

**WOMEN AND THEIR AGENCY IN  
THE NEO-ASSYRIAN EMPIRE**

Assyriologia

Pro gradu

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Aim of the study

In this thesis, I will explore women's agency in the Neo-Assyrian Empire. The role of women in society is a fairly underdeveloped subject in Assyriology, which makes the focus of this thesis especially relevant. By exploring women's agency, this thesis will produce new perspectives on ways in which women functioned in Neo-Assyrian society.

I will complement the conventions of the Assyriological text-centered approach with some theories and concepts from other fields researching culture and society. The text-centered approach too often considers the text to be both the starting point and the finishing point of scientific research. Translation is an essential part of any Assyriological research, but the findings of a text-analysis can be enriched by finding out the meaning of the text in relation to larger cultural wholes. Theoretical approaches and diverse methods that are found in other fields of cultural studies, anthropology and sociology can be useful in Assyriology as well.

A good starting point for any discussion concerning theory is the fact that every scholar uses a theory in their writings. "Traditional approach" does not mean lack of theory but positivism. "Theoretical approach" on the other hand most commonly means postmodern scholarship. The postmodern is probably best described as *Zeitgeist*, in which skepticism has arisen in the midst of knowledge, leading to numerous theories, some even in opposition to one another. Nonetheless, they all have one stance in common, namely that all knowledges are socially constructed. Theory is therefore not an approach that a scholar might choose in place of an "objective" scholarship. The latter is already dependent on "commonsensical" beliefs and models. (Bahrani 2001: 12-13.) Theories and concepts from contemporary cultural studies can be successfully used in Assyriology as well.<sup>1</sup>

The theoretical emphasis of this study is in the relationships between individual, society and power, which collide in the concept of agency. To my knowledge, the concept of agency has not been used before in Assyriological research, although the role of women in Assyria has been studied. Implicitly, in most writings men have been seen as subjects and

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Bahrani 2001.

women as objects, with an exception of the royal women of the empire<sup>2</sup>. In this thesis, I will take a broader look at the agency of the women in the empire.

The concept of agency is a useful tool in the study of cultures. Any individual acts within the structures of the society, but rarely as a passive marionette. Rather, structures present individuals with a range of choices. The choices that are possible in contemporary Western societies were not possible in Assyria, and vice versa. Using the concept of agency, I will examine the choices that were available for Assyrian women.

As will be discussed in 2.1, agency is not merely autonomy in western sense, but can be found even in seemingly submissive behavior. Expressions of agency can be found in all spheres of society, not just in public sphere. Agency, as Tenhunen (1997: 11-12) sees it, is closely related to the question of how women functioned in their society: formed by it, but also fashioning and changing it.

However, the nature of the evidence caused me to rethink the concept of agency. Even if I do agree with Tenhunen that autonomy and self-sufficiency are not intrinsic to the concept of agency and that even seemingly submissive actions can be a form of agency, the material still somewhat defeated me. A list of women's names, or a sales document of a female slave tell very little of the agency of the women in question. Even the most subordinate **act** can be a form of agency, but unfortunately most women in Neo-Assyrian texts do not act in any way. Therefore, I needed to find those Neo-Assyrian women who either acted in some way, or who probably were active in their official capacity (for example the *šakintus*). The first group I designated as *explicit agents* and the second group as *implicit agents*.

I began with those women of the Empire that we know by their names: 712 altogether<sup>3</sup>. Out of these 712 women I chose 148 explicit and implicit agents for closer examination. Since the aim of my thesis was to cover all Neo-Assyrian women, next step was to find the women relevant to my thesis, which did not occur with their names in the texts. For this purpose, I read the glossary of *Assyrische Tempel* (Menzel 1981) and the glossaries of several volumes of State Archives of Assyria – series (SAA 4, SAA 6, SAA 7, SAA 10, SAA 11, SAA 12, SAA 13, SAA 14, SAA 15 and SAA 16). Thus, I managed to compose a list of female pro-

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Melville 1999.

<sup>3</sup> As PNA lacks the names beginning with š-w, I researched and categorized them myself (119 names altogether).

fessions and titles. I then proceeded to compare this list to the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian Texts<sup>4</sup>. In this way I acquired a list of every text where any of these titles were mentioned.

These texts form the material of my thesis. In this way, I hope to have reached every Neo-Assyrian woman, of whose agency something can be said. Naturally, from the viewpoint of agency, most Neo-Assyrian women were “invisible” (see chapter 3), since for example a list of women’s names tells practically nothing of their possible agency. Nonetheless, there were many women, who act in the documents and who could be defined either as explicit or implicit agents.

In order to find relevant spheres of women’s agency (see chapter 2.1) in Neo-Assyria, I placed Assyrian women in different spheres of action. Most women could be placed either in the orbit of the palace or the temple<sup>5</sup>. A clear majority of those were found within the context of palace. I further divided them into three groups, each discussed under their own chapter. Queens and other women related to the king are dealt with in chapter four. Those women who had some kind of clear duty to perform in the palace are dealt with in chapter six. In chapter seven, other palace women, for example *sekretus*, are introduced. The women associated with temples are discussed in chapter eight. In chapter nine I will introduce the women who seem to be acting outside the influence of either temple or palace – at least the texts in which they appear give no hints as to their role in these institutions. In chapter ten I present my findings. I shortly analyze each group of women, first in the form of tables, then in writing.

## 1.2 Background

This thesis concentrates on women of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. In the first phase of the empire (934-745) Assyrians re-established their claim to territories in Upper Mesopotamia held in the Middle Assyrian period. In the second phase (745-c. 610) the Assyrian empire expanded enormously, finally, in 705, achieving a territory stretching from the Arabian Persian Gulf to Commagene in Turkey. This expansion held until the collapse of the Assyrian regime in the 610s. (Kuhrt 1995: 473.) Even Egypt was under Assyrian control for a time, from ca. 671 to 656 (Kuhrt 1995: 499-500).

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<sup>4</sup> The Corpus contains transliterations of all Neo-Assyrian texts.

<sup>5</sup> I use these terms loosely here, “the palace” meaning the royal administration in all its forms and “the temple” meaning all temples and cultic administration.

An important aspect of the Neo-Assyrian Empire was its ethnic diversity. The Assyrians conquered areas and made them part of Assyria. They deported people from the conquered areas to Assyria, but also settled Assyrians to conquered areas. People from all around the empire (at least according to the evidence of their names) worked for the king. Even some queens had West-Semitic names.<sup>6</sup>

The fall of the Assyrian empire came swiftly and surprisingly. Sources and chronology from this time-period are very problematical. The following can be said for certain; Aššur-etel-ilani succeeded Assurbanipal, but at some point (possibly 622) his brother, Sin-šar-iškun managed to gain the throne from his brother and ruled until the fall of Nineveh in 612. Nabopolassar claimed the Babylonian throne in 626 and was in undisputed control there by 616, when he launched his first attack against Assyria. The Medes were drawn into conflict and despite tenacious resistance Medes and Babylonians defeated the Assyrians. From 608 onwards Assyrians disappear from the record. (Kuhrt 1995: 540-546.)

### **1.3 Problems with sources and material**

Perhaps the most important problem with the material of this thesis is the random nature of the sources that have been preserved. The material for this thesis has been gathered from many different types of documents. Each of these documents and/or archives represents merely a fraction of that rich and complex whole that was the Neo Assyrian Empire. The evidence that has been preserved for us is not carefully selected to give us a nice, whole picture of the Empire - on the contrary. As the nature of sources affects the results of this thesis, I give here a short introduction to the main sources and their problems.

There is also a more general problem that relates to the above-mentioned dilemma. In the field of the ancient Mesopotamian studies there is often a profusion of information on certain eras and places while at the same time there may be nothing on some other eras and places. That makes generalization an especially problematic tool in our field. When using Mesopotamian material that is not datable to Neo-Assyrian Empire, I will explain why I think that material can be used in the study of Neo-Assyrian Empire.

The material for this thesis has been gathered from two main sources: the Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (PNA, 3 volumes in years 1998-2002) and the Corpus of Neo-

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<sup>6</sup> For example Naqi'a, queen of Sennacherib (704-681).

Assyrian texts. The Corpus of course relies largely on already published works, as will be seen in chapter 1.3.2.

### 1.3.1 Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire

There are some special difficulties relating to PNA as a source. Names are most often mentioned in lists and sales documents, in order to identify an individual. This might cause a discrepancy in the statistics based on prosopography. However, I will balance the picture with other material.

Another problem relating to use of prosopography is that it has been written by so many people. The writers often use different terminology. If there is an epithet in a text like GÉME or MÍ É.GAL, the writers will translate it as “slave” or “woman of palace/harem”. If there is not a clear title, the writer will make one up. A sold woman could be called just “woman from x”, “a slave” or “a dependent”. For example see Nīnu’ītu (PNA 2/II: 965, Jas), who is “sold with an estate”. Does this mean she is dependent? Possibly a slave? Thus I am somewhat at the mercy of writers. I am sure there are inaccuracies and probably even some mistakes because of this.

A further difficulty concerning the PNA was that it is unfortunately not yet complete, but lacks names beginning with š-w. These missing names (119 altogether) I researched and categorized myself. Altogether there were 712 women known by their names in the Neo-Assyrian Empire. In most cases there was no other information about a woman except her name and possibly her place of origin. In sales documents there was often also a price. While such data is valuable in itself, it reveals very little about the quality of those women’s agency. This information is included in the present study mainly as a reference point to women who were expressing agency.

Most of the data in this thesis relating to women in PNA (i.e. names beginning with A-S) is from articles in PNA. However, I have avoided referring to PNA in every sentence. Rather, I refer to texts according to its text identification numbers (found in the articles of PNA), since this is surely more useful for the reader than quoting page numbers from PNA. I will only refer to articles of PNA when they give information concerning the text that is not found from the text itself, for example when a writer presents their interpretation of the text.

The dates after 649 will be based on PNA. The dates after the end of canonical lists (in 649 BC) are marked with an asterisk after the year (for example 648\*). The post-canonical dates given in PNA (and thus in this study) are based on Parpola's list of probable order of post-canonical eponyms. This list can be found in the first volume of PNA (1/I: XVIII-XXI).

### 1.3.2 Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts

Most of the transliterations in the Corpus have already been published. Here, and later in this thesis, I refer to these sources with abbreviations. The list of abbreviations can be found at the very end of this thesis. This chapter is not meant to be complete guide to the sources of the Corpus, but merely an introduction to the material used in this thesis.

The SAA-series is definitely the source I have used most frequently. It is also the most recent and in that respect, most reliable. Most of the ABL and ADD have been published in SAA-series. Whenever possible I have referred to them with their SAA text numbers. If a text is referred to with an ABL or ADD number, it has not been published in the SAA-series.

Another significant series has been the CTN-series (CTN 2, CTN 3, NWL and NL). Although the first volume of the series (NWL) is somewhat outdated (more in respect to its conclusions than to its transliterations and translations), the series include both transliterations and translations, as does the SAA-series. These have helped me enormously. Most of the texts from Nineveh and Nimrud are published in these two series.

Some of the Neo-Assyrian texts from Assur (A) have been published in the StAT series (StAT 1 and StAT 2), which is fairly recent and also includes translations. Some, however, have not. I have been able to use the unpublished texts texts from Assur (A and Mass) and other places<sup>7</sup> as part of the material of this thesis only because of the transliterations of the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts. Also the articles in PNA have been of great help, since the translation of all relevant texts has not been within the scope of this work.

Most recent editions of the royal inscriptions – with transliterations, translations and comments – can be found in Grayson's RIMA 2 (1991) and RIMA 3 (1996). Unfortunately, the series is not yet complete (RIMA 3 ends to 745 BC), so I have had to rely on older editions

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<sup>7</sup> For example Til-Barsip (TB), Nimrud (ND partly) and museums (VAT partly).

as well. Tadmor's *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III King of Assyria* is quite recent, from 1994, but the other sources are fairly old: Streck's *Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige bis zum Untergange Nineveh's* is from 1916, Luckenbill's *The Annals of Sennacherib* from 1924 and Borger's *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Königs von Assyrien* from 1956.

The texts that have been published more than 70 years ago (for example the above – mentioned royal inscriptions, ABL, ADD, CT and TCL) are naturally not useless just because they are old, although of course first editions of texts are always lacking. In fact, the accuracy of editions has often more to do with the diligence of the copyist than the date of the edition. Generally however, the more the scholars research the texts, the better the editions get.

The biggest problem with any edition is the fact that editions are always interpretations of texts. The larger issue behind this problem is of course the impossibility of total objectivity – no scholar can disengage from their personality and culture when doing research.

## **2. THEORETICAL APPROACH – EMPOWERING MESOPOTAMIAN WOMEN**

### **2.1 Power, agency and spheres of action**

The concept of agency is central to my thesis. In this chapter it will be showed how the concept of agency is formed in the triangle of power, individual and society and how this concept has been used in this thesis

Power is an elusive concept on which much has been written. In sociology power has traditionally been defined as the ability of an individual or social group to make others act in a desired way, even if they resist this. (Alasuutari 1993:46-52.)

Giddens emphasizes the central position of the concept of power to social theory. According to Durkheim and many other sociologists, society has primacy over the individual person. They believe that social structure sets the limits to what we can do as individuals. The critics of the Durkheimian approach see “society” as the composite of many individual actions. They see individuals as creators, not creatures of society. (Giddens 2001 666-668.)

Giddens does not see these two views as wholly irreconcilable. Although social institutions do exert constraint over us, they do not determine what we do. For example, one could choose to live without using money. If enough people would choose to do so, the monetary system would collapse. Thus we actively make and remake social structure during the course of our everyday activities. According to Giddens, groups or societies only have “structure” if people behave in regular ways. On the other hand, “action” is only possible when people have enough socially structured knowledge. For example, language is in constant process of structuration. Language needs a structure, but the structure only exists when individual language users follow those rules in practice. (Giddens 2001 668-669.) Thus, structure is not a barrier to agency, but very much involved in its production. (Giddens 1979: 70.)

Giddens criticizes strongly those forms of social theory, which regard actors as mere cultural dopes (Giddens 1979: 70-72). Power within social systems involves reproduced relations of autonomy and dependency in social interaction. Thus, power relations are always

reciprocal. Even the most autonomous agent is to some degree dependent and the most dependent actor retains some autonomy. (Giddens 1979: 93.)

Foucault, on the other hand concentrated his research mainly on the relationship between power, ideology and discourse in relation to modern organizational systems. According to him, power works through discourse, which is often established by those with power. These discourses shape individuals, their attitudes towards different phenomena and force them to observe themselves for any lack of “normality”. (Foucault 1975)

Foucault’s view has been criticized by some feminists<sup>8</sup>, as well as by Giddens (Giddens 1987: 98), as deterministic and totalizing in its definitions of power, leaving no space for the possibility of individual agency. Bahrani sees Foucault’s work differently. She writes that it actually “theorized individual agency into the systems of power as necessary component of the working of that power itself”. Power does not emanate from agents, it is something that is exercised rather than possessed. (Bahrani 2001: 22.)

In all the discussions above, agency has been connected with autonomy. Sirpa Tenhunen, in her doctorate thesis *Secret Freedom in the City: Women’s Wage Work and Agency in Calcutta*, criticizes this and takes the concept of agency further.

At first glance, her thesis has nothing to do with Assyria. However, working class women of Calcutta resemble the women of Neo-Assyrian Empire in many ways. They are poorly researched and mostly portrayed as a passive group, unable to make changes or choices of their own. (Tenhunen 1997: 4.)

Like third world women, they are assumed to be a homogenous group of victims of their own traditional sexist culture. This discourse about third world women exercises power over them by creating the “ideal” emancipated modern Western woman. (Mohanty 1991: 54, 56.) Often agency is equated with individual freedom, capacity to subordinate objects to suit one’s own needs. Tenhunen questions this. She writes that agency can be many things and it should be interpreted within specific historical, cultural and social contexts. (Tenhunen 1997: 5-6.)

Question of agency was more widely approached in anthropological discussion in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s. In 1984 most of the earlier work on agency was placed under the

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<sup>8</sup> See for example Walby 1990.

rubric of practice theory, which was mainly interested in looking at how structures of society are reproduced. Resistance studies, born about the same time, paid more attention to issues of power, change and discontinuity in a society. The problem shared by practice theory, resistance studies and some feminist studies is that they do not acknowledge subjects as culturally constructed. (Tenhunen 1997: 6-8.)

The modernist juxtaposing of the individual and structure can be seen in Giddens' writings as well. Although he notes that persons are also products of structures, he still associates agency with power and autonomy, in contrast to powerlessness and dependency. (Giddens 1979: 88-95.) This approach, which juxtaposes subject and object, can lead to a narrow view of agency. There is a danger of imposing the western idea of the free individual as subject and agent on women in cultures where this idea rarely works, for example in the case of Assyrian women. Agency and empowerment do not always require self-sufficiency. (Tenhunen 1997: 6-9.)

Only by understanding the subject as culturally constructed, we can understand that even seemingly submissive behavior can be a form of agency depending on the context. For example, persons in a Bengali village pursue differing and conflicting interests, but always as members of family hierarchy, not as individuals seeking their individual rights. (Davis 1983.)

Although scholars have tried to define autonomy in new ways, in order to deal with other cultures, the concept of autonomy is rooted in Kant's rationalism. Kant's subject knew autonomy as the capacity to act freely, to create, and to act independently of the determination of any other force but that of the rational will. Tenhunen (among others, see for example Hekman 1995) contradicts this definition of autonomy. She writes that subjects are constituted through social discourses. However, at the same time these discourses provide the basis for agency. (Tenhunen 1997: 11-13.) This will also be the view in this study.

I agree with Tenhunen that agency is different in different cultures and it should be interpreted within specific historical, cultural and social contexts. I also agree with her that even seemingly submissive behavior can be a form of agency. Nonetheless, the nature of the material caused me to define the concept of agency in a simpler way. Even the most subordinate **act** can be a form of agency, but first I needed to find those Neo-Assyrian women who did act in some way. Therefore, in this thesis to have agency is to act in the society

and to not have agency is absence of that action. I found the active women this way, and I further divided them into two groups. The explicit agents are those who actually act in the evidence, and the implicit agents are those who probably acted in their official capacity, although the text does not tell that directly. For example, a *šakintu* who buys a slave is an explicit agent, but a *šakintu* who appears in a list of personnel is an implicit agent.

One aspect of agency is the problem of who is designated as an active force, able to practice agency, in a society. In other words: where do people think agency resides in their society. (Tenhunen 1997: 16-17.) Men occupy the valued spatial institutions like courts of law, parliament whereas women's spaces contain devalued knowledge of childcare and cooking. (Spain 1992: 10-15). Both a clerk in a corporation and a housewife act in a social setting, but a clerk is usually regarded as the more significant agent. This is not because of anything they do, but because their spheres of action are perceived differently. (Tenhunen 1997: 17.)

This designation of agency does not happen passively, but is a result of a contest of meanings. Culturally constructed gendered spheres are the bases for this designation of agency. Tenhunen examines gendered spaces (for example home - outside world) as the spheres of agency. (Tenhunen 1997: 16-17.)

However, because all cultures have their own forms of agency, public sphere is not naturally endowed with agency. Too often women are seen as slaves to domestic sphere, which has been seen as apolitical, somehow a secondary sphere included in public sphere. This has served to diminish their agency. (Tenhunen 1997: 13-14.)

The above-mentioned spheres of agency form a difficult problem in ancient cultures. The only information we have concerning women is mostly written by men. Textual evidence is one huge male sphere of agency.<sup>9</sup> Another problem is the possibility of projection from the contemporary world. For example the modern dichotomy religion – state can be applied to the ancient Mesopotamia only with caution as the religious and state institutions slowly grew into separate institutions during the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. We cannot be certain – without carefully examining the evidence – that dichotomy public-private sphere is not just another concept projected to the ancient world by us.

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<sup>9</sup> Iconography is of course another matter and is not really within the scope of this work. However, there is no reason to believe that women could affect imagery any more than texts.

Van de Mieroop writes that the opposition public/private-male/female has been too readily used in the ancient Near East studies in general. He sees it as too simplistic and too modern. The customary view is that a woman's role was entirely domestic and all women who were not were aberrations. This is not the most fruitful way of studying women of Mesopotamia. (Van de Mieroop 1999:159.) Westenholz is of the same opinion: one should not assume that there universally exist two separate and unequal spheres. Rather, Westenholz sees the spheres of men and women as overlapping. (Westenholz 1990: 511.) In my thesis I have taken this ambivalence of spheres of action into account by using other criteria (instead of public-private) when categorizing the women in my material.

Palace and temple rose from the material as the most dominant spheres of agency: most women could be placed either in the orbit of one of them. This is natural, since as stated before, most of our evidence comes from the public sphere and these two institutions were important centers of public life. Women who are affiliated with the palace are dealt with in chapters four, five, six and seven. In chapter eight I discuss women who are associated with temples. In chapter nine women who – at least seemingly - act outside the influence of either palace or temple are introduced.

## **2.2 Women studies and women's history**

*“Only a history based on the recognition that women have always been essential to the making of history and that men and women are the measure of significance, will be truly a universal history.”* (Gerda Lerner 1979: 168-180.)

There is plenty of historical material available on Mesopotamia, but only a small part of it is written directly about women. Information on gender relations can be deduced from almost any kind of evidence but ultimately the most valuable insights on women's lives are gained from texts written directly on women or, preferably, from texts written by women themselves. Because of this lack of material many research approaches that have been successfully used to uncover women's history elsewhere are useless in ancient Mesopotamia. However, women studies are very relevant to any study concerning women. This is why in this chapter I will give a general overview on women studies as they relate to this thesis.

In this chapter the term “women studies” means general, scientific study of women.<sup>10</sup> Although women studies sprung from the realization of women’s unequal position in today’s world, and it is largely concentrating on contemporary studies, some of its theories can be used when studying ancient culture as well. Päivi Setälä writes: “women of the past will not be found just by finding new sources, but by looking at existing sources in a new way.” (Setälä 1983: 7, translation mine.)

An important starting point is the idea of double distortion in historical research when women are concerned. First, women have throughout history had what Nenola calls double accounting. They share the male community values, but they also have their own culture<sup>11</sup>. However, this culture usually goes unnoticed, because they do not have the means to express it, at least not in a way that would be in concordance with community’s “general” (i.e. male) values. (Nenola 1986: 36-38.)

Secondly, since most cultural studies – at least in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – have been conducted by men, these studies have been affected by male bias (Nenola 1986: 29-30). Naturally, male-biased studies have also been done by women, just as unbiased studies have been done by men. Still, often – especially in older studies – male bias is all too obvious. Thus, when male-biased scholars research patriarchal cultures, such as Assyria, women are made doubly invisible: first by male bias of their time, then by male bias of our time.

Gerda Lerner, in her book, *The Majority finds Its Past, Placing Women in History* lays down some ground rules for women’s history studies. Lerner’s first point is that women have a separate history from men and that this history has been made invisible by patriarchal values. Secondly, women are not a minority in any sense, but a biological sex. They are distributed through every group and class in history and they are always more closely allied with men of their own group than with women of another group. These special problems mean that women must have a separate women’s history, outside traditional history.

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<sup>10</sup> I will rather use the term “women studies”, as the term “feminist studies” still seems to give (at least for some) reason to doubt the validity of research. Both women studies and feminist studies have their roots in the women’s emancipation movement beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Also their methods and goals are similar, although feminist studies are more committed to emancipatory goals. Another matter altogether are gender studies, which concentrate more on concepts of femininity and masculinity and the possibilities of third and fourth genders. Gender is the complicated fabric of identity usually based on person’s physiological sex and the expectations of culture around that person.

<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, women adapt and accept the male view of women. On the other hand, they use this view for their own purposes. (Nenola 1986: 50-51.) In this way, women can deny the male hegemony of power,

After the women's history is written, these two histories can be brought together to form a truly universal history. (Lerner 1979: 168-180.)

Although Lerner's points are valid, her last request raises some doubts. Is not a narrow focus on only women's history just a repetition of the mistake that the earlier male-oriented history writing did? In addition to that, there would be serious practical difficulties in "bringing together the two histories to form a truly universal history". It is surely a more fruitful approach to write women into the existing history, despite the difficulties.

According to Lerner, for all of the above-mentioned reasons gender as a category must be added to basic set of race, class, ethnicity and religious affiliation. Also, traditional sources must be reorganized. Women should not be classified as a sub-group under men<sup>12</sup>. Lerner sees problems with traditional periodisation as well. Usually periods are defined via male-oriented activities, wars, revolutions and/or vast cultural and religious shifts. This has not necessarily anything to do with how women of the time perceived time. Also redefinition of categories and values is necessary. Before, we have considered history only in male-centered terms. (Lerner 1979: 168-180.) The use of traditional historical sources written by men is sometimes problematic, because it is not easy to distinguish between what men thought women are/should be and what women actually have done (Lerner 1979: 148-150).

Lerner demands that the "oppressed women"- model should be discarded (Lerner 1979: 10-11). Women are not interesting only as an oppressed group. Women have always made contributions to the history of humankind, but these contributions have rarely been recognized. Concentrating on oppression of women only affirms the earlier male oriented history's vision of women as passive victims. The true history of women is women's functioning in the male world on their own terms. (Lerner 1979: 147-148.)

Women appear to be marginal contributors to human development only because man is the measure of significance. The activities of men were considered more significant than what women did. (Lerner 1979: 168-169, 171.) This pattern can be seen in unequal pay for men and women as well. For example in Sumer, women were usually paid less for their work than men were (Pollock 1991: 366-387). This devaluing process also means that we have

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using a sort of "mental judo"; i.e. using opponent's strength against him. Nenola sees this as the basis for women's culture. (Nenola 1986: 52-53.)

to look for women from other areas of life. On the other hand, although women can mainly be found in a family environment, it is not sufficient to see women only as family members. The status of a person is not defined in one area of their functioning (for example family), but in all of them. The problem with this, of course, is that “the decisive historical fact about women is that the areas of their functioning, not only their status within those areas have been determined by men” (Lerner 1979: 151-152)<sup>13</sup>.

Lerner’s views can also be criticized. She sees women’s history as historical investigations of things, which are considered intrinsically or essentially female. Bahrani criticizes this kind of women’s history, since it might easily lead to the positioning of women in the private/home sphere of action and men into the public sphere of work and polity. This positioning takes the categories of woman and man as self-evident, when they actually vary across cultures. Trying to track down essential female concerns is to hold on to *a priori* notions of what is intrinsically female and what constitutes a proper historical record. Some feminists have argued that the division between public and private is in itself a gendered structure. (Bahrani 2001: 8-9.)

Bahrani writes that the matrix of sexual difference is integral to the structuring of societies. This is why “women” cannot be analyzed as side issue, as Lerner seems to suggest. Contemporary feminist history is less concerned with finding “woman” in history and more concerned in attempting to find what “woman” *means* in that historical record. (Bahrani 2001: 10.)

### **2.3 Feminist scholarship and ancient Near East studies**

Women studies are a relatively new approach in the field of ancient Near Eastern studies and it is difficult to assess feminist scholarship in ancient Near East studies. Certainly there are more books and articles published about women in ancient Near East during the last five years than during the preceding 20 years<sup>14</sup>.

Still, scholars from other disciplines have exploited Mesopotamian sources a lot more than Assyriologists. Non-specialists unfortunately tend to misread or misinterpret the sources

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<sup>12</sup> See for example Westenholz 1990: 519 for criticism on RIMA’s classification system.

<sup>13</sup> Lerner’s “areas of functioning” resemble greatly Tenhunen’s “spheres of agency” in chapter 2.1.

and are therefore not taken seriously by Assyriologists (Asher-Greve 1997b: 218-219.) Van de Mieroop writes that ancient Mesopotamian studies have been following the lead of others, and often with a delay. He sees this lagging behind as mainly due to the inequality between men and women in academic world, as women are still congregating only in the lower levels of academic employment. (Van de Mieroop 1999: 138-139.)

A good starting point concerning the feminist scholarship is that feminist criticism or theory is neither static nor something that can be reduced to single “correct” method. A number of feminist approaches have been developed, and these are usually described as “waves” of scholarships. These waves are not easy to pinpoint chronologically and in fact largely overlap each other. (Bahrani 2001: 11.)

The first wave was generated with the revelation that earlier research had overlooked the activities of half of the population and only studied the accomplishments of men. In the 1960s feminist scholarship started to write women “into” history. (Bahrani 2001: 14-15.) The importance of these First Wave women studies was largely accepted by Ancient Near East studies finally in 1986, when the 33. RAI was held on the topic of women<sup>15</sup>. (Van de Mieroop 1999: 139-140.)

The Second Wave of feminist scholarship began roughly in the late 1970s. One of its chief achievements was the development of the notion of gender. The Second Wave considered gender roles as socially constructed identities imposed upon biological sex. (Bahrani 2001: 15.)

Second Wave also shifted the focus from writing women into history into attempts to find cause for the subordinate status of female gender. At the same time Second Wave Marxist scholars questioned the definitions of labor and value from a feminist standpoint. Two main strains concerned with the women’s subordinate status emerged. (Bahrani 2001: 15-18.)

In oppression theory, universal oppression of women is the key assumption and historical records are sought for these oppressed women. The problem is of course, that Western no-

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<sup>14</sup> I noticed that (at least in SOAS, UCL and Helsinki University libraries) very little had been written on the issues of *gender* in the ancient Near East. Most of my material I found by using keywords *women* and *every day life*.

<sup>15</sup> See Durand 1987; see Westenholz 1990 for commentary on the conference.

tions of patriarchy are not universal and should not be projected back in time. (Bahrani 2001: 16.)

In an opposing but related view, matriarchy is thought to be the repressed historical reality of the ancient world<sup>16</sup>. This view has caused the most heated discussions in the ancient Near Eastern studies and these discussions revealed a lot about our discipline's attitude towards women studies.

Many Second Wave scholars believed that patriarchy developed in the late pre-historic and early historic periods of human evolution. Before that there was matriarchy, where women were equal or possessed a greater authority than men. The shift from matriarchy to patriarchy could be best studied in the ancient Near East, since it was the region where written history began. (Van de Mieroop 1999: 140-141.)

The most widely known statement of this idea is Gerda Lerner's *The Creation of Patriarchy*. She sees the creation of patriarchy as the nexus of the growth of other inequalities based on gender, race, ethnicity and class. She argues that women's status gradually deteriorated in Mesopotamia, as states increasingly intervened and codified their subordinate position in the legal systems. (Lerner 1986: 101-122, 212-229.)

Despite the lack of unequivocal evidence, assyriologists commonly assume that the living conditions of women deteriorated over time in Mesopotamia (Van de Mieroop 1999: 142-143). Some scholars paint a rosy picture of women's "original" good position,<sup>17</sup> but others vehemently oppose this.<sup>18</sup>

Much of the proof of early matriarchal society was sought from prehistory. Prehistoric evidence relied heavily on the assumed cult of the Great Goddess in Neolithic societies<sup>19</sup>. (Van de Mieroop 1999: 141.) Even if the Great Goddess cult might have existed in many cultures, it does not prove the existence of an early matriarchy.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> First to formulate the idea of early matriarchy was Swiss lawyer Jacob Bachofen in 1861 in his book *Das Mutterrecht*. Stella Georgoudi (1990, pp. 449-463) writes that Bachofen based his work on Greek myth and that his error was to mistake myth for history. She sees the Greek myths as an attempt to remove female power to the remote past, thus exclude women from Greek history. Same theory could be applied in Mesopotamia as well; most strong women of Mesopotamia are found in myths.

<sup>17</sup> See for example Kramer 1976: 12-17

<sup>18</sup> See for example Harris 1992: 948.

<sup>19</sup> See for example Miles 1988: 18-36.

<sup>20</sup> Some supporting evidence for an early matriarchy can be found in myths, for example in the Babylonian creation myth. In the Babylonian creation myth Marduk kills the powerful mother goddess Tiamat, who is

The roots of patriarchy have also been seen in the change from the hunter-gatherer society into the agrarian society. On the other hand, Meillassoux claims that patriarchy began after the development of agriculture. In an agrarian society reproduction and children, as the future labor-force, became more important. This eventually led to women leaving their kin-group for marriage, and thus becoming dependent on their husbands. (Meillassoux 1981.) Ortner sees the root of female subordination in nature vs. culture dichotomy, where women are universally connected with nature (Ortner 1974). As Durkheim has stated, religions tend to reflect the societies in which they are born (Jacobsen 1976, Durkheim 1915). Cultivating fields brought a change: chaotic nature needed to be ordered. The Babylonian creation myth might give an account of this.

In 1999, van de Mieroop writes that the community of Mesopotamian specialists has largely refused to discuss the possible development of patriarchy in ancient Mesopotamia. Moreover, he claims that the subservient position of women has been accepted as a part of the human condition, without any scientific discussion. (Van de Mieroop 1999: 141-143.) The situation has however changed rapidly, if in fact it was as grim in 1999 as van de Mieroop claims. For example Julia Asher-Greve (1999 and 2003) and Zainab Bahrani (2001) have researched the position of women in ancient Mesopotamia extensively.

According to Bahrani, the weak point in all of the matriarchy theories discussed above is the same as those of the oppression theories: the assumption that patriarchy is universal. Prehistoric matriarchy is a mythic construction, a part of the narrative of patriarchy, which it at the same time wishes to overthrow. The search for a matriarchal past derives from a need to find a golden age in history, which would inspire the women of today. (Bahrani 2001: 16-17.)

In the middle of the 1980s, under the influence of postmodernism, the feminist scholarship began to concentrate on the critique of epistemology. This critique was ultimately derived from Foucault's "discourse analysis" and it claims that the whole process of knowledge-production is in itself gendered. This approach meant turning away from the search for

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described as evil, chaotic force. After Marduk has killed her, he fashions the world from her body, thus making it part of a cosmic order. The myths suggest that in the cosmic order of things chaotic and dangerous women were to be harnessed under male rule. However, myths about cosmic, original chaos are common in many cultures (see for example Campbell 1949). Also the idea that "uncontrolled" women are dangerous is common in many cultures. Women have often been seen as "the other" (see de Beauvoir 1949). The fact that Mesopotamians named chaos female, does not necessarily suggest early matriarchy.

women in the historical record and documenting their oppression to forming of new methodologies. (Bahrani 2001: 18-19.)

The Third Wave also reformulated the earlier binary concept of sex/gender and came to the conclusion that there is no sex prior to or separate from its social construction. The Third Wave also brought into focus previously ignored topics such as sexuality and the body. Also psychoanalysis has been used by Third Wave scholars. Quite recently, queer theory and masculinist theory have broadened the focus of gender studies. (Bahrani 2001: 20-21, 23-24.)

The effects of this third wave of feminist scholarship to the ancient Mesopotamian studies have been minimal, despite the fact that some scholars of the discipline are committed to it<sup>21</sup>. In general, the discipline is still committed to the first wave of studies, trying to write women into the ancient Mesopotamia. (Van de Mieroop 1999: 143 and Westenholz 1990:510-512.)

In summary, the differences between the three waves of feminist scholarship are methodological rather than chronological. The Third Wave differs from the previous two as it challenged the assumptions of “universal” notions of sex, gender, and subjectivity, which actually were modern Western notions. Especially the concept of subject remained untheorised in Second Wave feminism. (Bahrani 2001: 24-25.)

Also this thesis can be placed within the context of the feminist scholarship. As one of the goals of this thesis is writing Neo-Assyrian women “into” history, this thesis is committed to the First Wave studies. On the other hand I am committed to the theory of agency, which is clearly connected with the Third Wave studies. This serves to illustrate the overlapping nature of the “waves” of feminist scholarship.

#### **2.4 Problems relating to women studies of ancient Near East**

The problems facing the feminist/women studies of ancient Near East are many. Bahrani writes that our field of study can enrich itself by learning from contemporary theories a self-reflexive approach, the factors of ideologies and the limitations of the record. However, methods borrowed from the contemporary feminist scholarship cannot be applied as

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<sup>21</sup> See for example Winter 1996, Asher-Greve 1997a and Nissinen 1998b.

such for the study of the ancient Near East. The material and our relationship to it are too different. While it is necessary to know and understand the methods of feminist scholarship, we have to develop our own methods, which fit the ancient Near East. (Bahrani 2001: 25-27.)

Bahrani uses the concept of subjectivity as an example. She writes that as scholars of antiquity, we have no access to what we construe as an individual in antiquity, beyond our own interpretation of individuality. Ancient people certainly had agency, but we can never access it as an essence, at least outside our own structures of interpretation. According to Bahrani, “subjectivity is something that ought to be investigated in relation to ourselves as scholars rather than to individuals that we can have no unmediated access to.” (Bahrani 2001: 25-26.) Here I disagree with her. Surely we should not confine research only to the “easy” areas of the discipline and certainly we should not give up on the topic without at least first attempting to defeat the above-mentioned problems.

Julia Asher-Greve writes that the biggest barrier in the way of feminist ancient Near Eastern studies is the general negative attitude within the discipline. There is a wide-spread disinterest towards feminist studies and many regard feminist studies as partial or only relevant to special interest groups. (Asher-Greve 1997b: 220-221.)

A contributing factor towards this unenthusiastic attitude is the reluctance of Ancient Near East studies to accept or adapt to new theories and approaches. Indeed, theory and methodology has never been a favorite subject in ancient Near East studies. The prevailing research model is positivistic and empiricist, although claiming to be value-free. Few realize that interpretation always depends on the scholar’s viewpoint and ideology. Unfortunately, feminist methods offer no easy way out of this (as I discovered when starting out with this thesis). Most of them are either too theoretical or too pragmatic. The one thing the methods agree upon is that everyone, including the scientist, is socially and historically situated, and this influences the production of knowledge. (Asher-Greve 1997b: 222-226.)

Westenholz on the other hand thinks that knowledge can be objective. She is more optimistic concerning the methodological approaches as well. She sees the methodology developed by American feminists together with the French *Annales* school as a possible answer to problems of feminist approaches to ancient Near East studies. (Westenholz 1990: 511-

512.) As it is not always possible to apply western theories even to other contemporary cultures, Westenholz's optimism might not be justified.

Van de Mieroop writes about the same problem as Asher-Greve (1997b), but uses the easier concept of "*a priori* assumptions"<sup>22</sup>. He illuminates the problem by giving an example of missing names. When a name of a person has been eroded from a document, scholars easily label a person acting in the public sphere as a man and a person involved in the private sphere as a woman. The *a priori* assumptions have also served to direct the search for women on spheres of action where they have been expected to appear. (Van de Mieroop 1999: 144-147.)

Asher-Greve and van de Mieroop agree that scholars should investigate and contradict the ethnocentric conceptual background that has been used in the study of the women of ancient Mesopotamia (Van de Mieroop 1999: 144-147, Asher-Greve 1997b: 226-228). However, Van de Mieroop and Asher-Greve see this conceptual background differently. Asher-Greve is more concerned with the flaws in methodology caused by androcentrism. She therefore offers feminist methods as a cure for this. Feminist critique would force scholars to re-think their individual standpoints as well as those of their discipline. (Asher-Greve 1997b: 226-228.)

Asher-Greve points out that although the feminist model (for example gender theory) leads to new questions, it does not necessarily lead to new methods. Re-examining evidence by using new questions is not specifically feminist. The feminist aspect is the standpoint that women and gender are equally important as ideological, religious and social concepts. The engendering of ancient Near East studies requires attention to the basic principles of a feminist approach. It requires continuous and reflective consideration of women and gender, which includes testing theories, assumptions and implicit tacit knowledge. (Asher-Greve 1997b: 234-237.)

Van de Mieroop on the other hand writes that the conceptual background that should be battled against consists of stereotypical views of women's position in modern Middle East and in ancient Greece. His example of this is the use of the words "harem" and "veil" in translations. These translations are loaded with cultural meanings. They conjure exotic images on the oppressed women at the mercy of an insatiable despot, sequestered from the

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<sup>22</sup> See also Bahrani 2001: 12.

outside world. Subsequently, these images have influenced research, despite the lack of proof. (Van de Mierop 1999: 147-154; see also Westenholz 1990: 513-516.) This is why I have avoided the use of the words harem and veil in this work.

Of course, the paradigms of gender in the scholar's own culture influence the research as well. The articles on ancient Near East women written before the Second World War are excellent examples of this (see for example Brooks 1922 and Pinches 1919). The role of women in the ancient world was seen to be the same as it was in the society of the writer i.e. that of the mother and the housekeeper. On the other hand, one has to be wary of over-interpreting the data too much in the other direction, and presenting women of the ancient world as the spiritual *urmoeders* of the modern-day emancipated woman.

It seems that Van de Mierop is concerned with the more concrete problems of methodology, whereas Asher-Greve criticizes the lax definitions of larger concepts such as "civilization", "culture" and "patriarchy"<sup>23</sup>. (Asher-Greve 1997b: 228-233.)

An ever-present problem when writing about women is "pseudo inclusion". This refers to attempts to remedy the absence of women from history by writing on women alone, or dedicating a special chapter to them in a book. This might serve as basis for more inclusive studies later on, but it also serves to marginalize women. The study of women might end up being treated as a specialism, rather than as a necessary part of any understanding of the past. When pseudo inclusion is done by women, it reinforces the problem: women's history is characterized as a specialism to be studied by women. Sometimes in the academic world it is even argued that female scholars are more able to understand the women in the past. The same argument is never applied to men, whose perspective is assumedly "universal", encompassing the entire human species. (Whitehouse 2000: 16.) This is a problem that concerns this thesis as well, but Whitehouse does not offer any clear alternatives. Writing women into history without categorizing them as women is easier said than done.

The problems facing the study of gender in ancient Mesopotamian studies are numerous. The hard task ahead of us is to study gender roles in Mesopotamia within its own cultural context, as much as that is possible. A critical review of earlier research on Mesopotamian

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<sup>23</sup> Also "homosexuality" and "prostitute" are terms which should never be used without first properly defining them.

women would also be in order, since many problems of studying women of ancient Mesopotamia have only been realized during the last few years.

### 3. NEO-ASSYRIAN WOMEN – INVISIBLE WOMEN?

*“The Urartian ... are very much afraid of the king, my lord. They tremble and keep silent like women.”* (SAA 1 32)

This thesis concentrates on those women of whose agency something can be said. However, one should keep in mind that these women are a minority in documents. Most texts mention women only in passing, as sales objects, personnel or ration lists, wives and daughters. There is really nothing that can be said concerning the agency of such women, simply because there is not enough data. These “invisible” women will have to be introduced shortly, before we approach the unusual, active women, who are the subject of this thesis. This introduction to the “regular” women of the empire will illuminate the exceptional nature of the women presented in later chapters.

There is very little written directly on Neo-Assyrian women in general. I managed to find only one article (Garelli 1998), which dealt exclusively with Neo-Assyrian women. Even that was not of much help, since Garelli merely gives a short introduction on the topic, naming a few prominent women and some of the better-known female professions.

The fact that no law collection is known from the Neo-Assyrian era makes it even more difficult to research the position of Neo-Assyrian women in general. On the whole the lives of the Neo-Assyrian women probably did not differ radically from the lives of the women of ancient Mesopotamia on the whole. Certainly words from the hymn to Gula, goddess of healing sum it up well:

*“I am a daughter, I am a daughter-in-law, I am a spouse, I am a housekeeper.”* (Lambert 1967: 121:65.)

A woman lived with her family, under the authority of her father, until she married. The natural state for women was the married one, and her family usually selected her spouse carefully. Both fathers gave contributions for the new household, dowry from the father of the bride and bride wealth from the family of the groom. The marriage was effective only after bride and groom had moved in together. The aim of any marriage was to produce male heirs. The children would then take care of their parents when they aged. (Greengus 1995: 478-480.)

Divorce was not generally accepted, but did happen in some cases. Husband could send his wife away and pay compensation, but for a woman to leave her husband was a far more serious matter. In a worst-case scenario, the wife was put to death. Polygamy was rare, but presumably did exist throughout the Mesopotamian history. (Postgate 1992: 105-106.) At least from the Neo- and late Babylonian periods we have evidence of polygamy (Friedl 2000: 36 and Kuhrt 1991: 225).

During the Late Babylonian period the women of the wealthy families had a fairly strong legal position (Kuhrt 1991 227-30). Indeed, Harris writes that throughout Mesopotamian history women had the right to conduct legal transactions on their own. They engaged in trade, lending and borrowing and acquired property. However, it is very difficult to assess how freely they could do all this. Was male consent always a prerequisite for these transactions? (Harris 1991: 146-149.)

The position of women outside matrimony is still largely unresearched. For example, widows were surely vulnerable without a male protector, but also less constrained than married women. Also some prostitutes (*harimtu*) might have been rather independent. (Harris 1991: 146-149.)

Amélie Kuhrt raises an interesting point concerning the women outside direct control of men. She writes that in the incantation series *maqlû* all types of witches, “sacred prostitutes” as well as other female cultic officials are listed as liable to attack men by the use of witchcraft. Now, these are all women who are “abnormal” and have escaped regular masculine authority. This, in a male-dominated society, broke the correct social order. Consequently such women were considered dangerous and possibly even fear inspiring. (Kuhrt 1991: 238.)

From the 712 women in the Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire<sup>24</sup>, 563 are “invisible women”. I divided these women into several groups and subgroups. The largest group of which were women appearing in lists (240 women). Many slaves (195) were also mentioned by name. Also dependent women (48 altogether, see definition below) and pledges (28) were found in the documents. The remaining 52 women are introduced last. I have not included here the names of these women or the texts in which they appear, because these

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<sup>24</sup> As the PNA lacks the names beginning with š-w, I researched and categorized them myself (119 names altogether).

women are included here only as comparative evidence for the actual object of study, the women with agency.

Most of the women known by their names appear in unspecified lists of women and in lists of female names (176). Forty-nine women appear in lists of food rations. Ten of these are “dependents”. This might imply that there was some obligation to provide food for the workers. In lists of deportees 15 (two weavers included) women appear.

According to Dandamaev almost half of the population in the Late Babylonian period were slaves (Dandamaev 1984:218). There is no way of knowing if the same was true in the Neo-Assyrian period. However, purchase documents are the one place where we have no shortage of women known by names (195). Roughly 27% of all women in the prosopography were slaves. Of course, this abundance of named women can be explained by the need to identify merchandise correctly.

Kuhrt writes that in the Late Babylonian period only household slaves could be sold or manumitted. The common price for a female slave was about fifty shekels, but the value of the slave depended on her age, and probably appearance as well<sup>25</sup>. Temple slaves were less vulnerable to sexual advances and probably had more stable lives. On the other hand there was no hope for “moving up in the world”. (Kuhrt 1991: 230-235.)

Altogether 156 named women appear in purchase documents. Another 28 exchanged hands via some other method, for example inheritance. In six cases it was a member of their family, usually a brother or father who sold the woman into slavery. Much rarer are the cases, where a female slave is bought back from her owner by a family member. Out of the five occurrences, only in one case she is redeemed by her family.

Some slaves were former free citizens, who were forced into slavery by debts (Greengus 1995: 475). In the six occurrences I found, women usually ended up in debt slavery as a result from their husbands’ debts. In the Late Babylonian period debt-slavery did not play a major role as a source of new slaves, nor did people usually sell their family members except in the times of turmoil or famine. (Kuhrt 1991: 230-235.)

The articles in PNA are less than clear on the topic of “dependent women” There is no Akkadian term for it. In the PNA, the writers obviously use the term “dependent” for people

who are sold/given away with land. Persons, who are handed over without land are called slaves. The dependency is therefore something the writers have assumed from the context, rather than translated from the text. Nonetheless, I have used this category, as it at least helps to divide slaves into more than one class. The dependent women appear mostly in lists (38). Most (21) of such lists seem to be land grants or documents for exemption of taxes. Ten women appear in ration lists from Assur and two in the Harran Census<sup>26</sup>. In addition to lists, dependent women appear also in purchase (8) or pledging (2) documents.

In addition to “free men” (*awīlum*) and slaves (*amtum* and *wardum*), there was a class of semi-free people in Mesopotamia, traditionally called *muškēnum* in the law codes. Scholars have had some difficulties placing this class in society outside the framework of the codes. The best guess at present is that they were tied to their land, but they were definitely not slaves. (Postgate 1992: 237-240.) The “dependent women” of PNA might have belonged to this semi-free class, even if the term *muškēnum* was not used.

Altogether 28 women were mentioned in the PNA as pledges, usually for loans. Quite a large number (12) of them were given as pledges by a family member, usually a father or a brother. Also slave women could be pledged (9). It is not clear to me exactly what was the fate of these pledges. In some cases they seem to have moved to the household of the creditor. If that was the case, how did this differ from debt-slavery, where the debtor worked for the creditor to pay the loan that they had been unable to pay? Part of this problem might be caused by the multitude of article writers in PNA. What some call pledge, others might call debt slaves or dependents.

To make my presentation of “invisible” women complete, I will briefly mention the remaining categories. My aim was not to classify women in relation to others (as wives, mothers and daughters as has been done so many times before), but sometimes the relationship of the woman to others was the only information I had concerning her. Thus, I created categories for mothers (15)<sup>27</sup>, wives (10) and women who were adopted as daugh-

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<sup>25</sup> Kuhrt writes that female slaves had reproductive and sexual functions, which made young and beautiful slaves more valuable. She refers to CT 22, 201;202 and Nbn. 388. (Kuhrt 1991: 231)

<sup>26</sup> Harran Census is a distinct group of texts from Nineveh, where varying number of rural holdings were listed in groups, according to the identity of the owners of the group of holdings. Possibly the compilation of such lists is related to the vast operation of granting tax exemptions, undertaken by Sargon II upon his ascent to the throne. (Fales & Postgate 1995: xxx-xxxiv.)

<sup>27</sup> Usually individuals defined themselves via fathers, but in these 15 occurrences person gave his name as X, son of a mother.

ters (4). In addition to these women, five women are mentioned in connection with court cases and three are reported as receiving gifts. Some women defied all of the above categories; altogether 15 women had some indefinable passive role.

## 4. ASSYRIAN ROYAL WOMEN

In this chapter I will deal with all those women whose connection to the palace is their relationship to the king, either as wives or as blood relatives. First I will write about the queens and their household, then about other royal women. I will deal with both groups in chronological order, according to table 1 below. For regnal years, see Kuhrt 1995: 479.

Regnal years	King	Queen
911-891	Adad-nirari II (daughter ...-Zarpanitu)	
890-884	Tukulti-Ninurta II	
883-859	Ashurnasirpal II	Mullissu-mukannišat-Nīnua
858-824	Shalmaneser III	
823-811	Shamsi-Adad	Sammu-rāmat
744-727	Tiglath-pileser III	Iabā
726-722	Shalmaneser V	Banītu
721-705	Sargon II (daughter Ahāt-abīša)	Atalia
704-681	Sennacherib (daughter Šaddītu)	Naqī'a/ Zakūtu (sister Abi-rāmu) Tašmētu-šarrat
680-669	Esarhaddon (daughter Šērū'a-ēīrat and an unnamed daughter)	Ešarra-hammat Ana-tašmētum-taklāk?
668-631? Or 627?	Assurbanipal (unnamed daughter?)	Libbāli-šarrat

**TABLE 1: ROYAL WOMEN OF THE NEO-ASSYRIAN EMPIRE**

### 4.1 Queens

In addition to the financial and administrative aspects of the queenship – discussed in chapter 4.2 – the ideological significance of the queen is also an important question<sup>28</sup>. At least

<sup>28</sup> Third important area of the queenship is of course her reproductive role, as a mother of the future king. Of this aspect, we have unfortunately little information.

according to Ornan, queen of the Neo-Assyrian Empire had no visual tradition of her own. Rather, when a queen is depicted, she was signified either by attributes borrowed from her male consort or by new symbols, which were aimed at exalting the king. However, queens were depicted in the official Neo-Assyrian art, which was an innovative feature in the Neo-Assyrian public display. Ornan sees their appearance as part of wider visual changes that were initially introduced by Sennacherib; he does not consider the possible meaning of the change in terms of female power in the court. (Ornan 2002: 461-477.)

Altogether we know ten Neo-Assyrian queens, *sēgallu* (MÍ É.GAL) in Akkadian<sup>29</sup>. Unfortunately, we only have a wealth of information about three queens; Naqī'a /Zakūtu, Libbāli-šarrat and Sammu-rāmat. Of the others we know little more than a name.

**Mullissu-mukannišat-Nīnua** was queen of Assurnāširpal II (883-859) and of Shalmaneser III (858-824). She was the daughter of Assurnāširpal's great cupbearer, Aššur-nirka-da'in. Her grave has recently been discovered in Kalhu. On the lid of the sarcophagus there is an inscription, which identifies her and forbids placing any future palace woman or queen inside it, or removing the sarcophagus from its place (BaM 21 471 and BaM 21 472).

**Sammu-rāmat**, queen of Šamši-Adad, is a mysterious figure that has given rise to many legends after her death. There has been a great deal of speculation about the origin of Sammu-rāmat. Levant, Assyria, Babylon, Armenia, Bit-Adini, Bit-Gabbari, Carchemish, Gurgum, Namri, Patina, Que and Šubria have all been suggested being her native lands. In the absence of further evidence these proposals must remain speculative. (PNA 3/I: 1084, Novotny.)

She is known firstly in the inscription on her own stele from Assur (RIMA 3 A.0.104.2001). She is also mentioned in another inscription as having gone on a campaign with her son, the reigning but minor King Adad-nirari III (RIMA 3 A.0.104.3, a boundary-stone). This inscription describes the defeat of Ušpilulume, king of the Kummuhites. This is unprecedented in Assyrian history and Grayson writes that she probably had some authority in the state (Grayson 1993: 29). It seems possible that she acted as *pater familias* after the death of her husband Šamši-Adad while Adad-nirari III became of age.

Bel-tarši-ilumma, governor of Kalhu dedicated two identical inscribed statues to the god Nabû and set them up in the Nabû Temple of Kalhu. Both statues state that Bel-tarši-

ilumma had the statue made and dedicated it for the life of Adad-nirari and Sammu-rāmat (RIMA 3 A.0.104.2002).

In post-Assyrian sources Semiramis (i.e. Sammu-ramat) appears in the accounts of later authors such as Berossos, Herodotos, Diodorus (drawing on Ctesias, Athenaeus and other historians), and Nicolaus of Damascus. It is generally accepted that the legend of Semiramis contains many ingredients from various traditions. (PNA 3/I: 1084, Novotny.)

The queens of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727), Shalmaneser V (726-722) and Sargon II (721-705) go literally hand in hand. The bodies of **Iabâ**, queen and wife of Tiglath-pileser III, and presumably **Atalia**, queen and wife of Sargon II were found in the same sarcophagus. The sarcophagus also contained two vessels (a gold bowl and a cosmetic container) bearing queen **Banītu**'s<sup>30</sup> inscription. They were probably heirlooms, a part of Atalia's grave goods. Also a gold bowl, electron mirror and a crystal jar belonging to Atalia were found in the sarcophagus. (PNA 1/II: 265, 433, Radner.)

Two golden bowls belonging to Iabâ, queen of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727) were also found in the stone sarcophagus. In an inscription on a stone tablet (BaM 21 462) found in the antechamber of the tomb, the queen reports that she died a natural death and curses those who might place someone else in her tomb and lift her out of it.

Why then was Atalia buried in Iabâ's sarcophagus instead of in one of her own? Frahm disapproves of the suggestion that Atalia was Iabâ's daughter, because he thinks that Atalia was Sargon's sister or half-sister (PNA 2/I: 485, Frahm).<sup>31</sup>

**Naqī'a** was the queen of Sennacherib (704-681), daughter-in-law of Sargon, mother of Esarhaddon and grandmother of Assurbanipal. She was also known as Zakūtu. Nothing certain can be said concerning her origins, although her name is West Semitic. She had probably married Sennacherib by the penultimate decade of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and bore a son, Esarhaddon, in ca. 713. Esarhaddon's promotion to crown prince was somewhat unexpected, but according to Melville there is no indication that Naqī'a was in any way responsible for this. Melville writes that it is not even certain that she achieved the status of first wife during the reign of Sennacherib. (Melville 1999: 29.)

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<sup>29</sup> On *sēgallu* see Parpola 1988.

<sup>30</sup> Meaning "the beautiful one" (Parpola, oral communication), contra Bānītu, "creatress" in PNA 1/II.

<sup>31</sup> Contra Thomas 1993: 465-471

In many of the sources Naqī'a is referred to as the "queen mother" rather than by her name. Most occurrences of "mother of the king" in Neo-Assyrian texts refer to Naqī'a. Melville (1999: 105) writes that two texts (SAA 12, 21-23 and SAA 6 143) refer to the queen mother of Sennacherib and one text (SAA 6 325) may refer to the queen mother of Assurbanipal. It seems that the basic structure of the queen mother's household was similar to that of the queen and other high officials. She undoubtedly had residences in other major Assyrian cities in addition to Nineveh and was extremely wealthy, possibly even wealthier than the queen. She had an extensive staff<sup>32</sup> and she made numerous donations to temples and contributed horses to the palace. Obviously, some of these expenditures were tax obligations. (Melville 1999: 105-112.)

After Esarhaddon's accession to the throne Naqī'a's authority definitely grew. She built a palace for her son in Nineveh and composed an inscription commemorating it (ARRIM 6 11 no. 91-5-9, 217). She also made a dedication to the goddess Belet-Ninua for her own life and that of her son Esarhaddon. The other side of this tablet bears an inscription recording a dedication made by Zakūtu to the goddess Mullissu (ADD 645).

A number of letters addressed to her underline her exceptional position. Flattering epithets are used, such as "able like Adapa" (SAA 10 244 r.7ff). It is also said that "[The verdict of the mother of the king, my lord], is as final as that of the gods" (SAA 10 17 r. 1). Letters to the queen mother deal mainly with cultic matters (for example SAA 10 313, SAA 13 76 SAA 13 77), but some also concern political affairs (for example ABL 917 and SAA 10 154). In a letter to the king the exorcist Nabû-nadin-šumi asks whether he should perform some rites for the queen mother (SAA 10 274). A letter from the king to the queen mother is also preserved (ABL 303).

Naqī'a also owned estates in Lahiru in Babylonia (SAA 14 469). It is unclear whether the estates of the queen mother in Šabbu referred to in the related texts SAA 12 21-23 belonged to Naqī'a, as the queen mother here might refer to the mother of Sennacherib (Melville 1999 105).

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<sup>32</sup> Fourteen attested offices: eunuch, treasurer, scribe, palace superintendent, village manager, cohort commander, bodyguard, guard, chariot driver, third man on a chariot, deputy cupbearer, deputy chief of quays, chief fuller, chief confectioner (Melville 1999:106-107). Although these officials are mentioned specifically with Naqī'a, it is quite possible that other queens and queen mothers had similar, if perhaps not as large staff.

A number of letters from scholars also refer to the state of of the queen mother's health (for example SAA 10 200-201 and 244). Also a query to the sun-god concerns Naqī'a, who is ill (SAA 4 190). Another query to the sun god concerns a potential appointment; it asks whether the person in question will guard Naqī'a like his own self (SAA 4 151).

Melville explains Naqī'a's prominence by her son's political long-range plans. Melville suggests that the civil war after the death of Sennacherib caused Esarhaddon to desire a smoother ascension for his sons. Melville sees this desire as the reason for Naqī'a's prominent position in his court. She claims that Esarhaddon promoted his mother's status, so that she could ensure smooth ascension for Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin. The latest evidence for Naqī'a is from the beginning of the reign of Assurbanipal (end of 669). That is when, using her Akkadian name Zakūtu, she had the king's family, the aristocracy and the nation of Assyria swear an oath of loyalty to her grandson (SAA 2 8). According to Melville, this was the climax and the endpoint of her political career, consummation of her son's plans. (Melville 1999: 91-92.)

Also other views have been presented. Melville sees Naqī'a primarily as a mother, who unselfishly helped her son to achieve his goal, whereas Ben-Barak is of a totally different opinion. He sees her as a woman chiefly devoted to her own personal advancement. He argues that she achieved power by exploiting every opportunity that came her way, including her husband and son<sup>33</sup>. (Ben-Barak 1987: 35-40.)

**Tašmētu-šarrat** was probably Sennacherib's second wife. According to Reade, it is likely that she overlaps with Naqī'a and is possibly the mother of Aššur-nadin-šumi (Reade 1987: 141-142).<sup>34</sup> Tašmētu-šarrat is known from an inscription (Luckenbill 1924: 152) on a votive vase, which merely states her name and position as Sennacherib's queen (MÍ É.GAL). The existence of the inscription of her own is significant on its own – not anyone could do that. She is also known from Sennacherib's building inscription where she is called "the queen" (MÍ. É.GAL), and a "beloved wife" (Reade 1987: 141). Reade writes that visual

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<sup>33</sup> Ben-Barak also sees Sammuramat in a similar role: a mother of a younger son, who helps her son to achieve the throne in order to guarantee her own power (Ben-Barak 1987: 36-40).

<sup>34</sup> Aššur-nadin-šumi, the eldest son of Sennacherib was installed as the king in Babylon in 699. When Aššur-nadin-šumi was deported to Elam in 694, Babylonia got a new crown prince, Nergal-šumu-[ibni]. In 698 their brother, the murderer of Sennacherib, Arda-Mullissi, was appointed as the crown prince of Assyria. Esarhaddon however replaced him as the crown prince of Assyria in 693. (Kwasman and Parpola 1991: xxvii-xxxiv.) Esarhaddon was certainly Naqī'a's son, but the mothers of other princes are not certain.

evidence suggests that both Naqī'a and Tašmētu-šarrat contributed to the policies characteristic of Sennacherib's rule (Reade 1987: 140-145).

**Ešarra-hammat** was queen of Assyria, wife of Esarhaddon (680-669), mother of Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin (died in 672). There are no references to her as a living person but the sources make it very clear that her loss caused deep grief for Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal and that she was remembered with great reverence. Quite extraordinarily, the date of her death in Addaru (xii) 672 is recorded in some Babylonian chronicles. Esarhaddon also built a mausoleum for her (Borger 1956: Ass. I, 5). This mausoleum was presumably located in Assur, as it is mentioned in two administrative texts from this city as the recipient of food offerings (SAA 12 81). As the crown prince, Assurbanipal is responsible for the mausoleum (AfO 13 T4), which offers indirect evidence for the assumption that Ešarra-hammat is Assurbanipal's mother. This assumption that is further strengthened by the letter SAA 10 188, which elaborates on the close relationship between the crown prince and the ghost of the deceased queen. Since Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin shared the same mother, Ešarra-hammat must be also his mother. (PNA 1/II: 406-407, Radner.)

Recently Finkel has come across a new Assyrian queen, **Ana-tašmētum-taklāk**. Her name was found on a shallow limestone dish and Finkel has reconstructed the inscription following: [ša(?) <sup>f</sup>a-na taš]-me-tu<sub>4</sub>-<tak>-lak MÍ.<É.GAL>. Judging by the provenance and period of the vessel (museum number 55-12-5,252), she was probably the second wife of Esarhaddon (after the death of Ešarra-hammat). This is however far from certain and she might also have been the wife/widow of Sargon II, the second wife of Assurbanipal or the wife of one of Assurbanipal's sons. (Finkel 2000: 12.)

**Libbāli-šarrat** was wife of Assurbanipal (668-631? or 627?) and is known from many texts. At the time when Libbāli-šarrat is only the wife of the crown prince Assurbanipal (during the reign of Esarhaddon), a letter from Assurbanipal's oldest sister (SAA 16 28) reveals a degree of tension between the female members of the royal family. The daughter of King Esarhaddon writes a letter and complains that she (Libbali-šarrat) does not write to her. She reminds the recipient that she has a higher rank than Libbali-šarrat. As the queen of Assurbanipal, Libbāli-šarrat is known from an inscription on a stele from Assur bearing a representation of the queen (Streck 1916: 390, text 1). Libbali-šarrat is also presumably

the woman depicted with Assurbanipal on the relief from Nineveh bearing the famous banquet scene<sup>35</sup> (PNA 2/II: 661, Ambos).

The evidence presented above demonstrates that the queens had many duties to perform in addition to producing an heir to the throne. The notable possessions of queens were probably mostly managed by subordinates, but it seems that the queens did have the ultimate say in their own financial matters. At least nothing implies that the king interfered in his wife's business affairs. In addition, the two royal women who are definitely explicit agents<sup>36</sup>, namely Sammu-rāmat and Naqī'a, act in various ways in very high level of governing. That is why it seems possible that also the other eight queens, the implicit agents, were more important figures in the court than the scarce evidence we have available at the moment leads one to believe.

## 4.2 Queen's household

In this thesis, a queen's household is defined as a unit consisting of the queen herself and the staff under her command. As seen in chapter 4.1, this included both administrative and military officials. A queen's household is not the same thing as "harem", which – especially when not defined properly – calls to mind orientalist stereotypes<sup>37</sup>. Although we do not know what the life in these "harems" was like, the term itself persuades us to see the evidence in a certain light.

Van de Mieroop gives a good example of this, namely the decrees that were originally published as "Hof- und Harems-Erlasse assyrischer Könige aus dem 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr". By using the word "harem" the editor places the decrees within the context of the stereotypical Middle Eastern harem. His own description of the texts shows this clearly. (Van de Mieroop 1999: 147-149.)

*"The palace-women are restricted to the area of the harem and thus they try by all means to deal with the deadly boredom, whereby gossip, quarrels, and fights occur all too often, and the smallest occasions have to serve to satisfy female curiosity."* (Weidner 1954-56: 261.) [Translation by van de Mieroop: 1999: 148]

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<sup>35</sup> See Reade 1983 68f for photographs of the relief.

<sup>36</sup> See chapter 2.1 on the concept of agency in this thesis.

<sup>37</sup> See Said 1978 and Bahrani 2001: 161-179.

The views about the cultural background of these texts also affect their translation, even recent translations. The common use of the term “harem” perpetuates the assumption that all women mentioned in connection with the palace must have been there for sexual purposes rather than for their technical skills. (Van de Mieroop 1999: 149-150.)

Much of our knowledge of the queen’s household comes from Kalhu (Nimrud). For the most part documents found from Fort Shalmaneser were written in either the late 8<sup>th</sup> century or in the post-canonical period (Dalley and Postgate 1984: 1). The existence of a queen’s household in the Review Palace was evident in both late 8<sup>th</sup> century and in the post-canonical period (Dalley and Postgate 1984: 1, 11). Also archaeological finds concerning the layout of the palace seem to support the idea of a secluded queen’s household<sup>38</sup> (Dalley & Postgate 1984: 11-12).

The existence of regular military activity is documented mostly from the first time period, late 8<sup>th</sup> century. In post-canonical period there is little evidence for regular military activity from Fort Shalmaneser (Dalley and Postgate 1984: 1) Nonetheless, Dalley and Postgate speculate that the queen might have had her own military unit there at that time<sup>39</sup> (Dalley & Postgate 1984: 11).

In any case, it seems that the royal couple could have more than one residence in any one city and not necessarily only in citadel areas. It seems that the household in the Review Palace was maintained without the queen for most of the time, at least if we assume that MÍ.É.GAL refers to one woman at the time. (Dalley & Postgate 1984: 11-12.)

In fact, it seems that there could be more than one queen at a time. There are two cases of this known to me. First, in K 164<sup>40</sup>, a funerary ritual for Ešarra-hammāt, queen of Esarhad-don, there is a mention of other queens. In lines 40-41 of K 164 “the queens (MÍ É.GAL.MEŠ) cry out: bury the queen (MÍ É.GAL)”. (Parpola 1983: 190.) Secondly, at least according to Reade, Tašmētu-šarrat probably overlaps with Naqī’a as Sennacherib’s second wife. (Reade 1987: 141-142).

However, I have been unable to find more than these two occurrences of many queens (MÍ É.GAL) at the same time. It is possible that all kings had many queens, but just as possible

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<sup>38</sup> See 7.1.7 for seclusion of the royal women.

<sup>39</sup> References to a queen’s (or queen mother’s) military establishment begin during Sennacherib’s reign and continue down into the post-canonical period (Dalley and Postgate 1984: 41).

<sup>40</sup> Edited and discussed in Dhorme 1941: 57-66.

is that this was not common practise. In any case, Dalley and Postgate found no reference to any secondary wives or “harem” in the Review Palace (Dalley & Postgate 1984: 11-12).

From an earlier period<sup>41</sup> one can get some clues concerning the number of members in queen’s household. According to Kinnier Wilson the daily allocation of wine to the queen’s household was considerable (3 *sāti*). Queens of Adad-nirari III and Shalmaneser IV are represented in the lists, although their names are not given in the texts. Both received 3 *sūtu* of wine. 1 *qa* was given for ten men, which indicates that 3 *sūtu* is about 300 rations. However, consumption of wine was probably greater in these privileged circles, which would mean that there were less than 300 members in queen’s household. (Kinnier Wilson 1972: 44.)

Kinnier Wilson’s theory is not, however, without problems. Fales has convincingly argued that the Nimrud Wine Lists represented the result of a one-day distribution. He writes that the tablets were written for the purpose of handing out wine for a ceremonial occasion, which probably occurred only once a year. (Fales 1994: 361-380.) If wine was handed out only once a year, Kinnier Wilson’s estimate of members of the queen’s household drops radically.

It seems probable that the number of functionaries differed greatly from one queen’s household to another, depending where and when the household existed. The evidence from Kalhu suggests that the queen’s households were mainly financial and administrative units, which could function without resident queen. The queen probably had both personnel who followed her and personnel who took care of her interests away from the court<sup>42</sup>. All the evidence suggests that queens (and queen mothers) had considerable financial networks across the empire<sup>43</sup>. If all of the *šakintus* households<sup>44</sup> were in fact part of queen’s household, the number of people employed directly or indirectly by the queen must have been hundreds of people.

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<sup>41</sup> According to Fales (1994) Nimrud Wine Lists span approximately two decades, 780s and 770s.

<sup>42</sup> See also Melville 1999: 105-112.

<sup>43</sup> See Melville 1999: 105-112 on Naqī’a.

<sup>44</sup> See chapter 6.1.1.

### 4.3 Daughters of kings and other royal women

In SAA 12 2 ...-**Zarpanitu**, daughter of the king is mentioned. Text is very fragmentary, but it is possibly part of a land grant to Aššur for offerings made by king Adad-nirari II.

**Ahāt-abīša** was daughter of Sargon II and wife of Ambaris, king of Tabal. Sennacherib reports to his father Sargon II about a letter sent from Tabal by Nabû-le'i, major-domo of Ahāt-abīša (SAA 1 31). Aro-Valjus writes that the fact that the letter was sent from Tabal identifies her as a daughter of Sargon II, who was given in marriage to Ambaris, later king of Tabal/Bit-Purutaš. No further details about the life of Ahat-abiša are known. It is possible that she stayed in Tabal and acted as Assyrian administrator after her husband and his family had been deported to Assyria as a consequence of the conspiracy against Assyria in 713. However, this is a highly speculative suggestion and based only on the dating of SAA 1 31 after 713. A dating to 714 or earlier, however, seems more plausible not only because of the context of the letter but also because Sargon II claims to have removed Ambaris and his family to Assyria in 713 without mentioning any exception. (PNA 1/I: 59, Aro-Valjus.)

**Šaddītu** was the daughter of Sennacherib, sister of Esarhaddon. In 672 (SAA 10 273) Nabû-nadin-šumi is annoyed, because a colleague of his, Šumaya, performed the ritual “Excluding evil from a person’s home” for Šaddītu, without his consent and after the king had ordered him to perform the ritual. Šaddītu obviously had a very high rank in the court, since the chief exorcist, one of king’s Inner Circle (Parpola 1993: xxvi) was to perform the ritual. Šaddītu is also mentioned in SAA 6 251, where she buys land for 8 minas of silver.

**Šērū’a-ēṭirat**, King Esarhaddon’s daughter is mentioned in many documents and is the author of one letter, which is addressed to her brother’s wife, Libbāli-šarrat (SAA 16 28; see Libbāli-šarrat above). A very fragmentary letter from the reign of Assurbanipal (after the revolt) mentions Elam, princess and Kandalānu, king of Babylon (CT 53 966).

In a letter to Esarhaddon, concerning offerings for him and his family, Šērū’a-ēṭirat is mentioned right after the two crown princes, Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin (SAA 13 56).

In a text titled “Accounts from Ceremonial Banquet” (SAA 7 154) her name is mentioned, along with her brothers’ names and food items. Mattila writes that the account is probably one of the accounts of food (and possibly gifts) distributed at the royal New Year’s reception arranged in the Assyrian capital (Mattila 1990: 16).

She is mentioned again in a grant of Assurbanipal (AfO 13 T4), along with her brothers and some priests. Her name is also mentioned in a medical report (SAA 10 223), when Adad-šumu-ušur reports to the king in 669 about the health of the royal family.

In SAA 4 20, King Esarhaddon queries the sun god concerning his daughter's marriage to Bartatua, king of the Scythians. It is uncertain whether Šērū'a-ēṭirat (or another unnamed royal daughter?) married Bartatua. In SAA 4 21 there is a similar query, but unfortunately the name of the proposed groom is lost.

In SAA 18 55, the Babylonian Nabû-nadin-šumi (reign of Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal) sends a letter to the princess to let her know that he is praying for her and her father. The receiver of the letter is probably Šērū'a-ēṭirat, since the only other known daughter of Esarhaddon is mentioned only once, in a list of Esarhaddon's children. Even her name has not been preserved. (AfO 13, 214:23).

In addition to the above-mentioned texts, Šērū'a-ēṭirat is also mentioned in a later fictional Aramaic text (Steiner & Nims 1985: 60-81), telling the tale of two brothers, Assurbanipal (called Sarbanabal in the tale) and Šamaš-šumu-ukīn (Sarmuge) and their sister, Šērū'a-ēṭirat (Saritrah). Šērū'a-ēṭirat's role in this tale is of some importance, as she is the messenger of Assurbanipal attempting to persuade their rebellious brother Šamaš-šumu-ukīn to return to Nineveh.

In SAA 11 221, "town of the daughter of the king" is mentioned in the beginning of the text, which is a schedule of estates assigned to officials. According to Mattila 2000 (p. 63) text is from the reign of Assurbanipal. It is possible that the name refers to a specific daughter of Assurbanipal rather than to princesses in general.

**Abi-rāmu**, sister of Naqī'a can also be described as part of royal family although her origins (like those of Naqī'a) are obscure. She lends silver against a pledge of land in the town of Baruri in 674. (SAA 6 252)

In addition to the above-mentioned real princesses there is a rather uncertain case of an unnamed Assyrian princess from Kalhu in CTN 2 247. Villard (PNA 1/I: 232) writes that Atara[...] was the husband of an Assyrian princess. Their marriage contract states that his wife may leave if he takes another woman/second wife. Also, his wife is not involved if Atara[...] owes money. However, in CTN 2 247 there is no mention of the woman in question being a princess.

In addition to matrimony, a possible destiny for a princess might have been the position of *ēntu*-priestess. SAA 8 104 (datable to 656), an Assyrian report on omen reads: “If [there is an eclips]e in Nisan on the 28<sup>th</sup> day: [the king of that land will fall ill but recover]; in his stead, a daughter of the king, [an *ēntu* -priestess, will die.]” At least one historical occurrence of princess-*ēntu* is of course the well-known Enheduanna, daughter of Sargon of Agade (2296-2240) admittedly from a far earlier period (Kuhrt 1995, 49-50). However, as SAA 8 104 naturally uses an earlier collection as a source, it is possible that this report on omen refers to a real historical occurrence, although probably not from the Neo-Assyrian period. In the end, the possible *ēntu*-ship of Neo-Assyrian princesses must remain a speculation.

A grimmer destiny could also be in store for them; in Assurbanipal’s annals (Streck 1916: 56-57 (cyl. A) and cyl. F, 557<sup>45</sup>) daughters and sisters of the kings were part of the bounty, taken to Assyria.

The evidence suggests that also the other royal women were quite active. The princesses write and receive letters and one of them buys land. Only half of the women in this subchapter can be classified as explicit agents, but they probably had power in the court, due to their high rank.

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<sup>45</sup> Unpublished, text identification from the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts.

## 5. FOREIGN LEADERS AND QUEENS

In this chapter I will introduce fourteen female leaders of tribes in Assyria. These women are included here because they are a part of the Assyrian empire, although they existed in its margins, both culturally and geographically. “Leaders” is probably the best designation for this group of women. Although most of them bear the title of *šarratu*, these women were not queens in the Assyrian sense, since in the Neo-Assyrian empire queen usually refers to the wife of a ruler, not to the ruler herself.

The main difference between Assyrian and Arabic queens is their different spheres of action. Arabic queens resemble kings of Assyria, in a sense that they act freely in the public sphere. The Assyrian queens seem invisible in comparison. Even the well-documented ones, like Naqī’a/ Zakūtu, Libbāli-šarrat and Sammu-rāmat are not so visible in the public sphere. Also, none of the Assyrian high-ranking ladies can be said to be a leader of a community on her own right. Of course, the nature of the sources – mostly annals of kings – also reinforces this active image of the Arabic female leaders. Only women who have done something deemed worth reporting are mentioned in these annals.

Most of the *šarratu*-titles of the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts were used in connection with goddesses. Interestingly, in the royal inscriptions all the references to human *šarratus* were to non-Assyrian queens. Thus, it seems that in the inscriptions non-Assyrian queens were usually called *šarratu* and Assyrian *sēgallu*<sup>46</sup> (MÍ É.GAL). However, this is not always the case. At least in the annals of Esarhaddon (Borger 1956: 99) and Assurbanipal (Strekk 1916: 42-45) the queens of enemy kings<sup>47</sup> are called MÍ É.GAL. Also, it is worth noticing that all the texts where *šarratus* were found were written in Standard Babylonian. It is thus also possible that the title *šarratu* is merely a Standard Babylonian feature.

The evidence concerning these women is limited to years 744-627, whereas the names of the Assyrian queens are known from 911-627, almost throughout the Neo-Assyrian pe-

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<sup>46</sup> On *sēgallu*, see Parpola 1988.

<sup>47</sup> In Esarhaddon’s annals queen of king of Egypt and Kush and in Assurbanipal’s annals queen of king of Elam.

riod<sup>48</sup>. I will deal with the queens and leaders in chronological order, according to table 2 below. For regnal years, see Kuhrt 1995: 479.

Regnal years	King	Leaders/queens
744-727	Tiglath-pileser III	Zabibê ( <i>šar-rat</i> KUR. <i>a-ri-bi</i> )
		Šarrūt-Aia (foreign queen?)
		Samsi ( <i>šar-rat</i> KUR. <i>a-ri-bi</i> )
726-722	Shalmaneser V	Samsi ( <i>šar-rat</i> KUR. <i>a-ri-bi</i> )
721-705	Sargon II	Samsi ( <i>šar-rat</i> KUR. <i>a-ri-bi</i> )
		Šarrūt-Aia (foreign queen?)
		Barsipītu (leader of Bīt-Dakkuri?)
		Iati'e ( <i>šar-rat</i> LÚ. <i>a-ri-bi</i> )
704-681	Sennacherib	Iati'e ( <i>šar-rat</i> LÚ. <i>a-ri-bi</i> )
		Te'elhunu(=Apkallatu?) ( <i>kumirtu</i> of Dilbat)
		Apkallatu(=Te'elhunu?) ( <i>šar-rat</i> LÚ. <i>a-ri-bi</i> / <i>šar-rat</i> KUR. <i>a-ri-bi</i> )
		An unnamed [ <i>šar</i> ]- <i>rat</i> LÚ. <i>a-ra-bi</i>
		Tabū'a ( <i>tarbīt ekalli</i> )
680-669	Esarhaddon	Tabū'a ( <i>tarbīt ekalli</i> )
		Baslu ( <i>šar-rat</i> URU. <i>i-hi-lum</i> )
		Iapa' ( <i>šar-rat</i> URU. <i>di-ih-ra-a-ni</i> )
668-631? (Or 627?)	Assurbanipal	Humbuštu (leader of Bīt-Amukani)
		Hulalītu, Rīhtu and Balīhītu (leaders of Bīt-Ibâ)
		Adiya ( <i>aššat Iata' šar Aribi/šarrat Aribi</i> )

TABLE 2: FOREIGN LEADERS AND QUEENS<sup>49</sup>

**Zabibê**, queen of the Arabs (*šar-rat* KUR.*a-ri-bi*), sends tribute to Tiglath-pileser (Tadmor 1994: Ann 14 (pp. 69-71); dupls: Ann 27 (p. 89) and Ann 3(p. 87)) in 738 (Eph'al 1982: 23). Eph'al suggests that her full title is <sup>kur</sup>Qidri <sup>kur</sup>Aribi – queen of the Qedarites, queen

<sup>48</sup> The Neo Assyrian period, according to Kuhrt (1995: 473), lasted from 934 to 610 BC.

<sup>49</sup> I have given the Akkadian title of the woman in question in parentheses after her name, if any title has appeared in the texts.

of the Arabs”. He also suggests that her reason for this tribute was economical: Zabibê paid tribute in order to avoid a possible disruption of the Arabian trade. (Eph’al 1982: 82-83) On another occasion (Tadmor 1994: St 3A, pp. 106-109) she sends tribute with the kings of Hatti and Arameans.

**Šarrūt-Aia** is mentioned in a wine list (CTN 3 135), which is probably an extract from a longer wine list. She is probably a foreign queen and her envoy receives 1 *qa* of wine. The text can be dated either to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III around 734 or the reign of Sargon around 720-710. (Dalley and Postgate 1984: 246-247)

**Samsi** was queen of the Arabs in the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II. In 733 (Eph’al 1982: 26-27) she “broke her oath to Šamaš” (Tadmor 1994: Ann 23). Eph’al sees her violation of her oath as part of the extensive anti-Assyrian activity in the region (Eph’al 1982: 84). Apparently Tiglath-pileser defeated her at Mt. Saqurri. He killed or captured numerous of her people as well as a lot of livestock and other property. Samsi herself fled, but later on submitted to Tiglath-pileser and sent tribute to him. The king installed an inspector over her, presumably to control the Arabs’ movements. (Tadmor 1994: Smm 4, 8, 9, 13 and Eph’al 1982: 33-36.) In the inscriptions of Sargon she is one of the rulers who brought tribute to Sargon in about 716. Eph’al suspects that this tribute was rather a gesture of friendship than actual tribute, as the other two rulers mentioned here were not under Sargon’s direct control. (Eph’al 1982: 86,108-111.) Presumably she was queen also between the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II, when Shalmaneser V ruled.

Samsi is also known from an administrative document of uncertain date (SAA 11 162), where [fugitives] (and camels) of the Arabs are to be brought to Samsi and those of Samsi are to be brought up to the Arabs. It is possible that the “[fugitives] of the Arabs” are in fact Assyrian deserters who have fled to the Arabs, whereas “those of Samsi” are Arabs who are to be repatriated. (PNA 3/I: 1085, Jursa.)

**Barsipītu** might be a Chaldean leader. According to Villard (PNA 1/II: 273) she is a high-ranking Babylonian lady connected with the Chaldean tribe Bit-Dakkuri during the reign of Sargon II. She might also be a member of the dynastic house of Borsippa; at least her name suggests that.

Barsipītu is the author of a Babylonian letter informing the king that she entered Bit-Dakkuri in peace and was welcomed by Ana-[Nabû-taklak] and all the people (SAA 17

73). The same woman is mentioned three times in a Babylonian letter sent by Ana-Nabû-taklak to the king (SAA 17 68). In the letter Ana-Nabû-taklak answers the king's query as to why he had not sent any messenger since she came to him. He informs the king that Barsipîtu and Nabû-šu[ma-iddina] came to him on the first day of the month Šabaṭu (xi) and goes on to explain why the messenger was delayed.

The name is quite rare, so it is also possible that she is the same Barsipîtu, who buys a family of four slaves from Babilaiu for three minas of silver in 695 in the royal court of Nineveh (SAA 6 96).

**Iati'e** was the queen of the Arabs during the reigns of Sargon II and Sennacherib. During Sargon's reign, in an administrative text listing jewellery disbursements to visiting delegations (SAA 7 58, not dated), her emissaries bring ho[rses?] to Arbail and receive silver rings in return. Although she bears no title, Iati'e is listed among Arab leaders in the text. Iati'e is also mentioned in the annals of Sennacherib (Luckenbill 1924: 51, l. 28), when Sennacherib captures her brother Basqanu. In this text her title, queen of the Arabs (*šar-rat LÚ.a-ri-bi*) is also mentioned. Neither SAA 7 58 or this text was dated, but the capture of Basqanu took place in 703 (Eph'al 1984: 112-113).

**Te'elhunu** was a queen of the Arabs during the reign of Sennacherib. According to Esarhaddon's annals Sennacherib conquered the city Adummatu, an Arabian fortress, and brought her together with loot and divine images back to Assyria in ca 690. (Eph'al 1982: 122-123; Borger 1956: 53 (Nin.A iv 4), with variant Nin.B ii 59.) In Sennacherib's own inscription this woman is called Te'elhunu, but in Esarhaddon's inscriptions she is called Apkallatu (PNA 1/I: 113, Radner). Possibly Apkallatu was not her name, but her title<sup>50</sup>, which the Assyrians misunderstood as a personal name (Borger 1957: 9).

In Sennacherib's annals name Te'elhunu is restored by Luckenbill – only the last sign of the name and the title are visible in the text: [xxx]-*nu šar-rat LÚ.a-ra-bi* (Luckenbill 1924: 92, l. 22). The passage records the attack on her and Hazā-il, king of the Arabs/king of the Qedarites (Eph'al 1982: 41).

The victory of Sennacherib over Hazā-il and Te'elhunu is told yet again in the inscriptions of Assurbanipal. In Streck 1916: 216ff (K 3087) and Streck 1916: 222 (K 3404 and K

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<sup>50</sup>*Apkallatu* can be translated as “wise woman”. The title refers to a non-goddess only in this text. The masculine form *apkallu*, “expert, wise man” is, however, well attested as a title of a priest or diviner. (CAD A.)

3405) Te'elhunu is called *MÍ.ku-mir-tu* of god/city of Dilbat, instead of “queen”. Although the title *kumirtu* only appears in this text (CAD K: 532-533), the meaning of the term is quite clear: *kumirtu* is obviously a feminine form of *kumru*, priest (CAD K: 534-544).

An unnamed queen of the Arabs is mentioned in a fragmentary unpublished text K 8544, from the reign of Sennacherib (according to the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian Texts). The line in question reads; [xxx *šar*]-*rat* LÚ.*a-ra-bi a-di* DINGIR-[MEŠ-*ša?* xxx]. It seems that the text is a fragment of a Sennacherib's account of a campaign, where he defeats the unnamed queen of Arabs, quite possibly Te'elhunu.

**Tabū'a**, queen of the Arabs, is mentioned in Borger 1956: Nin A iv 15 (dups; Borger 1956: Mnm B, Nin A5 414, Nin B 260, Nin B1 313, Nin C 303', Nin D 309' and NinA18 010'). In his annals, Esarhaddon reports that he installed a new king and queen of Arab tribes (*ana šarrūti elišunu aškun*) and returned the “renewed” Arab gods. Tabū'a, “who grew up in palace of Sennacherib” (*tarbūt ekalli*) he installed in place of Te'elhunu (see above) and Iata' instead of Haza-il. (Borger 1956: Nin. A iv 1-31.) It is clear that these nominations were separate occasions (Eph'al 1982 127-128). Some have speculated that Tabū'a might be Te'elhunu's daughter, but no evidence for that has been found (Eph'al 1982: 122-123). It seems that at least in certain Arab tribes there was a tradition of female leaders, which also Assyrians recognized; otherwise Esarhaddon would surely have installed a king to rule.

Tabū'a is also mentioned in the annals of Assurbanipal. According to them, Esarhaddon queried Shamash in some matter concerning Tabū'a. (Streck 1916: 216-218 (K 3087) and Streck 1916: 222 (K 3404 and K 3405).)

King Esarhaddon, during his campaign against Bazu in northeast Arabia, conducted in about 677, defeats and kills a number of Arabian leaders. Among them are **Baslu**, the queen of Ihilum (in northeastern Arabia) and **Iapa'**, queen of Dihranu (modern Dahrán in north-east Arabia). Also some kings are mentioned. (Borger 1956: Nin. A iv 64 and 67.)

**Humbuštu** was the mother of Ea-zera-qiša, chief of the Chaldean tribe Bit-Amukani during the reigns of Šamaš-šumu-ukin and Assurbanipal. Ea-zera-qiša, while in custody in Assyria and fearing for his life, sends a letter (written by an Assyrian scribe) to his mother, imploring her to settle a matter involving anti-Assyrian fugitives in Bīt-Amukani and to

confirm the loyalty of the tribe to Assyria (ABL 896). Also a letter of the King Assurbanipal mentions a report concerning Humbuštu (ABL 517).

Three Aramaic women, **Hulālītu** (SAA 3 29 and ABL 454), **Rīhtu** (ABL 454) and **Balīhītu** (ABL 454 and SAA 3 30) are all part of the same occurrence revolving around Bit-Ibâ. Most information about this event is found in a Babylonian letter to the king (ABL 454), written by Bel-eṭir of Bīt-Ibâ. Bel-eṭir was a leader of Bīt-Ibâ, who apparently betrayed other leaders (Hulalitu, Rīhtu and Balihitu among them) of Bīt-Ibâ group. This would certainly explain why Marduk-šarru-ušur expanded his territory after receiving an appointment in Susa<sup>51</sup>. (PNA1/II: 299, Luppert-Barnard.) Apparently the clash between Bel-eṭir of Bit-Ibâ and the Assyrians coincided with the Šamaš-šumu-ukin revolt (PNA 1/II: 259-260, Vanderroost). This would place ABL 454 sometime before the revolt (652-648, according to PNA 1/I: 166, Ruby). In any case, in ABL 454 Bel-eṭir writes that the women Hulalitu, Rīhtu and Balihitu are opponents of the king. However, According to Perroudon Bel-eṭir himself subsequently turned against the king and is thus not the most reliable source (PNA 3/I: 1053, Perroudon). This view contradicts Luppert-Barnards theory on the expansion of Bel-eṭirs territory (see above).

In a warning to Bel-eṭir (SAA 3 29), someone (possibly Bel-eṭir) is said to have feared Hulālītu. In the same text there is a mention that **Našqat** has praised Šallâ. This might possibly indicate that Našqat also had high status.

Balīhītu, the daughter of Šamaš-ibni also appears in an incantation (SAA 3 30) against Bel-eṭir, where he is described, among other insults, as the slave of Balīhītu. The meaning of this insult is puzzling. If taken seriously, it seems to indicate that Bel-eṭir might have been under her authority. In any case, the insult seems rather meaningless, if there was no contest of power between them.

Eph'al also lists **Adiya** among the queens of Arabs. In the inscriptions of Assurbanipal she is called either “*aššat Iata' šar Aribi*” which means “wife of Iata' (son of Hazā-il) king of the Arabs” or *šarrat Aribi* “, “queen of the Arabs” (Eph'al 1982: 224). She is thus the only one of Arab queens, who was not a leader of a tribe on her own right, but acted as her husband's agent. Iata' assisted Šamaš-šumu-ukin in his revolt by sending Adiya and another

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<sup>51</sup> The mentioning of Susa indicates that Bīt-Ibâ was located somewhere near Elam, but Brinkman and Luppert-Barnard (PNA 2/I: 498) write that it was situated somewhere near Uruk.

Qedarite leader, Ammuladi, to attack the territories in the western part of the Assyrian empire. Unfortunately they were defeated by the Assyrians and by the local kings. They were captured by the king of Moabites in 649. (Eph'al 1982: 143.)

The foreign leaders and queens appear to be one of the most autonomous groups in this thesis. Nine out of fourteen<sup>52</sup> take active role in war, diplomacy or trade. The question would require a more rigorous study, but the evidence at this stage suggests that among Arabian tribes there existed a less conservative ideology concerning woman's role in the society. Even Assyrians recognized this, as when King Esarhaddon placed Tabū'a as the leader of an Arabic tribe. Their role in the tribe appears to have been more similar to the role of the king in Assyria, rather than the Assyrian queen.

Of course one must also consider the nature of the sources. These tribal leaders usually appear only in the annals of kings. In other words, we only have knowledge concerning active female leaders, as Assyrians had little interest in documenting the other women in the tribes. Nonetheless, this notable presence of women in the highest levels of decision-making does give reason to believe that at least the aristocratic women of the tribes enjoyed a fairly autonomous position.

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<sup>52</sup> The unnamed queen of the Arabs (K 8544) from the reign of Sennacherib is not included in this figure, since her existence is rather uncertain: she is quite possibly Te'elhunu.

## 6. PERSONNEL OF THE PALACE

In this chapter I first discuss the groups of women, which can be seen as “the workforce” of the palace. The largest group is the *šakintu*, who acted as the administrators of palaces. A large amount of evidence also exists about *lahhinutu*-officials, musicians and palace maids. The other female professionals of the palace, who are sometimes mentioned only in one text, are discussed last, in chapter 6.5.

### 6.1 *Šakintu* - administrator

The term *šakintu* has often been translated as “harem manageress”. This is a very narrow translation, especially because rarely does anyone bother to define “harem”. Undefined, it conjures exotic images of the oppressed women at the mercy of an insatiable despot, sequestered from the outside world. The question of the “harem” in ancient Near East is a complex one and I have discussed it in chapter 4.2. Because of the problematic nature of the term “harem” I will call *šakintu* “administrator”, especially because this seems to be closer to the actual meaning of the word. It is in accord with her many different activities, which also sprawled outside palaces.

The administrators (*šakintu*) and their staff and relatives are the largest autonomous group of women within the Assyrian royal palaces. In the evidence presented below, there are 46 *šakintus* and 24 of them can be classified as explicit agents<sup>53</sup>. The administrators took care of various matters mostly in the financial sphere. In addition to buying, lending and borrowing, they also appear in an occasional courtcase. Despite the fact that most of these transactions were probably connected to their professional duties, some documents<sup>54</sup> imply that they had similar autonomy in their private lives. The reason for the large number of *šakintus* as implicit agents is their frequent appearance in different kinds of lists, most notably SAA 7 23.

I will first discuss briefly *šakintu* professional role in chapter 6.1.1. Then I will introduce the evidence, first those *šakintus* that are known to us by their names. However, most *šakintus* appear in texts only with their titles. I have placed them in subchapters chronologi-

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<sup>53</sup> See chapter 10.1 on the criteria and method of counting.

cally, according to the reigns of kings. First *šakintu* of the Neo-Assyrian Empire appear in the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727), although it is probable that the office also existed earlier<sup>55</sup>.

### 6.1.1 *Šakintu*'s household

In Fort Shalmaneser *šakintu* was the housekeeper of the queen, “queen’s *šakintu*” (Dalley & Postgate: 1984 9-14). According to Heltzer however, that was not always the case. Heltzer bases this conclusion on the fact that many royal palaces had *šakintus*, who were not specifically called queen’s *šakintu*. (Heltzer 1987: 88.) However, the absence of the definition “queen’s” does not conclusively prove that they were not part of queen’s staff.

In any case *šakintu* had high administrative position and had her own staff. She could possess considerable property and freely participate in legal actions. (Heltzer 1987: 88-90.) The 46 *šakintus*, whom I managed to find from the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts, engage in various activities, mostly financial. They take part in different kinds of legal transactions; they sell, buy, lend and borrow. They could have children<sup>56</sup>, but nothing is known about their husbands.

Due to *šakintu*'s no doubt extensive duties, she had a large staff. Amat-Ba'al, the *šakintu* of the Old Palace of Kalhu had a female stewardess, **Ahat-abû** (see chapter 6.2, ND 2309). In the Review Palace of Kalhu *šakintu* had at her disposal the “female scribe of the household of the queen”, **Attār-paltī** and also a female deputy, **Kabalāia**.

Attār-paltī was the scribe (LÚ.A.BA-tú ša É MÍ.KUR) of the queen some time after reign of Assurbanipal. It is probable that she actually worked for the *šakintu*, as it seems that the queen did not reside in Fort Shalmaneser (see chapter 4.2 – queen’s household). In two separate documents (CTN 3 40 and CTN 3 39) both datable to 615\* Nasî and Šalmu-šarri-iqbi borrow silver from her. However, it is not certain, whether she did this in a private ca-

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<sup>54</sup> See for example Amat-Astārti in chapter 6.1.2.

<sup>55</sup> See for example Kinnier Wilson 1972:44. He writes that although no *šakintus* are explicitly mentioned in Nimrud Wine lists, certain entries “may be thought to concern *šakintus*, most obviously perhaps pl. 32, 21 ff”. Nimrud Wine Lists are dated 791-779; at the end of the reign of Adad-nirari III and the beginning of the reign of Shalmaneser IV.

<sup>56</sup> In BaM24 L19 1.[x]-qa-da-qa-pa-x[x], son of *šakintu* is mentioned in a witness list when a certain Nabû-tuklatū'a buys a family of six slaves. In ND 2307 *šakintu* Amat-Astārti marries her daughter off.

capacity or in her official role as scribe. The silver she loans to these men is (at least in 39) silver of the temple of Mullissu<sup>57</sup>. (Dalley and Postgate 1984: 93- 94.)

Kabalāia was at first a deputy of the queen’s household (LÚ.2-*i-tú ša É MÍ KUR* in SAAB 1 24) and later deputy of the female administrator of the Review Palace (LÚ.2-*i-tú ša MÍ.šá-kin-te šá É.GAL ma-šar-ti* in CTN 3 30). The administrator in question is probably Šīti-ilat. In 626\* the deputy lends ten shekels of silver to La-qepu (SAAB 1 24). In another, judicial document (CTN 3 30) from 617\*, she has brought a court case against Andasu. Andasu gives her a woman and ten shekels of silver in settlement of the affair.

Kabalāia is probably also the unnamed deputy of *šakintu* in CTN 3 29, who instigates a court case over a slave girl in the eponymy of Sin-šarrussu-ka”in. Apparently she bought a woman Mussa’ītu for one mina of silver. The slave ran away, and Isseme-ili, who had acted as the slave’s surety, had to pay half a mina of silver to the purchaser. The purchaser would repay him in the event of the slave being found, and the slave would revert to her previous owner. In that case, the deputy of the administrator would be compensated for the price of the slave and the time during which she was deprived of her services. There is no absolute dating for this text<sup>58</sup>.

In addition to the female scribe and deputy, also other persons belonged to *šakintu*’s household. It is of course not possible to know how much the size and composition of the staff varied from *šakintu* to *šakintu*, but the following examples give some idea of the kind of people that might have been included. In Stat 2 244 a man from the house of *šakintu* witnesses a purchase of house. In NL 81 Ašipâ<sup>59</sup> informs the king that the cook of *šakintu* has reported a theft in the palace. In SAAB 9 67 Ilu-dūru-ušur, “the man in charge of the sacks in the household of *šakintu*”, borrows 6 shekels of silver in 618\*. In SAA 6 152, Ruradidi, eunuch (LÚ.SAG) of *šakintu*, is a witness in a document recording the purchase of a woman in 687. In SAA 14 177 Remut-Nergal, eunuch of the *šakintu* buys a vacant lot ca. 630-612.

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<sup>57</sup> People could store their capital in temple by giving it to the temple as an “offering”. In reality, the silver was still available for the depositor, who could borrow it if he wanted. This way the depositor had a safe-deposit in which to store his money and the temple secured a considerable holding in currency of the time. (Postgate 1983: 158.)

<sup>58</sup> Eponym of Sin-šarrussu-ka”in, see Dalley & Postgate 1984: 10 for suggestions.

<sup>59</sup> A royal official during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III or Sargon II; PNA 1/I: 142.

From the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts I located 45 *šakintus* and 23 locations for them. Assur, Nineveh and Kalhu get mentioned several times as locations for *šakintus*, other cities are mentioned only in connection with one *šakintu*. In Nineveh, two different palaces are mentioned (Central City of Nineveh and Review Palace of Nineveh), in Kalhu three (Old Palace of Kalhu, Kalhu Review Palace, New palace of Kalhu). It seems that it was not unusual to have a *šakintu* in a royal palace, but as the exact number of royal palaces in the Neo-Assyrian Empire is not known, it is impossible to say how common it was.

As *šakintu*'s activities seem to be mostly financial, it is possible that she was in charge of the queen's households in different locations. It has been earlier noted that the Neo-Assyrian queens were extremely wealthy. It is therefore not unthinkable that they had a network of *šakintu* - households generating resources for the queen. As queen's agents, *šakintus* naturally would have had quarters in royal palaces, like Review Palace in Kalhu.

#### 6.1.2 *Šakintu*-officials known by name

Name	Date	Location	Text
Addatī	reign of Sennacherib	Nineveh	SAA 6 81, 82
Ahi-ṭallī	reign of Sennacherib	Central City of Nineveh	SAA 6 88-90, 92-93
Amat-Ba'al	7 <sup>th</sup> century	Old Palace of Kalhu	ND 2309
Iliā	7 <sup>th</sup> century	Kalhu	ND 2313
Zarpī	668-V-27	Nineveh	SAA 14 8
Šīti-ilat	Ca. 642-615	Kalhu Review Palace	CTN 3 35
Amat-Astārti	after reign of Assurbanipal	New palace of Kalhu	ND 2307

**TABLE 3A: ŠAKINTU-OFFICIALS KNOWN BY NAME**

The seven administrators (*šakintu*) we know by their names were very active figures. I will introduce them in chronological order according to the table 3A.

**Addatī** was an administrator from Nineveh from the reign of Sennacherib. The deputy village manager Bibia owes silver to her and pledges an estate and seven persons to her (SAA 6 81). In another document she buys a slave woman from Abi-salamu (SAA 6 82).

**Ahi-ṭallī** was the administrator of the Central City of Nineveh in the reign of Sennacherib. She is only a *sekretu* (see chapter 7.1) in 687 (SAA 6 88), but she is the administrator of

the Central City of Nineveh after 686. She is known from several documents, where she buys slaves, once a girl from her mother. She also buys an orchard with slaves and land “for the king’s life”. (SAA 6 89-90, 92-93.)

**Amat-Ba’al** was administrator of the Old Palace of Kalhu in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (ND 2309). Unfortunately, she is only known through her stewardess, Ahat-abû (see chapter 6.2).

**Ilia** was the administrator in Kalhu in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. She purchases a child from its father Kaparia, a servant of the treasurer (ND 2313).

**Zarpî**, administrator from Nineveh buys a woman in 668 (SAA 14 8).

In *The Tablets from Fort Shalmaneser* (CTN 3) Dalley and Postgate assign texts 28-45 as “the *šakintu* group: texts from queen’s household”. According to them there are too many types of texts in the group to call it *šakintu*’s archive, although they were probably stored together in single office under her administration. No 28 is a letter, 29-32 deal with legal matters, 33-36 deal with the sale of persons and 37-45 are an assortment of loan and debt documents and a contract. Mostly documents are related to the administration of the queen’s household in some way. Dalley and Postgate suggest that this *šakintu* of the household of the queen of the Kalhu Review Palace was **Šīti-ilat**. (Dalley & Postgate: 1984 9-14.)

Šīti-ilat’s name is actually mentioned only in CTN 3 35, when she buys some people, a house and a field, but she must be the unnamed *šakintu* in CTN 3 34, who buys the daughter of Mannu-ki-Ninua. Her deputy was named Kabalaia (see chapter 6.1.1). The texts in the *šakintu*-group (28-45) are dated around the period from 642 to 615.

**Amat-Astārti**, administrator of the New Palace of Kalhu gives her daughter Šubetu in marriage to Milki-ramu son of Abdi-Azuzi some time after the reign of Assurbanipal (ND 2307).

The seven administrators shortly summarized here were all clearly very powerful figures in their palaces. They buy land and slaves, lend money and owe money. All in all, they seem to be very wealthy women. One of them even marries her daughter off, which is usually done by the *pater familias*.

### 6.1.3 The unnamed *šakintu*-officials

#### 6.1.3.1 The period from Tiglath-pileser III (744-727) to Sargon II (721-705)

Year (if known)	Location	Text
	Arbail	ND 2803
	Kilizu	ND 2803
	Adian	ND 2803
	Kasappa	ND 2803
721-612	Haurina	SAA 7 134

**TABLE 3B: FROM TIGLATH-PILESER III (744-727) TO SARGON II (721-705)**

In a ration account from North-West Palace in Nimrud (Parker 1961, pp. 55-61, ND 2803) in reverse col. II, *šakintu* is mentioned 4 times. Parker suggests that ND 2803 relates to rations issued in royal establishments in outlying towns. Since the tablet was found in the royal offices in Kalhu, the accounts from the various government storehouses were probably sent to the central government for inspection at regular intervals. The text is not dated, but is probably from the period from Tiglath-pileser III to Sargon II. (Parker 1961: 15-17.)

Lines 1-8 concern Arbail, lines 9-20 Kilizu, lines 21-31 Adian and lines 32-34 Ka-šil?-pa, (or according to the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts Ka-<sa>-pa). The amounts mentioned are big; lines 2 and 9 (which are restored in the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts, not by Parker) mention 36 homers of grain for *šakintu*, (3 homers per month). In line 21 the amount is 14 homers 4 sutu for *šakintu*, (1 homer, 2 sutu per month) and in line 32 14 homers, 5 sutu for *šakintu*, (1 homer 2 sutu per month). (Parker 1961: 55-61.) Three of these villages/towns are named royal establishments by Parker (1961: 17) namely Arbail, Kilizu and Adian. The large amounts of grain seem to support the idea that administrators had a large staff, or at least she was responsible for distributing grain to a large number of people.

In SAA 7 134 the *šakintu* of Haurina is mentioned. The text is a fragmentary list of various contributions to or from officials (ca. 721-612, reign of Sargon II).

### 6.1.3.2 Reign of Sennacherib (704-681)

Year (if known)	Location	Text
694-xii-10	Nineveh	SAA 6 83
694-xii-10	Nineveh	SAA 6 84
692-x-6	Central City <sup>60</sup> of Nineveh	SAA 6 85
	Central City of Nineveh	SAA 6 86
	Central City of Nineveh	SAA 6 87
	Central City of Nineveh	SAA 6 94
	Nineveh	SAA 6 95

**TABLE 3C: REIGN OF SENNACHERIB (704-681)**

In SAA 6 (Kwasman & Parpola 1991) chapter 6 is dedicated for the legal transactions of the *šakintus* and other royal women of the royal court of Nineveh during the reign of Sennacherib (704-681). The documents of this chapter are dated in the time span of 694-681. When an unnamed *šakintu* is not mentioned in connection with any palace, I have assumed that her station is the royal palace of Nineveh.

In SAA 6 83 *šakintu* gets a fine in 694-xii-10. In SAA 6 84 a *šakintu* loans sheep in 694-xii-10. In SAA 6 85 *šakintu* of the Central City buys two slaves for one mina of silver in 692-x-6. In SAA 6 86 *šakintu* of the Central City buys twenty slaves for 8 minas of silver. In SAA 6 87 *šakintu* of the Central City buys slaves for ten minas of silver. *Šakintu* of the Central City [releases] 31 people to NN for 17, 5 minas of silver in SAA 6 94. In SAA 6 95 *šakintu* forfeits a pledged field.

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<sup>60</sup> MURUB<sub>4</sub> - URU

### 6.1.3.3 Reign of Esarhaddon (680-669)

Year (if known)	Location	Text
	Kilizi	SAA 6 247
	Central City of Nineveh	SAA 7 23
	Review Palace of Nineveh	SAA 7 23
	Review Palace of the New Contigent	SAA 7 23
	Našibina	SAA 7 23
	Šibaniba	SAA 7 23
	Bit-Adad-le'i	SAA 7 23
	Šudu	SAA 7 23
	Te'di	SAA 7 23
	Kahat	SAA 7 23
	2 in Sunê	SAA 7 23
	Tuphan	SAA 7 23
	The household of the Lady of the House	SAA 7 23
		SAA 16 183
	Inner City of Aššur	SAA 13 18

**TABLE 3D: REIGN OF ESARHADDON 680-669**

SAA 6 247 is a note of a mule belonging to the *šakintu* of the Kilizi during the reign of Esarhaddon (680-669). Although most of the texts in SAA 6 are from Nineveh, many are retrieved from other sites as well (Kwasman & Parpola 1991: xv). This might be one of them.

Thirteen *šakintus* are also mentioned in SAA 7 23, which is a survey of *šakintus* and weavers<sup>61</sup>. Fales and Postgate write that the text is unique and possibly written for a specific event, maybe during the reign of Esarhaddon (Fales & Postgate 1992, xvii-xix). The two faces of the tablet (one listing weavers, the other *šakintus*) are written at different times, possibly even by different scribes. This means that there is not necessarily any connection between *šakintus* and weavers, although it is of course possible that *šakintus* were in charge of weaving. In any case the text tells us locations of *šakintus*' households. Altogether twelve locations are mentioned (See table 3D).

<sup>61</sup> For weavers, see also chapters 6.5.2 and 9.1.2.

In SAA 16 183, a letter to the king Esarhaddon, a *šakintu* is mentioned. Unfortunately, the context is too fragmentary to draw any conclusions.

Another document possibly from the reign of Esarhaddon is SAA 13 18. Dadî, a high temple official of Aššur-temple, writes to the king Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal and asks for instructions. Apparently there are leftovers from Aššur temple's offerings and last year the king told Dadî to assign them to the storehouse. This year the temple scribe told him to give the leftovers in question to the *šakintu* of the Inner City. Now Dadî asks the king what to do. Obviously, at least to the king, the borders between temple and royal administration were non-existent.

#### 6.1.3.4 Reign of Assurbanipal (668-631?)

Year	Location	Text
668-i-22	Central city of Nineveh	SAA 14 9
654	Nineveh	SAA 14 11
668-650	Nineveh	SAA 14 12
650	Assur	SAA 14 13
668-650	Assur	SAA 14 14
645*	Til Barsip?	TB 13

**TABLE 3E: REIGN OF ASSURBANIPAL (668-631?)**

In SAA 14 (Mattila 2002), chapter two consists of legal transactions of the royal women of the court in Nineveh from the reign of Assurbanipal (668-631?). All documents from this chapter date to ca 668-650. *Šakintu* of the central city buys a slave in 668-I-22 (SAA 14 9). In 654 a *šakintu* assigns Belet-isse'a, her female slave for lifelong service to Sinqi-Issār in order to cover a debt (SAA 14 11). In SAA 14 12 a *šakintu* buys two slaves for 50 shekels of silver. *Šakintu* of city of Assur buys a slave in 650 (SAA 14 13). *Šakintu* of city of Assur buys a woman for half a mina and 5 shekels of silver (SAA 14 14).

In TB 13 a slave is sold to an unnamed *šakintu* for thirty-five shekels of silver in 645\*.

### 6.1.3.5 Reign of Aššur-etel-ilani (630?-623?) or Sin-šarru-iškun (622?-612)

Year (if known)	Location	Text
	Central City of Nineveh	SAA 14 175
	Nineveh	SAA 14 176
625*-ix-26	Central City of Nineveh	SAA 14 159

**TABLE 3F: AŠŠUR-ETEL-ILANI (630? - 623?) OR SIN-ŠARRU-IŠKUN (622? - 612)**

In SAA 14, chapter 9 consists of legal transactions of the *šakintu* of the royal court of Nineveh from either the reign of Aššur-etel-ilani (630? - 623?) or Sin-šarru-iškun (622? - 612). In SAA 14 175 *šakintu* of the Central City of Nineveh buys land. In SAA 14 176 *šakintu* from Nineveh buys something, the beginning of the document is lost.

In SAA 14 159 (chapter 12, varia), *šakintu* of the central city of Nineveh (*ša* MURUB<sub>4</sub> - URU) lends silver to Urdu-Iššar, whose son, Ubru-ahhešu is the pledge (625\*-ix-26).

### 6.1.3.6 The unnamed *šakintu*-officials in other contexts

In ND 2344 Isānītu, a slave woman, is sold by Išdi-Nabû, palace manager to an unnamed *šakintu* for one mina of silver (date lost).

In SAA 14 471, (date lost) an unnamed manageress lends 200 barley to Il-amara, chief of granaries.

*Šakintu* is mentioned also in mystical and cultic explanatory works (SAA 3 34 and 35). The passages seem to refer to *šakintu*'s position as the leader of the household.

### 6.1.4 Women related to *šakintu*

A certain **Abi-rahî** from Nineveh, a sister of an administrator (NIN-*sa ša šá-kín-te*) buys three women from Minahimu probably during the reign of Esarhaddon (SAA 6 250).

**Šubētu**, the daughter of the above-mentioned *šakintu* Amat-Astarti, is married off by her mother to Milki-ramu, son of Abdi-Azuzi in 622\* (ND 2307). The dowry includes gold, silver, garments and furniture. If Šubētu is childless, she shall provide a female slave to bear Milki-ramu's sons and they shall count as her own. If Šubētu divorces Milki-ramu,

she shall leave him. If he divorces her, he pays her double the dowry. Lipinski (1991) suggests that her husband, Milki-ramu, might be the chief tailor, eponym for the year 656, but this seems very unlikely. It seems that Amat-Astarti was able to dictate remarkably good marriage terms for her daughter. That and also the size of the dowry indicate that she and her daughter definitely had high status in the Neo-Assyrian society.

Obviously, the women related to *šakintus* were high-ranking ladies themselves, able to practice agency. Whether this was because of their relationship with *šakintu* or for other reasons is unclear. It is possible that the position of *šakintu* could only be achieved by women whose family already was “aristocratic”. On the other hand, Ahi-ṭallī’s rise from *sekretu* to an administrator does not support this.

## 6.2 *Lahhinutu* - official

Although some sources translate *lahhinutu* as temple stewardess (for example SAA-series), according to CAD she was a female official at the queen’s court. Also the evidence from the Neo-Assyrian time suggests that the title was more tightly connected with the palace than with the temple. In fact, although her male counterpart *lahhinnu* undoubtedly worked both in temples and in palaces<sup>62</sup>, the texts from the Neo-Assyrian period concerning *lahhinutu* show no indication that she was working in temples. Thus, the title “stewardess” seems to best describe her activities.

**Ahat-abû** was a stewardess of Amat-Ba’al, the administrator of the Old Palace of Kalhu in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. She buys the daughter of Nurtî to dedicate her as a *šēlûtu* to the goddess Mullissu. Her title is *MÍ.lah-hi-nu-tu MÍ.a-ma-ti—ba-a[l]* (ND 2309). Fales calls her first (PNA 1/I: 59) “temple stewardess”, but later (PNA 1/I: 98) “stewardess”. An interesting question is also whether she bought the devotee in her official capacity or as a private person.

In the text SAA 6 66, Bahianu, village manager of the stewardess (LÚ.GAL - URU.MEŠ *ša MÍ.láh-hi-ni-te*) releases the woman Uhimâ. Altogether Bahianu acts in 21 texts, in chapter 5 of the SAA 6, during years 704-682. Most texts (15) concern loans of barley or wheat, in three texts he loans copper or silver. In text no: 61, he redeems a bondman and in

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<sup>62</sup> See Menzel 1981: 223-228.

text no: 65 he buys land and people. Unfortunately, there is no further knowledge concerning the stewardess he is working for.

*Lahhinutu* is also mentioned in SAA 13 157, stewardess' statement concerning the theft of the golden statue of Erra from the Succession Palace is quoted in a letter.

In SAA 11 152 two professions are mentioned in a small fragment of a list of female staff, namely a stewardess and a female musician (see chapter 6.3.2). Stewardesses are also mentioned in SAA 7 24 (see chapter 6.5.1).

Menzel describes *lahhinnu* as as a treasurer, who had an important role in economy and administration. It seems that the importance of his function was conditioned by the size of the institution, a temple or a palace, in which he served. (See Menzel 1981: 223-228)

The above-presented evidence, especially SAA 13 157 indicates that *lahhinutu*'s role was similar to that of *lahhinnu*'s, although she appears to have been only in the service of palaces. Even if *lahhinutu* exercised considerable power in her role in the economic administration of the queen's household, there is little direct evidence on this. This is mainly due to the fact that six out of ten *lahhinutus* are mentioned in a personnel list (SAA 7 24). Therefore, out of ten occurrences<sup>63</sup>, only two are explicit agents.

### 6.3 Musicians

The terms *nuārtu* and *nargallutu* are translated as “female musician” and as “chief female musician” by CAD (N, 363-364). However, in the sources presented below *nuārtu* and *nargallutu* have often been translated as singers by the editors. The exact nature of their performance is still unclear. The only available evidence is found in A 125, where it seems that *nargallutu* is singing or reciting something.

They seem to have duties relating both to the palace and the temple. In the Neo-Assyrian time at least it seems that they were more a part of palace personnel than temple personnel. At least they appear most frequently appear in wine lists and as part of the loot taken from palaces. The only two texts that link them explicitly with temples are A 125 and PKTA 12f (see below). It seems probable that they were hired in both palaces and temples.

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<sup>63</sup> See chapter 10.1 on the criteria and method of counting.

Perhaps, the most noticeable thing in this group is that they appear to have been numerous. Partly this can be explained by the fact that they are often mentioned as part of the loot that the Assyrian kings took. However, there must have been a lot of them, since in just one document, SAA 7 24, 8 *nargallutus* and 53 other musicians are mentioned.

Another interesting question is their nationality. Both in Nimrud wine lists and in lists of personnel (see chapter 6.5.1) they are divided to different groups according to their countries. Why were so many musicians brought (or looted) to Assyria from abroad?

Their agency is a difficult question. Although there are a lot of them, 89 when one counts also those in personnel lists<sup>64</sup>, they and the palace maids appear most rarely as active agents. This is natural since their status must have been significantly lower than for example *šakintus*. It makes sense that their actions would have been recorded only in rare cases. In fact, only one of these 89 can be considered to be an explicit agent, and even then the text in question (A 125) is quite fragmentary. Nonetheless, they were active as musicians, and possibly also as some kind of cultic functionaries, so they are undoubtedly implicit agents.

### 6.3.1 *Nargallutu* - chief female musician

There are only two mentions of *nargallutu* in the Neo-Assyrian evidence. The first one is in personnel lists (see chapter 6.5.1, SAA 7 24). The second case is less clear. An unclear line in A 125 (no known archive, Pedersen 1986: 154) is read by Van Driel followingly: SAL.É x?? ZI and translated as “the queen (?) has risen” (van Driel 1969: 121-131, text A 125, v 22). Nonetheless, in the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian Texts the line in question, (CA pl.3f+ R322’) is read MÍ.NÀR.GÁL. The text in question is quite fragmentary, but according to van Driel the text gives a day-by-day description of acts of worship performed by the king Assurbanipal in Aššur. (Van Driel 1969: 121-131.) Also Menzel identifies the line in question as referring to *nargallutu*. It seems that she recites or sings a passage in front of king in the ritual. (Menzel 1981: 254.)

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<sup>64</sup> See chapter 10.1 on the criteria and method of counting.

### 6.3.2 *Nuārtu* - female musician

Female musicians are mainly found in lists of wine distribution or as part of the loot that the Assyrian kings ransacked from enemy palaces. In addition to these contexts they sometimes appear in connection with temples and palaces. In SAA 17 122 two *nuārtus* are mentioned as part of a gift given to Abu-Eriba, (a king's relative) by the king Sennacherib. In SAA 11 152 a *nuārtu* is found in a fragment of a list of female staff together with *lahhinutu* (undatable). Musicians are also found in lists of female personnel, see chapter 6.5.1 (SAA 7 24 and 26).

The only text that refers to their cultic activities is PKTA 12f. Even there the female musicians are mentioned in a broken context. However, in the beginning of the text the king makes offerings to gods (based on the transliteration in the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian Texts).

#### 6.3.2.1 *In wine and ration lists*

In SAA 7, in texts 140 and 142 female musicians receive wine, bread and beer. The text is not dated, but it is probably from sometime between 721-612, probably from the reign of Esarhaddon (Fales & Postgate 1992: xiv).

A wine list fragment (784 BC) from Nimrud mentions female musicians [MÍ?] NAR.MEŠ (CTN 3 145). They are also mentioned in two Nimrud Wine Lists<sup>65</sup>, namely in texts 8 and 21. Kinnier Wilson has not restored the countries in either text, but the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts has restored KUR.[*ha*]-*t[a!-a.a-te* in text 8 line r6' and KUR.á[*r?-pad*]-<*a.a*> in text 8 line r7'. In line r6' musicians receive 6,5 *qa* and in line r7' 5,5 *qa* of wine. In text 21 (line 5), the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts restores K[UR].*h[a!-ta-a].a* as the country of the musicians. In text 21, line 6 both Kinnier Wilson and Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts agree with reading KUR.[*Ar*]-<*pa-da*>-*aju*. Both in line 5 and line 6 receive 6,5 *qa* of wine.<sup>66</sup>

#### 6.3.2.2 *As part of the royal loot*

Ashurnasirpal II (883-859) receives a large amount of tribute from the ruler of Patinu, among them 10 female musicians in RIMA 2 Asn2 01C. In RIMA 2 Asn2 73 he again receives tribute, among them female musicians, possibly from land of Patinu like above.

Also Tiglath-pileser III (744-727) receives male and female musicians as tribute in Tadmor 1994: Summ. 9.

In Sennacherib's (704-681) annals female musicians are mentioned three times. In Luckenbill 1924: 60, l. 58 the musicians taken as loot are delivered to Nineveh. In Luckenbill 1924: 24, l. 33 Sennacherib takes musicians as loot from Babylon, from Merodach-baladan's palace. In Luckenbill 1924: 34, l. 47 Sennacherib conquers and loots king Hezekiah's palace in Jerusalem, taking with him his daughters, palace women and musicians.

Also Assurbanipal (668-631?) takes musicians as a part of loot in his annals, more specifically in prisms A and C. The prism G is quite fragmentary, but it seems probable, that here, too the musicians are part of the loot. (Asb B 628, Asb C vii 23 and Asb G 907<sup>67</sup>.)

#### **6.4 Amat ekalli - palace maid**

There are no occurrences of palace maids in person, but there are several mentions of the sons of palace maids and one attestation of a manager of the house of the palace maids. In ND 2307 Nabû-bêlu-ušur, “manager of the house of the palace maids” in Kalhu (during the reign of Assurbanipal or later) witnesses the marriage contract of the daughter of *šakintu* Amat-Astarti in 622\*.

The translations of GÉME—É.GAL are varied, from “palace slave woman” to “palace handmaid”. SAA-series use the term palace maid, which seems quite accurate. Exactly what kind of work they did or how they ended up in the palace is unclear. Their status seems to be higher than normal slaves, since the governor of Aššur makes a separate list of the “sons of the bought (slaves)” and the “sons of palace maids”. There also must have been quite a lot of these women, since the list sent to the king by the governor of Aššur lists 370 men altogether for “sons of the bought (slaves)” and the “sons of palace maids”.

The position of these sons is ambiguous. Although their mothers seem to be some kind of slaves, the sons are engaged in many activities that denote a good financial status. In SAA 11 221, King Assurbanipal (according to Mattila 2000: 63) gives four estates previously

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<sup>65</sup> The archive spans approximately two decades, 780s and 770s (Fales 1994).

<sup>66</sup> See Fales 1994: 361-380 for discussion on Nimrud Wine lists.

<sup>67</sup> The line numbering in the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian Texts differs from the one used by either Streck 1916 or Borger 1996 making it impossible to locate the passages that I found in the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian Texts

belonging to three cohort commanders and a bodyguard to a “son of the palace maid of the New Palace<sup>68</sup>”. In 635\* the location of a plot of bare ground is defined with the help of “the house of Dibbayu, the son of “palace hand-maid” (SAAB 5 35). In ND 2078 Ubrunabû, son of Nabû-dûri and a “palace woman” borrows silver in 638\*. In CTN 2 105 Nai, son of the “palace servant-girl” loans corn. Son of a palace maid is also mentioned in SAA 12 83. The text is fragmentary, but in the end there seems to be a list of professions that might hold estates and are under *ilku* – obligation. Among them the son of a palace maid is mentioned.

On the other hand it seems that these sons were used as the crown’s labour force. In SAA 1 99 the governor of Assur writes to King Sargon II followingly (lines 12’-16’): “I have just made a list of the “sons of the bought (slaves)” and the “sons of palace maids” on a writing-board and am sending it herewith to the king, my lord. They are 370 men: 90 are king’s men, 90 are reserves, 190 should do the king’s work.” In SAA 1 77 governor of Aššur writes to king Sargon II concerning a wood store. He informs the king that the sons of the palace maids will supply the materials needed and plaster its roof. On the whole it seems that these sons were part of a semi-free class. They were certainly not slaves, but they probably had some obligations towards the king.

Palace maids are not explicitly mentioned in any of the above-introduced texts, but seven texts mention their sons and one mentions their supervisor. Even so, as they had a professional status in the palace, they can be considered as implicit agents. It is reasonable that their doings would not have been recorded, because they must have had a fairly low status in the palace.

## 6.5 Other professionals of the palace

This group naturally consists of mostly implicit agents. This is because 40 of them appear in the personnel lists in the imperial administrative records<sup>69</sup> (see chapter 6.5.1). The remaining seven women presented in chapter 6.5.2 consist of both obviously high-ranking

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in either of them. I was therefore only able to use the transliteration of the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian Texts and the text identification numbers refer to the lines in the Corpus.

<sup>68</sup> In SAA 11 221 DUMU!-GÉME—É.GAL is translated as “princess”. This is obviously wrong and the correct translation should be “son of the palace-maid”.

<sup>69</sup> This figure does not include those women who are already counted once in some other chapter, namely administrators, musicians and stewardesses. See chapter 10.1 on the criteria and method of counting.

women (for example Rīša(t)-abīša) and low-ranking women (for example weavers). There are four explicit agents in this group and they are of course the four high-ranking women.

#### 6.5.1 Professionals of the imperial administrative records

In *Imperial Administrative Records, Part I* (SAA7) the whole of chapter four is dedicated to lists of female personnel (texts 23-26). These four documents cannot be dated with any certainty, nor do we know where in Nineveh they were excavated. However, they seem to be part of palace archives, as most titles in the texts are clearly connected with the palace. In text 23 *šakintus* are mentioned, in 24 we find “father of the crown prince” and in text 26 female cupbearers appear. Even those titles that are not used exclusively in the palace administration, for example musicians, do not pose a problem as the king surely provided for the temple as well as the palace.

These four texts list many female professionals, doubtless actively engaged in their trade. Some of these female professions are only found in these texts. In table 4 all the professions in these texts and their occurrences in other texts are summarised. Probably more of these professionals existed, but no other mentions can be found, at least not from the Neo-Assyrian period. In addition to professions, these texts list women from different regions and also their maids. The texts give names of five women (Šīti-tabni, Amat-emūni, Nikkal-hammat, Humatāti and Nikkal-šarrat), but they do not shed light to the texts as they only appear in these documents (see also chapter 7.5, table 6).

Profession	Translation	Occurrences	Listed in SAA 7
<i>šakintu</i>	Administrator	SAA 7 23/ see chapter 6.1	13
<i>nargallutu</i>	Chief musician	SAA 7 24/ see chapter 6.3.1	8
<i>lahhinutu</i>	Stewardess	SAA 7 24/ see chapter 6.2	6
<i>tupšarrutu</i>	Scribe	SAA 7 24, CTN 3 39, 40/ see chapter 6.1.1	6
<i>masennutu</i>	Treasurer	SAA 7 26/ see chapter 6.5.2	many (.MEŠ)
<i>nuārtu</i>	Musician	SAA 7 26 and 24 /see chapter 6.3.2	many (.MEŠ) + 53
<i>nappāhtu</i>	Smith	SAA 7 24	Altogether 15
<i>pallissu</i>	Stone-borer	SAA 7 24	
<i>gallābtu</i>	Barber	SAA 7 24	1
<i>kurgarrutu</i>	Performer of some kind	SAA 7 24	X + 13
<i>muraqqītu</i>	Perfume maker / Spice-bread baker	SAA 7 24	1
<i>šāqītu</i>	Cup bearer	SAA 7 26	many (.MEŠ)
<i>āpītu</i>	Baker	SAA 7 26	many (.MEŠ)

**TABLE 4: WOMEN PROFESSIONALS OF THE IMPERIAL ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS**

As a group, writers of SAA 7 do not have much to say concerning these lists. They merely state that no. 24 lists female personnel in large numbers and nos. 25 and 26 are smaller fragments, possibly related to it. They write that these tablets or at least some of them might have been written for a specific event, possibly during the reign of Esarhaddon (Fales & Postgate 1992, xvii-xix).

I have already dealt with text 23 in chapter 6.1.3.3, as it only lists *šakintus* and weavers, so I start with the text 24, which is a rather well preserved long text. Its first part lists women from different countries, their maids and *replacements* (*šihlu*). The first part ends with a total of 94 women and 46 maids, “total of the father of the crown prince” (AD-šú ša A – MAN), which is a most curious title. The second part consists of listing four women by their names (see table 6). Third part begins by listing 61 female musicians, in seven groups. In five of these groups women do not bear any specific title, but are called women

from this or that country. One of the groups consists of *kurgarrutus* (performers of some kind, according to CAD K) and one of *nargallutus*. However, in the summary line all these women are called “musicians” (MÍ.NA[R.MEŠ]). After the musicians the text lists other professionals and four women from Dor. The end of the tablet is either destroyed or uninscribed.

Text 25 is too fragmentary to draw any conclusions; it merely lists 23 women and 15 daughters.

Text 26 is a small fragment with 8 legible lines, which nonetheless manages to list a variety of professions. Jas (PNA 2/II: 962) suspects that it is a ration list. The text lists female cupbearers, female bakers, female treasurers, female singers and three women by their names. In most lines there is a number before the name of the group or individual. The name of the commodity distributed has unfortunately been lost.

#### 6.5.2 Other named and unnamed professionals

Only seven occurrences of women working for the palace cannot be placed in any of the professional categories above. They are presented here in chronological order.

*Karkadinnutu*, a female confectioner (according to CAD K “a baker or cook producing special dishes”) of the queen (MÍ.SUM.NINDA-*tú ša* MÍ—É.GAL) is mentioned in the text CTN 3 87, which lists *illakāte* contributions paid or to be paid into the review palace in Kalhu. The text is possibly from the late 8<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> centuries (Dalley & Postgate 1984: 148).

In SAA 1 33 female weavers (*išpārtu*)<sup>70</sup> are mentioned. The text is a letter written by the crown prince Sennacherib to the king and it concerns the tribute brought by the emissaries of Commagene to Sargon II. The relevant passage (19-24 and r.1) reads: “They also brought red wool. The merchants told me that they have selected seven talents from it but that the Commageneans did not agree but said: “Who do you think you are? You are not to make the selection. Let them take it over and let the king’s weavers (MI.UŠ.BAR.MEŠ-*te*) make a selection over there.” Now the crown prince asks the king “to whom they are supposed to give it”. This letter implies that these weavers were an authority, at least in their own field, whose opinion counted more than that of the male traders.

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<sup>70</sup> For weavers see also chapters 9.1.2 and 6.1.3.3.

In Luckenbill 1924: 52, l. 32 Sennacherib loots Merodach-Baladan's palace in Babylon taking a *masennutu* (female treasurer) as loot along with the singers. *Masennutu* also appears in SAA 7 personnel lists, see chapter 6.5.1.

**Riša(t)-abiša** from Nineveh is a widow (MÍ.NU.KÚŠ.Ù) of Haza-il. Together with her brother-in-law Nabû-(u)šalli she sells the slave Mar-suri to Ilu-ušur in year 680 (SAA 6 257). She and her brother-in-law are described as servants of the lady of the house of the crown prince (PAB 2 LÚ-MEŠ-*e* ARAD-MEŠ-*ni ša* GAŠAN—É *ša* DUMU—MAN).

**Sāraia** from the reign of Esarhaddon writes to the palace scribe concerning seven servants of the governor of Bit-Naialu who are to be handed over to the house of Marduk-eriba (ABL 220). Although it is not certain, she is probably working for the palace as a female subordinate of the palace scribe.

In an astrological report (SAA 8 305, reign of Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal), Zakir mentions that women were given to **Damqâ** so that they would weave? (*mahāṣu*) under her supervision. She might have been a female overseer of women at the royal court of Nineveh.

**Mullissu-šēzibinni** is possibly a female official (MÍ.<sup>d</sup>NIN.LIL2--*še-zib-ni* MÍ.<x>) from Kalhu who lends silver to Abu-ul-ide in 615\*. Although her title is destroyed, she was probably part of the queen's household, as the text in question (CTN 3 38) was found in the *šakintu* group (Dalley & Postgate 1984 9-10, 92, see also 6.1.2 Šiti-ilat).

## 7. OTHER WOMEN OF THE PALACE

### 7.1 *Sekretu*

Very little is known about *sekretus* (MÍ.*sek-re-e-tu*/MÍ.ERIM.É.GAL/MÍ.UN.MEŠ—É.GAL) other than that they were part of the palace household. They appear in many different kinds of sources. Most appear in wine or ration lists, or part of the loot of the Assyrian kings in their annals. The question of their role in the palace is a complicated one. Therefore I will first introduce the available evidence and discuss her status and the meaning of the word *sekretu* after that, in chapter 7.1.6. The question of seclusion is dealt with in chapter 7.1.7.

#### 7.1.1 *Sekretus* in active roles

Only three occurrences of *sekretus* in active roles have remained. In addition to **Ahi-ṭalli**, who buys a girl in 687 (SAA 6 88, see chapter 6.1.2), in 681 a *sekretu* buys 27 people with their property (SAA 6 91). During the reign of Sennacherib (SAA 6 99) a *sekretu* purchases real estate. The buyer in both these texts could be Ahi-ṭalli, but since no name is mentioned the buyer could be some other *sekretu* as well.

#### 7.1.2 As part of the royal loot

Most often *sekretus* are mentioned as part of the loot that the Assyrian kings take. They are almost always mentioned after a long list of other loot that was gained in the attack. The texts give reason to assume that there were *sekretus* also in many royal palaces of the enemies of the Assyrians (or at least some palace women, who were identified as such by Assyrians).

Ashurnasirpal II (883-859) takes *sekretus* as loot when he defeats the city Sūru. He defeats the city twice, the first time at some point between his accession and his fifth regnal year and the second time sometime between his 6<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> regnal years. (RIMA 2 Asn2, text 1, col 1 l. 85 and col 3 l. 22.)

Shalmaneser III (858-824) took the palace women of the conquered city Til-turahi in his 6<sup>th</sup> regal year. In his 16<sup>th</sup> regal year he took the palace women of the city Paddira, and the land of Namri. (RIMA 3 A.0.102.6 col4, l. 19; RIMA 3 A.0.102.16 l. 30.)

Šamši-Adad V (823-811) carries palace women away as loot from cities Nibu and Dūr-Papsukkal (RIMA 3 A.0.103.1 col 4, l. 32; RIMA 3 A.0.103.2 col 4, l. 18'). In addition to the historical texts from the reign of Šamši-Adad V, a letter of god Aššur (SAA 3 41) tells him how the king destroyed the city of Dēr with the help of Aššur and looted the palace women.

Next remark on *sekretu*-looting is from the reign of Sennacherib (704-681). The king tells extensively of the looting of Merodach-Baladan's palace. Obviously, Sennacherib carried away everything that was not nailed to the floor, including the *sekretus*, *masennutu* and singers (Luckenbill 1924: 52, l. 32; Luckenbill 1924: 56, l. 9, dupl. C1 l. 8; Luckenbill 1924: 24, l. 31). Also in Luckenbill 1924 (p. 60, l. 58) women of the palace are taken, along with singers. In Luckenbill 1924 (p. 34, l. 46) Sennacherib takes *sekretus* from Jerusalem.

Esarhaddon takes the relatives, wives and *sekretus* (MÍ.ERIM) from Memphis, when he defeated the king of Egypt and Kush (Borger 1956: Mnm A R043; dupl. Frt K 7). This statement is repeated in another monument (Borger 1956: Mnm C 12). Also an omen text (SAA 10 351) informs us that King Esarhaddon (680-669) will conquer lands of Kush, Tyre or Mugallu and carry away his "concubines" (MÍ.ERIM).

Also Assurbanipal (Asb A iv line 64 and Asb C ix line 34) takes *sekretus* as loot. In Asb B vi 27 and Asb C vii 23 Assurbanipal takes *nuārtu*-singers as loot in addition to *sekretus*.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> The line numbering in the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts differs from the one used by either Streck 1916 or Borger 1996 making it impossible to locate the passages that I found in the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts in either of them. I was therefore only able to use the transliteration of the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts and the text identification numbers refer to the lines in the Corpus.

### 7.1.3 In wine lists

The information concerning the *sekretus* appearing in wine lists is best portrayed in a table.

Quantity	In liters <sup>72</sup>	Title	Text
2 <i>sūtu</i> 1 <i>qa</i>	8,8	<i>sekretus</i> of the Inner City (MÚRUB—URU)	NWL 3
8 <i>qa</i>	6,4	<i>sekretus</i> of the É.GAL <i>ma-šar-ti</i>	NWL 3
1 <i>šappu</i>	4	<i>sekretus</i> from the land of Arpadajate (KUR. <i>ar-pa-da-aj</i> [ <i>a-t</i> ]e)	NWL 4
9 <i>qa</i>	7,2	<i>sekretus</i> (MÍ.ERIM.É.GAL.MEŠ)	NWL 4
x <i>qa</i>		<i>sekretus</i> (MÍ.ERIM.É.GAL.MEŠ)	NWL 6
1 <i>sūtu</i>	8	<i>sekretus</i> (MÍ.ERIM.É.GAL.MEŠ)	NWL 8
2 <i>šappu</i>	8	<i>sekretus</i> (MÍ.ERIM.É.GAL.MEŠ)	NWL 18
X		<i>sekretus</i> (MÍ.ERIM.É.GAL.MEŠ)	NWL 19
X		<i>sekretus</i> (MÍ.ERIM.É.GAL.MEŠ)	NWL 21
30 <i>qa</i>	24	MÍ.ERIM.MEŠ <sup>73</sup>	TH 61

**TABLE 5: SEKRETUS AND WINE RATIOS**

According to Kinnier Wilson (1972: 46) the evidence of the Nimrud Wine lists (NWL) is confined to the reign of Adad-nirari III (810-793). In a later article, Fales (1994) arrived at the conclusion that the archive spans approximately two decades, 780s and 770s.

In addition to the Nimrud Wine Lists only one document lists *sekretus*, namely TH 61 from Guzana (modern Tell Halaf). The text is from the archive of the governor of Guzana (Mannu-kī-māt-Aššur in PNA 2/II) and can thus be dated to the reign of Adad-nirari III (Weidner 1940: 8-9).

From the table 5 we see that the quantities of wine given to *sekretu* in NWL are quite large, implying a large number of *sekretus* in the palace. The exact number of *sekretus* is impossible to calculate. Firstly, we do not know for certain whether the daily distribution or con-

<sup>72</sup> The amount in liters is calculated based on the article in RIA (Powell 1990: 502) where the writer suggests that 1 *qū* in Nimrud Wine Lists might be about 0,8 liter and one *sūtu* would thus be 8 liters (contra Kinnier Wilson 1972: 114-115, where he states that one *qū* was probably 1,842 liters). In addition to that, Nimrud Wine Lists use unit *šappu*, which was probably 5 *qū* (Kinnier Wilson 1972: 114-115). For sake of consistency I have assumed that also the *qa* of Tell Halaf is 0,8 liters, although Weidner (1940: 40) writes that 30 *qa* is ca. 29,1 litres.

<sup>73</sup> In the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts the two lines read 30 *qa* MÍ.ERIM.MEŠ ša <sup>m</sup>A-tar—x[x]. This reading seems unlikely as in no other text (at least from the Neo-Assyrian time) is an owner for the *sekretus* cited. I therefore keep with the original reading of TH 61; 30 *qa* MÍ.ERIM.MEŠ 40 *qa* <sup>m</sup>A-tar—x[x].

sumption of wine in a yearly event, is listed. Fales has convincingly argued against Kinnier Wilson's view that the lists represented daily consumption (Kinnier Wilson 1972: 44). According to Fales the tablets were written for the purpose of handing out wine for a feast, a ceremonial occasion, which probably occurred once a year. (Fales 1994: 361-380.) Assuming Fales is correct and bearing in mind that different groups of *sekretus* receive different amounts of wine the numbers still do suggest something. To my mind, if ca. 8-15 litres of wine was distributed, there were perhaps between five and twenty-five *sekretus* in the palaces of Kalhu in most years.

#### 7.1.4 In other texts

*Sekretus* are also mentioned three times in the inscriptions of queens Iabâ (Fadhil 1990a: 426, l. 6) and Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua. (Fadhil 1990b: 471, l. 2 and 474, l.4). The inscriptions are found in the tomb of the queens. In Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua's inscription she forbids anyone, "be it a palace woman (MÍ.ERIM.É.GAL) or the queen" to enter the grave. Iabâ's inscription is more specific; no one is to disturb her grave, be it "the queen who sits on the throne or a palace woman, beloved of the king".

According to CAD (S: 215), in the unpublished text B6 Ash 17 3<sup>74</sup> Nanâ, the exalted spouse of Muzebbasa'a<sup>75</sup> is "the revered *sekretu*, beloved of his majesty". In SAA 3 32 *sekretu* refers to the goddess Namtartu.

#### 7.1.5 *Rab isāti*

An official called *rab isāti* (LÚ.GAL—MÍ.MEŠ) is often mentioned in connection with the *sekretus*. The title is most accurately translated as the "master of women". In the light of the evidence, it is not possible to say if he was only or even mainly in charge of the *sekretus*, but it seems probable that he had some role in their lives. Most of the texts that mention him give no hints as to what his duties were. According to ABL 1364 (see below) he had subordinates, but otherwise his position in the court remains unresolved.

In SAAB 2 15<sup>76</sup> and in SAA 14 337 (date lost) an overseer of women acts as a witness in purchase documents. In SAA 17 114 (a letter to the King Sennacherib) LÚ.GAL—

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<sup>74</sup> Text identification number is from the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts.

<sup>75</sup> According to Parpola (personal communication) Muzebbasa'a is merely another name for Nabû.

MÍ.MEŠ is translated as “harem warden”. Otherwise the text is too broken to give any additional information. An overseer is also mentioned in ABL 1364<sup>77</sup> line 4’, where an unnamed official sends a letter to King Assurbanipal. He reminds the king that he was appointed under “harem warden” (*ina pān rab isāti iptaqdanni*) by the king’s father and that he has “done his duty”.

#### 7.1.6 *Sekretus*’ role in the palace

The question of *sekretus*’s (MÍ.*sek-re-e-tu*/MÍ.ERIM.É.GAL/MÍ.UN.MEŠ—É.GAL) role in the palace and the question of seclusion and “harem” all relate tightly to each other. According to CAD (S) *sekēru*, the verb behind the word *sekretu* means “to close, confine, hold in, block, restrain”. Although this suggests that the *sekretus* lived in confinement, it is not – in itself – sufficient evidence to prove it.

Although the Middle-Assyrian Palace Decrees (MAPD) are from an earlier period<sup>78</sup>, it is useful to compare *sekretus* to the “women of the palace” (MÍ ša É.GAL) of the MAPD. These women of the palace had quarters in the palace and access to them was restricted. From the edicts one gets the impression that these women were not expected to work and the palace provided them with clothing and servants. They are sometimes mentioned together with king’s wife<sup>79</sup>. (Roth 1997: 195-209.) All this would point to the direction that “the women of the palace” in the Edicts were secondary wives of the king.

On the other hand, it is not at all clear if the *sekretus* of the Neo-Assyrian Empire are the same thing as these “women of the palace” of MAPD. On the basis of Neo-Assyrian evidence there is little we can say about *sekretus*. They lived in the palaces of kings, were provided with wine (and presumably food) and possibly had a supervisor (*rab isāti*). In war they were routinely taken as part of the loot, along with the other personnel of the palace. They could participate in legal transactions such as purchases and were occasionally mentioned in connection with the queens. They were obviously present in many palaces, not only in the capital (see 7.1.3 for wine lists).

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<sup>76</sup> In the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts the title reads LÚ.GAL—MÍ-MEŠ, but in SAAB the title is given as LÚ.GAL.rak.MEŠ, “overseer of the *raksute*” (SAAB 2 15 rev. 7’).

<sup>77</sup> Translations are my own.

<sup>78</sup> The Edicts were assembled in the time of the Tiglath-Pileser I (1114-1076) (Roth 1997: 195). The first decrees in the collection are from the reign of Ashur-uballit I (1363-1328).

<sup>79</sup> See for example Roth 1997: 204.

The material I had at my disposal did not shed much light on how a woman became a *sekretu*. I found three occurrences of women being sent to the palace by high-ranking officials<sup>80</sup>, but it is not at all certain if these women were destined to become *sekretus*.

The advancement of Ahi-ṭallī to the position of *šakintu* (see Ahi-ṭallī in chapter 6.1.2) gives another angle to the position of the so-called “harem woman”. *Sekretu* was not a position for life - her status could change.

In the light of the evidence it seems possible that *sekretus* were in fact some kind of secondary wives of the king. Their exact status and possible other duties, however, remain a mystery. This makes defining their agency very difficult as well. They appear as explicit agents only three times (buying people or real estate), but if they were some kind of “secondary wives” of the king, they might have had quite a lot of influence in the court. There is, however, very little evidence concerning their status in the palace.

#### 7.1.7 *Sekretus* and the seclusion of women of the palace

Now to another important question: how tightly secluded were the *sekretus* – and other women residing in the palace for that matter? To what extent could they act outside the palace?

Often all women who are living in the palace (royal women, personnel of the palace and other women of the palace) are labelled together as “harem”. In chapter 4.2 the dangerously culturally loaded nature of the term was explained, here the question of seclusion of women, often associated with “harem” is discussed.

First of all, it is clear that not all the women who are associated with the palace<sup>81</sup> actually lived there. We may be fairly certain that at least part of palace personnel and officials, in addition to the queen and royal children, lived there. It also seems probable that the *sekretu* also lived in the palace.

According to Westenholz there is not sufficient evidence of seclusion of women from the time of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. She writes that even the palace edicts (MAPD) mentioned in the previous chapter show that the ladies at court “enjoyed a considerable measure of freedom”. (Westenholz 1990: 515-516.) Westenholz’s view, which differs from the

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<sup>80</sup> Re’indu in SAA 18 20, Urkittu-rēmīnī in SAA 13 65 and Šuhru in SAA 10 194.

<sup>81</sup> With palace I do not mean only the royal residence of the capital, but all the royal residences.

opinion of most scholars studying ancient Mesopotamia, shows that the evidence is far from unequivocal.

It is commonly assumed that women of the palace had separate quarters. There is some archaeological evidence supporting the theory of seclusion<sup>82</sup>, but such evidence is in no way conclusive. In addition to that, even the existence of separate women's quarters does not necessarily mean that the women could not leave the palace at all. Certainly the movements of the high-ranking ladies must have been controlled to some degree, but there is no way to know how tightly.

In any case, because there were clearly several very different groups of women with very different duties towards the palace, it seems reasonable to assume that there was also variation on the degree of their "control". It is for example possible that the royal women were more tightly guarded than their servants. Many women of the court, including the queen, owned substantial amounts of land and were involved in complicated financial transactions. This must have meant at least some amount of interaction with the outside world. Another question is the *šakintus* and female administrative personnel, not to mention those married women who lived in the palace. Their need to deal directly with merchants, village managers and such people must have been even greater. The existence of female staff, for example female scribes, implies that at least some women were secluded. In any case, it seems certain that not all the women living in the palace were secluded to the same degree.

A complicated and – at the moment unanswerable – question is the cultural significance of seclusion. For example in India, although seclusion limits women's mobility, women perceive this seclusion as a positive value and source of power, as it is a vital element of the caste's superior position (Ganesh 1989).

## **7.2 Court ladies and wives**

In this chapter I will introduce the remaining women of the palace of whose status in the palace something is known. The first two are some kind of high-ranking court ladies and the two introduced after them are married women with connection to the palace. One of the court ladies, as well as one of the wives is an explicit agent.

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<sup>82</sup> See Dalley & Postgate 1984: 11.

Šamaš-metu-uballiṭ asks in a letter addressed to King Esarhaddon for a physician because **Bābu-gāmilat**, who is described by Streck (PNA 1/II: 247) as a slave girl of the king (GÉME *ša* LUGAL), is ill (SAA 16 26). Here I think Streck might be translating the term *amtu* a bit too freely. Surely this servant of king had high status. If she were a regular slave girl, she would not have been called the servant of the king, but rather a servant of some court official. Also the request for a physician from the king speaks of her high status. It is probable that the title had a more technical meaning that just “slave of the king” also in Neo-Assyrian times since at least in the Neo-Babylonian legal records the profession of *amat šarrūtu* and *arad šarrūtu* is known (Finkelstein 1953:126). In addition to that, in Neo-Assyrian times many high-ranking men are referred to as *urdu ša šarri*, in order to emphasize their loyalty to the king. Obviously, *amtu ša šarri* should be understood similarly. (Parpola 2004, personal communication.)

A similar case is present in a letter dated to year 670 from the chief exorcist Adad-šumu-ušur to the king. He reports that he has been contacted by a “maid of the king” concerning an order by Urdu-Gula (SAA 10 194). Like Bābu-gāmilat, this servant probably was a high-ranking lady.

Also the wives of the high palace officials sometimes have an active role in the affairs of the palace. In SAA 16 95 governor’s wife has an important role when the city mourns the death of King Sennacherib in 680. The relevant passage (lines 1-7) is translated as follows<sup>83</sup>: “The king received the [wife] of the governor ([MÍ]-šú *ša* LÚ.GAR.KUR) and brought her into the Palace. On the day we heard that the king was dead and the people of the Inner City were weeping, the governor brought his wife out of the palace. She burnt a female goat-kid, (while) he installed a eunuch of his as the mayor.” The writer of the letter is from Assur.

In ND 2605, an administrative text from the northwest palace of Kalhu, from reign of Sargon II, another remarkable wife emerges, namely MÍ.GAŠAN—É *ša* LÚ.*tar-tan* (rev.4). Parker suggests that although the sign resembles GAŠAN, the context suggests GÉME. I fail to see why she makes such a suggestion, when she nonetheless translates the relevant passage: “Išdi-aššur, the *rab alani* officer of **the wife** of the *turtan*-official.” Obviously GAŠAN makes more sense than GÉME (in the sense of “lady of the house” of *turtānu*) In

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<sup>83</sup> Translation by the writers of SAA 16 (Luukko & Van Buylaere 2002).

any case, this lady evidently owns estates in her own right, since she has a *rab alāni* officer. (Parker 1961: 36-37.)

### 7.3 Active women with unknown status

Although none of these women are explicitly stated as being involved with the royal palace, the archaeological find context makes this clear. The legal corpus that is dealt with in SAA 6 and 14 derives from the palace area of Nineveh. Although the exact position of these women cannot be stated, it seems obvious that they lived and/or worked in the palace. If women outside SAA 6 and 14 are included in this group, I will state the reasons for that. It is possible that many of the women mentioned in chapter nine were also connected with palaces, but the material leaves us unsure of this.

Since the text is usually found in the archive of the buyer, I will first introduce them, then sellers (both in chronological order). After them follows two “lenders” and an “owner”. All but the “owner” are explicit agents. The owner is an implicit agent, because she is not documented as acting in the document, but her ownership indicates that she could act.

**Lā-teggi-ana-...** buys the female slave Abi-ha’ili from Se’-zabadi for nine shekels of silver in 682 (SAA 6 98).

**Urkittu-tašmanni** buys a girl for 9 shekels of silver in 667-xi-2 (SAA 14 10).

Probably during the reign of Assurbanipal or later, **Bēssi-ṭalli** from the Review Palace of Kalhu buys a slave from Akburu for one mina five shekels of silver (CTN 3 50). Dalley & Postgate (1984: 108) believe that she was resident in the palace.

**Mullissu-šarru-ušri** was a woman from Kalhu during the reign of Assurbanipal, who has some connection to the palace (M[Í.xxx É].GAL). She buys a female slave from Abu-ul-idi in 638\* (ND 2314).

**Eri...** buys a woman during either the reign of Aššur-etel-ilani (630?-623?) or Sin-šarru-iškun (622?-612) (SAA 14 174).

**Nihti-Eša-rau**, an Egyptian woman buys Mullissu-ḥašina(t), the daughter of Nabû-rehtu-ušur, as a wife for her son Šihâ in 623\* (SAA 14 161.)

**Amat-Sūla** was the wife of Bel-duri, shield bearing “third man”. Together with Šarru-lu-dari and Attar-suri, she sells a house in Nineveh, to Šilli-Aššur, the Egyptian scribe in 692. (SAA 6 142.)

**Daliyâ** sells a girl to the administrator (*šakintu*) Ahi-ṭalli in 687 (SAA 6 88; see chapter 6.1.2).

**Indibî** from the royal court of Nineveh lends seventeen minas (a very large sum) of silver to Arbaiu, receiving a vineyard and several people as pledges in 693 (SAA 6 97.)

**Sinqi-Issar** from the royal court of Nineveh gets the maid of an unnamed *šakintu*, Belet-isše’a, instead of silver in 654-ii-14 (SAA 14 11). Reasons for this are unclear. Probably the administrator or the servant herself owed Sinqi-Issar silver.

During the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, Muaddî buys real estate from the city of Alli adjoining a field owned by **Aššūr-[...]** from Barruqu in 729 (SAA 6 22).

#### **7.4 Women in lists**

Finally, I turn to those women of the palace of whom we have the least information, mainly those in the lists. In table six I have divided them into three categories. Eleven women are mentioned in lists or documents where only the fact that they are somehow connected to the palace can be deduced. Two more women’s names only appear because they are given a linen garment. It is unclear, whether these women did any work for palace. Ten women are identifiable as palace personnel on the basis of the wine lists, where they are listed as palace personnel. The fact that they were given wine indicates that these were probably not servants, because wine was distinctly a luxury item, reserved for the wealthy and the powerful. Actually, they might be high ranking women. Some of the remaining 13 women could be workers. Obviously, none of the women presented in table 6 are explicit agents. Once again, the nature of the material does not permit further speculation on the agency of these women.

In lists		Gift receivers		In wine lists	
Šīti-tabni	SAA 7 24	Arbītu	ND 2687	Abi-rāmu	CTN 3 144
Aia-ahâ	ADD 993	Bazâ	ND 2687	Kisītu-abni	CTN 3 144
Amat-emūni	SAA 7 24			Esutu	CTN 3 144
Ekallītu	ABL 1291			Hassunu	CTN 3 144
Damqāia	ABL 368			Saggilia	CTN 3 144
Nikkal-šarrat	SAA 7 26			Qannuntu	NWL 4
Humatāti	SAA 7 26			Ahātû	NWL 4
Nikkal-hammat	SAA 7 26			Harrānāiu	NWL 8, NWL 13, NWL 18, NWL 21
Attār-dallāti	ND 2443+			Hannî	NWL 18
Nagībâ	ND 2443+			Šilānu	NWL 18
Hazūgâ	ND 2443+				

**TABLE 6 WOMEN OF THE PALACE – APPEARING IN LISTS**

## 8. WOMEN ASSOCIATED WITH TEMPLES

### 8.1 Prophetesses

The Neo-Assyrian word for “prophet” is *raggimu/raggintu*, which literally means “shouter/proclaimer”. The term *raggimu/raggintu* does not appear outside Neo-Assyrian texts. Instead, the term *mahhû/mahhûtu* (“ecstatic prophet”) is attested in many texts, but in purely Neo-Assyrian sources only twice. It therefore appears that *raggimu* was a specifically Neo-Assyrian word for prophet and that it replaced the older term *mahhû*. However, *mahhû* remained as a synonym in literary texts. This is why Parpola suggests that the title MÍ.GUB.BA in SAA 9 10, which is read as *mahhûtu* in literary texts, should be read as *raggintu* in SAA 9 10 (see Dunnaša-āmur below). It is unclear whether this change in title reflected a change in the social role (between the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods) of the prophets. (Parpola 1997: xlv-xlvi.)

The cult of Ištar and Assyrian prophecy had close connection. The Assyrian oracles are called words of Ištar or Mullissu and many prophets bear names associated with the Goddess or her cult<sup>84</sup>. The prophets were probably permanent members of temple communities in major cult centers of the Goddess such as Arbail, Kalhu and Aššur. (Parpola 1997: xlvi-xlvii.) Prophet’s main role, to act as an intermediate between men and gods, is paralleled in the role of the Goddess (Ištar/Mullissu) as an intermediate between the king and the gods (Nissinen 2000: 96-97). Although the most important source of prophecy is Ištar of Arbail, the prophets also proclaim the words of other deities. It seems that although the temple of Ištar of Arbail was the nerve center of prophecy, the prophets represented their patroness even in temples of other deities, proclaiming the words of the god that was most appropriate there<sup>85</sup>. (Nissinen 2000: 98-100.)

The prophets found their nearest colleagues among the other “odd” devotees of Ištar, for example *kalû*, “chanter”, *kurgarru* “man-woman” and *assinnu* “man-woman”. Prophets are

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<sup>84</sup> These names are probably not the names they were born with but given at the time when the person became a prophet (Nissinen 2000: 96).

<sup>85</sup> In Harran, the Harranean deities Nikkal and Nusku, in Babylonia Bel etc (Nissinen 2000: 99).

often associated with them in lexical lists, as well as in cultic and administrative texts<sup>86</sup>. Also, the appearance and behavior of both prophets and the above mentioned devotees of Ištar differed from the social norm. Furthermore, the rather uncertain gender of some Assyrian prophets (see for example Bayâ below) links them to this group. (Nissinen 2000: 93-95.)

The fact that Neo-Assyrian prophecies have only been preserved from the reigns of Esarhaddon (680-669, SAA 9 1-6) and Assurbanipal (668-631, SAA 9 7-11) raises the question of the earlier prophets. Although the prophets existed throughout the Middle Assyrian<sup>87</sup> and Neo-Assyrian periods, it seems that kings valued their messages differently. Obviously, Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal valued them more than most. Another explanation is that only the most recent prophecies were kept in the archives. In other words, the small quantity of prophecy does not necessarily indicate low significance of prophecy. (Nissinen 2000: 105-106.)

Nissinen divides divination into subcategories on the basis of different techniques of divination. Noninductive methods do not require specialized studies – for example the prophets and dream interpreters relied on their inspiration alone. Inductive methods of divination were only practiced by expert scholars. (Nissinen 2000: 107-108.)

The Assyrian prophets differ from the scholars in gender, social standing and politics. First of all, most prophets are women. According to Nissinen, this is explained by the fact that the prophets impersonated the goddess<sup>88</sup>. Prophets do not write letters to the king – their words are transmitted by a third party<sup>89</sup>. They are in no way part of the political elite and, unlike scholars they do not seem to be in position of making practical suggestions though their oracles often concern political decision-making. The distinctive features of the prophets are their devotion to Ištar and the socioreligious role distinct from that of an average Neo-Assyrian citizen. (Nissinen 2000: 108-110.)

Texts 1-4 in SAA 9 are collections of oracles, probably arranged chronologically and also thematically. Texts 5-11 are reports on oracles. (Parpola 1997: lxviii-lxxi.) The differences

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<sup>86</sup> For example see MSL 12:102-103, 209-217 and ARM 23 446: 18-20.

<sup>87</sup> See for example VS 19 1.

<sup>88</sup> As Ištar can take the role of both sexes, also men could be her prophets (Nissinen 2000:110).

<sup>89</sup> It seems that the words of the female prophets were commonly transmitted by female intermediaries, such as Naqia the queen mother. Although it was not always the case, female-through-female communication clearly existed. (Nissinen 2000: 102-104.)

in text types seem to explain some of the differences in the use of titles. Although prophetesses known by their names are 11 in number, only three of them bear the title of *raggintu*. These three occurrences occur in SAA 9 7, SAA 9 10 and in SAA 13 37 (a letter). In the collections of oracles (1-4) the prophetesses are always called woman/daughter of a certain place. An interesting title for a prophetess is *šēlūtu*, “votaress”, which occurs in SAA 9 1.7 and SAA 13 148.

Interestingly, the prophetesses as a group were the only female cult personnel recorded with their names. Other female cultic personnel were mainly referred to by their titles. One possible reason for this is that the name of the prophet(ess) validated the prophecy. Also, some of the prophetesses might have been considered more reliable than the others, which might have made prophet’s name important information.

The prophetesses are the largest group of women among the women affiliated with temples. Altogether there are 17 of them and 15 of them are explicit agents<sup>90</sup>. This is easily explained by the nature of the material: the prophetesses are mostly mentioned in connection to the divine messages they give. Their autonomy in other areas, for example their private lives or in the temple hierarchy, is another matter entirely. This question is also likely to remain unresolved, as we have very little data concerning those aspects of prophets’ and prophetesses’ lives, although SAA 10 109 seems to imply that they were not held in very high regard. In respect to their agency there seems to be no difference between the prophetesses known to us by their names and the unnamed prophesizing women.

I will first deal with the prophetesses known by name in chronological order (see below 8.1.1). The one undated prophetess will be introduced after them. In 8.1.2 I deal with the unnamed prophesizing women (six occurrences in all), also in chronological order.

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<sup>90</sup> See chapter 10.1 on the criteria and method of counting.

### 8.1.1 Prophetesses known to us by their names

Date <sup>91</sup>	Prophetess	Title	Text no
early in 680	Ahāt-abīša	DUMU.MÍ URU. <i>arba-ìl</i>	SAA 9 1.8
early in 680	Issār-bēlī-da”ini	PN <i>šēlūtu ša</i> LUGAL	SAA 9 1.7
early in 680	Urkittu-šarrat	PN URU. <i>kal-hi-tú</i>	SAA 9 2.4
681 ca. xi-xii early in 680	Sinqīša-āmur (Dunnaša-āmur?)	DUMU.MÍ URU. <i>arba-ìl</i>	SAA 9 1.2, SAA 9 2.5
681 ca. xi-xii early in 680	Bāia/Bayâ	DUMU URU. <i>arba-ìl</i> / PN URU. <i>arba-ìl-&lt;a-a&gt;</i>	SAA 9 1.4, SAA 9 2.2
681 ca. xi-xii	Ilūssa-āmur	PN URU.ŠÀ - URU- <i>a-[a]</i>	SAA 9 1.5
681 ca. xi-xii	Rēmūt-Allati	PN <i>ša</i> URU. <i>Dara-ahuya</i> <i>ša birti</i> KUR.MEŠ- <i>ni</i>	SAA 9 1.3
Iyyar, 672	Mullissu-kabtat	<i>Raggintu</i>	SAA 9 7
Nisan 18, 650	Dunnaša-āmur (Sinqīša-āmur?)	DUMU.MÍ URU. <i>arba-ìl</i> / MÍ.GUB-BA	SAA 9 9, SAA 9 10
Ca. 670-640	Mullissu-abu-ūsrī	<i>Raggintu</i>	SAA 13 37
Ca. 670-640	Hammāia	none	SAA 13 43

**TABLE 7: PROPHETESSES IN THE NEO-ASSYRIAN EMPIRE KNOWN BY THEIR NAMES**

**Ahāt-abīša** from Arbail prophesies technically during the reign of Sennacherib, because the civil war between Esarhaddon and his brothers was not over yet (Nissinen 1998a: 22). Her prophesy is addressed to the queen mother Naqī’a (SAA 9 1.8). Her oracle is very short, and refers to Naqia’s prayer to Ištar on behalf of her son in exile.

During the civil war, **Issār-bēlī-da”ini**<sup>92</sup>, a *šēlūtu* (see chapter 8.2) given to the temple by the king, delivers an oracle most likely addressed to the queen mother Naqī’a, concerning Esarhaddon (SAA 9 1.7).

**Urkittu-šarrat** from Kalhu prophesies to Esarhaddon concerning the stabilization of his rule (SAA 9 2.4). Although she comes from [the Ištar temple of] Kalhu, she proclaims the words of the “Ištar of Arbail and Queen Mullissu”.

<sup>91</sup> According to Parpola texts 1-6 in SAA 9 are oracles addressed to Esarhaddon and 7-11 to Assurbanipal (Parpola 1997: lxviii-lxxi).

<sup>92</sup> She was probably from Arbail (Parpola 1997: 1).

**Sinqīša-āmur**, from Arbail proclaims an oracle of Ištar of Arbail, promising to deliver up the enemy of the king of Assyria and keep him safe in his Palace of Succession (SAA 9 1.2). The mention of the Palace of Succession indicates that it was delivered while Esarhaddon was still crown prince, although he is addressed as “king of Assyria”. She is probably also the author of SAA 9 2.5, though her name there is not preserved. SAA 9 2.5 is an oracle assuring the king that the goddess is on her side. It is possible that Sinqīša-āmur is identical with **Dunnaša-amur**, but it seems unlikely, as this would mean that she was an active prophet for 31 years (Parpola 1997: lii).

Prophetess **Bayâ** from Arbail, along with **Ilūssa-āmur** (see below) and Issār-lā-tašīyat<sup>93</sup>, have a rather uncertain gender. The ambiguity of gender (DUMU URU.*arba-il* instead of DUMU.MÍ) suggests that Bayâ belonged to the devotees of Ištar who were “turned from men into women” (Parpola 1997 il). She/he proclaims the oracle of Bel, Ištar of Arbail and Nabû to Esarhaddon in 681 (SAA 9 1.4). Also, in Esarhaddon’s first regnal year, it is probably Bayâ who proclaims a divine word to the king concerning the stabilization of his rule (SAA 9 2.2). The gender of prophetess Ilūssa-āmur from Assur is also not firmly determined. Although her name is spelled with MÍ, the gentilic adjective in SAA 9 1.5 is masculine. She proclaims an oracle of Mullissu to Esarhaddon in 681 (SAA 9 1.5). She is probably also known from a fragment KAV 121, where she receives provisions along with other women of the temple (Parpola 1997: l).

**Rēmūt-Allati** was from Dara-ahu’a, an otherwise unknown town “in the middle of the mountains” She proclaims that she rejoices with Esarhaddon, her king, and that (Ištar of) Arbail rejoices (SAA 9 1.3).

**Mullissu-kabtat**, probably from Nineveh (Parpola 1997: li) addresses an oracle of Mullissu to Assurbanipal (then crown prince), promising to look after him until he becomes king (SAA 9 7).

**Dunnaša-āmur** from Arbail proclaims an oracle of Ištar of Arbail and Mullissu to Assurbanipal in 650 (SAA 9 9). She is also the proclaimer of another fragmentarily preserved

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<sup>93</sup> The masculine and divine determinatives are written over the originally written MÍ in the beginning of the name (SAA 9 1.1). It is not clear if this is merely a simple correction, or if it indicates uncertainty about the gender of the prophet (Nissinen 2000: 94). I have followed Parpola (1997: l) and considered Issār-lā-tašīyat a male prophet.

prophecy text (SAA 9 10). The reading of the logographic element in her name is uncertain. It is possible that the name could be read as **Sinqiša-āmur** (see above).

According to a letter of Adad-ahu-iddina to the king, **Mullissu-abu-ušrī**, a prophetess probably from Nineveh took the king's (Esarhaddon) clothes to Babylonia and made a prophecy in the temple concerning the throne. Unfortunately the main part of her utterance is lost. (SAA 13 37.)

An uncertain prophetess is **Hammāia** from Assur. The sender of a letter tells the recipient that, on the day when the recipient performed the previous sacrifices in front of Ešarra, he (the sender) sent Hammāia and an outrider with a message for the recipient's well-being. The contents of the letter are obscure but CAD K 77a interprets it as oracular and assumes that Hammaia is a prophetess. The text is however by no means clear on this. (SAA 13 43.)

### 8.1.2 Unnamed prophetesses

In year 809 (Nissinen 2000: 90) in a decree of expenditures for ceremonies in the Aššur temple (SAA 12 69), the brewers take 1 homer and 5 litres of barley for the presence of the prophetesses (*mahhāte*).

A slave-girl of Bel-ahu-ušur from Harran spoke words of Nusku, wife of Sin, who resided in Harran (ABL 1217). According to this prophecy, Sennacherib will be destroyed and Sašī (probably an agent of Sennacherib) will be king. This prophecy was apparently part of Harranian conspiracy. (Nissinen 2001: 204.)

In SAA 10 109, a letter to the king Esarhaddon by Bel-ušezib, prophetesses are mentioned in passing. It seems that the writer is quite hurt that the prophets and prophetesses are summoned before he – a skilled and loyal astrologer – is. This implies that the prophets were not often honored by royal summons. (Nissinen 2000: 102-103.)

In SAA 13 144 (reign of Esarhaddon) an unnamed woman prophesies to the king. The name and title of the woman and the deity are unfortunately lost.

In SAA 10 352 (year 671) it is reported that an unnamed prophetess (*raggintu*) prophesied to the substitute king Damqī before his death that he will be king.

In addition to Issār-bēlī-daʾini mentioned above, an unnamed votaress (*šēlūtu*) of Ištar of Arbail appears in SAA 13 148. Only the beginning of the text has survived, but it seems

that the text is a fragment of a report of a prophecy to the king. The report is not dated, but is probably from the reign of Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal.

## 8.2 Šēlūtu - Votaresses

Šēlūtu, a woman dedicated to a temple, is mentioned in the Neo-Assyrian evidence in mainly two kinds of contexts. Either she is getting married or she is mentioned as property. Other than these contexts, there are two references to prophesying *šēlūtus*. In addition to Issār-bēlī-da”ini (SAA 9 1.7), an unnamed votaress of Ištār of Arbail prophesies to the king in SAA 13 148 (see chapter 8.1).

The *šēlūtus* mentioned in connection with marriages definitely form a distinct group, different from those *šēlūtus* who are regarded as property. In all, I found four occurrences of the *šēlūtus* of the first group.

**Mullissu-hammāt** daughter of Pabba’u, a horse keeper(?) of Ištār of Arbail, is given in marriage, along with a dowry, to Awa son of Tapnahte by her father in 675. At the end of the marriage contract it is stated that she is a votaress of Ištār of Arbail (StAT 2 164<sup>94</sup>). **Šulmu-...-lūmur**, votaress of Ištār of Arbail is married off by her brother in StAT 2 184<sup>95</sup>. Expressions in the document like “She will grow up” and “She should remain in the Inner City” indicate that the bride might still be a child. The amount of dowry indicates high rank. In 641\* **Milki-haiāia**, votaress of the goddess Mullissu, royal servant of the New Palace at Kalhu, marries Tuqun-Issar (ND 2316). **Al-hapi-mepi**, woman in Nineveh (7<sup>th</sup> century, probably after reign of Assurbanipal) is given as a wife to Puṭueši by Puṭumeheši in a document from the archive of Inurta-šarru-ušur. If a divorce should occur, she will pay him ten shekels of silver and will be free to leave. As long as Puṭueši lives she and her sons will be votaries of Ištār of Arbail. (TIM 11 14.)

It is interesting that at least three out of these four women seem to be high-ranking ladies. Although all the votaresses found from the Neo-Assyrian evidence are devotees of Ištār or Mullissu, three out of four of the women in this group are specified as votaresses of Ištār of

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<sup>94</sup> Archive N 31, (the Egyptians). See Pedersen 1986 on the archive.

<sup>95</sup> Half of the texts in this archive (N 31, Egyptians) can be dated to period 647-610 (Donbaz & Parpola 2001: xv) suggesting that this marriage contract might be from that time-period as well.

Arbail (the fourth is a devotee of Mullissu<sup>96</sup>). It seems possible that high-ranking daughters were sometimes raised/deposited in the temple of Ištar until the time came for them to marry, although sometimes even married *šēlūtus* stayed in the temple (see **Al-hapi-mepi** above).

A different group is formed by those *šēlūtus* (four occurrences in all) referred to only as the property of temple. A census tablet from Harran census<sup>97</sup> (SAA 11 219) mentions a *šēlūtu*. The votaress is mentioned as belonging – along with 13 gardeners, 2 women and a few children and 33, 7 groves of fruit trees – to Ištar of the city Huzirina. **Bānāt-Emašmaš**, daughter of Nurtî from Kalhu is bought as a devotee in 7<sup>th</sup> century by Ahat-abû, stewardess of a *šakintu* (see chapter 6.2) for the goddess Mullissu (ND 2309). **Kakkū’a** is probably a *šēlūtu*-votaress from Kalhu, who is redeemed by Abi-uri in 626\* (CTN 3 52). A similar case appears in ND 2308, where a woman who is probably a *šēlūtu*-votaress is released (Dalley & Postgate 1984: 111). In SAA 13 126<sup>98</sup> Iddin-Ea informs the king about Urdu Nabû’s outrageous behavior – he has taken “a field, house and people, sons of votaries” (DUMU.MEŠ *še-lu-a-te* in r.6’).

It seems that there were at least two kinds of votaresses in the temples. One group consisted of the daughters or wives of high-ranking men, the other group, both women and their sons, were simply property of the temple. Therefore it seems that these votaresses were far from a homogenous group and that also their agency was far from homogenous. In any case, the only explicit agents of this group are the two prophesying votaresses. Evidence is nonetheless scarce, so no firm conclusions concerning their agency as a group can be made.

### 8.3 MÍ.MAŠ

No reading for MÍ.MAŠ is known (Postgate 1973: 45) and her function is unclear as well. I have grouped her with the women associated with temples, as in two occurrences out of three she is connected with the temple in Kurbail.

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<sup>96</sup> However, in Neo-Assyrian texts, Ištar cannot be separated from Mullissu as a divine being. (Nissinen 2000: 95)

<sup>97</sup> Undated, possibly reign of Sargon II (Fales and Postgate 1995: xxxii-xxxiii).

<sup>98</sup> Probably ca. 670-640 (Cole and Machinist 1998: xi)

The title MÍ.MAŠ is known from two texts. In CTN 2 17 seven male and seven female MÍ.MAŠ are to be given to Adad of Kurbail by anyone wishing to negate the contract. In CTN 2 15 the clause is otherwise identical, but the spouse of Adad of Kurbail, Šala, is the deity to whom the MÍ.MAŠ should be given. Furthermore, in CTN 2 15, Mār-Ištar, chief of the MÍ.MAŠ of the house of *turtānu* (GAL MÍ.MAŠ.MEŠ ša É *tur-ta-ni*) is mentioned in the witness list.

Since there obviously existed MÍ.MAŠ also outside the temple, in the household of the *turtānu*, it seems that the MÍ.MAŠ should not be translated as votaress (see Postgate 1973: 45, 49), but rather as a profession or a social class of some sort. Menzel (1981:32) suggests that MÍ.MAŠ could be shorthand for UŠ.BAR (a weaver) or possibly MAŠ.EN.GAG (*muškēnu*). In any case, it is interesting that this title only appears in connection with the city of Kurbail. All MÍ.MAŠ are implicit agents. As I have failed to find any mention on them from any other time-period either, there is unfortunately nothing further that we can say about their agency.

#### 8.4 Priestesses

In the Neo-Assyrian period, only three kinds of priestesses are mentioned, namely *kezertu*, *qadištu* (*qadissu* in Neo-Assyrian times) and *ēntu*. Both *kezertu* and *qadištu* have been connected with “cultic prostitution” and also with common prostitution (Leick 1994: 162-163). However, Westenholz argues that *qadištu* was definitely not a “cultic prostitute” (Westenholz 1989: 245-265). The evidence of *kezertu*’s prostitution seems rather meager as well, at least in Neo-Assyrian times. The only thing that can be said with certainty concerning all these women is that they were involved in temple rituals. This is why these women are grouped under the common title of “priestesses” in this thesis.

According to Westenholz *kezertu* had a special relationship to a female deity and her sexuality was unregulated. On the other hand, *qadištu* (and certainly *ēntu*, although Westenholz does not mention her) worshipped a male god and their sexuality was controlled either by marriage or celibacy. (Westenholz 1989: 251.)

One of the reasons for assuming that *kezertu* and *qadištu* are sacred prostitutes is their connection to *harimtu*. *Harimtu*, *qadištu* and *kezertu* are often mentioned together in the texts. According to Assante, however, it is possible that they are mentioned in connection with

*harimtu* because of their single status<sup>99</sup>. According to Assante, at least *qadištu* might have been a single woman, as she was often unwed and lived away from her father. (Assante 1999: 39-44.)

It is difficult to say anything definitive concerning the agency of the “priestesses”-group, since there is so little evidence. That is why one must largely rely on sources that come from other time-periods, when constructing an image of the agency of these women. At least *ēntu* probably had considerable autonomy, as she was a high-ranking priestess. *Qadištu*’s agency on the other hand is a less clear matter. It seems that she had some cultic functions, but also had something to do with nursing children. Of her possibilities to act in the society, we know practically nothing. Even less is known about *kezertu*.

I will first shortly introduce the discussion concerning the existence of sacred prostitution in ancient Mesopotamia and then present the Neo-Assyrian evidence concerning *kezertu*, *qadištu* and *ēntu*.

#### 8.4.1 Sacred prostitutes?

The very existence of “sacred prostitution” has been strongly criticized in the last twenty years. Westenholz states that the idea of “sacred prostitution” in Mesopotamia is widespread among scholars, although the term “sacred prostitution” has not been properly defined. She bases her definition on Oxford English Dictionary and defines “sacred prostitution” as “the act of offering the body to indiscriminate lewdness for hire in the sacred sphere, ritual or place.” She then continues that there is absolutely no proof of such activity in ancient Mesopotamia. The sacred marriage ritual certainly does not qualify as such. The myth of sacred prostitution in Mesopotamia seems to rise from the Herodotus’s statements and the biblical reference to Babylon as mother of harlots, neither of which are historically reliable<sup>100</sup>. (Westenholz 1989: 260-265.)

Also Julia Assante has criticised the idea of “sacred prostitution” in Mesopotamia. According to her, nineteenth century scholars who saw the ancient Orient as a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe created the myth of sacred prostitution. The biblical and classical stories of sexy, tyrannical women – which most scholars accepted as historical truth – helped this process along. (Assante 2003:19-24)

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<sup>99</sup> According to Assante, *harimtu* denotes the status of a single woman (Assante 1999). See chapter 9.1.1.

Also Beard and Henderson (1997) discount the historical reality of the mythic “temple prostitution” in antiquity. The most important source that supports the existence of temple prostitution is Herodotus. Without him, the picture of “sacred prostitution” in ancient Near East is very tentative, especially since the information on Mesopotamian temples does not allow us to know exactly how labels of cultic personnel correlated with functions in the temple. Beard and Henderson argue that to Herodotus, as well as to the other Greeks, Babylonians represented culturally “other” people. Thus, the narration of Herodotus in Histories 1.196 and 1.199 have more to do with Herodotus’ desire to illuminate the moral decline of Babylon than any historical facts. (Beard & Henderson 1997: 488-490.)

In light of the discussions presented above as well as in the light of Neo-Assyrian evidence presented below, the existence of sacred prostitution in Mesopotamia does seem very questionable. Still, the issue is complex, and a thorough examination of it is not the main goal of this thesis. Suffice to say that I found no Neo-Assyrian evidence to support the claim that sacred prostitution existed during this time.

#### 8.4.2 *Qadištu* - sacred woman

The evidence from the Old Babylonian period suggests that *qadištu* was a sacred woman who could marry and have children and also nurse the children of others. She was probably also involved in childbirth. She sometimes appears as a votary of Adad in Kish and Sippar and Annunītu in Mari. She might have had some ritual functions. Later Babylonian texts contain fewer references to *qadištu*, which do not considerably alter the impression we receive from Old Babylonian sources. (Westenholz 1989: 252-253.)

In Assyria, the *qadištu* appears from Old Assyrian period onwards. She could marry, and, as a wife, could be veiled in public. She is also mentioned beside the midwife. In the Middle Assyrian sources she is connected with Adad of Assur. (Westenholz 1989: 254-255.) In Neo-Assyrian sources, she is mentioned twice, in both occurrences in ritual functions. In SAA 10 246, (“Rituals for the Royal family”) *qadissu* is supposed to perform “a certain rite” (*memēni epēšu*) for the royal family<sup>101</sup>. The other text is an Assyrian ritual, where *qadištu* uses salt to undo a lightheartedly sworn oath (Ebeling 1953: 43).

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<sup>100</sup> As a matter of fact, the Babylon in Rev 17:4-5 alludes to Rome (Westenholz 1989: 264).

<sup>101</sup> Reign of either Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal.

In conclusion, *qadištu* seems to have held two main roles in Mesopotamia. On the one hand she was involved in the tasks of procreation and nurture, on the other, cultic functions.

#### 8.4.3 *Kezertu* – “woman with curled hair”

CAD (volume K) translates *kezertu* as a prostitute. The literal meaning of the word is a “woman with curled hair”. Westenholz writes that in the Old Babylonian period, *harimtu* and *šamhatu* practiced secular prostitution, whereas *kezertu* was linked to the cult of various goddesses (Westenholz 1989: 251). However, *kezertu*’s service obligation may have included some sexual activities (Finkelstein 1972: 10-11). Nonetheless, CAD’s straightforward assumption of prostitution seems somewhat hasty.

In Neo-Assyrian times *kezertu* is mentioned three times. CTN 2 17 is a contract concerning a large land area. Anyone who wishes to negate the agreement should do many impossible or costly things, including giving seven male and seven female *kezertus* (MÍ.SUHUR.LÁ.MEŠ) to Ištar of Arbail.

In SAA 12 68 king Tukulti-Ninurta decrees the regular offering for the temple of Šarrat-nipha. He defines carefully how much and what food every official gets. Sons of the *kezertu* get “1 litre of [...] bread [...] and shanks (of sheep)”. At the end of the text king dedicates a baker, brewer and sons of the *kezertu* to the temple.

An overseer of *kezertu* is mentioned in SAA 12 in text 76, a collection of decrees of Šamši-Adad V and Adad-nirari III. In the first part of the text, Marduk-bēlu-ušur, overseer of the *kezertu* receives a gift from King Šamši-Adad V. The text ends with a statement that Marduk-bēlu-ušur, overseer of the *kezertu*, and Bel-dan, palace herald are assigned responsibility of these decrees of Šamši-Adad V and Adad-nirari III.

#### 8.4.4 *Ēntu* - high priestess

Only one occurrence of *ēntu*-priestess appears in the Neo-Assyrian times; in SAA 14 68 Bahianu lends barley to an *ēntu* priestess in 667. In addition to that, there are several omen texts where *ēntu*-priestesses appear. In SAA 8 104, the omen is related to an eclipse. “If [there is an eclips]se in Nisan on the 28<sup>th</sup> day: [the king of that land will fall ill but recover]; in his stead, a daughter of the king, an *entu*-priestess will die” The omen “If Scorpius is in

lunar halo, *entu*-priestesses will be made pregnant” is repeated in three omen texts (SAA 8 147, 307 and 480). ). Of course one must take into account that SAA 8 147 naturally uses an earlier collection as a source, which means that it proves nothing concerning the *entu*-priestesses of the Neo-Assyrian period.

*Ēntu*-priestess is better known from earlier sources (CAD E: 172-173). These sources indicate that the position of the *ēntu* -priestess was a high temple office, suitable for daughters of kings. Often it is difficult to differentiate between *ugbaltu* and *ēntu*-priestess, as the sumerogram NIN.DINGIR is used for both. Chastity was expected of both classes of priestesses. However, *ēntu*-priestess was of higher rank than *ugbaltu*. Often the correct transliteration must be established from the context alone. (CAD E: 173.)

## 9. WOMEN OUTSIDE INSTITUTIONS

The women introduced in this chapter are those who cannot comfortably be placed in the context of either the palace or the temple. Some of these women of course might have had connections to these institutions, but it cannot be ascertained from the textual evidence. Naturally some groups work both in palaces and outside them and are thus divided. For example weavers appear in this chapter as well as in chapters 6.1.3.3 and 6.5.2.

### 9.1 Working women

This chapter consists of women with some clear status, profession or title. Women, who have no clear title or sphere of action, are dealt with in chapters 9.2 and 9.3.

#### 9.1.1 *Harimtu* – prostitute?

Most scholars agree that *harimtu* (KAR.KID) should be translated as a prostitute. Among them are the writers of Chicago Assyrian Dictionary (see CAD H), Gwendolyn Leick (1994: 162-163) and Amelie Kuhrt (Kuhrt 1991: 232-236).

Nevertheless, Julia Assante (1999) argues that *harimtu* was a name for a legal category. According to her, *harimtu* was a single woman who existed outside family structure. Within this legal status she could be anything from a virgin to a prostitute. The only qualification of *harimtu* is that she was neither “a wife of a man” nor “a daughter of a man”. (Assante 1999: 8-13.)

Assante also claims that although many texts describe the street as the place of a *harimtu*, this does not necessarily mean common street harlotry. Rather, it could be interpreted as a non-literal place for all those who did not belong to a household. (Assante 1999: 47-53.) Thus *harimtu* was free of male authority but also outside the protection of law and customs (Assante 1999: 36-37).

*Harimtu*'s socio-economic status is difficult to ascertain, since in most Mesopotamian documents only class or occupation is mentioned. It is thus impossible to know how many of the professional women were also *harimtu*, single. In any case, most *harimtus* seem to have been poor. According to Assante, their unenviable position is reflected for example in

SAA 2 2, a treaty curse of Assur-nerari V (SAA 2 2): “may Mati’-ilu become *harimtu*, his soldiers women, may they receive [*a gift*] in the square of their cities like any *harimtu*.” Still, at least some *harimtus* were financially well off. They could work in many professions and some even owned houses. (Assante 1999 59-65.) It seems that *harimtu* could also own property, which also remained hers if she married (Assante 1999: 36-37).

In MSL 1 96-97<sup>102</sup> a *harimtu* even owns a tavern. Assante writes that contrary to common misconceptions, tavern (*aštammu*) was not a brothel but rather a center-point for communal activities, where both men and women could relax and socialize. (Assante 1999:66-68.) According to Assante the female tavern keeper, *sābītu*, was often a *harimtu* (Assante 1999: 69). It is thus possible that one of *harimtu*’s occupations was *sinnišat aštammi*, a female tavern keeper. Unfortunately, *sinnišat aštammi* is known only from one passage from Neo-Assyrian times, namely Assurbanipal’s inscriptions.<sup>103</sup> Whether or not this profession really existed during the Neo-Assyrian period is uncertain. The text in question does not shed any light on the issue, but merely states that Assurbanipal brought back so many camels from his campaign that they were given as gifts to *sinnišat aštammu*.

In two texts *harimtu* seems to be used as a derogatory term. In a letter to the people of Sealand (ABL 289), Assurbanipal refers to the crime of Nab-bēl-šumāti and names him “the *harimtu* of Menanu<sup>104</sup>”. The king sent reinforcements to him, which he then promptly took captive, as he was in league with the Babylonian King Šamaš-šumu-ukin. In SAA 3 29, in a mocking passage, *harimtu* sets up a stele for the son of Ibâ “the farther” and leaves it for posterity.

In three texts *harimtu* is mentioned simply as a profession. In SAA 12 83 Assurnaširpal II appoints Nergal-apil-kumu’a as a city overseer of Kalhu. The text is fragmentary, but in the end there is a people, whom are defined in the text as “Assyrian craftsmen, ‘enterer’ and performers of *ilku*-service”. Among these *harimtu* and son of a palace maid is mentioned. In a letter from Tušhan to Sargon II (SAA 5 24) *harimtus* are mentioned together with other professions. *Harimtu* (MÍ.KAR.KID) is also mentioned in a list of professions

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<sup>102</sup> Probably Neo-Assyrian text; see Assante 1999: 69.

<sup>103</sup> Borger (1996: 67) reads the passage in question (Asb A ix l. 50, dupl. VAT 5600, col ii, l. 3) as MÍ.áš-tam-mu, but Streck (1916:76 and 376) reads it *šu-tam-mu*. Here I have followed CAD (vol. A II: 473), and read the passage as SAL *áš-tam-mu* (*sinnišat aštammi*).

<sup>104</sup> Menanu was possibly an Elamite leader (PNA 2/II: 748, Waters).

(Landsberger 1969: 237). All three instances could, however, indicate social class as well as occupation, so they do not invalidate Assante's claim by themselves.

Obviously, *harimtus* were not totally shunned by the society – at least some of them married, although they were not considered good wife material (Leick 1994: 163). In addition, it seems that at least some of them remained in touch with their families. In two documents, where *harimtu* is described as mother, also her relatives appear. In SAA 12 92 a man (or rather a boy?) is given to temple of Ninurta by his uncles. His mother gave birth to him “during her prostitution (*ina ha-rim-ti-ša*)”. In SAA 14 442, where Puti-Athiṣ buys a son from Ahu –iddina. The son in question is described as the “son of his daughter from her temple-prostitution (*ša ha-rim-te-ša*)”. These texts also indicate that the status of *harimtu* could be a temporary phase in a woman's life.

To my mind, none of the evidence above proves conclusively that *harimtu* is “a single woman”. Although Assante's theory is interesting, it must remain speculative for the time being. Perhaps the biggest problem in Assante's theory is that if she is right, there seems to have been no prostitutes in ancient Mesopotamia at all. This seems unlikely, as in most strongly patriarchal societies – such as ancient Mesopotamia – there usually are.

There are no sources from the Neo-Assyrian period telling us how a woman became a prostitute, but Kuhrt writes that at least during Late Babylonian Period slave women were widely used as prostitutes. According to her, role of the free women as prostitutes is a much more muddled issue. Probably at least poor girls turned to prostitution to support themselves. (Kuhrt 1991: 232-236.)

*Harimtus* appear to be the largest group of professionals that exists outside institutions. Still, the actual Neo-Assyrian evidence tells us very little of them. All Neo-Assyrian *harimtus* are implicit agents, which fits Assante's (1999:36-37) claim that they were mostly poor. Usually only the wealthy women had reason to document anything. Only once, as the tavern owner, does she seem to have some status.

However, something can be said based on sources from other time-periods. The prostitutes in Mesopotamia seem to have been at the same time both vulnerable and independent. (Leick 1994: 162-169) Although at least some *harimtus* probably had more control over their lives than other women, they also lacked most of the protection that the regular daughters and wives had. This in turn would have lessened their chances of practicing

agency. Once again question of power appears to be the key issue. It seems obvious that the more successful *harimtu* was in her profession and the more power<sup>105</sup> she had (for example in the form of money or influence), the more able she was to practice agency. In a worst-case scenario, her position might have been similar to that of a slave. On a brighter note, some prostitutes certainly had good financial status.

### 9.1.2 Other working women

In addition to the *harimtu*, there were very few professionals who were not connected to either palace or temple. The four occurrences of agents that are presented here consist of weavers, a goldsmith and a dyer. *Tārītu*, a wet nurse cannot be counted as an agent in Neo-Assyrian times, because there is no explicit evidence that the profession existed in Neo-Assyrian times. All the professionals introduced here, except for the goldsmith, are implicit agents.

In SAA 12 63, a fragment of Assurbanipal type schedule mentions NN,...-**Issar**, a female weaver (MÍ.U[Š.BAR?]). In SAA 11 169 two female weavers are mentioned by name. **Eša-rteše** is an Egyptian weaver from 7<sup>th</sup> century. She is one of the four weavers mentioned in a text listing Egyptian deportees and their possessions. In the same list is mentioned **Tanatha**.<sup>106</sup>

In 656 **Mullissu-taqīša**, a female goldsmith (KUG.DIM) from Assur receives the female slave Reminni from the woman La-tamuti as a pledge for a debt of fifteen shekels of silver (StAT 2 46/A 1912\*, Archive N 12 “Caravansary”).

The *tārītu*, a wet nurse, is mentioned only in cultic texts in the Neo-Assyrian period. It is possible that the term was only used in literary texts during this period. On two occasions goddesses are referred to as nurses. In SAA 3 39, Ištar (as Tiamat), wet nurse of Bel, is mentioned. In SAA 9 7 Lady of Arbail and Mullissu are referred to as king’s nurses. In SAA 10 275 the king wears the clothes of a nurse. In SAA 8 158 (an omen text), “nurse” appears (in broken context) in an apodosis to an omen derived from a meteorite. In SAA 2 6, (a treaty text), nurses are mentioned in the curse formula: ”May Belet-ili deprive your nurses of the cries of little children in the streets and squares”. *Tārītu* is also mentioned in the Practical Vocabulary Assur (Landsberger & Gurney 1957-1958: 328 ff).

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<sup>105</sup> See discussion in chapter 2.1.

In SAA 16 54 (reign of Esarhaddon) we find the only mention of a female dyer, a *mušappītu*. The sender of this letter wants his money back. The sender replies to the age-old excuse “there is no silver” by writing “I have heard it, my lord should send 14 minas of silver”. Then he itemises the bill; four merchants, their four wives and a female dyer; each should get half a mina. It is interesting that also merchants’ wives were involved in trade.

## 9.2 WOMEN IN THE FINANCIAL SPHERE

This group of women was surprisingly big. Altogether 33 women were somehow involved with finance. I have placed these women in six different categories: buyers and sellers (4), creditors and borrowers (5), guarantors and witnesses (4), women with property (6), financiers (7) and other financially active women (7). Most of these categories are self-explanatory. In each chapter the ladies will appear in chronological order. Women appearing in undatable texts are placed last in alphabetical order. In the last subchapter, 9.2.7, I will discuss the agency of these women.

### 9.2.1 Buyers and sellers

Since the text is usually found in the archive of the buyer, I will first introduce them, then sellers (both in chronological order).

**Iautatu** from the governor’s palace in Kalhu purchases a plot of land for ten minas of copper in 727 (CTN 2 29). Postgate states that it is uncertain whether she was employed in the palace, as there could be other reasons for her document showing up in the palace archives (Postgate 1973: 15). This is why she is not included in chapter concerning the women of the palace.

**Attâ-hāši** from Kalhu buys a slave woman from the Egyptian Amurteše in 663 (ND 2315:4).

**Kata[...]** from Kalhu, buys the slave woman Pilaqqitu from Bel-kumu’a in 613\* (ND 3479b).

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<sup>106</sup> For weavers see also chapters 6.1.3.3 and 6.5.2.

**Latāte** the wife of Nabû-reši-išši, Atanha-ilu and La-qepu sell a female slave in 665 (StAT 2 267/A 1803<sup>107</sup>).

### 9.2.2 Creditors and borrowers

I will first introduce the creditors (the “owner” of the text in question) then borrowers, all in chronological order.

**Kummītu** from Kalhu impresses her fingernail on the document as one of the eleven creditors of Sabiri whose debts are paid by Bel-tarši-ilumma, the governor of Kalhu in 793. The debt owed to her amounts to twelve minas of bronze. Sabiri also owes two minas to **Lā-ṣahittu** and three minas of silver to the unnamed slave of **Mūrāitu**<sup>108</sup>. (CTN 2 93.) As Sabiri is the only one with a probable connection to the palace, these women cannot be placed in the context of palace.

**Ṭab-šār-Urkitti** (ND 2089) lends altogether 4 shekels of silver to Hananî and Gīrtāti in 671 or 666 (PNA 1/II: 426 Gīrtāti by Schwemer).

**Lā-tamūti** is attested in several tablets (see also 9.2.3 and 9.3.2.2) from the same archive (Archive N 12, Pedersen 1986). In StAT 2 46 she owes fifteen shekels of silver to Mullissu-taqiša, a female goldsmith, and gives the girl Reminni as a pledge in 656.

Wife of Zabbanaiu, **Dādāia** from Assur, and Ṭab-Dada borrow silver from Mutaqqin-Aššur in 637\* (SAAB 9 106).

### 9.2.3 Guarantors and witnesses

Women as witnesses and guarantors seem to be extremely rare in the Neo-Assyrian documents. All in all, I managed to find only two occurrences of both. On the other hand, there are thousands of male witnesses and guarantors. One possible reason for this could be that – like in many patriarchal societies – women were not considered fully autonomous subjects. However, there seems to be few signs of this in any other texts: obviously women could – for example – loan, borrow, buy and sell without a permission of their assumed “male guardian”.

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<sup>107</sup> No specific archive, Pedersen 1986: 158.

<sup>108</sup> See also 9.2.4.

Why then would they be so rare as witnesses and guarantors? I see two possibilities: either men were considered more reliable witnesses, or the lack of witnesses is due to the nature of the evidence. One must always remember that the evidence that has been preserved for us is not carefully selected to give us a nice, whole picture of the Empire, but is in fact rather random.

**Ahāt-abīša** and Eriba-Aššur are guarantors for the silver Šamši-iada' owes to Šarru-lu-dari in 687 (A 2505<sup>109</sup>).

**Lā-tamūti** (see above) from Assur acts as a guarantor for Ušinni, son of Šumu-ṭaba in 657 (StAT 2 38).

**Suni[...]** from Kalhu (reign of Shalmaneser IV) acts as a witness for Eriba-Marduk, who buys land in 779 (CTN 2 19). As her connection to the governor's palace is unclear, I have not placed her among the palace women.

**Inzi-Aia** from Assur acts as a witness in a loan document in 630\* (A 1934, archive N 11, a small archive of Dadaja).

#### 9.2.4 Women with property

**Mūrāitu** owns a slave, who is involved in the Sabiri-incident (see 9.2.2) in 793 (CTN 2 93).

**Zarpānitu-šarrat** owns the slave Ampāru, who acts as a witness in CTN 2 15 in 791.

Bel-na'di gives a house in Nineveh together with eleven persons to his daughter **Ba'altī-iābatu** in 627\* (ADD 619).

In a division of inheritance in 620\* (AfO 32: 42,11), one of the properties in question is said to lie next to the alley of Ilu-balassu-iqbi and **Ia-Dādi**. Of course it is possible that the alley is just named after Ia-Dādi and is not, in fact, her property.

SAA 7 141 records some wine and food, "in disposal of **Ubitē**". The text is probably datable sometime between 721-612 (Fales & Postgate 1992 xiv). The text might be connected either with palace or temple administration, which is why I have not included it in the "women of the palace" –chapter.

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<sup>109</sup> No specific archive (Pedersen 1986).

**Lā-qēptu**, wife of Šalam-šarri-iqbi, from Kalhu (reign of Assurbanipal), owns the slave Šamaš-taqqinanni. Her husband sells the slave as an adoptive son to Baṭuru (ND 5480).<sup>110</sup>

### 9.2.5 Financers

MAss is the siglum of tablets from the German excavations in Assur in 1990. The archive is dated roughly to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, reign of Assurbanipal or later. This archive consists of names, both male and female, all connected to amounts of grain and money. In PNA, many of the writers have interpreted this to be a list of people who financed a trade enterprise. However, Radner (1999b: 119) thinks that these balance sheets for trading expeditions probably list persons receiving parts of merchandise brought back from an expedition, because so many different individuals are mentioned. In any case, the ladies mentioned in these lists must have been involved in the trading expeditions in some way.

The women in question are usually listed with their names only. In six cases, however, there are also some designations after the names. In text MAAss 17b, **Apil-Aia** has a broken designation for some household (*ina É ...*). In text MAAss 19, **Nanāia-hammat** is designated as “wife of PN” (MÍ-šú šá PN). In text 20<sup>111</sup> **Karānutu** is designated as “Egyptian” (*mu-šur*) and **Ezibtu** is designated as “Egyptian in Qumbāte<sup>112</sup>” (*mu-šur-tú ina qu-um-bat*). In text 24 **Arbail-hammat** is defined as “daughter of Bēssū’a” ([DUMU.M]Í 1.*bi-su-u-a*). **Ahāssunu** appears in texts 24<sup>113</sup> and 29. In both texts she is “of the house of Abu-eriba” (É 1.AD—SU).

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<sup>110</sup> See PNA 1/II: 278 for Baṭuru and PNA 2/II: 652 for Lā-qēptu.

<sup>111</sup> Transliterated and translated by Radner 2000 (text ID there is Ass. 1990-20).

<sup>112</sup> For the toponym, see Kwasman 1988: 490.

<sup>113</sup> The reading of the name in text 24 is unclear. The Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts reads it as [xxx 1.SU]HUŠ-*su-nu*, but Fales (PNA 1/I: 58) reads the name as [MÍ.NI]N-*su-nu*. This does seem more likely, since the person in question is one of the household of 1.AD-SU, which in the text 29 is undoubtedly the designation of Ahāssunu.

Name	Sum	Name of the organizer	Text number
Arbail-hammat	½ shekels of silver	Unknown	MAss 17b
Arbail-hammat	6 3 4 (unit unclear)	Adi-mat- [...]	MAss 24
Ezibtu	3 shekels of silver	Mušezib-Aššur	MAss 20
Ezibtu		Adi-mat- [...].	MAss 24
Ahāssunu		Adi-mat- [...].	MAss 24
Ahāssunu	2 minas, 9 shekels of silver	Mušezib-Aššur	MAss 29
Apil-Aia	1 shekel of silver	Unknown	MAss 17b
Nanāia-hammat	1(?) shekel of silver	Unknown	MAss 19
Karānutu	3 shekels of silver	Mušezib-Aššur	MAss 20
Ašāia	6 3 4 (unit unclear, possibly grain)	Adi-mat- [...]	MAss 24

**TABLE 8: WOMEN INVOLVED IN TRADING VENTURES**

### 9.2.6 Other financially active women

This chapter includes seven women who are involved in financial transactions that do not fit any of the categories above.

**Ahâ** from Assur (probably reign of Assurbanipal or later) is involved in a transaction concerning people and animals (A 3331<sup>114</sup>). Possibly the lady in question also received some rations of stored grain (PNA 1/I: 56, Fales).

**Labâ** from Dur-Katlimmu/Magdalû (7<sup>th</sup> century) is involved in trade. A fragmentary conveyance document notes that the silver of Labâ, sister-in-law of Dadi-abi, was involved. (BATSH 6 21.)

**Lâ-tubāšinni** from Assur has given to Bessu'a and Mudammiq-Aššur silver belonging to Nabû-nadin-apli (possibly her husband). Mudammiq-Aššur now returns to her his share in 638\*. (SAAB 5 18.)

**Musallamāia** is mentioned in the operative section of a damaged tablet recording a loan of silver by Assur-le'i in 625\* (SAAB 9 108). Unfortunately it is unclear in which capacity she acted.

<sup>114</sup> No archival context (Pedersen 1986).

In a Babylonian letter (SAA 17 139) from reign of Sargon II, Šumu-ukin mentions various sums of silver to Nergal-našir. These include altogether fifteen minas brought to **Namirtu** (see also 9.3.3 for the first part of the letter).

In a list of amounts of silver and other items **Sarhāia** and **Mannu-kī-ummi** from Assur are listed with an unknown sum (KAV 121). Possibly these ladies were financiers of some kind.

### 9.2.7 Financially active women and agency

All the women presented above were definitely agents. Some of them might have acted on behalf of their male relatives or husbands, but most women seem to have been doing business on their own behalf. Of course, this is only the impression that one gets from the texts, as no male relative has been mentioned there. Naturally, it is possible that they needed the permission from their husbands/male relatives before making any contracts. Nonetheless, with or without consent of their male guardians (if such existed) these women are engaged in various economic contracts.

Although their agency is clear, these women form a difficult problem, because we know very little of their background. Although it is valuable knowledge that women did business in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, it would be much more useful to know what *kind* of women did that. The present evidence allows us only to conclude that they were agents, but any further conclusions of their role in Neo-Assyrian society would depend on knowing their status in that society.

## 9.3 WOMEN ACTIVE IN OTHER SPHERES

Here I have collected all the remaining women, who have acted as agents in one sphere of action or another. They are divided into three categories: women's correspondence, women in justice system and women of uncertain status and activity. In the last subchapter, 9.3.4 the agency of these women will be discussed.

### 9.3.1 Women's correspondence

This subchapter contains nine women, four letter senders and five receivers. I have included all the women who send letters, because a woman sending any letter is definitely an

explicit agent. I also included five women receiving letters because their contents clearly indicated that the woman in question was acting as an agent in some way (implicit agent). In one personal letter written to women by their family this condition was not met, (ZA 73 13 **Kallutu**) so she is not included in 9.3.1.2. However, such personal letters confirm that the women of a family were far from considered meaningless. Power has more than one face and is not limited to public spheres of action (see discussion concerning power and agency in chapter 2.1).

Although letters from/to women are scattered throughout this work (see, for example, Barsipītu in chapter 5), I have here grouped only those women who have not fit in any of the other categories. I have grouped these letters into two categories, recipients of letters and senders of letters. Another categorization I could have used is private/official letters, but all the letters under discussion are private in nature. Also, it is sometimes difficult to separate between private and official letters (see for example the letter of chief Ea-zera-qiša to her mother). This is why the less ambiguous categories of recipients and senders were chosen.

#### 9.3.1.1 *Senders*

Writing a private letter in Babylonian language and script to her brother Šumu-iddina, **Datâ** (reign of Tiglath-pileser III or Sargon II) informs him about the death of **Gagâ**. The blessings of the goddesses Mullissu and Ištar of Babylon are invoked twice. (NL 38.)

Only the beginning is left of the letter from Borsippa gentlewomen ([GÉME.M]EŠ-*ka* MÍ.a-m[e-la-te]) to King Esarhaddon (SAA 16 153).

A broken passage in a Babylonian letter (CT 54 139, probably reign of Assurbanipal) mentions the messenger of **Iāti'-abī**. The names of the sender and recipient are lost, but cities of Bit-Amukanu are mentioned. In any case, it is clear that Iāti'-abī is the sender of some letter, since she has a messenger.

**Lū-tēširi** from Assur writes a letter to the woman **Kabtaia**. The contents are mostly lost. (see below, KAV 170.)

#### 9.3.1.2 *Recipients*

**Kabtaia**, a woman from Assur is the addressee of a letter written by a woman, Lū-tēširi (KAV 170, see above). Although the contents are broken it seems that the writer, Lū-tēširi

has acted according to the orders of Kabtaia. This means that both of these women can be classified as agents.

**Meia** from Assur receives a letter from her brother in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Gula-eṭir writes to his brother Ribaia and his sister Meia in CT 53 974. The letter to Ribaia is written on the obverse the letter to Meia on the reverse of the tablet. In the letter to Meia, he writes to his sister asking her to keep his daughter at home and tells her that he will be with her in ten days.

**Bāia/Baiâ**, a widow from Assur (7<sup>th</sup> century) is the recipient of the private letter (KAV 215) from her son Nabû-šulmu-ereš concerning the management of the family's property, probably left by the deceased *pater familias* and exploited arbitrarily by other members of the family. (Nissinen, PNA1/II: 253.) She is probably also the mother of Nabû-ahhe-eriba, since a woman Bāia also receives a letter (VAT 9770) written by Nabû-ahhe-eriba, who addresses her as “my mother” (AMA-iá).

Nabû-ahu-iddina writes a fragmentarily preserved letter to **Bēlet-lēšir** in the reign of Esarhaddon calling himself “your (f.) servant” (CT 53 53).

Bel-iddina sends a letter (TH 117, post-612) in Neo-Babylonian language and script concerning the servants to his son Nergal-ušallim and his daughter **Burāšu**. Remarkably, the letter is addressed to both his children, not just to his son, as is usually the case.

### 9.3.2 Women in the justice system

In this subchapter I concentrate on women who are clearly active in juridical proceedings. Altogether I found nine women, who acted as agents in the justice system as participants in legally binding contracts or in court cases. One woman is adopting, the rest are either suing or being sued. The one thing that was conspicuously missing were women sentenced for actual crimes, for example stealing or murdering. This poses an interesting question. Were women not part of the general criminal justice system?

It is conceivable that some legal matters were resolved by the head of the family<sup>115</sup>, but in very few societies for example murder is a private matter. Usually such acts are condemned by the whole society, be it the village elders or the modern court of law. Of course, documents concerning stealing or murdering are not common even when men are in ques-

tion, but the reasons for this are still unclear.<sup>116</sup> Perhaps such cases were not usually documented, or if documented, then not kept and archived.

### 9.3.2.1 Adoption

Sinqi-Issar and his wife **Ra'imtu** adopt Aššur-šabassu-iqbi, natural son of Nabû-na'id in 658 (TCL 9 57).

### 9.3.2.2 Suers and sueés

In a letter to the king (SAA 16 63) a high-ranking official writes to Esarhaddon (680-669) concerning the political situation in Guzana. This letter can be placed within the general context of letters from Esarhaddon's reign dealing with the Harranian Sasî and his attempts to rebel against the Ninevite royal dynasty. Six men and one woman, **Zāzâ**, wife of Tarašî, are responsible for misdeeds against the king. All are servants of governor. Her misdeed is not specified, but others seem to have misused power. Writer only mentions her son's and husband's misdemeanors (economical dishonesty). The writer directly accuses her of slander.<sup>117</sup>

**Mullissu-abî** from Assur pays half a mina of silver in 656-ii-28. This was her share of a fine for a slave woman, which she then claims from **Lā-tamūti**. (StAT 2 39, 40, 42, 43<sup>118</sup>) Another woman involved in the Lā-tamūti incident, was **Šašallu-ṭābat**, whose seal is found in an envelope to the text 43 (StAT 2 44). Text 43 records that Lā-tamūti has paid her fine to Mullissu-abî, concerning a maid. Right after Lā-tamūti are Mašlâ, Ya-dada and Nabû-deni-epuš mentioned. The envelope (text 44), in addition to the seal of Šašallu-ṭābat, bears the seals of Mašlata, Mašlâ, Mušallim-Aššur, Nabû-deni-epuš and Lā-tamūti.

Since witnesses do not seal documents and three out of the six sealers in text 44 are mentioned in the actual document 43 right after Lā-tamūti, we may conclude that they were somehow involved in the transaction. Possibly all persons mentioned next to Lā-tamūti in texts 43 and 44 were responsible for the debt, but only Lā-tamūti paid it.

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<sup>115</sup> Compare to Rome, where *pater familias* could punish members of his household, even kill them.

<sup>116</sup> For information on Neo-Assyrian judicial proceedings, see Jas 1996.

<sup>117</sup> See also Fales 1980 142-146.

<sup>118</sup> All from archive N12 "Caravansary" (Pedersen 1986).

**Bāni-Aia** from Assur is accused by Bel-šumu-iškun and Nabû-mušabši of holding their brother Nabû-šallim-ahhe in serfdom in 653 (ZA 73 9).

In a legal case in 635\* Šalam-šarri-[...] sues **Mamû** from Assur. The case has something to do with his wife, possibly even dissolution of marriage. (StAT 2 172/A 1936.<sup>119</sup>)

A court decision from probably 7<sup>th</sup> century orders the cohort commander [...] -Aššur to give several persons and two plough oxen to **Amtîtu** from Nineveh within a certain period of time (SAAB 6 10).

Woman **Ilāni-usātî** is the step-mother of Sakip-Aššur, from Assur (reign of Assurbanipal or later). She is mentioned in a letter (StAT 1 51) from Nabû-mušēši to his “brother”, the goldsmith Nabû-zeru-iddina. She seems to be the step-mother (*aššat abīja*) of a certain Sakip-Aššur who claims to be the object of her hatred. She is central to a lawsuit involving Nabû-mušēši and Nabû-zeru-iddina as well as Sakip-Aššur and two other men.

### 9.3.3 Women of uncertain status and activity

These five women seem to be significant in some way, but there is not enough data to classify them properly.

The only information we have on **Gagâ** (reign of Tiglath-pileser III/Sargon II) is a letter reporting her death (NL 38)<sup>120</sup>. That such a report was given, might mean that she was a woman in high position. On the other hand, she might have been a favorite aunt or some other relative.

The inscription on the seal VAT 9361 claims that it belongs to **Ahātî-ṭābat**. The persons using the seal are, however, Sin-na’di, the mayor of Assur, Nabû-rehtu-ušur, the city overseer of Assur, and Nabû’a, the head of the collegium of ten scribes of Assur. These officials are active in the reign of Assurbanipal. The seal is used on another occasion by Sin-na’di alone. According to stylistic criteria, the seal was made in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century. (PNA 1/I: 59, Fales.) As seals are, after all, all about controlling ones own goods, I consider its original owner a woman who must have frequently acted as an agent.

In a Babylonian letter (SAA 17 139) from the reign of Sargon II (721-705) Šumu-ukin states that he has given Arrābātu, Binītu, Tu’atu and Huluttu to **Qallatu** as he was told.

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<sup>119</sup> Archive N31, a private archive of probably Egyptian homeowners (Pedersen 1986).

In a letter to the king (either in 710 or in 703 according to Dietrich 2003: xxv) the magnates of Hamureans claim that they are keeping the watch. Bit-Dakkuri is mentioned. At the end of the letter they say that they are not sending **Šumattu** to the king. Unfortunately, the context is very broken. (SAA 17 81.)

In a letter (undated, Jursa & Radner 1995: 96, text A 6)) without the names of the sender or the receiver, the sender rebukes the receiver concerning the way he has treated **Tetaia**. First part of the letter deals with wine and the writer states that he is her patron. This could indicate that also Tetaia is a merchant.

#### 9.3.4 Women active in other spheres and agency

The women who are active in other spheres are divided into three subchapters, namely women's correspondence, women in the justice system and women of uncertain status and activity. The women engaged in these activities are not all agents. In fact, many of them do not act at all and are only mentioned in chapter three. In chapter 9.3 only the active ones are discussed.

Obviously, the women writing letters are explicit agents, and chapter 9.3.1 has five of them. In addition, I defined four women as implicit agents, because the contents of the letters they receive clearly indicate that the receiver could act, or had acted earlier. Of all the women who participate in legal system, I found nine women who can be said to act in some way. Five of them were explicit agents and four implicit agents. The last group (9.3.3) consists of five women of uncertain status who are therefore classified as implicit agents.<sup>121</sup>

The same problem that was evident with women who are active in the financial sphere applies here as well. Although the agency of these women is clear, we know very little of their background. Further conclusions of their role in Neo-Assyrian society would depend on knowing their status in the society.

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<sup>120</sup> See also 3.4.3.2 for Datâ's letter to her brother.

<sup>121</sup> See chapter 10.1 on problems and method of counting.

## 10. CONCLUSIONS

Even if autonomy and self-sufficiency are not intrinsic to concept of agency and even if seemingly submissive actions can be a form of agency (Tenhunen 1997: 6-9), a list of women's names or a sales document of a female slave tell very little of the agency of the women in question. Even the most subordinate **act** can be a form of agency, but first it was necessary to find those Neo-Assyrian women who did act in some way, or who might have been active in their official capacity. In the end, this nature of the material led me to use the simplest definition of agency. In this thesis, to have agency is to act in the society and to not have agency is absence of that action. Needless to say, agency can be much more than action (see chapter 2.1), but this will suffice for the material of this thesis.

This definition of agency also connects with the goals and the theoretical framework that I presented in the beginning of this thesis. Theoretical emphasis of this thesis is in the relations between individual, society and power, which come together in the concept of agency. It is clear that women's actions illuminate best the connections between these three factors in the Neo-Assyrian Empire. It is the actions of Neo-Assyrian women, which enable one to evaluate their agency and capability to make choices.

However, the nature of material caused some problems. For one thing, almost all the women in this thesis belong to the public sphere<sup>122</sup>, outside home, since most of the evidence we have concerning ancient Mesopotamia is from public sphere. Only some tantalizing glimpses on private sphere can be caught in literary works (such as myths and proverbs), which are outside the scope of this thesis. Thus, the subtler, private nuances of agency and the finer nuances of relations between individual, power and society that are suggested in the chapter 2.1 are practically impossible to find and recognize from the material.

In addition to the fact that the traditional division between women-private sphere and men-public sphere is too simplistic, it also does not fit well with the nature of the material. This is why I divided the women of this thesis into three broad categories, which rose from the material itself. In chapters four, five, six and seven women connected to the palaces were

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<sup>122</sup> See chapter 2.1 for discussion on problems relating to the use of public-private dichotomy.

investigated. In chapter eight, women associated with temples were dealt with and in chapter nine I introduced the women who do not seem to belong to either of these institutions. This is naturally only a crude division, as many groups of women (for example musicians) seem to have worked in both institutions and possibly also outside them.

The aim of this thesis was to present an as complete as possible evaluation on the agency of Neo-Assyrian women. The evidence has confirmed my hypothesis: the women of the Neo-Assyrian Empire were indeed not merely passive marionettes of patriarchal structures, but actually could and did make choices and acted in the society in various ways. The Neo-Assyrian women were indeed formed by their society, but they were also changing it.

The essential results of this thesis however lie in researching **how** women acted in the society. Although much of this has become clear in the previous chapters, in the following subchapters 10.2 (women associated with palaces), 10.3 (women associated with temples) and 10.4 (women outside institutions), I will summarize these results and analyze the agency of each group of women.

Although all women in this thesis (introduced in chapters 4-9) are agents, in the tables I present below, I have, however, modified the above-mentioned definition of agency further. I have separated the women “agents” into two groups. The women of the other group express their agency via *acting*. These women I have called *explicit agents*. The remaining women, whose agency is only implicated, for example by their titles, are called *implicit agents*. The explicit agents are those who actively “practice their agency”, whereas for the implicit agents the agency must be assumed from the context.

### **10.1 Problems of analysis**

All the women classified as *implicit agents* in the following tables are women who probably were active in some way, although the text does not tell this to us directly. For example, even when a professional woman like *šakintu* is mentioned in a list, we can assume that she has full agency and is acting on her own behalf *as a professional*. I use the term professional here loosely. Not only scribes or dyers are professionals, but also the ladies of the court. I define professional as a woman who has a function recognized by others in the society and which presumably allows her to exercise her autonomy.

Using the above-mentioned definitions I have approached each group of women and evaluated each group of women as having one of the four statuses. In the following three subchapters I give the results of this evaluation, followed by a short analysis.

The problems with this categorization were numerous. Each group of women presented their own difficulties. Roughly, the problems relate to two questions. Firstly, how to establish the exact number of women in any particular group? Secondly, how to separate explicit agents from implicit agents in practice?

Some women presented in this work are rather “uncertain”. For example, in chapter five an “unnamed Arabic queen” is quite possibly one of the named ones, probably Te’elhunu. Such uncertain cases I have ignored.

Also, I have aimed at including only “real-life” women. Therefore I have not included any women appearing in literary texts (for example *harimtu* in treaty curse, chapter 9.1.1), omen texts (*ēntu*-priestesses in chapter 8.4.4) or cultic texts (*tārītu* in chapter 9.1.2). Also, the figurative use of title or profession (for example “*harimtu* of Menanu” in chapter 9.1.1) is not included in the number of occurrences.

Furthermore, the exact number of people is not possible to know when women appear in texts only as a group of women. Such is the case with for example *sekretus*, who are mainly looted as groups (MÍ.ERIM.É.GAL.MEŠ) from palaces. In such cases I have considered one group as one occurrence.

The groups of women that appear in more than one category also create a problem. For example musicians appear both in chapter 6.3 and in chapter 6.5.1. In such cases I have gathered the women under the most prominent heading, for example musicians that are presented in table 9 include both musicians from chapter 6.3 and 6.5. There are also some women who appear in many categories, especially in chapter nine where women are categorized based on their actions and not their titles (for example Lā-tamūti both in chapter 9.2 and 9.3).

I have only considered the Neo-Assyrian evidence in my calculations. Although the Neo-Assyrian evidence has often been fleshed out with material from other time-periods, these examples are not included in the count.

The problems relating to defining women as either explicit or implicit agents were also numerous. All in all I have strictly abided by the ground rule: if she is not acting in some way, she is not an explicit agent.

However, some documents were simply too broken to say anything sure concerning the persons agency (for example the *šakintu* of Haurina in chapter 6.1.3.1). These women are counted as implicit agents.

Those women who are presented in both active and passive roles in different documents (for example some of the Assyrian royal women in chapter 4) presented another kind of problem. In the end I considered all those women explicit agents who had performed at least one action.

All of the above-mentioned factors cause the tables to be less than accurate. However, total accuracy is hardly possible with this kind of material, nor is it the aim of these calculations. Rather, the tables aim to show a rough guideline concerning the agency of women in Neo-Assyrian Empire. A more detailed image of their agency can be obtained from the relevant chapters.

## 10.2 Women of the palace

Name of the group of women	Explicit agents / all women of the group	Implicit agents/ all women of the group	90% or more are explicit agents	50% or more are explicit agents	Less than 50% are explicit agents	10% or less are explicit agents
Assyrian queens	2/10	8/10			X	
Other Assyrian royal women	3/6	3/6		X		
Foreign leaders and queens	9/14	5/14		X		
<i>Šakintu</i> – administrator	24/46	22/46		X		
Female staff and relatives of <i>šakintu</i>	4/5	1/5		X		
<i>Lahhinutu</i> – official	2/10	8/10			X	
Musicians: <i>nargallutu</i> and <i>nuārtu</i>	1/89	88/89				X
<i>Amat ekalli</i> – palace maid	0/8	8/8				X
Other professionals	4/47	43/47				X
<i>Sekretu</i> – palace woman	3/25	22/25			X	
Other women of the palace	12/38	26/38			X	

**TABLE 9: AGENCY OF THE WOMEN ASSOCIATED WITH THE PALACE**

Although the percentage of explicit agents among the royal women is noticeably smaller than that of the tribal leaders, the evidence presented in chapter four clearly shows that they had many duties to perform in addition to producing an heir to the throne. The notable possessions of queens were probably mostly managed by subordinates, but it is difficult to imagine that the queens did not have the ultimate say in their own financial matters. Although the king naturally had the ultimate power, nothing implies that he had interfered in his wife's business affairs. In addition, the two royal women who are explicit agents (Sammu-rāmat and Naqī'a) act in various ways in very high level of governing. Therefore it seems possible that also the other eight queens, the implicit agents, were more important figures in the court than the scarce evidence we have available at the moment leads one to believe. Also the royal daughters appear surprisingly active: they write and receive letters, and one of them buys land.

One of the most autonomous groups in the table seems to be foreign leaders and queens. Nine out of fourteen take active role in war, diplomacy or trade. The question would require a more rigorous study, but the evidence at this stage indicates that among Arabian tribes there existed a more liberal ideology concerning woman's role in the society. Even Assyrians recognized this, as when king Esarhaddon placed **Tabū'a** as the leader of an Arabic tribe (see chapter five). It appears that some women could rise to be leaders of tribes on their own right. Their role in the tribe appears to have been more similar to the role of the king in Assyria, rather than the Assyrian queen.

Of course one must also consider the nature of the sources, namely that these tribal leaders usually appear only in the annals of kings. In other words, we only have knowledge concerning active female leaders, as Assyrians had little interest in documenting the other women of the tribes. Nonetheless, this notable presence of women in the highest levels of decision-making does give reason to believe that at least aristocratic women of the tribes enjoyed a fairly autonomous position.

The administrators (*šakintu*) and their staff and relatives are the largest autonomous group of women within the Assyrian royal palaces. Possibly the role of *šakintu* was to manage the numerous queen's households. In any case, the administrators took care of various matters mostly in the financial sphere. In addition to buying, lending and borrowing they also appear in the occasional courtcase. Despite the fact that most of these transactions were probably connected to their professional duties, a few documents<sup>123</sup> imply that they had similar autonomy in their private lives. Quite a large number of them are implicit agents, because they are often mentioned in different kinds of lists, most notably in SAA 7 23.

*Lahhinutu*, a stewardess, appears to have been only in the service of palace in the Neo-Assyrian period, despite the fact that her male counterpart *lahhinnu* worked mostly in temples. It appears that *lahhinutu* had an important role in the economic administration of the queen's household. In that capacity, she no doubt exercised considerable power, although there is little direct evidence on this, as six out of ten *lahhinutus* are mentioned in a personnel list (SAA 7 24).

Those female professionals who appear most rarely as active agents are musicians and palace maids. This is natural since their status must have been significantly lower than for ex-

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<sup>123</sup> See for example Amat-Astārti in chapter 6.1.2

ample *šakintus*'. It makes sense that their doings would have been recorded only in rare cases.

Although there are many musicians, 89 when one counts also those in personnel lists, there is little material concerning their agency. In fact, only one of these 89 is an explicit agent, and even then the text in question (A 125) is quite fragmentary. Nonetheless, they were active as musicians (and possibly also as some kind of cultic functionaries) so they can be considered to be implicit agents.

The palace maids on the other hand are all implicit agents. Palace maids are not explicitly mentioned in any of the eight texts, but seven texts mention their sons and one mentions their supervisor. Even so, they obviously existed and had a professional status in the palace, and can therefore also be listed as implicit agents.

The group "other professional women" includes naturally mostly implicit agents, as most women of the group, 40 altogether, appear in the personnel lists in the imperial administrative records. The remaining seven consist of both obviously high-ranking women (for example Rīša(t)-abīša) and low-ranking women (for example weavers). Naturally, the four explicit agents are the four high-ranking women.

Agency of the *sekretus* is difficult to evaluate, because their exact status in the palace household is not clear. They appear in active roles only three times, but if they were some kind of "secondary wives" of the king, they might have had quite a lot of influence in the court. There is, however, very little evidence concerning their status in the palace. The three explicit agents buy people or real estates.

The group "other women of the palace" consists of the women introduced in chapters 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4. In chapter 7.2 two court ladies and two high ranking wives are discussed. One of the court ladies, as well as one of the wives is an explicit agent. Chapter 7.3 introduces "active women with unknown status". In this chapter there are altogether eleven women, who are all involved in a variety of financial transactions. All of them are explicit agents except for the woman who does not act in the document, but is mentioned as an owner. Chapter 7.4 consists of those women who are mentioned in palace personnel lists by their names, but without any title. It is difficult to say anything concerning their agency, because of the lack of data. At least the ten women who receive wine are probably high-ranking women with agency, because wine was a distinctly luxury item. Some of the remaining 13

women could be workers. Nevertheless, once again the nature of the material does not permit further speculation.

### 10.3 Women associated with temples

Name of the group of women	Explicit agents / all women of the group	Implicit agents/ all women of the group	90% or more are explicit agents	50% or more are explicit agents	Less than 50% are explicit agents	10% or less are explicit agents
Prophetess	15/17	2/17	X			
<i>Šēlūtu</i> - votaress	2/10	8/10			X	
MÍ.MAŠ	0/3	3/3				X
Priestesses	3/5	2/5		X		

**TABLE 10: AGENCY OF THE WOMEN ASSOCIATED WITH TEMPLES**

The largest group in this category is the prophetesses. Practically all of them are explicit agents. This is easily explainable by the nature of the material: the prophetesses are most often mentioned in connection to the divine messages they deliver. How much autonomy and choices they had in other areas, for example their private lives or in the temple hierarchy is another matter entirely. This question is also likely to remain unresolved, as we have very little data concerning those aspects of prophets' and prophetesses' lives, although SAA 10 109 seems to imply that they were not held in very high regard. In respect to their agency there seems to be no difference between the named prophetesses and the unnamed prophesizing women.

*Šēlūtu*, a woman dedicated to the temple, is mentioned in the Neo-Assyrian evidence either as a bride (usually of apparently high rank) or as part of the property of the temple. Therefore it seems that these votaresses were not a homogenous group, which also makes the evaluation of their agency (as a group) difficult. Also the evidence is rather scarce, so no firm conclusions concerning the agency as a group can be made. The only explicit agents of this group are the two prophesying votaresses.

The enigmatic group of MÍ.MAŠ consists only of implicit agents. I have failed to find any mention on them from any other time-period either, so there is really nothing that we can say about them for certain. They might have been professionals of some kind, as they appear both in temple and in palace, but their exact function is unclear.

The “priestesses” group mentioned in the table consists of one *ēntu*, two *qadištus* and two *kezertus*. There is so little evidence that it is difficult to say anything definitive concerning the agency of these women. Therefore we must largely rely on sources that come from other time-periods, when constructing a picture of the agency of these women.

At least *ēntu* probably had considerable autonomy, as she was a very high-ranking priestess: *ēntu*-ship was a suitable occupation even for a daughter of a king. *Qadištu* on the other hand is a less clear title. It seems that she had some cultic functions, but also had something to do with nursing children. Of her possibilities to act in the society, we know practically nothing. *Kezertu* is possibly a prostitute, especially in the earlier times. Unfortunately, the Neo-Assyrian evidence tells us nothing of her agency.

#### 10.4 Women outside institutions

Name of the group of women	Explicit agents / all women of the group	Implicit agents/ all women of the group	90% or more are explicit agents	50% or more are explicit agents	Less than 50% are explicit agents	10% or less are explicit agents
<i>Harimtu</i> – prostitute?	0/5	5/5				X
Other professionals	1/4	3/4			X	
Financial sphere	27/33	6/33		X		
Other spheres	9/23	14/23			X	

**TABLE 11: AGENCY OF THE WOMEN OUTSIDE INSTITUTIONS**

The largest group of professionals that exists outside institutions is that of *harimtu*, a prostitute<sup>124</sup>. The actual Neo-Assyrian evidence tells us very little of them. All Neo-Assyrian

<sup>124</sup> See discussion in chapter 9.1.1.

*harimtus* are implicit agents, which fits Assante's (1999:36-37) claim that they were mostly poor. Usually only the wealthy had reason to document anything. In two occurrences out of five *harimtus* are mentioned as a group and in two they appear as mothers. In only one occurrence she seems to have some status, namely as the tavern owner.

However, something can be said based on sources from other time-periods. They indicate that *harimtu* was fairly autonomous, as she was not part of any household. In reality, however, it seems probable that there were rather strict limits to where and how she could act. In a worst-case scenario, her position might have been similar to that of a slave. Then again, some prostitutes certainly had good financial status. The agency of the prostitutes probably varied a lot, depending on how successful she was in her profession.

In addition to *harimtu*, there were very few professionals who were not connected to either palace or temple. The four occurrences in the table consist of weavers, a goldsmith and a dyer. The goldsmith is the only explicit agent: she receives a female slave as a pledge for a debt of fifteen shekels of silver.

The last two categories in the table refer to women in chapters 9.2 (women active in the financial sphere) and 9.3 (women active in other spheres). Their number is surprisingly large and undoubtedly further study would reveal some of them as belonging to the context of either palace or temple, although the evidence has not allowed placement to either. Almost all of them are explicit agents. Those who are implicit agents clearly demonstrate in other ways that they can exercise agency, for example those women who own land or slaves. Nonetheless, they contribute very little to the analysis of women's agency in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, as we do not know what kind of status they held in that society.

The women who were active in the financial sphere (chapter 9.2) were indeed active, in various kinds of financial transactions. They buy and sell, they borrow money and loan it in addition to financing trading expeditions and acting as guarantors or witnesses for others. Almost all of them are explicit agents, the only exception being the women with property (six altogether) who are implicit agents. Some of them might have acted on behalf of their male relatives or husbands, but most women seem to have been doing business on their own behalf.

The women who are active in other spheres (chapter 9.3) are divided into three subchapters, namely women's correspondence, women in the justice system and women of uncer-

tain status and activity. Women who are engaged in correspondence or legal cases are not, by definition, agents. In fact, many of them do not act at all and are only mentioned in chapter three. In chapter 9.3 and here only the active ones are discussed.

Obviously, the women writing letters are explicit agents, and chapter 9.3.1 has five of them. In addition, I defined four women as implicit agents, because the contents of the letters they receive clearly indicate that the receiver could act, or had acted earlier. Of the all the women who participate in legal system, I found nine women who can be said to act in some way. Five of them were explicit agents and four implicit agents. The last group (9.3.3) consists of five women of uncertain status who are therefore classified as implicit agents.

## 10.5 Summary

The concept of agency is a useful tool, but applying it to Neo-Assyrian texts is not without problems. Therefore the results presented in this thesis can be considered only preliminary. For example by concentrating on women's actions I have been largely forced to overlook the ideological significance of women and their place in the Neo-Assyrian worldview, which without a doubt would have further illuminated their agency.

Also the nature of material must be considered. The evidence that has been preserved presents only a fraction of the whole complex system that was the Neo-Assyrian Empire. The remaining evidence often directs our attention in a certain way instead of giving us the big picture. Often the evidence does not yield as much results as one would like, so the danger of overinterpreting is constant. Nonetheless, I hope that by recognizing these dangers I have also managed to avoid them.

When starting this thesis, I did not expect that very many women would have an independent role in the Neo-Assyrian society<sup>125</sup>. I was surprised, when more and more women emerged from the depths of the archives. As I have purposely eliminated the “invisible women” (see chapter three) from the material, the women in this thesis give a fairly complete picture of the women playing an active role in the Neo-Assyrian society.

However, we must remember that the women that are under discussion in this thesis hardly represent the “average” Neo-Assyrian women. In that sense, this thesis can be seen as part

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<sup>125</sup> As far as anyone can be seen independent of their society, see for example Giddens 1979.

of the first wave feminist studies (see chapter 2.3), still trying to find “strong” women and “write them into history”.

Although the agency of the Neo-Assyrian women is a complex issue, it seems that the women associated with palace had more possibilities to act and make choices than other women – at least they have a clear numerical advantage. There are altogether 298 women in the palace group. In comparison, there are only 35 women associated with temples and 65 women outside institutions. All figures are naturally only suggestive as the categories I have used in this thesis are not definitive. Rather, they are meant to act as flexible helping concepts. Some women also belong to many groups simultaneously.

In addition, the reason for the high number of women associated with the palace can also be found in the research method. In search of material, I located from the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts women with titles<sup>126</sup>. As it turned out, there are more women in the palaces who have a title of some kind, than there are in the temples. This fact is very interesting. It could suggest that the temples were more strongly a male sphere of action than the palaces. Also, it supports the idea that a queen’s household was an important feature of the palaces of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

Lastly, I would like to introduce a few ideas unfortunately outside the scope of this work, but which I hope to undertake in my future dissertation. First, it would be very illuminating to make some comparisons between the female population and male population. It is very difficult to say anything absolute concerning the influence of women in the society, when I have no compatible figures for the male population. Secondly, in this thesis I have ignored most literary works such as epics and proverbs, as most of them are not purely from the Neo-Assyrian era. These texts would, however give a lot of information on women’s ideological place in the society. Thirdly, I have not examined most of the texts personally, but have largely trusted on secondary sources and ready-made translations. A lot of information can be gained with a deeper investigation of the texts. Finally, I have avoided the complicated issues of Neo-Assyrian gender, although especially the ambiguous male/female prophets/prophetesses would be an excellent object for study.

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<sup>126</sup> See chapter 1.1 for description of the method.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A = Siglum of texts in the Assur collection of the Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri or siglum of texts in the collection of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago.

ABL = *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters belonging to the Kouyunjik Collection of the British Museum* I-XIV. See Harper 1892-1914.

ADD = *Assyrian Deeds and Documents* I-II, see Johns 1898-1901 and Johns 1925/1926.

AfO = *Archiv für Orientforschung*

ARM 23= Archives royales de Mari 23, see Bardet et al. 1984.

ARRIM = Annual Report of the Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Project.

BaM = *Baghdader Mitteilungen*.

BATSH 6 = *Berichte der Ausgrabung Tall Šēh Hamad* 6, see Radner 2002.

CAD = The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

CT = Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets ... in the British Museum.

CTN 2 = Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud 2, see Postgate 1973.

CTN 3 = Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud 3, see Dalley & Postgate 1984.

KAV = *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur verschiedenen Inhalts*, see Schroeder 1920.

Mass = Siglum of texts excavated in the German excavations at Assur in 1990.

MSL 1 = *Materialien zum Sumerischen Lexicon* 1, see Landsberger 1937.

MSL 12 = *Materialien zum Sumerischen Lexicon* 12, see Landsberger 1969.

ND = Siglum of texts excavated in the British excavations at Nimrud (Kalhu). See Wiseman 1953, Parker 1954, 1957 and 1961.

NL = *The Nimrud Letters*, see Saggs 2001.

NWL = *Nimrud Wine Lists*, see Kinnier Wilson 1972.

PKTA = *Parfümrezepte und kultische texte aus Assur*, see Ebeling 1950.

PNA 1/I = *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire 1/I*, see Radner 1998.

PNA 1/II = *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire 1/II*, see Radner 1999a.

PNA 2/I = *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire 2/I*, see Baker 2000.

PNA 2/II = *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire 2/II*, see Baker 2001.

PNA 3/I = *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire 3/I*, see Baker 2002.

RIMA 2 = *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia 2*, see Grayson 1991.

RIMA 3 = *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia 3*, see Grayson 1996.

SAA 1 = *State Archives of Assyria 1*, see Parpola 1987

SAA 2 = *State Archives of Assyria 2*, see Parpola and Watanabe 1988.

SAA 3 = *State Archives of Assyria 3*, see Livingstone 1989.

SAA 4 = *State Archives of Assyria 4*, see Starr 1990.

SAA 5 = *State Archives of Assyria 5*, see Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990.

SAA 6 = *State Archives of Assyria 6*, see Kwasman and Parpola 1991.

SAA 7 = *State Archives of Assyria 7*, see Fales and Postgate 1992.

SAA 8 = *State Archives of Assyria 8*, see Hunger 1992.

SAA 9 = *State Archives of Assyria 9*, see Parpola 1997.

SAA 10 = *State Archives of Assyria 10*, see Parpola 1993

SAA 11 = *State Archives of Assyria 11*, see Fales and Postgate 1995.

SAA 12 = State Archives of Assyria 12, see Kataja and Whiting 1995.

SAA 13 = State Archives of Assyria 13, see Cole and Machinist 1998.

SAA 14 = State Archives of Assyria 14, see Mattila 2002.

SAA 15 = State Archives of Assyria 15, see Fuchs and Parpola 2001.

SAA 16 = State Archives of Assyria 16, see Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002.

SAA 17 = State Archives of Assyria 17, see Dietrich 2003.

SAA 18 = State Archives of Assyria 18, see Reynolds 2003.

SAAB = *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin*.

StAT 1 = Studien zu den Assur-Texten 1, see Radner 1999c.

StAT 2 = Studien zu den Assur-Texten 2, see Donbaz & Parpola 2001.

TB = siglum of texts excavated in the Australian excavations at Til-Barsip.

TCL = Textes cunéiformes du Louvre.

TH = *Die Inschriften vom Tell Halaf*, see Friedrich et al. 1940.

TIM 11 = *Texts from Nineveh*, see N. Postgate & B. K. Ismail 1993.

VAT = Siglum of texts in the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin.

VS = *Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler*.

ZA = *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatisches Archäologie*.