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(Re)constructing the Image of the Assinnu

Svärd, Saana; Nissinen, Martti

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Studying Gender in the Ancient Near East

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Studying Gender in the Ancient Near East

edited by

Saana Svärd and Agnès Garcia-Ventura

Eisenbrauns

University Park, Pennsylvania

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This volume is dedicated to all of the pioneers in the study of women, gender, and the ancient Near East. Thank you for asking new and challenging questions; you cannot find something that you do not sense is missing.

Aux alentours de midi, je me rendis compte que j'étais perdue. J'abordai un responsable en ces termes:

— Mesopotamia, please.

— Third floor, turn to the left, me répondit-on le plus simplement du monde.

Comme quoi on a bien tort de croire que la Mésopotamie est à ce point inaccessible.

(Amélie Nothomb, *Pétronille*)

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Acknowledgments

This volume has its genesis in three workshops that we organized in 2013 and 2014. As two of the workshops were held in the framework of the Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, they would not have been possible without the warm welcome and help of the Organizing Committees of the Rencontre conferences in Ghent (2013) and Warsaw (2014). We would especially like to thank Katrien De Graef and Małgorzata Sandowicz, who were our interlocutors for the Ghent and Warsaw conferences, respectively. In addition, we want to thank heartily all of the colleagues who made these workshops possible by chairing panels and delivering papers. The third workshop, which we organized in Helsinki in October 2014, was made possible through the generous support of the Centre of Excellence in "Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions" and the Finnish Institute in the Middle East.

As indicated in our dedication, although the relationship between gender studies and analysis of the ancient Near East has not always been easy, a great deal of work has already been done during the last decades. We are hugely indebted to those scholars who have come before. As a public acknowledgment of this, we decided to dedicate the first workshop we organized together (at the Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Ghent 2013) to the memory of Joan Goodnick Westenholz, who sadly passed away in February of that year. She and others like her have literally made this volume possible.

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ancient Near East held in Rome (April 2013), which allowed us to collaborate with colleagues from the Universidad de Rosario (Argentina) and to work further on the initiatives that later crystallized in the workshops mentioned above.

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Abbreviations

General

A.	texts in the Assur collection of the Istanbul Arkeoloji Muzeleri, siglum
AO	museum siglum Louvre
Ass.	texts excavated in the German excavations at Assur, siglum
BM	British Museum
Curt.	Quintius Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni*
D. S.	Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica*
ED	Early Dynastic
Hdt.	Herodotus, *Historiae*
IB	Ishan Bahriyat, Isin excavation sigla
Iust.	Marcus Junianus Justinus, *Epitome Historiarum philippicarum Pompei Trog*
K	texts in the Kuyunjik Collection of the British Museum, siglum
MAL	Middle Assyrian Laws
ND	field numbers of tablets excavated at Nimrud
OB	Old Babylonian
Pomp. Trog.	Gaius Pompeus Trogus
Str.	Strabo, *Geographica*
VAT	museum siglum of the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin

Reference Works

AHw	W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1959–81
AMT	R. C. Thompson, *Assyrian Medical Texts from the Originals of the British Museum*. London: Humphrey Milford Oxford University Press, 1923
ARM 26 I/1	J.-M. Durand, *Archives épistolaires de Mari 1/1*. Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988
ASV	T. C. Mitchell and A. Searight, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum: Stamp Seals*, part 3: *Impressions of Stamp Seals on Cuneiform Tablets, Clay Bullae, and Jar Handles*. Leiden: Brill, 2008
BAM	F. Köcher, *Die babylonisch-assyrische Medizin in Texten und Untersuchungen Vol. 1–6*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963–80
BAP	B. Meissner, *Beiträge zum altbabylonischen Privatrecht*. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1893
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BDTNS	Database of Neo-Sumerian Texts. Online: http://bdtns.filol.csic.es/
BRM 1	A. T. Clay, *Babylonian Business Transactions of the First Millennium B.C.: Babylonian Records in the Library of J. Pierpont Morgan*. Part 1. New York, 1912
BWL	W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon 1960
CAD	Ignace J. Gelb et al., editors. *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. 21 vols. (A–Z). Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956–2011

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CAT	M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín, *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places (KTU: second, enlarged edition)*. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996
CDA	J. Black et al., *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*. 2nd ed. Santag 5. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000
CDLI	Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative. Online: http://cdli.ucla.edu/
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
CRRAI	*Compte rendu* of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale
CT 4	E. A. W. Budge, *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum, Part IV*. London: British Museum, 1898
CT 6	E. A. W. Budge, *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum, Part VI*. London: British Museum, 1898
CT 8	E. A. W. Budge, *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum, Part VIII*. London: British Museum, 1899
CT 18	E. A. W. Budge, *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum, Part XVIII*. London: British Museum, 1964
CT 39	C. J. Gadd *CuneiformTexts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum, Part XXXIX.* London: British Museum, 1926
CT 45	T. G. Pinches, *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum, Part XLV*, *Old-Babylonian Business Documents*. London: British Museum, 1964
CT 47	H. H. Figulla, *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum, Part XLVII, Old-Babylonian Nadītu Records*. London: British Museum, 1967
CT 48	J. J. Finkelstein, *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum, Part XLVIII, Old-Babylonian Legal Documents*. London: British Museum, 1968
CUSAS	Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology
ePSD	*The Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary.* Online: psd.museum.upenn.edu
ETCSL	Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature. Online: http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk
FAOS	Freiburger Altorientalische Studien
GBAO	Göttinger Beiträge zum Alten Orient
HES	Heidelberger Emesal Studien
HSS V	E. Chiera, *Excavations at Nuzi*, vol. 1: *Texts of Varied Contents*. Harvard Semitic Series V. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929
Igituḫ	B. Landsberger and O. R. Gurney, "igi-duḫ-a = tāmartu, Short Version." *Archiv für Orientforschung* 18 (1957–58): 81–86
JCS Supplement	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies Supplement*
JEN 3	E. Chiera, *Joint Expedition with the Iraq Museum at Nuzi*, vol. 3: *Exchange and Security Documents*. American Schools of Oriental Research, Publications of the Baghdad School: Texts 3. Paris: Geuthner, 1931
JEN 7	E. R. Lacheman and M. P. Maidman, *Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians*. Vol. 3. Joint Expedition with the Iraq Museum at Nuzi, Miscellaneous Texts 7. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989
KADP	F. Köcher, *Keilschrifttexte zur assyrisch-babylonischen Drogen- und Pflanzenkunde. Texte der Serien uru.an.na: maltakal, HAR. ra: hubullu und Ú GAR-sú*. Berlin Akademie-Verlag, 1955
KAR	E. Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts*. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1915–23
KTU	M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín, editors. *Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit.* Alter Orient und Altes Testament 24. Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker / Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1976

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LIMC	*Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae.* Düsseldorf: Artemis, 1981–2009
LKA	E. Ebeling, *Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Assur*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1953
LTBA	W. von Soden, *Die lexikalischen Tafelserien der Babylonier und Assyrer in den Berliner Museen*, vol. 2: *Die akkadischen Synonymenlisten*. Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Vorderasiatische Abteilung, 1933
MAD	I. J. Gelb, *Materials for the Assyrian Dictionary*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952–70
malku = šarru	A. D. Kilmer, "The First Tablet of *malku = šarru* together with Its Explicit Version." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83 (1963): 421–46
MC	Mesopotamian Civilizations
MHEOP	Mesopotamian History and Environment, Occasional Publications
MHET	L. Dekiere, *Old Babylonian Real Estate Documents from Sippar in the British Museum—Parts 1–6 (= Mesopotamian History and Environment Texts II 1–6)*. Wetteren: Cultura, 1994–97
MSL 12	M. Civil, *The Series lú = ša and Related Texts*. Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon 12. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969
MSL 17	A. Cavigneaux, H. Güterbock, and M. Roth, *The Series* Erim-huš = anantu *and* An-ta-gál = šaqû. Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon 17. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1985
Murgud B	*see* MSL 12
NABU	*Nouvelles Assyriologique Brèves et Utilitaires*
NPN	I. J. Gelb, P. M. Purves, and A. A. MacRae, *Nuzi Personal Names*. Oriental Institute Publications 57. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary.* 2nd ed. 20 vols. Oxford: Clarendon / New York: Oxford University Press, 1989
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
Oracc	The Open Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus. Online: http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/
PIHANS	Publications de l'Institut historique-archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul
RAI	Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale
RIMA 1	A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia B.C. (to 1115 B.C.)*. Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods 1. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987
RIMA 2	A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium B.C., Volume 1 (1114–859 B.C.).* Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods 2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991
RIMA 3	A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium B.C., Volume 2 (858–745 B.C.).* Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods 3. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996
RIME	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods
RIME 3/1	D. O. Edzard, *Gudea and His Dynasty*. Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods 3/1. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997
RIME 3/2	D. Frayne, *Ur III Period*. Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods 3/2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997
RIME 4	D. Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period (2003–1595 BC)*. Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods 4. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990
RINAP 4	Leichty, E., 2011. *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 B.C.)*. Winona Lake IN: The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 4. Eisenbrauns.

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RINAP 3/2	A. K. Grayson and J. R. Novotny., 2014. *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681 BC)*, Part 2. The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 3/2. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014
RlA	*Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie*
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAA 1	S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II*, part 1: *Letters from Assyria and the West.* State Archives of Assyria 1. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1987
SAA 2	S. Parpola and K. Watanabe. *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths.* State Archives of Assyria 2. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988.
SAA 3	A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea.* Helsinki: State Archives of Assyria 3. Helsinki University Press, 1989
SAA 5	G. B. Lanfranchi and S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II*, part 2: *Letters from the Northern and Northeastern Provinces.* State Archives of Assyria 5. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1990
SAA 7	F. M. Fales and J. N. Postgate, *Imperial Administrative Records*, part 1: *Palace and Temple Administration*. State Archives of Assyria 7. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1992
SAA 9	S. Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*. State Archives of Assyria 9. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997
SAA 10	S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*. State Archives of Assyria 10. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993
SAA 13	S. W. Cole and P. Machinist, *Letters from Priests to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*. State Archives of Assyria 13. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1998
SAA 15	A. Fuchs, and S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II*, part 3: *Letters from Babylonia and the Eastern Provinces.* State Archives of Assyria 15. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2001
SAA 16	M. Luukko and G. van Buylaere, *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon.* State Archives of Assyria 16. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2002
SAA 17	M. Dietrich, *The Babylonian Correspondence of Sargon and Sennacherib.* State Archives of Assyria 17. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2003
SAA 18	F. S. Reynolds, *The Babylonian Correspondence of Esarhaddon and Letters to Assurbanipal and Sin-šarru-iškun from Northern and Central Babylonia.* State Archives of Assyria 18. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2003
SAA 19	M. Luukko, *The Correspondence of Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II from Calah/Nimrud*. State Archives of Assyria 19. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2012
SAA 20	S. Parpola, *Assyrian Royal Rituals and Cultic Texts*. State Archives of Assyria 20. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2017
SAAB	*State Archives of Assyria Bulletin*
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SAG A and SAG B	M. Civil, O. R. Gurney, and D. A. Kennedy, *The Sag-Tablet, Lexical Texts in the Ashmolean Museum, Middle Babylonian Grammatical Texts, Miscellaneous Texts*. Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon Supplementary Series 1. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1986
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization
SFS	V. Scheil, *Une saison de fouilles à Sippar, Institut français d'archéologie orientale*. Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1902
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East

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SpTU 1	H. Hunger, *Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk. Teil I*. Berlin: Mann, 1976
SpTU 3	E. von Weiher, *Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk III*. Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft in Uruk-Warka 12. Berlin: Mann, 1988
SpTU 5	E. von Weiher, *Uruk. Teil 5, Spätbabylonische Texte aus dem Planquadrat U 18*. Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern 1998
STT	O. R. Gurney, *The Sultantepe Tablets Vol. 1–2*. Ankara: Occasional Publications of the British Institute of Archaeology in Ankara, 1957–64
TCL I	F. Thureau-Dangin, *Lettres et contrats de l'époque de la première dynastie babylonienne*. Paris: Geuthner, 1910
UDB	J.-L. Cunchillos, J.-P. Vita, and J.-Á. Zamora, *The Texts of the Ugaritic Data Bank*. Vol. 1. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2003
UE	L. Woolley and M. Mallowan, *The Old Babylonian Period*. Ur Excavations 7. London: British Museum Publications, 1976
VS	Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der (Königlichen) Museen zu Berlin
WOO	Wiener Offene Orientalistik
YBC	Yale Babylonian Collection
YOS 10	A. Goetze, *Old Babylonian Omen Texts*. Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts 10. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1947
ZTT	S. Parpola, "Cuneiform Texts from Ziyaret Tepe (Tušḫan), 2002–2003." *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 17 (2008): 1–113

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(Re)constructing the Image of the Assinnu

Saana Svärd and Martti Nissinen

1. Introduction

The figure of the Mesopotamian goddess Ištar is accompanied by a large number of people known by various designations, more or less directly associated with the goddess and her cult. The role and function of the members of Ištar's entourage have been discussed for the most part from the point of view of gender and sexuality, and this is also true for persons labeled as *assinnu* and *kurgarrû*.[1] The scholarly image of these male, or perhaps inter/transgender, functionaries has been described as "Ištar's kinky boys," involving features such as same-sex activity and cultic prostitution.[2] However, this description may be somewhat oversimplified with regard to previous research. In fact, it is difficult to find a homogeneous description of the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrû* until the mid-1990s, and there is no unanimity about their sexual/transgender role either.

To start with the older layer of interpretations, for example, the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* denies the transgender aspect altogether, while the *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* translates *assinnu* as "Buhlknabe (im Kult)."[3] Brigitte Groneberg and Stefan M. Maul consider *assinnu* and *kurgarrû* trans-/bi-/asexual actors in the cult of Ištar who assumed a female sexual role and contributed to healing and blessings by way of ecstatic performances; their ability to transgress conventional codes

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1. In our own text, we have harmonized the transliterations of terms, for example, writing consistently saĝ-ur-saĝ (Sumerian) / SAG.UR.SAG (logogram in Akkadian) and lú-ur-sal (see further, p. 390 n. 94) but have not changed transliterations when we explicitly quote transliterations of others. The article refers to a number of dialects and historical periods of Mesopotamia. For a reader not familiar with them, the approximate chronological scopes and abbreviations for them are the following: Old Akkadian (ca. 2340–2200); Ur III period (Ur III, ca. 2100–2000); Gudea (ca. 2144–2124); Old Babylonian (OB, ca. 2000–1600); Middle Assyrian (MA, ca. 1400–1000); Middle Babylonian (MB, ca. 1600–1100); Neo-Assyrian (NA, ca. 900–612); Neo-Babylonian period (NB, ca. 626–539); Late Babylonian (LB, the dialect of Akkadian texts after ca. 550); Hellenistic period (ca 330–30); Arsacid/Parthian Mesopotamia (ca .129 B.C.E.–115 C.E.). All dates are B.C.E. unless otherwise indicated.

2. See Assante 2009.

3. *CAD* A/2 341–42; *AHw* 75–76.

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of behavior caused them to be revered and despised at the same time.[4] Richard A. Henshaw discusses them as belonging to "a special kind of officials, as a kind of actor in the cultic drama, whose forte is the interpretation of sexuality, but seemingly abnormal sexuality," including hermaphroditism, homosexuality, and impotence.[5] Gwendolyn Leick regards them as representatives of liminal sexuality under the aegis of Inanna/Ištar as do Réka Esztári and Ádám Vér.[6]

The image of the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrû* has been undergoing a conscious reconstruction for quite some time already. The once-widespread idea reflected by translations such as "cult homosexuals" or "male cult prostitutes" has given way to modifications causing a more-or-less thorough reconstruction of the image of the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrû*.

The most debated construction of the image of the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrû* at the moment is that of Simo Parpola and Pirjo Lapinkivi, according to whom the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrû* are neither cult prostitutes nor homosexuals but religious devotees of Ištar. For the sake of emulating the agony of the goddess in her descent to the Netherworld, they reached an altered state of consciousness and practiced self-mutilation, dancing, weeping, and wailing as a part of an ecstatic ritual, the purpose of which was salvation for the initiates. Their gender role was determined by their self-emasculation, the purpose of which was to imitate the sexually bipolar nature of the goddess herself.[7] We agree that the *assinnu* and his cognates emulated the gender bipolarity of the goddess herself, laying more emphasis on the role of a third gender that allowed them to perform a nonconventional gender role within a society in which gender roles were otherwise strict.[8] We have not found decisive evidence for castration and same-sex activity, even though we have pointed out some pieces of the evidence that may give reason for such suggestions.[9]

Julia Assante has opposed fiercely not only the "modern prostituting" of Ištar and her worship, but also its spiritual interpretation.[10] She does not deny the sexual and other kinds of ambivalence as an important aspect of the goddess and her cult members; however, according to her, sexual changes caused by and associated with Ištar are related to her power of reversing people's fate. "Because power was gendered in ancient Mesopotamia, images used for the gift and withdrawal of power were also gendered."[11]

Ilona Zsolnay, on the other hand, has highlighted the martial dimension of the image of the *assinnu* (following the assumption that saĝ-ur-saĝ equals *assinnu*), virtually disregarding the gender aspect.[12] According to her, the *assinnu* originally seems to have been a heroic strongman who worked for the palace during the Ur III period. Later, in the Old Babylonian period, the *assinnu* played the role of a hero in festivals devoted to the martial Ištar and became associated and conflated with "the weapon-wielding *kurgarrû* and the lament-singing *kalû*" who were also connected with the martial cult of the goddess. At Mari, the *assinnu*s can also be

4. Groneberg 1986; Maul 1992.
5. Henshaw 1994: 284–311, quotation p. 289.
6. Leick 1994: 157–69; Esztári and Vér 2015: 19–20.
7. Parpola 1997: xxxi–xxxvi; Lapinkivi 2004: 155–66; 2009; 2010: 72–79.
8. However, for nuances of gender roles, see Asher-Greve, pp. 15–50 in this volume.
9. Teppo 2008; Nissinen 1998: 28–36; 2013a: 41–44; 2013b.
10. Assante 2009.
11. Assante 2009: 48.
12. Zsolnay 2013: 98. Suspicion about the sexual ambivalence of the *assinnu* has also been expressed by Jonathan Stökl (2013).

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found giving prophetic messages, which results from their connection with Annunitum, that is, Ištar of war. Zsolnay does not discuss later material, except for one Neo-Assyrian/Late Babylonian ritual text in which the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrû* perform a battle scene;[13] hence, her observations concern mainly the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods.

The newest reconstruction is that of Ilan Peled, who, again, lays emphasis on the gender dimension. Peled also agrees with the idea of the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrû* representing the spectrum of the gender image of Ištar.[14] He argues that these two figures formed a mirror image of each other, representing the feminine and the masculine aspect of the image of Ištar so that the *assinnu* played the feminine role while the *kurgarrû* featured as a masculine figure. Peled also finds indirect evidence for the role of the *assinnu* as the sexually penetrated party and the *kurgarrû* as the penetrator in a cultic performance.

Questioning the old paradigm, as we can see, has resulted in diverse readings of the original sources, either reinterpreting the gender aspect or highlighting entirely different dimensions of the image(s) of the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrû*. This motivates us to attempt yet another reconstruction of the image of the *assinnu*. We will focus specifically on the *assinnu*, because we, following Zsolnay and Peled, are convinced that the *assinnu* is not simply a synonym for the *kurgarrû* but a related yet independent figure deserving an independent discussion. We do our best to base our (re)construction on a diachronic and multidimensional interpretation of a full set of the original sources presented in the appendix to this essay (with comments and further sources), paying attention to the gender aspect as well as other dimensions, such as the cultic functions and the genre of the texts mentioning the *assinnu*.

The methodological challenge is how to construct the image of the *assinnu* from a rather limited set of sources deriving from different places and scattered over almost two millennia; hence, the provenance, the genre, and the date of the sources must be given due attention. As Zsolnay reminds us, texts deriving from different times and places do not yield a synchronic picture of one figure belonging to one cultic context; on the other hand, the texts do not derive from entirely different planets but belong to a historical process of continuity and change in religious and scholarly traditions.[15] The genre requires attention because the information obtainable from the sources depends on whether it comes from lexical lists, letters, administrative documents, rituals, omens, or mythological and literary texts, all composed for different uses and purposes. With regard to gender and methodology—the topic of this volume—we can note that the use of concepts such as homosexuality, castration, transvestism, prostitution, and third gender has often been uninformed about recent theoretical developments in gender and queer studies.[16] We try our best not to add to the conceptual confusion but, hopefully, to bring some clarity to it.

A further question is to what extent the researcher constructing the image of the *assinnu* is allowed to add to the information directly obtainable from the sources.

13. Zsolnay 2013: 93–94; for the text Lambert 1975: 104–5 (BM 41005 iii 11–17).

14. Peled 2014: 283–97; 2016.

15. Zsolnay 2013. With regard to the worship of female deities, such as Ištar, see Asher-Greve and Westenholz 2013. Regarding lexical lists, Veldhuis writes: "They changed and developed considerably—but still one can easily recognize a Late Babylonian copy of the list of wooden objects as being part of the same tradition as its Old Babylonian predecessors" (Veldhuis 2012: 12).

16. For the difficulty of translating ancient gender terminology into a modern language, see Chapman 2016.

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A programmatic minimalism—that is, retelling strictly only what the sources say—will quite certainly lead to misconstructions because we know this sort of image to be based on incomplete information.

This article discusses four specific topics related to the *assinnu*. The terminology section will outline the main concerns for identifying the *assinnu*s from texts. After that, we analyze the position of the *assinnu* in relation to other cultic functionaries and officials. This analysis is mainly based on lexical lists, but other evidence also matches the picture that emerges from the lexical lists. In §4, we discuss the *assinnu*'s relationship to his patroness, the goddess Ištar and examine some ritual texts and texts relating to the cultic sphere. The fifth section is dedicated to discussing evidence relating to the *assinnu*'s gender role and sexual practices. Finally, we end with a short concluding section.

2. Terminology

The terminology relating to *assinnu* is complex. Because the text evidence is thoroughly discussed in other sections, we focus here only on our main points. References to individual texts can be found in the appendix.

Syllabically written, *assinnu* is equated with other words in a number of texts. We will first discuss some interrelated writings: LÚ.UR.SAL, UR.SAL, *sinnišu*, *sinnišānu*, and LÚ.SAL.

In lexical lists (discussed more thoroughly in §3 below) the logogram LÚ.UR.SAL (abbreviated as UR.SAL) is equated five times with *assinnu*. This term only appears in Neo-Assyrian or later texts (in addition to lexical lists; see also ritual texts and omen texts). LÚ.UR.SAL and UR.SAL appear to be straightforward synonyms to *assinnu*.

The lexical lists equate LÚ.UR.SAL both with *assinnu* and with two terms that connote femininity: *sinnišu* and *sinnišānu* (literally 'woman-like').[17] In addition to lexical lists, this word appears in a proverb that is difficult to translate exactly but that uses *sinnišānu* as a subject in the sentence, indicating that the word at least in this proverb referred to a kind of human being that would have been known to the audience.[18] On the other hand, *sinnišāniš* used adverbially in the curse sections of the royal inscriptions does not refer to individuals, which is why we have not included them in the appendix.[19] In sum, we believe that the terms *sinnišu* and *sinnišānu* referred to *assinnu*.

This "feminine" terminology resembles the term LÚ.SAL, literally 'man-woman', which appears in Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian administrative texts (three times) and ritual texts (twice). Furthermore, the context of these five texts mentioning LÚ.SAL implies a connection to the cult of Ištar. Thus, we support the idea that during the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods, LÚ.UR.SAL was abbreviated to LÚ.SAL.

Thus, we can fairly confidently state that in addition to syllabic writings of *assinnu*, the word could in the first millennium be written with LÚ.UR.SAL, *sinnišu*, *sinnišanu*, UR.SAL, and LÚ.SAL.[20]

17. See Murgud B 133 (MSL 12, 226) in the appendix; Cole 1996: no. 122, p. 254–56; *SpTU* 3 116 r. ii 41.

18. Lambert 1960: 218. For discussion on *sinnišānu*, see Peled 2016: 270–72.

19. We follow Ilona Zsolnay (2010: 394–95) and Werner Mayer (1995: 172), who understand *sinnišāniš* as *ana sinnišūti* 'zur Weiblichkeit' (in English 'to femininity').

20. At this point, it should be mentioned that a fragment of a statue that dates perhaps as early as ca. 2000 B.C.E. records by name and title one Silim-abzuta "lú-UŠ.SAL ^{d}inanna-ke$_4$", translated by Julian

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Table 1. Appearances of the Terms in Texts, Based on the Appendix

	saĝ-ur-saĝ	*syllabic* assinnu, LÚ.UR.SAL, UR.SAL, LÚ.SAL, sinnišu, *and* sinnišānu
Gudea, Ur III, OB Isin, and Sumerian literary texts[a]	11	
OB (incl. Alalakh)	4	5
MA or MB	1	5
NA or NB	3	30
LB or later		9

a. Three personal names in lists from Ur III period have been seen as syllabic writings of *assinnu* by Peled (2016:165), but are excluded here because these seem clear personal names (CUSAS 3: text nos. 308, 321, 324).

The Sumerian word saĝ-ur-saĝ (later, a logogram SAG.UR.SAG) is a more complicated matter. It is known mostly from cultic and literary texts in the Sumerian language from the Old Babylonian period or before.

More specifically, during the reigns of Gudea and the Ur III dynasty, the term appears in five royal texts. It also appears in five Sumerian literary texts, four of them connected with Inanna, whereas the fifth is *Debate between Grain and Sheep*.

It appears in cultic texts as well, namely in the Sumerian *Iddin-Dagan A* and the lament úru àm-ma-ir-ra-bi. In the bilingual version of the lament úru àm-ma-ir-ra-bi, the term saĝ-ur-saĝ is translated with *assinnu*. The term saĝ-ur-saĝ is only twice used in Akkadian texts, both from Old Babylonian Alalakh (a historical text and an administrative text). Finally, saĝ-ur-saĝ appears alone in an Old Babylonian lexical list, and as an equivalent of *assinnu* in lexical lists that date from the Middle Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian periods.

Two groups are forming here. On the one hand, *assinnu* clusters with LÚ.UR.SAL, UR.SAL, LÚ.SAL, *sinnišu,* and *sinnišānu* roughly after 1500 B.C.E. and especially in Neo-Assyrian (and later) sources. On the other hand, saĝ-ur-saĝ almost exclusively appears in Sumerian texts from the Old Babylonian period or before and is equated with *assinnu* only in the Middle Babylonian period and after. Table 1 highlights this gradual shift. Even factoring in a margin for error and considering that in many cases the exact dates of the texts are debated, it still seems that the term saĝ-ur-saĝ might be slowly being replaced by the syllabic writing *assinnu* and its associates,[21] possibly as the Sumerian literary culture makes way for the Akkadian tradition. Sebastian Fink suggests (regarding RIME 3/2.1.4.3) that: "Maybe, especially in this military context, we should understand the term rather as a designation for a special kind of worker or even as a term for the foremost hero."[22] This resonates with Ilona Zsolnay's conclusions regarding the Ur III and Old Babylonian period.[23] Ilan Peled also argues that the saĝ-ur-saĝ was separate from the *assinnu*, although similar in some respects.[24] Based on the available evidence, it does seem possible that

Reade (2002: 262) as "Silimabzuta, hermaphrodite of Inanna." Due to the chronological gap, and because the title does not exactly match LÚ.UR.SAL discussed here, we have not included this inscription among our sources in the appendix. See further the essay of Asher-Greve in this volume.

21. As already tentatively suggested in Peled 2016: 267.
22. Fink 2016: 121. See also Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 225.
23. Zsolnay 2013.
24. Peled 2016: 257–67.

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the saĝ-ur-saĝ might have referred to a slightly different kind of position in the Ur III and Old Babylonian period than *assinnu*-terminology in later texts. The chronological distribution suggests that the terms might have been separate at one point and that Sumerian saĝ-ur-saĝ was more connected with warfare and kingship than it was in the first millennium. The best evidence for this is seen in three references to saĝ-ur-saĝs that clearly present saĝ-ur-saĝ as a hero or warrior.[25]

Here, also the discussion of the SAG lists is relevant. The association in the lexical lists can be based on homonymity: words that sound similar are placed next to each other, which seems to be the case in the SAG lists. The Middle Babylonian SAG list, listing 110 words beginning with the sign SAG, equates saĝ-ur-saĝ with both *qarrādu* ('hero', 'warrior') and *assinnu*:[26]

saĝ	*i-mu*	tuft of black hair
saĝ-saĝ	MIN	ditto
saĝ saĝ-saĝ	*im-ta-na-nu*	tuft of black hair
saĝ-ur-saĝ	*qar-ra-du*	hero
saĝ-ur-saĝ	*as-sí-nu*	*assinnu*
saĝ-zi	*na-še re-ši*	one who raises the head
saĝ-zi	*a-le-e re-ši*	one who raises the head
saĝ-kal	ŠU-*ma*	foremost
saĝ-kal	*a-ša-re-du*	foremost

This is the only occasion where *qarrādu* and *assinnu* appear close to each other. As we can see, the list is organized so that the Sumerian logograms are arranged in an acrographic order,[27] while the different Akkadian equivalents to one and the same logogram may or may not be synonymous.[28] Therefore, Ilan Peled suggests that the two saĝ-ur-saĝs are only linked together because of the homonymity of the words and should not be interpreted as synonyms.[29] In fact, we cannot directly assume that *assinnu* is the Akkadian equivalent of *qarrādu*, even though both are presented as Akkadian equivalents of the Sumerian saĝ-ur-saĝ. It is only here that saĝ-ur-saĝ is equated with *qarrādu*, whereas *assinnu* appears as a translation of saĝ-ur-saĝ in other texts as well.

On the other hand, the way that saĝ-ur-saĝ is portrayed in the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods does not directly contrast with the activities of the *assinnu* in later texts. For example, the connection with the *kurgarrû* and rituals of Ištar is evident in the saĝ-ur-saĝ material. Therefore, with some reservations, we include saĝ-ur-saĝ in our inquiries.

On the basis of all this we accept that in addition to syllabic writings of *assinnu*, the following were also used to refer to the *assinnu*: LÚ.UR.SAL, UR.SAL, LÚ.SAL, *sinnišu, sinnišānu*, and SAG.UR.SAG. Appearances of these are listed in the appendix. In lexical lists there are also outliers that do not match other evidence, for example, LÚ.AN.SAL = *assinnu* and *ugbabtum* = *assinnatum*. It is possible that these and other terms, pi-li-pi-li for example, might have referred to the *assinnu*, but at the moment there is not sufficient evidence for this.

25. RIME 3/1.1.7.StB; RIME 3/2.1.4.3 and *Debate between Grain and Sheep*. However, for a different interpretation, see Peled 2016: 257–67.

26. SAG B i 10–18; p. 28.

27. See Veldhuis 2014: 8–10, 166–75.

28. See also also SAG B i 29–30 where saĝ-du has both *qaqqadu* 'head' and *nabnītum* 'progeny' as equivalents (p. 29).

29. Peled 2014: 284–85.

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Overall, the lexical lists (details are in the next section) group the *assinnu* into the same semantic environment as the *kurgarrû*, prophets, and other ecstatics, as well as people with various cultic functions, especially those related to lamenting and magic. This image corresponds to the image obtainable from other texts. The *kurgarrû* in particular is often mentioned in connection to the *assinnu*. In §4, we shall see them performing together in several rituals from different periods. In the *Erra Epic*, the *kurgarrû*s and the *assinnu*s are mentioned as having their masculinity turned into femininity by Ištar. In a Sumerian hymn to Inanna, the saĝ-ur-saĝ is joined with an ecstatic (lú-al-éd-dè), the "transformed" pilipili (pi-li-pi-li bal),[30] and the kur-ĝar-ra.[31] We will turn to these texts in the following sections.

Finally, in a Neo-Assyrian *Hymn to the City of Arbela*, a female cultic functionary, *kulmašītu*, appears in sequence with *kurgarrû* and, perhaps, with *assinnu*, but this depends on the reconstruction of the damaged signs.[32]

3. Assinnu *among Other Functionaries*

As is well known, the *assinnu* is recurrently mentioned in conjunction with people with different labels. Some people, especially the *kurgarrû*, appear together with the *assinnu* with such regularity that it is warranted to assume a socioreligious connection between these people. The cuneiform lexical lists from different periods of time are by their very nature sources where the *assinnu* can be found in conjunction with other designations.

Using word-lists as a historical source is somewhat hazardous, of course, because they cannot be expected to reveal social structures or socioreligious circumstances in any exact way, nor can they be utilized the way modern dictionaries are used. Nevertheless, word-lists constitute an intellectual enterprise of construction of knowledge and demonstrate the cultural capital of their compilers; as Niek Veldhuis puts it, "the practical utility of studying a lexical list is thus not measured against the actual use of such words and signs in the daily tasks of a scribe, but rather in terms of the knowledge that is necessary, as cultural capital, in the identity of a learned scribe and in the self-evident recognition of that status by others."[33] This implies more than mere copying of signs from one list to another—indeed, the lists exhibit a hermeneutical approach to ancient tradition.[34] While there is reason to wonder whether the terms listed, sometimes quite exotic terms, were always fully understood by the scribes,[35] it is reasonable to assume that the lists can be taken as serious interpretations of the intellectual tradition of the scribes who compiled them. Thus, the rather long discussion of lexical lists in this article is necessary because we see them as important for analyzing the complex terminology surrounding *assinnu*.

There are different ways of associating things in the lists. The association can be based on homonymity: words that sound similar are placed next to each other, for instance, in the SAG lists discussed above.

30. On the "transformed" pi-li-pi-li, see below, p. 388.
31. *Inanna C* (ETCSL 4.07.3: 88).
32. *Hymn to the City of Arbela* (SAA 3 8 r. 12–16).
33. Veldhuis 2014: 4.
34. See also Veldhuis 2014: 422 on the activity of Iqiša the *āšipu* and his family in Late Babylonian Uruk.
35. See also Zsolnay 2013: 86.

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Much more often, the lexical lists group together words of similar semantic content.[36] Even in these cases, the pairing or grouping of words does not indicate synonymity in the strict sense but, rather, a close semantic association between the two (or three) words. The association is presented either as correlating one word with the other or grouping words together in a way that gives them a certain kind of common denominator. It can be assumed that words that are regularly associated with each other stand for things or people that also belong together in the scribes' and/or readers' actual world or at least in their imagination; otherwise, the association would not make much sense. It must be borne in mind, however, that the words included in the lexical lists are primarily related to each other and only secondarily to the world outside them.[37]

The saĝ-ur-saĝ is listed immediately before kur-ĝar-ra and pi-li-pi-li in the Old Babylonian monolingual Lú = *ša* list,[38] and in the monolingual Neo-Assyrian Kuyunjik List, LÚ.KUR.GAR.RA precedes LÚ.UR.SAL.[39] The bilingual Lú-lists—that is, lists of human beings and professions introduced in the Old Babylonian period and further developed in later periods[40]—multiply the associations to different kinds of designations. A lengthy section both from the short and the standard Neo-Assyrian recensions of Lú = *ša* is worth quoting to give the idea of the lexical environment of the appearances of the term *assinnu*:

Short recension:[41]		
gašan	*be-e*[*l-tum*]	lady
nin-dingir-ra	*en*-[*tum*]	high priestess
nin-dingir-ra	*ug-bab-tum*	female temple employee
nu-gig	*qa-diš-tum*	female temple employee
nu-bar	*kul-ma-ši-tum*	female temple employee
gudu$_4$-abzu	ŠU-*u*	cultic functionary
[gu]du$_4$-síg-bar-ra	*šu-ʾ-ú-ru*	hairy
gudu$_4$-tur-ra	*lu-ma-ak-ku*	cultic functionary
nu-^{eš}èš	*ne-šak-ku*	cultic functionary
susbu^{bu}	*ra-am-ku*	cultic functionary
sanga$_2$-maḫ	ŠU-*ḫu*	exorcist
[maš]-maš	*maš-ma-šu*	magician
nar-balaĝ	*a-ši-pu*	magician
ka-piriĝ	MIN	ditto
muš-DU$^{la\text{-}la\text{-}aḫ}$DU	*muš-la-la-aḫ-ḫu*	snake charmer
lú-^{giš}gàm-šu-du$_7$	*muš-ši-pu*	magician
la-bar	*ka-lu-ú*	lamentation singer
gala-maḫ	ŠU-*ḫu*	lamentation singer

36. See Veldhuis 2014: 7–8.

37. As Veldhuis (ibid.: 390) writes on the change of the Babylonian lexical tradition in Assyria: "The primary focus of scribal knowledge was no longer the learned scribe, but became more and more the tablet itself."

38. The so-called Proto-Lu, lines 278–80; see MSL 12: 42.

39. MSL 12, 240 vi 23–26 (K. 4395).

40. See Veldhuis 2014: 159–66.

41. Lú = *ša* short recension, excerpt I: 193–217 (MSL 12: 102–3). Note that the English equivalents referring to the Akkadian word are mainly generic (e.g., "cultic functionary") and in many cases tentative at best.

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i-lu-di	*mu-nam-bu-ú*	lamentation singer
i-lu-a-li	*lal-la-ru*	lamentation singer
lú-gub-ba	*maḫ-ḫu-ú*	prophet
lú-ní-zu-ub	*za-ab-bu*	ecstatic
kur-ĝar-ra	ŠU-*u*	*kurgarrû*
ur-sal	*as-sin-nu*	*assinnu*
lú-^{giš}bal-šu-du$_7$	*na-áš pi-laq-qi*	carrier of spindle
saĝ-ḫul-ḫa-za	*mu-kil re-eš* ḪUL-*ti*	one who provides evil

Standard Recension:[42]

gala-maḫ	ŠU-*ḫu*	lamentation singer
gala-ús-sa	ŠU-*ḫu*	lamentation singer
gala-ḫal-tuš-a	ŠU-*ḫu*	lamentation singer
gala-zé-è	*a-ṣu-ú*	lamentation singer[43]
gala-kèš-da	MIN *ki-iṣ-ri*	lamentation singer[44]
balaĝ-íl	*na-áš ba-lam-gi*	musician[45]
balaĝ-di	*ṣa-ri-ru*	lamentation singer
balaĝ-i-lu-di	*mu-nam-bu-u*	lamentation singer
ḫul-a-li	*lal-la-ru*	lamentation singer
SAL ḫul-a-li	*lal-la-ar-ti*	female lamentation singer
ka-kù-ĝál	ŠU-*lu*	magician
kur-ĝar-ra	ŠU-*u*	*kurgarrû*
ama-ér-ra	ŠU-*u*	female lamentation singer
pi-il-pi-li	*pa-ar-*[*ru-u*]	*parrû*
pi-il-pi-li	*as-*[*sin-nu*]	*assinnu*
saĝ-ur-saĝ	*as-sin-nu*	*assinnu*
saĝ-bur-ra	KI.MIN	ditto
lú.gal	KI.MIN	ditto
saĝ-bulug$_2$-ga	KI.MIN	ditto
saĝ-ti-erin$_2$	KI.MIN	ditto
kur-ĝar-ra	KI.MIN	ditto
an-ti-bal	KI.MIN	ditto
an-ti-za	KI.MIN	ditto
dùn-lá	KI.MIN	ditto
^{giš}šibir-šu-du$_7$	KI.MIN	ditto
ur-sal	*as-sin-nu*	*assinnu*
lú-túg-lá	*šá kar-ra lab-šu*	one wearing a mourning garment
lú-$^{ku\text{-}uš}$-lá	*a-gu-uḫ-ḫu*	(one wearing an) *aguḫḫu*[46]
kuš-lá	*šá ḫa-rim-ti*	one belonging to a *ḫarimtu*
^{giš}šibir-šu-du$_7$	*na-áš ši-bir-ri*	carrier of scepter
lú-^{giš}bal-šu-du$_7$	*na-áš pi-laq-qi*	carrier of spindle
saĝ-ús-IŠ-zu	*mu-kil re-ši*	companion

42. Lú = *ša* iv 169–203 (MSL 12: 134–35).

43. The word *(w)āṣû* means literally 'one who goes out' and may indicate another type of lamentation singer; see *CAD* A/2 s.v. *āṣû* 3c.

44. See also previous note.

45. Literally: carrier of the *balaggu*-instrument.

46. Thus, MSL 12: 135. The article of clothing called *aguḫḫu* belongs especially to Ištar's wardrobe; see *CAD* A/1 s.v. *aguḫḫu*. Note that there *CAD* reads this line as kuš$^{ku\text{-}uš}$-lá, i.e., kuš instead of lú.

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saĝ-ḫa-za	KI.MIN	ditto
saĝ-ḫul-ḫa-za	*mu-kil re-eš* ḪUL-*ti*	one who provides evil

Erimhuš, a Middle Babylonian list, includes a section between rulings, juxtaposing the *assinnu* with the *kurgarrû* but also with prophets and ecstatics (*muhhû* and *zabbu*):[47]

saĝ-íl-la	*di-na-nu*	substitute
lú-gub-b[a-r]a	*mu-*[*u*]*ḫ-ḫu-*[*ú*]	prophet
ní-zu-ra-[aḫ]	*zab-b*[*u*]	ecstatic
kur-[gar-r]a	*kur-ga-ru-u*	*kurgarrû*
lú.AN.SAL: E	*as-sin-nu*	*assinnu*
níĝ-ba	*qí-iš-t*[*um*]	votive gift
še-ga	*še-mu-u*	one who hears
inim-ĝar	*i-g*[*i*]*-r*[*u*]*-u*	oracle
li-dur	*a-bu-un-na-t*[*um*]	center
two broken lines		

In Neo-Assyrian lists, which are the most numerous, *assinnu* is repeatedly associated with similar words. The fragment K. 4193 r. ii 20–26 lists *eššepû*, *parrû*, *muššuru*, *zabbu*, *isinnu* (= *assinnu*), *apillû* and *kurgarrû* in this order, associating the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrû* with ecstatics.[48] Murgud (ḪAR-gud) is a three-column commentary of the thematic word-list Ura but takes up other lexical sources as well.[49] Murgud places the *assinnu* between somewhat-unclear designations indicating poor or lowly origin and professional titles of prophets, followed by artisans and craftsmen:

Murgud 131–149[50]

[lú]-umuš-nu-tu[ku]	[*dunna*]*mu*	*sa*[*klu*]	one of lowly origin
[lú]-zilulu	(blank)	*saḫḫiru*	peripatetic person
[lú]-ur-sal	[*a*]*ssinnu*	*sinnišānu*	*assinnu*/man-woman
lú-šabra	*šabrû*	*raggimu*	prophet
lú-gub-ba	*a*[*p*]*illû*	*aššа*[. . .]	prophet
lú-ú-bíl-la	*upillû*	*kuttimmu*	craftsman
lú-tibira	*gurgurru*	*kapšarru*	metalworker
lú-túg-tag-ga	*māḫiṣu ša sissikti*	*išparû*	weaver
lú-pan-tag-ga	(blank)	*māḫiṣu*	weaver
lú-kuš-tag-ga	*ēpiš ipši*	*paqqāyu*	maker of reed mats[51]
lú-ninni$_5$-tag-ga	*ēpiš* [*tuš*]*ši*	*ḫuppû*	weaver
lú-bára-tag-ga	*ēpiš ba*[*šā*]*mu*	*šabšû*	male midwife[52]
lú-nu-bànda^{da}	*laputt*[*û*]	*ḫa*[*za*]*nnu*	mayor

47. Erimhuš 3:169–72; see MSL 17: 51.

48. CT 18 pl. 5 (= K 4193 r. ii 20–26): *eš-še-bu-*[*u*] / *pa-ru-*[*u*] / *muš-šu-ru* / *zab-bu* / *i-sin-nu-nu* / *a-pi-lu-u* / *kur-gar-ru-u*. The tablet is an Akkadian-Akkadian lexical list of unknown size, the reverse containing only the last 11 lines. The left column is blank; hence there are no equivalents to these words. See also CDLI P346038.

49. See Veldhuis 2014: 363–66.

50. MSL 12: 225–26.

51. Note that *ēpiš ipši* can also mean a magician, which is the case in several other lexical lists.

52. See also *CAD* Š/1 s.v. *šabšû*.

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lú-šar-rab-tu-ú	(blank)	*ṣuḫurtu*	young person
lú-ki-zu-ú	*tašlīšu*	*ḫanigalbatu*	chariot soldier
lú-ti-ru	*tīru*	*manzaz pāni*	courtier
lú-an-né-ba-tu	*eššebû*	*maḫḫû*	ecstatic/prophet
lú-gidim-ma	*ša eṭimmu*	*manza*[*z*]*û*	necromancer
lú-saĝ-buluĝ-ga	*mušēlû eṭimmu*	*íd* [. . .]	necromancer

Another large Neo-Assyrian lexical compilation (LTBA 2 1) gives the following two Sumerian-Akkadian and Akkadian-Akkadian sequences of designations, placing the *assinnu* in the company of not only prophets and ecstatics but also of *kurgarrû* and *kulu'u*:[53]

LTBA 2 1 iii 19–31[54]

lú-uš-bar	*uš-pa-ru*	weaver
lú-ka-šìr	*ka-ṣi-ru*	tailor
lú-saĝ-šur	*ka-pi-ru*	caulker
lú-muš-laḫ$_4$	*muš-la-ḫa*	snake charmer
lú-en-me-li	*ša-'i-lu*	inquirer (of divine words)
lú-gub-ba	*maḫ-ḫu-u*	prophet
lú-[ní-su]-ub	*zab-bu*	ecstatic
lú-[ur-sal]	*ku-*[*lu*]*-'u*	*kulu'u*
lú-[ur-sal]	[*as-sin*]*-nu*	*assinnu*
lú-[x-x]	[*kur*]*-gàr-ru*	*kurgarrû*
[lú-an-ni-ba-tu]	*eš-še-pu-u*	ecstatic
[lú-x-x]	*nàr-ši-du*	magician
[lú-kuš]-tag-ga	*e-piš ip-ši*	magician

LTBA 2 1 vi 41–48[55]

eš-še-pu-u	*maḫ-ḫu-u*	ecstatic = prophet
pa-ru-u	KI.MIN	*parrû* = ditto
uš-šu-ru	KI.MIN	a released person = ditto
za-ab-bu	KI.MIN	ecstatic = ditto
a-zí-nu	*ku-lu-'u*	*assinnu* = *kulu'u*
pil-pi-lu-u	KI.MIN	*pilpilû* = ditto
kur-ga-ru-u	KI.MIN	*kurgarrû* = ditto
a-ra-ru-u	KI.MIN	*ararû* = ditto[56]

These lists are akin to a list from the governor's archive from Nippur, dating to the early Neo-Babylonian period. This list equates *kurgarrû* with *kulu'u* and lú-ur-sal with *sinnišānu*:[57]

lú-ad-kid	*at-kup-pu*	reed-mat weaver
lú-uš	*re-du-ú*	soldier

53. Von Soden 1933: pl. 1 and 3.

54. This section is almost identical to Igituḫ 258–70, which has lú-pa-ĝišgal= *saḫ-ḫi-ru* (line 267) instead of [*kur*]*-gàr-ru*; see Landsberger and Gurney 1957–58: 83–84.

55. The left column of this section is almost identical to what is left of CT 18 pl. 5 r. ii 20–26 (K 4193); see above, n. 48. Note that this list has *pilpilû* instead of *apillû*.

56. This is the only instance of the word *ararû* as a designation of a person; according to *CAD* A/2 it is "a word for male prostitute," probably presupposing that the previous words also carry this meaning.

57. Cole 1996: 254–55 (122: 16–30).

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lú-sar	*ba-qil*	maltster
lú-àr-àr	*ṭe-i-ni*	miller
lú-nar	*na-a-ra*	male musician
sal-lú-nar	*na-ár-tum*	female musician
lú-kur-ĝar-ra	*ku-lu-ú*	*kulu'u*
lú-sipa-tur	*ka-par*	young shepherd
lú-na-gada	*na-qid-da*	herdsman
lú-ĝar-máš-anše	*šá-kin bu-lu*	manager of the herds
lú-laḫ$_4$-laḫ$_4$	*la-as-ma*	courier
lú-ur-sal	*si-niš-a-nu*	*sinnišānu*
lú-du-du	*mut-tag-giš*	traveling inspector (?)
lú-gub-ba	*maḫ-ḫu-u*	prophet
lú-maš-maš	*a-šip*	exorcist

The latest text where the word *assinnu* can be found is a Late Babylonian word-list from Uruk (*SpTU* 3 116 r. ii 31–56). The relevant section is divided by lines, presenting centuries later a rather similar, even though somewhat more diverse, gallery of designations:

lú-[inim]-gi-na	*kattû* = *mukinnu*	witness
[lú]-inim-dug$_4$-dug$_4$	*šaḫšaḫḫu* = *dabbibi*	slanderer
[lú]-inim-inim-dug$_4$-dug$_4$	*āmânû* = MIN	slanderer
lú-eme-lul	*munamgiru* = *ākil karṣi*	slanderer
lú-*x x*-anše?	*muna''išu* = *asû* $^{\text{ḫepî eššu}}$	(veterinary) physician
[. . .]	(blank) = *kabtu*	dignitary
[lú-eme]-tuku	*ša lišānu* = $^{\text{ḫepî eššu}}$	person of the tongue
[. . .]	*ša išānu* = *muškēnu*	person of lower status
[. . .]	*emû* = *samû*	undecided person
[lú-zilulu]	*zilullû* = *saḫḫirum*	peripatetic person
[lú-ur-sal]	*assinnu* = *sinnišu*	man-woman
[. . .]	*šabrû* = *raggimu*	dreamer/prophet
[. . .]	*apillû* = *aššābu*	tenant
[. . .]	*upellû* = *kuddimmu*	charcoal-burner
[. . .]	*qurqurrum* = [*kab*]*šarri*	metal worker/stone-carver
[. . .]	*māḫiṣu* = [. . .] *išpari*	weaver
[. . .]	(blank) = [. . .]*lum*	[. . .]
[. . .]	*ēpiš ibšu* = *paqqāya*	mat-weaver
[. . .]	MIN *tumšu* = *ḫuppû*	weaver
[. . .]	MIN *bašāmu* = *sabsû*	sack-maker
[. . .]	*laputtû* = *ḫazannu*	mayor
[. . .]	[. . .] = *ṣuḫurti*	young man
[. . .]	[. . .] = *manzāz pāni*	courtier
[. . .]	[. . .] = *maḫḫû*	prophet
[. . .]	[. . .] = *ša su*[. . .]	one who [. . .]
[. . .]	[. . .] = *nar-še-ṭu*	sorcerer

In a diachronic view, we have already paid attention to how the Sumerian saĝ-ur-saĝ has given way to the syllabically written *assinnu*, which becomes more common in Middle and Neo-Assyrian texts. In addition, we can observe an increase in the number of different designations brought together with the *assinnu*. In the Old

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and Middle Babylonian lists, which are shorter and less numerous, the most immediate company of the *assinnu* consists of kur-ĝar-ra/*kurgarrû*, pi-li-pi-li, *qarrādu*, *zabbu*, and *muḫḫû*. The gallery of people associated with the *assinnu* is richer in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-/Late Babylonian texts based on older lexical scholarship. These lists make it evident that equation indicates not necessarily synonymity but, rather, close association, expressed by means of horizontal equation and vertical juxtaposition. Words having a horizontal equation with *assinnu* include ur-sal, lú.an.sal, pi-il-pi-li, *sinnišānu*, and *kulu'u*, while the *kurgarrû*, *zabbu*, *raggimu*, *āpilu*/*apillû*,[58] *kulu'u*, *saḫḫiru*, *ša karra labšu*, and *nāš pilaqqi* have a vertical juxtaposition with *assinnu*. In addition, words equated horizontally with *assinnu* are also equated with *kurgarrû*, *parrû*, and *pilpillû* within the same lists. We should also note the equations kur-ĝar-ra = *kulu'u* and lú-ur-sal = *sinnišānu*, as well as the vertical juxtaposition of kur-ĝar-ra and ur-sal.

In close proximity with *assinnu* we rather regularly find designations of persons whose roles have to do with prophecy and ecstasy (*muḫḫû*/*maḫḫû*, *raggimu*, *šā'ilu*, *zabbu, eššepû*, *saḫḫiru*), lamenting and singing (*munambû, lallaru, kalû*, *kalamāḫu*, *nāru*) as well as magic (*āšipu*, *mašmaššu*, *mušlalaḫḫu*, *muššipu*, *naršindu*, *ēpiš ipši*). In addition, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, craftsmen such as weavers of different kinds appear many times in the same lists, perhaps because of their affiliation with temples.

The *assinnu* also appears in conjunction with *parrû*—whatever the word *parrû* stands for, because it can only be defined with the help of other designations equated or juxtaposed with it. The word is horizontally equated with pi-il-pi-li,[59] and [ka] è-de,[60] which brings the *parrû* into proximity with both the *assinnu* and ecstasy. Interestingly, [ka] è-de is equated with *parrû ša pî* '*parrû* of the mouth', perhaps suggesting a prophetic function of the *parrû* in the minds of the compilers of this word-list.

When interpreting these data, we have to keep in mind that the primary context of the words in each list is the list itself, and the secondary context is formed by scribal education. The word lists cannot be expected to give exact information about real structures of the personnel of temples or relationships between their members. Nevertheless, they are "neither an unthinking aggregation of material nor a hopelessly complicated store into which data were put with little hope of retrieval."[61] They do not mechanically copy each other but seem to be designed individually by their compilers, who have used their creativity in clustering words together in a semantically meaningful way. As a social practice, being part of a process of learning and interpretation, the word lists had to make sense to their compilers and users, and the equations, associations, and clusters of words had to have workable counterparts in their own conceptual system. Therefore, we may conclude that, in the semantic world of the users of the lexical lists, the *assinnu* belonged to the same

58. The exact function of the *apillû* is difficult to reconstruct from the very few available instances (see *CAD* A/2 s.v. *apillû*). In the lexical tradition, the word is equated with both *kulu'u* and lú-gub-ba, which implies a function related to the bearers of the other designations listed here. It is not excluded that it, in fact, equals *āpilu*, one of the designations for a prophet.

59. Lú = *ša* iv 183 (MSL 12 134–35); Antagal iii 38 (see MSL 17: 161).

60. Antagal iii 39 (K 4193 in MSL 17: 161), r. 6. A juxtaposition of *parrû* with saĝ-ur-saĝ has also been found in a curse section of the inscription of Yarim-Lim of Alalakh (RIME 4 34.1.1: 19–20), but the reading and meaning of the text is uncertain. For details, see RIME 4 34.1.1 in the appendix.

61. Taylor 2007: 444.

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semantic environment as the *kurgarrû*, prophets, and other ecstatics, as well as people with various cultic functions, especially those related to lamenting and magic.

4. Relation to Ištar and Cultic Functions

No one so far has contested the close affinity of the *assinnu* with the worship of Ištar or one of her Near Eastern manifestations. This is evident everywhere where the sources reveal anything at all about their socioreligious background. In the letters from Mari, two *assinnu*s known by name, Šelebum and Ili- ḫaznaya, appear to be affiliated with the temple of Annunitum (an aspect of Ištar),[62] and in a Middle Assyrian proviant list from Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, the *assinnu*s appear among people receiving food rations in the temple of Ištar.[63] In a Neo-Assyrian debt note from Ziyaret Tepe, an *assinnu* (LÚ.SAL) appears to be owned by Sasî, scribe of the temple of Ištar of Nineveh.[64]

Their affiliation with her is clearly seen from the literary texts as well. In a clear majority of Sumerian and Akkadian literary texts, they are described as being connected with Inanna/Ištar in some way. The most notable case is of course *Ištar's Descent to the Netherworld*, where—in the Akkadian version—the *assinnu* is sent to save Ištar from the Underworld.[65] This eventually leads the *assinnu* to being cursed by the ruler of the Underworld, Ereškigal, to a miserable existence on the margins of society. Whether this indicates something about the actual position of the *assinnu* in the society is, of course, debatable. Interestingly, part of the curse is similar to the curse found in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* for the prostitute Šamhat: cursing her to stand by the city wall, enduring abuse from all who pass by.[66]

Another example of the connection between the *assinnu* and Ištar in literary texts is found in the mythological composition *Inanna and Enki*, where Inanna reportedly gained the *kurgarrû* and saĝ-ur-saĝ from Enki her father while he was drunk. Here, both *kurgarrû* and saĝ-ur-saĝ are mentioned after other cultic functionaries received by Inanna.

The socioreligious setting of the *assinnu* in the temples of Ištar is reflected especially by ritual texts that show them in highly characteristic cultic roles. The rituals involving the *assinnu* are attested from the early 19th century *Iddin-Dagan A* and two Old Babylonian rituals through Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian sources to Late Babylonian rituals from the Hellenistic (Arsacid) period. These are without exception rituals of Ištar.

In ritual texts from different periods, the *assinnu* assumes a number of ritual roles, often together with the *kurgarrû*, possibly involving cross-dressing. The meaning of their dress is discussed further in §5 on gender, but here we examine the evidence of the two texts that might refer to this practice.

In *Iddin-Dagan A*, the saĝ-ur-saĝ are part of the ritual procession of Inanna, together with some other groups of people presumably connected with the cult of Inanna. After these groups of people are mentioned, a general "they" is used to refer to some or all of them who wear women's clothing on the left side of their body and

62. Šelebum: ARM 26 I/1 197; 198; 213; Ili-ḫaznaya: ARM 26 I/1 212 (see also, M. 11299, mentioned in ARM 26 I/1 p. 399).

63. Freydank 1976: pl. 1, i 37–39; see also CDLI P281893.

64. ZTT 6; see Parpola 2008: 45–52.

65. Lines 91–108; see Lapinkivi 2010: 19–20, 27, 31–32.

66. Peled 2016: 158.

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men's clothing on the right side.[67] Furthermore, in an Old Babylonian ritual of Ištar, in the so-called Ištar-Louvre, the performance of the *assinnu* belongs to a ritual in which men and women appear in the outfit of the opposite gender. The subversion of gender roles in this section of the ritual embodies Ištar's ability to transgress boundaries of gender.[68]

In the bilingual Old Babylonian lamentation úru àm-ma-ir-ra-bi, the saĝ-ur-saĝs/*assinnu*s are called *ramkūtu* "purifiers."[69] The purifying function may be at stake also in the Middle Assyrian sickness ritual in which the *assinnu* plays a prominent role, sitting down, singing an *inḫu*-song, standing by and carrying the sickness away by chasing it out the window and, eventually, leaving the room taking with him the cakes that were placed before the goddess Gula.[70]

Singing and performing belong to the job description of the *assinnu*. In the Neo-Assyrian period, a text has the title [*annû*] *ša assinnu imanni* "[This] is to be recited by the *assinnu*," and the song itself mentions the *assinnu*, together with the *kurgarrû*, going on both sides of Ištar of Babylon, accompanied by wind instruments.[71] They also perform together with the *nāru* musicians and the *kurgarrû* in some kind of battle scene.[72] A similar setting is provided by the jealousy ritual, misnamed the "Love Lyrics," in which the *kurgarrû* recites prayers and sings, and the *assinnu* "goes down to battle."[73] This ritual is known in some form as late as in the Hellenistic/Arsacid period. In a ritual of Ištar of Babylon in the month of Simanu, the *kurgarrû* and the *assinnu* have alternating roles: the *assinnu* sets down a brick in the House of Lament, sprinkles juniper, lights a bonfire, casts food offerings onto it, and, finally, recites a song.[74] In Sumerian literary texts, the saĝ-ur-saĝ is possibly connected with the celebration of the *ešeš* festival[75] and is portrayed as participating in rituals of Ištar that involved lamenting, weeping, and singing.[76] In a Neo-Assyrian hymn, if the reconstruction is correct, the lyre of the *assinnu* is mentioned, and a further Neo-Assyrian text refers to them as actors in a ritual drama.[77]

Two ritual texts from Hellenistic Babylonia present the *kurgarrû* and the *assinnu* associated with the goddess Narudu in addition to Ištar and receiving six shekels of silver for their services, together with the singers.[78] In one case, the *assinnu* is connected with averting the evil of an eclipse (hemerology, see *CT* 4 5–6 in appendix).

These texts confirm what the lexical lists suggest, that is, that the *assinnu* assumed cultic functions together with the *kurgarrû* and the musicians and was at least occasionally involved in possible cross-dressing, purification, and healing. As a whole, the *assinnu* does not seem exclusively involved in only one type of ritual, but in all periods the connection with the ritual performances, music, and cult places of Ištar is strong.

67. *Iddin-Dagan A* (ETCSL 2.5.3.1: 45, 63). Also discussed in Peled 2016: 263–66.
68. AO 6035 ii 11–20, 31–40; see Groneberg 1997a: 26–29, 45 n. 90.
69. Lament úru àm-ma-ir-ra-bi 19:51–52; see Groneberg 1997b: 293.
70. Farber 1977: 65–69 (A Ia 19: 36–37, 50–51).
71. Pongratz-Leisten 1994: 228–32 (K. 9876+: 1, 10–12).
72. SAA 20 18.
73. Lambert 1975: 104–5 (BM 41005 iii 11–17).
74. George 2000: 270–80 (BM 32656).
75. Šulgi A (ETCSL 2.4.2.01: 70–78).
76. *Inanna C* (ETCSL 4.07.3: 80–90).
77. *Hymn to the City of Arbela* (SAA 3 8 r. 13); SAA 20 15: i 6.
78. Thureau-Dangin 1921: 115 r. 7; Lackenbacher 1977: 41, 46, 50; Hibbert 1984: 93–95 (BRM 1 99: 37–39).

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There are only four administrative texts in our material (see the appendix). In two texts, the *assinnu* was given grain rations. This implies official affiliation with the temple, and it seems probable that their role in temples was at the very least semipermanent. However, here we have to be especially careful, as the evidence for *assinnu* covers such a long time span that their administrative position could have changed many times over.

One important function, however, is not present in the ritual texts but is strongly suggested by the lexical lists and confirmed by the letters of Mari, that is, prophecy. Transmitting divine words was probably nowhere their principal occupation, but, as servants of the goddess, they were involved in prophetic activity at least at Mari. The two *assinnu*s from Mari both deliver prophetic oracles, and this, at least in the case of Šelebum, took place in an altered state of consciousness, or ecstasy. This is consistent with the recurrent association of the *assinnu,* the *maḫḫû*, and the *zabbu* in the lexical lists. That the affiliation of the *assinnu* with prophets is not restricted to Old Babylonian Mari is suggested by the Middle Assyrian proviant list from Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta in which male and female prophets and the *assinnu*s belong together. Potentially noteworthy is also the Neo-Assyrian collection of prophecies (SAA 9 1) in which the word *assinnu* is not mentioned, but the gender of the prophet speaking the divine word is somehow ambiguous on no less than three occasions.[79] Relating to this, we next discuss the debated issue of gender ambiguity with regard to the *assinnu*.

5. *Gender Aspects and Sexuality*

It has been commonplace to present the *assinnu*, together with the *kurgarrû*, the *kulu'u*, and some other personnel, in terms of "sexual deviation" or otherness. In many older studies, this otherness has been interpreted in terms of cultic prostitution, homosexuality, hermaphroditism, or sexual ambivalence. However, the gender-related terminology and the conclusions and images drawn from it have shown themselves problematic in multiple ways. The term *homosexuality* pertains to an individual sexual orientation that the ancient sources are unlikely to reveal,[80] and hermaphroditism, that is, intersex, is a physiological condition equally difficult to detect if not described in sufficiently clear terms.[81] When it comes to cultic prostitution, the whole concept and practice has been seriously questioned.[82] Finally, even the term *gender ambiguity* has turned out to be itself ambiguous with regard to ancient Near Eastern sources.[83] All this contributes decisively to the construction of the image of the *assinnu*.

79. SAA 9 1 i 28 (Issar-la-tašiyaṭ), ii 40 (Bayâ), iii 5 (Ilussa-amur); *pace* Stökl 2013.

80. See also Nissinen 2010.

81. Perhaps the most explicit ancient description can be found in the *Natural History* of Pliny the Elder: "Individuals are occasionally born, who belong to both sexes; such persons we call by the name of hermaphrodites; they were formerly called androgyni, and were looked upon as monsters, but at the present day they are employed for sensual purposes" (Pliny the Elder, *Nat*. 7.3.3). The phenomenon takes its name from Hermaphroditus, son of Hermes and Aphrodite (Ovid, *Metam.* 4.285–388), whose body merged with that of the nymph Salmacis so that they were no longer two, either a man or a woman, but both at the same time: "they seemed neither, and yet both" (*nec duo sunt et forma duplex, nec femina dicit nec puer ut possit: neutrumque et utrumque videntur*; Ovid, *Metam.*, 4.378–79). See Brisson 2002: 42–60.

82. See especially Assante 1998; Budin 2008; Nyberg 2008; Stark 2006; and all essays in Scheer 2009, including Assante 2009.

83. See Stökl 2013: 62–69.

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First of all, it is important to differentiate among (1) sex as a biological category, (2) gender as a social construct, and (3) sexual practices. In the conventional discourse that takes the heteronormative framework for granted, terms such as *homosexuality*, *castration*, *transvestism*, *hermaphroditism*, *androgyny*, *bisexuality*, *prostitution*, even *third gender* are used in a way that virtually lumps together all people whose "sexuality" is seen as somehow ambiguous, deviant, or unconventional. Perhaps the perplexed vocabulary is partly due to the ancient sources that may not always be consistent in their use of gender-related terminology. However, a more immediate source of modern scholarly terminology should be sought in the late-19th–early-20th century sexology[84] that taught the Western world to classify people according to sexual categories, especially those related to sexual orientation, providing a taxonomic pattern that could be (mis)used for dividing human beings into categories, essentializing sexual and gender identities (if a distinction is made at all).[85] Thus, the main reason for the terminological confusion is doubtless that modern patterns have no semantic or conceptual counterpart in ancient sources.

In more recent studies, the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrû* have been considered representatives of a third gender, being neither men nor women. Since even this classification, represented by us among others, is no longer accepted unanimously,[86] it is necessary to take it once more under consideration. Our point of departure, inspired by recent studies on gender and masculinity in antiquity,[87] is that the gender role is always performed, reproduced, and changed in interactions between individuals.[88] Another important departure point for us is the idea of intersectionality, which in simplistic terms refers to the idea that gender cannot be studied independently from other factors affecting an individual's identity, such as age, class, and social group identities.

Accordingly, we use the term *gender ambiguity* as a matter of performance, not as denoting essentialist qualities. More often than not, this performance seems to belong to a liminal or a "queer" role of the persons involved. It does not necessarily imply homosexuality, castration, transvestism, hermaphroditism, or infertility, although all this is possible.

From this, it also follows that an *assinnu* could theoretically have offspring, although there is no evidence on this. On that topic, there is some previous research that needs to be addressed here. There are four texts from Nuzi referring to a man named Teḫiya. Two of them have been interpreted as evidence for *assinnu* having children.[89] The first, JEN 7 no. 689, was originally read as Teḫiya, "^{am}*a-zi-innu*, son of *A-ku-*[*še-en-ni*]," [90] which could be understood that Teḫiya was a son of the *assinnu* Aku-šenni. However, Maidman's transliteration of the signs is (lines

84. See Crozier 2008.

85. See Foucault 1976: 59: "L'homosexualité est apparue comme une des figures de la sexualité lorsqu'elle a été rabattue de la pratique de la sodomie sur une sorte d'androgynie intérieure, un hermaphroditisme de l'âme. Le sodomite était un relaps, l'homosexuel est maintenant une espèce." For the distinction of sexual identity and gender identification, see, e.g., Nissinen 1998: 10–16.

86. See above, p. 374 n. 9; and see also Peled 2014; McCaffrey 2002.

87. Especially Halperin 1990; Gleason 1995; Williams 2010; Bahrani 2001; Zimmermann 2001; Asher-Greve 2002; Moore and Anderson 2003; Penner and Vander Stichele 2007; Creangă 2010; Heacock 2011; Creangă and Smit 2014; Zsolnay 2017.

88. See, for example, West and Zimmerman 1987 and 2009.

89. In the other two a man named Teḫiya appears simply as the son of Aku-šenni (JEN 3 no. 265:9 ^{m}*Te-ḫi-ia* DUMU *A-ku-še-ni;* HSS V 63:16 *Te-ḫi-ia* DUMU *A-ku-še-en-ni*).

90. Gelb, Purves and MacRae 1943: 151 (see JENu 880).

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21–22) *Te-ḫi-ya* DUMU A-*ku-še-e*[*n-ni*] ^{LÚ}*sà-sí-in-nu*, with Maidman even commenting on the line in question that "The ZA is perfectly clear, as copied" and that the old entry in *NPN* should be corrected.[91] Thus, the correct translation there is "Teḫiya, son of Aku-šenni, the maker of bows and arrows." The fourth and last text is JEN 3 no. 260:13, which is transliterated IGI *te-ḫi-ia* DUMU A-*ku-še-en-ni* LÚ.*a-zi-en-nu*. However, Andrews has suggested that it should be read as *sà*$^{!}$-*sé-en-ni*.[92] Ilan Peled supports this idea and argues that the person in this text as well was a *sasinnu*, a maker of bows and arrows, not an *assinnu*.[93] Considering that it is very probable that it is the same person in JEN 7 no. 689 and JEN 3 no. 260, the emendation suggested by Andrews seems very probable, and we can therefore exclude these texts from Nuzi from further discussion.

While many if not most of the sources are not gender-specific in any way with regard to the *assinnu*s, the assumption of their nonconventional gender performance has not arisen out of nothing. Originally, the sumerogram lú.ur.sal/lú.sal gave reason for it, although this is circumstantial evidence at best.[94] However, the lexical associations with *sinnišānu* 'man-woman' are suggestive. Furthermore, as outlined above in §3, it seems possible that *Iddin-Dagan A* and the Ištar-Louvre refer to a ritual ambience involving cross-dressing. This is suggestive from a gender perspective, as dress can be analyzed as a performance of gender. Interestingly, in YOS 10 47: 20, *assinnu*-ship is presented as something that is performed (Akk., *epēšu*).

Also noteworthy is the regular association of the *assinnu* with other cultic functionaries—not only with the *kurgarrû* but also with the *kulu'u*, who likewise belongs to the community of worshipers of Ištar. The *kulu'u* appears as the goddess's bedfellow, and his manhood is contested in a Middle Babylonian letter: "He is a *kulu'u*, not a man."[95] This evidence has been interpreted in terms of prostitution and hermaphroditism.[96] However, to us it rather suggests that perhaps the *kulu'u* was like the *assinnu,* belonging to a temple community instead of a traditional Mesopotamian household. Not belonging to a traditional household might further indicate the *assinnu*'s nontraditional gender performance. [97]

The gender role of the *assinnu*s cannot be discussed separately from their setting in the worship of Ištar. In a Sumerian Enḫeduanna hymn, the ability to "turn a male into a female and a female into a male" is ascribed to Inanna:[98]

> [nitaḫ] munus-ra munus nitaḫ-ra ku_4-ku_4-de_3 ^{d}inanna za-kam //
> *zikaram ana sinništim sinništam ana zikarim turrum kumma Ištar*

91. Maidman 1994: 65–68. Note that the sign ZA has a phonetic value *sà*.

92. Andrews 1994: 141.

93. Peled 2016: 167.

94. The sign SAL can be interpreted as sal '(to be) fine, thin, delicate, narrow; to be frivolous' as well as munus 'woman.' As always in Sumerian, the exact meaning of individual signs is far from clear. See the discussion in Schretter 1990: 2–6. In the current work we are aware of the distinction between reading the sign in question as sal, munus or just as the sign itself, SAL. However, for the purposes of this article, in the interest of simplicity and clarity, we decided to use the reading lú-ur-sal for it consistently in Sumerian transliterations.

95. KAR 144:46–47 and Weidner (1935–36): 3, line 21. For *kulu'u*, see Peled 2015.

96. E.g., Henshaw 1994: 299–300.

97. Assante 2009: 41.

98. *Inanna C* (ETCSL 4.07.3: 120). See also Sjöberg 1975; Alster 1990: 80. The dating of this text is slightly controversial, with possibilities varying between the Old Akkadian and the Old Babylonian periods (Rubio 2011, 16).

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> To turn [a male] into a female and a female into a male are yours, Inanna.

Earlier in the same composition, the saĝ-ur-saĝ appears together with an ecstatic (lú-al-éd-dè), the "transformed" pilipili (pi-li-pi-li bal), and the kur-ĝar-ra in a context of lament: "They exhaust themselves with weeping and grief."[99] That these persons are associated with lamentation singers is familiar to us from the later lexical lists. The "transformation" or "transgression" (bal) of the pi-li-pi-li could be a reference to an earlier passage in the same text: "She removed disease from her flesh and prayed. She paid homage with a meal and called out 'pilipili.' She snapped the spear like a man . . . gave her a weapon."[100] It seems possible that the pi-li-pi-li is the new name of the disease removed from Inanna's (or Enheduanna's?) body that becomes a female cult actor with a weapon.

The topic of gender transformation reemerges in the famous passage of the Neo-Assyrian *Erra Epic*:[101]

> As for Uruk, the dwelling of Anu and Ištar, a city of *kezretu*s, *šamḫatu*s and *ḫarimtu*s[102] whom Ištar deprived of husbands and delivered into th[eir]/yo[ur][103] hands. Sutean men and women shout *yarurūtu*,[104] they rose up (in) Eanna; the *kurgarrû*s and *assin*[*nu*s], who for making people reverent, Ištar turned their masculinity to fem[ininity]; the carriers of dagger, carriers of razor, scalpel and flin[t-blade], who for delighting the mind of Ištar, do regularly f[orbidden things]. You have plac[ed] over them a cruel and merciless governor.

There are several interesting features about this much-commented paragraph. What exactly is referred to with "doing forbidden things" (*asakka akālu*) is debatable, but one gets the impression that what is forbidden for people in general is not a taboo for the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrû* who, thus, are seen as a liminal class of people whose nonstandard behavior is authorized by the goddess. The sharp items, sometimes interpreted as insinuating castration, are reminiscent of the martial aspects of the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrû* in several rituals described above; however, they are conspicuously small in comparison with the sword normally associated with these people.[105] The crucial phrase from the point of view of gender is, of course, "turning masculinity (*zikrūtu*) into femininity (*sinnišūtu*)," which is an exceptionally clear expression of the ambiguous, or liminal, gender of the *assinnu* and the

99. *Inanna C* (ETCSL 4.07.3: 88–90).

100. *Inanna C* (ETCSL 4.07.3: 80–82). Translation from text 5.2.1 in Halton and Svärd 2018.

101. *Erra* 4:52–59; see Cagni 1969: 110–11; Peled 2014: 288–89.

102. This is not the place to discuss the meaning of the words *kezretu*, *šamḫatu* and *ḫarimtu*; we leave them without translation because we find conventional translations such as 'harlots' and 'prostitutes' potentially tendentious and misleading. Julia Assante has argued against interpreting them as prostitutes (1998; see also Assante 2009: 31–33), while Cooper (2006) interprets the evidence in terms of prostitution, noting, however, at the end of his article: "Challenges to the conventional translations are, however, a useful reminder that our notion of prostitution carries with it connotations that can hardly apply to ancient Mesopotamian prostitution, a concept whose contours we can only dimly apprehend" (Cooper 2006: 20); see also Cooper 2013.

103. The damaged word has been read either *qa-tuš-š*[*un*] (e.g., Cagni 1969: 110–11), referring to enemies, or *qa-tuš-k*[*a*] (e.g., Lambert 1992: 136), referring to Erra.

104. Probably a battle cry of the Suteans, a Western population who at times raided Babylonia with Arameans; see Kärger and Minx 2011–13.

105. See Zsolnay 2013: 87–94 for details on the weapons of the *assinnu*, and see also the appendix for connections between the *assinnu* and battle/weapons (for example, SAA 20 15 i 6 GIŠ.TUKUL.MEŠ 'weapons').

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kurgarrû. The text does not maintain that they are neither men nor women, nor does it say that they are turned from men to women, but it implies a transformation in their gender status from what is perceived as male to what is perceived as female. This is presented as the work of Ištar for two purposes: to make people afraid and to entertain the goddess herself. The awe-inspiring appearance of the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrû* is meant to manifest Ištar's power over people's lives; as Julia Assante puts it: "The goddess's weapon-wielding functionaries remind the people that she keeps fate balanced on a razor's edge, as it were."[106] The genderwise ambiguous appearance, again, as suggested by many scholars, serves as a demonstration of the power of the goddess to tamper with people's gender and her own ability to transgress conventional gender boundaries—and divine-human boundaries as well.[107]

One Neo-Assyrian lexical list, *malku* = *šarru*, records an *assinnatum*, who is equated with *ugbabtu* and associated with other temple women such as *šamḫatu*, *nadītu*, *uppuštu*, *qadištu*, and *entu*:[108]

šá-muk-tum	*na-di-tum*	female temple employee
up-pu-uš-tum	KIMIN	female temple employee
šá-mu-uḫ-tum	*qa-diš-tum*	female temple employee
ug-bab-tum	*en-tum*	female temple employee
ug-bab-tum	*as-sin-na-tum*	female temple employee (?)
ma-šu-ú	*a-ḫu*	brother
ta-li-mu	KIMIN	ditto
im-nu	KIMIN	ditto
ma-ši-tum	*a-ḫa-tum*	sister

As we can see, *assinnatum* concludes the sequence of female designations before the list continues with equivalents of 'brother' and 'sister'. This is the only known instance of the feminine *assinnatum*,[109] and the masculine *assinnu* is never directly associated with these female cultic functionaries in the lexical lists; even in the short recension Lú = *ša*, *ugbabtum*, *nadītum*, and *qadištum* appear some 20 lines earlier.[110] How should this single instance of *assinnatum* be interpreted? It is possible, of course, that the compiler of the list had a female counterpart of *assinnu* in mind. We consider it more probable that the title is simply written in feminine because of its less-than-usual association with female cultic professionals, which would be a further indication of the *assinnu*'s "masculinity turned into femininity." All in all, we would therefore consider that the cultic performances of the *assinnu* involved gender transgression.

In addition to the discussion on the *assinnu*'s sex and gender, the topic of the sexuality of the *assinnu* has sparked much debate. Some omens and literary texts

106. Assante 2009: 45. See also Groneberg 1986, 36–37; Leick 1994: 161.

107. See also Esztári and Vér 2015: 19–20.

108. For the text, see *malku* = *šarru* i 126–35 and Kilmer 1963: 427. Both *šamuktum* and *šamuḫtum* are forms of *šamḫatum*; see *CAD* Š/1. The word *uppuštu*/*ummuštu* appears only here and in MSL 12: 129 iv 17 as equivalent of [nin].^{d}ištaran; see *CAD* U–W s.v. *uppuštu* B.

109. There is also one single instance of a female *kurgarrû*, if restored correctly, in a Neo-Assyrian survey of female personnel: 13 MÍ.KUR.GAR.R[A.MEŠ] '13 female *kurgarr*[*ûs*]' (SAA 7 24 r. 24; see Fales and Postgate 1992: 32, 34). See, however, Peled 2014: 286–87, who reads KUR as a geographical determinative and interprets the text as mentioning a group of women from an unidentified locality or ethnicity, perhaps Carchemish, which indeed seems more likely.

110. Lú = *ša* short recension, excerpt I: 195–97 (MSL 12: 102); See §4 above for a long quotation of this.

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have been interpreted as suggesting a nonconventional sexual performance of the *assinnu*. The most debated case at the moment is one of the omens of *Šumma ālu*, the interpretation of which is challenging both because the four manuscripts preserving the omen can be read in different ways and the translations of scholars differ from each other quite dramatically. Depending on the interpretation, the omen reads (*CT* 39 44:15):

Protasis A
šumma amēlu ana zikarūti ina kili uštaktitma
If a man excites himself to "manhood" in captivity,
OR: If a man suffers physically in prison,[111]

Protasis B
(*either:*) *u assēniš nāk zikarūta ḫuššuḫšu*
and like an *assinnu* manhood's intercourse is denied to him,[112]
OR: and like an *assinnu* wants to copulate (with) something masculine,[113]
(*or:*) *u ina* ZI-*e nīš nāk zikarūta ḫuššuḫšu*
but, when erect, the rise of the emission (?) of manhood is denied to him,[114]

Apodosis
ina pīqi lumna immar
he will experience misfortune in distress.[115]

The most important questions are, (1) whether the word *assinnu* appears in the text at all, and (2) what kind of sexual performance is implied in the omen. As to the first question, the very appearance of the *assinnu* in the text is questioned by Ann Guinan who, on the basis of one of the three manuscripts containing this omen (K 126 r. 9–10), reads *ina* ZI-*e nīš* instead of *assēniš*. Ilan Peled, however, has demonstrated that the manuscript K 1994: 24–25 actually supports the reading *assēniš*.[116] As to the second question, the sexual performance of the person in question is interpreted in terms of either a passive sexual role, impotence, or an active sexual role. The suffix attached to the verb *ḫuššuḫšu* points to the meaning 'to take away' rather than 'to desire'. For these reasons, we interpret the omen as referring to an *assinnu* who is not supposed to have 'male intercourse' (*nāk zikarūta*), that is,

111. The word *uštaktit* is derived from *katātu,* a verb for which several translations have been suggested. According to *CAD* K it means 'to be low or short', in the Št stem 'to submit oneself (?)' or 'to suffer physical collapse', while *CDA* 153 (similarly *AHw* 465) gives 'to quiver, vibrate'?, in the Št stem 'be disturbed'. This plurality (if not perplexity) of meanings is reflected by the translations of the omen. J. Bottéro and H. Petschow (1972/75: 464) translate: "se soumet—sexuellement—à des hommes"; W. G. Lambert (1992: 151) suggests "If a man starts trembling," while Henshaw (1994: 285) and Assante (2009: 43) translate: "If a man suffers physically in prison." The translation "excited himself" interprets *uštaktit* in a reflexive sense; thus Peled 2014: 293–94; Guinan 1997: 474.

112. This translation interprets *ḫuššuḫu* in the meaning 'to deprive, take away', that is, *nāk zikarūta* 'male intercourse'; thus Peled 2014: 293–94; see also Lambert 1992: 151: "and like an *assinnu* the desire to copulate is taken away"; *CAD* Ḫ s.v. *ḫuššuḫu*.

113. This translation understands *ḫuššuḫu* as 'to desire'; thus Assante (2009: 43); similarly, Bottéro and Petschow 1972–75: 464, although in the directly opposite meaning: "il vient une forte envie de copuler avec des hommes (mot à mot: être objet du coït d'autres hommes)."

114. Thus Guinan 1997: 474. This translation is based on the manuscript K 126, where the line division is different from the other two manuscripts.

115. See also Guinan 1997: 474: "that man will experience one-time misfortune." Guinan seems to derive *pīqi* from *pīqa* 'now and again' (*CAD* P s.v. *pīqa*) or 'on one occasion' (*AHw* 864; *CDA* 274).

116. Peled 2017.

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sexual intercourse with a male person or in the male manner. This implies neither "passive homosexuality" nor castration, not necessarily even impotence. The point is rather that, according to the omen's imagery, the *assinnu* is deprived of sexual performance according to conventional male standards, whether "by nature" or because of social norms.

Elsewhere in *Šumma ālu*, the *assinnu* is portrayed as someone with whom a man can have sexual relations, but so are several other male persons (CT 39 44:13, 45:32–34):[117]

> If a man has sexual relations with his social peer from the rear, he will become foremost among his peers and brothers.
> If a man has sexual relations with an *assinnu*, hardships will be released from him.
> If a man has sexual relations with a *gerseqqû*, for an entire year the deprivations which beset him will be kept away.
> If a man has sexual relations with a male house-born slave, hardship will seize him.

The gallery of a male person's ominous same-sex partners includes his social peer, an *assinnu*, a palace attendant, and a slave, which makes it impossible to separate the *assinnu* from the others as a special class of "passive homosexuals." It is important to remember that the omens do not set the limits of acceptable behavior but, rather, imagine occasions where the behavior of people may indeed go beyond the limits sanctioned by social norms. The apodoses are related to the social space of a male person: sexual relations with the *assinnu* appear as a favorable omen perhaps because this intercourse takes place with a devotee of Ištar. On the other hand, contra the omen above, intimate contact with a saĝ-ur-saĝ can also be presented in a negative light, provided that the curse section of the inscription of Yarim-Lim of Alalakh actually associates saĝ-ur-saĝ with undesirable sexual action.[118]

In any case, the gender role of the *assinnu* is related to that of the *kurgarrû* who in many cases seem to perform as the counterpart of the *assinnu*. Ilan Peled has presented the hitherto most articulate attempt to separate the roles of these two kinds of people, suggesting that these two designations indicate two different gender roles. He proposes that the *kurgarrû* represented the male aspect of Ištar, and the *assinnu* the female aspect: "the *assinnu* signified her feminine aspect of eroticism and receptive sexuality, while the *kurgarrû* signified her manly, aggressive and warrior-like qualities."[119] Peled argues that the heroic-masculine image of the *assinnu* cannot be based on the lexical juxtaposition with *qarrādu* in SAG B i 13. In Peled's reading, the first line should be read saĝ ur-saĝ 'heroic, valiant person', a word different from saĝ-ur-saĝ in the next line to be equated with *assinnu*.[120] He also suggests that the lines interpreted as female *kurgarrû* in SAA 7 24 11, r. 24 may not necessarily be correctly reconstructed.[121] In the above-quoted passage from the *Erra Epic*, he finds a chiastic structure indicating that the *assinnu*s are those whose masculinity Ištar has turned into femininity, while the *kurgarrû*s are those who carry daggers and other edged weapons.[122] Peled also takes the above-quoted

117. See Guinan 1997: 469–70; 2017: 158–63; Nissinen 2010: 75.
118. RIME 4 34.1.1: 19–20; For details, see RIME 4 34.1.1 in the appendix.
119. Peled 2014: 296.
120. Peled 2014: 284–86.
121. Peled 2014: 286–87.
122. Peled 2014: 289–90.

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Šumma ālu omen as an "insinuation of passive homosexuality"[123] and interprets a passage in *The Rites of Egašankalamma* (SAA 3 38:14–16), a Neo-Assyrian mystical text, in homoerotic terms.[124] We welcome Peled's attempt to make a distinction between the *assinnu* and the *kurgarrû* as each other's counterpart instead of lumping the two designations together as is customarily done, even though we find it impossible to regard the *assinnu* consistently as the representative of "passive homosexuality"—not only because we find the term itself inappropriate but also because the feminine-receptive role of the *assinnu* is not supported by unequivocal evidence.[125] Although the words *assinnu* and *qarrādu* are not necessarily synonyms, even the *assinnu* may assume a warlike role going to battle (BM 41005 iii 16–17: *milḫu imalluḫu*);[126] the *Šumma ālu* omen CT 39 44:15 refers to something not compatible with the masculine performance but not necessarily to a passive sexual position, and the other omen (CT 39 45:32) does not present the *assinnu* as different from other potential sexual partners of a male person. Moreover, we find it problematic to induce the passive/receptive sexual performance of the *assinnu* from the alleged chiasm in the *Erra Epic* or the extremely enigmatic passage in *The Rites of Egašankalamma* (SAA 3 38:14–16). In any case, difficulties do not turn the sexual performance of the *assinnu* into that of the Mesopotamian "Average Joe."

Many of the cases discussed above are very difficult to read and understand, and so the translations are heavily dependent on the interpretive will of the translator. This is why any attempt may be brought under suspicion of fitting preconceptions, whether of a sexual or nonsexual nature; indeed, it is often impossible to translate certain words or expressions without having *any* kind of a preconception, because the categories themselves are heavily biased by their very existence. The biased nature of our terminology seriously complicates scholarly communication on gender-related issues and entails a series of questions to be pondered by every scholar when trying to cope with gender in antiquity. As discussed by Agnès Garcia-Ventura elsewhere in this volume, when all categories of analysis are biased, the feminist epistemologies suggest a greater awareness and explicitness of these categories as the cure.

What, then, was ancient masculinity, what was femininity, and what did the change from masculinity to femininity mean in social, religious, and cultural terms? Are we talking about changes in physical sex, in sexual performance, or gender roles? Permanent or temporary? What do we mean when we talk about "third gender": a mixture of two categories or a category of its own? The meager corpus of evidence that we have for *assinnu* yields only limited answers to these questions, and, unlike many of our colleagues, we do not play down altogether the interpretive potential of later sources[127] which we have not discussed in this article.

If the category "third gender" is applicable to the *assinnu*, it may refer to the liminality and flexibility of their gender status, and the same goes for "ambiguity." All this is about a relative sexual status and gender performance, which makes the use of essentialistic terminology misleading. As aptly written by Cynthia Ruth Chapman: "Modern gender-critical theory can help the researcher recognize the

123. Peled 2014: 294.

124. Peled 2014: 296–97.

125. However, Peled has recently been reappraising some of his arguments regarding this (Peled, conference presentation "Identifying Gender Ambiguity in Texts and Artifacts" in February 2017).

126. See Zsolnay 2013: 93–94.

127. Such as those used by Simo Parpola and Pirjo Lapinkivi; see above, p. 374 n. 7.

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instability of ancient gendered categories and resist the urge to resolve that instability through recourse to our own categories."[128] The sources discussed in this essay, coming from different periods, present enough evidence for an unconventional gender performance attached to the image of the *assinnu*. The unusual gender performance and possibly unusual sexual practice of the *assinnu* is not mere speculation, and acknowledging it does not automatically mean falling into the trap of modern terminology and categories; indeed, the sources make the *assinnu* an interesting case for queer studies and gender studies. The change from masculinity into femininity evidently does not mean changing the person from a man to a woman but, rather, changing his gender performance from masculine to feminine and the sexual status of the *assinnu* from the average into the liminal, demonstrating the power of Ištar and emulating her ability to perform such transfers.

6. Conclusion

In this study, we started by outlining some of the previous research that has engaged with the figure of the *assinnu*. In §2, we established, after careful consideration of all the sources as presented in the appendix, that in addition to syllabic writings of *assinnu*, the term could be written with the logograms LÚ.UR.SAL, UR.SAL, and LÚ.SAL. Additionally, we believe that the terms *sinnišu* and *sinnišānu* referred to the *assinnu*. Saĝ-ur-saĝ probably also referred to the *assinnu* but the term saĝ-ur-saĝ was gradually replaced by the syllabic writing *assinnu* and its associates.

The next section (§3) examined the lexical lists with the aim of identifying the *assinnu*'s place among other functionaries. Some people, especially the *kurgarrû*, regularly appear together with the *assinnu*, giving reason to propose a socioreligious connection between the two designations. Other than the *kurgarrû*, the lists associate the *assinnu* with persons relating to prophecy, ecstasy, musical performances, and magic.

In §4, we discuss the *assinnu*'s relationship to his patroness, the goddess Ištar, and examine some ritual texts and texts relating to the cultic sphere. Evidence relating to the *assinnu*'s role in the temple and cult fits with what we know based on the lexical lists. The *assinnu*'s role in cult was connected with the *kurgarrû* and musical performances. It might occasionally involve possible cross-dressing, and relate to purification and healing. The *assinnu* appears in different kinds of rituals, but almost always with a robust association with the ritual performances, music, and cult places of Ištar. The *assinnu*'s membership in the temple community is further suggested by administrative texts, but there is little direct evidence to determine his position in these communities in any precise terms. Finally, although the evidence from the cultic sphere does not document it, the lexical lists and letters from Mari refer to the *assinnu*'s link to prophecy.

Section 5 is dedicated to discussing evidence relating to the *assinnu*'s gender role and sexual practice. These aspects of the figure of the *assinnu* have often been erroneously conflated. Our departure point was the understanding of the *assinnu*'s gender as something that is performed. Furthermore, the gender identity is never performed in isolation but is always intertwined with other factors. The section discusses in detail the cultic performances where there seems to be reason enough

128. Chapman 2016: 92.

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to associate the *assinnu* with transgression of gender boundaries, the *Erra Epic* foremost among them.

The sexuality of the *assinnu* has been a debated topic, the most elaborate and recent suggestion coming from Ilan Peled, who has suggested that the *assinnu* was a passive party in a homosexual act. The texts that have been interpreted to attest to this, for instance, omen texts, are difficult to interpret and have raised much discussion. Nonetheless, we see no convincing evidence for the *assinnu*'s passive sexual role, and the whole term *homosexuality* is a weak analytical tool because of its modern origins. However, the cumulative evidence of the texts presented in this section cannot be explained away. Although we feel it is unwise to present any rigid conclusions regarding the *assinnu*'s sexual role, it seems clear to us that it was dissimilar to the standard.

In many ways, the *assinnu*s defy simple and single definition as successfully as their patron goddess. This is hardly coincidental. Like Inanna/Ištar, they seem to have fulfilled various cultic roles. Like her, they existed in different cities and states, known with different designations in different eras and places, throughout Mesopotamian history. The constant and solid constituents of their image are their connection to music and performance in cult and their tie to Inanna/Ištar. Moreover, there are persistent hints that their gender performance and the way they acted as sexual beings was somehow nonstandard and related to Ištar's power of transgressing and transforming gender.

At this point then, it is good to be reminded that "if gender is performance, then it is also context-dependent."[129] Recent critics, especially Zsolnay, have done well in turning attention to other-than-gender aspects in the image of the *assinnu*, toward the socioreligious status of the *assinnu* in specific contexts. The sources from different time periods leave no doubt that the primary, if not the only context of the performance of the *assinnu* was the worship of Ištar, and the liminal gender was but an aspect of his performance as a member of the worshiping community. Other aspects, such as the martial and prophetic performaces, sometimes belonged to the status of the *assinnu* as well.

To end on a note relating to gender and methodology, this study hopes to have raised the focus on intersectionality to the forefront. The *assinnu* is a perfect example of how gender cannot be studied as an isolated issue, but how it needs to be understood intersectionally, from many perspectives at the same time. Careful consideration of gender and methodological aspects are especially relevant for these studies because the evidence itself is ambivalent. We can hope to attain good results only by (1) reexamining the primary sources, (2) placing them in a modern theoretical and methodological framework, and (3) positioning them in the larger context of what we know of masculinity and femininity in Mesopotamia.

129. See the contribution of Niek Veldhuis in this volume (section 4).

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7. *Appendix: Texts Referring to* Assinnu *by Genre, in Chronological Order*[a]

Text	*Chronological frame*	*Transliteration of the Term*	*Notes*
Lexical Lists			
MSL 12 42	OB	saĝ-ur-saĝ	Following: pi-li-pi-li kur-ĝar-ra
SAG B i 13–14 // SAG A i 8–9	MB	saĝ-ur-saĝ = *qar-ra-du* saĝ-ur-saĝ = *as-sí-nu*	See Peled 2014: 284–85.
Erimhuš III 172 (MSL 17: 51)	MB	lú.AN.SAL:E = *as-sin-nu*	Nearby: *muḫḫû*, *zabbu*, *kurgarrû*
Lú = *ša* iv 184 (MSL 12: 134–35)	NA	saĝ-ur-saĝ = *as-sin-nu*	See §4 above for a long quotation of this. Many cultic functionaries mentioned close by.
Lú = *ša* short recension, excerpt I (MSL 12 102–3)	NA	ur-sal = *as-sin-nu*	See §4 above for a long quotation of this. Many cultic functionaries mentioned close by.
Murgud B 133 (MSL 12, 226)	NA	[lú]-ur-sal = [*a*]*s-sin-nu* = *sin-niš-*⌜*a*⌝-[*nu*]	Nearby: prophets
CT 18 pl. 5 r. ii 20–26 (K 4193 5–11)	NA	*i-sin-nu-u*	Nearby: ecstatics. See above, p. 382 n. 48 and p. 383 n. 55. See also CDLI P346038
Igituḫ 266 (Landsberger and Gurney 1957–58: 83–84)	NA	lú-ur-sal = *as-sin-nu*	Preceding: *zabbu*, and l. 265 lú-[ur-sal] *ku-lu-'u*
MSL 12, 240 vi 23–26	NA	lú-ur-sal	Preceding: lú-kur-ĝar-ra
malku = *šarru* 135 (Kilmer 1963: 427[b])	NA	*ug-bab-tum* = *as-sin-na-tum*	Preceding: *nadītum*, *qadištum*, *entum*. Note the feminine form of *assinnu* here.
Cole 1996: no 122, p. 254–256	Ca. 755–732	lú-ur-sal = *si-niš*$^{!}$*-a-*⌜*nu*⌝	Nearby: lú-ku-gar-ra = *ku-lu-ú* and *maḫḫû*
LTBA 2 1 (von Soden 1933, pl. 1 and 3)	NA	lú-[ur-sal] = [*as-sin*]*-nu* (iii, l. 27) *a-zí-nu* = *ku-lu-'u* (vi l. 45)	
SpTU 3 116 r. ii 41	LB	[lú-ur-sal] = *as-sin-nu* = *sin-niš-ú*	

a. Many of these texts are also discussed in Peled 2016: 155–202.
b. For a more recent edition, see Hrusa 2010, who reads the same signs as *ug-bab-tu*$_4$ = *as-sin-na-tu*$_4$.

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SpTU 5 256 9′	LB/ early Hellenistic	[*a*]*s-sin-ni*	Erimhuš III 172 (above) is quoted in this commentary to the diagnostic series sa-gig (from Uruk). See Peled 2016: 162–63.
Durand 1979: 163:7 (AO 17661)	LB/ early Hellenistic	*as-s*[*i-n*]*u*	Commentary to the diagnostic series sa-gig (from Nippur). See Peled 2016: 163.
Letters			
ARM 26 197: 4–5	OB/Mari	*as-sí-in-nu*	Šelebum, the *assinnu* delivers an oracle. See also ARM 26 198:3.
ARM 26 213: 23–27	OB/Mari	*as-sí-*[*in-nim*]	Translation: "Now I am sending the hai[r and the fringe of the garment] of the *assi*[*nnu*] (certainly Šelebum) to [my lord]."
ARM 26 I/1 212: 5–6	OB/Mari	^{m}Ì-[*lí-ḫa-a*]*z-na-a-ia* ^{lú}*a*[*s-s*]í-[*i*]*n-n*[*u*] *ša an-*[*nu-ni-tim il*]*-li-ka*[*m*]	Queen Šibtu writes to the king: "I[li-ḫa]znaya, *assinnu* of An[nunitum ca]me [to me]." See Ili-ḫaznaya also in M. 11299:13 (mentioned in ARM 26 p. 399)
Administrative Texts			
Wiseman 1954: 21 (text no. 265.4) and Wiseman 1959: 27	OB	10 *Pa-at-ḫa* SAG. UR.SAG	Alalakh text lists grain rations of Patḫa, the *assinnu*.
Freydank 1976: pl. 1, i 37–39	MA	LÚ.ᶠSALᵀ.MEŠ	Barley for the food rations of the prophets, prophetesses and the *assinnu*s of the Ištar temple. Freydank 1974: 60 has LÚ.*x*.MEŠ, but the copy in Freydank 1976: pl. 1 shows LÚ.ᶠSALᵀ.MEŠ. See also CDLI P281893.
ZTT 6: 3 (Parpola 2008: 45–52)	NA	LÚ.SAL	Sasî, scribe of Ištar of Nineveh is the owner of the "man-woman" being given.
Finkelstein 1953: 140–141, 175 (text no. 85)	NA	[x] É.MEŠ. LÚ.SAL.ME	Houses of "men-women" are referred to in a list of professions found from ancient Šibaniba.
Texts Referring to Cultic Actions			
Iddin-Dagan A ETCSL 2.5.3.1: 45	OB Isin dyn.	saĝ-ur-saĝ	This hymn to Ninsiana (aspect of Inanna), describes cultic action. The saĝ-ur-saĝ are parading before the goddess. Later (ll. 60–64) someone is dressed on their right side with men's clothing and on their left side with women's clothing. In line 76 kur-ĝar-ra is mentioned. (See Peled 2016: 263–66; Zsolnay 2013: 88–89)
Ištar-Louvre AO 6035 ii 11–20, 31–40 (Groneberg 1997a: 26–29)	OB	*as-si-in-nu-um-mi*	The *assinnu* is involved in a ritual involving subversion of gender roles. "The *assinnu* shouts: 'Be pure! Lie down!' When he sits down, he is buried."

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úru àm-ma-ir-ra-bi	OB and 1st mill.	Sum. version: line 10 or 11: [saĝ]-ur-saĝ. Bilingual version: l. 51 *ra-am-ku-tim* / saĝ-ur-saĝ l. 52 *as-sí-in-nu* / saĝ-ur-saĝ	For an overview of sources, see Cohen 1988: 536–40.[c] For discussion, see Peled 2016: 75–79.
Farber 1977: 65–69 (A Ia 19: 36–37, 50–51)	MA	*as-sin-na-ki*	The *assinnu* is an active participant in healing in this incantation of Ištar. See Peled 2016: 197–98.
SAA 20 15 i 6	NA	LÚ[!].SAL (following collated reading in SAA 20)	LÚ.SAL raises weapons and shouts, opposite Ištar: "*ebirna, ebirna*"
SAA 20 18 l. 20	NA	LÚ.UR.SAL.MEŠ	In this ritual the *nāru*, *kurgarrû* and *assinnu* perform together, the *assinnu*s shouting *yarurūtu* and performing something most probably a song or a dance (*milḫu imalluḫu*). See also Zsolnay 2013: 93–94 and Peled 2016: 182.
Pongratz-Leisten 1994: 228–32 (K. 9876+: 1, 10–12) See also CDLI P398372.	NA	l. 1 LÚ.UR.SAL l. 11 *as-sin-nu*	Ritual text where the *assinnu* perform together with the *nāru* musicians and the *kurgarrû*.
Lambert 1975: 104–5 (BM 41005 iii 11–17)	NA/LB	LÚ.UR.SAL	The text related probably to rituals of Ištar of Babylon. The *kurgarrû* (or possibly the *assinnu*) will recite the composition "Battle is my game, warfare is my game" after which the *assinnu* "will go down to battle" and do a dance of some kind. See also Zsolnay 2013: 93–94 and Peled 2016: 182–84.
George 2000: 270–80 (BM 32656 iv 13)	LB Arsacid	LÚ.UR.SAL	The *kurgarrû* and the *assinnu* perform a ritual. See also Linssen 2004: 120–21.
Hibbert 1984: 93–95 (BRM 1 99: 37–39)	LB Arsacid	[LÚ].UR.SAL	The *assinnu*s receive six shekels of silver, together with the female singers and the *kurgarrû*s for their services during a procession. See also Peled 2016: 169–70.

c. For the Old Babylonian version in Sumerian, see Cohen 1988: 556, 594 and Zsolnay 2013: 88. For the bilingual version, see Groneberg 1997b: 293 and Volk 1989: 83–84. The Old Babylonian version in Sumerian (VAT 1339 = VS 2 29) has, according to Cohen (1988: 556): line 11 [sag]-ur-sag-da mu-un-da-dúr-ru-ne-eš nam-gala?-e mu-ni-ib-DU. Translation (Cohen 1988: 594) is 'They sit down with the sagursag. She has brought the gala-priesthood'. According to Zsolnay (2013: 88), the Sumerian version (line 10) is: [sag]-ur-sag-da mu-un-da-dúr-ru-ne-eš nam-ur-sag-e mu-ni-íb-DU, "she stays with the sagursag, she brings heroism." In any case, *kurgarrû* is mentioned soon after, as are actions that might be preparations for a celebration. In the first-millennium bilingual version of this lament, saĝ-ur-saĝ is translated with *assinnu* and called *ramkūtu* 'purifiers' as follows on lines 51–53: (51) *ra-am-ku-tim i-re-ed-di-am* saĝ-ur-saĝ-gá mu-ni-íb-DU (52) *as-sí-in-nu ra-am-ku-tim aš-bu-šim* saĝ-ur-saĝ-gá mu-un-da-dúr-ru-ne-eš (53) ka-le-e i-re-ed-di-am na-ám-gala-e mu-ni-íb-DU.

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Thureau-Dangin 1921: 115 r. 7 and Lackenbacher 1977: 41, 46, 50 (AO 7439+ r. 25′)	LB	LÚ.UR.SAL	*Kurgarrû* and *assinnu* perform a ritual relating to Narudu and Ištar: [LÚ].KUR.GAR.RA LÚ.UR.SAL *šá til-le-e* ^{d}*Na-ru-du rak-su ki-ma ma*$^{?}$*-ri-i* TA [*a*]*-na* 15 NIGIN-*šú-nu-tú* A.MEŠ ŠU.2 *a-na* ^{d}INANNA ÍL-*ši-ma* LUGAL *ù* UN.MEŠ *ú-lap-pat*
Omen Texts			
YOS 10 47:20	OB	*as-sí-nu-ú-tam*	*Šumma immeru* series. The owner of the sheep will practice *assinnu*-ship. See also Peled 2016: 191.
CT 39 41:23	NA	UR.ʿSALʾ	*Šumma ālu* omen collection mentions *assinnu*, but in a broken context. *Kurgarrû* mentioned in the next omen. See Peled 2016: 192.
CT 39 44:15	NA	*às-sé-e-ni-iš*	*Šumma ālu* omen collection. Transliteration and meaning of the omen for *assinnu*'s sexuality is debated, see above. See also Peled 2016: 192–94.
CT 39 45:32	NA	*as-sin-ni*	*Šumma ālu* omen collection: "If a man has sexual relations with an *assinnu*, hardships will be released from him." See Peled 2016: 194–95.
CT 4 5–6 r. 14 (Livingstone 2013: 195–98)	NB	LÚ.UR.SAL	This hemerology details instructions in case of a lunar eclipse. To avert catastrophe the king should (among other things) touch the head of an *assinnu*. *Kurgarrû* appears in the text in a similar role, helping the king avert evil. See also Peled 2016: 198–99.
Royal Texts[d]			
RIME 3/1.1.7.StB: iv 6	Sum. (Gudea)	saĝ-ur-saĝ	King Gudea is describing the building work of the temple for Ningirsu. Here saĝ-ur-saĝ seems to be in contraposition to women. Edzard (reading the signs as saĝ ur-saĝ, "the best warriors") translates the passage: "women doing work he banished from the city; no woman would carry the basket, only the best of warriors would work for him." Based on the surrounding text it seems possible that cultic purity was the issue here, but see also Peled 2016: 259–60.

d. We do not include here RIMA 1 A.0.40.1001, where *a-sí-nim* seems more probably a personal name than a reference to *assinnu*. For discussion, see Peled 2016: 166–67.

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Ur-namma C (ETCSL 2.4.1.3: 84)	Sum. (Ur III)	saĝ-ur-saĝ	One of the accomplishments of Ur-namma was "lifting the yoke" of the saĝ-ur-saĝ of the realm, which seems to connect with abundance and plenty. Another translation possibility is "Its sag-ur-sag lifted their yoke" (Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 216–17). See also Peled 2016: 260.
Šulgi A (ETCSL 2.4.2.01: 77)	Sum. (Ur III)	saĝ-ur-saĝ	According to the text, King Šulgi's saĝ-ur-saĝs looked at him with admiration for his running skills. The saĝ-ur-saĝ might relate to the celebration of the *ešeš* festival by implication but this is not clear. See also Peled 2016: 260–61.
Šulgi C (ETCSL 2.4.2.03: 63)	Sum. (Ur III)	saĝ-ur-saĝ	Praise to King Šulgi, but the surrounding context for the term is missing.
RIME 3/2.1.4.3: iii 12	Sum. (Ur III)	saĝ-ur-saĝ-bi	Translated as *assinnu*s here, the text recounts that King "Šū-Suen cut down their *assinnu*s. He enfeebled their runners. He killed both strong and weak. He sowed the heads of the just and the iniquitous (alike) like seeds." See also Peled 2016: 261.
RIME 4 34.1.1: 19–20	OB Alalakh	SAG.UR.SAG	A curse section for the enemies in this Akkadian text. If the readings of Frayne (1990), Zsolnay (2010) and Lauinger (2015) are correct, no *parrû* is mentioned in the text but there is an association between *assinnu* and the loss of male potency.[e]
Mythological And Literary Texts			
Inanna and Enki (ETCSL 1.3.1: segment F 25 and I 23)	Sum.	saĝ-ur-saĝ	One of the things that Inanna gains from Enki seems to be the *kurgarrû* and saĝ-ur-saĝ. Around them are references to moving between this world and the underworld as well as to sword and club, different garments and hair-styles.

e. Henshaw (1994: 297) gives three possible translations: 'may Ishtar raise up [*tebû*] the SAG.UR.SAG and *parrû* onto his (the one who alters the treaty) sexual organs (to rape him)'; 'may Ishtar sink [*ṭebû*] the SAG.UR.SAG and *parrû* onto his sexual organs'; 'may Ishtar spread [*ṭepû*] (the legs of) the SAG.UR.SAG (and) *parrû* onto his sexual organs', with the implication: 'Whatever the meaning, it seems to refer to homosexual intercourse involving the SAG.UR.SAG and *parrû*, and thus a disparaging note'. See, however, *CAD* Ṭ s.v. *ṭepû* 1d, reading *še*(?)-*ra ú-ra-m* instead of *pa-ra-ú-ra-am*, which yields the translation 'may Ištar attach (?) the SAG-UR-SAG to his loins day and night.' Douglas Frayne (1990: 800) reads ^{d}*eš*$_4$-*tár* SAG.UR.SAG *pa-ra-ú-ra-am i-na bi-ir-ki-šu li-te-eb-bi* 'may the goddess Eštar (as with) a eunuch cause potency to leave his private parts', interpreting *pa-ra-ú-ra-am* not as referring to *parrû* but, perhaps, to male potency. Similarly, Ilona Zsolnay (2010: 400), although later Zsolnay (2013: 97–98) translates 'may Eštar (and) the *assinnu* cause potency to leave his groin'. Jacob Lauinger (2015: 282–84) reads *liṭebbi* (*ṭebû* 'to sink, submerge'), suggesting diminishment of sexual potency but finds it difficult to equate the word *parauram* with *parrû* and refrains from defining its meaning. See also Peled 2016: 261–62.

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Inanna C (ETCSL 4.07.3: 88; Sjöberg 1975; see also Alster 1990: 80)	Sum. (OB)	saĝ-ur-saĝ	For discussion on this hymn to Inanna, see above, p. 387.
A hymn to Inanna (ETCSL 4.07.a: 75)	Sum.	saĝ-ur-˹saĝ˺	The term appears in a hymn to Inanna but the context is not preserved.
Kramer 1944: no. 45: 9 (see also p. 20)	Sum.	saĝ-ur-saĝ	Fragment of a literary text: "[I will give you] m[y] priesthood; [I will give you] m[y] gala-ship; I will gi[ve you] my *kurgarrû*; I will giv[e] you my sword (and) *patarru*; I will give you my SAG-UR-SAG." (Peled 2016: 189)
Debate between Grain and Sheep (ETCSL 5.3.2: 74)	Sum.	saĝ-ur-saĝ	In lines 71–80 Grain boasts, "I grant my power to the saĝursaĝ—he fills the palace with awe and people spread his fame to the borders of the Land." A few lines later warrior/hero (UR.SAG) is given the same power: "I make him leave ... as to the playing field."
Lambert 1960: 218, (transliteration on line 3)	NA	*sin-niš-a-nu*	Translation in *CAD* S s.v. *sinnišānu* "When the *sinnišānu* entered the tavern and lifted his hand (in prayer?), he said: Let us, you (fem.) and I, (divide) half and half the wages of the matchmaker(?)." See Peled 2016: 270–72.
Ištar's Descent to the Netherworld, see Lapinkivi 2010: 19–20, 27, 31–32 (lines 91–108)	NA	LÚ*as-sin-nu*, variant *ku-lu-*ˀ*a*˺-[*a*]	In the older Sumerian version we have *kurgarrû* and *kalaturru* helping Ištar out of the Netherworld, but in the Assyrian version they are replaced by one person, an *assinnu* (but note the variant *kulu'u*).
Erra Epic (Cagni 1969: 110–11)	NA	LÚ*i-sin-*[*ni*]	Ištar turns the masculinity of *kurgarrû*s and *assinnu*s into femininity. Both are associated with weapons and "forbidden things." See also Peled 2014: 288–90.
Rites of Egašankalamma (SAA 3 38:15)	NA	LÚ.SAL	Suggested translation by Livingstone in SAA 3 is "The *kurgarrû* and the horse trainer, who w[ash] each other in water—the horse trainer is Bel, the *assinnu* is Illil, when Bel consigned Illil to the underworld." The passage is enigmatic, but connects *assinnu* with Ištar's rituals.
Hymn to the City of Arbela (SAA 3 8 r. 13)	NA	LÚ.˹*x*˺ [*x x*]	Suggested translation by Livingstone in SAA 3 is "The lyre of the [*assin*]*nu* is tuned!" If the reconstruction is correct, this is followed by references to musical performances of *kurgarrû*, *kulmašītu*, and others.

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