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The Sumerian goddess Inanna (3400-2200 BC)

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Introduction

Of the myriad Sumerian deities that have emerged from the cuneiform records of ancient Mesopotamia perhaps the most famous - but least understood - is the goddess Inanna, the 'lady of heaven'. As a patron of sexuality and aggression she appears in many ancient myths and legends and continues to exert a fascination over contemporary minds.

Southern Mesopotamia, called Sumer, witnessed the development of the world's oldest writing system during the Late Uruk period. However, there are few references to Inanna in the extant cuneiform records before the Dynasty of Akkad. Any reconstruction of the cult of Inanna at the dawn of history must, therefore, rely initially on textual evidence of much later periods: the vast repertoire of myths, hymns and prayers to the goddess have been attributed to the 3rd Dynasty of Ur III and the Isin-Larsa Dynasties (Table 1). Certain details in these stories may reflect beliefs and practices from earlier periods but, these elements are difficult to identify. However, the archaeological record of the late fourth and third millennia has revealed evidence for numerous temples dedicated to Inanna, testifyingto an important and widespread cult. This paper first discusses the archaeological record (Fig. 1), before going on to attempt to define the role of Inanna and investigate a proposed syncretism of the goddess with the Semitic deity Ishtar.

The temples of Inanna

Adab (Tell Bismayah)

Among the temples abandoned by Inanna in the Sumerian text of the 'Descent to the Underworld' (Kramer 1951), is the 'Eshar' of Adab. A number of inscriptions referring to this temple were recovered from a temple building on Mound V, including a text of Mesalim (c. 2550 BC). None of these inscriptions mentions Inanna. Three brick stamps were discovered on mound IVa, describing the fourth king of the Dynasty of Akkad, Naram-Sin, as 'the builder of the temple of the Goddess Inanna' (Banks 1912: 342). No temple was located on this mound and the inscriptions may possibly refer to the building on Mound V at which a deep sounding suggested a long sequence of buildings dating from ED I/II (Banks 1912: 322).

Bad-tibira (Tell al-Mada'in)

No temple building is known, but an inscription of Entemena (c.2404-2375) found at the site records the building of the E-mush temple, dedicated to Inanna

and Dumuzi. The temple is listed among those abandoned by the goddess in Inanna's Descent (Kramer 1951).

Eresh(?) (Tell Abu Salabikh)

Among the texts recovered are the *ZA.MI* hymns (c.2500 BC), forerunners of later temple hymns of Enheduanna discussed in the section 'Inanna and Ishtar'. These take the form of a list of prayers addressed to specific temples throughout the southern Mesopotamian plain, including the temples of Inanna in Kullaba and Zabalam, and the temple of 'Inanna of the mountain' (Biggs 1971: 45-56). A fragmentary god list from the site reveals Inanna as the sixth deity after Anu, Enlil, Nin.KID, Enki and SES.KI (Biggs 1974: 83).

Period	Date
Halaf/Ubaid	5000-4000 BC
Early Uruk	4000-3400 BC
Late Uruk	3400-3200 BC
Jendet Nasr	3200-3000 BC
Early Dynastic I	3000-2750 BC
Early Dynastic II	2750- 2600 BC
Early Dynastic III	2600-2350 BC
Dynasty of Akkad	2350-2150 BC
3rd Dynasty of Ur	2150-2000 BC
Isin-Larsa Dynasties	2000-1800 BC
1st Dynasty of Babylon	1800-1600 BC

Table 1 Time period classification for Mesopotamia (after Postgate 1992: 22)

Girsu (Telloh)

Although there is no evidence for temple buildings, it has been suggested that the ED II 'Construction Inférieure' had a religious function (Crawford 1987: 72). ED III texts from Girsu mention an 'Eb temple of Inanna' within an area called Eanna. The term Eanna presumably refers to a temple complex such as those at Uruk and Lagash. It is significant that the cities of Girsu and Lagash, which were

part of a single kingdom during ED III, both have temples called Ib (Eb) dedicated to Inanna. The etymology of the name Ib remains unclear.

Kish (Tell Ingharra/Tell Uhaimir)

The remains of a Neo-Babylonian (612 - 539 BC) temple at Ingharra is assumed to be the last version of a building which 'was in the early periods dedicated to Inanna' (Gibson 1972: 4). Texts of the 3rd Dynasty of Ur list Zababa and Inanna as the deities of Kish. In the story of Inanna's Descent (Kramer 1951), the temple of Inanna at Kish is named as Hursagkalamma.

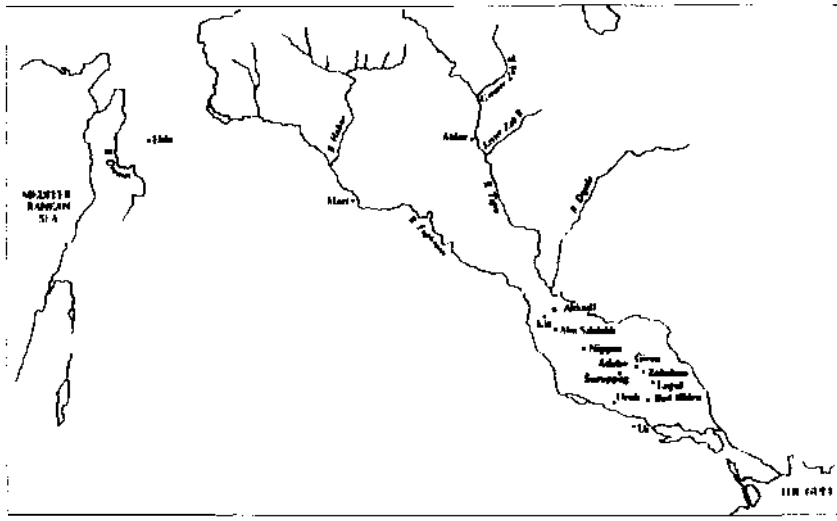

Figure 1 Map of the Near East showing sites mentioned in the text.

Lagash (Al-Hiba)

A temple with an outer oval shaped court which was surrounded by a wall is identified as the 'Ibgal of Inanna', based on 14 inscribed foundation figurines found *in situ*. A foundation stone of Enannatum I (ED III), and votive bowls, all dedicated to Inanna, were found in the level II fill. The temple levels are dated by the excavator to late ED III, and a sounding beneath Level III revealed eight earlier architectural levels, with the lowest producing spouted jars and cups dated to ED I (Hansen 1980: 424).

Nippur (Nuffar)

Here, 27 levels of a temple dedicated to Inanna, identified initially on foundation deposits of Shulgi (c.2094 - 2047 BC) in the uppermost level, have been uncovered. The building is called E-duranki in Shulgi's foundation texts, but in 'Inanna's Descent' it is named as Baradurgarra (Kramer 1951). The best preserved buildings of the Inanna temple sequence are the ED II and ED II/III structures. The plans of these two temples are essentially the same with the later building wider and longer. In each, there are two sanctuaries, paralleling the Late

Uruk Inanna temple depicted on the Warka vase relief. On clearing the floor of the level VII temple, the excavators discovered over fifty stone bowls and statues (Crawford 1959; Hansen and Dales 1962). Approximately forty of these objects were inscribed, and are dedicated, mainly by women, to Inanna.

Shuruppak (Tell Fara)

Many administrative and lexical tablets were recovered from the site dated to c. 2500 BC and are the direct descendants in content of many of the earlier Uruk tablets. The god lists from Shuruppak name Inanna as the third deity, coming after Anu and Enlil, but before Enki. It is not known whether these tablets were the records of a temple, or a palace, or come from various buildings. A possible temple has been reconstructed by Martin (1975) but it is not known to which deity it was dedicated.

Ur (Tell al Muqayyar)

It is assumed that a major Early Dynastic building lies buried within the ziggurat of Ur-Nammu. There is evidence in the form of a list of offerings, dated to ED III, recovered from the site that Inanna and Nanna (the moon god and patron deity of Ur) were considered to be the chief gods of Ur at this time (Alberti 1986: 104). The later hymns of Enheduanna confirm the importance of Inanna at Ur and are discussed in a later section.

Uruk (Warka): Eanna

The rulers of the Dynasties of Ur III and Isin-Larsa appear to have had a strong predilection for the religious and literary traditions of Uruk, and their inscriptions and building activity at Uruk identify the site of a major temple complex connected with a cult of Inanna, called Eanna, 'the house of heaven'. However, the earliest surviving reference to this precinct is in an inscription of Lugalkingeneshdudu, king of Uruk (c.2400 BC). The inscription occurs on a stone vase dedicated at Nippur to Inanna of Eanna. Unfortunately, the identification of an Inanna temple within the Eanna precinct has been frustrated by the lack of any relevant objects found in context. The various complex building phases muddle the issue further. It is possible that the main Inanna temples lie buried beneath the 3rd Dynasty of Ur ziggurat of Inanna to the north-east of the Late Uruk complex of buildings. However, the importance of the goddess in the late fourth millennium at Uruk can perhaps be inferred from the the number and range of objects associated with Inanna, including sculpture, seals and sealings, and cuneiform tablets which are discussed in a later section.

Uruk: Kullaba

It has been suggested that the city of Uruk grew out of two settlements, Kullaba and Eanna which by the beginning of the third millennium BC formed one unit surrounded by a city wall (Nissen 1972). Certainly the concept of twin areas of the city survived into the historic period. An inscription of Utu-hegel (2019 - 2013 BC), for example, refers to 'the citizens of Uruk and the citizens of Kullaba' (after Sollberger and Kupper 1971: 131). The area identified at Uruk as Kullaba

(about 500m west of the Eanna precinct) contains the remains of a series of temples set on terraces dating back to the Ubaid period. The earliest reference to Kullaba is in the *ZA.MI* hymns from Abu Salabikh (c. 2500 BC) where Uruk is called the 'twin brother of Kullaba' (Biggs 1974: 46), and praise is addressed to the Temple of Inanna of Kullaba. There is no mention of the Eanna complex in the *ZA.MI* hymns, whereas in the later temple hymns, Eanna is described as the 'house with the great *me* (duties and standards) of Kullaba' (Sjoberg and Bergmann 1969: 29). This suggests that in the third millennium the term Kullaba encompassed the whole religious area of Uruk including Eanna, rather than one single temple complex. Utu-hegal's division of the city thus makes a distinction between the population of the religious sector and the inhabitants of 'secular' Uruk.

Zabalam (Ibzaykh)

The earliest connection of Inanna with Zabalam is found on Archaic Level III tablets from Uruk, where MUS-*te* (MUS being a reading of the Inanna symbol discussed in the next section) is interpreted as the city (Green and Nissen 1987: 248). Some four hundred years later, the *ZA.MI* hymns from Abu Salabikh give praise to the Zabalam temple of Inanna (Biggs 1974: 58). The temple hymns of Enheduanna also address praise to 'the house of Inanna in Zabalam' (Sjoberg and Bergmann 1969: 36). The temple is called Giguna in the myth of Inanna's Descent (Kramer 1951).

The symbol of Inanna

The earliest references to the name Inanna are on clay tablets from the Eanna district of Uruk; in levels below the remains of major religious buildings dating to the 3rd Dynasty of Ur, and termed 'Archaic' by the excavators. The tablets were found within Archaic levels IV and III (Late Uruk and Jemdet Nasr periods). None were found in secure contexts, but were in layers of rubbish, or unstratified deposits. However, the date attributed by the excavators is generally accepted (Falkenstein 1936; Nissen 1986).

The level IV tablets (c. 3200 BC) contain signs which are purely pictographic and among these occurs a symbol which has been identified in texts of a later date as INANNA or MUS ('radiant' - perhaps a description of Inanna) (Falkenstein 1936; Green and Nissen 1987). On the Uruk III tablets (c. 3100-3000 BC) the signs have become more abstract in form, and are much closer to the fully cuneiform shapes of later periods. These tablets can now be read with some confidence, as the language is recognisably Sumerian. One contains a geographical list mentioning *d.inanna.ki* (the place of Inanna), perhaps to be identified with Eanna, and MUS-*te*, possibly the town of Zabalam (Green and Nissen 1987: 248).

Andrae (1930) has suggested that the Inanna symbol represented a support for the entrance and door of a reedhouse such as those built in the southern marshes of Iraq today. The upper ends of the reed bundle are bent over to form a loop 'through which to slip a pole supporting the reed mat which formed the door, and with the surplus ends of the reeds left sticking out at the back, thus

forming the "streamer"' (van Buren 1945: 48). This interpretation of the sign has been accepted by many writers (Frankfort 1936; Gelb 1960; Jacobsen 1976). However, it remains unclear what the Inanna symbol actually represents, and what its significance is in relation to the goddess. The meaning of the Inanna sign appears to have been lost by ED II, as it then disappears from the artistic repertoire, perhaps reflecting a decline in Eanna's importance as other cities established their own Inanna cults and political independence.

The Inanna sign also appears on sculptures, reliefs and cylinder seals contemporary with the Archaic IV/III tablets. A variety of scenes are depicted in association with the sign, but there are common motifs; for example, a bearded man wearing a net-cloak and Pathan-style hat is often depicted feeding stylised flowers to flocks of sheep and goats. Found in association with this scene are vases between two Inanna symbols. It has been suggested by Brandes (1979) that the seals and sealings with similar designs represent the authority of the central temple and the man portrayed is the 'priest-king' of Uruk identified in texts as the *en* (Fig. 2). Other seal designs, dating to ED I and known as 'city-seals', consist of symbols, including that of Inanna, apparently representing groups of city states (Wright, 1969). These may represent economic and political collaboration between cities, clearly demonstrating the importance of the Uruk temple and the cult of Inanna.

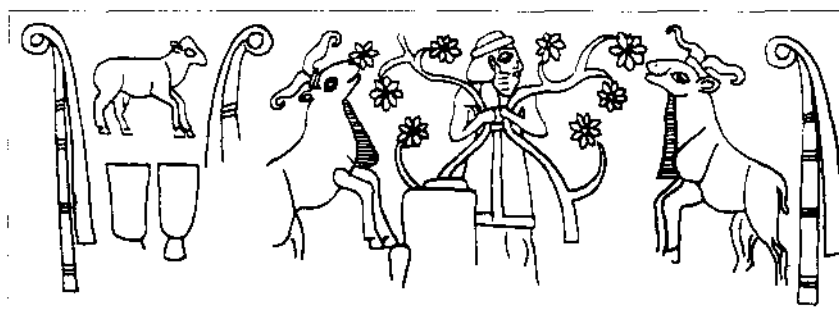

Figure 2 Drawing of a seal impression from Uruk (VA 10537)

Perhaps the most famous object from Uruk with Inanna symbols is a large alabaster vase. It was discovered in an area dated to Archaic level III but has been dated on stylistic grounds to the earlier level IV (Basmachi 1947: 119; Frankfort 1970: 27; Mallowan 1971: 78). The vase was broken into fifteen pieces with a large section of the rim and much of the base missing. Following restoration, the vase is 110cm high, and has four registers of relief-carving circling it. The lowest three registers depict, from the bottom: a frieze of vegetation; a line of alternate rams and ewes moving from left to right; and a file of nine naked men carrying various vessels, some containing objects. The widest register circles the top of the vase. On this a naked man holding a large vessel containing various objects faces a figure who has a raised right arm and is wearing a 'robe which is peculiar to women' (Basmachi 1947: 119). Behind this figure are two Inanna signs which, like the figure, fill the whole vertical height of the register. Beyond these are objects representing the interior fittings of a temple. There appear to be two

shrines represented within the temple: two figures each stand on a dais on the back of a bull which has a double outline suggesting two animals side by side. The human figures on the bulls have been identified as a man and a woman (Frankfort 1970: 27), but their gender is unclear, and both are dressed in similar clothing. One figure holds a stack of vessels (possibly bevel rim bowls) while the other stands in front of an Inanna symbol with hands raised before the face. On the floor, behind this scene, are a pair of vessels full of fruit and grain. Above these are a pair of tall vases; two problematical objects; and vases shaped like a ram and a lion. The interpretation of the characters and objects depicted on the vase will be discussed further in a later section.

Sacred marriage

In his influential study of magic and religion, James Frazer (1922) identified what he considered to be a worldwide ritual for promoting all aspects of life in the community. This involved the enactment (usually annually, in relation to the seasons) of a sexual act between the deities of fertility represented by the leader of the community and a priestess of the goddess. The earliest Mesopotamian textual evidence for this practice dates from the 3rd Dynasty of Ur and the Dynasties of Isin-Larsa (Kramer 1969). During the Isin-Larsa period it is clear that Dumuzi (called in these texts 'Amaushumgalanna') was considered to be the consort of Inanna and a sacred marriage ritual was centred at Uruk. Although ED royal inscriptions describe how rulers might be related to a deity, it is only at times, such as the 3rd Dynasty of Ur and Isin-Larsa period, when kings were elevated to divine status, that hymns depict them as embodying the god Dumuzi. In these texts, Inanna is portrayed as a goddess of sexual love with the king participating in a ritual enactment of sexual intercourse (Romer 1965: 133). Although there is no evidence of how the goddess was represented in the ritual, it is possible that her place was taken by a class of priestess known as ***nu-gig*** (Renger 1975).

Many writers have attempted to use these hymns to explain details of the carved stone and clay tablets of the Uruk and ED periods (including Frankfort 1970; Jacobsen 1976; Kramer 1969). For example, in his study of Mesopotamian religion, Jacobsen suggests that the relief on the Warka vase depicts the sacred marriage ritual. He interprets the top register as depicting 'Amaushumgalanna, the god of the date palm, shown approaching the gate of his bride at the head of a long retinue bearing his wedding gifts. Receiving and opening the gate to him is his bride, the goddess of the storehouse, Inanna. Behind her is the sanctuary in her temple with its altar and sacred furniture' (Jacobsen 1976: 24). While his interpretation of the sanctuary as belonging to Inanna is probably secure, based on the appearance of the Inanna symbol, his identification of the figures depicted is more problematic. The figure on the Warka vase to whom the gifts are apparently being presented is, as indicated earlier, usually assumed to be a woman, and although often interpreted as being Inanna, has been convincingly identified by Asher-Greve (1985) as a priestess. Much of the figure Jacobsen identifies as the priest-king/Dumuzi is missing, having been lost when the vase was broken.

However, fragments of a net-like garment survive together with a long belt, one end of whichis held by a man. As mentioned earlier a man in a net cloak frequently appears on contemporary cylinder seals, and has been interpreted as the priest-king bringing offerings to the temple. Jacobsen translates Amaushumgalanna as 'the one great source of the date clusters', although other scholars have translated this name more accurately as 'the mother (is) a (heavenly) dragon' (Leick 1991: 31). Inanna is translated as the 'lady of the date clusters' (Jacobsen 1976: 26). Even if correct in translation, Jacobsen's assumption of synonymy between Amaushumgalanna and Dumuzi is anachronistic. It is clear from flour offering lists from Shuruppak that Dumuzi and Amaushumgalanna coexisted as two distinct deities as late as 2500 BC (Jestin 1937: no. 715) and an association of the two gods is known only from texts of the 3rd Dynasty of Ur and later. To account for this, Jacobsen argues that there was a unification of the two cults reflecting 'the dual economies of Uruk: date growing (Amaushumgalanna, the date god) and animal husbandry (Dumuzi, the shepherd), (Jacobsen 1976: 135). This is, however, a circular argument relying on the Ur III textual evidence.

Nevertheless, ED texts from Bad-tibira make it clear that Dumuzi was certainly associated with Inanna during this period, and it is possible that sacred marriage rites developed from a cult at this city. However, there appears to be no evidence from the first half of the third millennium BC to justify the traditional interpretation, exemplified by Jacobsen, of the figures on the Warka vase, or for the existence of a sacred marriage ritual involving Inanna at this time. To apply this interpretation to events depicted a thousand years earlier is anachronistic and potentially misleading.

Inanna and Ishtar

In an important early article, Jacobsen (1939) demonstrated that the then generally accepted belief of a racial conflict between a native Sumerian population and invading Semitic groups during the ED period, culminating in a Semitic victory under Sargon of Akkad, had no basis in fact. Today Jacobsen's arguments are generally accepted, with increasing evidence pointing to a very mixed Sumerian/Semitic speaking population having existed on the southern plain from a period predating the supposed conflict. It has also been argued that, during the ED period, the Sumerian language was being spoken by an increasingly smaller percentage of the population (Cooper 1973). But although this theory of racial conflict has been discredited, the concept continues to influence ideas concerning a syncretism of Inanna with the Semitic goddess Ishtar.

The name of the goddess Eshtar (later Ishtar) occurs as elements in both Presargonic and Sargonic personal names. It has been suggested that Eshtar derives from a form of 'Attar, a male deity known from Ugaritic and South Arabian inscriptions (Roberts, 1972: 39). The corresponding female forms are 'Attart/'Ashtart. The two names may have designated the planet Venus under its aspect of a male morning star ('Attar) and a female evening star ('Attart). This would apparently account for the dual personality of Ishtar as a goddess of love (female) and of war (male). In Mesopotamia the masculine form took over the

functions of the female and a goddess developed contrary to its grammatical gender; perhaps under influence from Sumerian Inanna who may have possessed similar attributes. This is discussed further in the next section.

In 1968 Hallo and van Dijk argued that following Sargon's conquest of the southern plain, the king of Akkad initiated a deliberate policy of combining Sumerian gods with his own Semitic deities. In this way he would 'lay the theological foundations for a united empire of Sumer and Akkad' (Hallo and van Dijk 1968: 9) and make Semitic gods 'more acceptable to the Sumerian population' (Leick 1991: 96). This formed part of Sargon's centralisation of power.

Sargon's claim to sovereignty was probably strengthened by the appointment of his daughter Enheduanna as high priestess at Ur (and after her, Sargon's great-granddaughter, Enmenanna). Ur and Uruk had a long history as a condominium, and when Sargon defeated their overlord, Lugalzagezi of Umma, the two cities fell to him. It is likely, although there are no contemporary inscriptions for Enheduanna outside Ur, that Sargon's daughter also held a religious role at the twin city of Uruk, since her texts not only mention Nanna (patron god of Ur) but also the two leading deities of Uruk: Anu and Inanna. Enheduanna is credited in colophons with the composition of a collection of temple hymns (Sjoberg and Bergmann 1969) together with a number of hymns of praise to Inanna: ***in.nin.sa.gur.re*** (Sjoberg 1976), ***nin.me.sha.ra*** (Hallo and van Dijk 1968) and possibly also 'Inanna and Ebih' (***in.nin.me.hush.a***). According to Hallo and van Dijk, the hymns of Enheduanna reflect historical events and tell how she was expelled from Ur and Uruk by a rival to the authority of the kings of Akkad. She pleads to both Anu and Nanna for her position to be restored but eventually owes her restoration to Inanna. However, all these compositions are preserved as copies dating to the 3rd Dynasty of Ur and their origins remain hypothetical.

The works of Enheduanna have a clear Sumerian orientation and praise Sumerian gods rather than Semitic deities, especially Inanna. Yet later chronographic tradition clearly regarded the dynasty of Akkad as the 'Dynasty of Ishtar'. This title may rest on the importance of the cult of Ishtar at the capital city rather than reflecting Akkadian religious policy. In curse formulae found in two of Naram-Sin's inscriptions, a list of gods begins with Enlil (supreme god of Sumer) and INANNA.***annunitum*** (analysed to mean 'skirmisher') (Roberts 1972: 145). The Sumerian ideogram INANNA was borrowed by the Semitic speaking scribes and should probably be read as Ishtar, as 'one does not expect an Akkadian epithet with a Sumerian deity' (Roberts 1972: 147). In other texts of the Akkadian kings this goddess is often paired with Ilaba, described as the city god of Akkad and personal god of Sargon and Naram-Sin. Generally a person had both a male and a female personal god. The latter was normally overshadowed by her spouse but Ishtar seems to have been an exception to this rule, with Ilaba as the more shadowy figure. This could explain the later designation of the Akkad Period as the 'Dynasty of Ishtar'.

There was no attempt by Sargon and his successors to impose their Semitic gods on their empire. It is clear from Akkadian royal inscriptions that the kings of Akkad attribute their rule over the southern plain of Sumer to Enlil (supreme god of the Sumerian pantheon) who maintained his primacy in god lists (Roberts

1972: 159 no. 33). It is possible that the northern plain, centred on the capital city Akkad, lay under the authority of Ishtar.annunitum thus reflecting a division of the country found in the later Ur III royal title 'king of Sumer and Akkad'. Divine control thus followed tradition since beyond the Mesopotamian plain, northern conquests were attributed by Sargon and Naram-Sin to Dagon (god of the middle Euphrates).

Since there appears to have been no deliberate attempt by the kings of Akkad to combine Sumerian and Semitic deities, the confusion, or association, of Inanna with Ishtar must have resulted from the goddesses possessing comparable powers. This idea is discussed in the next section. However, any process of association must have been increased by the unification of Mesopotamia under the kings of Akkad, and resulted in the 'apparently seamless garment of Mesopotamian religion' (Roberts 1972: 154). Indeed, the confusion between the two deities is already apparent in inscriptions dating to late in the Early Dynastic period, as demonstrated by material from the following sites:

Akkad (unlocated)

Chosen by Sargon, founder of the Dynasty of Akkad, as his capital, the city contained a temple called Eulmash dedicated to Ishtar, which is mentioned in numerous texts from the Akkad Empire and remained an important cult centre down to the 1st Dynasty of Babylon. Years were named after events during the Akkad period and a relevant example survives. An inscription, probably dating from the reign of Sargon's grandson, Naram-Sin, records, 'Year: The temple of Inanna was built in Akkad' (Foster 1983).

Ashur (Qalat Sherqat)

In the so-called 'Archaic Ishtar' temple, five superimposed floors were revealed (levels D,E,F,G,H) (Andrae 1922). Level H is ED IIIa in date, and it is probable that G is constructed from the remains of level H (Tunca 1984: 239). The identification of this temple with Inanna/Ishtar is problematic. The oldest inscriptions from Ashur are those of Ititi (Dynasty of Akkad) and Ilushuma (3rd Dynasty of Ur) referring to the erection of a stele and temple dedicated to Ishtar. Both inscriptions were recovered beyond the temple building. A small gypsum relief (5cm) showing a heavily jewelled, naked woman found in the 'Archaic Temple' has been interpreted as a cult statue of Ishtar by Andrae (1930) but there is no evidence to confirm this suggestion.

Ebla (Tell Mardikh)

Among the lexical tablets from the Hall of Archives which is dated by the excavator to c. 2250 BC (Matthiae 1980: 53), offering lists show that a temple dedicated to the Semitic goddess Eshtar existed at Ebla. In bilingual vocabularies from the site, Eshtar is equated with Sumerian Inanna. Further evidence for a close connection between Ebla and Sumer is provided by the fact that the leading characters in the Ebla mythological texts are Sumerian, rather than Eblaite, great gods and include Inanna (Matthiae 1980: 188).

Mari (Tell Hariri)

A temple was revealed through seven levels: g-a (levels d-a are attributed to the ED period). According to inscriptions on three statues from ED III levels, the temple was dedicated to INANNA.US. The reading of INANNA.US is also known from texts found at Ebla and it has been suggested that the Sumerian ideogram INANNA should be read as Ishtar with US as an epithet (Gelb 1977). Two other buildings at Mari are identified as the temples of Ninni.zaza and Ishtarat, following the discovery of a number of inscribed objects. Linguistic analysis suggests that all three names known from Mari refer to the Semitic goddess Ishtar (Roberts 1972: 100 no. 284).

Representations of Inanna

Asher-Greve (1985) has convincingly argued that there are no representations of deities dating to the fourth millennium. Although no depictions of the goddess exist, the most important document for defining the role and functions of Inanna at this time is the Warka vase (Fig. 3). As suggested earlier, the relief on the vase depicts a double shrine of Inanna at Uruk. Furthermore, the objects within the sanctuary may relate to either of the two figures, perhaps cultic statues, standing on the back of bulls. I suggest that the vase in the form of a ram should be associated with the figure holding a 'stack of vessels', while the lioness vase (behind the ram) relates to the figure with an Inanna symbol (behind the figure with 'bowls').

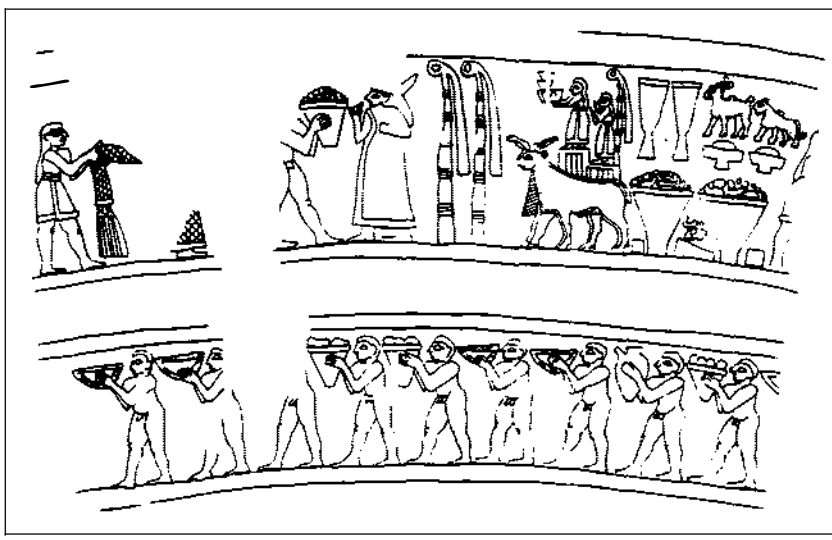

Figure 3 Detail of a vase from Uruk (after Green and Black, 1992 : 150, drawing by Tessa Rickards).

The lioness and ram may represent two aspects of the goddess (perhaps the male and female principle), signified by the double Inanna symbols at the

entrance to the temple. Inanna/Ishtar was often associated with a lion on cylinder seals and reliefs following the Akkad Dynasty, but an early connection between the two is found on a chlorite bowl discovered in the Inanna temple at Nippur, level VIII (ED III). The vessel depicts a snake in combat with a large cat, and is labelled in cuneiform 'Inanna and the serpent'. Inanna, conceived as a lioness, may represent the aggressive aspect of nature. The role of the ram found on the Warka vase, and depicted on contemporary cylinder seals and reliefs in association with the Inanna symbol, is less easy to define. It is not found associated with a deity in later periods but I suggest it may represent Inanna's role as goddess of fertility, an important aspect of Inanna according to later hymns and prayers. Inanna was thus easily equated with the Semitic goddess Ishtar who probably possessed similar attributes: as the 'skirmisher' Ishtar was a warrior and Roberts (1972) indicates that there is some evidence to suggest a sexual role.

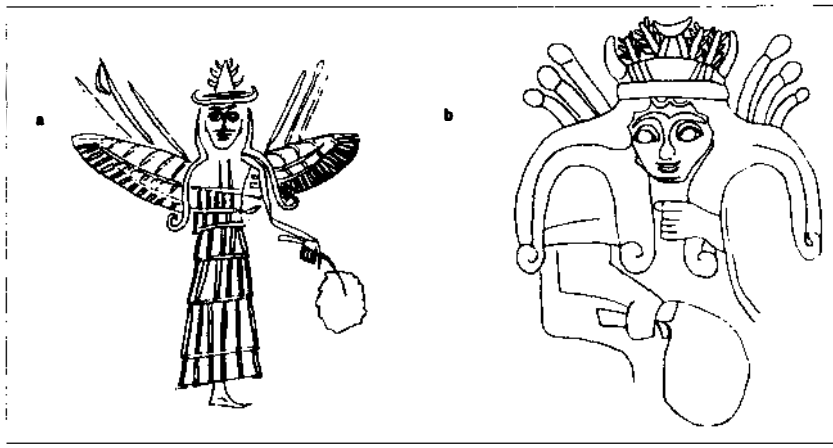

Figure 4 Details of: a) seal of Adda (after Collon 1982: no.190); b) vase of Entemena (after Orthman 1975: 188).

A possible representation of Inanna/Ishtar appears on a cylinder seal of Akkad date. Identified by an inscription as belonging to the scribe Adda, the seal depicts four of the major gods of Mesopotamia: Enki, Shamash, a hunting god and a winged goddess in a flounced robe with weapons rising from her shoulders. She holds a date cluster in one hand (Fig. 4a). This female deity, suggested to be Inanna/Ishtar combining her two aspects of war and sexuality (Collon 1987: 165), is very similar to the representation of a goddess on a fragment of a large vessel, now in Berlin, and probably dating to the time of Entemena of Lagash (ED III) (Orthmann 1975: 188). It shows a goddess, full face, wearing a flounced robe and a horned crown over long flowing hair. From her shoulders rise maces or other weapons and in her right hand is a date cluster (Fig. 4b). The similarities between the two goddesses are obvious and, if the Berlin relief does depict Inanna, it represents one of the earliest known portraits of the deity. A similar goddess, holding weapons in her left hand, is depicted on a fragment of a stone plaque from the Nippur Inanna temple. It was found out of context but has been

dated on stylistic grounds to c. 2500 BC (Orthmann 1975: 192). The identification of all three representations is, however, far from secure.

Conclusion

The complex character of Inanna/Ishtar that emerges from representations and literary texts probably represents an assimilation of the functions of numerous, often provincial, female deities as well as the more obvious roles of Inanna and Ishtar during the third millennium BC. The tradition of Inanna/Ishtar as a goddess of love and war thus presented a portrait of the goddess 'as the independent, wilful, and spoiled young noblewoman whose seductive and voluptuous charm hides a fickle heart and a vicious temper' (Roberts 1972: 40). As such, Inanna formed a character of such complexity and adaptability that she was highly attractive to poets and story-tellers, ensuring her survival as an important deity throughout ancient Mesopotamian history.

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