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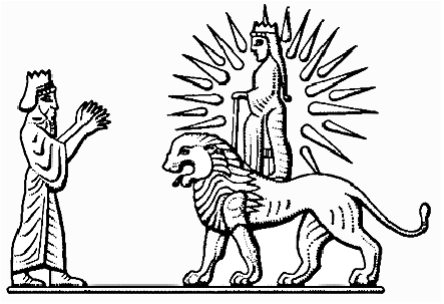

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"Akkadian Rituals and Poetry of Divine Love"

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Published in Melammu Symposia 2:

R. M. Whiting (ed.),
Mythology and Mythologies.
Methodological Approaches to Intercultural Influences.
Proceedings of the Second Annual Symposium of the Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project. Held in Paris, France, October 4-7, 1999 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project 2001), pp. 93-136.
Publisher: http://www.helsinki.fi/science/saa/

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MARTTI NISSINEN Helsinki

Akkadian Rituals and Poetry of Divine Love

hašādu išakkanū irrubū bīt ruʾāmi
They perform the ritual of love, they enter the house of love.
K 2411 i 19

1. The Problem of Sacred Marriage

It may not be quite all the vogue to mention "sacred marriage" in present-day discussion. Having enjoyed a long currency in cultural anthropology and religious studies for several decades in the aftermath of Sir James Frazer's illustrious *The Golden Bough*,[1] the concept of *hieros gamos* has lost most of its attractiveness during the last twenty-five years or so. The reason for this has been pointed out by several recent studies, often written by female scholars: "sacred marriage" has been used as a part of a co-ordinated outfit comprising precarious elements like "fertility cult" and "sacred prostitution" and designed by Western gentlemen affected by the post-Victorian ideas of "sexuality."[2]

As a term, sacred marriage could, of course, be used in a neutral meaning, denoting any divine love affair eventually expressed by ritual means. In practice, however, the concept is difficult to separate from the ongoing debate mainly revolving around the Sumerian literature describing the love of the goddess Inanna (Ištar) and the god Dumuzi (Tammuz). According to the classic fertility cult pattern, more or less fully represented by individual scholars, this literature reflects a ritual celebrated annually during the New Year festival. The purpose of the ritual, so goes the traditional reasoning, was to generate life and abundance and guarantee fertility of the people, animals and the earth by means of symbolic magic; in concrete terms, the sacred marriage was consummated in a cultic intercourse of the Sumerian king and a priestess.[3] As a corollary of this visualization, the divine marital paradigm has formed the principal interpretative context of the reading of ancient Near Eastern texts with erotic content; also, the idea of "sacred prostitu-

[1] Frazer 1890-1915, abridged edition in one volume 1922, in which the idea of sacred marriage, exemplified by Diana, "the goddess of fertility," is to be found on pp. 139-40; cf. the new abridgement by Th. Gaster (1959: 124-67). In the field of cuneiform studies, the works of Thorkild Jacobsen (e.g., 1970) and Samuel Noah Kramer (e.g., 1969) can be seen as the scholarly culminations of the "sacred marriage" idea. For further representatives, see Renger 1972/75: 252-54.

[2] For the historical, anthropological and ideological problems of "fertility cult" and, above all, of "sacred prostitution," see, e.g., Wacker 1992 and Bird 1997: 38-43.

[3] Elements of this pattern – but not necessarily the whole pattern! – can be found, e.g., in Langdon 1914: 25-28; Labat 1939: 163-65, 247-49; Van Buren 1944; Frankfort 1948: 286-99; Schmökel 1956; Jacobsen 1970 and, fully elaborated, in Kramer 1969. See Cooper 1993 for an evaluation of the interpretations.

R.M. Whiting (ed.)
MELAMMU SYMPOSIA II (Helsinki 2001)
ISBN 951-45-9049-X

tion" has played a role as a prominent element in descriptions of fertility cults in the ancient Near East as a derivative of the sacred marriage notion.[4]

While variants of the fertility pattern still have their proponents,[5] alternative explanations have become prevalent among today's cuneiformists. The reality of the actual sexual intercourse in the ritual has been brought under serious suspicion, and even the concern for fertility has lost its centrality in the recent interpretations of the sacred marriage. Instead, it has been seen as a royal ritual, the purpose of which was the constitution and legitimation of the king's rule,[6] or, in a more comprehensive sense, the establishment of a benevolent personal liaison between the gods and the king – and, through him, the people.[7] According to the balanced view of Piotr Steinkeller, the aspect of fertility, as a consequence of the reciprocal relationship between men and gods, should not be completely played down, but the sacred marriage should not be understood as a mere fertility rite but as a manifestation of "a stable and durable relationship between the ruler and the divine order" which, according to Steinkeller, exists through the institution of "enship," Sumerian priesthood. The king, as the "lord" (**en**), i.e., high priest, of Uruk, assumed the role of Dumuzi as the symbolic spouse of Inanna.[8]

The strong concentration of the sacred marriage debate on Inanna and Dumuzi is easy to explain: the overwhelming majority of the evidence comes from sources in the Sumerian language from the Ur III and Early Old Babylonian periods (ca. 2100 – 1800 BC), especially from the love-songs describing the love of Inanna and Dumuzi.[9] In addition, there are a few Old Babylonian love lyrics in the Akkadian language, the affiliation of which to related cultic practices is yet to be substantiated.[10] However, it is clear that the celebration of love between gods is not restricted to that period; in fact, there is an ample documentation at our disposal of the ritual celebration of divine love in first millennium BC Mesopotamia, consisting of royal inscriptions, cultic calendars, administrative documents, literary texts and poetry.

Most of the first millennium sources in question have been collected and annotated by Eiko Matsushima in her important contributions of the 1980s,[11] and they are referred to even in standard reference works, such as the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*.[12] This notwithstanding, these documents have attracted considerably less scholarly attraction than the sources from older periods, perhaps because they are less numerous and scattered over different historical periods and publications. Moreover, some scholars have found in these sources an idea of sacred marriage different from that represented by the Sumerian literature and, for this reason, either discussed them separately,[13] or did not include them at all in the deliberations on sacred marriage.[14] Since the later Akkadian sources, nevertheless, provide indispensable evidence of ritual celebration of divine love, it is difficult to divorce them altogether from the discussion concerning sacred marriage in more ancient documents. The divine protagonists may change, the rituals may take divergent

[4] See Oden 1987: 131-53.
[5] Cf. Frayne 1985: 12-22, Klein 1992: 868.
[6] Thus Renger 1972/75: 256-57.
[7] Cooper 1993: 91.
[8] Steinkeller 1999: 135-36 and passim. A similar view has been put forward independently by Gwendolyn Leick (1994: 97-110).
[9] See now the critical edition of the texts by Sefati (1998).
[10] See Lambert 1966, Westenholz 1987, Groneberg 1999.
[11] Matsushima 1980, 1985, 1987, 1988.
[12] Klein 1992: 869; see also Leick 1994: 130-38.
[13] Cf. Klein 1992: 868.
[14] Cf. Renger 1972/75: 255, 1998.

forms, and there may be even be differences in the ideas of the meaning of divine love and its celebration, but what the sources do have in common is the very idea of love of two deities from which the humans are somehow supposed to benefit.

It is the purpose of this article to draw together the pertinent sources, both texts with a reference to divine love rituals and poetry that could, without stretching credulity, be affiliated with these rituals, to deliberate on the meaning of the rituals and their relation with the poetry, and, finally, to reflect on the relevance of the first-millennium sources to the concept of "sacred marriage."

2. Rituals of Divine Love

While the Sumerian sacred marriage ritual can be discerned from literary sources only,[15] there is direct evidence of rituals of divine love in some letters, royal inscriptions, cultic texts and administrative documents from later periods, in which the rituals are mentioned or even described to some extent, or commodities meant to be used in these rituals are itemized. This does not mean that the rituals in question could be fully reconstructed on the basis of the existing evidence. We only have a collection of random hints which, however, leave no room for doubt that the rituals were indeed celebrated from the Neo-Assyrian to the Late Babylonian (Seleucid) period in different Mesopotamian cities, and not only that, but they also provide occasional glimpses at the details and venues of the ceremonies.

The extant documentation begins with Neo-Assyrian sources from the 7th century; pertinent rituals older than that are unknown, save, perhaps, the Middle Babylonian installation of the high priestess (*entu*) of Emar, which reaches a climax in her wedding with the storm god (^{d}**im**).[16] This ritual, involving a priestess and a male deity, is based on a different pattern and seems not to be directly comparable with the rituals involving two deities and, eventually, their earthly representatives.[17] The Neo-Assyrian and Neo- and Late Babylonian documents are all more enlightening, giving accounts of love rituals involving various deities in different Mesopotamian cities.

2.1. Mullissu's Love Ritual in Assur

Let us start the survey with a ritual, the nature of which remains somewhat obscure even though it appears in several Neo-Assyrian documents: the love ritual (*quršu*) of the goddess Mullissu. The *quršu* of Mullissu is mentioned in ritual calendars for the month of Shebat (XI) in the city of Assur,[18] as well as in inventories of commodities assigned to certain departments of Ešarra,

[15] For the direct and indirect evidence, see Sefati 1998: 30-49.

[16] Emar 369 (Arnaud 1986: 326-27); for a detailed study of this text, see Fleming 1992.

[17] Fleming 1992: 293: "She [scil. the priestess] is indeed married to the storm god, but we have no indication of rites intended to promote fertility. No marriage partner is provided for her bed, and when she ends the celebration by getting into bed, the priestess may be finalizing her transition to residence in the household of ^{d}im rather than preparing for consummation of a sacred marriage."

[18] A 485 + A 3109 (Menzel 1981: T42-46), K 9622 + K 13325 (Virolleaud 1907: 207) + K 13312 (Menzel 1981: T52-54), both to be included in the Rituals volume of the State Archives of Assyria series. I am grateful to Prof. Simo Parpola for providing me with the drafts of this forthcoming publication.

the temple of Aššur in Assur, on a specific day during these rituals.[19] The sequence of days in the preserved sources (from the 17th to the 22nd)[20] suggests a week-long celebration. According to the ritual calendars, the *quršu* of Mullissu appears to be part of the major royal festivities established by Assurbanipal after the rebuilding of Ešarra. These festivities lasted from 16th Shebat (XI) until the 10th of Adar (XII), and the *quršu* of Mullissu coincides exactly the period when the king sojourned in this temple as the central figure of various ceremonies, i.e., from the 16th until the 22nd of Shebat (XI).[21]

The commodities mentioned in the texts consist entirely of food and drink donated by the highest ranking members of the Neo-Assyrian community: the queen (SAA 7 183-184, [K 9622+ ii 8]), the crown prince (SAA 7 185, 215-216, [K 9622+ iii 1-2]), the chief treasurer (*masennu* SAA 7 186, 208) and the prefect of the land (*šaknu* SAA 7 209; A 485+ r. 18). The king participates the ritual throughout the celebration, but his role in Mullissu's love ritual is not indicated. The donations include different sorts of wine and beer as well as of large amounts of meat, fruit and seasonings, from which it can be concluded that the rituals included huge sacrificial meals involving the Assyrian high society.

The sources, devoid of any description of the *quršu* of Mullissu, leave its details entirely in the dark; therefore, its nature can only be discerned from its title. The word *q/guršu* is to be derived from the verb *garāšu* "to make love, copulate";[22] hence the translation "love ritual." This word is used to describe the lovemaking of the gods Nabû and Tašmetu after their entering the ceremonial bed chamber in the Nabû temple of Calah (SAA 13 78:10; see below), hence, something similar must be at issue in the *quršu* of Mullissu which is best understood as a ritual of love between her and her divine spouse Aššur, the main god of Assyria. There can be no doubt about the divine male partner of the ritual, since all the described festivities take place in Ešarra.

Any further details of the love ritual of Mullissu can only be assumed by analogy to love rituals related to other deities, the best known contemporary counterpart being the ritual of Nabû and Tašmetu. However, one interesting historical detail deserves to be mentioned before we turn our attention to that ritual, namely the transportation of some cultic objects to Assur reported by Ṭab-šar-Aššur, the treasurer of king Sargon II. In two of his letters (SAA 1 54-55) he gives account of the transportation by water of a bed (*eršu*[23]) and some other items to be brought down the river to the temple of Aššur. Especially the bed is handled with a special care. It is watched over day and night,[24] and sacrifices are made before it.[25] The writer also refers to a ritual of decorating and washing the bed.[26] The cultic function of the bed is not indicated in the letter,

[19] SAA 7 183-186, 207-209, 215-216, 218. See Fales & Postgate 1992: xxxv-xxxvi.

[20] SAA 7 183 lists the offerings of day 17, SAA 7 184 of day 18, SAA 7 185 and 207 of day 19, SAA 7 186 and 208 of day 21, SAA 7 209 of day 22 and A 485+ and K 9622+ both of day 18 through day 22.

[21] For these festivities, see Maul 2000.

[22] See Reiner 1975: 95, Parpola 1983: 119 n. 251; for alternative explanations, see Matsushima 1987: 133-34. This verb, as well as the word *eršu* "bed," goes back to the Semitic root *ʿrš*, cf. Arab. *ʿurs* "wedding"; Heb. *ʿeres*/ Aram. *ʿarsā* "sexual connection"; Heb. *ʿereś* "bed."

[23] For the derivation of *eršu*, see the preceding footnote.

[24] SAA 1 54 r. 12-15: *eršu ina muhhi nārimma mūšu anniu ina libbi eleppi tabīad anīnu ina muhhi nārimma nibīad maṣṣartaša ninaṣṣar* "The bed is on the river and will stay in the boat for tonight. We will also spend the night on the river and keep watch over it." Cf. SAA 1 55:10-11.

[25] SAA 1 55:13-r.1: *ūmu ša eršu ina libbīni dariu ina pān inassuhu* "As long as the bed is aboard, regular sheep offerings are being made in front of it."

[26] SAA 1 54:14-r.6.

but as an object of religious veneration it is hardly just another luxurious couch Sargon has ordered for his private bedroom. On the other hand, the cultic use of beds is virtually restricted to two spheres: sickness rituals, in which the bed itself is first and foremost the object on which the sick person is laying, without a special ritual significance, and sacred marriage ceremonies performed in the ritual bed chamber (*bēt erši*).[27] Even though there are no sources reporting the cult of Assur in the time of Sargon II, the traditional capital of Assyria remained the principal venue of royal festivities throughout the Neo-Assyrian period,[28] hence, it is not unwarranted to conclude that the bed transported to Assur by Ṭab-šar-Aššur was meant for a ritual of divine love celebrated in the temple of Aššur.[29]

2.2. Nabû and Tašmetu in Assyria

The love of the gods Nabû and Tašmetu is documented better than any other divine love affair in Mesopotamia except that of Inanna and Dumuzi. The love story of these deities can be traced back to the early Old Babylonian period,[30] and it grows fervent in Neo-Assyria, where Nabû and Tašmetu regularly appear as a couple.

The evidence of the Neo-Assyrian Nabû and Tašmetu ritual comprises letters from priests and temple officials to the kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal,[31] the best preserved Akkadian love song[32] and a hymn of Assurbanipal to this divine couple.[33] According to the letters, all written by authorities of the Nabû temple in Calah, the ritual took place annually at the beginning of the month of Iyyar (II) in the city of Calah, which may not be the only Assyrian city where the love of Nabû and Tašmetu was celebrated. Both the joyous "footrace" (*lismu*) of Nabû on the streets of the city of Assur in the same month, mentioned in the Blessing for Assur,[34] and the procession of Tašmetu described in Assurbanipal's hymn listing various gates and shrines of Assur[35] are likely to refer to parts of a related ritual celebrated in Assur.

The course of the ritual of Nabû and Tašmetu can be sketched in broad outline on the basis of the letters, none of which gives a full account of it, but contain enough references to the various phases of the ceremony to make it possible to follow it almost step by step, albeit with some variation in details.

First, the ceremonial bed chamber (*bēt erši*), situated in the inner parts of the temple,[36] is prepared for the erotic rendezvous of Nabû and Tašmetu. According to the letter of Nabû-šumu-iddina, the temple administrator (*hazannu*), this is done on the 3rd of Iyyar.[37] After this, the gods are conveyed to the chamber. Assurbanipal's hymn to Nabû and Tašmetu seems to allude to this procession when it mentions a procession of Tašmetu on the 5th day of a month[38] and

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[27] See *CAD* E 316-18.
[28] Cf. Maul 2000: 389-90.
[29] Cf. the letter SAA 13 188, which reports a considerable amount of silver to have been received to be used at Harran for cultic objects, including a bed (line 21). The poorly preserved text refers to preparations for a ritual performed in the month of Shebat (XI) and involving, among other things, "the gods" and the bed (lines 15-28).
[30] For the sources, see Pomponio 1998: 21.
[31] SAA 13 56, 70, 78; see Matsushima 1987: 132-43, Nissinen 1998a: 592-95, Cole & Machinist 1999: xv-xvi.
[32] SAA 3 14; see Matsushima 1987, Nissinen 1998a. For translation, see also Livingstone 1997.
[33] SAA 3 6.
[34] SAA 3 10 r. 8-14.
[35] SAA 3 6.
[36] Possibly one of the twin shrines of Nabû and Tašmetu; see the plan of the Nabû temple in Calah by Max Mallowan in Wiseman & Black 1996, facing page 1.
[37] SAA 13 78: UD.3.KÁM *ša Ajjāri Kalhi eršu ša Nabû takkarrar* "On the 3rd day of Iyyar (II), in Calah, the bed of Nabû will be set up."
[38] It is not absolutely certain that SAA 3 6 refers to this very ritual, in spite of the many common elements. The

tells about Tašmetu coming from her holy workshop (*mummu*) and Nabû coming from his tablet house (*bēt ṭuppi*) to the "nuptial chamber" (*hammūtu*), which corresponds to the *bēt erši*.[39] The hymn continues with a dialogue of the divine couple, after which the entering the cella (*papāhu*), again corresponding to the ceremonial bed chamber,[40] takes place. A similar procedure is described in the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu, which begins with invitations to the sanctuary by the chorus of worshippers, going on with a dialogue of the gods.[41]

Entering the bed chamber is described in the letters in two slightly deviant ways. According to Nabû-šumu-iddina, Nabû enters the bed chamber on the 3rd of Iyyar, and the 4th is the wedding night, or "intercourse" (*quršu*), of Nabû (his partner Tašmetu is not mentioned at all),[42] whereas the other writers say that Nabû and Tašmetu enter the bed chamber together on the 4th day.[43] In any case, the divine couple stays in the bed chamber for several days. During these days, offerings of the royal family are brought before the gods and performed in the bed chamber.[44] On the 5th day, a royal banquet (*šākussu ša šarri*), i.e., a sacrificial meal, is served; the temple administrator himself attends the meal together with apprentice priests.[45]

From the 5th until the 10th day, Nabû and Tašmetu stay in the bedroom with the temple administrator in their presence.[46] Nothing is told about ritual performances during those days, but something essential about the implications of the divine intimacy can be learned from a Neo-Assyrian colophon addressed to Nabû by Assurbanipal:[47]

> [*Tašmē*]*tu bēltu rabītu hīrtu naramtaka ṣābitat abbutti ina mahrīka ina majjāl taknê* [*ūmišam*] *lā naparkâ literriška balāṭī* [*tā-kilk*]*a ul ibâš Nabû*
>
> [Tašme]tu, the Great Lady, your beloved spouse, who intercedes (for me) [daily] before you in the sweet bed, who never ceases demanding you to protect my life. [The one who trusts in] you will not come to shame, O Nabû.

This telling piece of evidence makes plain the earthly ramifications of the divine love-making. The goddess, while gratifying her beloved in the "sweet bed," intercedes with him on behalf of the king – and, through him, the community of worshippers.

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letter of Nabû-kudurri-ušur mentions a *qarītu* festival of Tašmetu during which the goddess moves to the festival chapel (*bēt akīti*) and subsequently returns and takes up her seat (SAA 13 130:8-20). This text, however, neither specifies the date of the festival nor mentions Nabû at all. On the other hand, the other reports of the ritual of Nabû and Tašmetu do not mention the *bēt akīti*.

[39] SAA 3 6:9-11: *issu qirib mumme ina uṣêša ana Nabiā*[*ni*] *mār Bēl issu bēt ṭuppi ana hammūti rēšīšu kî ušaqqû* "When she emerges from the holy workshop to [our] Nabû, the son of Bel raises his head from the tablet house to the nuptial chamber." The word *hammūtu* probably stands here for *bēt hammūti* which means the part of the house that the male and female heads of the household share together (cf. *AHw* 318; *CAD* Ḫ 69-70; Matsushima 1987, 154).

[40] Cf. Nissinen 1998a: 601.

[41] SAA 3 14:1-19; cf. Nissinen 1998a: 598-610.

[42] SAA 13 78:9-10.

[43] Urdu-Nabû SAA 13 56:15-17: UD.4.KÁM *ša Ajjāru Nabû Tašmētum ina bēt erši errubū* "On the 4th day of Iyyar (II), Nabû and Tašmetu will enter the bed chamber"; Nergal-šarrani SAA 13 70:6-8: *ina šiāri* UD.4.KÁM *ana bādi Nabû Tašmētum ina bēt erši errubū* "Tomorrow, on the 4th day, in the evening, Nabû and Tašmetu will enter the bed chamber."

[44] Urdu-Nabû SAA 13 56 r. 11-13: *niqiātīšunu u*[*bbal ina*] *pān Nabû Tašmē*[*tum*] *ina bēt er*[*ši*] *eppaš* "I will brin]g their offerings before Nabû and Tašme[tu], and will perform them in the [bed]room."

[45] Nergal-šarrani SAA 13 70:9-10: UD.5.KAM *šākussu ša šarri ušakkulū hazannu uššab* "On the 5th day, they will serve the royal banquet. The administrator will attend." Cf. Nabû-šumu-iddina SAA 13 78:12-14: *hazannu ša bēt Nabû anāku lallik* [*ina*] *Kalhi* "I am the administrator of the temple of Nabû. I should therefore go [to] Calah"; ibid., r. 6-9: *šamallû ša niqîšu ibaššūni eppaš ša 1 qa aklīšu ušella ina bēt Nabû ekkal* "Of the apprentice priests, whoever has a sacrifice to make will do so, and whoever brings even one seah of food may eat it in the temple of Nabû." The meal (*naptan ekurri*) is also alluded to in Assurbanipal's hymn (SAA 3 6 r. 11-12).

[46] Nergal-šarrani SAA 13 70:13-17: *issu libbi* UD.5.KAM *adi* UD.10.KAM [*il*]*āni ina bēt erši šunu u hazannu* [*k*]*ammus* "From the 5th to the 10th, the gods will be in the bed chamber, and the administrator will sit by."

[47] Hunger 1968: 106(# 338):21-25; cf. Matsushima 1987: 157-58, Nissinen 1998a: 596-97.

On the 11th day, Nabû comes out from the bed chamber,[48] according to Nabû-šumu-iddina first to the "threshing floor" (*adru*) of the palace and from there to the garden (*kiriu*)[49] – or, as Nergal-šarrani puts it, "streches his legs,"[50] goes to the game park (*ambassu*) to kill some wild oxen, after which he returns into his dwelling.[51] Either way, the god needs transporting which, as probably in the preceding processions as well, is done in a chariot, as referred to by Nabû-šumu-iddina.[52] We have to imagine a real procession from the temple of Nabû along the city streets to a garden or a game park which, as in many other ritual processions,[53] is the terminal point of the procession and the whole celebration.

The strange thing about the descriptions of the final phase of the ritual is that they entirely fail to mention the goddess Tašmetu. Does she stay in the bed chamber while Nabû goes out to make his "footrace" and hunting, finally enjoying all by himself the pleasures of the garden? With regard to the heated mutual invitations of the gods to the garden in Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu,[54] it is difficult to think that the goddess would not have any role to play in the final celebration of their mutual love in the garden. "Going to the garden" belongs to the standard imagery of Mesopotamian love poetry,[55] and is obviously put into practice ritually in the celebrations of divine love; it would be counter-intuitive to exclude the goddess from the climax of the festival. Presumably, the participation of Tašmetu is simply taken for granted, as in the letter of Nabû-šumu-iddina who does not bother to mention the self-evident sojourning of Tašmetu in the bed chamber at all.

2.3. Nabû and Nanaya in Babylonia

The marital affairs of Nabû are not restricted to his sacred marriage with Tašmetu. In Babylon, he has an established relationship with the goddess Nanaya, the "queen of Uruk" who is virtually identical with Ištar[56] and whose extraordinary sex appeal (sum. **hi-li**, Akk. *kuzbu*) finds expression not only in her various epitheta,[57]

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[48] In SAA 13 32:7-14, however, it says that Nabû stays in the bedroom until the12th day: *ša šarru bēlī išpuranni mā ilāni ana adê* [*li*]*lik*ū*ni* [*Na*]*bû ina bēt erši* [*ad*]*i* UD.12.KAM [*kam*]*mus* "As to what the king, my lord, wrote to me, saying: 'Let the gods [co]me for the treaty ceremony,' [Na]bû is [st]aying in the bedroom [un]til the 12th day…" The ceremony in question probably concerns the succession treaty of Esarhaddon concluded on the occasion of the investiture of Assurbanipal as crown prince in Iyyar (II), 672.

[49] SAA 13 78:15-19 *ilu ina libbi adri ekalli uṣṣa issu libbi adri ekalli ana kirî illaka niqiu ina libbi* [*in*]*neppaš* "The god will set out from the threshing floor of the palace. From the threshing floor of the palace he will come to the garden. There a sacrifice will be performed."

[50] This may refer to the "footrace" of Nabû (*lismu ša Nabû*) mentioned in the Blessing of Assur (SAA 3 10 r. 8); thus Cole & Machinist 1999: 62.

[51] SAA 13 70 r. 1-4: UD.11.KAM *Nabû uṣṣa šēpēšu ipaššar ana ambassi illak rīmāni idūak elli ina šubtīšu uššab* "On the 11th, Nabû will go out and stretch his legs. He will go to the game park and kill wild oxen. Then he will ascend and take up residence again in his dwelling."

[52] SAA 13 78:20-r.3: *urû ša ilāni mukīl appāti ša ilānimma illak ilu ušēṣa u usahhar* "The chariot-driver of the gods will go with the team of horses of the gods. He will bring the god out and back in again." Cf. the chariots of the goddess Banitu and her consort in STT 366 (Deller 1983, for which see below) and the chariot driver and 'third man' of Aššur mentioned by name in an inscription of Sennacherib (SAA 12 86 r. 30).

[53] See Pongratz-Leisten 1994: 153-54.

[54] SAA 3 14 r. 15-32; cf. Nissinen 1998a: 616-20.

[55] See, e.g., Westenholz & Westenholz 1977: 213, Deller 1983: 143, Lambert 1987: 27-31, Leick 1994: 73-75, Pongratz-Leisten 1994: 153-54.

[56] Esarhaddon's Uruk C and D inscriptions (Borger 1956: 77 §§ 49-50) are otherwise virtually identical to the Uruk B inscription, but whenever Uruk B mentions Ištar of Uruk, Uruk C and D replace her with Nanaya. For the identification of Nanaya and Ištar in Old Babylonian times, see Charpin 1986: 411-13. In a Hymn for Nanaya (Reiner 1974) she is identified with many other goddesses as well.

[57] Cf., e.g., the beginning of the Uruk C inscription of Esarhaddon (Borger 1956: 77 § 49) *ana Nanāja pussumti ilāti ša kuzbu u ulṣi zaʾnātu lulê malâtu* "To Nanaya, the bride of the goddesses who is full of charm, joy and attraction"; see also Stol 1998: 147, 1999: 613.

but also in the name of her temple in Uruk, Ehilianna ("House of the Heavenly Allurement"). Indeed, Nanaya is called the wife (*hīrtu*)[58] or beloved (*ra''imtu*)[59] of Nabû with whom she was affiliated in the time of Merodach-Baladan I (1173-61) at the latest.[60] The relationship of Nabû and Nanaya may be due to the identification of Nabû with Muati, Nanaya's partner in the Old Babylonian dialogue of love from the time of Abi-ešuh (1711-1684).[61]

The conjugal relationships of Nabû are usually explained as depending on the city: Tašmetu was Nabû's spouse in Assyria (Calah and Assur), whereas Nanaya assumed this role in Babylonia (Borsippa and Babylon).[62] However, there is a text cataloguing the evil deeds of Nabû-šumu-iškun who ruled as the king of Babylonia from ca. 760 to 748. According to this text, one of the sacrileges of Nabû-šumu-iškun was to remove gods from their proper places and to interfere with the triangle involving Nabû, Nanaya and Tašmetu, all of whom appear to have been worshipped in Babylonia.[63] He had allegedly made Nanaya of Ezida (the main temple of Nabû in Borsippa), "the lover of Nabû," enter the "workshop" (*bīt mummu*), detained Nabû in Babylon and covered the garment of Nabû with the garment of Bel (Marduk) in the month of Shebat (XI). Then he himself, dressed as Bel, "proposed Bel's marriage to Tašmetu" (*aššūta ša Bēl ana Tašmētum ušatriṣ*).[64] The concrete procedure behind this accusation is not altogether clear, but it seems like Nanaya had replaced Tašmetu in the "workshop," presumably in Borsippa,[65] whereas Nabû, impersonated by the king and falsely dressed as Marduk, was betrothed to Tašmetu in Babylon. Thus, Nanaya was left alone in Borsippa, whereas Tašmetu got her proper husband who, however, was made to play the role of the main god of Babylon. The scenario is rather fantastic, but it evidently blames the blasphemous king for blurring the divine roles and cheating the goddess, thus desecrating the rituals of divine love. If there is any truth in this story, it may be concluded that even Tašmetu had a dwelling in Babylonia at that time, even though Nanaya without doubt was seen as Nabû's principal beloved in that city. There is, indeed, evidence for a chapel of Nabû and Tašmetu in the southern part Etemenanki, the ziggurrat of Babylon, albeit only from the Seleucid period (3rd century).[66]

Even in later times, the love of Nabû and Nanaya was celebrated ritually in Babylonia. A Late Babylonian ritual calendar (*SBH* 8 ii 12ff)[67] describes the ritual of love (*hadaššūtu*) of Nabû and Nanaya which begins

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[58] Borger 1956: 77 § 49: 3

[59] TCL 12 13:15-16 (cf. Watanabe 1987: 42 # 8). For further evidence, see Stol 1998: 148.

[60] Thus in a *kudurru* text from that period which mentions the triad Nabû, Nanaya and Tašmetu (Page 1967: 66 iii 21-22); for further evidence, see Stol 1998: 148, 1999: 613.

[61] Thus Pomponio 1998: 21; the dialogue of Nanaya and Muati is published in Lambert 1966. It deserves attention that in an Old Babylonian god list, Nanaya and Muati are listed among the gods of Uruk, whereas Nabû and Tašmetu occur with the gods of the nearby Eridu (TCL 15 10 iii 13-14).

[62] Matsushima 1980: 143-44; cf. Pomponio 1998: 21, Stol 1998: 148.

[63] The text *SpTU* 3 58, a Late Babylonian copy of an earlier literary text, is edited by von Weiher 1984 and re-edited and commented upon by Cole 1994.

[64] *SpTU* 3 58 ii 7-14.

[65] This interpretation takes a *bīt mummu* as the dwelling place of Tašmetu (cf. SAA 3 6:9) and not just a place where the statue of Nanaya was taken for repairs (thus Stol 1998:150). If the latter is true, there is nothing outrageous in Nabû-šuma-iškun's action, which, then, would not belong to a catalogue of crimes like the present one which itemizes even other gods that he removed to places belonging to other gods: Nabû was held in Babylon, Ea was made to reside in the gate of Bel who, for his part was "sent down" (*SpTU* 3 58 ii 23-24).

[66] The so-called Esaggil Tablet (*TCL* 6 32); see Matsushima 1988: 108-109.

[67] Reisner 1896: 145-46; see Matsushima 1987: 158-161; cf. also Jacobsen 1975: 71 and Pomponio 1978: 132-136.

on the 2nd of Iyyar. Nabû, prepared for the love ritual, is dressed in a garment of "Anuship," i.e., the status of the Supreme God.[68] Illuminating the night with his splendor he moves from Ezida, his temple in Borsippa, to Ehuršaba, shrine of Nanaya, and comes before his beloved: "All is prepared for the ritual of love."[69] Together the gods enter the bedroom (literally "the pleasant nocturnal bed" *majjāltum mūši ṭābi*) where they stay a few days. From there Nabû leaves for a garden on the 6th day, and on the 7th day he continues to the garden of Anu near his temple Eanna – in Uruk! – where the kingship of Anu, Nanaya's father, is granted to him.[70] Nanaya withdraws from Ehuršaba on the 17th day to the "garden of the mountain" (*ana kirî hursannu*); whether identical to the previously mentioned gardens, is difficult to say.

The love ritual of Nabû and Nanaya has much in common with the Assyrian ritual of Nabû and Tašmetu described above. Not only is it celebrated at the same time of the year, in the month of Iyyar (II), but its constituent parts are also essentially the same as in the Assyrian ritual: the gods' entering the bedroom in a procession, their staying there for several days and the subsequent garden scene, the concrete circumstances of which are, regrettably, difficult to elucidate. There is little doubt, however, that the ritual of Nabû and Nanaya, as described in the Late Babylonian ritual calender, documents the enduring significance of the ritual tradition of the divine love in Hellenistic Babylonia.

2.4. Nanaya and her Spouse in Palestine and Egypt

A part of the considerable chronological gap between the Neo-Assyrian and Late Babylonian documents can be filled by an intriguing piece of evidence from Egypt. The Aramaic text in Demotic script (Papyrus Amherst 63) gives an account of a ritual of love between Nanaya and her beloved.[71] The text, still lacking a complete edition, is full of substantial problems concerning the decipherment of the Demotic script, the divine names, the origin of the background community and so on, which make its interpretation the subject of controversy.[72] According to Richard C. Steiner, the ritual belongs to the New Year festival celebrated in the month of Tishri (VII) by Aramaic-speaking people originally coming from the area between Babylonia and Elam called Rash or Arašu (*rš/ʿrš*). Before their colonization in Upper Egypt, probably to Syene, these people had been first deported by Assurbanipal to Samaria, where they apparently belonged to the people who "paid homage to Yahweh while at the same time they served their own gods, according to the custom of the nations from which they had been carried into exile" (2 Kgs 17:33).[73] If this historical setting is correct, then it can be concluded that a ritual of divine love was actually celebrated in Palestine and Egypt in the 7th-6th century BC by deportees who carried on their religious traditions of Babylonian origin. If the location of Rash should be sought elsewhere,[74] the ritual need not be

[68] *SBH* 8 ii 15: *Nabû ša hadaššūtu innandiq tēdīq Anūtu.*
[69] *SBH* 8 ii 19: *irrumma ana mahar Bēlti kali šitkunu ana had*[*aššūtu*].
[70] *SBH* 8 ii 25: *šarrut Anim ilqû ugammiri.*
[71] See Steiner 1991 and, for a translation of the whole composition, Steiner 1997. I am totally dependent on Steiner's translation (1997: 322), from which the quotations below are taken. Cf. also Steinkeller 1999: 135.
[72] For these problems, see, e.g., Kottsieper 1988, 1997 and Rösel 2000.
[73] Steiner 1997: 310.
[74] Kottsieper 1997: 406-16 suggests a location on the mountains of Lebanon.

traced directly back to Babylonia, but may be taken as a Canaanite/Palestinian offshoot of a common ancient Near Eastern tradition.

The text is composed of a series of poems, among them psalms that evidently share a common tradition with the biblical psalms (col. xi 11-19//Ps 20 and col. xii 1-10//Ps 75),[75] and a description of an erotic encounter between Nanaya and her beloved (col. xvi 7-19). In Steiner's liturgical reading, this is the climax of the New Year festival; however, as an artistic composition, the poem is not necessarily an accurate description of actual events. The identity of Nanaya's partner is not altogether clear. Steiner identifies him with the "king," i.e., the head of the community, but the possibility of a divine spouse cannot be excluded either. At the outset of the ritual, the male beloved introduces the rendezvous of the couple:

> Nana, you are my wife.
> The *bed of rushes* they have laid down,
> perfumed fragrances for your nostrils.
> Our goddess, may you be carried,
> escorted to your dear one,
> let them bear you to the dear one.
> In your bridal chamber a priest sings.
> Nanai, bring near to me your lips.

Before entering the bed chamber, the lovers stay together for a lengthy while:

> We dwelled (here) in the morning;
> we shall dwell (here) in the evening.
> The chosen lad too has come.
> A sound keeps you awake in the evening;
> into our shrine, my …, who is coming?
> A sound of harps keeps you awake in the evening;
> in the grave of my ancestor, a dirge.
> A sound of lyres from the grave keeps you awake in the evening.

At the appointed hour, they enter the chamber, "the perfumed hideaway":

> My beloved, enter the door into our house.
> With my mouth, consort of our lord, let me kiss you.
> And I go and enter. In my nostrils it is sweet;
> Come, enter the perfumed hideaway.

Again, the resemblance to the previously discussed rituals is unmistakable, although the identity of Nanaya's spouse, as well as the concrete circumstances of the encounter of the goddess and her beloved remain obscure. However, irrespective of whether the male partner is thought to participate in the ritual in a physical or metaphorical way, it is clear that he represents the male deities of a pantheon with Syro-Palestinian roots:

> *Horus*-Bethel[76] will lay you on the bedspread;
> El, on embroidered covers.
> In his heavens, Mar[77] from Rash blesses;
> Mar, a blessing before Bethel everlasting:
> "My sister, Marah – blessed are you, O Cow, our lady."
> "Blessed are you, O Had, with a blessing *fit for El*.
> Blessed are you, Baal of Heaven."
> "Rebuild, man, Ellipi.[78]
> A cursed land rebuild, a city of ruins rebuild;
> by the side of the Hambanites, a great land.
> Keep alive the pauper; … the poor man."

The purpose of divine lovemaking appears to be the bestowal of divine blessing upon the land, the deported people, and – if the "man" means the "king" – the head of the community.

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[75] For the parallelism of these psalms with Papyrus Amherst 63, see Kottsieper 1988, Rösel 2000.

[76] Thus according to Steiner 1997: 322. The first part of the name has alternative interpretations, mostly taking it as El or Yahweh; see Kottsieper 1997: 399-406, Rösel 2000: 90-93. For the god Bethel, see Vleeming & Wesselius 1983-84, Röllig 1999.

[77] I.e., the "Lord," the spouse of Nanaya who is also called Marah (Steiner 1997: 310).

[78] Ellipi is the area northwest of Elam. If this reading is correct, it supports the location of Rash in the neighboring region of Arašu.

2.5. Nanaya and Antiokhos IV in Susa

A further allusion to a "marriage" of the goddess Nanaya is to be found in the Second Book of Maccabees (1:13-17) where it reads that the king Antiochus IV Epiphanes entered the temple of Nanaya in Persia, i.e., in Susa,[79] in the month of Kislev (IX) in the year 164. It was his intention to acquire the possession of the considerable treasures of that temple by "marrying" (*synoikein*) the goddess and taking them as "dowry" (*eis fernēs logon*), but he only got himself killed in the temple in an ambush laid by its priests. This may have been the last but not the first time Antiochus was involved in such fraudulence: according to the report of Granius Licinianus, he had married the Syrian goddess Atargatis at Hierapolis-Bambyke with the same intentions and better success.[80]

The historicity of the propagandistic story in 2 Macc is extremely doubtful,[81] and it adds little to our knowledge of love rituals of Nanaya. It is well known that the goddess had a temple in Susa called Nanaion, where the tradition of the love rituals of Nanaya may have been carried on. The interesting point in the account of 2 Macc is the role of the king, which brings in mind not only the the crucial role of the Sumerian king in the sacred marriage of Inanna and Dumuzi but also the likewise treacherous action of Nabû-šuma-iškun who came to propose to Tašmetu in the dress of Marduk, and, maybe, the head of the community behind Papyrus Amherst 63. While these texts have neither historically nor literally anything in common, they independently suggest that the king, or a person impersonating the king, could perform a role amalgamating with that of the male deity. Whether this was the standard procedure everywhere cannot be known, since the majority of the Akkadian sources do not make explicit any personal involvement of the king in the performance of the ritual.[82] Moreover, nothing supports the idea of the carnal consummation of the marriage by the king and the priestess or another female person impersonating the goddess.

2.6. Marduk and Zarpanitu in Babylon

The Babylonian celebration of divine love is not restricted to rituals involving Nabû, but comprises also the love affair of his divine father, Marduk, and his consort from the late second millennium at the latest, Zarpanitu. This divine couple was worshipped first and foremost in Esaggil, the main temple of Marduk in Babylon, where also the rituals of love between Marduk and Zarpanitu took place.

After Sennacherib's destruction of Babylon in the year 689, Esaggil lay in ruins. Its rebuilding was begun by Esarhaddon and completed by Assurbanipal who also took care of the repatriation of the exiled gods of Esaggil. Even the chamber for the love rituals of Marduk and Zarpanitu was renewed; this took place as late as in the years 655-652.[83] In one of his inscriptions, Assurbani-

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[79] Cf. 1 Macc 6:1 where the temple is described; the city is called Elymais (Elam).

[80] Granius Licinianus 28; see Mørkholm 1966: 132.

[81] Cf. Goldstein 1983: 157-67.

[82] Most explicitly, this is mentioned in the ritual of Anu and Antu, for which see below. Cf. also the first encounter of Gilgamesh and Enkidu: "For the goddess of weddings the bed was laid out, Gilgamesh met with the maiden by night. Forward came Enkidu, he stood in the street, blocking the path of Gilgamesh" (translation from George 1999: 16). This passage cannot be taken as a direct evidence of the participation of the king in the sacred marriage ritual, since Gilgamesh is going to exercise his *ius primae noctis.* On the other hand, "two thirds of him are god and one third human."

[83] According to the Šamaš-šumu-ukin Chronicle, the bed and the chariot of Marduk were transported to Babylon in Šamaš-šumu-ukin's 14th and 15th year, i.e., in 654-652 (Grayson 1975: 129:4-5); however, the inscription K 2411, (see below) is dated to 655 (lines ii 38: eponym of Awianu).

pal gives the following account:[84]

> *narkabtu ṣīrtu rukūb Marduk etelli ilāni bēl bēlāni ina hurāṣi kaspi abnē nisiqti agmura nabnitsa / ana Marduk šar kiššat šamê erṣeti sāpin nakrēja ana širikti ašruk / erši musukkanni iṣṣi dārē ša pašallu litbušat abnē nisiqti zaʾanat ana majjāl taqnê Bēl u Bēltīja šakān hašādi epēš ruʾāme nakliš ēpuš / ina Kahilisu maštak Zarpānītum ša kuzbu salhu addi*
>
> The lofty chariot, the vehicle of Marduk, prince of gods, lord of lords, I prepared of gold, silver and precious stones / and I gave it to Marduk, king of the universe, heaven and earth, suppressor of my enemies, as a present. / A bed of *musukkannu* tree, the eternal tree, covered with gold and decorated with precious stones, I made with skill to be the sweet couch for the betrothal and love-making of Bel and my Lady. / I placed it in Kahilisu, the residence of Zarpanitu full of charm.

Another inscription, dated to the year 655, gives an almost verbatim account of the chariot and the bed of *musukkannu*,[85] amplifying it with a section concerning the purpose of the making of these objects:[86]

> [*ana balāṭ napš*]*ātīja arki ūmēja ana širikti ašruk* / [*inūma h*]*ašādu išakkanū irrubū bīt ruʾāmi* […]*-ja ahāmiš liqbû ilāni kilallān* / [*ina ṣ*]*īt pîšunu elli ša lā nakiri likrubū šarrūtī* / *ṣummirāt libbīja lišakšidūinni ša ašteʾa ašrišun* / [*naka*]*rūtēja lispunū ša ušallimu bibil libbīšun …*
> *Marduk šar ilāni nīš libbīšu lēṭir lihalliq zēršu* / *Zarpānītu ina urši bēt hammūti lemuttašu littasqar*
>
> [For the sake of] my [li]fe and for the lengthening of my days I gave them as a present. / [When] they perform the ritual of love and enter the house of love, may the divine couple talk to each other of my […]! / May they bless my kingship [by the ut]terance of their pure mouths which is not to be countermanded! / May they make me, who looked for their dwellings, attain my heart's desire! / May they supress my enemies, (I) who fulfilled their ardent wish. …
> May Marduk, king of the gods, weaken his potency and destroy his seed, May Zarpanitu pronounce a bad word about him on the bed of her boudoir.

In the next section of the text (lines ii 1-15), Aššur and Mullissu, the principal divine couple of Assyria, are urged to bestow their blessing upon the king.[87] What follows (lines ii 16-39) is an inventory of objects placed in the ceremonial bedroom, comprising furniture and decorative materials loaded with erotic connotations (gold, *pappardilû* stone, pomegranate, obsidian, carnelian, lapis lazuli).[88] The room is also furnished with several beneficent *lamassu* demons and a throne.

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[84] Prism C i 38-48 // T i 39-54; cf. Borger 1996: 139-40 (transliteration), 206 (translation); Matsushima 1988: 99-100 (transliteration and translation), 120-23 n. 7 (synopsis of sources). Some variants (cf. Matsushima 1988: 122-23) continue with the following words: *erši ušî iṣṣi dārē ša hurāṣi hušší litbušat ana Marduk šar ilāni rāʾim palêja aqīš unāt kaspi hurāṣi* [...] *erî parzilli mimma šipir* […] *ušēpišma qereb Esaggil ekal ilāni ukīn* "A bed of ebony, the eternal tree, covered with shining gold, I gave to Marduk, king of gods who loves my reign. The utensils of silver and gold, […] copper and iron, and whatever work […] I had done and placed inside Esaggil, the palace of the gods."

[85] K 2411 = *ABRT* 1 76-79 (cf. Streck 1916: 300, Matsushima 1988: 100-105), lines i 12-14: [*ēpuš*] *narkabtu šar ilāni ṣīrtu rukūb bēl bēlāni* [*eršu m*]*usukkanni iṣṣi dare majjāl taqnê* [*ša pašallu li*]*tbušat abnē nisiqti zaʾanat* "[I made] a lofty chariot of the king of gods, vehicle of the lord of lords, [and a bed of *m*]*usukkannu* tree, the eternal tree, a sweet couch covered [with gold] and decorated with precious stones."

[86] K 2411 i 18-28; cf. Streck 1916: 302.

[87] The king is called Sennacherib in this passage, which may imply a formula used in his time and simply copied in the inscription of Assurbanipal. Lines ii 10-15: *Mullissu šarrat Ešarra hīrat Aššūr bānīt ilāni rabûti Sînahhê-riba šar māt Aššūr ūmišam amat damiqtīšu ina muhhi Aššūr liššakin šaptušša* […*kiš*]*šūti šēbē littūti ārik ūmēšu kūn palîšu* […] *kussî šarrūtīšu Aššūr Mullissu littasqarū ana dūri ana dāri* "May Mullissu, queen of Ešarra, spouse of Aššur, creatrix of the great gods, pronounce with her lips every day a good word in favor of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, before Aššur, […ru]le, long life and plenty of days, establishment of his reign […] his royal throne. May Aššur and Mullissu pronounce (this) forever and ever."

[88] Lines ii 18-21; for the erotic overtones of these materials, see, e.g., Nissinen 1998a: 613-14.

The inscriptions of Assurbanipal describe two objects essential for the performing of the love ritual of Marduk and Zarpanitu: the chariot of Marduk and the bed placed in the ceremonial bedroom. In addition, the latter inscription mentions a throne. The bedroom has no less than four designations: Kahilisu "Gate of the Joyful Charm," *maštak Zarpānītu* "residence of Zarpanitu," *bīt ruʾāmi* "House of Love" and *bīt hammūti*, which means the part of the house that the male and female heads of the household share together, and in this context clearly refers to the divine bedchamber.[89] The equipment of the chariot and the bed imply that the ritual of Marduk and Zarpanitu, just like the rituals discussed above, consisted of at least two fundamental parts: the procession of the god(s) and their love-making in the bedroom.

The so-called Esaggil Tablet indicates that the ziggurrat of Babylon, Etemenanki, boasted a *bīt erši* still in the Seleucid period. It was situated in the western part of the building, and its measures and equipment are described in the tablet, according to which there were two beds and a throne in the room, as well as four gates, one to each point of the compass.[90] That it was dedicated to Marduk and Zarpanitu can only be guessed since this is not mentioned in the text.

The basic function of the ritual is characterized in the inscriptions as *hašādu šakānu*, straightforwardly paralleled by *ruʾāmu epēšu* "to make love" The word *hašādu* which, hence, is justifiably translated as "love ritual," calls to mind the conclusion of the above discussed letter of Nabû-šumu-iddina describing the Nabû and Tašmetu ritual: "May Bel and Nabû whose ritual of love is performed in the month of Shebat (XI), protect the life of the crown prince, my lord."[91] The word used here is *hašaddu/hašādu*, which is usually translated as "marriage," referring to the sacred marriage ritual, as a synonym for the word *hadaššūtu*, familiar to us from the ritual of Nabû and Nanaya. Steven W. Cole has recently suggested that *hašaddu* actually refers to the "betrothal" of the gods in Shebat (XI), whereas *hadaššūtu* is the word for the "marriage" celebrated three months later, in Iyyar (II).[92] The word *hadaššūtu* occurs in *SBH* 8 only, but is clearly related to the words *hadaššatu* and *hadaššû*, which in lexical lists stand for bride and bridegroom respectively.[93] On the other hand, *hašādu* is used almost exclusively of rituals of divine love[94] and never occurs in the same context with *hadaššūtu*. The issue of the alleged etymological affinity of *hašādu* and *hadaššūtu* must be left open here,[95] and the meager evidence of the word *hadaššūtu* does not necessarily warrant the conclusion that it was used of the ritual of the month of Iyyar (II) always and everywhere. In any case, it is evident from from the letter of Nabû-šumu-iddina (SAA 13 78) which mentions both occasions, as well as from the sources to be presented below, that rituals of divine love were performed in Iyyar (II) and Shebat (XI); what they were called and how they related to each other, is more difficult to comprehend. Translations "betrothal" and "marriage" imply the chronological sequence of the festivals but do not necessarily adequately express their function. This is why I confine myself to the translation "ritual of love" for both *hašādu* and *hadaššūtu*.

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[89] Matsushima 1988: 108, Nissinen 1998a: 594.
[90] *TCL* 6 32-33:31-35; see Matsushima 1988: 108-109.
[91] SAA 13 78 r. 16-19: *Bēl Nabû ša ina Šabāṭu hašaddašanūni napšāte ša mār šarri bēlīja liṣṣurū*.
[92] Cole 1994: 239-40; cf. Cole and Machinist 1999: 70.
[93] See *CAD* Ḫ 22.
[94] *CAD* Ḫ 134 lists only one occurence, in which *bīt hašādi nigûti* "house of lovemaking and joy" refers to humans (SAA 3 32:21).
[95] See Bauer 1933: 31 n.3.

2.7. Šamaš and Aya in Sippar

That rituals of divine love were celebrated until Late Babylonian times is confirmed, not only by the account of *SBH* 8 on the ritual of Nabû and Nanaya discussed above, but also by several other sources which add a new divine couple to the Mesopotamian divine lovemakers, Šamaš and Aya, as well as a new temple, Ebabbar. Šamaš and Aya were venerated in Sippar from Sumerian times. The Ebabbar temple ("White House") was renovated by Assurbanipal and again by Nebuchadnezar II. However, there are no records of divine love rituals until the next renovation in the 2nd year of Nabonidus, king of Babylonia (555-539).[96]

A Neo- or Late Babylonian cultic calendar of Sippar indicates that Šamaš and Aya were brought together twice a month, on the 1st and the 15th day, but this happened in the open air on the lower courtyard of Ebabbar.[97] As regards the more intimate encounter of the divine couple, several independent administrative records deal with supplies for the ceremonial bedchamber in Ebabbar,[98] The oldest of them is a document from the 1st of Shebat (XI) of the 3rd year of king Neriglissar (559-556), mentioning an amount of linen for a textile belonging to the "bed of Šamaš."[99] Likewise, a text dated to the 1st of Shebat (XI) of Nabonidus' 12th year itemizes tissues "for the bed of Šamaš" (*ana erši ša Šamaš*).[100] Moreover, pieces of linen to be placed "on the bed" (*ša muhhi erši*) are ordered in documents dating from the 1st of Tishri (VII) of his 3rd year[101] and from 9th of Iyyar (II) of his 7th year.[102] Rituals affiliated with the bed of Šamaš are not described.

One of the inscriptions of Nabonidus concerning the rebuilding of Ebabbar in Sippar includes a prayer to Šamaš in which Aya assumes a prominent role:[103]

> *ina papāhi bēlūtīka šubat dajjānūtīka ina ašābīku / ilāni ālīka u bītīka lišapšihū kabtatka / ilāni rabûti libbaka liṭibbi / Aja kallāti rabîti āšibat bīt majjāli kajjānamma pānūka lišnammir ūmišam dami<q>tāja liqbīku / ina būnīka namrūtu hidûtu pānīka libitti qātīja šūquru epšētūja damqāta šiṭir šumīja u ṣalam šarrūtīja hadiš naplisamma*
>
> When you take up residence in the cella of your lordship, the dwelling of your judgeship, / may the gods of your city and your temple calm you down / may the great gods appease your heart! / May Aya, the great bride who dwells in the bedroom, constantly make your face shine, may she every day speak favorably on my behalf! / May you in your radiant appearance look friendly and with joyful face upon the precious work of my hands, my good deeds, the inscription of my name and the statue of my kingship!

Among all deities, the divine beloved is the one whose intercession makes the face of Šamaš shine and turns him friendly towards the king; the same idea is expressed as the conclusion of the extensive Babylonian hymn to Šamaš: "May [Aya, the sp]ouse, talk to you in the bedchamber."[104] Once again, the divine bedchamber (*bīt majjāli*) appears as the place where the goddess says a good word for the king; the role of Aya fully coincides with that of Tašmetu and Zarpani-

[96] See Maul 1999a: 285-86 with a drawing of the plan of Ebabbar, p. 314; for the sources concerning Nabonidus' restoration of Ebabbar, see Beaulieu 1989: 6-14, 25-26, 30-31, 34, 134-37.
[97] BM 50503 (82-3-23,1494):2-3, 11-12; see Maul 1999a: 292-93, 302-303.
[98] For these sources, see Matsushima 1985: 130-31, Joannès 1992: 166-68.
[99] BM 60427; see Joannès 1992: 167.
[100] Strassmeier 1887: # 660.
[101] Strassmeier 1887: # 115.
[102] Strassmeier 1887: # 252.
[103] Nabonidus 6 ii 17-23 (Langdon 1912: 258); cf. Matsushima 1985: 132. For the inscription, dated to the 2nd year of Nabonidus, see Beaulieu 1989: 25-26, 47-50.
[104] *BWL* 138: 200: [*Aja hī*]*rtum ina bīt majjāli liqbika* (Lambert 1960: 138).

tu, both of whom are addressed as "dwelling in the bedroom." It may be concluded that the ritual pleasures of the divine bedroom were not withheld from Šamaš and Aya, even though there are no sources giving any account of a ritual of love involving this couple. The datings to the months of Shebat (XI) and Iyyar (II) familiar from documents discussed above support this assumption.

2.8. The Love Ritual of the Lady of Sippar

Some Neo-Babylonian administrative documents mention another bed, namely the "bed of the Lady of Sippar" (*eršu ša Bēlet Sippar*). It, too, is supplied with textiles, as recorded by a text deriving from the 1st of Shebat (XI) of Nabonidus' 3rd year[105] and another from the month of Iyyar (II) of the 19th year of king Darius I of Persia (521-486).[106] There is no doubt that even this bed is meant for ritual use, since the love ritual of the Lady of Sippar is explicitly mentioned in four different sources.[107] These, too, are administrative documents concerning supplies for *hašādu ša Bēlet Sippar*. One of them dates from the 11th of Shebat (XI) of Nabonidus' 16th year and deals with a payment of bread consumed on this occasion.[108] Two texts, both enumerating food supplies (dates and sesame) for the love ritual of the Lady of Sippar, are dated to the month of Shebat (XI) of the 4th and 6th year of Cambyses, king of Persia (529-522).[109] The latest text, also documenting the use of grain for the bread to be consumed in that particular festival, is dated to the 14th of Shebat (XI) of the 24th year of Darius I.[110]

All this documentation leaves no doubt that the Lady of Sippar was involved in a ritual of love in the month of Shebat (XI) throughout the Neo-Babylonian period. However, several question remain unanswered, for example: who was the divine partner of the goddess? And, what is still more important: who was the Lady of Sippar? It would seem natural to identify her with Aya, but Francis Joannès considers this impossible, since both goddesses may be mentioned in sequence in one and the same document. According to him, the Lady of Sippar should rather be seen as a hypostasis of Ištar who in Old Babylonian documents is known as "the queen of Sippar."[111] If this is true, we have to reckon with two Neo-Babylonian rituals of divine love in Sippar, one between Šamaš and Aya and another involving the Lady of Sippar with an unknown consort. But *Bēlet Sippar* may also be understood as another appellation of Aya in Sippar, where Šamaš and Aya assumed the roles of other deities as the divine couple par excellence;[112] Aya may also have been worshipped as an aspect of Ištar as the goddess of love. The mentioning of several appellations of a deity in one and the same text is not impossible, especially if reference is made to the statues of the deities representing their different hypostases.

At this turn, one should pay attention to another administrative list from the 6th of Adar (XII) of Nabonidus' 5th year.[113] This

[105] Strassmeier 1887: # 125; thus according to the reading of Joannès 1992: 167 n. 32.
[106] *CT* 2 2; see Joannès 1992: 181-83.
[107] For these sources, see Joannès 1992: 167.
[108] *CT* 55 282.
[109] Strassmeier 1890: ## 265 and 342. Note that Joannès 1992: 167 n. 35 reads ^{d}GAŠAN ZIMBIR.KI instead of ^{d}BALAG.DI, resolving the problem of the identity of the goddess (cf. Matsushima 1985: 133-34).
[110] *CT* 57 141.
[111] Joannès 1992: 168. According to him, the texts in question are economic, but he does not give any textual references.
[112] Aya is sometimes called "the beloved of Marduk" (*hīrat Marduk*), whereby Šamaš assumes the role of Marduk; see Maul 1999a: 306-309.
[113] *GCCI* 1 386; see Matsushima 1988: 115-16.

text records the expenditure of not only 11¾ shekels of gold for necklaces used in the love ritual of the Lady of Uruk (*hašādu ša Bēlet Uruk*), but also ⅓ shekel of gold for a necklace of Aya and the "daughters of Ebabbar."[114] The juxtaposition of the Lady of Uruk and Aya remains obscure. They seem to appear as separate deities, but, since the necklaces are surely needed for cult images, it may again be asked whether we have to do with just two aspects of one Goddess, represented by separate images. The identity of the Lady of Uruk is also unclear; most often, though, this designation is used of Ištar and Nanaya. It should be noted that the text describing the love ritual of Nabû and Nanaya actually calls Nanaya "the Lady" (*Bēltu*) and mentions Eanna, the temple in Uruk where both Ištar and Nanaya were worshipped as if they were one deity.[115] The intriguingly elusive role differentiation of Aya, Nanaya, Ištar and the Ladies of Uruk and Sippar suggests that in rituals of love, the role and function of the divine female in general weighed more than names of goddesses compatible with the local religious traditions.

2.9. Anu and Antu in Uruk

Our last established divine couple constitutes Anu and Antu, the Sumerian God of Heaven and his spouse. After a long period as a *deus otiosus*, Anu gained new importance in Seleucid Uruk, where he was identified with Tammuz[116] and Aššur.[117] The love ritual of Anu and Antu – now assuming the role of Ištar who also is known as Anu's spouse – is likewise documented in sources coming from Seleucid Uruk. In a catalogue of offerings to "Anu, Antu and all gods," the *parṣē hašādu*, ritual of love, is listed among other regular festivals during the liturgical year of the temples of Uruk.[118] The cultic text concerning the akitu-festival of Anu in Uruk in the month of Tishri (VII) implies that the ritual of love was celebrated at the very outset of this festival:[119]

> *Tašrītu* UD.1.KAM *Enlil Ēa u šūt Uruk elabbišū / narkabat Anu kaspi narkabat Anu hurāṣi ūmu iltiššu adi* UD.8.KAM *itti tardennu ša šēri ana bīt akītu elīt ša Anu illakma / nārū ina pānīšunu illak / parṣi ša hašādu ina Ehilikugga Enir ša Ehilianna bīt Nanāja uptarraṣ*
>
> In the month of Tishri (VII), on the first day, Enlil, Ea and the gods of Uruk are dressed. / The silver chariot of Anu and the golden chariot of Anu make a daily tour, with a cultic breakfast, to the upper *akītu*-house of Anu until the 8th day. / The musicians go before them. / The ritual of love is performed in Ehilikugga, that is, the Enir of Ehilianna, temple of Nanaya.

This description implies that there was a special shrine for the love ritual called Ehilikugga or Enir,[120] that belonged to Ehilianna, the "House of Heavenly Allurement" of Nanaya – where, as we know, her love rituals were celebrated as well. The ritual was going on from the 1st until the 8th of Tishri (VII), during which a daily procession of the chariots of Anu to his *akītu*-

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[114] The *mārāti Ebabbar* are mentioned also in Strassmeier 1887 ## 115 and 252. Since the expression in both cases is preceded by divine names, it may designate the lesser goddesses of Ebabbar

[115] See, e.g., Langdon 1923, which includes a long list of offerings established in Uruk for Ištar and Nanaya.

[116] See Ebeling 1932 and Leick 1991: 4-6.

[117] See Beaulieu 1997: 65-72.

[118] AO 6451:35-39, r. 35-39 (Thureau-Dangin 1921: 63, 65, 77, 79, 82, 85; cf. Matsushima 1988: 111-12).

[119] AO 6459:1-5 (Thureau-Dangin 1921: 66, 89, 93-94; cf. Matsushima 1988: 112).

[120] Note that the sanctuary of Ištar in Uruk is called Enirgalanna "House of the Great Heavenly Support" in Esarhaddon's Uruk B inscription: *Enirgalanna bēt papāhi Ištār bēltīja ša qereb Eanna* "Enirgalanna, the cella of my Lady Ištar within Eanna" (Borger 1956: 76 [§ 48]:11).

house took place, presumably with the purpose of bringing a ritual breakfast to the gods and to those who attended the ritual. On the 8th day, it appears, the door before Anu and Antu is opened and Anu steps down to the courtyard.[121] At least from now on, even the king takes part in the ritual, performing sacrifices together with the high priest. The rest of the text gives an account of the libations and the sacrificial meals until the 11th day of the ritual.[122]

The Enir/Ehilikugga shrine is explicitly called "the golden bedchamber of Antu" (*Enir bīt erši ša hurāṣi ša Antum*) in another text dealing with a nocturnal festival (*bajjatu*) likewise involving Anu and Antu.[123] It is first described how the "Scepter" and the "Sandal" (*haṭṭu u šēnu*) arise and descend to the courtyard with gods and goddesses. The incantation priest purifies the "Sceptre" who goes in and occupies his place, while the gods Papsukkal, Nusku and Ša take their seats on the forecourt of Anu. Consequently, the "Sandal," together with the "daughters" of Anu and Uruk come, the "Sandal" enters the "golden bedchamber of Antu" stationing herself on the "footstool," and the "daughters," i.e., goddesses, remain on the forecourt of Antu.[124] The remaining part of the text includes a long description of the sacrificial meals, incense-burning and the prayers performed during the nocturnal ritual, in which even the inhabitants of the land take part in their homes making offerings to Anu and Antu, and the guards on the streets and at the gates of the city light torches.[125] Finally, on the 17th day of unknown month (the beginning of the text is destroyed), 40 minutes before sunrise, the door is opened before Anu and Antu, and breakfast is served to the divine couple.[126] Obviously, "Sceptre" and "Sandal" are nicknames of Anu and Antu. While the "Sceptre," besides the unmistakable phallic symbolism, can be interpreted as the symbol of Anu's authority as the supreme god, the "Sandal" is more difficult to explain. Of course, loosening of a sandal (*šēnam paṭārum*) belongs to erotic imagery as *pars pro toto* of stripping off,[127] and in figurative speech it is sometimes used of redemption.[128] In the Book of Ruth this symbolism includes even marriage.[129] This may be a possible interpretation even here, but the question remains, from whom would the father of gods have redeemed his wife, and why is the wife herself called "Sandal."

The love ritual of Anu and Antu appears to be a popular religious festival in 2nd-century Uruk. The constitutive elements – the chariot of the god, the divine couple's entering the bedroom and their staying there for a few days, sacrificial meals and so on, not to mention the fact that the bedchamber of Antu is situated in the very temple where the love of Nanaya for her spouse is celebrated, leave no doubt that it continues the tradition of divine love rituals well known from the previously discussed sources.

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[121] AO 6459: 16; cf. Nabû's coming to the "threshing floor" SAA 13 78:15-16.

[122] The text goes on with the rest of the obverse of AO 6459, both sides of AO 6465 and the reverse of AO 6459; see Thureau-Dangin 1921: 66-67 (copy of AO 6459), 72 (copy of AO 6465), 89-99 (transliteration and translation).

[123] AO 6460 (Thureau-Dangin 1921: 68-69, 118-25; cf. Matsushima 1988: 113-15).

[124] AO 6460:2-8.

[125] AO 6460:9-r. 27.

[126] AO 6460 r. 28ff. (like the beginning, the end of the text on the reverse side is destroyed).

[127] Thus in the "Babylonian Ballad," line 20: *puṭur puṭur šēnīka* "Loosen, loosen your sandals!" (Black 1983: 31).

[128] It is used in the prophetic oracle from Ešnunna: *šīn mātim elītim u šapl ītim tapaṭṭar makkūr mātim elītim u šaplītim tebedde* "You will ransom the upper and lower country, you will amass the riches of the upper and lower country" (FLP 1674:14-17; see Ellis 1987: 261-63).

[129] Cf. Ruth 4:7-8, where pulling off the sandal and giving it to the other party is the symbol of the redemption of property, in this case of Ruth and the patrimony of her late husband.

2.10. Why Rituals of Divine Love?

The brief survey of sources has shown that, according to the existing records, divine love rituals involving different divine couples have been celebrated in Assyria, Babylonia and possibly even in Palestine, Egypt and Persia from the Sargonid era to the Persian and Hellenistic times. Three months of the year distinguish themselves as the principal seasons of these festivals. Iyyar (II) is the month of the celebration of the love ritual of Nabû and Tašmetu in Calah, the *hadaššūtu* of Nabû and Nanaya in Borsippa or Uruk and rituals involving Šamaš and Aya in Sippar. Shebat (XI) is the month of Mullissu's love ritual in Assur, the *hašādu* of Marduk and Zarpanitu in Babylon as well as further rituals of Šamaš and Aya and the Lady of Sippar. This was also the month of the alleged sacrilege of Nabû-šumu-iškun. Moreover, the New Year festival in the month of Tishri (VII) includes love rituals of Anu and Antu in Uruk, Šamaš and Aya in Sippar, and, possibly, Nanaya according to Papyrus Amherst 63. The only source deviating from these dates is the narrative of 2 Maccabees about the unfortunate attempt of Antiochus IV to "marry" Nanaya in the month of Kislev (IX) in Susa.

While many details of the rituals in different times and places remain obscure, the procession of the gods to the bedroom, their love-making there, and the accompanying sacrificial meals seem to have belonged to the standard procedure virtually everywhere. By and large, there is no grave discrepancy given by the dispersed and disparate collection of sources in the picture of the basic framework of the ritual, which remains rather consistent all along the line. There is no single allusion to putting the divine love-making into practice according to the best tradition of the fertility cult ideology, that is, by means of a concrete sexual union between the king and the priestess or other cultic functionaries. The bed was certainly there, but no specific hints are given to us as to how it was used and how the erotic interaction of the gods was symbolized; presumably the deities were represented by their statues and/or symbols which were transported ceremonially to and from the bedchamber. In addition to the king whose ritual role, though, is rather indefinite and indicated in just a few sources, the only persons that are said to take an active part in the ritual are the temple administrator (*hazannu*) who is in charge of the ritual (SAA 13 78:12-14; SAA 13 70: 10) and who stays in the bedchamber during it (SAA 13 70:15-17), the "chariot driver of the gods" (*mukīl appāti ša ilāni*) who takes care of their transportation (SAA 13 78:20-r.5), and the "apprentices" (*šamallû*) who make the offerings in the temple of Nabû (SAA 13 78 r. 6-9). A legion of other personnel taking care of the processions and sacrificial meals must, of course, have been involved in the ritual.

Whatever role the king may have concretely assumed on each occasion, the royal significance of the ritual is beyond doubt. Some texts quoted above already give a clue to a basic idea repeatedly manifested in the sources: the intercession of the goddess on behalf of the king, performed by Tašmetu, Zarpanitu and Aya in the documents quoted above. The intercession can be found in royal inscriptions with a reference to the goddess dwelling in her sanctuary which automatically leads the thoughts to love rituals.[130]

The royal concern of the celebration of

[130] See the colophon quoted above (note 46, Hunger 1968 # 338) and cf. e.g., Esarhaddon Uruk B: 16-17 (Borger 1956: 76 [§ 48]): *Ištār Uruk bēltu ṣīrti ina qereb bīt papāhi šuāte hadiš ina ašābīki jāti Aššūr-ahu-iddina šar māt Aššūr amat damiqtīja liššakin šaptukki* "O Ištar in Uruk, the superior lady, when you happily dwell in

divine love finds a clear expression also in the letters of the Neo-Assyrian temple officials concerning the ritual of Nabû and Tašmetu. In the words of Nabû-šumu-iddina (SAA 13 78: 11-21):

> *ana buluṭ napšāte ša mār šarri bēlīja lušallimū lēpušū / mīnu ša mār šarri bēlī išapparanni / Bēl Nabû ša ina Šabāṭu hašaddašanūni napšāte ša mār šarri bēlīja liṣṣurū / šarrūtka ana ṣāt ūme lušallikū*
>
> For the sake of the life of the crown prince, my lord, they should perform the rites of their gods to perfection. / What are the written instructions of the crown prince, my lord? / May Bel and Nabû who are betrothed in the month of Shebat (XI), protect the life of the crown prince, my lord. / May they extend your kingship to the end of time.

A similar concern for the royal family as the beneficiaries of the ritual is articulated by Urdu-Nabû (SAA 13 56 r. 6-17):

> *niqi*[*āti*] *ša Aššūr-bāni-apli* [*mār*] *ša*[*rri rab*]*iu ša Šamaš-šumu-ukīn mār šarri Bābili ša Šerûʾa-eṭērat ša Aššūr-mukīn-palêja ša Ašš*[*ūr-et*]*el-šamê-erṣeti-muballissu ṭēmu assakan / niqiātīšunu u*[*bbal ina*] *pān Nabû Tašmē*[*tum*] *ina bēt er*[*ši*] *eppa*[*š*] */ meat šanāti luballiṭūšunu marʾēšunu mar marêʾšunu uptataršumū šarru bēlī emmar*
>
> I have given instructions about the offering[s] for Assurbanipal, the gr[eat cro]wn prince, for Šamaš-šumu-ukin, the crown prince of Babylon, for Šeru'a-eṭerat, for Aššur-mukin-paleya, and for Ašš[ur-et]el-šame-erṣeti-muballissu. / I [will bri]ng their offerings before Nabû and Tašme[tu], and will perform them in the [be]droom. / May they allow them to live 100 years. Their children and grandchildren will grow old, and the king, my lord, will see it.

The inscription of Assurbanipal concerning the love ritual of Marduk and Zarpanitu is most emphatic of the divine blessing emanating from the favorable words the deities speak to each other in the bedroom in favor of Assurbanipal – and, as the reverse of the medal, against his enemies.[131] In fact, they seem to enter the bedroom and make love for that particular reason. Assurbanipal arranges the whole scenario "for the sake of his life and for the lengthening of his days." Everything points to the conclusion that the purpose and function of the divine love-making was to establish the kingship and support the king and his family. Thanks to the divine intercession, he was worthy of participating in the love of the gods and sharing the favors and blessing caused by this love.

The idea of the intercession of the goddess is not restricted in rituals of love. It is propagated also by Neo-Assyrian prophets who transmit the intercesson of Ištar/Mullissu to the king without a reference to love rituals but certainly clinging to the same ideology. In prophetic texts the goddess speaks on behalf of the king before the council of gods, effecting a decision in his favor.[132] In older poetry, the intercession

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your cella, may a favorable word for me, Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, be uttered by your lips"; and the variant Uruk C: 16-17 (Borger 1956: 77 [§ 49]): *Nanāja Uruk bēltu ṣīrti ina qereb bīt papāhi šuāte hadiš ina ašābīki jāti Aššūr-ahu-iddina šar māt Aššūr ina mahar Nabû hāʾirīki tisqari bānīti* "O Nanaya of Uruk, the superior lady, when you happily dwell in your cella, may you speak a favorable word for me, Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, before Nabû, your spouse"; Nabonidus 1 ii 38-39 (Langdon 1912: 224): *Nikkal ummu ilāni rabûti ina mahar Sîn narāmīšu liqbâ banītī* "May Nikkal, the mother of the great gods, speak favorably on my behalf before Sin, her beloved."

[131] Above, K 2411 (note 75); cf. SAA 12 97:7-r.1: *Marduk Zarpānītum* [*x x x*] *palâšu issu māt lihalliq*[*ū*] *Nabû ṭupšar Esaggil ūmēšu arkūti likarri Tašmētum hīrat Nabium ina pān Nabium hāʾirīša lemuttašu littašqir* "(May) Marduk and [*his*] *s*[*pous*]*e* Zarpanitu make his dynasty disappear from the land; may Nabû, the scribe of Esaggil, shorten his long days and may Tašmetu, the spouse of Nabû, speak unfavorably of him in the presence of her husband Nabû"; similarly SAA 12 95:13-r.5; SAA 12 96 r. 2-5 (dated to Sin-šarru-iškun).

[132] Cf. SAA 9 9:20: *ina puhur ilāni kalāmi aqṭibi balāṭaka* "I (Ištar/Mullissu) have ordained life for you in the assembly of all the gods"; SAA 13 139:1-5 [*anāku*]

may have a clearly amatory context, though, as in the Love Lyrics of Nanaya and Muati, where the goddess, after a flirting description of her beloved, puts the following in his mouth (VAT 17347: 14): *šarrum lū dari ina qabêki Abī-ešuh lū dar*[*i ina qabêki*] "Let the king live for ever at your command! Let Abi-ešuh live for ever [at your command]!"[133] Even more sympathy of the goddess for the city and king of Babylon is expressed elsewhere in the poem.[134]

Another example can be found in an Old Babylonian hymn to Ištar (AO 4479: 45-59):[135]

> *išti Anim hāwirīša tēteršaššum dāriam balāṭam arkam mādātim šanāt balāṭim ana Ammiditāna tušatlim Ištār tattadin siqrušša tušaknišaššum kibrāt erbēm ana šēpīšu u naphar kalīšunu dadmī taṣṣammissunūti ana nīrīšu*[136]
>
> *bibil libbīša zamār lalêša naṭûmma ana pîšu siqri Ēa īpuša ešmēma tanittāša irīussu libluṭmi šarrāšu lirāmšu addariš*
>
> *Ištār ana Ammiditāna šarri rā'imīki arkam dāriam balāṭam šurkī libluṭ*
>
> She (Ištar) kept entreating Anu, her beloved, a long and everlasting life for him. Everlasting years of life you, Ištar, have granted and given to Ammiditana! According to her command she has subjugated the four regions under his feet, each and every dwelling place she has submitted to his yoke.
>
> The desire of her heart, the song of her charm is fit for his mouth. He carried out what Ea said, he listened to her praise and rejoiced over him. Long live his king, he shall love him forever!
>
> Ištar, grant long and everlasting life to Ammiditana, the king whom you love.
> May he live!

In this hymn, Ištar is presented as speaking on behalf of Ammiditana – the follower of Abi-ešuh as the king of Babylonia in the first half of the 17th century – before Anu, the supreme god, whereas the "order of Ea," his son and the god of wisdom, refers to Ea's position as the determiner of destinies and to leadership of the divine council.[137] Indeed, the goddess, who herself gives commands and gives life to the king, seems to be authorized to do so by male gods. She is the intermediator between the great gods and the king, and when the king acts according to the divine decisions, the goddess praises the great gods, who then rejoice over him. But why has the goddess two lovers, the divine and the human, and who is the male person acting in the middle section of the above quotation? Anu, or the king, or both at the same time?

This text may correspond with the two-in-one role of the king in the rituals of divine love.[138] As the earthly representative of the divine, the king symbolically assumes the role of the beloved of the goddess, acting as the benefactor of the mankind upon the intercession of the goddess. Since he by the same token was the rep-

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Bēl ētarba issi Mu[*ll*]*issu asillim Aššūr-bāni-apli šar māt Aššūr ša turabbīni* [*l*]*ā tapallah* "[I] am Bel. I have entered and reconciled with Mullissu. Assurbanipal, king of Assyria whom she raised: Fear not!" See Nissinen 2000: 96-97.

[133] Lambert 1966: 49, 51; cf. Pomponio 1978: 42-44.

[134] VAT 17347 r. 3-7 (Lambert 1966: 49, 51): *tappal*[*is B*]*ābilam ina īnīša dam*[*qātim …*] *takrub*[*šu t*]*aqtabi dumuqšu* […] *ūmīša balāṭa*[*m an*]*a šarri āšibīšu* [……] *Nanāja balāṭa*[*m an*]*a šarri Abī-eš*[*uh ……*] *tušūšibšu ina šupat nīhti* […] "She looked on Babylon with her kind[ly] eyes […] She blessed [it], she decreed its prosperity […] Every day [she …s] health [for] the king who lives in it […] Nanaya […s] health [for] the king Abieš[uh …] She set him in a quiet abode […]"

[135] Thureau-Dangin 1925: 170-71; cf. Groneberg 1999: 169-71.

[136] Written *a-ni-ri-i-ši-ú*; cf. *AHw* 794.

[137] Ea has this position at least in ARM 26 208; see Uehlinger 1992: 351-52. For the prominence of Ea, especially in association with the king's behavior, see Hurowitz 1998. Note the repeated formula *Ēa balāṭka liqbi* "May Ea speak for your life" in the Middle Assyrian song list; see below, n. 187.

[138] For the double role of the king, see Parpola 1993: xv-xvii, Maul 1999b.

resentative of the mankind before the heavenly world, he himself needs the divine intercession, and the blessing bestowed upon him was in fact granted to the whole people. The processions on the streets made it possible for the inhabitants of the city to be part of the ritual; in Uruk, it says, the people celebrated Anu's and Antu's night of love in their homes. The people participated in the ritual through the person of the king, and the mutual devotion of the deities to each other found a counterpart in the devotion of the worshippers to the gods, thus even the worshippers participated in the divine love and shared its blessings in a mystical or, should we say, sacramental way.

As regards the gender matrix involving divine male-female gender, it is interesting to note how it mirrors the human male-female gender matrix of the patriarchal society. The gender differentiation is clearly based on a hierarchical ladder, on which the female deity occupies the step below the male deity. In general (and with the meaningful exception of Ištar!), the goddesses of Mesopotamia seldom assume a role independent of their divine spouses; we have already noted how the temple officials report the movements of Nabû in the first place and sometimes do not bother to mention Tašmetu at all. On the other hand, some rituals, like the *quršu* of Mullissu and the love ritual of the Lady of Sippar, are referred to only by the name of the goddess which leaves us in uncertainty about the male deity altogether. While subordinate to her divine spouse, "in front of" whom (*ina pān*) the goddess speaks on behalf of the king, she has in the capacity of intercessor a role that makes her the central figure and the influential party of the divine love ritual: what the goddess says, the god performs; woman's head is man, but woman is the neck that makes the head turn. This is the role of Esther, of Ruth, and many other women in the Hebrew Bible who make use of what were and still often are understood as female qualities, like empathy, compassion and love of mankind of which the self-esteemed and aggressive man must be reminded. Especially from prophetic sources, it becomes clear that intercession on behalf of the king and country before the divine council is predominantly a female function.[139] In rituals of divine love, the intercessory function is transferred into the privacy of the divine bedroom, where the mutual love of the gods makes it even more effective.

3. Poetry of Divine Love

First-millennium Mesopotamian sources, even though rather informative about love rituals of different deities in different cities, do not provide a corpus of love poetry comparable in volume and thematic consistency to the Sumerian love songs which, on the other hand, are our only source of Sumerian rituals. The meager set of first-millennium sources can be substantially enriched by prolonging the time-span and including the remains of poetry from the Middle Assyrian period (ca. 1100 BC) and even some Old Babylonian poems, a couple of which have already been quoted previously to illuminate the function and purpose of rituals of divine love. Even though the reading of this

[139] For prophets as the channel, through which the intercession of the goddess is bestowed upon people, see Nissinen 2000: 96-97.

poetry is hampered by the fragmentary state of the texts, it rewards the reader with some interesting and necessary viewpoints.

3.1. Nabû and Tašmetu

The Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu (SAA 3 14) not only constitutes the closest Mesopotamian parallel to the Song of Songs known thus far,[140] it is also the best preserved cuneiform love poem in the Akkadian language; there is only a break of a few lines in the middle of the text due to the damage of the tablet. The Love Lyrics form a poetic composition with a dramatic design and clearly distinguishable episodes. The lines are divided between three parties: Nabû and Tašmetu who have a dialogue with each other, and a chorus, whose speech motivates and introduces the interplay of the gods, leads forward the action and links the parts of the text together.

The text begins with the devotion of the chorus to Nabû and Tašmetu (lines 1-5), an expression of the worshippers of their participation in the ritual and blessings of divine love. This introductory episode is followed by invitations to the sanctuary. First, Tašmetu is urged to enter her cella (lines 6-8), after which she presents her sanctuary as the shade of cedar, cypress and juniper, prepared for the king, for his magnates and "for my Nabû and my games" (lines 9-11). In the next scene, Tašmetu is sitting in the lap of Nabû, anxious to make him happy "in the garden" and "in the tablet house," thus referring to the dwellings of love and wisdom as the scene of the divine encounter. Nabû answers her but most of the answer is broken away (lines 12-19). The rest of the obverse of which only a few words are left, may have contained a description of a procession of goddesses (lines 20ff).

On the reverse, Nabû promises a new chariot for Tašmetu and describes her in the *waṣf* style, comparing the members of her body to a gazelle, to an apple and to precious stones (lines r. 3-8). Related body descriptions can be found in so-called god-description texts belonging to mystical and cultic explanatory works, in which the divine presence is made real in a mystical sense by identification of parts of the divine body with observable objects.[141] This kind of description has found its way in love poetry as well, thus loading the erotic imagery, and also the described body, whether human or divine, with a good deal of mystical power.[142]

The body description is followed by a nocturnal scene happening in the bedroom (*bēt erši*) of Tašmetu, who enters the room in exuberant outfit, rinses herself, climbs up onto the bed and weeps. Nabû springs up from the dark and wipes away her tears (lines r. 9-13). The chorus urges him to ask a question, so Nabû asks why Tašmetu is adorned and she answers: "So that I may go to the garden with you, my Nabû" (lines r. 14-16). Upon Tašmetu's yearning to go to the garden with Nabû (lines r. 17-21), the chorus encourages the gods (or Nabû[143]) to "bind and harness" their days and nights to the garden (lines r. 22-24), and the text ends with Nabû's invitation of Tašmetu to the garden (lines r. 25-32).

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[140] The text, IM 3233 = TIM 9 54 (van Dijk 1957, pl. 26-27 = 1976, pl. 42-43) is edited by Matsushima 1987 and Livingstone 1989 (cf. Livingstone 1997); for the parallelism with the Song of Songs, cf. Lambert 1987: 27, Watson 1995: 261, Nissinen 1998a.

[141] E.g., SAA 3 38 r. 9-17; SAA 3 39:1-18; see Livingstone 1986: 92-112; Nissinen 1998a: 610-14. [See also the contribution of J. Hämeen-Anttila in this volume (RMW).]

[142] This can be seen as the religio-historical root, if not the implied meaning, of the *waṣf* style member-for-member description which makes the modern reader concerned about the voyeuristic (male) gaze and the absence of the real body; cf. Exum 2000: 32-34.

[143] The imperative *ru-uk-sa* ("bind!") can be interpreted as a ventive sg. 2. masc. (*ruksa*), or as pl. 2. (*ruksā*).

The ritual setting of the text is beyond any serious doubt. Without being a detailed ritual description, the Love Lyrics clearly reflect different phases of the love ritual of Nabû and Tašmetu discernible from other sources, above all the entrance of the gods to the ceremonial bedchamber sheltering the divine intimacies and the subsequent scene in the garden. It is noteworthy, however, that the poetry itself, save the first five lines, is not overtly "religious" but gives expression to the glowing eroticism common to ancient Near Eastern love poetry in general, evidently utilizing the same intercultural reservoir of poetic symbolism as the Egyptian, Hebrew, Ugaritic or Greek poets before and after. Just like its biblical and other ancient counterparts, the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu use the language of desire, playing with the expressions of flirt and want,[144] with the presence and absence of the beloved and sustained longing,[145] leaving much to the imagination of the reader/hearer and yielding a variety of interpretations.

Without the knowledge of the love ritual of Nabû and Tašmetu, the cultic setting of the Love Lyrics could pass the reader unnoticed. This is not to say that the poem would be empty of theological meaning. On the contrary, "the shade of the cedar, the king's shelter, the shade of the cypress, the shelter of his magnates, the shade of the sprig of juniper, the shelter of my Nabû and my games" (lines 9-11) most clearly articulates the ideology of the divine love ritual. The cella, the garden, and the tablet house of Nabû are all symbols of the paradisaical space where there is no suffering and death, but pure blessing and pleasure. In Francis Landy's words, "[t]he garden is enclosed, an island of life, planted in an earth where everything is still potential. Outside it is history and death."[146] Like the biblical garden of Eden, the garden of the love rituals is a mythical space, planted by God and accessible only in a mystical reality where there is ultimately no time, no place and no constraints of society.

This is where the people are invited by poetic and ritual means alike. The divine love affair concerns the king, his cabinet and, implicitly, the whole community. It brings about the salvation requested by the worshippers who say: "Save, sit down in the cella!" (line 7). With regard to the importance of the intercession of the goddess as a basic function of the love ritual, it is quite consistent that this request is addressed to Tašmetu who, rather than Nabû, is the central figure of the poem. She is first addressed by the choir of worshippers (lines 6-8), she seduces Nabû into lovemaking (line 15) and into the garden (lines r. 16-18), her nocturnal tears soften the heart of Nabû (lines r. 9-13). The initiative of Tašmetu in the poem, very much comparable to the active role of the woman in the Song of Songs, is noteworthy in two respects: first, the poem makes the role of the goddess much more prominent than the letters of Assyrian officials reporting on the ritual; and second, as in the Song of Songs, the divine female is very probably the creation of male authors,[147] which is interesting with regard to the gender matrix of the rituals of divine love: there is no gender equality, but the love and erotic power of the woman turns the man's heart affectionate. The reciprocal "my Nabû" and "my Tašmetu" makes mutuality win over dominance, bringing into mind the verse repeated in the Song of Songs: "My love is mine and I am his" (Cant 2:16, 6:3).

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[144] For the difference between expressions of flirt and want in the Song of Songs, see Walsh 2000: 57-81.
[145] See Walsh 2000: 94-102.
[146] Landy 1983: 191; cf. his discussion of the biblical garden imagery, pp. 189-210.
[147] See Clines 1995: 102-106, Exum 2000: 28-29.

3.2. Banitu and her Consort

Nabû's – and probably also Tašmetu's – going to the garden is paralleled by a Neo-Babylonian tablet from Sultantepe, which describes the preparing of chariots for the goddess Banitu and her anonymous consort.[148] While Banitu, the "Creatrix," is one of the appellatives of Ištar in the Neo-Assyrian period,[149] the identity of the divine consort is unclear; Karlheinz Deller opts cautiously for Ninurta.[150] Banitu gives an order "from the house of her charm" (*ultu bīt kuzbīša*) to harness a *maširu*-chariot[151] for her (lines 1-3). For the consort, again, a resplendent *narkabtu*-chariot is prepared and horses are harnessed to it (lines 4-13). The chariot of the goddess is joyously brought to a garden of juniper (*kirî burāši*) by lesser goddesses (lines 14-20). All this resembles the garden scene of the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu in which the metaphorized "bind and harness" request (*ruksā ṣamidā* lines r. 22-24) has a concrete point of reference in the chariots.

In the Sultantepe tablet, only the goddess's going to the garden is described, whereas the divine consort is represented by his chariot only; it is quite apparent, though, that even that chariot is thought to have the same destination. Presumably, the text copied on this tablet originally belonged to a larger composition which probably contained a fuller description of the love affair of Banitu and her consort. The text is actually written on a school tablet that contains another text which is in no way related to the Banitu text but also gives an impression of being an excerpt of a larger entity.

It is difficult to say anything about the cultic affiliation of this text, since there are no documents of a love ritual of Banitu at our disposal. By analogy to the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu, which undoubtedly is part of the hymnal of the ritual of these gods, and not forgetting the fact that chariots were indeed part of the actual rituals, as we have learned, it can be at least speculated that the excerpt preserved on the school tablet is all that has been preserved for us from the hymnal of a love ritual of the goddess Banitu and her beloved.[152]

3.3. Ištar and Tammuz

In the Sumerian literature, the divine love poetry presumably had its cultic context in the love ritual of Tammuz and Ištar, of which there is no evidence in the late second and first-millennium sources. This is not to say that Tammuz and Ištar would have fallen into oblivion as a divine couple. The death of Tammuz and Ištar's descent to the Underworld was a well known myth even in Neo-Assyrian times. Incantation rituals were performed under their aegis;[153] especially the time when the death of Tammuz was ritually wailed over was suitable for sickness rituals since Ištar was there "to attend to the people's concerns."[154] The bewailing of Tammuz, often assimilated to that of

[148] STT 366; see Deller 1983 and cf. Matsushima 1988: 124-25.
[149] See Parpola 1997: xviii, lxxx n. 6, 14. The popularity of this manifestation of the goddess is reflected by the numerous personal names with Banitu as the theophoric element (*Bānītu-abu-uṣri*, *Bānītu-dannat*, *Bānītu-šarrat*, *Bānītu-ummī* etc.); cf. the respective entries by Karen Radner and Kaisa Åkerman in *PNA* 1/II (Radner [ed.] 1999: 265-67).
[150] Deller 1983: 142.
[151] For this chariot, see Deller 1983: 143.
[152] So, too, Matsushima 1988: 109-10.
[153] See Farber 1977.
[154] Farber 1977: 128, lines 3-7: *ina arah Duʾūzi enūma Ištār ana Dumuzi harmīša nīšī māti ušabkû kimti amīli ašrānu pahrat Ištār izzazma pî nīšī ihâra murṣa ittabbal murṣa išakkan* "In the month of Tammuz, when Ištar makes the whole land wail over Dumuzi, his beloved, and the family of the man is gathered in a proper place, Ištar is there to attend to the people's concerns. She may take the sickness away, but she may cause sickness as well."

Adonis, is well documented from different parts of the ancient Near East, including the Neo-Assyrian empire[155] and the Hebrew Bible (Ez 8:14), until late times.[156] However, there are no sources indicating that a ritual of love belonged to this context.

The apparent cessation of the performance of the love ritual of Tammuz and Ištar did not result in the drying up of the poetic sources which still celebrated their love at least until the Middle Assyrian/Babylonian period. A prime example of love poetry from that period is the Middle Babylonian poem published by J. A. Black (BM 47507)[157] and itemized even in the Middle Assyrian song list *KAR* 158 (see below). The poem constitutes a series of passages, in which a loose narrative plot can be discerned in spite of the fact that the speakers and scenes switch many times. Black reads the poem as a fantasy of Ištar, "cast as an infatuated but reticent young girl,"[158] who imagines an amatory encounter with the "shepherd," Tammuz, (lines 1-10):

erbamma rēʾû harmi Ištārma / mašâmma rēʾû haram Ištār
erēbukka abī hadi kāšumma / ummī Nikkal tultīalkum
šamna ina mallatim tumahhirkāma
erēbukka sikkūrū lirīšūkumma / dāltum ramānīšima lippitā[*kum*]*ma*
atta sikkūru iṣu mīn tī[*deʾ*] */ mīnam tīde erēb ma*[…]
annû arâm arâm …

Come in, Shepherd, Ištar's lover, / spend the night here, Shepherd, Ištar's lover.
At your entering, my father is delighted with you, / My mother Nikkal invites you to recline.
She offered you oil in a bowl.
When you enter, may the bolts rejoice over you, / May the door open of its own accord.
You, bolt, and wood – what do you kn[ow?] / What do you know, …?
Yes, indeed! I love him, I love him! …

In this opening scene, Ištar is inside behind the bolts (cf. Cant 5:5), inviting her beloved to her parents' house (cf. Cant 3:4; 8:2) and hoping that they will give him a warm welcome. The next scene tells about Tammuz leaving his (sheep)dogs and entering the presence of Nikkal (lines 11-14), and about his repeated visits which aggravate other "shepherds," or rival suitors (lines 15-18). The scene ends – or the next scene begins – with the words *šalmat ummatum šalim šarrumma šalim Dumuzi šudad Ištār* "The …[159] is safe, the king is safe, Tammuz is safe, the beloved[160] of Ištar" (lines 19-20). What follows is a fragmentary speech of Ištar, first probably describing her pleasures together with Tammuz (*puṭur puṭur šēnīka* "loosen, loosen your sandals" line 21; *nikkal nahšum* "we shall eat, O lusty one!" lines 23, 26) and then turning the attention to the sheepfold of the "shepherd" (lines 21-35). In the final scene, the movement is reversed: now Ištar goes to the place where her beloved is feeding his flocks (lines 36-3; cf. Cant 1:7-8):

tākuš Ištār ana qereb supūrīšuma / pāša tēpuša šuātu tazzakar
māmū kī ṭābū māmū supūrīka / mûka hālilu māmīka tarbaṣi

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[155] Cf. the letters SAA 10:18, 19, 386 and the elegies in SAA 3 16.
[156] See Alster 1999 and, especially for Ez 8:14 and the West Semitic milieu, Ackerman 1992: 79-99.
[157] Black 1983 (copy, photograph, transliteration and translation). Cf. also Leick 1994: 187-89
[158] Black 1983: 30.
[159] The meaning of the word *ummatum* is unclear; see Black 1983: 33.
[160] Written *šu-da-tu* which may be a misreading for *šu-da-ad*. The word *šudadu* is equated with *raʾīmu* in a lexical list (*CT* 18 13 iv 20; see Black 1983: 33).

Ištar went to his sheepfold, / she opened her mouth and said to him:
"How pleasant are the waters, the waters of your sheepfold! / Your waters are burbling, the waters of the cattle-pen."

A colophon concludes the text, indicating that it belongs to the song series called *Māruma rāʾimni* "O young man loving me,"[161] which is a series of of *zamāru* songs included in the Middle Assyrian song list *KAR* 158. According to the colophon, the text is a library tablet of Taqišum, overseer (*šāpiru*) of an Ištar temple – the location of the temple is beyond our knowledge because of the unknown provenance of the tablet.

Tammuz appears as a shepherd also in a Middle Assyrian poem from Assur, the cuneiform copy of which is included in Ebeling's *Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Assur*; the text is published here in Simo Parpola's transliteration and translation (*LKA* 15 = VAT 14039):[162]

Obv.

1 ^{d}DUMU.ZI ^{d}U.DAR *iš-te-né-ʾe re-i-ia i-*⌜*še*⌝*-ʾe re-i-ia*
2 *it-te-ner-ru bu-la-šu i-sa-hur-ma ri-*⌜*ta*!⌝ *a-šar di-šu up-ta-ṣa-na nu-ru-*[*b*]*a*?*-*⌜*ti*?⌝
3 *i-na ap-pa-*((*pa*))*-te ša* GIŠ *ih-ta-nu-ba-ma il-lu-ru*
4 IGI.MEŠ*-šu ri-ta qer-bi-ta i-bir-ra-ma ina na-mé-e qí-ša-ta* KUR.MEŠ *i-ši-ma* ⌜*ku-up*⌝*-pi*
5 *i-mur-ma* ^{d}U.DAR *na-ra-ma i-ši-ʾi a-na gu-ub-ri* ⌜*ik-ta*⌝*-ma-ti-ma is-sà-qar-šu*

---

6 [*at-t*]*a al-ka re-i ma-ra-ni lu-ru-ku re-i-ia ri-i-ʾi bu-ul-ka*
7 [DUM]U*?* *aš-šur* ⌜*le*?⌝*-li a-na ri-ti-ni-ma ša šam-ha-at*
8 [*a*]*t-ta-ma ta-*⌜*mi*⌝*-ir-ta-ni ta-re-ʾi ter-te*?*-ne*?*-ʾi ú-šal-li-ni-ma ša š*[*am*]*-*⌜*ha-ti*⌝
9 [*x x x*]*x sa*[*r x x x*] ⌜*x*⌝*-e* ⌜*x x x-te ša*⌝ *iš-*⌜*ru-ka*⌝ *a-ba-ia-ma* ⌜*x*⌝ [*x x*]*x*
10 [*x x x x x x x x x x x*]*x ri-te ri-*⌜*piš*⌝ *x*[*x x x*] ⌜*x*⌝ *x*[*x x x*]*x*
rest broken away

Rev.

beginning broken away
1 [*x x x x x x*]*x ma* [*x*] ⌜*x x la*?⌝ GEŠTIN *ša be-*⌜*la*⌝*-*[*x*] ⌜*x*⌝
2 [*x x x x*] ^{d}UTU *ù* ⌜*x*⌝ [*x*] GÚ.GAL GIG *ù in-ni-nu*
3 [*x x x x*]*-še pi-ʾi n*[*a*]*m*?*-ha-ri ṭu-ub ši-ka-ri*
4 *x*[*x x x x x*]*x-ṣi ka-li-ku-nu* ⌜*l*⌝*i*?*-riš* ^{d}U.DAR *a-na pa-ni-ku-nu*
5 *ṣu-lu-l*[*u lit-t*]*ab-ši* UGU*-ku-nu li-a lu-ba-ri a-bu-re-e-a* ⌜*x*⌝
6 ⌜*ša* ^{md}DI!⌝*-m*[*a-n*]*u-*SAG *ni-iš qa-*⌜*ta-ti*⌝*-šu im-ta-har*
7 *id-di-na-šu* [*š*]*a e-ri-šu* ⌜*za-ma*⌝*-ru ša at-tu-ia mim-ma-ni iz-za-mur*

---

8 *ṭup-pi* 4.KÁM.MA

1 Ištar is looking for Tammuz everywhere, she seeks my shepherd, my shepherd.
2 He keeps guiding his cattle, looks for a pasture where grass veils the moist pa[rts] and *illuru*-flowers florish on the tops of the tree(s).
4 His eyes scan the pasture and meadow, and seek water-sources in the steppe and the mountain forests.
5 When Ištar saw (her) beloved, she sought him out, …ed to the shepherd's hut and said to him:

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[161] BM 47507:42; cf. *KAR* 158 i 43, viii 3.
[162] I am indebted to Prof. Simo Parpola for turning my attention to this text and for his kind permission to publish his transliteration and translation.

6 "Come, my shepherd, [yo]u, let me lead our sons to you: shepherd, your cattle, my shepherd! May [the son of] Aššur go up to our pasture, which is abundant.
8 It is you who shall shepherd our meadow, who shall shepherd our river-meadow which is abundant.
[……] the … which my father granted […… in] the pasture, increase [……]
(Break)
r. 1 [……] … wine of […] May Šamaš and [DN …] the chick-pea, wheat and *inninu*-cereal, […] the beer-jar (and)(fermenting) vat, the goodness of beer!
4 […] … all of you, may Ištar rejoice in your (pl.) presence! May there be protection for you (pl.), ……!
6 (S)he accepted the hand-lifting prayers of Shalmaneser (I), (s)he gave him what he asked for, (s)he sang the song which is all mine.

8 Tablet 4.

The imagery in both poems, BM 47507 and LKA 15, clearly goes back to similar language in the Sumerian Dumuzi-Inanna poetry, where "shepherd" is one of the most common epithets of Dumuzi,[163] and Inanna's going to his sheepfolds is a recurrent theme.[164] A related metaphor in the Sumerian poetry is the "steppe" likened to a garden as Dumuzi's dwelling place.[165] This language is employed by an Old Babylonian composition in the Musée d'art et d'histoire in Geneva, published recently by Brigitte Groneberg (MAH 16056 i 1-20):[166]

ēš rāmī šūqur u naši inibšū
… kīma hašhūri armanni mali rīšātim …

rāmī aṣēri[167] *uštāṣia u abīat*
ṣīhātīja alammi u sukannīnu uštēli

rāmī ša ṣēri hābilū literrūnimma
īhātīja talammi u nukarribu liblam

quppî addī eṭlam[*ma*] *u sukannīna luṣbatma*
ša ṣīhātīja anna ūtumalla[*m*]

Where is my beloved, the precious one?
Does he bear his fruit?[168]
… Like an apple, like a pomegranate, is he full of joy …?

My beloved to the steppe I sent, now I shall spend the night (with him),
My laughing – I shall embrace (him)! The turtle dove took wing.

My beloved of the steppe[169] let the evildoers bring back (to me)!
My laughing – you shall embrace me! The gardener shall bring (you?[170]) to me.

My stiletto, my missile, rise high for me![171]
I shall catch the turtle dove.
As to my laughing – oh yes, it fills me altogether!

The text of the middle section, comprising more than a half of the entire composition, is almost completely destroyed; the text is readable again on the last column (lines iv 6-18):

[163] See Sefati 1998: 78-79 and cf., e.g., the texts entitled "Meeting in the Shepherd's Quarters" (DI V), "Dumuzi's Wedding" (DI C_1) and "The Shepherd and the Farmer" (SF) in Sefati1998: 257-59, 286-300, 324-43.
[164] See, e.g., Sefati 1998: 236-40 (DI R A 20-28, C 9-18), 257-58 (DI V).
[165] See Sefati 1998: 166 (DI E 2), 187-88 (DI H r. 19, 21), 221, 225 (DI P iii 11), 261, 263 (DI W 37), 328, 333 (SF 72-73); cf. Groneberg 1999: 176.
[166] Groneberg 1999: 177-81.
[167] Written *a-ṣe-ri* for *ana ṣēri*.
[168] For the sexual overtones of *inbu*, which is used of female sex-appeal and male genitals alike, see Groneberg 1999: 182-84.
[169] Or: "who belongs to the steppe."
[170] Or an aphrodisiac (cf. Groneberg 1999: 178 n. 41).
[171] For this and alternative translations, see Groneberg 1999: 179 n. 42.

[*eg*]*irrê šulmīka u dār balāṭīka*
[*l*]*išrukku Ištar Ammiditāna edišma balṭāša*
rā'imtum libši ilibbīka idamiqti[172] *šuqirši*
limdā limdā šita'ala
mā šurrāssu inhe'ūja u ṣeher râmī

GIŠ.GI$_4$.GÁL.BI

4 *irātum iškar ēš rāmī šūqur*

(As) a [si]gn of your well-being and of the endurance of your life,
may Ištar grant to you, Ammiditana, once again her life!
May the beloved dwell in your heart, may her precious one be in good (care).
Learn (pl.), learn, and ask each other:
If my love begins[173] with a "woe" sigh, it is slight!

Summary

Four *irtum* songs of the series "Where is my beloved, the precious one?"

The deities are not named in the beginning section, but the general affinity with Dumuzi-Inanna poems strongly suggests this divine couple. The last section explicitly mentions Ištar, and identifies her beloved as Ammiditana, king of Babylonia and successor of the above-mentioned Abi-ešuh in the second part of the first half of the 17th century. The provenance of the Geneva composition is unknown, but Groneberg suggests that it was composed when Ammiditana made a donation for the Ištar temple of Kiš in his 29th year.[174] According to the colophon, this library tablet originally consisted of four columns and included a series of four *irtum* ("breast") songs which is one of the designations of Akkadian love songs.

In the framework of this article, the three sets of love poetry, BM 47507, *LKA* 15 and MAH 16056, are significant from a threefold perspective, i.e., from the point of view of cult, kingship and gender.

The colophons indicate that the tablets belonged to organized libraries as a part of series of poetry of similar type, evidently forming part of the scribal repertoire based on the Sumerian tradition of love poetry. The fact that one of them, BM 47507, belonged to the library of a high official of a local temple of Ištar, is not surprising with regard to the prominent role of that goddess in the poem in question, and it opens up the possibility of the use of the poem in the rituals of the goddess.[175] It also deserves attention that the concluding passages of both *LKA* 15 and MAH 16056 use pl. 2. forms, as if addressing a group of worshippers: "May Ištar rejoice in your presence! May there be protection for you" (*LKA* 15 r. 4-5); "Learn, learn, and ask each other!" (MAH 16056 iv 12). Moreover, the foodstuff particularized on the first lines of the reverse of *LKA* 15 – wine, beer, chick-peas, wheat(bread) and cereal – is reminiscent of the commodities assigned to the *quršu* of Mullissu[176] and may refer to a (sacrificial) meal on a similar occasion. Hence, the assumption of a ritual context of these poems is not without foundation, even though it cannot be verified by other extant documents.

If the cultic affiliation of the texts remains somewhat faint, their royal context is quite explicit, especially in the two texts which mention specific Mesopotamian kings. The concluding lines of *LKA* 15 set the framework, within which the whole composition should be read. The loving encounter of Ištar and Tammuz, as well as the eventually described ritual meal, aims at one royal

[172] Written *i-li-ib-bi-ka* and *i-da-mi-iq-ti* for *ina libbīka* and *ina damiqti*.
[173] For the translation 'beginning' of *šurrâtu*, see Groneberg 1999: 181 n. 53.
[174] Groneberg 1999: 171-72. For another love poem from Kiš, see Westenholz 1987.
[175] Cf. Leick 1994: 189.
[176] Wine, beer, chick-peas and bread are standard items of the lists of offerings of the *quršu* of Mullissu; cf. SAA 7 183-186, 207-210, 215-216.

purpose: the acceptance of the prayers of Shalmaneser I, king of Assyria (1273-1244). The verbal forms do not reveal the gender of the deity who is said to accept his prayers and to give him what he has asked for, but the outcome of the divine love, the well-being and success of the king, is fully consistent with the function of the divine love rituals. The same idea is made explicit in the Geneva composition which more straightforwardly calls the king the beloved of the goddess and identifies the king with her divine spouse, thus merging together the roles of the king and the god.[177] In the case of the "Babylonian Ballad," the royal concern is less explicit. No specific king is mentioned, and the word *šarru* occurs only once, but the occurrence is all the more revealing. Exactly in the middle of the poem, before the encounter of Tammuz and Ištar, it says: *šalim šarrumma šalim Dumuzi šudad Ištār* "The king is safe, Tammuz is safe, the beloved of Ištar" (lines 19-20). In a superficial reading, this would only mean that Tammuz is in the mood, but at the same time, probably intentionally, it enables the reader to mingle the god with the actual king according to the best Sumerian traditions.[178]

Finally, as in previous cases, the role of the woman calls for attention. All three poems[179] are spoken by a female voice. Again, the poems play with the presence and absence of the beloved; again, much is left to the imagination and interpretation of the reader/hearer. The goddess is the central figure of all activity. She takes the initiative, she invites her beloved and goes after him. Even this is consistent, not only with the Song of Songs and the roles of Dumuzi and Inanna in the Sumerian poetry,[180] but also with the gender matrix of the divine love rituals.

3.4. The Middle Assyrian Song List

Our inventory of Akkadian love poetry cannot exclude the list of song incipits from Assur (*KAR* 158), which in all likelihood comes from Middle Assyrian times, ca. 1100 BC.[181] The preserved part of the Middle Assyrian list (*KAR* 158) comprises about 275 of the original ca. 400 incipits of love songs, all but one[182] of which are lost or still unidentified. Like the half-a-millennium older Geneva composition discussed above, one part of these songs are designated as *irtum*.[183] The startling affinity of the language of these song fragments with the Song of Songs was noticed already by Erich Ebeling, their publisher, who affiliated them with the Tammuz and Ištar cult and identified the origin of the Song of Songs in religious circles as well,[184] and by T. J. Meek who was even more determined about the background of the Song of Songs in the Tammuz cult.[185] Since the heyday of the fertility cult ideology, and along with the decreasing scholarly interest in Mesopotamian prototypes of the Song of Songs, even the Middle Assyrian Song List has seldom been connected

[177] Cf. Groneberg 1999: 176.
[178] For the identification of the king (as the **en** of Uruk) with Dumuzi, the spouse of Inanna, see Steinkeller 1999: 130-31 and, e.g., Sefati 1998: 301-306 (DI D_1).
[179] The same is true for the Old Babylonian love lyrics in Lambert 1966 and Westenholz 1987.
[180] See Sefati 1998: 108-109.
[181] Copy Ebeling 1919: 273-76, edition Ebeling 1922; cf. Ebeling 1924; Loretz 1964: 196-201; Pope 1977: 146-47; Black 1983: 25, 28-29. A fragment of a similar list (BM 59484) is published by Finkel 1988. A precise dating of the text is impossible, since its excavation number has been lost; it has been assigned to the library of Tiglath-Pileser I (1114-1076) that was continued by Tukulti-Ninurta II (890-884; see Weidner 1952/53: 199).
[182] I.e., the above discussed BM 47507 (Black 1983), equals *KAR* 158 i 6.
[183] *KAR* 158 vii 6, 24.
[184] Ebeling 1924: lxviii-lxix (abstract of a paper read at Deutscher Orientalistentag in Munich, Oct. 3, 1924).
[185] Meek 1922/23 and 1924.

with biblical love poetry. Even the cultic context of the Middle Assyrian songs themselves has been brought under suspicion.[186] Today, however, having at hand the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu, which not only has an indisputably cultic affiliation but also bears an even greater resemblance to the Song of Songs and provides many parallels to the Middle Assyrian incipits,[187] parallels such as the following require renewed reflection in the wider context of a common Near Eastern background:

> The fragrance of cedar is your love, O lord (*KAR* 158 vii 21).
> The shade of the cedar, the king's shelter (SAA 3 14:9).
> His stature is like Lebanon, select as the cedars (Cant 5:15).
>
> How gorgeous she is, how resplendent! (KAR 158 vii 25).
> Tašmetu, looking exuberant, enters the bedroom (SAA 3 14 r. 9).
> How beautiful you are, my darling, how beautiful! (Cant 4:1).
>
> Rejoice, Nanaya, in the garden of Ebabbar that you love! (*KAR* 158 vii 38).
> Let my Tašmetu come with me to the garden (SAA 3 14 r. 25).
> I have come to my garden, my sister and bride (Cant 5:1).
>
> By night I thought of you (*KAR* 158 vii 46).
> She… got onto the bed, into a bowl … her tears flow (SAA 3 14 r.11-12).
> On my bed at night I missed him whom I love (Cant 3:1).
>
> After I lay in the bosom of the son (*KAR* 158 vii 48).
> Tašmetu fondles a bunch of gold in the lap of (my?) Nabû (SAA 3 14:12).[188]
> A bundle of myrrh is my lover to me, between my breasts he lies (Cant 1:13).
>
> A quarter of you is lapis lazuli (*KAR* 158 vii 49).
> Whose whole being is a tablet of lapis lazuli (SAA 3 14 r. 8).
> His belly is a plaque of ivory overlaid with lapis lazuli (Cant 5:14).
>
> Come and rejoice, O king! (*KAR* 158 vii 50).
> Let me make you happy [in the tab]let [house]! (SAA 3 14:16).
> Bring me to your chamber, O king! (Cant 1:4).

Without assuming any literary dependence between the texts, such an accumulation of common themes suggests a common reservoir of poetic imagery and raises questions concerning socioreligious context and function.

In view of all the similarities, it would be easy to imagine that all the above discussed poems once were included in a list similar to *KAR* 158; only the undeniable cultic background of the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu may appear as problematic in this respect if the affilitation of the Middle Assyrian songs to the Tammuz and Ištar cult is repudiated. It is true that the cultic context of the songs of the list should not be regarded as a matter of course, as may have been done under the influence of the fertility cult ideology; most of the incipits can be read without the slightest hint of any

[186] Cf., e.g., Loretz 1964: 202-3, who fully recognizes the affinity of the Song of Songs with the Middle Assyrian songs, but does not read either corpus as religious poetry.

[187] See Nissinen 1998a.

[188] For the problems of translation, see Nissinen 1998a: 588.

religious activity. Nevertheless, some of them are overtly religious (e.g., *bēlu luzmur zamār ilūtīka* "O Lord, I will sing a song of your divinity" line i 22), and attention should be paid also to the frequency of divine names appearing in them.

Many songs are dedicated to Ištar (e.g., *zamār Ištār šarra*[*ti*] *azammur* "I will sing a song of queen Ištar" line ii 6; *Ištār šarrat nīšē rā'umtu* "O Ištar, beloved queen of mankind" line vi 22) and Nanaya (e.g., *Nanāja libbaša hadâ ublamma* "Nanaya brought me her joyful heart" line ii 44), which immediately calls in mind the above discussed poetry and rituals of love, even though Nanaya is unexpectedly associated with Ebabbar (*rīšī Nanāja ina kirî Ebabbar ša tarammi* "Rejoice, Nanaya, in the garden of Ebabbar that you love!" line vii 38).[189] The male lover is called "son" (lines vii 9, 13, 16, 29, 32, 48) "lord" (lines vii 10, 20, 21), and "king" (lines vii 28, 50) – all appellations that can denote divine beings as well and thus yield an interpretation of the "king" etc. as a divine epithet, a concrete reference to the earthly ruler, or a symbolic designation of any male beloved. Finally, the repeated formula *Ēa balāṭka liqbi* "May Ea speak for your life" in the beginning of each set of *zamāru* songs included in the three first colums of the list[190] surely places the songs in the context of a royal theology. This, together with the palpable parallelism of the list with the undisputably cultic texts, should warn one against throwing the baby out with the bath water by a strictly secular interpretation, even though their eventual cultic setting cannot be demonstrated from extant sources.

3.5. Marduk, Zarpanitu and Ištar

Very different first-millennium poetry can be read from a set of sources known as "love lyrics," according to the title given by the publisher, W. G. Lambert,[191] although the texts, in the judgment of D. O. Edzard, are "weder sehr lieblich noch sehr lyrisch."[192] The texts are very difficult to read and interpret. Some of the cuneiform tablets belonging to this composition are badly damaged, and it is impossible to piece them together into a compositional unity. In any case, a collection of poetic passages arranged by Lambert in four groups can be distinguished from the Ritual Tablet which gives the poetry a cultic setting. The colophon of the Ritual Tablet indicates that it belongs to *qinajjātu*, a word which Lambert translates "regular rites"[193] but which may imply more: according to the interpretation of Edzard, it should be translated "rites against a (female) rival."[194] The Ritual Tablet consists of very brief cultic instructions and incipits of poems, some of which can be found among the poems of the fourth group.[195] The staccato style of the lines in the first group of poems gives the impression of a list of incipits, whereas the second, third and fourth group consist of

[189] In the fragment published by Finkel (1988: 17), one of the songs begins with the words *Ištar bulliṭīšu* "O Ištar, cure him" (BM 59484: 8), which rather clearly implies a context in the Tammuz and Ištar cult.

[190] *KAR* 158 i 3, 11, 19, 27, 36, 44; ii 3, 12, 20, 29, 37, 47; iii 2, 10, 18, 30, 39.

[191] See Lambert 1975 which adds substantially to the preliminary publication Lambert 1959. Cf. Edzard 1987 and Leick 1994: 239-46.

[192] Edzard 1987: 58.

[193] Lambert 1975: 98.

[194] Edzard 1987: 59-60: "Mittel, Praktiken gegen eine Nebenbuhlerin"; he derives the word from *qinītu* "female rival" which appears several times in the text of the ritual tablet.

[195] "You are the mother, Ištar of Babylon" (Ritual Tablet i 5, ii 9 = Group IV:18); "O genitals of my girl-friend, the district of Babylon is seeking a rag" (Ritual Tablet iii 10 = Group IV: 4); "Into your genitals in which you trust I will make a dog enter and will tie shut the door" (Ritual Tablet iii 7 = Group IV: 11); "Into your genitals in which you trust, like your precious stone before you" (Ritual Tablet iii 8 = Group IV: 8)

short poetic passages.

The idea of rivalry in love is not without foundation in the text, the main protagonists of which are Marduk, Zarpanitu and Ištar of Babylon who appears as the "girlfriend" or "concubine" of Marduk, whereas Zarpanitu is his wife. The ritual itself is characterized with the expressions *riksu ša Zarpānītu* and *mīlulāti ša Marduk*, which could be translated "commitment of Zarpanitu" and "(free) games of Marduk" respectively.[196] The ritual tablet begins with incipits of a lament and poems describing Zarpanitu in her cella (*papāhu*) and Marduk on the roof, apparently having a nocturnal rendez-vous with Ištar of Babylon,[197] against whom the angry wife Zarpanitu expresses open hostility:[198]

atti mannu šumki mannu
ša ana šub[*at*] *bēlīja tandanirri*
alkimma kî ša aqabbaki epši
ultu muhhi ūri ana muhhi patri muqti
sikkat parzilli muhri ana ṣi[*l*]*īki*

You, whoever you are, whatever your name is,
Who always go to the dwelling of my lord,
Come and do as I tell you!
Fall from the roof on to a dagger,
Get an iron spike in your side.

All this has led to the conviction that the cultic context of the texts is a public ritual allowing "the expression of extreme emotional disturbance"[199] by performing the ménage-à-trois involving Marduk, Zarpanitu and Ištar of Babylon. To all appearances, this ritual took place in different locations in the city of Babylon, with the Ištar temple Eturkalamma as the central scene.[200] Due to the fragmentary evidence, the sequence of ritual events cannot be discerned.

How does this ritual of divine adultery or jealousy relate to the rituals of divine love? Clearly the rituals should be regarded as separate entities. The fragmentary state of the jealousy poems does not allow far-reaching conclusions of what they originally may have included, but at least the preserved parts do not refer to such standard parts of the rituals of love as the procession of the gods and entering the bedroom. On the other hand, they do involve ritual performances of the men-women *kurgarrû* and *assinnu*,[201] who are never mentioned in connection of love rituals, but whose social and sexual liminality and the role as devotees and representatives of Ištar may motivate their participation in jealousy rituals involving their patron lady in a precarious sexual role.[202]

When it comes to poetry, is not difficult to find affinities in details between the lyrics attached to the jealousy ritual and the above discussed love literature. There are enough examples of similar use of imagery to show a common poetic tradition, the use of the *waṣf* type of body description, for example;[203] some passages could indeed be part of any poem celebrating divine love:

atti ummê Ištar Bābili
banīti šarrat Bābilājē
atti ummê gišimmaru sāndu
banīti ša ana magal banâtu
ša ana magal belû
ša ana magal banû lānšu

---

[196] Group I, Section I: 1-3 (Lambert 1975: 108-109); line 4 reads *qinnājāti ša Zarpānītum* which may be taken as a synonym of *riksu*. For the "games" of Marduk, cf. *Nabiumāja mēlulā* "Nabû and my games" in SAA 3 14: 11.

[197] Ritual Tablet i 1-5; Lambert 1975: 102-3.

[198] Group II, Column B: 26-29; cf. Ritual Tablet ii 10 = iii 18: (Lambert 1975: 104-105): "When Zarpanitum became angry she went up to the ziggurat"; ii 13: "Zarpanitum will go down to the garden and will keep crying to the gardener …"; Group I, Section I: 11: (Lambert 1975: 108-109): "In my hostility to Ištar of Babylon …"

[199] Leick 1994: 23; cf. Edzard 1987: 68-69.

[200] Ritual Tablet ii 22 (Lambert 1975: 104-105): "This is what takes place on the 4th day at noon and in the evening in the street of Eturkalamma and at the river."

[201] Ritual Tablet iii 12, 17 (Lambert 1975: 104-5).

[202] Cf. Leick 1994: 246. On *kurgarrû* and *assinnu*, see ibid., 159-62 and Nissinen 1998b: 28-35.

[203] Group I, Section III (Lambert 1975: 112-13).

You are the mother, Ištar of Babylon,
The beautiful one, the queen of the Babylonians.
You are the mother, a palm of carnelian,
Most beautiful of the beautiful ones,
Who is extremely red(?),
Whose figure is most beautiful of all.[204]

On the other hand, it is also easy to recognize that "[i]magery of the boldest kind is commonplace, and the eroticism is the most explicit for ancient Mesopotamia,"[205] giving this poetry a clearly distinguishable, at times downright pornographic image:

[*biṣṣurū ša*] *tappātīja pirik Bābili singu isahh*[*ur*]
[*ana ka*]*pāri ša rēmīki ana kapāri ša libiššatīki*
[*u*] *ana Bābilājāti liqbi singu lā inamdināniššši*
[*a*]*na kapāri ša rēmīša ana kapāri ša libiššatīša*

[O genitals] of my girl-friend, the district of Babylon is seeking a rag,
[To] wipe your vulva, to wipe your vagina.
[Now] let him/her say to the women of Babylon: "The women will not give a rag
To wipe her vulva, to wipe her vagina."[206]

Counterparts for this kind of blatant eroticism, untypical of other known representatives of Mesopotamian love lyrics, can be found in those passages in the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible that give expression to violent sexual fantasies and negative feelings towards the woman blamed for her wanton behavior, i.e., Israel.[207] While there is a notable difference in the role division between the Mesopotamian and biblical rhetoric of jealousy,[208] it is evident that on both sides, jealousy is expressed with pornographic and insulting language alien to the poetry that describes mutual love and affection, like the Song of Songs or the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu. Obviously, rituals of jealousy make use of different poetry than rituals of love, because one party arouses sympathy (Zarpanitu) while the other one is blamed (Ištar); the role of Marduk, the object of the quarrel, is conspicuously limited.[209] Even without further knowledge of the performers and participants, we may imagine this poetry to have belonged to women's rituals, which allowed the expression of jealousy within a society in which the male sphere of life had more legitimate sexual options than did the female.

3.6. Poetry: Secular or Sacred?

The few love lyrics from second- and first-millennium Mesopotamia known to us are enough to indicate the common legacy of the eastern Mediterranean erotic-lyric tradition[210] as manifested by the Song of Songs, by the Egyptian love poetry, and so on. Nevertheless, they constitute nothing but a scrap of a literature that, to judge from the number of songs listed in *KAR* 158, was produced in considerable quantities, presumably not just for scribal purposes but for public use among the contemporary population. But where were they sung, by whom, and for what purpose? The concern for the safety and well-being of the king expressed in many, if not most, of them certainly sug-

[204] Group IV: 18-22 (Lambert 1975: 122-23); as to the translation, see also Edzard 1987: 62. For the "redness" of the beloved, cf. Cant 5:10: *dôdî ṣaḥ wĕ-ʾādôm* "My beloved (m.) is white and red."
[205] Lambert 1975: 99.
[206] Group IV: 4-7 (Lambert 1975: 123).
[207] Jer 2-5; Ez 16, 23; Hos 1-3; cf., e.g., Brenner 1996 and Day 2000.
[208] In the Akkadian jealousy poems, the legal wife Zarpanitu is presented as being jealous of Ištar whose position as the concubine is not as such illegal, whereas in biblical texts the jealous party is always God, the wronged husband whose authority is at stake.
[209] Cf. Leick 1994: 241.
[210] For this concept, see Nissinen 1998a: 624-27.

gests their use in royal contexts in general, and in rituals of divine love in particular. Their official use as a part of canonical literature is evident also from the fact that they have been organized in series and deposited in libraries, at least once in an archive of an official of a temple of Ištar (BM 47507).

What presents problems, however, is the eventual cultic affiliation of the Akkadian love poems. With the exception of the Neo-Assyrian Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu, the documents of love poetry on one hand and those of love rituals on the other do not match up or even coincide. Given the paucity and casual distribution of the evidence, this does not compulsorily, or even credibly, mean that the second millennium poetry had no ritual use, while no poetry was recited in love rituals after the Neo-Assyrian era. Since, however, arguments cannot be based on missing sources, the overall picture must remain incomplete until more evidence crops up – which, to be sure, is more than wishful thinking considering the fact that even in this article, two poems have been quoted (MAH 16056 and *LKA* 15) that have only recently become a subject of scholarly discussion.

A further problem is constituted by the elusive borderline between cultic and noncultic poetry, best demonstrated by the baffling similarity of the certainly cultic Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu and the Song of Songs, which at least in its present composition and context cannot be a cultic drama. What indeed makes the one sacred and the other profane? Did the ancient poets "originally" mean their texts to be understood as either sacred or profane, thus exposing themselves to the liability of being misunderstood in this respect?

The actual problem, in fact, may hide in scholarly classifications rather than in the texts, especially in the strict dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, according to which even poetry is divided into two categories. Indeed, what seems to make Mesopotamian love poems "sacred" are the names of deities mentioned in them, and even such poems can be read as "secular" if there is no clear sign of a ritual setting.[211] When language and metaphors are concerned, the difference of sacred and secular vanishes altogether, since they give no indication of whether the poems belong to sacred or profane contexts. Divine and human beings are addressed alike, similar imagery is used of both the lovers and the venues of their love-making. Even poetic form does not imply anything about the cultic or noncultic use of the poems. Like the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu, many Mesopotamian love poems are designed as dialogues[212] (or monologues disguised as dialogues, since there is seldom any real polyphony or dissonance between the voices[213]), which may reflect a (cultic) performance; however, it is possible to employ the dialogic style purely literally. On the other hand, the poetry used in divine love rituals uses the same poetic devices as any love poetry.

In general, it turns out that poetic language and erotic imagery cannot be classified according to the sacred/secular system, and it is worthwhile to ask whether the eventual ritual use of a poem makes it appear as "sacred" in contrast to a "secular" poem without religious connotations.

The dismantling of the sacred/secular dichotomy, at least when it comes to the classifications of love poetry by modern

[211] Cf. Black 1983: 29.

[212] Cf. Lambert 1966, Westenholz 1987, Leick 1994: 66-89, Nissinen 1998a: 597-98. It is possible that the songs listed in *KAR* 158 are in large part dialogues; almost every one of the incipits addresses directly the other party.

[213] Cf. Exum 1999: 49 on the Song of Songs.

scholarship, is necessary from the point of view of both love and poetry. The close affinity of the languages of religion and love in Mesopotamia and elsewhere, as well as the similarities of human love and religious devotion,[214] raise the question whether there has ever been love without a divine connotation before and beyond the so-called "secularization" in the modern Western world. Even in Christian tradition, love is from God, and God is love (1 John 4:7-8). As a divine attribute, love implies divine favor; being in love is a foretaste of heaven. Through millennia, love between humans has been seen as a reflection of divine love which, in turn, has been constructed on the model of human male-female relationship – either as divine male-female love as in Mesopotamian rituals and other theological systems conventionally depicted as "polytheistic," or as divine-human love where the male role belongs to God and female role to humans, as in the interpretations of the Song of Songs.[215]

On the other hand, poetry is not just writing, reading and reciting but also a matter of performance, experience and interpretation. Erotic poetry generates erotic experience, its reading is motivated by the pleasure it effects. The reader/listener is invited to the "poetic garden of eroticism"[216] to participate the lovemaking of the literary personae and to experience the blessings it brings about. Likewise the people present in a ritual do not just attend some strange goings-on performed by some mumbling priests but – at least in principle – truly participate in the divine mysteries celebrated in a ceremonial way. In Mesopotamian rituals of divine love, the Assyrians and Babylonians, represented by their king, were invited to experience the pleasures of the divine bed chamber and the garden of divine love, thus participating in heavenly love and benevolence. Obviously, the poetry recited in rituals of love was love poetry. On the other hand, the texts used in religious ceremonies were not necessarily confined inside the walls of the temples; presumably their language was forceful enough to be used as expressions of personal feelings and for pure entertainment in noncultic environment as well.[217] Either way, love is the primary experience and the root metaphor.

4. Sacred Marriage Reconsidered

The sources reviewed in this article demonstrate a living celebration of love between gods, revealing some features of the cognate rituals and the overall ideology promoted by them during more than half a millennium from the 8th through the 2nd century BC. The descriptions of the rituals and their commodities in inscriptions, letters and administrative documents are supplemented by contemporary and older love poems, which yield further insights into the ideological, mythological, aesthetical and erotic aspects of the rituals. The sources reveal that the substance of the rituals was love – not just love between deities, but divine love encompassing the whole com-

[214] For Mesopotamian sources, cf. Lambert 1987 and for the Song of Songs, Ostriker 2000: 37-42, Pelletier 2000: 71-72, Walsh 2000: 187-216.
[215] For this "theological marriage matrix," in which the gender difference is determined by positions on a cosmic hierarchy rather than by physical sex, see Carr 2000.
[216] Exum 1999: 56.
[217] The famous quotations of Rabbi Akiba, who calls the Song of Songs the Holy of Holies (*m. Yadayim* 3:5) and, in another context, forbids its singing in a banquet house (*t. Sanhedrin* 12:10), indicate that it was actually used both for sacred purposes and for entertainment; cf. Pope 1977: 19, Ostriker 2000: 37-38.

munity of worshippers through the person of the king who as the object of the divine intercession was the primary beneficiary of the ritual.

The question immediately rises whether the first millennium rituals and related poetry should be seen in continuity with the older tradition manifested in Dumuzi-Inanna love songs and the Sumerian sacred marriage ritual. In poetry, the continuity is apparent and there is no big chronological gap between the earlier Sumerian and the later Akkadian sources. In the absence of evidence of divine love rituals between Early Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian times, however, the eventual transformation of the Sumerian sacred marriage ceremony into love rituals of different divine couples cannot be proved.[218] A comparison of the materials will certainly help to argue whether an overall ideology of divine love and its effects on humans – with necessary historical variations – can be demonstrated on both sides. Having not examined the Sumerian sources, I cannot properly perform this task in this article. I can only suggest some brief guidelines depending on the general understanding of the Sumerian ritual.

If fertility was the central idea of the Sumerian sacred marriage, and if the actual intercourse during the ritual was essential to its fulfilment, then the first-millennium rituals have little to do with the Sumerian sacred marriage and should not be confused with it even on a terminological level. Fertility is not a theme in the love rituals of Nabû and Tašmetu, Marduk and Zarpanitu, Anu and Antu or any other divine couple. Nor do the extant sources give any indication of concrete consummation of the divine marriage by human actors; also, no "sacred prostitution" is involved in these rituals. The gods, doubtless represented by their statues, were brought in the ceremonial bedroom where they made love several days. Their intercourse is symbolic (which does not make it "unreal" in the symbolic world of the worshippers), it can only be described by poetic means drawing from the common Near Eastern reservoir of erotic-lyric imagery familiar to us even from the Song of Songs.

If, on the other hand, the idea of the establishment of the king's rule and, through it, the divine-human relationship is to be seen as the principal meaning of the Sumerian sacred marriage, then it is most relevant to compare it with the first-millennium rituals of divine love. Both materials can be understood as expressions of royal ideology – the role of the king is central irrespective of how he concretely participates in the ceremomies. The ritual agenda of the Sumerian sacred marriage is virtually unknown, but the participation of the king, impersonating Dumuzi, seems to be essential.[219] In first-millennium documents this is less clear; the king certainly takes part of the is explicitly mentioned as the partner of the goddess only twice, namely in the lampoon about the sacrileges of Nabû-šumu-iškun, and in the Second Book of Maccabees, always in connection with Nanaya, but both cases are historically doubtful. Be that as it may, there is no doubt about the beneficiary of the divine favors in rituals of divine love. The rites are performed for the sake of the king's (or the crown prince's) life (SAA 13 56, 78) and the venue of the divine lovemaking, the bed chamber, is

[218] Jacobsen 1975: 75 correctly notes that "the fact that a rite survives does not guarantee that it preserves its original meaning." He sees the Late Babylonian ritual of Nabû and Nanaya (*SBH* 8) as a survival of the ancient sacred marriage drama, but he overlooks the love rituals of other divine couples, which leads him to the erroneous conclusion that "the old role of the king as vying for divine favors has disappeared."

[219] Cf. Steinkeller 1999: 130.

called "the king's shelter" (SAA 3 14), where the divine intercession on his behalf is uttered. The intercession on behalf of the king and country appears to be a central function in these rituals, in which the goddess plays the key role. Traditio-historically, one is tempted to see a continuation between the goddess who intercedes for the king with her beloved, and Mary, the Holy Mother of God, who pleads with her Son for mankind.

If the notion of divine lovemaking for the benefit of humans through the person of the king is enough to constitute a link between the Sumerian and the first-millennium sources, they may well be seen as belonging under the same ideological umbrella with or without a historical cultic continuum. If the concept of "sacred marriage" is all too burdened with post-Frazerian connotations, as it seems, could we just talk about "rituals and poetry of divine love"?

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