

Temple/Sacred Prostitution in Ancient Mesopotamia Revisited

Religion in the Economy*

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Abstract

In *Ugarit-Forschungen* 30 and elsewhere, Assante vigorously argues on behalf of three striking and rather novel propositions: (1) There is no Sumerian or Akkadian word meaning “prostitute / sex professional”; (2) Evidence for Mesopotamian prostitution adduced by “patriarchally” oriented scholars actually refers to the sexual activity of “single women / women without a husband”; (3) There is no evidence for “sacred” prostitution in Mesopotamia. The present paper reconsiders the evidence within the framework of a simple economically oriented model of temple/sacred prostitution. Assante’s findings are rejected as inconsistent with important evidence. The main conclusion is that the Inanna/Ishtar cult was involved, directly or by means of agents, in the production and sale of sexual services. It is suggested that sexually explicit rituals, myths, and hymns of goddesses were employed to increase the demand for the services of cultic prostitutes. The analysis is based primarily on literary texts. However, legal texts provide suggestive evidence that cults derived income from the sale of sexual services. More generally, it is seen that open-minded consideration of the seemingly narrow problem of prostitution casts new light on fundamental questions concerning the role of religious institutions in the ancient Near East.

Assante (1998, 10) maintains “Until now, philologists have not recognized a word in Sumerian or Akkadian that conveys the idea of the single woman, a social phenomenon that seems to incorporate a rather large group of females in various periods of antiquity.” For the unfortunate result Assante (1998, 10) blames “the patriarchal system scholars have developed and imposed on the study of ancient Mesopotamia [which] had no room for such a legal category” (cf. Budin 2006, 83). This claim has merit and, together with Assante, Diakonoff (1986) deserves credit for challenging the “patriarchal” perspective. Assante has succeeded in discrediting an almost reflexive sexualization of female cultic roles. Even the *nadītu*-priestess, whose business affairs were conventional and

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important, had not been able to escape the taint of prostitution. Just as importantly, Assante has succeeded in giving ancient Mesopotamians a life!

However, in the process of demolishing an extremist position, Assante has put forward an extremist “desexualized” vision of ancient societies. Thus, Assante (2003, 33) does not recognize a word that means “prostitute / sex professional”—a group that must have been of some social significance in all periods of antiquity! Moreover, she denies that prostitutes had cultic connections. “There are no cuneiform words for hierodule, prostitute, or prostitution; nor is there evidence for sacred prostitution” (Assante 2000, 9; cf. Budin 2006, 77). Assante finds no room in her vision of antiquity for such women and sexual practices and they are removed from history. Sacred prostitution is deprived of its “rightful” place among the economic institutions of the ancient world. In its place, Assante installs an untested vision of the “single woman / woman without a husband.”

Assante’s theoretical perspective and treatment of evidence have not been subjected to critical scrutiny. This is accomplished below by reconsidering the evidence within the framework of a simple economically oriented model of temple/sacred prostitution. It will be seen that careful consideration of the seemingly narrow problem of prostitution casts new light on fundamental questions concerning the role of religious institutions in the ancient Near East (ANE).

“Temple/sacred prostitution” is understood here to refer to the sale of sexual services under the auspices of a cult/god. The auspices are what make the activity “sacred.” It is well understood that interference with activities carried out by temples displeases the god. At one limit of the practice of sacred prostitution, temples employ prostitutes and directly sell their services to the public. A possible example of direct participation in the economy by cults is the production of textiles in “houses of women” attached to Sumerian temples. At the other limit, temples provide facilities of various kinds to private firms (brothels) and individual prostitutes. To illustrate this form of business organization, in the OA and OB periods, priests and the gods Assur and Shamash formed commercial partnerships with private merchants (Dercksen 2000, 139–140; Veenhof 2004, 556–567). Under both forms of business organization, temples derive regular income from the sale of sexual services. Antiquity’s prostitution industry very probably included a mixture of temple and private producers. The possibility that producers not associated with temples also sold sexual services is not excluded (cf. Lambert 1992, 136).

On the other hand, “temple/sacred prostitution” does not at all refer to or have as its objective “fertility.” The outcome/service demanded by buyers and supplied by sellers is sexual pleasure. Thus, this paper does not adhere to Lambert’s (1992, 143) suggestion that “Thus, in ancient Mesopotamia all prostitution was by definition sacral, because the sexual act was a natural force working for the well being of the human race and was a power personified in the goddess Inanna/Ishtar.” Note in this connection, Pruss’ (2002, 544) rejection of the view that female figurines with emphasized sexual characteristics pertain to fertility

and reproduction: “Generally, there is no reason to believe that the ancient inhabitants of Mesopotamia and Syria could not separate the fields of eroticism and human procreation. They were able to perceive sexuality as an independent thriving force behind human behavior. Contrary to our modern understanding, human fertility was in the Ancient Near East more closely linked with males than with females.”

At one limit of the labor force, employees (prostitutes) have freely chosen to improve their economic status by selling sexual services. At the other limit, prostitutes are slaves required by their owners (temple or private) to provide sexual services to the public. In the ancient world, a mixture of free and enslaved prostitutes would be employed in the prostitution industry. Other things equal, free prostitutes would enjoy an appreciably higher standard of living than slave prostitutes.

Preferences matter in determining occupational choices, however. Individuals with a positive preference (or lesser aversion) for this lifestyle would, other things equal, be more likely to be employed as prostitutes. Similarly, those believing they had a religious duty to provide sexual services to the public would, other things equal, be more likely to find employment as prostitutes.

Some individuals would spend most of their productive lives providing sexual services to the public. Others would be employed in the capacity of prostitutes on a temporary or short-term basis. Those working as prostitutes would typically comprise a small fraction of the aggregate labor force and, more specifically, a small fraction of those technically capable of satisfying the public’s demand for sexual services.

Temple/sacred prostitution neither requires nor excludes religious/societal expectations that all/most women should regularly/occasionally provide sexual services to the public or specific public groups (see Herodotus 1.199.1–5). .

I. Model for Analyzing Temple/Sacred Prostitution

A. Economic-Religious Environment of Sacred Prostitution

1. Mesopotamia and the ANE generally were familiar with markets (Silver 1995; 2004).
2. For good economic reasons, diverse business activities were conducted in antiquity by gods (cults) or under their auspices. OB texts refer to a god and goddess called “Merchant of the Bazaars” (Lambert 1989, 5). In other OB texts the gods Enlil and Shamash are called *tāmkaru*, “merchant.” The economic role of gods found important expression in their function as protectors of honest business practices. Some deities openly combated opportunism (self-interest pursued with guile) and lowered transaction costs by actively inculcating and enforcing professional standards. Unfortunately, the most concise examples are from outside Mesopotamia. (On several occasions, the Mesopotamian evidence is supplemented by examples from elsewhere in the ANE.) Thus, in an Egyptian tomb scene of the mid-third millennium, a

smelter admonishes his partner that “sloth is abominable to Sokaris”, the god of metal smelting and patron of metalworkers (Hodjash/Berlev 1980, 36–37). A Hittite literary tablet of the mid-second millennium portrays the merchant holding the scales before the sun-god, with whom he had a special relationship, but the document adds, according to Puhvel’s (1983, 222) translation, that he “falsifies the scales.” We may nevertheless assume that in practice merchants often heeded their patrons and gave honest weights.

3. Patron gods looked after the welfare of various crafts—for examples, merchant, potter, and smith. Kothar-and-Hasis, Ptah, Reshef/Nergal and Athena are prominent examples of this role. At Emar in Syria (and probably elsewhere), Nergal was a patron of merchants and “lord of the marketplace” (EN KILAM *bēl maḥīri*) (see Westenholz 1999, 151–152). Assante (1998, 69 with n. 195) adds Ninkasi as patron of the Mesopotamian beer-crafts. Craftsmen tithed their god. For example, in the earlier second millennium, merchants returning from Tilmun tithed the temple of the goddess Ningal, a patron of sea-traders (Leemans 1960, 31).¹ Patron gods of crafts were sometimes elevated into local pantheons.² We may take note of the deification of Siduri who probably originated as the patron god of the *sabitu* “female tavern keeper.” In the Gilgamesh Epic (GE) she is “Siduri (Assante 1998, 70).
4. The typical ancient individual might simultaneously worship a number of distinct gods, including gods of his/her household, city, kingdom, and craft/profession (see e. g., van der Toorn 1996, 2).
5. Entrepreneurial priests and others created and reshaped the cults, myths, hymns, rituals, and temples (houses) of gods.

Mesopotamian mythological texts (*Erra Epic*, *Enuma Eliš*) sometimes attest to the creative process by adding a colophon stating the name of the scribe or priest who “wrote it down”. The hymn to Nina and Nanshe, Jacobsen (1987a, 126) states, was “written by the poetess Enheduanna around 2350 B. C.” She also composed several other hymns (Hallo / van Dijk 1968, chap. 1). Tablets, poetic and prose, from the library of Assurbanipal include the expression *ša pī X* “of the mouth of X,” including the god Ea. Lambert (1962, 72) explains that “authorship must certainly be indicated. No one would have described Ea as the editor of another’s works.” Some works were authored by gods and legendary figures but a number are attributed to individuals who are “given a priestly title and are said to be scholars (*ummānu*) of particular towns” (Lambert 1962, 74). It would appear that these authors were historical figures (Hillers/McCall 1976, 22).

Shulgi, an Ur III ruler, boasts in a hymn that he generously subsidized the production of songs and poems in the “Wisdom-House-of-(the-goddess)-Nisaba/(Nidaba):

¹ For Greek examples, see Mattusch 1977.

² For Greco-Roman examples, see Burkert 1986, 48–49, 150, n. 99.

“I, the upright, the benefactor of the land—
 Let my songs be (placed) in every mouth.
 Let my poems never pass from memory!
 That these, my paeans never pass from memory!
 These laudatory words, which [the god] Enki established for me.
 This joyfully *deliberated wisdom* of Geshtinanna.
 Should not be forgotten for distant days—
 To that end, I made the Wisdom-House-of-Nisaba
 Resplendent with *generous gifts*, like heavenly stars.”
 (Translation of Assante 2000, 223; emphasis in original)

The goddess Geshtinanna was known as “chief scribe” (Lambert 1990, 298–299) and probably was a patron of scribes, as was Nidaba/Nisaba (Michalowski 2002).

As a concrete example of cultic entrepreneurship in the ANE, consider a thirteenth-century legal document from Emar recording the foundation by an individual of a place of worship for the god Nergal. The right of his son to succeed the founder as priest is guaranteed (Fleming 2000, 43–44).³

6. In general, there was no enforced monopolization of the cultic enterprise in Mesopotamia. Experimentation and innovation were usually possible. Indeed, those willing to pay the asked-for price might make use of important cultic symbols for their private purposes, as is well attested in Mesopotamian documents (see e. g. Harris 1965, esp. 218–220; Spaey 1993, 413–414, 417–418).

B. Building Blocks of Sacred Prostitution

1. A potential supply and a potential demand for sexual services existed and, hence, the basis for a market in sexual services—i. e. prostitution.
2. Professional prostitutes, proprietors of brothels or, most likely, cultic entrepreneurs create gods (or adapt existing gods) to be the patrons of prostitutes.
3. On behalf of prostitutes, a house/temple is built for the patron god and/or space for the patron of prostitutes is rented in the temple of another god.

For the actual founding of a temple by prostitutes, I can cite only a unique Greek example. Athenaeus (13.572f–573a); referencing Alexis of Samos, in the second book of his “Samian Annals,” states “The Aphrodite of Samos, whom some call by the title ‘In the Reeds,’ others, ‘In the Swamp,’ was dedicated by Athenian prostitutes who accompanied the army of Pericles when he was laying siege to Samos, after they had earned sufficient funds by their seductions” (Gulick). With respect to the joint occupancy of temples, the Ur III hymn to Lagash’s goddess Nanshe reveals that Inanna had been installed in one of Nanshe’s neighborhood shrines (Heimpel 1981, 110). In-

³ For Greco-Roman examples see West 1986, 234, and White 1990, 39–43; for Egypt see Redford 1984, I 337.

deed, the joint occupancy pattern may help to explain the delivery of “offerings” by one cult to another (for Ur III, see Frayne 1997, 14; for OB Nippur, see Robertson 1992).

4. The priesthood of the prostitute’s god establishes professional standards for the craft. Cultic symbols are made available to brothels conforming to the standards. Given the special risks and vulnerabilities borne by consumers and sellers of sexual services, the oversight of this marketplace by gods is understandable and predictable.
5. In order to increase interest in their “product,” the priesthood composes sexually explicit hymns, myths and rituals sanctifying/promoting/praising the sexual activities of cultic prostitutes. This activity provides an empirical context for the use of literary materials as evidence.
6. Prostitutes practice their trade in and around their temple as do the other crafts and, like other crafts, they make payments to their god.
7. The cult of the patron of prostitutes flourishes. The patron may even be inducted into the pantheon.

II. Evidence of Temple/Sacred Prostitution

A. General Considerations

The use of literary texts as evidence is justified, as noted above, by their predictable role in validating and promoting (advertising) temple-sponsored sexual relations. Beyond this undoubted relevance, literary texts, given their cultic connections and permanent artistic merits, are more likely to have been preserved than economic records of transactions between prostitutes and their clients.

On the other hand, Assante (1998, 8 n. 9) stresses that the “over 2000 tablets and fragments” from the Inanna temple in Nippur “did not produce a single fragment documenting sacred prostitution.” Be this as it may, many if not most of the tablets were of an economic nature. As what economists call “spot transactions,” much like the purchase of bread in the local bakery, it is unlikely that contracts for sex were ever written. (A *spot market* is a market in which products are bought and sold for cash and delivered immediately.) Assante (1998, 65) suggests that “Sex for pay was simply not a topic Mesopotamians wished to record.” It is no exaggeration to say that once literary texts are excluded, the proverbial “oldest profession” mostly ceases to exist. However, as we shall see, legal texts from the archive of a priest in Sippar Amnānum are consistent with the view that cults reaped a financial benefit from prostitution.

For Greece there is evidence of explicit long-term contracts for sexual services.⁴ For Mesopotamia, we may mention Middle Babylonian (MB) adoption tablets in which adoptees may be employed as “prostitutes” (see *CAD* s. v. *ḥarīmūtu*; Lambert 1992, 134; Stol 1995, 137–138). The key word here is *ḥa-*

⁴ For examples and discussion of the contracts, see Cohen 2000, 128–130; 2006, 109–110.

rīmtu, about which much more below. Also, in an Old Babylonian (OB) text from Nippur, (BE 6/2 4), a woman adopts a girl in order make her a “prostitute” (Stone and Owen 1991, 54). In this text, the significant term is *kar-kid* about which, again, more below. It must be noted that Assante disputes the meaning of the adoption tablets.

B. Specifics of the Evidence

1 Evidence in the Gilgamesh Epic

In Enkidu’s blessing of Shamhat the *ḥarīmtu* (GE VII 156–160), we see the exchange of sexual favors for material valuables—i. e. prostitution. The goddess Ishtar is introduced into the exchange nexus.

“May no soldier [be slow] to undo his belt for you!
 (Foster (2001, 57) translates line 156 as “May the subordinate not hold back from you, but open his trousers.”)
 May he [give you] obsidian, lapis lazuli, and gold,
 Multiple ear-[rings] shall be your gift!
 To a man whose household [is well off], whose storage bins are heaped high,
 To the man who is secure, whose granaries are full,
 may Ishtar, [the most able] of the gods, send you in!”
 (George 2003, I, 643)

i. Meaning of *ḥarīmtu*

GE does not explain why Gilgamesh and/or the trapper’s father chose Shamhat nor does it reveal her motive in performing sexual services for Enkidu. “Dating” by a “sexually experienced single woman” (Assante 1998, 11) is not a sufficient explanation. The suggestion that “her compliance is a response to destiny” (Assante 1998, 57) does not come to grips with the issue.

Enkidu’s blessing portrays Shamhat as a woman who will trade sex for gifts. Clearly, she is viewed as a prostitute. It may be suggested, however, that Shamhat represents the casual or part-time prostitute—a sexual opportunist on the lookout for gifts of all kinds. However, the status of professional prostitute explains Shamhat’s willing participation and ties in well with Enkidu’s blessing. Enkidu’s curse “The shadow of a wall shall be your station” reinforces the conclusion that Shamhat is a prostitute (see 6, 8 below). The curse should not be taken in isolation from the blessing (compare Assante 1998, 58).

Assante (2003, 33) maintains that “In a world before currency (...) the definition of paid-for sex blurs.” Elsewhere, in discussing the transactions of the tavernkeeper, Assante (1998, 71) suggests that both beer and grain “were common currency.” In any event, “currency” meaning money (silver, copper) did exist. Indeed, there may well have been a form of “coinage” as well (Silver 1995, 157–164). In the second place, even in the absence of a money commodity, the nature of market exchange for bread, sex or whatever would not become a blur.

There is little or no basis for Assante's proposition that *ḥarīmtu* means no more than "single woman / not the wife of a man / sexually experienced woman". In defending this position, Assante (1998, 13) points out that *ḥarmu*, in the few texts in which it appears, is translated as "(male) lover" not "male prostitute". She sees the *ḥarmu* as an "unmarried man". However, *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (CAD)* does not seem to recognize a connection between *ḥarmu* and *ḥarīmtu*. CAD (s. v. *ḥarmu*) remarks: "The relation of *ḥarmu* to *ḥarmatu* and *ḥarīmtu* remains obscure, especially if one connects [as is usual] the latter with *ḥarāmu* ["to separate" (CAD s. v.)]. Apparently, the meaning of *ḥarmu* is a rather difficult problem.

ii. Role of Ishtar

Should Enkidu's request for Ishtar's intervention on behalf of Shamhat be attributed to her role as a goddess of fate/good fortune? Alternatively, is she portrayed as one who brings together clients and prostitutes, such as the *ḥarīmtu* Shamhat? The latter interpretation is more firmly based in Ishtar's sexual "resume."

iii. *ḥarīmtu* and Ishtar in the Gilgamesh Epic

Shamhat the *ḥarīmtu* also is linked with Ishtar and cult in the following GE passages:

In GE (I 215–218)

"Enkidu spoke to the harlot:
 'Come, Shamhat, take me along
 to the sacred temple, the holy dwelling of Anu and Ishtar,
 where Gilgamesh is perfect in strength'"
 (George 2003, I, 551)

In GE (VI 158–59) Ishtar calls upon *ḥarīmtu*'s (also *kezertu*'s and *šamḥatu*'s) to unite with her in mourning (George 2003, I, 629). As noted below (6), Ishtar characterizes herself as a *ḥarīmtu*.

Henshaw (1994, 215–216), citing GE VII iii 35f, adds that Shamhat gave Enkidu *kurunnu*, "a kind of choice beer often used in ritual" (citing CAD s. v.).

It is clear that Shamhat the *ḥarīmtu* had a cultic connection.

iv. Preliminary Evaluation

So far, the meaning of *ḥarīmtu* has not been addressed. Why does GE make Shamhat a *ḥarīmtu*? Harris (1990, 222, n. 14) sees *ḥarīmtu* "as a non-judgmental term for a woman who uses her sexuality to support herself". Another explanation is that Shamhat is a single woman (= *ḥarīmtu*), who also happens to be a prostitute: "Even if Shamhat were a sex professional of some sort, she still need not stand for all *ḥarīmtu*'s" (Assante 1998, 57). Elsewhere, Assante (1998, 63) suggests, with special reference to the Neo-Assyrian (NA) and later periods, "Prostitution and dependence on men married to other women may have risen under such conditions. Certainly some *ḥarīmtu*'s took these routes. Inevitably,

prostitutes would normally have come from their ranks” (cf. page 73). Again, “Comparing the treatment of Ishtar and Shamhat in this late text [GE], leaves one wondering if women who actively sought sex to fulfill their own needs were thought to be more fearsome than those who performed intercourse by decree or out of economic necessity” (Assante 1998, 59). These remarks are especially speculative. Moreover, the relevant text is not “late” (see Assante 1998, 55, n. 147).

Perhaps Assante is suggesting that in “late” times, *ḥarīmtu* came to have the meaning “prostitute” because so many prostitutes were *ḥarīmtu*’s (= single women). Any such suggestion would be problematic because prostitutes would have been drawn from the ranks of single women / women without a husband in much earlier times. Indeed, due in no small measure to problems in identifying paternity (see Beaulieu 1993, 12) and to sexually transmitted diseases, active prostitutes would, other things equal, be more likely to remain single than other economically active women. In any event, Assante does not draw this conclusion and, indeed, she continues to insist that the word for “prostitute” remains unknown or simply is nonexistent (e. g. Assante 1998, 86 with n. 238). The most obvious explanation for Shamhat’s identification is that, whatever its etymological derivation (see below), “professional prostitute” is a main meaning of *ḥarīmtu* in *all* periods.

GE’s evidence weighs heavily against Assante’s hypothesis that temple prostitution did not exist in ancient Mesopotamia. So heavily, indeed, that Assante opens a kind of “second front” against it. Assante (1998, 63) returns to the hypothesis that Mesopotamian society changed radically during and after NA–NB times. Perhaps it did. However, Assante fails to take her argument to its logical conclusion by stipulating to the emergence of temple prostitution in the first millennium. (As noted above, she concedes only that in later times *some* *ḥarīmtu*’s may have become prostitutes.) Standing squarely in the way of any such stipulation is an OB era text testifying strongly to the existence of temple prostitution. This is a hymn depicting Nanaya, an Ishtar-type-goddess, marketing sexual services at her cella/bedroom (see 8 below). Assante (1998, 86 with n. 237) refers to this hymn only on the last page of her article where she suggests that there is “reason to believe” that two key lines are “later interpolations.”

2 *ḥarīmtu* and Ishtar in Other Texts

The *Erra Epic* (iv. 52–53), whose author Kabti-ilani-Marduk is usually dated to the eighth century, links Ishtar with *ḥarīmtu*’s, *kezertu*’s and *šamḥatu*’s “whom Ishtar deprived of husbands and reckoned as her own” (Foster 2005, 904) or “whom Ishtar left to their own hands (Cagni 1977, 52–53; Diakonoff 1986,

229–230).⁵

In a NA curse formula in the Kapara inscriptions from Tell Halaf (*Weidner Tn 73* No. 8:7), a defaulter must burn his sons and give over his daughters to Ishtar and *ḥarīmūtu* (Stol 1995, 138–139). Assante (1998, 23) reasons as follows: “Conceivably, the girls could have been dedicated to temple prostitution, but as its existence is not attested in cuneiform, such an interpretation seems far fetched and in fact, besides the point.” Thus, following a pattern, evidence consistent with temple prostitution is taken in isolation and then dismissed on the ground that there is no other evidence supporting this conclusion! Assante (1998, 23) suggests instead that “the force of the curse relies wholly (...) on the importance Mesopotamians placed on continuing the patrilineal line. Destroying the sons and turning one’s daughters into *ḥarimtu*’s effectively end the house for neither dead sons nor estranged *ḥarimtu* daughters could produce legal heirs to carry his line.” Perhaps this interpretation has merit. There is, however, another possibility meriting consideration—i. e., the force of the curse is that beloved sons are condemned to death and beloved daughters are condemned to a wretched fate of prostitution for Ishtar (see Kapparis 1999, 5 and below).

In a text from Nuzi (SMN 1670), a man pledges a woman to the goddess Ishtar Shaushka “*ana ḥarīmūtu*” (Assante 1998, 61). *CAD* (s. v. *ḥarīmūtu*) translates *ana ḥarīmūtu* as “for prostitution”. Thus, it appears that a woman was dedicated to Ishtar to serve as a prostitute. According to Wilhelm, the text undoubtedly demonstrates the presence of prostitution in the temple organization (cited by Assante 1998, 60, n. 159; cf. Henshaw 1994, 216).⁶ Assante (1998, 61), however, understands *ana ḥarīmūtu* to mean that a single woman is pledged to the temple to do whatever. This is not what the text appears to mean.

Assante does not discuss why the woman was pledged to Ishtar in particular: “Most likely, the debtor owed the temple money and sent the *ḥarimtu* as collateral or to work it off” (Assante 1998, 61). Thus, the pledge might have been to any god or, for that matter, to any lender. The logic of Assante’s argument is that Ishtar’s role is mere coincidence. However, in commenting on the curse formula from Halaf (above), Assante (1998, 23; cf. 43) explains that “Abandoning them [the daughters] specifically to Ishtar, whether figuratively or literally, would have been logical given she was the only goddess in the pantheon who was also a *ḥarimtu*.” This is revealing of the meaning and sexual content of *ana ḥarīmūtu*, since Ishtar designates herself as a “loving *ḥarimtu*” in the context of sitting at the entrance of a tavern (6 below) and, as *kar.kid* in the context of being “one who knows the penis” (see 3–4 below).

⁵ In an arbitration decision concerning the hetaera Neaera, it is decided that she is *autē hautēs kyria*, “her own mistress.” This means that “like a man, she can own and manage property and she has a public presence” (Skinner 2005, 99 citing *Demosthenes* 59.46).

⁶ The phrase *ana ḥarīmūti balṭat* appears in a Nuzi text (HSS 5 11). Assante (1998, 20) translates: “the daughter lives as a *ḥarimtu*”; *CAD* (s. v. *ḥarīmūtu*) translates “the daughter has lived for *ḥarīmūtu*”.

Elsewhere, Assante (1998, 24–25, 35) cites OB omen texts in which “a king’s daughter” / “a man’s wife” go out of the palace/house *ana ḥarīmūti* (*CAD* s. v. *ḥarīmūtu*). In addition, she cites a royal proclamation from Nuzi requiring palace servants to receive permission before letting their daughters leave the palace *ana ḥarīmūti* (*CAD* s. v. *ḥarīmūtu*). Assante’s understanding of *ana ḥarīmūti* in these texts eludes me. The clear implication is that women might choose to become prostitutes.⁷

The evidence clearly links the *ḥarīmtu* with Ishtar. The expression *ana ḥarīmūtu* is best understood as “for prostitution,” including prostitution in the Ishtar cult.

3 Sexualization of the *ḥarīmtu*/kar-kid

kar-kid is the Sumerian equivalent of *ḥarīmtu* (the “separated one“?) but the terms are seemingly unrelated etymologically. Lambert (1992, 138) explains kar-kid as “she who works the quay“. Some doubt is apparently cast on this explanation by a text published by Taylor (2001, 227–228).

In Sumerian we have “I am a kar-kid, one who knows the penis” (*CAD* s. v. *ḥarīmtu*; Assante 1998, 74 n. 210). The usual translation “prostitute” for kar-kid is consistent with familiarity with the penis. Possibly, on the other hand, such familiarity might be assumed of a sexually active single woman (see Assante 1998, 49, n. 126, 50).

In a collection of materials that, according to Lambert (1992, 133), are probably of MB origin but circulated in late Assyrian and Babylonian copies, there is the admonition:

“Do not marry a *ḥarīmtu*, whose husbands are legion [literally 3600]. A harlot [Lambert’s translation of *ištarītu*] dedicated to a god. The courtesan [Lambert’s translation of *kulmašītu*] whose favors are many [alternative: who often draws near someone]. In your troubles, she will not support you.” (BWL 103, 74; Lambert 1992, 133. Henshaw 1994, 202).

As I understand the admonition, *ḥarīmtu* is made equivalent to “harlot dedicated to a god“. In other words, insofar as temple prostitution is concerned, *ištarītu* equals *ḥarīmtu*. The line with *kulmašītu* is more obscure and its meaning is disputed. Assante (1998, 54–55) sees this matter quite differently: The women are all bad marriage choices because, for different reasons in each case, they will

⁷ This understanding finds support in another OB omen text in which we read “If the (sacrificial) sheep grinds its teeth, the wife of a man will commit fornication [literally, be fornicated upon]; she will go out of [her] house” (Finkelstein 1966, 362; Assante 1998, 48 n. 123; 50). In this case, the wife leaves the male household permanently, but she is not said to depart *ana ḥarīmūti*. That is, the status change implied by the latter term has a specific content that goes beyond going out of the male household.

Cohen (2006, 106–107) notes Hellenistic epigrams and other examples in which women seek to escape the low-income status of wool worker by becoming prostitutes (cf. Kapparis 1999, 5–8).

not give their primary attention to the husband. This is possible.

However, it is not very easy to understand, with Assante (1998, 54), the *ḥarīmtu*'s "legion of husbands" as "the quintessential sign of her unmarried state". In the first place, there must have been independent single women who were not so very "quintessential."⁸ More basically, the "legion of husbands" recalls the OB (according to its subscript) Akkadian composition (a *pārum* for Ishtar) from Nippur called "Ishtar Will Not Tire."

"Since I'm ready to give you all you want,
Get all the young men of your city together,
Let's go to the shade of a wall!
Seven for her midriff, seven for her loins,
Sixty then sixty satisfy themselves in turn upon her nakedness.
Young men have tired, Ishtar will not tire."
(Foster 2005, 678; for a complete translation with discussion, see Hurowitz 1995.)

As noted by Hurowitz (1995, 551), the initial lines (not translated above) include two titles of Ishtar, ^d*telitum* and *ardatum*. The action begins when a young man approaches "Ishtar" and says *alkī mugrīnni* "come, obey me" but no price is mentioned (Hurowitz 1995, 551–552). Such depictions and references to "numerous husbands" fit best as references to the professional prostitute who may indeed have many hundred sex partners in a career. Indeed, the untiring Ishtar has a promotional or warranty aspect: "We devotees of Ishtar will always provide outstanding service to those who purchase our services."

An OB Sumerian literary text (*TIM* 9 6) includes the dialogue:

"Why did you insult the daughter of a man [*awīlum*], your equal,
And call her a *kar.kid*
So that you caused (her) husband to divorce her?"
(Assante 1998, 31)

Assante (1998, 31) maintains that the *kar-kid* reference is aimed not at the

⁸ If not, there are grounds for hesitating to categorize Assante's "single women" with contemporary "single women," meaning women who date and do not reside with parents. Even today, the group of sexually liberated women is much smaller than the group of single women. Indeed, the group of sexually liberated is smaller than the group of liberated women.

Citing the example of the "aroused female of the Inanna hymns (...) 'My vulva is wet, who will plough it'", Assante (2000, 22) suggests that Mesopotamian erotic materials, especially the textual, "*revealed* females who were anything but passive" (emphasis added). However, the sexually active female is well represented in the sexual fantasies of males. Inanna's sexually explicit hymns were probably written by men and women for male consumption.

Skinner (2005, 181) cites "Asclepiades' epigrams on women, depicting many of them as sexually active and self-reliant without mentioning an exchange of sex for money (...). Apart from this equivocal literary testimony, however, we have no documentation for the historical actuality of this class of [independent] women."

woman's sexual behavior, but at her socio-legal status. The "identification of the maligned woman as a 'daughter of a man' indicates that the slander was about her *original status before marriage*" (emphasis added). Certainly, this interpretation is possible. On the other hand, the references to the woman being "the daughter of a man" and "your equal" are equally consistent with the "slander" being about the woman's behavior *during marriage*. Indeed, there is every reason to believe that a prospective husband would know (have to know?) the socio-legal status of his future wife, whether "daughter of a man" or *kar.kid* "from the street" (4 below). What the husband did not know was that his wife was *currently* performing as a prostitute.⁹ No doubt, this explains why Lambert (1992, 132) and other scholars take the insult and divorce as a reference to prostitution.

The sexualized nature of the *ḥarīmtu*/*kar-kid* has been established. There is sufficient reason to believe that she was a prostitute.

4 *kar-kid*/*ḥarīmtu* and "Street"

Sometimes, "street" (Akkadian *sūqu*; Sumerian *silā*) is a legal term referring to individuals outside organized households (*CAD* s. v. 1a.2'), but it also means "public place" (*CAD* s. v. 1a.1').

Incipit of a Sumerian OB incantation for love sickness (BL IV):

"the beautiful [*sa*₆] girl [*ki-sikil*] standing in the street, the young *kar-kid* daughter of Inanna".

(Civil 1983, 61)

In the next line, the *kar-kid* in the street is placed in the tavern. In a variant, the woman in the street is not called *kar-kid*; she is described only as "girl, daughter of Inanna" and is again associated with the tavern (Geller 2002, 137). "Girl" (*ki-sikil*) may refer to a sexually experienced female and, indeed, line 32 gives the girl in the incantation a child (Geller 2002, 131, 137).

It is not "over-sexualization" (cf. Assante 1998, 48) to understand this "street" literally and, further, to understand the *kar-kid* in the street as a prostitute. This is the view of Civil (1983, 61) who notes that "Enlil obviously mistakes Sud for a prostitute because he finds her 'standing in the street'. It is clear that saying *silā-a gub-ba* of a woman indicates that she is a prostitute" (compare Assante 1998, 51 n. 133). The interpretation of *kar-kid* as "she who works the quay" is consistent with the view that the attractive "daughter" of Inanna is a prostitute. Ishtar/Inanna inspires copulation in the "street" and, as we have seen, in the OB text from Nippur ("Ishtar Will Not Tire") she copulates with a legion

⁹ In the *ana ittīšu* text, the husband certainly knew that he was marrying a *kar-kid*. Assante (1998, 3; compare *CAD* s. v. *ḥarīmūtu*) adds "the daughter of a man is represented by her father or male guardian" in forming a marriage contract. For a possible example of a married woman performing as a prostitute, see Kapparis 1999, 9 with n. 18. On performing as prostitute and marriage prospects, see Edlund/Korn 2002.

of men at the city wall (cf. Assante 1998, 52 with n. 136). The role of the tavern is considered below.

However, Assante (1998, 51) maintains that “it would be illogical for a man to resort to incantations in order to sleep with a prostitute when he could simply pay her.” This is a reasonable objection. It is not at all conclusive, however. In ll. 27–33, the “incantation” calls for the young man to pour butter into a yellow stone vessel, apply the butter to the girl’s breasts and then say, “May she run after me!” (Geller 2002, 137). This is the full extent of the magic. A man may resort to magic/incantation or simple prayer because he wants the prostitute to love him—i. e. to provide him with the totality of her sexual services. Note the references to “loving of the heart” or “loving heart” in the text.¹⁰ It is perfectly logical to obtain the services of a prostitute without paying for them! Assante ignores the budgetary aspect. It is far cheaper to control an attractive (expensive) prostitute’s services by means of prayer or enchantment than to pay the market price. The sexual attractiveness of the prostitute is attested in ll. 12–16:

“her bottom is shining, her hips are lapis luzuli,
when her backside descends from above,
to spread feelings of love,
to reduce inhibitions of love,
arousal extends from above like (from) a wall.”
(Geller 2002, 137)

I would suggest that the man’s resort to an “incantation” should be understood as a testimonial or tribute to the sexual attractiveness of the prostitute “daughters of Inanna.”

The early second millennium Laws of Lipit-Ishtar (§ 30) begins

¹⁰ This is similar to the view of Leick (1994, 196–198) who understands that the young man desires more than the professional services of the prostitute, but wishes to induce “loving of the heart.” Geller (2002, 129, n. 7) says that “Leick misunderstands this point, since the *ša-ki-àg* or ‘loving heart’ describes the effect which the maiden has on her man, rather than what the man desires of the woman.”

Erotic binding-spells from Late Roman Egypt portray very well the desire to monopolize sexual services. “The model-spell prays that the [desired] woman not enjoy vaginal or anal intercourse and that she should do nothing else contributing to the pleasure of any other man” (Dickie 2000, 568). Some spells add fellation to the services listed. The desired woman might be sought out in a tavern. “It is tempting at this point to conclude that those who used the model-spell tended to be men intent on making their own exclusive sexual property prostitutes or women who were prepared to bestow their sexual favors on others” (Dickie 2000, 569). In only one case, however, does there seem to be explicit evidence suggesting that a spell is aimed at monopolizing the services of a prostitute. A spell (no. 9) of the third century C. E. from the Athenian Agora calls for an end of the sexual relationship between Juliana and man named Polynikos. “Since Juliana is to be found in an *ergastērion* (no. 8.5) she is a prostitute” (Dickie 2000, 576). Dickie is inclined to believe that the caster of the spell is a competing (female) prostitute not a competing (male) lover.

“If a married man has sexual relations with a *kar.kid* from the street (...)”
(Assante 1998, 27 with n. 56).

Texts from various periods refer to the “*kar.kid* of the street” and to the *ḥarīmtu* of the street” (Assante 1998, 47).

Taking everything together, one might argue that “quay” or “city-square”/ “street” represents a kind of “downtown,” a place of courtship where single women “hang out” and meet their dates (Assante 1998, 50–1).¹¹ Obviously, Mesopotamian women were not locked up in their homes. Thus, Finkelstein (1966, 363) cites a bilingual text (Sm. 49+752 rev. i 5ff.): “The maid (i. e., the *ardat lili*), who does not promenade along the roads and streets together with the (normal) maidens” (cf. Assante 1998, 52). Her lover Dumuzi advises Inanna to tell her mother she was late to get home because “My girlfriend was strolling with me in the square (...) and time went by!” (Jacobsen 1987a, 11). The problem of the “street” requires additional evidence and analysis.

A NA text (*ana ittīšu*; MSL 1:96f. 23–28) with possible OB antecedents, reads in Assante’s (1998, 37) translation:

“He brought her in from the street in her status as *kar.kid*.
He married her in her status as *kar.kid*.
He gave her back her tavern.
He had her enter his house.
He arranged her marriage contract.
He carried in her marriage gift.”

CAD’s (s. v. *ḥarīmūtu*) translation differs mainly in the first sentence:

“He took her from the street (and) supported her, as a *kar.kid/ḥarīmtu*”.

The difference in the interpretation of the text is striking. *CAD* understands that the woman remained a *kar-kid/ḥarīmtu* after her marriage. Assante (1998, 37, n. 86) replies: “In my opinion, the lines are quite clear in that they establish her exact legal status before marriage”. Perhaps, but it is not in the least clear that the woman ceased to be a *ḥarīmtu* after marriage and this is what matters! Let us just say that the text is ambiguous.

In the Middle Assyrian Laws (§ 40), dated to late in the second millennium, we find that married women, including a married *qadiltu*[=*qadištu*]-woman, are to be veiled when they go out on the street. In addition, a concubine is to be veiled when she accompanies the primary wife. On the other hand, an unmarried *qadiltu*-woman, a slave woman and a *ḥarīmtu* are not to be veiled. Assante (1998, 33) points out “The most obvious common characteristic linking these three categories [*qadiltu*, slave, *ḥarīmtu*] (...) is their unmarried status”. This conclusion has merit. There is a problem, however. If *ḥarīmtu* does not mean,

¹¹ Michalowski (1994, 29) points out that “Typically, on Early Dynastic seals and plaques, one finds two persons, often of opposite sex, drinking [beer] through straws from the same vessel.” It is tempting to think of “dating” in this context.

“prostitute,” but means only “unmarried woman,” then why do not the laws state simply that *ḥarīmtu*’s must not be veiled in the street? That is, why mention separately the unmarried slave, the unmarried *qadiltu*-woman, and, by inference, the concubine when alone in the street. Assante (1998, 33–34) tries to address this problem but, as she would surely grant, her remarks are hardly conclusive.

Be this as it may, even the most generous interpretation of the “street” will not make the following text conform to the “single woman” hypothesis.

A NA curse formula (Ashurnirari VI)

“may PN become a *ḥarīmtu*, (his) men become women, may they receive gifts in the square of their city as a *ḥarīmtu* (does)” (*CAD* s. v. *ḥarīmtu*).

Assante (1998, 61–62) seeks to explain this passage (and the Nuzi pledge text SMN 1670) by declaring that “the *ḥarimutu* is mostly associated with the lowest social strata”—they received “hand-outs” in the city-square. Then she adds: “The *ḥarimtu* rather than living in the streets in dire poverty, could own her own house and support her own children, contrary to this dismal depiction [her own?] (...)” (Assante 1998, 62). “To summarize, the *ḥarimtu*’s exact means of earning a living is poorly attested, not because she lacked occupations but because they were usually of a type that went unrecorded” (Assante 1998, 63). Nevertheless, it is quite clear that prostitutes do receive “gifts” in city-squares and they are not “charity.” It is also clear that Assante has undermined her assertion that “the *ḥarimutu* is mostly associated with the lowest social strata.”

Taken as a whole, the evidence for *kar-kid/ḥarīmtu* in the “street” favors the prostitution explanation much more than it does Assante’s “single woman” theory. In addition, three NA texts associate the *ḥarīmtu* with occupations (Tepo 2005, 98–99). This is consistent with prostitution but not with “status of single woman.”

5. *Kezertu*’s and Prostitution

As noted above, *kezertu*’s are associated with Ishtar and *ḥarīmtu*’s in several texts. Lambert (1992, 132, 154), citing *kezēru* “curl the hair”, suggests that the *kezertu* is a prostitute identified by a distinctive hairstyle. Some scholars have said that *kezertu* means “hairstylist,” but Lambert (1992, 154) objects that “this is impossible in view of the alternative forms *kezretu* and *kazratu*”. In the Hymn to Inanna-Ninegalla, Inanna goes out from the tavern in search of men wearing “the bead necklace [*erimmatu*] of the *kar.kid*” (Assante 1998, 76 and below).

With respect to distinctive hairstyle and dress, it is well to note that in antiquity visual cues or insignia were offered to signal social status and a capacity to engage in specialized transactions and productive activities of various kinds. Hephaistos and the Egyptian Ptah, craftsmen gods, are depicted wearing the smith’s cap (Pipili 2000, 160–162). Wu (1998) suggests that in Mesopotamia, slaves and freemen were distinguished by their hairstyles.

Assante (1998, 42) notes correctly, “The *kezertu* has been studied by many. So far, no evidence of prostitution nor descriptions of her sexual activity have

come to light.” There are, however, references in OB texts from Kish to payments by women called *kezērum-* or *kezertum-*silver. These are discussed below.

6. Ishtar and *ḥarīmtu*/kar-kid in the Tavern/Inn

“When I [Ishtar] sit at the entrance of the tavern/hostel [*aštammu*], I am a loving *ḥarīmtum*.”

(*CAD* s. vv. *ḥarīmtu*; *aštammu*; Assante 1998, 74)

It is reasonable to suggest that the “loving” Ishtar sits at the entrance of the tavern for purposes of prostitution. The evidence demonstrates that the tavern is Ishtar’s home (Henshaw 1994, 315; Assante 2000, 232). In the Sumerian *Epic of Lugalbanda*, Inanna is “the kar.kid [= *ḥarīmtu*], setting out toward the éšdam [“tavern”], who makes the bed sweet” (Assante 1998, 73’; Henshaw 1994, Appendix 4). More explicitly, in the Sumerian Hymn to Inanna-Ninegalla, the goddess departs from the tavern—her “dwelling place”—in search of men. To this end, she dons a sexy outfit and wears the beads of the kar-kid (Jacobsen 1976, 140; Assante 1998, 75–76). The text (*BE* 31, 12) has Inanna standing in the (tavern) window, probably to solicit sexual clients.¹² The hymn adds:

“When you trip along into the lap of Dumuzi, your Bridegroom,
Inanna, your seven (= all) paronyms [nigir-si = *susapinnu*] lie with you.”
(Malul 1989, 246)

These matters are unresolved and subject to some dispute. In any event, while a prostitute might very well reside in a tavern this does not seem a likely home for

¹² Jacobsen (1976, 140; cf Malul 1989, 245–246) includes the lines “O harlot, you set out for the alehouse, O Inanna, you are bent on going into your (usual) window (namely, to solicit) for a lover (...).” Assante (1998, 75 n. 213) says that Jacobsen has indulged in a “lot of overinterpretation. For one, nothing is said of Inanna soliciting. For another, the imagery Jacobsen used of the harlot in the window is an anachronism and as Arnaud (...) points out, is inconsistent with Mesopotamian texts.” She goes on to cite Silver (1995, 15) about the “woman in the window” as an oath-goddess. Assante does not, however, challenge Jacobsen’s reading that Inanna places herself in a tavern window. For an important, but inconclusive, argument suggesting from Greek material that the “woman in the window” is a prostitute, see Graham 1998.

Foxvog (November 29, 2005) notes: “Exactly one kar-kid is registered in the ca. 1800 tablets of the Pre-Sargonic administrative corpus. Her name is Ama-ab-e₂-ta, probably to be understood as “Mother from (within) the Window of the House,” presumably a professional name related to her occupation (...). What can be understood about this person? Like many other personnel found in these three [ration account] texts, Ama-ab-e₂-ta is recorded nowhere else in the pre-Sargonic Lagash e₂-i₂ texts. She is listed not as someone’s wife but instead as a woman with an occupation (...).” In personal correspondence (dated December 02, 2005), Foxvog notes an alternative interpretation offered by Selz in which he “takes the kar-kid’s name as a unique writing for a name ama-^dab-ba₆-e₂-ta, for which a parallel exists.”

the average “single woman.”¹³ Assante (1998, 73) says only that the single woman “used the tavern as an extension of her home.” The question of the residence of the “single woman” may be more important than meets the eye.

In Enkidu’s sexually loaded curse of Shamhat the *ḥarīmtu* (GE VII iii), she is condemned to life in an *altammu* “tavern” (or “street”) (*CAD* s. v.; reconstruction by Lambert 1992, 130; Assante 1998, 58 n. 153).

The *ana ittīšu* text (discussed above) shows us a kar-kid/*ḥarīmtu* who actually owned a tavern (*aštammu/éšdam*).

Note that “tavern” like “kitchen” may refer to a building in the temple complex (see *CAD* s. v. *aštammu*; Assante 1998, 69 with n. 193). In a stele of the second half of the second millennium, the Assyrian ruler Adadnārāri I (MA) claims that he restored “the storeroom of the goddess Ishtar of the courtyard which is called the ‘Inn of the Goddess Ishtar’ (...).” (Grayson 1987, 150; *CAD* s. v. *ḥuršu*). Indeed, the temple may actually be called “tavern”. An OB letter (Di 208) from the Ur-Utu archive (see below) refers to “*The taverns lying next to the temple*” (van Lerberghe and Voet 1991, 133; emphasis added).

Assante (1998, 11) is displeased by the conflation of tavern with brothel. In the interests of her argument, she speaks of female-tavern keepers, not prostitutes, who were “probably” *ḥarīmtu*’s (Assante 1998, 69–70).¹⁴ She does not, however, argue the ahistorical position that there was no such connection! “Al-

¹³ The idea of residence in the tavern may be conveyed in the Sumerian *Curse of Agade* (line 240) wherein the kar-kid “will rise/hang herself at the door of the tavern” (J. S. Cooper cited by Henshaw 1994, 315). In the Greek world, prostitutes working in brothels lived on the premises (see Kapparis 1999, 228–229). I have not seen any evidence that other single women resided in the same physical premises. This may turn out to be a central question.

¹⁴ This is not the only instance in which Assante argues her case by assuming that women not so designated in the texts are in fact *ḥarīmtu*’s. Thus, in a NB text, members of the Egibi family provide a female slave named Iskhunnatu with capital to open a tavern. She is obligated to pay interest (Stol 1994, 179–180). “Because there is no mention that she was married, she was *no doubt* a *ḥarīmtu*” (Assante 1998, 69; emphasis added). A girl who represents herself in Nuzi adoption proceedings “may even have been a *ḥarīmtu* before [her] adoption” (Assante 1998, 18). Interestingly, Cohen (2006, 110) notes a case in which a prostitute acts for herself in a private arbitration proceeding with two Athenian patrons (citing *Demosthenes* 59.45–46).

See also Assante’s discussion of the Laws of Eshnunna and Laws of Hammurabi: “The only term that fits such a description is *ḥarīmtu*. It is not until the Nuzi archives (ca. 15th century B. C.) when women in this nebulous category are actually named *ḥarīmtu*’s” (Assante 1998, 29–30). Again, if a woman is divorced and evicted “her legal status is unclear, and I would argue in this case it is *ḥarīmūtu*” (Assante 1998, 35).

Turnabout is not fair play, however. A woman who arranges for a pair to have sexual relations cannot be a *ḥarīmtu* because she is married. MAL A § 23 “involves a *private* tryst between a man and another man’s wife arranged by a married woman, not a *ḥarīmtu*. It took place in the female procurer’s *home*” (Assante 1998, 72, n. 203; emphasis added).

though some *kar.kid/ḥarimtu*'s may have professionally sported with men at the tavern (...) it is even more likely that a single woman who lived alone (...) used the tavern as an extension of her home" (Assante 1998, 73). Neither does Assante suggest that Ishtar was merely the patron of the single woman.

In the Akkadian Namburbi texts (Text 14), the tavern owner calls for Ishtar to enter his establishment in the interests of "brisk trade." She is also called upon to enter the tavern with "your sweet bedfellow, your lover, and your *kulu'u*" (*CAD* s. v.; Assante 1998, 77, 80). The context is sexual. The possibility exists that Ishtar would manifest a physical presence in the tavern. This presence might take the form of an image or symbol.¹⁵ This much we do know: one tablet from Assur bearing this *namburbi* spell has holes for mounting (Maul cited by Assante 2000, 247). We may assume it hung in a tavern.

7 Old Babylonian Erotic Terracottas

The OB erotic plaques "depict images of men and women in coitus or pre-coital embrace or women alone in erotic postures," such as the spread-leg motif (Assante 2000, 1, 11).¹⁶ The most prominent of the Mesopotamian plaques is the

¹⁵ Admittedly, the passage quoted is somewhat obscure, especially the role of the *kulu'u*. In another text *kulu'u* is used in parallel with *ḥarimtu* (*CAD* s. v. *kulu'u*). Sladek (1974, 88–9) notes the parallelism and he cites several additional texts including: "(PN) about whom you said, 'He is a *kulu'u*, not a man'." He concludes: "It therefore seems most probable that the *kulu'u* was a male homosexual prostitute." There is nothing in the texts to justify the translation of *CAD* "actor, member of the temple personnel (of Ishtar), performing dances and music" (compare Henshaw 1994, 300).

¹⁶ In addition to the Mesopotamian plaques, there are numerous sexually explicit terracottas from Susa in Iran. These take the form of modeled beds depicting erotic scenes, including *en face* and *a tergo* copulation. Daems (2001, 27–29) provides illustrations. The erotic modeled beds were excavated together with molded female figurines, small empty model beds, models of three-legged tables, and plaques with bowlegged musicians (Carter 1997, 360). Apparently, the terracottas were found in a pit next to a building, the so-called *Grand Bâtiment Central*, dated to the first half of the second millennium (Steve et al. cited by Carter 1997, 360). Jars had been put into the floor of the building (Daems 2001, 27). Ghirshman regarded the building as a temple (Carter 1997, 360). This combination of factors convinced Trümpelmann that the building was a tavern/brothel associated with a cult (Carter 1997, 360; Daems 2001, 28). Moorey (2001, 11) has a different interpretation: "What Ghirshman (1964) reported, but only in a preliminary account, may well be simply the fill for the foundations of a building, randomly containing rubbish from what he had regarded as an adjacent temple area." Caution is certainly justified in the interpretation of this site. However, it should be noted that Moorey: (1) does not directly challenge the accuracy of Ghirshman's report; (2) does not comment on the jars in the floor; and (3) describes as "random" objects that seem systematically related. Unfortunately, Assante (2000, 17–18) does not consider the Elamite erotic terracottas.

coitus a tergo beer-drinking scene (18 out of 52 provenienced erotic plaques): The women is penetrated from behind while she sucks beer through a tube from a jar. An Ischali plaque depicts the man flourishing a jar during copulation (Moorey 2001, 104). In another example from Larsa, there is *a tergo* sex while each of the partners plays a musical instrument (Assante 2002, 27, n. 3). Moorey (2001, 104) reports that the association of jars with drinking tubes alongside copulating couples has a long history.

The plaques do not bear inscriptions and the copulating men and women do not wear symbols (e. g. horned helmets) associated with divinities. Nevertheless, Assante (2000, 3, 15), taking into account the erotic literary works, interprets “one level of such imagery’s meaning as illustrations of Inanna/Ishtar sexual exploits”. Alternatively, of her devotees! Moorey (2001, 104), citing Hrouda, describes an early second millennium cylinder seal from Tell Halaf in which “two couples have intercourse whilst drinking from tubes; to one side is a figure above an animal, possibly the ‘nude goddess’.”

Assante (2000, 11) states her conclusion: “There is no archaeological connection between erotic plaques and any official institution,¹⁷ Inanna/Ishtar’s or otherwise. Known contexts were residential with the possible exception of two Assur plaques.” Actually, no more than 27 percent (14 out of 52) erotic plaques can be placed inside “residences.” This finding is quite generous as it includes three plaques found in two residences that also contained temple records. Further, all we are told about the plaque from Sippar-Amnānum is that it came from inside the “Southwest Building” in “Ensemble 1f” (Assante 2000, 143).

On the other hand: four or, more probably, five plaques were found in temples or temple dumps; four plaques from Kish appear to have come from a “complex of 35 rooms” that “included an important scribal center and school, containing many literary, lexical and administrative documents as well as practice tablets” (Assante 2000, 146). One plaque from Isin “lay in an unexcavated square (...) between a house of impressive size, 20 rooms and courts, and a second building partially uncovered whose thick walls and large bricks are more consistent with the architecture of administrative buildings” (Assante 2000, 130). With respect to Kish, Moorey (2001, 104), whom Assante frequently cites, states that the occurrence of sexually explicit plaques “in temple complexes both at Tell Uhaimir and at Tell Inghara [both in Kish], where the cult of Ishtar was prominent, might be taken to strengthen the conventional association of them with this deity as argued, for example, by Opificius (...).” (cf. Assante 2000, 169). Uncharacteristically, Assante (2000, 158) does not discuss the findspots of

In Greek vase paintings there are scenes that “depict face-to-face copulation (...) [but] by far the most common position shown in heterosexual congress is rear entry—whether vaginal or anal is usually not made clear” (Skinner 2005, 101).

¹⁷ Assante (2000, 38 n. 53) notes a Middle Syrian depiction from Cyprus of a couple having intercourse “attended by a priest”. This seems “official,” but Assante asserts the scene is not “primarily sexual,” it depicts an “exorcism.”

two *coitus a tergo* drinking scenes from Tell Harmal (ancient Shaduppum). Mostly she talks about the town's centrally located Nisaba/Nidaba temple. The Harmal plaques are assigned to the "Other" category "(surface finds and dumps)" in a table (Assante 2000, 164). This leaves open the possibility that they were associated with temples. In any event, using Assante's data, I would link no less than 19 percent (10 of 52) of the erotic plaques with "official institutions".

Assante classifies as "Residential" plaques found in an area including residences. Assante (2000, 165) suggests that plaques in temple fills "are not likely to be primary deposits" and she classifies them as "Other". My view is that the so-called "residential area" includes structures with a variety of functions. (This is well demonstrated by the Isin plaque just considered.) Consequently, I classify as "Residential" only plaques found within residences. On the other hand, Assante's temples are large well-known and reasonably well-defined structures. For this reason, I classify any plaque found in proximity to a temple as "Temple."¹⁸

Assante challenges even plaques found inside a temple. Thus, the plaque found in the Sin temple at Khafajah "was found in a room whose function was not known. In any case, the room probably did not have an *official religious function* because it exhibits none of the architectural features known for sanctuaries" (Assante 2000, 165; emphasis added). Assante does not discuss the architectural features of a brothel and it is most doubtful that she would qualify temple prostitution as an "official religious function."

The central unresolved questions relate to the function of the erotic plaques. Assante (2002a, 27; cf. 2002b, 8; 2003, 15, 31; 2000, 15) puts forward the fantastic claim that plaques of this kind "functioned primarily to protect the house and its occupants (...). [T]hey are amulets that were used to prevent malevolent agents from slipping into the house through doorways and windows; at the same time, they attracted the auspicious to enter." For example, "Nude females lying on beds might have disarmed evil by arousing sexual desire, at least at one level of function." (Assante 2002b, 8). Assante does not provide a protective rationale for the *coitus a tergo* beer-drinking scene.

It strikes me that the plaques look very much like advertisements for taverns: "We have sex, beer, and music, come in and enjoy!"¹⁹ Assante (2000, 138) reports on a *coitus a tergo* drinking plaque from Abu Hatab as follows:

¹⁸ It is interesting and instructive to compare the possible interpretations of "naked woman" figurines found at Ebla in pits associated with a temple attributed to Ishtar (see Pruss 2002, 542–543).

¹⁹ Roman merchants used eye-catching signs and painted labels (Latin *tituli picti*) on transport containers to advertise their wares. Inscriptional evidence demonstrates that the prices charged by Roman prostitutes were sometimes advertised (McGinn 1989, 93 with notes 100 and 101). In a Greek vase painting there is a "fellatio scene in which the youth being serviced seems almost more intent on keeping his drinking horn from spilling" (Skinner 2005, 103).

“Holes that were made while the clay was still wet appear on the upper left and at the bottom center. Presumably, there was a hole on the upper right as well but this edge of the plaque is broken off. The beer drinking scene from Abu Hatab leaves no doubt that some erotic scenes were mounted to a vertical surface in permanent or quasi-permanent exhibition.”

This plaque does not have a known findspot. I suspect it was mounted on an exterior wall of a tavern/brothel.

The advertising function may help to explain the dispersal of erotic plaques into “residences”. Were the “advertisements” meant to encourage young singles to visit local “hot-spots”? Do they depict temple-sponsored social gatherings? Is *coitus a tergo* a kind of trademark of Inanna/Ishtar? Do the plaques advertise the sale of sex? I do not pretend to have definitive answers.²⁰

8. Ishtar Sells Sex

Powerful evidence of temple prostitution is provided in a version (CBS 8530) of an OB Sumerian balbale (dialogue) hymn. Nanaya, an Inanna-like goddess, explicitly offers to sell sexual services at the door of her *papāḥum* “cella, sanctuary, chapel, bedroom” (*CAD* s. v.; Assante 1998, 86 n. 237; Westenholz 1994, 65). Moreover, the goddess actually quotes prices for sexual acts:

“When I am standing by the wall it is one lamb.
 When I am bowing down, it is one and a half shekels.
 Don’t go digging any other canal. I will be your canal!
 Don’t go plowing any other field. I will be your field!
 Farmer, don’t go looking for any other moist patch. I will be your moist
 (Assante 1998, 86 n. 237) \ patch!”

²⁰ I should note a unique feature of the erotic plaques from Kish, where Inanna was especially prominent—the display of the Humbaba/Huwawa head on two *a tergo* scenes (Assante 2000, 145, 243). In the Sumerian version of the myth, we learn that Gilgamesh returned from an expedition to obtain lumber (cedar), probably to Syria/Lebanon, with a leather “sack” containing the severed “head” of Huwawa. Gilgamesh turned the sack over to the gods Enlil and Ninlil in Uruk, his home city. (For a convenient translation, see Foster 2001, 104–120.) I have argued elsewhere that both “head” and “sack” have monetary significance. (Silver 1992, chap. 1; 1995 esp. 163–164). Here, a brief summary should suffice. In the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world, “capital” or, more specifically, “money” are well-attested nuances of words whose primary meaning is “head” (e. g. Akkadian *qaqqadu* = Sumerian *sag.du/sag*). In the Old Assyrian trade with Cappadocia, commercial undertakings were often financed by long-term partnerships called *naruqqum*, literally “sack.”

A Greek cup probably depicting anal intercourse includes an *aryballos* “globe-shaped pot” hanging on the wall in front of the couple (Skinner 2005, 298, n. 11). I understand that a related term *aryballus* has the meaning “bag, purse.”

Assante (1998; 86 with n. 237) seeks to cast doubt on this evidence by referring to the first two lines (19–20) as adding “a touch of comic cynicism incongruous to a poem that is largely composed of steamy love talk standard for Sumerian love lyrics (...).” In addition, noting that lines 19–20 are not included in a parallel text (ROM 721), she suggests that there “is reason to believe [the lines] are later interpolations” (Assante 1998, 86). The date of the alleged “later” interpolation is not mentioned. This is a weak argument that Assante raises, but does really press.²¹

It is important to understand that the universal goddess Inanna/Ishtar, a high goddess of the pantheon, is the result of a merging/identification of numerous goddesses. As the article “Ishtar” in Bienkowski/Millard 2000, 156, explains: “The name [Ishtar] is first found as an element in (male and female) personal names of the Sargonic period. The goddess at that time was already equated with Sumerian Inana, who may originally have been a separate deity. Probably several local deities—including the Inanas of the cities of Uruk, Zabala, Akkad and Kish, as well as the Assyrian Ishtars of Nineveh and Arbela (Erbil)—by syncretism formed the goddess’s personality”. The syncretism is consistent with the flourishing of the local cults as patrons for prostitutes (see II.B.6 above). Given the creative origins of the hymns and the geographic and temporal variation in the origins of Inanna/Ishtar, different versions of texts are only to be expected. This would certainly be the case for well-traveled Nanaya as well. (For the travels of Nanaya, see Westenholz 1997.). Indeed, different versions attest to the creative efforts of local entrepreneurs standing behind these goddesses (see II.B.4 above).

In any event, whether or not the first two lines are “inserts,” later or not, does not change the point.²² As already noted, Ishtar copulates with “‘sixty time sixty men’ in the shade of the city wall”. The connection of the wall with prostitution is apparent in Enkidu’s curse of Shamhat the *ḥarīmtu* (GE VII): “May the shade of the wall be your station/place of business” (Assante 1998, 58; Foster 2001, 55). The “bowing down” probably refers to *coitus a tergo* (see Sjöberg 1977, 24), a technique, as just noted, prominent in OB Mesopotamian plaques.

Speaking of Inanna/Ishtar as a tavern-goer in search of sexual companionship, Assante (1998, 66) suggests that “this common and spirited literary motif never once includes payment and it would be odd indeed if this powerful god-

²¹ Tinney (1999, 35) recently considered the text and commented on Nanaya’s pricing of sex acts. He does not suggest that this material is a later insert. Moreover, there is a third version of the text (UM 29-15-560) that, according to Alster (1993, 15) “seems to have had a more detailed specification of prices of similar services (nearly completely broken (...).”

²² Westenholz (1994, 69) reports that “There is an agate plate offered to Nanaya by Nanaya-ibsa the travelling *lukur* of the [Ur III] king Bur-Sin (...).” Jacobsen (1987b, 57 n. 2) suggests that *lukur* is a “handmaiden” who “accompanied a man on a journey (*kaskal*) away from home to look after his comforts, or possibly who had her own establishments at often visited points on the journey.”

dess of sex and love were financed by her favors.” It seems just as odd that a “powerful” goddess would find it necessary to go to a tavern to find sex. *However, the Nanaya hymn cannot be ignored or assumed away and in it the goddess does indeed seek payment.*

Why should a goddess utter the words of a prostitute? Why should a goddess be portrayed as pricing sexual services? The strongest explanation for this behavior, I submit, is that the prostitutes devoted to Ishtar priced sexual services. The goddess is acting as a “role model.” Indeed, the cult of the prostitutes may well have promulgated prices for sex acts. The hymn also hints that the prostitution market was thick enough to support standard prices.

Why should a goddess positioned at the door of her cella/bedroom offer sexual services to the public? Because, I submit, she stands for the (similarly positioned) prostitutes devoted to her cult. This hymn provides strong evidence for sacred prostitution. Indeed, the lines quoting prices are the goddesses’ reply to a man’s (somewhat obscure) proposition(?). Alster (1993, 15) understands the man to “flatter her for being a true woman when speaking to a man and when looking at him, and then states that her nakedness (? lit. ‘naked heart’) is sweet when she stands against a wall (17), and that (her) hips are sweet when she bows down (18).” See, very similarly, the “Nanaya Song” (CBS 8350) in a version of the Early Dynastic Shuruppak’s Instructions (Alster 1993, 19–20). Alster (1993, 15) sees the mention of “bowing down” as a reference to *coitus a tergo*.

Why would hymns to goddesses so often include “steamy love talk”? (see Alster 1993, 15–16). It is quite clear that this inclusion has nothing to do with “fertility.” “One may well ask,” with Alster (1993, 16), “if this strongly erotic language can be seen in a broader cultural perspective, apart from mere poetic delight.” This broader perspective is, I submit, the role of cult-sponsored sex talk in stimulating the demand for the services of prostitutes devoted to the goddesses.

Returning to Assante’s remark, much of the power of the Inanna/Ishtar cult would have rested on its wealth. Arguably, the wealth rested on the contributions of prostitutes (see 9 below). In the example of Nanaya, the single woman / dating and casual prostitution explanations of the evidence collapse. Answering that, after all, this is prostitution by a goddess (see e. g. Roth 2006, 25) cannot salvage the interpretation. The goddess is not a real person. It is important to keep the motives of her cultic managers in mind when advancing arguments.²³

From this perspective the apparent contradictions in the personalities of gods become more understandable, even predictable. It appears, for example, that

²³ I realize that some readers will take offense at this statement. It is not my intention to offend. The problem is that we cannot hope to understand ancient societies when we reify the gods the ancients worshipped. The myths, rituals and symbols are not reflections of the god—they are the god. There is much to be said in favor of an observation made by the late Assyriologist I. J. Gelb (1965, 62) that “as all man’s ideas about the divine are human, it is my firm belief that we shall never know what was the nectar of the gods until we learn what was the daily bread of the people.”

Inanna was the patron of a number of crafts besides that of prostitute. In “Inanna and Enki” she is given the crafts of carpenter, coppersmith, scribe, smith, leather-worker, builder, fuller, and reed worker (see e. g. Segment D 10–17. Source: *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* 1.3.1). Given the diverse sponsorship, it is not entirely surprising that ancient Near Easterners and contemporary scholars regard Inanna/Ishtar as something of a paradox. Thus, Harris (1991, 263) notes “She represented both order and disorder, structure and antistructure (...). Prayers, hymns, myths, festivals, and cultic personnel reveal the contours of this distinctive aspect of the goddess who was far more than simply a goddess of fertility, of love and war, and the Venus star.” Recognition of the distinct motives of Inanna/Ishtar’s sponsors has the potential to dramatically reduce the apparent randomness in her observed personal characteristics.²⁴

9. Cultic Payments of *ḥarīmūtum*- and *kezertum*-Silver

The OB legal texts (i. e. witnessed texts) from the archive of the *galamaḥ* “lamentation priest” Ur-Utu in Sippar Amnānum include one text (CT 48 45), in which a married woman (Itani wife of Warad-Marduk), makes a payment of silver [designated as *parṣu* “service obligation”] to an Ishtar-goddess (Annunitum) from the function/service of *ḥarīmūtum* (Gallery 1980, 333, 338; Yoffee 1998, 330–331). *ḥarīmūtum* is related to (an abstract noun for) *ḥarīmtu* and is commonly translated “state of a prostitute” (*CAD* s. v. *ḥarīmūtu*; cf. Gallery 1980, 335; Yoffee 1998, 330).

Such payments are consistent with the transfer to cult administrators of fees collected by prostitutes. Thus, the woman was herself a prostitute or, alternatively, she was a cult-designated financial intermediary between prostitutes and their goddess. The latter explanation seems preferable since *ḥarīmūtum*-payments to the cult are also recorded for men (Tanret and van Lerberghe 1993, 441; Yoffee 1998, 332). “Dates,” whether by single or married women, do not give rise to institutionalized cultic payments. Neither do the triumphs of casual prostitutes. The institutionalized nature of the payments is underlined by the presence at Sippar Amnānum of a *nig ḥarīmti* or “*ḥarīmūtum*-office” (Di 292; van Lerberghe and Voet 1991, 117).

Assante (1998, 42, n. 103) mentions Sippar’s *ḥarīmūtu* “rites” in a footnote to the discussion of “The *šamḥatu* and *kezertu*”. There, she cites Tanret and van Lerberghe (1993, 441) who state that “there is, in our texts, not the slightest evidence pointing to a sexual nature of these rites.” This line of evidence puzzles me. Of course, cultic payments/receipts are not in themselves sexual. (I hesitate to concede that “silver is not sexy”!) Assante (1998, 42, n. 103) suggests “We still do not know what these rites entailed.” Obviously, we would like to know much more about all the various functions producing income for the goddess.

²⁴ Similar difficulties in understanding due to multiple sponsorships are evident in the case of Aphrodite, compare MacLachan 1992 and Demetriou 2005.

References to “rites” should not, however, divert attention from the central issue. What Assante does not mention is that the payments to the cult and the office have their origin in the function of *ḥarīmūtum*. Given the evidence suggesting that *ḥarīmtu*’s were prostitutes and the absence of a reasonable alternative explanation of the *ḥarīmūtum*-payments, it is fair to accept as a working hypothesis that the income originated in the prostitution industry.

In addition, OB texts from Kish refer to payments by women, married and unmarried, of *kezērum/kezertum*-silver (Assante 1998, 42 with n. 103). Women whose occupations, when named, include tavern keeper, midwife and *kezertu* of the goddess Shamhatum make the payments (Gallery 1980, 334 n. 4; Spaey 1990, 67). In some texts, the silver is explicitly designated as *paṣṣu* “rites” / “service obligation” of the *kezertu* women. The recipients of the payments, when named, are *ugula kezrēti* “supervisor of *kezertu*’s” (Spaey 1990; Yoffee 1998) and an “overseer of *pašišu*-priests” (*CAD* s. v. *kezēru*). Some supervisors of *kezertu*’s seem to have cultic business connections, including with the goddesses Kanisurra (1972, 11–12) and Nanaya. Thus, “In # 7 large amounts of gold and silver, which were weighed and stored in baskets, were entrusted to the supervisor and a colleague by temple administrators (SANGA and *ērib bīt Nanaya*)” (Yoffee 1998, 322). Nanaya, an Ishtar-like-goddess, as noted earlier, is portrayed as a seller of sexual services.

Moreover, the *kezertu*’s are linked with Ishtar and, in texts of the first millennium, with *ḥarīmtu*’s. Why the latter linkage? Assante (1998, 43) responds: “Whether the *kezertu* and the *šamḥatu* were associated with the *ḥarīmtu* solely because of their single status is uncertain.” The “uncertainty” is puzzling since in the preceding sentence Assante (1998, 43; cf. 42), citing Finkelstein (1972, 10), grants that “some married *kezertu*’s are documented”. There is a problem here. According to Assante, the basic meaning of *ḥarīmtu* is “single woman”. Why, then, would a single woman be called *kezertu*, not *ḥarīmtu*? Might she be called both *kezertu* and *ḥarīmtu*? Assante does not take up this question.²⁵

It is tempting to view the *kezertu*’s as a distinctive “guild” of prostitutes and the *kezērum/kezertum*-silver as derived from their earnings in this profession. However, since there are no texts depicting the sexual activity of *kezertu*’s it seems best to leave the matter open.

²⁵ Similarly, in a NA *ana ittīšu* text, a man takes a *qadištu*-woman “from the street” and marries her (Assante 1998, 48 with n. 123). Evidently, this “single woman” was not referred to as a *ḥarīmtu*.

According to McGinn (1989, 81), “Many, if not most, prostitutes probably were not married, but marriage, as we know from other sources, was hardly inconsistent with the practice of prostitution in the Roman world.”

Concluding Remarks

A variety of evidence supports the following conclusions:

1. The ancient Near East was familiar with the marketing of sexual services; There is reason to believe that the prostitution market was active enough to support standard prices.
2. The Inanna/Ishtar cult was involved, directly and/or means of agents, in the production and sale of sexual services. Indeed, its activities were so successful economically that many local goddesses were merged and a syncretistic figure elevated to the pantheon.
3. Sexually explicit hymns and myths of goddesses served to advertise and to increase the demand for the services of cultic prostitutes. The OB Akkadian composition “Ishtar Will Not Tire” provides a good example. Indeed, the latter composition may be regarded as a kind of implicit warranty of conscientious service to clients. There is evidence in texts of the first millennium from Ashurbanipal’s libraries that sexually explicit rituals played a similar role. Lambert (1975, 105) discusses “amatory, or even pornographic” lyrics celebrating the love affair between Marduk and Ishtar: “Still more important, two pieces of a related Late Babylonian ritual tablet have been found, which proves that the sections of the text were to be recited in the course of rites for Ishtar of Babylon” (compare Roth 2006, 23). Lambert (1975, 105) adds, “The striking thing is the high and distinctive literary quality of the texts to be recited. One would like to think that a single author composed them, and this is possible.”²⁶
4. Taverns/Inns in temple precincts housed brothels. Some brothels were probably privately owned. There is some reason to suspect that brothels were advertised by means of small sexually explicit terracotta plaques. Sexual services were also sold in the street/city square.
5. The *ḥarīmtu*/kar-kid was a professional prostitute with cultic connections. The theory advanced by Assante, that the *ḥarīmtu*/kar-kid was no more than a sexy “single woman / woman without a husband” is inconsistent with much of the evidence.

²⁶ Lambert (1975, 105–106) notes the difficulties of imagining the actual sexual behavior that accompanied the Ishtar rites. The question of “sacred marriage” awaits further clarification. For a convenient summary, see Henshaw 1994, 236–243.

Pinnock (1995, 253–254) refers to an Early Dynastic seal presenting a couple having intercourse “over a kind of shrine”. Mazzoni (2002, 369), among other depictions, notes Early Dynastic “images of women squatting over men, in explicit intercourse, (...) [which] seem to have their place in some ritual context (...)”. A Middle Assyrian lead figurine from Assur shows a couple having intercourse; the woman leans back on what looks like an altar (Black/Green 1992, 152). For Pinnock (1995, 2526) “This support looks like a kind of mud-brick pilaster or tower; it might be the representation of the town walls, near which harlots usually lived and probably practiced their professions.” Assante (2000, 272), however, calls the support a “platform.”

This is not to deny Assante's important thesis that women living outside male-headed households formed an important socioeconomic stratum in the ancient Near East and elsewhere. They certainly were not only or mainly sex-professionals.

6. Women might be adopted and made into prostitutes.
7. Women might be pledged or dedicated to the Ishtar cult for purposes of prostitution.
8. Women might choose to become prostitutes.

The above conclusions, based mainly on literary texts, find additional support in OB legal texts from Sippar Amnānum recording payments of silver [designated as *parṣu*] to a goddess from the function/service of *ḥarīmūtum*. It would be most challenging to devise an explanation of how dates, casual prostitution, or the status of "single woman / not the wife of a man" might generate institution-alized cultic payments and, indeed, even a "*ḥarīmūtum*-office". Temple prostitution, at least, faces no such obstacle!

Assante (2003, 31) argues that "If temple prostitutes brought in revenue, as scholars assert, some records, especially from the temples of Inanna/Ishtar, should have survived." (cf. Assante 2000, 65) As noted above, it is not obvious that such records would exist for "spot transactions". Nevertheless, it appears that at Sippar Amnānum (and possibly Kish) records do survive in the form of payments from the function/service of *ḥarīmūtum*!²⁷ Taking together the numerous sexual connections of the *ḥarīmtu*/kar-kid, the numerous sexual connections of Ishtar, Ishtar's and Nanaya's connections with prostitution, and the absence of evidence for any alternative revenue-generating activity for the *ḥarīmtu*/kar-kid, we should conclude that the payments represent proceeds from prostitution conducted under cultic auspices. This hypothesis is viable and it is the best available.

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²⁷ Tanret and Lerberghe (1993, 441, n. 14) write: "CT 4, 15c shows that the *galamaḥ* ["lamentation-priest"] has a special relationship with the *ḥarīmtu*-women. In this text 21 'prostitutes' (kar.kid.mes) are under the responsibility (nig-su) of the chief dirge singer." We need to know more about this.

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