

Conceptualising the Erotic: Metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs”

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Acknowledgements

I must firstly give my biggest thanks to my supervisor, Professor Jacob Dahl, who, from the very beginning of this project, unfailingly championed my ideas and intentions to work on this difficult but extraordinary corpus of Sumerian texts. Thank you for your feedback, encouragement, and support. The content of these texts has made this project (I think) a fun one, and I appreciate the laughs that have accompanied thinking seriously about what these texts have to say and what they were for (and that the contents of this thesis were often so rude that you had to carry it around in a brown-paper bag to keep it from unsuspecting eyes).

Thank you to all those who have read bits and pieces of this thesis and/or discussed it with me over the years. Special thanks to Dr Agnès Garcia-Ventura, Dr Christopher Metcalf, Dr Laura Quick, Professor Margaret Jaques, and Professor Paul Delnero for your kind comments and feedback; to Joseph Barber and Karina Atudosie for the helpful suggestions; and to Dr Marie-Christine Ludwig for your help reading Emesal texts at the British Museum.

I have felt really privileged the last few years to be part of building a real community of scholars interested in the ancient Middle East at Oxford and have many of them to thank for keeping me sane and motivated whilst completing this thesis. A special mention to the OPCA crew and EANES faculty and students, for all the support, laughs, language learning, and kindness.

A massive thanks to Tom. We got a dog, lived through a pandemic, you got a master's degree, we got married, we moved into a van, all in the time it has taken me to finish this thesis. It's been both wonderful and insane and thank you for doing it all with me.

And finally, thank you to the OOC-DTP and Wolfson College Marriott Scholarship for supporting the completion of this thesis.

Abstract

This thesis examines the metaphorical language of the Old Babylonian Sumerian “Love Songs”, and its role in constructing eroticism in this corpus. Using approaches borrowed from cognitive linguistics and Conceptual Metaphor Theory, I investigate how metaphor can be used as a tool for analysing the more abstract concepts and emotions essential to poems about love and sex, and how these feelings were experienced and embodied at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE in southern Mesopotamia.

The introduction includes a literature review (1.1), as well as an overview of the compositions’ context, content, and previous interpretations (1.2). I also lay out my approach taken in analysing the metaphorical language of the “Love Songs”; this includes reading these compositions explicitly as erotic poetry, with a deliberate focus on the female expression of desire and pleasure in the corpus (1.3), as well as the methodological approach taken in analysing metaphor in Sumerian (1.4 and 1.5).

The metaphorical analysis itself is broken into two sections. The first focuses on the “source domains” of the Sumerian “Love Songs”, broken into sub-sections that engage with each image in turn, and explore how this imagery maps onto its metaphorical “target domains”. Though each image is given its own sub-section, it is emphasised that these source domains consistently interact in order to construct and conceptualise the target domains that are analysed in the next chapter (3). The second section of metaphor analysis focuses on the four most prominent target domains: desire (3.1), pleasure (3.2), allure (3.3), and abundance (3.4). The concluding chapter returns to the question of context of the “Love Songs”, and the significance of writing and preserving poems that focus on intimacy and care for female pleasure (4).

[There are typographical corrections in this thesis which will be amended for publication.]

Abbreviations for Grammatical Analysis

A grammatical analysis is provided of the Sumerian transliteration where it was deemed necessary for clarification of interpretation. The style of grammatical analysis of the Sumerian that is presented in this thesis is adopted from Woods, C. (2008) *The Grammar of Perspective: The Sumerian Conjugation Prefixes as a System of Voice*. Leiden: Brill.

The abbreviations are as follows, adapted from Jagersma, A.H. (2010) *A Descriptive Grammar of Sumerian*. PhD Dissertation. Leiden University.

Nominal Case Markers and Dimensional Infixes

ABL- Ablative

COM- Comitative

DEM- Demonstrative

DIR- Directive (Locative/Terminative)

EQU- Equative

ERG- Ergative

Ø- Absolutive

GEN- Genitive

LOC- Locative

TERM- Terminative

Possessive Pronominal Pronouns

1POSS- 1st person singular possessive pronoun

2POSS- 2nd person singular possessive pronoun

3POSS- 3rd person singular possessive pronoun

1POSS PL- 1st person plural possessive pronoun

The Verbal Chain

AFF- Affirmative Modal Prefix

COHORT- Cohortative Modal Prefix

CONJ (-nga-)- “Conjunctive Prefix”¹

NEG- Negative Modal Prefix

MM- Middle Voice Marker²

PREC- Precative Modal Prefix

PROH- Prohibitive Modal Prefix

PROSP- Prospective Modal Prefix

VENT- Ventive

VP- Vocalic Prefix

Ø- Direct Object/Intransitive Subject

IPP – Initial Personal Prefix (see Jagersma 2010: 381ff).

DO- Direct Object

IO- Indirect Object

OO- Oblique Object

ed- Imperfective/*marû* intransitive stem

3SG – 3rd person singular

2SG- 2nd person singular

1SG- 1st person singular

1PL- 1st person plural

Post-positions

COP- Enclitic Copula

NOM- Nominalising Suffix

Other

RDP- Reduplication

ES- Emesal

NH- Non-human

Sumerian quoted in-text is in **bold**. Akkadian and other languages (Hebrew, Ugaritic) are in *italics*. Transliterations of Emesal words are in **pink**, only meant as a tongue-in-cheek

¹ See Jagersma 2010: 513ff for discussion of this prefix, the meaning of which is undetermined, but could have the meaning ‘also’ or ‘and then’.

² For the many uses of the **ba**- verbal prefix as a middle marker, see discussion in Jagersma 2010: 487ff.

reference to the fact that Emesal is spoken by the female characters in the Sumerian love literature.

When quoting lines from the “Love Songs” corpus, the museum and CDLI P numbers of the tablets are given. For other texts, composite editions are usually referenced with ETCSL numbers unless otherwise stated.

Abbreviations

aBZL	Mittermayer, C. (unter Mitarbeit von P. Attinger) (2006) <i>Altbabylonische Zeichenliste der sumerisch-literarischen Texte</i> (= OBOS). Fribourg: Vandenhoeck Ruprecht.
CAD	The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago
CDLI	Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative https://cdli.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/
eBL	Electronic Babylonian Library https://www.ebl.lmu.de/
ePSD2	Electronic Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/epsd2/sux
ETCSL	Electronic Corpus of Sumerian Literature https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/
DCCLT	Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus
DSSt	Datenbank sumerischer Streitliteratur http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/pager
MSL	<i>Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon.</i>
OBEL	Old Babylonian Emesal Liturgies http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/obel/pager
ORACC	The Open Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/
RINAP	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/rinap/corpus/
SAA	State Archives of Assyria http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/saao/

1. Introduction

The Old Babylonian Sumerian “Love Songs” use rich and multi-valent metaphorical, erotic language. Labelled as “Love Songs” by Sefati in his edition of many of the texts, this corpus is also referred to as the Inanna-Dumuzi hymns (ETCSL 4.08.01-33),³ the Sacred Marriage texts (Kramer 1963), but also as ‘Sumerian sexual lyrics’ (Tinney 2000) or ‘love lyrics’ (Couto-Ferreira 2022). Generally, the corpus encompasses the texts labelled on the ETCSL as *Dumuzi-Inanna A-F1* (ETCSL 4.08.01-32), *Šu-Suen A, B, and C* (ETCSL 2.4.4.1-3), and also sometimes the disputation *Dumuzi and Enkimdu* (ETCSL 4.08.33). The corpus can also include the royal hymns *Iddin-Dagan A* and *Šulgi X* that are thought to depict the Sacred Marriage ritual,⁴ as well as the difficult text known as *The Manchester Tammuz*, published by Alster in 1992.⁵ The parameters of this corpus are a modern invention (Tinney 2000: 23), usually categorised on thematic grounds as involving the (erotic) relationship of the deities Inanna and Dumuzi, or the goddess and a king, or non-divine, different-sex, human lovers (Alster 1985a). The texts all, to varying degrees, use Emesal,⁶ and are typically structured as dialogue between lovers, sharing characteristically erotic and metaphorical language taken mostly from the domains of agriculture and food production.⁷ In many ways, they are

³ ETCSL numbers refer to composite text editions by Black, J.A./Cunningham, G./Ebeling, J./Flückiger-Hawker, E./Robson, E./Taylor, J./Zólyomi, G., *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>), Oxford 1998–2006.

⁴ ETCSL 2.5.3.1 and 2.4.2.24; Lapinkivi 2004: 47-50. For the most recent editions of these texts, see Attinger 2014 and 2022. I do not include these as part of the “Love Songs” corpus examined in this thesis. Though they feature short passages in which the king engages sexually with the goddess Inanna, the majority of both compositions are dedicated to praise of the deity/king and do not use the erotic metaphor and other erotic devices explored in this thesis.

⁵ See also Civil 1990 for edition of a witness of this text.

⁶ For an overview of previous scholarship on Emesal, see Garcia-Ventura 2017. In the context of the “Love Songs”, Emesal is a ‘dialect’ of Sumerian used by female speakers. This mostly involves the use of vocabulary with certain phonological changes from the ‘standard’ Emegir, though this is not employed consistently, and I have not been able to identify any pattern by which the female speakers switch between Emesal and Emegir. If these texts were intended to be sung, perhaps the switch to Emesal refers to a change in voice/sound; recently, Ludwig has shown that Emesal was lexically related to terminology for constricted/shrill speech (Ludwig 2021).

⁷ See, for example, Lambert 1987; Couto-Ferreira 2017; Bertolini 2020; Zisa 2021b; 2023; Carr [forthcoming].

one of our earliest sources for understanding the construction of concepts such as sexual desire and pleasure.⁸ Almost uniquely amongst literature of the ancient world, they are written from the female point of view, and a female voice, as well as imagery of the female body, dominates many of the texts listed above.

This thesis examines the metaphorical language of the Old Babylonian Sumerian “Love Songs”, and its role in constructing eroticism in this corpus. Recently, commentators have highlighted study of the metaphor in the “Love Songs” as a well-worn topic (Couto-Ferreira: 2017: 54), and yet the latest studies tend to focus primarily on the language that metaphorises the physicality of sex, the ‘ploughing’ and the ‘canal-digging’, and the appearance of the genitalia (Couto-Ferreira 2017; 2018; Zisa 2023). In analysing the metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, I instead intend to investigate how metaphor forms the more abstract concepts essential to poems about love and sex; how images interplay with and create eroticism; what such metaphor can tell us (if anything) about desire, pleasure, allure, and abundance; and how these feelings were experienced and embodied at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE in southern Mesopotamia.

Another aim of this thesis is to attempt to advance the study of Sumerian metaphorical language. Using an approach borrowed from cognitive linguistics, I will analyse the corpus using Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The theory mainly states that we understand abstract concepts through mappings from embodied experiences (see chapter 1.4). A corpus that depicts sexual and loving relationships such as the Sumerian “Love

⁸ Perhaps the earliest source known which concerns love and desire is the Old Akkadian incantation from Kiš, **MAD 5, 8** (P285640), which aims to exert control over the beloved it addresses (for most recent discussion and references for previous editions and commentary see Weeden 2022: 19ff). Incantations of this kind are also known from the Old Babylonian period (Wasserman 2016). There are a small number of Old Babylonian literary texts written in Akkadian that depict love and erotic themes, as well as heartache (Wasserman 2016; for the theme of “heartbreak” in later medical literature, see also Al-Rashid 2022). Both the small corpus of early Akkadian love spells and literature would also contribute to our understanding of the construction of concepts such as love, desire, and pleasure, but a thorough comparison between the Sumerian and Akkadian corpora is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Songs” deals with deeply embodied experiences that give way to more abstract feelings and emotions, such as love, desire, and pleasure. These abstract concepts, as will be explored, are constructed, and conceptualised through metaphorical language rooted in an embodied experience of the world. This thesis tries to identify and analyse the relationship between the embodied imagery and the abstract feelings, and how such complex concepts as desire and pleasure were conceived.

This corpus has not been the focus of an extended study since publication of their editions in 1998 by Sefati (see chapter 1.1); the introductory chapters of this thesis will then give an updated literature review, as well as an overview of the compositions’ context, content, and previous interpretations (chapter 1.2). In these first chapters, I will also lay out my approach taken in analysing the metaphorical language of the “Love Songs”; this includes reading these compositions explicitly as erotic poetry, with a deliberate focus on the female expression of desire and pleasure in the corpus (1.3), as well as the methodological approach taken in analysing metaphor in Sumerian (1.4 and 1.5).

The metaphorical analysis itself is broken into two sections. The first, the most detailed and significant portion of this thesis, focuses on the “source domains” of the Sumerian “Love Songs”, broken into sub-sections that engage with each image in turn, and explore how this imagery maps onto its metaphorical “target domains”. Though each image is given its own sub-section, it is emphasised that these source domains consistently interact in order to construct and conceptualise the target domains that are analysed in the next chapter (3). The second section of metaphor analysis focuses on the four most prominent target domains, those abstract emotions and concepts most emphasised throughout the “Love Songs”: desire, pleasure, allure, and abundance. The concluding chapter returns to the question of context of the “Love Songs”, and the significance of writing and preserving poems that focus on intimacy and care for female pleasure (chapter 4). Appendix A includes

a catalogue of texts studied for this thesis. Appendix B is a visualisation of the source-target domain mapping in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, also discussed in chapter 4. Appendix C is a sample text edition of *Inanna-Dumuzi D*, with a poetic and accessible translation aimed at a wider audience.

1.1 Literature Review

1. The Sumerian “Love Songs”: Previous Studies

No doubt because of their abundant, erotic metaphorical language, the Sumerian “Love Songs” have been keenly studied and discussed by modern scholars. Even so, the “Love Songs” have mainly been studied philologically, with the focus placed on the publication of text editions, and occasional commentary on their context and purpose. The first editions and discussion of many of the texts that make up the corpus of the Sumerian “Love Songs” were published sixty years ago by Kramer in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107. Kramer designated these twenty-five compositions as ‘The Sacred Marriage Texts’,⁹ and then later published partial translations of more of the “Love Songs” in his study *The Sacred Marriage Rite* in 1969.¹⁰ In the following decades, further editions, translations, and commentaries on various “Love Songs” were published by Jacobsen (1973; 1975; 1976; 1987a; 1987b) and Alster (1985a; 1992; 1993).¹¹

Twenty-five years ago, Sefati published editions of *Inanna-Dumuzi A-F1*, *Šu-Suen A, B, C*, and *Dumuzi and Enkimdu* in *Love Songs in Sumerian Literature: Critical Edition of the Dumuzi-Inanna Songs* (1998). Regarded as the reliable edition of the “Love Songs” corpus (George 2006: 315), no further attempt has been made to reproduce editions of the

⁹ Four of these Kramer categorised as compositions reflecting the ‘premarital courting’ of Inanna and Dumuzi (*Inanna-Dumuzi I, T, C1, H*), three as texts related to ‘rite and ritual’ (*Inanna-Dumuzi D1, P, Inanna G*), four designated generically as ‘love songs’ (*Šu-Suen C, Inanna-Dumuzi E, D, G*) or ‘rhapsodic love songs uttered by the goddess Inanna to Dumuzi or by one of the temple hierodules to the king in the role of Dumuzi’ (Kramer 1963: 490), and the rest as relating to the myth ‘Inanna’s Descent’, which Kramer saw as a continuation and tragic ending of a cultic narrative that involved Inanna and Dumuzi (Kramer 1963: 490-491).

¹⁰ *Inanna-Dumuzi A, B, C, E, G, H, I, P, T, Y, C1, D1, F1, Dumuzi & Enkimdu, Šu-Suen A, B and C, Šulgi X, Iddin-Dagan A* (Kramer 1969a).

¹¹ Other scholars have also contributed to the publication of texts associated with the Inanna-Dumuzi corpus, which involve the kings of the Ur III and Isin dynasties (eg. Klein 1981b; Römer 1965; Reisman 1970; Attinger 2014; Attinger 2022).

compositions,¹² except for the publication of new tablets and fragments,¹³ and the online editions published by Attinger of *Inanna-Dumuzi A, B, D, H, Dumuzi and Enkimdu*, and *Šu-Suen B* on his profile at the Universität Bern (2019).¹⁴ Though the “Love Songs” have been discussed in short recent studies by Couto-Ferreira (2017; 2018; 2022) and Zisa (2021b; 2023), since Sefati’s publication in 1998, the corpus has received relatively little attention or extensive analysis.¹⁵

Where the “Love Songs” often have been discussed is in studies that relate them to the Sacred Marriage Ritual (see chapter 1.2). Aside from their purported connection to the Sacred Marriage, the Sumerian “Love Songs” have also received attention with regards to their metaphorical language. The existing publications dedicated to the use of metaphor in the “Love Songs” have all largely been comparative studies of erotic poetry across the ancient Middle East, that take examples from the Sumerian “Love Songs” and consider trends across various love song traditions.¹⁶ Lambert discussed the ‘languages of religion and love’ in Sumerian, Akkadian, and Biblical love poetry (Lambert 1987). Goodnick-Westenholz similarly compared the erotic garden motif across Sumerian, Akkadian, Egyptian, Biblical, and Ugaritic texts (Goodnick-Westenholz 1992), whilst Paul also selected and compared the ‘deft erotic *doubles entendres*’ of love poetry in the ancient Middle East (Paul 1997: 99). In particular, he examined instances of garden/orchard and vineyard imagery (Paul 1997: 100ff). In 2002, Paul again surveyed sexual metaphor and

¹² Though for the Italian translation of many of the texts, see Mander 2005.

¹³ *Inanna-Dumuzi X* (Sefati 2005); A ‘Sumerian Wedding Song’, **CT 58, 12** (P274207), which the authors attribute to the Inanna-Dumuzi corpus (Mirelman/Sallaberger 2010); *Inanna-Dumuzi Q* (Klein/Sefati 2012); *Šu-Suen B* (Reid/Wagensonner 2017); **HS 2940**, ‘Ein neues Dumuzi-Inanna-Lied’ (Krebernik 2020).

¹⁴ A forthcoming compilation of these editions, accompanied by editions of a handful of other “Love Songs” and related texts, with an English translation by K. Boddy is forthcoming. My deepest gratitude is extended to Attinger and Boddy for allowing me to read a draft of this publication in the preparation of this thesis.

¹⁵ The corpus was discussed by Fritz within an extensive study of the gods Dumuzi, Ama-ušumgal-anna, and Damu (Fritz 2003). The author gives overviews of the contents of many of the texts considered here.

¹⁶ A short article by Afanasjeva, that does focus exclusively on the “Love Songs” corpus, elaborates on a comment made by Kramer on the imagery of the **šuba** stones in the composition *Inanna-Dumuzi I* (Kramer 1963: 495; Afanasjeva 1982).

euphemism in Mesopotamian and Biblical texts. More recently, the figurative language of the “Love Songs”, as well as of other Sumerian compositions, was discussed in an article by Couto-Ferreira in 2017. The focus of this study was agricultural imagery and the female body in cuneiform sources, and discussed texts such as *Inanna H*, *Inanna-Dumuzi P and A*, as well as *Enlil and Ninlil*, *Enki and Ninhursaga*, medical texts and birth incantations (Couto-Ferreira 2017; 2018).¹⁷

Despite the density of metaphorical language in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, the topic has not been studied exclusively in an extended study. In the introductory section to his edition of the Sumerian “Love Songs”, Sefati only points to uses of certain similes and metaphors (Sefati 1998: 86ff), and, in a recent article, Bertolini explores the specific use of vegetal imagery (Bertolini 2020). The comparative approach of the aforementioned studies has shed significant light on the meaning of some of the more prolific imagery of erotic poetry, as well as identified important trends of shared imagery across ancient Middle Eastern textual traditions. Whilst these studies each pinpoint the recurring figurative imagery of ancient Middle Eastern love poetry, they do not approach metaphor with a coherent theoretical framework for discussing the mechanisms of metaphor, though Lambert and Goodnick-Westenholz identified and considered the intangibility and versatility of the metaphorical images in the texts. Lambert warned that ‘one should not seek too precise an application of the various terms to particular things or aspects of human (and divine) love [...] They create the sense of pleasure which they bring, without creating any precise

¹⁷ This publication is of considerable importance to this thesis, as it touches upon several of the images that will be discussed with relation to the conceptualisation of the female body in the “Love Songs”. Couto-Ferreira lists the metaphorical implications of terms used in these Sumerian compositions, such as **a du₁₁** (irrigation, used metaphorically for ejaculation), **kislaḥ** (a “threshing floor”, used metaphorically for sexual intercourse), **ki-durus** (damp ground, used metaphorically for the female genitals), and **ab-sin₂** (a furrow, used metaphorically for the female genitals) (Couto-Ferreira 2017: 58-64). The author argues that these metaphors may implicitly represent the female body as ‘domesticated, possessed, and brought to fruition when irrigated, ploughed, and cultivated’ (Couto-Ferreira 2017: 60). For another discussion of metaphors for the female body in Sumerian literature with similar conclusions, see Zisa 2021b and 2023.

allegory' (Lambert 1987: 27). Goodnick-Westenholz emphasised the multivalence of metaphorical language:

The most noteworthy feature of these symbols and metaphors is their extreme plasticity and their capability to refer to several levels of perception at the same time. Not only can the same metaphor be used in different contexts with quite different meaning but it may even have several meanings at the same time in the same text. It is also difficult to read love lyrics without sensing that the distinction between the metaphorical and the literal meanings of the words vanish like smoke (Goodnick-Westenholz 1992: 383).

The imprecise and polyvalent nature of metaphor that Lambert and Goodnick-Westenholz described can be better understood in relation to the components of conceptual metaphor discussed below (chapter 1.4), particularly of the 'mapping' between 'source' and 'target' domains that explains the many layers and relationships of metaphorical meaning.

The aim of this study, then, is to further our understanding of the mechanisms of metaphor in Old Babylonian Sumerian literature by applying a modern theoretical approach, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, to the abundant metaphor of the Sumerian "Love Songs". By analysing metaphor across the defined parameters of these erotic literary texts, I will explore the creativity and interaction that occurs with the creation of metaphor in this corpus, and also demonstrate that the analysis of figurative language can be used as a tool for accessing culturally constructed domains of experience.

Unlike the philological editions and studies that have situated the "Love Songs" closely with the Sacred Marriage Ritual, another aim of this thesis is to bring to the forefront discussion of gender, "sexuality", and the formulation of eroticism that is presented in the corpus. In spite of their content, only few studies have so far considered these concepts in

relation to the “Love Songs”. Leick’s *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature* (1994) was the first to place any emphasis on the prominent female voice and expression of sexuality in the “Love Songs”, and both Cooper (1989; 1997) and Couto-Ferreira (2017; 2022) explore the extraordinary depictions of female sexuality and the body within the corpus.¹⁸ There has been a recent criticism in gender studies that focusing on “sexuality”, particularly female, limits the exploration of gender identities, as it eschews sexuality as a side, ‘female preoccupation’ (Bahrani 2001: 8; Zsolnay 2018: 465 n. 23). However, whilst the overt eroticism and displays of female sexuality in the “Love Songs” might seem an ‘obvious’ candidate in the study of sex and gender in the ancient Middle East,¹⁹ in this regard the texts are yet to receive an adequate and extensive analysis. This thesis bridges the study of metaphor, eroticism and sexual experience in the Sumerian “Love Songs”.

2. Metaphor in the ancient Middle East: Previous Studies

The study of metaphorical language in Mesopotamian texts has been extensive.²⁰ The analysis of imagery in Akkadian texts, particularly the study of formal typologies and linguistic structures of figurative language, has been the subject of many studies over the last century (Schott 1926; Buccellati 1976; Mayer 1976; Farber 1982; Groneberg 1987).²¹

The mechanisms of Akkadian metaphorical language were systematically mapped out by

¹⁸ The bibliography of ‘Gender and Women in Ancient Near Eastern Studies: 2002-2016’ published in 2017 by Agnès Garcia-Ventura and Gioele Zisa demonstrates that there has been a dramatic increase in the interest of this subject in recent years. It also significantly reveals that there have been no recent publications within this field that focus exclusively on the Sumerian “Love Songs”, other than those cited above with relation to the Sacred Marriage.

¹⁹ That the erotic metaphors in the “Love Songs” are also “obvious” and not worth examining was a feeling already established by Lambert in 1987 (Lambert 1987: 27).

²⁰ The popularity of examining animal metaphors, prosperous as they may be in the material, has rather monopolised previous scholarship on metaphor in the ancient Middle East (Heimpel 1968; Marcus 1977; J.A. Black 1996; Watanabe 2002; Veldhuis 2004; Strawn 2005; Feldt 2007; Pochia 2009; Pfiztner 2020; Anthonioz 2020; Nadali 2020; Portuese 2020). Furthermore, animal metaphors have frequently been examined with respect to their relationship to kingship (Marcus 1977; Ponchia 2009; in Watanabe 2002; in Strawn 2005; Anthonioz 2020; Nadali 2020; Portuese 2020).

²¹ These studies particularly focus on ‘similes’ and the ways in which these were conceived grammatically through the morphemes *kī*, *kīma*, *-āni*, and *-iš*.

Streck in *Die Bildersprache der akkadischen Epik* (1999),²² and Goodnick-Westenholz also considered and classified different ‘figurative processes’ in Akkadian (Goodnick-Westenholz 1996: 191-3).²³ Wasserman also conducted a thorough statistical and grammatical analysis of simile in Old Babylonian Akkadian literary texts (Wasserman 2003: 104-130).²⁴ Studies of Akkadian metaphor have also focused on a number of genres other than literature, attesting to the pervasiveness of figurative language across textual traditions; for example in royal inscriptions and iconography (Marcus 1977; Portuese 2018; Anthonioz 2020; Nadali 2020), as well as the omen corpus (Rochberg 1996).

There have been fewer studies on metaphorical language in Sumerian, despite the fact that the corpus of literary texts, in particular, clearly uses metaphorical language in abundance (Berlin 1979: 28). The grammatical and syntactical structure of simile and metaphor was outlined by Wilcke in the essay ‘Formale Gesichtspunkte in der Sumerischen Literatur’ (1976); whilst it is generally assumed that the post-position **-gen7** added to a nominalised noun or sentence forms a simile or comparison,²⁵ Wilcke noted that ‘Der Schritt von ihnen zur Metapher ist nur gering’ (Wilcke 1976: 210).²⁶ It is likely that the lack of grammatical identification of a metaphor in Sumerian, as well as the oftentimes ambiguous

²² Namely the use of the so-called ‘Bildempfänger’ and the ‘Bildspender’ and their *tertium comparationis*. This framework corresponds to the English terms ‘tenor’ and ‘vehicle’ which are used to describe ‘the compared element’ and the ‘compared-to element’, usually of a simile. Streck then structured his analysis of metaphorical language according to ‘Die Bildfelder’, for example, the semantic fields of the ‘Bildspender’ of animals, plants, and nature.

²³ Goodnick-Westenholz’s short but important study classified algebraically four ‘figurative processes’ in Akkadian, including ‘congruence’ (A is (like) B); ‘analogy’ (A is as B= A is [to X] as B is [to Y]); ‘identity’ (A is B); and ‘semantic transformation’ (A may be substituted by B within a certain semantic field)’ (Goodnick-Westenholz 1996: 184-186). The author also differentiates between ‘simple’ images, such as animal metaphors, and ‘complex multi-layered images’, which she deemed as ‘polysemic images simultaneously embodying several layers of meaning’ (Goodnick-Westenholz 1996: 191-193).

²⁴ This process focused first on philological matters, such as the frequency and position of simile markers (Wasserman 2003: 130-135), before analysing the semantic fields of the tenors and vehicles, categorised following Streck 1999, plotting the ‘combinations of the semantic fields’ in a table and making conclusions about the frequency of tenor and vehicle relationships (Wasserman 2003: 135-146).

²⁵ See Kramer 1969b in which the author collects ‘similes’ marked with the equative suffix.

²⁶ Wilcke presents examples from the Šulgi hymns for metaphor expressed through apposition, as nominal and verbal predicates (with or without the copula), as accusative object, as a genitive, and as a free occurrence (Wilcke 1976: 210-212)

and polyvalent nature of metaphor in the texts, is at the heart of the hesitancy to identify and interpret its metaphorical imagery. Descriptions of certain important aspects of Sumerian metaphor have been included in studies of particular literary compositions; for example, in Berlin's edition of *Enmerkar and Ensuĥkešdanna*, the author commented 'many of the metaphors and similes within a given cluster are similar or related to one idea, and contribute to the total picture which the poet wished to evoke' (Berlin 1979: 29).²⁷ In analysing bull imagery in *Gilgameš and the Bull of Heaven*, Ponchia has explored how metaphors appear to 'function simultaneously at different levels', and also 'play with the ambiguity of the identification of tenor and vehicle' (Ponchia 2009: 400).

However, there have been only two extended studies of metaphor in Sumerian texts. In 1968, Heimpel published an extensive collection of Sumerian animal imagery and offers the only lengthy discussion on four categories of imagery in Sumerian, which the author defined as: metaphor, simile, parable, and comparison. Thirty years later, J.A. Black published *Reading Sumerian Poetry* (1998), a theoretically informed and systematic approach to metaphor in the narrative poem *Lugalbanda*, using statistical analysis to record occurrences and relationships of images throughout the composition (J.A. Black 1998: 73-169).

More recent studies have also adopted theoretical frameworks for analysing metaphor in Mesopotamian texts that moves beyond simply picking out imagery and instances of figurative language, and instead focuses on the function, relationships,

²⁷ See also Veldhuis 2004:53-4 in his edition of *Nanše and the Birds*; Jaques 2011 in discussion of metaphor in the **dinger-ša₃ dab₅-ba** Sumerian and Sumerian/Akkadian bilingual prayers; Pfitzner 2020 analyses five 'unusual' metaphors, correcting modern 'misinterpretations of sign readings' (Pfitzner 2020: 98-99) or ancient and modern 'misinterpretations of translation' (Pfitzner 2020: 99-101; 101-106) that have obscured the meaning of certain metaphors to the modern interpreter.

flexibility, and interplay of metaphor within and across texts.²⁸ In particular, a conceptual and embodied approach to metaphor has been applied to a variety of sources (Selz 2014; Simkins 2014; Böck 2014; Steinert 2017; Salin 2018, 2020; Al-Rashid 2022), including studies of metaphor in Hebrew (van Hecke 2005; Brenner 1999; Gault 2019; Brownsmith 2020), Hittite (Pallavidini 2017, 2020), and Ugaritic (Lam 2019; 2020).

As one of the only extended analyses of metaphor in Sumerian literature, this project will contribute to the study of metaphor in the ancient Middle East with a systematic approach borrowed from modern cognitive linguistics and literary theory. This will allow for Sumerian metaphor to be thoroughly investigated in a way that demonstrates not only its intertextual and literary merit but also its elucidation of cultural concepts. By focusing exclusively on the Sumerian “Love Songs”, this study avoids using an extensive or comparative approach with a vast scope that would be unable always to account for the intricate mechanisms and complex effects of metaphorical language, but which rather mainly works to point out usages of certain images across varied contexts (for example, Heimpele 1968; Streck 1999; Watanabe 2002; Strawn 2005). Working with a smaller corpus, I can closely examine the metaphorical networks within a particular context, and only then build on the conceptualisation of such concepts through intertextual analysis (see chapter 1.5 for detailed methodology).

²⁸ The most recent example of how the study of metaphor has progressed in the field is the volume *Researching Metaphor in the Ancient Near East* (2020). The volume as a whole applies modern metaphor theory, including conceptual metaphor theory, to Sumerian, Akkadian, Hittite, Luwian, and Ugaritic texts and images.

1.2 Context and Content of the Sumerian “Love Songs”

The context of the Sumerian “Love Songs”, like most Sumerian literature from the beginning of the second millennium BCE, has been the subject of much debate. Rarely, however, has the archaeological and material context of the “Love Songs” been mentioned in published editions, as the texts have always been assumed to have an “original context”, distinct from that in which they were excavated.²⁹ This usually assumes that the compositions are copies descended from a context in the late 3rd millennium BCE.³⁰ In this section, I will briefly outline the information available about the material context and features of the tablets of the Sumerian “Love Songs”. I will then discuss matters related to proposed “original contexts” of the songs that have been previously highlighted, as well as some further considerations. The second part of this chapter will present an overview of the corpus’ varied content.

1. Context of Tablets

The majority of the provenanced tablets of this corpus come from the city of Nippur.³¹ In fact, out of sixty-one tablets, forty-five are from Nippur, whilst only three are from Ur. One

²⁹ For example, both Kramer (1963) and Sefati (1998) begin their editions of the “Love Songs” by situating them in the context of the Sacred Marriage Ritual (see below), which they observe to be a tradition practised by the kings of the Ur III period. Lapinkivi stated, ‘Most of the sacred marriage texts come from the Ur III period, from Šulgi on, and in the following Isin period, although the tradition predates these periods’ (Lapinkivi 2004: 2).

³⁰ This is assumed of most Old Babylonian Sumerian literature (Tinney 2011: 592; Boivin 2022: 612), despite the lack of Sumerian literary texts extant from the 3rd millennium BCE.

³¹ See Appendix A for tablet numbers, provenience and other information discussed here.

tablet comes from Uruk, two (possibly three) are from Kiš,³² and eight are unprovenanced. All are from the Old Babylonian period.³³

It seems that at least some of the Sumerian “Love Songs” had a secondary context in the scribal school or were involved in scribal education.³⁴ There are only two tablets (that I know of so far) that have information about their exact findspots. Both were found amongst scribal school material. One is a witness of *Inanna-Dumuzi R* (Source A), **UM 55-21-309** (excavation no. **3N T344**, P257383). This tablet is from Nippur and was found in room 205 of the famous “House F” (Robson 2001), alongside exemplars of other Sumerian literary compositions thought of as products of scribal training (Veldhuis 1997; Tinney 1999).

The other is a small fragment containing the first six lines of *Inanna-Dumuzi A*, **W 11603, r** (AUWE 23, 103, P349106). It is the only provenanced tablet in the corpus from

³² The third text with a suggested provenance of Kiš is **BM 103163** (P413235), a manuscript of *Šu-Suen B*. This was proposed by Reid/Wagensonner, based on the acquisition of the tablet by the British Museum from the antiquities dealer, I. E. Géjou, which was amongst a great number of other texts that seemed to come from Kiš, modern Tell Uhaimir. However, the authors stated that the tablet could also have originated from Nippur, the source of other tablets which Géjou also sold to the museum (Reid/Wagensonner 2017: 250).

³³ I take as face value the dating of the tablets as coming from the Old Babylonian period, and so also consider the compositions as having been composed and written down somewhere in the first half of the 2nd millennium BCE. It is not possible to be more precise than this, and perhaps the texts were composed and written down at various points in the first half of this millennium. The tablet from “House F”, **UM 55-21-309** (P257383), can only be placed during the early reign of Samsu-iluna, c. 1740s BCE (Robson 2001: 40). Whilst it is often assumed that Old Babylonian Sumerian literary texts are final copies of texts composed in the 3rd millennium, there is no material evidence (so far) that suggests the Sumerian “Love Songs” were the product of an earlier tradition. The presence of the names of kings Šulgi and Šu-Suen in only a small number of songs under discussion in this thesis is not sufficient evidence to say they were composed during the reigns of these Ur III rulers. The tradition of stories invoking 3rd millennium kings continued well into the 1st millennium BCE (Boivin 2023).

³⁴ There is perhaps a complex and uncomfortable reality (for the modern reader) that erotic material, such as the Sumerian “Love Songs”, were involved in the scribal curriculum of young scribes, some of whom would have been children. The treatment of erotic/taboo material in a pedagogical environment is not unique to the Sumerian scribal school and can be seen, for example, in the use/adaptation of Chaucer and Shakespeare into children’s books in 18th century England (see the work of Oxford DPhil candidate L. Fleming). These issues raise questions of culture-specific definitions and categorisations of the “child”, as well how the erotic is consumed differently depending on age/experience, and when and to whom the erotic is inappropriate. In a study of metaphorical language, it is also worth pointing out that the erotic imagery used in the “Love Songs” might have been understood, or conversely opaque, depending on the audience. Further thoughts on this topic were part of an interdisciplinary workshop organised at the University of Oxford, some notes on which can be found here: <https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/article/teaching-and-translating-taboo-reflections-from-a-critical-thinking-community>. Discussing ancient Egyptian love poetry, L. Meskell highlighted that these, too, were likely used in scribal training and so considered ‘suitable’ for adolescents despite their erotic content, adding that this demonstrates how sexuality was not considered a ‘separate sphere’ of life in ancient Egypt (Meskell 2002: 129).

the city of Uruk, published by Cavigneaux in 1996. The tablet was found in the ‘altbabylonische Scherbenloch’, in the south-eastern area of the Eanna ziggurat (Cavigneaux 1996: 2). The pit yielded a variety of textual genres, including administrative documents, letters, other Sumerian literary texts, and school texts. Indeed, a wide variety of Sumerian literary texts accompanied the small fragment of *Inanna-Dumuzi A* in the ‘Scherbenloch’, including hymns to Inanna, but also the *Curse of Akkad*, *Dumuzi’s Dream*, and myths such as *Gilgameš*, *Enkidu*, and *the Netherworld*. Cavigneaux proposed these were the remains of an office attached to the Eanna, and the scribes were priests who participated in the administrative work of the temple, but also corresponded with the city of Larsa, read literary texts, and educated younger scribes (Cavigneaux 1996: 5).

Most of the Sumerian “Love Songs” have between two and three witnesses; *Inanna-Dumuzi E* and *Inanna-Dumuzi X* have four witness manuscripts respectively. It is less common that a composition is only extant on one copy, though there are only single witnesses of *Inanna-Dumuzi B*, *M*, *V*, *BI*, *CI*, *DI*, *EI*, *Šu-Suen A*, and *Šulgi Z*. An extreme outlier is *Inanna-Dumuzi G*, which currently has nine witness manuscripts. This seems quite unprecedented compared to the rest of the corpus. Four of the tablets are from Nippur, two from Ur, and three unprovenanced. Six are collective tablets. In lines 3-8 of *Inanna-Dumuzi G*, a female speaker addresses a beloved, describing him with professional titles that are literary constructions.³⁵

2. Tablet Characteristics

The following information has been compiled in Appendix A. Most of the tablets are one-columned, usually inscribed on the obverse and the reverse. There are a handful of two-columned tablets (**CBS 8037 +**, **Ist Ni 4569**, **Ist Ni 9602**, **CBS 6657b+**, **CBS 14002**, **BM**

³⁵ These titles were not used in the Ur III period. For example, **ensi₂ ma₂-gurs**, ‘governor of the barge’, is not an attested profession (as far as I can tell).

15280), and one larger tablet with three columns, the so-called *Manchester Tammuz* (MMUM 35516+).

It was pointed out by Tinney that a number of the “Love Songs” feature on collective tablets (Tinney 2000). Whilst the texts in modernity have been grouped together on a thematic basis, their organisation as a “corpus” is not as explicit in antiquity (Tinney 2000: 23). However, as Tinney demonstrated, several collective tablets show that many of the “Love Songs” (and other texts) were likely linked by ancient authors as well. There are sixteen collective tablets that have one or more of the “Love Songs” inscribed upon them. A hymn to Inanna (*Inanna F*) is also written upon a tablet containing *Inanna-Dumuzi A, C, G*, and *Šu-Suen C* (N 4305); *Ur-Namma D* appears alongside *Inanna-Dumuzi C, N*, and *U* (CBS 8037+); *Ninkasi A* with *Inanna-Dumuzi E* (AO 5385); and *Inanna-Dumuzi G, O, F1*, with an unidentified text (Ist Ni 4569), perhaps highlighting any erotic connotations of these other compositions (Tinney 2000:25).

Ten tablets with Akkadian glosses are a reminder that the scribes writing down these compositions in the Old Babylonian period were Akkadian (not Sumerian) speaking scribes. Usually, only one witness of a composition inscribed upon multiple tablets has these Akkadian glosses. An exception is *Inanna-Dumuzi X*. All four tablets of this composition contain numerous Akkadian glosses.³⁶

Most of the “Love Songs” include a subscript at the end of the composition (for detailed discussion see Zgoll 2006). The majority were designated as **bal-bal-e** of Inanna (*Inanna-Dumuzi A-G, O, E1*, a parallel version of *Išme-Dagan J* (ETCSL 4.08.a), *Dumuzi and Enkimdu*, *Šu-Suen B and C*); of Bau (*Šu-Suen A*); and Nanaya (*Inanna H*).³⁷ Others are

³⁶ See Sövegjártó (2021) for further classification and discussion of these glosses.

³⁷ Half of all extant **bal-bal-e** songs are dedicated to the goddess Inanna, whilst others belong to many other deities. A main theme of this type of song seems to be that of fertility and sexuality, with a prominent use of

tigi of Inanna (*Inanna-Dumuzi H*);³⁸ **kungar** of Inanna (*Inanna-Dumuzi I* and *T*);³⁹ **širnamšub** of Inanna (*Inanna-Dumuzi M*, *Inanna G*), Ninisina (*Ninisina B*), or Utu (*Utu E/F*);⁴⁰ or **širnamsipa** of Dumuzi (*Inanna-Dumuzi R*, **HS 2940**).⁴¹ Many others do not include a subscript, either because they are too broken at the end, or because they feature on a collective tablet and represent perhaps only an excerpt of a text (*Inanna-Dumuzi L, N, P, Q, U, V, W, X, Y, Z, B1, C1, D1, F1, Šulgi Z*, the *Manchester Tammuz*). The relationship between the subscripts and the content of the compositions is not easily distinguishable.

3. Proposed Contexts: Cultic vs. Secular

The question of the “original” cultural context of the Sumerian “Love Songs” examined in this thesis has plagued editions and discussion of these compositions. It is not an easily answered problem. Some or all of the Sumerian “Love Songs” have nearly always been discussed in relation to their supposed association to the Sacred Marriage Ritual, a proposed ritual marriage of Inanna-Dumuzi, or an enacted ritual played out by the goddess (perhaps a priestess) and a king of the Ur III and Isin dynasties (Kramer 1963; 1969; Jacobsen 1976; Sefati 1998; Lapinkivi 2004; Zisa 2023). Perceived initially as a fertility ritual,⁴² the purpose

metaphorical language (Shehata 2009: 293-5). Shehata proposed that **bal-bal-e** songs were likely performed accompanied with music (Shehata 2009: 296).

³⁸ Generally, **tigi** songs are short praise poems of deities or kings (Shehata 2009: 252); the content and dialogic structure of *Inanna-Dumuzi H* is quite unique amongst other versions of this song type. It does, however, include the musical notations found in other **tigi** and **adab** songs, separated into sections by the headings **sagida** and **sagara**.

³⁹ These are the only two representatives of this type of text; they share distinct structural and linguistic features with both **bal-bal-e** and **tigi** songs (Shehata 2009: 298).

⁴⁰ The content of these songs varied widely. They may have been related in some way to the performance of the **balag** and **er2-šem-ma**, as some texts of this type are listed amongst the laments in an Old Babylonian catalogue (**VS 10, 216**) from Sippar (Shehata 2009: 272).

⁴¹ These are the only two texts attested of this type (Klein/Sefati 2012; Krebenik 2020).

⁴² Kramer used the songs to paint a narrative that was the mythological background for a proposed Mesopotamian ‘fertility cult’. This included the wooing and courting of Inanna and Dumuzi, which then led to their marriage (enacted in a cultic ritual) and culminated with the death of Dumuzi. For Kramer, the purpose of the Sacred Marriage was to bring fertility to the land. This is rooted in the pervasiveness of Victorian anthropologist James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*. The influence of the interpretation of the biblical *Song of Songs* as an allegorical divine marriage is also heavily present in early interpretations of the “Love Songs” context (eg. see Kramer 1969a). In the introduction to his edition of the corpus, Sefati situated the texts firmly within the context of the Sacred Marriage, though using the texts as evidence for this cultic event has been questioned (Cunningham 2000; Zgoll 2006).

of this cultic event has been debated.⁴³ On this topic, Lapinkivi wrote, ‘In the Sumerian frame of reference, the term Sacred Marriage is applied to the intimate relationship between the goddess of love and the king, as described in texts belonging to the Dumuzi-Inanna cycle or in other related texts’ (Lapinkivi 2008:7).⁴⁴ As evidence for the ritual, the author listed all the Sumerian “Love Songs” under discussion in this thesis, though there are many that do not explicitly feature any kind of ceremony (see below).⁴⁵ Most recently, Zisa has suggested that the gender dynamics present in the agricultural metaphors of Mesopotamian love literature had political and economic implications, linked to the Sacred Marriage. The agricultural and plant metaphors that position the female body as ‘domesticable’ (Zisa 2023: 111), place the male body in a position of power, whilst the ‘goddess assumes the passive task of incubating the god’s power’ (Zisa 2023: 117). The author argues that the function of the sexual relationship of the Sacred Marriage is the legitimisation of the king; sex ‘permits the restoration of political and consequently socio-economic order, of which the fertility of agro-pastoral activities is a central aspect’ (Zisa 2023: 124).

Jacobsen claimed that at least some of the songs were unconnected to any rituals and were purely literary entertainment: ‘They are lightweight stuff, popular ditties such as would

⁴³ For a comprehensive overview of previous literature on the Sacred Marriage, see Lapinkivi 2004: 3-13.

⁴⁴ The evidence for a Sacred Marriage enacted in the 3rd and early 2nd millennium BCE is scanty. Whilst there was seemingly a tradition in royal inscriptions of king’s referring to themselves as the ‘spouse’ of Inanna, it is typically the two literary compositions *Šulgi X* and *Iddin-Dagan A* that are used as evidence for the existence of a ritual involving sexual relations between the goddess Inanna/a priestess and a king or the Ur III/Isin dynasties. More recently, Attinger (2014) questioned whether the ‘sacred marriage’ episode in *Iddin-Dagan A* (lines 167-220) was not actually a later addition to a composition that otherwise praises Inanna’s warrior-like aspects. Similarly, the ‘sacred marriage episode’ in *Šulgi X* (lines 22-37) stands out from the rest of the composition as the only passage that uses Emesal. In the rest of the text, the king visits various deities who heap praise upon him. In both texts, in the depictions of intimacy, the king’s name is replaced with Ama-*ušumgal-anna* and Dumuzi. For a thorough consideration of the “Love Songs” relationship to the Sacred Marriage, see Zgoll 2006.

⁴⁵ The view that erotic textual and pictorial material of any kind from ancient Mesopotamia has to assume a ritual function has been heavily criticised by Assante, ‘Early philologists such as Beatrice Brooks, Jacobsen and Kramer and art historians such as Frankfort, Anton Moortgat and E. Douglas van Buren used Victorian anthropology’s theory of fertility magic to explain Mesopotamian’s depictions of unrestrained female sexuality in art and text [...] Unquestionably, philologists took literary descriptions of sexual encounters as examples of ritual’ (Assante 2000: 32).

be sung by women to while away the time at spinning or weaving, or perhaps as songs to dance to' (Jacobsen 1976: 27). Alster also sought 'to throw some light on the variety of social conditions into which each text may fit' (Alster 1985a: 127-128). He argued that the use of Šu-Suen's name in *Šu-Suen B* need not indicate that this text represents a marriage of the king, but rather that the name is 'hardly more than a metaphor here and could stand for any man' (Alster 1985a: 135). In 1993, in a chapter reflecting on love and marriage, Alster continued his discussion of the potentially secular context of many of the "Love Songs": 'If we try to divest the songs of cultic setting in which facts of daily life may in a number of cases be couched, we can in some of the songs recognize the scenery of courting and wedding among ordinary people in the secular sphere of life' (Alster 1993: 17).

The idea that the texts had secular origins was refuted by Klein and Sefati, because of their subscripts and rubrics, which they saw as a clear indicator that these compositions were used in the Sacred Marriage rite, found also in Sumerian liturgical texts and with parallels in the biblical Psalms (Klein/Sefati 2008: 615). The authors concede that in the case of the texts' 'literary genre', 'many of these songs derive from popular and "secular" love and wedding songs or contain elements borrowed from them'; however, their *Sitz im Leben* was cultic-mythological (Klein/Sefati 2008: 618). They follow Lambert (1987) in claiming that any expression of human sexual love cannot be detached from its divine representative, Inanna (Klein/Sefati 2008: 618).

4. Further Considerations

Without a clearer archaeological context for most of these songs, it is unlikely that the origins and functions the Sumerian "Love Songs" had in antiquity will ever be certainly known. The diverse content of the Sumerian "Love Songs" also make it unlikely that these texts all have the same source (see below), though their shared use of erotic language and

metaphor suggest some common origin in the Sumerian language tradition. However, here, I would like to outline some further considerations on the possible contexts and origins of these texts. As this thesis deals with how metaphor can be used to elucidate certain *cultural concepts*, it is important to also outline here the author/audience framework I have in mind in the analysis of this corpus' vivid metaphorical language.

Much of the Old Babylonian Sumerian literature is concerned with kingship, war, appeasing angry gods, or hymns that praise deities; the intimacy of the Sumerian "Love Songs" is somewhat unique amongst this varied corpus.⁴⁶ Such poetic exploration of sexual love and intimacy, with the explicit focus on the expression of female desire and pleasure, is at odds with traditional interpretations that assume these texts depict scenes associated with the Sacred Marriage Ritual. As such, the erotic, different-sex relationships of the Sumerian "Love Songs" have been analysed as definitively serving the male partner, in the guise of the king. Primarily construed as a fertility ritual, the purpose of the Sacred Marriage has also been interpreted to operate as part of the king's coronation;⁴⁷ as a ritual deifying the king;⁴⁸ as providing an heir to the throne;⁴⁹ and as the king assuming the duties of the **en** of Uruk.⁵⁰ Even studies which consider the Sacred Marriage as a symbolic, metaphorical, and literary event interpret the actions of the texts either as divine blessings or a transferral of divine knowledge for the king,⁵¹: 'sexual imagery, whether a literary motif or a ritual performance, proves to be the basis for decreeing good destiny for the king' (Pongratz-Leisten 2008: 68). Yet the only two compositions amongst the corpus that explicitly state that Inanna will grant a long and propitious reign to the king following a sexual union are

⁴⁶ A similar observation was made by Fox in his study of the Egyptian love songs, 'these songs were transmitted and valued even though they do not speak of great issues of myth and religions, of questions of state of events of national history... They tell rather of individual feelings and private concerns' (Fox 1985: xix).

⁴⁷ Renger 1972-1975.

⁴⁸ Douglas van Buren 1944.

⁴⁹ Hallo 1987.

⁵⁰ Steinkeller 1999.

⁵¹ Kraus 1974; Pongratz-Leisten 2008.

Šulgi X (lines 36-41) and *Inanna-Dumuzi D1* (lines 33-46).⁵² The ‘outcome of the union’ in the compositions *Inanna-Dumuzi B, C, D, E, F, G, H, P, T, C1, F1*, the *Manchester Tammuz*, *Šu-Suen A, B*, and *C* rather involves mutual pleasure between the lovers, or specifically for the goddess.⁵³ By only seeing this corpus of erotic poetry as having ‘political-economic implications’ (Zisa 2023), placed within the context of the Sacred Marriage Ritual, much of the tenderness and sensuality that these texts possess is lost to a perspective that somewhat reinforces the stereotype of the despotic Middle Eastern ruler, only interested in power and domination. The reading of the metaphorical language of the “Love Songs” as domestication, control over, and passivity of the female body comes close to reiterating the Western perspective of the oppressed lives of women in the Middle East today.⁵⁴

Instead of restricting my interpretation of this corpus to their relationship with a purported enacted ritual in the service of the king, I would like to explore further the idea that elements of these compositions extend from the “popular” and even intimate world, specifically from poetry sung amongst women, an idea proposed by Jacobsen in 1976 (but generally dismissed). As pointed out by Meskell whilst discussing the ancient Egyptian love poetry, ‘romantic love is not necessarily the prerogative of a leisured class, nor does it

⁵² The extent of the praise for the king in *Iddin-Dagan A* is suspiciously short compared to the extensive praise following a sexual encounter with the goddess in *Šulgi X*; it is merely: ‘Iddin-Dagan, you are truly my beloved!’ (Line 194).

⁵³ An overview of the ‘outcome of the union’ is given for each text in Lapinkivi 2004: 30ff.

⁵⁴ This is a concern addressed by Abu-Lughod in the preface to the fifteenth anniversary edition of her book *Writing Women’s Worlds* (2008), in which she expresses her hope that the complexity she details of the lives of the Arab women in the Bedouin community may counter the very charged trope in the discourse of the twenty-first century of the “oppressed Muslim woman” (Abu-Lughod 2008: xiv). I am not suggesting that reading the female body of the “Love Songs” as controlled and domesticated comes close to the complexities and politicisation of how Middle Eastern Muslim women are represented by the West today. However, I think it is important not to assume that ancient Middle Eastern women also have to be interpreted as fitting so neatly into categories perpetuating patriarchy and oppression, particularly when the Sumerian “Love Songs” are devoted to the expression of female voice and desire. Abu-Lughod writes, ‘Such generalisations about constraining social structures rely on assumptions about agency and conformity that are at odds with the ways the women I write about seem to experience themselves’ (Abu-Lughod 2008: xv). That is to say that even where patrilineal structures are in place, such as in ancient Mesopotamia, women can still express feelings of love and intimacy, and representations of sexual relationships in love poetry need not reflect institutions and gendered structures of power.

require a complex society. It is not solely heterosexual, nor does it always lead to marriage. Romantic attachment is not intrinsically linked to capitalism, small families, sexual oppression, the cult of motherhood, or a quest for identity' (Meskell 2002: 127).

In other times and places, poetry is used to express intimacy, love, and eroticism. In her time spent with the Bedouin tribes of Egypt, anthropologist Abu-Lughod observed that poetry was recited in specific social contexts and was not 'an obscure art form set apart from daily life' (Abu-Lughod 1986: 28). Abu-Lughod found that, particularly amongst women of the Bedouin, poetry was exchanged that expressed love or sentiments that could not otherwise be explored in open conversation, due to social conventions of female modesty, 'poetry is the discourse of intimacy' (Abu-Lughod 1986: 234). The language of this poetry was deliberately 'obscure, the images condensed, and the referents ambiguous' (Abu-Lughod 1986: 27). No names were ever included that could identify the poet, addressee, or subject. Instead, the poems recalled a 'world of tradition', building new poetry and expressing intimate experiences using the 'heroes and heroines of love' (Abu-Lughod 1986: 240). The Bedouin women's poetry seemed to demonstrate a 'familiarity with a large corpus of poems'- 'even familiarity of ordinary images [...] derive great connotative richness from subliminal intertextual comparisons' (Abu-Lughod 1986: 173). This familiarity was not from *reading* such poems, but Abu-Lughod noted that the Bedouin poetry displayed great sensitivity to 'oral textual elements', such as sound and alliteration (Abu-Lughod 1986: 173).⁵⁵

It is not hard to imagine, I think, a comparable context for (at least) some of the Sumerian "Love Songs", and there are certain features of the Bedouin women's poems that

⁵⁵ I am grateful to Prof. M. Jaques for recommending the works of Abu-Lughod, that have greatly influenced and given structure to how I think we can read the voices of the Sumerian "Love Songs" in a different light to how they have been previously examined.

resonate with those found in the “Love Songs”. It has often been pointed out that the compositions in this corpus express, almost uniquely in the ancient world, a female perspective of love and eroticism (eg. Cooper 1989; Alster 1993), and outside of the liturgical corpus, are the Sumerian literary compositions that most frequently use Emesal. This thesis corroborates this observation; the eroticism present in this corpus is almost exclusively concerned with the *feminine* erotic experience. Like the poems of the Bedouin women, the abundance of metaphorical imagery in the Sumerian “Love Songs” often approaches obscurity. This is an element of how they formulate eroticism but could also be a way of *depersonalising* the intimacy they portray. This follows the line of thought of Alster, who observed that the names of the deities and kings of these poems were used to replace those of ordinary people (1985, 1993). As the archetypal loving couple, the Sumerian “Love Songs” evoke Inanna-Dumuzi (and sometimes a king) to express the poets’ own experiences of love, desire, and pleasure that were perhaps not permissible or appropriate to sing about oneself.⁵⁶ This draws on an enormous amount of connotative and intertextual imagery of the deities, particularly of the agricultural, fertile landscape.

The subscripts and rubrics of the “Love Songs”, as well as the Akkadian glosses, suggest that, at some point, this poetry, perhaps shared intimately amongst women or sung in certain social settings, such as weddings, was formalised, written down, studied, and perhaps performed to music. This likely took place in an elite setting. The sophisticated interaction of metaphors and allusions suggest that the “Love Songs” was poetry for a literate audience. Yet, the world that the “Love Songs” originated in could be from shared

⁵⁶ Whilst certain kinds of women in various places of early Mesopotamian history might have enjoyed certain levels of agency, including economic, it is clear that women were generally confined to the patrilineal household. Certainly, female sexual “promiscuity” of any kind in the Old Babylonian period was a disgrace, evident in the disputation poem *Two Women B*, in which a woman is accused of being a “whore” (**kar-ke4**) and brings her accuser to trial (Matuszak 2020).

expressions of intimacies amongst women.⁵⁷ To sing of gods and kings is a common feature of most folktales (for example, of the German folktales of the Brothers Grimm), and sharing these in a tavern or whilst working is not too far out of the question. The language of many of the “Love Songs” stems from everyday realities of southern Babylonia; beer, produce, textiles, and with a focus on the agricultural and pastoral worlds. This repertoire of imagery is also reflected in many ways in the working environments of women, who, in both a domestic and professional capacity, were involved in food-processing, weaving and textile production, as well as agricultural activities (Lion/Michel 2016).⁵⁸

As noted by Cunningham, the Sumerian “Love Songs” likely had a range of settings and functions, ritual or used in weddings, but also simply existed as a ‘poetic exploration of sexual love expressed in terms of complex interrelationship between the human and divine domains that typifies most Sumerian literature’ (2000: 107). Depictions of the intimacy, desire, and pleasure of gods/goddesses and the king/his wives in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, whether from within the court or in the popular mind, or even more specifically from amongst groups of women, imply that care for female pleasure and love was seen as an important dynamic of the divine, royal, and human worlds.

5. Content

⁵⁷ The question of whether the “Love Songs” were actually *written* onto the extant tablets by these women is not implausible but unprovable. Whilst women ‘had access to reading and writing that was comparable to men’s in the ways they used them’ (Lion 2011: 106), these activities were related to male-dominated domains. The issue of women’s writing in Mesopotamia is part of a larger, complex concept of ancient authorship and agency in general, for an overview see Halton/ Svärd 2017: 16-24. As part of an anthology of Mesopotamian women’s writing, the authors take a broad approach, and include ‘what women actually wrote (often debatable) [...] what ancient scribes thought women wrote or should have written [...] what modern scholars thought women wrote or should have written’ (Halton/ Svärd 2017: 32). When referring to the “Love Songs” as songs shared amongst women, I refer to a proposed original context, which perhaps did result in the compositions written by the women who produced them, but also could have been committed to clay by another, literate audience.

⁵⁸ Whilst agricultural activities such as ploughing are often treated as an irrevocably male action, realised in poetry as a metaphor for domestication/subjugation of the fertile land/female body (ie. Couto-Ferreira 2017; 2018; Zisa 2023), there is also evidence that women could be involved in such practices (see essays in Lion/Michel 2016).

It is difficult to generalise about any unifying content of the Sumerian “Love Songs”. Despite the fact that they are grouped here as a corpus of erotic poetry,⁵⁹ each text is quite unique and defies strict classification. One significant feature that these compositions *do* share is their use of the Emesal dialect, which occurs to varying degrees in female dialogue in nearly all of the compositions analysed in this thesis.⁶⁰ It is notable that Emesal occurs predominantly in literary texts which feature erotic content, even those compositions which might not be first categorised as a “love poem”; for example, in the famous “sacred marriage” section of the praise poem *Šulgi X* (lines 22-37); when Inanna asks Utu to help her learn about “women’s things” such as sex and kissing in the deity hymn *Utu E/F*; and in a hymn to Ninisina that depicts the goddess bathing herself in oils (*Ninisina B*, ETCSL 4.22.2).⁶¹

Previous attempts have differentiated the corpus based on the participants of the texts (the lovers are Inanna-Dumuzi, or the king and Inanna/his queen, or the lovers are unnamed),⁶² or the focus of the compositions on the courtship of Inanna-Dumuzi as opposed to those that depict their marriage (Sefati 1998: 94ff). Within these themes, there are motifs

⁵⁹ Some compositions that are traditionally treated as part of this corpus have outlying features that, I think, do not reconcile them as part of the erotic literary tradition and their analysis is excluded in this thesis. This includes *Inanna-Dumuzi J* (Alster 1985b) and “Source B” of *Inanna-Dumuzi R* (Sefati 1998: 241), which both seem, instead, to be more akin to lament narratives.

⁶⁰ There are two instances where a male speaker uses Emesal in the corpus. In one witness of *Inanna-Dumuzi A*, the god Utu responds to Inanna’s request for him to bring her warped flax with the Emesal (**ze2-a**), whilst in the other manuscript he uses the Emegir (**dun-na**). This is presumably a scribal mistake; the text as a whole is framed as Inanna and Utu repeating the desired actions back to one another, and usually it is Inanna who uses Emesal forms (eg. the verb **ir**) and Utu responds with the Emegir form (**de6**). In *Inanna-Dumuzi H*, Dumuzi switches to using the Emesal dialect when he is “speaking” as a woman, instructing Inanna how to lie to her mother about their meeting (lines 15ff). If anything, this example proves irrevocably that in the context of love literature, Emesal is used for the voices of women.

⁶¹ There are only three compositions that do *not* feature Emesal considered here, which raises questions about their relationship to the rest of the corpus. The first, *Inanna-Dumuzi V*, is broken after the first fifteen lines, so perhaps Emesal did occur in a lost part of this text. The second, *Inanna-Dumuzi J* also does not use Emesal vocabulary. As raised in footnote 59, I do not consider this text to be part of the tradition of the other “Love Songs”; its lack of Emesal therefore also makes it conspicuous. Finally, **HS 2940**, recently published and designated as a new love song by Krebernik (2020) also does not use Emesal. It is hesitantly included amongst the corpus analysed in this thesis for its use of pastoral imagery. Its subscript, “a shepherd-song of Dumuzi”, and its lack of female voice make it unique amongst the “Love Songs”.

⁶² Particularly Alster 1985a; Leick 1994: 66; Sefati 1998.

of dressing and adornment, the meeting of lovers, the interaction with various divine family members, foreplay and union of the lovers, as well as the general focus on their appearance and feelings, and the final outcomes of prosperity (Sefati 1998: 94ff; Attinger forthcoming).

Only a couple of further observations on the content of the “Love Songs” will be made here. It is possible to differentiate broadly songs belonging to two types.⁶³ Firstly, those that, despite subscripts that designate them as songs of Inanna (see above), feature no apparent divine setting or participants, where the focus is on the meeting of lovers, who praise each other with erotic metaphor. This includes *Inanna-Dumuzi B, C, D, E, G, O, Q, Y, FI*, and those with a courtly or elite setting such as *Šu-Suen A, B, C*, and *Šulgi Z*.

The second type is concerned with and set within the world of Inanna and Dumuzi. However, these deities display varying characteristics that affect the tone and content of the poems (Sefati 1998: 108ff; Zgoll 2006: 115). In texts like *Inanna-Dumuzi F, P, T, Z*, and *DI*, the couple function as powerful deities; the setting is the temple, and Inanna has divine authority over kingship. In other texts, such as *Inanna-Dumuzi A, H, V, CI, EI*, the *Manchester Tammuz*, and **HS 2940**, though the divine pair are named, the lovers of these compositions behave and are involved in activities that are very *human*, with their participants involved in domestic activities such as weaving (*Inanna-Dumuzi A*) or “meeting the parents” (*Inanna-Dumuzi H*).

As most of the “Love Songs” are arranged as dialogues between lovers, very rarely is their setting made explicit; however, allusions are often made to where the lovers may meet (or *wish* to meet). Such settings include gardens or orchards (*Inanna-Dumuzi A, FI, Šulgi Z*, the *Manchester Tammuz*); the female lover’s house (*Inanna-Dumuzi C, D, H, CI*); the riverbank (*Inanna-Dumuzi O*); or the sheepfold/cattlepen (*Inanna Dumuzi V, X, BI*,

⁶³ Unfortunately, there are a few Inanna-Dumuzi texts (*L, M, N, S, U*) that are too fragmentary and their content not possible to fully assess.

Išme-Dagan J). In only a handful of texts is reference made to specific temples as the lovers' meeting place: *Inanna-Dumuzi F* (the **Ekur**); *Inanna-Dumuzi P* (the **Enamtila**); *Inanna-Dumuzi T* (the **Eanna**); *Inanna-Dumuzi B1* (the **Eturkamma**); *Inanna-Dumuzi D1* (the **Etemeniguru, Eanna, Irigal**), and the *Manchester Tammuz* (the **Abzu**). Whilst there are references that indicate that the relationships of the "Love Songs" are to be placed within a marital setting,⁶⁴ there is a conspicuous lack of explicit references to any actual ceremony in the extant corpus. Those that come close to representing features of a wedding/ceremony are very different in style. In *Inanna-Dumuzi T*, Dumuzi meets Inanna at the door of the **gipar**, her abode in the **Eanna** temple (line 30). The tone of this text, in which the couple act explicitly as deities who meet at the temple, differs to that of *Inanna-Dumuzi C1*, in which the goddess hopes the "groomsmen" (**nigirsi/libirsi**) and Dumuzi will bring her abundant produce (lines 11-32), before her mother tells her to bathe and adorn herself (12-23), and she greets Dumuzi at her house. Though named as gods in this text, the setting and relationships are markedly "human" and could just as easily be set in the "real" world.

Smaller unifying characteristics can also create subsets of the corpus; for example, *Inanna-Dumuzi D, H, O* and *Inanna G* all begin with repeated pronominal conjugations, **di-da-gu₁₀-ne**, "As I was going..." (*Inanna-Dumuzi D*, 1-2; *Inanna-Dumuzi O*, 3; *Inanna G*, 1-15), or **u4 zal-la-gu₁₀-ne**, "As I passed the time" (*Inanna-Dumuzi H*, 1-3). Then there are those compositions that strongly feature pastoral imagery, whose content means they are tentatively treated as part of the erotic literary corpus. As Cunningham has previously highlighted, pastoral imagery in the Western poetic tradition often has erotic undertones, 'the songs' pastoral imagery is recurrent in Western poetry, with Elizabethan writers, for

⁶⁴ For example, because the lovers refer to one another regularly as **gidlam**, "spouse", or because of the presence of family members. The various scenes in which Inanna adorns herself also might refer to a rite performed before a marriage, as attested in an Old Babylonian text, **UET 5, 636** (see Greengus 1966). However, other attestations of this practice are only found in literary texts, such as the *Inanna-Dumuzi* songs.

example, personifying themselves as shepherds and referring to hills and fields in evocation of the female body' (Cunningham 2000: 106). Songs such as *Inanna-Dumuzi W, X, B1*, **HS 2940**, and *Išme-Dagan J* all feature pastoral activities of the shepherd and often a dialogue between Dumuzi and his sister/lover that could be construed as having layers of erotic *double entendre*.⁶⁵

These texts did not exist in a vacuum. The story of Inanna and Dumuzi occurs most frequently in the corpus of Emesal laments, as well as in other major literary compositions such as *Inanna's Descent* and *Dumuzi's Dream*.⁶⁶ The fact that the Sumerian "Love Songs" vary between lovers that are divine, human-like, or seemingly mortal, attests to the likelihood that these compositions were not all written for the same ritualistic purpose, but supports the view that they amalgamate moments from "myth" with "folk" songs and poetry; stories shared amongst women that reflect their own feelings and experiences, but sometimes borrow characters and motifs from the Inanna-Dumuzi cycle.

⁶⁵ Erotic content is not only limited to the Inanna-Dumuzi texts; passages in hymns that contain praise for deities, such as *Inanna G* and *H*, *Utu E/F*, and *Ninisina B*, all in their own way utilise metaphorical source domains found in many of the other compositions considered here to map onto erotic target domains. Finally, the well-known and unique composition *Message from Ludingira for his mother* contains equally suggestive language and imagery shared amongst the "Love Songs" in the description of "mother".

⁶⁶ Though the relationship between these different types of text that feature Inanna-Dumuzi is not discussed in this thesis, there is no doubt that they were intimately connected with each other and fed into a broader conceptual, oral tradition of these archetypal lovers. Much of the imagery in the "Love Songs" discussed in this thesis is also present in the cultic Emesal laments. In her work on the Book of Job, Southwood considers its connectedness with other biblical genres, such as lament, quoting the following passage that discusses the genre theory of Todorov; its sentiment expresses the likely relationship between the Emesal laments, love songs, and narrative literary texts of Inanna-Dumuzi: [every genre] 'is always defined against a constellation of neighbouring forms, and exists in a dynamic tension with them' (Konstan 2012: 29; qtd. Southwood 2021: 12).

1.3 Eroticism

One of the main explorations of this thesis is the way in which metaphorical creation and interaction assists and formulates eroticism in this corpus of early love poetry. The term “erotic” is almost deliberately allusive. From the Greek *eros*, the word typically denotes sexual desire and love, but can evoke something much more complex. For the Greek lyric poet Sappho, *eros* was ‘bittersweet’, in that there could be a pain or lack in the pleasure or desire of anticipating and experiencing romantic love (Carson 2023: 3). The eroticism felt and forged in the Sumerian “Love Songs” bears no explicit sign of such lack,⁶⁷ but it can be sensed to encompass a mixture of desire and the anticipation of receiving pleasure, as well as sexual allure and abundance. This section explores the mechanisms and emblems used to evoke the erotic in the world’s earliest love poetry.

Eroticism is created in literature and art not through the explicit representation of sex or body parts (Lorde 2019: 24; Steinem 1982) but is ‘established through the intersection of sense and imagination’ (Boodakian 2008: 39). That which is not fully seen but requires use of the senses is erotic. For Roland Barthes, ‘it is intermittence, as psychoanalysis has so rightly stated, which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance’ (Barthes 1990: 10). Erotic poetry employs metaphor as a tool in covering up what is explicit, of providing this intermittent flash of something more that requires being filled in by the senses and imagination. The rich, metaphorical language of the Sumerian “Love Songs” is titillating, in that it often couches the naked body or feelings of sexual

⁶⁷ Unlike in the Akkadian or Egyptian love poetry, where the theme of unreciprocated love is more present.

arousal, desire, and pleasure in imagery that draws upon and is conceptualised through other embodied senses. These images evoke the physicality and emotions of sexual experience by hinting at their sensation, through vision, taste, smell, and texture. This point is explored thoroughly throughout this thesis.

Other methods are employed in the “Love Songs” to create their erotic nature. This includes the outlining of the female body in dressing and adornment scenes, as explored more thoroughly in the chapter on Sexual Allure (3.3). In itemising the clothing and jewellery and where it is placed upon the female body, these passages draw the audience’s gaze head to toe over the body of the goddess without being explicit or pornographic. Eroticism is also felt in the very language of the poems; as discussed in the chapter on Sexual Desire (3.1), the repetitive and cumulative use of precative and cohortative verbal wish forms throughout the corpus enhances the lovers’ feelings of desire and want for pleasure. Such erotic sentiments such as allure/attraction, desire, and pleasure are encompassed in the Sumerian term, **hi-li**, which operates as a marker of eroticism. Significantly, amongst the Old Babylonian Sumerian literary corpus, this term is most prevalent in the “Love Songs”, as well as hymns to Inanna. In the “Love Songs”, the term **hi-li** clusters around its metaphorical imagery, imbuing it with eroticism. As an umbrella term for luxuriance, abundance, pleasure, joy, sexual attraction, and desire,⁶⁸ **hi-li** embodies the themes of the Sumerian “Love Songs”. Like the Greek concept of *aphrodisia*, in which action, desire, and pleasure work as an ensemble of intimately bound but distinguishable elements (Foucault 1984), **hi-li** as a concept in Sumerian seems to have constituted a *state* of attractiveness and

⁶⁸ Hruška suggested three varying meanings; firstly, as equivalent to Akkadian *riāšum*, *ḥašāšu*, or *ulšu* (and therefore with a semantic field of joy); secondly, with a meaning of abundance, parallel to **he2-gal2** or **giri17-zal**; and thirdly, as an ornament or wig (Hruška 1969: 497). However, Jaques argued that *riāšum* and its semantic field are not correct translations of **hi-li**. Instead, evident from grammatical, lexical and bilingual texts, the proper Akkadian equivalents are *kuzbu*, *menû* and maybe *neḥû* (Jaques 2006: 251ff), and therefore the term expresses luxuriance, abundance, charm, pleasure, joy, and sexual attraction.

desirability, which further bound it with emotions of desire and feelings of abundance, luxury, and pleasure. Its meaning seemingly shifts throughout the texts.

More concretely, **hi-li** operates as a wig in several compositions.⁶⁹ For example, in *Inanna's Descent*:

Inanna's Descent

ETCSL 1.4.1

18 hi-li sag-ki-na šu ba-ni-in-ti

She put a wig on her forehead.

In other texts, **hi-li** appears to refer both to an actual wig, but also to the attractiveness that the wig provides the wearer; for example, used as a simile in *Enki and the World Order*:

Enki and the World Order

ETCSL 1.1.3

34 ʾinim ʾ-zu ki-sikil-e hi-li-a-ni-gen⁷ sag-ga₂ mu-ni-in-gal₂

The young woman placed your word on her head like her allure/wig,

35 [iri^{ki}] gar-gar-ra-bi ug₃-e u₆ mu-e

(so that) the people of the settled cities admire her.

⁶⁹ See also *Gilgameš and Huwawa B*, ETCSL 1.8.1.5.1 line 154; *Ur Lament*, ETCSL 2.2.2 line 347; and *Hendursaga A*, ETCSL 4.06.1 line 76. Interestingly, in each of these texts **hi-li** as a wig is associated with the **gudu** priest (**gudu₄**, Sallaberger 2019; Steinkeller 2019; Charpin 2020). Löhnert argued that when **hi-li** is associated with the **gudu**, it should not designate a wig but retain its more abstract meanings of 'Reiz, Üppigkeit, Pracht, Sex-Appeal', and reference the essential function of the priest in ensuring fertility of the land through his relationship with the gods (Löhnert 2009: 341-2). It seems to me that **hi-li** can both signify the wig and produce its more abstract meanings. A similar phenomenon can be found with the term **gil-sa**, which likely originally had the meaning "jewellery", later extended to refer to the more abstract "treasure" in the Ur III period (see Dahl 2021: 49 and fn. 19).

It seems likely that the attractiveness of a wig produced the more abstract sense of **hi-li** as a term referring to sexual attraction,⁷⁰ often a feminine allure.⁷¹ As well as the state of attractiveness, the term **hi-li** is also certainly related to erotic emotions. In lexical lists and literary compositions, **hi-li** often precedes or follows **ša3** (Jaques 2006: 251), well-known as the bodily seat of emotions in ancient Mesopotamia. Both terms appear together in several texts in the “Love Songs”; for example, *Inanna-Dumuzi D*, line 5; *Inanna-Dumuzi I*, line 24; *Inanna-Dumuzi T*, line 47; and in *Šu-Suen C*, the male beloved is described as follows by his female lover:

Šu-Suen C

N 3560 (P278585)

21 igi-ga₂ lal₃-bi-im ša₃-ga₂ hi-li-bi-im

He is the honey of my eyes; he is the sexual delight of my belly!

Not only does this hint at her sexual attraction to the man, but it informs us that the sensation of **hi-li** could be felt as an emotion in the belly. Elsewhere, in a hymn to Ninlil, **hi-li** is described as physically *filling* the belly of her husband Enlil:

Ninlil A

ETCSL 4.24.1

24 ʾ me ʾ² giri₁₇-zal ša₃ hi-li sa₅-na gu₂-da ma-ra-ni-in-la₂

⁷⁰ See also the inscribed stone wig from the reign of Šulgi with the dedication: **hi-li nam-munus-ka-ni/mu-na-dim₂**, ‘he fashioned for her a wig of womanliness’ (Frayne, 1997: 216; P226717). Given the many metaphors for the male and female beloved’s hair in the “Love Songs”, it was clearly a focal point of attraction and beauty (see chapter 3.3). Inanna’s hair in *Šu-Suen C* is given the name ‘let him come!’ (see chapter 2.3).

⁷¹ For example, in *Inanna and Enki*, ETCSL 1.3.1 I line 95, **umuš ki ga₂-ga₂ hi-li nam-munus-e-ne ba-<e-de₆>**, ‘you have brought the founding of plans(?) and the delights of women’; in *Inanna D*, ETCSL 4.07.4 line 194, **ʾ inanna ʾki-sikil hi-li-a-gen₇ u₆-e ša-ba-ab-gub-be₂**, ‘Inanna, you stand to be admired, like an alluring young woman’. This is not to say that men or male gods cannot also be attributed with **hi-li**; in *Gudea A*, ETCSL 2.3.2 line 17 the king as the shepherd is chosen for his **hi-li**.

In his belly filled with sexual delight, he embraced the abundant powers for you!

As an abstract emotion, **hi-li** not only *fills* the body, but it is also something conceived of as being carried or worn. It appears with the verbal root **gur₃-ru** frequently elsewhere in Old Babylonian literature,⁷² used to convey desirability and beauty:⁷³

Išme-Dagan M

ETCSL 2.5.4.13

27 u₄-sakar dalla e₃-a hi-li gur₃-ru u₆ di du₁₀-ga-zu-še₃

Bright, rising crescent moon, alluring, because of your sweet sight,

28 nin gal ki-ur₃-ra ama ^dnin-lil₂ X-ra hul₂-la mu-ni-ib-DU

The great lady of Kiura, Mother Ninlil...rejoicing...

In the Sumerian literary corpus, **hi-li** is also the object of the verbal root **du₈**,⁷⁴ and so situated as something that can be heaped up:⁷⁵

Inanna B

ETCSL 4.07.2

147 u₄ ba-an-na-du₁₀ la-la ba-an-su₃-su₃ hi-li ma-az ba-an-du₈-du₈

ba (MM)- n.na (3SG+DAT)- sweet- Ø ba (MM)- ni (LOC)- long (RDPL)- Ø

⁷² Amongst many examples, *Ur-Namma C*, ETCSL 2.4.1.3 line 4; *Šulgi C*, ETCSL 2.4.2.03 line 31; *Ur-Ninurta A*, ETCSL 2.5.6.1 line 79; *Bau A*, ETCSL 4.02.1 B line 9; *Nanna A*, ETCSL 4.13.01 line 57; *Hoe and Plough*, ETCSL 5.3.1 line 42; *Ezinam and Ewe*, ETCSL 5.3.2 line 50; *Ludingira*, ETCSL 5.5.1 line 31.

⁷³ **hi-li gur₃**^{ru} « être plein d'attraits, de grâce » (Attinger 2021 : 453).

⁷⁴ For example, *Enlil and Sud*, ETCSL 1.2.2 Section A line 6; *Lugalbanda and the Mountain Cave*, ETCSL 1.8.2.1 line 299; *Inanna B*, ETCSL 4.07.2 line 147; *Ezinam and Ewe*, ETCSL 5.3.2 line 48; *Ludingira*, ETCSL 5.5.1 line 25.

⁷⁵ **hi-li du₈** « être revêtu de charmes, être plein de charmes, dégager le charme » (Attinger 2021 : 275).

The day was sweet for her, delight was long-lasting, allure and desire heaped up there!

The compound verb **hi-li te/TE.A (kar)**, equated with Akkadian *menû*, to love, be attracted (to someone/something), also positions sexual delight/desire as an exterior entity to the body or an object. When it comes to the “Love Songs”, the verb in *Šu-Suen B* is used to convey the desire the man feels for the female speaker.⁷⁶

Šu-Suen B

Ist Ni 2461 (P343111)

15 **mu-ti-in ma-ra** hi-li mu-e-TE.A

Man, you are attracted to me!

Just as it can be worn, carried, and heaped up, to have attraction for something is conceived as the approach towards **hi-li**, used with the verb **te**. This exteriority of **hi-li** creates an eroticism based on its impermanence; its construction in Sumerian as an exterior entity suggests that **hi-li** was not *fixed* upon an object/subject. As explored above, the erotic is often ephemeral, titillating precisely because it is something that might be temporary and intermittent.

hi-li is often connected with sweetness and pleasure in the “Love Songs”. This is explicit in *Inanna-Dumuzi B*, where the refrain **hi-li-zu ze2-ba-am3**, ‘your allure is sweet’ occurs throughout lines 27-32 of the text; where it relates to the adjective **du10-ga** in *Inanna-Dumuzi F*, line 34 (see chapter 2.4); and with **lal3** and **ku7-ku7-da** in *Šu-Suen B* (see chapter 2.1). The sense of pleasure attached to the concept of **hi-li** is associated with hunger and eating as sexual metaphor, as it is also generally linked with the lusciousness of fruit and the

⁷⁶ See the verb also in *Inanna-Dumuzi A*, lines 6 and 7.

abundance of plants,⁷⁷ as well as the pleasures of the lap.⁷⁸ In Enlil and Sud, **hi-li** is used as a verb explicitly to express the god’s sexual pleasure:

Enlil and Sud

ETCSL 1.2.2

B. 8 ^den-lil₂ gidlam-a-ni geš-a-ni X im-mi-ni-nir mu-ni-ib-**hi-li-**hi-li****

Enlil penetrated his wife, experiencing much pleasure.

What this overview of the term **hi-li** demonstrates is that emotions of desire and pleasure, as well as allure/a state of attraction, and abundance were conceived of as an intertwining and interacting concept in Sumerian that can be labelled as “eroticism”. This concept was structured through the senses (of sight, **hi-li** as a wig; or taste, **hi-li** as “sweet”) and embodied action (**hi-li** as something worn, carried, approaching, or filling the body). In the Sumerian “Love Songs”, the term has a close relationship with many metaphorical source domains that map onto precisely the target domains that **hi-li** as a concept encompasses: desire, pleasure, allure, and abundance. It therefore operates as a key emblem of eroticism throughout the corpus.

It is quite clear that the metaphorical language of the Sumerian “Love Songs” is erotic. However, exploring the mechanisms of how this eroticism is expressed has not been approached in regard to this corpus, where discussion of their metaphor has, even more recently, focused on how it is framed by discourses of power and domestication of the female body in the context of a Sacred Marriage Ritual (see discussion in chapter 1.2). Reading the

⁷⁷ As, for example, in *Rim-Sîn F*, ETCSL 2.6.9.6 line 30; the *Hymn to Inanna*, ETCSL 4.07.a line 29 and 46; *Temple Hymns* ETCSL 4.80.1 line 199, to Eanna of Kulaba, **gibil gurun-na si₁₂-ga u₆ di hi-li gur₃-ru**, ‘green fresh fruit, admirable, luscious’.

⁷⁸ As in *Išme-Dagan I*, ETCSL 2.5.4.09 line 94, **hi-li nig₂ ku₇-ku₇-da ur₂ ku₃**; See also *Inanna D*, ETCSL 4.07.4 line 99, **ur₂ gidlam-za^d dumu-zi-da-ke₄ hi-li- hi-li-a-zu-ne**, ‘As you pleasure the lap of your spouse, of Dumuzi’.

Sumerian “Love Songs” within the framework of *eros* and eroticism allows us to read these poems for what they express, not what purpose they served. Moreover, reading these compositions as erotic poetry allows for an analysis that does not focus on the ways in which female desire was used as a precursor to (Sacred) marriage, fertility, or reproduction, but instead proceed with an analysis that can focus on the conceptualisation of (female) desire and pleasure in and of itself.

1.4 Theory

This thesis proposes taking an approach to metaphor in Sumerian literature borrowed from cognitive linguistics, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, that understands abstract concepts as being mapped from embodied experiences. As the Sumerian “Love Songs” deal explicitly with human embodiment, namely sex, desire, and physical pleasure, Conceptual Metaphor Theory offers a theoretical framework for uncovering aspects of the human sexual and erotic experience in the early second millennium BCE through analysis of the texts’ metaphorical language. This section will outline the pertinent components of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, before defining how this thesis uses terminology related to metaphorical language. I will then outline the theoretical approach to gender and “sexuality” taken in this thesis.

1. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

The traditional understanding of metaphor is that it has an ‘X is Y’ structure (M. Black 1962: 31). However, this view focuses on metaphor only as ‘linguistic phenomena’ (Semino and Steen 2008: 234) and considers it as a decoration or a deviation from what might be seen as true, literal, and objective meaning (M. Black 1962: 34).⁷⁹ Cognitive linguists have since argued that meaning is dependent on human experience within their own cultural frameworks and is thus subjective (Johnson 1987: xi-xii). It is argued that ‘literality is not a default feature of thought’ (Kövecses 2006: 183), and, in fact, according to cognitive science, ‘the distinction between literal and metaphorical language is rarely, if ever, reflected

⁷⁹ Traditional approaches to the nature of meaning saw it as objective and excluded the human imagination or experience from what was ‘literal’ or ‘true’ (Johnson 1987: x-xiii). In this approach, meaning is the relationship between words or images and ‘reality’, which is objective and thus ‘mind-independent’ (Johnson 1987: xxii). This understanding of meaning considers metaphor as entirely separate from the literal.

in a qualitative change in the psychological processes involved in processing language’ (Rumelhart 1993: 72).

In the 1980s, Lakoff and Johnson’s now seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* proposed a conceptual theory of metaphor, which argued that many everyday concepts are constructed metaphorically from embodied experiences, which are then projected onto abstract domains of experience in order for them to be understood (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; 1999). Conceptual metaphor ‘allows conventional mental imagery from sensorimotor domains to be used for domains of subjective experience’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 45) and is structured as a ‘systematic set of correspondences between two domains of experience’ (Kövecses 2020: 2). This argument surpassed the traditional idea that metaphor is only based on similarity and used exclusively as a literary device to this effect. Instead, our whole conceptual system is constructed as a metaphorical conceptual system. The following overview gives the pertinent components and terminology of Conceptual Metaphor Theory that is applied to the Sumerian “Love Songs” in this thesis.

2. Embodiment

Embodiment theory argues that our physical interaction with the world is what shapes our understanding (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 25; Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 45; Gibbs 2005: 66; Kövecses 2006: 117-118): ‘Our reality is shaped by the patterns of our bodily movement, the contours of our spatial and temporal orientation, and the forms of our interactions with objects’ (Johnson 1987: xix). Instead of an objective view of reality, an embodied understanding of meaning sees cognition formed by the interaction with the physical and cultural environment (Gibbs 2005: 66; Maalej and Yu 2011; Hampe 2017: 13). The embodied experience therefore helps to structure an experience that is abstract, such as emotions (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 25; Kövecses 2010). Johnson argued that meaning, the

‘embodied, imaginative understanding’ of experience, is structured by both ‘image schema’ and metaphor (Johnson 1987: xiv). He defines an image schema as a ‘recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programmes that gives coherence and structure to our experience’ (Johnson 1987: xiv). Metaphor uses these image schemata, patterns obtained through physical embodied experience, and projects them in order to ‘organise our more abstract understanding’ (Johnson 1987: xv).⁸⁰ In this way, it has been argued that ‘human thought processes are largely metaphorical’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 6).

3. Source and Target Domains

One of the main mechanisms of the theory of conceptual metaphor is the idea of ‘domains of experience’, also called frames, schemas, or (experiential) *gestalts*, which ‘all designate a coherent organisation of human experience’ (Kövecses 2006: 64). A domain is ‘a structured mental representation of a conceptual category’ (Kövecses 2006: 64). Metaphors ‘map’ between a ‘source’ domain and a ‘target’ domain. The source domain is typically physical and experienced bodily, whilst the target domain is abstract.⁸¹ For example, in English, we use the common metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, whereby LIFE is the target domain and JOURNEY is the source domain. The physical elements of making a journey, such as having a physical destination, a distance covered, physical obstacles, and the human

⁸⁰ An important example of this is the image schema of VERTICALITY. This is a shared, embodied human experience, originating from our standing upright, which creates our UP-DOWN orientation (Johnson 1987: xiv). From the VERTICALITY schema stems the metaphor MORE IS UP, “*prices rose*”, “*stocks plummeted*”. It is natural for us to assume that MORE is understood as UP because of physical interactions such as the filling of a container, or the piling up of objects, where the levels of such substances go UP (Johnson 1987: xv; Lakoff and Johnson 1999:45).

⁸¹ Most recently, Kövecses has proposed an extended version of conceptual metaphor that revisits some aspects of the theory that were originally unaccounted for (Kövecses 2020). One aspect that Kövecses focuses on is the fact that ‘conceptual metaphor theory relies heavily on the abstract-concrete division’ of the source and target domains (Kövecses 2020: 22). Kövecses aims to show that many ‘concrete’ concepts that might be expected to work as source domains, such as the sense of smell, are in fact also conceptualised metaphorically. This argument indicates that metaphor is an even more active part of cognition than initially proposed by conceptual metaphor theory.

experience of being a traveller all ‘map’ onto the abstract domain of LIFE, where we see ourselves as having purpose, progression along a path, obstacles (in life), and ‘leading’ a life (Kövecses 2006: 116-117).

4. Mapping

Metaphorical ‘mapping’ is the set of basic correlations between the source and target domains. Another example used widely by cognitive linguists is the metaphor ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER, seen in expressions such as “*boil with anger*” (Kövecses 2006: 123; Gibbs 2005: 86; Short 2018a: 17). Within this conceptual metaphor are correlations (metaphorical mapping) between the source and target domains, such as:

‘The physical container → the angry person’s body

The hot fluid inside the container → the anger

The degree of fluid heat → the intensity of the anger

The cause of increase in fluid heat → the cause of anger’ (Kövecses 2006: 123).⁸²

5. Entailments

Entailments comprise the metaphor and expand upon what is mapped from source to target domain. For example, Lakoff and Johnson explore the metaphor TIME IS MONEY, and note this metaphor works as a system in which multiple ‘entailments’ comprise the metaphor; some entailments refer to money (“*How do you **spend** your time these days*”), some to limited resources (“*You’re **running out of time***”), and others to commodities (“*I*

⁸² A similar metaphor where bodily heat maps onto anger is also present in Akkadian sources, where a hot belly/liver expresses rage. For example, in the Assyrian Annals, King Aššurbanipal states: *lib₃-bi e-gug-ma iṣ-ša-ru-uḥ ka-bit-ti*, ‘My heart was enraged, and my liver became hot’ (RINAP 05: 011 i.64).

lost a lot of time when I got sick”). Sometimes various entailments can correspond (“*You don’t use (commodity) your time profitably (money)*”) (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 8-9).

6. Metaphorical Structuring

Significant to the theory of conceptual metaphor is the idea of partial metaphorical structuring, by which only certain aspects of either the source or target domain comprises the metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson argue that this is logical, because if the metaphorical structuring were total, ‘one concept would actually *be* the other, not merely understood in terms of it’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 13). Multiple conceptual metaphors can be linked to structure a certain concept. Lakoff and Turner note that ‘sometimes metaphors are related to one another not because they are special cases of some more general metaphor or because they map onto the same target but because they have the same grounding in everyday experience of common place knowledge’ (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 88-89).

7. Primary and Complex Metaphor

The theory makes a distinction between primary (or conventional) and complex metaphors. Primary metaphors are built from basic human sensorimotor experiences (Gibbs 2005: 78; Grady and Ascoli 2017). A compound or complex metaphor is derived by multiple primary metaphors (Gibbs 2005: 79). Abstract concepts, such as emotions, are usually structured by multiple metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 70). This can either be through what Kövecses calls ‘scope of the source’, by which the source domain is applied to more than one target, or, through the ‘range of the target’, by which the target is attached to multiple sources (Kövecses 2006: 120-121). A common example of a complex metaphor is ‘love’, which in English has over twenty source domains, such as ‘journey’, ‘war’, ‘fire’ and ‘game’ (Kövecses 2006: 121). Example target domains such as these, including ‘anger’, are largely understood metaphorically in most languages. Lakoff and Johnson argued that this

‘clustering’ of metaphors around an abstract target domain reflects the fact that these concepts are inherently and cognitively understood metaphorically (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; 1999; Short 2018a: 16).

8. Metaphor and the Analysis of Culture

The study of conceptual metaphor is an important tool in the study of culture, particularly of cultural symbols (Kövecses 2006: 136; Winter/Matlock 2017). This is because the study of culture analyses the ‘frames’ or ‘domains’ of experience, which are ‘not only cognitive but cultural constructs’ (Kövecses 2006: 64-69). As these domains are culturally constructed, they are shared or varied cross-culturally.

Of course, just because the creation of metaphors stems from the human embodied experience, does not mean that these experiences and corresponding metaphors are universal, nor are they necessarily all entirely varied. It has been shown that conceptual metaphors are certainly culturally dependent (Kövecses 2005). On a generic level, different cultures can share primary metaphors, but all show variation with regards to specific content, whether that be the variation in source or target domains or both (Kövecses 2005: 11, 69). Kövecses 2005 demonstrates that metaphors for ANGER are generically universal across modern, independent language communities, such as Chinese, Hungarian, Zulu and Wolof (Kövecses 2005: 36-40). For the study of ancient culture, the theory is significant as it treats conceptual metaphor as fundamental to the structuring of human conceptual systems, construed through the embodiment of image schemata. It is therefore culturally dependent and can reveal much about cultural symbols and understanding.⁸³

⁸³ In his application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory to Latin texts, Short argues ‘image schema theory provides exactly the sort of language-independent, “etic” framework of analysis that can enable an “emic” accounting of Latin speakers’ conceptual system’ (Short 2018a: 29). Elsewhere, Short defines this as an “experience-near” approach to the study of the ancient world: ‘an “experience-near” perspective, as we know, privileges native ways of knowing and of representing the world, rather than as concepts belonging to the observer’s own cultural framework’ (Short 2018b: 61).

9. Metaphor and Literature

Even in literary contexts, metaphor is never an ‘arbitrary fanciful projection’ since it is constrained by ‘concrete bodily experience’ (Johnson 1987: xv). The use of metaphor in literature is therefore an elaboration, extension, questioning, or a combination of conceptual metaphors that structures everyday thought (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 9-10, 67; Semino and Steen 2008: 236). Metaphor within literature also has the potential to move within ‘frames of reference’, whereby a metaphor does not have to be ‘defined or presented in full in a text; they may simply be named, referred to, hinted at, or evoked through some of their details’ (Harshav 2007: 40). Multiple entailments and complex metaphorical structuring, as well as the way metaphor can evoke certain domains within frames of reference, accounts for the ambiguity and polyvalency identified in the Sumerian “Love Songs” (see above).

10. Defining Metaphor

In this thesis, ‘metaphor’ is used as an umbrella term to also refer to various processes related to metaphorical language, all considered as operating on a spectrum of metaphorical expression.⁸⁴ This includes ‘simile’,⁸⁵ which is typically defined as a separate phenomenon from metaphor.⁸⁶ Such a broad definition of metaphor allows for a more fluid and far-

⁸⁴ In particular, metaphors for the genitals might be considered as further acting euphemistically (as Quick has pointed out, for example, in the Hebrew bible, see Quick 2020). However, the term ‘euphemism’ is not employed in this thesis, as it implies a covering up of something conceptualised by a culture as offensive or taboo. There is no evidence that this is the reason why metaphors are commonly employed for describing the male and female bodies in the Sumerian “Love Songs”; it is more likely a tactic for forming eroticism (see chapter 1.3).

⁸⁵ Another related device that is subsumed in this thesis under the term ‘metaphor’ is metonymy. Conceptual Metaphor Theory considers metonymy as ‘within-domain’ mapping, whereby an aspect of a domain is understood with respect to an aspect of the same domain (Kövecses 2006: 100-106). Metonymy is a vital process in the construction of a conceptual metaphor, working on a continuum and acting as ‘the link between bodily experience and metaphor in the mapping process from concrete experience to abstract concepts’ (Maalej and Yu 2011: 9; Yu 2007: 388).

⁸⁶ For Lakoff and Turner, even the ‘grammar school distinction’ between metaphor (A is B) and simile (A is like B) is insufficiently bound to figurative language as a linguistic phenomenon:

‘This attempt to define metaphor in terms of syntactic form misses entirely what metaphor is about: the understanding of one concept in terms of another. Statements of both forms can employ conceptual metaphor. The kind called a simile simply makes a weaker claim...On the whole, the syntactic form of an utterance has little, if anything, to do with whether metaphor is involved in comprehending it’ (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 133).

reaching analysis of metaphorical language in the Sumerian “Love Songs”. It perceives metaphor as a system of interactions between concepts that does not rely on comparison, identifiable only by grammatical components (ie. **-gen7**, ‘like’). The associated embodied actions, experience and conceptual framework of images are woven throughout the corpus. This approach to metaphor means that an image can also evoke metaphorical meaning, even where the image might be in “literal” use in the text. Whilst this illuminates many more instances of metaphor used throughout the “Love Songs” than already commented upon by other scholars (see above), this approach also aims to demonstrate how metaphorical imagery was used to structure much larger conceptual domains, related to human sexual experience.

11. Gender and Sexuality

This thesis deals with representations and constructs related to gender and the gendered sexual experience. Recent studies of gender and sexuality in the ancient Middle East have sought to appropriately apply gender theory, after criticisms of earlier research, particularly on women in the ancient Mesopotamian world, simply identified where women appeared in the archaeological and textual record (Bahrani 2001; Svärd 2015; Svärd/Garcia-Ventura 2018; Budin/Cifarelli et al 2018).⁸⁷ These studies mainly work within the frameworks laid out by Foucault and Butler, that identified the cultural constructivism of sexuality and gender.⁸⁸ It is now well-accepted that “sexuality” is not a constant concept that can be appropriately applied as an aspect of identity before the 19th century AD.⁸⁹ Gender is also a highly scripted cultural and social practice, an iterative performance which in its imitation of its own ideals produces ‘the effect of being natural’.⁹⁰ These theoretical approaches and

⁸⁷ Overviews of the study of women, sex and gender in Assyriology has already been produced several times recently (Bahrani 2001; Svärd 2015; Garcia-Ventura/Zisa 2017; Svärd/Garcia Ventura 2018).

⁸⁸ Foucault 1984; Butler 1990; 1993.

⁸⁹ Foucault 1984: 35. Halperin 1990: 16.

⁹⁰ Richardson 2000: 25; Butler 1990, 1993.

their application to Mesopotamian sources have been described at length elsewhere (see particularly Bahrani 2001).

The Sumerian “Love Songs” give detailed depictions of what once might have been referred to as “sexuality”. However, after Foucault, it is evident that “sexuality” as an organised concept encompassing aspects of identity, direction of desire, and the sexual experience is anachronistic in the ancient world. Instead, this thesis identifies that what is metaphorically constructed in the “Love Songs” through interacting and embodied imagery is the complex concepts of desire, pleasure, allure, and abundance - all aspects of eroticism. The “Love Songs” also present vivid imagery of the gendered human body and the lovers of these compositions are further gendered through speech,⁹¹ dress, and social dynamics.⁹² Feminist scholarship has argued that the body is an important site in which to read socially and culturally constructed markers of identity.⁹³ The way that a body is conceptualised to operate, to look, to experience, and how a body is represented in iconographic and textual sources can reveal cultural conceptions surrounding what it meant to be male or female. In its discussion of desire, pleasure, allure, eroticism, gender, female/male, feminine/masculine, this thesis reads these concepts also as culturally inscribed platforms, assuming that erotic experiences and bodies are artefacts to be analysed for how they reflect the ‘cultural poetics’ of societies.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ie. the use of Emesal for the female speakers.

⁹² Though the couples of the Sumerian “Love Songs” are always different-sex partners, I do not apply the term “heterosexual” to describe these relationships. Using modern labels such as “homosexual” to describe the direction of sexual desire of people of the past is anachronistic; sexual preference and behaviour was not how identity or gender was organised (Halperin 1990). The label of “heterosexuality”, then, to describe ancient people must be equally anachronistic. The term “heterosexuality” also invokes particular modern cultural connotations of penetrative intercourse, marriage, domesticity, parenting, and even the oppression of women (Rich 1980; Jackson 2004; Lochrie 2005).

⁹³ ‘The body must be regarded as a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution. The body is not opposed to culture [...] it is itself a cultural, *the* cultural, product’ (Grosz 1994: x)

⁹⁴ Halperin/Winkler/Zeitlin 1990:4.

1.5 Methodology

The analysis of Old Babylonian Sumerian metaphor, and literature in general, involves tackling certain theoretical and methodological difficulties. It is necessary to deal with the cultural, chronological, and geographical distance between the modern day and the time of writing; ancient texts with no certain, identifiable author or audience; and an archaeological context possibly removed from the composition history of the texts.⁹⁵ Moreover, there are philological uncertainties in the understanding of Sumerian grammar and lexicon; and it is inevitable that modern analysis brings subjective judgments and interpretations of a text's figurative language. Some of these challenges are insurmountable, but modern theories of metaphor offer pragmatic frameworks for approaching an otherwise elusive topic. In this section, I will outline the methods adopted in this thesis for identifying and analysing metaphor in the Sumerian "Love Songs": the 'Metaphor Identification Procedure' and Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

1. Identifying Metaphor: Pragglejaz and the MIP

Approaches to the study of metaphor are similarly plagued with difficulties. Since Aristotle's *Poetics*, but especially since the mid-20th century there have been numerous attempts to understand the mechanisms of metaphor. Whilst Aristotle wrote that 'Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else' (Aristotle, 21, 1457b1-30), modern metaphor theoreticians have tried to uncover how the device of metaphor is

⁹⁵ In trying to analyse the unique situation of Sumerian literature, its lack of clear author, performer, reader, or context, it is necessary to straddle several theoretical approaches to literary interpretation. In terms of modern literary criticism, these problems lie within the realms of Formalism and New Criticism - theories which are concerned with the text as an object, authorial intent, and construction of meaning (Davis/Womack 2002). Both methods focus their analysis within the boundaries of the text-object, and also allow for a post-modernist attitude of subjective interpretation, especially significant for the analysis of figurative language as undertaken here, 'there can be no single reading of a work' (Davis/Womack 2002: 37). This is important for the analysis of Sumerian literature, which generally has been hesitant to engage critically and theoretically with Sumerian literary compositions (J.A. Black 1998: 7-9).

able to transfer meaning in such a way that we can comprehend its intention. Furthermore, as John R. Searle puts it, the field has searched for the answer to the question: ‘Why do we use expressions metaphorically instead of saying exactly and literally what we mean?’ (Searle 1993: 83).

However, whilst the mechanisms of *how* a metaphor operates have been studied extensively, it is still often difficult to simply *identify* a metaphor, even in modern texts.⁹⁶ In the first extensive study of metaphor in Sumerian literature, Wolfgang Heimpel noted the difficulty of accessing and interpreting its figurative imagery (Heimpel 1968: 15-16). There are indeed several major concerns with the identification of metaphor in Sumerian texts; namely, they are, for the most part, grammatically unmarked, which can mean the line between the literal and the metaphorical is not clearly or obviously demarcated.⁹⁷ For example, beer is used as a metaphor for female sexual arousal in both lines from the following texts, though this is only grammatically apparent in the first:

Šu-Suen A

Ist Ni 2463 (P345315)

20 kaš-a-ni-gen₇ gal₄-la-ni ze₂-ba-am₃/ kaš-a-ni ze₂-ba-am₃

Like her beer, her vulva is sweet/ her beer is sweet!

Inanna-Dumuzi B

Ist Ni 2489 (P345323)

⁹⁶ It should be noted that, in the future, large language models (LLM) such as Chat GPT will likely be able to aid in the identification of metaphor. Currently, LLMs are able to identify and understand simple metaphor in modern languages, ‘but their accuracy and comprehension may vary based on the complexity and context of the metaphor’; moreover, their proficiency in identifying metaphors in an ancient language like Sumerian is currently limited (OpenAI. "ChatGPT." [https://chat.openai.com/c/f1133065-d3cb-4e14-b91d-19ff2db02456]. Accessed [27/10/2023].

⁹⁷ Wilcke 1976: 210-212.

7 nin₉-gu₁₀ še-za kaš-bi in-du₁₀ ka la₃ ʾ ama ʾ-na- gu₁₀

My sister, the beer of your barley is sweet! My honey-mouth of her mother!

Whilst it is evident that in *Šu-Suen A* a beer is likened metaphorically to the vulva, marked with the equative **-gen₇**, a further process of identification is required to comprehend the metaphoricity of beer in *Inanna-Dumuzi B* (see chapter 2.5).

The identification of metaphor in everyday language and literature of all languages is often an intuitive and subjective process (Pragglejaz 2007: 2, 25). That is why, in 2007, a group of metaphor theoreticians known as the ‘Pragglejaz Group’ proposed a pragmatic methodology for identifying whether a word or image was metaphorical, the ‘Metaphor Identification Procedure’ (MIP). This responded to a problem within metaphor research that involved the lack of specificity over what a metaphor *is*, combined with the intuitive and empirical approach taken in the identification of a metaphor:

Metaphor scholars often do not provide criteria in their empirical investigations for specifying what is, and what is not, metaphorical, and not surprisingly focus on different aspects of metaphorical language depending on their own theoretical orientation and research purpose. Variability in intuitions, and lack of precision about what counts as a metaphor, makes it quite difficult to compare different empirical analyses. More important, the lack of agreed criteria for metaphor identification complicates any evaluation of theoretical claims about the frequency of metaphor, its organization in discourse, and possible relations between metaphoric language and metaphoric thought (Pragglejaz 2007: 1-2).

Whilst the Pragglejaz Group’s focus is on metaphor in modern English discourse, their approach is useful in thinking about how to identify metaphors in Sumerian texts. Consider the following:

Our procedure adopts a maximal, and not a minimal, approach such that a wide range of words may be considered as conveying metaphorical meaning based on their use in context. We require that a clear decision be made about whether a word conveys, or does not convey, a metaphorical meaning, although we recognize that words, and language more generally, differ in the degree to which they express metaphoricity. Although we make no claims as to whether actual writers or speakers intended their specific words to express metaphorical meanings, our procedure may be viewed as providing a reliable research method for determining whether words in contexts convey metaphorical meaning (Pragglejaz 2007: 2).

Of importance here is the emphasis on the use of a word or phrase *in context* to determine its metaphoricity, rather than relying on elements not always discernible from Sumerian literature, such as authorial intent or a specific grammatical element to signify metaphorical meaning. For example, the contextual meaning of **lal3** in administrative documents does not bear the same sexual connotations that it has in the erotic, poetic context of the “Love Songs” and other literary texts (chapter 2.1).

The MIP intends to counter the traditional, intuitive way of deciding upon the metaphoricity of a word and to introduce some reliability into a process which is inherently subjective (Pragglejaz 2007: 25). The procedure is as follows:

1. Read the entire text-discourse to establish general meaning
2. Determine the lexical units in the text-discourse
3. (a) for each lexical unit, establish its meaning in context

(b) for each lexical unit, determine if it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts ie. more concrete, related to bodily action, more precise, historically older.

(c) if the lexical unit has a more basic current-contemporary meaning in other contexts than the given context, decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it

4. If yes, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical (Pragglejaz group 2007:3ff).

The main task is to contrast contextual meaning with basic meaning. Particularly important is to not only rely on the intuition and subjective judgement of an individual analyst, but to ‘consult external resources’ which can be used as a ‘frame of reference to check individual intuitions’ (Pragglejaz 2007: 25). The checking of external sources for the basic meaning of a word is naturally part of the philological analysis of the Sumerian language (see Powell 1978: 165ff), but it can also be used to advantage in the determining of the metaphoricity and the metaphorical conceptualisation of a word or image in its context.

Therefore, in this thesis, consulting external sources to the Sumerian “Love Songs” in order to determine the basic meaning, frame of reference, or source domain of a word or image is the initial step in analysing metaphorical conceptualisation. This will mainly involve the way that a word or image is employed in one “Love Song” compared to other texts in the corpus, but also the Old Babylonian Sumerian literary corpus more widely. The primary source of comparison will be from other Sumerian literature of the Old Babylonian period, with the view that this corpus will be drawing from similar ‘frames of reference’ (see above). Beyond this, comparison with Akkadian literature, lexical texts, and cross-cultural material will all be varyingly utilised to understand how a conceptual source or target domain is built.⁹⁸ It is, however, not the main aim of this thesis to compare metaphor from

⁹⁸ When using comparative material from elsewhere in the ancient Near East, the appropriateness of making parallels must be approached with caution. See Lawson Younger (2003) on the ‘contextual method’, which ‘seeks to observe both comparisons as well as contrasts in the literature of the ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible’ (Lawson Younger 2003: xxxvii). Lawson Younger acknowledges the important contribution that a comparative approach can have to literary analysis (Lawson Younger 2003: xxxvii), whilst remaining cautious: ‘balance in the evaluation of the evidence is achieved through the assessment of propinquity along four lines: linguistic, geographic, chronological and cultural. A parallel that is closer to the biblical material in language,

the Sumerian “Love Songs” with other erotic poetry from the ancient Middle East, as this has already been the focus of most other studies of its imagery elsewhere (see chapter 1.1).

2. Application of MIP to *Inanna-Dumuzi E*: An Example Analysis

To demonstrate the MIP with relation to Sumerian texts, I will apply the method in the following example analysis of the **first lexical unit** in line 3 from *Inanna-Dumuzi E*, and copy the language and style of the Pragglejazz group:

Inanna-Dumuzi E

3 še ab-sin₂-ba ḫi-li-a sa₅-gu₁₀ ḫi-is^{sar}-am₃ a ba-an-du₁₁/de₂

My barley in its furrow, filled with sexual allure, it is the lettuce he watered!

Read the entire text-discourse to establish general meaning

The composition is a short, erotic poem in which a female speaker describes her body and the sexual pleasure that her male partner gives her. The text uses metaphorical imagery to describe both the male and female bodies and bodily functions, as well as the more abstract feelings of desire and pleasure. The ‘text-discourse’ in its entirety goes beyond just this composition, however, and includes all the compositions appended to the “Love Songs” corpus.

2. Determine the lexical units in the text-discourse

Line 3 has been broken up into the following lexical units:

še ab-sin₂-bi-a | ḫi-li-a | sa₅-gu₁₀ | ḫi-is^{sar} -am₃ | a | ba-an-du₁₁/de₂ |

in geographic proximity, in time, and culture is a stronger parallel than one that is removed from the biblical material along one or more of these lines’ (Lawson Younger 2003: xxxvii). At the same time, conceptual metaphors reveal that some embodied experiences and images are universally shared, even amongst cultures with no contact, whilst some are culture specific (Yu 2007; see chapter 1.4; Gault 2019: 46-47).

3.

še ab-sin₂-bi-a: barley in the furrow

(a) for each lexical unit, establish its meaning in context

The first lexical unit is **še ab-sin₂-bi-a**, ‘barley in its furrow’. In this context, the ‘barley in its furrow’ indicates the vulva and the female body. This is evident because of the contextual interaction with other elements in this line and the erotic content of the rest of the composition. In this context, the furrow is ‘filled’ (**sa₅**) with desire (**hi-li**), reflecting well-known constructions of the female body as a vessel that can be filled with a substance. The barley is also syntactically equated with the watered lettuce, another metaphor for the vulva (see chapters 2.2 and 2.3).

(b) for each lexical unit, determine if it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts ie. more concrete, related to bodily action, more precise, historically older.

The noun **še** is ‘barley’, the most used and recorded cereal crop in all periods of Mesopotamian history (Powell 1984: 49). Sumerian **ab-sin₂**, is translated as ‘furrow’ in English, with the OED definition: ‘a narrow trench made in the earth with a plough, especially for the reception of seed’. The Sumerian literary text *The Farmer’s Instructions* offers a detailed guide of the appropriate width and depth of a furrow for planting seed with a seeder plough (ETCSL 5.6.3, lines 41ff). In a first millennium lexical list, **ab-sin₂** is also equated with the Akkadian word for womb, *ša₃-sur-rum* (Antagal B 88, see Sefati 1998: 215; Couto-Ferreira 2017: 64).

(c) if the lexical unit has a more basic current-contemporary meaning in other contexts than the given context, decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it

The contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning, though the contextual meaning can be understood in terms of the basic. The barley in the furrow mirrors the female anatomy; this is clearly the conceptual connection made in the late lexical list referenced above.

4. If yes, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical

Metaphorically used? Yes

The pragmatic approach of the MIP is useful in its emphasis on context in the understanding of metaphorical language; this is imperative to the interpretation of metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, in which the erotic context informs the comprehension of many of its metaphors. The identification of what the MIP calls ‘basic meaning’ of a lexical unit, usually gleaned from external sources to the analysed text, is also important in the approach to metaphor in this thesis. Within each section of analysis, collecting a word or images’ frame of reference from external sources, determining its ‘basic meaning’ and its construction as a source domain of experience, informs the interpretation of an image’s target domain or ‘contextual meaning’. Each section will include this methodology, though it will not be presented in the same way as the example application of the MIP above, in the interest of style and readability.

3. Analysing Metaphor: Conceptual Metaphor Theory

The key components of Conceptual Metaphor Theory were treated in the previous chapter (1.4). Borrowed from cognitive linguistics, the theory mainly states that we understand abstract concepts through mappings from embodied experiences. This is a process of metaphorical conceptualisation, which involves the mapping between a more concrete source domain and an often-abstract target domain.⁹⁹ Therefore, the analysis of metaphor in

⁹⁹ If everything is metaphorical, how do we choose which metaphors to analyse from literature, which are often thought of as more ‘creative, novel, original, striking, rich, interesting, complex, difficult, and interpretable than those [...] in non-literary texts’ (Semino/Steen 2008: 233)? De Joode and van Loon question whether the

this thesis is broken into two sections.¹⁰⁰ Firstly, it concentrates on the analysis of the source domains used metaphorically in the Sumerian “Love Songs”. This is where the MIP will mostly be applied. Each source domain will be considered individually or as part of a cluster when the metaphorical mechanisms are similar (for example in the use of beer, wine, and water metaphors). Each section will outline the cultural significance, embodied, experiential meaning of each image to give a conceptual background to its metaphorical use in the Sumerian “Love Songs”. This will include philological analysis of lesser-known terms or situating an item in its literary, historical and (if possible) archaeological framework. In this way, we establish the ‘basic meaning’ of a term before contrasting it with and analysing the ‘contextual meaning’ of a word or image across the “Love Songs”.

The second section will focus on the target domains expressed in the corpus. This analysis will draw upon the previous section to take a zoomed-out perspective on the domains conceptualised in the “Love Songs”. A visual representation of the conceptual mappings between source and target domains can be found in Appendix B and is discussed in chapter 4. This visualisation was created and used as a tool in identifying patterns in the use of source domains and the structuring of target domains.

Determining the metaphorical target domain is arguably the most subjective part of this process. The main target domains that are conceptualised in the “Love Songs” are either abstract emotions (desire, allure, and pleasure), or related to the body (appearance, functions,

apparent ubiquity of conceptual metaphor in everyday life inhibits the analysis of metaphor in literary material. They propose utilising Steen’s theories of ‘deliberate metaphor’, together with Pilkington’s theories on the range and strength of metaphorical mappings, in order to choose the most impactful metaphors present in the Hebrew Bible (de Joode/van Loon 2014). In this thesis, the selection of which conceptual metaphors to analyse has been helped by the fact that they nearly all concern erotic content; in this way, I have not had to disregard any conceptual metaphors because they all relate to similar target domains.

¹⁰⁰ See another approach in Kotzé 2005 for a step-by-step procedure used to identify and analyse conceptual metaphor in the Hebrew Bible. Kotzé proposes firstly identifying the linguistic unit that carries the metaphorical vehicle; establishing the meaning and cultural connotations of the image conveyed; identifying the ‘main meaning focus’ of the source domain; and finally, distinguishing between metaphors and metonymy.

fluids, actions), or related to the motif of abundance. Notably, the three abstract emotion target domains are semantically and conceptually linked, often appearing together, and can therefore be difficult to categorise. The following will give examples and outline the process of selecting the sense of these intricately connected target domains. The judgements made are of course, subjective, and sometimes a source domain maps onto more than one of these target domains. The reasoning behind a selected target domain is discussed in detail in each section and relies on using Conceptual Metaphor Theory and the MIP. The basic criteria of which emotion is being expressed has been decided on the following basis.

Target Domain:	Sense:	Example
Sexual Desire	The want of a thing	<i>Inanna-Dumuzi Z</i> , rev. 17, 'Let us lie down on it! Let us lie together on my <i>berry-red</i> bed!'
Sexual Allure	The state of attractiveness	<i>Inanna-Dumuzi R</i> , lines 6-7, 'Inanna, multicoloured like a grain heap, suitable for Dumuzi!/ Young woman, you are a heap of hulled grain, constantly alluring!'
Sexual Pleasure	The enjoyment of a thing	<i>Inanna-Dumuzi E</i> , line 5, 'The honey-man, the honey-man 'sugar-sweetened' me!'

Sexual Desire: The want of a thing: In the example from *Inanna-Dumuzi Z*, the source domains are the red berry (**gerin**) and the bed (see chapter 2.4). The target domain of sexual desire, with the sense of the want of a thing, can firstly be decided upon by the cohortative mood of the verb, expressing the wish to lie upon the '*berry-red* bed'. Throughout the "Love Songs", the cohortative and precative modal verb prefixes are frequently used to express

wish, want, and in this sexual context, desire. The desirability of the ‘*berry-red* bed’ is then apparent as the direct object of the verb. The bed, as the place of sexual intercourse is desirable; the red berry, as a metaphor elsewhere for the vulva, also alludes to and injects the image with eroticism.

Sexual Allure: The state of attractiveness: In the example from *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, the source domains are the heaps of grain (see chapter 2.2). The target domain of Sexual Allure, with the sense of a state of attractiveness, is determined by how the grain heap is described with the term **hi-li**, a key concept used throughout the “Love Songs” that has a semantic range of sexual attractiveness, desire, and pleasure (see chapter 1.3).

Sexual Pleasure: The enjoyment of a thing: In the example from *Inanna-Dumuzi E*, the source domains are honey and sweetness (see chapter 2.1). The target domain of sexual pleasure, with the sense of an enjoyment of a thing, is expressed by the verb translated as ‘sugar-sweetened’, Sumerian **ku7-ku7.d**. In the context of the “Love Songs”, honey and sweetness are key erotic markers. The action of ‘sweetening’ something comes from the pleasure and enjoyment of tasting sweet honey. That this line indicates sexual pleasure can be construed by the male subject of the verb, ‘the honey-man’, the embodiment of eroticism, enacting sweetness upon the 1st person singular object. The reduplication of the verb acts as an intensifier which mirrors the female speaker’s sexual pleasure.

The final target domain analysed in chapter 3 is Abundance. The motif of abundance is commonly expressed in Sumerian literature, including cultic laments, and is apparent through imagery of agricultural prosperity, references to animals, animal products, food, plants, water, and material wealth. In this thesis, I have chosen to interpret this imagery as a metaphorical target domain, where this imagery expresses an abstract sense of sought-after Abundance, which in the context of the “Love Songs” is attached to eroticism. The lovers

are surrounded by abundance, and their emotions expressed through the plethora of foodstuffs and environmental prosperity (see chapter 3.4).

Target Domain:	Sense:	Example:
Abundance	The desire for and sense of agricultural and material prosperity	<i>Inanna-Dumuzi D1</i> , lines 50-53, ‘May flax be with him, may barley be with him!/In the river, may there be spring (carp) waters with him!/In the fields, may there be multi-coloured barley with him!/In the marshes, may the fish and birds chatter with him!’

In the example from *Inanna-Dumuzi D1*, Abundance is sensed through the listing of plants, water, and animals; the repetitive syntax; and the desire for them constructed through the precativ mood of the verbs.

The criteria for determining the (abstract) target domain of an image is therefore based not only on a concrete object in itself, but relies on various grammatical elements and positions, adjectives and comparisons, and the interaction and allusions to other source and target domains. Sometimes, a source domain significantly has more than one of these abstract emotion target domains, which can strengthen its metaphorical force.¹⁰¹ For example, in *Šu-Suen B*, line 23, the target domain is both desire and pleasure, **ge-ru ma-a-ra ag2 ze2-ba-zu nu-uš-mu-e-a-AK-e**, ‘*Lover*, if only¹⁰² you would do your sweet things to

¹⁰¹ Pilkington (2000); see de Joode/van Loon for the application of Pilkington’s theories on the range and strength of conceptual metaphor mappings to the Hebrew Bible (2014).

¹⁰² For the frustrative **nuš-** with other examples, see Edzard 2003: 120-21; Attinger 1993: 297.

me'. Here, the frustrative mood of the verb expresses the female's sexual *desire* for 'sweet things' to be done to her. The 'sweet things' are also sexual *pleasure*, something that can be enacted upon the body, mapping from the embodied experience of the pleasure of eating and tasting.

Using the MIP and with the application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, I hope to create a pragmatic and useful approach to the pervasive but sometimes obscure metaphor in Old Babylonian Sumerian literary texts. By analysing metaphor across the defined parameters of the erotic literary texts known as the Sumerian "Love Songs", I will display the creativity and interaction that occurs with the creation and comprehension of certain metaphor, and also demonstrate that the analysis of figurative language can be used as tool for accessing culturally constructed domains of experience.

2. Source Domains in the Sumerian “Love Songs”

In the following chapter, I analyse the metaphorical source domains present in the corpus, ie. the imagery, usually a concrete object or embodied experience, and explore how these source domains interact with one another to map onto and construct metaphorical target domains. Each section begins with a preliminary discussion of the ‘basic’ meaning of an image; this includes how a particular object was perceived in ancient Mesopotamia by exploring various sources or undertaking philological investigations to comprehend the meaning or associations of a term/concept. This is then followed by analysis of the ‘contextual’ meaning of the image in the Sumerian “Love Song”, and its particular use in constructing erotic meaning and domains.

2.1 Honey and Sweetness

The most frequently attested and pervasive conceptual metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs” uses the source domain “honey”, Sumerian **lal3**. Not only does it simultaneously represent the emotional and physical states of sexual desire, but it imbues eroticism onto other images and domains through its metaphorical entailments of ‘sweetness’ and ‘stickiness’.¹⁰³ This section will describe the basic meaning and significance of honey in Mesopotamia and the ancient world, before exploring the experiential and sensual entailments of honey that are used in the construction of metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs”.

1. **lal3**: Honey or Date Syrup? Honey and Basic Meaning in Mesopotamia and the Ancient World

In the Hebrew bible, Yahweh’s ordinances are declared as more desirable than the most coveted substances imaginable, honey among them: הַנְּחֹמִים מִזֶּהָב וּמִפָּז רַב וּמְתוּקִים מִדְּבַשׁ וְנֹפֶת צִיפִּים, ‘More desirable than gold, than much fine gold; sweeter than honey, than drippings of the comb’. (Ps.19:10; JPS). Indeed, an insatiable desire for honey can be traced throughout human history. Wild honey collected from rock nests or trees is depicted in rock art from the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods worldwide, and the techniques for honey-hunting have changed very little even today (Crane 1999: 36; Crittenden 2011:260-265). “Hunters” of wild honey who utilise traditional practices stemming from the Upper

¹⁰³ These aspects that characterise the use of honey in the “Love Songs” are sensual. This is expected on two levels in this context; firstly, as Lakoff and Johnson understand it: ‘A metaphor can serve as a vehicle of understanding a concept only by virtue of its experiential basis’ (Lakoff/Johnson 1980: 18). Experiential understanding of honey, a food, logically extends from the sensual perceptions of taste and texture; this experience then gives way to its use as an ontological metaphor (Lakoff/Johnson 1980: 25), in this case as a metaphor for sexual desire and arousal. Secondly, in a corpus in which sexual desire and pleasure are the main themes, the use of a metaphor stemming from sensual experience adds layers to the very sensuality that is enjoyed by the participants described in the texts.

Palaeolithic period (40,000-8,000 years ago) will risk their lives to acquire the desirable substance. For example, the honey foragers of Nepal use rope ladders to scale cliff faces, gathering honey from the nests of honeybees, collecting an astonishing 40 litres of liquid honey and 10 kilograms of honeycomb in under an hour (Crittenden 2011: 261).¹⁰⁴ Foraging communities today across Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Australia consume enormous amounts of honey and bee larvae (Crittenden 2011: 261-265). As one of the most 'energy dense foods in nature', containing 80-95% sugar and a highly concentrated source of fructose and glucose, the lust and coveting of sweet honey appear universal (Crittenden 2011: 257-258).

However, in the context of ancient Mesopotamia, the identification of Sumerian **lal3**, Akkadian *dišpu*, though traditionally translated as 'honey' has been disputed. Volk highlighted the lack of evidence of hive beekeeping in Southern Iraq due to the unsuitable climate, and therefore suggested that **lal3** instead indicates a general sweetener, likely date syrup, as the date palm was abundant in southern Iraq (Volk 1999: 279 ff; Powell 1994: 99; for the date palm see Charles 1987: 1ff). Though the climate did not suit the industry of hive beekeeping, there is evidence of the importation of honey into southern Babylonia from the neighbouring regions of Egypt and Anatolia, famous centres for apiculture (Crane 1999: 162-167; Volk 1999: 290 n. 97). Old Babylonian letters found at the royal archives of Mari mention *dišpu* coming from Susa, Ašnakku, Aleppo and Karkemiš (Volk 1999: 285). Beeswax was certainly imported in the third and second millennium, though it is uncertain where it came from (Volk 1999: 288-289). Moreover, modern accounts from the

¹⁰⁴ See also the short 2017 documentary directed by Ben Knight, *The Last Honey Hunter*, (<https://vimeo.com/201695311>), in which the spiritual and economic significance of the region's 'psychotropic' honey is highlighted. The documentary portrays this dangerous and skilled tradition of collecting honey. For a summary of the documentary see: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/article/honey-hunters-bees-climbing-nepal>

southwestern Iranian Bakhtiari tribe highlight the presence of wild bee honey in the Zagros, relished by Zagros bears and tribesmen alike (Samsam Bakhtiari 2006: 21).¹⁰⁵ During the Ur III period, the delivery of bears¹⁰⁶ from Der in the eastern highlands to Puzriš-Dagan in lower Mesopotamia is well-attested from Šulgi's 43rd regnal year to Amar-Suen's 6th regnal year (Michalowski 2013: 318). When serving as governor of Der, the prince Šu-Suen, during the reign of Amar-Suen, is recorded as responsible for such bear deliveries, which throughout bear cub season were almost daily (Michalowski 2013: 308). It seems likely, therefore, that such desirable wild, Zagros honey was simultaneously imported with the bears that enjoyed it.

The earliest reference to hive beekeeping in Mesopotamia is on an Assyrian relief found in Suḫa of the governor of Suḫa and Mari, Šamaš-rēš-ušur (Frame 1995: 281-282, iv 13-v 6). The inscription informs us that hives were brought to Mesopotamia, and were therefore non-native, and likely wild bees gathered from the region of either South East Armenia or North West Kurdistan, areas with a rich bee-keeping tradition even in the present day (Crane 1999: 172). The governor of Suḫa and Mari revered bee honey and wax and hoped its introduction to the region would aid his legacy. The reverence of honey is present elsewhere in the ancient world; in Hittite literature, the bee symbolises abundance, and within Hittite law codes from Bogazköy, there are strict punishments for the theft of bee

¹⁰⁵ Recent study of human-bear conflict in the Central Zagros suggests that bears also feed upon honey from farms, causing damage and financial losses to hives and farmers (Qashqaei et al 2014).

¹⁰⁶ Sumerian **az**, identified with the Syrian Brown Bear, *Ursus arctus syriacus* (see Michalowski 2013: 305; Gutleb/Ziaie 1999).

swarms and hives (Mazar/Panitz-Cohen 2007: 216; Volk 1999: 281 n.18; Crane 1999: 173).¹⁰⁷

Biblical scholars have dealt with the same issues of whether דְּבַשׁ, *dəbaš*, indicates bee or fruit honey in the Hebrew Bible. Though there are frequent references to *dəbaš* in biblical literature, the Bible does not allude to hive beekeeping, and it has similarly been assumed that *dəbaš* refers to fruit honey (Forti 2006: 328; Mazar/Panitz-Cohen 2007: 213). Nonetheless, various references in the Bible clearly indicate that wild bee honey, not fruit honey, is meant, for example in the *Song of Moses*: וַיִּשְׁמְנוּ מִחֶלְמֵי־שָׁר וַיִּגְדְּקוּ דְּבַשׁ מִסֵּלַע, ‘Nursing them with honey from the crag, And oil from the flinty rock’ (Deut. 32:13; JPS); וַיִּאֲכִילֵהוּ מִחֶלֶב הַטֵּהָה אֶמְצוֹר דְּבַשׁ אֲשֶׁר־בֵּיעָף, ‘He fed them the finest wheat; I sated you with honey from the rock’ (Ps. 81: 16; JPS); and in *Judges*, when Samson finds a beehive inside a lion’s carcass (Judg. 14: 8-9). As noted above, wild honey collected from trees and rock nests is well attested prehistorically. Further to this, a substantial discovery at Tell Reḥov, a bronze and iron age site in the Jordan valley in Israel, revealed man-made beehives on an industrial scale (Mazar/Panitz-Cohen 2007). This discovery demonstrated that hive beekeeping was a prosperous economic activity in the First Temple period, approx. 1000-586 BCE, and makes it likely that *dəbaš* in the Bible is bee honey (Mazar/ Panitz-Cohen 2007: 214).

Significantly, honey and the honeycomb appear in an erotic context in the biblical *Song of Songs*: נֶפֶת תִּטְפָּנָה שִׁפְתוֹתַיךָ כֶּלֶה דְּבַשׁ וְחֵלֶב תַּחַת לְשׁוֹנֶיךָ, ‘Sweetness (honeycomb) drops from your lips, O bride; Honey and milk are under your tongue’ (Song 4:11; JPS). The substantial evidence of beekeeping in the wider ancient Middle East, the attestations of imported wax, honey, and bears into Mesopotamia, the universal and historical significance and desirability of honey, and the eroticism of honey in the biblical *Song of Songs* suggest

¹⁰⁷ In the Hittite Telipinu myth, a bee is instructed to soothe the god’s anger with beeswax (*nu-za DUḪ.LAL₃ da-a*, CTH 324.2, D. obv. ii. line 7’), see Rieken et al 2009.

that **lal3** in the Sumerian “Love Songs” is bees’ honey, not date syrup. The eroticism constructed by the metaphor of honey for sexual desire, pleasure and female sexual arousal in the “Love Songs” is made more powerful with the knowledge that honey is a substance universally hunted, craved and desired.

2. Contextual Meaning: Honey as a Metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs”

The use of **lal3** as an erotic metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs” emerges from the historical and universal lust for honey, and its dizzying sugariness and addictive qualities make it a fitting metaphor for sexual desire and pleasure. In the Sumerian “Love Songs”, honey works as a source domain that maps onto semantically related target domains: sexual desire, sexual arousal, pleasure, the female body, and abundance.

The connection between honey, desire and sexual pleasure in the corpus has already been noted and is well-attested in Middle Eastern love poetry (Alster 1993: 16 n. 7; Leick 1994: 123; Reid/Wagensonner 2017: 255). In his edition of the Sumerian corpus, Sefati also suggests ‘the poets used many metaphors which liken both the raptures of love and the pleasantness of the place in which the holy couple united to the sweetness of honey’ (1998: 93). Nonetheless, this assertion by Sefati dulls the sexual intensity of this metaphor which is varyingly used as a metaphor for sexual desire, female sexual arousal and sexual fluids (as noted by Black et al 2004: 89; Steinert 2017: 292 n.34).

There are three key texts in which the honey metaphor is utilised: *Inanna-Dumuzi B*, *Inanna-Dumuzi E*, and *Šu-Suen B*. The boundaries between the target domains are blurred, and honey constructs eroticism through its ability to encompass both the emotional states of desire and pleasure, and the physical state of a woman’s sexual arousal. The below analysis will outline how the honey metaphor maps onto these more abstract emotions of desire,

pleasure and the physical female body and arousal. The ‘sticky-sweetness’ (Black et al 2004: 89), the physical experience of honey, is the means of creating this eroticism.

3. The ‘Sweetness’ Entailment: Honey in *Šu-Suen B*

The quality of ‘sweetness’ permeates the “Love Songs”; it is attributed to both the male and female speakers,¹⁰⁸ body parts, food, objects, and **hi-li**. There are three Sumerian words used throughout the “Love Songs” which share the semantic field of ‘sweet’; these are: **du₁₀.g** (Emegir) and the corresponding **ze₂-eb** (Emesal), **sa₆.g**, and **ku₇-ku₇.d** (both Emegir). The most frequent, **du₁₀.g/ze₂-eb**, is also the term that modifies the most metaphorical source domains which are used to conceptualise sexual target domains, such as honey, beer, oil, milk, butter, as well as the erotic body parts of the vulva, penis, mouth, and lips. Because a key (and desirable) feature of honey is its sweetness, arguably the presence of terms meaning ‘sweet’ across the corpus recalls the honey metaphor and its erotic target domains of desire, pleasure, and arousal. Sweetness, therefore, is a marker of sexual metaphor in the “Love Songs”.

The composition known as *Šu-Suen B* can be used to exemplify this precedent. Honey is explicitly associated with sweetness and with **hi-li**:

Šu-Suen B

Ist Ni 2461 (P343111)

1 **mu-ti-in**¹⁰⁹ ša₃- ga₂ ʽ mu ʽ-ʽ lu ʽ [ki-ig-ga-ag₂-gu₁₀]

¹⁰⁸ For example, in *Šu-Suen B*, the male lover’s sexual allure is repeatedly called “sweet”, **hi-li-zu ag₂ ze₂-ba-am₃** (lines 2, 4); and in *Šu-Suen A*, the adjective is used to describe the female lover’s beer and vulva, **kaš-a-ni-gen₇ gal₄-la-ni ze₂-ba-am₃** (line 20).

¹⁰⁹ Emesal **mu-ti-in/mu-tin** is equated with **geštin**, but also Akkadian *zikāru*, young man (Schretter 1990: 236; Attinger 2021: 734-5). Sefati translates as ‘bridegroom’, which serves his view that the “Love Songs” are explicit evidence for the Sacred Marriage Rite (Sefati 1998: 77-78). Reid and Wagensonner note that the semantic meaning of **mu-ti-in** might extend to “man, bridegroom”, given its parallel with Dumuzi in *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, lines 27-28 (Reid/Wagensonner 2017: 254-255). They also highlight that ‘the homophony of “tree”

Man of my belly,¹¹⁰ my beloved,

2 ḫi-li-zu ag₂ ze₂ -ba-am₃ la₃-^ʀ am₃ ^ʀ- [ku₇-ku₇-da]

Your allure is a sweet thing, it is the sweetest honey!

3 ge-ru ša₃- ga₂ mu-lu ki-ig-^ʀ ga-ag₂-gu₁₀ ^ʀ

Lover of my belly, my beloved,

4 ḫi-li-zu ag₂ ze₂-ba-am₃ la₃-am₃ ku₇-ku₇-da

Your allure is a sweet thing, it is the sweetest honey!

Through the repetition of **ze₂-eb** and **ku₇-ku₇**, sweet taste is emphasised as the embodied entailment of honey used to build eroticism. The syntactical paralleling of the enclitic copula on these adjectives in lines 2 and 4 especially highlights the conceptual connection between honey and its sweetness as something sexually desirable, aligning it with **ḫi-li**, sexual allure. As the female speaker addresses her male beloved, her sexual desire for the man is constructed from the desire for tasting sweet honey.

(part of the sign for grapevine) and “penis” explains the connection between **geštin**, “grapevine”, and “male, husband” (Reid/Wagensonner 2017: 255), though Dumuzi’s sister Geštinanna is spelt **mu-tin** in *Dumuzi and his sisters* (ETCSL 1.4.1.3). In the so-called *Manchester Tammuz*, line 7, **mu-ti-in/mu-tin** appears to mean grapevine, and is paralleled with apples, ‘For the shepherd(?) the apples in the garden are loaded(?) with attractiveness/into the garden of grapes (**mu-ti-na-ka**), he brought joy’ (lines 6-7, Alster 1992: 18, 25 n.l 7). Here grapes are associated with the male beloved who brings them. In the disputation *Two Women B*, line 153, **mu-tin** is attested in the plural, **lu₂-tu-gu₁₀ ga-ab-us₂ mu-tin-e-ne**, ‘Liar, pursuer of men!’ (DSSSt Q000771, <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/pager>).

¹¹⁰ Throughout this thesis, I translate **ša₃** as ‘belly’ rather than ‘heart’. Though the heart is where, in modern day understanding, one metaphorically feels amorous emotions, the term **ša₃** in this period refers to the whole torso, including its insides (Attinger 2021: 956). The term also referred to the stomach/belly, as made apparent by the term **ša₃-du₁₀**, literally ‘sweet belly’, used for baby animals in administrative texts of the 3rd millennium BCE, including for piglets, **šah₂ nita ša₃-du₁₀/ šah₂ munus ša₃-du₁₀** (see Dahl 2006: 34). Babies, and baby animals, of course, tend to have rounded stomachs. Translating **ša₃** as ‘belly’ also refers to the way strong emotions, such as desire, can often be felt in the stomach, ie. a *gut feeling*.

In lines 5-10, the female speaker's sexual desire is narrated through the cohortative verbal prefixes as she expresses her wish to move towards the beloved and towards the erotic space of the bedroom. As sweetness has been explicitly associated with sexual desire and honey in lines 1-4, the emphatic repetition of **ze2-eb** (Emesal of **du10**) recalls the honey imagery:

Šu-Suen B

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5 en-tuš-en¹¹¹ ʔ ni₂ ʔ-ʔ ga₂ ʔ **du₅-mu-u₈-ši-gen**

i (VP)- en (1SG DO)- sit- en (2SG) self-1 POSS+GEN

du₅ (ES) (COHORT)-mu (VENT)-e.ši (2SG+TERM)-come

You make me wait, but let me come, eagerly, to you!

6 **mu-ti-in** ga¹¹²-ba-e-da-kar ʔ ki ʔ **mu-nu₂-da-še₃**

ga-(COHORT)-ba (MM)-e.da-(2SG+COM)-run

Man! Let me run with you to the bedroom,

7 en-tuš-en ni₂- ga₂ **du₅-mu-ʔ u₈ ʔ-ši-gen**

You make me wait, but let me come, eagerly, to you!

8 ge-ru ga-ba-e-da-kar ʔ ki ʔ **mu-nu₂-ʔ da ʔ-ʔ še₃ ʔ**

Lover! Let me run with you to the bedroom,

¹¹¹ Reading **KU** as **TUŠ** and understanding **en-TUŠ-en** as a verbal chain, following Attinger (1999-2000: 265; 2019: n. 1). My translation 'eagerly' is an interpretation of the reflexive pronoun **ni₂-ga₂** (literally 'of myself'), adapting Sefati and Reid/Wagensohn's understanding of the pronoun as 'of my own will' (Sefati 1998: 355-356; Reid/Wagensohn 2017: 256).

¹¹² A shift happens throughout the text between using the Emesal cohortative/precativ modal prefixes **du₅-/da-/de₃** and the Emegir cohortative prefix **ga-**, without any apparent change in the person speaking: 'Die Inkonsequenz der Emesaltexte hinsichtlich des Prekativ-Präformativs ist bekannt' (Krecher 1967: 98).

9 mu-ti-in ʳ ag₂ ʳ ze₂ ʳ-ze₂-ba du₅-mu-u₈-AK

du₅ (ES) (COHORT)-mu-(VENT)- e- (2SG+ LOC)-do

Man! Let me do the sweetest things to you!

10 ze₂-ba kal-la gu₁₀ ʳ la₃ ʳ-e da-ag₂-e-ga¹¹³

honey-**DIR** da (COHORT)-m(VENT)-e (2SG DO)-bring (ES)

My precious sweet, let me bring you to the honey.

Honey and sweetness metaphorically map onto multiple target domains in this passage. In line 9, the female speaker expresses her wish to ‘do sweet things’ to the male beloved, a clear reference to her desire to give sexual pleasure to her partner. Then, in line 10, honey is simultaneously used as a metaphor for desirability and female sexual arousal. The male beloved’s desirability is highlighted through the affectionate name ‘my precious sweet’. The directive **-e** on **la₃-e** indicates that the desire of movement is now *towards* the honey, the aroused female body (see below). As source domains, honey and sweetness melt and blend the target domains of pleasure, desire, and arousal together. This is reiterated in lines 12-15:

Šu-Suen B

Ist Ni 2461 (P343111)

12¹¹⁴ ʰi-li ʳ ag₂ ʳ ze₂-ba-ʳ zu ʳ ga-ba-ʰul₂-ʰul₂-le-en-ʳ de₃ ʳ-en

ga (COHORT)-ba (MM)-enjoy (RDP)-enden (1PL)

Let us enjoy your allure, the sweet thing,

¹¹³ Emesal **ga** = *babālu* (Emesal voc., III. i. 4-5, MSL IV:27).

¹¹⁴ **BM 103163** has additional lines here, though they are broken (see Reid/Wagensonner 2017):

12 ʰi-li ag₂ ze₂-ba-ʳ zu ʳ ga-[. . .]
12a. ʳ mu ʳ-ti-in ʳ ma ʳ-ʳ ra ʳ-ʳ ʰi ʳ-ʳ li ʳ [. . .]
12b. ʳ ama ʳ-gu₁₀-ʳ ra ʳ-ʳ du₁₁ ʳ-ʳ ga ʳ-ʳ na ʳ-ʳ ab ʳ [. . .]
speak-(n.)na (3SG DAT)- b (DO)

13¹¹⁵ ge-ru ag₂ ze₂-ze₂ -^ʀ ba ^ʀ du₅-mu-u₈-^ʀ AK ^ʀ

Lover, let me do sweet things to you!

14 ze₂-ba kal-la-gu₁₀ lal₃-e da-ag₂-e-ga

My precious sweet, let me bring you to the honey!

15 mu-ti-in ma-ra ħi-li mu-e-TE.A¹¹⁶

mu (VENT)-e (2SG)-approached

Man, you are attracted to me!

In these lines we find a repetition of concepts drawn earlier in the poem; sweetness is again related to **ħi-li**, both things to be sexually enjoyed by the female speaker and her beloved; sweetness is an act that can be performed, conceptualised as sexual pleasure; and finally, the proposed movement towards the ‘honey’ positions it as the wet female genitals. Altogether, the dizzying repetition, especially of terms for sweetness and honey, builds up the atmosphere of (female) sexual longing in this text.

4. The ‘Stickiness’ Entailment: Honey in *Inanna-Dumuzi B*

Whilst ‘sweetness’ draws upon the sense of tasting honey; its texture is also used as an experiential entailment in the “Love Songs” for constructing the target domain of female sexual arousal. In *Inanna-Dumuzi B (Ist Ni 2489)*, the conceptual connection between honey and the wetness of the vulva is threaded through various interacting entailments placed throughout the text. This starts in line 3, where the male speaker uses three images in

¹¹⁵ **BM 103163** deviates:

13 ^ʀ ge-ru ma-ra ħi-li mu-e-TE.A ^ʀ

¹¹⁶ For **ħi-li TE.A** see Jaques 2006: 256ff. ‘**ħi-li te** est une forme elliptique de **ħi-li šu te** “approcher la main de l’attrait, du plaisir” c’est-à-dire “être attiré (par quelqu’un), désirer”, expression qu’on devrait rapprocher de *kuzbam leqû* “prendre, saisir (le siège) de l’attrait, du plaisir” (Jaques 2006:257).

apposition, **geštin-duru₅-gu₁₀**, **lal₃ ku₇-ku₇-gu₁₀**, and **ka lal₃ ama-na-gu₁₀**, that all share the textural aspect of stickiness or wetness:

Inanna-Dumuzi B

Ist Ni 2489 (P345323)

1 lu-bi- gu₁₀ ʿ lu ʿ-bi- gu₁₀ lu-bi- gu₁₀

My *lubi*, my *lubi*, my *lubi*,

2 la-bi- gu₁₀ la-ʿ bi ʿ-ʿ gu₁₀ ʿ lal₃ ama ugu¹¹⁷-na-gu₁₀

honey mother-GEN bore-3POSS+NOM+1 POSS

My *lubi*, my *lubi*, my honey of the mother who bore her,

3 geštin-duru₅¹¹⁸- gu₁₀ lal₃ ku₇-ʿ ku₇ ʿ- gu₁₀ ka lal₃ ʿ ama ʿ-na- gu₁₀

My wet grape, my sweetest honey, my honey-mouth of her mother.

Once again, the sweetness of honey is highlighted, but the shared entailment between the grape, honey, and the mouth is the wet consistency of sap, honey, and saliva. The term **geštin-durus** is not attested elsewhere in the Sumerian literary corpus. Its emphatic position at the beginning of the line highlights the physical attribute of wetness that carries through to the repetition of **lal₃**.

The end of line 3, ‘my honey mouth of her mother’, occurs as a refrain throughout *Inanna-Dumuzi B* in lines 3, 5, 7, and 9. Elsewhere in the Sumerian literary corpus, the

¹¹⁷ Following Alster (1985a) who understands **ugu** as **ugu₄**, transitive ‘to give birth’. Sefati noted that this phrase finds a parallel in the *Song of Songs* (1990: 54), ‘the favourite of the mother who bore her’ (Song 6:9)

¹¹⁸ See Sefati (1990: 54) on the reading of **A** as **durus**, as in *Šulgi D* and *P*: ^{geš}**eren-durus** – sappy cedar (Klein 1981b: 238). This reading appears in Ur III administrative texts, with the meaning ‘fresh grapes’, as opposed to ‘dried grapes’, ‘raisins’, **geštin ḥad₂** (Dahl 2020: 94).

notion of the ‘honey mouth’ references sweetness of voice or pleasing words. For example, in *Lipit-Eštar B*:

Lipit-Eštar B

ETCSL 2.5.5.2

15 ka lal₃-gen₇ du₁₀ mu du₁₁-ge du₇

(Your) mouth like honey (is) sweet, perfectly speaking the name.

Sefati follows this notion in the refrain in 3, 5, 7, and 9 in *Inanna-Dumuzi B*, using the adjective ‘mellifluous’ (from the Latin *mel* (honey) and *fluere* (to flow), translating: ‘my mellifluous mouth of her mother’ (1998: 129-130). In the “Love Songs”, however, both honey and the mouth have erotic connotations. The ‘wet’ entailment attached to honey through its association with the wet grape and the mouth in *Inanna-Dumuzi B*, line 3, suggests that the ‘honey mouth’ evokes the vulva and female sexual arousal.

The metonymic image of the mouth as the vulva occurs in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, but is also not an uncommon image in erotic texts elsewhere, for example, from **K 3464+N 3354**, rev. 1-3 (P395034): $\lceil \text{šap} \lceil \lceil \text{ta} \lceil \lceil \text{a} \lceil \lceil \text{a} \lceil \lceil \text{lu} \lceil \lceil \text{u}_2 \text{lal-la} \lceil \lceil \text{ra} \lceil \lceil \text{qa-ta-a-a lu-u}_2 \text{kuzbu} \lceil \lceil \text{bu} \lceil \lceil \text{ša} \lceil \lceil \text{-pat ki-pat-ti-ia lu-u}_2 \text{ša-pat} \lceil \lceil \text{LAL}_3 \lceil \lceil$, ‘Let my lips be white honey, let my hands be sexual allure (*kuzbu*), let the lips of my vulva be lips of honey’ (for edition see Panayotov 2013).¹¹⁹ Notably, this line also exhibits the connection between the vulva, honey, **hi-li** (*kuzbu*), and the mouth that is found in the Sumerian “Love Songs”. In *Šu-Suen A*, this erotic metonymy is explicit:

¹¹⁹ See also the Ugaritic text, *The Birth of the Gracious and Beautiful Gods* (**RS. 2.002**), where similarly the lips and mouth are metonymic for the female genitals, *yhbr. špthm. yšq/hn. špthm. mtqtm./mtqtm. k lrmn[m]/bm. nšq. w hr./b hbq hmhmt* ‘He bent down, he kissed their lips, /their lips are sweet,/sweet as pomegranates,/on kissing there was conception,/on embracing there was pregnancy’ (lines 55-8).

Šu-Suen A

Ist Ni 2463 (P345315)

20 kaš-a-ni-gen₇ gal₄-la-ni ze₂-ba-am₃/ kaš-a-ni ze₂-ba-am₃

Like her beer, her vulva is sweet/ her vulva is sweet!

21 ka-ka-a-ni-gen₇ gal₄-la-ni ze₂-ba-am₃/kaš-a-ni ze₂-ba-am₃

Like her mouth, her vulva is sweet/her beer is sweet!

This couplet advances several significant connections. The vulva is syntactically and semantically equated to the mouth; the beer, vulva and mouth are all assigned the ‘sweetness’ attribute stemming from the honey metaphor; and significantly, the vulva is likened to the liquid substance of beer, highlighting the wetness of the female body.¹²⁰ In *Inanna-Dumuzi B*, the repetition of the ‘honey mouth’ refrain is further emphasised and eroticised by the focus on the mouth elsewhere in the text. For example, in line 6:

Inanna-Dumuzi B

Ist Ni 2489 (P345323)

6 numdum-za¹ ne su-ub-bi² ma-du₁₀¹ DU² nin₉ ki ag₂-gu₁₀

Of your lips, their kisses are sweet to me, come, my beloved sister!

Towards the end of the composition, in the most sexually charged scene of the text, the mouth and the vulva are the key participating body parts in the sexual activity:

Inanna-Dumuzi B

¹²⁰ As noted by Assante, ‘Beer was firmly equated to saliva and vaginal wetness, the chief features of the excited female body. Mesopotamian beer was normally sweetened with date syrup [...] In most literary erotica the mouth and vulva are honey-sweet’ (Assante 2002: 34). See also chapter 2.5 in this thesis on beer, wine and water metaphors in the “Love Songs”.

Ist Ni 2489 (P345323)

21 šu zi-da-zu gal₄-la-ga₂ **bi₂-im-mar**¹²¹

b (**IPP**) i (**LOC**)-e (**2SG**) -placed (ES)- Ø (**DO**)

You placed your right hand on my vulva,

22 gub₃-bu-zu sag-gu₁₀-uš im-ši-ri

i (**VP**)-m (**VENT**)-b+ši(**3SG NH+TERM**)- e (**2SG**)-laid- Ø (**DO**)

You laid your left down near my head,

23 ka-zu ka-ga₂ um-me-te

u₃ (**PROSP**)-m (**VENT**)- ba (**MM**)- e (**2SG**)-approached- Ø (**DO**)

When your mouth approached my mouth,

24 **šu-um-du-um-gu**₁₀ ka-za u₃-ba-e-ni-dab₅

u₃ (**PROSP**)- ba (**MM**)- ni (**LOC**)- e (**2SG**)-seized- Ø (**DO**)

When you seized my lips in your mouth...

From line 3, a semantic build-up forms between wetness, stickiness and the mouth, culminating in the moment that the mouth and vulva are engaged in sexual activity. The text starts this accumulation of imagery by drawing attention to sappiness or stickiness, disclosing the erotic tone because they are semantically connected throughout the text to the female genitals. The ‘honey mouth’ in *Inanna-Dumuzi B* demonstrates the evocative and interactive nature of metaphor; it is erotic because of the ‘stickiness’ and ‘wetness’

¹²¹ Reading the first sign as **bi₂**- rather than **de₃**-, following the suggestion by Attinger (1999-2000: 262).

entailments that honey attaches to the mouth, and equally because of the metonymy of the mouth as the vulva.

5. Honey on the Bed: *Inanna-Dumuzi D, F1* and *Šu-Suen B*

In three texts across the corpus, the striking image of honey, wet or dripping, upon the bed recurs as a metaphor for the target domains of sexual desire and arousal. In *Inanna-Dumuzi D*, the image of honey upon the bed comes immediately before descriptions of sexual intimacy:

Inanna-Dumuzi D

UM 29-16-08 (P256688)

10 šeš-e e₂-ni-a im-ma-ni-in-ku₄-re-en

i (VP)-m (VENT)-ba (MM)- ni (LOC)-n (3SG)-entered-en (1SG DO)

The brother brought me into hid house,

11 mu-nu₂ lal₃ ḥab₂-ba bi₂-in-nu₂-e¹²²

b (IPP)-i (LOC)- n (3SG)-laid-e(n) (1SG DO)

He laid me on the bed of *dripping* honey,¹²³

¹²² **Ist Ni 4552** has **bi₂-in-na₂-en**. For a full edition of this text, see Appendix C.

¹²³ The expression **lal₃ ḥab₂** is difficult. The sign read **ḥab₂** is **LAGABxU** which also has the values **pu₂**, a ‘well’, and **du₂**, a ‘waterhole, pit, pond’ (Attinger 2021: 842; 309). This suggests to me that **ḥab₂** is also related in some way to liquids, thus I have translated the term as *dripping*, though there has been disagreement over its meaning. The term also occurs in *Šu-Suen B*, line 11; *Inanna-Dumuzi F1*, line 2 (see below); *Enlil and Sud*, ETCSL 1.2.2 line 116. Sjöberg (1973: 45-46), S. Cohen (1973: 303 n.621) and Sefati (1998: 160-161) translate it as ‘dripping honey’. Alster (1993) translates the line in *Inanna-Dumuzi D* as: ‘he made me lie on the honey-smelling bed’; however, in *Proto-Aa*, **ḥa-ab** = **LAGABxU** = *bi-i-šum* (*Proto-Aa*, 90, MSL XIV: 196), along with several other meanings that have the semantic connotations of an ill-smelling odour (MSL XIV: 212-213). An undesirable odour does not correspond with **lal₃**, where elsewhere it is sweet and desirable. Civil in his edition of *Enlil and Sud* (1983), interpreted **lal₃-ḥab₂** as ‘dry honey’, as it is equated with Akkadian *lal-la-a-ru* (‘white honey’, CAD L:48) in **UR₅-ra** XXIV, 3 (MSL XI:78). However, the line in question reads: **lal₃ ḥad₂ lal₃ ḥab₂ ku₇-ku₇-da ḥi x x x x [...]** (*Enlil and Sud*, line 116, Civil 1983). It seems intuitive that if the first adjective, **ḥad₂**, indicates dryness (Dahl 2020: 94), that **ḥab₂** in this line could work as its opposite, indicating wetness and creating a poetic contrast. Attinger discusses the compound phrases **šū ta-ḥab₂-du₁₁** and **lal₃ ḥab₂-du₁₁**. He notes that **ta-ḥab₂** likely does not mean ‘to soak, saturate’, as later argued by Civil

12 **ze₂-ba** kal-la-gu₁₀ **ša₃-ab-gu₁₀** a-ba-nu₂

a (VP)-ba (MM)-lay- Ø (3SG)

My precious sweet lay next to my belly,

13 AŠ-AŠ-ta eme AK AŠ-AŠ-ta

One by one, *doing tongues*,¹²⁴ one by one,

14 šeš **i-bi₂** sa₆-sa₆-gu₁₀ ninnu-am₃ mu-un-AK

My brother of the beautiful eyes, he did it fifty times,

15 lu₂ si-ga-gen₇ mu-na-de₃-gen

mu (VENT)-n.na (3SG+DAT)+da (COM)-e (LOC)-came- Ø (3SG)

Like a silent man he came to her with it (there),¹²⁵

16 ki-ta tuku₄-e-da SI-A mu-na-ni-in-gar

Below-ABL tremble-ed (NF)-a (NOM) fill-(NOM)

mu (VENT)-n.na (3SG+DAT)-ni (LOC)—n (3SG)- placed- Ø (DO)

(And) as she trembles from below, he filled her.¹²⁶

(1987: 45). Attinger interprets the expression as ‘(laisser) vieillir’ ou (laisser) épaissir/durcir (par vieillissement)’ (Attinger 1993, 5.3.180, 718ff.). Reflecting this, in his own online translation of this line, Attinger translates, ‘et me coucha sur un lit (aussi moelleux que du) *miel épais*’ (Attinger 2019). See also an overview by Reid and Wagensooner, discussing this term for *Šu-Suen B*, line 11 (Reid/Wagensooner 2017: 257).

¹²⁴ For the sexual connotations of **eme-AK**, see most recently Matuszak 2022: 211-2. The author points out the verb’s usage in the *Sumerian Proverbs* and its association with donkeys; the donkey section includes many allusions to the animal’s sexual activities.

¹²⁵ Sefati translates the verb as ‘I stood there for him’ (Sefati 1998: 153); however, we would then expect the 1sg suffix **-en** for the intransitive conjugation. As the verb ends in the 3sg absolutive suffix in all three manuscripts, the verb must be 3sg and the speaker is the ‘chorus’ (Attinger 2019: n.22). I interpret this chorus as a group of Inanna’s friends; see edition and translation in Appendix C.

¹²⁶ Attinger suggests the literal translation might be: ‘Il a posé pour elle l’être comblé dans le trembler ({{**tuku₄** + **ed** + ‘a}, /ni/) depuis le bas’ (Attinger 2019: n.24). However, Sefati suggests **si-a gar** as a synonym of **ni-me gar** ‘to be silenced, to silence’ (Sefati 1998: 162). Alster translates literally ‘trembling from the ground’, and translates ‘like an earthquake, he was put to silence’ (Alster 1993: 23). Assante interpreted this as a

Line 11 is particularly significant. The same phrasing is used in *Inanna-Dumuzi F1*:

Inanna-Dumuzi F1

Ist Ni 4569 (P343146)

2 **mu-nu₂** **lal₃** **ḥab₂-ba** [bi₂-in-na₂-en]

[He laid me down] on the bed of *dripping* honey.

In the same setting, the phrase **lal₃-ḥab₂** appears in *Šu-Suen B*:

Šu-Suen B

Ist Ni 2461 (P343111)

11 ʿe₂ ʿki-nu₂-a **lal₃** **ḥab₂** du₁₁-ga-ba

In the bedroom, made *dripping* with honey¹²⁷

Situating desirable honey upon the bed imbues the space of sexual activity with the target domain of sexual desire, but its highlighted liquid nature, or ‘stickiness, ‘wetness’ entailments, also lends itself to the interpretation that **lal₃ ḥab₂** operates here as a metaphor for female sexual arousal.¹²⁸ In the *Song of Songs*, dripping and flowing oils also work to metaphorise something of the arousal of the female beloved, as she goes to let her lover into

description of orgasm (Assante 2002: 42). Note that the verb on witness **NBC 10923** is written **mu-na-ni-gar**, and on **Ist Ni 4552** **mu-un-na-[...]**.

¹²⁷ The rationale being that if the adjective **ḥab₂** indicates wetness, the auxiliary verb **du₁₁** is ‘to make something *wet/dripping*’.

¹²⁸ In support of the interpretation that **ḥab₂** indicates a wet texture, in *Inanna-Dumuzi T*, line 21, the goddess Inanna adorns her hips with honey and water in a single line before her sexual union with Dumuzi: **pu₂ lal₃ a du₁₀-ga in-pa₃-de₃ ib₂-ib₂-a-ni mu-un-ga₂-ga₂**, ‘She chooses the well of honey and sweet water, she places it on her hips’. Note the use of the sign **LAGABxU (pu₂)**. It precedes **lal₃** and is not nominalised as the use of **ḥab₂** in the other texts discussed here, though I think it likely there is a connection. The line suggests that it is the ‘wetness’ entailment of honey that is again being utilised. That Inanna can apply honey and water onto her body in the same action suggests that **lal₃** is more inherently fluid than some translations of the ‘honey on the bed’ image imply. Significantly, again, a connection is drawn between honey, liquid, and the region of the female genitalia. In this text, from lines 11-24 Inanna adorns each part of her body, starting from the head and working down to the toes. This descriptive outlining of Inanna’s body is itself erotic as it traces her nude body; the inclusion of honey in this adornment is thus anticipated.

her house: קָמַתִּי אֲנִי לְפָתַח לְדוֹדַי וְנָדִי גָטְפוּ-מִזֶּרֶחַ וְאַצְבָּעֵתִי מִזֶּרֶחַ עַל כַּפּוֹת הַמְנַעְוֵל: ‘I rose to let in my beloved; My hands dripped myrrh-, My fingers, flowing myrrh-, Upon the handles of the bolt’ (Song 5:5; JPS). The image could be a literal one, in that the fragranced oil/perfume that the lover rubs on herself before bed physically drips off her body, or, as biblical scholar C. Exum notes, ‘hands dripping with flowing myrrh suggest the intimacy of touches, caresses, and bodily fluids that feature in love-making. Dripping myrrh is an image of “gratuitous abundance” befitting “a love which can no longer be contained” (Munro, cf. Exum 2005: 196). Similarly, the flowing honey on the bed in the Sumerian “Love Songs” captures something of the sensuous overflowing of desire and arousal.

6. The Sensuality of the Honey Metaphor

In addition to the association with the actions and place of sexual activity, and the experiential entailments of sweet taste and wet texture, across the “Love Songs” honey is varyingly accompanied with either sight or touch.¹²⁹

In *Šu-Suen C*, honey is associated with visual attraction:

Šu-Suen C

N 3560 (P278585)

21 igi-ga₂ lal₃-bi-im ša₃-ga₂ hi-li¹³⁰-bi-im

¹²⁹ In *Inanna-Dumuzi W* (N 3512 + N 6322, CBS 15163), honey is associated with the sense of smell. It is an unusual text that has previously been classified as a “Love Song”; the opening and closing lines are broken, and it only becomes probable that this is part of the corpus in the extant final 4 lines. Even these lines are fragmentary and only extant on CBS 15163, but they include words such as **am**, “wild bull” (line 41), a common epithet of Dumuzi. Civil has demonstrated the intertextuality of this text, in that it ‘consists of an enumeration of the lexical subset of plants grazed on by sheep inserted into a lyrical frame typical of Dumuzi-Inanna poems’, though this frame is mostly lost (Civil 1987: 38). Each couplet names a plant and comments on some aspect of the plant, may it be appearance, habitat, its properties or uses (Civil 1987: 38). In lines 23-24, *dripping* honey (lal₃ ta-hab₂-ba-gu₁₀) is associated with an aromatic, **šim**, meaning aromatic and pleasantly fragrant, used primarily in terms for incense and perfumes (Akkadian *riqqu*, CAD R: 368ff).

¹³⁰ Kramer (1963) reads hi-<is>-sar-bi-im. This would be an interesting link made between honey, sexual desire, and lettuce, another metaphor that this thesis will discuss in detail.

He is the honey of my eyes; he is the sexual delight of my belly!

As a feature of the eyes, honey works as a symbol of desire and visual attractiveness. Furthermore, honey is associated with **hi-li**, which the female speaker viscerally feels for Šu-Suen in her belly.

In *Inanna-Dumuzi T*, Inanna physically adorns her eyes with honey:

Inanna-Dumuzi T

AO 6967 (P345414)

17 nig₂ lal₃ diri-diri-ga in-pa₃-de₃ igi-ni-a mu-un-ga₂-ga₂

She finds the things, copious with honey; she places them on her eyes.

Just as honey was applied to the region of the hips in this text (see footnote 128), it is also applied to the eyes. This connects the region of female sexual arousal with the sense of sight, signalling honey as a metaphor also expressing visual sexual attraction and desire.

In other texts, honey is associated with the action of touch. For example, in *Inanna-Dumuzi E*:

Inanna-Dumuzi E

AO 5385 (P345364)

5 lu₂ lal₃-e lu₂ lal₃-e ga₂-a¹³¹ mu-ku₇-ku₇-de₃-en¹³²

mu (VENT)-n (3SG)-sweetened (RDP)-en (1SG DO)

The honey-man, the honey-man sugar-sweetened me,

¹³¹ In *Ist Ni 9486*, the 1st person independent personal pronoun is written in Emesal, **me-e**.

¹³² The verb in manuscript *AO 5385* is corrupted; the 3rd singular *hamtu* final person prefix -n- appears in lines 7 and 8 of *AO 5385* and *UET 6/1, 121*. Sefati (1998) translates the verb in the durative, following the corrupt *AO 5385*, despite the correction in lines 7 and 8 and *UET 6/1, 121*.

6 en-gu₁₀ lu₂-lal₃-e dingir-ra sa₆-ga ama-na-gu₁₀

My lord, the honey-man, a god, my favourite of his mother,

7¹³³ šu-ni lal₃-e giri₃-ni lal₃-e ga₂-a mu-un-ku₇-ku₇-de₃-[en]

His honey-hand, his honey-foot, sugar-sweetened me,

8¹³⁴ a₂-šu-giri₃-ni lal₃ ku₇-ku₇-dam ga₂-a mu-un-ku₇-[ku₇-de₃-en]

His limbs are sweetest honey, he sugar-sweetened me!

The ‘honey-man’ is clearly the epitome of sexual attractiveness and desire. He has honey hands, feet, and limbs; he is the subject of the verb **ku₇-ku₇**, to sweeten, indicating his ability to cause sexual pleasure for the female speaker. The repetition here only enhances the sense of the speaker’s desire. Moreover, this description is not structured as the usual outlining of the body that occurs throughout the corpus which starts typically with the head or face (as in *Inanna-Dumuzi T, C, P, CI* and *EI*). Significantly, the description goes directly to the hands and the feet. The hands especially are the body part with the most agency and with the ability to touch.¹³⁵

Finally, in *Inanna-Dumuzi Y*, in which the attractiveness of hair is an explicit focus (see chapters 2.6 and 2.9), the erotic action of having the male beloved touch the female speaker’s hair is potentially described as ‘honey’, indicating the pleasure it causes:

Inanna-Dumuzi Y

CBS 4569 (P260882)

¹³³ UET 6/1, 121, 7, šu-ni lal₃-e []-ni lal₃-e/ ma₃-e mu-un-ku₇-ku₇-da

¹³⁴ UET 6/1, 121, 8, a₂-šu- giri₃-ni lal₃-e ku₇-ku₇-de₃/ ma₃-e mu-un- ku₇-ku₇-da. The form lal₃-e ku₇-ku₇-de₃ is difficult. It could literally be ‘to make ‘sugar’-sweet his limbs (with respect to)-honey’.

¹³⁵ Note also that in Hebrew literature, hands and feet act euphemistically for the genitals (see Quick 2020).

32 šu siki ub-dab₅-be₂-en la₁₃ (or **TA**)-me/mu-un-gal₂

u (**PROSP**)-b (**DO**)-sieze- en (2SG)

When you touch (my) hair, it is our *honey*.¹³⁶

7. Honey as a Source Domain in the “Love Songs”: Summary

The associations made in the context of the “Love Songs” between the erotic metaphor of honey and the senses of sight and touch further assert the process of conceptual metaphor to map from concrete, experiential domains to the abstract domains of emotions. The partial metaphorical structuring of the honey metaphor utilises the sweet taste and sticky, wet texture of honey in the construction of eroticism and to represent the target domains of sexual desire and arousal. The repeatedly emphasised sweetness of honey is used to represent insatiable desire and pleasure, whilst the wetness of honey and its associations with the mouth lends itself as a metaphor for the vulva during sexual arousal. Found upon the bed and in the space of sexual activity, honey represents both sexual longing and fluids. The sensual associations of honey charge its meaning with an eroticism that is imbued with the universal and historical lust for honey that is traceable to the present day.

¹³⁶ Alster suggested that the sign **TA**, which would act as an Emesal interrogative participle, ‘what are you to us?’ could be read as the graphically similar sign **la₁₃ (TAxHI)** ‘you are honey to us’ (Alster 1985a: 132-4). Others also read **siki (SIG₂)** in this line as **U₈**, and as part of the verbal chain, ‘I have caused you to be fettered’ (Sefati 1998: 270). From the photograph (P260882), I think it could be either sign. I tentatively here follow Alster’s reading, as I find the alternative suggestions even more awkward.

2.2 Barley and Flax

The source domains of barley (**še**) and flax (**gu**) regularly appear in parallelism together (Sefati 1998: 64) and whilst to the modern reader this imagery is not typically ‘erotic’, these domains generate some of the most productive metaphors in the Sumerian “Love Songs”. The difficulty in modern comprehension of flax/barley as erotic metaphors attests to the influence of culture on the construction of target domains.¹³⁷ In the “Love Songs”, they are used in nearly identical ways and often appear together within the corpus to conceptualise the target domains of female sexual desire, pleasure, allure, the vulva, and abundance. The following analysis first considers the ‘basic meaning’ and cultural significance of barley, flax, and grain, before assessing how these products operate metaphorically in the context of the Sumerian “Love Songs”.

1. Agricultural Staples: Barley, Flax, and their Basic Meaning in Mesopotamia

Barley was a pillar of the Mesopotamian agrarian economy (Verderame 2020: 13). From the 3rd millennium BCE, barley was produced on a massive, institutional scale. Used for food staples like bread, porridge, soup, and beer, barley was used as rations remunerated to workers, and the surplus used as fodder for animals. It had significant ‘political-economic and symbolic value’ (A. C. Cohen 2007: 411). The wealth evoked by barley is summarised in the following Sumerian proverb, where it is valued higher than precious materials and livestock:

¹³⁷ ‘Conceptual metaphors are usually grounded in bodily experiences; cultural models, however, filter bodily experiences for specific target domains of conceptual metaphors; and cultural models themselves are very often structured by conceptual metaphors. As such, any one of the three constraining the next one will affect the third one as well. Thus, culture, by interpreting bodily experience, affects the formation of conceptual metaphors; body, by grounding metaphorical mappings, affects cultural understanding; and metaphor, by structuring cultural models, affects the understanding of bodily experience’ (Yu 2007: 389).

UET 6/2 263/UET 6/2, 266 (Proverbs from Ur, Alster 1997: 311)

1 ku₃ tuku-e za-gin₃ tuku-e gu₄ tuku-e udu tuku-e

The one who has silver, the one who has lapis, the one who has oxen, and the one who has sheep,

2 ʾ ka₂ ʾ lu₂ še tuku-ka u₄ mi-ni-ib-zal-zal-e

He waits at the gate of the man who has barley.

This proverb is also closely paralleled in the closing remarks of the disputation poem *Ezinam and Ewe* (lines 189-190), spoken by Enki. In this composition, the grain goddess is chosen as superior over her competitor, Ewe, but the beginning of the composition enumerates both their important roles in the prosperity of the land:

Ezinam and Ewe¹³⁸

53 unken-na ħe₂-gal₂ mu-un-de₃-gal₂

In the assembly, there is abundance with them,

54 kalam-ma zi-ša₃-gal₂ mu-un-de₃-gal₂

In the land, there is life with them,

55 me dingir-re-e-ne si im-sa₂-sa₂-e-ne

i (VP)-m (VENT)-b (DO)-straighten-ene (3PL)

They put in order the “me” of the gods,

56 irimma kalam-ma-ka nig₂ mu-ni-ib-lu-lu

¹³⁸ Line numbers follow the composite on the *Datenbank sumerischer Streitliteratur* (DSSSt) <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/pager>. See also ETCSL 5.3.2.

mu (VENT)-ni (LOC)- b (3SG NH)-multiply (RDPL)- Ø (DO)

In the storerooms of the land, they made riches multiply,

57 ame₂ kalam-ma-ka dugud mu-un-de₃-gal₂

In the households of the land, fullness is with them,

58 e₂ uku₂-ra saḥar ki us₂-sa-a-ba

In the house of the poor, of those who were laid in the dust,

59 u₃-mu-un-sun₅-ne-eš ḥe₂-gal₂ mu-un-de₃-gal₂-le-eš

u₃ (PROSP)-mu (VENT)- ni (LOC)-entered-eš (3PL)

When they entered, they brought abundance with them,

60 min₃-na-ne-ne ki giri₃-ne-ne bi₂-in-gub-bu-uš-a

b (IPP)-i (LOC)-n -stepped-eš (3PL)-a (NOM)

Both of them, in the places they have stepped,

61 dugud-bi e₂-a nig₂ taḥ-(e)-me-eš

They are the ones whose importance adds riches to the household.

The great abundance and prosperity that barley and grain represented can also be seen in the Sumerian city and cultic laments, where its *absence* is included amongst the catastrophic events that they describe, **a-ša₃-ga še gu-nu nu-gal₂ ug₃-e nu-gu₇-e**, ‘in the fields, multi-coloured barley did not grow, the people do not eat’ (LSUr, ETCSL 2.2.3, line 127); **gana₂ uru₂- ga₂-ke₄ še ba-ra-ma-al mu-un-gar₃-bi ba-ra-gen**, ‘In the fields of my city, there is no grain, their farmer does not come’ (LUr ETCSL 2.2.2, line 271); **še mu-un-kus-kus buru₅^{mušen}-gu₁₀ mu-un-dal-dal**, ‘He cut barley, and he made my flock of sparrows fly away’ (Inanna **balag**, **BM 096680** (P345778), rev. col. i. line 63, OBEL).

Flax is one of the earliest cultivated plants in the ancient Middle East and was the first plant fibre used in textile production (Breniquet 2010: 54).¹³⁹ Linen is produced from processing the fibres of the flax plant.¹⁴⁰ Though in the third millennium BCE wool became the predominant fibre in ancient Mesopotamia (Waetzoldt 1980; 2010: 201; Quillien 2014: 271),¹⁴¹ linen fabrics became used for important ritual purposes, such as clothes for priests and (statues of) deities (Breniquet 2010: 54; 2013: 20). This suggests the high status of flax and linen; it is unlikely that normal citizens or workers would have worn linen clothing (Waetzoldt 1980). The prestige of linen fabrics is reflected in other Middle Eastern contexts. For example, in Egypt, linen was one of the largest and most prosperous commodities,¹⁴² and in Hittite inventory texts it is listed amongst luxury goods, like gold and silver, traded between kings (Vigo 2010: 290). In the disputation poem, *Dumuzi and Enkimdu*, Inanna appears to state her preference for the farmer who produces flax (and barley), over the shepherd who would give her a woollen garment. The Akkadian glosses on witness **CBS 8320** (P263161) allow for the restorations at the beginning of lines 21-22:¹⁴³

Dumuzi and Enkimdu¹⁴⁴

21 [tu⁹?] gibil-la-na **ba-ra-mi-ni-ga-ga-an**

¹³⁹ Despite an identification of the term **še-geš-iz**, “oil-plant”, as linseed by H. Helbaeck (1966), it is now established that the term refers to sesame oil, the predominant oil used in ancient Mesopotamia (Powell 1991; Reculeau 2009). The use of the seeds of the flax plant for oil is apparently absent in the textual sources (Waetzoldt 1985b: 78).

¹⁴⁰ The cultivation and processing of flax for textiles is a laborious process that requires good soil, undamaged by salinisation. It is thought that it was probably grown in small garden plots (Waetzoldt 1985b: 78; Powell 1991: 163). McCorriston observed the following steps in linen production: growing, weeding, pulling, rippling, retting, bracking, scutching, hackling, and spinning (McCorriston 1997: 523). This is compared to the relatively simpler processing of wool, which McCorriston argues is one of the reasons there was a shift to woollen fibres as the predominant textile in the 3rd millennium BCE.

¹⁴¹ Wool was the main fibre used for clothing, but workers also received wool as part of their wages (Waetzoldt 2010: 201).

¹⁴² Linen was also the main export from Egypt. Cuneiform tablets from the Middle Babylonian period record the use of Egyptian linen (**gada ša uru^{mi}-šir**) for the garments of deities (Vigo 2010: 290).

¹⁴³ Sefati notes that these restorations are made based on the Akkadian glosses on **CBS 8320** (Sefati 1998: 338). Line 21 has *šu₂-ba-ti-šu na-ap-ši-im*, ‘wide? garment’; line 22 has *re-ši-it ša ši-pa-ti-šu*, ‘? of wool’.

¹⁴⁴ Line numbers follow DSSt <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/pager>. See also ETCSL 4.08.33.

bara (NEG)- mu (VENT)-ni (LOC)-n (3SG)-bring (ES) (RDPL)-en (1SG DO)

He did not bring me *to* his new garments!

22 [siki? gibil]-la₂-a-ni sa₂ ba-ra-mu-e-[en]

I will not touch his [new wool]!

23 'ki-sikil¹-gen me-e mu-un-gar₃-e de₃-mu-du₁₂-du₁₂-un

de₃ (ES) (PREC)-mu (VENT)-n (DO)-marry-en (1SG)

I am a young woman- let me marry this farmer!

24 mu-un-gar₃ gu gun₃.gun₃-a-da

The farmer with multi-coloured flax!

25 mu-un-gar₃ še gun₃.gun₃-a-da

The farmer with multi-coloured barley!

The apparent wealth and prosperity that barley and flax both independently symbolised in the agricultural and textile worlds is often brought together in the Old Babylonian Sumerian literary texts to metaphorise abundance. This pairing is perhaps not limited to the textual material of this period; one of the lower registers of the Uruk vase bears two alternating plants, identified possibly as barley/wheat and flax (Crawford 1985; Bahrani 2002: 16).

In an Old Babylonian **er₂-šem-ma**, in a long enumeration of epithets of Enlil, flax and barley are paralleled in a passage that focuses on the fertility that the god brings to the land (rev. 2- 7):

BM 013963 (P345447)¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ See also the passage paralleled in rev. lines 12'ff of **VAT 04112** (P342909). In line rev. 12', the verbal base is emphatically tripled, reflecting the motif of abundance: **mu₂-mu₂-mu₂**.

Rev.

4 a-a ^dmu-ul-lil₂ mu-lu gu mu₂-mu₂-me-en/ mu-lu še mu₂-mu₂-me-en

Father Enlil, you are one who grows flax, you are one who grows barley!

In the composition named *How Grain Came to Sumer*, grain, barley, and flax are seemingly markers of “civilisation”, given by the gods Ninazu and Ninmada to humans, who before this only ate grass like animals:¹⁴⁶

How Grain Came to Sumer

ETCSL 1.7.6

1 ug₃-e udu-gen₇ u₂ ka-ba mu-ni-ib-<ni >-[gu₇]

Like sheep, the people ate grass in their mouths,

2 u₄ re-a ^dezina₂ še gu nu-[zu]

In that time, they did not know grain, barley, or flax.

Overall, these crops provided nourishment and fibre for clothing, but their basic meaning in ancient Mesopotamia is hugely connotative. They are inherently desirable. Particularly in the case of barley for food/beer, the use of this crop was a dietary staple, but an abundance of barley also equalled economic prosperity and luxury.¹⁴⁷ Not only this, but these crops

¹⁴⁶ A motif found to describe the feral, wild-man Enkidu in Tablet I of the *Epic of Gilgameš*, line 108. Breniquet noted that ‘weaving is a mark of civilisation by the same token as the transformation of food by cooking’ (Breniquet 2013: 6). Waetzoldt also remarked on the art of weaving and its relationship with civilisation, quoting the disputation poem *Ezinam and Ewe*, ‘(Weil die Göttin des Getreides [...] und die Göttin der Webkunst [...] noch nicht geboren waren,) “kannten die Menschen der Urzeit kein Brot zum Essen, kannten keine Stoffe, um sich darin zu kleiden”’ (Waetzoldt 1972: xix).

¹⁴⁷ That being said, in the disputation *Two Women B*, Gašankuzu/Ninkuzu insults “Mrs A” for her low economic status, apparent by her hard physical labour, including the continuous processing of oil and barley, **u₅-mu sur-sur/ še sa-sa-sa/ inda₃ gu-lu-a du₈-du₈**, ‘Always pressing oil, permanently roasting barley, constantly baking big breads!’ (line 44), <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/pager>, see also Matuszak 2016: 234. It would seem that whilst the crop represented agricultural prosperity, the menial tasks of processing barley for food were disparaged.

move within the semantic domains of food/eating, agricultural activity, and clothing, domains from which erotic metaphors are often also constructed, as is evident in the Sumerian “Love Songs” and elsewhere.

2. Contextual Meaning: Barley and Flax as Metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs”

In the wider Old Babylonian Sumerian literary corpus, flax and barley metaphorise abundance and prosperity. In the context of the Sumerian “Love Songs”, this abundance is closely connected with eroticism.¹⁴⁸ The target domain Abundance (see chapter 3.4) shares its source domains with many that also metaphorically map onto and construct domains of desire, pleasure, and allure. This conceptually draws the target domains of abundance and those with erotic aspects together and frames a desire for agricultural prosperity within the frame of *sexual* desire.¹⁴⁹

This is in some ways to do with the erotic metaphor of hunger/eating for desire/pleasure, a motif regularly encountered in love poetry in both ancient and modern contexts. In *Inanna-Dumuzi D1*, the connection between desire, pleasure, and agricultural abundance is clearly made. The first half of *Inanna-Dumuzi D1* focuses on Inanna’s lust for

¹⁴⁸ This contextual use of an abundance of barley/flax/grain as erotic metaphor is significantly juxtaposed by its use as a violent image in the city lamentations, where bodies are described as being heaped up like grain. For example, in the Nippur lament, **ki-sikil guruš di4-di4-la2-bi-ne zar-re-eš mi-ni-ib-sal-sal-la-aš us-a bi-im-me**, ‘Because they piled up the young women, young men and their little children like heaps of grain, it cries “Woe!” for them’ (Tinney 1996: 100-101).

¹⁴⁹ The motif of flax and barley is also found in *Inanna-Dumuzi X* (Sefati 2005). The tentative reconstruction of this composition makes it difficult to see how the different sections fit together. “Section A” has reed imagery, “Section B” has milk and churning imagery, “Section C” has an address by Ninsun to Dumuzi about his city, and “Section D” has pastoral imagery (see Sefati 2005 for this reconstruction and commentary). The following lines from “Section C” describe Dumuzi’s city, Ku’ara:

Inanna-Dumuzi X

Ist Ni 2369 (P345118)

122 gu-bi! na-mu₂-mu₂ na-bu-re x x
 qa₂-a-šu ša uš-šu-u₂ i-na-sa₃-^hhu! x x x
 Its flax will indeed grow, will indeed be plucked!

123 še-bi na-mu₂-mu₂ na-gur₁₀-gur₁₀ x [...]
 ŠE-šu ša ib-ba-an-nu-u₂ x x ki x NE x [...]

Its barley will indeed grow, will indeed be reaped!

Here, the presence and growth of the cereals, as well as the affirmative verbs, suggests an aspirational abundance of the land.

the bed, which is associated with source domains such as red berries/flowers (chapter 2.4), lapis lazuli (chapter 2.9) and honey (chapter 2.1). After this erotic episode, Inanna’s minister, Ninšubur, tells Inanna the things she should give to her lover, including the crown and throne of kingship (lines 33-47). The verbal forms then switch from the imperative (**šum2-mu-na-ab**) to the precative, and Ninšubur wishes for the male lover to bring abundance, encapsulated by a sequence of images that appear elsewhere (Gabbay/Mirelman/Reid 2020; discussed in chapter 3.4).

Naturally, amongst this motif of abundance, Ninšubur wishes for the union of Inanna and the king to bring flax and barley:

Inanna-Dumuzi D1

BM 15280 (P283738)

50 gu ħe2-en-da-gal2 še ħe2-en-da-gal2

May flax be with him, may barley be with him!

51 i7-da a-eštub ħe2-en-da-gal2

In the river, may there be spring (carp) waters with him!

52 a-ša3-ga še gu-nu ħe2-en-da-gal2

In the fields, may there be multicoloured barley with him!

The minister also wishes for the lover to be accompanied by fish and birds in the marshes, reeds in the reedbeds, plants in the steppe, and sheep and goats in the forests (lines 53-56; see chapter 2.10). Further to this, the sense of abundance is qualified with some familiar images to the “Love Songs”, elsewhere used as erotic metaphors (see chapters 2.1 and 2.3):

57 pu2-geš⁶kiri6 la3 geštin ħe2-en-da-il2

In the orchards, may honey and wine rise with him!

58 mu₂-sar-ra ḥi-is-^{sar} za₃-ḥi-li^{sar} ḥe₂-en-da-mu₂

In the gardens, may lettuce and *cress* grow with him!

Whilst these depictions and wishes for prosperous landscapes creates a sense of sought-after abundance, the clustering of food and agricultural images in these lines also recalls the metaphorical relationship between food consumption and sexual desire/pleasure. This tactic is observable in other erotic literature; in her commentary on book 4, verses 10-16 of the *Song of Songs*, Exum noted that ‘names of exotic plants piled up in a kind of sensory overload suggest something of the woman’s sexual amplex and ripeness and, along with it, the glutting of sexual desire’ (Exum 2005: 178).

The precative mood in *Inanna-Dumuzi D1* also mirrors other instances in the “Love Songs” which express desire (chapter 3.1), such as in *Šu-Suen C*, in which the source domain of barley also appears to conceptualise an abundance that is associated with eroticism:

Šu-Suen C

N 3560 (P278585)

20 mu-un-gar₃ še maḥ tum₃-me ḥe₂-me-en

May you be our farmer, bringing resplendent barley!

21 igi-ga₂ lal₃-bi-im ša₃-ga₂ ḥi-li-bi-im

He is the honey of my eyes; he is the sexual delight of my belly!

With such explicit reference to sexual desire in line 21, established both by honey and by **ḥi-li**, the barley in line 20 also appears to bear sexual meaning, and not only refer to abundance of the land.

A sensation of excess and abundance seems deeply associated with the imagery of these crops. At the end of the hymn *Inanna G*, the image of flax and barley pouring forth from the goddess' breasts evokes several conceptual metaphors that tie abundance and fertility to the female body. Dumuzi addresses the goddess after their meeting in the temple, in which a bed had been set up for them:

Inanna G

BM 15794 (P283740)

70 ^dinanna ubur-zu gan₂-ne₂-zu ħe₂-a

Inanna- may your breasts be your fields!

71 gan₂-ne₂ dagal-e gu de₂-a-zu

Your wide fields that pour out flax,

72 gan₂-ne₂ dagal-e še de₂-a-zu

Your wide fields that pour out barley,

73 a bal-am₃-ta mu-lu₂ ŠE (erasure) gar-am₃-ta

Make water overflow from them, provide *for* the man!

74 a bal-bal-am₃-ta mu-lu₂ gar-gar-am₃-^r ta [?]

Make water flow and flow from them, provide and provide *for* the man!

75 ^r mu [?]-lu du₁₁-ga-ra u₃-na-e-^r ni [?]-^r du₁₁ [?]

u₃ (**PROSP**)-n.na (**3SG+DAT**)-ni (**LOC**)-e (**2SG**)-spoken-Ø (**DO**)

After you have told this to the man,

76 ne-en ga-ra-na₈-^r na₈ [?]?

Let me offer you this to drink!

This imagery situates the goddess' body as both the arable land from which an abundance of crops may grow, and as a vessel from which things can pour forth (see discussion in chapter 2.5). Flax and barley are positioned as sustenance and nourishment, exuding from the breasts like milk, and, along with water, providing essentials to be consumed.

3. Barley, Grain, and Flax as Erotic Metaphors

An abundance of barley, grain, and flax in the “Love Songs” contributes to the sense of delightful excess and luxury that surrounds and represents the worlds of the lovers. These images, then, at the same time, also operate as more explicit metaphors for the desire, allure, and pleasure that is *felt* by the lovers.

In *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, the attractiveness and allure of grain is emphasised in a description of Inanna by the narrator. She is directly compared with a colourful sheaf of grain:

Inanna-Dumuzi R

UM 55-21-309 (P257383)

5 ^llu² ^ʔki-sikil ^{še}zar-maš-gen⁷ gun³-^la ^ʔlugal-ra tum²-ma

Young woman, multicoloured like a grain stook, made for a king,

6 ^dinanna ^{še}zar-maš-gen⁷ gun³-a ^ddumu-zi-ra tum²-ma

Inanna, multicoloured like a grain stook, made for Dumuzi!

7 ^llu²ki-sikil ^{še}zar gu²-^lnida ^ʔ-a ^hi-li ^lšu ^ʔge⁴-a-gen

Young woman, you are a sheaf of hulled grain, constantly alluring,

8 ^dinanna ^{še}zar gu₂-^rnida ^ʔ-a ^{hi}-li šu **ge₄-a-gen**

Inanna, you are a sheaf of hulled grain, constantly alluring!

9 **nin-gen nin-gen** x x x ^{hi}^ʔ-li^ʔ **gur₃-ru-gen**

I am the queen, I am the queen....I am alluring,

10 **me-e ki-sikil-gen** ^rnin ^ʔ-^rgen ^ʔ[x] ^rhi-li **gur₃ ^ʔ-ru- gen**

I, I am a young woman, I am the *queen*, I am alluring!

Grain is mapped as a metaphor for Inanna's allure, using imagery that moves from the macro-image to the specific. In lines 5 and 6, Inanna is compared to the shimmering and multi-coloured appearance of a grain stook (**še-zar-maš**, Attinger 2021: 1154), the arrangement of cut grain sheaves left for drying. In lines 7-8, the image is specified, she is a sheaf of **gu₂-nida**, hulled grain, likely emmer.¹⁵⁰ The term **gu₂-nida** predominantly qualifies emmer (**ziz₂**), a type of hulled wheat. The grain **ziz₂** can be modified by different colour terms, **babbar**, **si₄**, or **ge₆** (Peterson 2007: 484), which is perhaps what is referenced in the preceding lines 5-6 of *Inanna-Dumuzi R*. The specificity of **gu₂-nida** possibly has a further erotic nuance; if **gu₂-nida** is a reference to hulled grain/wheat, a specific type of wheat that requires threshing to remove hulls from the crop, the mapping may reference the unclothing or nudity of the goddess. The desirable appearance of both the sheaves of grain and Inanna is highlighted by the repeated appearance of the term **hi-li**, which attaches itself on numerous occasions to images of barley and flax in the corpus (see below).

The beauty and allure of barley and grain is again used in *Inanna-Dumuzi O* as a description of the female beloved:

¹⁵⁰ For **gu₂-nida** see Powell (1984: 53ff); as “hulled grain” see Civil (1964: 78); Sjöberg (1973: 16).

Inanna-Dumuzi O

Ist Ni 4569 (P343146)

9 še ab-sin₂-^ṽ na ^ṽ x x ^ṽ sa₆ ^ṽ-ga ḥe₂-me-en

May you be beautiful.... barley in the furrow,

10 ^d ezina₂ x x sa₆-ge ḥe₂-me-en

May you be beautiful.... Ezinam (grain)

Much of *Inanna-Dumuzi O* is made up of these precative, wishful statements between an unnamed female and male character, expressing their desire for one another. The adjective, **sa₆**, with a semantic range meaning ‘sweet’, ‘good’, or ‘beautiful’, is repeated to describe both the furrow and the grain goddess Ezinam in line 10, further emphasising that here barley also has the target domain of sexual allure. Similar language is used in the *Debate between Ezinam and Ewe*, where the desirability of Ezinam is expressed in a familiar way, with **ḥi-li**:

Ezinam and Ewe

49 ^dezina₂ ab-sin₂-na gub-ba-ne₂

Ezinam, when she stands in the furrow,

50 ki-sikil si₁₂-ga ḥi-li gur₃-ru-am₃

The young, ripe woman is alluring.

In both texts, the ‘barley in the furrow’ recalls the way this image is used as a metaphor for the vulva in *Inanna-Dumuzi A* and *E* (see below). There, too, barley is closely related with **ḥi-li**, sexual allure, suggesting the desirability of the female body. In the third description of Ludingira’s mother, amongst other luscious imagery of gardens, she is described as follows:

Ludingira's Message to his Mother

ETCSL 5.5.1

34 buru₁₄ ħe₂-nun še gu-nu mu₂-a

She is a bountiful harvest of grown, multi-coloured barley!

Barley, conceptually established as a desirable and pleasurable entity, is more attractive in abundance.

The attractiveness of barley and flax elsewhere manifests in *Inanna-Dumuzi P* as a metaphor for *pleasure*. Flax and barley appear post-coitally, after the episode which densely utilises metaphorical language for the vulva and sexual intercourse:

Inanna-Dumuzi P

Ist Ni 9602 (P343627)

col. iii.

9 ur₂ lugal-la-ta zi-ga-^r ni [?][ta?]

After her rising from the lap of the king,

10 gu mu-un-da-zi še mu-un-da-zi

Flax rose with her; barley rose with her!

This imagery has typically been read as one related to the sympathetic fertility ritual, the Sacred Marriage; for example, Jacobsen wrote, ‘some lines are completely lost but they must have led up to Inanna’s union with Dumuzi for when the text resumes it describes the union and tells how it magically awakens new life through all nature’ (Jacobsen 1976: 46). Lapinkivi assumes the same outcome (Lapinkivi 2004: 40). Whilst it is certainly true that crops, as well as fruits and shoots in line 8, come after Inanna’s sexual encounter with

Dumuzi, it is possible that fertility is not the only significant outcome, but also her sexual pleasure.

The explicit focus on female desire and pleasure throughout the corpus indicates this could be the case, and therefore the ‘rising’ of flax and barley in *Inanna-Dumuzi P* symbolises the rising and fulfilment of Inanna’s pleasure after sex. The emphatic, triple use of the verb **zi.g**, ‘to rise’, in these lines is suggestive. Some conceptual metaphors are orientational and have a basis in our embodied and spatial experiences. For example, a common conceptual metaphor in English is HAPPY (or other positive emotions) IS UP, whilst SAD IS DOWN. Lakoff and Johnson argued that there was a physical basis for this orientational metaphor, in that standing with an erect posture is associated with feeling positive emotions, whereas feeling sad typically makes the body droop in a downwards motion (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 15). In ancient Mesopotamia, it seems likely that an upwards orientation also held positive connotations. In Sumerian, the compound **sag-il₂**, ‘to raise the head high’, is a movement associated with pre-eminence, pride, or contentment (Attinger 2021: 563-4). Similarly, the Akkadian verb *šaqû*, to be high, and its derivatives, is also often used to indicate prominence and exaltedness (CAD Š2: 15ff). Notably, the compound **geš₃-zi.g**, ‘raising of the penis’, as well as the idiom **ša₃.g-zi.g**, ‘raising of the heart/belly’, refers to a male erection and indicates physical desire and pleasure. In the instance in *Inanna-Dumuzi P*, Inanna’s rising after sexual activity with the king causes not only the flax and barley to rise in abundance, indicating the prosperity of the union, but also refers metaphorically to the abstract pleasure she feels, mapped from the positive orientational experience of an upward movement.

4. Barley as a Metaphor for the Vulva in *Inanna-Dumuzi A, B and E*

Whilst a want and need for abundant cereals maps onto sexual allure, desire, and pleasure in the “Love Songs”, flax and barley also have erotic connotations in the corpus because they work as metaphors for the female genitals. In *Inanna-Dumuzi A* and *E*, as also highlighted by Couto-Ferreira, the term **še ab-sin₂** (furrow) is a conceptual metaphor for the vulva (Couto-Ferreira 2017: 64):

Inanna-Dumuzi A

CBS 10465 (P265677)

3 in-nin₉ gu sar-ra ħi-li gur₃-ru

“Lady, the flax in the garden¹⁵¹ is alluring!

4 ^dinanna gu sar-ra ħi-li gur₃-ru

Inanna, the flax in the garden is alluring!

5 še ab-sin₂-na ħi-li ma-az diri-ga

The barley in the furrow, overflowing with allure and lust!

Once again, these plants are attributed with **ħi-li**. The parallelism with barley suggests that flax could also be working as a metaphor for the desirable female body. In *Inanna-Dumuzi E*, a similar image is repeated:

Inanna-Dumuzi E

AO 5385 (P345364)

¹⁵¹ Note the difference between flax in the *garden* and barley in the *furrow* (ie. field). This supports the idea that flax was probably grown in small, garden plots, as it required lots of watering and was vulnerable to salinisation (Waetzdolt 1985b: 78).

3 še ab-sin₂-ba hi-li-a¹⁵² sa₅- gu₁₀ hi-is^{sar}-am₃ a ba-an-du₁₁

My barley in its furrow, filled with sexual allure, it is the lettuce he watered!

As an image metaphor (Lakoff 1987), the furrow, an opening in the earth in which to plant seed and pour water, mimics the shape of the female body, and mirrors the dichotomised roles of the male and female body in sexual intercourse. The conceptual relationship between the furrow and the female body is also clear from later lexical material. Sefati and Couto-Ferreira significantly point to a first millennium lexical list which equates **ab-sin₂** with the Akkadian word for womb, *ša₃-sur-rum* (Antagal B 88; Sefati 1998: 215; Couto-Ferreira 2017: 64). Further to this, another image metaphor seems to map onto the target domain of the vulva: the shape of the barley flowers, arranged with a number of layered spikelets, are bead-shaped and covered with bristles (Charles 1984: 17-19).¹⁵³

In both *Inanna-Dumuzi A* and *E*, barley is associated and said to be *filled with hi-li*. The notion that the female body can be ‘full’ of a substance is expressed elsewhere in the Sumerian literary corpus, in the construction of the female body as a vessel for containing liquids (see chapter 2.5). In the cases of *Inanna-Dumuzi A* and *E*, the barley-vulva is ‘filled’, and even ‘overflowing’, with sexual allure.¹⁵⁴ The fullness of the body could also be a reference to the erotic metaphor of food consumption. In the “Love Songs”, synonyms of **hi-li**, **la-la** and **ma-az**,¹⁵⁵ occur, whose Akkadian equivalents indicate similar semantic fields

¹⁵² Manuscripts **Ist Ni 9486** and **IM 11087** do not have the unclear post-position -a on **hi-li**. For **hi-li sas** (=SI.A), Sefati refers to CAD M/1, 175: *malû*: **hi-li** SI.A= *kuzba malû*, **la-la** SI.A= *lalâ malû* (Sefati 1998: 168).

¹⁵³ In the *Song of Songs*, the male describes his lover: בְּטֶנְנֶךָ עֲרֻמַת הַטִּיִּים סִנְיָה בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים ‘your belly like a heap of wheat, encircled by lilies’ (Song 7:2; JPS). The metaphorical mappings are quite different to what is found in the Sumerian “Love Songs”; Exum notes, ‘the image is suggestive of the softness of her belly’ (Exum 2005: 234). Other commentators assume that the comparison references the shape and colour of the woman’s belly, its ‘gentle curve and tawny hue’ (Fox 1985: 159).

¹⁵⁴ Seemingly, occasionally the *male* body can also be filled with sexual desire. For example, in a hymn to Ninlil, **hi-li** is described as physically filling the belly of her husband Enlil: ʾ me ʾ giri₁₇-zal ša₃ hi-li sas-na gu₂-da ma-ra-ni-in-la₂, ‘In his belly filled with sexual delight, he embraced the abundant powers for you!’ (*Ninlil A*, ETCSL 4.24.1 line 24).

¹⁵⁵ For **la-la** see *Inanna Dumuzi B*, lines 9 and 10. For **ma-az**, see *Inanna-Dumuzi A*, line 5.

to **hi-li**, but additionally denote swelling and flourishing (*elēšum, hitbušu, šebû, elšiš, ulšum*; Jaques 2006: 251 fn. 519). That there are also sexual connotations to these terms is evident by the noun *ulšum*, which with the verb *epēšum* can mean to experience sexual pleasure. Akkadian *šebûm*, meaning both ‘to become sated (with food)’ and ‘to enjoy fully’, seemingly bridges a gap between the state of being full of a substance, the human body being full of food, and the experience of joy, sexual pleasure, and satisfaction.¹⁵⁶

Female sexual arousal in the corpus is conceptualised through liquid substances such as honey and beer, and therefore substances with properties that allow them to physically fill and overflow a container. The indication here, then, that the barley in the furrow overflows with what is contained not only positions it as the vulva, but as the sexually aroused state of the female body. Barley is also present in this manner in *Inanna-Dumuzi B*:

Inanna-Dumuzi B

Ist Ni 2489 (P345323)

7 nin₉-gu₁₀ še-za¹⁵⁷ kaš-bi in-du₁₀ ka lal₃ ʾ ama ʾ-na- gu₁₀

My sister, the beer from your barley is sweet, my honey-mouth of her mother!

Beer is used as a conceptual metaphor for female sexual arousal elsewhere in the corpus (chapter 2.5). Here, it is in a syntactical relationship with barley, where beer is positioned as *coming from* barley. As its container, barley is working as a metaphor for the vulva in a state of arousal (Assante 2002: 35).

¹⁵⁶ The sexual use of the verb *šebûm* is evident in this famous passage from Tablet 1 (lines 194-5) of the *Epic of Gilgameš*, where sexual satisfaction is conceptualised as satiation, the cessation of hunger: 6 *ur-ri* 7 *GI₆^{meš}* ʾEN.KI.DU₃ *te-bi-ma šam-ḥat ir-ḥi/ ul-tu iš-bu-u₂ la-la-ša₂*, ‘For six days and 7 nights, Enkidu, erect, had sex with Šamḥat/After, he was sated with her allure’ (see George 2003: 548-9).

¹⁵⁷ The post-position on barley is either the locative or the genitive marker. The locative infix in the verbal chain suggests it is the locative; however, the following noun with the demonstrative pronoun also suggests it is an anticipatory genitive.

5. Linen Production as Sexual Metaphor in *Inanna-Dumuzi A*

Inanna-Dumuzi A is a composition almost entirely dedicated to the source domain of flax. It is a repetitive dialogue between Inanna and Utu which describes the process of producing linen. From lines 11 onwards, Inanna asks who will perform an action related to the production of a linen garment and Utu answers in the cohortative, exclaiming that he will bring her the processed flax. The actions involved are the hoeing, hackling, spinning, twining, warping, weaving, and whitening of flax.¹⁵⁸ Finally, at the end of the composition, Inanna asks who will lie on the flax with her, to which Utu replies that Ama-ušumgal-anna will lie on it with her, thus revealing the product of these actions as the bed linen.

Linen, used as clothing or spread upon the bed, is a recurring erotic motif in the Egyptian love songs. As in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, the dressing/clothing of the female beloved is a key erotic motif (see chapter 3.3). In the Egyptian texts, rather than the jewels and ornaments used to embellish the often-statuesque beauty of the female body (see chapter 2.9), her linen garments, soaked in oil, create a more intimate, erotic image. This is found in several of the so-called Cairo love songs (Fox 1985). In text 20C, the female speaker exclaims (speaking to her lover), ‘my heart desires to go down, to bathe myself before you, that I may show you my beauty in a tunic of the finest royal linen, which is drenched in *tišp*-oil’ (Fox 1985: 32). In another, text 21B, the male speaker yearns to touch the clothing of his lover:

‘If only I were the laundryman

of my sister’s linen garment

(even) for one month!

¹⁵⁸ The process more or less seems to reflect modern accounts of linen production, described by McCorriston 1997: 523.

I would be strengthened,¹⁵⁹

by grasping [the clothes]

that touch her body.

for it would be I who washed out the moringa oils

That are in her kerchief.

Then I'd rub my body

with her cast-off garments' (Fox 1985: 37).

In 20G, linen's proximity to the lusted after female body is as erotic as the fabric spread on the bed,

'Come here

so I may speak to you!

Put fine linen between her legs,

while spreading (her bed) with royal linen' (Fox 1985: 33).

Of these moments in the Cairo love songs, Fox surmised, 'The youth speaks not of the sensuousness of the act but of the sensuousness of her bed, where (we are to assume) the couple will make love. The youth speaks of the sheet tucked between his girl's legs, of her plush linen bed-clothes, and of the fragrance of her body. We are led to picture her there, wrapped in silky, scented luxury as she awaits her lover. The poem stops here. The imagination does not' (Fox 1985: 44).

¹⁵⁹ Fox notes that the line could be translated, 'I would be strengthened as a male' (Fox 1985: 39), presumably referring to the young man's feelings of arousal and virility on being able to touch the female lover's garments.

This kind of suggestiveness is found in the metaphors of the Sumerian “Love Songs” too. In *Inanna-Dumuzi A*, linen not only acts metonymically, where the fibre that adorns the space of sexual activity stands in for the sexual pleasure/intercourse of the lovers, but the stages of processing the flax plant are also encompassed within the metaphor. Before the action of processing the flax begins in the text, Utu explicitly states Inanna’s desire for the bed linen:

Inanna-Dumuzi A

CBS 10465 (P265677)

6 nin₉ gada maḥ-e ḥi-li ba-e-TE.A

Sister, you desired a fine linen,

7 ^dinanna gada maḥ-e ḥi-li ba-e-TE.A

Inanna, you desired a fine linen,

8 al ga-mu-ra-ab-AK x ga-mu-ra-ab-šum₂

ga (COHORT)-mu (VENT)-e.ra (2SG+DAT)-b (DO)-hoe/give

Let me hoe it for you! Let me give it to you!

9 in-nin₉ gu sar-ra ga-mu-^rra ^l.de₆

ga (COHORT)-mu (VENT)-e.ra (2SG+DAT)-b (DO)-bring

Sister, let me bring flax of the garden to you!

What Inanna desires at the beginning of the composition comes into fruition through each stage of processing flax, brought to the young goddess by the sun god. This composition has been previously interpreted as blurring ‘literal’ and metaphorical lines. For Jacobsen, the processing of the flax is a metaphor of the ‘binding arrangements’ for Inanna to marry Ama-

ušumgal-anna (Jacobsen 1976: 30; 1987a: 13). For Leick, the process is a metaphor for the transformation of the ‘girl’ to a bride, who ‘like the sheets, lies on the bed in expectation of her groom’ (Leick 1994: 81). It was first suggested by Couto-Ferreira that the actions of linen production in *Inanna-Dumuzi A* could be interpreted as metaphors for sexual intercourse (Couto-Ferreira 2017: 62-63),

In the light of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic parallels, however, it might be argued the composition also deploys a sexual meaning. On the specific terms for “beating”, “weaving” and so on could be alluding in this context to the physical act of sexual intercourse, or even to a sort of initiation in lovemaking (Couto Ferreira 2017: 62-63).

I would add that the rhythmic actions of the flax processing in *Inanna-Dumuzi A* is mimicked by the structural and syntactical repetition of the poem to recall further the recurrent actions of sexual intercourse. For example, the text is structured throughout repeating the same pattern, replacing only the activity related to processing the flax:

Question: ‘Brother, after you have brought the [beaten, spun, twined, warped, woven, bleached] flax, who will [beat, spin, twine, warp, weave, bleach] it for me?’

Repeat of Question: ‘Who will [beat, spin, twine, warp, weave, bleach] it for me?’

Utu’s reply ‘My sister, I will bring it to you [beaten, spun, twined, warped, woven, bleached], Inanna I will bring it to you [beaten, spun, twined, warped, woven, bleached]’

Not only is this text hugely repetitive, but most of the verbs used to describe the stages of linen production are reduplicated or their sounds partially reduplicated: **ma-ab-nu-nu** (lines 17-18), **ma-ab-tab-be₂** (lines 22-23), **ma-ab-ze₂-ze₂** (lines 27-28), **ma-tag-tag** (lines 32-33), and **ma-tan₃-tan₃** (lines 37-38). The sexual act is not explicitly depicted but can be felt in

the rhythmic cadence of the stages of processing flax into the bed linen, where Inanna and her lover will meet. This is ultimately the outcome at the end of the composition. It is revealed that it is Ama-ušumgal-anna who is the one who will ‘lie’ with Inanna on the linen, a metonym for sexual activity (lines 42-48). In the final lines, the poem returns to barley as the metaphor for abundance and desire, with Inanna stating that Ama-ušumgal-anna is the one who regularly brings barley into the storehouse (line 52), and whose grain is of ‘innumerable heaps’ (**mu-un-gar₃ še-[ni] guru₇ šar₂-ra-kam**). Again, an abundance of barley is positioned as desirable and attractive.

5. Flax and Barley as a Source Domain in the “Love Songs”: Summary

This overview of the way barley and flax appear throughout various “Love Songs” has demonstrated the flexibility of these crops as source domains, acting as metaphors for the sumptuous, abundant world of the lovers, but also their feelings of allure, desire, pleasure, and as image metaphors for the female body. The inherent desirability and significance of barley and flax in the agricultural and textile domains, as apparent in other Old Babylonian Sumerian literature, in the context of the Sumerian “Love Songs” become metaphors that construct an eroticism based on their sought-after abundance. Barley and flax contribute to the imagery of bursting agricultural prosperity portrayed in the “Love Songs”, which in this erotic context is used to evoke a sense of the overwhelming emotions of desire, pleasure, and attraction.

2.3 Lettuce

Lettuce in the Sumerian “Love Songs” is a metaphor for the vulva, and, through various metaphorical mappings, the state of the female body during sexual arousal and desire. This section will firstly outline the basic meaning and frame of reference of lettuce in Mesopotamia and the ancient world, before analysing the contextual and metaphorical meaning of lettuce in *Inanna-Dumuzi E* and *Šu-Suen C*.

1. Lettuce: Basic Meaning in Mesopotamia and the Ancient World

The Sumerian noun **hi-is^{sar}** has now long been identified as the lettuce plant, *lactuca sativa* L. (Thompson 1924: 125). Lexically equated with Akkadian *ḥassu* (**URs-ra** XVII, 327, MSL X: 95), the identification comes from cognates in Syriac *ḥasstā* and Iraqi Arabic *ḥass* (Falkenstein 1941: 200). The Hebrew noun *ḥassāh* has also been tentatively identified as the lettuce plant (Meissner 1891: 293). However, whilst the seeds of *lactuca sativa* L. have been reported in archaeological deposits in ancient Egypt (Germer 1985: 185; Zohary et al 2012: 157), there is no way to confirm the species of lettuce in Mesopotamia due to the fast decay of vegetal tissues (Powell 2003: 19; Renfrew 1995: 192).¹⁶⁰ Evidence of the cultivation of **hi-is^{sar}** in Mesopotamia comes from a rather late source, **BM 46226** (P365355), a list of the plants in the gardens of Marduk-apla-iddina (biblical Merodach-Baladan), the Babylonian king from the 1st millennium BCE (Meissner 1891: 289).

Lettuces in ancient Egypt are associated with phallic fertility. Regularly appearing upon Old and Middle Kingdom tomb reliefs and monuments (Zohary et al. 2012: 158),

¹⁶⁰ It is possible that several species of lettuce existed in Mesopotamia. Lexical lists indicate seven different names associated with **hi-is^{sar}** (**URs-ra** XVII, 327-335, MSL X: 95-96), including **hi-is-tur^{sar}**, equated with Akkadian *guzāzu* and *murāru* (**URs-ra** XVII 328-329, MSL X: 95). Thompson suggests that as the Sumerian of *guzāzu* is translatable as ‘small lettuce’, it is probably a variety such as the cabbage lettuce, rather than the upright cos lettuce (Thompson 1924: 125; 1949: 72-74). He equates *murāru* with cognates in Arabic *murār* and Syriac *ḥas merārê*, meaning ‘bitter lettuce’ (Thompson 1924: 125; 1949: 72-74).

depictions of lettuce from the Old Kingdom to the Ptolemaic period are mostly conical in shape, with long and upright leaves, resembling the modern cos or romaine species of lettuce (Keimer 1924a: 1; Norris 2015: 26). The lettuce is often associated and depicted with Min, the Egyptian god of fertility. For example, on a New Kingdom stela, two lettuce plants on a pedestal stand behind the god Min, depicted in a minimalistic style to highlight his erect phallus (Norris 2015: 46).

Whilst the lettuces in Egyptian art are distinctly phallic, their association with Min is also probably due to the latex that the lettuce produces, a milky substance that exudes from the stalk and leaves of the lettuce when broken. During the reproductive stage of the plant's life, the latex is produced in greater quantities and builds pressure; when the stalk is broken, the latex exudes with force and possibly resembles ejaculation (Norris 2015: 142). The similarity with semen likely associated the lettuce with fertility and reproduction in ancient Egypt (Keimer 1924b: 143; Norris 2015: 145). In the mythological narrative *The Contendings of Horus and Seth*, the semen of Horus is spread upon lettuce, which Seth eats and consequently becomes pregnant (Gardiner 1931: Chester Beatty Papyrus 1: 11.12).

Comparatively, in ancient Greece, varying sources claim that lettuce is an anaphrodisiac (Norris 2015: 146-147). It is distinctly unappealing. For example, Athenaeus of Naucratis in his *Deipnosophistae (The Learned Banqueters)* explains the literary image of Aphrodite laying her lover Adonis onto a bed of lettuce as an allegory for the impotence-inducing qualities of lettuce (II. c, 392). He also references Lycus the Pythagorean in his naming of lettuce as both the 'eunuch-lettuce' and the 'impotent lettuce' (II. d, 392). The lettuce in ancient Greek myth is coded as cold and wet, which aligns it with things destined to 'rot and die' (Detienne 1994: 68).

To my knowledge, there are no Mesopotamian iconographic depictions of lettuces, and it is rare in the textual sources outside of lexical and administrative material. However, the lettuce plant appears in the Old Babylonian literature primarily in erotic contexts within the “Love Songs” corpus. Elsewhere, it occurs in a passage of *Nanna K* which incidentally finds a close parallel in *Inanna-Dumuzi D1* (see chapter 3.4).¹⁶¹ The passage is broken, but the lettuce appears amongst imagery that typically denotes fertility and abundance of land and produce; carp-floods, reedbeds, and orchards of honey and wine (Sjöberg 1960; ETCSL 4.13.11; see chapter 3.4). The latex exudation of the lettuce is referred to in a proverb from Nippur, ‘...meadow grass is the milk of lettuce’ (KUŠ 𒄩 u²sas ga 𒄩i-is^{sar}-kam, ETCSL 6.2.1.C.3).

The lettuce also occurs in two Šulgi hymns, *Šulgi Z* and *N*. The former is filled with erotic imagery found elsewhere in the “Love Songs” corpus (see further discussion in chapter 2.6). In reverse line 24, though the line is broken, the *gakkul* lettuce is mentioned (on the *gakkul* lettuce see below in this chapter). In *Šulgi N* (ETCSL 2.4.2.14), the lettuce appears quite prominently. This composition has been interpreted as a ‘lullaby’ to the son of Šulgi, sung by the wife of the king (Kramer 1971: 191). The composition opens with the mother singing of the growth of her son (1-7), and then addresses Sleep personified, asking for Sleep to overwhelm the child (10-18). In the passage that follows, the mother relates the cultivation of lettuce to her son obtaining a wife and a child:

Šulgi N

ETCSL 2.4.2.14

¹⁶¹ Sefati also points to *Utu E* and *F*, obv. 32ff (Kramer 1985), and the *Lamentation of Sumer and Ur*, lines 498-507 (Michalowski 1989) as parallels to the passage in *Nanna K* and *Inanna-Dumuzi D1* (Sefati 1998: 311).

24 geš^skiri₆-gu₁₀ hi-is^{sar}-am₃ a im-mi-du₁₁

i (VP)-m (VENT)-bi (OO)-* (1SG)-watered- Ø (DO)

My garden, it is the lettuce I watered,

25 hi-is^{sar} gakkul-am₃ ma₈ im-mi-du₁₁

It is the *gakkul* lettuce I chopped,

26 hi-is^{sar}-bi u₃-mu-un-e he₂-gu₇-e

May the lord eat that lettuce!

27 u₃-ru-ru-ga₂ dam ga-an-na-an-ze₂-eg₃

With my *crooning*, let me give him a wife!

28 [dam] [ga-an]-na-an-ze₂-eg₃ ʳ du₅ ʳ-[mu] ga-an-na-an-ze₂-eg₃

ga (COHORT)-n.na (3SG+DAT)-n (DO)-give (ES)

Let me give him a wife, let me give him a child!

The mother, here, cultivates the lettuce for her son to later consume. The action of watering the lettuce is paralleled with the son marrying a wife in line 27, where watering is a metaphor for sexual intercourse (see below); whilst harvesting the lettuce is paralleled with the birth of a child in line 28. The mother's cultivation of the lettuce is therefore a metaphor for her son's future marriage and offspring, which lends itself to the notion that the lettuce here is a symbol of abundance and even reproductive success.

2. Contextual Meaning: Lettuce in the Sumerian "Love Songs"

Contrary to its phallic associations in ancient Egypt, the lettuce in the Sumerian “Love Songs” works primarily as a metaphor for the female genitals and as a symbol of female sexual desire. There are two key texts in which this occurs, *Inanna-Dumuzi E* and *Šu-Suen C*. In the former, the lettuce conceptualises not only aspects of the physical appearance of the female body, but also sexual arousal. In *Šu-Suen C*, the lettuce’s target domain is (pubic) hair, arranged in order to attract the king Šu-Suen. In *Inanna-Dumuzi D1*, the lettuce also occurs amongst imagery of the abundant land, caused by the union of Inanna and a king (see discussion in chapter 3.4).

3. Interacting Metaphors: Lettuce and the Vulva in *Inanna-Dumuzi E*

The lettuce is most-prominent in the first four lines of *Inanna-Dumuzi E*, extant upon four tablets. The first few lines are copied upon **AO 5385 (Sefati source A, P345364)** and **IM 11087, 65 (Sefati source D, P223411)**, with some important variations:

Inanna-Dumuzi E

1

A ba-lam¹⁶² ba-lam-lam ḥi-is^{sar}-am₃ a ba-an-du₁₁

ba (MM)-n (3SG)-watered- Ø (DO)

It swells, it flourishes,¹⁶³ it is the lettuce he watered,¹⁶⁴

2

A ^{ges}kiri₆ ge₆ eden-na gu₂ gar-gar-ra-na sa₆-ga ama-na-gu₁₀

¹⁶² **lam** = *ešebu*, *uššubu*, to grow luxuriantly (Mittermayer 2009: n.615; CAD E: 352).

¹⁶³ The reduplication is presumably for intensification. Following Leick’s suggestion: ‘I think that ‘it’ is the vulva, here compared to a leafy, fast-growing vegetable, which does not exactly ‘sprout’ but ‘swell’ (Leick 1994: 122).

¹⁶⁴ Attinger noted that Sefati’s translation of ‘(like) well-watered lettuce’ is ungrammatical, and is simply ‘il a arrosé’ (Attinger 1999-2000: 263). In a forthcoming publication, Attinger, however, translates as ‘il a arrosé comme une laitue’, noting that, literally, the line reads ‘c’est une laitue’.

yielding-RDP-NOM+3POSS+LOC

“sweetheart”-NOM mother-3POSS+GEN+1POSS

In her *ge'eden* garden that richly yields (abundance), my sweetheart of her mother!¹⁶⁵

D ^r geš ^ʔ[kiri₆] ge₆ eden^ʔ gu₂ mar-mar-ra-na hi-is^[sar] -[am₃] a ba-an-de₂¹⁶⁶

In her *ge'eden*¹⁶⁷ garden that richly yields (abundance), it is the lettuce he watered,

3

A še ab-sin₂-ba hi-li-a sa₅-gu₁₀ hi-is^{sar} -am₃ a ba-an-du₁₁

D [x x x]-ba hi-li sa₅-gu₁₀ hi!-is^{sar} -[am₃] a ba-an-de₂

My barley in its furrow, filled with sexual allure, it is the lettuce he watered,

4

A ^{geš} hašhur ag₂ sag-ga₂ gurun il₂-la-gu₁₀ <hi>- is^{sar} -am₃ a ba-an-du₁₁

D ^r geš ^ʔ hašhur ^ʔ ^r ag₂ ^ʔ -[] ^r il₂ ^ʔ -^r la ^ʔ -gu₁₀ hi- is^{sar} [a] ^r ba ^ʔ -an-de₂

My best apple tree, bearing fruit at the top, it is the lettuce he watered!

¹⁶⁵ Sefati translates ‘My shaded garden of the steppe, richly blooming, favourite of his mother’ (1998: 166), but this does not account for the 3rd person possessive suffix in **gar-gar-ra-na**. Though Sefati privileges throughout the unprovenanced tablet **AO 5385 (A)**, the end of this line in **IM 11087 (D)** instead uses the refrain related to the lettuce, which structurally mirrors the ends of lines 3 and 4. Following the argument made below, this indicates the shaded garden is also a metaphor for the vulva.

¹⁶⁶ Civil listed three compound verbs that share a meaning ‘to irrigate’. He suggested the nuances of these verbs as follows:

1. **a-gar**: A more general meaning, or ‘to be submerged’
2. **a-de₂**: Referencing the spring flood, using the flood in irrigation
3. **a-du₁₁**: Irrigation of fields from canal water. (Civil 1994: 68-69).

The verbs **a-de₂** and **a-du₁₁** have a tangential meaning ‘to water’, ‘arrosor’ (Attinger 1993: 416). Attinger notes that whilst the primary meaning of **a-de₂** is ‘to flow’ ‘couler’, when it is used causatively it takes on a meaning similar to **a-du₁₁**, ‘arrosor’ (Attinger 1993: 480).

¹⁶⁷ **MI eden-na** is possibly an abbreviated form of **GEŠ.MI(=gessu) eden-na** (Sefati 1998: 168); however, Heimpel states that ‘The grammatical structure and meaning of the term is obscure; the commonly accepted translation “(deeply) shaded garden” is difficult to prove. The frequency and different contexts of the attestations indicate a particular type of garden. The great variety of trees, including indigenous trees, creates the impression that it was a kind of botanical garden’ (Heimpel 2011:87).

The lettuce works as a rich ontological metaphor for the vulva, with several mappings. The exudation of latex mimics the secretions of the female body, whilst its overlapping leaves resembles both the pubic hair and the appearance of the vulva (Leick 1994: 123). However, previous interpretations of the lettuce in *Inanna-Dumuzi E* indicated that the lettuce was a phallic symbol. Sefati suggested that in this text Inanna describes the body of her male beloved (Sefati 1998: 167), following the interpretation of this composition by both Kramer (1969a: 645), and Jacobsen (1987a). The latter proposed that in lines 1-4 ‘lettuce stands for pubic hair [...] Barley stalk and apple tree are metaphors for the male member’ (Jacobsen 1987a: 94; quoted by Alster 1993: 21).¹⁶⁸ Leick argued that in both Jacobsen and Alster’s translations, there is an androcentric perspective which focuses on the actions of the phallus, despite it being more in keeping with the “Love Songs” corpus to focus on the vulva (Leick 1994: 122-123). *Inanna-Dumuzi E* is also not a poem concerning phallogocentric male desire, but with a female perspective of sexual longing that privileges imagery associated with the vulva, female sexual desire, and pleasure.

Furthermore, there are other related conceptual metaphors rooted within the composition and elsewhere in the Sumerian literary corpus that inform and support the conceptualisation of lettuce as the vulva in the “Love Songs”. This interplay of metaphorical concepts demonstrates the way that ‘human thought processes are largely metaphorical’ by showing that varying domains of experience are constructed through metaphorical interaction (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 6).

¹⁶⁸ It is possible that Jacobsen’s interpretation of the lettuce as a phallic symbol was influenced by his colleague, the archaeologist Henri Frankfort, with whom he published the volume *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* in 1946. Frankfort worked on both Egypt and Mesopotamia. In his seminal work *Kingship of the Gods*, published later in 1948, Frankfort comments on the lettuce as a phallic symbol of the god Min (Frankfort 1948: 188, 390 n. 23). Therefore, the interpretation of the lettuce in *Inanna-Dumuzi E* could have been influenced by its phallic associations in ancient Egypt.

In *Inanna-Dumuzi E*, the feminine perspective and focus on the pleasure of the female body in lines 5-8, encapsulated by the presence of the honey metaphor, informs and corroborates the feminine focus and the lettuce-vulva metaphor of lines 1-4. As explored in the chapter on honey (2.1), the metaphor in lines 5-8 emphasises that the pleasure is to be enacted upon the *female* body throughout the composition, ‘The honey-man, the honey-man sugar-sweetened me,/My lord, the honey-man, a god, my favourite of his mother,/His honey-hand, his honey-foot, sugar-sweetened me,/His limbs are sweetest honey, he sugar-sweetened me!’. This suggests that the lettuce and plant metaphors in lines 1-4 are working within the domain of metaphors for the vulva and female sexual arousal. **AO 5385** preserves lines 1-11 (the full composition); **Ist Ni 9846** preserves lines 1-7; **UET 6/1, 121** preserves lines 4-11; and **IM 11087** preserves lines 1-5. Therefore, lines from both the first strophe, 1-4, and second strophe, 5-8, are included on all copies, indicating a relationship between these metaphors. The feminine perspective, the male action, and the effect on the female body present in the second strophe can therefore be paralleled in the first strophe.

That the action of pouring water is often a metaphor for male ejaculation amongst the Sumerian literary corpus also situates the lettuce as a metaphor for the female genitals in *Inanna-Dumuzi E* (see discussion in chapter 2.5). The action of watering the lettuce can therefore be associated with the conceptual actions of the male body, whilst placing the lettuce, a plant that requires plenty of water to thrive, as a conceptual metaphor for the vulva and female arousal. Elsewhere, wetness (of honey, beer, the mouth, fields) metaphorises sexual fluids. Imagery of the wet female body is most prominent in the elaborate, metaphorical description of the vulva in *Inanna-Dumuzi P* and the description of the female

body as the ‘wet place’ (**ki-durus**) in *Inanna H* (see 2.5). In the “Love Songs”, the wet, female body is the emblem of sexual desire.¹⁶⁹

The presence of other metaphors for the vulva in the lines 1-4 of *Inanna-Dumuzi E* further support the conceptualisation of the lettuce as the female body. The garden, barley, and apple tree are syntactically equated to the lettuce and also act as metaphors for the vulva. Paul 1997 demonstrated how the garden motif in Sumerian, Akkadian, Egyptian, and Hebrew erotic poetry worked simultaneously as the erotic setting of the texts and as a metaphor for female sexuality and genitals (Paul 1997; Zisa 2023; see also chapter 2.6 in this thesis). In line 2 of *Inanna-Dumuzi E*, the garden also represents the vulva. The specific type of garden, named the *ge’eden* garden, also occurs in *Gilgameš and Huwawa*, where he harvests various trees for axe handles (ETCSL 1.8.1.5, line 56). In *Gudea Cylinder A*, the *ge’eden* garden is described as a ‘mountain dripping with wine’ (Cyl A, XXVIII). Heimpel states that the *ge’eden* garden is associated with the Bagara temple of Ningirsu, but interestingly also with the temple of the divine couple Ningirsu and Bau in Kisura, where it is named ‘the *ge’eden* garden, the two of them’ (^ges³**kir**i⁶ **ge**⁶ **eden min-a-bi**, **BM 21381**, P108644), and with a garden of Inanna (Heimpel 2011: 87). The *ge’eden* garden therefore perhaps had certain erotic connotations. In *Inanna-Dumuzi E*, line 2, the *ge’eden* garden is said to be ‘richly yielding’ (fruit, plants), signifying the abundance of desire and arousal of the female body. Paralleled with barley and the apple tree, both used as erotic metaphors for the female genitals elsewhere in this corpus (see chapters 2.2 and 2.6), the garden here also metaphorises the vulva.

¹⁶⁹ Leick points out that the vulva is also the emblem and focus of Mesopotamian eroticism more generally (Leick 1994: 96).

4. Further Connections: The *gakkul* Lettuce in *Šu-Suen C*

The other text in the “Love Songs” corpus which prominently features the lettuce is a hymn to Šu-Suen. In *Šu-Suen C*, the opening lines are also dominated by lettuce imagery, used as a metaphor previously interpreted as a description of Inanna’s hairdo (Kramer 1963: 508; Sefati 1998: 361), but probably one of her pubic hairs (Attinger 2021: 526; Zisa 2023: 114). The remaining lines, though fragmentary, praise Šu-Suen, who is named in lines 10 and 22:

Šu-Suen C

N 3560 (P278585)

1 siki-gu₁₀ ħi-is^{sar}-am₃ a im-^r ma ^l-[an-du₁₁]¹⁷⁰

My hair, it is the lettuce he watered,

2 ħi-is-gakkul₃^{sar171}-am₃ a im-[ma-an-du₁₁]

It is the *gakkul* lettuce he watered,

3 su-ħu-uħ₂ ħu-ub₄-bi ba-tag-tag-[ge]¹⁷²

ħu-um-mu-u₃-un¹⁷³

suku₅ (combs)?-GEN ħub₂ (heaping)?-DEM

ba (MM)-touches (RDP)-e (3SG)

¹⁷⁰ The end of this line (and line 2) is reconstructed by Kramer (1963) and Sefati (1998) from *Inanna-Dumuzi E*.

¹⁷¹ The determinative unusually appears after *gakkul* rather than after *ħi-is*, as seen in *Šulgi N*, line 25.

¹⁷² Sefati translates line 3 as ‘Its *tangled coils* were tightened’ (1998: 361). He follows Kramer in suggesting the form *su-ħu-uħ₃-ħu-ub₄-be₂* comes from *suħ₃* – to be confused (Sefati 1998: 362). I wonder if the scribe was trying to write something else here, referring to the lover’s hairstyle; perhaps *sukus ħub₂* (=tu₁₁)-bi, ‘the piling up of combs/hair’ (*sukus*, Attinger 2021: 946; tu₁₁ = to heap up, Attinger 2021: 1050). For the value tu₁₁ for HUB₂, see Old Babylonian Nippur *Ea*, **CBS 04880** (P228019) obv. i. 8 (MSL 08/1, 082 V39).

¹⁷³ The line appears to have a gloss underneath, *ħu-um-mu-u₃-un*; Sövegjártó suggests it could be an alternative verbal prefix chain (Sövegjártó 2020:258), ‘may she(?) let him(?) touch...’.

He touches *my hair heaped with combs*,

4 um-me-da-gu₁₀ maḥ mu-un-x-[x-x]

My nursemaid...lofty,

5 siki-gu₁₀-a aslum_x im-mi-in-AK

i (VP)-m (VENT)-b (IPP)-i (LOC)-n (3SG)-made- Ø (DO)

She had made my hair *like alum sheep wool*,¹⁷⁴

6 suku₅¹⁷⁵ tur-tur-bi mu-un-dub-dub¹⁷⁶

mu (VENT)-n (3SG)-brushed (RDPL)- Ø (DO)

Its *small combs*, she had brushed and brushed,

7 ḥe₂-im-du-gu₁₀ si im-sa₂-sa₂-e

He straightens out my “let him come!”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Sefati tentatively suggests reading **a-a-lum** as an Akkadian loan from *ayālum*, a description of the ‘shape of the beloved’s coiffure’ (Sefati 1998: 362). He supports this argument with a reference from the *Song of Songs*, שְׂעָרָיְךָ כְּעֶדְרַת הַעֲזִימִים שֶׁנִּלְשָׁו מִהַר גִּלְעָד, ‘Your hair (is) like a flock of goats descending from mount Gilead’ (Song 4:1; JPS). Sefati also suggests that the line could be read **sig₂-gu₁₀-a a-lum im-mi-in-AK**: ‘in the hair of my head she made a-lum’ (Sefati 1998: 362). Though Sefati asserts that the meaning of **A.LUM**, in this case, would remain unknown, he also noted that this term refers to a type of sheep, ^{udu}**aslum_x (A.LUM)** (Sefati 1998: 362). It is equally as probable that the *alum* sheep *is* referred to in this line, and possibly reflects scribal wordplay; note that in Old Babylonian Nippur **UR₅-ra** (and unprovenanced copies), **udu a-lum gukkal**, ‘long-fleeced fat-tailed sheep’, is listed as an entry before others that also include the **gukkal** signs (**LU.ḪUL₂**) (MSL 09, 41, obv. i. 11ff); perhaps the scribe has created wordplay with the *gakkul* lettuce in *Šu-Suen C* line 2. It might be coincidental, but the *alum* sheep is given as an offering to Dumuzi in *Ur-Namma A* (ETCSL 2.4.1.1, line 33), and sacrificed for Inanna in *Iddin-Dagan A* (ETCSL 2.5.3.1, line 148). I think the sense is that the nursemaid tends to the female lover’s hair and makes it soft like wool, but this is obviously uncertain.

¹⁷⁵ This term is also used in *Inanna-Dumuzi H (HS 1486)*, **suku₅ ga-mu-ra-[du₈]**, with the Akkadian gloss *mu-uš-ṭa-ti-ki lu-pa-ṭi-ir*. ‘Let me loosen your combs!’ (line 21). Sefati restores **du₈** in this line as the ‘antonym of **muš₂ dub-dub**’, which he translates as ‘has tightened its small combs’ (Sefati 1998: 192), though this is unattested elsewhere. For **dub-dub** meaning ‘combing’ the hair, see *Iddin-Dagan A* line 45, edited by Reisman, who suggests ‘the verb has something to do with combing or setting of hair’ (1973: 194). See also M. E. Cohen for the verb used again in conjunction with ‘hair’, with the same meaning (1975: 601: 20, n. 602).

¹⁷⁶ Lines 5 and 6 appear to use perfective verbs to refer to the past actions of the nursemaid, framed by the imperfective verbs in lines 3 and 7 that I interpret as being the present (or wishful future) actions of the male beloved.

¹⁷⁷ Sefati translates freely as ‘my graceful crown’, though notes this as a frozen verbal form of the precative *marū*. He interprets it as a word that ‘possibly describes Inanna’s coiffure which captured Dumuzi’s gaze, or it may refer to an ornament or crown placed on her head’ (Sefati 1998: 362). Kramer interpreted the phrase as referring to ‘my attendant’ (Kramer 1963: 508). For now, I have left the literal translation, which I think works

8 he₂-im-du-gu₁₀ siki-gu₁₀ hi-is^{sar} nisi sa₆-sa₆-ga-am₃

My “let him come”, my hair, it is a lettuce, the most beautiful vegetable!

Unlike in *Inanna-Dumuzi E*, in line 2 of *Šu-Suen C*, it is specified that the female lover’s hair is the *gakkul* lettuce,¹⁷⁸ a species of lettuce whose name likely refers to its visual similarities to the *gakkul* vessel, a vat for fermenting beer (Civil 1964: 83-84; Attinger 2021: 526).¹⁷⁹ In his edition of a hymn to Ninkasi,¹⁸⁰ Civil noted that the *gakkul* ‘was a rather paunchy vessel with a narrow opening’ (Civil 1964: 83). In the hymn to Ninkasi, this opening is potentially referred to as the ‘eye’:

Hymn to Ninkasi

AO 5385 (P345364)

59 igi ^{ge}gakkul-am₃ igi-me na-nam

Is not the eye of the *gakkul* our eye?

60 ša₃ ^{ge}gakkul-am₃ ša₃-me na-nam

Is not the belly of the *gakkul* our belly?

Typically, the opening of a vessel is referred to as the ‘mouth’, **ka**, and so Civil argues that the ‘eye’ of the *gakkul* vat indicates either a smaller or second hole of the vessel (Civil 1964:

well to demonstrate that the speaker is trying to attract her male lover whilst describing her own body, as argued for *Inanna-Dumuzi E*. Note also that the name “let him come” is used for the kohl Inanna uses on her eyes in *Inanna’s Descent*, ETCSL 1.4.1, line 22.

¹⁷⁸ This variety of lettuce is also named in *Šulgi N*, line 25, and also in *Inanna-Dumuzi Y*, where it metaphorises the beard and hair of Dumuzi (see chapter 2.9).

¹⁷⁹ Note that this vessel is attested with both **ge** (reed) and **dug** (clay pot) determinatives; see Civil 1964: 83, ‘As for the **gakkul** listed among the reed objects, it was either made of wickerwork coated with bitumen [...] or an earthen container protected, like a demijohn, by a reed wrapping’.

¹⁸⁰ This Ninkasi hymn is incidentally the text inscribed above *Inanna-Dumuzi E* on **AO 5385**. It may be significant that an erotic poem was copied beneath a hymn to the beer goddess, which describes the process of making beer. It is possible this is highlighting the relationship between beer, the tavern, prostitution, and sex (Tinney 2000: 25).

83). As the contents of the vat were required to be tightly sealed, the *gakkul* is also found as a metaphor for secrecy (Civil 1964: 83; Sefati 1998: 277). The construction of the female body as a vessel in Sumerian literary texts is highlighted in this thesis (chapter 2.5), and the shape of the *gakkul* vessel with a narrow opening also mirrors the shape of the female body. The *gakkul* lettuce in *Šu-Suen C* recalls two metaphorical concepts concerned with the vulva, the mappings between the appearance of the lettuce leaves and pubic hair, and the interior form of the body. Because the female speaker prepares herself for a sexual encounter with her male beloved,¹⁸¹ the lettuce therefore represents the domains of physical attractiveness and desire, embedded in and stemming from its metaphorical use as the vulva. Furthermore, her hair, given the name “let him come”, which highlights how she prepares her body to attract her male lover, is described in line 8 as the ‘most beautiful (sa6-sa6) vegetable’.

5. Lettuce as a Source Domain in the “Love Songs”: Summary

The use of lettuce as a metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs” demonstrates how conceptual metaphors interact. The overall effect of the lettuce imagery as a source domain for the female body and her pubic hair is predicated on other important metaphorical mappings: for example, the imagined actions of the male body and his associations with water, or the female body as one that can be filled with substances. Lettuce is also an image rooted in the abundant plant and agricultural activity motif (*Inanna-Dumuzi D1*, line 58, see chapter 3.4), and so contributes to that sense of excess and abundance that is so intertwined with eroticism throughout the corpus.

¹⁸¹ The motif of adornment before sexual intercourse occurs throughout the “Love Songs”, in *Inanna-Dumuzi C, P, T, C1* and *E1* (see chapter 3.3), and associated texts *Šulgi X* and *Iddin-Dagan A*.

2.4 (Red) Fruit/Flower

Another flexible and versatile metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs” is the Sumerian term, **gerin**,¹⁸² appearing in four compositions, *Inanna-Dumuzi F, T, Z, and D1*. Functioning as an adjective that modifies the bed, as well as a direct object of longing, **gerin** conceptualises the target domains of sexual desire and the female body. This section will explore its metaphorical conceptualisation, through firstly determining the basic meaning of **gerin**, before analysing its use in the Sumerian “Love Songs” as an erotic metaphor.¹⁸³

1. Berry, Flower, Stone? **gerin** and its Basic Meaning in Sumerian Texts

An overview of the translations of **gerin** in various contexts reveals that there has been no consensus over the term’s precise meaning, and it is varyingly treated as a fruit, a tree, a stone, and more commonly translated as a flower. Perhaps to avoid this imprecision, in *Inanna-Dumuzi F*, Sefati translated **gerin** as ‘greenery’ (Sefati 1998: 174), and the ETCSL opted for ‘foliage’ (4.08.06). In Attinger’s recently published *Glossaire*, **gerin** as a noun is translated as “Une fleur rouge(?)”, and the adjective as “Florissant, fleuri; rouge lumineux, cornaline (**gug**)” (Attinger 2021: 405). This section investigates the use of **gerin** across various texts and contexts in order to try and understand the basic meaning and possible important connotations of this elusive term.

Firstly, looking to the lexical materials, according to Powell in his study of **UR5-ra=hubullu**, **gerin** most likely indicates berries or a berry tree (Powell 1987: 150). However, Civil argued that in ‘Sumerian contexts, the meaning is “flower” rather than fruit’, though

¹⁸² Spelt **ge-rin**, **ge-ri2-in**, **ge-rin2**, **ge4-rin**. Attinger transcribes as **gerin** (2021: 405).

¹⁸³ Other than its appearance in *Inanna-Dumuzi F, T, Z* and *D1*, the erotic connotations of **gerin** are clear from a fragmentary text from Ur, **UET 06, 473** (P346511). The text shares many images that are source domains for sexual metaphors in the texts that have been identified as part of the “Love Songs” corpus (eg. cream, honey, sweetness), as well as Emesal, and therefore it is likely that this text is a copy of a previously unidentified Inanna-Dumuzi “Love Song”.

no justification for this is given (Civil 2007: 24). Later lexical materials indicate that the term denotes a (red) berry or a flower, though to what extent they are useful in grasping the sense of the word in the Old Babylonian period is difficult to determine. In a Middle Assyrian copy of the lexical list *Ea 01* (VAT 10172, col. i. 39ff, P282497), **gerin** is connected with the Akkadian words *inbu* (fruit, CAD I: 144), *illuru* (red flowered/berried plant, CAD I: 87), *ḫulamēsu* (a type of tree and its fruit, CAD H: 227), *sirdu* (an olive/olive tree, CAD S: 311), and the adjective *ellu* (bright, pure, CAD E: 102). Lexical material from the Old Babylonian period that might indicate what is meant by the term in the Sumerian literature does not list **gerin** as fruit, but neither does it list it as a flower. In Old Babylonian copies of the lexical list **UR5-ra**, **gerin** is listed as a tree, ^{geš}**ge-rin** (translated as ‘berry tree’ by Powell), followed by the olive tree, which Focke identifies is often its paired/equivalent (Focke 2015: 214 n. 2016). In **UR5-ra**, **gerin** is also listed as a type of stone.¹⁸⁴ For example, in **BM 015780a**, b col. ii. 37-38, P429484, **gerin** appears as ^{na4}**ge-rin nir2**, listed above ^{na4}**gug**, carnelian.¹⁸⁵

The term **gerin** elsewhere modifies or is paralleled with carnelian, ^{na4}**gug**, indicating a connection with the colour red, perhaps formed through a conceptual connection between this colour and that of the fruit/flowers it originally referred to: **GUG**: *sa-am-tum*, **GI.RI.IM**: **MIN** (Nabnitu XXII 299-230, MSL 16 198).¹⁸⁶ It often appears together as a pair with lapis lazuli. For example, in a royal inscription of Šu-Suen, the king is said to have decorated a boat with these precious stones:

RIME 3/2.1.4.1

¹⁸⁴ From another copy of Old Babylonian **UR5-ra**, (CBS 04848, col. iv. 3’, P227990), the stone ^{na4}**ge-rin hi-li-e** is listed, which, considering the erotic connotations of the concept **hi-li** in the Sumerian “Love Songs” is potentially significant.

¹⁸⁵ Or simply a red stone (see Schuster-Brandis 2008: 413- 414).

¹⁸⁶ For ^{na4}**gug/sāmtu** as a colour term see Thavapalan 2020: 141ff.

P227137

Col. xi

27 ^{na4}nir₂ sag kal

28 ^{na4}gug ge-rin₂

29 ^{na4}za-gin₃ su₃-ag₂

30 šu gal ba-ni-in-du₇

He perfected it with top quality, precious *nir* stone, “*berry-red*” carnelian, and shiny lapis lazuli.

Here, **ge-rin₂** modifies carnelian. Similarly, in the Old Babylonian Sumerian literary text *Inanna and Ebiḫ* (Attinger 1998, see also ETCSL 1.3.2), Inanna adorns herself with “*berry-red*” carnelian, ^{na4}**gug ge₄-rin-na**:¹⁸⁷

Inanna and Ebiḫ¹⁸⁸

54 ni₂ me-lam₂ huš-a sag-ki-na še-er-ka-an ba-ni-in-du₁₁

With an amber-coloured aura, she adorned her forehead,

55 za-pa-ag₂ ku₃-ga-na ^{na4}gug ge₄-rin-na si ba-ni-in-sa₂-sa₂

On her splendid throat, she straightened “*berry-red*” carnelians,

56 udug₂ sag 7-e zi-^r da ^r-na nam-šul ba-ni-in-AK

¹⁸⁷ In his edition of *Inanna and Ebiḫ*, Attinger translates **kur gerin** with ‘montagne florissant’, but also as ‘rouge lumineux’ when it qualifies the noun ^{na4}**gug**, opting for two meanings of **gerin** later attested in lexical lists (Attinger 1998: 190; 2021: 3, 4). For the passage cited above, the ETCSL translates rev. line 6 as ‘She arranged carnelian (sic.) rosettes around her holy throat’ (1.3.2), opting for the most commonly used translation of **gerin** as a flower.

¹⁸⁸ Lines follow Attinger’s composite edition (1998).

With the seven headed *udug* weapon on her right side, she performed manhood,

8 galam ^{na4}za-gin₃-na giri₃-ni bi₂-in-gub

Upon the lapis lazuli staircase, she placed her foot.

In these two examples, the redness of the carnelian stone is potentially *emphasised* with the term **gerin** operating adjectivally. In *Inanna and Ebiḫ*, that colour is the attribute being drawn out is highlighted by the presence of the parallel adjective **ḫuš-a**, meaning ‘reddish’ or ‘glowing orange’ in rev. line 5.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, the red items with which Inanna adorns herself are dichotomised with the blue, lapis lazuli staircase on which she steps. Colour is vivid in this passage,¹⁹⁰ and it is possibly significant that the female body is connected and decorated with red.

This association with carnelian suggests that **gerin** derives its meaning from its *redness*. The synonymous Akkadian noun *illuru* seemingly also connects **gerin** to this colour; for example, in the omen series *šumma immeru*, **VAT 9518+A 468** (P513847), obv. 7: [BE UDU] *da-mu-šu ki-ma il-lu-ri sa-a-mu*, ‘if the sheep’s blood is as red as the *illuru*’ (CAD I/J: 87; for the omen series, see recently Y. Cohen 2020). This association then forms the adjective *illuriš* (a reddish hue), used in Standard Babylonian texts (CAD I/J: 87), but the root is also attested as a woman’s name, *illuratu* (the colour of the *illuru*), in the Old

¹⁸⁹ Whilst the ePSD2 and the CAD list **ḫuš-a**/Akk. *ḫ/ruššû* as ‘red’ or ‘reddish’ (<http://oracc.org/epsd2/o0030442>; version 2.3 built 2021-03-21; CAD H: 261), Waetzoldt argued that this term designated gold or bright, shining yellow (Waetzoldt 1985a:9; 2010: 202). However, Thavapalan notes that the Akkadian equivalent *ḫ/ruššû* instead indicates a glowing/orange character, noting that the term ‘delineates hue but primarily characterises brightness’ (Thavapalan 2020: 124). She lists the colour’s referents as gold, bronze, beer, honey, urine, but also notes its use in texts that refer to the glass-making process, **ḫuš-a** used as a term to describe molten glass. Therefore, **ḫuš-a** is ‘comparable to English “amber”’ (Thavapalan 2020: 124, 127).

¹⁹⁰ On the use of precious stones indicating colour terms, Thavapalan notes, ‘while the names for materials generally do not function as colour designations, certain precious stones and metals pose notable exceptions to this trend. It is not coincidental that precisely those substances that are historically and culturally-speaking most important are the ones that expand their meaning beyond their immediate material-basis and thus become colour terms’ (Thavapalan 2020: 171).

Babylonian period. Her name is attested on a cylinder seal bearing the inscription, *il-lu-ra-tum/DUMU-MUNUS a-bi-ma-ra-aš/ GEME₂ ^diš-ha-ra*, ‘Illuratum/ daughter of Abi-maraš, / servant of the god Išhara’.¹⁹¹

The connection with women and the colour red is possibly identifiable from other sources. The well-known Old Babylonian birth incantation, **AUAM 73, 3094** (P249267), suggests that whilst girls are conceptually linked to the colour red, boys are related to the colour blue, ‘I know not whether it (the child) be *sāmtu* (ie. female) or lapis lazuli (ie. male) (Schuster-Brandis 2008: 413-414).¹⁹² Two Middle Babylonian cylinder seals (P476271 and P477407) containing prayers to the goddess Gula, cut from red and black Jasper, likely originally had female owners (Salammbô-Zimmerman, 2018, *RAI* 64). In an Old Babylonian scribal exercise (**CUNES 47-10-007**, P322208), a literary letter details an inventory of items that are specified as being for *women’s* use, **geš^šsu-kar₂ munus-e in-na-an-šum₂ a₂ ṽ-šu-du₇-a munus-e in-du₇-a**, ‘he gave to him (all of these) utensils that women (use)/This equipment, which is suitable for a woman’ (obv. lines 19-20); the term **gerin** twice modifies **tug₂** in this list (obv. Lines 8, 10), ‘assorted carnelian(-coloured) garments’ (Kleinerman/Gadotti 2014: 104-5).

If the most commonly identifiable feature of **gerin** is its redness, it could work as a term that originated as fruit *or* flowers, as red berries and flowers are numerous in southern Iraq.¹⁹³ In the Old Babylonian Sumerian literature, **gerin** works most frequently as an adjective qualifying a bed,¹⁹⁴ and has subsequently been taken to mean ‘flowered’. For

¹⁹¹ The seal impression survives on 50 tablets and bullae from Sippar, all of which concern the hiring of workers (see CDLI for the composite S012114).

¹⁹² Garcia-Ventura points out the difficulties in assuming a dichotomy between red/blue=girl/boy that happens to closely mimic the modern construct of pink=girl, boy=blue. It is likely that it is the *darkness* of lapis, not its blue colour, that is associated with masculinity, which raises problems in making clear-cut associations of gender with certain *colours* (Garcia-Ventura 2019: 165-6).

¹⁹³ See the multi-volume *Flora of Iraq*, in which there are too many plants with red fruit/flowers to list here.

¹⁹⁴ More infrequently, it modifies the nouns **kur** (in *Enlil and Sud*, ETCSL 1.2.2, line 122); **geš^šgu-za** (in *Gilgameš, Enkidu and the Netherworld*, ETCSL 1.8.1.4, line 38; *Iddin-Dagan A* ETCSL 2.5.3.1, line 215); **geš^škiri₆** (in *Gilgameš, Enkidu and the Netherworld*, ETCSL 1.8.1.4, 35); **geš^šgal** (in *Ninurta’s return to Nippur*,

example, in *Ur-Namma C*, (Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 317), and *Inanna G* (Wagensonner 2010: 236). In Enheduanna's **nin-me-šar-ra**, line 118, the bed is also described with **gerin**, and Hallo and van Dijk highlighted the varying translations of 'blossoming, fruitful, shining', commenting that it designates 'the result of adorning the bed with herbs and perhaps flowers' (Hallo and van Dijk 1968: 76).¹⁹⁵ In the Sumerian "Love Songs", Sefati also translated **gerin** as 'flowered' when it modifies the bed in *Inanna-Dumuzi T* and *DI* (Sefati 1998: 250, 304).¹⁹⁶ Strewing flowers upon the bed is of course a more natural image and idea than fruit. It seems to be a symbol well known from ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt, and modern times. For example, in ancient Greek and Roman mythology, the rose was a symbol of the goddess of sexual love, Aphrodite/Venus and her lover Adonis, and appears frequently in the lyric poetry of Sappho and Anacreon.¹⁹⁷ The Romans celebrated the festival of the goddess Flora, the *Floralia*, which is attested as being erotic in nature (Ovid, *Fasti* V, 299ff; Baudy 2006; Graf 2006). The image of flowers on the bed or in the bedroom is known from Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, in which Lucius, the protagonist, describes the bridal couch as being prepared with a flowered bedspread (10.29, Hersch 2010: 217). Furthermore, Cleopatra was said to have covered her home in rose petals when she welcomed Marc Anthony (Roller 2010:79). An episode of the Augustan History reports that the emperor Elagabalus filled his room with so many rose petals that they smothered his guests (*Life of Elagabalus*, 2.21.5ff). This scene is depicted in the famous painting *The Roses of*

ETCSL 1.6.1, line 155); **u3-luḫ** (in a *Letter from Ku3-Nanna to Ninšubur*, ETCSL 3.3.39, line 4); and the temple **e2-muš3-a** (in *Temple Hymns*, ETCSL 4.80.1, line 213).

¹⁹⁵ Comparatively, for the same line Zgoll translated **gerin** as 'frei, rein, strahlend' (Zgoll 1997: 419). In his edition of *Ur-Ninurta D*, Falkenstein also interpreted **gerin** as 'strahlende' or 'leuchtenden' in line 19 (Falkenstein 1957: 68, 61): however, in this text, the phrase ^{ges}**nu2 ge4-rin** is immediately followed by **ḫi-li sas**, which, in the Sumerian "Love Songs", is a key component in designating many erotic metaphors and therefore seems unlikely to connote purity or shininess. The 'purifying' of sexual images as religious in the Sumerian erotic literature and Old Babylonian terracotta plaques has been condemned by Assante (2000).

¹⁹⁶ Despite his translation of 'greenery' in *Inanna-Dumuzi F* and 'luxuriant' in *Inanna-Dumuzi Z* (Sefati 1998: 174, 283).

¹⁹⁷ For example, fragment 2 of Sappho and poems 6, 41, and 54 of the *Anacreontea* (see *Greek Lyric* vols. 1 and 2)

Heliogabalus (1888) by Lawrence Alma-Tadema,¹⁹⁸ and captures the erotic connotations of roses, portraying them as part of the sensual excesses of the Roman elite. The association between romance and flowers, particularly of red roses, is common in the modern world; rose petals are often scattered upon beds to welcome the newly wedded couple on their honeymoon, and roses have become synonymous with Valentine's Day.

However, I think there is compelling evidence that **gerin** refers to red berries/fruits. Not only does it seem related to another word for fruit, **gurun** (M.E. Cohen 2023: 487),¹⁹⁹ but the use of the Sumerian loanword *girimmu* in an Old Babylonian Akkadian incantation also suggests that **gerin** is a berry. In **VAT 8354** (P274691), obv. 2-3, a woman is likened to *girimmu*, which is paralleled with an orchard fruit, *šu₂-uh₂-ḫu-ri-iš gi-ri-im-mi-iš/ ki-ma i-ni-ib ki-ri-im e-li-šu wa-a-ši-a-ti!*(BI), 'as a tiny *girimmu*, like an orchard fruit, she grew out over him'.²⁰⁰ The Akkadian noun *girimmu* is also attested in lexical lists, but only from the Neo-Assyrian period onwards. In a Neo-Assyrian copy of the text *malku-šarru* 03 (**K 04375**, obv. 53, P345976), *girimmu* is given as a synonym of *erimtum*, another lexical term for a red berry (CAD E: 294-295), and in a Neo-Assyrian copy of **uru-an-na** I, *girimmu* is given the label 'of the forest whose fruit is red' (CAD G: 88). Considering these lexical associations, the CAD notes that 'the equation of **girim** with *sirdu*, "olive", and the qualifications red, white and green (cf. also **ge-ri-im** = *sa-am-tum* "red (berry?)") *Nabnitu* XXII 230) suggest that *girimmu*, unlike the more general terms *illuru* and *inbu*, designates

¹⁹⁸ <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/subsites/museums/leightonhousemuseum/avictorianobsession/background/exhibitionhighlights.aspx>

¹⁹⁹ In a first millennium bilingual **šu-il₂-la** prayer to *Sîn*, **gerin** is equated with *enbu*, 'fruit' (Sjöberg 1960: 174, 4R9, P394722, line 11).

²⁰⁰ The term **gerin** is also related to the orchard in *Gilgameš, Enkidu, and the Netherworld*, ETCSL 1.8.1.4 line 35 (see also 78 and 122), ^{g^s}**kiri₆ ge-rin dⁱinana-še₃ im-ma-ni-in-ku₄-ku₄-re**, 'she was brought into the fruit (?) garden of Inanna' (Focke 2015: 411 n.4064). This would suggest that **gerin** refers to fruit in this context; however, the matter is confused as **gerin** also modifies the nouns 'throne' and 'bed' in this composition (see footnote 194).

a specific type of fruit, perhaps a berry' (CAD G, 88).²⁰¹ The association with stones might also explain the other Akkadian terms equated with **gerin**; the shape of a stone mimics the shape of a fruit, berry, or olive (and their stones/pips/pits). This is evident from a Neo-Assyrian inscription, with a term for a precious stone that is connected with the loanword *girimmu*, *girimḫilibû* (CAD G:88): GI.RIM.ḪI.LI.BA *ša kīma inib* ^{gcs}NU.[UR₂.MA], 'the *girimḫilibû* stone, which is like the fruit of the pomegranate tree' (RINAP Sennacherib: 49, 12'b). Depending on the type of berry, the shiny skin of the fruit might also explain the lexical association with *ellu*.

This overview has demonstrated that **gerin** could refer to a berry/fruit or flower, but it appears that its *colour* is particularly significant to its basic meaning. Colour terms can have metaphorical origins, for example the English colour navy, derived from the colour of a military uniform (Thavapalan 2020: 13). Thavapalan highlights that 'colour is not a conceptual isolate but rather linked to materials, the environment and cosmological principles' (Thavapalan 2020: 1), and 'surface texture, whether an object is smooth or lumpy, transparency and even aspects of non-appearance such as edibility, symbolism and emotion are all qualities that may be considered a part of a language's colour system' (Thavapalan 2020: 16). The conceptual link of the red berry/flower **gerin** to red carnelian stone suggests that the term **gerin** can also metaphorically denote the colour red, derived from its likely origins as a red berry/flower. Furthermore, the colour red is very likely conceptually linked to women, which is relevant to its metaphorical use in the Sumerian "Love Songs", as explored below.

²⁰¹ It is difficult to say whether the differentiation between 'fruit' and 'berry' meant the same to the Old Babylonians as it does to us, with a berry being a small, soft, fleshy fruit. Considering the metaphorical implications outlined below, it is also possible that **gerin** refers to a small fruit with a harder skin, soft in the centre. With many red berries native to Iraq, the exact identification of **gerin/girimmu** can only be speculative. Though as a term it is rare, its appearance in poetry suggests it would have been a commonly known berry (or flower), otherwise its reference would mean little to ancient audiences (Böck, personal correspondence).

2. Contextual Meaning: **gerin** as a Metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs”

As outlined above, it is clear from other Sumerian literary texts that **gerin** is most often used as an adjective that describes the bed. This is also the case in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, and **gerin** appears in three compositions, *Inanna-Dumuzi T, Z, and DI*, to describe the bed on which Inanna and Dumuzi/a king meet.²⁰² It will be argued that this motif is used to imbue the bed, metaphorically, with the target domain sexual desire. In *Inanna-Dumuzi F*, **gerin** most frequently acts as a metaphor for the vulva, though it will be demonstrated that the two target domains are fundamentally linked.

The erotic context of the “Love Songs” could further suggest that **gerin** is understood as fruit, rather than as a flower. Fruit, especially, is acknowledged as a well-known erotic metaphor in many contexts,²⁰³ a mapping perhaps universal because of the ‘intrinsic sexuality of fruit itself. Fruit is the reproductive part of the plant - its sexual organs’ (Veenker 1999-2000:58), and fruit are ‘very colourful and shaped so that it is readily differentiated from foliage. It is attractive to the eye and tempts one to approach and touch it. Fruit exudes an appealing fragrance, especially strong and irresistible when it is very ripe’ (Morrisett 1992 qtd Veenker 1999-2000: 58 n.2). Erotic fruit metaphors are prolific in other literature of the ancient Middle East.²⁰⁴ In the Sumerian “Love Songs”, fruit (**gurun**) metaphorises the male and female bodies (*Inanna-Dumuzi B*, line 29; *Inanna-Dumuzi E*, line 4), and their wet texture alludes to sexual arousal (*Inanna-Dumuzi B*, line 3). The sweetness of dates

²⁰² In *Inanna-Dumuzi T* and *DI*, the setting of the bed is within the **Eanna** temple.

²⁰³ Brenner 1999; Veenker 1999-2000; Paul 2002: 490; Westenholz 1992: 382; George 2009: 52.

²⁰⁴ For example, in an Akkadian love song, *da-du-ka ta3-a-bu/ mu-uh2'(uh-x)-ta-an-bu in-bu-ka*, ‘Your charms are sweet!/Your fruits are flourishing’ (**PRAK 1B 472**, obv. col. i., 6'-7', Wasserman 2016: 150ff), and particularly noticeable in the biblical *Song of Songs*: שְׁלֵחֶיךָ פְּרָדִים רְמוֹנִים עִם פְּרֵי מִגְדֵיךָ קָפְרִים עִם-נֶרְדִים זֵאת קוֹמְתֶךָ / ‘Your limbs are an orchard of pomegranates/And of all luscious fruits, Of henna and nard’ (Song 4:13; JPS); דָּמְתָה לְתַמְרֵי הַשָּׁדִיךָ לְאֲשְׁפְלוֹת אֲמֶרְתִּי אֶעֱלֶה בְּתַמְרֵי אֲתוֹנָה / ‘Your stately form is like the palm, /Your breasts are like clusters. (Song 7:8; JPS); בְּסִסְגֵי וְהֵייוֹנָה שְׁדִיךָ כְּאֲשְׁפְלוֹת הַגֶּפֶן וְרֵיחַ אֲפִיךָ כְּתַפְרוֹתֵי: / ‘I say: let me climb the palm, /Let me take hold of its branches;/ Let your breasts be like clusters of grapes, /Your breath like the fragrance of apples’ (Song 7:9; JPS).

evokes the attractiveness of a person; for example, in in the third description of Ludingira's mother, **zu2-lum Dilmun-na ku7-ku7 zu2-lum sag kig2-kig2-e**, '[she is] a sugar-sweet Dilmun date, the best, sought after date' (ETCSL 5.5.1, line 39); and dates are collected, bringing pleasure, for the female lover (*Inanna-Dumuzi T*, lines 3-4; *Manchester Tammuz*, line 122). Fruit in the "Love Songs" all play on the poly-sensory experience of them; their sweetness, taste, wetness, and their shared attributes with the human sex organs.

3. *Inanna-Dumuzi F*: **gerin** as the Vulva

Inanna-Dumuzi F is the only composition in our corpus where **gerin** does not act as an adjective modifying the bed. Instead, it is the physical object of desire, a metaphor for the goddess Inanna, and likely her vulva.²⁰⁵ Whether **gerin** is to be understood as a red berry or a red flower gives us different, though not dissimilar, entailments for this metaphor. A berry is a soft, reddish fruit, wet when opened. These entailments are played with using other source domains in this corpus (see chapters 2.1 and 2.5). A red flower is layered with petals, that also part. Both fruit and flowers are well-attested in other Mesopotamian erotic literature (eg. Wasserman 2016: 54-5). Perhaps **gerin/girimmu** could refer to *both* small red berries and flowers, in which case a multiplicity of entailments may be at work. The colour red, seemingly associated with women, is arguably significant here.

In the opening lines of the text, Inanna both wants to admire and gaze upon the **gerin**:

Inanna-Dumuzi F

CBS 4589 (P260899)

²⁰⁵ Two recent articles have differing opinions on whether **gerin** in *Inanna-Dumuzi F* acts as a metaphor for Dumuzi (Bertolini 2020: 41) or is part of the 'poetic-erotic vegetal language' for describing Inanna/female bodies (Zisa 2023: 112).

1²⁰⁶ ga-ša-an-gen ge-rin-e u₆ ga-e-da-du₁₁

ga (COHORT)-e.da (2SG+COM)-b (DO)- admire

“I am the lady, let me admire the “red berry/flower” with you!

2 ʳ ga ʳ-[ša]-ʳ an ʳ-[an]-ʳ na ʳ- gen ge-rin ḫal-ḫal-la i-bi₂-gu₁₀ de₃-ʳ ma ʳʔ-ʳ al ʳʔ

de₃ (ES) (COHORT)- b (DO)- look (ES)

I am Inanna, let me gaze upon the split “red berry/flower”!

The erotic context of *Inanna-Dumuzi F*, which later in the poem focuses on the satisfaction of the male body (see chapter 2.6), suggests that the meaning of **gerin** in these lines is an erotic metaphor for the *female* body. Though I have translated it as “red berry/flower”, the fact that **gerin** is described as ‘divided’ or ‘open’ (**ḫal-ḫal-la**) is an indicator that this metaphor likens the opening of the vagina to a red *berry*, split open.

These lines are comparable to the beginning of *Inanna and Enki* (Farber-Flügge 1973) in which, with more explicit language, Inanna admires and rejoices in her vulva:

Inanna and Enki

ETCSL 1.3.1

4'. [... gam]-e-dam gal₄-la-ni u₆ di-dam

...*Bowing down*, her vulva is marvellous!

5'. [...] ʳ zi ʳ-de₃-eš gam-e-dam gal₄-la-ni <u₆ di-dam>

...*Bowing down*, her vulva is marvellous!

²⁰⁶ The line numbers for *Inanna-Dumuzi F* follow Sefati’s reconstruction of the text, known from two sources, **CBS 4589** (=obv.1-8, rev.1-6) and **Ist Ni 2408** (=obv. 8-21, rev. 25-40).

6'. [...] ʁ gal₄ ʔ-la-ni-še₃ ʁul₂-la-e ni₂-te-ni mi₂ zi iri-in-ga-am₃-me

i (VP)-nga(CONJ)-mu(VENT)-bi (OO)-admires-e (3SG)

...rejoicing her vulva, she also admires herself,

7'. [... gal₄-la]-ni-še₃ ʁul₂-la-e ni₂-te-ni <mi₂ zi iri-in-ga-am₃-me>

...rejoicing her vulva, she also admires herself,

8'. [...] igi nam-ši-in-bar

na (AFF)-mu (VENT)-b.ši (3SG NH+TERM)-n (3SG)-looked- Ø (DO)

...indeed, she looked at it...

9'. [...] ʁ igi ʔ nam-da-ra-ši-in-bar

na (AFF)-mu (VENT)-da (COM)-ta (ABL)- ši (TERM)²⁰⁷-n (3SG)-looked-Ø (DO)

...indeed, she looked directly at it...

10'. [...] x igi nam-ši-in-bar

...indeed, she looked at it...

Similar verbs are used; the “berry/flower” in *Inanna-Dumuzi F* and the vulva in *Inanna and Enki* are both admired and looked upon by the female character.

Elsewhere in *Inanna-Dumuzi F*, there are other familiar indicators and interactions that position **gerin** conceptually as a metaphor for the vulva. In Line 26, the “berry/flower” is described as being ‘full of sexual allure’:

²⁰⁷ For the rare prefix chain **-da-ta-ši-**, I follow Jaques and Koch’s interpretation, as outlined on the *Sumerian Verb Conjugator and Analyser* (http://www.gilgamesh.ch/svc/svc.html?docu=1#hanc_docu_dataci), ‘While it is clear that the terminative **-ši-** refers to the person to whom it is permitted or with whom it is agreed, the exact function of the apparent comitative and ablative prefixes in this verb form is difficult to determine. Rather it seems, from this and other examples given below, that the prefix chain **-da-ra-ši-** {+da+ta+ši+}, just gives the meaning “directly, immediately to/from”’.

Inanna-Dumuzi F

Ist Ni 2408 (P345089)

26 [...ge]-rin-na ħi-li du₈-du₈ a-a ama^ʔ-^r na ^ʔ?

...in the “red berry/flower”, heaped with sexual allure, of his/her father and *mother*

Again, the notion that the “berry” can be heaped or filled with **ħi-li** mirrors the perceived construction of the female body as a container that can be filled, with concrete substances such as semen (discussed in 2.5)²⁰⁸ or abstract substances such as allure/desire (chapter 1.3 and 2.2).²⁰⁹ In line 34, this idea is substantiated:

Inanna-Dumuzi F

Ist Ni 2408

34 [...] ge-rin-na-gen₇ ħi-li-zu du₁₀-ga-am₃

...like the “red berry/flower”, your sexual allure is sweet.

This line recalls the erotic associations that come with combining the term **ħi-li** with sweetness (see chapter 1.3 and 2.1). Structurally, this line parallels the following lines from *Šu-Suen A*:

Šu-Suen A

Ist Ni 2463 (P345315)

20 kaš-a-ni-gen₇ gal₄-la-ni ze₂-ba-am₃/ kaš-a-ni ze₂-ba-am₃

Like her beer, her vulva is sweet/her beer is sweet,

²⁰⁸ See Steinert (2017) for examples of this from gynaecological medical texts.

²⁰⁹ As in *Inanna-Dumuzi A*, line 5, and *Inanna-Dumuzi E*, line 3, where barley, as a metaphor for the vulva, is described as full of **ħi-li**.

21 ka-ka-a-ni-gen₇ gal₄-la-ni ze₂-ba-am₃/kaš-a-ni ze₂-ba-am₃

Like her mouth, her vulva is sweet/her beer is sweet.

The equative marker, followed by a noun with a possessive suffix, is predicated with the adjective ‘sweet’ in both texts. In *Šu-Suen A*, the explicit erotic metonymy that conceptualises the vulva as beer, the mouth and as ‘sweet’ is a frame of reference transferred implicitly into the construction of **gerin** as another metaphor for the vulva.

With lines 5 and 6 of *Inanna-Dumuzi F*, it seems evident that there are converging target domains from the “red berry/flower” source domain. Whilst lines 1 and 2 seem to establish the image of the red berry/flower as a metaphor related to the female speaker’s body, in the following lines, feelings of desire are also evoked:

Inanna-Dumuzi F

CBS 4589 (P260899)

5 ga-ša-an-gen ge-rin-e da-nu₂

da²¹⁰ (COHORT)-n (3SG DO)-lie down

I am the lady, let me lie him down on the “red berry/flower”!

6 ga-ša-an-an-na-gen ge-rin-e kaš₄ da-mu-ni-du₁₁-du₁₁

da (COHORT)-mu (VENT)-nni (3SG OO)-b (DO)- run (RDPL)²¹¹

I am Inanna, let me make him run to the “red berry/flower”!

²¹⁰ There is not always a clear distinction between the cohortative and precative Emesal modal prefixes; whilst the verbs in these lines have been interpreted as first-person cohortative (Sefati 1998: 172), it is not out of the question that the modal prefix **da-** is in fact the 3rd person precative. I have interpreted them here as 1st person causative constructions, where the female speaker wishes for the male beloved to ‘lie’ on and ‘run to’ her.

²¹¹ For the reduplication of **du₁₁** see Attinger 1993: 123, 187.

Like many instances in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, the cohortative verb is used to express sexual longing. The directive post-position on **gerin** in these lines indicates it as the object of this desire, with lying upon the “berry/flower” as an action with obvious sexual connotations seen elsewhere,²¹² and running to the “berry/flower” expressing a more intense desire for sexual satisfaction.²¹³ Here, both actions can be interpreted metaphorically as expressing the sexual desire of the female speaker. Whilst it has been suggested that these lines refer to a longing to lie down upon and run to **gerin**, a term used for the bed (Zisa 2023: 112 n. 4), it could also be that the red berry/flower still refers to the female body, the vehicle of her desire and pleasure. As with other conceptual metaphors in the “Love Songs”, the fact that the “berry/flower” is a metaphor for the vulva likely lends itself to also being a metaphor for sexual desire.

4. Sexual Desire: **gerin** and the Bed in the Sumerian “Love Songs”

The bed is a significant place in the “Love Songs”, as this is where nearly all the sexual activity takes place.²¹⁴ The bed, then, often stands metonymically for sexual desire, intercourse and pleasure. That **gerin** is a modifier of this space suggests that it also contributes to this metaphorisation. As the term **gerin** is a red berry/flower, the image appropriately fits with the other metaphors for sexual desire and pleasure within the “Love Songs”, often taken from the domains of fruit and plants. Furthermore, used as a colour term, **gerin** also adds a conceptual link to women, highlighting the female voice and indicating the bed as a red, female space in the following texts.

²¹² For example, *Inanna-Dumuzi D*, line 11.

²¹³ As in *Šu-Suen B*, line 8: **ge-ru ga-ba-e-da-kar [ki] mu-nu₂-[da]-še₃** - ‘*Lover*, let me run with you to the bedroom!’.

²¹⁴ That is to say, the ‘actual’, physical sexual activity that is described in *Inanna-Dumuzi D*, rather than the metaphorical actions of, for example, ‘ploughing’ the vulva in *Inanna-Dumuzi P*.

In *Inanna-Dumuzi T*, the erection of the “*berry-red*” bed precludes the female speaker’s wishes for a sexual encounter with Ama-ušumgal-anna (lines 42-47). Here, as **gerin** modifies the bed, it is translated as an adjective and a colour term:

Inanna-Dumuzi T

AO 6967 (P345414)

40 geš^snu₂ ge₄-rin-na mu-un-na-ab-gub-bu-ne

mu (VENT)- n.na (3SG+DAT)- b (DO)-stand-ene (3PL)

They will stand (my) “*berry-red*” bed for him!

Similarly, in *Inanna-Dumuzi Z*, the female speaker expresses her desire for sex with her beloved on the “*berry-red*” bed:

Inanna-Dumuzi Z

Rev.17²¹⁵

HS 1429+ (P345619)

[...] ga-ba-e-^r nu₂ ^r-en-de₃-en

ga (COHORT)-ba (MM)-e (LOC)-lie-enden (1PL)

...let us lie down on it!

Ist Ni 4552 (P343628)

mu-nu₂ ge-rin-ga₂-da ga-ba?^r nu₂ ^r-[...]

Let *us* lie together on my “*berry-red*” bed!

²¹⁵ Following Sefati’s composite line numbers (1998).

That **gerin** metaphorises the target domain of sexual desire becomes most clear in *Inanna-Dumuzi D1*. Early in the composition, the narrator describes the bed as “*berry-red*” and inlaid with precious stones. Significantly, the bed in *Inanna-Dumuzi D1* is vividly connected to sexual longing:

Inanna-Dumuzi D1

BM 15280 (P283738)

18 al ba-an-du₁₁ al ba-an-du₁₁ ki-nu₂ al ba-an-du₁₁

ba (MM)-n (3SG)-desired-Ø (DO)

She desired it, she desired it, she desired the bed,

19 ki-nu₂ ša₃ ħul₂-la al ba-an-du₁₁ ki-nu₂ al ba-an-du₁₁

She desired the bed that makes the belly rejoice, she desired the bed,

20 ki-nu₂ ur₂ ze₂-ba al ba-an-du₁₁ ki-nu₂ al ba-an-du₁₁

She desired the bed that sweetens the lap, she desired the bed!

By association, positioning **gerin** with this object indicates it as a marker of sexual desire:

Inanna-Dumuzi D1

BM 15280 (P283738)

8 ki-nu₂ ge-rin^{ri}-na za-gin₃ si₃^{zi}-ga-am₃

The “*berry-red*” bed, it is inlaid with lapis lazuli.

Here, **gerin** is paired with lapis lazuli, which in the “Love Songs” also shares the target domain of sexual desire (see chapter 2.9). The significance of **gerin** as an adjective modifying the bed in these erotic contexts may extend from several entailments, perhaps

simultaneously. It might ‘literally’ refer to strewing red flowers upon the bed, a practice attested in other contexts (it seems unlikely, though not impossible, that berries were strewn onto the bed, for practical reasons). As red berries/flowers were metaphors for the vulva, they here could evoke and imbue the desirability of the female body onto the image of the bed. Furthermore, the *colour* of **gerin** could here, as elsewhere (see above), be an important part of its conceptualisation. Considering the apparent conceptual link between women and the colour red, imbuing the bed with this colour associates this space with female sexuality and her desire. That the bed was an inherently female space is also evident from the erotic terracotta plaques from the Old Babylonian period; some of these plaques simply feature a drawing of a vulva, a marker of the female body, upon a bed (Assante 2002: 40). It is also potentially significant that this line again pairs lapis lazuli and **gerin**, considering the seeming link between women and the colour red and men and the colour blue/a dark hue, a possible suggestion of sexual union.

5. Red berry/flower as a Source Domain in the “Love Songs”: Summary

The red, carnelian, colour of **gerin**, either a small berry or flower, is an important aspect of both its basic and contextual meaning. The redness, as well as the softness/wetness/layering, of a red berry/flower maps as a metaphor for the vulva in the “Love Songs”, which is admired, gazed upon, and desired. This desirability of **gerin** is used to emphasise the attraction to the bed, the privileged erotic space of the corpus. This use of **gerin** to denote sexual desire perhaps interacts with its use as a metaphor for the vulva, as well as advancing the alluring, feminine quality of the redness of the berry/flower.

2.5 Beer, Water, and Wine

Liquids are one of the most explicit metaphors of this corpus, as they are namely source domains for the wetness of the female genitals during sexual arousal, and their consumption evokes pleasure and abundance. However, beer, water, and wine each bring their own unique set of connotations and entailments to their metaphorical conceptualisation. By firstly identifying the overarching conceptual metaphor in which the body is constructed as a vessel for liquids, I will then outline the specific nuances of beer, water, and wine metaphors in the Sumerian “Love Songs”.

1. An Overarching Conceptual Metaphor: THE BODY IS A CONTAINER

The basic meaning of water and other liquids in ancient Mesopotamia is both simple and complex. Water is simply but significantly the region’s vital resource. This is manifested in many Sumerian literary narratives when water is equated with semen of the gods, but also in the devastating effects of drought as described in the lamentations.²¹⁶ Other liquids such as beer and wine, nutritionally and economically valuable, are also symbolically valuable, whether as offerings to the gods²¹⁷ or as ‘le propre’ of divine banquets (Bottéro 1994: 6).

Liquids are, of course, consumable, and as such have a tangible and visceral connection with the body, human or divine. The primary and overarching conceptual metaphor that is central to the liquids source domains dealt with in this chapter is THE BODY IS A CONTAINER. The body in many Mesopotamian sources is conceptualised as a vessel for containing liquids, and whilst this metaphor can be used to describe other internal mechanisms (Steinert 2017: 299, n.48), it is very often used to conceptualise the

²¹⁶ For example, in the *Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur*, lines 127ff (Michalowski 1989: 44; ETCSL 2.2.3), ‘Its river was empty, no water was poured/ like a river cursed by Enki, its mouth was dammed’.

²¹⁷ For example, in *Utu E*, **BM 23631**, lines 25-27 (Kramer 1985, ETCSL 4.32), ‘Pour out beer for him there! Pour out liquor for him there!/ Vizier- pour out liquor for your lord!/ Nusku- pour out liquor there for Enlil!’.

female reproductive body (see Steinert 2017 for this discussion in full). For example, a Neo-Babylonian medical ritual describes the haemorrhaging female body and the womb as a waterskin (**K.263+10934**, P237802, line 43; Steinert 2012a: 68; Steinert 2017: 301),²¹⁸ and a 1st millennium BCE incantation, also against bleeding, metaphorises the womb as both a fermenting vat and a waterskin (Steinert 2017: 319; Schuster-Brandis 2008: 322, 325):

W 23279 (SpTU 4, 129; P348723)

Obv.

21' 𒄩 GEN₇ 𒄩 DUG.NIG₂.DUR₂.BUR₃ ša₂ 𒄩 pu 𒄩-ru-𒄩 sa 𒄩-ša₂ la par₂-sum₂

Like a fermenting vat whose stopper does not stop,

22' 𒄩 GEN₇ 𒄩 na-a-du ša₂ la 𒄩 dun 𒄩-nu-nu KEŠDA la tak-lu SA

Like a water skin whose strap is not strong, whose binding is not trustworthy...

In this text, the incantation is against the bleeding of both men and women, who are positioned as bleeding from opposite orifices: whilst men bleed from the nose, women bleed from the vagina (Steiner 2017: 320). In each case, the body is the container for fluids; for the female body, liquid particularly emits from the genitals, stored within the vaginal canal and the womb.

In mythological narratives, the way that sexual intercourse is described demonstrates that conceptually the female body is also the container for semen. For example, in *Enki and Ninhursaga*, the god and his exaggerated virility allows him to impregnate the mother

²¹⁸ 'The ritual actions employ symbolic and metaphoric associations relating to the woman's body and her disorder. An object, presumably a waterskin in which something has been deposited or which was filled with a liquid, is to be closed with a mixture of clay and chaff and to be sealed with a carnelian seal. The waterskin reminds us of the female body and its open canal (or more specifically the womb and its neck), which is to be sealed off, and the use of a carnelian seal employs a colour symbolism entailing the colour of blood' (Steinert 2012a: 70). For the colour red in relation to women, see chapter 2.4 on the "(Red) Fruit/Flower" metaphor in the "Love Songs".

goddess Ninḫursaga and his own daughters consecutively. The refrain in which this is described occurs as follows:

Enki and Ninḫursaga²¹⁹

ETCSL 1.1.1

72 ^den-ki-ke₄ a ^ddam-gal-nun-na-ka-ni mi-ni-in-du₁₁

m (VENT)-ni (LOC)-n (3SG)-watered-Ø (DO)

Enki watered²²⁰ his semen of Damgalnunna,

73 ^dnin-ḫur-sag-ga₂-ke₄ a ša₃-ga ba-ni-in-ri

ba (MM)-ni (LOC)- n (3SG)-poured- Ø (DO)

He poured semen into the womb of Ninḫursaga.

The refrain and image of pouring semen into the womb is repeated several times. The compound verb **a-ri**, meaning to ‘pour out’, ‘inject into’, ‘direct towards’, Akkadian. *reḫûm*, (Gragg 1973: 25, Behrens 1978: 132-138), here has a transitive function in which the female body is the indirect object into which something is poured. As the object here is Enki’s semen, also water, the female body is constructed as a vessel, or a container, for this liquid substance. The same image and verb are used in the composition *Enlil and Ninlil* (ETCSL 1.2.1; editions by Behrens 1978; Attinger 2019). In this narrative, the god Enlil impregnates the goddess on four occasions. Quadruple pregnant, this contributes to the image of the female body as a vessel, as Ninlil demonstrates here that her body can quite literally be topped up with Enlil’s semen as you might fill a container with additional water.

²¹⁹ For an edition of this text, see Attinger 1984.

²²⁰ Attinger comments on the sexual connotation of **a-du₁₁**: “arrosers”. He notes that the phrase **a-X-ak**, ‘the semen of X’, usually indicates the semen where one was born (Attinger 1984: 38).

The metaphorical positioning of the female body as the vessel for liquids might suggest a reproductive passivity, by which the male actively provides, and the female contains semen.²²¹ However, in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, the female body as a vessel is a conceptual metaphor not only limited to these gendered roles,²²² as she is able to herself produce and emit liquid in accordance with her sexual pleasure and arousal.²²³

2. Beer, Pleasure and Women: Basic Meaning in Mesopotamia

The production of beer in ancient Mesopotamia is recorded in early proto-cuneiform texts from the 4th millennium BCE, and its production, distribution and consumption were continuously documented in the subsequent millennia of Mesopotamian history (Damerow 2012). The social and cultural importance of beer can be gleaned from its presence in literary narratives, where it often appears involved in divine banquets, councils, and as a precursor to competitions (Glassner 1991; Bottéro 1994; Michalowski 1994). Lion noted that in Mesopotamia, ‘boire de la bière est un signe de civilisation’ and cites the moment in which Enkidu in the *Epic of Gilgameš* arrives amongst men from the wildness of the steppe, to eat bread and drink beer (Lion 2013: 393).

In other Old Babylonian Sumerian texts, beer is often connected with cheerfulness and joviality, its effects described using various ways of expressing joyfulness and pleasure. For example, in *Enki’s Journey to Nippur*, upon Enki’s arrival to the temple, the god pours

²²¹ Steinert points out that both the BODY IS A CONTAINER metaphor and ‘an agricultural model of conception’ found in Mesopotamian sources both position ‘the woman and her womb as a passive receptacle for the male semen’, ‘the female role is regarded as “ancillary”, contributing nothing essential to procreation’ (Steinert 2017: 303-304, with references to other literature).

²²² Steinert has further argued that references to female fluids in a reproductive context, rather than referring to amniotic fluid or vaginal discharge, could actually represent the ‘female contribution to conception analogous to the male semen’ (for examples see Steinert 2017: 307ff). This would counter the predominant view of conception that perceives the female body as a passive receptacle of semen.

²²³ Note that in a very different context, the corpse of Ištar is imagined as a waterskin in *Ištar’s Descent*, which Asušanamir wishes to drink from: *šuuqi rēšika ana ḫalziqqi uzna šukun/(mā) ē bēlī ḫalziqqa lidnūnī-(ma) mē ina libbi luttatti*, ‘Look up and set your mind on the waterskin,/Oh, my lady, let them give me the waterskin, that I may drink water from it’ (EBL; Setälä 2022). Drinking from the waterskin, and sprinkling the goddess with the water of life, the vizier is able to bring her back from the netherworld.

out beer and wine (lines 96-103), joins Enlil, An, Nintur, and the Anunna gods for a feast (lines 105-109), and the gods drink beer together:

Enki's Journey to Nippur²²⁴

107 lu₂-u₃-ne kaš i₃-na₈-na₈-ne kurun im-du₁₀-ge-ne

They were drinking beer, they were enjoying *kurun beer*,

108 za^{bar}AGA im-kur₄-kur₄-(r)e-ne

i (VP)-m (VENT)-b (DO)- filling (RDP)-ene (3PL)

They were filling the bronze *aga* vessel to the brim,

109 zabar-e an ^duraš-e a-da-min₃ mu-un-e₃-ne

mu (VENT)- ni (LOC)-competing- ene (3PL)

They were competing for the bronze vessel in heaven and on earth,

110 ti-lim-da ma₂-gur₈ ku₃ im-bi-bi-re-e-ne²²⁵

i (VP)- m (VENT)-b (DO)- were *making bright* (RDP)-ene (3PL)

They were making the *tilimda* vessel bright (like) the shiny *magur*-boat,

111 kaš ba-nag kurun₂ ba-du₁₀-ga-ta

After beer had been drunk and the *kurun beer* had been enjoyed,

112 e₂-ta giri₃-bi-a ba-ra-gar-ra-ta

ba (MM)-ta (ABL)-b (3SG NH)-placed-NOM+ABL

²²⁴ Lines and transliteration follow the composite edition (with variants) of this text by Ceccarelli 2012: 90ff. The text was also edited by Al-Fouadi in 1969; see also ETCSL 1.1.4 lines 110-116.

²²⁵ Three other manuscripts suggest that the verb indicates the meaning 'to make shine', with the variant verbs: **im-ba-ba-re-e-ne** (*babbar?*); **im-kara₂-kara₂-re-ne**; **im-kara₂-kar₂-re-ne** (see Ceccarelli 2012: 101, for line 110).

After having set (themselves) on their feet from the house,

113 ^den-lil₂ nibru^{ki}-a hul₂-la mu-ni-ib-DU²²⁶

mu (VENT)-ni (LOC)-b (3SG NH)-brought-Ø (DO)

They made Enlil happy in Nippur.

In this scene, drinking beer is a key communal activity (Bottéro 1994: 4-6), that leads to a competition (**a-da-min₃**), and essentially to the appeasement and happiness of the supreme god, Enlil. Rendu-Loisel notes that : ‘Le banquet apparaît comme une expérience polysensorielle d’émulation collective, dans une forme de manipulation par une substance qui met en joie, dans un contexte de débordements d’effets sensoriels plaisants’ (2017 : 41).²²⁷

Beer can also be used to alter and manipulate mood. In *Lugalbanda and the Anzu Bird*, the narrative opens with Lugalbanda hoping to invite Anzu, his wife, and his child to a feast. He praises the beer goddess Ninkasi, and he hopes that after drinking beer Anzu will aid him in finding the soldiers of Uruk (lines 1-27):

Lugalbanda and the Anzu bird

ETCSL 1.8.2.2

24 mušen kaš nag-ga₂ ul ti-a²²⁸

drink-a (NOM)

²²⁶ For **hul₂-(la) DU (de₆/tum₂)**, see Jaques 2006: 367, ‘apporter la joie’; see also Ceccarelli 2012: 110, line 79, for more examples.

²²⁷ The pleasure of beer and intoxication is also presented as disruptive. For example, in *Inanna and Enki*, the god is outwitted by Inanna after a drinking session and competition that results in Inanna stealing the *me*’s from him. The above passage from *Enki’s Journey to Nippur* is paralleled in *Inanna and Enki* (C lines 27-30); however, after a lacuna in the text, it seems that Inanna has gained the upper hand, taking the *me*’s and leaving Enki in a drunken stupor. Here, we see the dubious effects of beer represented in the loss of Enki’s wits (see discussion in Rendu-Loisel 2017).

²²⁸ For the verb **ul ti**, ‘to be cheerful’, see also Jaques 2006: 208 n.448, quoting a passage from *Ninkasi A* (Civil 1964), line 74, **gurun₆ nag-a ul-ti-a-gu₁₀-ne**, ‘après que la liquer bue m’eut rendu allègre’. Interestingly, the verb is here also used to refer to a joviality caused by drinking alcohol.

When the bird has drunk the beer and is cheerful,

25 anzu^{mušen} kaš nag₂-ga₂ ul ti-a

When Anzu has drunk the beer and is cheerful,

26 ki unug^{ki} ba-gen-na ħa-ma-an-pa₃-de₃

The place to which (the men) of Uruk are going, may he find it for me!

In both texts, the effect of drinking beer is happiness, expressed either through the verbs **ħul₂-DU** or **ul-te**, and it is used to provoke a favourable mood in another. This mood-altering intoxication often leads to a competitive tipsiness whereby the gods engage seemingly either in a drinking competition (see *Enki's Journey to Nippur*, line 109), or a contest of divine prowess. Once again, in the creation narrative *Enki and Ninmah*,²²⁹ the verb **ul-te** is utilised to express the cheerful mood aroused by drinking beer together:

Enki and Ninmah

ETCSL 1.1.2

52 ^den-ki-ke₄ ^dnin-maḥ-e kaš im-na₈-na₈-ne ša₃-bi ul mu-un-te

mu (**VENT**)-n (**3SG**)-was cheerful- Ø (**DO**)

Enki and Ninmah were drinking beer, their bellies were cheerful!

These examples from other Sumerian narratives demonstrate the relationships between beer and the pleasure that it causes; associated with divine feasts and contests, beer is presented as an important element in communal social settings, provoking a jovial atmosphere, no

²²⁹ Edition by Benito 1969; ETCSL 1.1.2.

doubt due to its inebriating effects.²³⁰ Shared drunkenness is a source of joy (Rendu-Loisel 2017: 44).²³¹ Beer is mood-altering, used to raise the spirits of others.

It is not hard to imagine that the cheerful emotions and inebriation that beer provoked at divine banquets and contests were paralleled in the human realm, centred at the institution of the tavern (**eš2-dam**). However, that the tavern was also a locus of uninhibited and even criminal behaviour can perhaps be gleaned from the law codes of Ḫammurapi.²³² For example, code 109 orders the death of any innkeeper who allows criminals to congregate at her establishment, and the harsh penalty of death by burning for a priestess who ‘opens’ a tavern or drinks beer in code 110 suggests the tavern’s potential immoral or impure status (Roth 1997: 102).²³³ The tavern in literature is a liminal space, according to Cassin, and ‘cette position périphérique, éloignée des lieux habités, mais au croisement des chemins, et l’effet enivrant des boissons qu’on y vendait...faisait du cabaret un centre de vie sociale intense, mais aussi d’une renommée douteuse’ (Cassin 1961: 166).

In the Old Babylonian period, the tavern was associated with and seemingly ran by women (the *sa-bi-tum*), attested in the laws of Ḫammurapi, Ešnunna, and the edicts of Ammišaduqa (Lion 2013: 394ff). The first famous female tavern-keeper, Kubaba, is attested in the *Sumerian King List* as a king of Kiš. The association made between priestesses of Inanna/Ištar with the tavern, especially the *ḫarimtu* (Sumerian **kar-ke4**), have meant that the tavern has in modern scholarship been understood as a ‘brothel’, and the women who work

²³⁰ For more examples of drinking as an important element of social life and ceremony, see Bottéro 1994; Michalowski 1994.

²³¹ Though excessive drinking is also presented as disruptive, as in *Inanna and Enki* (see note 227 and Rendu-Loisel 2017), J.A. Black noted that drunkenness in these texts is often related with important events: ‘drunkenness seems to have carried no stigma of disapprobation. In a number of Sumerian literary works, the gods get drunk on wine and beer in circumstances which are not merely amusing but are dramatically important’ (J.A. Black 2015).

²³² For other law codes and edicts in which the ‘tavern’ is mentioned, see Lion 2013: 394ff.

²³³ For discussion of code 110 and its possible implications see Roth: 1999.

or visit there as prostitutes (Assante 1998: 11). The link between Inanna, the tavern, the *harimtu*, and sex is known from a hymn to Inanna:

Hymn to Inanna-Ninegalla (Inanna D)

ETCSL 4.07.4

112 nunuz kar-ke₄ gu₂-za i-im-du₃

The beads of the *kar-ke₄* are fastened on your neck,

113 eš₂-dam-ta lu₂ mu-dab₅-me-en

mu (VENT)-n (DO?)-seizes-e (3SG?)-a (NOM)-men (2SG COP)

You are she that seizes men from the tavern,

114 ur₂ gidlam-zu ^ddumu-zi-da-ke₄ kušum ta₃-ta₃-ge-da-zu-ne

When you hurry to the lap of Dumuzi, your spouse,

115 ^dinanna nigir-si 7-e ki-nu₂ mu-e-da-ak-e

mu-e.da (2SG+COM)-AK-e (3SG)

Inanna, the 7 *groomsmen make love* with you! /Inanna, he (Dumuzi) makes love with you *for/in front of? the 7 groomsmen!*²³⁴

According to some, there is little other evidence that the tavern operated as a brothel (Assante 1998: 66; Lion 2013: 398), or that the *harimtu/kar-ke₄* was involved with prostitution (Shehata 2009: 101; however, for the opposite view, see recently Steinkeller

²³⁴ For the **nigir-si/libir-si** (Akkadian *susapinnu*), see Malul 1989, where he argued that cross-cultural evidence seems to suggest that the role of the *susapinnu*, as attested in the Talmudic and Jewish sources, should be described as a ‘paranymph, best man’. It is difficult to ascertain precisely the role played by this figure in the cuneiform evidence. Alster translated this line as ‘Inanna, you make love with your seven paranymphs!’ (Alster 1974: 93), though I think the subject of the verb must be either the ‘paranymphs’ or Dumuzi, considering the 2SG initial person-prefix and comitative infix in this passage of direct speech.

2022). The term evidently had sexual connotations, as **kar-ke4** was used as an insult in the disputation *Two Women B*, implying sexual promiscuity and adultery (Matuszak 2020: 111-112).

A clear conceptual relationship between beer and sex is found across various sources, including the Sumerian “Love Songs”, from which Rendu-Loisel (2017) drew a connection between the shared, poly-sensorial experience of inebriation at banquets to the pleasurable experiences of amatory love and sex found in the “Love Songs”, explored below. The most striking examples of the connection between beer and sex are the erotic terracotta plaques from the Old Babylonian period, which depict women drinking beer through a straw whilst their sexual partner penetrates them from behind (Assante 2000; 2002). In an essay on these plaques, Assante noted, ‘The association between drinking and sex was deeply rooted in the Mesopotamian psyche of the Old Babylonian period [...] For example, beer was firmly equated to saliva and vaginal wetness, the chief features of the excited female body. Mesopotamian beer was normally sweetened with date syrup, called “honey” in modern translations. In most literary erotica the mouth and vulva are honey-sweet’ (Assante 2002: 34). Cooper references this ‘nexus of inebriation and sexuality’, deeming these images as ‘emblematic of the link between consumption of alcohol and sexual activity’ (Cooper 2016:214), and Michalowski noted that ‘the sexual overtones of alcohol are obvious and universal’ (Michalowski 1994: 38). Within Sumerian literature, two of the three extant copies of *Ninkasi A*, a hymn to the beer goddess, are written onto tablets that also have erotic, Inanna-Dumuzi songs, inscribed upon them (Tinney 2000: 25). The strong presence of beer in the texts known as *Utu E* and *F*, both inscribed upon **BM 23631** (Kramer 1985), also creates a connection between beer and sex; in column iv of this tablet, Utu is described as providing beer before his ‘sister’, Inanna, who pleads to go with him to the mountains. The passage is filled with erotic language, in which Inanna claims to be ignorant of ‘women’s

things (**ag2 munus-e-ne**), such as sex and kissing (lines 138-139).²³⁵ Very little connects the obverse (*Utu E*) narrative with the reverse (*Utu F*) of this tablet, other than the frequent appearance of beer throughout both compositions.

3. Contextual Meaning: Beer as a Metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs”

The pleasure that drinking beer causes, its inebriating effects, and its centrality to social environments situate beer as a complex and multi-sensory source domain for sexual metaphors in the Sumerian “Love Songs”. The cheerful, pleasurable feeling that beer produced, amongst human and divine drinkers, effortlessly maps onto feelings of sexual pleasure. For Rendu-Loisel, ‘Les poèmes décrivant l’amour qui unit la déesse Inana et le dieu Dumuzi ou les hymnes à Ninkasi la déesse sumérienne de la bière illustrent comment l’ivresse peut conduire à une plénitude de l’expérience sensible, multi-sensorielle et partagée’ (2017 : 39). In the Sumerian “Love Songs”, the sensual experience of drinking and tasting beer metaphorises the pleasure felt by the lovers.

In particular, beer acts as a metaphor for the vulva. The female body, a vessel for sweet beer, can then be metaphorically drunk from and enjoyed. In a passage at the beginning of *Inanna-Dumuzi B*, in which an unnamed male speaker describes his female beloved, the sweetness of her beer is praised:

Inanna-Dumuzi B

Ist Ni 2489 (P345323)

5 ka-za ka-silim di-bi ma-du₁₀ ʿka ʿʿlal₃ ʿama-na-gu₁₀

²³⁵ Her ignorance seems to be resolved through the trip to the mountains; the two deities ‘eat’ herbs and ‘cedar’ there before returning to Inanna’s house in Zabalam, holding hands (lines 141-148). Bruschweiler interpreted this passage as Inanna obtaining the knowledge of procreation through eating plants (Bruschweiler 1987: 61-62); however, considering the language of foodstuffs and consumption used throughout erotic poetry, almost universally, I think we can also read sexual undertones to this passage. For more on this, see chapters 2.2, 3.2, 3.4.

The praise of your mouth is sweet to me- my honey-mouth of her mother!

6 numdum-za ne¹ su¹ ub¹ bi¹ ma-du₁₀¹ DU¹ nin₉ ki-ag₂-gu₁₀

The kisses of your lips are sweet to me- come, my beloved sister!

7 nin₉-gu₁₀ še-za kaš-bi in-du₁₀ ka lal₃ ama-na-gu₁₀

My sister, the beer of your barley is sweet, my honey-mouth of her mother!

8 bappir₂-za gu₂-me-¹ zi₂¹ bi¹ in-du₁₀ DU nin₉ ki ag₂-gu₁₀

The *gumezi*²³⁶ beer of your *sourdough*²³⁷ is sweet! Come, my beloved sister!

Both the feelings of sexual pleasure and the physicality of sexual arousal are evoked in this passage through the interaction of sensory source domains. The movement from the female beloved's mouth and lips, described as honey-sweet (and therefore pleasurable to taste), to her 'barley' (as a metaphor for the vulva, see chapter 2.2) connects the erotic orifices of the female body and draws on the sexual connotations of the honey metaphor (see chapter 2.1). Beer is added to these metaphorical interactions; the anticipatory genitive construction in lines 7 and 8 highlights the barley and *sourdough* as the base ingredients of which the wet, liquid beer emerges, representing the aroused female body and the wetness it exudes.

The conceptual connections between honey, beer, and the vulva are made especially explicit in *Šu-Suen A*, again producing the target domains of physical sexual arousal and pleasure:

²³⁶ *gumezi* appears to be a type of beer, though it is rarely attested, and its meaning unclear (Sefati 1990: 56). In the Old Babylonian Sumerian literature, it appears only here and in *Lugalbanda and the Mountain Cave*, ETCSL 1.8.2.1 line 105, **geštin nas-nas gu₂-me-ze₂ du₁₀-ga-am₃**. Otherwise, it is attested lexically in Neo-Assyrian **UR₅-ra**; listed amongst other types of beer, it is equated with Akkadian *hālilu* beer (**K 04251**, P395462).

²³⁷ The term **bappir** is usually translated as 'beer bread', a mixture of grain and aromatic herbs, as described in *Ninkasi A*, lines 13-20 (Civil 1964: 72ff). Sallaberger suggests that **bappir₂** (or **babir₂**) is to be understood as sourdough, 'Sauerteig', used to add yeast to dough in a controlled manner (Sallaberger 2012: 308-316).

Šu-Suen A

Ist Ni 2463 (P345315)

19 AN x x x x- gu₁₀ za-bi-tum-ma/ kaš-a-ni ze₂-ba-am₃

My...of the brewer- her beer is sweet!

20 kaš-a-ni-gen₇ gal₄-la-ni ze₂-ba-am₃/ kaš-a-ni ze₂-ba-am₃

Like her beer, her vulva is sweet- her beer is sweet!

21 ka-ka-a-ni-gen₇ gal₄-la-ni ze₂-ba-am₃/ kaš-a-ni ze₂-ba-am₃

Like her mouth,²³⁸ her vulva is sweet- her beer is sweet!

22 a-su₃-a-ni kaš-a-ni ze₂-ba-am₃

Her *kašbir*²³⁹-beer, her beer is sweet!

The beloved whom Šu-Suen speaks of here is called the **za-bi-tum**, the female tavern keeper, whose connection with the place in which beer is drunk and sold, as well as the seeming connections to the sexual cult of Inanna/Ištar is referenced above. Beer and the tavern are explicitly eroticised here. The poet marks the similitude between sweet beer, the vulva, and the mouth with the equative **-gen₇** and syntactic parallelism. However, similarity is not the

²³⁸ Assante regards the reduplication **ka-ka** as a reference to multiple orifices of the female body, the vulva and also the anus (Assante 2002: 34, n.33 and 34). However, Sefati notes that the full form of the word is **kaš**, the reduplication in line 21 used because of the 3rd singular possessive suffix (Sefati 1998: 278). Whilst I do not want to completely discount the idea that other parts of the female body are eroticised with the beer metaphor, it seems more likely that just the vulva is referenced here, seeing as there are numerous metaphors in the corpus which use the liquidity of substances such as honey, saliva, water, and wine to denote the wet female genitals.

²³⁹ According to Alster (1985a: 142) and Sefati (1998: 352), **a-su₃** is for **kašbir** (**KAŠ.A.SU₃**). In later lexical material, **kašbir** is related to *hīqu*, ‘small beer’, ‘a diluted watery type of beer’, from the verb *hīāqum*, to mix liquids (CAD H: 197; Alster 1985: 142; Sefati 1998: 346). In the disputation poem *Dumuzi and Enkimdu*, Stol noted that the farmer lists the quality of his beer, from best to worst- **kaš sag**, **kaš sag₁₀**, **kaš sa₂-gī₄**, **kašbir** (lines 49-53; Stol 1994: 162, Sefati 1998: 333, 339-340). Accordingly, Assante argues that here ‘the poetic device of listing two types of beer, one inferior and one regular, was not random but alludes to two different female orifices. It is reasonable to read regular beer in conjunction with the vagina...and inferior beer in conjunction with the anus’ (Assante 2002: 34, n.34).

only tactic of metaphorical conceptualisation at play; whilst the sweet and pleasurable taste of beer is evoked as part of enjoying the aroused female body, the passage also references other interacting entailments. Like in *Inanna-Dumuzi B*, the playful paralleling of the mouth and vulva draws on the wetness of these particular body parts (discussed in chapter 2.1), and at once conceives of the female body as a vessel that can exude consumable liquids.

In *Inanna-Dumuzi B1*, beer is included amongst a motif of abundance, consumed by Dumuzi and his sister in the sheepfold:

Inanna-Dumuzi B1

BM 23702 (P345460)

30 e₂-tur₃-ra ḫe₂-gal₂ im-mi-in-si

i (VP)-b (IPP)-i (LOC)-n (3SG)-filled- Ø (DO)

He filled the stall with abundance,

31 amaš-e nam-ḫe₂-a ṽ i₃ ṽ-ṽ zal ṽ-ṽ e ṽ

He let flow plenty into the sheepfold,

32 i₃-gu₇-ne u₂ sikil i₃-gu₇-ne

They eat pure plants, they eat

33 i₃ sur-sur-ra lal₃ i₃-nun-na-ke₄

Pressed oil, honey, ghee,

34 i₃-na₈-ne ^{kaš}ulušin₃ kurun

They drink honied emmer-beer²⁴⁰ and *kurun* beer.

There is an underlying eroticism to this pastoral setting. The paralleled synonyms **ḥe2-gal2**, ‘abundance’, **nam-ḥe2-a**, ‘plenty’ create an atmosphere of excess. The verb **gu7** is repeated, and the pair consume beer, plants, oil, and ghee- all source domains which have erotic metaphorical associations elsewhere in the corpus. Filling this scene with particularly pleasurable, sweet, sensuous foodstuffs constructs feelings of excess, consumption, and pleasure in the abundance of food (see below and chapter 3.4 on the target domain Abundance). Dumuzi supplies these pleasurable treats to his ‘sister’, an action that is overwhelmingly male to female in its directionality throughout the corpus (as seen in the discussion of wine below), immediately before showing her the sexual acts performed by his animals in the stall. With beer so connected with the vulva, sexual arousal, and eroticism in the other compositions of the “Love Songs”, it is hard to disconnect its presence here from its metaphorical conceptualisation of (sexual) pleasure.

4. Water, Fertility and Semen: Basic Meaning

The significance of water to the lives of the Mesopotamian people perhaps goes without saying. Water is portrayed most often as a substance that brings life, fertility and abundance. As such, it is synonymous in many narratives with semen. Ejaculation in the Sumerian corpus is metaphorised as the action of pouring water. Like in *Enki and Ninhursaga* and *Enlil and Ninlil* (see above), the verbs **a-de2** and **a-du11**, ‘to water’, when used as causative finite verbs in the Sumerian literature, often have a male subject, especially in contexts of fertility and procreation. The association between water and semen is most significantly

²⁴⁰ According to the CAD, the Akkadian translations of **ulušin** are *dišiptuḥḥu* and the loanword *ulušinnu*, both meaning ‘emmer-beer’; the literal meaning of *dišiptuḥḥu* (honey of the dregs) indicates that the beer contained honey (CAD D: 160; CAD U-W: 91). The drink **kurun**, Akkadian *kurunnu*, is lexically equated with *karānu*, wine, in Old Babylonian lexical lists (Old Babylonian **diri**, UET 7, 06, P33177, obv. 23; Old Babylonian *Ea*, MAH 15850, P333149, rev. iii. 53’), but also with beer, *šikaru* (Old Babylonian Nippur **diri**, composite CDLI no: Q000057, section 6, 12).

portrayed in the narrative *Enki and the World Order* in which Enki ejaculates the water of the Tigris (ETCSL 1.1.3, lines 250-254).

The action of pouring water or watering was perceived as being associated with the male body and is coherent with the ancient Middle Eastern notion that fertility was a phallogentric and masculine domain (Budin 2015: 32ff). But, as with the image of the body as a water-skin found in medical incantations (see above), the female body also contained water. Water within the female body could represent many things: semen, amniotic fluid and fluids of the womb (Steinert 2017), and in sexual contexts, wetness and arousal.

5. Contextual Meaning: Water in the Sumerian “Love Songs”

The metaphorical construction of water metaphors in the “Love Songs” is much like that of beer, explored above. The female body is positioned as a container for liquids and, in the erotic context of the “Love Songs”, water appears to metaphorise female arousal.

The most explicit and well-known example of this occurs in *Inanna-Dumuzi P*:

Inanna-Dumuzi P

Ist Ni 9602 (P343627)

Col. ii.

24 a-ša₃ an-na ne-en a ma-ra-gu₁₀

My flooded field of heaven,

25 ma-a gal₄-la-gu₁₀ du₆ du₈-du₈-a a ma-a-ra

Me, my vulva, a flooded, spreading mound,

26 ki-sikil-gen a-ba-a ur₁₁-ru-a-bi

I am a young woman, who will plough it?

27 gal₄-la-gu₁₀ ki duru₅ a ma-ra

My vulva, a flooded, wet place...

Recent commentators of this passage discuss its agricultural metaphor and consider the connection made between the female body as the land and the man as the farmer who domesticates and cultivates her (Couto-Ferreira 2017; Zisa 2023). Similar imagery is seen in the much-discussed passage of *Inanna H* (lines 21-25), in which the goddess exclaims her desire to be her lover's canal and field, his 'wet place' (**ki duru₅**). That Inanna or the female body is being presented as controlled or domesticated seems incongruous here. The emphasis in this section of *Inanna-Dumuzi P* is placed on the wetness of the field and vulva, with varying phrases used to metaphorise the aroused sensation of the female body. In these lines, the past participle, Emesal **a mar-a**, suggests that the female body is in a *state* of arousal, differing from the causative construction in lines 1-4 of *Inanna-Dumuzi E*, for example, where the active, ergative verb **a ba-an-du₁₁/de₂** is indicative of the action of the male body. Inanna's body can be *watered* by her male lover, but she also *produces* water herself. She anticipates the 'ploughing' of her lover, but her desire and arousal is already present as the water also metaphorically emits from her body.

In another hymn to Inanna, the goddess is irrevocably connected to and produces water:

Inanna G²⁴¹

BM 15794 (P283740)

20 a e₃ me-e^r gen^r na^r a e₃ me-e gen-na

I, who goes bringing forth water, I, who goes bringing forth water!

²⁴¹ Line numbers and transliteration follow the edition by Wagensohnner (2010). See also ETCSL 4.07.7.

The significance and greatness of the rivers is referred to 16 lines later:

Inanna G

BM 15794

36 i₇-de₃ i₇-de₃ i₇ diri-gen₇ dam-gen₇ ze₂-eb uru₂-^r gen₇ ^r ze₂-eb/ur₅-gen₇ ze₂-eb nu-gal₂

The river, the river, like an overflowing river, sweet like a wife, sweet like a city/there is nothing sweet like this!

The repetition of the Emesal **ze₂-eb** is suggestive (see chapter 2.1); the river that ‘overflows’ is equated to a wife, possibly an allusion to the BODY IS A CONTAINER metaphor. This conceptualisation is extremely evident at the end of the composition, where water is depicted not as flowing from Inanna’s genitals but from her breasts:

70 ^dinanna ubur-zu gan₂-ne₂-zu ħe₂-a

Inanna - may your breasts be your fields!

71 gan₂-ne₂ dagal-e gu de₂-a-zu

Your wide fields that pour out flax,

72 gan₂-ne₂ dagal-e še de₂-a-zu

Your wide fields that pour out barley,

73 a bala-am₃-ta mu-lu₂ ŠE (erasure) gar-am₃-ta

Make water overflow from them, provide *for* the man!

74 a bal-bal-am₃-ta mu-lu₂ gar-gar-am₃-ta

Make water flow and flow from them, provide and provide *for* the man!

Breast-feeding probably lends itself to this image, further positioning the female body as a vessel which contains and then emits liquid. Significantly, Inanna's body is presented as *producing*, not only water but other agricultural products (chapter 2.2).

In *Inanna-Dumuzi B1*, water appears in two distinct ways. The first alludes to water's conceptualisation as bodily fluids, which significantly appears later in the composition when Dumuzi explains to his sister that when the animals in the pen copulate, the male fills her with his semen (**a-ni mi-ni-in-si**, 'he filled her with his semen', line 46; **te-am₃ a ri-a-ni gal₄-^r la^r mi-ni-in-su-su**, 'what it is- he filled (her) vulva with his ejaculated semen', line 54). Water first appears, however, in line 10, where Dumuzi informs Inanna of his intentions:

Inanna-Dumuzi B1

BM 23702 (P345460)

10 gidlam a zal ki a-ri-a-še₃ ga-de₆

Wife, I will carry flowing water to the wasteland!

Dumuzi also states that he intends to care for the cattle and sheep pens. Only the first two sections (**ki-ru-gu₂**) of this composition survive; the purpose of Dumuzi wanting to show his sister the copulating animals has been suspected as a precursor to him having sexual relations with Geštinanna himself (Kramer 1973; Alster 1975). The allusion to water in line 10 perhaps supports this interpretation. The relationship between water and (sexual) bodily fluids in other compositions, as well as this one, suggests that Dumuzi intends to have sex (with Inanna? with his sister?), with the flowing water a metaphor for semen/female arousal and the 'wasteland' standing as the unaroused female body. The metaphorical image of the unaroused body as being in a state without water is present in the narrative *Enki and Ninhursaga*, which begins by praising the land of Dilmun, a city apparently infamous for its water (Leick 1994: 39). However, the city is initially described as lacking this precious

substance, with no river or fields (lines 35-38). Dilmun is as virginal as the daughters' who Enki precedes to impregnate throughout the narrative; the virginal body is one without semen, the virginal land without water. Consequently, Enki gives the people of Dilmun what they require (lines 58ff). In Dilmun, it is the presence of Enki, and therefore his semen, that provides water to the arid city (Leick 1994: 39). In *Inanna-Dumuzi B1*, Dumuzi promises to provide sexual pleasure for his lover.

The second use of water in *Inanna-Dumuzi B1* is quite distinct and seems to metaphorise Inanna's feelings of anger or astonishment. Upon hearing Dumuzi's plan, Inanna returns to the **Eturkalama**:

Inanna-Dumuzi B1

BM 23702

19 x mu-ni-in-ku₄ nig-me-[gar] ba-an-dab₅

She brought in...she was dumbstruck,

20 mu-ge_{17-eb} ga-ša-an-an-na [a]-ge_{6-ʿ} gen₇ ʿ ba-bara₂

The *nugig* Inanna unfurled²⁴² like a wave.

21 ki-ru-gu₂ [1]-kam-ma

It is the first *kirugu*

As waves/floods (**a-ge₆**) are typically destructive in Sumerian literature, this 'dark water' suggests that Dumuzi's intentions upset and perhaps anger the goddess. In the composition

²⁴² Collation: the final sign of line 20 appears to be **bara₂**, not **lu₃** as suggested by Alster 1975, who translated: 'the sacred one, Queen of Heaven, was confused like a flood' (1975: 218).

Ninurta and the Turtle, both uses of the wave source domain are used, firstly to express something of the god's displeasure, and then to represent the destructive wrath of Enlil:

Ninurta and the Turtle

ETCSL 1.6.3

25 ur-sag nam-tar-ra-bi ša₃-bi nu-ḥul₂

The hero was unhappy about this decision,

26 ki gub-ba-ne₂ a-^ṛ ge₆ ^ṛ? i-im-ku₁₀-ku₁₀-ge i-si₁₂-si₁₂-ge

Where he stood, [like?] a [wave] he darkens, he becomes green.

[...]

32 eš₂-e abzu-a a-ge₆ mud i-im-tuku₄-tuku₄-^ṛ e ^ṛ

In the shrine, in the Abzu he stirred up blood [like] a wave.

In line 26, the verbs infer that the metaphorical entailment being highlighted is the *colour* of the wave, whilst in 32 it is a wave's disturbing, roiling nature. In *Inanna-Dumuzi B1*, the verb **bara₂**, 'to spread' also evokes a wave's tumultuous surge; Inanna's emotions are envisaged as watery and tempestuous. Such a metaphorical use of water imagery, as well as an apparent moment of rage, is unusual in the Sumerian "Love Songs", where generally metaphor, including water, is used for erotic material that evokes feelings of pleasure and delight. Yet, water is, again, associated with the goddess; her emotions conceived of as spilling forth from the river/sea, reflecting the familiar conceptual metaphor of the body as a container for liquids.

6. Wine: Basic Meaning

Wine, as opposed to beer, appears to have been an expensive and therefore rare commodity in Mesopotamia, though the presence of the grapevine is recorded as early as the fourth millennium BC. In the Old Babylonian period, around 1800 BCE, wine culture was present in Syria and Anatolia, but viticulture does not appear in the cuneiform record in Mesopotamia until the first millennium BCE (Powell 1996). As noted by J.A. Black, wine and beer, when mentioned in the Sumerian literature, are often drunk together (J.A. Black 2015), and where wine appears it is usually connected with other consumable goods.

7. Contextual Meaning: Wine in the Sumerian “Love Songs”

Unlike the other liquid metaphors in the “Love Songs” corpus, wine is not used as an overtly sexual source domain for bodily fluids. It is, however, similar to the other liquid source domains in that it is used to construct the feelings of abundance and prosperity that occur so often throughout the compositions.

For example, in *Inanna-Dumuzi C1*, the so-called ‘paranymphs’, ‘groomsmen’ of Inanna and Dumuzi, are sent for to bring produce to the goddess:

Inanna-Dumuzi C1

Ist Ni 2377 (P345166)

Col. i.

11 ^r lu₂ ^{7?} su₈-ba-še₃ mu-lu da-an-ge₄-ge₄

da (ES) (COHORT)-n (DO)-return (RDPL)

Let me send a man to the shepherd,

12 [i₃] sag ga sag mi₂ ^r de₃ ^{7-r} ga₂ ^{7-r} ab ⁷-be₂

And may he please me with top butter and top milk!

13 ʀ engar ʀ²-gu₁₀-u₈?-še₃ mu-lu <da-an-ge₄-ge₄>

Let me send a man to my farmer,

14 [lal₃] ʀ geštin ʀ²-e mi₂ de₃-<ga₂-ab-be₂>

And may he please me with [honey] and wine!

Here, Inanna wishes for wine to be given to her as a gift, along with good butter and milk.²⁴³

As happens very often in the “Love Songs”, precative and cohortative verbal forms are used to express (female) desire,²⁴⁴ and gifts metaphorise sexual pleasure (see chapters 2.10 and 3.1). In a similar way, wine appears in the following lines from *Inanna-Dumuzi D1*:

Inanna-Dumuzi D1

BM 15820 (P283738)

57 pu₂ geš³kiri₆ lal₃ geštin ʀe₂-en-da-il₂

In the orchards may honey and wine rise with him!

As discussed in chapters 2.2 and 3.4, in this poem, wine is amongst the long motif of abundance that clusters food and agricultural imagery, contributing to the eroticism and evoking the sensuous and excessive emotions of the lovers, Inanna and her king.

8. Liquids as a Source Domain in the “Love Songs”: Summary

Beer and wine, especially, associated with inciting ‘poly-sensory’ pleasures, joyful moods, consumption, and abundance operate metaphorically not only as evoking the erotic eating and hunger conceptual metaphor, but also as relating to the overarching metaphor THE

²⁴³ With the beginning of line 14 broken it is not certain, but notably the produce first brought to Inanna here is all liquids - is this another allusion to the liquids as source domains of sexual pleasure and arousal?

²⁴⁴ An analysis of such forms undertaken for my GeMANE paper (2021) suggests that 168 forms expressing wish and desire are used by the female speakers, whilst only 55 by male speakers and 30 by ‘narrators’. This correlates with the female-dominated voice of the corpus, as well as the focus on the expression of female desire and pleasure.

BODY IS A CONTAINER. Liquids are consumed and can be contained within the body, as well as being emitted. Beer, with its connotations of inebriation and sex operates as a metaphor for female arousal. Water, while elsewhere it functions as a symbol of masculine virility and fertility, in these compositions is another reference to the wet, aroused female body. The eroticism of liquidity and wetness throughout these compositions is apparent and shared with other Emesal texts. For example, in line 3 of **BM 88318** (P274208), **gal4-la-gu10 dur5-ru-am3**, ‘my vulva, it is wet!’, it is very clear that wetness is an attractive attribute of the aroused female body.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ The term **durus** is also repeated extensively in Emesal texts **BM 88406** (P274210) and **BM 23666** (P274211).

2.6 Trees

Trees are the only metaphor throughout the corpus that more regularly act as source domains for the male body and his arousal, where others almost exclusively concern the female body and experience. Trees, obviously phallic in shape, were notably associated with masculinity and kingship throughout the Old Babylonian Sumerian literary corpus and are particularly prominent in the royal hymns of king Šulgi. In this section, I will firstly highlight the entailments that mark various trees as metaphors for good kingship in the wider Old Babylonian literary tradition, before demonstrating that these same entailments are subverted to frequently metaphorise the penis and other erotic aspects in the Sumerian “Love Songs”.

1. Trees and Royal Ideology in the Sumerian Old Babylonian Literary Tradition

There are several identifiable images related to trees in the Sumerian Old Babylonian corpus that work as metaphors for good kingship: the fertile fruitfulness of trees; growing or spreading branches as an image of protection; roots, strength and uprightness associated with stability; and the relationship between trees and life-giving water. The hackberry tree (**mes**) is the most prosperous in the Sumerian royal hymns, but the apple tree (**ḥašḥur**), the cedar (**eren**), the date palm (**gešnimbar**), and the poplar (**ildag₂**) are also used.

2. Fruitfulness

The *mes*-tree has been identified as *celtis australis*, the hackberry tree, also known as a nettle-tree and a honeyberry tree (Powell 1987: 149; Heimpel 2011: 130). The hackberry has an edible fruit, which, in Greek, is called the *lotus*, and is possibly the sweet species that the lotus-eaters consume in book IX of the *Odyssey*.²⁴⁶ That the fruitfulness of the hackberry

²⁴⁶ Lidell/Scott [Greek-English Lexicon](#).

was desirable is evident in a passage of *Šulgi D*, rich in tree imagery (see below), that describes the king’s physical strength and beauty (Klein 1981b: 51):

Šulgi D

ETCSL 2.4.2.04

33 mes zi gurun₇-na gun₃-a-gen₇ u₆ di du₁₀-ga-me-en₃

Like a true hackberry-tree of colourful fruits, you are a sweet sight!

34 gešnimbar dilmun ku₃-gen₇ ^dnin-e₂-gal-ke₄ mi₂ zi du₁₁-ga-me-en₃

Like a holy date palm of Dilmun, you are truly enjoyed by Ninegal!

The fruits of the hackberry are also highlighted as a favourable attribute of the king in *Šulgi F*:

Šulgi F²⁴⁷

63 ^{gešr}mes ṽ zi-ṽ dam ṽ gurun₇ ṽ? ku₃ mu-ṽ un ṽ-ṽ il₂ ṽ

He is a true hackberry-tree, he carried shiny fruits!

Fruits bestow obvious overtones of fertility on these images of the king, but with the apple tree (^{geš}hašhur), evident mostly from the “Love Songs” (see below), there are also added erotic connotations. For example, in another hymn to Šulgi:

Šulgi Z

Ist Ni 4171 (P343098)

Rev.

²⁴⁷ Lines follow the composite edition in Lämmerhirt 2012.

16 nin₉-gu₁₀ ^{geš} ḥašḥur ʾ-ʾ gu₁₀ ʾ-ʾ še₃ ʾ ga-ba-e-de₃-gen

My sister, let me go with you to my apple tree,

17 DU₈-a ^{geš} ḥašḥur x šu-ga₂ ḥe₂-gal₂

i-na

.....may the apple tree...be in my hand

This text, though fragmentary, is filled with familiar erotic imagery explored elsewhere in this thesis, including wet fields, lettuce, ploughing, and honey. The inclusion of apple trees here therefore contributes to the sensual environment in which the king wants to meet his ‘sister’, likely Inanna.²⁴⁸

3. Spreading/Growing Branches and Protection

Perhaps the most common tree imagery across the Old Babylonian Sumerian literary texts is that of growing or spreading branches, usually using the verbal compound **pa-mul**.²⁴⁹ Again, this is frequently used with the hackberry; for example, in *Šulgi P*, when the goddess Ninsun describes the king:²⁵⁰

Šulgi P²⁵¹

ETCSL 2.4.2.16

obv.

15’ mes pa-mul-gu₁₀-um ki ma-an-dar’

²⁴⁸ The fruit (**zulum**) of the date palm (**gešnimbar**) is also depicted sensuously in *A Message of Ludingira* (ETCSL 5.5.1), line 48: **ama-gu₁₀ ^{geš}gešnimbar ir-si-im du₁₀-du₁₀-ga**, ‘my mother is a date palm with the sweetest fragrance’.

²⁴⁹ Attinger 2021: 739.

²⁵⁰ We find this image probably describing the god Ninurta in *Šulgi T*, line 2: **^dnin-urta ^{geš}mes pa mul dagal-la [...]**.

²⁵¹ See also the edition by Klein 1981a.

He is my hackberry with spreading branches, he split the earth for me!²⁵²

This passage is a praise of Šulgi in which Ninsun implores An to elevate him as king of all the lands. Considering that the line before calls for Šulgi to be the people's 'loyal shepherd' (**sipa zi-bi he2-am3**), the metaphor of the spreading branches of the hackberry likely also represents the king's stability and protection of his people (Attinger 2021: 739).²⁵³ The canopy of the hackberry providing protection is used in the following hymn to Ur-Namma:

Ur-Namma I

ETCSL 2.4.1.a

B 3 lugal mes babbar₂ uri₅^{ki}-ma ki du₁₀-ge mu₂-a

King, white hackberry of Ur, grown in a sweet place,

4 geš an-dul₃ pa gal-gal-la ʾigi ʾan-na gub-ba

A tree, a canopy of great branches, stood before heaven,

5 gessu-zu-uš mu-ri mu he₂-gal₂-la kur₂-kur₂-ra dul₄-la

mu (VENT)-e (2SG)-led-Ø (DO)

To your shade, you led them²⁵⁴; years of abundance that covered all the lands.

In *Šulgi P*, this motif (with **pa-mul**) is extended to the cedar tree:

Šulgi P

²⁵² Bertolini notes that breaking the ground (to plant solid roots) is used to symbolise the strong foundations of kingship, whilst the extending branches are an expansion of power (Bertolini 2020: 49).

²⁵³ In lines 20-21 of the *Heron and the Turtle* (ETCSL 5.9.2), the poplar (**ildag₂**) and the spreading branches of the hackberry are used to describe the offices of **lugal** and **dumu lugal** (Peterson 2007: 277).

²⁵⁴ The subject of the verb here is not entirely clear. Based on the use of the 2nd person singular possessive pronoun on **gessu-zu-uš**, I assume it to be also 2nd singular, speaking directly to the king. Civil noted the uncertainty here, but opted for a 1st person singular subject, 'I (?) will keep close to your shade' (Civil 1996: 164); however, the rest of the composition only addresses the king in the 3rd or 2nd person.

ETCSL 2.4.2.16

5 ^{geš}eren duru₅ ^{geš}ha-šū-ur₂-ra du₃-a-[┘] am₃ [┘]

Like a sappy cedar planted among cypresses,

6 a-a-zu an ku₃-ge pa mu-ni-mul-[┘] mul [┘]

Your father, radiant An, will make its branches spread there!

The image here is striking; the branches of a cedar tree extend much wider than the branches of the **ha-šū-ur₂**, a conifer usually translated as ‘cypress’ (Attinger 2021: 518).²⁵⁵

4. Roots and Strength

As recently highlighted by Bertolini, the clustering of tree metaphor in the passage from *Šulgi D* highlights aspects of kingship such as strength, firmness, solidity, and protection (Bertolini 2020: 51). In line 32, the king’s strength is identified with the poplar tree:

Šulgi D

ETCSL 2.4.2.04

32 ^{geš}ildag₂ ki-en-du za₃-ga du₃-a-gen₇ usu-a-me-en₃

Like the poplar planted by the side of the watercourse, you are strong!²⁵⁶

The tree motifs found mostly in the hymns to Šulgi are emulated and embellished in a poem of Išme-Dagan:²⁵⁷

Išme-Dagan A+V

²⁵⁵ This image is parallel with line 35 of *Šulgi D*, ^{geš}eren duru₅ ha-šū-ur₂-re mu₂-a-gen₇ gessu du₁₀-ga-me-en₃, ‘You are sweet shade, like a sappy cedar grown among cypresses’.

²⁵⁶ For **ki-en-du** see Klein 1981b: 92-93; Attinger 2021: 607.

²⁵⁷ Išme-Dagan is said to have ‘consciously emulated the deeds of his famous Ur III predecessor’ (Frayne 1998: 6; also Klein 1981b: 24 n.17).

ETCSL 2.5.4.01

239 ^{geš}mes maḥ ur₂ gur-ra pa mul dagal-la-me-en

I am a lofty hackberry, with thick²⁵⁸ roots and broad, spreading branches!²⁵⁹

240 an-dul₃ ki-en-gi-ra gessu du₁₀-ga-me-en

I am the cover of Sumer, sweet shade.

Here, he borrows the image of the branching hackberry, but adds to its metaphorical resonances as an image of stability with the inclusion of its thick roots. Bertolini points out the distant parts of the tree highlighted in this line, the bottom of the plant (**ur₂**) and the top (**pa**), which forms an image of the king uniting the earth with the heavens (Bertolini 2020: 49).

5. Life-Giving Water

The final key image considered here that uses trees as a metaphor associated with kingship is their relationship with water. The poplar (**ildag₂**) in this respect is mentioned twice in the Šulgi hymns; once in line 32 of *Šulgi D* (above), and in line 15 of *Šulgi Z* (ETCSL 2.4.2.26), both described as being next to the watercourse (**ki-en-du**).²⁶⁰ In *Šulgi N*, it is the apple tree that overhangs the river:

Šulgi N

ETCSL 2.4.2.14

4 ^{geš{i}}irina₃^{na}-gen₇ ur₂ ḥe₂-gur₄-re

lim-x-x

²⁵⁸ Assuming **gur** = **gur₄**

²⁵⁹ With a similar construction in *Išme-Dagan U* (ETCSL 2.5.4.21), line a 7': **nun-ne₂ ^{geš}mes pa mul-la [...]**

²⁶⁰ For lexical references of the poplar's association with the watercourse, see Klein 1981b: 93.

Like a root, may (his) lap be thick!

5 ^{u2}šakir₃-ra-gen₇ pa ħe₂.tal₂-tal₂-e

Like a *šakir*-plant, may his branches be broad!

6 **u₃-mu-un** ne-ta mu-e-zu me-ta-me

Lord, from this you know our place.²⁶¹

7 ^{geš}ħašħur zal-le i₇-de₃ la₂-a-ba

Among those dripping apple trees hung by the river,

8 ^ʾlu₂ ^{ʾʾ}di ^{ʾ?}-de₃ šu-ni ħa-ma^{ʾ?}-an-peš-e

The man who wanders there, may he stretch out his hand for me.²⁶²

In this text, the mother addresses the child of Šulgi, and asks Sleep to overcome him (Kramer 1971; Volk/Bohny 2015).²⁶³ She expresses her wishes for the king's son in language familiar to the tree metaphor explored so far in this section, indicating her wish for him to become a stable, protective, and fruitful king.

The proximity of the trees to water connects it to a vital life-source, and thus presents kingship as connected to and giving life (Bertolini 2020: 52). Further to this, building and restoring canals and watercourses was often an important duty extolled by the king in his year names and royal inscriptions. Unsurprisingly, this role is emphasised in another hymn to Šulgi:

²⁶¹ For **me-ta** see Attinger 2021: 721.

²⁶² The meaning of lines 6 and 8 is obscure, it is not clear whether the speaker still addresses or refers to her son, or if Sleep is the subject (Kramer 1971: 199). Volk interprets line 6 as addressed to the father of the baby (ie. the king), and line 8 as the mother expressing a wish that a passer-by let her son sleep (Volk/Bohny 2015: 85).

²⁶³ Halton/ Svärd note, however, that a wife of Šulgi is not actually named, and it is only assumed that the author of a 'lullaby' is most likely a wife and mother (Halton/ Svärd 2017: 102-3).

Šulgi B

ETCSL 2.4.2.02

252 a-gar₃ gal-gal-e gu₂ ʿ mu ʿ-[x-šum₂]

I paid attention to the great meadows,

253 gan₂-ne gan₂ zi-de₃ geš ʿ mu ʿ-[x-du₃]

I planted trees for the fields, for the fertile fields,

254 du₆ sag eg₂ pa₅-re a₂ šum₂-ʿ mu ʿ-[me-en]²⁶⁴

I am the one who gave strength to the high mounds, the embankments, the canals.

It is notable that the tree imagery identified in the royal hymns is also used in descriptions of the gods. In the beginning of the narrative *Enki and the World Order*, the god is praised with the following imagery:

Enki and the World Order

ETCSL 1.1.3

4 lugal ^{geš}mes abzu-a du₃-a kur-kur-ta il₂-la

King, hackberry planted in the Abzu, risen over all the lands!

5 ušumgal maḥ eridu^{ki}-ga gub-ba

Great dragon, stood in Eridu,

²⁶⁴ Restorations of verbal roots and copula follow suggestions made by the ETCSL, though they restore 3rd singular forms **mu-un-šum₂**, **mu-ni-in-du₃**.

6 gessu-bi an ki-a dul-la

Whose shade covered heaven and earth,

7 ^{geš}ter ^{geš}geštin-na kalam-ma la₂-a

A forest of vines hung over the land.

This image of Enki as the towering canopy of the hackberry is even more emphatic than when it is used in the royal hymns, but the language employed seems to have been consciously borrowed and applied to that of the kings of the Ur III and Isin dynasties, particularly Šulgi (Klein 1981b: 29). The tree metaphors examined here work to create an image of ideal kingship; they emphasise the king's important connection to fertility and abundance, including water; they highlight his strength and ability to protect his people and borders; and they emphasise his relationship with the divine, either an erotic relationship with the goddess Inanna (see *Šulgi Z*, above); a proximity to the heavens (for example, *Išme-Dagan A*, above); or consciously emulate the gods, highlighting their similarities through shared metaphor and attributes (Klein 1981b: 32).²⁶⁵

6. Contextual Use: Trees and the Male Body in the Sumerian “Love Songs”

Trees seem to have had a strong conceptual relationship with men, particularly kings and male gods.²⁶⁶ The Sumerian word for penis, **geš₃**, was homonymic to, and could also be

²⁶⁵ Notably, the tree imagery discussed here is inverted to metaphorise weakness and despair in the first millennium Damu lament *In the Steppe in the Early Grass*, ^{geš}šenig-ga mu₂-sar a nu-nag-a-gu₁₀/su^{hur} eden-na pa nu-si₁₂-ga-gu₁₀/^{geš}ildag₂ šita₃-na-ba nu-su₃-ga-gu₁₀/^{geš}ildag₂ ur₂-ra ba-ab-bu-ra-gu₁₀/gu mu₂-sar-ra a nu-nag-a-gu₁₀, ‘My tamarisk who does not drink water in its garden bed,/My tresses whose branches are not green in the steppe,/My poplar who will not empty its (water)channels,/My poplar, torn out at the root,/My flax who does not drink water in its garden bed’ (transliteration following M.E. Cohen 1988: 683). The trees here do not thrive in water, their branches do not flourish, and their roots are torn up. Thank you to J. Barber for bringing these interesting parallels to my attention.

²⁶⁶ There are a number of male gods associated with specific trees in the Mesopotamian pantheon: Lugal-asal/Bēl-šarbi (poplar; this god also had a female companion, Bētel-šarbi); Lugal-šinig/Bēl-bīni (tamarisk); and Lugal-gešimmar (datepalm). All are associated with the underworld deity, Nergal, in later god-lists (Steinkeller 1992: 269ff). Note that the god Ningeszida, whose name means ‘lord of the good tree’ (or grapevine, see Lambert 1990: 300), is also attested as descending to the netherworld. Dumuzi is, of course,

written with, the sign **geš**, tree (Attinger 2021: 498). This is particularly apparent in Emesal, where **mu** is both ‘tree’ and ‘man, penis’. In fact, in Emesal lamentations, a parallel equation is made between man as tree (**mu**) and woman as reed (**ge**) (Cavigneaux 1987b: 253; Schretter 1990: 185ff; 217ff). This man/tree relationship manifests itself regularly in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, where trees metaphorise the penis of Dumuzi or the male beloved, but their foliage is also used as a metaphor for his hair. Many different trees are found in the corpus, including those explored above which feature frequently in the royal hymns; the hackberry, the apple tree, the poplar (**ildag₂**, **asal₂**), the date palm, the tamarisk (**geš₃senig**), the fig (**geš₃peš₃**), and the willow tree (**geš₃kim₃**). Several attributes that are used to style a trees’ association with kingship are also used in the “Love Songs” to map onto the target domain of the penis or other erotic domains. In this section, I will highlight how motifs of growing and spreading branches, fruitfulness, the shade that a tree provides, and its foliage, are all utilised to form erotic metaphor.

7. “Growing”

The hackberry, perhaps the most prestigious tree in the Old Babylonian Sumerian literary corpus,²⁶⁷ is the central focus of *Inanna-Dumuzi F*, which begins with Inanna praising and admiring the “red-berry”, ie. her vulva (chapter 2.4). In the middle part of the composition, Inanna wishes to make Ama-ušumgal-anna’s hackberry tree “grow”, a metaphor for his arousal:²⁶⁸

Inanna-Dumuzi F

Ist Ni 2408 (P345089)

also a deity associated with the netherworld, and who in the “Love Songs” corpus is strongly coupled with tree imagery.

²⁶⁷ the ‘l’arbre par excellence’ (Attinger 2021: 724 n.2136).

²⁶⁸ As noted by Attinger, ‘dans cette composition, l’arbre ‘mes’ semble être tout à la fois une métaphore pour le roi (comme c’est fréquemment le cas) et pour son pénis’ (Attinger 1999-2000: 263).

10 [...da]-^r mul ^ʔ-^r mul ^ʔ mes-gu₁₀ pa da-e₃

da (ES) (COHORT)-b (DO)-*grow* (RDPL) da(ES) (COHORT)-bi (OO) bring out

[Let me] make it grow,²⁶⁹ let me make my hackberry sprout!

11 [e₂] [^dmu]-^r ul ^ʔ-lil₂-la₂-ke₄ a da-ag₂-su₃

da (ES) (COHORT)-mu (VENT)-sprinkle

In the house of Enlil, let me sprinkle water!

12 [...] x a da-mul-mul mes-gu₁₀ pa da-an-e₃

da (ES) (COHORT)-nni (OO)-bring out

Let me make it grow! Let me make him, my hackberry, sprout!

13 [...] [e₂]-kur-ra a da-ag₂-su₃

In the Ekur, let me sprinkle water!

As the text continues, there is a change from using cohortative prefixes to indicative verb forms, emphasising that Inanna's wishes are actualised:

Inanna-Dumuzi F

Ist Ni 2408

14 x ^r lugal ^ʔ-gu₁₀ ^{geš}mes-gen₇ kisal-la bi₂-in-mu₂-mu₂

b (IPP) i (LOC)-n (3SG DO)-grow (RDPL)-en (1SG)

...I make my king grow like a hackberry in the courtyard!²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Assuming that the broken verb is **pa-mul**.

²⁷⁰ Note that Sefati translates this verb as intransitive, 'My king will sprout forth' (Sefati 1998: 173), but I agree with the note from Attinger 1999-2000: 263 that it is a transitive verb.

15 [e₂^d]-^r mu^ˀ-ul-lil₂-la₂-ke₄ a bi₂-in-su₃

b (IPP) i (LOC)-n (3SG)-sprinkled-Ø

(And) he sprinkled water in the house of Enlil,

16 ^r lugal^{ˀ?} d^d ama-ušumgal-an-na^{geš} mes-gen₇ kisal-la bi₂-in-mu₂-mu₂

b (IPP) i (LOC)-n (3SG DO)-grow (RDPL)-en (1SG)

I make the king, Ama-ušumgal-anna, grow like a hackberry in the courtyard!

Significantly, in lines 10 and 12, two verbs reminiscent of the language associated with the hackberry in the royal hymns are used to metaphorise Dumuzi's erection: **pa-mul** and **pa-e₃**.²⁷¹ The shape of a tree's trunk, here standing presumably alone in the "courtyard", creates obvious phallic imagery. As transitive verbs, it is apparent that Inanna's wish is to arouse her partner (make him "grow" and "sprout"), which then seems to occur in lines 14-16.²⁷²

An Old Babylonian Akkadian tablet that collects incipits of erotic poetry makes clear that an erection can be metaphorised using the language of growing:

CUSAS 10, 12 (P252332)

8 *a-bu-un-ti lu-uš-tu-uḫ-^r ma^ˀ*

Let me grow long for the girl!

34 *^r i^ˀ-na mu-uḫ-ḫi^r e^ˀ-^r re^ˀ-ni-im na-ba^ˀ-su₂ wa-ša-at*

²⁷¹ Whilst **pa-e₃** typically means 'to make (something) appear, manifest' (Sallaberger 2020: 800; Attinger 2021: 333), the literal meaning of this compound verb- 'making the branch(es) go out'- emphasises not only aspects of the source domain (the branches of the tree) but also contributes to those of the target domain by mimicking the effect on an erect penis. Moreover, this literal use of **pa-e₃** is confirmed by and parallel with the verbal root **mu₂** in lines 14 and 16.

²⁷² As this scene is placed amongst seemingly cultic activity (the setting is the **Ekur** and the **Abzu**; Inanna wants to sprinkle water in the temple; and in line 37, the **balag** instrument is mentioned), Bertolini sees this passage as a ritual act in which Inanna is bestowing kingly power upon Dumuzi (Bertolini 2020: 50). However, I think it is possible that the action of 'sprinkling water' is also a metaphor for ejaculation.

On top of the cedar his...is protruding (George 2009: 71-75).

Line 34 significantly uses the verb *wašûm*, familiar to the language of *Inanna-Dumuzi F* (**pa da-e3**). A synonym with the meaning ‘to be(come) big/to make big/to grow’ (**bulug3**)²⁷³ is used in another Sumerian “Love Song”, *Inanna-Dumuzi Q*, where a similar passage uses the image of an apple tree as a metaphor for the penis:

Inanna-Dumuzi Q

Source A: CBS 8534 (obv)+N1015 obv. (P263336)

7 ħe₂-bulug₃-e ħe₂-bulug₃-e ^[geš̄] ħašĥur ^ʔ [...]

ħe (PREC)-grow-ed

May it grow! May it grow! [May the] apple tree [grow]!

8 ^{geš̄}ħašĥur LAL²⁷⁴-a ħe₂-bulug₃-e ^{geš̄} ħašĥur ^ʔ [...]

May the *hung* apple tree grow! [May the] apple tree [grow]!

9 ^{geš̄}ħašĥur-^r e ^ʔKU a ħe₂-KEŠ₂^ʔ-re ^{geš̄?} [...]

May the apple tree...

10 lu-ub₂^{sar} en-te-en-e ur₂ ^r ħe₂ ^ʔ- [...]

May the winter turnip²⁷⁵...the lap

²⁷³ As a transitive verb, **bulug3** can also have the nuance ‘to raise (a child)’ (Attinger 2021: 214).

²⁷⁴ Klein and Sefati transliterate **lal2-a**, with the suggestion it is a phonetic writing for **la-la** (Akk. *lalû*), a term that often appears with **ħi-li**, and so holds similar connotations of sexual attractiveness and desirability (2012: 317). However, the sign **lal2** does not seem to be attested in the Old Babylonian period (see Mittermayer 2006, aBZL: 263), nor is **la-la** attested as being written in this way (Attinger 2021: 662). From the RTI image accessible on the CDLI (P263336), the sign is likely **LAL**, and we also find **LAL** in Source B (CBS 12613), line 3’ as an alternative spelling to **LI-a** in CBS 8534 (obv)+N1015 obv. line 20. Perhaps the reading is **la2-a**, ‘hung apple trees’.

²⁷⁵ **lu-ub2^{sar}**, ‘turnip’ seems rare in literary texts, and does not appear in any other Inanna-Dumuzi songs (Klein/Sefati 2012: 317). For other attestations, see Attinger 2021: 687.

11 $geš^r$ asal₂ \bar{e} $geš^i$ il- \bar{r} ur₂ \bar{r} [...]

May the poplar...its red *flower*²⁷⁶...

12 ki $geš^r$ geštin \bar{r} - \bar{r} na \bar{r} šu he_2 -gur- \bar{r} re \bar{r} [...]

he (**PREC**)- *pluck*-ed

May the vineyard *be plucked* ...

13 lu₂ ki- \bar{r} sikil \bar{r} $geš^r$ \bar{r} $hašhur$ bulug₃-e- \bar{r} de₃ \bar{r} [...]

grow-ed (**NF**)-e (**DIR**)

For the young woman to make the apple tree grow...

14 $dinanna$ $geš^i$ $hašhur$ bulug₃-e- \bar{r} de₃ \bar{r} [...]

For Inanna to make the apple tree grow...

15 $geš^i$ $hašhur$ -e KU KEŠ₂-re-[-e-de₃ ...]

For the apple tree to...

16 lu-ub₂^{sar} en-te-en-e [...]

For the winter turnip to...

17 $geš^r$ asal₂ \bar{e} \bar{r} il \bar{r} ? [...]

For the poplar to...

18 ki $geš^i$ geštin-na šu gur-ru- \bar{r} de₃ \bar{r} [...] ²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ For *illuru* and its associations with the colour red, see the omen discussed in chapter 2.4: ‘if the sheep’s blood is as red as the *illuru*’. The *populus euphratica* does have small (green), capsule-like fruits, but, interestingly, the male catkins of the Euphrates poplar are reddish in colour, and with an elongated, droopy shape, potentially fitting the phallic connotations involved in my interpretation of this passage.

²⁷⁷ See Civil 1987, 51-54 for the varying meanings of the compound verb **šu-gur**. Klein and Sefati opt for the translation of line 12 as ‘May the place of the grape-vine *be full of tangled vines!* ...’, explaining this as ‘based on the image of the tangled creeping vines of a blossoming vineyard and its [the verb’s] meaning “to roll up,”

For the vineyard *to be plucked*²⁷⁸ ...

19 in-ga₂-buluḡ₃ im-ga₂-buluḡ₃ [...] ²⁷⁹

i (VP)-nga- grew-ed

Then it grew! Then it grew! [Then the apple tree grew!]

20 geš^hhašhur LI-a im-ga₂-^r buluḡ₃ ^r [...] ²⁸⁰

Then the *hung* apple tree grew!

21 geš^hhašhur-e KU im-ma-[...]

The apple tree...

22 lu-ub₂^{sar} en-te-en-^r e ^r [...] ²⁸¹

The winter turnip...

23 geš^hasal₂-e geš^h[...] ²⁸²

The poplar...

24 ki geš^hgeštin-e šu im-[...] ²⁸³

The vineyard...

“wrap around” (Klein/Sefati 2012: 318). Civil uses this line for evidence of the lexical equation of **šū-gur-ra** = *qatāpu* GEŠ.GEŠTIN, ‘to pick grapes’ (Nabnitu XVII 314, MSL 16, 164), and translates our line as ‘in the places where grapevines can be picked’ (Civil 1987: 53). Considering the sexual connotations of *qatāpu*, ‘to pluck, pick’, for example in the Akkadian composition *Nabû and Tašmētu*, *qa-ta-pu ša in-bi-ka* IGI.II-a-a *le-mu-ra*, ‘let my eyes see the plucking of your fruit!’ (Livingstone 1989; CAD Q: 164), I prefer Civil’s translation here, though the line is too broken for any certainty.

²⁷⁸ For the verb, ‘to pluck, gather’ in an erotic setting, see the *Song of Songs*, כָּאתִי לְגַנִּי אֶחְתִּי כִלְהָ אֶרִיתִי מוֹרֵי עֵם, בָּאתִי אֶלְתִּי יַעֲרֵי עִם־דְּבָשִׁי שְׁתִּיתִי יַיִן עִם־חֶלְבִי אֶכְלוּ רֵעִים שְׁתוּ וְשָׁכְרוּ דוֹדַימִי בְּשֵׁמִי אֶכְלֹתִי יַעֲרֵי עִם־דְּבָשִׁי שְׁתִּיתִי יַיִן עִם־חֶלְבִי אֶכְלוּ רֵעִים שְׁתוּ וְשָׁכְרוּ דוֹדַימִי ‘I have come to the garden, my sister, bride, I have plucked myrrh with my spice, eaten honeycomb with my honey, drunk wine with my milk’, “Eat, friends, drink and be drunk with love-making!” (Song 5:1; JPS).

²⁷⁹ Source B, CBS 12613, 19 in-ga-buluḡ₃ in-[ga₂]-buluḡ₃

²⁸⁰ Source B, CBS 12613, 20 geš^hhašhur LAL-a in-ga₂-[...]

²⁸¹ CBS 12613, 22 lu-ub₂^{sar} en-te-en-e ur₂ im-ma-[ab]-[...]

²⁸² CBS 12613, 23 geš^hasal₂-e il-ur im-ma-[...]

²⁸³ CBS 12613, 24 geš^hgeštin-na ur₂ im-ma-ab-[...]

In their edition of *Inanna-Dumuzi Q*, Klein and Sefati highlight the structure of this text, broken into ‘strophes’, that moves from the use of the precative mood to the indicative (Klein and Sefati 2012: 310). Whilst the authors emphasise that the four plants that belong to this passage symbolise fertility and bore cultic significance (Klein/Sefati 2012: 311), I think that the plants and the progression of the poetic narrative instead (or, perhaps, also) utilises the familiar phallic tree metaphors seen elsewhere in the “Love Songs”. The structure that Klein and Sefati describe, the movement from precative wish forms, to *marû* non-finite, to indicative, instead mimics a sexual anticipation. The use of verbal wish forms expresses sexual desire, and the line-by-line revealing of Inanna as the agent, the one who will *make* the apple tree and plants grow, is a playful build-up that then positions the plants as the male body, pleased by the female. The results of this are that the apple tree and plants then *do* grow, metaphorising the desired outcome of this sexual encounter, the male beloved’s erection.²⁸⁴

8. Fruiting Trees

As in the wider Old Babylonian Sumerian literary corpus, trees that bear fruit are frequent in the “Love Songs”, primarily again as a metaphor for the penis, but they also provide an erotic setting or atmosphere in which the lovers meet.

The blossoming and subsequent fruiting of trees in the following passage from *Inanna-Dumuzi B* focus on the actions of sprouting and developing forth from a tree. The two verbs implemented **gur3-ru** (27-28) and **il2** (29) indicate a movement of

²⁸⁴ Moreover, the plants of this narrative can all be seen to work as phallic metaphors; the turnip and the red catkins of a poplar could certainly be construed as phallic in shape (though not used elsewhere in the “Love Songs”); the ‘plucking’ of the grapevine, if this is what we see here, could also metaphorise the pleasuring of the male body.

carrying/raising, but their objects **ul** (blossom) and **gurun** (fruit), as well as the verbs' non-finite form, suggests a growing action:

Inanna-Dumuzi B

Ist Ni 2498 (P345323)

27 ul gur₃-ru-gu₁₀ ul gur₃-ru-gu₁₀/ ħi-li-zu ze₂-ba-am₃

My blossoming one,²⁸⁵ by blossoming one,/ your allure is sweet,

28 geš₆kiri₆ geš₆ħaşħur-a ul gur₃-ru-gu₁₀/ ħi-li-zu ze₂-ba-am₃

My blossoming apple orchard,/ your allure is sweet,

29 geš₆kiri₆ geš₆mes-a gurun il₂-la-gu₁₀/ ħi-li-zu ze₂-ba-am₃

My fruiting hackberry garden,/ your allure is sweet!

In this passage in which the female speaker describes the male beloved, the budding blossom and fruiting of a tree is similarly taken to metaphorise an erection,²⁸⁶ though the imagery also denotes the male beloved's attractiveness and sweetness to the speaker (Bertolini 2020: 46). Two key markers of eroticism, **ħi-li** and **ze₂-eb**, repeatedly emphasise the speaker's

²⁸⁵ For **ul gur₃-ru** as having the meaning 'one who carries lust, attractiveness', see Sefati 1990: 60-61, where the author points to MSL IV, 117, 11, in which **ul gur₃-ru** is equated with the Akkadian abstract noun *minûtu* (desire, love), from the verb *menûm* (to love), CAD M: 19. See also Sjöberg for an Old Babylonian bilingual text, in which the Sumerian **ul gur₃-ru** is translated with [*ul*]-*ša na-ši-at*, 'the one who carries lust' (Sjöberg 1974: 162, line 12').

²⁸⁶ Note that Leick sees not a metaphor for the penis (as Jacobsen 1987b: 62 n. 29), but 'a sort of eulogy of the vulva', spoken by the man. She points to the naming of the figure addressed in these lines as Dumuzi-Abzu in line 30, who is traditionally a female deity of the Lagaš pantheon. Furthermore, Leick sees **dim₃** (lines 31 and 32) and 'fruiting of the orchard' as clitoral metaphor': 'Although the choice of metaphors is to our sensibility more suggestive of phallic connotations, something which most of the (male) translators have been quick to perceive, the fact that Sumerian love poetry is wholly gynocentric, and that the references to male anatomy or enjoyment are almost totally absent...we should be careful of assigning such meanings' (Leick 1994: 128-129). I would be inclined to agree with her, but the continuation of Emesal from the speech of a woman that comes before line 27 (clear by phrases such as addressing another as 'my brother of the beautiful eyes') suggests that the speaker is still female here and describing her male beloved. See George (2003: 861, n.181) and Kutcher (1990: 37) for references for the syncretism of female Dumuzi-Abzu to male Dumuzi from the late third and into the second millennium BCE.

desire for her lover's arousal.²⁸⁷ In a late Old Babylonian Akkadian erotic text,²⁸⁸ the female speaker's desire for her lover (and his arousal?) is also metaphorised through fruit metaphor. The 'lifted' fruit is possibly a phallic image:

MAH 16056 (P424004)

Obv. col. i.

1 [e?]-[⌈] eš [⌈] ra-a-mi-i šu-qu₂-ur₂

Where is my loved one? He is so precious!

2 [⌈] u₃ [⌈] na-ši i-ni[!]-ib-šu-u₂

And does he lift his fruit?

In other instances where fruit trees appear in the "Love Songs", the phallic metaphor is less evident, but the male beloved is depicted as bringing fruit to the female, for example in *Inanna-Dumuzi T*:

Inanna-Dumuzi T²⁸⁹

AO 6967 (P345414)

3 lu₂ zu₂-lum de₅-de₅-ge mu-nim-mar AN [...] ²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ The phallic metaphor continues in the subsequent lines, see chapter 2.9 for **dim₃** (pillar).

²⁸⁸ The text names the Babylonian king Ammī-ditāna (Wasserman 2016: 104ff).

²⁸⁹ Jacobsen saw in this passage reference to Inanna's relationship with the date palm and its fruit, and the relationship between Inanna and Dumuzi as reflecting the cultivation of the tree; according to Jacobsen, Dumuzi is the 'personified power in the one enormous bud which the date palm sprouts each year...he is, in fact, the power in and behind the date harvest' (Jacobsen 1976: 34ff). If Dumuzi and Inanna are so closely connected with this tree and its fruit, it is surprising that dates and date palms do not appear very frequently in the "Love Songs". Apparent associations found between the fruiting date palm and Inanna/Ištar are found particularly in later glyptic art (Collins 2006: 99ff).

²⁹⁰ Jacobsen suggested that the 'missing verb was most likely one denoting 'ascended' or 'plucked' (Jacobsen 1975: 79 n. 7). In his 1976 translation included in *Treasures*, he opts for 'climbed' (Jacobsen 1976: 34); Sefati points out that this would be grammatically difficult as **mu-nim-mar** appears to be the direct object (Sefati 1998: 252).

The man collecting dates...the date palm

4 ku₃ dⁱinanna-ra lu₂ zu₂-lum de₅-de₅-ge mu-nim-^r mar ^ʾ [...]

For shiny Inanna, the man collecting dates...the date palm.

As elsewhere, the bringing of foodstuffs to the female is a motif that reflects the male beloved bringing pleasure to his lover.

Fruit trees also act as erotic settings. In *Inanna-Dumuzi F1*, the male lover brings the female into a garden of date palms, apple, fig, and willow trees:²⁹¹

Inanna-Dumuzi F1

Ist Ni 4569 (P343146)

11 šeš-e ^{geš^l}kiri₆-ni-a im-^r ma ^ʾ-[ni-in-ku₄-re-en]

i (VP)-mu (VENT)-ba (MM)-ni (LOC)-n (3SG)-entered-en (1SG DO)

The brother brought me into his garden,

12 mu gub-ba-ni ^{he₂^ʾ}-x-ni^ʾ-^r gub ^ʾ

His standing tree, *may it stand*,

13 mu nu₂-a-ni ^r ^{he₂^ʾ}-x-nu₂-e-^r de₃ ^ʾ

His lying down tree, *may it lie down*,

14 x x x ^r bi₂ ^ʾ-in-nu₂-x

²⁹¹ Fig and willow trees are not used as emphatically throughout the Sumerian literary corpus as the hackberry, apple, or date palm. For the fig tree in Old Babylonian literature, see references in Attinger 2021: 495. According to Attinger, the term for a willow tree, ^{geš}kim₃ or ^{geš}gim₇, is not certainly attested in the corpus (Attinger 2021: 492 n.1332). However, like the other more prominent trees, the fig and willow tree likely held associations with fertility and abundance, with the willow growing alongside rivers and canals and so connected with water, and the fruit of the fig tree often appearing among gifts of other sweet foodstuffs, such as in *Enlil and Sud* lines 118-123 (ETCSL 1.2.2). For further references and sources, see CAD T: 435 for *tittu*, fig tree and CAD H: 185 for *hilēpu*, the willow.

b (IPP) i (LOC)-n (3SG)-laid down-[en] (1SG DO)

He laid [me] down on it,

15 zu₂-lum in-^ɾ ze₂^ʔ-^ɾ ze₂^ʔ-eg₃^ʔ-ga₂ bi₂-in-PA-x

i (VP)-n (3SG)-gave? (ES) (RDPL)-a (NOM) ...

My dates that he gave me he...

16 ag₂-e^{geš}ħašħur-a ma-da-ab-be₂

ma (1SG DAT)-da (COM)-b (DO)-speaks-e (3SG)

He speaks to me among the apple trees,

17 ze₂-ba kal-la-gu₁₀^ɾ sag^ʔ-ga₂ ba-an-x-x

My precious sweet...on my head...

18 ag₂^{mu}peš₃-a ma-da-ab-be₂

He speaks to me among the fig trees,

19 ze₂-ba kal-la-gu₁₀ NA x x AB-ga₂-x

My precious sweet...

20 ag₂-e^{mu}KIM₃^ʔ-e^ɾ ma^ɿ-[...]

He [speaks with me] among the willow trees.

Amongst the amorous and erotic setting of the fruit trees, there is the image of the male beloved's 'standing' and 'lying' trees, also notable in a similar passage in a **šir₃-nam-šub** to Inanna, **BM 88318** (P274208). In this text, the "brother" similarly brings the female speaker into a garden of trees. Notably, in lines 27 and 28, the woman says she 'lies' with the lover among his 'standing' trees and stands with him among his 'lying down trees',

parallel to lines 12 and 13 of *Inanna-Dumuzi F1*. The paralleling of these lines and the opposing actions of the trees forge a clear phallic metaphor (emphasised by the Emesal form, **mu**, ‘tree’, also used to write ‘man, penis’ (see above). In line 29 of **BM 88318**, the apple tree is also probably a phallic metaphor, ^{ges}**ḥašhur-e zi-de2-eš gam-e-en**, ‘I bow down properly towards the apple tree’.²⁹² Bowing down (**gam**) in a sexual context is evident in *Inanna H* (ETCSL 4.07.8), line 20, **gam-e-de3 ib2-ib2 i3-sa6-sa6**, ‘Your hips are good for bending over’. Therefore, trees in this text simultaneously metaphorise the male body and act as the setting for sexual activity.²⁹³

9. Shade and Pleasure

In a passage of *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, the poplar is situated as one of the desired objects of Inanna’s wishes:

Inanna-Dumuzi R

UM 55-21-309 (P257383)

22 ^dama-ušumgal-^r an ^r-^r na ^r ga-gu₁₀ ga-ga-gu₁₀ **di-di du₅-mu-u₅-zu**

du₅ (ES) (COHORT)-mu (VENT)- OO-know

May I know the way²⁹⁴ (of) Ama-ušumgal-anna, my milk, my cream!

23 ^{u2}numun₂-še₃? ga-gu₁₀ ga[?]-gu₁₀-še₃? ga-gu₁₀ **di-di du₅-mu-u₅-zu**

²⁹² **gam-e-en** lacks a verbal prefix; Kramer suggested that the preceding {eš} should perhaps be read {eše}, with the vocalic prefix of the verbal chain then absorbed by the final vowel of the terminative (Kramer 1984: 8). Note that a similar problem occurs in *Inanna’s Descent* (ETCSL 1.4.1), line 32; here, the verb apparently also lacks a verbal prefix, and the verbal base directly follows the terminative case, **kur-še₃ ed₃-de₃-en**.

²⁹³ The apple orchard also operates as an erotic meeting place in the *Manchester Tammuz*, lines 5-6 (Alster 1992), 5 ^r **ki ^r-[ri] ḥa-aš-ku-ra-ka me-me ba-ni-de₆**, ‘Into the apple orchard, he brought joy’, 6 ^r **ḥa ^r-[aš]-^r ku ^r-ra ki-ri-a me-am-ra ḥi-li/ al-KU-DU**, ‘Into the apple orchard, for the shepherd, he brought sexual allure’. For notes to these lines of this difficult text, see Alster 1992: 24ff.

²⁹⁴ The translation tentatively follows Sefati who sees **di-di** as the Emesal form of **DU** (MSL IV: 27).

May I know the way to the rushes, my milk, to my milk, my milk!

24 ^{geš}asal₂ ki se₉-še₃ ga-gu₁₀ di-di du₅-mu-u₅-zu

May I know the way to the poplar, the cold place, my milk!

25 ^{u₂}in-uš u₂-siki_l-še₃ ga-gu₁₀ di-di du₅-mu-u₅-zu

May I know the way to the soapwort, the pure plant,²⁹⁵ my milk!

26 ^{u₂}rib-ba ki ḥalbi₂-še₃ ga-gu₁₀ di-di du₅-mu-u₅-zu

May I know the way to the *ribba* plant, the frosty place, my milk!

In these lines, the plants and the milk which Inanna wishes to “know” metaphorise the sexual gratification she seeks from Dumuzi/Ama-ušumgal-anna. For knowledge as a sexual metaphor, see the discussion in chapter 2.7 and 3.2. The dramatic repetition of the verb, **du₅-mu-zu**, written with the Emesal modal prefix (**du₅-**) and the ventive conjugation prefix (**mu-**) is made deliberately homonymic to the name of Inanna’s lover, Dumuzi, adding to this sense of longing; as she expresses her wish she simultaneously expresses her desire for him.

Significantly, in line 24, Inanna wishes to “know” the cool shade of the poplar, the **ki se₉.d**, a metaphor for the relief of sexual pleasure.²⁹⁶ As pointed out by Verderame, the celebrated shade of the poplar acts as protection against the sun, vital in the desert environment of southern Babylonia, but its coolness and refreshment also act as a metaphor for love and fulfilment of desire in the love lyric tradition (Verderame 2020: 23; Zisa 2023: 116-117).²⁹⁷ Further to this, the shade of the poplar is paralleled by the ‘frosty’ (**ḥalbi**) *ribba*

²⁹⁵ Dumuzi and his sister eat ‘pure plants’ in *Inanna-Dumuzi B1* (ETCSL 4.8.28), lines 32-33, along with the more sensuous dripping oil, honey, and butter.

²⁹⁶ The shade of the poplar is referenced in other literary contexts. For example, in *Inanna and Šukaletuda*, it is underneath the shady poplar that the gardener rapes the goddess (ETCSL 1.3.3, lines 109, 156, 279: **geš an-dul₃-bi** ^{geš}asal₂ gessu dagal-la-kam). With more positive connotations, in the Gudea cylinders, poplars are planted at the temple for their pleasant shade (Cylinder A xxii 18-19).

²⁹⁷ This contrasts with instances in biblical and other Near Eastern literature, where heat is used as a euphemism for sexual pleasure (Quick 2021b).

plant in line 26, which also conceptually maps the feeling of coldness to sexual pleasure. The terms **halbi** and **se9.d** are used in epithets of the healing goddess Gula; she is the **ama šu hal-bi**, ‘mother with the soothing hand’ (Böck 2014: 15; George 2016: 106), and in an Old Babylonian Sumerian hymn to Ninisina, the goddess is described as having ‘soothing hands’ with **šu se9.d** (Böck 2014: 16).²⁹⁸ In Akkadian texts, the healing hands and bandages of the gods are referred to with the adjective *rabbu*, meaning ‘gentle, soft’, *liballiṭka Gula ina rabbâti qātīša*, ‘May Gula heal you with her gentle hands’ (BM 98589, P421867, obv. i. 7, see CAD R: 15). This suggests that coldness could be seen as a pleasurable physical sensation.²⁹⁹ In *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, Inanna’s desire to have knowledge of the poplar’s shade metaphorises Dumuzi (his penis?) as the tree, the shade it gives as the pleasure he provides.

10. Hair

The final instance in which trees are used metaphorically for the male lover in the Sumerian “Love Songs” is found in *Inanna-Dumuzi Y*, in which the foliage of the tamarisk and the date palm are used to describe his (attractive) hair.

The tamarisk tree only appears once in the “Love Songs”. The conceptual frame or domain of the tamarisk is difficult to ascertain from other Sumerian literary compositions,³⁰⁰

²⁹⁸ The bandages which Ninisina applied to her patients are also described with **se9.d** in *Nanna-manšum’s Letter Prayer to Ninisina* (line 6, ETCSL 3.3.21, Böck 2014: 17).

²⁹⁹ This could be understood as an example of Kövecses’ conceptual metaphor HAPPINESS IS A PLEASURABLE PHYSICAL SENSATION (Kövecses 2010: 24). There are other examples where coldness is also a negative sensation, for example in a Neo-Babylonian letter, *halpû idūkunu*, ‘the frost has killed us’ (CAD H: 49, with other examples).

³⁰⁰ It appears as a cleaning tool in Gudea, Cylinder B 4:10; similarly, its wood is used as a tool in *Hoe and Plough* (ETCSL 5.3.1), 3. In the precedence debate, *Date Palm and Tamarisk* (ETCSL 5.3.7), the wood of the tamarisk is called ‘the body of the gods’, presumably referring to its use for divine statues. In *Ningešzida’s Journey to the Netherworld*, reference is made to how well-watered the tree is, as well as its shade (ETCSL 1.7.3, line 33). The strength of the tamarisk is perhaps alluded to in *Copper and Silver* (ETCSL 5.3.6) in which the stripping and pulling out of tamarisk (and ash) is said to dull Copper’s blade. The tamarisk does appear significantly in the final ‘allegorical’ or ‘oracular’ passage of *Lugalbanda and the Anzu bird*, a ritual uttered by Inanna in response to Enmerkar and Lugalbanda’s plea to aid them in their siege of Aratta. The passage is rather obscure; it describes how Enmerkar must cut down a lone tamarisk found by the waterside, and fashion it into a bucket, then cut down reeds to chase out, catch and cook the **GEŠ.ŠEŠ** fish, which he must then feed to the *ankar* weapon of Inanna (lines 388 ff, ETCSL 1.8.2.2; J.A. Black 1998: 160). Black has explained the passage as an allegory with reference to other parts of the narrative, identifying features of the ritual with

though it has a prevalent role in ritual prescriptions, particularly those against witchcraft (Abusch 2020). The native species of tamarisk to Iraq, the *tamarix ramosissima*, also known as the ‘salt cedar’ is a deciduous tree that grows well in saline conditions. According to modern accounts, it has a ‘glaucous feathery foliage and plumes of bright pink flowers’.³⁰¹ The apparent visual appeal of the plumage of the tamarisk and the date palm are used here to metaphorise the presumed lusciousness and sexual allure of the male beloved’s hair.³⁰² His appearance sexually attracts and excites the female speaker, so much so that she wishes for him to rub his hair on her breasts:

Inanna-Dumuzi Y

CBS 4569 (P260882)

34 suḥur-e³⁰³ du₇-gu₁₀ suḥur-e du₇-gu₁₀

My perfect tresses, my perfect tresses,

35 ze₂-ba-gu₁₀ zi (erasure?) suḥur-e du₇-gu₁₀

My sweet, my perfect tresses,

36 mu-nim-mar-gen₇ suḥur-e du₇-gu₁₀

Like a date palm, my perfect tresses,

37 ^{geš}senig-gen₇ gu₂ lum-lum-gu₁₀ ᵀ suḥur ᵀ-e/ du₇-gu₁₀

characters of the story, and describing it ‘like a dream, in which familiar elements are rearranged and make nonsense’ (J.A. Black 1998: 161ff; 163).

³⁰¹ <https://www.gardenersworld.com/plants/tamarix-ramosissima-pink-cascade/>

³⁰² Elsewhere in the “Love Songs”, it is usually the female lover/Inanna’s hair that is focused upon as an emblem of allure. For example, in *Šu-Suen C*, Inanna’s hair is named, **he₂-em-du**, ‘let him come!’. A Sumerian proverb seems to allude to the sex appeal of a man’s hair, **sipa geš₃-a-ni nu-^{geš}kiri₆ suḥur-ni**, ‘A shepherd’s (allure) is his penis, a gardener’s (allure) is his hair’ (SP 16 Sec.B 4, Alster 1997: 232).

³⁰³ Sefati notes that **suḥur** can refer to forelocks, beards, or the ‘crown’ of a palm tree (Sefati 1998: 275 and n.12 for further references). I assume the **-e** case marker on **suḥur** is the directive, with a literal meaning of ‘my one who is perfect *with respect to* their tresses’.

Like a tamarisk, my flourishing neck, my perfect tresses,

38 **mu-ti-in** suḥur-za[?]/ ukkin-na du^{7- \bar{r}} gu¹⁰ ⁷

Man of your tresses, my perfect one in the assembly,

39 **ze₂-ba-gu₁₀** gaba-me-a su-ub-be₂

My sweet, rub them on our breasts!

11. Subversion of a Metaphor?

Though the use of tree metaphors for kingship might be argued to be semantically related to its use as phallic metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, it is striking that similar entailments occur that subvert the seemingly well-established symbolism of trees providing stability and protection. The growing/spreading branches and fruitfulness that metaphorise a king’s extensive power and fertility in the royal hymns are subverted in the context of the “Love Songs” to metaphorise Dumuzi’s erection, whilst the motif of a tree’s shade providing protection is employed as a metaphor of sexual pleasure in the Inanna-Dumuzi texts. The erotic context of the “Love Songs” is key to understanding the difference in the use of these tree metaphors (see Methodology, chapter 1.5), though the deviation could be seen as a marker of some significance, possibly humour or scribal creativity. Pfitzner points out a possible example of metaphorical subversion and scribal creativity in the composition *Sargon and Ur-Zababa* (ETCSL 2.1.4), in which the term **pirig**, lion, is used derogatively. In the text, Ur-Zababa urinates on himself in fear, like a lion (Pfitzner 2020: 107). The example is interesting because, as the tree metaphor explored in this section, imagery of the lion is usually associated with strength, power, and kingship, but its use in *Sargon and Ur-Zababa* is a deviation from its normal use.

The question of whether this use of subverted tree metaphor in the “Love Songs” can be seen as humorous is more conjectural. Humour is subjective and culturally specific (D’Agostino 1999; Southwood 2021: 13-15). It is, of course, impossible for us to tell if an audience as distant in time and geography would have found this subversion of an important metaphor for kingship into one of penises and erections *funny*, but I think it is worth considering that it may have been a deliberate device.³⁰⁴ In her study of the book of Job, Southwood highlights a functionalist approach to humour, which ‘understood joking as a symbolic representation of underlying social arrangements [...] Douglas argued, therefore, that jokes were anti-rites that subverted the social order, an order regularly validated and maintained by religious rituals’ (Southwood 2021: 166-7). As outlined in the introduction, I suggest as a possible original context for the Sumerian “Love Songs” the poems and stories shared amongst women, potentially also elite women in a courtly context. Seen in this manner, the subversion of self-important metaphors of masculinity and kingship transformed into ones that serve female pleasure in the erotic context of the “Love Songs” certainly could be seen as a humorous and playful device.

12. Trees and the Female Body in the Sumerian “Love Songs”

It is evident both from the wider Old Babylonian Sumerian literary corpus and in the “Love Songs” that trees were more commonly associated with masculinity, kingship, and the male body.

However, in *Inanna-Dumuzi T*, the willow tree is associated with the *female* pubic hair as Inanna dresses herself for her meeting with Dumuzi:

Inanna-Dumuzi T

³⁰⁴ Alster 1975 explores many examples taken from Sumerian poetry, particularly the proverbs but also mythological narratives, where humour seems deliberately constructed using various kinds of paradox and wordplay.

AO 6967 (P345414)

23 ^{geš}kim₃ siki¹ (PU₂)³⁰⁵ ge₆-ga in-pa₃-de₃ gal₄-la-na mu-un-ga₂-ga₂

She finds there the willow tree of dark hair³⁰⁶; she places it on her vulva.

Line 23 is the penultimate line in a long dressing and adornment passage which erotically outlines Inanna's body.³⁰⁷ Whilst the male lover's head hair in *Inanna-Dumuzi Y* was likened metaphorically (-gen₇) to the foliage of the tamarisk and date palm, here the leaves of the willow are placed as an actual ornament upon her genitals, presumably to represent and/or decorate her pubic hair.³⁰⁸

In *Inanna-Dumuzi E*, the apple tree is a metaphor for the vulva, paralleled in other images such as the barley in the furrow (chapter 2.2), and the lettuce that is watered by the male body (chapter 2.3):

Inanna-Dumuzi E

AO 5385 (P345364)

4 ^{geš} ḥašḥur ag₂ sag-ga₂ gurun il₂-la-gu₁₀ <ḥi>- is^{sar}-am₃ a ba-an-du₁₁

My best apple tree, bearing fruit at the top, it is the lettuce he watered!

Sefati and others had suggested that in this text Inanna describes the body of her male beloved (Sefati 1998: 167); however, as discussed in chapter 2.3, the imagery in this composition describes the female body (see also Leick 1994: 122-123). While the imagery here is more intuitively phallic, Leick has suggested that the apple tree instead represents

³⁰⁵ Manuscript N 3577 has **siki su₃**.

³⁰⁶ Or 'long hair' (source N 3577), probably referring to the long branches and leaves of the willow tree.

³⁰⁷ For the erotic image of the goddess' pubic hair, see also *Ninisina B* (ETCSL 4.22.2), line 21, **siki-ur₂ siki-pa dub-dub-ba-ni i₃-li ḥe₂-en-na-an-su₃**. 'May the finest oils be sprinkled on her combed pubic hair and (head) hair for her!'

³⁰⁸ In *Inanna-Dumuzi E* and *Šu-Suen C*, the leaves of the lettuce also metaphorise female pubic hair.

the vulva, implying the ‘fruit at the top’ is the clitoris (Leick 1994: 123). The syntactical equation with the lettuce and the identical structure to previous lines also indicates that here the apple tree must represent the female body.³⁰⁹

13. Corruption of a Metaphor?

The use of trees as a metaphor to describe a woman/goddess is used in a well-known Old Babylonian Sumerian incantation (Geller 2002):

Old Babylonian Incantation

A= Langdon BL, no. iv

B= WCMA 20.1.30 (P355884)

6A ^{geš}kiri₆ ḥašḥur-a ul gur₃-ru-am₃

She is a blossoming apple orchard!

6B ki-sikil tuš-a-ne₂ ter ha-šu-ur₂-ra ul gur₃-ru-am₃

When the young woman sits, she is a blossoming forest of cypresses!

However, amongst the Old Babylonian Sumerian “Love Songs”, the use of tree metaphor for the vulva is in stark contrast to its use as a metaphor for the penis in *Inanna-Dumuzi Q*, *F*, *B*, and *FI* and contradicts an apparently strong metaphorical relationship between trees and masculinity/kingship as seen particularly in the royal praise poetry.

A metaphor can have more than one target domain; however, if a metaphorical mapping is dominant and well-established, such as it seems with the masculine tree

³⁰⁹ The apple tree as a feminine erotic metaphor is present in other poetry of the ancient world, as in Sappho 105a where the apple also resembles the clitoris: ‘As the sweet-apple reddens on the bough-top, on the top of the topmost bough; the apple-gatherers have forgotten it—no they have not forgotten it entirely, but they could not reach it’ (Trans. Campbell 2014: 131).

metaphors in the Old Babylonian Sumerian literature, it is less likely to have numerous and more intricate mappings (de Joode/van Loon 2014: 44-5). It is particularly striking that the apple tree metaphor is used in *Inanna-Dumuzi E* in “opposition” to its use elsewhere as a metaphor for the penis (eg. *Inanna-Dumuzi Q*).

Possibly, this is a development in the use of tree metaphor, that originally resonated strongly with imagery of masculinity and kingship. This corruption of a seemingly standardised metaphor is possibly an indication that *Inanna-Dumuzi E* is a later composition than some of the other texts attributed to the “Love Songs” corpus, often thought to have been originally composed earlier, at the end of the 3rd millennium BCE. The references to Inanna’s relationship with kings of the Ur III dynasty in *Šu-Suen A, B, and C*, as well as *Šulgi X*, is one reason that suggests these texts may come from an earlier tradition. Some other archaising features are noticeable among the corpus; for example, in *Inanna-Dumuzi B1*, reverse lines 3-4, the verb **im-da-du7-ru** appears to preserve the final **d/r** consonant known from 3rd millennium Sumerian (Jagersma 2010: 43-4). However, all copies of these texts come from the Old Babylonian period, and that Akkadian scribes are the copyists of the Sumerian “Love Songs” is evident by those compositions which exhibit Akkadian glosses.

The parallel tradition of Akkadian love literature in the Old Babylonian period is often remarkably different in tone and imagery,³¹⁰ but the inclusion of the name of the Ur III king Šu-Suen in multiple compositions of this type suggests that the scribes were

³¹⁰ For example, the Akkadian love literature uses semantic fields of domestic/wild fauna and fabricated objects much more extensively than the Sumerian “Love Songs” (Wasserman 2016: 56-8). The Akkadian love literature, unlike the Sumerian, also encompasses incantations and catalogues of incipits, as well as texts in which love is unreciprocated (Wasserman 2016: 20).

engaging with and influenced by the Sumerian texts.³¹¹ In the *Moussaieff Love Song*,³¹² there is a possible instance where a tree is used as a metaphor for the woman. The language is reminiscent of the Sumerian “Love Songs”:

Rev.

2 [du?]-mi-iq ma-di-iš šu-um-mi-ḥa-an-ni ḥu ḫ di -a-an-ni lu- mu-ur ^{ges}KIRI₆ lam'-
mi [x]-[...]

(She:) [Ma]ke (me) beautiful! Make me greatly flourish! Make me happy! (He?:) Let me see the orchard of the almond trees! (Wasserman 2016: 132-5).

In particular, the verb *šummiḥanni*, ‘make me flourish!’, is evocative of the tree metaphors in the Sumerian texts, except this time the female speaker refers to herself and not to the growth or budding/blossoming of her lover. If the speaker in the second half of the line is the male lover,³¹³ it would place the woman metaphorically as the orchard of trees. Therefore, perhaps the female-tree metaphor in *Inanna-Dumuzi E* reflects the creative input of Akkadian scribes and reflects a transition in the conceptual mappings of tree imagery.³¹⁴ Certainly, in later periods, trees, particularly the fruit of apple and pomegranate trees, are

³¹¹ The tablets which mention the king are **PRAK 2 C 3, PRAK 2 C 30, PRAK 2 C 41, PRAK 2 C 125, PRAK 2 C 134, PRAK 2 C 135** (see Wasserman 2016: 154ff). These compositions are the only ones in the Akkadian love literature to depict a relationship between the human king and the divine. Unfortunately, they are very fragmentary.

³¹² Wasserman 2016. The text is dated to the Middle Babylonian period, but has Old Babylonian features, suggesting it was composed at an earlier date.

³¹³ Distinguishing the speaker in this unusual composition is difficult. Uncharacteristically the tablet is written in landscape orientation, which means that the lines are significantly longer than other texts, and that both the man and woman’s speech appears together in some lines (Wasserman 2016: 130). Wasserman suggests that the second half of reverse line 2 is spoken by the male lover, as this passage would otherwise be unusually dominated by the female speaker.

³¹⁴ The atypical use of the apple tree as a metaphor for the vulva in *Inanna-Dumuzi E* could also be indicative that the composition’s origins are separate from some of the other Sumerian “Love Songs”. Klein and Sefati argue that scribes would not have deemed it ‘worthy’ or ‘important’ to copy and transmit “secular” love songs, but only those connected to cult and ritual (Klein/Sefati 2008: 624). However, it is difficult to see *Inanna-Dumuzi E* in this light, as, though the subscript designates it as a **bal-bal-e** of Inanna, there are no “ritual” or cultic” elements, nor are the gods named, such as in other Inanna-Dumuzi compositions which feature the phallic tree metaphor (above).

strongly associated with female sexuality.³¹⁵ For example, in the Neo-Assyrian incantation **KAR 61** (Biggs 1967: 70) apples and pomegranates are used as apparent aphrodisiacs in a ritual to attract a woman:

VAT 08272 (KAR 61, P369043)

1 ʿ en₂ ʿ munus sa₆-sa₆-ga ag₂ ba-ra-e₃

Incantation. The beautiful woman has brought forth love for you.

2 dⁱinanna ag₂ gešⁱ ḥašḥur geš^s nu-ur-ma

Inanna, who loves apple and pomegranate trees,

3 ša₃-zi-ga ba-ra-e₃

Has brought forth sexual desire/an erection for you.³¹⁶

[...]

7 INIM.INIM.MA DIŠ MUNUS IGI *ana* GEŠ₃ NA *ina-ši*

Incantation: If a woman looks upon the penis of a man.

8 DU₃.DU₃.BI *lu* <ana> GEŠ^s ḤAŠḤUR *lu ana* GEŠ^s NU.UR.MA

The ritual: either <to> an apple or a pomegranate.

9 EN₂ 3-š_{u2} ŠUB *ana* MUNUS *ta-dan* A.MEŠ-š_u-nu *tu-šam-zaq-ši*

³¹⁵ However, for an association between Inanna and the apple tree in an Old Babylonian text, see the Emesal lament **VS 10, 117** (P342925), [...] x **SIKIL ḥa-aš-ḥu-ur₂ ki-ri-bi-da / si-ga-a/ [...]** [ḥa-aš-ḥu-ur₂] 'gu'-gu-la-bi-da si-ga-a, '... who provides the apple trees with their orchards,/... who provides the apples with their juiciness' (OBEL http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/obel/pager#obel:P342925_project-en.5). Trees are associated with the god Damu in the first millennium lament *In the Desert in the Early Grass* (M.E. Cohen 1988: 683). Notably, the tree imagery in this text inverts the entailments used to metaphorise kingship (discussed above). See note 265 for the translation of this passage.

³¹⁶ Though the incantation is late, note the use of the verb e₃ to refer to Inanna causing the man's arousal/erection, as also seen in the "Love Songs".

You recite the incantation three times. You give (the fruit) to the woman (and) have her suck their juices.

10 MUNUS-BI GEN-*ku* AG₂-*ši*

That woman will come to you; you can make love to her. (Translation and commentary after Biggs 1967: 70ff)

As noted in the chapter on the Sumerian term **gerin** (red fruit/flower), fruit is used very frequently as an erotic metaphor, given the attractive, sweet, and wet qualities that map conceptually in metaphors for the genitalia (chapter 2.4). In various ancient Greek sources, including “love magic” and erotic mythological settings, apples also regularly appear as an aphrodisiac for inciting female desire (Faraone 1999: 69ff). In the Old Babylonian royal praise poetry, fruitfulness of trees likely metaphorised prosperous kingship, whilst in the Inanna-Dumuzi texts, the specific sprouting and growing of fruit metaphorised male arousal. However, it would seem that fruit, especially apples, also become associated with the attractiveness of the female body in later traditions.³¹⁷

14. Trees as Source Domains in the Sumerian “Love Songs”: Summary

Trees clearly functioned as a strong metaphor for kingship in the Old Babylonian Sumerian literary tradition and remained a prominent masculine metaphor in the context of the Sumerian “Love Songs”. In the “Love Songs”, the continued association between ‘man, penis’ and trees that is so evident in the graphic analogy **geš** = **geš₃** (both Emesal **mu**) is foregrounded, as trees are primarily used as source domains to metaphorise the male beloved’s

³¹⁷ Though I can find no examples in the written Mesopotamian magico-medical sources, it is interesting to note that certain properties of the trees assessed in this chapter also become associated with aspects of female health and sexuality in later traditions. For example, the *celtis australis* (hackberry), the possible identity of the *mes*-tree, is used in folk medicine to treat menstrual disorders (Benamar et al 2023); the poplar and willow was considered a contraceptive by the Greek physicians Dioscorides and Soranus, and Galen identified the date palm as an emmenagogue, stimulating menstruation (Riddle 1992: 52). Thank you to Prof. L. Quick for bringing these properties to my attention.

penis and arousal. The specific entailments used to structure the concept of kingship seen in the wider Sumerian praise poetry are deliberately subverted in the erotic context of the “Love Songs” to one’s that ultimately serve the desires and pleasure of the female lovers. Trees are simultaneously the setting of erotic encounters, and twice metaphorise the female pubic hair and vulva in a use of the source domain that suggests a transition in the conceptual mappings of (particularly fruit) trees, where they later become more associated with female sexuality.

2.7 Plants

As well as those already discussed (lettuce, berry/flower, trees, barley/flax), there are a number of unique plant metaphors in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, which also metaphorise the more abstract target domains and aspects of sexual desire, pleasure and allure.

1. Plants: Basic Meaning and Properties in ancient Mesopotamia

In therapeutic rituals and practices, plants (as well as various minerals and sometimes animal substances) played an important role. A vast quantity of recipes, included in medical literature and rituals, combine plants (or parts of plants) or invoke them in a formula for healing both physical and demonic ailments (Böck 2012; Panayotov 2018; see Abusch 2020: 469ff for an extensive list of plant/mineral substances used in prescriptions in anti-witchcraft rituals).

Plants, therefore, were viewed as having specific and pertinent properties. This is outlined in the plant lexical list **uru-an-na**= *maš-ta-kal*, a pharmacological text giving variant names for plant-drugs; and in the *šammu šikinšu* manual, that describes the appearance and uses of various medicinal plants (Kinnier-Wilson 2005; Böck 2012).³¹⁸ Interestingly, in a literary composition closer to home for this thesis, *Inanna-Dumuzi W* enumerates plants eaten by sheep, giving a description, followed by the plant-name, mimicking the lexical tradition (Civil 1987: 37-8). For example:

Inanna-Dumuzi W

N 3512+N 6322 (P278541)

13 𒌶 nu 𒌶-[siki] il₂-il₂-gu₁₀ nu-mu-un-su da-ri-gu₁₀

³¹⁸ See also Böck 2012 for discussion on the difficulties of ancient plant identification.

My raising the orphan, my supporting the widow,

14 u₂-gu₁₀ u²šakir₃-ra- gu₁₀ udu-gu₁₀ ḥa-ma-gu₇-e

May my sheep eat my plant, my *šakir* plant!

Traditionally the *šakir* plant has been identified as henbane, which, though it was used in poultices and concoctions for various medical ailments, including pre- and post-natal conditions (Thompson 1949: 230), is poisonous to consume. It is unlikely that *šakir*, with its descriptor of *helper* of orphans and widows in *Inanna-Dumuzi W* refers to henbane (Civil 1987: 42). Moreover, Civil points to the fact that in the manual *šammu šikinšu*, the broad leaves/branches of the *šakir* plant are often used for comparison (Civil 1987: 43; see this use in *Šulgi N*, line 5, discussed in chapter 2.6). In the chapter on Trees, it was seen that a repeated metaphor for kingship and protection was that of broad and spreading branches (see 2.6), an image also apparent in this description of the *šakir* plant in *Inanna-Dumuzi W*. Plants, then, can be hugely connotative and referential.³¹⁹

2. Plants: Contextual Meaning in the Sumerian “Love Songs”

In the following passage of *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, also explored in chapter 2.6, grasses and plants seemingly metaphorise the sexual pleasure which Inanna wishes to “know” and find her way to:

Inanna-Dumuzi R

UM 55-21-309 (P257383)

22 ^dama-ušumgal-^r an ^r-^r na ^r ga-gu₁₀ ga-ga-gu₁₀ di-di du₅-mu-u₅-zu

May I know the way (of) Ama-ušumgal-anna, my milk, my cream!

³¹⁹ However, Zisa warns that it is not always possible to tell if plants were used therapeutically for their known medicinal or symbolic properties or both (Zisa 2021a: 160ff).

23 ^{u2}numun₂-še₃? ga-gu₁₀ ga[?]-gu₁₀-še₃? ga-gu₁₀ **di-di du₅-mu-u₅-zu**

May I know the way to the rushes, my milk, to my milk, my milk!

24 ^{geš}asal₂ ki šed₄-še₃ ga-gu₁₀ **di-di du₅-mu-u₅-zu**

May I know the way to the poplar, the cold place, my milk!

25 ^{u2}in-uš u₂-siki_l-še₃ ga-gu₁₀ **di-di du₅-mu-u₅-zu**

May I know the way to the soapwort, the pure plant, my milk!

26 ^{u2}rib-ba ki ḫalba₂-še₃ ga-gu₁₀ **di-di du₅-mu-u₅-zu**

May I know the way to the *ribba* plant, the frosty place, my milk!

In chapter 2.6, I discuss the conceptualisation of the cool place of the poplar (line 24) as a metaphor for sexual pleasure, and in 2.8, I explore the significance of the milk metaphor in these lines. Source A of *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, **UM 55-21-309**, was discovered in “House F”, the scribal school in Old Babylonian Nippur. The following three particular plants used as metaphors for Ama-ušumgal-anna, and the pleasure Inanna wishes to experience (“know”) may well have been chosen for their intertextual references with other literary and lexical texts (which may have been different from those identified here). Equated with her lover, also personified as “milk” (chapter 2.8), the qualities and referents of each plant are positioned as madly desired by Inanna.

The first plant, ^{u2}numun₂, *elpetu*, ‘grass, alfalfa grass, rushes, reeds’ (MSL III, pg. 121, CAD E: 108; Attinger 2021: 825), appears in various lamentation texts, for example in its Emesal form in **NCBT 000688**, P302741, line 54: **mušen ^{u2}šu-mu-še₃ i₃-dal-la-bi ^{u2}šu-mu-še₃ ba-da-ab-kur**, ‘its bird which had flown to the rushes, died among the rushes’ (M.E. Cohen 1975: 604; MSL IV Emesal II, pg. 23; for more references see Attinger 2021: 825). Why the *elpetu*-grass is desirable is uncertain; it is connected in some way to the **šumunda-**

grass, which in another Old Babylonian literary text features alongside Inanna and Dumuzi, where it is associated primarily with destruction and fire (see Kramer 1980; Wagensohn 2009; ETCSL 1.7.7).³²⁰ Ultimately, Dumuzi is able to bundle the **šumunda**-grass and gain control over it (Wagensohn 2009: 359). In an Old Babylonian Emesal lament featuring the deities Damu and Ištaran, however, the grass has potential erotic implications. After a passage in which the goddess adorns herself, the god is said to lie down and ‘fill’ the grass, [... šu]-^r mu ^r-e?-am₃ i-ni-in-^r nu₂ ^r u₂ ^r numun₂ ^r-[...]/ [... šu]-^r mu ^r-a i-ni-in-nu₂ šu-mu-e-a am₃-[si], ‘He lies down in the grass and [fills] the grass,/He lies down in the grass and [fills] the grass’ (N 1373+, P277466, obv. 24’-25’).³²¹ The text is too broken for certainty, but the inference, as seen with other erotic metaphors (see discussion in chapters 2.2 and 2.5), is that the grass is the female body, ‘filled’ by her lover. This grass also features in the series **uru-an-na**= *maš-ta-kal* where a variant name is given, U₂ KI.NU₂ ^dEŠ₄.DAR, ‘the bed of Ištar’ (BM 108860, P366025, col. i, 42’ Fincke 2021, plate IX-X). Beds were likely made with layering of reeds and rushes, so in *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, the ‘way to the rushes’ could indicate her desire for meeting her lover in bed (as seen in *Inanna-Dumuzi D1*, see chapter 2.4 and 2.10). That the rushes represent Dumuzi himself is also a possibility; in a Middle Assyrian lexical tablet, ^u2numun₂ is equated with both LUGAL and *be-lu* (BM 122629, P286029, obv. iv, 11’-12’, MA Šarru 3).

The second plant, ^u2in-nu-uš, *maštakal*, ‘soapwort’ (Thompson 1949: 39-46), had a significant role in magic and medical texts as a purifier (Panayotov 2018: 208-9). As in *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, this plant is commonly referred to as ‘the pure plant’ (Böck 2012).³²² The *innuš* plant or ‘soapwort’ appears with this function, for example, in an Old Babylonian

³²⁰ In a Lamaštu incantation, *elpetu* also features in a violent manner, ‘May the hard stalks of the *alfalfa* grass pierce your feet’ (II, lines 47, 146; Farber 2014).

³²¹ Transliteration and translation from the OBEL, N 1373+, <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/obel/pager#P277466.22>

³²² But for **u₂-sikil**, see also the recent ASOR article on its uses in Akkadian and Greek sources (Rumor 2022).

incantation, ‘The soapwort touched Sky, it purified Sky. It touched Earth, it cleansed Earth. (With the plant that) touched Sky, that purified Sky, (that) touched Earth, that cleansed Earth, Enki, lord of Abzu, (will now) purify and cleanse the place where stands a man, son of his god (George 2016: 59-60; for other references Attinger 2021: 573). Because of its purifying properties, the *maštakal* plant also appears in several *nīš libbi* incantations for countering a loss of male sexual desire (especially in those that are prescriptions against symptoms caused by witchcraft, see Zisa 2021a: 164; 526). Perhaps like the protective shade of the poplar in line 24 of *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, the cleansing and protective properties of the soapwort against bewitchment that generally causes weakness, including loss of virility, are equated with Dumuzi to reflect the pleasure and care he will give to Inanna.

The final plant, **u²rib-ba**, is unidentified, though in a version of the lexical list **UR₅-ra** from Ugarit, it is equated with Akkadian *išbābtu*, a type of grass or weed (MSL X, 108; Sefati 1998:245). M.E. Cohen translates **u²rib-ba** as ‘lush grasslands’, connecting it to the verb **rib**, ‘to be surpassing’ (2023: 1085; 1470). As with the pleasurable shade provided by the poplar, the ‘frosty’ attribute of the *ribba* plant refers metaphorically to coldness as the pleasurable physical sensation that Inanna desires (see discussion in chapter 2.6). A play on words is also possible here; in Old Babylonian versions of the lexical lists **Lu** and **UR₅-ra**, there is a **muš u²rib-ba** listed amongst other types of snakes (eg. MSL 8/1, 82, CBS 12704 r ii. 8’), which seems to be the plant’s most common association. Amongst the first snakes listed in these lexical lists is **muš ušumgal**, ‘dragon snake’, the second part comprising an epithet of Dumuzi, Ama-ušumgal-anna, as he is named in *Inanna-Dumuzi R*.

The “knowledge” of plants as a sexual metaphor is also present in the composition *Utu E/F* (for further consideration of the metaphor of “knowing” for sexual experience, see chapter 3.2). Inanna claims to have no knowledge of sexual things, asking Utu to take her to

the mountains so that they may eat herbs and cedar before she returns to her house, presumably to take her new sexual knowledge back to her husband, Dumuzi.

Utu E/F³²³

BM 23631 (P355673)

137 ag₂ munus-ene mu [du₁₁[?]] nu-zu-gen

I am one who does not know womanly things- sex!

138 ag₂ munus-ene mu du₁₁ nu-zu-gen

I am one who does not know womanly things- sex!

139 ag₂ munus-ene še su-ub nu-zu-gen

I am one who does not know womanly things- kissing!

140 mu du₁₁ nu-zu-gen še su-ub nu-zu-gen

I am one who does not know sex, I am one who does not know kissing!

141 kur-ra a-na mu-un-ma-al a-na ga-gu₇-un-de₃-en

What exists in the mountains, let us eat it!

142 ḥur-sag-ga₂ a-na mu-un-ma-al a-na ga-gu₇-en-de₃-en

What exists in the mountain ranges, let us it eat!

143 kur šim-ma-še₃ kur ^{geš}eren-na-še₃

To the mountain of fragrant herbs, to the mountain of cedar,

144 kur ^{geš}eren-na kur ḥa-šu-ur₂-ra-še₃

³²³ Line numbers follow the edition by Kramer 1985.

To the mountain of cedar and the mountain of cypresses,

145 kur-ra a-na **mu-un-ma-al** a-na ga-gu₇-un-de₃-en

What exists in the mountains, let us eat it!

146 šim mu-un-gu₇-a-ta ^{geš}eren mu-un-gu₇-a-ta

After the herbs were eaten there, after the cedar was eaten there,

147 šu-gu₁₀ šu u₃-bi₂-du₃ e₂-gu₁₀-še₃ ge₄-mu

When you put (your) hand in my hand, return to my house!

In *Utu E/F*, herbs and cedar of the mountains are both desirable for their appealing fragrance, but they are also desired to be *eaten* and *tasted*, drawing on both the scent and the consumption of the plants to form metaphorical mappings. Eating and sexual intercourse share basic features that lead to their conceptual and metaphorical relationship and is a common metaphor in many contexts.³²⁴ In *Utu E/F*, the senses are stimulated both through smell and taste of the desirable herbs and cedar, and the plants enter the body in an act that metaphorically simulates penetration. In this way, Inanna's consumption of the plants gives her the sexual "knowledge", the 'womanly things', which she craves for Utu to teach her.

In another text, the scent of the fragrant herbs (**u₂-šim**) creates the metaphor of sexual allure and desire. The following passage comes at the end of *Inanna-Dumuzi H*, after Inanna as the young **ki-sikil** encounters Dumuzi, and they craft a lie to tell her mother whilst they have sex all night (obv, lines 1-22, **me-en-de₃ iti₆-še₃ e-ne su₃-ud ga'(BI)-^r da ^r-e** {*i-na ri-ša-tim i nim-me-li-^r il ^r*}, 'as for us- let me have sex with you until the moon rises!').

³²⁴ These shared features are the entering of external substances into the body and penetration; both hunger and sexual drive are considered instinctual; both eating and sex create social relationships and both of course include the stimulation of the senses (Counihan 1999:9).

Inanna-Dumuzi H

HS 1486 (P345620)

Rev.

13 **u₃-mu-un-gu₁₀** ur₂ ku₃-ge ħe₂-du₇

ħe (PREC)-n (3SG)-perfected-Ø (DO)

My lord indeed perfected the splendid lap,

14 ^dama-ušumgal-an-na musa ^dsuen-na

Ama-ušumgal-anna, son-in-law of Suen,

15 en ^ddumu-zi ur₂ ku₃-ge ħe₂-du₇

The lord Dumuzi indeed perfected the splendid lap,

16 ^dama-ušumgal-an-na musa ^dsuen-na

Ama-ušumgal-anna, son-in-law of Suen,

17 **u₃-mu-un-gu₁₀ ħe₂-ma-al-zu ze₂-ba-am₃**

My lord, your abundance is sweet!

18 eden-na u₂-šim-zu ku₇-ku₇-dam

Your fragrant herbs in the steppe are sugar-sweet!

19 ^dama-ušumgal-an-na **ħe₂-ma-al-zu ze₂-ba-am₃**

Ama-ušumgal-anna, your abundance is sweet!

20 eden-na u₂-šim-zu ku₇-ku₇-dam

Your fragrant herbs in the steppe are sugar-sweet!

The scent of Dumuzi's herbs is pleurably sweet (**ze2-eb, ku7-ku7.d**), metaphorically alluding to his attractiveness, and Inanna's desire for him. The term **u2-šim**, here and elsewhere, is a motif of abundance, varyingly associated with the adjectives **giri17-zal** and **he2-gal2**.³²⁵ The 'herbs of the steppe' appear twice in *Enki and the World Order*, first in a passage in which Enki creates the high steppe and appoints it to the god Šakkan (lines 349-357), and secondly in the following passage in which Enki puts Dumuzi in charge of both the sheepfolds and the steppe (358-367). In each passage, the steppe is likened to the prosperous fragrant herbs:

Enki and the World Order

ETCSL 1.1.3

350 an eden-na su₆ ^{r na4} ʾza-gin₃ am₃-la₂ su_{h10} ^{r na4} ʾza-gin₃ am₃-keše₂

i (VP)-m (VENT)-n (3SG)-hung- Ø (DO)

He hung a lapis beard on the high steppe, he fastened a lapis headdress on it,

351 ki du₁₀-ga u₂- šim giri₁₇-zal-am₃ šu gal mu-un-du₇-du₇

With abundant fragrant herbs, he perfected this good place

352 maš-anše an-eden-na mi-ni-in-lu me-te-aš bi₂-ib-gal₂

m (VENT)-ni (LOC)-n (3SG)-multiplied- Ø (DO)

b (IPP)-i (LOC)-b (DO)-makes-e (3SG)

He multiplied the animals in the high steppe; he makes them as an ornament there,

353 šeg₉ šeg₉-bar u₂-numun-na mu-un-lu e-ne su₃-ud-bi mu-un-e

³²⁵ For example, in *Enlil A*, line 122, **eden-na giri17-zal-bi u2-šim nu-mu2-mu2**, '(Without Enlil) fragrant herbs would not grow lushly in the steppe' (ETCSL 4.05.1); *Ninurta B*, obv. line 10, **ki dagal-la u2-šim giri17-zal gu2 me-er-me-re-de3**, 'to make thrive the abundant herbs in the steppe' (ETCSL 4.27.02).

mu (VENT)- ni (LOC)-copulate-e (for 3PL)

He multiplied the ibex and wild goats of the rushes, and they copulate there,

354 ur-sag an-eden-na men-bi-im eden-na lugal-bi-im

The hero is the crown of the high steppe, he is the king of the steppe,

355 pirig gal an-edin-na a₂-r̄ tuku ʾr̄ gal ʾʔr̄ a₂ ʾ mah d^hen-lil₂-la₂-kam

He is the great lion of the high steppe, the powerful one, the strong one of Enlil.

356 d^hšakkan₂ lugal ḥur-sag-ga₂-ke₄

Šakkan, king of the mountain ranges,

357 d^hen-ki-ke₄ za₃-ba nam-mi-in-gub

na (AFF)-mu (VENT)-b (IPP) i (LOC)-n (3SG)-stood-Ø (DO)

Enki indeed placed him at its side.

This passage concerning Šakkan is particularly striking, as Enki creates the high steppe with imagery familiar to the Inanna-Dumuzi texts. The lapis lazuli beard is reminiscent of the various descriptions of the male lover's attractiveness (see chapter 2.9). Fragrant herbs are here a part of the desirable abundance assigned to the realm of the god Šakkan, described with an enumeration of epithets that adorn him with masculinity. The next passage describes the appointment of Dumuzi. Again, fragrant herbs in the steppe comprise the motif of abundance:

358 tur₃ mu-un-du₃ šu-luh-e si bi₂-in-sa₂

He built the sheepfold, he organised its hand-washing there,

359 amaš mu-un-gar i₃ gara₂ sag bi₂-in-šum₂

He set up the cowpens, he gave to them the best butter and cream,

360 ki ninda gu₇ dingir-re-e-ne-ke₄ giri₁₇-zal-la mi-ni-in-ge₄

He returned luxury to the eating places of the gods,

361 eden u₂-šim-gen₇ du₃-a he₂-gal₂ sa₂ bi₂-in-du₁₁

Planted like fragrant herbs of the steppe, he reached abundance,

362 lugal u₂-a zi e₂-an-na gu₅-li [an-na]

The king, provider of the Eanna, friend of An,

363 mussa ki ag₂ šul^dsuen-na dam^r ku₃^r ku₃^r ku₃^d [inana]

Young, beloved son in law of Suen, spouse of radiant Inanna,

364 in-nin₉ nin me gal-gal-la-ke₄

The lady, the queen of great powers,

365 sila dagal-la kul-aba^{ki}-ka e-ne su₃-ud-bi du₁₁-du₁₁

who (*causes them*) to have sex in the wide streets of Kulaba,

366^ddumu-zi-^dušumgal-an-na gu₅-li an-na-kam

Dumuzi- ušumgal-anna, friend of An,

367^den-ki-ke₄ [za₃]-ba nam-mi-[in-gub]

Enki indeed placed him at its side.

The fragrant herbs in the steppe in *Enki and the World Order* are tied to images of masculinity, but also to an abundance of food, copulating animals and people. The desirable, sweet fragrance of the herbs in *Inanna-Dumuzi H* draw on a pleasing aroma as a metaphor

for Dumuzi's attractiveness and Inanna's desire, but this source domains is also inextricably linked to that familiar sensation of excess and abundance that permeates the "Love Songs". Prosperity of plants is again used as a means to express the emotions of these lovers.

3. Plants as a Source Domain in the "Love Songs": Summary

Unlike those other plant source domains that in some ways map as image metaphors for the anatomy of the male and female bodies (ie. trees - 2.6, lettuce - 2.3), the plant metaphors explored in this chapter are drawing upon a variety of entailments to metaphorise erotic emotions, such as pleasure, allure, and desire. The specific properties of certain plants may construct these emotions through their special uses and significance known from a wider range of scribal exercises and texts, whilst the senses that are aroused evoke a certain luxury and sensuality from their taste and scent.

2.8 Milk, Cream, Butter

Dumuzi's role as the shepherd means that milk, cream, and butter are recurring gifts that he brings to Inanna throughout many of the Sumerian "Love Songs". As with other gifts of produce and foodstuffs throughout the corpus, there are metaphorical undertones to these actions; the man gives the woman abundant produce just as he gives her pleasure. Therefore, there are times where milk and its by-products act as source domains to conceptualise feelings of sexual pleasure and desire, whilst simultaneously maintaining a sense of bucolic abundance and prosperity.

1. Milk: Basic Meaning

In a hot climate such as ancient Mesopotamia, milk would have been rarely drunk fresh, consumed only by young animals or offered to the gods (Stol 1993: 100).³²⁶ Instead, milk was processed into butter/ghee (**i3 nun**), cream (**garaz**), and cheese (**ga HAR**) that could be preserved (Englund 1995: 378-384; Stol 1993; Paoletti 2023).³²⁷ Dairy products were seemingly a desirable and hard-earned commodity.³²⁸ In literary texts, they appear amongst

³²⁶ As can be seen in a hymn to Nanše, in which butter and milk are the first offerings listed for the temple's first fruit festival: **i3 gur3-ru ħe2-em e2-e i3 ba-an-dib-ba/ ga gur3-ru ħe2-em e2-e ga ba-an-dib-ba**. 'Let there be a butter carrier who delivers butter to the house!./ Let there be a milk carrier who delivers milk to the house!' (*Nanše A*, ETCSL 4.14.1, lines 77-8).

³²⁷ Only the milk of cows and goats was processed, there is no attestation of ewe's milk (Englund 1995: 382 n.11; Stol 1993: 100). Paoletti points to occasional Ur III sources from Puzriš-Dagan that attest that the milk of wild animals such as wild goats, deer, gazelle, and aurochs was also processed into milk and sour milk cheese (Paoletti 2023).

³²⁸ In the Ur III period, herders of cattle delivered 5 litres of ghee and 7 ½ litres of cheese per adult cow per year to the state, with the minimal amount of milk that was not left for the calves consumed by the herders themselves (Englund 1995: 384). Interpreting the dairy herd account **TCL 2, 5499** (P131589) as a theoretical account that totals the ideal amount of ghee and cheese production of a herd of cattle, Englund surmised the involved process of dairy production in the Ur III state:

These living "capital resources" of the state were placed at the disposal of cattle herders who were to tend animals and thus guarantee for their well-being, care for the yearly calving of the adult cows and, once having calved, for the production of milk and its derived products butter oil and cheese. The state required, beyond the yearly increase of the herd at a rate of one calf per two adult cows, 5 **silaz**, i.e., ca. 5 litres, of the butter oil qualified **i3 nun** and 7 ½ **silaz** (litres) of the cheese qualified **ga HAR**, or their equivalents- either in value or in inherent contents- in a number of different dairy products, including raw of soured milk (Englund 1995: 394).

motifs of abundance. For example, in a hymn to Nisaba, a wish for the goddess to heap up piles of grain paralleled with imagery of butter and cream demonstrates clear reverence of the goddess’s productive capabilities:

Nisaba A

ETCSL 4.16.1

52 ^dnisaba tur₃-ra i₃ ḥe₂-me-en amaš-a gara₂ ḥe₂-me-en

[^d] NISABA ^ˈ i-na ta-ar-ba-ši-im ^ˈ lu ^ˈ-^ˈ u₂ ^ˈ ša-am-nu-um at-ti [i-na] su-pu-ri-im
^ˈ lu ^ˈ -^ˈ u₂ ^ˈ li ^ˈ-iš-^ˈ du ^ˈ-um ^ˈ at ^ˈ-^ˈ ti ^ˈ

Nisaba, may you be butter in the animal pen! May you be cream in the sheepfold!

Imagery of milk and churning butter in other literary texts is used to express something of a pastoral idyll. Shepherding activities are depicted as accompanied by singing and “rocking” of churns (Klein 1998: 212-3). For example, describing the bucolic abundance provided by the god Enki:

Enki and the World Order

ETCSL 1.1.3

28 [x x] x i₃ na-nam³²⁹ ga na-nam tur₃ amaš-e nam-de₆

na (AFF)-mu (VENT)-brought-Ø

There is indeed butter, there is indeed milk, they were indeed brought into the cow-pen, the sheepfold!

29 [sipa]-de₃ i-lu-lam-ma-na du₁₀-ge-eš im-mi-ib-be₂

³²⁹ Edzard 2003:120 considers **na-nam** as a variation of the form **na-am₃**; the verb me, ‘to be’, with the affirmative prefix **na-**.

The [shepherd] sweetly sings his song there,

30 𒌶 unu₃ 𒀠-de₃ dun₅-dun₅ ^{dug}šakir-ra-ka-na u₄ im-di-ni-ib-zal-e

i (VP)-mu (VENT)-b.da (3SG NH+COM)-ni (LOC)-b (DO)-passes-e (3SG)

The cowherd passes the day with them, rocking his churns there.

As an image associated with prosperity, milk is used in the description of kings in the royal praise poetry. For example, in *Lipit-Eštar A*, the king poses himself both as the shepherd and the butter and milk his flock provides (**sipa** ^{e2}**tur₃-re i₃ ga maḥ-me-en**, ‘I am the shepherd, the splendid butter and milk in the animal-stall’, ETCSL 2.5.5.1, line 45; **uri^{ki}-še₃ i₃ sag ga sag-me-en**, ‘I am the best butter and the best milk for Ur’, ETCSL 2.5.5.1, line 65). In *Šulgi C*, the king claims himself as born amongst these dairy products: **lugal ab₂-šilam-e tu-da i₃ ga-a ne-ḥa-me-en₃**, ‘I am the king born of the mother-cow, who rested amongst butter and milk’ (ETCSL 2.4.2.03, line 5).

In contrast to these images of abundance, spilt milk or the breaking/desertion of churns is used as a motif of destruction (see Klein 1998: 213). Note that in the Enheduanna hymn, *Inanna C*, in a passage detailing the devastating powers of the goddess, there is reference to Inanna’s ‘food and milk of death’ (**u₂ ga nam-uš₂-a**, ETCSL 4.07.3, line 40/41).

The richness of milk, cream and butter mean that not only can they stand metaphorically to create a sense of prosperity, but also lend themselves to sexual undercurrents, such as in the following incantation, in which the **kar-ke₄** is also described with apple tree metaphor (see chapter 2.6):

Old Babylonian Incantation

WCMA 20.1.30 (P355884)

1 ki-sikil sa₆-ga sila-a gub-ba

The beautiful young woman stood in the street,

2 ki-sikil kar-ke₄ dumu dⁱinanna

The young woman, the *kar-ke₄*, child of Inanna

3 ki-sikil dumu dⁱinanna e₂ eš₂-dam-ma gub-ba

The young woman, child of Inanna, stood in the tavern,

4 i₃ šar₂-ra-am₃ gara₂ šar₂-ra-am₃

She is plentiful butter; she is plentiful cream.

In this incantation, the **kar-ke₄**, whose potential involvement with prostitution/sexual promiscuity was addressed in chapter 2.5, is connected again with the tavern, described using metaphorically sexual language. The **kar-ke₄** is called ‘plentiful butter’ and ‘plentiful cream’, positioning her as rich food to be consumed and enjoyed.

2. Contextual Meaning: Milk as Erotic Metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs”

In most of the instances in which milk, butter, or cream occur in the “Love Songs”, Dumuzi is the designated milk carrier,³³⁰ and the compositions typically lead up to descriptions of the sexual satisfaction of Inanna. As the milk carrier, Dumuzi fulfils his iconic roles as both shepherd and lover (Wiggermann 2010), and this duality gives way to the *double entendre* that to bring milk is to bring sexual satisfaction. In the context of the “Love Songs”, the latter intent, to serve Inanna’s sexual desires, is often emphasised, and so, as observed by Wiggermann in relation to the iconography of Dumuzi, ‘even his shepherdship is made subservient to his role as lover’ (Wiggermann 2010: 331).

³³⁰ Attinger distinguishes between the habitual **ga guru₃^{ru}**, ‘carrying milk’ to a profession attested in the Ur III period, **ga-IL₂**, ‘milk-carrier’ (for references see Attinger 2021: 370; 453).

Milk and its derivatives are invariably connected with the female body and the female animals that produce it, though this is not a motif that we find in the Sumerian “Love Songs”. Inanna’s breasts pour forth water and flax (*Inanna G*, see chapter 2.2 and 2.5), in mimicry of milk exuding from her breasts, but notably milk is absent except when it is brought in by the male characters. In the Sumerian “Love Songs”, milk and its by-products are firmly associated with the male god, Dumuzi.³³¹ That carrying milk was an important role played by Dumuzi within his relationship with Inanna is also attested in *Inanna’s Descent*, where he appeals to Utu, his brother-in-law, to help him escape his condemnation to the netherworld:

Inanna’s Descent

ETCSL 1.4.1

371 e₂ ama-zu-še₃ i₃ gur₃-ru-me-en

I am one who carries butter to your mother’s house,

372 e₂ nin-gal-še₃ ga gur₃-ru-me-en

I am one who carries milk to Ningal’s house!³³²

Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, to see Dumuzi as the milk carrier crop up several times in the Sumerian “Love Songs”. However, whilst in *Inanna’s Descent* Dumuzi’s identification

³³¹ It is not unknown for milk to work as a metaphor for semen in the ancient world. It appears as both female *and* male sexual fluid in Vedic literature, where it is predominantly considered as the female procreative “seed”, the *payas*, but also functions metaphorically to describe semen (Doniger 1980: 19; 23-24; 32). In the Ṛg Veda, a wife is said to ‘milk’ seed from her husband (Doniger 1980: 24), and in the Sanskrit epic the Mahābhārata, churning butter is also likened to ‘churning’ seed from a man: ‘As butter is churned out from the milk by the churning sticks, so seed is churned out (of a man) by the churning sticks born of bodily desires’ (12.207.21, Doniger 49). There is the concurrent notion that milk is a female fluid, whilst recognising that the emission of fluid from the phallus, as well as its colour and texture, also mimic that of breast milk.

³³² M. Jaque has noted: ‘Dans La Descente d’Inana dans les Enfers 371-372, i₃ **guru₃-ru**, ga **guru₃-ru** en relation avec Dumuzi signifie ‘porter pour offrir’. C’est un des rares cas où **guru₃** s’applique à un élément qui ne fait pas partie de la personne du porteur, mais Dumuzi porte graisse et lait contre son coeur, et ils sont pour Dumuzi presque un ‘ornement’. (Jaque 2012: 199).

as the butter/milk carrier seems to serve as a marker of his importance to the domestic, bringing abundant and rich produce to the family household, in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, it appears to serve as a marker of his sexual attractiveness and ability to bring pleasure to Inanna. For example, in *Inanna-Dumuzi C1*, Inanna wishes the shepherd to pleasure her with his best milk (**mi₂ du₁₁**)³³³:

Inanna-Dumuzi C1

Ist Ni 2377 (P345166)

Col. i.

11 𒌷 lu₂ 𒊕? **su₈-ba-še₃ mu-lu da-an-ge₄-ge₄**

da (ES) (**PREC**)-n (**DO**)-return (**RDPL**)

Let me send a man to the shepherd,

12 [i₃] sag ga sag mi₂ 𒌷 **de₃ 𒊕 ga₂ 𒊕 ab 𒊕-be₂**

[li-ka]-an-ni-a-am

de (ES) (**PREC**)-ma (**1SG DAT**)-b (**DO**) – pleasure -e (**3SG**)

And may he please me with top butter and top milk!

The verb **mi₂—du₁₁** is used in an explicitly sexual context in *Šulgi X*, amongst descriptions of the king and Inanna’s most intimate moments, **gal₄ ku₃-ga₂ šu bi₂-in-ma-ra-gen₇**, ‘When he placed (his) hand on my splendid vulva’ (*Šulgi X*, line 30):

Šulgi X

ETCSL 2.4.2.24

³³³ Attinger 2021: 294, “traiter tendrement (sexuel)”.

34 ki-nu₂-a mi₂ ga₂-ni-du₁₁-ga-a-gen₇

m (ES) + (1SG DAT)-ni-n (3SG)-pleasured-NOM-EQU

When he has pleased me on the bed,

35 u₃-mu-un-ra mi₂ da-an-du₁₁

da (ES) (COHORT)-nni (OO)-pleasure

Let me pleasure the lord too.

Phrased with the same verb, in *Inanna-Dumuzi C1*, it is Inanna's wish that Dumuzi, with his milk, should equally bring this kind of sexual satisfaction. Later in the composition, Dumuzi is depicted as transporting the desired goods to Inanna:

Inanna-Dumuzi C1

Ist Ni 2377 (P345166)

Col i.

25 lu₂ sipa-de₃ i₃ ṣu ṣ-še₃ mu-un-la₂

it-ta-na-ši

The shepherd took butter in his hands,

26 ^ddumu-zi-de₃ ga za₃-še₃ mu-un-la₂

i-na [bu?]-ṣ di ṣ-šu

Dumuzi took milk by his side,

27 i₃ ^{dug}nig₂-banda₃^{da} za₃-še₃ mu-un-la₂

He took butter in a small container³³⁴ by his side.

Following this passage, Dumuzi greets Inanna at her house with these gifts, she dresses and adorns herself, and when she comes forth from the house, the couple embrace and kiss (col ii lines 13'-22').

Butter and milk appear in a similar way in the composition *Inanna-Dumuzi C*. It depicts the young woman, presumably Inanna, dressing and adorning herself (lines 1-18), before her male beloved, presumably Dumuzi,³³⁵ exclaims that he would like to fulfil all her desires (lines 19-20). This later transpires and the male beloved promises to satisfy Inanna's desires to have butter and milk, as well as lambs and kids (lines 34ff), brought into her household:

Inanna-Dumuzi C

Ist Ni 2429 (P345297)

32 ħe₂-DU.DU ħe₂-DU.DU i₃-li₂ ga-bi ga-na ħe₂-DU.DU

“Let him bring it, let him bring fine butter and milk! Come on! Let him bring it!”³³⁶

33 nin₉-gu₁₀ e₂-a ga-mu-u₈-da-DU.DU

“My sister, let me bring it all with me into the house!”

³³⁴ Following the suggestion by Attinger 2021: 787 n. 2343. Sefati reads **i₃ ga NIG₂-ban₃-da** (Sefati 1998: 287). For attestations of this small container for oil and milk, see references in Sefati 1998: 296.

³³⁵ Neither Inanna nor Dumuzi are named as the participants of this text, though the subscript signals it as a **bal-bal-e** of Inanna. However, the identification of milk and its derivatives elsewhere in the corpus with Dumuzi suggests that here we also have the divine couple.

³³⁶ It is often difficult to ascertain the speaker in *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, though it has previously been interpreted that there are three participants: the female speaker (Inanna), who uses Emesal; the male speaker (Dumuzi); and a chorus, who use plural forms. Line 32, because it does not use the Emesal forms, is thought to have been spoken by a chorus of Inanna's friends (Sefati 1998: 138). It is not implausible that this line is spoken by the main female speaker, as the Emesal forms are not consistently used in the corpus. The transliteration here follows Attinger's suggestion (2021: 550 n. 1522), rather than Sefati's **dig-dig-ga-bi**, 'Let him bring, let him bring, please, let him bring abundantly' (1998: 134, 136, 147). The term **i₃-li₂** is distinguishable from **i₃-li**, but also denotes a fat/oil of high quality (Attinger 2021: 550; 2003: 34).

Again, Dumuzi's gifts to Inanna result in her sexual satisfaction. In this text, Inanna is particularly presented as the young, virginal bride, and she praises her body as newly ready to engage in sexual intercourse:³³⁷

Inanna-Dumuzi C

Ist Ni 2429 (P345297)

39 i-da-lam gaba-me ba-gub-gub

Now, our³³⁸ breasts stick out!

40 i-da-lam gal₄-la-me siki ba-an-mu₂

Now, hair grows on our vulva!

41 ur₂ mu-ti-in-na-še₃ di-di-de₃ ba-ba ga-ba-ḥul₂-ḥul₂-le-en-de₃-en

ba-ba- 3SG COP?

Going to the lap of a man *is a gift!*³³⁹ Let us rejoice!

42 gu₄-ud-an-ze₂-en gu₄-ud-an-ze₂-en

Dance! Dance!

43 ^dba-U₂ gal₄-la-ga₂-ke₄-eš ga-ba-ḥul₂-ḥul₂-le-en-de₃-en

Bau! Let us rejoice about my vulva!

³³⁷ Discussed by Jacobsen 1975: 83.

³³⁸ Manuscript **CBS 8037+ N 1703** has the singular forms, 'my breasts', 'my vulva'; the plural forms have been considered to operate as the 'plural of ecstasy', paralleled in the biblical *Song of Songs* (Paul 2005; Sefati 1998: 84, 148-149).

³³⁹ Sefati interpreted **ba-ba** as a phonetic writing for ^d**ba-U₂/ba₆**, which is paralleled with the name of the goddess written fully with the divine determinative in line 43 (1998: 149), though the reading of ^d**ba-U₂** as ^d**ba-ba₆** remains disputed (Marchesi 2002; Rubio 2010). If Bau/Baba, goddess of the Lagaš pantheon, and Inanna became syncretised (Falkenstein 1947: 49-50), why does the young woman, if Inanna, address herself in line 43 (Rubio 2001: 273)?

Newly nubile and having received the proper (marriage?) gifts of butter, milk, and milk-producing animals, the couple ‘rejoice’.

One manuscript, **Ist Ni 2429**,³⁴⁰ adds a **geš-ge4-gal** after the subscript of the composition, which are variants of lines 32 and 33:

Inanna-Dumuzi C

Ist Ni 2429 (P345297)

46 bal-bal-e ^dianna-kam

It is a bal-bal-e song of Inanna,

47 ħe₂-DU.DU ħe₂-DU.DU

May he bring it! May he bring it!

48 i₃-li₂ ga-bi ga-na ħe₂-DU.DU

May he bring fine butter and milk! Come on!

49 geš-ge₄-gal₂-bi-im

It is the geš-ge-gal

This is the only composition in the corpus to include the **geš-ge4-gal** rubric, which is typically interpreted as a reference to a technical musical instruction (Shehata 2009: 344). Its appendage to one witness of this composition might suggest it was at some point adapted for performance. The **geš-ge4-gal** is thought usually to summarise the content of the composition, and also act as a kind of ‘motto’ that elucidates the theme of the text (Shehata

³⁴⁰ On **N 4305**, the composition ends with the subscript; on **CBS 8037+ N 1703**, the tablet continues with *Ur-Namma D*; **CBS 15126** preserves lines 33-40 of the composite text only.

2009: 346). That means that butter and milk are highlighted as a quintessential aspect of this poem, drawing our attention to them and the potential for their erotic *double entendre*.

The eroticism that can be attached to butter and milk is apparent in the composition *Ninisina B* (ETCSL 4.22.2). In this text, the goddess bathes herself in oils that drip upon her throat, eyes, breasts, and pubic hair. To this imagery, butter and milk are added:

Ninisina B

SM 1904.04.021 (P405598)

8 ga-ša-an-gu₁₀ sin₂^{mušen}-gen₇ a tu₅-tu₅-a

My lady, who bathes like a swallow,

9 i₃ geš^{eren}-na i₃ ḥa-šu-ur₂-ra-ka

In cedar oil, in oil of the cypress,

[...]

12 i₃ ab₂ ku₃-ge ga ab₂-šilam-ma

Butter of the splendid cow, milk of the dairy cow,

13 i₃-nun tur₃ ku₃ ga-ga amaš-gen₇ ga-ga

Ghee brought from (?) the splendid cattle pen, brought from (?) the sheepfold.

The inclusion of these products in this text, which in lines 16-24 details the anointing of oil upon the goddess's neck, hair, hands, pubic hair, and limbs, all erotic parts of the body (see discussed in chapters 2.1, 2.3, 3.3), alludes to the erotic qualities that milk and butter metaphorically possessed. The final line of the composition compares the goddess dripping with oil to a cow:

24 munus-e ab₂ a-e gar-ra-gen₇ i₃-li ħe₂-la₂-e

woman-**DIR** fine oil- Ø ħe (**PREC**)-hang-ed

Oil clung to the woman like a cow stood in water.

The overt eroticism of this cow imagery is quite evocative, especially as it contrasts with the strong association between the cow (**ab₂**) and birth/motherhood in other Sumerian literary texts (as highlighted by Pfitzner 2019: 146-147). Cows are also depicted, however, as sexually alluring; for example, in *Enlil and Sud* (ETCSL 1.2.2, line 8), [x] x x **ab₂ maĥ si₁₂-ga-^r gen₇ ^r u₆-e am₃-ma-gub**, ‘She stood to be admired like a great, yellow, cow’ (Pfitzner 2019: 151).³⁴¹

In a **bal-bal-e** of Inanna (**YBC 04609**, ETCSL 4.08.a), one version of which replaces the name Dumuzi with the king Išme-Dagan (*Išme-Dagan J*, **AO 9075**, ETCSL 2.5.4.10), the bucolic setting of the animal pen and sheepfold also lends itself to erotic allusions. Not only is Inanna provided with plentiful butter, milk, and cream by her lover,³⁴² but the singing and churn-rocking associated with the shepherd and cowherd (see above) is also said to provide her with pleasure:

YBC 04609 (P305839)

8 ^{dug}šakir₃ ^ddumu-zi-[x] gu₃ ħe₂-em-me

May the churn of Dumuzi sing!

9 dun₅-ru ^{dug}šakir₃-ra ^rša ^r-mu-ra-an-du₁₂-am₃

³⁴¹ In the incantation *The Cow of Šin*, attested on Middle and Neo-Assyrian copies, note that the cow is situated both as sexually alluring, beloved by the moon god, and associated with fertility, as the narrative makes up a childbirth incantation (Veldhuis 1991).

³⁴² **lugal ša₃-ge bi₂-pa₃-da-zu/^ddumu-zi dumu ^dr en ^r-^rlil^r ^r-ra [...]/e₂ tur₃-e i₃ ga ħe₂-en-da-ab-be₂/^r amaš ^r-e giri₁₇-zal-la ħe₂-en-da-ab-be₂**, ‘The king whom you have chosen for your heart,/For Dumuzi, child of Enlil,/May the animal stall “produce” butter and milk with him,/ May the sheepfold “produce” abundance with him’ (**YBC 04609**, lins 30-33). See also *Išme-Dagan J*, ETCSL 2.5.4.10 lines 21-22.

ša (?)³⁴³-mu (VENT)-e.ra (2SG+DAT)-n (3SG)-performed-a (NOM)-am (3SG COP)

And so, it is the rocking³⁴⁴ of the churn that he performed for you!

10 ^dinanna ur₅-re ʿ ša ʿ-^lmu-u₈-^hul₂-ʿ le ʿ

ša (?) - mu (VENT)-e (2SG DO)-rejoice-e (3SG)

Inanna, he pleases (your) mood!

11 ^{dug} šakir₃ ku₃-ge gu₃- x ša-mu-ra^l(NA)[-ab-be₂]

And the splendid churn *sings for you*,

12 ^dnin-e₂-gal ur₅-re ʿ ša ʿ-^lmu-u₈-^hul₂-[le]

Ninegal, he pleases (your) mood!

The rhythmic rocking of the churn is potentially sexually suggestive, just as the beating, weaving, and repetitive actions of processing flax into linen was in *Inanna-Dumuzi A* (see chapter 2.2). The combination **ur₅** (liver, mood) and **hul₂** (to rejoice, make rejoice) is a variant form of **ša₃-hul₂** or **ur₅-sa₆**, ‘coeur joyeux (et) humeur favorable’ (Jaques 2006: 461-2), seen elsewhere in the “Love Songs” as expressions of experiencing pleasure (see chapter 3.2).

In one source of *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, Dumuzi is once again depicted in his seemingly important role as the milk and butter carrier:

Inanna-Dumuzi R

³⁴³ The function of the preformative **ša-** is unclear (Jagersma 2010: 577), though Edzard classes it as an affirmative, ‘something that already had been stated or occurred’ (Edzard 2003: 120).

³⁴⁴ The spelling **duns/du₉-ru** is irregular; perhaps the scribe thought this verb ended in a /dr/ consonant (Klein 1998: 210). In the parallel line in *Išme-Dagan J*, the scribe used the reduplicated **du₉-du₉**. In line three of the *Išme-Dagan J* manuscript, the verb **duns** is also spelt irregularly, **um^l-du₉-u₃-nam**, compared to the variant in **YBC 04609**, **nu-um-ši^l-duns-na-am₃**. Note that Klein interprets the verb as **du**, ‘to go/come’ (Klein 1998), understanding it as a 2sg.

Source C. CBS 8534 (P263336)

2' ʀ en ʔ-ʀ e ʔ gaʔ ma-ar muʔ-unʔ-ʀ lu ʔ gu₂ [...]

“The lord made milk abundant for me!

3' ʀ d ʔdumu-zi-de₃ u₅ ma-ar mu-un-lu ʀ gu₂ ʔ [...]

Dumuzi made butter abundant for me!

4' u₅ gur₃-ru-ne₂ u₅ mu-un-lu [...]

As he carried the butter, he made the butter abundant...

5' ga gur₃-ru-ne₂ ga mu-un-lu [...]

As he carried the milk, he made the milk abundant...

6' ga u₅ gur₃-ru-ne₂ ma³⁴⁵-a nu-mu-ni-in-ku₄ [...]

As he carried milk and butter, he indeed brought them into the house,

7' ʀ in ʔ-nin₉-e ga-ab-du₁₁ ʔe₂-em-me-di-di-x³⁴⁶

(He said) “Let me tell it to the lady! May she come here!”

8' mu-tin-na ga-gu₁₀ ga-ga-gu₁₀ di-di du₅-ʀ mu ʔ-[u₅-zu]

May I know *the way* to my man, my milk, my cream!

³⁴⁵ Sefati corrects this sign to e₂ (1998: 237), but there is no need; the sign on the tablet looks to me like MA (P263336, rev. 6'), which is the Emesal for ‘house’ (Schretter 1990: 204).

³⁴⁶ Sefati transliterates this line quite differently: ʀ in ʔ-nin₉-e i₃-li sag ʔe₂-em-me-eb²-ʀ šeš₂ ʔ-[e], ‘May the young lady anoint (her) head with fine oil’ (Sefati 1998: 140). My transliteration here follows the suggestion by Civil 1994: 160, who pointed out the parallel with *Inanna-Dumuzi R* (Source A), line 19, e₂-e kab-du₁₁-ga ʀ BI ʔ [ga]-mu-un-da-an-di-di-in, ‘I want to come to the house with its *kabtukku* jars’. The suggestion from Civil takes the line in source C to be a syllabic rendering of Source A, though I wonder if it was not the opposite, as *Inanna-Dumuzi R* source A is certainly a school tablet (discussed in chapter 1.2). Perhaps the scribe was trying to write the cohortative verb, ‘let me tell’, from source C. From the RTI image on the CDLI of tablet CBS 8534, the sign looks to me like ga-ab- rather than i₃-li sag (P220031). The forthcoming edition of *Inanna-Dumuzi R* by Attinger/Boddy also follows Civil’s transliteration and follows the translation of kab-du₁₁/ga-ab-du₁₁ as some kind of jar.

9' ^dama-ušum-gu₁₀ ga-gu₁₀ ga-ga-gu₁₀ di-^r di ^ʾ <du₅-mu-u₅-zu>³⁴⁷

May I know *the way* to my Ama-ušum, my milk, my cream!”

In the chapters on trees and plants (2.6 and 2.7), I explored how these source domains conceptualised Inanna’s sexual desire and pleasure in this passage, and how Inanna’s desire to “know” Dumuzi could be interpreted as a sexual metaphor. In this copy of the text, Dumuzi is also simultaneously depicted as carrying and multiplying the desirable milk and butter, as he is in the other texts. Whilst *Inanna-Dumuzi R* does not culminate in an explicit sexual encounter between the couple, the repetition in lines 8’-14’ builds up a certain tension with repeated cohortative forms. These verbs excitedly express Inanna’s desire to (sexually) “know” Dumuzi/Ama-ušumgal-anna, who is positioned *as* her milk and her cream. Here, the very products that Dumuzi iconically carries come to represent him completely. By standing in for Dumuzi, milk and cream work as source domains for Inanna’s sexual desire, as well as her pleasure upon consuming them.

3. Desirable Milk

The desirability of these products to the female characters in these compositions is evident from the texts already discussed so far. In a final text, *Inanna-Dumuzi P*, again the repetition of Inanna’s requests for Dumuzi’s milk creates an atmosphere of desire and longing. Jacobsen noted ‘From the description of the union and its effects the text moves without apparent transition to a description of Inanna’s joy at living in Dumuzi’s house and of her request of him to make the milk yellow - that is, creamy and fat - for her’ (Jacobsen 1976: 46). This passage follows the moments that she rises from the lap of the king and flax, barley and fruits rise with her as expressions of her sexual pleasure (see chapters 2.2 and 3.2). The

³⁴⁷ Unlike Source A (see discussion in chapter 2.6 and 2.7), the scribe does not write the repeated verb **du₅-mu-u₅-zu** after line 8’.

transition to the following lines concerned with milk sees Inanna satisfied, dwelling joyfully and in pleasure with Dumuzi in the **Enamtila**, but wanting more: for Dumuzi to make milk creamier and richer:

Inanna-Dumuzi P

Ist Ni 9602 (P343627)

col iii

14 e₂-nam-ti-la e₂ ^ddumu-zi-da-ka

In the Enamtila, in the house of Dumuzi,

15 ^dinanna ul-la mu-un-da-an-tuš

Inanna dwelt with him in pleasure

16 ^dinanna e₂-a-ni ḫul₂-la-e

Inanna, rejoicing in his house,

17 lugal-ra u₃-gul mu-na-ga₂-ga₂

She speaks a prayer to the king,

18 ga si₁₂-a-ma-ab **mu-ud-na-gu₁₀** ga si₁₂-^r a [?][ma-ab]

Make the milk yellow³⁴⁸ for me, my husband! Make the milk yellow for me!

19 **mu-ud-na-gu₁₀** me-e ga **de₃-e-da-^r na₈ [?]-[na₈ [?]]**

³⁴⁸ Attinger treats **ga SIG₇-a** as ‘lait crémeux, lait gras’ (2021; 367). **ga si₁₂-a** is listed as the best milk product in *Dumuzi and Enkimdu*, ETCSL 4.08.33 line 48. The term is usually understood to refer to sour/fermented milk (Stol 1997: 192, 200; Paoletti 2023), a primary stage in the production of butter (**i₃-nun**) and sour milk cheese. In the Ur III accounts on delivery of dairy products, amounts of **ga SIG₇-a/ še-a** (it is not certain if these graphemes refer to the same product (Attinger 2021: 367 n. 917), are delivered to the state administration to be then processed into butter and cheese (Paoletti 2023). Making the milk “yellow” in the passage from *Inanna-Dumuzi P* perhaps refers to the coagulation of fat that occurs during the fermentation process.

My husband, I will drink the milk with you!

20 am ^ddumu-zi-de₃ ga si₁₂-a ma-^r ab ^ʔ [...]

Wild bull, Dumuzi, make the milk yellow for me!

21 mu-ud-na-gu₁₀ me-e ga de₃-^r e ^ʔ-^r da ^ʔ-[na₈-na₈^ʔ]

My husband, I will drink the milk with you!

22 ga ud₅-da-ke₄ amaš [...]

Milk of the nanny goat, the sheepfold...

23 nin šar₂-ra ^{du}gšakir ku₃-ga₂ su₃-[ga-ma-ab]

I am the innumerable lady (?), fill my shiny churn for me!

24 ^ddumu-zi ga am-si-ḥar-ra-^r an ^ʔ-[na si₁₂-a-ma-ab]

Dumuzi, make the milk of the camel yellow for me!

25 ^r am ^ʔ-^r si ^ʔ-ḥar-ra-an-na ga-bi [ze₂-ba-am₃]

Of the camel, its milk is sweet!

26 u₅ ga-bi ze₂-ba-am₃ [...]

This butter and milk are sweet-

27 u₃-mu-un du₅-mu-zi [...]/ me-e ga de₃-e-^r da ^ʔ-[na₈^ʔ-na₈^ʔ]

Lord Dumuzi...I will drink milk with you!

As with other passages of the Sumerian “Love Songs”, the repetition in these lines adds to the sense of intensity of Inanna’s desire. Once again, Dumuzi, as the shepherd, is the provider of the milk, and, as the lover, is the provider of sexual pleasure. The inclusion of

camel milk in lines 24 and 25 is particularly striking, thought by some to be the earliest record of the domestication of the Bactrian camel in Mesopotamia. The animal **am-si-ḥar-ra-an**, as well as **am-si-kur-ra**, were in earlier lexical material listed amongst exotic and wild animals, and their names are compounds of the wild aurochs, **am** (Horowitz 2008). Dumuzi, lord of domesticated animals (as in *Enki and the World Order*, discussed in chapter 2.7), is himself referred to as a wild bull (Heimpel 1968: 79ff; Sefati 1998: 76). In this passage of *Inanna-Dumuzi P*, the god is asked to bring milk of both domestic and wild animals, perhaps as a means of expressing his prowess and even virility.

This scene in which Inanna wishes for the couple to ‘drink’ milk together follows metaphorical patterns where to eat or drink is a metaphor for sexual desire and satisfaction. For example, honey and milk appear together as the male lover gives a sensuous description of his beloved in the biblical *Song of Songs*, נֶפֶת תִּטְפְּנָה שְׁפֹתַיִךְ כַּלְהָ דְבַשׁ וְחֵלֶב תַּחַת לְשׁוֹנֶיךָ וְגַרְיִים, ‘Sweetness (honey-comb) drops from your lips, O bride; Honey and milk are under your tongue; And the scent of your robes, Is like the scent of Lebanon’ (Song 4:11; JPS). Later, the male lover echoes this imagery, בָּאתִי לִגְנִי אֶחְתִּי כֹלֶה אֶרְיִתִּי מִוְרֵי עֵם־בְּשָׁמִי אֶכְלֶתִּי, ‘I have come to my garden, My own, my bride; I have plucked my myrrh and spice, Eaten my honey and honeycomb, Drunk my wine and my milk, Eat, lovers, and drink: Drink deep of love!’ (Song 5:1; JPS). On this passage, Exum comments, ‘Honey and milk provide the crowning touch to the sumptuous erotic meal’ (Exum 2005: 173). By evoking sweetness and the sense of taste, food imagery in this manner draws parallels between eating/drinking and love-making. This conceptual metaphor is also found in the *Gītagovinda*, a Sanskrit poem concerning the union and reunion of the god Krshna and the goddess Rādhā. The poet Jayadeva employed a recurring metaphor that expresses desire using the language of consumption. Kissing is imagined as the ‘drinking’ of the liquid of the lower lip:

‘I was laid-down on a bed of fresh shoots; for a long time he lay on my breast; I caressed him and kissed him; embracing me, he drank from my lower lip; O friend! Make him make love to me...’ (II.13, Trans. Siegel 1978: 252).

Elsewhere, the image is expanded to describe the contents of the lower lip: ‘drinking the sweet honey of her lower-lip’ (VI.2, Trans. Siegel 1978: 263); ‘give me a drink of the mead from the lotus of your mouth!’ (X.2, Trans. Siegel 1978: 273). For Inanna and Dumuzi in *Inanna-Dumuzi P*, the image of them drinking milk together is permeated with this same eroticism; it metaphorises something of their union, and Inanna’s pleasure in the milk provided by her lover.

4. Milk, Cream, and Butter as a Source Domain in the Sumerian “Love Songs”: Summary

Throughout the Sumerian “Love Songs”, milk and its by-products are framed as desirable, brought by the god Dumuzi to his lover Inanna. This act of *bringing* produce, from the male to the female, is often a metaphor for the pleasure that he provides for her. In the erotic context of the songs, milk metaphorises the sexual pleasure that Dumuzi gives to Inanna, captured in the repetition and use of the cohortative/precativ e moods. In *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, Dumuzi himself is presented as the milk that Inanna will consume. The pleasure of drinking milk is paralleled with sexual pleasures.

2.9 Precious Materials and Objects

This section looks at source domains from the mineral world, and materials that were inherently prestigious in ancient Middle Eastern culture. Lapis lazuli, gold, silver, ivory, bronze, and alabaster are well attested materials of valuable objects such as deity statues, jewellery, votives, temple adornments, and amulets (Schuster-Brandis 2008). In the Sumerian “Love Songs”, these precious materials are used metaphorically to depict the beauty and value of the lovers to one another, but they also appear in descriptions of the adornment of the goddess Inanna. Though this is a literal act of adorning the body, there is also symbolic and metaphorical value inherent in both the material and colour of such precious objects.

1. The Value of Materials and Objects: Basic Meaning

In ancient Mesopotamia, certain objects and the materials from which they were made held a combination of economic, magical, and sacral value. The material and colour of objects operated as metaphorical referents and even held agency, as these qualities were inherently meaningful (Benzel 2015). Precious metals, such as gold and silver, or stone, particularly lapis lazuli, were appreciated aesthetically for their brightness or radiance (Winter 1995; Benzel 2015: 97ff), which was associated with purity and therefore sacredness.³⁴⁹ Not only was material aesthetically and conceptually meaningful, but the finished object and fine craftsmanship was also seen as inherently valuable (Winter 2010b: 272ff).

The innate value and perceived purity of materials such as gold, silver, and lapis meant that they were used upon statues of deities and in their adornment, the “body” crafted from different kinds of wood or metal (Hurowitz 2006). Though no deity statues survive

³⁴⁹ Note that precious objects, such as jewellery, weaponry, musical instruments, and statues appear in third millennium sources with the divine determinative, and with offerings made to them (see Selz 1997).

from antiquity, likely due to their being made of precious stones and metals, textual evidence attests to the array of materials used to overlay and adorn these images;³⁵⁰ for example, several administrative documents from the reign of Ibbi-Suen detail the materials used for copper statues of the goddess Nanaya (Hurowtiz 2006: 7; eg. **UET 3, 509**, P136831), which were variably plated or inlaid with silver and gold (Paoletti 2013). These texts provide information on the materials and some of the colour of these deity statues. Other allusions to their ornaments or dress might be found in certain literary descriptions; for example, depictions of the goddess Nanše adorned with a headdress, garment, sceptre and sandals of fish is likely a reference to a physical representation of the goddess (see Alster 2005); and a metaphorical description of a statue of the dairy goddess Nin-eiga in the *Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur* has her accompanied by cows and sheep, her destruction metaphorically construed as the uprooting of a date palm (see Dahl 2011).

Statues of kings and royal women were also crafted with fine metals and adorned with jewellery. Recently published Ur III tablets by Verderame give interesting details about the formation and postures of such statues (Verderame 2021). One tablet (**U.18815**; P331089) gives the weight of two copper arms of a statue of a royal woman (**2 urudu_{a2} alan/nin**). Another (**U.30117**; P331647) gives the amount of gold and lapis lazuli to be added (**daḥ-ḥe-de3**) to a copper statue of a king. This tablet also lists the amount of gold and lapis to be used for copper statues of women in various positions: one breastfeeding (**urudu_{a2} alan munus dumu-ga ninda-ke4**), one cleaning a child (**urudu_{a2} alan munus dumu-ga bi-luḥ**), and another with a child at her chest (Verderame 2021: 344-348). Another tablet (**U. 30138**; P331218) lists the amount of copper for a statue of the king drinking beer

³⁵⁰ Earlier studies claimed that statues of deities did not exist in the 3rd millennium BCE (Hallo 1983), though textual evidence now irrefutably attests to the supplying of precious materials for cult statues in the Ur III period. Alster highlighted a tablet of Ur-Nanše recording the statues of various deities, including Nanše and Gatumdu (**AO 3179** (P222364); Alster 2005: 16).

(^{urudu}alan lugal/kaš nag-^r KA ^u). Precious metal and stones embellish (**daḥ**), gild (**gar**), and are inlaid (**si3**) into these statues in a seemingly similar manner to the statue of the goddess Nanaya.

There are also Lagašite statues, presumably of royal women, that were adorned with gold, silver, and copper bracelets (Thomas 2016). From the Early Dynastic cemetery at Ur, it is evident that abundant and lavish jewellery was an indicator of prestige and perhaps power, best exemplified in the beautiful gold, lapis, and carnelian jewellery in the grave of Pu-Abi (Gansell 2007). Similarly impressive jewellery found at Uruk, made of beads of agate, gold, carnelian, and turquoise, dedicated to the concubines of the king Šu-Suen, also attest to the inherent value and prestige attributed to precious materials and objects (E3/2.1.4.28-30, Frayne 1997). The gold, silver, copper, lapis, carnelian, turquoise, and agate attested in this overview of texts and objects is a stark reminder that the Mesopotamian world was also filled with bright colour and hue.³⁵¹

This short discussion about the inherent value of precious materials, their use in crafting statues of both deities and humans, as well as their signifying of wealth and prestige, is relevant to the following analysis of the metaphorical use of such materials in the Sumerian “Love Songs”. In these texts the materials metaphorise the erotic body of the lovers and their sexual allure and adorn the body of the goddess Inanna. This recalls and perhaps references the bodies of statues of deities and royal women, which were also decorated with lavish jewellery and materials.³⁵²

2. Contextual Meaning: Materials in The Sumerian “Love Songs” and the Male Body

³⁵¹ Considerable work has been recently completed on the specific materiality, colour and hue of stones and materials in Mesopotamia (for example, Schuster-Brandis 2008; Thavapalan 2020). For first millennium sources, chemical and photographic analysis of the Assyrian palace friezes has indeed shown that the Mesopotamian world could be a brightly coloured place (Thavapalan 2020: 318ff; 403ff).

³⁵² See also Metcalf 2019 for an edition of *Lammasaga A*, where the adorned body of the statue of the Lamma goddess is described at length.

The colour and hue of materials and precious stones are particularly vivid and evocative. Thavapalan, in her study of the meaning of colour in Akkadian, asked ‘is colour decorative or a more defining element of visual communication?’ (Thavapalan 2020: 413). In the Sumerian “Love Songs”, the colour and hue of precious materials not only acts as decoration of the body but also communicates and metaphorises the erotic body and its sexual attractiveness. Primarily, precious materials and objects metaphorise the male body throughout the “Love Songs” corpus (Sefati 1998: 92). Lapis lazuli, especially, is associated with the beard and (pubic) hair of Dumuzi, but alabaster, ivory and silver also appear to metaphorise the male body and his allure.

In two Inanna-Dumuzi texts, lapis lazuli is contrasted with the lighter tones of alabaster and ivory, both to describe **dim₃**, the pillar, which is used as a metaphor for the penis. The following lines of *Inanna-Dumuzi B* follow those in which the female beloved describes her male lover using other phallic tree metaphors (see chapter 2.6):

Inanna-Dumuzi B

Ist Ni 02489 (P345323)

30 **du₅-mu-zi-abzu** ni₂ te-na-ne₂ ħi-li-zu **ze₂-ba-am₃**

Dumuzi-Abzu, *as he cooled himself*,³⁵³ your allure is sweet!

31 dim₃ ku₃-ga-gu₁₀ dim₃ ku₃-ga-gu₁₀ ħi-li-zu **ze₂-ba-am₃**

My shiny pillar, my shiny pillar, your allure is sweet!

32 dim₃ ^{geš}gešnu(ŠIR)-gal suku₅ za-gin₃ keše₂ ħi-li-zu **ze₂-ba-am₃**

³⁵³ Attinger has noted that whilst **ni₂ te-na-ni** in this line is usually treated as a form of the reflexive pronoun **ni-te**, the form here has an additional vowel, which instead makes it seem like a pronominal conjugation of the verb **ni₂-ten**. He also notes that the meaning of this line escapes him (Attinger 2019).

My alabaster pillar, encircled with a lapis headdress, your allure is sweet!

This passage continues the patterns of the previous lines; **hi-li** and sweetness highlight and construct eroticism and are syntactically parallel to the phallic image which starts each line, denoting its attractiveness. Like the action of ‘sprouting’ apple and hackberry trees in lines 27-29 (see 2.6), **dim₃** acts as a metaphor for the male beloved’s penis. Because of these parallels, **dim₃** here is understood to mean ‘pillar’,³⁵⁴ though it can also mean ‘figurine’ (Civil 1984: 294; Matuszak 2020: 348) and ‘trinket’ (Cavigneaux/al-Rawi 1995: 38ff). There are two other instances in which the translation ‘pillar’ for **dim₃** is evident; in *Lammasaga A*, line 31 (Metcalf 2019: 24) and in the Akkadian translation on a tablet from Ugarit of the following lines of the *Message of Ludingira to his Mother* (Kämmerer 1998: 164-69; Metcalf 2019: 28):

Ludingira

ETCSL 5.5.1

30 ^dlamma ^{na4}geš-nu₁₁-gal ki-gal ^{na4}za-gin₃-na gub-ba-am₃

(My mother), she is an alabaster Lamma goddess, stood on a lapis lazuli platform,

31 dim₃-ma ti-la hi-li šu giri₃ gur₃-ru-a

A perfect pillar, whose limbs are sexually alluring!

RS 25.421

Col. ii.

26’ ^dLAMMA₂ ^{na4}ŠIR.GAL

³⁵⁴ **dim₃** in this context has repeatedly been translated as ‘figurine’ (for example, Sefati 1998: 130; ETCSL 4.08.02; Gadotti 2010: 124). Alster translated it as “pin” (Alster 1985a: 134-135; 146).

(She is) an alabaster Lamma goddess,

27' 𒊩𒌆𒀭 ina uq-ni-i i-za-az

Who stands upon lapis lazuli,

28' 𒊩𒌆𒀭-ku-ut ZU₉ qu₂-ut-tu₃-tu₃

(She is) a perfect pillar³⁵⁵ of ivory,

29' 𒊩𒌆𒀭 ul-ša ma-la-at

Who is filled with pleasure.

In both the Sumerian and Akkadian, lapis lazuli is contrasted to the body of the Lamma goddess, described as an alabaster and ivory post.³⁵⁶ The deliberate contrasting colour of stones and other materials is repeated amongst the “Love Songs”, reminiscent of the way statues of deities and people were crafted from different stones and metals for various parts of the body (see above). In *Inanna-Dumuzi B* and in the lines of *Inanna-Dumuzi Y* discussed below, the distinctive colour contrast of lapis lazuli against brighter hues is used to emphasise the colour of the male beloved’s hair and its sexual attractiveness.³⁵⁷

Lapis lazuli often appears as a metaphor for the dark hue of a man’s beard (Winter 1999: 47). This motif occurs in *Inanna-Dumuzi I* when Inanna describes Dumuzi as her perfect match:

³⁵⁵ *makūtum*- staff, pole, post (CDA: 192; CAD M1: 143)

³⁵⁶ Inanna’s body is also described as a pillar in *Inanna I*, line 19, **munus dim₃-ma ti-la me-e gen-[na]**, ‘I, I am a woman, a *perfect* pillar’. Like in *Ludingira*, **dim₃** is described with **ti.l** as ‘completed’, ie. *perfect* (following M. E. Cohen 1975: 606), or perhaps as ‘living’, as interpreted by the ETCSL 4.7.09, ‘I am a woman, a figurine brought to life’.

³⁵⁷ Thavapalan underlines the contrasting of colour as a key consideration in the Akkadian conception of colour and aesthetics:

‘These many reds, blues and yellows [...] generally found visual expression in pleasing combinations... Colours were enjoyed in their multiplicity and were meaningful in how hues were combined, how lightness interacted with darkness, how colourful materials stood as signs for ideas and how ideas informed the way people engaged with those materials’ (Thavapalan 2020: 416).

Inanna-Dumuzi I

UM 29-16-37 (P256650)

43 ma-ab-du₃-da-a-ga₂ ma-ab-du₃-da-a-ga₂/su₆-a-ni^{na4}za-gin₃-na

ba-a-ni-i

ma (1SG DAT)-bi (LOC?)-made-ed (IMPERF)-a (NOM)+1SG POSS+GEN

Of my one who was made for me, of my one who was made for me,

his beard is lapis lazuli,

44 **me-a-am** an-ne₂ ma-ab-du₃-da-a-ga₂ su₆-a-ni^{na4}za-gin₃-na

Of my shepherd, made by An for me, his beard is lapis lazuli!

In several hymns to the rulers of the Ur III period, the king is similarly described as being adorned with a lapis lazuli beard; for example, in *Ur-Namma E* (ETCSL 2.4.1.5, line 24'), *Ur-Namma F* (ETCSL 2.4.1.6, lines 5, 45) and a *Hymn for Šu-Suen* (ETCSL 2.4.4.a, line 17). In *Šulgi D*, his lapis beard is described as something especially to be admired, **su₆ za-gin₃ gaba ku₃-ga u₆ di**, 'a lapis beard, a splendid chest, to be admired' (ETCSL 2.4.2.04, line 7). It is evident enough that lapis beards metaphorise a 'rich, well-developed maleness' (Winter 1999: 48). In *Inanna-Dumuzi B*, the 'lapis crown' that encircles the alabaster pillar seems, therefore, to refer to the male beloved's pubic hair, the dark, blue-purple colour of the lapis crown contrasting with the brighter colour of alabaster.³⁵⁸

There is a similar play with colour contrast in *Inanna-Dumuzi Y*, in which Dumuzi is described as having a lapis beard and his penis as an ivory 'pillar':

³⁵⁸ Alabaster is a referent of the colour terms *ebbu* and *namru*, which suggests its brightness is its primary entailment (Thavapalan 2020: 98, 101). For example, in a **šu-il₂-la** prayer to Marduk: GEN₇^{na4}GEŠ.NU₁₁.GAL *nu-ri lim-mir*, may my mood (lit. light) dazzle like alabaster (**K 00163+**; P393775, obv. line 69; Thavapalan 2020: 101).

Inanna-Dumuzi Y

CBS 4569 (P260882)

col. iii.

42 su₆ za-gin₃-gu₁₀ suḥur gakkul₃-gu₁₀

My lapis lazuli beard, my *gakkul* lettuce tresses,

43 su_{6-x} za-gin₃-gen₇ gun₃-a-gu₁₀

My beard...multi-coloured like lapis lazuli,

44 suḥur gakkul₃-gen₇ gar-gar-ra-gu₁₀

My tresses, placed like *gakkul* lettuces,

45 dim₃ zu₂-gu₁₀ me-dim₂/ ku₃-si₂₂-ga-gu₁₀

My ivory pillar, my gold limb,

46 nig₂ nagar ku₃-zu dim₂-ma-gu₁₀

My object, created by an ingenious carpenter,

47 tibira ku₃-zu kig₂ AK-a-gu₁₀

My (object), worked by a skilled sculptor!"

48 gen nin₉ ki ag₂-gu₁₀ ka-ka X/ ME RI MU BI E

"Come, my beloved sister...mouth,

49 ka-ka-ni-gen₇ gal₄-^r la ^r-[ni du₁₀-ga-am₃]

Her vulva [is sweet] like her mouth,

50 ^r gal₄ ^r-^r la ^r-ni-gen₇ ka-ka-[ni du₁₀-ga-am₃]

Her mouth [is sweet] like her vulva”

Earlier in this text, the ‘tresses’ of Dumuzi are described with tamarisk and date palm metaphors, mapping the appealing foliage of these trees onto the sexual attractiveness of Dumuzi to Inanna (see chapter 2.6). It is apparent that it is the feathery texture of the trees’ foliage which forms the metaphor, and this is transferred to the subsequent descriptions of his beard. In line 42, Dumuzi is described as Inanna’s ‘lapis lazuli beard’, which is paralleled with the description ‘my *gakkul* tresses’. Whilst this has previously been interpreted as referring to the *gakkul* fermenting vat, ‘my fermenting-vat shock of hair’ (ETCSL 4.08.25), it seems more likely to refer to the leafy head of the *gakkul* lettuce, which is also a metaphor for (pubic?) hair in *Šu-Suen C* (see chapter 2.3).

The soft texture of the leaves of the lettuce complements the plumage of the trees in previous lines, and tactilely contrasts with the hardness of the ‘ivory pillar’ and the ‘gold limb’ in line 45. The text similarly juxtaposes the dark blue/purple colours of lapis lazuli hair to the brighter hues of ivory and gold, thus structuring the metaphor by differentiating the softness of hair from the hardness of the male body. The eroticism of texture and touch are also seemingly played with in the mention of the carpenter and the sculptor in lines 46 and 47. These tactile professions ultimately privilege the use of the hands and touch to sculpt and form. In *Inanna-Dumuzi Y*, the reference to the sculpting of the ‘ivory pillar’ and the ‘gold limb’ (ie. the penis) invites the erotic image of hands upon the male body.

The construction of eroticism is furthered through the parallel image in the male beloved’s reply and description of the vulva in lines 48-50. The reference to the vulva is explicit, but the metaphorical resonances are more drawn from its description as ‘sweet’, an entailment from the highly erotic honey metaphor (see chapter 2.1), and comparison with the mouth (see 2.1 and 2.5). Whilst the senses of sight and touch are employed in the lapis

lazuli beard and ivory/gold penis metaphors, in these lines it is taste that encourages the erotic image.³⁵⁹

Once again, this kind of sensuality is employed in a description of the king Šu-Suen by the female speaker in *Šu-Suen C*, and lapis lazuli is similarly contrasted with a lighter, brighter material, silver:

Šu-Suen C

N 3560 (P278585)

18 u₃-mu-un-me ħe₂-me-en u₃-[mu]-un-me/ħe₂-me-en

May you be our lord, may you be our lord!

19 ku₃ ^{na4}za-gin₃-na u₃-mu-un-me ħe₂-me-en

Of silver and lapis, may you be our lord!

20 mu-un-gar₃ še maḥ tum₃-me ħe₂-me-en

May you be our farmer who brings resplendent barley!

21 igi-ga₂ lal₃-bi-im ša₃-ga₂ ħi-li-bi-im

He is the honey of my eyes; he is the sexual delight of my belly!

In these lines, lapis and silver are used to construct the target domain of sexual desire and sexual allure. The desire of the female speaker for the king is evident through the precative verbs that end lines 18-20, expressing her wish for what the king will embody to please her, whilst his attractiveness is encompassed in the aesthetic beauty of the contrasting blue/purple lapis and bright silver in line 19.³⁶⁰ This is paralleled in the pleasure of the abundance of

³⁵⁹ The comparison of the mouth also draws a visual and conceptual connection between the sexual body and the domain of eating, a universal metaphor for sexual desire and pleasure. See chapter 3.2.

³⁶⁰ Silver is a referent of *ebbu* when it functions as a colour word (Thavapalan 2020: 98).

crops the female speaker wishes her farmer will bring in line 20 (see chapter 2.2 and 3.4) and even more so by the presence of honey and **hi-li** in line 21 (see 2.1).

The prestige of lapis lazuli, silver, alabaster, ivory, and gold clearly contributes to the construction of these materials as conceptual metaphors for sexual desire and allure. Their high status makes them attractive objects, whose desirability maps onto the feelings of sexual desire and allure when describing the hair, body, and essence of the male beloved characters across the “Love Songs”. The desirability of the stones and materials also seems to come from their colour, and particularly in the contrasting colours of the dark blue/purple of lapis lazuli and the brighter tones of alabaster, ivory, gold, and silver. The contrast distinguishes parts of the male body from one another, providing a comparison that positions the male body as statuesque.

3. Adorning the Body: Colours and Materials in *Inanna-Dumuzi T*

In the Sumerian “Love Songs”, precious stones and metals also adorn and beautify Inanna. The significance of prestigious objects and their metaphorical resonances in Mesopotamian erotic texts has already been commented on by Goodnick-Westenholz, who identified the metaphorical significance and multi-valence of the jewel and precious stone metaphors:

To conclude, the jewellery metaphor can be analyzed as follows: On the level of reality, there is the bride bedecked with jewellery, going to the marriage bed rather a statuette. Thus, on the one hand, jewellery represents the loveliness of the beloved and on another, the monetary value that she represents. Beauty is found in the bodily adornments[...]the jewels symbolize beauty, feminine allure, sexual attraction, fertility, love and marriage (Goodnick-Westenholz 1992: 387).

The section in *Inanna-Dumuzi T* in which Inanna adorns her body with precious jewels in preparation for meeting Dumuzi is the lengthiest and most elaborate adornment description

of the “Love Songs”. It is also the text whose imagery incorporates the most precious stones and materials, and therefore is perhaps one of the most visually colourful compositions of the corpus. Other adornment scenes include *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, lines 3-18 and *Inanna-Dumuzi CI*, 12-23 lines (see chapter 3.3). In *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, Inanna dresses herself with her “weapon” (discussed in 2.10), hair pins, a gold bracelet, and lapis neck beads; whilst in *Inanna-Dumuzi CI*, she dresses in a garment, dress pin, lapis neck beads, and holds her cylinder seal. These precious objects are reminiscent of the assemblages of lavish jewellery found in the royal cemetery at Ur (Gansell 2007), evoking the inherent wealth and prestige of their wearers. The stones and jewellery that Inanna puts on her body in the Sumerian “Love Songs” have typically been interpreted as marriage gifts, though Fritz notes that the jewellery should not be considered as the bride price, but rather as a personal gift to the goddess from her husband-to-be (Fritz 2003: 34).

At the beginning of *Inanna-Dumuzi T*, once Dumuzi has gathered dates for Inanna, he indeed heaps up a mound of stones that the goddess can choose from. Lapis lazuli is collected from its primary place at the top of a presumably colourful pile of stones:³⁶¹

Inanna-Dumuzi T

AO 6967 (P345414)

7 lu₂ na-de₆ lu₂ na-de₆ du₆ za pa₃-še₃ na-de₆

na (AFF)- n (3SG)-carried- Ø (DO)

³⁶¹ Hurowitz highlights the efforts that would have been undertaken to procure precious metals and stones for, in particular, deity statues. As an example, the author points to a letter addressed to the Neo-Assyrian king Esarhaddon, concerning the procurement of serpentine eye-stones and gold used for a tiara of the god Nabû; these materials were delivered guarded by an official and sealed (ABL 340: 13-22; P334220; Hurowitz 2006: 8). The feat of Dumuzi collecting precious stones for Inanna is perhaps a significant indicator of his devotion to the goddess.

The man indeed carried, the man indeed carried, the man indeed carried a mound of stones to choose from,

8 ki-sikil ^dinanna lu₂ na-de₆ du₆ za pa₃-še₃ na-de₆

The man indeed carried (to) the young woman Inanna, he indeed carried a mound of stones to choose from,

9 du₆-ra gaba-bi-a za-gin₃-na bi₂-ib-de₅-de₅-ge

b (IPP)-i (LOC)-b (DO)- collects (RDPL)-e (3SG)

He collects lapis lazuli from (on) the top of the mound,

10 ^dinanna-ra du₆-ra gaba-bi-a za-gin₃-na bi₂-ib-de₅-de₅-ge

For Inanna, he collects lapis lazuli from the top of the mound.

Whilst these stones might be construed as gifts for Inanna from her lover, the goddess only wears the lapis lazuli collected in these lines around her neck. The rest of her body is covered in an array of other materials and colours, presumably procured from elsewhere:

Inanna-Dumuzi T

AO 6967 (P345414)

11 nunuz dur₂-ra in-pa₃-de₃ dur₂-ra-na mu-un-ga₂-ga₂

i (VP)-ni (LOC)-chooses-e (3SG)

mu (VENT)-ni (LOC)-places (RDPL)-e (3SG)

She chooses the buttocks beads, she places them on her buttocks,

12 ^dinanna-ke₄ nunuz sag-ga₂ in-pa₃-de₃ sag-ga₂-na mu-un-ga₂-ga₂

Inanna chooses the head beads; she places them on her head,

13 ^{na4}lagab za-gin₃ duru^{ru} in-pa₃-de₃ gu₂-bar-ra-na mu-un-ga₂-ga₂

She chooses a block of *aqueous* lapis lazuli,³⁶² she places it around her neck,

14 nig₂ gal₄-la ku₃-si₂₂ in-pa₃-de₃ siki sag-ga₂-na mu-un-ga₂-ga₂

She chooses golden vulva jewellery, she places it on the hair of her head,

15 ku₃-si₂₂ geštug- geštug gal₄-la in-pa₃-de₃ geštug₂-na mu-un-ga₂-ga₂

geš-du-geš[?]-du[?]

She chooses golden vulva earrings, she places them on her ears,

16 zabar ag₂ su-ub ak-a in-pa₃-de₃ us₂ geštug₂-ga-na mu-un-ga₂-ga₂

She chooses burnished bronze, she places it on the side of her ears,

17 nig₂ lal₃ diri-diri-ga in-pa₃-de₃ igi-ni-a mu-un-ga₂-ga₂

RI.RI

She chooses the things overflowing with honey, she places them on her eyes.

In the composition *Inanna's* (and later *Ištar's*) *Descent*, the goddess' adornment before she enters the netherworld are perceived of as her divine powers, 'not merely bodily embellishment, it is also inextricably linked to the identity(ies) of the goddess(es)' (Benzel 2015: 93). In this text, Inanna adorns herself with headdress, wig, a lapis necklace, breast beads, the *pala* garment, a gold ring, and the lapis measuring rod and rope (ETCSL 1.4.1, line 14-25). Perhaps Inanna's adornment in the "Love Songs" need not only be seen as gifts

³⁶² The term **za-gin₃ durus**, Akkadian *zagindurû*, has been identified as a colourful variety of lapis lazuli or other blue stone, described with *ellu* and *ebbu* (Schuster-Brandis 2008: 453). Thavapalan has recently argued that the term refers to a 'light blue, turquoise vitreous material', like Egyptian faience, and refers to coloured glass, not the lapis stone (Thavapalan 2020: 355-360). My translation of **durus** as *aqueous* intends to keep the element of wetness attributed to the stone, as it adds an eroticism that is ingrained in other erotic metaphors throughout the corpus (eg. Honey, beer, grapes).

from her lover, but as an extension of her identity, divinity, power, and beauty. In an Old Babylonian hymn to Ištar, the goddess' jewellery is itself set up before a procession to be worshipped (AO 6035, P492407, obv. col. ii, 21-22; Groneberg 1997: 26-27; 18, 136), demonstrating the concept that in ancient Mesopotamia, 'inorganic objects such as garments, jewelry [sic], and other decorations and belongings, such as cylinder seals, were all associated with the body and identity and could stand in for the person in a very real sense. They could become objects with agency' (Bahrani 2008: 78). In the "Love Songs", Inanna adorns her body before meeting Dumuzi with precious materials and accessories that evoke her power and identity as the goddess of eroticism, emphasising her beauty and sexual allure. That these objects are an extension of her identity, not merely decorative baubles, can be seen in *Inanna-Dumuzi C1*, where, as part of her dressing to meet her lover, she grasps her cylinder seal in her hand, ^{na4}**kišib šu-ni-a ba-ni-in-dus** (line 17).

The elaborate adornment scene in *Inanna-Dumuzi T* depicts the goddess wearing a higher and more varied quantity of jewellery than seen elsewhere. Like with the depiction of the male body in the "Love Songs" described above, contrasts of colour are perhaps meaningful here. Inanna's hair and ears are decorated with the bright and warm hues of gold and bronze,³⁶³ and golden honey is placed on her eyes. In the region of her head, then, the bright lapis that she wears around her neck stands out starkly from the golden and reddish colours of her earrings, the vulva-shaped hair jewellery, and honey. In other Sumerian "Love Songs" and literary texts that describe Inanna's' jewellery, lapis lazuli is also only placed around her neck; for example, in *Inanna's Descent*, line 19, and *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, line 17, both with the **za-gin3 di4-di4**, 'small lapis lazuli (beads)' placed or hung on the neck. Similarly, in *Inanna-Dumuzi C1*, line 16, and in a broken context in *Inanna-Dumuzi F1*, line 9, the goddess places lapis only around her neck. In these texts, Inanna does not adorn herself

³⁶³ Like gold, the brightness and radiance of bronze seems to be its dominant feature (Thavapalan 2020: 98).

with other jewellery as she does in *Inanna-Dumuzi T* (except with a golden bracelet in *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, line 16) and so the lapis lazuli necklace equally stands out from the rest of her attire and body.

This contrasting colour seemingly draws attention to her neck and its blue adornments, signalling it as one of the most erotic and beautiful parts of the body (see chapter 3.3). It also, however, evokes an image that is potentially similar to the masculine lapis lazuli beards of her lover Dumuzi and other gods and kings. The image is evocative of one that occurs much later in a famous Neo-Assyrian text, Aššurbanipal's hymn to Ištar of Nineveh:

SAA 03 007

6 *a-ki AN-ŠAR₂ ziq-ni zaq-nat nam-ri ḫal-^r pat ^ṽ [x x x]*

Like Aššur, she wears a beard and is clothed in light!

7 *a-gu-u ina SAG.DU-ša₂ a-ki kak-ka-bi ^r na ^ṽ-[ba-at]*

The crown on her head gleams like the stars!

The impression in this hymn is that Ištar radiates and shines with light, much in the same way the golden and bronze items she wears in *Inanna-Dumuzi T* would make her glow.³⁶⁴ Though the colour or material of her beard in the Ištar hymn is not specified, considering the ubiquity of the lapis beard imagery explored above, perhaps we can assume this is the image evoked here too, imbuing the goddess with masculine energy.

Contrast of bright and dark colours is utilised in the adornment of the lower part of Inanna's body too:

³⁶⁴ Thavapalan notes that metal plating, like bronze, used for sculpture and spaces, would play with light to create a particular 'radiance that was considered particularly attractive in ancient times' (Thavapalan 2020: 98). She found that 'the language of brightness [...] an aspect of colour that was intimately associated with numinous beauty, capture[s] the intended effects of polychromy' (Thavapalan 2020: 414).

Inanna-Dumuzi T

AO 6967 (P345414)

21 pu₂ la₃ a du₁₀-ga in-pa₃-de₃ ib₂-ib₂-a-ni mu-un-ga₂-ga₂

She chooses the well of honey and sweet water, she places it on her hips,

22 ^{na⁴}geš-nu₁₁-gal zalag-ga in-pa₃-de₃ ḥaš₄-na mu-un-ga₂-ga₂

She chooses bright alabaster, she places it on her thighs,

23 ^{geš}kim₃ siki ge₆-ga in-pa₃-de₃ gal₄-la-na mu-un-ga₂-ga₂

LAL.KAK?³⁶⁵

She chooses black willow hair, she places it on her vulva.

The golden tones of honey and bright alabaster are placed around her hips and thighs, positioned starkly against the black willow that imitates Inanna's pubic hair (see chapter 2.6). This particular colour juxtaposition is reminiscent of the way Dumuzi's body was erotically depicted in *Inanna-Dumuzi B* and *Y*, with the same textural contrast between alabaster and soft willow/hair.

Whilst Inanna literally and physically adorns herself with prestigious and colourful stones and jewellery to emphasise her sexual attractiveness and allure, considering the colour and inherent value of such adornment adds metaphorical resonances to this scene. Not only does her lapis lazuli neck jewellery evoke a powerful masculinity shared by gods and kings, but the contrasting tones of bright, golden objects with bright blue and dark ones draws attention especially to the erotic areas of her neck and to her genital region.

³⁶⁵ For a discussion of this gloss see Sövegjártó 2020: 155-157.

4. The šuba Stones: Another Look

The repetitive image of ‘ploughing the šuba stones’ in *Inanna-Dumuzi I* has been commented on by several scholars, and apparently excited the imaginations of many (Cooper 1997: 85):

Inanna-Dumuzi I

UM 29-16-37 (P256650)

23 inim bi₂-in-eš-a inim ħi-li-eš-am₃

The words which they spoke were words about desire,

24 du₁₄ mu₂-mu₂-r da ʾ-a ħi-li ša₃-ga-na-ke₄

The one who started a quarrel, the desire of her heart,

25 ^{na4}šuba-r ke₄ ʾ ^{na4}šuba-ke₄ ^{na4}šuba na-ur₁₁-ru

He of the šuba stones, he of the šuba stones, he will indeed plough the šuba stones!

26 ^dama-ušumgal-an-na ^{na4}šuba-ke₄ ^{na4}šuba na-ur₁₁-ru

Ama-ušumgal-anna, he of the šuba stones, he will indeed plough the šuba stones!

Iterations of lines 25 and 26 occur all the way through until the end of this 45-line composition.³⁶⁶ The interpretation of the vivid ‘ploughing the šuba stones’ metaphor has been controversial. While Kramer initially interpreted the image as a metaphor for sexual intercourse, he later argued that the šuba stones were simply jewels worn by Inanna (Kramer 1969a: 73). Lambert agreed with Kramer’s initial interpretation of the metaphor as one for sexual intercourse, and suggested the stones resembled the vulva-shaped jewellery used to

³⁶⁶ The beginning of this text, lines 1-22, seems quite separate from the rest, with lines 23-24 as a bridge between the two.

adorn statues of Inanna/Ištar (Lambert 1987: 33). Jewellery shaped like the female genitals also appears in *Inanna-Dumuzi T* (see above).

The ‘ploughing’ action as a metaphor for penetrative intercourse is understood more easily in texts such as *Inanna-Dumuzi P* and *Inanna H*, where the female body is positioned as the field, the penis as the plough that enters the furrow (Couto-Ferreira 2017: 55-57). The ploughing of stones is conceptually more difficult to grasp. Wilcke interpreted the ‘ploughing’ of the stones to represent the stringing together of a necklace worn by the goddess (Wilcke 1976: 315), and Afanasjeva argued that the ‘ploughing’ of the **šuba** stones metaphorised the loss of virginity, in that the action represented the boring of a hole into stone (Afanasjeva 1982: 16).³⁶⁷

Goodnick-Westenholz convincingly argued that the ploughing of the **šuba** stones is in fact connected to the agricultural metaphor of ploughing the fields seen in other texts (Goodnick-Westenholz 1992). The **šuba** stones are indeed paralleled to seed and grain in *Inanna-Dumuzi I*:

Inanna-Dumuzi I

UM 29-16-37 (P256650)

27 ^{na4}šuba ^{na4}šuba ^{na4}tur ^{na4}tur ^{na4}bi [nu-mu-ne₂-eš] ^{na4}na ^{na4}ga₂ ^{na4}[ga₂][?]

The šuba stones, their small šuba stones he places as seeds,

28 [^{na4}]šuba ^{na4}na ^{na4}šuba gal-gal-bi ^{na4}guru₇ ^{na4}[še₃ na-du₃ ^{na4}-du₃]³⁶⁸

The šuba stones, their big šuba stones he plants as a grain heap.

³⁶⁷ See also Fritz 2003: 74 n.298

³⁶⁸ Restorations in line 26 and 27 from parallel lines on **PRAK II B 46 obv.** + **PRAK II C 94.**

Amalgamating others' interpretations of the **šuba** stones as jewellery, it was proposed that the small **šuba** stones were worn around the neck, and the big **šuba** stones on the breasts, as suggested by the parallel lines 34 and 35:

Inanna-Dumuzi I

UM 29-16-37 (P256650)

34 ^{na4r} šuba ʾ[na] ʾ ^{na4} ʾ šuba ʾ tur-tur-bi ši-pa-ag₂-me **de₃-a**

Of the šuba stones, may their small šuba stones be on our throat!

35 ^{na4} šuba-na ^{na4r} šuba ʾ gal ʾ gal-bi gaba ku₃-me **de₃-a**

Of the šuba stones, may their big šuba stones be on our splendid breasts!

Accordingly, Goodnick-Westenholz elaborated that the small stones were shaped like seed, and the larger stones were vulva-shaped (Goodnick-Westenholz 1992: 386). Therefore:

On the metaphorical level, the **šuba** stones render fertility and sexuality together, two aspects of the same physical love. Consequently, the plowing/sowing of these **šuba** stones may have two analogical relations. As the seeder plough places seed in the earth, the penis inseminates the uterus. As the stone borer cuts a hole in the stone, the penis pierces the vagina (Goodnick-Westenholz 1992: 387).

Inanna-Dumuzi I gives no indication of the colour of the **šuba** stones, though lexically red (**sa5**), green/yellow (**si12**) and multi-coloured (**gun3-a**) **šuba** stones are attested (Schuster-Brandis 2008: 446). Because of a lack of mineral identification, Schuster-Brandis, followed by Attinger, have argued it quite likely that the **šuba** are, in fact, cowrie shells rather than stones (Schuster-Brandis 2008: 446; Attinger 2021: 940, ^{na4}**subi**). One reason for this is a lexical equation with Akkadian (*u*)*yarahḫu*, a fine kind of grain, whose shape is similar to a cowrie or snail shell. The likeness with cereal grain would also reconcile with the description

of the **šuba** as seeds and grain in *Inanna-Dumuzi I*, lines 27-28. Schuster-Brandis remarked that a cowrie shell would equally work as a metaphor for the vulva in the “Love Songs”, presumably because of its indented shape and pink inner lip (Schuster-Brandis 2008: 446). Other lexical material, however, confuses the picture further. In Old Babylonian **diri**, **šuba** is equated with *el-[lum]* (pure, bright), *et- lum* (young man), *da- mu* (a syncretism of Dumuzi (?), Jacobsen 1962: 190, though see also Fritz 2003), and *re-e-e- um* (shepherd) (MSL 15, 039 A, **Ashm 1923-0401**, P447992, b ii 2ff). In a Neo-Assyrian lexical text, **šuba** is given as a name of a river of Dumuzi (MSL 11, 054, **K 02035a+K04337**, P394150, rev. i 12). Whether these associations with Dumuzi are simply because of a pervasive image of ploughing the **šuba**, (ie. the vulva) as seen in *Inanna-Dumuzi I*, or if instead the **šuba** stones became a masculine image is difficult to ascertain fully.

5. Precious Materials and Objects in the “Love Songs”: Summary

In the erotic context of the “Love Songs”, the inherent value and meaning of precious materials and colourful objects act as entailments that map onto the target domains of desire and allure. Precious stones primarily metaphorise the male beloved’s beard and penis, indicating what was considered the most sexually desirable and attractive parts of the male body for the onlooking lover. Like statues, the descriptions of the lovers with imagery of precious materials and objects utilise contrasting colours and textures. The use of colour focused the gaze upon the most erotic parts of the lovers’ bodies, and the contrasting of hard and soft textures alluded to the sensuality of their shared pleasure. The adornment of Inanna’s body with jewellery and precious objects similarly has such metaphorical resonances; the value and colour of the items she adorns herself with act as markers of her sexual allure and erotically draw attention to her body, but they also act as extensions of her power and identity.

2.10 Other Metaphors

The previous sections focused on metaphors that were recurring or used similar metaphorical mappings, grouped together to primarily demonstrate the interaction and interconnectedness of metaphor in the conceptualisation of eroticism in the “Love Songs” corpus. The following sections explore “other” metaphors present in the corpus, those that occur only singularly or very infrequently. The source and target domain are identified, with only a brief explanation of why I think these images map onto certain target domains. It is interesting to note, however, that even outside of the main source domains identified throughout the corpus, the target domains discussed here are remarkably similar and can also be associated with eroticism. There are some other target domains outlined in this chapter, such as motherhood, birth, and kingship which stand apart from the others.

1. Objects

Primarily, plants, food, and precious stones are the most frequent source domains throughout the “Love Songs”, but occasionally other objects are used metaphorically. Objects can stand in for the body, working as image metaphors to mimic shape or texture, but they can also metaphorise abstract concepts. Desirability is conceptualised through objects that enhance or reflect beauty, whilst pleasure is seen as a gift. In one instance, Inanna’s weapon seems to metaphorise her sexual allure, positioning her beauty as power over Dumuzi.

1.1 Weapon: Sexual Allure

As pointed out by Verde, military metaphors in erotic poetry are very common for conceptualising the power relationships and nuances of love (2021: 3-4). In the *Song of Songs*, weapon imagery is used several times to describe the beauty and allure of the female beloved; for example, כַּמְגֵדֶל דְּוִיד צִנְאָרָה בְּנִי לְתַלְפִּיזוֹת אֶלֶף הַמַּגֵּן תְּלוּי עָלָיו כֹּל שְׁלֵטֵי הַגְּבָרִים, ‘Your

neck is like the tower of David, built to hold weapons; hung with a thousand shields, all the quivers of warriors’ (Song 4:4; JPS). Verde further highlights the portrayal of warrior goddesses in the ancient Middle East; in particular the Canaanite goddess Anat, ‘described as a tremendous, bloodthirsty female warrior’ but who was also associated with love and fertility (Verde 2021: 146). This aspect of Inanna/Ištar is well-known. Her sexual allure and warrior-like aspects are present in the hymn *Inanna E*,

Inanna E³⁶⁹

BM 96739 (P345503)

1 nin^dnin-gal-e ul-e ħi-li-še₃ si₁₂-ga

blossoming-**DIR** sexual allure-**TERM** made green-**NOM**

Queen, ripened by Ningal to be sexually alluring,³⁷⁰

2 ušumgal-am₃ ħu-ħub₂ ša-mu-ra-an-gal₂

She created speed for you too, as a dragon.

Inanna’s warrior aspect is not explored in the Sumerian “Love Songs”.³⁷¹ However, in *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, a reference to her weapon amalgamates this aspect with her identity as goddess of love and sex:

Inanna-Dumuzi C

Ist Ni 2429 (P345297)

³⁶⁹ For the translation of this text see Attinger (2019). For transliteration, translation (see ETCSL 4.07.5) and commentary see Foxvog 1993.

³⁷⁰ Attinger (2019) suggests the following literal translation: ‘peut-être "que Ningal a fait verdoyer vers l'épanouissement pour le charme (term.)/de manière charmante (adv.)". Pour **ul** associé à **si₁₂.g**, cf. encore **ul-la si₁₂.g**, litt. "être faite verdoyer dans l'épanouissement/les fleurs/les bourgeons", d'où "être créée épanouie".

³⁷¹ In the composition *Iddin-Dagan A* (subscript: **šir₃ nam-ur-sag-ga₂**, ‘song of the warrior’), typically associated with the “Love Songs” because of its “Sacred Marriage episode”, the goddess is celebrated in her warrior aspect (see Attinger 2014: 13). This is one reason I consider this text distinct from the “Love Songs” corpus.

12 ^{geš}tukul-gu₁₀ bala in-na-sa₆-ga mu-zu

I know my weapon that made the reign pleasing for him.

This line comes while Inanna washes and prepares herself to meet Dumuzi. Her ‘weapon’ is her sexual attractiveness, an idea perhaps more prevalent in later depictions of the goddess Ištar, as noted by Bahrani, ‘Her [Ištar’s] very powerful sexual allure can also be read as being in itself destructive and frightening. Her femininity, her beauty, can seduce men to their destruction, can kill them, and is so dangerous that it can change a man into something other than a man’ (Bahrani 2001: 153).

1.2 Gifts: Sexual Pleasure

The motif of giving as a metaphor for providing sexual pleasure permeates the corpus (see chapter 3.2). It is explicitly laid out in *Inanna-Dumuzi D*:

Inanna-Dumuzi D

UM 29-16-08 (P256630)

5 ša₃ ^rki ^ʾ-ig-ga ag₂ hi-li ag₂ ku₇-ku₇-dam

A beloved belly and sexual delights are the sweetest things,

6 ku₃ ga-ša-an-na-gu₁₀ ag₂-še₃ ma-ra-an-ba

My splendid Inanna, to you he gave them as a gift.

These lines are followed by a passage describing the couple’s sexual activity (discussed in chapter 2.1), suggestive of the gifts that the male lover provides.

1.3 Kohl: Sexual Allure

In *Inanna-Dumuzi V*, Inanna is identified as the **šembiz-zi**, kohl, of the king:

Inanna-Dumuzi V

Ist Ni 3056 (P345188)

1 in-nin₉ šembi₂-zi lugal-^r la ^ˀ-[kam]

The lady is the kohl of the king,

2 ^dinanna šembi₂-^r zi ^ˀdumu-zi-da x

Inanna is the kohl of Dumuzi,

3 ul gur₃-ru ħi-li šu ta₃ du₁₁-^r ga ^ˀ

Blossoming, the one adorned with sexual delight.

In other compositions, Inanna beautifies her eyes with kohl (for example, in *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, line 9; *Inanna-Dumuzi EI* rev. lines 4 and 12). It therefore metaphorises her sexual attractiveness to Dumuzi.³⁷² In *Inanna's Descent*, ETCSL 1.4.1 line 22, it is evident that kohl is particularly attractive, as it is named ‘Let the man come!’, **šembi₂-zi lu₂ ħe₂-em-du ħe₂-em-du igi-na ba-ni-in-gar**, ‘She placed on her eyes the kohl, (named) ‘let the man come! Let him come!’ (see chapter 2.3 for this same construction in *Šu-Suen C*). Recently, Zand (2020: 463-4) has identified an Early Dynastic **UD.GAL.NUN** text with parallels to this image of Inanna as the kohl of Dumuzi, **NTSŠ 82 (UGN), VII.12, šim lu₂ (PA)-gal (NUN) lu₂ (PA) nu-diri**, ‘the kohl/fragrance of the king, nobody surpasses (her)’.³⁷³

1.4 Mirror: Sexual Desire/Allure

³⁷²Painting her eyes to seduce Dumuzi is not negatively coded as it is elsewhere in the ancient Middle East. In the Hebrew Bible, Jezebel’s application of eyeliner has been perceived as an allusion to her characterisation as ‘dangerous seductress’ (Quick 2021a: 151-2); though it is also a self-aware act that communicates the ‘gaze of the other’ to induce anxiety in the onlooker, Jehu (Quick 2021a: 179).

³⁷³ I am grateful to C. Metcalf for making me aware of this intriguing, early reference to Inanna and Dumuzi’s relationship.

In a passage of *Inanna-Dumuzi Y*, in which the female speaker lists several pleasing things that she wishes for her lover to be (sweet words, a pleasant reign, a festival- see below), one of these items is a mirror:

Inanna-Dumuzi Y

CBS 4569 (P260882)

59 zabar-šu dadag-ga ħe₂-me-en,

May you be a shining mirror!³⁷⁴

The precative form indicates Inanna's desire for the mirror. A mirror is a tool to reflect one's visual appearance and is therefore also associated with attractiveness and allure. The term **zabar-šu** is only attested in one other Old Babylonian Sumerian literary text, *Sargon and Ur-Zababa* (ETCSL 2.1.4), where the king instructs Sargon to deliver it to his chief smith, to possibly be included in a ritual as a reaction to hearing Sargon's foreboding dream about Inanna and his demise. The significance of the mirror in this context is unclear. In other, later contexts, mirrors are symbols of femininity; this object is held by the Neo-Assyrian queen mother, Naqia/Zakutu, on a bronze plaque (**AO 20185**); Ornan 2002: 472); and by goddesses in first millennium seal impressions from Nuzi (Ornan 2002: 472). In *Inanna-Dumuzi Y*, however, the female speaker uses the term to metaphorically describe her male beloved, and his attractiveness.

1.5 Bed: Sexual Pleasure

The bed is often the setting of sexual activity. In *Inanna-Dumuzi DI*, the repetitive desiring of the bed from lines 18-29 is the centre of the composition:

³⁷⁴ **zabar-šu** = *mu-ša-lu* (Old Babylonian **UR₅-ra**, eg. **BM 085983** (P247857), rev. ii. 5), 'mirror' (CAD M.2: 257). However, see Attinger 2021: 1151 n. 3707 for the suggestion that **zabar-šu** could also be a bronze vessel.

Inanna-Dumuzi D1

BM 15280 (P283738)

18 al ba-an-du₁₁ al ba-an-du₁₁ ki-nu₂ al ba-an-du₁₁

She desired it, she desired it, she desired the bed!

19 ki-nu₂ ša₃ ħul₂-la al ba-an-du₁₁ ki-nu₂ al ba-an-du₁₁

She desired the bed that made the heart rejoice, she desired the bed!

In other texts, the bed is associated with desirable things, dripping honey (chapter 2.1), red berries (2.4), lapis lazuli (2.9), and flax (2.2). The bed metonymically stands for the sexual actions and pleasure shared by the lovers.

1.6 Objects: The Body

A group of metaphorical images in a well-known passage of *Inanna-Dumuzi P* are used to describe the female genitalia: a ‘horn bound to a great wagon’ (**si-gen₇ gešmar gal-e ṛ keše₂ ṛ** [...], obv. col. ii, line 19), mimicking the shape of the vulva, maybe even the clitoris, with the cart representing the female body onto which the horn is bound; and a ‘boat of heaven, hung with ropes’ (**ma₂ an-na ne-en eš₂ la₂**, obv. col. ii. line 20), a metaphor that mimics the shape of the female body. In childbirth incantations, the female body is also depicted as a boat (Hätinen 2017). The ropes presumably metaphorise the tendrils of pubic hair.

Rope appears again at the end of *Šu-Suen B*:

Šu-Suen B

Ist Ni 2461 (P343111)

28 ṛ EŠE₂ ṛ gešba-an-na-gen₇ ṛ šu ṛ gub-ma-ni

Place a hand on it for me, like a *rope of a measuring vessel*,

29 EŠE₂ ^{geš}ba-an si₃-ki-na-gen₇ ʿ šu ʿ DAR.DAR-ma-ni

Touch a hand on it for me like a *rope of a measuring vessel of her/his hair*,

Difficulty with these two lines has caused multiple translations. Reid and Wagensonner took EŠE₂ ^{geš}ba-an to refer to some sort of ‘leash’ related to the **algar** instrument that appears in line 29b on **BM 103163** (Reid/Wagensonner 2017), whilst Attinger leaves the translation blank (2019). Sefati transliterated EŠE₂ as TUG₂, ‘a *cap* (ie. a cloth) on a measuring cup’ (Sefati 1998: 358). For ^{geš}ba-an si₃-ki as ^{geš}ba-an siki see Reid/Wagensonner 2017: 259. The meaning is not entirely clear to me here; the female speaker wants her male beloved to touch her ‘sweet place’ (line 27) like a rope on some kind of vessel. With the recurring image of the vessel as a metaphor for the female body (see chapter 2.5), the measuring vessel should perhaps be understood as the vulva, whilst the rope is the male beloved’s hand (possibly his penis). This seems likely, given that the next two additional lines of source **BM 103163** (lines 29a-29b) have clear erotic meaning: **an-ta zi-zi ħe₂-mu-e-da-ze₂-ʿ eb ʿ** [...]/ama-ʿ gu₁₀ ʿ ba-zu![?](BA)-zu ne-ta ʿ mu ʿ-[-...]/ ib₂-ib₂ ba![?]-sa₆ al-gar šu ħe₂-[-...]/šā₃-zu ħe₂-bur₂, ‘May your *erection* (**zi-zi**) be sweet with you! My mother knows this.../(my) hips are beautiful, *play* the *algar*...may your belly release’ (following Attinger 2019).

1.7 Cloth/Warp Beam: Motherhood, Birth

Motherhood is not a central experience to the Sumerian “Love Songs”, apart from the presence of Inanna’s mother, Ningal, in compositions in which Inanna is characterised as a

young woman. However, in *Šu-Suen A*, the text begins with reference to the mother, Abi-Simti, and wife, Kubatum, of king Šu-Suen:³⁷⁵

Šu-Suen A

Ist Ni 2463 (P345315)

5 geš-ge-na tug₂ nam-sa₆-ga-gu₁₀ a-bi-si₂-im-ti-gu₁₀

My cloth beam, garment of pleasure, my Abi-Simti,

6 geš-sag-du tug₂ dun-na gal₂-[la]-gu₁₀ nin-gu₁₀ ku-ba-tum

My warp beam used for weaving cloth, my queen Kubatum.

The cloth beam is the front roller of the loom onto which the woven, completed fabric is wound. Abi-Simti is the mother of Šu-Suen, and so as the cloth beam, she is the one who holds the completed fabric, and is the one who has given birth (lines 1-3).³⁷⁶ Weaving is therefore a metaphor for giving birth, the completed fabric is the child. The warp beam is the back roller of a loom onto which the warp is wound; this is the working beam used to hold the thread whilst being woven. Compared to his mother as the cloth beam, Šu-Suen describes his lover, Kubatum, as the warp beam, presumably metaphorising that she is one that will give birth to his child in the future.

2. Animals

Animals often appear in order to contribute to the target domain of abundance, usually positioned alongside other plant and fruit source domains throughout the corpus, but they are also used to metaphorise body parts. The beauty of an animal's coat is also used to

³⁷⁵ For an overview of all previous interpretations of the identity of Abi-Simti and Kubatum in this text, see Sefati 1998: 348-350. For the publication of a recent inscription that confirms Abi-Simti as the mother of Šu-Suen, see Owen 2020.

³⁷⁶ Jacobsen 1987b: 58.

describe Inanna, metaphorising her sexual allure and beauty. This use of animal imagery is significantly different from that in Akkadian love literature (including some incantations), where animals often reflect the ‘force of sexuality’ (Wasserman 2016: 43 and see chapter 3.1).

2.1 Birds and Fish: Abundance/The Female Body

There are a great variety of birds present in the Akkadian love literature (Wasserman 2016: 44, 48-9); their twittering mimics lovemaking (Groneberg 1986; George 2003: 797), and the flapping of their wings metaphorises the ‘agitation of the impatiently loving heart’ (Wasserman 2016: 49). In *Ninisina B*, the erotic image of a woman/goddess washing in oil is likened to a bird bathing itself, **ga-ša-an-gu₁₀ sin₂^{mušen}-gen₇ a tu₅-tu₅-a**, ‘My lady, who bathes like a swallow’ (ETCSL 4.22.2, line 8). However, in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, birds are mainly used to emote abundance and prosperity:

Inanna-Dumuzi C1

Ist Ni 2377 (P345166)

col. i

17 [mušen] ṽ sag₁₀ ṽ[?]-ga mi₂ **de₃-<ga₂-ab-be₂>**

May he please me with the best birds!

In this passage, Inanna asks the shepherd to bring her the best milk (discussed in 2.8), the fowler to bring her the best birds and the fisherman to bring her the fattest carp (**suhur^{ku6} gur-gur-ra mi₂ de₃-<ga₂-ab-be₂>**, line 20) as gifts. These things metaphorise a sought-after abundance and fertility, but for the sexual connotations of the verb **mi₂-du₁₁**, see chapter 2.8.

Similarly, in *Inanna-Dumuzi D1*, birds and fish appear in a passage in which Inanna wishes for Dumuzi to bring her fertility and abundant produce in exchange for his kingship:

Inanna-Dumuzi D1

BM 15280 (P283738)

51 i₇-da a-eštub ḫe₂-en-da-gal₂

In the river, may there be spring (carp) waters with him!

...

53 ambar-ra ku₆ mušen gu₃ ḫu-mu-da-ra-ra

In the marshes, may the fish and birds chatter with him!

These two images clearly refer to environmental abundance; the term **a-eštub** refers to the springtime, when milder temperatures cause the carp to spawn, ‘with spectacular splashing’ (Civil 1997: 52); whilst the reference in line 53 to the noise of these animals alludes to their great number. For discussion of this passage and its relationship with eroticism, see chapter 3.4.

A final instance of bird metaphor comes in the description of Inanna’s vulva in *Inanna-Dumuzi P*, **a-ša₃ uz^{mušen} ne-en uz^{mušen} dur₂-[ra]-^r gu₁₀** ⁷, ‘this field of ducks where my ducks sit’ (obv. col.ii, line 23). Jacobsen suggested that the ducks sitting dotted on the field were a metaphor for the hair upon the pubic mound (Jacobsen 1975:83).

2.2 Domestic Animals: The Male Body/Sexual Allure

In *Inanna-Dumuzi P*, the ox is a metaphor for the male body, working in conjunction with the field and ploughing metaphors in this text. Inanna wants the ox to plough and graze her field, **gal₄-la-gu₁₀ ki duru₅ a ma-ra/ga-ša-an-gen gu₄ a-ba-a bi₂-ib₂-gub-be₂**, ‘My vulva,

a flooded, wet place/ I am the lady-who will stand an ox there?’ (obv. col. ii. 27-8). In a recent article, Zisa suggested that the ox conceptualised the domestic, and therefore reproduction and fertility, whilst the aurochs conceptualised male sexual virility (Zisa 2023: 119-120). This is especially evident in the *nīš libbi* incantations, where the wild bull is frequently used to metaphorise male sexual drive (Zisa 2021a). In *Enki and the World Order*, the god is described as an aggressive (**u3-na**), rutting (**du7-du7**) ox (**gu4**) as he ejaculates and produces the river Tigris (ETCSL 1.1.3, line 252), a stark image of male (re)productive prowess.

Nonetheless, in *Inanna-Dumuzi P*, Inanna’s wishes for oxen to be stationed upon her ‘wet place’ suggests instead her desire for the male body to bring her repeated pleasure that does not have to denote discourses of reproductive fertility. After all, the repetitive action of the ploughing oxen, and that oxen can plough for prolonged periods of time, is evident in the *Farmer’s Instructions*:

Farmer’s Instructions³⁷⁷

38 u4 mul an-na šu im-ma-ab-du7-a-ta

When the stars in the sky are perfect,

39 10-am3 a2 gu4 a-ša3 zi-zi-i-da-še3 igi-zu nam-ba-e-gid2-i

nan (NEG)-ba (MM)-e (LOC)-make long-en (2SG)

You should not frown at bringing the strength of the oxen of the fields many times.

The use of repetition and rhythmic action as a means of expressing desire, pleasure, and penetrative intercourse, is evident in many metaphorical images across the “Love Songs” (see chapter 2.2 and 3.1). Note that the domesticated female cow acts as a metaphor for

³⁷⁷ Lines follow the edition in Civil 1994: 30-31. See also ETCSL 5.6.3.

sexual allure in the composition *Ninisina B*, line 24, **munus-e ab₂ a-e gar-ra-gen₇ i₃-li he₂-la₂-e**, ‘Fine oil clung to the woman like a cow stood in water’ (discussed in chapter 2.8). The image is explicitly erotic, arguably devoid of reproductive association.

2.3 Wild Animals: Allure, Kingship

Whilst **am**, ‘wild bull’, is an epithet of Dumuzi in the Sumerian “Love Songs” (Sefati 1998: 76), other wild animals do not metaphorise sexual drive, but contribute to the target domain of abundance, as well as sexual allure. There does not seem to be any obvious patterns to the ways wild animals are used as source domains in the “Love Songs”. Both predators and prey are present.

In the same passage where birds and fish appear in *Inanna-Dumuzi D1*, the wish is for wild animals to also be numerous, **ter-ter-ra šeg₉ šeg₉-bar he₂-en-da-lu**, ‘In the forests, may wild sheep and wild goats multiply with him’ (line 56). In *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, the manes of wild goats and deer describe the allure of Inanna, probably referring to her hair, but generally alluding to her beauty.³⁷⁸

Inanna-Dumuzi R

UM 55-21-309 (P257383)

2 [d¹] inanna ṽ kug₂-siki mul-mul-la si₁₂ sa₆-ga-am₃

Inanna, shining mane, she is *yellow* and beautiful,

3 [lu²ki-sikil] kug₂-siki tarah₃ x ṽ lu ṽ-lim x lu-lim-ma

Young woman, mane of the wild goat...the deer...of the deer,

³⁷⁸ See the *Song of Songs*, שְׂעָרֶיךָ כְּעֶדֶר הָעִזִּים שְׂגִלְשׁוֹ מֵהַר גִּלְעָד: ‘Your hair (is) like a flock of goats descending from mount Gilead’ (Song 4:1; JPS).

4 ᵀᵀᵀ inanna ᵀ kug₂-siki tarah x [lu]-lim x lu-lim-e

Inanna, mane of the wild goat...the deer...the deer.

Two unusual wild animal metaphors occur in *Šu-Suen A*:

Šu-Suen A

Ist Ni 2463 (P345315)

17 **uru₂-zu** ku₅-da-gen₇ šu ḥe₂-eb-ᵀ mu₂ ^{??379} **u₃-mu-un** ᵀᵀᵀ^dš^du-ᵀsuen-gu₁₀

May your city stretch its hand out to you like an *otter*, my lord Šu-Suen,

18 ur-ᵀ nim ᵀ-gen₇ giri₃-zu-še₃ ḥe₂-nu₂ **du₅-mu** ᵀᵀᵀ^dšul-gi-ra-ᵀ gu₁₀ ᵀ

Like a *leopard*,³⁸⁰ may it lie at your feet, my son of Šulgi.

These lines use animal imagery to conceptualise something about kingship and a ruler's relationship with his people. The animal in line 17 is perhaps an otter. For the many translations of **kus-da** and all attestations see Peterson 2007: 217-224. Peterson argued that the most likely translation of **kus-da** is the "otter", though the evidence is inconclusive.³⁸¹ The dexterous otter perhaps intimates something about skill or a friendly gesture towards the king. The *leopard* curled at the feet of the king is an image of docility (Peterson 2007: 83 n.329); the term may refer here to a cub (Peterson 2007: 219 n. 960).

³⁷⁹ Peterson transliterates the verb as **šu-zu** (Peterson 2007: 219), 'May your city, like a *kud-da* (perform the act of) **šu-zu**! The verb is also attested with **kus-da** in *Nanna's Journey to Nippur* and an **er₂-šem-ma** to Bau (Peterson 2007: 222), and is possibly diagnostic of an animal with skilful paws.

³⁸⁰ Attinger 2021: 1115. The term only appears in *Curse of Agade* (ETCSL 2.1.5 line 23), and *Enmerkara and Ensukukešdana* (ETCSL 1.8.2.4).

³⁸¹ Sefati understood **kus-da** as "cripple", possibly related to the adjective **kus.d/r** (Attinger 2021: 645, "estropie, invalide, mutilé, amputé"), as attested in the *Bird and Fish* disputation text, ETCSL 5.3.5 line 59. In *Bird and Fish*, the term is written **kus**, whilst its use elsewhere, seemingly as an aquatic animal, is written **kus-da** (Peterson 2007: 218ff). If the translation "cripple" is correct, the sense would be that the city will ask for aid from its king.

In *Inanna-Dumuzi B1*, though from a very broken context, Inanna is presented as mounting dogs and lions, **ur-ra mu-un-us ur-ra ʿ mu ʿ-[...]/[X] X X ur-maḥ-a ʿ mu ʿ-[...]/[...] X ur gal-la [...]**, ‘She mounted a dog, she [mounted] a dog,/[she mounted] a lion,/[she mounted] a big dog’ (lines 20-22). Despite the broken state of the tablet, the image is reminiscent of the depiction of Inanna/Ištar stepping upon the back of a lion, known from cylinder seals.³⁸² The goddess is likened to a ferocious lion (**pirig**) in *Inanna and Ebih*, lines 7-9 (ETCSL 1.3.2) where she is praised as the ‘queen of battle’ (**nin me3**, line 23). As noted above, Inanna’s warrior aspect is rarely alluded to in the “Love Songs”; her presiding over dogs and lions may be an exception (though it cannot be dismissed as a metaphor with sexual innuendo).³⁸³

3. Human Activity

Inanna and Dumuzi’s association with kingship and cultic events are sometimes referenced throughout the corpus.³⁸⁴ The experience of pleasure is occasionally aligned with the reign of kingship, bestowed by Inanna upon Dumuzi. Almost the entirety of *Inanna-Dumuzi G* is concerned with professional titles of, perhaps, administrative offices.

3.1 Reign: Sexual Pleasure

There are three texts in which it is referenced that Inanna gives a pleasing (**sa6**) reign to Dumuzi/an unnamed king. In *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, line 12, Inanna prepares her body to meet Dumuzi. Within this process, she states, ^{ges}**tukul-gu10 bala in-na-sa6-ga mu-zu**, ‘I know my weapon that made the reign pleasing for him’. The reign is perhaps euphemistically

³⁸² For example, there are a number of Old Babylonian seals in the British Museum which depict a ‘warrior goddess’ stepping her foot onto a lion, **BM 130694, BM 89058, BM 134765, BM 103314, BM 89268, BM 129528, BM 130695, BM 89017, BM 89169, BM 89766, BM 130694, BM 129529**. Thanks to L. Bampfield for sending me the museum numbers of these seals.

³⁸³ See *Enlil A*, ETCSL 4.05.1 lines 130 and 152; for **u5** meaning “to copulate” see Attinger 2021: 1090.

³⁸⁴ References to the royal realm are also found in the *Song of Songs*, where imagery associated with king Solomon is entwined with the dialogue of the lovers (Exum 2003; for an interpretation of this relationship in the *Song* as political, see Scott Spencer 2020).

positioned as the pleasurable time they will spend together, and her sexual attractiveness (her ‘weapon’) will make this time ‘sweet’ for him (see above). For the use of ‘knowing’ as a metaphor for sexual experience used elsewhere in the “Love Songs”, see chapters 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, and 3.2.

Similarly, in *Inanna-Dumuzi Y*, line 57, the female speaker wishes for her lover to be a pleasurable reign, **bala u4 sa6-ga e3 ħe2-me-en**, ‘May you be a reign that brings forth pleasurable days’. In this way, she wishes that the time spent with her lover will bring her pleasure. In *Inanna-Dumuzi D1*, Ninšubur orders Inanna to: **bala sa6-ga pa e3 šum2-mu-un-an**, ‘Give to him a sweet and *radiant* reign’ (line 38). Elsewhere in the corpus, **pa-e3** refers to the branches of the tree and constructs metaphors for the male beloved’s erection (see chapter 2.6). Perhaps here there is an innuendo.

3.2 Festival: Sexual Pleasure

In the same passage of *Inanna-Dumuzi Y* as discussed above, the female speaker wishes for her lover to also be a festival: **ezen sag-ki zalag-ga ħe2-me-en**, ‘May you be the festival that brightens the forehead’ (line 58). The phrase **sag-ki zalag-ga** literally translates as radiant/shining forehead/face (Attinger 2021: 1154). The term is often used to describe the shining faces of gods and kings.³⁸⁵ The line above calls for Dumuzi to be a ‘pleasurable reign’. Here, the same sense, that Dumuzi will bring Inanna something pleasurable, is intimated. Lines 56-58 of *Inanna-Dumuzi Y* are closely paralleled with lines in *Šulgi N*, (ETCSL 2.4.2.14 lines 61-63). Both passages use the precativish wish forms, and wish for another to be sweet words, a pleasurable reign, and a forehead-brightening feast (Sefati 1998: 279). In the context of the “Love Songs”, these things seem to take on sexual

³⁸⁵ For example, *Ninurta’s Return to Nibru*, ETCSL 1.6.1, line 176; *Šulgi X*, ETCSL 2.4.2.24, line 80; *Samsuiluna A*, ETCSL 2.8.3.1, line 26.

connotations. In *Ludingira*, the mother is also described in the fourth sign as a festival (**ezen**) that brings joy (ETCSL 5.5.1; Gadotti 2010: 120-121).

3.3 Administrative Offices: Abundance?

In *Inanna-Dumuzi G*, lines 4-7, the female speaker wishes for her lover to be (**he2-me-en**) a list of professional offices: **šeš ka2 e2-gal**, ‘brother of the palace gate’; **ensiz ma2-gur8**, ‘governor of the barge’; **nu-banda3 gešgigir**, ‘overseer of the chariots’; **šuš3 gešgigir**, ‘groom of the chariots’. I assume this list of professional titles are used metaphorically because they are literary constructs rather than real official titles. They are desirable to Inanna in some way, because in the final line of this text, Inanna wishes for her lover to join her in pleasure in the bedroom, **ze2-ba-gu10 ki-nu2-[a] [du5]/-mu\ -ni-ib-ze2-be2-en-de3-en**, ‘my sweet, let us delight ourselves in bed’ (line 16).³⁸⁶ Sefati suggested that ‘they liken him [the lover] to a series of administrative office holders whose proper and constant activity constituted a guarantee for the prosperity and security of the city and its inhabitants’ (Sefati 1998: 181). Abundance and prosperity are typically metaphorised through the source domains of food, agricultural produce, and precious materials. These things are primarily related to the abundant and pastoral environment in which the lovers meet, and how their feelings of desire are expressed (see chapter 3.4). Using these titles of “officials” to express prosperity would be a rare occasion in which city-life is utilised in this way.

4. Celestial: Female Body/Sexual Allure

Despite Inanna’s well-known astral aspect as Venus, the morning and evening star,³⁸⁷ celestial metaphors are scarce in the “Love Songs”. She is described twice as the moon. In *Inanna-Dumuzi P*, the shape of a crescent moon maps as a metaphor for the shape of the

³⁸⁶ It was pointed out to me by Andrew George that these could also be sexual innuendos- I think he might be right!

³⁸⁷ Perhaps worshipped in her astral aspect as early as archaic Uruk, see Szarzynska 1993:8.

vulva, **u4-sakar gibil-gen7 hi-li ʳ gur3 ʳ-[ru-gu10]**, ‘Like a new crescent moon, my alluring one’ (Inanna-Dumuzi P, obv. col. ii, line 21).

The moon is used as a source domain for the target domain of sexual allure in *Inanna-Dumuzi C1*:

Inanna-Dumuzi C1

Ist Ni 2377 (P345166)

col. ii

20 e2-e iti6-gen7 im-ma-na-ra-e3

i (VP)- m (VENT)-ba (MM)-n.na (3SG+DAT)-ta (ABL)-came out- Ø (3SG)

She came out from the house for him like the moon.

Assuming the simile refers to the radiant light of the moon coming out at night, here this represents Inanna’s beauty to Dumuzi; in lines 21-22, he sees and rejoices in her, before they kiss and embrace.³⁸⁸

5. Other Source Domains in the “Love Songs”: Summary

Though the source domains briefly explored in this chapter are not as frequent, they use similar mappings and primarily have the same target domains of other metaphors used more explicitly throughout the “Love Songs”. It is clear that the metaphor in the “Love Songs” is largely formed through source domains of food, plants, and agriculture, where abundance of produce contributes significantly to the texts’ eroticism (see chapter 3.4). However, a number of other source domains highlighted in this chapter demonstrate that experiences

³⁸⁸ In *Inanna E* (ETCSL 4.07.5), it is Ama-ušumgal-anna who is named as the moon: **iti-da u4-sakar-ra ʳsuen-gen7 an-ne za-ra ša-mu-ra-an-u3-tu**, ‘Each month, at the crescent moon, An created him (Ama-ušumgal-anna) like Suen for you’ (line 48). For an astrological interpretation of this text, see Foxvog 1993, who suggests this Dumuzi-moon imagery refers to the spring equinox and first appearance of Aries (the ram= Dumuzi).

from royal and city-life could also be used as erotic metaphors that mapped some aspects of desire, pleasure, allure, and abundance. Finally, it is notable that metaphors of or reference to the warrior/celestial aspects of the goddess Inanna that are celebrated in other Old Babylonian literary texts are scarce in the “Love Songs”. Where weapon or cosmological imagery is used to describe the goddess, it metaphorises her sexual allure and beauty.

3. Target Domains in the Sumerian “Love Songs”

In the previous section, I explored individual metaphorical source domains, and how they appeared and functioned as metaphors across the “Love Songs” corpus. In this section, I will take a wider perspective, and investigate these metaphors as a tool for understanding how domains of experience in the “Love Songs” were structured and conceptualised. One of the main mechanisms of the theory of conceptual metaphor is the idea of ‘domains of experience’, also called frames, schemas, or (experiential) *gestalts*, which ‘all designate a coherent organisation of human experience’ (Kövecses 2006: 64). A domain is ‘a structured mental representation of a conceptual category’ (Kövecses 2006: 64). The vast majority of metaphors in the Sumerian “Love Songs” map onto abstract domains of desire, pleasure, allure, as well as for the male and female bodies. The motif of environmental and agricultural Abundance is also a significant target domain in the “Love Songs”, though it is especially intertwined with the other target domains.

These depictions of the erotic are amongst the earliest in written history and give one of the fullest and extended representations of sexual domains of experience from the ancient Mesopotamian world. The concepts that they portray, particularly desire and pleasure, have been consistently philosophised and theorised since classical antiquity. Though the writers of the “Love Songs” were certainly not developing a statement or discussion on these topics as advanced much later in Graeco-Roman philosophical works, the way that they are depicted metaphorically can tell us something of how desire, pleasure, allure, and eroticism were conceptualised at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE.

3.1 Desire and Arousal

Tackling what desire is and how it works has been the pursuit of philosophers since Plato and Aristotle. In the ancient Mesopotamian world, there exists no explicit discussion of what desire was or how it was structured as a concept, but the extended, metaphorical portrayals of sexual desire in the Sumerian “Love Songs” might be the earliest accounts of what desire looked like and how it manifested itself.³⁸⁹ In this section, I will highlight patterns in the use of certain metaphorical source domains for sexual desire in the Sumerian “Love Songs” and explore how these patterns can inform us of how desire, and its physical manifestations (arousal), were conceptualised in the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE.

1. Theories of Desire

I will begin this section by briefly outlining how the complex concept of desire has been approached by philosophers and psychologists. In classical antiquity, bodily desire, including sexual desire, was seemingly designated as irrational, compared to a rational desire for knowledge:

Now, of desires some are irrational, others rational. I call irrational all those that are not the result of any assumption. Such are all those that are called natural; for instance, those that come into existence through the body—such as the appetite for food, thirst and hunger; the appetite for such and such food in particular; the desires connected with taste and sexual pleasures, or generally, with touch; and with smell, hearing, and sight (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1370a, Trans. Freese 2020: 113-114).

³⁸⁹ It is difficult to ascertain if there are any ‘literal’ expressions of desire in the “Love Songs” that do not use metaphorical imagery. As argued by Conceptual Metaphor Theory, abstract emotions are necessarily structured as a metaphorical process (chapter 1.4 Theory).

Plato, too, distinguished between a rational erotic love and an animalistic, unruly sexual desire that he emphasised should be restrained (Toates 2014: 75-76). Moreover, hedonism was treated by Aristotle as the ‘most important motive for wrongdoing and pain’ (see Trans.Freese 2020: xvii), and this motif appears in other cultures; desire is the cause of suffering in Buddhist philosophy and is the root of sin in Christianity. Tangled with philosophies of desire is a consistent belief in dualism of body and mind, whereby the pursuit of carnal sexual pleasure is considered inferior and even harmful compared to pure, intellectual pursuits of the mind.³⁹⁰

Modern approaches to the study of human sexuality extensively debate whether sexual desire is a physiological, hormonal, cognitive, emotional, or psychological response (Regan/Bersheid 1999), and in psychoanalytic terms has been varyingly characterised as *lack*, as *production*, and as a *drive* (e.g., by Freud, Lacan, Deleuze and Guatarri). The topic of sexual desire has also become significant amongst feminist and queer theory, as presupposing desire as a biological instinct to reproduce has constructed heterosexuality as normative (Rich 1980; Richardson 2000).

One of the most common frameworks within which to view sexual desire is as an ‘innate motivational force (eg.an instinct, drive, need, urge, appetite, wish, or want)’ (Regan/Bersheid 1999: 22ff). Psychoanalysts such as Freud considered *libido* as biological

³⁹⁰ For example, we find this also in Islamic approaches to pleasure, many of which were influenced by Aristotle (Rizvi 2018). In Western philosophy, dualism is discussed by Descartes and Kant. Of course, alongside these philosophical and theoretical pursuits, erotic literature, as well as erotic iconography, festivities, and practices in various cultures (such as the concept of *eros* that permeated classical Greek culture, or the Sanskrit erotic manual the *kāmāsūtra*) has co-existed and also portrayed the concept of sexual desire in a manner which might appear quite separate from its philosophical positioning as irrational or sinful; for example, depictions of desire in the *Song of Songs* in the Hebrew Bible or erotic poetry in the Islamic tradition (Rizvi 2018; Kugle 2007) might appear contradictory to the cultural beliefs that frame them. But it is important to remember that ‘accounts of sexual desire do not exist in a social vacuum [...] Rather, societal attitudes, prohibitions and morals to some extent reflect the contemporary understanding of desire and contribute to theories on its nature’ (Toates 2014: 22). Depictions of desire in erotic literature contribute to the understanding of how a culture conceptualised this domain of experience.

drive (Freud 1920), whilst later sex behavioural theorists and psychologists also considered sexual desire as a biological motivator akin to hunger, with an individual seeking out sexual gratification as a person seeks out food (Kon 1987: 258; Toates 2014: 89). Eating, drinking, and desire have been shown to share both internal brain processes and are influenced by similar external factors (Toates 2014: 96).

However, one criticism of the motivational model of sexual desire, aside from its adherence to heteronormativity and biological determinism (Jackson 2004: 30), is that unlike hunger, *not* satiating desire does not physically cause harm to body tissues, meaning desire cannot be as instinctual/biological as hunger or thirst. Instead, an incentive-based model of desire has been proposed that counters viewing desire as a *drive*: ‘Whereas *desires* are intentional and fixed on some object, so that the subject acts to fulfil desire, *drives* are pushed, so to speak, from behind’ (Cameron/Frazer 1987: 83; Toates 2014: 103). With sexual desire, the incentive is often the ‘pull exerted by another individual’ (Toates 2014: 206), argued by some to even be created externally in the desired partner or object, since desire draws an individual towards the other (Verhulst/Heiman 1979: 21). Berlant wrote, ‘Desire visits you as an impact from the outside, and yet [...] makes you feel as though it comes from within you’ (Berlant 2012: 6).

Other theorists have also defined sexual desire as a cognitive or emotional phenomenon aroused by the senses, a sensation that ‘arises either spontaneously from within the individual or is externally stimulated by sensory (eg. visual) erotic cues’ (Regan/Berscheid 1999: 25). This structuring of desire also appears to fit the incentive-based model, where desire ‘reflects a wish for - a ‘wanting of’ - sexual contact, an engagement of the mind with sexual thoughts, fantasy, and imagery’ (Toates 2014: 107). Sexual desire is a *wish* for sexual pleasure. The Austrian psychologist Fritz Heider defined desire as: a wish/want that ‘may exist long before a specific action is taken to satisfy it, or without it

ever being actualized in action’ (Heider 1958: 128). He argued that ‘the fulfilment of desire is *always* linked to pleasure’, because the anticipation of pleasure is essential to why desire arises, though the pleasure itself need not take place (Regan/Berscheid 1999: 14).

2. Desire in Mesopotamia

Aside from the love literature, one of the main sources for information on how desire was conceptualised in ancient Mesopotamia are the ŠA₃.ZI.GA/*nīš libbi* incantations, used to counter a *loss* of a man’s sexual desire.³⁹¹ In a recent edition of the corpus, Zisa argued that the mind-body dualism did not exist in Mesopotamia; desire was therefore not considered singularly as a corporeal or “psychological” phenomena, but ‘as a sexual desire experienced *with* and *by* the body[...] in the *libbu*’s raising: *a bodily sexual desire* (Zisa 2021a: 53; see also 19-34, 42-53). A singular example will suffice here; Zisa demonstrates that the following excerpt from an incantation expresses a ‘direct relationship’ between “sexual desire” (*nīš libbi*) and penile erection; the two different metaphors demonstrate that *nīš libbi* was not only bodily arousal:

nīš lib₃-bi-ia lu A^{meš} ID₂ a--^ṛ ku ^ṛ-^ṛ u ^ṛ-^ṛ ti ^ṛ

May my sexual desire be constant river water!

u₂-ša₂-ri lu-u šer₃-an sa-mi-^ṛ e ^ṛ

May my penis be a harp string,

³⁹¹ Another source for this is the sexual omens from the first millennium BCE, collected upon tablets 103 and 104 of the terrestrial omen series *šumma ālu*, which, like the *nīš libbi* incantations, give a male orientation of erotic experience and desire (Guinan 1997: 462). The inherent structure of the omens means that there are social and cultural consequences ascribed to different kinds of sexual behaviour that particularly impact male identity; for example, Guinan notes that sexual advances directed by a woman towards a man have a negative apodosis that is inauspicious for the male involved (Guinan 1997: 464). As a source for understanding Mesopotamian conceptualisations of desire, it must be considered that the omens are structured across strict binaries and oppositions, and the different consequences of sexual behaviour always place normative male sexuality as dominant, whilst female is passive and subjected, which, as discussed by Guinan, replaces the actual ‘erotic reciprocity’ of sexual experiences (Guinan 1997: 468). As discussed below, strict binaries between the expression of male and female desire are not apparent in the “Love Songs”.

la u₂-^r ra ^r-^r da ^r/ ul-tu₂ mu^h-^hi-ša₂ TU₆ EN₂

So that it will not dangle out of her! Incantation Formula' (No. A.1: 35-37; Zisa 2021a: 45).

This *bodily sexual desire* is also tangible in the Sumerian “Love Songs”; desire is conceptualised both as a *wish* for pleasure and metaphorised through imagery of the wet female body and penile erection. Both a more ‘abstract’ form of desire and its physical manifestations will be examined in this chapter.

3. Desire in the Sumerian “Love Songs”

There are several ways that the metaphor in the “Love Songs” can reveal a glimpse of how sexual desire was structured conceptually, and how it manifested itself. In exploring *what* is metaphorically positioned as desirable, *how* it is identifiable as desirable, and *who* desires it, in this section I will demonstrate how in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, desire is constructed as incentive-based, the *wish* and *want* for pleasure.

4. What is Desirable?

The analysis of the metaphorical source domains in the previous section demonstrates that food produce, plants, and trees, as well as precious minerals and materials are the objects of desire for the lovers across the corpus. The presence of food metaphors for sexual desire is unsurprising considering the pervasiveness of this metaphorical relationship in both ancient and modern erotic literature. The types of produce used as source domains for desire and arousal in the “Love Songs” range from sweet (or sweetened), sugary foods and drinks such as honey, fruit, wine, and beer; animal by-products like milk and butter; as well as staple agricultural crops of flax, barley, and grain.

As suggested in the chapter on honey metaphor (2.1), sweetness permeates the “Love Songs” corpus; the adjectives **du₁₀.g/ze₂-eb** and **ku₇-ku₇.d** signify the desirability of the objects and actions they modify. Modern scientific approaches have proven that attraction to sweet tastes is innate and universal. Humans have a ‘strong pleasure response’ to sweet tasting foods, and studies have shown that the parts of the brain that are activated when tasting something sweet are the same as when consuming certain addictive drugs.³⁹² It is argued that the human senses evolved to detect energy rich foods that taste sweet; the pleasure response from consuming sweet things is dubbed “a human’s natural reward”. Studies suggest that sweet, palatable foods are often desired by adults and children, even when a person is satiated. Perhaps another one of the reasons to desire sweet-tasting foods is because they have been shown to have pain and stress-reducing properties (Drewnowski et al 2012). The *want* for an intense pleasure response from tasting sweet and sweetened foods naturally maps metaphorically onto feelings of sexual desire. The clustering of honey metaphor and terms for sweetness in *Šu-Suen B* demonstrates how the want for sweetness is used to convey the urgency of sexual desire: **hi-li ʿ ag₂ ʿ ze₂-ba-ʿ zu ʿ ga-ba-ḥul₂-ḥul₂-le-en-ʿ de₃ ʿ -en/ ge-ru ag₂ ze₂-ze₂-ʿ ba ʿ du₅-mu-u₈-ʿ AK ʿ / ze₂-ba kal-la-gu₁₀ lal₃-e da-ag₂-e-ga**, ‘Let us enjoy your allure, the sweet thing,/ *Lover*, let me do sweet things to you!/ My precious sweet, let me bring you to the honey!’ (lines 12-14, chapter 2.1). Desire in the “Love Songs” is therefore conceptualised as a *want* for a strong pleasure response.³⁹³

A similar model can be seen in the use of animal by-products such as milk and butter as metaphors for desire. In many cultures and mythologies, the symbolism attached to milk

³⁹² Lenoir et al. 2007 found in their experiments with rats that the subjects chose substances sweetened with sugar or an artificial sweetener over cocaine.

³⁹³ Some neuroscientists differentiate between the experiences of ‘liking’ and ‘wanting’; liking might be considered an unconscious hedonic reaction to a sensory experience, whilst wanting is a more conscious affective experience (Kringelbach/Berridge 2009).

and other dairy products is complex (Valenze 2011).³⁹⁴ There is a contradiction seen in the ancient world between milk symbolising fecundity, rooted in its ‘tightly defined relationship between a female parent and offspring’ (Valenze 2011: 28), and its inherent scarcity, conditional on the cycles of animals. Milk is also perishable and would have been difficult to keep for long in the ancient world.³⁹⁵ This paradox makes milk and its by-products fundamentally desirable foodstuffs. In the Old Babylonian Sumerian disputation *Dumuzi and Enkimdu* (ETCSL 4.08.33 line 17A), butter and milk are explicitly deemed as desirable: ‘*is 3-ni du10-ga-am3 ga-3 ni 3 [du10-ga-am3]*, ‘His butter is sweet, his milk is sweet’. The farmer’s best beer is paralleled with the shepherd’s yellow milk (**ga si12-a-gu10**), a substance that is desired by the goddess in *Inanna-Dumuzi P*: **ga si12-a-ma-ab**, ‘make the milk yellow for me!’ (col iii. Lines 18-20, chapter 2. 7) . Stol suggested that **ga si12** was likely ‘sour milk’ or *leben* (Stol 1993: 100-101); he quotes the following from an ethnographical study of a modern Iraqi village, used here to demonstrate the pleasure and enjoyment from consuming these food products,

“- I made yoghurt from the water-buffalo milk, which was richer than the milk yielded by the settlement's undernourished cows. (...) Still foaming, the milk was put to boil. It cooled during the night. In the morning we skimmed off the cream, a rich, thick butter-like substance (*gaymar*) which was delicious with jam on toast...”

Like metaphors that use sweet foods, using milk and butter to metaphorise desire suggest that desire was a *want*. Milk and butter were products dependent on the gestation periods of

³⁹⁴ For example, in Hindu mythology, milk and butter play a key role in the creation of the cosmos when the gods churn the ocean waters; from the churned mass comes the universe (Valenze 2011: 13). In Egyptian mythology, the goddess Isis is associated with life-giving milk, depicted nursing infant pharaohs (Valenze 2011: 15ff). In ancient Greece, women’s milk-production contributed to the view that women were inherently ‘leaky’ and dangerous (Valenze 2011: 21ff).

³⁹⁵ Milk was then processed into by-products that could be stored (see Stol 1993).

animals; desire for them is then for something that was not a given constant, but that ebbed and flowed along natural cycles.

The use of barley, flax, and grain as source domains for desire is rooted in the fact that abundance of agricultural production was a luxury (Feldman 2015), that elsewhere is presented as being provided by the king due to his relationship with the gods (Winter 2010a). The desire for fields, gardens, and orchards in the “Love Songs” also replicates this motif of a wish for abundance and fecundity. An appetite for luxury maps onto the desire of the lovers in the corpus; the male speaker in *Inanna-Dumuzi O* wishes for the female to be barley planted in the furrow: **še ab-sin2-¹na ²x x ³sa6 ⁴-ga ħe2-me-en/^dezina2 x x sa6-ge ħe2-me-en**, ‘May you be beautiful...barley in the furrow,/May you be beautiful...Ezinam (grain)’ (lines 18-19, chapter 2.2). Like milk and butter, success of agricultural production was not a constant, at the peril of the natural world and the gods.³⁹⁶ Desire for these things is therefore a want for something that cannot be consumed or produced all the time.

Similarly, the aesthetic beauty and material worth of precious materials like lapis and silver were also a luxury of the elite, and a wish to obtain them readily map onto feelings of sexual desire. The female speaker in *Šu-Suen C* wishes for the king to embody these materials: **ku3 ^{na4}za-gin3-na u3-mu-un-me ħe2-me-en**, ‘Of silver and lapis, may you be our lord!’ (line 19, chapter 2.8). Attestations of inscribed precious materials gifted to queens and concubines of the Ur III kings, such as the necklaces of Ayya-bašti and Kubatum found at

³⁹⁶ The misery of this is best exemplified in the city lamentations; for example, in the *Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur* (ETCSL 2.2.3), lines 129-30, **a-ša3-ga še gu-nu nu-gal2 ug3-e nu-gu7-e/pu2 ^{geš}kiri6-bi gir4-gen7 ba-ħur-ħur eden-bi sag2 ba-ab-di**, ‘The barley and flax of the fields was no more, the people do not eat/Their orchards were scorched like an oven, its steppe was scattered’.

Uruk,³⁹⁷ suggest that precious materials and objects could also be gifts of affection, as well as prestige.

The way that desire is usually configured in the “Love Songs” as the *want* for a desirable object, may it be food or produce or materials, suggests that desire was conceptualised as an externally created phenomena, a feeling that commences from a desired partner or object, *not* as a biological (ie. internal) instinct or *drive*.³⁹⁸ Characteristic of the items that come to metaphorise desire in the “Love Songs” is their inconsistent nature and occasional scarcity in the ancient world. Sexual desire is therefore paralleled with a craving for tantalising, intermittent instances of pleasure.³⁹⁹

5. How to Identify Desire?

The desire for foodstuffs, produce, and precious objects is evident through consistent and repetitive use of verbal wish forms throughout the “Love Songs” corpus. In many cases, the speakers express themselves with the precative or cohortative, leaving the action in an uncompleted state of anticipation. There are approximately 253 times throughout the texts that the precative and cohortative verbal prefixes (Emegir **hV-** and **ga-**; Emesal **da-**, **du-**, **de₃-**) are used, expressing wish or intention for things that have not yet taken place or for objects not yet obtained.⁴⁰⁰ Not only do these verb forms work to express the desire of the speakers of the texts, but they are often repetitively used. Clustering of these verb forms creates a heightened tension that reflects the urgency of sexual desire and captures an anticipation for pleasure; for example, in *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, **ḏama-ušumgal-ḫ an ḫ-na ga-**

³⁹⁷ The necklace of Ayya-bašti is a remarkable piece of jewellery, a silver thread set with agate, gold, and carnelian beads. The Kubatum necklace was made with gold thread with small gold and turquoise beads, otherwise unattested (E3/2.1.4.28-30, Frayne 1997).

³⁹⁸ Contrary to a motivational model of desire (see above).

³⁹⁹ Some areas of neuroscience disagree that pleasure is simply the fulfilment of desire, ‘since getting what you desire does not always lead to pleasure’ (Kringelbach/Berridge 2009).

⁴⁰⁰ In *Inanna-Dumuzi A-FI* (ETCSL 4.08.01-32), and *Šu-Suen A, B, C* (ETCSL 2.4.4.1-3). The amount is approximate because it takes count from composite texts only.

gu₁₀ ga-ga-gu₁₀ di-di dus-mu-u₅-zu^{/u²numun₂-še₃ʔ} ga-gu₁₀ ga^ʔ-gu₁₀-še₃ʔ ga-gu₁₀ di-di dus-mu-u₅-zu /^{geš}asal₂ ki se₉-še₃ ga-gu₁₀ di-di dus-mu-u₅-zu, ‘May I know the way (of) Ama-ušumgal-anna, my milk, my cream!/May I know the way to the rushes, my milk, to my milk, my milk!/May I know the way to the poplar, the cold place, my milk!’ (lines 22-24, discussed in chapters 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8). Significantly, the action never progresses in this text past this passage; an indicative verb is not used. Desire is presented as an anticipation for pleasure that does not need to be actualised.

The use of these verb forms follows regular patterns throughout the corpus. The speaker might express a desire to achieve a pleasurable state. This is either the wish to do something to a lover:

- a) **ag₂ ze₂-ze₂-ba dus-mu-u₈-AK**, ‘Let **me** do the sweetest things to you!’,

Šu-Suen B, line 9.

- b) **e-ne su₃-ud ga(BI)[!]-da-e**, ‘Let **me** have sex with you’,

Inanna-Dumuzi H, line 20.

For the lover to perform an action for the speaker:

- c) **i₃ sag ga sag mi₂ de₃-ga₂-ab-be₂**, ‘May **he** please me with top butter and top milk!’,

Inanna-Dumuzi C1, line 12.

Or for the couple to achieve pleasure together:

- d) **gal₄-la-ga₂-ke₄-eš/ga-ba-hul₂-hul₂-le-en-de₃-en**, ‘Let **us** rejoice about my vulva!’,

Inanna-Dumuzi C, line 43.

The precative is used either to express a desired outcome:

- e) **he₂-bulug₃-e he₂-bulug₃-e**, ‘May it grow! May it grow!’,

Inanna-Dumuzi Q, line 7.

Or to express the speaker's wish for their lover to *be* something, using the verb **ḫe2-me-en**:

f) **zabar-šu dadag-ga ḫe2-me-en**, 'May you be a shining mirror!'

Inanna-Dumuzi Y, line 59.

Repetition in the "Love Songs" also assists in identifying when an image is working as a metaphor for sexual desire.⁴⁰¹ For example, the insistent repetition of honey and sweetness in *Šu-Suen B* (chapter 2.1), and the repetitive requests of Inanna for Dumuzi to 'make the milk yellow' in *Inanna-Dumuzi P* (chapter 2.8) creates tension and an expectation of a climax. Repetition in the "Love Songs" mimics the urgency of sexual desire, incited by an imagined action, object, or person.⁴⁰² As with the use of modal verbal prefixes, the construction of these metaphors works beyond simply the concrete object, and repetition contributes to the metaphorisation of sexual desire.⁴⁰³

6. The Direction of Desire

Desire is most often expressed by the female speaker (Table 1), directed towards her male lover. It is possible that in the "Love Songs" corpus we are dealing specifically with a

⁴⁰¹ Repetition in Sumerian (see Limet 1976) and Akkadian literary texts is one of their key poetic features: 'It adds body to the narrative, heightens tension, allows the development of details and the introduction of subjective elements, sometimes in a very subtle way. It may bring two (or more) events together through which the second becomes more significant by means of its associations with the first; and it may in a very specific and poetical way work towards a climax through cumulations if identical expectations, only realised at the end, but already predicted at the beginning (Vogelzang 1996: 168).

⁴⁰² Sefati also highlighted the use of repetition and parallelism in the corpus and gives examples (Sefati 1998: 62ff) but does not comment on the effect of such poetic devices.

⁴⁰³ This also corresponds with Harshav's frame of reference theory; for Harshav, metaphor is not limited to linguistic syntax, and a metaphor's frame of reference is 'a construct based on discontinuous elements in a text, which are linked to each other by some kind of flexible but necessary "semantic syntax"' (Harshav 2007: 38-39).

construction and depiction of female desire. When male desire is depicted, it is seemingly in the same manner as female desire.⁴⁰⁴

Source Domain	Text	Male or Female desire?
Flax	A, lines 6-7.	Female
Grain	A, lines 51-53.	Female
	O, line 10.	Male
Grape/grapevine	O, line 12	Male
Honey	Y, line 32	Female
	ŠSB, lines 2, 4, 25	Female
	ŠSC, line 21	Female
Butter	C, lines 32, 48	Female
Milk	C, lines 32, 48	Female
	P, lines 18, 20, 22, 24, 25, 26	Female
	C1, col. i. 12	Female
Barley	O, line 9	Male
	ŠSC, line 20	Female
“Red berry”	T, line 40	Female
	Z, rev. line 17’, 19’	Female
	D1, 8	Female
	Inanna G, line 51	Female
Lapis lazuli	T, line 41	Female
	D1, line 8	Female
	ŠSC, line 19	Female
Mirror	Y, line 59	Female
Wine	C1, col.i. 14	Female
Silver	ŠSC, line 19	Female
Field	Šulgi Z, lines 10, 11, 12, 13, 18, 19	Male
Garden	Šulgi Z, lines 10, 11, 12,	Male

⁴⁰⁴ Such as a passage in *Inanna-Dumu*zi O and in *Šulgi Z*, where the precative verbs indicate a wish/want by the male speaker. There is not really enough evidence to say whether there is an ungendered, ‘one-sex’ model of desire in the Sumerian “Love Songs” (Laquer 1990).

Poplar Tree	Šulgi Z, line 15	Male
Apple Tree	Šulgi Z, line 16	Male
Pomegranate Tree	Šulgi Z, line 18	Male

Table 1 Distribution of female or male desire expressed through metaphor in the Sumerian "Love Songs"

As already pointed out by Cooper, depictions of male and female sexuality in Sumerian literature are markedly different. The phallogentric, reproductive sexuality of Enki, for example, contrasts with the sensuous depictions of female desire we find in the "Love Songs" (Cooper 1989; 1997: 88). Cooper also briefly compared the 'female voices' of the "Love Songs" with the explicit expressions of male sexuality in the ŠA₃.ZI.GA/ *nīš libbi* incantations, 'sweet herbs emanate from a different world of metaphor and simile than the rutting quadrupeds of the potency incantation' (Cooper 1997: 92). Comparing how desire is constructed in the ŠA₃.ZI.GA/*nīš libbi* incantations to its expression in the "Love Songs" may reveal interesting results. An initial analysis of the ŠA₃.ZI.GA/*nīš libbi* metaphors, for example, suggests that male desire is constructed as much more of a biological *drive* and urge, sensed particularly through the plentiful wild animal metaphors, that 'convey ideas related to active, irrepressible, vigorous male sexuality' (Zisa 2021a: 97).⁴⁰⁵

It is probably not possible to ascertain whether the way that desire was felt or expressed was really thought to be different in women and men in ancient Mesopotamia. Physical manifestations of arousal in the "Love Songs" are certainly expressed using different metaphorical domains (see below), but the abstract expression of desire is not

⁴⁰⁵ Zisa also highlights weather metaphors that depict an 'uninterrupted, prosperous' male desire; 'May the wind blow! May the grove quake! May the cloud gather! May the moisture fall!' (No. A.1: 33–34; Zisa 2021a: 146). He also notes the use of weapon and martial imagery that forms a relationship between sexual intercourse and battle: 'May [the quiver not become empty]! May the bow not slacken! /May the batt[le of my love]-making be fought and may we lie down (together) by night! / [Incantation formula]. [Nī]š libbi Inc[anta]tion. [Its ritual]: You make a bow of a thorn [. . .]' (No. J.2: 10–13; Zisa 2021a: 196). Across the ancient Middle East, the image of the bow operates as a symbol of masculinity and manhood (Zisa 2021a: 197–199). To shoot an arrow mimics penetration, and therefore metaphorically positions male desire as an act of conquest. Weapon imagery is scarce in the Sumerian "Love Songs". A weapon is only mentioned once, in *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, line 12, and appears to actually metaphorise Inanna's sexual allure (see chapter 2.10).

distinct in this corpus. The contrast of desire in the “Love Songs” with the ŠA₃.ZI.GA/nīš libbi incantations is probably more to do with context and purpose. Whilst the incantation corpora have an explicit purpose of inciting male penile arousal and desire, the “Love Songs” formulate desire replete with anticipation, wishing, wanting, and objects that are tantalising for their intermittent availability - these aspects feed into their specifically erotic agenda (see chapter 1.3).

7. Arousal

In modern approaches to desire, physical sexual arousal is usually distinguished from desire (Regan/Berscheid 1999: 15ff; Toates 2014: 170). This is because genital sexual arousal may occur unconsciously, especially in women, unaccompanied by feelings of desire (Toates 2014: 171ff). As already mentioned above, sexual desire in the “Love Songs” is both psychological and corporeal. Male arousal is characterised by the actions of growing and budding, usually of trees which consistently act as metaphors for the penis, or with source domains of precious stones and objects with textually hard properties (see chapters 2.6 and 2.9). Female sexual arousal is metaphorically mapped from entailments of wetness and liquids. Honey, beer, grapes, berries, and the wet agricultural landscape all metaphorise arousal, and therefore the desire, of the female characters.

The aroused (ie. wet or erect) genitals are usually accompanied by identifiable expressions of desire, demonstrating the united concept of abstract/physical desire in ancient Mesopotamia. For example, in *Inanna-Dumuzi P*, the vulva is depicted as a wet field when Inanna repeatedly asks, and then demands, for Dumuzi to ‘plough’ her (col. ii. lines 18-31, chapter 2.5). A relationship between genital arousal and (abstract) desire can also be postulated because some source domains map metaphorically onto both target domains. In *Šu-Suen B*, honey metaphorises both emotional and physical desire: **hi-li-zu ag₂ ze₂-ba-am₃**

lal₃-am₃ ku₇-ku₇-da, ‘Your allure is a sweet thing, it is the sweetest honey’ (ie. desirable);
 𒂗 **e₂ 𒂗 ki-nu₂-a lal₃ hab₂ du₁₁-ga-ba**, ‘In the bedroom, made *dripping* with honey (ie. wet texture of arousal). In *Inanna-Dumuzi B*, line 3, the wetness of a grape metaphorises the aroused female body (**geštin duru₅-gu₁₀ lal₃ ku₇-𒂗 ku₇ 𒂗-gu₁₀**, ‘my wet grape, my sweetest honey’), whilst in *Inanna-Dumuzi O*, line 12, the male speaker desires for his lover to *be* a grapevine (^{ges}**geštin? he₂-me-en**).

8. Desire in the Sumerian “Love Songs”: Summary

The metaphorical construction of sexual desire and arousal in the Sumerian “Love Songs” reveals several interesting, albeit subtle, glimpses of how desire as an abstract and embodied experience was conceived in these Old Babylonian compositions. Centred upon intrinsically desirable produce and objects, and expressed through wishes, desire is presented as an *expectation* for a pleasure response and fits with a modern incentive-based model of desire. An action need not be actualised, nor an object obtained for desire to be felt; rather it is the sense of anticipation aroused by an external object or partner. Desire in the “Love Songs” is not necessarily a gendered experience, but desire that manifests corporeally is presented as distinct.

3.2 Sexual Pleasure

Pleasure is a complex topic. In the erotic context of the Sumerian “Love Songs”, the pleasure that is depicted and that has been analysed in this thesis is sexual, related to sexual activity and amatory emotions. However, it is clear that the embodied sensations that map onto the target domain of sexual pleasure in the texts relate to other kinds of pleasures experienced by the human body and mind. This correlates to a difficulty approached in modern neuroscience about how the human brain responds to pleasure, and whether the sensation of pleasure arises in the same way to different triggers. In this section, I will try to understand how (sexual) pleasure was perceived to feel and how it was conceptualised in the Sumerian “Love Songs”. As in the previous section, I will briefly outline relevant philosophical and theoretical discussions about the concept of pleasure, before turning to think about how pleasure is manifested in Mesopotamian sources. I will then explore the target domain of sexual pleasure in the “Love Songs”, using metaphor to track how sexual pleasure was perceived as akin to other embodied experiences.

1. Theories of Pleasure

The concept of pleasure, like desire (chapter 3.1), has been discussed by philosophers since classical antiquity. More recently, it has increasingly become a topic of interest in the fields of psychology and neuroscience. Within all of these disciplines, there is a consensus that humans experience different kinds of pleasures. For Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus, there was a clear distinction between false pleasures of the body and true pleasures of the mind (Dubé/le Bel 2003: 265-6).⁴⁰⁶ Much later, pleasures are categorised into sensory or aesthetic,

⁴⁰⁶ This kind of dualism is also present in early Islamic approaches to pleasure (Rizvi 2018). For Plato, pleasure was also always connected with pain, two concepts that are regularly linked (Fletcher 2018). The idea that desire for pleasure is a painful experience, in that one longs for the end of desire (de Sousa 2015: 39-40), is exemplified in Shakespeare’s sonnet 129, ‘Th’ expense of spirit in a waste of shame/Is lust in action; and till action, lust/Is perjured, murd’rous, bloody, full of blame...’.

as well as feelings of accomplishment (Duncker 1941), and further divided elsewhere into physio-, socio-, psycho-, and ideo-pleasures (Tiger 1992:53-60). It is obvious that there are many different stimuli for pleasure.

In emotion studies and cognitive science, defining pleasure is difficult, and is often related to happiness, satisfaction, hedonic responses, and positive emotion (Russell 2003: 161). Neuroscience has attempted to answer whether pleasure is the same as getting what we want or liking something; whether pleasure is an unconscious response to an external stimulus; or if it is a more subjective experience:

The experience of one pleasure often seems very different from another. Eating delicious foods, experiencing romantic or sexual pleasures, using addictive drugs, listening to music, or seeing a loved one: each feels unique. The only psychological feature in common would seem that all are pleasant. However, the difference in one's subjective experiences is not necessarily a good guide to the underlying neural mechanisms. Those neural mechanisms may overlap to a surprising degree. Over the last decades, a growing set of results from neuroimaging studies have suggested that many diverse rewards activate a shared or overlapping brain system: a "common currency" reward network of interacting brain regions. Pleasures of food, sex, addictive drugs, friends and loved ones, music, art, and even sustained states of happiness can produce strikingly similar patterns of brain activity (Berridge/Kringelbach 2015: 649).

Some psychologists and cognitive scientists assume that the brain's pleasure response evolved as a survival measure, 'to generate pleasant or unpleasant feelings to those aspects of the environment that were a consistent benefit or threat to gene survival in ancestral environments' (Johnston 2003: 173). Others view pleasure as an indicator of homeostasis

(Cabanac 1992). However, contrary to these theories that the brain's pleasure response is evolutionary and biological, pleasure (and the things that trigger it) is also a product of culture (Bloom 2010: 6).⁴⁰⁷

Pleasure is considered as fundamentally motivating of all human action (Shapiro 2018: 2), intricately related to desire. Pleasures that are considered as instinctual behaviours, such as sex and eating, have also been recognised as cyclical in nature, following cycles of motivational, consummatory, and satiatory phases. These pleasure triggers also interestingly tend to involve a 'high degree of rhythmicity', such as chewing or vaginal penetration (Georgiadis/Kringelbach 2012). With regards to sexual pleasure, an empirical cognitive study suggests that there is a distinction between anticipated and experienced pleasure, where the former is affected by past experiences, but also by socio/cultural norms and individual expectation about certain sexual behaviours (Pinkerton et al. 2003: 350-1). The authors of the study also note that desire for physical pleasure is not the only reason that people have sexual contact; love, intimacy, but again, socio-cultural factors also play a role.

2. Pleasures in Ancient Mesopotamia

Though the Sumerian "Love Songs" are concerned with sexual pleasures, it is obvious that pleasure in ancient Mesopotamia, like today, was associated with a variety of activities and sensations. Though there has been no specific analysis of the concept of pleasure, there are studies that have focused on semantically related emotions such as joy and happiness in Sumerian and Akkadian literature and royal inscriptions (Mander 2003; Luukko 2020; Morello 2022), as well as the vocabulary associated with these emotions (Jaques 2006; 2022; Wende 2022).

⁴⁰⁷ In a study on pleasure in imperial Rome, Laurence argued that the frequent debauchery of the Roman emperors placed pleasure, whether sensual or aesthetic, central to the definition and parameters of their culture (Laurence 2010).

Activities such as eating and drinking were identifiably associated with pleasure; for example, in various Old Babylonian Sumerian literary texts, it was shown in chapter 2.5 that drinking beer was considered pleasurable (**ul-te**) and caused joy (**hulz**; see also Mander 2003; Jaques 2006: 33-5,45). Dancing, too, was considered a pleasurable activity, attested in various literary sources (Gabbay 2003). A passage from the Old Babylonian *Epic of Gilgameš* spoken by the ale-wife Sidurri seems to outline the things considered the essential pleasures of life, ‘You, Gilgamesh, let your belly be full/Keep enjoying yourself (*hi-ta-ad-du₂*), day and night!/Every day make merry (*š_u-ku-un hi-du-tam*),/dance and play day and night!/Let your clothes be clean!/Let your head be washed, may you be bathed in water!/Gaze on the little one who holds your hand!/Let a wife enjoy (*li-i_h-ta-^r ad ^r da ^r a ^r am ^r*) your repeated embrace!/Such is the destiny [*of mortal men*]’ (George 2003/1: 278-9). In this passage alone, several different kinds of pleasures are described; the physio-pleasures of eating and sex, socio- and psycho- pleasures of dancing and (ritual) cleanliness, as well as ideo-pleasures associated with the ideal of domesticity and the family.

Sensations of happiness/joy are often expressed metaphorically as brightness; for example, in the literary letter from *Lugal-nisag to Enlil-massu*, ETCSL 3.3.09 line 6, **ur-sag ša₃ zalag-e-de₃ a₂-ag₂-ga₂ ki-bi-še₃ ge₄**, ‘the hero who, for illuminating the heart (ie. to please the king), restores order’ (Jaques 2006: 20). Joy is also often associated with and felt in a person’s **ša₃/libbu** (heart/middle) or **ur₅/kabattu** (liver), considered the seats of emotions in Mesopotamia (Jaques 2006; Steinert 2012b; Luukko 2020: 263). Expressions of joy in Sumerian literary texts frequently place **ša₃** as the direct object of the verb **hulz**, ‘to rejoice’, and occasionally as the subject (Jaques 2006: 34). When constructed with a transitive verb such as **hulz** or **du₁₀**, doing something to someone’s **ša₃** can mean to cause pleasure for someone/thing else; for example, in *Iddin-Dagan B*, ETCSL 2.5.3.2, lines 53-4, **nam-lugal-zu ug₃-e ba-sa₆/nam-sipa-zu ša₃-ge um-ma-du₁₀**, ‘Your kingship is good for the

people/After your shepherdship had pleased the heart...’. Similarly, the compound **ur5-sa6**, literally to please/make good the liver, is used to indicate a happy mood, and is also attested in Old Babylonian Sumerian literature, often paired with **ša3-hul2** (Jaques 2006: 597, Table 2).

3. Sexual Pleasure in the Sumerian “Love Songs”

In the last section, it was determined that desire in the Sumerian “Love Songs” was constructed as a wish for pleasure. In the following discussion, I will explore how that pleasure was experienced, by examining *what* is metaphorically positioned as pleasurable, and the actions associated with these pleasures.

4. Pleasure as a Gift

Just as with desire, in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, the experience of pleasure is primarily depicted through metaphor. In only one instance, in *Inanna-Dumuzi D*, line 16, is there possibly a more explicit and physical depiction of an orgasm (Assante 2002: 42): **ki-ta tuku4-e-da SI-A mu-na-ni-in-gar**, ‘(And) as she trembles from below, he filled her’ (for notes to lines, see chapter 2.1 and Appendix C). Elsewhere, sexual pleasure is conceptualised using metaphor. The source domains used to metaphorise sexual pleasure display similar patterns to those used for desire (see chapter 3.1), and flax, barley, honey, butter, and milk metaphorise both these target domains. These two concepts are irrevocably connected. The pursuit of pleasure is a cyclical learning process, ‘desire motivates pursuit, successful pursuit secures its object; securing the object produces pleasure; pleasure adds to desire next time around’ (de Sousa 2015: 38). What is desirable *is* pleasure, and so it is logical that these metaphors in the Sumerian “Love Songs” overlap. There are some significant differences, however, in the metaphorical construction of desire and pleasure in the texts. Whilst desire was expressed as a wish, an intent usually placed on the obtainment of a desirable object,

pleasure is conceived of as more embodied and experiential, the *sensation* of receiving the desirable object.

Frequently, an external object that can be perceived as causing pleasure (such as the sweet taste of honey, the receipt of a gift), is depicted as being gifted, brought, or collected for Inanna/the female speaker by her male lover. For example, in *Inanna-Dumuzi D*, lines 5-6, love and **hi-li** are presented as gifts to the goddess: **ša3 ʿki ʿ-ig-ga ag2 hi-li ag2 ku7-ku7-dam/ku3 ga-ša-an-na-gu10 ag2-še3 ma-ra-an-ba**, ‘A beloved belly and sexual delights are the sweetest things,/ My splendid Inanna, to you he gave them as a gift’ (chapter 2.10). In *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, line 32, Inanna desires for milk, butter, and milk-producing animals to be brought to her: **he2-DU.DU he2-DU.DU i3-li2 ga-bi ga-na he2-DU.DU**, ‘Let him bring it, let him bring fine butter and milk! Come on! Let him bring it!’ (chapter 2.8); and in *Inanna-Dumuzi T*, line 4, the male beloved collects dates for the goddess: **ku3 di-inanna-ra lu2 zu2-lum de5-de5-ge mu-nim-[mar]** [...], ‘For shiny Inanna, the man collecting dates...the date palm’.

On the one hand, the bringing of these gifts represents Inanna’s divine status, and potentially her status as the bride receiving bride-wealth gifts;⁴⁰⁸ On the other hand, it operates metaphorically - the man gives the woman abundant produce and gifts just as he gives her pleasure. In one instance in *Šu-Suen B*, lines 10 and 14, it is the female speaker who wishes to bring the male *to* her honey: **ze2-ba kal-la-gu10 lal3-e da-ag2-e-ga**, ‘my precious sweet, let me bring you to the honey!’. Honey here metaphorises both the pleasure the male will receive once he has tasted it, as well as presumably the arousal of the female beloved (see chapter 2.1). In every case, sexual pleasure is conceived of as a sensation that

⁴⁰⁸ This is the traditional way of interpreting the ‘gifts’ present in the “Love Songs”; see Alster, 1993: 25 and Sefati, 1998: 293.

is enacted (ie. “brought”) by an individual to another, suggesting that pleasure was considered a response to an external stimulus.

5. Pleasurable Action and Sensation

More noticeably than with the construction of desire, actions and sensations metaphorise pleasure in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, indicating that pleasure was conceived of as an embodied experience and response.

These actions unsurprisingly comprise those affecting the senses and associated with other actions known to stimulate or associated with bodily pleasure. Scientific studies have shown that there are clear similarities between the brain networks stimulated in response to sexual stimuli and other pleasures, such as eating and drinking (Georgiadis/Kringelbach 2012). This relationship is apparent in the “Love Songs”; for example, in *Inanna-Dumuzi P*, col. iii lines 19, 21, and 27, Inanna explicitly desires ‘yellow milk’ (see chapter 2.8); her pleasure of this desirable product is stimulated by drinking it: **mu-ud-na-gu₁₀ me-e ga de₃-e-da-^r nas [?]-[nas]**, ‘My husband, I will drink the milk with you!’. Inanna’s desire for the milk, followed by a wish to consume it, fits with the neuroscientific model of the ‘feeding pleasure cycle’; a process that involves ‘motivational (hunger) and consummatory (eating) stages, as well as processes that lead to termination of food intake (satiation, satiety)’ (Georgiadis/Kringelbach 2012). This cycle also transpires in the desire for, attainment of, and period of satiety following sexual stimulation and pleasure.

The strong pleasure response to sweet foods discussed in the section on desire is also mapped onto the target domain of sexual pleasure. In *Inanna-Dumuzi E*, lines 5-8, the action of ‘sweetening’ (**ku₇-ku₇.d**) is presented as a transitive action that can be performed on another person to cause pleasure, with the tactile body parts of the hands, feet, and limbs: **lu₂ la₃-e lu₂ la₃-e ga₂-a mu-ku₇-ku₇-de₃-en/ en-gu₁₀ lu₂ la₃-e dingir-ra sa₆-ga ama-na-**

gu₁₀/ šu-ni lal₃-e giri₃-ni lal₃-e ga₂-a mu-un-ku₇-ku₇-de₃-[en]/ a₂-šu-giri₃-ni lal₃ ku₇-ku₇-dam ga₂-a mu-un- ku₇-[ku₇-de₃-en], ‘The honey-man, the honey-man sugar-sweetened me,/ My lord, the honey-man, a god, my favourite of his mother,/ His honey-hand, his honey-foot, sugar-sweetened me,/ His limbs are sweetest honey, he sugar-sweetened me!’ (chapter 2.1). In *Šu-Suen B*, line 9, pleasure is depicted again as something sweet that can be done (**AK**) to another person: **mu-ti-in ᵀ ag₂ ᵀ ze₂ ᵀ ze₂-ba dus-mu-u₈-AK**, ‘*Lover*, let me do the sweetest things to you!’. The action of *doing*, meaning to give pleasure through sexual activity, with the verbal base **AK**, is also present in *Inanna-Dumuzi D*, line 14: **šeš i-bi₂ sa₆-sa₆-gu₁₀ ninnu-am₃ mu-un-AK**, ‘my brother of the beautiful eyes, he did it 50 times’.

The pleasing sensation of coolness also metaphorises the pleasure that Dumuzi can give to Inanna, as with the shade of the poplar in *Inanna-Dumuzi R*: **geš^sasal₂ ki se₉-še₃ ga-gu₁₀ di-di du₅-mu-u₅-zu**, ‘May I know the way to the poplar, the cold place, my milk!’ (chapter 2.6). The return to a balanced and comfortable visceral state, homeostasis, has been discussed as a possible function and definition of pleasure (Cabanac 1992; Dubé/Le Bel 2003: 265). In *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, relief from the heat of the sun in southern Mesopotamia mimics the relief felt from sexual stimulation. Elsewhere, pleasure is also conceived of as a ‘rising’ sensation. In *Inanna-Dumuzi P*, col. iii. lines 9-10, I interpret the rising of flax and barley after the goddess’ sexual encounter with the king, as a metaphor for sexual pleasure (chapter 2.2): **ur₂-lugal-la-ta zi-ga-ᵀ ni ᵀ-[ta]/gu mu-un-da-zi še mu-un-da-zi**, ‘After rising from the lap of the king/Flax rose with her, barley rose with her’. This orientational conceptual metaphor maps upwards movement with a positive pleasure response.

Therefore, these metaphors demonstrate that the experience of sexual pleasure in the “Love Songs” was perceived as being akin to other sensual, visceral, and embodied pleasures. Notably, again, pleasure in these examples is often an action shared between

lovers ('I will drink the milk *with you*'), or as being something that can be performed by an individual onto another. This is not insignificant; the example of various pleasures given in the *Gilgameš* passage cited above demonstrates that some pleasures can be experienced alone. That the pleasure in the Sumerian "Love Songs" often involves the lover and their partner is a strong indicator that sexual pleasure, in particular, is meant.

6. Pleasurable Action and Cognition

Sexual pleasure is not only metaphorised using mappings from other embodied, sensual experiences but also occasionally those that are themselves more abstract, cognitive sensations. For example, in *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, the repeated refrain of **du5-mu-u5-zu**, 'may I know', implies that knowledge is a metaphor for sexual activity (chapter 2.7). Knowledge is a common idiom for sexual experience in many cultures.⁴⁰⁹ It is apparent in several Sumerian literary texts from the Old Babylonian period; for example, as discussed in chapter 2.7, in the composition *Utu E/F*, line 137, Inanna claims not to have sexual experience: **ag2 munus-ene mu [du₁₁'] nu-zu-gen**, 'I am one who does not know womanly things - sex!'. Similarly, the idiom 'to not know a man/woman' is used in various Akkadian legal and medical texts to refer to virginity (CAD I/J: 28). Elsewhere, when referring to sexual experiences, the verb 'to know' is often negated, indicating sexual inexperience as a lack, such as in *Enlil and Ninlil*, ETCSL 1.2.1 line 30: **gal4-la-gu₁₀ tur-ra-am₃ peš₁₁ nu-mu-un-zu**, 'my vulva is small, it does not know pregnancy'. This frames both knowledge and sexual activity as things to be *experienced*, but also to be *possessed* (Seidel 2000: 14). In both the previous section on desire and in the above, the experiences of desire and pleasure in the "Love Songs" have been shown to be metaphorically structured with various external

⁴⁰⁹ Perhaps the most famous example of the sexual knowledge metaphor is from the biblical book of Genesis, 4.1, 'Now Adam knew Eve, his wife'. In Vedanta Hinduism, the term for "bliss", *ānanda*, means the knowledge of all Being (ie. God), but also is the word for human sexual pleasure (Seidel 2000: 15). In philosophy, from classical antiquity to modern theories of Sartre and de Beauvoir, the opposite is true; human sexuality is a common metaphor in theories of knowledge, but not the other way around (Seidel 2000: 14).

objects, things that can be brought and obtained. The source domain of ‘knowing’ for the target domain of sexual pleasure is similarly structured. In *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, Inanna’s repeated and urgent wish for knowledge of her lover, with the verb ‘to know’ in the cohortative, is paralleled with various desirable produce and plants. This implies that in this context, “to know” her lover is to engage with him sexually, but also to experience and possess (objects of) pleasure (see chapters 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8).

In the “Love Songs”, pleasure is also constructed as an impermanent sensation; it is conceptualised as a desirable object that can be brought (but also taken away), as an action performed by a lover (but not continuously), and more abstractly as knowledge that can be obtained. In several texts, human activities that specifically take place over an expanse of time but are not eternal, such as a king’s reign or a festival, are presented as bringing pleasure (chapter 2.10). In *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, line 12, amongst the erotic dressing and adornment scene, Inanna refers to her ‘weapon’ that makes reigns pleasurable: ^{gēš}**tukul-gu₁₀ bala in-na-sa₆-ga mu-zu**, ‘I know my weapon that made the reign pleasing for him’. In *Inanna-Dumuzi Y*, lines 57-8, a similar image occurs: **bala u₄ sa₆-ga e₃ ħe₂-me-en/ ezen sag-ki zalag-ga ħe₂-me-en**, ‘May you be a reign that brings forth pleasurable days/ May you be the festival that brightens the forehead’.⁴¹⁰ In these texts, the **bala**, reign, is made **sa₆**, ‘good, sweet, pleasurable’, whilst the **ezen**, festival, also seemingly provokes joy (**sag-ki zalag-ga**). In a final example, in *Inanna-Dumuzi DI*, line 38, the minister Ninšubur implores Inanna to give a pleasurable reign to Dumuzi: **bala sa₆-ga pa e₃ šum₂-mu-un-an**, ‘Give to him a sweet and *radiant* reign’. As discussed above, pleasure in the “Love Songs” is often conceptualised as a desirable object, gifted to a lover, and the term **sa₆.g**, like **du₁₀.g** and **ku₇.d**, all denoting sweetness, is often attached to sexual metaphorical source domains

⁴¹⁰ Happiness is often said to be visible, expressed as brightness or shining on the face of kings and gods (Luukko 2020: 256; Wende 2022: 151).

(chapter 2.1). Perhaps significantly, in the example from *Inanna-Dumuzi DI*, the **bala** is not only sweet, but ‘*radiant*’, using the compound **pa-mul**. It was evident in the discussion in chapter 2.6 on tree metaphor that this compound was used to metaphorise penile erection.

A pleasurable reign, of course, does not only consist of sexual pleasures. Luukko gives an example from a letter to Aššurbanipal from his exorcist, who praises his reign of happiness, giving some indication of what a good and pleasurable reign consisted of:

A good reign—righteous days, years of justice; copious rains, huge floods, a fine rate of exchange! The gods are appeased, there is much fear of god, the temples abound; the great gods of heaven and earth have become exalted in the time of the king, my lord. The old men dance, the young men sing, the women and girls are merry and rejoice [*ḥadia rīša*]; women are married and provided with earrings; boys and girls are brought forth, the births thrive...(SAA 10 226: 9-21, Luukko 2020: 271).

Similar themes, such as agricultural abundance, dancing and singing, are also very present in the “Love Songs”. However, I suggest that because pleasure elsewhere in the “Love Songs” is often erotic, it appears that there are innuendos at play, where the experience of a happy reign (or festival) is used to metaphorise the time spent experiencing sexual pleasure. As with other metaphors highlighted in this section, these more abstract source domains of knowledge and a king’s reign are framed as involving the participation of two lovers, structuring sexual pleasure as a shared experience.

7. Rhythmicity

It was noted above that certain bodily pleasures share a pattern involving rhythmic action. This is a pattern identifiable in the poetic structure of various metaphorical imagery in the “Love Songs”. Repetition was discussed in chapter 3.1 as a key indicator of the target

domain of desire. Similarly, repetition, but also repetitive actions, are used in metaphors of pleasure. For example, the whole structure of *Inanna-Dumuzi A*, in which Utu exclaims that he will bring and process flax through various repetitive stages (chapter 2.2), eventually leads to Inanna and Ama-ušumgal-anna ‘lying’ on the processed linen together;⁴¹¹ the composition *Išme-Dagan J* (ETCSl 2.5.4.10) and a parallel **bal-bal-e** of Inanna (ETCSL 4.08.a) also involve the rhythmic action of churning milk (chapter 2.8); whilst in *Inanna-Dumuzi P*, as outlined above, the goddess’ desire to drink the milk that Dumuzi provides also involves rhythmic action involving the mouth and throat.

8. Pleasure in the Body

As with other emotions, amatory feelings in the “Love Songs” are also associated with the body parts **ša3** and **ur5**. Affection is evidently felt in the **ša3**, as the female lover of these compositions consistently refers to her lover as **mu-lu ša3-ab-ga2**: ‘Man of my belly!’.⁴¹² That feelings of love and affection felt in the **ša3** (and the **ur5**) can also have erotic undertones is evident in *Šu-Suen B*, lines 18-21: **ur5 sa6 ki ur5 sa6-ge-bi mu-zu/mu-ti-in u4 te-en-še3 e2-me-a nu2-a/ ša3-za ki ša3 hu2-bi mu-zu/ge-ru u4 te-en-še3 e2-me-a nu2-a**, ‘Of a sweet mood, I know the place of its sweet mood,/Man, lay in our house until morning!/Of your heart, I know the place of its joy,/Lover, lay in our house until morning!’.⁴¹³ Though the literal syntax is slightly convoluted, the sense here is that the female speaker is expressing she knows how to satisfy her lover’s sexual desires.⁴¹⁴ Therefore, sexual pleasure here is

⁴¹¹ It was suggested already by Couto-Ferreira that these stages of linen production, in their rhythmicity, reflect sexual intercourse (Couto-Ferreira 2017: 62-63).

⁴¹² *Inanna-Dumuzi A*, 51-2; *Inanna-Dumuzi B*, 18 ; *Inanna-Dumuzi F*, 40 ; *Inanna-Dumuzi P*, col. ii. 31; *Inanna-Dumuzi T*, 42; in *Šu-Suen B*, 1, 3, 6 with **mu-ti-in/ge-ru ša3-ga2**.

⁴¹³ **ša3** and **ur5** also appear together in *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, 30-1 and *Inanna-Dumuzi Z*, rev. 7’.

⁴¹⁴ See also Wagensonner/Reid 2017; Attinger 2019.

also associated with the belly (**ša3**) and liver (**ur5**), aligning with other expressions of positive emotions in Sumerian (see above).⁴¹⁵

However, naturally, sexual pleasure is also associated with the lap, **ur2**. The previous chapter on desire and arousal noted how physical desire was expressed with metaphors for the aroused state of the male and female genitals. As discussed above in this chapter, the metaphor of barley and flax rising from the lap of the king (**ur2 lugal-la-ta**) in *Inanna-Dumuzi P* is mapped from the positive associations of upward orientation. In *Inanna-Dumuzi DI*, 19-20, it is the honey metaphor that ascribes pleasure felt in the female lover's **ur2**, paralleled with **ša3 hul2: ki-nu2 ša3 hul2-la al ba-an-du11 ki-nu2 al ba-an-du11/ki nu2 ur2 ze2-ba al ba-an-du11 ki-nu2 al ba-an-du11**, 'She desired the bed that rejoices the belly, she desired the bed!/She desired the bed that sweetens the lap, she desired the bed!'. Here, it seems apparent that more abstract feelings of pleasure are felt in the **ša3**, whilst physical pleasures are associated with the (female) genitals. This is explicit in the desire for Dumuzi to 'plough' Inanna's vulva, expressed in *Inanna-Dumuzi P*, col. ii. 26-31, and also in *Inanna-Dumuzi DI*, line 6: **ur2 ga2- ša-an-na-ka- še3 ši-li-a mu-ni-ku4**, 'She brought him, aroused, to the lap of Inanna'.

9. Anticipated and Experienced Pleasure

Similarly suggested by modern studies of sexual pleasure, it is identifiable in the "Love Songs" that two states of pleasure are depicted: *anticipated* and *experienced*. As discussed throughout this thesis, the numerous use of precative and cohortative verb forms express

⁴¹⁵ Similar to the expression of other positive emotions in Sumerian, the verbs **hul2** and **sa6.g** are used in the "Love Songs" to express pleasure and amatory feelings; for example, in *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, lines 43, **gal4-la-ga2-ke4-eš/ga-ba-hul2-hul2-le-en-de3-en**, 'let us rejoice for my vulva!', and line 45, **egir-bi in-na-sa6**, 'afterwards, it will be pleasing for him!'. In addition, in *Inanna-Dumuzi CI*, lines 12, 14, 17, 20, the verb **mi2-du11** is used to express Inanna's desire to be treated to foodstuffs brought to her. Here, and in other erotic contexts, it has overtones of 'to please/pleasure' (see discussion in chapter 2.8). It is perhaps no coincidence that the compound verb uses the nominal element **mi2**, perhaps to better be read **munus** or **gal4**, the sign for the female genitalia.

desire as a wish and want for pleasure that need not be actualised. The use of wish forms and *marû*/imperfective or non-finite verbs often depicts pleasure in a state of not having yet happened or not having reached completion. For example, in *Šu-Suen B*, line 14, the female speaker wishes to bring pleasure to her beloved: **ze2-ba kal-la-gu10 lal3-e da-ag2-e-ga**, ‘My precious sweet, let me bring you to the honey!’. In contrast to the frequent depiction of anticipated pleasure, *hamtu* or nominalised forms portray pleasure that has happened or an action that has been completed. For example, with the same honey source domain, in *Inanna-Dumuzi E*, line 5: **lu2 lal3-e ga2-a mu-ku7-ku7-de3-en**, ‘the honey man sugar-sweetened me’. ‘Anticipated pleasures’ are depicted much more frequently than ‘experienced’ pleasure.

10. Sexual Pleasure in the Sumerian “Love Songs”: Summary

Pleasure in the “Love Songs” is constructed in a similar way to desire. Because the sensation of pleasure is metaphorically centred upon desirable objects that can be brought, collected, or gifted from one lover to another, it seems that sexual pleasure was perceived as an external phenomenon enacted upon the body. Sexual pleasure is perceived as a similar embodied sensation to other physical pleasures, but also as more abstract pleasures of obtaining knowledge or experiencing a pleasing expanse of time. Both the more embodied and abstract source domains structure pleasure as something that can be obtained and possessed, but also as something shared between lovers. Like other emotions, pleasure in the “Love Songs” is felt in the belly and occasionally the liver, but physically pleasurable sensation is centred upon the female genitals. The more common type of pleasure is *anticipated*, another example of the way in which eroticism is constructed within the corpus.

3.3 Sexual Allure

Modern approaches to the psychology of attraction state that various physical and personal characteristics determine sexual attractiveness and *produce* sexual desire (Regan/Berscheid 1999: 93). Allure is necessarily related to, and inextricable from, sexual desire (chapter 3.1), as what is *alluring* and attractive is obviously desirable. The target domain sexual allure is considered here as the *state* of (sexual) attractiveness of the lovers', metaphorically presented in the "Love Songs" (see chapter 1.5). This section analyses the patterns observed in the metaphorical construction of sexual allure, firstly considering the depiction of physical beauty in the frequent dressing and adornment literary motif, and how physical and visual beauty partly constitutes what is considered sexually *alluring* in the "Love Songs". Secondly, this section highlights the more abstract magnetism associated with sexual attractiveness, notable through the attachment of **hi-li** to source domains for sexual allure.

1. Allure, Beauty and Adornment

Physical beauty is a key, but not the only, aspect of sexual allure and attraction. There have been numerous studies of *why* we are sexually attracted to and desire certain people; amongst physical attractiveness, psychologists have gathered evidence that suggests physique, social status, interpersonal behaviour, novelty, and pheromones can all affect perceived attractiveness (Regan/Berscheid 1999: 90-106). What seems clear from modern studies is that sexual allure is a quality of a person that is perceived by an onlooker.

In a thorough discussion of feminine beauty in the literature of the ancient Middle East,⁴¹⁶ Gansell identified that ideal beauty was constructed threefold in disparate Levantine and Mesopotamian sources. In a similar way to that found in modern studies, beauty was a

⁴¹⁶ As part of the author's analysis of ideal beauty in the ivory sculptures of women from the early first millennium BCE (Gansell 2008).

concept split between the perceived characteristics of *physical* beauty, the use of products and adornment for *amplifying* beauty, but also incorporated positive, personal qualities (Gansell 2008: 168-9). Winter also connects the Akkadian term *damqu*, “auspicious/good” with the visual depiction of masculine beauty on the stele of Naram-Suen, noting that physical deformity in ancient Mesopotamia was interpreted as *inauspicious*; the “perfect” body of Naram-Suen therefore manifests goodness/auspiciousness in its ‘lack of a lack’ (Winter 2010c: 86-7).

Beauty, and the narrative role that beauty, dress, and adornment play, in the Hebrew bible has been discussed extensively in recent studies (eg. Dobbs-Allsop 2005; Macwilliam 2009; Penchansky 2013; Quick 2019a; Quick 2019b; Quick 2021a). Physical beauty is often positioned as seen or observed (Gansell 2008: 176), and the Hebrew term, *יָפָה*, *yaphah*, ‘often refers to human beauty that excites sexual desire in the onlooker’ (Macwilliam 2009: 267). The gaze plays a significant role in the conceptualisation of physical beauty and attractiveness. A frequent motif across the literary sources examined by Gansell was one that depicted itemised female beauty, most commonly in scenes of dressing and adornment that draw attention to specific body parts and the clothes, jewellery, or cosmetics that are used to amplify their allure; for example, in the apocryphal book of Judith (Gansell 2008: 182).⁴¹⁷ Quick also highlights the use of the *wasf* style in describing body parts from the head down used in the Hebrew bible; the most extensive examples are from the *Song of Songs* to describe the beauty of the female beloved; for example: *הַיָּפָה יָפָה רַעֲיִתִי הַגֵּנָה יָפָה עֵינָיֶיהָ* ‘Ah you are fair, my darling, Ah you are fair, Your eyes are like doves behind your veil, Your hair is like a flock of goats streaming

⁴¹⁷ Unlike in Mesopotamian sources, the use of cosmetics in the biblical world could be connected to immoral behaviour and sexual depravity (Quick 2019a;2019b).

down Mount Gilead' (Song 4:1; JPS).⁴¹⁸ However, in feminist psychoanalytic theory, the male gaze is said to project a constructed fantasy onto the female body which is then 'styled accordingly', forcing the female body to operate as a bearer of patriarchal and ideological meaning (Mulvey 1975: 10). Indeed, in the biblical texts, Quick notes that 'the male gaze upon female bodies is explicitly voyeuristic and the object of the look often becomes the object of sexual desire to be acted upon [...] a woman's beauty often leads to her sexual appropriation at the hands of the male observer' (Quick 2021c: 11).⁴¹⁹ Sexual allure is then a perceived attribute projected by the onlooker onto the object of the gaze, which can reduce them to objectification, and sometimes violence.

Visual art of the ancient Middle East also eroticises elements of the female body; in particular, the adorned body is sexualised (Bahrani 2001: 42), and numerous nude female figurines are often depicted only wearing jewellery, a marker of sexual allure (Bahrani 2001: 155-7). In the Sumerian "Love Songs", sexual attractiveness and allure is also encompassed in imagery of the adorned female body, in similar scenes in the *wasf* style where Inanna prepares herself for a sexual encounter with Dumuzi, linking the enhancement of physical beauty with sexual desire. Similarly, Konstan noted that 'the classical Greek notion of beauty is closely related to *eros*, that is, passionate desire [...] the fundamental response that is excited by beauty in ancient Greece was understood to be precisely desire' (Konstan 2014: 62). These scenes of adornment, namely in *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, lines 3-18; *Inanna-Dumuzi P* i.27-33; *Inanna-Dumuzi T*, lines 11-24, *Inanna-Dumuzi C1*, ii.13-17, and *Inanna-Dumuzi*

⁴¹⁸ Quick notes 'this downward movement is not always truly linear... Nevertheless, the directionality is still ultimately descending downwards, and so the poet goes on to describe the Beloved's neck (v.4) and breasts (v.5)' (Quick 2021c: 7 n. 25).

⁴¹⁹ The question of sexual appropriation through the "male gaze" is perhaps applied with difficulty to the Sumerian "Love Songs"; within this corpus, Inanna's beauty does not result in violence, but regularly her own pleasure. The narrative *Inanna and Šukaletuda* does, however, suggest the sexual appropriation associated with the goddess's appearance, as the gardener, upon seeing Inanna asleep by the tree, rapes her (ETCSL 1.3.3). Of course, it is possible that the outlining and description of the goddess's body in the "Love Songs" is a product of male scribes' fantasies (Gansell 2008: 213).

El, rev. lines 2'-16', erotically outline the female body from head to toe. In the framing of the "Love Songs", the adornment of the body and enhancement of sexual allure is *for* the desire of and to attract the male beloved. For example, in *Inanna-Dumuzi P*, Inanna describes her preparation to meet Dumuzi:

Inanna-Dumuzi P

Ist Ni 9602 (P343627)

col. i

27 a mu-ši-tu₅ **na-ma** mu-ši-su-ub

mu (VENT)-n.ši (3SG+TERM)-*(1SG)-bathed- Ø (DO)

I bathed myself for him, I rubbed myself with soap for him,

28 šen a tu₅-a x u₃-mu-ši-gub

u (PROSP)-mu (VENT)-n.ši (3SG+TERM)-*(1SG?)-set up- Ø (DO)

After I placed...in the wash-basin for him,

29 tug₂-gu₁₀ tug₂ **ag₂** kala-ga-gen₇ si ba-sa₂-e

ba (MM)- straighten-ed

My garment, my garment, is straightened, like a strong thing,

30 ^{tug₂}pala₃ maḥ mu-na-kala-ge-en

mu-(VENT)-n.na (3SG+DAT)- b (DO)- strengthening-en (1SG)

I was making my lofty *pala* garment strong for him.

It is explicit that Inanna does these things *for* Dumuzi, as evident by the terminative and dative verbal infixes, with the dative co-referent in line 24: ^d**dumu-zi ki-ig-ga-ag₂** ^d**mu-ul-**

lil2-la2-ra, ‘For Dumuzi, beloved of Enlil’. Similarly, in *Inanna-Dumuzi T* (lines 26-31) and *CI* (line 19’), the goddess meets Dumuzi directly after washing and adorning her body, making it clear that her male lover will view her as sexually alluring.⁴²⁰

Nonetheless, the role of *looking* in the construction of sexual allure here is not necessarily harmful, but erotic.⁴²¹ Notably, in attraction studies that consider the phenomenon of ‘love at first sight’, emotional affection and attraction is communicated via a ‘copulatory gaze’, sustained eye contact between two people (Grant-Jacob 2016). In *Inanna-Dumuzi B*, line 4, the male lover states clearly that the glance of his lover pleases him: **igi-za igi dus-ru-na-bi ma-du₁₀ DU nin₉ ki ag₂-gu₁₀**,⁴²² ‘The gazing of your eyes is sweet to me, come my beloved sister!’. In her commentary on the *Song of Songs*, Exum makes a significant distinction between ways of looking, which she uses to express a mutuality to the erotic experiences of the lovers in this text.⁴²³ There is a difference, she argues, between the controlling ‘intrusion’ of the voyeuristic gaze, and the erotic look, which she defines as a ‘looking that participates in that which is seen’ (Exum 2005:22). In other words, there is an erotic invitation for the body to be looked upon, which does not have to necessarily subject the body to objectification. Another commentator of the *Song*, F. Black,

⁴²⁰ Whilst the colours and value of Inanna’s jewellery (see chapter 2.9) aids in her self-construction of sexual allure for her lover Dumuzi to *look upon*, I am reminded, reading Baudelaire’s *Les Fleur du Mal* poem, ‘The Jewels’, of the eroticism of sound that these images can also evoke: ‘My dearest love was naked, and, knowing my heart,/Had kept as sole attire her most sonorous gems [...] When, shaken, it emits a lively mocking sound,/This radiant world of metal and resplendent stone,/Fills me with ecstasy, for I have always found,/Joy in the subtle interplay of light and tone’ (trans. Tidball 2016: 73).

⁴²¹ This analysis of the gaze in the “Love Songs” demonstrates only one aspect in textual and visual sources of ancient Mesopotamia. See Guinan 2022 for discussion of the female gaze in the omen series *šumma ālu*, where the author expresses the corpora’s anxieties over ‘Assyrian sexualised subjecthood’ (2022: 82), that placed the female gaze within the omen series binary framework that indicated that even the female gaze ‘issues from a subjected body’ (2022: 83). On the contrary, see the analysis by Asher-Greve of visual sources of the goddess (especially Inanna/Ištar) depicted frontally, ‘When depicted frontally, the goddess trespasses the limits given by the pictorial frame in that her view is directed into the open space in front of her. She is subject (“I”) confronting beholder (“you”), a transient situation existing only in the presence and the present of the beholder.’ (Asher-Greve 2006: 34).

⁴²² I cannot explain the -n- in the chain **dus-ru-na-bi**. The long form of the verb is **dus.r** (Attinger 2021: 276). Sefati posited the compound **igi-durun** (Sefati 1990: 54); however, **durun** is the plural stem of the verb **tuš** (Attinger 2021: 1070).

⁴²³ Exum’s argument counters the view that the lengthy descriptions by the male speaker of the female lover in *the Song of Songs* itemises and objectifies her body (eg. F. Black 2009: 49).

further Exum's arguments by stating that 'variability is part of the lover's experience' (F. Black 2009: 201). She writes of the lovers in the *Song*: 'might they intermittently hold power and be subject to it? Might lovers objectify as well as invite the other to be part of the looking?' (F. Black 2009: 201). In adorning herself *for* her lover, Inanna invites the erotic look. In both *Inanna-Dumuzi P* (above) and *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, these scenes are narrated in the first-person voice, where Inanna erotically outlines her own body by describing and itemising what she will wear in the self-construction of her sexual allure.⁴²⁴

The dressing and adornment scenes of the "Love Songs" help to identify the features of the female body that were considered to be attractive, and which stimulated desire in the onlooker. Each adornment scene shares similarities of the body parts highlighted, though some are more extensive than others and range over the entire female body (such as *Inanna-Dumuzi T*, lines 11-24; discussed in chapter 2.9). The neck and hair of the female beloved occurs with the most frequency in these episodes. For example, in *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, the female speaker refers to the adornment of her nape (**gu₂-bar**, lines 10, 15), her hair (**siki**, line 11, with combs, **suku₅**, line 14), her neck (**gu₂**, line 17), and her neck 'sinews' (**gu₂-sa**, line 18). These decorated body parts are seemingly the most alluring.⁴²⁵ Significantly, whilst these adornment scenes draw attention to constructions of *female* allure, there are many instances throughout the "Love Songs" where male sexual allure is also evoked. The difference is that male sexual attractiveness is only depicted through metaphor.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁴ The mutuality in the construction of sexual allure between lovers is strikingly clear in the 1st millennium love song of *Nabû and Tašmetu*, where the goddess asks for the god to help her put on her jewellery: *be-li₂ an-ša-ab-tum šuk-na-an-ni-ma/qa₂-reb*⁷ GIŠ.SAR lu-lal-li-ka-a*, 'My lord, put an earring on me,/let me pleasure you in the garden!' (SAA 03, 14, obv. lines 13-14; Bahrani 2001: 87).

⁴²⁵ These areas of the body are also highlighted as the most sexually alluring in *Ninisina B* (ETCSL 4.22.2), where the female body is described as dripping with oil upon the throat (line 16), neck (line 19), and nape (line 21), as well as her pubic hair/hair (line 20), hands, feet, and limbs (line 22). Notably, in *Ninisina B*, the fragrance of these oils is repeatedly referred to, alluding to the eroticism grounded in scent, as well as sight, of the subject.

⁴²⁶ Except for when the common epithet, **šeš i-bi₂ sa₆-sa₆-gu₁₀**, 'my brother of the beautiful eyes', is used, though this is also likely a metaphorical image, stemming from **sa₆** as an adjective meaning good/sweet.

2. Sexual Allure in the “Love Songs”: Physical Beauty

The adornment scenes in several passages of the “Love Songs” make clear that physical beauty was a key component of sexual allure, and they further identify the specific attributes of the body that were seen as sexually attractive, as well as those items considered to enhance the beauty of the wearer. Some of these features are metaphorised and encompassed under the target domain of sexual allure.

Attributes of the body considered the most alluring are positioned as metaphorical target domains. In particular, hair of the male and female beloved is metaphorised using source domains that signal its pleasing and attractive appearance. For example, the luscious foliage of trees (see chapter 2.6), and the aesthetic and precious qualities of lapis lazuli (chapter 2.9) map onto the visual allure of the male beloved’s hair and beard.⁴²⁷ Whilst the hair of the female lover is frequently referenced as alluring in the adornment scenes described above, it is also depicted through metaphor, though mapped from different source domains than the male’s hair. For example, Inanna is described metonymically as the ‘shining mane’ (**kug₂-siki mul-mul**) of the wild goat (and) deer (*Inanna-Dumuzi R*, line 2, discussed in chapter 2.10). Gansell noted that in the Sumerian texts, styled female hair is described more frequently above its natural properties, pointing to the arrangement of Inanna’s (pubic) hair in *Šu-Suen C*, and the piling up and loosening of Inanna’s hair with combs in the adornment passage from *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, line 14: **suku₅-gu₁₀ ba-bur₂-bur₂ mu-dub-dub**, ‘I released my combs, I piled them up’ (Gansell 2008: 228).⁴²⁸ Alluring

⁴²⁷ For the image of a man’s beard and hair as a key aspect of masculinity and masculine allure see the discussion in chapter 2.9, and Winter 2010c: 87. Bahrani noted that *kuzbu* (**hi-li**) is equally essential to the male body, as well as the female (Bahrani 2001: 55).

⁴²⁸ Gansell also describes the eroticism associated with these actions, ‘By freeing the hair, it becomes an erotic feature. It could move and bounce; it could obscure and reveal the face and body; it could become more lustrous and exude scent, and it could be caressed and tousled’ (2008: 228).

stylisation of hair is perhaps referenced in the metaphor in *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, as **kug2-siki** appears in the lexical list **ugu-gu10** amongst other hairstyles.⁴²⁹

Cosmetics and items used to *enhance* physical beauty are used as source domains in the “Love Songs” to also capture the sense of a lover’s (both female and male) attractiveness. These are items which are seen to adorn the body in the dressing scenes discussed above, such as kohl: **in-nin9 šembiz-zi lugal-⁷ la ⁷-[kam]**, ‘the lady is the kohl of the king’ (*Inanna-Dumuzi V*, line 1, chapter 2.9); and fragrant oil: **u5 ze2-ba u5 ze2-ba x x x ir-⁷ si ⁷-im ze2-ba-gen**, ‘Sweet oil, sweet oil...I am sweet fragrance’ (*Inanna-Dumuzi R*, line 13). Precious stones and metals metaphorise the attractiveness of the male lover: **ku3 ^{na4}za-gin3-na u3-mu-un-me he2-me-en**, ‘Of silver and lapis, may you be our lord!’ (*Šu-Suen C*, line 19). These items’ regular inclusion in acts of beautifying the body allow them to metaphorically map onto the state of attractiveness of the lover being described.

Two images that I interpret as source domains for sexual allure seem to specifically metaphorise the allure of the goddess Inanna. Firstly, in *Inanna-Dumuzi C*, line 12, amongst the dressing and adornment scene, Inanna refers to her weapon: **geštukul-gu10 bala in-na-sa6-ga mu-zu**, ‘I know my weapon that made the reign pleasing for him’. I discussed in chapter 2.10 and 3.2 the metaphorisation of the king’s reign (**bala**) as sexual pleasure. The weapon is Inanna’s allure and attractiveness. This is the only reference to Inanna’s aspect as a warrior goddess in the “Love Songs” corpus. Secondly, in *Inanna-Dumuzi C1*, col. ii, line 20, Inanna is equated to the moon: **e2-e iti6-gen7 im-ma-na-ra-e3**, ‘She came out from the house for him like the moon’. Similarly, this image follows a dressing and adornment scene before the goddess comes out to meet Dumuzi. The image refers to the radiant beauty of

⁴²⁹ For example, in an Old Babylonian copy, **Ashm 1923-0377**, P347478, line 15.

Inanna, likening her to the luminous light of the moon.⁴³⁰ These two metaphors for Inanna's sexual allure demonstrate that this aspect of her divine persona was not unconnected to her other aspects as a warrior and astral deity (Bahrani 2001: 159).

3. **hi-li** and the Abstractness of Attraction

The target domain of sexual allure is conceptualised by source domains that directly map onto features of the body perceived as the most attractive, as well as items and cosmetics that enhance the beauty of the wearer. This suggests that allure encompassed physical and visual beauty of the female and male bodies, perceived by the gaze of the lover. Further to this, allure is specifically related to a more complex, abstract feeling, the Sumerian term **hi-li**, which denotes a “charm” with erotic undertones, and is also related to feelings of luxury, abundance, and joy (see chapter 1.3). Sexual allure is then conceptualised not only as physical beauty, but as a certain energy worn by the desirable beloved.⁴³¹ Winter, in describing the nuances of **hi-li**, succinctly describes the force that **hi-li** impacts upon an onlooker:

Lusciousness, or luxuriance, deriving from the sweet, ripe, or fruity range of associated metaphors and associations, seems to serve well as the ascribed quality being signalled. What it does not do is suggest the quality as an active force radiating from the subject. The most suitable term in English I have found for this aspect, in all of its usages, is “allure.” Like attractiveness, with its base in physical pull or magnetism, it implies not just a passive attribute, but one in which energy passes between the possessor and the receiver. But whereas for attractiveness, magnetism

⁴³⁰ A feature of attractiveness made apparent in *Ludingira*, ETCSL 5.5.1 lines 22-23, **ama-gu₁₀ su₃-ra-ag₂-gen₇ lu-lim hur-sag-ga₂/mul a₂-gu₂-zi-ga**, ‘My mother is like a brilliant light, red deer of the mountains, the morning star’.

⁴³¹ Sexual attraction is conceptualised as a concrete object that is worn in Old Babylonian Akkadian love incantations. The love charm (*er'imu/irimu*) is worn like a crown to ‘help the suitor act remotely on the female body [...] The love charms may have been physically and tangibly present in the ritual scene, with the use of a specific object or substance with particular sensory property’ (Rendu-Loisel 2018: 69).

even, the direction of movement is a pulling IN toward the possessor, for **hi-li** /*kuzbu* the force seems to emanate OUT from the possessor, like some sort of pheromone (Winter 2010c: 89-90).

The term **hi-li** is attached to many source domains in the “Love Songs”, signalling them as erotic metaphor (see chapter 1.3). When it is the object of desire’s allure/attractiveness that is being metaphorised, **hi-li** is often present in its description. For example, in the beginning of *Inanna-Dumuzi A*, Utu describes the flax and barley in the garden: **in-nin⁹ gu sar-ra hi-li gur₃-ru**/^d**inanna gu sar-ra hi-li gur₃-ru/še ab-sin₂-na hi-li ma-az diri-ga**, ‘Lady, the flax in the garden is alluring!/Inanna, the flax in the garden is alluring! The barley in the furrow, overflowing with allure and lust’ (lines 3-5; chapter 2.2). These plants will eventually become the bed linen for Inanna and Dumuzi. The term **hi-li** clusters in these lines, and, as described by Winter, **hi-li** has both an inward and outward movement. It is both worn/carried (**gur₃-ru**) and fills in/overflows (**diri-ga**) the barley, a metaphor for the vulva.

In *Inanna-Dumuzi R*, **hi-li** is similarly repeated and clusters around the image of Inanna as multi-coloured grain: ^{lu}**ki-sikil še^ezar gu₂-^rnida [?]-a hi-li šu ge₄-a-gen**/^d**inanna še^ezar gu₂-^rnida [?]-a hi-li šu ge₄-a-gen/ nin-gen nin-gen x x x hi[?]-li[?] gur₃-ru-gen / me-e ki-sikil-gen ^rnin [?]-^rgen [?][x] [hi]-li ^rgur₃ [?]-ru-gen**, ‘Young woman, you are a sheaf of hulled grain, constantly alluring!/Inanna, you are a sheaf of hulled grain, constantly alluring!’ ‘I am the queen, I am the queen...I am alluring,/I, I am a young woman, I am the queen, I am alluring!’ (lines 7-10). The attractiveness of Inanna to Dumuzi is particularly evident here, as her **hi-li** is described with the term **šu-ge₄**, literally ‘to return the hand’, ie. to repeat, meaning her charms are never-ending. Notably, the construction of allure is also associated with imagery and source domains of abundance (see chapters 2.2 and 3.4).

A final example from *Šu-Suen C* demonstrates the duality of sexual allure in the “Love Songs” as a concept related to physical beauty, as well as a more abstract, emanated magnetism. In line 21, the female speaker describes her beloved, the king, as follows, **igi-ga2 lal3-bi-im ša3-ga2 ħi-li-bi-im**, ‘He is the honey of my eyes; he is the sexual delight of my belly!’. This line parallels the eyes, the organ of looking that can gaze upon physical beauty, with the belly, the seat of feeling and emotions. The beloved is sweet to look at, but also causes sensation viscerally in the belly.

4. Sexual Allure in the Sumerian “Love Songs”: Summary

Sexual attractiveness is produced by various physical and personal characteristics, perceived by an onlooker. Though in many instances from the ancient world feminine sexual allure is subjected to the male gaze, in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, the erotic look is invited and shared by the lovers. The various dressing and adornment scenes of the corpus highlight that sexual allure was primarily evoked by physical beauty, and the enhancement of beauty through dress and jewellery was a marker of sexual attractiveness. Sexual allure is constructed metaphorically in the “Love Songs” through the use of source domains that metaphorise the most attractive physical attributes of the lovers, but also through the items that self-construct the beauty of the wearer. Finally, sexual allure shares a close relationship with the term **ħi-li**, signalling allure as an abstract magnetism that emanated from the sexually desirable person.

3.4 Abundance

The motif of abundance, typically framed as a surplus of water, plants, foodstuffs, and animals, is starkly present in both Mesopotamian literature and the visual arts. Various deities or kings in nearly all periods of Mesopotamian history are presented as the providers of such agricultural wealth (Winter 2010a: 201). The exploration of metaphorical language in the Sumerian “Love Songs” thus far demonstrates that an abundance of foodstuffs, water, plants, and crops also acted as a setting for and expressed the erotic emotions of the lovers in these texts. In this section, I will investigate the target domain of abundance in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, and argue that agricultural prosperity, rather than denoting a discourse of reproductive fertility, or as a literal outcome of a fertility ritual, is in fact intertwined with the texts’ eroticism.

1. The Sumerian Motif of Abundance and Fertility

There are several terms in Sumerian that refer to abundance: **he₂-gal₂**, **nam-he₂-a**, **he₂-nun**; or are semantically related: **giri₁₇-zal**, **hi-li** (Jaques 2006: 18), which itself suggests its significance as a concept in the Sumerian literary tradition. There was, of course, a *need for* the land to be fertile, and for there to be a surplus of food, expressed by the many instances in Old Babylonian Sumerian literature where a deity is praised for supplying the land with an abundance of produce. For example, in *Ninurta F*, the god is celebrated for supplying flax, barley, fish, animals, and various plants to a lush natural environment (ETCSL 4.27.06, lines 22-31). This passage uses a stock sequence found in several other Sumerian literary compositions, including *Nanna K*, ETCSL 4.13.11 lines 3-11, several Emesal laments/prayers (see Gabbay/Mirelman/Reid 2020), and *Inanna-Dumuzi D1*. A connection between this agricultural prosperity and human fertility can be identified in some of these

passages, where lines use verbs that imply that the abundance produced has been *birthed* (**tud/utud**, eg. *Ninurta F*, ETCSL 4.27.07 lines 22-3).

Motifs of abundance such as these, but also in the visual arts of ancient Mesopotamia, have been considered to have socio-political and rhetorical force. For example, in discussing the motif in the art of the ‘early agrarian state’, Winter argued:

Abundance is both necessary and desired; and, as on the Warka Vase, the luxuriance of natural production is what undergirds the ordered cosmos as well as the urbanized city-state. In this universe, an “iconography of abundance” lends itself to a “cultural rhetoric of abundance,” with the agricultural and pastoral landscape as much a component in the state apparatus, and as political, as the urban landscape (Winter 2010a: 213).

Dependence of the functionality of the state on agricultural and environmental abundance can be identified in the use of the motif in the Old Babylonian Sumerian royal praise poetry; for example, in *Ur-Namma C*, the king is said to have provided abundance for the god Enlil: **i7 ʿ lugal ʿ-ia e2 ʿen-lil2-la-še3 ʿe2-gal2 mu-un-da-ku4**, ‘Abundance entered with him in the canal of the king and for the house of Enlil’ (ETCSL 2.4.1.3, line 103).

The apparent political implications of the abundance motif used elsewhere in Sumerian literary texts have influenced interpretation of the agricultural prosperity presented throughout the corpus of Sumerian “Love Songs”. Older and more recent views see the agricultural motifs and abundance present in the corpus as related to the fertility cult of the Sacred Marriage, that had a direct relationship to legitimising the rulers of the Ur III and Isin dynasties, where sexual activity with the goddess Inanna led to agricultural and environmental abundance (eg. Jacobsen 1976: 32ff; Zisa 2023). The depiction of this dynamic in literature, ie. in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, has been argued as functioning to

serve discourses of royal power (Couto-Ferreira 2018). Furthermore, the positioning of the female body in the “Love Songs” as land or plants has been interpreted as a means of marking distinct *reproductive* gender roles, in which the active male body domesticates the passive, female body:

The reading of Inanna’s body is strongly informed by landscape and surroundings, more specifically, by the domesticated environment. Images present the female genitals as a landscape subjected to anthropization, based on man-made spaces that need to be managed and constantly cared for so as to ensure productivity [...] we may argue that female genitals and bodies, when described in contexts of courtship and marriage, are often seen as landscapes to govern and to be made fruitful, even when in the case of the Dumuzi and Inanna songs no explicit reference to the production of offspring is made [...] Although most images employed in love compositions present sexual intercourse as an act of pleasure, by using a whole range of references to watering and agriculture, they implicitly emphasize a reproductive discourse that contrasts with the immediacy and non-procreative profile of the images employed in, for example, the ša.zi.ga texts (Couto-Ferreira 2017: 66-7).⁴³²

Emphasis has been placed upon those images where Inanna asks to be “ploughed” or her vulva is metaphorised as a furrow (*Inanna-Dumuzi P*, *Inanna-Dumuzi A/E*), or her vulva is a lettuce to be “watered” by her lover (*Inanna-Dumuzi E*), each positioning the male as the active reproductive body and the female as the passive receiver, even where it has been noted that Inanna and Dumuzi’s relationship does not function reproductively (Cooper 1989: 88-9). Whilst it has been argued that ‘sexually active bodies are meant not only to enjoy sexuality, but most importantly, to produce and be a part of the dynamics of abundance’

⁴³² See Zisa 2021a for the most recent edition of the ŠA.ZI.GA incantation corpus, a group of incantations that counter the loss of male sexual desire.

(Couto-Ferreira 2018: 7), in erotic poetry the use of motifs of agricultural fertility do not necessarily only have to speak to a reproductive discourse. Instead, sexual satisfaction is often metaphorically conceptualised using imagery of abundance. The lettuce is watered to be *eaten* and the land a “wet place” (**ki-durus**), ie. *aroused*, to be ploughed.

2. Abundance in the Sumerian “Love Songs”

The abundance presented in the Sumerian “Love Songs” is intertwined with eroticism. As a target domain, the abstract concept of abundance is constructed with source domains primarily taken from the everyday environment and shared with motifs of abundance found elsewhere in the Old Babylonian literary corpus: beer, water, wine, plants, animals, and occasionally precious materials. Notably, many of these source domains are used for multiple target domains throughout the “Love Songs”, also occurring as metaphors for desire, pleasure, arousal, and allure (see Appendix B for a visualisation of these relationships; discussed in chapter 4).

The abstract sense of abundance is often felt through the impression that there is a surplus of plants, produce, or precious materials that surrounds the world of the lovers in the Sumerian “Love Songs”. This is expressed in various ways. Firstly, the source domains can appear plentiful; for example, in *Inanna-Dumuzi A*, line 55, Ama-ušumgal-anna is described as a farmer who can provide innumerable heaps of grain to Inanna: **mu-un-gar₃ še-[ni] guru₇ šar₂-ra-kam** (see chapter 2.2); and in *Inanna-Dumuzi T*, lines 7-10, Dumuzi carries a mound of precious stones for Inanna to choose from: **lu₂ na-de₆ lu₂ na-de₆ du₆ za pa₃-še₃ na-de₆** (see chapter 2.9). Supplying a heap or mound of such produce or objects clearly evokes affluence.

Secondly, source domains may cluster together, similarly suggestive of the surplus of produce available to the lovers. For example, in *Inanna-Dumuzi B1*:

Inanna-Dumuzi B1

BM 23702 (P345460)

30 e₂-tur₃-ra ḥe₂-gal₂ im-mi-in-si

He filled the stall with abundance,

31 amaš-e nam-ḥe₂-a ṽ i₃ ṽ-ṽ zal ṽ-ṽ e ṽ

He let flow plenty into the sheepfold,

32 i₃-gu₇-ne u₂ sikil i₃-gu₇-ne

They eat pure plants, they eat

33 i₃ sur-sur-ra lal₃ i₃-nun-na-ke₄

Pressed oil, honey, ghee,

34 i₃-nag-ne ^{kaš}ulušin₃ kurun

They drink honied emmer-beer and beer.

Here, the presence of plants, oil, honey, ghee, *and* beer forms an atmosphere of excess and delight. They are collectively referred to both as “abundance” (**ḥe₂-gal₂**) and “plenty” (**nam-ḥe₂-a**) in lines 30-31 (see discussion in chapter 2.5). Finally, repetition of source domains equally helps to map onto the target domain of abundance, again through expressing possession, or desired possession, of a surplus of produce.⁴³³ For example, in *Inanna-*

⁴³³ Note that repetition also signalled abundance in visual art as well, ‘the underlying concept of desired abundance in the natural world was clearly articulated in text and image through the representation of often-repeated domesticated plants and animals, the rivers and the life they sustained, all of which remained a constant theme for millennia’ (Winter 2010a: 214).

Dumuzi P, lines 18-27, Inanna repeatedly requests “yellow” milk from Dumuzi (**ga si₁₂-a-ma-ab**).

The target domain of abundance is metaphorised at length in a passage of *Inanna-Dumuzi D1*, that shares stock images with several other compositions (see above). Notably, imagery of plants, animals and foodstuffs cluster, accompanied with repetition of the initial parts of the verbal chain to metaphorise a sense of prosperity and surplus of produce. Here, Ninšubur declares the abundance that the king will bring when Inanna bestows kingship upon him:

Inanna-Dumuzi D1

BM 15280 (P283738)

50 gu ḥe₂-en-da-gal₂ še ḥe₂-en-da-gal₂

May flax be with him, may barley be with him!

51 i₇-da a-eštub ḥe₂-en-da-gal₂

In the river, may there be spring (carp) waters with him!

52 a-ša₃-ga še gu-nu ḥe₂-en-da-gal₂

In the fields, may there be multi-coloured barley with him!

53 ambar-ra ku₆ mušen gu₃ ḥu-mu-da-ra-ra

In the marshes, may the fish and birds chatter with him!

54 **mu-ge-e** ge bad ge ḥenbur ḥe₂-en-da-an-mu₂

In the reedbeds, may old reeds and new reeds grow with him!

55 an eden-na ^{mu}**maš-gurum** ḥe₂-en-da-an-mu₂

In the high steppe, may the *mašgurum* tree grow with him!

56 ter-ter-ra šeg₉ šeg₉-bar ħe₂-en-da-lu

In the forests, may wild sheep and wild goats multiply with him!

57 pu₂-^{geš}kiri₆ la₃ geštin ħe₂-en-da- il₂

In the orchards, may honey and wine rise with him!

58 sar-sar-ra ħi -is^{sar} za₃-ħi-li^{sar} ħe₂-en-da-mu₂

In the gardens, may lettuce and *cress* grow with him!

59 e₂ gal-la zi su₃-ud-gal₂ ħe₂-en-da-an-gal₂

In the palace, may there be long life with him!

Outside of the Sumerian “Love Songs”, such imagery may not be interpreted as typically erotic; however, the contextual use of these source domains for abundance in the “Love Songs” can be argued to operate as contributing to their eroticism. The beginning passages of *Inanna-Dumuzi D1*, for example, includes repetitive wishes for a bed on which Inanna desires to meet the king: **ki-nu₂ ur₂ ze₂-ba al ba-an-du₁₁ ki-nu₂ al ba-an-du₁₁**, ‘She desired the bed that sweetens the lap, she desired the bed’ (line 20). On one level, the text involves the goddess handing over kingship, with the wish that he will bring lush and fertile lands, but on another it also involves her meeting with a lover who brings her ample pleasure, metaphorised as the plants and food that are desired elsewhere throughout the corpus. In *Inanna-Dumuzi H*, abundance clearly refers to such pleasure shared between lovers:

Inanna-Dumuzi H

HS 1486 (P345620)

20 me-en-de₃ iti₆-še₃ e-ne su₃-ud ga¹-da-e

i-na ri-ša-tim i nim-me-li-^r il^ṽ

As for us- let me have sex with you until the moon rises!

21 ki-nu₂ ku₃ ḥe₂-nun-na suku₅ ga-mu-ra-^r du₈^ṽ

mu-uš-ṭa-ti-ki lu-pa-ṭi-ir

On the shiny, abundant bed, let me release your combs for you!

22 u₄ du₁₀ nam-ḥe₂-a ḥul₂-la ḥu-mu-u₃[!]-di-ni-^r ib^ṽ-[zal-en]

li-ip-pu'-uḥ₂'

Let *me* spend a sweet day of abundance rejoicing with you!

It is later hoped by Inanna that Dumuzi will “perfect” (**ḥe₂-du₇**) her “splendid lap” (lines 13-15); the pleasure that he provides metaphorised as sensuous abundance and fragrant plants: **u₃-mu-un-gu₁₀ ḥe₂-ma-al-zu ze₂-ba-am₃/eden-na u₂-šim-zu ku₇-ku₇-dam**, ‘My lord, your abundance is sweet! Your fragrant herbs in the steppe are sugar-sweet!’ (lines 17-18, discussed in chapter 2.7).

Such erotic motifs involving abundance are not unique. In the ancient Egyptian love poetry, just as in the Sumerian, sensuous abundance metaphorises and surrounds the lovers; Meskell noted that ‘The desire for togetherness is likened to abundant greenness and blossoming flowers, something that was considered beautiful and “ideal” in Egyptian thought. Surrounded by the desert, often described as a red, hostile land, the presence of trees and gardens spoke of luxury and perfection on earth’ (Meskell 2002: 131). The clustering of food and plant imagery also recalls another, perhaps universal, metaphor found in erotic poetry; that which likens food/eating to desire and sexual activity. As observed in the section on Flax and Barley (chapter 2.2), biblical scholar Exum has commented that the overloading of plant and fruit imagery in the *Song of Songs* is suggestive of the ‘glutting of

sexual desire’ (Exum 2005: 178). In several places in this thesis, this metaphor has been identified in the “Love Songs” corpus (chapters 2.1, 2.2, 2.5, 2.8). Agricultural abundance and copious imagery from the domains of food and drink also contribute to the eroticisation of this corpus, likening the enjoyments of sexual pleasure to eating/drinking. The lovers imagine one another *as* various plants or foodstuffs, whilst their sexual emotions and experiences are also metaphorised with imagery of abundance.

Moreover, whilst abundance in other Old Babylonian Sumerian literary texts is often framed as a god or king providing agricultural prosperity for the people, in the context of the Sumerian “Love Songs”, it is nearly always situated as being provided *by* the male lover *to* the female, often the goddess Inanna. In this way, the target domain shares this structuring with the target domain of sexual pleasure (chapter 3.2), which can be metaphorised through the bringing of gifts and produce. For example, in *Inanna-Dumuzi C1*, Inanna wishes for fish and birds to be brought as gifts to please her: [mušen] ᵀ sag₁₀ ᵀ-ga mi₂ de₃-ga₂-ab-be₂, ‘May he please me with the best birds!’ (col. i. line 17), as well as wine and milk (see passage discussed in chapters 2.10, 2.5 and 2.8). Similarly, there are aspects of the target domain of abundance that correspond with entailments structuring the target domain of sexual desire; for example, the use of precative wish forms to express the lovers’ desire for something, as in *Šu-Suen C*, where the female speaker hopes for her lover to act as a farmer, abundant crops brought for her: mu-un-gar₃ še maḥ tum₃-me ḥe₂-me-en, ‘May you be our farmer, bringing resplendent barley!’ (line 20).

Finally, abundance is related to the concept of ḥi-li (Jaques 2006: 18), which, as discussed in chapter 1.3, is a key marker of eroticism whose meaning intertwines those main themes and target domains of the Sumerian “Love Songs”: sexual desire, pleasure, allure, and abundance. The term is used in reference to the lusciousness/abundance of fruit or plants in various kinds of literary texts; for example, in a metaphor for the **Ekišnugal** in *Rīm-Šîn*

F, line 30: **hi-li su₃-su₃ gurun-gen₇ si₁₂-ga**, ‘whose long-lasting allure is like ripe fruit’ (ETCSL 2.6.9.6); and in a hymn to Inanna, lines 46-7: **hi-li ʾ^ddumu-zi ge^šildag₃ gub-gub-dam/ša₃-gu₁₀ hi-li ge₄-im-si**, ‘The allure of Dumuzi is the standing poplar tree,/Let me fill my belly with desire’ (ETCSL 4.07.a), with obvious erotic intent. Just as the various meanings of **hi-li** blend and intertwine, the target domain Abundance in the Sumerian “Love Songs” is interconnected with the erotic emotions and experiences depicted.

The target domain of abundance occurs slightly differently than the others discussed in this thesis. Though the source-target domain relationship is identifiable, there is also a sense that the theme of abundance in all forms is presented as underlying the corpus. Some metaphors permeate through literature without explicitly surfacing; the metaphor theorist Kövecses considered this kind of metaphor as a “megametaphor” that provides an undercurrent to all other metaphors used in a literary work (Kövecses 2010: 57-9). Abundance is present in the fact that nearly all the source domains used in the Sumerian “Love Songs” come from the domains of food, plants, agriculture, or material wealth, and are often all portrayed as appearing copiously, surrounding the lovers’ of the texts. In this way, ABUNDANCE IS EROTIC works as a “megametaphor” of the Sumerian “Love Songs”.

3. Abundance in the Sumerian “Love Songs”: Summary

From analysing the metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, it is evident that the literary motif and target domain of Abundance is inextricable from eroticism. Interpreting abundance as a metaphor in the “Love Songs” is a decision to not interpret literally the depiction of agricultural prosperity as an outcome of a fertility ritual. The wealth of food, plants, and precious objects instead metaphorically comprise the sensuous, erotic makeup of these compositions. Structured with many of the same source domains as those that map

onto sexual desire, pleasure, and allure, a conceptual relationship is further suggested by similar strategies for structuring the target domain of abundance: the clustering and repetition of imagery, the providing of produce to the female lover, and the framing of desire using verbal wish forms. The assumed connection to and representation of reproductive fertility in these texts is eclipsed by the tying of imagery of abundant agriculture and foodstuffs to the delight and desires of the lovers in this corpus.

4. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have investigated metaphors for sexual desire, pleasure, allure, and abundance in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, exploring how metaphorical source domains crucially interact to structure these abstract target domains and formulate the corpus’ eroticism. By applying a modern theoretical approach, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, to the abundant metaphor of the Sumerian “Love Songs”, I sought to understand how the analysis of figurative language could be used as a tool for accessing amatory feelings and experiences conceptualised and embodied at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE in southern Mesopotamia. As the world’s earliest corpus of love poetry, I aimed to comprehend how eroticism was built and evoked through metaphorical language, and how these texts’ worked to express sentiments such as desire and pleasure. In this conclusion, I will review the results of my methodological approach to the metaphor of the “Love Songs”, before giving a summary of my main conclusions, and some further considerations and implications that this study has raised.

1. Results: An Assessment of the Application of the MIP and Conceptual Metaphor Theory

In the introduction, I outlined the difficulties in identifying and analysing metaphor in Sumerian literature, which has led to an inevitable hesitancy to approach this topic. One of the main results of this thesis, then, has been the application of modern theoretical approaches to metaphor, which has allowed for an extended study upon the mechanisms of metaphor in Old Babylonian Sumerian literature.

This application of first, the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), and second, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), has both its merits and its difficulties. There are some challenges in the study of Sumerian metaphor that remain insurmountable (discussed in chapter 1.2, 1.4 and 1.5); however, this thesis has demonstrated the effectiveness of an

exploration of Sumerian metaphor using the MIP and CMT that, I think, outweighs the obvious difficulties. The main feature of the MIP that aims for a less subjective identification of metaphor is the contrasting of ‘basic’ meaning of a term/image with its ‘contextual’ meaning to determine its metaphoricity (see chapter 1.5). Whilst I acknowledge the inherent subjectivity of my study of metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, the application of the MIP allowed me to compare how source domains operated elsewhere, either in the wider Old Babylonian Sumerian literary corpus or other sources, with how the source domains appear in the erotic context of the Sumerian “Love Songs”. With this approach, I was able to give evidence for my interpretation of the imagery in the “Love Songs”, supporting my analysis of metaphorical meaning with an exploration of the emic conceptualisation of a source domains’ ‘basic meaning’. Highlighting an image’s ‘contextual meaning’ in the erotic context of the Sumerian “Love Songs” was often significant to comprehending the use of certain source domains and has further allowed for a different interpretation of certain metaphors that usually are thought to represent themes connected to discourses of fertility, reproduction, and kingship, instead viewing them as serving expressions of desire and eroticism.

Significantly, the application of CMT, with its emphasis on the construction of abstract meaning through embodiment (see 1.4), has often allowed for a greater and more extensive identification and interpretation of metaphorical language in this corpus than observed before. Rather than only focusing on source domains that metaphorise the bodies of the lovers or sexual intercourse, by recognising that embodied objects and actions can map onto and structure abstract target domains, this thesis has been able to explore and consider the metaphorical structuring of more abstract erotic experiences attached to love poetry (see below). The analysis of the mappings and entailments between source and target domains has highlighted the construction of eroticism in this early corpus of erotic love

poetry; formed through the interaction of metaphor that particularly drew from sensory domains of taste, sight, smell, and touch. The enjoyment of the lovers is sensed through the presentation of great abundance of food and agricultural prosperity. Whilst the source domains used were specific to the Old Babylonian world and appeared frequently elsewhere in the literary corpus, many of them can also be understood as universal erotic imagery, particularly honey, fruit, milk, and plants. Others, such as barley/flax seem specific to the Sumerian context.

2. Visualising Conceptual Metaphors and Mapping in the “Love Songs”

One of the main outcomes of my analysis of Sumerian metaphor in this corpus is the realisation that metaphor cannot be viewed and comprehended when taken as an isolated image; the effectiveness of the abundant metaphorical language of the Sumerian “Love Songs” is dependent on the interaction between source domains and the polyvalency and *double entendre* of its imagery. Source domains recall and build upon one another to structure abstract erotic sensations and emotions. Furthermore, the analysis of Sumerian metaphor is not possible when only attempting to comprehend the transfer between image A= B, because determining the target domain of a source was seen to be based not only on a concrete object in itself, but relied on wider frames of reference that included grammatical elements and positions, the use of specific adjectives and comparisons, and the interaction and allusions to other source and target domains.

Figure 1 (Source/Target Mapping in the Sumerian “Love Songs”; also found in Appendix B) is a visualisation of the mappings between source and target domains that have been explored in this thesis. The visualisation aids in giving an overview of how the target domains were conceptualised in the “Love Songs” by drawing connections between the concrete objects or embodied actions (the source domains) and the target domains. The

arrows demonstrate the direction of metaphorical mapping, from source to target. I created the visualisation as a tool for identifying patterns in the kinds of source domains used, as well as the structuring of the target domains.

The map makes clear that the majority of source domains used are taken from the domains of agriculture, plants, and foodstuffs, though the patterns that are presented demonstrate a departure from some perceptions often made about the metaphorical construction of gender and the body in erotic/love literature. For example, it is most often women whose bodies are conceptualised as food to be consumed by her male lover.⁴³⁴ This pattern is apparent in the Sumerian “Love Songs”; however, Figure 1 clearly shows that domains related to food, eating, and plants, also map onto the male body (primarily as trees), but further they act as source domains used to express the abstract aspects of sexual experience. Food is not only the female body for the male to consume, but it also participates metaphorically in the construction of the female experience of her own pleasure and desire.⁴³⁵ For example, the source domain ‘Barley’ has a wide scope of the source (see section 7 in chapter 1.4), and maps onto five target domains: the vulva, sexual desire, sexual allure, sexual pleasure, and abundance (discussed in chapter 2.2), indicating the multiplicity of mappings that an image may produce.

Figure 1 illustrates that all target domains of the “Love Songs” are structured by multiple metaphors and exhibit a wide range. The four main target domains of the corpus are those which have the most source domains, and were explored in chapter 3: sexual desire,

⁴³⁴ In the *Song of Songs*, the ‘male lover “eats” and “drinks” the female lover’ (Brenner 1999: 107). See Brownsmith 2020: 31ff for this construction, particularly in biblical texts. In Old Babylonian Akkadian similes, Wasserman identified that it is mostly women who are compared to fruit or domestic plants (Wasserman 1999: 193). Crespo-Fernández 2015 has identified the misogynistic trend of referring to woman as foodstuffs in internet forums (Crespo-Fernández 2015: 153ff).

⁴³⁵ This is the topic of my forthcoming article, ‘Desire and Hunger; Women and Food: The earliest example of a universal conceptual metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs”?’ , published in the proceedings of the 67th *Rencontre*.

allure, pleasure, and abundance. Whilst there are many source domains that map onto the bodily target domains (hair, male/female bodies, genitalia), it is significant that what is most prominently expressed in the “Love Songs” are these abstract emotions and concepts, which speaks to the erotic intent of the corpus. Eroticism is not focused on the explicit representation of the nude/sexual body (chapter 1.3). The source domains that are outlined in various colours are those with a wide scope that map onto more than one target domain, demonstrating the interaction and conceptual connections between source and target concepts. Figure 1 highlights the close conceptual relationships between the expression of sexual desire, allure, and pleasure. Notably, as discussed in chapter 3.4, the target domain of abundance is conceptually connected to the erotic target domains in the “Love Songs” through a significant sharing of source domains.

Whilst there are inevitable limitations in analysing the abstract target domains of desire, pleasure, and allure, that are necessarily constrained by modern understanding of such concepts, visually mapping the metaphorical connections in this corpus has demonstrated that there are conceivable patterns in the structuring of these complex, abstract concepts. Whilst there exists no philosophical treatise or definitions of these concepts from ancient Mesopotamia, studies such as these can help in illuminating some of the ways in which such complex emotions and ideas were conceptually structured in Sumerian, that can be added to a long history of ancient consideration and treatises that are primarily known from the Classical world.

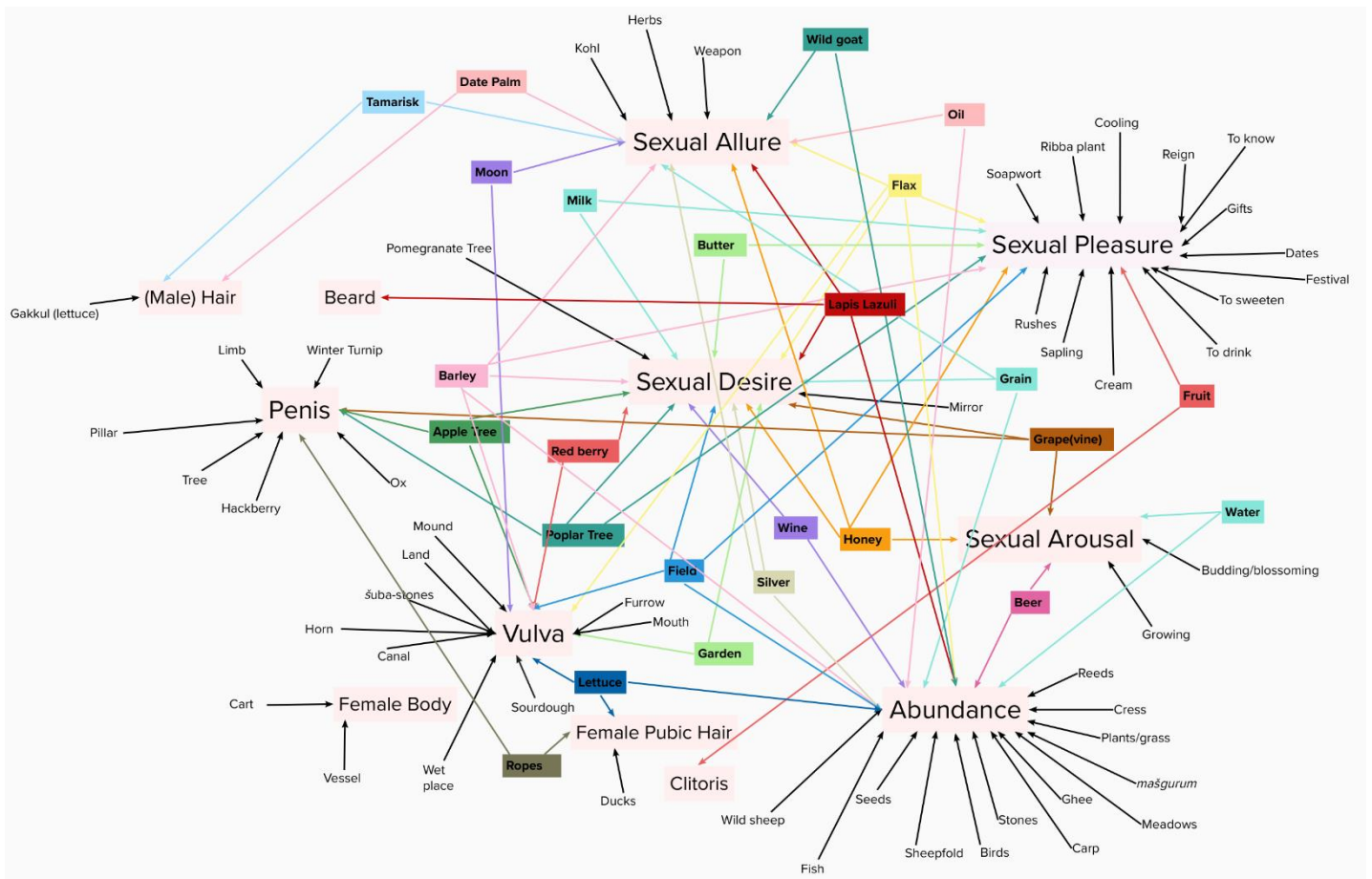


Figure 1 Source/Target Mapping in the Sumerian "Love Songs"

3. Summary of Main Conclusions

Whilst the metaphor of the Sumerian “Love Songs” has been discussed before (see chapter 1.1), this thesis is the first extended study that not only takes a modern theoretical approach to their vivid and frequent figurative language but uses metaphor to explore more abstract amatory emotions and their construction of eroticism. Viewing the “Love Songs” more explicitly as erotic poetry (chapter 1.3), and as expressing the feelings and intimacies shared amongst women, has led to some significant conclusions that moves away from an interpretation that limits the texts to being understood as expressions of royal dominion over land and the female body (discussed in chapter 1.2). The following summarises my main conclusions.

The identification of how eroticism is constructed and manoeuvred in this corpus places these Sumerian texts within a much wider history and framework of ancient and modern love poetry. In chapter 1.3, I argued that Sumerian eroticism can be encompassed by the term **hi-li**, that figures frequently in the Sumerian “Love Songs” and has a particularly strong relationship with its metaphorical source domains. Significantly, the term **hi-li** encompasses meanings that directly correspond with the target domains identified as most prevalent in the “Love Songs”: desire, pleasure, allure, and abundance. Focusing on how these texts formulated an eroticism conceived and shared amongst women (discussed in chapter 1.2) deliberately removed them from a restricted view of seeing them as serving some ritualistic purpose and placed them within a much more humanistic framework of ancient people sharing and amalgamating myth, folklore, and poetry with personal experiences and intimacies.

Chapter 2 gave a thorough analysis of the source domains used in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, through identifying the ‘basic’ meaning of an image and then exploring its contextual use to determine its metaphorical effect. Chapter 2.1 investigated the use of honey and sweetness as erotic source domains, finding that a seemingly universal and innate desire for tasting something sweet mapped pervasively onto erotic target domains of desire, pleasure, and (female) arousal. The impact of the honey metaphor was argued to be strong enough that the presence of sweetness permeates the corpus, and the prolific use of adjectives for ‘sweet’ recalled back to the erotic honey metaphor. In chapter 2.2, I analysed the source domains of barley and flax, which, though unexpected as erotic metaphor to a modern reader, drew upon feelings of sought-after agricultural abundance to map onto target domains of desire, pleasure, and allure. Barley, related to the domains of food/drinking/eating, and flax, related to domains of textiles, clothing, and bed linen, were shown to therefore display conceptual connections to erotic domains of experience. As an

image metaphor that reflected the shape and structure of the female body, barley in the furrow, described as filled with **hi-li**, was also used as a source domain for the vulva.

Chapter 2.3 explored lettuce as another source domain for the vulva. Whilst the shape, texture, and exudations make the lettuce an ontological metaphor for the female genitals, the richness of this image comes from interacting conceptual metaphors that surround it in the corpus: watering as a metaphor for male ejaculation, and paralleled imagery of barley, gardens, apple trees, and vessels as source domains for the vulva. In chapter 2.4, I argued that the difficult Sumerian term **gerin** was employed as a colour term and recalled its origins as a red berry (or flower). In the “Love Songs”, this was used as a metaphor for the vulva, but also used adjectivally to modify the image of the bed, imbuing this space with erotic connotations, and metaphorising sexual desire.

Chapter 2.5 explored three connected source domains: beer, water, and wine. They were argued to work within the wider, overarching conceptual metaphor THE BODY IS A CONTAINER, where the female body in particular was perceived as a vessel for containing liquids. In the erotic context of the “Love Songs”, these liquids primarily acted as metaphors for female sexual arousal, and it was argued that, whilst watering was elsewhere conceptualised as a male action, the female body in the “Love Songs” also produced liquid and did not just passively contain it. Enjoyment of consuming these liquids and the prosperity that they represented also led to their use as metaphors for abundance and pleasure.

In chapter 2.6, I explored the prominent use of tree metaphors for kingship in the Old Babylonian Sumerian literary corpus, and their recurring entailments which metaphorised the stability, protection, and fruitfulness that the ruler could provide. I highlighted how the trope of royal tree metaphors was subverted in the “Love Songs” to operate as metaphors

for the male lover and his penis, using a similar range of metaphorical entailments. I suggested that this could have been a humorous poetic device to serve the interests of the texts' female creators. Trees were also used as the erotic environment of the lovers, and, in two instances, as source domains for the female lover, which I argued to reflect a potential transition in the conceptual association of (fruit) tree metaphors, which later became strongly associated with female sexuality.

Chapter 2.7 analysed specific plants and their properties that were used as metaphors for pleasure, allure, and desire in the context of the "Love Songs". The analysis of these source domains especially highlighted the scribal context of these compositions and suggested at the intertextual references with other scholarly texts and knowledge of certain plant properties that contributed to understanding of their metaphorical resonances. In chapter 2.8, milk, cream, and butter were analysed as source domains that mapped onto target domains of desire and pleasure; these products were carried and brought as gifts by the shepherd, Dumuzi, to his lover, Inanna, and in some cases personified him. Further to this, Inanna wishing to drink the milk of Dumuzi was interpreted as a sexual metaphor, as was the rhythmic rocking of churns. As other source domains, abundance of these food products contributed to the feelings of excess and consumption that surrounds the lovers in these texts.

Chapter 2.9 investigated the use of precious materials and objects as source domains in the "Love Songs", finding that colour and texture of these objects was played with to draw attention to the most erotic and sexually alluring parts of the male and female bodies. Finally, in chapter 2.10, I briefly outlined some of the less frequent metaphors present in the "Love Songs". I argued that many of them still contributed to the eroticism of the corpus, including domains taken from the ceremonial and ritual worlds, such as reigns and festivals. Animal source domains mapped as metaphors for abundance and allure, rather than sexual vigour as

expected and seen in other kinds of texts. There are very few references to Inanna's warrior and celestial aspects in the "Love Songs"; only one mention of her weapon, which I suggested was here a metaphor for her sexual allure; and in two instances she is described as the moon.

In chapter 3, I analysed the observable patterns presented by the kinds of source domains used in the "Love Songs" to comment on how the abstract target domains of sexual desire/arousal, pleasure, allure, and abundance were conceptually structured. It is perhaps unsurprising, but few target domains identifiable in the Sumerian "Love Songs" were *not* related to eroticism. Another important conclusion that seems obvious, but that has been demonstrated by metaphor theoreticians for modern languages (see chapter 1.4), is that the complex metaphors of desire, pleasure, allure (and so target domains of emotions) are *only* expressed metaphorically in this corpus.

In chapter 3.1, it was demonstrated that sexual desire in the "Love Songs" was conceived of as an *expectation* for a pleasure response, fitting with a modern incentive-based model of desire. This was evident through the types of source domains used that paralleled sexual desire with a craving for intermittent instances of pleasure (ie. sweet foodstuffs, desirable but perishable foods/crops), but also grammatically through the use of verbal wish forms and repetition. As expected, *female* desire was represented more frequently than male in the corpus. Finally, it was noted that physical sexual arousal exhibited clear gendered differences, using source domains with wetness entailments for female arousal, and actions of sprouting and growing for male penile arousal.

In chapter 3.2, I explored the conceptualisation of sexual pleasure. Connected inextricably to the target domain of desire, pleasure was conceived of as more embodied and experiential; the *sensation* of receiving the desirable object, rather than the *wish* for it. The

source domains used to metaphorise pleasure were actions comprised of those affecting the senses and associated with other actions known to stimulate or associated with bodily pleasure: sweet foods; actions of doing (something sweet), cooling, rising; knowing; and experiencing. Therefore, these metaphors demonstrate that the experience of sexual pleasure in the “Love Songs” was perceived as being akin to other sensual, visceral, and embodied pleasures. Significantly, sexual pleasure was conceived of as a sensation that was enacted (ie. “brought”) by an individual to another, suggesting that pleasure was considered a response to an external stimulus, and notably as an action shared between lovers, or as something that can be performed by an individual onto another. This suggested the perception that sexual pleasure was an experience to be shared mutually between lovers. As with other emotion concepts in Sumerian, pleasure was identifiably felt in the belly and liver, but also commensurately in the lap of the female lover.

In chapter 3.3, it was demonstrated that sexual allure was conceptualised by source domains that directly map onto features of the body perceived as the most attractive, as well as items and cosmetics that enhance the beauty of the wearer, suggesting that allure encompassed physical and visual beauty of the female and male bodies. While the female body was often looked upon as visually alluring, the erotic and consummatory gaze of the “Love Songs” was argued to express the mutuality of the sexual experience. Furthermore, it was suggested that allure was also related to a more abstract feeling of attractiveness, connected to the presence of **hi-li**. When the object of desire’s allure/attractiveness was being metaphorised, **hi-li** was often present in its description.

Finally, in chapter 3.4, I argued that the agricultural abundance and copious imagery from the domains of food and drink also contributed to the eroticisation of this corpus, likening the enjoyments of sexual pleasure to eating/drinking and agricultural success. The conceptual connection between abundance and the erotic target domains of desire, pleasure,

and allure can be gleaned through the sharing of their source domains (see Figure 1; Appendix B), but also in the shared structuring of the target domains. Abundance is situated in the “Love Songs” as being provided *by* the male lover *to* the female, often the goddess Inanna. In this way, the target domain shares this structuring with the target domain of sexual pleasure. Abundance of crops and produce is also often *wished* for, structuring the abstract sense of prosperity in the same way as the domain of sexual desire. Moreover, whilst the concept of **hi-li** encompasses the meanings of desire, pleasure, and allure, it also relates to a sense of joyous abundance. Just as the various meanings of **hi-li** blend and intertwine, the target domain abundance in the Sumerian “Love Songs” is interconnected with the erotic emotions and experiences depicted.

4. Further Considerations: Preserving Expressions of Love and Intimacy

In the introduction, I returned to Jacobsen’s claim that (some of) the Sumerian “Love Songs” were ‘popular ditties such as would be sung by women to while away the time at spinning or weaving, or perhaps as songs to dance to’ (Jacobsen 1976: 27), noting that it is not impossible that a corpus that focuses so heavily on the female voice and perspective of sexual desire and pleasure represents the intimacies and stories shared amongst women, as is the case in other times and places (chapter 1.2). Nonetheless, as with other Old Babylonian Sumerian literature, these texts have a secondary context, preserved through copying and scribal education. Here, I will briefly consider some of the implications and further questions raised by the deliberate preservation of poetry that focuses on intimacy and care for female pleasure.

Whilst it has not been an explicit intention of this thesis to analyse the gender power dynamics in the depiction of sexual experiences in the Sumerian “Love Songs”, it is not difficult to see, in this respect, that the dynamics preserved in the “Love Songs” are quite

unique. Unlike other sources from ancient Mesopotamia that tend to depict a male orientation of sexual experience, such as the ŠA₃.ZI.GA incantations (Zisa 2021a; see discussion in chapter 3.1) or the *šumma ālu* omen series (see fn. 390), nearly every composition included as part of the “Love Songs” corpus that includes dialogue between lovers privileges the female voice or is structured as a monologue with a female speaker.⁴³⁶ Whilst the female voice and experience is certainly privileged in this corpus, it is the mutuality of pleasure and erotic experience that is emphasised (see especially chapters 3.2 and 3.3). In some texts, Inanna/an unnamed woman is presented as a young woman who receives gifts from her lover/spouse; in others, she is a goddess ready to bestow kingship to the king who can bring her agricultural abundance and pleasure. She desires both her own pleasure and that of her lover. The erotic relationships in the “Love Songs” are not strictly controlled by binaries and oppositions that necessitate a passive female subjectivity or a dominant male sexuality, such as in *šumma ālu*, where, as noted by Guinan, such binaries replace the actual ‘erotic reciprocity’ of sexual experiences (Guinan 1997: 468). The preservation of such a portrayal of erotic experience contrasts greatly with the incantations and omens, as there is no explicit *purpose* that, for example, seeks to counter a loss of male sexual desire, or to ascribe (in)auspicious outcomes to various sexual encounters.

In ancient texts with no certain, identifiable author or audience, it is impossible to fully understand *who* wanted to preserve this kind of erotic poetry. Leick placed at least some of the corpus as an ‘elevated art form’, enjoyed by the royal court (Leick 1994: 129), based on the inclusion of the king Šu-Suen as the male lover in several compositions. The

⁴³⁶ This is based upon rough manual calculations of how many lines were spoken by female, male, or “narrator” voices in each (composite) text. Exceptions to the rule that sees the most lines in the majority of the “Love Songs” framed as female speech (of the goddess Inanna/an unnamed woman) are *Inanna-Dumuzi I*, in which the lines are shared almost equally between Inanna (16 lines)/Dumuzi (18 lines)/the narrator (11 lines); and *Inanna-Dumuzi Q, T, V, B1, C1, D1, E1, bal-bal-e* of *Inanna/Išme-Dagan J*, and **HS 2940**, where the majority of lines feature a “narratorial” voice that narrates the action of the lovers in the 3rd person.

comprehension and the sophisticated use and interaction of the abundant metaphorical language of the “Love Songs” exhibits scribal and poetic skill, and perhaps did enter education (chapter 1.2) and reach a scholarly or elite milieu. However, as this thesis argues, the embodied conceptualisation of erotic emotions in the “Love Songs” is structured using source domains taken primarily from the everyday life and repertoire of the Old Babylonian world and could have easily drawn upon an oral tradition of erotic poetry, conceived of, and sung amongst women (see 1.2). The formalisation and perhaps performance of the Sumerian “Love Songs” is evident by their various rubrics and subscripts; for example, *Inanna-Dumuzi H*, a **tigi** song of Inanna, is broken into two parts, the **sagida** and the **sagara**, terms that seem related to the tuning of string instruments. The performance of erotic literature to music is reminiscent of the context of ancient Greek lyric poetry, known to have been performed for entertainment at weddings, cultic festivals, and in the symposium (Robbins/Fuhrer 2023 [Pauly]). The situation for the “Love Songs” is, of course, not clear, but the inclusion of love poetry amongst the Old Babylonian Sumerian literature, some of which had its origins in scribal education (see 1.2), injects a concern for female voice and sexual experience into a corpus which is predominated by mythological narratives or hymns involving gods and kings.⁴³⁷

Aside from several fragmentary examples that contain Šu-Suen’s name (see discussion in chapter 2.6), the literary tradition of the Sumerian “Love Songs” surprisingly does not live on into Akkadian, at least not in the extant sources (Wasserman 2016). Love literature *does* continue in Akkadian, but in an ostensibly different form, and with a close relationship with the incantation corpus. Such focus on (female) desire and pleasure was

⁴³⁷ However, there are texts which also present intimate, loving, familial relationships of the divine and royal worlds. Terms of endearment are regularly used, referring to beloved spouses, parents, in-laws, children, and siblings. Notably, such familial language ‘When employed in myths, epics, and royal inscriptions [...] often serve both to construct genealogies of power and to reinforce the bonds between human kings and their patron deities’, for example, Gilgameš is said to be the brother of the Ur III kings (Couto-Ferreira 2022: 680).

therefore apparently seen as existing as part of the Sumerian tradition by Old Babylonian scribes.⁴³⁸ Perhaps love poetry such as the “Love Songs” was considered prestigious, only to be preserved in Sumerian, which, at that time, was the language of scholarship. It might be that the use of Emesal was particularly significant for recording the songs and voices of women in erotic poetry, though the continued use of Emesal in liturgies and laments suggests a transition in the purpose of this ‘dialect’, and probably had something to do with the priests who performed them. Perhaps the compositions were related in some way to those sung in the Ur III courts, as suggested by Leick, as it is well-known that king Šulgi and Šu-Suen kept wives and concubines at the palace;⁴³⁹ moments of intimacy between the king and his beloved can be seen, for example, in a necklace from the Ur III period containing an inscribed bead with the **lukur**’s name, *ku-ba-tum/lukur ki-ag₂/d^šu-d^{EN}.ZU*, ‘Kubatum, beloved **lukur** of Šu-Suen’, framed between two smaller beads inscribed with the name of the king (RIME 3/2.1.4.28).

It would seem that something of the eroticism and a female perspective of desire, pleasure, allure, and abundance, conceptualised through a plethora of vivid and sensuous metaphorical imagery, was seen to have existed solely as a remnant of the Sumerian tradition, preserved by Old Babylonian scribes. If it cannot be said with any certainty *why* erotic poetry was preserved as part of this corpus, at least it can be confirmed that the intricate mapping and conceptualisation of the ways in which women experienced sexual intimacy and pleasure was deemed as important and worthy of inscribing. This is not insubstantial, considering the lack of female voice in ancient literature.

⁴³⁸ Future research should question the (non-)transmission of the Sumerian love literature past the Old Babylonian period and consider its relationship with the corpus of Akkadian love literature that continues into the first millennium BCE.

⁴³⁹ On the topic of women at the royal court, see Sharlach’s (2017) study on the archives related to the wives of king Šulgi.

The Sumerian “Love Songs” contain a wealth of material for those interested in ancient eroticism, love poetry, gender, and metaphor, though they are not widely known outside of Assyriology. Following on from this thesis, I am preparing accessible and more conventionally “poetic” translations of the Sumerian “Love Songs” corpus, aimed at a general and popular audience, to continue to preserve the extraordinary female voices of this corpus. For a sample edition and translation of a text, see Appendix C, in which I give a “traditional” edition of *Inanna-Dumuzi D*, with partiture, grammatical analysis and a literal translation for the specialist and those who want to engage with a closer reading of the text. This is then followed by a freer translation of the poem, that captures its tone and sense in a more reader-friendly and accessible way. It is hoped that this exploration of the mechanisms of the metaphorical language in the formulation of eroticism in the Sumerian “Love Songs” may now be available and of interest to non-Assyriologists and scholars of antiquity. With this study, and with a forthcoming anthology of accessible (“popular”) translations of this corpus, the Sumerian “Love Songs” may hopefully now be placed appropriately at the forefront of a world history of erotic poetry and the records of love and intimacy between peoples.

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Appendix A: Catalogue

The following table is a concordance of the ETCSL, Museum, and CDLI P numbers for the compositions analysed as part of this thesis. This includes the compositions typically assigned as the Sumerian “Love Songs”, but also several other texts with erotic imagery and use of Emesal. I also include the ancient subscript (if known), tablet proveniences, compositions included on the tablet,⁴⁴⁰ and whether the tablet has (Akkadian) glosses (information discussed in chapter 1.2). For classification and discussion of the glosses, refer to Sövegjártó 2020. For bibliographical information on editions and translations, a recent, exhaustive catalogue for Sumerian literary compositions has been compiled by Attinger (2021: 21-56).

Composition Name	Subscript	ETCSL Number	Museum Number	CDLI P Number	Provenience	Tablet Type	Tablet Columns	(Akkadian) Glosses
Inanna-Dumuzi A	bal-bal-e of Inanna	4.08.01						
			CBS 10465	P265677	Nippur		1	
			CBS 8085	P263001	Nippur	Collective [I-D A; I-D C]	1	Yes
			N 4305	P275012	Nippur	Collective [I-D A; I-D C; I-D G; ŠS C; Inanna F]	1	
			W 11603, r (AUWE 23, 103)	P349106	Uruk		1	
Inanna-Dumuzi B	bal-bal-e of Inanna	4.08.02						
			Ist Ni 2489	P345323	Nippur		1	

⁴⁴⁰ Referred to by their designated names on the ETCSL. I-D = Inanna-Dumuzi; ŠS = Šu-Suen.

Inanna-Dumuzi C	bal-bal-e of Inanna	4.08.03						
			Ist Ni 2429	P345297	Nippur		1	
			CBS 8037 + N 1703 + N 1832 + N 7508	P262964	Nippur	Collective [I-D C, I-D N, I-D U, Ur-Namma D]	2	
			CBS 15126	P269682	Nippur		1	
			N 4305	P275012	Nippur	Collective [I-D A; I-D C; I-D G; ŠS C; Inanna F]	1	
Inanna-Dumuzi D	bal-bal-e of Inanna	4.08.04						
			UM 29-16- 08	P256630	Nippur	Collective [I-D D; I-D G]	1	
			NBC 10923	P286260	Unprov.	Collective [I-D D; I-D G]	1	
			Ist Ni 4552	P343628	Nippur	Collective [I-D D; I-D L; I-D Z]	1	
Inanna-Dumuzi E	bal-bal-e of Inanna	4.08.05						
			AO 5385	P345364	Unprov.	Collective [I-D E; Ninkasi A]	1	
			IM 11087, 65	P223411	Unprov.		1	
			Ist Ni 9486	P464018	Nippur		1	
			UET 6/1, 121	P346206	Ur	Collective [I-D E; I-D G; ŠS C?]	1	

Inanna-Dumuza F	bal-bal-e of Inanna	4.08.06						
			CBS 4589	P260899	Nippur		1	
			Ist Ni 2408	P345089	Nippur		1	
Inanna-Dumuza G	bal-bal-e of Inanna	4.08.07						
			CBS 13397	P268477	Nippur		1	
			Ist Ni 4569	P343146	Nippur	Collective [I-D G; I-D O; I-D F1; Ninkasi A; Unidentified]	2	
			UET 6/1, 122	P346207	Ur			
			MS 3358	P252299	Unprov.			
			CST 503		Unprov.			
			N 4305	P275012	Nippur	Collective [I-D A; I-D C; I-D G; ŠS C; Inanna F]	1	
			UM 29-16- 08	P256630	Nippur	Collective [I-D D; I-D G]	1	
			NBC 10923	P286260	Unprov.	Collective [I-D D; I-D G]	1	
			UET 6/1, 121	P346206	Ur	Collective [I-D E; I-D G; ŠS C?]	1	
Inanna-Dumuza H	tigi of Inanna	4.08.08						
			HS 1486	P345620	Nippur		1	Yes
Inanna-Dumuza I	kun-gar of Inanna	4.08.09						

			UM 29-16-37	P256650	Nippur		1	Yes
			PRAK II B 46 obv + PRAK II C 94	P343863	Kiš	Collective [I-D I; unidentified]	1	
Inanna- Dumuzi O	bal-bal-e of Inanna	4.08.15						
			CBS 10917 + CBS 10941 + Ist Ni 4011 + Ist Ni 4019	P266110	Nippur	Collective [I-D O; unidentified]	1	
			Ist Ni 4569	P343146	Nippur	Collective [I-D G; I-D O; I-D F1; Ninkasi A; Unidentified]	2	
Inanna- Dumuzi P		4.08.16						
			Ist Ni 9602	P343627	Nippur		2	
			N 3373	P278410	Nippur	Collective [I-D P; unidentified]	1	
			IM 44539a	P223449	Unprov.			
Inanna- Dumuzi Q								
			CBS 8534 + N 1015	P263336	Nippur	Collective [I-D Q; I-D R]	1	
			CBS 12613	P267251	Nippur		1	
Inanna- Dumuzi R	šir- nam-	4.08.18						

	sipa of Dumuzi							
			UM 55-21-309	P257383	Nippur		1	
			CBS 8534 + N 1015	P263336	Nippur	Collective [I-D Q; I-D R]	1	
Inanna-Dumuzi T	kun-gar of Inanna	4.08.20						
			AO 6967	P345414	Unprov.		1	Yes
			N 3577	P278602	Nippur	Collective [I-D T; unidentified]	1	
Inanna-Dumuzi V		4.08.22						
			Ist Ni 3056	P345188	Nippur			
Inanna-Dumuzi W		4.08.23						
			N 3512 + N 6322	P278541	Nippur		1	
			CBS 15163	P269718	Nippur		1	
Inanna-Dumuzi X								
			Ist Ni 2369	P345118	Nippur			Yes
			CBS 6657b+N 1839 + N 2565 + N 5300 + unnn(2)	P269031	Nippur		2	Yes
			CBS 14002+CBS 14002A	P269032	Nippur		2	Yes
			HS 1457 + HS 2531 + HS 2494c + HS 2553	P345726	Nippur		1	Yes

Inanna-Dumuzi Y		4.08.25						
			CBS 4569	P260882	Nippur		1	
			UM 29-16-237	P256805	Nippur		1	
Inanna-Dumuzi Z		4.08.26						
			HS 1429+ N 2854 + N 2861	P345619	Nippur		1	
			Ist Ni 4552	P343628	Nippur	Collective [I-D D; I-D L; I-D Z]	1	
Inanna-Dumuzi B1		4.08.28						
			BM 23702	P345460	Nippur		1	
Inanna-Dumuzi C1		4.08.29						
			Ist Ni 2377	P345166	Nippur		1	Yes
Inanna-Dumuzi D1		4.08.30						
			BM 15280	P283738	Unprov.		2	Yes
Inanna-Dumuzi E1	bal-bal-e of Inanna	4.08.31						
			Ist Ni 4563	P464076	Nippur			
Inanna-Dumuzi F1		4.08.32						
			Ist Ni 4569	P343146	Nippur	Collective [I-D G; I-D O; I-D F1; Ninkasi A; Unidentified]	2	
Šu-Suen A	bal-bal-e of Bau	2.4.4.1						
			Ist Ni 2463	P345315	Nippur			
Šu-Suen B	bal-bal-e of Inanna	2.4.4.2						

			Ist Ni 2461	P343111	Nippur			
			BM 103163	P413235	Kish?		1	
Šu-Suen C	bal-bal-e of Inanna	2.4.4.3						
			N 3560	P278585	Nippur		1	
bal-bal-e of Inanna	bal-bal-e of Inanna	4.08.a						
			YBC 04609	P305839	Unprov.		1	
Išme-Dagan J		2.5.4.10						
			AO 9075	P345441	Unprov.		1	
			N 4305	P275012	Nippur	Collective [I-D A; I-D C; I-D G; ŠS C; Inanna F]	1	
Šulgi Z		2.4.2.26						
			Ist Ni 4171	P343098	Nippur			
Manchester Tammuz								
			MMUM 35516 +	P355698	Sippar?		3	
			CBS 11371 + CBS 11419 + N 3361 + N 3392 + N 6471A + N 7668 + N 7716	P266518	Nippur		1	
HS 2940					Nippur	*441		
Inanna G	šir-nam-šub of Inanna	4.07.7						
			BM 15794	P283740	Unprov.		1	

⁴⁴¹ While **HS 2940** is not a collective tablet, Krebernik has identified parallel lines from other compositions, including from the Sumerian Proverbs, *Ezinam and Ewe*, *Inanna-Dumuzi H* and *A* (Krebernik 2020: 132-133).

Inanna H	bal-bal-e of Nanaya	4.07.8						
			CBS 7932 + CBS 8530	P262889	Nippur	Collective [Inanna A; Inanna H]	1	
			CBS 13915 + N 3156 + UM 29-15- 560	P268925	Nippur		1	
			ROM 721	P417041	Unprov.		1	
			N 3724	P278733	Nippur		1	
šir₃-nam- šub	of Inanna							
			BM 88318	P274208	Unprov.		1	
Utu E/F	šir₃- nam- šub	4.32.e 4.32.f						
	of Utu							
			BM 23631	P355673	Unprov.		2	
Ninisina B	šir₃- nam- šub	4.22.2						
	of Ninisina							
			SM 1904.04.021	P405598	Girsu		1	
The message of Lu-dingira to his mother		5.5.1						
			Ni 2759	P459056	Nippur			
			CBS 1554	P258887	Unprov.		1	
			AO 6330	P345383	Unprov.		1	
			BM 17117	P283751	Unprov.		1	
			LB 2112	P345844	Unprov.		1	

Appendix C: Sample Edition and Translation of Inanna-Dumuzi D

Edition and Translation

Below is a sample edition of one of the Sumerian “Love Songs”. I include partiture, grammatical analysis and a “literal” translation, aimed at the specialist, or those interested in a close translation of the text. Following this, I include an English translation of the text that seeks to be more conventionally “poetic” to a modern audience. With this translation, I take certain liberties; the choice to make most of the poem rhyme is an attempt to make it more palatable to modern readers/listeners; and the inclusion of certain elements, or occasional changing of certain pronouns, is so the reader may follow it more clearly. The next phase of this project will be to compile an anthology of accessible and popular translations of the Sumerian “Love Songs” in this manner.

Inanna-Dumuzi D

Sources:

A: UM 29-16-08 (photo available: P256630), obv. 6'-10'; rev. 1-20

B: NBC 10923 (copy available: P286260), obv. 18-19; rev. 1-21

C: Ist Ni 4552 (P343628; no photo/copy available, transliteration follows Sefati 1998), obv. = lines 9-22

1

A di-[⌈] da ˀ-[⌈] gu₁₀ ˀ-ne di-da-gu₁₀-ne

B [⌈] di ˀ-[⌈] da ˀ-[⌈] gu₁₀ ˀ-ne di-da-gu₁₀-[⌈] ne ˀ

going-a (NOM)+1POSS+ne

As I was going, as I was going,

2

A e₂ x [di-da-gu₁₀]-^ɾ ne ^ɾ di-da-gu₁₀-ne

B [x x x x]-še₃ [?] di-da-gu₁₀-ne

As I was going to the house,

3

A ga-ša-an-[na-gu₁₀] i-bi₂ mu-ši-in-bar

B [...] -e[?]- ši-in-^ɾ bar ^ɾ442

Lady-(ES)-1POSS eyes (ES) mu (VENT)-e. ši (2SG+TERM)-n (3SG)-looked- Ø (DO)

My lady, he looked at you!⁴⁴³

4

A ^ɾ šeš ^ɾ?-^ɾ e ^ɾ? ^ɾ ta ^ɾ [...] ^ɾ ma ^ɾ-ra-an-taḥ

B [...] x ma-ra-an-taḥ

Brother-ERG what? (ES) [...] m (VENT)-e.ra (2SG+DAT)-n (3SG)-add- Ø (DO)

⁴⁴² Note that this line on **UM 29-16-08** is very broken and difficult to read; Attinger doubts the presence of **ga-ša-an-** and the verb **bar** (2019). The verb on **NBC 10923** is also unclear from the hand copy (**P286260**). However for both Sefati (1998: 151) and Jacobsen (1973: 200) the verb is **bar**.

⁴⁴³ As with many of the “Love Songs”, it is often difficult to determine the speaker. This composition apparently begins with a first-person female voice (Emesal first-person pronominal conjugation), but the verb in line 3 appears to be 3rd person (-n-). Jacobsen interpreted this text as a dialogue between Dumuzi and his sister Geštinanna, who narrates an encounter with Inanna who speaks to her of her love for Dumuzi (Jacobsen 1973; followed by Sefati 1998). Kramer (1963) and Attinger (1999-2000; 2019) both identify a third-person narrator or choir, as well as the voice of Inanna. An overview of these different interpretations is given by Fritz 2003: 79-81. I also interpret the text to involve a female speaker (Inanna) and a chorus of Inanna’s friends (who also use Emesal).

The brother...what did he give to you again?⁴⁴⁴

5

A ša₃ ʿki ʿ-ig-ga ag₂ ʿi-li ag₂ ku₇-ku₇-dam

B ša₃ ki-ig ʿ ag₂ ʿ i-li-na ag₂ ku₇-ku₇-dam

Sweetest (RDPL)-3SG COP

A beloved belly and sexual delights are the sweetest things,

6

A ku₃ ga-ša-an-na-gu₁₀ ag₂-še₃ ma-ra-an-ba

B ku₃ ga-ša-an-gu₁₀ ag₂-še₃ ma-ra-an-ba

Inanna/lady-1POSS thing-TERM m (VENT)-e.ra (2SG+DAT)-n (3SG)-give- Ø (DO)

My splendid Inanna/lady, to you he gave them as a gift.

7

A ki-bi[?] i-bi₂-gu₁₀ ma-ra-gu₁₀-ne

B [ki]-ga[?] i-bi₂-gu₁₀ ma-ra-gu₁₀-[ne]

Place-DEM ? eyes (ES)- 1POSS place (ES)- a (NOM)+1POSS+ne

As I looked upon that place,

8

⁴⁴⁴ Sefati sees the verb [ma-ra]-an[?]-du₁₁ before the second verb on **UM 29-16-08**, though like the preceding line, the tablet is very broken and this is difficult to see from the photo (P256630; Attinger 2019). In line 6, the subject gives a gift (**ba**) to Inanna; I interpret line 4 as a rhetorical question in which the female friends ask Inanna what it is that Dumuzi gave to her again (using the verb **taḥ**, Attinger 2021: 1027), intimating how he brings her continuous pleasure.

A **mu-lu ki-ig** ag₂-gu₁₀ gaba im-ma-an-ri

B [...] ʔ ki ʔ-ig-ga-gu₁₀ gaba im-ma-ʔ an ʔ-ri

i (VP)-m (VENT)-ba (MM)-n (3SG)-met- Ø (DO)

My beloved man came to meet (me) here,⁴⁴⁵

9

A ʔi-li mu-e-ši-in-te AŠ mu-e-da-ʔul₂

B [ʔi-li] mu-e-ši-in-te AŠ mu-e-ʔ da ʔ-ʔ ʔul₂ ʔ

C ʔ ʔi ʔ- [...]

mu (VENT)-e.ši (2SG+TERM)-n (3SG)-attracted- Ø

mu(VENT)-e.da(2SG+COM)-rejoiced- Ø (3SG)

He was attracted to you, he rejoiced with you alone!

10

A šeš-e e₂-ni-a im-ma-ni-in-ku₄-re-en

B ʔ šeš ʔ-ʔ e ʔ-ʔ e₂ ʔ-a-ni im-ma-ni-in-[ku₄-re-en]

C ʔ šeš ʔ- [...]

i (VP)-m (VENT)-ba (MM)- ni (LOC)-n (3SG)-entered-en (1SG DO)

The brother brought me into his house,

11

A **mu-nu₂** la₃ ʔab₂-ba bi₂-in-nu₂-e

⁴⁴⁵ As noted by Attinger 2019, we might expect the verb **gaba mu-un-ri**, ‘he met me’ (VENT+OO+3SG+met+Ø).

B **mu-nu₂** la₃ ḥab₂-ba bi₂-in-x-e

C **mu-nu₂** la₃ ḥab₂-ba bi₂-in-na₂-en

b (IPP)-i (LOC)- n (3SG)-laid-en (1SG DO)

He laid me on the bed of *dripping* honey,⁴⁴⁶

12

A **ze₂-ba** kal-la-gu₁₀ ša₃-ab-gu₁₀ a-ba-nu₂

B **ze₂-ba** kal-^ʀ la^ʀ-gu₁₀ ša₃-^ʀ ab^ʀ-x [...]]

C **ze₂-ba** [...]

a (VP)-ba (MM)-lay- Ø (3SG)

My precious sweet lay on my belly,

13

A AŠ-AŠ-ta eme AK AŠ-AŠ-ta

B AŠ-AŠ-ta^ʀ eme^ʀ x [...]

C AŠ-AŠ-ta [...]

One by one, *doing tongues*,⁴⁴⁷ one by one,

14

A šeš **i-bi₂** sa₆-sa₆-gu₁₀ ninnu-am₃ mu-un-AK

⁴⁴⁶ The difficult expression **la₃ ḥab₂** is discussed in chapter 2.1 and fn. 123 of this thesis. I interpret **ḥab₂** (LAGABxU) to refer to the wetness of the honey, given the other values of LAGABxU (values **pu₂**, a ‘well’, and **du₂**, a ‘waterhole, pit, pond’), and the metaphorical entailments of honey that are used in the “Love Songs”, which make it likely that honey here is working as a metaphor for female sexual arousal.

⁴⁴⁷ For the sexual connotations of **eme-AK**, see most recently Matuszak 2022: 211-2. The author points out the verb’s usage in the *Sumerian Proverbs* and its association with donkeys; the donkey section includes many allusions to the animal’s sexual activities.

B šeš **i-bi**₂ ʃ sa₆ ʔ-sa₆-gu₁₀ ninnu x x x-ʃ AK ʔ

C šeš **i-bi**₂ [...]

mu (VENT)-n (3SG)-did- Ø (DO)

My brother of the beautiful eyes, he did it fifty times!

15

A lu₂ si-ga-gen₇ mu-na-de₃-gen

B lu₂ si-ga-gen₇ mu-na-de₃-gen

C mu-lu si-ga-gen₇ x x ʃ na ʔ x x

mu (VENT)-n.na (3SG+DAT)+da (COM)-e (LOC)-came- Ø (3SG)

Like a silent man he came to her with it (there),⁴⁴⁸

16

A ki-ta tuku₄-e-da SI-A mu-na-ni-in-gar

B ki-ta tuku₄-e-da ʃ SI ʔ-A mu-na-ni-gar

C ki-ta tuku₄-e-da ʃ mu ʔ-un-na-x

Below-ABL tremble-ed (NF)-a (NOM) fill-(NOM)⁴⁴⁹

mu (VENT)-n.na (3SG+DAT)-ni (LOC)—n (3SG)- placed- Ø (DO)

*(And) as she trembles from below, he filled her*⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁸ Sefati translates the verb as ‘I stood there for him’ (Sefati 1998: 153); however, we would then expect the 1sg suffix **-en** for the intransitive conjugation. As the verb ends in the 3sg absolutive suffix in all three manuscripts, the verb must be 3sg and the speaker is the ‘chorus’ (Attinger 2019: n.22).

⁴⁴⁹ **SI.A** is possibly read **sa**₅ (a present participle, ‘filling’).

⁴⁵⁰ Attinger suggests the literal translation might be: ‘Il a posé pour elle l’être comblé dans le trembler ({ **tuku**₄ + **ed** + ‘a’ }, /ni/) depuis le bas’ (Attinger 2019: n.24). However, Sefati suggests **si-a gar** as a synonym of **ni₃-me gar** ‘to be silenced, to silence’ (Sefati 1998: 162). Alster translates literally ‘trembling from the ground’, and translates

17

A šeš-gu₁₀ ib₂-ba-na šu gub-bu-de₃

B šeš-gu₁₀ ^ɾib₂ ^ˀba-na šu gid₂-de₃

C šeš-gu₁₀ ib₂-ba-na šu gub-x-x

stand/tighten-ed (NF)-e (DIR)

My brother, (for) setting my hands on his hips,

18

A ze₂-ba kal-la-gu₁₀ u₄ mu-un-di-ni-ib-zal-e

B ze₂-ba kal-la-gu₁₀ u₄ mu-un-di-ni-ib-zal-e

C ze₂-ba kal-la-gu₁₀ u₄ mu-un-di-ni-[x x x]

mu (VENT)-n.di (3SG+COM)-ni (LOC)-b (DO)-pass-en? (1SG)

My precious sweet, I pass the time there with him.

19

A šu ba-am₃-mu-u₈ nin₉-gu₁₀ šu ba-am₃-mu-u₈

B šu ba-mu-u₈ nin₉-gu₁₀ šu ba-mu-u₈

C nin₉-gu₁₀ šu ba-mu-u₈ šu ^ɾba ^ˀ-[x x]

release-a (VP)-mu (VENT)-* (1SG DO)

Release me, my sister, release me!

‘like an earthquake, he was put to silence’ (Alster 1993: 23). Assante interpreted this as a description of orgasm (Assante 2002: 42).

20

A ʾ DU ʾ nin₉ ki ag₂-gu₁₀ e₂ gal-la ga-gen

B DU nin₉ ki ag₂-gu₁₀ e₂ x x ga-gen

C DU nin₉ ki ag₂-gu₁₀ e₂-me-še₃ [...]

ga (COHORT)-go

Come, my beloved sister, let me go into the palace/to our house,

21

A ʾ igi ʾ ad-da-gu₁₀ dumu tur ʔe₂-me-en

B igi ad-da-ga₂ dumu x x x-ʾ en ʾ

C igi ad-da- ga₂ dumu tur [...]

ʔe₂ (PREC)-are-en (2SG)

In my father's eyes, you are a small child!

22

A ʾ d ʾ ba-u₂ lu₂ ʔa-ba-zu šu ba-e-ri-ši-bar-re

B d ba-u₂ lu₂ ʔa-ba-zu ʾ šu ʾ [x x x x]-ʾ re ʾ

C [...]-ʾ ba ʾ -zu šu [...]

ba (MM)-e.ra (2SG+DAT)-n. ši (3SG+TERM)- b (DO)- open-e (3SG)

Bau truly knows the man, she will let you go to him!⁴⁵¹

⁴⁵¹ The verb **šu ba-e-ri- ši-bar-re** is perhaps literally ‘she will open the hand for you towards him’. This interpretation follows Attinger (2019), whereas Sefati translates ‘I will set you free’ (1998: 153).

23

A bal-bal-e ^dinanna-^r kam ^ṽ

B bal-bal-e [...]

It is a bal-bal-e song of Inanna.

24

A [x] x giri₃-ni i₃-^r sa₆ ^{ṽ?} [...]⁴⁵²

25

A [x] x giri₃-ni i₃ [...]

Girini-isa

⁴⁵² Perhaps the name of the scribe. Girini-isa is the name of one of the characters in Dialogue 3, a debate between two scribal school students. See DSSSt <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/pager#Q000769.139> for a transliteration. The name is also attested in Ur III and Old Babylonian administrative texts.

Inanna-Dumuzi D

There are three speakers in this poem: the goddess Inanna; a female “chorus” of friends who speak both directly to Inanna and narrate the actions of the poem; and the male beloved, presumably the god Dumuzi, though he is not named. This text is one of those in our corpus in which these deities seemingly act as humans, a young man and woman. The woman wanders aimlessly near her beloved’s house, hoping for a chance encounter. Her friends excitedly question her about what the couple got up to when they saw one another. Inanna gives them the intimate details of her encounter with her lover, with interjection from the narrators. The male lover panics- what will his father think of his affair with this young woman? But the female friends reassure Inanna: the goddess Bau will let the two of them be together.

The text uses sensuous imagery typical of the Sumerian “Love Songs”. The couple look to one another; the male lover brings the woman gifts of anticipation and pleasure; and the bed on which they lay oozes erotically with sweet honey and arousal.

The Encounter

“As I wandered, as I wandered,

As I wandered near his house...”

“O, my lady- how he looked at you!

The brother, what did he bring to you anew?

Dancing belly butterflies, pleasures sensuous and sweet,

My radiant Inanna, he gave them to you as a treat!”

“As I looked upon that place,

My beloved met me,

my embrace”

“And towards you was he inclined?

Did he enjoy you alone, entwined?”

“Into his house the brother led the way,

On a bed dripping with honey, he made me lay,

My darling then lay down against my belly,

In turns, his tongue, in turns-

My brother with the beautiful eyes did it fifty times!”

Silently, he came to serve her pleads,

She trembles from below,

He filled her needs.

“My brother, with my hands tight on your hips,

My darling, we let the daylight slip!”

“Release me, my sister, release me!

Come, my beloved sister, we should home now flee,

In my father’s eyes, you are but a child (- you see?)”

“(Don’t despair)- Bau knows this man,

To let you be with him- her plan”.

It is a balbale song of Inanna.

Written by Girinisa

