TOWARDS A NEW CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE FEMALE ROLE IN MESOPOTAMIAN SOCIETY*

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The theme of the annual international meeting of assyriological scholars in Paris in 1986 was *La Femme*. The papers presented at that meeting and collected in the volume under review reflect the present state of knowledge of that subject. Not only is the current feminist scholarship on the subject almost totally ignored but also a clear lack of understanding of the problems involved in such research is demonstrated. Consequently, the present reviewer attempts to outline certain fruitful avenues of approach to the study of the functions and roles of women in Mesopotamian society.

The French tradition of scholarship has taken the lead in valuing the study of womankind. To this reviewer's knowledge, the *Histoire mondiale de la femme* of 1965 was the first attempt at such a compendium.[1] In that *Histoire*, Jean Bottéro gave the earliest synopsis of the female role in Mesopotamian society.[2] More recently, at Strasbourg, there have been two colloquiums on the topic, "La Femme dans les sociétés antiques."[3] Thus, it was fitting that at the occasion of the XXXIIIe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, which was held in Paris in July 1986, it was decided to adopt as the theme of the meeting: "La Femme dans le Proche-Orient antique." According to P. Garelli in his preface, this choice was made for the following reasons: (a) it was in accord with the Parisian ambience and (b) it was a topic to which both philologists and archaeologists could equally con-

tribute. Since the Rencontre was only loosely structured in accordance with the contributions offered, there was no systematic attempt to address the problems surrounding the study of women in ancient neareastern society. In this article, I will attempt to suggest certain means that could be employed to reach the goal of properly understanding the female role in Mesopotamian society, to evaluate the terminology to be used, to apply this type of critique to the studies of the Rencontre volume, and to suggest future steps to reach the stated goal.

HISTORIANS AND METHODOLOGIES

There are various approaches that have been conceived in current feminist theory, but not all such approaches have relevance for ancient Mesopotamian society. Theories, such as the universal oppression of women, the exclusion of women, and the notion of women's experience which is existentially subjective or its opposite objectifying, are unproductive. On the other hand, there are other areas of women's studies that not only can productively be applied to our field but also can offer critically important insights. For example, underlying the modern Western cultural assumptions regarding gender is the tenet that there are universal patterns of development, i.e., a common life cycle:

> Foremost among these has been the traditional assumption that for women biology is destiny: the capacity to bear children has been understood as providing the meaning for and determining the pattern of women's lives. Until very recently in American society, this understanding has provided the basis for

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[1] Pierre Grimal, ed., *Histoire mondiale de la femme* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie de France, 1965).

[2] Jean Bottéro, "La Femme dans la Mésopotamie ancienne," in *Histoire mondiale de la femme*, 158-223.

[3] Edmond Lévy, ed., *La Femme dans les sociétés antiques*. Actes des colloques de Strasbourg, mai 1980 et mars 1981 (Strasbourg: AECR, 1983).

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the perception of childbearing and childrearing as women's natural work and of the private or domestic sphere as woman's proper place. In contrast with men, a woman's usefulness or uselessness has been defined primarily in terms of her sexuality.[4]

This attitude is clearly delineated by Prof. Kramer ("The Woman in Ancient Sumer: Gleanings from Sumerian Literature," 109): "The crucial importance of the wife as child-bearer is succinctly and concisely expressed in the pithy saying . . . 'The wife is a man's posterity'."

Present research on women in past societies tries to redress the imbalance of previous analysis, which drew on the perspectives of men in the definition of societal norms. Moreover, such analysis was determined by traditional gender assumptions held by the society of the particular scholar making the analysis. Gender assumptions are culture specific and have not been recognized as such. Consequently, at this time, there is great emphasis in gender study on the development of the awareness of the unconscious culture-specific assumptions that give a distorting bias in reconstructing society. The relationship between a historian's presuppositions, approach, methodology, and evidence shape his vision of history. Until those presuppositions are recognized and critically evaluated, we as scholars will not be able to view objectively the evidence of ancient societies.

Thus, the first duty of the historian must be to be aware of his own presuppositions based on Western cultural ideology and to divest himself of them in order to minimize distortions due to gender presuppositions, with the goal of obtaining an objective viewpoint on ancient society. A system of analysis that aims to define woman's sphere of activity can be self-limiting. First, one should not assume as a universal axiom that there are two separate and unequal spheres: man's public sphere of action and influence and woman's restricted private sphere. In Mesopotamia, participation in the "great institutions" is not restricted to men. We must recognize that the whole discussion concerning temple economy in early Sumer rests on the evidence of an institution at whose head sat a woman. At that time, there existed the phenomenon of parallel institutions,

under male and female leadership with mixed staffs—a different societal norm of which feminist scholars are unaware.

The next issue is how to attempt

> . . . to reconstruct an accurate account of historical people who have been excluded from setting the values, style, and momentum of their cultures. A crucial part of the task of recovering the stories of those who have neither defined their cultures nor played dominant roles in them is the development of new methodologies.[5]

Work on creating such methodologies has begun:

> Feminist historians, critics of the status quo, soon encountered the limitations of traditional sources and methodologies and began to discover new archives and approaches. Aligning themselves with social historians in the tradition of the French *Annales* school, American feminists focussed on sources that included women and on the place where women were: on material culture, on "*mentalités*," on the family, and on religion.[6]

Thus, the methodology developed by historians of women is based on the French school of social history founded by L. Febvre in Strasbourg. With his colleagues and students, he conceived a problem-oriented history with an interdisciplinary approach including sociology, geography, philosophy, and psychology. With this approach, the narrative of events was placed in its social and economic context within the physical environment, to create a total history.[7] The importance of the relation between individual and social group in this approach appealed to historians of women's history. Likewise, the emphasis on physical, social, and economic context and the concern for the

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[4] Constance H. Buchanan, "Gender, Religion, and the Aging Society," in *Shaping New Vision: Gender and Values in American Culture*, Studies in Religion, no. 5, Harvard Women's Studies in Religion Series, ed. C. W. Atkinson, C. H. Buchanan, and M. R. Miles (Ann Arbor: U. Mich. Research Press, 1987), 181.

[5] Margaret Miles, "Introduction," in *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*. Harvard Women's Studies in Religion Series (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 1.

[6] Clarissa Atkinson, "Introduction," in *Shaping New Vision*, 3.

[7] Peter Burke, "Introduction: The Development of Lucien Febvre," in *A New Kind of History, from the Writings of Febvre* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), ix–xvi. For an analysis of the relationship between the *Annales* school and feminist theory, see Susan Mosher Stuard, "The Annales School and Feminist History: Opening Dialogue with the American Stepchild," *Signs* 7 (1981): 135–43.

process of history beyond that of the literate elite was essential to understanding individual women and describing communities of women in general. Furthermore, in the above quotations, Prof. Atkinson refers to non-textual evidence of material culture, the physical folklife. "Material culture responds to techniques, skills, recipes, and formulas transmitted across the generations and subject to the same forces of conservative tradition and individual variation as verbal art. How men and women in tradition-oriented societies build their homes, make their clothes, prepare their food, farm and fish, process the earth's bounty, fashion their tools and implements, and design their furniture and utensils are questions that concern the student of material culture."[8] As to *mentalités*, in accordance with the French school of social history, the emphasis is on the history of the inner state of consciousness, of emotional states and cognitive awareness. Family may be understood in many ways: as a sphere of women's activity, an area of control of or by women, and as her place in the societal family and kin structures.

As to the place of the study of religion and ideology in the reconstruction of the history of women, it has been demonstrated that the interface of religious symbols and social situations is particularly decisive for understanding the conditions framing woman's existence in a given society—the ideal images and the practical effects of those images. At Harvard Divinity School, feminist scholars have been working on the specific thesis that the

> . . . intersection of religion and culture provides a fruitful nexus for exploring women's lives. . . . religion can provide women with a critical perspective on and alternatives to the conditioning they receive as members of their societies . . . not only can religion make available tools with which women may create a degree of spiritual, political, and personal autonomy not provided by secular culture, but it also inevitably forms part of women's cultural conditioning.[9]

The relationship between religious symbols and social reality is complex. On the one hand, positive female imagery can contribute to affirmative female roles in the societal matrix. On the other hand, there is a caveat to such a generalization: Anne Klein has depicted the female symbolism that is central to various forms of Tibetan Buddhist practice and iconography in both categories of external and internal religion. She suggests that "these two levels—external and internal, mythic and experiential, symbol and symbolized— have different implications for women and different degrees of significance in the social realm."[10] She is trying to explain "why inner religious egalitarianism fails to translate into social egalitarianism."[11]

Taking into consideration the above observations, let us now define the goals we would like to achieve in our reconstruction of the female role in Mesopotamian society: (1) depictions of the images of women: (a) self-images and (b) society-engendered images on the various levels—mythic, heroic, folk; (2) establishment of the life-cycle pattern of women within the kinship structure, including birth, marriage, childbirth, as well as inclusion or exclusion from male society; (3) delineation of roles possible to women in the political system, accessible positions within the hierarchy of the state structure; (4) definition and boundaries of women's roles and responsibilities in the socio-economic matrix; (5) function of women in the religious sphere; their relationship to the sacred; piety and pollution. '

As we work towards such goals, we must consider the existence of diachronic and socio-ethnic distinctions. Beyond these, there are three further factors that must be kept in mind. The first is class distinctions: royal and upper classes, middle class, lower classes, as well as citizen versus foreigner. The second is the possible disparity in roles of the same individual in the private and public domains, the boundaries of which are not clearly outlined. The third and most essential is the evidentiary value of the literary texts, which may present a past archetypical society, the law codes, which may express the ideal present situation, the administrative texts and letters, which may reflect restricted segments of the social reality, and the visual evidence, which portrays aspects of life not necessarily demonstrable from written evidence.

To reach these goals, certain questions must be asked. Two of the most important are: those concerning women's access to formal and informal power— issues of power and empowerment form one of the fundamental categories of analysis especially in relation to force and authority—and secondly, those

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[8] Richard M. Dorson, "Introduction, Concepts of Folklore and Folklife Studies," in *Folklore and Folklife*, ed. R. Dorson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 2f.

[9] M. Miles, op. cit., 2.

[10] Anne C. Klein, "Primordial Purity and Everyday Life: Exalted Female Symbols and the Women of Tibet," in *Immaculate and Powerful*, 126.

[11] Ibid., 134.

concerning women's sexuality—the issue of who controls women's sexual identity and its political dimensions is essential to the definition of the female role in society.

The results of such investigations will contribute to reevaluation and reinterpretation of the whole social and cultural system. In such an investigation, great care must be taken in the interpretation of the evidence. There are problems as to what constitutes trustworthy evidence for women's lives and how we are to interpret this evidence. The decoding of works of art to extract "subliminal messages" is fraught with danger. To avoid misinterpretation, visual evidence must be analyzed together with written material; only together may both possibly give a true reflection of the position of imagery within the societal matrix. An historian must contextualize evidence of either the visual or the written type in order to give a true account of the society under study. Moreover, one must be constantly aware of the various possibilities and levels of interpretation. This reviewer would like to point out in the volume under review the exceptionally astute comprehension and awareness of the problems of interpretation demonstrated by K. Grosz ("Daughters Adopted as Sons at Nuzi and Emar," 86):

> There is no doubt that an heiress' legal position was not self-evident and that she had to be invested with a special status if her father wished to bequeath to her his entire property and to continue his line through her. The practice of appointing a daughter as a son can be perceived as a softening of the strictly patrilineal system which made it gradually possible for women to attain the status of full legal independence. It is also possible however, to perceive this practice as an integral indispensible part of the patrilineal system and one which even made it more durable—a safety measure which made it possible to continue the family even in cases when no sons were born to it.

TERMINOLOGY

In our attempt to organize an amorphous mass of data, we tend to apply certain known categorizations. However, it should be obvious that culture-specific terms taken out of context should not be employed. This reviewer would like to discuss two such terms that appear in the volume under review, namely harem and *femme fatale*. Since especially the former is applied consistently in certain areas of research and serious consideration has been expended on both terms, one must evaluate their usefulness.

The first, harem, is from Arabic حريم /ḥarīm/ 'sacrosanct, inviolable, forbidden' (according to Islamic religious law). It refers to those parts of a house to which access is forbidden, in particular the women's quarters, and is a development of the provisions of the Ḳur'ān on the veiling and seclusion of women (XXXIII: 53–59).[12] "The term veil in the Moslem world indicates not one particular style of protective covering, as various countries have developed their own distinctive type of veiling. It may only mean covering the face completely, or the lower part only, leaving the eyes exposed as in Egypt. The essential point however in all types of the veil, is the covering of the hair, a woman's crowning glory, and the avoidance in public of any feminine appeal. Hence the costume connected with the actual face covering is important, as for example the *charshaf* and veil in Turkey and the Near East, the *chaddur* [*sic* = châdur] and *pecheh* [*sic* = pīche] in Iran, the *aba* in Iraq, and the *burqa* in India . . . the customs of seclusion or purdah system, as it is called, the literal meaning of purdah being a curtain. . . . The whole life of the *purdahnashin* [*sic* = parda-nishīn], the woman in purdah, is determined by fixed rules of seclusion"[13] and segregation from male society.

The question should be raised as to whether the term harem is an appropriate description in Mesopotamian society. It occurs in 9 instances in the 24 articles in the Rencontre volume in the following contexts:

(1) In reference to the royal ladies of Ebla: "Il me semble évident qu'il s'agit des femmes de la famille royale et de la cour et dans ce cas le terme dam indique les femmes secondaires du roi et les femmes de la cour, du <u>harem entendu comme maison des femmes</u>" (M. G. Biga, "Femmes de la famille royale d'Ebla," 42).

(2–4) In reference to the ladies of the court at Mari: "Les textes de *M.A.R.I.* 4 permettent de faire progresser notre connaissance sur le «<u>Harem</u>»" (F. Abdallah, "La Femme dans le royaume d'Alep au XVIIIᵉ siècle av. J.-C.," 13); "le tome X des *ARM* . . . [a] permis de renouveler notre savoir sur le rôle et le

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[12] *Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. B. Lewis, V. L. Ménage, Ch. Pellat, and J. Schacht (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), III:209.

[13] Ruth Francis Woodsmall, *Women in the Changing Islamic System* (New Delhi: Bimla Publishing House, 1983) [original title: *Moslem Women Enter a New World*, first ed., 1936], 40. Note that she uses the Persian word *purdah* (parda) in place of the Arabic term *ḥijāb* to refer to the institution of the veil, cf. *Encyclopedia of Islam*, III:349f.

statut de la femme dans la région du Moyen-Euphrate au début du IIe millénaire. Pour ne citer qu'un exemple, on pourrait prendre celui de l'organisation des harems royaux dont certains, il y a peu, contestaient encore jusqu'à l'existence même" (B. Lafont, "Les Filles du roi de Mari," 113); "Amu-du $_{10}$-ga, die in den Haremstexten Jasmaḫ-Adads zunächst an erster Stelle . . . steht" (C. Wilcke, "Die Schwester des Ehemannes (/erib/)," 186).

(5) In reference to the so-called Middle Assyrian harem-edicts; "In einem assyrischen 'Haremerlass' wird dem Mann, der sich heimlich mit einer Palastfrau trifft, der Tod angedroht; sogar eine Beobachter, der dies nicht meldet, wird anscheinend mit dem Tod bestraft" (G. Steiner, "Die *Femme fatale* im alten Orient," 150).

(6–7) In reference to Neo-Assyrian queens and female officials: (6) banquet scene of King Ashurbanipal and his consort Ashur-sharrat: "the locale is a garden situated in the queen's harem where only female servants are engaged to look after the royal couple . . . the renderings of these women provide clues to support the idea of a harem hierarchy . . . the more intricate embroidery on the garments of the fan bearers suggest that these women enjoyed a higher rank within the harem" (P. Albenda, "Woman, Child, and Family, their Imagery in Assyrian Art," 20); (7) the *šakintu*, an administrative official of palace hierarchies: "that the *šakintu* had at her disposal a *rêšū* 'eunuch' can be interpreted also that she was connected with the supervision of the royal harem . . . the *sōkenet* had also according to Israelite customs in her hands the running of the royal harem" (M. Heltzer, "The Neo-Assyrian *Šakintu* and the Biblical *Sōkenet* [I Reg. 1,4]," 89).

(8) In reference to a building in the Persian palace: "from an inscription from the harem at Persepolis" (Z. Ben-Barak, "The Queen-Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne," 35).

(9) In reference to the whole ancient near-eastern court system: "she [the queen-consort] knows that her being merely one of a number of women in the king's harem makes her position precarious" (Z. Ben-Barak, "The Queen-Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne," 39).

Thus, all the above references are to the ladies of royal courts, a limited group of women, wives and relatives of kings and to the quarters in which they live. They are geographically circumscribed: the capitals of two Syrian city-states: Ebla and Mari, the capitals of the Assyrian and Persian Empires. Consequently, there are three cultural contexts: the Syrian culture area, the Assyrian culture area and the Persian

culture area. Let us take each area separately because of diachronic, ethnic, and evidentiary disparities.

Nos. 1–4 are from the Syrian culture area and based on administrative documents and correspondence. The argument bears upon the establishment of a separate part of a dwelling in which the women were segregated. Philological evidence concerning the word *tubqum* 'corner/inner quarters' and the archaeological evidence of a secondary structure at the palace of Mari has been taken to prove the existence of a harem.[14] The relationship between the inner quarters and the Islamic system of *parda/ḥijāb* is touched upon tangentially. In the argument, women are divided into two statuses. In reference to the queen, it is stated: "la place de la Reine Syrienne de l'époque paléo-babylonienne . . . devait être tout à fait éminente. On ne constate en rien qu'elle ait été une recluse. De grands personnages ont accès à elle. . . . Il semble même que la Reine, le Roi parti, ait été la personne qui ait normalement exercé le pouvoir."[15] Her reception of ambassadors, her freedom of movement, and her cultic functions are described. According to this theory, the role of the first lady of the land is distinguished from that of the lesser wives and other royal and non-royal female personages who are segregated in a harem. Such dichotomy of female roles is never found in the Islamic world: it was the conservatism of the court of Egypt in Cairo in the early twentieth century that set the general standards of behavior of the country. Consequently, mixed social life was not endorsed, and Egyptian Moslem women were not received in official Egyptian society or in official foreign functions. "The Queen, before the King's death, always lived a secluded life, never appearing in any public functions, held receptions for ladies only. . . . The Queen had no part in the life of modern Egypt. As long as the Queen remains entirely secluded, official society will probably not change."[16] This dichotomy sheds a reasonable doubt on the theory of the harem in ancient Syria. Other exceptions have been mentioned by even the strongest proponent of the harem theory, J.-M. Durand:

Dans l'ignorance complète où nous sommes des conditions de vie et du statut de ces femmes que nous voyons être énumérées dans les 'listes de distribution

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[14] Jean-Marie Durand and Jean Margueron, "La Question du harem royal dans le palais de Mari," *Journal des Savants* (1980): 253–80; synopsis: *La Femme dans les sociétés antiques* (Strasbourg, 1983), 7–8.

[15] Ibid. 258.

[16] Woodsmall, op. cit., 85.

du harem', nous ne savons pas si une *mušâḫiztum*, dont tout permet de penser qu'elle vivait dans le harem non point pour y être une épouse secondaire du roi, mais comme une des organisatrices de sa vie interne pouvait ou non être mariée. . . . On voit à quel point la possibilité d'une simple homonymie empêche de répondre à tous ces problèmes, pourtant fondamentaux pour mieux apprécier la liberté d'entrer et de sortir d'un monde que notre conception première d'un 'harem à l'orientale' nous incite à considérer comme clos et lieu définitif d'hébergement pour quiconque y est entré.[17]

As described above, the seclusion of women in a harem is an extension of the Ḳurʾānic injunction of the veil. In the volume under review, the veil receives some attention by F. Abdallah ("La Femme dans le royaume d'Alep au XVIIIᵉ siècle av. J.-C."), who on the basis of unpublished Mari texts remarks that "la femme mariée porte le voile *kuttumum*" and that veils are well attested in the lists of garments from Mari (p. 14, cf. p. 118); and one of his conclusions is that "la femme alépine de haut rang participe à la vie sociale et politique, fait du commerce mais derrière le voile bien entendu" (p. 15). Unfortunately, evidence of veiling in the Syrian culture area is slim. In addition to the word *kuttumum* in the Mari dowry lists usually translated 'couvertures' (see our volume, p. 118), another piece of evidence might be the quotation to which the correspondent is responding: *šumma ul rittum qaqqadki kutmima atlakim* 'if this is not acceptable, veil yourself and come' *ARM* 2 113:6, 10 76:8 (letters of Inib-šarri, daughter of Zimri-Lim, wife of Ibâl-Addu, king of Ašlakkà). Other words for veil also occur in Mari, e.g., *šitrum*. However, if the married woman wore a veil, why does the visual evidence show none from any period or region of Mesopotamia? The female-worshipper figures,[18] female statues,[19]

votive plaques,[20] terracotta reliefs,[21] and stele[22] clearly show their faces and coiffures. The problem is complicated and deserves more attention than can be given in this review.

Lack of correspondence with the model of the harem from the Islamic world has been variously stated. In the volume under review, and concerning the Old Akkadian period, B. Foster ("Notes on Women in Sargonic Society") alone voices dissent, saying that "royal ladies had access to the wealth and responsibility one would expect for them and were by no means sequestered" (p. 53).

Relating to the Assyrian culture area are nos. 5–7. The so-called Middle Assyrian harem-edicts,[23] referred to in no. 5 are a compilation made in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser I (1115–1077 B.C.) of palace edicts issued by his predecessors from the time of Ashur-uballit I (1365–1330 B.C.). "This is the most complete document relating to etiquette in an ancient western Asiatic court."[24] Even in this Middle Assyrian period,

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variety of hair styles and headdresses continues, no. 113 described on p. 166 [head of a statuette from Assur] as having hair concealed under a 'veil'), 198–203, 212, nos. 136–38, 144 (survey of Neo-Sumerian-period royal women, chignon and hairband most common), 251–56, nos. 174–75 (survey of Old Babylonian female statues), 296 (Middle Babylonian: one head), 300–305 (Middle Assyrian: long uncovered hair styles), 358f., fig. 80 (Neo-Babylonian with undulating hair style), 369–72, fig. 82 (Neo-Assyrian with long hair style).

[20] J. Boese, *Altmesopotamischen Weihplatten*, Untersuchungen zur Assyriologie und Borderasiatischen Archäologie, vol. VI (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971), AG 1–2, AS 3–4, CT 2, CS 7, N 6, K 2 (early Sumerian banquet scenes), T 9 (early Sumerian offering scene), K 12 (Neo-Sumerian seated priestess[?]).

[21] R. Opificius, *Das altbabylonische Terrakottarelief*, Untersuchungen zur Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie, vol. II (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1961), 387–88 (Old Babylonian couples, wife with chignon and headband).

[22] J. Börker-Klähn, *Altvorderasiatische Bildstelen und Vergleichbare Felsreliefs*, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Baghdader Forschungen, Band 4 (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1982), figs. 6c, e (early Sumerian kudurrus), 15 (stone monument of Ur-nanše, poorly preserved), 88 (clapping women, Neo-Sumerian stele fragment).

[23] Ernst F. Weidner, "Hof- und Harems-Erlasse assyrischer Könige aus dem 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.," *AfO* 17 (1954–56): 257ff., translated in Grayson, *ARI* I §§304–6, 335–41, 517, 681–83, 850–59, 905–12, 928 and 989, *ARI* II §§184–93.

[24] A. K. Grayson *ARI* I:47.

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[17] Jean-Marie Durand, "Les Dames du palais de Mari à l'époque du royaume de Haute-Mesopotamie," *M.A.R.I.* 4 (1985): 417f.

[18] E. Braun-Holzinger, *Frühdynastische Beterstatuetten* (Berlin: Mann, 1977).

[19] A. Spycket, *La Statuaire du Proche-Orient ancien* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 53, 56, pl. no. 37 (two female statues ED II Tell Asmar), 68f. (description of coiffure), 69, no. 44 (seated couple ED II Nippur), p. 82, no. 52 (female head with polos ED III Mari), 107–21, nos. 69–83 (discussion of variety of hair styles on female statues ED III—introduction of turban and hairnet in addition to polos), 112, no. 75 (additionally enveloped in a kaunakès abayah-like wrapping), 165–74, nos. 112–16 (survey of Old Akkadian female statues,

otherwise noted for its harsh and repressive measures in dealing with females, the ladies at court seem to have enjoyed a considerable measure of freedom, in particular, in their comings and goings.[25] Apparently, their freedom of movement was not hampered, contrary to widespread misconceptions.[26] The exception to this rule is the decree that during cultic rituals, a woman of the palace who was untouchable (i.e., menstruating) should not enter into the presence of a king.[27] Moreover, the existence of the harem as the women's quarters (*bītānu* 'inner quarters') must be proven rather than surmised. The same word is used of specific buildings inside the palace for princes and inside temples for the gods.

Whatever the life style of the Middle Assyrian court, the term "harem" in nos. 6–7 was in reference to the Neo-Assyrian court and it assumes more than our present state of knowledge permits.[28] Whereas quotation no. 6 predicates the existence of a harem on the basis of the depiction of women in the Ashurbanipal relief, Julian Reade suggests that the relief can be interpreted as "one of a number of scraps of evidence suggesting that the status of women at the Assyrian court was better, in the seventh century, than it had been previously" (J. Reade, "Was Sennacherib a Feminist?," 140).

As to the last two quotations, nos. 8 and 9, the former is from a culture area and time period outside the competence of this reviewer, and the latter is a generalization for which the evidentiary basis is lacking.

The term *femme fatale* refers to a "femme à laquelle les hommes ne peuvent résister et qui cause leur

perte."[29] To G. Steiner ("Die *Femme fatale* im alten Orient"), it means not only the image of the female as temptress but also as the relevant cause of death of any male whether from her witchcraft or from his breaking sexual taboos. It is evidence that Steiner sees a *femme fatale* in *any* woman with whom sexual intercourse is forbidden: sister, mother, daughter, daughter-in-law, etc. This is, of course, not what the term normally means, and the issue is further muddled by Steiner's tendentious treatment of the subject: to him, apparently, adultery, even rape, is the woman's fault. A few quotations may serve as illustration of his approach:

> Die neueren Beiträge zur Rolle der Frau in den alten Hochkulturen zielen vor allem darauf ab, den positiven Anteil der Frauen im Leben der Gesellschaft herauszustellen. Jedoch wird man selbst bei bestem Willen, nicht leugnen können, dass sich beim weiblichen Geschlecht auch manche negative Züge feststellen lassen. So ist denn auch für den Bereich des Alten Orients davon auszugehen, dass die Frauen—im Rahmen ihrer Möglichkeiten—in gleichem Masse zum Bösen neigen konnten wie die Männer (p. 147).

> Erstaunlicherweise findet sich—wenn man den Aussagen der Quellen glauben darf—der Typ der 'femme fatale' kaum unter den Vertreterinnen des—angeblich—ältesten Gewerbes der Welt (p. 148).

> So unerfreulich der Ehebruch seiner Gattin für den betroffenen Mann auch sein mochte, als wahre 'femme fatale' erwies sich die Ehebrecherin für ihren Liebhaber, wenn nämlich beide 'in flagranti' ertappt wurden. Das Abenteuer endete dann mit seinem Tod, falls nicht der Ehemann seine Gattin begnadigte (p. 149f.).

> Immerhin ist es ein gewisser Trost, dass es einer solchen 'femme fatale' meistens auch schlecht erging (p. 150).

> Dies aber, nämlich einer Frau zu sehr verfallen zu sein, gilt für einen Mann keineswegs als positiv (p. 152).

Such statements do not lead to productive results for the determination of the female role in Mesopotamian society.

MESOPOTAMIAN WOMEN

On the basis of the studies in this volume, however, it is possible to suggest the ways in which the roles

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[25] *AfO* 17:274 (Satzung 6 = §853 [Tukulti-Ninurta I], *AfO* 17:277f. (Satzung 9 = §908 [Ninurta-apil-Ekur]).

[26] Weidner, *AfO* 17:261: "Im allgemeinen sind die Palastfrauen auf das Gebiet des Harems beschränkt und versuchen dort auf all Weise, der tödlichen Lagenweile zu entgehen, wobei Klatschereien, Zänkereien und Prügeleien nur zu oft vorkommen (Z. 76,78) und die unbedeutendsten Anlässe zur Befriedigung der weiblichen Neugierde dienen müssen (Z. 111f)"; Grayson *ARI* I:47: "The enforced idleness and seclusion—apart from the king and princes it appears that the only non-females they ever saw were eunuchs—led to unrest and bitter quarrels."

[27] *AfO* 17:276 (Satzung 7 = §856 [Tukulti-Ninurta I]).

[28] For Assyrian queens, their reign *palû*, their rule *bēlūtu*, and their households, see M.-J. Seux, "Königtum, E. Les Femmes et le pouvoir," *RlA* 6 (1980–1983): 159–62; G. van Driel, "Wine Lists and Beyond?" *BiOr* 38 (1981): 272, sub "queens."

[29] *Le Robert dictionnaire de la langue française*, tome IV (Paris, 1985), 453.

and functions of Mesopotamian women might be understood if analyzed according to the goals outlined above.

First, there were contributions to the tableau of images of women displayed in visual representations and in textual sources. Although there was no attempt to study the self-images projected in writings of women (despite the existence of untapped sources of information in the literary pieces and manifold correspondence from many periods and places), several authors discussed the society-engendered images of the female on various levels. On the cosmic level, Lambert answers his question, "Goddesses in the Pantheon: A Reflection of Women in Society?" in the negative. He explains the prominence of goddesses in Sumer compared with Babylonia as the result of the rise and decline of certain city-states. On the other hand, both he and Foster ("Notes on Women in Sargonic Society") touch on the symbolization of Ishtar (as goddess of war) as a feminine attribute and its possible meaning. Some of our corroboration for such symbolization comes from onomastic evidence. In this volume, Fronzaroli attempts to understand the linguistic structure of the corpus of feminine personal names in the third-millennium city-state of Ebla ("La Formation des noms personnels féminins à Ebla"). There are two levels left where more work is needed: the heroic and the folk. On the heroic, the image of the woman is seen as the civilizing agent, embodying wisdom and temptation in epic literature. On the folk, attestations of proverbial sayings about women are commonly quoted but a thorough investigation is needed. Several authors work on the visual imagery of historical women: I. Winter, "Women in Public: the Disk of Enheduanna, the Beginning of the Office of EN-priestess and the Weight of Visual Evidence"; P. Albenda, "Woman, Child, and Family, their Imagery in Assyrian Art"; and J. Reade, "Was Sennacherib a Feminist?" treating of the imagery of Royal Assyrian women. In addition to her dating of the ritual office of en-priestess in the cult of the moon-god Nanna/Su'en of Ur at least as early as the ED III period, Winter argued that the female did not herself perform ritual libations and thus emphasized the limited number of ways in which women were represented in Mesopotamian art. Additional evidence might illuminate and balance the picture. Note in particular for the en-priestess the other reliefs found in the *gipāru* at Ur dating to Early Dynastic as well as Akkadian period,[30] the various Old Akkadian seals of women performing

ritual libations,[31] as well as the seal of Aman-Eštar, servant of Tutanapsum, *ēntu*-priestess of Enlil in Nippur.[32] After a dearth of visual representations in the second half of the second millennium, there appeared Neo-Assyrian narrative reliefs, which have been treated by Albenda and Reade. Albenda demonstrates the image of women as mother, while Reade depicts the visual evidence of the queen's rise to power from the period of Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.).

S. N. Kramer ("The Woman in Ancient Sumer: Gleanings from Sumerian Literature") makes the only attempt to describe the life-cycle of Mesopotamian woman based on the Sumerian literary tradition. Other scholars mention specific areas of a woman's life-cycle. For a divine birthing of a royal prince, see J. Klein, "The Birth of a Crownprince in the Temple: A Neo-Sumerian Literary Topos." Many authors discuss marriage customs and regulations, mostly within the context of kinship and family law or within political relations between large commercial households or states (see below). H. Neumann ("Bemerkungen zu Ehe, Konkubinat und Bigamie in neusumerischer Zeit") states that written marriage contracts were drawn up under abnormal circumstances, especially in reference to the propertied class and that ordinary marriages were not contractual but customary. One of the customs is the subject of C. Wilcke's "Die Schwester des Ehemannes (/erib/)," in which he demonstrates, on the basis of the Sumerian literary texts, the role of the husband's sister in bringing the bride from her paternal household to her future household. To balance the picture of the texts, the literary conventions are diagrammed by H. L. J. Vanstiphout in his "*Un Carré d'amour sumérien,* or Ways to Win a Woman." Although the bride is the object of the transaction rather than a partner, the person who controls her according to the literary texts

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[30] Boese, op. cit., U 2–5.

[31] R. M. Boehmer, *Die Entwicklung der Glyptik während der Akkad-Zeit.* Untersuchungen zur Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie, vol. IV (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965), Abb. 384, 386, 388, 646; D. Collon, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum, Cylinder Seals II: Akkadian–Post-Akkadian–Ur III Periods* (London: British Museum, 1982), no. 225; W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient,* Propyläen Kunstgeschichte, Band 14 (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1975), pl. 138c.

[32] For Tutanapsum, her manifold activities, and her household, see for present, P. Michalowski, "Tudanapšum, Naram-Sin and Nippur," *RA* 75 (1981): 173–76, J. Oelsner and A. Westenholz, "Weihplattenfragmente der Hilprecht—Sammlung," *AoF* 10 (1983): 212–16, J. and A. Westenholz, "Die Prinzessin Tutanapsum," *AoF* 10 (1983): 387–88.

is her mother. The facile assumption of male control over women's sexuality made on the basis of legal and administrative texts needs to be questioned. During marriage, the wife had many household duties. She apparently supervised the household staff and at times managed cottage industries. No one has attempted to write on housewifery and the domestic establishment as an institution. Moreover, there is testimony as to the independent social and economic status of the widow in the Ur III period.[33] In this connection, note the discussion of a testator giving his wife or daughter the status of father and mother of the house, power and authority of head of the household, *paterfamilias*, in K. Grosz's "Daughters Adopted as Sons at Nuzi and Emar." For an illuminating definition of widowhood as the state of a woman bereft of husband, sons, and male in-laws, see A. A. Tavares, "L'*Almanah* hébraïque et l'*Almattu* des textes akkadiens." Nevertheless, an investigation into the possibility of a woman existing on her own outside the bounds of matrimony and temple devotion would be interesting, since female professionals are known.

Life histories of specific women are dealt with by B. Lafont in "Les Filles du Roi de Mari" and by J. C. Greenfield in "Some Neo-Babylonian Women." While Lafont describes only royal women, Greenfield portrays lives of well-to-do women and common women, wet nurses, temple prostitutes, and slave girls. Other life histories of women living in different periods and times would be interesting; although no presentation was given on the subject of the Ur III women, much has been written about them.[34] On the other hand, nothing has been written on the women of the Old Babylonian period outside of Sippar.[35]

Emphasis was given to kinship and family law. Monogamy, endogamy, patrilineal descent system, and patrilocal residence characterized Mesopotamian marriages from the third millennium (H. Neumann, "Bemerkungen zu Ehe, Konkubinat und Bigamie in neusumerischer Zeit") through the first millennium (Fr. Joannès, "Un Cas de remariage d'époque néobabylonienne"). Greenfield and Joannès both mention the evidence for the levirate marriage being de facto, if not de jure, in the first millennium. Despite urbanization, the Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian family unit was not nuclear but rather an extended family (for a discussion of the Akkadian in relation to the Sumerian nuclear family, see B. Foster, "Notes on Women in Sargonic Society," 55; for the Babylonian, see Fr. Joannès "Un Cas de remariage d'époque néobabylonienne," 95; for the Assyrian, there is no study in this volume). Women were not only given in marriage between great families but also between nations. Political marriages in third-millennium Ebla were recorded by M. G. Biga in "Femmes de la famille royale d'Ebla," in second-millennium Aleppo by F. Abdallah in "La Femme dans le royaume d'Alep au XVIIIe siècle av. J.-C.," in Mari by B. Lafont, "Les Filles du roi de Mari," and in the later second millennium throughout the whole ancient near east by P. Artzi, "The Influence of Political Marriages on the International Relations of the Amarna-Age." For a cross cultural study of suspected unproveable adultery, see S. Demaire, "L'Interprétation de Nb 5,31 à la lumière des droits cunéiformes." Divorce proceedings were usually initiated by the male partner but could also be opened by the female partner (see for third millennium H. Neumann, "Bemerkungen zu Ehe, Konkubinat und Bigamie in neusumerischer Zeit," 78; for second millennium, F. Abdallah, "La Femme dans le royaume d'Alep au XVIIIe siècle av. J.-C.," 14; for first millennium, J. C. Greenfield, "Some Neo-Babylonian Women," 133).

The roles accessible to women in the political system either by law, de jure, or by custom, de facto, need to be investigated. At the top of the political hierarchy stood the king. In the third millennium and first half of the second millennium there is evidence that the queen stood second in command. Not only does the political system and the power structure need examination, but also the presuppositions in the clas-

[33] D. I. Owen, "Widows' Rights in Ur III Sumer," *ZA* 70 (1980): 170–84.

[34] Most important are, in alphabetic order: W. W. Hallo, "Women of Sumer," in *The Legacy of Sumer*, Bibliotheca Mesopotamica, vol. 4 (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1976), 23–40; S. T. Kang, "The Role of Women in the Drehem Texts," in *Sumerian Economic Texts from the Drehem Archive*, vol. I (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 257–70; R. Kutscher, "From Royal Court to Slavery in the Ur III Period," *Tel Aviv* 11 (1984): 183–88; P. Michalowski, "Royal Women of the Ur III Period, part I: The Wife of Šulgi," *JCS* 28 (1976): 169–72; "Royal Women of the Ur III Period, part II: Geme-Ninlila," *JCS* 31 (1979): 171–76; "Royal Women of the Ur III Period, part III," *Acta Sumerologica* 4 (1982): 129–42; P. Steinkeller, "More of Ur III Royal Wives," *Acta Sumerologica* 3 (1981): 77–92.

[35] Rivkah Harris, *Ancient Sippar: A Demographic Study of an Old-Babylonian City (1894–1595 B.C.)* (Istanbul: Neder-

lands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1975); Ulla Jeyes, "The *Nadītu* Women of Sippar," in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 260–72.

sification and typology of royal inscriptions. Considering the many present projects that involve the royal inscriptions of Mesopotamia,[36] a word of criticism might be offered. The corpus usually includes all official inscriptions in which the name of the king occurs. The first volume of the newest project came out this year with the following classificatory system:

> The system of numbering the texts throughout the series requires some explanation. The first letter stands for the general period: A = Assyrian Periods, B = Babylonian Periods, and E = Early Periods. The number following this stands for the dynasty. . . . In the third position appears the ruler number. . . . In the fourth position is the text number. . . . Texts which cannot be assigned definitely to a particular ruler are given text numbers beginning at 1001. . . . Some private inscriptions which give information relevant for establishing royal names and titles—e.g., 'servant seals'—are included and have been given numbers beginning at 2001.[37]

Consequently, one remains ignorant that there are royal inscriptions by queens and princesses. If perchance one is aware of the fact of their existence, one must search for them probably under their husbands and fathers. This classification can lead to chronological errors, since queens sometimes outlive their husbands. Basic investigatory work needs to be done on the subject of inscriptions by royal females. Only one contribution in the Rencontre volume discussed de facto power wielded by women: Z. Ben-Barak "The Queen-Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne." Female roles as state officials belong to another unknown area—see the contribution on the first millennium for one such official by M. Heltzer

"The Neo-Assyrian *Šakintu* and the Biblical *Sōkenet* (I Reg. 1,4)."

The definition and boundaries of women's roles in the socio-economic matrix have received attention in many studies: for the third millennium, see B. Foster, "Notes on Women in Sargonic Society," for the second millennium, K. Grosz, "Daughters Adopted as Sons at Nuzi and Emar," and for the first millennium, J. C. Greenfield, "Some Neo-Babylonian Women." A novel approach would be to probe the establishments under her control, noting not her personal abilities to control finance but the authority she is able to delegate. The power and authority that she exerts over others defines and frames her real control. The investigation of her place in the matrix, both in relation to those beneath her on the vertical axis and, moreover, to those, male and female, on the horizontal axis, could lead to some illuminating insights. Note the unique Sumerian letter from an angry housewife concerning problems within her domestic establishment, its storehouse and its fields.[38] The royal ladies of Mari have transmitted to us not only their correspondence but also their dowry lists concerning their personnel.[39] Not in our volume are the Old Assyrian ladies, heads of large economic establishments. For example, there is Tarām-Kubi who not only corresponds with her husband Inā, a commercial agent in Kaneš but also with other agents, including Imdi-ilum. She also seems to have a partner, Šimat-Aššur.[40] For other periods and areas such material has yet to be probed. For example, the Old Babylonian letters shed much light on the lives of ordinary people. One arbitrarily chosen from a volume I recently reviewed[41] is *YOS* 2 15 = *AbB* 9 15. A man complains to a woman:

> Speak to Elmešum: Thus, says Sirum. May Šamaš and Pannigara keep you in good health forever for

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[36] In order of publication, the recent volumes of royal inscriptions are: E. Sollberger and J.-R. Kupper, *Inscriptions Royales Sumeriennes et Akkadiennes* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1971); A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1972-); I. Kärki, *Die Sumerischen und Akkadischen Königsinschriften der altbabylonischen Zeit*, Studia Orientalia 49 and 51 (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 1980); J. S. Cooper, *Sumerian and Akkadian Royal Inscriptions* (New Haven, Conn.: The American Oriental Society, 1986); A. K. Grayson et al., *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia B.C.*, The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods, vol. 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

[37] R. F. G. Sweet, "Editorial Notes," *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia B.C.*, xiii.

[38] D. I. Owen, "A Sumerian Letter from an Angry Housewife (?)," in *The Bible World: Essays in Honor of Cyrus H. Gordon*, ed. G. Rendsburg, R. Adler, M. Arfa, and N. H. Winter (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1980), 189–202.

[39] I owe this suggestion to Jack Sasson, but unfortunately I could not inspect the dowry lists, since the Mari volumes XXI and above cannot be found in the Harvard Library system at present.

[40] L. Matouš, "Zur Korrespondence des Imdi-ilum mit Tarām-Kubi," in *Zikir Šumim: Assyriological Studies Presented to F. R. Kraus on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982), 268–70.

[41] M. Stol, *Letters from Yale*, Altbabylonsiche Briefe, Heft IX (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981). The review is published in *JNES* 48 (1989): 150–55.

my sake! Do establish fraternal relations in such a
way that, although we grew up together ever since we
were (very) young, you never paid a bit of attention to
me, since you had (that) good fortune! Even the other
day, when you came here, I had a . . . . and you were
not agreeable until you had taken (it) from me: and
you said thus: "From there, I will send you a good
stick and a. . . ." You did not send (them). Moreover,
I told you thus: "If the honorable 'father of the
Amorites' who is married to you, needs (any) beams,
let him write to me and I will send him five beams."
Now I have despatched to you a man with the boat of
Adad; send me one hundred locusts and food worth
one-sixth shekel of silver. Let me experience your
fraternal relationship in this.[42]

Mesopotamian women are most visible functioning
in the religious sphere. Their cultic roles are empha-
sized by J. Asher-Grève in "The Oldest Female
Oneiromancer." Whether or not the enigmatic seal she
discusses portrays a dream interpretress, the author
has collected evidence for this function from epic and
literary texts. Outside these texts, the *šā'iltum* occurs
in Old Akkadian, Old Assyrian, and Old Babylonian
correspondence and administrative texts.[43] I. Winter
underscores the importance of the visual evidence in
dating the earliest evidence for the ritual office of en-
priestess, in "Women in Public: the Disk of Enhe-
duanna, the Beginning of the Office of EN-priestess
and the Weight of Visual Evidence." Likewise, the en-
priestess is the concern of J. Klein in his "The Birth of
a Crownprince in the Temple: A Neo-Sumerian
Literary Topos." He explores the idea that the birth
episode in the royal hymn, Šulgi G, was a legendary
concoction of the Nippur clergy as a theological
apology for Ur-Nammu's death. However, the back-
ground for the attribution of an en-priestess as the
mother of Šulgi is not clarified. Perhaps, emerging
from the nexus, the meeting point of human and
divine spheres in the sacred marriage of Nanna and
en-priestess, Šulgi is born both divine and human, a
god in human form to be worshipped with full cult
ceremonies. Other areas of concern might have related
to possible exercise of spiritual power by any female
or exhibition of personal piety by women.

Although class consciousness was expressed by
some authors, they could not avoid an emphasis on
the upper classes due to the unevenness of evidence;
see, for example, on royalty: F. Abdallah, "La Femme
dans le royaume d'Alep au XVIIIᵉ siècle av. J.-C." Class
distinctions are employed by B. Foster, "Notes on Wo-
men in Sargonic Society," H. Neumann, "Bemerkungen
zu Ehe, Konkubinat und Bigamie in neusumerischer
Zeit," and J. C. Greenfield, "Some Neo-Babylonian
Women."

As can be seen, some areas of inquiry concerning
the functions and roles of women in Mesopotamia
have been investigated in this volume, while other
areas have been left untouched. This reviewer would
suggest that a future Rencontre in Paris again take up
this subject for review to see what progress has been
achieved in understanding Mesopotamian women.

CONCLUSION: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

The study of the status of women in Mesopotamian
society is not a new endeavor. In the early days of
Assyriology, Viktor Marx wrote an article entitled
"Die Stellung der Frauen in Babylonien gemäss den
Kontrakten aus der Zeit von Nebukadnezar bis Darius
(604–485)," *Beiträge zur Assyriologie* 4 (1902): 1–77.
However, past work on the subject has been limited to
analysis of legal rights and privileges. Not only mar-
riage law but also economic assumptions were based
on legal texts (which includes all types of juridi-
cal documents—those of marriage, adoption, inheri-
tance, as well as sales of moveable and immoveable
property—all documents that needed to be executed
before witnesses). Even the information on the *nadītu*-
priestesses came from legal texts.

Recent decades have seen the emphasis switch to
socio-economic studies based on the myriad of ad-
ministrative documents. Evidence for the reconstruc-
tion of the lives of Ur III women and Mari women
comes from this type of source.

New departures from the prevailing traditions of
scholarship have been made in re the visual imagery
of women and their life cycle. Julia Asher-Greve has
made a definitive study of the visual imagery of Early
Dynastic women in relation to the limited written
corpus and has raised many provocative points.[44] In
relation to the life cycle, two recent contributions
have appeared in Dutch that treat gender typing in

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[42] Ibid., 11.

[43] *AHw* 1133b. Note the penetrating study of the oneiric
experiences available from Mari and in particular of Adad-
dūri's messages and reports of oracular and divinatory
activities: Jack Sasson, "Mari Dreams," *JAOS* 103 (1983):
283–93.

[44] J. M. Asher-Greve, *Frauen in altsumerischer Zeit*, Bib-
liotheca Mesopotamica, vol. 18 (Malibu: Undena Publica-
tions, 1985).

youth, childbirth and motherhood, female piety and widowhood.[45]

Present challenges and future tasks require our attention. One challenge is made by J. C. Greenfield, "A book like Sarah Pomeroy's *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* cannot be written for Mesopotamia" (p. 76). While not as well acquainted with the first millennium as is Prof. Greenfield, this reviewer thinks that the challenge can be and should be met, for such a book *is* possible for the earlier periods.

As to the images of the female, other approaches might include an investigation of woman embodying wisdom: *milkum ša sinništim* (Gilg. P ii 25), as well as woman as the means of civilizing man. For the political, economic and cultic roles, some suggestions for future research were made above.

It is essential for Assyriology to develop its own methodologies for ascertaining the roles of the female

in Mesopotamian society, lest others less equipped do so to the detriment of future scholarship. Furthermore, we have it in our power to contribute profoundly to feminist historiography. Our sources undermine generalizations such as

> the person who seeks to understand women of a particular time and place must inevitably use evidence provided by men. How can a vivid and nuanced picture of the lives of women be constructed on the basis of texts written by male authors? Are the expectations, descriptions of women's roles, and the value of these roles in the community expressed in such writings to be understood as normative for women in that culture? Would the women we study have recognized themselves and their own lives in these statements about what women should and should not say, feel, and do?[46]

To sum up, examining the conceptual framework that shapes our understanding of the female role in Mesopotamian society will reveal our underlying presuppositions and make possible new approaches to defining woman's place in Mesopotamian society.

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[45] Martin Stol, *Zwangerschap en geboorte bij de Babyloniërs en in de Bijbel* (Leiden, 1983); Karel van der Toorn, *Van haar wieg tot haar graf: De rol van de godsdienst in het leven van de Israëlitische en de Babylonische vrouw* (Ten Have: Baarn, 1987).

[46] M. Miles, op. cit., 8.