998–2006. "Enki and the world order", ll. 401f.

⁴⁷⁷ 9. lugal bára kù-ga ^dnin-tu-re bí-in-ù-tu / [...] 11–12. [en] mu-un-ù-tu lagar mu-un-ù-tu / 'lugal' bara kù-ga ^dnin-tu-re bí-in-ù-tu. Transliteration adapted, and translation taken, from Black et al. 1998–2006. "A *tigi* to Nintur".

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. Black et al. 1998–2006. "The building of Ninġirsu's temple (Gudea, cylinders A and B)", l. 66, where King Gudea says to the goddess Ġatumdu that she gave birth to him.

⁴⁷⁹ Black et al. 1998–2006. "A praise poem of Lipit-Eštar (Lipit-Eštar A)", ll. 29f.; "An *adab* to Inana for Ur-Ninurta (Ur-Ninurta D)", l. 15; "An *adab* to Inana for Rīm-Sin (Rīm-Sin H)", ll. 4f. and "A praise poem of Ur-Namma (Ur-Namma C)", l. 24.

birth.⁴⁸⁰ Further, as in the case of Eanatum, Enanatum I, and Enmetena, as well as other kings, she nurtures specific kings.⁴⁸¹ In all of these cases but one, her name Nintu is used. In the single case of “Enmerkar and En-suḫgir-ana” she is called Aruru.

3.1.3. Family relations

We saw earlier that Ninḫursaġa and Enlil had sex and got seven twins in the Early Dynastic IIIb Barton Cylinder, which indicates a marital relationship between the two. Such a relation between them is also found in one text where the mother goddess is said to be the mother of Pabilsaġ, and in two where she is the mother of Ninurta. In these cases we meet the mother goddess under her name Nintu.⁴⁸²

Another common relation between Enlil and the mother goddess is as brother and sister, and in these cases the mother goddess is met with under the name Aruru.⁴⁸³ In this role we meet her e.g. in “Enlil and Sud”, where it is said that Aruru and Sud shall become sisters-in-law. Here Aruru has the task to lead Enlil’s bride Ninlil/Sud into the wedding chamber.

When we meet the mother goddess under the name Ninḫursaġa her common spouse is Šulpa’e. It is only in relation to him that Ninḫursaġa is called wife (dam).⁴⁸⁴ Their son is called Ašgi in the Keš Temple hymn.⁴⁸⁵

In An-Anum PapNIĜINġara is mentioned as the son of Šulpa’e, which makes it likely that he is also the son of the mother goddess, since Šulpa’e is her spouse there.⁴⁸⁶ Ašgi is also mentioned in An-Anum, and besides him Lil and Lisin are enumerated there as prominent sons of the mother goddess under her name Diġirmaḫ.⁴⁸⁷ Then a row of 16 children of the mother goddess is enumerated.⁴⁸⁸ There is also another tradition where 14 children of the mother goddess are enumerated. Krebernik writes that the 14 children might correspond to the womb goddesses created by the mother goddess in

⁴⁸⁰ Black et al. 1998–2006. “A praise poem of Išme-Dagan (Išme-Dagan A + V)”, l. 44, and “A praise poem of Ur-Namma (Ur-Namma C)”, l. 47.

⁴⁸¹ Black et al. 1998–2006. “A praise poem of Šulgi (Šulgi A)”, l. 43; “Enmerkar and En-suḫgir-ana”, ll. 94f., and Steible 1991b: 337 (Neo Sumerian king Puzurmama). Cf. *ibid.* “A hymn to Ninkasi (Ninkasi A)”, l. 2, where the goddess Ninkasi is said to have been “tenderly cared for by Ninḫursaġa”.

⁴⁸² Black et al. 1998–2006. “Pabilsaġ’s journey to Nibru”, l. 30; “Ninurta’s return to Nibru: a *šir-gida* to Ninurta”, l. 2, and “An *adab* to Ninurta for Lipit-Eštar (Lipit-Eštar D)”, l. 9f.

⁴⁸³ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enlil and Sud”, l. 71; “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta”, l. 413; “The death of Gilgameš”, l. 9, “The temple hymns”, l. 98; “Enki and the world order”, l. 395 and “The lament for Eridug”, l. 9.

⁴⁸⁴ Black et al. 1998–2006. “The death of Gilgameš”, ll. 19f.; “A hymn to Šul-pa-e (Šul-pa-e A)”, l. 14, and “The song of the hoe”, ll. 46–48.

⁴⁸⁵ Gragg 1969.

⁴⁸⁶ Litke 1998: 73, II: 60.

⁴⁸⁷ Litke 1998: 74f., II: 64, 68, 70.

⁴⁸⁸ Litke 1998: 82, II: 123.

the Atraḥasīs myth.⁴⁸⁹ As will be seen below, the mother goddess gives birth to Ninnisi in “Enki and Ninḥursaġa”, and she shall perhaps be seen as the mother of the eight healing deities that she gives birth to when healing Enki.

3.1.4. Relation to power and kingship

It has been pointed out by several scholars that the order of the highest deities changed in the Mesopotamian pantheon over time, so that Ninḥursaġa/Ninmaḥ was moved from the third to the fourth place, changing places with Enki,⁴⁹⁰ as in the following table:

Table 2. The position of the mother goddess among the four highest deities

An	Enlil	Ninḥursaġa/Ninmaḥ	Enki
An	Enlil	Enki	Ninḥursaġa/Ninmaḥ

In the literary texts, Ninḥursaġa/Ninmaḥ is in most cases placed as the last deity among these high deities of four.⁴⁹¹ In a couple of cases no fourth deity is enumerated, and then Enki is missing. In “Enki’s journey to Nibru” Nintu comes as the third deity,⁴⁹² which is natural here, since Enki himself encounters the three deities whom he offers a meal. Further, in Gudea Cylinders A and B, by Black et al. called “The building of Ninġirsu’s temple”, Ninmaḥ is enumerated as the third deity after An and Enlil.⁴⁹³ In the temple hymn of Adab, Nintu is mentioned as the first deity before Enlil and Enki,⁴⁹⁴ but this can be seen as a special case, since the hymn is for Ninḥursaġa’s temple in Adab. We find Ninḥursaġa as the third deity, enumerated before Enki, in “A praise poem of Ur-Namma (Ur-Namma I)”, where she comes after Enlil and Ninlil.⁴⁹⁵ Similarly, Nintu is enumerated as the third deity in the Keš Temple

⁴⁸⁹ Krebernik 1997b: 508f.

⁴⁹⁰ Jacobsen 1976: 110; Kramer 1976: 14f.; Kramer and Maier 1989: 2; cf. Krebernik 1997b: 512.

⁴⁹¹ See Black et al. 1998–2006. “The lament for Sumer and Urim”, ll. 496f. (Ninmaḥ, Isin-Larsa); “The Flood story”, l. 9 (Ninḥursaġa, late Old Babylonian); “Lugalbanda in the mountain cave”, ll. 373, 385 (Ninḥursaġa, Isin-Larsa); “A hymn to Nanna (Nanna O)”, l. 7 (Ninḥursaġa, Šulgi); “The lament for Nibru”, l. 237 (Ninmaḥ, Isin-Larsa), and “A *tigi* to Suen for Ibbi-Suen (Ibbi-Suen A)”, ll. 25f. (Nintu, Isin-Larsa). See also Peterson, where Nanna-Su’en is posited as the highest god, with An, Enlil, Enki, Ninḥursaġa, Utu and Inana, in that order, being advisors of Nanna-Su’en (2011: 283f.).

⁴⁹² See Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki’s journey to Nibru”, ll. 104–108.

⁴⁹³ See Black et al. 1998–2006. “The building of Ninġirsu’s temple (Gudea, cylinders A and B)”, ll. 1261–1263.

⁴⁹⁴ Sjöberg and Bergmann chose to read this line as follows: “Mother Nintu – An and Enlil determine your destiny!” (1969: 38, l. 369).

⁴⁹⁵ See Black et al. 1998–2006. “A praise poem of Ur-Namma (Ur-Namma I)”, ll. 8–11.

hymn, here after An and Enlil. Here Enki is missing.⁴⁹⁶ In an Akkadian royal inscription of the early Old Babylonian king Ipiq-Eštar of Malgium the mother goddess under her name Bēlet-ilī is enumerated as the third deity after Anum (Sum. An) and Enlil, and before Ea (Sum. Enki).⁴⁹⁷

Three of the literary sources where Enki replaces Ninḫursaġa/Ninmaḫ as the third deity date to the Isin-Larsa period; one mentions King Šulgi, which makes its date no earlier than his reign, and one dates to the late Old Babylonian period.

Ninḫursaġa/Ninmaḫ was mentioned before Enki by Gudea, Ur-Namma and in the Keš Temple hymn. Gudea's "The building of Ninġirsu's temple" is slightly predating the Ur III period, and the hymns of Ur-Namma belong to the oldest of the royal hymns, which culminate in those of his son Šulgi.⁴⁹⁸ The Keš Temple hymn dates to the Old Babylonian period, but has a forerunner from Early Dynastic IIIa Abū Šalābīḥ, i.e. the earliest period of literature. The slight difference in date between the texts might reflect the historical development when Enki took over Ninḫursaġa/Ninmaḫ's role as the third most important deity. To note is that Enki is missing in Gudea and in the Keš Temple hymn, which probably indicates a different tradition.

Ninḫursaġa/Ninmaḫ could be used as a legitimation of both other deities and kings. In "Enki and the world order" Enki says that:

With An, the king, on An's dais, I oversee justice. With Enlil, looking out over the lands, I decree good destinies. He has placed in my hands the decreeing of fates in the place where the sun rises. I am cherished by Nintur. I am named with a good name by Ninḫursaġa.⁴⁹⁹

Here Enki is presented very much as a king who is legitimated by the greatest deities. The role of Nintu/Ninḫursaġa is to tend and name Enki, which reminds of her role at the birth of a king. In Temple hymn no. 39 for Ninḫursaġa's house in ҒI.ZA it is said that:

Mother Nintu, the lady of creation, performs her task within your dark place, binding the true suḫ crown on the new-born king, setting the crown on the new-born lord who is secure in her hand. The midwife of heaven and earth, Ninḫursaġa.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁶ Gragg 1969: 169, ll. 38f.

⁴⁹⁷ Frayne 1990: 669.

⁴⁹⁸ Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 9.

⁴⁹⁹ 74–76. an lugal-da bára an-na-ka di si sá-e-me-en / ^den-lil-da kur-ra igi ġál-la-ka nam du₁₀ tar-ra-me-en / nam tar-ra ki u₄ è-a-ke₄ šu-ġá mu-un-ġál 77–78. ^dnin-tu-re mí zi du₁₁-ga-me-en / ^dnin-ḫur-saġ-ġá-ke₄ mu du₁₀ sa₄-a-me-en. Transliteration and translation with adaptations, taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. "Enki and the world order").

⁵⁰⁰ 500–504. ama ^dnin-tu nin-ulutim-ma / šà ki gi₆-gi₆-ga kíġ-ak-e / lugal ù-tu mùš zi kēš-de / en ù-tu saġ-men ġá-ġá šu-na i-ġál / šà-zu an-ki. Transliteration taken from Sjöberg and Bergmann (1969: 46f.).

The power of Ninḫursaĝa/Ninmaḫ can be said to have been incorporated by Enlil and Ninurta. In “Enlil and Sud” we read that:

The lord [Enlil] – his utterings are powerful – also determined a destiny for the lady, his preferred woman; Nintu, the lady who gives birth, the lady who spreads the knees,⁵⁰¹ he gave her as name.⁵⁰²

Similarly, Ninḫursaĝa/Ninmaḫ is named by her son Ninurta in “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta”:

He [Ninurta] looked at her with his look of life and said to her: woman, since you came to the mountains / Ninmaḫ, since you entered the rebel lands because of me / since you did not stay far away from me when I turned to the fierce battle, / I am the hero; the heap that I heaped up / – its name will be mountain, (and) you will be its lady, / now, (that) is the destiny decreed by Ninurta. From this day one will say Ninḫursaĝa. So it will be.⁵⁰³

The Sumerian verb *še*₂₁ was not only used for denoting “to name”, but also for “to appoint a person to an office”.⁵⁰⁴ Thus, it becomes clear that in the above excerpts the ideological aim is to present the functions of Nintu/Ninḫursaĝa as bestowed upon her by Enlil and Ninurta, and thereby posing them above her in rank.

3.1.5. Traces of cultic expressions

In “The death of Gilgamesh” the mother goddess under her name Aruru is related to the cult of the dead. We read that she is said to provide the people with offspring for the purpose of uttering their names when dead, so that they are not forgotten.⁵⁰⁵ Thus, there was a close conceptual relation between offspring and the ancestor cult. Ninurta is decreeing destinies for the defeated stones in “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta”, and three stones treated as one get the fate to be part of the festival of the spirits of the dead as well as part of the cult of Ninḫursaĝa.⁵⁰⁶ This passage will be treated fur-

⁵⁰¹ Cf. ^dama du₁₀ bad which is translated into Akkadian as Ummu pētiāt birkī in An-Anum (Litke 1998: 71, II: 39).

⁵⁰² 10–11. en du₁₁-ga-ni uru_x(URU×URUDU) nin munus tam-[t]am-ma-ni nam ḫé-ⁿⁱ(RI)-ib^{tar}-re / ^dnin-tu-re nin ū-tu nin du₁₀ bad mu-*še*₂₁ m[u-ri]-in-sa₄. Transliteration adapted from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enlil and Sud”, Version B) and Civil (1983: 57, II. 151f.).

⁵⁰³ 389–392. iĝi nam-ti-la-ka-ni mu-un-ši-in-bar ĝu mu-na-dé-e / munus kur-šè i-im-ĝen-ne-en-na-ĝin₇ / ^dnin-maḫ nam-ĝu₁₀-šè ki-bal-a mu-un-kur₉-re-en-na-ĝin₇ / mè ní ḫuš-ba ri-a-ĝá la-ba-an-sud-dè-en-na-ĝin₇ 393–396. ur-saĝ-me-en ĝu-ru-um ĝar-ra-ĝá / ḫur-saĝ mu-bi ḫé-em za-e nin-bi ḫé-em / i-ne-éš nam tar-ra ^dnin-urta-ka / u₄-da ^dnin-ḫur-saĝ-ĝá di-šè ur₅ ḫé-en-na-nam-ma-àm. Transliteration adapted from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta”).

⁵⁰⁴ CAD N/1 and AHw sub *nabû*.

⁵⁰⁵ Black et al. 1998–2006. “The death of Gilgamesh”, II. 3–10.

⁵⁰⁶ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta”, II. 642–644.

ther below in section 4.14. It is sufficient for now to say that there is a connection between the mother goddess and the ancestor cult also in that text.

Connected to death is lament, and Ninḫursaġa/Ninmaḥ is found several times as a lamenting goddess. Lamenting is a common theme in Sumerian literature, which the lamentations over the destruction of several cities show.⁵⁰⁷ In “The death of Ur-Namma” Ninmaḥ laments the death of the king.⁵⁰⁸ In “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta” she laments when her son Ninurta has struck down rebellion in the mountains:

Ninmaḥ was not sleeping because of the place where he [Ninurta] was engendered. She covered her outside with wool, like a heavy ewe. She lamented greatly about the mountains to which there were no roads (anymore).⁵⁰⁹

There are other texts where the mother goddess laments in the likeness of an animal. In an eršemma (a cult song) of Ninḫursaġa we read that the lamenting goddess is searching for her young like a cow searching for her calf, an ewe for her lamb and a goat for her kid.⁵¹⁰ In another song she searches for her young donkey and mule.⁵¹¹

“A praise poem of Lipit-Eštar (Lipit-Eštar B)” gives at hand that the mother goddess is also connected to incantations and lustrations, since here, she is choosing the king as an išib priest of Keš (whereas he e.g. gets a head-dress by Enki and a throne-dais by Ninisina).⁵¹² The išib priest is the Sumerian version of the Akkadian *āšipu* priest who healed people with incantations. The *āšipu* will be discussed further below in section 4.15.1. Ninḫursaġa is also mentioned in two birth incantations.⁵¹³

In the Keš Temple hymn we read in the translation of Gragg that Nintu is giving an oracle for the temple:

Temple founded by An, praised by Enlil, given an oracle by mother Nintu.⁵¹⁴

The word translated with “oracle” is ešbar, which means not only “oracle”, but also “decision”. The semantic context of this word is to decide how it will be, to decide or get an oracular answer about e.g. the future of a temple

⁵⁰⁷ See the City laments in Black et al. (1998–2006).

⁵⁰⁸ Black et al. 1998–2006. “The death of Ur-Namma (Ur-Namma A)”, l. 10.

⁵⁰⁹ 369–371. ^dnin-maḥ-e ki ḡiš du₁₁-ga-ni-šè ù nu-um-[šī-ib-ku-ku] / siki u₈ dugud-gin₇ bar-ra bi-in-dul / i-lu kur ḡiri nu-ḡál-la-bi gal-gal-bi mi-ni-ib-bé. Transliteration adapted from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta”).

⁵¹⁰ Kramer 1982: 142.

⁵¹¹ Jacobsen 1973: 283.

⁵¹² Black et al. 1998–2006. “A praise poem of Lipit-Eštar (Lipit-Eštar B)”, l. 46.

⁵¹³ One is treated by Sigrist (1980), and the other by Farber (1984).

⁵¹⁴ 38–39. é an-né ki ḡar-ra ^den-líl-le zà-mí du₁₁-ga / ama ^dnin-tu-ra eš-bar kíḡ du₁₁-ga. Transliteration and translation taken from Gragg (1969: 169).

when it is founded,⁵¹⁵ or to decide the future of a city.⁵¹⁶ The decision is closely connected to Enlil, the king in the literary and state pantheon,⁵¹⁷ as well as to kingship, the determining of destinies and the sacred rules of the universe.⁵¹⁸ Here we have a couple of contexts of formal rule where we find the word *ešbar*:

to change the place of kingship, to suspend the seeking of oracles (*ešbar*), to remove kingship from the land...⁵¹⁹

In the court of the assembly, the place of rendering great verdicts, they no longer know correct decisions (*ešbar*).⁵²⁰

Thus, the oracle for the temple given by Nintu can be understood as one of a firm future, and the temple being a base of rulership. A last connection between the mother goddess and the context of cultic activities is found in two utterances of King Šulgi who likens himself with Nintu:

Since from birth I am also a Nintur (creator deity), wise in all matters, I can recognise the omens of that extispicy in a pure place.⁵²¹

I am the very Nintur (creator deity) of the collections of omens.⁵²²

As we see, King Šulgi makes a connection between Nintu and omens. Although he mentions several different deities in his hymns, he chooses Nintu as a creation deity in relation to omens. On the one hand it can be argued that he saw her as *the* creation deity, and on the other that she was comprehended

⁵¹⁵ Black et al. 1998–2006. “The building of Ninġirsu’s temple (Gudea, cylinders A and B)”, ll. 553f., 888, 932f.

⁵¹⁶ Black et al. 1998–2006. “The lament for Nibru”, ll. 22f.

⁵¹⁷ Black et al. 1998–2006. E.g. “A *tigi* to Enlil for Ur-Namma (Ur-Namma B)”, l. 46; “An ululumama to Suen for Ibbi-Suen (Ibbi-Suen D)”, l. 14 and “An *adab* to Enlil for Būr-Suen (Būr-Suen B)”, l. 4. (Enlil is called Nunamnir in the latter text).

⁵¹⁸ For the connection between the oracle and the sacred rules of the universe and decreeing of fates (*ġarza*, me; *namtar*), see Black et al. 1998–2006. E.g. “A *tigi* to Enki for Ur-Ninurta (Ur-Ninurta B)”, ll. 1–3 (me); “A *šir-ġida* to Nuska (Nuska A)”, l. 16 (*ġarza*); “An ululumama to Suen for Ibbi-Suen (Ibbi-Suen D)” (me); “The temple hymns”, ll. 65, 266 (me); “Enki and the world order”, l. 43 (*namtar*); “An *adab* (?) to Suen for Šu-Suen (Šu-Suen F)”, l. 15f. (*namtar*) and “A hymn to Enki (?) for Išme-Dagan (Išme-Dagan X)”, ll. 1f. (*namtar*).

⁵¹⁹ 17–19. *nam-lugal-la ki-tuš-bi kūr-ru-dè / eš-bar kíġ-e šu lá-e-dè / nam-lugal kalam-ma kar-kar-re-dè*. Transliteration taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. “The lament for Sumer and Urim”).

⁵²⁰ 20–21. *ub-šu-unken-na ki di gal ku₅-ru / eš-bar-e si sá ba-ra-an-zu-uš-àm*. Transliteration adapted from Black et al. (1998–2006. “The lament for Nibru”).

⁵²¹ 97–98. *ša-ta^d nin-tu gal-zu niġ-nam-ma in-ga-me-na-ta / uzu-ga ki dadag-ga-ba ġiškim mu-ni-zu*. Transliteration with adaptations, and translation, taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. “A praise poem of Šulgi (Šulgi C)”).

⁵²² 132. *ġiri ġen-na inim uzu-ga-ka^d nin-tu-bi ġe₂₆-e-me-en*. Transliteration with adaptations, and translation, taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. “A praise poem of Šulgi (Šulgi B)”).

as having a connection to omens, which like oracles was a way of seeing the future.

We see that the traces of cultic activities in relationship to our mother goddess deal with ancestor cult (or cult of the dead), lamenting death and loss; and regarding incantations the cult relates to healing (at childbirth). Further, the mother goddess is related to deciding and finding out about the future. All these areas were important for people in general, regardless of which deity they worshipped. Therefore these areas can be found also in relation to other deities, although there was a specialization in the literary texts and the godlists.⁵²³

3.1.6. Natural environment

As the mother goddess' name Ninḫursaġa makes clear, she is the “Lady of the mountain”. This is also reflected in the sources; the mother goddess is herself born in the mountains, she comes from there, and she gives birth there. In “A *tigi* to Nintur” we read about her that she is:

born in the mountains (ḫursaġ), the pure place⁵²⁴

and we have seen above that in “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta” it is said that she gave birth to Ninurta in the mountain. What do the mountains of Ninḫursaġa look like, then? Ninurta gives a description when he proclaims how it will be there:

Let its meadows produce herbs for you. Let its slopes produce honey and wine for you. Let its hillsides grow cedars, cypress, juniper and box for you. Let it make abundant for you ripe fruits, as a garden. Let the mountain (ḫursaġ) supply you richly with divine perfumes. Let it mine gold and silver for you, make [] for you. Let it smelt copper and tin for you, make its tribute for you. Let the mountains make wild animals teem for you. Let the mountain increase the fecundity of quadrupeds for you. You, O Queen, become equal to An, wearing a terrifying splendour. [---] Lady, I have given you great powers: may you be exalted.⁵²⁵

⁵²³ See e.g. Black and Green (2008), under the entries “Divination”, “Ereškigal” and “Gula”.

⁵²⁴ 2. ḫur-saġ ki sikil-la ù-tu-da. Transliteration with adaptations, and translation, taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. “A *tigi* to Nintur”).

⁵²⁵ 397–400. šà-túm-bi šim ḫa-ra-an-mú / gú-gú-bi lâl ġeštín ḫa-ra-an-mú / ġiš^{er}in ġiš^{su}-úr-mén ġiš^{za}-ba-lum ġiš^{taš}karin du₈-du₈-bi ḫa-ra-an-mú / kiri₆-gin₇ níġ-sa-ḫa šu ḫu-mu-ra-ni-ib-tag 401–404. ḫur-saġ-e ir nam-diġir-ra ḫu-mu-ra-an-[gu]-ul-gú⁷-e / kù-siġ₁₇ kù-babbar ḫu-mu-ra-ab-bal-e 𐎶.𐎠.𐎠.𐎠 ḫu-mu-ra-ab-ak / urudu nagga ḫu-mu-ra-ab-zal-le gún-bi ḫu-mu-ra-an-ak / kur-[re] máš-anše ḫa-ra-ab-lu-e / 405–406. ḫur-saġ-e níġ-úr-4-e numun ḫa-ra-ni-ib-i-i / za-e nin-me-en i-da-sá-sá-a an-gin₇ ní ḫuš gùr-ru [---] 410. [...] nin me maḥ ma-ra-an-šúm za-e hé-em-il-e. Transliteration with adaptations, and translation, taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta”).

Thus, the pure mountains of Ninḫursaĝa are rich in natural resources and full of wild game. Ninḫursaĝa was not only associated with the mountains, but also with the steppe or desert (eden).⁵²⁶ Her temple in Keš was itself seen as a high mountain located in the steppe, and it was also likened to a lion, a predator of the steppe:

Respected Keš, your inside is a deep inside, your outside is elevated. Great lion [...] on the high plain (an-eden), prowling the plain, mountain (ḫursaĝ) founded with incantations.⁵²⁷

House Keš, crown of the land, prominent fierce bull, growing with the mountains (ḫursaĝ), embracing the heavens.⁵²⁸

House, mountain (kur) of abundance which passes the days in glory; house of Ninḫursaĝa which establishes the life of the Land! House, great mountain (ḫursaĝ).⁵²⁹

Temple, borne by a lion⁵³⁰

Ninḫursaĝa was also related to MAR.TU, Akk. *amurru*, which is seen in “A *šir-gida* to Martu (Martu A)” where she is said to be his mother, and An his father. MAR.TU has earlier been understood as referring to the west, as well as the people denoted by the same term, nowadays called the Amorites.⁵³¹ Sumerologist Piotr Michalowski has shown however, that the Amurru lands were rather situated to the east, northeast and northwest of Sumer, and not to the west.⁵³² If we turn to the deified Martu, we see that he was related to mountains and lions just as his mother Ninḫursaĝa:

Martu, august youth, who completely controls the distant mountains (kur) as far as their borders, who possesses the strength of a savage lion, who occupies a holy dais in the mountains (ḫursaĝ), the pure place [...], who is imbued

⁵²⁶ See also Black et al. 1998–2006. “Nanše and the birds (Nanše C)”, ll. 2–6, and cf. “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta”, l. 581.

⁵²⁷ 90–92. *kèš^{ki} aratta^{ki} šà-zu šà sig bar-zu al-íl / piriĝ gal an-eden-na ḫé-šed-da eden-na dag-ga / ḫur-saĝ gal mu₇-mu₇-ta ri-a*. Transliteration adapted from Sjöberg and Bergmann (1969: 22).

⁵²⁸ 14–15. *é kèš^{ki} muš kalam-ma gu₄ ḫuš aratta / ḫur-saĝ-da mú-a an-da gú lá-a*. Transliteration taken from Gragg (1969: 167).

⁵²⁹ 58G–I. *é kur ḫé-ĝál giri₁₇-zal u₄ zal-zal-le / é^d nin-ḫur-saĝ-ĝá zi kalam-ma ki-bi-šè ĝar / é ḫur-saĝ*. Transliteration and translation taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. “The Keš temple hymn”). (This text variant is not found in Gragg (1969)).

⁵³⁰ 75. *é piriĝ ù-tu*. Transliteration and translation taken from Gragg (1969: 171).

⁵³¹ Buccellati 1966: 10, 236, and *AHw* sub *amurru*.

⁵³² Michalowski 2011: 94, 104. It has been argued that the Amorites lived in the area of the mountain Jebel Bishri, as well as in the Syrian desert as nomads or semi-nomads (Buccellati 1966: e.g. 236, 330, 336), but Michalowski argues that they were not generally nomads. Their livelihood was more probably related to the area where they lived than to their linguistic background (2011: 89).

with great fearsomeness, whom holy An engendered, who appears gloriously with numerous divine powers! His own mother Ninḫursaġa made his form excel Medim-ša's so that no one should threaten him. [---] His father [...] presented to him the pure hills [...], the lapis-lazuli mountains; he presented to him the Martu lands, the lapis-lazuli mountains.⁵³³

The overall picture of the natural habitat of Ninḫursaġa is that it is a mountainous area with coveted raw materials, wild game and fierce lions. The relationship between Ninḫursaġa and wild animals is pointed to by Heimpel, who writes that the copper relief with two stags and a lionheaded eagle above the door of Ninḫursaġa's temple in al-'Ubad "wohl N. als Göttin der wilden Tiere verherrlichte".⁵³⁴ Referring to Jacobsen, he also writes that earlier Ninḫursaġa was seen as the mistress of wild animals, and Nintu as the mistress of domesticated animals, but that these two were assimilated.⁵³⁵

Ninḫursaġa is further associated with the Martu-people in north-west, north, and east. Since Aratta, which was located in Iran, is mentioned in both the Sumerian Temple hymns and the Keš Temple hymn,⁵³⁶ this might also relate her to the eastern mountains. Sumerologists Åke Sjöberg and Eugen Bergmann write that "aratta^{ki} is very often mentioned together with kēši^{ki}", and they further suggest that aratta in the Sumerian Temple hymns could be understood as Akk. *kabtu*, heavy, important, which is an attested reading of the term.⁵³⁷ Black et al. follow the suggestion of Sjöberg and Bergmann in their translation. I will return to the relation between Ninḫursaġa and the mountains below in section 5.4. ("How shall we understand Ḫarali, the place where the minor gods work?").

3.1.7. Destruction

Just as the mother goddess is a source of life, she is also a source of destruction. Both these aspects are pointed out in "Enlil in the Ekur (Enlil A)", with the ideology that these powers of hers come from Enlil:

Without the Great Mountain Enlil, Nintur would not kill, she would not strike dead; no cow would drop its calf in the cattle-pen, no ewe would bring forth a [] lamb in its sheepfold; the living creatures which multiply by themselves

⁵³³ 2–3. ^dmar-tu šul maḫ kur idim-ma zà-bi-šè til-la / usu piriġ huš ḫur-saġ ki sikil-la bára kù-ge si-a [...] 5–7. ní gal ġur-ru an kù-ge tu-da me šár-ra dalla è / ama ugu-ni ^dnin-ḫur-saġ-ġá-ke₄ / alan-na-ni me-dím-ša im-mi-in-diri na-me saġ nu-mu-e-šúm [---] 29–32. a-a ugu-ni [...] / an sù-ud ki daġal-ba im-mi-in-si [...] / ḫur-saġ sikil kur ^{na4}za-ġin-na saġ-e-eš mu-ni-in-[riġ₇] / kur mar-tu <kur ^{na4}za-ġin-na saġ-e-eš mu-ni-in-riġ₇>. Transliteration with adaptations, and translation, taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. "A *šir-gida* to Martu (Martu A)").

⁵³⁴ Heimpel 2001b: 379.

⁵³⁵ Heimpel 2001b: 379; Jacobsen 1973: 285.

⁵³⁶ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 22, l. 90; Gragg 1969: 167, ll. 13f.

⁵³⁷ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 70.

would not lie down in their [⁵³⁸] [...], the four-legged animals would not propagate, they would not mate.

The mother goddess can destroy her own city as well as her own creatures:

Aruru, the sister of Enlil, destroyed her city Uru-saĝ-rig. In Keš, the creation place of the Land, the people saw inside its holy sanctuary where daylight had been unknown. She destroyed it but did not abandon it.⁵³⁹

[A]fter An had frowned upon all the lands, after Enlil had looked favourably on an enemy land, after Nintur had scattered the creatures that she had created, after Enki had altered the course of the Tigris and Euphrates. [---]

An frightened the very dwellings of Sumer, the people were afraid. Enlil blew an evil storm, silence lay upon the city. Nintur bolted the door of the storehouses of the Land. Enki blocked the water in the Tigris and the Euphrates.⁵⁴⁰

On the Stele of the Vultures we read that “the man of Umma” swears an oath “by the life of Ninĥursaĝa”, that he will never cross Ninĝirsu’s boundary again, never change the course of the irrigation canals, and never remove the boundary stele again. If “the man of Umma” should transgress what he has sworn, it is hoped that Ninĥursaĝa’s net shall fall over him.⁵⁴¹ Although Ninĥursaĝa appears as the one who wet-nursed the ruler, as on the Stele of the Vultures, the function as nurturer of the ruler is mostly found in a context of war.⁵⁴²

Despite her fierce side, the mother goddess also laments the destruction of her city and creatures:

⁵³⁸ 124–126. kur gal ^den-lil-da nu-me-a / ^dnin-tu nu-ug₅-ge saĝ ĝiš nu-ra-ra / áb-e ^étùr-ra amar-bi nu-šub-bé 127–130. u₈-e amaš-bi-a sila₄ ĝá gig nu-è / a-za-lu-lu ní-ba lu-a / TUG-bi KUL-ba nu-mu-ni-ib-nú-nú / máš-anše niĝ-úr-4-e numun nu-mu-ni-ib-è e-ne sù-ud-bi nu-mu-un-u₅. Transliteration with adaptations, and translation, from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enlil in the Ekur (Enlil A)”).

⁵³⁹ Segment C, 9–13. ^da-[ru]-ru nin₉ ^dmu-ul-lil-lá-ke₄ / uru-ni uru-saĝ-rig₇ zà h^é-bí-in-tag / kèš^[ki] ki-úlutim kalam-ma-ke₄ / itima kù u₄ nu-zu-ba ûĝ-e igi h^é-ni-in-bar / zà h^é-bí-in-tag šu li-bí-in-tag. Transliteration with adaptations, and translation from Black et al. (1998–2006. “The lament for Eridug”). Cf. “The lament for Urim”, l. 8, where it is said that Ninmaĥ abandoned Keš.

⁵⁴⁰ 22–25. u₄ an-né kur-kur-ra saĝ-ki ba-da-an-gíd-da-ba / ^den-lil-le igi-ni ki kúr-ra ba-an-ĝar-ra-a-ba / ^dnin-tu-re niĝ-dím-dím-ma-ni zà bí-in-tag-ga-a-ba / ^den-ki-ke₄ ¹⁷idigna ¹⁷buranun-na áš bí-in-bal-a-ba [---] 58–61. an-né ki-en-gi ki-tuš-ba bí-in-ĥu-luĥ ûĝ-e ní bí-in-te / ^den-lil-le u₄ gig-ga mu-un-zal uru-a me bí-ib-ĝar / ^dnin-tu-re ama₅ kalam-ma-ka ^{ĝis}ig-šu-úr im-mi-in-de₆ / ^den-ki-ke₄ ¹⁷idigna ¹⁷buranun-na a im-ma-da-an-kéš. Transliteration with adaptations, and translation, taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. “The lament for Sumer and Urim”).

⁵⁴¹ Steible and Behrens 1982a: 131–133. This is also said about Enlil who comes first, followed by Ninĥursaĝa, and then Enki comes, and thereafter Su’en and Utu (ibid. 129–140).

⁵⁴² Selz 1995b: 253.

Keš, built all alone on the high open country, was haunted. Adab, the settlement which stretches out along the river, was treated as a rebellious land. [---] The Gutians bred there, issued their seed. Nintur wept bitter tears over her creatures. ‘Alas, the destroyed city, my destroyed house’, she cried bitterly.⁵⁴³

For the Mesopotamians the anger of the god was an explanation of catastrophes, such as death, storms, changed river courses and so on. Whereas e.g. Enlil was thought to destroy by storm and Enki by withholding water, the mother goddess was thought to destroy her creatures, humans and animals, e.g. by withholding food, the produce of the land. In spite of this the mother goddess was thought of as a compassionate mother,⁵⁴⁴ and she never completely left her creatures, but lamented their destruction.

3.2. Enki

Enki was one of the most important deities in the pantheon, and his frequency in the sources indicates that he also was a very popular deity. I do not pretend to give an exhaustive picture of Enki in the overview below, but I hope that it will point to his general traits. Since he is so well attested, I have only looked at the sources where he is central in the narrative.⁵⁴⁵

3.2.1. Enki’s element: water

The basic element of Enki is water, and this element is recurrent in all aspects of this god. He is the male deity of sexual drive, and the Sumerian word for semen is a homonym of that for water. This interconnection between semen and water will be seen in the analysis of “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” below, and it is also met with in “Enki and the world order”.⁵⁴⁶

The water element is a very prominent feature of the environment of Enki’s city Eridu, as well as his shrine, the watery Abzu, which were situated

⁵⁴³ 143–144. *kēš^{ki} an-edēn-na dili dū-a šu līl-lá ba-ab-du₁₁ / adab^{ki}-bu é i₇-dè lá-a re ki-bal-šè ba-ab-du₁₁ [...] 146–148. gu-ti-um^{ki} šà ba-ni-ib-bal-bal numun ba-ni-ib-i-i / ^dnin-tu-re níġ-dím-dím-ma-ni-šè ér gig mu-un-še₈-še₈ / a uru gul-la é gul-la-ġu₁₀ gig-ga-bi im-me. Transliteration with adaptations, and translation, taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. “The lament for Sumer and Urim”); cf. also ll. 207–209, and further “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta”, ll. 369–371.*

⁵⁴⁴ Black et al. 1998–2006. “The message of Lu-diġira to his mother”, l. 52B. The mother goddess is called compassionate mother (*ummu rēmēnītu*, Sum. ama arġuš) also in Akkadian sources (Ebeling 1953: 54f. Bēlet-ilī). In this respect she is presented in the same way that the healing goddess is.

⁵⁴⁵ General overviews of Enki/Ea can be found e.g. in Kramer and Maier’s book *Myths of Enki, The Crafty God*, and for Enki/Ea in the Akkadian texts in Assyriologist Hannes Galter’s book *Der Gott Ea/Enki in der akkadischen Überlieferung*.

⁵⁴⁶ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki and the world order”, ll. 250–256.

near the marshes of southern Sumer. In the marshes there were both fish and birds:⁵⁴⁷

By my house the *suḫur* carp dart among the honey plants, and the *eštub* carp wave their tails [sic!] among the small *gizi* reeds. The small birds chirp in their nest.⁵⁴⁸

Thus, the marshes were teeming with animal life,⁵⁴⁹ and the water of Enki was seen as a giver of abundance, also to the fields.⁵⁵⁰ It was probably this connection to abundance that was part of the association between Enki and distant trade. Both in “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” and in “Enki and the world order” Enki is associated to the faraway countries Meluḫḫa, Magan and Dilmun, which bring hardwood, gold and silver to Sumer.⁵⁵¹

3.2.2. The wise Enki

A central trait of Enki is wisdom,⁵⁵² and recurrent among the scholars when describing him are words like “cunning” and “crafty”.⁵⁵³ A common role of Enki in the sources is to be advisor and problem solver of the other gods. Enki is “counsellor of holy An, adviser of the Great Mountain [Enlil]”⁵⁵⁴ and “Lord who among the gods makes the clever decisions”.⁵⁵⁵ According to Jacobsen, Enki is not posed as ruler in the sources, but rather as the counsellor of the ruling gods An and Enlil. He further writes that Enki’s ways of solving problems does not usually include violence, but instead cunning and diplomacy.⁵⁵⁶

In the myths treated here, it will be seen that Enki uses his cunning on the one hand to get sexual access to the young goddess Uttu, and on the other in a competition where he defeats Ninmaḫ.

⁵⁴⁷ Cf. Black et al. (1998–2006.) “The debate between Bird and Fish”, where Enki is the central deity, settling the dispute between the two.

⁵⁴⁸ 97–99. \acute{e} - $\acute{g}u_{10}$ \acute{r} suḫur- ku_6 \acute{e} ! \acute{u} -lāl-e sun $_4$ im- $\acute{s}i$ -sud-e / eštub[ku_6 gi-zi di $_4$]-di $_4$ -lá kun mu-na-sud-e / buru $_5$ $\acute{m}u\acute{s}en$ gùd-ba $\acute{s}eg_{11}$ mu-da-an-gi $_4$ -gi $_4$. Transliteration and translation taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enki and the world order”).

⁵⁴⁹ Enki was related also to the turtle, which is seen in “The heron and the turtle” as well as “Ninurta and the turtle” (Black et al. 1998–2006).

⁵⁵⁰ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki and the world order”, ll. 56f.

⁵⁵¹ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki and the world order”, ll. 124–130.

⁵⁵² See Black et al. (1998–2006), e.g. “A prayer to Enki for Ḥammu-rābi (Ḥammu-rābi B)”, l. 9; “A *šir-šag-ḫula* to Damgalnuna (Damgalnuna A)”, ll. 5f., and “A *tigi* to Enki for Ur-Ninurta (Ur-Ninurta B)”, ll. 2f.

⁵⁵³ Jacobsen 1976: 110; Kramer and Maier 1989; Bottéro and Kramer 1993: 151.

⁵⁵⁴ Black et al. 1998–2006. “A *balbale* to Enki for Iṣme-Dagan (Iṣme-Dagan E)”, ll. 5, 7.

⁵⁵⁵ Black et al. 1998–2006. “A hymn to Enki (?) for Iṣme-Dagan (Iṣme-Dagan X)”, l. 1.

⁵⁵⁶ Jacobsen 1976: 112, 116.

3.2.3. Enki's competition with the mother goddess

Kramer and Maier write that in both “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” and “Enki and Ninmah” “the dominating motif” is “[t]he bitter rivalry between Enki and the goddess”.⁵⁵⁷ According to them “the stories [...] highlight the conflict between the male and the female elements in the process of creation”.⁵⁵⁸ Regarding this latter interpretation, I would rather say that the myths reflect the competition between two ideologies in Sumer at the time of the composition of the texts. In one of the ideologies creation comes from a male, often being called father,⁵⁵⁹ and in the other creation⁵⁵⁹ comes from a female, often being called mother.

The competitive relation between Enki and the mother goddess recurs also in the myth called “Ninurta and the turtle”. The mother goddess is met with there under her name Ninmena, and she complains about her not having the divine powers (me) that belong to Enki in the Abzu:

Ninmena gave out a wail: “And what about me? These divine powers have not fallen into my hand. I shall not exercise their authority. I shall not live (?) like him in the shrine, in the *Abzu*.”⁵⁶⁰

I understand the myth to mean that Ninmena has sent her son Ninurta to Enki to steal the divine powers (me). Ninurta fails, and at the end we read:

Ninmena learned of this situation. She ripped the clothes on her body and she [*uncertain reading*]. “You my plant-eater Enki, who shall I send to you? Men will shake their heads in fear [*uncertain reading*]. Who shall I send to you? [...] You who are death which has no mercy, who shall I send to you?”⁵⁶¹

Thus, here we see the competition between the mother goddess and Enki that we will meet also further on. Here, as in “Enki and Ninmah”, the mother goddess loses the competition for power.

The competition for power between Enki and Ninḫursaġa/Ninmah circles around creation; on the one hand Enki is a source of life through his water/semens, and on the other the mother goddess is the source of life through birth. Enki's power over the me can be understood as power over how things

⁵⁵⁷ Kramer and Maier 1989: 12f.

⁵⁵⁸ Kramer and Maier 1989: 4.

⁵⁵⁹ This epithet of Enki can be found throughout in the texts about him in Black et al. (1998–2006). The attestations can be found through the glossary under a-a (“father”).

⁵⁶⁰ 6–8. [^dnin-men]-na-ke₄ a-nir im-ġá-ġá / ġe₂₆-e me-bi šu-ġu₁₀-uš li-^bi⁷-kur₉ nam-en-bi nu-ak-e / [ġe₂₆-e] e-ne-ġin₇ ^{èš-e²} abzu-a nu-mu-un-til. Transliteration and translation taken from Black et al. 1998–2006. “Ninurta and the turtle”.

⁵⁶¹ 55–58. ^dnin-men-na-ke₄ inim-bi ba-da-an-pà / túġ bar-ra-na ^{al}-bir₇²-re KAŠ₄ im-sar-[sar-re] / ^uġ gu₇-gu₇-ġu₁₀-uš ^{za}’-[e] a-ba-a mu-ra-ab-túm / lú saġ-bi mu-un-bul-bul ba-x-[x]-un-GIL-x za-e a-^{ba}-a mu-^{ra}-^{ab}-túm [...] 60. nam-úš šu ġar nu-tuku-a za-e a-[ba]-a mu-ra-ab-túm. Transliteration with adaptations, and translation, taken from Black et al. 1998–2006. “Ninurta and the turtle”.

“are” in their essence. Enki is also connected to creation through being the patron god of artisans.⁵⁶² He is called Nudimmud “image fashioner”, which according to Jacobsen relates to the ability of water to form clay.⁵⁶³

In “Enki and Ninmaḥ” first Enki’s mother Namma, and then both Enki and Ninmaḥ use clay to form humans. In “Ninurta and the turtle” Enki creates the turtle with clay from the Abzu,⁵⁶⁴ and in “Inana’s descent to the nether world” he creates the kurġara and the galatura out of dirt from under his finger nails.⁵⁶⁵ Thus, a well-known function of Enki is to create life. Connected to this ability is to be able to bring about health and life.⁵⁶⁶ This is seen when Enki restores Inana back to life when she is in the netherworld. This part of “Inana’s decent to the nether world” will be discussed further below in section 4.6. Enki establishes contact with the netherworld also in “Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world”,⁵⁶⁷ an ability that most probably is related to his ability to cure and bring back to life.

Although the mother goddess is the common patron deity of birth-giving, in one source it is said that Enki is “knowledgeable about giving birth”.⁵⁶⁸ This is probably related to his function as the common deity of incantations. Enki is found in birth incantations, and most often so when he comes and helps his son Asalluḥi who then serves as midwife.⁵⁶⁹

Unlike Ninḥursaġa/Ninmaḥ Enki is seldom depicted as a deity who both gives and destroys life. One rare instance of destruction is when Enki “had altered and blocked the course of the Tigris and the Euphrates”.⁵⁷⁰

3.2.4. The family relations of Enki

Several later sources say that the god of heaven, An, is the father of Enki, and in one of these sources we read that his mother is Uraš.⁵⁷¹ As we shall see below, the goddess Namma was also understood to be Enki’s mother. Namma figures as the wife of An in an Early Dynastic royal inscription, but it is not clear whether that would make her the mother of Enki in some local tradition.⁵⁷² This was the case, however, in the godlist An-Anum as well as in

⁵⁶² E.g. Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki and the world order”, I. 84.

⁵⁶³ Jacobsen 1976: 111.

⁵⁶⁴ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Ninurta and the turtle”,

⁵⁶⁵ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Inana’s descent to the nether world”, II. 222f.

⁵⁶⁶ Cf. Black et al. 1998–2006. “A prayer to Enki for Ḥammu-rābi (Ḥammu-rābi B)”, II. 2, 7, and “A *tigi* to Enki for Ur-Ninurta (Ur-Ninurta B)”, I. 33.

⁵⁶⁷ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world”, II. 15–26; 58–69; 237–242; Jacobsen 1993.

⁵⁶⁸ Black et al. 1998–2006. “A *šir-šag-ḥula* to Damgalnuna (Damgalnuna A)”, I. 9.

⁵⁶⁹ E.g. Finkel 1980; Farber 1984; van Dijk 1975; Sigrist 1980.

⁵⁷⁰ Black et al. 1998–2006. “The lament for Sumer and Urim”, II. 25, 61.

⁵⁷¹ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki and the world order”, I. 62 (An); “A *tigi* to Enki for Ur-Ninurta (Ur-Ninurta B)” (An); “Ninurta’s journey to Eridug: a *šir-gida* to Ninurta (Ninurta B)” (An) and “A *balbale* to Enki for Išme-Dagan (Išme-Dagan E)” (An and Uraš).

⁵⁷² Wiggermann 2001a: 138.

later bilingual sources. Assyriologist Frans Wiggermann writes that “N[amma] (water) and Uraš (earth) are certainly distinct entities, but presumably one may take the place of the other in alternative local cosmogonies”.⁵⁷³ Both mothers are primeval entities, as is An, and therefore Enki is placed in the first generation of deities.

In “Enki’s journey to Nibru” Enlil is said to be his father, whereas in two other sources Enki and Enlil are said to be brothers.⁵⁷⁴ In light of the frequency of An as the father of Enki in the sources, I would say that the text where Enlil is said to be Enki’s father is an ideological attempt to elevate Enlil further above Enki.

In “A hymn to Ninkasi” we read that Enki is the father of this goddess, and that her mother is Ninti, which echoes “Enki and Ninḥursaġa” where the mother goddess gives birth (or helps Enki to give birth) to Ninti and Ninkasi.⁵⁷⁵ Since Ninkasi is the goddess of beer, it is logical that the god of waters should be her father.

3.2.5. Enki’s relation to power and kingship

As we saw in the section above on Ninḥursaġa/Ninmaḥ, Enki belonged to the four most prominent deities in the pantheon. Whereas Enlil was the king (lugal) of the pantheon, Enki was most commonly called lord, en,⁵⁷⁶ seldom having the epithet king, lugal.⁵⁷⁷ As we saw, Jacobsen sees Enki as an advisor of the ruler of the pantheon, while himself not being one. I rather understand Enki as the early ruler called en. In the early period the rule was exerted more in an assembly,⁵⁷⁸ and one can imagine that the ruler was initially a person who could guide the society through his knowledge and skills. Enki can be understood as an important chief of the early villages where crafts and techniques were critical for the group. Enlil, can instead be interpreted as the later ruler of wealthy cities with walls that have to defend themselves against assaults from enemies who want to get hold of their riches.

Enki is seldom related to kingship in the way Ninḥursaġa/Ninmaḥ is,⁵⁷⁹ but there are some hymns to Enki for kings.⁵⁸⁰ The aim of such hymns and

⁵⁷³ Wiggermann 2001a: 138.

⁵⁷⁴ Black et al. 1998–2006. “A *tigi* to Enki for Ur-Ninurta (Ur-Ninurta B)”. “Enki and the world order”, l. 64.

⁵⁷⁵ Black et al. 1998–2006. “A hymn to Ninkasi (Ninkasi A)”, ll. 9f.

⁵⁷⁶ This occurs in all the texts about Enki in Black et al. (1998–2006). For the translation “lord” of en, see Rubio (2009: 33).

⁵⁷⁷ In Black et al. 1998–2006. “The heron and the turtle”, Enki is called king in several lines, e.g. ll. 33, 68B, 69, 80f., whereas he is called lord (here: en eridu^{ki}) only once (l. 71). Another common epithet of Enki that occurs there is prince, nun (e.g. ll. 107, 129, 131).

⁵⁷⁸ Cf. Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki and the world order”, l. 18.

⁵⁷⁹ But cf. Black et al. (1998–2006. “A hymn to Enki (?) for Išme-Dagan (Išme-Dagan X)”, l. 9), where we read: “He assigns the sceptres, he distributes the loyal crowns”.

⁵⁸⁰ Išme-Dagan, Ḥammurabi and Ur-Ninurta. They can all be found in Black et al. (1998–2006).

prayers is that the deity to whom it is directed shall bestow properties that are characteristic of the deity upon the king. In the case of Enki the properties are life and wisdom.

3.2.6. Enki's relation to the me:s and the destinies

The me represent the “archetype” or ideational prototype of everything that exists in culture. When something is destroyed its divine powers (me) is also destroyed. This is seen in the city laments where it is said in all but the one about Urim that the me of the city were overturned.⁵⁸¹

According to Kramer and Maier the me originally belonged to An and Enlil, but were later given to Enki.⁵⁸² This does not seem to be correct since the me have a special connection to Enki in the sources, although other deities can also own the me.⁵⁸³ When An and/or Enlil are said to be the origin of the me in the sources,⁵⁸⁴ I understand this as ideology, and part of a development when the Eridu pantheon was integrated into the Nippur pantheon.

There is even a whole myth where Enki originally is the lord of the me. According to this myth Inana cheated Enki to give her the me, and she succeeded to bring them from Eridu to her city Uruk.⁵⁸⁵ Although this myth tells us that Enki lost the me, he is in fact very commonly said to be ruling over them.⁵⁸⁶

Whereas the me can be said to be the original plan, or essence, of something in culture, the destiny is the future and life span of an individual. Enki is also found as decreer of fates in several sources,⁵⁸⁷ although not as commonly as he is connected to the me. This aspect will be discussed further below, in section 4.13.2.

⁵⁸¹ See the City laments in Black et al. (1998–2006).

⁵⁸² Kramer and Maier 1989: 57.

⁵⁸³ See the references in Black et al. (1998–2006) in the glossary under “me”.

⁵⁸⁴ See e.g. Black et al. 1998–2006. “A *tigi* to Enki for Ur-Ninurta (Ur-Ninurta B)”, l. 7, and “A hymn to Enki for Išme-Dagan”, ll. 8–10.

⁵⁸⁵ See “Inana and Enki” in Black et al. (1998–2006), or the publication of the myth by Farber-Flügge (1973).

⁵⁸⁶ See e.g. Black et al. 1998–2006 “A prayer to Enki for Ḫammu-rābi (Ḫammu-rābi B)”, l. 5; “A *balbale* to Enki for Išme-Dagan (Išme-Dagan E)”, l. 9; “A *tigi* to Enki for Ur-Ninurta (Ur-Ninurta B)”, l. 1; “Enki’s journey to Nibru”, l. 52; “The song of the hoe”, l. 43; “Ninurta’s journey to Eridug: a *šir-gida* to Ninurta (Ninurta B)”, Segment B, ll. 7f.; “Ninurta and the turtle”.

⁵⁸⁷ See Black et al. 1998–2006. “A hymn to Enki (?) for Išme-Dagan (Išme-Dagan X)”, l. 2; “Enki’s journey to Nibru”, ll. 5, 44; “A *šir-šag-ḫula* to Damgalnuna (Damgalnuna A)”, l. 2; “A *tigi* to Enki for Ur-Ninurta (Ur-Ninurta B)”, l. 16; “Enki and the world order”, l. 43, 118, and “The debate between bird and fish”, l. 4.

4. Enki and Ninḫursaĝa

4.1. Introduction

4.1.1. Provenience of the sources to “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa”

The reconstruction of the myth “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa” is primarily based on text A, which is a tablet from Nippur, the religious center of Sumer. There is also a duplicating fragment from Ur (text B) and a fragment of unknown provenience (text C).⁵⁸⁸ It is not possible to exactly date the composition of the myth, but the three sources were copied in the Old Babylonian period.

Text A, was unearthed from a mound in Nippur, “the Scribal Quarters”, where the excavators found more than 30,000 tablets, dating from the middle of the third millennium and up to the end of the cuneiform culture.⁵⁸⁹ The Scribal Quarters were situated to the south-east of the temple mound, with no obvious connection to the temples.⁵⁹⁰ The first 30,000 or so tablets were unearthed rather early in the history of archaeology, and at that time the archaeologists did not document the exact provenience.⁵⁹¹ It seems clear however, that some were found in official buildings,⁵⁹² but the absolute majority was unearthed in the living quarters of the scribes.⁵⁹³ Further, no tablets were found in the temple precinct.

Text B of “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa”, with Ur as provenience, is 62 lines shorter than the Nippur version although it contains the “Rīm-Sîn interpolation”. It has a date upon it; the year 21 of Rīm-Sîn (1802 BCE).⁵⁹⁴ This tablet was found in the Old Babylonian house no. 7 Quiet Street, which was perceived to be a school by the excavators,⁵⁹⁵ something that was later corroborated by the philologists working with the tablets found there.⁵⁹⁶ The house

⁵⁸⁸ Kramer and Maier 1989: 13.

⁵⁸⁹ Kramer 1971: 23.

⁵⁹⁰ Peters 1905: 145. There was an Enlil temple and an Inana temple in the temple mound (Kramer 1971: 31), and a temple in another mound of an unidentified deity called “the north temple”. See the plan of Nippur in Zettler (1993, plate 2).

⁵⁹¹ See e.g. Peters 1905: 163.

⁵⁹² Buccellati and Biggs 1969: 1–4, 9.

⁵⁹³ In the TA area 1496 tablets out of a total of 1591 tablets were school tablets. In the TB area there were 202 school texts, and all other texts amounted to 142 (see Stone 1987: 36f., 76f.).

⁵⁹⁴ Attinger 1984: 5.

⁵⁹⁵ Woolley and Mallowan 1976: 112.

⁵⁹⁶ Charpin 1986: 434.

was one of sixteen situated in an area just close to the temple precinct of the primary deity of Ur, Nanna-Su'en. It has been shown that the people living in this area were clergy working for Nanna's temple.⁵⁹⁷ Most of the archival texts of no. 7 Quiet Street belonged to a certain Ku-Ningal, who was an *abriqqu*, a purification priest.⁵⁹⁸ He, like Igmil-Sîn, another priest in the area, was teaching in his own house, and Charpin concludes that "il apparaît qu'à Ur la formation des futures scribes aurait été largement le fait du clergé".⁵⁹⁹

Charpin comes to the conclusion that the pupils of Ku-Ningal most likely were his five sons.⁶⁰⁰ Michalowski writes that these students seem to have had their elementary education at some other place.⁶⁰¹ To note is that no. 7 Quiet Street, by us called "school", shall not be understood to have had the same features as a school building of today; the schools in early Old Babylonian Mesopotamia seem to have been located in the home of the teacher, which is seen in this case. Not only tablets were found in this house, but a hearth and several burials as well.⁶⁰²

Text C of "Enki and Ninḥursaġa" is of unknown provenience, and it contains the passage with the goddess Ninimma, which is not found in text A. (Regarding text B, this part is not preserved.)

The little information that can be drawn from the provenience of the texts suggests that our myth was used in a school setting. This is expected, since literature of exact known provenience is found in school contexts. Further, since the myth was found at sites in the north (Nippur) and the south (Ur) respectively of Sumer, the tradition of the text is more than a local phenomenon.

4.1.2. A short summary of the content of the myth

In the myth there are several different occurrences of creation. At the beginning we are told that Dilmun, the place where the story takes place, is a pure place. We also get to know that the predators have not (yet) taken prey, and that there is (yet) no illness.⁶⁰³ Ninsikila, the wife⁶⁰⁴ of Enki complains since

⁵⁹⁷ Charpin 1986: 25f., 140f.

⁵⁹⁸ Charpin 1986: 51.

⁵⁹⁹ Charpin 1986: 434. In fact not only in Ur the school was the home of a priest; in Mari a school was found in the home of a haruspex priest called Asqudum, and likewise the house of the gala-maḥ Ur-Utu in Sippar (Tell ed-Dēr) functioned as a school (Volk 2009: 6).

⁶⁰⁰ Charpin 1986: 434.

⁶⁰¹ Michalowski 1992: 234. Charpin writes that no copies of elementary exercises had been found in the house (1986: 424).

⁶⁰² Woolley and Mallowan 1976: 111f.; cf. Charpin 1986: 420ff.

⁶⁰³ This led Kramer (1945) to understand "Enki and Ninḥursaġa" as a paradise myth. Bottéro points to this interpretation in his and Kramer's book *Lorsque les dieux faisaient l'homme*, and writes that the passage rather expresses a state of nothingness and potentiality (1993: 159f.).

⁶⁰⁴ Ninsikila is later calling Enki "father" (l. 31 in Attinger 1984). This corresponds to the later sexual relations Enki has with his progeny in this myth.

the canals in Dilmun, the city that she has received as a gift from him, are without water. This is a typical introduction of Mesopotamian literature; we are in a static state before creation, which turns into creation through an action of a mythological creature, for example a deity.⁶⁰⁵

In this myth the process of creation begins when Utu, the sun god, causes water to pour out of the ground. The second sequence of creation is when Enki impregnates earth,⁶⁰⁶ Ninḫursaġa/Nintu, Ninnisi, Ninkura, Ninimma, and finally Uttu. The semen that Enki pours out in the lap of Uttu is wiped off by Ninḫursaġa, and then eight plants grow. Since Enki eats the plants and decrees their fate he is condemned to death by Ninḫursaġa. She is persuaded to bring him back to life, though, and in order to heal him she creates eight deities, five female and three male. Enki is cured, and at the end the eight deities are allotted their functions.

4.2. Dilmun, the setting of the myth

4.2.1. Contextualization of Dilmun

The most common identification of ancient Dilmun is today's sheikhdom Bahrain.⁶⁰⁷ This island was mentioned already in the archaic Uruk texts (dated roughly to 3200–3000 BCE),⁶⁰⁸ and we know that the first well-known king from Early Dynastic IIIb period, Ur-Nanše (approximately 2500 BCE), with whom the actual history of ancient Mesopotamia begins, imported woods from Dilmun. Also Ur-Namma, the first king of the Ur III dynasty, traded with Dilmun, as did the regents of the Larsa dynasty. Then there was no trade until the 14th century, when the Kassites (1600–1200 BCE) resumed contacts with the island again.⁶⁰⁹ Also in texts from Middle Babylonian, Middle Assyrian, and Neo-Assyrian times, the island is mentioned.⁶¹⁰

Dilmun was famous for its trading goods. The merchandise was copper, lapis lazuli, stone beads, woods, linen, dates and probably pearls, and the

⁶⁰⁵ This sort of state before creation is seen for example in “Enki and Ninmah” (see below, Chapter 5), “The debate between Grain and Sheep” and “The song of the Hoe” (see Black et al. 1998–2006). Cf. the discussion below under section 5.7, on the difference between myths and debate poems.

⁶⁰⁶ When Enki makes a ditch in the earth with his penis, I see this as a parallel to the other copulations. Also Bottéro and Kramer interpret this as Enki's fertilization of the earth (1993: 161).

⁶⁰⁷ This identification is seen in the title of the book which I refer to here: *Dilmun: New Studies in the Archaeology and Early History of Bahrain*, edited by D. T. Potts (1983). For a discussion on this question, see Alster (1983: 39–52), in the same book.

⁶⁰⁸ Englund 1983: 35.

⁶⁰⁹ Alster 1983: 39.

⁶¹⁰ Whereas there are very few instances of references to Dilmun in the Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian sources, the Neo-Assyrian sources have “die bei weitem detaillreichsten und dichtesten Informationen über Dilmun” (Kessler 1983: 147f.).

Mesopotamians traded with clothes, silver and grain.⁶¹¹ A reflection of the trade of Dilmun is the passage interpolated in the myth, of which the extant copy is dated to the 21st year of Rīm-Sîn of Larsa⁶¹² (1822–1763). Here it is told about import to Dilmun from Meluḥḥa, Magan and others.⁶¹³ This suggests that the island was a major center of trade.⁶¹⁴

Besides the fact that the goods of Dilmun tempted the seafarers of Mesopotamia to go there, the island also served as a transit port for more distant trade where the merchants could stop to get fresh water.⁶¹⁵ Also this latter “product” of Dilmun is a prominent element in our myth. Alster means that the fact that Enki was the god of fresh water in Mesopotamia made the Mesopotamians associate him with Dilmun. Further, he states that the myth aims at showing how the cult of Enki was extended to the island. This is made by equalling Ninḥursaġa with Ninsikila, the goddess of Dilmun,⁶¹⁶ and by posing Enzak, the god of Dilmun as the progeny of this couple. Alster writes that this introduction of Enki was made during the third dynasty of Ur.⁶¹⁷

Perhaps also the leading actress of our myth had from early times a cult at Dilmun. On the northern coast of the island a Sumerian temple has been found. It has been rebuilt three times, and Alster writes that Archaeologist Peder Mortensen dated the oldest to the late Jemdet Nasr period. This date relies upon the fact that the goblets and shards found were of Jemdet Nasr type. He dated the second level to the Early Dynastic II period, and the third to 2200–2000 BCE. However, others think that a more probable dating is Ur III and Old Babylonian periods. In the temple there was a square well, and Alster maintains that “[t]his well must have been important for the cult performed in the temple, as it was modified, but retained, in all three phases”. Mortensen has suggested that this temple belonged to Ninḥursaġa, since it is similar to the oval al-‘Ubaid temple, which belonged to her.⁶¹⁸

4.2.2. Ideological aspects of Dilmun

Regarding the time span that is discussed here, Dilmun was an important trade partner of Mesopotamia up to the period of the Larsa dynasty. As will be seen below in the section on the Rīm-Sîn interpolation, the Sumerian

⁶¹¹ Alster 1983: 39.

⁶¹² Komoróczy 1977: 68 with fn. 20.

⁶¹³ Attinger 1984: 12f.

⁶¹⁴ Dilmun may well have been a transit port for trade in the Persian Gulf (Alster 1983: 41).

⁶¹⁵ Alster 1983: 39, 44.

⁶¹⁶ The Dilmunite name of this goddess was Meskilak, Ninsikila being the Sumerian version of the name (Black and Green 2008: 66; Jacobsen 1987: 183; Bottéro and Kramer 1993: 163).

⁶¹⁷ Alster 1983: 59.

⁶¹⁸ Alster 1983: 40. Mortensen has suggested that the oval temple of Khafajah belonged to Ninḥursaġa as well, since it was similar to the above discussed temples (Mortensen apud Alster 1983: 40). We do not have any historical evidence however, that tells us to whom this temple was dedicated (Delougaz 1940: 144f.).

kings were dependent upon other regions and states to get access to valuable woods, metals and precious stones, since there were no such materials in Mesopotamia. Thus, to posit Enki and Ninḫursaġa as the main deities of Dilmun, paralleling Ninḫursaġa and Ninsikila, and posing Ninḫursaġa and Enki as the parents of Dilmun’s male deity Enzak, was a way to incorporate the island into the Mesopotamian sphere of influence. Here the interests of the Mesopotamian kings are advanced, since they could claim close relations to and benevolence from the deities of Dilmun through this assimilation. Further, the assimilation can also be understood as a way of negotiating with extant traditions on the island, which must have been easier than introducing deities that were completely different from those of Dilmun.

4.3. The role of Utu

4.3.1. Contextualization of Utu

When Ninsikila complains about the deficiency of water at Dilmun she gets the following answer by Enki:

Utu, standing in heaven, / from the ...⁶¹⁹ vessels of the coast of Ezen, / from the x x horned high temple of Nanna, / from the mouth (where) water runs in earth, he will make sweet water run from earth. / In your vessel that he has made big for me, may he make water come down!⁶²⁰

I have chosen to interpret the agent in the same way as Attinger. Whereas he sees Utu as the active agent of the course of events, Black et al. interpret him as an indirect agent.⁶²¹ As Attinger writes in his comment: “gub-bé-e: -e = agentif. La graphie pleine permet de lever l’ambiguïté de la forme verbale”.⁶²² In any case, both translations pose Utu – indirectly or directly – as the initiator of the life process at Dilmun. Therefore, when Alster writes

⁶¹⁹ With the reading “erected” chosen in Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”), we would expect gub-ba (i.e. DU-ba). I do not find a satisfactory translation of DU-a.

⁶²⁰ 42–46. [ˈutu an-na gub-bé-e] (?) / [ġiri₁₆ (?) DU-a gaba EZEN^{ki}-na-ta] (?) / [é (?) suḫur si ˈnanna-a-ta] (?) / [ka a ki-a DU.DU-ta a du₁₀ ki-ta ...-DU (-x)] (?) / ġiri-ma-an-gal-la-za a ḫé-em-ta-e₁₁-dè. All transliterations of “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” in this work are adapted from Attinger (1984). Here the readings of the first signs of l. 43–44 are influenced by Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”). The translations are always mine, when not otherwise stated. I am naturally influenced, very much helped, and inspired by the interpretation of other scholars. For the interpretation of l. 43, I rely heavily on the reading of Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”).

⁶²¹ Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”, ll. 40f.), write: “When Utu steps up into heaven, fresh waters shall run”.

⁶²² Attinger 1984: 36.

that Enki creates the world in this myth,⁶²³ I think that his standpoint has to be modified. There are several agents in this creation.

Attinger writes that “Le rôle d’Utu dans ce passage n’est pas clair”.⁶²⁴ I agree, and therefore I will investigate his role, and this will be done by collecting material on Utu according to the method of collecting a certain redundancy in order to find the ideas that cluster around Utu as a *constellation*.

We know that the sun was connected with Dilmun, since the island was called ki-u₄-è “the place where the sun rises”.⁶²⁵ In Temple hymn no. 38, it is said of Utu that “he pronounces judgment at the place where the sun rises”,⁶²⁶ which may then refer to Dilmun. The impression of these expressions is perhaps that the place where the sun rises is a positive and life-giving place, which is indeed one connotation of the location.⁶²⁷ That this is not solely the case however, is shown in “Enki and the world order”, where we read the following about Utu:

The father of the great city, the place where the sun rises, the great herald of pure An.⁶²⁸

As Katz writes, uru gal “great city” is a name for the netherworld, and also for the grave.⁶²⁹ The connection with the netherworld is corroborated by the fact that an énsi of Umma by the name Lu-Utu (!) built a temple for Ereškigal “in the place where the sun rises, the place of destiny” (ki^d-utu-è ki nam-tar-re-da).⁶³⁰ The destiny was, as will be seen below, often referred to regarding death. Likewise Nergal, the husband of Ereškigal, and accordingly the lord of the netherworld, was related to this place; he is told to “rise in the mountain where the sun rises”. In “Inana’s descent” this connection is also confirmed.⁶³¹ Inana, a goddess on her way down to the netherworld, says that she is heading towards the place where the sun rises (ki^d-utu-è-a-aš),⁶³² when she is asked by the doorman of the netherworld.

Not only Utu, but also Dilmun seems to have had a netherworldly connotation. The archaeologists have found more than 150,000 burial mounds on the island. These “have been said to form the largest prehistoric cemetery in the world”. The typical Bronze Age tumuli were constructed in the late third millennium, at a time when Mesopotamia had had contacts with the island

⁶²³ Alster 1983: 52.

⁶²⁴ Attinger 1984: 36.

⁶²⁵ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 89.

⁶²⁶ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 46, l. 489. This is the temple hymn of Utu and his temple in Sippar.

⁶²⁷ See Polonsky 2006.

⁶²⁸ 376. ad-da uru gal ki u₄ è-a niĝir [gal] an kù-ga. Transliteration adapted from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enki and the world order”).

⁶²⁹ Katz 2003: 338f.

⁶³⁰ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 90.

⁶³¹ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 90.

⁶³² Black et al. 1998–2006. “Inana’s descent to the nether world”, l. 81.

for at least a thousand years.⁶³³ (Thus, it must not have been the case that the Mesopotamians initially connected Dilmun with the netherworld.)

In the Nanše hymn ̩endursaġa is the son of Utu, and in another text ̩endursaġa's Akkadian equivalent Išum is the son of the sungod. Further, during the time of Gudea he is mentioned after Utu in a curse. In Gudea Statue B ̩endursaġa is twice called herald, and in these two cases he stands between two gods of the netherworld, which thus relates him to that realm.⁶³⁴

In the ̩endursaġa-hymn, we meet Utu in the following context:

The day began, and Utu got out. / Utu went to the place of the scale. / If someone buys cattle, / Utu will ask ̩endursaġa. / He will not tell his insight to the buyer of cattle; / he will tell it to ̩endursaġa. / If ̩endursaġa says: "the cattle is bought", / Utu will decide the destiny of the building of his cattle pen.⁶³⁵

This refrain is repeated about buying a sheep, a slave, and about taking a wife.⁶³⁶ We see here that Utu has to get information from ̩endursaġa about the persons who perform transactions. I suggest that this is due to the level of vicinity to humans of these two gods. Although daily life is a concern of Utu, he is a rather far-off deity. Therefore he needs gods that are more in the vicinity of the people to work for him. After the information from ̩endursaġa, the final decision lies with Utu; he is the one who decides the destiny of the person whom they have discussed.

While Utu is a far-off deity, seen to travel across the heaven, from horizon to horizon, he is naturally related to distant places and long-distance travel. Besides the association with the remote island of Dilmun he was also associated with the far-off mountains in the northwest of Mesopotamia. Thus also the mountain areas with cedar forests are called "the place where the sun rises".⁶³⁷ The relation between Utu and the far-off mountains is seen in the well-known text "Gilgameš and ̩uwawa". When Gilgameš tells his companion Enkidu that he will set off for the mountains he gets the answer:

⁶³³ Alster 1983: 40, 52f.

⁶³⁴ Edzard and Wilcke 1976: 142f. and fn. 9.

⁶³⁵ 232'-238'. u₄ um-zal d^uutu um-ta-è / d^uutu ki ġiš-rin-na-ka mu-un-DU / tukumbi lú gu₄ in-sa₁₀-sa₁₀ / d^uutu d^hendur-saġ-ġá-ra èn mu-na-tar-re / lú gu₄ sa₁₀-sa₁₀-dè igi ġál-la-ni nu-mu-na-ab-bé / d^hendur-saġ-ġá-ra mu-na-ab-bé / tukumbi d^hendur-saġ-ġá-ke₄ gu₄ sa₁₀-sa₁₀ mu-na-ab-bé / d^uutu tūr-(ra-)ni dù-a-bi nam im-mi-ib-tar-re. Transliteration taken from Edzard and Wilcke (1976: 156f.). There are three texts: A, E₂ and F. There are slight variants in some lines, but on the whole the duplicates are very close to each other. I follow text A here.

⁶³⁶ Edzard and Wilcke 1976: 157ff.

⁶³⁷ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 90.

My lord! If you will enter the mountain land, Utu should get to know about it from us [...] / The creatures of the mountain land are (the domain) of Utu.⁶³⁸

Also when Inana wants to go to the mountains she turns to Utu:

Lord of heaven, awe-inspiring lord, lord, let me ride with you to the mountains!⁶³⁹

Now when we have gained a wider knowledge of the role of Utu we can better understand his role in our myth. He is an actor in the drama of creation at Dilmun, since he is connected to Dilmun as a far-off place. Another reason for the connection is probably the fact that at the winter solstice the sun is seen to rise over the Persian Gulf (although not as far to the south as Bahrain) from southern Mesopotamia's point of view.⁶⁴⁰ Further, there could also be an association between the both through the association with the netherworld. I suppose that Utu initiates the creation process since he is connected to daily life; when he travels across the sky the earlier static state before creation is left behind.

Remaining, however, is to explain the relation of Utu with water, which is not usually related to him. Why is this the substance he uses to initiate creation? One answer could be that this depends on the fact that Enki is the god of sweet water, and since he is the main male actor in the rest of the myth, water is chosen. I think however, that the answer may lie in the fact that the myth deals with birth-giving. Sumerologist Christopher Woods writes in his article on the eastern Mesopotamian horizon to which the sun god is related, that “[a] particularly striking metaphor involving the horizon is the couching of the birth event in terms of sunrise”. Referring to Stol, Woods points to the fact that Šamaš, the Akkadian version of the sun god (and also Su'en and Asalluḫi/Marduk) was assisting at childbirths, and in a footnote he refers to several seals where the sun god is depicted together with an infant as a possible reference to this role. The eastern horizon was comprehended as the source of the primeval river, “the creatrix of everything”, as was the river Euphrates.⁶⁴¹ Euphrates was also related to the sun god, since his city Sippar was situated at it, and both the name of the city and of the river had the same spelling.⁶⁴²

In the birth incantations where the moon god plays a central role, he is often assisted by two protective genies that come with magical water to help to

⁶³⁸ 9. lugal-ĝu₁₀ tukumbi kur-ra i-in-ku₄-ku₄-dè-en ^dutu ḫé-me-da-an-zu [...] 11. kur-ra dím-ma-bi ^dutu-kam. The transliteration is taken from Edzard (1991: 170f.).

⁶³⁹ 25. ù-mu-un an-na ù-mu-un ní gùr-ru ù-mu-un kur-šè ga-ba-e-da-u₅, Transliteration and translation taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. “A *šir-namšub* to Utu (Utu F)”).

⁶⁴⁰ Alster 1983: 45.

⁶⁴¹ Woods 2009: 209f. and fn. 148. Woods also refers to Stol (2000a: 133f.). Furthermore, see Polonsky (2006).

⁶⁴² Woods 2005: 18, 32.

deliver the “maid of Su’en” (gēme^dsu’en). In an Akkadian text referred to by Assyriologist J. J. A. van Dijk, Šamaš, the Akkadian correspondence of Utu, plays the role of the moon god, and he gets help from his son Sakan, the god of cattle.⁶⁴³ Further, there is an Early Dynastic IIIa hymn where Šamaš is met with in a context of inter-city trade.⁶⁴⁴ In the section on the Rīm-Sîn interpolation below, I will discuss trade overseas as birth imagery. Thus, I suggest that Utu’s role is to initiate a creation of nature which later in our myth is paralleled with human childbirth.

Lastly, I will refer to one interesting possible parallel to our myth that could explain why Utu is the one who opens up the ground (to make water come forth), which also contains the netherworld motif. The passage I have in mind is a part of “Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world”. When Enkidu is seized by the netherworld, Gilgameš goes to seek help. Neither Enlil, nor Sîn, (Sîn⁶⁴⁵ occurs only in the Akkadian version) stand by him. Then he goes to Enki, and Enki helps him:

Father Enki stood by him⁶⁴⁶ in this matter. / He says to the hero, the young Utu, the child born by Ningal: / “Now, a hole is to be opened in the netherworld, / bring up his servant from the netherworld.” / He made a hole in the netherworld, / (and) with his breeze⁶⁴⁷ he brought his servant from the netherworld.⁶⁴⁸

Thus, there was an idea that Utu could make a hole into the netherworld. This must have taken place as he rose or set. In our myth he releases the underground water, although not explicitly by making a hole, but as he stands in heaven.

4.3.2. Ideological aspects of the role of Utu

The categories in the passage where Utu is acting are Ninsikila, Enki and Utu, and the place where the events take place is Dilmun. Dilmun is presented as an arid and infertile place. Ninsikila, the goddess of Dilmun, is presented as a passive female who cannot do anything about the barrenness of

⁶⁴³ van Dijk 1972: 340–344.

⁶⁴⁴ Woods 2005: 41; Andersson 2012: 70.

⁶⁴⁵ Sîn is the contracted form of Su’en, the Akkadian name of the moon god. This form is later than Su’en, but found already in Ur III sources (Krebernik 1997a: 361).

⁶⁴⁶ Lit. “stood by you”.

⁶⁴⁷ Both Black et al. (1998–2006. “Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world”), and Assyriologist Aaron Shaffer translate *si-si-ig* as “breeze”. The Akkadian version has *ki-i za-qi-qi* “like a breeze” (1975: 86, 115). In *AHW* sub *zīqīqu*, *zāqīqu* we find Sum. *si-si-ig = zīqīqu*.

⁶⁴⁸ 237–242. a-a^den-ki inim-bé ba-e-dè-gub / ur-saġ šul^dutu-ra dumu^dnin-gal-e tu-da gù mu-na-dé-e / i-ne-éš ab-lâl kur-ra ġâl ù-bí-in-tak₄ / šubur-a-ni kur-ta e₁₁-dè-mu-na-ab / ab-lâl kur-ra ġâl im-ma-an-tak₄ / si-si-ig-ni-ta šubur-a-ni kur-ta mu-’da’-ra-ab-è-dè. The transliteration is adapted from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world”). Cf. Shaffer (1975) and Gadotti (2006).

her habitat. Further, her husband Enki has given her this infertile land. The one who brings about the desired state at Dilmun is Utu, but only after Enki has said so.

In this triad Ninsikila is ranked as the lowliest, being unable to bring about fertility herself; she is at the mercy of the good will of Enki. Enki both gives the arid land to the goddess, and makes Utu bring the water there. The logic of the passage seems to be that Enki is the one in control of creation, both regarding the soil and the water.

Can we see any signs of negotiation in this passage? I would say that the roles of Ninsikila and Utu respectively are incorporated into the role of Enki. This indicates that the relation between Ninsikila and the soil, and Utu and the water, were original relations, and that these relations are recalibrated here; the myth says that Enki is in fact in control of these matters. We saw that Enki was also posed as the one initiating the opening of the hole to the netherworld in “Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world”. There Enki gives a direct order to Utu, whereas here he is only saying that “may he make the water come down”. The impression is that the recalibration of the relationship between Enki and Utu has not gone as far in our myth as in “Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world”.

4.4. The Rīm-Sîn interpolation

4.4.1. Contextualization of the Rīm-Sîn interpolation

When we have left the primordial state on the island, and when Utu has initiated flowing water, text B also describes a flourishing trade in the area. According to Assyriologist Géza Komoróczy the passage under discussion here is an interpolation. He writes that the date of the interpolation must be somewhere between the Ur III period and the date when our tablet was inscribed and dated, which is the 21st year of Rīm-Sîn.⁶⁴⁹ The higher limit of the date is due to the mentioning of Ur as a royal seat in the passage, a formulation that was used during the Ur III period, but also later. According to Komoróczy the list of cities that were to bring goods to Dilmun points to a later dating of the text. He concludes that the interpolation was made during the Dynasty of Larsa, either under Gungunum and his successors, or during the first half of Rīm-Sîn’s reign.⁶⁵⁰ Since Ur was an important city for the kings of Larsa, it is quite probable that the interpolation was done during their reign. When Gungunum conquered the city, it gave the Larsa kingdom access to the maritime trade in the Persian Gulf,⁶⁵¹ and this might have been a cause for the composition and the interpolation. Although Dilmun is the

⁶⁴⁹ Komoróczy 1977: 68 with fn. 20.

⁶⁵⁰ Komoróczy 1977: 68, 70.

⁶⁵¹ Brisch 2007: 38.

focus of the trade, Komoróczy understands the island only to be a market for “the land”, that is, for Sumer.⁶⁵² Thus, according to him, the final destination for the goods of the Gulf is Sumer.

Since there is a gap in text B before and after the interpolation, it is not quite clear where it shall be inserted in the myth as we have it in text A. Attinger inserts it after line 64 of text A.⁶⁵³ Komoróczy instead understands the interpolation as completing the introduction of the myth, placing it somewhere after line 50.⁶⁵⁴ I have chosen to follow Attinger, since I find it more logical with a sequence where Utu initiates the flowing of water, Dilmun flourishes, and then there is a description of foreign trade. I will take a look at the text sequence and then discuss the content:

May the land Tukriš deliver gold from Ḥarali, lapis lazuli and x x for you. / The land Meluḥḥa may fill great boats with carnelian, demanded and precious things, Magan wood and good Sea wood for you. / The land Marḥaši may x x precious stones, agate/topaz and GABA (?) for you. / The land Magan may [x] strong copper, [great?] strength (?), diorite, U-stones and “stones with two handles”. / The land(s) of the seas may [x x] ebony, ornament x x of kingship to you. / The “land of the tents” may [x] multicolored, fine wool [x] to you. / The land Elam may deliver choice wool [as] x [] tribute to you. / The temple of Ur, the seat of kingship, the [] city, may load barley, oil, splendid garments, fine garments onto big boats for you. / Those of the wide sea may [deliver] their abundance [to you]. / The city – its dwellings are good dwellings. / Dilmun – its dwellings are good dwellings. / Its grain/barley is fresh (?) grain/barley. / Its dates are very big dates. / Its crops ([]) three [] / Its woods ([]) woods [].⁶⁵⁵

This passage describes a vivid trade in the Persian Gulf area. Komoróczy writes that an important point for understanding the development of the maritime trade in the region during this period is that the earlier route of trade over land, from Elam, was blocked in the late third millennium.⁶⁵⁶ At this time the proto-Elamite culture and trade collapsed, and several centuries of

⁶⁵² Komoróczy 1977: 70.

⁶⁵³ Attinger 1984: 12f.

⁶⁵⁴ Komoróczy 1977: 68.

⁶⁵⁵ I BII–21 BII. kur tu-^ruk-ri-iš^{ki} KÙ.SIG₁₇ ḥa-ra-l[i] / na₄ za-gi[n x]-ga ḥu-mu-ra-^rbal^r-bal[-(e)] / kur me-luḥ-ḥa^{ki} na₄ gug niḡ al-di kal-l[a] / ^{ḡis}mès šà-gan ḡiš ab-ba sig₅-g[a] / má gal-gal ḥu-mu-ra-ab-s[á] / ^{kur}mar-ḥa-ši^{ki} na₄ kal-la na₄ d[u₈-ši] / GABA ḥu-mu-ra-ab-[] / kur má-gan^{ki} ^rurudu^r niḡ-kala-ga ^rusu[] / na₄ esi na₄ U na₄ šu-min ḥu-mu-[] / kur ab-ba^{ki}-ke₄ ^{ḡis}esi me-te ^rx [] lugal-la ḥu-mu-ra-ab-[] / kur za-lam-ḡar^{ki} siki gùn^r (SAHAR) sa₆-ga [] ḥu-mu-ra-ab-[] / kur elam^{ki}-ma siki igi saḡḡa gú-u[n] ḥu-mu-ra-ab-bal-[bal-(e)] / èš úru^{ki} bára nam-lugal-la uru^k[] / še i-ḡiš šutur (TU₉.MAḤ) tu₉ sig₅ má gal-gal ḥu-mu-ra-ab-[sá] / a-ab-ba daḡal-la ḥé-ḡál-bi ḥu-m[u-] / uru^{ki} ki-tuš-bi ki-tuš du₁₀-g[a-àm^r] / dilmun^{ki} ki-tuš-bi ki-tuš du₁₀-g[a-àm^r] / še-bi še di₄-di₄-lá-[àm^r] / zú-lum-bi zú-lum gu-ul-g[u-la-àm^r] / buru₁₄-bi 3-àm [] / ḡiš-bi ḡiš ^rx ^rx []. Transliteration adapted from Attinger (1984).

⁶⁵⁶ Komoróczy 1977: 69. To note is however that the Persian Gulf was a region of trade for the Mesopotamians already from the fifth millennium BCE. (Leemans 1975: 77).

war between Mesopotamia and Elam followed.⁶⁵⁷ Thus, during a period Mesopotamia had to find new ways to continue trade with the regions in the east and around the Gulf. I will discuss the passage line by line and then summarize the overall picture that the passage gives.

Ll. 1–2. Assyriologist Karel van Lerberghe writes about Tukriš that it is “a well-known region eastward of the Tigris and northward of Elam”.⁶⁵⁸ Komoróczy writes that in an inscription of Ḥammurabi Tukriš was enumerated after Elam, Gutium and Subir (= Subartu), and therefore he also believes that Tukriš is to be found east or northeast of Mesopotamia. Further, in an inscription of Šamši-Adad I, it is said that this king received tribute from *mātu elītu* “the upper land” and from Tukriš. *mātu elītu* was situated in the area of modern Kurdistan, and then a possible interpretation is that Tukriš is to be found nearby. Komoróczy’s conclusion is that Tukriš was situated “in der Gegend des bis heute gebrauchten Weges nach Kirmanšāḥ und weiter nach Ḥamadān”,⁶⁵⁹ i.e. in the area between modern Baghdad and Teheran. I would say that since Tukriš was probably situated north of Elam (mentioned together with *mātu elītu* and coming after Subir) it is more likely that it was found more to the north.

Even though Tukriš seems to have been localized somewhere between Baghdad, Teheran and Lake Urmia its main commodity was the lapis lazuli stone. The principal or sole source for lapis lazuli in the Ancient Near East was according to Komoróczy Afghanistan,⁶⁶⁰ i.e. at quite a distance from the localisation of Tukriš. Was Tukriš a trade nation, transmitting goods from distant places? In our lines Tukriš is said to be a supplier of gold from Ḥarali. Below in section 5.4.2. I will argue that Ḥarali was situated somewhere in the area of Subartu, i.e. northern Mesopotamia, bordering to Turkey. This is also logical since *ḥarali* is said to be a Subaraic word.⁶⁶¹ Komoróczy argues that Ḥarali was situated east of Tukriš and probably at quite a distance from Mesopotamia.⁶⁶² But why would a region in the east have a name that is Subaraic, i.e. be named with a language from the north of Mesopotamia? I will argue below (section 5.4.2.) that the most probable source of gold for the Mesopotamians was Anatolia. My hypothesis is that Tukriš indeed was a trading nation, bringing lapis lazuli from Afghanistan in the east and gold from Ḥarali in the northwest. It seems as if the conflicts with the peoples in the Iranian plateau hindered the goods from Tukriš to be brought by land, and therefore they also found their way over seas.

Ll. 3–5. Because of the goods reported to have come from Meluḥḥa it has been identified with northwestern India and the peninsula Gujarat. From the

⁶⁵⁷ Brentjes 1995: 1002.

⁶⁵⁸ van Lerberghe 1979: 34.

⁶⁵⁹ Komoróczy 1972: 114f.

⁶⁶⁰ Komoróczy 1972: 115.

⁶⁶¹ See *AHW* and *CAD* Ḥ sub *ḥarali*.

⁶⁶² Komoróczy 1972: 119.

Ur III period there was no direct contact between Mesopotamia and this region; instead goods from Meluḥḥa were imported via Magan and Dilmun.⁶⁶³

The principal import from Meluḥḥa was carnelian, and in one hymn the region is even called “the land of the carnelian”.⁶⁶⁴ In Sumerian this precious stone was called ^{na4}gug and in Akkadian *sāmtu*. Meluḥḥa, and more specifically Ratanpur in the southern parts of Gujarat, was also the largest source of carnelian in the area. This is the case for the whole world up until today.⁶⁶⁵

In “A *šir-namšub* to Ninurta (Ninurta G)” we are informed that lapis lazuli also came from Meluḥḥa.⁶⁶⁶ Further, in Gudea Statue B it is also said that gold came from this region.⁶⁶⁷ Besides the precious stones high-grade wood was also an export commodity of Meluḥḥa. In our passage the Magan wood, or the Dalbergie, is mentioned, as well as the “Sea wood”. A further high-grade wood that came from Meluḥḥa was the ebony.⁶⁶⁸ Assyriologist Armas Salonen writes that the Sea wood was used to make chairs. The Magan wood/Dalbergie was the material of chairs, beds, tables, doors, and also used as parts of ships and wagons. Salonen also points to the fact that there were very little woods in Mesopotamia.⁶⁶⁹ This shows that Mesopotamia was quite dependent upon the goods of other countries when building its civilization.

Ll. 6–7. Steinkeller has written an article where he convincingly argues for Marḥaši as being located east of Elam. Marḥaši is often mentioned in cuneiform sources from the third millennium. It was known as a remote land with exotic gems, plants and animals, a bit like Meluḥḥa and Magan.⁶⁷⁰ The du₈-ši (Akk. *dušū*) gem is the most important mineral that the Mesopotamians received from Marḥaši, and this country was the main source of it. Steinkeller writes that the use, texture and color of the du₈-ši stone suggest that it is the agate.⁶⁷¹ Assyriologist Manuel Molina, on the other hand, writes that it denotes either quartz or topaz.⁶⁷² After the Ur III period there are only two certain references to Marḥaši; one is in an inscription of the early Old Babylonian king Ilum-muttābbil of Dēr⁶⁷³ and the other is part of the year formula of Ḥammurabi’s 30th regnal year.⁶⁷⁴

Ll. 8–9. During the Sargonic, Lagaš II (c. 2160–2110 BCE) and Ur III periods Mesopotamia had direct contact with Magan. During the Ur III period

⁶⁶³ Heimpel 1997b: 53.

⁶⁶⁴ Heimpel 1997b: 54.

⁶⁶⁵ Tosi 1980: 448f.

⁶⁶⁶ Black et al. 1998–2006. “A *šir-namšub* to Ninurta (Ninurta G)”, l. 138.

⁶⁶⁷ Ll. vi: 38–40 (Edzard 1997: 34).

⁶⁶⁸ Heimpel 1997b: 54.

⁶⁶⁹ Salonen 1975: 453.

⁶⁷⁰ Steinkeller 1982: 237, 247; see also Steinkeller’s paper “Marḥaši” (1990: 381–382).

⁶⁷¹ Steinkeller 1982: 249f.

⁶⁷² Molina 1989: 83.

⁶⁷³ Ilum-muttābbil was a contemporary of Šu-ilīšu, king of Isin, who lived in the early 19th century BCE (Frayne 1990: 677).

⁶⁷⁴ Steinkeller 1990b: 382.

Magan was even Mesopotamia's main trade partner in the Gulf, and the transport of goods mainly took place on "Magan ships". These were built by "Magan shipbuilders" with Sumerian names in the region of Lagaš. Both before and after these periods there was no direct contact, and the goods from Magan came via Dilmun.⁶⁷⁵

In Gudea cylinder A the mediating role of Dilmun is expressed when Ninzaga is said to have made copper from Magan reach Gudea.⁶⁷⁶ As Heimpel points out with Adam Falkenstein, Ninzaga is another name for Enzak, the lord of Dilmun.⁶⁷⁷ In our myth Enzak is etiologically destined to be lord over Dilmun in l. 277, and in l. 271 it is said that Ninsiki'la shall be lord over Magan.

urudu is a Sumerian word for copper, and according to Professor in Ancient History Francis Joannès, originally referring to an alloy of copper. This word became a common determinative for metal objects, and therefore there has been some confusion between urudu and zabar, the latter being an alloy with tin.⁶⁷⁸ Archaeologist James Muhly writes that the Mesopotamians had interest in copper mines in eastern Anatolia, and then continues: "The assumed shift to Omani (Magan) sources of copper ca 3000 BCE is also poorly supported by analytical data". He writes that the Sumerian texts dated to 2500–1800 BCE that say that copper came from Oman have scarce support in the archaeological material.⁶⁷⁹ Old copper workshops have however been found in Ġabal Aḥḍar which is located in eastern Oman. Further, findings also show that there were copper mining at Oman.⁶⁸⁰ The Mesopotamians even called Magan "copper mountain".⁶⁸¹

The ^{na4}esi stone (Akk. *ušū*) corresponds to diorite/dolerite. It is a hard, black and polishable stone. At least two of the Gudea statues are made of this stone, and according to the inscriptions of the statues, statues A-E, G, H and K were made of diorite.⁶⁸²

For ^{na4}šu-min, Alster gives the translation "stone with two handles", and also refers to Gordon who suggests "anvil" or "(stone) pounding-hammer, sledge",⁶⁸³ whereas Black et al. (1998–2006) translates it as "(door) bar" in their glossary. The ^{na4}šu-min, written šu-min, is also found in Gudea Cylinder A, where we read:

⁶⁷⁵ Heimpel 1990: 196f. The direct contact after these periods was initiated again as late as the Neo-Assyrian period, during Assurbanipal's reign (ibid. 197).

⁶⁷⁶ Heimpel 1990: 197. See these lines in Black et al. (1998–2006. "The building of Ningirsu's temple (Gudea Cylinders A and B)", ll. 397ff.).

⁶⁷⁷ Heimpel 1990: 197. Attinger writes that Ninzag(a) is an older name for Enzak, referring to Gudea Cylinder A xv:11 (1984: 47).

⁶⁷⁸ Joannès 1997: 97.

⁶⁷⁹ Muhly 1997: 128f.

⁶⁸⁰ Heimpel 1990: 195f.

⁶⁸¹ Heimpel 1990: 198.

⁶⁸² Heimpel 1990: 197f.

⁶⁸³ Alster 1997, proverb 2.112.

Nintu of the land brought the chief-smith before him, and the ^{na4}šu-min stone cried out (like) a storm.⁶⁸⁴

This passage comes after several semi-precious gemstones and other stones have been brought for building the temple. It seems then as if the ^{na4}šu-min(3) stone is a tool used by the smith. It may be, that the ^{na4}šu-min(3) stone was a sort of stone that was preferably used by the smith as an anvil or the like, and that the word denotes both the mineral and the tool. Since copper was worked in Magan it is not unlikely that the Maganites also exported stones and tools for working metals like copper.

L. 10. As was mentioned above, ebony came from Meluhḫa. Its Sumerian name is ^{ĝis}esi, and in Akkadian it was called *ušû*. van Lerberghe convincingly shows that the ^{ĝis}esi, is the Diospyros melanoxylon, “Indian ebony”, which is found on the Indian peninsula.⁶⁸⁵ As is seen, the Sumerian and Akkadian name is the same as that of diorite, the only difference being the determinative. Ebony was used in Mesopotamia to produce chairs, beds, tables, doors, boxes and wagons,⁶⁸⁶ as well parts of cultic thrones.⁶⁸⁷ The price of this wood was very high; in Mari one text gives the price of 1 shekel silver for 500 grammes (= 1 mina) of this wood. This price corresponds to that of 300 liters of wheat or one small cattle. A text from Larsa even gives a higher price; five minas cost 10 shekels.⁶⁸⁸ This expensive wood seems to have been understood as an “ornament [] of kingship” at least in our text. And because of its cost it seems clear that ordinary people could not buy ebony. Thus, it was most probably found in the cult, at the court, and perhaps also in the homes of high officials of the state. Since a private trade developed besides that of the palace and temple during the Isin-Larsa period,⁶⁸⁹ it might have been that now private businessmen also were granted access to this wood.

L. 11. *kur za-lam-ĝar* “land of the tents”, is probably a nomad area.⁶⁹⁰ Assyriologist Horst Klengel writes that “Zweifellos haben auch nomadische Gruppen Produkte ihrer Viehwirtschaft – etwa Wolle, Käse, Leder und Gewebe – auf den lokalen Märkten [...] angeboten”, but he is of the opinion that this exchange of products was not of great importance.⁶⁹¹ However, our line indicates that the products were important. The wool that is wanted from

⁶⁸⁴ xvi: 29–32. *saĝa-simug* ^dnin-tu *kalam-ma-ke*₄ *igi-ni-šè* *si im-sá* ^{na4}šu-min-e *u*₄-*da-àm sig*₄ *mu-na-ab-ĝi*₄. Transliteration taken from Edzard (1997: 79).

⁶⁸⁵ van Lerberghe 1979: 31–49.

⁶⁸⁶ Salonen 1975: 454.

⁶⁸⁷ van Lerberghe 1979: 39.

⁶⁸⁸ van Lerberghe 1979: 39.

⁶⁸⁹ Leemans 1975: 80f.

⁶⁹⁰ E.g. Klengel 1977: 166f.

⁶⁹¹ Klengel 1977: 166f.

the “land of the tents” is multicolored, fine wool.⁶⁹² It might be that this wool was of a special quality that was unavailable elsewhere.

L. 12. Elam was a state situated in the east of Iraq and in the west of Iran, in the area of Khuzestan. During the late fourth and early third millennia the culture in this area is called “proto-Elamite”, based upon the assumption that it was the predecessor of the Elamite culture. In the late third and second millennia the Elamites proper lived in southern Iran, nearby Khuzestan. Findings in and around this area show signs of long distance trade. At Tepe Sialk, a site in the eastern parts of Elam, findings of trade have been unearthed; in the proto-Elamite level, finds of worked silver and copper have been found, and there are also finds of gold and lapis lazuli from the Elamite period. Proto-Elamite cylinder seals point to a position of Tepe Sialk as trade station for the people from Khuzestan.⁶⁹³

The oldest literary reference of trade between Mesopotamia and the peoples of Iran is the epic “Enmerkar and the lord of Aratta”. Here Enmerkar, a Sumerian king, succeeded in making the king of Aratta deliver silver, gold, carnelian and lapis lazuli – materials that he needed in order to decorate the temples.⁶⁹⁴ Since there was almost constant conflict between Elam/the peoples of the Iranian plateau and Mesopotamia,⁶⁹⁵ overland routes were often an impossible way of trade. But goods were imported from Elam over seas instead; both in the Early Dynastic and the Ur III periods goods were shipped from Elam to Mesopotamia.⁶⁹⁶ During the Isin-Larsa period, tin from the northwestern areas of Iran was imported from the north by Assyrian merchants.⁶⁹⁷

The constant wars between Mesopotamia and the peoples of the Iranian plateau must have often had economic causes. Reasons for the conflicts could have been e.g. appropriation of land and control over trade routes.⁶⁹⁸

In our line it is said that Elam should bring tribute to Dilmun. Mesopotamia had a constant wish to subdue Elam in order to get hold of its riches, be it materials or trade routes. Why is *Dilmun* the destination of the tribute from Elam? Does it suggest that the mythographers wanted to pose themselves as rulers of the island? The tribute wanted from Elam was *siki igi saĝĝa* (SAG₅), which probably is the same as *siki igi saĝ-ĝá*. The Akkadian word for this is *šipātu nasqātu* “choice wool”.⁶⁹⁹

Ll. 13–15. In these lines the export products of Mesopotamia are described. Assyriologist W. F. Leemans writes about the Ur III period that the

⁶⁹² Attinger reads *siki ġun!* (SAĤAR) *sa₆-ga* (1984: 12). Since *ġun* is attested elsewhere as a designation on wool (Waetzoldt 1972: 50, 52), I follow Attinger’s reading.

⁶⁹³ Brentjes 1995: 1001f.

⁶⁹⁴ Leemans 1975: 77; Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enmerkar and the lord of Aratta”.

⁶⁹⁵ E.g. Brentjes 1995: 1002, 1004ff.

⁶⁹⁶ Leemans 1975: 78f.

⁶⁹⁷ Leemans 1975: 81.

⁶⁹⁸ Kuhrt 1997: 40ff., 61, 87.

⁶⁹⁹ Waetzoldt 1972: 41; CAD Š/3 sub *šipātu*, h): *šipātu nasqātu*.

goods that the Mesopotamians traded were textiles, wool and leather as well as sesame oil,⁷⁰⁰ which corresponds well to our lines. The harbor of Ur was a center for the Gulf trade in the Ur III period as well as the Isin-Larsa period. The harbor, Akk. *kārum*, was not only the place where the boats made land, but also a market place.⁷⁰¹

During the Isin-Larsa period the trade underwent thorough changes; whereas earlier the temple and the state had monopoly of the trade, now private merchants acted on the market as well. To start with, textiles were initially a means of trade, but under Rīm-Sîn the currency changed to silver.⁷⁰² As we saw above, Komoróczy dated the interpolation to the first half of Rīm-Sîn's reign. In our lines it is the temple, the seat of kingship, that loads the goods for the Gulf trade. This of course does not exclude private merchants at the time of writing the text, but it could point to a date before private trade. Further, the goods loaded in our lines are not silver. Therefore, it might be that our passage dates to the early Isin-Larsa period, perhaps even early under Rīm-Sîn, or even to the Ur III period.

Here we see that Ur delivered barley as means of trade. This means is also used by Enmerkar when importing precious stones and metals from the lord of Aratta.⁷⁰³ Barley was the principal grain grown in Mesopotamia – so much so that *še* in Sumerian denotes both grain and barley. The Mesopotamians made beer, flour, bread and groats from barley. Also the wages were paid in barley. Regarding oil, olive oil was preferred in Mesopotamia, but in regions where the olive tree did not grow, sesame was pressed for its oil.⁷⁰⁴

The splendid garment, *šutur* (TU₉.MAḪ) is equaled with Akkadian *tūzu* “splendid garment”, *nalbašu* “cloak” or *gadamāḫu* (also GADA.MAḪ) “splendid linen garment” in the lexical lists.⁷⁰⁵ The *šutur* seems to be both a cloth and a garment especially used in royal contexts. This is seen e.g. in “Inana's descent”⁷⁰⁶ and in two of the letters from the Ur III royal correspondence. In the two Ur III letters we read that, “[h]e was seated upon a throne, a foundation clad with a *šutur* cloth”.⁷⁰⁷ Further, in “Inana and Enki”

⁷⁰⁰ Leemans 1975: 80.

⁷⁰¹ Leemans 1975: 78, 81f.

⁷⁰² Leemans 1975: 80f.

⁷⁰³ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enmerkar and the lord of Aratta”.

⁷⁰⁴ von Soden 1994: 100f.

⁷⁰⁵ See *CAD* G, N/1, and T, and *AHW* sub *gad(a)māḫu*, *nalbašu* and *tūzu*, respectively.

⁷⁰⁶ L. 349. ^ddumu-zi TU₉.MAḪ-a i-im-mu₄ maḫ-a dūr-a dūr im-ma-ḡar (text K: gloss: *i-na¹ ku-us¹-si a-ši-ib*). “Dumuzi, dressed in a *šutur* robe, in greatness (?) he sat upon a seat/throne.” (This is the scene that Inana meets when she comes up from the netherworld with the demons to deliver Dumuzi as her substitute). Transliteration in Black et al. (1998–2006. “Inana's descent to the nether world”, l. 349).

⁷⁰⁷ L. 18 ^{ḡis}gu-za bára *šutur*-e ri-a i-íb-tuš. The letters are called Aradmu to Šulgi 1 and Šulgi to Aradmu 1. (Michalowski 2011: 249, 255, 275).

TU₉.MAḪ appears among the me:s of kingship.⁷⁰⁸ In line 15 we read that “those of the wide sea may [deliver] their abundance [to you]”. Thus, again, the focus in this interpolation is Dilmun, to which the riches shall be delivered. Even the temple of Ur shall load goods for Dilmun. This is quite exceptional, since usually the land of Sumer is in focus in the Sumerian myths. Thus, the question arises as to whether the interpolation intends to pose Sumer as being in control of Dilmun and the Dilmun trade.

Ll. 16–21. Dilmun was already discussed above under section 4.2., and I will only make some comments on our lines here. These five last lines of the passage describe Dilmun as a prosperous place, as does the whole myth. Is Dilmun perhaps idealised in these lines as a wonderful place and market in the Gulf trade? As was pointed out earlier, barley was the staple food of the Mesopotamians. Further, the date palm was a very commonly cultivated tree in Mesopotamia. The dates were eaten fresh, dried or as syrup and they were also exported.⁷⁰⁹ Thus, when the Mesopotamians found good dwellings, fresh barley and big dates at Dilmun, they must have felt somewhat at home. Perhaps the products of Dilmun were just like those of Mesopotamia, only a bit fresher and bigger?

Although Dilmun is posed at the center of the trade, the impression from the Rīm-Sîn interpolation is that Mesopotamia got access to enormous riches through the Gulf trade. The Mesopotamians did not only try to reach riches by subduing its owners. Gudea is an example of a king who took advantage of the riches of the east in a friendly manner, bringing the luxuries mainly by trade.⁷¹⁰ And we have seen above that friendly trade was the rule also during Ur III and Isin-Larsa periods.

When we are informed of all the furniture, adornment, and all sorts of utensils that were imported during the time period described above, it is clear that the Mesopotamian culture would not even have existed without all the contact with the surrounding areas. Trade and wars seem to have had one main reason: to get access to riches, be it land, metals or gems. The Mesopotamians succeeded in building a huge state upon its resources of agricultural products. It was an immense enterprise; not even the earth was arable in and of itself, but had to be irrigated. And beyond working the earth, the Mesopotamians succeeded in intense contact – both friendly and unfriendly – with their neighbors.

And why was this passage interpolated in our myth? The most obvious reason is that Dilmun is at the center of events both in the interpolation and in the myth. Other aspects could be that there are other conceptual relations between the Dilmun/Gulf trade and our myth. Just as the Mesopotamians

⁷⁰⁸ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Inana and Enki”, Segment F, l. 19; Segment I, l. 8. See also the discussion on the TU₉.MAḪ by Andersson regarding its occurrence in the onomasticon (2012: 91 with fn. 465).

⁷⁰⁹ von Soden 1994: 102.

⁷¹⁰ Kuhrt 1997: 58.

“domesticated” the regions in the Gulf in order to get hold of their riches, so we will see that Enki “domesticates” the goddesses in our myth. We will see below that Uttu represents a transition into culture, and just as Enki gives her gifts from the garden in order to get sexual access to her, the Mesopotamians turned from pure violence to trade in the Gulf. I believe that a further reason for the interpolation is that in some birth incantations there was imagery where the child as well as the vulva was likened to a boat coming loaded with precious materials like lapis lazuli and carnelian. (This imagery will be treated below in section 4.9.) Thus, not only the rest of the myth deals with creation and birth, but the interpolation has such connotations as well.

4.4.2. Ideological aspects of the Rīm-Sîn interpolation

The categories of this section are Dilmun, as well as the royal seat of Ur, and their trading partners. The parties are presented in a rather equitable and friendly manner, although Dilmun is the center of the trade and Ur is posited above all others as “the seat of kingship”. Further, Elam can be said to be singled out in a negative way, since that is the only region that is said to pay tribute to Dilmun. I would say that the logic of this ranking is that all regions but Elam deliver what the Mesopotamians want, and further most of them are so far away that conquest is not an option. Elam, on the other hand, is a nearby region that now and then opposes the claim of supremacy of the Sumerian kings. It is conspicuous that the tribute of Elam is only choice wool although the state could deliver precious metals and stones. Is this a way to present the land in a derogatory manner? Of further note is that it seems that Sumer did not only profit from the raw materials of the other regions; there are signs in the text that knowledge and tools such as the Magan ships and the anvil of the smith were also imported. The interests of the Sumerian state are advanced in this passage; the good relations to the trading partners depend upon their delivery of valuable goods, and it even seems as if Dilmun is represented as being part of Sumer.

4.5. Enki’s copulation with the earth and the creative act of the mother goddess

4.5.1. Contextualization of Enki’s and Ninḫursaġa’s sexual encounter

The copulation with earth is thus described:

Enki, the one who had acquired understanding; in the direction of Nintu, the mother of the land; / his penis digs a ditch for the water in her direction. / His

penis, diving into the reed (and water), it dives into it towards her. / The penis rises onto the lofty garment (bardul maḥ) from there.⁷¹¹

And after he has had his penis to rise onto the lofty garment he cries: “I will not let anyone pass by in the marshes.”, and then: “Lying down – lying down in the marshes, in the marshes – delight!”.

Regarding the above translated Sumerian lines there are somewhat different readings among the scholars. Kramer and Maier read the a in ll. 67–68 as “semen” and understand the lines as Enki filling the ditches with semen and lets the reeds bathe in sperm. Then, regarding the lofty garment (bardul maḥ), they read that Enki is tearing away the cloth that covers the lap with his penis (HI read as du₁₀).⁷¹² There are no big differences between Attinger’s, Black et al.’s, and my readings of ll. 67–68. Regarding l. 69 Black et al. chose another reading: “the august one pulled his phallus aside”. It is not clear to me what they have done with the lofty garment. Attinger translates the verb in l. 69 as “bubble up”/“spurt forth” (jaillir),⁷¹³ whereas I have chosen to read it as an equivalent to Akk. *našû* “to lift, to rise”, or to *tebû* “to rise”. The verb *tebû* must also have covered a meaning “to be (sexually) excited”,⁷¹⁴ as the verbal adjective of the verb means “raised, ready”, and “rutting, in heat”.⁷¹⁵

Attinger poses the question if the line could express an image of growing vegetation, i.e. that the lofty garment (in his words “...vêtement ‘bardul’”) is vegetation that “spurts forth”. In this respect I follow Kramer and Maier; the garment is the cloth that covers the lap. To note though is that bardul is an outer garment (bar dul “to cover the outside/body”), and not a loin cloth.

The difference between Kramer/Maier and me is that whereas they interpret the penis as tearing away the garment, I read it as the penis rising onto the garment. Thus, Enki has intercourse with the earth, and at the same time he directs his penis towards Nintu. This means that I understand the bardul as Nintu’s garment.

The interpretation that Enki has intercourse with the earth is supported by the beginning of the myth. Here we are at Dilmun, where a process of crea-

⁷¹¹ 66–69. ^den-ki-ke₄ ḡêštu-ge tuku-a ^dnin-tu (ama kalam-ma-šè) / ḡiš-a-ni e a ba-an-ši-in-dun-e / ḡiš-a-ni gi(-)a gígri-e ba-an-ši-gígri-e / ḡiš-a-ni bar-dul₅-maḥ(-)ḡe ša-ba-ra-an-zi-zi. Transliteration adapted from Attinger (1984). Although usually the locative-terminative of maḥ is -e and not -ḡe, I have chosen to understand -ḡe here as a locative-terminative. I have not found any other such writing of the locative-terminative of maḥ, but there are rare similar writings as ki maḥ-ḡa-na “in his lofty place” (“A praise poem of Šulgi (Šulgi X)”, l. 157) and TI NI BAL ga-ar-za UM MU MU DI maḥ-ḡa (“A hymn to Enlil for Samsu-iluna (Samsu-iluna F)”, l. 3). Cf. also “A hymn to Nanna (Nanna N)” where we have ki-sa₂-al ma-ḡe “in the lofty court”. All these lines can be found in Black et al. (1998–2006).

⁷¹² Kramer and Maier 1989: 24.

⁷¹³ Attinger 1984: 15, l. 69.

⁷¹⁴ Jakob Andersson, personal communication.

⁷¹⁵ CAD T sub *tebû*, adj.

tion is going on, and Enki lies down with Ninsikila, who is said to be his spouse:

At that place where Enki laid down with his wife, [...] / At that place where Enki laid down with Ninsikila, / That place is virgin; that place is bright.⁷¹⁶

Here the place is called pure (ki sikil),⁷¹⁷ which most probably refers to virgin (ki-sikil). And the name of Enki's spouse in this passage (Ninsikila) seems also to refer to virginity. In this way his spouse is related to the pure/virgin land of Dilmun.⁷¹⁸

According to Attinger and Black et al., Enki asks the mother goddess to lie down in the marshes after he has copulated with the earth.⁷¹⁹ The verb can be read as standing in the imperative, but also as an intransitive, passive participle. I have chosen the latter. Therefore I suggest the following translation, which is influenced by the interpretation of Alster: “‘Lying down – lying down in the marshes, in the marshes – delight!’ Enki poured out his (for) Damgalnuna (destined) semen there. Ninḥursaġa (took the semen and) poured it into her (lit. the) womb”.⁷²⁰ This passage changes the level of creativity, and opens for the following intercours. Damgalnuna is the common

⁷¹⁶ 8. ki ^den-ki(-ke₄) dam-a-ni-t/da ba-(an-)da-nú-a-ba / [...] 11–12. ki ^den-ki(-ke₄) ^dnin-sikil-la ba-(an-)da-nú-a-ba / ki-bi sikil-àm ki-bi dadag-ga(-àm). Transliteration adapted from Attinger (1984).

⁷¹⁷ ki also means “earth”.

⁷¹⁸ Cf. Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki and Ninḥursaġa”, ll. 9f.: “and the place where Enki had lain down with Ninsikila, that place was virginal, that place was pristine”.

⁷¹⁹ Attinger 1984: 14f., 73; Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki and Ninḥursaġa”, l. 71.

⁷²⁰ The interpretation that Ninḥursaġa is taking the semen and pouring it into the womb is suggested by Alster (1978: 17). With some hesitation I follow his interpretation, and I do so on textual and logical grounds. Regarding the text, the phrase here; ^dnin-ḥur-saġ-ġá-ke₄ a šà-ga ba-ni-in-ri, has a parallel in later instances when Enki impregnates the young goddesses; ^den-ki-ke₄ a šà-ga ba-ni-in-ri. Therefore I believe that the /-e/ after Ninḥursaġa shall be read as an ergative and not as a locative-terminative. A locative-terminative can however not be wholly excluded; cf. Attinger, who writes that at least in sentences with the verb du₁₁/e/di the dative of the nominal chain is very frequently replaced by a locative-terminative in Ur III juridical and economical texts as well as in (late) Old Babylonian literary texts (1993: 240). Support for an understanding of Ninḥursaġa as recipient rather than agent in the text itself is the locative-terminative in connection with lú-tur/^dNin-nisi/^dNin-kur-ra sa₆-ga-e, also text A, in ll. 92f., 95, 112, 115. The textual logic that makes me inclined to read the /-e/ as an ergative is that in the myth we have two further interventions by Ninḥursaġa that result in a new form of creation. The other instances are when she is wiping off the semen from Uttu's loins, and when she puts Enki in her own womb. Thus, I suggest that these are three instances when Ninḥursaġa's acts lead to creation. It may however also be, that the mythographer deliberately used the locative-terminative, sounding like an ergative, in order to make a joke of the sounding that a goddess acted in a male fashion, pouring the semen into the lap. To note is however, that there is another mother goddess who seems to be putting the semen into her womb. In Gudea Cylinder A Gudea says to Ġatumdu that “I have no mother – you are my mother. I have no father – you are my father. You put my semen in your (lit. the) womb, and I was born in the sanctuary, Ġatumdu, your pure name is sweet!”. (iii : 6–9. ama nu-tuku-me ama-ġu₁₀ zé-me / a nu-tuku-me a-ġu₁₀ zé-me / a-ġu₁₀ šà-ga šu ba-ni-du₁₁ unu₆-a i-tu-e / ^dġá-tùm-du₁₀ mu kù-zu du₁₀-ga-àm. Transliteration taken from Edzard (1997: 70)).

spouse of Enki. When Enki is watering the ground, which I have suggested parallels his spouse in this myth, this could be seen as him having intercourse with his wife.

Ninḥursaġa/Nintu can be understood as a parallel to Ninsikila, and this interpretation is made by both Alster and Attinger. Attinger also understands Damgalnuna as another name for the mother goddess here,⁷²¹ a name otherwise referring to Enki's common spouse. I believe that this is correct, and consequently Ninḥursaġa is not stealing the semen that is destined for someone else. Her act should rather be seen as highlighting her role as creatress, and at the same time it shows that she cannot create alone.⁷²² Further, there is in fact a text where the name Damgalnun(a) probably refers to Ninḥursaġa, dated to the Early Dynastic IIIa period. The text is found on a statue representing one of the persons who built the temple of Ninḥursaġa in al-'Ubaid, and that was installed there by him. On it we read: "Kur-lil,⁷²³ keeper of the granary of Uruk, (the goddess) Damgalnun he fashioned, (her) temple he built".⁷²⁴ Since the sculpture is found in Ninḥursaġa's temple, where also other objects with texts relate other persons with the temple building, it is reasonable to understand the name Damgalnun as an epithet of Ninḥursaġa here.

The structural meaning of this passage is that the initially described intercourse (or lying down) with the pure place, represented by Ninsikila, corresponds to the "intercourse" here with the earth/the mother goddess. Moreover these intercourses are parts of a larger structure with a series of intercourses. Regarding the equalling of earth and the goddesses, this also has a connotative meaning; it tells us something of the quality of the goddesses. Their realm is the earth, and therewith the vegetation and the animals on earth belong to them. This means that Enki is on one level having intercourse with the same goddess throughout our myth.

4.5.2. Ideological aspects of Enki's and Ninḥursaġa's sexual encounter

The categories that we meet in this section are Enki and Ninḥursaġa/Nintu/Damgalnuna, and the latter is understood as a parallel to Ninsikila. The ranking of the categories can be understood in terms of activity and passivity as well as independence. (This aspect will be further investigated below in section 4.16.2. where a structural analysis of the myth is done

⁷²¹ Attinger 1984: 38, comments to ll. 65f.

⁷²² This is also pointed to by Frymer-Kensky, who writes that "[t]here is clearly a rivalry going on between Enki and Ninḥursaġa, but in this myth the two powers seem to have struck a balance: both Enki's semen and Ninḥursaġa's womb are necessary for the creation of goddesses" (1992: 72).

⁷²³ This is the conventional reading of the name. Perhaps it shall rather be read É:kur?

⁷²⁴ Gadd 1927: 125.

regarding activity and passivity.) Whereas Ninsikila was presented as a passive female earlier in the myth, here we see an active mother goddess, *taking* the semen in order to be fertilized. Likewise Enki is sexually active when penetrating the passive soil. When the mother goddess is called Nintu and Damgalnuna she is passive; Enki moves towards Nintu, and the semen is destined for Damgalnuna. Enki's dependence on the mother goddess when engaging in creative acts is not made apparent, whereas Ninḥursaġa's dependence on him is obvious since she has to take the semen. The logic of this ranking seems to be that although the mother goddess is a powerful goddess, the audience of the myth shall become aware that she is not creating independently. I understand this as a subtle way to rearrange the ranking of the mother goddess; it is one reflection of the process when Enki superseded Ninḥursaġa as the third deity of the literary and state pantheon. Katz refers to this process in her analysis of "Enki and Ninḥursaġa", and writes that the conflict between the two deities "marks an intention to promote his [Enki's] status in the Babylonian pantheon and his cult".⁷²⁵ Due to lack of sources it is difficult to say something specific about whose interests were advanced in this process, but safe to say is that the myth reflects state ideology in some way.

4.6. The goddess Ninnisi, daughter of Nintu

The fruit of the "self-insemination" of the mother goddess is Ninnisi.⁷²⁶ The connotation of the word nisi.g belongs to the same field as the other words written with SAR; i.e. mú which means "to grow", and kiri₆.k, "garden". In Black et al.'s glossary nisi.g is translated as "greenery", and in the texts referred to there we find translations like "flourish" and "plant".⁷²⁷ Jacobsen translates Ninnisi as "lady verdure".⁷²⁸

The goddess Ninnisi was an ancient goddess, found already in the texts from Abū Šalābīḥ, from where some of the oldest literary texts in Sumerian come. Here we find her as the carpenter of heaven and earth.⁷²⁹ In the Early Dynastic IIIb texts from Ġirsu she is met with in the big Ningirsu offering

⁷²⁵ Katz 2008: 322.

⁷²⁶ Both Attinger (1984) and Black et al. (1998–2006) read the name of this goddess nin-SAR, whereas Kramer and Maier (1989: 210, not 16) read it nin-mú. Bottéro and Kramer have chosen the reading Ninsar, and they translate sar as "plantes-de-jardin" (1993: 161). The spelling SAR by Attinger and Black et al. shows that the interpreters want to state that we do not know yet how the name of this goddess is to be read, since this is the name of the sign, which also has the reading mú among others. Jacobsen read this name as Ninnisiga already in *The Harps that once...*, published in 1987. It seems that Jacobsen's reading is correct, and that SAR here shall probably be read nisi.g (see Cavigneaux and Krebernik 2001a: 484).

⁷²⁷ Black et al. 1998–2006.

⁷²⁸ Jacobsen 1987: 192, fn. 18. Cf. the similar translation of Cavigneaux and Krebernik; "Herin Grün(zeug)" (2001a: 484).

⁷²⁹ 177. ab-NAGAR, 178. NAGAR an-ki, 179. ^dnin-SAR zà-mì (Biggs 1974: 51).

lists, where she receives offerings of medium size together with the goddesses Lamma and 𒬷𒂊-ĝír. Lamma was a protective deity, sometimes called e.g. “the lamma of ⁴ba-ú”, “the sweet lamma” and “the lamma of the thin alley/road”. The last epithet is also a name of a later popular Bau sanctuary.⁷³⁰ 𒬷𒂊-ĝír (later with the ending -nun-na) has the following meaning according to Selz: “Dabei steht ĝír für ĝír-nun, den ‘Hohen Weg’, das ist die Prozessionsstrasse in Ĝirsu. Da 𒬷𒂊 mit der Lesung /gan/ als (alter) Allograph zu géme bestimmt werden kann, bedeutet der Gottesname ‘Magd (des Hohen) Weges’”.⁷³¹ The relation to these other deities is unclear to me.

In an Ur III offering list we find Ninnisi between Ĝatumdu and Ninisina.⁷³² Ĝatumdu was a mother goddess of the city-state of Lagaš, and Ninisina was a healing goddess, and presumably also a mother goddess, which will be discussed below. In the godlist An-Anum, Ninnisi is found in a context where we also meet Ninduluma and Ninmug.⁷³³ The former is a carpenter god, often related to the making of cult statues,⁷³⁴ and the latter is both a metalworker and a birth goddess, as will be seen in the next chapter. These sources thus place Ninnisi in a context of mother and birth goddesses as well as crafts goddesses.

In the Old Babylonian forerunner to An-Anum, Ninnisi is enumerated before Erragal, and in An-Anum she is said to be the spouse of Erragal/Nergal. She is further called ĝír-lá, sword carrier/butcher of the é-kur.⁷³⁵ The picture we get of the goddess from this source is also found in an Old Babylonian lamentation.⁷³⁶ Her title implies that she is a goddess of the netherworld. The Ekur is the home of Ninlil and Enlil, and the meaning of the word is “house (of the) netherworld/mountain”. And since she is said to be the spouse of Nergal, she is the spouse of the lord of the netherworld. Thereby she is associated with the principal goddess of the netherworld.⁷³⁷

Regarding the context of birth goddesses, it will be met with again and again in this thesis, and it is not requiring a thorough discussion here. The netherworldly connotations do need some elucidation, though. Since Ninnisi is associated with the principal goddess of the netherworld, I will turn to Ereškigal, the common goddess of the netherworld. To start with the name, Ereškigal means “mistress of the great earth”, and the great earth is one of the names of the netherworld.

⁷³⁰ Selz 1995b: 158.

⁷³¹ Selz 1995b: 140.

⁷³² Cavigneaux and Krebernik 2001a: 485.

⁷³³ Cavigneaux and Krebernik 2001a: 484.

⁷³⁴ Cavigneaux and Krebernik 2001c: 340f.

⁷³⁵ Litke 1998: 60, I: 328, 332.

⁷³⁶ See Cohen 1988: 284, I. 208.

⁷³⁷ Lambert means that Ninazu, the son of Ereškigal, initially was the Sumerian ruler of the netherworld, and that he became superseded by his mother at the end of the third millennium. She later became the spouse of Nergal, which Lambert states was the Akkadian deity of the netherworld (1980: 62).

We have two myths where Ereškigal plays one of the main roles: “Inana’s descent” (with the Akkadian variant “Ištar’s descent”, dated to the Neo-Assyrian period)⁷³⁸ and “Nergal and Ereškigal”.⁷³⁹ “Inana’s descent” is the oldest of these myths, and the copies that we have date to the early second millennium, i.e. to the same time as those of “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”. Here the role of Ereškigal is to condemn Inana, the intruder in the netherworld, to death. In the Akkadian version the result of Inana’s death is that the reproduction on earth stops.⁷⁴⁰ Ereškigal does not only put to death however, but also accepts that Inana goes back to life – if the netherworld is given a substitute. When Inana has been put to death and Enki’s creatures, the kurġara and the galatura, come to save her, Ereškigal lies there as a mourning woman. As I understand it her suffering is due to her inability to give birth.⁷⁴¹ The visiting creatures succeed in their mission by showing compassion to the tormented goddess.

A common trait of the inhabitants of the netherworld was their asexuality and barrenness.⁷⁴² Ninnisi is able to give birth, but is nevertheless paralleled with Ereškigal. Why should she be associated with Ereškigal if the latter is barren? We know though, that Ereškigal has children, and in “Nergal and Ereškigal” she is not asexual.

We have two versions of “Nergal and Ereškigal”; one less complete version, from Amarna, dated to the 14th century, and the Sultantepe version dated to the late 8th or early 7th century with the Uruk copy dated to the Neo-Babylonian period, i.e. about 500 BCE.⁷⁴³ Both of the later copies belong to the same traditions and they are known as the standard version.

In the younger version a central trait of Ereškigal is that she is overwhelmed by sexual craving, and because of this, and the fact that she is sexually defiled, she willingly hands over the power of the netherworld to Nergal.⁷⁴⁴ In this version the pulling off Ereškigal from the throne is to be understood as “violent passion”. In the Amarna version instead, Nergal does

⁷³⁸ Sladek 1974.

⁷³⁹ Gurney 1960: 105–130; Pettinato 2000.

⁷⁴⁰ See Sladek 1974: 246, 258, ll. 87–90.

⁷⁴¹ I suggest this understanding of Ereškigal’s suffering elsewhere (Rodin, forthcoming).

⁷⁴² See Sladek 1974: 66; Katz 2003: 143.

⁷⁴³ Pettinato writes that the Amarna version dates to the middle of the fifteenth century BCE (2000: 5, 47), although the Amarna period is dated to the fourteenth century BCE. I suppose that Pettinato estimates that the myth was composed earlier, and then brought to Amarna. Regarding the Sultantepe version he on the one hand writes that it dates to the ninth century BCE (ibid. 5), but on the other he gives the date “all’ultimo periodo dell’impero assiro, attorno al 650 a.C.” (ibid. 47). The only explanation I can think of regarding his dating of the Sultantepe version is that there is a misprint on p. 5. Regarding the texts found at Sultantepe Assyriologist M. Hutter writes that “Der zeitliche Rahmen für die Schriftfunde läßt sich durch die wenigen datierten Kolophone zwischen 718 und 619 festlegen” (1985: 18). Pettinato writes that the Uruk version dates to the late Babylonian period, around 500 BCE (2000: 5, 47), which seems to be correct.

⁷⁴⁴ Gurney 1960: 120ff., IV: 54’–56’; V: 7’; Pettinato 2000: 96ff., IV: 55/8–57/9. (Sultantepe/Uruk); V: 8. (Sultantepe).

this with the intention to cut off her head. She offers him marriage, though, and says: “I will let you seize kingship on the wide earth, I will put the tablet of wisdom in your hand”.⁷⁴⁵ Common to both versions is the great power that Ereškigal initially has. She is judging for the great gods in the Sultantepe version,⁷⁴⁶ and she seems to have had the power of all earth. Furthermore, she owns “the tablet of wisdom” in the Amarna version.

When we compare these two versions with “Inana’s descent” the picture of Ereškigal is a goddess with a lot of power. In “Inana’s descent” Ereškigal does not have a “tablet of wisdom”, but she has the power to put to death, and also to release Inana back to life. Since there is an association between Ninnisi and the principal goddess of the netherworld I assume that both the aspect of power and that of death is underlined. Ninnisi was also found in a context of birth/mother goddesses in the sources; thus, she is not only a “death goddess”, but also a goddess who gives life; the latter aspect is seen also in our myth. I will argue in section 4.13.2. The decreeing of destinies, that the aspects of both life and death might initially have been traits of the mother goddess.

In section 4.9. below, dealing with the intercourses on a boat, the ideological implications of Enki’s intercourse with Ninnisi as well the other goddesses on a boat will be discussed.

4.7. The goddess Ninkura, daughter of Ninnisi

In their translation of “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” Bottéro and Kramer translate this name as “Dame des plantes à fibres”, followed by a question mark. They write that this translation of kur(a) is based upon the context only.⁷⁴⁷ I assume that they have chosen this reading since they interpret Enki’s subsequent intercourses as producing 1. grass and reed, when fecundating the earth 2. edible plants, when having intercourse with Ninnisi (by them called Ninsar) 3. fiber plants for spinning and weaving, when having intercourse with Ninkura, and then Uttu, the weaver (see further below, section 4.10.) will use the fibers.⁷⁴⁸ As will be seen below, I believe that the subsequent intercourses do express a development connected to nature and culture, but I have a different interpretation. As far as the name Ninkura is concerned, the basic meaning of kur is “mountain, land, netherworld”,⁷⁴⁹ and therefore I

⁷⁴⁵ Rev. 16. [...] *lu-še-eṣ-bi-it-ka* 17. *šar-ru-ta i-na er-še-e-ti ra-pa-aš-ti lu-uš-ku-un tú-up-pa* 18. *ša né-mé-e-qi a-na qá-ti-ka* [...] (Pettinato 2000: 64). The Amarna version of “Nergal and Ereškigal” is also published by Assyriologist Schlomo Izre’el (1997: 51–61).

⁷⁴⁶ Gurney 1960: 123, V: 7’; Pettinato 2000: 98, V: 8.

⁷⁴⁷ Bottéro and Kramer 1993: 155.

⁷⁴⁸ Bottéro and Kramer 1993: 161.

⁷⁴⁹ According to Katz kur initially referred to mountain, being the place of the dead. She writes that in the middle of the third millennium this “horizontal” comprehension gave way to

chose to translate the goddess' name as "mistress of the netherworld/mountain land". In "An elegy on the death of Nawirtum" we read: "May Ninkura stand by you, may she lift your neck high".⁷⁵⁰ Her presence in the elegy of this dead person and the wish for her to stand by her indicates that Ninkura is not only by name associated with the netherworld. Her name suggests a close connection to her mother who was also related to the netherworld. I am aware of one other source on this goddess; in An-Anum Ninkura has become reinterpreted as a male god, and mentioned as a spouse of Uttu.⁷⁵¹ In An-Anum, as in our myth, there is a connection between this god(dess), (over Ninimma in text C), and Uttu, the last goddess in the series of intercourses. I shall examine the two following goddesses, and see if I can treat the three or four last goddesses as a unity. In section 4.9. below, dealing with the intercourses on a boat, the ideological implications of Enki's intercourse with Ninkura as well the other goddesses on a boat will be discussed.

4.8. The goddess Ninimma, daughter of Ninkura

The goddess Ninimma only occurs in one of the two texts that have the lines of this passage (text C).⁷⁵² In the other (text A) Ninkura gives birth to Uttu, and thus we have one intercourse and one birth less in one of these two duplicates.

Assyriologist Karen Focke has published both a hymn to this goddess, and an article on all the attestations on Ninimma.⁷⁵³ In the hymn nothing is said about reproduction and sexuality or a role as mother goddess. Instead she is described much like Nisaba, the wise scribal goddess, commonly is. Ninimma is the "seal keeper" (kišib-ĝál), "the scribe of heaven" (dubsar ana), and she holds the measuring line and rod (éš-gána and gi-l-ninda).⁷⁵⁴ She is also probably described as a light phenomenon in the heavens, which Focke suggests could have a correspondence in the relation Nisaba has with heaven and the stars.⁷⁵⁵ Ninimma also has epithets common to both Nisaba and Enki, as for example ĝéštu diri, "outstandingly intelligent" and ĝéštu

a "vertical" comprehension of cosmos, with the realm of the dead located under the soil of the earth (2003: 22, 63ff., 105).

⁷⁵⁰ L. 63. ^dnin-kur-ra-ke₄ ħé-da-ši-DU gú-zu ħé-éb-il-e. See Black et al. 1998–2006. "An elegy on the death of Nawirtum".

⁷⁵¹ Litke 1998: 110, II: 362.

⁷⁵² Attinger 1984: 18ff.; Black et al. 1998–2006. "Enki and Ninĥursaĝa", after line 126.

⁷⁵³ Focke 1998: 196–224; id. 1999–2000: 92–110.

⁷⁵⁴ Focke 1998: 197, 201, 204, 208.

⁷⁵⁵ Focke 1998: 214ff., 223.

bad, “wide eared”.⁷⁵⁶ Furthermore, Ninimma probably holds the im nam-ti-la, the tablet of life.⁷⁵⁷

Besides both “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” and “Enki and Ninmah”,⁷⁵⁸ there are other indications that this goddess also was a mother goddess, being related to sexuality and childbirth, and even cosmogony. In his paper on cosmogony Lambert writes that Nammu/a is the Emesal form of Imma, and that Ninimma like Nammu/a is described as a creatress of all.⁷⁵⁹ Regarding the element SIG₇ (imma) in Ninimma’s name Focke writes that a possible interpretation is that it refers to yellow/green (Akk. *warqu(m)*). Since this word is used e.g. for vegetation Focke suggests that this could be aimed at in “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”, thus posing Ninimma as a creatress or vegetation goddess. Ninimma’s epithet “nin é-sar-ra” is pointing in the same direction,⁷⁶⁰ meaning something like “lady of the house/temple of the garden”.

In An-Anum Ninimma has e.g. the following epitheta: um-mi-a ^den-líl-lá dubsar zà-ga é-kur¹-ra-ke₄ “the artisan of Enlil, the land registrar of Ekur”, um-me-ga-lá ^den-zu-na-ke₄, “wet-nurse of Sîn”, ^dnin-tu-babbar-re “shining mother goddess” and ^dsaġ-gul-gul “skull crusher” (!).⁷⁶¹ The first epithet agrees very well with the picture we have of the goddess in her hymn; a learned goddess, engaged in writing and field measuring. The second and third epithets instead agree with the attestations of Ninimma as a goddess related to sexuality and childbirth. Regarding the epithet ^dsaġ-gul-gul, Focke reads this as ^dsaġ-kul-kul (GUL can be read kúl, whereas KUL can be read gúl), which means “the bolt”. Referring to the *CAD*, Focke writes that this word can be used in a figurative sense as a part of the uterus,⁷⁶² which is also mentioned as one of the meanings of the Akkadian equivalent *sikkūru* in the *AHW*. Regarding *sikkūru* the *CAD* refers to a passage in an incantation that is (or was at the time) only edited in transliteration where we read in a context of childbirth that “the mother goddess spoke to the lock, ‘Be open’”.⁷⁶³ I believe that Focke is correct in understanding ^dsaġ-gul-gul as an unorthographic writing for “bolt”, rather than representing “skull crusher”.

The overall picture of Ninimma is that she has two sides – one learned and one as a goddess related to childbirth and the female sphere. Interesting is that her grandmother was associated with Ereškigal, who in the Amarna

⁷⁵⁶ Focke 1998: 211, 216.

⁷⁵⁷ The tablet is broken at this place, and Focke translates the line thus: “Die die ‘Tafel des Lebens’ ..., bist du” (1998: 197, 199, l. 5). The interpretation of Focke is probable though, since her role is similar to that of Ḫaja in his hymn. There he is putting his reed to the tablet of the great destinies (l.5), and is asked to write on the tablet of life (l.52) (Charpin 1986: 344ff.).

⁷⁵⁸ See below, section 5.6. The creative acts of Namma and her assistants.

⁷⁵⁹ Lambert 1984: 220. Wiggermann also makes this etymological conclusion (2001a: 136). This is referred to also below, under section 5.5. Namma, the mother of Enki.

⁷⁶⁰ Focke 1999–2000: 93.

⁷⁶¹ Litke 1998: 56, I: 306–310.

⁷⁶² Focke 1999–2000: 97.

⁷⁶³ *CAD* S sub *sikkūru* e).

version of “Nergal and Ereškigal” kept “the tablet of wisdom”, and that she herself kept “the tablet of life”. Besides this possible reference to the goddess of the netherworld, we do not have any obvious netherworldly connotations for this goddess. In the following section the ideological implications of Enki’s intercourse with Ninimma as well the other goddesses on a boat will be discussed.

4.9. The question of virginity and intercourses with boat imagery

4.9.1. Contextualization of boat imagery

The intercourse(s) Enki has with the earth/the mother goddess is followed by a series of three intercourses in connection to a boat. Thereafter he cohabits with Uttu, the last of his daughters. I see the passage with the boat as an intercourse imagery, just as Enki’s sexual behavior towards the earth in a way can be seen as an imagery of the following impregnation of the mother goddess. I will investigate the imagery and discuss why it is connected to Ninnisi, Ninkura and Ninimma, but not to Uttu. (Regarding the incest theme, it will be dealt with below in section 4.13.1.)

The discussion between Enki and his vizier that precedes the three intercourses, as well as the intercourses themselves are expressed roughly, but not exactly, in the same ways. The passage here is taken from the first one, when Enki has sex with Ninnisi:

“The lovely young girl – why don’t I kiss her? / The lovely Ninnisi – why don’t I kiss her?” / His vizier Isimu answers him: / “The lovely young girl – why don’t you kiss her! / The lovely Ninnisi – why don’t you kiss her! / My king will sail and I will navigate it; he will sail and I will navigate it.” / He set his foot onto the only one, onto the boat, / and then (lit. secondly) he verily set it on arid land. / He pressed her onto the breast (and) kissed her. / Enki poured out the semen in the womb.⁷⁶⁴

The dialogue between Enki and his vizier and the following intercourse is very similar to the first intercourse in “Enlil and Ninlil”. This myth also has other parallels to ours.⁷⁶⁵ When we read the corresponding passage closer,

⁷⁶⁴ 92–101. lú-tur sa₆-ga-e ne nu-mu-un-su-ub-bé / ^dnin-nisi sa₆-ga-e (ne nu-mu-un-su-ub-bé) / sukkal-a-ni ^disimu₄-dè mu-na-ni-ib-gi₄-gi₄ / lú-tur sa₆-ga-e ne nu-mu-un-su-ub-bé / ^dnin-nisi sa₆(-ga-e ne nu-mu-un-su-ub-bé) / lugal-ġu₁₀ im-điri ga-ri im-điri ga-ri / ġiri-ni AŠ-a ^{ġis}má-a bi-in-gub / min-kam-ma pâr-rim₄-ma nam-mi-in-gub / gaba im-ma-an-tab ne im-ma-an-su-ub / ^den-ki-ke₄ a šà-ga ba-ni-in-ri. Transliteration adapted from Attinger (1984).

⁷⁶⁵ For a structural analysis of the relations between the couples in “Enki and Ninġursaġa”, “Enlil and Ninlil” and “Enlil and Sud”, see Vanstiphout (1987: 163–178). The similarity between “Enki and Ninġursaġa” and “Enlil and Ninlil” is also pointed out by Kirk (1973:

though, there is one major difference; in “Enlil and Ninlil” the discussion between Enlil and his vizier deals with the virginity of Ninlil, but this is, as we have seen, not the case in “Enki and Ninhursaga”. Thus, in both myths we have a constellation of ideas where intercourse after a boat trip is one ingredient. The question that arises is whether we can relate the idea of virginity also to our myth. I shall first read the passage in “Enlil and Ninlil”, and then try to contextualize this motif.

“Someone, the virgin, this lovely, this shining / Ninlil, this lovely, this shining / did someone make love to her, did someone kiss her?” / The vizier brought something like a boat to his master. / Indeed, the linen of the small boat he brings to him, /Indeed, the big boat he brings to him.⁷⁶⁶ / My king, ..., it is me who will navigate. / He verily made love to her, he verily kissed her.⁷⁶⁷

The utterance by Enlil that initiates this passage is preceded by Ninlil warding off the advances of Enlil. She tells him that her vulva is young and does not know pregnancy; that her lips are young, and do not know kissing.⁷⁶⁸ Thus it is clear that the virginity of Ninlil is of importance. The attempt by Ninlil to ward off Enlil seems to have the opposite effect. Enlil happily repeats her statement that she is virgin, and thereafter he prepares himself to have sex with her. Although in another context, we also meet this theme with virginity, in the text that Kramer called “Bread for Enlil, Sex for Inanna”.⁷⁶⁹ Here Inana says, “I am one who knows not that which is womanly – copulating. I am one who knows not that which is womanly – kissing.”⁷⁷⁰ This indicates that virginity was an important concept for the Sumerians when thinking on women. That this was the case is also shown by Finkelstein in his paper “Sex Offenses in Sumerian Laws”, where he treats the subject of legal sanctions of illegal defloration (when establishing the term for deflora-

103). Kirk maintains that in both myths there was damaging effects on the fertility as a result of the punishment of the male god. This is a misconception however.

⁷⁶⁶ Attinger writes that a construction with loc. term. in the nominal phrase is possible with a transitive verb in the passive (1993: 239, § 152 a)).

⁷⁶⁷ 38–45. lú ki-sikil ne-en sa₆-ga-ra ne-en mul-la-ra / ^dnin-líl ne-en sa-ga₆-ra ne-en mul-la-ra / lú ġiš na-an-du₁₁ lú ne na-an-ni-su-ub / sukkal lugal-a-ni ^{ġis}má-gin₇ mu-un-ši-de₆ / ^{ġis}és má tur-ra-àm mu-un-ši-ib-^{túm}-x / ^{ġis}má gu-la-àm mu-un-ši-ib-^{túm}-e / lugal-ġu₁₀ MU.MES ga-e diri-ga-àm / ġiš-bi na-mu-un-du₁₁ ne-bi na-mu-un-su-ub. Transliteration adapted from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enlil and Ninlil”).

⁷⁶⁸ 30–31. gal₄-la-ġu₁₀ tur-ra-àm peš₁₁ nu-mu-un-zu šu-um-du-um-ġu₁₀ tur-ra-àm še su-ub nu-un-zu. Transliteration taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enlil and Ninlil”).

⁷⁶⁹ Kramer 1985: 117–132. This text is found as two in Black et al. (1998–2006), called “A *šir-namšub* to Utu (Utu E)” and “A *šir-namšub* to Utu (Utu F)”.

⁷⁷⁰ 138. áġ munus-e-ne mu du₁₁ nu-zu-mèn 139. áġ munus-e-ne še su-ub nu-zu-mèn. Transliteration adapted, and translation taken, from Kramer (1985: 122, 127).

tion).⁷⁷¹ To note though, is that adultery was seen as a far more grave crime than the defloration of a young virgin.⁷⁷²

In our myth none of the goddesses are called virgins. However, the motif when the intercourse takes place after a boat trip is very similar to that in “Enlil and Ninlil”. In both the vizier is helping his master with the boat, which seems to be the means to reach to the young goddess. This can suggest that the goddesses in our myth are also seen as virgins. Further, as we have seen, there is evidence in our myth that suggests that virginity is a theme that is dealt with. Dilmun itself, where the events take place, is a pure place (ki sikil), which most probably is a pun on the word for virgin (ki-sikil). Thus, just as Enki first is impregnating virgin land, he thereafter impregnates virgin goddesses.

In the passages when Enki is impregnating the goddesses one would expect the word for virgin, ki-sikil, firstly since there is a parallel to the land (the island Dilmun), and secondly since there are parallels between “Enki and Ninḥursaġa” and “Enlil and Ninlil”. Why wasn’t the mythographer explicit about the virginity of the goddesses? One reason is perhaps that it was obvious to him. Another reason may be that our myth is a conflation of different ideas about female sexuality. On the one hand, the idea of virginity of the young maiden is a major motif, but on the other hand, the male is on one level not really having intercourse with a young girl, but with the earth/mother goddess. When this latter theme is presented alone, we do not read anything about virginity.⁷⁷³ I will return to this question in the next section.

Why, then, are these intercourses carried out in connection with a sailing tour? I propose that on one level the tours shall be read as imageries for lovemaking, that is, that the male god is “entering a vulva”. When I write “on one level” this means that I think that there is ambiguity in these passages. This means that I do not read it as “either a sailing tour or an imagery for intercourse is meant”, but “both a sailing tour and an imagery for intercourse is meant”. Further, the word *diri.g*, to sail, is also possible to translate as “to drift”. Then we could also read line 97 as “My king! It is drifting, but I will verily land it!”. This would implicate that the woman is in fact referred to as a drifting boat.⁷⁷⁴ A woman thus described, is found in Ur-Namma A, where Ur-Namma’s wife is described as a drifting boat when mourning the death of Ur-Namma.⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷¹ Finkelstein 1966: 355–372.

⁷⁷² Finkelstein 1966: 366f.

⁷⁷³ As we will see in the following chapter, the mother goddess Namma is even giving birth without a preceding coitus. See also Black et al. (1998–2006), “The *šumunda* grass”, where it is said that heaven impregnated earth who gave birth, and id. “The debate between Winter and Summer”, where Enlil copulated with the hills that thereafter bore Summer and Winter. In these texts nothing is said about virginity/virgin land.

⁷⁷⁴ The boat can be seen both as a woman, and as an expression of *pars pro toto*.

⁷⁷⁵ Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 132, l. 182.

To further substantiate my interpretation I will look at other texts where similar imageries are used. That the vulva is described like a boat is known both from Inana and Dumuzi poetry and birth incantations. As to the latter, van Dijk parallels the mother with a boat,⁷⁷⁶ whereas Assyriologist Gertrud Farber means that it is the child who is a boat, “being steered through the (amniotic) water”. In the incantation published by Farber the boat does indeed seem to refer to the child. There we read: “The woman who was about to give birth steered the *Gi*-boat through the water”.⁷⁷⁷ It may however be, that the vulva is also meant here. We can understand this incantation as also expressing ambiguity. On one level the mother is seen as a boat,⁷⁷⁸ carrying the child, whereas on another she is associated with the water/sea.

The following lines come from a birth incantation (UM 29–15–367) treated by van Dijk:

Like the boat of the en the linen was spread out. / Onto the boat of the king, she loaded goods. / On the cargo⁷⁷⁹ (?) ship of that one she loaded carnelian and lapis lazuli. / In the vulva, the human being, the “troubled one”⁷⁸⁰ – his neck was bound.⁷⁸¹

Since it is common that the en and the king are treated as parallels also in other texts dealing with their births⁷⁸² I assume that they shall be understood as such here as well. The woman giving birth is according to this understanding the boat/the vulva from which on the one hand the en, and on the other the king is born. It might be that the woman is comprehended also as

⁷⁷⁶ van Dijk 1972: 342.

⁷⁷⁷ Farber 1984: 311.

⁷⁷⁸ Stol writes about boat imagery in relation to childbirth, and he refers e.g. to a liver omen where the mother giving birth is paralleled to a boat loaded with valuable goods (2000: 62).

⁷⁷⁹ má-gur₈ is translated as river boat and cargo ship in the literature (eg. Farber-Flügge 1973: 50). See also *AHW* sub *makūru*, *makurru*. Maybe má-gur₁₁ (uncertain reading) shall be translated in the same way.

⁷⁸⁰ pap-ḫal-la can among other things mean “immer wieder gehen/kommen”, *AHW* sub *alāku*, Gtn-stem. Geller writes that pap-ḫal refers to the patient or victim in bilingual incantations (2010: 48). Shall we understand the genitive of pap-ḫal as “the troubled one of that person”, referring to the mother giving birth?

⁷⁸¹ 12–15. má en-na-gin₇ gada i-im-búr / má lugal-la-ke₄ ni-gur₁₁ im-mi-in-si / má-gur₁₁? lú-ka_{na4} gug_{na4} za-gin mi-ni-in-si / [gal₄-la lú-ùlu pap-ḫal-la-ke₄ gú ba-da-ab-lá-lá]. Transliteration adapted from van Dijk (1975: 55, 58f.). My translation differs from that of van Dijk, and substantially so in l. 12. See also the treatment by Stol (2000: 60–63). I translate lá in the last line as “to bind”. For the meanings of this verb, see Thomsen (2001: 310). What is meant here is not sure, but it may be that the child is not coming out. See also the birth incantation with boat imagery MLC 1207 (van Dijk 1975: 66ff.), as well as a bilingual birth incantation similar to the latter, treated by Cohen (1976: 136, 139, ll. 10–18). In these two incantations it is said that the woman about to give birth is loading cedar, carnelian and lapis lazuli on a boat.

⁷⁸² See Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki and the world order”, id. “A *tigi* to Nintur (Nintur A)”, and Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969, Temple hymn no. 39, 46f., ll. 502f.

the sea, and then the boat is her vulva and the goods the child.⁷⁸³ Although we cannot be sure about all the details, we can see the floating associations between child-boat-precious stones on the one hand, and that of woman-vulva-boat-water on the other. Further, it was seen in the section on Utu, that he as well as the moon god Nanna-Su'en were helpers at childbirth. The latter deity was often imagined as a boat.⁷⁸⁴

Whereas the vulva/boat in the birth incantations is connected with pain, in the Inana-Dumuzi poetry it is connected with pleasure. Examples of the boat imagery are when Inana says: "My vulva, the horn, The Boat of Heaven"⁷⁸⁵, and "The shepherd Dumuzi filled my lap with cream and milk [...], He smoothed my black boat with cream, He quickened my narrow boat with milk".⁷⁸⁶ Our myth and these other examples show us that the boat imagery is used here at three different sexual experiences of the female: at defloration, sexual pleasure and at childbirth.

Why is this imagery used only with these three goddesses, and not with the ones preceding and following? One aspect might be that all three of them have netherworldly connotations. As we have seen, Ninnisi was associated with Ereškigal, and Ninkura is associated with the netherworld through her name. There was not an obvious connection between Ninimma and the netherworld, but she is met with here in a context of foremothers who have such associations. I would further say that she might in fact be found in a netherworld context, since her relation to Ekur, Enlil⁷⁸⁷ and the moon god Sîn are possible references to the netherworld.⁷⁸⁸

As a matter of fact, the boat imagery has not only sexual connotations either, but also refers to the netherworld. We have already seen that the wife of Ur-Namma is likened to a drifting boat when mourning the death of her husband, i.e. when he is travelling to the netherworld. Also Ur-Namma is described as a boat when he is dying: "Their [Ur-Namma's soldiers'] ship, as if

⁷⁸³ Cf. also Andersson who writes that "[a] few names associate the lugal with vessels for transporting plenty or with places for storing wealth", and then gives the example "the lugal is just right for the cargo ship" (2012: 135).

⁷⁸⁴ Sjöberg 1960; Hall 1985: 675ff.

⁷⁸⁵ Wolkstein and Kramer 1983: 37; Kramer 1963: 506.

⁷⁸⁶ Wolkstein and Kramer 1983: 44.

⁷⁸⁷ Regarding Ekur and Enlil, I understand "Enlil and Ninlil" as describing how Enlil and Ninlil are leaving the netherworld when leaving Nippur; this since they go out of the city gate, and then pass the river of the netherworld, i.e. the opposite direction of those who travel to the netherworld. Further, the first three of the four children that are begotten by Enlil and Ninlil, the first being Su'en, have clear netherworldly connotations. On the travel towards the netherworld, the river is first passed, and then one arrives at the door of the netherworld (Selz 1995a: 205ff.). Cf. both Jacobsen (1993: 122) and Cooper (2013: 179) who instead understand Enlil as travelling towards the netherworld.

⁷⁸⁸ Although not commonly connected to the netherworld, there are some representations on cylinder seals that suggest that Nanna-Suen(Ašimbabbar) also belonged to the netherworld sphere; just as the sun god was depicted as rising between two mountains, coming up from the netherworld, so was the moon god (Collon 1997b: 372; see also id. 1997a: 11).

from/in Dilmun, was sunk in the (foreign) land, a place unknown to him”.⁷⁸⁹ The Dilmun ship here fits our context very well. We also find the ship in a context of death and destruction, as well as referring to prosperity, in the lamentations.⁷⁹⁰ And finally, we find both the death connotations and those of prosperity in the description of the mother giving birth; on the one hand she is the cargo ship loaded with luxury goods, coming from foreign lands,⁷⁹¹ but on the other the mother who is about to die in childbirth is described as “a boat cast adrift”.⁷⁹² I suggest that the goddesses here discussed represent the first ones being born, and in their roles as mother goddesses also the first ones to give birth, and that this refers to both the introduction of life and death in society. This interpretation is also supported by their being both related to birth and the netherworld.

4.9.2. Ideological aspects of intercourses with boat imagery

The categories that we meet in this section of the myth are on the one hand Enki and his vizier, and on the other the young goddesses who are also the daughters of Enki. The ranking between the male and female parties is unequal. The vizier of Enki is ranked above the goddesses, but below his master. Enki is also ranked above the females as their father. What is the logic of this ranking, and is there any sign of a recalibration of the ranking of the categories? On one level the logic of the ranking seems to be that if women walk along the river they are fair game for men; the latter can even cooperate to get access to the body of a female.

The role of the goddesses as more or less anonymous objects for the male gods does not correspond well with the findings on them when they were contextualized above. Ninnisi was an ancient goddess who was the carpenter of heaven and earth, butcher and spouse to the lord of the netherworld. Ninkura’s name means “mistress of the netherworld”, which points to a role similar to that of her mother regarding the netherworld. Ninimma was a wise scribe and artisan, as well as mother goddess, the owner of the tablet of life, wet-nurse and even “creatress of all”. In light of the contextualization of these goddesses, it seems likely that all three of them are recalibrated in this myth, from being independent artisans, rulers (of the netherworld) and possibly mother goddesses, to weak objects of male sexual desire. These three goddesses are connected to boat imagery, whereas the following goddess

⁷⁸⁹ Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 113, l. 65. Cf. also Enki who travels to the netherworld in a boat in “Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world”, (Black et al. 1998–2006) as well as the deity Ningišzida who is brought to the netherworld in a boat at his death (Jacobsen and Alster 2000).

⁷⁹⁰ Cohen 1988: 148, 617, 689, ll. 170f., 230f., 119.

⁷⁹¹ See the above excerpt from the birth incantation published by van Dijk, and further Farber (1984: 313f.).

⁷⁹² Stol 2000a: 140.

Uttu is not. I suggest that this is due to the fact that here the main focus of the goddesses is their vulva (boat) only in relation to sexuality and reproductivity, whereas with Uttu the focus is primarily on the general gender role of women. (I will discuss the role of Uttu further in the following section.)

The fact that these goddesses are not called virgins in our myth, whereas Ninlil is called virgin in a similar context in “Enlil and Ninlil”, can also point to a process of recalibration, where the focus on virginity increases in “Enlil and Ninlil”. The parallel between the goddesses and the pure land (ki sikil) can be one of the first steps to direct the focus onto the virginity of females.

Both Ninnisi’s and Ninimma’s names are related to greenery, which thus points at fertility and prosperity. Nevertheless they are paralleled to “arid land” in our myth. I understand this as a way to claim that these “earth mothers” in fact cannot produce prosperity themselves, but they need the aid of the fertilizing Enki, and this is a further recalibration of their roles.

In a way the goddesses discussed here can be understood as “commodified”. They are like boats that the male uses to get precious stones and other materials. We saw above in the section on the history of women in Mesopotamia that the marriage has been understood as no more than a purchase. Because of the work intensive way of earning a living in this society, children were very valuable; thus, the parallel between children and precious stones is understandable. On one level then, women were a means (boat) to get hold of precious material (children).

This section of the myth is narrated from Enki’s point of view; it deals with what he does, and how he acts upon females. This is also a way to rank the sexes, and the logic of it is to establish a patriarchal society. Thus, the interests of males in general are advanced in this section, although this is the ideology of the ruling class rather than that of people in general.

4.10. The goddess Uttu, daughter of Ninimma

4.10.1. Contextualization of Uttu

The three preceding goddesses have hardly been born before Enki is lurking in the marshes for them.⁷⁹³ Uttu, on the contrary, is advised by the mother goddess after it is told that she was born; Nintu tells Uttu that Enki is lying and lurking in the marshes. Then there is regrettably a gap of about ten lines.⁷⁹⁴

Another difference between Uttu and the other goddesses is the way Enki treats her. Probably as a consequence of the advice of Nintu, Uttu does not

⁷⁹³ In text A Ninkura is the mother of Uttu, and Ninimma is missing.

⁷⁹⁴ Attinger 1984: 20f., ll. 128–132.

go to the marshes.⁷⁹⁵ Therefore Enki has to change tactics. Uttu has uttered that she wants fruit and vegetables from the gardener. She says:

Bring [... cucumbers]! / Bring [app]les on their [flourishing branches]! /
Bring clusters of grapes! / May my tethering rope be taken in the house! /
Enki indeed took my tethering rope!⁷⁹⁶

Thus, Enki goes to the gardener and waters his garden, and as thanks he gets the fruit and vegetables demanded by Uttu. These he brings to her, knocks at her door, and says that he is the gardener coming with the garden produce:

I am the gardener, bringing you cucumbers, apples and grapes for (your) consent.⁷⁹⁷

Uttu claps her hands in joy, and then Enki arouses her. He caresses her and pours his semen into her.⁷⁹⁸

This passage, and the overall role of Uttu, is rather thoroughly discussed in an article by Vanstiphout.⁷⁹⁹ He points out about Enki that “[i]n order to achieve coitus with her he has to go through a form of marriage”,⁸⁰⁰ and by this he means the gifts Enki is bringing to Uttu. The gifts are seen as a bride price. Which other facts point to the hypothesis of marriage?

For one thing, Uttu says that she wants her tethering rope to be taken and that Enki took it. (I cannot explain the latter tense.) Is this an expression of a wish to marry Enki? Attinger writes in a footnote: “Expression proverbiale signifiant ‘devenir mon maître’, v.s.?”⁸⁰¹ and Jacobsen interprets it as referring to marriage.⁸⁰² It does seem to represent some sort of leadership of Enki over Uttu, and I believe as Vanstiphout and Jacobsen that it is referring to marriage. When Enki comes and offers the gifts wanted by Uttu he says that he does this for her “consent”. The expression used here is *ḫé-àm-šè*, literally “for the ‘so be it’”. The expression *ḫé-àm* can also be used as a noun and

⁷⁹⁵ So Kramer and Maier 1989: 26.

⁷⁹⁶ 148–152. [úkuš sur-ra-x] túm-um / [ḡišḡašḡur]! [gu ul-ul]-ba túm-um / ḡišḡeštin ga-ra-an-ba túm-um / é²-a sáman-ḡu₁₀ ḫé-dab₅ / ^den-ki-ke₄ sáman-ḡu₁₀ ḫé-bi-in-dab₅. Transliteration adapted from Attinger (1984). I understand the verbal chain *ḫé-dab₅* as a passive construction, which explains that a *ḫamtu* form is expressing the future tense. Since we have a subject (Enki) to the following verbal chain (*ḫé-bi-in-dab₅*) however, it must be interpreted as a *ḫamtu* form expressing the past tense.

⁷⁹⁷ 172. ḡá-e nu-ḡiš⁶kiri₆ úkuš ḡišḡašḡur [ḡišḡeštin] ḫé-àm-šè ga-mu-ra-ab-šúm. Transliteration adapted from Attinger (1984).

⁷⁹⁸ Attinger 1984: 20ff.; his understanding is that it is Enki who is aroused, whereas my reading corresponds to that of Black, “Enki and Ninḫursaḡa”.

⁷⁹⁹ Vanstiphout 1990a: 40ff.

⁸⁰⁰ Vanstiphout 1990a: 41.

⁸⁰¹ Attinger 1984: 21, fn. 42.

⁸⁰² Jacobsen 1987: 197–199. Bottéro and Kramer do not translate this passage, and they do not interpret it as a marriage (1993: 156, 162).

is equalled to Akk. *annu*, “approval, consent”.⁸⁰³ Thus, it seems quite probable that we are dealing with a context of marriage.

But is Enki really acting as a suitor, going through a marriage in our myth, as Vanstiphout maintains? Shouldn’t he come openly, and not under disguise if he is a suitor? I believe that he is disguising as a “middle-man”, to take an expression found in Vanstiphout’s article “Un carré d’amour sumérien, or ways to win a woman”. He means that there is a Sumerian “marriage square” where the corners are represented by A. the young man, B. the nubile young woman, C. a person (here: a woman) representing the young woman’s lineage and D. the middle-man.⁸⁰⁴ The middle-man is establishing the relationship between the suitor and the family of the girl he wishes to marry. As I see it, Enki is disguising as the middle-man in order to have Uttu open the door. In this way he fools her that he (Enki) is intending to wed her in the proper way. When she opens the door, he has sex with her, which is not the correct behavior of a middle-man.⁸⁰⁵ Enki has achieved what he wanted: not marriage, but only sex.

Vanstiphout points to the more elaborate sexual encounter between Uttu and Enki. He compares her with her predecessors, and writes that “she is also the only one requiring at least *some* lovemaking or foreplay before coitus” (italics original).⁸⁰⁶ His explanation of the role of Uttu is that it is overtly sexual, and therefore she appears at the end of the series. He proposes that the overt sexuality is laid down in her role as a weaver goddess, since weaving has sexual connotations in different cultures all over the world. So whereas the previous intercourses were “uncouth and raw copulation”, the sex between Enki and Uttu introduces the social structure where a marriage contract is a part.⁸⁰⁷ Besides the connotation of sexuality, weaving also refers to industriousness, having been a central and time-occupying task of many Mesopotamian women.⁸⁰⁸ The industriousness is perhaps also expressed in the name Uttu, which means spider,⁸⁰⁹ referring to spiders’ incessant activities of spinning webs.⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰³ See Thomsen 2001: 205. Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”, read ḫé-àm-šè as “for your ‘Yes’”. This reading was also favored by Jacobsen (1987: 199), as well as in Greengus (1969: 528). The latter discusses this line in his investigation of marriage contracts. Kramer and Maier have chosen to translate the expression as “as a reward” (1989: 27), and Attinger gives the following translation: “pour satisfaire ton désir (?)”. He writes in a footnote that it literally means “pour le ‘Qu’il soit!’” (1984: 23 and fn. 46).

⁸⁰⁴ Vanstiphout 1987: 165–172.

⁸⁰⁵ Cf. Enlil’s emissary Nuska who acts as a middle-man in “Enlil and Sud”, bringing wedding gifts to Sud (Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enlil and Sud”, ll. 83–85).

⁸⁰⁶ Vanstiphout 1990a: 41.

⁸⁰⁷ Vanstiphout 1990a: 41f.

⁸⁰⁸ Cf. Frymer-Kensky who writes that “[t]he importance of women’s spinning and weaving in early economic life cannot be overestimated” (1992: 23f.).

⁸⁰⁹ E.g. Jacobsen 1987: 184.

⁸¹⁰ Cf. the word be₅-en-zé-er which is a Semitic loanword in Sumerian, which means both womb (Akk. *biṣṣūru*) and spiderweb (Civil 2006).

Just as Vanstiphout points out, the sexual encounter between Enki and his partner has reached a new dimension with Uttu, although here also the male focuses on his own satisfaction. As I see it, the new dimension is the social context where Uttu, the goddess of weaving, represents the “common, earthly woman”.⁸¹¹ Frymer-Kensky comes to a similar conclusion, calling Uttu “the domestic woman”. Unlike me however, she understands Uttu as becoming married with Enki, and therefore writes that she (Uttu) is “the first wife, the paradigm of a married woman”.⁸¹²

We saw in the section on historical setting that for the earthly woman pregnancy and birth-giving was pivotal. In opposition to her predecessors Uttu’s sexual activity does not lead to pregnancy.⁸¹³ I shall investigate what happens after the intercourse, and then discuss its meaning. The intercourse is followed by a reaction of the female:

Uttu, the sweet woman says “oh my loins!”, she says “oh my body, oh my stomach!”⁸¹⁴

The sign for “oh” is usually a, but here we have á instead, and therefore this reading is not self-evident.⁸¹⁵ We do however have another goddess in the Sumerian literature who says “oh, my stomach (heart)”, where á is used for “oh”. This is Ninsumun who mourns because of the death of King Ur-Namma: á šà-ĝu₁₀ im-me.⁸¹⁶ Further, Kramer and Maier point out that the reaction of Uttu is similar to that of Ereškigal in “Inana’s descent”. In this connection they write of the possibility to read á as a phonetic variant of a.⁸¹⁷

⁸¹¹ This is corroborated by the fact that newly born girls, according to some birth incantations, were to receive a spindle (^{gis}bala) (and a make-up spatula (^{gis}kirid)), see texts UM 29–15–367, VAT 8381 = VS 17, 34 and MLC 1207, in van Dijk (1975: 57, 63, 67). See also Cunningham who likewise treats UM 29–15–367 (1997: 69–75); on the topic of giving birth, see also *ibid.* pp. 21f., 33, 107.

⁸¹² Frymer-Kensky 1992: 22f.

⁸¹³ In the case of the previous goddesses we read u₄ 9-àm iti 9-a-ni iti nam-munus-a-ka “it was the ninth day, her ninth month, it was the month of womanhood”. (LI. A85, A105, A124, C25; the latter slightly different, but containing nam-munus.) Childbirth and midwifery are topics treated also e.g. in sections 4.3. and 4.15.4.

⁸¹⁴ 186. ^duttu munus sa₆-ga á¹⁷ hás-ĝu₁₀ im-me á¹⁷ bar-ĝu₁₀ á¹⁷ šà¹⁷-ba-ĝu₁₀ im-[me]. Transliteration taken from Attinger (1984). As to the translation of bar and šà there are different possibilities of choice. Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enki and Ninĥursaĝa”), choose liver and heart, Attinger (1984) body and stomach, and Kramer and Maier (1989) choose outside and inside. Actually all these translations are possible. I choose to follow Attinger.

⁸¹⁵ Whereas Attinger (1984) and Black et al. (1998–2006) choose roughly the same translation – “hélas” and “woe”, Kramer and Maier translate it as “the power” (Kramer and Maier 1989: 28), which is one of the common readings of á. (The basic meaning of á is “arm”.) “Woe”, instead, is commonly written a. Attinger sees the writing as a wordplay, and means that the allusion to “power”/“force” is due to the fact that Enki has abused Uttu (Attinger 1984: 43).

⁸¹⁶ Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 103, l. 16 (the Susa version (=Sb₁)). Another – although tiny – support is the gloss á before a = [na-a]-qú, in CAD N/1 sub *náqu* A, which means “to cry”, “to groan”.

⁸¹⁷ Kramer and Maier 1989: 211, note 24.

In the passage in “Inana’s descent” the kurġara and the galatura come to console the goddess of the netherworld, and then we read:

As she said: “oh, my stomach!” [...] / As she said “oh, my body!”⁸¹⁸

Also this passage is related to mourning. As has already been noted, I maintain that Ereškigal suffers because she is barren.⁸¹⁹ We have also seen that regarding Uttu nothing is said about pregnancy or delivery, as by the other goddesses giving birth in our myth. But just as the reproduction on earth is released when Ereškigal gets consoled by the two creatures created by Enki,⁸²⁰ the result of the intercourse with Uttu is growing vegetation. I do not believe that we shall understand Uttu’s complaint as mourning. Instead the utterance is used to parallel her to Ereškigal, and presumably her barrenness. Further, her lament can be understood as a reaction to the rape she is subjected to.

I suggest that the reaction of Uttu shall be understood in the light of the interpretation that we now are in a cultural and social context. Earlier Enki could engage both in rape and incestual intercourse without any detrimental effects on the parties involved. When the creation evolves into culture this is no longer possible. As the “common, earthly woman”, it is not appropriate for Uttu to have extramarital intercourse, nor is rape and/or incest proper behavior in a social context. Therefore Uttu reacts to and gets ill by the intercourse. She is “healed” by the mother goddess who wipes off the semen, and as a result eight plants grow. This can be seen as a parallel to the passage where Ninġursaġa cures Enki and brings him back to life; there eight deities are connected to the cure.

As mentioned, Uttu is the goddess of weaving. She is seen in this role for example in “Laġar and Ašan”,⁸²¹ a text which was copied in the Old Baby-

⁸¹⁸ 263. [ù-u₈-a] ʿšà'-ġu₁₀ du₁₁-ga-ni [...] 265. [ù-u₈-a] bar-ġu₁₀ du₁₁-ga-ni. Transliteration adapted from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Inana’s descent to the nether world”). The restoration of the lines is made from ll. 236, 238 where this passage is described when Enki is instructing the kurġara and the galatura.

⁸¹⁹ I shall argue elsewhere (Rodin, forthcoming) that the word gaba for females referred to female breasts before pregnancy, birth and lactation, and that the description of Ereškigal in “Inana’s descent” is of a woman who lies in pain because she *cannot* give birth, ll. 230–233: “The mothers giving birth – because of their “that of having children”, / Ereškigal is lying (there). / She has not spread linen onto her pure body. / She has not stretched out her breasts like šaġan vessels”. Thus, Ereškigal’s breasts are *not* full of milk as those of pregnant women, about to give birth. Although there was a tradition of Ereškigal as a mother of Ninazu, there was also a strong tradition of the inhabitants of the netherworld as being infertile and unable to produce life.

⁸²⁰ I assume that Inana here represents the antithesis of Ereškigal, i.e. is a representative of life and reproduction. Therefore, when she is revived and brought back to earth her power of life-giving can be exercised there. Regarding the appeasing of Enki’s creatures, it was a cultic task of the gala(tura) to appease and console deities; see Cohen (e.g. 1988: 104, 164, 195, ll. 216, 234, 60f.).

⁸²¹ Called “The debate between Grain and Sheep” in Black et al. (1998–2006).

lonian period.⁸²² The introduction of this text describes a state before creation – here before the introduction of culture. An had created the Anuna gods, but neither Ašnan (“godly Wheat”) nor Laḥar (Ewe) were born,⁸²³ and “Nor had been fashioned in the Land the yarn of the godly Weaver [i.e. Uttu, my comment], Nor had the loom of the godly Weaver even been pegged out”.⁸²⁴ Further we get to know that:

Nor small wheat, nor mountain wheat, nor wheat of the goodly villages. Also there was no cloth to wear: The godly Weaver had not been born, so no royal cap was worn.⁸²⁵ [---] The people of those distant days, They knew not bread to eat; They knew not cloth to wear; They went about with naked limbs in the Land, and like sheep they ate grass with their mouth.⁸²⁶

Here we see how the absence of clothes and bread represents the stage before culture, when humans were like animals. When no cloth is made there is also no king. Therefore the clothes serve as markers of hierarchies; thus the clothes put a limit against nature, but also differentiate the people within culture. This motif with clothes as a marker of culture can also be found in the Gilgameš epic. There Šamḥat, the harlot, “treated the man [i.e. Enkidu] to the work of a woman”⁸²⁷ as a part of the humanization of him. The final part of this humanization takes place when Enkidu receives ale and bread and a garment.⁸²⁸ Thus sexuality, bread and clothes represent culture, and since these are connected to woman, she also represents culture.

According to Vanstiphout, although there is no overt sexuality in the role of Uttu in “Enki and the world order”, we shall read it as a *double entendre*. Here follows the relevant passage:

He fastened the tow and made straight the foundation / Enki greatly perfected things related to womanhood. / For Enki the people [] in sheep skin garments. / Vitality of the palace, adornment of the king, / Uttu, the right woman, the silent one, / Enki verily put at their side.⁸²⁹

⁸²² Alster and Vanstiphout 1987: 1–43.

⁸²³ Alster and Vanstiphout 1987: 14f., ll. 3 and 6.

⁸²⁴ Alster and Vanstiphout 1987: 14f., ll. 4f.

⁸²⁵ Alster and Vanstiphout 1987: 14f., ll. 15–17

⁸²⁶ 20–24. nam-lú-ùlu u₄-ri-a-ke₄-ne / ninda gu₇-ù-bi nu-mu-un-zu-uš-àm / túg níġ mu₄-mu₄-bi nu-mu-un-zu-uš-àm / kalam ġiš-gi-na su-bi mu-un-du / udu-gin₇ ka-ba ú mu-ni-ib-gu₇. Transliteration and translation taken from Alster and Vanstiphout (1987: 14f.).

⁸²⁷ George 2003: 548, I: 192.

⁸²⁸ George 2003: 561, II: 34–51.

⁸²⁹ 381–386. mug mu-un-dun temen si bi-in-sá / ^den-ki-ke₄ níġ nam-munus-a šu gal ba^c-ni^ˀ-in-du₇ / ^den-ki-ra ùġ-e ^{túg}sùluġu-a mu-un-da-an-[]-e / téš é-gal me-te lugal-la / ^duttu munus zi níġ-me-ġar-ra / ^den-ki-ke₄ zà-ba nam-mi-in-gub. Transliteration adapted from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enki and the world order”). The translation of lines 382, 383, and the second half of 385 correspond to that of Black et al.

Vanstiphout means that “the task of woman” (“things related to womanhood”) alludes to another womanly work – lovemaking. He further writes: “If we accept the double meaning [...] the placing [of Uttu in the myth, i.e. before Inana, my comment] becomes rather poignant”⁸³⁰. He also points out under entry 60) in the same journal⁸³¹, that in another text Inana uses the expression “that which is womanly” about copulating and kissing, and this very much resembles “the task of women”.⁸³²

I am not sure that there is a connection between Uttu and lovemaking in “Enki and the world order”. “Things related to womanhood” and then a connection to weaving most probably refer to the socially prescribed female role which is to be a wife, to work with womanly occupations, and also to the role as mother.⁸³³ As a matter of fact there is a connection between weaving and birth-giving in another text: “Šu-Su’en – the Ideal Lover (Šu-Su’en A)”.⁸³⁴ Here it is said about the mother of Šu-Su’en: “The queen (who) is pure, gave birth. My cloth-beam of fair garment, my Abisimti”,⁸³⁵ and then “My warp-beam, on which the woven cloth is placed, my queen, Kubatum”,⁸³⁶ presumably said by about the wife of Šu-Su’en.⁸³⁷ Vanstiphout suggests that the roles of Inana and Uttu are similar. I believe instead that Uttu and Inana are two different kinds of women. Inana is a woman who freely expresses her sexuality, whereas both Uttu and the women in the love song of Šu-Su’en are described as paragons of virtue; i.e. as ideal women. The sexuality of the queens was expressed in a socially approved context, and the focus by the mother of Šu-Su’en is primarily on her role as birth-giver of the king. Similarly, if there is a reference to Uttu’s sexuality in “Enki and the world order” I believe that it primarily has to do with birth-giving. In this and in weaving, an approved female occupation, she supports the king.

I shall lastly look at a passage in “Enki and Ninmah”, which perhaps can help us to further understand the role of Uttu. Although her name is not mentioned here, the word “weaver” is used. Since Uttu is The Weaver, I think that the passage could be helpful:

⁸³⁰ Vanstiphout 1990a: 41f.

⁸³¹ Vanstiphout 1990b: 45f.

⁸³² Vanstiphout 1990b: 45; his translation of the line is “that which is Woman’s work”. This utterance of Inana (“I am one who knows not that which is womanly”) was seen above, section 4.9., at the discussion of virginity.

⁸³³ In our myth nam-munus refers to childbirth: ll. 85 and 105: u₄ 9-àm iti 9-a-ni iti nam-munus-a-ka, l. 25C: [u₄ 9-bi] iti nam-munus-a-ni n[a-na]m; ll. 85 and 105: “It was the ninth day, her ninth month, it was the month of womanhood.”, l. 25C: “that ninth day, her month of womanhood it was indeed!”.

⁸³⁴ Sefati 1998: 344f.

⁸³⁵ Sefati 1998: 345: 4f.

⁸³⁶ Sefati 1998: 345: 6.

⁸³⁷ The identity of the women in this song is not established with certainty; see the commentary in Sefati (1998: 346f.).

Sixth, she fashioned a woman who cannot give birth. / Enki saw a weaver, and he made her stay in the queen's household.⁸³⁸

The word weaver is only used in text C. In text A the woman unable to give birth is put in the household of the queen. It might be that she is thought to work as a weaver also in text A. As Sumerologist Kazuya Maekawa has shown, there was a large-scale textile industry in the queen's household during Early Dynastic IIIb/Pre-Sargonic and Ur III periods in Lagaš.⁸³⁹ This fact also accords well with the description of Uttu in "Laḫar and Ašnan": she is the weaver of the cap of the king. Also in "Enki and the world order" she is connected to the king, and there she seems to be an overseer of people producing cloth. Just as Uttu in our myth, also in the excerpt here from "Enki and Ninmaḫ" the weaver is childless. However, the female weavers investigated by Maekawa were not childless. In his paper he writes as much about the female weavers as about their children. This naturally does not have to mean that there were no barren women working as weavers.⁸⁴⁰

The role of Uttu is more complicated and nuanced than that of her predecessors. I suggest that with her predecessors the biological task of women was set; birth-giving. Uttu on the other hand is the starting point of culture and is as such more strongly connected to gender models and social rules. Her sexuality is emphasized, and at the same time put in a social context; males must relate to her according to rules for courting and wedding, and further this is only allowed for men from outside the family. This makes me understand Uttu's barrenness as a result of the incestuous relation between her and Enki. Within culture there is an incest prohibition, and this can only be broken with detrimental results. This may also be the reason why Uttu is paralleled to the goddess of the netherworld and another mourning goddess through the "mourning formula". Incest is in this way paralleled to infertility and death. Further, barrenness was a problem among ordinary women, and thus "the Weaver" is in many ways reflecting the situation of earthly women.

4.10.2. Ideological aspects of the passage on Uttu

The categories at issue here are the advising mother (to be treated in the next section), the young goddess Uttu, the gardener and Enki. The advising moth-

⁸³⁸ II: 38. peš-peš-gi munus nu-ù-tu àm-ma-ši-in-dím 39–40. ^den-ki-ke₄ [...] uš-bar igi mu-ni-in-du₈ é munus-a-kam àm-ma-ni-in-dù. Transliteration taken from Lambert (2013: 338).

⁸³⁹ Maekawa 1980: 81–125.

⁸⁴⁰ Perhaps the writer(s) of the myth thought of the word ki-siki, an Early Dynastic IIIb/Pre-Sargonic word for "weaver", when Uttu was posed in this myth. Thus, the ki-siki (weaver) perhaps was a ki-sikil (virgin), being at the ki sikil (pure place). As a matter of fact, the word siki (wool, hair) occurs in our myth, although not with Uttu; when Ninḫursaġa cures Enki she heals his hair by creating Nin-siki-lá. Then she puts this deity as lord of Magan (Attinger 1984: 28f., 30f., ll. 256, 271). The connection between ki-siki and ki-sikil however, does not explain why Uttu does not give birth.

er is rather anonymous, but she seems to have a high ranking since she is able to influence the course of events. The gardener is anonymous as well. His ranking is below Enki, since he gets help from him. Further, he is used by Enki who helps him only to get garden produce from him.

Uttu is in one way an active woman, and can be said to be ranked on a par with Enki; she says what she wants, and Enki has to bring it in order to get what he wants. When Enki comes with vegetables and fruit Uttu is actively letting him in. Enki is high ranked in the passage, and he controls the events of things; he plans how to be able to have sex with Uttu, and his plan succeeds. To trick someone does not seem to be a negative trait in the Mesopotamian culture, since both here and in “Enlil and Ninlil” the male is tricking the female in order to get sex, but nevertheless is praised at the end. Further, in “Inana’s descent” on behalf of Enki the kurġara and galatura trick Ereškigal to give them Inana’s corpse so that they can revivify her. Also in “Inana and Enki” cheating is used without any detrimental effects. The logic of the ranking can be that although the sexes in one way are equal, in another the male always gets his way.

Uttu is very much the representative of an ideal gender role for women – she is delighted when the “gardener” comes with the bride price, and she wishes that Enki shall take her “tethering rope”. Thus, the woman is here depicted as a strong supporter of a patriarchal marriage when she is paid for by a man, and then more or less owned by him. As weaver Uttu represents one of the most common female occupations in Mesopotamia, since thousands of women worked as weavers for the state. Thus, Uttu’s field of activity is approved and wanted. Uttu is further found indoors, which the goddesses who were raped in relation to a boat trip were not. She does everything right, and is represented as a paragon of virtue. To sum up the gender role that Uttu represents, it is of a woman who stays indoors, embraces patriarchal marriage, and is industrious. Further, she seems to have tried to ward off unwanted sex, or at least complains after it has taken place. An aspect that was missing regarding Uttu’s gender role was that of motherhood. I assume that this is due to on the one hand that the relation between Enki and Uttu was incestuous, and on the other that children were not to be the result of licentious sexual behavior. The gender role of Enki is one of happily consuming whatever he wishes to consume, and also guile is accepted in his gender role. Enki falls ill by “consuming his own seed” however, and incest is depicted as detrimental, and even lethal. Thus, incest, rather than advances towards women, is represented as unacceptable. I would say that the interests that are advanced here are those of patriarchy; the sexes not only stick to but also themselves approve of the established patriarchal gender roles.

I understand the gender roles depicted here to be ideological exhortations to Mesopotamian men and women, but we saw in the section on historical setting that in reality the gender roles were more flexible than the ideology indicates.

4.11. The advising mother (goddess)

4.11.1. Contextualization of the “advising theme”

The advising mother is a theme found also in the kindred myths “Enlil and Ninlil”, and “Enlil and Sud”. This theme is connected to the wedding theme that was referred to above (section 4.10.1.) regarding the “marriage square” discussed by Vanstiphout. He discusses four parties involved in the negotiations preceding a wedding. Here I am only interested in the corner C of the square, the person representing the woman’s lineage. Vanstiphout points out that “Lévi-Strauss’ dictum that a woman is always given to a man by another man seems to be contradicted here: in every instance the figure representing the girl’s lineage is a female [...]”.⁸⁴¹ Since our mother goddess, under her name Nintu, is found in the same context as the advising mother in the two other myths mentioned, I assume that she is also a representative of the young woman’s lineage. First I will investigate the instances of advising mothers in the myths, and thereafter briefly return to this question.

Here follows the advice of Nintu to Uttu:

Nintu says to Uttu: / “I will give you advice; [may you grasp] my advice! / I will tell you a word – to my word [your ear]! / There is one hang[ing] out in the marshes, [hanging out in the marshes.] / Enki is ha[n]ging out] in the marshes, [he is hanging out in the marshes.] / [He will set] eyes [on you...]”⁸⁴²

The formulation here is typical,⁸⁴³ and found also in “The instructions of Šuruppag”, a literary text with a forerunner from Abū Šalābīḥ, thus belonging to the oldest literary texts known from Mesopotamia.⁸⁴⁴ I shall look at the first instance where the instruction formulation appears in “The instructions of Šuruppag”:

Šuruppag, the son of Ubara-Tutu / advised his son Ziusudra: / “My son, I will give you advice; may you grasp my advice! / Ziusudra, I will tell you a word; listen to it!”⁸⁴⁵

⁸⁴¹ Vanstiphout 1987: 171.

⁸⁴² 128–133. ^dnin-tu-re ^duttu-[ra/e] gù mu-na-dé-[e] / na ga-e-de₅ na-de₅-ġu₁₀ [h_é(-e)-dab₅] / inim ga-ra-’ab’-du₁₁ inim-ġu₁₀-[š_è ġéštu-zu] / lú-diš-àm ambar-ra im-da-lá-[e-dè im-da-lá-e-dè] / ^den-ki-ke₄ ambar-ra im-[da-lá-e-dè (im-da-lá-e-dè)] / igi /x [x] ‘x’ [] (then about 10 broken lines follow). Transliteration adapted from Attinger (1984).

⁸⁴³ The formulation in l. 129 of “Enki and Ninġursaġa” and l. 9 of “The instructions of Šuruppag” can be found also in e.g. “Inana’s descent to the nether world”, l. 30A, “The marriage of Martu”, l. 45 and “Lugalbanda and the Anzud bird”, l. 211, see Black et al. (1998–2006). For other examples, see the glossary of Black et al. (under the verb de₅).

⁸⁴⁴ Krebernik 1998: 317, 319.

⁸⁴⁵ 7–10. šuruppag^{ki}-e dumu ubara-tu-tu-ke₄ / zi-u₄-sù-rá dumu-ni-ra na na-mu-un-de₅-de₅ / dumu-ġu₁₀ na ga-de₅ na-de₅-ġu₁₀ h_é-dab₅ / zi-u₄-sù-rá inim ga-ra-ab-’du₁₁ ġizzal h_é-em-ši-ak. Transliteration adapted from Black et al. (1998–2006. “The instructions of Šuruppag”).

We see that the advising formulation here is almost exactly the same as in our myth. But whereas Šuruppag instructs his son in all areas of life, including choosing a woman,⁸⁴⁶ the instructions of Nintu/Ninhursagâ as well as Nunbaršegunu/Nanibgal in the myths mentioned above have only to do with sexual relations and wedding. Although the advising formulation is not occurring in “Enlil and Sud” and “Enlil and Ninlil” in the same way as in the case of Nintu and Šuruppag, we do find the verb for advising (na—de₅) also in these myths. I shall also look at the advice in these myths and then discuss its function. In “Enlil and Ninlil” we read:

At that time the maiden’s mother was giving her advice. / Nunbaršegunu advised Ninlil: / “The river is holy, no woman – the river is holy – may bathe in it. / Ninlil! Do not (even) walk along the banks of the Inunbirtum-river! / His eye is holy, the lord, his eye is holy, will look at you, / The great mountain, father Enlil, his eye is holy, will look at you, / The shepherd, decreer of destinies, his eye is holy, will look at you. / Now, he will have sex with you, he will kiss you. / After his rejoicing of heart and pouring of lustful semen into your womb he will leave you!⁸⁴⁷

This passage might shed some light upon how we shall understand the relevant lines in our myth. In our myth Nintu warns Uttu about Enki hanging out in the marshes. Then we read “eye” in a broken context and thereafter a gap of about ten lines follows. I assume that Nintu warns Uttu that Enki will look at her and then have sex with her, just as Nunbaršegunu is warning Ninlil in that way. But whereas Ninlil does not heed her mother’s advice Uttu seems to heed Nintu; at least she does not go to the marshes. In “Enlil and Sud” the mother also gives advice, and in this myth Ninlil – under the name of Sud – does heed her mother. We read:

Nanibgal speaks [to Sud], gives her advice: / “My little one, the midst of your apartment, your pure [], the sweet private quarters, / which belongs to the house of Nisaba’s Wisdom – come out of there! / [Nuska] the living work, your silver; he is an artisan. / [] to his presence and pour beer to him!” / Ac-

⁸⁴⁶ Black et al. 1998–2006. “The instructions of Šuruppag”, ll. 208, 215.

⁸⁴⁷ 13–21. u₄-ba ki-sikil ama ugu-na ša na-mu-un-de₅-de₅ / ^dnin-lil-le ^dnun-bar-še-gu-nu ša namu-un-de₅-de₅ / i₇ kù-ga-àm nu-nus-e i₇ kù-ga-àm a nam-mi-tu₅-tu₅ / ^dnin-lil-le gú i₇-nun-bi-irtúm-ka nam-mi-in-du-dè / i-bí kù-ga-àm ù-mu-un-e i-bí kù-ga-àm i-bí ba-e-ši-bar-re / kur gal a-a ^dmu-ul-lil i-bí kù-ga-àm i-bí ba-e-ši-bar-re / sipa na-ág tar-tar-re i-bí kù-ga-àm i-bí ba-e-ši-bar-re / a-da-lam mu-bi àm-i-i še àm-mi-ib-su-ub-bé / ša húl a hi-li ša-ge si-a-na àm-mu-undi-ni-ib-da₁₃-da₁₃(TAG₄.TAG₄). Transliteration adapted from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enlil and Ninlil”). I understand -n.di- as a comitative. “He will leave/separate with you(!).” (A reference to the second (-e-) and not the third (-n-) person is expected.) Another solution (in order to avoid “with you” – since the logic says he leaves without her) is to understand -di- as an ablative. According to Thomsen however, the ablative is never used with animate (2001: 104).

cording to her mother's words she washed (his) hands and put a cup in his hands.⁸⁴⁸

Here we see how Sud heeds her mother and goes out to Nuska, the emissary of Enlil, who comes with wedding gifts on Enlil's behalf. Thus, in this myth the mother does not warn her daughter to avoid a man who wants illicit sex, but exhorts her to enter into correct relationships between the sexes; receiving of wedding gifts and then a wedding, followed by a sexual relation. In all three myths the mothers aim at the same thing: that the daughter only is engaged in sex in a culturally approved context.

Both Kramer/Maier and Vanstiphout understand the advice of Ninḫursaĝa in our myth to deal with demands of gifts,⁸⁴⁹ and Vanstiphout understands these gifts as a bride price.⁸⁵⁰ In light of "Enlil and Sud" this might well be the case; Ninḫursaĝa may be telling Uttu what is the right behavior before entering a sexual relationship, and advises her to marry before having sex. It is however possible that she, like Nunbaršegunu, only warned the young girl to avoid illicit sexual behavior, and that she said nothing about the gifts. The wished effect is nevertheless the same: that the young ones have sex only after they have married.

The advising person in both "The instructions of Šuruppag" and in "Enlil and Ninlil" is referred to by words that most often are translated as "old wise man" and "old wise woman", *abba* and *umma*,⁸⁵¹ which will be seen below. By Black et al. we find the translation "experienced woman" in the glossary. Ninḫursaĝa is not called *umma* in our text. Since there is a connection between this term and the role of giving advice however, I will investigate it in order to get a picture of the personages giving advice.

The fact that the *umma* was an *old* woman has been disputed by Jacobsen, whereas Römer believes that the usage of this term on younger women was a secondary development.⁸⁵² The Akkadian equivalent of *umma* is *šībtu*, which means "die, das Graue; alte Frau; Zeugin". Similarly, the Akkadian word corresponding to *abba*, *šību*, means "grau; alt, Alter, Greis; Ältester; Zeuge".⁸⁵³ Thus, it seems as if Römer is right,⁸⁵⁴ although there is a possibility that the word has changed meaning over time.

⁸⁴⁸ 77–82. ^dnanibgal [^gù mu]-^rna'-an-dé na mu-ni-ib-de₃-ge / lú tur-ĝu₁₀ šà 'ná' -[] kù-ga-zu ama₅ du₁₀ / é ĝeš^{tú} ^dnisaba-ka-kam [] è-a-me-en / [] X kíĝ ti-la kù-zu gal-an-zu-àm / [X] 'igi'-ni-šè na-an-DU.DU kaš dé-nu-na-ni-ib / [du₁₁]-^rga' ama-na-šè šu bí-in-luḫ zabar šu-na bí-in-ĝar. Transliteration adapted from Black et al. (1998–2006. "Enlil and Sud").

⁸⁴⁹ Kramer and Maier 1989: 27; Vanstiphout 1987: 166.

⁸⁵⁰ Vanstiphout 1987: 166.

⁸⁵¹ These words are sometimes translated as "mother" and "father", which is the reading given e.g. by Heimpel (1968: 458), and *AHW* and *CAD A/1* sub *abu*, as well as *ePSD* sub *abba* and *umma*.

⁸⁵² Römer 1965: 160.

⁸⁵³ For the Akkadian words, see *AHW*.

⁸⁵⁴ When Behrens discusses *umma* he takes for granted that it refers to an old woman (1978: 74f.).

If we look at the instances where the word *umma* is used for a goddess we see that it is applied to several young⁸⁵⁵ goddesses. In both “Enlil and Ninlil” and “Enlil and Sud” Ninlil’s mother is called Nunbaršegunu, and in the latter myth she is also called Nanibgal. Nunbaršegunu is another name for Nisaba,⁸⁵⁶ as is also Nanibgal.⁸⁵⁷ (In “Enlil and Sud” the mother is not called *umma*, but occurs in the advising context.) Nisaba is not belonging to the older generation in the pantheon, but is commonly a young woman, and particularly a scribal goddess.⁸⁵⁸ Also Inana, a young goddess,⁸⁵⁹ has this epithet, and the same goes for Nanše. The latter is said to be Enki’s daughter in “The Nanše Hymn”. Further, as will be seen, in our myth Enki is also the father of Nanše, and here we meet the goddess under the name Nazi,⁸⁶⁰ which besides our myth is attested in three Old Babylonian godlists, and in the Middle and Neo-Assyrian godlist An-Anum.⁸⁶¹

In the texts where the young goddesses are called *umma* however, they belong to the older generation among those acting in the story. In these texts they represent their respective cities; Nunbaršegunu is the *umma* of Nippur,⁸⁶² Inana is the *umma* of Uruk-Kulaba in “Enmerkar and Aratta”,⁸⁶³ and Nanše, the *umma* of Lagaš, is said to have founded this latter city.⁸⁶⁴

That the *umma* often had a function in the city is pointed out by Sumerologist Hermann Behrens. He refers to “The curse of Akkade”,⁸⁶⁵ where Inana gives the wise old woman the ability to give advice. He also refers to “Enki and Ninḥursaġa”,⁸⁶⁶ at the beginning where the static (and antithetical) state before creation is described. There we read: “Its [i.e. Dilmun’s] wise old woman does not say: ‘I am a wise old woman’, its wise old man does not say ‘I am a wise old man’”.⁸⁶⁷ Behrens writes that the characteristics of the *umma* are that she belongs to the older generation, and that she is able to give

⁸⁵⁵ With “young” I mean goddesses that often occur as daughters of other deities. E.g. Ninḥursaġa on the other hand, is not posed as daughter of other deities.

⁸⁵⁶ This is clear from the Ḥaja hymn (Charpin 1986: 346, l. 12).

⁸⁵⁷ McEvan 2001: 151.

⁸⁵⁸ There are two different genealogies for Nisaba; on the one hand she is called the oldest child of Enlil and on the other she is said to be the daughter of Uraš (Michalowski 2001: 576). In “Enlil and Ninlil” and “Enlil and Sud” she is as we have seen the mother-in-law of Enlil.

⁸⁵⁹ Inana is the daughter of the moon god Nanna-Su’*en* and his wife Ningal (Wilcke 1980: 80).

⁸⁶⁰ On Nanše’s family relations, see Heimpel (2001a: 154f.).

⁸⁶¹ Lambert 2013: 429.

⁸⁶² Behrens 1978: 213, l. 12.

⁸⁶³ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enmerkar and the lord of Aratta”. In l. 588, Inana is called *umma*, and from the whole story it is clear that she is important as the goddess of Uruk-Kulaba.

⁸⁶⁴ Black et al. 1998–2006. “A hymn to Nanše (Nanše A)”, l. 225. The mother goddess Ġatumdu is also called the *umma* of Lagaš, see Black et al. (1998–2006. “The lament for Urim”, l. 27).

⁸⁶⁵ See Black et al. 1998–2006. “The Cursing of Agade”, ll. 29f.

⁸⁶⁶ Behrens 1978: 74.

⁸⁶⁷ My translation, following the transliteration of Attinger (1984: 8).

instructions.⁸⁶⁸ Both these characteristics are found with Ninḫursaġa. Further, she probably has a special function on the island itself, just as the goddesses called umma had in their cities.

Jacobsen has reconstructed a prehistoric Mesopotamian assembly by tracing remnants of this institution in the early texts. According to him, a central role in the early Mesopotamian assembly was held by a group of elders, i.e. abba:s. At the same time all free members of the city constituted the assembly. Jacobsen believes though, that women were not part of the assembly.⁸⁶⁹

Presumably the status of elder did not coincide only with old age, but often also with parenthood. The parents of grown up women and men about to marry were naturally of an age when they could be called elders. This could explain why the roles of parent and umma or abba, as in “The instructions of Šuruppag” and “Enlil and Ninlil”, coincide.

Above we saw that Vanstiphout pointed out that the mother represents the girl’s lineage although this role is said always to be played by men. Does the myth reflect reality, i.e. can we find the corresponding roles of women in Mesopotamian society? Vanstiphout’s answer to this, regarding the mother’s role as representing the lineage, is that “her role in the sociological structure of marriage as it can be read from the documents of ideology as well as practice is minimal at best”.⁸⁷⁰ To note is that Le Roy Ladurie, the scholar from whom Vanstiphout borrowed the “marriage square”, found that the square disappeared from the Occitan literature when the sociological conditions for it died out,⁸⁷¹ i.e. the literature was a reflection of societal practice. If we translate this to the Mesopotamian context, the female role as representative of the young woman’s lineage could be understood as remnants from an earlier “square” that was about to die out. It is not improbable that women in the early Mesopotamian societies were representing the lineage of their daughter(s), although, as far as I know, there is no historical evidence that can support this.

To sum up, Nintu/Ninḫursaġa is acting in our myth in a role that is corresponding to the umma, the wise and experienced woman belonging to the older generation. She is advising her daughter regarding matters concerning the correct sexual behavior, advice found also in relation to Ninlil/Sud. As a mother goddess and umma Ninḫursaġa is related to the habitat in the myth, i.e. Dilmun, which is also corroborated through the fact that she is paralleled to Dilmun’s common goddess Ninsikila.

⁸⁶⁸ Behrens 1978: 75.

⁸⁶⁹ Jacobsen 1943: 160ff.

⁸⁷⁰ Vanstiphout 1987: 176.

⁸⁷¹ Vanstiphout 1987: 175.

4.11.2. Ideological aspects of the “advising theme”

The central categories of the advising theme in our myth are a (great great) grandmother and her (great great) granddaughter.⁸⁷² The woman of the younger generation is ranked below the woman of the older generation. A further category is the man about whom the granddaughter is advised. Enki seems to be beyond the influence of Ninḥursaġa here, and is thus ranked above both women.

It was argued that Ninḥursaġa is represented as an *umma*, an old and wise woman here, since she is found in a context where other deities are called “old wise woman/man”, and further the verb *met* with in these contexts (*na—de_s*) occurs also with Ninḥursaġa. Enki, on the other hand, is not represented as an *abba*, an old wise man, but as a young man who only focusses on sex, although he does belong to the older generation. The gender role of Ninḥursaġa is to take responsibility of the social rules as well as of the health and safety of her granddaughter, whereas Enki is quite irresponsible, and only thinks about satisfying his sexual urge. This seems to reflect the situation in society where only women were forbidden by law to have extramarital sexual relations.

The advising of Ninḥursaġa is restricted to the area of sexuality and probably also wedding, whereas Šuruppag instructed his son in all areas of life. The situation in our myth differs from that in “The instructions of Šuruppag” though, since we here deal with a specific problem of the risk of being raped when going out. Nevertheless, Ninḥursaġa’s role as *umma*, old and wise woman, is restricted here. She is not a wise woman in general, but only in areas that “pertain to womanhood” from the patriarchal point of view. And why is the gender role of Uttu only focused on sexuality and wedding? I assume that this is due to the fact that the myth was narrated from a patriarchal point of view; the gender role of Uttu is the one demanded for women in a patriarchal society. Thus, our myth does not narrate the whole picture of undertakings of women, but only those ideologically interesting in a patriarchal framework.

Vanstiphout discussed the fact that it is very uncommon that a woman represents the girl’s lineage, both in ideological and practical sources. In the section on historical background we saw however, that there were exceptions to rules regarding women’s status in areas like inheritance and ownership. The Mesopotamian material is not univocally patriarchal, which can be a sign of an ongoing recalibration of gender roles. This is also an argument for not excluding that Ninḥursaġa’s role as *umma* reflects social practices.

⁸⁷² I do not exclude that Ninḥursaġa is representing the mother here, and that all the previous goddesses in a sense can be seen as representatives of the mother goddess.

4.12. The irrigating Enki

4.12.1. Contextualization of Enki's irrigation

A central trait of our myth is the role of Enki as irrigator of the arid land. At the beginning of the myth Enki's spouse Ninsikila complains about the gift that she has received from Enki; what shall she do with Dilmun when there is no water in the canals? Then Enki says that water will come, brought by Utu, when he stands in heaven. Thus, the conditions for irrigation were brought by Utu, and now Enki can set to work.

The irrigating acts of Enki coincide with the sexual intercourses. The equivocal description in these passages is easily made in Sumerian, since the same sign is used for both semen and water. When Enki is having his first intercourse, which is with the earth, he is digging canals with his penis.⁸⁷³

When this digging is done he is pouring out his semen/the water into the earth, and then Ninḥursaġa takes it and pours it into her womb. In Sumerian womb was commonly called šà.g⁸⁷⁴ (it can also mean “middle”), and a name for field was a-šà.g; thus we can see also here how easily the thoughts go in both the direction of intercourse, and in that of (watering) a field. The word used here for “watering”, “pouring out” (a—du₁₁.g) is the common term for irrigation.⁸⁷⁵ Further, the verb used when Ninḥursaġa is pouring the semen into her womb (a—ri) can mean both “to beget” (lit. “pour out semen”) and “to inundate” (Akk. *raḥāšu*).

After the “intercourse” with the ground, and the self-insemination of Ninḥursaġa, the already discussed intercourses following a boat trip take place. As we have seen, Enki first puts his foot on a boat, and secondly steps onto arid land. I propose that these intercourses describe how he inundates the arid land, and thus cultivates the wilderness.⁸⁷⁶ In connection with the

⁸⁷³ The term here used for canal is e.g, which according to Steinkeller was not a ditch, but an earth wall with a canal on its top. The e.g canal was small, just as the pa₄, the canal or ditch which was nearest by the irrigation furrows (Steinkeller 1988: 73f.).

⁸⁷⁴ There are other words for womb: *agarin*, Akk. *agarinnu*; gal₄-la, Akk. *biššūru*, *ūru*. Further, Sumerologist Miguel Civil has shown that also the word be₃-en-zé-er denotes the womb, being a Semitic loan word in Sumerian, originating from the same root as Akk. *biššūru* (2006). In our myth we meet šà.g in all the instances dealing with intercourse. Later when Ninḥursaġa is healing Enki by putting him into her vulva however, the word gal₄-la is used.

⁸⁷⁵ Attinger 1993: 477ff. Another word related to the irrigation technique is naġ, “to inundate”, and is for example seen in a text treated by Steinkeller (1988: 79, IV: 2). The Akkadian correspondence is *šaġû*. Further a—dé is a common verb in relation to watering and irrigation, see eg. “The debate between Hoe and Plough”, l. 69 and “The instructions of Šuruppag”, l. 4 (Black et al. 1998–2006).

⁸⁷⁶ For the cultivation of arid land (bar-rim₄), see Black et al. (1998–2006. “The debate between Hoe and Plough”, l. 173). Kirk also understands “Enki and Ninḥursaġa” as dealing with irrigation. He believes however that it was a part of a plot of Ninḥursaġa to make Enki to irrigate the desert so that more of her region was fertilized. He means that this plot was an attempt “to force irrigation beyond its natural place” (1973: 95). I do not agree with Kirk's interpretation. The myth deals with the extension of the irrigation agriculture and not with irrigation at an unnatural place. Further, it will be argued below that the aim of the mythogra-

last intercourse nothing is said about (arid) land, and the intercourse is, as we have seen, more “human”. The irrigation instead takes place when Enki helps the gardener to water his plantations:

secondly, his filling of water; / the embankments – he filled them with water,
/ the ditches – he filled them with water, / the fallow fields – he filled them
with water.⁸⁷⁷

This makes the gardener very happy, and he gives Enki the gifts that he needs to make advances to Uttu. When we compare with the three preceding intercourses, we see that here, just as there, the watering is preceded by “min-kam-ma”. At the time of the intercourses after a boat trip, we read “secondly, he put his foot on arid land”. This could be a device to connect these two sorts of “irrigation”,⁸⁷⁸ i.e. the previous intercourses closely parallel this watering of the fields.

This preoccupation with irrigation is of course not strange. As Cooper has pointed out, Enki had a role “as the ultimate source of fresh water irrigation, the fecundation that is the very basis of Babylonia’s agricultural economy”.⁸⁷⁹ Actually, Mesopotamian society is unthinkable without this technique. Although the temperature and sea level were higher in the ancient times,⁸⁸⁰ studies on today’s conditions in Iraq, could give some information on how it was a long time ago.

Studies made in the fifties tell us that the rain periods in Iraq do not coincide with that of vegetable growth, and if rain comes it is never enough. When it is time to sow the earth is often hard baked by the sun, and needs water to be workable.⁸⁸¹ Also the flooding of the rivers does not coincide with the need for watering the fields.⁸⁸² This means that one needs to have barriers which keep the water back, or reservoirs where one collects water till it is needed to let it out.⁸⁸³

All these facts situate Enki at a special stage in the cultural development. He represents the first irrigation engineer, although his technique does not seem all too smart. Thus he corresponds to a development that probably

pher(s) was to show that Ninḫursaġa was not the sole source of life, since without Enki she was only arid land.

⁸⁷⁷ 153–156. min-kam-ma a si-si-da-ni / e a bī-in-si / pa₅ a bī-in-si / kislāḡ a bī-in-si. Transliteration taken from Attinger (1984).

⁸⁷⁸ Also in “Enki and the world order” Enki is bringing water by ejaculating. Here his pouring out of semen fills the Tigris, see Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enki and the world order”, l. 250ff); for a discussion of this passage, see also Cooper 1989: 87f.

⁸⁷⁹ Cooper 1989: 89.

⁸⁸⁰ Postgate 1988: vii.

⁸⁸¹ Charles 1988: 1f.

⁸⁸² Charles 1988: 6.

⁸⁸³ We know that dams and other technical solutions were used to regulate the flow of water (Steinkeller 1988: 74ff.).

started at the end of the fifth millennium in southern Mesopotamia.⁸⁸⁴ Postgate writes that “closer inspection of the third millennium evidence does suggest that the irrigation system was in the hands of the traditional local authorities”.⁸⁸⁵ Enki can be seen as a representative of such a local authority, being a leader on the local level.

4.12.2. Ideological aspects of Enki’s role as irrigator

Regarding Enki’s role as irrigator it is throughout paralleled with intercourse. He is further throughout posed as the fecund one, whereas the females are depicted as arid and in need of Enki’s fertilizing power. Thus, the male is ranked above the female in this respect. The understanding of the male as a fertilizing irrigator can be related to the rise of an irrigation agriculture in Mesopotamia, where predominantly males worked the fields. Since Enki’s role is related to a specific phase in history, and since a struggle of supremacy unfolds both in this myth and the one to be treated in the next chapter, it is reasonable to assume that a recalibration is taking place regarding the role of the female in the areas of fertility and procreation. Whereas previously having represented the village and early city, being the mother of all, the female is now likened to arid land. In one respect this recalibration can be understood as a step taken by patriarchy, but it can also be interpreted as a result of historical change regarding how the people in the region earned a living.

4.13. The sin of Enki

The eight plants are the result of the lovemaking between Enki and Uttu, and they are consumed by Enki. He eats them, and then it is said that “Enki decreed the destinies of the plants; he knew their hearts”.⁸⁸⁶ This makes Ninḥursaġa swear thus on the name of Enki: “until death I will not look with the eye of life upon him”.⁸⁸⁷

Since Ninḥursaġa in this way condemns Enki to death, he must – from her point of view – have committed a terrible crime by eating the plants, and then decreeing their fates. The eating of plants has been interpreted by Alster as resulting in pregnancy on the part of Enki.⁸⁸⁸ Since this role belongs to Ninḥursaġa/the female, her condemnation can, according to this interpretation, be due to the fact that Enki tries to take over this role. I will however

⁸⁸⁴ Hruška 1988: 61.

⁸⁸⁵ Postgate 1992: 173.

⁸⁸⁶ L. 217.

⁸⁸⁷ Ll. 218f.

⁸⁸⁸ Alster 1978: 19.

focus on two other themes here; that of incest and the decreeing of fates. I will first turn to the question of incest.

4.13.1. The incest theme

To understand the meaning of incest in our myth I will first generally discuss theories on incest. The question of incest has been a major topic of discussion among anthropologists during the last century, and primarily regarding the prohibition/taboo of incest. It has been found that incest is prohibited in almost all societies,⁸⁸⁹ although there are exceptions where incestual marriages were practiced in royal families.⁸⁹⁰

The reason for the near to universal incest prohibition has been explained differently by different scholars, and the theories are mainly based upon cultural or biological explanations. The cultural theories take as a starting point that the human avoidance of incest is culturally learned, whereas the biological theories presume that the avoidance of incest is an innate drive. According to Lévi-Strauss the incest taboo constitutes the transition between nature and culture. Anthropologist Paul B. Roscoe writes about the theory of Lévi-Strauss, that “For him, everything that is universal and instinctive in human beings belongs to the natural order; everything subject to a rule is cultural. Human incest avoidance is unique, he claims, because it is simultaneously universal, instinctive, and rule governed”.⁸⁹¹

Although it is not of direct importance for me to choose a standpoint in the discussion of the reason for incest prohibition – I can take as a starting point that in Mesopotamia there was a prohibition – indirectly it will, as will be seen, influence my interpretation of our myth. Therefore, I will here present the theory that I find most convincing.

Anthropologist W. Arens represents the biological view, which I will follow here. He argues against the functional explanations of the cultural theories, since he believes that the incest prohibition is not necessarily following from the cultural expressions assumed to be the reasons for the prohibition. For example, it has been proposed that the prohibition was a result of the need to establish allies outside the own kinship group. This led to exogamy which in turn was inculcated by the incest prohibition. Arens means that there need not be a connection between exogamy and the incest prohibition since there is a differentiation between marriage rules and rules on sexual behavior.⁸⁹²

⁸⁸⁹ Arens 1996: 295; Barnard 1994: 800; Roscoe 1996: 631.

⁸⁹⁰ Roscoe refers to royal marriages in Hawaii, in the Inca empire and in Central Africa. He writes that it is not clear if the couples were full siblings and if they had intercourse (1996). See also Arens (1996: 296) and Barnard (1994: 801).

⁸⁹¹ Roscoe 1996: 631ff.

⁸⁹² Arens 1996: 294f. Also Anthropologist Alan Barnard points out that the rules of exogamy and those of incest need not coincide (1994: 801).

A further criticism on the functional theories that Arens has is that they “all implicitly assume that the incest prohibition was at some point in time created by human beings in recognition of its benefits”. He writes that this presumption is not supported by historical or anthropological data.⁸⁹³

The initial formulation of what was to develop into the theory held by Arens was made by Edward Westermarck. He meant that humans naturally become sexually attracted by persons outside the family and that they avoid incest. He could however not explain why there is a prohibition against incest when there is a natural inclination to avoid it. This is explained by Arens by comparing nature with culture. He writes that all primates outbreed, and thus the avoidance of incest was established before there were human beings and “is assumed to have been a feature of our last common ancestor extant at least 400,000 years ago”. According to Arens the avoidance of incest is then based in nature. This leads him to conclude that the activity of incest, and thus the prohibition of it is based in culture.⁸⁹⁴ Cultural circumstances could be the wish to keep a royal bloodline pure or to avoid relating to people with other backgrounds. Also the drive to keep property in the family could be a cultural drive to practice incest.⁸⁹⁵ If it is natural to avoid incest I assume that incest as sexual abuse is a cultural product as well. To investigate that phenomenon lies beyond this thesis however.

With the theory of Arens as a background I will now return to the theory of Lévi-Strauss. He believed that the incest taboo constituted the transition between nature and culture. If Arens is correct, the incest avoidance shall instead be related to nature and the incest taboo/prohibition to culture. I believe however that the theory of Lévi-Strauss very well describes the way the incest taboo is treated in our myth. Therefore I suggest that it was *comprehended* by the Sumerians to constitute a transition between nature and culture.

We have seen that Enki engaged in incestual intercourse on a stage of creation before the introduction of culture, without being punished. When he has intercourse with “the first woman”, namely Uttu, she becomes ill. Further, when he then “consumes the progeny” that he has engendered by her, he is condemned to death. In the latter instance incest is paralleled with eating, and is thus described by the usage of another natural category.⁸⁹⁶ Here, just as with Lévi-Strauss’s interpretation of the Oedipus myth⁸⁹⁷ one relation can be understood as elucidating the other and making it comprehensible. Incest is explained as consumption of one’s own seed, and thereby the danger is made more explicit; just as physical illness can be an immediate corol-

⁸⁹³ Arens 1996: 295.

⁸⁹⁴ Arens 1996: 295f.

⁸⁹⁵ Arens 1996: 296; Barnard 1994: 801.

⁸⁹⁶ Throughout *La pensée sauvage* (1962) Lévi-Strauss describes this device to make one natural category understandable and known by paralleling it with another natural category.

⁸⁹⁷ Lévi-Strauss 1958: 236ff.

lary when eating something improper, the consuming of one's own seed is likewise seen as improper. Further, I suspect that on one level the danger lies in the fact that the male in this way "impregnates himself", which is not good for him, since he cannot give birth.⁸⁹⁸

4.13.2. The decreeing of destinies

When I discussed the concept "mother goddess" in the introductory chapter, I maintained that one of the tasks of the mother goddess was to decree fates. If this is correct one can suspect that Ninḫursaġa is angry at Enki because he is trying to usurp her role. However, other deities had the right to decree fates. I shall use my method of investigating the constellation of ideas surrounding the concept of "decreeing destinies" to try to reach an understanding of Enki's and Ninḫursaġa's relations to this task. I will investigate who usually decrees destiny in the mythical world of the Mesopotamians. If this differs from case to case, I also have to discuss who is expected to decree on this occasion. In "Enki and Ninḫursaġa" the word for decreeing destiny, *nam—tar*, occurs when the Anuna gods are the subjects of the verb. The object of the verb is not clear. Perhaps they decree the destiny that Enlil has promised the fox if it can make Ninḫursaġa change her mind about the "death-sentence" on Enki.

At the end of the myth the deities Ninḫursaġa has given birth to⁸⁹⁹ receive their destinies.⁹⁰⁰ Regrettably there is a gap where the verb is expected. Black et al. have not chosen to restore the verb *nam—tar* "to decree destinies". They read: "For the little ones to whom I have given birth may rewards not be lacking" (*di₄-di₄-lá-lá ba-tu-dè-en-na-aš níġ-'ba nam'-[lá]*).⁹⁰¹ This seems to be a plausible reading, and the distribution of spheres and places of activities could be compared to the decreeing of destinies, since this tells about the destinies of these deities.⁹⁰² This passage is problematic since we do not

⁸⁹⁸ As stated above, also Alster interprets the consumption of the plants as resulting in pregnancy. Further, the mouth is also related to the vulva, which supports the idea that Enki gets pregnant. On the relation between mouth and vulva, with examples from the Greek culture, see Ardener (1987: 118–123).

⁸⁹⁹ According to Alster's interpretation it is Enki who is giving birth to these deities (although with help from Ninḫursaġa) (1978: 19). This naturally leads to another understanding of other parts of the myth (e.g. that Ninḫursaġa seems to accept that he also gives birth).

⁹⁰⁰ Cf. "A hymn to Nungal (Nungal A)" (Black et al. 1998–2006) ll. 71–72, where Nungal says: "I assist Nintur at the place of child-delivery (?); I know how to cut the umbilical cord and know the favourable words when determining fates". Here childbirth and determining of fates are interconnected. Nungal, is the one determining the fates of the child in this text, and she can be compared to the mother goddess in our text who both gives birth and acts as an assistant when Enki "gives birth".

⁹⁰¹ Black et al. 1998–2006. "Enki and Ninḫursaġa", l. 272.

⁹⁰² Cf. the Standard Babylonian Anzû myth where Enlil allots tasks and spheres to Anzû and all the gods when the creation has been set into motion by the coming of water at the birth of Anzû (Hallo and Moran 1979: 80f., III: 3f.). See also Assyriologist Amar Annus' publication

know with certainty who is allotting them their spheres.⁹⁰³ If it is Ninḫursaġa it would support the understanding that Enki gets condemned because he has entered her domain. Then the end could be seen as a return to the right order; Ninḫursaġa gives birth, and then decrees the destinies of her children. Another interpretation is that Ninḫursaġa is condemning Enki only because he is “pregnant”. In that case it is possible that he is the one who “decrees the destinies” at the end. According to the latter understanding Ninḫursaġa is satisfied while she has got back one of her domains, and then accepts that Enki allots the spheres to their progeny.

In “Enlil and Ninlil” we also find a group of gods and a single deity who decree destinies: “the seven gods who decide destinies”⁹⁰⁴ and “The shepherd [= Enlil], who decides all destinies”.⁹⁰⁵ Perhaps there is an answer at the end of the myth as to which sort of destiny-decreeing it is that Enlil exercises:

You are the lord who makes the flax grow, who makes the barley grow, you are lord in heaven, lord (of) abundance, lord on earth. [...] Enlil of heaven, Enlil is king! Lord whose utterances are unalterable.⁹⁰⁶

The end of the myth could be understood as a praise of the fate-decreeing ability of Enlil, and is then a sort of counterpart to the end of “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”. A difference between the two myths is that in the latter the deity utters a decree (or an allotment) him/herself, whereas the ability of the deity to do so is praised by the mythographer(s) in “Enlil and Ninlil”.

In both texts the groups of gods seem to decree fate at more specific occasions. In “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” they perhaps do this for the fox. In “Enlil and Ninlil” it is as a result of a crime: Enlil has raped Ninlil, and shall therefore be expelled from the city. To note is that in “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” the Anuna gods do not have the power to influence Ninḫursaġa by force, whereas in “Enlil and Ninlil” the seven gods who decree destiny have the power to expel Enlil.

From this we see that there were at least four (possible) concepts of decreeing destinies by the ancient Mesopotamians:

1. Power to decree unalterable destinies in the world. (Enlil)

of the cuneiform text and the transliteration of the Standard Babylonian version of the Anzû myth (2001).

⁹⁰³ Alster works according to the interpretation that Enki is decreeing these destinies/allotting these spheres (1978: 19). The same interpretation is suggested by Attinger (1984: 31, note 56). In Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”), the fates are understood as being allotted by Ninḫursaġa, l. 272.

⁹⁰⁴ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enlil and Ninlil”, l. 57.

⁹⁰⁵ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enlil and Ninlil”, l. 19.

⁹⁰⁶ 147–148. en gu mú-mú en še mú-mú za-e-me-en / en an-na en hé-ġál en ki-a za-e-me-en [...] 150–151. ^den-lil an-na ^den-lil lugal-[la]-am en du₁₁-ga-ni níġ nu-kúr-ru-dam. Transliteration adapted from Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enlil and Ninlil”.

2. Power to decree destinies of newly created beings. (The text is broken; Ninḥursaġa or Enki?)

3. Power to decree a new and fortuitous destiny as a reward. (the Anuna gods)

4. Power to decree a destiny as a punishment following a crime. (the seven gods who decree destiny)

The picture of the decreeing of destiny that we have reached from these two myths is rather disparate, and therefore I will turn to other myths to see if we can reach a deeper understanding of the problem.

In “Inana’s descent” we have a situation that resembles what happens to Enlil in “Enlil and Ninlil”: a verdict following a transgression. And as in “Enlil and Ninlil” the ones who impose the verdict are “the Anuna, those seven judges” (^da-nun-na di-ku₅ imin-bi).⁹⁰⁷ This formulation suggests that the group of deities in “Enki and Ninḥursaġa” called “the Anuna” (^da-nun-na-ke₄-ne) who are decreeing fates and “their seven gods decreeing fates” (diġir nam-tar-ra imin-na-ne-ne) in “Enlil and Ninlil”, are the same. A difference between “Inana’s descent” and the other myths is that here the juridical term “to impose a verdict” (di—ku₅.r) is used instead of “decreeing fates” (nam—tar). Moreover, the sentence that they pronounce is that of death, and as a result they (or Ereškigal) look(s) at Inana with the look of death. The sentence resembles the act of Ninḥursaġa when Enki decreed the fates of the plants.

What entitles us to see the juridical act in “Inana’s descent” as a correspondence to the situations in the two other myths, when another term is used there? One answer is quite simply that we have there the sequence transgression – verdict by seven gods, just as in “Enlil and Ninlil”. Further, we have already seen⁹⁰⁸ that the netherworld (or its entrance) was a place of both justice and destinies. The place where the sun rises had clear netherworldly connotations. There Utu pronounced judgment, and it was also called the place of destiny. The sequence of transgression – verdict by seven gods gives a hint then that the act of Ninḥursaġa is also to be seen as a verdict. Further, as Woods writes:

the determination of fate or destiny, nam-tar, is often paired – and in many cases interchangeable – with judging, di-kud [...]. The semantic overlap between the two is captured by the lexicon itself, as both di-kud and nam-tar denote cutting.⁹⁰⁹

The following table gives a picture of the sequences in the myths, and how they can be used to inform us of one another:

⁹⁰⁷ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Inana’s descent to the nether world”, l. 167; Sladek 1974: 123, l. 167.

⁹⁰⁸ See above, section 4.3. The role of Utu.

⁹⁰⁹ Woods 2009: 215.

Table 3. Transgressions and their result in “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”, “Enlil and Ninlil” and in “Inana’s descent”

Myth	Transgression	Decision of punishment	Punishment
Enki and Ninḫursaġa	Eating plants (incest, rape) and decreeing fate	X	Removal of the look of life
Enlil and Ninlil	Rape	Seizure and decreeing of fate	Expulsion from Nippur
Inana’s descent	Coveting the me:s of the netherworld	Rendering of verdict	The look of death

Two of these transgressions end up with a death-sentence. Is there a similarity between them? It seems as if the crime of Inana and Enki respectively is that they both try to enter the domain of power of another deity.

In “Ištar’s descent” we find yet another type of decreeing of fate, although this term is not used. A deity formerly put to death (Ištar) is given back life (by Ereškigal). That the concept of fate and that of judgment are interrelated is also clear in this passage. Ereškigal asks Namtar to fetch the Anunaki and seat them on the golden thrones, and thereafter he shall sprinkle Ištar with the water of life.⁹¹⁰ Here fate is personified (Namtar), and he himself executes the act that turns Ištar’s fate (my formulation) to die, to a fate to live again. This new fate resembles that of Enki when Ninḫursaġa decides that she will heal him. Enki is not dead, though, but dying, and he is not healed by water, but by eight deities, born by Ninḫursaġa, while Enki sits in her vulva, and there he also gets healed.

Mammītum/Mama/Mami is the name of the wife of Nergal/Erra, who is the god of the netherworld,⁹¹¹ and at the same time Mama/i is a name of the mother goddess.⁹¹² The goddess Mammītum is met with in the Gilgameš epic in a context of life, death and decreeing destinies. At the end of tablet X Ūta-napišti says that:

The Anunaki, the great gods, were in assembly, Mammītum who creates destiny, made a decree with them: death and life they did establish, the day of death they did not reveal.⁹¹³

⁹¹⁰ Sladek 1974: 260, ll. 113f.

⁹¹¹ Krebernik 1990: 330.

⁹¹² Krebernik 1997b: 504.

⁹¹³ 319–322. ^d*a-nun-na-ki ilū rabūtu paḥ-ru / ^dma-am-me-tum ba-na-at šim-ti itti-šū-nu ši-ma-tú i-ši[m-mā] / iš-tak-nu mu-ta u ba-la-[a] / šá mu-ti ul ud-du-ú ūmī-šú*. Transliteration and translation taken from George 2003: 696–699.

The following tablet (XI) contains the Flood Story of the Gilgamesh epic. When the flood is coming Bēlet-ilī says: “Indeed the past has truly turned to clay, because I spoke evil in the assembly of the gods. How was it I spoke evil in the assembly of the gods, (and) declared a war to destroy my people? It is I that gave birth (to them)!”⁹¹⁴ Mammītum as well as the “more common” Akkadian mother goddess Bēlet-ilī, seem to be one and the same here. Thus, we see that here the mother goddess also decrees fate.⁹¹⁵

To complete the picture, I will now turn to the Sumerian Temple hymns, i.e. step outside the genre of myth. The extant copies of the hymns are mainly dated to the Old Babylonian period, but there are two fragments from the Ur III period.⁹¹⁶ As was pointed out above in section 2.1.2.3., these hymns end with stating that Enḫeduana, the daughter of King Sargon, had compiled the hymns, putting the written words in her mouth (or hand). Regardless of who did compile the hymns, the collection in itself is advantageous since it deals with so many gods, and therefore it is possible to get an overall picture of how the concept of fate was connected to the members of the literary pantheon.

The first hymn is dedicated to Enki and his temple in Eridu. Nothing is said about decreeing destinies. The five following gods constitute a unit: first comes Enlil, and then his family. In the hymn to Enlil and his temple, the decreeing of destiny is mentioned several times; “shrine where destiny is determined”, “your ‘back’ determines destiny” and “the lord, who determines destiny”.⁹¹⁷ In none of the hymns to his family members and their temples⁹¹⁸ the decreeing of destinies is mentioned. Hymn number 7 is dedicated to Ninḫursaġa in Keš, and here she is called the sister of Enlil, and could therefore be said to also belong to the entourage of Enlil. As is the case with Enki, nothing is said here about the decreeing of destiny.⁹¹⁹

The next hymn to mention our subject is number 9 to Šulgi and his temple Eḫursaġ. Then comes no. 20 for Ninġirsu and his Eninnu in Lagaš, and he is here called the son of Enlil. Thereafter in the hymn of Uruk(g) its goddess Bau is said to be the one “who determines the destiny of her city”.⁹²⁰ In Temple hymn no. 29 for Ninḫursaġa’s temple in Adab, Nintu (this name for Ninḫursaġa is also met with in our myth in ll. 65Af and 128A), Enlil and

⁹¹⁴ George 2003: 710f., ll. 119–123.

⁹¹⁵ In the Akkadian Anzu myth the mother goddess does not decree the fates, but occurs in a context where the tablet of destinies is stolen. She forwards her son as the one who will bring back the tablet. In this myth the mother goddess is met with under her names Mami and Bēlet-ilī (see Hruška 1975; Hallo and Moran 1979 and Saggs 1986).

⁹¹⁶ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 5f.

⁹¹⁷ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 18, 29, ll. 25, 35.

⁹¹⁸ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 19–21.

⁹¹⁹ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 22.

⁹²⁰ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 24, 31f., 32f.

Enki are determining destinies.⁹²¹ In the temple of Ninisina⁹²² in Isin it is An and Enlil who determine destiny,⁹²³ and finally in the temple of Ninḫursaĝa in HI.ZA destiny is determined by the goddess herself.⁹²⁴

To sum up the facts from the Temple hymns, the greatest gods – An, Enlil, Ninḫursaĝa and Enki – decree fates here, but also Ninĝirsu and Bau. Conspicuously, Enki does not decree destinies in his own temple – instead he does this together with Enlil and Nintu in the latter’s temple in Adab. Another interesting fact is that An has not even got a temple of his own. He is instead found decreeing destinies in the temple of Ninisina.

I understand the position of Enlil and his family at the beginning, just after Enki, as a result of a Nippur theology. Enlil is posed as *the* decreer of fates, and in a patriarchal manner he is the only one in his family who has this ability. Not even Ninḫursaĝa decrees the destinies when she is included in Enlil’s sphere. In the two other hymns where we meet her, she decrees destinies, and there she is not posed as a relative of Enlil. It seems as if the Nippur theologians try to enlarge Enlil’s area of power since he also usurps Ninisina’s right to decree destinies in her own city, and when he rivals Nintu regarding this task in Adab.

According to Steinkeller Enlil was “a secondary development in the Sumerian pantheon”, and he means that Enlil was not initially part of it.⁹²⁵ Also van Dijk sees Enlil as a newcomer in the pantheon, as does Selz regarding the city-state of Lagaš.⁹²⁶ Thus, the understanding of these scholars supports my interpretation of Enlil in the hymn cycle as being an intruder.

Since only three deities besides Enlil decree destinies in their own temples I believe that they are more or less original decreers. Ninḫursaĝa is a decreer since she is the tutelary (mother) goddess of her cities, and the same goes for Bau. I understand Ninĝirsu’s role as decreer of fates to be due to the fact that he is the son of Enlil.⁹²⁷

In the Temple hymns we do not find a connection between decreeing of destinies and the netherworld.⁹²⁸ This connection is however often met with

⁹²¹ Sjöberg and Bergmann read *ama d^lnin-tu d^len-lil d^len-ki-ke₄ nam tar-ra* as “Mother Nintu, Enlil and Enki determine (your) destiny” (1969: 38), whereas I understand it as “mother Nintu, Enlil and Enki decree destinies”.

⁹²² Steinkeller has argued that the name of this goddess shall be read Ninisina only, and not with a variant Nininsina, as was previously thought. (1978: 169). Thus, in the relevant hymn we shall read *d^lnin-^lisin^{si}-na* (Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 40, l. 393).

⁹²³ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 39, l. 383.

⁹²⁴ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 46f.

⁹²⁵ Steinkeller 1999: 113f., with fn. 36.

⁹²⁶ van Dijk 1983: 4; Selz 1992: 203.

⁹²⁷ Sjöberg and Bergmann assume that Enki was originally the father of Ninĝirsu, since Nanše is his sister, and also the daughter of Enki. Further, Bau, the wife of Ninĝirsu, is said to be the daughter-in-law of Enki in an Early Dynastic IIIb text, whereas later she is understood as the daughter-in-law of Enlil (1969: 10).

⁹²⁸ References to the netherworld are found in the temple hymns of Ninazu (l. 182), Ninĝiszida (l. 190), Dumuzi (l. 215) and Utu (l. 489), but not in connection to fate (Sjöberg

in the myths, as was seen above. Further, we also know that there is a correspondence between the mother goddess and the mistress of the netherworld. We have met this correspondence also with Ninnisi and Ninkura, the daughter and granddaughter of Ninḫursaġa. Thus, the mother goddess and the goddess of the netherworld seem to be two versions of the same goddess, both being decreers of fate.⁹²⁹

Table 4. Relationship between mother goddess and death goddess and the fates

mother goddess – death goddess

birthgiving – deathgiving

decreeing of fates

The connection between death, birth and fate is also seen in relation to the sun god Utu.⁹³⁰ Regarding the mother goddess, my understanding is that there was an early split between the mother in her function as giving and taking life respectively. In Mesopotamia this split is expressed by these two goddesses, although they have both kept some of their earlier connotations.

The mother/death goddess is often connected to the judging Anuna gods. In the Atrahāsīs myth they are called *pāqīdu šimāti*, administrators of destinies. The Anuna gods are further the representatives of the assembly of the gods.⁹³¹ Since they have an assembly no deity can decide important things on her/his own. The assembly does not seem to have any real power to stop the mother/death goddess from decreeing destinies however, and also Enlil and Enki act on their own in the myth. Perhaps the Anuna gods shall be seen as advisors, and as they are called, administrators. To note however, is that in the Babylonian creation myth *Enūma eliš* they are called “great gods, ordainers of destinies”,⁹³² which suggests that the assembly was seen as powerful.

and Bergmann 1969: 27f., 30, 46). The line in Utu’s temple hymn was referred to above, section 4.3. In this line it is said that “he pronounces judgment at the place where the sun rises”. The verb *di-kuṣ.r* is used (ibid., 46).

⁹²⁹ Cf. Professor Emerita in the History of Religions Britt-Mari Näsström who writes about goddesses that she calls “great goddesses”. She points to the roles of these goddesses besides being mothers, as decreers of destinies, and as death goddesses, and regarding Freyja, she was also a love goddess (1995: 73, 76f.). Although the “great goddesses” had several similar traits, Näsström underlines that they also were quite different due to the cultural context (1995: 90).

⁹³⁰ Polonsky 2006: 300, 302, 305.

⁹³¹ Lambert and Millard 1999: 50, 58, I: 122, 134, I: 218f.

⁹³² Foster 1996: 371, I. 130; Lambert 2013: 82, I. 130.

My understanding of the development in Mesopotamia regarding the decreeing of fates is that when the comprehension of who creates the world and life changed, the one having the role of decreeing destinies also changed. Thus, I mean that the decreeing of fates was thought primarily to belong to the creatress/creator. In the Atrahasis myth the mother goddess is called *šassūru*, *bānāt šīmtu*, “womb (/birth goddess), creatress of destiny”.⁹³³ I believe that this expresses an older comprehension of who decrees destinies. The pre- and protohistoric comprehension of creation was modelled upon female birth-giving, and dealt with sexual imagery. Later when creation was connected to the male, ideas were developed that he created, first through irrigation, and then, e.g. through presence or speech.

In the early phase of irrigation, there was a development of a new leadership, which in the myths is represented by Enki, the irrigation engineer. During a transition phase both sexes are thought to create life, and the creation is modelled upon intercourse. Therefore both sexes are seen as decreers of fates. The male is soon trying to pose himself as the origin of life and thus also as the sole decreer of destinies. This process has started in the society reflected in “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”, and in “Enki and Ninmaḥ” Enki, representing the male, more or less succeeds in usurping the roles that earlier belonged to the mother goddess. In “Enki and the world order” the female is totally absent,⁹³⁴ and the role of Enki can be understood there as a later stage than that seen in “Enki and Ninmaḥ”.⁹³⁵ Enki is posed as the decreer of fate throughout “Enki and the world order”.⁹³⁶

As to the relation between the mother goddess and Enki in our myth, I suggest then, that it enacts a competition between Ninḫursaġa and Enki,⁹³⁷ which is a result of the development of new leadership and values. From this point of view Enki is trying to enter the domain of Ninḫursaġa, reflecting the historical process. Here Ninḫursaġa still seems to have the upper hand though, and she still seems to be the one who has the ability to decree fates. In the next chapter we will encounter a society that has developed further into patriarchy, and therefore the relations between Enki and Ninḫursaġa/Ninmaḥ will also be changed.

⁹³³ Lambert and Millard 1999: 62, 102, I: 11, III: 47. Cf. *CAD* Š/2 sub *šassūru* A where the word is understood to denote “womb” and “mother goddess”.

⁹³⁴ See Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki and the world order”.

⁹³⁵ According to Attinger, private communication, “Enki and the world order” seems to be linguistically older than “Enki and Ninmaḥ”. He points out that this does not have to mean that the content of “Enki and Ninmaḥ” has to be younger than that of “Enki and the world order”.

⁹³⁶ See Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki and the world order”, II. 43, 75, 95, 118, 191, 211, 217, 220, 271, 391.

⁹³⁷ Kramer and Maier refer to the competitions between Enki and Ninḫursaġa, and write that they “highlight the conflict between the male and female elements in the process of creation” (1989: 4).

4.13.3. Ideological aspects of Enki's sin

Regarding the aspect of incest as part of Enki's "sin", the ideological categories are Enki and Ninḫursaġa respectively. Enki is representing disorder through consumption of his own seed, which leads to self-impregnation. Ninḫursaġa on the other hand, is the defender of cultural values and represents a socially acceptable sexual order. Therefore, here Ninḫursaġa is ranked above Enki. Enki's attempt to impregnate himself can be seen as an effort to usurp Ninḫursaġa's role as creatress and life-giver, but since it is against the "natural order" it is unsuccessful. Here the interests of society are advanced, and Ninḫursaġa is representing them. I would argue that the historical process when new leadership led to reinterpretations of who is creatress/creator is reflected here; the creative role is about to be moved from the mother goddess to Enki, and the passage with incest is a way to reflect on the fact that the birth-giving creativity cannot be transferred to Enki.

It was suggested that another aspect of Enki's "sin" was that he usurped Ninḫursaġa's role as decreer of destinies. We saw that creation and decreeing of fates were often found together, and further that when one deity entered the domain of another, this led to severe punishment. Since we do not know who decreed the destinies at the end of our myth, it is not possible to say whether Enki succeeded in usurping Ninḫursaġa's role as decreer of fates for her creatures, and thus if a recalibration of the categories took place.

4.14. The role of the fox

4.14.1. Contextualization of the fox

Although the part played by the fox in our myth is not a lengthy one, it is very important; it⁹³⁸ is the fox that succeeds in appeasing Ninḫursaġa so that she brings Enki back to life. Whereas the Anuna gods are sitting as if paralyzed, the fox is taking action. It turns to Enlil and asks him what reward it will get if it fetches Ninḫursaġa. Enlil answers that he will plant a *kiškanû*-tree for it in his [i.e. Enlil's] city, and that its (i.e. the fox's) name will be famous.

Then the fox prepares itself to carry out its task. It collects its fur (?), shakes out its [x] (?), and puts kohl on its eyes.⁹³⁹ Then we have a break of

⁹³⁸ It is not clear whether the fox is female or male.

⁹³⁹ This passage is difficult to read; one sign is damaged and another is not surely identified. Attinger reads thus: 226. ka₅-a kuš¹⁷-ni diš-àm im-ma-an-KAD₄.KAD₄, 227. 'x'-ni diš-àm im-ma-an-BÚR.BÚR, 228. igi-ni diš-àm šimbi bí-in-ġar. In footnote w he writes that the damaged sign in l. 227 is 'ša' on the copy (1984: 26). Black et al. (1998–2006. "Enki and Ninḫursaġa"), read the same sign for kuš but choose the reading su. For the damaged sign in l. 227 (their line 229) they read "siki?". In an unpublished transliteration Åke Sjöberg reads kiš₄ for the "kuš?" of Attinger and comments that the following sign 'x' in l. 227 also looks like

about four lines, and then the fox says that it has been to Enlil, Nanna, Utu, Inana, but... (fragmentary). According to Black et al. this is said to Ninḫursaġa,⁹⁴⁰ whereas Attinger poses the question “Discours du renard à un dieu?”⁹⁴¹ After a lacuna of about eight lines Ninḫursaġa ran towards the [temple (?)], and there the Anuna gods “slipped off her garment”, made something (lacuna), and then decreed a destiny. The whole passage ends with Ninḫursaġa putting Enki in her vulva.

The deity that the fox turns to and gets help from has the same role as Enki in “Inana’s descent”. The fox itself seems to have the same role as Inana’s vizier Ninšubur; both of them turn to several deities in a row with the aim to bring a deity (Enki/Inana) back to life. The first deities Ninšubur turns to are not willing to help her, but when she comes to Enki, he accepts to help her bring back Inana from the netherworld. He creates two creatures, the kurġara and the galatura from the dirt under his fingernails, and then he furnishes them with the plant and water of life. They go to the netherworld where they comfort its tormented mistress. As thanks for their sympathy they can make a wish, and they ask for Inana’s corpse. They get the corpse and then revive it by sprinkling the plant and water of life upon it.

The behavior of the fox before it departs to bring Ninḫursaġa back is interpreted by Attinger as a parody on Inana’s dressing up in “Inana’s descent” before she departs to the netherworld and Ereškigal.⁹⁴² As we saw, I understood its acts as corresponding to those of Ninšubur. Further, I believe that its appearance could refer to the kurġara and the galatura in “Inana’s descent”, and also their correspondence in the Akkadian version, Ašušnamir, the *assinnu*.⁹⁴³ These creatures not only played in the same role in the Sumerian and the Akkadian versions of “Inana’s descent” respectively, but also had very similar tasks in the rituals. According to Assyriologist Stefan Maul, the functions of the *kurgarrû* and the *assinnu* at least, can hardly be differentiated from each other. They were both functionaries in the cult of Ištar, and one of their distinctive features was their effeminate appearance. The *kurgarrû* used make-up just like women, and the *assinnu* wore women’s clothes in the rituals.⁹⁴⁴ Their main task seems to have been that they were to

kišī. Thus, as far as the state of research is right now ll. 226–227 are unclear, but l. 229 is readable.

⁹⁴⁰ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”, comment before the translation to l. 235.

⁹⁴¹ Attinger 1984: 27, fn. 52.

⁹⁴² Attinger 1984: 45.

⁹⁴³ For the Akkadian version, see Sladek (1974: 241–264).

⁹⁴⁴ Maul 1992. Assyriologist Saana Teppo writes about these cultic functionaries as having an ambivalent gender, being “men who were changed into women”, having a liminal function, just as their mistress Ištar (2008: 75ff.). According to Teppo and others, these functionaries represented a permanent third gender in Mesopotamia (Teppo 2008: 88f.; Nissinen 2010: 75f.).

establish relations to the netherworld to bring about healing, and Maul points out that they are very similar to shamans.⁹⁴⁵

Thus, although the *kurgarrû* and the *assinnu* are found in “Inana’s descent” as creatures of Enki, according to Maul they belonged to the cult of Inana/Ištar.⁹⁴⁶ Moreover, in the myth “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta” these officials are related to Ninḫursaĝa. There Ninurta decrees a good destiny for the kur-ga-ra-nu-um-stone, the ^{na4}bal-stone and the ^{na4}šimbi-sig7-sig7-stone, treated as one:

The hero turned to the *kurgarrû*-stone, / he spoke to the “stone of change”, / the lord to that stone of green kohl / Ninurta, son of Enlil, decreed a destiny: [...] “The man, the one praising, is consumed for you. You turn him into a eunuch (saĝ-gin7 mu-un-ti-en).⁹⁴⁷ (?) / May the [ga]šamtura speak sweetly! / For [the feast of the de]ad may he make it sweet. / On the ninth [day of the month] the man of the new moon indeed made a [door-po]st for you.”⁹⁴⁸ (?) / This he put [as a part of the ri]tes of Ninḫursaĝa.⁹⁴⁹

In this passage we do not only have a reference to the kurĝara/*kurgarrû*, but seemingly also the gala-tur and the *assinnu*. van Dijk points out that the verb saĝ—ti brings the saĝ-ti-eren, Akkadian *assinnu* in mind, and that the gašamtura may refer to the galatura. He also writes that the stones here ascribed to the cult of Ninḫursaĝa usually are found in the cult of Inana. We already know that the *kurgarrû* was an official in Ištar’s cult. Further, Inana uses the ^{na4}šimbi-sig7-sig7-stone as make-up in the hieros gamos rite. According to van Dijk bal refers to the changing (šu—bal) of sex, which as we know is also related to Inana’s cult. He maintains that this cult originally belonged to Ninḫursaĝa, and was later inherited by Inana,⁹⁵⁰ but he does not give any facts that support this statement. In any case the cult is related to Ninḫursaĝa here. If the fox corresponds to the *assinnu*/kurĝara and galatura, these cultic functionaries are related to Ninḫursaĝa both in “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta” and in our myth.⁹⁵¹

⁹⁴⁵ Maul 1992.

⁹⁴⁶ Teppo 2008.

⁹⁴⁷ Cf. the discussion on the saĝ lugala created by Ninmah, below in section 5.8.

⁹⁴⁸ Or “On the ninth day of the month the man made a door-post to the new moon for you”?

⁹⁴⁹ 637–640. ur-saĝ kur-ga-ra-nu-um-e ba-gub/ ^{na4}bal-e ĝu ba-dé-e / en-e šim-bi sig7-sig7-ga-bi / ^dnin-urta dumu ^{den}en-lil-lá-ke₄ nam àm-mi-ib-tar-re [...] 643–647. ĝuruš lú ár-e mi-ri-gu7-àm saĝ-gin7 mu-un-ti-en / [ga]šam-tur-ra mí ħu-mu-ne-e / [ezen gidim]-ma-ke₄ ħé-em-ma-sa₆-ge / [iti-da u₄] ilimmu ĝuruš u₄-sakar-ra-ke₄ [zà-d]u₈? ħu-mu-ra-an-ak / [P]A.A[N^d-d]a ^dnin-hur-saĝ-ĝá-ka-šè - []-a[n-gub³]. Transliteration taken from van Dijk (1983). My translation is heavily influenced by his.

⁹⁵⁰ van Dijk 1983: 41.

⁹⁵¹ At least the gala’s (Akk. *kalû*) role was to appease deities (Renger 1969: 190; Sladek 1974: 97; Cohen 1988: 14). Sumerologist William Sladek further writes that “in ID [Inana’s descent] the kur-ĝar-ra and gala-tur-ra play their customary soothing cultic role” (ibid, 98f.). In the section on the kurĝara (ibid. 93–95) he does not mention this role of the kurĝara however, so it is not clear to me where this information come from.

Inana wore šimbi kohl during the hieros gamos rites, but she also applied it before she was heading towards the netherworld.⁹⁵² Since the *kurgarrû* and the *assinnu* used make-up in their rituals, and since these rituals were dealing with the netherworld, they probably also applied the šimbi kohl before they established a contact with the netherworld. The fox puts the šimbi kohl on its eyes before it departs to seek help, and it might be that, like Inana and the *kurgarrû* and *assinnu*, it was departing for the netherworld. The fox entering its lair could have been thought of as an ability to go to the netherworld, and this may be the explanation of why it was chosen by the mythographer for the role it has in “Enki and Ninḥursaġa”. The relation to the netherworld is also found in several incantations where it is said of the lamented city that “Its lord ... has gone to the netherworld. Its lady ... has gone with him to the netherworld. The fox drags his tail there”.⁹⁵³ I suppose that the city is seen as abandoned and almost a parallel to the netherworld.⁹⁵⁴

The connection to the netherworld may also be seen in the above passage from “Ninurta’s exploits a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta”, where the cultic functionaries corresponding to the *kurġara* and the *galatura*/the *assinnu* seem to be related to the cult of the dead. (To be noted though is that this reading is built upon a couple of restored signs; [ezen gidi]m⁹¹) In any case we already saw that they were related to the netherworld, and that suggests that the mistress of these creatures was also related to the realm of the dead. This assumption accords well with our findings on Ninḥursaġa; she is a mother goddess giving birth, but at the same time she is able to bring death. Thus, in the light of the contextualization of the fox, Kirk’s interpretation that Ninḥursaġa goes to the netherworld in our myth is convincing.⁹⁵⁵ Ninḥursaġa’s role as both taker and giver of life can be compared with the role of Ereškigal in “Inana’s descent”. The latter goddess condemns Inana to death, but is also the one who lets her come back to life again. Further, in the Akkadian version Ereškigal is sending out sixty diseases towards Iṣtar, and that could be seen as a parallel to the diseases that strike Enki. Thus, in both our myth and the Akkadian “Iṣtar’s descent” we have the following constellation of ideas:

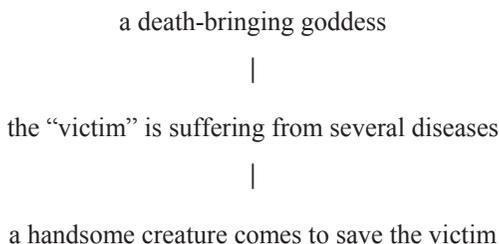
⁹⁵² In line 22 in “Inana’s descent to the nether world” we read: šimbi zi lú ḥé-em-du ḥé-em-du igi-na ba-ni-in-ġar. “She put the šimbi kohl ‘may a man come, may he come!’ on her eyes”. Transliteration adapted from Black et al. (1998–2006).

⁹⁵³ Cohen 1988: 112f., 140, 171, 268. To be noted is also that the lamentations were sung by the *gala*, i.e. the same officials as the *galatura* (= the small *gala*).

⁹⁵⁴ Cf. the word *uru gal* “great city”, which denotes the netherworld (Katz 2003: 338f.).

⁹⁵⁵ Kirk 1970: 102.

Table 5. Constellation of ideas associated with the role of the fox



Regarding the *kiškanû*-tree that Enlil promises to set up for the fox, Attinger writes that it plays an important role in the rituals and that the profit that the fox gets from it is enigmatic – will the fox perhaps win magic power from it? He also points out that the tree is connected to Enki and Eridu.⁹⁵⁶ In fact this tree also has netherworldly connotations. In a Middle Assyrian bilingual incantation against evil spirits it is said that:

Incantation. In Eridu a *kiškanû*-tree was created in a pure place; its radiance of pure lapis lazuli stretches forth into the Apsû. The way of Ea is full of abundance, and his dwelling is the place of the underworld.⁹⁵⁷

In a short Sumerian version of this incantation, dated to the Sargonic period, we read that “The king is created in a pure place like a *kiškanû*-tree, Enki is created in a pure place, like a *kiškanû*-tree”.⁹⁵⁸ It seems as if the fox gets powers through the tree, otherwise connected with Enki.

To get further information on the fox I will turn to the fragments published by Lambert called “The Fable of the Fox”. This fable written in the Akkadian language consists of thirteen fragments, one of Middle Assyrian date, nine of Late Assyrian date, one Late Babylonian, and one of unknown provenience and date. Lambert estimates that the fable is Old Babylonian, “and the Middle Assyrian copies do not allow a date later than the Kassite period”.⁹⁵⁹ Thus, although the fragments found are of a late date, the estimation of Lambert suggests that the original version(s) were contemporary with the writing down of our myth.

⁹⁵⁶ Attinger 1984: 44.

⁹⁵⁷ 2'-9'. én NUN^{ki} ġiš-kín ki-sikil-la mú-a / múš-bi^{na4} za-gìn duru₅ abzu-ta lá-a / ^den-ki-ke₄ ki DU.DU ħé-ġál BU-ta-àm / ki-tuš-a-na ki ganzer-àm / ina eri₁-du₁₀ GIŠ.KÍN ina áš-ri el-lim ib-ba-ni / zi-mu-šú^{na4} ZA.GÌN KÙ ina ap-si-i tar-šu / šá^d é-a a-lak-ta-šú ĤĒ.GÁL ma-la-at / mu-šab-šu a-šar er-še-ti-ma. Transliteration adapted, and translation taken, from Geller 1980: 28, 34.

⁹⁵⁸ Geller 1980: 28, 34, ll. 2'-9' and 24, ll. 2-5.

⁹⁵⁹ Lambert 1960: 186, 189.

Just as in “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” the fox in the fable intervenes when something devastating has happened. Here it angrily speaks to Enlil that he shall not keep back the rain and destroy what he has created.⁹⁶⁰ Interestingly we could see this as a rather direct parallel to that which happened in “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”; since Enki is the god of water, one can see also his death as resulting in a drought. The motif of a deity that destroys its own creation is also found in the passages of the Flood Story in the Gilgameš epic referred to earlier. There the mother goddess says that she herself has ordered the destruction of the people that she has given birth to.⁹⁶¹ Thus both creation and destruction are said to come from the same deity in both “The Fable of the Fox” and the Flood Story in the Gilgameš epic.

There is not only a similarity between the *kurgarrû* and *assinnu* and the fox, or Inana and the fox, but also between the fox and Enki. The cunning of the fox is according to Lambert “proverbial everywhere”,⁹⁶² and cunning is an ability that is typical of Enki. That the fox resembles Enki is also seen when the fox is called “the wise one, the sorcerer” in the fable,⁹⁶³ which relates to Enki as magician. Further, just as the *kurgara* and *galatura*/the *assinnu*, and perhaps also the fox travelled to the netherworld, Enki travels to the netherworld in “Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world”.⁹⁶⁴

A correspondence between the *kurgarrû*, the *assinnu* and Enki is that they all worked to heal people and thus tried to ward off death. This makes me believe that Enki is a deified shaman (the lord of the earth – en-ki)⁹⁶⁵ and originally had the same relation to the mistress of death and life as the *kurgarrû*, the *assinnu* and the fox. Regarding the fox, the same theme so many times referred to in this chapter is seen also in its role; at the same time as it is related to the netherworld it is also related to life, since it intervenes to bring Enki back to life.

⁹⁶⁰ Lambert 1960: 190f.

⁹⁶¹ Actually, the assembly of gods order the destruction, even though the mother goddess expresses herself in this way, see the relevant lines in George (2003: 705, XI: 14, XI: 117–124). See also the similar passage in the deluge story in the Atrahasis myth treated by Lambert and Millard (1999: 87, 95, viii: 34, iii: 32–44).

⁹⁶² Lambert 1960: 187.

⁹⁶³ Lambert 1960: 200f.: 18.

⁹⁶⁴ This literary composition can be found in Black et al. (1998–2006).

⁹⁶⁵ Attinger writes that the reading -ke₄ and not -gé of the genitive is conventional, and that there are lexical texts that point to the reading -gé (1993: 259). Further, in all instances where Enki is followed by a genitive marker in the publications of Black et al. (1998–2006) it is written with -ke₄ or -kâ (GA). Therefore, the “Auslaut” .g in Enki’s name (Enki.g) is not an argument against the understanding of his name as “the lord or the earth”. Also Galter sees the interpretation of the writing Enki.g/k as a genitive construction as the best solution. He writes: “Der Wechsel von -g and -k im Auslaut des Namens (^den-ki-ga bzw. ^den-ki-ke₄) macht deutlich, daß es sich um ein Genetivkomplex handelt mit der Bedeutung ‚Herr der Erde‘” (1983: 8).

4.14.2. Ideological aspects of the role of the fox

The categories found in the section on the fox are the fox itself, Enki, Ninḫursaġa, Enlil, the Anuna gods, and the deities that decline to help the fox; Enlil, Nanna, Utu and Inana. Here Ninḫursaġa is ranked very high, since the other gods are in need of her skills. Likewise the fox has a high ranking since it can affect Ninḫursaġa so that she comes back, and since the other deities are in need of its ability to appease Ninḫursaġa. Enlil has quite a high ranking, since he is able to promise gifts to the fox that makes it want to go to fetch Ninḫursaġa. The logic of this ranking seems to be that Ninḫursaġa is irreplaceable; only she can heal Enki, and it is not accepted that Enki replaces her in the domain of childbirth and decreeing of destinies. It was argued that the fox corresponds to the *kurġara* and *galatura*/the *assinnu*, and as such represents a cultic practitioner establishing relations to the netherworld. Here the indispensability of this practitioner is pointed to, whereas in society they had quite a low rank.⁹⁶⁶

One possible recalibration regarding the ranking between Ninḫursaġa and Enki can be that the fox in fact equals Enki as well as his creatures, the *kurġara* and *galatura*. We saw that the fox was understood as cunning, just like Enki, that it got the *kiškanû*-tree that belonged to Enki, and that Enki was known to be travelling to the netherworld as well. Thus, this might have been a way for the mythographers to pose Enki himself as the one saving his life, through his creature, the fox, without questioning Ninḫursaġa's role as healer of his diseases. Besides representing a recalibration it can also be seen as a negotiation between different concepts of healing; although the mother goddess does not lose her role as healer, Enki is posed as the one ultimately bringing about healing. As will be seen in the following section, initially goddesses were healers in the Sumerian pantheon, but they were successively replaced by gods. It will further be seen that female healing practitioners were an exception in the Old Babylonian society. I assume that the interests that are advanced here belong to those who did not see the mother goddess as the source of life and healing, but instead moved these characteristics to a male deity as well as male practitioners.

4.15. The mother goddess as healer

When the fox has succeeded in bringing back Ninḫursaġa with the aim that she shall restore Enki back to life, Ninḫursaġa heals Enki in the following way:

⁹⁶⁶ See Maul 1992.

Ninḫursaġa made Enki sit in her vul[va]. / “My brother, what is making you ill?” / “The top of my head hurts me.” / She made Abba⁹⁶⁷ to be born from there. / “My brother, what is making you ill?” / “The locks of my hair hurt me.” / She bore Ninsiki’la from there. / “My brother, what is making you ill?” “My nose hurts me.” / She bore Ninkiriutu from there. / “My brother, what is making you ill?” “My mouth hurts me.” / She bore Ninkasi from there. / “My brother, what is making you ill?” “My throat hurts me.” / She bore Nazi from there. / “My brother, what is making you ill?” “My arm hurts me.” / She bore Azimua from there. / “My brother, what is making you ill?” “My ribs hurt me.” / She bore Ninti from there. / “My brother, what is making you ill?” “My sides hurt me.” / She bore Ensag⁹⁶⁸ from there. / “For the small ones that I bore x x x [] / Abba will be the king of plants. / Ninsiki’la will be the lord of Magan. / Ninkiriutu will marry Ninazu. / Ninkasi will be the one who satisfies the desires. / Nazi will marry UmunDARa. / Azimua will marry Ninġišzida. / Ninti will be the mistress of months. / Ensag will be the lord of Dilmun.”⁹⁶⁹

There are several aspects that have to be investigated in order to reach an understanding of this passage. It deals with healing, although in an “unconventional” way; the healer puts the patient into her vulva and gives birth in order to heal. The birth-giving aspect of the mother goddess is of course an inherent part of her role in the literary and state pantheon as the mother of the gods. This aspect was discussed in section 1.4.1. Is Ninḫursaġa’s role as healer here secondary, and that of birth-giver primary? In either case she heals Enki. Therefore I will contextualize the passage by situating it in the context of Mesopotamian healing and medicine. In this respect I shall focus on the medical practitioners and the comprehension of illness.

⁹⁶⁷ The name of this deity was earlier read Aba-Ú. Richter points to the variant writings of this name as ^da-ba, ^dab-ba₆ and ^dab-ba (2004: 117f. with fn. 526), and this makes it likely that we shall read Ú as ba₆. Cf. Peterson however, who maintains that since the god in question is to be the lord of plants (ú) in our myth, this “clearly calls for a reading /u/ for the grapheme Ú in this particular context” (2009: 49). I am not convinced that the reading has to be /u/ because of the relationship to plants, since the sign nevertheless evokes this association for the educated scribe.

⁹⁶⁸ Here the name of this god is written ^den-sa₆-ag, which means “lord who makes good”. The common spelling of the name is ^den-zà.g (by Gudea ^dnin-zà.g), which means “lord of the sides”. Attinger points to the fact that the sign SA₆ is also used for ġiššimar, date palm, which was the national tree of Dilmun (1984: 47 with fn. 92).

⁹⁶⁹ 250–277. ^dnin-ḫur-saġ-ġá-ke₄ ^den-ki g[a]l₄-la-na ba-ni-in-tuš / šeš-ġu₁₀ a-na-zu a-ra-gig / ugu-díli-ġu₁₀ ma-gig / ^dab-ba₆ im-ma-ra-an-tu-ud / šeš-ġu₁₀ a-na-zu a-ra-gig / pa-siki-ġu₁₀ ma-gig / ^dnin-siki-la/lá im-ma-ra-an-tu-ud / šeš-ġu₁₀ a-na-zu a-ra-gig kiri-ġu₁₀ ma-gig / ^dnin-kiri-ù-tu im-ma-ra-an-tu-ud / šeš-ġu₁₀ a-na-zu a-ra-gig ka-ġu₁₀ ma-gig / ^dnin-ka-si im-ma-ra-[an]-tu-ud / šeš-ġu₁₀ a-na-zu a-ra-gig z[i]-ġu₁₀ ma-gig / ^dna-zi im-ma-ra-an-t[u-ud] / šeš-ġu₁₀ a-na-zu a-ra-gig á[ġu₁₀ ma-gig] / ^dá-zi-mú-a im-ma-ra-[an-tu-ud] / šeš-ġu₁₀ a-na-zu a-ra-gig ti-ġu₁₀ ma-[gig] / ^dnin-ti im-ma-ra-an-[tu-ud] / šeš-ġu₁₀ a-na-zu a-ra-gig zà-ġu₁₀ [ma-gig] / ^den-sa₆-ag im-ma-ra-an-[tu-ud] / di₄-di₄-lá-lá ba-tu-dè-en-na-aš níġ-x(-)x[] / ^dab-ba₆ lugal ú hē-a / ^dnin-siki-la en-má-gan-na hē-a / ^dnin-kiri-ù-tu ^dnin-a-zu ḫa-ba-an-du₁₂-du₁₂ / ^dnin-ka-si níġ-šá si hē-a / ^dna-zi ù-mu-un-DAR-a ḫa-ba-an-du₁₂-du₁₂ / ^dá-zi-[mú-a ^dnin]-ġiz-zi-da ḫa-ba-an-du₁₂-du₁₂ / ^dni[n-ti ni]n iti-e hē-a / [^den-sa₆-a]g en dilmun-na hē-a. Transliteration adapted from Attinger (1984).

Besides our myth we do not have much material that represents our mother goddess as healer. She does however appear alongside of Gula in one Neo-Assyrian healing prescription, as well as in one healing incantation from the same period of time.⁹⁷⁰ In order to investigate the role of the mother goddess as healer further, I will turn to analogous roles by other (mother) goddesses. I shall also touch upon whether there were any female practitioners within medicine in Mesopotamia. Then I will analyze Ninḫursaġa's acts as healer in the light of the previous investigation.

When Ninḫursaġa heals Enki she heals eight different body parts of his. These will be analyzed as well as their corresponding deities. I will also discuss the plants that Enki ate as well as contextualizing Ninḫursaġa's relation to healing herbs. Lastly, since Ninḫursaġa is the midwife of the gods and not commonly called doctor, I will discuss the relation between midwifery and healing.

4.15.1. Healing practitioners and the comprehension of illnesses applied to our myth

In 1965 Assyriologist Edith Ritter published a paper which has had an important impact on subsequent studies on medicine in Mesopotamia. Until Professor in Religious Studies Hector Avalos published his book *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East* in 1998 her hypothesis on the distinction between the medical practitioners⁹⁷¹ *asû* and *āšipu* had been accepted by most scholars.⁹⁷² After the publication of Avalos, other scholars also have discussed, questioned and refined the theories of Ritter.⁹⁷³

Regrettably, the question of gender regarding healing practitioners has hardly been treated at all in previous scholarship. The primary reason for this is probably that already the early textual sources reflect a patriarchal society where primarily male deities and practitioners are met with in the areas of healing and magic. Further, the predominance of male deities in the area of healing gets stronger over time. Goddesses functioning as incantation priests and other magic practitioners are rarities, and some scholars even question if they have ever existed in reality.⁹⁷⁴ Because of this when discussing healing practitioners in this section, the terms used will be of masculine gender.

⁹⁷⁰ In the healing prescription she is met with under her name Ninmaḥ, and in the incantation under her name Dingirmaḥ (Böck 2013: 25, 107f.).

⁹⁷¹ There was also the *bārû*, the diviner, who could establish the causes of illnesses, but did not treat them (Avalos 1995: 168).

⁹⁷² Avalos 1995: 144 with fn. 135.

⁹⁷³ See van Binsbergen and Wiggerman 1999: 29f.; Scurlock 1999: 69–79 and Geller 2010, especially pp. 43–55 and 62–72.

⁹⁷⁴ Female practitioners in the area of black magic on the other hand are more numerous, see the references in Henshaw (1994: 152f.). Assyriologist Richard Henshaw writes that *bāriātu* (feminine plural form of *barû*), female diviners, and *šā'ilātu* (feminine plural form of *šā'ilu*), female dream interpreters, are found in an Old Assyrian text. In a Neo-Assyrian text Gula is

The Sumerian names of the two medical practitioners are *azu*⁹⁷⁵ and *maš-maš*. Most of the scholars discussing the healing practitioners do this from the point of view of Akkadian sources, however. Thus, below we shall mainly use the Akkadian names. Since Ritter, Avalos and also Scurlock,⁹⁷⁶ it has become clear that the most common Akkadian term for magician/exorcist was *mašmaššu* (a Sumerian loan word),⁹⁷⁷ and not *āšipu*, and this is true in the oldest sources as well as in Neo-Assyrian letters. Assyriologist Markham Geller writes that *āšipu* was a more scholarly title, whereas *mašmaššu* belonged to the everyday vocabulary.⁹⁷⁸ In spite of this, we shall also use the title *āšipu* below, since most of the scholars I refer to use this designation.

Ritter's distinction between the two practitioners is based upon the argument that both these healers used different methods, and also that they comprehended the causes of diseases differently. Because there is no exact boundary line between the two professions, the *asû* sometimes using incantations, and the *mašmaššu* sometimes using medicinal drugs and treatments, Ritter's interpretation that the two practitioners dealt with medicine and magic respectively has been questioned.⁹⁷⁹ Geller shows however, that the two professions were quite separate during the second millennium. In texts from this period the main medical practitioner is the *asû*, and the exorcist/magician is seldom mentioned. Geller understands this state of the sources as reflecting a reality where the *asû* took care of the magico-medical tasks, whereas the *mašmaššu* dealt with the magico-religious aspects only. In the Neo-Assyrian court letters the *mašmaššu* appears beside the *asû* (and

called *ba-ra-at*, but Henshaw comments on this that it “does not necessarily indicate that there are corresponding female offices” (1994: 138). The *šā'iltu* (Sum. *ensi*) is attested in the Old Babylonian Proto Lu lexical list. She is also found in an Old Babylonian document, and also the goddess Nanše is called *ensi* (ibid. 139–141). Regarding the incantation office Henshaw writes that “The occurrences of the female *āšiptu* are only epithets of goddesses, and this is not necessarily an indication that the female office existed in practice” (ibid. 145). Cf. Bottéro who writes that “Les *āšiptu*, exorcistes femmes, paraissent avoir été rarissimes”, referring to *CAD A/2* sub *āšiptu* (1990: 234). The title of *asātu* (feminine form of *asû*), female doctor, belongs to the goddesses Gula and Ninisina, but one female doctor is also attested at the Larsa palace in the Old Babylonian period (Henshaw 1994: 149f. and fn. 83). Cf. Robson who writes that Sumerian *azu*, as well as *šimmu*, are most often referring to goddesses in the Old Babylonian literary texts (2008: 467ff.).

⁹⁷⁵ Attinger refers to the common interpretation of *azu* as “the knower of water”, and puts this into question, pointing to the Fāra and Abū Šalābīḥ orthography traditionally read a-zu₅. He means that this transliteration is incorrect; the word is written AZU.E. There is also a writing A.AZU and E of the former and A of the latter are phonetic markers; the first word shall be read ezu_x^e and the second ^aazu or ^{e4}ezu_x. Attinger suggests that the initial vowel of the two variants is a prefix, and that the word means “the one who knows” (2008: 71f).

⁹⁷⁶ Scurlock 1999: 69–79.

⁹⁷⁷ Attinger, contrary to Geller, interprets *maš-maš* as an original Sumerian word (2008: 76 with fn. 98). For the opinion of Geller, see his *Ancient Babylonian Medicine* (2010: 44).

⁹⁷⁸ Geller 2010: 44, 48f., 50.

⁹⁷⁹ Scurlock 1999: 69, 76.

other officials), and Geller writes that the two professions became more and more overlapping in the first millennium.⁹⁸⁰

Another point of discussion ensuing from Ritter's paper is the question of which worldview was behind the two practitioners' actions when treating their patients. Ritter argues that whereas the *āšīpu* perceived diseases as caused by supernatural powers – gods, demons, ghosts etc. – the *asû* related illnesses to natural causes.⁹⁸¹ This distinction is also argued from these healers' different methods. According to Ritter the *asû*, as a herbalist, mainly treated her/his patients with drugs, whereas the *āšīpu*'s main treatment was incantation rituals.⁹⁸²

Avalos writes that it is erroneous to ascribe the comprehension that diseases were naturally caused only to the *asû*. There are several texts, and even the whole series SA.GIG, used by the *āšīpu*, which deals with natural causes. He also points to the fact that incantations could be a part of the *asû*'s treatment. Avalos' conclusion is that although the medicaments used by the *asû* may be medically efficient, the *asû* might have understood the efficiency as a result of magical powers from the gods. Thus, he maintains that the work of both these professions overlapped, and that they worked within the same worldview.⁹⁸³

According to Binsbergen and Wiggerman, the two practitioners did act out of different comprehensions of the world and the cause of illness. The *āšīpu* had the theistic worldview, seeing suffering and illness as caused by gods or demons and due to sin, whereas the *asû* explained illnesses as a result of natural causes like fire that drips from the stars and enters the body.⁹⁸⁴ Geller points to the different spheres of action of the two practitioners throughout his book *Ancient Babylonian Medicine*, e.g. writing that “[e]arly medicine contains no magic, and early magic contains no medicine”.⁹⁸⁵ Further, in the Mari letters, where the treatments of the *asû* are referred to, only plants and bandages are mentioned, but nothing is said about a supernatural world.⁹⁸⁶

Both Assyriologists Tzvi Abusch and Markham Geller have shown that there was a historical development of the understanding of what caused illness. In the early phase of texts, written in Sumerian, and dating to the late third millennium, demons were often referred to as the cause of illness. Then, during the second millennium the cause was understood as a result of the personal deity turning away from his or her ward because of a transgres-

⁹⁸⁰ Geller 2010: 66ff., 72, 162f.

⁹⁸¹ Ritter 1965: 301f., 305.

⁹⁸² Ritter 1965: 308f. She points out though, that there were instances when the *asû* used incantations as well as the *āšīpu* using herbs and other materials (ibid. 308f.).

⁹⁸³ Avalos 1995: 144f., 149, 151, 155ff.

⁹⁸⁴ van Binsbergen and Wiggerman 1999: 28, 30.

⁹⁸⁵ Geller 2010: 162.

⁹⁸⁶ Geller 2010: 62–64.

sion of the latter.⁹⁸⁷ Gradually witchcraft became an explanation of illness and suffering, and in the first millennium it was the main explanation of misfortune.⁹⁸⁸ In all three stages the ultimate reason why the person could be struck by misfortune and illness caused by demons, witchcraft or as a result of sin, was due to the fact that the personal deity could not or did not want to protect her ward,⁹⁸⁹ or that another deity touched or seized the individual because of the transgression, leaving him or her open to evil forces.⁹⁹⁰

Here follows an example dating to the Old Babylonian period, where the affliction is caused by demons. The citation comes from a forerunner of the series *Udug ḫul*:

They opposed the young man without a (personal) god.⁹⁹¹

We have a contemporaneous variant of this theme in the following lines:

They attacked the body of the young man who has not got a (personal) god, / they put illness (and) evil in his body.⁹⁹²

These passages show that only a man without a personal god was an easy prey for evil spirits. The idea that the personal deity protects is also expressed when the evil spirits are exhorted to withdraw, or not come close to, “the human being, the child of his god” (*lú-ùlu dumu diġir-ra-na*).⁹⁹³ Further, twice in the forerunners to *Udug ḫul*, there is the expression that the afflicted person may be returned to the hands of his (personal) god,⁹⁹⁴ and this also shows that the presence of a personal god was a prerequisite for good health. Besides the wish of the presence of the personal god, in the forerunners to *Udug ḫul* there are two passages expressing the wish that the good *udug* and *lamma* spirits shall be present.⁹⁹⁵

The three historical phases in the comprehension of illness related above are by Abusch interpreted as a result of historical change regarding focus of control. In the oldest phase the Sumerians dealt with trying to control natural forces. When the city-states had been established and a certain degree of technology had developed there was some sense of ability of controlling the

⁹⁸⁷ In this case the secondary cause of illness could be that the deity struck her ward, that she sent demons towards her, or that the ward was unprotected against demons/causes of illness because she had been abandoned by her deity.

⁹⁸⁸ Abusch 1999: 90f., 102ff.; Geller 2010: 27ff., 165.

⁹⁸⁹ Abusch 1999: 90ff.

⁹⁹⁰ Heeßel 2000: 58f., 77, 79f.

⁹⁹¹ 480. *šul diġir nu-tuku gaba im-ma-ri-eš*. Transliteration taken from Geller (1985: 46).

⁹⁹² 777–778. *šul diġir nu-tuku-ra bar-šè mu-un-na-tag-meš / ni gig ni ḫul su-na mi-ni-in-ġar-re-eš*. Transliteration taken from Geller (1985: 74).

⁹⁹³ Geller 1985: 38f., 42f., 44f., 50f., 52f., 54f., ll. 334, 340, 397, 417, 440, 536, 579, 612.

⁹⁹⁴ Geller 1985: 40f., 62f., ll. 356f., 689.

⁹⁹⁵ Geller 1985: 46f., 78f., ll. 466, 830; cf of the similar expression in a Middle Assyrian version of *Udug ḫul/utukkū lemmūtu* (ibid. 1980: 29, ll. 77’f., with translation on page 35).

natural environment. In the following Babylonian and Assyrian societies it was instead the social, interpersonal relationships that were difficult and complex, and humans felt that they were threatened by other humans. In the oldest phase the threats were personified as demons, and in the complex city-state the threats were instead seen as coming from other people who were thought to be witches. To note however, is that the concept of sin or transgression towards the deity was existent already in the late Early Dynastic III period,⁹⁹⁶ and we probably cannot draw sharp demarcation lines between periods regarding the comprehension of the cause of illness.

As I understand it, the two practitioners did perhaps partly share the same theistic worldview, but the *asû* based his/her actions as a medical practitioner upon a worldview where illness was interpreted as caused by natural phenomena. The *asû*'s practice was more based upon the old comprehension of the world where natural phenomena (sometimes seen as demons) were understood as the cause of illness.⁹⁹⁷ S/he was further a non-institutionalized therapist,⁹⁹⁸ and this can also be the reason why the *asû* kept to the old worldview.⁹⁹⁹

The development of new explanations of what was the cause of illness widened the possible field of activity of the practitioners. Avalos believes that the specialization of the two practitioners was due to the high demands on the healers; one profession could not meet with it all. He further believes that it is very probable that this specialization had developed already “by the dawn of Mesopotamian civilization”.¹⁰⁰⁰ As we have seen, the two practitioners were specialized in the early sources, whereas in the younger ones both medical and magical practices seem to be more and more the task of the *mašmaššu/āšipu*. Thus, although the society became more complex, probably making higher demands on medical practice, this practice was – at least in the sources – gradually taken over by the exorcist/magician.¹⁰⁰¹

⁹⁹⁶ See Uru'inimgina 5, viii: 1–3 (Frayne 2008: 279), and further the name “the lugal (removes?) sin”, dating to the Sargonic period (Andersson 2012: 140).

⁹⁹⁷ Cf. Assyriologist Nathan Wasserman who studies the eleven Old Babylonian incantations where various diseases are enumerated. These incantations can be divided into two subgroups, one saying that the diseases have celestial origin, like “the ziqqurat of heaven” or “the teat of heaven”, whereas the other point out several demons as the causers of diseases (2007: 40–55 with fn. 3).

⁹⁹⁸ Geller writes that the *asû* was a private entrepreneur who probably received his/her patients in the street (2010: 50f.).

⁹⁹⁹ Anthropologist Wim van Binsbergen and Assyriologist Frans Wiggerman see the theistic worldview that is found in the Mesopotamian sources as an expression of hegemonic control of the state. They mean that “*magic is a dislocated sediment of pre-hegemonic popular notions of control which have ended up in the hegemonic corpus*” (italics original) (1999: 16). We can instead see the practice of the *asû* as being pre-theistic and pre-magic and as a sediment of pre-hegemonic popular notions in the hegemonic corpus.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Avalos 1995: 160, 162f., 170.

¹⁰⁰¹ As was pointed out earlier, the field of activity of the two practitioners overlapped in the first millennium. During this period both worked within medicine. After the Persian conquest

The role of the *mašmaššu/āšipu* probably grew because of the growing explanatory value of witchcraft and magic regarding suffering. At the same time a reason may have been the growing importance of – or the focussing on the sources on – erudition. Assyriologist Jean-Marie Durand points out that we do not have any letters written by the *asû* among the Old Babylonian Mari letters. In this respect he refers to Charpin who compared the *asû* and the *mašmaššu/āšipu* respectively with the roles of the surgeon and the doctor in the *Ancien Régime* of France. The latter was a learned man of letters, knowing Latin, whereas this did not go for the former. Thus, the lack of letters written by the *asû* indicates a similar division between the two practitioners discussed here; in Mesopotamia the *mašmaššu/āšipu* was the learned practitioner, whereas the *asû* was not.¹⁰⁰²

The affliction in our myth is caused by a divinity, and we shall look closer at the explanations where illness is said to be the result of an act of a deity. In the diagnostic texts the cause was most often said to be *qāt* [deity's name] “hand of [deity's name]”. Besides this the gods could also seize (DAB/*šabātu*), touch (TAG/*lapātu*), strike (SĪG/*maḥāšu*) and reach (KUR/*kašādu*) their victim.¹⁰⁰³ Illness was quite simply the means of the gods to send messages of different kinds to people. Avalos calls the deity causing the disease the “sender/controller” of the illness. This also means that health was brought about by the same deity who caused the disease.¹⁰⁰⁴ Assyriologist Kazuko Watanabe also points to this dual role of the gods,¹⁰⁰⁵ as does Assyriologist Barbara Böck regarding the healing goddess Gula.¹⁰⁰⁶

The study of letters from Old Babylonian Mari by Durand referred to above shows a picture similar to that of the Mesopotamian Old Babylonian society regarding illness. The cause of an illness was said to be the hand of a god, that the god had hit somebody, that the god ate, or because of the wrath of a deity. Further, there also seems to have been a consciousness of contamination on a more natural level; the people in Mari avoided cities hit by plagues, and peoples of the afflicted cities were not allowed to enter other cities. Moreover, soldiers recruited from Babylonia were sent home when they were found sick. They also burnt clothes contaminated by illness.¹⁰⁰⁷ Also at Mari the causer of the illness seems to have been the one to turn to in order to bring about health, since this god had to be appeased.¹⁰⁰⁸

We have seen that the cause of an illness was probably comprehended as both natural and supernatural. In our myth Enki's illness was caused by

of Babylonia the exorcist dominated the medical scene, taking over the practice and study of medicine and magic (Geller 2010: 163).

¹⁰⁰² Durand 1988: 555, 557; Renger 1969: 224; Cavigneaux 1988: 183.

¹⁰⁰³ Heeßel 2007: 120, 125.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Avalos 1995: 130, 133ff.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Watanabe 1994: 595.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Böck 2013: e.g. 47, 130, 172.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Durand 1988: 546ff., 553.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Durand 1988: 544.

Ninḫursaġa who removed her look of life from him. Thus, the ultimate cause in our myth seems to be supernatural. Further, Enki's illness appeared after he had eaten the plants, which can be seen as the natural cause. Besides the natural and supernatural explanations, a transgression of the patient is also sometimes given as the reason of illness. Ritter enumerates causes of illness that are found within the practice of the *āšipu*, and one group of such causes is by her called "Retribution",¹⁰⁰⁹ which corresponds to the action of a deity towards human sin. In this group she has two excerpts from the diagnostic texts that may be of interest for us:

If his larynx is constricted, he ate the tabooed of his god – he will be saved.

If he is hit on his lumbago – hand of Šulak; he approached his sister – he will linger on, and then he will die.¹⁰¹⁰

If we now compare these texts with Enki's illnesses and cure we see that there are some correspondences. To start with, although we do not know if Enki has a constricted larynx, he has pain in his throat. Further, he has eaten something that was forbidden from Ninḫursaġa's point of view, thus resembling the diagnosis of the first omen above also in this respect. Although Enki is not complaining about pain in his back, which was the illness in the line from second prognosis omen, the latter is interesting in relation to the act that led to Enki's diseases – incest (in our myth through consumption of his own seed). In the example from the prognosis omina¹⁰¹¹ the prognosis is a period of illness followed by death. This is almost what happens to Enki, although he is saved at the last minute. In the example when the afflicted person had eaten what his god considered taboo, the prognosis was good – he was to be saved. This is also what happened to Enki. Thus the implicit causes and prognosis of Enki's diseases seem to reflect the comprehension found in the texts on causes and prognoses.

As we saw, both Avalos and Watanabe maintained that the deity who brought about the healing was the one also causing the illness, and therefore Avalos calls the deity the "sender/controller" of the illness. To bring about

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ritter calls the other causes within the world view of the *āšipu* "Supernatural Causes" and "'Natural' Causes" (1965: 305).

¹⁰¹⁰ 28. *šumma ur'ud-su ḡa-niq asak ili-šú ikul uš-te-zib*; 17. [*šumma ina ÚR.*]KUN-šú *maḡiṣ qāt dšú-lak ana aḡāti-šú iḡi(ḡi) urrak-ma imāt*. (Prognosis omen 10, 84 and Prognosis omen 12, 108 (Labat 1951)). These diagnoses are not part of Heeβel's publication of parts three to five of the series, but he mentions them with reference to Labat (Heeβel 2000: 58f.).

¹⁰¹¹ In the prognostic and diagnostic series published by Labat there are two examples of incest. One is cited above, and the other deals with incest between mother and son. In the latter case the son's lips become afflicted. No prognosis is given (1951, tablet 6, 58f., rev. 25').

healing, the deity who had sent the disease had to be appeased.¹⁰¹² Avalos also refers to the paragraph in the Laws of Hammurabi where it is said that Gula may cause a disease to anyone who destroys the law stele.¹⁰¹³ Thus, he understands Gula as both cause and solution at least in some cases. However, Ea (Akk. for Enki) seldom had this dual role; he was not frequently occurring in the prognosis omina as the cause of diseases.¹⁰¹⁴

There obviously was not always a one-to-one relationship between the deity who caused the disease and the deity who healed it. In our myth the relationship is however one-to-one; Ninḫursaġa both “sends” the illnesses and removes them, and can therefore be understood as their “controller”. Further, Ninḫursaġa is also appeased by the fox that was interpreted as a correspondence to the *kurgarrû*, galatura and the *assinnu*, and at least the galatura had the task to appease deities. The *kurgarrû* and the *assinnu* contacted the netherworld in the cult in order to bring about healing.

As pointed out earlier, Ninḫursaġa heals in an unconventional way in our myth. She puts Enki in her vulva, and thereby he gets healed. This aspect deals with the rivaling relation between the two deities in our myth regarding who creates life. Enki consumes his own seed, but since he is a man he cannot give birth to its fruit. This – and the incest – makes him ill. The mother goddess solves the situation by letting Enki, bearing his own seed, take place in her vulva. She lends him her vulva so to speak. The message of this part of the myth is on the one hand that it is forbidden to consume one’s own seed, and on the other, that the female is needed to create life.

Ninḫursaġa is thus acting here both as birthgiver and as midwife. She can further be compared with the *asû*, since she is related to plants and their deities. She does not use an incantation when healing Enki, but she does give birth to deities, thus being part of a theistic worldview, i.e. the comprehension that deities are thought to exist and act in the world. This latter aspect she has in common with the *mašmaššu/āšipu*. In other words, Ninḫursaġa’s acts correspond to those of a midwife, as well as an *asû* and a *mašmaššu/āšipu* at the same time in our myth. This will be further elucidated in section 4.15.2. below where I will compare our mother goddess with other healing goddesses.

¹⁰¹² Cf. the five texts treated by Stol where the diagnosis of illness is “[t]he wrath of god and goddess”. He further refers to two magico-medical texts where the aim of the ritual is “[t]o undo the wrath of the god and goddess” in order to heal the patient (1999: 62, 64).

¹⁰¹³ Avalos 1995: 135, 185; Roth 1997: 139f.

¹⁰¹⁴ In the diagnosis and prognosis series published by Labat (1951) and Heeßel (2000), Ištar was the most common deity afflicting people, occurring there 73 times as a cause. She is followed by Šamaš (42), Sîn (29), the personal god (25) the Twins (24) and Gula (18). Marduk is the cause of diseases in 8 cases and Ea in only one case (Heeßel 2000: 53f.; cf. Labat 1951: XXII f.).

4.15.1.1. Ideological considerations on healing practitioners and the comprehension of illnesses

The categories dealt with in the previous section are the *mašmaššu/āšipu* and the *asû*. Neither of them is mentioned in our myth, but Ninḫursaġa acts as a healer. It was seen that the *mašmaššu/āšipu* was the more scholarly profession, and that only s/he is met with in letters from Mari. Thus, from an ideological point of view, the *āšipu* was probably ranked above the *asû*, dealing with difficult incantations that were written down. Whereas the two professions were distinct from another during the second millennium, they developed into one profession that was more focused on incantations in the first millennium. Thus, the tasks of the healer seem to have been moved from the popular *asû* to the professional *āšipu* in the first millennium. This can be understood as an incorporation of the tasks of the *asû*, and a recalibration of the *āšipu* who now represented all aspects of healing. This development was preceded by a change in the pantheon, where the roles of healing goddesses were moved to male deities. We will turn to this change in the following section.

4.15.2. Healing goddesses – Ninḫursaġa contextualized

Ninḫursaġa is very seldom mentioned in the sources in a healing context, and in comparison with male healing deities the same goes for other goddesses. We shall turn to the evidence of two other healing goddesses in order to contextualize the role of Ninḫursaġa in our myth. Thereafter we shall discuss Ninḫursaġa in relation to these goddesses. It is important to point out that the usage of the method of collecting a redundancy of material, here material on other healing goddesses, is not only relevant because they are females and healers, but also because both of them are related to midwifery, and therefore have similar functions as Ninḫursaġa. Further, they are two of the main goddesses in their respective field of practice. Here I will focus mainly on their healing activities.

When Avalos writes on healing in Mesopotamia he has chosen to focus on the goddess Gula. As he writes however, “Gula, Ninisina, Ninkarrak, Bau and Nintinugga may be viewed as different names of a single female healing deity”, and their assimilation was carried through in the Old Babylonian period. He thus includes all these goddesses in his study, and calls “this healing goddess” Gula/Ninisina (G/N).¹⁰¹⁵ Böck does not make a distinction between the two goddess names either, and she treats material referring to both Gula and Ninisina in her book with the title *The Healing Goddess Gula*. She writes that these names denoted the same goddess in the second and first

¹⁰¹⁵ Avalos 1995: 99, 101f. See the discussion on these goddesses by Sumerologist F. R. Kraus (1951: 62–75).

millennia.¹⁰¹⁶ However, since Gula and Ninisina were originally distinct from each other, I will keep them apart however, focusing on Ninisina. It must be noted though, that in the sources from the Old Babylonian period and later this is not always feasible because of their assimilation.¹⁰¹⁷

Avalos refers to Ritter who has pointed out that Gula/Ninisina most often is mentioned in relation to the *asû*. This indicates that she was primarily his patroness.¹⁰¹⁸ Ningirima, the other goddess here investigated, is a goddess of magic and incantations,¹⁰¹⁹ thus being related to the *mašmaššu/āšīpu*. When we turn to the sources on the healing goddesses it is however near to impossible to keep the distinction between the two professions, and above all regarding the goddess related to the *asû*. Each goddess will be investigated separately, and thereafter we will try to reach a synthesis and a delineation of the role of Ninḫursaġa.

4.15.2.1. Ninisina

The goddess Ninisina is attested from the Early Dynastic IIIa period.¹⁰²⁰ Römer has done a study on texts about this goddess from the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods. An original side of Ninisina was according to Römer probably that she was a doctor (Heilgöttin). Römer writes that this is expressed e.g. in her epithets *azu-gal* “great doctor” and *šimmu* (wr. *šim-mú*). Römer translates the latter as “incantation priest(ess)”,¹⁰²¹ but according to Geller this term denotes the apothecary (lit. “grower of medicinal plants”).¹⁰²² Ninisina’s role as doctor is seen in the hymn called “Ninisina A”¹⁰²³ for which Römer gives a transliteration, translation and commentary. There she is also related to incantations in several places. We shall look at some lines of this hymn in order to get a picture of how her role as healer was comprehended:

The me of the art of medicine are accomplished. / To her child, the king of Ġirsi, / Damu, the sweet one, she gives it in his hand. / “My child, onto everything that belongs to medicine direct your mind.” [...] / He takes the band-

¹⁰¹⁶ Böck 2013: 11, 13, 17.

¹⁰¹⁷ There is a literary text from the Isin-Larsa period where Ninisina and Gula are equalled to each other. (Kraus 1951: 65) The assimilation of them is further seen both in an Old Babylonian godlist from Nippur (Kraus 1951: 64f.; Peterson 2009: 14, ll. 42ff.), and in the Neo-Assyrian godlist An-Anum (Litke 1998: 179–181, V: 128–137).

¹⁰¹⁸ Avalos 1995: 221. According to Böck Gula/Ninisina was the patron deity of the *asû* (2013: 17).

¹⁰¹⁹ Krebernik 2001a: 365f.; Wiggermann 2001a: 138f. For the Anatolian area, see Haas (1990: 238f.).

¹⁰²⁰ Avalos 1995: 103. Avalos writes that this is the case if the suggested reading ^dNin-in = ^dNin-isin_x is correct (ibid. fn. 14). Cf. Steinkeller (1978).

¹⁰²¹ Römer (1969: 283). The epithet *šimmu* has been interpreted as = *āšīp(t)u* or *šā’iltu* (ibid., fn. 65). The latter refers to the dream interpreter. Both the epithet *azu-gal* and *šimmu* are found also used about Bau in her hymn in Römer (1965: 236, ll. 6f.; see also comm. 244f.).

¹⁰²² Geller 2010: 46.

¹⁰²³ Black et al. 1998–2006. “A *šir-gida* to Ninisina (Ninisina A)”.

age¹⁰²⁴ (and) wipes it off.¹⁰²⁵ / He treats his bandage with oil. [---] / My lady, midwife of the mothers of the land. / She is the great doctor of the black-headed. [---] / Pure Ninisina practices the išib priest(ess)ship for him. / Enki has given it from the Abzu of Eridu. [---] / My lady has greatly accomplished the išib priest(ess)ship. / Ninisina has uttered the incantation – it is sweet. [---] / This human, like wind in his body she lets it (the illness) go out from there. [---] / The fate demon has become overwhelming for the human. / He prays a prayer to pure Ninisina; he utters a supplication to her. [...] / Your incantation comes down to the person. / May she treat him as a young man who has a (protective) deity.¹⁰²⁶

In this text Ninisina is depicted as the one who has accomplished the art of medicine and thereafter transfers it to her son Damu. She seems to be an older skilled doctor who instructs her son in her profession. Thus, Damu is her apprentice, a role that he also otherwise has.¹⁰²⁷ Ninisina is called midwife,¹⁰²⁸ followed by great doctor in the next line. This suggests that there was a close relationship between the two professions. Ninisina also practices as an išib priestess, which points to her connection to incantations and lustration rites. The title is derived from Akkadian *āšīpu*, and is attested in its Sumerian form already by the Early Dynastic IIIb king Lugalzagesi. In the literary texts both išib and išib-maḥ are found as epithets of deities, and in the latter case always in connection to Eridu.¹⁰²⁹ This, as well as the close connection between Enki and the function of *āšīpu*, may explain why Ninisina got this priest(ess)ship from Enki. To note though, is that this priest was found in connection with several other gods in the important survey by Renger, and there are more attestations of išib priests of Inana (3) than of Enki (1).¹⁰³⁰ Further, in another text treated by Römer, Ninisina says that she has been given the išib priest(ess)ship from pure heaven.¹⁰³¹

¹⁰²⁴ Römer writes that *túg-bar-si.g = paršīgu* “Binde” (1969: 287).

¹⁰²⁵ In his first treatment of this hymn Römer translates *gur-gur* as “to wipe off”, followed by a question mark (1969: 284).

¹⁰²⁶ AI: 12–15. *me nam-a-zu šu im-du₇-du₇ / dumu-ni lugal ġír-si-ra / ^dda-mu lú sa₆-ga šu-né ba-ab-šúm-mu / dumu-ġu₁₀ níġ nam-a-zu-ka ġizzal ġé-em-ma-ak [...] / 17–18. ^{túg}bar-si-ge šu im-ma-an-ti šu im-gur-gur-re / ^{túg}bar-si-ni[?] i[?]-e im-ma-ak[?]-e [---] / 22–23. nin-ġu₁₀ šà-zu ama kalam-ma-ka / a-zu-gal saġ-ġi₆-ga-kam [---] / 30–31. kù ^dnin-isin_x^{si}-na<-ke₄[?]> nam-išib mu-na-ak-e / ^den-ki-ke₄ abzu eridu^{ki}-ta saġ-e-eš mu-ni-in-rig₇ [---] / 36–37. nin-ġu₁₀ nam-išib-^re^r šu-gal mu-un-du₇-du₇ / ^dnin-isin_x^{si}-na-ke₄ tu₆ bí-in-du₁₁ ba-sa₆ [---] / AII: 3. lú-ùlu-bé tum₉[?]-ġin₇ su-a-na im-ma-an-di-ni-ib-è-dè [---] / 15–16. lú-ùlu nam-tar um-ma-an-điri-ga / kù ^dnin-isin_x^{si}-na siskur mu-na-ab-bé a-ra-zu mu-na-ab-bé [...] / 18–19. tu₆-zu lú-ra mu-un-ta-e₁₁-dè / šul dġir tuku ġé-em-mu-un-ak. The transliteration is adapted from Römer (2001: 111f.), and the translation is influenced by his. I closely follow his translation in the last line of this passage. Römer treatment of this hymn from 1969 has also influenced me (Römer 1969: 284f.). Cf. also Böck (2013) who has treated ll. 17–21 and 37–40 of this hymn.*

¹⁰²⁷ Böck 2014: 27; cf. Frymer-Kensky 1992: 43, 71.

¹⁰²⁸ Ninisina’s role as midwife is more closely described in another text in Römer (1969: 295).

¹⁰²⁹ Renger 1969: 122ff.

¹⁰³⁰ Renger 1969: 123.

¹⁰³¹ Römer 1969: 302f.

In the same text we see that the healing goddess is connected to midwifery, and the functions of the *asû* and the *āšipu*. This may suggest that these were basic traits of the healing goddess(es). Ninisina is dependent on males in her practice of healing; and on the one hand the dependence is related to Enki, on the other to the sky god An.

As is clear, Ninisina was primarily a healing goddess. She further has connotations of sexuality and lust,¹⁰³² just like Inana. There are some indications that she was also comprehended as a mother goddess. For one thing, the goddess Ninlāra is identified with Ninisina, and at the same time this name is enumerated as one of the names of the mother goddess in one Old Babylonian godlist. In An-Anum, Ninisina occurs as one name of Ninkarak, and another name is ^dum-me-ga-lá zi, “true wet-nurse”.¹⁰³³ As we saw in the hymn above, Ninisina was also comprehended as midwife. Further, according to Weiershäuser, the é-ni₉-ġar-ra in Gula/Ninisina’s temple in Isin of the Ur III period had close relations to the uterus and to childbirth.¹⁰³⁴

4.15.2.2. Ningirima

Ningirima, is like Ninisina, also attested in the oldest literary sources in Sumerian.¹⁰³⁵ She had a high rank as an incantation goddess in the third millennium; since almost all incantations¹⁰³⁶ are said to be the “incantation speech of Ningirima”,¹⁰³⁷ she seems to have been *the* incantation deity of the period. In the second millennium she did lose her importance to Asalluġi/Marduk however. In An-Anum she is linked to the entourage of Enlil as his sister. A connection to Enlil is also seen in the Fāra and Ebla incantations where Enlil “anstelle Eas die höchste Beschwörungsinstanz ist, während die Beschwörung selbst N. zugeschrieben wird”.¹⁰³⁸ Ningirima seems further to

¹⁰³² Which can be argued from from “A *šir-namšub* to Ninisina (Ninisina B)”, Il. 17, 20 (Black et al. 1998–2006), Further, both in “Ninisina A”, B Il. 38f. (Römer 2001: 119) and “Ninisina and the gods (Ninisina F)” (Black et al. 1998–2006) it is said that she lay down with her spouse Pabilsaġ. The sexual aspect of Ninisina is also pointed to by Eleanor Robson (2008: 466).

¹⁰³³ Litke 1998: 179, 182, V: 128, 148.

¹⁰³⁴ Weiershäuser 2008: 157f. To note is that also Gula had connotations of a mother goddess. Besides being called midwife and assisting at births, she was particularly connected to illnesses of the belly, which Böck relates to her connection to the womb, maintaining that the whole area of the belly belonged to her competence. Further, one of her medical plants was used to ease childbirth (Böck 2013: 33, 44f., 165).

¹⁰³⁵ Krebernik 2001a: 363.

¹⁰³⁶ 32 have Ningirima’s closing formula, four do not have it, and three are broken at the end, see the incantations in Krebernik (1984).

¹⁰³⁷ This is Cunningham’s translation of the closing formula ((KA+)UD du₁₁-ga ^dnin-GIRIMA+) (1997: 16). Krebernik understands the formula as a correspondence to the later Akkadian *šiptu ul iattu* formula, which is attested for the first time in the Sargonic period: *si-ib-da-an la i-a-da-an si-ib-da* ^dnin-PÉŠ.gi-ma DIĠIR-t[im] “Die beiden Beschwörungen sind nicht meine, (es sind) zwei Beschwörungen der Ningirima [, die Göttin]” (1984: 209).

¹⁰³⁸ Krebernik 2001a: 365. Enlil is seen as her father in the incantations from Fāra and Ebla, which correspond to the later Marduk-Ea-Typ of incantations (Krebernik 1984: 254).

have a connection to Enki in a text from Abū Šalābīḥ, and in a later incantation she is called the daughter of Enki. Regarding the mentioning of the Abzu in her temple hymn, Krebernik sees it as an integration of Ningirima in the circle of Enki.¹⁰³⁹ In her temple hymn we read:

City, from Abzu founded upon a base, / established for the išib priest(ess)ship. / House (where) incantations of heaven and earth are recited.¹⁰⁴⁰

Thus, Ningirima like Ninisina is related to išib priest(ess)ship, and by both it is found in connection to Abzu. Further, just like the incantation (tu₆) follows directly after the mentioning of the išib priest(ess)ship in the case of Ninisina, so it does regarding Ningirima. As incantation goddess, Ningirima has epithets like “high incantation priestess (*mašmaštu*) of all the gods” and “incantation priestess (*mašmaštu*) of (all) the gods”.¹⁰⁴¹ Since the most important aim of the incantations was to cure illness, Ningirima is of course also a healing goddess. This aspect is explicitly expressed in a Neo-Assyrian bilingual incantation text where we read about her:

Lady, whose incantation is life/recovery.¹⁰⁴²

Ningirima is also related to birth, just like Ninisina. From Fāra we have a birth incantation in two versions, and in one of them Ningirima is mentioned (the other is broken at this point). We also encounter the “great midwife of Kulaba” in this incantation, and this may be an epithet of Ningirima. Here follows the relevant passage:

The great midwife of Kulaba, in order to throw the incantation in the water, / She went into the DAG.É.NUN. / If it is a female, the spindle and the needle / may she let come out from there. / If it is a male, the throw-stick and the club / may she let come out from there. / May Ningirima let the incantation (come out from there?).¹⁰⁴³

This incantation can be interpreted as Ningirima first being mentioned under the epithet the “great midwife of Kulaba”, and then it is said that she (the

¹⁰³⁹ Krebernik 2001a: 365.

¹⁰⁴⁰ 230–232. uru abzu-ta bára-ga ri-a / nam-išib-e ġar-ra / é tu₆-tu₆ an-ki-a šed-da. Transliteration adapted from Sjöberg and Bergmann (1969: 31).

¹⁰⁴¹ *mes-ma-si-gal-li ga-li* DIĠIR.DIĠIR.DIĠIR and *maš-maš-ti* DIĠIR.DIĠIR (Krebernik 1984: 164, 190, XXI: 1, III: 4f.).

¹⁰⁴² gašan tu₆-bi nam-ti-la-ke₄ / *be-el-tum šá tu-ú-šá ba-la-tu*. Transliteration taken from Krebernik (1984: 256).

¹⁰⁴³ VI 7–8. ša-zu-gal kul-ab a TU₆ RU-da / DAG.É.NUN an-da-DU / VII 1–5. munus NE me-a bal tab / ħé-ta-è / nita NE me-a illar tukul / ħé-ta-[è] / nin-/MUŠ/.DU.HA.A KA+[U]D-du₁₁-ga ħé. Transliteration taken from Krebernik (1984: 36). The translation mainly follows Krebernik’s German one. (For his translation, see *ibid.* 43, 45).

midwife/Ningirima) may let something come out from the DAG.É.NUN. Krebernik is also open for the possibility to see Ningirima as the midwife, because of the known relations between Ningirima and Uruk-Kulaba.¹⁰⁴⁴ In any case, Krebernik sees the midwife as denoting a deity, or perhaps a priestess representing the deity.¹⁰⁴⁵

Krebernik points to the common relation between birth and water in connection to the throwing of an incantation into the water in the birth incantation. We know from section 4.9. above that in later birth incantations the child is said to come from the deeps or over the waters by boat. Regarding this connotation Krebernik writes: “Konkrete Grundlage dieser Vorstellung dürfte das Fruchtwasser sein”.¹⁰⁴⁶ Besides this possible relation between Ningirima and water in a birth context, it is clear that she otherwise had a basic connection to water. Krebernik writes that the most conspicuous of her traits is her relation to water, snakes and fish. He points out that these aspects are even implicit in her name since the composite logogram following nin- (A.MUŠ.ĜA.DU = girim_x) means “snake-and-fish-water”.¹⁰⁴⁷ He further interprets the word girima as a cultic toponym, and more specifically as a water. In a source, which may date to the late Ur III period, it is said that “Das GIRIMA⁺ (möge?) von oben vorbeikommen”, and therefore Krebernik understands Girima as running water, i.e. a river.¹⁰⁴⁸ If this holds true, Ningirima is the “lady of the Girima river”.

Ningirima also had a connection to the a gúb-ba “lustral water (basin)”, which is seen in her temple hymn, where she is called nin a gúb-ba dad[ag-ga] “lady of the pure lustration water (basin)”.¹⁰⁴⁹ Further, in the godlist An-Anum, the deified lustral water is mentioned directly after her. The lustral water also seems to have been present in her temple in Uruk, where a water basin has been found. Krebernik points out that there is a connection between the word for incantation (KA×LI = tu₆) and lustral water (LI = gúb).¹⁰⁵⁰

From Ningirima we get a somewhat different picture than from Ninisina. Whereas Ninisina was related to both herbs and incantations, Ningirima is only related to incantations. She is also related to midwifery – at least in one text. This is an indication that she might have had functions similar to those of the mother goddess. As Ninisina she is dependent on males, in some cases Enlil, in other Enki. Nevertheless, the sources on Ningirima are contradicto-

¹⁰⁴⁴ Krebernik 1984: 43. See also Krebernik 1984: 258f., where he treats the relations between Ningirima and Uruk-Kulaba. For one thing, she had the epithet nin-unu^{ki}-ga, “mistress of Uruk” in the big Lugalzagesi inscription.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Krebernik 1984: 43.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Krebernik 1984: 44.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Krebernik 2001a: 365.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Krebernik 1984: 245ff.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 31.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Krebernik 2001a: 366.

ry. Ningirima is the “high incantation priest(ess) of all the gods”, but in spite of this another deity (Enlil or Enki) is the highest authority in incantations.

4.15.2.3. Conclusion and ideological aspects of the healing goddesses

As a conclusion I shall now discuss similarities and differences between Ninḥursaġa and the above analyzed goddesses, as well as some ideological implications of the findings on these goddesses.

We saw that Ninisina was related to incantations, healing with herbs and midwifery. In our myth Ninḥursaġa is “using herbs” (or their patron deities) for healing, and we know that she is a midwife. In fact, Ninḥursaġa is also related to incantations; in the temple hymn cycle Ninḥursaġa and Ningirima are the only deities who are related to incantations (tu₆ (KA×LI)).¹⁰⁵¹

Besides the connection to incantations there are other correspondences between Ninḥursaġa and Ningirima. As we saw Ningirima was also related to midwifery. Further, both she and Ninḥursaġa have been called sisters of Enlil. Both also have the epithet *igi-zi-gal an-na*,¹⁰⁵² “the true and great lady of heaven”.¹⁰⁵³ It seems as if the role of Ningirima is more restricted since she does not heal by using herbs.

The two above analyzed goddesses are dependent on gods in their healing practice, and thus the male deities are ranked above the goddesses. Both Enki and Enlil are found as the source of the goddesses’ healing practices. We saw that incantations commonly were connected to water, as well as the closeness in the signs for “incantation” tu₆, written KA×LI, and LI, the latter also being used for lustral water, *gúb*. Ningirima is a goddess of snake-and-fish-water, whereas a relation to water is not found in the case of Ninisina.¹⁰⁵⁴ Just as in the case of the healing goddesses, there seems to have been on the one hand a tradition of mother goddesses more related to plant life and earth as creative matter (regarding earth, or clay, see the creative acts of Ninmah₃ in the following chapter), and on the other a tradition of mother goddesses of waters (e.g. Namma and Tiāmat). Ninḥursaġa is a mother goddess related to vegetation, earth and wildlife.

The power over water as a substance of incantations and healing might be a partial explanation as to why Ninisina was dependent on Enki, the god of subterranean water, in her healing practice, a goddess of earth and plants also being in need of the water element. But this cannot be the explanation regarding healing goddesses connected to water. As I understand it, the pri-

¹⁰⁵¹ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 22, 31, ll. 92, 321.

¹⁰⁵² For Ningirima, see Krebernik (1984: 255), and for Ninḥursaġa, see Alster and Westenholz (1994: 18, ii: 1).

¹⁰⁵³ Sjöberg and Bergmann refer to Falkenstein who has interpreted *igi* in this epithet as a graphic writing for *égi* = NIN. There is also a priestess title *égi-zi-an-na* (1969: 73). If the epithet of Ningirima and Ninḥursaġa is a priestess title, the *gal* indicates a high priestess role.

¹⁰⁵⁴ If we disregard the “vessel with seven teats” that flows for Ninisina (Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 40) as well as a natural link between Ninisina and the canal of her city (Römer 2001: 119).

mary explanation of the dependence of male deities in healing is the patriarchal development in society when tasks are moved from female to male deities. In our myth the goddess is equal to the male, or perhaps even stronger than he is, since she saves him. It was suggested earlier, however, that it is in fact Enki who brings about his own healing through his equivalent, the fox.

We have seen that the healing goddess Ninisina was practicing her profession with the aid of herbs as well as incantations. Ningirima, as far as the sources show, only use incantations. Both of the goddesses were further connected to midwifery. At the same time as they had these functions they were dependent upon male deities who were often the final authority regarding health and life. I understand the material to express a recalibration of the goddesses, from being the ones who controlled healing, to becoming envoys of the male god. In this way it was possible to avoid questioning the role of the goddesses, which could have met resistance, and only subordinating their healing under the aegis of a male god.

4.15.3. The plants and the body parts

Since Enki ate eight plants and the result of Ninḫursaġa's healing seance is eight deities, I assume that there is a correspondence between the two groups. My working hypothesis will be that the deities are either the masters and mistresses of the plants, or they (at least on one level) are seen as plants. This hypothesis results in the comprehension that Ninḫursaġa heals Enki with medicinal herbs or deities presiding over these herbs. The healing goddess Gula is also related to medicinal plants, and Böck understands the plants related to Gula as her "avatars", i.e. she sees them as aspects of the goddess.¹⁰⁵⁵ It is possible to do a corresponding interpretation of the relationship between the mother goddess and the deities of the healing plants discussed here; they may be comprehended as emanations of the mother goddess.

Although there are no signs of any use of incantations in our myth, the supernatural element is seen not only in the cause, but also in the cure – herbs are used, but their efficiency is obviously due to the deities that they are somehow related to. I shall investigate the plants that Enki eats as well as look at healing substances in mythical contexts. I shall also analyze the body parts as a healing motif in the literature. Lastly I will look at the deities related to the body parts in our myth.

4.15.3.1. The plants

The importance of herbs in the medicines is expressed through the fact that the word *šammū* (Ú.ĜI.A) "plants", was a collective term for all healing

¹⁰⁵⁵ Böck 2013: 2, 130.

ingredients.¹⁰⁵⁶ This may be a clue as to how some of the plants in “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” shall be understood; the word *ú*, “plant” may in some cases quite simply mean “ingredient”. The first plant is called *ú-ġiš*. Here I do not believe that *ú-* shall be read separate from *-ġiš*, but suggest that they, as one word, refer to “oil”, Akk. *šamnu*, which can be written *ú-ġiš* in Sumerian. The second plant is called *ú-lál* “honey plant”. Attinger writes that this was a food preferred by the *suḫur* carps in the Lugalbanda epic.¹⁰⁵⁷ Nevertheless, I believe that here, we shall understand it as “the ingredient honey”. Both oil and honey were common substances in Mesopotamian medicaments.¹⁰⁵⁸

Since the text is damaged where the third plant is mentioned it is not ascertained what is written. Kramer has suggested the reading *ú-sara*,¹⁰⁵⁹ and this reading is also found by Black et al.¹⁰⁶⁰ In the latter source this plant is translated as “vegetable plant”, and Kramer gives the translation *r[oad-wee]d* plant.¹⁰⁶¹ The word *sar* can also denote a garden plot. If we in this case follow the suggested understanding of *ú* as “ingredient(s)”, this “plant” can denote vegetables/garden produce in general. Such ingredients were common in the Mesopotamian medicaments.¹⁰⁶² The fourth plant is the *ú A.NÚMUN*. The word *númun* is found in the *AHw* as a correspondence to *elpetu*, the halfa grass,¹⁰⁶³ but also by the *šikkurratu* which Assyriologist Wolfram von Soden translates as “ein Teil des Schilfrohes?”.¹⁰⁶⁴ Regarding the latter both leaves and pulp of the reed are enumerated as ingredients by Assyriologists Pablo Herrero and Marcel Sigríst.¹⁰⁶⁵ I believe that besides the reference to vegetal ingredients this word is also a pun relating to male semen. First we have *a* = Akk. *riḫûtu* “seed, semen”. The second word *númun* is a homonym to *numun*, Akk. *zēru* “seed, semen”. Human sperm (*ri-ḫu-ut* NAM.LÚ.U₁₈.LU) is counted as an ingredient by Herrero and Sigríst, and the word *numun/zēru* is met with as referring to vegetal seed.¹⁰⁶⁶ It may be then, that besides the possible understanding of *ú A.NÚMUN* as halfa or reed, in this “plant” we perhaps also have a reference to one of the body fluids that was used in medicine.

The following plant, the *atutu*, has a correspondence in Akkadian *atutu* (Sumerian loan word), which is said to be a plant with thorns. In the light of

¹⁰⁵⁶ Ritter 1965: 308.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Attinger 1984: 44.

¹⁰⁵⁸ See Ritter 1965: 308f., and Herrero and Sigríst (1984: 52, 55). Cf. also the oldest medical prescriptions known, which are published by Civil (1960: 61f.), where oil (but not honey) is used throughout.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Kramer 1945: 18, l. 205.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”, l. 207.

¹⁰⁶¹ Kramer 1945: 19, l. 205.

¹⁰⁶² Ritter 1965: 309 under c. See also Herrero and Sigríst (1984: 53ff.).

¹⁰⁶³ *AHw* sub *elpetu*.

¹⁰⁶⁴ *AHw* sub *šikkurratu*.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Herrero and Sigríst 1984: 53f.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Herrero and Sigríst 1984: 52, 54. Cf. Civil (1960: 61, 62, ll. 33, 48, 94), where the word *numun* is denoting seed of plants.

the discussion of the previous plant we can see also this one as referring to body fluid. Since a can mean water and tu-tu “to give birth” I suggest that this plant refers to the amniotic water.¹⁰⁶⁷

The name of the sixth plant is a bit damaged but has been read ú-aš-tál-tál by at least three scholars.¹⁰⁶⁸ There is a plant ú-tál-tál-(sal-la) that is corresponding to *uri(j)ānu/urānu*. von Soden translates it as “Fenchel?”, and he notes that it had a usage as a drug.¹⁰⁶⁹ Since ú-aš means *ēdu* “plant”,¹⁰⁷⁰ the name of our plant and that found in the *AHw* are practically the same. If this plant is fennel then, it is an ingredient that was used in medicines.¹⁰⁷¹

The name of the seventh plant is too damaged to be read, but the eighth plant is the *amḥaru* (Akk. *amḥara*) plant, which is a medicinal plant. Thus, several of the plants eaten by Enki were common ingredients in medicaments (oil, honey, reed (/semen/seed (?)), fennel and the *amḥara* plant). The ú-sara may refer to garden vegetables in general, and therefore also to common ingredients. Lastly, it is not impossible that amniotic water was used as an ingredient since other body fluids were. We see then that the plants Enki ate were not arbitrarily chosen in our myth; they were commonly used ingredients in medicine

4.15.3.2. The usage of plants in a wider mythological context

I have suggested that the deities created by Ninḥursaġa were corresponding to the plants. This can be interpreted as Ninḥursaġa healing Enki with medicinal plants/ingredients. Is it typical for the mother goddess to heal with plants, or are there other deities more connected to plants as a healing device? We shall now turn to the relationship between the mother goddesses as well as other deities and healing plants. The relationship between the goddess Ninisina and plants is expressed through the epithet *šimmu*, which literally means “herb grower”.¹⁰⁷² Further, Ninisina’s temple in Larsa, é ú-nam-

¹⁰⁶⁷ In the work of Herrero and Sigrist we do not find this body fluid, but besides sperm they enumerate blood, gall, urine and milk (1984: 52). This would indicate that other body fluids as well can have been ingredients.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Attinger mentions Rosengarten and Civil (1984: 24 fn. t-t). The reading is also found in Black et al. (1998–2006. I. 213). It may of course be that one of the scholars influenced the other two.

¹⁰⁶⁹ *AHw* sub *uri(j)ānu, urānu*.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Herrero and Sigrist 1984: 130.

¹⁰⁷¹ Can it be that we also here have a reference to human sexuality? Cf. Lugal ud me-lám-bi nir-ġál (in Black et al. (1998–2006) called “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta”) where it is said of Asakku that he has spread his offspring widely in the mountains (numun ba-tál-tál / *ze-ra ur-tap-pi-iš*) (van Dijk, 1983: 56, l. 34).

¹⁰⁷² This reading has been suggested by Geller (1985: 92), but has been called into question by Charpin who instead underlines the fact that the *šimmu* is equalled to both the *raqqū* “perfumer” and the *šā’il(t)u*, a sort of seer. The latter could use smoke in her seances. Therefore Charpin sees the *šimmu* as one who burned aromatic plants (1986: 387, fn. 8). As was pointed out above under section 4.15.2.1. about Ninisina, Geller sticks with his interpretation of *šimmu*, giving the literal translation “grower of medicinal plants” (2010: 46).

ti-la “house of the herb of life,”¹⁰⁷³ also expresses the relation. The plant of life is likewise mentioned in the hymn called “A hymn to Ninisina (Ninisina D)”¹⁰⁷⁴.

The mother/healing goddesses were however not the only ones related to healing plants. This is seen by Watanabe, who has gone through several instances in Mesopotamian literature where we encounter substances that bring life and death. She writes that they often appear in pairs, one substance giving life, and the other death. This she understands as a reflection of the gods’ abilities to bring both life and death.¹⁰⁷⁵ In fact the substances only appear in opposite pairs in the lexical lists, whereas in literary texts they mainly occur as one or two life-giving substances.¹⁰⁷⁶ Watanabe writes that the substances that she discusses seem to have a background in Mesopotamian pharmacology, and that this also goes for the literary cases.¹⁰⁷⁷ Since she makes this connection between these more or less mythical substances and the medicine, the former can be of interest to us. I shall turn to the instances she discusses where the substances are bread or a plant, or another vegetal substance, sometimes accompanied by water.

There are two cases in Watanabe’s article where the life-bringing substance is found in heaven: in the Adapa myth and in the Etana myth.¹⁰⁷⁸ Regarding Adapa, Anu, the god of heaven, offers him the bread and water of life. Since Ea has warned him not to receive the bread and water of death however, he misunderstands the offer and rejects it.¹⁰⁷⁹ The Etana myth deals with the “plant of birth”. Etana is carried off by an eagle which helps him to search for the plant safeguarded by Ištar in heaven. The text breaks at the end, and we do not get to know if they succeed.¹⁰⁸⁰

In the Gilgameš epic the plant is called “when old, a man becomes young”. Gilgameš is informed that this plant is found in the deeps of Abzu, and there he gets it, but he is later robbed of it by a snake. The Abzu is the habitat of Enki/Ea, and he is the one who owns the life-bringing substances in “Inana’s descent”. There he gives the kurġara and the galatura the herb and water of life and then sends them to the netherworld to revivify Inana. Ea is also found as the keeper of the water of non-existence and in one in-

¹⁰⁷³ Avalos 1995: 104, 106. In his book *House Most High*, George lists all the ceremonial temple names known to him. He has used all temple lists and topographical lists known to him, all royal inscriptions and year names he could find, and also several literary and religious texts (1993: 1, 60). In his listing *ú-nam-ti-la* occurs only once, as the ceremonial name of Ninisina’s temple in Larsa (ibid. 152).

¹⁰⁷⁴ Black et al. 1998–2006.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Watanabe 1994: 595.

¹⁰⁷⁶ See Watanabe 1994: 579–596.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Watanabe 1994: 594f.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Watanabe 1994: 581, 584f.

¹⁰⁷⁹ See Izre’el 2001.

¹⁰⁸⁰ See Haul (2000) and Kinnier Wilson (1985). The late version of the epic is the most complete one.

cantation he and Asalluḫi are related to the “oil of life”.¹⁰⁸¹ Since Enki can be understood as representing the early local leader, it can be of interest to note in relation to him that “the plant of life” was an ancient designation of the king.¹⁰⁸²

In one of the texts treated by Böck a patient says that he will “drink this plant” (*šam-mu an-na-a* NAG), and further that he has taken the plant of life of his mistress (Gula), and therewith has been restored to life. The drinking of the plant points to the fact that the word *ú* (Sum.)/*šammu* (Akk.) has wider connotations than simply “plant”.¹⁰⁸³

The picture from the sources is that there were three places where the plant (or the like) was kept; in heaven, in the underground ocean Abzu and by the healing/mother goddess (Ninisina/Gula). The latter is a representative of earth. Thus, the plant was related to three levels in the universe. Since the mother goddess is presiding over the natural landscape and its fauna and flora,¹⁰⁸⁴ healing herbs naturally belong to her.

4.15.3.3. The body parts

When Ninḫursaġa heals Enki she does not heal him from illnesses that have afflicted him,¹⁰⁸⁵ but she heals eight body parts, which Enki says are afflicted. I shall now turn to the connotations of the afflicted body parts, as well as positive and negative agents related to them. This will be done by situating the ideas of the body parts in their cultural context.

To start with, besides the relation between our mother goddess and the healing of body parts, such a relation seems to have existed also regarding Gula. At several sites with Gula temples, figurines with persons holding a hand on different body parts have been found, and at a ramp by her temple at Isin, figurines of legs and feet were unearthed.¹⁰⁸⁶ In one hymn to Ninisina/Ninkarak, we have a further relation between the healing goddess and afflicted body parts:

Headache, toothache, heart-illness, bowel-illness,¹⁰⁸⁷ / Eye-disease, plague demon, skin disease, evil disease [*break*]¹⁰⁸⁸

¹⁰⁸¹ Watanabe 1994: 581ff., 591f.

¹⁰⁸² See Widengren 1951: 5–79, and especially chapter III: “The king is the Tree or Plant of Life”, 42–58. The equation of king and plant of life is also pointed out by Watanabe (1994: 588).

¹⁰⁸³ Böck 2013: 87f.; Watanabe 1994: 590. Whereas Watanabe translates the word *šammu* with its literal meaning plant, Böck translates it with “potion”.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Jacobsen writes about Ninḫursaġa that “[a]s numen of the rocky wilds the wildlife belonged to her” (1973: 282).

¹⁰⁸⁵ There is however a specialized terminology with names for different diseases that commonly occur in the medical literature, cf. Wasserman (2007: 40–61 (especially 40–55)), and further Kinnier Wilson and Renynolds (2007: 67–99).

¹⁰⁸⁶ Avalos 1995: 209f.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Akk., lit. “cooling down of the bowel”.

The series of diagnoses and prognoses¹⁰⁸⁹ called SA.GIG/*sakikkû*, “symptoms” was published by Assyriologist René Labat in 1951, and the third, fourth and the fifth parts were published by Assyriologist Nils Heeßel in 2000. In the second part of this six part series we find the ordering of diseases according to body parts from top to toe.¹⁰⁹⁰ That this was customary in Mesopotamia is also seen in a colophon of another medical text, where we read:

Healing-prescriptions (effective against diseases) from top of the head to the (toe-)nails.¹⁰⁹¹

Thus, the impression is that our myth reflects a well-known and common way of enumerating afflictions of the body parts in Mesopotamia. Nevertheless, in the incantations this is seldom the case, which may be due to the fact that not all body parts needed treatment at the same time. I shall turn to some incantations to investigate in which context and to what extent we meet body parts. If we first turn to the oldest Sumerian incantations, from the middle of the third millennium BCE, we usually only have one body part mentioned. In Incantation 7 (Krebernik’s numbering) we have the interior/heart (šà); in number 9 gall (zé), interior (ša = šà) and heart (li-bi-iš₁₁ = lipiš); in number 24 we have the knee (du₁₀) and in number 34 the arm (a = á).¹⁰⁹² The enumeration of body parts does not, with one exception that will be treated below, occur in Assyriologist Graham Cunningham’s treatment of Mesopotamian incantations dating from 2500–1500 BCE. A similar picture is also encountered in Geller’s work on Sumerian incantations dating mainly from the Old Babylonian period.¹⁰⁹³ Some body parts are however found by Geller; either the evil spirit is forbidden to put his head, neck and hand upon the patient, or he may not set his hand near the patient’s hand, “nor set your

¹⁰⁸⁸ 17–20. saĝ gíg zú gíg šà gíg lipiš gíg / mu-ru-uš qa-qà-di muruš šin-ni muruš lib-bi ki-iš lib-bi / [igi gi]g á-sig sa-ma-ná tur hul ĝ[ál-la] / [] muruš i-ni a-sak-ku sa-ma-nu mur-šu / [em-nu]. Transliteration adapted from Mullo-Weir (1929: 8).

¹⁰⁸⁹ Because of new findings, Heeßel could add to the reconstruction of Labat. Whereas Labat had understood the series to consist of five parts, it is now known to consist of six parts distributed over forty tablets (Heeßel 2000: 13ff.).

¹⁰⁹⁰ Heeßel 2000: 18, 24ff. The diagnoses and prognoses texts were ordered into a series by the scribe Esagil-kīn-apli in the reign of King Adad-apla-iddina (1068–1047 BCE) of the second Isin dynasty, whereas the oldest single diagnostic and prognostic text that we have was written already in the first half of the second millennium BCE. Most of the texts of the series date from the eighth to the fifth centuries BCE (ibid. 3, 10f., 97f., 131).

¹⁰⁹¹ *bulī ištu muḥḥi adi šupri*. Transcription and translation from Ritter (1965: 300). The text where we find this colophon, coming from a text in Assurbanipal’s library in Nineveh, dates to the seventh century BCE.

¹⁰⁹² Krebernik 1984: 48f., 64ff., 122f., 172, 174.

¹⁰⁹³ One of the texts that Geller treats dates to the Middle Babylonian period (Geller 1985: 7).

name together with their name”.¹⁰⁹⁴ In one case the evil Udug demon attacks “the maiden from the palace of the steppe” (ki-sikil é-gal eden-ta). The demon attacks different body parts of the maiden:

He struck her hand, and placed it in his hand, / he struck her foot, and placed it onto his foot, / he struck her head, and put it onto his head.¹⁰⁹⁵

In both the above citation and the instances referred to when the evil spirit is forbidden to approach the patient, we have three body parts at the most. Further, whereas in our myth each body part seems to have been afflicted by a specific agent (a plant), here the same agent afflicts all the mentioned body parts.

I shall now turn to the Neo-Assyrian incantation series *Maqlû* to investigate the mentioning of body parts. In this series we have both the idea of evil forces afflicting body parts, and the idea that positive forces protect body parts. Regarding the afflicting forces, one such agent is once said to have afflicted eight body parts,¹⁰⁹⁶ and once “they” had afflicted seven body parts.¹⁰⁹⁷ In none of these cases does one evil agent correspond to one body part – either one afflicts all, or “they” afflict every body part together. (In two instances in *Maqlû* the body parts of the afflicting agent(s) are seized in order to remove the assault. The number of the body parts is six and three respectively.¹⁰⁹⁸)

In two instances the body parts of the patient are paralleled to deities or important phenomena. In one instance eight (or nine, since one occurs two times) body parts are enumerated in this manner, and in the other two instances we have four and five body parts respectively. I shall look closer at the sequence with the eight body parts:

Incantation. Enlil is my head, the storm is my face. / Uraš, the perfected deity, is the protective deity of my fa[ce]. / My neck is the necklace of N[inlil]. / My arms are the deified boomerang of Sin of the we[st]. / My fingers are (of) tamarisk wood, the bones of the Ig[igi (?)]. / [...] / Lugalédenna (and) Lata-rak are m[y] chest. / My knees are Muḫra, my feet, which are walking about.¹⁰⁹⁹

¹⁰⁹⁴ Geller 1985: 38f., 44f., ll. 341–343, 442f. In four instances, three of them with the same formula, different diseases are mentioned, but these instances are not really mentions of body parts (see *ibid.* 50f., 58f., 62f., ll. 529–532, 650, 660, 686).

¹⁰⁹⁵ 455–457. [š]u-ni in-ra ù šu-ni-a im-mi-in-ġar / [ġir]i-ni in-[ra ù?] ġiri-ni-šè im-[mi-in-ġar] / [saġ-ġ]á-[ni in-ra ù?] saġ-ġá-a-ni-šè [im-m]i-in-ġar. Transliteration taken from Geller (1985: 46).

¹⁰⁹⁶ Meier 1937: 14, II: 31–35.

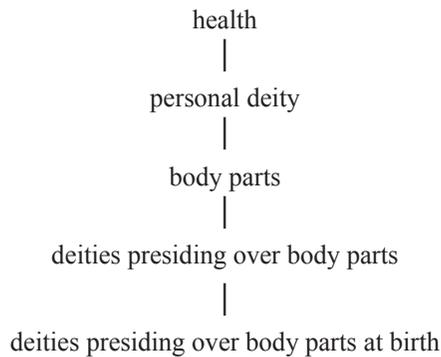
¹⁰⁹⁷ Meier 1937: 11, I: 97–101.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Meier 1937: 25, 27f., III: 94–98, III: 165, 168, 170.

¹⁰⁹⁹ VI: 1–5. én^d en-lil qaqqadi-ia₅ pa-nu-ú-a u_r-mu / ^duraš ilu ġit-ma-lu la-mas-sat pa-[ni-ia] / kišādi-ia₅ ul-lu šá^dn[in-lil] / idā.meš-ai^d gam-lu₄ šá^dsin amur[rī] / ubānātu.meš-ú-a^{ḡis} bīnu ešem^dig[igi (?)] / [...] / 7–8. ^dlugal-eden-na^d la-ta-rak irti-i[a₅] / kin-ša-ai^d mu-úḫ-ra šēpāl-ai šá ittanallaka^{ka}. Transliteration adapted from Meier (1937: 41).

The deities or phenomena related to body parts here, just as in the two other cases,¹¹⁰⁰ are a bit disparate, and the impression when comparing with our myth is that the idea of deities protecting each body part is not conscious and fully carried through. It seems as if some deities and phenomena are chosen not because of their protective qualities, but because they in themselves are unassailable or in some way valued. A clearer correspondence to our myth however, is the role of Uraš in line 2, who is explicitly said to be the protective deity of the face. Protective deities, which can also be called personal gods, are however quite common in the Mesopotamian sources, although they are not related to specific body parts.¹¹⁰¹ If we look at our myth in combination with the other sources, we do however see a pattern, which could be presented as the constellation of ideas seen in the table below.

Table 6. Constellation of ideas associated with body parts and the healing deities



4.15.3.4. The eight deities

- 1) ^dab-ba₆ is related to ugu-dīli, the top of the head. He is the only healing deity whose name does not contain the name of the body part he presides over. In our myth ^dab-ba₆ gets the task to be the king of plants. Thus, he can be understood as a sort of prototypical healing herb. This deity's name has the following spellings: ^da-ba/ ^dab-ba/ ^dab-ba₆. I assume that the latter spelling was used here, since Ú (= ba₆) also means herb. In Isin we meet Abba as the spouse of Gula, the healing goddess, and in a Nippur text he is said to be the father of Damu, the son of the healing goddess.¹¹⁰²

¹¹⁰⁰ In VI: 98–100 we have the deity It representing the head, the feet are the river, the AN.ḪUL.LA plant is the mouth, and the sea of the vast Tiāmat is the hand. In VII: 50–53 Enlil is the head, the forehead is the crescent moon, the arms are the boomerang from the gate of Marduk, the ears (?) are a tablet (?) and the feet are *lahmū* (Meier 1937: 44, 48).

¹¹⁰¹ On the personal protective deity in Mesopotamia, see Spycket (1960: 73–84). The personal protective deity is also referred to by Abusch, although focus is on the reason of suffering in his article “Witchcraft and the Anger of the Personal God” (1999: 83–122).

¹¹⁰² Richter 2004: 117f. and fn. 526, 197.

- 2) ^dnin-siki-lá/la, the “lord of hair” is related to the top of the hair (pa-siki) and ascribed to be “lord of Magan”. He is related to the healing of the pa-siki which is a part of the hair. Attinger writes that this deity is not attested elsewhere, but in a footnote he mentions ^dnin-siki in An-Anum, there a goddess.¹¹⁰³
- 3) ^dnin-kiri-ù/e-tu “lady giving birth to the nose” is related to the nose (kiri) and is given as spouse to Ninazu. ^dnin-kiri-ù/e-tu is corresponding to ^dnin-giri₁₆-da who in turn is assimilated with Gula.¹¹⁰⁴ Ninkiriutu’s/Ningirida’s husband Ninazu is a healer, his name meaning “Lord healer”. In spite of this name, according to Wiggermann he is seldom associated with healing. Ninazu is a vegetation god of decay and growth, a so-called “dying god”. Wiggermann points out, that such gods used to be gods of healing in other places in the Eastern Mediterranean. In third millennium incantations Ninazu is active against snake bite. There are incantations against snake bite from Ninazu’s temple in Enegi that are of Hurrian and Elamite origin.¹¹⁰⁵ Further, van Dijk and Geller have published an Ur III incantation where Ninazu acts against Asag-disease.¹¹⁰⁶ Ninazu is also connected to death; in an Early Dynastic IIIa zami hymn he is a black dog lying at the tavern, the black dog being a common representative for death.¹¹⁰⁷ This can be compared with the fact that the dog is otherwise a symbol of the healing goddess Gula.
- 4) ^dnin-ka-si (phonetical writing of nin-kas-si) “lady beer brewing” is related to the mouth (ka) in our myth, and she is called “the lady who fulfills the desires” here. Ninkasi is the beer goddess and in the Ninkasi hymn she is said to have been born from running water and nursed by Ninḫursaĝa. Then it is said that Enki is her father and ^dnin-ti her mother.¹¹⁰⁸ According to Richter, her mother is instead Damgalnuna in some texts.¹¹⁰⁹ In both An-Anum and its Old Babylonian forerunner Ninkasi is appearing in the circle of Enlil. She appears among Ninnisi, Šuziana and Ninmada. In the Emesal list we have the following row: Ninimma, Ninnisi, Ninkasi, Ninmada.¹¹¹⁰ As will be seen in the next chapter, these other goddesses are birth goddesses. Krebernik writes that Ninkasi (and the other beer deity Siris) represent(s) the “loosening” and intoxicating quality of the beer. Because of this possibility to set loose, the tavern could be vis-

¹¹⁰³ Attinger 1984: 46 and fn. 89.

¹¹⁰⁴ Attinger 1984: 46.

¹¹⁰⁵ Wiggermann 2001c: 330f.

¹¹⁰⁶ van Dijk and Geller 2003: 19f.

¹¹⁰⁷ Wiggermann 2001c: 333.

¹¹⁰⁸ Civil 1964: 69, 72: 1–12.

¹¹⁰⁹ Richter 2004: 99.

¹¹¹⁰ Krebernik 2001b: 443. We have already met Ninnisi and Ninimma here as daughters of Enki and his progeny. In the next chapter we will meet Ninimma, Šuziana and Ninmada as birth goddesses helping when the mother goddess Namma gives birth.

ited as a part of a ritual aimed at setting something loose.¹¹¹¹ Beer was also used in different medical treatments, at least as found on a Sumerian tablet with medical prescriptions. There we find beer used in poultices for compresses, as potions and in washings for the afflicted part.¹¹¹²

- 5) ^dna-zi “it’s in order”, “...life”, or “...throat” is related to the throat (zi). According to Attinger it is a goddess closely related to Nanše or perhaps a variant name for her.¹¹¹³ Heimpel writes that Nazi is a writing for Nanše.¹¹¹⁴ Nanše is a goddess of justice and law (zi).¹¹¹⁵ She is given as wife to UmunDARA (the latter written without the determinative for deity!), otherwise read as Nindara.¹¹¹⁶ Enki is said to be Nanše’s father in the Nanše hymn and she is also called “the child born in Eridu” there.¹¹¹⁷ Common traits of Nanše are her connection to fish and fowl, to the sea, her role as dream interpreter, protector of the weak in society and as keeper of boundaries.¹¹¹⁸ Nanše is also related to a healing herb; the plant ú-sikil, although in a late work.¹¹¹⁹
- 6) ^dá-zi-mú-a “who makes a good arm grow” is related to the arm (á) and given as wife to Ninġišzida. This goddess was called ^dnin-a-zi-mú-a during Ur III and after that only ^da-zi-mú-a. The writing with á- instead of a- is rare and possibly due to folk etymology.¹¹²⁰ According to Wiggerman her name means “(The Lady) who lets the juice grow”. Ninazimua is in Ur-Namma A called the chief scribe of the netherworld.¹¹²¹ Azimua’s husband Ninġišzida, “Lord of the true tree”, was reared in Abzu, his father being Ninazu. He is a chthonic god connected with vegetation and the cycle of growth and decay, belonging to the “dying gods” just as his father. When Ninġišzida returns from the netherworld after the winter he “breaks through the earth like fresh grass”. Wiggerman writes that in contrast to his fa-

¹¹¹¹ Krebernik 2001b: 444.

¹¹¹² The tablet is dated to Ur III or perhaps somewhat earlier (Civil 1960: 60ff).

¹¹¹³ Attinger 1984: 47.

¹¹¹⁴ Heimpel 2001a: 152; cf. the Old Babylonian Nippur Godlist where Nazi and Nanše are listed in l. 98 and 99, i.e. together. Peterson understands these names to be variant orthographies (2009: 6, 15).

¹¹¹⁵ Attinger 1984: 47.

¹¹¹⁶ ù-mu-un is the Emesal form for en. In Edzard’s article on Nindara in *RIA* it is said that this is a minor deity with unclear functions. It has been suggested that his name means “lord cock”, which accords with Nanše’s relation to birds (Edzard 2001: 338). Daniel E. Roiter has forwarded another possible understanding of Nindara. He writes that this deity could be corresponding to the Indo-European, proto-Hittite, deity Indar, and he suggests that Nindara could be a Sumerian understanding of this deity as Nin-Indar, which then developed into Nindar(a) (2013: 66).

¹¹¹⁷ Heimpel 1981: 85, 99, ll. 61, 255.

¹¹¹⁸ Heimpel 2001a: 153ff.

¹¹¹⁹ Heimpel 2001a: 160. He refers to Livingstone (1986: 176, 7).

¹¹²⁰ Cavigneaux and Krebernik 2001b: 329.

¹¹²¹ Wiggermann 2001d: 368.

ther, Ningišzida is not a healing deity. He writes however, that, “[h]e does appear in incantations, but only as a netherworld functionary or in connection with beer and wine”. There is a namburbi text where the patient visits the tavern in order to get help from Siris and Ningišzida to become released. Ningišzida is also sometimes seen as a god of plagues as well as justice.¹¹²²

- 7) ^dnin-ti “lady of the ribs” and “lady (of) life” is related to the ribs (ti). She will be the “lady of the months (iti)”. According to Attinger she shall be distinguished from Ninti, the spouse of Enki and mother of Nanše.¹¹²³ Since she is the sister of Nanše here, it seems illogical that she is the same goddess as the mother of Nanše. Sumerian genealogies are often illogical however, a fact that makes me not preclude that we deal with the same deity.¹¹²⁴ Further, in An-Anum Ninti appears as a name of Damgalnuna,¹¹²⁵ and in our myth Damgalnuna is used as a name of the mother goddess.
- 8) ^dEn-sa₆-ag finally, “the lord (of) good things”, “lord of the flancs” is related to the flancs (zà.g). This is the lord of Dilmun, and his name is usually written ^dEn-zà.g. Attinger writes that the writing sa₆.g here probably is a word play with SA₆ = ĝišimmar “date palm”, which is a tree characteristic of Dilmun.¹¹²⁶

There are no obvious semantic connections between the eight deities that are the result of Ninḥursaĝa’s healing ritual and the eight plants Enki ate. I nevertheless assume that there is a relationship between both, and understand the deities as the mistresses/masters of the plants. I further suggested above that the healing deities might even have been understood as emanations of the mother goddess.

Several of the deities have healing connotations. Abba is the spouse of the healing goddess Gula, and the father of her son. Ninkiriutu is corresponding to Ningirida, a goddess that was assimilated to the healing goddess Gula. She was also married to Ninazu, “lord healer”. Ninkasi is the beer goddess. Beer was a substance that was used in medicine, and the tavern was used in rituals aimed at loosening something. Nazi/Nanše is a dream interpreter, and in late times she was associated with a healing herb. Azimua was married to Ningišzida, a deity who was involved in loosening rituals in the tavern.

¹¹²² Wiggermann 2001d: 369ff.

¹¹²³ Attinger 1984: 47. This opinion is also expressed by Civil in his commentary on his publication of the Ninkasi hymn (1964: 75).

¹¹²⁴ Ninḥursaĝa is the great mother goddess, mother of all the gods, and a midwife. The name Ninti, “lady (of) life” would suit her, just as “lady of the months” would. Ninkasi was nursed by Ninḥursaĝa, and the mother was said to be Ninti. Are Ninti and Ninḥursaĝa actually the same goddess? In that case Ninti could be seen as a variant or emanation of the mother goddess.

¹¹²⁵ Litke 1998: 88, I: 179.

¹¹²⁶ Attinger 1984: 47, fn. 92.

Ninti, in the popular etymology meaning “lady (of) life”, is connected to the birth of children. As we will see in the following chapter there is a connection between midwifery and healing. Ensag is related to the date palm. The date was used in medicine,¹¹²⁷ and the date palm was a motif in incantations.¹¹²⁸

4.15.3.5. Ideological aspects of the plants and the body parts

Among the plants that were eaten by Enki we saw that one of them may allude to human sperm, and another to amniotic fluid. These substances are in a way representative of what happens in the whole myth, and related to the male and female parts in creation of life. In the context of herbs they seem to have the same ranking. Regarding the use of herbs by different deities, it was argued that the mythological healing herbs are found in three contexts; in heaven, on earth, and in Abzu or the underground, thus relating to the three levels of cosmos. Also in this context the herbs and their divine keepers can be understood to have the same ranking.

The deities that were born out of the healing act of Ninḥursaġa can be analyzed from the point of view of ideology. Five of the deities were female and three male. All males were to be rulers; Abba as king of plants and the other two as lords of Magan and Dilmun respectively. Three of the goddesses were to be married to male gods, Ninkasi was to fulfill desires, and Ninti was to be the lady of the months. I understand the male deities to be ranked above the female ones, and the latter are related to males rather than having a task of their own. Although Ninkasi and Ninti are not related to males, both of them are related to childbearing; Ninkasi is so since she has been found in a context of birth goddesses, and Ninti’s name can be understood as referring to the months of pregnancy. Ninkiriutu, Nazi/Nanše and Azimua were strong goddesses, having their own areas of competence. As we saw, Ninkiriutu/Ningirida was assimilated to *the* healer goddess, Gula, which points to a similar function of this goddess, Nazi/Nanše was e.g. dream interpreter and keeper of boundaries, and Azimua was the chief scribe of the netherworld. The picture given in our myth is different however; they are only said to be married to male gods. This presentation of these healing goddesses can be understood as a recalibration of them, reorganizing them from being competent goddesses in their own right to representing spouses of male deities. The logic of this new ranking is patriarchal; women are not individuals in themselves, but only represented as related to men, and they are subordinated to their husbands.

¹¹²⁷ Ritter 1965: 308.

¹¹²⁸ E.g. *Maqlû* I: 22, see Meier (1937: 8), and the same line in Schwemer (2010: 315f.); Köcher 1966: 17, ll. 28f.; Geller 1980: 28f., 35, ll. 52’–62’.

4.15.4. The relation between midwifery and healing

Avalos has shown that there was a relationship between the healing goddess Gula and births, and he concludes: “we can only speculate that Gula was originally associated with birth and midwifery, activities which can involve herbs and other types of remedies, and then the link progressed to more general types of healing”.¹¹²⁹ Regarding Ninḫursaġa we know that she is connected to birth and midwifery, and my question is if we can assume a similar development also in her case. I shall therefore discuss the relation between the role as healer and that as midwife with the aim to throw some further light on Ninḫursaġa’s role as healer. One question that will be dealt with is whether the development from midwife to healer that is suggested by Avalos only goes for a development regarding Gula/mother goddesses or if anything can be said about the historical development in Mesopotamia.

4.15.4.1. Contextualization of the relationship between midwifery and healing

I shall start the investigation by looking at the Ur III birth incantation which we met above in section 4.9. After the description of the mother about to give birth we are told that Asalluḫi saw her situation. He then turns to his father Enki and for the Marduk-Ea type of incantation a common scene develops: Asalluḫi tells his father about the woman’s situation and asks what to do. His father answers: “my child, what do you not know, what can I add to you? [...] What I know you (also) know and what you know I know (as well)”.¹¹³⁰ Thereafter Asalluḫi takes to action to help the woman:

Fat of the pure cow, cream of the šilam-cow, / he grasped in the erected “abode” of the bedchamber. / In the vulva of the troubled human being, / the net was stretched. / He uttered (lit. gave) the incantation of Eridu. / “May the water be released like the water of heaven, / [---] / Like a broken jug may she be opened (lit. broken) / [---] / Gula, the good steward of meticulous hands – / (at) her cutting of the umbilical cord, may she decree a fate”.¹¹³¹

Here we see that the main role is played by the male deity, and this is made by magical acts and the reading of an incantation. The magical acts of

¹¹²⁹ Avalos 1995: 107, 192–194, 223.

¹¹³⁰ Based on the transliteration and translation of van Dijk (1975: 55, ll. 34, 36). van Dijk has forgotten to translate the last sentence cited, but it is found in his translation of text MLC 1207 (ibid., 68, ll. 19f.).

¹¹³¹ 37–42. i áb kù-ga [gára áb-šilam-ma[?]] / DAG agrun-n[a-ka gub-ba[?]] šu um-me-t[i] / gal₄-la lú-ùlu [pap-ḫal-la-ka] / gu ba-da-ab-lá-[lâ[?]] / nam-šub eridu^{ki}-ga ù-[me-ni-šúm] / im-šeġ₆(A) an-na-gin₇ ḫé-[em-mi-du₈] / [---] 45. dug-gaz-za-gin₇ ḫé-[em-ma]-gaz-gaz / [---] / 49–50. ^ugu-la agrig zi [šu]-dim₄-ma-ke₄ / gi-dur ku₅-rá-a-ni nam ḫé-em-mi-ib-tar-re. (UM 29-15-367) Transliteration adapted from van Dijk (1975: 55, 57). van Dijk’s restorations are based on a very similar birth incantation published in the same article. (Ll. 37–38 are restored from VAT 8381 = VS 17, 33, ibid., 63: 16f. and ll. 39–40 are restored from the text called John Rylands Library, Box 24 E6 (24), ibid. 69: 4’.) Cf. Böck who translates ll. 49f. (2013: 31).

Asalluḫi are more closely described in a slightly different version of this incantation. There we are informed that he shall mix the fat and the cream and apply it on the back and the sides of the woman in order that the child shall come out. Gula is found in the same role as above.¹¹³² What we see here is a division of labour between the male and the female. The male is active during the birth-giving whereas the female takes care of the child.¹¹³³

This division of labour brings us back to the discussion on the *asû* and the *āšipu*. When Avalos argues against Ritter's distinction between the *āšipu* and the *asû* he writes: "In actuality, the *āšipu* is more analogous to a modern physician in that he attempts to provide a general portrayal of an illness, while the *asû* is more akin to a combination of a modern pharmacist and nurse".¹¹³⁴ Earlier we saw that the *āšipu* was probably a learned scholar whereas the *asû* was the more practically oriented practitioner. In the text above we get the same impression; Gula is more of an assisting nurse than an independent midwife. The male instead, is acting as a learned incantation priest. I understand one of the differences between the *asû* and the *āšipu* to be the same as one between the physician and the nurse; the one is more learned, the other more practical. If I would apply our modern terms on these practitioners however, I would say that the *asû* was the doctor of that time, and the *āšipu* the ritual practitioner.

It was stated above in section 4.15.1. that primarily male deities and male human practitioners are represented in the sources practicing healing and magic. Female human practitioners are very seldom seen in the sources, but regarding midwifery there are a few references that suggest that women practiced as such in Mesopotamia.¹¹³⁵ In the literary texts instead, the mother goddess and the healing goddesses are commonly represented as midwives, although this is less so over time.

We saw above that Avalos suggested that Gula's role as healer might have developed out of midwifery.¹¹³⁶ We know that Gula was practicing in contexts of childbirth as well as in the role of an *asātu*.¹¹³⁷ Can these facts be applied to historical development, i.e. can it be argued that the historical role of the doctor in Mesopotamia was developed out of the role of the midwife?

¹¹³² van Dijk 1975: 62ff. In the two other incantations published by van Dijk only the male practitioners are met with (ibid.: 66ff.). Böck refers to a further incantation where we find this division of labor between Gula and Asalluḫi (2013: 28).

¹¹³³ To note is that treatments in relation to deliveries are not found in the medical texts (Biggs 1990: 628).

¹¹³⁴ Avalos 1995: 167.

¹¹³⁵ Stol 2000: 172.

¹¹³⁶ Cf. the Hittite culture where midwives sometimes acted outside the context of birth. Hittitologist Gary Beckman sees this role of the midwife as a healer in general as "an extension of her role as spokesperson for the new-born child" (1983: 234f.).

¹¹³⁷ Gula was met with in a birth incantation earlier, which is published by van Dijk (1975). Regarding Gula as being called female doctor, *asātu*, see footnote 974.

Women are cross-culturally those nursing and tending children¹¹³⁸ and sick people as well as taking care of the dead.¹¹³⁹ It is not farfetched to believe that the healing profession sometimes developed out of such experiences. Further, women are predominantly those gathering herbs and other edible plants as well as those preparing food.¹¹⁴⁰ This must have led to knowledge of the foodstuffs beyond their edibility, which can be illustrated by the following lines from a Neo-Assyrian healing incantation:

May Gula cook a mash of beer bread, seed of the *papparhû* plant and suet over the fire! [...] / May Gula produce pills from the mash!¹¹⁴¹

The realm of birth and midwifery is also predominantly a female domain¹¹⁴² (although in our western society the highest responsibility and competence often lie in the hands of a male doctor). The treatment of complications within this area may have developed a skill in treating other life-threatening conditions. Although we do not have any historical evidence from Mesopotamia that medicine developed out of midwifery, the literary material suggests a close relationship between the female ability to give birth, to act as helper at the time of giving birth and the role as healer. Our mother goddess Ninḫursaĝa is a midwife, and this function also seems to be related to her healing abilities.

4.15.4.2. Ideological aspects of midwifery and healing

We have seen here in section 4.15. that there was a close connection between childbirth, healing herbs and healing with incantations in the Sumerian texts. Our mother goddess is not explicitly said to represent the professions of šazu (wr. šà-zu) (midwife), *asû* and *mašmaššu/āšipu*, but she expresses all three in her healing acts. This can be understood as a support of the suggestion of Avalos, that the practice of healing can have grown out of midwifery in Mesopotamia. At the same time male deities as practitioners are more frequent in contexts of healing and childbirth, and more so the later the sources are. The discussion on the relationship between healing and midwifery also suggests a change in ranking regarding male and female deities as practitioners; initially goddesses were seen as active in this area, but they were soon to a large extent superseded by male deities. At present it is difficult to say whether there was a similar process in society where female practitioners decreased over time.

¹¹³⁸ Murdock and Provost 1973: 210.

¹¹³⁹ Howarth 2001: 480.

¹¹⁴⁰ See Murdock and Provost 1973: 207.

¹¹⁴¹ 18. ^d*gu-la ra-pi-ik* BĀPPIR NUMUN BABBAR.ĤI^{sar} Ì.UDU *ina* IZI *li-šab-ši-il* [...] 23. ^d*gu-la ku-pa-tin-nu šá ra-pi-qi li-kap-pit-ma*. Translation and transliteration from Böck (2013: 102f.).

¹¹⁴² See e.g. Garratt 2001; Ehrenreich and English 2010.

4.16. Discussions on the structure of the myth

4.16.1. The interpretation of Alster – evaluation and discussion

The whole structure of our myth is treated by Alster in his article “Enki and Ninhursag: The Creation of the first Woman”. I find several of his conclusions convincing, but I do not always find it convincing when he strictly sticks to his theory of binary oppositions. I will present a short summary of his ideas, and then discuss them. Thus, the analysis of Alster is relying on the theory of binary oppositions, and also on reversal of themes. His binary oppositions are seen in the following table:

Table 7. The binary oppositions presented by Alster

male	female
abnormal sexual relations	normal sexual relations
chaos	cosmos
unity	duality

Alster means that Enki and Ninsikila are sleeping at the beginning, and that this is “an intermediate stage between existence and non-existence”.¹¹⁴³ Then when Enki starts his sexual advances towards Nintu, Alster states that Enki does not want to have sex with the mother goddess, but she urges him to act. He only wants to masturbate, and forbids everybody to walk in the marshes, since he does not want anybody to take his semen. The act of masturbation Alster calls “unnatural”.¹¹⁴⁴

When Ninḥursaġa then receives the semen in her womb Alster means that she “violates his prohibition” and “[...] *takes* Enki’s semen and impregnates herself, i.e., plays the role of a man” (italics original).¹¹⁴⁵ Even though Alster works according to the idea of the unwillingness of Enki, he writes about Enki’s reactions when he sees Ninnisi, his daughter with the mother goddess, as very willing: “since he cannot control his own emotions”, and “wants to kiss her”. Alster states that this intercourse is also abnormal, since it is an incestuous one.¹¹⁴⁶

Concerning the passage where Ninḥursaġa is wiping off the semen from Uttu’s thighs, and “apparently, spreads it on the ground” Alster interprets this as “the reversed order of what happened when originally the mother

¹¹⁴³ Alster 1978: 16.

¹¹⁴⁴ Alster 1978: 17.

¹¹⁴⁵ Alster 1978: 17.

¹¹⁴⁶ Alster 1978: 17.

goddess picked up his semen from the water”. After Alster has discussed all the instances of intercourse, he states that “[s]o far we may conclude that it is the woman who has tricked the man into acting”. When Ninḥursaġa removes “the eye of life” from Enki this is interpreted as a part of the consequences of creation; we turn from chaos to cosmos, and then back to chaos.¹¹⁴⁷

When Enki has eaten the plants, Alster sees this as a new reversed pattern; “this time it is Enki, the man, who is pregnant”. And when the result of the last delivery (when Enki is put in the womb of Ninḥursaġa, and gets help to give birth to the eight deities) is both male and female deities, this is interpreted to be when “the normal order of sexual relations was established”.¹¹⁴⁸ From all this Alster concludes that our myth “is not basically concerned with agricultural life, irrigation, or any kind of natural phenomena, but primarily with the paradoxical beginning of sexual relations”.¹¹⁴⁹

Sometimes it seems as if the structural theory is more important for Alster than the actual information that the text gives. When he writes that Ninsikila and Enki are sleeping at the beginning, I suppose that this is due to the idea of “mediating instances” between the binary oppositions, that initially has been introduced by Lévi-Strauss.¹¹⁵⁰ Alster has chosen to read the verb as “to sleep”, which is a possible reading. I instead choose “to lie down”, which is the general meaning of the verb. Thus I translate lines 8/11 as following: “at that place where Enki laid down with his wife/Ninsikila”. (See above, section 4.5.1., and below section 8.1.) Thereafter we are informed that at that pure place no raven croaked, no lion killed etc. My understanding of this sequence is that the listener/reader gets to know that nothing was yet born in the place where Enki and his wife laid down. Thus, his and his wife’s actions lead to the creation of life. As I see it then, Enki and Ninsikila are not in an unconscious state of sleep, but are acting from the beginning. I agree with Alster, though, that we are in an initial state of creation, when yet no action, process, or with Alster’s word, time, exists. But this is said of the environment, and the (lack of) culture, and here the gods *act* to initiate and maintain the creative process. We see here also, how there is an ambiguous comprehension of the female, since she is related to the nature as pure earth (ki sikil).

The statement by Alster that Enki does not want to get sexually involved is a natural corollary of the idea of the binary opposition of unity-duality. Enki represents the unity, and he is unwilling to give up this role of containing everything in himself. Further, Alster compares Enki with Kronos as portrayed by Hesiod. And as Kronos is tricked to swallow a stone instead of

¹¹⁴⁷ Alster 1978: 18.

¹¹⁴⁸ Alster 1978: 19.

¹¹⁴⁹ Alster 1978: 19.

¹¹⁵⁰ I suppose that this is what Alster is aiming at with the “intermediate stage”. For the usage by Lévi-Strauss of the idea of a “mediating instance” (my expression), see e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1984 (295–314, and especially 310ff.).

Zeus, Enki is also tricked; he “was forced against his will to beget children”.¹¹⁵¹

I think that Alster is correct to point out the autoeroticity¹¹⁵² of Enki. Here, just as in “Enki and the world order”, he is sexually active on his own. I do not think though, that this is the only side of Enki’s sexuality. The myth also tells us about his penis that is erected towards Nintu, and about his recurring inability to keep his hands away from the women who walk by the riverside. Further, when he is forbidding anyone to walk in the marshes, I do not think that the reason is that he wants to keep his semen for himself. Instead I prefer an interpretation suggested by Sumerologist Claus Wilcke. He means that Enki says this because he wants to entice the goddesses to transgress the prohibition, and refers to the similar transgression by Ninlil in “Enlil and Ninlil”.¹¹⁵³ (cf. above, section 4.11. on the advising mother goddess.)

My interpretation of the sexual behavior of Enki is that he is oscillating between autoeroticity, and lust towards the female. The autoeroticity/striving for unity is shown twice; when he is masturbating, and when he is consuming the plants. In the first instance, he is resolving the pressure of lust by masturbating, and in the second, when he nevertheless has poured out his semen into a woman, he tries to regain it by consuming its products. This striving for unity could be compared with the thought that Ninḫursaġa/the mother goddess is creating life on her own. In this myth it is shown that neither male, nor female is able to do this. The difference between the sexes is that whereas the male part of creation is most obvious at the sexual act (when he is pouring out his semen), the female part is most obvious at childbirth. A result of this difference is that when a male wants to “contain everything in himself” he will hold back his sexuality towards the female. The female on the other hand, is more self-sufficient when she gives birth.

I believe that Alster has pointed out an important fact of the myth when he says that Ninḫursaġa is taking the semen and puts it into her womb. I also believe that it is correct that this should be connected to the act when she is wiping the semen away from Uttu’s loins. Whereas he sees these instances as the opposites of each other (put in – take away), I interpret them as corresponding to each other. Since Ninḫursaġa is the mother of the land, she is also the mother of both animals and plants. The latter passage shows, according to my interpretation, that in fact a male is also needed when plants grow. And when Ninḫursaġa is pouring the semen into her womb, she is revealed; she is not the sole source of life.

Alster suggests that the aim of the myth is the establishment of sexual relations as seen among the deities created for the sake of healing the illnesses

¹¹⁵¹ Alster 1978: 25.

¹¹⁵² This expression is not used by Alster, but he writes that “[t]his first existential act must necessarily be a ‘sin’ in that the creator who, in terms of the myth, comprises all in one, must sacrifice his own unity” (1978: 20).

¹¹⁵³ Wilcke, private communication.

of Enki. I agree that this is one important part of the myth, but a more general aim is to show that neither male, nor female can create alone, and this theme is related to Enki and Ninḥursaġa, not the eight deities that are born. Another interpretation made by Alster is dealing more with one of the overall intentions of the myth: through the identification between Ninsikila and Ninḥursaġa, Enki is connected to Dilmun, and it is shown how his cult came to the island. And through this identification Enki is also posed as the father of Ensag/Enzak, the lord of Dilmun, since Ensag is the last healing deity who is born by Ninḥursaġa/(Enki).¹¹⁵⁴ Further, it could well be, that the end deals with the introduction in the world of (sometimes mortal) illness, and the different cures for the different parts of the body. That Enki/Ea was connected to healing is well known, through incantation texts of the Marduk-Ea type.¹¹⁵⁵

My last comment on Alster's interpretation is that I think it is erroneous to comprehend myths as dealing only with one theme, for example the introduction of "normal sexuality".¹¹⁵⁶ Myths are always multi-layered, and deal with different things important to human life. One of these things naturally was the production of food, and the base of the cultural development, in this case irrigation. Further, I believe, as Lévi-Strauss, that different themes mutually elucidate one another.

4.16.2. The creative acts – male and female behavior in a structural analysis

I will now investigate the structure of the myth myself. I will start with the relations between male and female and the degree of activity and passivity respectively that the sexes show in the sexual act specifically. Here "male" and "female" are meant in a broad sense, since there is a relation between natural phenomena and the sexes in the myth.

¹¹⁵⁴ Alster 1983: 59; this interpretation is already referred to above in section 4.2. Dilmun, the setting of the myth.

¹¹⁵⁵ Falkenstein classifies the incantations in four groups, and of these the Marduk-Ea type is the largest (1931: 44).

¹¹⁵⁶ Cf. the opinion of Kirk (e.g. 1973: 98, 104), who maintains that the myth aims at expressing an interrelation between the fertility of humans and nature.

Table 8. Structure of “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” regarding activity and passivity

Event	Object/passivity	Subject/activity	Result
Beginning of creation	The virgin earth gets “penetrated”	the sun	Dilmun flourishes
The creative/cultivating process continues	“Mother earth” gets penetrated	Enki	Initiation of irrigation
The creation of progeny starts		Enki ejaculates, Ninḫursaġa puts his semen in her womb	Ninnisi is born
	Ninnisi receives the semen	Enki pours out the semen in her womb	Ninkura is born
	Ninkura receives the semen	Enki pours out the semen in her womb	Ninimma/Uttu is born
“The first woman” is created	Ninimma receives the semen	Enki pours out the semen in her womb	Uttu is born
Within culture; incest leads to illness	Uttu receives the semen and gets ill	Enki pours out the semen in her womb Ninḫursaġa wipes off the semen	Plants start to grow
Incest gets punished	The plants are consumed	by Enki	
	Enki is cursed to death	by Ninḫursaġa	Enki is dying
Healing	Enki is put into the vulva of Ninḫursaġa	by Ninḫursaġa	Deities are born

We see in the table above that the female almost always is passive during the sexual act. One important deviation from this is the active role of Ninḫursaġa. Is the result of her activity positive or negative? When she first takes the semen into her womb, and as a result gives birth to Ninnisi, this is at least not negative. Giving birth to children has started. When she wipes off the semen from Uttu, this is also not negative; plants should in general be seen as positive. Also when she puts Enki in her womb, heals him, and gives birth to the eight deities, this is positive. Thus it can be stated, that the active

sexuality of Ninḥursaġa was not seen as negative.¹¹⁵⁷ As already stated, I believe that the point that the mythographers wanted to make here was that it was not Ninḥursaġa alone who created children or plants – and this goes also for the eight deities. In all these instances the male was needed and part of the creative act. I suppose that behind this “statement” lies an objection toward an earlier idea that the mother goddess in fact did create alone. This can be said to be the central recalibration of the myth, and the recalibration can be understood as made through negotiation, where the mother goddess does keep her tasks, but they are reinterpreted as dependent upon the male.

Another level of the myth is when “social communication” takes place between male and female. Since this happens only twice (if the marriage of the eight deities is disregarded), there is no need for a table at this point in analysis. The first communication takes place when Ninsikila complains over the gift she has received from Enki. This most probably is a wedding gift, which should also be the case when Enki gives fruits and vegetables to Uttu. In this latter passage, we thus have the second communication. When Enki comes with the gift, Uttu claps her hands in joy. What we see here is an active female, in relation to the also active male. Both these goddesses express what they want, which they also get. Thus, it seems as if the female is active within the framework of rules for courting and wedding. This can be understood as another recalibration of the female; her activity is channeled into behavior that is acceptable in a patriarchal society.

A difference between the two wedding gifts is that whereas the first one was useless since it was unfruitful (to start with), the latter one was a product of Enki’s fertilizing ability. I think that this is a part of the message of the myth; mother earth is dry and barren without the semen of Enki, and is of no worth without it. Another level of the myth that is connected to the creative forces of male and female is that of reproduction and production. The products of male work (on the earth) become a gift to the female as a step on the way towards reproduction; through this product the male establishes a relation where he can reproduce. Interestingly, the productive acts in our myth result in reproduction, whereas the “reproductive relation” results in “products”; Enki’s sexual behavior towards the ground (and here I also include the mother goddess(es)) results in children, whereas his sexual behavior towards the “common woman” results in plants.

¹¹⁵⁷ Kirk writes that Ninḥursaġa’s sexual acts are irregular and that the whole sequence of intercourses is a reversal of “natural marital relations and childbirth” (1973: 97). It is correct that her acts are irregular from the cultural point of view.

4.17. A comparison between “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa” and “Enlil and Ninlil”

We have already seen that there are several correspondences between “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa” and “Enlil and Ninlil”. It could be worthwhile to study the relations between these myths further, and thereby gain more information on our myth and ultimately also on Ninḫursaĝa. I shall start to compare the course of events in the myths, as in the table below.

Table 9. Comparison between “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa” and “Enlil and Ninlil”

Enki and Ninḫursaĝa	Enlil and Ninlil
Dilmun is a virgin place and there is a static setting before creation.	Nippur is a city with irrigation systems and generations of habitants.
Creation is initiated by Utu and by Enki and Ninḫursaĝa. Enki starts his sexual behavior towards the earth.	
The mother is advising.	The mother is advising.
A sequence of three intercourses with boat imagery. A fourth intercourse. Enki is disguised. (three boats, one disguise)	A sequence of four intercourses. (one boat, three disguises)
Four deities have been engendered.	Four deities have been engendered.
Enki eats the plants and gets condemned.	As a result of the first intercourse with Ninlil Enlil gets banned from the city.
The fox intervenes.	
	Ninlil follows Enlil.
Enki is healed.	
	Enlil is praised as a producer of prosperity and abundance.
The “destinies” of the plants are decreed.	

In the table above we see that the main correspondences between the two myths are the advising mother, the sexual transgression followed by a punishment, the four conceptions, the disguise and the boat imagery used symbolically for intercourse. The differences are mainly due to the fact that whereas in “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa” the myth deals with creation, in “Enlil

and Ninlil” the setting is social and not related to a primordial time. Therefore, in “Enlil and Ninlil” we are directly introduced to the social context and rules for sexual behavior. A further difference between the two myths is that in “Enlil and Ninlil” there are no births. Instead we are only informed that Enlil “poured the seed of [deity’s name] in her [Ninlil’s] womb”.¹¹⁵⁸ I suggest that the reason for this is that the focus here lies on the procreative act of the male. Enlil is posed as the father of Su’en, a rather prominent god, and of three other gods that are not unimportant.

Behrens writes that the meaning of the myth can be found in the concluding hymn. There Enlil is posed as the lord of heaven and earth, and, as interpreted by Behrens, Ninlil is raised to the same level as him through their relation. Further, “Durch Enlil wird Su’en zum höchsten Gott nach Enlil, der sich wie dieser *lugal* ‘Herr’ nennt”. And the brothers of Su’en get their tasks by Enlil.¹¹⁵⁹ As a matter of fact, Su’en was called *lugal* already in the *zami* hymns from Abū Ṣalābīḥ, and he had the *lugal* epithet also in the Ur III period.¹¹⁶⁰ Further, I am not sure that Behrens is right when he means that the connection between Su’en and Enlil elevates the former to a higher level. I think that it is just as possible to see it the other way around, i.e. that Enlil gained in status through his connection with Su’en. This suspicion is however difficult to prove, since such a development must have taken place in prehistory.

Behrens makes an important observation as to what Enlil says before the last three intercours with Ninlil; there is a reference to “above” and “below”, related to Enlil’s ability to procreate and produce abundance.¹¹⁶¹ The expression reads as follows:

My royal semen may go to heaven, my semen may go to earth! / My semen,
like that of my royal semen, may go to earth!¹¹⁶²

Behrens points to “The debate between Winter and Summer”¹¹⁶³ and “Enlil in the E-kur (Enlil A)” (“Enlilsudraše”) where the two directions are also referred to regarding Enlil. In the latter we read:

¹¹⁵⁸ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enlil and Ninlil”, ll. 53, 90, 116, 142.

¹¹⁵⁹ Behrens 1978: 251.

¹¹⁶⁰ Andersson 2012: 69, 141.

¹¹⁶¹ Behrens 1978: 252f.

¹¹⁶² 85–86. a *lugal*-*ĝu*₁₀ an-*šè* *hé*-du a-*ĝu*₁₀ ki-*šè* *hé*-du / a-*ĝu*₁₀ a *lugal*-*ĝá*-*gin*₇ ki-*šè* *hé*-em-ma-du. Transliteration taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enlil and Ninlil”).

¹¹⁶³ Behrens calls this text “Emeš and Enten”. I do not find the example from it to be that suitable in this context. The lines Behrens refers to are: 9–11. *é*-me-eš an-na ní-*ĝ*-kéš ak-dè / en-te-en a *hè*-*ĝál*-la kar-ra ge-né-dè / ^den-lil *lugal* kur-kur-ra-ke₄ *ĝé*štu-ga-ni na-an-gub. “That Summer puts a knot onto heaven / that Winter makes firm the water of abundance at the quay / – onto that did Enlil, the king of all lands, set his mind”. Transliteration adapted from Black et al. (1998–2006. “The debate between Winter and Summer”).

Your word is heavy for heaven and a foundation for earth. For heaven it is great advice,¹¹⁶⁴ reaching onto heaven, for earth it is a foundation that cannot be destroyed. When it has approached heaven there is abundance; abundance will then pour from heaven. When it has approached earth there is prosperity;¹¹⁶⁵ prosperity will then grow on earth. Your word is flax, your word is barley.¹¹⁶⁶

What I find interesting in this citation is that the *word* of Enlil is the origin of abundance.¹¹⁶⁷

The two directions pointed out by Behrens are also found in the concluding praise of Enlil in “Enlil and Ninlil”:

You are the lord who makes the flax grow, who makes the barley grow, you are lord in heaven, lord (of) abundance, lord on earth. [...] Enlil of heaven, Enlil is king! Lord whose utterances are unalterable.¹¹⁶⁸

Thus it is clear that Enlil is seen as a creator and bringer of abundance in all directions. He is posed as a creator on a cosmic scale. And whereas the mother goddess and Enki are only creating by sexual acts in “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa”, implied here is that besides the sexual creativity, Enlil is also able to create by will, often using his word.

If we now turn to the activity/passivity of the sexes, Ninlil seems to be more active than the females in “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa”, Ninḫursaĝa not counted. She defies the advice of her mother, she offers verbal resistance to Enlil and she follows Enlil when he leaves her. Further, she speaks up to Enlil in his three disguises. Enlil is the active one at the intercourses and he is actively leaving Ninlil. He is also active when he tells the three men with whom he hides, that they shall not tell Ninlil that he is there. Enlil is acted upon, though, when the Anuna gods banish him from the city.

¹¹⁶⁴ idim gal can be = *māliku* “advisor”, see *AHw* sub *māliku*.

¹¹⁶⁵ The most basic meaning of *giri₁₇-zal* is “joy”. I follow the translation of Black et al., (1998–2006. “Enlil in the Ekur (Enlil A)”), here however, and choose “prosperity” which I find suitable in this context.

¹¹⁶⁶ 143–150. *inim-zu an-šè idim-ma ki-šè temen-àm / an-šè idim gal an-né ús-sa / ki-šè temen ság nu-dí-dam / an-e um-ma-te hé-ĝál-la-àm / an-ta hé-ĝál im-da-šèĝ-šèĝ / ki-a um-ma-te giri₁₇-zal-àm / ki-ta giri₁₇-zal im-da-mú-mú / inim-zu gu-àm inim-zu še-àm*. Transliteration with adaptations, and translation, taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enlil in the Ekur (Enlil A)”).

¹¹⁶⁷ I suppose that the god uttering a creative word is a picture originating from the almighty king giving orders. Also Enki is depicted in this way in “Enki and the world order”, e.g. 21. *ka ba-a-zu níĝ im-lu-lu hé-ĝál ki bí-ib-ús [---] 90–91. an-e um-ma-te im hé-ĝál-la an-ta šèĝ-ĝá / ki-e um-ma-te a ešub ù-ba-ĝál-la-àm*. 21. When you open your mouth everything is multiplying (and) abundance is established. [---] 90–91. “I approach heaven, and rain of abundance is raining from heaven. / I approach earth, and there is a carp flood.” (said of Enki) Transliteration taken from Black et al. (1998–2006.)

¹¹⁶⁸ 147–148. *en gu mú-mú en še mú-mú za-e-me-en / en an-na en hé-ĝál en ki-a za-e-me-en [...] 151. 147–148. en gu mú-mú en še mú-mú za-e-me-en / en an-na en hé-ĝál en ki-a za-e-me-en [...] 150–151. ⁰en-líl an-na ^den-líl lugal-[la]-am en du₁₁-ga-ni níĝ nu-kúr-ru-dam*. Transliteration adapted from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enlil and Ninlil”).

Both the fact that Enlil is acted upon and the fact that Ninlil is so active is rather surprising. Since Enlil is described as a deity that decrees all the destinies, and further produces abundance in heaven and earth, it is rather contradictory that the seven gods who decree destiny (!) have the power to banish him. This cannot be solved by the explanation that the myth is working on two levels, the mythic and the social/human; when Enlil is treated as a human, being expelled from the city, those who expel him belong to the mythic category. In fact, nothing that Enlil *does* poses him as the cosmic creator, this is only *said* about him. This contradictory picture is probably to be explained by the fact that in “Enlil and Ninlil” next to nothing is taking place on a mythic level. All protagonists in this myth are acting on a human level.

The active role of Ninlil has, as the only correspondence in “Enki and Ninhursaga”, the mother goddess herself, although she, as the progeny of Ninhursaga, belongs to a younger generation. Ninlil’s activity is contradictory to Steinkeller’s statement that she was “but a female reflection of Enlil” and “an artificial creation, which was superimposed on the cult of Ninhursaga, the goddess of Tugal and the mother of Ninurta”.¹¹⁶⁹

As was pointed out earlier Steinkeller also sees Enlil as a secondary development in the pantheon.¹¹⁷⁰ Thus, his interpretation is in line with my suggestion that the status of Enlil might have grown higher in Sumer when he was posed as the father of Su’en. This supports my understanding of a development where the mother goddess is an older representative of the creative forces, who becomes contested as the culture develops with large scale irrigation systems and military leaders. In both “Enlil and Ninlil” and “Enki and Ninhursaga” it is shown that the female deity is in need of the male one; Ninlil is seemingly emotional, since she follows Enlil, and regarding Ninhursaga it is shown that she needs Enki in the creative process.

Now I will turn to the children in both of the myths discussed here. A question that will be investigated is whether the sequence of children engendered is haphazard or if they correspond to each other. The sequences in the myths are as seen in the following table.

¹¹⁶⁹ Steinkeller 1999: 114, note 36.

¹¹⁷⁰ This was discussed above under the section 4.13.2. The decreeing of destinies.

Table 10. The children engendered in “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” and “Enlil and Ninlil”

Enki and Ninḫursaġa	Enlil and Ninlil
Ninnisi	Su'en
Ninkura	Nergal-Meslamta'ea
Ninimma	Ninazu
Uttu	Enbilulu

The first child of Enlil and Ninlil is Su'en. It was referred to above in section 4.3. that he played a central role in the birth incantation “the maid of Su'en”.¹¹⁷¹ Thereby he is posited in a context of childbirth. The association to the netherworld is not prominent by Su'en. The netherworld god Lugal-irra could however be identified with Su'en.¹¹⁷² Further, as was pointed out above in footnote 788, there are some cylinder seal depictions where Su'en is rising between two mountains, just as the sun god did, when rising from the netherworld.¹¹⁷³ We have already seen that the relation of the sun god with the mountains also was a relation to the netherworld.¹¹⁷⁴ Like Su'en, Ninnisi was also related to both birth and the netherworld.

The parallel to Nergal-Meslamta'ea is Ninkura. As has been seen, the information on Ninkura is very scarce. She is connected to the netherworld through her name, and she is also found in an elegy to a dead person. Nergal-Meslamta'ea instead, is a well-known deity, sometimes thought of as two separate gods. Nergal was initially thought of as the lord of the netherworld only in Akkade, whereas in Sumer the main gods of the netherworld were Ereškigal and her son Ninazu.¹¹⁷⁵ From the Old Babylonian period the northern and the southern groups of netherworld deities were integrated, as “formalized by the marriage of N[ergal] and Ereškigal”.¹¹⁷⁶ In spite of that the groups continued to be separated in the godlists.¹¹⁷⁷ Thus, Nergal-Meslamta'ea, and seemingly also Ninkura were netherworld deities.

On Ninimma we had comparatively much information, and therefore more ground for comparison. Ninazu means “lord healer/physician”, but he rarely acts as such. As was seen above, section 4.15.3.4., however, there are

¹¹⁷¹ van Dijk 1972: 340f. Stol writes that this birth incantation motif began already in the Sumerian Fāra texts. There are five Akkadian versions of this incantation (2000a: 66).

¹¹⁷² Krebernik 1997a: 366.

¹¹⁷³ Collon 1997b: 372. Archaeologist Dominique Collon has further found that many of the seals earlier interpreted as depicting the sun god in fact are depicting the moon god (1997a: 11).

¹¹⁷⁴ In fact, it seems as if almost all the Sumerian deities had connections to the netherworld, and therefore, if it is not a central trait, the relation to that sphere is not enough to establish a connection between two deities.

¹¹⁷⁵ Wiggermann 2001b: 216f.

¹¹⁷⁶ Wiggermann 2001b: 219.

¹¹⁷⁷ Wiggermann 2001b: 219.

incantations where Ninazu is active against illnesses. Otherwise Ninazu is primarily a chthonic deity, connected with vegetation and decay. In one myth he and his brother Ninmada introduce grain in Sumer,¹¹⁷⁸ and in “Enlil and Ninlil” he is also connected to agriculture. There he is called *lugal éš-ganá-gíd-da*,¹¹⁷⁹ “the lord of the outstretched measuring line”. In this role he is corresponding to Ninimma, who also holds the measuring line.¹¹⁸⁰

Although later seen as the lord of the netherworld, Ninazu was initially its steward. In this capacity he was its *kišib-gal*, seal keeper,¹¹⁸¹ and in Ekur this task was occupied by Ninimma.¹¹⁸² Thus, both deities were seen as administrators. Beside these parallels there are of course several differences. The similarities are enough, though, to suggest that they were thought of as paralleling each other.

The last god engendered by Enlil is Enbilulu, the canal inspector. He is closely identified with Enkimdu, the farmer and son of Enki.¹¹⁸³ Enbilulu is connected to Enki also in “Enki and the world order”, where Enki appoints him as canal inspector.¹¹⁸⁴

At first sight there are perhaps no obvious correlation between Uttu and Enbilulu. I propose though, that the parallel aimed at is that they both represent a “prototype” of the respective gender of the sexes. We have seen that Uttu represents the “earthly woman”, and I suggest that Enbilulu represents the “earthly man” here. One main task of the men in Mesopotamia was to cultivate the earth, and a major part of this work was to dig and maintain the irrigation canals, walls etc. The typical gender models of the sexes can also be found in the birth incantations, but there the male gender is connected to warfare, and not agriculture, and this was the case already in the Early Dynastic IIIa period.¹¹⁸⁵ Instead of interpreting the birth incantation as confuting my interpretation of Enbilulu, I see it as an expression of one side of the male gender model, and Enbilulu as another side of it.

We have seen that both myths introduce the setting of the story at the beginning, but that in “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” this was at the beginning of a creation, and in “Enlil and Ninlil” we are introduced to a social context. The female role as creatress is suppressed in “Enlil and Ninlil”, but just slightly so in “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”. Ninlil is nevertheless active, and this has been suggested to be due to the fact that she was equal to the mother goddess. I have delineated a development of recalibration where the mother goddess initially had the main power to create, which was contested by Enki, the god

¹¹⁷⁸ Wiggermann 2001c: 330f.

¹¹⁷⁹ Behrens 1978: 217, l. 116.

¹¹⁸⁰ See above, section 4.8.

¹¹⁸¹ Wiggermann 2001c: 332.

¹¹⁸² Focke 1998: 197, 201. Here with the spelling *kišib-ġál*.

¹¹⁸³ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Dumuzid and Enkimdu”, ll. 70, 82.

¹¹⁸⁴ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki and the world order”, ll. 272f.

¹¹⁸⁵ Stol: 2000a: 60.

of developed irrigation agriculture. Yet another step on this recalibration process is taken when Enlil is posed as a cosmic creator, seemingly producing abundance just by his will. In both myths the male is needed by the female. Further, we have seen that the four children of the pairs in the respective myths seem to correspond to each other. This strengthens the comprehension that the myths are related, and are engaged in a sort of dialogue with each other.

4.18. Conclusions

In the myth “Enki and Ninhursagâ” the creation is taking place on the level of human sexuality and childbirth. The main preoccupation of the creation is the irrigation agriculture and the society with its rules. The social and cultural categories are related to corporeal categories; irrigation is described as sexual behavior and the island, as a place of long distance trade, is related to childbirth.

One important theme in the myth is the roles of the male and the female during the act of creation. The myth seems to deal with the knowledge that neither of the sexes can create alone. This possibly was an earlier belief regarding the female; my interpretation is that she previously was understood as the sole source of life. We see how the role of the female begins to be recalibrated here; without the irrigating male she is the arid and barren land.

All through the myth the goddess has netherworldly connotations and rules over death (while Enki does not)¹¹⁸⁶ as well as life. This could be due to the close connection between birth and death. Moreover, the mother goddess represents, or even is, earth, and thus is the grave of the dead. In connection to the recalibration of male and female deities in the area of healing and illnesses we saw that the role as healer was increasingly belonging to male deities.

The comparison with “Enlil and Ninlil” has shown that there were similar themes in both myths, and a sort of “mythic dialogue” between them was suggested. This implies that the themes and recalibrations dealt with were of major importance for the mythographers/users of the myths. I have further proposed that the myths express historical phases; Ninhursagâ represents the oldest creative force, presumably as the mother of the Neolithic villages. Enki is the next authority, representing the irrigation agriculture and early city formation. Finally, Enlil is the patriarchal ruler, almost totally repressing the creative force of the female.

¹¹⁸⁶ In fact, Enki does not seem to be a “chthonian” deity or a deity of the netherworld. He does however very often interact with the netherworld; this is one of his main traits in his role as magician. As Kramer and Maier put it: “Enki knows the way in and out of the world below, the world of the dead” (1989: 114). For more information on Enki’s role as magician, see Kramer and Maier’s chapter “The Great Magician” (1989: 99–126).

Our myth also reflects different stages of womanhood, and these are connected to the development of human nature and culture, as comprehended in a patriarchal context. At first we are on Dilmun, a virgin land, which then gets irrigated and at the end also gets domesticated when it get its lord. Similarly the goddesses in our myth are at first virgins, and then the three first daughters of Enki fulfill the female biological task of becoming a mother. Thereafter Uttu is the first woman who acts within a cultural context. Although she is not fulfilling her task as a wife she is representing the earthly, virtuous woman. At the end there are deities that marry, and now the female cycle has come to an end. It is as if the different aspects of womanhood are divided in several agents. Although the contextualizations of the sequences of the myth show that women and goddesses had other tasks than those related to marriage and sexuality, “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa” supports the patriarchal view of women.

5. Enki and Ninmah

5.1. Introduction

5.1.1. Provenience of the sources to “Enki and Ninmah”

Text A of “Enki and Ninmah” was unearthed in Nippur, and from the same mound as was text A of “Enki and Ninhursağa”. As was pointed out regarding “Enki and Ninhursağa”, the archaeologists of that time did not document the exact place of provenience of the texts. We know however that it was found in the area where all the other tablets were found, and that area contained both official buildings and living quarters.¹¹⁸⁷ Texts A, B and C date to the Old Babylonian period, and according to Lambert text A “is no doubt later than Samsu-iluna’s reign”, whereas text B “is probably later”.¹¹⁸⁸ The provenience of texts B and C is not known. There is also a bilingual version from the library of Assurbanipal (c. 668–627 BCE). We only have some fragments of the bilingual version.¹¹⁸⁹ They do not add much new to the understanding of the myth, and will only be referred to occasionally.

5.1.2. A short summary of the content of the myth

Just as in the preceding myth, “Enki and Ninmah” begins with a description of the time of creation; here we read that heaven and earth were created, the destinies determined, and the gods were born. Further, the goddesses were taken in marriage and were distributed in heaven and earth. Then we get a description of the toil of the minor gods; they have to work to produce food for the goddesses and the great gods. They begin to complain and turn against Enki. Therefore Namma, Enki’s mother, asks him to create a substitute who will work instead of the gods. This happens; Enki plans the creation, Namma gives birth and Ninmah stands by her as a midwife.

To celebrate Enki arranges a feast. Enki and Ninmah drink beer and become drunk. Then Ninmah challenges Enki; she can create good or bad ac-

¹¹⁸⁷ Buccellati and Biggs 1969: 1–4, 9; Stone 1987: 2, 33, 35, 37, 76f.

¹¹⁸⁸ Lambert 2013: 330.

¹¹⁸⁹ The Neo-Assyrian version has lines that correspond to ll. 1–14, section I, which are quite damaged, and ll. 30–37 that are even more broken. For section II we have ll. 5–6 that are damaged, and ll. 28, 32–36 that are even more broken (see Lambert 2013: 342ff.).

ording to her will, and decree good and bad destinies as it pleases her. Enki says that he will counterbalance every destiny that Ninmaḥ decrees. The competition starts, Ninmaḥ creates a series of six freaks, and Enki succeeds in decreeing fates for them. Thereafter Enki creates a freak and Ninmaḥ is unable to find a suitable fate for the freak. After a fragmentary passage Ninmaḥ says that her city is ruined and that she herself is a fugitive. As a conclusion it is said that Ninmaḥ could not rival Enki and the latter is praised.

5.2. Who are the minor gods and why do they complain?

5.2.1. Contextualization of the minor gods

The gods working to produce food are called “minor gods”, whereas they have overseers called “great gods”. The former are complaining about their toil, and they are stirring up a controversy. The aggressive feelings are directed towards Enki, presumably in his role as leader of the great gods. Here the relevant passage follows:

The great gods stood at (oversaw?) the work, the minor gods were bearing the toil. / The gods, digging the canals, were heaping up the silt of Ḫarali. / The gods were worried,¹¹⁹⁰ and were making claims (regarding) their life. / At that time, the one of wide wisdom, the creator of all the existing¹¹⁹¹ great gods, / Enki in the deep Engur, where water was dripping – there exists no god who has seen its interior – / was lying in his bed, not rising from his sleep. / The gods were weeping and said: “he caused us the present trouble!”¹¹⁹².

To be able to understand the role of the minor gods, I will, according to my method, contextualize the passage through scholarship on male work done by Assyriologists. When I turn to the scholarship on the Mesopotamian male workers, I will look for characteristics that are found with the working minor gods in “Enki and Ninmaḥ”. Characteristic for these gods is that they pro-

¹¹⁹⁰ This reading is based upon the suggestion by Lambert who writes that “[t]he meaning of IM ir is not certain. [...] The compound verb zi-ir = *ašāsu* would be apposite, and perhaps ni ir is a variant of it” (2013: 502).

¹¹⁹¹ An attempt to translate ḡál-ḡál.

¹¹⁹² I: 9–15. diḡir šár-šár kíḡ-ḡá al-su₈-ge-eš diḡir tur-tur du₆(TER)-lum im-íl-íl-e-ne / diḡir i₇-dun-dun-ù-nè saḡar-bi ḡa-ra-li im-dub-dub-bu-ne / diḡir ní ir-ir-re-ne zi-bi inim àm-ma-ḡar-re-ne / u₄-ba ḡeš₇tú daḡal mud diḡir šár-šár ḡál-ḡál / ^den-ki-ke engur bùru a sur-ra ki diḡir na-me šà-bé u₆ nu-um-me / ki-nú-ni i-nú ù-ku nu-um-zi-zi / diḡir ér-ra im-pà-pà-dè a-nir ḡál i-ak im-me-ne. Transliteration adapted from Lambert (2013: 334, 336). All transliterations of “Enki and Ninmaḥ” in this work are adapted from Lambert (2013). The translations are always mine, when not otherwise stated. I am naturally influenced, very much helped, and inspired by the interpretation of other scholars.

duce food for their wives,¹¹⁹³ that they (probably) have overseers at work, that they are digging canals and heap up silt. Further, they are discontented with their situation and they hold the leader responsible for it.¹¹⁹⁴

When turning to the Mesopotamian society to try to find the references for the minor gods I will look at the Old Babylonian period, since “Enki and Ninmah” was copied in this period. Further, since the text that has come down to us does not have to be the first version, I will also shortly turn to the previous periods regarding male work.

5.2.1.1. The male workers

A clear correspondence of the minor gods in the Mesopotamian society, are the conscripted men who worked for state and temple, maintaining and digging canals. There was a long tradition of collective forced male – and female – labor in Mesopotamia. The oldest information on collective labor is dating from the late Uruk period, i.e. as soon as we have written sources. Sumerologist Robert Englund writes about this in his paper “Texts from the Late Uruk Period”.¹¹⁹⁵ He has a perspective of power, which could help us to understand the complaint of the minor gods. He writes that:

[p]roto-cuneiform documents seem [...] to reward us with the intriguing, albeit obscure information about the organization and exploitation of men and women, whose labor and low maintenance created the economic surpluses requisite for a growing urban elite [...].¹¹⁹⁶

The people recorded in these documents were men and women, KUR_a and MUNUS, signs that according to Englund probably refer to the respective genitalia of the sexes.¹¹⁹⁷ In one text both men and women are ordered in groups of about 20 persons, and at the end they are summed up as 211 men and women. It is not apparent in the discussion of this text whether both men and women were listed together in the groups, but when Englund refers to another text the sexes are separated.¹¹⁹⁸ Englund means that we could conventionally call these workers slaves, until we can define their status more

¹¹⁹³ The wives will be dealt with in the following section.

¹¹⁹⁴ Enki is called “the creator of all the great gods”, and I assume that he is representing the leader.

¹¹⁹⁵ The texts discussed by Englund do not in fact tell us that these people worked and in that case with what. He refers to two texts that could be broken ration lists though (Englund 1998: 178, figure 67, 181, figure 68). Moreover, textual evidence of later periods suggests that we deal with workers here.

¹¹⁹⁶ Englund 1998: 176.

¹¹⁹⁷ Englund writes that the compound MUNUS.KUR_a (= géme) originally represented both female and male workers (1998: 176). A common interpretation of this compound is instead “woman of the mountains” (e.g. Maekawa 1987: 52.).

¹¹⁹⁸ Englund 1998: 176ff.

precisely.¹¹⁹⁹ Thus, already in this early society there were groups of men working for the state,¹²⁰⁰ who most probably had reasons to complain.

Regarding the periods after the Uruk period, down to and including the Old Babylonian period, the people we are looking for are not those called “(male) slaves”, *arad/árad*, Akk. *wardu*, but male laborers not defined as slaves, although performing forced labor. Slaves are said to have been an insignificant and unimportant group in the Early Dynastic IIIb and Sargonic periods,¹²⁰¹ and the work force mainly consisted of male laborers and not slaves also in the Ur III period, as well as in the Old Babylonian period.¹²⁰²

During the Early Dynastic IIIb period, the male workers collectively doing forced labor were called RU-lugal,¹²⁰³ and during the Sargonic period the men doing the same work were called *lú*.¹²⁰⁴ During the Ur III period, they were individually called *ĝuruš*, or collectively groups of workers/troops, *éren*.¹²⁰⁵ During the Old Babylonian period the troops were referred to with the Akkadian word *šābu*, which can be translated as e.g. “group of people”, “contingent of workers” and “troop of soldiers”.¹²⁰⁶ Sometimes the word was written syllabically (*ša-bu*), but quite often also with the Sumerian logogram ÉREN.¹²⁰⁷ The Old Babylonian individual workers were called *eṭlu*, which means “(able-bodied) man”,¹²⁰⁸ corresponding to Sumerian *ĝuruš*.

When writing about different terms for forced labor in the Old Babylonian period, Stol states that the most common word for this labor in Akkadian is *tupšikku*, a word that refers to the carrying of a basket with construction materials, or rather the basket itself.¹²⁰⁹ From the Sargonic period the word

¹¹⁹⁹ That Englund comprehends MUNUS (earlier read SAL) and KUR_a as slaves is also seen when he writes that “archaic texts from Jemdet Nasr more precisely qualified laborers designated as SAL and KUR_a with the signs SAG+MA [...] and ERIM [=ÉREN, my comment]”, the sign SAG+MA depicted a head with a cord around its neck, and ÉREN represented a yoke. Englund understands the sign SAG+MA to refer to captives, and likewise ÉREN is understood as denoting captives fettered by a yoke. He understands these people as forced laborers. (1998: 179). Therefore, if, as Englund suggests, MUNUS and KUR_a are abbreviations of MUNUS or KUR_a SAG+MA/ÉREN the conclusion that they were slaves is not far away.

¹²⁰⁰ The temples were large landowners, and initially the god of the city was the one who owned the land. Thus, the workers did their labor also for the temple. In reality, however, it was the upper classes that ran the temple, and the king installed the administrator, *saĝa*, Akk. *šangû* there (van der Toorn 1996: 15f., 33).

¹²⁰¹ Bauer 1998: 534; Westenholz 1999: 68.

¹²⁰² For the Ur III period, see e.g. Maekawa (1987), Steinkeller (1987) and Waetzoldt (1987), for the Old Babylonian period, see e.g. Stol (2004, chapters 8 and 9).

¹²⁰³ Bauer 1998: 534; Maekawa 1987: e.g. 49, 55.

¹²⁰⁴ Westenholz 1999: 62.

¹²⁰⁵ Sallaberger 1999: e.g. 310f., 323f.; Maekawa 1998: 56. See also id. 1987: 63f., 69. *gême* is the female correspondence to *ĝuruš*. The word ÉREN means both “to tie up, harness” and “team-worker” (Steinkeller 1990a).

¹²⁰⁶ CAD S sub *šābu*.

¹²⁰⁷ Stol 2004: 742, 745.

¹²⁰⁸ CAD E sub *eṭlu*.

¹²⁰⁹ Stol 2004: 751; CAD T sub *tupšikku*.

also means corvée labor.¹²¹⁰ Another common term for forced labor is *ilku*, and according to Frankena the difference between *ilku* and *tupšikku* is that whereas only some people had to do *ilku*, all could be conscripted to *tupšikku*.¹²¹¹ *tupšikku* has a variant *šupšikku* in the passage in the Atrahasis myth that is very similar in content to the part of the discontented working gods in our myth. The term *tupšikku* is further attested in an Old Assyrian birth incantation where we meet the mother goddess under her name Šassur, “womb”, accompanied by “seven and seven” daughters.¹²¹² The term *tupšikku* also occurs as a Sumerian variant in “Enki and Ninmah”, as *zubsig* (wr. *zub-sig*).¹²¹³

A further term that refers to corvée labor in our myth is the verb *kéš* with which the noun *zubsig* is constructed in section I, lines 30 and 37, and which is found without *zubsig* in section I, line 8. Here follow the three relevant lines:

The gods – their rations were delivered, x they were bound to their dining-room.

My mother! My creature, your “make it!”, will come into existence. Tie (to him) the (carrying of) baskets of the gods!

My mother! You will decide his (lit. its) destiny; Ninmah will bind the basket (to him).¹²¹⁴

The verb *kéš* is found in an Early Dynastic IIIb text from Ĝirsu-Lagaš dealing with laborers active at canal work.¹²¹⁵ Thus, a male work force is also here bound to the corvée work through the verb *kéš*:

Workers bound (by treaties) were assigned¹²¹⁶ (to the work).¹²¹⁷

¹²¹⁰ CAD T sub *tupšikku*.

¹²¹¹ Stol 2004: 751.

¹²¹² Kouwenberg and Fincke 2012–2013: 142, 145.

¹²¹³ This understanding of the Sumerian word is suggested by Benito (1969: 57).

¹²¹⁴ I: 8. diĝir kurum₆-ma-bi(-)a(-)ab-du₈ x únu-bi-šè ba-ab-kéš-a 30. ama-ĝu₁₀¹(NI) mud-ĝu₁₀ ĝar-ra-zu ì-ĝál-la-àm zub-sig diĝir-re-e-ne kéš-i 37. ama-ĝu₁₀ za-e nam-bi ù-mu-e-tar⁹ ninmah-e zub-sig-bi hé-kéš. Transliteration adapted from Lambert (2013: 334, 336).

¹²¹⁵ Bauer 1972: 56ff. For the work at canals during the Early Dynastic IIIb period, see also Sumerologist Tohru Maeda (1984: 33–53).

¹²¹⁶ Bauer translates *dab₅* as “to take over” (übernehmen) (1972: 57, 61), whereas Maeda reads it as “to assign” (1984: 34). The basic meaning of *dab₅* is “to take, seize”, but can also be used in a causative sense: “to make somebody take”, and thus “to assign”. I find that the context of forced labor makes it preferable to choose the translation of Maeda.

¹²¹⁷ III, 2. éren zú kéš-rá e-dab₅. Bauer reads bir KA-kéš-de₆ e-dab₅ (1972: 56). Steinkeller suggests that ÉREN is to be read *sur_x* when followed by -r in ED IIIb and Early Sargonic sources and not *bir*. He writes that ÉREN is not followed by -r after Early Sargonic times. Further, the sign LAL gets the value *sur₅* during the Old Babylonian period. He concludes that the value [sur] was transferred from the sign ÉREN to the sign LAL during the Sargonic or Ur

In our myth we see that the verb is used once of the minor gods and twice of the first man. In the myth the verb is not, as in the administrative text from Ĝirsu-Lagaš, a compound with zú(KA). According to Sumerologist Josef Bauer KA-kéš(da) corresponds to Akk. *rakāsu*, “to bind (by a treaty)”.¹²¹⁸ Also van Dijk and Kramer/Maier understand kéš in line 30 as referring to the forced labor of the male workers.¹²¹⁹ Thus, when contextualized we see that the terms used about the minor gods, as well as the first man, point to forced labor for the state.

As a matter of fact, the éren could sometimes have been not only semi-free, but also slaves. In his paper on prisoners of war Assyriologist Ignace Gelb writes that the term éren is ambivalent, since it is applied on both native workers and prisoners of war. The word éren was even originally used to designate the war captives, and only during the Ur III period was it used on the native male workers.¹²²⁰ According to Gelb, the éren of foreign origin were the second largest source of male workers in Ur III times. Gelb pointed out at the time of writing his paper, that the fact that a large amount of workers in Mesopotamia were prisoners of war had not yet been discussed within Assyriology.¹²²¹

Until now we have contextualized the working minor gods, and seen that they reflect men in the Mesopotamian society active in canal work. I will now turn to possible factors that may have constituted grounds for complaint. For one thing, the amount of work might have been grounds for complaint, as well as the tasks to be done.

5.2.1.2. The conscription and work per year

The rations that the male workers received can be an indication of how many months per year they worked for the state. Maekawa writes that the workers during the Early Dynastic IIIb period received barley rations the last four or five months of the year.¹²²² Regarding the Ur III period some sources indicate about five months of barley rations, but this is not completely clear. Maekawa concludes that we can at least reckon with two months of service for the workers during Ur III period.¹²²³ When we come down to the Old Babylonian period it is clear that the working men had to work for the state

III periods (1990a: 9f.). In this work I will throughout read ÉREN as representing the value éren. Regarding the verb it is now read zú—kéš, see Cavigneaux and al-Rawi (1995: 36f.).

¹²¹⁸ Bauer 1972: 60; *AHw* sub *rakāsu*. I will neither enter a discussion of the form of these treatises, nor whether the verb perhaps rather shall be understood as “to be bound by a duty”. Suffice for now is that the verb kéš in our myth has a correspondence in a text dealing with late Early Dynastic irrigation workers being bound to work.

¹²¹⁹ Kramer and Maier 1989: 32f.; van Dijk 1964: 29.

¹²²⁰ Gelb 1973: 84f. See Englund who comes to the same conclusion regarding the ÉREN in the late Uruk period (1998: 179, and above fn. 1199).

¹²²¹ Gelb 1973: 95.

¹²²² Maekawa 1987: 60.

¹²²³ Maekawa 1987: 65.

for four months each year. Further, the state had the right to conscript workers whenever it wanted.¹²²⁴ During the Early Dynastic IIIb period the workers also worked in-between conscriptions, whereas during the Ur III period the workers could be hired to do further work between the conscriptions.¹²²⁵

In the Old Babylonian period the picture is a bit different. Now there were people who were exempted from the conscription for work for the state, in Akkadian called *muškēnu*.¹²²⁶ Further, in this period it was also quite common to present a substitute (Akk. *taḥḥu*, Sum. *daḥ*) for the forced labor. The substitute was according to Stol taken from the family, and the order of who was in turn was put down in lists. The brother was the first to replace the conscripted person, and secondarily his father was to do his work.¹²²⁷ To note though, is that it seems to have been possible to present a substitute also during the Early Dynastic III period, and according to Bauer the designation of this person as “brother” was not a kinship term, but just meant “substitute”.¹²²⁸

Under King Ḥammurabi work could only be replaced by means of work carried out by other people, but during the late Old Babylonian period it was quite common to pay in order to avoid forced work.¹²²⁹ The work for the state can be seen as a sort of tax; instead of payment in some sort of currency the people paid through workload.¹²³⁰ The payment for escaping the four months of conscription was two shekels of silver. Thus, if a man had assets, he could either send a substitute, or in the later period buy himself out of all duties for the state. Stol illustrates this situation as follows: “ein Scheich, der nicht mit seinem Stamme erschienen war, erklärte: ‘Ich habe Silber für meinen Stamm (*līmu*) gegeben.’”¹²³¹ Thus, the four months of work was something that people in general wanted to avoid. The least wanted task for the conscripts was that of a soldier. Also in that case, the men who were able, let another man be conscripted as a substitute.¹²³²

The idea of a substitute is found also both in the Atraḥasīs myth and in our myth. In the Atraḥasīs myth Ea (Akk. for Enki) says to the mother goddess under her name Bēlet-ilī:

You are indeed the womb goddess, creatress of mankind. Create man, and he may bear the yoke; he may bear the yoke, Enlil’s assignment. Let man carry the toil of the gods!¹²³³

¹²²⁴ Stol 2004: 755f.

¹²²⁵ Maekawa 1987: 69.

¹²²⁶ Stol 2004: 732.

¹²²⁷ Stol 2004: 742.

¹²²⁸ Bauer 1998: 534.

¹²²⁹ Stol 2004: 732.

¹²³⁰ Stol 2004: 747.

¹²³¹ Stol 2004: 741.

¹²³² Stol 2004: 740.

¹²³³ 194–197. *at-ti-i-ma šà-as-sú-ru ba-ni-a-at a-wi-lu-ti / bi-ni-ma lu-ul-la-a li-bi-il₅ ab-ša-nam / ab-ša-nam li-bi-il ši-pi-ir^d en-lil / šu-up-ši-ik ilim a-wi-lum li-iš-ši*. Transliteration taken

In our myth, I: 23, Namma says to her son Enki:

Create a substitute for the gods, (so that) they can slacken their toil!¹²³⁴

The word translated as “substitute” in our myth is *kíĝ-sì*. Benito follows van Dijk when translating it as “substitute”.¹²³⁵ Also Lambert gives this translation.¹²³⁶ The word *kíĝ* means “work”, and *sì* means e.g. “to put” and “to place”,¹²³⁷ corresponding to Akk. *šakānu*.¹²³⁸ I understand this construction as a sentence with a non-finite verbal form, meaning something like “(one) to put at the work”.¹²³⁹ Benito writes about our term that “it may be taken as a phonetic writing of *kíĝ-sig* ‘meal’, but it seems not to fit the present context”.¹²⁴⁰ I would say that this could be a word play, and perhaps the reason for choosing the rare expression *kíĝ-sì*; if we read “meal” we could instead read: “Create (the one [i.e. man] of) the meal of the gods, so that they can slacken their toil!”.

5.2.1.3. The tasks of the male workers

I will now turn to the question of what the minor gods as well as their poor substitutes had to do when put to work. Maekawa discusses a tablet, *TSA* 23, which is the largest known dealing with collective labor on canals during the Early Dynastic IIIb period.¹²⁴¹ From the text Maekawa estimates that each worker had to clean at least about 1 meter of canal, but later informs us that “men receiving the largest amount of barley were often obligated to dig 24 *šu-dù-a* [4 meters, my comment] per capita”.¹²⁴² I suppose that these figures are work demanded each day.

Examples of work recorded in the sources from the Ur III period are e.g. to carry wood, reed and clay, to dig earth and transport by boat.¹²⁴³ These tasks seem to be related to the building and maintenance of the irrigation

from Lambert and Millard 1999: 56. The source is a Neo-Assyrian manuscript, since these lines are more complete in that version. A similar writing is found also in the Old Babylonian manuscript G of the myth (see *ibid.* 54–55). The translation partly follows that of Lambert and Millard.

¹²³⁴ I: 23. *kíĝ-sì dim-mi-ir-e-ne-ke₄ ù-mu-[x x]-dím du_x(TER)-lum-bi ħa-ba-tu-lu-[n]e*. Transliteration taken from Lambert (2013: 336).

¹²³⁵ Benito 1969: 36, 51.

¹²³⁶ Lambert 2013: 337.

¹²³⁷ Cf. Lambert who points to the meaning “to be similar, equal”, Akk. *mašālu*, of *sì* (2013: 503).

¹²³⁸ See *ePSD* and Black et al. (1998–2006) sub *sig₉* and *sig₁₀*.

¹²³⁹ Cf. Thomsen’s discussion of asyntactic non-finite verbal forms. A writing that is very close to our term is *dubsar*, “scribe”, which she interprets as (*lú*) *dub sar*, literally meaning “(the one) writing on tablets” (2001: 254, 257ff.).

¹²⁴⁰ Benito 1969: 52.

¹²⁴¹ Maekawa 1987: 54, figure 1. If we understand the two designations of the *RU-lugal* that Maekawa mentions as two subgroups, this figure is not 1093, but 1745 (*ibid.* 57).

¹²⁴² Maekawa 1987: 56f., 59.

¹²⁴³ Sallaberger 1999: 313.

system. The records from Umma also inform us about the work on the canals, important working sites in the whole province.¹²⁴⁴ The work on the canals is central also during the Old Babylonian period; besides the conscriptions to the royal campaigns, the most important work to be done was that of maintenance of the canals. The term of this latter work was in Akkadian *epēri nasāḫu*, “to dig up silt”.¹²⁴⁵ In our myth we have the expression *saḫar dub* “to heap up silt”, which is quite similar to the Akkadian expression.¹²⁴⁶

An indication of what the workers did further can be found in the text “The debate between Hoe and Plough”, written down in the Old Babylonian period. Since it is stated in this text that the hoe enabled the male worker (*ḡuruš*) to support his wife and children,¹²⁴⁷ I assume that the hoe was a central working tool for the working men. In the text the hoe says about his tasks that he is going out in the fields before the plough (Sum. *apin*); he opens up the fields, removes the weeds, and heaps up stumps and roots for the plough. Further he says that whereas the time of duty of the hoe is 12 months, the plough only works for four months. Although the *ḡuruš* was probably not the only worker who used the hoe, I assume that the preparatory work on the fields was made by these men. Further, the statement that the hoe was at service 12 months reflects the earlier statement that the *ḡuruš* of the Old Babylonian period could be conscripted all year, something that seems to have been the rule also during the Early Dynastic IIIb period. The picture given in “The debate between Hoe and Plough” is that the working men had quite hard tasks to perform, and also the fact that they could be conscripted the whole year probably was a cause of discontent.

5.2.1.4. The income of the male workers

Other grounds for complaint can have been the amount and kind of wages the workers received. Gelb makes an outline of the development of communities from the pre- and protohistoric periods and throughout history, and he writes that in the protohistoric period the tribe or clan owned the land.¹²⁴⁸ We can imagine that the land was cultivated in rather large units in the beginning. When the city-states developed, large parts of the land instead became the property of the crown and the temples.¹²⁴⁹ From the Early Dynastic IIIb period we have administrative texts from the temple of Bau,¹²⁵⁰ which

¹²⁴⁴ Sallaberger 1999: 323ff.

¹²⁴⁵ Stol 2004: 752, 755.

¹²⁴⁶ *epēru* and *saḫar* are complete equivalents.

¹²⁴⁷ Black et al. 1998–2006. “The debate between Hoe and Plough”, ll.82ff., 105f., 138.

¹²⁴⁸ Gelb 1972a: 89.

¹²⁴⁹ According to Diakonoff, there was a private sector where the land was owned by extended families, and this was the case from the Early Dynastic period and down through the second millennium (the first millennium is not discussed by Diakonoff) (1996: 55ff.).

¹²⁵⁰ As was stated in section 2.1.2.2., the household initially called *é-munus* “the house(hold) of the woman” when taken care of by the queen, was called *é-ba-ú* “the house(hold) of Bau” under Uru’*inim*gina (Maekawa 1980: 81).

come from a time span of thirteen years.¹²⁵¹ In these texts we can read that the workers called RU-lugal received allotments of land as a compensation for their work.¹²⁵² Their plots were very small, and related to the family level.¹²⁵³ This supposedly must have been inefficient because of e.g. salination.¹²⁵⁴ Perhaps some workers could not support their families on their land and their rations.

In the Sargonic period the workers were paid with monthly rations of barley. Westenholz writes that, “you could reckon with provisions to keep you and your dependents alive – nothing more”.¹²⁵⁵ No wonder then, some of the workers in the ration lists were noted to have fled.¹²⁵⁶ During the Ur III period the workers probably received rations only during their conscription, but otherwise earned a living through allotted fields. This is assumed both since they did not work for the state year-round, and since people who somehow could not count on getting a harvest are mentioned as needing barley from the state.¹²⁵⁷

Also in the Old Babylonian period the people working for the state received their wages either as barley rations or as allotted fields.¹²⁵⁸ Stol writes that it becomes clear in the royal correspondence of King Hammurabi that he aimed at reducing the number of people receiving rations, and instead giving them fields for maintenance. Those having fields nevertheless received barley for the field and the oxen.¹²⁵⁹

¹²⁵¹ Bauer 1998: 532. According to Maekawa, we have information on the last twenty years of the Early Dynastic IIIb period in Girsu. Further, he argues that the texts are not temple documents, but administrative texts from the *é-munus*, the household run by the queen. He means that there was only a fictive identification between *é-munus* and *é-d⁴ba-ú* (1987: 49f.). I will not enter the discussion of the relation between the *é-munus* and the *é-d⁴ba-ú*, since it is of minor relevance for the discussion of the workers.

¹²⁵² Bauer 1998: 534.

¹²⁵³ Bauer writes regarding Early Dynastic IIIb period that a plot of 2 iku could support a small family (1998: 535). During the Ur III period the smallest plots of the workers were 2 iku, and they could be up to 4,5 iku. (Maekawa 1987: 52; Waetzoldt 1987: 134). During these periods the workers also received barely allotments. Waetzoldt concludes regarding the Ur III period that the income of a family with a father, a mother and three children was just enough to keep the family alive (1987: 134). One document from the Old Babylonian period tells us that a shepherd received a field of 9 iku, so that he did not also claim barley rations, and in another document we read that a soldier received two fields of 3 iku each, so that he would not go and ask for barley rations. Stol concludes from these documents that they indicate that the state wanted the workers to support themselves only on their plots rather than a combination of their own yields and barley from the state (Stol 2004: 734). The relatively small plots of the workers of all three periods do indicate that the plots were not intended to support large, extended families.

¹²⁵⁴ Postgate 1992: 180f.; 189. Cf. Stone 1987: 14f.

¹²⁵⁵ Westenholz 1999: 61f. with fn. 250.

¹²⁵⁶ Westenholz 1999: 62.

¹²⁵⁷ Sallaberger 1999: 312.

¹²⁵⁸ Stol 2004: 732.

¹²⁵⁹ Stol 2004: 734.

5.2.1.5. Summary regarding grounds for complaint

The sources indicate changes in the relation between the state and the workers during the discussed period. One change suggested by Maekawa is that in the process when the society turned from city-states to an empire, there was “a gradual invalidation of the principle that the great public institutions (the royal household and the temples) should conscript, for collective labor, the men to whom these institutions allotted land”.¹²⁶⁰ According to Maekawa the allotment of land was gradually replaced by the allotment of barley during the Ur III period, which was then changed back to allotment of land in the Old Babylonian period. Another change during the Ur III period was that the workers who had finished their service could be hired to do further work between the conscriptions. During the Early Dynastic IIIb period the workers also worked in-between their conscriptions, but they were not considered as hired,¹²⁶¹ but had to work anyway. As was seen above, this seems to have been the case also during the Old Babylonian period.

We have seen above that there were several grounds for complaint for the working men. The conscription was generally disliked, which is also indicated by the hatred we meet in later sources directed towards the official who gathered the conscripts.¹²⁶² A further ground for discontent could have been that the fruits of civilization could only be enjoyed in the cities, and thus the major part of the workers could not partake in it on a daily basis.¹²⁶³

The conscript officials, as well as the ordering of workers on tablets, and the men working in work gangs, show that they were subordinated to the officials and the administration of the state. Further, each group of working men had an overseer,¹²⁶⁴ which also seems to be the case regarding the working gods.

The discontent of the minor gods is not directed towards the great gods, but towards Enki. They say that he is the one responsible for their toil. In the previous chapter I argued that Enki represented the local leader, organizing the irrigation work. I propose that we shall understand his role as ruler also in this myth. One argument for that is that he is the father of the great gods, and thus has a role as leader among them. Further, the distance of Enki from the minor gods could also indicate that he even is a king in the more developed society with city-states or even larger states. If Enki represents the king, the anger of the minor gods is directed toward the right person since the king was responsible for the irrigation projects and the conscription of work forces.

¹²⁶⁰ Maekawa 1987: 49.

¹²⁶¹ Maekawa 1987: 68f.

¹²⁶² Westenholz 1999: 63.

¹²⁶³ Westenholz writes that the main part of the people lived in the countryside, but that the culture blossomed in the cities (1999: 60).

¹²⁶⁴ Maekawa 1987: 54, figure 1; 64 (Early Dynastic IIIb and Ur III); Westenholz 1999: 62 (the Sargonic period); Stol 2004: 743 (Old Babylonian period).

The distance between king and subjects was a reality during the Sargonic period, and regarding this Westenholz writes: “We should not forget that most of Sargon’s or Naramsin’s subjects only knew about their kings from hearsay, so the idea of the Sargonic kings as ‘living legends’ may not be far out”.¹²⁶⁵ We do not have to assume that the society mirrored in our myth corresponds to that of the vast empire of the Sargonic period. But I believe that we do have to seek its correspondence in the society with a distinct administrative hierarchy, where the king had officials carrying out tasks of leadership as representatives for him.

5.2.1.6. The working men as husbands and fathers

As a last point I will turn to the statement that the gods had wives. Also this is supported by other sources. For one thing, we saw that also according to the literary text “The debate between Hoe and Plough” the *ġuruš* worked to support his wife and children. The scholars working with administrative and practical sources also assume that the male workers from the Early Dynastic IIIb to the Ur III period had families,¹²⁶⁶ and regarding the Old Babylonian period we know that this was the case. The allotted field was inherited from father to son(s), as was the *corvée* work. Further, if the man died before the sons were adults, his widow was to take care of the allotted field, and also to perform the husband’s work for the state.¹²⁶⁷ I will shortly turn to the wives of the minor gods after having discussed the ideological implications of the section on the minor gods.

5.2.2. Ideological aspects of the minor gods

The categories in this section of the myth are the minor gods, the great gods and Enki, who is the ruler. The minor gods are subordinated to the great gods, as well as to Enki; the latter seems to be a rather remote ruler who does not commonly interact with his lowliest subjects. At the same time Enki is vulnerable to the opinions of the minor gods; when they complain he has to take to action to change the situation.

The contextualizing material shows that the workers throughout the period in question were “semi-free”, and bound to conscriptions of the state. They had a very low income, whereas the surplus of their work went to the urban elite. Our myth gives a picture that the workers were freed from their work – but we will see that the tasks were only moved to the newly created human being. This is mirroring the male workers’ use of a substitute in the

¹²⁶⁵ Westenholz 1999: 23.

¹²⁶⁶ Gelb 1972a: 87, chart III; id. 1979a: 293f.; Maekawa 1987: 64. Cf. Jacobsen who states that the *ġuruš* could be married, but that their wives continued to live with their parents until the husband arranged a household of his own (1993: 70, fn. 5; 76). He does not refer to any sources to support this however.

¹²⁶⁷ Stol 2004: 737, 739f.

society. As I see it, there is no recalibration of the categories in this sequence. Instead it seems to mirror historical situations when the workers were prone to complain. It can be said that the passage on the working gods and the creation of their substitute is a way to establish man's role in society, thus justifying the ranking between lords (corresponding to the gods) and working men (corresponding to the substitute of the minor gods); the ordinary man was created to take over the toil of the gods, and to provide them with food. Through the mythical framework this role is established as unquestionable; man was created for this purpose only.

5.3. The wives of the minor gods

5.3.1. Contextualization of the wives of the minor gods

The wives of the minor gods are found at the beginning of the myth, and there the settlement of gender seems to be inherent in creation:

At the coming of the days – on the day when heaven wa[s separated] from earth. / At the coming of the nights – on the night when heaven and earth we[re put] there. (?) [x x x] / When the [Anu]na gods had been born / When the gods took the goddesses in marriage / when the gods and goddesses were distributed in heaven and earth, / when the gods and goddesses x x x x, they became pregnant and gave birth, / The gods – their rations were delivered, x they were bound to their¹²⁶⁸ dining-room.¹²⁶⁹

Here we see a rather stereotypical image of the female gender. The goddesses are passive objects of distribution and their role is to be wife and mother. The role of the gods seems to be related to the sustenance of the goddesses and their common progeny. We have already met these gender roles in the preceding chapter; the males produce in order that the females shall reproduce. And through the reproduction a continued production is secured.

In the translation above we read that, “the gods took the goddesses in marriage”. The verb here used is *tuku*, which in combination with the noun *dam* “spouse”, or the abstract *nam-dam*, is the common word for “take in marriage”, and therefore I assume that this is meant here. The general meaning of the verb *tuku* is “to have”.¹²⁷⁰ The latter meaning implies that we do not have to understand the expression as referring to an act of factual *taking* (of a wife). Nevertheless the wives/goddesses are acted upon. This is in ac-

¹²⁶⁸ The goddesses’?

¹²⁶⁹ I: 1–2. [u₄ ri-a-ta] u₄ an ki-’ta’ b[ad-rá-a-ba] / [ĝe₆ ri-a-ta ĝ]e₆ an ki-a ĝa[r-ra-a-ba] [...] / 5–8. diĝir amalu nam-númun-šè ba-tuku-a-ba / diĝir amalu an ki-a ba-ĥal-ĥal-la-a-ba / diĝir amalu a x NI² NI² x-a-peš₁₁ ù-tu-da-a-ba / diĝir kurum₆-ma-bi(-)a(-)ab-du₈ x únu-bi-šè ba-ab-kéš-a. Transliteration adapted from Lambert (2013: 334). The writing ^dama-^dINANA/MÛŠ (so Lambert) shall according to Cavigneaux and al-Rawi be read as *amalu* (1995: 20, 31).

¹²⁷⁰ See Thomsen 2001: 320.

cordance with the patriarchal marriage customs in ancient Mesopotamia. Marriage customs are thoroughly dealt with by several scholars,¹²⁷¹ and I therefore refer to them for those interested in that subject.

In the section on the working gods we saw that they pointed out Enki, the ruler, as responsible for their toil. Further, we saw that in “The debate between Hoe and Plough” it was said that the male worker worked to support his wife and children. Thus, it seems possible to understand “The gods [...] they were bound to their dining-room” in the sequence above to mean that the male gods were bound to support their wives. One gets the impression here, that the wives of the minor gods are passive and do not partake in work. We have already seen in the chapter on historical background that this was the ideal, whereas the reality was that most women had to work to help support the family. I will here try to identify the wives of the working men, and then I will discuss their tasks.

5.3.1.1. The female workers *gème*

The *gème* are the female workers said to correspond to the male workers. There is some research on female workers,¹²⁷² but in general publications dealing with work and social groups, you have to look for women in footnotes and within brackets.¹²⁷³ One problem when looking at the *gème* and their alleged male counterparts is that they do not wholly correspond to each other; the Sumerian word *gème* is understood as the designation of both “female slave” and “female semi-free serf”, whereas for the corresponding males two words are used: *arad/árad* for male slave, and *RU-lugal*, *lú* and *ĝuruš* for “male semi-free serf” depending on period. In the Old Babylonian period the everyday language was instead Akkadian. Here *wardu* corresponds to Sumerian *arad/árad* and *amtu* to *gème*. It was pointed to above that the Sumerian word *ĝuruš* corresponds to Akkadian *eṭlu*, which means “young man”.¹²⁷⁴ In both the Proto-Ea and a secondary branch of the Proto-Ea lexical series (both dating to the Old Babylonian period, the secondary branch being somewhat younger), the Sumerian sign KAL is equated to among others both *eṭlu* and *wardu*.¹²⁷⁵ This could suggest that the *eṭlu* had serflike connotations, just like the *ĝuruš*.

Akkadian *amtu* means slave woman, whereas the word *wardatu*, besides the word *sinništu*, was used as denoting women in general.¹²⁷⁶ The female

¹²⁷¹ See e.g. Neumann 1987: 131–137; Ebeling 1938: 281–286; id. 1971: 9ff.; Finkelstein 1966: 366f. Further, Lerner writes on the subject, using secondary sources (1986: 101–122). See also above, sections 2.1.2.4. and 4.10.1.

¹²⁷² E.g. Waetzoldt (1972); Maekawa (1980); Lafont (2013) and Michel (2013).

¹²⁷³ Such as Powell (ed.) (1987) and Edzard (ed.) (1972).

¹²⁷⁴ CAD E sub *eṭlu*. See also Marchesi (2004: 191f.).

¹²⁷⁵ Civil et al. 1979: 45, ll. 342, 344; *ibid.*, 127, ll. 1015f.

¹²⁷⁶ CAD S sub *sinništu* translates the word as “female” and “woman”, attested in the Old Assyrian and Old Babylonian and later Akkadian dialects. The term *wardatu* instead, is trans-

counterpart of the *eṭlu* was the *wardatu*, and the *amtu* generally had the *wardu* as her counterpart. Thus, in Akkadian the female slave and the female correspondence to the male worker were designated differently, in contrast to the Sumerian vocabulary.

Regarding the Sumerian, I shall here take the correspondence between the RU-lugal, the *lú* and the *ġuruš* and the *ġéme* as a starting-point, and try to draw an outline of the latter. In the Old Babylonian society instead, the wives of the male workers are not to be sought among the *amtu*.

The largest group of *ġéme* was those working as weavers for the state. These women were listed with their children in the ration lists.¹²⁷⁷ From the Early Dynastic IIIb period of Lagaš the sources on workers come from the *émunus* “the household of the woman”, which was the household of the queen. The amount of weavers in the Early Dynastic IIIb period Lagaš was modest; in three tables by Maekawa we see that during the first year of Uru’iningina at three different months 92, 138 and 169 *ġéme* respectively, were listed.¹²⁷⁸ The Ur III sources come from the administration of the public institutions of the whole city of Ġirsu-Lagaš.¹²⁷⁹ According to Maekawa the textile industry in Lagaš of the Ur III period employed 6406 female weavers,¹²⁸⁰ whereas Assyriologist Hartmut Waetzoldt writes that more than 15,000 people worked here.¹²⁸¹ Besides the work in the textile industry *ġéme* also commonly worked in the mills during the Ur III period.¹²⁸² Only women worked as weavers during the Ur III period, whereas in the Old Babylonian sources male weavers occur, though mainly as overseers of the female weavers.¹²⁸³ Women could be leaders of a work gang during the Ur III period,¹²⁸⁴ but men were most commonly the overseers in this industry.¹²⁸⁵

The *ġéme* received monthly rations for their work.¹²⁸⁶ Waetzoldt points out that the women of the Ur III period, the female weavers not counted, had very small possibilities to get higher rations, whereas the rations of the men had a larger spectrum.¹²⁸⁷ Further, the men almost always had larger rations than women. The situation is thus described by Waetzoldt: “Rates of allotment vary according to profession, status and sex. The most clear cut varia-

lated as “young woman (girl or adult)” by the *CAD* A/2 sub *ardatu*, and is attested in the Old Babylonian, Standard Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian dialects.

¹²⁷⁷ Maekawa 1980: 82, 93, 101.

¹²⁷⁸ Maekawa 1980: 84ff.

¹²⁷⁹ Maekawa 1987: 50, 62f.

¹²⁸⁰ Maekawa 1980: 81.

¹²⁸¹ Waetzoldt 1987: 119.

¹²⁸² Maekawa 1980: 96, 97f., tables 5–6.

¹²⁸³ Stol 2004: 968f.

¹²⁸⁴ Maekawa 1980: 96, 97f., tables 5–6.

¹²⁸⁵ E.g. Waetzoldt 1987: 68.

¹²⁸⁶ Maekawa 1980: 88f., 95, 103. Cf. *CAD* I/J sub *išpartu*; “barley [...] which is given as rations to the weaver”. (“weaver” actually stands in the plural in the text from *CAD*: GÊME.UŠ.BAR.MEŠ.)

¹²⁸⁷ Waetzoldt 1987: 122.

tion is according to sex; other variations are more difficult to define and describe”.¹²⁸⁸

Besides the work of weaving and milling we also find the *gēme* in other occupations. In a text from Early Dynastic IIIb period we meet thirteen *gēme-šáḫ* “swineherds”, and one *gēme-maš* “goatherd”.¹²⁸⁹ The *gēme-šáḫ* are also found in Sargonic times; during the reign of Narām-Su’en there were 200 *gēme-šáḫ* working for the temple of Enlil.¹²⁹⁰ Occupations for the women of the Ur III period that are listed by Waetzoldt are *gēme-ara₅* “miller”, *gēme uš-bar* “weaver” and oil-presser.¹²⁹¹ Other spheres where the *gēme* were occupied were in the breweries, as carriers¹²⁹² and as palace builders.¹²⁹³

The *gēme* working as weavers in Early Dynastic IIIb as well as the Ur III period, were donated women, war-captives, slaves and fugitives.¹²⁹⁴ In the Old Babylonian period we have the same picture; the female weavers occur in contexts of war-captives, and are often said to be slaves.¹²⁹⁵

Also the daughters of these *gēme* are supposed to have become weavers.¹²⁹⁶ Further, from the Early Dynastic IIIb period we have evidence that females were bought to work in the textile industry of the state.¹²⁹⁷ These bought women constituted half of the weavers in the industry. They, as well as many of the other weavers, had foreign names.¹²⁹⁸ The foreign names of the *gēme* are understandable if the meaning of the word *gēme*, as stated by Maekawa, is correct. He writes that this word originally designated women brought from foreign lands, and later was used on women dependent on institutions or other persons.¹²⁹⁹

Maekawa writes about the Early Dynastic IIIb period that the male children of the female weavers in Lagaš must have been separated from their mothers in mature age. This is based on the absence of adult men working in the textile industry.¹³⁰⁰ Evidence from the Ur III period indicates that the sons of the *gēme* occupied a very low status. Maekawa believes that the sons of the *gēme* were taken from their mothers just before reaching mature age.

¹²⁸⁸ Waetzoldt 1987: 121.

¹²⁸⁹ Bauer 1972: 197, I: 1–4, III: 1.

¹²⁹⁰ Westenholz 1999: 72.

¹²⁹¹ Waetzoldt 1987: 121.

¹²⁹² *gēme kaš-a gub-ba-me*, “die *gēme*-Arbeiterinnen sind beim Bier eingesetzt”, text 175, V: 19; *gēme ūg-ĪL é-gal* “übernommen von den *gēme*-Arbeiterinnen, den Trägerinnen des Palastes”, adapted from Sauren (1969, text 175, IX: 35).

¹²⁹³ Gelb writes that 285 *gēme* were used to build the palace of Amar-Su’en (older: Būr-Sîn) (1973: 83).

¹²⁹⁴ Maekawa 1980: 112f.

¹²⁹⁵ Stol 2004: 968f.; *CAD I/J* sub *išpartu*.

¹²⁹⁶ Maekawa 1980: 92.

¹²⁹⁷ Maekawa 1980: 87.

¹²⁹⁸ Maekawa 1987: 53.

¹²⁹⁹ Maekawa 1987: 52.

¹³⁰⁰ Maekawa 1980: 92.

These men had lowly work, e.g. to tow boats.¹³⁰¹ This indicates that the sons of the *gême* working as weavers were not generally the (official) sons of the *ĝuruš*.

Gelb writes that the *gême* were the wives of the *ĝuruš* however, but he also points out that some *gême*, especially in the temple households, had no family life, and that “their status between free, semi-free, and unfree is not quite clear”.¹³⁰² Further, in a later publication Gelb maintains that the *gême* working in public households had no family life.¹³⁰³

Lafont also discusses the status of these working women. He comes to the conclusion that women who worked in the textile industry were war-captives, slaves, donated persons or impoverished women and outcasts.¹³⁰⁴ However, he maintains that:

these categories of women certainly did not represent the entire workforce [...]. They would have been an insufficient number to meet the economic needs of the state. In all likelihood, many of the female workers employed in the mills¹³⁰⁵ were simply state-dependants, working part-time or full-time for rations and salaries, like their male counterparts.¹³⁰⁶

Lafont’s statement above suggests that some of the *gême* were married, since their counterparts, the *ĝuruš*, were. Further, if they were corresponding to each other, I suppose that they were spouses. In spite of this, referring to an article of Gelb,¹³⁰⁷ who asked about the *gême*, “where are their husbands?”, Lafont writes that 40 years after Gelb’s article, we still do not know. He suggests that the *gême* had different life-situations; some were prisoners and slaves, whereas others had homes and family life.¹³⁰⁸

According to Steinkeller, “[i]t is generally agreed today that the slaves were numerically and economically of little significance in the Ur III period and that the main force involved in productive labor was a class of people often designated in Ur III texts by the appellatives *ĝuruš* and *gême*”. Also he refers to Gelb who means that these workers should be distinguished from the slaves who were of foreign origin and without families.¹³⁰⁹

The problem here is that the facts regarding the *gême* in the public households are just about the same as those we have in the description of slaves. According to Gelb a slave is “foreign born, without family life, without means of production, employed full time mainly in *service type of labor* [...]

¹³⁰¹ Maekawa 1980: 112.

¹³⁰² Gelb 1972a: 88.

¹³⁰³ Gelb 1979b: 23f.

¹³⁰⁴ Lafont 2013a.

¹³⁰⁵ Lafont uses the word “mill” in the meaning “factory” here.

¹³⁰⁶ Lafont 2013a.

¹³⁰⁷ Gelb 1972b.

¹³⁰⁸ Lafont 2013a.

¹³⁰⁹ Steinkeller 1987: 73; Gelb 1979a: 294. These opinions are also found in Gelb 1972a: 87f.

and mainly in private sector” (italics original).¹³¹⁰ This can be compared with his description of the “women and children without family”, who are regarded as the female personnel in the public households: they “have no family life – work full-time for the household – have no means of production – receive rations throughout the year”.¹³¹¹ Gelb has emphasized that the slaves worked in “service type of labor”, since he argues that the semi-free serfs worked in “productive type of labor”.¹³¹² This aspect and the statement that the slaves were mainly used in the private sector are the only things that differentiate the “semi-free géme” and the géme functioning as slaves.

We saw earlier that at least before the Old Babylonian period, many of the éren were foreigners. This points to a similar status of the ġuruš/éren and the géme; a considerable number of both groups seem to have been war captives or otherwise captured persons. The difference remains though, that whereas the state saw to it that the foreign éren were settled, received land allotments, and became “semi-free”, and thereby integrated to society,¹³¹³ the géme do not seem to have been settled in this way, but most of them continued to live a slave-like life.

I assume that the géme of the large state households were not the wives of the RU-lugal/ġuruš,¹³¹⁴ just as the *amtu* were not the wives of the *eṭlu* of the Old Babylonian period.¹³¹⁵ If the géme were without family life and wholly dependent on the state, they must in fact have constituted a huge slave class. This would also imply that the current comprehension that the work force of slaves was only of minor importance in ancient Mesopotamia is only true regarding the males. I think that the understanding of slaves and “semi-free serfs” must be reevaluated with both sexes as a point of departure.

¹³¹⁰ Gelb 1979a: 294.

¹³¹¹ Gelb 1979b: 24.

¹³¹² Gelb 1979b: 24.

¹³¹³ Gelb 1973: 85f., 91, 94f.

¹³¹⁴ To bear in mind, however, is the risk of a bad harvest or salination. These problems could have resulted in some wives of the ġuruš having to start to work as géme.

¹³¹⁵ Renger writes that the Old Babylonian society was much more complex than its predecessors, and one aspect of higher complexity is the higher differentiation between social groups (1972: 167f.). This is mirrored in the many categories of groups of working men. There were e.g. two groups of soldiers doing *ilku* service, *rēdū* and *bā'iru*, and therefore having land allotments from the crown. A further group having allotments from the crown was the *nāši bilti*, “the bearers of tribute” (Klengel 1987: 162). The diversity of the work forces is seen also in Renger who writes about several groups from the working classes mentioned in the Ammisaduqa edict: *nāši bilti*, *muškēnu*, *rēdū*, *bā'iru*, and *ilku aḡū ša Babili u nawēšu* (1972: 172). When a specific professional term is not used, individually each of these men was most likely called *eṭlu*. It becomes clear in the CAD E entry *eṭlu* that this term was used as denoting working men (as well as young, but adult men), and it is sometimes used as referring to a man belonging to a collective group of workers, i.e. *šābu*.

5.3.1.2. The *gème* working part-time and women not working for the state

As was mentioned in the chapter on historical background as well as in the previous section, Lafont maintains that there were *gème* who did only part-time *corvée* work, just as the working men.¹³¹⁶ Although I believe that this needs more research, I here follow the hypothesis that there seems to be a difference between the *gème* who worked the whole year in the large households of the state, and the *gème* who were conscripted for parts of the year like their men. Thus, some of the wives of the *RU-lugal*, the *lú* and the *ġuruš* seem to have been *gème* who worked part time for the state. Since so many of the *gème* working for the state were more or less enslaved, I would say that it is possible that most of the wives of the working men were ordinary women who were not *gème*.

We can find traces of these women in the sources. But besides the ideological description of these women in our myth, the sources are also a hindrance when we are searching for them. The texts we have come from larger institutions and households, and say next to nothing of the private life of the people. Westenholz has pointed out this problem, and says that the women are to be sought in the domestic sphere. He then writes:

But though the hand that rocks the cradle may rule the world, this is not very helpful, as we know nothing about that sphere beyond what kitchen utensils and spindle whorls we can dig up today. Even so, I have no doubt that most women under Sargon's rule spent their waking hours as housewives. Grinding barley for flour and baking bread in the courtyard oven, going to the river for water [...], washing clothes in the same river, chatting with neighbors, cooking [...], spinning and weaving, nursing her baby, [...], taking care of the sick, wailing for the dead [--], and, in old age, giving sage counsel [...]; but of this we have next to no evidence and have to imagine it all. The only clue is that somebody had to do all these chores, and most men were occupied with their own work.¹³¹⁷

Besides all the tasks above suggested by Westenholz, women also seem to have partaken in the cultivation of the allotted land. This since Waetzoldt writes that the allotted land of the *éren* was of a size that these men could cultivate with the help of their family. Since he estimates that a whole family was needed to work the plot, he assumes that the male workers had free time during the harvest.¹³¹⁸

Since possibly most of the wives of the *RU-lugal*, the *lú* and the *ġuruš* were ordinary women who were not *gème*, some of the female occupations that were not referred to as being performed by the *gème* might have been filled by these wives. In the chapter on historical background I mentioned

¹³¹⁶ Lafont 2013b.

¹³¹⁷ Westenholz 1999: 71.

¹³¹⁸ Waetzoldt 1987: 129, 132.

the research by Foster that gives us information on the working women in Sargonic society. He tells us about a large household called Mesag. There were 172 people working within the household, and of these about 25 percent were women. One third of the women had professions like “ploughman” (!), “gardener” and “fisherman” (!). In the texts from this household also persons from outside it are mentioned. Among them only four percent of the workers are women.¹³¹⁹

My conclusion is that it is probable that the wives of the RU-lugal, the lú and the ġuruš did a major part of the work at their allotted land, as well as working with other tasks. Some of these women might have been géme, working part time for the state, but many of them were probably not géme. The statement in both our myth and in “The debate between Hoe and Plough” that the male workers supported their wives, indicates, that their wives were not the géme working all year at households of the state. Likewise, in the Old Babylonian society the wives of the working men were not female slaves, Akk. *amtu*.

5.3.2. Ideological aspects of the wives of the minor gods

Since we identified the minor gods with the working RU-lugal, the lú and the ġuruš, the point of departure when trying to identify their wives was the géme that are said to be the female equivalents of the RU-lugal, the lú and the ġuruš. This statement had to be modified however, since most of the géme worked the whole year for the state, and had no family life. Further, in the Old Babylonian society the *eġlu* and the *amtu*, which correspond to the ġuruš and the géme, were not married to each other. It is not likely that the géme working the whole year for the state were the wives of the RU-lugal, the lú and the ġuruš. There seems to have been géme who were conscripted part time however, and these were probably some of the RU-lugal, the lú and the ġuruš’s wives.

This differentiation among the géme has not been discussed in earlier scholarship. It is interesting from an ideological point of view in itself, since it suggests partial gender bias in some earlier scholarship; the model of female semi-free and slave status has largely been derived from the male model of semi-free and slave status. Since there is one Sumerian designation of male slave (*arad*, *árad*) and other designations for a male “semi-free serf” (RU-lugal, the lú and the ġuruš), whereas both female slaves and alleged female “semi-free serfs” have the same Sumerian designation, géme, the different distribution of terms in itself could point to a difference in roles.

One question that arises is where the wives of the RU-lugal, the lú and the ġuruš not being géme came from. Were they Mesopotamian women, or did they come from other countries like many of the RU-lugal/ġuruš? Were they

¹³¹⁹ Foster 1987: 54.

perhaps (partly) freed *gème* of the state households? These are questions that cannot be answered here.

I shall discuss some of the ideological implications of the *gème* working full time for the state, although they in fact do not seem to be the wives I was looking for. Thus, the categories that we are dealing with are the *gème* working full time for the state, the *gème* working part time for the state, the RU-lugal, the *lú* and the *ĝuruš*, and the wives of the RU-lugal, the *lú* and the *ĝuruš* not being *gème*. Also the children of these adults are a category to deal with since in our myth it is said that the goddesses were taken in marriage to produce offspring. The lowliest ranked of these groups seem to be the children of the *gème* working full time for the state, and perhaps most of all their sons, who had lowly jobs. The daughters instead, seem to have been raised to do the same job as their mothers, which was in all probability tough, but at least the weavers had some possibilities to advance and earn a higher wage. The *gème* working full time for the state were ranked lower than the RU-lugal, the *lú* and the *ĝuruš*; they never received land allotments, but were serfs working for large households the whole year. They further had no family life, whereas the RU-lugal, the *lú* and the *ĝuruš* had such a possibility. The *gème* seem further to have been discriminated at the workplaces, since when compared to male workers, many occupations were closed to them, and most often occupations that gave higher incomes. Further, the difference in income between the *gème* and the RU-lugal and the *ĝuruš* was so high, that it could not be explained by any other parameter than gender.¹³²⁰ As we know, unequal wages due to gender continue even to this day.

In one way the wives of the RU-lugal, the *lú* and the *ĝuruš* not being *gème* might have been even higher ranked than their husbands, or at least had more freedom; this since they were seemingly not conscripted. They probably had to work hard on the family plot, but they were free to make up their workday. On the other hand, these women were probably seen as the property of their husbands, and therefore subordinated to them according to patriarchal logic.

The depiction of the wives of the minor gods in our myth does not match reality, but is an ideological statement; they are described as passive objects, taken in marriage to produce offspring, and to be supported by their men. As was seen in the section on the historical background, this was the ideal rather than reality. The wives of the RU-lugal, the *lú* and the *ĝuruš* were most likely all but passive, working at home the whole day, taking care of children, cultivating the family plot, grinding flour, baking bread and so on, and some of them were even conscripted by the state. In spite of this, these women are just as invisible in our myth as they are in the sources in general. Here again, we see how the interests of the patriarchal society are forwarded, depicting all efforts and power as coming from males. Perhaps the men at that time did

¹³²⁰ We have to reckon with the fact that men often need more food than women, however.

not even see the work of the women, taking it for granted, just as is also often the case today? Even though the description of the wives was perhaps not conscious, it was a part of a recalibration of females as weak and in need of being taken care of by men.

5.4. How shall we understand 𒀭arali, the place where the minor gods work?

We saw above that 𒀭arali was the working place of the minor gods. Under this section I shall take “*harali*” as a starting point and do an excursus to try to understand the thoughts behind the usage of this word. According to the *AHw* and the *CAD*, the word *harali* means “door” in a language called Sub-araic.¹³²¹ I will here identify the constellation of ideas in Mesopotamian myths where a door is a part. Further, in order to contextualize the word on a historical and social level, I have to examine the geographic and linguistic connotations of it. With this background I shall return to our mother goddess, and investigate whether we find any correspondences between her and the constellation of ideas identified. As a concluding part, I will discuss the ideological implications of the contextualization of 𒀭arali in relation to our mother goddess.

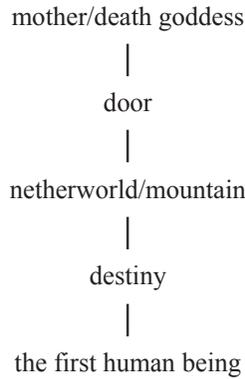
5.4.1. The concept “door” as part of a constellation of ideas in Mesopotamian myths

The fact that the word referring to a door in our myth is foreign will now be put aside for a while. First I will try to uncover what the concept “door” represented in the mythological thinking in ancient Mesopotamia. To do this I will identify a constellation of ideas where “door” is a part. To be able to find the other ideas of the constellation I shall turn to three other myths written in Sumerian where we meet with a door that is of importance for the story; “Inana’s descent”, “Enlil and Ninlil”, and “Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world”. Thus, I will use my hermeneutic method of collecting a redundancy of material, thereby finding those ideas regarding the central idea “door” that compose a constellation.¹³²² I believe that we can find a constellation of ideas in these three myths, that is also met with in “Enki and Ninkmah”. This constellation is composed of the following ideas:

¹³²¹ See *AHw* and *CAD* 𒀭 sub *harali*.

¹³²² Cf. Andersson who writes about personal names like *lugal-ig-gal* “the king is a great door” and *lugal-si-gar* “the king is a door bolt”. He points out in the footnote that, “[t]he earliest attested PNN with this nominal predicate feature female appellatives: *ama-ig-gal*, *munus-ig-gal*, and *nin-ig-gal*” (2012: 116 with fn. 631).

Table 11. Constellation of ideas associated with the concept “door”



The first myth to be discussed here where a door is of importance is “Inana’s descent”. Here Inana is heading towards the netherworld, arrives at its door and pushes on it:

Inana arrived at the palace Ganzer / She pushed viciously at the door of the netherworld / she shouted viciously at the gate of the netherworld.¹³²³

Here the name of the door is both *ig* and *abul*, Sumerian words for door and gate respectively. Inana is representing the first human being in this myth. She is initially a goddess, but when entering the netherworld, a domain that is not hers, she becomes mortal. And in another myth, her main role is that of the first human being: “Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world”. There she is the first woman to walk along the banks of the Euphrates, just after the order of the world has been settled.¹³²⁴ My interpretation is that Inana has the connotation of “the first human being”, although this is not a central trait in “Inana’s descent”. Thus, in “Inana’s descent” we have the death goddess behind the door, in the netherworld, and this goddess decrees the destiny to die¹³²⁵ for the “first human being”.

In “Enlil and Ninlil” we also meet a gate of importance. When Enlil has raped Ninlil he is banished from the city by the seven gods who decree destinies. Enlil goes to the “man of the city gate, the man of the bolt” and asks this man to hide him from Ninlil. We read:

Enlil speaks to the man of the gate: / “Man of the gate, man of the bolt”.¹³²⁶

¹³²³ 73–75. ^dinana é-gal ganzer-šè um-ma-te / ^{giš}ig kur-ra-ka šu-ḫul ba-an-ús / abul kur-ra-ka gù ḫul ba-an-dé. Transliteration taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Inana’s descent to the nether world”).

¹³²⁴ Black et al. 1998–2006. “Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world”, ll. 1–35.

¹³²⁵ On the decreeing of destiny, see above, section 4.13.2.

¹³²⁶ 65–66. ^den-lil-le lú abul-la-ra gù [mu-na-dé-e] / lú abul-la lú-^{giš}si-gar-ra. Transliteration taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enlil and Ninlil”).

The man at the gate hides Enlil. Then Enlil disguises himself as this man and sleeps with Ninlil in this disguise. The result of this intercourse is Nergal-Meslamta'ea. In this myth the gate belongs to the city of Nippur. We have the reference to the netherworld/mountain (kur) when we think of the name of Enlil's temple: Ekur (é-kur), "house netherworld/mountain". Further, the god engendered at the gate, Nergal-Meslamta'ea, is the god of the netherworld. The first human being is Enbilulu, who I have already suggested is a prototype of the "earthly man".¹³²⁷ It is however not Enbilulu who is banned from Nippur; this is the destiny of Enlil. Therefore, Enlil plays the role of the first human being regarding the destiny; through sexual intercourse or rape he has to leave his godly abode.¹³²⁸ The mother- and death goddess here is Ninlil.¹³²⁹

In "Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world" we also meet the door of the netherworld. There the *pukku* and *mekku*¹³³⁰ of Gilgameš fall into the netherworld, and he cannot reach them. Then the following lines come:

At the gate of Ganzer, the front of the netherworld, he sat down / Gilgameš weeps, and the color leaves his face.¹³³¹

Enkidu, the servant of Gilgameš, goes to fetch the *pukku* and *mekku*, but the netherworld seizes him. Gilgameš then turns to the gods to get help to bring Enkidu back. Enlil will not help him, neither will Sîn, who occurs only in the Akkadian version¹³³², but Enki is willing to help. Enki asks Utu to make a hole in the netherworld and bring up Enkidu. So he does, and Enkidu's ghost comes up and tells Gilgameš about the conditions of the netherworld.

In "Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world" we obviously have the door, the netherworld, the death goddess in the netherworld¹³³³, and also the desti-

¹³²⁷ See above, section 4.17.

¹³²⁸ I would suggest however, that Enlil is leaving the netherworld. Enlil and Ninlil are connected to that sphere, and there is reason to believe that this was their natural habitation as gods. That they go from the gate where Nergal-Meslamta'ea is begotten, to the man-eating river, the river of the netherworld (i₇-kur), and then to the man of the ferry indicate that they in fact leave the netherworld.

¹³²⁹ In section 4.17. we saw that Ninlil was acting in the role of a mother goddess.

¹³³⁰ It is not clear what these terms mean.

¹³³¹ 166–167. *abul ganzer igi kur-ra-ka dūr im-ma-ni-in-ġar / ^dgilgameš ér im-ma-an-pà sig₇-sig₇ i-ġá-ġá*. Transliteration adapted from Black et al. (1998–2006. "Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world"). The expression "[deity's name] weeps, and the color leaves his face" is also found in "Dumuzid's dream", and also there in a context of the netherworld: ll. 151–152. *dumu-zi-dè e a-ra-li-ka mu-ni-in-dab₅-bé-ne dumu-zi-dè ér im-ma-an-pà sig₇-sig₇ i-ġá-ġá*. "They seize Dumuzi in the ditches of Arali; / Dumuzi weeps and the color leaves his face". See the transliteration and translation of Black et al. (1998–2006. "Dumuzid's dream").

¹³³² Shaffer 1975: 83, 112f.

¹³³³ Ereškigal is mentioned at the beginning of the text, and further we read: "to her who lies, to her who lies / to the mother of Ninazu who lies, her pure shoulders are not covered with a cloth / on her pure breasts no linen is spread." (ll. 200–203). Cf. the discussion on a similar passage in "Inana's decent" above, section 4.10. However, when Enkidu is put to death it is only said that "the netherworld (kur) took him".

ny of Enkidu to die. Man's (!) destiny to die is in fact the main theme in almost all Gilgameš texts. That Enkidu can represent the "first human being" is indicated in the Gilgameš epic. There he is created by Aruru¹³³⁴ out of clay, and then he initially lives like a "primordial man" among the animals of the steppe.¹³³⁵

Do we then find the five here indicated ideas in our myth? The door clearly is there, as is the mother- and death goddess, and similarly the first human being. The destiny of man focused upon in our myth is not death, but an arduous life filled with work. This was the lot of the common man throughout life. In this myth the lot is explained as a divine order. Regarding the netherworld/mountain, there are seemingly no obvious references made to it. I now have to turn to the foreign word for door.

5.4.2. Linguistic and geographic considerations

Ḫarali, the name of the place where the minor gods are working, is very similar to a name of the netherworld – arali (Akk. *arallû*). Benito points out this similarity but does not suggest a connection between the words. He writes that van Dijk has suggested that *ḫarali* is related to arali as a topographical name, but not to arali's connotation "netherworld".¹³³⁶ The word has been investigated by Komoróczy as well, and he argues that the word denotes a real geographical place as well as being a variant of the word arali/*arallû*.

The point of departure for Komoróczy's investigation is the passage in "Enki and Ninḫursaġa" where we meet Tukriš as a transit region for gold from Ḫarali, which was then brought to Dilmun. As was referred to in section 4.4.1., he comes to the conclusion that Tukriš was situated somewhere in the area of Kurdistan. Tukriš traded with lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, and Komoróczy assumes that the gold likewise came from the east, and then via Tukriš entered Mesopotamia.¹³³⁷ Since Ḫarali is the origin of gold and arali/*arallû* in several texts is called the "gold land/mountain" he argues that the two terms are designations for the same place.¹³³⁸ Komoróczy's paper shows that *ḫarali* was related both to the netherworld and a mountain. From the sources where we meet *ḫarali* Komoróczy deduces that it originally was

¹³³⁴ Aruru is a name of the mother goddess.

¹³³⁵ This information on Enkidu is found in the Standard Babylonian twelve-tablet version of the Gilgameš epic, see George (2003, 544f., ll. 99–112).

¹³³⁶ Benito 1969: 48, l. 10. Kramer and Maier's comment on the word is that "*ḫarali* is an obscure word of uncertain meaning" (1989: 212, note 7).

¹³³⁷ Komoróczy 1972: 113ff.

¹³³⁸ Komoróczy 1972: 117. This equation is also supported by phonetic arguments. The different rendering of the word in Sumerian and Akkadian respectively suggests a foreign phoneme; Akkadian a- and Sumerian ḫ- point to an original *h. The Akkadian writing agrees with the northern Babylonian rendering of ḫ which corresponds to *h (ibid. 119).

a part of primordial myths (Urzeitmythen), and that the connotation nether-world was a secondary development.¹³³⁹

Regarding the idea “door”, the *AHW* and the *CAD* tell us that an Akkadian synonym list equals *ḥarali* with *daltu*, door, and as was pointed to earlier, the word is said to be Subaraic.¹³⁴⁰ Komoróczy instead interprets the list as “*ḥārali*: Tür von Subartu”.¹³⁴¹ If the latter understanding is correct, the word seems to be a word for a place that was seen as an entrance to Subartu. As we saw Komoróczy argued that *Ḥarali* was situated in the far east of Mesopotamia. Is this compatible with the statements that *ḥarali* is the “door of Subartu”/a “Subaraic word for door”? To answer this question I shall try to locate the area of Subartu.

The designation “Subaraic” corresponds to the region called Subartu. There have been discussions among the scholars as to the location of this region.¹³⁴² Some sources indicate that Subartu was located somewhere from the upper reaches of Tigris, stretching toward the west into the area later called Assyria, and perhaps further up to Syria,¹³⁴³ whereas others locate it more to the east of the upper Tigris.¹³⁴⁴ In the Old Babylonian period, it is clear that Subartu was not a state, but a region with several city-states with their respective kings. This region included “distant mountain areas” and the arable land of Assyria.¹³⁴⁵

Although the references to Subartu are a bit disparate – it is situated somewhere between the cedar forest in northern Syria and Elam in the east of Sumer – there is a definite pattern. The area is always within the limits of the dry farming arable land in northern Mesopotamia, i.e. roughly the area of Assyria, which is sometimes also called “the Fertile Crescent” today.

The logogram ŠUBUR is the oldest writing for “Subartu”. This logogram is found in a text from the time of Eanatum. In an Old Babylonian copy of a Sargonic period inscription of Narām-Su’en, the word ŠUBUR is glossed with *su-bar-tim*, which gives us the reading of it at least in Old Babylonian times. In a very late hymn the god^d ereš is called gašan šubur-ra, with the Akkadian equation *be-el e[r]-še-tim*, “lord of the earth”. The god Ereš was a peasant god. Regarding this Gelb writes: “This implies that *šubur* over which he is the lord is not the underworld but the (cultivable) earth”.¹³⁴⁶ It may be that Subartu quite simply referred to “the arable earth” in the area sometimes denoted as “the Fertile Crescent”. In Sumerian and Akkadian

¹³³⁹ Komoróczy 1972: 120f.

¹³⁴⁰ *AHW* sub *ḥarali*: “Tür”, in SynL: *ḥa-a-ra-li = da-al-tum* Subartu”; *CAD* Ḥ sub *ḥarali* also refers to the same source as *AHW*: “*ḥa-a-ra-li = da-al-tum* SU^{ki}”, with the translation “door (in the language of) Subartu”.

¹³⁴¹ Komoróczy 1972: 118.

¹³⁴² E.g. Gelb 1944: 12f., and Wilhelm 1989: 7 with notes.

¹³⁴³ Gelb 1944: 33ff.; von Soden 1994: 16 with fn. 3; Wilhelm 1989: 7f.

¹³⁴⁴ Gelb 1944: 34, 38ff.

¹³⁴⁵ Gelb 1944: 42.

¹³⁴⁶ Gelb 1944: 23.

sources šubur is often used as “slave” or “servant”.¹³⁴⁷ This can be explained by the popularity of slaves from the areas in the north of Mesopotamia.¹³⁴⁸ Assyriologist William Hallo comes to the same conclusion when writing that the word “Subarian” seems to have become a designation for slave in general since slaves of Subarian origin were “most prized or most common”, at least in the second millennium.¹³⁴⁹

We saw that Komoróczy understood *ḥarali* as a mountain, being the “door of Subartu”, and that it was sometimes called “Gold Mountain”. Is this possible to relate to the interpretation of Subartu as roughly corresponding to the dry farming arable land in the area of Assyria? To start with, there were no gold sources in the core area of Assyria. One example of known origin of gold in Mesopotamia is the gold objects from the cemetery of Ur. Archaeologists Cyril Smith and William Young have analyzed 125 of these gold objects, and they found that they had inclusions of platinum (PGE), similar to the gold of the Pactolus river in western Anatolia. Smith and Young concluded that the gold of Ur was derived from Anatolia.¹³⁵⁰ Thus, the article of Smith and Young states that there was gold in Anatolia, and it also points to a relationship between Mesopotamia and Anatolia regarding gold. The Fertile Crescent of northern Mesopotamia also stretches into the western parts of Anatolia, i.e. towards the area of the Pactolus river. If *Ḥarali* was seen as a door of Subartu one expects that it was situated somewhere on its border, and it might well have been in the western parts of Anatolia.

Muhly writes of *arallû/ḥarali* that “there is no point in trying to find a geographical location for this fairy tale land”.¹³⁵¹ He is correct in pointing to the fact that not all mythical places have references in the real world. Since some of them have however, I believe that we could at least give investigations of the location of mythical places a chance before dismissing them as only mythical. Thus, it should not be excluded that *Ḥarali* refers to an area in western Anatolia where gold was mined.

To conclude, my understanding of the word *ḥarali*, the place where the minor gods work, is that it seems to refer to an area on the border of the Fertile Crescent, since it is called “the door of Subartu”. Further, since *ḥarali* was an origin of gold, it is more probable, as I see it, that it was situated

¹³⁴⁷ Gelb 1944: 23f.; *AHW* sub (*w*)*ardu*; *PSD* B, 189.

¹³⁴⁸ Gelb 1944: 29, 37, 43; Wilhelm 1989: 10, 14; Postgate 1992: 107.

¹³⁴⁹ Hallo 2013: 59.

¹³⁵⁰ For the research of Smith and Young, see Young (1972: 4–13). Young’s findings are also published in his and Whitmore’s paper “Application of the Laser Microprobe and Electron Microprobe in the Analysis of Platinum Inclusions in Gold” (1973: 88–94). Muhly points to the fact that later investigations have shown that the inclusion of PGE in gold is quite common and found at various sites from Ireland to India. Muhly writes that PGE has not been found in gold from Egyptian mines however (Muhly 1983: 6), which disproves this origin regarding the gold found in the cemetery of Ur.

¹³⁵¹ Muhly 1997: 123.

somewhere in the area of Anatolia where gold came from, than, as Kormórczy argues, in the Far East.

5.4.3. Ideological aspects of the relation between Ninmaḥ and Ḥarali

I understand Ninmaḥ as the central category regarding Ḥarali, the place where the minor gods work, since we have seen above that this place has a connotation of both netherworld and mountain, and since our mother goddess Ninḥursaġa/Ninmaḥ, as well as the other mother goddesses discussed, were related to the netherworld/mountain. Further, the word *ḥarali* means door, and this was also an idea that was related to the mother/death goddess. Whereas the mother/death goddess was initially powerful, in our myth Ninmaḥ's ranking is quite low. This is shown when she is not the one creating mankind, but only acts as helper. Further, she does not decide his destiny, but gets the less glamorous task to impose upon him the hard work previously done by the minor gods at Ḥarali. In the rest of the myth Ninmaḥ is depicted as incompetent; she creates freaks, and she cannot decree a destiny for the creature of Enki.

In our myth the minor gods were not obliged to work only because of Enki, the ruler, but also because they had to feed the goddesses who got pregnant and gave birth. This implies these goddesses are also the cause of the toil of the minor gods. As to the human being created to take over the toil, it is not explicitly stated that he will work at Ḥarali. Since he will act as a substitute for the gods one expects though, that he will be placed at the very working place of these gods. Whereas Namma will decree the destiny of the first human being, Ninmaḥ is the one who shall impose the work upon him. Thus, one gets the impression that the responsibility for the toil of the mortal men is laid upon Namma and Ninmaḥ, although Enki has decided this.

Although we do not meet with open hostility towards the goddess, the description is rather disparaging. I understand the reference to Ḥarali in our myth, as a way to point out who is to blame; Ḥarali is the door to the realm of the mother/death goddess and is thus referring to the one responsible for the toil of gods and humans alike.

As I understand the description of Ninmaḥ in our myth, it is an extensive recalibration of her traits; previously she was creatress, but now it is explained that she actually only acts as a helper at birth, previously she decreed destinies, but now we are informed that she actually only imposes the destiny on the humans, and so on. Further, there is a recalibration of the mountain/netherworld of the mother goddess, earlier being a place of awe, having connotations of gold, but now understood as the source of the toil in life, where most of it deals with digging in the dust. Since the recalibration of the

connotations of our mother goddess is so close to the earlier comprehension of her, it was probably quite convincing.

5.5. Namma, the mother of Enki

At the distress of the minor gods Namma, the mother of Enki intervenes:

Namma, the foremost mother, the birthgiver of the great gods / (she) brought the weeping of the gods to her son: / “Lord, you are indeed lying there! Lord, indeed you are asleep, / and do not rise [from your bed]! / The gods, your creatures, are striking (against) their assignment. / My son, rise from your bed, apply the skill deriving from your wisdom, / create a substitute for the gods (so that) they can slacken their toil!”¹³⁵²

Here we see that Namma is thought of as the mother of the first generation of gods. This conflicts with the expression in line 12 that Enki was the creator of all the great gods. And although Namma is a mother goddess with the ability to create, she turns to Enki here when she thinks that a substitute needs to be created.

There are variant readings of the name of Namma: Namma/i/u; Namnama/i/u; Nannama/i/u, and also Lammu. Wiggermann points out that Namnama resembles the name Ninimma and that (n)imma (SIG₇) is probably etymologically related to Nammu/a. Both (n)imma and nam(m)u are variants of the parts making up the name Ninimma. Wiggerman writes that they were “understood by native commentators as a noun corresponding to Akkadian words (*nabnītu*, *bunnannū*) derived from the root *banū*, ‘to create’”. From this he concludes that if there in fact is an etymological relation between Ninimma and Namma, the latter, and its variants, can also be understood as “Creatrix”.¹³⁵³

The name Nammu/a is written with the sign ENGUR (LAGAB×HAL), and so already in the Early Dynastic III period. From the Ur III period the sign was also used to designate heaven, ziku(m), which had earlier been written with another sign.¹³⁵⁴ ENGUR can also designate Abzu, the subterranean sweet-water ocean of Enki.¹³⁵⁵ Namma herself was thought of as a watery body, which is seen not only in the sign ENGUR, but also in her role in cosmology and since she is related to reed, water and magic. She is an old

¹³⁵² I: 17–23. ^dnamma-ke₄ ama palil ù-tu diġir šár-šár-ra-ke₄-ne / ér-ra diġir-re-e-ne dumu-ni-ir ba-ši-in-de₆ / ‘ú-mu-un ší’-nú-ù-nam ù-‘mu-un’ ší-ku-ku na-nam / [x (x)]- te ba/zu l[a’ / x x - š]i-zi-zi / ‘dim’-mi-ir šu-dím-dím-ma-z[u (-) è]š-gàr-bi im-tu₁₀-tu₁₀-ne / du₅-mu-ġu₁₀ ki-nú-zu zi-ga ‘i’-[b]í-ma-al-la-zu-ta na-áġ-kù-zu (ù-)mu-e-kíġ-k[íġ-ġe] / kíġ-si dim-mi-ir-e-ne-ke₄ ù-mu-[x x]-dím du_x(TER)-lum-bi ħa-ba-tu-lu-[n]e. Transliteration adapted from Lambert (2013: 336).

¹³⁵³ Wiggermann 2001a: 136. Cf. also section 4.8. above, dealing with Ninimma.

¹³⁵⁴ Wiggermann 2001a: 136.

¹³⁵⁵ Labat and Malbran-Labat 1995: 43, 215.

indigenous goddess of Eridu, and there she supported her son Enki in magic. In An-Anum and its forerunner, Namma is called “the mother who gave birth to Heaven-and-Earth” (^dama-ù-tu-an-ki).¹³⁵⁶

In the chapter dealing with “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa” we have seen that the mother goddess is not creating alone, but needs the help of a male. I have suggested that it was one of the aims of the mythographers to point out that this was the case. But behind this statement we see earlier beliefs, where the mother goddess was creating alone. This earlier view is also evident in the case of Namma; she is the primordial ocean bringing forth all life on her own.

Thus, we have the picture of Namma as the birthgiver of all the great gods, her name pointing to her role as “Creatrix”, and that she as a watery body gave birth to heaven and earth. At the same time our myth presents her as dependent upon her son in her role as mother goddess; here it is instead Enki who shall use his skill to create a substitute for the minor gods. I understand this as a recalibration of the roles of Namma and her son Enki, where Namma earlier could create on her own, but now the creative ability is transferred to Enki. Further, Enki uses his mental capacity in order to bring about the new creature, which can be understood as a recalibration of the comprehension of how life is created.

5.6. The creative acts of Namma and her assistants

In “Enki and Ninmaḥ” we encounter a development of how male creation was comprehended already touched upon in the previous chapter. This includes a movement away from corporeality and also a suppression of female creativity. In “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa” the male was still creating on the corporeal level, as was the mother goddess. In “Enki and Ninmaḥ” instead, the understanding of male creation is altered, as is partly also that of the female; the male is initiating the creation by using his intellect, and the female is not only bearing a child, but is also forming the human being out of clay. The denigration of the female creativity is seen in that the male, i.e. Enki, is planning as well as telling his mother how the creation shall be carried through:

My mother! My creature, your “make it!”, will come into existence. Tie (to him) the (carrying of) baskets of the gods! / Womb-clay (?) will be mixed for you on the top of the Abzu.¹³⁵⁷ / The womb goddesses¹³⁵⁸ will nip off the clay

¹³⁵⁶ Wiggermann 2001a: 137.

¹³⁵⁷ Regarding the noun ša.g, which means womb, inside and the like, it is difficult to find a solution as to how this word shall be understood in the sentence. Benito has interpreted it as ša....-ak-a, *ina libbi* (1969: 57). If this was the case I would expect im ša ugu abzu-ka-ka. Perhaps his reading is the best solution anyway.

there, and then you will bring the form into existence. / Ninmaḥ will act as your assistant. / Ninimma, Šuziana, Ninmada, Ninbara, (Ninšar)¹³⁵⁹ / Ninmug, Sarsargaba (and) NinNĪGINa / will stand by at your birth-giving.¹³⁶⁰

5.6.1. The potter theme

5.6.1.1. Contextualization of the potter theme

In our myth the mother goddess Namma, assisted by the womb goddesses and the mother goddess Ninmaḥ, is mixing and forming clay in order to create the first human being. This image brings the art of pottery to mind. But as Sumerologist Walther Sallaberger writes:

Ob das Formen von Figurinen Aufgabe eines Töpfers ist oder ob jeder, der in Lehm arbeitet, der dann gebrannt wird, als ‘Töpfer’ bezeichnet wird, läßt sich nicht eindeutig entscheiden.¹³⁶¹

Thus, it is not self-evident that a person making figurines is also a potter. Sallaberger refers to an argumentation of Barrelet though, who means that since Ea (Akk. for Enki) and the mother goddess form humans out of clay, and since they in godlists are called potters, the forming of figurines was the task of the potter.¹³⁶² The interpretation of Barrelet will be followed here.

The word for potter was in Sumerian the word baḥar₍₂₋₄₎. This word was also used by the Akkadians as *paḥāru*. Sallaberger writes that the word can be etymologized neither as Sumerian nor as Akkadian, but points out that this does not necessarily mean that the word comes from a third language; nothing speaks against it being a Sumerian word.¹³⁶³

In our myth there are two sequences where humans are formed out of clay. First Namma and the other goddesses mentioned earlier do this. Then humans are formed during Enki’s and Ninmaḥ’s competition. We read that Ninmaḥ takes clay from the Abzu and forms her creatures. Enki also forms a creature, but it is not told what material he uses. Thus, in our myth it is only clear that females act as “potters”. Men were potters, though, and Asher-Greve writes that in the Early Dynastic period no women are mentioned in

¹³⁵⁸ Lit. “wombs”.

¹³⁵⁹ It might be that Ninšar is only a reduplication of the previous name, since these names are written with the same signs. If that is the case, we are only dealing with seven birth goddesses.

¹³⁶⁰ I: 30–36. ama-ĝu₁₀¹(NI) mud-ĝu₁₀ ĝar-ra-zu i-ĝál-la-àm zub-sig diĝir-re-e-ne kéš-da-i / ša im ugu abzu-ka ù-mu-e-ni-in-ḥi / se₁₂-en-^{sa7}sár im mu-e-kir-kir-re-ne za-e me-dím ù-mu-e-ni-ĝál / ^dnin-maḥ-e an-ta-zu ḥé-ak-e / ^dnin-imma ^dsu-zi-an-na ^dnin-ma-da ^dnin-bára ^dnin-šar₆ / ^dnin-mug ^dSAR.SAR.GABA ^dnin-NĪGIN[?]-na / tu-tu-a-zu ḥa-ra-gub-bu-ne. Transliteration adapted from Lambert (2013: 336).

¹³⁶¹ Sallaberger 1996: 4.

¹³⁶² Sallaberger 1996: 4, fn. 10.

¹³⁶³ Sallaberger 1996: 3.

the textual evidence as being potters.¹³⁶⁴ This picture is corroborated by Sallaberger, who writes that in the textual sources from the é-munus of Old Sumerian Ĝirsu (Early Dynastic IIIb period) only men worked as potters, and this was the case also in the following centuries. He writes in a footnote though, that the work in the private households is hardly attainable in the textual sources, and that there is a possibility that women were working with pottery for private use.¹³⁶⁵ Professor of Anthropology Rita Wright writes that in Neo-Sumerian texts potters are included in a list of male professions. She, as Sallaberger, points out that this does not necessarily mean that only men produced pottery, but that:

it does suggest that some pottery production was concentrated or at least located in temples or households (centrally administered) and that it was mainly carried out by males.¹³⁶⁶

Although the textual sources on practical life do not inform us whether women were potters in Mesopotamia, our myth suggests the possibility. Besides our myth, perhaps a last remnant of evidence of a pre/proto-state female occupation, we find female potters on an Uruk-Jemdet Nasr seal described by Asher-Greve. On the seal we see eight persons in two rows. In the upper part one of them squats behind a kiln. In front of the kiln a woman with a ponytail is sitting with her hands stretched out onto round objects. There is a second kiln in front of which another person, probably also with a ponytail, and thus, according to Asher-Greve, a woman, is sitting stretching out her arms onto a round object. To the left of her a woman is carrying a round object. Asher-Greve interprets these women as working with the putting in and taking out of the pottery from the oven. She suggests that the women in the lower row either hold burned or unburned pottery, and if the latter is the case she believes that the vessels are delivered to the ovens by the women in the upper row.¹³⁶⁷ Thus, if Asher-Greve's interpretation of the seal is correct, it does show that there were female potters at the very beginning of early Mesopotamian state formation.

Wright believes that the development of the state can explain why some occupations, e.g. that of pottery, were principally occupied by men.¹³⁶⁸ The question of who were potters can also be elucidated by cross-cultural data. Wright writes that ethnographers have associated prehistoric pottery with women working only for the need of the household and with simple techniques. When the production became merchandised and commercialized

¹³⁶⁴ Asher-Greve 1985: 51.

¹³⁶⁵ Sallaberger 1996: 27 with fn. 134.

¹³⁶⁶ Wright 1991: 202.

¹³⁶⁷ Asher-Greve 1985: 51f.

¹³⁶⁸ Wright 1991: 202.

these scholars assumed that women no longer worked as potters.¹³⁶⁹ This picture is also met with in a paper by Anthropologists George Murdock and Caterina Provost. They list 50 technological activities from 185 cultures, both prehistoric and historic. These activities are then ordered according to the degree of male/female participation. Pottery is defined as a “swing activity”, which means that it is not predominantly practiced by one sex worldwide; in some cultures it is man’s work, in others women are the potters. They found though, that men work as potters in societies with a high degree of division of labor and complex technology, whereas women do this work in less complex societies.¹³⁷⁰

Wright discusses several aspects to be considered when estimating female participation in pottery production in prehistoric societies. One aspect is the misleading individual western perspective, seen in many ethnographers’ discussions on *the* potter, ignoring the fact that the production often was made in several stages by a team. There is evidence from societies where men formed the vessels that women did other tasks connected to the pottery, and also of the opposite situation in societies where women shaped the vessels.¹³⁷¹

Wright writes that in small-scale societies the social organization is ordered around kinship, whereas this is reordered in states, where women often are excluded from several tasks.¹³⁷² In both types of societies there is a division of labor by sex, but in the former this was done on more equal terms, and in the latter through an exclusion of women from several occupations. As we saw above this picture can also be found by Murdock and Provost regarding pottery, and it is also true for the development in general regarding division of labor by sex, as seen in their data.¹³⁷³

Knowledge of the potters can further be gained from work in similar techniques. Wright refers to Archaeologist Ruth Amiran, a scholar who has associated the development of pottery with the “making/cooking of porridge”. She points out that in both activities there is mixing, kneading, shap-

¹³⁶⁹ Wright 1991: 195.

¹³⁷⁰ Murdock and Provost 1973: 209, 212f. Wright refers to Anthropologist Dean E. Arnold who used other statistics presented in Murdock and Provost’s paper however, and his findings indicate that pottery was predominantly an occupation of women irrespective of degree of complexity in the society (Wright 1991: 197f.).

¹³⁷¹ Wright 1991: 198f.

¹³⁷² Wright 1991: 203. Cf. Arnold who writes about pottery that, “[a]s traditional subsistence strategies (like agriculture and hunting) were reduced and ultimately eliminated by population pressure [...], pottery making would become the primary activity for a livelihood. Since there would be no scheduling conflicts with subsistence activities, male potters would become more involved in the pottery making process and eventually would replace female potters, since the use of females for making pottery on a part-time basis is related to the female advantage in making pottery in a household and a solution to scheduling conflicts” (1985: 106). It thus seems as if it is more likely to find female potters in a less specialized society, and that the potters are more likely males in a highly specialized society.

¹³⁷³ Murdock and Provost 1973: 212f.

ing and firing. Clay has also often been found near the oven and can have been fired accidentally.¹³⁷⁴ Since women predominantly are those who prepare food in all societies,¹³⁷⁵ the invention of pottery can be related to women.¹³⁷⁶ Wright states that this “suggests that experimentation and development of the two techniques occurred hand-in-hand”.¹³⁷⁷

This picture can also be related to our myth; clay is mixed for Namma by somebody else, the womb goddesses nip off the clay,¹³⁷⁸ and Namma herself forms the clay. It is possible that the description of the pottery work of the goddesses in our myth reflects a certain social structure and stage in Mesopotamia. Thus, the association between the creation of a fetus in the vagina and the forming of clay can have originated from factual circumstances, women doing both, reflecting a comprehension of pottery as a women’s activity.

5.6.1.2. Ideological aspects of the potter theme

The categories that we deal with in the pottery theme are Enki, Ninmaḥ, Namma, and the seven womb goddesses. The logic of the ranking between these parties mirrors the urbanized Mesopotamian society; there is a hierarchic relationship between all those partaking in the forming of the first human being out of clay, and this mirrors the hierarchic relations in the pottery production in society. Enki is the one who designs how the being shall be formed. Namma is to form the being, but first the clay is mixed, and thereafter nipped off by the womb goddesses. Ninmaḥ shall act as an assistant to Namma, which poses her above the womb goddesses, but below Namma. Here we see a recalibration of both the mother goddesses, who earlier created alone, but now are dependent upon Enki. Further, a recalibration of Ninmaḥ is taking place when she is posed as the assistant of Namma; in this way she is placed as less powerful than the Eridu deities.

It was pointed out that the mother goddess is called potter, and that only females act as potters in our myth. Nevertheless, we never find women as potters in the sources. However, the seal dating to the Uruk-Jemdet Nasr period does indicate that there were women working with pottery in the early urban society, which then makes it possible that the goddesses’ acts reflect women’s acts in society. The seal, as our myth, can be understood as a group of potters that has internal specializations in the production process. The

¹³⁷⁴ Wright 1991: 107; Amiran 1965: 240, 242, 244f.

¹³⁷⁵ Wright 1991: 198.

¹³⁷⁶ Further, Murdock and Provost write that their data suggests a correspondence between producer and user (1973: 212).

¹³⁷⁷ Wright 1991: 210.

¹³⁷⁸ Cf. Archaeologist Hans Nissen who writes that “[w]e can [...] assume that there was an extensive internal division of labor in pottery production after the introduction of the potter’s wheel, because we may assume that the long-drawn-out process of preparing the clay was done by others” (1988: 48). I assume that he with “others” means others than the ones working at the wheel.

potter theme of the myth can be comprehended as reflecting a process where women's pottery production was subsumed under a male leader, thus supporting a social development where men became overseers of groups of working women. The development was due to a growing hierarchical complexity in society, which was initiated and favored by an increasingly patriarchal leadership.

5.6.2. The womb goddesses

5.6.2.1. Contextualization of the womb goddesses

When Enki is taking to action to create the substitute for the gods as demanded by Namma, his first move is as we saw to ponder, and thereafter he lets the sensar,¹³⁷⁹ come forth (verb: è). This creature has been understood by Pettinato as a first creation, representing the model of the man that is to be created: “Das was Enki bis jetzt erschuf, ist noch nicht der Mensch, sondern nur die ‘Form’ des Menschen, der höhere Bestandteil”.¹³⁸⁰ It is true that it is possible to read the sensar as a singular in section I, lines 26 and 32 (lines 28 and 34 in Pettinato's edition), but if it is a collective, as understood here, the plural does not have to be marked on the verb. In the third instance (section II, l. 9) where this word is met with it is however combined with a plural suffix (sensar nun-**ne**-ke₄).¹³⁸¹ The transliteration and translation of Pettinato do not go as far as to this line. In section I l. 9 we read:

All the noble (?) womb goddesses, those of destiny, eat first-class reed (?) and bread.¹³⁸²

Besides the argument of the plural suffix **-(e)ne**, the fact that sensar means “womb” in Sumerian¹³⁸³ makes it almost certain that the womb(s) are the

¹³⁷⁹ Stol refers to ll. 26 and 32 in our myth and points to this reading which first was suggested by Lambert (Stol 2000a: 80 with fn. 228). See also Lambert (1992: 130–132). Jacobsen instead reads this as two words: Imma-en and Imma-šar, interpreting these as personifications of the ovaries (1987: 156, with fn. 7). sensar was earlier read SIG₇.EN.SIG₇.DU₁₀.

¹³⁸⁰ Pettinato 1971: 39.

¹³⁸¹ I have gone through all instances in Black et al. (1998–2006) of -ne-ke₄. Throughout we find diġir(-re)-e-ne-ke₄ and some other instances of -e-ne-ke₄. In “A praise poem of Šulgi (Šulgi P)”, l. 36 however, we find diġir gal-gal-ne-ke₄. In “A hymn to Ħaia for Rīm-Sîn (Rīm-Sîn B)”, l. 26 we read: an^den-lil-lá unu₇ maḥ-ne-ne-ke₄ (/ni-ene-(a)k-e/). There are no other contexts with -ne-ke₄ (as for example unorthographic genitive /*.n-ek-e/) than those referring to the plural. These facts make me understand our -ne- to be a third person plural suffix.

¹³⁸² II: 9. gú se₁₂-en-^{sa7}sár nun-ne-ke₄ nam-tar gi-saġ ninda im-gu₇-e. Transliteration adapted from Lambert (2013: 336). This line has been found difficult by the translator of Black et al. (1998–2006) who writes: “All the princely birth-goddesses (?) ate delicate reed (?) and bread”, and similarly by Lambert who translates “The group of birth goddesses ... ate bread” (2013: 337). Klein has suggested the reading of namtar as Namtar, i.e. the god, or Fate, and not fate (2001: 144). If this was the case we would however expect nam-tar-re. I have tentatively chosen to read nam-tar as a genitive. Since our word is ending in -r the genitive is not graphically marked, for this see Attinger (1993: 258f.).

same collective as the seven enumerated goddesses. The contextual arguments for understanding sensar as the seven goddesses are as follows: First we are informed that Enki lets the sensar come forth. Then seven goddesses are enumerated as those who shall stand by Namma as she gives birth. After the birth Enki sets a feast, and then the sensar are mentioned again, but the seven goddesses are not enumerated. Here the sensar are mentioned after Ninmaḥ, as were the seven goddesses in the passage before. I find, then, that the most reasonable is to follow the interpretation already proposed by Benito (which predates that of Pettinato), and see the sensar as a collective designation of the seven goddesses who shall nip off the clay.¹³⁸⁴

In the Sumerian line of the bilingual version of “Enki and Ninmaḥ” sensar is replaced by Sumerian šatur (wr. šà-tur),¹³⁸⁵ which corresponds to Akkadian *šassūru* “womb”, the latter word in turn, being a loan word from Sumerian sensar.¹³⁸⁶ This word is also used in the Atraḥasīs myth in a context similar to ours. The first human beings are to be created so that they can do the work of the gods. The mother goddess throughout has the epithet *šassūru*, womb, here,¹³⁸⁷ and this is also the designation of a group of womb goddesses (*šassūrātu*) helping her. The mother goddess is herself nipping off fourteen pieces of clay¹³⁸⁸ and then we read:

The wise and knowing (mother goddess) kneaded, / seven and seven womb goddesses; seven created males, / seven created women.¹³⁸⁹

The parallel in the Atraḥasīs myth makes it obvious that the seven goddesses in our myth are collectively seen as womb goddesses, or literally “wombs”. The collective of womb and birth goddesses is also found in the Old Assyrian birth incantation referred to above, section 5.2.1.1., where we read that the “seven and seven” daughters of the mother goddess, the latter with the name Šassur, help at the birth.¹³⁹⁰ In our myth as well as in these two latter

¹³⁸³ Stol 2000a: 80 with fn. 228. The word can also be read sensur and sansur.

¹³⁸⁴ Benito 1969: 57, note to line 32.

¹³⁸⁵ Benito 1969: 57, note to line 32. The bilingual version of “Enki and Ninmaḥ” is published by Borger (1985: 18–22, for this line, see II: 6’, p. 21) as well as Lambert (2013: 343, l. 2).

¹³⁸⁶ Stol 2000a: 80.

¹³⁸⁷ Lambert and Millard 1999: 56f.

¹³⁸⁸ Lambert and Millard 1999: 60f., ll. 251, 256.

¹³⁸⁹ 8–10. *tal-si-ma er-še-tu mu-te-ti* / [7] *ù ’7’ šà-su-ra-ti 7 ú-ba-na-a zikarī^{mes}* / [7] *ú-ba-na-a sinnišāti^{mes}*. Transliteration adapted from Shehata (2001: 76). (King 1902, plate 49, IV: 8’ has *mu-te-ti*, and not *mu-te-te* as has Shehata.) Cf. Lambert and Millard (1999: 62).

¹³⁹⁰ Kouwenberg and Fincke 2012–2013: 142, 145. Cf. also the Hittite area, where similarly a group of female helpers at birth are found. This group is related to a mother goddess as well. The latter is called Ḥannaḥanna, written with the logogram DĪGIR.MAḤ, or sometimes ^dNIN.TU, i.e. with the same writing as two of the names of the Sumerian mother goddess. The collective is written DĪGIR.MAḤ^{tbl.A}. The goddesses of the collective are according to Beckman inferior deities in contrast to the powerful Ḥannaḥanna. The collective often occurs together with the ^dGul-še-eš, the Fate deities (1983: 239ff.). Beckman believes that both groups were thought to be present at every birth (1983: 244).

Akkadian cases we have a prominent mother goddess, and also a group of minor womb and birth goddesses assisting the woman giving birth.

The Akkadian material thus supports the theory of the sensar as a collective. Another aspect that is suggested by the Atraḥasīs myth is that the womb goddesses were seen as artisans, since the word *mudû/mudātu*¹³⁹¹ is a common designation on people working with crafts.¹³⁹²

Now it is time to turn to the individual womb goddesses. This will give us a wider knowledge of the field of associations regarding their role during the creation of man (!) as well as their relations to the mother goddess. The first of the womb goddesses is Ninimma, already known from “Enki and Ninḥursaġa”. From there we know that she is a learned goddess, active as scribe, land registrar and artisan of Enlil. In both “Enki and Ninḥursaġa” and “Enki and Ninmah” she is related to birth-giving.

Šuziana means “the true hand of heaven”. This goddess is attested in an offering list from the Ur III period.¹³⁹³ Šuziana is known as the minor wife of Enlil in several sources.¹³⁹⁴ What seems to be a special epithet of hers is *munus-dili*, “the singular woman”. Inana has the same epithet in the Sumerian Temple hymn no. 26.¹³⁹⁵ The meaning of the epithet is unclear.

Šuziana is also found in several lamentations, both from the Old Babylonian period and the first millennium. In these lamentations there are mainly two contexts where we meet her, both with Old Babylonian and first millennium dates. In the first context we read:

Usaḥara, the child of the *ištarītu*, / the shining lady, Šuziana, / the sweet wet-nurse, the one of the Ekur.¹³⁹⁶

The other context is as follows:

the son of the great lord, Nanna-Su'en, / the nu-gig of heaven, the lady of heaven, / the young Utu, lord, great hero / the shining lady, Šuziana / the mother (of) the house of the chief city, Nintinuga.¹³⁹⁷

¹³⁹¹ Lambert and Millard write that “*mu-te-ti* is taken as queer orthography for *mūdātī*” (1999: 154, note to S iii: 8).

¹³⁹² See *CAD M/2* sub *mudû*.

¹³⁹³ Krebernik 2001c: 455.

¹³⁹⁴ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 21, l. 84; Richter 2004: 44, 86f.

¹³⁹⁵ Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: 21, 36, ll. 80, 321.

¹³⁹⁶ 303–305. ^du₄-saḥar-ra du₅-mu mu-gig-ga ^dx[...ma]r iš-ta-[ri-ti] / gašan-babbar ^d[šu-zi-ana] / úmmeda ša₆-ga [mu-lu é]-kur-[ra]. The transliteration is taken from Cohen (1988: 237f., 249). The translation mainly follows that of Cohen. See also Cohen (1988: 285f., 306, 361) for the restoration.

¹³⁹⁷ a+51– a+55. ^dumu nun gal ^dnanna-^dsu'en-na / mu-gig an-na gašan an-na-ke₄ / šul ^dutu umun ur-saġ gal-la-[ke₄] / gašan-babbar ^dšu-zi-an-na-ke₄ / ama é úru saġ-ġá gašan-tin-lu-ba-ke₄. The transliteration is taken from Cohen (1988: 471). It is also found on page 529, and restored on page 390 (Cohen 1988).

To start with, Šuziana appears in both contexts among astral deities. This fact and her epithet *munus-dili* which she has in common with Inana, makes me suspect that she had astral connotations. In the first context above, Šuziana is called *ištarītu*, Sum. *nu-gig*, which refers to a priestess. This priestess is rarely attested, and it is seldom expressly stated to what context she belongs,¹³⁹⁸ but Renger writes that in one text this priestess appears with a midwife, seeing to it that another *ištarītu* gives her child to a wet-nurse.¹³⁹⁹ Also in the case of Šuziana, the *ištarītu* occurs in a wet-nurse context. Šuziana, just like Ninimma, is called the “wet-nurse of Sîn” in An-Anum.¹⁴⁰⁰ Further Šuziana is met with in a context of the healing goddess Nintinuga, who is related to both life and death.¹⁴⁰¹ The relation to both the *ištarītu* and Nintinuga corresponds to the role of Šuziana in our myth.

Ninmada is the next womb goddess. The name means “the lord/lady of the land”. We find this name in connection with a male deity in the myth “How grain came to Sumer”. There Ninmada is the brother of Ninazu, and both of them are about to introduce grain in Sumer. This they will do by fetching it in the mountains where it is kept by Enlil.¹⁴⁰² In the comment to the relevant line, Benito writes that “The equation in *MSL* IV p. 413 line 29 ^dnin-ma-da = ^dgašan-ma-da = muš-laḥ-^de[n-lil-l]a-ke₄ [the snake charmer of Enlil, my comment] has been interpreted by Bergmann and Falkenstein as a mistake. If that interpretation is correct then this is the only occurrence of Nin-ma-da with a feminine role”.¹⁴⁰³ What Benito means here is that Bergmann and Falkenstein understood the equation of nin of Ninmada with Emesal *gašan* as a mistake, since *gašan* only refers to females. Since Ninmada is a female in our myth as well, I do not see it as necessary to understand the instance in *MSL* of Ninmada as a female deity as a mistake. Further, there is also an attestation of Ninmada as goddess in a godlist from Nippur where she is posed as the wife of Dagan. Otherwise, besides in “How grain came to Sumer”, Ninmada is attested as male also in a litany, in Gudea Cyl. B iv:1–3 and in An-Anum.¹⁴⁰⁴

Ninbara’s name means “the lady of the dais/throne”. Sumerologists Antoine Cavigneaux and Manfred Krebernik write that she was either corresponding to, or associated with, the mother goddess in the big godlist from Fāra, and she is found in a context of motherhood, standing before Nin-AMA.ME in another Fāra text. Ninbara is further attested in the Abū Šalābīḥ

¹³⁹⁸ In several texts the *ištarītu* is only mentioned, and the contexts often do not give much information on her (*CAD* I/J sub *ištarītu*).

¹³⁹⁹ Renger 1967: 184.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Lambert 2013: 506.

¹⁴⁰¹ The name Nintinuga means “the mistress who revives the dead” (“Herrin die den Toten belebt” (Edzard 1965: 78)).

¹⁴⁰² Black et al. 1998–2006. “How grain came to Sumer”.

¹⁴⁰³ Benito 1969: 58; see Landsberger 1956: 5 (Emesal I: 29).

¹⁴⁰⁴ Cavigneaux and Krebernik 2001e: 462.

godlist.¹⁴⁰⁵ In *MSL* IV Emesal I: 85 she is called *telītu*,¹⁴⁰⁶ which according to the *AHw* means “the very virtuous one” (“die überaus Tüchtige”).¹⁴⁰⁷ This epithet is commonly found by Inana; hence Jacobsen’s conclusion that Ninbara is a form of the goddess Inana.¹⁴⁰⁸ According to Assyriologist H. Zimmern, *telītu* is a designation of a priestess. His conclusion is based upon the fact that this word besides *nadītu* and *šugītu* is equalled to SAL.ME (= lukur) in a lexical text (*MSL* XII 129: 23–25).¹⁴⁰⁹ Also Lambert comes to a similar conclusion.¹⁴¹⁰ The *nadītu* (Sumerian lukur) is a well-known priestess from the Old Babylonian period and the *šugītu* is also attested as a priestess.¹⁴¹¹

The signs constituting the spelling of Ninbara are written twice consecutively, and Lambert chooses the reading Nin-šar₆ in both instances, whereas in the translation he only writes this name once.¹⁴¹² Jacobsen instead, first reads Ninšar, and then Ninbara. Jacobsen writes that Ninšar is a version of Inana as well, and in this case as the spouse of An, the god of heaven.¹⁴¹³ I follow Lambert here and understand the duplication of one goddess’ name as duplication and nothing more. This line occurs in only one manuscript treated by both Lambert and Benito, which means that we cannot compare with other scribes’ writings. Since the birth/womb goddesses are seven in all other instances,¹⁴¹⁴ I assume that this is the case also in our myth. However, note that Ninḫursaġa is giving birth to eight deities in “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” when healing Enki.

After Ninbara/Ninšar the goddess Ninmug is enumerated. In “Enki and the world order” she is the goddess of metal work. There Enki allots her tasks in the following way:

This¹⁴¹⁵ sister of mine, pure Ninmug, / the golden chisel and the silver burin¹⁴¹⁶ will be received by her. / The big flint antasura blade will be taken by

¹⁴⁰⁵ Cavigneaux and Krebernik 2001y: 336.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Landsberger 1956: 8.

¹⁴⁰⁷ *AHw* sub *telītu*. von Soden translates *telītu* as “tüchtig (?)” (1933: 167). In *CAD* T sub *tele’û*, the word is translated with “able, experienced”. In the latter source there are a few references where the masculine form of this word (*tele’û*) is attested. The majority of the references are in the feminine form. As *telītu* the word is said to be either “1’ In apposition to the divine name Ištar”, or “2’ alone or attributive to other epithets of Ištar”.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Jacobsen 1987: 157, fn. 10.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Zimmern 1918–1919: 180; Civil et al. 1969: 129 (Lu IV: 23–25).

¹⁴¹⁰ Lambert 1982: 213f.

¹⁴¹¹ The *nadītu* is treated in sections 2.1.2.3. and 5.6.4. For the *šugītu*, see Renger (1967: 176ff.), and *CAD* Š/3 sub *šugītu*.

¹⁴¹² Lambert 2013: 336, l. 34.

¹⁴¹³ Jacobsen 1987: 156 f. with fn. 10.

¹⁴¹⁴ The Atrahašis myth and the Assyrian birth incantation referred to in section 5.6.2., as well as the seven twins being born by Ninḫursaġa in the Barton Cylinder. For the latter, see section 1., as well as section 3.1.2.

¹⁴¹⁵ I tentatively read -e- as “this”. See Thomsen who writes that -e sometimes seems to function as a demonstrative (2001: 81).

her. / She will be the metalworker of the land! / When a king is born, the binding of the true crown (onto his head), / when a lord is born, the putting of the crown (on his head) – that does indeed lie in her hands.¹⁴¹⁷

Further, in the ̒endursaĝa hymn Ninmug is the one who sees to that the fire, Gibil, is to be at hand in the temple Ekur.¹⁴¹⁸ This is probably due to her role as metalworker. In one source Ninmug is called “wife of Išum”,¹⁴¹⁹ i.e. the Akkadian version of ̒endursaĝa. As Cavigneaux and Krebernik point out, the placing of Ninmug as the first deity of ̒endursaĝa’s retinue suggests that she is his wife.¹⁴²⁰ Besides corresponding to ̒endursaĝa, Išum was seen as a variant of the netherworld god Erra/Nergal as well,¹⁴²¹ which relates also Ninmug to that sphere.

An epithet of Ninmug’s is *bēlet biššūri*, “the lady of the woman’s genitals”.¹⁴²² In an Eršemma she is paralleled to Ninḥursaĝa and Diĝirmaḥ.¹⁴²³ This also connects her to the sphere of childbirth and midwifery. Cavigneaux and Krebernik write that Ninmug was both a craft and a birth goddess, and that this is related to the fact that the Sumerian word used for “giving birth” (tu.d) could also denote the production of statuettes.¹⁴²⁴

The information on Ninmug puts her in a context that corresponds very well with that of the goddesses in “Enki and Ninḥursaĝa”, our previous myth; all of them had netherworldly connotations, and at the same time the focus was on childbirth and on their sexuality. By Ninmug we also have a further aspect of the womb and mother goddesses, which is that of crafts.

At the end we have two goddesses of whom nothing is known. The name of the first is written SAR.SAR.GABA, which Kramer and Maier read as Musargaba.¹⁴²⁵ Attinger has pointed to the fact that sar alone is used for Akk. *mušaru*, flower bed, plot, as have Sumerologists Antoine Cavigneaux and Farouk al-Rawi after him. They also suggest that SAR.SAR shall in fact be read sar-sar.¹⁴²⁶ Thus, the correct reading of this name might be Sarsargaba. As its Akkadian correspondence sar(-sar) means flower bed, plot, and gaba means breast, chest, coast, surface etc. it can be hypothesized that her name

¹⁴¹⁶ So Black et al. 1998–2006. “Enki and the world order”.

¹⁴¹⁷ 406–411. nin₉-e-ĝu₁₀ kù^d nin-mug-ke₄ / buluĝ kù-siĝ₁₇ ma-an-ga-ra kù-babbar šu ḥé-em-ma-an-ti / ĝiri zú gal an-ta-sur-ra-ni ḥé-em-ma-da-an-ri / tibira kalam-ma ḥé-em / lugal ù-tu suḥ zi kéš-dè / en ù-tu saĝ-men ĝá-ĝá šu-na ḥé-en-ĝál. Transliteration adapted from Black et al. (1998–2006. “Enki and the world order”).

¹⁴¹⁸ Edzard and Wilcke 1976: 150f., ll. 92f.

¹⁴¹⁹ Benito 1969: 58, l. 35.

¹⁴²⁰ Cavigneaux and Krebernik 2001g: 472.

¹⁴²¹ Black and Green 2008: 112.

¹⁴²² Benito 1969: 58, l. 35.

¹⁴²³ Cavigneaux and Krebernik 2001g: 472.

¹⁴²⁴ Cavigneaux and Krebernik 2001g: 473.

¹⁴²⁵ Kramer and Maier 1989: 33. Kramer and Maier point out that the reading of the name is uncertain (ibid. 213, note 21).

¹⁴²⁶ Attinger 1999–2000: 262; Cavigneaux and al-Rawi 2002: 52.

means “the surface of the flower bed”. The references and texts that I have found with the word sar(-sar) all seem to relate it to abundance and prosperity. In the *CAD* it occurs in contexts such as “the delicacies of the garden” and “luxuriant gardens”.¹⁴²⁷ In “Dumuzi-Inana D₁” we also find the word in a context of prosperity. Inana has craved the royal bed, and then her servant Ninšubur brings the king to her and says:

May the king, your beloved spouse, spend long days in your lap, the sweet thing. / [...] / Give him the throne of kingship, of its firm foundation. / [---] / May he establish fields like a farmer. / Like a righteous shepherd may he make the sheepfolds teem. / [---] / In the plots (sar-sar-ra) may lettuce and cress grow under him.¹⁴²⁸ / In the palace long life may be there under him.¹⁴²⁹

A similar picture is seen in the “Hymne an Inana-Dilibad/Ninsi’anna mit Erwähnung der Heiligen Hochzeit Iddindagāns mit der Göttin”, treated by Römer. Here Inana as Venus is seen in the evening sky, and the land is depicted as peaceful and prosperous, abundant and multiplying.¹⁴³⁰ Although the garden plot is only mentioned here, it seems to be in a context where it is commonly found. The presence of Sarsargaba in the myth may be due to her connotations of growth and abundance, and her powers can have been understood as giving the child a good start in life. The name of this goddess is read differently by Jacobsen. He calls her “Dududuḥ”,¹⁴³¹ and writes that “Dududuḥ seems to denote ‘the one who opens the one giving birth’”.¹⁴³² Lambert instead reads Mumudu, and suggests that this is referring to the dream deity Mamu.¹⁴³³

The last goddess is read Ninguna by Benito,¹⁴³⁴ and Ereš(NIN)guna by Jacobsen,¹⁴³⁵ whereas Lambert reads Nin-NĪGIN[?]-a.¹⁴³⁶ Nin/Erešguna means “the bright(ly colored) lady”. According to Jacobsen, Erešguna is a version of Inana,¹⁴³⁷ whereas Cavigneaux and Krebernik differentiate between Inana as Ninguna¹⁴³⁸ and our goddess (when read Ninguna).

¹⁴²⁷ *CAD* M/2 sub *mušaru* B.

¹⁴²⁸ I follow Sefati and read -n.da, “with him” as “under him”, see Sefati’s comment (1998: 311).

¹⁴²⁹ 37. lugal-e nitadam ki-áĝ-zu úr kù níĝ du₁₀-zu u₄ ḥa-ba-ni-ib-sù-ud-dè / [...] / 39. ĝiš^{is} gu-za nam-lugal-la suḥuš gi-na-ba šúm-mu-na-ab / [---] / 48–49. e-ne engar-gin₇ gána ḥé-ĝá-ĝá / sipa zi-gin₇ amaš ḥé-im-mi-lu-lu / [---] / 58–59. sar-sar-ra ḥi-is^{sar} zà-ḥi-li^{sar} ḥé-en-da-mú / 59. é-gal-la zi sù-ud ĝál ḥé-en-da-an-ĝál. Transliteration adapted from Sefati (1998: 302–303).

¹⁴³⁰ Römer 1965: 131, 139, ll. 86–105.

¹⁴³¹ Jacobsen 1987: 156.

¹⁴³² Jacobsen 1987: 156f. and fn. 10.

¹⁴³³ Lambert 2013: 506.

¹⁴³⁴ Benito 1969: 24, 37, l. 35.

¹⁴³⁵ Jacobsen 1987: 156.

¹⁴³⁶ Cavigneaux and Krebernik 2001d: 376–377.

¹⁴³⁷ Jacobsen 1987: 157, fn. 10.

¹⁴³⁸ Variant writing: Ningunu.

Benito writes in his commentary to this name that, “[t]he traces of the sign after the last NIN seem to point to GÙN not NIGÍN as read by Van Dijk”.¹⁴³⁹ When looking at Lambert’s copy of the tablet,¹⁴⁴⁰ I would say that the sign could be GÙN as well as NÍĜIN. However, since Lambert is the scholar who has most recently looked at the evidence, I choose to follow him. There is a goddess ^dNIN.NÍĜIN that shall be read Ereš/Egi-niĝara. The word niĝara is a name on sanctuaries belonging to Gula/Ninisina in Isin and Inana in Šuruppag, Akkade and Zabalam. The goddess Ereš/Egi-niĝara often appears in the godlists after Nintinuga. The contexts where Ereš/Egi-niĝara is found point to an equation between Ereš/Egi-niĝara and the healing goddess.¹⁴⁴¹

5.6.2.2. Ideological aspects of the womb goddesses

The womb goddesses are referred to by the word literally meaning “wombs” in our myth, and that is the case also in the Atraḥasīs myth. When the womb goddesses were contextualized however, it was seen that their area of competence was in several cases much wider than just that of giving birth. The depiction of the womb goddesses in our myth is in line with what we saw regarding the minor goddesses in “Enki and Ninḥursaĝa”; the myth does not give any information on their wider area of competence. I understand this to be a recalibration of the womb goddesses as well, narrowing their function, reducing it to their sex.

One aspect that several of them have in common is a relation to Enlil or Inana, as well as a function in relation to the king (lugal); Ninimma is the artisan of Enlil; Šuziana is the minor wife of Enlil; Ninmada is the snake charmer of Enlil; Ninbara represents the throne, and she is also closely related to Inana; Ninmug is related to Enlil since she makes sure that there is fire in the Ekur, Enlil’s abode. Ninmug is further related to the king since it is said in “Enki and the world order” that it is Ninmug’s task to put the crown on lord and king. Nothing is known of the goddess Sarsargaba, but perhaps her relationship to abundance can be understood as referring to a legitimate kingship. Lastly NinNÍĜINa is related to the healing goddess Gula/Ninisina if she shall be understood as Ereš/Egi-niĝara. Further, there is a possible relation to Inana since niĝara was the name of at least three of her sanctuaries. Not only Enlil represented kingship, but Inana was one of the foremost advocates of it. Thus, most or all of these goddesses can be related to the legitimate kingship of Sumer.

I will argue below, in section 5.8., called “Ninmaḥ’s creatures and their destinies” that Ninmaḥ is the protectress of a rulership that superseded the kingship that Enki represented; Enki was the ruler called en, whereas Enlil

¹⁴³⁹ Benito 1969: 59, note to line 35.

¹⁴⁴⁰ Lambert 2013: 591.

¹⁴⁴¹ Cavigneaux and Krebernik 2001h: 477.

represented the king, *lugal*. As was noted, almost all womb goddesses are related to kingship, either through royal attributes (*bára*,¹⁴⁴² “throne”), through a function in relation to the king (putting the crown on kings and lords, as was the case with *Ninmug*), through a relationship with *Enlil*, the *lugal*, “king”, of the pantheon, or through being related to *Inana*, the champion of the legitimate kingship. I understand this as an attempt to recalibrate the concept of kingship (*nam-lugal*) by denigrating it. Here we are informed that the substitute of the working gods, who is the king, is created with the help of *Ninmah* and these goddesses. Thus, the goddesses representing and supporting kingship are in fact related to nothing more than the first slave¹⁴⁴³ of the gods. In this way both the goddesses and the king (*lugal*) are recalibrated. They are in one sense represented as belonging to those who are ranked at the bottom of society. I understand the myth as reflecting a conflict between two ways of rule.

Although most of the womb goddesses have left next to no imprints in the sources of ancient Mesopotamia, we can reach a deeper understanding of their connotations by further exploring some of the contexts that they are related to. Therefore I will return to the method of contextualization regarding two of the womb goddesses’ professions below.

5.6.3. *Ninmug*, the metalworker

5.6.3.1. Contextualization of *Ninmug*, the metalworker

Since *Ninmug* is the goddess of metal work, I will examine the context of metallurgy. To start with, there were hardly any natural deposits of metals in Mesopotamia, and the metals therefore had to be brought in from the surrounding mountainous areas.¹⁴⁴⁴ Thus, the origin of metallurgy is not to be

¹⁴⁴² This word is used as denoting a throne for both the *en* and the *lugal*.

¹⁴⁴³ Humans were understood as the slaves of the gods in ancient Mesopotamia. The king was instead seen as close to the gods, being the intermediary between humans and the divine world. At times he was understood either as a spouse or a child of deities, and sometimes he even posed himself as a god (Selz 2008: 20; Cooper 2008: 261).

¹⁴⁴⁴ Copper was imported from Iran and eastern Anatolia, and during a period between 2500 and 1800 BCE also from Oman. The most used metals in Mesopotamia were copper and its alloy bronze. According to Muhly, copper metallurgy was undeveloped in Mesopotamia up to the middle of the third millennium. The knowledge of this craft is very old in the Ancient Near East, though. The oldest copper objects in the area have been found at *Cayönü Tepesi* and *Nevali Cori* in Anatolia, both sites dated to the eighth millennium. In Mesopotamia the oldest copper object is an owl, found at a site northwest of *Yarim Tepe*, estimated to date to the late seventh millennium. Other copper finds come from the *Sinjar valley* (situated in northern Iraq, a little to the west of *Nineveh*) and date to *Archaic Hassuna*, *Hassuna* and *Halaf* periods (5800–4500 BCE). The oldest known lead objects in the area, a bracelet and a bead, date to 6000 BCE, and they come from *Yarim Tepe* and *Jarmo* respectively. Silver was worked in the Ancient Near East from the fourth millennium. Also the silver found in Mesopotamia seems to originate from the northern mountainous areas. According to a preliminary study by Muhly, at least, the silver of an Early Dynastic coil from *Hafaga* and Neo-Sumerian rings from *Tello* come from mines in the *Taurus mountains*. Examples of early objects con-

sought in Mesopotamia. Even the oldest copper and lead objects of Mesopotamia come from the northern parts well beyond the core land of early high civilization. This means that the first metalworkers cannot be found in Mesopotamia either. This is also assumed by Joannès in the beginning of his paper on Mesopotamian metallurgy: “Il apparaît ainsi que les artisans assyro-babyloniens spécialisés dans le métal n’ont pas été à l’origine de l’utilisation de nouveaux métaux, et que c’est à l’Ouest (Anatolie et Syrie-Palestine) et à l’Est (plateau iranien) qu’il faut chercher les foyers initiateurs de nouvelles techniques”¹⁴⁴⁵.

In spite of this situation, the main information on metalworkers in the cuneiform culture deals with Mesopotamian metalworkers. Joannès writes that there were three basic professions within metallurgy. The founder (Sum. *simug*, Akk. *nappāhu*) melted and founded the metal, the metalworker (Sum. *tibira*, Akk. *gurgurru*) worked and formed it, and the goldsmith (Sum. *kù-dím*, Akk. *kutimmu*) worked with precious metals.¹⁴⁴⁶ The metalworkers of Mesopotamia often worked in large communities, and in the late periods they belonged to the upper class of the artisans.¹⁴⁴⁷

The mould was in Sumerian called *kùš(-kùš)* and in Akkadian *rāṭ nappāhi*. According to Joannès another word, Sumerian ^{urudu}*āgarin* (AMA.GÍN), Akkadian *agarinnu*, perhaps designated the mould for the pickaxe.¹⁴⁴⁸ The term *agarin* is also found in Gudea Cylinder A, although with yet another spelling:

He struck the mould (and) the brick fell (out) in the light. / To its crucible’s clay pit / he looked with an approving gaze.¹⁴⁴⁹

I suppose that what is meant here is that the clay of the brick was taken from a special clay pit that was also used for the moulds. Clay was a common material for the moulds. One example is Sennacherib’s fabrication of moulds, when he, as translated by Joannès, says: “J’ai réalisé un moulage

taining gold in Mesopotamia are findings at the Royal Cemetery of Ur. We saw above, section 5.4.2., that although Muhly does not lean towards an Anatolian origin of this gold there are indications that it in fact can have been derived from that area (Muhly 1997: 123–130; von Soden 1994: 118). Gold and especially copper are also discussed above in section 4.4.1.

¹⁴⁴⁵ Joannès 1997: 96.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Joannès 1997: 100f. The same occupations are also found in the Hittite culture (Sieglová 1997: 117). Specialization is further found already by the metalworkers at the Chalcolithic (4500–3500 BCE) Palestine site Mishmar (Muhly 1997: 125).

¹⁴⁴⁷ Joannès 1997: 101. In Hittite Anatolia there were centralized workshops. The evidence seems to indicate though, that there were also more freely working metalworkers engaged in local metal work (Sieglová 1997: 113ff.).

¹⁴⁴⁸ Joannès 1997: 107. This assumption might be based upon the meaning of the two signs of the word, which mean mother and pickaxe. In the lexical list Erimḫuš AMA.GÍN is thus glossed: AMA^{a-ga-ti-in}GÍN (*AHw* sub *agarinnu*), which tells us that these signs together shall be read “*agarin*”.

¹⁴⁴⁹ xix: 3–5. *ù-šub mu-dúb sig₄ u₄-dè ba-šub / ka-al im āga-rí-na-ba-šè / igi zi ba-ši-bar*. Transliteration taken from Edzard (1997: 81).

(d'animaux) en bronze; [...] avec l'inspiration du dieu (Ea) je fabriquai des moules d'argile".¹⁴⁵⁰

The word *agarin/agarinnu* meant both “mould (of the pickaxe)” and “mother”,¹⁴⁵¹ and according to the *AHw* also “womb”.¹⁴⁵² Perhaps the connotation “mother” or “womb” was inherent also in the usage of the term for mould, the mould being seen as a “mother” of the cast metal object. The metalworker can be seen as a midwife, helping the new life or form to come into existence. From this perspective it seems natural that the goddess of metal work helps Namma when she is giving birth.

A question of interest for us, but not discussed by the scholars here referred to, is whether women also worked in the production of metal. If we take the ethnographic data presented by Murdock and Provost as a point of departure when trying to answer this question, it is not likely that women were metalworkers in Mesopotamia.¹⁴⁵³ In the 185 cultures studied by them, metallurgy is a “strictly masculine activity”.¹⁴⁵⁴ There are however female metalworkers attested in Mesopotamia, although from the Neo-Assyrian period. They are listed among 200 other women like musicians, bakers and scribes.¹⁴⁵⁵ In literary texts we do not only meet a female metalworker in “Enki and the world order”, but also in the incantation collection *Maqlû*. The latter text is dated to the Neo-Assyrian period. Although of a late date the source is of importance for us since along with “Enki and the world order”, it gives some information on the comprehension of the female metalworker.¹⁴⁵⁶ Thus, it is worthwhile looking a little closer at it. The purpose of the incantations in this collection is to free a person from witchcraft. At the beginning we are told that the bewitched one has the mouth full of witches' knots and that his or her rejoicing has turned into sorrow etc.¹⁴⁵⁷ The incantations are accompanied by different magical acts when the sorcery is driven away.¹⁴⁵⁸

If we now turn to the female metalworkers we find them in two places; once as a *gurgurratu*,¹⁴⁵⁹ which simply means “female metalworker”, and in

¹⁴⁵⁰ Joannès 1997: 107.

¹⁴⁵¹ It also meant beer mash. See *PSD* A/III, 60; *CAD* A/1 sub *agarinnu*.

¹⁴⁵² *AHw* sub *agarinnu(m)*.

¹⁴⁵³ Assyriologist JoAnn Scurlock writes that a spindle and a *kirissu*, “make-up spatula”, or an *agarinnu*, “mould”, was handed over to the newborn girl (1991: 148). I assume that the *agarinnu* was given only because the word is a synonym for “mother” and “womb”, and therefore the mould represented the future of the girl.

¹⁴⁵⁴ Murdock and Provost 1973: 208.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Lion 2011: 101; Svård 2012: 179f.

¹⁴⁵⁶ I have found one other literary attestation of a female metalworker: *AHw* sub *qurqurratu(m)*, where we read: *qú-ur-qú-ra-at Anunakī*, with reference HS, 175, III: 24. The other reference there is to *Maqlû*.

¹⁴⁵⁷ Meier 1937: 7; Schwemer 2010: 316, I: 8–9.

¹⁴⁵⁸ Meier 1937, passim, and especially the last tablet which is a ritual tablet (ibid. 53–64). See also Schwemer (2010: 317f.).

¹⁴⁵⁹ *AHw* sub *qurqurru*; *CAD* G sub *gurgurratu*, has *Maqlû* as only reference. See also *CAD* G sub *gurgurru* A.

another place as a *kutimmatu*,¹⁴⁶⁰ a female goldsmith.¹⁴⁶¹ To start with, these women are found in a context alongside other women, and further, they are pointed out as those who have bewitched the afflicted person. Throughout the incantation collection, words for witch and sorcerer occur. However, the words of the feminine gender are twice as many as those with masculine gender.¹⁴⁶² Further, feminine pronouns and verbal forms dominate when referring to the witch. Thus, the context here is that of evil women, who seem to be more suspect than men just because they are women. Another fact is that there are several references to foreigners,¹⁴⁶³ and the *gurgurratu* occurs in a row together with foreigners. In this passage the bewitched says that the sorceress (¹*kaššāptu*) is an Elamite, a Gutian, a Sutean, a Lullubean, a person from Ḫanigalbat, an *agugiltu*, a *naršinnatu*,¹⁴⁶⁴ a snake charmer, a witchcraft priestess, a female metalworker, a person lurking at the door of the afflicted, and finally a female citizen (*mārat alī-ja*).¹⁴⁶⁵ All the designations of different people are written in the feminine here. They all refer to peoples living in the areas east (Elamites), north-east (Gutians and Lullubeans),¹⁴⁶⁶ and west (Suteans) of Mesopotamia.¹⁴⁶⁷ Ḫanigalbat was a designation of an area of fluctuating size, denoting the Hurrian empire also called Mitanni. At its greatest extent in the middle of the 15th century it stretched from the Mediterranean in the west up to the area of Nuzi in the east, comprising almost all of Assyria.¹⁴⁶⁸ Regarding the relationship between Mesopotamia and the mentioned peoples, it was one of constant conflict; the latter not only blocked the trading routes of the Mesopotamians into the mountains, but they also attacked and looted Mesopotamian cities.¹⁴⁶⁹

These peoples were constantly warring with and raiding Mesopotamia, but why are individuals threatened by alleged female metalworkers? It may be that they represent an anomaly, being both women and practicing a male

¹⁴⁶⁰ Meier 1937: 33, 41, IV: 128 (*gurgurratu*), VI: 20 (*kutimmatu*).

¹⁴⁶¹ *AHW* sub *kutimmatu*, translates this word with “Silberschmiedin” and the only reference is to *Maqlū*. See also *AHW* *kutīmu* “Gold- u Silberschmied”. *CAD* translates *kutimmatu* as “female charcoal burner (?)”, and similarly refers to *Maqlū*, but also to another reference in an uncertain medical context. The same dictionary translates *kutimmu* as “gold- or silversmith” (*CAD* K).

¹⁴⁶² I counted to 164 designations of sorceresses and other female agents comprehended as witches, and 82 designations of male sorcerers and other males comprehended as such.

¹⁴⁶³ Besides the passage with the *gurgurratu* (IV: 128) other passages where we meet foreigners are: in III: 78–81 where a male Sutean and a male Elamite are followed by a female Sutean and Elamite, and in IV: 106f. where female Gutians, Elamites and Ḫanigalbatites are mentioned (Meier 1937: 24, 32).

¹⁴⁶⁴ According to *AHW* sub *agugillu* and *agugiltu*, the *agugiltu* is a sorceress, possibly a Sumerian loan word meaning “Fadencreuzer”. See also *CAD* A/1 sub *agugillu*. The *naršinnatu* is a witch; see *AHW* sub *naršindatu*, *naršindū* and *CAD* N/1 sub *naršindu*.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Meier 1937: 33, IV: 119–130.

¹⁴⁶⁶ von Soden 1994: 25f.

¹⁴⁶⁷ Stol 2004: 648.

¹⁴⁶⁸ von Weiher 1975: 105.

¹⁴⁶⁹ E.g. von Soden 1994: 26.

occupation. From this perspective they do not necessarily represent real female metalworkers; it can have been an image of evil and anomaly. Further, since the female metalworkers occur in rows of foreigners, they may have been foreigners themselves, which also poses them as deviating and dangerous persons. Thus, this female can have been comprehended as an anomaly on three levels: she is a woman, she is foreign and she is working in a men's profession.

The context of the peoples of the mountains met with by the *gurgurratu* accords well with the origins of metallurgy in the area. It also accords with our previous finds regarding the mother goddess, who was also related to the mountainous areas. Although Murdock and Provost's data suggests that women never are metalworkers, "Enki and the world order" and *Maqlû* at least leaves the possibility open that there once were female metalworkers in Mesopotamia and/or adjacent areas. Further, as pointed out, female metalworkers are attested in Mesopotamia in a list from the Neo-Assyrian period enumerating several female professionals.

5.6.3.2. Ideological aspects of Ninmug

In our myth, Ninmug is as said not represented as a metalworker, but as a "womb", whereas in "Enki and the world order" she is said to be the metalworker of the land. This can be understood as a recalibration of a goddess representing skilled female metalworkers. In our myth Ninmug is however not disparaged as the female metalworkers of *Maqlû*. The latter text seems to represent a later stage of this recalibration, being an expression in a society where open hostility was expressed against able women.

5.6.4. Ninmada, the snake charmer

5.6.4.1. Contextualization of Ninmada, the snake charmer

In *Maqlû* we also meet the profession of Ninmada, the snake charmer. This profession was enumerated in the same row of foreigners and others, as was the *gurgurratu*. The *mušlahḫatu* is also found in another context in *Maqlû*, which starts at the beginning of tablet III. There we read:

Incantation. Witch who walks in the streets, / who presses her way into houses, / running around in the alleys... / [---] / who took away the virility of the handsome man, / who carried away the fruit of the attractive maiden.¹⁴⁷⁰

Then the writer/speaker tells that his sorceress poisoned a person's way and which magical acts the person uses to ward off the evil. Thereafter the section where the snake charmer is mentioned comes:

¹⁴⁷⁰ III: 1–3. *én kaššāptu mut-tal-lik-tú šá šūqāti^{meš} / mu-ter-rib-tu₄ šá bītāti^{meš} / da-ai-li-tu₄ ša bi-re-e-ti / [---] / 8–9. šá eḫli damqi du-us-su i-kim / šá ardatu damiqtu^{tu^f} i-ni-ib-šá it-bal.* Transliteration adapted from Meier (1937: 22).

Incantation. Witch, murderess, / hag, *naršindatu*-witch, / incantation priestess, ecstatic woman, / female snake charmer, sorceress, / *qadištu*-priestess, *nadītu*-priestess, *ištarītu*-priestess, *kulmašītu*-priestess¹⁴⁷¹

The women of the two first lines as well as the *agugiltu*/sorceress following the *mušlahḫatu*/female snake charmer are obviously practicing evil, and their presence as possible persons who have cast evil upon the afflicted one is quite expected. The other females demand some explanation however. I shall start with the last four professions and then shortly comment upon the incantation priestess and the ecstatic woman. Thereafter I shall return to the *mušlahḫatu* and her connotations.

The four last titles have been met with earlier,¹⁴⁷² and we have seen that they all refer to priestesses. They shall be discussed with the aim to see if they had any common denominators. These common denominators could then be a part of the context where the *mušlahḫatu* is met. As was mentioned earlier, all these priestess titles have Sumerian equivalents: nu-gig equals *ištarītu*, as well as *qadištu*.¹⁴⁷³ Further, we also saw that nu-bar corresponds to *kulmašītu*¹⁴⁷⁴ and that the Sumerian word for *nadītu* is lukur.¹⁴⁷⁵ The titles nu-gig and lukur are found in the oldest sources,¹⁴⁷⁶ whereas nu-bar is attested from Old Babylonian period.¹⁴⁷⁷

The right to property and inheritance are facts that can tell us something of the position of these priestesses. It was stated earlier that according to the Laws of Hammurabi the *qadištu*, *kulmašītu* and the *nadītu* had the right to a dowry (*šeriktu*), and that they all had the right to inherit a third of the assets of their father, if they had not received a dowry before his death. Although the woman's brothers to some extent were to control the property, the laws of inheritance nevertheless show that they were thought of differently than other women. Ordinary women usually did not get a share of the inheritance since they were to be supported by their husbands.¹⁴⁷⁸ The property regulations for the priestesses obviously aimed at seeing to it that they were supported during their lifetime. Since these priestesses often were unmarried,

¹⁴⁷¹ III: 40–45. é¹kaššāptu nir-ta-ni-tu₄ / e-le-ni-tu₄ nar-šin-da-tu₄ / a-ši-ip-tu₄ eš-še-bu-ti / mušlahḫatu^{tu₄} a-gu-gil-tu₄ / ¹qadištu ¹nadītu / ^dištar-i-tu₄ kul-ma-ši-tu₄. Transliteration adapted from Meier (1937: 23).

¹⁴⁷² All but the *ištarītu* were discussed in the section on the historical setting, and the *ištarītu* was met with when I discussed Šuziana.

¹⁴⁷³ Edzard 1962: 104; Renger 1967: 179, 184.

¹⁴⁷⁴ Edzard 1962: 106; Renger 1967: 185.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Renger 1967: 149f.

¹⁴⁷⁶ The nu-gig is attested from the Early Dynastic IIIa period (Edzard 1962: 104), and so is the lukur (Renger 1967: 175).

¹⁴⁷⁷ Edzard 1962: 106.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Assyriologist V. Korošec writes that there is – or was, when he wrote his paper – no consensus among the scholars regarding the right of inheritance of the daughters. Daughters do appear as heirs in the documents, but this does not seem to be the normal case. The compound DUMU.NITA which represents the Sumerian word for heir, *ibila*, also indicates that sons usually inherited, since it means “male child” (1938: 458ff.).

and thus did not get their sustenance from a husband's property, they were more or less economically unbound in relation to men.¹⁴⁷⁹

Unlike the *nadītu*, the three other priestesses had the right to marry and bear children.¹⁴⁸⁰ The sharp difference between the *nadītu* and the other priestesses regarding sexuality is seen in her commonly living in seclusion, as well as being dependent upon temple and convent, which seemingly was not the case of the *qadištu* and the *kulmašītu*.¹⁴⁸¹ Regarding the *ištarītu* the sources are too scanty to establish whether she was related to some institutions.¹⁴⁸² We saw earlier, that all these three priestesses occur in contexts of sexuality and birth-giving.

Before I draw some conclusions I shall say something of the status of these priestesses. Assyriologist Dietz Otto Edzard writes that legal, lexical and literary sources rank the *lukur/nadītu* the highest, and then comes the *nu-gig/qadištu*, followed by the *nu-bar/kulmašītu*. He also tells us that the *nu-gig* lost her high standing in society as the time passed by.¹⁴⁸³ That she initially had a very high status is indicated by the temple hymn cited in section 2.1.2.3., where she wears a *mūš* crown, which was also an attribute of rulers.¹⁴⁸⁴ The high status can also be assumed from the fact that *nu-gig* was a frequent epithet of Inana,¹⁴⁸⁵ and also occurs in connection with Ninmah and Ninisina.¹⁴⁸⁶ The Akkadian correspondence of the *nu-gig*, the *qadištu*, often had a low income,¹⁴⁸⁷ which is an indication of low status. Also the *nu-bar/kulmašītu* and the *lukur/nadītu* seem to have been degraded. The former came from respected families.¹⁴⁸⁸ In spite of this, we read in a wisdom composition from the Middle Babylonian period that a man is even warned to marry a *kulmašītu*, as well as a *ḥarimtu* or an *ištarītu*.¹⁴⁸⁹

Regarding the *lukur*, we know that this title was commonly used about the Ur III royal wives from the end of Šulgi's reign on.¹⁴⁹⁰ The lowered status of the *lukur/nadītu* during the Old Babylonian period can be assumed from their seclusion and since they lived in larger communities. They now had

¹⁴⁷⁹ The special treatment of these priestesses is also at hand in the older Laws of Lipit-Ištar where § 22 says that the *ereš-diġir*, the *lukur* and the *nu-gig* are like (male) heirs (*ibila*) and shall live in their father's house (Roth 1997: 30). This law is discussed by Renger (1967: 180).

¹⁴⁸⁰ Edzard 1962: 107; Renger 1967: 180, 184, 186.

¹⁴⁸¹ Renger 1967: 183, 187.

¹⁴⁸² See *CAD I/J* sub *ištarītu* and Renger 1967: 184.

¹⁴⁸³ Edzard 1962: 104f.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Renger 1967: 183.

¹⁴⁸⁵ Zgoll 1997: 181–195.

¹⁴⁸⁶ Renger 1967: 183.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Renger 1967: 181.

¹⁴⁸⁸ Renger 1967: 187.

¹⁴⁸⁹ Lambert 1960: 102f., ll. 72–74. This passage is referred to by Edzard (1962: 107). The *ḥarimtu* was also discussed above under section 2.1.2.4., and the *kulmašītu* under section 2.1.2.3.

¹⁴⁹⁰ Steinkeller 1981: 81.

overseers among the temple personnel,¹⁴⁹¹ which probably was not the case for the wives of the king.

The evidence on the four priestesses suggests that they were women not living according to the normative female gender. A major part of the deviation seems to have been that they were more independent of men than were other women. For one thing, they could dispose of their property more freely than their married sisters. Further, at least two of the priestess groups (*qadištu*, *kulmašītu*) seem to have been free in relation to the (more or less patriarchal) institutions, and three of them were active in the women's sphere of birth-giving and wet-nursing (*qadištu*, *kulmašītu*, *ištarītu*), where males normally had little part.

From the beginning these priestesses were held in high esteem and were closely related to the king or the men below him. Later they were however denigrated and put on the same level as prostitutes and evil persons. The connotation of prostitution is found at the beginning of tablet III of *Maqlû*, cited above, where the witch is said to walk in the streets. Women walking in the streets were more or less defined as whores – there was even a word for prostitute in Old Babylonian Akkadian, *wašitu*, that was derived from the verb for “go out”, *wašû*.¹⁴⁹² These women walking freely in the streets were obviously felt as a big threat in this patriarchal society.

Now I shall comment on the *eššebû* (male), the *eššebûtu* (female) and the *āšiptu*. In the *CAD* we read that the former was “an ecstatic with evil magical powers”.¹⁴⁹³ Since most of the *CAD*'s references on the *eššebû* come from *Maqlû* I assume that “evil” is derived from there. The impression from both the *CAD* and the *AHW* is that there are few texts where this ecstatic is encountered, since both dictionaries have very few references on the word. Regarding the *āšiptu* I first have to point out that we do not have evidence that for sure tells us women worked in this profession.¹⁴⁹⁴ Therefore I will use the masculine form of the profession, *āšipu*. We saw already in the previous chapter that the *āšipu* was an incantation priest working with magic to ward off evil and demons, and that the aim of his work was to cure people. He used written documents, which tells us that he was a learned man.¹⁴⁹⁵ The reason why the *āšiptu* is included in the enumeration in *Maqlû* can be that she worked with dangerous things that people were afraid of.¹⁴⁹⁶ The *āšipu*

¹⁴⁹¹ Renger 1967: 157.

¹⁴⁹² Finkelstein draws the attention to the fact that in the Sumerian laws discussed by him, a rape was related to where it took place; “if (someone) deflowered the daughter of a free citizen in the street...”. He writes that if it happened in the street the man who raped could argue that he was ignorant of the woman's status. In this connection he also refers to the Akkadian word *wašû* (1966: 358, 362).

¹⁴⁹³ *CAD* E sub *eššebû*.

¹⁴⁹⁴ The lack of attestations on human *āšiptu* is pointed to above in section 4.15.1., fn. 974.

¹⁴⁹⁵ Durand 1988: 555, 557; Renger 1969: 224; Cavigneaux 1988: 183.

¹⁴⁹⁶ Maul has interpreted the fear people had of the *kurgarrû* and the *assinnu* in this way; since they dealt with “the other side” they were suspect and dangerous (1992: 166).

was even afraid to be afflicted himself, since he started an incantation ritual with a formula that aimed at protecting himself. A part of it was that he said that he was “the man of [deity’s name]”, often of Ea, and also that he was sent by this god. Then he exhorted the demons not to go near him.¹⁴⁹⁷

All these facts give at hand that the *mušlahḫatu* is found together with women of initially very high status, having their own profession and probably being more or less independent of men. Several of these women are also related to birth-giving and wet-nursing, which is the context where we find Ninmada in our myth. They were all relating to the “other world”, either to gods or demons, and therefore had contact with power as well as possessing power themselves. The powerfulness is also seen by the *mušlahḫ(at)u*. This person was able to domesticate snakes and gain power over their demonic ability to spread pestilence and death.¹⁴⁹⁸ Also the *mušlahḫ(at)u* seems to have lost her/his high status in the Mesopotamian society. At least van Dijk writes that “Le *mušlahḫu* détenait un office très estimé dans la société sumérienne. On ne le trouve guère dans les textes accadiens”. He writes that the disappearance of the *mušlahḫu* took place after 2000 BCE.¹⁴⁹⁹ The presence of Ninmada at the birth-giving of the mother goddess seems to be appropriate and a good choice, since she as a *mušlahḫatu* has the power to ward off illness and death, and thus to promote life.

5.6.4.2. Ideological aspects of Ninmada

Ninmada is not represented in a negative way in our myth, but she is recalibrated from being a powerful snake charmer to a helper in a pottery workshop. We saw that the snake charmer was met with in a context of independent female cultic practitioners, whereas in our myth she is met with in a group that is subordinated to the male god, working on behalf of him. The recalibration can be due to the fact that snake charmers were an anomaly in the society where our myth was written, or it was part of a general recalibration of prominent women and their professions.

5.7. The competition

5.7.1. Contextualization of the competition

As was told in the introduction to this chapter, there is a competition between Enki and Ninmah during the feast that is set to celebrate the birth of man. The literature that lies closest at hand for comparison regarding the competition is the debate poems. They in fact lie so close that Wilcke has defined “Enki and Ninmah” as such a poem (Streitgedicht), although he also

¹⁴⁹⁷ Renger 1969: 225; Falkenstein 1931: 24f., 40.

¹⁴⁹⁸ See the snake incantations published by van Dijk (1969: 540, 542f.).

¹⁴⁹⁹ van Dijk 1969: 547.

writes that it can be seen as a “selbständigen kleinen Mythos”.¹⁵⁰⁰ Wilcke’s definition of our myth as a debate poem may be due to the fact pointed out by Alster, that it is often difficult to draw a line between the debate poems and other narrative texts.¹⁵⁰¹ I will investigate the content and structure of the debate poems and discuss the relation between “Enki and Ninmah” and these poems.

The debate poems were called *adaminduga* (wr. a-da-mìn du₁₁-ga) in Sumerian,¹⁵⁰² and the term is sometimes found at the beginning of the debate poems, but most often at the end,¹⁵⁰³ although not in the last line as a subscript. If we take this term as a point of departure, “Enki and Ninmah” does not belong to the genre, since the word does not occur in the myth. Alster discusses those texts where we find the term *adaminduga*, calling them precedence debate poems.¹⁵⁰⁴ These texts are roughly those that other scholars commonly define as debate poems,¹⁵⁰⁵ Wilcke included, if we disregard his inclusion of “Enki and Ninmah”.

Alster classifies the genre in two groups. To the first belong the epics “Enmerkar and the lord of Aratta” and “Enmerkar and En-suhgir-ana”. Here the king Enmerkar and the en of Aratta rival each other, but the contest is not taking place as a debate. In the other group of the genre he includes four categories: 1) debates between ordinary people, such as the “Dialogue Between Two Women”, 2) debates of the scribes, 3) debates related to agriculture, animal husbandry and artisanry, and 4) debates between animals but with references to human life, thus being fables.¹⁵⁰⁶

Vanstiphout is a scholar who is of another opinion regarding the texts that are to be included in the genre. He only includes those debate poems belonging to the third and fourth category of the second group by Alster,¹⁵⁰⁷ which, with Bottéro, will hereafter be referred to as “debate poems belonging to the area of production and consumption”.¹⁵⁰⁸ Vanstiphout is of the opinion that “it is the debate itself which in all cases justifies the adscription [sic!] of a certain piece to the genre”.¹⁵⁰⁹ Regarding Alster’s categories only categories three and four will concern us here. These categories, here called debate

¹⁵⁰⁰ Wilcke 1971: 2151f.

¹⁵⁰¹ Alster 1990: 2.

¹⁵⁰² Alster 1990: 2.

¹⁵⁰³ This can be seen in the debate poems published by Black et al. (1998–2006); there the word *adaminduga* introduces and ends the debate in “Enmerkar and En-suhgir-ana”, “The debate between Hoe and Plough” and “The debate between Grain and Sheep”. It ends the debate in “Dumuzid and Enkimdu”, “The debate between Winter and Summer” and “The debate between Bird and Fish”. “The debate between Copper and Silver” is broken at the beginning of the debate, but at the end we find the word *adaminduga*.

¹⁵⁰⁴ Alster 1990: 2.

¹⁵⁰⁵ Cf. Kramer 1960: 288ff. and Bottéro 1991: 7f.

¹⁵⁰⁶ Alster 1990: 3f., 7.

¹⁵⁰⁷ Vanstiphout 1991: 24ff.

¹⁵⁰⁸ Bottéro 1991: 13.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Vanstiphout 1991: 24.

poems belonging to the area of production and consumption, are the classical debate poems. As was pointed out above, they commonly end the debate with the term for debate, *adaminduga* and several of them also introduce the debate with this word.¹⁵¹⁰

The most general structure of the debate poems is that they begin with an introduction that is followed by the dispute, and then ends by a verdict.¹⁵¹¹ One aspect that is in common for “Enki and Ninmah” and several of the debate poems belonging to the area of production and consumption, but that is absent in the other debate poems is the mythological introduction.¹⁵¹² Further, in “Enki and Ninmah”, as well as in several debate poems belonging to the area of production and consumption, the settler of the dispute is a deity.¹⁵¹³ Because of these similarities, the discussion is limited to the debate poems belonging to the area of production and consumption in relation to “Enki and Ninmah”.

The poems referred to as debates, belonging to the area of production and consumption, include animals and vegetables as well as objects and phenomena acting as individuals. There are both Sumerian and Akkadian such debate poems; Bottéro counts to seven Sumerian and eight Akkadian ones. Most of the latter are however in a very fragmentary state whereas several of the former are well preserved¹⁵¹⁴ and constitute an important part of the Sumerian literature.

Bottéro singles out several characteristics of the poems. The debating parties represent complementarity, and they belong to the area of production and consumption. Further, almost all debate poems have a cosmological introduction.¹⁵¹⁵ Another important characteristic mentioned by Vanstiphout is that of polarity.¹⁵¹⁶ The debating objects and phenomena etc. are according to Bottéro prototypes; they are the first Winter and Summer, the first Silver and Copper and so on, described at their creation. He means that the presentation of them as prototypes depends on the Mesopotamians’ interest in destiny; the role that these antagonists were given at the time of their creation was to be theirs from then on. When the debate of the parties developed, both of them reported on their own advantages and the other’s disad-

¹⁵¹⁰ Regarding “Enmerkar and En-suĝgir-ana” and “Enmerkar and the lord of Aratta” (Alster’s group 1), these epics deal with rivalry rather than debate. In “Enmerkar and En-suĝgir-ana” the term *adaminduga* ends the “debate”. The debate is however not settled by a deity, as in the classical debate poems. In “Enmerkar and the lord of Aratta” the rivalry is not initiated by the term for debate. It does however occur several times throughout the text. The end is broken, so it is not known if it was called *adaminduga*.

¹⁵¹¹ Alster 1990: 7.

¹⁵¹² Bottéro 1991: 14; Wilcke 1971: 2151.

¹⁵¹³ Bottéro 1991: 13; Wilcke 1971: 2153. The settling of the contest in “Enki and Ninmah” differs somewhat from these debate poems since one of the opponents, Enki, comes with the concluding remarks.

¹⁵¹⁴ Bottéro 1991: 8ff.

¹⁵¹⁵ Bottéro 1991: 13f.

¹⁵¹⁶ Vanstiphout 1991: 26.

vantages, and so the knowledge about their properties and accordingly their destinies, unfolded.¹⁵¹⁷ The aspect of knowledge and erudition is underlined also by other scholars.¹⁵¹⁸

One important aspect that has been pointed out by Alster and Vanstiphout is that in these poems the composer aimed at convincing her audience that the outcome was just.¹⁵¹⁹ This means that the poem was arranged according to the purposes of the composer and did not just display the objective truth of the opponents.

If we compare Bottéro's outline of the components of the debate poems we find that they are applicable to our myth. To start with, just like the antagonists in the debate poems, Enki and Ninmaḥ are both complementary and opposed to each other. Both of these aspects are based upon the gender of Enki and Ninmaḥ. We saw already in "Enki and Ninḥursaġa" that they were related to each other in this way. In "Enki and Ninmaḥ" the complementarity is played down though, since Ninmaḥ is barely needed – neither for creation nor for the decreeing of destinies, which is seen when she totally fails in the contest.

Our myth clearly deals with production and consumption, as do the debate poems, although here this is partly expressed on another level. The production of food is the task of the first man, embodying the concept of both king and commoner. He is however not one of the antagonists. They instead produce human beings, which is partly related to birth-giving, i.e. reproduction, but mainly to artisanry. They also have to use their minds when they shall "produce" a destiny for the creatures of the opponent. This latter aspect can be related to debate situations, where the opponents had to use their wit and rhetorical skill to win.¹⁵²⁰

In our myth, as in most of the debate poems, there is, as we know, a cosmological introduction, and further it deals with prototypes and destiny. A difference between the both is however that, whereas in the debate poems the parties fight with words, in "Enki and Ninmaḥ" they compete with acts, creating human beings. This also means that the antagonists are not described in "Enki and Ninmaḥ", and therefore the focus is not directly on developing knowledge about their properties and destinies. In this respect "Enki and Ninmaḥ" is more similar to the precedence poems belonging to Alster's first group of classification, i.e. the epics where two kings rival each other, but not through a debate. Regarding prototypes, the deities can be seen as prototypes for humans. Another prototype is the first created man, although he is not one of the debating parties.

¹⁵¹⁷ Bottéro 1991: 20f.

¹⁵¹⁸ Alster 1990: 11; Kramer 1960: 289f.; Vanstiphout 1991: 31–37.

¹⁵¹⁹ Alster and Vanstiphout 1987: 9.

¹⁵²⁰ The debate situation and the structure in the poems that refer to it are discussed by Vanstiphout (1991: 31–37).

Since there are so many correspondences one may ask which genre influenced the other. Was “Enki and Ninmaḥ” modeled upon the form of the debate poems or were the debate poems influenced by myths? I believe that the debate poems influenced our myth regarding the very debate. The cosmological introduction is found in several myths and is not a distinctive mark of debate poems. Further, just as some myths do not have such an introduction, there is at least one debate poem, “Hoe and Plough”, that does not have it either. Inherent in the debate poems were, as we have seen, complementarity and polarity, and these aspects indeed are refined in them. As we saw such motifs are also found in “Enki and Ninḥursaġa” and “Enki and Ninmaḥ”. We can also understand e.g. the myth “Inana’s descent” as expressing complementarity and polarity; Inana, the queen of heaven and goddess of reproduction, is opposed to her sister Ereškigal who is the mistress of the netherworld and ruler over death. Both are also complementary to each other.

The aspects of (re)production and consumption are also found in the three myths “Enki and Ninḥursaġa”, “Enki and Ninmaḥ” and “Inana’s descent”. These can be understood as “eternal themes”, and as such as important in the myths as in the debate poems. Whereas the debate poems focus on the singular materials for production, the myths focus rather on creation of the first human being, reproduction and the development of culture and society. From this point of view the prototypes are related both to debate poems and myths, but in the former they are objects, phenomena, vegetables and animals and in the latter they are human beings, culture and social structures. In the debate poems the properties and usefulness of the objects is coming to the fore,¹⁵²¹ which is not the case for the prototypes in the myths. Therefore I agree with Bottéro, who maintains that a central part of the debate poems was a drive toward obtaining knowledge. This is not the fact with the myths, which instead mainly were representing central topics in human life through the lense of ideology.

In spite of the suggestion that the debate poems did not influence the whole myth, one debate poem that has a striking resemblance with “Enki and Ninmaḥ” is “Grain and Sheep”.¹⁵²² The correspondences can be tabulated as seen below.

¹⁵²¹ This is also pointed out by Wilcke (1971: 2152).

¹⁵²² This debate poem is called “Laḥar and Aṣnan” by Alster and Vanstiphout. See their delineation of the poem’s structure and their translation (1987).

Table 12. Comparison between “Enki and Ninmah” and “Grain and Sheep”

Enki and Ninmah	Common sequences	Grain and Sheep
	Cosmological introduction	
Cosmos created, fates determined etc.		Grain and Sheep not yet created, humans had neither bread nor clothes.
Anuna born, goddesses distributed in heaven and earth.		Gods created Grain and Sheep.
	Gods discontented	
Minor gods complain over their toil.		The gods drink and eat but are not sated.
	Solution to discontent	
The first human created.		Grain and Sheep given to the humans.
	Arrangement of new order	
Ninmah imposes the work upon the first man.		Grain and Sheep installed in ewefold and field.
		The store-rooms of the land are filled.
	The banquet	
Enki organizes a feast, Ninmah and Enki become drunk, Ninmah challenges Enki.		Grain and Sheep drink wine and beer, start a quarrel.
	The debate	
Ninmah creates six freaks, Enki determines their destinies. Enki creates a freak, Ninmah cannot decree its fate.		Grain and Sheep enumerate their own advantages and disadvantages of the opponent.
	The outcome	
Enki is praised and has won the contest.		Enki says Grain and Sheep shall go together, but Grain is the greater of them.

How shall we understand this almost total correspondence in sequences? I have looked at three other debate poems¹⁵²³ – “Summer and Winter”, “Hoe and Plough” and “Bird and Fish”¹⁵²⁴ – to see if they also show this sequence, which would then suggest that I have to change my mind regarding the extent to which the debate poems have influenced our myth. In all three we find the debate and the outcome, and in “Summer and Winter” and “Bird and Fish” there is also a cosmological introduction. The discontent, the solution, the arrangement of the new order and the banquet are not found in these three poems. This leads me to believe that the debate poem “Grain and Sheep” was influenced by a mythological pattern or patterns. An example of a myth where we find a correspondence to the structure of “Enki and Ninmah” and “Grain and Sheep” is “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta”, although there the ideas are not in the same order.

“Ninurta’s exploits” starts with a banquet where the hero Ninurta is decreeing the destinies. Then he finds out that Asakku is born in the mountains and that he is extending his area of power step by step (i.e. “starts a quarrel”). The “debate” continues when the hero attacks the mountains and Asakku answers with a counter-attack. Ninurta attacks again, but Asakku does not even tremble. However, with his last attack Ninurta emerges victorious. Thereafter a primordial state is described, when the Tigris was not running through the land and there was no irrigation, agriculture etc. Then the hero establishes the culture in the land, with agriculture, commerce and so on. He also determines the destinies of the conquered enemies,¹⁵²⁵ and at the end he is praised.¹⁵²⁶ Thus, in this myth we have the banquet – the debate – the “cosmological introduction” – the arrangement of the new order – the outcome.

The discontent and the solution are not found in “Ninurta’s exploits”. As we know, these aspects are well known from *Atraḥasīs* though, where the first human being is created to relieve the gods of their toil. The discontent is also found in *Enūma eliš*, and there the older gods are angry with the younger ones, since they are making noise and so disturb them. They do not reach a solution though, because they do not succeed in killing the younger gods as they had planned.¹⁵²⁷ The discontent of the gods thus also seems to be a common mythological theme.

¹⁵²³ I excluded two other poems: “The debate between the Date Palm and the Tamarisk” and “The debate between Silver and Copper”, both found in treatments by Black et al. (1998–2006), since they are too fragmentary and cannot be used for comparison.

¹⁵²⁴ “The debate between Bird and Fish”, “The debate between Winter and Summer”, “The debate between Hoe and Plough”, all found in Black et al. (1998–2006).

¹⁵²⁵ The destinies of the enemies (which are different sorts of stones) seem to aim at knowledge about them in a similar way, as is the aim in the debate poems. A big difference though, is that they do not debate to express their properties.

¹⁵²⁶ van Dijk 1983.

¹⁵²⁷ Initially Apsū plans to kill the younger gods without getting support from Tiamat. Apsū does not succeed, and he gets killed by the opponents. Later Tiamat is convinced by the other

In this thesis I follow the definition of myth that is formulated by Lincoln; “myth is ideology in narrative form”. From this point of view the debate poems have the same function as the genre that is commonly called “myths”. From the perspective of genre, it seems that myths and debate poems influenced each other mutually. Or, we could also put it the way we did already at the beginning of this section, that there were no strict demarcation lines between the two genres. From this point of view I believe that the best description of “Enki and Ninmah” is that it is a myth, but that it has traits of debate poems, and that “Grain and Sheep” is a debate poem with mythical traits. Regarding “Enmerkar and the lord of Aratta”, and “Enmerkar and En-suhgir-ana” they have traits of epics, but also of debate poems, and although a modern scholar would perhaps call them epics,¹⁵²⁸ at least “Enmerkar and En-suhgir-ana” was called debate poem by the Mesopotamians. This shows that the classification of Mesopotamian literature is far from easy, a fact that speaks in favor of focusing on the ideological function of literature in general. Regarding the so frequent occurrence of debate traits in Sumerian literature, it can be explained by Kramer’s statement that one of the driving forces of the Sumerians was to reach superiority and preeminence.¹⁵²⁹

5.7.2. Ideological aspects of the competition

As has already been pointed out, “Enki and Ninmah”, as a myth, does not primarily aim at developing knowledge, but is representing central topics in human life through the lense of ideology. Further, as was stated above, not only myths, but also debate poems have a political aspect; the composer has a purpose when arranging the story. According to Vanstiphout one central rhetorical trick was to reverse the argument of the opponent against him/her, and he writes that “this reversion of arguments in one’s favor leads inexorably to ridicule”.¹⁵³⁰ This trick is also consciously used in “Enki and Ninmah”, and in the section of the competition the two deities are the categories at issue. The composer lets Ninmah start the competition by challenging Enki with the following words: “The form of mankind, [whether it is to] be good or bad, belongs to me. According to my heart, I will make the destiny good or bad”. When the competition is over however, it is obvious that Ninmah is only able to create malformed and sterile persons. Further, she is not able to decree a destiny for Enki’s creature. The outcome then, makes a ridiculous figure out of Ninmah. In this way the mother goddess is recal-

of the older gods that they shall try to kill the younger gods; they do not succeed either. See Lambert (2013).

¹⁵²⁸ The classification of them as epics would be based upon the fact that they deal with alleged historic heroic kings and a conflict that allegedly took place in history. At the same time these stories are ideological products with the focus on the storyteller’s heroic king.

¹⁵²⁹ Kramer 1960: 288.

¹⁵³⁰ Vanstiphout 1991: 39.

brated; she has shown herself that she is inferior to Enki when it comes to creation, and thus her ranking below him seems natural.

5.8. Ninmah's creatures and their destinies

Now when we know a little more about the literary context of the competition between Enki and Ninmah, I shall turn to the relevant lines in our myth, where the competition is described. I shall try to gain an understanding of the creatures created at the competition, in this section starting with those of Ninmah. Thus, after Ninmah has challenged Enki she takes clay from the top of the Abzu and starts to form her creatures, and each of them are assigned a destiny by Enki:

The first,¹⁵³¹ one with hands that overthrow and overwhelm, (one) that does not give in, that one did she form. / When Enki had seen the first, the one with hands that overthrow and overwhelm, (one) that does not give in, / he decreed his¹⁵³² destiny; he installed him as a servant of the king. / Second, she formed one turning back (?) the light, a person (constantly) gazing (?). / Enki [...] / decreed his destiny – he gave (him) the musical arts, / He [appointed] him to be the great force of the palace (?), (to stand) before the king. / [Third, she formed (one with) ... feet], (one with) paralyzed feet. / Enki [...] / [installed him] ... work ... like silver, his awesome splendor. / Fourth, she formed an idiot, slave (from) his birth. / Enki [...] / decreed his destiny and installed him as a servant of the king. / Fifth, she formed one dripping with semen. / Enki [...] / washed him with holy water¹⁵³³ and removed his body's destiny. / Sixth, she formed a woman not able to give birth. / Enki [...], / saw a weaver, and he made her stay in the queen's household. / Seventh, she formed one who had neither penis nor vagina on his body. / Enki [...] / named him eunuch. / To be a servant of the king he decreed as his fate.¹⁵³⁴

As is seen in the lines above, most or all the persons created by Ninmah were disabled in different ways; the second turned back the light, which

¹⁵³¹ I follow the conventional translation of the ordinal numbers.

¹⁵³² Throughout these creatures are referred to as inanimate, i.e. lit. "its' (fate)".

¹⁵³³ So Lambert 2013: 339, l. 37.

¹⁵³⁴ II: 22. [l]ú gi šu šú-šú sá-di-dè nu-gam lú-u₆ àm-ma-ni-in-dím 23. [^den-ki-ke₄ lú gi šu šú-šú sá-di-dè nu-gam igi-du₈-a-ni-ta 24. [n]am-bi i-ni-in-tar saġ lugal-la-ke₄ àm-ma-ni-in-gub 25. gi₄-bi ġiš-nu₁₁ gi₄-gi₄ lú u₆-e àm-ma-ni-in-dím 26–27. ^den-ki-ke₄ [...] nam-bi i-ni-in-tar nam-nar mi-ni-in-ba 28. [é²]-gal zà-gu-la igi lugal-la-ke₄ àm-[m]a-ni-i[n-gub (ġar³) 29. [gi₄-bi-bi² lú ĠĪRI-MI-ġiš] ġiri dab₅-ba à[m-ma-ni-in-dím] 30–31. ^de[n-ki-ke₄] [...] kíġ-x [x] kù-babbar-gin₇ me-lám-^rma⁻ni x [mu]-ni-in-x 32. [g]i₄-[p]eš-bi lú-lil ù-tu-bi šubur àm-^rma-ni-dím^r [...] 33–34. ^den-ki-ke₄ [...] nam-bi i-ni-in-tar saġ lugal-la-ka im-ma-ši-in-gub 35. peš-gi lú a sur-sur àm-ma-ši-in-dím 36–37. ^den-ki-ke₄ [...] a mu₇-mu₇ mi-ni-in-tu₅ nam-tar su-bi àm-ma-ni-in-zi 38. peš-peš-gi munus nu-ù-tu àm-ma-ši-in-dím 39–40. ^den-ki-ke₄ [...] uš-bar igi mu-ni-in-du₈ é munus-a-kam àm-ma-ni-in-dù 41. peš-bal-gi lú su-ba ġiš nu-ġar gal₄-la nu-ġar àm-ma-ši-in-dím 42–43. ^den-ki-ke₄ [...] tirum-e mu-ni-in-sa₄ saġ lugal-la-ke₄ im-ma-ši-in-gub. Transliteration adapted from Lambert (2013: 338).

might indicate blindness; the third had paralyzed feet, and the fourth was an idiot; the fifth was dripping with semen; the sixth was unable to give birth, and the seventh had no genitals. Further, all but the fifth person (the third is unclear) were to be installed as servants in the palace, one in the service of the queen, and the others in the service of the king. I will treat the creatures one by one, although I will skip the third and the sixth person; the former since the text is damaged here, and thus unclear, and the latter since this woman, unable to give birth, being installed as a weaver in the queen's household, was already treated in section 4.10., on Uttu, the weaver.

5.8.1. The first and the fourth creatures

Both the first and the fourth person created by Ninmaḫ received the fate to be the servant of the king (saĝ lugala). This servant is well-known, and so mainly from the younger sources, as the LÚ.SAĜ(.LUGAL), in Akkadian *ša rēši* (*šarri*). These servants have been understood to be eunuchs by several scholars,¹⁵³⁵ whereas others have questioned this interpretation.¹⁵³⁶

Assyriologists Kirk Grayson and Karlheinz Deller are two scholars who convincingly argue that the LÚ.SAĜ/*ša rēši* were eunuchs,¹⁵³⁷ and Deller further suggests that their designation referred to their being castrated. He starts by referring to the opinion of both the *CAD* and the *AHW*, that the LÚ.SAĜ/*ša rēši* were not (the *CAD*: primarily) eunuchs, and then asks: “if *ša rēši* does not mean eunuch *per se*, what should be the Assyrian or Babylonian word for it? Other languages do have unequivocal words for eunuchs [...] like Hebrew and Aramaic *sarīs* and the latter is, according to the *communis opinio*, etymologically linked with *ša rēši*”. He further compares the term with the Latin word *testiculus*. The ending *-iculus* is a diminutive, whereas *test-* is of unknown etymology. He suggests that it can have the same origin as Italian *testa* and French *tête*, which have the same meaning as *rēšu*. Thus, the designation “head” could have been used on round, “head-shaped organs”, like testicles. Further, in one case, the term *ša rēši* is used in the dual (*ša rēšēn* “(the one) of the two heads”). From this he concludes that,

¹⁵³⁵ Grayson writes that “[t]he vast majority of Neo-Assyrian specialists, such as Borger, Deller, Parpola, Postgate and Tadmor believe that in Assyria the word *ša rēši* means ‘eunuch’” (1995: 92); cf. Meier 1938: 485, and Brinkman 1968: 309ff. In *CAD* R sub *rēšu* in *ša rēši* A, the translation given is: “1. attendant, soldier, officer, official, 2. eunuch; from OB [Old Babylonian] on”. Thus, according to the *CAD* the meaning “eunuch” is attested quite early in the Babylonian dialect. To note however, is that in Old Akkadian and Mari documents, *ša rēši* does not mean eunuch, and in this context *CAD* writes that “[t]he evidence from later texts does not demand a meaning eunuch” (*CAD* R: 296).

¹⁵³⁶ Deller mentions von Soden and Reiner (1999: 304), and Grayson also refers to von Soden and further to Oppenheim and Garelli (1995: 92f.).

¹⁵³⁷ Grayson 1995: 91ff.; Deller 1999, *passim*.

“[e]uphemism is quite common in Semitic languages, so that ‘the one with two heads’ could easily become ‘the one without two heads’”.¹⁵³⁸

However, the common Akkadian word for head is not *rēšu*, but *qaqqadu*. Since, according to Deller, “[t]he only congruous group of references for *šu-(ut) SAG.(MEŠ)/ re-ši* comes from Mari [...] the bulk from the reigns of Samsi-Addu and Zimri-Lim”, these officials could have a western Semitic origin. This would solve the problem with *qaqqadu/rēšu*, since the west-Semitic word for head is *rē/āšu*.¹⁵³⁹

Besides the possible Hebrew and Aramaic parallels, and the etymological discussion regarding words for “head”, there are other arguments that the LÚ.SAĜ/*ša rēši* were eunuchs. One is that these officials were depicted without beards. In the Hittite empire there were depictions of beardless courtiers who have been connected with the officials designated with the logogram LÚ.MEŠ.SAĜ.¹⁵⁴⁰ This connection is supported by both Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian seals; in all cases the inscription *ša rēši* occurs together with a depiction of a beardless man.¹⁵⁴¹ A further argument is that in sale documents the *ša rēši* are found in a different kinship context than that of common male citizens. Where the latters’ sons and grandsons are referred to, the brothers and the brothers’ sons are mentioned in the documents of the *ša rēši*.¹⁵⁴² This supports the understanding of the *ša rēši* as unmarried and without children.¹⁵⁴³ These facts point to a possibility of interpreting the saĝ lugala in “Enki and Ninmaḥ” as being eunuchs. Such an understanding is further probable from the context of these officials in our myth, since two of Ninmaḥ’s other creatures were explicitly sexually defective.

All the lines describing the creatures of Ninmaḥ are difficult to interpret. What seems clear is that the creatures are presented as unusual and difficult to assign a destiny. In spite of this Enki finds a well-suited position for each of them. In the first line where we have a person destined to be the servant of the king, we have the verb *šú*, which I have chosen to read as “to overthrow” (Akk. *saḥāpu*), *sá—du₁₁.g/e/di* as “to overwhelm” (Akk. *kašādu*), and the verb *gam*, which I have translated as “to give in” (Akk. *kanāšu*).¹⁵⁴⁴ Accordingly we get a picture of a person that can be dangerous, but in the role of a servant of the king his capacities are well used. The fourth creature is also to become a saĝ lugala. He is called an idiot and slave. It is not clear to me why an idiot would be suitable to serve the king. One born to be a slave or servant is more understandable as serving the king. As we saw above in section

¹⁵³⁸ Deller 1999: 304f.

¹⁵³⁹ Deller 1999: 311.

¹⁵⁴⁰ Deller 1999: 309.

¹⁵⁴¹ Watanabe 1999: 319f.

¹⁵⁴² Watanabe 1999: 317f.

¹⁵⁴³ Deller 1999: 303.

¹⁵⁴⁴ Cf. the translation of Black et al. (1998–2006 “Enki and Ninmaḥ”); “she fashioned [...] first a man who could not bend his outstretched weak hands”.

5.4.2., šubur, the word used here for servant or slave, refers to the area north of Mesopotamia, an area from which slaves often originated.

I have not found any indications that the *ša rēši* were mentally disabled. The Assyrian *ša rēši* were organized in the *ša rēšuttu*, and their central task was to act as bodyguards to the king and his family.¹⁵⁴⁵ It is therefore not likely that they were idiots. They also had important positions as e.g. city overseers, cooks, bakers, cupbearers, officers, scribes and envoys,¹⁵⁴⁶ which, if anything, points to the opposite of disability. The Chief Eunuch was found at the top of the military hierarchy, and sometimes he replaced the king on long and dangerous campaigns.¹⁵⁴⁷ He was even of such high rank that he could be installed as king at times.¹⁵⁴⁸ Because of the good possibilities to make a career it was an attractive choice for foreigners as well as the second and third sons of an Assyrian family to become *ša rēši*.¹⁵⁴⁹

5.8.2. The second creature

Ninmaḥ's second creature was to become a musician of the king. Music was played in the temples, but also in the palace. There were musicians who received rations from the palace, and there may even have been music schools supported by the court.¹⁵⁵⁰ Music was especially important in the festivals of Inana/Ištar,¹⁵⁵¹ but seems also to have been central in Enki's cult.¹⁵⁵² Foreign captives, most often women, were trained as musicians, as were blind children.¹⁵⁵³ Thus, the possible disability of sight of our musician seems to have had an actual background. I translated the sign *lú*, designating the creatures of Ninmaḥ, as "one (person)", since "person" is one original meaning of the word.¹⁵⁵⁴ From this point of view we do not know the sex of the musician. Since *lú* developed into a determinative for males however, this musician is possibly a male.

Assyriologist Anne Kilmer writes that "[d]epictions of physically effeminate male singers with special coiffure lead us to suspect that some belonged to a *castrati* class".¹⁵⁵⁵ Such a cross-gendered musician is found already in

¹⁵⁴⁵ Deller 1999: 306, 310.

¹⁵⁴⁶ Deller 1999: 308

¹⁵⁴⁷ Deller 1999: 308.

¹⁵⁴⁸ Watanabe 1999: 320.

¹⁵⁴⁹ Deller 1999: 305f.

¹⁵⁵⁰ Kilmer 1997: 467, 469.

¹⁵⁵¹ Kilmer 1997: 467.

¹⁵⁵² Collon 1997c: 488.

¹⁵⁵³ Kilmer 1997: 468. Cf. *CAD* N/1 sub *nârūtu*, where we find the following quotation: "they brought the blind PN to me that she might learn the art of the musician". This indicates that among the blind musicians there were females.

¹⁵⁵⁴ Cf. Thomsen, who writes that *lú* can also be used as "someone", "who" (2001: 242). The word *lú* can also mean "the one in charge", referring to both men and women. It mainly has this meaning to distinguish between people of different status (Jacobsen 1993: 70, 73, 78).

¹⁵⁵⁵ Kilmer 1997: 468.

the Early Dynastic III period at Mari, represented in two statues of the singer Ur-Nanše installed in the temple of Ninni-zaza.¹⁵⁵⁶ Thus, even the musician, although not overtly sexually disabled in our myth, may have been a eunuch as well.

5.8.3. The fifth creature

Ninmaḥ's fifth creature was dripping semen. This person seems to have been included among the creatures of Ninmaḥ because his disease afflicted the genitalia, and he fits well among the other sexually disabled creatures of the goddess.

5.8.4. The seventh creature

The *tīru* (Sum. also *tiru*) was a courtier, and is attested from the Sargonic and Old Babylonian periods as well as in Standard Babylonian texts. In the lexical text *Erimḫuš* this official seems to be referred to as a eunuch.¹⁵⁵⁷ George points to the context of the word *tiru* in "Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world". The word *tiru* comes in the section when Enkidu tells Gilgameš about the lot of different persons in the netherworld. The word occurs in three manuscripts of the text, whereas in a fourth, at the corresponding place it says "the man with no heir" (*lú ibila nu-tuku*). The lot of the *tiru* is thus translated by George: "Like a useless alala-stick he is propped in a corner". He compares this lot with the description of the eunuch as a dry tree in Isaiah 56: 3.¹⁵⁵⁸ Thus, it seems very likely that the *tiru* was a eunuch. Further, he was to be the servant of the king (*saĝ lugala*) just as the first and the fourth creatures, who were probably eunuchs as well.

5.8.5. Ideological aspects of Ninmaḥ's creatures

The central categories in this section are Enki, Ninmaḥ, and the disabled persons that are to become palace officials. Since Ninmaḥ is only able to create disabled persons, and since Enki nevertheless can decree a destiny for them, Enki is ranked above Ninmaḥ. Further, although the creatures are to be officials at the palace, they are depicted in a disparaging way, thus being seen as low-ranking people. I understand the depiction of the officials as a way to recalibrate them, from having high reputation, to being seen as defective.

Common for Ninmaḥ's creatures is that they are disabled, either sexually or in other ways, and that they are installed in the service of the king or the

¹⁵⁵⁶ Collon 1997c: 488.

¹⁵⁵⁷ *CAD* T sub *tīru*.

¹⁵⁵⁸ George 1997.

queen. I believe that the almost ridiculed way the servants of the king and the queen are described is due to a conflict regarding kingship. On several occasions in our myth Enki is called en.¹⁵⁵⁹ This is a ruler's title, and sometimes it also denotes a priest. As I understand it, our myth expresses a rivalry between two categories of kingship, Enki representing en-rulership, and Ninmaḥ being the protectress of the lugal-rulership. The myth is working for the interests of the older kingship.

The kingship protected by Ninmaḥ seems to be foreign. The saḡ lugal might have had a West Semitic origin – at least the majority of the sources on the LÚ.SAĜ/ša rēši come from Mari, a city on the northwestern fringe of the Mesopotamian cultural area. Further, the word ša rēši is West Semitic. Regarding musicians, we saw that foreign captives were trained to become musicians. And two statues of a cross-gendered musician were found at Mari, dating to the Early Dynastic III period. One of the saḡ lugal was a šubur, i.e. probably a foreign slave/servant. And just as the šubur came from the area north of Mesopotamia, we saw in sections 2.1.2.5. and 5.3., that often, so did the weavers. Here, as regarding *ḥarali*, our myth relates Ninmaḥ to the area north of Mesopotamia.

5.9. Enki's creature and the outcome of the competition

When it is Enki's turn to create a being the following takes place:

Enki formed the creature of his head, the fetus, in that womb. / He says to (the one of?) Ninmaḥ: / “When fertilizing semen, poured into the womb of a woman; that woman will bear in her womb.” / Ninmaḥ x x stood by at that (or: its) birth.¹⁵⁶⁰ / That woman, that day, to x x x, dropped the fetus of her (lit. in that) womb. / Ninmaḥ x x x x x x was filled. / Then, Uḡul – its head was afflicted, its temples were afflicted, / its eyes were afflicted, its neck was afflicted, the breath was leaving, life was dripping away. / The lungs were afflicted, the bowels were afflicted, the heart was afflicted. / Its¹⁵⁶¹ hands and head were hanging, (and) it could not put bread to its mouth. / All of the back was paralyzed, the bottom broken, (and) onto the front ... (?) / The feet were twisted, and it could not go to the field; such (a creature) did he create.¹⁵⁶²

¹⁵⁵⁹ Ll. 47, 49, 50, 80, 140.

¹⁵⁶⁰ The verb is transitive. Is a more literal reading something like “Ninmaḥ x x put her self into service at that birth”?

¹⁵⁶¹ Here all three texts have -ni, i.e. “his/her”.

¹⁵⁶² II: 48–51. ^den-ki-ke₄ me-dím saḡ-ḡá-na zur-du₁₁ šà-ba àm-ma-ni-dím / ^dnin-maḥ-a-ra gù mu-na-dé-e / a gan ša munus-a-ka ri-a šà-ga-na munus-bi mu-un-ù-tu / ^dnin-maḥ-é' x x ù-tu-bi-šè àm-ma-[ni]-in-gub 52–52c. munus-bi u₄-bi x x (x)-ga-aš zur-du₁₁ šà-ba à[m-m]a-ni-in-šub / munus-bi u₄ [x (x)] x x [...] x (x) [p]eš [š]à-ga ri [zur[?]-du₁₁[?] šà[?]-ba[?] à]m-è 53–55. ^dnin-m[aḥ x x x (x)] x x x ì-si-ge / gi₄-bi u₄-ḡu₁₀-ul a-za-ad-bi gig-ga ki-nam-ésir-bi gig-ga / igi-bi gig-ga gú-bi gig-ga zi úš-úš ti sur-sur 56–59. mur gig-ga ša gig-ga lipiš gig-ga / šu-ni a-za-ad lá-lá ka-bi-šè ninda nu-ḡar / murgu lum-lum gu-du zé-re zà-še sur / ḡiri sur-sur a-gàr nu-gub àm-ma-ni-in-dím. Transliteration adapted from Lambert (2013: 338, 340).

Ninmah gets confused by this creature. She asks him questions, but he cannot speak. She gives him bread, but he does not reach out for it. He cannot sit, lie down etc., and Ninmah says “Your creature is one not being alive, one not being dead; it cannot carry (anything (?))”,¹⁵⁶³ thus giving in.

5.9.1. Contextualization of Enki’s creature and the outcome

Kilmer has convincingly interpreted Enki’s creature as the first baby. She writes that Enki created him by first creating a female with functioning reproductive organs. She understands Enki as the one inseminating this female since he later praises his penis. The understanding of Uĝul as a baby is partly based upon the interpretation of his name as “My day (of death) is far (off)”. To support this reading she refers to an Akkadian text where it is said that “His day (of death) is near, he will not live”.¹⁵⁶⁴ She also points to the similar names of the flood heroes and Uĝul, and that the former were “primal” men. Both Uĝul and the flood heroes were further semi-divine, Uĝul so since he was the son of Enki.¹⁵⁶⁵ Thus, Kilmer’s interpretation of Uĝul supports our understanding of Enki’s creature as a new first, or primal, man.

Biblical scholar James Davila writes that the story of the flood hero and the list of primeval kings were initially separate narratives, fused in the early second millennium. He means that the flood hero instead originally was a priest.¹⁵⁶⁶ Both the king and the priest represent leaders. This may also be an explanation of why the two traditions were fused. As was touched upon earlier, one aspect of our myth is that it seems to express a rivalry between these two forms of leadership. Enki is throughout called en, lord, ruler, a title that also was used on a certain category of priests and priestesses. This title is even intrinsic in Enki’s name.

The creatures of both the mother goddesses Namma and Ninmah, are born in a royal context, those of the latter explicitly being related to the lugal. Uĝul is created after Ninmah’s defective creatures, separated from them through the fact that Enki is his creator. It may be that he corresponds to his creator, representing the leader called en and not the lugal. Uĝul may thus be a rivaling comprehension of the primordial man and ruler.

Regarding Kilmer’s interpretation of Uĝul as the first baby, it fits very well into the whole passage of the competition. Ninmah has shown that she is unable to create fertile humans, thus being unable to act in her very role as mother goddess. When Enki creates the first baby he is taking over one of the central tasks of Ninmah, and she, the šazu, the midwife, literally the “knower of the womb”, does not even recognize the fruit of the womb!

¹⁵⁶³ II: 70. lú šu-dím-ma-zu lú ti-la in-nu lú ú[š i]n-nu il-bi nu-mu-da.

¹⁵⁶⁴ Kilmer 1976: 265f. with fn. 3. Cf. also Attinger: “le ‘jour’ d’un homme – ou d’un dieu! – le jour de sa mort (passim)” (1993: 646, fn. 1864).

¹⁵⁶⁵ Kilmer 1976: 267.

¹⁵⁶⁶ Davila (1995: 199–208) with a summary of his arguments and conclusions (213f.).

In the chapter on “Enki and Ninḫursaġa” I argued that there was an aim to show that the mother goddess was not able to create alone, but needed the semen of a male. In “Enki and Ninmaḥ” Enki’s creation of a baby shows that the male cannot create alone either, but now the need of the opposite sex is almost totally suppressed, the female only being a vessel. Further, the first birth-giving woman is created by Enki, and therefore the female creativity originates from man.

Enki admonishes Ninmaḥ when she is unable to decree a destiny for Uġul; he had decreed fates to all her creatures and given them their daily bread. Then, after a gap in the text, Ninmaḥ answers Enki. The first nine lines of the answer are missing, and then we read:

Now, you did not live in heaven, you did not live on earth. You do not go out to direct your gaze onto the land. / Where you do not dwell (and) my temple is erected, your words are not listened to. / Where you do not live (and) my city is built, I myself strike against falsehood. / My city is destroyed, my house is crushed, my child is taken (as captive), / and I am a fugitive, I am leaving Ekur. / (That) day I could not deliver myself from your hands.¹⁵⁶⁷

These lines show quite another picture than that of the banquet scene. Here, we instead seem to deal with a political situation between two city-states or similar constellations. It seems as if Ninmaḥ either blames Enki, that before he did not live in heaven and earth, or forbids him to do so.¹⁵⁶⁸ Implicitly then, it seems that according to Ninmaḥ these spheres of power initially belonged to her, but have been, or are threatened to be taken over by Enki. The expression “to gaze onto the land” that is used about Enki here, is found also in the Keš Temple hymn, where it seems to be related to rulership. There we read:

Enlil, the exalted lord, came out of the temple. / The exalted lord, in royal majesty he came out of the temple. / Enlil directed his gaze onto all the lands.¹⁵⁶⁹

¹⁵⁶⁷ II: 93–95. á-še an nu-mu-e-tuš ki nu-[mu]-e`-tuš i-bí il-la-zu ka-`na-áġ`-ġá nu-è-mèn / ki za-e nu-tuš-en é-mu dù-a inim-zu ġiš nu-tuku / ki za-e nu-ti-en uru-mu dù-a ní-mu lul ab-si-ge-en 96–98. [ur]u-mu gel-le-èġ-ġá é-mu gul-la du₅-mu-⟨mu⟩ šu dab₅-ba / `ù` kar-ra-`mèn` é-kur-ta è-mèn / u₄ me-e ní-mu šu-zu-ta nu-mu-ni-è. Transliteration adapted from Lambert (2013: 340).

¹⁵⁶⁸ The modal prefix nu- can be used both in a neutral and a prohibitive sense; on this, see the examples listed by Thomsen (2001: 190). Cf. Lambert who instead understands Ninmaḥ as the subject of the verbs in this line (2013: 340f., l. 93). Since the pronominal prefix of the first person singular is almost never written (Thomsen 2001: 148; Attinger 1993: 206), whereas that of the second person singular is commonly -e-, I choose to understand Enki as the subject. Further, in these instances a pronominal prefix is needed, whereas in the two following lines the subject is denoted by the personal pronoun za-e, “you”.

¹⁵⁶⁹ 2–4. ^den-líl nám-nun-e é-ta nam-ta-ab-è / nám-nun-e nam-lugal-la é-ta nam-ta-ab-è / ^den-líl kur-kur-ra igi mi-ni-ib-il-il-i. Transliteration taken from Gragg (1969: 167).

To go out (è.d) and gaze (igi—íl) upon the land (kalam/kur), seems to be connected to kingship here. Gragg writes that the expression *igi—íl/našû ša ĩni* has a connotation of desire and will.¹⁵⁷⁰ Maybe this act expresses a claim of power over the lands. If this is the case Ninmaḥ either states that Enki is not the ruler of the land, or she forbids him to be so. She also denies his power where her temple is built.

The three last lines in the passage of our myth translated above bring the city laments in mind, and seem to be an “abbreviated form” of a city lament. The expression that the city or temple is destroyed (*uru/é gul*) is found throughout in all city laments published by Black et al. Also the word *ḥalam* (destroy), in our passage found in the Emesal form *gelleḡ* (wr. *gel-le-èḡ*), is found in all the laments. Here is an example from “The lament for Urim”:

The Šimaškians, the Elamites, those of destruction¹⁵⁷¹

The Šimaškians and the Elamites were peoples from the eastern mountainous areas of Mesopotamia.¹⁵⁷² It is their raiding and warring against the Mesopotamian cities that is lamented in both “The lament for Urim” and in “The lament for Eridug”.¹⁵⁷³ The war situation is seen also in “Enki and Ninmaḥ”; Ninmaḥ’s child is taken (as captive), and the goddess herself is a fugitive. These lines give us a different view on the competition. It does not only deal with a playful rivalry, but as I said also concerns political power in the geographical sense. Ninmaḥ has not only lost her prerogative of creating humans,¹⁵⁷⁴ but also political influence in the land. And, as if that was not enough, in the concluding passage Enki takes Ninmaḥ’s profession from her, thereafter praising his penis:

Enki says to Ninmaḥ: / “The word coming from your mouth – who can change it? / Uḡul held at your chest, remove him from your lap! / Ninmaḥ, may your work be suspended, / [] it shall be taken. Who can oppose this? / The human, having hereafter (?), that word will be heeded. (?) / Today, let my penis be praised! May your lost¹⁵⁷⁵ sense be (there again).¹⁵⁷⁶

¹⁵⁷⁰ Gragg 1969: 177.

¹⁵⁷¹ 243. *šimaški^{ki} elam^{ki} lú ḥa-lam-ma* [...]. The transliteration is taken from Black et al. (1998–2006. “The lament for Urim”).

¹⁵⁷² Kuhrt 1997: 70f.; Potts 1999: 130.

¹⁵⁷³ In “The lament for Sumer and Urim”, l. 230, the Gutians are mentioned as *lú ḥa-lam-ma*, see Black et al. (1998–2006). Also the Gutians came from the eastern mountains.

¹⁵⁷⁴ Cf. the different reading of Frymer-Kensky who writes that Uḡul is prematurely born, and that s/he shall be a reminder that Ninmaḥ’s part in creation is also needed (1997: 99).

¹⁵⁷⁵ The reading *ri.g* as “to lose” is based upon Falkenstein’s translation “verlorengehen, umkommen, sterben” (apud Bauer 1972: 310).

¹⁵⁷⁶ II: 99. *^den-ki-ke⁴ ^dnin-maḥ-ra mu-na-ni-ib-gi⁴-gi⁴ 100. inim ka-zu è-a a-ba-a ì-kúr-re 101. u⁴-ḡu¹⁰-ul gaba-zu dab⁵-ba úr-zu-ta šu ḡál-ab-ta 102. ^dnin⁷-maḥ⁷ kíḡ-ḡá-zu ḥé-bi-lá-lá 103. [x] x [(x)]-ma⁷-dab⁵ a-ba-ám saḡ mu-un-ḡá-ḡá 104. lú-^rùlu⁷ eḡer-bi-šè tuku-a inim-bi šu ḥé-ni-ḡál 105. u⁴-da ḡiš-ḡu¹⁰ me-téš ḥa-ba-i-i ḡéštu ri-ge-zu ḥé-ḡál*. Lambert reads *^dnin⁷-mug⁷* in l. 102, and comments that “[t]he difficult sign is like MUG but with an extra wedge” (2013:

The removal of Ninmah from her profession as midwife can throw light upon the fact that male deities usually act in the birth incantations, and often so Enki's son Asalluḫi, who is even called šazu, midwife.¹⁵⁷⁷

5.9.2. Ideological aspects of Enki's creature and the outcome

As in the previous section, I understand the categories at issue here to be not only Enki and Ninmah, but also en and lugal kingship respectively. The lugal kingship is depicted as abnormal, whereas en kingship is the rulership that is victorious in this myth. The aim here is to recalibrate lugal kingship, something which was not successful in the long run, since that rulership became the norm.

Ninmah is recalibrated in her own area of competence. She, who according to tradition is the one who forms life in the womb, is the wet-nurse of kings and midwife at all births, cannot even recognize the first child. Her creative power here is as defective as are her creatures. Enki on the other hand justly wins, since he has shown that he possesses creative power through his penis. This situation also reflects their extent of earthly, geographic power, Enki taking over not only Ninmah's field of competence, but also her spheres of political power. I assume that the interests represented in this myth are related to representatives of Enki and Ninmah respectively, but in what way is unclear.

5.10. Conclusions

As has been seen, "Enki and Ninmah" is a very complex myth dealing with power on several levels. Central in these power relations is the patriarchal state. Regarding the male workers they were forced to work for the state, and that for a low income. Besides the exploitation of these workers there was also a general exploitation of the countryside, draining its workforce and materials in order to make the city flourish. The exploitation is further seen in relation to the mountainous areas surrounding Mesopotamia. Many workers and slaves, males as well as females, were derived from these areas, just as were woods, metals and other materials of importance for the city-states. The power relations of the state are also expressed by the supervising gods

508). Since it is not clear which sign we are dealing with, and since Ninmug is not at all expected in a dialogue between Enki and Ninmah where they talk about their counterpart ("you" this and that), I have chosen the same reading as Benito (1969: 32, 43, l. 132) and Black et al. (1998–2006), l. 132.

¹⁵⁷⁷ The fact that male deities predominantly act at births is pointed out by Stol. He connects this situation with the diminishing importance of female deities that took place over time (2000a: 70f.).

as well as by the creatures of Ninmah, almost all of them being assigned destinies to serve the king.

One aspect of power relations in the patriarchal state is that between the sexes. Our myth displays patriarchal gender relations from beginning to end; it starts by telling that the goddesses were distributed and taken in marriage, and ends by praising male (pro)creativity with which the male has won over the female. Regarding gender in “Enki and Ninmah”, it is clearly an ideological statement. This means that we meet an ideology of gender, and mainly so of female gender, that does not always correspond to reality. One example of this ideology is when the wives of the minor gods are depicted as passive, being supported by their men.

The minor gods were contextualized as being modeled upon the working men in early Mesopotamia, and accordingly their wives should correspond to the wives of the working men. We saw that these earthly wives in fact must have contributed with a great part of the work needed for survival. Another ideological presentation of gender is more on the conceptual level and deals with the ability to create and decree fates. Ninmah is posed as unable in both respects, whereas Enki is not. This expresses a gender ideology that says that (procreative) life originates from the male and that the male intellect is superior, being the only one able to find a fate for different life forms. This is further prescriptive also on the conceptual level; the aim is that people thereafter believe that these functions belong to the male, not the female. In this way it is a political act depriving the female of her previous abilities.

In our myth the mother goddess Namma is only able to give birth at the command of Enki, and the mother goddess Ninmah is not represented in her role as giving birth to kings here. Further, the first woman is now created by Enki, and therefore the female creativity originates from him. Whereas earlier the womb of the (local) mother goddess was important as origin of the king,¹⁵⁷⁸ now the king originates from Enki’s penis. This can be compared with the fallocentrism that we see e.g. in the society reflected in the Bible. There the descendants were usually called seed (*zera*⁶), whereas the womb very seldom was referred to as origin.¹⁵⁷⁹ We also see this fallocentric tendency in the Old Babylonian society, which was patrilineal and patrilocal just as the Biblical one. The patrilineality led to a wish to get male offspring, and the kinship line from the forefathers, to the father, to the sons was the important one.¹⁵⁸⁰

¹⁵⁷⁸ E.g. the following expressions show that the mother as origin was important for the kings. King Šulgi says: “I am a hero from the womb, I am a mighty man from birth”, and: “I am a noble son blessed from the womb”; Lipit-Ištar says: “I am a king adored, a fecund seed from the womb”, and Rīm-Sin says that he is “a prince fit (?) for kingship from the fecund womb” (Kramer 1974: 167 with fn:s).

¹⁵⁷⁹ Levine 2002.

¹⁵⁸⁰ van der Toorn 1996: 48, 72, 74f., 78, 98. Cf. however the epithet *mudeššû zēri*, “providing abundant seed”, of both the god and the goddess of the house in a first millennium prayer (van der Toorn 1996: 62).

The earlier focus on the womb as origin can be reflections of earlier times when women were held in higher esteem. The connotations of the womb goddesses point to a society where females had high status both in relation to birth-giving, childcare and crafts and professions. There even seems to have been a conceptual relation between birth-giving and crafts.

An aspect that we have met throughout in this chapter is the foreigners. Initially éren, male work troops, was a designation of foreigners, and géme can be understood as “woman of the mountains”. We also saw that a large amount of the géme were foreigners. Further, some of the womb goddesses were related to the mountains in the north of Mesopotamia; Ninmug’s profession, metal work, came from there, and Ninmada was found in a context of foreigners. Also the eunuchs were in part foreigners. In fact even our mother goddess might have been of foreign origin, since many of her traits refer to the mountainous areas surrounding Mesopotamia. It might be that her cult was either brought down from the mountains with the first settlers of Mesopotamia, or was introduced by the vast foreign population. The new-coming highlanders must have felt somewhat at home when they encountered the cult of the Mistress of the Mountains (i.e. Ninḫursaĝa) in their new land. Such an origin of Ninmah/Ninḫursaĝa may also explain some of the hate directed toward her – she represented the hated raiding peoples of the mountains.

The outcome of our myth then, is that the creative powers conceptually are moved from female to male, and that patriarchy triumphs. Whereas the sexes were posed as more or less complementary in “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa”, here they are definitely opposed, and the female is subordinated to the male. This very much resembles the picture that we have of gender relations up to this day.

6. Concluding discussions

The central theoretical point of departure of the present thesis is that “myth is ideology in narrative form”. It has throughout been shown that both the myths here analyzed are expressions of state ideology, as expressed by the scribes of the eduba, the Old Babylonian school. The myths depict gender and status as something that was settled “in the beginning” by the gods, and thus something that was static in society. However, the theoretical tool of this thesis has made it possible to show that the categories that the myths refer to in society were anything but static; instead the myths represent interests of the categories that have the state and the eduba as the societal reference.

One central aspect of the state ideology that is reflected in our myths is what can be called an “exploitative mentality”. The myths represent exploitation of women, foreigners, and riches of other countries and areas as something natural and accepted. Thus, this mentality is behind the alleged naturalness of the advanced interests. At the same time as foreign lands and peoples participate in the building of the Sumerian and Mesopotamian states, these areas and peoples are often depicted in disparaging ways. It was suggested that Ninḫursaġa, “the Mistress of the Mountains”, might even have had a foreign origin as well, coming from the mountains outside of Sumer. The ambivalence shown towards the mountainous areas and their inhabitants is also shown towards Ninḫursaġa/Ninmaḫ in our myths. In certain respects nothing has changed in society since those days. Today riches and wealth is often built upon the exploitation of other people. Similarly, we often have an ambivalent relation towards other countries and regions, as inhabited by “foreigners” of other skin color and religion than we have ourselves.

It was argued that the mother goddess, Enki and Enlil represented three different types of leadership at different stages in the development of society. The mother goddess represents the leader in the villages or early urban societies, whereas Enki represents the leader of the irrigation agriculture. Enlil instead, is the leader of kingdoms and empires. The myths enact a struggle between the leaderships represented by Ninḫursaġa/Ninmaḫ and Enki, and we see an increasing denigration of the mother goddess. She is recalibrated from representing the origin of life and destiny, over having a complementary role in creation at the side of Enki, to a role as a mere helper at births, whereas the creative power comes from Enki.

Through the depiction of the relation between creation and decreeing of destinies and Ninḫursaġa/Ninmah and Enki respectively, it has been argued that there was a recalibration of gender. The decreasing participation in creation by the female deity is seen also when the goddesses in the myths are only related to traditional female roles as childbirth, midwifery and wet-nursing. However, when contextualized, it was shown that all the goddesses for whom it was possible to get information were earlier thought of as powerful goddesses, active e.g. as carpenter, butcher, scribe, weaver, magician, healer, potter, priestess and metalworker.

Since the question of a relation between myth and society is central in this thesis, I have tried to investigate whether the categories of the myths had correspondences in society. In the sources informing on society we see that there were women practicing as e.g. scribes, healers and metalworkers, but also that they were exceptions. It is not possible at present to say whether female participation in the mentioned professions decreased over time. However, we see a correspondence between myth and society; just as the knowledgeable goddesses in our myths are depicted mainly as mothers and nurturers, women in society often had the possibility to specialize only in these spheres.

The historical material suggests a successive lowered status of e.g. queens and some priestesses over time. In the oldest sources queens owned estates, whereas later they managed the lands and assets of the state, which belonged to the king. The priestesses who lost in status over time were often working in traditional female spheres such as midwifery and wet-nursing, and they were often independent of men. Thus, at the same time as the traditional female sphere based upon reproduction was one area where women continued to have influence, this area seems to have been denigrated. This is also reflected in our myths, where the female role in creation of humans is downplayed, and seen as less important.

Although probably “everybody” taking part of the myths treated here knew about the connotations of the goddesses beyond those dealing with childbirth and midwifery the myths can be understood as a way to render those connotations invisible. When the older, more powerful connotations are rendered invisible again and again, they will soon be forgotten. For me as scholar, it was not at all obvious that these goddesses had such connotations; they had to be “unearthed” by me. It is important that we as scholars do not continue to render goddesses and women invisible, and that we do not fail to notice the gender ideology and recalibrations of the societies we study. We all struggle with partial blindness regarding different phenomena in society, but a central role that we have as scholars is to become aware of things we have not seen before.

7. Future research

In both myths the mother goddess is related to other regions than Mesopotamia; “Enki and Ninḫursaĝa” takes place on the island Dilmun in the Persian Gulf, and it was suggested that the working place of the working gods in “Enki and Ninmaḥ” was located in the mountains in western Anatolia. In the latter myth there are constant references to the mountains surrounding Mesopotamia, through the fact that male and female workers were often derived from the mountains, either as slaves or being recruited. Also metal work points to the mountains, as does the name of Ninḫursaĝa, which means “The Mistress of the Mountains”. It was not possible to thoroughly go into the recurring theme of foreign and mountainous lands here, to investigate the more precise relationships between these areas and our mother goddess. This would be a venue for future research. In line with the approach of this thesis it would be interesting to investigate what the references are of the ideological statements about the foreign mountainous lands in Sumerian literature, relating ideology to history.

In “Enki and Ninmaḥ” there seems to be a conflict between two different strategies for rulership; that of the en-rulership, which is represented by Enki, and that of the lugal-rulership, which is represented by Ninmaḥ. I only point out that there seems to be a conflict between two different forms of rulership, but this was not possible to investigate within the framework of this thesis. This is a further venue for future research. Through an understanding of the ideologies of these types of rulership, as well as their references in society, we will also get to know more about the power struggles and historical processes forming kingship in Ancient Mesopotamia.

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9. Appendix

9.1. Translation of “Enki and Ninḫursaġa”

Text A¹⁵⁸¹

1. [The purest city] – give it to us!
2. The land Dilmun is pure.
3. Sumer is pure – give it to us!
4. The land Dilmun is pure.
5. The land Dilmun is pure, the land Dilmun is virgin.
6. The land Dilmun is virgin, the land Dilmun is shining.
7. He was to lay down with his only one (?) at Dilmun.
8. At that place where Enki laid down with his wife,
9. that place is virgin, that place is bright.
10. (He was to lay down) with his only one (?) (at Dilmun).
11. At that place where Enki (laid down) with Ninsikila,
12. That place is virgin, (that place is shining).
13. At Dilmun the raven does not (yet) cry “KA”.
14. The francolin does not (yet) cry “dar” there.
15. The lion does not (yet) hit the head (i.e kill).
16. The wolf does not (yet) take lambs.
17. The domestic dog subduing goats is not (yet) known.
18. The pig eating grain is not (yet) known.
19. When the widow spreads malt on the roof,
20. no bird in heaven eats that malt,
21. no dove lowers its head at her presence.
22. The one with an eye disease does not (yet) say there: “I am one with sick eyes”.

¹⁵⁸¹ I base my translation upon Attinger’s (1984) transliteration, with adaptations. I follow text A throughout, which in cases of gaps is restored by text B and C. Text B contains the Rīm-Sîn interpolation, and accordingly that passage comes from text B. The passage concerning Ninimma is only extant in text C, which means that that text is used for the translation of that passage. Text in brackets is inserted by me. When the verbal chain is repeated several times, the scribe often only repeats the first conjugational element of the chain. Attinger has added the rest of the verbal chain within parentheses, and I use this principle also in my translation. When I write x, it means that there are vestiges of signs. When I write [] it means that there is a gap in the text, and when I write ... it means that some signs are legible, but are incomprehensible because of gaps around the signs.

23. The one with a head disease does not (yet say there): “I am one with a head disease”;
24. Its old woman does not (yet say there): “I am an old woman”.
25. Its old man does not (yet say there): “I am an old man”.
26. The maiden not (yet) bathed, does not (yet) throw her xx water in the city.
27. The man traversing the river does not (yet) say “MI.NE”.
28. The herald does not go around in his territories.
29. No singer says ”elulam“ there,
30. (and) does not say “i-lu” at the border of the city.
31. Ninsikila says to her father Enki:
32. You gave a city, you gave a city; your giving is my destiny.
33. You gave the city of Dilmun, (you gave) the city; (your giving is my destiny).
34. You gave [a city], (you gave) a city; (your giving is my destiny).
35. [A city] which has no [water] in its canals;
36. You gave [a city],(you gave) a city; (your giving is my destiny).

37–41: *broken*

42–45: *restored*:

42. Utu, standing in heaven,
43. from the ... vessels of the coast of Ezen,
44. from the x x horned high temple of Nanna;
45. from the mouth (where) water runs in earth, he will make sweet water run from earth.

46. In your vessel that he has made big for me, may he make water come down!
47. May he water your city with water of abundance.
- 48.(May he water) Dilmun with water (of abund)ance.
49. May your well of bitter water become a well of sweet water.
50. May your city become the center (lit. house) among (all) the quays of the land.
51. May Dilmun (become) the center (among all the quays of the land).
52. Now, Utu, on that day;
53. Utu standing in heaven,
54. from the ... vessels of the coast of Ezen,
55. from the x x horned high temple of Nanna;
56. from the mouth (where) water runs in earth; he brought her sweet water from the earth.
57. (and) water came (lit. comes) up at his vessel that he has made big for me.
58. He waters in her city with water of abundance.
59. (He waters) Dilmun with water of abund(ance).

60. Her well of bitter water has indeed become (a well of) sweet water.
61. Her fields, meadows and furrows [produce ?] grain.
62. Her city is indeed the center (lit. house) among (all) the quays of the land.
63. Dilmun is indeed the center (lit. house) among (all) the quays of the land.
64. Now, Utu, on that day; thus it was indeed!

The Rīm-Sîn interpolation, text B:

- 1–2. May the land Tukriš deliver gold from Ḫarali, lapis lazuli and x x for you.
- 3–5. The land Meluḫḫa may fill great boats with carnelian, demanded and precious things, Magan wood and good Sea wood for you.
- 6–7. The land Marḫaši may [x] precious stones, agate/topaz and GABA (?) for you.
- 8–9. The land Magan may [x] strong copper, [great?] strength (?), diorite, U-stones and “stones with two handles”.
10. The land(s) of the seas may [x x] ebony, ornament x x of kingship to you.
11. The “land of the tents” may [x] multicolored, fine wool [x] to you.
12. The land Elam may deliver choice wool [as] x [] tribute to you.
- 13–14. The temple of Ur, the seat of kingship, the [] city, may load barley, oil, splendid garments, fine garments onto big boats for you.
15. Those of the wide sea may [deliver] their abundance [to you].
16. The city – its dwellings are good dwellings.
17. Dilmun – its dwellings are good dwellings.
18. Its grain/barley is fresh (?) grain/barley.
19. Its dates are [very] big dates.
20. Its crops x three x x
21. Its woods x woods x x

Text A:

65. Her only one (?), the wise one, toward Nintu, the mother of the land,
66. Enki, the one who had acquired understanding; in the direction of Nintu, (the mother of the land);
67. his penis digs a ditch for the water in her direction.
68. His penis, diving into the reed (and water), it dives into it towards her.
69. The penis rises onto the lofty garment (bardul maḥ) from there.
70. He cried out there: “I will not let anyone pass by in the marshes”.
71. Enki cried out there: “(I will not let anyone pass by in the marshes)”.
72. He swore by the life of heaven.
73. “Lying down – lying down in the marshes, in the marshes – delight!”
74. Enki poured out his (for) Damgalnunna (destined) semen there.
75. Ninḫursaġa poured the semen into (her) womb.
76. She received the semen in her womb – it was Enki’s semen.

77. It was the first day – her first month.
 78. It was the second day – her second month.
 79. It was the third day – her third month.
 80. It was the fourth day – her fourth month.
 81. It was the fifth day – (her fifth month).
 82. It was the sixth day – (her sixth month).
 83. It was the seventh day – (her seventh month).
 84. It was the eighth day – (her eighth month).
 85. It was the ninth day – her ninth month, it was the month of womanhood.
 86. Like x-oil, like x-oil, like “fertility-oil”,
 87. [Nintu], the mother of the land
 88. bore [Ninnisi].
89. Ninnisi [takes off] her garment (?) at the riverside.
 90. Enki is hanging out in the marshes, he is hanging out (?).
 91. He says to his vizier Isimu:
 92. “The lovely young girl – why don’t I kiss her?
 93. The lovely Ninnisi – (why don’t I kiss her?)”
 94. His vizier Isimu answers him:
 95. “The lovely young girl - why don’t you kiss her!
 96. The lovely Ninnisi – (why don’t you kiss her!)
 97. My king will sail and I will navigate it; he will sail and I will navigate it.”
 98. He set his foot onto the only one, onto the boat,
 99. and then (lit. secondly) he verily set it on arid land.
 100. He pressed her onto the breast (and) kissed her.
 101. Enki poured out the semen in the womb.
 102. She received the semen into the womb. It was Enki’s semen.
103. It was the first day – her first month.
 104. It was the second day – her second month.
 105. It was the ninth day – her ninth month, it was the month of womanhood.
 106. Like x-oil, like x-oil, like “fertility-oil”,
 107. [Ninnisi, like] x-[oil,] (like x-oil, like “fertility-oil”),
 108. Ninnisi bore Nin[kura].
109. Ninkura [takes off her garment (?) at the riverside.]
 110. Enki [is hanging out] in the marshes, [he is hanging out] (?).
 111. [He says] to his vizier Isimu:
 112. “The young and sweet one – why don’t I [kiss] her?
 113. (The) sweet Ninkura (– why don’t I kiss her?)”
 114. His vizier Isimu answers him:
 115. “Do kiss the young and sweet one!

116. (Do kiss the) sweet Ninkura!
 117. My king will sail and I will navigate it; he will sail and I will navigate it.”
 118 He set his foot onto the only one, onto the boat,
 119. and then (lit. secondly) he verily set it on arid land.
 120. He pressed her onto the breast (and) kissed her.
 121. Enki poured out the semen in the womb.
 122. She received the semen into the womb. It was Enki’s semen.
 123. It was the first day – her first month.
124. It was the ninth day – her ninth month, it was the month of womanhood.
 125. Like x-oil, like x-oil, [like “fer]tility-oil”
 126. Ninkura, (like) x-oil, (like x-oil, like “fertility-oil”)
 127. She [bore] Uttu, the mature woman.

Text C:

1. Ninkura [bore] Ninimma.
2. She [bore] the young, mature woman.

3. Ninimma [takes off her garment?] at the riverside.
4. Enki is pulling a boat, he is hanging out (?).
5. He [sets] his eyes upon Ninimma at the riverside.
6. He says to Isimu, his vizier:
7. “One like this lovely young girl – did I indeed kiss one?”
8. One like the lovely Ninimma – did I indeed have sex with one?”
9. His vizier Isimu answers him:
10. “My king will sail and I will navigate it; he will sail and I will navigate it.”
11. First he set his foot onto the boat,
12. and then (lit. secondly) he set it on arid land.
13. He pressed her onto the breast, he lay in her lap,
14. he had sex with the young one, he kissed her.
15. Enki, Ninimma, he poured out the semen in her womb,
16. she received the semen into the womb. It was Enki’s semen.

17. For the woman the first day was indeed the first month,
18. the second day was indeed the second month,
19. the third day was indeed the third month,
20. the fourth day was indeed the fourth month,
21. the fifth day was indeed the fifth month,
22. the sixth day was indeed the sixth month,
23. the seventh day was indeed the seventh month,
24. the eighth day was indeed the eighth month,

25. the ninth day was indeed her month of womanhood.

26. lik[e x-oil, lik]e “fertility-oil”,

27. [Ninimma li]ke “fertility-oil”,

28. [bore Uttu].

Text A:

128. Nintu says [to] Uttu:

129. “I will give you advice; [may you grasp] my advice!

130. I will tell you a word – to my word [your ear]!

131. There is one hang[ing] out in the marshes, [(hanging out in the marshes).]

132. Enki is ha[n]ging out in the marshes, [he is (hanging out in the marshes).]

133. [He will set] eyes [on you...].”

134–143: *broken*

144. [Uttu], the mature woman [].

145–147. *Traces of a few signs.*

148. “Bring [... cucumbers]!

149. Bring [app]les on their [flourishing branches]!

150. Bring clusters of grapes!

151. May my tethering rope be taken in the house!

152. Enki indeed took my tethering rope!”

153. Secondly, his filling of water;

154. the embankments – he filled them with water,

155. the ditches – he filled them with water,

156. the fallow fields – he filled them with water.

157. the gardener [x x] out of joy

158. (and) he hugged him.

159. “Who are you [] garden?”

160. Enki [answered] the gardener:

161–164: *broken*

165. He bro[ught him ...-cucumbers],

166. he brought him apples on their string of fruits (?),

167. he brought him grapes in their clusters, and filled his lap with them.

168. Enki colored his eyes green (?) and took a cane.

169. Enki went to Uttu.

170. He knocked (on the door) at her house (and said): “open up, [open up]”!

171. “Who are you?”, (she said).

172. “I am the gardener, bringing you cucumbers, apples and [grapes] for (your) consent.”

173. Out of joy Uttu opened her house.

174. To Uttu, the mature woman, Enki (then)

175. gives ...-cucumbers,

176. he gives her apples on their string of fruits (?),

177. (and) he gives her grapes in their clusters.
178. Uttu, the mature woman, ... , she applauded him.

Text C:

179. Enki exhilarated Uttu.
180. He pressed her onto the breast, he lay in her lap,
181. he caressed her loins, he fondled her.
182. He pressed her onto the breast, he lay in her lap,
183. he had sex with the young one, he kissed her.
184. Enki, Uttu, he poured out the semen in her womb,
185. she received the semen into the womb. It was Enki's semen.
186. Uttu, the sweet woman says "oh my loins!", she says "oh my body, oh my stomach!"
187. Ninḥursaġa wiped the semen off her loins.
188. The "oil plant" grew there.

Text A:

189. The "honey plant" grew there.
190. The "vegetable plant" grew there.
191. The A.NÚMUN plant grew there.
192. The *atutu* plant grew there.
193. The fennel (?) (grew there.)
194. The [...-plant] (grew there.)
195. The *amḥara* plant grew there.

196. Enki is hanging out in the marshes, he is hanging out (?).
197. He says to his vizier Isimu:
198. "The plants – I will [] their destinies.
199. Which is this one, which is this one?"
200. His vizier Isimu answers him:
201. "My king, it is the 'oil plant'", he says to him.
202. He (Isimu) cuts it off for him, (and) he (Enki) eats it.
203. "My king, it is the 'honey plant'", he says to him.
204. He (Isimu) tears it out for him, (and) he (Enki) eat[s it].
205. "My king, it is the ['vegetable plant']", (he says to him).
206. He (Isimu) cuts it off for him, (and) he (Enki) (eats it).
207. "My king, it is the A.NÚMUN", (he says to him).
208. He (Isimu) tears it out for him, (and) he (Enki) (eats it).
209. "[My king, it is the *a*]tutu plant", (he says to him).
210. [He (Isimu) cuts it off for him], (and) he (Enki) (eats it).
211. "[My king, it is the fenn]el (?)", (he says to him).
212. [He (Isimu) tears it out for him, (and) he (Enki) (eats it)].
213. "[My king, it is the ...-plant", (he says to him)].
214. [He (Isimu) cuts it off for him, (and) he (Enki) (eats it)].

215. “[My king], it is the *amḥara* plant”, he says to him.
 216. [He (Isimu)] tea[rs it out for him], (and) he (Enki) eats it.
 217. Enki decreed the destinies of the plants; he knew their hearts/wombs.
218. Ninḥursaġa swore on the name of Enki:
 219. “I will not look with the look of life on him until he is dead!”
 220. The Anuna deities sat in the dust.
 221. A fox says to Enlil:
 222. “(If) I bring Ninḥursaġa back – what will be my present?”
 223. Enlil answers the fox:
 224. “(If) you indeed bring back Ninḥursaġa,
 225. I will plant two (?) *kiškanû* trees in my city for you, (and) your name
 will be famous.”
 226. To start with, the fox anointed his fur,
 227. to start with, it released its heart (?),
 228. to start with, it put antimony on its eyes.
 229–232: *broken*
 233. “I went [to], Enlil [].
 234. I went [t]o [], Nanna [].
 235. I went to [], Utu [].
 236. I went to [], Inana [].
 237. [] brings []”
 238. *Traces of a few signs.*
 239. Ninḥursaġa [].
 240–243: *broken*
 244. [] ...
245. Ninḥursaġa ran towards the [temple (?)]
 246. The Anu[na] deities pulled off her dress.
 247. (and) made [].
 248. They decreed a destiny,
 249. (and) released [].
 250. Ninḥursaġa made Enki sit in her vul[va].
 251. “My brother, what is making you ill?”
 252. “The top of my head hurts me.”
 253. She made Abba to be born from there.
 254. “My brother, what is making you ill?”
 255. “The locks of my hair hurt me.”
 256. She bore Ninsiki’la from there.
 257. “My brother, what is making you ill?” “My nose hurts me.”
 258. She bore Ninkiriutu from there.
 259. “My brother, what is making you ill?” “My mouth hurts me.”
 260. She bore Ninkasi from there.
 261. “My brother, what is making you ill?” “My throat hurts me.”

262. She bore Nazi from there.
263. “My brother, what is making you ill?” “My arm hurts me.”
264. She bore Azimua from there.
265. “My brother, what is making you ill?” “My ribs hurt me.”
266. She bore Ninti from there.
267. “My brother, what is making you ill?” “My sides hurt me.”
268. She bore Ensag from there.
269. “For the small ones that I bore x x x []
270. Abba will be the king of plants.
271. Ninsiki’la will be the lord of Magan.
272. Ninkiriutu will marry Ninazu.
273. Ninkasi will be the one who satisfies the desires.
274. Nazi will marry UmunDARa.
275. Azimua will marry Ningišzida.
276. Ninti will be the mistress of months.
277. Ensag will be the lord of Dilmun.”
278. Praise be Enki!

9.2. Translation of “Enki and Ninmah”

Section I¹⁵⁸²

1. At the coming of the days – on the day when heaven wa[s separated] from earth.
2. At the coming of the nights – on the night when heaven and earth we[re put] there. (?)
3. [x x x]
4. When the [Anu]na gods had been born,
5. when the gods took the goddesses in marriage,
6. when the gods and goddesses were distributed in heaven and earth,
7. when the gods and goddesses x x x x, they became pregnant and gave birth,
8. The gods – their rations were delivered, x they were bound to their dining-room.
9. The great gods stood at (oversaw?) the work, the minor gods were bearing the toil.
10. The gods, digging the canals, were heaping up the silt of Ḫarali.
11. The gods were worried, and were making claims (regarding) their life.

12. At that time, the one of wide wisdom, the creator of all the existing great gods,
13. Enki in the deep Engur, where water was dripping – there exists no god who has seen its interior –
14. was lying in his bed, not rising from his sleep.
15. The gods were weeping and said: “he caused us the present trouble!”
16. The one sleeping was lying in bed, he did not rise.
17. Namma, the foremost mother, the birthgiver of the great gods
18. (she) brought the weeping of the gods to her son:
19. “Lord, you are indeed lying there! Lord, indeed you are asleep,
20. and do not rise [from your bed]!
21. The gods, your creatures, are striking (against) their assignment.
22. My son, rise from your bed, apply the skill deriving from your wisdom,
23. create a substitute for the gods (so that) they can slacken their toil!”
24. Enki got up from his bed at the words of his mother Namma.

25. In Ḫalanku, walking around (?), at his deliberating, he [slapped] his thighs.
26. The wise, knowing, enquiring, skilled, the maker of forms of everything, let the womb goddesses come forth.

¹⁵⁸² I base my translation upon Lambert’s (2013) transliteration, with adaptations. When I write x, it means that there are vestiges of signs. When I write [] it means that there is a gap in the text, and when I write ... it means that some signs are legible, but are incomprehensible because of gaps around the signs.

27. Enki put them at his side, surrounding them with wisdom (?).
 28. Enki, the maker of forms, by himself, casts their hearts with wisdom (?).
 29. He says to his mother Namma:
 30. “My mother! My creature, your ‘make it!’, will come into existence. Tie (to him) the (carrying of) baskets of the gods!
 31. Womb-clay (?) will be mixed for you on the top of the Abzu.
 32. The womb goddesses will nip off the clay there, and then you will bring the form into existence.
 33. Ninmah will act as your assistant.
 34. Ninimma, Šuziana, Ninmada, Ninbara, (Ninšar)
 35. Ninmug, Sarsargaba (and) NinNIĜINa
 36. will stand by at your birth-giving.
 37. My mother! You will decide his (lit. its) destiny; Ninmah will bind the basket (to him).”
- Short gap.*

Section II

1. x x x x [x x x x] x x x human
 2. [x x (and) Enki creat]ed human.
 3. [x x x x x] x x x x [x]
 4. [x x x (x)] x x those dining-rooms [x] on their bodies.
 5. [the breeder (?) x x] [x] x poured out light (?) (and) [took her] in marriage.
 6. [x x] x the breeder poured (it?) out onto the woman (?). The creature in her womb came out.
 7. Enki looked at the small (?) work and his heart rejoiced.
-
8. For his mother Namma and for Ninmah he set a feast.
 9. All the noble (?) womb goddesses, those of destiny, eat first-class reed (?) and bread.
 10. Lord Nudimmud roasts (?) a pure kid for An and Enlil.
 11. All the great gods praise him:
 12. “The lord of wide wisdom – who can outrank his wisdom?
 13. Great lord, Enki, who can surpass your work?
 14. You are like an engendering father, the one decreeing all the destinies you are indeed!”
 15. Enki and Ninmah drink beer, and their hearts become elated.
 16. (then) Ninmah says to Enki:
 17. “The form of humankind; [whether it is to] be good or bad, belongs to me.
 18. According to my heart, I will make the destiny good or bad.”
 19. Enki answers Ninmah:

20. “I will suspend the destiny (that is) according to your heart, be it good or bad.”

21. Ninmah took clay on the top of the Abzu.

22. The first, one with hands that overthrow and overwhelm, (one) that does not give in, that one did she form.

23. When Enki had seen the first, the one with hands that overthrow and overwhelm, (one) that does not give in,

24. he decreed his destiny; he installed him as a servant of the king.

25. Second, she formed one turning back (?) the light, a person (constantly) gazing (?).

26. When Enki had seen the one turning back (?) the light, a person (constantly) gazing (?)

27. he decreed his destiny – he gave (him) the musical arts,

28. he [appointed] him to be the great force of the palace (?), (to stand) before the king.

29. [Third, she formed (one with) ... feet], (one with) paralyzed feet.

30. [When] E[nki had se]en [(the one with) ... feet], (one with) paralyzed feet,

31. he [installed him] ... work ... like silver, his awesome splendor.

32. Fourth, she formed an idiot, slave (from) his birth.

33. When Enki had seen the idiot, slave (from) his birth,

34. he decreed his destiny and installed him as a servant of the king.

35. Fifth, she formed one dripping with semen.

36. When Enki had seen the one dripping semen,

37. he washed him with holy water and removed his body's destiny.

38. Sixth, she formed a woman not able to give birth.

39. When Enki had seen the woman not able to give birth,

40. he saw a weaver, and he made her stay in the queen's household.

41. Seventh, she formed one who had neither penis nor vagina on his body.

42. When Enki had seen the one who had neither penis nor vagina on his body,

43. he named him eunuch. To be a servant of the king he decreed as his fate.

44. Ninmah threw the nipped-off clay in her hand on the ground and was struck with silence.

45. The great lord Enki says to Ninmah:

46. “I decreed a destiny for your creatures, (and) I gave them bread,

47. Now, I will create (a creature), (and) you shall decree the destiny of (the one) who has been born.”

48. Enki formed the creature of his head, the fetus, in that womb.

49. He says to (the one of?) Ninmah:

50. “When fertilizing semen, poured into the womb of a woman; that woman will bear in her womb.”

51. Ninmaḥ x x stood by at that (or: its) birth.
52. That woman, that day, to x x x, dropp[ed] the fetus of her (lit. in that) womb.
53. Ninmaḥ x x x x x x was filled.
54. Then, Uḡul – its head was afflicted, its temples were afflicted,
55. its eyes were afflicted, its neck was afflicted, the breath was leaving, life was dripping away.
56. The lungs were afflicted, the bowels were afflicted, the heart was afflicted.
57. Its hands and head were hanging, (and) it could not put bread to its mouth.
58. All of the back was paralyzed, the bottom broken, (and) onto the front ... (?)
59. The feet were twisted, and it could not go to the field; such (a creature) did he create.
60. Enki says to Ninmaḥ:
61. “I decreed a destiny for your creatures, (and) made them eat bread,
62. You shall decree a destiny for my creature, (and) make it eat bread.”
63. When Ninmaḥ looked at Uḡul, she turned onto ...
64. She approached Uḡul; (when) interrogating it, it does not move its head
65. She gave it bread to eat, (but) it did not stretch out its hand to it (lit. “to her”).
66. She offered it her hand, but it was not rising.
67. In the bed its heart did not come to rest (?), it did indeed not come to rest (?).
68. It could not stand, it could not sit, it could not lie, it could not x x; it could not do anything.
69. Ninmaḥ [speaks] a word to Enki:
70. “Your creature is one not being alive, one not being dead; it cannot carry (anything (?)).”
71. Enki answers Ninmaḥ:
72. “I decreed a destiny for the one with hands that overthrow; I gave him bread.
73. I decreed a destiny for the one turning back (?) the light; I gave him bread.
74. I decreed a destiny for the one with ... feet; I ga[ve] him bread.
75. I decreed a destiny for the [idi]ot; [I ga]ve him bread.
76. I decreed a destiny for the one [dripping] with semen; [I gave him bread.]
77. I decre[ed a destiny fo]r the woman not [able to give bir]th; [I gave her bread.]
78. [I decreed a destiny for] the eun[uch]; I gave him bread.]

79. My sister, you [...]'

80–92: *fragmentary beginning, then break, of lines*

93. “Now, you did not live in heaven, you did not live on earth. You do not go out to direct your gaze onto the land.

94. Where you do not dwell (and) my temple is erected, your words are not listened to.

95. Where you do not live (and) my city is built, I myself strike against falsehood.

96. My city is destroyed, my house is crushed, my child is taken (as captive),

97. and I am a fugitive, I am leaving Ekur.

98. (That) day I could not deliver myself from your hands.”

99. Enki says to Ninmah:

100. “The word coming from your mouth – who can change it?

101. Uĝul held at your chest, remove him from your lap!

102. Ninmah, may your work be suspended,

103. [x] x [(x)] it shall be taken. Who can oppose this?

104. The human, having hereafter (?), that word will be heeded. (?)

105. Today, let my penis be praised! May your lost sense be (there again).

106. The Enkum and Ninkum,

107. if (my?) strength is opposed they may not x x x, may they praise me.

108. My sister, the strength of my heroism [] will come forth. (?)

109. song x x x heavy x [] x x x x [] x

110. The deities hearing this (?): Uĝul erecting x x, may he build my house!”

111. Ninmah could not equal the great lord Enki.

112. Father Enki, your praise is sweet!

10. Indices

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