Excursus: “Sacred” and Other Marriages

Sex Omens
If any data would lead to caution about the universality of gender designations, it would be the omens collected by Mesopotamian scholars. Ann Kessler Guinan has investigated the more than one hundred observations collected in a massive 1st millennium BCE omen compendium called *Shumma Ālu*. The first part of each omen indicates sexual behavior, and the second part considers the behavior either fortunate or unfortunate for the males who engage in the behavior. Not surprisingly in a society that, by the 1st millennium BCE if not earlier, had kept the esoteric knowledge largely in the hands of professionals who were male, the orientation of the omen material is male. Guinan points out that, however strange (to us) are the observations and their predictions, they reveal the common assumption of masculine hegemony.

Of the 100+ omens on Tablets 103 and 104 of *Shumma Ālu* Guinan considers seventeen in some detail. Tablet 103 contains 32 omens that deal with heterosexual intercourse; Tablet 104 is divided between a group of 38 omens that deal with a variety of sexual behaviors and 35 others that deal with disasters that threaten the man in cases of divorce or marital abuse. The first one she considers probably looks rather normal even in the modern West. “If a man, a woman mounts him, that woman will take his vigor; for one month he will not have a personal god” (41). Guinan notes that the Akkadian syntax is distorted in the original, as it is in her English translation. The distortion would seem to reflect an “abnormal” situation, with the woman mounting the man. In this case, the prognosis is unfortunate for the man, whose “vigor” is taken from him, leaving him vulnerable for one month. Since a “personal god,” when protecting a man or woman from harm, dwells within the person, the god’s withdrawal for even a short period opens the man to a great variety of harms. Guinan interprets the withdrawal of the personal god as depriving a man of “his drive to pursue his proper place in the world” (41).

Many of these omens concern a man’s place in society at least as much as his personal safety. A pair of omens shows a peculiar Mesopotamian notion of what is called “The Gaze” today. If a man stares at a woman’s vagina, “his health will be good” and he will gather the possessions of others. On the other hand, if a woman stares at a man’s penis, “whatever he finds will not be secure in his house.” If a man ejaculates in the same night when he has intercourse, he “will experience heavy expenses,” as if the semen spent diminished his capital (42). Yet if he “ejaculates in his dream” and his semen spatters on him, “that man will find riches.”

A more complex (and more peculiar) omen has a man talking with a woman on a bed, then rising and “making his manhood,” which Guinan interprets as masturbating, he will experience nothing but joy and prosperity. “That man will have happiness and jubilation bestowed upon him; wherever he goes all will be agreeable; he will always achieve [his] goal” (43).
Perhaps the most puzzling from a modern standpoint are the omens that deal with sex between males. Guinan thinks that Mesopotamia viewed such sexual behavior as the Greeks did: the behavior is acceptable as long as the man is not the one penetrated (44-45). Two omens deal with a man having sex with males who are in special categories, an *assinnu* or a *girseqû*. (The first of these, as we gave seen, thought to be a transvestite or perhaps a eunuch, was in the service of Ishtar; the second had domestic duties in a palace or temple.) In both cases, the man who has sex with them can expect that “hardships” and “deprivations” will be removed from his life. Sex between social equals is often the most difficult to conceptualize in a society, since the power relationship between them is not as clear as it is with the man who is “feminized” in the process. A Mesopotamian omen, though, makes clear that sex with a man and his *mehru*, his social equal, brings the man great prosperity. “If a man has sex *per anum* with his social peer, that man will become foremost among his brothers and colleagues” (45). Guinan points out that the omen contains a number of puns that are easily lost in translation. The word for “anus,” for example, *qinnatu*, is probably a play on “colleagues,” *kinātu*. But the puns do not undercut the clear message: more important even than riches, the reputation among one’s peers, both relatives (“brothers”) and colleagues, is enhanced by the behavior.

By the 1st millennium BCE omen collections had become standardized, and the professionals who were expert in the material were among the most prestigious in Mesopotamian society. We do not know, however, how the collections came into being, how and when observations were made and by whom. Since unusual activity of almost any sort could be taken as messages from the gods, it was worth noting and evaluating—about as “objective” and scientific as Mesopotamia could be in detecting and interpreting phenomena.

Guinan points out that the omen that shows the good fortune of the man who has sex with his *mehru* avoids one of the terms that appears elsewhere in the omen collection—and is important in the literature that deals with homosexuality in *Gilgamesh*. In *Gilgamesh* Enkidu is called Gilgamesh’s *tappû* at least seven times. The word appears to capture a particularly intimate friendship. Frequently it designates the warrior’s “comrade in arms.” The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary shows that is has a wide range of meanings, from a business partner, an official’s colleague, a fellow worker, friend, companion, even the mate of an animal (18.184-90), so it does not always (or often) have a particularly erotic meaning. But Middle Assyrian law protected the relationship between a man and his *tappû*.

**Visualizing Inanna and Her Administration**

Krystyna Szarzyńska noted parallels in the earliest (Proto-cuneiform) script, the glyptic arts, especially cylinder seal impressions, and the plastic arts of Archaic Uruk that enabled her to distinguish the symbols of different deities that had tended to be lumped together before she was able to show systematic differences among them. In particular, the symbols of Inanna and her temple can now be differentiated from those of Nanna and Enki. One of the most interesting results of her study is that the god who is traditionally
linked to Inanna, the sky-god An (Akkadian Anu), is very poorly attested to in early Urukean sources. It appears that he did not have his own temple or receive regular offerings. This is in sharp contrast to Inanna, who received offerings under three or her four titles. The great emphasis on the temples and rites of An in late 1st millennium Uruk would seem to be an innovation, perhaps to be explained by parallels in other Hellenistic cities, where gigantic temples were built for male figures considered to be the highest gods in the pantheon. (Think of the statue of Zeus set up in the Second Temple of Jerusalem.)

In a series of articles Holly Pittman examined the functional role of cylinder seal impressions and the symbolic messages their imagery conveyed in the period of Archaic Uruk scripts. Like others, Pittman sees a significant qualitative difference—a “quantum leap”—between the Late Uruk and earlier Ubaid art in its “complexity and breadth of the visual repertory.” More than 450 images from Eanna levels VI through III have been published so far. They show two distinctive thematic categories: “action” scenes of events or activities, and depictions of things, places, or emblems.

Furthermore, the themes found on Uruk seals are different from those from similar periods in the area of Susa, in Iran. According to Pittman, Uruk seals include “feeding the flocks; presentation to Inanna; procession to temple; boat approaching temple; ritual at temple; herd to temple; workers; warfare; marshes; twist; animal and object; animal file; heraldic animals; symbols.” For Susa, on the other hand, where similar seals can be found, the thematic repertory is different. There one sees: “ritual with ruler; master of animals; combat; prisoners; hunting; herding; figures with goods/standards; transportation of goods; symbols; weaving; figures and vessels; lists; human birthing; animal birthing; working the fields; animal files; heraldic composition of animal; composite animals; snake interlace; animal and object.”

Pittman disagrees with Hans Nissen, who thinks that the more complex imagery of the seals points to the importance of individuals in the administrative system, that the seals were “objects of elite ownership.” Pittman, on the other hand, sees something very different. The hierarchical political and economic system “had long been in place in southern Mesopotamia. But can we conclude therefore that such a hierarchical structure would be the single most or one of the most important features flagged by the imagery of glyptic for the economic administration?” Pittman thinks, rather, that “their primary function was not to convey hierarchical status in the administration but rather to convey some kind of information directly relevant to the transaction at hand.”

Both her temple and something of Inanna’s administration of Uruk can be seen in the most famous work of art from “Archaic” Uruk, The Uruk Vase.

**Visualizing the Sacred Marriage: The Uruk Vase**

For more than half a century after the discovery of a tall vase more than three feet high scholars have puzzled over the details of the frieze that decorates it. The vase can be
dated to 3000 BCE, or perhaps slightly earlier.568 [Insert Fig. 33: Norman Frisch drawing of The Uruk Vase]

Even early observers of the alabaster vase discovered in Uruk were not very confident in identifying the smallish figures in the uppermost register: Two Dinka sheep carry structures on their backs. Standing on the structures are two attendant figures—perhaps statues—one of whom bears the sign, en, and the lower figure next to it folding its hands in prayer.569 While the large male who is being greeted by the goddess (or her pūhu) is the one who is being invested as the en can only be identified by fragments of his clothing, the one who accompanies him is very clearly delineated on the vase, the one seen on cylinder seals accompanying the en. He appears with long hair flowing down his back, and he is clothed in a short skirt.

We do not know the names of the attendant figures. In fact we do not know the names of any figures depicted on the vase, unless the prominent female figure represents Uruk’s most famous deity, the goddess Inanna. We know that Inanna is implicated in the scene by her cult symbols,570 and most assume that the female is either Inanna, now seen in human form, or her human representative in the city. But nothing on the vase indicates the titles of her attendant figures.

While the human figures (or anthropomorphized deities) seem to us quite individualized, they may not have been intended to represent individuals—on principle. Virtually every feature on The Uruk Vase is matched on the tiny cylinder seals that in a later age would be used by individuals to mark their possessions. (Jars and doors, for example, would be sealed by rolling the seals along clay pressed into the entrance or locks.) Holly Pittman noticed that the seal impressions in this very early period, about 3000 BCE, do not carry inscriptions, which would have indicated individual owners, even though writing, as we will see, had already been invented, probably in this very region. (Recall “Daily Bread and Beer” from this period in Uruk.) Pittman also observed that the figures on The Uruk Vase and on art works contemporary with the vase are marked by a striking clarity. Each figure is clearly distinguished from others in a scene. She suggests that such definition served to focus on the different social roles played, and to distinguish among activities and products of a complex, hierarchical society. Pittman thinks that for the first time art served to “narrate social relations and social behavior; through illustration, imagery communicated social norms and it extended ritual” (191-92).571

When, later, cylinder seals were used to mark an individual’s possession, the seals carried the names of the individuals—and the scenes depicted on the seals were typically crowded and stylized, suggesting relatively little interest in the display of goods and social roles.

Moreover, Pittman observes, certain features of the pictorial art evident on The Uruk Vase are also the features of early, Proto-cuneiform writing: legibility, standardization, and syntax, as Margaret Whitney Green had seen in early Uruk texts (189). We will see these features in a text that will be discussed below.
The Uruk Vase was discovered in 1933/34 by the German team excavating the temple precinct known as Eanna, level III/1.\textsuperscript{572} The vase was one of two identical pieces found near an important collection of objects called the Sammelfund. Progress in the deciphering of writing, an innovation in that age, and of symbols found in the art of the period is coming so rapidly that the identification of the attendant figures may come in the near future. If the vase records an event or if the artist had actual individuals in mind, the names of the individuals will likely never be recovered: there is no inscription on the vase naming any of the participants. The keen interest in the roles and titles of temple officials in a period that saw the development of a complex hierarchical society, however, may well provide clues to the titles. One, the \textit{en}, is inscribed on the vase.

In the absence of such a precise identification, we want to make several points about the vase: first, the way it illustrates a relationship of religion to “life;” and second, the way it provides a position for what Richard Henshaw calls the “keepers of the sacred house,” in this case the house of the Great Goddess Inanna. Insert Fig. 34: Visual of the two attendant figures]

Nearly all of the historians of art who deal with the ancient Near East emphasize the importance of The Uruk Vase, but they are clearly puzzled by the two attendant figures in what I would call the “sacred precinct,” possibly the \textit{gipar}. A sampling of early and more recent comments reveals an increasing tendency to ignore the difficulties. E. Douglas Van Buren took them to be male, “because their long skirts are girded, whereas women at that time do not seem to have worn belted garments” (34).\textsuperscript{573} Henri Frankfort claimed that they are a man and a woman.\textsuperscript{574} Ann Perkins, calling the narrative a “culminating scene,” and “one of the earliest narrative monuments,” does not discuss the two figures.\textsuperscript{575} André Parrot largely ignores the “small figures.”\textsuperscript{576} Beatrice Goff considers them two men.\textsuperscript{577} Anton Moortgat, who calls them simply “two human figures,” says they are “standing praying and sacrificing.”\textsuperscript{578} Walther Wolf thinks they are “sacrificers.”\textsuperscript{579} H. A. Groenewegen-Frankfort does not mention them.\textsuperscript{580} R. F. G. Sweet calls them simply “models of two human figures.”\textsuperscript{581} Dominique Collon does not provide comments on the details of the vase.\textsuperscript{582} And F. A. M. Wiggermann gives a marvelously compact interpretation of the scene, but does not comment specifically on the two figures.\textsuperscript{583}

The naturalism of the relief, especially the depiction of the human form, makes it easy to see that “life” is most abundant in the familiar forms of healthy bodies, movement, the growth of vegetation, and even in the flow of water upon which the cycle of life depends. Unlike much of the visual art of the 4\textsuperscript{th} millennium BCE for which we lack interpretive keys, the scene on The Uruk Vase makes great sense to us even if we cannot understand all the details.

**Life, Fertility, and Sexuality**

Basic to Mesopotamian religion, we feel—fundamental perhaps to all religions—is the persistence, the ongoingness of life.\textsuperscript{584} This is no better illustrated than in the influence of Inanna and her Companions. Much has been made of two life-related elements of Mesopotamian religion, the “sacred marriage” and “sacred prostitution.” In both of these
Inanna is at the center. Both the “sacred marriage” and “sacred prostitution” are difficult concepts for the modern West to grasp, and there is no unanimity even among the specialists who take up these concepts—or even as they exist as nameable social constructs. Certainly, though, fertility, the means by which life will continue, was a major concern in the earliest visual representations of religion in Uruk, and it is most evident in The Uruk Vase—as it is in most early religions. The need for humans, animals, and plants to continue through the next generation is the most basic need of living creatures.

Sumerian and Akkadian are rich in the language of life. The abstraction formed from something living (ti), nam-ti-la, Akkadian balātu, means life, vigor, good health and (held and dispensed by the gods), immortality.\(^{585}\) It is important to emphasize that everlasting life by definition included the gods and excluded humans. From a Mesopotamian connection, the promise of an enduring and pleasant life after death familiar in Judaism, Christianity and Islam would be deification. A few exceptional individuals were given a godlike existence. The hero of the flood story in *Gilgamesh*, Ut-napishtim, and his wife, for example, are “raised” to a life “like us gods” (ki ilāni nashima).\(^{586}\) In the long and complex history of Mesopotamian religion, a few kings claimed to be divine, and some others were deified after their deaths.\(^{587}\) What religion offered humans was not eternal life for the individual but a fullness of life, of which fertility is the most conspicuous part. Long life and abundant provisions were within reach of mortals. Notice that health was a most important aspect of life. The verbal form of ti/balātu means first of all to get well, to recover from a sickness. Secondary meanings include being vigorous, living long, obtaining food, keeping safe, and being pardoned.\(^{588}\) Healing could be the result of divine action or medical treatment. The distinction between the two was not terribly clear.

“Abundance” is another term related to life. Sumerian hé-gal, borrowed into Akkadian as hegallu, indicated the abundant yield of animals and plants. It also indicated the fertilizing waters of the all-important water supply. Abundance, productivity, and charismatic power were also captured by the term. Not surprisingly, the word for “treasury” was the “house” of hé-gal.\(^{589}\)

Western ideas of religion betray such an otherworldly orientation that conspicuous displays of wealth and abundance are still sometimes denounced as shameful. That attitude would seem odd to the Mesopotamian. Stranger still would be certain Western attitudes toward sexuality. Even without “sacred” marriages and “sacred” prostitution, the frank celebration of sexual attractiveness and sexual vigor found in Mesopotamian religion can be disturbing. Again, the Sumerians had a word for it: hili, which translated to Akkadian kuzbu. The word can mean luxuriance and abundance, as with hé-gal, and it can refer to plentiful water and even the rich adornment of buildings. Mainly it refers to a sexual attractiveness that was not simply (or perhaps originally) human. It was an attribute of goddesses like Inanna and Ishtar, as one might expect, since they are regularly described as goddesses of love, rather like Aphrodite and Venus; but hili was an attribute as well of goddesses like the wise Nisaba, goddess of writers.\(^{590}\) Since we tend to see something like hili in a gendered way, more a feature of the feminine than the masculine,
it is worth noting that Mesopotamia saw it as an attribute of gods as much as it was of goddesses.591

One might expect that the needs for food and offspring were so pressing that the Sumerians would always link life-enhancing sexuality with reproduction. While it is dangerous to separate the two completely—the goddesses Inanna and Ishtar, for example, regularly exhibit their hili/kuzbu but are rarely seen as mothers592—a curious pattern has been observed in Sumerian literature that points to their separation in a way we would find unusual. Jerrold S. Cooper found it interesting that Sumerian scholars are often very reticent to translate sexual passages with their original directness. (As late as 1948 a prominent scholar translated a passage in the Akkadian Gilgamesh, not in English, like the rest of the work, but in Latin.) Cooper pointed out that the god Enki, in an important mythological poem, masturbates and his ejaculate fills the Tigris with ever-flowing water.593 In another case Enki admires his own penis. The unabashedly erotic poetry that deals with Inanna and Dumuzi, however, rarely mentions the male organ (or even sexual intercourse) by name. The indirection is all the more curious in that Inanna’s vulva is praised in several Inanna poems. And at the beginning of the narrative in which Inanna tricks the trickster himself, Enki, into giving her the divine me that will give her control over much of the universe, Inanna praises herself while she examines her private parts. The significant difference between the Enki poems and the Inanna poems, perhaps reflective of female scribes at work in composing the Inanna literature, is that Enki’s sexual displays are always connected with reproduction, while Inanna’s are not. Cooper (using a more recent transliteration of the name Inanna) concludes,

The tender, sensuous sexuality of the Inana-Dumuzi poetry does not lead to conception, and privileges the female organ over the male. It is associated with agricultural fertility and abundance, which, in the sacred marriage ritual, are generalized to other areas of successful rulership. Enki’s sexuality is raw, often violent, phallocentric and is reproductive on both the metaphor and concrete levels. The explanation for these contrasting sexualities is to be sought both in the “woman’s voice” that pervades the Inana-Dumuzi material, and in Enki’s role as the ultimate source of fresh water irrigation, the fecundation that is the very basis of Babylonia’s agricultural economy.594

There is another, related possibility. Much has been made of the necessity to tie sexual experience to the father, since it is not obvious who the father of a child is, though it is clear who the mother is. The work of Jacques Lacan, who symbolizes the child’s entry into language, into the Symbolic Order, by the Name of the Father, is the most thorough working out of the psychology involved in paternity (and patriarchy). Just to forestall any worry that the Sumerians did not know the connection between intercourse and offspring, it is worth noting that the Enki literature, which often concerns itself with reproduction, creation, and the formation of sometimes unusual creatures, usually turns on the cooperation, sometimes on the conflict, between Enki and the goddesses. When normal reproduction is depicted, a role is assigned to both male and female in the process.595 (The recently recovered Ardi, *ardipithecus ramidus*, a million years earlier than Lucy,
may already have been socialized to form a partnership with males to provide food and protection for the females and their offspring.)

Before the mother goddess, Ninhursag, provides a new order of deities who can reproduce normally, Enki celebrates his own creative potency. Science fiction writer Neal Stephenson, following Sumerologist Bendt Alster, interprets the well-known myth, “Enki and Ninhursag: A Sumerian Paradise Myth,” as an account of the development of normal male and female reproduction. Enki brings life-giving “water of the heart” to an arid land by masturbating. The mother goddess, Ninhursag, steals Enki’s semen and impregnates herself, giving birth to a daughter, Ninmu. Enki then becomes attracted to Ninmu, impregnates her and then in turn his granddaughter Ninkurra and great granddaughter Uttu. The incestuous cycle is finally broken when Ninhursag extracts the semen from Uttu, spreads it on the ground and then heals a seriously ill Enki (who has eaten the plants that grew from his seed). Together they produce children in what becomes the normal way of human reproduction. Whether the myth speculates on the difference between sexual and asexual reproduction, it certainly ends with the paradigm of male-female cooperation.

If certain Enki myths tended to reinforce the importance of the male in fertility, the portrayal of a fertility figure like Inanna without an emphasis on motherhood may be related to an equally important but often overlooked insight: that humans, unlike most other animals, even the higher mammals with which they share so much DNA, are capable of severing sexuality from reproduction. The evolutionary development of humans is tied in many unsuspected ways to this freedom from estrus, as Helen Fisher and Riane Eisler have pointed out.

According to anthropologist Fisher, when “Lucy” of the Oldevai Gorge lost estrus, her partner did not know when she was fertile and thus was obliged to copulate with her regularly in order to bear a child. The advantage of Lucy was that her condition “kept a special friend in constant close proximity, providing protection and food the female prized.” Even Enki had that lesson to learn. In “Enki and Ninhursag: A Sumerian Paradise Myth,” the pattern of incest is finally broken when Ninhursag advises great granddaughter Uttu not to have anything to do with Enki—until he brings her a gift of cucumbers, apples, and grapes. (These water-filled plants flourished in southern Iraq when the river water produced by Enki was channeled into irrigated fields.) Now that Ardi--millions of years before the Sumerians were in Mesopotamia--could both walk upright and climb trees, our ancestors could swap food for sex.

Riane Eisler goes further than Helen Fisher. Eisler agrees that the evolution of human sexuality was a major factor in the evolution of complex life forms. She proposes that “our unique capacity for higher consciousness combined with the evolution of our unique capacity for prolonged sexual pleasure unconstrained by seasonality, along with the long caretaking needed for human maturation, provided the potential for a major evolutionary breakthrough toward—in the normative or value-related, rather than descriptive sense—a truly more evolved form of life.” What Eisler calls a “dominator” model of social
organization, evident in the phallocentrism of the Enki literature (even though the mythology involving Enki features reconciliation as often as rivalry with the great goddesses), largely replaced an earlier “partnership” model, not matriarchy, as some have claimed in the past. The partnership model, which may be evidenced in the Inanna-Dumuzi literature, would show the marks of an evolutionary process not yet yielding to the dominator model. For Eisler, the prevalence of a partnership model in early prehistory offers promise that the model could emerge once again in the modern world.

For our purpose, if what Fisher and Eisler claim is true, it is not so much that the great goddess Inanna is depicted as a sexually active human—even as the ultimate femme fatale — instead of being portrayed as a Mother Goddess; rather, that the sexuality that she embodies is what differentiates humans from the reproductive life of plants and animals, over which she has great power. Inanna is always portrayed as the free being, insisting on her rights and demanding her place. On The Uruk Vase she is seen in her aspect of command as much as in her erotic aspect.

We now know, thanks to the careful elucidation of Archaic Sumerian texts, that Inanna was worshipped under four aspects. Krystyna Szarzyńska discovered that different offerings were presented to as Inanna-hud2, Inanna-sig, and Inanna-nun. A fourth aspect, Inanna-kur, was recognized in the texts, but it is not clear if she received offerings under this title. One interesting feature is that a clear distinction was made between the first two aspects, Inanna as Morning Star and as Evening Star. (The periodic disappearance of the planet Venus and occasional eclipse of the planet, like the moon, could symbolize the descent of the goddess into the underworld.) Szarzyńska calls the nun-aspect, the “princely” Inanna; perhaps to avoid the ambiguities in the English term “princely” and use instead, “majestic,” which captures the commanding and the grandeur we think nun carried at that early date. It is possible that the nun-aspect reflects Uruk’s (and Inanna’s) domination over Enki’s Eridu. The kur-aspect has yet to be worked out. Elsewhere Szarzyńska has connected a unique and puzzling structure related to the Eanna temple complex to Inanna’s descent into the underworld and her resurrection. Called by the excavators the Steingebäude, originating probably in Uruk IV, an underground labyrinth was constructed just at the side of a ziggurat. It was a deep pit with three independent circle of walls around a central room. Szarzyńska points out that at the very center was a complex structure that served as a “cover of some important place on earth.” She speculates that it is the opening into the underworld. In addition to the Sumerian and Akkadian poems on the descent of Inanna/Ishtar into the underworld, Szarzyńska cites the “hole” or vent into the underworld made by Enki to enable Enkidu to escape temporarily from the underworld so that he might speak with Gilgamesh. The story is told at length in “Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Nether World” and in Tablet 12 of Gilgamesh, a translation of part of that earlier Sumerian poem.

Tentatively we see the four facets of Inanna as her majestic, erotic, ludic, and tragic aspects. They may all be figured on The Uruk Vase, but two, the majestic and the erotic, are clearly evident.
The sexuality of Inanna may, we are suggesting, have provided a very positive image for women in Uruk society, especially those engaged in the work of the temple, which was at the height of its power to direct the city-state’s economy at precisely the time The Uruk Vase was fashioned. Apart from practices we would identify as “religious rituals,” women in the temple were important in the temple economy, e.g., in the textile industry. What in a later period—in the period that produced, for example, the witty, if blasphemous, insults hurled at Ishtar by Gilgamesh—might so separate female to male and see in Inanna/Ishtar the femme fatale, destroyer of men, in this early period recognizes the power of the female and the need for a “partnership” relationship of women and men in society.

On the other hand, Susan Pollock and Reinhard Bernbeck, who studied the percentages of males, females, and genderless figures on The Uruk Vase and other visual representations in the same period, argues that even there the goddess and her high priest/ess do not represent women of the period.

Apart from the depiction of this important female, probably a goddess, women are almost invariably represented as pig-tailed figures. They occur in scenes markedly different than those just considered: they are almost never shown individually; in most cases they are seated; and they occur only on seals. In more than half of the scenes in which they are portrayed, they are engaged in repetitive tasks in which two or more figures perform the same activity.607

The women are most often seen in textile production and the production of vessels, especially those that carry liquids, beer and animal fats in particular (159).

Elsewhere Pollock, following Hans J. Nissen, has suggested that profound changes from these early (Late Uruk and Jemdet Nasr) periods through the 3rd millennium, changes in the representation of women in a variety of economic activities to ritual activities, correspond to changes in the Mesopotamian state. Where the earlier representations of men and women celebrate the economic productivity of the temple-centered state, later representations reflect the emergence of kings, whose characteristic activities are organized warfare, and the building of regional empires. They suggest that the ideology that considered the city-state a “household” of a god or goddess is a strategy of resistance to the palace and its increasing usurpation of temple authority.608 We would suggest that, as part of that shift, women involved in the activities of the temple would maintain their now-traditional status, even if the “secularized” women could not.

Whatever pattern The Uruk Vase implies, in the encounter between female and male, a majestic goddess and the soon to be deified male, the portrayal of the divine in human terms was a significant turn for Mesopotamia. Since Sumero-Akkadian ideology credits the gods with providing the paradigms and patterns that are given—like kingship, nāmulugal, which was said to “descend” from the gods—to humankind, the pattern of human sexual freedom would naturally be seen as derived from the gods.
Life is most evident on the vase, then, in the number of living beings and in the meeting of female and male, which symbolizes its continuity. The fertility aspect is implied even if the emphasis is on sexuality rather than reproduction.

**A Great Chain of Being**

By the Uruk Period (3800-2800 BCE) agriculture and animal husbandry had long been developed in the region of Uruk. Temples at the center of the economy in the cities of southern Mesopotamia stored grain and kept large herds of animals. The temple was a redistribution center through which the economy flowed. The Uruk Vase offers a rare look at an interlocking system, almost an ecological niche, in which human and divine, animal and plant lived harmoniously together.

Agriculture in the flood plain where Uruk stood required great care in maintaining a system of irrigation canals. Uruk itself was positioned between a major river on the west and a smaller canal on its east side. The flow of water in the Euphrates River was difficult to predict and hard to control. A complex, stratified society emerged to handle both agriculture and animal husbandry in the area. The temple, as a holder of land, keeper of herds, grain storage center and something like a central bank, dominated the economies of the city-states of the south. It is evident that the temple was immensely important in producing the foods necessary for the society to live, and also for preserving foodstuffs, wine, for example, and beer. (Though beer was not preserved for any length of time, the grains needed for brewing were stored for later use.)

Less obvious is the temple’s role in the development of trade. Uruk developed as a major city in an area that is resource-poor. Through trade over what would seem like extraordinarily far reaches, given the means of transportation in the 4th millennium, into Iran to the east and to such places as Nineveh to the north, Uruk initiated a “world system” that brought raw materials into the city and worked them into finished products that could be used at home or traded abroad. The alabaster used in The Uruk Vase gives evidence of the trade network. The stone is not native to southern Mesopotamia, and had to be imported from highland sources. Guillermo Algaze claims that the trade contacts had a direct impact on social complexity, “since imports consisted largely of products that required processing before they could be used, and exports consisted mostly of goods that required considerable investments in (dependent) manpower for their production as well as a bureaucratic superstructure to administer, store, and redistribute that production.”

The “world system” did not, however, require a worldview that was as simple, coherent and closed as The Uruk Vase seems to offer. Mesopotamian thought, from the earliest texts through the long tradition of scribal schools, preferred complexity.

The History of Ideas was literally founded on the metaphor of a “great chain of being,” since it provided the title for Arthur O. Lovejoy’s 1936 work, subtitled “A Study of the History of an Idea.” While the metaphor itself may have derived from Homer, Lovejoy found the notion of a hierarchical universe first in Plato, where two principles of the
divine, the absolute self-sufficiency of the Good and the expansiveness or plenitude of the Good, which demanded that “the Absolute would not be what it is if it gave rise to anything less than a complete world in which the ‘model,’ i.e., the totality of ideal Forms, is translated into concrete realities.” paradoxically co-existed. And Aristotle added a third principle, of continuity, in which Nature works by subtle gradations so that intermediate forms, e.g., “zoophytes,” are difficult to classify as plants or animals. The paradoxes and inconsistencies in the Platonic and Aristotelian views led Lovejoy—and many others after him—to a much more sophisticated model of the universe, as the philosophers advanced it, than is sometimes thought. But the simplified version served the West for millennia: the universe ordered from high to low, from the divine, human, animal, plant, to the inorganic; within each band, as much fullness (in numbers and in types of beings) as was compatible with the principle of hierarchy. It was a closed, full, and beautiful universe—a cosmos.

That world view does not seem to have dominated Mesopotamian thought, which was so aware of complexity, of multiplicity, that the beautifully ordered cosmos is only rarely glimpsed. When the city god of Babylon, Marduk, is elevated (by the Babylonians) to kingship of the gods, he does, it is true, form the stuff of earlier reality into a well-ordered place. The biblical view, usually attributed to the Priestly tradition, of a creation in several well-defined stages beginning with the least important and culminating in the most important creature, humankind, may well derive from Babylonian thought. And it is true that very early Sumerian myths attempt a description of the origins of things. As often as not, the origin is the good place, before conflict, sickness, and death made their appearance. Even in the creation stories, and in the stories that look back to origins, though, the more process one finds, the more complexity is evident. The story of Marduk’s exaltation, Enuma Elish, would seem to be the main exception, since the origins of the universe contain the principles of chaos that a Marduk is only with difficulty able to contain. When all the creating is accomplished, and everything is in its place, even Marduk receives his reward in a typically Mesopotamian form: a solemn list of fifty titles. Besides Marduk, he is called Marukka, the god who is creator of everything, and Marutukku, “refuge of the land” and protector of his people, Barshakushu, a wide heart, and Lugaldimmerankia (Emesal for King of the Gods of the Above and the Below), and Asarluhi (Asalluhi), a name given him by his father, and Asaru, creator of grains and legumes, and Shazu, who knows the hearts of the gods and sees that evildoers do not escape. Scholars have attempted to find a simple model of the universe as Mesopotamians understood it, but the attempts have largely failed. A list-mentality prevails, especially among the makers of texts, and the lists quickly strip everything of its simplicity. It is difficult to see what simple principles organize the fifty titles of Marduk. And it is even more difficult to see what orders the lists of omens, and the lists of signs and the lists of vocabularies that proved so important to the ancient scribes.

Nearly 4000 clay tablets have been found in the ancient city of Uruk from about 3100 BCE. These Archaic texts are the oldest written documents from the ancient Near East, and they may well be the oldest writings in the history of humankind. Hans J. Nissen,
who has studied these texts closely and has begun to translate them, estimates that almost 450 texts, 15% of the total, are “Lexical Lists” (317). The remaining 85% are “economic” texts, mostly inventories and invoices that relate to the goods moving in and out of the temple. There are lists of “wood” things, and lists of places, and lists of animals, vessels, and metals. One that contains close to 100 titles and names of professions is known as the Standard Professions List, and it was copied in different periods and in different places for many hundreds of years. The oldest version tells us of the important figures in the temple economy, e.g., “leaders” (NAM₂) of the law, the city, the troops, the plow, and “of barley.”619 No doubt the list describes a social hierarchy, but much of it remains obscure. There is a courtier, ambassador, priest, gardener, cook, baker, coppersmith, jeweler and potter on the list. Exactly how the list is organized, though, is still not clear.

H. L. J. Vanstiphout has pointed out that the lexical compilations are the longest literary works in cuneiform literature. He noticed that the ambiguities and punning one finds in the literary texts are found in the lexical lists, where a single logogram allows for several different readings.620 The earliest lexical lists arranged words thematically or provided signs with their pronunciation in the Sumerian language. Then, a column was added that provided the Akkadian equivalents of the Sumerian terms. Later, grammatical functions were given in the lists.621 Vanstiphout underscores the organized list-format in Mesopotamian thought.

The important point is that the principle underlying all this effort of collection, classification, organization, and analysis is the principle of writing. To the Mesopotamians themselves, therefore, the term approximating what we would call “science” or “knowledge” was simply tupšarrūtu, “the art, knowledge, and technique of the scribe.” Ancient reflection upon reality and the world was based on language in its written, not its spoken form, as was the case with, for instance, much of Greek philosophy.622

Rather than focusing on the meaning of spoken words, their references, Mesopotamian scribes considered first the signs themselves. Lists developed by accumulation or accretion, and the signs took on a life of their own. Vanstiphout noticed that the lists contain signs that never appear in actual texts apart from the lexical lists, including “obviously impossible entries.”623 (This may, however, reflect the relative paucity of our texts.) Instead of nested hierarchical classes of objects, such as we have become familiar since Aristotle, the lists are more like our familiar drop-down menus in computer programs.

Against this list-mentality, evident already in the earliest written documents that have been discovered, the “bands of being” on The Uruk Vase seem remarkably clear and well-ordered. There are three main registers. The whole piece rests on a double row of undulating lines, no doubt representing the waters below the earth’s surface upon which life depends. (Another possibility is that the lines are as straight as the artist could make them at that difficult angle.) With one important exception, all the figures in the three registers are firmly set upon the earth, whose surface is heavily marked by double lines.
Since Sumerian thought divided the universe first of all between *an*, The Above, and *ki*, The Below, most objects maintain their contact with the dividing line, the earth’s surface. Like later Mesopotamian narrative art, The Uruk Vase is meant to be read from the bottom register up. The division of the surface into registers and the portrayal of group action in files of single figures one sees on The Uruk Vase became conventional in Mesopotamian art.624

On the line marking the surface above the waters appear alternating date palms and barley stalks. We have already noticed the economic and ideological importance of these items, especially for Uruk. Above the plant level, in the same register, is a line of ten animals shorn of their coats,625 five rams and five ewes, all set in the same direction. Where the plants completely fill the lower part vertically, the line of animals is set in motion along the groundline. The contrast between the vertical stasis and the horizontal movement is quite striking. The plants and animals in the divided register are the same height as the register above it, which is completely filled with men carrying vessels. At first glance, the nine nude men who make up the line—their nudity suggesting that they are priests engaged in a ritual act—seem identical. Moving in the opposite direction of the animals below them, the line gives an even stronger effect of a procession, an even more powerful movement. Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that the vessels they carry, even when they are similar to one another, are not identical. Some of them are heaped with fruits, others are apparently filled with liquids, probably milk and oil.626 The men, too, turn out to be a diverse lot. Henri Frankfort observed that “the many small differences between individual figures destroy, on closer scrutiny, the impression of a merely ornamental frieze, and one notices that even here the figures are rendered with such vigour and directness that they seem vibrant with the excitement of the occasion, and therefore intimately connected with the occasion.”627 Such “vividness and vigour” Frankfort finds characteristic of the age in which The Uruk Vase was fashioned (11). The point is worth emphasizing. Even when the scene is at its most schematic, and the large movements in space and time are exaggerated—giving the event represented a proper ritual quality—variety and difference are respected.

The second register, with the men carrying vessels, is the same height as the lower register. That is, the men are portrayed as twice the height of the plants and animals below them. The top register presents two and possibly three human figures (in the fragment that has not been recovered) that are even taller than the men in the middle register. One figure, wearing a short skirt and holding a stole, is the same size as the “priests” below. (This one is our acolyte seen in cylinder seal impressions.)

The scene has attracted a great deal of commentary, especially since it is the earliest example of narrative art yet discovered. The lines of moving animals and men in the lower registers converge in an encounter between three men and a woman in the top register. Behind the woman is a collection of items oriented right to left, that is, in the direction opposite to the men moving toward her.
Since it was discovered, the vase has been seen to depict a “sacred marriage rite,” or, to be more precise, a “culminating scene” in a complex ceremony. A culminating scene has “one group of figures, one moment of time, at the climax of a series of events” standing for the entire story. The problem has been to identify the main participants. Most agree that the tall woman stands for the goddess Inanna, and the figure in the break (the details that have been recovered make it clear that he wears a long garment and a stole) stands for her lover, Dumuzi. Very possibly human figures stand in for the goddess and her lover. Most think that the male in the break is the en of the temple, playing the role of Dumuzi, and the female may well be a priestess. In one way, the very problem is an advantage to us. The West has become so used to figuring the divine in human terms—anthropomorphizing the sacred—that it is useful to remind ourselves that this was an innovation in the late 4th millennium BCE.

The naturalistic elements so prominent on The Uruk Vase have been variously interpreted. Beatrice Goff emphasized the abstract nature of art even in the Uruk Period during which the vase was fashioned. She argued against the view of Arnold Hauser that naturalism is connected with individualistic and anarchistic social patterns, while geometrism is connected with a uniformity of organization and stable institutions. Goff argued that, while the art of the period had passed beyond the aniconic stage, and that individual deities were worshipped in anthropomorphic form, in at least six ways the naturalistic art was still abstract (and not at all individualistic and anarchic). By simplifying the realistic, a single figure could stand for a class of objects, not a particular plant, animal, or landscape. Goff detected a pattern that was found even earlier than the Uruk Period, a pattern in which fertility is contrasted with conflict. By making certain details more realistic, animals attacking one another, for example, the conflict would be exaggerated; the same would be true of figures representing fertility. A third element was the distortion of reality introduced by placing one scene next to another in an inappropriate way. Scenes showing the feeding of the herd, for example, are juxtaposed with scenes of sacrifice. Fourthly, by setting objects next to objects that have no naturalistic connection with them, the artist emphasizes the symbolic element. Including a bull’s head in a scene where a herdsman is protecting a calving cow from a lion is one example. Two representational forms can be combined. Quadrupeds, for example, may be given the necks of serpents and the heads of snakes. And finally, Goff points out, symbols are arranged in pairs, sometimes set antithetically one against the other. Two is prominent, with pairs of animals and humans, some of the same sex, some of the opposite sex. The alternating palm-trees and ears of barley in the lowest register of The Uruk Vase may further represent male and female, since one symbolized Dumuzi in the archaic period, and the second symbolized Inanna.

Goff’s comments are particularly helpful in appreciating the schematic elements of The Uruk Vase—and also the collection of objects behind the goddess in the highest register. But the naturalistic elements that are so conspicuous make a “chain of being” visible. The work does not consider perspective, so the individual figures stand out against a background that is entirely neutral—except for the firm grounding on the earth. The
figures of plants, animals, and humans are clear enough without their being multiplied. The duplication and multiplication of figures allow them to be seen as a class of objects even as their individual differences are made visible. The orders of being are separated, yet connected in a procession to the goddess. Everywhere life, fertility, and abundance are celebrated. As in the Greek notion of The Great Chain of Being, the whole is ordered and yet full, separated into bands and yet each is still connected with those above and below. The hierarchical ordering is clear from the relative size of the figures.

The goods of the earth are presented as an offering to the goddess, each element sustaining the level above it: water, plants, animals, humans—and the divine. Except for the vessels carried by the men, everything is in its natural state in the procession to the goddess. For us, the scandalous presentation of men not only unclothed but completely shaved as well takes the natural to a degree we might find problematic. The large male striding up to the goddess is presumably of a higher status than the men in the middle register. But he is not the main actor. The one whose stole is being held is the one presented to the goddess, and in texts that appear to deal with similar rituals, that one is the en of the temple-state. Calling the en a “priest-king,” as is often done today, poses something of a problem, as we have already seen, since it begs the question of what “priest” or “king” may have meant in Archaic Uruk. However the figure is interpreted, it is clear that the humans are not simply individuals, but are organized hierarchically.

The long garment and the stole help to identify the figure, even though that part of the vase is missing. E. D. Van Buren had suggested that the figure was bearded (37), thus contrasting him with his retinue. D. Schmandt-Besserat has noticed that the long kilt that is barely visible is made of a transparent, net-like fabric represented by a criss-cross pattern (204). Thus F. A. M. Wiggerman has reconstructed the figure in the following way:

[Insert Fig. 36, The en and his attendant (Wiggermann’s Figure 1).]

The net-like garment is the most conspicuous mark of the en. Another is the rolled cap that Wiggermann fills in. “The Early Dynastic Hymn to Gilgamesh” has the lover of Inanna wearing a bar-si(g), a headpiece known in Akkadian as a parsīgu. Late into the 1st millennium BCE it was worn by Inanna and other goddesses in Uruk. One might guess that the exchange of clothing between goddess and (male) human was symbolic of the change in fate as the human is selected by Inanna to be her lover. The items of clothing on The Uruk Vase that appear to be worn by the human may be part of the ritual: the en in this case would be seen as putting on the garment. The stole or sash, as Wiggermann reconstructs the scene, is a costly piece of linen offered to the goddess (not worn by the en), but the exchange could be going in the opposite way.

We will see later how the parsīgu functions in Gilgamesh.

Wiggermann also provides a rationale for the naturalism of works like The Uruk Vase. The Uruk Period saw a transformation of the gods from nature gods into city-gods and heads-of-state. A new social structure emerged based on the service to the city god
rather than to the family. Wiggermann thinks a new theory of the state was developed to justify social stratification.638

A city was organized around the service to the city god who owned the city’s domains; the city’s leadership, headed by the city ruler (EN, or “Lord”), redistributed the produce of the god’s lands among his servants, the city’s population: and the city ruler owed his office and a circumscription of his duties (to provide for the deity) to his marriage with the city god(dess).639

Wiggermann suggests the occasion of the event represented on the vase was a harvest festival, probably including a sacred marriage rite. Mesopotamian weddings formally began with the presentation of the groom’s gifts, the bridewealth, which usually consisted of food for the wedding feast and sometimes clothing or jewelry.640

A clue that the main actor in this scene is the en appears in an unusual place. It was recognized early that one of the figures attending the goddess carries the cuneiform sign EN or its pictographic prototype. Since The Uruk Vase dates from the time of the earliest writings yet discovered, and those writings are only now being deciphered, it is difficult to determine how the sign should be read, if indeed it is the cuneiform sign the attendant is carrying. [Insert Fig. 37: Attendant carrying the sign, the sacred precinct]

The EN sign, which some have taken as a representation of a ceremonial boat—or a hat—may not have been read in Sumerian, hence as en. It is possible that a pictograph could be “read” in the language of anyone interpreting the picture. But the presence of phonetic indicators in the earliest writing has led one scholar, Piotr Steinkeller, to claim that by Uruk IV script we have “iron-clad proof that the language underlying the Uruk script is in fact Sumerian.”642 (Evidence for the suggestion that the EN sign represents a field rather than a boat or hat is given below.)

Where, then, do the attending figures stand in the hierarchical order? The en is often depicted with a faithful attendant, beardless and wearing a short kilt in net-like textile. An indication of his status is the long hair falling on his shoulders.643 [Insert Fig. 38: The attendant/acolyte upon the en]

With his background in the Classics, A. H. Sayce suggested that Enkidu was represented on cylinder seals as a satyr or faun.644 The suggestion has not found much favor among scholars, but it may be that the long-haired acolyte was as much a model for Enkidu as the bull-like half-man half-beast portrayed on Old Akkadian seals.

What one sees on The Uruk Vase, then, is the teeming abundance of life held in check by an unusually Greek-like ordering of the ranks of being. Such ranking is replicated in the new social order, where the principle of hierarchy prevails. The en has his place, and the goddess provides that place in the chain of being.

**Depictions of the Human Figure**

Before identifying the players further, it is well to consider how naturalistically the humans are presented on the vase. The nude men are individualized,645 but it is clear
they are uniformly young, vigorous and healthy. Their bodies—including genitalia—make visible the link between “life,” health and potency. The nudity may symbolize “purity,” possibly even virginity.)

In describing the liveliness of the scene on The Uruk Vase, H. A. Groenewegen-Frankfort notes that each of the men is “an individual presence, organic, alive.” In contrast the Egyptian art, with its long-legged and “long-flanked” men, early Sumerian art prefers figures whose “corporeality is as convincing as that on early black-figured Greek vases,” with their “muscular strength concentrated in thighs and shoulders.” The men are rendered in profile except for the right shoulder, “which appears pressed forward rather awkwardly.” The awkwardness is significant, since the display of the right side of the body showed that the man was healthy, if not flawless. Only one of the nude “priests” is shown from the left.

Taller figures are more important than shorter ones. The female dominates the scene. If the female were wearing the horned headdress of the gods, there would be no problem in identifying her as a god (rather than as a priest), and then fixing her identity as Inanna. But the convention of the horned headdress was not established until a later period. One could argue, too, that the en, if he represents Dumuzi as a soon to be deified human, is presented as a god. Both Inanna and Dumuzi may be considered divine, but they are portrayed anthropomorphically.

Anton Moortgat commented on one of the problems that has bothered students of myth, religion, and literature. It is difficult to tell if the vase represents a mythical event or a religious ceremony. He decides it is best to avoid the distinction.

The protohistorical world of Sumer, as it came to maturity in Uruk, is indeed in every direction—sociological/political as well as religious/artistic—a union of the sacred world of the gods and the profane world of humans, of the real and the metaphysical, of nature and the abstract; in some ways it was a golden age, in which the life of the gods and the life of humans still intermingled. Man, not yet as an individual separated from his community, has through his princes the closest possible relationship with the gods, and has in a way taken part in eternal life.

Moortgat also notes the naturalism and abstraction combined in the scene. If the central figure is indeed the goddess, “then she is shown for the first time in purely human form, in front of her two standards of ringed bundles, these being her abstract symbols. In this way representation of the deity in human form would also have been initiated in this period of Protohistory, an event of great importance to Near Eastern art.” The anthropomorphism “follows naturally from the particular attitude to life shown during this period.”

F. A. M. Wiggermann makes the important related point that when the gods are seen in human form, they are distinguished by gender. The Sumerian language does not distinguish nouns or names by grammatical gender. The writing system later developed a system of silent determinatives to mark the gender, when it was important to indicate
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it. If the scene represents an episode in the Sacred Marriage between Inanna and Dumuzi, anthropomorphism, gender differences, and the metaphor of love all appear for the first time in this 4th millennium BCE frieze.

In the long event—from Protohistory through the early years of the Common Era—the relationship of humans to the gods changes in Mesopotamia from this indication of intimate union to one in which the gods are seen as parents, and finally to one in which the gods are envisaged as transcendent and remote.651

Of course there is no question about the sex of the men carrying the food to the goddess. The goddess herself is female, though she is fully clothed—and it is clear that she is represented as a beautiful as well as a powerful woman. The en, who is often depicted in a see-through skirt, is easily identified as male. Since gender-crossing became important in the Inanna/Ishtar cult—priests in the “Iddin-Dagan Hymn” discussed below wear women’s clothing on one side of the body and men’s clothing on the other—it not always that clear whether the attendant figures are male, female, or androgynous. In the myths, Inanna’s attendant, Ninshubur, is sometimes male, sometimes female. And the “character” of Inanna herself, like Shakespeare’s Cleopatra, is a mixture of male and female traits.

Since there are human and divine figures on the vase depicted in human form, the normal way of identifying the figures would be through their clothing and their hairstyles. Complicating the picture is that the Sumerians wore wigs, no doubt to deal with head lice. King Shulgi prepares for his encounter with Inanna, for example, by dressing in cloak and robe, and putting a periwig “as diadem” on his head to attract the admiration of Inanna.652

Clothing like the parsīgu, hairstyles, and gestures are usually a good guide to at least the period in which a work was completed. In this case, the results have not been conclusive.

Of these, clothing has been the most studied. Among the Archaic Uruk tablets are records of garments and cloths made of wool, flax, hide and pelts. Krystyna Szarzyńska found at least 36 signs representing these and various rugs and mats.653 And the vast herds kept by the temple were maintained mainly for wool production.654 Domique Collon, in a survey of clothing through the different periods of Mesopotamian history, emphasizes it as products of the “corporation,” the textile industry centered in the temple.655 Of the reasons to domesticate animals, milk and the need to store foods, to spread consumption over long periods, were more important than to supply a reliable source of meat. The animals offered for sacrifice at the temples ensured the availability of animals, in the phrase used by Brian Hesse, “flowing through the system.”656 The temple provided a managed system of production and centralized redistribution, and sheep were the most valued animals in that system. The meat was important. Sheep and goats, herded together, provided the meat most prized by the elite. (Beef was the diet of the bureaucrats, and the rural folk and other non-elite members of the community ate pork).657 Clearly, though, the emphasis was on wool production. Hesse refers to the “flow of sheep to cities” (at this period completely dominated by the temples), very like the way the sheep are represented on The Uruk Vase.
Although the specific garments worn by figures on The Uruk Vase have not been related to the records, a special skirt, LAL, was worn by Sumerian dignitaries. It may well have been the en’s wispy skirt portrayed on cylinder seals. The figure attending upon the en on the vase holds a tasseled train of the same material as the en is wearing. The goddess’s long robe has a wide border running from the right shoulder down the front of the dress and around the hem. Her right arm was free; it is not clear if the left arm is free. A band around the forehead confined her hair, and she probably wore an elaborate headdress, but that part of the vase was broken and repaired in antiquity.

Textiles were often traded and exchanged as gifts by the elites. As has long been recognized, clothing has symbolic value, as witness the clothing of Adam and Eve in Genesis. The symbolism is evident much earlier than the Bible, though. The “golden garments of the gods” were perhaps the most spectacular. In a later period the kusītu garment of the Lady of Uruk (i.e., Inanna/Ishtar) included golden stars. The garment had its own boat, which carried it to distant temples “on loan,” as it were to lesser deities. Clothing was used figuratively to mean not only cover and envelope, but also overpower and overwhelm. As M. E. Vogelzang and W. J. van Bekkum point out, “a garment is that object of material culture that takes the nearest position between man and his environment; it has therefore also an informative function. It informs us about the dignity and the function of a person in society.” Vogelzang and Van Bekkum show that a piece of clothing in a text may indicate necessity (protection of the body), economy (commercial value), legislation (punishment, reward), elegance (external ornamentation), affectivity (mourning, submissiveness, joy), and profession (status).

Even though there is much still to learn about the details of clothing and grooming—and as much about nudity and shaved bodies—on the vase, it is already clear that these indicators are represented in the scene.

Think of the significance of the harimtu stripping before Enkidu and then preparing her clothing on the ground as a mat for their love-making.

Without knowing the code, one might mistake the line of nude men for prisoners, stripped of their former status, or slaves. We know, though, that the practice of certain “priests” to perform ritual acts in the nude persisted through the 3rd millennium BCE. By the middle of that millennium, men were generally clean-shaven, even when the beard was retained. Later, men other than kings could be portrayed as beardless and shaven-headed, but the kings after the time of Gudea were generally bearded.

The goddess raises her right hand in a gesture of greeting. We do not know how the en is responding, but it is likely that it is not a gesture of servility. As he surveyed Mesopotamian religious love poetry, W. G. Lambert found numerous references to gardens, fruits, and salads, and noted that certain fruits were preferred for their aphrodisiac properties—not unlike the love poetry of many parts of the world. But though it was devotional, especially the love poetry that celebrated the relationship between Inanna and Dumuzi, the poetry lacked one quality that has been conspicuous in the European tradition since the Middle Ages: the man does not abase himself in order to win
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the hand of the beloved. He speculated “the relations between the sexes were so understood that no man would openly confess to servility in his desire for a wife.” If this was already the case in the Uruk Period, it could account for the formality in the actual encounter between the goddess and her human lover. Nowhere in Mesopotamian art has the face-to-face meeting of the divine and human lover been so intimate and yet so formally precise.

Once again, without knowing the code fully, we can only speculate if the two figures behind the goddess are replicating the goddess’s gesture, the one conferring upon the en his status and the other raising the wrist in a ritual greeting. Again the play of signifiers is evident in the treatment of the body, its posture, hair, or lack of it, the clothes, possibly androgynous, and the gestures of the participants.

To turn the ambiguity to advantage, it is also clear that The Uruk Vase strongly signifies the difference between the clothed and the nude, between hair and shaved bodies, and between gestures. We may not have the key to the code, but the signifiers are all the more clear for that. We are forced to see that clothing, even hair, are forms of cultural production. For the Uruk temple, textiles were a most important part of the economic “world system.” Inanna is the nun not just of those things we would consider emotional and spiritual. The divide between the spiritual and the physical, like the sacred and the secular, is not nearly as wide as the West has come to think of it. And many of the other, non-human figures on the vase also represent economic products, like theriomorphic vessels, and economic processes, like taming and preserving foodstuffs.

The Sacred Marriage: Iddin-Dagan and Inanna

While the historians of art may disagree on the details, most agree that the scene on the vase depicts what has been called the Sacred Marriage Rite.

The scene certainly could indicate a wedding. The goddess (or her human representative) greets the bridegroom (Dumuzi, or his representative, the en of Uruk) at the gate, as was the custom in Mesopotamia. The bridegroom was expected to bring gifts to the bride. This scene captures the significant moment of the marriage itself, the event that established the contract. This moment, the banquet that followed, or the sexual union itself could all be represented to mark the important event. One might wonder why a certain episode would be highlighted on any given piece. Banquet scenes are relatively common in the visual arts of the archaic period, and erotic art, which may also depict a Sacred Marriage, is found early. One theory, advanced by Frances Pinnock, sees the selection of episode as a function of the social position of the one for whom the artifact was made. The urban ruler might want to portray the public events, while one less concerned with the public display of art—the owner of a country estate, say—might prefer a more intimate, erotic scene, one less appropriate to a piece that might be viewed by the public. “Palace and temple had to be the centers of community life and the main link between the populace and the deities; these officials stressed their social position rather than a realistic representation of what had to be performed. In their seals the peripheral
officials may have wished to represent a more private moment, the sexual conjunction between the two main characters.”

The Sacred Marriage has been much discussed by scholars of ancient Mesopotamia, and much of the subject remains controversial. Was there an actual rite of Sacred Marriage in which a priest or priestess (representing the god or goddess of the city) slept with the leader of the city, male or female (depending upon the gender of the deity)? Are such rites, if they were practiced, related to the widespread notion of “dying gods of fertility?” The controversial questions aside for the moment, there is no doubt that Mesopotamia knew stories and songs that celebrated the love and lamented the death of Dumuzi, lover of the high goddess Inanna. The metaphor of sexual union with the goddess is very ancient indeed. Its discussion among Mesopotamian specialists owes little to classical parallels or even to the Eliade-type phenomenology of religion. Rather, to the extent that it is associated with matters outside Mesopotamia proper, the Sacred Marriage is linked with “The Song of Songs.”

Samuel Noah Kramer, who touched off the discussion in his groundbreaking *The Sacred Marriage Rite*, for example, devoted a complete chapter to “The Sacred Marriage and Solomon’s Song of Songs.”

All discussions of the Sacred Marriage focus on a Neo-Sumerian Hymn to Inanna that features not Dumuzi but Iddin-Dagan, king of Isin. Rather, the king is identified with his famous predecessor. Iddin-Dagan’s name is replaced in a key line by an ancient name of Dumuzi, Amaushumgalanna (line 187). (Recall that Amaushumgalanna is consistently used in “The Early Dynastic Hymn to Gilgamesh” for the hero.) The poem consists of 228 lines, divided into ten unequal parts, or kirugu. Within the context of a praise of the great goddess, mainly in her aspect as the Evening Star, the king cohabits with Inanna in the most explicit terms.

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The divine king stays with her there.
At the New Year, on the day of the ritual,
So that she will determine the fates for all the lands,
So during the day (?) the true servants are inspected,
So on the day the moon disappears the me are perfected,
They set up a bed for my nin.
They clean the rushes with sweet-smelling cedar oil,
They arrange them for my nin, for their bed,
They smooth out a cover for the bed.

So they will find sweetness on “The Cover that Brings the Heart Joy,”
My nin bathes her holy thighs,
She bathes them for the thighs of the king; she sprinkles cedar oil on the ground.

The king approaches with head held high the thighs of Inanna.
Amaushumgalanna lies down beside her,
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He caresses her holy thighs.
After the nin has brought joy to him with her holy thighs,
after pure Inanna on the bed has brought joy to to him with her holy thighs,
She makes love to him on her bed:
“Iddin-Dagan, you are surely my lover.” (ll. 172-194)⁶⁷⁵

The statement that ends the episode, “You are surely my beloved” (ki-ág-mu hé-me-en),
may seem obvious enough, given the context, but it is one of only two statements by the
lovers. Once Iddin-Dagan is given the throne and sits proudly on the “dais of kingship”
(214), he utters a corresponding “You are the hierodule born of the heaven and the earth”
(nu-u-gig an-ki-da tu-da-me-en). His statement confirms what she has always been, the
nu-gig, translated by yet another of the modern Greek-based term, “hierodule.” Hers is
a stronger proclamation, one that brings into being the very status she names. She names
him as her ki-ág, her lover.

The narrative in which this occurs is worth considering. Iddin-Dagan stands at a
particularly important point in the historical development of kingship in Mesopotamia.
Even when a deceased king is deified, as happens occasionally, the living king like other
mortals, is only rarely deified. Iddin-Dagan is one of those few. When the “black headed
cold, the people”—“black headed” is the way Sumerians describe themselves—set up a
throne for Inanna and the king sits with her in the palace, the king is explicitly identified
as a god (lugal dingir-àm, line 170).⁶⁷⁶

In the first section of the poem, Inanna is hailed as the nu-gig who “comes forth from
heaven,” that is from “above” (an, as opposed to its cosmic complement, ki, “below”). It
is important here to notice that the nu-gig was an important temple official in the group
of those who interpret sexuality and fertility.⁶⁷⁷ As one who comes from heaven, Inanna
appears as the great goddess who becomes visible at night, “her coming forth radiantly at
evening” (11), the evening star. The first section is filled with the imagery of light in the
darkness; but it ends with another aspect of Inanna, that “her coming forth is that of a
hero” (ur-sag, 18).

The second section links Inanna explicitly with the other high gods (of the more than five
thousand deities that were known in Mesopotamia⁶⁷⁸): Enki, An, Enlil, and the collective
known as the Anunna gods. This section celebrates her position as a world judge, making
decisions for “the land” (Sumer) and its “black-headed people” (33). Included in the
section is an important allusion that clarifies why Inanna has such powers. She was given
the divine me in Eridu, in the Abzu, by Enki. Two of the me are specified. In the long
narrative to which this alludes, “Inanna and Enki: The Transfer of the Arts of Civilization
from Eridu to Uruk,”⁶⁷⁹ the two me, nam-en nam-lugal, are mentioned at the top of a list
of over one hundred me given to Inanna by Enki. “Lordship” and “kingship” are the usual
translations of these me, which in Sumerian are named by the officials, the en and the
lugal, and made into abstractions by prefixing nam. Hence “lord” and “king” are made
into “lordship” and “kingship” (24). The juxtaposition has the force of identifying the two
originally separate functions. For the king of this poem, Iddin-Dagan, it will serve to unite
both the high priestly office and the secular office of king. Inanna possesses those powers,
of course, holding them “in her hand” (24) and enabling her to determine the fates in her land. Through her Iddin-Dagan possesses the powers as well.

The next four kirugu describe a procession before Inanna (35-44, 45-59, 60-67, 68-86), altogether more than fifty lines devoted to it. Scenes of procession, often in boats along the rivers and canals, are so frequent in early cylinder seal impressions that it is clear that it was an essential part of religious display, much like the “charismatic” progresses of kings in England and Morocco anthropologist Clifford Geertz has interpreted for us.

First the musicians pass by, and then certain cultic officials associated with sexuality and fertility (sag-ur-sag, lú-zi, nin-sag-tuku, mí-um-ma-gal-gal-la, guruš, ki-sikil, kur-garra). All walk before Inanna.

In the seventh section, the effects of the Evening Star are described. The people raise their glance to Inanna. Men purify themselves, and women do as well. The ox “tosses his head in his yoke,” and the sheep “pile up the dust in their pen” (89-92). Other animals, then vegetation—orchards and gardens, plots, reeds—finally, fish and birds, “the living creatures, the numerous people, they bend the knee before her” (98). Not surprisingly they prepare great quantities of food and drink for Inanna, and there is “play” (ki-a-ne-di, 102) and festivity (ezem) in the land. The young man makes love to his spouse.

The eighth and ninth sections develop two themes already considered: the judgment of Inanna, who recognizes evil and brings the proper fates to the just and the unjust. Emphasized even more, though, is the abundance of the “storehouse” (ama). Offerings to Inanna include sheep, butter, dates, cheese, fruits of all kinds, beers (dark and light) and breads, honey and wine. Gods and humans (159) go to her with food and drink.

The implications of this great catalog of offerings to the temple will be drawn later. For the purposes of these remarks on the context of the hieros gamos celebrated in the tenth and last section of the poem, it is important to keep in mind the artful ways in which all orders of being, considered both as it were vertically—something like Homer’s chain, a hierarchy of being from the high gods at the top through ranks of creatures, together with the enormous abundance at each link in the chain—and horizontally, through time. The poem is replete with “arrest and movement,” the telling phrase that gave H. A. Groenewegen-Frankfort the title of her famous “essay on space and time in the representational art of the ancient Near East,” although it operates through the narrative time and space of language rather than visually through graphic display. Inanna’s place in a world that is both static and full of movement is richly illustrated in this poem, where she is both the center and the moving light that brings life and joy to all creatures. All of this prepares for the assembly of the people and the sacred marriage itself, which is narrated in the tenth section.

**The Sacred Precinct**

On The Uruk Vase, the area behind Inanna (or the nu-gig) is a sanctuary, a sacred space, possibly a temple. More likely, it represents what the Sumerians called the gipar. Akkadian borrowed the term as gipāru. Originally a storehouse for food, the gipar was
the residence of the en, and in Uruk, where the en was ruler, the gipar took on the functions of a palace. For its sacred character, it was taboo. It served as the place of the “sacred marriage” rite. A Sumerian text tells of a lapis lazuli door where Inanna met the en; the parallel line, a characteristic of Sumerian poetry, specifies it as the gipar of Eanna, and the one she meets is Dumuzi.

The earliest Mesopotamian temple, found at nearby Eridu ca. 6000 BCE, was a simple mud-brick building, barely thirteen feet square. Excavators at the site found heaps of ashes and large quantities of fish-bones, evidence of fish-sacrifice. By Uruk III, the Eanna temple precinct in Uruk, in contrast, was an immense and complex structure. It consisted of an L-shaped High Terrace and a ziggurat, which formed the nucleus of a “vast cultic area” with an inner and an outer peripheral double-wall. A large park spread before the ziggurat between the inner and outer walls. Besides places for sacrifice and other rituals, priestly residences, and storage areas, Eanna contained workshops for, e.g., the making of pottery. It was certainly an appropriately grand and complex place to carry on the increasingly sophisticated enterprises of the community.

The Uruk Vase does not represent any of this structure directly, but it does contain, we would argue, a representation of the sacred precinct. The procession of life forms, in movements that suggest a spiral motion not unlike the movement up a ziggurat, an artificial mountain, ends at the spot where Inanna greets the en. The movement through the bands is very cleverly handled so that at the top the en and his retinue is moving one way, and the entire sacred precinct is oriented in the opposite direction. The goddess herself is replicated in the cult symbols, large reed bundles that represent her in a non-anthropomorphic way. Two of these symbols, MUSH₃, stand behind the goddess, and another stands on the lower platform carried by the Dinka sheep. (Recall that the MUSH sign can be seen as well on the “Daily Bread and Beer” text.)

The control of space in the lower bands of the vase, with each living creature bound firmly to the earth, gives way in the upper band to a treatment of space rather like that of cylinder seals. Some of the figures in the sacred precinct are rooted to the earth, the sheep and the two large vases in particular. But the pair of vases that replicate The Uruk Vase itself, two animals, and two dishes on low stands is arranged on levels without any indication of the ground. The two animals are thought to be a gazelle and a lion, animals of considerable significance in Gilgamesh. Close inspection shows that they are actually theriomorphic vessels similar to what are seen on cylinder seals of the period, and which are carried in procession. With the exception of the bull’s head and certain as yet unidentified objects beneath the large vases filled with fruit and vegetables, the composition is quite neat and regular, with horizontal lines suggesting both arrest and movement.” She noticed that the upper register has an “almost weird concreteness.” The confrontation between goddess and the en is “wholly undramatic and yet the impression of a momentous meeting prevails; the scene has the very quality of dynamic space which is so completely absent in the juxtaposition of figures in ritual acts in Egypt.” The presents piled up in the sacred precinct, which “may represent objects which have been or will be brought as gifts,” do
not break the pattern. Groenewegen-Frankfort was so impressed with the treatment of movement that returns upon itself that she was surprised that so few examples of simple rows of men or animals heading in one direction are to be seen in the art of the period.

The items in the sacred precinct do not represent the bed of the nuptial chamber, the throne of the assembly, or the sacrificial offering-place. Clearly they represent the abundance of life, especially in the sheep and the vessels. (The theriomorphic vessels carried liquids. It is not clear what would have filled such vases. Today, excavators would examine the fragments of a vessel for organic residues. Since bread and beer were often important in the temple banquets, it is possible that the vases are not empty but rather full of a liquid that could not be represented in the pictorial style of the period.) The sheep and cargo suggest a procession. The bull’s head alone makes explicit what is implicit in the artifacts that are collected here: that all have been changed from their natural state, most of them by death. If the registers below highlight the teeming abundance of life in and on the earth or close to the ground, the upper register, with its display of textiles (and wigs?), its platforms, vases, and signs highlight rather the transformative power at work here. Inanna is the gate—her MUSH₃ reed bundles marking the transition—and the space within involves “finished” products, including rituals, signs, and artifacts. The gazelle and lion, in particular, unlike the tamed sheep, are wild animals, but have been transformed by art. The pair of vases replicating The Uruk Vase suggests infinite duplication and expansion, like the lexical lists that were begun at this period. (The figures recall that these vases, where they are represented are always in pairs; the duplicate of The Uruk Vase was broken beyond hope of restoration, but is thought to have been identical.) The precinct is full, almost crammed full, of objects. The animals and, with their human carriers, the fruits and vegetation flow to the precinct, the way sheep actually flowed to the temples. The temple in turn transformed them into commodities.

Among the products of the temple, bread and beer—preserved foods—symbolize “life” in different forms. Others, the textiles in particular, beyond drawing a distinction between the clothed and the unclothed, allowed life to survive.

And if the bull’s head suggests sacrifice, it, too, points to the sacred transformations in the gipar.

One item that is not doubled in the gipar is the head of an animal, apparently bovine, that appears by itself below the large vessels. The image is striking, although the head is not highlighted. It is the single image of death on the vase, but it points out that all the plants and animals die to provide for the banquet. Life is necessarily sacrificed to preserve it.

And if the bull’s head suggests sacrifice, it, too, points to the sacred transformations in the gipar. The bull’s head might simply be filler, but that is unlikely. The same item appears on a cylinder seal.689 [Insert Fig. 40: The en, his attendant, and various items (Amiet #643)]

Mircea Eliade was perhaps the most eloquent spokesperson for the position that religious humanity—in contrast to modern, secularized humans—“becomes aware of the sacred
Excursus: “Sacred” and Other Marriages

because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane.” There is a difference on The Uruk Vase between the space inside the sacred house and the space outside it. One is almost tempted to see the spiraling upward of plants, animals, and humans as reaching the “above” in the contact with the goddess. Human and divine were never so closely related as they are here, linked through union and deification. In this sense one might want to say that the vase represents both sacred and profane space.

But the presence of “priests,” including the en and his attendant, the ritual directionality of the movement to the goddess, and the connectedness of the goddess to the life-forms moving toward her, suggests that her space and time are not “wholly other” than the space outside, however naturalistically it is rendered. Rather, as Eliade would have it, for humans “of all pre-modern societies, the sacred is equivalent to a power, and, in the last analysis, to reality.” (12). The symbols and rituals Eliade sees as humanity’s attempt to re-experience the sacred are no doubt the reason why all commentators on The Uruk Vase think that a ritual, not an isolated event, is represented on the vase. It is just that the profane world, including especially the world of commerce that many moderns think is the very antithesis of the sacred, was never united to the holy as it is represented on the vase. The divine shows itself in human form, invites union, and transforms everything in its presence. Everyone, including the craftsmen and other briqueteurs who are largely excluded from the modern, Greek-influenced view of reality, is included. In the sacred precinct, even the chain of being seems to be suspended; transformation, play, multiplicity, and complexity rule.

Replicating the vase in miniature on The Uruk Vase is a device that would make a postmodern artist proud. It draws attention to the artifact as artifact, to the ability of representation itself. The curious tendency of Mesopotamian art to reproduce its most significant scenes on the tiniest scale—the cylinder seal—has been noted before. The frieze presents a more complex figuration than the traditional distinction between nature and culture.

What is striking about the collection is not only duplication but—in Jacques Derrida’s curious term—différance. Where the outside, with its procession of priests, is relatively direct and unambiguous, the gipar, the inside, plays everywhere with identity and difference. One is realistic, the other symbolic. The plants, animals, and humans are visibly—nakedly—alive, natural. Inside, everything is figured, transformed, artifice: food and drink fit for consumption, clothing, constructions, craftware—briquetage. One would particularly like to know if the collection represents a complex ritual, perhaps involving a procession and a banquet. Signs abound: the gestures by which Inanna greets the en; the EN-sign carried by the androgynous (?) priest; and hand gesture of the second priest/ess. Even the human form of Inanna is duplicated by the MUSH3-signs that stand for her (and as gate-posts distinguish inside and out).

If the figure Inanna greets is the en and the en represents the lover, Dumuzi, the bovine head among the items in the sacred precinct presages his tragic fate. If the procession,
banquet, and union are figured in the storehouse, the tragic death of Dumuzi, perhaps even his deification, is likewise prefigured.

Inanna is the transformer par excellence. She not only stands at the border of civilized life, represented by the gipar, and the natural world. The early temple held grain in storage and herds for food. In Uruk plants and animals were even more important for the textiles (linen, wool) and skins than for food. The storehouse holds food and drink changed and preserved. The bull’s head marks the loss that is necessary for such transformations.

The Uruk Vase: Attendant Figures

Who, then, might these attendant figures be? The EN-sign one of them carries is a clue, but so far none of the three have been properly identified: the two in the sacred precinct, one carrying the sign and the other raising a hand in prayer; or the one attending upon the en himself.

Some thirty artifacts represent the en. He is shown with craftsmen, prisoners, lion, herds, Combining political and religious leadership, the en’s absence on the earliest lexical list may indicate that he was far above the other leading figures in the temple community. He is usually presented, as he is on The Uruk Vase, as taller than others are. He has a broad face, prominent nose, beard, and he wears a characteristic round headdress and long, see-through skirt. In some instances he carries weapons, a bow and a spear. Denise Schmandt-Besserat thinks that the spear is a symbol of justice, while the bow is a symbol of warfare. (While much later, Gilgamesh, who is usually visualized wielding a knife or axe, is sometimes shown wearing a sheaf of arrows and carrying a bow.) On three of the monuments, the en is associated with writing. Among his activities he is shown as a warrior and as dispensing justice; as hunter or master of animals; as “good shepherd” to his flocks; as priest; as central collector; and as Inanna’s consort.

On cylinder seals of the period, the en is often accompanied by what Van Buren thinks is a younger man (because, unlike the en, he is beardless) with long hair, who also wears a characteristic short skirt. Other than on The Uruk Vase, he appears on the Blau Monument with his hands raised in prayer; before a temple where the en pours a liquid over his head; and in two scenes where he walks behind the en, carrying a jar and a sprig of vegetation. On the cylinder seal impression above, the attendant carries his jar, while the en before him carries a theriomorphic (gazelle-shaped) vessel. A collection of items much like those on The Uruk Vase are assembled before him: two heaping vases, two low stands, a second theriomorphic vessel (probably a ram), and a pair of vases in the same shape as The Uruk Vase itself. All the figures are oriented toward a pair of MUSH r reed bundles.

Except that the skirts of the attendants behind the goddess on The Uruk Vase are longer than the skirt worn by the en’s attendant, they are all much alike. Clearly some important priestly function is indicated on these pieces, but what priestly title the figure would hold is still not clear.
Four aspects of Inanna known from Archaic Uruk, which I have called her majestic, erotic, ludic and tragic aspects. In Mesopotamian religion, officials served four different functions: high officials who administered the temple; officiants who interpreted sexuality and fertility; players (singers, musicians, and dancers), craftsmen, and athletes; and the diviners, magicians, ecstatics, wisdom figures, the specialists who knew secrets of the gods, of the underworld, and of healing.

Because we have a tendency to identify these officials with Akkadian titles, rather than the earlier Sumerian equivalents—we have far more texts relating to ritual officials from later periods, in Akkadian, than we have of early Sumerian texts—certain distinctions that were clear when the priestly function of the en were disappearing in the 2nd millennium BCE may not have been clear earlier. en of itself does not indicate male or female, since Sumerian nouns do not carry gender distinctions. The roughly equivalent nin is similar. On other evidence we know there were male and female en’s and male and female nin’s. Mythological texts often mention Inanna’s attendant Ninshubur, identified as her vizier or even as her “trusty maid,” but this minor deity is sometimes male, sometimes female. (See, e.g., The Seal of Adda.) The term nin later came to refer to females. en came to be read two different ways when it referred in Akkadian (which always marks gender) to males. If it referred to a kind of overlord, it would be read bēlu, “lord,” whereas it was read ēnu when it referred to priestly functions. EN could also, however, be read as two different, but related priestesses: the entu or the ugbabtu. Conceivably, the EN sign carried by the attendant on The Uruk Vase could refer in a complex way to figures inside and outside the sacred precinct, and they could be male or female.

In lexical texts the en is often associated with another priest, lagar; and the lagar is connected with the most curious and most prevalent of Sumerian priests, the gala, who is a performer, usually a singer of lamentations. Iike the sag-ur-sag, who was represented in the “Iddin-Dagan Hymn” wearing both male and female dress, the gala remained beardless even in Neo-Assyrian times, when all mature men were depicted as bearded. The sexual proclivities of the gala made him the object of humor that became proverbial. The en (usually when his/her priestly functions were most important) lived in the gipar.

Complicating the question, but providing clues that may someday provide precise identifications of these priestly titles, is the way the gods themselves could carry titles that were shared by their human counterparts. Inanna, for example, is often referred to as a nu-gig. Since we have difficulty connecting the kind of frank sexuality shown in the Inanna literature with our ideas of the sacred, we have difficulty translating the title. Usually a Greek term, hierodule, is selected, since the Greeks had women (and men) in the temple who performed sexual acts and were distinguished by rank. The title nu-gig often appears in the lists along with the “lady-god,” nin-dingir, the nu-bar, and the lukur.

Tentatively, one might guess that the males represented in the retinue with the en held high priestly offices that embraced at least three of the four aspects known in the early Inanna cult. If the en is to be identified with Dumuzi, and the bull’s head in the sacred
precinct is a reminder of sacrifice, there may be a suggestion of the tragic Inanna as well, the Inanna who was involved in the death of her husband-lover and who established the annual ritual when he was brought up from the underworld. One would guess as well that the attendant figures on the other side, in the goddess’s precinct, were equally high-ranking priests or priestesses, those who engaged at least in the ritual processions that were so prominent in Sumerian religion.

It may turn out that the figures attending the goddess were aspects of Inanna herself, Nanaya,701 say, or Ishhara702—or the human actors who portrayed them. In any case, the serious playfulness of the scene on The Uruk Vase is perhaps the fullest expression of “life” in its many aspects, only a few of which we have been able yet to decipher. In the 4th millennium both divine and human figures, as they appear on The Uruk Vase, celebrate life—in the context of the new hierarchical, specialized state whose center was the temple. The economic activities represented there and in other visual representations of life then, in what must be considered the most unified concept of life in all its spheres, largely disappear from the visual record in the king-dominated imperial states that emerge in the 3rd millennium, and with that disappearance the status of women in Mesopotamia changes, but the Sumerian temples and their keepers resisted those “secularizing” tendencies of the state.

Gilgamesh as Amaushumgalanna in “The Early Dynastic Hymn to Gilgamesh” and much later in *Gilgamesh* itself carries on the tradition of the *en*—at the same time vigorously representing the new rulers of Mesopotamia, the kings.

**The *en* in the Gap**

At least 2000 “Archaic” seal impressions have been recovered from 4th millennium BCE Uruk,703 roughly contemporary with The Uruk Vase. Other “Archaic” seal impressions were found at Jemdet Nasr (at a time approximating Uruk Eanna III) and Ur (from Early Dynastic I in the early 3rd millennium BCE). The great number and variety of cylinder seal impressions testifies to the popularity of the cylinder seal, which appears to have been invented in Uruk itself. The cylinder seal, rolled onto clay to provide security and to identify the owner of whatever is sealed, provides a much more interesting and complex image than the older “stamp” seals, which were largely simple designs like rosettes.

Seal impressions showing the *en* with his rolled cap and distinctive garb are frequent in the “Archaic” period, especially from Uruk and Susa (in modern day Iran), as we have already seen.704

Certain cylinder seal impressions show clear resemblances to the upper level of relief on the famous Uruk Vase. Whether the cylinder seals influenced the designs on the vase or the vase influenced the cylinder seals, they come from the same period in Uruk.

A fragment of the broken vase would make the identification of the human figure that is now missing secure. As we have seen, small sections of the garments the figure was wearing make it highly probable that the figure is the *en*.705 And the EN sign can be seen in the “sacred precinct.”
Excursus: “Sacred” and Other Marriages

The section of a robe made of netlike textile and the long fringed sash or belt were enough to allow an artist’s reconstruction of the figure.

Piotr Steinkeller and Gebhard J. Selz have written extensively on the en and other forms of rule in ancient Sumer. In attempting to establish the meaning of the symbol that represented Inanna in cylinder seal impressions (and on The Uruk Vase), Steinkeller uncovered a most intriguing clue to what looks like a magnificent sash that is—or is in the process of being—wrapped around the en. The Inanna symbol has been much discussed.

The symbol was already the Proto-cuneiform sign for Inanna, and that connection led Steinkeller to a garment that is signified by a gunified variant of the sign MÛSH, that is, MÛSH₃. The garment was called a suh in Sumerian. Steinkeller thinks that the Inanna symbol and the MÛSH sign depict a type of scarf, shawl or band. The suh is such a garment and is usually “fastened” (keshda) in some way. As we have seen before, virtually all references found so far to the suh see it as an emblem of enship. In one case it is specifically the suh of godship. Steinkeller thinks it is a type of band.

Of the sixteen passages Steinkeller cites for the suh, at least nine refer to something fastened or tied as a sign of enship. King Shulgi wears both the crown of kingship and the suh of enship. While it could perhaps refer to the “rolled cap” worn by the en in Archaic Uruk, I would suggest that it is visualized frequently on the cylinder seal impressions and in the Uruk Vase relief, where a great sash is—or is about to be—fastened to the figure who is certainly the en. In any case the suh is a garment that crosses gender: it is worn by deities, male and female; by the en, who could be male or female; and by a nu-gig priestess. On one occasion it is explicitly associated with the prototypical en, Dumuzi.

When humans and deities exercise “kingship,” they wear a “crown” (men) or “tiara” (aga). It is not clear to me if these emblematic head coverings distinguish different forms of rule. We will see later that, at least in the case of the famous King Shulgi of Ur, the poets and theologians tend to use different terms for rule associated with three different city-states: en for Uruk, lugal for Ur, and sipa (“shepherd”) for the city that had gained primacy among the “league” of Sumerian cities in the 3rd millennium, Nippur.

Of the more than 500 “Archaic” impressions from Ur, as opposed to the impression from nearby Uruk, a few show motifs that might reasonably compare with the older Uruk impressions: a man taming (?) an ibex, a Bowman, and numerous scenes of a hero spearing a lion that is attacking a horned animal. (In one the hero is contesting a bull. The Ur impressions are rather more cluttered than the earlier Uruk seals. One may portray the en in his approach to a female; behind her an ibex is under attack from a lion.

In the closest Ur impression to the scene of an en approaching a nin, the scene appears to be reversed. The procession of the usual three figures shows two of them with the long dress (perhaps with right shoulder and arm exposed) and head covering of females, while the object of their gaze is an en. He wears the familiar rolled gap; his upper torso is unclothed; his see-through skirt is tied with a sash that may extend down the skirt. He is
sheltered, and behind him is a temple with ringed posts. The scene suggests a strong parallel with the en approaching the nin, but if the temple is Enki’s, the male figure may be Enki himself (or his human avatar). Approaching him would be, not the male en but his female counterpart, who is well known from later 3rd millennium Ur. In Ur the en, the most famous of whom was the poet Enheduanna, was in the service of the male moon-god Nanna. (In a powerful hymn exalting Inanna to the highest place in the Sumerian pantheon, Enheduanna transfers her allegiance from Nanna to Inanna, since her god has been unable or willing to protect her.)

Otherwise the en is absent from the seal impressions found at Ur. This may simply be the result of accident; more spadework may discover a different set of impressions. On the other hand, evidence from other sources is increasingly suggesting that the power of the en was already being challenged by the increasingly powerful lugal.

**From the Time of The Uruk Vase to Early Dynastic Times**

In his *Mesopotamia Before History* (2002) Petr Charvát interprets the evidence of the Sumerian en in light of other proto-cuneiform signs that contain the EN sign. EN and NIN, his female counterpart, constitute “the central pontifical couple” of the “Uruk corporate entity” that emerged in the 4th millennium BCE.713

Further the “pontifical couple” perform a particularly important function in the early city-state in a ritual involving the NA₂, a “bed.” The bed, which later becomes a standard item (with a kind of throne) in the innermost part of Inanna’s Eanna temple complex, is apparently related to the gipar. The gipar, in historical times the residence of the en and entu, was originally most likely a storehouse for grain. Where the en and entu had political power, the gipar served as something like a palace. According to the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* the gipar (Akkadian gipāru) had a taboo character.714 The gipar could also refer to part of a private house and even a pasture or meadow. Charvát suggests that an even earlier meaning is as the reed-mat that covered the earth, the site of a fertility ritual.

This is how Charvát explains the office of the EN.

The EN constituted, together with his female counterpart NIN, the central pontifical couple, providing the land with fertility which they generated in the course of the NA₂ ceremony. The fertility thus generated filled the entire building in which the act took place, together with its (presumably cultic) paraphernalia including statues (ALAN). Interested persons could partake of this fertility by performing the TAK₄ ALAN rite, most probably “touching the statue(s).” The EN took the relevant symbols or statues around the country in order to make fertility accessible to all people. How far this entitled him to the collection of reciprocal contributions which apparently constituted the base of his and the NIN’s wealth in various commodities remains unknown, though a parallel to the great Makahiki festival of Oceania may not be entirely out of place.715

Charvát’s analysis is based on the combinations of early “archaic” signs. The EN sign is connected often with specific places, possibly storehouses, and thus suggests the
movement of the EN. On the other hand, the EN and NIN are largely ceremonial figures. They do not, in Charvát’s analysis, function in the management of the economy, though they belonged to the “inner” sector of the Uruk economy, in which animal husbandry played a major role. Charvát speculates that the “EN-cum-Nin ‘enterprises’” were possibly administered by the LUGAL.

Proto-Cuneiform and Later Cuneiform Signs for the Key Figures

Fig. 41: Development of the EN Sign.

Fig. 42: Development of the NIN Sign.
The Proto-cuneiform EN and NIN signs (far left column) are from 4th millennium BCE Uruk exemplars; the LUGAL sign, for Labat, does not appear until later. The far left column show “Archaic” signs Uruk (and sometimes Jemdat Nasr and Ur). Already in “Classical” Sumerian texts the signs (second column) have been rotated 90° and have begun to lose their pictographic quality. From that point on they are inscribed with a stylus in typical “wedge-shaped” characters. The third column shows early Assyrian signs (A) and early Babylonian signs (B). The A row continues with Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian signs; the B row continues with Middle Babylonian and Neo-Late Babylonian signs.

The earliest signs are found in the 4th Millennium; the latest cuneiform texts date from early CE from about the time of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (70 CE).
The Status of the EN

Charvát boldly speculates about the social position of the EN in the Uruk “corporate entity.” (He is less concerned about the NIN, although at one point he notices that the NIN recalls Inanna as the nu-gig. Might it be that the human NIN is the earthly embodiment of the goddess, and the union of the EN with the divine ensures the fertility of the land?)

The curious omission of EN in the list of professions leads Charvát to propose that the EN is part of Uruk’s elite, most of whom run the corporation, that is, administering the temple-based economy. That the role of EN and NIN is largely ceremonial does not mean they are less important to the city. Indeed, Charvát boldly speculates that the Urukean penchant for using a triad of white, red and black indicates a social hierarchy symbolized by those colors. White, he thinks, represents EN and NIN, while red represents a lower level of the elite, perhaps including the LUGAL and KINGAL as administrators. Black represents the commoners. (Charvát suggests that the epithet Sumerians used for themselves, the “black-headed people,” may derive from this color scheme.)

Charvát offers an intriguing analogy to make this point of a social hierarchy in a culture that otherwise emphasized egalitarian principles. The threefold division looks rather like the Indian brahman/ksatriya/vaisya division. The LUGAL, a rather modest official in Late Uruk, comes into his own in the next period. Significantly, Charvát titles his chapter on the Jemdet Nasr and Early Dynastic periods (which he considers together) as the time “When Kingship Descended Upon the Earth” (Chapter 6).

The curious connection between the high-status EN and somewhat lower status of the corporate officers—though both constitute an elite—in contrast to the commoners (like the GURUSH) does not, in Charvát’s reconstruction, deny his even more striking claim, that Uruk culture was a “huge and essentially egalitarian Leviathan.” In the corporate culture of Uruk everyone carries out assignments and gets just rewards in a world where the gods deliver life-giving force through EN and NIN. While others emphasize the revolutionary character of Uruk culture, Charvát sees rather a continuation of Chalcolithic culture, especially in the principle of equality. Everyone is treated about the same; fair shares for everyone as the vastly more complex economy is served by innovations that grew out of earlier traditions.

He finds the egalitarian principle in the rations that are distributed to different groups and especially in Urukean burial practices. Quite unlike other societies in which burials and grave goods vividly display the high status of elites, few of Uruk’s graves can even be found. And where other groups use burial practices to distinguish between the sexes and age groups, those Uruk graves that have been found are very modest and show that every group is treated in much the same way. Uruk’s corporate entity was quite practical but nevertheless saw the world as a unity involving the gods as well as the most earthly of things and processes. Another piece of evidence for the essentially egalitarian society is
that in the spectacular public buildings of the city there is no indication that the elites lived there.

Yet another indication is the existence—or persistence—of the Assembly, the UKKN. Just who constituted the Assembly (or assemblies) and who was permitted to speak is not specified, but this other aspect of Chalcolithic society is certainly registered in early writing. Perhaps Charvát would agree with Thorkild Jacobsen’s theory of a “primitive democracy” that later gave way to a more strictly hierarchical, top-down society in Mesopotamia.

**Kinship**

A striking feature of Late Uruk Proto-cuneiform writing is the absence of kinship terms. Only SHESH appears and there is little indication of kinship connections among the corporate elites. This reflects the analysis of cylinder seal impressions by Holly Pittman, who emphasizes that roles rather than individuals are depicted. The position one played in the complex economy seems to have mattered more than the family relationships that mark early village societies. (When one thinks of the myriad of kinship terms in Arabic today, which reflects the centrality of extended families even among city dwellers, the relative paucity of kinship terms in early writing is noteworthy. It is still difficult to tell what ethnicities divided the Uruk population. Certainly the nomadic populations that appear on the scene later are ones that, at least in Old Babylonian Nippur (early 2nd millennium BCE), show signs of tribal organization.

This changes radically in the subsequent Jemdet Nasr and Early Dynastic periods. Cemeteries provide vivid evidence of ranking and subgroup affiliation. Kinship groupings are evident in, e.g., the sale of land. Charvát finds that the organization of the Jemdet Nasr and Early Dynastic oikai is based on kinship. It appears so suddenly in the record that Charvát suggests it was always a factor but not evident in the sources. But by ED IIIa “the role of kinship ties acquired a new significance as more wealth flowed into the community; the kinship groupings may have grown larger and introduced undivided property tenure. Contemporary Mesopotamian social bodies displayed patrilineal descent, patrilocal residence and generalized matrimonial exchange.” Sexual division becomes more important. “The emphasis on femininity”—again, evident in grave goods especially—“is likely to reflect changes in the social position of women and perhaps also in matrimonial exchange.” but “what is clear, however, is that womanly status loses its exclusively biological value and assumes the character of a social category” by early ED III.

**EN, NIN and LUGAL: Three Early Periods**

Charvát concludes his survey of Mesopotamian prehistory with a suggestion about Gilgamesh. Could it be, he wonders, that the oppression of Uruk’s youth with which *Gilgamesh* opens derives from the political reorganization of Sumer after the decline of Uruk? We might add an additional wrinkle. The Early Dynastic period saw a reduction of the status of the *en* to a ceremonial role while the *lugal* gained power. What Charvát calls an “Uruk-less Uruk” may have produced a conflict between the two figures, and the
conflict was remembered in stories about Gilgamesh long after his reign in Early Dynastic times. Charvát himself seems conflicted about the situation.

The three ages Charvát distinguishes are pre-historic in the sense that history begins with individuals. His reference to Gilgamesh at the very end of the book suggests that he, like others before him, thinks of the legendary Uruk king as reflecting the emergence of the individual. It is interesting to see how the great Uruk of the late 3rd millennium BCE, with its emphasis on the social roles of its elites (rather than the names of the officials), fits into his scheme of the three ages.

The first he calls an “age of inspiration,” a long period from the 9th through the late 6th or early 5th millennia BCE. One of Charvát’s major claims is that even in this early age, characterized by the freedom of people to experiment and abandon failed projects, virtually a Golden Age, humans were as capable as moderns to think up innovative solutions to problems that arise.

Our Uruk, which Charvát always emphasizes is a “corporate entity,” is a development at the end of the second age, an “age of domination.” Uruk is the climax of changes that take place between the 5th and 3rd millennia BCE. The brilliant innovations of Uruk, like true writing, are part of a larger movement. Key to the “age of domination” is sedentarization, the process that involved agriculture and animal husbandry. For all its remarkable inventions Charvát sees a tremendous loss of freedom in this age. Where earlier peoples could simply move on when conditions warranted it, the villages and then the cities could not as simply be abandoned.

The leap between late 3rd millennium Uruk and the third age, which Charvát sees as an “age of maintenance,” spans several centuries. He is largely concerned with the period from the 26th century BCE until the 24th century, when Sargon of Akkad transforms Mesopotamia once again. The key development in this period takes place not in Uruk (“Uruk-less Uruk,” not nearly as dominant as before) but in the cities of Shuruppak, Kish, and Ur. The innovations are first seen in Shuruppak, which the Sumerians considered the city of the great Flood, after which “kingship descended upon the earth” from heaven. At Shuruppak are found the earliest literary compositions like the proverb collection that is conceived as advice from a father to his son. The first ritual texts and historical writings appear at this time. (Charvát does not mention it, but the earliest literary form, the so-called “Ea-Marduk” incantations or “Divine Dialogues,” appear as well; the format always involves the Father, the god Enki, or Ea in his Akkadian form, giving advice to his son, Asalluhi, in Akkadian the god Marduk who becomes head of the pantheon in Babylon. The advice consists of magical rituals to be performed, including magic formulas to be pronounced, in order to solve the problems the good Son has uncovered.)

This, the age of kings like Gilgamesh, is in many ways a reversion to patterns that are very old and obscured by the great Uruk, which had taken such a different tack. Probably the most striking feature is a renewed emphasis on kinship—the very thing Uruk avoided. The LUGALs and NINs (which are now “Queens” but still are seen in the names of
male gods) gather wealth, protect it and display it, in temples, palaces, and in some cases in grave goods—as in the famous “royal tombs” of Ur.

Where Charvát’s reconstruction is difficult to follow is in the treatment of the EN, which had been so central to the great 3rd millennium Uruk. On the one hand, the power of the EN appears to be reduced, headed in the direction of its virtual disappearance in parts of Mesopotamia during Akkadian periods. The reduction in power had to be accomplished by the rise of kings. Where, according to Charvát, the LUGAL in the earlier period was a lesser administrator, probably the head of the defensive fortifications that dotted the landscape, the kings of rival city-states gained their authority at the expense of the temple. Eventually, in the long event of Mesopotamian history, the roles of palace and temple would be reversed, in the sense that the early kings depicted themselves as builders and protectors of temples; later the temples would pay taxes to the palace. Charvát sees this early temple building as, ironically, an indirect way for the kings to accumulate more wealth for themselves, since they could arrange for the use of temple lands. So even in the “age of maintenance” the palace could be said to profit from the pious offerings of the king.

On the other hand Charvát is convinced that, for the first time in history, the throne (LUGAL and NIN) and altar (EN) were united, and he clearly sees this as an important development in human history. As William Hallo proposed before, the LUGAL as a title of great importance probably emerged in Ur. In Uruk en continues to be a title of authority. Charvát himself recognizes that the first EN for which we have a name in Early Dynastic Sumer was a certain Enshakushanna of Uruk,728 at a time when certain cities in Sumer were united in league that was probably centered in Nippur. (The later Sumerian King List, from which is derived the idea that kingship descended after the Flood, lists the famous Enmerkar and others carrying the en name in different Uruk dynasties.)

It may be, as Charvát suggests, that at this point in history palace and temple were united in a way that was never seen before (and may never have been seen later). When we consider that the power of the en of Uruk derived from his union with the great goddess (who presumably selected him), the reduction of his authority in Early Dynastic Sumer may reflect that other conspicuous feature of the times, the bias toward the masculine and the suppression of the feminine in kinship-based societies—as well as in theology (?). Perhaps there was some justification for the much later Gilgamesh to see even in Uruk the great king’s oppression of the citizens, male and female, as the reason they cried out to the gods for justice. (Their plea, we recall, lead to the creation of Enkidu, which initiated the adventures of the famous heroes.)

The Remarkable Shulgi of Ur

The Temple Hymns attributed to the daughter of Sargon of Akkad, Enheduanna, have provided us with intriguing 3rd millennium BCE portraits of the great deities of Gilgamesh. The deities, Inanna, Enki, Enlil, and Utu were not only goddesses and gods of Gilgamesh or Sumerian Uruk; they were known and revered throughout Sumer and were assimilated, for the most part, with Semitic deities.
A real oddity of the collection of Temple Hymns was the addition, after the time of Enheduanna, of a decidedly lesser deity, King Shulgi of Ur. He may have been a lesser god, but he was one of the most celebrated kings in Mesopotamian history. He had a particularly long reign. He organized or reorganized much of the political and economic life of Sumer. And he was deified. He was seen as a figure with the status of Gilgamesh and Dumuzi. Indeed, he (or his poets) thought he was the living relative of those deified ens.

Shulgi was the second Ur king in what is known as the Ur III dynasty. He reigned several hundred years after Enheduanna, and lived ca. 2112-2004 BCE. Like his father, Urnamma, he had a special relationship with Uruk. Someone wedged a Temple Hymn for Shulgi between the great temple of Nanna, the Moon God, and a temple of Enki’s son, Asarluhi. Even the standard copy of the collection included the notation that the 9th hymn in the series was an extra one, inserted after the others.

As Betty De Shong Meador notes in her translation of the poem, Temple Hymn 9 does not follow the pattern of the other temple hymns, though it does share some of their characteristics. It praises the temple as Emumah, with its “lofty name,” as a “high-lying mountain of heaven,” though the actual name for the temple was Ehursag. It has a precious base, an interior filled with “princely forces,” and it glows with a “shining light.” This is perhaps not unexpected as a companion to the Moon God’s temple in Ur. One part of the 14-line poem is particularly striking, as Meador points out.

your outside a verdant height
your visible façade (touches) all people
binding the land in a single path
a mighty river opening wide its mouth
gathering widespread cosmic powers

Other images reinforce these, showing the high status of Shulgi, noble on his throne, an “imposing strong wind,” holding the divine me and deciding fates. His house is a terrifying mountain, a “broad and central mountain” and “a vast gathering storm” rumbling.

Shulgi built a palace in his tenth year of rule, and the palace, Ehursag (“Mountain House”), became a temple where he was worshiped. Meador thinks that Shulgi may have been imitating the famous (better, notorious) king of Akkad, Naram-Sin, the first ruler to declare himself a god. Naram-Sin would later become vilified for his hubris. He was crushed by the gods. But Shulgi’s reputation, though never achieving the height of a Gilgamesh or a Dumuzi, remained positive for many centuries after his death.

Shulgi standardized the education of scribes. Among his amazing achievements, he allowed a flourishing of literature, and received some twenty royal hymns praising him from his court poets. Many other literary forms were written during his reign, including Wisdom literature.
For our purposes it is not so much that Shulgi was considered the “brother” of Gilgamesh but that he was a model en as well aslugal (and a sipa), as each aspect of his ruling authority was highlighted in different royal hymns.

As one who embodied the ideals of masculinity, Shulgi was celebrated for his running ability. The poetic tribute to his running reminds us of the Mesopotamian artistic tradition that depicts heroic figures standing upright or moving, but firmly on the groundline, with powerful bodies, such as the men portrayed on The Uruk Vase. For us, though, the connection between Shulgi and the Sacred Marriage, placing him in a tradition between Gilgamesh and Iddin-Dagan, is of prime importance.

The God-King of Ur: Shulgi X and P
The remarkable king of Ur, Shulgi, may or may not have been as literate as the poems about him claim he was, but his reign left a brilliant legacy of writings—mainly about him. In one of the hymns in which he speaks in the first person, “Shulgi, the Ideal King,” he boasts of his education in the Sumerian school:

As a youth, I studied the scribal art in the EDUBBA,
From the tablets of Sumer and Akkad;
Of the nobility, no one was able to write a tablet like me,
In the place where people attend to learn the scribal art,
Adding, subtracting, counting, and accounting—I completed all [of the courses];
The fair Nanibgal-Nisaba (goddess of scribes)
Endowed me generously with wisdom and intelligence.

Theoretically, then, Shulgi may have been able to write the more than twenty different hymns that celebrate his accomplishments. Since he ruled for forty-eight years and revolutionized the political economy of southern and northern Mesopotamia, he had reason to boast. In the middle of his reign, he claimed the status of a god. His name came to be spelled with the DINGIR sign, and he was worshiped in his palace.

Shulgi took over the celebration of the “sacred marriage.”

Ur is, of course, not far from Uruk, and we have seen that Shulgi’s father, Ur-Namma, was himself from Uruk. Perhaps this Urukean connection made the claim that he was Dumuzi more acceptable than it might have been from a more distant king. Ninsun has him installed as king and adopts him as the natural son of the famous hero Lugalbanda and herself—thus a brother to Gilgamesh. (We have seen that Ur-Namma himself was described in the same way.)

In a poem cited above, which Jacob Klein calls “Shulgi, the Ideal King,” Shulgi is presented not just as a warrior and military leader, a mighty hunter and a swift runner, the king also boasts of his role as master diviner, an office (māš-shu-gid-gid) that was traditionally part of the temple. In examining the liver of sacrificial animals—to learn the will of the gods—Shulgi impressed even the professional, for he never made an error in distinguishing a good omen from a bad omen. When he boasts of his musical talents,
as a singer and as a musician, Shulgi was also competing with the experts who originally had been keepers of the temple.

In a poem Klein calls “The Testament of Shulgi” he makes a lesser claim for himself when he says he commissioned his poets to compose a variety of hymns: royal prayers, supplications, ballads, praises of kingship, psalms, love poems, love dialogues, flute songs and drum songs. When he includes within that commission that his hymns were unique and cannot be imitated by anyone, Shulgi reflects the growing interest in the individual, which we have seen is a mark of 3rd millennium Mesopotamian culture. He expects that his songs will be sung in the sacred houses—including the increasingly prestigious religious center, the Ekur of Enlil in Nippur. The monthly festivals for Enlil and his consort Ninlil will include his songs. Without yet claiming to be divine, Shulgi’s ideal king implicitly justifies his intimate access to the high gods.

His reforms were impressive, certainly. Besides establishing a standing army, he reorganized the temple organizations—and placed them under the control of governors. To check the power of governors, who were usually local elites, he established a second level of control, the shagina, a military commander, who was more often than not an outsider, dependent upon the king’s favor. The shagina was under orders from the state chancellor, a sukkal-mah. He transformed the economy by organizing the empire along the principle of regional specializations. Thus Puzrish-Dagan became a large redistribution center of livestock, much of which came into the “core” of his territory from the “periphery,” controlled by the generals. All the military, not just the generals, were “taxed” and had to contribute livestock according to the men’s military rank. (One can easily see how under such a system the generals would see to it that they and their men received more from the local economy than the amount of their taxes.) Temples were required to provide goods, especially agricultural and industrial products, to the state.

By thus “taxing” the temples, Shulgi transformed a system that had earlier seen kings make contributions to the temples. There is no better indication of the growing power of the king than Shulgi’s demands on the temples—and his transformation of the palace into what was, in effect, a temple, where some cultic actions were performed.

One reason that Shulgi’s reforms were kept up—at least for a while after his death—was the standardization not only of bureaucratic titles, but of what would feed the bureaucracy, the schools. Shulgi expanded the schools and the curriculum. He also standardized cylinder seals, which contained the names and titles of their possessors. [Insert Fig. 44: Seal of Lugal-engardu = “Inanna of Nippur” in Keepers Visuals]

**Lugal-engardu**

Cylinder seal art of the Ur III period has not captured the attention of art historians the way others, like the earliest Archaic Uruk seals, have. The very clear and quite complicated designs of the late 4th millennium had already given way to a far more restricted repertory by the Early Dynastic Period, when the themes in the visual arts were reduced to a very few and the designs were often muddy. Among the reforms initiated by
Shulgi in the late 3rd millennium we must count also the standardization of cylinder seals.\textsuperscript{740} Both in subject matter and in vitality Ur III seals seem relatively weaker than earlier periods. They are repetitive and formulaic, lacking the features most admired by modern Western artists.

In the development of the Ur III bureaucracy standardization was not only useful but necessary to keep different parts of a complicated empire together. When a face to face meeting with the king or his high officials was increasingly unlikely, signs that told others of an official’s authority increased in value. The greater the distance between a person and high authority, the greater was the need to have something like a modern charge card. Ur III seals that combined a visual representation of the king or the gods and an inscription that identified the card-holder and his rank provided just that extension of authority one needed to secure, say, delivery of goods to a provincial governor. Hence the proliferation in the period of “royal presentation scenes” showing an individual being introduced to the royal presence. Usually the king, seated, is recognizable by dress, headgear, or an object he holds in his right hand. The individual approaching him is often bald, clean-shaven, standing, and frequently accompanied by a deity who intercedes for him with the king. To make it abundantly clear what is going on, these Ur III presentation scenes are accompanied by inscriptions that name the individual, provide his official position, and identify the king.

Irene J. Winter has studied these presentation scenes carefully\textsuperscript{741} and notes the emphasis on the deified king who acts like the gods in dispensing justice, maintaining order, and delegating authority.\textsuperscript{742} When the image and the inscription are combined, it is clear to anyone seeing the impression the seal makes that the seal-owner derives his authority from the king, and that the king is the proper source of the delegated powers. Not surprisingly the seals were restricted to a class of high-ranking officials just below the level of the king in the bureaucratic hierarchy. We might recall that the seals from 4th millennium Uruk did not carry inscriptions.

Winter is particularly interested in the brilliant way Shulgi reorganized the bureaucracy that administered the land. The nation-state Shulgi invented set one set of officials, mainly local elites, next to and checked by a military hierarchy that reached from the king and his generals, the \textit{shaginas}, through officers to common soldiers.\textsuperscript{743} For our purposes this development by Shulgi is yet one more—perhaps the most striking—piece of evidence that the \textit{lugal} was gaining power and was claiming ultimate authority as a god himself. Officials who once may have been part of the temple organization were now in the service of the god-king.

At least some persons in the service of a god or temple owned seals, and one in particular, the seal of a certain Lugal-engardu illustrates the care in which the image on the seal and the inscription define the role of the seal-owner and the authority from which that role derives.

As reconstructed the Seal of Lugal-engardu shows the man himself in the presence of, not the king, but the goddess Inanna. The impression was found on a tablet from Nippur,\textsuperscript{744}
and the inscription tells us of Lugal-engardu’s position in Inanna’s temple in Nippur—more evidence of the growing importance of Inanna outside Uruk.

The impression shows a royal figure on one side of a palm plant, upon which he is pouring liquid from a vase. The gesture recalls the very ancient practice that is often depicted by the high god Enki as the “god with streams,” sometimes by a goddess. (Note that two other trees are depicted in the scene.)

The royal ideology Shulgi developed along the lines of his Akkadian predecessor Naram-Sin survived longer than many of his administrative and economic reforms. Ishmedagan of Isin imitated Shulgi’s literary forms and models. The model of kingship may be reflected in Solomon. But Shulgi was taking no chances that his kingship would not be accepted in Sumer. It is interesting that Shulgi does not justify his overlordship by lineage. The Shulgi hymns do not even recognize his “natural” parent, king Ur-Namma. But they do indicate that the gods of the three most important cities in Sumer proclaimed his fate: Nippur, Uruk and Ur.

Nippur, a relative newcomer to Sumer, was the city of Enlil, the chief god of Sumer by Ur III times. Nippur was younger than the cities we have been discussing, those mentioned in Archaic Uruk city lists and in Presargonic and Early Dynastic texts: Eridu, Uruk, and Ur. Acceptance by the priests of Enlil’s temple was as necessary for legitimacy as was Shulgi’s major claim, that he completely destroyed Sumer’s enemy, the Gutians. Shulgi’s coronation in the Ekur of Enlil is the subject of the royal hymn, Shulgi G, and it was also treated in Shulgi D and Shulgi X. (The letters assigned to the poems are, of course, a modern scholarly convention.)

Ur was, of course, the home of Shulgi, and Uruk had been the home of Shulgi’s father. Coronations in these three cities, then, would secure Shulgi’s legitimacy.

But for our purposes, the two visits of Shulgi to Uruk are most telling. They seem almost to describe two different worlds.

To understand the differences, it is important to recall that the epithets and titles attributed to ens and kings were not just empty counters. They defined the relationships to the gods and to those who were subject to the rulers.

The beginning of Shulgi D provides a good illustration of the variety of epithets attributed to Shulgi. He is, of course, king (lugal), the title that appears to have originated in Ur. He is also “shepherd” (sipa), a title that in Ur III seems to be connected with Nippur. In addition Shulgi is praised as a great bull, a dragon with “eyes of a lion,” a young bull, a fierce panther, a lion, a charioted, and a “noble ass” among others. He is also likened to a series of trees. Three different garments symbolize his position. One is the “royal diadem” (sag-men-a); another is “the legitimate crown” (aga-zi-da); and the third is “the divine pectoral” (suh-keshda-nam-tingir-ra) (ll. 8-10). The first two are common terms for “crown” (sag-men and aga). The last, though, differs from the first two. The garment, suh-keshda, may be a headdress, like the other two, or a pectoral, as Klein translates it here (90-91). Unlike the first two, which are insignia of kingship, the suh-keshda is a sign
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of en-ship. When it is identified here as the garment of “godship”—divinity (nam-dingir-ra)—the suh-keshda completes the list with a strong suggestion that Shulgi has already become divine.752

**Shulgi and the Goddesses: Adoption by Ninsun**

In *Shulgi P* the king is crowned in the divine assembly hall, the *Ubshu’ukkina* by the famous parents of Gilgamesh, the goddess Ninsun and her hero-en, Lugalbanda. The beginning of the poem is lost, but in what survives, Lugalbanda is apparently the person addressing Ninsun.753 She is urged to intercede with An for Shulgi. In the assembly Ninsun tells Shulgi that she had selected Shulgi for kingship of Sumer from among the multitudes. Using a comparison of Shulgi to a mes-tree, Ninsun praises him as the source of abundance and prosperity for her.

    Ninsun made a fateful decision with her spouse, Lugalbanda,
    She heeded his prayer.
    She went straight to holy An, in the Ubshu’ukkinna:
    “My father, An, you are the king of the gods!
    I looked through the Land in its extent:
    Among its ‘black-headed (people)’, who are numerous like ewes,
    I elevated Shulgi to me high above their head. May he be their ‘righteous shepherd!’”
    He is my mes-tree, with ‘shining’ branches; he sprang up from the soil from me.”
    (lines A.8-15, after Klein, 37)

An picks up the tree metaphor and pledges his support for Shulgi. An makes it clear that Shulgi will perfect the “cultic norms” (*pi-lu₅-da*) of kingship and the “statutes of the gods” (*gish-hur-dingir-re-ne-ke₄*) (lines B.7-8).

With An’s support, Ninsun takes Shulgi by the hand and leads her to her palace, Egalmah, where she seats him on the dais. There she calls him “a pure calf, born to me...a good seed of Lugalbanda./ I raised you upon my own pure lap” (lines B.22-23). She is the “queen” (*nin*) and the “mother of kingship” (*ama-nam-lugal-la*) (line B.28). He will wear her “ma-garment” (l. B.31). Shepherd and king, Shulgi is told that his father, Lugalbanda, has called his name, “Valiant-Whom-An-Knows-Well-Among-the-Gods.”

Another key Urukean is Geshtinanna, about whom we will see more later. Usually she is identified as the sister of Dumuzi. Here she is “the king’s sister” and the one with the “mellifluous mouth” who will praise Shulgi (lines B. 43-44). Ninsun even mentions her mother, Urrash, and her father An. Shulgi is then likened to Utu, who offers firm reign for the king upon his throne, the one who gives just verdicts.

In the poem, Shulgi is consistently king and shepherd. The imagery and the title en is virtually absent from the lines that have survived.

**Shulgi and the Goddesses: The Sacred Marriage**

There is reluctance on the part of many scholars to connect Shulgi’s participation in the “sacred marriage” with the divinity claimed for him midway through his reign. The claim
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to godship was a decisive break with Shulgi’s past practices. How many of his reforms were justified by the greater authority his divine status must have given him is difficult to assess, but like Naram-Sin’s claim to deity before him, it must have bolstered his ability to act decisively in many ways, especially those that affected the relationship between palace and temple.

Fortunately there is a document that marks the king’s change of status. One of the most beautiful of Sumerian poems is indexed by modern scholars simply as Shulgi X. It is one of few poems that vividly illustrates the “sacred marriage.” In fact, it is the earliest written evidence of the sacred marriage rite. One could hardly imagine a greater contrast than the enthronement of Shulgi in Shulgi P, where Inanna is not even mentioned.

The whole of Shulgi X is 160 lines, about half of which are devoted to Shulgi’s journey to Uruk. And Shulgi X may itself have been the conclusion to Shulgi D. At any rate, it opens with Shulgi embarking on a boat that takes him first to Uruk, and then into three other sites where he is blessed by the principal deities in those cities. He ends up in Ur, as expected. Between Uruk and Ur Shulgi travels to the Ebabbar temple of Utu, presumably in Larsa, and to a place, EN.DIM.GIG, where the god Ninazu confirms his status. The Uruk section is by far the longest (74 lines) of the four that make up Shulgi X.

As in the other hymns of enthronement, Shulgi is considered both “shepherd” and “king.” The title of shepherd is interesting in that it is given in two forms, the usual sipa and the Emesal form, suba (line 16). We have already noticed Emesal, a second and most controversial dialect of the Sumerian language. (It was still used in the Akitu festivals in Uruk during the late 1st millennium BCE, more than a thousand years after Sumerian had disappeared as a living language in Mesopotamia.) While it may originally have been a local variety of Sumerian, it is preserved in poems where women or goddesses speak—as here—or poems composed and performed by the enigmatic galas. Written in cuneiform signs as “women’s-tongue,” Emesal has opened a great deal of discussion if it may have been gender-based. In Shulgi X, what is clear is that Inanna highlights Shulgi’s status as en by using the Emesal form of the word, umun (lines 14, 22, 35).

The narrative opens with Shulgi in his boat arriving at the ancient Urukean site, the quay of Kullab. He carried with him “large mountain bulls,” lambs, and kids, both dappled and bearded. (At each stop on his journey Shulgi offers the proper animals.) As he enters the Eanna complex (ēš-ē-an-na-ka), he dresses himself in a hili-wig “as a crown” (men) and a ma-garment. Both items point to a role of Inanna’s en. The term hili is most appropriate for the en, since it indicates a powerful sexual appeal.

Inanna looks upon Shulgi “in wonder” and breaks spontaneously into song (šir), which she utters as a chant (ēn-du). She actually composes two lengthy songs praising Shulgi and pronouncing his good fate.

The first song has Inanna likening Shulgi to her famous lover, Dumuzi. The details of Inanna’s preparation for sex and the sexual encounter with Dumuzi is as vivid as any
“sacred marriage” account. She bathes for him, adorns her body with perfume and makeup. He presses her loins, soothes her with drink (milk and beer), plays with the hair of her vulva and speaks pleasant words to her umun, who has become identified with Dumuzi. Dumuzi, like Shulgi in other royal hymns, is a “shepherd” (suba)—appropriate, as we have seen, since the famous en is always seen in pastoral settings. But Dumuzi, like Shulgi, is also en and lugal.

Inanna then decrees Shulgi’s fate. A triple epithet introduces the second Inanna song. The goddess is called nin (usually translated as “queen”), but also the hili—libido—of the “black-headed people” (the Sumerians). Finally she is “the heroic woman” (mi-shul-la) who “excels her mother.” She is also identified as the daughter of Sin, appropriate to Shulgi’s capital, Ur. (Sin is the Akkadian equivalent of Nanna, moon god, chief god of Ur.) The reference reminds us that attempts to trace a consistent genealogy of the Sumerian gods is probably futile. Given the situation, Inanna is the daughter of An, or Enki, or, as here, Nanna/ Sin (suen).

In the second song, the most appropriate epithet of Inanna is “heroic woman.” The fate she decrees for Shulgi in this section is the powerful warrior. He will be lead in battle by Inanna herself. Western readers will be reminded of Athena’s support of Odysseus in Odyssey. All elements of leadership are fated for him: that is, Inanna rewards her en with such qualities. As we have seen her in Enheduanna’s poems, Inanna is not the creator but the one—in the next “generation” of the high gods—who transforms whoever, whatever, gains her favor. Along with the purely martial powers, she praises Shulgi (lines 53-55) for his support of the temple-complex at Uruk.

Lines of the poem identify the weapons Shulgi will use in battle. His prowess as a swift runner is juxtaposed with the euphemistic reference to his sexual life with the goddess: “You, the swift runner, for racing on the road you are suited/ To prance on my holy knees like a tender calf you are suited” (lines 68-69).

With such a complete set of leadership qualities, Shulgi moves on. He visits Utu, Ninazu, and then Sin in passages that are equally positive for Shulgi but not nearly as lengthy or as detailed as the encounter with Inanna.

Several other goddesses are mentioned in Shulgi X: Ashnan and Ningal, for example. Worth noting is that Shulgi X ends with a za-mi (praise) of Nisaba. Clearly she had not been replaced at the time of this composition by male gods of wisdom.

The key divine figure in Shulgi X, though, is still Inanna—the one so conspicuously absent in crowning of Shulgi at Uruk in Shulgi P.

When Shulgi Went to Heaven

Most marriages during the late 3rd millennium were monogamous. While there is evidence for older or local customs of matrilineal inheritance—shown by the emphasis on maternal uncles—patrilineal inheritance was also the practice in parts of Mesopotamia. In what will show up in many eras and in a variety of cultures of the Middle East, polygyny
appears, but it is rare, confined mainly to royalty and very wealthy families. Shulgi is a
good example of the latter. He had at least nine wives and sired more than fifty
children.\textsuperscript{761} Although women could testify in court and make contracts—and were active
in a number of important offices, none of the wives were given high administrative offices.
An exception, though, may be the two \textit{lukurs} buried with Shulgi.

For all their importance from the 3\textsuperscript{rd} millennium on, Mesopotamian kings for the most
part left the earth without a trace. The Royal Tombs of Ur, in which noteworthy persons
were buried with a retinue to accompany them after death, remain a conspicuous
exception, an innovation that did not persist. The “Death of Gilgamesh” is an early
literary treatment of the subject, as we have seen. Now that a manmade structure has
been discovered in canals of Uruk, it may turn out that the literary account of Gilgamesh’s
burial was not mere fiction. Aside from these early examples, the death of kings went
unnoticed in the literature—unless, as in the case of Ur-Namma and Sargon II, the kings
died in battle.\textsuperscript{762}

Shulgi, though, is credited with yet another reform in that his death was not only noticed,
but he was said to have risen to heaven for a short time before he made his inevitable
descent into the underworld.

During the Presargonic and Ur III periods deceased kings were worshiped after their
deaths. Offerings were delivered to a place called a \textit{ki-a-nag}. There liquids were given to
the kings and allowed them to live well in the underworld. Kings were not the only ones
remembered. At Girsu the dead \textit{nin-dingir} women and their mothers were worshiped in
the same way as the kings and the city governors (and their wives). The line of Ur III
kings, Ur-Namma, Shulgi, Amar-Sin, and Shu-Sin, received such treatment. Ur-
Namma’s libation-place also included mention of a \textit{nin} (queen).

Piotr Michalowski has interpreted a text from the first year of Shulgi’s heir, Amar-Sin,
that mentions three libation-places related to Shulgi. To the kitchen at Shulgi’s \textit{ki-a-nag}
in Ur were delivered one grain-fed sheep, one grain-fed lamb, two grain-fed ewes, five
ewes and one suckling goat (221-22). In the next line we see a grain-fed sheep and a ewe
delivered to the \textit{ki-a-nag} of a certain Geme-Ninlilla. This is followed by yet another
delivery, of a ewe, to a \textit{ki-a-nag} there, this one to a woman known as Shulgi-simti.

Geme-Ninlilla and Shulgi-simti were women who had some relationship with Shulgi.
Michalowski concludes that the two women mentioned in the text were among the seven
persons buried in the tomb of Shulgi and in the two adjacent chambers.\textsuperscript{763} They had all
been buried at the same time. Michalowski suggests three possible explanations for the
multiple deaths. The sacrifice of “consorts” may have been a practice during the Ur III
period—or at least practiced when the king died under certain circumstances. Shulgi and
the three women may have actually died of natural causes at the same time. Or, Shulgi
was assassinated to end his long, 48-year, reign\textsuperscript{764 224). William W. Hallo is inclined to
think that Amar-Sin either affected or at least took advantage of the death of his father to
take over the kingdom. Soon afterwards the rightful heir, Shu-Sin, succeeded him.\textsuperscript{765}
While it is not certain why the women were buried with Shulgi, Michalowski notes that Shulgi's father, Ur-Namma, was buried long before his wife, Watartum. The women whose *ki-a-nags* were mentioned along with Shulgi, though, were not necessarily wives of the king. They were, however, *lukurs*. It is possible that their association with Shulgi was connected with another astonishing fact about Shulgi's death. We know from an unusual source that the divine Shulgi was “taken up into heaven (and served) as doorkeeper.” Hallo thinks that this unusual role was performed for a short time, most likely the seven days after his death. Could the *lukurs* have been instrumental in his ascent—and subsequent descent into the underworld?

The ascent to heaven was indeed remarkable. Only such figures as the legendary sages Adapa and Utu-abzu and the equally legendary king Etana were known to have made such an ascent. A closer parallel may have been Dumuzi, with whom Shulgi had been identified in *Shulgi X*. From the Adapa myth we know that Dumuzi—and (Nin)-gizzida—served as doorkeepers at the heavenly gate. If the deification of Dumuzi derived from his “sacred marriage” to Inanna, it may be that Shulgi's fate had been likewise decreed by her. It remains to be seen if the *lukurs* who are mentioned with Shulgi at his death are agents of his ascent.

Shulgi’s attempts to centralize the Mesopotamian economy led to thousands of rather humble account texts that, for example, maintained an inventory of livestock brought in from the countryside to a place known as Puzrish-Dagan, from there to be dispatched to other parts of the country. As these often tiny invoices are being assembled and interpreted by modern scholars, the account texts provide odd glimpses of a very complex redistributive economy. One striking result of this painstaking scholarly work has been the identification of an endowment in the name of the very *lukur* mentioned with—possibly buried with—Shulgi, Shulgi-simti.

In the texts the woman’s name is written with the DINGIR sign at the beginning of Shulgi’s name, as if to mean “the god Shulgi is my glory.” Whether she was a wife or “consort” of Shulgi, the name itself looks like one given her when she became what the texts indicate, a *lukur*.

Not much is known about the office of *lukur* before the Ur III period, but then a good deal of information comes out of the voluminous Ur III archives. Still, it is difficult to know exactly what they did for the temple. In the lexical lists of professional titles we have been mentioning from the beginning the *lukur* is mentioned often with other high-ranking officiants who interpret fertility and sexuality. These officiants symbolize, act out, pray for, rejoice in, and are central to the fertility of humans and animals. The groups of officials include the widest variety of sexual and gender symbolism, with transvestite, bisexual, homosexual, celibate, and possibly castrated performers, in addition to the more conventional reproductive activities. Along with those who promote reproduction are others who inhibit and even prohibit reproduction. [Insert Fig. 45: Textbox on plaques from Kish]

The office of *lukur* was written with two signs, SAL (“woman”) and ME.
Excursus: “Sacred” and Other Marriages

The seals of a lukur of Shulgi have been found. Two lukurs of Shulgi’s son, Shu-Sin, are known, one named Tiamat-bashti, the other Kubatum, both of whom are described as “beloved” of the king. Kubatum is a singer in and presumably the author of two Enesal hymns to Shu-Sin—more evidence of the literacy of (some) women in the period and of the “sacred marriage.” The same cuneiform signs were read in Akkadian at the next period, the Old Babylonian period, as nadītu—to be discussed below—but it is difficult to know if the offices were the same. Unlike the nadītu, who were not to have children, some of whom were forbidden to marry, the lukur in the Pre-Sargonic period could be married and have children. There were heavenly and earthly lukurs, those associated with male gods and others with kings. Imaged as rain-cloud goddesses, the earthly ones may have been the counterparts of the heavenly lukurs.

Shulgi-simti appears in texts from the 32nd year of Shulgi’s reign. She is called lukur-kaskal-lá-ka-ni, “lukur of his journey.” This could mean that she was a temporary wife, a mistress for the road. But the importance of Shulgi-simti suggests that she was more than simply a “consort” or even a “favorite wife,” as she has been described by modern scholars.

Account texts that refer to the Shulgi-simti endowment or foundation indicate that an impressive array of notables contributed to it: princes, governors of provinces (ensi), military governors (shagina), and a series of temple functionaries (agrig, shabra, and ugula). The reforms of Shulgi make it difficult to tell if the dub-sars, farmers, and shepherds should be characterized as “secular” or temple offices. Many women contributed to the foundation, many of them associated with high-ranking officials.

Most interesting are the similarities and differences between the activities supported by the foundation in the two cities, Ur and Uruk.

The invoices specify animals distributed through Puzrish-Dagan to temples in Ur and Uruk. At Ur one of the more striking features of the endowment is the preeminence of two otherwise little-known goddesses, Bēlat-tirraban and Bēlat-suhrnir. Their names indicate they were worshiped in two sites, Tirran and Suhnnir, in the northern periphery of Shulgi’s empire, near modern Kirkuk (some 170 miles north of Baghdad). Calling the goddesses bēlu, the Akkadian feminine form of the term that translates Sumerian en, simply indicates that the goddesses were the overlords of those sites. (Modern English “lady” hardly carries the force of such an otherwise transparent title.) Bēlat-tirraban and Bēlat-suhrnir were introduced into the empire in the 32nd year of Shulgi’s reign. In a temple for the two goddesses, regular offerings were also provided for An. Sigrist wonders if Shulgi-simti may herself have come from the Kirkuk region.

Other, better known deities received offerings at Ur through the foundation. Most of them are either avatars of Inanna, like Ulmashitum, Annunitum, Nanaya (whose en is mentioned), and Ishhara, or her underworld counterpart, Allatum (that is, Ereshkigal). Geshtinanna, brother of Dumuzi, also figures in the lists. Ninsun, the Urukean goddess claimed by Shulgi to be his mother, received offerings in his temple. Male gods—besides An—received offerings, notably Utu, Ishkur and the Boat of An (or the Boat of Heaven).
Shulgi himself received offerings in his palace, as did the goddesses Bēlat-tirraban and Bēlat-suhnir. Allatum also received libations there.

The foundation supported a number of rituals at Ur. Texts mention *ki-zâh*, *erūbatum*, *elûnum*, *girrānum*, *nabrium*, and *shersherum*. Offerings, sacrifices, libations are involved in the festivals.

As a whole, the Shulgi-simti foundation at Ur supported gods who are largely chthonic. The rituals are largely involved in the cult of the dead and are tied into the cycle of the moon.

At Uruk, Ur's great Moon God Nanna was also celebrated. The Shulgi-simti endowment mainly, though, supported the *en* in the *gîpar* (243). As in Ur, well-known gods received offerings alongside others who are rarely attested, like Mushirgal and Ninigizibarra. As at Ur, the rites included lamentations (*girrānum*, *îr* in Sumerian), especially for Inanna. Other lamentations were performed for the goddesses Bēlat-tirraban and Bēlat-suhnir in their temple, and for Nanaya, Annunitum and Ulmashitum. An “entry” rite (*erūbatum*) for Annunitum and Ulmashitum is also recorded. At Uruk the *elûnum* and *nabrium* festivals were held. In these festivals the same northern goddesses, Bēlat-tirraban and Bēlat-suhnir, are again prominent. (Geme-Ninlilla, the *lukur* mentioned with Shulgi-simti, was also feted.) The *akītum* was celebrated in the month that carried its name. In that festival, the Boat of Nanna was employed, presumably to carry celebrants from the city proper to the Akitu house outside the city walls.

The lunar cycle was celebrated particularly at Uruk.

Exactly who participated in these rites is hard to say. The ancient records do not indicate what must have been obvious at the time—who performed them and exactly what was done. By the Ur III period the calendar of some cities can be reconstructed. A standard calendar for Mesopotamia was adopted later, in Old Babylonian times. How much the older Sumerian cities resisted the standard calendar and continued to follow their own scheduled events is also difficult to determine. At Ur the new calendar with its Nippur festival names seems to have been employed, but without changing the religious observances there.

We have seen that at Uruk in the Archaic Uruk period (c. 3000 BCE) that festivals celebrating Inanna as a morning goddess and as an evening goddess—presumably an identification with the planet Venus—were often mentioned. The Ur III calendar of Uruk certainly continues the emphasis on Inanna, but the other goddesses mentioned above are also conspicuous. Like the account texts that tell us about the animals sent down from Puzrish-Dagan for the Shulgi-simti foundation, the calendars of Ur and Uruk give us another glimpse of the complex religious life of the old cities. In particular they tell us more about the two goddesses Shulgi introduced from his northern periphery, Bēlat-tirraban and Bēlat-suhnir.

Mark E. Cohen has discovered quite a bit about the major Uruk festivals from an examination of the calendar. There was, for example, *shûkultum* or “banquet” of Inanna
in which offerings were presented at the entrance to the gipar of the en and also at the entrance to the shrine (èsh).\textsuperscript{782} Laments sung during circumambulating the city and at the entrance to the gipar are also known. A ritual known as the “the waving of the palm-fronds” is mentioned.

On the first day of the first month a number of animals from Puzrish-Dagan were offered in Uruk: a lamb at the entrance of the shrine, a grain-fed sheep and a lamb at the entrance to the gipar, a lamb for Nanaya, a second and a third lamb for the entrance to the gipar on the first and second days.\textsuperscript{783} A festival of Dumuzi at the New Year may refer to the sacred marriage in Shulgi’s time. Dumuzi is prominent in other months, too.

Much of what has survived of Uruk’s calendar of events involves the underworld, and it is not only Inanna’s descent into the underworld that is significant. The Boat of An (or Boat of Heaven) that Inanna takes in her journey from Uruk to Eridu and from Eridu to Uruk in the myth, “Inanna and Enki,” is employed at various times during the year. We will see that Inanna’s journey in “Inanna and Enki,” in which she tricks the usually wise Enki into giving her more than one hundred of the divine mes, could be read on one level as a journey into the underworld, into Enki’s watery house, the Abzu (from which we have the “abyss”). In the seventh month of the Uruk calendar the king supplied no fewer than ten grass-fed sheep for the Great Offering in the temple of Inanna;\textsuperscript{784} and the Boat of An was employed in at least one of the important festivals of that month. At Ur the Boat of An was used in laments for deceased kings. In the tenth month at Uruk a very long list of foodstuffs was scheduled for the Boat of An, probably to be taken to the temple of Inanna or An in the city.\textsuperscript{785} One of the festivals of that month specifies it is for a ritual wailing (girrānum).

We have discussed the Akitu festival before. It may have been celebrated at Uruk in the eighth month. The earliest record of the Akitu in Uruk, from these Ur III times, mentions an offering of sheep and goats for the entu-priestess as she performed in the Akitu festival.\textsuperscript{786}

Even though the evidence is still fragmentary, it is clear that rituals for the goddesses dominate the Urukean calendar. Very little is known about three of the twelve months. Inanna is prominent in seven of the months we know about. Her lover Dumuzi is mentioned at least twice. Annunitum and Ulmashitum, both of whom are likely extensions of Inanna herself, have a major festival in the ninth month. Nanaya is feted in two other months.

Although Inanna and Ninsun inhabit different mythological domains, they are celebrated together in at least two months.

The high god An, for all his importance in god lists, where he heads the pantheon along with Enlil and Enki (and sometimes a goddess), is notably absent in Uruk’s rituals during this period. This, we saw, was the case in Archaic Uruk as well. On the other hand, the Boat of An, which figures in rituals of the seventh and tenth months, implicates the high god, if only in his identification with “The Above,” the heavens.
Male deities do not appear often in these rituals. Besides Dumuzi and An, who are present because of their relationship with Inanna, only the underworld gods, Meslamtae in the tenth month, and Nergal, have roles to play. Nergal’s is in the twelfth month.

What is most surprising about the rituals in the Uruk calendar, then, is the persistent presence of the northern goddesses Bēlat-tirraban and Bēlat-suhrnir. They are prominent in no fewer than four months. In the third month five grain-fed sheep and two goats are offered for the “Festival of Chains,” which may be a reference to the capture and journey to the underworld of the two goddesses or their having been placed in chains when they are held there. (211).

In the eighth month there is a ritual wailing for the two goddesses—and for Inanna. A text from the 47th year of Shulgi’s reign even mentions their Place of Disappearance. A nābrīnum festival is held for them in the ninth month. And while the Great Offering marks the celebration in the tenth month, there is a three day banquet for Bēlat-tirraban and Bēlat-suhrnir in that month. On the first day of the banquet offerings of an ox, four sheep, three lambs, two goats, and beer are offered “for Meslamtae.” A somewhat similar offering is made “for the Place of Disappearance” on the second day. And the whole festival is marked for the two goddesses on the third day. The underworld connects Inanna, the two goddesses, Meslamtae, and Nergal (specifically in the twelfth month). Like Inanna, whose disappearance into the underworld and her death there lead on earth to great mourning, the two goddesses disappear and are mourned. With Inanna, the lamentation extends to Dumuzi, the lover who takes her place in the underworld. Her return—and the annual return of Dumuzi—must have been cause for equally great celebration. However many of the gods and goddesses of Uruk are involved in similar journeys in and out of the underworld is hard to say. But what we know of the calendar of festivals and rituals in Uruk during the Ur III period is heavily weighted by lamentation and banqueting.

We are tempted to think that the intense concern for the dead, including the dead remembered in the gipars of both Ur and Uruk, is intimately connected with the life-giving erotic powers of the deities celebrated in those cities. (Recall that in the myths of Inanna’s descent into the underworld, the life-principles of food and water are found in that otherwise dark place.)

At Ur a “Great Wailing” was introduced into the Akitu festival to lament the destruction of the city, presumably by the Elamites in 2004 BCE. A similar Great Wailing was performed in Isin when Shu-ilishu, the king, “went up to heaven.” Otherwise the old calendar at Shulgi’s city, from what has been preserved, contained the rites discussed earlier, and those rites are much like those of Uruk. The underworld god Ninazu was celebrated there, and rituals for Ninazu were intertwined with offerings on behalf of the entu-priestesses of Ur, Enmegalanna and her predecessor Enannatumma. The Boat of Nanna is prominent in a way that the Boat of An is in Uruk. In other words, the emphasis in Ur and Uruk may differ, but many of the rites, especially those involving the cult of the dead, appear to reflect or complement each other.
The deification of Shulgi, which involved treating his palace as a temple, is not reflected in Uruk’s calendar of rituals. But the high status accorded to the northern goddesses, Bēlat-tirraban and Bēlat-suhnir, in both Ur and Uruk must certainly give evidence of the king’s authority in the religious life of the city of Shulgi’s ancestors. That the Shulgi-simti foundation supported rites in both cities and involved donations from among the highest-ranking persons of the empire is striking testimony to Shulgi’s relationship to Shulgi-simti. The question still remains, though, if the Shulgi-simti foundation and the cult of the two goddesses are related to Shulgi-simti’s role as a lukur. It may have been, as has been suggested, merely a matter that Shulgi-simti was the favored spouse. It is quite conceivable that the foundation had a rather direct political purpose, to link the towns of the northern periphery to the ancient towns of the south, particularly the two cities that were important to Shulgi’s claim to kingship over all of Mesopotamia.

We think, though, that the deification of Shulgi at the midpoint of his reign is not unrelated to the spouses Shulgi has after that point: lukurs and not dams, the ordinary word for “wife.” It may well be that the lukur, like the naditu of a later age, had an important role in the cult of the dead. We think that the lamentations that are so prominent in the ritual life of Ur and Uruk during Shulgi’s reign are not so much a means of recalling past generations and myths of descent and ascent, as they are ritual means of affecting the other world. Shulgi’s deification, we propose, if rather tentatively, is connected with his participation in the “sacred marriage.” The identification with that other famous human, Dumuzi, who, in joining with Inanna, was translated into a deity—the identification made explicit in Shulgi X—allowed Shulgi to be considered a god. Like other gods—his “brother” Gilgamesh for one—it was not a stretch to think of Shulgi as a king in the underworld. What captured the attention of his contemporaries was that Shulgi ascended to heaven. There, like Dumuzi and Ningishzida, those “dying gods” who kept the door to heaven, Shulgi would spend time in the world of the gods before descending to the netherworld.

We think that the two lukurs who accompanied Shulgi on his journey were doing their job. If Bēlat-tirraban and Bēlat-suhnir could descend into kur and return, as Inanna had, perhaps Shulgi would travel the way Dumuzi—and other ens of Uruk—into a life that other mortals could not share.

Shulgi and Shulgi-simti died at the same time. The endowment ended with their deaths.

**Two Later lukurs**

Who represented Inanna in the “sacred marriage” rites? Since the great goddess herself is often called a nu-gig, she may have been played by a woman who held that title. Assyriologists usually translate the Sumerian term with the Greek word, “hierodule,” a high-status, often educated consort of men, a “sacred” prostitute. It may be, though, that the lukur represented the Inanna in the “sacred marriage.” In Uruk—in the Eanna itself—excavators found two precious necklaces that had been given to lukurs in the reign of Shulgi’s heir, Shu-Sin. Both were inscribed lukur ki-ág of Shu-Sin, that is, “lukur, lover of” (or “loved by”) the king. Fortunately the inscriptions also named the
beloved: Tiamat-bashti and Kubatum. Little is known about the first of this lukur pair, but Kubatum is mentioned by name in one of three love songs dedicated to Shu-Sin as the “ideal lover.”

Yitschak Sefati calls the three Sumerian poems (called bal-bal-es) “Shusin—The Ideal Lover,” “Bridegroom, Sleep in Our House Till Dawn,” and “You are Our Lord.” The last of these is a translation of a phrase in the poem, ù-mu-un-me hé-me-en (l. 18), where ù-mu-un is the Emesal equivalent of the en. Because the implied speaker in the poems is Inanna—or her representative—she uses Emesal forms rather than the dialect found in the majority of Sumerian texts, Emegir. As the lover of Inanna, the Shu-Sin himself represents Dumuzi.

Poetry, then as now, admits of multiple interpretations, and the poem, “Shusin-The Ideal Lover” is no exception. The difficulty with this beautiful lyric is in identifying the speaking voice. Sefati suggests that, while Kubatum herself is mentioned in line 6 of the poem, the one who sings the poem is another lukur. The poem begins with a praise of the queen who gave birth to Shu-Sin, Abisimti. The queen is likened to a “cloth-beam” used in weaving, while Kubatum is praised equally as the “warp-beam”—certainly appropriate for the textile-producing south. The imagery ties together, the way warp and woof cross each other, the two “queens” (nin(s) and the singer as well.

She (who) is pure, gave birth, she (who) is pure, gave birth,
The queen (who) is pure, gave birth,
Abisimti (who) is pure, gave birth,
The queen (who) is pure, gave birth.
My cloth-beam of fair garment, my Abisimti,
My warp-beam, on which the woven cloth is placed, my queen, Kubatum.
(lines 1-6)

Having praised the two nin(s), the poet turns to Shu-Sin and emphasizes the wonderful gifts the king has given her, a golden pin, a lapis lazuli seal, a golden bracelet and a silver bracelet. The poem ends with a stanza that expresses the pleasure Shu-Sin has given her. The last two lines identify Shu-Sin as the “beloved” of Enlil, “king” and—most appropriately after Shulgi had claimed divinity for himself—“the god of his country” (dingir-kalam-ma-na).

The poem contains some interesting images. The poet asks that the city “stretch out hand” to Shu-Sin “like a cripple;” and the city is likened also to a “lion cub” that will lie down at the king’s feet (lines. 17-18). More striking, though, is the expression of erotic ecstasy in the following lines.

My god, the wine-maid how sweet is her beer!
Like her beer her nakedness is sweet, / how sweet is her beer!
Like her mouth her nakedness is sweet, / how sweet is her beer!
Her (beer) diluted with water, how sweet is her beer! (lines 19-22)

The mixing of intoxicants with erotic joy makes modern scholars rather nervous, since it may be considered inappropriate to the high seriousness of the poem, but we will see
many examples in the literature of Inanna. The translation, “wine-maid,” deserves a note. The \textit{lukur} likens herself to \textit{sà-bi-tum}, the keeper of a tavern.\textsuperscript{798} Since Inanna/Ishtar is sometimes identified as a \textit{sâbitu} or \textit{kurun}, the identification of the poet and the goddess is quite apt in this context.\textsuperscript{799} (Siduri, a major figure in \textit{Gilgamesh} Tablet 10, is a \textit{sâbitu}.) The Shu-Sin love poems, especially if they were composed by \textit{lukurs}, as this one is, reinforce the importance for Shulgi and his heirs of the women who incarnate Inanna and who lead the king to his otherworldly destiny.

\textbf{Shulgi’s Impact on Keepers of the Temple}

The \textit{gipar} of Uruk, which housed the \textit{en}, was, as we have seen, the location of many important rituals according to Ur III texts. Unfortunately, the exact location of the \textit{gipar} there has not been discovered.\textsuperscript{800} On the other hand, the \textit{gipar} of Ur has been studied extensively, and the transformation of the sacred house during the Ur III period tells us a good bit about the women who lived there. Whereas the \textit{en} in Uruk was the spouse of Inanna, in Ur the \textit{en} was the wife of Nanna. From the time of Enheduanna until the Old Babylonian period the names of the \textit{ens} are known.\textsuperscript{801} Two of them were installed by Shulgi. One, Ennirzianna, was his daughter, installed in the 17\textsuperscript{th} year of his reign. (Since her name had been Me-Enlil, the adoption of a name that begins with \textit{en} suggests that such names were given upon their initiation into that role.) It was his father, though, who began this \textit{gipar} as a cloister for the \textit{en}. Ur-Namma installed his daughter, Ennirgalanna, as \textit{en}. Texts indicate that Ur-Namma built the \textit{gipar} for her and later kings elaborated the structure.\textsuperscript{802}

Ur and Uruk were not the only cities to have \textit{ens}. By the Ur III period, the cities were identified as the homes of the high gods, and the \textit{en} would be male if, as in Uruk, the city was the home of a goddess. In Ur and Nippur, where Nanna and Enlil were said to live, the \textit{en} was female. The model of such an arrangement derives from Uruk. Actually, there is little evidence of male \textit{ens} other than in Uruk—as there were increasingly few cities dominated by goddesses, even as the religion of Inanna/Ishtar spread through Mesopotamia.

An \textit{en} in Nippur bore Ur-Namma a son to ensure the royal line. Penelope N. Weadock thinks that the child may have been conceived in the “sacred marriage” when Ur-Namma assumed the role of Nanna in Nippur. For Weadock this is important evidence that the “sacred marriage” was actual, not just symbolic, and that the \textit{ens} of Nanna were not, like some of the cloistered \textit{nadītu} in the Old Babylonian period, required to remain childless (102).

The \textit{gipar} of Ur came to have a well-defined structure,\textsuperscript{803} one that certainly suggests a cloister. The complex was divided into three parts. A sanctuary, \textit{é-nun}, was dedicated to the moon god’s spouse, the goddess Ningal. Ningal’s dwelling place was separated from two other units by a narrow corridor. It had elements of a private house, but also contained a ritual washing place and other items that indicated it was the house of a deity. Storage jars, a weaver’s pit, and economic tablets found there indicate the place was a
center for running a large estate. It also contained a large room with a low platform that occupied nearly half its area—possibly as a base for a bed. Weadock suggests that this central room in the sanctuary was an agrun, what Akkadian speakers called a kummu. It was the place where Nanna/Sîn might spend the night. For Weadock the plan of the temple with its agrun indicated that the supreme purpose of the sanctuary was the celebration of the “sacred marriage.”

A second part of the complex consisted of small rooms with tombs beneath their floors—the resting place of former ens—and rooms adjacent to a cemetery, probably enlarged by the en, Enanadu. A dining room with urinnu-symbols was presumably used for ceremonial banquets and possibly for daily meals. A central room and two one-room shrines that may have been for deities named Ningalanda, Ninkiurra, and Adamusaharra. A kitchen connected the various parts of the complex, providing offerings of food for the gods and daily meals for the ens.

A third section included the living quarters of the ens and a sacred enclosure. Between the domestic quarters and the shrine was a purification chamber. Prayers for the life of the deified king (through his statue) may have been performed in this sanctuary—until the end of the Ur III period. The complex then consisted of a Ningal temple; the gipar proper, a dwelling place of the en, and its cemetery; and the sanctuary where the en prayed for the life of the king, “in the hope that the gods would bestow prosperity upon the land through the king, their human regent.”

The gipar was well-designed for the roles the ens of Ur were expected to perform. According to Weakock, the most important roles was as the human wife of the god, on the analogy of Uruk’s en, the spouse of Inanna. The purpose of the “sacred marriage” was to produce abundance. Hence the old meaning of gipar as “storehouse.”

But the ens of Ur also prayed for the life of the king and provided for the goddess Ningal. During the Ur III period the ens managed a vast estate—and this function seems to have extended deep into the 1st millennium. Certainly the functions of the en show how inadequate are our modern, Western ideas that separate “religious” and “secular” domains. Even though Shulgi may have taken a crucial step in the direction of an independent kingship—as a deified king he could claim the authority to in effect tax the temples of Mesopotamia—there is still no ideological split between sacred and profane realms. The situation was as true in Uruk.

One additional function of the en of Ur was the cult of dead ens. There is evidence that festivals for the ens, the “resting ones,” were held already at the time of Lugalanda and Urukagina of Lagash. By the Isin-Larsa period the cult was well-established at Ur, and two of the ens were especially prominent. Regular offerings of cheese, butter, and dates for Enannatumma and Enmegalanna were made at their libation place, ki-a-nag.

We do not know if there is an ideological or historical connection between the ens, lukurs, and the later naditus, but one large trend we have been noticing through the 3rd millennium is evident in our ability to identify and even characterize persons who are
neither kings nor heroes. Enheduanna, Shulgi-Simti, and Enanedu, to mention the most prominent, are keepers of the sacred house, defined by their roles, but they are also individuals. In the case of the ens we know their identity because it may have been important to living ens to care for their departed—so that they, too, would be treated well when they arrived in the underworld. We will see that this is certainly the case with the cloistered women of the early 2nd millennium, the naditus.

Shulgi’s political, economic, and educational reforms were far-reaching. As in the case of his support of the Shulgi-simti foundation, the very power of the king to support religious institutions was intimately connected to what would eventually “secularize” parts of the economy. Centralization of the economy hastened, if it did not create, the professionalization of the military and the vast bureaucracy, both of which were needed to keep the Ur III Empire running. Local elites were governors of the provinces within the “core” of the empire; but their power was checked by military governors in the same regions, and the military shagina were appointed by the king. Often they were “foreign,” that is, non-local and ethnically different from those in the region they governed. Of course, the military was entirely a male operation. No doubt the increasing importance of a military organization with its rigid hierarchy was the major reason why women, for example, eventually became marginalized in the Mesopotamian political order.

Shulgi’s expansion and standardization of the schools eventually had a similar effect. The teachers and the literate bureaucrats, all necessarily dub-sars, became professionalized in the sense that their roles were passed down from generation to generation in the male line. The number of women who were literate may have actually increased in the late 3rd millennium, but as we shall see, largely disappeared by the end of the Old Babylonian period in the 2nd millennium, when scribal “families” like the one headed by the reputed “author” of Gilgamesh, a certain Sin-leqi-unninni, increasingly dominated education and many parts of the bureaucracy.

We have seen that the Shulgi-simti foundation supported religious activities deep in southern Mesopotamia, in Uruk and Ur in particular. The support was especially important for the two goddesses from the northern “periphery” of the Ur III state. Such areas were run by the military governors. All ranks of the military in those areas were expected to pay “taxes” in the form of livestock, which was sent to the central holding area, Puzrish-Dagan, and then distributed to institutions like the gipar of Uruk. We know about the Shulgi-simti foundation because of the detailed accounts of livestock distribution. The names of the women at Puzrish-Dagan who were responsible for the transactions are known for the period in which the foundation flourished. If the military governors were responsible for their end of the transaction, it is reasonable to assume that military appropriated the livestock from the communities it ruled—at what profit to the military ranks is not known. If this follows the taxation policies in other periods of world history, one would guess that it operated at considerable profit both to the state and to the military, which would have extracted more from the territories than it returned to the state.
Some indication of the scale of such operations can be glimpsed in the temple of the goddess Bau in Lagash. Livestock constituted only a part of the centralized economy. For the northern and eastern periphery of the Ur III state, though, the massive transfer of animals was particularly important: goods flowed from the good pasture lands of the periphery into the core of the state. Much of the movement of goods and persons was by river and canal. Fully 10% of the keepers of Bau’s house in Lagash (about 125 persons) were boatmen. The temple, then, as expected from its origins as the very center of Sumerian city-state economies, continued to employ many persons whose work we would today think of as “secular.” We know from Lagash also that both male and female slaves were sometimes in crews.816

The Ur III kings continued to support temples in many ways, as the Shulgi-simti foundation shows. But when Shulgi was deified the relationship between palace and temple became immensely complicated. Not only was Shulgi’s palace at Ur now a temple to Shulgi, and the royal cult introduced into nearby Uruk, but the cult spread rapidly through the “core” territory of the Ur III State. The economy of a relatively small and somewhat inaccessible city, Umma, whose animal husbandry was closely tied to the temples of the local gods—and was relatively independent of the hub centralized livestock system at Puzrish-Dagan—had three temples, one of which was for the divine Shulgi.817 Daniel Snell has pointed out that at Nippur the Inanna temple “seems to have owned less land than its southern counterparts and to have been dominated by a single family that ran it as a private preserve. Perhaps Shulgi had reorganized the temples and made them de facto state property under royal governors.”818

Slavery was never as important a part of the economy as it would be in, say, Greece and Rome in classical antiquity. Most of the slaves in the early documents appear to have been prisoners of war. In the Ur III period large numbers of slave women were engaged in the centralized textile “industry” and in the gathering of grain. The situation of slaves in the Mesopotamian temples was, ironically, worse than those who were held by others, the palace or by private citizens. Those who were branded with Ishtar’s star, for example, could not be sold or freed, whereas the non-temple slaves could see their status improved upon occasion. Law codes established principles for handling slaves.

On the one hand, the increased importance of the military even during peaceful times must have made prisoners of war valuable commodities both in the temple and in non-temple operations. Most of the slaves had been captured in military campaigns outside the Ur III “core.” On the other hand, persons in desperate poverty could dedicate their children to the temple. Such temple slaves could then survive but could not be alienated. Slavery does not seem to have been important in the period, however. They were too expensive, for one thing, and the largest number in any household was 220, itself a very high figure. Apparently most free persons held no slaves at all.819

The question of slavery in Mesopotamia is complicated by the principle that everyone was, in effect, a slave of some “master”—an **en**, male or female, human or divine.820 To be the “slave” of a god was a mark of high regard, in a way that the Arabic word for “slave,” **‘abd**,
is written into the proper relationship between a believer and Allah. Still, the law codes that begin to appear late in the 3rd millennia make it clear that the actual status of slaves was quite different from that of free citizens. Since much of the law involving slaves was concerned with runaways, it is obvious that however exalted the title might be in religious thought slavery exploited those who were unlucky enough to be trapped into it.

Harmut Waetzoldt concluded that the temples in Ur III, though still important contributors to the economy, had become second to the central state in almost every economic activity. The state was not only involved deeply in animal husbandry and agriculture but in weaving, milling, and the crafts involved in working metals, wood, leather and reeds. The temples, though, continued to own large estates devoted to animal husbandry and agriculture, and they also employed many craftspersons, officials, and administrators. They had to compete, though, not only with the state but with private citizens who also owned houses, cattle and agricultural land. A *nin-dingir* priestess of the goddess Baba, for example, owned a weaving business in addition to agricultural lands. And scribes owned houses, cattle, and slaves.

Compensation for labor in the Ur III period depended upon profession, status, and sex. Among the crafts that were now masculine occupations, many had been at one time held by women. Smiths, reed weavers, leather workers, bakers, cooks, potters, brewers, basket makers, fullers and scribes were masculine occupations, according to Waetzoldt, while grinding grain, pressing oil, and weaving were done by women. Typically women were paid less than men. They received between 30 to 40 liters of barley each month, while their male counterparts earned about 60 liters. (While silver and, less often, gold were in use as money during the period, payment for labor continued to be in grain and enough wool to provide one garment a year for most workers. Recall that in the 4th millennium the temple was the chief repository of grain and was thus the central bank of the city-state.)

Waetzoldt also points out that the difference in compensation between women and men was exaggerated by another feature of the Ur III economy: men could receive raises in pay, while this was seldom the case with women. Craftsmen could make as much as 300 liters of barley a month, and herdmen may even have received at much as 900 liters a month. Professionals like the farm supervisor, *engar*, could make anywhere between 150 and 1200 liters per month. Since literacy was key to the expanded centralized bureaucracy brought in by Shulgi, it is not surprising that persons with a scribal education could rise to the highest pay levels. For the literate person mobility was possible in a system that otherwise did not encourage it. In an exceptional case, Waetzoldt points out, a scribe who started at 60 liters a month could eventually rise to the administrative *shabra*, whose compensation of 5000 liters a month would be more than eighty times his starting salary—a disparity that foreshadows the compensation of a modern CEO.

How, then, would an “average” Ur III family fare? After making all the calculations based on economic documents from the period, Waetzoldt extrapolates the data to compare it with a modern Syrian village. Taking a “normal” family of father, mother, two children
who were working at an early age, and two children below the age of five, the family would earn some 140 liters of barley a month. They would use that to buy fats, cheese, milk, salt, other foods, and cooking fuel. Onions, garlic and lentils were relatively cheap. A sheep would cost the family more than a month’s income. (And housing may have been an expense.) The bottom line, according to Waetzoldt, was that a family could survive as long as no one fell sick. If one of the adults were unable to work for a month or two, the family would be in deep trouble. And it could expect no help from the state.

As before in Mesopotamia, most households were nuclear families. One would guess that, as in the 4th millennium, villages would consist mainly of related members of extended families, and the relatives would be expected to help a family in distress. Most families were monogamous. In another pattern that persists through the centuries, kings could take more than one wife—Shulgi had nine, as we have seen—but few others would have had even a second wife. We have been highlighting certain exceptional cases of women like Pu-abi, Enheduanna, Shulgi-simti, and Kubatum in the 3rd millennium, women who achieved prominence at least in part through their association with the powerful kings, but who nonetheless produced (in the case of at least two of them) significant literary works. Women such as these received grants of goods and animals. As Dan Snell points out, though, the wives of Shulgi held no high administrative office. Female scribes are known in the period, but their numbers are small.

The overall picture in the bureaucratic state Shulgi developed is one of relative prosperity for those at the top of a social hierarchy and a difficult survival for those on the bottom. Women especially could be exploited. They could testify in court and make contracts; but they could not inherit if there were sons. Lower-class women could be forced into working, especially in weaving and processing wool. Women were also sent to work as grain grinders. Children could be sold into slavery.

As Waetzoldt shows, though, men could also be seized and forced to work, even in the grain grinding establishments. He presents evidence that gardeners, singers, fullers, porters, potters, reed mat weavers and even merchants were at times seized for work—probably for debt. And it is clear that the forced labor was unpleasant. A large number of persons tried to run away from such work.

The much-vaunted reforms initiated by Shulgi may not have changed the conditions of those lowest on the social hierarchy, but certainly changed the administrators of the central state. Those who became literate were probably among the most mobile persons of the empire, since literacy was needed to administer the bureaucracy. Even here, social mobility must have favored men over literate women. The military clearly offered another opportunity for upward mobility. The king’s increasing influence in religious matters on the one hand must have opened some doors for those who would keep the king’s house—now a temple. But his policy of awarding land to his administrators, especially the military shaginas, must have come at the expense of the temple. Shulgi and his successors gave much to the temples—but taxed them, too. The Sumerian literary renaissance that was prompted in large measure by the royal hymns and prayers that are
so conspicuous in Shulgi’s reign, but the literature must have supported both the literate and the “authors” who were, in the tradition of Enheduanna, temple-based women of particularly high regard.

**Literary Representations of Mesopotamian Marriage**

With a stone sculpture of a mature, obviously contented couple holding each other in an affectionate embrace Rivkah Harris illustrated her contention that the ideal of marital relations in ancient Mesopotamia involved mutuality and shared sexual passion. The sculpture was found in the temple of the goddess Inanna in Nippur. For the most part Harris demonstrates the mutuality and love between husband and wife through literary texts from very early in Mesopotamian history through the 1st millennium BCE. She even finds it in the myth of *Nergal and Ereshkigal*, where the masculine attributes of mastery and dominance are described in a very vivid fashion. It may be significant, though, that the stone sculpture of the contented couple comes from the temple of the most passionate lover in Mesopotamian literature, the great goddess Inanna, who tended to dominate her lovers. While the relationships between Inanna and her lovers are usually called “sacred” marriages, they are rarely considered models of actual human marriage. The discovery of an alternate form of marriage in Sumer, “Entrance Marriage,” provides a different view of marriage—rather, marriages—than what is usually interpreted in visual and literary illustrations of marital relationships.

Among the oddest of the odd couples in Sumerian literature—and they are many—is a pair of deities that do not consummate their relationship. There is a suggestion, of course, that when the great Inanna journeys from her city, Uruk, to the city where the crafty god, Enki, dwells, she seduces him in order to wrest from him powers that control the universe. In “Inanna and Enki,” Enki does certainly become intoxicated with the beer he serves at the welcoming party; he does give Inanna over one hundred of those powers, the divine *me*, and he does regret his generosity when he sobers up. Seven times he tries to stop her upon her return to Uruk. When the attempts fail, he is reconciled to the wily and seductive goddess—but they do not become lovers or marital partners. They do not form a “sacred marriage.”

**Marriage(s) and “Sacred” Marriage(s) in Mesopotamia**

In one way Enki and Inanna became entwined in a little-known development in Mesopotamian social history. One form of marriage comes to dominate Mesopotamian society and another form disappears. So thoroughly is the second form driven from view that standard works on Mesopotamian family law either ignore it or reduce it to an “anomalous” category. The form that disappears was called Entrance Marriage, or nam-*nerba-sh*. This section will address certain vestiges of Entrance Marriage and ideological formations in myth and literature that involve such marriages.

For purposes of this essay I will refer to the dominant form as the *mutūtu*-form. In this form especially marriage was understood as a contract between families wherein the man, *mutu*, “took” a woman. In what was more than a symbolic gesture the man “took” the woman from her home, the family compound, and installed her in his household. One
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Important purpose—possibly the most important purpose—of such a marriage was to produce an heir. To the extent that lineage, traced through the male line, was important, a *mutūtu* marriage allowed for the regulated passing of property from generation to generation. As private property increased in importance, marriage customs were increasingly codified in legal documents.

For a variety of reasons, the other form, Entrance Marriage, largely disappeared by the end of the Old Babylonian period, that is, rather early in the 2nd millennium BCE. Vestiges of Entrance Marriage can be found in myths and literature that deal with what has become known as the “sacred” marriage. I will argue that Mesopotamian literature not only contains vestiges of the other form of marriage but that helps to articulate an ideological shift from Entrance Marriage to the increasingly dominant form.

The literature I will cite is mainly mythic and hymnic. That is, it involves the gods and goddesses of the Sumero-Akkadian pantheon. For the most part it deals with the highest ranking deities in the pantheon. Hence it has a “sacred” character. But just as other significant customs and institutions of Mesopotamian society were thought to have “descended” from the gods to humans, Mesopotamian literature offers a divine paradigm for human activity. Kingship, for example, was not simply an invention of human ingenuity; rather, at a significant moment in history the institution “descended” from the heavens. Similarly, in Uruk, whose defining feature was the Eanna, Inanna seized Eanna from its original home in heaven and brought it to earth.

While stories of deities may have had some entertainment value, the institutions that are portrayed in the stories have significance for those of us on the ground, as you will, earthlings. In particular, Mesopotamian literature provided ideological support for certain religious specialists that over the centuries were either novelties or otherwise anomalous. A case in point is the notorious *gala*, who performed important roles in the religious rites of Inanna. Several accounts of the formation of the *gala* exist have survived. As far as Entrance Marriage is concerned, one of its defining features was that a man, far from taking his bride away from her home, entered into the household of the bride, where he displaced the bride’s father. The paradigm for such a marriage is installation of the *en*. When the *en* is espoused by the goddess Inanna, he remains cloistered in her house, Eanna. This was, as we have seen, a very ancient pattern in Uruk and may have spread to other Sumerian cities. What is better known is the emergence in the 3rd millennium of cloistered women who were considered to be married to gods. The most important of these cloistered women were, as we have seen, *ens*, *lukurs*, and *nadītu*. These high-ranking women were not expected to bear children. In some cases they were forbidden to have children (though they might adopt them). It may be that the ideological justification for such marriages of humans with deities derived from the “sacred marriage” par excellence, that is, the marriage of Inanna and the male she selected.\(^{834}\) (That a female could take the initiative in proposing marriage to a male is another feature that would be anomalous in *mutūtu* marriage.) In any event, at the very moment when Entrance Marriage disappears, so also do the cloistered men and women—except, perhaps, in Inanna’s Uruk.
We have, then, evidence for more than one form of marriage in Mesopotamia and for the marriages of humans to deities. I will argue that the discussion of the “sacred” marriage may be clarified if we see more than one form of marriage among the gods and goddesses of Mesopotamia. Since a great deal of attention has been paid to the “sacred” marriage literature and rites, it will provide the framework for a consideration of Entrance Marriage.

A Model “Sacred” Entrance Marriage

The “sacred marriage” is, as already suggested, one of the most discussed and most controversial questions in Assyriology. The “marriage” of the great goddess Inanna and her lover, the en of her city and later the lugal or king of major cities like Ur, Isin, and Larsa, is well attested in documents from the 3rd and early 2nd millennia BCE. The prototype was her relationship with the most famous of her lovers, the en Dumuzi/Tammuz. The love song, “Dumuzi Meets Inanna in Her House,” mentioned earlier, vividly describes the meeting of Inanna and Dumuzi at the entrance of her sanctuary, the gipar, in Uruk. The gipar is the holy of holies where Inanna’s bed and throne are located.

“Dumuzi Meets Inanna in Her House” is one of twenty-seven love songs in Sumerian, most of which are related to Inanna and Dumuzi. The forty-seven-line kungar-song is divided into two parts, a 24-line sagidda-song and a 21-line sagarra. While it contains the usual share of problems facing the translator, the main lines of the song are clear. In the first part a “man” (lú), certainly Dumuzi, gathers dates for Inanna, brings her water and seeds of emmer-wheat, and most importantly, heaps of lapis lazuli stones. Over the surface of a mound Inanna finds some thirteen types of precious stones and places them upon her body: on her buttocks, head, neck, hair, ears, eyes, nose, mouth, navel, hips, thighs and her “nakedness.” Shoes cover her feet. The poem is certainly a blazon to Inanna’s beauty. Eanna is often described poetically as covered with lapis lazuli, and the covering of Inanna’s body with precious stones metaphorically relates the body and the temple, which is specified in the second part of the poem.

For our purposes the second part is the more important part. It is as clear a description of Entrance Marriage as has yet been found. The en meets her at the door of the most sacred part of Inanna’s temple in Uruk, the gipar of Eanna. The gipar is best envisioned as a storehouse or granary, then a treasury—the very heart of the city-state’s wealth and power. Note that here, as elsewhere, Dumuzi the shepherd is also seen as gardener and farmer. The poem ends with an enthusiastic song Inanna sings while she is also dancing. The song is more than a wish. The very utterance of the song brings the ritual into being. It is seen as a message to Inanna’s father, An.

It is quite clear that Inanna is the one who brings about the marriage that takes place in the most sacred chamber of her “house.” The erotic element is not as graphic as it is in other “sacred marriage” songs, but it is clear that Inanna takes the initiative. Union with her confers the very authority—en-ship—that characterizes Dumuzi and other ens selected by Inanna.
The selection of an *en* in Uruk was of such importance that year names for all of Sumer are often given in respect for what was the single most significant event of the year.836

The earliest direct evidence for a “sacred marriage rite” is the royal hymn discussed above, “Shulgi X,” which describes in quite graphic detail the sexual congress of the famous Ur III king and Inanna in her residence at Uruk.837 (Mesopotamian literature is considerably more reticent than our own XXX literature in describing sexual matters.)

In spite of the literary evidence for the “sacred marriage,” certain problems in conceptualizing the marriage remain. I am not concerned here with what seems to be the main sticking point for those who are skeptical that a “sacred marriage rite” actually existed; that is, that the *en*, who could be male or female depending upon the sex attributed to the goddess or god of a particular Sumerian city-state, would actually engage in sexual relations with the deity, presumably incarnate in a *pūhu*, a human substitute. I have no problem with such an arrangement, but that is not the subject of this essay.

Rather, I want to suggest a very different and unusual slant on the “sacred marriage.” Whatever else the sacred marriage may have been, as a *marriage* it was certainly anomalous. I suggest that it was the form known as an Entrance Marriage.

The first problem is one of terminology, or the lack of it. While the laws and customs of marriage are well-known, Sumerian and Akkadian do not seem to have a word for marriage itself. For the most part, a man “takes a spouse” (*dam-tuku*). The closest to a state or status of marriage may be the Akkadian “wife-hood” (*aššūtu*) or “husband-hood” (*mutūtu*).838 Note that while Akkadian clearly distinguishes between wife and husband, the Sumerian term for “spouse” is gender-free. Husband and wife are both *dam*, and the status of the spouse is *nam-dam*. Typically, marriages were contracts signed by male representatives of the groom’s and bride’s families. Like modern Middle Eastern marriages today, Mesopotamian marriages were patrilocal, patrilineal, and patriarchal.839 Islam in particular supports a certain form of marriage and forbids others. In what I have called *mutūtu*-marriage (in Arabic a *ba’al*-marriage) offspring are central to the arrangement. Children of the union belonged to the father’s group. Physical paternity is important because the genitor must be the social father. We tend to focus these days on the limited sexual freedom of women in such marriages. Since a woman’s chastity is key to the establishment of a child’s legitimacy, a great deal of emphasis is given to the bride’s virginity at the time of marriage. Less often emphasized, though no less important, is the status of women in such an institution, where the wife depends on her husband for protection and food. The location of such marriages is typically the husband’s household.840

Two Forms of Marriage in Conflict: “Enki and Ninmah”

Until recently there was no reason to suspect that Mesopotamia knew anything other than *mutūtu*-marriage. Textual and visual evidence of “sacred” marriages were simply anomalous. Then, in a brilliant analysis of a very difficult Sumerian mythological poem,
“Nammu and Enki,” Herbert Sauren found evidence for Entrance Marriage. According to Sauren,

In this form of marriage the man enters into the family of his wife. His children take the name of the woman’s family and perpetuate only this one family name. The house of the wife is the property and life base of this family. The man abandons his own family. This form of marriage is known in Sumerian times.841

“Nammu and Enki”842 is actually the beginning of a longer poem known as “Enki and Ninmah: The Creation of Humankind.” I must confess that when Samuel Noah Kramer and I translated “Enki and Ninmah,” we did not see the implications Sauren discovered. I shall suggest a rather different analysis of the work as a whole than Sauren provides, but one that depends upon his reading of the opening forty-six lines. I have already suggested that the Entrance Marriage of Inanna and her en is portrayed on one of the most important visual works of Mesopotamia, The Uruk Vase.

The 141-line “Enki and Ninmah” is best known for its debate between Enki and a Mother Goddess, Ninmah. It is worth noting that she is not the Mother Goddess. If anything, Nammu, the mother in the prologue, deserves that title. As is well known, the great gods exalt Enki and set up a feast during which Enki and Ninmah drink plenty of beer until “their hearts race.”843 Most commentary—including our own—concentrates on the debate that follows. Ninmah opens the debate with a challenge to Enki. She will, by herself, decree a fate “on the form of a man.” Enki then claims he will counter her action. Ninmah makes a creature from clay, a man “who when reaching could not bend his rigid (?) hands.”844 Enki counters by decreeing a fate for him: he will become a servant of the king. Ninmah then makes a man who “could see, though blind.” Enki, undeterred, decrees a fate for him: giving him the art of song, the man is named chief musician for the king. (One might consider the traditions in many societies where the singer, like Demodokos in Odyssey, is blind. In ancient China the great musicians were blind.) Ninmah tries four more times, with creatures who are so defective that they would seem to have no useful function in society, and each time Enki finds a fate appropriate for them. One has paralyzed feet; another is a man who kept dripping semen; yet another is a woman who could not give birth; and the last is a person without penis or vulva.845 Enki exults in his triumph. Then he challenges Ninmah to a reversal of roles. He will form creatures, and she will have to decree fates for them. The first seems quite odd, but Ninmah seems up to the task. But the second, a creature called an umul—the nature of which is still debated—is so defective that he cannot even eat the bread that is given him. When she gives up, the poem turns bitter as Ninmah reproaches Enki. At the end Enki is able to find a fate even for poor umul. The poem ends with a clear victory for Enki. “Nimah could not rival the great lord Enki. O Father Enki, sweet is your praise!”

Just before the end Enki is heard praising his own phallicus: it will be acclaimed as a “wisdom-giver.” We recall that before the contest began, Enki was praised by the great gods as a noble deity who, “like a fathering father,” is the one who takes care of the mes, powers, as we have seen earlier, like the operating system of the universe.
Sauren sees the contest as a kind of satire. Even though both Enki and Ninmah fashion new forms of existence, Sauren thinks he, “cannot see any context of a creation myth while all misshapen creatures serve in the palace. By this means the organization of the palace is exposed to mockery and not religion. We have no reason to make the Sumerian religion appear ridiculous, for Sumerian man believed in his gods.”

I rather think that the contest, while it accounts for the existence of certain persons with disabilities—a “reality” in any ancient or modern society for that matter—Enki’s superiority is shown by his ability to find a place in society for even the most disabled person. That they may function in an exalted place, the palace, only serves to highlight the paradox underlying the contest. Even those who appear unable to perform normal life tasks have a legitimate place in a complex social order. Had Enki been unable to decree a fate for them the poem could be seen as a satire and a mockery of religion.

It is worth noting that three of the six creatures formed by Ninmah comment directly on fertility. One is impotent, a woman is barren, and the third is a eunuch. The barren woman is given a place in a harem; that is, she is cloistered. (Eunuchs did serve, at least in later Neo-Assyrian times, as high officials in the kingdom and are represented along with the more conventionally powerful fighting men in battle.)

I would argue that this part of the story comments on the relative importance of male and female in reproduction. The goddess is one who forms creatures from clay—giving them an earthly body and the water needed to sustain life. Enki, however, provides creatures with the direction their lives will take, as if he were providing the DNA while the goddess shapes matter. At least twice the “fathering Father” is called a “form-fashioner,” the “skilled one who fashions the form of things.”

Any society that understands the complementary roles of male and female in animal reproduction—as Sumer certainly did from long before any written records exist—must deal with two related problems regarding sexuality. For a society that depends heavily on animal husbandry, one major difference between the cattle, sheep and goats they tended and humans had to be observed very early: that while sexual activity in the animals is directly related to reproduction, humans are—with the exception of, say, bonobos—uniquely capable of a great variety of sexual activities that are unrelated to the reproductive cycle. On the other hand, in such a case, when paternity becomes an issue, the relationship between the father and the offspring is obviously of paramount importance. The folk belief that infants resemble the father was at least known in Sumer, though how widespread is not known. There is no evidence that the reverse was believed, that infants resemble the mother. One could speculate that infants who did in some ways resemble the fathers had an evolutionary advantage over those who did not. Since human young, unlike many of the animals known to the Sumerians, require such a long period of protection and nurturing, those who had fathers to protect them and their mothers would have survived when others would have struggled. That one could not be sure of a child’s father the way one could be assured of the child’s mother may well have prompted the overvaluation of paternity, the relatively devaluation of the mother and other familiar features of patriarchal systems.
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It has been taken for granted that this interest in paternity was dominant in Sumer from the beginnings of the culture. I think it is becoming clear, though, that however early it may have been an issue, the emphasis on paternity seems to emerge in Mesopotamia in the 3rd millennium and to gain impetus through later millennia. The organization of society around the king and his palace advanced at the same time and may have been responsible for the increased interest. A document like The Sumerian King List, begun during the reigns of the Ur III kings (or in the Sargonic period) and completed in Isin times in the early 2nd millennium, is eloquent witness to a concern with fathers and sons. The many dynasties that are listed in The Sumerian King List continue until force of arms brings about a change. The genealogies are sometimes as suspect as the incredibly long reigns of early kings, but there is no question that a genealogical principle prevails.

It is not surprising, then, to give one example from the list, that when Uruk was “smitten with weapons,” its kingship was “carried” to Ur, where Ur-Namma is said to have reigned 18 years; his “divine” son Shulgi reigned 46 (or 48) years; his divine son Amar-Sin only 9 years, followed by Shu-Sin, then Ibbi-Sin, when Ur was “smitten with weapons” and the dynasty of Isin began. Modern historians largely confirm the list at this point, while the claims for earlier, legendary figures are not. The famous Etana, a “shepherd,” “who to heaven ascended,” is said to have reigned 1560 years, though his son Balih reigned a mere 400 years. Enki’s city, Eridu, actually begins the list, for kingship was said to have been “lowered from heaven” and the first three kings of Eridu reigned 28,800 years, 36,000 years, and 64,800 years respectively.

Not all the early kings are said to have inherited their titles as the Ur III and Isin kings did. Inanna’s city, Uruk, is interesting in that regard. The first of the kings of Uruk, a certain Mes-kiag-gasher, was, according to The Sumerian King List, both en and king. (Kingship was actually “carried” to the temple Eanna before the city itself was built, under the next en, Enmerkar.) The four leaders of Uruk after Mes-kiag-gasher, of whom little is known historically, were famous heroes: Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, Dumuzi, and, of course, Gilgamesh. While those heroes reigned anywhere from 1200 to 100 years, Gilgamesh’s son, Ur-Nungal, completely forgotten by tradition, reigned only 30 years—arguably the first accurate count of an actual reign in the list.

By the time of The Sumerian King List, then, the patrilineal principle was clearly important. We know that in the Ur III period certain other titles were passed from father to son. The House of Ur-me-me, for example, can be followed through five generations, where sons on one side of the family became governors of Nippur while the sons of the other side became “prefects” of the Inanna temple in that city.

In the developing ideology of fatherhood one of the oldest known Sumerian literary forms emerges in a surprising number of contexts, all reinforcing the father-son relationship. The “Marduk-Ea” incantations (or “Divine Dialogues”) are readily identified from a fixed formula in which the Father, Ea, our Enki, passes along his solution to a terrible problem to the Son, Marduk (city god of Babylon, who appropriated the traditions of Enki’s son, Asalluhi). After Marduk observes a distressful situation, he approaches Father Enki,
who then ritually transfers the solution when he says to him, “Son, what you don’t know—what could I add to it? Whatever I know, you know as well. And you—what I know, you know as well.” The literary form appears in a variety of magical contexts, as in some incantations of the collection Shurpu and in the Mis pî rituals for bringing to life statues of the gods. The most elaborate use of the “Marduk-Ea” incantation form is as a frame in the important late work in Akkadian, Enuma Elish, of “The Babylonian Creation Epic.”

In what is no doubt the most explicit depiction of the Father’s importance, the myth, “Enki and Inanna: The Organization of the Earth,” portrays Enki lifting his penis and ejaculating, filling the Tigris and Euphrates rivers with water and bringing forth abundance from the earth.

This bring us back to the prologue to “Enki and Ninmah,” which Herbert Sauren calls “Nammu and Enki.” He takes the prologue to have been an earlier, independent myth that was transformed in the Old Babylonian period. As it is, the prologue gives way to the longer debate between Enki and Ninmah, which establishes, I would argue, the newly preferred relationship between male and female in reproduction, one which favors the male as the active principle and shaper of destinies. “Nammu and Enki” had overvalued the female principle, evident in the ultimate Mother, Nammu. It is in the context of Enki’s relationship to Nammu that Sauren sees the model of an Entrance Marriage. The relationship is virtually reversed in the second, longer part of the poem.

Sauren translates the difficult first lines in this way.

As Nammu, Enki, came to life,
As the goddess was taken in entrance-marriage,
As the goddess was devised in heaven and earth,
As this goddess became pregnant and gave birth,
As heaven and food supply were formally arranged,
All the myriads of gods stood by,
Even the minor gods held the tankard.

The tankard (filled with beer) indicates a celebration. But matters change when the gods discover that they are required to do the work of maintaining life, mainly by digging canals. They grumble and complain to Nammu. She brings the complaint to her sleeping son and husband.

On this day, the wise one,
The creator of all myriads in existence,
Enki, (lay) inside the deep well,
At the place where no god is,
Where no worship takes place,
He lay in his bed, and
He did not arise from his sleep.
To the sleeping one, to the lying one,
To the one who did not arise from his bed,
Nammu, the primeval mother,
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(brought) the tears of the gods,
she brought (them) to her boy.863

Obedient to her words, Enki rouses himself and begins a ritual that will end with the creation of humankind. (Humans will then take over the work of the gods, a persistent motif in Mesopotamian mythology.) From his own thinking, he directs Nammu to act. A series of birth-goddesses will assist in the process. Nammu will “multiply what is in the waters of your belly,/ and you will give form to the limbs,” but his mother will also determine the destiny of humankind (namlulu).

Nammu gives birth to humankind. The first out is male. A second time she “held her flesh to the sperm” and this time a female emerges. Nammu “stamped her for the carrying basket of birth, for the sperm.” Where the fate of the male Nammu proclaims as, “he has our limbs, will be his omen,” she proclaims a very different fate for the female. “She is a woman, birth shall be her counsel.” Enki is pleased. He prepares a feast for Nammu and eats at the “side of the womb together with the new born princes.”864

The most surprising features of this creation myth is Sauren’s explanation of the paradox of the primeval mother Nammu. Nammu is both heaven (AN) and earth (KI), who divide in her. “Heaven and earth are not children of Enki, who dwells inside the house of the earth.” Then, “at this point of the narrative myth we have a triad of gods: Nammu = An, Nammu = Ki, and Enki, the husband of Ki as his name indicates. It is only with Nammu = Ki that Enki begets children, their offspring being the myriads of gods.”865

Sauren’s analysis deals subtly with the details of the poem, which he sees as being overwritten by a different, later tradition. Where “Nammu and Enki” represents an older, Eridu theology, the story of creation of men from clay, which underlies the actions of Ninmah in the later section of the narrative, is the product of a Nippur theology.866 For our purposes the conclusion Sauren draws about the relationship between Nammu and Enki in the prologue reveals the importance of the Entrance Marriage. “Nammu is of higher rank than Enki, both in the Entrance Marriage and in their mother/son relationship. It is evident that Nammu’s petition is, in reality, an order to Enki, and he executes the words of Nammu immediately.”

Sacred Marriages in the 3rd and Early 2nd Millennia BCE

The Sacred Marriage has, as we have already seen, been much discussed by scholars of ancient Mesopotamia, and much of the subject remains controversial.867 Was there an actual rite of Sacred Marriage in which a priest or priestess (representing the god or goddess of the city) slept with the leader of the city, male or female (depending upon the gender of the deity)? Are such rites, if they were practiced, related to the widespread notion of “dying gods of fertility?” The controversial questions aside for the moment, there is no doubt that Mesopotamia knew stories and songs that celebrated the love and lamented the death of Dumuzi,868 lover of Inanna. As we have seen in “Dumuzi Meets Inanna in Her House,” the Sumerians composed many poems on the courtship and marriage of Uruk’s most famous couple. “The Descent of Inanna to the Underworld” is the most famous example of the tragic aftermath of Inanna’s selection of Dumuzi. In that
poetic narrative Inanna demands that Dumuzi become her substitute when she has been trapped and slain in the underworld.

All discussions of the “Sacred Marriage” begin with Inanna of Uruk and her en. While Inanna’s marriage with Dumuzi is certainly the model for a certain type of marriage—Entrance Marriage—it is not at all clear that there was only one form of “Sacred Marriage.” In view of the differences between Inanna’s marriage with her en and Mesopotamian gods who have marital relations with their spouses, I would claim that there are at least two forms of “Sacred Marriage.” Portrayals of Enlil and Ninlil of Nippur, Marduk and Sarpānītu (Zarpanitum) of Babylon, and Nabû and Tashmetum of Borsippa, to name the most famous marriages of the deities, correspond to marriages of the mutūtu type.

The factor that complicates the “Sacred Marriage” question is the increasing power of the king in the 3rd millennium. Kings, known in Sumerian as lugal, sometimes claimed to be ens, and were depicted as performing the role—or becoming identified with—Dumuzi, even to the extent of sharing her bed in the gipar. The kings for whom these claims are made are also the kings who were deified in their lifetime. Both claims come to disappear in the early part of the 2nd millennium. The reign of the powerful Babylonian king Hammurabi seems to bring both the deified king and the king’s “Sacred Marriage” with Inanna to an end. This is also the period in which Entrance Marriage disappears. Vestiges remain in Inanna’s Uruk, as would be expected, but the “Sacred Marriage,” in both literature and rite, conforms elsewhere to the mutūtu form of marriage.

The king’s insertion into the Sacred Marriage complicates matters because in at least one case the female participation in the rite gives birth to a son. While it must have been the case that the community benefited from every form of Sacred Marriage, and that “prosperity” was seen in productive yields of grains and produce and successful births of animals—upon which all settlements in Mesopotamian depended for their survival—such “fertility” in the Inanna-based Sacred Marriage never involves her giving birth to the king’s offspring.

In a poem Yischak Sefati calls “The Blessing of Dumuzi on His Wedding Day” a king, as Dumuzi, may receive the following. There is no mention of a son to maintain a dynasty.

“May he exercise the shepherdshepship over their [Sumer and Akkad’s] black-headed inhabitants,
He, like a farmer, may establish cultivated fields,
May he like a faithful shepherd multiply the sheepfolds,
May there be flax under him, may there be barley under him,
May there be carp-floods under him in the river,
May there be multicolored barley under him in the fields,
May fish and birds make sound under him in the reed marshes,
May mature reeds and verdant reeds grow under him in the canebrake,
May mashgurum-plants grow under him in the high plain,
May wild sheep and wild goats multiply under him in the forests,
May orchards and gardens bear juice and wine under him,
May lettuce and cress grow under him in the high plain,
May there be long life under him in the palace.” (lines 47-59)  

As far as Sacred Marriages that celebrate the relationship between Inanna and known kings is concerned, her marriage to Shulgi of Ur is, as we have seen, the earliest textual evidence of the rite. It is possible that the most striking innovation of this grand reformer of the empire, his elevation to godhead in the middle of his long reign, is related to his union with Inanna. Kingship (nam-lugal) may well have emerged at Ur, where Shulgi, like his father Ur-Namma, recognized a family connection to nearby Uruk, but the king’s union with Inanna is a claim to en-ship. (Shulgi nowhere even acknowledges his human father, and his claim to be the son of a goddess is part of another tradition in Uruk.)

The metaphor of sexual union with the goddess is very ancient indeed. Its discussion among Mesopotamian specialists owes little to classical parallels or even to the Eliade-type phenomenology of religion. Rather, to the extent that it is associated with matters outside Mesopotamia proper, the Sacred Marriage is linked with “The Song of Songs.” Samuel Noah Kramer, who touched off the discussion in his groundbreaking The Sacred Marriage Rite, for example, devoted a complete chapter to “The Sacred Marriage and Solomon’s Song of Songs.” But the earliest textual evidence is from “Shulgi X.”

The Disappearance of the Sacred Entrance Marriage

Iddin-Dagan was the third of fourteen kings of Isin, according to The Sumerian King List. The dynasty of Isin held power between 2017 and 1794 BCE. When the “black headed folk, the people”—“black headed” is the way Sumerians describe themselves—set up a throne for Inanna and the king sits with her in the palace, the king is explicitly identified as a god (lugal dingir-âm, line 170).

“The Iddin-Dagan Hymn,” discussed above, stands between “Shulgi X” and the disappearance of the Sacred Entrance Marriage with the Babylonian kings that followed soon after Iddin-Dagan. (Babylon gained power during a period that stretched from 1984-1595 BCE.)

What is conspicuous in its absence is any reference to offspring that might result from the Sacred Marriage. The kings, as king, were of course not cloistered. They dwelt in their own Great Houses. To the extent that they derived their power from their special relationship with Inanna, though, they entered the gipar and an Entrance Marriage, as en.

A child did result in at least one case of a Sacred Marriage, and that was enough to make it remarkable.

For all the interest in tracing a male line through the kings of Ur III and Isin in The Sumerian King List, the royal hymns do not claim that kingship and en-ship conferred by Inanna pass from father to son. In a very striking example, Shulgi claims to be the son of the Sacred Marriage of hero Lugalbanda and the goddess Ninsun (thus making him a brother of Gilgamesh, who lived, of course, many centuries before Shulgi). With such a mythic claim of parentage, the royal hymns of Shulgi completely ignore his actual human father, Ur-Namma.
Union with the great goddess Inanna, though, confers power and perhaps immortality, but not heirs. It is an Entrance Marriage, though one modified by kingship.

In a chapter of Tikva Frymer-Kensky’s *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* tellingly entitled, “The Marginalization of the Goddesses,” Frymer-Kensky described a “new sensibility” that affected a whole host of aspects of the Sacred Marriage. Divine kingship was one. The Sacred Marriage was another. Goddesses—with the conspicuous exception of Inanna/Ishtar—were increasingly marginalized.

We would add to the list the virtual disappearance of cloistered women and men. By the end of the Old Babylonian period, the *en*, both male and female, had largely vanished. The women who had special religious status, the *nadītu* and the *lukurs*, also disappeared, except for an occasion reference in literature that as often as not denigrated the titles.

Sacred Marriages did not entirely disappear, but they were changed by the new sensibility. According to Frymer-Kensky, they were no longer state-centered or even public worship. The king no longer took part in the rituals. Indeed the human element drops out. Frymer-Kensky notices that, “by the fact that it lacks the human component, it cannot serve to bring people or kings into any particular relationship with the divine.”

One might add that the key element of the Sacred Entrance Marriage was the transformation of the king, by the end of the Old Babylonian period no longer a possibility.

What did survive was a ceremony in which statues of the deities were taken into a garden and left there overnight. This may have been a custom in the 4th and 3rd millennia, but the textual evidence is not clear on this point. The way Frymer-Kensky phrases the change in ceremony suggests another important shift in emphasis. “A ritual of union between the gods Marduk and Nabû and their spouses was practiced in the temples after the Old Babylonian period, but it was dramatically altered.” The phrase, “and their spouses,” captures the supporting role played by the largely faceless “consorts” of the high gods of, in these instances, Babylon and Borsippa. Nabû was understood to be the son of Marduk (himself, as we have seen, the son of Enki/Ea). Marduk was exalted to the “kingship” of the gods as the city of Babylon rose from obscurity to become the center of an empire. The cult of Nabû may actually have been more influential than the cult of Marduk, but was in any case widespread. The featureless “consorts,” Marduk’s Zarpanitum and Nabû’s Tashmetum, had cellas of their own but were largely overshadowed by the male deities. In Babylon, for example, Inanna/Ishtar became known as the Lady of Babylon even though one might have guessed that Zarpanitum would carry that title. The famous Ishtar Gate and the Ishtar temple attest to the high status the Urukean goddess held in that northern city long after Uruk had lost its political independence. (The disappearance of the *en* follows Uruk’s dependence on a succession of imperial centers.)

A similar combination of a powerful high god and a featureless “consort” was conspicuous in the rise of Nippur in the 3rd millennium. Throughout Sumer the god Enlil came to be considered the strongest of the gods, king of the gods, one of the three (or four) highest...
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deities in the pantheon. Many myths and hymns praise his importance. His consort, Ninlil, absorbed a number of local goddesses, and she had her own place in Nippur, but the economic texts that itemize offerings, for example, typically mention Ninlil with Enlil. She was, basically, the female counterpart of a male deity. Piotr Michalowski provides strong evidence that Ninlil absorbed goddesses in the neighborhood of Nippur, especially Sud at Shuruppak and Nidaba (Nisaba) at Eresh. He concludes, “It is noteworthy that it was the cult of a female deity that led to the abandonment of other goddesses; the males may have had much to answer for, but they cannot be blamed for all evil in the ancient divine world.”879 The movement Michalowski describes could, however, be interpreted to see the cult of Enlil operating in the background, or at least a combination Enlil/Ninlil providing the ideological support for absorbing a number of deities into centralized worship based in Nippur.

Interestingly, the major myths of Enlil provide one of the clearest portrayals of the mutūtu form of marriage. “Enlil and Sud” is mainly an account of Enlil’s courtship of the goddess Sud.880 He travels about the countryside looking for a wife. When he finds Sud, whose name is changed to Ninlil when they marry, Enlil follows the custom of having the families arrange the match. Much of the text details the great marriage gifts he bestows upon Sud. The mother-in-law makes the decision, and Sud leaves her home to join Enlil in his temple-home. Great emphasis is placed upon the respect with which she will be treated in Enlil’s home—and on the progeny they will produce.

“Enlil and Ninlil” is a bit more problematic in that it tells a rather different version of Enlil’s courtship of Ninlil.881 A “wise old woman,” Ninlil’s mother, advises the beautiful maiden not to bathe in the holy river or walk along its bank. Enlil will see her and want to have intercourse with her. Immediately Ninlil does what her wise mother advises against. For a moment Ninlil resists Enlil, but the great god takes her into a boat and consummates the relationship. For having committed a “ritually impure” act, Enlil is arrested by “the fifty great gods and the seven gods who decide destinies,” and forced to leave the city. As Enlil leaves the city and journeys into the underworld, his already-pregnant Ninlil follows him. On three occasions along the way Enlil has sex with her; on each occasion she becomes pregnant.

The upshot of this myth seems to be not so much a punishment for Enlil as a curious twist in which the first born son of Enlil and Ninlil, the god Nanna (the moon), is provided substitutes so that he will not have to remain in the underworld. Three other, lesser gods will take his place. With the fathering of four male deities the story of “Enlil and Ninlil” ends. As is frequently the case with such texts, the poem ends with an elaborate praise of “Father Enlil.” He is lord and king. He is the one who makes flax and barley grow. He is the lord in heaven whose pronouncements cannot be altered. The last line does praise “Ninlil the mother” but even then it moves quickly to praise the Great Mountain Enlil.

The myth may be a story that accounts for the origins of the moon, who disappears periodically and was thought to spend time in the underworld, and for three other deities who were associated with the underworld. Another layer of meaning would tie Enlil’s
fathering of the four sons to Nippur’s dominance over four cities who maintained worship of those deities. The most important of these would be the moon, Nanna, primary god of the city of Ur. Even the great Ur III kings formally recognized the importance of Enlil’s Nippur. For our purposes, though, the story avoids the tragic complexities of, say, “Inanna’s Descent to the Underworld.” The son of Enlil does not protest, as Inanna’s Dumuzi would, the terrible fate in store for him. More obvious is that Ninlil is a great mother and Enlil is a great father. There is no question that in the ideal relationship between husband and wife in the mutūtu marriage, which the two Enlil myths portray, male and female are in some ways equal but the Enlil/Ninlil combination is a miniature hierarchy and the first element prevails over the second.

In such a relationship as the Sumerian Enlil/Ninlil, Babylonian Marduk/Sautopānītum, and Nabû/Tashmetum with Nabû considered the “son” of Marduk, there is a clear distinction between the great god and his consort, but the disparity which we are claiming is at the center of the Sacred Marriage, whose prototype is the union of Inanna/Ishtar and her en—is missing. Even in those texts when Dumuzi, the archetypal en of Mesopotamian literature, claims to be divine, his status is significantly lower than Inanna’s. It is through her power and authority that the en derives his authority. He is transformed in the Sacred Marriage.

The model of the Inanna-type Sacred Marriage is, we think, the Sumerian Entrance Marriage. That form of marriage, for humans, disappears in Old Babylonian times. The Sacred Marriage may continue in different forms. The relationship between Marduk and Zarpanitum resembles another form of marriage, the one that will crowd out the Entrance Marriage until the old form is forgotten, except in traces found in the worship of Inanna. I think, then, that discussions of the Sacred Marriage should really be a consideration of Sacred Marriages.

The New Sensibility: “The Babylonian Epic of Creation”

Nabû is an Akkadian god who was known very early in northern Mesopotamia, but the immense popularity of the god, the primary city god of Borsippa, is a product of the 1st millennium. His cult spread and seems actually to have overshadowed the great god of Babylon himself, Marduk. The divine lineage that was so important to the Babylonians—Marduk the son of Ea (Sumerian Enki), and Nabû the son of Marduk—emphasized the characteristic the three of them shared: wisdom, usually associated with magical power. The relationship between Nabû and his consort Tashmetum is usually considered in discussions of the Sacred Marriage. A series of love lyrics celebrating the relationship of Nabû and Tashmetum have survived.882 Pirjo Lapinkivi considers the marriage of Nabû and Tashmetum as one of a series of allegories that involve a deity gaining gifts through the relationship with another deity. The gift is in one form or another “wisdom.” In this case the goddess asks Nabû for earrings and a bracelet in exchange for meeting him in the garden. She enters her bedroom, locks the door, washes herself, climbs into bed and starts to cry. When Nabû enters, and inquires about her tears, Tashmetum says she is
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preparation to enter the garden with him, but a throne is not among the gifts she will receive. Nabû then promises to elevate Tashmetum by providing her with a throne.883

Whether earrings, bracelets and a throne are symbols of wisdom or not, it is clear from this late, Assyrian love literature that the initiative for the relationship is largely the same as for Enlil and Ninlil earlier. The male takes the initiative, and the male offers gifts that elevate the female to something like equality with the male. Once the relationship is consummated (in the garden), the goddess, who has already left her home, is accepted into the household of the husband.

It may be mere accident that, with the conspicuous exception of Inanna/Ishtar and her circle of goddesses, the goddesses in the Sacred Marriage literature are notably featureless; but much less is known about the worship of these “consorts” than about the husbands. The literary representations of the relationships that follow the mutūtu largely reflect the characteristics of the worship of the divine partners. Both aspects tend to support Frymer-Kensky’s notion of a “new sensibility” that appears by the end of the Old Babylonian period.

No better literary evidence of the new sensibility can be found than the 2nd millennium poem in Akkadian known as Enuma Elish, or “The Epic of Creation.”884 The poem has been of great interest not only as a major creation myth—though only part of the poem deals with creation—but also because the reading of the poem was an important part in the annual New Year’s Festival in Babylon. The story line combines the origins of the universe, including the gods, with a heroic narrative in which first Enki and then his son Marduk subdue the primordial pair, Apsu and Tiamat. Of the two heroic narratives, the first is brief and preliminary to the second, which shows how Marduk demanded to be named king of the gods in return for challenging the formidable mother, Tiamat. When he is able to defeat Tiamat, Marduk shapes the physical universe into an ordered cosmos. The social order, a monarchy, and the natural world, then, are finally brought into a coherent unity. The poem ends with a list of the 50 sacred names of Marduk. Many take the ending to underscore the point that the epic was more a praise of Marduk than a creation story.

For our purposes a small apparent glitch in the early part of the poem marks the new sensibility—and, I would argue, narrates the overturning of Entrance Marriage and the celebration of another, the acceptable form, the mutūtu or ba‘al form. The great Mother Goddess, Tiamat, like Nammu in “Nammu and Enki,” has a primitive and improper relationship with the First Begetter, Apsu. The proper relationship, on the other hand, is imaged by Enki, who is called by an epithet, Nudimmud and by his Akkadian name, Ea. Enki/Ea’s spouse is a goddess, Damkina, whose name is an Akkadianized form of the Sumerian Damgalnunna. Ea and Damkina are parents of the hero of the poem, Marduk. It is the same sensibility that added the “Nammu and Enki” prologue to “Enki and Ninmah” in Old Babylonian times.

The poem opens with a version of creation that, as in “Nammu and Enki,” names the first begetters of everything in the emerging universe.
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When skies above were not named
Nor earth below pronounced by name,
Apsu, the first one, their begetter
And maker Tiamat, who bore them all,
Had mixed their waters together,
But had not formed pastures, nor discovered reed-beds;
When yet no gods were manifest,
Nor names pronounced, nor destinies decreed,
Then gods were born within them.
Lahmu (and) Lahamu emerged, their names pronounced.
As soon as they matured, were full formed,
Anshar (and) Kishar were born, surpassing them.
They passed the days at length, they added to the years.
Anu their first-born son rivaled his forefathers:
Anshar made his son Anu like himself,
And Anu begot Nudimmud in his likeness.
He, Nudimmud, was superior to his forefathers:
Profound of understanding, he was wise, was very strong at arms.
M mightier far than Anshar his father’s begetter,
He had no rival among the gods his peers.885

The string of generations is marked, first, by a gradual improvement, and, second, an increasing emphasis on the father passing along his “likeness,” like our DNA, which enables the improvement to occur. At the end of this string is Nudimmud, whom we know as Enki, or Ea. Schematically, the first generations are:

Apsu and Tiamat
Lahmu and Lahamu
Anshar and Kishar
Anu
Nudimmud.

Apsu is killed by Nudimmud when it becomes clear to the crafty Enki that the old man is planning to kill the young ones for making too much noise. (Noise that disturbs the gods is a symbol that appears in other mythological poems.) The killing of Apsu rouses Tiamat to a rage, and she raises one of her sons, Qingu, to a position of power when he becomes her lover. When Marduk prepares to fight Tiamat, he accuses the Mother of using seductive speech (to weaken Marduk’s resolve) and of doing two reprehensible things:
“You named Qingu as your lover,  
You appointed him to rites of Anu-power, wrongfully his.”

The accusation points to the anomaly at the beginning of the poem: the first three sets of parents are pairs, while Nudimmud (Enki/Ea) is only fathered. No “consort” of Anu is mentioned.

The generations do not end there. Ea fails to defeat Tiamat—and we now know that Anu was also given the chance by Anshar but could not accomplish the feat. It would only be the “good son,” Marduk, who will be able to defeat Tiamat. By this time in the evolutionary scheme, Marduk (who is called by the honorific Bel in the passage below) is generated by a conventional—a model—marital relationship. Ea and his spouse live in the house built and named by Ea himself, his own residence.

And Ea and Damkina his lover dwelt in splendour.  
In the chamber of destinies, the hall of designs,  
Bel, cleverest of the clever, sage of the gods, was begotten.  
And inside Apsu, Marduk was created;  
Inside pure Apsu, Marduk was born.  
Ea his father created him,  
Damkina his mother bore him.  
He suckled the teats of goddesses;  
The nurse who reared him filled him with awesomeness.  
Proud was his form, piercing his stare,  
Mature his emergence, he was powerful from the start.  
Anu his father’s begetter beheld him,  
And rejoiced, beamed; his heart was filled with joy.  
He made him so perfect that his godhead was doubled.  
Elevated far above them, he was superior in every way.

The birth of Marduk introduces not only the greatest of the gods but the model for humans, and the mutūtu form of marriage is the model of male/female relationships. The mother, Damkina, is in no way denigrated, but very literally knows her place.

And it is the male line that counts. The children of Tiamat, including monsters that are produced in her with no help from a male, are clearly hers. But the lineage of Anshar-Anu-Ea-Marduk is what is celebrated in the poem.

It may be significant that among the missing in Enuma Elish is Ishtar, who may be represented by the Bowstar in the sky, and Marduk’s consort, Zarpanitum. Neither goddess is important enough to be part of the narrative.

Just as in “Enki and Ninmah,” the older Entrance Marriage of Nammu to her consort and son gives way in the Old Babylonian overwriting of the prologue to a more acceptable
model. Enki’s consort in the Sumerian poem is Ninmah. In *Enuma Elish* she is Damkina. Both are legitimate, active, and productive, but the relationship of Enki and his consort, whatever her name, reverses the relationship of the primordial pair, Tiamat and Apsu.\(^{889}\)

The best evidence that Tikva Frymer-Kensky gives for the marginalization of the goddesses is the “continuing rise of Enki”\(^{890}\) at the expense of goddesses, like Nisaba, who had been such an important goddess of the kinds of wisdom increasingly attributed to Enki. Frymer-Kensky sees the change in the Old Babylonian *Atrahasis*, another Akkadian creation myth, and she, too, sees the change exaggerated in *Enuma Elish*.\(^{891}\)

Inanna/Ishtar, as usual, resisted the otherwise general change in status. In the late fragmentary and puzzling group of love lyrics that involve poetry and ritual, Marduk is the focus of what appears to be rivalry between his good wife, Zarpanitum (Sarpānītu), who is called an *emuqtu*—a “housekeeper”—and Ishtar, who is Marduk’s *tappāttu*. The *tappāttu* was a friend, partner, and companion.\(^{892}\)

**Sadiqa Marriage: The Pattern Repeats Itself**

In “Sex and Marriage Before Islam,” Sociologist Fatima Mernissi discovered a form of marriage that was suppressed in Islam and is now almost forgotten but which has striking similarities to Sumerian Entrance Marriage.\(^{893}\)

It is pretty clear to everyone who writes about Islam that the family is the central institution and that physical paternity is of supreme importance in maintaining that institution.\(^{894}\) The *idda*, or waiting period, is probably the most obvious example. According to Mernissi, “Islam ensured physical paternity by instituting the *idda* period, which obliges a widowed or divorced woman to wait several menstrual cycles before getting married again.”\(^{895}\) A pregnant woman is forbidden to marry again until she has given birth to the child. The law protects the bond between father and child, and the child belongs to the father.

Such was not the case in pre-Islamic Arabia. The *ba’al* marriage was only one of several forms. The Prophet’s great-grandfather, Hashim, for example, contracted an uxorilocal marriage, and the Prophet’s grandfather, the result of the union, was raised by his mother.\(^{896}\) The Prophet’s own father, Abdallah, contracted a matrilineal marriage with Amina Bint Wahb. Women were able to propose marriage, and some proposed to the Prophet himself. Such practices came to be forbidden in early Islam.

At least four types of marriage were observed by the Muslim historian Bukhari. For our purposes it is the *sadiqa* form that is important. Where in the now-acceptable *ba’al* marriage, the child belongs to the father’s household, in the *sadiqa* ("companionate") marriage, the child belonged to the mother’s group. Where physical paternity is important in the *ba’al* arrangement, since the genitor must be the social father, in a *sadiqa* marriage the genitor does not have rights over his offspring.

Physical paternity is the main reason for limiting the sexual freedom of women in the conventional Islamic marriage. Since chastity has no social function in *sadiqa* marriages-
-shocking, in view of the importance chastity has for the preservation of family honor in much of the Middle East today—women have a degree of sexual freedom that is zealously suppressed in the more acceptable arrangement. Rather than depending upon a husband for protection and food, the woman in a *sadiqa* marriage is a member of a larger extended family that offers her protection. And, in an aspect that may tell us much about certain unusual practices in ancient Mesopotamia, the *sadiqa* marriage is usually uxorilocal, while in *ba’al* marriages the bride comes to live in the husband’s family compound. Even today, when married couples choose to live by themselves, since marriage contracts are made between male representatives of the two families—women are forbidden to make such a contract and requires a *wali* or male protector to make the arrangements—brides live in what is regarded as the husband’s house or apartment.

Two things are quite striking about the *sadiqa* marriage. It is not so much that offspring are unimportant, but that from the man’s point of view offspring is not the primary purpose of the marriage. In what may be a modern trace of a much older practice, Wahhabi Muslims (concentrated in Saudi Arabia and the Yemen) are free to contract a *zawaj misyar*, in which the husband has neither rights over nor obligations to offspring that may result from the union. As Wahhabi-Salafism comes under increasing scrutiny these days, such an arrangement is coming under attack as a mere “marriage of convenience.”

The *sadiqa* form of marriage came under attack in early Islam. A famous case involved a group of women who in protesting the changes Islam was pressing upon the tribes, were labeled the “Harlots of Hadramaut.” Mernissi points out that the episode, which involved women celebrating the death of the Prophet in a joyful way, is known from their opponents. Ibn Habib al-Baghdadi, in his *Kitab al-Muhabbar*, described the situation this way.

> There were in Hadramaut six women, of Kinda and Hadramaut, who desired the death of the Prophet of God; they therefore [on hearing the news] dyed their hands with henna and played on the tambourine. To them came out the harlots of Hadramaut and did likewise so that some twenty-odd women joined the six.

The caliph, Abu Bakr, responded immediately, and the protest was violently suppressed. Mernissi noticed that the women who are dismissed as “harlots” were hardly prostitutes. “Two were grandmothers, one a mother, and seven were young girls. Three of the twelve belonged to the *ashraf* (‘the noble class’) and four to the tribe of Kinda, a royal tribe which provided Yemen with its kings.” Mernissi suggests that the protest was really a clash between the old religion and the new.

The *ens* of early Mesopotamia are invariably identified with their entrance into the dwelling place of the goddess. As one reads the various accounts of the four most celebrated (and perhaps historical) *ens* of Uruk, Dumuzi, Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, and Gilgamesh, it is clear that the cloistering of the *ens* was becoming increasingly problematic. When kingship comes to dominate Sumer, a Shulgi may be an *en* in Uruk, but he did not live in the *gipar*. The female *ens*, from the famous Enheduanna to the ones...
who were buried in the court of the gīpar over hundreds of years, were certainly cloistered, though it is not necessarily the case that they could not travel outside the sacred compound.

The cloistering of others, like the lukurs (perhaps) and nadītu, often specified if the women could be married or not and if they could have children (by adoption). It is not necessarily the case that any of the women needed to be celibate. In spite of the resemblance to medieval Christian nuns, chastity was hardly an issue for them. But those who were cloistered in the Old Babylonian period, before the institutions disappeared, were certainly concerned with inheritance. As private property came to the fore, as it did increasingly in the Old Babylonian period, the protection of property through inheritance became the major issue involving women who, after all, could inherit property and pass it along to their offspring. At least some titles could be passed along as well, mostly from father to son. Paternity was increasingly an issue for the kings of Mesopotamia.

A number of factors, then, combined to highlight the need to establish paternity. Perhaps as much as the obvious factors that were tending to push Mesopotamian societies toward androcentric and patriarchal customs—the plow and the bow come to mind immediately, the need for hard labor in maintaining the irrigation and planting of fields on the one hand and the increasing use of war on a large scale for political purposes—it may have been the need to protect property that squeezed out of existence such institutions as the Entrance Marriage.900

The bond between father and offspring may have deep roots in the utility of protecting mother and child in the long period when the human child is utterly dependent upon others. But the patrilineal institutions that favored preoccupation with physical paternity is much more closely connected with the passing on of property, including titles, than of physical resemblance.

A tendency to label those religious women and men, followers of Inanna/Ishtar and often cloistered, as prostitutes, came in the wake of those larger social changes.901

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557 Guinan’s translation and transliteration of the omens is provided 49-50, 53-55.


560 Holly Pittman, “Towards an Understanding of the Role of Glyptic Imagery in the Administrative Systems of Proto-Literate Greater Mesopotamia,” Archives before Writing, eds. Piera Ferioli, et al. (Turin:


Eva Strommenger, 5000 Years of the Art of Mesopotamia (New York: Harry N. Abrams, n.d.), 384. The base is largely a reconstruction. The height of the body is about 92 cm., 1.05 cm. with the base. The upper diameter is 36 cm. It is found in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad. Broken and repaired in antiquity, it was broken again when it was stolen from the museum in 2003 CE, but has now been recovered. See Diana McDonald, “The Warka Vase,” The Looting of the Iraq Museum, Baghdad: The Lost Legacy of Ancient Mesopotamia, ed. Milbry Polk and Angela M. H. Schuster (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 2005), 80-81.

Holly Pittman, “Towards an Understanding of the Role of Glyptic Imagery in the Administrative Systems of Proto-literate Greater Mesopotamia,” 177-203, estimates that more than 450 images from the proto-historic phase (contemporary with Eanna IV and III in Uruk) have already been published (180). Of these 161 images are from Uruk. (The largest number, 220, derive from Susa.) The Uruk seals contain a wide range of themes. Pittman identifies the main themes as: feeding the flocks; presentation to Inanna; procession to temple; boat approaching temple; ritual at temple; herd to temple; animal bier; workers; warfare; marshes; twist; animal and object; animal file; heraldic animals; and symbols (199). Of these, several are obvious on The Uruk Vase itself. The presentation to Inanna is the most conspicuous, of course; but animal files, animals associated with objects (usually vessels), a procession, and symbols are also evident. The clarity by which each figure is presented, separated from the others (except for the two sheep who are almost superimposed on each other), is itself a characteristic of early glyptic art. It will give way later to a smaller repertory of themes but also to less clarity.

It is important to note that the temple is not represented on The Uruk Vase or in similar scenes from Uruk, as an architectural figure, although representation of a temple is common in Uruk glyptic art. Pittman suggests that the rather elaborate form toward which persons, animals, and boats move is never the Inanna temple but may be the temple of Enki (198). This is so even though the “themes of action” from Uruk usually depict rituals. (The other major action theme in Uruk is a depiction of political or military events.)

The images from Uruk are so well connected with Uruk “colonies” in places such as Habuba Kabira and even Nineveh, but especially Susa—e.g., in the portrayal of the net-skirted en—that is also surprising that the themes differ from Uruk and Susa. The action images in Susa commonly depict the manufacturing
of goods, especially weaving. Threshing and storing of grain, birthing of young animals, and the transportation of goods are also common there. Pittman summarizes the major themes in Susa as: ritual with water; master with animals; combat; prisoners; hunting; herding; figures with goods and standards; transportation of goods; symbols; weaving; figures and vessels; lists; human birthing; animal birthing; working in the fields; animal files; heraldic composition of animals; composite animals; snake interlace; and animal associated with objects (197). Many of these are associated with the En-sign and some may be implied in the depiction of plants, animals, ritual objects and cultic officials on The Uruk Vase. Pittman argues that there was a “strong structural, contextual and thematic linkage” between the two modes of symbolic expression, glyptic imagery and writing, in the early period (192)—and that both stood in opposition to spoken communication and to ritual (physical communication). Both symbolizing systems externalized and concretized information and were instruments of social control. When the proto-literate socio-economic organization reflected in these symbol systems collapsed, the great variety exhibited in both systems was constricted. In the Early Dynastic city-states that followed in the decline of the Uruk “world” system, both writing and seal impressions show a different range of themes and signs.

With the exception of the En-sign (and the possible exception of the standard of Inanna), The Uruk Vase is not inscribed. For an indication of the spread of writing on pictorial representations—often on the figures themselves—see Donald P. Hansen, “Früsumerische und Früdynastische Flachbildkunst,” Der Alte Orient, ed. Winfried Orthmann (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1975), 179-93 and Plates 68-79. The Blau Monument, contemporary with The Uruk Vase, clearly separates writing and figures; by the oldest Early Dynastic pieces (ca. 2800 B.C.E.), figures are themselves inscribed. Hansen considers the iconography of The Uruk Vase, 179-80, fig. 33 and Plates 69a and 69b.

571 Susan Pollock, “Images of Sumerian Women,” Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory, eds. Joan M. Gero and Margaret W. Conkey (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 366-87, pointed out that women as well as men possessed cylinder seals, but may not have used them as frequently as men did to authorize economic activities. Early (4th millennium) seals portray women in a wide range of productive activities, while later one tend to focus on ritual activities, 380-81.


CAD, 2.46-52.


William W. Hallo, “Royal Ancestor Worship in the Biblical World,” *Sha’arei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*, ed. Michael Fishbane and Emanuel Tov (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 381-402. Hallo points out that royal deification was a practice for a very brief period, ca. 2200-1800 BCE, when kings were sometimes deified at their accession or afterwards, sometimes at birth, and sometimes after death, 388-89. Later the very idea was considered sacrilegious.

CAD, 2.52-63.

CAD, 2.167-68.


The life-giving sexuality of men and women, goddesses and gods, should be related to the concept of the gendered body, as discussed by Julia M. Asher-Greve, “The Essential Body: Mesopotamian Conceptions of the Gendered Body,” *Gender & History* 9 (1997), 432-61. Asher-Greve discusses the gender categories evident on The Uruk Vase, and notes the ambiguous gender of the two small figures on pedestals, 441-43. She makes the most interesting observation that the nude men on the vase may be guruš, young, unmarried men, and that they may be portrayed as virginal, 441.

To see the maternal in Inanna requires an argument that she is the double of the goddess of the underworld, Ereshkigal, who is, to our modern thinking, clearly depicted as a birth-mother in “The Descent of Inanna to the Nether World,” an argument that is difficult to take up in this brief report. Sylvia Brinton Perera’s Jungian interpretation of the poem allows for such a nontraditional interpretation. See her *Descent to the Goddess: A Way of Initiation for Women* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1981). Ishtar, on the other hand, is explicitly described as Assurbanipal’s mother in “To Ishtar of Nineveh and Arbela,” but the Assyrian poem is very much later than the Sumerian tradition discussed here. For a translation of the poem, see Benjamin Foster, ed. and trans., *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1993), 718-19. An esoteric Assyrian commentary on *Enuma Elish* even identifies Ishtar as the ultimate mother, Tiamat, according to Alasdair Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 81-89. Rivkah Harris, “Images of Women in the Gilgamesh Epic,” notes that Ishtar is identified as a mother-goddess in the flood story as it is told in the Standard version of *Gilgamesh*, 85.


Cooper, “Enki’s Member,” 89.


Kramer and Maier, 25-27.


Tikva Frymer-Kensky emphasizes the Inanna who is “free to be the ultimate femme fatale,” a goddess who is basically unattached and nondomesticated and therefore not a model for Mesopotamian women, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992), 25-29. Certainly Frymer-Kensky is correct in her survey of changes in the valuation of women, goddesses, and even Inanna/Ishtar (who persists more than any other Sumerian goddess through the thousands of years she was worshipped not only at Uruk but in many other places in Mesopotamia). The point here is that her sexual freedom may once have signified the difference between human and animal, and may have supported a degree of power and independence of the female that was later challenged by an increasingly patriarchal regime. For a recent study of Inanna as a religious figure, see Helgard Balz-Cochois, *Inanna: Wesensbild und Kult einer unmütterlichen Göttin* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1992).


The snake goddess, queen of the netherworld, Ereshkigal, had no city on the surface of the earth, according to F. A. M. Wiggermann, “Transtigridian snake gods,” *Sumerian Gods and Their Representations*, 34. If the identification of Ereshkigal as the dark twin of Inanna, evident in the Sumerian myth, “The Descent of Inanna to the Netherworld,” should prove to be an archaic conception, the two figures may have been identified in the kur-aspect of Inanna.


Much has been written on the development of Uruk's economy and its complex stratified society. Guillermo Algaze characterizes it as a "world system," a term coined by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, and details the expansion and collapse of that system in The Uruk World System: The Dynamics of Expansion of Early Mesopotamian Civilization (Chicago: University Press, 1993), 7.

Algaze, 80.

Algaze, 104.


Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being, 54.


H. L. J. Vanstiphout, "Memory and Literacy in Ancient Western Asia," Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 2181—96.

Vanstiphout, "Memory and Literacy," 2191.

Vanstiphout, "Memory and Literacy," 2191.


The animals are so carefully depicted that one can see that the males have curled horns while the females are polled. See Bulletin on Sumerian Agriculture 7 (1993).


For a recent discussion, see Wiggermann, "Theologies, Priests, and Worship in Ancient Mesopotamia," 1868.

Perkins, 55.

Goff, 89.

Goff, 88.

Goff, 65.

Goff, 82.
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637 This follows the theory advanced by Thorkild Jacobsen, that the history of Mesopotamian religion was marked by changing metaphors of the sacred: from the sacred as indwelling wills and spiritual powers associated with natural phenomena to gods as rulers (and then to gods as parents), _The Treasures of Darkness, A History of Mesopotamian Religion_ (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 20.


641 Thorkild Jacobsen, _The Harps that Once: Sumerian Poetry in Translation_ (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 107 n. 18; see also Richard A. Henshaw, 44.


643 Schmandt-Besserat, [ ], 213.

644 _The Chaldean Account of Genesis_, 204. Of course, Sayce followed Smith in thinking Enkidu was a sage living in a cave because the “reason” and “understanding” of Enkidu followed closely after the description of him with the skin of a gazelle.

645 Julia M. Asher-Greve, to the contrary, emphasizes the uniformity of the group, not their individuality, 441. She makes the important point that clothing (or lack of it) determines gender and social status on the vase. She notes that the attendant upon the _en_ on the vase, whom she considers a servant, “exhibits the same gender ambiguity as the two persons in the divine sphere, only his short skirt marks him as a male” (442).

646 That potency was a worry in Mesopotamia is illustrated in a collection of incantations known as _ŠÂ.ZI.GA_, which may go back at least as far as the Old Babylonian period. The incantations and the rituals that accompanied them were intended to heal men who had difficulty maintaining an erection sufficient for sexual intercourse. Inanna/Ishtar is not the only deity mentioned in the texts, but she is certainly a major figure. In one text (#25), she is evoked along with two other goddesses sometimes fused with her, Nanaya and Ishara, for what they “did for” their lovers or husbands: “Let his ’heart’ not become tired (either) night or day!” See Robert D. Biggs, _ŠÂ.ZI.GA: Ancient Mesopotamian Potency Incantations_ (Locust Valley, New York: J. J. Augustin, 1967), 3, 44.

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Moortgat, 13.


Dominique Collon, “Clothing and Grooming in Ancient Western Asia,” *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, 503-515. For the Uruk Period, Collon mentions only cylinder seals portraying the *en₂* and The Uruk Vase, 505-506.


Hesse, 213. The association of certain foods with different sectors of the society again illustrates the social divisions opened up in the early state. Hesse includes a sidebar on the much-discussed prohibition of the pig in the ancient Near East. In addition to the ecological and ethnic arguments that have been proposed for the prohibition of pork, Hesse raises another issue, that pig raising is mainly a subsistence activity, of relatively little use to the urban-based redistributive systems such as that in Uruk, 215. The herding of sheep and goats, on the other hand, required considerable investment and was of great interest to the state and temple, 212.


Collon, “Clothing and Grooming,” 505.

Collon, “Clothing and Grooming,” 505-506. Collon traces the history of the horned headdress for the gods, a practice later than The Uruk Vase. Similarly, the flounced wool skirt worn by the gods is later than the Uruk Period.


By the Neo-Sumerian and Old Babylonian periods, priests are sometimes depicted as naked, but are often shown kilted, Collon, “Clothing and Grooming,” 508.


For the controversy over the “rite,” see Henshaw, 236-43.


Pinnock, 2528.


Some versions have, “with head held high, she goes to” his thighs; see *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, 269.


For the significance of this claim, see William W. Hallo, “Royal Ancestor Worship in the Biblical World,” 392-93. Hallo calls this “royal deification at its height.”

Henshaw, 206-13. The *nu-gig* is later translated into Akkadian as *qadištu*, less frequently as *ištaritu*. “Hierodule” associates the Mesopotamian official with a Greek “sacred prostitute.” Sometimes the term is used to refer to a street prostitute, but she is more often a woman of very high status, one associated with childbirth. For the difficult problem of “sacred prostitution” in Greece, Mesopotamia, and the Hebrew Bible, see pp. 228-36. For comments on the Iddin-Dagan hymn, see pp. 237-39, part of the discussion of the Sacred Marriage, pp. 236-43.

Kramer and Maier, 57-68.


To be compared with Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (New York: Harper & Row, 1936), the work upon which the history of ideas in the West is founded.

Groenewegen-Frankfort, 152. While this comment emphasizes the tension between stasis and movement in the poem, another quality, the “confident and joyful proximity of the human and divine in celebration” so evident in the poem, is precisely the quality Groenewegen-Frankfort found in the representational art of an earlier age, specifically in The Uruk Vase. She pointed out that such confident and joyful proximity “never occurs again in Mesopotamian art,” 169. For her comments on The Uruk Vase, see 150-52.

For the relationship between the *gipar* and the *gigunû*, see Van Buren, “The Sacred Marriage in Early Times in Mesopotamia,” 17-33. The *gipar* was a group of buildings that included a residence for the *en* and a temple; the *gigunû* was the nuptial chamber itself. According to Van Buren, only the priest “charged to guard against intrusion and to testify to the due accomplishment of the ritual acts”…and “Išhara, the goddess who presided over the consummation of marriage,” were permitted to be present with the couple in the nuptial chamber (17).


Krystyna Szarzyńska, “Some of the Oldest Cult Symbols in Archaic Uruk,” *Jaarbericht Ex Oriente Lux* 30 (1987-88), 3-21. The pictograph represents high poles made of reed stalks bound together, used as vault supports or decorate door-posts of reed huts still constructed in southern Iraq. Szarzyńska cautions that they are not abstract signs but representations of real objects, which probably marked the pens that contained animals owned by a specific deity or its temple. The pictograph entered the cuneiform writing system as a sign for Inanna herself, MUS<3>.

Wiggermann, Fig. 7. See Van Buren, “Religious Rites and Ritual in the Time of Uruk IV-III,” 36.

Groenewegen-Frankfort, 151-52.


Perkins, 54.

Schmandt-Besserat, “Images of Enship,” 210. The earlier lexical lists (ED, Ab 5, etc.) have different principles of organization from the later ones (OB and others).
Excursus: “Sacred” and Other Marriages


696 Schmandt-Besserat, “Images of Enship,” figures 4, 5a, 7, 15a, and 15b.

697 Henshaw, 9-10.

698 For the importance of this point, see Julia M. Asher-Greve, “The Essential Body,” 32-37.

699 Henshaw, 44-45, 45-51.


701 Joan Goodnick Westenholz, “Nanaya, Lady of mystery,” Sumerian Gods and Their Representations, 76, points out that though Nanaya shared the trigal temenos with Ishtar, should not be considered an aspect of Inanna/Ishtar. The “aspect” question is complicated, at least in the 1st millennium, if, as Simo Parpola argues, for the Assyrians at least, Ishtar herself was considered, along with the multitude of gods and goddesses, as aspects of the transcendent Aššur, Assyrian Prophecies (Helsinki: University Press, 1997), xviii-xxvi.

702 A goddess in her own right, with connections with Ishtar, but relatively little association with Uruk. See Doris Prechel, Die Göttin Išhara: Ein Beitrag zur altorientalischen Religionsgeschichte (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996).


708 Steinkeller, “Inanna’s Archaic Symbol,” 93.

709 Piotr Steinkeller, “Inanna’s Archaic Symbol,” 93-95. For examples of Archaic Uruk cylinder seal impressions, see Amiet, Pl. 13 bis A; Pl. 43, 636 A and B, 637 B; Pl. 44, 639, 640, 642, 643; Pl. 45, 644, 649, 651; Pl. 46, 652, 655, 656, 659; and Predynastic impressions #611, 613; Pl 48 bis #B, C, and D. Contrast
Banquet scenes, where figures wear robes but do not have girdles or sashes, e.g., Pl. 88 and 89. Nude heroes are sometimes depicted as wearing sashes (which suggest they are wrestlers?), e.g., #1470, 1471. On seals from Khafaje, sashes are often clearly marked, e.g., #1222, 1223, 1224, 1225. The point is that when sashes or girdles are important, probably marking the status, title, or role of the figure, the artists were careful to include such details, especially on the earliest cylinder seals. For the lexical lists, see Henshaw, Female and Male, #4.8.2.

This is because Sumerian, unlike the Semitic languages like Akkadian, does not distinguish nouns by grammatical gender. Translating en as “lord” opens up the objection that English “lord” is traditionally distinguished from “lady,” although neither term carries a gender marker; the common equivalents in Akkadian, bēlu and bēltu, carry with them masculine and feminine grammatical gender. As with en, so also with Sumerian nin, which is also usually translated into English as “lady,” but which is neither grammatically masculine or feminine. It is true that many Sumerian goddesses have names beginning with nin, but a number of gods also have names beginning with nin. The companion and advisor of Inanna is depicted as both male and female. Over time, as the title nin carried less and less real power, it is increasingly used for women who are considered “queens” in situations where “kings” hold the power.

See L. Legrain, Archaic Seal-Impressions, #314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319; a bowman (#288); a hero spearing a lion (e.g., #256, #499); for the en in his approach to a female (#297).

Legrain, #387.


CAD 5.84.

Charvát, Mesopotamia Before History, 139. The analysis is based on Charvát’s earlier On People, Signs and States: Spotlights on Sumerian Society, c. 3500-2500 BC (Prague: The Oriental Institute, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 1997).

Charvát, Mesopotamia Before History, 139-41.


Labat, Manuel D’Épigraphie Akkadienne, #556.

Labat, Manuel D’Épigraphie Akkadienne, #151.

Charvát, Mesopotamia Before History, 155.

Charvát, Mesopotamia Before History, 143.

Charvát, Mesopotamia Before History, 150.

Charvát, Mesopotamia Before History, 204.

Charvát, Mesopotamia Before History, 205-206.

Charvát, Mesopotamia Before History, 206-207.

Charvát, Mesopotamia Before History, 239.

Charvát, Mesopotamia Before History, 235.

Charvát, Mesopotamia Before History, 209.
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For an overview of Shulgi’s reign, see Jacob Klein, “Shulgi of Ur: King of a Neo-Sumerian Empire,” Sasson, *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, 842-57.


Klein, “Shulgi of Ur,” 849, and *Shulgi D*, 292.


Winter, “Legitimation of Authority,” 70.


E. Douglas Van Buren, “The God with Streams [complete]

Jacob Klein, “Šulgi and Išmedagan: Runners in the Service of the Gods (SRT 13),” *Beer-Sheva* 2 (1988), 7-38. Gudea was also a model for Shulgi, according to Jacob Klein, “From Gudea to Šulgi:


752 Klein discusses the terms, 90-91, but does not draw the inference that *en*-ship is defined here as “divinity.” The two terms exist in a list of *me* along with kingship in “Inanna and Enki.”


756 Before Inanna speaks (using Emesal forms), Shulgi is called the “righteous lord,” with the poet using Emeku *en-zi(d)* (l. 6).

757 For *hi-li* (Akkadian *kuzbu*), sexual allure, as a divine attribute of Inanna (and other gods and goddesses), see Elena Cassin, *Le splendeur divine* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), 121 ff. For the *ma₆*-garment in its connection with the *en*, see Klein’s note to ll. 8-10 of *Šulgi D*.


759 Two aspects of the end of the poem deserve note. It is not entirely clear, according to Klein in his commentary on lines 141-59, if the goddess who is cited at the end, Ninegal, in her “Lofty Palace” (Egalmah), is firmly established in Ur; or if she is identified with Inanna—or even Ninsun, since as king he is empowered by not only Enlil but An and Ninsun’s mother, Urrash. Another intriguing point is that, though Shulgi has visited Utu, probably at Larsa, Utu is not described in his judicial role; at the end of the poem Shulgi is likened rather to Ishtaran of Der—he is the “Ishtaran of Sumer”—a king who renders firm judgments, obtains firm decisions, and does not allow the strong to oppress the weak (ll. 142-45). These are precisely the roles celebrated in the early Mesopotamian law codes, as we will see in the next chapter. Since the earliest of the law codes, usually considered the work of Shulgi’s father, Ur-Namma, was probably Shulgi’s, the attribution of such qualities to Ishtaran rather than Utu may be significant.


761 Snell, 34.

762 Piotr Michalowski, “The Death of Šulgi,” *Orientalia* 46 (1977), 220-25. Assassinations of rulers are also occasionally reported, 220.

763 Michalowski, “The Death of Šulgi,” 223.
Michalowski, “The Death of Šulgi,” 224.

William W. Hallo, “The Death of Kings,” Ah, Assyria, 158.

Shulgi may have been buried elsewhere, in his palace, as his father had been, according to Hallo, 158.

Michalowski, 222.

Hallo, “The Death of Kings,” 158.

A hymn to Inanna from either Ur III or early Isin periods reflects the Inanna of Shulgi X and has her lover, Ushumgalana, calling upon her to become her husband; see Åke Sjöberg, “A Hymn to Inanna and Her Self-Praise,” Journal of Cuneiform Studies 40 (1988), 169.


Sigrist, 222.

Henshaw, 192-95.

Henshaw, 191.

Henshaw, 193.

The texts have been edited in Markus Hilgert, Drehem Administrative Documents from the Reign of Šulgi (Chicago: University Press, 1998), 71-122.


Sigrist, 240-45.

Sigrist, 237.

Sigrist, 237.

Sigrist, 242.


Cohen, The Cultic Calendars, 212.


Cohen mentions two other male deities in the twelfth month, and he offers the possibility that the Assyrian high god Assur may be referred to in the name of the eleventh month, The Cultic Calendars, 220-21.

Cohen, The Cultic Calendars, 211.


Richard has collected many examples from Ur III administrative texts. [Personal Communication]


Henshaw, 192.


For a discussion of the two Sumerian dialects, see below, ch. 3.


The *bal-bal-e* is dedicated to Baba; Sefati explains the identification of Baba and Inanna, 149-50.


Less is known of the earliest *en* in Ur, Nin-me-tabarri, the daughter of AN.BU, king of Mari, and of the much later figures like En-nig-al-di-Nanna, the daughter of Nabonidus. Nabonidus, the 1st millennium king of Babylon, had a special attachment to Nanna and rebuilt the *gipar* of Ur (Weadock, 128). He established his daughter as *en* and built a house for her beside the *gipar*.

Weadock, 107.

Weadock shows that the Ur III building was restored after its destruction, probably with the defeat of Ibbi-Sin by the Elamites, during the Isin –Larsa period. The restoration was based securely on the Ur III structure, 107-108.

Weadock, 117.

Weadock, 118.

Weadock, 119.

Weadock interprets an Enanadu text that reads, “at that time, as for the ‘Dining room in which the *urinnu*-symbols are set up,’ the place of the fateful day of the ancient *entu*-priestesses, the wall did not reach around its site,” as differentiating a dining room and a “place of the fateful day” (119).

Weadock,120.

Weadock, 123.

Weadock, 124.

Weadock, 102.

Weadock, 103-104.
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For the operation of a system of checks and balances, see Irene J. Winter, “Legitimation of Authority Through Image and Legend,” 88-89.

For other foundations, see Markus Hilgert, Drehem Administrative Documents from the Reign of Šulgi (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1998).

For the gún ma-da tax, paid in livestock by the military according to rank, see Steinkeller, “The Administrative and Economic Organization of the Ur III State: The Core and the Periphery,” 30-37.

George F. Bass, “Sea and River Craft in the Ancient Near East,” Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 1421. Another indication of the importance of rivers and canals: in one instance during Ur III some 600 vessels filled with grain moved from Isin to Ur, 1421.

Marek Stepień, Animal Husbandry in the Ancient Near East: A Prosopographic Study of Third-Millennium Umma (Bethesda: CDL, 1996), 28, 74. The increasing importance of the king may be glimpsed in the very large number of personal names that began with lugal (versus those beginning with en, for example) in the livestock business of Umma alone in the Ur III period, 121-50.


Snell, 36.


Waetzoldt, 117.

Waetzoldt, 117.

Waetzoldt, 121.

Waetzoldt shows that wool or cloth were not the only other ways labor was compensated. Oil, dates, fish, meat, and bread—and in some cases land—were allotted, 125-29. While it is difficult to determine exactly the ranking of professions, a hierarchy is implied in, e.g., the land allotments given to those in higher and lower pay scales, 128-29. Child labor was also a factor in the economy, then as now in the Middle East. See 132-35.

Waetzoldt, 122.

Snell, 34.

Snell, 34-35.

Snell, 35.

Snell, 35.

Waetzoldt, 139.

Rivkah Harris, Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia: The “Gilgamesh Epic” and Other Ancient Literature (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000). 144.

“Gender and Sexuality in the Myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal,” 129-46.
See Maier, “Sacred Marriage(s) in Mesopotamian Literature,” Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes & Midwest Biblical Literature Societies 24 (2004), 17-34. Some of this material was presented at a meeting of the society and published in the proceedings.

A striking modern parallel can be found in anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano’s study of a 50-year-old unmarried Moroccan tile maker, in Tuhami: Potrait of a Moroccan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 66-72. Tuhami was convinced that he had been seduced by the powerful demoness, Aisha Qandisha, whose exploits are known throughout Morocco. Once seduced by Aisha Qandisha, Tuhami became one of her “husbands,” and she entirely dominated his sexual life. While Islam allows no possibility of the existence of a goddess, it is noteworthy that Aisha Qandisha is honored in the same place as the two most powerful Sufi saints of Morocco. Her grotto is a pilgrimage site for both men and women, particularly those involved in ecstatic and occult activities. See also Fatima Mernissi’s interview with “Habiba the Psychic” in Doing Daily Battle, tr. Mary Jo Lakeland (London: The Women’s Press, 1988), 126-44.

Julia Assante has shown that gateways to the body and to analogous structures (gates, doorways, windows, cross-roads, shrines and the like), “liminal zones in general,” were thought to have magical potency, and such metaphorical equivalences are extensive in erotic art and literature, at least by the Old Babylonian Period, “Sex, Magic and the Liminal Body in the Erotic Art and Texts of the Old Babylonian Period,” Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East, ed. Simo Parpola and R. M. Whiting, 28. For the šuba-stones in Sumersian love literature, see Sefati, Love Songs in Sumerian Literature, 197-200.


Sefati, Love Songs in Sumerian Literature, 38-40. Sefati conveniently summarizes the evidence and the debate over the “sacred marriage rite,” 30-49.

CAD, 1.ii.471-72.


For an overview of the Palestinian family, which is extended, patrilineal, patrilateral, polygynous, endogamous, and patrilocal, see Ibrahim Muhawi and Sharif Kanaana, Speak, Bird, Speak Again (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 13-18.


The key lines open “Nammu and Enki:”

\[\text{u dnammu d} \text{enki} \quad \text{ba-tud-aba} \]
\[\text{d} \text{iltum nam-nerba-š} \quad \text{ba-tuk-aba} \]
\[\text{d} \text{iltum an-ki-a} \quad \text{ba-halhal-aba} \]
\[\text{d} \text{iltum-ma ba-peš} \quad \text{u-tud-aba} \] (Sauren, 199)

As Nammu, Enki, came to life,
as the goddess was taken in entrance-marriage,
as the goddess was devised in heaven and earth,
as this goddess became pregnant and gave birth…. (Sauren 199)

Sauren interprets “entrance-marriage” in the second line as an Akkadian word ner-bú with a Sumerian abstract element nam preceding and ending with a Sumerian postposition (204). The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature does not decide on a reading of NIR.PA ( www-etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk/section1/c112.htm ).
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Kramer and Maier, 33.

Kramer and Maier, 34.

Sauren, “Kramer and Enki,” notes that the creatures are given the following functions: the man with the unbending arm becomes a court officer; the blind man becomes a king’s singer; the dwarf becomes a goldsmith; an impotent one becomes an embalmer; a barren woman becomes a harem lady; and the eunuch “stands before the king” (198).


For two very different views on eunuchs in the Assyrian bureaucracy, see Stephanie Dalley, “Evolution of Gender in Mesopotamian Mythology and Iconography with a Possible Explanation of ša rešēn, “the man with two heads,” 117-22, and Hayim Tadmor, “The Role of the Chief Eunuch and the Place of Eunuchs in the Assyrian Empire,” 603-12, Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East, ed. Simo Parpola and R. M. Whiting.

Bonobos, or pygmy chimpanzees (Pan paniscus), engage in heterosexual and homosexual activity almost daily to ease tension and to stimulate sharing during meals, according to Helen Fisher, Anatomy of Love, 128-30; unlike most higher mammals, their sexual activity is not related to estrus. See also Riane Eisler, Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body, 40-52. Eisler would call what I have claimed is the mutūtu-form or marriage a “dominator” form, and Entrance Marriage a “partnership” model, for which even the bonobos offers a non-human parallel.


For an extreme form, epigenesis, which held sway in the West from the time Aristotle proposed the theory until the 16th century CE, see Adele Reinhartz, “‘And the Word was Begotten’: Divine Epigenesis in the Gospel of John,” Semeia 85 (1999): 83-103. According to this theory male sperm is the vehicle for logos and pneuma of the father; the female semen provides the matter of generation.

Marc Van De Mieroop, “In Search of Prestige: Foreign Contacts and the Rise of an Elite in Early Dynastic Babylonia,” Leaving No Stones Unturned, ed. Erica Ehrenberg (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), emphasizes socio-economic changes from about 2600 BCE that caused increased demand for luxury items. In contrast to the late 4th millennium the Early Dynastic Period was marked by kings as warlords, extensive commercial and military contacts of Babylonia with the periphery, and increasing concern for the individual, 125-37.


For a sampling of such incantations, see Kramer and Maier, 100-114.

Kramer and Maier, 106.

Kramer and Maier, 47-48. Jerrold S. Cooper has pointed out the asymmetry between literary representations of the goddess Inanna, which emphasize the genitals, and of Enki, which emphasize his potency, “Enki’s Member: Eros and Irrigation in Sumerian Literature,” DUMU-€₂-DUB-BA-A, 87-89.

Sauren, “Nammu and Enki,” 199.


Sauren, “Nammu and Enki,” 203.

Sauren, “Nammu and Enki,” 204.


For the controversy over the “rite,” see Henshaw, 236-43.


Sefati, Love Songs in Sumerian Literature, 305.


For the significance of this claim, see William W. Hallo, “Royal Ancestor Worship in the Biblical World,” 392-93. Hallo calls this “royal deification at its height.”
Like the scholarship on the Sacred Marriage, the scholarship on Inanna is vast and increasing at a rapid pace. The first volume of the journal *NiN, Journal of Gender Studies in Antiquity* (Groningen: Styx, 2000), is devoted to discussions of Inanna/Ishtar. The seven articles provide a useful bibliography for study of the goddess. More recently, Joan G. Westenholz, whose article in *NiN* is “King by Love of Inanna,” 75-89, has explored the evidence that Inanna/Ishtar provided the very notion of “goddess” to Mesopotamia, “Great Goddesses in Mesopotamia,” *Bulletin of The Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 37 (2002), 13-27.

In his survey of the many anomalous figures in Mesopotamia who are at one time or the other associated with prostitution, most of whom were in the service of Inanna/Ishtar, Wilfried G. Lambert, concludes that both males and females “stood outside the normal life-cycle of birth-marriage with procreation-death;” for the women, “lack of child-bearing is the ideological characteristic,” and for the males “inability to be a father seems to have been the norm,” “Prostitution,” *Außenseiter und Randgruppen*, ed. Volkert Haas (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag, 1992), 153.

Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, Ch. 7 (70-80); reprinted in Maier, *Gilgamesh, A Reader*, 95-108.

Not all scholars agree that, even if granted, the new sensibility reflects a change in the status of women. Susan Pollock and Reinhard Bernbeck see that gender ideology that is present in later ages already existed in Archaic Uruk of the 4th millennium. “The same ideology that depicted a powerful deity as female also made clear that the epitome of human power was male,” “Gendered Ideologies in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *Reading the Body: Representations and Remains in the Archaeological Record*, ed. Alison E. Rautman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 163. Rivkah Harris, whose study of the best-known of the cloistered women, the *nadītu*, in *Ancient Sippar: A Demographic Study of an Old Babylonian City (1894-1595 B.C.*) (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1975), and in “The Nadītu Woman,” *Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1964), 106-35, opened the discussion of the issue, is skeptical. An extensive debate followed each of the papers in the Proceedings of the Conference on Women in the Ancient Near East (Brown University, 1987), published as *Women’s Earliest Records: From Ancient Egypt and Western Asia*, ed. Barbara S. Lesko (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989). Families in the Old Babylonian period manipulated the religious institution to protect property as private property became more common; once a simpler system of inheritance was established, the institution dwindled. See Harris, “Independent Women in Ancient Mesopotamia?” 145-57, and discussion, 157-65. Elizabeth C. Stone notes the importance of the *nadītu* in Old Babylonian Nippur, and notes that she may have been prominent there as early as Ur III, but as in Sippar and Babylon the *nadītu* declined when she was no longer useful for keeping private property within the extended family, *Nippur Neighborhoods*, 26.

Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, 76.

Henshaw [personal communication].

Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, 76.


“Enlil and Sud” in The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature.

“Enlil and Ninlil” in The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature.

Excursus: “Sacred” and Other Marriages


884 Introduced and translated by Stephanie Dalley, Myths from Mesopotamia, 228-77.

885 Dalley, Myths from Mesopotamia, 233.

886 Dalley, Myths from Mesopotamia, 252-53.

887 Dalley, Myths from Mesopotamia, 235.


889 This may in part account for the Assyrian spins on the Epic of Creation, where Ishtar is an important helper to the hero, Assur (rather than Babylon’s Marduk), and for the Assyrian identification of Assur with Anshar and Ishtar with Tiamat. In the Assyrian scheme it would seem that prior is better, while the Babylonians favored the notion that the younger gods, Marduk and Nabû, surpassed their elders even while they carried their image and likeness. Note that in the pair, Lahmu and Lahamu, the female is called hirtu (=mi-nita-dam), a more exalted term than the ordinary word for “wife,” aššatu (CAD 6.200), which is seldom used for goddesses.

890 Frymer-Kensky, In the Wake of the Goddesses, 74.

891 But for other reasons. She points out that the creation of humankind in Enuma Elish, according to a plan of Ea and Marduk, did not require the clay used by the mother goddesses in forming creatures—or the mother goddess herself—for the process, 74-75.

892 For the terms, see A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian, eds. Jeremy Black, Andrew George and Nicholas Postgate (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999), 398. The “companion” in later times is sometimes used as a “secondary wife.” Ishtar is also called Marduk’s k/qinītu, which may mean “concubine.” See A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian, 158.


894 For an overview of classical Muslim family law, see John Esposito, Women in Muslim Family Law (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 13-48. Certain arrangements are classified as batil, void or completely bad in its foundation; fasid, irregular, but with some lawful elements; or sahib, completely valid and lawful, 18-20; for idda, see 21-22.

895 Mernissi, Beyond the Veil, 63.

896 Mernissi, Beyond the Veil, 68.


898 Mernissi, Beyond the Veil, 71.

899 Mernissi, Beyond the Veil, 72-73.

900 That almost all aspects of marital arrangements vary according to different cultures, consider the well-studied case of marriage among Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea. See, e.g., Annette B.

The bad reputation of such women is seen mainly in late, 1st millennium texts. By the Neo-Babylonian period women were so peripheral to the matters that texts from the period deal with, mainly economic and legal matters, that Jonas C. Greenfield thinks women in that period were treated much as they are today in the Middle East, “Some Neo-Babylonian Women,” *La Femme dans le Proche-Orient Antique*, ed. Jean-Marie Durand (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1987), 78-80. Greenfield finds no evidence that women were literate during the period. (He thinks that the women who served as exorcists may have had no need of writing. It is, however, possible that they were not only literate, but that they wrote their own texts. Henshaw notes that there, admittedly few, female writers, *t上下 paddatu*, and performers such as *nārtu* and *zammārtu*, in later periods, 37, 96-102, and 150.) Among the examples Greenfield gives are a wet nurse, a female slave of Ishtar, and a *harimtu* who, for reasons that are not entirely clear, gives over the care of her infant son to her brother, 77. Mesopotamian texts may generally be concerned with issues that are important to men rather than women, but it is becoming increasingly evident that feminine problems, such as abnormally heavy menstrual periods, infertility, problems of pregnancy, contraception and abortion, were known and remedies available to women. See, e.g., J. A. Scurlock, “Baby-Snatching Demons, Restless Souls and the Dangers of Childbirth: Medico-Magical Means of Dealing with Some of the Perils of Motherhood in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *Incognita* 2 (1991), 137-85, and Biggs, “Conception, Contraception, and Abortion in Ancient Mesopotamia.” 1st Millennium medical texts include treatments for women’s problems like haemorrhage, difficult pregnancies, barrenness and abortion. See Irving L. Finkel, “On Late Babylonian Medical Training,” *Wisdom, Gods and Literature*, ed. A. R. George and I. L. Finkel (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 168-73.