White Rose Research Online

eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk
Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York

Deposited via The University of York.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/246932/

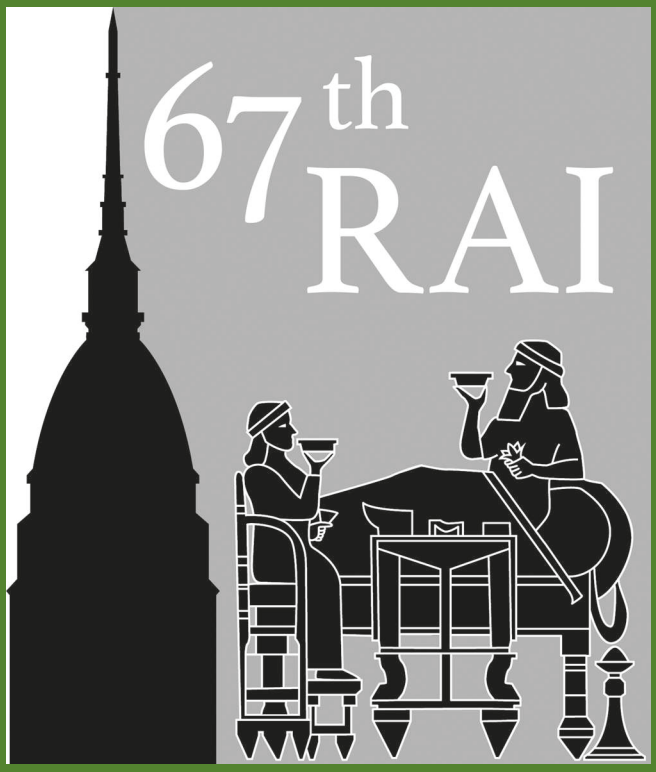
Version: Published Version

Proceedings Paper:
Carr, Christie (2024) Desire and Hunger; Women and Food: The Earliest Example of a Universal Conceptual Metaphor in the Sumerian “Love Songs”? In: Eating and Drinking in the Ancient Near East:Proceedings of the 67th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale. Dubsar.

Reuse
This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike (CC BY-SA) licence. This licence allows you to remix, tweak, and build upon the work even for commercial purposes, as long as you credit the authors and license your new creations under the identical terms. All new works based on this article must carry the same licence, so any derivatives will also allow commercial use. More information and the full terms of the licence here: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/

Takedown
If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS
University of Sheffield
UNIVERSITY of York



Eating and Drinking in the Ancient Near East

Proceedings of the 67th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Turin, July 12–16, 2021

Edited by Stefano de Martino,
Elena Devecchi and Maurizio Viano

dubsar 33

Zaphon

Eating and Drinking in the Ancient Near East

Proceedings of the 67th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Turin, July 12–16, 2021

Edited by Stefano de Martino, Elena Devecchi and Maurizio Viano

dubsar

Altorientalistische Publikationen
Publications on the Ancient Near East

Band 33

Herausgegeben von Kristin Kleber und Kai A. Metzler

Eating and Drinking in the Ancient Near East

Proceedings of the 67th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Turin, July 12–16, 2021

Edited by Stefano de Martino, Elena Devecchi and Maurizio Viano

Zaphon
Münster
2024

Illustration on the cover: designed by Maria Letizia Ferri,
Department of Historical Studies, University of Torino.

Eating and Drinking in the Ancient Near East.
Proceedings of the 67th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale,
Turin, July 12–16, 2021

Edited by Stefano de Martino, Elena Devecchi and Maurizio Viano

dubsar 33

All the essays published in this volume have undergone a peer-review process.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 (BY-SA) which means that the text may be used for commercial use, distribution and duplication in all media. For details go to: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en. Creative Commons license terms for re-use do not apply to any content (such as graphs, figures, photos, excerpts, etc.) not original to the Open Access publication and further permission may be required from the rights holder. The obligation to research and clear permission lies solely with the party re-using the material.

2024 Zaphon, Enkingweg 36, Münster (www.zaphon.de)

Printed in Germany. Printed on acid-free paper.

ISBN 978-3-96327-272-1 (book)
ISBN 978-3-96327-273-8 (e-book)

ISSN 2627-7174

Table of Contents

Preface
Stefano de Martino / *Elena Devecchi* / *Maurizio Viano* IX

1. Opening Lectures

'There is no one to set my table': Gender Aspects in Food and Drink Preparation
Cécile Michel 3

Hittite Foodways: The King as the Provider of his People
Theo van den Hout 25

2. Food Production

Viticulture in 1st Millennium BCE Anatolia: New Archaeobotanical Evidence from Southern Cappadocia and a Regional Overview
Lorenzo Castellano 45

Cooking Practices in a Central Anatolian Site between the 2nd and the 1st Millennium BC: Fires and Pots at Uşaklı Höyük
Giacomo Casucci 57

Dairy Production in SW Iran from the Middle Elamite to the Neo-Elamite Period
Francesca Giusto 73

"Ferment to Be": Butter and Cheese Production in the Third Millennium BCE Babylonia
Paola Paoletti 89

Reviving Food through Mesopotamian Recipes and Archaeological Data: New Methodological Approaches to the Ancient Nutrition Studies
Andrea Polcaro / *Paolo Braconi* 137

Food and Craft Production at Tulūl al-Baqarat, Mound 7: A Typological and Functional Analysis of Fire and Work Installations from Building A
Eleonora Quirico 151

3. Resource Management

Boire et manger d'après la documentation palatiale de Nuzi (14ème s. av. J.-C.): Première partie: les denrées alimentaires
Philippe Abrahami / *Brigitte Lion* 165

Feeding *māt Aššur*: Barley Supplies as a Means of Governance in the Western Middle Assyrian State
Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum / *Aron Dornauer* 177

Economy and Food Production at the Beginning of Urbanization: The Case Study of Jebel al-Mutawwaq
Alessandra Caselli / *Andrea Polcaro* / *Juan Ramon Muniz* 197

The Value of Food: Historical, Prosopographical and Quantitative Aspects of the Final Letters and Related Texts from Ebla Palace G (3rd Millennium BC)
Amalia Catagnoti / *Elisabetta Cianfanelli* / *Fiammetta Gori* / *Marco Bonechi* 215

On the Logistical Probabilities of Maništušu's 'Magan' Campaign
John Dayton 227

Accounting for Alimentary Items in Third Millennium Southern Mesopotamia: Some Notes on the Role of Waxed Boards in the Historical Development of Early Mesopotamian Bookkeeping
Massimo Maiocchi 243

Health and Social Crises in 108/107 BC as Recorded in the Late Babylonian Astronomical Diaries
Yasuyuki Mitsuma 253

Yataraya and the Wine: Her Role in the Palace Administration of Mari (1775–1762 BC)
Luciana Urbano 263

4. Rituality, Banquet and Commensality

The Vessels of the Assyrian Royal Banquet: An Archaeological and Iconographic Approach
Adonice-A. Baaklini / *Margaux Spruyt* 275

What Fine Ceramics Can Tell Us About Social Drinking in Iron Age Iran
Trudy Kawami 289

Toasting with the Dead: Funerary Drinking Vessels in Early and Middle Bronze Age Upper Mesopotamian Burials
Juliette Mas 303

Representing Banquets in Ancient Mesopotamia: A Public Affair?
Davide Nadali 315

Food and Drinks in Ancient Diaeuhi and Colchis
Natia Phiphia / *Omari Dzadzamia* 325

The Iconography of the "Banquet Scene" among the Figurative Documentation from the Second and Third Millennium Levels at Tell Ashara / Terqa (Syria)
Paola Poli 337

The Assyrian Royal Banquet: A Sociological and Anthropological Approach
Ludovico Portuese 353

Marzeah in Mesopotamia
JoAnn Scurlock 365

From Intention to Accomplishment: Secular and Cultic Feasts Provided by the Neo-Assyrian King
Zozan Tarhan 381

5. Medicine and Literature

Desire and Hunger; Women and Food: The Earliest Example of a Universal Conceptual Metaphor in the Sumerian "Love Songs"?
Christie Carr 397

"Eat and drink, but do not look at my, the king's, eyes!": On a Metaphorical Expression in Old Hittite
Paola Dardano 409

The Potion in the 1st Millennium Assyro-Babylonian Medicine
Kiril Mladenov 419

The Use of Eggs in Mesopotamian Medicine and beyond
Jan Tavernier 429

Rites, Music, and Banquets: Some Observations on Rituals in Sumerian Divine Journeys
Klaus Wagensonner 461

6. Philological and Archaeological Researches

An Old Babylonian Cylinder Seal from the Museo Orientale Umberto Scerrato: Notes on a Digital Microscopic High Magnification Analysis
Romolo Loreto 485

The Cuneiform Corpus in its Geographical Setting: Preliminary Results of the Project *Geomapping Landscapes of Writing*
Seraina Nett / *Gustav Ryberg Smidt* / *Carolin Johansson* / *Rune Rattenborg* 497

ArCOA Project: The Ancient Near Eastern Collections in Italy from Study to Public Fruition
Luca Peyronel / *Tatiana Pedrazzi* / *Stefano Anastasio* / *Elena Devecchi* / *Silvana Di Paolo* / *Stefania Ermidoro* / *Valentina Oselini* / *Irene Rossi* 507

News from Ashurbanipal's Library
Babette Schnitzlein / *Sophie Cohen* 549

7. Varia

Marad between the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Empires
John P. Nielsen 563

Desire and Hunger; Women and Food

The Earliest Example of a Universal Conceptual Metaphor in the Sumerian "Love Songs"?[*]

Christie Carr[**]

1. Desire and hunger

Food, eating, and drinking are well-known metaphors for sexual acts, desire, pleasure and the body in both ancient and modern erotic literature.[1] In the biblical Song of Songs, the sweet 'taste' of the lovers' fruit (Cant II.3) is entwined with layers of sensual food and fruit imagery for the body (for example, Cant VII.8), whilst in the Sanskrit *Gītagovinda*, a poem concerning the union of the god Krshna and the goddess Rādhā, kissing is repeatedly depicted as drinking the liquid of the lower lip, 'give me a drink of the mead from the lotus of your mouth!' (*Gītagovinda* X.2, Trans. Siegel 1978: 273). In a Love Sonnet of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, the speaker wants to consume the person he desires, 'I crave your mouth, your voice, your hair. Silent and starving, I prowl through the streets. Bread does not nourish me, dawn disrupts me, all day…I hunger for your sleek laugh…I want to eat your skin like a whole almond' (Neruda, Love Sonnet XI).[2]

Not only in poetry but in everyday language and thought, we find food and eating as sexual metaphor. In his study *Metaphor and Emotion,* Kövecses showed that English speakers conceptualise lust using two principal metaphors: fire/heat

---

[*] Thank you to the organisers of the RAI 2021 Turin, and to the chairs, fellow presenters, and participants of the 'Literature' panel for your feedback and your insightful questions. Thank you also to my supervisor, Professor Jacob Dahl, for your feedback and encouragement when writing this paper.

[**] Wolfson College, Oxford.

[1] For further examples of this metaphor in the ancient Near Eastern context, see Brenner, 1999: 107; Veenker, 1999–2000: 62ff; Paul, 2002: 495; Brownsmith, 2020. The metaphor is not only restricted to poetry but can be found, for example, in contemporary pop culture (Parasecoli, 2007; Spang, 2011).

[2] Consumption of a lover as metaphor for love was discussed by the French bishop and theologian Jaques Benigne Bousset; 'in the ecstasy of human love, who is unaware that we eat and devour each other, that we long to become part of each other in every way …' (in Siegel, 1978: 44).

and hunger/eating.[3] The examples associated with hunger/eating that the author provides from everyday speech particularly emphasise lust as a feeling of primal need: "she's sex-*starved*", "he prepared to *satisfy* their sexual *hunger*". This is because eating and sexual intercourse share basic, embodied features that lead to their conceptual and metaphorical relationship. These 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.[4]

The Sumerian "Love Songs",[5] an Old Babylonian literary 'corpus' which depicts the relationship of the goddess Inanna and her lover Dumuzi,[6] use rich and multi-valent metaphorical erotic language, including a plethora of food imagery.[7] In *Toward the Image of Tammuz,* Thorkild Jacobsen observed that the basic experience of Dumuzi was through the phenomena of food, namely dates, grain, beer and milk, and likened the 'attraction and enticement in response to Tammuz' to the experience and rapture of enjoying pleasurable food.[8] He reasoned that the connection between the 'undemanding pleasure in the sheer being of the beloved Dumuzi' and the tastiness of food was due to the 'universal use of metaphors from the realm of eating and tasting for love, ranging from sexual "appetite" and "hunger" to the lover's desire to "eat" his beloved, and to his use of terms like sweet, delicious, honey'.[9] Jacobsen noted the universality of this metaphor, but only considered it in relation to experiencing the powers of Dumuzi, without exploring how the metaphor also manifests in depicting the sexual encounters of the lovers in the Sumerian "Love Songs". This paper explores the ways in which the 'universal' sex, food, and eating metaphors can be detected in the world's oldest erotic literary texts.

---

[3] Kövecses, 2010: 30

[4] Counihan, 1999: 9

[5] Sefati, 1998. This corpus usually includes Inanna-Dumuzi A-F1 (ETCSL 4.08), and Šu-Suen A, B, C (ETCSL 2.4.4.1–3). I also include Inanna G, H (ETCSL 4.07.7–8), the Manchester Tammuz (Alster 1992), and Šulgi Z (ETCSL 2.4.2.26).

[6] Some texts also depict the erotic relationship of Inanna and the king Šu-Suen (A, B, C), and those that feature unnamed female and male lovers, for example Inanna-Dumuzi D, E, G, Y, F1.

[7] The metaphorical language of the Sumerian "Love Songs" has often been compared with other love and erotic poetry of the ancient Near East (Lambert, 1987; Goodnick-Westenholz, 1991; Paul, 1996; 2002). Agricultural and plant metaphor in erotic Sumerian and Akkadian literature, within and outside the "Love Songs" corpus, has most recently been treated by Couto-Ferreira, 2017; Bertolini, 2020; Zisa, 2021. The application of conceptual metaphor theory (see below) in analysing what metaphor in the Sumerian "Love Songs" can tell us about cultural constructs of sexuality, desire, and pleasure is the topic of my DPhil research (University of Oxford).

[8] Jacobsen, 1970: 74–80.

[9] Jacobsen, 1970: 79–80.

2. Women and food

This paper also discusses whether the role of gender in the metaphorical relationship between food and sex plays a part in the figurative language of the Sumerian "Love Songs". Significantly, it is most often women who are conceptualised as food to be consumed by her male lover.[10]

Often this serves to objectify the female body. Carol Adams likened the consumption of meat to the metaphorical consumption of the female subject positioned as food.[11] Both involve a process that leads to the 'fulfilment of oppression': 'A subject [i.e., a woman] first is viewed, or objectified, through metaphor. Through fragmentation the object is severed from its ontological meaning. Finally, consumed, it exists only through what it represents. The consumption of the referent reiterates its annihilation as a subject of importance in itself'.[12]

Perhaps this metaphorical relationship is rooted in the fact that food and eating are often thought of as 'emblematic' activities for women, not least because the preparation of food is universally considered a female domain, but also because in relation to child-rearing women are literally the food of the unborn and young child.[13] Breastfeeding and domestic food preparation likely also forged a conceptual link between women and food in ancient Mesopotamia.[14]

However, in the context of marriage, it was the bridegroom who brought foodstuffs to the bride's family,[15] a relationship that is reflected in the Sumerian "Love Songs", where Inanna is frequently provided with food by Dumuzi (see examples below). This male to female orientation of giving food produce is ubiquitous amongst the "Love Songs", a reflection not only of Inanna's divine and sometimes bridal status,[16] but also of the texts' focus on the female sexual experience – the

---

[10] 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).

[11] Adams, 1990; see also Brownsmith, 2020.

[12] Adams, 1990: 73.

[13] Counihan, 1999: 63.

[14] Archival documents across periods for large households and palaces suggest, however, that food preparation and production roles were shared amongst men and women. See essays in Lion / Michel, 2016.

[15] In the Ur III period, bride wealth gifts were given exclusively by the groom to the family of the bride (Greengus, 1990).

[16] This motif in which it is Dumuzi that is associated with the food/produce brought to Inanna could also be indicative of the fact that Inanna was perhaps not originally nor solely a fertility/mother goddess (perhaps worshipped in archaic Uruk in her astral aspect, see Szarzynska 1993: 8. A lengthy passage from Inanna C (ETCSL 4.07.3, lines 115ff) exemplifies the numerous domains associated with Inanna). As a reflection of Inanna's special

god gives the goddess abundant produce and gifts just as he gives her pleasure.[17]

3. Conceptual metaphor and the Sumerian "Love Songs"

This paper treats metaphor as 'conceptual'. 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.[18] Significantly, it is argued that our physical interaction with the world is what shapes our understanding.[19] The embodied experience therefore helps to structure an experience that is often abstract, such as emotions,[20] and this is a metaphorical process. Metaphors 'map' between a 'source' domain and a 'target' domain.[21] The source domain is physical and experienced bodily, whilst the target domain is often abstract. For example, in relation to this paper, the source domains under discussion are hunger, eating, and food (embodied experiences and objects) and the target domains are (abstract) sexual desire, pleasure and the body.

The study of conceptual metaphor is an important tool in the study of culture because the creation of metaphors stems from the human embodied experience, but it has also been shown that conceptual metaphors display cultural variation. Metaphor can inform us, then, about socio-cultural constructs, and this extends to the study of ancient cultures.[22] Applying conceptual metaphor theory to the metaphorical language in the Sumerian "Love Songs" can be used to understand cultural constructs surrounding the conceptualisation of the human body, sexuality, pleasure, and desire.

4. ḫi-li: pleasure and appetite

Whilst in the Sumerian "Love Songs", the conceptualisation of desire as hunger might not be as explicit as in Neruda's sonnet XI, there are inferences which sug-

---

divine status, see col. iv, lines 1ff of Inanna-Dumuzi C1; a fragmentary passage which Sefati interprets as Dumuzi promising his new wife that she will not have to do the work of a typical housewife (Sefati, 1998: 294).

[17] Evident in Inanna-Dumuzi D, lines 5–6: ša$_3$ ki-ig-ga aĝ$_2$ ḫi-li aĝ$_2$ ku$_7$-ku$_7$-dam/ ku$_3$ ga-ša-an-na-ĝu$_{10}$ aĝ$_2$-še$_3$ ma-ra-an-ba, 'A beloved heart and sexual pleasure are the sweetest things / My Inanna, to you he gave them as a gift'.

[18] Lakoff / Johnson, 1980; 1999.

[19] Lakoff / Johnson, 1980: 25; Lakoff / Johnson, 1999: 45; Gibbs, 2005: 66; Kövecses, 2006: 117–118.

[20] Lakoff / Johnson, 1980: 25; Kövecses, 2010.

[21] Kövecses, 2006: 64.

[22] For example, Short, 2018a and 2018b. The application of conceptual metaphor theory to the ancient Mesopotamian world has been particularly prosperous in analysing medical literature (Steinert, 2017; Salin, 2018; Al-Rashid, 2021).

gest that food and sex, pleasure and appetite had a metaphorical relationship.

The first indication of this is tied up with the concept of ḫi-li, which appears frequently within the corpus, either as an attribute of or syntactically parallel to images such as flax, barley, and honey, which map onto sexual target domains.[23] ḫi-li as a concept covers several semantic fields. Lexically and contextually, it is equated with the Akkadian noun *kuzbu,* and can express luxuriance, abundance, attractiveness, charm, pleasure, and joy.[24] In the "Love Songs", we also find the semantically associated terms la-la and ma-az,[25] whose Akkadian equivalents indicate similar semantic fields of rejoicing, but also swelling and flourishing (*elēṣum*, *ḫitbuṣu*, *šebû*, *elṣiš*, *ulṣum*).[26] That there are also sexual connotations to these terms is evident by the noun *ulṣum*, which with the verb *epēšum* can mean to experience sexual pleasure. Akkadian *šebû*, meaning both 'to become sated (with food)' and 'to enjoy fully',[27] 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.

The nuance of sexual desire and pleasure as a feeling of fullness and satiation can be detected in the composition Inanna-Dumuzi E,[28] where ḫi-li helps construct barley as a conceptual metaphor for the vulva and the female body:[29]

3 še ab-sin$_2$-ba ḫi-li-a sa$_5$- g̃u$_{10}$ ḫi-is^{sar}-am$_3$ a ba-an-du$_{11}$
My barley in its furrow, filled with sexual allure, it is the lettuce he watered!

The barley in the furrow, an opening in the earth in which to plant seed and pour water,[30] also mimics the conceptual shape of the female genitals as a vessel for containing liquids, and thus as something that can be filled and emptied.[31] That

---

[23] For example, marking barley as the vulva in Inanna-Dumuzi A, line 5, še ab-sin$_2$-na ḫi-li ma-az dirig-ga, 'the barley in the furrow, overflowing with allure and lust!'.

[24] Jaques, 2006: 251ff; CAD K: 614. The semantic range is also connected to its meaning as a wig, presumably aiding in the attractiveness of the wearer; see the inscribed stone wig from the reign of Šulgi with the dedication: ḫi-li nam-munus-ka-ni/mu-na-dim$_2$, 'he fashioned for her a wig of womanliness' (Frame, 1997: 216; CDLI P226717).

[25] For example, in Inanna-Dumuzi A, line 5, and perhaps Inanna-Dumuzi Q, line 8 (Klein/Sefati, 2012).

[26] Jaques, 2006: 251 n.519.

[27] CAD Š2: 251ff.

[28] See this same construction in Inanna-Dumuzi A, line 5.

[29] Assante, 2002: 35.

[30] Sefati and Couto-Ferreira significantly point to a first millennium lexical list which equates ab-sin$_2$ with the Akkadian word for womb, *ša$_3$-sur-rum* (Antagal B 88; Sefati, 1998: 215; Couto-Ferreira, 2017: 64).

[31] An iteration of the BODY IS A CONTAINER metaphor; the body in many Mesopotamian sources is conceptualised as a vessel for containing liquids. The metaphor is often used to conceptualise the female reproductive body (Steinert, 2017). This is also expressed in other Sumerian literary texts; for example, where semen is depicted as being poured

the body can be filled with ḫi-li, allure and desire, in Inanna-Dumuzi E, also mirrors the feeling of fullness upon being satiated with food, and so we can observe a variation of the 'universal' metaphor that connects eating with sexual desire and pleasure.

5. The conceptualisation of the female body in the Sumerian "Love Songs"

The metaphors used for the female body in the Sumerian "Love Songs" mostly use source domains related to crops, plants, and agriculture – all pertaining in some way to foodstuffs and the realm of eating. Flax, barley,[32] lettuce,[33] apple trees,[34] red berries,[35] honey,[36] and fields[37] all metaphorically map as metaphors for the female genitals.[38]

In Šu-Suen A, the vulva is also metaphorised as beer:

19 AN x x x x-g̃u$_{10}$ za-bi-tum-ma/ kaš-a-ni ze$_2$-ba-am$_3$
20 kaš-a-ni-gin$_7$ gal$_4$-la-ni ze$_2$-ba-am$_3$/ kaš-a-ni ze$_2$-ba-am$_3$
21 ka-ka-a-ni-gin$_7$ gal$_4$-la-ni ze$_2$-ba-am$_3$/ kaš-a-ni ze$_2$-ba-am$_3$
22 A.SU$_3$-a-ni kaš-a-ni ze$_2$-ba-am$_3$
My … of the brewer – her beer is sweet!
Like her beer, her vulva is sweet – her beer is sweet!
Like her mouth, her vulva is sweet – her beer is sweet!
Her *kašbir*-beer, her beer is sweet!

The metaphorical construction in these lines is partly determined by the equative marker, -gin$_7$, in lines 20 and 21; the vulva is likened to sweet beer, as well as to the mouth, which specifically draws a visual and conceptual connection between the sexual body and the domain of eating.[39] The sweetness of the beer likened to

---

into the womb in Enki and Ninḫursaĝa (ETCSL 1.1.1), line 73: ^{d}nin-ḫur-saĝ-g̃a$_2$-ke$_4$ a ša$_3$-ga ba-ni-in-ri.

[32] Inanna-Dumuzi A, lines 3–5.

[33] In Inanna-Dumuzi E, lines 1–5, and Šu-Suen C, lines 1–2.

[34] Inanna-Dumuzi E, line 4 (see Leick, 1994: 123). The lettuce has previously been interpreted as a metaphor for the penis (Alster, 1993: 21).

[35] Sumerian girin; Inanna-Dumuzi F, lines 1–8.

[36] Prominent in Inanna-Dumuzi B.

[37] Inanna-Dumuzi P, col. ii. lines 24ff and Inanna H, lines 22–25.

[38] See author's forthcoming PhD thesis.

[39] I treat simile, and other mechanisms such as metonymy, on a spectrum of metaphoricity. The difference between simile and metaphor is only linguistic: '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 … the syntactic form of an utterance has little, if anything, to do with whether metaphor is involved in comprehending it' (Lakoff / Turner, 1989: 133).

the female body implies that to drink her is enjoyable, giving us the target domain of sexual pleasure, the enjoyment of a thing.[40] The conceptual metaphor is not limited only to the resemblance of taste, but also incorporates the wetness of the aroused female genitals, mouth, and beer, and the cultural construction of the female body as a vessel that can exude liquids. In Šu-Suen A, the female body is therefore positioned as a liquid to be drunk by her admiring male beloved.

6. Food and the female sexual experience

The metaphorisation of the female body as food in the Sumerian "Love Songs" might indicate an objectification of the female subject. However, there are several variations of the metaphor that occur, where food also metaphorises the desire and pleasure of the female characters. In Inanna-Dumuzi P, the female body is not metaphorised as food, but is situated as the fertile earth which will *produce* the food. Once Dumuzi has 'ploughed' Inanna (col. ii lines 24ff) and she is sexually satisfied, fruit, flax and barley rise with her in an image that both emotes the positive effects on the prosperity of the land, but also the target domain of Inanna's abundant pleasure:

Col. iii
9 ur$_2$ lugal-la-ta zi-ga-ni-ta
10 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!

Not only is the female body itself forged metaphorically through source domains of foodstuff, but so is the female sexual experience itself. The motif of the male lover bringing food to the female metaphorically reflects his ability to bring her pleasure; for example, in Inanna-Dumuzi C1, Inanna wishes to be treated to butter and milk that Dumuzi later brings to her:

Col. i.
11 ⌈lu$_2$⌉? su$_8$-ba-še$_3$ mu-lu da-an-gi$_4$-gi$_4$
12 [i$_3$] sag̃ ⌈ga⌋ sag̃ mi$_2$ ⌈de$_3$⌋-⌈g̃a$_2$⌋-⌈ab⌋-be$_2$
[*li-ka*]-*an-ni-a-am*
Let me send a man to the shepherd,
And may he pleasure me[41] with top butter and top milk!

---

[40] The three main abstract target domains present in the Sumerian "Love Songs" are semantically and conceptually linked, often appearing together, and can therefore be difficult to categorise. The basic criteria of which emotion is being expressed has been decided on the following basis: sexual desire = the want of a thing; sexual allure = state of attractiveness; sexual pleasure = enjoyment of a thing.

[41] The verb mi$_2$–du$_{11}$ is used in an explicitly sexual context in Šulgi X (ETCSL 2.4.2.24), lines 34–35.

Food is also used as a metaphor for female desire.[42] For example, where we saw the vulva likened to sweet beer in Šu-Suen A, in Šu-Suen B, the female speaker's own desire for her lover is expressed through the emphasis on his sweetness and the desirability of tasting (his) honey:

4 ḫi-li-zu aĝ$_2$ ze$_2$ -ba-am$_3$ lal$_3$- am$_3$ ku$_7$-ku$_7$-da
Your allure is a sweet thing, it is the sweetest honey!

The frequent food, plant, and animal imagery across the corpus also metaphorises a sought-after abundance and prosperity of the land, often caused by the sexual union of Inanna and Dumuzi. In Inanna-Dumuzi D1, for example, Inanna desires productive fields, fish, flax, barley, birds, sheep, goats, honey, wine, lettuce, and other plants that Dumuzi will again bring to her once she has bestowed kingship upon him (lines 47–59). Because many of these source domains also map onto target domains of female desire and pleasure, abundance of food produce in the Sumerian "Love Songs" forges an eroticism that is sensed through Inanna's desire to have plentiful foodstuffs, plants, and fruit to consume, mimicking a (female) hunger for sexual pleasure.

7. Conclusions

We can therefore observe some variations on the seemingly universal conceptual metaphors, desire is hunger, women are food, which as shown above are present in the world's oldest erotic literary texts. Sexual desire and pleasure as a hunger and eating are not explicit, but implicitly built into the semantic fields associated with the key concept of ḫi-li, and the way the female body is metaphorically constructed primarily through source domains of food, plants or produce.

However, there are several nuances of the metaphor in the Sumerian "Love Songs". Whilst the female body is situated as consumable food or domesticable land, food is brought *to* her; the female figures of the "Love Songs" desire the taste of honey; her arousal is represented as sweet beer; and her pleasure as the rising of barley and flax. Food is not only the female body for the male to consume, but it also participates metaphorically in the construction of the female sexual experience of her own pleasure and desire.

Bibliography

Adams, C., 1990: *Sexual Politics of Meat: A feminist-vegetarian critical theory*. Cambridge.

Al-Rashid, M., 2022: ""His heart is low": Metaphor and Making Sense of Illness in Cuneiform Medical Texts". *AVAR* 1.1, 29–49.

Alster, B., 1992: "The Manchester Tammuz". *Acta Sumerologica* 14, 1–43.

[42] Interestingly, *not* being able to eat is a symptom of a woman's lovesickness in the Akkadian love literature (A 7478, Wasserman, 2016: 34–35).

— 1993: "Marriage and Love in the Sumerian Love Songs, with some notes on the Manchester Tammuz". In M. E. Cohen / D. C. Snell / D. B. Weisberg (eds.): *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo*. Bethesda, MD, 15–27.

Assante, J., 2002: "Sex, Magic, and the Liminal Body in the Erotic Art and Texts of the Old Babylonian Period". In S. Parpola / R. Whiting (eds.): *Sex and gender in the ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, July 2–6, 2001*. Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project. Helsinki, 27–52.

Bertolini, L., 2020: "Lasciate che erigano il mio letto fiorito!» Elementi vegetali nella letteratura sumerica paleo-babilonese". *Ocula*, vol. 21, no. 23, 37–61.

Brenner, A., 1999: "The Food of Love: Gendered Food and Food Imagery in the Song of Songs". *Semeia* 86, 101–112.

Brownsmith, E., 2020: "To Serve Woman: Jezebel, Anat, and the Metaphor of Women as Food". In M. Pallavidini / L. Portuese (eds.): *Researching Metaphor in the Ancient Near East*. Wiesbaden, 29–52.

Counihan, C. M., 1999: *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power*. London.

Couto-Ferreira, M. E., 2017: "'Let me be your canal': some thoughts on agricultural landscape and female bodies in Sumero-Akkadian sources". In L. Feliu / F. Karahashi / R. Gonzalo (eds.): *The First Ninety Years: a Sumerian Celebration in Honor or Miguel Civil.* Berlin, 54–69.

Crespo-Fernández, E*.,* 2015: *Sex in language: Euphemistic and dysphemistic metaphors in internet forums.* Bloomsbury Academic.

Frayne, D., 1997: *Ur III period (2112–2004 BC)*. *Royal inscriptions of Mesopotamia. Early periods*, vol. 3/2. Toronto / Buffalo / London.

Goodnick-Westenholz, J., 1992: "Metaphorical Language in the Poetry of Love in the Ancient Near East". In D. Charpin / F. Joannès (eds.): *La circulation des biens, des personnes et des idées dans le Proche-Orient ancien. Actes de la XXXVIIIe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (Paris, 8–10 juillet 1991) – Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations*, Paris, 381–382.

Greengus, S., 1990: "Bridewealth in Sumerian Sources". *Hebrew Union College Annual* 61, 25–88.

Jacobsen, T. / Moran, W. (ed.), 1970: *Toward an Image of Tammuz*. Harvard Semitic Studies, 21. Leiden / Boston.

Jaques, M., 2006: *Le vocabulaire des sentiments dans les textes sumériens: recherche sur le lexique sumérien et akkadien,* Münster.

Klein, J. / Sefati, Y., 2012: "Two Dumuzi-Inanna Love Songs: DI Q and an Unidentified Song". In K. Abraham / J. Fleishman (eds.): *Looking at the ancient Near East and the Bible through the same eyes: A tribute to Aaron Skaist.* Bethesda, 309–329.

Kövecses, Z., 2006: *Language, Mind, and Culture: A Practical Introduction.* Oxford.
— 2010: *Metaphor and emotion: language, culture, and body in human feeling.* Cambridge.
Lakoff, G. / Johnson, M.,1980: *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago.
— 1999: *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought,* New York.
Lakoff, G. / Turner, M., 1989: *More than cool reason: A field guide to poetic metaphor*. Chicago.
Lambert, W. G., 1987: "Devotion: The Languages of Religion and Love". In M. J. Geller / J. E. Wansbrough / M. Mindlin (eds.): *Figurative Language in the Ancient Near East*. London, 21–36.
Leick, G., 1994: *Sex and eroticism in Mesopotamian literature*, London.
Lion, B. / Michel, C., 2016: *The Role of Women in Work and Society in the Ancient Near East.* Berlin.
Neruda, P. / Salmon. R. O (ed.), 1991: *Selection of Love Sonnets* in *Chiricú*, 6(2), 39–50.
Parasecoli, F., 2007: "Food and the Female Body in Contemporary Black Pop Culture". In *Women's Studies Quarterly. The Sexual Body*, Spring–Summer, 2007, vol. 35, no. 1/2, 110–125.
Paul, S. M., 1996: "A lover's garden of verse: literal and metaphorical imagery in Ancient Near Eastern Love Poetry". In *Tehillah le-Moshe: biblical and Judaic studies in honor of Moshe Greenberg*. Winona Lake, 99–109.
— 2002: "Shared Legacy of Sexual Metaphors and Euphemisms in Mesopotamian and Biblical Literature". In S. Parpola / R. Whiting (eds.): *Sex and gender in the ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, July 2–6, 2001*. Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2. Helsinki, 489–498.
Salin, S., 2018: "Conceptual Metaphors and Networks of Metaphors in Assyro-Babylonian Medical Texts". *SAAB* 24, 195–211.
Sefati, Y., 1998: *Love songs in Sumerian literature: critical edition of the Dumuzi-Inanna songs*, Ramat Gan.
Short, W. M., 2018a: "Fundamentals for a Cognitive Semantics of Latin: Image Schemas and Metaphor in the Meaning of the Roman Animus-concept. In J. Lauwers *et al.* (eds.): *Psychology and the Classics: A Dialogue of Disciplines*. Berlin, 13–31.
— 2018b: "Metaphors". In M. Bettini / W. M. Short (eds.): *The World through Roman Eyes: Anthropological Studies of Ancient Culture.* Cambridge, 47–40.
Siegel, L., 1978: *Sacred and Profane Dimensions of Love in Indian Traditions as Exemplified in the Gītagovina of Jayadeva,* Delhi.
Spang, L., 2011: "Chasing the mango. Food as sexual metaphor in Belizean pop culture". *Appetite* 56(2), 545.

Steinert, U., 2017: “Concepts of the Female Body in Mesopotamian Gynaecological Texts”. In J. Z. Wee (ed.): *The Comparable Body: Analogy and Metaphor in Ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Greco-Roman Medicine.* Leiden, 275–357.

Szarzynska, K., 1993: “Offerings for the goddess Inanna in archaic Uruk”. In *Revue d’Assyriologie et d’Archéologie orientale* 87.1, 7–28.

Veenker, R., 1999–2000: “Forbidden Fruit: Ancient Near Eastern Sexual Metaphors”. *Hebrew Union College Annual* 70–71, 57–73.

Wasserman, N., 1999: “”Sweeter Than Honey and Wine ...” Semantic Domains and Old-Babylonian Imagery”. In L. Milano / S. de Martino / F. M. Fales / G. B. Lanfranchi (eds.): *Landscapes, Territories, Frontiers and Horizons in the Ancient Near East. Papers Presented to the XLIV Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale Venezia, 7–11 July, 1997 – History of the Ancient Near East* / *Monographs – III*/*1–3,* Venezia, 191–196.

— 2016: *Akkadian Love Literature of the Third and Second Millennium BCE*. Leipziger Altorientalistische Studien, 4. Wiesbaden.

Zisa, G., 2021: “Il corpo sessuato delle dee. Agricoltura, pastorizia e mondo vegetale nella Mesopotamia antica”. In D. Bonanno / I. E. Buttitta (eds.): *Narrazioni e rappresentazioni del sacro femminile.* Acta Diurna. Palermo, 29–60.