

Inanna, Lady of Heaven and Earth

History of a Sumerian Goddess

Colophon

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Goddess Inanna, provided with weapons and with one foot on the back of a lion.

Cylinder seal..Provenance unknown. (Courtesy: Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago)

Copper head, supposedly of king Sargon or Naram-Sin, found in the Ištar-temple of Niniveh, ca. 2400 v.C. (Courtesy: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Orient-Abteilung, Berlin).

Restaurated disc of limestone of the high priestess Enheduanna of the city of Ur. Diameter: 26 cm. (Courtesy: © Penn Museum, Pennsylvania, United States)

Terracotta relief from the city of Larsa (Barrelet 1968, fig 527, Louvre AO 16681)

Terracotta relief, provenance unknown, (Barrelet 1968, fig. 744, Louvre AO 8662)

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Inanna, Lady of Heaven and Earth

History of a Sumerian Goddess

Henriette Broekema



*My lady, on your acquiring the stature of heaven,
Maiden Inanna on your becoming as magnificent as the earth,
on your coming forth like Utu the king and stretching your arms
wide,
on your walking in heaven and wearing fearsome terror,
on your wearing daylight and brilliance on earth,
on your walking in the mountain ranges and bringing forth be-
aming rays,
on your bathing the girinna plants of the mountains (in light),
on your giving birth to the bright mountain,
the mountain, the holy place,
on your [...] on your being strong with the mace like a joyful lord,
like an enthusiastic lord, on your exulting in such battle like a
destructive weapon,
the black headed people ring out in song and all the lands join in
with their quiet ilulama.*

(Inanna and the mount Ebih)



Plan of Mesopotamia. (After Sasson 1996, p. 839)

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Preface

Written language was first used five thousand years ago in Mesopotamia by a people who occupied the territory between the Euphrates and Tigris, in an area in present day Iraq. In the earliest written records Inanna enjoys already a prominent position. She was both Morning star Inanna and Evening star Inanna, names used to indicate the planet Venus which appears as the morning star in the east and the evening star in the west. For more than three thousand years Inanna was a top ranking goddess in the pantheon of the Ancient Near East, and later goddesses such as the Greek Aphrodite and the Roman Venus are distant heiresses of this powerful goddess of the Bronze Age.

Inanna played a prominent part in the myths the Sumerians recorded in writing about their gods during the third millennium BC, moreover she is one of the very few deities we can recognize with certainty in the pictures drawn on cylinder seals and reliefs. Inanna represented various principles in the cosmos and while initially she was a powerful love goddess, responsible for the fecundity of the cattle and the crops on the fields, in the third millennium she emerged as a war goddess whose help was sought by kings on the battlefield.

The time in which Inanna wielded power is called the Bronze Age, a period that in the Middle East started about 4000 BC when the first large cities began to develop. About 1200 BC, when the states of the Hittites and Egypt and the Phoenician city states on the west coast of the Mediterranean were overrun by hostile peoples, this ancient world was lost to us forever. We can reconstruct tiny pieces of information thanks to the written sources that have survived, but they give only a fragmentary picture, their interpretation a difficult task, fraught with uncertainties and leaving many issues unresolved.

Scholars usually specialize in a restricted branch of this research, but in an attempt to make this world better known, I have tried to give an overview of all those little pieces of the jigsaw puzzle that this world has brought to light.

The Sumerian city states were theocratic societies, headed by a king who played a central role in the private lives of the citizens and behaved as if he was the son of the city god, to whom he dedicated temples in the hope of ingratiating himself. Traditionally, and from the earliest times, people in rural areas venerated their own gods, whose dwelling places they constructed from reeds and foliage and in these modest

huts left their unobtrusive gifts, hoping the gods would not forget them. In contrast to this, in the huge monumental temples that the kings built, the gods lived as genuine feudal lords. However, whether in the public sphere of the temple and the palace or the private sphere of the people, the goddess Inanna had a specific place and in this book we shall become acquainted with these two separated worlds.

Relatively speaking, we are in possession of a lot of information about temple life, temples being the foundation stone of the economy of the city states. We know for instance the name and work of a high priestess of the moon god who lived in Ur about 2400 BC. Her name was Enheduanna and she had a special relationship with the goddess Inanna, to whom she dedicated three hymns which are an important part of this story. Two chapters are dedicated to an account of the amazing discoveries in the cemetery of the Royal Graves in Ur in use from about 2,600 BC, and one chapter is devoted to the so called temple prostitution in Mesopotamia, currently a controversial topic. A number of hymns which have survived about the relationship between Inanna and her loved one, which perhaps bear traces in the Song of Songs of the Old Testament, while the ritual of the Sacred Marriage, will be paramount in the discussion. Inanna was also the focus of a widely diffused ritual called Great Weeping. Her grief for the untimely death of her lover Dumuzi seems to be reflected in the inconsolable mourning for the Greek god Adonis and of Mary for her son Jesus. Even the Passion of Jesus reminds one in certain respects of the way Inanna's beloved died and rose again from the dead.

The Mesopotamians carved their written texts with a cane, which was pressed into a soft clay tablet. The result was a sign that looked like a wedge, and so archaeologists gave it the name of cuneiform writing. The first language scholars have been able to decipher is the language of the Sumerians, who lived in the south of Mesopotamia. In the north of Sumer lived the Akkadians who spoke a Semitic language, but borrowed the cuneiform script from the Sumerians. Halfway through the third millennium the first texts in the Akkadian language appeared and from 2000 B.C. onwards Sumerian became a dead language, living on only in scribal schools that continued the much esteemed literary tradition, while Akkadian became predominantly the spoken language.

The major part of the texts in this book and their translations are available via the website of The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL: <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>), an initiative beyond praise of the scholars of the university of Oxford.

The time of Inanna lies far behind us and it is difficult to give a global

idea of this ancient world. Our information of the past is very restricted and we meet all sorts of customs and usages which in our eyes are quite uncommon. I have tried to follow Inanna from the very first moment in which we find her name written on the cuneiform tablets until the time she advances into the full light of history. I have discussed political topics only in so far as they are relevant to our story and are an aid to our understanding of Inanna and the world in which she lived. The book contains 26 chapters that are more or less independent and there is a lexicon with the most important names and concepts and an index with dates of the main rulers in Mesopotamia.

For Sumerologists, Inanna is quite a celebrity about whom immense amounts has been written, but outside this specialised circle people hardly know who she was. So I hope more people will become acquainted with this mighty goddess and the story of how she was worshipped in the antique world. Possibly, with the help of this book, the reader will look at the sky with new eyes, seeing what our ancestors saw when Venus appeared on the horizon as Inanna, with the moon and the sun as her partners.

TIME TABLE

Early Dynastic period (2900-2350 B.C.)

Early Dynastic I (ca. 2900-2700)

Early Dynastic II (ca. 2700-2600)

Early Dynastic III (ca. 2600-2350)

First Dynasty of Lagaš

Ur-Nanše (ca. 2500)

Eannatum (Stele of Vultures ca. 2450)

Urukagina (ca. 2380)

Conquest of Lugalzagezi of Umma (ca. 2360 v.C.)

Akkad Empire (ca. 2350-2193 B.C.)

Sargon (2334-2279)

Rimuš (2278-2270)

Maništušu (2269-2255)

Naram-Sîn (2254-2218)

Šar-kali-šarri (2217-2193)

Invasion of the Gutians

Second Dynasty of Lagaš: New-Sumerian period

Gudea (ca. 2100)

Third Dynasty of Ur (Ur III) (2112-2004 B.C.)

Utu-Hegal (2116-2110)

Ur-Namma (2110-2095)

Šulgi (2095-2047)

Amar-Sîn (2046-2038)

Šu-Sîn (2037-2029)

Ibbi-Sîn (2028-2004)

Invasion of Amorites and (Elamitic) LU₂-SU-invasions

Isin (2017-1794 B.C.)

Išbi-Erra (2017-1985)

Šu-ilišu (1984-1975)

Iddin-Dagan (1974-1954)

Išme-Dagan (1953-1935)

Lipit-Ištar (1934-1924)

Ur-Ninurta (1923-1896)

Larsa (2025-1763 v.C.)

Gungunum (1932-1906)

Rim-Sin (1822-1763): conquers Isin

Old-Babylonian time (1894-1595 B.C.)

Hammurabi (1792-1750): conquers Isin and Larsa in 1763 B.C

Glossary

Gods

An	god of heaven
Anuna-gods	(also Anunaki): judges of underworld, together with the igigi-goden
Ama-ušumgal-ana Asarluhhi	'The Lord is a dragon of heaven', surname of Dumuzi son of Enki, a magician
BaU ₂ Dumuzi	also Ba-ba, goddess in Lagaš, wife of city god Ningirsu shepherd, legendary En-ruler of Šuruppak, lover of Inanna, in later times divinised
Enki Enlil	god of the sweet water basin below the earth, 'Abzu' in the third millennium the main god of the pantheon; his temple was in Sippar
Enmerkar Ereškigal Igigi-gods	legendary ruler of Uruk goddess of the underworld gods of the underworld, together with the Anuna-gods they are called 'the Great Gods', reference to all the gods of heaven or only the gods around the polar circle, that never set
Inanna/Ištar	Venus goddess, city goddess of Uruk and Kiš, goddess of sexual love and, later, of war
Isimu(d)	(Akkadian: Ušmu), messenger god of Enki, has two faces, Janus figure
Gidim Lahmu	death spirit protective spirit connected with the circle of the god Enki; has six curls of hair and holds the ringed door post of the shrine of Enki
Lama	protective (female) spirit, who has always both her hands lifted up, with hand palms turned outside in a gesture of protection
Latarak Lugalbanda Marduk Nanaya Nanna	god belonging to the circle of Inanna divinised king of Uruk, father of Gilgamesh major god of the Babylonians goddess who personifies the sexual aspects of Inanna moon god, in Akkadian 'Su-En', contracted to Sin, father of Inanna, his main temple was in Ur
Nanše	goddess of Lagaš, associated with fishes and birds and divination
Nin Ningal	'lady', title of Inanna, the En-priestess and the queen the wife of the moon god, and mother of Inanna, literally 'Great Lady'

Ningirsu	city god of Girsu, main god of the city state Lagaš
Ningišzida	'lord of the good tree', underworld god
Ninhursag	birth goddess. Literally 'Lady of the mountains'
Ninšubur	messenger goddess (sometimes messenger god) of Inanna
Ninsun	mother of Gilgameš, literally 'Lady wild cow'
Ninurta	the original city god of Nippur, later superseded by Enlil and changed into his son
Neti	god who guards the gates of the underworld
Šin	Akkadian name for the moon god, city god of Ur
Šamaš	Akkadian name of the sun god, his main temple was in Sippar
Šawuška	Hurrian goddess, closely related to Inanna
Tišpak	city god of Ešnunna, recognisable by the snakes that circle around his throne
Utu	Sumerian name for the sun god, son of the moon god and so brother of Inanna
Ziusudra	the 'Sumerian Noah', Akkadian: Ut-napištim or Atrahasis. He is no god, but a human being who was granted eternal life by the gods

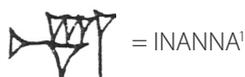
Sumerian concepts

Abzu	sweet water basin below the surface of the earth
arali	name for the steppe or underworld
eanna (of E ₂ -ana)	temple complex of Inanna in Uruk
Emesal	'tongue of the women', the typical ritual language that was used in hymns and lamentations
ensi	En-ruler, name of city ruler of Lagaš, Mari and Ešnunna
eš-dam	tavern, name of the temple of Inanna
ešemen	'skipping rope' or 'holy dance of Inanna', 'the game of holy Inanna' is her frenzy as war goddess
bal-bale	song that is performed with the bal-bale (a sort of lyre or drum)
garza	other word for ME
giguna	(Akkadian: <i>gigunum</i>) temple on top of a ziqqurat
gipar	name for the residence of the En-priestess in the temple complex
girinna-plants	fragrant grass like plants
he ₂ -gal	abundance
hi-li	sexual allure
ka-luh	(Akkadian: <i>mis pi</i>), mouth washing rite, necessary to make a statue of a god
ME	unchangeable eternal laws that govern the cosmos
melamma	fear-inspiring radiance that is distinctive of gods

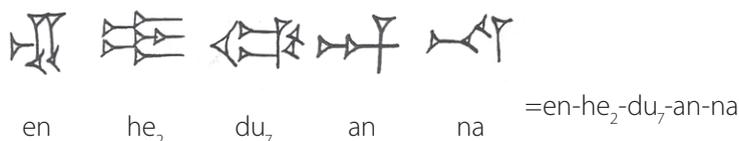
piqitum	offer that naditum-women were obliged to bring in the temple of the sun god Šamaš
<i>paršu</i>	= ME, the rite that was strictly to be observed, originally it was an attribute of the god, the garza, or an oracle staff
kaunakes	Greek word for the ritual cloak of gods, king, priests and priestesses
kusarikku	bull man, protective god who guards the entrance of the house against evil intruders
masabbu-basket	ritual basket, used by Enheduanna
MUŠ ₃	'scintillating', 'sparkling', 'divine radiance', name of the cuneiform sign of Inanna
nu-gig	one of the honorary titles of Inanna, referring to her high heavenly position; class of priestesses
suh-crown	crown of Inanna; it is not known how it looked like, perhaps a veil
šu-luh-rites	'hand wash rites' performed in the gipar; these rites were some of the major tasks of the En-priestess;
umun	Emesal for En, 'lord'

A short elucidation on the notation of the cuneiform script

The first cuneiform signs represented only single concepts, so there was a single written sign for 'mountain' and for 'temple'. Inanna's sign, which we shall discuss in more detail later on, was also written with one single ideogram:



Later, the Sumerian writers began to use the signs alphabetically and they could be read as syllables such as ba-, wa-, me-, la- ... etc. At the same time they continued to use many old signs that represented entire words or ideas as well, which made the script very complicated. Sumerologists change the cuneiform signs in syllables (transcription) to make reading more comfortable. Take, for example, the name of the high priestess of the third millennium Enheduanna, which reads:



However, some signs in this name can also be read in another way. For instance, he₂ can also be read as gan or kan and du₇ can represent the sound ul. The reverse is also possible and the sound 'he' can be indicated by the use of various other cuneiform signs. Therefore, Sumerologists have given each cuneiform sign a number in order to differentiate between the divergent cuneiform signs. In this way he₂ indicates the second cuneiform sign that can be pronounced as 'he'. The number 7 in sign du₇, of 'Enheduanna' means that there are at least seven signs that can be pronounced as 'du' and that in the name of Enheduanna the seventh sign du₇, i.e. du₇, is used.

If we are not sure how to pronounce a cuneiform sign we write its name in capital letters. Thus we write for instance INANNA if the cuneiform sign can also represent other goddesses, such as Ištar or Šawuška. Compare

1 The cuneiform signs are copied from the inventory of René Labat/Malbran-Labat Florence, *Manuel d'épigraphie akkadienne: signes, syllabaire, idéogrammes*, 1988 (6th edition).

it with our traffic symbols, that can be read in any language. The same uncertainty is encountered with the Sumerian word EN, so we also write this word in capital letters, because it can be read in such a variety of different ways, as En-ruler, as En-priest of Uruk, as En-priestess of Ur or as $ensi_2$, the governor of Lagaš.

When the cuneiform signs in Sumerian or Akkadian are transcribed, the š is expressed as 'sh' and the ṣ is pronounced as 'ts'. The 'h' sounds as the 'h' in the word 'human' and the ḡ sounds like 'ng' as in 'England'. Enheduanna, the name of the high priestess of the moon god, is pronounced as 'Enheeduanna'. In the translation of an original text, square brackets [...] are used to indicate a lacuna, which may be filled in if the attempted restoration of the missing text can be made plausible. Normal brackets (...) are used to elaborate on the meaning of a sentence, or to explain a word.

Sumerian words are written with a short extension and Akkadian words in italics. Thus *enheduanna* is a Sumerian name, whereas *assinnu* (a follower of Inanna) is an Akkadian word. However, for fear of inhibiting the legibility of the text I have not applied the rule systematically, so although *gipar*, the name of the official residence of the En-priestess, is a Sumerian word, I write it simply without extension as *gipar*.

Chapter 1 The Sumerians

The Sumerians

Once upon a time, the region close to the Persian Gulf and nowadays known as Iraq, was inhabited by the Sumerian people. The Greeks called this country 'Mesopotamia' which literally means 'land between the rivers', as the Euphrates and the Tigris, both of which rise in the highlands of Anatolia, traverse the lowland plain of Syria and Iraq until they finally discharge into the Persian Gulf. To the north lay the land of 'Simurru', reminiscent of the name the Semitic peoples used later on for the southern region, Šumerûm, from which our word Sumerian is derived. The Sumerians themselves called their land ki-en-gi, which could be translated as 'land of the lordly En', after the priest king ('En'), who was the head of the Sumerian city-state.

The Sumerians must have moved to this coastal area sometime after 4000 BC but it is not known from where they came. Their language is not related to any other language spoken in the region and it used to be thought that they had migrated inland from the coastal area, having navigated up river from the Persian Gulf. However it now seems more likely that the Sumerians came from the other direction, from the northeast of Mesopotamia, and travelled down river to the south. It may be that the name of the northern region – 'Simurru' – indicates that the Sumerians once lived here.

When the Sumerians entered the area around the Persian Gulf they must have encountered other peoples who had already been settled there for a long time, as traces of an earlier culture can be observed in the names of a few cities that are not Sumerian, but must have come from another unknown language such as Uruk, Ešnunna and Šurupak. By the same token the name of the river Euphrates - Buranuna - makes no sense in Sumerian while the name of the Tigris, Idigna, could perhaps be explained in Sumerian as 'the blue river': i d₂ means 'rivier'; g i n₃ is 'blue'.

Small settlements of farmers had come into existence along these two great rivers during the fifth millennium BC and they had diverted the water of the rivers through a canal system to irrigate agricultural crops. Everyone living in this place was wholly dependent on floodwater from the rivers, as there was too little rainfall and the sun burned mercilessly during the summer months. On the other hand the rivers could be dangerous, as the land was flat and there was always the threat that the river would overflow its banks and change its course, inundating whole new areas, while other regions lost their water supply and farmers lost their crops.

Swamps had been formed along the Persian coast as the great rivers deposited the silt they had been carrying on their way through the plain. Here grew the cane that was used by the inhabitants to build little reed houses for the gods. This was the domain of Enki, the god of wisdom and the magic arts. He was said to have brought civilization to the Sumerians and he lived in a subterranean freshwater residence, the Abzu, situated below the surface of the earth, but above the salt water expanse of the ocean. The main temple of Enki was built in Eridu, a settlement then situated much closer to the coast, where archaeologists have discovered a prehistoric temple and a large quantity of fish remains, an indication of the practise of offering fish to the god of this temple.

The Sumerian king list, written down at the beginning of the second millennium BC noted that Eridu was the oldest city of the inhabited world. This king list contains a mythical record of the ancestors of the Sumerian dynasties, followed by historical kings, also verified from other sources. Kingship was said to have descended from heaven and each town in Sumer in their turn, exercised kingship for a while. After Eridu, various places were assigned the kingship successively, such as Sippar and Šuruppak but then the king list reports that a Flood came over the land and all came to an end.

This relates also to the story of a flood found in the Old Testament, Genesis (6:6-8). We learn that God regretted His Creation as people were behaving badly, so He decided to wipe them out and only Noah, a man who had lived in a righteous way was spared by God. He gave Noah precise instructions on how to build a big ship - an ark - from gopher wood covered with pitch inside and outside. In Sumerian mythology it was not Yahweh, but the god Enlil who decided to destroy his people and it was the god Enki who took the initiative to save a righteous man and life on earth. Enki resolved to warn this man, Ziusudra, the king of the city of Šuruppak and gave him instructions on how to build a ship to save himself, his family and all the animals. Six days and seven nights this vessel was forced to endure the terrific storm. *The wind continued, the deluge and windstorm levelled the land. When the seventh day arrived, the windstorm and deluge left off their battle, which had struggled, like a woman in labour. The sea grew calm, the tempest stilled, the deluge ceased.*¹ After seven days the boat ran aground on mount Nimuš, and Ziusudra released a dove but it returned to the boat as it found nowhere to land. After some time Ziusudra released a swallow but again this bird returned and finally he brought out a raven and set it free. *The raven went off and saw the ebbing of the waters. It ate, preened, left droppings, did not turn back.* The survivors then knew that the water had subsided enough to uncover land. They left