BEFORE *ART:*

THE FUSION OF RELIGION, SEXUALITY, AND AESTHETICS IN AGRARIAN MESOPOTAMIA

by

NANCY GUEVARA

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

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by

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This dissertation claims that *art* as we commonly understand it – as primarily an *aesthetic* product and endeavor - is a relatively recent invention that surfaced gradually over many centuries as part of a complex process that Max Weber identified as 'rationalization' (*demagification/disenchantment*). This work looks at art before it existed as a separate sphere of activity and meaning; specifically, before it became separated from religion and sexuality. It examines pre-modern modes of representation in agrarian Mesopotamia (the first major civilization of which we have record) and describes how art was integral to the most significant religious and social rituals of the community, and it recounts the key role that female sexuality played in such rituals more than four thousand years ago. This was a time when art was "magic" - especially communal, collective magic; art was the way that community re-created itself. In particular this work examines the single most important religious/social/magical ritual of the Mesopotamians. This *polymorphic* performance was known as the Sacred Marriage.

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I wish to express my love and gratitude to Anthony Calandro who teaches me daily the meaning of a sacred marriage.

I dedicate this dissertation to my late father, Francisco Guevara Zea, who understood the value of education for a family of limited means. With his encouragement and affection I was able to accomplish my academic goals.

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Chapter I. Introduction

> *Sociology "does not seek to become acquainted with bygone forms of civilization for the sole purpose of being acquainted with and reconstructing them…Its purpose above all is to explain a present reality that is near to us and thus capable of affecting our ideas and actions."*
>
> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Life*

This dissertation grew out of a desire to understand why art plays only a marginal role in our society. Art does not occupy the social place that religion, economics, politics, or even sexuality have. It seems to be perceived as a luxury rather than a vital component for the functioning of society. Consequently, its ability to impact social life is quite modest. Art is a small thing. Unlike some ancient poets and perfomers, the contemporary artist is no priest, priestess, or "shaman" [1] endowed with numinous power and expected to impart useful and reliable information for the re-structuring or benefit of the community. Hence, the role of the contemporary artist is also small. The "quest for formal perfection, and the sharpening of visual speech, are enough" goals for art and the artist today, proffers a distinguished art critic (Hughes 1991:375).

The preoccupation with what seems to be an ever more thinning social role for art and the artist led me to make inquiries into the emergence of *the concept of art*. Great civilizations of the past like that of the Mesopotamians or that of the Greeks did not possess a word for art.[2] Yet, their aesthetic products and sensibility continue to astound us. According to sociologist Herbert Read, "the Greeks had no word for art because they

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[1] In spite of recent and poignant critiques of the term "shaman," I have decided to use it throughout this text in quotation marks because its reintroduction by contemporary Western artists conveys efforts to honor the "other" and to expand and redefine the social and environmental role of art and the artist today. For a recent critique see: Alice B. Kehoe, Shamans and Religion: An Anthropological Exploration in Critical Thinking (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, Inc., 2000) 102.

[2] Likewise, the Native Americans and the ancient Japanese did not have a word for art in their vocabularies.

did not conceive it as separate from the apprehension of reality, the establishment of being, from physics and metaphysics" (Albrecht 1970:47). The word *techne*, which is often translated as "skill," appears to be the closest Greek equivalent to the term *art*. Likewise, before the Greeks, Sumerian, Akkadian, and Babylonian sculpture, painting, architecture, music, poetry, and dance existed within large functional contexts, and not just "for their own sake." [3]

Hence before the word *art* came into existence, and before art existed as an independent – primarily *aesthetic* - category and sphere of life, there were other modes of representation that served purposes besides the aesthetic. Specifically, in many early agrarian societies these other modes of representation integrated multiple domains of life such as religion, sexuality, and artistic activity. As a result, they encompassed various forms and social functions, well-beyond those we associate with art. Thus *art*, as we commonly understand it – that is, as primarily an *aesthetic* product and endeavor – is a relatively recent concept and term. *Art* is predominantly a modern form of representation.

Nonetheless, long before the appearance of the word *art* poets and intellectuals were engaged in the formulation, demarcation, and characterization of what we know as art. The nature, structure, and functions of epic and dramatic poetry, for instance, were subjects of serious debate and study in Greece.[4] To Socrates as well as Plato poetry was

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[3] Irene J. Winter, "Aesthetics in Ancient Mesopotamian Art," in Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, ed. Jack M. Sasson (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995) 4: 2569.

[4] Later on, in Rome, Horace - the leading lyric poet during the time of Augustus - wrote an epistle on dramatic poetry in the year 18 B.C. Horace was an admirer of the Greek poets and submitted that "the proper course" for the writing of poetry "is to study Greek models night and day." Alfredo Baker, Horace: Satires, Epistles, and Ars Poetica (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U Press, 1926) 446. He offered specific guidelines for the writing of plays: "a play should be in five acts." Ibid., 445. Moreover, he put forward that drama should serve a social purpose. It should be both *dulce et utile* (sweet and useful). Whereas he didn't seem to conceive drama as connected to religion in the sense that Socrates or Plato did, Horace believed that poetry should promote the cause of morality and religion. Ibid. His *Epistle to the Pisos* is found in

problematic because it was not a rational endeavor. Poets created from "inspiration" like "seers and oracle-mongers" (Cornford 1945:323). "The poets say what they say, not from their own wisdom, but in being filled by the god and possessed… (*Ion* 534 a) … [T]he poet is something buoyant, winged and holy, and he cannot create until he is filled with the god and without consciousness and until there is no more reason in him (*Ion* 534 b ff.)" (Gadamer 1980:42). "Like prophets, and deliverers of oracles, these poets have their reason taken away, and become servants of the Gods… it is the god who speaks to us and speaks through them" (Grote 1888:128). In other words, the poet is a vehicle of the divine who speaks as if possessed by it in an ecstatic trance like a "shaman" supposedly does. As a result, he stimulated the "passions," the irrational aspects of our nature. As Plato put it: "[The poet] stimulates and strengthens an element which threatens to undermine reason" (Cornford 1945:337). Consequently, Plato conceptualized poetry as "the adversary" – the foe of rational values like justice and virtue.[5]

In defense of poetry, Plato's pupil, Aristotle, wrote a series of lectures circa 347-335 BCE known as *The Poetics* (Else 1967). In these, he dispensed with the religious dimension of poetry and emphasized the *aesthetic* components of Greek tragedy: its apparent internal rules, laws, and connections. To this philosopher, poetry was a secular activity that had some social value but no religious import. Therefore, it posed no threat to reason, justice, or virtue (more about this debate in chapter 5). In this way, his rational theory of poetry put an end to the idea of the poet as "shaman," and of spirit posession as

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nearly all manuscripts under the title *Ars Poetica*. Nevertheless, "the composition is a letter rather than a formal treatise, and it is hard to believe that Horace himself is responsible for the conventional title." Ibid., 442. The name may have been assigned much later by the Roman rhetorician Quintilian (c.32-100 CE).

[5] It is important to remark that Plato didn't oppose all poetry; positive hymns to the gods and songs in praise of good individuals withstood his criticism, and his "attack" was not aimed at poetry alone. He criticized sculpture, architecture, painting, and music as well. A noteworthy defense of Plato's attack on art is found in: Julius A. Elias, Plato's Defence of Poetry (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).

the source of poetic inspiration. Furthermore, Aristotle's defense appears to have been the first attempt to formulate and describe the aesthetic dimension as a separate aspect of social life.[6] With the European rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics* in 1536 CE, the West inherited a rationalized and viable philosophy of literature which continues to greatly influence our thinking about art today.[7]

On the other hand, and according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term *art* was current circa 1225 CE in Europe and like the Greek word *techne* it referred to *skill* "in doing anything as the result of knowledge and practice" (OED 1989:657). Dexterity in the fabrication of objects or expertise in the performance of a specific activity or trade was *art*: "c. 1225 *St. Margarete* 194 Telle me of zoure art…Whi werrie ze cristene men" (1989). Hence, during the European Middle Ages *art* was vast. The learning of the schools was art: grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. "1393 Langl. P. Pl. C. XVIII. 96 Astronomyens al day in here art faillen" (1989). Medicine was art and the physician was a healing artist. There were the wollen art, the magic art, the military art, the fishing art, and the mechanical art as well.

While in the Middle Ages *art* did not refer primarily to the aesthetic dimension but to human skill in learning, science, or in the production of objects not found in nature, in the modern West a distinction between "crafts" (Greek *techne*, Latin *ars*) and "fine

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[6] According to a prominent historian of ancient Near Eastern economies, Aristotle was also the first "to describe the economy as a separate aspect of human society." Daniel C. Snell, Life in the Ancient Near East (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997) 116.

[7] For example, the most widely known and respected screenwriting lecturer in the world today - Robert McKee – upholds many of Aristotle's ideas on dramatic structure. Robert McKee, Story (New York: Harper Collins, 1997).

arts" has been widely assumed and accepted until very recently.[8] According to this division of creative production, the "fine arts" are mainly works "accessible through disinterested contemplation" and "divorced from any contextual function or utility" (Winter 1995:2569). Or, as sociologist Georg Simmel once put it: "Fully established, art is wholly separated from life" (Wolff 1950:42).

Irene Winter, a Harvard professor of fine arts, has explained that the distinction between crafts and fine arts is "grounded in notions of property and value that were specific" to the eighteenth century (Winter 1995:2569). Nonetheless, it seems that it was during the European Renaissance (roughly from the 14th through the 17th century) that the term and concept of *art*, in its most accepted modern sense as "fine art," began to rise. As we moved out of the Middle Ages, a time of great economic prosperity and wealth in the Italian city states allowed for increasing specialization of work and, subsequently, for a flowering of new professions. Gradually, the term *art* became associated with aesthetic works produced by professionals and by 1668 it already had specific meaning as a skill in painting and sculpture, for example.

The Renaissance had wide-ranging consequences in all intellectual pursuits but is perhaps best known for its artistic contributions. It was both a time of innovation and a time of nostalgia for the classical age. The "rebirth" of classical thought was fueled by the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Theories upon theories on what the functions of the theater should or should not be in society, for instance, burgeoned in the footsteps of Aristotle's secular and rational pronouncements.

[8] Likewise, "Modern Western usage insists on drawing a sharp distinction between artisan and artist." Ann C. Gunter, ed., Investigating Artistic Environments in the Ancient Near East (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1990) 11.

Therefore, what the term *art* represents and the role it plays in human society fluctuate according to historical epoch. Today, no sensible observer would perhaps dare to define art. In the current postmodern atmosphere in which many things are called art, the word seems to be used, like in the Middle Ages, as a broad term that includes a large variety of activities and products. Nonetheless, distinctions between art and craft, and among different kinds and levels of art such as high/fine/official and low/popular/fringe, continue to dominate the modern discourse on art and to play a role in the contemporary imagination.

This brief excursion into what is undoubtedly an incomplete genealogy of the term and concept of art led me to want to understand what art was like before it became a separate sphere of activity and meaning. In particular, what art encompassed and connoted before it developed into an "aesthetic" realm independent of religion and sexuality. That is, what art was when it was fully immersed in social life instead of "wholly separated from life" (Wolff 1950:42). I wanted to find out how and why art had been an integral part of life in other epochs and societies and what, if anything, this had to do with the place it occupied in those societies. More, I wished to understand what that social life was and what it could tell us about our own concept and practice of art as well as about our way of organizing human society. Hence, this dissertation developed as an attempt to understand the form of social life that preceded *art*, but that involved the elements that today we associate with it.

I was particularly interested in examining the involvement of women, as creative and sexual beings, within this form of life that today we would say is pervaded by religious beliefs and rituals. My previous academic research on the early Kabuki theatre

had taught me that ancient, early modern, and some medieval forms of representation in Japan and other areas of the world tended to give central place to religion and, moreover, to goddesses, the female form, female performers, and female sexuality.[9] My ongoing study of ancient and contemporary women's performance art, and my longstanding involvement in feminist performance art, made me curious about the role of women and of their sexuality in performance when it was not *art* but an integral part of social life.

The specific focus on the integration of religion, female sexuality, and aesthetics was sparked by contemporary female performance art in the United States. Since the nineteen seventies, female performers have been consciously incorporating "pagan" spiritual and sexually explicit material into their stage work. Linda Montano, Karen Finley, Annie Sprinkle, Hanna Wilke, Valery Export, Veronica Hart, Carolee Schneemann, Veronica Vera, Barbara T. Smith, Scarlot Harlot, Marisa Sullivan, and others have been exploring intricate theatrical fusions of art, spirituality, and female sexuality (Conclusions). This research was therefore also stimulated by a desire to gain a historical understanding of the theatrical intersection between these three spheres of life, in order to contextualize current feminist performance art within a broader reality capable of illuminating our ideas and actions and of informing on the promise and limitations of like mode of performance in the present.

With this in mind, I decided to examine the place and role of "art" in Mesopotamia (ancient Iraq). The myths, performances, artistic products, and legal and literary documents from that part of the world provide the basis for the knowledge and understandings we have of the earliest times of human history because writing was

[9] I worked closely with professor of Asian theater Claudia Orenstein while completing an M.A. in Theatre at Hunter College. Nancy Guevara, "That Which Pleases the Gods: Kagura," 2001; "Okuni: Sacred Erotic Performer and Innovator," 2003, Special Collections, Hunter College, New York.

invented in Mesopotamia circa 3200 BCE. Critical texts of early history in other parts of the world present similar stories to those found in Mesopotamia. For instance, the story of Beowolf (the earliest written Old English poem) and the Biblical story of the flood bare striking similarities with poems first composed in Mesopotamia.[10]

Likewise, the ritual performances of several ancient agrarian peoples – including those of the Greeks and Romans - often bear a resemblance with Mesopotamian tradition. The highly structured performance of a "sacred marriage," for instance, was celebrated in Mesopotamia before it became one of the most vital and widespread religious rituals in and around the ancient world. Thus it is possible that Mesopotamian stories and ritual practices were carried by peoples that migrated from that area to other parts of the world. Scholars often use these stories to understand social life in different parts of the world at different moments in history without always recognizing a continuity with Mesopotamia.

Of utmost interest is the fact that the Mesopotamian ritual performance of the "sacred marriage" corresponds to one of the earliest examples we have of performing traditions in which women played protagonic roles as sexual, spiritual, and creative beings. Moreover, the Mesopotamian "sacred marriage" exhibits a complex integration of aesthetic, economic, political, sexual - specifically, female sexuality – and religious transactions (chapter 4). As such, it also provides a prime example of *art* as integral part of social life.

While the manner in which female performers in the West today attempt to blend sexuality, spirituality, and art is of course sui generis (Conclusions), the ongoing effort to

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[10] Specifically, *Beowolf* distinctly resembles the Babylonian *Poem of Creation*. The story of a flood that destroyed humanity except for one man, his family, his kin, his gold, the craftsmen, and some wild and tame animals is told in the epic of king Gilgamesh and has been amply compared by scholars to the later biblical flood story found in Genesis. N. K. Sandars, ed., The Epic of Gilgamesh (New York: Penguin Books) 108-113.

build connections among what to us are three different spheres of life suggests a shift in the artistic, religious, and other values that formed the basis of twentieth century Western culture.[11] For some thirty years, a trend has been expanding on the margins of society and is now approaching the center. New artistic – as well as religious movements - are reinventing ancient connections or imagining new correlations between the spiritual, the sexual, and the aesthetic.

This contemporary desire to integrate the spiritual with the sexual and aesthetic can perhaps be interpreted as a sign that augurs what French sociologist Michel Maffesoli calls "the return of the repressed" (Maffesoli 1993:84) after centuries of efforts to structure human life/"civilization" around rationality alone, or first and foremost. It can also represent an example of an "alternative rationality" along the lines of the one envisioned by sociologist Roslyn Bologh in her book *Love or Greatness* (Bologh 1990).[12] An expression of "aesthetic rationality" (1990:240) which takes into account bodily

[11] "The Biennial…explores the artifice of American culture in what could be described as a pre-Enlightenment moment, in which culture is preoccupied with the irrational, the religious, the dark, the erotic, and the violent, filtered through a sense of flawed beauty. This restless mood is not unique to the United States; its presence across both America and Europe suggests a shift in the accepted values that have formed the basis of 20th century Western culture…The artists in the 2006 Biennial are working in a space between pre- and post-modernists parameters – somewhere between day and night, between the history of forms and the forms of history. In this twilight zone, many things are called into question or obscured" (Whitney Biennial 2006, 'Day for Night,' Press Release).

[12] A rationality that "includes the irrational (responsiveness to feelings), as part of the rational, and an understanding that the one-sidedly rational by itself is irrational." Roslyn W. Bologh, Love or Greatness: Max Weber and Masculine Thinking – A Feminist Inquiry (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990) 248. Bologh discusses different types of rationality: instrumental (formal) rationality has to do with achieving external goals by effective means; value (substantive) rationality implies "living according to some ethical principle or ideal." Ibid., 123-24. She points out that Weber identified rationality with freedom from "the constraints of tradition" as well as with aggressive action, self-determination, deliberation, calculation, choice, self-discipline, self-control, and repression. Ibid., 122, 127, 132-33. Bologh recognizes that, both, instrumental and value rationalities "seem to be desirable" because the first "replaces unthinking acceptance of tradition" and the second "elevates human life above that of mere physical survival and material self-interest." Ibid., 127. In addition, she calls for rationality "based on recognizing, responding to and reflecting on needs and feelings, attachments and relationships that give meaning and value to action and life…responsiveness to that which is other and those who are other." Ibid., 133.

pleasure, spirit, magic,[13] beauty,[14] reflection, playfulness, creativity, mutual pleasuring, and personal and social change to re-create a world that affects, enriches, and empowers people as it overcomes the repression of "eros" by "civilization" (1990:xvi, 213-240). Or, it can augur an attempt at equilibrium between the rational and what has been construed as "irrational" in order to create a world that values production as well as playfulness and the making of community.

The fact is that fringe and established artists today are using sexual and pagan material to claim or invent additional social roles for the artist; such as those of priestess, erotic entertainer, pleasure activist, or "shaman."[15] Chicago artist Fern Schaffer, for example, performs "empowerment rituals" in the waters of Lake Michigan in "shamanic outfit" (Perlmutter and Koppman 1999:11), and Marisa Sullivan in New York endeavors to establish polymorphous roles for the artist as feminist performer, "shamaness," and sexual educator.[16]

Also, painters, writers, land-art and earthwork artists in Europe and the United States as well as the proponents of anthropological theatre in Latin America are attempting to root their work in interpretations of pagan antiquities. More precisely, they are actively choosing values, images, and beliefs of pre-biblical, pre-Christian peoples from around the world and transforming them in their work to expand the roles and

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[13] "Feminist "magic" consists in empowering and inspiring women to resist and overcome" social arrangements "that are disempowering and demoralizing." Bologh, Love or Greatness, 158.

[14] "Anything that affects the senses and enriches our lives internally." Bologh, Love or Greatness, 240.

[15] Pioneering efforts in this direction by theater artists include Antonin Artaud's attempt in the late fifties to position the actor as "shaman;" the "shamanic" performances of Joseph Beuys in the sixties; and Grotowski's efforts to transform theatre into ritual.

[16] In the past few years, I have spoken to Marisa Sullivan about her work on a number of occasions. Her performances include *Squirt* (2002) on the topic of female ejaculation and *Guru at the Gate a.k.a. Kundalini Rising* (1999, 2000) on her spiritual-sexual journey.

responsibilities of the artist today. Thus, instead of reaching for the new, this increasing body of art has plunged into and reclaimed archaic imagery, knowledge, and modes of representation. A fountain of inspiration for these artists is the literature that emerged with the neopagan, new age, and feminist spirituality movements in the last five decades. Most of these writings are charismatic readings of ancient myths and histories that have found significant validation in new archeological discoveries.[17] From them, a world inhabited by "shamans," gods and goddesses, priests and priestesses, sacred-erotic entertainers, magicians, and the like has sprung.

Even mainstream artists are now claiming the role of "shaman." The Chinese-born "shaman-composer-conductor" Tan Dun, for instance, commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera House in New York to write a work destined to be a huge commercial success, has said that "he works with the aid of spirits who send him notes on the score" (Lypsite and Morris 2005).[18] As a result, he "describes himself as a shaman, moving easily between the spirit and the visible world" (2005). This yearning for "new" roles and possibilities of social intervention among artists exposes the reality that art and artists have been confined to minor functions in modern times. With a few exceptions, modern artists have been expected to accept, and rejoice in, a position as eccentric

[17] The discoveries of archeologist Marija Gimbutas (deceased in 1994) inspired neopagan and spiritual feminist authors as well as a new generation of scholars who are re-examining the history and significance of goddess worship. See, for example: Marija Gimbutas, The Civilization of the Goddess (San Francisco: Harper, 1991); Frank Battaglia, "Goddess Religion in the Early British Isles," *Journal of Indo-European Studies* (2005), no.19:48-82; and Gloria Orenstein's exploration of "feminist-matristic" paintings and writings that reclaim knowledge of the ancient goddesses from within the feminist movement. Gloria Feman Orenstein, The Reflowering of the Goddess (New York: Pergamon Press Inc., 1990). Popular charismatic writings include: Barbara Walker, Encyclopedia of Women's Myths and Secrets (New York: Harper, 1983), and Merlin Stone, When God was a Woman (New York: Harvest/Harcourt Brace, 1976). The number of pagans in the United States was estimated at around 300,000 in the mid-1990s. Paul Heelas, The New Age Movement (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996) 132.

[18] Robert Lipsyte and Lois B. Morris, "Tan Dun's Opera: A Special Delivery from the Spirit World," New York Times, Arts/Music, 26 June 2005.

geniuses, misunderstood rebels, pseudo-political activists, starving outsiders, romantic neurotics, media stars, or savvy businesspeople.

Yet, as prominent performance theorist Richard Schechner heralds, the contemporary Western "avant-garde" along with others is "whole-seeking in ways and on a scale not experienced in our culture for hundreds of years" (Schechner 2003:63). To him, most artists are not looking to return to the "primitive" rather they are pressing on, transforming, creating, and incarnating in a performance space "what cannot take place anywhere else" (2003:186).[19] Schechner identifies "yearnings which have triggered not only an interest in primitive peoples but artistic movements that concretize that interest and start to satisfy those yearnings" (2003:30-31). A shift is underway from an emphasis on art as "imitation of life,"[20] towards "lifelike art;" transformational performances in which multiple worlds and roles coexist and interact. The "orthodox dramaturgy…is finished" (2003:162) because it does not meet the needs of many people who seek to combine entertainment with ritual. As a result, "theatre people are moving into areas once occupied mostly by practitioners of religion and politics." (2003:163).

Along with this, it must be remembered that some premodern and contemporary non-Western traditional performance modes have been based on structures that integrate a multiplicity of systems in which political, recreational, sexual, social, aesthetic,

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[19] "What we are undergoing is not a neo-primitive movement, but a post-modern one." Richard Schechner, Performance Theory (New York: Routledge, 2003) 63. To him: "soft-headed artists continue to look afield, hoping to find in the Other a finer version of what their own self might be." Ibid., 30.

[20] The idea that art "holds up a mirror to nature" apparently became prominent in Greece towards the end of the fifth century BCE. Both Plato and Aristotle adopted this theory. Schechner, Performance Theory, 28. To Aristotle, art imitates nature but it's not just a copy of nature. His idea of *mimesis* involves the creation of an ideal; a move towards how things 'ought to be.' Marvin Carlson, Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) 17. Mimesis presupposes a separation between art and life for the artist imitates a previously existing reality or experience.

religious, and economic transactions take place. Such was the case during the annual theatrical performance of The Sacred Marriage in Mesopotamia as we shall see (chapter 4). Consequently, what is also occurring is that increasing numbers of artists are bursting through governing notions of art and seeking inspiration for this challenge in the premodern and beyond the West. To Schechner: "the construction of intercultural aesthetics and ritual is essential" to the contemporary human community (2003:324.)

Simultaneously, art critics and historians have been for some time defying universalizing *aesthetic* and *mimetic* notions of art which prevail in some contemporary circles. These presume, among other things, that "art is an enterprise that sets out mimetically to imitate the world and its details, and that all art or representations throughout history and in every society will set out to mirror or reflect all aspects of that society" (Bahrani 2001:122).[21] Such mimetic notion of art is particularly disadvantageous when trying to look at the arts of Mesopotamia because representation seems to have had a radically different function in that context. Mainly, it was not intended to imitate or reflect reality but "to give existence" to it (chapter 3).

Consequently, this study will strive to understand concepts such as art, religion, magic, and sexuality in the specific socio-historical context of Mesopotamia, especially in view of the fact that the Mesopotamians did not possess a word for "art" in their vocabulary (chapter 3); did not draw sharp distinctions between magic and religion (chapter 2); and imbued the sexual experience with meanings and contexts vastly different from those familiar to us (chapter 4). Even if and when, as art historian Zainab

[21] In brief, Bahrani explains that representation is not a reflection of social reality. Art does not inform us about how things were in real life in antiquity but only about how they were *represented*. An image is not a record of lived experience but rather it establishes a reality. Social reality cannot be unequivocally accessed through the image. Zainab Bahrani, Women of Babylon: Gender and Representation in Mesopotamia (New York: Routledge, 2001) 31-2.

Bahrani points out, "a retrieval of the original function of the artwork [sexuality or religion] within its culture" (Bahrani 2003:78) does not automatically constitute a more historically accurate or "objective" method than traditional globalizing analyses of form because it is determined by interpretation.[22]

This dissertation uses literature and other texts (such as legal texts) to provide us with a way of understanding Mesopotamian representation and social life. Specifically, the links established between visual and performing representations, "magical" beliefs and practices, and female sexuality. Consequently, the specific correlation between art, religion, and *male* sexuality in Mesopotamia is beyond the scope of this study. Moreover, this examination implies a cross-cultural, not necessarily universal, connection between these spheres of life.

The reason for this investigation is above all to identify and elucidate some of the beliefs and circumstances that made possible the integration of aesthetics, female sexuality, and religion in urban-agrarian Mesopotamia. In summary, this dissertation attempts to expand our understanding of art by analyzing its nature and significance before it became a separate sphere of activity and meaning. In particular, before it developed into an "aesthetic realm" independent of religion and sexuality. Its goal is to bring to light and examine the integration of aesthetics and female sexuality into a religious worldview that existed to different degrees in several *early* agrarian societies.[23]

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[22] Bahrani critiques the idea that "to situate the native point of view in its appropriate context is to arrive at an accurate social record or historical account. In art history this method is taken as means of knowing the true value of a work of art gained through a knowledge of its original use, practice, and intention." Zainab Bahrani, The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) 79.

[23] Early or "simple" agrarian has been distinguished from mature or "advanced" agrarian mainly by a major technological development: the systematic production and use of iron implements, which in the Near East appears to have been initiated by the Hittites in Anatolia (modern Turkey) around 1500 BCE. Therefore, this

Its focus is southern Mesopotamia (in modern Iraq), the birthplace of the city; primarily, the interrelations between art and the sacro-sexual systems of the Sumerians, Akkadians, and Babylonians from about 3000 to 1200 BCE. All dates presented in this study refer to the period before the Common Era unless otherwise indicated. The year 1200 marked a major break in Mesopotamian tradition as new ethnic groups invaded the land and began a radical revision of its creation myths (chapter 5).

Theoretical Background

A key theoretical underpinning of this dissertation is in feminism. My approach borrows from and values the different "waves" of feminist scholarship (Bahrani 2001:14-27). From the First Wave it takes its emphasis on women's activities and contributions. From the Second Wave it borrows insights regarding *some* of the different forms in which women can and have been subjugated as well as the assumption that gender is a social construct, intersected by class and race. From the Third Wave it adopts its accent on the sexual body and draws on its understanding that "all knowledge is necessarily a construction" linked to and mediated by power (2001:13).[24] Therefore, I work with a set of beliefs that attempt to give thought to several issues and circumstances: the belief that sexual difference or inequality varies historically and culturally; that contemporary categories of art, religion, and sexuality are not *directly* applicable to antiquity; that there have been several modes of representation; that terms like art, magic, religion, sexuality, and prostitution are ideological and historically specific constructs; that ancient texts are

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research is primarily about Bronze Age cultures. Gerhard E. Lenski, Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966) 191.

[24] Bahrani effectively clarifies a common misconception that conflates postmodern theories with a sort of nihilistic relativism which is deemed politically dangerous: "The point of postmodern theories such as deconstruction is not that all interpretations are equally good, but that all knowledge is necessarily a construction." Bahrani, Women of Babylon, 13.

"themselves products of ideologies" and "of historically specific concerns" (2001:27); and that my appreciation of Mesopotamian religion, sexuality, and representation is determined by the fact that "even when we think that we are doing our best to access and appreciate original context and indigenous ideas" we cannot "simply step outside our own socio-historical context" (2003:82).[25]

A further theoretical source for this dissertation is in classical sociology, especially the writings of Max Weber. His ideas on religious rationalization have stimulated my own. Hence in this dissertation rationalization is understood primarily in its Weberian sense as *disenchantment:* a displacement of a magical relation of human beings to the world and to the divine and its replacement by systematic and methodical approaches to both (Weber 1922). According to Weber, prophetic, ethical religion, with its "rationalization" of the world, devalued and rejected magic, art, and sexuality, the "irrational" dimensions of organized social life in ancient societies. Moreover, to Weber, the primeval institution of magic lost some of its hold on human societies as urbanization

[25] Bahrani's work suggests that in the study of non-Western arts it is not enough to search for "indigenous" ways of making, representing, or knowing. The crucial fact is that "alterity remains an issue." Bahrani, The Graven Image, 82. She calls for a methodological shift in art historical analysis. From the emphasis on context to the study of non-Western arts as an *enunciation of cultural difference*: "What I am calling for is the serious consideration of Homi Bhabha's definition of culture as an enunciative site (Bhabha 1994) and a theoretical reflection upon the implications that this definition has for the practices of a globalizing discipline of culture like the history of art." Ibid., 79. The study of non-Western arts as a proclamation and articulation of cultural difference may have several implications according to Bahrani: "The first and most obvious issue is that we can no longer have an unproblematic access to or a means of knowing non-Western cultures and appreciating them "on their own terms" in a multicultural celebration of diversity…The second implication of this focal shift is that if culture is an enunciative site, then the position of the art historian clearly becomes one of the translator of culture and can therefore be defined as an ethnographic position…The third point…is that a shift from culture as epistemological object to enunciative category opens possibilities for investigating cultural meaning in new ways…this shift can be a liberating discursive strategy in that it can allow views that are contestatory to hegemonic representations that are often still fixed in their colonial form. At the same time, it can also enable working outside the closure of the binary polarities of Occident/Orient, white/black, and so on." Ibid., 82.

increased because the city resident "has far less connection with nature" (1922:28).[26] Once the magical frame of reference was broken through in newly settled cities, people began to depend on occupational organizations or freely created religious associations for explanations, solutions, and comfort. It therefore appears that in the revolutionizing of social life in general, and in the formation of the concept of art in particular, the transcendence and marginalization of magic stands out as momentous.

As a "belief in spirits" gave way to a "belief in gods," the magicians or "shamans" who played the most important religious role in tribal societies lost their influence to the priests (and priestesses) of urban-agrarian communities. These new religious figures progressively rejected the *ecstatic* practices of the magician in favor of doctrine - a more rational system of religious concepts that offered prayer and sacrifice as alternative. The replacement of the "shaman" by the priest as principal religious figure brought with it a devaluation of magical conceptions and practices which manifested in the rejection of "idols" and their representations (art objects) as well as in the denunciation of "harlotry," orgiastic "temple prostitution." This devaluation of magic reflected a change in the nature of religion from a practice oriented to controlling spirits and gods to a practice oriented to making oneself pleasing to a supreme ethical god. For Weber, the estrangement of magic from religion denotes a critical phase in the rationalization of religion. To him, the most decisive step in this process was taken between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE by the

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[26] "Dependence on magic for influencing the irrational forces of nature cannot play the same role for the urban dweller as for the farmer…[Moreover,] the urban man's life has a far more rational essential character, viz., calculability and capacity for purposive manipulation. Furthermore, the artisan and in certain circumstances even the merchant lead economic existences which influence them to entertain the view that honesty is the best policy, that faithful work and the performance of obligations will find their reward and are 'deserving' of their just compensation...[On the other hand,] the peasants are much more remote from this notion of compensation and do not acquire it until…magic…has been eliminated by other forces." Max Weber, The Sociology of Religion (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1922) 28.

prophets – the Israelite prophets, Buddha, and Zoroaster, among others.[27] With them, religion apparently transcended magic and became an ethical discourse and system.

The deliberate separation of religion from magic that the prophets and the ancient intellectuals embarked on (chapter 5) resulted in the spiritual devaluation of magic and by extension of art. Prophets, for instance, opposed "the work of human hands" - which art is - because, to them, it could only promise illusory salvation. Thus the connection between religion and art appears to have weakened as religion became disentangled from magic, and representation appears to have lost spiritual value as magic lost religious status. On the other hand, Weber acknowledges: "religion is continually brought to recognize the undeniable "divinity" of artistic achievement. Mass religion in particular is frequently and directly dependent on artistic devices for the required potency of its effects, and it is inclined to make concessions to the needs of the masses, which everywhere tend toward magic and idolatry" (1978:609).

Weber's discussion of the radical, though not final, separation of magic from religion provides the basis for my research interest in studying the period before art becomes a separate domain because art seems to have some roots in, or early connections with, religion. Emile Durkheim, for example, stated that "games and the principal forms of art seem to have been born in religion and that they long maintained their religious character" (Durkheim 1965:385). Similarly, Weber asserted that "religion and art were intimately related in the beginning" and that early art was produced for magico-religious significance and was determined by magical conceptions (Weber 1922:242). Performing

[27] Weber calls this: "the great historic process in the development of religions." Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (New York: Scribners, 1958) 105.

arts, like mimicry and dance, appear to have been originally developed as "homeopathic, apotropaic, exorcistic, or magically coercive symbolisms" (1922:8).

Likewise, sexuality has been associated with early religious expression and organization by several social scientists. To Weber, the orgy is "the primordial form of communal religious association" and "originally the relation of sex and religion was very intimate" (1922:3). Sexual intercourse was "very frequently part of magic orgiasticism or was an unintended result of orgiastic excitement" (Gerth and Mills 1946:343).

In other words, the "irrational" activities of magic, art, and sexuality were central to and integrated in an "early" form of spirituality, which Weber calls "magical" or "orgiastic" (Weber 1922: 224, 343). It should therefore not surprise if an intimate and intricate connection has existed between these three spheres. In fact, their interrelation was widespread in several early agrarian societies and, in some, fairly lasting. In Japan, for instance, as late as the seventeenth century, the early women's *kabuki* theatre exhibited traits of this integration as the *kabuki* performer claimed to play multiple social roles, including that of priestess, actress, and erotic entertainer or prostitute. On the other hand, in the West the link between art, magic, religion, and sexuality seems to have begun to dissolve - that is, to become socially unacceptable and unsavory - in classical Greece, as the ostracism of the ancient bawdy *mimes*[28] and the intellectual debate on poetry apparently initiated by Plato make manifest (chapter 5). This revolution in human sensibility appears to have stemmed from social developments that contributed to the configuration of an "aesthetic realm" and thus to the emergence of the term and concept of *art*.

[28] The *mimes* are said to be "the first professional entertainers." Oscar G. Brockett, History of Theatre (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991) 46. Nancy Guevara, "The Mimes of Antiquity," 1997.

Nevertheless, Weber's account of the relationship of religion to sexuality[29] explicitly leaves out "as being rather unimportant for our purposes, the innumerable relationships of sexuality to magical notions, animistic notions, and symbols" (1922:236), while suggesting that it was common and important:

> "In the first place, sexual intoxication is a typical component of the orgy, which is the communal religious behavior of the laity at a primitive level. The function of sexual intoxication is even retained in relatively systematized religion…[as] in the Shakti religion of India, after the pattern of the ancient phallic cults and rites of the various functional gods who control reproduction…More frequently, however, the erotic orgy appears in religion as an undesired consequence of ecstasy basically produced by other orgiastic means, namely the dance…Various institutions which have been misunderstood, as for example temple prostitution, are related to orgiastic cults…The intoxication of the sexual orgy can…be sublimated explicitly or implicitly into erotic love for a god or savior. But there may also emerge from the sexual orgy, from temple prostitution, or from other magical practices the notion that sexual surrender has a religious meritoriousness" (1922).

It is just this connection between magic, art, sexuality, and religion that I wish to understand, while Weber writes: "This aspect of the matter need not interest us here" (1922).

Max Weber looked at religion from the viewpoint of beliefs and ideas. He was interested in the way religious ideas shape human conduct, especially economic behavior. He was interested in the *economic ethic* that characterizes the different world religions.

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[29] To Weber: "sacred harlotry…has usually been a survival of magical orgiasticism in which every ecstasy was considered "holy."" H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946) 343. Hence "profane heterosexual, as well as homosexual, prostitution is very ancient…And sexual life, *per se,* has had its ghosts and gods as has every other function." Ibid., 343-4. Today, an integral connection between ecstasy, including sexuality, and the holy or the sacred is not readily understood: "a certain tension between religion and sex came to the fore only with the temporary cultic chastity of priests…Subsequently the prophetic religions…have, almost without significant exception, regulated sexual intercourse in favor of marriage. The contrast of all rational regulation of life with magical orgiasticism and all sorts of irrational frenzies is expressed in this fact" Weber, The Sociology of Religion, 236. Along with magic, orgiastic intoxication was seen by the prophets as preventing the ethical patterning of life. For this reason, "Moses directed his rationalized ethical attack against the orgy of the dance, just as many founders or prophets of ethical religion attacked 'whoredom,' i.e. orgiastic temple prostitution." Ibid., 158.

However, he recognized that there were other aspects to religion besides the economic ethic. Just as there was a material, economic, and practical aspect to religion – prosperity, long life, health - there was also a psychological, emotional dimension, which he related to an element of erotic love and ecstasy. He defined *ecstasy* as a "psychological state" and linked it to what he called "magical" or "orgiastic" religion (1922:3), but he neglected the study of this aspect of religion. Ecstasy was the province of the "magician," and the layperson experienced it as "intoxication" during "the orgy" which he characterized as an "occasional activity" (1922).

This dissertation, on the other hand, doesn't look at religion in terms of an economic ethic but in terms of art. It views religion in terms of the collective representations created and shared by the group and in terms of ritual conduct; what Durkheim calls "modes of action" (Durkheim 1995:34). As we shall see, this approach reveals that what Weber saw as an "occasional intoxication" is in fact a whole organization of social life and one of the means by which the group affirms and maintains itself. In Mesopotamia, for example, the society made itself anew each year through the public and theatrical representation of The Sacred Marriage (chapter 4).

Drawing upon the writings of Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Gerhard Lenski, Gerda Lerner, Near Eastern historians and contemporary art critics, and relying on ample archeological evidence from early agrarian Mesopotamia, this dissertation attempts to better understand the integral character of Mesopotamian representation and of magic/art/sexuality/religion before it disintegrated into separate activities or spheres. It asks what made this mode of representation possible; what were the modes of thought and the social arrangements that allowed these spheres to harmonize.

To this end, Chapter 2, Magic and Religion, illustrates by means of historical and literary evidence some salient aspects of the spiritual spectrum of the Mesopotamians; in particular, their ability to blend the magical with the religious. It does so considering classical views of these twin topics in the social science literature. Appendix B reviews and summarizes these views. Chapter 3, Art as Magic, elaborates on the significance for artistic expression of the balance between the magical and the religious in Mesopotamia. It unveils a notion of art as magico-religious "power" utilized to impact social life and discusses the effects of economic conditions on aesthetic expression. Chapter 4, The Sacred Marriage, expands the discussion of art as magic to include theatrical ritual performance and reveals the power of sexual representation. It explores the links between religion and female sexuality and between sexuality and art. It extends the relationship between spirituality and sexuality beyond a concern with fertility and highlights the existence of a concept of *sacred sexuality* and of complex notions of male and female divinity.

In Chapter 5, The Performance of Religion and Female Sexuality Beyond Mesopotamia, examples from the histories and mythologies of several other early agrarian societies are used to provide a broader historical and formal context in which to continue to evaluate the integration of asthetics and female sexuality into religion; as well as to further appraise figures like the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar and her priestesses and "prostitutes." Appendix C, Women in Religion, presents concrete historical evidence about the active participation of women in the religion of ancient Iraq while it focuses on the roles played by priestesses and prostitutes. In the process, it reveals a complexity overlooked in the current sociological literature on social stratification in agrarian

societies. Contrary to leading views that locate the nadir of social inequality in agrarian societies,[30] this addendum submits that when we add other variables, such as religious power and privilege, the correlation between economic and gender stratification turns out to be more multifaceted than traditionally acknowledged. In regard to this, it is worth mentioning that new scholarship finds that in ancient Greece, religion meant power for women (Connelly 2007). Connelly's *Portrait of a Priestess*, touches upon several questions addressed in Appendix C and came out at the same time I completed my research.

In addition, Chapter 5 briefly points to several "rationalizing" developments inside and outside Mesopotamia that in time negatively impacted the relationship between religion, female sexuality, and art. Appendix D details this process. The Conclusions (Chapter 6) summarize the objectives and findings of this research and address the emerging mode of performance that is reinventing the correlation between religion, female sexuality, and art today.

Because Mesopotamian society is not as readily known to us as ancient Greece or Rome, for example, Appendix A provides general information on the evidence, geography, economy, religion, politics, and history of this time and region. Historian of ancient economies Daniel Snell has pointed out that "we are not used to seeing Mesopotamia as central to ancient history because we are more directly affected by later cultures, those of Israel and Greece and Rome" (Snell 1997:5). Nevertheless, new Western scholarship is recognizing that Mesopotamia contributed key innovations that

[30] According to sociologist Gerhard E. Lenski, inequality of wealth was almost inexistent in hunting and gathering societies; it increased in horticultural societies; and peaked in agrarian societies as technology advanced and economic surpluses expanded. Gerhard E. Lenski, Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966) 210 and 437.

"have led civilization to develop in the particular way it has done" (Hudson 2002:10). For instance, as far as socio-economic organization is concerned, "Sumer's temples and palaces represented a quantum leap in the scale of organizing and articulating economic relations; their size typically exceeded that of the private *oikos* estates of classical Greece and Rome" (2002:16). Correspondingly, this dissertation seeks to explore and consider possible contributions Mesopotamian representation may have for us today in light of current efforts to redefine - or explode - the concept of art and devise new social roles for the contemporary artist.

Chapter II. Magic and Religion: Aspects of the Spiritual Continuum of Mesopotamia

The twin topics of magic and religion have filled numerous pages of the Western social science literature for well over a century. Almost every prominent observer of religion from Edward B. Tylor and James G. Frazer to Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Sigmund Freud has had something to say about the nature of each and their interrelation (Appendix B). Generally speaking, magic and religion have been thought of as separable and uneven categories with religion being held in the highest regard. In brief, religion has been customarily posited as a more rational approach to the divine while magic is considered a simpler and less logical mode of consciousness. Today, these classic views of magic and religion are being re-examined and a new perspective is on the rise. Mainly, new scholarship suggests that magic and religion are and have always been practically inseparable.[31]

In view of the fact that this dissertation examines the integration of aesthetics and female sexuality within a religious world-system, this chapter illustrates by means of textual evidence some salient aspects of the spiritual spectrum of the Mesopotamians; in particular, their ability to blend the magical with the religious. Scholars who use the term "magico-religious" to explain the overall character of the Mesopotamian system bring out the fact that the interrelation between the two was very strong and significant (Farber

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[31] "Today, thanks to the lessons of anthropology, it is common to accept the impossibility of separating magic from religion and to pass on to more interesting subjects." Alain Moreau and Jean-Claude Turpin, eds., La Magie: du monde babylonien au monde hellénistique, vol. 1 (Montpellier, France: Paul Valéry University Research Publications, 2000) 177, n.1. Sorbonne professor Dominique Briquel tells us that "we can smile" at the "purely negative" conceptions previous scholars had of magic for, at present, most critics recognize that it is often impossible to distinguish magic from religion and it is common to interpret magic as a system of understanding the universe which is not fundamentally different from religion. Ibid. Even Marxists who tend to view magic and religion as a false set of beliefs agree on this point: "Religion and magic are logically and practically inseparable: they constitute the fundamental and complementary forms for an explanation (illusory) and the transformation (imaginary) of the world." Graham Cunningham, Religion and Magic: Approaches and Theories (New York: New York University Press, 1999) 94.

1995:1900). However, the term magico-religious seems insufficient when attempting to articulate the thought that Mesopotamian spirituality appears to have been a relatively balanced and flexible combination of more and less magical attitudes towards the divine and everyday life. In other words, what we customarily call "magic" and "religion" constituted two flowing and complementary facets of this spiritual and material worldview.

This specific sense of the expression magico-religious is important in the context of this dissertation because the blending of magical and religious ways of apprehending reality is offered here as one of the factors that allowed the Mesopotamians to find a plurality of values in both spiritual and material objects, actions, and pursuits;[32] as well as permitted them to invest created objects and performed actions with complex and significant meanings making their experience of artistic and sexual activities, for example, vastly different from our own. Their notions of art as sacred object or pursuit (chapter 3) and of the sexual act as religious offering (chapter 4), for instance, seem to be rooted in this ability to maintain a sort of equilibrium between magical and religious thinking, or between different types of rationalities for, as Max Weber noted long ago,

[32] As we shall see in the next chapter, numerous objects and the materials used to create them were believed to possess multiple values and meanings. Lapis lazuli, for example, was a stone with high aesthetic, magico-religious, and exchange values simultaneously. Furthermore: "magical protection or support was not restricted to exorcism in the Western sense of the term or to the defense against evil powers: magic was equally appropriate in most cases where, for our point of view, a religious prayer or even a completely secular nursery rhyme would be the remedy of choice." Walter Farber, "Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Mesopotamia," in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 3:1901. Baby incantations to quiet a crying baby, for example, "reflect the motifs and style of earlier lullabies." Ibid. Likewise, a number of spells that intend to ease childbirth, to keep wild dogs from biting, and the like, are neither apotropaic nor manipulative in a narrow sense and can be traced back to forms of folk poetry." Ibid.

magic is relatively rational because "it follows the rules of experience" and its thinking is part of the range of everyday "purposive conduct" (Weber 1922:1).[33]

This chapter therefore addresses the classic distinction between magic and religion so as to better comprehend and evaluate the nature and workings of the Mesopotamian mode of representation. Magic has for some time been positioned within the domain of the "primitive" and non-Western, and any activity or form that openly owns "magical" qualities or functions has tended to be mistrusted, maligned, or dismissed (Appendix B). As a result, we have been inclined to look at the aesthetic products and the social activities of people who use "magic" as *inferior* to ours; instead of *art*, we have seen mere *artifacts* – i.e. "simple or primitive tool, weapon, vessel, etc." (Webster's 1991:78). As we shall see in the following chapters, however, Mesopotamian representation is neither simple nor "primitive," and in fact the combination of magical and religious thinking bestowed upon it social meaning and significance.

The particular mixture of more and less rational elements in the spiritual system of Mesopotamia baffles scholars to this day. Prayer, for instance, which has been construed by modern scholarship as a distinctive element of religion is found side by side with spells - commonly designated as attributes of magic - indicating that a boundary between magic and religion was unknown or indifferent to the early inhabitants of the land: the Sumerians and the Akkadians. Opportunely, the emerging standpoint on magic

[33] While the answer to what constitutes "rationality" is far from clear, goal-directed action has served as a criterion for this concept among scholars. Anthropologist I.C. Jarvie, for example, has argued that magic and religion are rational because the actions of the actors are directed towards a goal. However, he claims, magic and religion constitute a "weak rationality," while science represents a "strong rationality." Cunningham, Religion and Magic, 79. Perhaps before Weber, the anthropologist James G. Frazer recognized that magic sought to control the course of nature for practical and economic ends which were often beneficial, such as procuring offspring for barren women, healing and preventing sickness, or aiding the community secure an adequate supply of food. James George Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion, vol. 1 (McLean, VA: IndyPublish, 1922) 16-19 and 66.

and religion in the social sciences inspires new ways of thinking about highly structured spiritualities like the anthropomorphist and polytheistic religious system of agrarian Mesopotamia. For instead of fruitlessly speculating about the use of religious elements, like prayers, in so-called "magical" settings or attempting to determine where religion begins and magic ends in a given spiritual system, as some have done,[34] we can now envision magic and religion on a continuum of spiritual belief with differently rational attitudes towards the divine. Or, we can begin to "dissolve" the very category of "magic" in our investigations, as anthropologist David Pocock once suggested (Mauss 1972:3).[35]

Nonetheless, theories positing distinctions between magic and religion in Mesopotamia persist, such as the one by eminent historian Jean Bottéro discussed below. Therefore, in order to elucidate the fusion of rationalities in Mesopotamian religion this chapter discusses some of its 'magical' and 'religious' aspects through the oppositions formulated in traditional scholarship between what are now often seen as two categories of the sacred (Cunningham 1999:vii). Three sets of opposites which imply additional tensions between magic and religion will be addressed here: immanence vs. transcendence, coercion vs. supplication, and secrecy vs. community.

Immanence vs. Transcendence:

A leading way of distinguishing magic from religion in the classical literature has been the claim that the first is governed by immanence while the latter is characterized by

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[34] Walter Farber, professor of Assyriology at the University of Chicago, has said that: "modern scholars who wonder about such a use of prayers in a magical setting simply fail to understand the underlying unity of magico-religious thought." Farber, "Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination," 1900. In his study of totemism, Durkheim declared his intention to study religion "and stop where magic begins." Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995) 41.

[35] In *Social Anthropology* (1982), Edmund Leach also expressed doubts about the usefulness of the term magic: "As for magic…after a lifetime's career as a professional anthropologist, I have almost reached the conclusion that the word has no meaning whatsoever." Cunningham, Religion and Magic, 90.

transcendence. Hegel, Tylor, Frazer, Weber, and Freud agreed on this: magic views the divine as being present in the world (Appendix B). As such, magic is a spirituality of nature that centers around a belief in spirits and demons.[36] On the other hand, when the divine is seen as being outside this world there is religion, which is essentially transcendent and revolves around the worship of gods. According to this position, immanence is an "earlier," "primitive," or less rational way of understanding the divine and magic is a "raw" or "crude" type of spirituality when compared to transcendent religion.[37] Models of immanent spiritual systems include, according to Hegel for example, Eastern religions such as those of Egypt and India, including Hinduism and Buddhism. While transcendent religions encompass the Jewish, the Greek, and the Roman faiths (Cunningham 1999:5). In line with this train of thought, the Near Eastern spiritual system of Mesopotamia which preceded Buddhism would fall in the category of immanent spirituality.[38]

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[36] Marx and Engels "followed Hegel in regarding the earliest religion as having been one of nature." Cunningham, Religion and Magic, 7.

[37] These and other classical ideas about magic have survived into the present. In the nineteen seventies the Director of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in France, Francois André Isambert, retold the story that magic was immanent (animistic), manipulatory, and private in character while religion possessed transcendental, propitiatory, and public traits. Thus reinstating the polarity between magic and religion. Roberto Cipriani, Sociology of Religion: An Historical Introduction, trans. Laura Ferrarotti (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 2000) 210. In the case of Mesopotamia, the existence of what some have called "temple prostitution" has been said to represent one of the "low and crude" features of the religion of the Babylonian or Assyrian. H. W. F. Saggs, Everyday Life in Babylonia and Assyria (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965) 196.

[38] Historian Thorkild Jacobsen has claimed that "the ancient Mesopotamian was governed by the conviction that numinous power was immanent." Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) 14.

While some classical scholars viewed magic as the "oldest" or "earliest" form of religion from which religion proper evolved (Hegel, Tylor, Frazer, Weber, Freud),[39] others envisaged it as separate but akin to religion (Malinowski, Mauss, Durkheim). All the same, the hierarchical opposition between immanence and transcendence - or magic and religion - implied conflicts between nature and culture as well as between body and mind. For, as Hegel made plain, transcendence refers to the elevation of Spirit above nature (1999:5); that is, the favoring of mind over body and reason over matter.

However, in his evolutionist model of religion Hegel posited a third religious stage: a synthesis of the previous two, which was both immanent and transcendent and was represented by Christianity: "the consummate religion" (1999). This idea of religious synthesis is helpful to this study.

Although I do not claim that Mesopotamian religion was a synthesis of immanence and transcendence, as Hegel's "whole" religion was to be, I offer that it exemplifies a spirituality of "immanent transcendence" [40] because both immanent and transcendent elements coexisted in it from at least the third millennium down to the latest times of this civilization in the first millennium BCE.[41] For instance, throughout this extensive period the belief in the superhuman powers of certain natural phenomena and

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[39] To Frazer, for example, magic "represents a ruder and earlier phase of the human mind, through which all the races of mankind have passed or are passing on their way to religion." James Frazer, The Golden Bough (New York: MacMillan, 1922) 56.

[40] French sociologist Michel Maffesoli uses this expression when explaining a different dynamic which he calls: "sociality at base." Michel Maffesoli, The Shadow of Dionysus: A Contribution to the Sociology of the Orgy (Albany: Sate University of New York Press, 1993) 130.

[41] Historian George Contenau points out that many elements "which one might reasonably expect to find in a primitive period, were however preserved, and the pantheon had scarcely changed even by the end of the Babylonian and Assyrian periods." Georges Contenau, Everyday Life in Babylon and Assyria (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1966) 266. The Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods encompassed the time from 1155 to 539 when Mesopotamia was invaded by the Persians.

of harmful forces, or "demons," [42] coexisted with a belief in gods and goddesses. As historian H. W. F. Saggs has noted, even during the Assyrian period, ca. 1155-626, the palaces built colossal lions and bulls to protect from dangerous entities (Saggs 1965:183-4).

Before the third millennium, Mesopotamian religion centered on "worship of powers in natural and other phenomena essential for economic survival" (Jacobsen 1976:21) or, in other words, on nature worship (Contenau 1966:245). During the third millennium, "this religion…diluted these vital forces by the creation of divinities with a specific and limited function – divinities of corn and forest, of vine and stream, besides spirits of a lower order, or demons" (1966:245-46). Yet "it must not be imagined that the element of nature worship had wholly vanished: on the contrary we still find the gods Dumuzi, Ningizzida, Shara and Ningursi, lords respectively of harvests, of the 'wood of life', of green things and of the river floods, together with their wives Baba goddess of health, Nintud goddess of childbirth, Gatumdug, the kindly giver of milk, Geshtin-anna the heavenly vine, and Shala the lady of the corn ear" (1966). Thus Mesopotamian religion "preserved a considerable number of early ideas, such as a "naturist" and localized concept of the gods and their prerogatives" (Bonnefoy 1991:143). This means that Mesopotamian religion "tended to turn the divine into an idea simultaneously transcendant and closely connected with the universal mastery and control of human life" (1991).

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[42] Bodies of water such as the Holy River, mountains, fire, fertile powers (the growth of sheep or grain) were endowed with superhuman powers and ranked below the gods in the pantheon. Bottéro, Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia, 63. The Sumerians and Akkadians did not use a collective term, such as "demons," to refer to harmful beings or forces. They recognized the presence of dangerous beings and attributed superior powers to them but "did not dwell very much on their persons, their nature, or their existence, as they have never been presented very clearly." Ibid.

The fact is that in Mesopotamia immanence appears to have been a deliberate collective aim which was not restricted to "demons" or natural phenomena. Great efforts were made to ensure the presence of the divine within the social world; in man-made objects such as art (chapter 3) and in human activities such as sexuality (chapter 4). Monumental temples were built to house the deities on earth, divine sculptures were deftly fashioned and daily cared for - fed, washed, clothed, entertained, wedded - as if they had human needs, and cult dramas such as that of the "sacred marriage" (chapter 4) were created to manifest the divine and guarantee its lasting presence among the people. Deities "resided *in* their statues and therefore *in* the sanctuaries where the statues were placed" (Bottéro 2001:68). Likewise, immanence was sought through inscription, naming, poetry, song, incantation, and prayer for words were believed to have the power to manifest the reality invoked (Jacobsen 1976:15; Contenau 1966:160).[43] Hence the Mesopotamians tended to perceive as well as seek divine or numinous power at the center of the natural and social worlds.[44] As a result, pursuits such as song, music, sculpture, and dance possessed a power (next chapter) which caused them "to be and thrive and flourish" (Jacobsen 1976:6).

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[43] "One way of fixing in perpetuity the power which resides in the voice that pronounces a name was by writing it…Since to know and pronounce the name of an object instantly endowed it with reality, and created power over it,…writing, which was a permanent record of the name, naturally contributed to this power, as did both drawing and sculpture." Contenau, Everyday Life in Babylon, 163-64.

[44] Despite this, according to Bottéro, no mystical notion of the divine existed among the Mesopotamians. The divine dwelt in many things and places inside and outside the world but "never in the heart or spirit of a person." Bottéro, Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia, 41. Except, perhaps, for the persons of the king as 'son' of a god or goddess and of the high priestess who impersonated the goddess Ishtar during the Sacred Marriage ceremony (chapter 4). Gods and goddesses existed to be revered, respected, and adored above all. However, if the word "mystic" means, as it does to Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, a belief "in forces and influences and actions which, though imperceptible to sense, are nevertheless real," it could be claimed that the Mesopotamian possessed a mystical notion of the divine. Cunningham, Religion and Magic, 57.

On the other hand, in the cosmography of the Mesopotamians the divine was both present in the world and outside the world, in heaven or "On High" and in hell or "Below." [45] The first triad of gods Anu, Enlil, and Ea dwelt in the sky and ruled air, earth, and water respectively. Anu was the most important deity during the early periods and was worshipped at Uruk, but his daughter Inanna/Ishtar appears to have gradually surpassed him in importance (Contenau 1966:246-7). The second triad, Sin, Shamash, and Inanna/Ishtar, also resided in the sky and had dominion over the moon, the sun, and the planet Venus respectively. Apparently, during the "earliest age" gods and goddesses dwelt both in heaven and in their temples upon earth (1966:159). Later on, however, they are said to have "reascended into heaven" (1966).[46] Perhaps as a result of these 'events,' the Mesopotamians assumed a similarity of composition and interdependence between heaven and earth which led them to the conviction that "every action in the one sphere must necessarily produce its counterpart in the other" (1966). This belief, expounded in the ensuing chapters, is one of the factors that permitted the Mesopotamians to understand and treat art and ritual sexual activity as sacred.

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[45] According to Bottéro, the Mesopotamians saw the universe as "a huge hollow spheroid whose upper, luminous part formed "On High," or "heaven," and whose lower, symmetrical, and obscure part formed "below," or "Hell." It was divided in the center by a sort of central island: "Earth," reflected below by Apsû, a layer of fresh water. Earth and Apsû were surrounded by the salt water of the sea. At the two eastern and western extremities of this system they imagined tall mountains to support the celestial vault, and two depressions that allowed free passage from the space Below to the space On High, and vice versa." Bottéro, Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia, 78.

[46] Contenau posits three stages of religious development in Mesopotamia: nature worship, the worship of the gods in heaven, and the introduction into the pantheon of two national gods: Marduk and Ashur. Contenau, Everyday Life in Babylon, 245-46. To him, the gods were represented in human form "from the very outset." Ibid., 256. To historian Thorkild Jacobsen, in the fourth millennium Mesopotamian religion was basically nature worship which may or may not have represented the divine in human form; in the third millennium, human forms of the divine "came to dominate almost completely" and religion added "the concept of the ruler and the hope of security against enemies;" in the second millennium, the "fortunes of the individual increase in importance until they rival those of communal economy and security [and the] typical figure is the personal god." Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, 9 and 21.

In Mesopotamia, the idea of transcendent divinity appears linked to the rise of empire (chapter 5). The formation of the world's first empire by king Sargon the Great circa 2334 introduced the notion of cosmic sovereignty for the gods who formerly had been thought to have national but not universal dominion. The Akkadians insisted on "the absolute superiority of their gods over the world" (Moreau 2000:70) and implemented a "rational hierarchical order" upon the pantheon by elevating fewer gods and goddesses (Bottéro 2001:48). Hence under Akkadian influence, the deities of Mesopotamia became more distant or transcendent: "enveloped in majesty, distant and fearsome, isolated in their own sphere, inaccessible to everything but their own kind" (2001:40).

Visual testimony to the increasing importance of transcendence in Mesopotamian society was the building of spectacular religious monuments known as *ziggurats*, or dwellings of the gods, which assumed their definitive shape at the end of the third millennium (Fig. 2). These multi-floored towers, connected by stairways or ramps, become increasingly narrow at the top in a sort of pyramidal or spiral configuration and may have served as inspiration for the biblical story of the Tower of Babel (Contenau 1976:279). Their elaborate elevation is said to belong to a Mesopotamian tradition of "associating height with religious edifices" (Aruz 2003:422). The *ziggurat* seems to represent an attempt by the religious elite to approach the divine at a time when it was becoming increasingly distant from the human realm. The *cella*, the sacred room of the chosen deity, was only accessible to members of the elite and to the cultic personnel in charge of attending to the daily needs of the deity. As such, the *ziggurat* stands for a type of divinity that was inaccessible and hence transcendent. Before their appearance, temples dedicated to gods and goddesses were raised on platforms or built inside large

walled compounds but they seem to have been "more or less accessible to the common "faithful," who were free to carry out their devotions there" (Bottéro 2001:119).

The transcendent quality of divinity is also made explicit in the writings of the Mesopotamians. In the *Theodicy*, for example, the author admits that: "The plans of the god…[and] The decrees of the goddess are not…To understand properly…The divine mind, like the centre of the heavens, is remote; knowledge of it is difficult; the masses do not know it…Who knows the will of the gods in heaven?...Where have mortals learnt the way of a god?" (Bottéro 2001:60-1). Yet despite the progressive elevation of gods and goddesses "whose appearances on earth had become much less frequent" (Contenau 1966:159), the union of heaven and earth endured thanks to numerous means of communication. Prayer, incantation, divination, numerology, astrology, sacrifice, exorcism, and even personal correspondence [47] allowed the Mesopotamians to stay in touch with transcendent divinity. Divination, for example, was conducted under the auspices of the sun god Shamash and of Adad, the Lord of Storms, while exorcism was the province of the great gods Ea and Marduk (1966). The association of these practices with powerful deities makes evident that they were accepted elements in official religion throughout Mesopotamian history.

In contrast, only prayer and sacrifice are considered elements of religion in classical social science (Appendix B). Under the term "magic," a variety of practices seem to have been lumped together by scholars. They include: meteorology, healing, divination,

[47] Written requests were addressed personally to the deities "from whom one hoped to obtain some advantage or favor" for oneself or for the community. Bottéro, Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia, 148. One such 'private' letter from about 1700 reads: "To the god, my father…Here is what Apil-Adad, your servant, says to you: "Why have you become indifferent to me?...Send a message to Marduk…to ask him to make my sin disappear. Then I will go (to the temple) to contemplate your face and kiss your feet! Further, concern yourself (also) with my family, big and small, and, for them, take pity on me! May your support reach me!" Ibid., 148-49.

telepathy, sexual cults, fertility rituals, temple prostitution, rain-making, sex-magic, fortune-telling, astrology, medium ship, necromancy, and incantation or the casting of spells (Frazer 1922; Weber 1922:2; Mauss 1972; Bottéro 2001:98; Malinowski 1954:41-46; Saggs 1965:181-198).

Hence "magic" or immanence and "religion" or transcendence were used in combination by the Mesopotamians. According to Mesopotamian theology (see the great poem *Atrahasis*), human beings were solely created to relieve the deities from hard work, to attend to their needs, to please, entertain, and honor them. Human survival and success depended on how well this was achieved. Divine presence preceded and guaranteed human existence. As a result, the Mesopotamians sought to ensure the presence of the divine *within* and *outside* their world: immanence and transcendence.

Another opposition - that between prayer as supplication and spell as coercion in the work of several classical scholars – is used in the next section to further illustrate the blending of magical and religious elements in the spiritual system of Mesopotamia.

Coercion vs. Supplication:

Hegel was among the early modern scholars who claimed that magic, "the oldest rawest, crudest form of religion," was based on manipulation of nature (Cunningham 1999:5). This theme of manipulation or coercion of natural forces by practitioners of "magic" appears in numerous classic writings. In *The Golden Bough* (1890), anthropologist James G. Frazer ((1854-1941) stated that it was "probable that magic arose before religion in the evolution of our race" (Frazer 1922:58) because it corresponded to a "primitive" intellectual phase in which people attempt to "force the great powers of nature to do their pleasure" (1922:59). On the other hand, religion

reflected a more evolved mind-set in which people acknowledge powers superior to them and think of "courting them by offerings and prayer" (1922). Accordingly, Frazer defined religion as "a belief in powers higher than man and an attempt to propitiate or please them" (1922:54). His views implied a hierarchical opposition between magic and religion and had a tremendous influence on subsequent theorizing. Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) commented that Frazer's "theory of magic and religion has been the starting point of most modern studies of the twin subjects" (Malinowski 1954:19).[48]

Among sociologists Max Weber (1864-1920) stayed very close to Frazer in his assessment of magic as coercion and religion as propitiation of supernatural forces. To him, religious behavior originally involved the use of *charisma* to attain this-worldly physical or material values or ends.[49] The extraordinary powers for which Weber used the term charisma, and the related phenomenon of ecstasy, constitute the two most important elements in what he sometimes called "magical religion" (Weber 1922:224) and "magical orgiasticism" (1922:343). The magician differs from the ordinary layman in that "he" is "permanently endowed with charisma;" he specializes in the cultivation of ecstasy, which represents or mediates charisma (1922:3).[50] The major concern of the magician's art is,

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[48] "It is in this distinction between direct control on the one hand and propitiation of superior powers on the other that Sir James Frazer sees the difference between religion and magic." Bronislaw Malinowski, Magic, Science, and Religion and Other Essays (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1954) 19.

[49] Ecstatic states are those "which are viewed, in accordance with primitive experience, as the preconditions for producing certain effects in meteorology, healing, divination and telepathy." Weber, Sociology of Religion, 2. Weber identified the approach to producing certain effects in nature by employing magical powers as a pre-animistic or naturalistic orientation.

[50] "For the layman, this psychological state is accessible only in occasional actions. Unlike the merely rational practice of wizardry, ecstasy occurs in a social form, the orgy, which is the primordial form of communal religious association. But the orgy is an occasional activity…Because of the routine demands of living, the layman can experience ecstasy only occasionally, as intoxication. To induce ecstasy, the layman

according to Weber, the rational manipulation of spirits in accordance with economic interests. On the other hand, the realm of religion developed with the rise of the idea of the "soul" and ideas of "gods," "demons," and "supernatural" powers and their relation to men. "Based on the experience with the conditions of orgies, there evolved the concept of "soul" as a separate entity present in, behind or near natural objects, even as the human body contains something that leaves it in dream,…ecstasy, or death" (1922).

> "What is primarily distinctive in this whole development…is the fact that new experiences now play a role in life. Before, only the things or events that actually exist or take place played a role in life; now certain experiences, of a different order in that they only signify something, also play a role in life. Magic is transformed from a direct manipulation of forces into a symbolic activity…Since it is assumed that behind real things and events there is something else, distinctive and spiritual, of which real events are only the symptoms or indeed the symbols, an effort must be made to influence, not the concrete things, but the spiritual powers that express themselves through concrete things. This is done through…instrumentalities that "mean" something, i.e., symbols" (1922:6-7).

Hence, to Weber, the change from direct manipulation or coercion of natural forces into a symbolic action determined a shift and a step forward in the development of religion. A progression that included an intermediate stage, the belief in gods, in which prayer and sacrifice replaced coercion while doctrine, cult, and priests displaced ecstasy and charisma; before reaching a third stage characterized by the belief in one transcendental god, the rise of the prophet, the congregation, the parish, written scriptures, preaching, and pastoral care. In this manner, Weber arrived at a set of definitions which closely approximate those of Frazer: "The relationships of men to supernatural forces which take the form of prayer, sacrifice and worship may be termed

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may employ any type of alcoholic beverage, tobacco, or similar narcotics –and especially music- of which originally served orgiastic purposes." Weber, Sociology of Religion, 3.

'cult' and 'religion,' as distinguished from sorcery, which is magical coercion" (1922: 28).

Another prominent contemporary of Frazer and Weber, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), conjectured that humanity had developed "three great pictures of the universe," Animism, Religion, and Science, and related magic to the first stage which "is not yet a religion but contains the foundations on which religions are later built" (Freud 1950:97). To him, magic was "a body of instructions upon how to obtain mastery over men, beasts and things – or rather, over their spirits," hence a coercive mechanism, and "the earlier and more important branch of animistic technique" (1950:98). Religion, on the other hand, appeared when power was transferred to the gods (Cipriani 2000:98).[51]

Although not every classical scholar agreed with this characterization,[52] to several prominent thinkers coercion of natural forces is inherent to magic while supplication in the form of prayer and sacrifice is a hallmark of religion.[53] What is more, the idea of

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[51] In Freud's scheme, however, both religion and magic were essentially an "illusion"; a device to avoid neurosis. Cipriani, Sociology of Religion, 99. They arose from "the necessity of defending oneself against the crushingly superior force of nature" Ibid., 100. He expected science to replace the religious and magical picture of the universe in the future when a more rational critical consciousness developed. Ibid.

[52] Marcel Mauss, for example, pointed out that religious rites can also constraint: "in most of the ancient religions, the god was unable to prevent a rite from accomplishing its end if it had been faultlessly executed." Marcel Mauss, A General Theory of Magic, trans. Robert Brain (New York: Routledge, [1902] 1972) 26. Besides, some magical rites do not have a direct action and they involve gods to whom magicians are sometimes "forced to supplicate." Ibid. Thus magic could involve prayer to gods as well as to spirits and was not all based on coercion as Frazer and his followers had assumed. To Mauss, distinctions between magic and religion lied rather in "the fact of prohibition." Ibid., 27. Rites that were "consistently magical" had to do with "evil spells" which were prohibited and punished: "The fact of their being prohibited provides delimitation for the whole sphere of magical action…*since association with evil as an aspect of magical rites always provides humanity with a rough general notion of magic*." Ibid. Italics are not in text.

[53] This view implies a further distinction between magic and religion as it relates to Frazer's contention that magic is based on arrogance while religion is based on humility. The magician "constraints or coerces instead of conciliating or propitiating [the spirits] as religion would do" because magicians believe their powers to be as great or greater than those of nature, spirits, and gods. Frazer, The Golden Bough, 55. This "haughtiness" and self-sufficiency "revolts" the priest who has often pursued the magician. Granted, Frazer acknowledges, the struggle between priests and magicians has had other motives: the "interests" of the priest "as well as his feelings were often injured by a rival practitioner." Ibid., 56. Echoing Frazer, Freud

magic as coercion and religion as supplication continues into the present despite new research and numerous critiques of this view.[54] In France, for instance, during the first international colloquium on magic at the University of Montpellier in the year 2000, professor of ancient Greek and Mythology Alain Moreau restated that religion accepts divine omnipotence - it prays and supplicates - while magic attempts to constrain gods and spirits (Moreau 2000:33). Before him, in 1982, the prominent Dutch archeologist Maarten J. Vermaseren stated that "the magician does not supplicate to the gods, he wants to constrain them" (2000:177-8). Likewise, Anne-Marie Tupet, the author of *La magie dans la poésie latine* (1975), has claimed that the religious person implores the gods and humbly submits to them while the "magician gives orders to his, and uses means to constrain them" (2000:119).

The tendency to define magic and religion respectively as coercion and supplication also continues in contemporary Mesopotamian scholarship (Jacobsen 1976; Moreau 2000). According to Jean Bottéro, magic was in the course of Mesopotamian history transformed - via exorcism - into theurgy, which to him is "truly religious" (2000:72-3). In rituals of exorcism, the Mesopotamians petitioned and prayed to the gods instead of giving them orders as it was, supposedly, customary in former magic rites (2000:69). In other words, magic compels while exorcism implores. For this reason, the latter constitutes religion proper. Though he defines magic as an "essentially beneficial" activity which struggles against many types of evil, in this particular case Bottéro

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contended that magic was about men ascribing "omnipotence" to themselves. Cipriani, Sociology of Religion, 98.

[54] Gérard Capdeville of the Sorbonne and Fritz Graf of Princeton University are among the contemporary scholars who oppose this distinction. In his recent study of Etruscan religion Capdeville argues that "this distinction does not appear pertinent to the Etruscans, or, more precisely, that prayer and constrain are both part of religion." Moreau, La Magie, 119.

theorizes along the lines of Frazer and his followers (2000:64). He does so, however, to counterbalance the scholarship that classifies the copious and varied texts found in Mesopotamia as mere "magic" in order to dismiss them (2000).[55]

Of utmost relevance to this study is the fact that the Mesopotamians combined religious prayer and sacrifice - as well as confessions[56] and religious processions[57] - with practices such as divination, incantation, chanting, astrology,[58] numerology, exorcism, hemerology,[59] and sexual cults (chapters 4 and 5), which to the minds of many of our contemporaries qualify as elements of magic. More, they attached sacred value to all without apparent distinction. Numerology, for example, was often used to "conceal some sacred mystery, and comprise[d] a mysterious language with a significance beyond our

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[55] He estimates that "half a million pieces" of written and visual documentation have been found by archeologists and include countless prayers, hymns, songs, myths, lists and catalogs of divine names, descriptions of rituals and ceremonies, words of wisdom, astronomical texts, literature, mathematical equations, and representations of sacred figures. Bottéro, Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia, 22-23.

[56] Elaborate confessions of sins have been recovered by archeologists. Since divine wrath was unpredictable, the Mesopotamians chose to confess all the sins they were aware of having committed plus all the additional faults they could think of in case any of their own "were thereby included." Contenau, Everyday Life in Babylon, 269. Examples of sins are: offences against a god or goddess, lying, stirring up enmity among friends or family, disobeying one's master, using inaccurate scales in business, retaining what one should have given, receiving what is not due to oneself, stealing or causing someone to steal, breaking into someone else's house, having intercourse with another man's wife, failing to set a prisoner free, committing injustice, being in the company of a man under a spell, stepping in the liquid of a libation which had been poured, touching anyone whose body was unclean, and spitting or urinating in the sacred river. Ibid., 269-70.

[57] Religious processions were held inside temple precincts and throughout the different cities. Participants included statues of the deities, government officials, priests and priestesses, performers, and worshippers. Contenau, Everyday Life in Babylon, 285.

[58] Mesopotamian astrology was based on meteorology. It was basically founded upon observation of the planets, the winds, the stars, eclipses and the like. It had relevance in high policy and in the daily lives of ordinary people. However, it was not based on the horoscope as is modern day astrology. Both the zodiac and the precession of the equinoxes were not known in Mesopotamia until late in its history. Contenau, Everyday Life in Babylon, 289. Furthermore, contrary to Weber's conviction, astrology did not develop into a rigid and fatalistic belief in the dominion of the stars over all things in Mesopotamia. Weber, Sociology of Religion, 22. To the Mesopotamian, the future could be unveiled but not *caused* by the stars. Bottéro, Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia, 216. It was after the demise of Mesopotamian civilization that an "astral religion" spread throughout the Mediterranean and had its apogee in imperial Rome. Ibid., 212.

[59] "The science of 'good' and 'bad' days." Contenau, Everyday Life in Babylon, 290.

comprehension" (Contenau 1966:218). Nidaba or Nisaba, a vegetation deity associated with reeds, was the "goddess of numbers and prophecies derived from them" (1966:252).[60] Likewise, divination occupied a special place and had its professional officiates within Mesopotamian religion.

Diviners or *bârû* worshipped all the deities in the pantheon but "claimed to be under the patronage" of the gods Shamash and Adad "and to represent an extremely ancient tradition, since the rites which they practiced were believed to have been handed down by Enmeduranki, king of Sippar before the Deluge" in mythical times (1966:281). According to this legend, the gods "revealed their will and their future intentions by a thousand signs" to the king (1966:286). Because of this original revelation, divination was considered sacred and accepted "as a source of official information" (1966). The diviners' work consisted primarily in studying and translating myriad daily phenomena in temples and palaces. In their letters the phrase "the king hath made me seek the meaning" of this or that is continually repeated confirming their role as official interpreters of divine will (1966:281).[61] Birthdays, oracles, dreams, chance meetings, spilt water on the road, patterns made by oil over water, star configurations, the entrails of goats or sheep, and physical malformations were all subject to interpretation by the diviners (1966:288-9).

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[60] The perfect number was 60 and each deity was ascribed a number; the god Anu possessed the perfect number and his daughter Ishtar the number 15. Also, every name could be expressed numerically and computed. The sexagesimal and the decimal systems of numeration were both current in Mesopotamia. Contenau, Everyday Life in Babylon, 258. The Mesopotamians used the system of *isosephia* or *geometria* which was later on further developed by the Greeks and commonly used by the Gnostics and the Fathers of the Christian Church who were "convinced believers in it." Ibid., 166-67. In addition to geometry, mathematics, including algebra, was widely used by the Mesopotamians as the collection of mathematical problems attests. Ibid., 222-23.

[61] Bottéro cites a document showing that the Mesopotamian diviners "readily accepted "revelations" by the gods" concerning the king: "if on the 29th of the month of Ayyar [April/May] there is a solar eclipse: the king will die"." Bottéro, Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia, 104.

The exorcists or *âshipu* comprised another class of officiates who claimed ancient ancestry. In their spells they avowed to be from Eridu, the most ancient of Sumerian cities: "I am the *âshipu* that was created at Eridu: yea, the *âshipu* that was begotten at Eridu and in Subaru [Assyria]" (1966:282). In this particular case, the exorcist basically claims to have existed throughout Mesopotamian history, from Sumerian to Assyrian times. Exorcists were in great demand for apparently the Mesopotamians were "continually assailed by demons" (1966:290). Exorcism was addressed to deities as well as dangerous entities and was conducted by the priesthood in palaces, temples, the homes of the sick, outdoors, or on the banks of the Holy River Euphrates. Its aim was to ensure deliverance from danger by any means, including bribery (1966).[62] For example, the "demon" Lamashtu who specialized in tormenting pregnant women and young children was enticed to spare her victims with the promise of gifts such as ornaments, "an ass to cross the desert," and a boat "for the passage of the waters beneath the earth" (1966:294).

To avert negative energies exorcists employed several practices and techniques; they wore red, burned multiple substances, untyied the symbolic knots that entangled a victim, and used the technique of the spell (1966:291). Small images were made to be tortured and destroyed and specific words were pronounced: "In my hand I hold the (magic) circle of Ea, in my hand I hold the cedar wood, the sacred weapon of Ea, in my hand I hold the branch of the palm tree of the great rite" (1966:292). Lists of spells and their magical

[62] Exorcists also used herbal formulas to both expel harmful beings and alleviate the physical ailments they caused. According to Contenau: "By the period of the Sargonid dynasty [ca. 2334-2197], a patient in Mesopotamia could be treated on a system of pre-Hippocratic medicine administered by the *asû* (from the Sumerian *a-zu*, one who divines knowledge from water). The *asû*, or doctors, formed a corporate body from whose members the chief physicians to the king were drawn." Contenau, Everyday Life in Babylon, 295.

steps abound (Saggs 1965:181-198). Here is an example of an incantation addressed to a harmful being:

> "Let him eat his fury like the beast eats grass!
> And may the evil he has caused lose its force!
> …….
> May he be able to cover his face (with shame, or impotency?)
> And may his speech again become as ineffective as when he was born!"
> (Bottéro 2001:193-4).

On the other hand, from at least 2500 on exorcists used prayers to implore divine intervention on their behalf and that of their clients.[63] The following rather long ritual of exorcism is a striking example that illustrates the combination of less rational and more rational modes of approaching the supernatural in ancient Mesopotamia. It concerns the birth of a premature and monstrous fetus which augured misfortune and had to be disposed of in the Holy River to set its family free:

> " If, in the house of the one concerned, there arrives a misshapen birth, either a farm animal…or a cow…or a human, in order to avert the misfortune promised by this phenomenon, so that it touches neither the person concerned or his house: One will go to the banks of the river and will erect an enclosure of reeds, inside of which one will spread some "garden grass" [a plant thought to be lustral and used to create a space protected from supernatural danger].Then one will construct a small, rough altar out of reeds there, on which one will place seven breads of offering, beer, dates, and *sasqu* flour; one will fill an incense burner…and will fill three jugs of beer…*pannigu* breads, ear-breads; a grain…of silver and a grain of gold [for the gods]…One

[63] More than a hundred and thirty tablets are dedicated to the type of exorcism which seeks pardon from the gods and a relaxation of their punishment. Bottéro, Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia, 196. To Bottéro, "magic and exorcism should be distinguished" because exorcism's explanation of evil places it one step ahead of magic. Ibid., 185. According to "magic," evil spirits are the cause of suffering –illness, calamities, misfortune, heartbreaks, worries. To counter this situation, magicians seek to compel demons to let go by any means necessary. Exorcists, on the other hand, claim "sin" as the cause of suffering. Sin infuriates the gods who send the evil sprits to punish the sufferer and, hence, the responsibility for suffering is transferred to the sufferer. To assuage the effects of sinning, exorcists implore the deities to intervene and restrain the evil spirits. Bottéro attributes this change to the influence of the Akkadians who conquered Sumer during this time period. Ibid., 186-88. However, this explanation of suffering was somewhat questioned by the Mesopotamians themselves as a famous piece in the *Theodicy* demonstrates: "In my youth I sought the will of my god; with prostration and prayer I followed my goddess. But I was bearing a profitless corvée as a yoke. My god decreed instead of wealth destitution. A cripple is my superior, a lunatic outstrips me…I have looked around society, but the evidence is contrary. The god does not impede the way of the devil." Ibid., 191.

> will then place at the head of the misshapen object a pin (?) of gold, and after having attached a breastplate of gold to a piece of red wool, it will be attached to its chest. Then one will place on top of the "garden grass" the misshapen object thus presented.
>
> Then, after having the one concerned kneel, he will be made to recite the following [prayer]: "O Šamaš, Judge of the Heavens and the Earth, Lord of Right and of Equity, Ruler of regions On High and of Below! O Šamaš, it is in your power to give life to a dying man, to deliver the prisoner! O Šamaš, I have come to you! O Šamaš, I have sought out your presence! O Šamaš, I have turned toward you! Deliver me from the misfortune foretold by this misshapen object: let it not reach me! May that misfortune flee far way from me, so that day after day I may bless you, and that whoever sees me…forever sings your praises!"
>
> This should be recited three times…And facing River, one will say this to it: "O Holy River, you are the creator of everything…make it descend into your depths…Take away this misfortune and grant the one concerned joy and life!" Having recited this three times, the one concerned will be purified with water, with tamarisk, with…Then the misshapen object will be placed in the water with provisions and gifts…"one will make a necklace out of carnelian beads, lazulite, serpentine, "spotted stone," "very spotted stone," shiny silex, breccia, and "little breccia," and one will put it around his neck for seven days. And the misfortune announced by the misshapen object will then be completely dissolved" (2001:197-8).

In this example, the magical steps to be followed by the exorcist and the potential victim of misfortune are readily combined with a prayer to the god Shamash who was a deity motivated by considerations of ethical justice if we are to judge from the content of the hymns usually addressed to him:

> "You take care of all the people of the lands…You give the crooked judge experience of prison; The person who perverts justice for a bribe, you make to bear punishment. He who does not accept a bribe but takes the part of the weak is pleasing to Shamash, who will give him long life" (Saggs 1965:197).

Accompanying rituals of exorcism there were often dancers as well as chanters or *kalû* who were participants in a large number of religious ceremonies that aimed at purification and protection. One document clarifies the activities of this sexually

ambiguous officiant:[64] "The *kalû*…standing, will then sing the chosen hymn…Then, another *kalû* will sing the *eršemma* lament, accompanied by kettle drums…After which a *šangû*…in front of (the statue of) the goddess Ishtar, will pour…a libation of water" (2001:121). The *eršemma* constituted a lamentation prayer and appears to have been performed by priestesses because it was written in what some scholars think was a "feminine dialect" known as eme.sal in Sumerian (2001:137). A lengthy prayer of lamentation to the goddess Ishtar, which was to be accompanied by a ritual of incantation, begins thus:

> "I pray to thee, O Lady of ladies, goddess of goddesses. O Ishtar, queen of all peoples, who guides mankind aright…O most mighty of princesses, exalted is thy name…O supporter of arms, who determines battle, O possessor of all divine power, who wears the crown of dominion…Where is not thy name, where is not thy divine power?... At the thought of thy name heaven and earth tremble. The gods tremble…the masses of mankind pay homage to thy might…See me O my Lady; accept my prayers. Faithfully look upon me and hear my supplication…Pity! For my wretched body which is full of confusion and trouble. Pity! For my sickened heart which is full of tears and suffering…Drive away the evil spells of my body (and) let me see the bright light…I am beaten down…my spirit is distressed…what have I done, o my god and my goddess?...Forgive my sin…guide my steps aright" (Pritchard 1955: 384-85).

Lamentation prayers, hymns, and incantations were intoned to the accompaniment of music from drums, citherns, harps, and flutes, for chanting to "soften the heart of the gods" and goddesses was another ingredient of the magico-religious system of Mesopotamia (Contenau 1966:281-2). There were additional forms of prayer. Dialogues, for example, were "sung or modulated by two people or two choruses" (Bottéro 2001:137). Likewise, there were the prayers that worshippers offered with clasped hands to their god or goddess (Fig. 3). Side by side with dialogues, hymns, lamentation prayers,

[64] Male *kalû* occasionally dressed as women and took part in lascivious dances in honor of Ishtar. Bottéro, Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia, 123.

and spells were the sacrifices performed by worshippers. As we shall have the opportunity to see in the chapters that follow, the Mesopotamian gods and goddesses were at times "swift to wrath and quick to punish" and their anger "could only be assuaged by prayer and, above all, by sacrifices" (Contenau 1966:262). To the Mesopotamian, "reverence begets favour, sacrifice prolongs life, and prayer atones for guilt" (Bottéro 2001:165).

Therefore, along with prayer, sacrifice was a central element of the cult. Sacrifices generally involved the killing of animals from goats and bulls to birds by a 'knife carrier' but they also took the form of "the pouring of libations of milk, wine and honey" (Contenau 1966:285). While the term "sacrifice" generally means renunciation or deprivation to us, it meant something else to the Mesopotamians. A sacrifice "was exclusively a gift, an offering, presented to a divinity for its benefit or pleasure" (Bottéro 2001:125). Hence sacrifice was positive. Immolated animals, libations, food, jewels, clothing, precious or rare objects, dance, music, and acts of sexual love were offered with the intention of providing the deities with help or pleasure.[65] Numerous representations of libation scenes exist. From the Early Dynastic III period circa 2550-2250, for example, a wall plaque found in the residence of a high priestess at Ur features several figures attending a libation ceremony performed by a naked man before a temple façade (Fig. 4). On a separate plaque, also found in the city of Ur, a nude and clean shaven man is depicted pouring a libation before a post supported on bull's legs (Fig. 5).

[65] Weber recognized that both prayer and sacrifice had origins in magic and claimed that the magical aspect of sacrifice rested on the fact that in "magical" religions those who made the offering expected something in exchange. Cunningham, Religion and Magic, 12. While this seems to be true to some extent in Mesopotamia, sacrifice was also intended there to assist and please the deities.

According to Contenau, "the key note of every service was purification" because Babylonians had a terror of "even involuntary impurity which might leave a loophole for the tormenting demons" (Contenau 1966:285). While several of the Mesopotamian practices reviewed here indeed aimed at purification or protection (libations, chanting, hemerology) as well as at seeking clarification (divination, astrology), others attempted to coerce spirits and gods at least to some extent. Exorcists, for example, cast spells and bribed harmful beings with gifts while they also petitioned and prayed to the gods. Therefore, in Mesopotamia both manipulation and propitiation of supernatural forces were used in combination by religious figures and lay people to obtain the favor of deities or harmful beings: the spell and the prayer coexisted. Interpretive, supplicatory, and coercive means of approaching the supernatural were blended in Mesopotamian spirituality. What is more, these means were highly organized under the auspices of the two major public institutions: temples and palaces.

Secrecy vs. Community:

Another way in which a number of classical (and contemporary[66]) thinkers have sought to distinguish magic from religion is the claim that magic is practiced occasionally and in secrecy by isolated individuals for other individuals in search of solutions to concrete and practical problems. Accordingly, magic is assumed to lack stable social organization and function. Conversely, religion is defined as a communal endeavor with multiple and long-standing social ends. In Mesopotamia, secret as well as organized and continuous communal rites existed side by side. More fundamentally, certain 'magical' practices such as divination, astrology, and incantation were part of communal worship,

[66] In 2000, Alain Moreau restated the classical view that "magical operations, except for healing rituals, take place in hiding, at night, and without witnesses." Moreau, La Magie, 28.

showing once again that the 'magical' and the 'religious' were therein inseparable. Among the prominent classic scholars of religion who defined magic as an individual and occasional pursuit and religion as a permanently organized communal practice were Weber, Durkheim, and Mauss.

To Weber, magic had developed into a secret lore and magicians, who specialized in the cultivation of *ecstasy*, lacked "a continuously operative cult" (Weber 1922:30). While he recognized that the magician's ecstasy occurred "in a social form, the orgy, which is the primordial form of communal religious association" (1922:3), Weber claimed that the orgy was an occasional activity and hence was not permanent and stable like the activities of a congregation, for example. In other words, to him, the social ties of magicians were sporadic and consequently tenuous. Along the same lines, Durkheim proclaimed that "there is no church of magic" (Durkheim 1995:42), implying that the social footing of magic was weaker than that of religion. Magic beliefs,

> "are often widespread among broad strata of the population…But they do not bind men who believe in them to one another and unite them into the same group, living the same life…Between the magician and the individuals who consult him, there are no durable ties that make them members of a single moral body, comparable to the ties that join the faithful of the same god or adherents of the same cult. The magician has a clientele, not a Church…[And, relations between magicians and their clients are] generally accidental and transient, analogous to those of a sick man with his doctor" (1995).

In short, magic had no "moral community," no laity, and no priests. The "lone" magician worked in isolation. By contrast, "religion is inseparable from the idea of Church" (1995).[67] Thus in Durkheim's thinking religion was "an eminently collective

[67] "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden –beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." Durkheim, Elementary Forms, 44.

thing" (1995:44) while magic did not appear to be so. Yet despite its individual character, magic, like religion, "is made up of beliefs and rites…it has its own myths and dogmas" (1995:39). Nonetheless, "these are less well developed, probably because, given its pursuit of technical and utilitarian ends, magic does not waste time in pure speculation" (1995).[68] While Durkheim was aware that many tribal cultures conceived magic as an aspect and a particular form of "one and the same force" (1995:199)[69] – that is, they did not draw sharp distinctions between magic and religion - he maintained and advocated a qualitative division between the two: religious forces are salutary and beneficent while "*the function of magic forces is above all to cause death and illness*" (1995. Italics are not in text). It is thus perhaps in Durkheim's work that we find an explanation for the scholarly inclination to find distinctions between magic and religion. If magic is "above all" the use of universal energy (*mana*) and magicians' powers for evil deeds, then religion is without question a better, superior, more humane, more rational, and socially constructive force.

Durkheim's nephew Marcel Mauss, "one of the most important scholars of the anthropology of religion of the first half of our century" (Cipriani 2000:56), considered that none among his peers had come up with a satisfactory idea of magic and attempted to produce one himself (Mauss 1972:18).[70] Nevertheless throughout his study of magic

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[68] The idea that magic is practical and concrete seems to go hand in hand with the opposition between secrecy and community, and is found in the writings of Frazer, Weber, Durkheim, Mauss, and Malinowski. Appendix B.

[69] "Magic forces and religious forces are not different in their essence. Indeed, they are sometimes designated by the same word. In Melanesia, the magician and his charms have mana just as do the agents and rites of the regular cult." Durkheim, Elementary Forms, 200.

[70] In Mauss's view, "the definitions of the anthropological school tended to confuse 'magic' with 'sympathetic magic.' Mauss, Theory of Magic, 15. But sympathy is not a prerogative of magic "since there are sympathetic practices in religion." Ibid., 25. More importantly, the magician's practice of 'sympathy'

Mauss tended to reiterate many of the ideas already proposed by other scholars: that magic deals with evil (1972:34), that it is practiced by individuals in isolation and secrecy (1972:11, 28-29, 110, 158), that it is "poorly organized" (1972:13) or "diffuse" (1972:109), that it is anti-religious (1972:29) and anti-social (1972:110), that it is practical, monotonous, and of "the utmost simplicity" (1972:112, 175), that it has a predilection for the forbidden (1972:158), that it resembles science and technology, [71] and last but not least, that it is "the domain of pure production," the "art of doing things," and a "very simple craft" when compared to religion which "tends to be abstract" (1972:175) and is "directed towards more metaphysical ends" (1972:174).

Paradoxically, despite his own claims about magic being a secret and poorly organized practice, Mauss showed by means of concrete examples from around the world that magicians were not loners working individually and in isolation. The profession of magician depended on public sentiment to succeed,[72] and magicians formed "magical

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seems to have been a bit more complex than most scholars had acknowledged. To the magician, "actions performed at a distance are not always thought to be working on their own." Ibid., 90. Thus, Mauss implied that 'cause' and 'effect' were not completely unconnected at least in the minds and work of magicians: "There is the idea of effluvia which leave the body, magical images which travel about, lines linking the magician and his field of action, ropes, chains. Even the magician's soul leaves the body to perform the act he has just produced." Ibid. While the kind of relation he explained was metaphysical rather than empirical, his analysis hinted at a complexity in magical thinking that had been previously ignored.

[71] "Sorcerers were the first poisoners, the first surgeons…Magicians made real discoveries in the field of metallurgy." Mauss, Theory of Magic, 94.

[72] Magicians come from diverse occupational backgrounds and may possess political authority: doctors, barbers, gravediggers, shepherds, blacksmiths, executioners, and even priests may be thought of as having magical virtues. Mauss, Theory of Magic, 36-7. Magicians take on different specializations but regardless of their specialty: "It is public opinion which makes the magician and creates the power he wields." Ibid., 50. Magicians can be specialists or amateurs but in general "magical practices are the prerogative of specialists." Ibid., 32. According to Mauss, magicians are found all over the world and people ascribe to them certain attributes: they "appear odd or untrustworthy," display "violent gestures, a shrill voice, oratorical or poetic gifts," betray "a kind of nervous condition," and fall into ecstatic states "often naturally induced but more usually feigned." Ibid., 34. On the other hand, magicians may possess positive qualities and personal gifts; they are thought to have "wonderful dexterity" and "outstanding knowledge," to posses the ability to "send out" their souls at will and, therefore, be in several places at once, and to shape-change

corporations recruited through heredity or through voluntary membership" (1972:54) In other words, magic was "a collective idea" (1972:12) which took place in a social milieu. Furthermore, the associations that magicians created were, in Mauss's view, very much like religious associations: "On the whole, where there are groups of magicians it is difficult to distinguish them from religious groups" (1972:54). A person could become a magician through revelation, consecration, or tradition (1972:50). Thus ordination may be achieved through inheritance, like Weber and others noted, revelation,[73] and also through "a communal evocation of the spirits" or a "presentation of the novice" to the spirits by the community (1972:52). That is, the magician could be chosen by his or her community to serve it. Hence the character of both magic and magicians had been highly social. Or, as Roberto Cipriani puts it, Mauss demonstrated that "magic rites followed social norms and collective expectations" (Cipriani 2000:59).

Before Mauss, Frazer had recognized private and public practices of magic: "in savage society there is commonly to be found in addition [to private magic] what we may call public magic, that is, sorcery practiced for the benefit of the whole community. Wherever ceremonies of this sort are observed…the magician ceases to be merely a private practitioner and becomes to some extent a public functionary" (Frazer 1922:49). Similarly, Weber had observed a distinction between private "wizardry" and the public ecstatic practices of the magician (Weber 1922:3). Nevertheless, none among these scholars acknowledged that "magic" entailed a complex social organization.

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into animals. Ibid., 40-45. One of the most important qualifications of a magician is the "power of being possessed." Ibid., 49.

[73] Magic is revealed when "a man believes himself to be in contact with one or more spirits, who place themselves at his service and teach him doctrine." Mauss, Theory of Magic, 50.

After Mauss, the early modern scholar who most methodically challenged the notion of the magician as "loner" who interacts only occasionally with other individuals is perhaps Mircea Eliade in his 1952 study of "shamanism." His first step forward was to contest the vague and monolithic view of "the magician" prevailing in classical scholarship by pointing to a need to establish clearer distinctions between different practitioners of "magic:"

> "Since the beginning of the [twentieth] century, ethnologists have fallen into the habit of using the terms "shaman," "medicine man," "sorcerer," and "magician" interchangeably to designate certain individuals possessing magico-religious powers and found in all "primitive" societies" (Eliade 1964:3).

Perhaps inspired by Weber, Eliade chose to restrict the term "shaman" to individuals who specialized in mastering the techniques of *ecstasy*. In his effort "to cast a clearer light on the history of "magic" (1964), Eliade viewed the "shaman" as one of the elect who was separated from other members of his community by the intensity of his religious experience;[74] someone who underwent a spiritual crisis "that is not lacking in tragic greatness and in beauty" (1964:13).[75] Thus the "shaman" was a sort of gifted mystic: "shamanism always remains an ecstatic technique at the disposal of a particular elite and represents…the mysticism of the particular religion" (1964:8). But the mysticism of the "shaman" was not that of an isolated individual: "shamans" cured the sick in their community, accompanied their dead, and served "as mediators between them and their gods" (1964). In sum, they directed the community's religious life and protected its

[74] He identified several "ways of access to magico-religious power": hereditary shamanism, direct bestowal by gods and spirits, personal quest, spontaneous vocation (as a result of illness, dreams, ecstasy, or chance encounters with "power"), and election by the community among others. Mircea Eliade, Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964) 20-32.

[75] Eliade suggested that the initiation of the "shaman" followed "the traditional schema of an initiation ceremony: suffering, death, resurrection." Eliade, Shamanism, 33-66.

"soul" (1964). He portrayed the "shaman" as an exceptional individual who entered into a trance, went up into the sky and met the gods, descended to the underworld and fought demons, sickness, and death, saw what was hidden and invisible, and brought back to his community useful, "direct and reliable information from the supernatural worlds" (1964: 509).

In addition, Eliade provided greater detail about some of the precise roles women seem to have played in "magic;" they appear as "shamanesses," female spirits who impart secret teachings to "shamans," sexual beings, teachers and helpers of "shamans" and heroes, fairies, celestial wives, and sexual partners (1964:73). In the role of "shamanesses," women may be healers, guide the souls of the dead, defend the tribe from evil spirits, practice divination, control atmospheric conditions, facilitate birth, increase game, make mystical journeys to the sky, present the desires of the tribe to the gods, and in particular serve as intermediaries between the community and the gods or spirits, just like their male counterparts (1964:323).

Recently, anthropologist Alice Beck Kehoe has questioned Eliade's intellectual motives, his sources, and his use and popularization (universalizing) of the term "shaman." She argues that "Eliade's romantic conception of an "eternally manifesting Sacred" is theology not social science, and that his work on shamanism "perpetuates the classical myth that out beyond civilization roam noble savages preserving a primordial religion more pure and true than any in the West" (Kehoe 2000:2). To her, the words "shaman" and "shamanism" are "used loosely and naively, by anthropologists no less than the general public…[And] they convey confusion far more than knowledge" (2000). In short, the term "shaman" is a "Western construction of a stereotyped, mythical Other"

that lumps a large variety of nonwestern practitioners, including, priests, doctors, seers, astrologers, healers, diviners, mediums, spiritual adepts, mystics, alchemists, necromancers, and magicians, under one label (2000:102).

While it is true that many of the practices that fall on the less rational end of the spiritual continuum tend to be subsumed under the category of "magic" in modern Western scholarship, it is worth mentioning in Eliade's defense that he seemed interested in balancing the highly contemptuous view of the subject and of the "primitive" in the then existing social science. Before him, ethnographic narratives treated magic/shamanism, as something of "an aberrant phenomenon," and confused it with "possession" or chose to "emphasize its degenerate aspects" (Eliade 1964:376). Eliade attempted to overturn such views when he put forward that the "shaman" struggled against the powers of evil: "The shamans have played an essential role in the defense of the psychic integrity of the community…they combat not only demos and disease, but also the black magicians…[S]hamanism defends life, health, fertility, the world of "light" (1964:508-9).[76] More fundamentally, Eliade undermined the distinction between magic and religion by subsuming both topics under the category of "the sacred" (Cunningham 1999:37). His work thus helps overcome 'the battle between good and evil' which appears to have been the tacit background in classical studies of religion and magic (Appendix B).

As far as Mesopotamia is concerned, the "shamans" seem to have occupied themselves with both good and evil. While beneficent practices were rewarded, maleficent ones were harshly prosecuted and, consequently, may have been practiced in

[76] Moreover, Eliade maintained: "the shaman has been able to contribute decisively to the *knowledge of death*." Eliade, Shamanism, 508-9.

secrecy. According to Saggs, a "whole class of priest-magicians existed ready (for a fee) to provide their assistance" to those harmed by witches or wizards (Saggs 1965:185). The Code of Hammurabi specifies punishment for what has been translated as "sorcery":

> "If [anyone] brought a charge of sorcery against [another], but has not proved it, the one against whom the charge of sorcery was brought, upon going to the river [Euphrates], shall throw himself into the river, and if the river has then overpowered him, his accuser shall take over his estate; if the river has shown that [person] to be innocent and he has accordingly come forth safe, the one who brought the charge of sorcery against him shall be put to death, while the one who threw himself into the river shall take over the estate of his accuser" (Pritchard 1955:166).

Historian Leo Oppenheim remarks that ecstasy played a minor role in Mesopotamian society: "Only rarely and rather reluctanctly" the Mesopotamians admit "that the deity can use man as a vehicle for the expression of divine intentions" (Oppenheim 1977:221). Prophetesses existed, however, and a few achieved some measure of social esteem during Assyrian times. The paucity of ecstatic - "shamanistic" - practices in Mesopotamia may in part be explained by the fact that certain human beings (priestesses and kings, for example) were believed *to be* divine beings during religious rituals like the "sacred marriage" (chapter 4), and therefore no ecstatic trance was deemed necessary to communicate with the divine.

In any event, the men and women who practiced divination, incantation, astrology, healing, exorcism, numerology, chanting, and sexual worship in the service of the deities were public figures, highly regarded and highly organized. Their offices and social functions lasted some three thousand years. Diviners, for example, underwent rigorous and lengthy studies as well as a consecration ceremony: "Since everyday life could not be conducted without the assistance of diviners, and since their services might be called upon a moment's notice, some were assigned for duty in the palace or the adjacent

temple…The diviners attached to the court had to be prepared to interpret anything, and as officials, they had to take the oath of loyalty" (Contenau 1966:281; Bottéro 2001:182-3). There were two types of divination: inspired and deductive. Deductive divination was based on the belief that the gods "wrote" things to communicate with human beings. They inscribed messages in their creations and in events such as the birth of an abnormal child/animal or in an eclipse. These messages could be deciphered, "deduced" by people (2001:177-78).

Inspired divination took place through an intermediary, a "receiver," who had a dream, a vision, a prophesy, or an inspiration which communicated a message from a deity: "women often appear to have been preferred in matters pertaining to communication with the supernatural" (2001:172). The interpretations of diviners were "derived from revelation, and were therefore beyond all question" (Contenau 1966:288). Moreover, the process of interpretation was "regulated by closely defined rules" (1966:287) which included formal prayers to the gods and goddesses (Bottéro 2001:185). Thus the activities of Mesopotamian diviners were formalized to last for generations.

As we shall see in Chapter 4, and in Appendix C, the women of religion in Mesopotamia were also intricately organized. They belonged to different classes of priestesses, each with specific social functions and privileges. The institution of the priesthood included in its ranks exorcists, diviners, astrologers, poets, sex-cult practitioners, and the like and was a major social force in ancient Mesopotamia because of the importance of the temple in economic and religious matters. The existence of sexual rituals – what some have called "temple prostitution" - has been said to represent one of the "low and crude" features of the spiritual life of the Babylonian or Assyrian

(Saggs 1965:196). As we shall see, however, the uses of ritual sexuality in Mesopotamia were highly structured in both form and substance. Priestesses as well as priests were in charge of organizing and carrying out the major religious ceremonies for the community, including the New Year Festival with its famous ceremony of "sacred marriage" discussed in chapter 4.

Hence in Mesopotamia secret as well as public rites existed side by side and, more importantly, what to us may appear to be "magical" practices - divination, sexual worship, exorcism, astrology, or incantation – were central to the workings of the Mesopotamian spiritual system. These activities were not conducted occasionally by "lone" individuals or in isolation and secrecy as "magic" supposedly has been but were instead an integral part of organized communal worship, and entertained multiple and long-standing social purposes. Therefore, the "magic" of the Mesopotamians contained secret as well as organized and continuous communal rites with a stable social organization and function.

Concluding Remarks

There has been and continues to be confusion and debate among scholars as to what exactly constitutes "magic." In the case of Mesopotamia, Georges Contenau classified exorcism as magic in the late nineteen sixties (Contenau 1966: 290) while Jean Bottéro elevated it to "truly religious" status only a few years ago (Moreau 2000:72-3). To summarize, the most commonly held views of magic among influential classical and some contemporary social scientists revolve around five major issues and assumptions: that magic is immanent, that it seeks to coerce, that it is more individualized and individualistic than religion and therefore has no strong social footing, that it deals with

the concrete and the immediate not the universal, and that it is secret and "dark." It is perhaps Louis Marin, a professor at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris from 1977 to 1992, who has most succinctly recapped the modern stance on magic and religion in Western social science:

> "Religion…is submission to an almighty Creator to whom we raise our prayers, [while] magic…consists of rites intended to compel supernatural forces, whatever they may be, to do the sorcerer's bidding" (Shah 1956:xiii).

Apart from the obvious parallels with Frazer's reasoning,[77] this statement implies that submission to patriarchal monotheism is a superior way to address forces and events we do not comprehend and control. By extension, it insinuates that polytheism and goddess worship are not religion. All the same, we have seen that the immanent transcendent spiritual system of Mesopotamia blended magical and religious elements. It combined a belief in spirits and "demons" with a belief in anthropomorphic male and female deities; a conscious effort to secure the presence of the divine in the world with a belief in gods and goddesses residing outside the world; the practice of prayer and sacrifice with attempts to manipulate supernatural forces; and the performance of secret rites with that of grand communal religious celebrations.

Therefore, what we customarily call "magic" and "religion" constituted two complementary facets of the Mesopotamian spiritual and material experience. The existence of such blending of rationalities was noticed by Frazer when he spoke generally about the "confusion of ideas" supposedly occurring in cult dramas such as the "sacred marriage," which to him represented "a religious theory…blended with a magical practice" (Cunningham 1999:20-21). A spirituality of immanent transcendence allowed

[77] "To Frazer magic is the direct coercion of natural forces by man, religion is the propitiation of divinities by the believer." Cipriani, Sociology of Religion, 52.

the Mesopotamians to structure the collective around diverse and even contradictory values.

This ability to balance different approaches to the divine and to everyday life is evident in their repeated choice to invest (what to us appear as) completely secular activities like sexuality and art with high spiritual power and considerable social significance.[78] "Magical" thinking furnished sexual and aesthetic activity with a plurality of values and meanings that are by and large alien to modern modes of rationality. The next chapter, *Art as Magic*, expounds this idea and explicates the place and role of art in agrarian Mesopotamia as it addresses the intersection between religion, magic, and artistic activity.

[78] The fusion of magical and religious elements in Mesopotamian spirituality did not always remain stable. Evidence suggests that a trend towards increasingly rational notions of the divine emerged and created a tension between dissimilar religious stances towards the end of Mesopotamian history. For instance, the reformulation of Mesopotamian theogeny in the *Enuma Elish* - The Creation Poem written by the Babylonians circa 1200 - denotes a shift toward a more logical, rational system of spiritual belief and establishes hierarchical distinctions between the emerging canon and previous, less rational, or as we have called them "magical" modes of spirituality. Appendix D explicates this process in detail.

Chapter III. Art as Magic: the spiritual and social powers of art in Mesopotamia

In Mesopotamia, art was a natural component of the overall worldview which considered the material world and human beings as the creation of gods and goddesses. Aesthetic activity was often a religious expression and spirituality was frequently expressed in aesthetic objects and performances. In this chapter, I propose that artistic activity in Mesopotamia was linked to specific "magical" ways of knowing and to vital socio-economic pursuits both of which endowed art with major spiritual and social significance. I have offered that Mesopotamian religion maintained a sort of equilibrium between more and less rational ways of apprehending reality (chapter 2). Below, I endeavor to illustrate how this allowed the Mesopotamians to find multiple values in artistic activity and to furnish aesthetic products with complex social meanings and purposes. As we shall see, the practice of "art as magic" in Mesopotamia invested art with productive, communicative, apotropaic, aesthetic, political, and supernatural values, meanings, and functions.

Art in Mesopotamia was anchored in *analogical* modes of thought and was pursued in conjunction with the agrarian priorities of the society: agriculture, animal husbandry, the construction of cities, conquest, monarchical government, and religion, for example.[79] This combination of "magical" ascription and attachment to prime social institutions and endeavors explains in part the esteem art enjoyed within the society: "Works of art and

[79] According to Lenski, "the great agrarian states of the past were all *conquest states*." Lenski, Power and Privilege, 195. Among the features of agrarian societies he lists: chronic warfare, military technology (chariot and cavalry warfare), urban dominance, monarchical government, trade and commerce, writing, limited literacy, and religion as "a matter of concern to state authorities." Ibid., 192-209.

those who fashioned them were highly prized…even if that recognition is not enshrined in the biographical mode familiar to Western art historiography" (Gunter 1990:11).[80]

Analogical reasoning entailed a sort of 'existential parallelism,' which permeated all aspects of life including visual and poetic expression[81] and permitted the development of notions of art as sacred, as repository of great powers, and as "divine need." Mesopotamian art was made to give existence to specific meaningful realities, to perpetuate them, and perhaps even to "multiply" them. It was also made to communicate with the divine and please and influence it on behalf of humanity. That is, representation was thought to have the power to impact human fate. This notion of art as a magico-religious *power* that can be utilized to affect social life is lost in traditional Western and modern approaches, especially in those that conceive art "for its own sake."

Analogical reasoning: art and its replica

The social, political, and spiritual importance of art in Mesopotamia, as explained and exemplified below, derived in part from the fact that Mesopotamian "magical" reasoning was founded on analogy.[82] To the Mesopotamian, the world was composed of two parallel and permanently united realms: heaven and earth. What happened on earth caused a reaction in heaven. Thus to induce rain, a person could water her plants. To

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[80] The prevalent view that the Greeks appreciated originality and individuality and hence elevated the artisan to the status of "artist" by exalting the name and personality of the maker is being challenged. Roman histories of Greek sculpture are filled with the achievements of great individuals, yet they may not reflect the actual conditions of artistic production and reception in the fifth century BCE: "contemporary building accounts from that era, for example, do not support the view that individual artists were so prominent as Roman sources assert." Gunter, Investigating Artistic Environments, 10.

[81] Examples of literary parallelism in Mesopotamian texts are explored by Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, Inanna Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1983) 136-139.

[82] According to Contenau, that Mesopotamian reasoning was founded on analogy also "explains the extended practice of divination and magic which were regarded as branches of science, and the sacerdotal aspect of medicine, which was largely another expression of the same idea." Contenau, Everyday Life in Babylon, 158.

increase agricultural productiveness, people could engage in sex. The actions, events, and physical reality of one realm produced the same or similar results in the other: "like all that exists, the terrestrial Babylon and its temple will have a replica in the sky" (Bonnefoy 1991:161). According to this way of reasoning, art was a representation for which there was a replica in heaven and, therefore, it participated in the sacred.

An analogical belief in *the power of the image* helped shape the role of art in Mesopotamian society. Artistic representations of the gods, whether painted or shaped, were thought to be identical and hence equally sacred to the deity represented (Wiggermann 1995:1862). Thus if a personal seal bore the image of a goddess, the image was accepted as the goddess herself and any alteration of her impression was thought to have grave consequences for the violator. Personal seals were beautifully crafted and used to lock one's door in order to protect one's property or to sign business contracts, for example (Contenau 1966:69-70). They were owned by most people except the poorest.

What is more, images were believed to possess the power to communicate with the divine and were purposely created or requested for that end. During the reign of king Gudea of Lagash, for instance, the "dedicatory sculpture" whose function was to convey messages to the gods became extremely popular.[83] In a famous piece known as *Architect with Plan* (Fig. 21), Gudea "requests that the statue communicate his many good deeds to Ningursu (the god of his city) and tells how "*he installed the statue in order to convey*

[83] The type of sculpture produced under Gudea's rule is said to be "the best-known ancient Near Eastern art from the end of the third millennium BC." Joan Aruz, ed., Art of the First Cities: The Third Millenium B.C. From the Mediterranean to the Indus (New Haven and London: Yale U Press) 417.

messages'" (Aruz 2003:418. Italics are not in text). To reinforce their communicative purpose, Gudea's statues were given names, for a name also possessed power (2003).[84]

Furthermore, analogical thinking implied that representation had the power *to give existence* to the reality depicted which, in turn, lasted as long as the representation itself (Contenau 1966:69). A mimed action in dance or theatre produced the desired result *in the real*; be that rain, fertility, abundance, or pleasure (chapter 4). Drawing, writing, speech, or naming were all believed to have the same effect: "to draw a fish or a head of grain, just as to simply say their names, was indeed to "achieve" – to give existence to – that fish, to that head of grain. Writing, like speech, was "realistic"." (Bottéro 2001:177-78).

In accordance with this outlook, art *creates* reality and engenders socially significant results. Art is not simply an "imitation" of life made to self-express, please, entertain, or educate as it is still generally envisaged in the West.[85] On the contrary, in Mesopotamia art was "magic" - *an act of deliberate creation* as well as *a sacred object* or pursuit which possessed the power to manifest reality, embody gods and goddesses, and communicate with the divine.

Representations of people, gods, goddesses, and even harmful beings were invested with sacred/magical qualities. Protective goddesses were generally portrayed "wearing long, often flounced skirts and with one or both hands raised in supplication" (Green

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[84] In Mesopotamia, nothing existed unless it had a name. The pronunciation of someone's name "in the proper tone" was an effective incantation. Contenau, Everyday Life in Babylon, 160-64. "With the act of naming that which is in flux…becomes shaped…becomes manifest." Wolkstein, Inanna Queen, 138.

[85] Plato proposed that art was an imitation of life and life merely a shadow of the Ideal Forms. A work of art was thus three steps removed from the essence of a thing and hence from "the throne of truth." As such, art was socially insignificant but dangerous. Francis M. Cornford, trans., The Republic of Plato (London, 1945) 333. The idea that art was an image or likeness of some original became prominent towards the end of the fifth century in Greece. Schechner, Performance Theory, 28.

1995:1847) and "protective gods…as wild-looking men, with long hair, often with four or six distinctive giant curls" (1995:1846). In some cases, "oracular quizzing of the gods preceded a decision on how to portray them visually" (Winter 1995:2571). As far as monsters (Fig. 22) and harmful beings were concerned, visual representations were created to deter them "by means of [their] own likeness" (Farber 1995:1897). For instance, effigies of Lamashtu, a misbegotten daughter of Anu who was particularly cruel against pregnant women and babies, were fashioned in her likeness to be carried as amulets by those who feared her evil deeds (Fig. 23).[86]

Therefore, the Mesopotamians also believed that creating an image of a non-visible and threatening entity like Lamashtu could help them push it away. In the bounds of this perception, representation is the likeness of an imagined reality and possesses the power to deter danger. As apotropaic power, art is also magic. And as magic, art served vital psycho-social functions. It procured the Mesopotamians with a sense of personal power in relation to threatening supernatural forces as well as with a sense of collective confidence in their right and ability to manifest their ideals in the world. To them, Mesopotamia was the center of the universe and their culture the best there ever was. Sumer was conceived as "the greatest, richest, most civilized, and most civilizing" country (Bonnefoy 1991:147).[87]

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[86] The effigies of Lamashtu were ritualistically and routinely "killed, destroyed, buried, sent downstream, or dispatched to the desert." Farber, "Witchcraft," in Sasson, Civilizations, 1897. The Mesopotamian concept of "likeness" should not be confused with Western notions of naturalism. Resemblance was conveyed "by appropriate headgear, clothing, weaponry, and other attributes that we ordinarily regard as external to an individual, but that the Mesopotamians deemed inseparable from office, disposition, or identity." Ibid., 2572.

[87] It has been said that Mesopotamians had both "a realistic awareness and an inflated idea of their own civilization." Bonnefoy, Mythologies, 147.

Hence the practice of "art as magic" – art as sacred object and pursuit with supernatural qualities – is related to analogical modes of thought in Mesopotamia. The idea of a world that is united and composed of matching realities made possible a transfer of supernatural powers to aesthetic objects and actions, which set in motion their ability to shape social life.

The Production of Art

The magico-aesthetic attributes of Mesopotamian representation elicited reverence, awe, and also compliance from the viewers. As we shall see further on, statues of gods and kings received praise as well as copious offerings from the common people enhancing the authority of rulers and priests who eagerly supported the production and circulation of artistic products.

Materials for complex artistic projects were expensive, difficult to obtain, and also invested with supernatural qualities. Lapis lazuli, for instance, "accorded the divine attribute "gleaming splendor," worn by the goddess Inanna/Ishtar…[and] was perhaps the most prestigious stone used in Mesopotamia. We imagine that the amuletic value of its color –ideally, deep blue with golden "starry" flecks – was paramount, along with its rarity and exotic associations" (Aruz 2003:242). Gold, silver, and other metals were also thought to possess magical properties, while individual stones and jewels "could be miraculous" (2003: 246, 233). Raw materials such as these have been found by archeologists in burial sites and at the base of religious edifices (2003:481). They were "used in temple rituals and to decorate temple altars and divine images, as well as…worn as personal adornment by the gods" (2003:242).

Mesopotamia had no metals, stone (of any kind), or wood, and therefore most of these aesthetic materials were imported, often from far away places. As a result, many forms of art were official. That is, they were sponsored and sanctioned by the governing elite which in temples and palaces and in every period of Mesopotamian history invested on a grand scale in the production of aestheticized products: metal and stone bas-reliefs, wall plaques made in gold, marble-gold-silver friezes, colorful mosaics, fine wood carvings, wall paintings, votive sculpture, fine pottery, jewelry, embroidery, musical instruments (harps, lyres, sistra, cymbals, and drums), theatrical performances, cylinder seals, and monumental architecture like *ziggurat* temples and royal palaces (Figs. 33-41).

Nevertheless, "private" or individual patronage seems to have existed as votive objects commissioned by individual men and women demonstrate. A votive portrait of a woman of Lagash dating from the Ur III period (2097-1989) and the famous relief monument known as the Disk of Enheduanna from ca. 2300-2184 exemplify both the high artistic quality of sculpture and the role of individual women as patrons of the arts (Figs. 27 and 30).

Cottage industries for aesthetic products that relied on local and inexpensive materials or equipment were also operated in small village workshops or home-based. According to Elizabeth Stone, data suggests "a pattern whereby manufacturing was embedded in the residential neighborhoods with some areas specializing in certain crafts. But it also seems probable that each district had its own potter, smith, and lapidary worker who would have catered to local needs. To this we should also add small-scale workshops located within temple and palace precincts…which fulfilled the needs of these institutions" (Stone 1995:242).

As a general rule, the artists[88] of the ancient Near East were grouped with a broad variety of specialists including scribes, masons, sculptors, cooks, musicians, barbers, weavers, diviners, dancers, and carpenters (Gunter 1990:12). These specialists usually learned their skills in palace or temple workshops where they often held lifetime positions, in some places apparently against their will: "captives, especially women, were trained to become vocal performers" (Kilmer 1995:2604). Their skills were greatly esteemed by their governments and by foreign countries where they sometimes spent time on assignment (Gunter 1990:12).

Mesopotamian artists valued both content and form in their expression and to them form had meaning, as their careful consideration of appearance, dimensions, color, position, materials, and texture suggests. Most art objects were characterized for their colored effect which has been said to reflect the "Sumerian interest in the interplay of color and texture" (Aruz 2003:82). Texture, medium, finish, color, and text on a work of art worked together to convey meaning. Choosing stone as a medium, for instance, possessed ideological meaning for in Mesopotamia writing, painting, or sculpting on stone "was largely a royal prerogative" (Gunter 1990:63). King Hammurabi used diorite - a hard, dark, and lustrous stone imported from islands in the Persian Gulf - to impress his amendments to Babylonian law.

Art was evaluated on both its ability to produce admiration, pleasure, reverence, awe, luck, and practical results as well as on the skill, expertise, ingenuity, artfulness, and

[88] In the early sixties, historian H.W.F. Saggs claimed that "much ancient [Near Eastern] art was the work of what we should regard as craftsmen rather than artists." Gunter, Investigating Artistic Environments, 9. Because traditional Western approaches to art and to the artist emphasize individual genius, innovation, and inspiration over anonymity, stylistic stability, or social context and purpose, some commentators of ancient Near Eastern art have upheld this view. Based on my examination of Mesopotamian art, I will avoid the sharp distinction between artisan and artist.

mastery with which the artists made it. "Ibbi- Sin of Ur (circa 2020) speaks of the skillful and strange workmanship of a gold jar of ointment, the decoration of which was meant to provoke unending admiration" (Winter 1995:2572).

Several Sumerian and Akkadian words and expressions convey to us how aesthetic works were received and judged: "surpassing," "suitable for praise," "treasure," "praise-worthy," "a pleasure to behold." Some of the terms employed in the conception and manufacture of aesthetic products include: "to create, fashion, form," "to execute according to a plan," "to decorate, adorn," "to make splendid," skillful, masterful, ingenious, surpassing, expertly done, "good" or "auspicious" (1995:2571-77).[89] Reactions to viewing were classified under two rubrics: producing joy/delight and producing admiration/awe. These responses indicate that the Mesopotamians understood aesthetics in its broadest sense to denote sensation or sensuality.

Sumerian artists contributed to the history of world art the continuous narrative (Fig. 18), which shows a figure performing two different actions within a single composition (Aruz 2003:23). The early arts of Uruk (3500-3000) have been accurately portrayed by contemporary art critics as displaying "considerable artistry and exquisite craftsmanship" (2003:16; see Figs. 6 to 15). Mesopotamian artistic styles during this and all subsequent periods combined naturalism with abstraction "to yield idealized figures suggesting inner qualities as well as outward appearances" (2003:6). An early example of quasi-realistic

[89] The reception of aesthetic objects varied according to the status of the audience. "To those that could read" inscribed illustrated objects such as stone steles or reliefs probably conveyed a fuller message, and "the very act of reading reaffirmed the status of the readers as members of the controlling elite." Gunter, Investigating Artistic Environments, 59. For those who could not read: "multiple forms of communication and visual means of social control were prevalent in the Near East in the periods directly preceding and during the time of rapid urbanization. Different social contexts provided the impetus for differing vehicles. Seals, potters' marks, painting and craft ornamentation, tokens, bullae, numerical tablets, and other designs – these must be seen as parallel systems of communication." Ibid.

representation is the famous *head of a woman* (Fig. 16). Early abstract sculpture is exemplified by the statue of the *nude 'priest-king'* (Fig. 17).[90]

Mesopotamian artists mastered a variety of postures, including the body in profile, and conceived artistic devices "to represent figures in space and to project Mesopotamian ideals" (2003:6). Height, for instance, was customarily used to represent social importance. Gender differentiation seems to have been conveyed in "the practice of gender augmentation in royal imagery…differences are observed in the relatively more slender frame and higher small of the back in female representations" (Azarpay 1995:2514). Likewise, artists developed a conceptual art "in which multiple views were combined in the rendering of single images" (Aruz 2003:6). A vessel fragment dating from ca. 2400-2250 displays a goddess's head and torso frontally while her right side is seen in profile (Fig. 19); the deity is identified as such by the horns on her crown - an artistic convention that came to distinguish divinities from human beings in the third millennium.

Furthermore, Sumerian artists introduced compositional schemes, such as registers, "to indicate different levels, depths, and realities" (2003). The outer surface of the famous, monumental stone cult vase known as the Uruk Vase from ca. 3300-3000 is divided into a series of registers which represent different components of agrarian life (Fig. 20).

Through meaningful, sensuous, aesthetic forms and materials the Mesopotamians crafted links between politics, magico-religious belief, and aesthetic affect. Political

[90] To art historian Holly Pittman, "one of the most striking features of the Uruk period is the highly refined, idealized naturalism of the figural arts…this naturalism seems to reflect quite literally the details of actual events." Joan Aruz, ed., Art of the First Cities: The Third Millenium B.C. From the Mediterranean to the Indus (New Haven and London: Yale University Press) 40.

ideologies were established, enhanced, propagated, and perpetuated throughout Mesopotamia by means of artistic representation via the "magical" attributes of the image. Wherever it was placed, royal art was thought to have the ability to manifest royal authority and commands as "sacred" and "auspicious," influence future events, deter opposition, and eternalize the status quo. In this manner, the practice of art as magic aided the Mesopotamians to conquer, to govern, and to prevail. Conversely, the use of art as "magical" power by the political establishment bolstered its social role.

Representation and Politics: the power of the magical image

Representation often embodied and conveyed the political interests of the elite via the magical attributes of the image. The link between art, magic, and conquest is clearly exemplified in the royal statuary and in the copious reliefs of military victories. Mesopotamians engaged in frequent military expeditions largely because, though rich in agricultural products, they depended on the outside world for wood, stone, gold, silver, copper, tin, alabaster, spices, and precious stones.[91] That is, they relied on trade, commerce, and conquest to obtain "the very tools needed for successful farming" (Stone 1995:236) as well as the materials to build and maintain their cities and to fashion their arts.

[91] The most famous literary text to have yet emerged from Mesopotamia recounts one such expedition by king Gilgamesh to obtain cedar wood circa 2700. Sandars, The Epic of Gilgamesh. This epic antedates the Homeric epic by at least one and a half thousand years. It was written down at the beginning of the second millennium BCE. The most complete edition comes from the seventh century BCE from the library of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal who copied and translated into Akkadian old Sumerian texts. Ibid., 7-8. King Gilgamesh may have actually lived during the third millennium. In any event, expeditions such as his were conducted by king Sargon of Agade and king Gudea of Lagash also during the third millennium "to protect their merchant colonies and bring back timber for their buildings." Ibid., 16.

It is known that at least from the Akkadian period on (2334-2197) elaborate victory steles were produced *en masse* with images and text (Gunter 1990:62).[92] In all epochs, they conveyed royal concerns and ideology and served as tokens of power throughout the land (Figs. 24 and 25). During the Old Babylonian period (2004-1595), for example, king Hammurabi had steles of his famous "laws" erected in all the major cities "as a visible token of his power" (1990). The 'presentation scene' before a seated deity portrayed on the stele (Fig. 26) illustrated and ratified the power of the king. The sun-god Shamash, god of justice, bestows symbols of authority - a ring and a rod - upon the king signifying that "the concern for and the authority to dispense justice is a royal prerogative and it is divinely sanctioned" (1990).

The use of visual images to transmit political ideology and legitimate a particular authority is, therefore and obviously, a very old practice.[93] However, the Mesopotamians used *magical* concepts (of art) to establish and, more, to 'eternalize' their presence, dominion, and ideologies. Analogical reasoning presupposed that representation had the ability to manifest the person or action depicted. Thus reliefs of military victories, for

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[92] Victory steles were a major art form under Akkadian rule. Violent, militaristic imagery was characteristic and epitomized the bellicose aspect of Akkadian kings. Aruz, First Cities, 421. According to Snell, "a naturalistic revolution in sculptural depiction" occurred during this time. Snell, Everyday Life, 127. Efforts were made to delineate musculature and to provide visual indicators to elucidate the narrative, such as distinctive hairstyles and nudity. Aruz, First Cities, 192. Compared to Sumerian art, Akkadian art exhibited a "heightened awareness of formal elements." Ibid., 194.

[93] Michelle Marcus calls attention to the political uses of the image: "the ability of art and other material goods to carry messages non verbally makes them an especially subtle and stealthy means for communicating certain potentially controversial political messages, without danger of protest, refusal, or controversy." Michelle I. Marcus, "Art and Ideology in Ancient Western Asia," in Sasson, Civilizations, 2487. Hence visual images are "effective tools to legitimate the authority of a dominant social group." Ibid. The Akkadians attempted to legitimate imperial ideology via the use of standard images, like the so-called 'presentation scene': "Representations of the [Akkadian] king receiving officials or tributaries, or holding a cup before attendants (often featuring worshippers before a deity) are reminiscent of "so-called presentation scenes…in earlier Sumerian and Babylonian artwork." Ibid., 2488. "The use of certain standard images that have a long history of representation in near eastern art…serves to eternalize and naturalize the legitimacy of the king and the state, by way of suggesting unity with the past." Ibid.

example, were intended not just to transmit but to establish new power relations between victors and subjects. In addition, analogical reasoning provided art with another function. The Mesopotamians believed that representation had the ability to *perpetuate* the image depicted. Statues of kings, for example, were meant to immortalize the person represented (Bahrani 2003:171), and statues of men and women with clasped hands (Figs. 3 and 27) were made with the intention of perpetuating the prayers of worshippers in temples (Spycket 1995:2589).[94] Likewise, reliefs "showing military victories and rows of prisoners" seem to have been intended to eternalize "the effect of the enemies' defeat and misery" and "to influence future events" (Porada 1995:2703).

From that standpoint, art not only *created* reality, it also *perpetuated* it. Art served a function as 'eternalizer' of social reality and official Mesopotamian art sought to eternalize the presence, goals, and authority of the ruling elite. The depiction of monstrous figures known to the general population as holders of great magical powers alongside the prisoners in victory steles might have served to add to the magico-political impact sought by the rulers.

Moreover, to enhance political authority and to protect rulers from danger magico-religious conventions were used in artistic renditions of their image (Fig. 28). According to incantations and omen texts, damage to the right side of the body augured evil for the individual depicted as well as for the state and its ruler. As a result, "the right side of a ruler is exposed in artistic representations to make clear that the ruler is both well-formed and auspicious" (Winter 1995:2578). The ideal ruler was conceived as strong, wise, pious, authoritative, protective of his people, and attentive to divine command. In visual

[94] A votive statue was usually "donated by an individual as an act of piety. It stands in the place of the worshipper in perpetual prayer before the deity." Bahrani, Women of Babylon, 98.

terms, large stature, broad chest, strong arms, wide ears, large eyes, and clasped hands were standard features in such representations (Fig. 29).

In essence, what the ruler asked from art was not the imitation of his own personal physiognomy but the representation of "those ideal aspects of his appearance that had been molded by the gods" (1995:2573).[95] Besides idealized appearance and dimensions, the representations of rulers, and of royal commandments, like the Code of Hammurabi, were bathed in luster because in Mesopotamia "to shine is good" (1995:2574). Beyond good, light and luster conveyed the meaning that the ruler and his commands shared in the luminosity traditionally associated with the sacred: "This imparted luminosity is the visible equivalent to the vital life force invested in and controlled by the gods…When applied to persons or noncultic objects, purity and cleanliness, as well as light, become the signs that someone or something has been touched by the sacred, or is prepared to come into contact with it" (1995:2573).[96] Light and luster were also considered "integral components of visual effect, and as such provoked a positive aesthetic response" (1995:2575).

Royal authority was then established, protected, divinely sanctioned, popularized, and rendered auspicious, holy, and aesthetically pleasing by means of the magical image. Statues of the ruler and of victory steles were produced en masse and distributed to all the

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[95] To my interest this practice touches on an aspect of *mimesis* as explained by theatre critic Marvin Carlson. In the *Poetics* Aristotle often uses the word to mean simple copying but sometimes adds something more: "for example…good portrait painters are said to reproduce the distinctive features of a man but at the same time, make him more handsome than he is. What is added is not simply embellishment but fulfillment. What is being imitated is an ideal toward which the example is moving but which it has not yet achieved." Carlson, Theories of the Theatre, 17. Mimesis is not simply a copy of nature but the creation of an ideal.

[96] The quality of 'radiant light' or luminosity was "viewed as particularly positive and auspicious and was believed to encircle holy persons, buildings, and objects." Winter, "Aesthetics in Ancient Mesopotamian Art," in Sasson, Civilizations, 2573.

territories conquered by the Akkadian and Ur III kings, for example.[97] The magical power of the image is expressed in the reactions of people to royal statuary: "administrative texts…record the installation of royal statues in even the most distant provinces of the Ur III empire and list the offerings, such as beer, grain, and sheep, that they received" (Aruz 2003:419). The representation of royal authority then had the power to shape economic and political relations in Mesopotamia.

Whereas art was intricately intertwined with the monarchical administration, it was also closely linked to religious institutions. The distinction between church and state or temple and palace must be made carefully, however, for in Mesopotamia it may have never been fully realized. In the early periods, the figure in authority played both the role of king and priest. For this reason, scholars developed the term "king-priest" to describe the typical ruler during the fourth millennium at Uruk. Furthermore, royal residences do not appear to have been in existence before 2600 and, once built, temples were often erected within them (Roaf 1995:425 and 432). As John F. Robertson remarks: "we cannot readily distinguish between "secular-political" and "temple-spiritual" spheres of power before the Early Dynastic period" (Robertson 1995:450). That is, before 3000.

The role of the temple as a foremost patron of the arts remained strong throughout Mesopotamian history despite the fact that its influence fluctuated and sometimes declined as it was the case under Akkadian rule and under king Hammurabi.[98] As I

[97] Akkadian kings "wanted to have their likenesses seen throughout their realm." Aruz, First Cities, 194. Likewise, steles "were mass produced for display in different cities of the Akkadian empire." Ibid., 205. God-statues also reviewed their cities in a procession from time to time and visited other gods in other cities. This was apparently intended to help maintain theological unity on a national level. Wiggermann, "Theologies," in Sasson, Civilizations, 1862.

[98] Under the paradigm of strongly centralized government imposed by the Akkadian king Sargon "the nature of the temples' economic activities changed somewhat and…their scope was narrowed." John F. Robertson, "The Social and Economic Organization of Mesopotamian Temples," in Sasson, Civilizations,

illustrate below, the social import of art in Mesopotamia was not limited to creative, communicative, or apotropaic functions. The relationship between temple and art sheds light on several socio-economic aspects of Mesopotamian representation and unveils an additional function of art as "divine need."

Representation and Religion: art as 'divine need'

The social importance of "art as magic" becomes all the time more apparent in the relationship between temple, art, and the economy. The temple assumed a considerable role in artistic production and provided theological justification for creative works and activity. Mesopotamian temples were self-financing public institutions engaged from early on in the purchase and rental of large holdings of land that afforded them control of a vast agricultural surplus which they spent on varied and grand ventures. They owed their central position in the agrarian economy to the belief that human beings were created to assist, serve, please, and care for the gods and goddesses.

In the (mythical) beginning, before the creation of humanity, two classes of gods existed: the Anunnaki and the Igigi. The Igigi served the Anunnaki because hard labor, imagination, and technical ingenuity were necessary for survival even for the gods in the harsh environment of southern Mesopotamia. The land was not cultivable on a large scale "without substantial modification and painstaking maintenance" (Butzer 1995:142) because it was prone to salinization which could turn it into desert without a sophisticated and effective system of irrigation (Appendix A). The south had "hot summers, cold winters, and extremely little precipitation" (Aruz 2003:11). Consequently, the task of digging canals, raising dikes, and the like fell on the Igigi who like the higher gods were

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451. During Hammurabi's reign, extensive lands were controlled by the palace and cultivated by personnel directly under its jurisdiction or assigned to people who owed the crown service: "The temples, however, seem to have continued to own sizable acreages." Ibid.

conceived as working deities with many duties and functions. The Anunnaki god Enki/Ea, for instance, was a technical genius as well as the god of magical knowledge and the god of *form*: "(he) who creates/shapes appearance, who fashions all things" (Winter 1995:2570). Each divine character "had its place and its role, as original and irreplaceable as bones in a skeleton" (Bonnefoy 1991:145).[99]

This situation was not to last long in Mesopotamian heaven. According to the great poem *Atrahasis* from circa 1640, the lesser gods went on strike refusing to continue to serve the higher gods (Pritchard 1955:104-6). To solve the political impasse, humanity was created to labor and provide for all deities. The issue of who created humanity is answered differently in different myths, however. The *Atrahasis* credits the god of technology, Enki. He created humankind to solve a "technical" problem, that of the revolt of the lesser gods (Bonnefoy 1991:148). Yet, Enki did not accomplish this task alone. The 'Lady of the Gods,' Mami, also known as Nammu or Bēlet-ilī, had advised him to find a replacement for the Igigi because she knew of their dissent and Enki cast a mold of a new being out of clay. He then engaged the help of "Ninmah and seven other goddesses, so that man can emerge from it" (1991:148-49).[100]

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[99] The society of Mesopotamian gods and goddesses has been likened to "a huge agricultural project, the master of which is the god Anu, the great absentee landlord, who lives in heaven and leaves the controls to his steward, the god Enlil. One group of the gods, who have been reduced to the role of unskilled laborers, is then charged with the responsibility of developing the estate by digging canals and raising dikes." Yves Bonnefoy, Mythologies, Vol.1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 145. Historian Thorkild Jacobsen explains it as follows: "the vast expanses of temple fields and orchards were unspoken testimony that [the deity's] ties were the strong ties of a landowner to his land." Robertson, John F. "The Social and Economic Organization," in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 444.

[100] "In the myth of Atrahasīs, the origin of man has as its starting point the intimate association of the male element, or water god, with the female element, or womb goddess, each of these elements unable or unwilling to be entirely responsible…The creation of man unfolds through a whole series of actions alternately performed by the god Ea and the goddess Bēlet-ilī, as though a kind of dialogue were developing between the two gods, a dialogue in which the alternation of their gestures permitted them to define their respective fields of action." Yves Bonnefoy, Mythologies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 175. More: "It is the goddess that is here called Nintu, the "lady of childbirth," who mixes and

Because human beings were created to serve the deities, social life revolved around the "maintenance" of the gods and goddesses. The Mesopotamians endeavored to supply all the goods and honors the deities required, such as room and board, plus innumerable elaborate private and public ceremonies in the hope that, in return, the deities would decide to curb human suffering. As time went on, increasingly spectacular temples were created to house specific gods and goddesses, to take care of them, and to allow them to live a luxurious and peaceful existence (Fig. 2). The belief that the main purpose of the temple, and of the state for that matter, was to supply gods and goddesses with their "needs" (Wiggermann 1995:1860-61) entailed building temples and making offerings that *pleased* the gods continually. In effect, a king's primary duty was to build temples and keep them. Each city had a main temple dedicated to its official deity and one deity could have temples in several cities.

Besides serving as main sites of worship, Mesopotamian temples were architectural marvels endowed with magical qualities and functions. In a cylinder inscription, king Gudea suggested that the temple he built for the god Ningirsu was capable of bringing joy to the deity and had an intrinsic ability to elicit admiration and awe from the population of Lagash: "The temple, its awesome radiance was cast over the land; its praise reached the mountains…its dread covered all the lands like a garment" (Winter 1995:2577). Whereas a political motive may certainly be read behind the inscription - "to report admiration and awe in the gaze of the people is a rhetorical strategy on the part of the particular Mesopotamian ruler that serves as the ultimate affirmation of his enterprise" (1995) – Mesopotamian temples were in fact considered sacred. Elaborate

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kneads the clay dough. This suggests that it is the female element – the womb, the "container" – that, using substances acquired from outside, creates the matter from which the living being emerges." Ibid.

rituals were undertaken by rulers and citizens during their construction. Hymns were composed and sung to them and the structures themselves were thought to have divine origin. Hence, like royal statuary or stela, temples possessed "magical"/sacred power (Appendix C).

The city temples were often raised above the ground and built at a distance from daily commotion. Some were surrounded by massive walls and formed a "city of the gods" within the city. They contained a number of buildings of all sizes and configurations in which varied economic and ritual activities were conducted. The grounds of an early temple-complex known as Eanna, built circa 3300 in Uruk (Fig. 32), provides us with an idea of the resources, personnel, and multiple operations of the Mesopotamian temple.

The Eanna, "House of Heaven," encompassed "orchards and agricultural fields as well as herds of animals that provided sustenance for the gods and for the personnel needed to maintain the huge divine estates or manors" (Aruz 2003:22). The Sumerian goddess Innana resided in the temple Eanna: "she sits on a throne with An [heaven], and decides the fates of Sumer with Enlil" (Leick 1994:98). The Eanna employed "a sizable portion of the population in early Sumer," including farmers, bakers, fishermen, performers, and visual artists who produced aesthetic products as well as "appropriate furnishings for the performance of the cultic ritual" (Aruz 2003:22). The complex has been said to be proof of a "truly complex administrative organization" and of the "enormous resources in labor and food that could be marshaled by this period" (Robertson 1995:449) under the guidance or management of temple authorities:

> "The construction of the huge mud-brick terrace in the western part of the…precinct may have required the labor of 1,500 people working ten hours

> per day for five years. In the vicinity of these buildings were recovered abundant artifacts of well-organized, complex administrative systems. These included dozens of cylinder seals and seal impressions depicting agricultural activities…ritual activities…pottery making, and weaving" (1995).

As the home of the deity, the temple was a site of much hustle and bustle. Gods and goddesses demanded food, bathing, regal clothing, entertainment, aesthetic satisfaction, sexual gratification, and multiple religious offerings on a daily basis. In addition, they requested to be taken on trips around the city or abroad, to be consulted through divination, and, of course, to be praised with all sorts of religious acts such as festivals, parades, libations, incantations, animal sacrifices, hymns, and prayers. The daily food offerings *alone* made to the deities at Uruk – the city of the goddess Inanna/Ishtar – provide an idea of the magnitude of such human responsibility towards the divine and suggest a concerted effort by many people within the society; one that rouses curiosity about the type of effort required of the general population during special times:[101]

> "The daily total, throughout the year, for the four meals per day: twenty-one first-class, fat, clean rams which have been fed barley for two years; two large bulls; one milk-fed bullock; eight lambs; thirty *marratu*-birds; thirty…-birds; three *cranes* which have been fed …-grain; five ducks which have been fed…-flour; two ducks of a lower quality that those just mentioned; four *wild boars*; three ostrich eggs; three duck eggs" (Pritchard 1955:344).

The morning offerings to the goddess of war and carnal love - Inanna/Ishtar - alone are listed in a hymn and include: incense, "fine sheep, maned sheep, and grain-fed sheep" (Jacobsen 1987:120) as well as ghee, dates, cheese, seven kinds of fruit, dark beer, light beer, barley beer, emmer beer, wine, honey, cakes, and loaves of bread (1987:121).

[101] Two tablets dating from the Seleucid period (320-141) describe the temple program for the New Year's Festival at Babylon, and are thought to reflect practices that went back to a much earlier time. Among the offerings listed are: images made of cedar and tamarisk and mounted in settings of gold with precious stones, weavings, sheep and rams for sacrificial rituals, wine, and prepared food such as roasted meat, loaves of barley bread, honey, and "aromatic ingredients and cypress." Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 331-34.

Temples served their deities at least two meals per day. Historian Leo Oppenheim has reconstructed the following sequence based on several descriptions of divine repasts:

> "First, a table was brought in and placed before the image, then water for washing was offered in a bowl. A number of liquid and semiliquid dishes in appropriate serving vessels were placed on the table in a prescribed arrangement, and containers with beverages were likewise set out. Next, specific cuts of meat were served as a main dish. Finally, fruit was brought in in…a beautiful arrangement, thus adding an aesthetic touch…Musicians performed, and the cella was fumigated [to dispel the odor of food]…Eventually, the table was cleared and removed and water in a bowl again offered to the image for the cleansing of the fingers. Having been presented to the image, the dishes from the god's meal were sent to the king for his consumption" (Oppenheim 1977:188-89).

Given its prime function as home and caretaker of the gods, the temple played a crucial role in the production, collection, storage, distribution, and redistribution of economic goods and services. To supply the gods and goddesses with their "needs," temples exploited extensive farm lands, maintained large herds, employed large numbers of people, participated in the slave trade,[102] exacted contributions from palace authorities and members of the community, and engaged in profit-seeking ventures. They were involved in long-distance trade, for instance. They financed the "voyages and caravans of merchants" (Hudson 2002:24) and their trading ties extended to Afghanistan from where the most prestigious stone - lapis lazuli - was imported for a variety of aesthetic projects. In regard to this, it has been noted that the international trade of aesthetic products may have taken place between Mesopotamia and the Harappan civilization in the Indus Valley as early as 2600. The style of the objects exchanged is called "intercultural" because they exhibit traits from different cultural areas of the ancient world (Fig. 31). Some "intercultural style" pieces appear to have "far exceed utilitarian function" because they

[102] Female slaves and their children were sometimes "offered" to the temples which employed them as performers or as weavers in the textile workshops: "for which service they were allocated rations." Robertson, "The Social and Economic Organization," in Sasson, Civilizations, 445.

have been found "in Mesopotamian ritual contexts, far from alleged sources of production" (Aruz 2003:244).

In addition to trading extensively, temples were occupied in the production and export of handicraft industry, including the lucrative business of textiles;[103] the teaching of trades and crafts; the construction and maintenance of canals; the building of monumental architecture; the mediation of the economic surplus,[104] and the lending of money at interest.[105] Their economic role grew to such proportions during the early periods that in some cities, such as that of Sippar, the people "owed their existence to the local temple and cloister" (Driver and Miles 1952:359).

For reasons such as these, economist Michael Hudson has called the Sumerian temples "history's first formal business corporations" (Hudson 1996:37). He argues that "Sumer's temples legitimized capital accumulation, that is, the reinvestment of surpluses *without reciprocity* to earn yet further gains. The objective…was to expand the means of production and to build up monetary savings…The various lands, workshops and herds

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[103] "Throughout the ancient Near East, *textiles sustained economies*; they served as the basis for economic development; they provided a means of accomplishing economic reform." Carol Bier, "Textile Arts in Ancient Western Asia," in Sasson, Civilizations, 1586. Italics are not in text. "From the earliest use of seal in fourth-millennium Mesopotamia are preserved the impressions of textiles, which often remain visible on clay sealings, or "bullae," of jars the contents of which were secured or covered by a textile." Ibid., 1578. The ancient Near East was "an environment favorable to the cultivation of natural textile fibers such as flax (for linen) and wool…[The domestication of sheep facilitated the making of textiles, yet] the lack of remains has obscured their importance to the economy and to society." Ibid., 1567. "We have ample written evidence to suggest extensive production and trade in textiles in all periods and over long distances. The production of textiles was highly organized for commercial purposes and often controlled by palace or temple enterprise. Other textile production was conducted at home in the domestic environment." Ibid., 1580.

[104] "As early as the fourth millennium, careful measuring was essential for planning the production of an economic surplus. A usufruct in the form of land-rent and interest was calculated – indeed, stipulated – in advance." Michael Hudson and Baruch A. Levine, eds. Privatization in the Ancient Near East and Classical World (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996) 38.

[105] The balances owed from interest-bearing debts were paid by community members to the temple (or palace) with standardized common denominators: "barley for agricultural obligations, silver for commercial ones." Hudson, Privatization, 38.

were organized in what today would be called profit centers" (1996). This was all possible thanks to a number of innovations that "have shaped the entire world's subsequent evolution" (1996):

> "Sumer's great contribution to civilization was a complex of innovations that broke through the traditional "anthropological" or "soft" interpersonal reciprocity of gift exchange to create the first known *economic* regime. The Sumerian innovations included bulk trade, standardized (hence, impersonal) money prizes and lot sizes, sharecropping rents, wage-rations, allotments, interest and contractual forms, and indeed the general system of weights and measures" (1996:36-7).

While Sumerian city-temples accumulated unprecedented amounts of capital, they did so in socially acceptable ways and, apparently, with an obligation to use some of the wealth in the public interest. They were public institutions which supported the community's welfare and its economic survival: "*Sumerian distinction between public and private sectors turned on the decision to set apart the community's industrial enterprise – along with land, herds and money – to support its workers in a corporately distinct sector that belonged at least nominally to the city-community as a whole*" (1996:39). Temples served the community by housing the deities and meeting their needs, which, in turn, secured for the city "the prosperity and happiness…the god's presence was taken to guarantee" (Oppenheim 1977:108). In other words, they constituted a link between the city and divine goodwill.

Temples rendered other services to the community, such as the administration of oaths and ordeals. They also granted small loans without interest in cases of hardship and were in charge of correcting the grievances of the underprivileged. They apparently established the standards of weights and measures as well as standardized interest rates to prevent the victimizing of the poor (1977:107). In addition, they took in the infirm, the

elderly, and famished children. On the other hand, temples were administered as corporately autonomous bodies - independent of communal family groupings – and this allowed their officials "to build up extraordinary family property, at least by the mid-third millennium BC" (Hudson 1996:45).

Certain classes of priestesses, for example, were able to acquire personal property and bring in substantial profits to the temple and to their families through their business ventures while in religious service (Appendix C). Hence the "communal" role of the Mesopotamian temple must be understood within this context of corporate enterprising.[106] Likewise, it must be noted that sanctions against self-seeking accumulation existed in the Near East, just as they have in "nearly all communities studied by anthropologists" as a way to support group solidarity and survival (Hudson 2002:12),[107] but exceptions were permitted in the case of Sumerian temples because they were institutions sanctified by the community "to perform functions deemed socially necessary" (2002). As a result, temples were largely free to profit from the labor of

[106] Hudson distinguishes between Sumer's communal and public sectors. To him, the communal sector of "self-supporting cultivators" was separate from the public sector of temples which functioned as "public utilities" and of the palaces. Hudson, Privatization, 44. Temples and palaces formed a corporately distinct sector within the society. The communal sector was "essentially a network of kinship-based and professional corporate communes which held land on a collective basis well into the second millennium. The land was redivided periodically or alienated as some families grew larger, others smaller…Families held tenure rights to cultivate this land, but were not "free" to transfer it as they chose – or, for that matter, to forfeit it permanently and thereby lose their economic freedom, citizenship rights and consequent obligations to serve in the army and to provide corvée labor…The function of the communal land was to support its holders, not to yield a formal economic rent." Ibid., 44.

[107] Mesopotamian rulers attempted to preserve economic balance by devising a series of checks, such as the periodic proclamation of Clean Slates, to the private concentration of wealth: "Most notably, rulers acted to restore the *status quo ante* of widespread land tenure by freeing debt bondsmen and annulling the barley-debt overhang, although leaving intact most commercial debts, urban real estate and commercial gardens or orchards." Hudson, Privatization, 46. "This ethic is needed to enable communities to survive in a risky, often hostile world of natural disruptions and aline predators. Internal opportunism is a luxury that hardly can be supported, as profiteering form other peoples' need would impoverish such communities, leaving them prone to external attack and internal collapse." Hudson, Debt and Economic Renewal in the Ancient Near East, 12.

others,[108] from the high interest rates they charged (up to 33 1/3 %), from land rent, from war and conquest, and from commerce:

> "They supported war orphans and widows in their workshops, setting them to work weaving textiles. These were consigned to traders to exchange in distant lands for needed raw materials, as well as to sell locally for barley or other crops. As the major organizers of trade, temple (and palace) administrators advanced these handicrafts and other assets to merchants and "entrepreneurs,' as well as land to sharecroppers for a stipulated return. This helped legitimize profit-making along with the interest that the temples charged merchants for the goods and other institutional assets they advanced. The temples thus became the midwife sanctifying Mesopotamia's commercial breaktrough. In time, religion would come to denounce the charging of interest…but city-temples are likely to have been the practice's initial promoters and beneficiaries" (2002).

Temple income was thus derived from varied sources including long-distance trade, agricultural holdings, commercial credit, business investments, and from the lands and war booty donated by the king.[109] The goods brought to the temple were distributed in at least four different ways: to feed, dress, and entertain the deities as well as perhaps the king or head priest/priestess,[110] to support the temple's large personnel, to store for future use, and to convert into export goods and exchange for needed raw materials (Oppenheim

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[108] Hudson explains that while "a surplus was squeezed out of propertyless labor…this process was not based on economic classes in the modern sense of the term. The temple labor force was composed of widows and orphans, the aged and infirm, and war prisoners whose dependency was an accident of physical disability, the loss of their husbands or fathers through warfare, or of military subjugation. What prevented them from supporting themselves on the land was these personal circumstances, not their belonging to a landless class as such. Taking out of their family context, they were placed in temples charged with caring for their needs while mobilizing their labor to produce textiles and other export handicrafts." Hudson, Privatization, 54.

[109] "The building and the constant maintenance of the sanctuaries was a royal prerogative and obligation. From victorious kings the temple expected a share in the booty, especially precious votive gifts to be exhibited to the deity in the cella and the dedication of prisoners of war to increase the labor force of the temple." Oppenheim, Ancient Mesopotamia, 108.

[110] Oppenheim clarifies that "it remains uncertain whether the practice of sending the food to the king involved all the dishes or only certain ones, and whether it was repeated every day or only on special occasions. Perhaps the top officials of the sanctuary enjoyed the same privilege." Leo Oppenheim, Ancient Mesopotamia, 189.

1977:187). The temple was hence organized "as a typical redistribution system with its characteristic double aspect, incoming rents and gifts and outgoing rations and wages" (1977:106). The large amounts of "food, beer, bread, and sweets, and the great number of animals brought in every day from the pastures to be slaughtered, were destined for distribution among the personnel of the sanctuary" (1977:189).

Temple personnel included: male and female scribes, various classes of priests and priestesses (Appendix C), constables, veterinarians, diviners, astrologers, exorcists, craftsmen, wine makers, weavers, hairdressers, jewelers, singers, dancers, musicians, "prostitutes" (Appendix C), potters, shepherds, farmers, merchants, and the widowed, orphaned, elderly, conquered, and disabled people who worked in the workshops.[111] Temple administrators and craftspeople received "what was not ear-marked for the table of the main deity, his consort, children, and servant gods" (1977). "A complicated cultic terminology was used to characterize the nature, destination, and other characteristics of the incoming deliveries" (1977). Products from fields and pastures were circulated "across the sacrificial table to those who were either, so to speak, shareholders of the institution or received rations from it" (1977:191). The collective corporate nature of the temple administration "made it necessary to divide the annual income among the members according to months, days, and even fractions of days…each member held his [or her] share in private ownership and was entitled to sell it, to give it as a dowry, or to leave it to his heirs" (1977:190).

[111] Mesopotamia possessed a highly specialized labor force. The division of labor "pervaded early Mesopotamian society. Some jobs were probably regarded as women's work, but this division did not keep women from exercising considerable freedom of movement and from dominating some institutions." Snell, Everyday Life, 20.

Hence, temple-complexes were prime centers of spiritual as well as economic organization in Mesopotamia.[112] They were also the principal patrons of the arts before palaces came into existence and shared this responsibility circa 2800. In effect, temples and palaces "often controlled the supply of materials and tools for particular projects" (Gunter 1995:1540). Elizabeth Stone recaps the role of the temple in cultural production: "It was under the auspices of…temples that those aspects of society which we associate with civilization grew up: writing, government, judicial system, fine art and architecture, and the like" (Stone 1995:236). And, Daniel Snell sums up the connection between economics and artistic production in Mesopotamia: "someone had control of a tremendous agricultural surplus and was spending it on building magnificent things" (Snell 1997:15).

While on the one hand artistic activity required an investment on the part of the religious establishment, on the other, aesthetic products represented a source of revenue for temples. Analogical thinking conferred on representation a reality equal to the person or scene depicted and therefore particular objects, like certain statues and musical instruments, received offerings from the population: "such as beer, grain, and sheep" (Aruz 2003:419). The fact that offerings were expected from all, including the inhabitants of the most distant conquered territories gives us an idea of the riches temples - and palaces - must have amassed.[113] In a similar way, members of the ruling elite "courted

[112] For additional information on how the Mesopotamians organized their economy, see Appendix A.

[113] In addition, the crown granted important privileges and prerogatives to the temple which added to its wealth. Under Hammurabi's reign, for example, certain temples were exempt from taxation and perhaps from mandatory labor service and received donations of land and prisoners. Robertson, "The Social and Economic Organization," in Sasson, Civilizations, 452.

divine favor through their largess to the temples: building or rebuilding temples, providing new cult statues…and furnishing cultic paraphernalia" (Robertson 1995:445).

Cultic paraphernalia included a wide variety of finely crafted objects like the well-known votive sculptures that were placed in the principal shrine - the *cella* - next to the statue of the main deity (Figs. 27 and 36) and the exquisite pottery dedicated in the temples (Fig. 37). Needless to say, votive gifts like all other contributions preserved and augmented the economic and social privilege of religious authorities. Conversely, the production of aesthetic objects for religious ends increased art's economic significance within the society. The economic merit of art was likewise related to the fact that in Mesopotamia artistic activity possessed magico-religious justification. A number of texts from the Old Babylonian period (2004-1595) further illustrate the beliefs about the needs of the gods. From these sources, art emerges as "divine need."

Art: Divine Need

Despite their immortality, Mesopotamian deities possessed human needs and emotions: "They came and went, conversed, laughed, and wept; they loved one another and came into conflict with one another, they raised families, and were fathers, mothers, children" (Bonnefoy 1991:145). They created the world for their own benefit and transferred the burden of labor to human beings who had to dutifully attend to their needs. Thus were rationalized by the Mesopotamian the elaborate rituals that took place on a daily basis in the temples and which included washing, dressing, feeding, and *entertaining* the deity. Clay tablets stolen from the city of Uruk apparently by Nabuaplausur the first Chaldean king (626-605), and copied by Kidinanu citizen of Uruk and priest of Anu and the goddess Antu (Ishtar's mother) during the Seleucid period

(320-141), list in riveting detail the regular offerings made to meet the "needs" of the gods and goddesses of Ishtar's city:

> "Every day in the year, for the main meal of the morning…You shall prepare fourteen gold *sappu*-vessels upon the tray of the goddess Antu [Ishtar's mother]. (These are to contain) prime beer…Twelve gold *sappu*-vessels (are to be set) before the goddess Ishtar…Every day in the year, a *būru*-vessel containing three *gur*-measures and three *pan*-measures of barley…one hundred and eight *sāt*-measures –the basic quantity for the regular offerings, according to the *sāt*-measure of "ten pounds"…which the millers in the kitchen shall turn over ti the chefs every day for the four meals of the deities [Anu], Antu, Ishtar, Nana, and the (other) deities dwelling in the city of Uruk…Of these…eighty-one *sāt*-measures of barley flour and twenty-seven *sāt*-measures of emmer flour which the chef shall use in baking two hundred and forty-three *sibtu*-loaves. Of these (loaves), the chef shall supply for the four (daily) meals thirty *sibtu*-loaves to be placed on the tray before the god Anu…thirty *sibtu*-loaves (to be set) before the goddess Antu, thirty *sibtu*-loaves (to be set) before the goddess Ishtar…(These loaves are also) in addition to the loave(s) of (?) the *rabbū* and the date cakes (to be prepared) for the god's trip…for the (ceremony) of the Clothing…for the overnight (ceremonies)…for the ritual of the (divine) marriage…for the sacrifices of the king" (Pritchard 1955:343).

In addition to bread and beer, daily offerings included large quantities of dates, raisins, bulls, rams, lambs, ducks, birds, and ostrich eggs, as mentioned before. Moreover, major deities were represented in their temples by sumptuously dressed and adorned anthropomorphic statues (Wiggermann 1995:1862) which had to be served and pleased by day and night. Consequently, in addition to an abundance of food to meet the divine requirement of two (or more) meals per day, beautifully crafted objects and detailed ceremonies were essential.

Luxurious garments, sculptures, fine jewelry, pottery, musical instruments, votive objects, and the like were made especially for the deities. Votive statues (Figs. 27 and 36) made to honor the deities by perpetuating the prayers of their worshippers existed since at least the Uruk period (3500-3000) but became increasingly popular during the Early

Dynastic II period (2800-2500), apparently because the altars, benches, and tables usually placed in the *cella* grew in size to such a degree that they "became like free-form sculptures so dense that movement within the holiest rooms…became virtually impossible" (Aruz 2003:29).[114] As far as ceremonies went, elaborate rituals were conducted to serve and please the deities. During eating and drinking hours, for instance, the mouths of deities were ritually washed and opened often to the accompaniment of music and the burning of incense (Wiggermann 1995:1863).

Music then, like singing and dancing, formed part of the human effort to meet divine needs. The musical arts were highly specialized in Mesopotamia and, like other types of representation, were infused with "magical" abilities. Certain types of music and song were made especifically for the purpose of "soothing" the heart of distressed deities (1995:1865). Enheduanna, the renowned daughter of king Sargon and high priestess of the temple of the moon-god, sought to appease the anger of the goddess Ishtar by composing a major hymnal prayer to her.[115] Thus music was thought to possess therapeutic potential and was used to please as well as pacify the divine. What is more,

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[114] Interestingly, votive sculpture did not always resemble animal or human figures, as the 'Votive Statue of a woman' in non-human form from the Ur III period (2500-2334) demonstrates (Fig. 42). According to Zainab Bahrani, this was possible because the Mesopotamian concept of identity was an "assemblage of aspects of the body that include such things as the name and shadow." Bahrani, Women of Babylon, 118. As a result, the "essence" of the identity of a donor could also be expressed in votive sculpture: "Rather than being a portrait that functions by external resemblance, it is an essence or a separated form of the self." Ibid., 119.

[115] "Queen of all the *me*, radiant light…beloved of Heaven and Earth, Hierodule of An, much bejeweled…You have filled the land with venom like a dragon, Vegetation ceases when you thunder like Ishkur, You who bring down the flood from the mountain, Supreme one, who are the queen of heaven and earth, Who rain flaming fire over the land…Destroyer of the foreign lands, you have given wings to the storm…My Queen, the foreing lands cower at your cry, In dread and fear of you, the South Wind, Mankind brought you their anguished clamor, Took before you their anguished outcry, Set up before you wailing and weeping…In the heat of battle, everything was struck down before you, My Queen, you are all-devouring in your power, You kept on attacking like the attacking storm, Kept on blowing harder than the howling storm…My Queen…the great gods, Fled before you like fluttering bats, Could not stand before your awesome face, Could not approach your awesome forehead, Who can soothe your angry heart!..." Kramer, From the Poetry of Sumer, 87-8.

reverence was conferred upon sacred musical instruments: “offerings were brought to lyres as to statues of the gods” (Wolkstein 1983:199).

The religious festivals and action-filled worship services featured costumed and masked performers who danced, sang, acted, and executed special feats of skill - like mock battle dances - in an around the temples. Not surprisingly, temples employed a variety of performers. Texts from the city of Larsa in the early second millennium list “allocations of oil, barley, wool, and garments to diverse personnel” including singers and dancers (Robertson 1995:448). Many singers and musicians belonged to the temple orchestra and worked under the direction of professional cult musicians while others accompanied the army or the laborers in the fields. Music and singing were also performed at ominous occasions suggesting that music was considered to have apotropaic power: “during a lunar eclipse, during childbirth, beside the sickbed, and during mourning rites” (Kilmer 1995:2612).

Similarly, dance was “closely connected to casual “play,” “frolic,” or “gambol” on the one hand, and to organized cult activities and the arts of magic and healing on the other” (1995:2608). Dancers accompanied the priestly art of healing in and around homes and palaces; they “participated in chasing away the disease or in protecting the living from any demonic influence at times of death and mourning” (1995:2610). Hence, like visual representations, music and dance were devised as “magic” in Mesopotamia. Both, performing and visual arts served social needs; such as the need to entertain the deities during their meals or to curb their dangerous rage which if left unattended could result in the destruction of the world and of the social group as the hymn composed by Enheduanna evinces (n. 115).

As "divine need," art was a social endeavor and responsibility with significant economic implications. Temple and palace authorities dedicated enormous resources to the acquisition of materials for artistic objects and pursuits. Costly expeditions to distant lands were undertaken to bring wood, stone, gold, carnelian, lapis lazuli, and other materials necessary for the construction of temples, palaces, and all aestheticized products. In addition, temples and palaces produced lavish public ceremonies (chapter 4) in honor of the gods and goddesses. This implies that while the spiritual and social powers of art in Mesopotamia were mediated by magico-religious belief, they depended on agrarian economic prosperity.

The grand theatrical performance of the "sacred marriage" examined in the next chapter furthers the argument that Mesopotamian representation was a serious endeavor with great socio-economic import and value. Before turning to it, however, I would like to offer that given the place of art in the economies of temples and palaces an additional function of Mesopotamian representation was to articulate and ensure the "magical" manifestation of agrarian abundance, and that this was attempted by means of *visual reiteration*. This practice suggests that art was expected to "multiply" agrarian goods and aspirations.

Visual Reiteration: art as a multiplier of reality?

A glance at the literature and the visual arts produced in Mesopotamia exposes the fact that repetition of word and image abounds. In the literary Cycle of Inanna, for example, the predominant stylistic feature is repetition: "words are repeated, sentence structure is repeated; and by this slow, studied, almost hypnotic repetition we are transported into another realm –the timeless realm of the gods, the soul, and the origins of

life" (Wolkstein 1983:136).[116] Likewise, images are continuously repeated on sacred aesthetic objects like the Uruk Vase (Fig. 20): "other than the slight difference in the shape of the vessels that they carry, all the [human] figures look remarkably alike in the rendering of their muscular bodies and their facial features. The effect of this similarity is a rhythmic repetition across the body of the vase and this is reinforced by the repetitive depiction of the rams and ewes, as well as the plants of the lower registers" (Bahrani 2001:135).[117]

Whereas the Mesopotamians used specific images like the "flowing vases" (Fig. 43) to represent - and apparently manifest - agrarian abundance, this value may have also been embedded in the practice of visual reiteration. Friezes with inlays of rows of bulls and birds advancing in files (Fig. 44) have been found in temples and have been invariably interpreted as related to "ideas of fertility" (Aruz 2003:87). While this seems obvious, the repeated image may have also intended the "magical" *multiplication* of all species. The prevalence and importance of repetition in Mesopotamian aesthetic expression can be explained through the belief that images had magical properties which, as we have seen, included the power to manifest and perpetuate the reality represented. If an image of grain or sheep, for example, was invested with the power to manifest these resources, the repetition of the image might have been conceived as a way to *multiply*

[116] In her rendition of the hymns and stories written by the Mesopotamians in honor of their goddess Inanna, Wolkstein "eliminated much of the repetition" to make the stories "accessible and compelling." Wolkstein, Inanna Queen, xviii. On the other hand, "to keep as close as possible to the power, wonder, and mystery embedded in the Sumerian texts" she has "retained as much of the repetition and Sumerian grammatical structure as the flow of the story would allow." Ibid.

[117] Speaking of the Uruk Vase, Bahrani suggests that "the insistence on repetitive forms of the middle registers, and on the doubling of forms in the upper register" are motifs that could be considered "beyond the iconographic context" just as relief carvings on the surface of the vase have been. Bahrani, Women of Babylon, 138.

them. If this interpretation is accurrate, the Mesopotamians bestowed an additional function on art: that of *multiplier* of a given reality.

The abundance of a wide variety of species and products was highly desirable to the Mesopotamians because they inhabited an arid valley where the climate was hot and dry, the soil had no minerals, and few natural resources existed. In such environment, prosperity depended on technological ingenuity, conquest, commerce, and on ritual belief. Several technological developments such as the invention of the wheel, the plow, the sail, metallurgy, money, and writing made possible the multiplication of resources in Mesopotamia. Larger crops, new forms of energy, new tools and skills, improved transportation systems for people and goods, and new ways of waging war helped to create abundance, making the multiplication of resources not only desirable but also possible. The Mesopotamian notion of abundance was therefore tied to actual and specific conditions of existence which suggest that visual reiteration might have been more than an abstract idea of "fertility." It may have been part of ritual measures on which agrarian prosperity was thought to depend.[118]

Concluding Remarks

The Mesopotamians sought to find solutions to the situations they encountered and created - like their struggles with a hostile environment, the mechanics of war, conquest and imperial control, the difficulties of existence in a stratified society, and the fragility of the human condition - "by discussing them with the deity" (Bonnefoy 1991:144). They

[118] Southern Mesopotamia was rich in agricultural products, especially grain. Its soil was devoted to large-scale agriculture and the raising of sheep. Barley, dates, and textiles were important items of export.

attempted this in several ways[119] and through a variety of means, including the practice of art as magic. Art was believed to have the power to bring about reality and was expected to procure practical and socially significant results. Art was made to give existence to specific meaningful realities, to perpetuate them, and perhaps even to *multiply* them. As such, art was literally a creative act. This role of art and of the artist as literal creator in the service of a community has virtually disappeared in our day.

The conditions of artistic conception and production examined here suggest that the ability to blend different rationalities - magic and religion (chapter 2) – is at the base of the type of analogical reasoning that allowed the Mesopotamians to ascribe multiple and significant social roles to art and to develop notions of art as sacred/ "magical" power. In adidition to creating the real, art was thought capable of deterring visible and invisible danger, conveying messages and communicating human achievements to the divine, "soothing" divine rage and satisfying divine needs. Art reflected, confirmed, and reaffirmed the human connection with the divine. Moreover, art assisted the Mesopotamians with practical concerns such as governing or legitimating particular authorites via the transmission and "manifestation" of political and religious ideas. Perhaps more important, "magic" made it possible for Mesopotamian representation to embody eternity - the ideals of the social group and its quest for continuity and transcendence.

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[119] One way was to philosophize about the human condition. Several texts reveal a deep existential anxiety: "In the presence of so many contradictions, I (wonder): - No, I cannot grasp its deeper meaning." Bonnefoy, Mythologies, 166. "In my youth, I devoted myself to the will of the gods. With prostration and fervent prayer, I sought (them). I wore as a yoke a servitude that brought me nothing in return. My god assigned poverty to me instead of wealth. A cripple is my superior, a lunatic outstrips me. The rogue has been promoted but I have been brought low…I have looked around the world, and everything goes the wrong way." Ibid., 169.

Art's connection to the major public institutions of Mesopotamia, temple and palace, buttressed its social role and impact. For while art's spiritual and social powers were mediated by magico-religious belief, they depended on agrarian endeavors and prosperity. Therefore, this chapter has argued that the combination of "magical" ascription and attachment to prime social institutions and goals explains to a significant extent the spiritual and social significance art had in Mesopotamia. In the next chapter, I would like to continue to explore the connections between art, magico-religious belief, and social life in Mesopotamia by using the performing arts as model and by expanding the discussion to include the role of sexuality.

Chapter IV. The Sacred Marriage: religion, sexuality, and theatrical representation

When human sexuality is blended with aesthetic expression within a magico-religious worldview like that of the Mesopotamians, a highly intricate and structured mode of representation becomes apparent. Art expresses, contains, and assumes many (more) forms and functions. It becomes *polymorphic*,[120]and this expands its social impact and meaning. This chapter shows that in early agrarian times the vital and widespread rite of what has been called "sacred marriage"[121] was a *polymorphic* performance. This typically public and theatrical celebration of the sexual act between a goddess and a king comprised multiple social transactions and aims. It was simultaneously a religious rite, a sexual act, a political event, an economic transaction, a communal celebration, and an aesthetic undertaking. As a result, it served various and significant social purposes including the legitimation of political rule by means of the goddess's acceptance of the king as consort.

The Mesopotamian rite of sacred marriage between the goddess Inanna and the god-king Dumuzi appears to have been the first of its kind at least in written history, and is thought by some scholars to represent an actual practice of intermarriage between the

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[120] I proposed the term *polymorphic* in a previous effort to explain the pluralistic, multi-layered, and dialogical structure of the ancient agrarian Japanese performance known as the *kagura*. Guevara, "That Which Pleases the Gods" (unpublished 2001). The term *polymorphic* encompasses at least two meanings: it refers to a "thing" that has or contains many forms as well as to a "thing" that assumes many forms. Ibid., 4. Bakhtin's discussion of "polyphony" inspired the notion of *polymorphic* modes of performance. Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, trans. Caryl Emerson, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[121] James Frazer named the common practice of ritual sexual unions a "marriage" and related it to plant fertility. In a chapter entitled 'The Sacred Marriage,' he stated: "We have seen that according to a widespread belief, which is not without a foundation in fact, plants reproduce their kinds through the sexual union of male and female elements, and that on the principle of homeopathic or imitative magic this reproduction is supposed to be stimulated by the real or mock marriage of men and women, who masquerade for the time being as spirits of vegetation. Such magical dramas have played a great part in the popular festivals of Europe." Frazer, The Golden Bough, 154.

settled farmers in and around cities and the "semi-nomadic herders at the fringe of Mesopotamian urban civilization" (Leick 1994:69). The "urban agrarian side" (Inanna) and "the herding culture of the steppe" (Dumuzi) comprise the two basic economic modes that existed in Mesopotamia: large-scale agriculture and pastoralism (1994:87).

The sacred marriage rite illustrates a mode of representation quite different from our own as it attaches sexual, political, religious, and economic values and significance to art. The sacred marriage puts into evidence that notions of sexuality also different from our own were once in existence and helped build the foundation for the mode of representation discussed here. The sacred marriage represents a practice of *sacred sexuality* that infused (performance) art with the power to rouse divine and human pleasure, for example.

Visual and literary evidence suggests that sacred sexual encounters were celebrated "joyously and rapturously" (Kramer 1969:49) in Mesopotamia as well as in Anatolia (modern Turkey), Syria, Canaan, the Aegean, Romania, Ireland, Scandinavia, classical Greece, and pre-Christian Rome.[122] Among the Irish, for instance, "a ritual mating with

[122] Flaith or Queen Medb "was not only intimately related to the land and its prosperity; she also symbolized spiritual and legal dominion over the land and the king. She was the goddess of sovereignty…"the intoxicating one." Gimbutas, The Civilization of the Goddess, 343. This goddess symbolized the land to whom the king is wedded. As Medb of Leinster, she cohabited with nine kings of Ireland, and of her it was written: "Great indeed was the power and influence of Medb over the men of Ireland, for she it was who would not permit a king in Tara unless he had her for his wife" (*Book of Leinster*, 380a)." Ibid., 185-86. A similar tradition of kings mating with a goddess "is known in Scandinavia prior to the late 5th century A.D." Gimbutas, The Civilization of the Goddess, 343. Furthermore, "the iconography of the sacred marriage is recognized in frescoes, gems, and ivory reliefs found in Indo-European Mycenaean and later Greek art. The repeated theme is that of the bridegroom who comes in his ship from overseas to fulfill the sacred wedding in the sanctuary of the goddess…This matrilocal tradition is also preserved in ancient Greece in the *hieros gamos* rite of Hera performed in the sanctuary of the goddess at the Argive Heraion and at Samos." Marija Gimbutas, The Living Goddess (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1999) 118-19. In classical Greece, the theme of sacred marriage between Hera and Zeus continued in Homer's *Iliad*, xiv:345-50: "There underneath them the divine earth broke into young, fresh grass, an into dewy clover, crocus, and hyacinth so thick and soft it held hard ground away from them." The earliest representations of what may have been 'sacred marriage' rites include the statuette from the Near Eastern Natufian culture dating from 10,000 and the sculpture of a female embracing a male found in Catal Hűyűk in central Anatolia (modern Turkey) dating from the 7th millennium B.C. Gimbutas, The

the local goddess" is said to have been at "the basis of inauguration of each of the 150 tribal kings reigning…in the first centuries A.D." (Gimbutas 1991:342-43).

In Mesopotamia, the sexual union of the goddess Inanna, "Queen of Heaven," and a number of kings appears to have taken place at different times during the year as well as in the course of the foremost communal religious occasion, the New Year festival. The story is told in various sources and has often been associated by scholars with fertility rites of agrarian character.[123] The monumental relief-carved alabaster vessel known as the Uruk Vase, ca. 3300-3000, found by archeologists in the sanctuary of Inanna in the city of Uruk (modern Warka), is believed by some observers to provide a visual narrative of the event (Fig. 20).[124] If indeed this representation signifies such occurrence, the vase would constitute one example among others of the integration of sexuality and aesthetic expression within Mesopotamian religion (Figs. 45-48).

> "Each register represents one component necessary for the fecundity of life in Sumer brought about by the union of Inanna and her consort, Dumuzi, who greet each other before the goddess's storehouse shown behind the female figure in the uppermost band…Inanna may be represented by her priestess, Dumuzi may appear in the guise of the ruler. The fusion of the world of the gods and that of the humans was so complete at the end of the fourth millennium, when the vase was produced, that depictions of figures lack indicators of divinity. The portrayal is the same whether the main figures are meant as Inanna and Dumuzi or her priestess and the priest-king, for in the cult performance they are one and the same" (Aruz 2003:24).

Civilization of the Goddess, 342. In Romania, the "Gumelnita Lovers" from circa 5000-4750 is a statuette which depicts "a man and a woman tenderly embracing" and may represent a marriage ritual. Marija Gimbutas, The Living Goddess, 18.

[123] Historian Thorkild Jacobsen interprets the Mesopotamian sacred marriage mainly in terms of fertility. To him, the goddess Ishtar embodies "the storehouse" that can "take care of the life of all lands." Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, 39. Besides Thorkild, Kramer, Frazer, and other scholars have stressed the role of fertility in rituals of sacred marriage. Max Weber also interpreted sacred marriage rites as symbolizing agricultural fertility. Cunningham, Religion and Magic, 55.

[124] Bahrani points out that "there is no inscription on the vase itself referring to the sacred marriage. The identification on the scene is based on iconographic readings of the relief in comparison with textual evidence of the practice." Bahrani, Women of Babylon, 182 n.1.

Cuneiform narratives datable to the Ur III-Isin periods (2112-2004) feature the sexual union of Inanna and a number of Sumerian kings.[125] The written accounts render these amorous encounters in dramatic form - characters, location, sets, "costumes," dialogues, and events are described in detail and in action. Accordingly, the ceremony is assumed to have been lavishly enacted at least during this time period. Using the words, images, and actions depicted in the existing sources, this chapter shows that an intimate connection between female sexuality and theatrical representation existed in Mesopotamia within the context of religious ritual.

It is worth noting here that a number of early commentators opposed the view that Mesopotamian kings participated in dramatized public sexual ceremonies. Some dismissed the evidence as mythological tales; others, "reject the very explicit evidence because they cannot believe that the ancient Mesopotamians could have been so crude as to have a religious ritual involving a live sex-act (Cooper 1993:89)" (Bahrani 2001:137). However, current scholarship acknowledges as fact that at least during the Ur III and Isin periods (2112-2004) such events took place. Moreover, it is important to note that by and large contemporary scholarship rejects James Frazer's interpretation of the phenomenon as fertility rite (*n*.120). Gwendolyn Leick, for example, argues against the "neo-primitive 'fertility rite' notion that the construct of the Sacred Marriage implies" (Leick 1994:129).[126]

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[125] Cuneiform texts have been translated by noted Assyriologists like Samuel Noah Kramer and Thorkild Jacobsen. Kramer, Samuel N., From the Poetry of Sumer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). Kramer Samuel N., The Sacred Marriage Rite: Aspects of Faith. Myth, and Ritual in Ancient Sumer (Bloomington, Ind.:1969). Thorkild Jacobsen, The Harps that Once…Sumerian Poetry in Translation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

[126] To Leick, Frazer's *Golden Bough* has had an enormous and detrimental influence on the interpretation of Mesopotamian literary texts relating to love and sensuality: "Every love-song, every hymn that mentioned Inanna and Dumuzi, as well as the archeological artifacts with sexual scenes, [have been]

Along with recent scholarship, this study recognizes that the sexual union of Inanna and the king(s) had social meanings and ends past those commonly associated with fertility.[127] The reading of sacred marriage performances as merely fertility rites presumes that the people involved utilized simple or misguided technical means to a simple end. Thereby social groups engaged in such "magic" are often portrayed as unsophisticated or naïve. Furthermore, the association of the sacred marriage with simple fertility ends mischaracterizes the nature of the religion/society in question as we shall see. In contrast, I argue that the Mesopotamian rite of sacred marriage was a multi-layered polymorphic performance which integrated diverse values and numerous dimensions of social life including the theatrical, the religious, the sexual, the economic, and the political.

Calling attention to the fact that our categories of religion, art/theatre, or sexuality are not directly applicable to antiquity, the chapter highlights the existence of *a sacred sexuality* and its connection to specific and intricate ideas of divinity in Mesopotamia. The texts indicate that female divinity did not simply represent fertility, understood in either the narrow sense of human fertility or the broader sense of abundance and material prosperity in general, but represented female sexual desire, sensual love, and lust as well as power, justice, vengeance, and other human traits that later societies associated mainly

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automatically classified as being pertinent to a 'Sacred Marriage' ritual, with the aim of perpetuating 'fertility'. The notion is still current among contemporary and eminent Assyriologists. But this simplifies the complexity of the subject far too much." Gwendolyn Leick, Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 6.

[127] While fertility is not the only value exalted in the evidence, interest in the fertility of land and animals is clearly expressed: "May [the king] like a farmer till the fields, may he like a good shepherd make the folds teem, may there be vines under him, may there be barley under him, may there be carp-floods in the river under him…may fishes and birds sound off in the marshes under him…may deer multiply in the forest under him, may lettuce and cress grow in the vegetable plots under him…" Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) 42.

with men and male deities. Hence the discussion points out the significance of the fact that the distinctive and explicit Mesopotamian representation of human sexuality appeared at a time when the existence of female deities was assumed. Since female deities were also portrayed as sexual beings, the representation of human sexuality - in the objects and texts uncovered - implied a host of associations that are not the case today, such as: a belief in female divinities who possessed religious, political, and sexual potency; a wide acceptance of positive and spiritual notions of female sexual activity and female sexual desire; and the practice of sexual acts as a form of religious offering.

In brief, the present chapter continues to expound that a correlation between religion, art, and sex existed in Mesopotamia as it highlights systems of sexuality, divinity, and artistic performance quite different from our own and stresses the fact that more than concern with fertility was at play in Mesopotamian representation. "Art as Magic" includes theatrical representation and this chapter unveils the social import of sexual representation. An overview of classical views from the social sciences on the link between religion and sex opens the discussion. Before turning to this and to our particular example of sacred marriage however, it is important to explain that the blending of theatricality and sex with religion was not restricted to the rite of sacred marriage in Mesopotamia and hence manifested during other ceremonial occasions.

Events such as the different phases of the moon and the heliacal appearance and disappearance of the planet Venus were the occasion of colorful festivities in which singing, dancing, and sexual and transsexual activity took place (Leick 2001:58) as a means of ensuring the good will of the goddess of sexual love, Inanna, and, perhaps, that of Nanâ – another goddess of sexuality that appears on records of the Ur III period and

thereafter (more later). What is more, a *daily* theatrical ritual of sexual union between deities, with music and singing, seems to have taken place in Mesopotamian temples. As we shall see below, the gods and goddesses enjoyed sex and required (rituals of) sexual gratification on a regular basis. Extant love-songs ascribed to deities are likely to have been "integrated in the [daily] routine of temple services that catered for the life of the gods; their lovemaking was obviously as important as their meals and regular outings" (1994:247).

In effect, there existed "marital quarters" within the temples where "love" ceremonies are said to have taken place: "a special bed was set up in a specially designated part of the temple…defined as 'the house of love'…. In the Sumerian texts, the bed is usually called 'the shining bed'…and was installed in the Gipar" (Leick 1994:138). The *gipar* was the private residence of the *entu*-priestesses who were the highest ranking priestesses in Mesopotamia.[128] Belief in the sanctity and value of the goddess Ishtar's extraordinary qualities and powers gave priestesses protagonic roles before the community (Appendix C). The daughters of royalty frequently held the prestigious position of High Priestess or "bride of the god." They occupied offices in the cities of Ur, Uruk, Larsa, Lagash, Isin, Sippar, Nippur, Kish, and Assur (Driver and Miles 1952:362), and performed sacral sexual services for the community. *Entus* participated in the annual sacred marriage ceremony as brides of the king-god and impersonators of the goddess Inanna/Ishtar

[128] In rank order, the classes of Mesopotamian priestesses included: *entu*, *naditu*, *qadistu*, *kulmasitu*, *sugetu*, and *salzikru*. Appendix C elaborates on the roles and functions of priestesess.

(Appendix C).[129] Hence their participation in other, private, rituals of love with the deities they served, whether real or symbolic, is plausible.

Enheduanna, the gifted daughter of king Sargon of Akkad, is believed to have occupied the position of *entu*, which seems to have existed in Mesopotamia from at least 2300. She was the high priestess of the moon and fertility god Nanna and a devotee of the goddess Ishtar. She managed the temple grounds under her authority, oversaw the offering of libations (Fig. 4), commissioned aesthetic votive objects for the deities (Fig. 30), and wrote literary works. She is slowly becoming known as "The World's First Author" – the composer of several religious hymn cycles "of recognized literary and stylistic merit" (Bahrani 2001:116, Kilmer 1995:2604). One of the poems attributed to her, and known as *Nin-me-šar-ra*, suggests that the office of *entu* was the object of political intrigue. In the hymn, Enheduanna claims that she was driven from her priestly office and city and suffered in exile but that "by persisting in praising the goddess [Ishtar] won back her favor and was restored to her previous position" (Leick 1994:58).

Furthermore, at different times, during specific festival days, sexual unions among deities were celebrated publicly and theatrically. Special feasts dramatized the sexual union of the goddess Antum and the god Anu,[130] the goddess Ninlil and the god Enlil, the

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[129] *Entus* wore distinctive clothing - the insignia and garments worn by the ruler, and usually lived unmarried in the *gipar*. Their private residence and administrative center contained the temple of the god or goddess they served, storerooms, library, school, graveyard, and "operative areas associated with the divine cult." Aruz, The First Cities, 200. They received rich dowries from their fathers and could use them freely when the father so authorized it. Religious office allowed priestesses to use their dowries to acquire and increase personal wealth through business ventures. High priestesses had charge of temple management and affairs, employed secretaries to help them with their extensive businesses, participated in public ceremonial acts, and, most likely, oversaw the pouring of libations as it seems attested on votive plaques (Fig. 4).

[130] This ritual included a nocturnal ceremony where the sandal of the god was carried in a procession to the chamber of Antu and placed on a stool. The daughters of the god Anu and the city of Uruk accompanied the procession and sat on chairs while the priest mixed wine and oil for libation "at the door of the

god Nabu and the goddess Nanâ,[131] the god Marduk and the goddess Sarpanitu. Local deities wedded cosmic ones and local divine couples married each other. In the city of Nippur, king Shu-Sin (or Suen) wrote an inscription on the wedding of the goddess Ninlil and the god Enlil who embarked on a ritual boating expedition:

> "Towards the cane-brake of Enlil's Tummal,
> Towards Ninlil's place of joy, Enlil together with Ninlil, sailed.
> He had sacred songs and incantations sung to him,
> For him he placed appropriately singers in the pleasing 'house of the lyre'."
> (Civil 1967:11f).

Bau, the goddess of Lagash, married Ningirsu during a festival which coincided with the high-water level of the Tigris:

> "Its bed, when it had been set up in the bedroom,
> Was (like) a young cow kneeling down in the place where it slept,
> On its pure back, spread with fresh hay,
> Mother Bau was lying down with lord Ningirsu" (1994:132). [132]

Even in later times, in northern Mesopotamia, the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal listed in the royal annals the temple furnishings he dedicated to the god Marduk on the occasion of his wedding to Sarpanitu. They included a wooden bed,

> "covered with gold and precious stones
> for the delicious bed of my lord and the lady,
> To consummate the marriage, to make love,
> I artfully fashioned it" (Matsushima 1988:100).

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sanctuary. Then a bull and sheep were sacrificed and meat, perfume, fruit, etc. are offered first to Anu and Antum, and then to all the other gods assembled in the courtyard." Leick, Sex and Eroticism, 137.

[131] Nabu was the son of the god Marduk and Nanâ was a goddess of love. A ritual calendar from Babylon relates their betrothal and the festival during which it took place: "On the second day (the day of the Stable), when the shining Sun is rising, Nabu, in his capacity as bridegroom is clothed in a garment beffiting his rank of supreme deity. From the Ezida (temple) he emerges at night-time, shining like a star at night…Towards the inner quarters of Eharšuba …He enters into the presence of the 'Lady'. All is prepared for the nuptials…On the bed of the 'sweet night' they lie down to sweet sleep…" Leick, Sex and Eroticism, 135-36.

[132] Also see: R. Jestin, " Un rite sumérien de fécondité: le Mariage du dieu Nin-Gir-Su et de la déese Ba-ba," *Archiv Orientální* 17 (Prague, 1949): 333-39.

Whether these sexually explicit cult dramas used statues - as some texts specify - or human beings to represent the deities, the result must have been the same to the Mesopotamians for a statue, just as much as a human actor, was conceived as the "presence" of the god or goddess (more later). What the evidence demonstrates is that the theatrical "celebration of the gods' nuptials…formed an integral part of the ritual year within the community" (Leick 1994:131) in Mesopotamia, and elsewhere for similar rites have survived into modern times in India for instance.[133]

Moreover, Mesopotamian texts suggest that the representation of sexuality had multifaceted ends. In this chapter we shall see that sexual representations were intended to meet the sexual needs of deities as well as to please their hearts, to curb their rage, to honor fertility and sexual potency, to bring about healing, to legitimate political authority, to circulate pleasure, abundance, and prosperity in the society, and to enlighten or edify human beings. A literary text discussed in Appendix C suggests that in Mesopotamia one of the means of acquiring knowledge of civilized/divine life was sexual intercourse with promiscuous women. Even so, the uses of sexuality in ancient religions are a matter of study and debate among scholars to this day.

Religion and Sexuality: fertility, desire, divinity

An intimate connection between religion and bodily pleasures, including sex, has been recognized by several scholars of religion. Max Weber, for instance, proposed that the orgy was "the primordial form of communal religious association" (Weber 1922:3). He wrote: "sexual intercourse was very frequently part of magic orgiasticism…in which

[133] In Madurai, "an important part of the daily service to the gods is the… 'bedchamber worship', in which 'the portable image Sundaresvara is taken from the god's temple to the bedchamber in [the goddess's] Minaksi's temple…The divine couple are offered food and lamps are waved in front of them-…and songs and music are performed…" Leick, Sex and Eroticism, 130.

every ecstasy was considered 'holy'" (Gerth and Mills 1946:343). To him, the notion that "sexual surrender has a religious meritoriousness" (Weber 1922:236) derived from the sexual orgy, the custom of "temple prostitution," and other "magical" practices. At the same time, a link between the sexual orgy and women has also been historically established. Under King Ashoka in fourth century India, for example, women were maligned because of this association (Weber 1958:239). What is more, the connection of women to the sexual orgy has been at times used to undermine notions of female divinity. In the Vedas, for instance, previously powerful female deities were "completely eclipsed as fertility demons of primary orgiastic sex cults" (1958:138).

Another observer of a correlation between sexuality and religion is Leo Sternberg who claimed that "shamanism" originated in the sexual-erotic encounter (Eliade 1992:73-4). French sociologist Michel Maffesoli in *The Shadow of Dionysus* (1985) not only links what he calls "orgiasm" to archaic religion and mysticism but also argues that the orgy has social efficacy and, therefore, is a factor of "sociality:" "orgiasm…allows for the restructuring or regeneration of the community" (Maffesoli 1993:2). More:

> "While miming disorder and chaos through the confusion of bodies, the Dionysian mystery periodically founds a new order; it also emphasizes the preeminence of the collective over the individual along with its rational correlate, which is the social" (1993:6).

To him:

> "The overwhelming sensuality which one cannot fail to observe in human histories is certainly a manner of living collectively the temporal rhythm in which darkness and light, death and life, tension and relaxation, inexorably follow one another. Here is a matter of popular wisdom which knows very well that in ritualizing these factors and in sharing them communally one can face natural adversity and social imposition…The orgiasm exists to remind us of communal creation" (1993).

Nonetheless, opponents of the view that sex ever was a main element of religion argue that its role has been inconsequential and perhaps even accidental. Mircea Eliade counterposed Sternberg's view by arguing that the essential element in shamanism was the initiatory "death and resurrection" of the "shaman" (1992:74-76).[134] While acknowledging the importance of sexual-spiritual roles played by female spirits during initiation trials in numerous societies, Eliade chose the religious schema of suffering-death-resurrection as the pivot of shamanic initiation. He concluded: "sexual relations with spirits" do not constitute "the essential and determining element in shamanic vocation" (1992:74). Nevertheless, there is a history of identifying sexual relations with spirits as a more or less important component of many cultural traditions.

Like Eliade, anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski argued that the role of sex in religion is insignificant. On the one side, he writes that in "primitive" societies, religion "demands the existence of seasonal, periodical feasts with a big concourse of people, with rejoicings and festive apparel, with an abundance of food, and with relaxation of rules and taboos. The members of the tribe come together, and they relax the usual restrictions, especially the barriers of conventional reserve in social and sexual intercourse. The appetites are provided for, indeed pandered to, and there is a common participation in the pleasures" (Malinowski 1954:55). Nevertheless, he makes the claims that sex "plays an astonishingly insignificant part in religion, considering its force and insidiousness in human life in general. Besides love magic and the use of sex in certain magical performances –phenomena not belonging to the domain of religion– there remain to be mentioned here only acts of license at harvest festivities or other public gatherings,

[134] To Eliade, the essential features of shamanism include: intense ecstasy and trance, ascent to heaven, descent to the underworld, evocation and incarnation of spirits, mastery over fire, magical flight, and healing abilities. Eliade, Shamanism, 29, 31, 376, and 400.

the facts of temple prostitution and, at the level of barbarism and lower civilization, the worship of phallic divinities. Contrary to what one would expect, in savagery sexual cults play an insignificant role" (1954:41).

On the face of it, this is a surprising assessment. Malinowski refers to the use of sex in magical performances but claims that these do not belong to the domain of religion. He states that religion demands seasonal periodical feasts involving sexual "licence" but treats these as nothing more than acts without religious significance. He refers to temple prostitution, sexual cults, and the worship of phallic divinities yet treats these as of no religious significance as well. The very fact that there was such worship speaks to a connection between religion and sexuality, and that is precisely what we would want to understand: what religion and worship were like in those earlier societies, particularly their relation to sex. Malinowski, rather than being helpful here, is merely being dismissive. Yet, he tries to be respectful and make sense of some of this:

> "It must also be remembered that acts of ceremonial licence are not mere indulgence, but that they express a reverent attitude towards the forces of generation and fertility in man and nature, forces on which the very existence of society and culture depends" (1954:41-2).

But for Malinowski, religion refers to a kind of morality that could not countenance such licence. Hence, he concludes:

> "Religion, the permanent source of moral control …has to turn its attention to these forces, at first drawing them merely into its sphere, later on submitting them to repression, finally establishing the ideal of chastity and the sanctification of askesis" (1954).

What we see here is a prime instance of limiting the understanding of religion by assuming that modern Western religion is the exemplar by which all other cultural traditions must be judged as religious or not. Yet, much of what was dismissed as

"magic" by early modern scholars is today understood to have involved religion – a calling on the gods or goddesses (chapter 2). The immediate relevance of this discussion is to point out that the link between religion and sexuality is a thorny subject in the social sciences, and that as Malinowski's comments reveal the reading of the evidence may be conditioned by the scholars' definition of religion and by their moral sensibility. Perhaps it is then as a result of modern and Judeo-Christian sentiments (chapter 5) that numerous Western social scientists have opted to construe the widely attested relationship between religion and sex as fertility, rather than sex for spiritual purposes or for the sake of physical pleasure.

Fertility vs. Sex:

Most traditional interpretations of sexually explicit religious representations, whether prehistoric or ancient, tend to downplay the role of sex and attribute greater significance to the role of fertility, which supposedly served as the main "sacred" motive for the rituals because it was "essential to…survival" (Lerner 1986:125). Nude female statuettes found in numerous ancient sites around the world and made more than twenty thousand years ago are generally read as fertility cult figures from a presumed pre-patriarchal epoch, and have been called "Venuses" or "goddesses" (Fig. 49). Against this trend, new feminist critiques of the matriarchal model of prehistory reject "the identification of such figures as goddesses" as "modern myth" (Baharani 2001:47). Social historians like Reay Tannahill have argued that "at this period, [humanity] seems to have had very little enthusiasm for human fertility. Too many children posed more of a problem than too few" (Tannahill 1992:36). In her view, therefore, these statuettes "can reasonably be seen as a matching representation of the female as female, and as sexual partner" (1992:37).

In and around Mesopotamia, female figurines dating from the Neolithic to about 3500 have been found in temples, private houses, and tombs. They are usually identified as the "Mother Goddess" (Fig. 50) because they possess "strongly accentuated physical characteristics that might be related with the procreative function: big and heavy breasts, outsize buttocks, a large belly, a strongly stylized head" and appear "frequently in a sitting position, one of the traditional postures for childbirth" sometimes holding or feeding a baby in their arms (Pinnock 1995:2523). Then again, interpretation is complicated by the fact that other representations of the female body appeared early on in Mesopotamia and did not possess the traits generally associated with fertility figures.

From the Jemdet-Nasr period on (3100-3000), a quite different representation of the female body surfaced and persisted until the Persian period, ca. 539-332: "a young, slender woman with small, well-modeled breasts (sometimes held firm by her hands, as in a provocative offering), her genitalia depicted by a big triangle filled with dots to render her pubic hair. The hair on her head is usually loose or plaited; it surrounds her face, falling to her shoulders. In the painted figures the woman has heavy makeup. In all the figurines the woman wears jewels, either earrings, necklaces, bracelets, anklets, or all of them" (1995).[135] It has been recognized that some of these figurines are primarily "sexual" (Fig. 51) and Bahrani, for instance, establishes with a text from Assyria that they were made for "titillation." To her, therefore, "all of these images represent the

[135] Frances Pinnock, a researcher in archeology at the University of Rome, remarks that usual interpretations of clay figurines associate them with "a representation of the female reproductive function" or with "a stylization of the goddess Ishtar, because of their richly painted or molded jewelry. Ishtar's connection with jewels and beads is attested in written evidence." Frances Pinnock, "Erotic Art in the Ancient Near East," in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 2528. To Pinnock, "the clay figurines are probably another expression of the same kind of popular set of beliefs illustrated in the cylinder seals" and are part of "a popular level of handicraft production" because of the material and style. Ibid.

female body as the ideal of sexuality and an object of pleasure for the male Gaze" (Bahrani 2001:89).

Therefore, generalizations about prehistoric and ancient nude female representations as fertility figures have blurred the fact that females were also depicted as sexual beings and, more, that sexuality was in certain contexts considered positive: "a direct expression of love, an act without negative connotations" (2001:53). Sexual display and activity were often associated with spiritual experience as well as with entertainment, pleasure, revitalization or prolongation of the life force, and healing in many regions of the ancient agrarian world. What is more, the belief that sexuality, including prostitution (Appendix C), possessed socio-spiritual value and had "magical" impact was not uncommon in ancient agrarian societies.[136]

In effect my research indicates that large numbers of people have ascribed spiritual meanings and powers to sexuality in different regions of the world and in most historical periods.[137] In Mesopotamia, sexuality was generally recognized as positive and sexual

[136]According to Weber, "a certain tension between religion and sex came to the fore only with the temporary cultic chastity of priests…Subsequently the prophetic religions…have, almost without significant exception, regulated sexual intercourse in favor of *marriage.* The contrast of all rational regulation of life with magical orgiasticism and all sorts of irrational frenzies is expressed in this fact." Max Weber, The Sociology of Religion (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1922) 236. Along with magic, orgiastic intoxication was seen by the prophets as preventing the ethical patterning of life. For this reason, "Moses directed his rationalized ethical attack against the orgy of the dance, just as many founders or prophets of ethical religion attacked 'whoredom,' i.e. orgiastic temple prostitution." Ibid., 158.

[137] For example, tribal religious leaders - commonly referred to as "shamans" - have utilized sexuality as a vehicle to the divine. In Japan, the ancient and medieval *kagura* rites performed by Shinto "shamanesses"/*miko* in honor of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu often involved sexual activity and display: "on the kagura night in remote villages…a village virgin was chosen to spend the night with a visiting kami (deity), and it is said that this sexual act was sometimes performed at the kagura rite." Webber, The Essence of Kabuki, 72. In addition, the relationship between Shinto priests and priestesses was often sexual "since the days of antiquity." Ibid. What is more, promiscuous sexual intercourse has frequently been associated with religious transcendence. In China, for instance, Taoist masters portrayed sexual intercourse as "one of the main highways to heaven," and hence considered sex a sacred duty. A. T. Mann and Jane Lyle, Sacred Sexuality (Rockport, MA: Element, 1995) 30. As recently as 1950, members of a secret Taoist sect still practiced sexual promiscuity as a valid "route to immortality." Tannahill, Sex in History (Chelsea, MI: Scarborough House, 1992) 178. Called Yi-koantao, the sect offended the government of the People's

pleasure for both men and women was considered important. Extant examples of "love prayers" and the literary attention paid to the female orgasm draw attention to this. The ability to take a woman to orgasm was called *nish libbi* in erotic language; an expression that has been translated as "lifting the heart" (Bottéro 1992:98). Prayers and incantations addressed to the gods and goddesses by actual human beings reveal positive and frank sexual feelings and stress compatibility between female sexual pleasure and religion:

> "Take me! Don't be afraid! Grow as hard as you can! By command of Ishtar, Shamash, Ea and Asalluhi! These words are not mine but Ishtar's own, goddess of Love! Gather some hairs taken from a rutting goat, some of its sperm, a few hairs from a rutting ram…; mix all together and place it on the loins of your lover, after reciting the above prayer over it seven times" (1992:99).[138]

Republic of China with their sexual practices. Its leaders were said to have incited the members to engage in "promiscuous carnal commerce, promising to the participants immortality and freedom from illness." Maffesoli, The Shadow of Dionysus, 45. Also in China, an imperial edict promulgated in 1839 revealed that members of the K'oe-tan sect "join each other at night; there are many in a single room, and the lamps do not burn. They have carnal commerce in the dark." Ibid. A well-known Tantric sexual ritual is the *cakra*; a circle of men and women performing the sexual act. Ibid., 106.

Likewise, "sex for the Hindu Indians…was a religious duty…(a way) of improving the state of his *karma*." Ibid., 201. Rudra's worship, for instance, included orgiastic cults of sex and meat. He was the god of the ubiquitous *lingam* cult as well as the patron of classical Sanskrit drama. Weber, The Religion of India, 138. Apparently, among the adherents of the Chaitanya sect in the sixteenth century some practiced the sexual orgy as the "primary means of self-deification, the device by which they sought absolution." Ibid., 317. Also, Krishna's followers have engaged in sexual-orgiastic rituals. Ibid., 307. "Sex was natural, enjoyable, a virtuous pursuit of the Third Aim, so why hide it?" Reay Tannahill, Sex in History, 209.

In Europe, Saint Hildegard of Bingen maintained in the twelfth century that women as well as men could 'attain divinity' through love. She believed that love involved both body and soul, for: "it is the power of eternity itself that has created physical union and decreed that two human beings should become physically one." Mann and Lyle, Sacred Sexuality, 162. Later on, between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, the mystics and scientists known as *alchemists* presented their esoteric version of this belief: to achieve spiritual enlightenment, "the two vital streams of physical and etheric energy [menstrual blood and semen] must be balanced and united" in the sexual act. Ibid., 175. Nowadays, the belief in the spiritual value of sexuality manifests in Tantric practices popular around the world. Many New Yorkers, for instance, regularly attend the Open Center in Manhattan which advertises intensive Tantra workshops as follows: "Tantra: Sexuality, Sacredness, Spiritual Vision…Tantra is a path that uses sexual energy and deep intimacy to reach profound spiritual states" (Open Center Catalogue Spring/Summer 2006:31).

[138] Potency rituals known as *Saziga* were used "to induce, or rekindle, love in an unresponsive individual, and specifically to enable the male partner to sustain an erection." Farber, "Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination," in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 1900. The Mesopotamians believed that animals had great sexual potency and objects were magically "enriched" with love power derived from the sexual organs of certain animals. Ibid., 1901. It was, therefore, assumed that sexual power could be transferred from animals to humans.

> "Become aroused! Become aroused! Grow Hard! Grow hard! Be aroused like a stag! Be as hard as a wild bull…Make love to me six times like a moufflon! Seven times like a stag! Twelve times like a cock partridge! Make love to me because I am young! Make love to me because I am on fire! Make love to me like a stag! And, I under the protection of the god Ningirsu, I will allay your passion!" (1992).[139]

Historian Gerda Lerner has concluded that in Mesopotamia "what seems to have happened was that sexual activity for and in behalf of the god or goddess was considered beneficial to the people and sacred" (Lerner 1986:125). In other words, there were sexual acts performed for - and by - the gods or goddessess and such acts were considered a sacred means to ensure the well being of the people in all senses of well being, not just human or non-human fertility. In southern Mesopotamia - where abundance and prosperity were prized more than fertility due to geographical circumstances, literary accounts suggest that fertility was not always the prime concern in life and religion. Sexual desire, vitality, and allure, for example, were highly valued by the Mesopotamians who called attention to them time and again in their hymns, epics, and myths. At any rate, sexual talk would have been strenuous if the ritual of sacred marriage, for example, had been meant as a mere means to summon fertility.

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[139] Likewise, the sexual handbooks written and illustrated by the ancient Chinese encouraged men to perform prolonged sexual intercourse with the help of various devices and techniques to ensure that women were roused to orgasm (Tannahill 1992:71). In addition to providing sexual pleasure, Taoist sexual positions promised "to cure various infirmities" (1992:176). According to Farber, in Mesopotamia, "the aspect of seduction, clearly present in the wording of some of the incantations, might also have been a necessary ingredient of Babylonian family life: marriages were generally not based on love, but rather were prearranged by the families. Thus, a little magic might have helped to make life together more agreeable by…secondarily inducing sexual desire where it was not necessarily present in the first place…*Saziga*…might even have served a fully legitimate social purpose." Farber, "Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination," in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 1900-901.

Female desire: *'the watered ground'* [140]

In Mesopotamian texts, "the equation of the body with sexuality rather than the usually emphasized fertility is stressed" (Bahrani 2001:87). Beside a clear concern for the fecundity of land and animals,[141] the graphic agrarian imagery suggests an interest in lust, sensuality, and sexual gratification for men and women as well as for gods and goddesses. In poems relating to the sexual union of Inanna and the god-king Dumuzi for instance, explicit female sexuality is embraced by the goddess:

> "My vulva is wet, [my vulva is wet],
> I, the queen of heaven, [my vulva is wet],
> Let the man on top [put his hand] on my vulva,
> Let the potent man [put his] hand on my vulva (Alster 1993:20)"
> (Leick 1994:93).

Similarly, in the following partial mix of royal love songs which seem to have belonged to the cult of Inanna during the Third Dynasty of Ur, ca. 2112-2004, and used in the school curriculum of scribes in the ensuing dynasties of Isin and Larsa, the poets revel in explicit female hetero-sexuality:[142]

> "Man, I would flee from you – into the bedroom…O! that you would do, all the sweet things to me…let us enjoy over and over your charms and sweetness!...O squeeze it in there for me! As (one would) flour into the measuring cup! O pound and pound it in there for me!...My "wool" being lettuce [pubic hair] he will water it, it being box (-grown) lettuce he will water it and touch the *dubdub* bird [clitoris] in its hole! My nurse has worked at me mightily, has done my "wool" up in a "stag" (arrangement), has gently combed it, and is straightening my "May He Come!" (breast-shields). Let

[140] "My parts [vulva], (well) watered lowlands." Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, 46.

[141] Concern with abundance is evident in the Sumerian myth known as "Dumuzi and Enkimdu" which tells the story of Inanna's initial rejection of Dumuzi, the Shepherd-God, in favor of the Farmer-God, and the eventual recognition of the need to have abundance of wool and "honey-cheese" as well as plenty of grains and dates. Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 41-2.

[142] Jacobsen speculates that the king or queen may have had in their entourage "a woman poet who enjoyed singing about love and lovemaking" and that the songs may have been "meant for the queen." Jacobsen, The Harps that Once…, 85-7. It is known that women worked as scribes during certain periods and elite women appear to have authored a number of literary works (Appendix C).

> him come! Into my "wool," it being the most pleasing of lettuces, I shall with arousing glances induce the brother to enter…Vigorously he sprouted, vigorously he sprouted and sprouted, watered it – it being lettuce…my barley stalk [penis] full of allure in its furrow, water it…The honey-sweet man, was doing sweet (things) to me! …O my one who of a sudden was doing sweet (things) to the whole (insides up) to the navel, my darling…you watered it – it being lettuce!...O my beloved one, man…Your right hand be placed in my [vulva]… my budding one, my budding one sweet are your charms!...O my pure pillar, my pure pillar sweet are your charms! Pillar of alabaster set in lapis lazuli sweet are your charms!" (Jacobsen 1987:88-98).

And,

> "As sweet as her mouth is her vulva
> And as sweet as her vulva is her mouth"
> (Leick 1994:119).

Like these earlier Sumerian texts, the "love-texts" from the Old Babylonian period (2004-1595) are sexually explicit and emphasize sensual pleasure:

> "The beating of your heart is joyful music, Rise…and let me make love to you! In your delicious lap, the one for love-making, Your passion is sweet, Growing luxuriantly is your 'fruit', My bed of incense is *ballukku* perfumed. O by the crown of our head, the rings of our ears…the voluptuousness of our breast, reach out (and) with your left hand touch our vulva, Fondle our breasts, Enter, I have opened (my) thighs…" (Leick 1994:186-87).

Thus female desire and interest in sex for the sake of pleasure are central to Mesopotamian literature. As Bahrani explains, "the vulva is usually the focal point in erotic poetry. In the literary Mesopotamian descriptions of sexual intercourse there is no privileging of the penis over the vulva (Cooper 1997). Moreover, there is no taboo on the word vulva…nor were there derogatory terms or euphemisms associated with the vulva [or the penis] as was the case in Classical Greece" (Bahrani 2001:87). In fact, the vulva was conceived as alluring, and two Sumerian deities, *Nin-imma* and *Nin-mug*, "were dedicated to the vulva alone" (2001:45, 87). In Leick's words: "[The vulva] seems to

have predominantly positive associations. It is not feared or spoken of as shameful or contaminating…indeed Inanna's vulva was 'holy'…In so far as Inanna stands for the power of sexuality, the vulva is sacred as such…[On the other hand,] According to the later omen-texts, semen was a highly polluting substance, whereas female exudations are said to taste sweet. The vulva is the instrument, the prime tool, of female sexuality; its various stages of excitement are carefully observed. While the phallus represented fertility, the vulva represented sexual potency" (Leick 1994:96).

Along with sexual desire, female sexual vitality was immortalized in Mesopotamian literature. A hymn to Ishtar, goddess of war and carnal love, from circa 1900 reads:

> "Sixty then sixty satisfy themselves in turn upon her nakedness. Young men have tired, Ishtar will not tire" (Bottéro 2001:67).

In the celebrated *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Ishtar unabashedly chased the king of Uruk. He is said to be "adorned with *k.:zu'una kuzba kalu zumbrišu*" (Kampen 1996:14) which has been variously translated as: "His whole body is covered with attractiveness"; "adorned with charm is his whole body"; "his entire body exudes voluptuousness" (1996). And, the goddess could not resist the impulse to make such sexually alluring man her lover:

> "Gilgamesh washed out his long locks and cleaned his weapons; he flung back his hair from his shoulders…He put on his royal robes and made them fast. When Gilgamesh had put on the crown, glorious Ishtar lifted her eyes, seeing the beauty of Gilgamesh. She said, 'Come to me Gilgamesh, and be my bridegroom; grant me seed of your body, let me be your bride and you shall be my husband" (Sandars 1972:85).

But the king rejected Ishtar's advances in part because she was proven to be a fickle and, at times, cruel lover:[143] "Which of your lovers did you ever love forever?" (Sandars

[143] An interpretation of the epic offered by Tzvi Abusch maintains that by the time the Akkadian text was written Gilgamesh was known as one of the judges of the underworld and, therefore, Ishtar's marriage

1972:86). Ishtar had hit one of her husbands and turned him into a wolf. She turned another lover into "a blind mole deep in the earth" (Sandars 1972:86-7). In addition, she had sent her main consort, Dumuzi, to the infernal regions for not having sufficiently wept and lamented her harsh experiences during her visit to the Nether World: "She fastened upon him the eye of death, Spoke the word against him, the word of wrath, Uttered the cry against him, the cry of guilt" (Kramer 1979:83). Enraged by the king's refusal to satisfy the desire of her flesh, Ishtar determined to put him to death and to wreak havoc on his city, which was also the home of her "far-famed sanctuary" (Kramer 1979:74).

She asked the god Anu - her father in some sources and her consort in others - for "the Bull of Heaven to destroy Gilgamesh" and threatened to "break in the doors of hell and smash the bolts" and to "bring up the dead to eat food like the living [and to] outnumber the living" if he denied her (Sandars 1972:87). Anu argued that her demand would cause "seven years of drought" (1972), but Ishtar promised to deliver enough grain and grass in exchange for the Bull. Armed with the mighty heavenly weapon, Ishtar declared war on the king. But, Gilgamesh killed the Bull with the help of his friend Enkidu (Fig. 53). Infuriated, the goddess rose up, cursed Gilgamesh, and called on "her people, *the dancing and singing girls, the prostitutes of the temple, the courtesans*" (Sandars 1972:88. Italics are not in text). The king, on the other hand, called on the smiths and armourers and in one of "the rare cases in Sumerian literature when the goddess suffered a humiliating defeat" (Kramer 1979:75), he outweighed her. He celebrated and hung the Bull's horns on the walls of his palace in a show of victory. Yet,

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proposal may be conceived as constituting "an offer to Gilgamesh to become a functionary of the netherworld." Leick, Sex and Eroticism, 259. To Leick, this interpretation "may well account for Gilgameš' subsequent rejection of Ištar's offer." Ibid., 260.

despite his success, the gods denied him immortality and punished Enkidu's affront against the goddess with death.

This mythical encounter between the hero and the goddess Ishtar depicts her as a being that possessed strong sexual drives (as well as political pull) and who relied on collective female (sexual) energy to confront her adversaries, which included males who denied her sexual gratification. Lust seems to have been the driving force behind Ishtar's forceful pursuit of the king since despite the goddess's request for "seed" from his body she is never primarily portrayed in the role of mother. Mainly, Ishtar expressed her desire and demanded gratification of her sexual needs. She did not obtain it in this particular case, but the sexual role and potency ascribed to the goddess in this and the other texts imply that in Mesopotamia religion and sexuality were thought to be compatible, and that there existed an association of female divinity with power, lust, and vengeance, as well as with sexual desire and vigor, all of which suggest images and conceptions of female divinity that are complex and unromantic.

Female Divinity: polysemy

Inanna was the Sumerican goddess of love. Daughter of the moon god Nanna and his consort Ningal, she was renamed Ishtar by the Akkadians who conquered Sumer around 2334. While in this writing she serves as the main example of female divinity, Inanna/Ishtar was not the only Mesopotamian goddess nor was she the only female deity associated with sexuality or with kingship.[144] From the Ur III period onwards (2112–2004), a daughter of Anu (heaven) by the name of Nanâ or Nanaya was, like Ishtar, said

[144] Other prominent Sumerian goddesses include: Nidaba, the goddess in charge of writing, learning, an accounting; Bau or Ninisinna, goddess of medicine and healing; and Nanshe, the deity "who judged mankind on New Year's day, and who saw to it that the weak, the poor, the oppressed…were looked after and cared for." Kramer, From the Poetry of Sumer, 71.

to be "filled with splendor" and endowed with "sex-appeal."[145] Nanâ too had a "dark side" - the ferocious Irnina, and like Ishtar was thought to be a sister of Utu and a manifestation of the planet Venus (Leick 1994:182-83). Her consort was the god Muati:

> "Muati, your love-making is sweet,
> The appeal of your love is sated with honey" (1994:184).

In royal hymns, Nanâ is credited with the success of king Samsu-iluna's reign (1994:183). Elsewhere in a reference to a statue commissioned perhaps by king Abi-šuh, Nanâ's sexual rapport with the king and the social import of that connection are made explicit:

> "The statue which you saw…Let the king live for ever at your (*fem.*) command! Let Abi-šuh live forever [at your command]….She looked on Babylon with her kindly eyes, She blessed [it], she decreed its prosperity…Everyday…health for the king Abi-ešuh…She made him live in a …abode… Lust, lust…of happiness…She establishes sensuous Muati for us, …he ever took pleasure in her, thirsting for her as for water, …here is my sex-appeal, stir yourself that I may make love to you!'… let me sate myself with your (*fem.*) lust…' (Lambert 1966:53-6)" (Leick 1994:184).

The ability to prolong the life of kings, to make their reigns successful, and to make the land prosper was also within Ishtar's domain as I discuss later on. The fact is that Mesopotamian goddesses, like the gods, were multifaceted and polysemic. The particular attributes and meanings of a deity appear to have been added one on top of the other and transformed as epochs and political regimes changed. For instance, it has been said that it was perhaps during the conquest of Sumer by king Sargon of Akkad that Inanna/Ishtar "joined the ranks of the fighting gods" and became goddess of war (1994:64).

As the *Epic of Gilgamesh* attests, by the Old Babylonian period (2004–1595) Isthar was known as a forceful and promiscuous deity. She was an indefatigable seeker of

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[145] "The goddess, sun of her people, Implore, laud (?) her approach! She – moon-like to look at, Her shadow (..), filled with splendor. In richness are stored up for her fertility, glory, sweetness and sex-appeal; With joy, laughter and love she is richly endowed (Hallo 1966:243)." Leick, Sex and Eroticism, 183.

carnal pleasures; a lover who could be fickle, cruel, narcissistic, and deceitful; a daughter - of Anu (heaven) - who was capricious, demanding, and self-centered. As a benefactor, she was the friend/patroness of performing artists, prostitutes, and transvestites. As a magician, she was powerful – she could turn men into animals, as well as, turn men into women and women into men.[146] Moreover, she represented a wrathful and vengeful force. Her powers of utter destruction are exposed in the epic:

> "For six days and six nights the winds blew, torrent and tempest and flood overwhelmed the world…When the seventh day dawned the storm from the south subsided, the sea grew calm, the flood was stilled; I [the son of Ubara-Tutu] looked at the face of the world and there was silence, all mankind was turned to clay" (Sandars 1972:111).

This portrayal of the goddess may indeed be as Leick proposes, "a critical, even an outsider's perspective" (Leick 1994:255). It may reflect changes "in cultural values from allegiance to local city-deities to the veneration of supranational, cosmic gods" (1994:264). After all, from the Old Babylonian period on foreign rulers like the Amorite king Hammurabi began to emerge in southern Mesopotamia and their gods started to vie for power. Hammurabi, for instance, elevated in the pantheon the minor god Marduk who in time became the national god of Babylonia (Sumer and Akkad). This shift from Sumerian and/or Akkadian perspective to "foreign" influence might explain in part why the episode between the goddess and the king appears to be "imbued with a strong dose of satire" (1994:258), and why Ishtar is therein treated to what Leick calls: "the most abusive and irreverent discourse of Mesopotamian literature" (1994). In the epic, Inanna/Ishtar – the patron deity of the old and august Sumerian city of Uruk and of the capital of the preceding Akkadian empire, is humiliated and defeated by the king.

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[146] "To turn a man into a woman and a woman into a man are yours, Inanna." Leick, Sex and Eroticism, 62.

> "The implication is that sexuality itself is dangerous and can be the downfall of people who give into the seductive urgings of Ištar. This Ištar is not the Lady of Heaven but the Harlot, never constant, fickle in her affection, impossible to please, with one disastrous affair after the other. But she is powerful…" (1994: 262).

Nonetheless, Ishtar continued to be revered as a spiritual and political force for hundreds of years in Mesopotamia. On balance, in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* Ishtar is not only capable of rage and destruction, she is also capable of regret: "I commanded evil; why did I command this evil in the council of all gods? I commanded wars to destroy the people, but are they not my people, for I brought them forth? Now like the spawn of fish they float in the ocean" (Sandars 1972:110). Alongside her portrayal as destructive force, many sources from different periods reveal her as healer and benefactor of humanity - the helper of women in childbirth, a dispenser of political power and justice, and the protectress of kings as we shall later on (Figs. 54-58).

Of interest to this study is the fact that similar models of complex, contradictory, and sexual female deities appear in several ancient agrarian mythologies. The Hindu goddess Durga, for example, is a warrior goddess who combats demons, eludes household duties, rejects marriage with fierce language, receives earth offerings from the doors of prostitutes, possesses untamed sexual energy, drinks alcohol and blood, benefits the growth of crops, creates-maintains-destroys the world, and like Ishtar stands on a lion bearing weapons (Kinsley 1986:95-115). Another Hindu warrior-goddess Mahadevi or Devi is a powerful, dynamic deity who "creates, pervades, governs, and protects the universe" (1986:135) while she drinks blood and the "wine of dates," devours humans and animals, and excites sexual desire (1986:132-50). In Japanese mythology, the Sun Goddess Amaterasu is another fierce deity who engages in battle against her brother

Susanoo over a territorial dispute: “shaking the upper tip of her bow, stamping her legs up to her very thighs into the hard earth, and kicking [the earth] about as if it were light snow, she shouted with an awesome fury…stamping her feet” (Philippi 1992:74 n.2). In Chinese mythology, the Great Mother is said to have nourished her mate through the sex act and replenished “his limited life force from her own inexhaustible supply” (Tannahill 1992:54).

In the Germanic traditions, female deities and their earthly representatives possess creative and destructive powers as well. The Cimbri priestesses served the war god and officiated at human sacrifices from the second century BCE, while ferocious, bloodthirsty female spirits did the commands of war, took part in battle, stirred up disorder, and devoured the slain (Battaglia 1991:433). Furthermore, the magician-goddesses who “survive up to the present as Basque Mari, Irish Macha or Medb, Baltic Ragana, Scandinavian Freyja, and German Holla…destroy or create fertility of fields and control male sexuality. They themselves are endowed with an inexhaustible sexual energy” (Gimbutas 1999:120). Ragana, for instance, continuously inflicts damage apparently in order to secure the renewal of life and “controls male sexuality. She dominates men, often utterly exhausting them after a night’s orgy” (1999:206). All of these goddesses “create clouds, tempestuous winds…They shed showers, fog, and hailstorms…are shapechangers and [like Ishtar] can change humans into animals” (1999:210).

What these mythical representations of female divinity, and of the uses and misuses of sexual energy by goddesses, reveal about actual gender ideology or interaction in any particular ancient agrarian society is difficult to ascertain. Modern scholars have attempted numerous explanations of Ishtar’s nature and role for example. She has been

interpreted as a paradox, a fusion of different deities into one (Contenau 1966:250; Bottéro 2001:47; Bottéro 1992:296), a goddess of the marginal, and a paradigm of androgyny, bisexuality, or hermaphroditism.[147] In recent times, Zainab Bahrani has offered a reading of Ishtar as *alterity*; what is not "man."[148] Hence the figure of Ishtar has lent itself to multiple interpretations which may well depend on the scholars' approach to polytheism[149] or on their approach to representation. As the embodiment of opposites - such as love and war, Ishtar has represented a paradox. However, the embodiment of such opposites is a paradox only for those who associate love with one

[147] Bahrani discusses some of these views in her book. Bahrani, Women of Babylon, 143-49. Ishtar as innocent young woman surfaces in several hymns: "That which pertains to women –copulation- I know not, That which pertains to women –kissing- I know not, I know not copulation, I know not kissing." Kramer, From the Poetry of Sumer, 95. For more songs depicting naïve, loving, and childlike facets of Ishtar see: Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, 27-36.

[148] "Ishtar is the personification of all that is analogous to the feminine, all that is other, or falls in the realm of alterity, and, as such, she is the superlative figure of difference…As the rhetorical figure of difference, Ishtar is the place of all extremes; she is all that is in excess or out of control. Therefore, she functions as a sign not only of the essence of femininity, but of that which is outside the societal norms, against whose image Mesopotamian masculinity defines itself, and Mesopotamian patriarchal culture delineated its boundaries. Thus it seems that in Mesopotamian culture, alterity and chaos were gendered female…In psychoanalytic terms, Ishtar is therefore like a symptom, that is, a sign that emerges out of repression which fails. As such, she becomes the signifying locus of displaced meanings. Unconscious meanings and associations, desires and fears are displaced and appear in a disguised manner…Ishtar…can stand in for hidden and figurative meanings…Acting as a point of reference for the definition of what is stable and normal, Ishtar's mythic construction as 'other than man' served to secure the cohesion of a Mesopotamian normalcy, a normalcy which was defined as the realm of men." Bahrani, Women of Babylonia, 159-60.

[149] There are numerous approaches to the study and the practice of polytheism. The *monistic* approach which conceives the variety of deities as aspects of a single divine essence is very popular nowadays. In studies of Hinduism, for example, it is often assumed that all female deities are manifestations of "one unifying power or essence," and, according to David Kinsley, this assumption "often involves a sectarian desire to demonstrate the superiority of one deity over others." David R. Kinsley, Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1986) 132-33. The *animistic* approach which understands deities as personifications of natural forces has been common in the social sciences (Appendix B). The *archetypal* approach sees the deities as "metaphorical doorways into the reaches of the human imagination." Carl McColman and Kathryn Hinds, Magic of the Celtic Gods and Goddesses: A Guide to their Spiritual Power, Healing Energies, and Mystical Joy (New Jersey: New Page Books, 2005) 29. In the *transpersonal* approach, gods and goddesses are products of the mind; they represent energies within the collective unconscious. Ibid. Another way to look at the gods and goddesses is called *Euhemerist*, after the Greek philosopher, and posits that the deities were originally humans "whose extraordinary deeds came to be regarded as divine." Ibid. The *henotheistic* approach recognizes distinct spiritual entities but chooses to concentrate on one or a few. A strictly *polytheistic* approach perceives the gods and goddesses as 'real' and 'distinct' spiritual beings with no single ultimate source or deity. Ibid., 30.

type of being – the female or the Goddess – and war with another type of being – the male or the God. This antinomy may not have been imagined as such at the time**.** As I point out below, both gods and goddesses (and by extension possibly men and women) were seen as capable of all feelings and actions. Therefore, I agree with Bahrani that "the paradox of Ishtar," rendered in traditional scholarship as "a dichotomy of irreconcilable traits," is "not a paradox at all" (2001:159). The figure of Ishtar can also be read as *polysemy*; a representation that encompasses multiple meanings.

Recent scholarship suggests that in Mesopotamia a representation, or "sign," could encompass numerous meanings. As Bahrani has aptly demonstrated in relation to the visual arts in Mesopotamia: "an image was a pluridimensional sign that carried latent meanings beyond the one manifest on the surface" (Bahrani 2003:185-86). In other words, polysemy was inherent to images and: "when a particular value was read in the sign, it nevertheless did not erase the latency of other possible meanings" (2003:206). Therefore, it is probable that the multidimensional image of the goddess Ishtar was conceived to mean many things to the Mesopotamians, as it apparently does to us.

Regardless of ongoing positive or negative interpretations of Ishtar, several facts suggest that in the ancient agrarian representation of female divinity and of the female sexual drive/body complex dynamics were at work. I will briefly point to three aspects that invite further research. First, the fact that divine gender tended to be somewhat flexible in Mesopotamia and elsewhere, especially in the early periods.[150] Second, the fact that female divinity had crucial and well-regarded social functions in many regions

[150] Flexibility of gender identity was common in early agrarian mythologies. Even Yahweh's gender identity seems to have been unspecified in the earlier texts and it has been argued that he was initially conceived as a principle which embodied male and female aspects. Yet: "the fact is that for over 2500 years the God of the Hebrews was addressed, represented, and interpreted as a male Father-God, no matter what other aspects He may have embodied." Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy, 178.

of the ancient world; Ishtar was the dispenser of royal power, as I discuss later. Third, that the Mesopotamians as well as many other ancient agrarian peoples often ascribed similar characteristics to mythic male and female figures.

In Mesopotamia, gods as well as goddesses were said to possess *kuzbu* - sexual allure or voluptuousness,[151] *banû* - well-formed bodies, and *damqu* - auspiciousness or goodness; and both divine genders were capable of behavior that was violent, capricious, cruel, vain, conflictive, promiscuous, lascivious, demanding, deceitful, destructive, and incestuous. The gods Nanna, Enlil, and Ninurta, and the goddesses Ninlil and Ishtar were credited with possessing or imparting *kuzbu* (Winter 1995:14). And, the Air God Enlil was as destructive and capricious as Ishtar. He prepared to destroy humanity because its noise disturbed his sleep (Wiggermann 1995:1861). Thus, capriciousness "cannot be said to be a specifically feminine trait" in Mesopotamia "since male gods, especially Enlil can also behave unpredictably, with devastating consequences" (Leick 1994:61). While Enlil was revered as creator and destroyer of humankind simultaneously, the goddesses Baba, Ninkarrak, and Gula are said to have watched "over the health of mankind and cure[d] his sickness" and, at the same time, to have on occasion brought death "upon him" (Contenau 1966:251). Incest was also the prerogative of both divine genders: the Lord of the Earth, Enki, slept with his daughter and then with his granddaughter to bring certain plants and the art of spinning into the world (Bonnefoy 1991:146), while Tiamat - the female sea - married her son and proclaimed him king without consulting the divine

[151] For a feminist interpretation of male sexual allure in Mesopotamian sculpture, see: Irene Winter, "Sex, Rhetoric, and the Public Monument," in Sexuality in Ancient Art, ed. Natalie Boymel Kampen (United Kingdom: Cambridge U Press, 1996) 11-26. Winter proposes that "erotic allure" served to seduce/dominate the viewer politically and socially. Ibid., 22.

council. More: Inanna "as a theological construct is just as contradictory as Enki" (Leick 1994:63).

Similarly, in Indian mythology both the god Shiva and the goddess Kali personify excess. Both are out of control. Both live on the margins of the normal and the socially acceptable. Both are places of extremes. Both are wild, mad, and destructive (Kinsley 1986:116-131). Hence there are numerous indications that in some ancient agrarian societies both male and female deities were complex figures revered in many aspects.

The widespread practice of goddess worship[152] and the socio-religious status of goddesses and of their earthly priestesses in many ancient agrarian societies (chapter 5, Appendix C) suggest that the authority and complexity ascribed to female deities were taken seriously by both men and women (Figs. 19, 59-62). In Mesopotamia, temples and altars were erected in honor of Ishtar by kings and priests throughout the country during all historical periods. Hundreds of altars were built for the goddess even during the latter epoch, between 700-530, despite the fact that the god Marduk had ascended to supremacy in the pantheon (Contenau 1966:279). Likewise, crucial economic resources, such as sheep and grain (Fig. 63), were allocated by the group to Ishtar as "her property" (Wolkstein 1983:v). Lavish gifts, including splendid jewels and clothing, were brought before her by the people of Sumer and Akkad. In a small town, circa 1700-1600, Ishtar's personal belongings included:

> "2 finger-rings of gold, 1*vulva* of gold, 19 fruit (-shaped beads) of gold, 2 rods of gold, 2 breast-ornaments of gold, 2 ear-rings of silver…4 (beads of) lapis lazuli, 6 cylinder seals, 2 stamp-seals, 1 cord of yellow metal-alloy, 6 breast-ornaments of ivory, 1 great ring of carnelian…3…coats of linen, 6

[152] Goddess worship appears to have existed in numerous ancient agrarian societies, including those of Scandinavia, Crete, Greece, Rome, Etruria, Japan, India, Egypt, China, Ireland, Britain, Spain, Germany, France, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, Finland, Estonia, and all of Mesopotamia (Sumer, Akkad, and Assyria).

> woolen ribbons, 4 ribbons of flax…5 beautiful gowns…2 beautiful gowns, 2 loincloths" (Bottéro 2001:132-33).

In chapter 5 and Appendix C, I address the relationship between the goddess Ishtar and the human beings who relate to her (priestesses, prostitutes, kings, etc.) as well as the significance of this relationship. Here I want to discuss the reverence bestowed by the people of Mesopotamia upon the goddess and continue to stress the fact that, unlike many older interpretations, we now know that Ishtar was not simply a symbol of fertility. Images of the goddess were reproduced *en masse* and kept in the homes of her devotees (Fig. 64). Worshippers, including male clerics, petitioned her in scenes and inscriptions on cylinder seals (Fig. 57), and their prayers were not necessarily related to fertility. Her sexual and healing powers were invoked by her followers who brought before her phallic objects as votive offerings to increase sexual potency (Bahrani 2001:65),[153] and who offered her votive vulvae fashioned "out of precious lapis lazuli stone" (Lerner 1986:142) in an attempt to secure her "aid in magical cures against disease" (Bahrani 2001:50): "The standard symbolic offering was a stylized, lozenge-shaped vulva, which illustrates the connection between sexuality and magic" (Leick 1994:227).

"Magical texts" from the first millennium confirm that Ishtar was, even in the later times, still regularly invoked in ritual incantations to help and to cure the diseased:

> "When Išhtar causes the people of the land to weep for her lover Dumuzi [in the month of Du'ūzu]. (Every) man's family is assembled at an appropriate place (when) Ištar appears and deals with the affairs of the people. She takes away disease and she causes disease. On the 28th, the day of the byre, you dedicate to Ištar a vulva of lapis lazuli with a little gold star. You pronounce the name of the diseased….Without your [Ishtar's] permission the *gallû* demon cannot approach the patient… (AIIa, 3-10, 102-3)" (1994:226).

[153] In India, it is still common practice to "rub the representations of both phallus and vulva when one passes by them in a temple." Schechner, Performance Theory, 68.

Inanna/Ishtar was one of the most revered and beloved Mesopotamian deities since at least 3000 and for some three millenia. As cuneiformist Samuel Noah Kramer puts it: "Female deities were worshipped and adored all through Sumerian history…But the goddess who outweighed, overshadowed, and outlasted them all was a deity known to the Sumerians by the name of Inanna, "Queen of Heaven," and to the Semites who lived in Sumer by the name of Ishtar" (Kramer 1979:71). In effect, "God in Sumer never became all male" and "*Inanna played a greater role in myth, epic, and hymn than any other deity, male or female*" (1979. Italics are not in text). Extant hymns reveal the "profound feeling of adoration and reverence on the part of the Sumerian people for their beloved "Queen of Heaven" (1979:84):

> "The holy one stands all alone in the clear sky; Upon all the lands and upon the black-haired people, the people as numerous as sheep, The Lady looks in sweet wonder from heaven's midst; They parade before the holy Inanna…The people in all the lands lift their eyes to her, The men purify themselves, the women cleanse themselves, the ox in his yoke lows to her…The living creatures, the multitudinous people, bend the knee before her, The "called ones" of the matriarchs, for the Queen, prepare immense quantities of food and drink, The lady refreshes herself in the land, There is festive play in the land, The young man soothes the heart of his spouse…They parade before the holy Inanna" (1979:85).

The Mesopotamians endowed Inanna/Ishtar with extraordinary qualities and powers. Her faculties and deeds were exalted in lyrics, psalms, chants, myths, and prayers by kings and others.[154] Widely worshipped in many aspects, Ishtar was at once the Venus-goddess, the bright Morning Star and Evening Star; the goddess of love, sexual desire,

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[154] King Ammiditana dedicated the following hymn to Ishtar circa 1600: "Praise…the most awesome of the goddesses. Let one revere the mistress of the peoples, the greatest of the Igigi…She is clothed with pleasure and love…In lips she is sweet…She is glorious…Her figure is beautiful…The fate of everything she holds in her hand…At her glance there is created joy, power, magnificence…She is sought after among the gods; extraordinary is her station. Respected is her word; it is *supreme* over them…She is their queen…All of them bow down before her…Women and men indeed revere her." Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 383.

and promiscuous sex; the goddess who could "take care of the life of all lands" (Jacobsen 1976:39); a "fertility" figure whose role as mother was, incidentally, never primary; a judge and dispenser of justice;[155] the "owner" of one of the oldest and most important Sumerian cities, Uruk; the patron deity of Agade, the seat of the Akkadian empire; the goddess of love and weaponry; and an awesome combatant and advisor-companion to kings in the battlefield (Fig. 65).[156] She was also the protagonist in the foremost religious ceremony in Sumerian culture: the sacred marriage. Through her sexuality the king was invested with royal authority and his "fate" was decreed.

Therefore, it can be said with some assurance that a great deal of responsibility, material wealth, faith, hope, deference, authority, devotion, power, admiration, and respect were bestowed upon the figure of Inanna/Ishtar by the people of Mesopotamia. Her extreme actions and character did not impact her station as she continued to be one of the greatest and most revered deities through the end of Mesopotamian history. The figure of Ishtar not only illustrates that in Mesopotamia there was goddess worship but also that female divinity was many-sided, polysemic, openly sexual, socially relevant, and widely represented. Perhaps more important, the belief in female divinity and the existence of a highly organized female priesthood in Mesopotamia (Appendix C) indicate that, just as in several other early agrarian societies, *all* women enjoyed religious

[155] "She made the night come forth like the moonlight, She made the morning come forth like the bright daylight…When all the lands and the black-haired people had assembled…and…brought their words to her, Then did she study their words, knew their evildoer, Against the evildoer she renders a cruel judgment, she destroys the wicked, She looks with kindly eyes on the straightforward, gives him her blessing…" Kramer, From the Poetry of Sumer, 86.

[156] She appears as awesome combatant in a myth that relates her virtual destruction of Mt. Ebih, "a region to the north of Sumer that had failed to do her homage." Kramer, From the Poetry of Sumer, 76. "Lordly queen of the awesome *me*, garbed in fear, who rides the great *me*, Inanna you who have perfected the *a-ankara* weapon, who are covered with its blood, who storm about in great battles…who initiate the flood-storm, Great queen Inanna who are knowledgeable in planning and combat, Destroyer of *kur*…Like a lion you roared in heaven and earth, you smote the flesh of the people…My queen, when you become immense as heaven…Then the black-haired people [the Sumerians] break out in song." Ibid.

representation and *some* – the high priestesses - held significant religious and economic power.

These findings suggest that a critical factor in making possible the integration of female sexuality, asthetics, and religion in early agrarian societies was the existence of female divinity - with social and sexual vitality. The central place accorded to the goddess Ishtar in Mesopotamian society made her the object of fervent devotion as well as of ample visual and poetic representation.

In today's Western society, there is no comparable matrix bringing together female sexuality, religion, and art. Neither is there full religious representation for women - no goddesses and few priestesses. Moreover, the representation of female sexuality as part of the divine does not exist today in the West – one reason so many women have been turning to religions of the East and to Old Europe. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the introduction, a unique fusion of female sexuality, art, and religion is reappearing, and denotes a change equivalent to a paradigm shift in modern spiritual, sexual, and artistic sensibilities and conventions. While this shift seeks inspiration from the past, it is concerned with expressing something new and meaningful for today's world and today's sensibilities. Most surprisingly to contemporary audiences perhaps -- considering the explicit, overt, and provocative use of female sexuality – is that this shift in the realm of art defines itself in spiritual terms.

Implied in the intricate representation of female divinity in Mesopotamia was the belief that goddesses possessed great sexual power, and that their sexual potency and activity were socially relevant and sacred in their own right. Accordingly, *a sacred sexuality* was exalted in Mesopotamian literature especially in regard to the ceremony of

sacred marriage in which a high-priestess and a king came together in sexual union for a variety of socially significant ends as explained below. Thus, just as we saw in relation to art, sexuality in Mesopotamia could acquire meanings and functions vastly different from those familiar to us.

This does not entail that all sexual activity was considered "sacred" – adultery, for instance, was criminalized and harshly punished. Sex was imbued with sacred attributes and "magical" powers only in certain contexts. In effect, there are scholars who claim that "other than this highly restricted and structured "sacred marriage," there was no ritualized or institutionalized sexual intercourse associated with Mesopotamian religions or temples" (Roth 2006:23). Roth disputes the existence of institutionalized "sacred prostitution," which is critically addressed in Appendix C, but her contention does not cancel out the fact that sexual representations often accompanied religious expression in Mesopotamia.

Art and Sex: the theatrical performance of sacred sexuality

Links between sexuality, religion, and aesthetic expression in Mesopotamia and other regions of the ancient agrarian world have been noted by scholars of ancient arts.[157] Explicit sexual images were visible in Mesopotamian temples and archeologists have unearthed clay and lead plaques depicting what may or may not have been scenes of ritual sex (Figs. 46-48, 66). According to Frances Pinnock, a researcher in archeology at

[157] From Paleolithic times on, images of copulating animals and humans adorned caves and temples. The cave at Tuc d'Audoubert exhibits "models of copulating bisons" and the cave art at El Castillo portrays vulvas in "five bell-shaped signs." Schechner, Performance Theory, 66-68. In ancient China, "penis rings," which were designed to ensure long erections and to stimulate the woman during the sacred act of sexual intercourse, were made of jade or ivory and "exquisitely carved in bas-relief." Tannahill, Sex in History, 181. Likewise, early Indian sculpture, such as the *maithuna*, represented in the temple two or more figures in the sacred act of intercourse. Ibid., 217. Etruscan art also "made use of the powerful force of sexual motifs, symbols, images, and connotations for religious, ritual, [and] apotropaic purposes." Larissa Bonfante, "Etruscan Sexuality and Funerary Art," in Kampen, Sexuality in Ancient Art, 166.

the University of Rome, the open representation of sexuality was possible because the Mesopotamians "did not have problems with eroticism. They liked it, and they were not ashamed to represent erotic subjects on objects of everyday use, like cylinder seals, or those in public buildings, like the figurines and plaques…In fact, lovemaking was considered a basic element of civilization, as if the possibility of having free sexual intercourse with the opposite sex, not strictly for the sake of reproduction and therefore not related to the cycle of nature, was a way of stepping out of the animal part of the human being" (Pinnock 1995:2530). Not surprisingly, therefore, in the sacred marriage, sexual, religious, and aesthetic elements were combined to produce a performance that was at once ritual and theatre.

Speaking of the Mesopotamian rite of sacred marriage, Lerner concludes that the basis for it "was the belief that fertility of the land and of the people depended on the celebration of the *sexual power* of the fertility goddess" (Lerner 1986:126. Italics are not in text). The texts that describe the sexual union of the goddess Inanna and a number of kings reveal that special qualities and powers were attributed to her sexuality and indicate that its representation encompassed meanings and ends beyond those of a fertility rite. As the next section illustrates, through the sacred sexual encounter of goddess and king the Mesopotamians sought to please the divine, to prolong human life, to legitimate and support political authority, to manifest and multiply material goods, to maintain political dominion over conquered territories, and to circulate pleasure, fertility, abundance, and joy in the real world.

The extant documents indicate that the Mesopotamians allocated vast economic resources for the enactment of the sacred marriage for at least a few hundred years. The

"divine couple" in the cult-drama was apparently made up by an *entu*-priestess (Appendix C) who incarnated the goddess and by the country's king - who may have been seen by the people as Dumuzi, Inanna's proverbial lover and bridegroom. This enduring and elaborately planned religious ceremony took place, according to at least one source, in the spring during the most sacred festival and seems to have required the effort of the entire population. The significance of this sexual ritual to Mesopotamian society should therefore not be underestimated:

> "The annual symbolic reenactment of this mythical union [of the goddess with the king] was a public celebration considered essential to the well-being of the community. It was the occasion of a joyous celebration, which may have involved sexual activity on the part of the worshipers, in and around the temple grounds. It is important for us to understand that contemporaries regarded this occasion as sacred…and that they regarded the king and the priestess with reverence and honored them for performing this "sacred" service" (1986:126-27).

The texts specify that the sacred sexual union was celebrated in the cities of Ur and Isin at the turn of the third millennium and scholars warn about the temptation "to extend the importance of the specific accounts to the entire history of the land, or even to other towns and other temples" (Bottéro 2001:155). Nevertheless, similar accounts continued to be written, if not performed in the same manner, far from these cities for at least fourteen more centuries as texts from the Neo-Assyrian period (1155-626) attest (2001:157-58). Moreover, the existing narratives feature at least one king traveling to the home of the goddess Inanna in Uruk to perform the sexual act (below). Another text from the city of Nippur recounts the offerings demanded and received by the goddess before

her "wedding" (below). These sources suggest that the ceremony was known and perhaps took place in the cities of Uruk and Nippur as well.[158]

It is, therefore, reasonable to surmise that from about 2500 (Kramer 1969:63), the people of Ur and Isin – and perhaps the citizens of other kingdoms - assembled near the palace or the temple to hear, witness, or partake in the grand theatrical performance of the *live* sexual encounter between the goddess Inanna and the king.

Three texts describe the ceremony as it concerned king Shulgi of the Third Dynasty of Ur (c. 2079-2032) and king Iddin-Dagan from the Isin Dynasty (2017-1817). One such text, known as the "Blessing of Shulgi" (1969), recounts the journey of the king of Ur to the home of the goddess Inanna in Uruk and their sexual interaction (more later). Upon arrival in the very ancient and famous port in the district of Kulaba, the king took the animals he had brought as offerings to the temple of the goddess. Once there, he proceeded to put on his ritual *me*-garment and covered his head with a crown-like wig (Kramer 1969:63): "Dressed in all his finery, he attracts the attention of the goddess, who promises to make love to him" (Aruz 2003:468):[159]

> "Shulgi, the faithful shepherd, set out on the boat,
> At the *me* of kingship, the *me* of princeship Sumer and Akkad marvelled,
> At the quay of Kullab he docked his boat,
> With large mountain bulls led by the arm,
> With sheep and goats tied to the hand,

[158] There is also a text that suggests a ritual sexual union between the goddess Inanna and the heroic king Enmerkar of Uruk two generations before king Dumuzi appears on the scene. The ruler of Aratta challenges Enmerkar; he wants the king of Uruk to recognize him as his overlord and asks that Inanna be brought to his city: "Let him Enmerkar bend the neck before me, carry the basket before me, …He will live with Inanna by the wall, But I will lie with Inanna in the lapis lazuli house of Aratta; He will lie by her side in a fruitful bed, But I will lie in sweet slumber on an ornate bed; He will gaze upon Inanna only in a dream, But I will converse with Inanna by her feet, the all-white." Kramer, The Sacred Marriage, 58.

[159] Leick examines the texts that relate king Shulgi's sexual encounter with Inanna and concludes that there is no indication that a marriage took place: "no processions, no acclamations of the bride, no mention of Inanna's parents, etc. Instead, we get the impression that the king comes to the goddess as to a courtesan." Leick, Sex and Eroticism, 99.

> With dappled [?] kids and bearded kids pressed to the breast,
> To Inanna in the shrine of Eanna he came" (Kramer 1969:63).

In the city of Isin, the New Year celebrations involved elaborate processions of Inanna's cult personnel, "complete with ecstatic transvestites and much beating of drums, special offerings of incense, food and beer, the recitation of songs, etc. This was followed by a special ritual, the lovemaking of Inanna" (Leick 1994:101). Two compositions have emerged from the reign of Iddin-Dagan (c.1953-1935). One text has been called "The Blessing of the Bridegroom" and places the ceremony in the temple Ezida:

> "The pure (bridal) bed, a very semblance of lapis lazuli, which Gibil (the firegod) was purifying for you in the Irigal (temple), has the caretaker - greatly fit for (ministering to) queenship – filled with his halfa straw for you …The day is (the one) named…the day for the king to arouse (desire in) a woman…She has called for it!...She has called for the bed!...She has called for the bed for sweetening the loins…She has called for the royal bed…She spreads the bedding out (evenly) for the king…she calls the beloved one…May the lord, the choice of your heart, may the king…pass long days in your sweet thing, the pure loins! Grant him a pleasant reign to come!" (Jacobsen 1976:40-1).[160]

The "Iddin-Dagan Text," on the other hand, places the action in the palace:

> "In the palace, the house which guides the land…In its judgement-hall [?], where the black-headed people gather, He [the king] erected a dais for the "Queen of the Palace" [Inanna], The king, the god, lived with her in its midst. In order to care for the life of all lands, To examine closely…,To carry out to perfection the divine rules on the day of "sleeping," On the New Year, the day of rites, A sleeping place was set up for "my queen." They [the people] purify it with pots full of rushes, and cedar….Over it they spread a coverlet, A coverlet which rejoices the heart, makes sweet the bed" (Kramer 1969:65).[161]

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[160] Another translation reads: "The day is named, the day is fixed, the day the lord arouses the woman. Give life to the lord! Give the lord the staff and crook! She demands it, she demands it, she demands the bed, The bed that rejoices the heart, She demands it, she demands the bed; The bed that makes the embrace delicious, she demands it, she demands the bed, She demands the bed of kinship, she demands it; She demands the bed of queen-ship, she demands it; By him (making it) delicious, by him (making it) delicious, by the delicious bed; By the bed that makes the embrace delicious…by his delicious bed of the delicious embrace…. The king goes with lifted head to the holy lap of Inanna…" Leick, Sex and Eroticism, 100.

[161] The translation by Jacobsen reads: "In the palace, the house that administers the nation…The king, being a god, will sojourn with her [the goddess] on it. That she take care of the life of all the lands, that on

That the sexual ceremony took place inside the temples and/or palaces suggests that not all could witness the action in full. In regard to this Jacobsen proposes: "conceivably, the composition, by reporting the cult acts in songs, helped to enhance a sense of participation in the assembled worshippers on the outskirts of the crowd and enabled them to follow what was going on" (Jacobsen 1976:34). What we do know is that the population was admitted at some point into the great shrine "where the king is seated on a dais next to the goddess" (Leick 1994:101). The people apparently paraded before the enthroned divine couple during the rich banquet offered by the authorities after the enactment of the copulation (Kramer 1969:79).

The Performance: theatre and ritual

The sexual union of goddess and king as described in the various sources took the form of a dramatic performance.[162] It was divided into several parts: a 'prologue,' the preparation/purification of the performance space and of the protagonists, a dramatic action, and an exodus. All the traditional elements of drama appear in the ritual: plot,

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the day…of going to bed together, the rites be performed to perfection…at New Year, the day of the ritual, set up a bed for milady. Halfa-straw they have been purifying with cedar perfume…over it a bedspread has been pulled straight for her, a bedspread of heart's delight to make the bed comfortable... Milady bathes in water the holy loins…for the loins of Iddin-Dagan she bathes them in water…The king goes with lifted head to the holy loins…to the loins of Inanna…After he on the bed…has made the queen rejoice…she in return soothes the heart for him there on the bed…The king has reached out for food and drink…The palace is in festive mood…the nation is passing the day amidst plenty." Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, 37-8.

[162] Mesopotamian scholars have reconstructed the narrative of the sacred marriage using a variety of texts; hence the structure and details of the performance vary somewhat according to the texts used. Jacobsen argues that different wedding texts reflect different worlds and economies. The texts featuring the orchardman refer to a harvest economy, the others are part of the herder's world and denote a fertility rite. Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, 47.

characters, thought, verbal expression, and spectacle – which included visual adornment and song composition, for example.[163]

The texts that narrate the courtship of Inanna and the god-king Dumuzi constitute a sort of 'prologue' within the overall story. Leick calls these texts the "Bridal Songs" and specifies that they were not "folk-songs, but literary compositions with a view to cultic usage" (Leick 1994:69). On the other hand, Thorkild Jacobsen calls them the "courtship texts" and claims that they "appear to be purely literary in nature, not connected to any rituals, serving only the purpose…of entertainment" (Jacobsen 1976:27). He bases his argument on the opinion that the courtship texts are "lightweight stuff, popular ditties such as would be sung by women to while away the time at spinning or weaving, or perhaps as songs to dance to" (1976).

Yet, mixing "lightweight stuff" with serious lyrics was not uncommon in ancient and medieval ritual performances. For instance, in Japanese *kagura* humorous and even "obscene" stories and acts were juxtaposed with serious texts (Guevara 2001:30). Rather, the problem with interpretation seems to lie elsewhere: "our conceptual categories do not fit the material" found in Mesopotamia (Leick 1994:6) and scholars have had difficulty determining the use of the existing texts in their original context. "Some may not have been intended for any ritual use at all, while others, which appear quite secular to our understanding, may have been used in initiations to cultic functions" (1994). All the same, the texts which detail the preamble to the sacred sexual union reveal a youthful, fun-loving, flirtatious, and devious Inanna/Ishtar:

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[163] These are basically the six constituent elements of dramatic poetry according to Aristotle. Gerald F. Else, trans. Aristotle Poetics (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1967) 26. Aristotle ascribed definite qualities to each of the six elements such as "wholeness" to plot and action, and "consistency" to characters.

> "I, Inanna, having whiled away the time since yesterday, having whiled away the time, having danced, having sung ditties all day to evening, he met me! He met me! … The Lord took my hand in his…Where (are you taking me)? Wild Bull. Let me go that I may go home…What fib could I tell my mother?" (Jacobsen 1976:29).

A number of these documents are charged with erotic meaning and suggest scenarios of pre-marital lovemaking:

> "The brother makes me enter his house:
> He made me lie on a honey-smelling bed,
> After my precious, dear one, had lain by my heart,
> One-by-one, making "tongues" [could imply lovemaking], one by one,
> My brother of the fairest face made fifty.
> He became (?) like a silenced man,
> With an 'earthquake' [an orgasm] he was put to silence.
> My brother, with a hand put on his waist,
> My precious, sweet one, the time passes!
> (Lover:) …
> Come, my beloved sister, let us go to the palace…
> May you be a little daughter in my father's eyes!' (Leick 1994:72)

Or:

> "[He] brought joy into the garden, I am the girl, the lady, where are you my man? [The shepherd (?)] brought joy into the garden, I am [the girl (?)], the lady, where are you my man? Into the garden of apple trees he brought joy, for the shepherd (?) the apples in the garden are loaded (?) with attractiveness (hi-li), Into the garden of grapes he brought joy" (1994:73).

In addition to pre-marital eroticism, these texts reveal that the groom was expected to approach Inanna's mother – not her father – to obtain consent, and that he was obliged to bring generous gifts:

> "In mother Ningal's gate he stands indeed.
> I, with joy I, the lady, am coming.
> Let the man speak the word to my mother.
> Let our neighbor sprinkle water on the ground for the Lady!...
> [Groom:] For you, maiden, when I put the gifts before you, I will add more for you,
> Holy Inanna, let me bring them to you!" (1994:75).

Upon delivery of the groom's gifts - which included dyed clothing, flax, oil, barley, and wool, the goddess determined the worthiness of her lover: "My lord, you are indeed worthy of the pure embrace…Lord Dumuzi, you are indeed worthy of the pure embrace…My lord, your riches are sweet, your herbs in the desert are all of them sweet" (Jacobsen 1976:30). The decision to marry the king-god Dumuzi follows. However, how this decision is reached varies according to different sources. In what Jacobsen calls "the wedding texts" (1976:32) there is insinuation that Inanna herself chose her husband to be:

> "I had in view having the nation multiply, chose Dumuzi for (personal) god of the country. For Dumuzi, beloved of Enlil, I made (his) name exalted, gave him status" (1976:44).

Elsewhere, the sun god Utu - Inanna's brother - has arranged Inanna's wedding and tries to inform her diplomatically by speaking about the preparation of new linens for a bridal bed:

> "[Utu:] Lordly Queen, the cultivated flax, luxuriant…Sister, who have your fill of lofty trees…I will hoe for you, will give the plant to you, Sister mine, I will bring you the cultivated flax…[Inanna:] Brother, after you have brought me the cultivated flax, Who will comb it for me?... [Utu:] Inanna, I will bring it to you combed. [Inanna:] Brother, after you have brought it to me combed, Who will spin it for me?...[Utu:] Sister mine, I will bring it to you spun…[Inanna:] Brother, after you have brought it to me spun, Who will braid it for me?...[Utu:] Inanna, I will bring it to you braided. [Inanna:] Brother, after who have brought it to me braided, Who will warp it for me?...Brother, after you have brought it to me warped, Who will weave it for me?...Who will dye it for me?..." (Kramer 1969:68-9).

Still another text shows brother Utu pleading with Inanna to accept the shepherd-god Dumuzi as husband over her favorite, the farmer-god Enkimdu:

> "O my sister, let the shepherd marry thee, O maid Inanna, why art thou unwilling? His fat is good, his milk is good, The shepherd everything his hand touches is bright, O Inanna, let the sheperd Dumuzi marry thee, … O *protector of* the king, why art thou unwilling?"

> "Me the shepherd shall not marry, In his new [*garment*] he shall not *drape* me,… Me, the maid, let the farmer marry, The farmer who makes *plants* grow abundantly, The farmer who makes grain grow abundantly…"
> (Pritchard 1955:41-2).

Dumuzi then represents pastoralism, "the herding culture of the steppe" (Leick 1994:87) and Inanna stands for the urban agrarian side - the settled farmers: the two basic economic modes that coexisted in Mesopotamia. Perhaps then, as Leick proposes: "The literary topic of the Sumerian woman marrying a pastoralist may reflect an actual practice of intermarriage between the two groups, the settled agrarians in and around cities, and the nomadic or semi-nomadic herders at the fringe of Mesopotamian urban civilization" (1994:69).

Given their theme and tenor it is conceivable that the texts just quoted were sung (or enacted) before or during the preparation and purification of the performance space and protagonists that preceded the ceremony of sexual union. What is certain is that the sexual act was sacralized via numerous ritual actions. Descriptions of the tasks carried out to prepare and purify for the sacred marriage are found in the "wedding texts:" "compositions which must be considered belletristic and compositions which are ritual in nature and closely related to communal worship" (Jacobsen 1976:32). The day before the New Year, for instance, the bridal bed was set up. Made of expensive (imported) cedar and halfa-straw, the bed was purified with cedar perfume and then covered with special linens. The song in which Utu diplomatically informs Inanna about her upcoming nuptials to Dumuzi (above) conveys the elaborate preparation of this latter element of the choreography: the "bedspread of heart's delight" (Jacobsen 1976:37).

As the space was ritually prepared for the ceremony so were the protagonists. The goddess Inanna, for instance, engaged in a series of ritual actions before the sexual union.

She sprinkled the floor with perfumed oil, washed herself with soap, applied make up, and was ceremonially dressed in "garments of power" - precious stones and ornaments thought to possess magical powers: gold and bronze earrings, "buttock" and head beads, blocks of lapis lazuli, eye and nose ornaments, "ornaments for her navel, a hip flask, ornaments of alabaster for her thighs, ornaments covering her vulva," and sandals for her feet (Jacobsen 1976:34).

> "I showered in water, rubbed myself with soap, showered in the water of the bright copper ewer, rubbed myself with soap of the shiny stone jar, anointed myself with the stone jar's sweet oil, and dressed in que queenly robe, the robe of the queenship of heaven…I put kohl on my eyes…I tied on my hipflask…I designated a weapon that will make the years of reign pleasant for him…Rings of gold I put on my hands, little stone-beads I hung around my neck, straightened their counterbalance on the nape of my neck…" (1987:16-7).

> "My lady bathes (her) pure lap,
> She bathes for the lap of the king,
> She bathes for the lap of Iddin-Daggan,
> The pure Inanna washes with soap,
> She sprinkles cedar oil on the ground…" (Leick 1994:101)

In addition, according to a text from the city of Nippur, as part of the ritual preparations the goddess received offerings from the shepherd, the farmer, the fowler, and the fisherman: "Inanna, when all is ready for the wedding, sends messengers to these four bidding them to come to honor her with their gifts, and so the shepherd loads himself with fresh cream and milk, the farmer brings the sweet new grain from the furrow, the fowler brings choice birds, and the fisherman offers carps, which at this time of year, the spring, swim up into the rivers in flood" (Jacobsen 1976:32). Another text from the city of Uruk specifies additional offerings made to the goddess before her wedding, such as dates from the date-gatherer and the precious magical stones and jewels she wears:

> "A date-gatherer is to climb (?) the date palm…for holy Inanna. May he take fresh ones to her!...dark early-ripening ones…The man has decided to take them…O maiden Inanna, the man has decided to take them to the gem-revealing heap…On the surface of the heap he is gathering lapis lazuli…for Inanna…He is finding the "buttock beads," is putting them on her buttocks! Inanna is finding the "head beads," is putting them on her head!...She is finding the narrow gold braid (?), is putting it in her hair!..." (Jacobsen 1976:34).

When the set and characters are in place, the main dramatic action begins. According to one "wedding text" - which, by the way, juxtaposes serious political lyrics with erotic lyrics - before she meets Dumuzi, the goddess may have been escorted to the bridal chamber by her attendants who exchange pleasantries with her:

> "(*Inanna*:) The words of my mouth are all pure,
> I am directing the country rightly!
> (*Girlfriends*:) As sweet as your mouth are your parts [vulva],
> they befit princely state,
> they befit princely state indeed!
> (*Inanna*:) Subduing the rebellious countries,
> Looking to having the nation multiply,
> I am directing the country rightly!" (1976:44)

Her anticipation is evident in this "Bridal Song:"

> "Going to the lap of the groom – let us rejoice,
> Let us dance, let us dance,
> O Bau, let us rejoice over my vulva!
> Let us dance, let us dance,
> (until) the end it will please him, it will please him!"
> (Leick 1994:90).

By opening the door of her chamber, the goddess signals her acceptance of the king-god as lover. The "opening of the door" is said to have been the central ceremony in a Sumerian wedding (Jacobsen 1976:35). When the king, wearing his own ritual attire, goes "with lifted head to the holy loins" (1976:38), joyful songs, invocations, and music fill the bridal chamber. This liturgy is followed, according to one text, by the

performance of a highly evocative and openly erotic song composed by the passionate Inanna to her vulva. She compares her vulva to a horn and to "well-watered hilly land" among other things:

> "The heavenly barge of the moon (with its) mooring ropes,
> The lovely crescent of the new moon,
> A fallow plot in the desert, a field of ducks, full of ducks,
> Well-watered hilly land" (Leick 1994:91)

The dialogue form suggests that the song might have been performed by several people: Inanna and the king or the priestess-goddess and a chorus of singers who as Jacobsen speculates may have acted as attendants and girlfriends to Inanna (Jacobsen 1976:44):

> "As for me, my vulva,
> For me, the piled-high hillock,
> Me-the maid, who will plow it for me?
> My vulva, the watered ground–for me,
> Me, the Queen, who will station the ox there?
>
> To which the answer comes:
> Oh Lordly Lady, the king will plow it for you,
> Dumuzi, the king, will plow it for you.
> And joyfully she responds:
> Plow my vulva, man of my heart!" (Kramer 1969:59).

Following Inanna's eulogy of her vulva,[164] goddess-priestess and god-king performed the live sex-act. Again, current scholarship maintains that the act of copulation was real, not symbolic: "During the Ur III period and the Isin kingdom [2112 -2004] the evidence for an actual copulation between the goddess and the king is certain" (Bahrani 2001:137, Bottéro 2001:155). What I find of great interest here is that whether the act of

[164] According to renowned archeologist Marija Gimbutas, early representations of female divinity were made in the form of the vulva; from the Upper Paleolithic, some 30, 000 years ago, "through the whole of the Neolithic, Copper, and Bronze ages, up to historical times. It is pictured as a supernatural triangle, lozenge, or oval…or as seeds depicted as a dot in the center of an enclosure." Gimbutas, The Civilization of the Goddess, 223. (Fig. 52).

copulation was literally or symbolically performed and/or simply narrated, the result must have been the same because the Mesopotamians believed that representation *creates* the real (Bahrani 2003:201). The textual and/or theatrical representation of the sexual act by priestess and king *created* the event with all its splendor and stated consequences, as discussed later on.

In bed, the king endeavored to please the goddess-priestess who demanded "that the act of physical love be conducted with the right attitude and dedication" (Leick 1994:99). Details of his caress suggest such attitude:

> "Since by his fair hands, my loins were pressed. Since the lord, the one lying down by holy Inanna, The shepherd Dumuzi, in (his) lap smoothed me with milk. Since in my…pure arms…he relaxed. Since like choice…(and) choice beer,…he touched, [since] the hair (of) my lap he [ruffled] for me. Since with the hair (of) my…he played. Since on my pure vulva he laid his hands. Since in the…of my sweet womb he laid down. Since like his "black boat", he…Since like his "black barge", he…Since on the bed he spoke pleasant (words), I (also) will speak pleasant (words) to my lord. A good fate I will decree for him!" (1994).

After the sexual act was performed to perfection as Mesopotamian ritual required, the goddess rewarded the king for servicing her sexuality. She proclaimed him suited to be her lover: "To dance on my holy knees/breast [To have intercourse with me] like a tender calf, You are suited" (1994). In addition, she declared him suited for the exercise of kingship as expounded below. With this, the central dramatic action appears to have come to an end. The divine couple proceeded to enter the palace or temple hall taking their place on the royal dais to the accompaniment of joyful music and song. A lavish feast ensued:

> "To pure lavations, lavers set up, to gently wafted incest vapors, to lighted juniper incense, to food portions standing ready…into his august palace she enters with him… holy Inanna has the the arm around his shoulders…Abundance, delicacies, plenty, they bring straight to her, a

> banquet of sweet things they lay out, the dark-headed people bring it straight to her. The bard has the lute, that gives tongue from the podium, the sweet-sounding *algar*-instruments, and the lyre, which belongs where mankind is gay, prove themselves in his song of joy of heart. The king has reached out for food and drink, Ama-ushumgal-anna [Dumuzi] has reached out for food and drink. The palace is in festive mood, the king is joyous, the nation spends the time amid plenty…On the royal throne dais she has (her) head on (his) shoulder. O Milady, you are given praise to the borders of heaven and earth!...Inanna, oldest child of the Moon, Queen, evening star, to praise you is sweet!" (Jacobsen 1987:123-24).

Folklorist Diane Wolkstein has recapped the ceremony as follows:[165]

A sleeping place was set up for Inanna; the people "cleansed the rushes with sweet-smelling cedar oil," arranged them for the bed, and spread a bridal sheet over the bed "to rejoice the heart…to sweeten the loins"; Inanna washed herself with soap and sprinkled sweet-smelling cedar oil on the ground; the king went with "lifted head" to the holy loins and lied down beside Inanna on the bed; he caressed her tenderly and whispered words of love to her; he entered her holy vulva causing the queen to rejoice; the king invited the people to enter the great hall; they brought food offerings, bowls, burnt juniper resin, performed lavations, and piled up sweet-smelling incense; the king embraced his beloved Inanna as she shone like daylight on the royal throne; the king arranged "abundance, lushness, and plenty before her" and assembled the people of Sumer; the musicians played string and percussion tunes for the queen; the singers sang for the goddess; the king ate and drank; the palace was festive; Inanna was honored and celebrated, she was the "ornament of the assembly, the joy of Sumer!"; the people spent "the day in plenty"; the king hailed Inanna before the assembly: "Holy Priestess…Inanna, First Daughter of the Moon, Lady of the Evening! I sing your praises" (Wolkstein 1983:107-10).

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[165] In the early eighties, cuneiformist Samuel Kramer worked closely with Diane Wolkstein to bring his translations up to date and "mold their raw contents in a way that would make them alive and meaningful to modern readers." Diana Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kamer, Inanna Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her stories and Hymns from Sumer (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1983).

While the drama of Inanna and Dumuzi did not end happily ever after as it appears here,[166]once the sacred sexual union was completed and the community celebrated the event, the performance appears to have come to an end. The foregoing review of the evidence on the Mesopotamian sacred marriage illustrates that the performance contained elements of religious ritual as well as theatre. Ceremonies of purification, libations, liturgies, invocations, magical garments, and the like make evident the ritual nature of the event. On the other hand, all the traditional qualities and elements of dramatic performance appear in the rite (Epps 1970:13-25). It had, for instance, a "whole" plot with a beginning, a middle, and and end; a story line with a unified action - a single action and a causal chain of events; several characters who were "consistent" (Inanna's sexual nature remains consistent, etc.). It used language in dialogue, song, and prayer; and, it incoporated sound and visual adornment, such as costumes, jewelry, and props.

Beyond theatre, and even ritual –understood as a religious performance, the performed image in Mesopotamian representation was intended *to create the real*.

The powers of theatrical representation:

The pleasurable theatrical union of Inanna and the king was meant to have immediate and magical effects. For instance, it was intended to impact the natural environment: "At the king's lap stood the rising cedar, plants rose high by his side, Grains rose high by his side…[and] gardens flourished luxuriantly by his side" (Kramer 1969:59). The divine sexual encounter seems to have been expected to have yet other sudden and "magical" consequences. Once the sexual union took place, Inanna proceeded

[166] Dumuzi is at some point in this love affair sent to his death by Inanna who later regrets her decision allowing for his resurrection to take place. Dumuzi's death and resurrection are related in a series of well-known texts including the one titled "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World." Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 52-7.

to make a series of promises to the king and to the people which, if we follow the logic of the Mesopotamians, were meant to manifest in the real.

In relation to this, it must be noted that the priestess who took the place of the goddess Inanna during the sacred marriage did not intend nor attempt to impersonate her, or serve as conduit for her.[167] She was believed "to be" the goddess Inanna herself during the performance, just like the statues of gods and kings were thought to be the actual deity or person (chapter 3). Hence the *entu*-priestess was far more powerful than an impersonator; she was "a presence" of the goddess (Bahrani 2003:144). The Mesopotamian belief in the magical powers of representation made it possible for the characters and the public at large to conceive the performed acts and words as actual.

Thus the theatrical performance of the sacred marriage was not a mimetic representation but the actualization of a sexual union intended to accomplish specific ends of great importance to the community. In other words, both visual and performed representations of the sacred sexual union intended to reiterate it. Bahrani explains this aim as follows:

> "It is well known from ritual texts that performative acts and performative utterances were central to Mesopotamian religious practices, and the Uruk Vase represents a ritual, even if some may doubt that it is in fact that of the sacred marriage. Jacques Derrida defines the performative as a 'communication which does not essentially limit itself to transporting an already constituted semantic content' (Derrida 1982:322). It is a communication that goes beyond indicating a pre-existing referent because it effectuates something at the moment of its utterance. We might not be too far off course then in describing this sacred marriage ritual as a performative

[167] Historian Leo Oppenheim remarks that ecstasy played a minor role in Mesopotamian society: "only rarely and rather reluctanctly" the Mesopotamians admit "that the deity can use man as a vehicle for the expression of divine intentions." Leo Oppenheim, Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977) 221. Prophetesses existed, however, and a few achieved some measure of social esteem during Assyrian times. Ibid. The absence of "shamanistic" concepts in Mesopotamia may in part be explained by the fact that certain human beings (priestesses and kings, for example) had the ability to be and speak as divine beings in religious ritual and, therefore, no messages from the gods were thought to be necessary.

> narrative, a theatrical enactment, the effects of which are magical transformation or epiphany" (2001). "This is a performative image in that the image itself has performative qualities. It not only represents a performative act but also reiterates it via representation in a similar way to the speech act" (2001:139).

Perhaps another way to attempt to understand and explicate the magical, social, aesthetic, and sexual signification of the sacred marriage is to envision it as an *actual*. According to influential performance theorist Richard Schechner, different cultures around the world have used "actualizing" or "making present a past time or event" in ritual performance (Schechner 2003:37). Actuals do not *mimic* past or mythical realities, rather they are events that make the myth present in the here an now. Moreover, *reactualizing* the myths, interests, beliefs, and concerns of the social group "*create* the very circumstances they purport to depict" (2003:263). That is, *actuals* "make happen" what they "celebrate" (2003:128).

In Mesopotamia, the reiteration of the sacred sexual union was a performative enactment that sought to effectuate something. William Hallo has proposed that one of the aims of this ritual act of copulation was to "produce a royal heir" (Bahrani 2001:137). Thorkild Jacobsen has argued that Inanna represented the communal "storehouse" which, as clearly stated in the texts, took "care of the life of all lands" (Jacobsen 1976:39). Hence, to him, the ceremony is basically a fertility rite. While these interpretations may be accurate, the performance appears to have been pluridimensional and multi-functional.

Like *actuals*, the sacred marriage embraced "multiple, valid, equivalent, and reciprocating realities" (Schechner 2003:44). During the ceremony the sexual act was invested with "magical" powers, and theatrical representation was infused with the ability to manifest the words, images, and actions represented. The texts reveal that besides the

belief in the power of the sexual union to create *in the real* fertility of land and animals, ritual sexuality was thought capable of accomplishing other vital social ends. For example, it was through sex and its pleasures that Inanna was said to prolong the life of the king and grant his reign:

> "After he on the bed…[the king] has made the queen rejoice…She in turn soothes the heart for him there on the bed: "Verily, I will be a constant prolonger of Iddin-Dagan's days (of life)" (Jacobsen 1976:38).
> "When on my vulva his hand he shall have laid…When like his marrow boat, he shall have brought life to it, When on the bed he shall have caressed me, Then shall I caress my lord, a sweet fate I shall decree for him, I shall caress his loins, the sheperherdship of all lands, I shall decree as his fate" (Kramer 1969:64).

Once again, the words and images pressed in these tablets must not be read merely as poetic metaphors for Mesopotamian writing was "associated with magic" (Bahrani 2003:207) and ritual texts possessed magical meanings and messages. According to Bahrani, "the conjunction of text and image is one of the hallmarks of Near Eastern art" (2003:165), hence the text should be considered part of the internal logic of the image and not a parallel source of information (2003:166). Thus the songs and invocations performed during the sacred sexual union spelled out magical aspects of the action being actualized. What the intended magical objectives were supposed to be is fairly clear in the texts. Inanna was expected to do much more than to prolong the life of the king. She was also entrusted by the community to grant him - via his passing of "long days" in her "sweet thing" - his kingdom and the quality of his reign.[168] She was expected to give him the ability to impart justice, to make the land prosper, and to realize firm political control

[168] Leick proposes that "The Sumerian king's erotic relationship with Inanna can to some extent be understood as product of royal ideology, which claimed that the sovereign had quasi-divine status and was integrated in the pantheon with symbolic kingship ties." Leick, Sex and Eroticism, 111.

over Sumer and its conquered territories. A plea uttered by Inanna's vizier unveils the responsibilities of the goddess:

> "Ninshubur, the good handmaiden of Eanna, stays awake at her goodly duties, she leads him [the groom] bewigged in to the loins of Inanna:
> "May the lord, the choice of your heart, may the king, your beloved bridegroom, pass long days in your sweet thing, the pure loins! Grant him a pleasant reign to come! Grant him a royal throne, firm in its foundations; grant him a scepter righting (wrongs in) the land, all shepherds' crooks; grant him the good crown, the turban that makes a head distinguished.
> From sunrise to sunset, from south to north, from the Upper sea to the lower sea…and in Sumer and Akkad, grant him all shepherds' crooks, and may he perform the shepherdship over the dark-headed people.
> May he like a farmer till the fields, make he like a good shepherd make the folds teem, may there be vines under him, may there be barley under him…may fishes and birds sound off in the marshes under him.
> May old and new reeds grow in the canebrake under him…may deer multiply in the forests under him…may lettuce and cress grow in the vegetable plots under him…O milady, queen of heaven and earth, may he live long in your embrace!" (Jacobsen 1976:41-2).

In "The Blessing of Shulgi" Inanna's political role and the fate of the king are made explicit:

> "In battle I am your leader, in combat I am your helpmate [?], in the assembly I am your champion [?], On the road I am your life, You, the chosen shepherd of the holy [?] house [?]…In all ways you are fit: To hold high your head on the lofty dais, you are fit. To sit on the lapis lazuli throne, you are fit. To fix the crown on your head, you are fit…To gird yourself in the garment of kinship, you are fit. To carry the mace and the weapon, you are fit…For the holy scepter in your hand, you are fit…To prance on my holy bosom like a 'lapis lazuli' calf, you are fit. May your beloved heart be long of days…Inanna holds you dear, you are the beloved of Ningal" (Kramer 1969:64).

A different text includes this blessing by the goddess:

> "Wild bull, 'eye of the land', I will bring life to its people, I will fulfill all its needs [?], Will make its people carry out justice, in the princely house, Will make its seed utter [?] words of justice in the palace" (1969:81).

Therefore, through sexual union with the king Inanna acquired weighty and varied responsibilities before the community. She acted as dispenser of royal power as well as

protector and guardian of the king and his reign,[169] as she vowed to manifest justice in the land, for example. This implies that the performed image, like "the graven image" (Bahrani 2003), was polyvalent in Mesopotamia. Sexual, political, economic, aesthetic, and religious matters were juxtaposed and various ends were intended by the rite of sacred marriage. The ritual took on many forms as it integrated multiple dimensions of social life. It was at once a religious, political, economic, aesthetic, and sexual event. It was both polymorphic and multidimensional.

Since Mesopotamian images "repeat" rather than "represent" (2003:144), ritual "love texts" must have also been intended to bring into being the sexual feelings and desires inscribed on them. The priestess-goddess named the pleasure, the sexual excitement, and the physical joy - as well as the longevity, the prosperity, the stable government, and the fertility - that humans desired, and she *created* them. As we have and shall continue to show, the texts place great emphasis on explicit sexuality and sexual pleasure. This accent suggests that the performance also served to reiterate the importance and positive value of these in human life at the time. In Mesopotamia, sexual fulfillment was recognized as a "cultural ideal" (Leick 1994:79).

The social import of theatrical sexual union:

The representation of sexual pleasure on earth had its counterpart in heaven; as humans enjoyed sex so did the gods and viceversa. Sexual love was an act the gods engaged in for the benefit of the community, and they did so in a spirit of pleasure, celebrating the joys of sexual being. Hence the ritual of sacred marriage also legitimated

[169] King Sargon of Akkad is said to have been "particularly devoted to the goddess" Ishtar who protected him and helped him achieve "his spectacular rise to supreme power." Leick, Sex and Eroticism, 57. Ishtar's role as protectress of the king lived on among the Assyrians: "the Assyrian kings up to Esarhaddon intimate –as does Hattusili III- that their rise to power was due to Ishtar's personal intervention." Oppenheimer, Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait, 205.

male and female sexual activity, display, and pleasure. After all, Inanna's vulva was not just a "storehouse" (Jacobsen 1976:39) from which grains and plants poured copiously, it was also a site of pride, mystery, pleasure, and joy:

> "She leaned back against the apple tree. When she leaned against the apple tree, her vulva was wondrous to behold. Rejoicing at her wondrous vulva, the young woman Inanna applauded herself" (Wolkstein 1983:12).

Sexual representation intended to *please* the divine; to provoke the pleasure of deities. It helped meet the pleasure/sexual needs of deities. It also honored them, for sexual activity on behalf of the gods and goddesses was a form of religious sacrifice. While the term "sacrifice" generally means renunciation or deprivation to us, in Mesopotamia it meant "exclusively a gift, and offering, presented to a divinity for its benefit or pleasure" (Bottéro 2001:125). As noted in chapter 3, immolated animals, libations, food, jewels, clothing, rare objects, dance, music, and acts of sexual love were offered with the intention of providing the deities with help or pleasure.[170]

According to Lerner, the priests and priestesses of the goddess Ishtar "sacrificed [gave of] their own sexuality in order to celebrate and enhance the fertility of the goddess" (Lerner 1986:192). Sexual sacrifice could take the form of ritual sexual activity, such as that performed in the sacred marriage, or of virginity and celibacy in honor of specific deities.[171] In *The Babylonian Laws*, Driver and Miles explain that "in the ancient

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[170] Weber recognized that both prayer and sacrifice had origins in magic and claimed that the magical aspect of sacrifice rested on the fact that in "magical religion" those who made the offering expected something in exchange. Cunningham, Religion and Magic, 12. While this seems to be true to some extent in Mesopotamia, sacrifice was also intended there to assist and please the deities. Because pleasing the deities helped ensure their good will and assistance on earth.

[171] Mafessoli offers that erotic mysticism which rests on sexual abstinence has a counterpart in orgiastic promiscuity. Mystical chastity can be an "inverted orgy that procures voluptuousness and shivers." Maffesoli, The Shadow of Dionysus, 39. The mystic Christine Ebner expressed her approach to Christ as "overflowing with desire, like a spouse to the nuptial bed." Ibid., 41. Likewise, Mechtilde of Magdegurg pleaded: "Lord, love me strongly, love me often and for a longtime. I call to you burning with desire, your

East vowed chastity and sacral prostitution were merely two diverse modes of worshipping the deity" (Driver and Miles 1952:360, n. 10). In Mesopotamia, even sexual practices that to us may appear dubious, like promiscuity and prostitution, were invested under certain conditions with sacred value and social import (Appendix C).

In addition, the cyclical public representation of the sexual act placed emphasis on the social over the private character of sexual relationship and recognized social significance in explicit sexuality. Hence in Mesopotamia the sacred sexual union also served as a means and an occasion to create community. The rapport between ritual sex and community is insinuated in a text that links the sexual vitality of the goddess Ishtar to the way in which the city is built:

> "One comes up to her — the city is built on pleasure!
> 'Come here, give me what I want' — the city is built on pleasure!
> Then another comes up to her — the city is built on pleasure!
> 'Come here, let me touch your vulva' — the city is built on pleasure!
> 'Since I'm ready to give you all that you want — the city is built on pleasure!
> Get all the young men of your city together — the city is built on pleasure!
> …
> 'Get on with it, fellows, for my lovely vulva!' — the city is built on pleasure!"
> (Bahrani 2001:87).

Besides legitimating sensuality, engendering community, or enhancing fertility, sexual representation served to structure social life and to reaffirm existing socio-economic arrangements. Public mating with the goddess inaugurated the king and cemented old obligations, or set up new ones, among the participants. The performance created or reordered the social hierarchy and ratified political change by bestowing the leading roles on members of the religious and political elite, by reinforcing the power of the king, or by legitimizing new kingships.

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burning love inflames me at all hours…I am only a naked soul and you, in it, are a richly dressed guest." Ibid.

Furthermore, through the presentation of offerings, which the goddess requested before the nuptial and which may have been shared collectively at the final banquet or redistributed to support the temples, the people acknowledged their social obligations and consented to their place in the social hierarchy. Moreover, the feast that brought to a close the ceremony of sacred marriage may have included sexual license or playfulness, in exchange for or in celebration of this public acceptance.

Sexual representation might have also been intended to beseech and create *abundance* – especially on the day(s) of this special occasion. During the New Year festival numerous items and foods were brought by the people before the goddess. Gold, silver, precious stones, and other expensive raw materials had to be imported from near and distant lands to manufacture the aesthetic objects (jewels, offerings, etc.) required for the performance. Copious amounts of food had to be gathered, prepared, and distributed during the closing banquet offered by the authorities. As the texts suggest, in addition to an abundance of animal meat - lambs, beef, birds, ducks, "precious carps" (Jacobsen 1987:20), substantial amounts of butter, milk, small cheeses, breads, honey, wine, beer, fruit, as well as a "feast of sweets" (Jacobsen 1976:39) were consumed during the ceremony:

> "For the holy sacrifices, for the well-established rites, for the fire-seared altar, for the cypress [?] altar, for the abundant bread-offerings, for the amply-filled vases, He [the king-god] entered with her [the priestess-goddess] in his lofty palace…Paraded abundance, cheer, and plenty before her, Prepared a goodly feast for her…" (Kramer 1969:65-6).

Thus, material abundance was a prerequisite for the ritual of sacred marriage and its blend of sexuality, religion, and aesthetics. There had to be abundance in the community that could be brought together to the temple or palace for this event in order for there to

be such extended feasting and celebrating. The display of abundance seems to have superseded a concern with fertility – as parenthood. As Bottéro points out, a main goal of the New Year festival was "to provide the land with abundance and prosperity, even more than "fertility," for even if "mythology is not logical," we must remember that neither Inanna nor Ishtar after her were ever wives, in the strict sense of the word, or mothers, which rendered them unsuitable to represent anything connected to maternity" (Bottéro 2001:156).

The "reverence" and "obsession" with prosperity and "abundance" (Kramer 1979:61, 64-70) noted by scholars of southern Mesopotamia may have been related to geo-political circumstances. As mentioned before, the urban centers of ancient Sumer were built on the windy and arid alluvial plain amid the rivers Tigris and Euphrates where the climate was hot and dry and the terrain was prone to salinization. Intensive human effort was required to make the land "fertile," and through technological ingenuity – such as the remarkable system of irrigated canals - the Mesopotamians achieved outstanding yields of grain; mainly barley. In fact, agricultural productivity in Sumer was higher than in early modern Europe (Snell 1997:37).[172] In spite of this man-made "fertility," the cities of Sumer depended on their periphery for many basic and luxury items. The combination of laborious artificial fertility and lack of natural resources may have provided the impetus for an "obsession" with riches and abundance, which the Sumerians as well as the

[172] "To cultivate the best lands it was necessary to control and distribute floodwaters through a network of canals that started at the levees and then dispersed irrigation waters radially by countless, small feeder canals and ditches." Butzer, "Environmental Change in the Near East," in Sasson Civilization of the Ancient Near East, 142.

Akkadians and Babylonians fought to acquire by any means necessary in order to achieve the grand urban works of their civilizations.[173]

To recapitulate, the theatrical performance of the sacred marriage constitutes a "pivot of systems" (Schechner 2003:116) involving sexual, corporeal, social, political, recreational, aesthetic, magical, religious, and economic transactions. The sanctioning and sacralization of sexual activity in the Mesopotamian ritual invited the corporeal into the theatrical performance. The sacred marriage placed theatricality in the sexual act and in so doing it may have incited sexuality in the social body of those attending the performance – suggesting that this ritual may have had an orgiastic dimension.[174] Ideas that the sexual act is a vehicle to spirit and that spirituality can be carnal have persisted in the human imagination throughout history up until the present day, indicating that large numbers of people have always opposed the alienation of sexual display and pleasure from the realm of the sacred.[175] In the West today, thousands of followers of the Neopagan and Feminist Spirituality movements, for example, also envision sexuality as

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[173] Expeditions to distant lands in search of wood, stone, gold, silver, spices, and other necessities were immortalized by the Mesopotamians in their literature and often entailed the subjugation of the peoples they encountered. The story of the "The Forest Journey" relates an expedition to acquire cedar wood to build a palace for king Gilgamesh. Sandars, The Epic of Gilgamesh, 70-84.

[174] Ritual collective sex is a practice found in many ancient and not-so-ancient societies. In ancient China as well as in Vietnam and Africa, for example, religious festivals included sexual unions in open air. As recently as 1954, young men and women of the Tacheta region were said to practice nocturnal "collective coupling" during the ritual of an agrarian cult. Maffesoli, The Shadow of Dionysus, 56-58, 65. In ancient Rome, people merged sexually in numerous religious festivals like the Liberalia, the Bacchanals, the festivals of Venus, the Floralia, the Priapeia, the Feriis Romanis, and the Juvenal. Ibid., 143. Furthermore, repetition of image was a common magico-artistic device used by the Mesopotamians (chapter 3) and appears to be related to their concern for abundance. Repeating the performed image of the sexual act falls within the parameters of this view.

[175] In addition to the examples provided in n. 137, orgiastic practitioners have included: the Russian Chlystes, the Judeo-Christian Sarabaites (from the fourth to ninth centuries), the Nicolaites, the Corpocratians, the Cainistes, the 'Pietists of Königsberg,' the English spiritualists of Hydesville (1901), the Adamites in the second century, the Picards in the thirteenth century, the Cathars, and the Waldensians. Maffesoli, In the Shadow of Dionysus, 43-4, and 145.

beneficial and sacred (Eller 1993:138).[176] What is more, the "ancient" connection between sexuality, religion, and art is being re-invented today as I elaborate in the conclusion.

Concluding Remarks

Some of the earliest examples we know of performing traditions include the ritual performances in honor of the ancient gods and goddesses. As often as not, these performances combined manifold interests and concerns of the particular social group.[177] Rites similar to the Mesopotamian sacred marriage flourished in numerous agrarian societies, including classical Greece and pre-Christian Rome. These "sacred marriages" were not simple symbols of agricultural fertility. In Mesopotamia, the sacred sexual encounter between the goddess Ishtar and the king comprised multiple transactions and aims within a particular ecological context. It integrated sexual, spiritual, and aesthetic interests, for example, and it endowed sexuality and theatrical representation with magical powers and social significance - political legitimacy, assurance of abundance, etc. It was simultaneously a religious rite, a sexual act, a political event, an economic

[176] In the 1990s there were approximately fifty to one hundred thousand serious adherents of Neopaganism in the United States alone. Cynthia Eller, Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America (New York: Crossroad, 1993) 50. Contemporary spiritual feminists believe that 'witchcraft' in Medieval Europe was a remnant of ancient goddess-centered religion, which antagonized the religious establishment by its practice of magic and, apparently, of unrestrained sexuality. For the persecutors of 'witches' sought to justify their genocidal rampage by denouncing magic as well as the "bizarre sexual practices of witches" and the insatiable "carnal lust" of women. Ibid., 173.

[177] In Mesopotamia, the followers of the goddess Ishtar also held colorful celebrations of military victory once a month: "The guardsmen [cult warriors] have combed (their hair) for her, - before holy Inanna, before her eyes they are parading – they have made colorful for her the back hair with colored ribbons…on their bodies are (sheep) skin (robes) (the dress) of divinities…Fine men, eminent ladies, the doyenne of the women sages…who hold harps and calming instruments, march beside them. –Before holy Inanna…They (themselves) are girt with implements of battle…spears…Their right arms are clothed with cloth in male fashion…Playfully, with painted buttocks, they engage in single combat - before holy Inanna…maidens and crones, curling their hair (as harlots) – before holy Inanna…daggers and clubs rage before her….blood sprinkles, -before holy Inanna…(gay music of) *tigi*-harps, tambourines, and lyres." Jacobsen, The Harps that Once, 115-17.

transaction, a social or communal celebration, and an artistic creation. This is what I call a polymorphic performance.

In *Social Anthropology* (1982) Edmund Leach put forth that "the various kinds of performance which have been assigned by scholars to the categories "magic," "religion," and "magico-religious" are "expressions of artistic creativity rather than misguided attempts to control the material world by mechanical means" (Cunningham 1999:90). From the perspective of this research, the Mesopotamian sacred marriage constitutes an example of ancient polymorphic expression which synthesizes varied social transactions including spiritual, sexual, and artistic values and interests.

The study of the performance suggests that numerous beliefs and factors made possible the specific combination of sexuality, religion, and artistic representation in Mesopotamia.[178] Economic prosperity in agrarian Mesopotamia made possible the seasonal and lavish celebration of sacred marriage. A belief in the spiritual and beneficial value of a sexual religious ritual established compatibility between religion and sex and made possible the celebration of female sexual vitality, allure, and especially gratification, as well as fertility in the religious ritual. Such compatibility generated the practice of a sacred sexuality which was conceived as capable of engendering socially significant results. The belief that sexuality had "magical"/social relevance figured in its cyclic communal representation and the belief that representation possessed the power to create the real made the theatrical repetition of the sexual act desirable for its results. The ritual representation of the sexual act served as an occasion to re-create community and

[178] In regard to this, it is important to note that a general, yet only partial, explanation for this fusion is inherent in the fact that in ancient societies spheres of life were not as differentiated as they are in modern societies. For more information on the phenomenon of social differentiation see: Richard K. Fenn, ed. The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

as a means to manifest and re-create fertility, abundance, pleasure, justice, and especially to legitimize royal authority.

The existence of Ishtar and her association with priestesses and "prostitutes" as well as performance artists sanctioned the integration of (performance) art and female sexuality into religion in Mesopotamian society. Traditional sacred notions of sexuality as well as of art provided the cultural underpinning for sacred as well as secular amalgamations of female sexuality, religion, and art in Mesopotamia. The extensive participation of women from vastly different social backgrounds in religion determined the style and character of these intersections. Powerful priestesses just as much as other women, including "prostitutes," were devotees of Ishtar and were expected to worship her and other deities through venues and in ways appropriate to each (Appendix C). [179]

The next and final chapter provides examples of the matrix spirit-sex-art from numerous ancient and some medieval agrarian societies. It also touches on several developments inside and outside Mesopotamia that in time hindered the convergence of these aspects of life.

[179] Appendix C delineates the relationship between the divine and real women. It examines the social place and role of priestesses and "prostitutes."

Chapter V. The Performance of Religion and Female Sexuality Beyond Mesopotamia

This final chapter brings to light a category of female figures who in myth and religious rites of various sorts and importance blended spirituality with sexual display or activity and performance in Mesopotamia and other regions of the ancient and not-so-ancient agrarian world. These figures were connected to the sacred by means of their titles, occupations, or through social and personal necessity. They engaged in the performance of sex and religion – often - for social ends. The chapter attempts to provide a broader historical context in which to continue to evaluate figures like the goddess Ishtar and her priestesses and "prostitutes." In addition, this chapter points to several developments inside and outside Mesopotamia that in time negatively impacted the survival of priestesses and the correlation between religion, female sexuality, and art. Mainly: the rise of one supreme male deity in the pantheons of Mesopotamia and its environs, the re-writing of Mesopotamian myth, and the advent of prophets and intellectuals.

Ideas of a supreme/"superior" god spread in the ancient Near East during the second millennium BCE. Max Weber put forth that "the concept of a transcendental, absolutely omnipotent god, implying the utterly subordinate and creaturely character of the world created by him out of nothing, arose in Asia Minor and was imposed upon the Occident" (Weber 1922:178). Asia Minor, roughly today's Turkey, bordered with Mesopotamia in the north. In Mesopotamia, Akkadian kings foreshadowed the belief in a supreme god as early as 2334 when they came to power and bestowed the title of "lord of the gods and of the entire world" (Bottéro 2001:55) on the god Enlil. Thus elevating his majesty and power above those of other gods and goddesses. Yet, it was during the reign

of the Amorite king Hammurabi (ca. 1792-1750) that the exaltation of one god (Marduk) truly began. Later on, under Kassite domination, the idea of "an exceptional figure" among the gods became concretized in Mesopotamia in the god Marduk: "a god superior to all others" (2001:56).[180] Among the Hebrews, Abraham is said to have declared his belief in One God around 1800. In time, this trend proclaiming the "superiority" of one male deity over all others had a negative impact on the status of goddesses in ancient agrarian societies.

According to Lerner, the "dethroning" of goddesses "takes place in many cultures and at different times, but usually it is associated with the same historical processes" (Lerner 1986:154), which to her include the development of strong kingships and of archaic states.[181] As we shall see, the emergence of the Akkadian empire and, especially, its development of notions of "universality" and "transcendence" indeed appear to have contributed to religious changes that favored male deities over female deities in

[180] We have seen that the Mesopotamians practiced *henotheism* by which any deity, male or female, could be exalted above the others at any given time for specific worship. However, what Hammurabi and the Kassites seem to have intended was the replacement of the head of the Sumerian/Akkadian pantheon with a new deity proclaimed forevermore superior to all the others. Bottéro explains that "true monotheism" was unknown in Mesopotamia; *henotheism* "admits the plurality of the gods but is interested in and attached…to only one of them" at a given time. Bottéro, Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia, 42.

[181] Gerda Lerner discusses this process at length in her book The Creation of Patriarchy (1986). In sum, she argues that with the rise of archaic states under strong kings during the second millennium B.C. "the figure of the Mother-Goddess is replaced from the head of the pantheon of gods" by that of a male god who, as time progresses, "comes to resemble an earthly king of the new kind." Ibid., 152. In this new social context, the once powerful goddesses turn up as daughters and wives of vegetation-gods. Ibid. The role of the goddess as creator, or "as the sole principle of universal fertility" is first transformed into that of the goddess as consort of male gods who assist her in her creative tasks, and, eventually, into an abstract concept of "the creative spirit," in which the female principle is no longer necessary. Ibid., 180. To Lerner, "the decisive change in the relationship of man to God occurs in the story of the covenant, and it is defined in such a way as to marginalize woman. Ibid., 188. With the covenant humans enter historical time…The covenant…is what unites the twelve disparate tribes into a nation…the ritual of the covenant, circumcision, symbolizes the rededication of each male child…to the covenant obligation…(therefore) women are absent from the covenant." Ibid. "The symbolism implicit in circumcision is powerful in its patriarchal reverberations. Not only signifies that procreativity now lodges in God and in human males, but it also links it with land and power." Ibid., 192. Moreover, "God's blessing of Abram's "seed" lends divine sanction to the transfer of procreativity from female to male." Ibid., 189.

Mesopotamia. Needless to say, the decline of goddesses' authority affected the social status of their worship and by extension the integration of female sexuality with religion. Moreover, prophetic religions and Greek intellectualism contributed novel ideas about magic, religion, sexuality, and the aesthetic which seem to have played a part in a gradual devaluation of polymorphic performances. Though further research is required to ascertain the range of factors that contributed to this development, it seems that as art and human sexuality were deliberately estranged from religion polymorphic performers lost status and began to be viewed as "obscene" entertainers.

All the same, the women who blended their sexuality with religion and artistic expression in early agrarian times appear to be the originators of numerous ancient and feudal female performing traditions in several societies. Their polymorphic arts influenced succeeding generations in spite of the fact that the presence of goddesses and priestesses diminished or disappeared in some places in the course of history. In Japan, for instance, the women's *kabuki* theatre of the late sixteenth century seems to be the descendant of the ancient sacred erotic *kagura* mythologically performed by a "shamaness" named Uzume.[182] The *kagura* has been interpreted as a ritual of revitalization in honor of the Sun Goddess (Hoff 1978:142) and as a funerary rite (Averbuch 1995:11). Its mixture of sacred, sexual, and theatrical elements is found in various combinations and degrees in the performing arts of ancient and medieval Japan (below). Performed by *miko* priestesses to this day, the *kagura* is considered both the first Shinto ritual and the first performing art. Because performers of polymorphic events appear in varying roles and carry out diverse functions in different myths and societies, I

[182] Uzume is considered the originator of performance in Japan as well as "the progenitor of a line of female shamans." Karen Brazell, ed., Traditional Japanese Theatre: An Anthology of Plays (New York: Columbia UP, 1998) 6.

have subdivided them in two categories: Divine Strippers/Hierodules and "Obscene" Performers.

Divine Strippers/Hierodules:

Figures like the "shamaness" Uzume who in Japanese myth performs an "obscene" dance fall in the category of divine strippers. According to the myth, the Sun Goddess Amaterasu (Fig. 70) concealed herself in a cave leaving the world in complete darkness after her brother Susanoo - the Tempest god - violated several religious conventions. Among other irreverent acts, he "defecated and strewed the feces about in the hall where the first fruits were tasted." [183] As a result, many calamities arose and the 'eight-hundred myriad deities' of Shinto resolved to assemble near a riverbed to consult the *kami* – spirit or deity – of wisdom. In the end, it was decided that a performance in front of the cave was required to appease the goddess's angry and dying spirit and to encourage her return. The *miko*-priestess Uzume was chosen to execute a sexually explicit theatrical performance – a *kagura* – which included a dance in which she "exposed her breasts, and pushed her skirt-band down to her genitals" (Philippi 1992:84). Her actions provoked laughter among the deities and aroused the curiosity of the Sun Goddess who stepped out of the cave, thus restoring light to the world.

Hence, the ancient Japanese also used sexual-aesthetic expression to appease and entertain their deities and invested sexual representation with magical, apotropaic powers in the process: "the exposure of private parts is…said to have magical efficacy in warding

[183] This hall was "the palace where the harvest festival was celebrated." Philippi, Donald L., trans. Kojiki (Tokyo: U of Tokyo P, 1992) 79. My analysis of the *kagura* is based on the sacred versions of this myth found in the Kojiki, the Record of Ancient Matters compiled in 712 A.D., and the Nihonji, compiled in 720 A.D. To this day, millions of people visit The Grand Shrine of Ise dedicated to the Sun Goddess. High priestesses known as *saigu* served as mediums for the Sun Goddess; the last *saigu* retired in 1336 A.D. In ancient agrarian Japan, 'shamanic' queens held political power; in the third century, queen Himiko was recognized by the Chinese court.

off evil spirits and increasing fertility" (Averbuch 1995:13).[184] In fact, to this day images of female and male sexual organs are found in Japan's shrines (Buruma 1984:9). The early *kagura* was a "shamanic," participatory, theatrical performance in which Shinto deities were believed to make their presence manifest through the "shamaness," and in which the revitalization of goddesses, gods, individuals, and the collective was thought to take place. It was intended as entertainment for deities who "enjoyed sex with impunity" (1984:5) and demanded sexually suggestive songs, dramatic skits, and dances. Uzume's theatrical performance, just like the Mesopotamian "sacred marriage," possessed sacro-sexual meaning and social significance as well as aesthetic and entertainment value (Guevara 2001). Of relevance here is the fact that Japanese historian Junko Saeki argues that "the cultural origin of *ỹujo* (prostitute), or *asobime* (literally, a woman who plays), is indeed *miko*, with the religious vocation" of the Shinto priestess (Swinton 1995:73-4). In other words, in Japan, the prostitute, the woman who "plays" (the actress?), and the priestess are inseparable.

Another example of a divine stripper dwelled in the Greek pantheon. The figure known as Baubo, called Iambe by some (Fig. 71), performed an "obscene" spectacle to persuade the goddess Demeter to cease her mourning for her lost daughter. She lifted up her skirts exposing her genitals in a sort of dance that brought the somber Demeter to laughter (Halperin 1990:87). In addition to dance, the Baubo figurines from the fourth century BCE portray her carrying a basket, a torch, or a lyre suggesting that music and other scenes may have taken place during the exchange between the divine stripper and the goddess (Fig. 72). These "obscene" statuettes were found at Priene in the remains of a

[184] Among the Ainu, a tribe of northern Japan, exposure of genitals to ward off evil spirits is still being practiced. Webber, The Essence of Kabuki, 30-1.

temple of Demeter and Kore; they are large heads sitting directly on top of a pair of legs. Two large eyes take the place of nipples and the female genitals serve as a dimple in the chin.[185]

The earliest version of Baubo's story is told in the *Homeric Hymns to Demeter.* According to the myth, Baubo's performance consisted of at least three scenes: the greeting of the goddess in which Baubo offers Demeter a drink and uses "obscene" humor as consolation, the dance which features the "lifting of the skirts," and the divine response, which according to some scholars heralded the return of fertility to the soil (1990:96). Yet again, Baubo's story may or may not have had anything to do with fertility for the end of the performance was not human reproduction. It might as well be a representation of what Maurice Olender calls "an outrageous sexuality" (Halperin 1990:105), which had as purpose the soothing of a goddess's broken heart. Baubo/Iambe was widely honored in Greece during women's festivals. At the Haloa of Eleusis, women gathered and exchanged lewd jokes, proffered insults in chorus, drank wine, spoke "the most shameful things," and "carried indecent representations of male and female genitals" (1990:95). They also ate cakes made in the shape of genitalia.

Another divine stripper-dancer still resides in India. The goddess Kali appears nude inciting her consort Shiva to wild behavior (Kinsley 1986:116). She is depicted sitting on the corpse of Shiva having sexual intercourse with him and/or dancing frantically on top of him while making the world shake (Fig. 73). The origin of this dance pose, known as Daksinakali, is explained in a myth that portrays Kali dancing out of

[185] Similar figures have been discovered in India: "nude goddesses squatting or with their thighs spread to display their sexual organs. These figures…often have their arms raised above their bodies and are headless or faceless." Kinsley, Hindu Goddesses, 175.

control in the battlefield "after having become drunk on the blood of her victims. To stop her rampage, Shiva lay down…like a corpse so that when she danced on his body she would stop, recognizing him as her husband" (1986:130). The goddess Kali continues to be of central importance in Tantrism today.[186] The *Yogini Tantra* is a sacred text that teaches Hindu women ways of calling Kali powers to themselves. During the Kali Puja, the most sacred festival in honor of this goddess, men and women sing and dance in her honor. A song said to be sung by the Hindu master Sri Ramakrishna in 1884 during the celebration of this festival refers to Kali's ecstatic dance:

> "O Kali, my Mother full of bliss!
> Enchantress of the almighty Shiva!
> In Thy delirious joy Thou dancest,
> Clapping Thy hands together!…"
> (Harding 1993:127).

An example of a divine stripper who is also a "hierodule" is the Egyptian goddess Hathor, commonly associated with promiscuous sex, music, and dance. At her Dendara temple, columns are "shaped like an Egyptian sistrum…and show her holding the sistrum and the tambourine" (Anderson 1995:2555). A text found in the Dendara crypts implies orgiastic worship when Hathor is described as "leader of the choral dance, the bestower of the drunkness that knows no end" (1995). The New Kingdom story known as "The Contendings of Horus and Seth" (c.1150), depicts the goddess performing an "obscene" spectacle before her father, the sun god Re:

> "She came and stood before her father, the All-lord. She uncovered her genitals before him. And then the great god smiled at her. He got up and sat with the Great Ennead, and he said to Horus and Seth, 'Speak for yourselves.'"(Roberts 1995:58).

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[186] Additional examples of divine strippers are found among the Celts and the Egyptians. An ancient Irish tale copied about 1100 A.D. describes the "obscene" acts of a goddess whose "lower beard…reaches to her knees." Battaglia, "Goddess Religion in the Early British Isles," in *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 19:58.

As in Mesopotamia, Japan, Greece, and several other regions of the ancient world, the Egyptian goddess's sexual spectacle had social purpose and significance. Both Horus and Seth believed that they were entitled to rule Egypt and the gods and goddesses gathered to decide who should occupy the vacant throne. Re favored Seth, the aggressive killer of Osiris, but the phallic god Baba insulted the sun god and Re retreated refusing to continue the discussion. The affairs of the tribunal came to an abrupt halt and no deity dared to approach the angry sun god, except his daughter Hathor. Through her performance and the laughter it caused, Re's good-will was restored and the proceedings continued.

Another "hierodule of heaven" was of course the Mesopotamian goddess Inanna/Ishtar who captivated her people with sexually explicit songs and actions. Her sacred erotic performance *par excellence* - the "sacred marriage" - depicts her as composer and singer of erotic lyrics and as protagonist of an elaborate theatrical representation intended to accomplish multiple social purposes (chapter 4). It is Inanna who is said to have improvised a song to her vulva upon seeing her beloved (Dumuzi) whose presence filled her with "such passion and desire" (Kramer 1969:59):

> "As for me, my vulva,
> For me the piled-high hillock,
> Me – the maid, who will plow it for me?
> My vulva, the watered ground – for me,
> Me, the Queen, who will station the ox there?...
> Plow my vulva man of my heart!" (1969)

According to the texts, it is also Inanna herself who breaks spontaneously into a passionate song upon seeing a ritually garbed king Shulgi from the city of Ur appear at the doorstep of her temple in Uruk:

> "When for the wild bull, for the lord, I shall have bathed, …When with…my sides I shall have adorned, When with amber my mouth I shall have coated, …When in his fair hands my loins shall have been shaped, When the lord, lying by holy Inanna,…With milk and cream the lap shall have smoothed…When on my vulva his hands he shall have laid, …When on the bed he shall have caressed me…I shall caress Shulgi…" (1969:63-4).

In texts relating to the "sacred marriage," Inanna not only appears as singer-composer but also as actor, in fact protagonist of an elaborate dramatic action which includes the sexual act with her lover, the celebration of their sacred union before the people, and her public blessing of the king and the land (chapter 4). In this highly complex theatrical narrative, Inanna figures as a supreme sacred erotic performer.[187]

"Obscene" Performers:

This category encompasses women believed to have partaken in acts in which religious implication, explicit sexuality, and aesthetic performance coincide. Mesopotamian *entu* priestesses, therefore, belong here. The role of the *entu* in the "sacred marriage" and its specific blend of the sexual, the spiritual, and the artistic as well as its social and economic implications have been discussed at length (chapter 4).[188] Here, I shall speak about the performances of the Mesopotamian *lukur* (Sumer) – the consorts of kings - and of female performers of lower social status, before offering examples from other regions of the ancient agrarian world.

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[187] A number of texts highlight Inanna as someone who also enjoys dancing: "I, Inanna, having whiled away the time, having danced, having sung ditties all day to evening…" Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, 28. Her role as guardian of the people - including dancers and prostitutes - and her interest in people dancing 'in the evening,' is brought to light in a passage in the Lugalbanda Epic: "So as to set the poor folk going at their dances, having (with her light) made the dancing green more pleasant, and to make the spots to bed down in more pleasant for the harlot setting out for the alehouse, did Inanna, the daughter of Suen, like a dancer (proudly) raise her head over the land." Ibid., 139-40.

[188] Leick conceives a role for the *entu* as participant in symbolic sex-rituals for the installation of the *en*, the city's governor. "The entu could be called the spouse of the deity, as in a text from Emar, which actually describes the dedication of an entu as a marriage ceremony (Dietrich 1989), although this may be a West Semitic tradition, as Emar lies in the Middle Euphrates region, well outside the Sumerian heartland." Leick, Sex and Eroticism, 108.

Existing sources provide the actual names of several *lukur* and disclose that they dedicated prayers, jewels, plaques, and even buildings to the gods and goddesses on behalf of their benefactors. A *lukur* by the name of Eanita "dedicated an inscribed agate-pearl to Inanna, with a prayer for king Šulgi and, so did Kubātum (Sollberger and Kupper 1971:143). A full dedicatory inscription addressed to Nanâ , for the life of Bur-Sîn of Isin and her (own) life, is found on an agate-plaque by Nanâ-ibsa, his **lukur-kaskalla** (Sollberger and Kupper 1971:178)" (Leick 1994:148). Nuttuptum had a certain building erected for the life of king Sînmagir of Isin (1827-1817) and for her own life (1994).

The term *lukur* appears in an Old Babylonian list correlated with *naditum*, *qadistum*, and *batultum* – all of which denote a position in the temple organization (Leick 1994:148) and suggest priestly functions (Appendix C). On the other hand, the word *lukur* is also associated with the "prostitute" in synomym lists from the first millennium (1994:149). Apparently based on the first linguistic association, numerous scholars have equated the Sumerian *lukur* with the Babylonian *naditu* and have ascribed religious (and sexual) functions to them. The problem with this is that *lukur* are believed to have born children for the king while *naditus* are said to have been forbidden childbearing, unless those who were consorts of kings lived by different rules. The latter correlation has led scholars such as Gwendolyn Leick to theorize that the *lukur* was a "royal courtesan" (1994) who did not carry out priestly functions. Whether priestesses or courtesans, the *lukur* were highly esteemed and even revered. As Leick admits, libation offerings - usually made for the deities – were also made for *lukur* after their death and "occasionally during their lifetime" (1994:112). In other words, the *lukur* "shared the

quasi-divine status of the king" (1994). They were, therefore, considered "sacred" and/or remained associated with the sacred despite other associations.

In this regard, it must also be remembered that kings performed priestly duties in Mesopotamian temples, and their consorts - the *lukur* - may have therefore played the role of divine partner on some occasions, including in or outside the "sacred marriage."

> "It is clear from some of the royal hymns that some Ur III kings, certainly Shulgi and Urnammu, were performing what one might call priestly duties in the various temples of the realm, including that of the *en* [governor of the city and consort of the patron deity]. In fact, in the hymn known as Sulgi X, the king could be greeted by Inanna as **ú-mu-un**, which is the Emesal [feminine dialect] for the word *en*, when she says 'Since for the king (lugal), the *en*, I bathed'. This implies that at least by the Ur III period there was a metaphorically erotic dimension in the priestly relationship with Inanna" (Leick 1994:108).

Consequently, a priestly function for the *lukur* – as "presence" of the goddess in royal ritual activities - cannot be convincingly dismissed at present, even if they also assumed the role of royal courtesans. A venerable *lukur* by the name of Kubatum or Dabbatum, beloved of king Shu-Sin (or Suen), is "first attested as a wet nurse under Amar-Suen, thus she must have borne children which can only have been of the king himself. Later she becomes the chief wife of Shu-Sin" (Lesko 1989:62). A short inscription on one of the beads of a precious necklace found by archeologists in the city of Uruk, and dated circa 2030, corroborates her existence: "Dabbatum, the *lukur* of Shu-Sin" (Pritchard 1969: 496, Bottéro 1992:109). This *lukur* apparently composed and performed songs:

> "The pure one gave birth, the pure one gave birth…
> Abi-simti, the pure gave birth
> The queen, the pure one, gave birth
> My loom (?)…of the cloth of pleasure,…
> My warp beam on which the warp is placed, my lady Kubātum….
> Because I sang it, because I sang it, the lord gave me a present!...

> A gold pin and a cylinder seal of lapis lazuli – the lord gave me a present!
> A gold ring and a ring of silver – the lord gave me a present!
> O lord! Your present enhace the hi-li (sex-appeal) so that you look at me!
> O Šu-Suen, your things enhance the sex-appeal, so that you look at me!
> The beer of my…Il-ummiya, the tapstress, is sweet!
> And her vulva is sweet like her beer – and her beer is sweet!
> And her vulva is sweet like her mouth and her beer is sweet!
> My Šu-Suen with whom I am pleased,…
> My one by whom I am made cheerful ever!
> Šu-Suen, my one with whom I am pleased,
> My Šu-Suen, beloved of Enlil, my king, god of his country"
> (Leick 1994:113-14).

This hymn has been identified as a *balbale* of Bau, which denotes a specific type of Sumerian composition and suggests that the author may have been a devotee or servant of the goddess Bau (or Baba). Most scholars see Kubatum as the author and singer of this composition but the mention of three women all speaking in the first person – Kubatum, the king's mother, and a tapstress - and the use of two different dialects has made it difficult to determine who is speaking at any given time. Parts of the hymn are written in the Emesal dialect which appears to have been adopted for female voices in Sumerian literature while other sections are written in the main Sumerian dialect, Emegir. Two possible answers to this puzzle have been offered by Gwendolyn Leick. First,

> "I propose that this is Inanna, or 'Baba' [who sings], as the doxology here specifies. The change of Emesal to Emegir…within one speech by the goddess is not unusual in such compositions….If the love-goddess provides the framework of the text, some of the problematic issues become clearer. She first speaks about Abi-simti [the king's mother] and Kubātum, who are said to be 'kug' ('pure', 'holy'), and *this could conceivably apply to some ritual function*, although the fact that their sexual activity resulted in childbirth, and thus consolidated their position in the royal household, would also merit the praise of the goddess" (Leick 1994:115. Italics are not in text).

Alternatively,

> "One could imagine Kubātum to be the 'author', as Falkenstein has suggested, and take the 'tapstress' to be her *alter ego*" (1994:116).

Whether we frame the composition around a *lukur* or a goddess, the hymn corroborates the role of female figures other than the *entus* in Mesopotamia as performers who blended sexually explicit and aesthetic elements with the sacred in situations of social importance such as the birth of a royal heir. Another song also datable to the same king Shu-Sin is identified as a *balbale* of Inanna, and "may well have been on the lips of the charming Kubatum" (Bottéro 1992:110) or on those of another *lukur*:

> "O my love…the pleasure you give me is sweet as honey! You have delighted me! I am all a-tremble before you!...Let me caress you, my darling!...I want to plunge deep into your delights! In the small bedroom…Let us enjoy your marvelous beauty! Let me caress you, my lion!...Please lavish your caresses upon me, O my lion! My divine Sovereign, Lord and protector, My Shû-Sîn who rejoices the heart of the king of the gods, Enlil, Please lavish your caress upon me! This little nook that is sweet as honey, place your hand upon it, I beg you: Place your hand upon it as you would on a material that is pleasant to touch, and close your hand upon it, as you would on a material voluptuous to feel!" (1992:110-11).[189]

Numerous comparable texts are in existence and are generally known as the "royal love songs" (chapter 4). Other hymns also addressed to the kings apparently by *lukur* of the Third Dynasty of Ur (2112 – 2004) contain the following lyrics:

> "My "wool" being lettuce [pubic hair] he will water it…and touch the *dubdub* bird [clitoris (?)] in its hole!...My nurse has worked at me mightily, has done my "wool" up in a "stag" (arrangement), has gently combed it….Let him come! Into my "wool," it being the most pleasing of lettuces, I shall with arousing glances induce the brother to enter. I shall make Shu-Suen – all ready – show himself a lusty man, Shu-Suen to whom my [allure] be without end…You are truly our Lord!...He being the apple of my eye, being the lure of my heart, may days of life dawn for him!May Shu-Suen [live long years!]" (Jacobsen 1987:93).

> "Vigorously he sprouted, vigorously he sprouted and sprouted, watered it – it being lettuce!.... my barley stalk full of allure in its furrow….The honey-

[189] "Bridegroom, dear to my heart, Goodly is your pleasure, honey-sweet; Lion, dear to my heart, Goodly is your pleasure, honey-sweet. You have captivated me, I stand trembling before you. Bridegroom, I would be carried off by you to the bedchamber…Bridegroom, let me give you of my caress…In the bedchamber, honey-filled, Let us enjoy your goodly beauty…Your place sweet as honey; pray lay a hand on it, Like a *gishban*-garment, bring your hand over it…Cup your hand over it." Kramer, From the Poetry of Sumer, 92-3.

> sweet man, the honey-sweet man was doing sweet (things) to me!....My lord, the honey-sweet man, the godly one…his hands honey sweet….O my one who of a sudden was doing sweet (things) to the whole (insides up) to the navel…" (1987:94).

An interesting text from the Old Babylonian period (2004-1595) suggests the presence in Mesopotamia of other women who may not have been *lukur* but who also blended sexual, religious, and aesthetic elements and endeavors. The text takes the form of a letter entrusted to a messenger to take to the city of Nippur. It is known as the "Message of Lú-dingir-ra to his Mother" (Leick 1994:153-54). Whether the text speaks of an actual mother or it constitutes a complex riddle such as those used in scribal education (1994:155), it portrays a woman of some stature, devotee and servant of the goddess Ishtar, who "fills songs" with joy and "makes public appeareances in all her finery" (1994:156), and who is a (royal?) wife and lover:

> "My mother is a very cheerful person, she is covered with ornaments. If you do not know my mother, I shall give you some signs: The name is Šat-Ištar ['She of Ištar' (Stamm 1968:263)]….The gracious goddess of (her) city quarter, since her childhood, has decreed her fate….She stands humbly before the goddess, her lady, knows how to look after Inanna's place….My mother is…a morning star…a precious carnelian stone…a treasure for the brother of the king, full of charm (hi-li)….a tin bracelet, a ring of antasurra…(but) she is alive, a breathing thing. (She is) an alabaster statuette, placed on a pedestal of lapis lazuli – A living figurine, (her) limbs are full of charm….A garden of delight, full of joy…My mother fills songs (and) prayers with joy, Her glance is sparkling (?) in the Akitum-festival…., daughter of a king, a song of abundance. She brings joy to the dancing places, a lover, a loving heart ['(or womb!)' (Leick 1994:155)] of inexhaustible delight…A good…giving perfumed oil….When you stand in her radiant presence, (thanks to) the signs I gave you, say to her: 'your beloved son Lú-dingir-ra greets you!" (1994:154).

According to Leick, the "reference to 'mother' (**ama**) might be a pun on **AMA.dINANNA**, which we found listed among persons connected with sexuality in a list of Inanna's **me**" (1994:156). Although it is not sufficiently clear from this text

whether the "mother" brings "sexual" joy to "the dancing places," this seems to be implied by the order of the composition and by the cultural context. The "mother" is identified as a "lover" right after we are told that "she brings joy to the dancing places." Moreover, the person described is a sensuous woman - adorned with jewels and perfumed with oils - who dances, sings, and prays in public, all in the name and honor of the goddess of carnal love.

Alongside women of high social standing, female (and male) "prostitutes," homosexuals, and transvestites blended the religious with the sexual and artistic on specific occasions in Mesopotamia. The procession taking place on the New Year festival during the reign of Iddin-Dagan (1984-1954) is described in the "Inanna-Dilibad" hymn. Leick proposes that this text "describes the ritual acceptance of liminal sexuality under the aegis of the goddess" (Leick 1994:159). I would like to stress that the text also depicts the integration of explicit sexuality and aesthetic expression in the Mesopotamian (religious) worldview. Although it is not always clear to whom the different names and titles apply to in the text, it is obvious that Inanna's devotees included men and women who cross-dressed, inverted traditional gender roles, played instruments, performed special feats and ecstatic dances, and exhibited their (liminal) sexuality in her honor and without shame:

> "Algar-instruments silver inwrought, they are beating for her,
> -before holy Inanna, before her eyes, they are parading-…
> Holy tambourines and holy kettledrums they are beating for her…
> -before holy Inanna, before her eyes, they are parading-…
> [The *sagurra* –male transvestites] have combed (their hair) for her…
> they have made colorful for her the back hair with colored ribbons…
> on their bodies are (sheep) skin (robes) (the dress) of divinities…
> Fine men, eminent ladies, the doyenne of the women sages [*sugetu*-priestesses] who hold harps and calming instruments, march beside them…
> They themselves are girt with implements of battle…

> Their right arms are clothed with cloth in male fashion…
> On their left arms they have put the cloth down and off…
> Playfully, with painted buttocks, they engage in single combat
> -before holy Inanna…
> maidens and crones, hurling the (ir) hair (as harlots)
> -before holy Inanna…
> daggers and clubs rage before her…
> the *kurgarûs* [associated with prostitutes] mounted (on chariots)
> swing the clubs –before holy Inanna, before her eyes, they are parading-
> blood sprinkles…" (Jacobsen 1987:115-17).

In addition, there appears to have been a group of female performers in Mesopotamia known as *istaritu* which comprised dancers, singers, and musicians in the service of Inanna. They apparently "demonstrated their sexuality by dancing a version of the sensuous, undulating, belly dance which is still extremely popular all over the Middle East today" (Mann and Lyle 1995:38, 42). Like the *harimtu* ("prostitutes") and the *qadistu* and *kulmasitu* (priestesses), the *istaritu* were associated with magic and witchcraft (Appendix C). According to Leick, this was "not only because their behavior was generally 'considered deviant' (Rollin 1983:39), but because their livelihood depended to some extent on their sexual services, or their sexual status" (Leick 2003:229).

What is certain is that Mesopotamian female dancers and dancing musicians sometimes performed in the nude as many images attest. According to Bahrani, these scenes of nude performers may depict actual popular dances which took place during festivals associated with Ishtar (Bahrani 2001:59). Moreover, female performers sometimes wore special headdresses and coiffures in the manner of prostitutes and, according to scholars, some "participated in scenes of explicit sexual activity by dancing around a copulating couple" (Kilmer 1995:2610). Performers had a place in the religious system of Mesopotamia because music, singing, and dancing were required to meet the

entertainment needs of gods and goddesses. Women performed mainly as dancers, musicians, and singers (Figs. 67-69) and female captives were often trained to become vocal performers (1995:2604). Temples and palaces supported and employed performance artists for all their religious ceremonies,[190] and performers received rations just like other temple personnel (Robertson 1995:448).

Singing and dancing like all other arts were imbued with magical attributes which in religious context instantly endowed the words sung and the actions mimed with reality. In song, "the power of the voice [was] enhanced both by the employment of the proper tone and often by their being sung by several voices at once" (Contenau 1966:164). Dances of love, war, or the chase mimed the actions a priest or priestess "intended to take in order to hasten their accomplishment" (1966:292). Apotropaic powers were attached to dancing. Dance accompanied the priestly arts of "magic" and healing in and around homes and palaces; dancers "participated in chasing away the disease or in protecting the living from any demonic influence at times of death and mourning" (Kilmer 1995:2610). Therefore, some musical and theatrical representations were believed to possess magical and social value for the community. Conversely, performers who worked under the auspices of religion benefited from special social standing and public institutional support.

Music and song played a role in all aspects of life "ranging from unaccompanied lullabies and work songs to full temple orchestra and choral performances under the

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[190] Even in death rituals the services of female musicians appear to have been 'employed.' The famous "Great Lyre" from ca. 2550-2400 (Fig. 7) was found in a royal grave at the cemetery of Ur resting "on the heads of three bodies" of women who are thought to have been musicians and singers "who took part in a celebration of the death ritual." Aruz, First Cities, 105. Texts from the city of Larsa in the early second millennium list "allocations of oil, barley, wool, and garments to diverse personnel," including singers and dancers. Robertson in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 448.

direction of professional cult musicians" (1995:2612) like the GALA/*kalu* and the NAR/*naru*. More, music and dance were never isolated from other social activities like jubilation or revelry: "the Sumerian and Akkadian vocabulary referring to music does not necessarily include a single term that specifically means "music" as distinct from "song," "jubilation," or "revelry" (1995:2606, 2608). Likewise, the act of "dancing" seems to have been inseparable from the actions of "skipping," "hopping," "jumping," "running around," and "whirling"," and was closely connected to casual "play," "frolic," or "gambol" (1995:2608). Whirling, circle, squatting, and acrobatic dances were performed in connection to religion: "At the annual feast for the goddess Inanna/Ishtar/Gushea/Agushaya, whirling dances were done in her honor. We are led to believe that "whirling" was usually done by men, but that the male persona of Ishtar also engaged in whirling as did her male and female cult personnel, some of them as cross-dressed entertainers" (1995:2609). The DU.DU/saru -"to form a dance in a circle"- was performed normally, but not exclusively, by women and acrobatic dances were performed by men in cultic activities together with wrestling and other action entertainment (1995).

Transvestite dancing may have been a choice or a necessity for "no mixed-gender dancing is attested for any period, either in pairs or in groups" (Kilmer 1995:2610).[191] Kilmer explains that "all cultic, magic, folkloric, and social occasions and rites of passage are [in today's Iraq] and were [in Mesopotamia] accompanied by music and dance, masks and costumes, as well as cross-dressing by male and female dancers" (1995:2612). The

[191] Male transvestites could at times use women's names and play the part of wives and mothers in real life. Bottéro, Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia, 95.

transvestite-cult performers are said to have "uttered "twitters" and "chirps" while they danced" (1995:2611).

We know that accompanying rituals of exorcism in Mesopotamia there were often transvestite dancers as well as chanters or *kalû.* The latter participated in a large number of religious ceremonies that aimed at purification and protection. Male *kalû* occasionally dressed as women and took part in lascivious dances in honor of Ishtar (Bottéro 2001:123). One document clarifies the activities of this officiant: "The *kalû*…standing, will then sing the chosen hymn…Then, another *kalû* will sing the *eršemma* lament, accompanied by kettle drums…After which a *šangû*…in front of (the statue of) the goddess Ishtar, will pour…a libation of water" (2001:121). The *eršemma* was written in the feminine dialect and constituted a lamentation prayer, which apparently was performed regularly by female officiants (2001:137). Hence female (and male) chanters also integrated explicit sexuality with art and religion in Mesopotamia.

All the main categories of musical instruments existed and some were considered sacred, as we have seen in the case of the harps which received offerings by the people (chapter 3): string, wind, and percussion instruments such as harps, lyres –with as many as 12 strings - fretted lutes, trumpets, horns, whistles, sistra, cymbals, clay rattles, clappers, bells, and various shapes and sizes of drums (Figs. 7, 41, 69). The small hand frame-drum figures among the earliest depictions of musical instruments and seems to have been, often but not always, played by the women who appear nude and in dancing motion on terra-cotta reliefs (1995:2603). Lutenists are also often depicted nude and "engaged in bending action with knees spread apart and other energetic body activity" (1995:2602). Both male and female lutenists and hand frame-drum players may have

engaged in sexual activity while playing their instruments and, apparently, were not considered part of the large temple orchestras (1995:2605). They are, hence, said to have been secular prostitute-performers who like other secular musicians and dancers performed in taverns and at social celebrations and lived in the artisan quarters of cities (1995).

However, the "secular" character of the lutenist or the hand frame-drum player must be contextualized for in the *me* - the sacred rules of the Mesopotamians - all arts and their instruments were assigned divine attributes and the lute is listed alongside several types of drums (1995:2606). The overall sacred character of music in Mesopotamia was borne by its divine origin and function. According to myth, the god Enki –the patron god of magic, the musical arts, and wisdom – "created the GALA/*kalû*, the primary cult cantor and lamentation singer, in order to appease the wild mood of the goddess Inanna/Ishtar" (Kilmer 1995:2605). Like the song of the *kalû*, the music produced by the frame-drum and other drums was believed to possess the power of calming the goddess when angry (1995:2608). Therefore, the music played by secular frame-drum players might have retained some form of religious import – perhaps in popular religious expression - even if it was not considered on the same level as the music emanating from the sacred harps, lyres, and kettledrums. All the same, the art of the Mesopotamian lutenist and hand frame-drum player calls to mind that of the ancient Greek mimes who combined the professions of musician, dancer, and prostitute while performing on the margins of the official religion (Guevara 1997).

In sum, Mesopotamian women of high and low social standing fashioned varied intersections between the artistic, the sexually explicit, and the sacred to different degrees

and in accordance with their social position and sphere of influence. Likewise, women from other regions of the ancient agrarian world attempted this convergence. In Egypt, female dancers and musicians performed sensual and acrobatic dances while rhythmically shaking their musical instruments (the *sistra*) for reasons similar to those that motivated their counterparts in Mesopotamia: to "drive away the rage" of their powerful goddess of carnal love, Hathor (Roberts 1997:14). Egyptian female performers also participated in the splendid annual boat procession known as "The Beautiful Reunion" which united the goddess of love with the hawk god Horus in a kind of "sacred marriage" ceremony (1997:14-5). Women musicians and dancers also performed "nocturnal rites" at the close of the first Sed Festival which intended to replenish the king's powers (1997:26). As mentioned before, a group of priestesses known as the *houri* entertained a sacro-sexual rapport with the sun god Re in Egypt. They protected their lover's solar barque on its journey through the underworld at night while "each woman ruled and danced for a certain hour of the night" (Mann and Lyle 1995:58).

In India, the *devadasis* – "temple prostitutes" – were "obligated to temple service through song and dance and had to be literate" (Weber 1958:354, n.24). Associated with the cult of Shiva, they formed a special caste with its own *dharma* (duty/purpose), had inheritance and adoption rights, had access to writing, and "were permitted table-community with the men of all castes" (1958). In Greece, the *horae* or *hieroduli* – "sacred whores" in the service of Aphrodite Goddess of Love and Sexual Intercourse - were skilled performers who marked the hours of the night with circling dances. They were renowned for their artistry, knowledge, healing powers, and for cultivating the arts of love (Mann and Lyle 1995:103). Aphrodite's sacro-sexual celebrations at her temples

in Corinth, Cyprus, and Mt. Eryx employed more than one thousand *horae* (1995). Also in Greece, the *maenads*, devotees of the god Dionysus performed ecstatic dances "dressed in festive attire, with exposed breasts, snake collars, and belts" during festivals which had great economic and religious import (Gimbutas 1999:162).

Some or all *kagura* performers of ancient and medieval Japan also blended sexual, artistic, and religious elements and values. Although there is some evidence that as recently as 798 CE participants in night *kagura* reached an orgiastic state,[192] most sexual play is considered by scholars to have been symbolic. According to Akemie Horie Webber: "on the kagura night in remote villages…a village virgin was chosen to spend the night with a visiting kami, and it is said that this sexual act was sometimes performed (presumably mimed) at the kagura rite" (Webber 1982:72). Several *kagura* songs portray the erotic behavior of *miko*/priestesses during ecstatic trance (1982:39, n.1). These female mediums were "thought to possess special occult power which enabled them…to achieve a position of prestige and respect in the community and to…contact…the kami (deity)" (Ono 1962:40). Also in Japan, the ancient all-female clan of *sarume* dancers made ample use of erotic gestures when in their trance state but may not have practiced open sexuality during their performances: "there are some extant *chinkon*…songs that portray licentiously erotic gestures of *miko* dancing" (1982:72). The *sarume* were skilled practitioners of *chinkon* rites, which were associated with securing and strengthening the life-force of a dying person. Therefore, like their ancestress Uzume they performed rites of revitalization. The *sarume* professed to communicate with *kami* (deities) and with the

[192] Japanese authorities forbade the performance of night *kagura* in 798 A.D. because: "They drink and eat together, and reach ultimately a state of drunken disorder. Men and women mingle indiscriminately, and high and low lose order and distinction among them." Webber, The Essence of Kabuki, 39, n. 1.

dead, and specialized in comic "monkey-dances" (Aston 1972:79).They performed at court as late as 955 CE.

In medieval Japan,[193] the *asobi* singers blended theatricality with religious concerns while enjoying sweeping popularity among all classes of people as courtesans. As "progenies of the ancient (*kagura*) shamaness," they sang lyrics that juxtaposed "the high and the low, sacred and profane, serious and light…men and women" (Case 1990: 320, 317). *Asobi* revered a phallic deity, *hyakudaifu*, and kept thousands of penises made out of wood, paper, and stone for their personal worship. They wandered around the country and benefited the shrines they frequented on their pilgrimages because they and their followers made offerings that increased the shrines' income. As a result, shrines welcomed them and their admirers enthusiastically. Thus, perhaps like the Babylonian *harimtu*, the *asobi* sought association with temples in order to practice their faith, their art, and their profession as "prostitutes."

Always in Japan, toward the end of the sixteenth century at the dawn of the modern era, a variety of popular female prostitute-performers claimed Uzume as their ancestress. The *shirabyōshi* or "white dancers," for example, were famous as "shamanesses," courtesans, and performers. They "cross-dressed in white male clothing and manly court caps. They carried swords like men and performed highly charged erotic songs and dances to music with a rhythmic beat…they were stars and the chosen companions of the country's most powerful men" (Downer 2001:30). Their dances had

[193] Before this, up until the 8th century, the *asobi* had been in charge of royal funerary rites. Because of their religious role, they paid no taxes and were exempted from agricultural work. After the Chinese-inspired Taiho reform in 701 A.D., however, they lost some of their status as a priestly class. Kim Kwon Yung-Hee, "The Female Entertainment Tradition in Medieval Japan: The Case of *Asobi*, " in Sue-Ellen Case, ed., Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990) 319-20.

magico-religious import. The most celebrated *shirabyōshi*, Shizuka Gozen, is said to have danced to end a hundred-year drought (Fig. 74). According to the legend, "the gods responded by sending rain as soon as she began to dance" (2001).

Likewise, the popular performers of *yayako odori* (Shinto child-"shamaness" dances) and those of the early *kabuki* theatre merged theatricality with sexual display/activity and religious motifs and ends. Okuni, the initiator of modern popular theatre in Japan and the founding figure of the early *kabuki* theatre, embodies the integration of the sexual, the spiritual, and the aesthetic in early modern Japan. Okuni is presumed to have been a *miko* from the Great Izumo shrine as well as an erotic entertainer or prostitute. Period documents describe her as a performer of unusual appearance who wore exotic costumes and cross-dressed as a man (Figs. 75-78). She performed regularly at shrines and included Buddhist and Shintoist dances, prayers, and rituals in her repertoire. Her popularity among all classes of people has been likened to that of contemporary rock stars, and it was in part responsible for the demise of the form she created. Her pleasure-centered theatrics posed a threat to the emerging military regime of the Tokugawa rulers who decided to ban Okuni kabuki in 1629, officially barring women from the Japanese stage for over two centuries (Guevara 2003).

In India, popular religious festivals in honor of numerous village goddesses take place to this day - especially in times of epidemics. The goddess is called on to confront and overcome the evil affecting the town and women officiate the event. They take on the role of the goddess who dances, sings, performs a blood sacrifice, and uses obscene language and gestures (more below): "Although the themes of conflict, struggle, defeat, and death are obviously prominent in these goddess festivals, there is also the theme of

the goddess's being awakened, aroused, and stimulated. Indeed, there is the suggestion that she may even have sexual intercourse with the demon or demons who invade her village…There is often a mixture of castes…blood is spilled in sacrificial offerings, people are awakened, aroused…Reversal of roles takes place…" (Kinsley 1986:206).

Among the Old Europeans, festivals in which women - and men – from different walks of life combined sexual display or activity with religious and artistic expression were not uncommon either. In Ireland as well as Scandinavia, for instance, theatrical ritual matings between rulers and local goddesses seem to have been the basis of inauguration of new kings (Battaglia 1991:418-19). The lusty Norse goddess Freyja was also a dancer who enjoyed being honored and entertained by human worshippers. It would seem that wherever there was goddess worship and socially as well as sexually potent goddesses, women (and men) found artistic and sexual means to honor them.

However, as we shall see below, several factors including the development of Christianity appear to have led to the increasing perception of these types of performances as irreligious or "obscene." In the Graeco-Roman world, the association of the performer (dancer, musician, actor) with the prostitute was well-established by the fourth century CE (Montserrat 1996:117) but a recognition of spiritual value in their activities had pretty much disappeared. In ancient Rome, Catharine Edwards explains, "actors and actresses were regularly assumed to be prostitutes" (Hallett and Skinner 1997:81). Because actors exposed themselves to public view and their bodies - which had to be pleasing to the viewers - served as objects of fascination and desire for men and women alike,[194] they were associated with prostitutes regardless of whether they engaged

[194] "As she watches the pantomime Bathyllus playing the role of Leda…all at once Apula moans in drawn-out-ecstasy, as if in a man's embrace" (Juv.6.63-65)." Catharine Edwards, "Unspeakbale Professions:

or not in sexual acts for pay (1997), and regardless of whether or not they had any religious beliefs or interests.

To recapitulate, the arts of music, singing, dancing, and theatrical representation were connected to magico-religious activities and ends in Mesopotamia and other regions of the ancient agrarian world. The overall "sacredness" attached to the arts and to sexuality in several ancient societies imbued the aesthetic with values and powers generally lost to us because in the West we do not tend to consider art, or sex, as having intrinsic sacred value or purpose. The examples of divine strippers/hierodules and "obscene" performers cited above suggest that the aesthetic performance of religion and sex went largely undisturbed, even if transformed, for many centuries. However, multiple developments contributed to the decline of polymorphic performers. Increasing rationalization of social and spiritual life, for example, emphasized order and logic over instinct and play and impinged on the relationship between religion, sexuality, and art.

As Max Weber pointed out long ago, rational religion "especially if it preaches brotherly love, enters into the deepest inner tensions with the strongest irrational power of personal life, namely sexuality" (Weber 1978:607). Hence as religions became rationalized, "irrational" aspects of life including explicit sexuality and artistic expression retreated into "shadowed corners."[195] While a process of religious rationalization is evident in ancient Mesopotamia, it did not dramatically transform the relationship between religion, sexuality, and art as polymorphic performers lived and thrived

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Public Performance and Prostitution in Ancient Rome," in Roman Sexualities, edited by Judith Hallett and Marilyn Skinner (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP., 1997) 81.

[195] In ancient India sculpture portrayed the sexual act between two or more partners and fiercely adorned the outer walls of temples until they became "relegated to the realm of moral delinquency" between 500 and 900 BCE apparently as a result of "increasing contact with other, more worldly, more opinionated cultures." Tannahill, Sex in History, 217. From then on: "*maithuna* sculpture became more seductive, more sexy, and much more self-conscious. It also developed a tendency to retreat into shadowed corners." Ibid.

throughout its history. However, social developments within Mesopotamia anticipated some of the trends that contributed to a separation of sexuality and artistic expression from religion later on. Therefore, in the remaining pages I have chosen to briefly address three rationalizing developments inside and outside Mesopotamia: the formation of empire, the elevation of Marduk in the pantheon, and the rise of prophets and intellectuals between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE. Needless to say, a complete analysis of these complex factors and of their impact on the separation of religion from sexuality and art is beyond the scope of this study.

The Akkadian Empire: *universality and transcendence*

The creation of the first world's empire by the Akkadian king Sargon around 2334 foreshadowed and accompanied changes in the religious realm as it contributed the notions of universality and transcendence that have become the hallmarks of God-the-Father. The Akkadian king bore the title of "king of the four shores" indicating that his dominion was universal and extended "to the limits of the inhabited world" (Charpin 1995:810). This claim introduced a notion of cosmic sovereignty for gods who formerly had been thought to have national but not universal dominion. Concomitantly, the transcendental character of Mesopotamian deities became more pronounced: "enveloped in majesty, distant and fearsome, isolated in their own sphere, inaccessible to everything but their own kind" (Bottéro 2001:40).

Akkadian "religious" notions of universality and transcendence appear to be logical corollaries of the empire's political organization and interests. To support and legitimate their imperial politics, the Akkadians ascribed universal and transcendental

characteristics to the divine and stressed the importance of *one* ruler of heaven envisioned after the omnipotent, transcendent, and, from then on, sacred figure of their monarch:

> "As the Sumerian cultural dominance weakened, not only did the number of "active" gods decrease, but the power, majesty, and importance of their personae increased, thus reflecting the rulers of the land, who, notably after Sargon of Akkad, were no longer the weak petty kings of tiny city-states but vigorous and omnipotent chiefs of great political organizations: the empire of Sargon, at the end of the third millennium, the empire of Babylon under Hammurabi (1792-1750), and of Aššur…(1813-1781)" (Bottéro 2001:54).

In conjunction with concepts of universality and transcendence, the Akkadians sought to implement a "rational hierarchical order" upon the pantheon by elevating the dignity and power of fewer gods and goddesses (2001:48). They are also said to have contributed to a more rational way of thinking about the divine by introducing a notion of personal responsibility in religious matters via a growing consciousness of "sin" and "punishment" (Moreau 2000:70). Nonetheless, as Bottéro underlines, the Akkadians did not create a new religious system for they, like the Babylonians after them, were subject to the same acculturation process. In Mesopotamia, "there were no distinct religions but only successive states of the same religious system" (Bottéro 2001:27).

In any event, politico-religious paradigms initiated by the Akkadians, such as that of the "emperor as god," seem to be at the base of later mythological developments in Mesopotamia. The figure of the Babylonian god Marduk, especially as it emerged in The Creation Poem circa 1200, emulates the divine counterpart of the earthly Akkadian emperor. Marduk, a sort of god-emperor, epitomized the imperial aspiration of absolute dominion. It was hence, perhaps, the universal and godlike emperor of the Akkadians who provided an early model for increasingly universal and transcendent notions of divinity among the Mesopotamians:

> "Upon the model of the king at the head of the state, surrounded in his palace by his close and distant relatives and by his coadjutors and functionaries, they superimposed an imagined ruler in the temple, with his family and his court made up of individuals organized hierarchically, starting with deities that had belonged to ancient villages and landholdings before their unification under the control of the capital" (Bonnefoy 1991:146).

Following the fall of the Akkadian empire - attributed by tradition to the invasion of the Gutians from the eastern mountains circa 2197 - the process of rationalizing everyday life and the spiritual in Mesopotamia continued and accelerated apparently due to ever increasing urbanization and militarization.[196] This process reached a climax around 1200 when The Creation Poem or *Enuma Elish* was reconceived and written down by the Babylonians.

The Elevation of Marduk: "a god superior to all others"

The city of Babylon, to the north of Sumer, rose from obscurity and became the new religious, political, and economic capital of Mesopotamia after numerous economic crises and new invasions by nomads, like that of the Amorites from Syria. The shift of urban centers to the north seems to have started sometime around 1800 and has been related to technological improvements which helped control flood damage in the northern River Plain characterized by high-energy floods (Butzer 1995:144). Moreover, the greater mobilization of labor as well as continuous episodes of salinization in the south destabilized crop production and hence the economy of the Sumerian cities. Such factors

[196] Cities grew to unparalleled proportions under Akkadian rule; Uruk had more than 60,000 people. Snell, Everyday Life, 32. During the Ur III period, once called 'Neo-Sumerian' (2112-2004), King Shulgi instituted a permanent military force in Mesopotamia, centralized the economy, reorganized temple management to fit the needs of the new economic system, standardized accounting procedures, created a uniform calendar, and built a road system. Dominique Charpin, "The History of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Overview," in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 812. What is more, a systematic erasure of old myths took place as Shulgi's scribes restructured Mesopotamian scholarship and teaching: "The abundant repertoire of early myths seems to have been discarded and to have disappeared for ever…In its place a new literature was formulated that was wholeheartedly geared toward the veneration of the new dynasty and its kings. The gods and goddesses of the land were celebrated with elaborate hymns, or odes, as were their temples." Aruz, First Cities, 454.

have been said to have "moved" the center of population and power "upstream to Babylon" (1995:144-45). It was in Babylon that the famous Amorite king Hammurabi reigned, between 1792 and 1750, and first exalted the up till then minor Babylonian god Marduk in the celebrated Codex Hammurabi:

> "Hammurabi, the lord, who is like a real father to the people, bestirred himself for the word of Marduk, his lord, and secured the triumph of Marduk above and below [over the north and south], thus making glad the heart of Marduk, his lord, and he also ensured prosperity for the people forever, and led the land aright" (Pritchard 1955:178).

By the end of the second millennium, the god Marduk had taken the place of Enlil in the Mesopotamian pantheon as "head of the universe" (Bottéro 2001:31-2). This divine *coup d' état* is the theme of the poem known as *Enuma Elish* or "When on high," whose purpose apparently was "to legitimize the reshuffling of the divine retinue that…came about as a result of the response to a political revolution" (Bonnefoy 1991:151). This revolution refers primarily to an intense period of widespread political dislocation marked by new invasions and conquests that threatened to destroy Mesopotamian culture. The advent of the horse-drawn chariot, circa 1500, apparently powered the new wave of invasions. The Hittites who ruled Anatolia (modern Turkey) during the second millennium possessed great skill in building and using chariots and raided Babylon. They are said to have carried off with them the statue of the god Marduk which was then recovered and returned to Babylon by a group of Indo-European invaders, the Kassites. The Kassites, who ruled from about 1375 to 1155, renewed the cult of Marduk and made him the equal of their corresponding god, Shuqamuna. This measure seems to have been a strategy used by the foreign invaders with neither Sumerian nor Akkadian background to legitimate their rule over Mesopotamia.

The invasion of Mesopotamia by the Indo-European speaking Kassites resulted in a dramatic transformation of theogeny when The Creation Poem was reformulated and written down in Akkadian circa 1200.[197] This "veritable theological treatise" (1991) relates the rise of Marduk as *supreme* leader of the pantheon and as an exceptional figure who brings order out of chaos. The plot of the new creation poem features a theme popular since the Akkadian conquest of Sumer: 'a battle of the gods.'[198] In it, "order" is symbolized by the ascending god Marduk and "chaos" by the older Sumerian goddess Nammu - or Tiamat in Akkadian.

In Sumerian myth, the goddess Nammu created the sky-god An and the earth-goddess Ki parthenogenetically. Nammu was of a marine nature and represented the sea. She was conceived as a feminine and compelling force: "unique and huge," "not paired up," and called "The Lady of the Gods" and "The Mother who gave birth to the Universe" (Bottéro 2001:74-5). In Akkadian myth, Tiamat, a distant but still powerful doublet of Nammu, gave birth to gods and goddesses with the help of a consort, *Apsu*, the freshwater.[199] In the *Enuma Elish*, the arresting, feminine, and primary creative force of

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[197] A relationship between a decline of goddess influence and invasions by Indo-European speaking peoples is discerned by archeologist Marija Gimbutas who claims that in Old Europe the authority of goddesses and priestesses dramatically diminished because of successive invasions by Indo-Europeans between 4400 and 3000. Marija Gimbutas, The Civililization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe (San Francisco: Harper, 1991). According to her, the Indo-Europeans from southern Russia were seminomadic pastoralists who arrived on horseback conquering and destroying "the gentle agriculturalists" with "thrusting and cutting weapons"; they were "a warlike, patriarchal, and hierarchical culture," while the Old Europeans were "peaceful, sedentary, matrifocal, matrilineal, and sex egalitarian." Ibid., 352. While it seems true that in Mesopotamia the Indo-European invading element contributed to a decline of goddess' authority as manifest in the revised creation poem, it would be wrong to conclude that the Sumerians or Akkadians whose livelihood depended mostly on agriculture were 'peaceful' and 'sex egalitarian.' As we have amply seen, Mesopotamian civilizations were by and large and as far as we can tell patrilineal, hierarchical, androcentric, and martial.

[198] "The theme of a battle among the gods was particularly popular" in the arts of the Akkadian period; in victory steles and in the seal-cutter's art, for example. Aruz, First Cities, 216.

[199] This change from single female creator to creative couple in the theogeny of many ancient civilizations is related by scholars to technological developments which increased human understanding of the process

Sumerian and Akkadian mythology, Nammu/Tiamat, is conquered, defeated, dismembered, and supplanted by a new deity: Marduk of Babylon. In this version of creation,[200] the waters of primordial Tiamat and Apsu give birth to heaven and earth as well as to the gods. A band of rebel gods begins to disturb the peace with loathsome acts and Apsu complains to Tiamat: "By day I find no relief, nor repose by night. I will destroy, I will wreck their ways, that quiet may be restored. Let us have rest!" (Pritchard 1955:61). Tiamat furiously opposes her husband's evil plan against their sons: "What? Should we destroy that which we have built?" (1955). The rebel gods learn of Apsu's intentions and Ea, 'the all-wise,' fetters and slews the father-god and ties up his accomplice Mummu. Subsequently, Ea and his wife Damkina give birth to a 'perfect' god: Marduk.[201]

But the old gods call again on their mother Tiamat after a mighty storm is unleashed against them by Anu: "Thou dost not love us! Let us have rest! Do thou avenge [Apsu and Mummu]!" (1955:62). Under pressure, Tiamat decides to wage battle against her rebel sons to avenge the dead and to restore peace. She engages the help of a magician in

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of procreation: "with the domestication of animals and the development of animal husbandry, the function of the male in the process of procreation became more apparent and was better understood." Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy, 149. To Tannahill, invasions by 'pastoralists' are responsible for this change. While in Sumerian myth the goddess Nammu was considered the sole creator of the universe, "three sets of pastoralist invaders later…the role of Nammu (now known as Tiamat, 'the salt-water ocean') had been considerably reduced." Tannahill, Sex in History, 51.

[200] It is important to make clear that the Mesopotamians "did not profess religions based on a single source of divine revelation, their explanations of the universe and of human existence were diverse, with many different traditions existing side by side. In their ways of thought, theological ideas did not emerge at a single moment in time, as happens in historically based religions, nor were their texts about the gods and their actions the result of a revelation given to an insightful religious mind. In Mesopotamia, knowledge and insight were cumulative, each narrative offering its own vision." Aruz, First Cities, 485. Therefore, "there exists no single Sumerian text wholly devoted to the topic of Creation. Instead there were several diverse, at times conflicting, traditions on the origins of the cosmos…One Early Dynastic fragmentary composition indicates that Primeval heaven and earth were conceived as being male and female." Ibid.

[201] "Perfect were his members beyond comprehension…He was the loftiest of the gods, surpassing was his stature; his members were enormous, he was exceedingly tall…Clothed with the halo of ten gods, he was strong to the utmost." Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 62.

preparation for war: "Mother Hubur, she who fashions all things…bore monster-serpents, sharp of tooth, unsparing of *fang*…Roaring dragons she has clothed with terror, has crowned them with haloes, making them like gods…She set up the Viper, the Dragon, and the *Sphinx*, the Great-Lion, the Mad-Dog, and the Scorpion-Man, mighty lion-demons, the Dragon-Fly, the Centaur" (1955). The opposite camp sends the god of heaven, Anu, to stand up to Tiamat but he is unable to face her and turns back. Ea then calls his son Marduk to go before the great god Anshar. Marduk speaks to the god Anshar:

> "I will go and attain thy heart's desire! ...What male is it who has pressed his fight against thee? [It is *but*] Tiamat, a woman, that flies at thee with weapons! [O my father-] creator, be glad and rejoice; the neck of Tiamat thou shalt soon tread upon! (1955:64).

In exchange for this heroic mission, Marduk demands to be elevated in the pantheon: "If I indeed, as your avenger, am to vanquish Tiamat and save your lives, set up the Assembly, proclaim supreme my destiny!" (1955:65). The gods erect for him a "princely throne" and Anshar bestows power upon him: "No one among the gods shall transgress thy bounds!...We have granted thee kinship over the universe entire…thy word shall be supreme…Marduk is king!" (1955:66).[202] The new hero then chooses his weapons for the battle: the storm-chariot, the bow and arrow, the mace, a net, the four winds, and the flood-storm. Tiamat and Marduk engage in battle:

> "She was like one possessed; she took leave of her senses…she recites a charm, keeps casting her spell, while the gods of battle sharpen their weapons…The lord [Marduk] spread out his net to enfold her…the fierce winds charged her belly, her body was distended and her mouth was wide open. He released the arrow, it tore her belly, it cut through her insides, splitting the heart. Having thus subdued her, he extinguished her life. He cast

[202] "Nonetheless, even at that time sovereign rule as exercised by a god –for example, Marduk- seemed to be derived from a sort of consensus of the gods, his peers, rather than from his unusual divine nature." Bonnefoy, Mythologies, 172.

> down her carcass to stand upon it. After he had slain Tiamat, the leader, her band was shattered, her troupe broken up…He made them captives and he smashed their weapons…The band of demons…he cast into fetters…Kingu…he bounded [and killed]" (1955:67).

Henceforth Marduk becomes god-creator: "Then the lord paused to view her dead body, that he might divide the monster and do artful works. He split her like a shellfish into two parts: half of her he set up and ceiled it as sky" (1955). In addition, Marduk built stations for the great gods "fixing their astral likeness as constellations. He determined the year by designating the zones: he set up three constellations for each of the twelve months" (1955). Afterwards, Marduk went on to create humanity:[203] "Blood I will mass and cause bones to be. I will establish a savage, 'man' shall be his name. Verily, savage-man I will create. He shall be charged with the service of the gods that they might be at ease!" (1955:68).

Scholars have noted that some of the contexts and meanings of this "battle of the gods" are revealed in the gear used by the two combatants. Marduk used a chariot, bow and arrow, a mace, and a net. His four-horse war chariot "stresses and accentuates…his enculturation" because "the chariot as a hunting and fighting machine represents one of the most perfected objects of the technical knowledge of that half of the second millennium" (Bonnefoy 1991:160). Likewise, the chariot represents "one of the indispensable signs of royalty" (1991). Moreover, Marduk's allies represent rational

[203] In the Old Babylonian text "Creation of Man by the Great Goddess," it was Mami who fulfilled this task: "The goddess they called…The most helpful of the gods, the wise Mami: Thou art the mother-womb, the one who creates mankind. Create, then, Lullu [the first man] and let him bear the yoke! The yoke he shall bear…The *burden* of creation man shall bear!...let Lullu appear! He who shall *serve* all the gods, Let him be *formed* out of clay, be *animated* with blood!" Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 99. In the Sumerian myth of Enki and Ninmah, divine females create the human race without male assistance. Namma, Enki's mother, "kneaded clay from the *abzu*, the freshwater ocean that lay under the earth, and placed it in her womb. With the help of the mother goddess Ninmah as midwife and minor deities as birth aides, she brought mankind into existence." Aruz, First Cities, 486. Another version of this myth attributes the creation of the human race to Enki/Ea who cast a mold for it and engaged the help of "Ninmah and seven other goddesses, so that man can emerge from it." Bonnefoy, Mythologies, 148-49.

interests; the four principal winds are “the axes on which time and space are organized” (1991). On the other hand, Tiamat is allied with terrible beings in the poem, monsters “full of ridicule” (1991:159), and with “savage nature in its most ferocious form” (1991).

Thus while Marduk represents advances in technological knowledge and invention, order, rationalization of time and space, change, growth in new material directions, and increased confidence in the human ability to control, tame, and use natural forces and resources, Tiamat figures as a wild “magician” - a *lullû* or “primitive being” (1991) who has attained only a very early stage of evolution (Appendix D). The stage “reached by a being that the goddess Aruru herself has fashioned by hand from a pinch of clay…the earthen figurine who acquires life and nothing more at the time that [he] obtains his form…it is only a starting point for some who will advance to a further evolutionary state” (1991). In other words, Tiamat is a being that has not yet been “enculturated” (1991:160). Dead, moreover, “she is nothing more than an embryonic being who dies before taking form. *In both cases, she is a kind of being who does not fully mature, culturally or physically, but who at the same time has a potentiality that contains the seeds of the future of the world*” (1991. Italics are not in text), for her dead body is used by Marduk to create heaven and earth.

The use of the net, a hunting instrument par excellence, implies that Tiamat is “viewed in the myth as a savage being…as a wild animal who is to be hunted and killed” (1991:159). Above all Tiamat is deemed savage because she disobeys the law by elevating her son-consort Kingu to leader of the Assembly without submitting her choice to the council of gods as it was customary. Hence the law that Tiamat violates is the increasingly androcentric law of the land which henceforth divests female figures of the

right to transfer royal power despite the fact that females were once "instruments of investiture" and "in the final analysis" dispensers of power in Mesopotamia (1991:172).[204] In the *Enuma Elish*, it is no longer a goddess but rather the god Anshar who convenes the Assembly and bestows power on Marduk. Hereafter, the ability of goddesses to dispense political power, to wield religious authority, to give birth, and to create life becomes the prerogative of males in Mesopotamian myth.

In the contemporary political arena, the religious symbolism of the creation poem seems to have corresponded to the rise of the invading Kassite king, who uses chariots, as absolute monarch over Mesopotamia and to attempts by Kassite rulers to transform southern Mesopotamia into a national state rather than the network of allied or antagonistic cities it was. Thus the mission entrusted to the god Marduk may have been an idealized version of the task Kassite rulers imposed upon themselves and on the Mesopotamians: to establish order and end the political "chaos" of the land. It is in this manner that in Babylon the concept of a supreme god seems to have begun to displace long-established notions of female divinities as commanding political and religious figures.

However, while the rise of Marduk in the pantheon suggests a major change in the status of goddesses, women and priestesses continued to enjoy religious rights and

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[204] "Myth and history offer many famous examples of such a situation. The widow – goddess or queen, or even a woman of ordinary rank – figures as the necessary link joining two generations of men. Thanks to her and through her the son may succeed the father. She thereby appears as an instrument of investiture, and in the final analysis, as a dispenser of power." Bonnefoy, Mythologies, 172. Though Tiamat could not exercise the royal function, "it is only through her as intermediary that the royal function, fallen fallow after Apsŭ's death, can be handed down to his successor." Ibid.

privileges in Mesopotamia until right before the Common Era.[205] As Contenau notes: "despite these radical changes, there was no break in the old established tradition of worshipping the other gods [and goddesses], and of making fresh copies of the hymns in their honour" (Contenau 1966:244). During the latest epoch, circa 625-539, the city of Babylon possessed "one hundred and eighty altars" dedicated to the goddess Ishtar. According to a contemporary inscription: "There are altogether in Babylon fifty-three temples of the great gods, fifty-five shrines dedicated to Marduk, three hundred shrines belonging to earth divinities, six hundred shrines for celestial divinities, one hundred and eighty altars to the goddess Ishtar…all these are actually inside the town" (1966:279-80). On the other hand, increasing emphasis on control of natural forces, heroism, order, and the machine (the chariot) set the stage for an increasing separation of human and nonhuman nature from spirituality. This process reached a height with the advent of prophets and intellectuals in other parts of the ancient world.

The Rise of Prophets: monotheism and atheism

Max Weber calls the advent of prophetic religions "the great historic process in the development of religions" (Weber 1958:105). With the prophets, Weber maintains, religion transcended "magic" and became an ethic - a system of rational moral standards and values. The increasingly rationalized religious sensibilities of the prophets and intellectuals who came onto the world stage between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE negatively impacted the continued existence of polymorphic performers.

It was outside Mesopotamia that the idea of a supreme god was elevated to new heights with the notion of a *single* creator who engaged in battle with all other deities and

[205] Speaking about this trend Lerner points out that: "the power of the goddesses and their priestesses in daily life and in popular religion continued in force, even as the supreme goddesses were dethroned." Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy, 141-42.

combated the activities of their worshippers. However, monotheism was not the only spiritual alternative to polytheism envisaged by the ancient prophets. Buddha, for instance, preached a form of radical atheism. Yet, in the end, both ancient monotheism and atheism rejected the association of sex and art with religion. The expulsion of the sexual body and of artistic representation from religion marked a profound transformation of ancient agrarian spiritualities. In due course, the new religious sensibility would supersede other practices in Mesopotamia (today's Islamic Iraq) and in many regions of the world. Under the new religious paradigms, sex and art were found incompatible with spirituality, and polymorphic performers such as priestesses became gradually downgraded or eradicated.

The battle between monotheism and polytheism, as waged by the Old Israelite prophets,[206] manifested in a strong opposition to "magic," "sacred prostitution," [207] the sexual orgy, and artistic representation. The Israelite prophets associated polytheism with superstition and "whoredom," which in their minds were injurious to society and to women (Weber 1922:158).[208] For reasons such as these, "Moses directed his rationalized ethical attack against the orgy of the dance, just as many founders or prophets of ethical religion attacked 'whoredom,' i.e. orgiastic temple prostitution" (1922). The corollary of such attack was the violent suppression of erotic performances in honor of orgiastic gods

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[206] Women were recognized as prophetesses in early Hebrew history. Deborah and Huldah counted among the prophetesses. Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy, 176. According to Lerner, the move from confederacy to statehood resulted in a gradual restriction of woman's public and economic roles, of her cultic functions, and of her sexuality. Ibid., 177.

[207] In the First Book of Kings, Asa "expelled the sacred prostitutes from the land and abolished the idols their fathers had made." Michel Maffesoli, The Shadow of Dionysus, 34.

[208] "If a priest's daughter 'plays the harlot' she was condemned to death by burning… this was considered an offence 'against religion'." Driver and Miles, The Babylonian Laws, 320.

like Baal, and perhaps of the goddess Asherah, as well as the exclusion of women from the priestly classes in Israel.[209]

It is worth noting that the Hebrew prophets sought to institute ethics over "magic" and orgiasticism partly out of a concern for social reform. They opposed "idolatry" – that is, polytheism – partly because they witnessed the corruption of justice by bribes and the oppression of slaves and the poor in the name of the many gods.[210] At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that Mesopotamian religion also had a definite ethical content. As we saw in chapter 2, hymns to Shamash stated the god's ethical standards: "You take care of all the people of the lands…You give the crooked judge experience of prison; The person who perverts justice for a bribe, you make to bear punishment. He who does not accept a bribe but takes the part of the weak is pleasing to Shamash, who will give him long life" (Saggs 1965:197). Hence, usury was denounced by Babylonians and Israelites alike (Hudson 2002:12, 28).

At any rate, the Israelite prophets' antagonism to artistic representation was linked to their opposition to "idol" worship. Their hostility toward "the work of human hands," which to them only promised illusory salvation, translated into religious resistance to image-making. That is, art. Several contemporary art critics claim that "the most effectual suppression of art occurred when the prohibition of images appeared in biblical literature

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[209] Recent archeological finds suggest that a goddess by the name of Asherah may have indeed been the consort of Yahweh and that, therefore, goddess worship might have existed side by side with the worship of Yahweh during a time in Canaan. Judith M. Hadley, The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah (United Kingdom: Cambridge UP, 2000). The cult of Baal, sun and fertility god in Canaan, is believed to have involved temple prostitution and human sacrifice. The cults of Baal and Asherah spread during the reign of King Ahab and his foreign born wife, Jezebel. In 852, four hundred priests of Baal were assassinated. Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy, 166. The cult of Asherah "had its greatest and most persistent strength among women." Ibid., 177. Other orgiastic cults mentioned in the Bible include those concerning Tamuz (Ezekiel 8:14) and the queen of the sky (Jeremiah 7:18).

[210] "They hurled their "woe be unto you" against those who oppressed and enslaved the poor, those who joined field to field, and those who deflected justice by bribes." Weber, The Sociology of Religion, 50.

in the form of the second commandment. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. 'Thou shalt not bow down onto them, nor serve them'" (Perlmutter and Koppman 1999:7, Gablik 1986, Lippard 1983). This prohibition is said to have "inadvertently initiated the subjugation of the spiritual in art in Western culture" (Perlmutter and Koppman 1999:9). While this may be true, similar views about art and sexuality emerged in the ancient world from dissimilar spiritual sources.

In the battle between atheism and polytheism, as carried on by the Buddhists from the sixth century BCE on for example, *form* (art) and sexuality also became dramatically devalued. The drive to "destroy" suffering (Weber 1958:209), and to find tranquility in the now through detachment from the world, led many Buddhists to the rejection of all sorts of human passions and pleasures. Ancient Buddhism was inimical to magic, love, sexuality, and artistic expression because its main goal was individual "illumination" which was to be achieved away from life's distractions through solitary contemplation.[211] The emphasis on illumination as supreme spiritual value brought about "a strong devaluation of the natural, the sensual, and the physical" (Weber 1922:123). Not surprisingly, therefore, one of the "five great vows" of the ancient Buddhist monk was chastity and one of the many ancient Buddhist prohibitions was against pictorial representation (Weber 1958:201, 237).

The conflict between sexuality and ancient Buddhism is linked to the belief that the source of human suffering is the "thirst" for life which involves love and desire: "love

[211] Not all Buddhist traditions adhered strictly to these principles. The Mahayana tradition, for example, in northern India replaced self-salvation with the redeemer ideal, the *bodhisattva*: a saint and helper of believers. "Distinguished ladies are said to have excelled as partisans of the Mahayana school." Weber, The Religion of India, 244. In Mahayana Buddhism, heaven, hell, and a messiah were accepted along with "magical therapy, apotropaic and magical homeopathic ecstasy, idolatry and hagiolatry, the whole host of deities, angels, and demons." Ibid., 255.

must be eliminated for it awakens a desire and the process of *karma*" (1958:201). To end suffering, one must destroy the thirst for life which entails sublimating or eradicating sexual desire. On the other hand, the clash between art and ancient Buddhist spirituality was related to the doctrine of *maya* or the "illusion" of reality. This doctrine was elaborated by the Vedanta school and became "the classical system of orthodox Brahmanical Buddhism" (1958:176). According to it, being is not real therefore the interest in *form*, including artistic representation, is futile.

Hence the prophets of Buddhism and Judaism sought to remove sexuality and artistic representation from spirituality using diametrically opposed rationales: the first, through the obliteration of the "self" and an absolute indifference to the idea of "god;" the second, through surrender of the self to an unshakable belief in One God. All the same, both types of prophets cast off the existence of goddesses and attempted to convert spirituality into an instrument of sexual control.

This function of religion as vehicle of control of "particular desires and emotions of raw human nature" has been noted and upheld by a number of modern scholars (Weber 1922:163, Malinowski 1954:41-2). In brief, the spiritual world of prophets seems to have been conceived as a place of 'escape' from earthly suffering - a place of 'perfection' or 'salvation.' It is hence through what could be called 'an ethic of restraint' that the advent of prophetic religions set the stage for the decline of religious performances that integrated sexual and artistic elements, even if polymorphic performers continued to exist for many centuries afterward in several regions of the world counting classical Greece and Rome.

The Rise of Intellectuals: the aesthetic sphere

In classical Greece innovative and lasting abstractions of art and sexuality from religion took shape. The rift between religion and art, perhaps initiated by the ancient prophets, increased as art emerged as a new sphere of life –*the aesthetic realm*- and acquired "its own set of constitutive values" (Weber 1922:243) different from religious, ethical, or sexual concerns. According to Weber, the newly evolving aesthetic sphere became conceptualized as savior from routine and religious leaders began to see in it a competitor that offered a false salvation: "art takes over the function of a this-worldly salvation…It provides a salvation from the routines of everyday life" (Gerth and Mills 1946:342).

An example of the ancient intellectualist formulation of an *aesthetic* sphere can be discerned in a dialogue between Plato's and Aristotle's writings on the nature and role of poetry. I offer that in this exchange, we can detect the disappearance of the poet as "shaman." That is, a separation of the aesthetic from the religious. The debate begins as a critique by Plato of ancient magical religion in favor of a rational, ethical conception of the gods.[212] His initial criticism of epic poetry – of how Homer and Hesiod portrayed the character and deeds of gods and heroes - eventually developed into a more generalized attack on poetry and the poets in the *Republic* circa 360.[213] In Book X, Plato elaborates

[212] Plato's disillusionment with the ambition, injustice, and greed of despotic statesmen during his lifetime led him to ask how society could be reshaped so that "man" might realize the best that is in him and rule accordingly. In his efforts "to work for the future overthrow of despotism" and to help extinguish the conflict between rich and poor (oligarch and democrat), Plato envisioned an ideal state. Cornford, The Republic of Plato, xxvi.

[213] In Book II, Plato proposes to "discard" the "stories now in use" because they misrepresent the true nature of gods and heroes. Cornford, The Republic of Plato, 69. To him, both Homer and Hesiod err when they depict the gods warring among themselves, deceiving each other and humanity, and mistreating their own parents because the divine nature "is good and must be described as such." Ibid., 70-1. In addition to being good, the gods of the ideal society should be truthful, therefore, Plato critiques the deceiving magic

the theme that poetry is not truthful and art in general is three steps removed from the essence of a thing, and hence from "the throne of truth." [214] He proclaims that "the poetry of dramatic representation…must be firmly excluded" from the commonwealth; that "art is a form of play, not to be taken seriously" (1941:333); and that the poet is "an image-maker whose images are phantoms far removed from reality" (1941:337).

According to one of Plato's translators, Francis Cornford, "the main object of attack" was not poetry per se but the claim "made by sophists and professional reciters of the Homeric poems, that Homer in particular, and in a less degree the tragedians, were [not only] masters of all technical knowledge…[but] *also moral and religious guides to the conduct of life*" [italics not in original] (1941:322). On such poets, quasi-supernatural powers were conferred. Socrates had noted after his examination of the poets that they worked from "inspiration" like "seers" instead of working with "conscious intelligence" like a philosopher (1941:323). As moral guide to the conduct of life, the poet represented "the rival of the philosopher" (1941:322).

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ascribed to the gods by the poets: "Do you think of a god as a sort of magician who might, for his own purposes, appear in various shapes, now actually passing into a number of different forms, now deluding us into believing he has done so?" Ibid., 72. In addition to taking issue with the poets' depiction of the gods, Plato's opposition to dramatic poetry seems also to have stemmed from his concern with the potentially harmful effects of impersonating individuals of questionable honor. For taking on the identity – habits, emotions, passions - of another may leave a permanent mark on the character of the actor and on the audience: "you must have noticed how the reproduction of another person's gestures or tones of voice or states of mind, if persisted in from youth up, grows into a habit which becomes second nature." Ibid., 83. Accordingly, Plato recommended that "only the appropriate types of character, men who are brave, religious, self-controlled, generous" should be impersonated. Ibid. Therefore, Plato was opposed to dramatic poetry because it involved impersonation of less than noble characters and a description of the gods as less than noble when the highest value should be: "to hold heaven …in reverence and to value good relations with one another." Ibid., 76.

[214] Plato conceived artistic representation –painting as well as drama- as being "at the third remove from the essential nature of the thing." Cornford, The Republic, 327. He used the making of a bed as example. The Form of the bed is conceived by a god, "the author of the true nature of Bed"; the carpenter is the manufacturer of the bed; and the painter produces an "appearance" of the bed. Thus the artist, painter or poet, simply "represents the things which the other two made" and, therefore, is "third in succession from the throne of truth." Ibid.

> "[Socrates:] The poets say what they say, not from their own wisdom, but in being filled by the god and possessed…(*Ion* 534 a)… the poet is something buoyant, winged and holy, and he cannot create until he is filled with the god and without consciousness and until there is no more reason in him" (*Ion* 534 b)... A poet is a light, airy, holy, person, who cannot compose verses at all, so long as his reason remains within him. The Muses take away his reason, substituting in place of it their own divine inspiration and special impulse… It is not they who, bereft of their reason, speak in such sublime strains: it is the God who speaks to us, and speaks through them…these fine compositions are not human performances at all, but divine: and…the poet is only an interpreter of the Gods, possessed by one or other of them…(*Ion* Chap. xvii)" (Grote 1888:128).

> "So the poets, deriving some magical power by inspiration from the gods, pass it on through their interpreters to the listener. The interpreters are ecstatic (535B), beside themselves as they become what they portray: vengeful Odysseus or pitiful Andromache" (Elias1984:6).

Plato calls the ability to receive inspiration from the gods *madness*, and he recognizes good and bad madness. Good madness was a privilege and a blessing and the poets and prophets were among the blessed. However, "inspiration," and the gift of poetry, was according to Plato conferred by the gods upon the most inferior beings – while reason and intelligence was the province of superior human beings: the philosophers.

> "Although poetry might be divine madness and possession, it is in any case not *knowing*. It is no skill (*techne*) which could account for and justify itself and its truth" (Gadamer 1980:42).

In sum, the poet is possessed and inspired by the gods. This is Plato's view as well as his teacher's. These views suggest that during their lifetime the poet still acted to some extent as religious figure – a sort of "shaman" familiar with magic "tricks" [215] - at least in

[215] The artist as magician is opposed by Plato in his critique of painting. He claimed that colors misled the eye in scene-painting to see the same thing as concave or convex and that a "weakness in our nature" was thus exploited by the artist "with a quite magical effect, by many tricks of illusion." Cornford, The Republic, 334.

people's imagination, and that a fusion of art with magico-religious belief was still extant in Greece. In fact, we know that orgiastic aesthetic performances in honor of Greek gods and goddesses continued throughout the classical period and were adamantly opposed by the intellectuals who saw them as an affront to "virtue." The conflict between sexual instinct, artistic expression, and ethics was well-expressed by Plato in the *Republic*: "We shall be justified in not admitting him [the poet] into a well-ordered commonwealth, because he stimulates and strengthens an element which threatens to undermine reason" (1941:337). More: "much is at stake, more than most people suppose: it is a choice between becoming a good man or a bad; and poetry, no more than wealth or power or honors, should tempt us to be careless of justice and virtue" (1941:340). Not surprisingly then Plato put poetry on trial daring his peers to defend it.

Plato's student, Aristotle, rose to the occasion by writing a series of lectures known to us as the *Poetics*, circa 360-355 or 335 (Else 1967:9). Aristotle's discourse on dramatic poetry essentially redefines poetry and conceives a new social role for it. Perhaps partly to assuage his teacher's fears, Aristotle interpreted away the religious and spiritual components of poetry in his defense, and in their place emphasized the aesthetic dimension of poetry: its apparent internal rules, laws, and connections. The *Poetics* offers a sophisticated discussion of plot, character, thought, and other elements of Greek tragedy. Thus in the *Poetics* artistic activity becomes an intellectual, psychological, secular activity whose social significance rests on its ability to give human beings "a valuable extension of…ordinary experience" (1967:6). By imitating human action, the poet is imitating something very real and direct that could advance our psychological and social experience. According to this stance, the poet deals with human choices and their

personal and social consequences and is no longer involved with religious leadership or inspiration. A rational concern, the mistakes of heroes and their grave *moral* consequences, replaces previous poetic responsibilities toward the divine conceived in non-ethical terms. Thus Aristotle's conception of the poet dislodges his/her role as "shaman."

This novel discourse on the aesthetic, disconnected from religion - especially orgiastic types of religion, echoed the process of exclusion of female erotic performers from religious ritual in Greece. We know that the worship of Dionysus was ecstatic in nature and that women actively participated in this cult as devotees, dancers, and sexual partners in the mystical union with the primal creative urge sought by Dionysian worshippers. We also know that by the sixth century BCE the orgiastic rites of the Dionysian ceremonies had been abated.[216] Hence, the *maenads*, the ecstatic female dancers in the service of this god, might have been expelled from Dionysian rituals, or had their activities stifled, around this time. Such like process is suggested by Weber:

> "The cult of Dionysus at its first appearance gave to the women who participated in its orgies an unparalleled degree of emancipation from conventions. This freedom subsequently became more and more stylized and regulated, both artistically and ceremonially; its scope was thereby limited, particularly to the processions and other festive activities of the various cults. Ultimately, therefore, this freedom lost all practical importance" (Weber 1922:105).

[216] The worship of Dionysus is believed to have originated in the ancient Near East as early as the thirteenth century B.C. As it arrived in Greece, it apparently met considerable resistance because of its ecstatic nature which involved sexual orgies, intoxication, and human sacrifice. However, it was eventually accepted throughout Greece as its orgiastic aspects progressively disappeared. Brocket, History of the Theatre, 16.

It is perhaps no coincidence that the "first professional entertainers" (Brocket 1991:46), the ancient *mimes*, flourished throughout Greece in the following century.[217] One of the first mime performances on record is presumed to have taken place in the year 421 at a banquet in the house of a wealthy Athenian by the name of Callias (Bieber 1961:106). This performance of a ballet on the theme of the love of Dionysus and Ariadne was given by a young couple and included dances, acrobatic feats, and flute music. The female performer appears to have been a skilled acrobat and performer of the sword-dance (1961:106-7). Like the frame-drum and lutenist artists of Mesopotamia, female mimes in Greece and Rome often practiced prostitution and at times performed in the nude (Guevara 1997:13). As a result, charges of obscenity or indecent and immoral conduct continue to be leveled against them by modern scholars of the form.[218]

Although I know of no evidence that would link the *maenads* to the *mimes*, it is possible to imagine that some *maenads* 'cleaned up their act' while others formed their own performing troupes or joined the ranks of *mimes* wandering around the Greek territories with burlesque representations of mythological characters and events. Deprived of religious function and accustomed to sacred notions of sexuality, some Dionysian

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[217] The art of the ancient mimes may have come from Sicily or may also have origins in the Doric farce of the sixth century B.C. Like the actors of the Dorian farce, mimes specialized in mythological burlesque and travesties of daily life. Nancy Guevara, "The Mimes of Antiquity" (unpublished, 1997). However, a religious function may have also been served by mimes in Greece and Rome. They were at times hired to mimic the dead during funerary rites and processions. The mime would wear the clothes of the dead person and imitate his or her walk and actions, including brief incidents from their lives. A mime is said to have "walked in the Emperor Vespasian's funeral procession," for example. Kathrine S. Walker, Eyes on Mime (New York: The John Day Company, 1969) 46.

[218] James Allen, for example, claims that the female actors and dancers of mime were "women of low character and shameless audacity," and that mimes "were presented with gross indecency" at the Florales in Rome. James T. Allen, Stage Antiquities of the Greeks and Romans and Their Influence (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927) 26 and 54. See also: W. Beare, The Roman Stage: A Short History of Latin Drama in the Time of the Republic (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1964).

performers may have contributed to the theatrical art of the *mime* or may have found in it a substitute profession.

All the same, in an atmosphere that was becoming increasingly secularized,[219] Aristotle provided a rational theory of poetry that put an end, at least temporarily, to the idea of the poet as religious figure and of magical knowledge as a source of artistic inspiration. With the rediscovery of the *Poetics* in the sixteenth century, the West inherited a rationalized notion of literature, drama, theatre, and art in general. Aristotle's practical philosophy of literature remains extremely influential to this day.

Concluding Remarks

Today, despite the passing of time and the sweeping transformations of social reality around the world, traces of the ancient sacred "obscene" in performance survive. In India, for instance, devotees of the goddess Radha and her consort Krishna celebrate their commitment with "song, dance, mimicry, and some orgiastic sexual freedom" (Weber India:317, Kinsley 1986:81-94). For them, Radha's frenzied and adulterous love for Krishna "is an emotion and an attitude to be emulated" (1986:82). Likewise, in left-handed Tantric rites the dancing goddess Tara is worshipped with wine, meat, and "illicit sex" (1986:171). Also in India, village-goddess festivals are still characterized by frenzied activity that includes ecstatic theatrical dance and erotic expression. A ritual of "sacred marriage" takes place between the goddess and representatives of her village (1986:199). This ritual is led on earth by low-caste female officiates known as Matangi

[219] Secular historical scholarship, for example, developed and flourished in Greece in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE; the writings of Herodotus and Thucydides separated religious thought from history. Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy, 201. At any rate, rationalization is never complete; magic, spirit, and instinct persist in art as well as in life to this day.

who, like the high priestesses of ancient Mesopotamia, personify the goddess during the ceremony:

> "The Matangis are unmarried and hold their office for life. During a festival for the village goddess the Matangi represents the goddess. Possessed by the goddess, she will dance wildly, use obscene language, [brake into wild, exulting songs], drink intoxicants, spit on spectators, and push people around with her backside. She seems to take special delight in abusing members of the high castes" (1986:207).

Nevertheless, in the contemporary official art world the link between art, the sacred, and sexual activity has virtually ceased to exist. Despite efforts by Western "spiritual erotic entertainers" like Annie Sprinkle, the actual connection of the "prostitute" with art - and religion - has not been widely accepted, especially since the transition to the modern era.[220] As contemporary debates between porno stars and feminists about whether pornography can constitute a form of art demonstrate,[221] the modern-day prostitute may or may not produce aesthetic products but, regardless, she is not generally viewed as an artist or her aesthetic-sexual activities as "art," especially not as related to or in the service of the sacred. This state of affairs suggests that modern official art has been for some time separated from explicit sexuality, and that sexuality has been alienated from the sacred.

In numerous early agrarian societies, on the other hand, "art" was made or performed for multiple ends which transformed it accordingly. Depending on the place and the occasion, a performance could be either religious ritual, act of seduction, artistic

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[220] At the beginning of modern Japan, for example, in the early seventeenth century, the military government or Shogunate banned women from the stage and separated the *kabuki* from female prostitution. Samuel Leiter L., ed. A Kabuki Reader: History and Performance (New York: M.E. Sharpe, inc., 2002) 54. As a result, today's Kabuki is widely known as an all-male performance art.

[221] In the West, contemporary porno stars have claimed 'artist' status and have attempted to show that theirs is "an ancient form of entertainment," but many feminists oppose their claims. Arlene Raven, "Star Studded," in Sally Everett, ed., Art Theory and Criticism (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company) 212.

event, entertainment, business transaction, or all of the above. Such performance model *contained* and *assumed* multiple forms - various intersecting artistic genres, dialogues, spheres of human experience, moods, and functions appear to have been juxtaposed. As a result, polymorphic performances like the "sacred marriage" in Mesopotamia and the ancient *kagura* in Japan were produced.[222]

Significantly, the polymorphic arts of the ancient agrarian world appear to have persisted, in Japan for example, until the dawn of the modern era. Uzume's *kagura* is at the origin of a chain of female entertainment traditions in Japan which includes: the *sarume* dancers, the *asobi* singers, the temple *shirabyōshi* dancers, the *yayako* actresses, and the early Okuni *kabuki* performers. In varied ways these performances celebrated male and female divinity, sexual power and abandon, fertility, abundance, prosperity, carnal love, and human excess. They constituted some of the earliest examples of female performing traditions and served multiple functions: to lift depression, to entertain, to lighten sadness, to cause laughter, to manifest a desired result, to celebrate human and divine sexual potency, to heal, to restore life and fertility to the land, to appease deities or spirits of the dead, to institute and legitimate political authority, to raise money for religious institutions or individuals, to facilitate revelation, and to honor the gods and goddesses.

Several developments such as the formation of empires, the rise of concepts of a supreme god inside and outside Mesopotamia, the gradual displacement of goddess religion, the emergence of monotheism and atheism with their "aversion to things

[222] Like the performance of the Sacred Marriage, the Japanese *kagura* was a site of intersecting social transactions which followed a dramatic sequence; it had a prologue, a ritual of purification, a liturgy, a sexually explicit dance, a dramatic action, and an exodus. Guevara, "That Which Pleases the Gods: Kagura" (2001).

aesthetic" (Weber 1922:257), and the formulation of an "aesthetic realm" by Greek ethical philosophers seem to have contributed to the gradual separation or differentiation of religion from magic as well as from artistic expression and human sexuality. As a result, the integration of sexuality, aesthetics, magic, and religion which prevailed in numerous early agrarian societies began to wane.

Chapter VI. Conclusions

> *"What is ancient can also be seen in our day. And what appears to be new has solid archaic roots."*
>
> Michel Maffesoli, *The Shadow of Dionysus*

The arts of contemporary "shamanic" artists, erotic performers, pleasure artists, or "prostitute-performer/artist-spiritual teacher/seekers" have solid archaic roots. They represent a conscious - or unconscious – attempt to reintegrate the aesthetic into social life. They challenge our ordinary understanding of art as "fine art" and inform on new possibilities. Art does not have to be a small thing. The traditional concept of art is a rationalization of *form* and of creative activity. What has become known as *art* is the result of a process of *disenchantment* or de-magification (Weber) of complex social interaction. As contemporary artists question and reinvent "art" – by reviving ancient connections or imagining new intersections between the spiritual, the sexual, and the aesthetic - a broader understanding of this concept becomes necessary in order to grasp the profound social transformations these trends are reflecting, establishing, and promoting.

This dissertation has examined the social meanings and powers of *art* before it became a separate sphere of activity and meaning. Specifically, before it was separated from religion and sexuality. In agrarian Mesopotamia, the aesthetic as well as the sexual were integrated into a unifying religious worldview. This shaped the forms of representation that emerged and governed there at the time. These forms of representation included songs or poetry expressing explicit sexual desires as well as explicit acts (either performed or implied) of sexual intercourse. These representations and performances were integral to the most significant religious/social rituals of the community. Such

religious rituals (forms of representation or forms of art) were integrated into the life of the community in an encompassing or holistic way.

For religion was not a separate sphere; it was the way in which the world was understood. Religion not only interpreted and explained the world, it created the world as it was known. Religious (artistic) activities, objects, rituals, performances actually re-created and affected the world and were necessary for ensuring and assuring certain outcomes. That is, religious activities and objects -- which were artistic activities and objects, and included as central female activities, representations, and expressions of female sexuality -- were efficacious. They had a profound and powerful effect on the world.

In Mesopotamia, collective representations/religion/art such as The Sacred Marriage provided a sense of common identity for the group. They affirmed and maintained the group. They strengthened the collective emotions, feelings, and beliefs of the group and embodied and represented its collective conscience and sentiments. They gave meaning and continuity to the group. The Sacred Marriage *created* the society it represented. It mediated political relations and economics. It effected change. The Sacred Marriage/Art enacted community. It was one of the acts by which the society made itself and remade itself periodically.

If society is founded on collective sentiments, as Durkheim believed (Durkehim 1995), and collective representations like the Sacred Marriage strengthen and maintain these sentiments, then the value/power of art 'Before Art' was rooted in its ability to create and maintain community.

This examination has shown that 'before *art*,' that is before the emergence of the concept of art, the fusion of the magical, religious, and sexual with the aesthetic bestowed numerous vital roles on artistic activity which for the most part it no longer has. For while religious and spiritual art continue to exist to this day, art no longer occupies the spiritual place nor possesses the magical, religious, or social powers ascribed to it in agrarian Mesopotamia. Similarly, the communally meaningful link of artistic activity, magic/religion, and sexuality/prostitution found 'before art' in several societies is not widely sanctioned today. Besides spiritual and social rationalization, multiple events and processes appear to have been responsible for the revolution in human sensibility that gave rise to the concept of *art* as an "aesthetic" realm independent of religion and human sexuality. Nevertheless, that is the subject of further and future research. In this dissertation, the main objective has been met. This investigation has identified and elucidated some of the beliefs and circumstances that made the fusion of art, religion, and female sexuality possible in urban agrarian Mesopotamia.

Chapter 2 showed that the spiritual system of Mesopotamia blended "magical" elements with "religious" elements as it combined a belief in spirits with a belief in anthropomorphic deities, secured the presence of the divine in the world while worshipping deities outside the world, and mixed prayer and sacrifice with attempts to manipulate supernatural forces. This ability to maintain a certain balance between more and less rational approaches to the divine and to everyday life was offered as partial explanation for the Mesopotamian practice of investing, what to us appear as, completely secular activities like art and sexuality with high spiritual power and considerable social significance. Through magico-religious "symmetry," the Mesopotamians were able to

find a plurality of values in both spiritual and material objects, actions, and pursuits making their experience of artistic, sexual, and spiritual activity vastly different from our own. The recognition of this fact set in motion the discussion of art as magic in the following chapter.

In Chapter 3, art was linked to *analogical* modes of thought which prevailed in Mesopotamia and helped explain how "power" was transferred to material objects, including art. Art thus emerged as sacred object and pursuit with supernatural qualities, which when combined with major rational social endeavors became a powerful force in Mesopotamian society. The chapter unveiled that the social functions of art in Mesopotamian society were mediated by magico-religious belief and depended on agrarian economic prosperity. Art was made to give existence to specific and socially and economically meaningful realities, to perpetuate them, and perhaps even to *multiply* them. It was created to honor and entertain the gods and goddesses as well as to influence them on behalf of humanity; it was thought to hold the power to beneficially direct human fate. Art was also made to materialize the immaterial; to protect human beings from danger; to reflect, confirm, and reaffirm the human connection with the divine; to manifest and transmit political and religious ideology and legitimate authority; to protect property; to communicate human achievements, desires, and intentions; to maintain the status quo; to satisfy the *pleasure needs* of humans and deities; and to perpetuate the community. For "magic" made that Mesopotamian art embodied eternity - the ideals of the social group and its quest for continuity and transcendence.

The connection between magical knowing and art was vast and sturdy in ancient Mesopotamia suggesting that Weber's train of thought on this issue was correct. No

drastic separation of magic from religion occurred in Mesopotamian history and art possessed significant spiritual value as well as great social importance. On the other hand, factors such as urbanization and militarization, which to Weber loomed large in the rationalization of religion, do not seem to have radically impacted the relationship between art, female sexuality, and spirituality in Mesopotamia. Despite ever-increasing urbanization and recurring military invasions, sacred erotic performances and performers persisted until the end of Mesopotamian history.

Chapter 4 (and Appendix C) revealed that it was in the early urban centers of Mesopotamia that women and goddesses secured socio-religious power in the temples and that this power was based on the influence of religion over numerous aspects of social life. The urbanization of Mesopotamia is estimated to have started as early as 3500 and one of the oldest and most important city-states, Uruk, was "owned" by a goddess whose temple, priestesses, and priests, controlled substantial economic resources and enterprises. Hence, urbanization seems to have strengthened the socio-religious power of women in ancient Mesopotamia, in particular that of elite religious figures who helped maintained the connection between female sexuality, spirit, and art.

Moreover, in the earliest cities, women and men of religion actively engaged in countless economic enterprises that increased their personal capital and profits, and turned Mesopotamia into a vibrant and wealthy society. That is to say that, contrary to what Weber would have expected, "magical religion" can create rational enterprising, abundance, human-made fertility, and an *economic ethic* motivated by profit.

Like urbanization, militarization and its favorite sport – conquest - did not have a sweeping negative impact on the integration of sex and art with religion in Mesopotamia.

Despite Weber's assertion that the degree of militarization determines the participation of women in religion,[223] the more and the less militarized civilizations of Mesopotamia always allowed for women's participation in religion and for intricate connections between religion, female sexuality, and art. Chapter 4 and Appendix C established that women in Mesopotamia enjoyed many religious rights and privileges which even contemporary Western women do not have. Likewise, they showed that specific notions of female divinity and sacred sexuality were integral to Mesopotamian religion and no degree of militarization was able to topple this foundation even if and when attempts were made in this direction.

Chapter 4 illustrated that the goddess Ishtar was the protagonist of one of the most important religious rituals in ancient Mesopotamia and that her sacred sexuality had major political and social value. The "sacred marriage" was a polymorphic performance that re-created or reordered the social hierarchy and ratified political change by legitimating kings and/or military takeovers. That male political leaders (earthly beings) needed legitimacy from the goddess - and not from any of the male gods that also existed at that time - is very suggestive and raises some interesting questions. First, it suggests that the goddess may have represented the primary sacred spirit and power of an earlier society, such that acceptance by the community was contingent upon acceptance by the society's sacred spiritual power - the goddess. Thus, when a male conquering figure wanted to legitimize his rule, he did so through marriage to that sacred representation of the living spirit and power of that community - the goddess. The ritual of the "sacred marriage" was a public performance that appears to have been intended for the

[223] "The greater or lesser, active or passive participation (or exclusion) of women from the religious cults is everywhere a function of the degree of the group's relative pacification or militarization." Weber, The Sociology of Religion, 104.

community as a display of acceptance by the sacred force or spirit of the community - the godess - and hence a means of legitimizing rule by a male leader who otherwise would lack legitimacy, being merely someone who was trying to impose his rule by force.

Furthermore, the "sacred marriage" makes clear that the association of ancient goddesses with simple fertility figures or rites mischaracterizes their nature and that of early agrarian religions and societies. The authority of ancient goddesses like Ishtar was not restricted to fertility. It was an almost all-encompassing power that included their ability to grant political office. In addition, the examination of this public expression of religious sentiment uncovered some of the environmental underpinnings of the integration of art and sexuality into religion. The performance beseeched and created abundance, prosperity, as well as collective pleasure through the magical reiteration of reproductive/sexual acts and through the collection and redistribution of offerings. It celebrated sex; sanctioned sexual activity as a form of religious sacrifice; and infused theatrical performance with social significance. It also reaffirmed existing socio-economic arrangements through the generous offerings of animals and goods by the subjects of the king. As such, it constituted a "pivot of systems" (Schechner 2003:116) in which multiple and vital social transactions took place in ancient Mesopotamia.

Lastly, Chapter 5 brought to light a category of female figures from around the ancient and not-so-ancient world that in myth and religious rites of various sorts and importance blended spirituality with sexual display or activity and performance. This provides a broader historical context in which to continue to evaluate figures like the goddess Ishtar and her priestesses and "prostitutes." In addition, the chapter pointed to several developments inside and outside Mesopotamia that in time negatively impacted

the survival of priestesses and the correlation between religion, female sexuality, and art. Mainly: the rise of one supreme male deity in the pantheons of Mesopotamia and its environs, the re-writing of Mesopotamian myth, and the advent of prophets and intellectuals.

Appendix C drew attention to the active and extensive involvement of women in Mesopotamian religion and detailed the religious rights and privileges of women from diverse social backgrounds. It pointed out that polymorphic representation depended on specific concepts and practices of sexuality and religion, including the notion of a sacred sexuality. It offered that the far-reaching participation of women in religion was a determining factor in the integration of sex, art, and religion, and provided concrete examples of the ways in which these spheres were combined by priestesses and prostitutes. It brought to light the fact that all priestesses as well as some prostitutes had the benefit of institutional support on account of magico-religious notions of female divinity, sexuality, and aesthetic activity. By examining the power and prestige of women in Mesopotamian religion, the appendix also challenged a leading sociological theory that posits agrarian societies as the nadir of social inequality.

To summarize, some of the beliefs and circumstances that made possible the integration of religion, female sexuality, and art - and infused artistic activity with social import - in agrarian Mesopotamia, are:

- The central place and overarching role of religion in the society, which contributed to the integration of these spheres into a unifying religious worlview.

- The existence of a spiritual system with a synchronic view of reality in which past, present, and future as well as a whole range of human activities could be viewed/experienced simultaneously.
- The economic power of temples and their sway over spiritual life, artistic production, and sexual mores: "It was under the auspices of…temples that those aspects of society which we associate with civilization grew up: writing, government, judicial system, fine art and architecture, and the like" (Stone 1995:236).
- The process of urbanization in Mesopotamia.[224]
- The economic prosperity of agrarian Mesopotamia.
- The religious involvement of women in force. The widespread and official recognition of complex female divinities as well as the active participation of women in sexual rites, artistic production, and religious life. The presence and authority of an organized and highly esteemed female priesthood. The existence of particular property relations that allowed priestesses, for example, to acquire and maintain socio-economic power (Appendix C).
- The belief and practice of sacred sexuality. The communal ritualization of the sexual act.
- The use of art as sacred vehicle and power.

[224] Although the genesis of the city continues to be debated, one key element seems to have been the growth of temples which served spiritual and cultural as well as economic and administrative roles. Elizabeth C. Stone "The Development of Cities in Ancient Mesopotamia," in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 236. Other scholars relate the advent of cities directly to the economy and to the control and distribution of economic surpluses. Southern Mesopotamian cities were built in an area known for hot summers, cold winters, and very little rain. These challenges played a part in the development of technologies such as artificial irrigation and the plow which progressively increased agricultural surpluses and allowed people to settle in greater numbers and in larger areas, "with one group gaining an increasing monopoly over the basic means of production within the society." Ibid.

- The existence of analogical modes of thought.
- The concurrence of "magical" beliefs with rational social pursuits. The fusion of rationalities in Mesopotamian religion and its integration of heterogeneous values.
- The official support of artistic production and ritual sexuality.

Based on these findings, the experiments of contemporary "shamanic" erotic artists seem to be destined (for now) to lack considerable social resonance. Without amply recognized notions of complex female divinities or of a powerful female priesthood, and without social acknowledgment of female sexuality as central to social life, for example, the contemporary blending of art, religion, and female sexuality is not likely to impact current society to the degree we have seen it is possible in this dissertation.

Max Weber suggested throughout his studies on religious rationalization that the modern, rational social emphasis on economic production relegated the sexual/sensual/passional and the aesthetic to the domain of the "irrational" and wasteful or useless. His insight seems to remain true today. Fusions of the "irrational" and "useless" are not likely to displace "productivism" in the near future. However, if the visions and observations of "avant-garde" scholars are correct (Schechner, Bologh, Maffesoli), rationality in its traditional sense as mind over body is losing ground in the West: "sentiments, in their broadest sense, relegated like women to the home, now tend to reassert their efficacy in the societal game" (Maffesoli 1993:14). Productivism is becoming the object of criticism and "orgiastic values" – which in the West appear to include sexual effervescence, human instinct and emotion, pleasure, inter-connectedness,

vulnerability, surrender, playfulness, ecstasy, the "shadow part," and the economically unproductive - seem to be gaining ground (1993:17-8):

> "Whether one regrets it or not…one cannot deny that the "nocturnal regime" of societal acts, which has had its periodic importance in the past, is about to return to the forefront of the scene…Without wishing to play the prophet, the sociologist can emphasize the numerous indices which seem to be going in this direction: a new relation to the body which becomes the object of jouissance, modern dances which recall innumerable phallic dances, the resurgence of festivals of a strongly orgiastic composition…" (1993:114, 153).

The ongoing revival of "paganism" led wittingly or unwittingly by archeologists, scholars of ancient Near Eastern and Old-European societies, members of the Neopagan and Feminist Spirituality movements, artists, and others, is reintroducing what some have called a "conflict of values" (1993:95) into the Western social body.[225] The incoming values are increasing awareness of the fact that there exist other ways to be in the world and in time, other ways to be human besides being economically productive for example. Perhaps because of their time-honored economic marginality, many artists are heeding the message. Although the impact of this movement depends and numerous and concomitant social developments which are difficult to estimate at present, explorations by contemporary artists of varied combinations of the spiritual, the sexual, and the aesthetic based on this knowledge abound and aim at expanding the social roles of art and the artist today and in the future.

[225] "Values do not engage in conflict with each other, only individuals, groups or nations committed to those values engage in conflict." Bologh, Love or Greatness, 306.

Examples of this trend include: the "hard-core porn" photography of porn-star/artist/sex-guru Annie Sprinkle (Sprinkle 1998:5, 122-29);[226] the "orgiastic rites" performed by Carolee Schneeman (*Meat Joy*); the *Sex Magic Masturbation Ritual* performed in the United States and Europe by Sprinkle (1998:170-73); Veronica Vera's *Shady Madonna*; Sprinkle's *In Search of the Ultimate Sexual Experience* video explorations of Tantric sexuality; and Sprinkle's "Erotic Bible Readings" (1998:98),[227] and "sex entertainment" installation window at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York (1998:136). Likewise, the pagan rock opera "Innana" (mysticgryphon/inanna.htm 1998) and the collaborations between the feminist artists' collective Carnival Knowledge and the sex workers' collective Club 90 at the Franklyn Furnace art gallery in New York [228] explore fusions of the old and the new as well as new social roles for the contemporary performance artist and for the modern-day prostitute.

The biographies of three prominent female "shamanic" erotic performers in the United States suffice here to illustrate the intricate social roles being explored.[229] Annie Sprinkle, born Ellen Steinberg in 1953, is a self-proclaimed "multimedia whore" (Sprinkle 1998:8) who advocates the practice of sex as "spiritual discipline"

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[226] Sprinkle created "The Sluts and Goddesses Transformation" photography series in collaboration with artist Linda Montano. Sprinkle holds a degree in photography from The School of Visual Arts in New York.

[227] The stage set for this performance was a "vulva-on-a-crucifix" sculpture made by the artist Rene.

[228] This collaboration between prostitutes and feminist artists asked through performance the question: "Is there a feminist pornography?"

[229] Contemporary male erotic entertainers include Frank Moore, a "sex guru" who performs "elaborate pieces in which he gets his audiences to take off their clothes and "eroplay" with each other…He has cerebral palsy and can't walk, talk normally, or stand up." Sprinkle, Post-Porn Modernist, 181.

(1998:12,139) and has worked professionally as prostitute,[230] porn star, stripper, filmmaker, photographer, writer, publisher, entrepreneur, video artist,[231] performance artist,[232] conceptual visual artist, actress, teacher/lecturer, "sexual adventurer," sexual healer,[233] pleasure activist, goddess,[234] and sex guru. (Fig. 79). Her motto "Let there be pleasure on earth – and let it begin with me" (1998:154) is based on her belief that there is already too much pain, suffering, sadness, and agony in the world and that "we have to try to consciously balance the scales" (1998). She likes to point out that "when compared with some ancient sexually advanced cultures, much of our society is still in kindergarten" (1998:157). As a result, she is committed to "sacred sex" and teaches Sacred Sex Workshops in New York (1998:180, 182). The "Post Porn Modernist Manifesto" that she and her collaborators wrote reads: "We embrace our genitals as part, not separate, from our spirits" (1998:196).

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[230] She describes the purposes and tribulations of the contemporary sex worker as follows: "to give sensual pleasure, nurture, entertain, listen, teach, inspire, help, create, touch, heal, love, and satisfy. At worst, it's to haggle, fight, put up with, endure clumsy touch, confront prejudice and judgmentalism, avoid arrest, wage legal battles, manage deadly sexually transmitted viruses, and avoid rape and murder." Sprinkle, Post-Porn Modernist, 134. She has been an activist in the prostitutes' rights movement which seeks to raise public awareness of sex as an essential and nourishing part of life and to "decriminalize desire." Ibid., 135.

[231] *The Sluts and Goddesses Video Workshop* – Or *How to be a Goddess in 101 Easy Steps* has played in film festivals, museums, and galleries and, according to Sprinkle, has become a "women's sex film herstory classic" used in home economics and feminist porn classes. Sprinkle, Post-Porn Modernist, 186.

[232] She performed *Post-Porn Modernist* at the well-known New York performance space The Kitchen and throughout Europe. Sprinkle, Post-Porn Modernist, 163-69. She also collaborated with renowned author/director Richard Schechner in *The Prometheus Project* performed at the prestigious Performing Garage in New York. Ibid., 95.

[233] Sprinkle asserts that "sex can cure a headache, relieve stress and tension, ease menstrual cramps, clear the mind…Research has shown that just thinking about sex will strengthen your immune system. Sex can bond people together, relieve loneliness, and be a great way to express love." Sprinkle, Post-Porn Modernist, 156.

[234] Several feminist performers today describe themselves as "goddesses." Sprinkle, Post-Porn Modernist, 194.

Linda M. Montano (born in 1942) is a performance artist, sculptor, ex-Catholic novice, devotee of guru Dr. R. S. Mishra, and teacher who "considers life to be her studio" (Montano 2000:512). In her *Fourteen Years of Living Art*, 1984 to 1998, Montano wore "different one-color clothes each year in honor of the seven chakras" (2000). Her sexually explicit experiments include her collaboration with Annie Sprinkle in *The Sluts and Goddesses Transformation* photography series displayed at Kinsey Institute's art gallery in a group show about gender (Sprinkle 1998:122-29). She is the founder of the Art/Life Institute in Kingston, New York, and has taught at the San Francisco Art Institute, Ohio State University, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the University of California at Los Angeles.

Carolee Schneemann (born in 1939) describes herself as a painter but "has used her body as the primary material, realizing her concepts in every media from assemblage, environments, happenings, and performance to kinetic sculpture, multimedia installations, film, video, and photography" (Schneemann 2002:3). Her "body art examines Western aesthetics by research into archaic visual traditions" (Montano 2000:517). She is the founder of Kinetic Theatre and uses "film, video installations, and projection systems to present the body as a source of knowledge and the sacred erotic" (2000). In her pioneering film *Fuses* (1965-68), Schneemann explored sexually explicit imagery as she "filmed her beloved cat, Kitch, on the window sill of her bedroom, positioned to view [her and her partner] making love" (Schneemann 2002:10).[235] Her fusions of spirituality, sexuality, and art are known in the United States and Europe and

[235] "We are perceived through the eyes of our cat. By visualizing the cat's point of view I was able to present our coupled images in the contexts of the rectangles and the seasons surrounding us…I did the filming even while I was participant in the action." Schneemann, Imagining Her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002) 45.

have been included in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Institute for Contemporary Arts in London.

In addition to expanding in very specific directions the social roles of the artist today, the new urban fusion of spirituality, sexuality, and art appears to be doing reparative work back to the feminism that missed the spiritual and pleasurable, and to be looking for places of power and empowerment that transcend the society at hand.[236] A conscious decision to anchor these artistic endeavors in new socio-religious movements, such as Neo-paganism or Feminist Spirituality, could potentially boost their social impact.

The contemporary artists who blend the spiritual and sexual with the aesthetic are "order breakers" (Maffesoli 1993:92) who seek to dislocate long established and widely cherished Western notions and practices of art, religion, and sexuality. They "play at perturbing" (1993) the prized Western belief in the possibility of building social and individual happiness on instrumental and value rationalities. Yet, despite the success of a number of "shamanic" erotic artists, their work is poorly understood and hardly appreciated in the Western mainstream. The photographic montages and performances of Carolee Schneemann, for example, have been regularly censored as "obscene" and she has suffered at least one attack by a member of the audience who tried to strangle her (Perlmutter and Koppman 1999:16). This type of reaction suggests that the boundaries of taste in contemporary North American society are more restricted and restrictive than

[236] Marisa Sullivan and I have discussed these and other aspirations of contemporary feminist performance.

those in ancient Mesopotamia, for example. It also suggests that the link between art and explicit sexuality is not always easily tolerated by our contemporaries. [237]

In the introduction I suggested that contemporary fusions of sex, spirit, and art point to a paradigm shift which may be related to what Mafesolli calls "the return of the repressed" or represent an example of Bologh's "aesthetic rationality." Perhaps they are an attempt at equilibrium between the "rational" and the "irrational;" production and playfulness in community. While further research would be required to ascertain this, it is undeniable that the ongoing process of fusion runs contrary to the process of "differentiation" which is said to distinguish modern societies. According to Richard Fenn, "for years sociologists have agreed on little else than the process of differentiation dominates modern societies" (Fenn 2000:11). Differentiation "allows each separate sphere to become relatively autonomous of the others in setting its own internal standards, setting its goals and policies, and determining its own identity and belief system" (2000). Audience reactions to ongoing combinations of art with explicit

[237] Artistic expression, sexual merging, and cosmic explanation/integration constitute archetypal tensions that can threaten order and community. Violence, perpetrated by men and women alike, has often accompanied rituals which combine artistic expression with orgiastic spirituality. The women of the Lenai in Athens, the Maenads of Thebes, and the Thyiads of Delphi in ancient Greece as well as the Yausa of Melanesia exercised violence against men during orgiastic festivals. The Yausa, according to Malinowski, raped men by provoking the erection of the penis through masturbatory practices and then crouching and introducing the penis into their vaginas, as well as by using the man's nose, mouth, toes, and fingers for their "lascivious" ends. Apparently, this sexual violence occurred whenever the Yausa were subjected to tedious or loathsome work. Maffesoli, The Shadow of Dionysus, 99. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that conflict, just as much as cooperation and sociability, is a reality which animates and structures social life and the human being. Conflict, however, does not need to be understood solely as a forceful "struggle for power," as Max Weber did. Bologh, Love or Greatness, 40. ('Sociability' is defined by Bologh as a "relationship in which the presence of one makes a pleasurable difference to, *affects*, the other." Ibid., 213.) Of more significance is then perhaps to find ways to ritualize the conflict or violence that emerges from the intersection of multiple and contradictory values because, as Maffesoli points out, "that which we do not know how to ritualize, take into account and manage, always finishes by resurfacing, all the more violently the harder and longer it has been denied." Maffesoli, The Shadow of Dionysus, 83.

sexuality and non-traditional spirituality seem to be upshots of this process. The personal sexual sphere is expected to be separate from that of art (and religion).

Of great interest in this regard is the fact that efforts to make "art" into a fully differentiated sphere were still going on as recently as the late nineteen sixties. In 1968, sociologist Milton Albrecht recognized attempts "in our society to build up art as a cosmos separate and self-contained, existing in its own right" (Albrecht et al. 1970:19).[238] According to him, modern social scientists have shown considerable uncertainty about the social place and importance of art. To some, art is not as "basic" to the maintenance of society as the family, economic, or political institutions; to others, art is a "primary" value and belongs among the "higher" institutions (1970:2-3).[239] Both positions point to the fact that "art is not highly integrated as institution and…in at least some respects it leads a semi-autonomous existence in society" (1970:4). In other words, after centuries of differentiation art has stayed (or has become?) socially marginal: "art…may be regarded as a minority culture that functions both for stability and for change" (1970:14).

Albrecht implied that to build up art as an institution its "aesthetic values" had to be emphasized. After all, what makes up "art" in the modern West is not its religious value though it may have it, nor its political or sexual values though it may also possess them, but its aesthetic value. The modern emphasis on aesthetic values makes sense in light of

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[238] Albrecht addressed "the question of the structure of art as a social institution, the problem of 'basic human need' that art serves" and the place of art in the social structure. Milton C. Albrecht, "Art as an Institution," in Milton C. Albrecht, James H. Barret, and Mason Griff, eds., The Sociology of Art and Literature: A Reader (New York: Praeger, 1970) 1.

[239] Social institutions correspond to "the principal structures through which human activities are organized and established to serve basic human needs." Albrecht in The Sociology of Art and Literature, 2. While no 'aesthetic need' may be as important as hunger or sex for the maintenance of society art meets many 'basic needs' psychologically and socially Ibid., 15. Art may contribute to social stability by "balancing emotional against instrumental needs," by providing "congenial occupations and interests for 'deviant' personalities," by enriching the 'value' resources of the society, and by fostering social change. Ibid., 14.

the process of differentiation. If art was to become an independent sphere of activity and meaning, separate from religion and sexuality for example, it had to have as Aristotle stated and Albrecht reiterated its own set of constitutive values beyond those of religion or sexuality. This, in turn, explains to a significant extent why notions and practices of art in the modern West have traditionally accentuated "qualities expressive of aesthetic form" (1970:18) and why modern scholars like Albrecht conceptualize art as "a collective term for a wide variety of aesthetic products" (1970:1). In brief, without aesthetic values, "art" does not exist.

Therefore, the "problem that art presents" (1970:6) seems to be twofold. On the one hand, the concept/category of art cannot exist without aesthetic values; on the other hand, its dependence on aesthetic values has affected its social value because they lessen its usefulness: "the idea of art as separate and distinct from all aspects of utility, apart from all social and cultural meanings, has…become widespread in the Western hemisphere" (1970:18). Because art is generally and primarily recognized for its aesthetic value its influence is very modest and not quite accepted to be as vital to the functioning of society as that of religion or sexuality continue to be, for example. Hence, paradoxically, what has made possible the rise of art as a modern institution independent of religion and sexuality - its cosmos of *aesthetic* values - seems to have also weakened its position in contemporary society. This situation is being recognized nowadays by large numbers of artists who are eagerly seeking to create new social roles for art and the artist as well as "new kinds of community" (Whitney Biennial Statement 2004).

As chapter 5 in this dissertation began to address, the configuration of *art* as a separate sphere of life seems to have been put underway by the ancient prophets and the

Greek intellectuals. In a future writing, I would like to explore to what extent the estrangement of "aesthetics" from religious/magical power and from orgiastic, or socio-sexual concerns and activities might have marginalized "art" and diminished its ability to affect the world. At present, I would like to close this investigation with a quote from the curators of the 2006 Whitney Biennial:

> "The Biennial…explores the artifice of American culture in what could be described as a pre-Enlightenment moment, in which culture is preoccupied with the irrational, the religious, the dark, the erotic, and the violent, filtered through a sense of flawed beauty. This restless mood is not unique to the United States; its presence across both America and Europe suggests a shift in the accepted values that have formed the basis of 20th century Western culture…The artists in the 2006 Biennial are working in a space between pre- and post-modernists parameters – somewhere between day and night, between the history of forms and the forms of history. In this twilight zone, many things are called into question or obscured" (Whitney Biennial 2006, 'Day for Night,' Press Release).

Appendix A: MESOPOTAMIA - General Information

It is perilous to speak of Mesopotamia as a cultural unit because its history encompassed some three thousand years and numerous, distinct ethnicities, languages, and belief systems imposed themselves upon the land at different times. Notwithstanding this major disadvantage, it is possible to ascertain a continuity of religious belief, legal principles, and economic enterprising which allows scholars to consider Mesopotamia as a unit. For instance, polytheism and goddess worship existed throughout Mesopotamian history. In terms of the law, scholars such as H.W.F. Saggs, Raymond Westbrook, Robert Ellickson, and Charles Thorland agree that from the Sumerian to the Babylonian civilizations Mesopotamians seem to have had a common legal tradition (VerSteeg 2000:5). Likewise, the economies of all the different groups which occupied it remained strictly agrarian. Moreover, by the end of the fourth millennium before the Christian era the two major cultural groups considered in this study, the Sumerians and the Akkadians, appear to have been "already sufficiently blended and mutually acculturated" to permit us with circumspection to speak of a "Mesopotamian civilization" (Bottéro 2001:11). In the following pages, I would like to introduce some general aspects of this remarkable civilization to facilitate the reading of this dissertation.

Geography and Environment

In Greek, the word *Mesopotamia* means "the land between the rivers." [240] The territory of Mesopotamia covered approximately that of present-day Iraq, between the

[240] According to Bahrani, "the word *Mesopotamia* is in fact a ninetheenth-century British designation revived from late Hellenistic and Roman usage (classical Greek texts actually use the term *Babylonia*)." Zainab Bahrani, The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) 59. Therefore, the term *Mesopotamia* is problematic because it is "a colonial term, and its continued usage has numerous political implications that must be brought to light." Ibid., 4. In brief, "the image of Mesopotamia, upon which we still depend, was necessary for a march of progress from East to West, a concept of world cultural development that is explicitly Eurocentric and imperialist." Ibid., 72.

rivers Tigris and Euphrates. It was divided into two major geo-political regions. To the north there was Assyria, a rain-fall agriculture zone which is not part of this study. To the south, there was Babylonia which was subdivided into Sumer and Akkad. Sumer, the most southern region of the country was the first major cultural force in Mesopotamian history. Southern Mesopotamia was not cultivable on a large scale "without substantial modification and painstaking maintenance" (Butzer 1995:142) because it was prone to salinization which could break down the irrigation system and turn land into desert: "To cultivate the best lands it was necessary to control and distribute floodwaters through a network of canals that started at the levees and then dispersed irrigation waters radially by countless, small feeder canals and ditches" (1995). The south had "hot summers, cold winters, and extremely little precipitation" (Nissen 2003:11). Despite this, the agricultural productivity of Mesopotamia was higher than, for example, that of early modern Europe. According to economist Daniel Snell: "The seed-to-grain ratio ranged from 1:12 to 1:20 in Mesopotamia while early modern Europe managed from 1:5 to 1:8" (Snell 1997:125).

Southern Mesopotamia was the birthplace of the city. One of its earliest cities, Uruk, flaunted a population of 60,000 at one point in its history (1997:32).[241] Among the prominent cities were: Eridu, Uruk, Ur, Lagash, Nippur, Isin, Sippar, Larsa, and Babylon (Fig. 1). The attraction for early settlement concentration in the south included other factors besides agricultural productivity. The potential of the river system for transportation and commerce appears to have been equally important; access to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean was possible in the south. Moreover, while high-

[241] By comparison, London had a population of 30,000 to 40,000 in the late 14th century A.D. Lenski, Power and Privilege, 199. The number of people in Mesopotamian cities may have fluctuated between ten and fifty thousand at any given time. Kramer, The Sacred Marriage, 25.

energy floods were a recurrent hazard in the north, the "river channels in the Delta did not generally carry violent floods" permitting the building and maintenance of a network of large and small canals "with little threat of periodic destruction" (Butzer 1995:144).

Mainly because of its impressive cities, monumental architecture, and its invention of writing (ca. 3200) Mesopotamia has been called the cradle of "civilization" (Kramer 1969:3).[242] Its city life, economy, politics, and religion were immortalized by the Mesopotamians themselves in thousands of written documents and art objects.[243] In effect, as Mesopotamian scholars like to remark, "the field of Near Eastern studies can boast a far greater amount of material than Classical antiquity" (Bahrani 2001:2, Kramer 1969:34, Snell 1997:7). The civilizations created by the Sumerians and the Akkadians in the southern portion of ancient Iraq constitute the focal point of this research.

Inhabitants

Sumerians and Akkadians may have settled the land between the rivers at around the same time during the fourth millennium before the Christian era, from 4000 to 3000. However it was the 'black-headed ones' or *sag giga*, as the Sumerians called themselves, who apparently created the first civilization in the land of *ki-en-gi*, "place of the civilized lords" (Aruz 2003:4). Before them, other ethnic groups inhabited the land making Mesopotamia a multiethnic and multilingual region from the outset. Whether or not the Sumerians arrived through the maritime region "by following the Iranian shores of the Persian Gulf" as historian Jean Bottéro argues (Bottéro 2001:9), their origin continues to

[242] For a fresh critique of the standard progress of civilization from East to West, see Bahrani, The Graven Image, 50-72.

[243] Primary sources have been translated into modern languages by cuneiformists and comprise thousands of written clay tablets, cylinder seals, and art objects found by archeologists. These sources include several categories: law collections, personal letters, religious and epic literature, business contracts, wills, loan receipts, adoption documents, international agreements, economic records, administrative texts, and visual representations. I specify the sources used throughout this dissertation.

be a matter of debate. On the other hand, the Akkadians are said to have resided mainly in Syria during the fourth millennium and have started to migrate south at the end of the third millennium in large and small bands "tempted by the gentler and more gratifying life" of the Sumerians (2001). A number of scholars have claimed that the Akkadians constitute the oldest Semitic population we know (2001:9-10; Snell 1997:17). What seems beyond doubt is that the Sumerians educated the Akkadians, "teaching them everything that made up civilized life" (Bottéro 2001:11).

As time went on, the Akkadians became more numerous in the south and by the end of the third millennium Akkadian replaced Sumerian as the official spoken language of the land. Nonetheless, Sumerian prevailed as the language of culture in literature, science, and liturgy until near the Christian era (Bonnefoy 1991:143). By the time the Akkadian king Sargon built the first world's empire, circa 2334, the Sumerians were rapidly disappearing. Akkadian predominance, however, lasted less than two hundred years. Following the Akkadians, several other ethnic groups invaded Mesopotamia and had more or less lasting effects on its culture and history. The Amorites, for example, arrived from the northwest and were quickly "tempted and subjugated by the civilization they found around them" (Bottéro 2001:14-5). The celebrated king Hammurabi was of Amorite descent. Next came the Hittites from Anatolia (modern Turkey) followed by the Kassites from the Zagros, southern Russia. Later on, the Arameans or Chaldeans came bringing the alphabet, which was "invented in Syria-Palestine, probably around 1500" (2001:16). After the rise and fall of the Assyrians in the north during the last millennium of Mesopotamian history, the Persians incorporated the land between the rivers into their empire. The Persians "did everything they could to maintain the life and economic

prosperity in that old land and venerable culture, whose prestige, success, and brilliance they admired so much" (2001:17).

But Mesopotamia was no longer independent. The official spoken language was changed to Aramaic. Moreover, in 330 Alexander the Great conquered the entire region and brought Mesopotamia into the Hellenistic cultural orbit. The last, and most recent, cuneiform document found by archeologists dates from the year 74 A.D. It represents "the very last link in that long chain" (2001:18) of invasions and innovations that contributed to the greatness and demise of Mesopotamian civilization.

Politics

Southern Mesopotamia emerged as a political mosaic of some thirty independent city-states as early as 3000. These Sumerian urban states shared the same way of life and the same religion; each chose a particular deity as its 'owner' and supernatural chief. The owner of Uruk, for instance, was Inanna or Ishtar, goddess of love and war. Political allegiances "were primarily determined by membership in the community and only secondarily by ties of blood and marriage…few formal traces of tribal or even clan identities can be found" (Greengus 1995:469). Hence admission to the city was based on a willingness to serve its goddess and its king, as the monarchical principle was accepted everywhere. The highest political authority of the city was the EN who was married to the city's deity and selected from a limited number of citizens by extispicy: the inspection by a diviner of the entrails of an animal. If the owner of the city was a god, the EN would normally be female and vice versa.[244] However, this practice must have been complicated

[244] A female EN, "who may not have had the same political power as her male counterpart," appears to have ruled the city of Ur. F.A.M Wiggermann, "Theologies, Priests, and Worship in Ancient Mesopotamia," in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 3:1863.

by the fact that the gender of deities "was not in all cases definitely fixed, and gender changes still occurred in the historical period" (Wiggermann 1995:1869).

Apparently, "no lasting authority could be imposed on these principalities, which jealously guarded their independence as is indicated by the erection around 2700 of fortification walls around cities" (Charpin 1995:809).[245] It is, nonetheless, possible that the early Sumerian city-states "may have formed a kind of league" (1995) since they all acknowledged first the god Enki, patron of the city of Eridu, as leader of the pantheon and later the god Enlil, the patron of Nippur.[246] Even so, the chief political model at this time appears to have been the "temple-city" which already existed by the end of the Uruk Period, 3500-3000 (Wiggermann 1995:1868). Districts or wards divided large cities and functioned as mini-communities; ward officials could issue warnings and convene courts and hearings (Greengus 1995:469).

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[245] Amihai Mazar explains that "Uruk of the Early Dynastic I Period [3000-2800] was surrounded by a defense wall 9.5 kilometers (almost 6 miles) long." Amihai Mazar, "The Fortification of Cities in the Ancient Near East," in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 3:1524. Settlements with massive outer walls going back to the Neolithic, 8th and 7th millennia BC, have been unearthed by archeologists suggesting that the use of walls for natural or political protection by different communities is a very old technology of defense. Ibid., 1523. In Mesopotamia, the first example of military architecture dates from the Samarra culture, ca. 5300, on the middle Tigris. In Syria, the site of Habuba al-Kabira was a Sumerian colony during the Uruk period (3500-3000 BC) and was defended by a mud-brick city wall three meters thick (about 10 feet) with fifty towers. Ibid., 1523-24. This Mesopotamian tradition of building walls around their villages and colonies suggests that the city of Uruk may have been fortified before 3000. The building of defensive walls around cities marked a new era of massive defense which was "accompanied by the rise of a new class of leaders called "kings" (*LUGAL* in Sumerian…) who took command of citizen troops. Sometimes military and ecclesiastical leaderships was combined in one person…(but) Kingship most often functioned as a separate office." Samuel Greengus, "Legal and Social Institutions of Ancient Mesopotamia," in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 1:470.

[246] "The distribution of gods over cities, with each major god having his or her own city, and the central unity of the late Uruk Period suggest a level of organization above that of the city, and later traditions…point to Eridu as its center. Eridu was the home of the earliest national "kingship," of the ME, the traditional rules that guided protoliterate civilization…Its god was Enki…His relations with Inanna, the goddess of more prosperous Uruk, and later with Enlil, his successor as national god, reveal the struggle for power that in the end he would lose." Wiggermann, "Theologies," in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 2:1869.

King Sargon of Akkad put an end to the system of city-states when he created the first world's empire through a series of wars and annexations between 2334 and 2197. Like all subsequent empires, his presupposed universal dominion and was characterized by ethnolinguistic diversity. As Sargon rose to prominence - a result of multiple factors including warfare between Sumerian cities and sharp declines in crop yields[247] - a unified and centralized organization monitored from the new capital city, Agade or Akkad, replaced the Sumerian mosaic of independent city-states.[248] In this new landscape, the king became "the cornerstone of the entire system" (Charpin 1995:812). He established a military force to protect the empire from "enemy" revolts, including those of dissatisfied Sumerians,[249] and replaced the Sumerian EN with the *sagina*.[250] In Akkad, the national king was appointed by the city's goddess, Ishtar (Wiggermann 1995:1864). Though the Akkadian empire did not last two centuries, the need or taste for unification continued in Mesopotamia as powerful kingdoms replaced the former ideal of the small city-state and

[247] Large scale agriculture was the most important economic activity in Mesopotamia; commerce and transportation followed suit. Around 2350, crop yields declined almost by half in Sumer while seed requirements more than doubled due to salinization, accentuated by a decrease in flood volume. According to Butzer, these factors led to a major socio-political change in the region: "the center of population and power in Mesopotamia moved upstream to Babylon." Karl W. Butzer, "Environmental Change in the Near East and Human Impact on the Land," in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 1:145. Others attribute the downfall of the Sumerians to their very success: "The rich cities with their busy markets and stepped temple towers known as ziggurats acted as magnets for rural dwellers, putting a strain on housing and sanitation. Internecine rivalries and warfare among these cities diverted labor and resources from more productive endeavors. Over the centuries the fields on which the residents dependent for their nourishment grew less productive, as water –spread across the fields by the irrigation channels –leached salts from the soil and gradually reduced its fertility." Thomas H. Flaherty, ed., Sumer: Cities of Eden (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1993) 13.

[248] Large cities had specialized corporations called *karum* in Akkadian which acted as "port authorities" collecting taxes, convening courts, and regulating commerce and trade. Greengus, "Legal and Social Institutions," 470.

[249] Sumerians rebelled on numerous occasions, for example under the reign of Naram-Sin because he allegedly committed sacrilege by destroying part of the great temple of Nippur. Dominique Charpin, "The History of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Overview," in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 2:811.

[250] Following scholarly usage, Sumerian words are transcribed in Roman type and Akkadian in italics.

its petty king: “The scale of political greatness, and of greatness itself, had changed” (Bottéro 2001:14).

After Sargon and his successors, the smaller but solidly built kingdom of Ur rose to prominence. Defeated in part by the arrival of Amorite invaders from Syria, the kingdom of Ur gave way to a new political division: “a sort of return to the fragmentation of the ancient city-states” (2001:15). The new principalities fell under the sway of two rival powers, Isin and Larsa, but the city of Ur remained economically and religiously important; Sumerian traditions were piously maintained in this religious metropolis (Charpin 1995:813). The kings of Larsa eventually conquered those of Isin and **“**installed there one of their daughters as high priestess (*entum*) of the god Sin,” a politically-motivated tradition that seems to have been initiated during the Akkadian period (1995).

Dominique Charpin explains that during these political transitions territorial expansion facilitated a new political model based on the distinction between core and periphery: “The core, which included northern and southern Babylonia and the Lower Diyala basin, was divided into some twenty provinces corresponding to the territories of the former city-states…The periphery was entirely under the authority of military governors who depended on the chancellor” (1995:811-12). The EN returned as governor of each province, chosen from a prominent family and appointed by the king. However, this time his power was curbed by that of the *sagina*, the military governor who depended entirely on the central administration (1995).

When the Amorite king Hammurabi conquered the kingdom of Larsa in 1763, he established control over all of Sumer once again and a new, but short, era of political cohesion returned (1995:817). He called himself “king of Sumer and Akkad” and built a

true but fragile empire stretching from upper to lower Mesopotamia. His Old Babylonian empire fell due to internal decay and external pressures: bureaucracies swelled, hereditary offices jeopardized central decision-making, scarcity forced the authorities to accept silver in lieu of military service, and foreign invaders raided the city of Babylon circa 1594.

A remarkable new technology, the military use of chariots pulled by horses, powered the new wave of invasions of Mesopotamia by Asian and Indo-European peoples. The Hittite king, Murshili I, attacked Babylon bringing the Old Babylonian Period to an end. Hittites are said to be the first to have systematically smelted iron in the Near East. Following on their footsteps, the Kassites ruled Mesopotamia from circa 1375 to 1155;[251] they sought to transform southern Mesopotamia into a national state and initiated a radical revision of its creation myths (chapter 5). In the meantime, northern Assyria began to form itself as a rival kingdom centered on the city of Ashur around 1300. Its ascendancy resulted in the political division of Mesopotamia into Assyria and Babylonia (Sumer and Akkad) which occurred sometime between 1000 and 800 when Assyria claimed its independence (Bottéro 2001:16).

Irregardless of the group in charge, and of the cyclical fragmentation-centralization of Mesopotamian political development, politics was never independent of religion. Political authority was "installed by the gods to keep their unruly human servants on track" (Wiggermann 1995:1863). The ruler was responsible for peace and for the destruction of outside enemies. As we shall see in the next section, human existence seems to have depended on the satisfaction of the gods and goddesses, and they depended

[251] Charpin proposes 1490 to 1465 as the dates of Kassite rule. Charpin, "The History of Ancient Mesopotamia," in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 817.

on human servants for their leisured life (1995:1860). Therefore, the purpose and justification for the survival of the state was: "to supply the gods with their needs" (1995:1861). For this reason, the king, who was the highest political authority of the land, also played the role of High Priest. One of his highest responsibilities was to erect temples, to restore them, to equip them luxuriously, and to make generous donations to them. Thus his political authority was constrained, as well as enhanced, by the religious obligations of his office.

Religion

> "The political evolution of the country – with cities alternating in their roles of dominance over others and as centers of extended kingdoms – was reflected in the reshuffling of the divine cabinet. For this organization of deities usually followed the changing fate of the city, so that some members of this supernatural society, without abandoning their local connections and privileges, emerged to play more universal roles. It was apparently in this way that a kind of central pantheon recognized by the entire country was constituted very early, at least by the middle of the third millennium," circa 2500 (Bonnefoy 1991:146).

"The oldest of all known religions" is apparently that of Mesopotamia "dating from the fourth millennium B.C. to shortly before the birth of Christ" (Bottéro 2001:vii). This spiritual system has been termed *magico-religious* because it blends "magical" and "religious" elements (chapter 2). It was polytheistic, anthropomorphist, and hierarchically structured. It was governed by usage, which changed depending on political and social developments.[252] The Mesopotamian pantheon was inhabited by hundreds and at times

[252] For this reason, it is classed by scholars among so-called prehistoric, traditional, popular, or primitive religions as opposed to historical or revealed religions, in which a historical figure founds the religion at a particular time. Jean Bottéro, Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001) 5. Many versions of creation, for example, coexisted in Mesopotamia and no 'holy book' or doctrine was imposed as the only authentic and credible one.

thousands of gods and goddesses.[253] Among the highest-ranking were: An or Anu, the god of heaven, Enlil, the ruler of the gods and of the earth, Inanna or Ishtar, the goddess of war and carnal love, and Enki or Ea, the god of technology, water, magic, and the arts. In addition, individuals had a "personal god" and a "personal goddess" who assisted them (2001:91). Because there was goddess worship, a highly organized female priesthood existed and exerted significant religious and economic influence (chapter 4 and Appendix C). In fact, to the Mesopotamians, the absence of priestesses in a given religion was a sign of backwardness or 'primitivism' (2001:121).

The gods, like the people they governed, were not all created equal. Two classes of gods existed: the Anunnaki and the Igigi. The first were the most eminent; the Igigi worked for them: "In Mesopotamia the idea of a world without work and without effort seems unthinkable even for the gods" (Bonnefoy 1991:145). Hard labor, imagination, and technical ingenuity were necessary for survival in a harsh environment. Accordingly, the gods and goddesses of the Mesopotamians were conceived as working deities with many tasks and responsibilities. For instance, the god Enki/Ea was a technical genius as well as the god of magical knowledge and the god of *form*: "(he) who creates/shapes appearance, who fashions all things" (Winter 1995:2570). Each divine character "had its place and its role, as original and irreplaceable as bones in a skeleton" (Bonnefoy 1991:145). Accordingly, the society of Mesopotamian gods and goddesses has been said to resemble "a huge agricultural project, the master of which is the god Anu, the great absentee landlord, who lives in heaven and leaves the controls to his steward, the god Enlil. One

[253] The most complete count of Mesopotamian, mainly Sumerian, deities done by Babylonian scholars in the second millennium BCE comprises almost two thousand names. Bottéro, Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia, 45.

group of the gods, who have been reduced to the role of unskilled laborers, is then charged with the responsibility of developing the estate by digging canals and raising dikes" (1991: 145).[254]

This situation was not to last long in Mesopotamian heaven. According to the great poem *Atrahasis* from circa 1640, the lesser gods went on strike refusing to continue to serve the higher gods (Pritchard 1955:104-6). To solve the political impasse, humanity was created to labor and provide for all deities. The issue of who created humanity is answered differently in different myths. The *Atrahasis* credits the god of technology, Enki; he created humankind to solve a 'technical' problem, that of the revolt of the lesser gods (Bonnefoy 1991:148). Yet, Enki did not accomplish this task alone. The 'Lady of the Gods,' Mami, also known as Nammu or Bēlet-ilī, had advised him to find a replacement for the Igigi because she knew of their dissent and Enki cast a mold of a new being out of clay. He then engaged the help of "Ninmah and seven other goddesses, so that man can emerge from it" (1991:148-49).[255]

Because human beings were created to assist deities, the religious cult revolved around the service to the gods and goddesses, their "maintenance." The Mesopotamians endeavored to supply all the goods and honors the deities required, such as 'room and board' plus innumerable elaborate private and public celebrations in the hope that, in

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[254] Historian Thorkild Jacobsen explains it as follows: "the vast expanses of temple fields and orchards were unspoken testimony that [the deity's] ties were the strong ties of a landowner to his land." Robertson in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 444.

[255] "In the myth of Atrahasīs, the origin of man has as its starting point the intimate association of the male element, or water god, with the female element, or womb goddess, each of these elements unable or unwilling to be entirely responsible…The creation of man unfolds through a whole series of actions alternately performed by the god Ea and the goddess Bēlet-ilī, as though a kind of dialogue were developing between the two gods, a dialogue in which the alternation of their gestures permitted them to define their respective fields of action." Yves Bonnefoy, Mythologies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 175. More: "It is the goddess that is here called Nintu, the "lady of childbirth," who mixes and kneads the clay dough. This suggests that it is the female element – the womb, the "container" – that, using substances acquired from outside, creates the matter from which the living being emerges." Ibid.

return, the deities would decide to curb human suffering. As time went on, increasingly spectacular temples were created to "house" specific gods and goddesses, to take care of them, and to allow them to live a luxurious and peaceful existence (Fig. 2). The city temples were often raised above the ground and built at a distance from daily commotion. Some were surrounded by massive walls and formed a "city of the gods" within the city; they contained a number of buildings of all sizes and configurations in which varied economic and ritual activities were conducted. Temples had specific names and were located in every city, town, and village.

The most holy space in the temple was the *cella*; there lived the patron deity, sometimes hidden behind a curtain, in the form of its sacred statue. This statue ensured the deity's "real presence" because it was believed that representation had the power to manifest the real (chapter 3). Temples themselves were considered sacred and hymns were dedicated to their structures. One of the oldest great sanctuaries - that of the goddess Inanna at Uruk - had this hymn addressed to it:

> "Well grown fresh fruit, marvelous, filled with ripeness, descending from the midst of heaven, shrine, built for (?) the steer. Eanna, house with seven corners, lifting the "seven fires" at night, surveying the seven…The great queen of heaven and earth, Inanna, has, O Eanna, placed the house upon your…, has taken her place on your dais." (Bottéro 2001:117).

Despite colossal efforts to care for and please the deities, they sometimes cared little for what happened to human beings. Enlil, for example, "was prepared to destroy them even for minor offenses such as disturbing his sleep" (Wiggermann 1995:1861). Gods and goddesses were easily irritated and could abandon their cities with disastrous consequences for humanity: "all the more reason…to attend dutifully to the deity's needs" (Robertson 1995:444). The generic term priest or priestess has not been identified

in either Sumerian or Akkadian but it is commonly used to designate the people who attended to the basic and daily needs of deities, which included washing, feeding, dressing, and entertaining (1995).

The numinous presence was believed to be a "fundamental prerequisite for success in all human endeavors" (1995). Consequently, temples and their officiates played crucial social roles, especially during the earlier periods considered in this dissertation. Mesopotamian temples always were "economic plums" desired by the rulers for they were important in the "storage and distribution of goods," for example (Snell 1997:18). Religious institutions were thus instrumental in the organization of ancient Mesopotamian economy.

Economy

Southern Mesopotamia was rich in agricultural products, especially grain.[256] Its soil was devoted to large-scale agriculture and the raising of sheep. Barley, dates, and textiles were important items of export.[257] On the other hand, Mesopotamia was completely dependent on trade[258] and conquest for building materials. The military

[256] This fact elucidates the use of barley as "money" in the early periods. The transition to a money economy was gradual: the use of grain was later replaced by the use of precious metals. There was no coinage per se during the time period considered in this dissertation for coinage made its first appearance in Lydia (western Turkey) circa 625. Snell, Everyday Life, 106. However, silver, was used as money in the Old Babylonian period, circa 2004-1595. Therefore, ancient Mesopotamia was a multimoney system.

[257] The ancient Near East was "an environment favorable to the cultivation of natural textile fibers such as flax (for linen) and wool." Carol Bier, "Textile Arts in Ancient Western Asia," in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 3:1567. The domestication of sheep and the preparation of flax supported the significant role of textiles in the region: "Throughout the ancient Near East, textiles sustained economies; they served as the basis for economic development; they provided a means of accomplishing economic reform." Ibid., 1586. The production of textiles was "highly organized for commercial purposes and often controlled by palace or temple enterprise. Other textile production was conducted at home in the domestic environment." Ibid., 1580.

[258] Where trade took place is a matter of debate; scholars have not agreed on the issue of the existence of a marketplace in ancient Mesopotamia. In the southern city of Ur harbors were attached to the intramural watercourses and "cuneiform sources suggest that trading activities were carried out in the vicinity of such

expeditions launched to acquire wood, stone, and other raw materials needed for the construction of cities, temples, and palaces are immortalized in epic poems like the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Sandars 1972). Mesopotamia imported timber, cedar, cypress, spruce, fir, and juniper, for example; the only tree that grew in the land of Sumer was the date palm tree (Aruz 2003:443). It also required spices, resins, stone, and metals; such as gold, silver, and copper. The most sought after precious stones were lapis lazuli and carnelian used in art objects and the making of jewelry.

Consequently, in agrarian Mesopotamia wealth laid principally "in the accumulation of a massive surplus of grain that could be used to support various social and economic enterprises" (Robertson 1995:445). Not surprisingly, the possession of land and the control of irrigation canals, both essential to agricultural prosperity, were coveted by all. According to administrative records dating from circa 2500, thousands of acres of land at this time "were already associated with the temples" (1995). This allowed temples to cultivate, store, and control vast quantities of grain and exert significant influence in the society. Notwithstanding the temple's role as great landholder, it appears that "there was private ownership of land in all periods and places" (Snell 1997:125).

At present, there exist several theories of how the ancients organized economic activity. Marxist scholars tend to see the ancient world in general as a slave society; that is, "one in which the labor force of slaves constituted the most important single factor in the production of goods and services" (1997:145). However, some scholars of ancient economies argue that although this is true of Greece and Rome, it is not true of other regions, like Mesopotamia and Egypt, where "forced labor" not slave labor played the

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harbors." Elizabeth Stone, "The Development of Cities in Ancient Mesopotamia," in Sasson, Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, 1:239.

most significant role (1997:146). In response, Marxists claim that a society based on forced labor is basically the same as a slave society even though laborers could not be bought and sold (1997). Emmanuel Wallerstein, a Marxist economist, has proposed a different approach. He recognizes a system based on a "center" and a "periphery," in which resources are extracted from the periphery for the use of the center. This is an attractive model because certain Near Eastern systems can be seen as analogous (1997:147). The early Mesopotamian cities, for example, were centers of political, religious, and economic power that depended on the surrounding countryside and on the yields of foreign expeditions for their creation and maintenance.

Another once very popular theory posited the notion of the "temple-state." That is, the temple as "the most important source of economic organizing power" (1997:148) Based on texts from the temple of the Goddess Bau in southern Mesopotamia, Anna Schneider argued that "almost all of the economic activity in this period in [the city of] Lagas was in the hands of temple authorities" (1997). The idea that all, or almost all, the land and labor of early Sumerian cities was controlled by a temple-state started to be challenged in the late 1950s particularly by two scholars I.J.Gelb and I.M. Diakonoff who demonstrated, respectively, that some land was privately owned during the Early Dynastic Period (3000-2334) and that a significant portion of the population of one important city (Girsu) was not employed by or directly affiliated with the temples in late third millennium Mesopotamia (Robertson 1995:450-51). More recent examinations of the sources show that "the economy of Lagash was in fact controlled by the king through the intermediary of large domains connected with the temples of the city's prominent deities" (Charpin 1995:809).

All the same, Schneider's theory is relevant to this study because for at least the first half millennium of Mesopotamian history religious authorities regulated many, though not all, aspects of society and economy "that were beyond the reach of broader citizen's councils" (Stone 1995:236). For instance, it was largely via the religious institutions or under religious pretext that Mesopotamia obtained the metals, stone, and wood it needed for building temples, palaces, and cities (Hudson 2002:18).[259] Likewise, temples appear to have been the "initial promoters and beneficiaries" (2002:12) of the practice of charging interest to merchants, entrepreneurs, or sharecroppers for goods and assets advanced to them.[260] In time, temples and palaces played the most important roles as creditors in ancient Mesopotamia. As we shall see, Mesopotamian priestesses acted as creditors on numerous occasions. What is more, a sort of temple-dominated state may in fact have existed during the Early Dynastic III period, from circa 2500 to 2334, just before imperial expansion began (Snell 1997:149). That is, the temple was an important center of economic, political, and spiritual power during an extended portion of the time period considered in this research.

Other models propose that the ancient Mesopotamian economy was organized around the royal center, the palace (1997:148); or under two modes of production, the palace and the family (1997:153); under the principle of "reciprocal trading" (1997:149); around "centralizing and feudalizing" cycles (1997:153); or, around interregional trade which, according to Morris Silver, was the element that changed the economy (1997:

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[259] The *Epic of Gilgamesh* tells the story of a king who journeys to "the country where the cedar is felled" to obtain wood to build a palace for himself and a temple in honor of the goddess Ishtar. N. K. Sandars, trans., The Epic of Gilgamesh (New York: Penguin Books, 1972) 70-84.

[260] Hudson explains that the policy of 'clean slates' by which agrarian debts were forgiven by rulers on a cyclical basis prevented creditors from "seizing assets needed as basic means of self-support" and promoted economic balance. Hudson, Debt and Economic Renewal, 31.

154). Max Weber, on the other hand, opposed general schemes like some of the ones described above. To him: "the aim should, rather, be the opposite: to identify and define the individuality of each development, the characteristics which made the one conclude in a manner so different from each other" (1997:148) His main contribution to the theory of ancient economies has been, according to Snell, the observation that household organization was crucial (1997).

Snell's own basic model posits two institutions, the household and the market, in opposition to each other as the main organizing elements of Mesopotamian and other Near Eastern economies. By household he understands a social unit with no monetary relations between its members, and by market, a system of information about what is available for purchasing at what price (1997:155). In this manner, Snell obviates the debate about whether a "marketplace" existed in Mesopotamia. To him, in the ancient Near East governments were households ruled by rich lords and markets depended on their productivity:

> "Economies are best understood as collections of individual households in which members are sustained socially and economically with little regard to their abilities to produce. The ways the households interact are markets, networks of knowledge…Both the household and the market have existed as back as we can see, but the household was more stable, and the ways in which the households interacted changed constantly" (1997:158)

Despite ongoing debate over how much land temple households owned or how many people they employed, scholars recognize that the Mesopotamian temples were pivotal self-financing institutions that developed in close association with urban settlements: "the temples…were powerful factors in the society and economy of ancient Mesopotamian urban communities. The resources that they controlled and created, and

the lives and livelihoods that they sustained, were crucial to the prosperity and stability – indeed, the survival – of those communities" (Robertson 1995:443; Hudson 2002:7-53). Thus the economic importance of early Sumerian temples is beyond doubt: "the earliest temples seem to have functioned as large households in which communal storage of grain, the production of commodities, and exchange were centralized" (Robertson 1995:448). In the early city of Uruk, the Eanna complex which dates from around 3300, and includes a temple in honor of the Sumerian goddess Inanna, is proof of a "truly complex administrative organization" and of the "enormous resources in labor and food that could be marshaled by this period" (1995: 449) in cooperation or association with a temple, or under the guidance or management of temple authorities.

Historical Overview

The following outline summarizes major events in Mesopotamian culture and its environs to serve as quick reference for the reader. Based on archeology,[261] two chronological schemes are currently used by scholars; however, dates vary from author to author and change as archeologists revise their findings or announce new discoveries. Therefore, all dates are of necessity approximate. The basic chronology used here combines the system that emphasizes human technological achievements in the mastery of materials such as gold, silver, bronze, or iron with the system that refers to developments in history and government. Since the technology of iron smelting was not brought into Mesopotamia until around 1500, most of this study is circumscribed to the Bronze Age. Early Bronze corresponds roughly to the third millennium and Middle Bronze corresponds to the period from 2000 to 1500. In sociological terms this means

[261] Archeologists consider pottery one of the most useful arts for dating sites because pottery styles change slowly overtime. Snell, Everyday Life, 13. In Mesopotamia, pottery was in existence as early as the sixth millennium BCE, the Ubaid Period ca. 5000-3500. Ibid.

that the societies here chosen for study are all examples of the *early* or *simple* agrarian type, for the *mature* agrarian type is marked by the dominance of iron metallurgy.

All dates presented in this study refer to the period before the Christian era unless otherwise indicated. It is important to keep in mind that this dissertation only deals with Mesopotamian history from about 3000 to 1200. The cut off date represents a major break in this culture's tradition as a radical revision of its creation myths was undertaken by the Kassites (chapter 5). In approaching Mesopotamian history, one must keep in mind that the older elements of culture survived throughout it and may have been reinterpreted time and again for we find "religious documents, myths, epics, laments, which have been handed down almost unchanged in copy after copy for as much as a thousand or fifteen hundred years, and it is often difficult to say with certainty whether a document originated in the period from which it seems to come, or whether it was in fact from earlier times" (Jacobsen 1976:19-20). This enduring quality of Mesopotamian culture is evident in the religious realm in which, for example, "early" emblematic representations of deities survived side by side with "later" anthropomorphic images. As we shall see in the first chapter, the *magico-religious* system of ancient Mesopotamia blended old beliefs and practices with new ones for nearly three millennia.

Prehistoric Era

Sixth millennium	Mesopotamia emerges as a great plain between the
6000 – 5000	rivers Tigris and Euphrates. Populated by, perhaps, several ethnic groups coming from north and east.
	5000 – 3500: Ubaid period

Fourth millennium	Sumerian presence becomes established.
4000 -3000	An urban society arises through the unification of more or less autonomous villages.
	3500 - 3100: Uruk period
	• The city of Uruk comes into prominence
	• Writing is invented around 3200.
	3100 – 3000: Jemdet-Nasr period

Historical Era

Bronze Age

Third millennium	3000 – 2800 : Early Dynastic I period
3000 – 2000	2800 – 2500 : Early Dynastic II period
	2500 – 2334 : Early Dynastic III period
	• Time of independent city-states.
	• Population density may vary from 10 to 50 thousand in any given city.
	• First Dynasties of Ur and Lagash
	2334 – 2197 : Old Akkadian period
	• King Sargon of Akkad builds the first empire.
	2197 – 2112 : The Guti period
	• Nomads invade and the empire falls.
	2112 – 2004: Ur III – 'Neo-Sumerian' period
	• Dynasties of Isin, Larsa, Eshnun, Mari.

- Texts on the ‘sacred marriage’
- Evidence for the existence of Kubatum, *lukur* of king Shu-Sin.
- Another goddess of sexuality, Nanâ, appears in Sumerian texts.
- King Shulgi institutes a permanent military force in Mesopotamia and centralizes the economy.
- Shulgi reorganizes temple management; standardizes accounting procedures; creates a uniform calendar; and builds a road system.
- Old Assyrian period: first rulers of Assyria emerge.

Second millennium 2004 - 1595: Old Babylonian period

2000 – 1000

- Arrival of the Amorites from Syria.
- First Dynasty of Babylon.
- Reign of King Hammurabi: 1792 – 1750; he reunites Sumer and Akkad in a kingdom centered on Babylon.
- Hammurabi promulgates his amendments to the law of the land circa 1752.

- End of ancient Sumer.
- Hammurabi elevates the unknown god Marduk in the pantheon.

Iron Age 1595 - 1155 : Middle Babylonian period.

- Dark Age.
- Invasion and control by the Hittites and the Kassites.
- Introduction of the horse chariot, ca. 1500.
- Middle Assyrian period, circa 1300.
- Revision of The Creation Poem, circa 1200.
- Supremacy of the god Marduk in the pantheon.
- Moses founds Judaism around 1250.

1155 – 626 : Neo- Assyrian period

- Arrival of the Arameans who bring the alphabet.
- Second Dynasty of Isin, circa 1100.
- Battle for hegemony between Assyria and Babylonia.
- Assyrian dominance in Mesopotamia.

First millennium 625 – 539 : Neo-Babylonian period

1000 – Christian Era

- Babylon takes control of Assyria in 609.
- Aramaization continues.
- Chaldean Dynasty.
- Coinage makes its first appearance in Lydia (western Turkey) around 625.

539 – 332 : Persian period

- Babylon falls to the Persian king Cyrus and is incorporated into the Persian empire.
- Aramaic begins to replace Akkadian as the spoken language.
- The Greek historian Herodotus travels to Mesopotamia sometime between 454 and 444.
- Siddhartha Gautama founds Buddhism in India around 500.

330 - 143: Seleucid period.

- Alexander The Great conquers the entire region in 330 and brings it into the Hellenistic cultural orbit.
- Greek is superimposed over popular Aramaic.

- Sumerian and Akkadian become the province of a select group of old scholars.

143 – 240 C.E.: Arsacid period.

- Babylon falls to the Parthians in 127.
- Mesopotamia loses all autonomy and passes into the hands of the Parthians.
- 74 A.D. marks the date of the most recent cuneiform document; an astronomical almanac.

Christian Era 240 C.E.– 636 C.E. : Sassanians

637 C.E. – Present : Arabs

Appendix B: Magic and Religion in the Social Sciences

This section is a review of the most prominent views of magic in its relation to religion that emerge from classical Western scholarship. These perspectives interpret magic in five major ways: as a precursor of religion (Tylor, Frazer, Weber, Freud), as a derivative of religion (Durkheim), as sharing a common origin with religion (Mauss), as separate but akin to religion (Malinowski), and as a form of pre-science.[262] As we shall see, some of these views have antecedents in Greek philosophical statements and some persist in contemporary scholarship.

In the beginning…there was "magic"

Max Weber (1864-1920) posited magic as a first stage in the development of religion and associated it with tribal communities, the *ecstasy* and *charisma* of magicians or sorcerers, and the belief in spirits. This is the belief that certain beings are concealed "behind" and responsible for the activity of a charismatically endowed natural phenomenon, art object, animal, or person: "At the outset, "spirit" is neither soul, demon, nor god, but something indeterminate, material yet invisible, non-personal and yet somehow endowed with volition. By entering into a concrete object, spirit endows the latter with its distinctive power. The spirit may depart from its host or vessel, leaving the latter inoperative and causing the magician's charisma to fail" (Weber 1922:3). "Spirits or souls may "dwell" more or less continuously near or within a concrete object or process, or they may "possess" types of events, things, or categories, the behavior and

[262] Magic as pre-science is discussed by E. B. Tylor, James Frazer, Alfred Lyall, F. B. Jevons, Andrew Lang, H. Oldenberg, Marcel Mauss, Sabino Acquaviva, and Bronislaw Malinowski among others, yet this topic is beyond the scope of this study. Sabino Acquaviva (1927-), one of the first scholars to write about the crisis of the sacred, viewed magic as follows: "The need to manipulate things, to dominate them, leads to the development of magic, which through time and secularization, transforms itself progressively in science." Cipriani, Sociology of Religion, 168.

efficacy of which they will decisively determine" (1922:4). These and similar views are animistic and have been equated with magic.

Weber explained that the most elementary forms of religion are oriented to *this* world: health, prosperity, and long life. Moreover, he specified that magically motivated behavior is relatively rational behavior in that it follows rules of experience (1922:1). We moderns "objectively distinguish between those attributions of causality which are 'correct' from those which are 'fallacious' and then designate the latter as irrational and the corresponding acts as 'magic.'…[However,] the person performing the magical act…will instead distinguish between the greater or lesser ordinariness of the phenomena in question" (1922:2). In addition, Weber made clear that "not every stone can serve as a fetish, a source of magical power," nor does every person have the capacity to achieve particular ecstatic states; these ecstatic states are those "which are viewed, in accordance with primitive experience, as the preconditions for producing certain effects in meteorology, healing, divination and telepathy" (1922). He employed the term, charisma, to refer to such extraordinary powers which are produced in or by ecstatic states.[263]

Thus religious behavior originally involved the use of charisma (magical powers) to attain this-worldly physical or material values or ends. Weber identified this approach to producing certain effects in nature by employing magical powers as a pre-animistic or naturalistic orientation. He illustrated its continuing existence in folk religion by describing the practice of the south European peasant "spitting in front of the statue of a saint when he holds it responsible for withholding a favor even though the customary procedures were performed" (1922).

[263] He added: "It is primarily, though not exclusively, these extraordinary powers that have been designated by such special terms as "mana," "orenda," and the Iranian "maga" (the term from which our word "magic" is derived)." Weber, The Sociology of Religion, 2.

The extraordinary powers for which Weber uses the term, charisma, and the related phenomenon of ecstasy constitute the two most important elements in what he sometimes called "magical religion" (1922:224) and "magical orgiasticism" (1922:343). The magician differs from the ordinary "layman" in that "he" is "permanently endowed with charisma" (1922:3). The magician specializes in the cultivation of ecstasy, which represents or mediates charisma.

> "For the layman, this psychological state is accessible only in occasional actions. Unlike the merely rational practice of wizardry, ecstasy occurs in a social form, the orgy, which is the primordial form of communal religious association. But the orgy is an occasional activity…Because of the routine demands of living, the layman can experience ecstasy only occasionally, as intoxication. To induce ecstasy, the layman may employ any type of alcoholic beverage, tobacco, or similar narcotics –and especially music- of which originally served orgiastic purposes" (1922).

The manner in which ecstasy was employed constituted an important concern of the magician's art, which developed almost everywhere into a *secret* lore**.** The major concern of the magician's art was the rational manipulation of spirits in accordance with economic interests. On the other hand, the realm of religion developed with the rise of the idea of the "soul" and ideas of "gods," "demons," and "supernatural" powers and their relation to men. "Based on the experience with the conditions of orgies, there evolved the concept of "soul" as a separate entity present in, behind or near natural objects, even as the human body contains something that leaves it in dream,…ecstasy, or death" (1922).

> "What is primarily distinctive in this whole development…is the fact that new experiences now play a role in life. Before, only the things or events that actually exist or take place played a role in life; now certain experiences, of a different order in that they only signify something, also play a role in life. Magic is transformed from a direct manipulation of forces into a symbolic activity…Since it is assumed that behind real things and events there is something else, distinctive and spiritual, of which real events are only the symptoms or indeed the symbols, an effort must be made to influence, not

> the concrete things, but the spiritual powers that express themselves through concrete things. This is done through…instrumentalities that "mean" something, i.e., symbols" (1922: 6-7).

Therefore, to Weber the change from direct manipulation or coercion of natural forces into a symbolic action determined a shift and a step forward in the development of religion. This was a progression that included an intermediate stage, the belief in gods, in which prayer and sacrifice replaced coercion[264] while doctrine, cult, and priests displaced ecstasy and magical charisma; before reaching a third stage characterized by the belief in one transcendental god, the rise of the prophet, the congregation, the parish, written scriptures, preaching, and pastoral care.

Weber's views on magic and religion might have been influenced by the writings of Hegel[265] and of two contemporary anthropologists: Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) and Sir James George Frazer (1854-1941). In *Primitive Culture* (1871), the founding father of cultural anthropology had maintained, long before Weber wrote on the subject, that animism was a belief in spirits and was the primary form of religion. To Tylor, animism was "the doctrine of souls and other spiritual beings" (Tylor 1958:23), and it characterized "tribes very low in the scale of humanity, and thence ascends, deeply modified in its transmission, but from first to last preserving an unbroken continuity, into the midst of high modern culture…Animism is…the groundwork of the Philosophy of Religion, from that of savages up to that of civilized men" (1958:10).

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[264] "The relationships of men to supernatural forces which take the form of prayer, sacrifice and worship may be termed 'cult' and 'religion,' as distinguished from sorcery, which is magical coercion." Weber, The Sociology of Religion, 28. Prayer and sacrifice "have their origin in magic." Ibid., 26.

[265] To Hegel, religion developed in three stages: 'immanent' or 'magical' religion, 'transcendent' religion, and a 'synthesis' that was both immanent and transcendent and represented by Christianity. Cunningham, Religion and Magic, 5.

Like Tylor, Weber saw in "the belief in spirits" an early stage in the development of religion and associated it with the "magic" practiced in tribal societies. However, Tylor's scheme was evolutionist like Hegel's before him, while Weber's was developmental. Moreover, Tylor's opinion of magic tended to be more unsympathetic: magic "belongs in its main principle to the lowest stages of civilization, and the lower races, who have not partaken largely of the education of the world, still maintain it in vigour" (1958:112).[266] He called magic a "spiteful craft" (1958:116), a "whole monstrous farrago" which has practically "no truth or value whatever" (1958:133), and the magician an "un unscrupulous intriguer" (1958:134) who learns "his time-honoured profession in good faith" but "combines the energy of a believer with the cunning of a hypocrite" (1958).

On the other hand, Tylor acknowledged a kinship between magic and science: "occult science…is an elaborate and systematic pseudo-science" (1958). Tylor's ideas were in tune with the empiricist philosophy (Locke and Hume) and the evolutionary (Darwin) theorizing of his time. His attempt to investigate the "laws of human nature" as a "branch of natural science" was novel and risky.[267] It aimed at pressing forward the study of human life by suggesting that human nature had definite principles that could be learned and mastered (1958:3). But the definite sense sequence of cause and effect that

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[266] He also cites numerous examples of magical belief among the contemporary European peasantry. In Germany, for instance, "Protestants get the aid of Catholic priests and monks to help them against witchcraft, to lay ghosts, consecrate herbs, and discover thieves." Edward Burnet Tylor, The Origins of Culture (New York: Harper and Row, 1958) 115.

[267] "The world at large is scarcely prepared to accept the general study of human life as a branch of natural science…To many…there seems something presumptuous and repulsive in the view that…our thoughts, wills, and actions accord to laws as definite as those which govern the motion of waves, the combination of acids and bases, and the growth of plants and animals." Tylor, The Origins of Culture, 2. In addition, Tylor refuted the myth, popular among his peers, that there were primitive peoples with no religion. Malinowski, Magic, Science, and Religion, 24.

the empiricists propounded as the basis of all knowledge automatically excluded magic, for the latter has been precisely believed to be founded on a lack of empirical connection between thought or action and effect as the following definition in *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences* illustrates:

> "Believing in the control over objects or events by verbal or nonverbal gestures (words or actions) where there is no empirical…connection between the gesture as cause and the object or event as effect" (Leech 1964:397).

Tylor therefore upheld the notion of "sympathetic magic" which was discussed by Herbert Spencer before him[268] and popularized by James G. Frazer later on: "a distant person is to be affected by acting on something closely associated with him," like the person's hair, clothes, or nails (Tylor 1958:116). And, therefore, according to the empiricist, magicians err because they "conclude that association in thought must involve similar connexion in reality," and thus they attempt to "discover, to foretell, and to cause events by means of processes which we can now see to have only an ideal significance…[Hence] magical arts [result from] mistaking an ideal for a real connexion" (1958).

James George Frazer, the infamous[269] author of *The Golden Bough* (1890), also set forth that magic – which he also called a pseudoscience - was the first stage in what to him were three grand moments in the evolution of the human mind: Magic, Religion, and Science. "From the earliest times man has been engaged in a search for general rules whereby to turn the order of natural phenomena to his own advantage" (Frazer 1958:53).

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[268] In *A System of Synthetic Philosophy* (1862-96), Spencer described magic as a trait of oral societies in which "the particular virtue possessed by an aggregate is supposed not only to inhere in all parts of it, but to extend to whatever is associated with it." Cunningham, Religion and Magic, 16-7.

[269] Frazer has been chastised for being ahistorical, methodologically naïve, and for influencing "negatively the developments of the historical-religious disciplines and [contributing] to a misleading image of religious life outside these disciplines." Cipriani, Sociology of Religion, 47.

Magic has been one of three systems used for this purpose; religion and science are the other two. In Frazer's design, religion developed along with human intellectual capacity: it was "probable that magic arose *before* religion in the evolution of our race" (1958:58. Italics are not in original) because it corresponds to a "primitive" intellectual phase in which people attempt to "force the great powers of nature to do their pleasure" (1958:59). On the other hand, religion reflects a more evolved mind-set in which people acknowledge powers superior to them and think of "courting them by offerings and prayer" (1958).

Thus "coercion" of natural forces is inherent to magic while prayer (supplication) and sacrifice are hallmarks of religion.[270] This view implied an opposition between religion and magic which has had a tremendous influence on modern theorizing (see Weber above).[271] It relates to Frazer's contention that magic is based on arrogance while religion is based on humility. The magician "constraints or coerces instead of conciliating or propitiating [the spirits] as religion would do" (1958:55) because magicians believe their powers to be as great or greater than those of nature, spirits, and gods. This haughtiness and self-sufficiency "revolts" the priest who has often pursued the magician. Granted, the struggle between priests and magicians has had other motives as Frazer himself acknowledges: the "interests" of the priest "as well as his feelings were often injured by a rival practitioner" (1958:56).

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[270] Religion is "a belief in powers higher than man and an attempt to propitiate or please them." Frazer, The Golden Bough, 54.

[271] "It is in this distinction between direct control on the one hand and propitiation of superior powers on the other that Sir James Frazer sees the difference between religion and magic…This theory of magic and religion has been the starting point of most modern studies of the twin subjects." Malinowski, Magic, Science, and Religion, 19.

Although he proclaimed that "all magic is necessarily false and barren" (1958:53), and that its entire basis is "a mistaken association of ideas" (1958:40),[272] Frazer recognized, like Weber did, that magic seeks above all to control the course of nature for practical and economic ends which are often beneficial, such as procuring offspring for barren women, healing and preventing sickness, or aiding the community secure an adequate supply of food (1958:16-19 and 66). Thus magic can be constructive or injurious, as well as private or public: "in savage society there is commonly to be found in addition [to private magic] what we may call public magic, that is, sorcery practiced for the benefit of the whole community. Wherever ceremonies of this sort are observed…the magician ceases to be merely a private practitioner and becomes to some extent a public functionary" (1958:49). Moreover, Frazer, like Weber after him, noted that magic tended to "fuse and amalgamate with religion in many ages and in many lands" (1958:58). Hence "sympathetic magic"[273] lived on "among the ignorant and superstitious classes of modern Europe" (1958:59).

One prominent contemporary of Frazer, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), stayed very close to Frazer's scheme in *Totem and Taboo* (1913) when he conjectured that humanity had developed "three great pictures of the universe": Animism, Religion, and Science. He claimed that "animism itself is not yet a religion but contains the foundations on which religions are later built" (Freud 1950:97), and related magic to this supposed pre-religious

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[272] To Frazer, magic was based on two elementary and mistaken principles of thought: first, that "like produces like," which he called Homeopathic Magic; second, that once things have come into contact they "continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed." He called this second type Contagious Magic. Frazer, The Golden Bough, 13. Hence imitation of an event, such as rain, in order to reproduce it and acting over an object to affect those who have been in contact with it comprise the modus operandi of the magician, according to Frazer.

[273] Frazer used this term to contain the two branches of magic he thought existed, homeopathic and contagious, "since both assume that things act on each other at a distance through a secret sympathy." Frazer, The Golden Bough, 14.

stage: "hand in hand with the animistic system, there went a body of instructions upon how to obtain mastery over men, beasts and things – or rather, over their spirits. These instructions go by the names of 'sorcery' and 'magic'. Reinach…describes them as 'the strategy of animism'; I should prefer, following Hubert and Mauss…to regard them as its technique…magic is the earlier and more important branch of animistic technique" (1950:98). Like Frazer, Freud believed that magic was about men ascribing "omnipotence" to themselves and that religion appeared when power was transferred to the gods (Cipriani 2000:98). But religion, like magic, was essentially an "illusion" in Freud's view; a device to avoid neurosis (2000:99). It arose from "the necessity of defending oneself against the crushingly superior force of nature" (2000:100). On the other hand, unlike magic and religion, science was no illusion:

> "The scientific view of the universe no longer affords any room to human omnipotence, men have acknowledged their smallness and submitted resignedly to death and to the other necessities of nature" (2000:98).

Accordingly, Freud, just like Frazer before him, expected science to replace the religious and magical picture of the universe in the future when a more rational critical consciousness developed (2000:100).

Religion as the Fountain of Human Knowledge

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), on the other hand, decided to swim against the intellectual current of the time when he inverted the origins of magic and religion. To him, magic "was born out of religion" (Durkheim 1995:367) for religious thought is the fountain of all human knowledge. Our "categories of understanding" – the notions of time, space, number, cause, substance, personality – "are born in and from religion; they are a product of religious thought" (1995:8-9). They are "essentially collective

representations…They depend upon the way the collectivity is organized, upon its morphology, its religious, moral, and economic institutions, and so on" (1995:15). More: "No idea exists…that is not, in all probability, the product of religious, hence collective, representations" (1995:11-12) In this paradigm, magic is hence a product of religion and a form of collective representation.

Unlike Tylor, Frazer, or even Weber, Durkheim was not directly concerned with the origins of religion: "There is no radical instant when religion began to exist…Like every other human institution, religion begins nowhere" (1995:7). What he wanted was "to find a means of discerning the ever-present causes on which the most basic forms of religious thought and practice depend" (1995). In that quest he broadened the existing definition of religion to include what others had dismissed as "magic." Herbert Spencer, for instance, had written off totemism as magic and hence as a primitive custom disconnected from the real (1995:xx). To Durkheim, on the other hand, totemism was based on real experience and constituted the most primitive form of religion (Malinowski 1954:22).

Thus Durkheim's work brought to a close Tylor's theory that animism was the most primitive form of religion and that it was common to all peoples. According to the animists, "dreams were the starting point of religious evolution" (Durkheim 1995:84). If one followed their thesis to its conclusion, Durkheim claimed, "religion would be only a dream" (1995:65-6) for "the underlying assumption of animism is that religion, at least at its origin, does not express any experiential reality" (1995:70). What is more, animists assumed that the "first sacred beings" were the souls of the dead and the first cult that of the ancestors but, Durkheim argued, "the ancestral cult developed and appears in its

characteristic form only in advanced societies…it is lacking in the Australian societies, which represent…the lowest and simplest form of social organization we know" (1995:59). Therefore, animism was not to be found in all cultures. Moreover, "if the soul is only the double of the body, it is unclear how it could survive at all once the body has finally disintegrated" (1995:58) Thus, in his opinion, "many reasons stand in the way of [the primitive] taking dreams for realities too easily and interpreting them by a doubling of his own being" (1995:54).[274]

Though opposed to animistic origins for religion, Durkheim like his predecessors endeavored to distinguish magic from religion because his declared intention was to study religion "and stop where magic begins" (1995:41). In that effort, he ascribed to religion the realm of the sacred: "the distinctive trait of religious thought" is "the division of the world into two domains, one containing all that is sacred and the other all that is profane" (1995:34). Therefore, a recognition and acceptance of the sacred was what defined religion: "The notion of the sacred is always and everywhere separate from the notion of the profane in man's mind… we imagine a kind of logical void between them" (1995:37). And, although magic was "full of religion and religion full of magic…magic takes a kind of professional pleasure in profaning holy things; inverting religious ceremonies in its rites" (1995:40). As magic relished in profanity, it subverted the sacred and this factor set it apart from religion in Durkheim's view.

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[274] In his refutation, Durkheim also pointed out that other, simpler, ideas beside "the double" or "soul," could have been derived from dreaming; that death by itself does not deify and hence Tylor fails to explain how the soul becomes sacred after death; that to the "primitive" the soul is "partly merged with the body" not distinct from it as Tylor assumed; and that animism implies that the souls of men were the model on which the gods were imagined but it could be that they were "from the beginning conceived as emanations of the deity." Durkheim, Elementary Forms, 53-61. "If man really had been driven to project his image into things, the first sacred beings would have been conceived of in his image…[But,] anthropomorphism is the mark of a relatively advanced civilization. At the beginning, sacred beings are conceived of in the form of animals and plants, from which human form has slowly emerged." Ibid., 64.

Another difference between magic and religion was, according to Durkheim, that "there is no church of magic" (1995:42). With this distinction he implied that the social footing of magic was weaker than that of religion. Magic beliefs,

> "are often widespread among broad strata of the population…But they do not bind men who believe in them to one another and unite them into the same group, living the same life…Between the magician and the individuals who consult him, there are no durable ties that make them members of a single moral body, comparable to the ties that join the faithful of the same god or adherents of the same cult. The magician has a clientele, not a Church…[And, relations between magicians and their clients are] generally accidental and transient, analogous to those of a sick man with his doctor" (1995).

In short, magic had no "moral community," no laity and no priests. The lone magician worked in isolation (1995:366. Weber expresses similar ideas[275]). By contrast, "religion is inseparable from the idea of Church" (1995:42).[276] Thus in Durkheim's thinking religion was "an eminently collective thing" (1995:44) while magic did not appear to be so. Before him, Robertson Smith had pioneered the idea that "primitive" religion "was essentially an affair of the community rather than of individuals" (Malinowski 1954:21) but Durkheim put it more forcibly by essentially equating the religious with the social. Despite its individual character, magic, like religion, "is made up of beliefs and rites…it has its own myths and dogmas" (1995:39). Nonetheless, "these

[275] A crucial feature of the priesthood is "the specialization of a particular group of persons in the continuous operation of a cult enterprise, permanently associated with particular norms, places and times, and related to specific social groups…[Magicians] lack a continuously operative cult, and so the term "priests" cannot be applied to them." Weber, The Sociology of Religion, 30. More: "The magician…exercises his craft independently or, if a member of a guild, serves a particular neighborhood or political group, not a specific religious congregation." Ibid., 61.

[276] "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden –beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." Durkheim, Elementary Forms, 44.

are less well developed, probably because, given its pursuit of technical and utilitarian ends, magic does not waste time in pure speculation" (1995).

Durkheim was aware that many tribal cultures conceived magic as an aspect and a particular form of "one and the same force" (1995:199)[277] – that is, they did not draw sharp distinctions between magic and religion - yet he maintained and advocated a qualitative division between the two: religious forces are salutary and beneficent while "*the function of magic forces is above all to cause death and illness*" (1995:199. Italics are not in text). It is thus perhaps in Durkheim's work that we find an explanation for the scholarly inclination to find distinctions between magic and religion. If magic is "above all" the use of universal energy (*mana*) and magicians' powers for evil deeds, then religion is without question a better, superior, more humane, more rational, and socially constructive force. Likewise, if religion is the realm of the sacred, the good, and the helpful, magic, implies Durkheim, belongs in the realm of the profane. However, he acknowledged that the sacred and the profane tended "to flow" into one another almost naturally: "that is why *they must be kept at a distance from each other and why…a void must be opened between them*" (1995:322. Italics are not in text). This train of thought suggests that Durkheim's distinction between religion and magic was hesitant and arbitrary.[278]

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[277] "Magic forces and religious forces are not different in their essence. Indeed, they are sometimes designated by the same word. In Melanesia, the magician and his charms have mana just as do the agents and rites of the regular cult." Durkheim, Elementary Forms, 200.

[278] Durkheim seems to have had a great deal of difficulty separating what is sacred from what it is profane in his study of totemism and making up his mind about the issue of magic and religion: "Magic forces, are, I think, only a special form of religious forces." Durkheim, Elementary Forms, 225, n. 35.

Mana: the common source of magic and religion

Durkheim's nephew, Marcel Mauss (1872-1950), "one of the most important scholars of the anthropology of religion of the first half of our century," (Cipriani 2000:56) published *A General Theory of Magic* in 1902. He considered magic the primordial form of collective representations and posited *mana* - the universal, impersonal force that Durkheim discussed in relation to totemic religion[279] - as the common origin for both magic and religion. In his words: "all magic may be reduced to this idea [*mana*]" (Mauss 1972:145), and "the sacred is inherent in the notion of *mana* and derives from it" (1972:146).

According to Mauss none among his peers had come up with a satisfactory idea of magic and consequently he worked at producing one himself. In his view, "the definitions of the anthropological school tended to confuse "magic" with "sympathetic magic" (1972:15). But sympathy is not a prerogative of magic "since there are sympathetic practices in religion" (1972:25). More importantly, the magician's practice of "sympathy" seemed to have been a bit more complex than most scholars had acknowledged. To the magician, "actions performed at a distance are not always thought to be working on their own" (1972:90). Hence, Mauss implied that "cause" and "effect" were not completely unconnected at least in the minds and work of magicians: "There is the idea of effluvia which leave the body, magical images which travel about, lines linking the magician and his field of action, ropes, chains. Even the magician's soul leaves the body to perform the act he has just produced" (1972). Although this kind of

[279] "The totemic cult proper is addressed…to a sort of diffuse power that permeates things…That force can attach to words spoken and gestures made, as well as to material substances." Durkheim, Elementary Forms, 201-2. More: "Always and in all cases, the notion of spirit logically and chronologically comes after that of mana or is derived from it." Ibid., 203.

relation between cause and effect is metaphysical rather than empirical, Mauss's analysis hinted at a complexity in magical thinking that had been previously ignored.

Furthermore, Mauss asserted that contrary to Frazer's belief religious rites can also constraint: "in most of the ancient religions, the god was unable to prevent a rite from accomplishing its end if it had been faultlessly executed" (1972:26). Besides, some magical rites do not have a direct action and they involve gods to whom magicians are sometimes "forced to supplicate" (1972). Thus magic could involve prayer to gods as well as to spirits and was not all based on coercion as Frazer and his followers had assumed. To Mauss, distinctions between magic and religion lied rather in "the fact of prohibition" (1972:27). Rites that were "consistently magical" had to do with "evil spells" which were prohibited and punished: "The fact of their being prohibited provides delimitation for the whole sphere of magical action…*since association with evil as an aspect of magical rites always provides humanity with a rough general notion of magic*" (1972. Italics are not in text).

In fact, throughout his study of magic Mauss tended to reiterate many of the ideas about magic already proposed by other scholars: that magic deals with evil (1972:34), that it is practiced by individuals in isolation and secrecy (1972:11, 28-29, 110, 158), that it is "poorly organized" (1972:13) or "diffuse" (1972:109), that it is anti-religious (1972:29) and anti-social (1972:110), that it is practical, monotonous, and of "the utmost simplicity" (1972:112 and 175), that it has a predilection for the forbidden (1972:158), that it resembles science[280] and technology, and last but not least, that it is "the domain of pure production," the "art of doing things," and a "very simple craft" when compared to

[280] "Sorcerers were the first poisoners, the first surgeons…Magicians made real discoveries in the field of metallurgy." Mauss, A General Theory, 94.

religion which "tends to be abstract" (1972:175) and is "directed towards more metaphysical ends" (1972:174). Still, Mauss contributed to the discussion on magic and religion by formulating a number of hypotheses on magicians which refuted many of the assumptions made by other scholars and even some of his own.[281]

Most important perhaps is that Mauss showed by means of concrete examples from around the world that magicians are not "loners," working individually and in isolation. The profession of magician depends on public sentiment to succeed,[282] and magicians "form magical corporations recruited through heredity or though voluntary membership" (1972:54). In other words, magic is *social* not individualistic as almost every other scholar reviewed here claims. Magic is "a collective idea" (1972:12) which takes place in a social milieu.

Furthermore, the associations that magicians create are very much like religious associations: "On the whole, where there are groups of magicians it is difficult to

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[281] For instance that the so-called 'simple' rites of magicians correspond to our concept of ritual and are in fact very complex; that "magic does not consist entirely of sympathetic rites," rituals of consecration, deconsecration, and purification are part of magic too; that magic, like religion, can involve sacrifice; that spells are verbal rituals and may include prayer, hymns, and oaths; that myth is part of magic, even if its expression is rudimentary. Mauss, A General Theory, 55-67. Mauss contradicts himself on several occasions; while he concludes that magic is "the most childish of skills," he writes innumerable pages on the complexity of magic rites and claims that "so-called simple rites have been incompletely observed or have been incompletely performed." Ibid., 175 and 124.

[282] Magicians come from diverse occupational backgrounds and may possess political authority; doctors, barbers, gravediggers, shepherds, blacksmiths, executioners, and even priests may be thought of as having magical virtues. Mauss, A General Theory, 36-7. Magicians taken on different specializations but regardless of their specialty: "It is public opinion which makes the magician and creates the power he wields." Ibid., 50. Magicians can be specialists or amateurs but in general "magical practices are the prerogative of specialists." Ibid., 32. According to Mauss, magicians are found all over the world and people ascribe to them certain attributes: they "appear odd or untrustworthy," display "violent gestures, a shrill voice, oratorical or poetic gifts," betray "a kind of nervous condition," and fall into ecstatic states "often naturally induced but more usually feigned." Ibid., 34. On the other hand, magicians may possess positive qualities and personal gifts; they are thought to have "wonderful dexterity" and "outstanding knowledge," to posses the ability to "send out" their souls at will and, therefore, be in several places at once, and to shape-change into animals. Ibid., 40-45. One of the most important qualifications of a magician is the "power of being possessed." Ibid., 49.

distinguish them from religious groups" (1972:54). Moreover, according to Mauss, a person could become a magician through revelation, consecration, or tradition (1972:50). Thus ordination may be achieved through inheritance, like Weber and others noted, revelation,[283] and also through "a communal evocation of the spirits" or a "presentation of the novice" to the spirits by the community (1972:52). That is, the magician can be chosen by his or her community to serve it. Hence the character of both magic and magicians is social. Or, as Roberto Cipriani puts it, Mauss demonstrated that "magic rites followed social norms and collective expectations" (Cipriani 2000:59). This idea of magic as "collective" has been taken up by contemporary intellectualist scholars such as Jack Goody (Cunningham 1999:78).

Although Mauss, like most other modern scholars, presumed the magician to be male, he pointed out that women were "everywhere recognized as being more prone to magic than men" (1972: 35). More:

> "Old women are [thought to be] witches; virgins are valuable auxiliaries; menstrual blood and other like products are common specifics. Moreover, it is true that women are particularly disposed to hysteria, and their nervous crises make them susceptible to superhuman forces, which endow them with special powers. However, even outside these critical periods, which occupy a not insignificant part of their life, women are the butt of superstitions and jural and religious taboos, which clearly mark them off as a separate class in society" (1972).

He noted that around the world women "are made out to be more different than men than they are in fact" (1972) and all sorts of mysterious activities are attributed to them. Mauss claimed that women derived their magical attributes from their social position; they "are excluded from most religious cults –or if admitted, reduced to a passive role," (1972) which then leads them to magic. So, to him, the "magic" of women

[283] Magic is revealed when "a man believes himself to be in contact with one or more spirits, who place themselves at his service and teach him doctrine." Mauss, A General Theory, 50.

is “more talked about than real” (1972). Hence in the end, to Mauss, the profession of magician was generally the prerogative of men: “In fact, there are fewer female practitioners of magic than public opinion would have us believe….on the whole, it is men who perform the magic while women are accused of it” (1972). Nevertheless, women played some role in magic and “a more important role in magic than in religion” because women are thought to be “a constant source of malignant influence…They bring misery and witchcraft. They possess the evil eye” (1972:148). Witches, for instance, are generally thought of as wicked and more; a female figure with magical attributes “has always been considered a lascivious creature, a kind of courtesan” (1972:47). Thus immorality and wantonness have been thought to be attributes of the female magician.

This study recognizes another contribution in Mauss’s work, addressed in greater detail in Appendix D. Although he did not develop an argument around this insight, Mauss seemed aware that the idea of magic is constructed under very particular social and historical conditions: **“**When two cultures come into contact, magic is usually attributed to the lesser developed. Classic examples are the Dasyus of India, and the Finns and the Lapps, accused respectively of sorcery by the Hindus and the Scandinavians” (1972:39). Furthermore: “Once a church loses its following the members of the new religion consider the former priests to be magicians. The Malays or the Moslem Shams treat the *pawang* and the *paja* as magicians; in fact, they were former priests” (1972:38). In this manner, Mauss pioneered one of the arguments briefly explored in Appendix D of this dissertation; that the term “magic” tends to arise under conditions of conquest and often refers to the suppressed religious life of the conquered.

Significantly, Mauss also remarked that the way scholars looked at magic and religion emulated this attitude of subjugation:

> "A religion designates the remnants of former cults as 'magical' even when the rites are still being performed in a religious manner; this way of looking at things has been followed by scholars" (1972:22).

Magic and Religion: two separate but akin responses to life's challenges

A very influential perspective on magic is the "theory of the gap" proposed by anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942):

> "Man, engaged in a series of practical activities, comes to a gap; the hunter is disappointed by his quarry, the sailor misses propitious winds, the canoe builder has to deal with some material which he is never certain that it will stand the strain, or the healthy person suddenly finds his strength failing…Forsaken by his knowledge…he realizes his impotence…his anxiety, his fears and hopes, induce a tension in his organism which drives him to some sort of activity…to some substitute activity. Obsessed by the idea of the desired end, he sees it and feels it. His organism reproduces the acts suggested by the anticipation of hope… The man under the sway of impotent fury or dominated by thwarted hate spontaneously clenches his fist and carries out imaginary thrusts at his enemy, muttering imprecations, casting words of hatred and anger against him" (Malinowski 1954:79).

Thus magic, according to Malinowski, entailed a dramatic expression of emotion[284] and served to fill the void of human uncertainty and to reduce anxiety. Magic is an "essential adjunct" of the processes that are vital to human beings "yet elude [their] normal rational efforts" (1954:74-5). It is "directed towards the attainment of practical aims" (1954:86). And, it is akin to science "in that it always has a definite aim intimately associated with human instincts, needs, and pursuits" (1954). Along with Tylor and Frazer, Malinowski called magic a pseudo-science (1954:87).

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[284] "For the sorcerer has, *as an essential part of the ritual performance*, not merely to point the bone art at his victim, but with an intense expression of fury and hatred he has to thrust it in the air, turn and twist it as if to bore in the wound, then pull it back with a sudden jerk…Thus…the passion of violence has to be enacted." Malinowski, Magic, Religion, and Science, 71. Italics are not in text.

Moreover, magic "refers principally to human activities and states, hunting, gardening, fishing, trading, love-making, disease and death" (1954:75) and therefore is "an essentially human possession…enshrined in man" (1954:76), instead of a force of nature or a universal force found everywhere like Mauss and others proposed. Yet despite its practical and earthly disposition, the fountainhead of magical belief was to be found in passion or ecstasy, according to Malinowski: "Magic is based on specific experience of emotional states" (1954:87). "Most of the principles of magic…have been revealed to man in those passionate experiences which assail him in the impasses of his instinctive life and of his practical pursuits, *in those gaps and breaches left in the ever-imperfect wall of culture* which he erects between himself and the besetting temptations of his destiny" (1954:81. Italics are not in text).

Religion, like magic, claimed Malinowski, also arises under emotional stress: "crises of life, lacunae in important pursuits, death and initiation into tribal mysteries, unhappy love and unsatisfied hate" (1954:87). Therefore, both magic and religion offer an escape from life impasses. But while magical acts are means to a definite end "expected to follow later on" (1954:88), religion is "a body of self-contained acts being themselves the fulfillment of their purpose" (1954).[285] Other differences between religion and magic, according to Malinowski, include that magic remains "in the hands of specialists" (1954) while religion "is an affair of all, in which everyone takes an active and equivalent part" (1954:89). Further: "One more difference between magic and religion is the play of black and white in witchcraft, while religion…has but little of the contrast between good and evil…early religion [is] essentially moral" (1954).

[285] This is of course not true in religious practices such as the pilgrimage. Even today, pilgrims journey to a particular sacred or miraculous site, like that of the Virgin of Lourdes in Spain, in the hope of achieving a 'definite end,' such as the restoration of their own health or that of a loved one.

Most important to Malinowski was that the cultural function of religion and magic also differ. Both meet important bio-social needs and for that reason they have always been present: "The function of magic is to ritualize man's optimism, to enhance his faith in the victory of hope over fear" (1954:90). Religion, on the other hand, meets human needs to build systems and to organize knowledge; it is "the core of civilization and the mainspring of moral values" (Cipriani 2000:52). While "religion refers to the fundamental issues of human existence, magic always turns round specific, concrete, and detailed problems" (2000). Or:

> "Religious faith establishes, fixes, and enhances all valuable mental attitudes, such as reverence for tradition, harmony with environment, courage and confidence in the struggle with difficulties and at the prospect of death (MSR:89) [On the other hand,] Magic supplies primitive man with a number of ready-made rituals acts and beliefs, with a definite mental and practical technique which *serves to bridge over the dangerous gaps in every important pursuit or critical situation*. It enables man to carry out with confidence his important tasks, to maintain his poise and his mental integrity in fits of anger, in the throes of hate, of unrequited love, of despair and anxiety. The function of magic is to ritualize man's optimism, to enhance his faith in the victory of hope over fear" (Malinowski 1954:90. Italics are not in text).

Thus although magic may seem crude and irrelevant to people in "developed civilizations," without "its power and guidance early man could not have mastered his practical difficulties as he has done, nor could man have advanced to the higher stages of culture" (1954). Hence magic, the "specific art for specific ends" (1954:88), has immense biological value as it helped early humanity to confront crises and to grow. Certainly, this theory of magic is related to Malinowski's overall "theory of needs" which professed that people have a range of organic needs that are met "only through group cooperation, the improvement of knowledge, and the development of ethnic values" (Cipriani 2000:51). To him: "It is always possible…to define and determine sociologically what effect the

activities of…an organized human group produce, what needs they satisfy, what services they render to themselves and the community as a whole" (2000).

Thus instead of searching for the origins of religion in magic or those of magic in religion as Tylor, Frazer, Mauss, Durkheim, and Weber had done, Malinowski presented that magic and religion, as well as science, served different cultural functions and controlled different phases of human behavior. Thus magic was akin to religion (and to science) but it was neither its source nor its derivative. It fulfilled particular needs and served –temporarily- instrumental, expressive, and symbolic functions. And, while he accepted Durkheim's division between sacred and profane spheres, Malinowski allocated both magic and religion to the sacred and science to the profane (Malinowski 1954:17).[286]

Malinowski's major contribution, however, was to disprove a widely held assumption about the "irrationality" of the "primitive." The view that "primitive" peoples did not possess reason but instead a magical, mystical, or prelogical mindset which rendered them incapable of abstraction as well as of comprehending the most elementary laws of nature –like cause and effect – was apparently popularized by the prominent French sociologist and philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939).[287] Malinowski's work helped dispel this fallacy: "every primitive community is in possession of a

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[286] Science, the "empirical and rational knowledge of nature, which is the foundation of [the primitive's] arts and crafts, of his economic enterprises and of his constructive abilities, forms an autonomous domain of social tradition." Malinowski, Magic, Religion, and Science, 59.

[287] Malinowski summarized Lévy-Bruhl's position as follows: "primitive man has no sober moods at all… he is hopelessly and completely immersed in a mystical frame of mind. Incapable of dispassionate and consistent observation, devoid of the power of abstraction, hampered by "a decided aversion towards reasoning," he is unable to draw any benefit from experience, to construct or comprehend even the most elementary laws of nature. "For minds thus orientated there is no fact purely physical." Nor can there exist for them any clear idea of substance and attribute, cause and effect, identity and contradiction. Their outlook is that of confused superstition, "prelogical," made of mystic "participations" and "exclusions." Malinowski, Magic, Religion, and Science, 25. Lévy-Bruhl is known for his research on the mentality of preliterate peoples. His books include: *How Natives Think* (1910) and *Primitive Mentality* (1922).

considerable store of knowledge, based on experience and fashioned by reason" (1954:26). Using his own ethnographic materials gathered during trips to the Trobriand Archipelago, Malinowski argued that the Melanesian field of knowledge is not "constantly swamped by superstition, ritualism, magic or religion" (1954:27). According to his evidence, these "natives" were "expert fishermen, industrious manufacturers and traders" as well as successful gardeners (1954). Their success depended "upon their extensive knowledge of the classes of soil, of the various cultivated plants, of the mutual adaptation of these two factors, and, last not least, upon their knowledge of the importance of accurate and hard work" (1954). In all their economic activities, which also included canoe building, "they are guided by a clear knowledge of weather and seasons, plants and pests, soil and tubers, [as well as hydrodynamics] and by a conviction that this knowledge is true and reliable" (1954:28). Furthermore: "If the fences are broken down, if the seed is destroyed or has been dried or washed away, he will have recourse not to magic, but to work, guided by knowledge and reason" (1954).

Magic is thus understood as one among other systems used by human beings to assist them with everyday predicaments.[288] It is specifically directed to control "unaccountable and adverse influences" and to increment "fortunate coincidence" (1954:29). Otherwise, there is science. The two run side by side but do not always mix. The "primitive" thus recognizes "both the natural and the supernatural forces and agencies, and…tries to use both for his benefit" (1954:32). Among the Melanesians, magic comes in as a recognition that despite "all their systematic knowledge" and its

[288] Acquaviva seems to follow Malinowski's lead in his bio-psychological theory which postulates that religion is helpful to overcome the stress that derives from "the limitations to the satisfaction of a whole series of needs." Cipriani, Sociology of Religion, 168.

methodical application, they are "still at the mercy of powerful incalculable tides, sudden gales during the monsoon season and unknown reefs" (1954:30).

In this explanation Malinowski implied that magic is the recourse of persons or communities who acknowledge superior powers and realize their impotence before them. Such concept of magic approximates that of religion as defined by Frazer for example. Moreover, Malinowski suggested that the motivation for magic was impotence, not arrogance like Frazer claimed: "Forsaken by his knowledge…he realizes his impotence" (1954:79).[289] Nevertheless, Malinowski also erected distinctions between magic and religion: "While in the magic act the underlying idea and aim is always clear, straightforward, and definite, in the religious ceremony there is no purpose directed toward a subsequent event" (1954:38). Thus religion has no practical end in mind. In sum, to Malinowski, impotence, desire, passion, obsession, illusion, and delusion are the sources and motivations for magic. Not surprisingly, he also expected magic to disappear once "new and decisive solutions were found and further knowledge was achieved" (Cipriani 2000:53).

Magic Contemporary

Contemporary scholars of religion appear less concerned than their predecessors with the subject of "origins" and by extension with that of magic yet some continue to reiterate or rework earlier assumptions. For example, in the seventies Francois André Isambert, Director of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in France, retold the story

[289] A similar train of thought surfaces in theories of religion that emphasize the role of fear. In Italy, for example, Ernesto De Martino (1908-1965) views magic as an "extra effort" a person makes to solve a problem when undergoing a difficult existential crisis. Magic intervenes to help people overcome the "crisis of presence," the danger of "being wiped out." Cipriani, Sociology of Religion, 135-6. Magic is a response to the fear of losing one's soul, of one's disintegration and death. Likewise, religion is "a protective technique that produced values that were able through culture to reshape individual fears deriving from the loss of presence." Ibid., 136. Thus both magic and religion are based on existential fear.

that magic was immanent (animistic), manipulatory, and private in character while religion possessed transcendental, propitiatory, and public traits; thus reinstating the polarity between magic and religion (2000:210). Similarly, revivals and elaborations of the early intellectualist approach, exemplified by Frazer, among British anthropologists like Jack Goody, I.C. Jarvie, Robin Horton, and John Skorupski have been common since the Second World War. [290]

Also in line with the classics, the founder of the contemporary study of the history of religion, Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), made assumptions throughout his work about primitives and primitive societies – which he called "archaic" - and implied distinctions between magic and religion by differentiating a "magical mentality" from "authentic religious experience" (2000:133). Despite this, Eliade made a considerable contribution to the study of magic and religion with his study of "shamanism" (1951). His first step forward was to challenge the vague and monolithic view of "the magician" prevailing in previous scholarship by pointing to a need to establish clearer distinctions between different practitioners of "magic:"

> "Since the beginning of the [twentieth] century, ethnologists have fallen into the habit of using the terms "shaman," "medicine man," "sorcerer," and "magician" interchangeably to designate certain individuals possessing magico-religious powers and found in all "primitive" societies" (Eliade 1992:3).

In his effort "to cast a clearer light on the history of "magic"," Eliade chose to restrict the term "shaman" to individuals who specialized in mastering techniques of *ecstasy*

[290] As we have seen, intellectualist definitions emphasized one progressively improving mode of thought - from magic to science – as well as the role of magic as "a method of controlling events" and of religion as "a method of explaining events by attributing them to divine intervention." Cunningham, Religion and Magic, 77. On the other hand, post-war intellectualists "regard magic as a means both of controlling events and of explaining them through attribution to magical agency, and similarly regard religion as a method both of explaining events and of influencing them through appeals either for helpful divine intervention or against its harmful equivalent." Ibid.

(1992). This established that not all magicians could be called "shamans" and that shamanism coexisted "with other forms of magic and religion" (1992:5). In addition, Eliade specified that the ecstasy of the "shaman" was only one specific variety among many types of ecstatic experience; the "shaman" specializes "in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld" (1992).[291] Besides, the "shaman" differed from other magicians in that even when possessed he did not become an instrument of spirits or demons but "controlled" them (1992:6).

Eliade viewed the "shaman" as one of the elect who was separated from other members of his community by the intensity of his religious experience;[292] someone who underwent a spiritual crisis "that is not lacking in tragic greatness and in beauty" (1992:13).[293] Thus the "shaman" was a sort of gifted mystic: "shamanism always remains an ecstatic technique at the disposal of a particular elite and represents…the mysticism of the particular religion" (1992:8). But the mysticism of the "shaman" was not that of an isolated individual: shamans cure the sick in their community, accompany their dead, and "serve as mediators between them and their gods"; they direct the community's religious life and protect its "soul" (1992). In this manner Eliade also contributed to the study of magic by defying earlier scholarly assumptions about magicians as loners, charlatans, and

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[291] To him, the "shamanic" symbolism of ascent was connected to a belief in a supreme being. Eliade, Shamanism, 505 and 507.

[292] He identified several "ways of access to magico-religious power": hereditary shamanism, direct bestowal by gods and spirits, personal quest, spontaneous vocation (as a result of illness, dreams, ecstasy, or chance encounters with "power"), and election by the community among others. Eliade, Shamanism, 20-32.

[293] Eliade showed that the initiation of the "shaman" followed "the traditional schema of an initiation ceremony: suffering, death, resurrection." Eliade, Shamanism, 33-66.

psychotics.[294] He portrayed the "shaman" as an exceptional individual who entered into a trance, went up into the sky and met the gods, descended to the underworld and fought demons, sickness, and death, saw what was hidden and invisible, and brought back to his community useful, "direct and reliable information from the supernatural worlds" (1992: 509).

In addition, Eliade provided greater details about some of the precise roles women have played in magic and, based on the work of Leo Sternberg, took brief account of the relationship between magic and sexuality. Women appear in magic as "shamanesses," female spirits who impart secret teachings to "shamans," sexual beings, teachers, helpers of heroes, fairies, celestial wives, and sexual partners (1992:73). In the role of "shamanesses," women may be healers, guide the souls of the dead, defend the tribe from evil spirits, practice divination, control atmospheric conditions, facilitate birth, increase game, make mystical journeys to the sky, present the desires of the tribe to the gods, and in particular serve as intermediaries between the community and the gods or spirits, just like their male counterparts (1992:323). But to Eliade the role of women and of sexuality in shamanism has been small. "Shamanesses" are rare and the "sexual emotion" is a deviation of the ecstatic experience (1992:79): "The mythological role of women is…markedly small, although traces of it remain in some shamanic traditions…Among the Turko-Tartars goddesses play a rather minor role…[yet] the Turko Tartar and Siberian peoples know several feminine divinities, but they are reserved for women, their

[294] Numerous scholars have linked the magician to the psychotic. Eliade dismisses this thesis as "the result of imperfect observations on the part of the earliest ethnologists," for the shaman is not a sick person; he is "a sick man who has been cured, who has succeeded in curing himself." Eliade, Shamanism, 27. "There is always a cure, a control, an equilibrium brought about by the actual practice of shamanism. It is no the fact that he is subject to epileptic attacks that the Eskimo or Indonesian shaman, for example, owes his power and prestige; it is to the fact that he can control his epilepsy." Ibid., 29. Moreover, "Their psychopathic experience has a theoretical content…they know…the *theory* of illness." Ibid., 31.

spheres being childbirth and children's diseases" (1992:10).[295] Yet, he admitted that in India, for instance, "shamanesses" outnumbered "shamans" among the Savara (1992:421).

As for the role of sexuality, to Sternberg's proposition that shamanism originated in the sexual-erotic encounter, Eliade counter posed that the essential element in shamanism is the initiatory "death and resurrection" of the "shaman" (1992:74-76).[296] While recognizing that important sexual-spiritual roles are played by female spirits during initiation trials, Eliade chose to emphasize the well-known religious schema of suffering-death-resurrection as the pivot of shamanic initiation. Thus he concluded: "sexual relations with spirits" do not constitute "the essential and determining element in shamanic vocation" (1992:74).

In addition, Eliade briefly acknowledged the role of the arts in magic: "From the earliest times, the classic method of achieving trance was dancing" (1992:451). "Shamans" compose special songs and sing, dance, and create spectacles "unequaled in the world of daily experience" (1992:511). Among the Araucanians of South America, for example, "shamanesses" use dance, drumming, and singing as means to achieve ecstasy (1992:124 and 329). Thus Eliade glimpsed at the sources of epic literature, dramatic spectacles, and lyric poetry in the ecstatic experiences of the "shaman" (1992: 510-11).

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[295] Eliade points out the use of transvestitism and ritual change of sex in shamanic practice in certain tribes of Indonesia and North and South America. To him, the "ritual and symbolic transformation into woman is probably explained by an ideology derived from the archaic matriarchy; but as we shall show, it does not appear to indicate any priority of women in the earliest shamanism." Eliade, Shamanism, 258.

[296] To Eliade, the essential features of shamanism include: intense ecstasy and trance, ascent to heaven, descent to the underworld, evocation and incarnation of spirits, mastery over fire, magical flight, and healing abilities. Eliade, Shamanism, 29, 31, 376, and 400.

Unlike other scholars, Eliade steered clear of defining magic and religion along the lines of good and evil. He recognized the difficulty in drawing "a clear line of demarcation between…the supposedly "good" and the supposedly "evil" religious powers" (1992:188). Eliade's skepticism led him to the notion of *hierophanies*: anything that reveals or manifests "the sacred" (Cipriani 2000:134). To him, the sacred was always manifesting in human societies -for example in "shamanism"- and had been a source of power, reality, and being.[297] More fundamentally, Eliade undermined the traditional distinction between religion and magic by subsuming both topics under the category of "the sacred" (Cunningham 1999:37).[298]

Recently, anthropologist Alice Beck Kehoe has questioned Eliade's intellectual motives, the sources he relied on, and his use and popularization (universalizing) of the term "shaman." She argues that "Eliade's romantic conception of an eternally manifesting Sacred" is theology, not social science, and that his work on shamanism "perpetuates the classical myth that out beyond civilization roam noble savages preserving a primordial religion more pure and true than any in the West" (Kehoe 2000: 2). To her, the words "shaman" and "shamanism" are "used loosely and naively, by anthropologists no less than the general public…[And] they convey confusion far more than knowledge" (2000). In short, the term "shaman" is a "Western construction of a

[297] "The man of archaic societies tends to live as much as possible *in* the sacred...because, for primitives as for the man of all premodern societies, the *sacred* is equivalent to a *power*, and, in the last analysis, to *reality*. The sacred is saturated with *being*…the wholly desacralized cosmos, is a recent discovery in the history of the human spirit." Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion, trans. Willard R. Trask. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc. 1959: 12-13.

[298]Apparently before Eliade, the English anthropologist A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955) had incorporated magic and religion within the category of ritual. Cunningham, Religion and Magic, 61. Several post-war scholars attempted to bring together religion and magic by interpreting both as symbolic. British anthropologists H.M. Beattie, Victor Turner, and S. J. Tambiah incorporate magic and religion within the category of the symbolic, as different from the scientific. Ibid., 64-7.

stereotyped, mythical Other" that lumps a large variety of nonwestern practitioners, including, priests, doctors, seers, astrologers, healers, diviners, mediums, spiritual adepts, mystics, alchemists, necromancers, and magicians, under one label (2000:102). Moreover, according to Kehoe, "one simple word for all non-Western religious practitioners brings us back to that millennia-old division between civilized Us and primitive far-away Others" (2000:45).

The word "shaman" comes from the Tungus language of Central Siberia and in its precise sense designates "religious leaders, men and women *who serve their communities* by using hand-held drums to call spirit allies" (2000:8. Italics are not in text). Hence "to be a shaman is a priestly calling" (2000). Yet after Eliade's book "became a cornerstone of the New Age," (2000:38) a tendency developed in which "spiritual leaders and ritual practitioners around the world outside of the urban West" were indiscriminately grouped under the term "shaman"," (2000:42). Eliade's emphasis on *ecstasy* and the *techniques* to achieve it, provided "shamanism" with a modern flavor that attracted middle-class, western spiritual seekers interested in individual, personal quests. In time, 'neo-shamans' ended up appropriating the way of the "shaman" as portrayed by Eliade and others without taking on the actual responsibility of the "shaman" to work and serve their communities. Specifically for this reason, Kehoe suggests that "good scholarship, good science, and ethics oblige scholars to maintain the terms "shaman" and "shamanism" primarily to Siberian practitioners so called in their homelands" (2000:102).

In sum, if we follow Kehoe's logic, Eliade's effort to "cast a clearer light on the history of magic" by attempting to circumscribe and explicate one magical pursuit, "shamanism," resulted in a new wave of racist mystification of nonwestern religious,

scientific, and healing practices and practitioners, as well as in a new exploitation of nonwestern cultural traditions. In Eliade's defense, it is worth mentioning that he seemed interested in balancing the highly contemptuous view of magic and of the primitive in the then existing social science literature. Before him, ethnographic narratives treated magic/shamanism, as something of "an aberrant phenomenon," and confused it with "possession" or chose to "emphasize its degenerate aspects" (1992:376). Eliade attempted to overturn such views when he put forward that the "shaman" struggled against "the powers of evil": "The shamans have played an essential role in the defense of the psychic integrity of the community…they combat not only demos and disease, but also the black magicians…[S]hamanism defends life, health, fertility, the world of "light"," (1992:508-9).[299]

Concluding Remarks

Despite all their serious shortcomings, the theoretical efforts of classic and early contemporary social scientists may be said to have "advanced the knowledge of their time within a body of assumptions that we no longer accept." [300] What is more, many of the suppositions made about magic by classic social scientists have ancient roots in the statements of Greek philosophers, Hebrew prophets, and others.

In Greece, Plato opposed "magicians," especially the *pharmakeiai* who apparently used substances to poison others. Significantly, his critique advanced the "modern" concept of magical constrain of the gods and the "modern" idea that magic has an "anti-

[299] Moreover, Eliade maintained: "the shaman has been able to contribute decisively to the *knowledge of death*." Eliade, Shamanism, 508-9.

[300] In her foreword to Eliade's *Shamanism*, Wendy Doniger applies to him E.P. Thompson's insight that the work of past scholars like Frazer and others should not be looked at "with the condescension of posterity" but rather appreciated for the strides it made in advancing the knowledge of the time while recognizing that its assumptions are no longer shared by us or useful to us. Eliade, Shamanism, xii.

social" character (Moreau 2000:267-292). His concern appears to have been fundamentally legal: magicians disturbed the social order. Plato's critique of magic was in line with emerging intellectualist notions of the divine which tended to denigrate non-rational ways of apprehending reality (2000:301). Moreover, Plato's critique of "magic" belonged in his more general condemnation of "subversive" activities like poetry for example. Plato went up against the deceiving magic ascribed in it to the gods by the poets: "Do you think of a god as a sort of magician who might, for his own purposes, appear in various shapes, now actually passing into a number of different forms, now deluding us into believing he has done so?" (Conford 1941:72). Hence to Plato the magician, as well as the poet, was someone who attempted to delude others. Such practices – magic and poetry – subverted the ethical and political principles of what Plato considered "authentic religion" (Moreau 2000:279).

Anthropologist S. J. Tambiah suggests in Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality (1990) that the distinctions between magic and religion made by the early intellectualists reflected the Biblical distinction made by the Hebrew prophets between "true religion" or monotheism and "false religion" or pagan idolatry/magic (Cunningham 1999:70). An additional source for this development is, according to Tambiah, the distinction developed by English Protestant propagandists in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries between religious acts and magical acts (1999: 70-71).

Before the Greeks and the prophets, however, distinctions between more rational and less rational or "magical" spiritual beliefs were being made by the Mesopotamians since at least 1200 BCE, as I illustrate in detail in Appendix D. Therefore, what has come to be

known as the Frazerian "opposition between religion and magic" (Moreau 2000:267) has antecedents in ancient Greek philosophy as well as in other earlier sources.

It is time to note, however, as French professor of mythology and ancient Greek Alain Moreau recently did, that the pejorative value attached to magic has not been constant. Also in the Bible, for instance, no negative connotation is attached to the three king-magicians who came from Persia to save the infant Jesus. On the contrary, they are portrayed as rich, good, and "wise men" (2000:7-8). That said it remains a fact that the myths about what constitutes "magic" continue into the present.

In France, for instance, during the first international colloquium on magic at the University of Montpellier in the year 2000, ancient and classic ideas about magic tended to be reiterated by several authors with little or no explication. For example, Alain Moreau restated the well-established belief that "magical operations, except for healing rituals, take place in hiding, at night, and without witnesses" (2000:28). In other words, secrecy is thought to be inherent to magic. By the same token, Moreau recapped the traditional distinctions between magic and religion[301] brushing off recent critiques such as the one offered by J. N. Bremmer who sees in such distinctions "a typical product of the Victorian middle classes of [Frazer's] time" and therefore declares that they have no place in a discussion of ancient magic (2000:34).[302]

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[301] Religion accepts divine omnipotence -it prays and supplicates - while magic attempts to constrain gods and spirits, religion aims at all that is good while magic may desire it but more often turns towards evil, and, of course, religion is practiced in the open, in collective ceremonies, while magic is practiced at night in solitude. Moreau, La Magie, 33. Among British scholars, John Skorupski also favors Frazer's definition of religion as propitiation and magic as coercion. Cunningham, Religion and Magic, 82.

[302] Ninian Smart, former professor of religious studies at Lancaster University explains: "For Victorians the issue of the distinction between religion and magic was important. This reflected varying strands in late Victorian values: the triumphant virtue of science; the spiritual superiority of Protestantism (and to some degree respectable Catholicism); the degeneracy of savages, etc." Cunningham, Religion and Magic, 40.

What appears to be happening is that some contemporary scholars continue to repeat back or elaborate on what Frazer and his followers said about magic and religion while others challenge it. Thus to Anne-Marie Tupet's regurgitation in the late nineteen seventies that the religious person implores the gods and humbly submits to them while the "magician gives orders to his, and uses means to constrain them," Sorbonne professor Gérard Capdeville responds in his recent study of Etruscan religion that "this distinction does not appear pertinent to the Etruscans, or, more precisely, that prayer and constrain are both part of religion" (2000:119). Similarly, Fritz Graf from Princeton University distances himself from the conclusions of the prominent Dutch archeologist Maarten J. Vermaseren who in 1982 stated that "the magician does not supplicate to the gods, he wants to constrain them" (2000:177-8).

Another Sorbonne professor, Dominique Briquel, tells us that today thanks to the advances made by anthropologists "we can smile" at the "purely negative" conceptions previous scholars had of magic (2000:177). At present, according to her, most critics recognize that it is often impossible to distinguish magic from religion and it is common to interpret magic as a system of understanding the universe which is not fundamentally different from religion (2000). Hence it is now apparently well-accepted knowledge among scholars of ancient religions that it is difficult and quite futile to attempt to separate the magical from the religious.

Notwithstanding this new stance, attempts to distance religion or "religious practices" from magic continue in subtle forms. According to renowned historian of Mesopotamian religion, Jean Bottéro, magic was in the course of Mesopotamian history and under specific influences transformed into theurgy – via exorcism - which to him is "truly

religious" (2000:72-3). In rituals of exorcism, the Mesopotamians apparently petitioned and prayed to the gods instead of giving them orders as it was, supposedly, customary in magic rites (2000:69). In other words, magic compels while exorcism implores; as such, the latter constitutes religion proper. As we can see, though he defines magic as an "essentially beneficial" activity which struggles against many types of evil, including human suffering (2000:64), in this particular case Bottéro theorizes along the lines of Frazer and his followers. He does so, nevertheless, in order to counterbalance a longstanding assumption among Mesopotamian scholars which categorizes the copious and varied texts found in Mesopotamia as mere "magic" (2000).[303]

To summarize, the most commonly held views of magic among influential classical and some contemporary social scientists revolve around five major issues and assumptions: that magic is coercion, that it seeks to compel mainly spirits and demons, that it is more individualized and individualistic than religion and therefore has no strong social footing, that it deals with the concrete and the immediate not the universal, and that it is secret and "dark." It is perhaps Louis Marin, another professor at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris from 1977 to 1992, who most succinctly recaps the leading stance on magic and religion in modern Western social science:

> "Religion…is submission to an almighty Creator to whom we raise our prayers, [while] magic…consists of rites intended to compel supernatural forces, whatever they may be, to do the sorcerer's bidding" (Shah 1956: xiii).

[303]Bottéro estimates that "half a million pieces" of written and visual documentation have been found by archeologists and include countless prayers, hymns, songs, myths, lists and catalogs of divine names, descriptions of rituals and ceremonies, words of wisdom, astronomical texts, literature, mathematical equations, and representations of sacred figures. Bottéro, Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia, 22-23.

Apart from the obvious parallels with Frazer's reasoning,[304] this statement implies that submission to patriarchal monotheism is a superior way to address forces and events we do not comprehend and control. By extension, it insinuates that polytheism and goddess worship, for example, are not "religion" proper.

[304] "To Frazer magic is the direct coercion of natural forces by man, religion is the propitiation of divinities by the believer." Cipriani, Sociology of Religion, 52.

Appendix C: Women in Religion - priestesses and "prostitutes"

> *Heaven is mine, earth is mine – I, a warrior am I!*
> *Is there a god who can vie with me*?
> Inanna / Ishtar

In the face of the goddess's bravado inequality between men and women seems to have been rampant in agrarian Mesopotamia.[305] However, the degree of gender difference appears to have been mediated by at least two factors that were at times related to each other: economic status and religious involvement. The economic or the religious status/activity of a woman affected her position in the social hierarchy and her ability to negotiate greater or lesser rights and privileges within the social order. Like contemporary Western and non-Western women from affluent backgrounds, elite women in Mesopotamia enjoyed many economic and social prerogatives such as the right to own property, the right to inherit, the right to sue in court and serve as witness,[306] and the privilege to employ others in their service. Unlike modern Western women, *all* women in urban Mesopotamia enjoyed full religious representation. This chapter shows that women from widely different backgrounds were conceived – in literature and in the law - as rightful participants in Mesopotamian religion.

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[305] There appears to have been only one independent queen in Mesopotamian history. Ku-Bau ruled the city of Kish for "one hundred years." Marc Van De Mieroop, "Women in the Economy of Sumer," in Women's Earliest Records From Ancient Egypt and Western Asia, ed. Barbara S. Lesko (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989) 54. Moreover, while women formed a large part of the labor force in Sumer, they were exploited by the administrators who forced them to work in labor gangs and gave them fewer rations of grain than those given to men. At Ebla, for instance, working men received twice as much as working women; on the other hand, however, "royal women's rations were higher than those of male overseers." Snell, Everyday Life, 35.

[306] Contenau remarks that while the Code of Hammurabi granted Mesopotamian women the right to give evidence in a court of law circa 1752 B.C., this right was not acquired by French women until the beginning of the twentieth century. Contenau, Everyday Life in Babylon, 250.

The extensive and prominent participation of women in a religion that conferred sacred value on ritual sexuality (chapter 4) and on artistic activity (chapter 3) was a determining factor in the integration of the spiritual with female sexuality and art. Polymorphic representation seems to have depended on specific concepts and practices of sexuality and religion. The following discussion deals primarily with the social status and functions of priestesses and "prostitutes" in Mesopotamia. These two categories of women played roles and enjoyed certain freedoms and protections not always available to other women. High religious office permitted the *entu* (high-priestess), for example, to perform sexual services for the community overtly and aesthetically (chapter 4). On the other hand, in the margins of the official cult, promiscuous women ("prostitutes") were also able to combine their sexuality with religious expression in Mesopotamia. Like all other mortals, "prostitutes" and priestesses existed to serve and please the gods and they did this in keeping with their social position and way of life.

Before examining the role of "prostitutes" and priestesses in Mesopotamian society, it is important to bring to light a complexity ignored in the current sociological literature on gender stratification in agrarian societies. Primary Mesopotamian sources such as the "law codes" [307] lay bare that contrary to leading views that locate the nadir of social inequality in agrarian societies[308] - and consistently equate economic and gender

[307] 'Law codes' include the Lipit-Ishtar legal text from circa 1900-1800 and the amendments made and promulgated by king Hammurabi (CH) circa 1752-1720. Debates about the use of the term 'law code' for these texts continue: "although popularly described as "law codes," these are nothing of the kind, as they had no statutory legal value." Aruz, First Cities, 471. Also see: Jean Bottéro, Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1992, 2001) 93.

[308] To sociologist Gerhard E. Lenski, for example, inequality of wealth was almost inexistent in hunting and gathering societies, increased in horticultural societies, and peaked in agrarian societies as technology advanced and economic surpluses expanded. He claims that "given the nature of man and society," as economic surpluses expand, military technology advances, and the powers of the state increase, "we should logically anticipate an increase in social inequality." Lenski, Power and Privilege, 210. Notwithstanding his

stratification[309] - women in urban agrarian Mesopotamia held greater religious power and privilege than women in some advanced horticultural and in the more recent and often thought to be "less unequal" industrial societies. Ample social recognition of powerful female deities and the institution of a prominent female priesthood with significant religious and economic opportunities for women, such as they existed in Mesopotamia, are largely missing in today's Western societies.

To cite only one example from horticultural social stratification, my research into Incan society suggests that even women of religion under Inca rule did not possess as much freedom and power as their counterparts in agrarian Mesopotamia, Egypt, or India did. The Incas kept tight control over their priestesses: the *acllas*. Incan priestesses did

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own claim, Lenski argues that "the average level of inequality in the most advanced industrial societies is no greater than that in the average advanced agrarian society, and probably less." Ibid., 437. In other words, as Randall Collins recaps, Lenski proposes that "agrarian societies are the peak level of inequality, and (that) this inequality declines to moderate levels in industrial societies." Randall Collins, "Lenski's Power Theory of Economic Inequality: A Central Neglected Question in Stratification Research," in Sociological Theory (June 2004), vol.22.2:224. Lenski suggests that "marked social inequality" is a feature of *early* as well as of *mature* agrarian societies when he claims that: "one fact that impresses itself on almost any observer of agrarian societies…is the fact of *marked social inequality*." Lenski, Power and Privilege, 210. He qualifies and amplifies this generalization in the same paragraph: "without exception, one finds pronounced differences in power, privilege, and honor associated with mature agrarian economies. These differences surpass those found in even the most stratified horticultural societies of Africa and the New World, and far exceed those found in simple horticultural or hunting and gathering societies." Ibid.

[309] Following on Lenski's footsteps, Janet Chafetz argues that the economic role of women is directly related to the level of gender stratification in society and proclaims that in agrarian societies "women's relative status reaches its nadir." Janet S. Chafetz, "Gendered Power and Privilege: Taking Lenski One Step Further," Sociological Theory, vol.22.2:274. Chafetz builds upon Lenski's premise that power and privilege emanate from control of economic surpluses that result from technological advances, "to explain how men in general come to enjoy superior power and privilege relative to otherwise socially equal women and how some men come to enjoy vastly superior advantage over virtually all women (as well as most men)." Ibid., 276. Similarly, Rae Blumberg considers fluctuations in the 'level of female power' based on women's control of economic resources; she attempts to "extend" Lenski's design to "hold up both halves of the sky" in an effort to provide "a more gender-sensitive scheme for classifying agrarian societies"; she has found that the "level of female power" varies in agrarian societies, and seeks to distinguish "several distinct levels of gender equality"; hence Blumberg improves on Lenski's 'simple' versus 'advanced' agrarian types by setting apart wet from dry societies and arguing that there is "greater gender equality" among irrigated rice societies. Rae Lesser Blumberg, "Extending Lenski's Schema to Hold Up Both Halves of the Sky – A Theory-Guided Way of Conceptualizing Agrarian Societies that Illuminates a Puzzle about Gender Stratification," Sociological Theory (June 2004), vol.22:2: 282, 286, 289. Forthcoming theories may also presuppose Lenski's assumptions. Joan Huber intends "to build a theory of gender inequality using the basic variables of the Lenski theory." Joan Huber, "Lenski Effects on Sex Stratification Theory," Sociological Theory, vol.22.2: 258.

obtain certain economic and social privileges for their religious role; they lived a life of luxury and were celebrated as "holy mothers," but they were not free to worship female deities, choose a mate other than the Inca, live outside the *acllawasi*, or invest for private gain as the Mesopotamian priestesses did. In brief, the *acllawasi* was not a temple where goddesses were revered and served. Rather, it was a sort of detention house where abducted young women served the state, the Incas, and their supreme male god: The Sun (Silverblatt 1987, Guevara 1988).

Consequently, Gerhard Lenski's proposition that social inequality peaks in agrarian societies (Collins 2004:224) must continue to be re-examined.[310] The evidence presented in this Appendix indicates that, contrary to Lenski's opinion,[311] the level of inequality in the most advanced industrial societies is actually greater than that in agrarian Mesopotamia if we consider women and their religious involvement or lack of. In all of Mesopotamia – as well as in other ancient agrarian societies like those of Egypt, India, Japan, Greece, and Rome - there existed a notion of female divinity and an established female priesthood that gave full religious representation to all women and a substantial

[310] Lenski's inequality trend is being challenged nowadays. Francois Nielsen, for example, points out that "for some dimensions of social inequality the nadir of human freedom is associated with the advanced horticultural type of society rather than with the advanced agrarian type as Lenski had conjectured"; he contends that there are "agrarian reversals" in inequality trends that have "important empirical and theoretical implications for understanding the evolution of social inequality," and puts forward that Lenski's depiction of the overall trend has to be qualified. Francois Nielsen, "The Ecological-Evolutionary Typology of Human Societies and the Evolution of Social Inequality," Sociological Theory, vol.22:2:293. Nielsen's insight that the lowest point of inequality is not unequivocally positioned in agrarian societies as Lenski speculated has the potential to elucidate crucial aspects of social stratification that seem to have been obscured by Lenski's pan-historical and pan-cultural schema. If we consider that Lenski's fundamentally economic approach to social stratification is exerting some influence on gender stratification theory as well as on general sociological theorizing, the effort to qualify and clarify his theory seems all the more urgent. Theoretical endeavors such as the elementary sociological theory of the economy devised by Jonathan Turner owe much to Lenski's work on stratification. Jonathan H. Turner, "Toward a General Sociological Theory of the Economy," Sociological Theory, vol.22.2: 229.

[311] "The average level of inequality in the most advanced industrial societies is no greater than that in the average advanced agrarian society, and probably less." Lenski, Power and Privilege, 437.

degree of economic power and social privilege to a few: mainly, the high priestesses.[312] Even though Lenski acknowledged that the priestly class "was often one of the wealthiest in agrarian societies" (Lenski 1966:257), he failed to discuss the presence and social significance of the priestess.

Even if in urban Mesopotamia women as a group had less control over economic resources than men, *all* women enjoyed religious parity with men as far as representation was concerned and, some, had greater religious and economic advantage over most women *and* over large numbers of men. Therefore, this research puts forward that while it seems to be true that economic stratification usually parallels social inequities, when we add other variables such as religious power and privilege - and the sexual and aesthetic values contained in many early agrarian religions - the correlation between economic and gender stratification turns out to be more multifaceted than traditionally acknowledged.[313] As we shall see, the religious activities of Mesopotamian women configured to some extent their social status and security in the agrarian hierarchy.

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[312] A hierarchy of priestesses has been attested for various ancient agrarian regions. In Scandinavia, the "magician-priestesses known as the Vølva had a council of nine wise women." Marija Gimbutas, The Living Goddess, 119. According to Gimbutas, "communities of priestesses and women's councils, which must have existed for millennia in Old Europe and in Crete, persisted into the patriarchal era…In the earth fertility ritual of the Thesmophoria (the festival of Demeter) in ancient Greece, women did choose a presiding person and form a council in which decisions were voted by majority rule. Men were not allowed to participate." Ibid., 120. More, the magician-goddesses who "survive up to the present as Basque Mari, Irish Macha or Medb, Baltic Ragana, Scandinavian Freyja, and German Holla…appear alone or with large groups of assistants [their priestesses], and they…destroy or create fertility of fields and control male sexuality." Ibid. New research finds that participation in religion also meant power for women in ancient Greece: Joan Breton Connelly, Portrait of a Priestess (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 2007).

[313] It must also be noted that Old Mesopotamian society was characterized, as one of its foremost scholars A. Leo Oppenheim remarks, by "a remarkable degree of economic mobility: poor people expect to become rich; the rich are afraid of becoming poor; both dread interference from the palace administration." A. Leo Oppenheim, Ancient Mesopotamia (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977) 87.

Since women participated in temple affairs as managers, administrators, cult practitioners, investors, performers, and workers, this discussion begins with an overview of the temple's socio-economic role and place in Mesopotamian society. This review intends to serve as backdrop for our discussion of priestesses and "prostitutes." The pivotal role played by the temple in Mesopotamian history draws attention to the fact that being a priestess (or priest) could be both an honor and a major personal/social responsibility. The Mesopotamian temple was a powerful public institution responsible for most of the economic activity of the land before the other great public institution, the palace, emerged circa 2800.[314] It was in the Sumerian city-temples that corporate enterprise is said to have first developed (Hudson 1996:33). Priests and priestesses undertook economic enterprise in the public interest and became very wealthy and socially influential in the process.

The Temple in Society

According to noted Sumerologist Samuel Kramer, the center of the cult in Mesopotamian society was the temple with its "priests, priestesses, singers, musicians, eunuchs, castrates, and hierodules" (Kramer 1969:18). The temple was the "largest, highest, and most important building in the city, in accordance with the [Sumerian] theory…that the entire city belonged to its main god [or goddess], to whom it had been assigned on the day the world was created" (1969:12). While the temple usually owned and occupied only some of the land available, and the ruler and individual families

[314] In an interesting discussion of the dynamics of privatization Hudson underlines the role of the palace: "One form [of privatization] occurred when Sumerian rulers appropriated communal land and temple estates as their own personal property…A second type of privatization occurred when rulers gave property away from their relatives…" Hudson, Privatization in the Ancient Near East and Classical World, 34.

owned the remainder,[315] its influence on social life was vast especially in the early periods covered in this dissertation. Without the temple Mesopotamian civilization might have never attained the cultural heights it did. It was in the temple, for instance, that writing was invented around 3200. This development seems to have been tied to the need to keep track of the vast resources collected and distributed by temples; scribes pressed 'wedges' and 'nails' into clay tablets to keep records, hence the term 'cuneiform' from the Latin *cuneus* or 'wedge' (Bottéro 2001:12). Five thousand years ago, the temples of southern Mesopotamia also started to develop a sophisticated economic regime based on corporate enterprise as elaborated further on.

The Mesopotamian temple was "the highest and most indispensable reality for the good functioning of the universe" (2001:118) for, as already mentioned**,** the raison d' être of humanity was to serve, please, and house the gods. Temples were required by the creators themselves; as a result, temple structures were considered sacred. Hymns were composed to them and extant texts provide numerous details about the intricate preparations and rituals rulers and their cities apparently underwent to house the gods and goddesses. For example, "one of the oldest Sumerian literary works that have come down to us" (Jacobsen 1987:377) is a hymn to the temple Kesh, home of the birth goddess Nintur or Ninhursaga. This text offers information about the divine origin of the temple, its magnificence and auspiciousness, its need and demand for revenue, and its functions as: 'doorpost of the country,' sponsor of divination, incantations and spells, collector of offerings, and place of 'birthgiving' and refuge.

> "…Enlil was looking at all lands…Kesh was there raising the head unto him…and (so) Enlil was moved to sing the praises of Kesh…Nidaba [the

[315] Hudson offers that while corporate enterprise developed in the temples, "personal landownership emanated mainly from the palace sector." Hudson, Privatization, 33.

> goddess of writing and literature], she spun, as it were, a web out of those words, and writing them down on a tablet she laid them (ready) to hand. House, doorpost of the country, to Aratta a ferocious bull…house grown (to vie) with the mountains, lifting the head above the mountains, opalescent like the deep, green like the hills! Is anyone on his part as deserving of superiority as Kesh!...Who laid eyes ever on one (as) superior as Nintur, its mistress?...Good house built in a good place…like a princely barge floating in the sky…like the boat of heaven…inside the innermost of the house…is the heart of the country inside its back room is the life's breath of Sumer [the 'boudoir' of Nintur]…right good house, great side walls thrust against the sky…House founded by An, praised by Enlil…House, six hundred cubic *iku* above ground…Inside it warrior (-priests) set things to right, perform with great correctness the divinations…the house is consuming hundreds of oxen…hundreds of sheep…all (rulers on) throne daises are presenting their tribute…House giving birth to lions…Nintur, the great mother sets birthgiving going…Urumash, the great high constable…is rounding up stags and oxen for the house…the kings bring stone jars [temples sent an empty bowl to the reigning king who returned it filled]…the *enkum* priests are casting spells on the ground, the anointed ones are beating the (drum) skins…To the city, to the city clients come seeking clientage…to its mistress Nintur clients come, seeking clientage. Kesh is built!...Praise be Nintur!" (Jacobsen 1987:378-85).

Another hymn, written circa 2100 on several stones known as "the cylinders of Gudea," recounts in great detail the building of a temple by king Gudea in the city of Girsu in honor of the god Ningirsu - the power in the yearly spring rains. The texts relate intricate events and rites considered necessary to obtain divine permission and to prepare the site for construction, including the spiritual journey undertaken by the ruler. Before ordering the construction of the 'holy house,' Gudea prepared to have an oracular dream by sacrificing "a fit bull and a fit kid" (1987:389). Then he traveled to the city of his "dream-interpretress," the goddess Nanshe, to ask her to "reveal the heart of it" to him (1987).

> " In his barge he decided to set foot, and the boat sailed down the Idninashdu toward Nina [the city of Nanshe's temple]…After he had reached Bagara [a temple for Ningirsu on the river at Lagash]…he offered up loaves of bread, libated cold water, went before Bagara's owner, and hailed him: "Warrior, rampant lion…You have commanded me, but (do) let me set hand to it right

> for you!...let me build your house for you, and to perfection institute the offices for you…May your sister…and the gods' dream interpretress, my Nanshe…guide the foot for me in this!"…Lord Ningirsu accepted from Gudea his prayer and plea…The ruler took its bedding over to Gatumdug [city goddess of Lagash], offered up loaves of bread, libated cold water…said a prayer to her… "You, Milady, child born to holy An…I have no mother – you are my mother, I have no father – you are my father…put life's breath in my insides…and may the right-hand palm of your (two) august hands…lend me protection!...I am going to the city…to Nina…may my dream interpretress…reveal the heart of it to me!" (1987:391-92).

Gudea went on to the city of Nina and after making offerings to its "queen and high-priestess," Nanshe, proceeded to tell her his dream. Reading the signs and symbols of the dream, she confirmed that Ningirsu wanted the king to build a temple, and advised him to build a chariot to appease the god and obtain his approval: "hitched up to it a donkey stallion, adorned that chariot with fine silver and lapis lazuli…fashioned its beloved standard for him…then he will accept from you your slightest word as weighty…he will reveal to you the design of his house" (1987:396). Gudea "nodded" and built the chariot from wood which he "supervised repeatedly" and treated "with care" (1987:397). A second dream and the ensuing prayer by Gudea corroborate once again the use and import of sexual imagery in Mesopotamian ritual:

> "…did the ruler have a milk sheep, a fat-tailed sheep, and a grain-fed kid lie down on the skin of a virgin female kid…" (1987:398).

> "O my master Ningirsu, lord, seminal waters reddened in the deflowering; able lord, seminal waters emitted by the 'Great Mountain'…I am to build you your house, but I have nothing to go by!" (1987).

In the second dream, Ningirsu gives the king instructions – signposts - to build his house and promises to grant him abundance of cream and wool as well as rain and sunshine upon completion. He declares that imported woods will be brought before the king to

build the temple, and the rituals to clear the site and build the home of Ningirsu begin: "The ruler gave instructions to his city…(Harsh) words from all mouths he barred, barred from that house (all) offense…wool of mother sheep he put into (the overseer's) hands…no man let ominously words fall" (1987:403-04). Gudea went on to purify the city and the construction site with fire, juniper, prayers, and hymns. Oak, cypress, spruce, and cedar wood as well as bitumen, copper, gold, silver, carnelian, stone, and alabaster were imported from Elam, Susa, Madga, Kimash, and other places for Ningirsu's structure: "Magan and Meluhha in their mountains loaded wood upon their shoulders for him…cedar rafts from the cedar foothills…In *hauna* boats and *nalua* boats…bitumen and gypsum from the foothills of Magda…gold was brought in dust from [Kimash's] mountains…" (1987:408-09). Gudea supervised the works with zeal:

> "For the sake of building the house for his master, he slept not nights, not rested the head at noon…" (1987:409).

> "Building with silver, the ruler sat with the silversmiths, building Eninnu with precious stones, he sat with the jewelers, building with coopper and tin, Ninturkalamma [a patroness of craftsmen?] directed before him the craftsmen and metal casters" (1987:407-08).

These sources point to some of the responsibilities gods, goddesses, and rulers seem to have assumed in the process of building a temple and to the human and material resources required for such endeavor. The cylinders of Gudea go on to describe the measuring and making of the foundations: how the bricks were chosen and blessed, how the structure and placement of the complex was thought out, etc. Various rooms and objects were considered in the building plans: terraces, pillars, stone steles, furniture, utensils, gates, gateposts, arches, bedroom, cella, cowbarn, slaughterhouse, brewhouse,

chariot house, stores, music room, stairs, garden, funerary chapel, towers, weapons, and more (1987:409-26). When the "holy house" was ready, the local deities are said to have come to admire it and Ningirsu traveled to the site. Upon his approval, the temple offices were assumed. Among those chosen to manage the temple complex were: a high constable, a butler, a marshal, a vice-marshal, a vice-regent, a private secretary, a valet de chambre, an equerry, a goatherd, a bard, an elegist, handmaidens, a farmer (supervisor), an inspector of fisheries, a ranger, and a guard. The role music was expected to play is intimated through the appointments of the bard and elegist:

> "To have the sweet-toned instrument, the *tigi*-harp correctly tuned, to fill the courtyard…with joy, to make the *algar* and *miritum*, instruments of the private quarters, lie down for the warrior with ear (for music)…was his beloved bard, Ushumgalkalamma…To assuage the heart, assuage the liver, to dry the tears in the teary eyes, to banish dolor from the dolorous heart, and to keep grief far away from the lord's heart…surging like the Euphrates…was his harp…Lugaligihush" (Jacobsen 1987:434).

Thus the construction of Mesopotamian temples was a highly elaborate ritual process in itself. This is sensible given that to provide an adequate - comfortable, aesthetically pleasing, and holy - home for the gods was a major social responsibility and a delicate enterprise if humans did not want to provoke divine wrath and, by extension, their own destruction. As the home of the deity, the temple was a site of much hustle and bustle. Gods and goddesses demanded food, bathing, clothing, entertainment, aesthetic satisfaction, sexual gratification, and multiple religious offerings on a daily basis. In addition, they requested to be taken on trips around the city or abroad, to be consulted through divination, and, of course, to be praised with all sorts of religious acts such as festivals, parades, libations, incantations, animal sacrifices, hymns, and prayers.

The daily food offerings *alone* made to the deities at Uruk - Ishtar's city – provide an idea of the magnitude of such human responsibility towards the divine and suggest a concerted effort by many people within the society, one that rouses curiosity about the type of effort required of the general population during special times:[316] "The **daily** total, throughout the year, for the four meals per day: twenty-one first-class, fat, clean rams which have been fed barley for two years; two large bulls; one milk-fed bullock; eight lambs; thirty *marratu*-birds; thirty…-birds; three *cranes* which have been fed …-grain; five ducks which have been fed…-flour; two ducks of a lower quality that those just mentioned; four *wild boars*; three ostrich eggs; three duck eggs" (Pritchard 1955:344). The morning offerings to Inanna alone are listed in a hymn and include: incense, "fine sheep, maned sheep, and grain-fed sheep" (Jacobsen 1987:120) as well as ghee, dates, cheese, seven kinds of fruit, dark beer, light beer, barley beer, emmer beer, wine, honey, cakes, and loaves of bread (1987:121).

Temples served their deities at least two meals per day. Historian Leo Oppenheim has reconstructed the following sequence based on several descriptions of divine repasts:

> "First, a table was brought in and placed before the image, then water for washing was offered in a bowl. A number of liquid and semiliquid dishes in appropriate serving vessels were placed on the table in a prescribed arrangement, and containers with beverages were likewise set out. Next, specific cuts of meat were served as a main dish. Finally, fruit was brought in in…a beautiful arrangement, thus adding an aesthetic touch…Musicians performed, and the cella was fumigated [to dispel the odor of food]…Eventually, the table was cleared and removed and water in a bowl again offered to the image for the cleansing of the fingers. Having been

[316] Two tablets dating from the Seleucid period (320-141) describe the temple program for the New Year's Festival at Babylon, and are thought to reflect practices that went back to a much earlier time. Among the offerings listed are: images made of cedar and tamarisk and mounted in settings of gold with precious stones, weavings, sheep and rams for sacrificial rituals, wine, and prepared food such as roasted meat, loaves of barley bread, honey, and "aromatic ingredients and cypress." Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 331-34.

> presented to the image, the dishes from the god's meal were sent to the king for his consumption" (Oppenheim 1977:188-89).

Given its prime function as home and caretaker of the gods, the temple played a crucial role in the production, collection, storage, distribution, and redistribution of economic goods and services. To supply the gods and goddesses with their "needs," temples exploited extensive farm lands, maintained large herds, employed large numbers of people, extracted contributions from the palace authorities, and engaged in profit-seeking ventures. As mentioned in chapter 3, temples were involved in the textile industry, the production and commerce of agricultural and other products, the construction and maintenance of canals, the import of raw materials through conquest or long-distance trade, the mediation of the economic surplus,[317] and the lending of money at interest.[318] Their economic role grew to such proportions during the early periods that in some cities, such as that of Sippar, the people "owed their existence to the local temple and cloister" (Driver and Miles 1952:359).

For reasons such as these, economist Michael Hudson has called the Sumerian temples "history's first formal business corporations" (Hudson 1996:37). He argues that "Sumer's temples legitimized capital accumulation, that is, the reinvestment of surpluses *without reciprocity* to earn yet further gains. The objective…was to expand the means of production and to build up monetary savings…The various lands, workshops and herds were organized in what today would be called profit centers" (1996). This was all

[317] "As early as the fourth millennium, careful measuring was essential for planning the production of an economic surplus. A usufruct in the form of land-rent and interest was calculated – indeed, stipulated – in advance." Hudson, Privatization, 38.

[318] The balances owed from interest-bearing debts were paid by community members to the temple (or palace) with standardized common denominators: "barley for agricultural obligations, silver for commercial ones." Hudson, Privatization, 38.

possible thanks to a number of innovations that "have shaped the entire world's subsequent evolution" (1996):

> "Sumer's great contribution to civilization was a complex of innovations that broke through the traditional "anthropological" or "soft" interpersonal reciprocity of gift exchange to create the first known *economic* regime. The Sumerian innovations included bulk trade, standardized (hence, impersonal) money prizes and lot sizes, sharecropping rents, wage-rations, allotments, interest and contractual forms, and indeed the general system of weights and measures" (1996:36-7).

While Sumerian city-temples accumulated unprecedented amounts of capital, they did so in socially acceptable ways and, apparently, with an obligation to use some of the wealth in the public interest. They were public institutions which supported the community's welfare and its economic survival: "*Sumerian distinction between public and private sectors turned on the decision to set apart the community's industrial enterprise – along with land, herds and money – to support its workers in a corporately distinct sector that belonged at least nominally to the city-community as a whole*" (1996:39). Temples served the community by housing the deities and meeting their needs, which, in turn, secured for the city "the prosperity and happiness…the god's presence was taken to guarantee" (Oppenheim 1977:108). In other words, they constituted a link between the city and divine goodwill. Temples rendered other services to the community, such as the administration of oaths and ordeals. They also granted small loans without interest in cases of hardship and were in charge of correcting the grievances of the underprivileged. They apparently established the standards of weights and measures as well as standardized interest rates to prevent the victimizing of the poor (1977:107). In addition, they took in the infirm, the elderly, and famished children.

On the other hand, temples were administered as corporately autonomous bodies - independent of communal family groupings – and this allowed their officials "to build up extraordinary family property, at least by the mid-third millennium BC" (Hudson 1996:45). Certain classes of priestesses, for instance, were able to acquire personal property and bring in substantial profits to the temple and to their families through their business ventures while in religious service (below). The "communal" role of the temple must be understood within this context of corporate enterprising.[319] It must also be noted that sanctions against self-seeking accumulation existed in the Near East, just as they have in "nearly all communities studied by anthropologists" as a way to support group solidarity and survival (Hudson 2002:12),[320] but exceptions were permitted in the case of Sumerian temples because they were institutions sanctified by the community "to perform functions deemed socially necessary" (2002). As a result, temples were largely

[319] Hudson distinguishes between Sumer's communal and public sectors. To him, the communal sector of "self-supporting cultivators" was separate from the public sector of temples which functioned as "public utilities" and of the palaces. Hudson, Privatization, 44. Temples and palaces formed a corporately distinct sector within the society; the communal sector was "essentially a network of kinship-based and professional corporate communes which held land on a collective basis well into the second millennium. The land was redivided periodically or alienated as some families grew larger, others smaller…Families held tenure rights to cultivate this land, but were not "free" to transfer it as they chose – or, for that matter, to forfeit it permanently and thereby lose their economic freedom, citizenship rights and consequent obligations to serve in the army and to provide corvée labor…The function of the communal land was to support its holders, not to yield a formal economic rent." Ibid., 44.

[320] Mesopotamian rulers attempted to preserve economic balance by devising a series of checks, such as the periodic proclamation of Clean Slates, to the private concentration of wealth: "Most notably, rulers acted to restore the *status quo ante* of widespread land tenure by freeing debt bondsmen and annulling the barley-debt overhang, although leaving intact most commercial debts, urban real estate and commercial gardens or orchards." Hudson, Privatization, 46. "This ethic is needed to enable communities to survive in a risky, often hostile world of natural disruptions and aline predators. Internal opportunism is a luxury that hardly can be supported, as profiteering form other peoples' need would impoverish such communities, leaving them prone to external attack and internal collapse." Hudson, Debt and Economic Renewal in the Ancient Near East, 12.

free to "profit" from the labor of others,[321] from the high interest rates they charged (up to 33 1/3 %), from land rent, from war and conquest, and from commerce:

> "They supported war orphans and widows in their workshops, setting them to work weaving textiles. These were consigned to traders to exchange in distant lands for needed raw materials, as well as to sell locally for barley or other crops. As the major organizers of trade, temple (and palace) administrators advanced these handicrafts and other assets to merchants and "entrepreneurs,' as well as land to sharecroppers for a stipulated return. This helped legitimize profit-making along with the interest that the temples charged merchants for the goods and other institutional assets they advanced. The temples thus became the midwife sanctifying Mesopotamia's commercial breaktrough. In time, religion would come to denounce the charging of interest…but city-temples are likely to have been the practice's initial promoters and beneficiaries" (2002).

Temple income was thus derived from varied sources including long-distance trade, agricultural holdings, commercial credit, business investments, and from the lands and war booty donated by the king.[322] The goods brought to the temple were distributed in at least four different ways: to feed, dress, and entertain the deities as well as perhaps the king or head priest/priestess,[323] to support the temple's large personnel, to store for future use, and to convert into export goods and exchange for needed raw materials (Oppenheim 1977:187). The temple was hence organized "as a typical redistribution system with its

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[321] Hudson explains that while "a surplus was squeezed out of propertyless labor…this process was not based on economic classes in the modern sense of the term. The temple labor force was composed of widows and orphans, the aged and infirm, and war prisoners whose dependency was an accident of physical disability, the loss of their husbands or fathers through warfare, or of military subjugation. What prevented them from supporting themselves on the land was these personal circumstances, not their belonging to a landless class as such. Taking out of their family context, they were placed in temples charged with caring for their needs while mobilizing their labor to produce textiles and other export handicrafts." Hudson, Privatization, 54.

[322] "The building and the constant maintenance of the sanctuaries was a royal prerogative and obligation. From victorious kings the temple expected a share in the booty, especially precious votive gifts to be exhibited to the deity in the cella and the dedication of prisoners of war to increase the labor force of the temple." Oppenheim, Ancient Mesopotamia, 108.

[323] Oppenheim clarifies that "it remains uncertain whether the practice of sending the food to the king involved all the dishes or only certain ones, and whether it was repeated every day or only on special occasions. Perhaps the top officials of the sanctuary enjoyed the same privilege." Leo Oppenheim, Ancient Mesopotamia, 189.

characterisitic double aspect, incoming rents and gifts and outgoing rations and wages" (1977:106). The large amounts of "food, beer, bread, and sweets, and the great number of animals brought in every day from the pastures to be slaughtered, were destined for distribution among the personnel of the sanctuary" (1977:189).

Temple personnel included: male and female scribes, various classes of priests and priestesses, constables, veterinarians, diviners, astrologers, exorcists, craftsmen, wine makers, weavers, hairdressers, jewelers, singers, dancers, musicians, 'prostitutes,' potters, shepherds, farmers, merchants, and the widowed, orphaned, elderly, conquered, and disabled people who worked in the workshops.[324] Temple administrators and craftspeople received "what was not ear-marked for the table of the main deity, his consort, children, and servant gods" (1977). "A complicated cultic terminology was used to characterize the nature, destination, and other characteristics of the incoming deliveries" (1977). Products from fields and pastures were circulated "across the sacrificial table to those who were either, so to speak, shareholders of the institution or received rations from it" (1977:191). The collective corporate nature of the temple administration "made it necessary to divide the annual income among the members according to months, days, and even fractions of days…each member held his [or her] share in private ownership and was entitled to sell it, to give it as a dowry, or to leave it to his heirs" (1977:190).

The overall social importance of the temple is evinced in the classic Mesopotamian calendar which suggests that temple-related activity pervaded the lives of the people: "very few days went by without here and there people celebrating some more or less

[324] Mesopotamia possessed a highly specialized labor force. The division of labor "pervaded early Mesopotamian society. Some jobs were probably regarded as women's work, but this division did not keep women from exercising considerable freedom of movement and from dominating some institutions." Snell, Everyday Life, 20.

grandiose and solemn ceremony, festivity, or unfolding of the "service to the gods"." (Bottéro 2001:154). The temple's wide-ranging social and economic activities come to life in legal and literary documents which unveil riveting details about the goings and doings of human beings at the service of religion. In these texts, women appear as spiritual figures, ambassadors, benefactors, and savvy entrepreneurs. The participation of priestesses and "prostitutes" in the activities of the temple seems to have invariably enhanced their social and economic standing and/or to have provided a measure of social protection. The priestesses – their ranks and functions – are portrayed in copious detail in The Code of Hammurabi (CH) written during the Old Babylonian period (2004-1595). Yet, the different classes of priestesses probably had their origin in the earlier Sumerian civilization for their titles were always written in Sumerian (Driver and Miles 1952:358). As we review evidence on the institution of the female priesthood, it must be kept in mind that as far as the amendments - literally written in stone during the reign of king Hammurabi - are concerned, they only mirror aspects of the pre-existing law of the land which is still unknown to us.

The Priestesses

Mesopotamian society featured three major social categories: the patricians, the burghers, and the laborers among whom there were slaves. Men and women belonged in each category and male control of property and of sexual relations *may* have been the norm within each status group. However, it is important to recognize that the evidence points to many cases in which women – not men – controlled substantial economic resources and other women's sexuality as well. In Mesopotamia, Participation in the "great institutions" – temple and palace - was not restricted to men. At that time, as Joan

G. Westenholz, has said "there existed the phenomenon of parallel institutions, under male and female leadership with mixed staffs, a different societal norm of which [some] feminist scholars are unaware" (Westenholz 1990:511). In any event, women were subdivided according to religious and economic status; on top of the women's social ladder were the priestesses who by virtue of their religious service – as virgins or sex-cult practitioners - "enjoyed rights otherwise reserved for men" (Lerner 1986:96). Wives,[325] concubines, laborers,[326] and slave women[327] followed the priestesses in order of social

[325] Two forms of marriage, by purchase and by contract, appear to have coexisted from the time of Hammurabic law, c.1750, onward and they applied to women of different classes: "the concept that the bride is a partner in the marriage was implicit in the marriage contract of upper-class families. For lower-class women, however, marriage amounted to domestic enslavement." Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy, 112. Daniel Snell, however, questions the existence of marriage by purchase because the bride's family also presented gifts to the groom's family. Snell, Everyday Life, 52. The exchange of gifts - land, slaves, objects, or money in the form of silver - sealed the marriage. According to Hammurabic law, there were pre-marital gifts and post-marital contracts. A premarital gift known as the *tirhâtum* is what some scholars have called a 'bride purchase price,' yet Driver and Miles have shown that bridal contracts are very different in form from bills of sale and hence maintain that "the *tirhâtum* has nothing to do with sale, and it ought to mean something connected or given in connection with the sexual act, to which it refers." Driver and Miles, The Babylonian Laws, 264.

[326] Women worked as weavers, spinners, potters, oilpressers, and in agriculture, winnowing, carrying and removing grain, and milling. Lesko, Women's Earliest Records, 63-4.

[327] Slave women – captured or impoverished - were often 'donated' to the temples and employed in the textile industry and in agriculture. Lesko, Women's Earliest Records, 65. In the city of Lagash, the ration lists of the temple of Bau dating from circa 2350 attest to the presence of "slave women and their children" occupied in "preparing and spinning wool," the grounding of grain, the kitchen and the brewery, and the tending of domestic animals. Lerner, The Creation, 83. Scholars of ancient economies debate the role of slavery in Mesopotamian society. To Daniel Snell, slavery played a small role in the economy for slaves were not held in large numbers and were not very important in supplying labor: "unfree laborers were much more important to the Mesopotamian economy than slaves were." Snell, Everyday Life, 36. Lerner points out that "in the archaic state and in the city-states of antiquity, a slave was regarded as a species of property, yet at the same time as a dependent member of a household, entitled to a degree of protection." Lerner, The Creation, 95. Slaves were not separated from their families and were allowed to marry and have children; they could also conduct businesses, own slaves of their own, save money, buy their freedom, and, subsequently, efface the 'slave mark'. Contenau, Everyday Life, 21-3. Documents show how slaves bought or obtained their freedom. A text from the city of Nippur reports a slave-girl buying her freedom from a priestess for 10 shekels of silver. Driver and Miles, The Babylonian Laws, 225-26; another text details that a slave-girl adopted by a priestess for personal service will become free after the priestess's death, after that she "belongs to herself" and "she can attain whatever is in her heart." Ibid., 227. Male slaves could marry freewomen according to CH 175 & 176. The slave mark or *abbuttum* was incised in the flesh of the feet, or on one side of the head on temple or cheek, on the arm or hand, or on the forehead: "These slave marks sometimes represented concrete objects such as a star, a stylus or a hoe, serving as the owner's emblem, and sometimes depicted his name…They therefore were not mere badges of slavery but indicated ownership, and the *abbuttum* was presumably used for the same purpose." Driver and Miles, The

importance. There were several classes of priestesses, and the high priestess occupied the topmost position. Of interest here is the fact that some priestesses were wives and concubines as well.

Before delving into the institution of the female priesthood, it should be noted that royal wives comprised a unique category and should perhaps be ranked alongside the high priestesses for in certain places and historical periods they possessed great riches and wielded significant power.[328] During the late Early Dynastic period c. 2500, for instance, the queen's household in the city of Girsu – later called the temple of the goddess Bau - seems to have been a self-contained and self-sufficient economic institution under the supervision of a female administrator: "This institution…remained in continuous use through the second half of the third millennium BC, and several generations of queens are recorded as having been its administrators" (Bahrani 2001:105). The household controlled a large agricultural area and was concerned with agriculture as well as with canal maintenance, animal husbandry, fishing, production of bread and beer, cult patronage, textile production, and external trade (2001:106-7). Such estate encompassed "a substantial part of the economic resources of the state" (2001:107) and hence, as Bahrani points out, "control of the economic resources of the state was not

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Babylonian Laws, 308. The slave-mark could be 'cut away' or effaced by a barber when the slave became free. Ibid., 309. It seems that the general ancient attitude toward slavery began to change with the Romans for whom: "the slave became a mere chattel; in law he had neither wife nor children, and his master had the power of life and death over him." Ibid., 223.

[328] The wives of governors also played prominent roles in the economy of Sumer. Umma Ninmelam, wife of Ur-Lisi, acted as the supervisor of gold, leather, wool, and cloth transactions. The wife of the governor of Girsu was active in the textile industry and in cultic activity. Lesko, Women's Earliest Records, 62-3.

simply…a matter of men in charge and women excluded and limited to the domestic realm, but involved class hierarchies beyond binary gender divisions" (2001).[329]

Similar institutions appear to have existed in other cities throughout Sumerian history (Lesko 1989:56), and royal women seem to have had "a separate network for certain cultic activities" (1989:58). Texts from Umma list "the gold offerings of Ninkalla at the same occasions as those of her husband, King Shulgi, but through a separate administration" (1989). Despite their prerogatives, scholars like Rivkah Harris warn that royal wives lived in the traditional mode and hence remained agents of their husbands (Lesko 1989:147). In the end, they seem to have lacked autonomy and independence. [330]

On the other hand, some priestesses occupied a social role analogous to that of the father.[331] This is significant for "the father had the power of life and death over his children…the power to commit infanticide…[to] give his daughters in marriage in exchange for receiving a bride price…consecrate them to a life of virginity [or 'cultic sex'] in the temple service…arrange marriages for children of both sexes…pledge his

[329] Around the same time, the city of Kish is said to have been ruled by a queen not a king. Queen Ku-baba appears to have been a former tavern-keeper. Bottéro, Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia, 125. Other elite wives had economic and legal rights and the potential to own slaves and profit from their labor. Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy, 112. The *rabitum* was possibly the 'first or chief wife'; they were treated with great respect if they had borne sons and were never inherited by the man's sons, as were inferior wives or concubines following the practice by which the son inherited the father's wives and concubines other than his own mother. Driver and Miles, The Code of Hammurabi, 321. Nonetheless, before and during the Akkadian period in Mesopotamia most marriages were monogamous. Only under special circumstances men took second wives; mainly, if a woman was barren or if she was forbidden to have children because of her particular religious office, as in the case of the *naditum* priestess. Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy, 113. Before 2000 or its whereabouts, "there is no record of the existence of harems in general." Ibid., 83.

[330] Harris's emphasis on autonomy and independence has been criticized. We have no idea whether these marked a kind of freedom of women in Mesopotamia: "Surely the whole notion of individual independence and autonomy is a very western, modern notion, and to read that back into antiquity and look there for evidence of that sort of thing seems to me distorting what is there." Lesko, Women's Earliest Records, 163.

[331] "In CH the major crime is that of the son's rebellion against the father, with the priestess occupying a social role somewhat akin to that of the father." Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy, 106.

wife, his concubines and their children as pawns for his debt" (Lerner 1986:89).[332] Like fathers, some priestesses had the power to exchange women. High priestesses gave their female slaves in marriage to their brothers or husbands "to provide sons" (Driver and Miles 1952:222). As a result, the sexuality of slave women was not only disposed of by "powerful men as though it were a marketable commodity" (Lerner 1986:96) as Lerner has remarked, but it was also controlled by powerful women in religious service.

Furthermore, some priestesses owned slaves and conducted businesses just like men of means did in Mesopotamia. Priestesses benefited financially and socially, even if not always personally from religious association; some were forbidden to bear children or to have sexual partners, and the extent of their power and privilege varied according to their family's economic status. That Hammurabi's 'law' contains so many amendments concerning the property of priestess has been interpreted by several authors as a sign that priestesses were "in danger of becoming a depressed class" (Driver and Miles 1952:359). Several classes of priestesses emerge from the copious but fragmentary evidence available to us.

Entu

The daughters of royalty frequently held the prestigious position of High Priestess for either a god or a goddess. The high-priestess or 'bride of the god' was called *nin-dingir* in Sumer and *entum* or *entu* in Babylon (1952:361). They were the chief priestesses - counterparts of male high priests - and occupied offices in the cities of Ur, Uruk, Larsa, Lagash, Isin, Sippar, Nippur, Kish, and Assur (1952:362). They were often

[332] Gerda Lerner puts forth that the 'patriarchal' family was first fully institutionalized in Hammurabic law, c.1752: "The archaic state, from its inception, recognized its dependence on the patriarchal family and equated the family's orderly functioning with order in the public domain. The metaphor of the patriarchal family as the cell, the basic building block, of the healthy organism of the public community was first expressed in Mesopotamian law." Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy, 121.

chosen from among the daughters of rulers who 'dedicated' them in the service of a god or goddess.[333] *En*-priestesses wore distinctive clothing - the insignia and garments worn by the ruler (1952:361), and usually lived unmarried in the *gipar* - their private residence and administrative center which contained the temple of the god or goddess they served, storerooms, library, school, graveyard, and "operative areas associated with the divine cult" (Aruz 2003:200). They received rich dowries from their fathers and could use them freely when the father so authorized it. CH 179 states: "In the case of a [*entu*], a hierodule, or a votary, whose father, upon presenting a dowry to her, wrote a sealed document for her…he wrote for her (permission) to give her heritage to whomever she pleased and has granted her full discretion, after her father has gone to (his) fate, she may give her heritage to whomever she pleases, with her brothers having no claim against her" (Pritchard 1955:174). A notable exception was the "hierodule" of the god Marduk who, according to CH 182, could "give her heritage to whomever she pleases," apparently without parental permission (1955).

If and when the father failed to write a tablet giving (several classes of) priestesses permission to use their inheritance as they pleased, CH 178 stipulated that "their brothers shall take her field and orchard and they shall give her food, oil, and clothing proportionate to the value of her share and thus make her comfortable; if her brothers have not given her food, oil and clothing…she may give her field and orchard to any tenant she pleases and her tenant shall support her, since she shall have the usufruct of the field, orchard or whatever her father gave her as long as she lives, without selling (it or)

[333] King Nabû-na'īd dedicated his daughter as *entu* to the god Sin: "I offered the daughter of my body for the high priesthood" and provided her with ornaments, clothing, and furniture. Driver and Miles, The Babylonian Laws, 361-62. *Entu*-priestesses served several male and female deities: Illil and Ea, Shamash and Nanna, Ninurta and Inanna/Ishtar.

willing (it) to another, since her patrimony belongs to her brothers" (1955). What is of interest here is that the right to pass on property, with or without the father's permission, was reserved to priestesses because of their religious office. Other Mesopotamian women of means could not name their heirs; their property belonged to their fathers, brothers, or children at their death. Furthermore, religious office allowed priestesses to use their dowries to acquire and increase personal wealth through business ventures as we shall detail later on. In the case of lay women, the dowry or *seriktum* was usually managed by the husband during the marriage and returned to her or to her father in case of divorce or death of the husband.[334]

High priestesses had charge of temple management and affairs, employed secretaries to help them with their extensive businesses, participated in public ceremonial acts, and, most likely, oversaw the pouring of libations as it seems attested on votive plaques (Fig. 4). By the time of Hammurabi (1792-1750), *entus* or *en*-priestesses were "bound to chastity" (Driver and Miles 1952:277). They and the *naditus* (below) were the only classes of priestesses subject to extreme penalties in case they "frequented or kept an inn or, what is much the same thing, a brothel" (1952:363).[335] Nevertheless, they performed sacral sexual services for the community and that function places them in the particular

[334] Bottéro explains that in addition to her dowry a woman "had a sort of dower, formed for her by her husband…and jewels which…he gave her… She was free to top up this nest-egg in a variety of ways, starting with the 'secret funds' she managed to put aside from day to day." Bottéro, Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia, 121-22. A document from the late Sumerian period specifies the conditions for the return of a bride's dowry: "Ama-Sukkal, the daughter of Ninurta-mansum, has been taken in marriage by Enlil-izzu, the high priest of Enlil, the son of Lugal-azida; Ama-sukkal has brought 19 shekels of silver to Enlil-izzu, her husband (as dowry). If Enlil-izzu ever says to Ama-sukkal, his wife, "You are no longer my wife," he shall return the 19 shekels of silver and shall also weigh out ½ mina as her divorce-settlement. On the other hand, if Ama-sukkal ever says to…her husband, "You are no longer my husband," she shall forfeit the 19 shekels of silver and she shall also weigh out ½ mina of silver. In mutual agreement they have sworn together by the king." Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 219.

[335] "If an *entu*, who is not living in a [*gipar*], has opened (the door of) a wineshop or has entered a wineshop for a drink, they shall burn that woman." Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 170.

category of ancient women who fused religion, female sexuality, and artistic representation expanded in chapter 5. *Entus* participated in the annual Sacred Marriage ceremony as brides of the king-god and "presence" of the goddess Inanna/Ishtar (chapter 4). This suggests that the chastity requirement for *en*-priestesses could have been a development that took place around Hammurabi's time for, as mentioned in chapter 3, evidence from the previous Ur III period (c. 2112-2004) purports that an actual copulation between king and priestess-goddess took place during the religious ceremony (Bahrani 2001:137). As a matter of fact, a *daily* ritual of sexual union with the *entu* as priestess-goddess may have taken place in Mesopotamian temples whether real or symbolic. There existed 'marital quarters' inside the temples (Leick 1994:138); a special bed was installed in the Gipar, the private residence of the *entu*. Mesopotamian gods and goddesses enjoyed sex and if the temple was their home they may have required (rituals of) sexual gratification on a regular basis.

All the same, if there was a chastity requirement for the *entu* it must have meant or served something very specific for as Lerner has pointed out: "the concept that a woman's honor resides in her virginity and in the fidelity of her sexual services to her husband was not yet fully developed in the second millennium B.C." (Lerner 1986:80). Moreover, the goddess Ishtar was amply known and revered for her outrageous and promiscuous sexuality which earned her the title of 'hierodule of heaven' (Kramer 1979:87). Inanna/Ishtar was the "patron of eroticism and sensuality, of conjugal love as well as adultery, of brides and prostitutes, transvestites and pederasts" (Leick 1994:57). If

the *entu* stood for the actual goddess, it seems odd that such emphasis was put on her chastity.[336]

Enheduanna, the gifted daughter of king Sargon, is believed to have occupied the position of *entu*, which appears to have existed in Mesopotamia from at least 2300. Through her, we can glimpse at some of the activities and industries high priestesses engaged in. She was the high priestess of the moon and fertility god Nanna (Aruz 2003:20) and a devotee of the goddess Ishtar. She managed the temple grounds under her authority, oversaw the offering of libations (Fig. 4), commissioned aesthetic votive objects for the deities (Fig. 30), and wrote literary works. She is slowly becoming known as 'The World's First Author;' the composer of several religious hymn cycles "of recognized literary and stylistic merit" (Bahrani 2001:116, Kilmer 1995:2604).[337] One of the poems attributed to her, and known as 'Nin-me-šar-ra,' suggests that the office of *entu* was the object of political intrigue. In the hymn, Enheduanna claims that she was driven from her priestly office and city and suffered in exile but that "by persisting in praising the goddess [Ishtar] won back her favor and was restored to her previous position" (Leick 1994:58).

As priestesses, writers, patronesses of the arts, public administrators, and incarnations of the goddess Ishtar, *entus* were respected and protected by the

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[336] It is of interest that sexual omens refer to the sexual behavior of the *entu*: "If an *entu* priestess has anal intercourse to avoid pregnancy. The *entu* will contract a venereal disease. The *entu* shall have repeatedly intercourse with the *enu*. The *entu* will be faithless towards her lover." Leick, Sex and Eroticism, 219.

[337] Among these is a spirited hymnal prayer to an angry Inanna: "Queen of all the *me*, radiant light, Life-giving woman, beloved of Heaven and Earth, Hierodule of An, much bejeweled…My Queen…You have filled the land with venom like a dragon…Supreme one, who are the queen of heaven and earth, Who rain flaming fire over the land…Destroyer of the foreign lands…My Queen, you are all-devouring in your power…My Queen…the great gods, Fled before you like fluttering bats, Could not stand before your awesome face, Could not approach your awesome forehead. Who can soothe your angry heart!" Kramer, From the Poetry of Sumer, 87-8.

Babylonians.[338] As the "presence" (Bahrani 2003:144) of the goddess Ishtar, they incarnated the sacred feminine, sanctified sexual power, 'actualized' prosperity and abundance, legitimized political power, and reaffirmed existing socio-economic arrangements (chapter 4). Hence, their cloisters were important religious and economic centers.

There may have been two ranks of *entus*: *entu rabitu* – "the greater high-priestess"- and *entu sihirtu* – "the lesser high-priestess" (Driver and Miles 1955:363). And/or, there was another type of high priestess, the *ugbagtum*, who ranked just below the *entu* and above the class of priestesses known as *naditus*. While there is little information about them in The Code of Hammurabi, letters written in the city of Mari in northern Mesopotamia concerning the home of an *ugbagtu* shed light on the lives of these high priestesses. To restore the home of an *ugbagtu*, the governor of the southern city of Terga, Kibri-Dagan, consulted with the king as well as with the gods. Once the omens he had taken proved favorable, he started "to put that building in order" (Batto 1974:80). But the house was too close to that of a woman who made pastries and new omens were taken to get approval from the god of Terga, Dagan. Apparently, the house was completed for Kibri-Dagan in a second letter refused the king's request to come to Mari and escort the priestess back to Terga: "May my lord, out of the goodness of his heart, come up and himself kiss the feet of Dagan, the one who loves him! … I cannot possibly come!" (1974:81). Other texts from Mari, reveal the actual names of several *ugbagtus*, and the fact that during times of war priestesses could become captives who, for the most part, received special treatment out of fear of offending the deities they served. They were, for

[338] For instance, a false charge of inchastity against them would result in punishment by ridicule. CH 127: "If a seignior pointed the finger at [an *entu*]…but has proved nothing, they shall drag that seignior into the presence of the judges and also cut off half his (hair)." Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 171.

instance, "spared the indignity of being assigned to the textile factory" (1974:85). Moreover, this evidence shows that "many of the same rules which governed the life of the *ugbagtu* applied to the *naditu* (1974:79). Neither was allowed to bear children.

Naditu

The *lukur* (Sumer) or *naditum* (Babylon) comprised a class of highly esteemed and financially powerful priestesses. The *naditus* –'left fallow'- were forbidden child-bearing[339] yet some could marry, such as those in the service of the god Marduk. Moreover, there are at least two cases in record in which *naditus* were in possession of new born infants and brought their childbearing out in the open without apparent punishment or social disgrace (Jeyes 1983:267). The class of *naditu* is recorded from circa 1880 to 1550 and cloisters existed in the cities of Sippar, Babylon, and Nippur. The cloister of Sippar, an important city of trade with a population of about 5000 people, housed 100 to 200 *naditus* at any given time. This cloister had a granary and employed "a female staff of weavers, millers and cooks" (1983:269).

By and large, *naditus* were the daughters of kings or high bureaucrats, scribes, doctors, and priests. They served many male (and female) deities: Marduk, Shamash, Ninurta, Sin, Anum, Ishtar, Ilabrat, and Suzianna (Driver and Miles 1952:364). In Sippar, "some one to two hundred *naditu* [of the god Shamash] and cloister officials lived in private dwellings – some owned, others leased by their residents" and surrounded by a wall (Lesko 1989:151). They stayed unmarried and had their own slaves to take care of

[339] This prohibition has been explained as part of and effort to curb overpopulation. The god Enki "introduces on earth several categories of women who either cannot have children (because of sterility or *because of a religious commitment* that precludes procreation) or who, after giving birth, will see their children quickly snatched away by the enemy of babies, the cruel demoness called the Extinguisher." Bonnefoy, Mythologies, 151. Italics are not in text.

household chores (1989:152).[340] On the other hand, the *naditus* of the god Marduk in Babylon were uncloistered and able to marry (1989:161). A princess from the northern city of Mari was apparently a *naditu* of the god Shamash and his consort the goddess Aya at the famous Sippar cloister.[341] Her name was Eristi-Aya, daughter of king Zimri-Lim. Her letters to her parents reveal not only one of her main religious functions but also details of her trials and tribulations. Eristi-Aya felt isolated and neglected by her parents. Her rations of oil, cloth, honey, money, and slaves were not being delivered as expected and she impressed her frustration in a letter to her mother:

> "I am a king's daughter! You are a king's wife!…They treat well soldiers taken as booty! You, then, treat me well!" (Batto 1974:99).

Eristi-Aya's roles as a foreign *naditu* – Sippar was south of Mari - seem to have been diverse. On the one hand, she was the personal representative of a foreign king before the god Shamash and the goddess Aya at what appears to have been the most prestigious cloister of her time. As such, she was a sort of political ambassador. On the other hand, her religious role included that of intercessor between the king and the god; or, especially, the goddess.[342] She prayed continually for him and for his dynasty: "Am I not your praying emblem who constantly prays for your life?" (1974:96). The role of intercessors on behalf of their fathers or benefactors was apparently "considered part of

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[340] Rivkah Harris describes the installation of the *naditu*. The entrance of a girl into the cloister took place at the beginning of a three day festival. Her guardian received a betrothal gift from the cloister administration. She may have been clothed in bridal dress, "which may have been the distinctive dress of a *naditu*." On the second day of the festival, all *naditus* performed rituals for the dead (*naditus*) and the neophyte may have been brought to the cemetery "to witness her guarantee of eternal care in the afterlife…" Lesko, Earliest Women's Records, 154.

[341] Cloisters accepted priestesses from other cities. The daughters of the kings of Babylon became *naditu* in Sippar, for example. Bernard Frank Batto, Studies on Women at Mari (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1974) 95.

[342] Rivkah Harris has pointed out that *naditu* were more attached to Aya than to Shamash. Batto, Studies on Women at Mari, 98.

the regular role" (1974:97) of the *naditus*. In Sippar, for example, the *naditus* termed themselves as "the one who prays continually for you/ your life" (1974). As such, they served an instrumental role in the stability and perpetuation of their communities.[343] The repeated action of praying for the king's life was most likely intended to ensure the prolongation of his reign and hence of the existing community, as was the repeated image in Mesopotamian representation (chapter 3). Other religious duties of a *naditu* included two daily religious offerings and a special monthly offering – the *piqittum*:

> "which consisted of oblates, cuts of meat, and beer…. Apart from this montly festival…about six other festivals…of which very little is known took place. It is possible that the *naditus* went to the temple in a procession for at least some of those festivals and took part in banquets" (Jeyes 1983:268).

Other Mesopotamian princesses who became *naditus* of Shamash include: Ajalatum - daughter of Sumulael, Iltani – daughter of Sin-muballit (Hammurabi's sister), and another Iltani – daughter of either Samsuiluna or Abi-esuh (1983:262). A woman by the name of Kubatum is also said to have been a *lukur/naditu* who lived in the royal household circa 2030. She was a vocalist who sang erotic hymns to her beloved king Shu-Sîn. Her position as *naditu* is controversial because apparently she had children by the king. As a result, at least one author has claimed that she was not a priestess but a royal courtesan (Leick 1994:149). However, as I show in chapter 5, there was a religious meaning/aura attached to this *lukur* and, therefore, like the *entu*, she also embodies the integration of religion, female sexuality, and art in Mesopotamia.

[343] Bernard F. Batto likens this role to the practice of offering votive statues before deities in the temples. The statues stood as continous prayer on behalf of the donor. Like the statues, *naditus* may have been "installed by the king as intercessors to pray continuously for him in his absence." Batto, Studies on Women at Mari, 97.

Because, as a rule, *naditus* were forbidden to bear children, they used slave women or low-ranking temple priestess-servants like the *sugetum* to bear sons for their husbands when married. They brought rich dowries to the temple and used them as capital for business transactions and to lend money at interest. Many of them apparently moved about the city at will to take care of their affairs which included selling land, slaves, and houses, making loans and gifts, and managing herds and fields (Lerner 1986:128). Some *naditus* were scribes (Jeyes 1983:268) while others "spun and wove to earn money" (Bottéro 1992:122), but most were "devoted to business…they invested and formed associations with itinerant business agents to organize a whole export trade in native products, and the import of foreign goods…they kept an eye on the working of their lands, engaged tenant farmers, growers, day-labourers and specialists in the cultivation of date-palms, giving orders to some, reprimanding others, demanding reports on the state of works in progress – in short, in the tranquility of their 'convent', leading the true life of 'business women', adventurous and hectic" (1992).

A list of items in a *naditu*'s dowry corroborates that these priestesses were recruited from wealthy families:

> "9 slave girls, 24 garments, 42 headdresses…a shroud…jewelry, crockery, weaving equipment, cows and sheep… [and] a share of the paternal estate" (Jeyes 1983:264).

Naditus often adopted children and, like *entus*, were forbidden to enter an inn if they resided in the cloister (Driver and Miles 1952:364). This prohibition is interpreted by Gerda Lerner as indicative of "a looseness of morals among cultic servants…(or) an increased desire on the part of the law-makers…to draw clear lines of distinction between respectable and non-respectable women" (Lerner 1986:128). I would like to suggest that

this amendment to the law during Hammurabi's reign might also indicate that in earlier times running wine-shops was the prerogative of such priestesses and new law-makers may have wanted to put an end to such profitable trade in the hands of women, especially in those of powerful women like the *entu* and *naditu*. In relation to this, it is worth noting that at least two documents assert that *naditus* owned taverns or a part of a tavern in the time of Hammurabi's father without impairing their respectability (Jeyes 1983:267). Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the goddess Ishtar was associated with taverns, and with the 'prostitutes' who apparently worked there, and that tavern keepers or wine sellers were often women as the stringent amendments regulating their businesses demonstrate.[344]

The affairs of the *naditu* were extensive.[345] They often bought various kinds of property with their "ring-money," which represented "what she has earned and of which she may have had free disposition" (Driver and Miles 1952:365). The property or money *naditus* acquired on their own through business ventures and investments could be used by them at will[346] and could be willed to their adopted children and others.[347] In one case,

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[344] CH 108: "If a woman wine seller, instead of receiving grain for the price of a drink, has received money by the large weight and so has made the value of the drink less than the value of the grain, they shall prove it against that wine seller and throw her into the water." Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 170. CH 109: "If outlaws have congregated in the establishment of a woman wine seller and she has not arrested those outlaws and did not take them to the palace, that wine seller shall be put to death." Ibid.

[345] Some authors have argued that the economic freedom of the *naditu* was essentially a device to expand the family patrimony. Lesko, Women's Earliest Records, 158. Critics of this position point out that "if you really want to concentrate on patrimony what you do is prevent some of your sons… [not your daughters] from marrying." Ibid, 162. Interestingly, the evidence shows that *naditu* generally outlived their brothers. Ibid., 158.

[346] CH 40: "A [*naditum*], a merchant, and a feudatory extraordinary may sell his field, orchard and house, with the purchaser assuming the feudal obligations of the field, orchard and house which he purchases." Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 168.

[347] Lerner has argued that in Mesopotamia a woman could not "cede or will her property." Lerner, The Creation, 109. However, this generalization obscures the important distinction between inherited and 'acquired' property. Moreover, other authors have noted that: "the derivative abstract noun for 'inheritance'

a priestess's house, built within the cloister, as well as her 'chattels' are left by the priestess to her niece. However, the evidence suggests that "all that a priestess can leave to an adopted child is her acquired property" (1952:379, n.4), unless she obtained permission from her father to will her dowry. In other words:

> "A priestess on the one hand could not leave or make a gift *post mortem* of property derived from her father to a stranger in blood [without the father's written permission] and…her interest in it was limited to her life; on the other hand, she could dispose of property otherwise acquired in favor of any person whom she chose to adopt. She often appears in documents as a purchaser of land which is said to be bought 'out of her ring-money'." (1952).

Despite these privileges, *naditus* were not exempt from paying royal taxes. One author suggests that this was the case because *naditus* "acted as private individuals in their business transactions, never as representatives for the cloister or the temple and, unlike the temple loans, there does not seem to have been any element of charity in the lending business of the *naditus*" (Jeyes 1983:270). In other words, *naditus* sought to profit personally from their business ventures and in this they acted as private investors who had obligations towards the king. One *naditu* is recorded to have employed 117 workers! (1983:271).

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is of frequent occurrence in reference to women" and conclude that "in the time of the Laws both the widow and the daughters had certain claims to inherit." Driver and Miles, The Code of Hammurabi, 329 and 331. Driver and Miles critique Koschaker who relates the right to inherit to the ancestral cult and "infers that the heir is the person who maintains the ancestral cult…and that women are incapable of participating in this cult." G.R. Driver and John C. Miles, eds., The Babylonian Laws (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952) vol.1:330. To them, "in ancient Babylonia women seem not to have been entirely excluded from participation in the rites connected with the ancestral cult, for Gudea king of Lagas can speak of a daughter burning oil and offering before a god in a house where there is no son, and a tablet of adoption of the Cassite period describes an adopted daughter as undertaking to pour water on her adoptive mother's grave, i.e. to perform a funerary rite." Ibid., 330-31.

What is more, in Mesopotamia inheritance of land, for example, "created merely a life-interest in it, sometimes even without possession." Ibid., 324. Thus certain types of inheritance were expected to be returned to one's family of origin at death. In the case of women, this idea seems to have been extended to all the assets received from their family of origin for a dowry was said to 'belong' to their father or brothers; and, if they were married, the dowry was 'managed' by the husband and passed on to her children at death or returned to the brothers if there were no children. Despite the well-established patrilineal system of inheritance, there is at least one citation in the 'laws' which specifies that a woman inherited from another woman, 'her heiress:' ""she who succeeds to her property after her" is the phrase used to describe a woman who inherits another woman's property." Ibid., 329, n. 4.

The sacro-sexual role of the *naditu* is controversial. Some authors have claimed that *naditus* were virgins who remained celibate and cloistered throughout their lives (Lesko 1989:151). Others argue that though usually unmarried, the *naditu* made no vow of chastity: "it is not…necessary to suppose a vow of chastity…for it is likely that she was in some temples, as for instance those of Istar, a sacral prostitute" (1952:366). In any event, if a *naditu* was found with child, its birth could "be prevented by abortion, which was a practice known to the Assyrians and was doubtless practiced in Babylonia" (1952:366-67) or the child could be exposed at birth. Another form of birth control used by priestesses was sodomy; according to one document, a priestess "had herself sodomised to avoid falling pregnant" (Bottéro 1992:102).

Qadistu

A third category of "temple-servant" was the *nu-gig* in Sumer and *qadistum* in Babylon. According to Driver and Miles, the Babylonian word *qadistum* is "philologically identical with that for the sacral 'harlot' or 'prostitute'" (1952:369, n.6). According to other evidence, the *qadistu* had more than one function during the long span of Mesopotamian history. On the one hand, she is believed to have performed sexual services while in the temple service because "Istar is herself described as a *qadistu,* and the *qadistu* is mentioned in a text of a subsequent period in connexion with witches, hierodules and prostitutes" (1952:369). On the other hand, she is identified with the tasks of procreation and nurture as well as with rituals of purification, exorcism, and other religious ceremonies.

The Old Babylonian legal texts indicate that *qadistus* often worked as midwives and paid wet-nurses. They owned property, could marry, could adopt - and perhaps even have

their own children.[348] There is evidence that *qadistus* married men in high positions, at least in pre-Sargonic Lagash (Westenholz 1982:258). Therefore, *qadistus* could live outside the cloister. In the city of Nippur, during the Isin-Larsa period, a *qadistu* by the name of Inbatum had her own domicile and personal household (1982:252). On the other hand, in the city of Larsa, *qadistus* were installed in "the place of the gods" and were considered a mark of the civilized way of life (1982). The Old Babylonian story of the flood – *Atrahasis* – alludes to the function of *qadistu* as midwife: "let the midwife rejoice in the house of the *qadištu*-woman where the pregnant wife gives birth" (1982). Likewise, later Babylonian texts contain references to the *qadistu*'s role in childbirth: "the *nadītus* who with skill heal the foetus, the *qadištus* who with water [per] form purifications" (1982:253).

In the city of Kish, *qadistus* seem to have had a ritual function in purification ceremonies according to the text known as *The Constest between the Tamarisk and the Palm:* "Come let us go I and you to the city of Kish…After the *qadištu*-woman has sprinkled water, she takes … and they worship and hold a festival" (1982). Other texts relate the *qadistu* to sorceresses and to rituals of exorcism (1982). Furthermore, in Middle Assyrian ritual texts, the *qadistu* officiated in the Adad cult in Assur and performed the role of cantor: "on the day that… Adad and they let the *qadištu*-women intone the *inhu*-chant, prolong the *inhu*-chant, the SANGA [priest] performs a purification ceremony, the *qadištu*-women raise the (statue of the) god, the SANGA and the *qadištu*-women depart from the temple of Adad. The procession continues to various other temples, and the same activities are repeated. During these rituals, the *qadištu*-women wear certain jewels.

[348] Driver and Miles point out that the law did not contemplate that the *qadistu* would bear *legitimate* children because their property passed to their brothers not to their sons. Driver and Miles, The Babylonian Laws, 370.

Furthermore, the *qadištu*-women partake of the sacrificial offering" (Westenholz 1982:254).

Hence in addition to participating in varied religious activities, the *qadistu* was a performer. Her role as performer seems to have extended beyond temple grounds. She was known for her special "costume" - jewelry and headdresses - as well as for her "shouting" and "screeching:" "the nu-gig-priestess screeched like an Anzu-bird of young ones even though she is not a young duck, she shrieked like one" (1982:260). Yet, as Westenholz points out, it is difficult to ascertain from the available evidence "whether the screeching refers to sympathetic labor pains or some other cultic, cacophonous performance" (1982). Nonetheless, her association with singing, (promiscuous) sexuality, and religion puts her in the category of ancient women who blended religion with sex and art.

Kulmasitu

A fourth type of priestess was the "votaress;" known as *nu-bar* in Sumer and *kulmasitum* in Babylon. Like the *naditu*, the votaress was allowed to marry but not to bear children (Driver and Miles 1952:371). She also received a dowry from her father and was allowed to give it to whomever she pleased with the father's permission. A dowry could include people as well as land; land gifts represented a payment in advance of the daughter's share in the father's estate (1952:274). Like other priestesses, she had the right to one-third of the paternal state and her inheritance usually reverted to her brothers upon death. *Kulmasitus* are usually mentioned together with the *qadistu* and are often portrayed as lower-ranking temple servants. However, the rank of the votaress is difficult to ascertain with precision because evidence shows that some *kulmasitus* were

also *naditus.* One document reveals that a certain bride was a *naditu* of Marduk and at the same time also a votaress (1952:257). The following is an example of a votaress-bride's dowry:

> "A slave-girl Belladatum…4 rings of silver…10 garments…2 three-year-old cows…1 cauldrin of copper…1 mill of stone for flour…bed, 5 wooden chairs…10 *qa* of fine oil…1 wooden dish (carried) on the head… 3 wooden combs for the head…2 wooden covers…1 woman Salurtum her sister…All this is the dowry of Liwir-Esagil the priestess of Marduk and votaress, the daughter of Awil-Sin, which …her father…has given (to) the priest of Istar, the son of…for Warad-Samas his son…her bridal gift has been bound in her girdle and restored to …her father-in-law, henceforth her sons are her heirs" (1952:253-54).

Sugetu

The "lay-sister," called *su.gei* in Sumer and *sugetum* in Babylon, often served as handmaid of the *naditu*. She bore children and occupied the place of concubine or second wife. However, she seems to have lived outside the cloister for she is described as "a priestess of the road" (1952:373, n.6). A document revealing that "'a cultivable field within the meadow-land of the sons of the lay-sisters'…is taken in partnership for cultivation for one year" has been used by Driver and Miles to speculate that the lay-priestesses "were collected together and lived in an institution" (1952:373-74). What is certain is that the law concerned itself with the property of these women too. CH 137 stipulates the terms in case of divorce for a *sugetu* who bore children:

> "If a seignior has made up his mind to divorce a lay priestess who bore him children…they shall return her dowry to that woman and also give half of the field, orchard and goods in order that she may rear her children; after she has brought up her children, from whatever was given to her children they shall give her a portion corresponding to (that of) an individual heir in order that the man of her choice may marry her" (Pritchard 1955:172).

Concubinage was a means of upward mobility for women in Mesopotamia and other regions of the ancient world. In ancient China, concubines "could attain the highest positions in society" (Lerner 1986:93). In Mesopotamia, *sugetus* received dowries but no other share in their father's estate as the *naditus* did (Pritchard 1952: 295, 372). Like the first wives, they sometimes also received "settlements" from husbands (1952:269).

On the other hand, the slave-concubine who did not partake in religious function served as domestic and procreative slave to the mistress, and her offspring belonged to the wife (Lerner 1986:92). She performed sexual services for the master "with the knowledge and consent of the wife" (1986) and although she may have "advanced her and her sons' positions by concubinage…she never ceased being a slave of the first wife" (1986:93). She was "obliged to serve the first wife, grind her daily meal, and carry her chair to the temple" (1986:113). If she aspired to equal status with the wife she could be sold (CH 146), but if she had borne sons she was allowed to remain as a slave (Pritchard 1955:172). The priestess-wife could put the slave-mark on "the slave-wife or concubine who has presumed to set herself on an equality with her after bearing children to the husband" (Driver and Miles 1952:307).

Beyond the ranks of priestesses reviewed thus far, there was a most intriguing figure among the "temple servants" in Mesopotamia known as the "epicene" or *salzikrum* in Sumerian – with no equivalent word in Akkadian. This "woman-man," sometimes referred also as *secretu*, seems to have been a woman of high rank who probably lived cloistered and, according to some observers, might have been an officer in charge of the women in the temple rather than a religious figure (Lerner 1986:130). Scholars speculate that she was a kind of eunuch-chamberlain, a male disguised as a woman, a woman

disguised as a man, or a person representing an earlier aspect of Mother-Goddess worship which stressed bisexuality or hermaphroditism (1986).[349] Nonetheless, before the law, the *salzikrum* "is regarded as a woman…she receives a *seriktum* [dowry] like other daughters from her father" and her inheritance, like that of other priestesses, reverted to her family at her death (Driver and Miles 1952:368).

The practice of cross-dressing and cross-gendering in connection to religious ritual is well-attested in numerous early agrarian societies.[350] In the Mesopotamian city of Uruk, male and female cult personnel – which included "prostitutes" – paraded with emblems of the opposite sex during the performance of public rites. The famous "Inanna-Dilibad" hymn which dates from the reign of Iddin-Dagan (1984-1954) describes such practice during the processions that took place on the occasion of the New Year Festival:

> "The spear, 'the arm of battle' they [*sagurra* – male prostitutes]
> grasp in their hand.
> They walk before the holy Inanna,
> Their right side they dress with men's clothes,
> They walk before the holy Inanna,
> Their left side they cover with women's clothes.
> They walk before the holy Inanna…
> With jump ropes and coloured cords they compete before her"
> (Leick 1994:157)

[349] "It has been thought to suggest either a male disguised as a woman or a female as a man. Incidentally either theory would explain why wearing the clothes of the opposite sex was disapproved by the Hebrew reformers as 'an abomination unto the Lord'; for … the prohibition 'is not a mere rule of conventional propriety but is directed against those simulated changes of sex which occur in Canaanite and Syrian heathenism." Driver and Miles, The Babylonian Laws, 367-68.

[350] The Greek *kouBaBos* "was represented by a statue of female form but in male dress at Hierapolis…and the eunuch-priests of Cybele, called indifferently *galli* and *gallae*…worshipped the goddess dressed in the clothes of the opposite sex. Driver and Miles, The Babylonian Laws, 368, n. 3. The Japanese Sun Goddess Amaterasu also cross-dressed as male warrior before confronting her brother Susanoo in battle. Philippi, Kojiki.

The *sagurra* are followed by young men carrying hoops and by *sugetus* (priestesses) who bring a sword and a double-edged axe before Inanna (1994:158). A different translation reads:

> "The male prostitutes comb their hair before you.
> They decorate the napes of their necks with colored scarfs,
> They drape the cloak of the gods about their shoulders…
> The women adorn their right side with men's clothing…
> The maidens and coiffured priestesses walk before you,
> They carry the sword and double-edged axe" (Wolkstein 1983:97-99).

Consequently, the *salzikrum* may indeed have been women who performed ritual tasks in male drag. In any event, the sexual ambiguity of the *salzikrum* as well as the practice of cross-dressing or cross-gendering within the context of religious ritual underline once again the connection between religion, sexuality, and the aesthetic/theatrical in Mesopotamia.

In sum, the ongoing review of existing sources on the women of religion in Mesopotamia raises many questions and answers others. We still do not know the exact gender and role of the *salzikrum* within the temple, but we have clear confirmation that a complex and highly organized female religious hierarchy existed. We do not know whether the sexual services of the *sugetus* – as handmaids of the *naditus* – had any religious value, but we know that some classes of priestesses performed sacral sexual services. These may have included the *qadistus* as well as the *naditus* and *entus*. The evidence also suggests that although not all priestesses engaged in ritual sex or in artistic endeavors, sexual and aesthetic concerns were central to the cult. Besides ritual sex-acts, music and poetry were composed and performed by some priestesses, for example.

The evidence bears that priestesses wielded substantial social and economic power. The centrality of the temple in Mesopotamian life gave free rein to priestesses (and

priests) to pursue a variety of economic and social enterprises that preserved and enhanced their status in the society. As a result, respect and reverence were conferred on the priestesses by the people of Mesopotamia, especially on the *entus* and *naditus* who took on prominent economic and ceremonial roles. Because of religious role, and in proportion to their economic status, Mesopotamian priestesses enjoyed greater social repute, exercised greater control over their property, and had greater access to business opportunities than most lay women, and insolvent men. Hence, despite vast gender difference in Mesopotamian society, priestesses had ample economic rights and protections under the law. In their case, property conventions were significantly modified, and their financial wellbeing was lawfully secured.[351]

Unlike other women of means who were proscribed to cede the property they inherited, many priestesess had the right to will family property when they received written permission from their fathers. Some – *naditus* – could receive a full share of the inheritance equal to that of their brothers if a dowry was not given to them before their father's death (Lesko 1989:152). And, they could disinherit their brothers if they did not provide the necessary supplies required by them. Moreover, priestesses were free to

[351] Wives in general enjoyed certain protections under the law. The 'settlement' or *nudunnum* was made "by the husband on his wife." Driver and Miles, The Babylonian Laws, 265. According to the law, "a widow had a right to the share of a single heir in her husband's estate, but it was apparently usual for a husband to settle a share of his property by deed on his wife for her maintenance during widowhood." Ibid. Land, slaves, garments, and mills could be part of a settlement. Ibid., 266. As the following example illustrates, a husband could and sometimes did leave "divorce money" to his wife upon termination of the marriage. Ibid., 291.This document exemplifies such arrangement as it demonstrates the bargaining power of wives: "Lu-Utu, the son of Nig-Baba, divorced Geme-Enlil. Digidu, an officer and official, took oath that Geme-Enlil had taken her stand (and) said, "By the king! Give me 10 shekels of silver (and) I will not enter claim against you," (and) that she made him forfeit 10 shekels of silver. Ur-..(was) the deputy; Ur-Lama (was) the governor." Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 217. In addition, the marriage contract or *riksatum*, "could endow the wife with certain property rights, specify conditions for her rights in case of separation, and could save her from being liable to enslavement for debts her husband had incurred prior to the marriage." Lerner, The Creation, 107. There is some evidence from the Old Babylonian period (2004-1595) that wives and children of both sexes could be reduced to bond-service for their husbands' and fathers' debts. Driver and Miles, The Babylonian Laws, 230.

acquire personal property through independent business ventures and to cede it or will it as they pleased. Thus the religious status of some patrician women increased their economic power.

Like priestesses, but most probably to a lesser extent, other women also benefited socially and economically from religious involvement in Mesopotamia. Female piety in Mesopotamia is well-documented and there is even a Sumerian proverb that pokes fun at women's religious ardor:

> "My wife is surely at the outdoor shrine,
> My mother at the river - [probably a place for ritual purity]
> And I shall die of hunger" (Van Der Toorn 1989:194).

"Prostitutes," for example, gained from participation in religious activities and endeavors. This suggests that the practice of prostitution in Mesopotamia also had meanings and purposes quite different from those we know.

The "Prostitutes"

The Babylonian Erra poem from the late second millenium deplores the oppression and persecution of Inanna's people, including her 'prostitutes' and transvestites, on the grounds that their acts - even if and when offensive - "please the heart of Ishtar" ensuring the goodwill of the goddess:

> "In Uruk, seat of Anu and Ištar, city of *kezretus*, *šamhatus*, and *harimtus* [various types of 'prostitutes'],
> Whom (or which, said of the city) Ištar deprived of husbands and handed over to you (Erra),
> Sutean men and women scream their abuse;
> They rouse Eanna, the *kurgarrus* and *assinnus* [transvestite-prostitutes]
> Whose masculinity Ištar has turned to femininity to make the people reverend, The carriers of dagger, razor, scalpel and flint blades,
> Who regularly do [forbidden things] to delight the heart of Ištar:
> You set over them an insolent governor who will not treat them kindly,
> (But) persecuted them and violated their rights.
> (With the effect) that Ištar became enraged and angry with Uruk,

> summoned an enemy who despoiled the land like grain before (flood) water" (Leick 1994:168).

The text states clearly that "prostitutes" (and transvestites) devoted to Ishtar enjoyed her protection and that they carried out theatrical and apparently 'obscene' religious rites on her behalf. "Prostitution" helped meet the sexual needs of the goddess of love and thereby ensured a degree of social stability. "Prostitutes" had an obligation to revere their patron deity and to deny their right to worship was a violation of cosmic order which provoked the rage of the goddess and had disastrous social consequences. The city of Uruk was despoiled because of such a transgression by an insolent governor and the community demanded that the "forbidden acts" of Ishtar's sexual devotees be allowed to continue to appease her fury.

Zainab Bahrani warns that the visual evidence on Mesopotamian "prostitution" must be considered carefully for there has been a tendency in the scholarly literature to label all women engaged in sexual acts as prostitutes (Bahrani 2001:51, 53). Just as there has been a tendency to see all Mesopotamian prostitutes as "sacred prostitutes." The term 'sacred prostitute' is problematic and is often used interchangeably with the terms 'temple harlot' and 'temple prostitute.' Joan G. Westenholz rejects the term on the grounds that it is poorly defined and employed for any and all sexual practices within the sacred sphere: "the sacred prostitute can be a priestess who participated in a "sacred marriage," a laywoman, such as Herodotus' s Babylonian woman, who once in her life has to offer herself to a stranger for money in the temple of Aphrodite, a priestess whose caring for the gods included offering them sexual services, or a laywoman who participated in organized, ritual sexual activities" (Westenholz 1982:261). To her, 'sacred prostitution' is "an amalgam of misconceptions, presuppositions, and inaccuracies"

(1982:263) which stems in part from Hebraic views of Babylonian religion and from Greek (Herodotus) derogatory perceptions of women and 'barbarians' (1982:264-65).

For these and other reasons some writers have decided to avoid the term altogether and instead have constructed distinctions between "commercial prostitutes" and women performing "sacral sexual services" in ancient contexts (Lerner 1986).[352] However, I would like to note that the attempt to separate commercialism from religion and religion from female prostitution in ancient contexts is open to discussion. The Mesopotamian sources reviewed here indicate that a separation of the religious from the commercial within the institution of the female priesthood did not exist. Priestesses, regardless of sexual role, were involved in extensive commercial ventures, including the commerce of sexual and reproductive services as was the case with the *naditus* who provided children for their husbands via their slaves, other priestesses, and even their own sisters. Gerda Lerner's assumption seems to be that sexuality had *no* spiritual value for "prostitutes," while it did for the priestesses who lived in the temples and performed "cultic sexual services." Whether that is true or not, the performance of religion and sex was not limited to priestesses in the ancient agrarian world (below).

Gwendolyn Leick also rejects the notion of 'sacred prostitution' on the grounds that it belongs to the Golden Bough school of historical anthropology where the 'sacred

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[352] To Lerner: "The use of the term "sacred prostitution" for any and all sexual practices connected with temple service keeps us from understanding the meaning such practices had for contemporaries. I will therefore distinguish between "cultic sexual service" and "prostitution," by which I mean commercial prostitution only…Cultic sexual service by men and women may date back to the Neolitic…The ancient Babylonians thought of the gods and goddesses as actually dwelling in the temple…For people who regarded fertility as sacred and essential to their own survival, the caring of the gods included, in some cases, offering them sexual services. Thus, a separate class of temple prostitutes developed. There was also, especially in the later period, commercial prostitution, which flourished near or within the temple. Again, modern scholars have been confusing the issue by referring to all of this activity as prostitution and by using the term "hierodule" without distinction for various types of women engaging in cultic or commercial sexual activity." Lerner, The Creation of Patriarchy, 125.

prostitute' "engages in sex as a magical rite in the context of some fertility cult or officiates in the rites of Inanna/Ištar" (Leick 1994:150-51). Martha T. Roth, a distinguished Mesopotamian scholar and editor of the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, explains that "other than the highly restricted and structured "sacred marriage," there was no ritualized or institutionalized sexual intercourse associated with Mesopotamian religions or temples" (Faraone and McClure, 2006:23). In other words, the evidence we have thus far does not support the idea that women other than the *entus* (high priestesses) were engaged in sexual activity specific to their role in the cult.

While it may be true that in the official cult actual sexual intercourse for religious ends was the province of the highest priestesses, promiscuous women and men – "prostitutes"(?) – also participated in religion and performed popular "obscene" rites in honor of the Goddess of Love as the Poem of Erra specifies. Seemingly with the blessing of religious authorities, women whose sexuality was unregulated gathered in associations under the protection of deities and/or temples. In certain cities, such as Sippar, the temple is known to have had jurisdiction over them (Lesko 1989:149). The names of individual associations, "hinted at their garments, which were particularly luxurious or odd, their coiffure, or their general appearance, which distinguished them from other women" (Pinnock 1995:1995). These associations included the *harimtu*, *samhatu*, and *kezertu*.

According to Frances Pinnock, a researcher in archeology at the University of Rome, *harimtus* had Ishtar as patroness, and their name - which is the Akkadian word for "prostitute" - connotes "the separate ones" (Pinnock 1995:2529). To other commentators, the class of *harimtu* was composed of semi-secular or secular prostitutes "attached" to the temple in Mesopotamia (Lerner 1986:130, Tannahill 1992:80, Bottéro 2001:122). Partly

because they were propertyless and from low-status - perhaps the daughters of slaves "owned by priests or priestesses" (Lerner 1986:131), it has been readily assumed that they did not constitute a class of 'temple servants' and are ranked separately. Nevertheless, *harimtus* figure prominently in Mesopotamian literature and religion. As we shall see, in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* a *harimtu* serves the king, the gods, and her society by performing the sexual act. *Harimtus* were closely associated with the goddess Ishtar in her connection to taverns: "When I sit in the entrance of the tavern, I, Ishtar, am a loving *harimtu*" (1986).

The tavern was a site for erotic pleasure in Mesopotamia and the goddess Ishtar reigned there, "as the tavern owner stressed in a prayer to secure business" (Stol 1995:493):

> "Ishtar of the lands, most heroic of goddesses, this is your priestly residence; exult and rejoice! Come, enter your house! With you may your sweet bedfellow enter, your lover and cult-actor! May my lips be honey, my hands my charm!" (Stol 1995:493).

Another association of promiscuous women, the *samhatus*, was apparently also under Ishtar's protection and has been linked to "secular prostitution" by some scholars (Westenholz 1982:251, n. 24). On the other hand, the *kezertus*, who served various goddesses, are known to have performed some sexual activities *as part of their religious obligations* and, as a result, are considered priestesses by some scholars. However, their low social status disqualifies them from the ranks of the priesthood in the eyes of some commentators. To Bernard F. Batto, for example, these women were prisoners of war and performed minor religious tasks such as that of accompanying the statues of goddesses when they traveled (Batto 1974:114). Consequenlty, he interprets the *kezertu* as "a kind

of prostitute:" "I do not wish to enter into a discussion of the religious nature of prostitution, except to note that its religious character alone does not qualify prostitutes to be included within the ranks of the clergy" (1994). All things considered, *kezertus* were connected to the sexual worship of several Mesopotamian goddesses and are known for having a special way of "dressing their hair" (Stol 1995:493).

According to Pinnock, the geographical position of prostitutes in the community reflected their social standing: "They were to be found at the borders of the physical space of the community, near the city walls, midway between the inside and the outside, or between the civilized and the savage world. Prostitutes were considered a part of the society, and yet they were women who had lost their proper destiny – that is, marriage and childbearing" (1995). In regard to this statement, it is worth noting that in the august city of Uruk prostitutes were permitted to live near the temple of Ishtar (Oppenheim 1977:193), and that marriage and children was not the destiny of women alone. Both men and women were expected to form a family and were considered marginals if they failed to do so (Bottéro 1992:92).

More importantly, despite the presumed social marginality of the "common prostitute," promiscuous female figures appear in Mesopotamian literature performing sexual acts in the service of society and under the command of kings and gods. The religious, social, sexual, and political significance of the *harimtu*, for example, figures prominently in a story related in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. The Mesopotamian *harimtu* is, both, blessed and cursed in this text, suggesting that social attitudes towards her profession were multifaceted or ambivalent.[353] Here, we shall concentrate on the

[353] Enkidu, the 'wild man,' curses and then blesses the 'temple harlot': "As for you woman, with a great curse I curse you! I will promise you a destiny to all eternity. My curse shall come on you soon and sudden.

Mesopotamian perception that her sexuality had social value. King Gilgamesh, "the first tragic hero" (Sandars 1972:7), had angered the citizens of Uruk with his haughtiness:

> "His arrogance has no bounds by day or night. No son is left with his father, for Gilgamesh takes them all, even the children; yet the king should be shepherd to his people. His lust leaves no virgin to his lover" (1972:62).

Gilgamesh is said to have gone into the marriage house and shut out the people. During the marriage with the Queen of Love, he demanded "to be first with the bride, the king to be first and the husband to follow, for that was ordained by the gods from his birth, from the time the umbilical cord was cut. But now the drums roll for the choice of the bride and the city groans" (1972:68). The gods heard the lament of the people and called on Aruru, the goddess of creation, to create a contender to offset the king's abuses: "let it be as like him as his own reflection, his second self…Let them contend together and leave Uruk in quiet" (1972:62). Aruru conceived an image in her mind and Enkidu was created: "his body was rough, he had long hair like a woman's…He was innocent of mankind; he knew nothing of the cultivated land" (1972:63). Enkidu was the strongest man in the world; he "ate grass in the hills with the gazelle and lurked with wild beasts at the water-holes" (1972).

To civilize and overpower the wild man, Gilgamesh was advised to send a "harlot, a wanton from the temple of love" (1972):

You shall be without a roof for your commerce, for you shall not keep house with other girls in the tavern, but do your business in places fouled by the vomit of the drunkard. Your hire will be potter's earth, your thievings will be flung into the hovel…you will make your bed on the dunghill at night, and by day take your stand in the wall's shadow…Let you be stripped of your purple dyes, for I too once in the wilderness with my wife had all the treasure I wished.' …When Shamash heard the words of Enkidu he called to him from heaven: 'Enkidu, why are you cursing the woman…who taught you to eat bread fit for gods and drink wine of kings? She who put upon you a magnificent garment…' When Enkidu heard glorious Shamash his angry heart grew quiet, he called back the curse and said, 'Woman, I promise you another destiny. The mouth which cursed you shall bless you! Kings, princes and nobles shall adore you…The priest will lead you into the presence of the gods." Sandars, The Epic of Gilgamesh, 90-1.

> "She was not ashamed to take him, she made herself naked and welcomed his eagerness; as he lay on her murmuring love she taught him the woman's art. For six days and seven nights they lay together…when he was satisfied he went back to the wild beasts…but his knees gave way when he started to run, his swiftness was gone…Enkidu was grown weak, for wisdom was in him" (1972:65).

Or,

> "She let fall her scarf, and revealed her vulva, so that he could enjoy her. Boldly, she kissed him on the mouth…and threw off her garments. Then he stretched out on top of her, and she showed him, this savage, what a woman can do, while he fondled and petted her" (Bottéro 1992:96).

After lovemaking, Enkidu entered the city led by the *harimtu* who took him to the temple of Ishtar and Anu: "of love and of heaven" (Sandars 1972:65). He swore "to change the old order" (1972) and the *harimtu* "divided her clothing in two and with one half she clothed him and with the other herself; and holding his hand she led him like a child to the sheepfolds…There all the shepherds crowded round to see him, they put down bread in front of him, but Enkidu could only suck the milk of wild animals…Then the woman said, 'Enkidu eat bread, it is the staff of life; drink the wine, it is the custom of the land.' So he ate till he was full and drank strong wine…he rubbed down the matted hair of his body and anointed himself with oil. Enkidu had become a man" (1972:67). Subsequently, Enkidu confronted Gilgamesh by blocking his way to the house of the goddess of love, "they grappled, holding each other like bulls…They shattered the doorposts and the walls shook" (1972:69). In the end, Gilgamesh overpowered Enkidu and "immediately his fury died" (1972). Mutual admiration turned their discord into friendship.

The story of the encounter between Enkidu, the *harimtu*, and the king uncovers that to resolve a major political impasse the community chose a "temple harlot" or *harimtu* as emissary. This suggests that "prostitution" in the service of society had an aggregative function in Mesopotamia. Through the actions and teachings of the *harimtu*, social solidarity and community were reinstated.[354] The story also suggests that "prostitution" in the service of religion had an enlightening or edifying function in Mesopotamia; a "prostitute" was chosen to civilize the wild man because she was believed to possess "a kind of wisdom" (Lerner 1986:132). Besides, behind the decision to send a *harimtu* on such important political and religious mission appears the fact that in Mesopotamia "the temple harlot is an accepted part of society" (1986). She is a respectable member of the community and her role is honorable. All this puts into evidence that "prostitution" was a complex phenomenon in agrarian Mesopotamia.

Linguistic evidence also seems to link "prostitution" to religion in Mesopotamia. *Kar.kid* is the Sumerian word for female prostitute and it is mentioned right after the word *nam.luku* which means '*naditu*-ship' – the office of the *naditu* priestess – in a list of professions from circa 2400, suggesting by association that female promiscuity was connected to temple service (Lerner 1986:131).[355] All in all, the value of "prostitution" to Mesopotamian religion was recognized by gods and humans alike. Enki put the goddess Ninisinna in charge of this domain: "which was so important at that time" (Bonnefoy

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[354] Michel Maffesoli points out this role of "sacred prostitution" in ancient societies. Maffesoli, The Shadow of Dionysus, 35.

[355] The words 'whore' and 'harlot' are apparently derived from Hora and Har, additional names given to the goddess Ishtar. Yet, clearly, these did not always have the pejorative overtones we now ascribe to them. The word 'whore' may also derive from the divine '*houri*,' the Egyptian sacred prostitutes. A. T. Mann and Jane Lyle, Sacred Sexuality (Rockport, MA: Element, 1995) 187, n. 22. In a similar way, the word 'virgin' apparently once referred to the 'divine female,' or to the *unmarried* status of goddesses and women, and not necessarily to pre-sexual status.

1991:147). The association of the celebrated goddess Ishtar with "prostitution" was also openly recognized in Mesopotamia implying that both divinity and "prostitution" were understood in ways different from ours. Hymns composed to honor the goddess describe her as harlot:

> "Harlot, you go down to the alehouse, Inanna, you are turning into one leaning out of the window lifting up your voice…As the beasts are stirring up the dust, as oxen and sheep are returning to byre and fold, you, my lady, have dressed like one of no repute in a single garment, have fastened the harlot's *erimmātu* [necklace] around your neck, you are become one who snatches the man from the wife's embrace…Inanna, your seven bridallers (suitors) are bedding you" (Stol 1995:493).

Hence there existed a divine model for the Mesopotamian "prostitute" and her trade had theological justification. Her sexual activity was required to "please the heart" of at least one of the most revered Mesopotamian deities, and perhaps that of other deities for songs about sexual and financial transactions between male customers and female "prostitutes" were composed and dedicated to the goddess Nanâ as well. Leick points out, however, that despite religious associations[356] the songs cannot be said with certainty to have pertained (or not) to the cult because of the "blurring of specific contents in these poems" (Leick 1994:150):

> "'Come with me, my sister, come with me,
> Come with me from the entrance of the bed-room (or cella),
> When you talk to a man, what a woman…
> When you lean the side against the wall, your nakedness is sweet.
> When (you) bow down, the hips are sweet.
> When I am standing against the wall – that's one lamb,
> When I bow down it is one and a half shekel'." (Leick 1994:149)

[356] Several aspects of these songs have led to their construction as evidence of 'sacred prostitution.' The fact that the poems are dedicated to a goddess; that the word **pa-pah** has been translated as cella – the inner sanctuary in a temple; and that a lamb constitutes a traditional donation to a temple. Leick, Sex and Eroticism, 150.

Or:

> "Do not dig a [canal], let me be your canal,
> Do not plough [a field], let me be your field.
> Farmer, do not search for a wet place,
> My precious sweet, let me be your wet place.-
> Let the ditch (?) be your farrow,
> Let our little apples be your desire!" (1994:149-50)

Given the ample and positive association of "prostitution" with the divine, it is not surprising that the Mesopotamians participated willingly, and probably unwillingly, in "prostitution." On occasion, married women voluntarily left their husbands to become *harimtu* (Bottéro 1992:189). Parents offered their daughters and other female dependents as "prostitutes" to the temples to earn money (Stol 1995:493), and perhaps to fulfill the family's religious obligation towards the goddess (es). Women short of means may have also engaged in "prostitution" to keep their engagements toward the deities and fulfill their vows, as it is known to have been the case in ancient Israel (Van Der Toorn 1989:193, 200). The desire for offspring was a common reason for women taking a vow in Israel as well as Mesopotamia (1989:196).

In turn, through "prostitution" Mesopotamian temples achieved at least two aims: they met the "need" of deities for sexual gratification and increased their own capitals. According to Reay Tannahill, in Babylon the earnings of 'temple harlots' seem to have "accounted for a substantial part of the temples' income" (Tannahill 1992:79). It is well known that "prostitution" in the ancient Near East was a source of profits for temples (Van Der Toorn 1983:203). Neo-Babylonian records from the temple of Ishtar at Uruk "show that the temple hired out certain members of its lower female personnel as concubines to private citizens" (1983:204).

On the other hand, affiliation with a temple may have guaranteed housing and subsistence for some Mesopotamian "prostitutes." And, if the woman had some talent in singing or dancing, she probably received additional compensation for these activities. Another possible source of revenue for the 'temple harlot' might have been derived from taking part in ritual incantations of Ishtar.[357] A role as "magician" is reasonable to assume, for "prostitutes" among others were associated with what we call "black magic" (Leick 1994:167, 225), and "magic" was part of the official cult.[358] It is of interest here that when malevolent beings interfered with the office of "prostitutes," incantations such as the one against the spirit known as Samana were carried out apparently with the help and consent of the gods:

> "As he blocked the hierodule in (the performance of) her office,
> As he blocked the prostitute in her services,
> Asarluhi sent a messenger to his father Enki" (Falkenstein 1953:214-15).

Seemingly, all Mesopotamian "prostitutes" were able to marry and have children - who were considered free and, therefore, could inherit from their fathers (VerSteeg 2000:26). Even though "wisdom texts" warn against marrying (several kinds of) "prostitutes," the concern seems directed more at their attitude of defiance than at their sexual behavior:

> "Do not marry a prostitute (*harīmtu*), whose husbands are legion. A harlot (*išhtaritu*) who is dedicated to a god, a courtesan (*kulmašitu*) whose favours are many. In your trouble she will not support you, in your dispute she will mock you; There is no reverence or submissiveness with her" (Lambert 1960:103).

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[357] Male transvestite-prostitutes (*assinnu*) took part in ritual incantations of Ishtar. Leick, Sex and Eroticism, 161. It is probable that her female servants performed similar functions.

[358] "In Mesopotamia, the temple organizations provided a range of services, from divination to incantations, to satisfy the demand…This was complemented, on a more mundane level, by folk-magic, such as the wearing of amulets…" Leick, Sex and Eroticism, 193.

Moreover:

> "She will disrupt the house she enters, and her partner will not assert himself" (1960).

A curious Old Babylonian "love incantation" of the series of the é-nu-ri confirms that it was indeed difficult to gain control over the bold heart of a prostitute:

> "The beautiful maid (ki-sikil), who stands on the street, The maid, the prostitute, daughter of Inanna, The maid, daughter of Inanna, who frequents the tavern…(She is) like rich cream, rich butter (?)…I reach out for….., ….loving of the heart…I reach (my) hand, the hand of loving of the heart…Butter of a holy cow…Pour it into a bowl, that belongs to the green šakan-vessel, And sprinkle it on the breast of the maid! Then the maid will not lock the open door, Will not push away her crying child, (but) will run after you" (Leick 1994:196-97).

While it is possible that, as Driver and Miles have suggested, in time the classes of Mesopotamian priestesses "came to be confused with the numerous harlots who frequented the temples of Istar" (Driver and Miles 1952:360), in Mesopotamia and several other regions of the ancient world what we call "prostitution" had complex socio-erotic, religious, and economic implications. In ancient Israel, for instance, temples used the money acquired through "prostitution" (as a means to pay vows) to "pay for the production of divine images, among other things (Van Der Toorn 1989:201). In India, 'temple prostitutes' were known as *devadasis* and also collected sizable amounts of money for their temples. As late as the eleventh century CE, the Rajarajesvara temple in Tanjore employed more than 400 *devadasis*; a special symbolic sanctity was attached to these women, and their religious functions included the role of sexual partner in Tantric rites (1992:218-25). In ancient agrarian Japan, among the *miko*-priestesses some

practiced "prostitution," some married, and still others remained sexually inactive.[359] In ancient Egypt, the so-called "concubines of the gods" or *houri* appear not to have had an open sexual role (1992:81), but they were celebrated as "dancing harlots." As concubines of the gods, they had a spiritual-sexual rapport with the divine as well as religious and artistic functions in the human realm (chapter 5). In Rome, women of the highest aristocracy "came to the temple of Juno Sospita to enter into the act of sacred prostitution when a revelation was needed" (Qualls-Corbett 1988:36). Likewise, in Lebanon, matrons and maids "prostituted themselves in the service of the goddess Attar" (1988:36).

Consequently, our present Western conceptualization of prostitution as, mainly, a sexual, financial, and ultimately objectionable transaction,[360] is insufficient for the analysis of promiscuous sexuality in previous historical epochs or in different regions of the world. Perhaps, we need to assess more cautiously when, where, and in which circumstances in which "prostitution" was practiced in a given society sexuality possessed sacred value and where it had lost that connotation. Without downplaying the highly exploitative effects prostitution has had on countless women throughout history,[361]

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[359] In Japan, "it seems that originally the *miko* were supposed to be virgins, who would abandon their practice when they married. There are, however, many cases of *miko* who continued in their functions after their marriage." Benito Ortolani, The Japanese Theatre: From Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1990) 22. Since this study draws attention to sexually active women, I do not discuss the equally longstanding relationship between virgins, like the Roman Vestal virgins and the holy Incan *acllas*, and religion.

[360] A majority of contemporary feminists view prostitution in predominantly negative terms: "some see prostitution as a profound symbol for the degradation and domination of women, whereas others see prostitution as merely unconventional and sometimes demeaning work that nonetheless women should be allowed to choose." Laurie Shrage, Moral Dilemmas of Feminism: Prostitution, Adultery, and Abortion (New York: Routledge, 1994) 82.

[361] Lerner discusses at length the origins of commercial prostitution and its effects on women. To her, 'commercial prostitution' is likely to have derived "directly from the enslavement of women and the consolidation and formation of classes. Military conquest led, in the third millennium B.C., to the enslavement and sexual abuse of captive women." Lerner, The Creation, 133. Another source was "the pauperization of farmers and their increasing dependence on loans in order to survive periods of famine,

we must recognize that in stark contrast with modern Western thinking and myth-making Mesopotamians envisioned that civilization was partly achieved through the sexual activity of the prostitute. The politico-religious mission carried out by the *harimtu* on behalf of the community conferred respectability on the profession of prostitutes; it invested it with honor and wisdom.

A radical break with millennia of Near Eastern religious tradition would eventually come about with the consolidation of the all-male priesthood in ancient Israel: "This new order under the all-powerful God proclaimed to Hebrews and to all those who took their bible as their moral and religious guide that women cannot speak to God" (Lerner 1986:179). Let alone make love to many men in his name. The Hebrew prophets virulently opposed women's "whoring." In Israel, the orgiastic cult of Baal and Asherah which "had its greatest and most persistent strength among women" (Lerner 1986:177) resulted in "the pervasive use of woman-the-whore as a metaphor for the evils of sinning society" (1986). Despite this, biblical references show that "prostitution" fulfilled a divine role among the Hebrews as well: Sarah gave to Abraham her handmaid in order to "get children by her" (Genesis 16:1); Abraham's brother had children by his concubine (Genesis 22:24); and Lot offered his two virgin daughters so that the inhabitants of Sodom would leave in peace the strangers he had welcomed (Genesis 19:6). Moreover, the Old Testament "contains ample evidence indeed of religious feasts that led to sexual excesses" (Van Der Toorn 1983:202). During the celebrations, worshippers ate, drank,

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which led to debt slavery…Women might end up as prostitutes because their parents had to sell them into slavery or their impoverished husbands might so use them." Ibid.

sang, danced, and played – *sahhēq* (an euphemism for sexual activities); some also cross-dressed.[362]

Of utmost relevance to this study is that "prostitution" seems to be related to the development of performing traditions. In Sumer, Akkad, and Babylon, "prostitutes" were involved in a variety of theatrical events of spiritual as well as secular nature. They often combined the profession of "prostitute" with that of entertainer. The term *kur-garru*, a male prostitute or transvestite entertainer, appears on the same list of professions with the female prostitute - *Kar.kid* – and together with entertainers (Lerner 1986:131) suggesting that the prostitute and the performer were thought to be related. The *ishtaritu*, for example, are said to have been dancers, singers, and musicians in the sexual service of Inanna. The "association of dancers with the broader "entertainment world," ranging from protected liturgical performance to secular prostitution, is attested from early cuneiform lists of professions and *can be compared to similar associations in modern times*" (Kilmer 1995. Italics are not in text).

Hence the connection of the performer with the prostitute which survives to some extent in our own epoch - and is being deliberately revived by contemporary Western prostitute/performers like Annie Sprinkle - has very old and long historical underpinnings.

Concluding Remarks

The urbanization of Mesopotamia is estimated to have started as early as 3500 and one of the oldest and most populated cities, Uruk, is said to have been "owned" by a goddess whose temple, and her priestesses and priests, controlled substantial economic

[362] Tikva Frymer-Kensky opposes the idea of sexual orgiasticism in Israel or Canaan as a chimera: "the product of ancient and modern sexual fantasies." Tikva Frymer-Kensky, In the Wake of the Goddesses (New York: The Free Press, 1992) 199.

resources and enterprises. Therefore, it was in the early urban centers of Mesopotamia that goddesses and their priestesses secured women's equality before the gods, through the religious and economic influence of their offices. In agrarian Mesopotamia, women from vastly different social backgrounds actively participated in religion. Priestesses just as much as "prostitutes" had responsabilities towards the divine and each honored the gods and goddesses in accordance with their social standing and way of life.

Mesopotamian women benefited socially and financially from religious association. In the case of priestesses, religious office afforded them substantial economic and social privileges. High-priestesses swayed significant religious and economic power over other women and men of lower strata. The power and prestige of Mesopotamian priestesses surpassed that held by women, including the women of religion, in some advanced horticultural settings such as that of Incan society. What is more, this power has been virtually eliminated in industrial and post-industrial societies, especially in the West where no goddesses inhabit the official pantheons and religious stratification between men and women appears to have peaked. Consequently, the nadir of gender inequality with respect to religious representation, power, and privilege cannot be convincingly assumed to be in agrarian society as Lenski and other commentators have claimed. With no commanding and multifaceted female divinities, no sacred concepts of female sexuality, and no equivalent to the Mesopotamian institution of the female priesthood, modern Western women lack in religious representation and power.

"Prostitution" in Mesopotamia was a complex phenomenon that appears to have served socio-religious, economic, and political aims, which, in turn, endowed the Mesopotamian "prostitute" with a measure of social acceptance and protection. While the

religious role of the Mesopotamian "prostitute" continues to be debated among scholars, there is no doubt that she participated in religious rites and festivals in honor of various deities. This active participation of the "prostitute" in religion is unknown in Western post-industrial societies.

This research acknowledges that women's active participation in Mesopotamian religion cannot be taken as an indication of equal social status with men because, as a group, women occupied a more or less subordinate position in their respective status groups, and both their sexual and reproductive capacities were often controlled by their fathers, husbands, brothers, or by the state, as were their labor and mobility. Nonetheless, as Lerner observes:

> "No matter how degraded and commodified the reproductive and sexual power of women was in real life, their essential quality could not be banished from thought and feeling, as long as the goddesses lived and were believed to rule human life. *Women must have found their likeness in the goddess, as men found theirs in the male gods. There was a perceived and essential equality of human beings before the gods, which must have radiated out into daily life*. The power and mystery of the priestess was as great as that of the priest. As long as women still mediated between humans and the supernatural, they might perform different functions and roles in society than those of men, but their essential quality as human beings remained unassailed" (Lerner 1986:160. Italics are not in text).

The existence of Ishtar and her association with priestesses and "prostitutes" as well as performance artists sanctioned the integration of art, female sexuality, and religion in Mesopotamian society. Traditional sacred notions of sexuality (chapter 4) as well as of art (chapter 3) provided the cultural underpinning for sacred as well as secular fusions of female sexuality, religion, and art in Mesopotamia. The extensive participation of women from vastly different social backgrounds in religion determined the style and character of these intersections.

Appendix D: Rationalizing the Divine in Mesopotamia

I would like to submit that the disentanglement of magic from religion which has occurred – though for the most part only partially - in the course of social and religious rationalization might have been initiated by the Mesopotamians late in their history. That is, earlier than presumed by Max Weber refuting notions that the Hebrew prophets and the Greeks initiated this process or that distinctions between magic and religion are exclusively of Western character or origin. As explained in chapter 5, a variety of factors seem to have contributed to an increasing rationalization of spiritual life in Mesopotamia. They included: the formation of the first empires and their popularization of values such as universality and transcendence, the military conquest and occupation of Mesopotamia by different ethnic populations, technological advancement, and the gradual preeminence of male figures and principles in the pantheon.

In conjunction with this, I would like to offer that the idea of "magic" is a categorical distinction that emerges under specific historical conditions often related to war and conquest. Hence that, to some extent, magic is *a category of conquest*. Based primarily on Mesopotamian myth and history, this addendum suggests that *some* of what we call magic is the religious life that becomes suppressed as social conditions change and new modes of thought emerge during times of considerable social and political strife. In ancient Greece, India, Europe, and Mesopotamia, the process of conquest of one group by another within or without the same geographical region seems to have entailed the creation of a category analogous to our term "magic." What is more, as Marcel Mauss remarked, the way that classic scholars looked at magic and religion emulated this attitude of subjugation:

> "A religion designates the remnants of former cults as 'magical' even when the rites are still being performed in a religious manner; this way of looking at things has been followed by scholars" (Mauss 1972:22).

Although to my knowledge classical scholars did not develop this insight, a few hinted at the creation of the category of magic by conquest. Mauss, for instance, noted that: **"**when two cultures come into contact, magic is usually attributed to the lesser developed. Classic examples are the Dasyus of India, and the Finns and the Lapps, accused respectively of sorcery by the Hindus and the Scandinavians" (1972:39). Furthermore: "Once a church loses its following the members of the new religion consider the former priests to be magicians. The Malays or the Moslem Shams treat the *pawang* and the *paja* as magicians; in fact, they were former priests" (1972:38). Likewise, Edward B. Tylor noted that in India once the Aryans conquered the land they "described the rude indigenes…by the epithets of 'possessed of magical powers,' 'changing their shape at will'" (Tylor 1958:114). In *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages* (1887-8), Henry Charles Lea put forth that as one religion supplants another, "the secret rites of the superseded faith become the forbidden *magic* of its successor" (Lea 1887-8. Italics are not in text).

In Greek, the word *mageia* is borrowed from the Iranian word *magus*. The *magus* was a priest or a "specialist of religion" in Persia (Moreau 2000:6). In Greece, however, *mageia* and the people associated with it acquired negative connotations as early as the sixth century BCE as evidenced in the writings of Heraclites who branded the practice as "impious" (2000). From at least that time then, in Greece, magic was associated with private cults, charlatans, wickedness, madness, and false prophets. An example of such correlation was mirrored circa 430 in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*:

> "What a wicked old man you are…Who told you shamelessness?...You sightless, witless, senseless, mad old man!...You child of total night!...This decrepit fortune-teller, this collector of dirty pennies, this prophet fraud...Has your mystic mummery ever approached the truth?...You'd come here to make a fool of yourself…[with] your infantile riddles! Your damned abracadabra!" (Jacobus 1993:51-2).

Relevant to the argument presented here is the fact that Greeks and Persians shared a long history of enmity. From the sixth to the fifth century Persians attempted to conquer Greece; first they subdued the Ionian cities in western Turkey and then they captured Athens, circa 480. In return, Alexander The Great conquered Persia in 330. The Greeks named "magic" (μαγεία) the Persian religious rituals they came into contact with, and "sorcerer" (μάγος) the priests and priestesses of that religion (Moreau 2000:43). That is, to the Greeks magic was something foreign, different, strange, and, above all, it belonged to the enemy. Similarly, the magician was the priest or priestess of a foreign, hostile, and to their minds, inferior, religion. Hence these terms were used by the Greeks to distance themselves and their religion from the people and the religion of the enemies they eventually vanquished.

Moreover, since the religious practices of the conquered represent a potential threat to any hegemonic culture, there emerged a need to both discredit and even obliterate them. In Greece this was understood by Plato who called for the death penalty for practitioners of *mageia* (2000). In addition, the fact that some of what *we* would call magic existed in Greece, as well as in Rome, as part of common and practical knowledge before the term *mageia* entered the Greek vocabulary, further suggests that the term refers to the religious (and scientific) practices of the Other.[363] In this context, it is important to point up that

[363] Fritz Graf points out, for example, that the Roman historian Plinius in his *Natural History* describes magic as pure and simple trickery yet goes on to recommend many measures that *we* would qualify as 'magical.' Moreau, La Magie, 53. Before the term *mageia* appeared in Greece, there existed an abundance

the term magic often becomes a weapon against anyone who threatens an established or emerging canon, especially as rational modes of thought gain prominence. In fifth century Greece, for instance, as rational explanations of illness emerged with Hippocrates, his followers - the specialists of "scientific" medicine - "denounced all other healing and cathartic activities as magic, while in the ancient society…diverse practices were allowed to coexist within limits that were sometimes uncertain and flexible" (2000:53). Thus the label "magic" was used to discredit and combat all rivals, internal and external, in Greek society.[364]

Similarly, less rational modes of religious belief were derided and obliterated in Mesopotamian myth as "magic" around 1200 when the region was invaded by Indo-Europeans. Although the Mesopotamians did not profess religions "based on a single source of divine revelation" (Aruz 2003:485),[365] and therefore several versions of one myth often coexisted, the "battle of the gods" described in The Creation Poem - *Enuma*

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of substances and words to which a supreme power was attached and which were used "in healing practices as well as in those that later would be called magic." Ibid., 49. Likewise, there existed the *goès*, a specialist who accompanied the dead as they left the land of the living; a sort of 'shaman' as this term is described by Eliade. Ibid., 50. Moreover, what we would call erotic or 'sex magic' existed in ancient Greece "just as wine, wheat, boats, or words exist." Ibid., 51. The Greeks differentiated among numerous types of practitioners: the *goès* chanted incantations and accompanied the dead, the *pharmakos* poisoned or healed, the *thelgein* specialized in charms, the *psukhagôgos* evoked the dead, the *baskanos* casted the 'evil eye,' etc. Ibid., 8-19.

[364] In imperial Rome, the charge of "magic" was directed against the philosophers who practiced theurgy: "divine work." Moreau, La Magie, 59-60.

[365] "Their explanations of the universe and of human existence were diverse, with many different traditions existing side by side. In their ways of thought, theological ideas did not emerge at a single moment in time, as happens in historically based religions, nor were their texts about the gods and their actions the result of a revelation given to an insightful religious mind. In Mesopotamia, knowledge and insight were cumulative, each narrative offering its own vision." Aruz, First Cities, 485. Therefore, "there exists no single Sumerian text wholly devoted to the topic of Creation. Instead there were several diverse, at times conflicting, traditions on the origins of the cosmos…One Early Dynastic fragmentary composition indicates that Primeval heaven and earth were conceived as being male and female." Ibid.

Elish or "When On High" – exemplifies the process by which a less rational mode of spirituality becomes downgraded as "magic" through political and military conquest.

The Battle of the Gods: Marduk vs. Tiamat

The military use of the horse-chariot powered a wave of invasions of Mesopotamia by Asian and Indo-European peoples around the middle of the second millennium BCE. The Hittites, for example, raided Babylon circa 1590 bringing the Old Babylonian empire to an end. They are said to have carried off with them the statue of the god Marduk which was then recovered and returned to Babylon by another group of invaders, the Kassites. The Kassites ruled Mesopotamia from about 1375 to 1155. During this time period, the Mesopotamian creation story was reformulated and written down in Akkadian. In the *Enuma Elish,* the arresting, feminine, and primary creative force of Sumerian mythology, Nammu/Tiamat,[366] is dismembered, conquered, and supplanted by a new, "supreme," and "creative" male deity: Marduk of Babylon. In this version of creation, Tiamat no longer symbolizes the creative principle but rather represents the "chaos" of previous and now deemed lesser and "magical" modes of thinking and living, while Marduk becomes the architect of the world and the progenitor of humankind.

According to the poem *Enuma Elish*, the waters of primordial Tiamat and Apsu gave birth to heaven and earth as well as to the gods. A band of rebel gods began to disturb the peace with loathsome acts and Apsu complained to Tiamat: "By day I find no relief, nor repose by night. I will destroy, I will wreck their ways, that quiet may be restored. Let us have rest!" (Pritchard 1955:61). Tiamat adamantly opposed her husband's evil plan

[366] In Sumerian myth, the goddess Nammu created the sky-god An and the earth-goddess Ki parthenogenetically. She was conceived as a feminine and compelling force: "unique and huge," "not paired up," and called "The Lady of the Gods" and "The Mother who gave birth to the Universe." Bottéro, Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia, 74-5. In Akkadian myth, Tiamat, a distant but still powerful doublet of Nammu, gave birth to gods and goddesses with the help of a consort, *Apsu*, the freshwater.

against their sons: "What? Should we destroy that which we have built?" (1955). The rebel gods learned of Apsu's intentions and Ea, "the all-wise," fettered and slewed the father-god as he tied up his accomplice Mummu. Subsequently, Ea and his wife Damkina gave birth to a "perfect" god, Marduk.[367]

The old gods called out to their mother for revenge against the new gods upon Apsu's murder and after a mighty storm was unleashed against them by Anu: "Thou dost not love us! Let us have rest! Do thou avenge [Apsu and Mummu]!" (1955:62). Finally, Tiamat decided to wage battle against her rebel sons: "Mother Hubur, she who fashions all things…bore monster-serpents, sharp of tooth, unsparing of *fang*…Roaring dragons she has clothed with terror, has crowned them with haloes, making them like gods…She set up the Viper, the Dragon, and the *Sphinx*, the Great-Lion, the Mad-Dog, and the Scorpion-Man, mighty lion-demons, the Dragon-Fly, the Centaur…" (1955). Anu was sent by the rebel gods to stand up to Tiamat but he was unable to face her and turned back. Ea then called his son Marduk to go before the great god Anshar. Marduk spoke:

> "I will go and attain thy heart's desire!...What male is it who has pressed his fight against thee? [It is *but*] Tiamat, a woman, that flies at thee with weapons! [O my father-] creator, be glad and rejoice; the neck of Tiamat thou shalt soon tread upon! (1955:64).

In exchange for this heroic mission, Marduk demanded to be elevated in the pantheon: "If I indeed, as your avenger, am to vanquish Tiamat and save your lives, set up the Assembly, proclaim supreme my destiny!" (1955:65). The gods erected for him a 'princely throne' and Anshar bestowed power upon him: "No one among the gods shall transgress thy bounds!...We have granted thee kinship over the universe entire…thy word

[367] "Perfect were his members beyond comprehension…He was the loftiest of the gods, surpassing was his stature; his members were enormous, he was exceedingly tall…Clothed with the halo of ten gods, he was strong to the utmost." Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 62.

shall be supreme…Marduk is king!" (1955:66). The new hero went on to choose his weapons: the storm-chariot, the bow and arrow, the mace, a net, the four winds, and the flood-storm. Marduk and Tiamat engaged in battle:

> "She was like one possessed; she took leave of her senses…she recites a charm, keeps casting her spell, while the gods of battle sharpen their weapons…The lord [Marduk] spread out his net to enfold her…the fierce winds charged her belly, her body was distended and her mouth was wide open. He released the arrow, it tore her belly, it cut through her insides, splitting the heart. Having thus subdued her, he extinguished her life. He cast down her carcass to stand upon it. After he had slain Tiamat, the leader, her band was shattered, her troupe broken up…He made them captives and he smashed their weapons…The band of demons…he cast into fetters…Kingu…he bounded [and killed]" (1955:67).

Hereafter Marduk became the god-creator: "Then the lord paused to view her dead body, that he might divide the monster and do artful works. He split her like a shellfish into two parts: half of her he set up and ceiled it as sky" (1955). In addition, Marduk built stations for the great gods "fixing their astral likeness as constellations. He determined the year by designating the zones: he set up three constellations for each of the twelve months" (1955). Marduk went on to create 'man':[368] "Blood I will mass and cause bones to be. I will establish a savage, 'man' shall be his name. Verily, savage-man I will create. He shall be charged with the service of the gods that they might be at ease!" (1955:68).

[368] In the Old Babylonian text "Creation of Man by the Great Goddess," it was Mami who fulfilled this task: "The goddess they called…The most helpful of the gods, the wise Mami: Thou art the mother-womb, the one who creates mankind. Create, then, Lullu [the first man] and let him bear the yoke! The yoke he shall bear…The *burden* of creation man shall bear!...let Lullu appear! He who shall *serve* all the gods, Let him be *formed* out of clay, be *animated* with blood!" Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 99. In the Sumerian myth of Enki and Ninmah, divine females create the human race without male assistance. Namma, Enki's mother, "kneaded clay from the *abzu*, the freshwater ocean that lay under the earth, and placed it in her womb. With the help of the mother goddess Ninmah as midwife and minor deities as birth aides, she brought mankind into existence." Aruz, First Cities, 486. Another version of this myth attributes the creation of the human race to Enki/Ea who cast a mold for it and engaged the help of "Ninmah and seven other goddesses, so that man can emerge from it." Bonnefoy, Mythologies, 148-9.

In this manner, the new version of the Mesopotamian creation story portrays Tiamat as a powerful and wild "magician" whose band of "demons" is defeated by more rational forces. Scholars have noted that some of the contexts and meanings of this battle of the gods are revealed in the gear used by the two combatants. Marduk used a chariot, bow and arrow, a mace, and a net. His four-horse war chariot, for example, "stresses and accentuates…his enculturation" because "the chariot as a hunting and fighting machine represents one of the most perfected objects of the technical knowledge of that half of the second millennium" (Bonnefoy 1991:160). Likewise it represents "one of the indispensable signs of royalty" (1991). More, Marduk's allies are the four principal winds, "the axes on which time and space are organized" (1991). On the other hand, Tiamat is allied with terrible beings, "full of ridicule," and with "savage nature in its most ferocious form" (1991:159).

Thus while Marduk represents advances in technological knowledge and invention, order, rationalization of time and space, change, growth and development in new material directions, and increased confidence in the human ability to control, tame, and use natural forces and resources, Tiamat figures as a wild "magical" being, a *lullû* or "living being" who has reached only a very early stage of evolution: that "reached by a being that the goddess Aruru herself has fashioned by hand from a pinch of clay…the earthen figurine who acquires life and nothing more at the time that [he] obtains his form…it is only a starting point for some who will advance to a further evolutionary state" (1991). In other words, Tiamat is not "enculturated" (1991:160). Dead, moreover, "she is nothing more than an embryonic being who dies before taking form. *In both cases, she is a kind of being who does not fully mature, culturally or physically, but who at the same time has a*

potentiality that contains the seeds of the future of the world" (1991:160. Italics are not in text). For her dead body is used by Marduk to create heaven and earth.

It has been said that the use of the net, a hunting instrument par excellence, implies that Tiamat is "viewed in the myth as a savage being…as a wild animal who is to be hunted and killed" (1991:159). Above all Tiamat is deemed savage because she elevated her son-consort Kingu to leader of the Assembly without submitting her choice to the council of gods. Thus the law that Tiamat violated was the increasingly patriarchal law of the land which henceforth divested women of the right to transfer royal power, despite the fact that, female figures were once "instruments of investiture" and "in the final analysis" dispensers of power in Mesopotamia.[369]

In the poem *Enuma Elish*, it is no longer a goddess but rather the god Anshar who convenes the Assembly and bestows power on Marduk. Thus Tiamat, "reservoir of the most ancient divine power," is defeated signifying "the end of one world and the birth of a new world," for the victory of Marduk had the effect of "definitively relegating the representative of the previous divine generations to a state of political impotence, which in the myth takes the form of killing her and cutting her body into pieces" (1991:159-60). Once Tiamat is conquered by Marduk, his word alone "renders useless this precious talisman of power" (1991:172).

In this manner, the ability to dispense political power, to wield religious authority, to give birth, and to create reality in Mesopotamia becomes the prerogative of men. Tiamat

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[369] "Myth and history offer many famous examples of such a situation. The widow – goddess or queen, or even a woman of ordinary rank – figures as the "necessary link joining two generations of men. Thanks to her and through her the son may succeed the father. She thereby appears as an instrument of investiture, and in the final analysis, as a dispenser of power." Bonnefoy, Mythologies, 172. Though Tiamat cannot exercise the royal function, it is only through her as intermediary that the royal function, "fallen fallow after Apsŭ's death, can be handed down to his successor." Ibid.

hurled “her magic formula at [Marduk] without flinching” and “like a primitive being, upon her lips she spoke falsehoods to him” (1991:159). Her strategy, therefore, is said to depend on deceit and illusion. Like a magician, she tricked Marduk by making monsters appear like gods. Like an artist, she relied on theatrical illusion to transform characters - by crowning them with haloes. Yet, such creative force is construed as “wicked” and “evil” (Pritchard 1955:67) in late Mesopotamian myth and becomes a target for destruction. As such, the myth represents the fight between the “magic” of Mesopotamia and the more rational, religious order of the invading Kassites who used the Babylonian god Marduk as conduit to establish “order” and end the “chaos” of the land. It is, hence, through the subjugation and destruction of Tiamat’s “magic” that the new belief system of Babylonia under foreign domination becomes the “religion” of Mesopotamia.

Concluding Remarks

Attempts at subjugating, ridiculing, taking over, or destroying the religious (or scientific) knowledge and practices of groups within one’s culture or in a different culture, like the ones presented above, express and expand the meaning of “magic” as a category of conquest. The evidence reviewed above suggests that a rationalization of the spiritual was underway in Mesopotamia and that distinctions between less rational and more rational modes of belief were being articulated. Therefore, the estrangement of magic from religion which became the hallmark of classical definitions of these topics might have been initiated by the Mesopotamians late in their history.

As discussed in Appendix B, the elimination or marginalization of magic as a sort of precondition for the appearance of religion was a popular theme in the writings of scholars until about the middle of the twentieth century. Weber in fact proclaimed that

"the elimination of magic" from the world was "the great historic process in the development of religions," which to him began "with the old Hebrew prophets and, in conjunction with Hellenistic scientific thought" (Weber 1958:105). Along similar lines, distinctions that posited religion as more rational than magic and, by extension, as spiritually more evolved characterized most nineteenth and twentieth century Western theorizing.

Critics of this scholarly trend have explained it in different ways. Professor of Assyriology Walter Farber, ascribes the proclivity to separate magic from religion to modern modes of thought which utilize opposites to understand and explain complex social or physical phenomena: "we are used to thinking in categories of opposites, such as monotheism and polytheism, god and devil, religion and magic, faith and superstition, priest and layperson, and medical science and quackery" (Sasson 1995:1895). As a result: "It is hard for us to cope with a system that in general fails to make such a clear distinction" (1995). As far as Mesopotamian religion is concerned Farber sustains that "magic, or witchcraft, as a separate entity simply did not exist in Sumerian and Akkadian thought…[Thus] any definition of magic and divination…rests on an artificial separation of certain texts, activities, and objects from their wider context" (1995).

One of the pioneers of the ongoing critique, David Pocock, Emeritus professor of Anthropology at the University of Sussex, also offered that "magic" is a category of the Western mind imposed upon the intellectual universes of other cultures and should hence be "dissolved" (Mauss 1972:3). However, the battle of Marduk and Tiamat illustrates that as early as the second millennium BCE, there were attempts to differentiate less rational or "magical" spiritualities from more rational ones in Mesopotamia. This, in turn, reveals

that the distinction between magic and religion is neither just Western, as Pocock supposed, nor brought about exclusively by the Israelite prophets in conjunction with the Greeks as Max Weber suggested. Rather, it seems to reflect a shift in power relations between peoples of different cultures and faiths at various moments in history.

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