

Chapter 13

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Ur-Utu's Story (Mesopotamian Family)

Their House

Ur-Utu's house: wooden door leads to central courtyard

courtyard hot, dry air surrounds

there: Ilsha-hegalli would've kept her loom for making clothes

doorway opens from courtyard to other rooms which were cooler

thick, muddy walls

did not have much furniture

decorated with rugs, cushions, wall hangings

Ur-Utu's Story

1650 BCE, foreign tribes attacking city of Sippar, he flees with family (they survive), he takes with him some of his clay tablets (not all), trips on steps and drops tablets (leaves them there and flees), house burns down (no one lives there afterward).

receipts: records that proved his ownership of fields and other goods (written on clay tablets)

Rare to find so much about one man and one family. This gives us a glimpse into Mesopotamian family life

Inanna-mansum: Ur-Utu's Father's story

His story: comes into inheritance when parents die, arranged marriages were common (not romantic marriages), so he had to ask Ilsha-hegalli's parents (his future wife) to ask for her hand in marriage.

Did Ilsha-hegalli have a choice? We don't know. She was probably a teenager (like most Mesopotamian brides)

Father would want to know if Ilsha-hegalli could support his daughter. What gift had he brought to show his seriousness?

Inanna-mansum would want to know what wealth her family could bring to marriage (bride's dowry)

Dowry

Dowry found in Ur-Utu's house:

1 slave girl, 1 bed, 5 chairs, 1 grindstone of black basalt, copper cauldrons, chests, splendid garments

Mesopotamian woman's dowry = her inheritance (came to her when she was married). The brothers had to wait for their share of inheritance until parents died

Husband could use the dowry for property (could sleep on her bed, etc), dowry eventually passed down to bride's children

Marriage

Hammurabi's law 128: “If a man marries a wife but does not draw up a formal contract for her, that woman is not a wife.”

Some marriage contracts favored husbands, some favored wives. Wives could divorce by paying husbands money (silver)

Wives could leave their “cruel” husbands and return to their father's household with their dowry

After marriage ceremony: bride moves into groom's house. Parents still lived there oftentimes

Bride expected to stay in touch with her old family and help them if they got into trouble

Childhood

Fate of infants and children: high casualty rates. Many died of diseases that are no longer dangerous today (medicine in its infancy)

Parents tried to protect their children with chants, prayers, magical charms, lullabies

Childhood: not as much is known. Many played with toys such as balls, clay wagons

Some went to “scribal schools” to learn to serve gods as a priest.priestess

Less privileged: learn from fathers how to manage a farm or business

Daughters: taught how to grind grain, cook, wash, spin wool, weave cloth, take care of children



An ancient pull-toy

A8911-15

Women

They would be managing household = full time job; most women did not have jobs outside home

Could own a business and, unlike Greek women, go out in public

Could become a priestess and could own and control fields/orchards