



How to Talk about Domestic Abuse in Old Babylonian

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Gender in the Ancient Near East

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Despite growing scholarly interest in violence against women in the Ancient Near East, domestic abuse in the ANE has been little studied. Any discussion of this subject must be careful to distinguish modern definitions of domestic abuse from ancient ones (whether attested or reconstructed). Certain behavior, such as a man punishing his wife by cutting off her ears, is shockingly abusive in the modern sense, but in the context of the Middle Assyrian Laws is the legally required outcome of certain cases. This study, focusing on the Old Babylonian Period, will demonstrate that we can speak of native conceptions of domestic abuse in the ANE, at least in limited contexts. The verb *buzzu'um* (among others to be discussed) is used frequently in the OB period to refer to behavior best translated as abuse, and is attested in marriage contexts. The textual evidence for domestic abuse identified as such includes letters written by women (from Mari and Karana) and legal documents (a Nippur trial record and possibly the Laws of Hammurabi). Together, these texts demonstrate that there were multiple ways in Old Babylonian to refer to domestic abuse, and that while such a notion existed, there was no single way of referring to or defining it.