

# INANNA QUEEN OF HEAVEN & EARTH

## The "Descent of Inanna"

Compiled by Amalya (Amy Peck M.A.) October 2003 rev 10-25-10

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The "Warka" mask. Thought to be a representation of Inanna. This marble head of a woman was discovered in the temple precinct of Inanna, Uruk. It is popularly known as the 'Mask of Warka', and also the 'Lady of Uruk'. It is one of the very earliest representations of the human face. The head was attached to a larger statue made of various materials. The hollowed out eyes and eyebrows bear traces of an ancient inlay, perhaps shell and lapis lazuli for the eyes. Perforations at the ears indicate that the image once wore jewellery and a head-dress.



The 8 pointed Star or Rosette, symbolic of Venus

Right Illustration: Enthroned Inanna, with date palm and Anzu bird, her feet on lion, raising hand to worshippers, bald, bare-footed suppliant and lesser goddess leading him. Steatite cylinder seal. Neo-Sumerian, ca. 2112-2004 BCE. S. Beaulieu, after Wolkstein & Kramer 1983:102

### Who is Inanna?

Inanna is the first Goddess about whom we have written records dating around 4,000 years ago from the ancient Sumerian cultures of the land of Sumer (Mesopotamia), that is now southern Iraq. The Important sanctuaries of Inanna were in Uruk, Zabalam, and Babylon.

To the Sumerians Inanna was Queen of Heaven and Earth, and to the Semites of Sumer she was called Ishtar. In Sumerian, Inanna's name means literally "Queen of Heaven" and she was called both the First Daughter of the Moon and the Morning and Evening Star (the planet Venus). She also carried the epithet of "the Lady of Edin" (nin edin) which some believe was the precursor to the biblical Eve of Eden! She is the Goddess of fertility, of love, sex, and procreation, of life and death, war, and rebirth. She is the Goddess of transition and transformation, and the Goddess of the Gateways and Crosser of Boundaries. She is often portrayed as a willful, clever, conniving, untamable, erotic and beautiful young woman. Inanna is praised as the one who brought the Holy "Me" to her city—by her cleverness she obtained the forbidden Me: the totality of knowledge, laws, and the arts of civilization. Her symbols are the lion, the 8 pointed star representing Venus, gateposts, and owl or the depiction of wings, and the measuring rod/line. Her cuneiform ideogram was a hook-shaped twisted knot of reeds, representing the doorpost of the storehouse, (and thus fertility and plenty).



*"Inanna's symbols appear on some of the earliest Mesopotamian seals (Adams 1966:12), and she is the first goddess about whom we have written records (Hallo & Van Dijk 1968)... "Forever an adolescent poised at the threshold of full womanhood, maiden Inanna was the eternal threshold through which everything passed in fulfillment of the cycle that is life." \**

\* (Johanna Stuckey article for MatriFocus Samhain 2004 Vol 4-1, "Inanna, Goddess of 'Infinite Variety'". [www.matrifocus.com](http://www.matrifocus.com))

## About The Descent of Inanna Myth



Many figurines were found in this style. Could be Inanna and/or Ishtar

The Descent of Inanna myth is the story of the prideful Inanna's journey to the Underworld to ostensibly pay homage to her sister, Ereshkigal, Queen of the "Kur" (Underworld). Ereshkigal's name means "Queen of the Great Earth". In her descent, Inanna had to pass through seven gates and at each gate she was commanded to relinquish one of her Queenly adornments, which Inanna gave up reluctantly. When she entered the Kur, Ereshkigal condemned Inanna to death and hung her on a hook to rot. After three days Inanna was rescued by aid of the God of Wisdom and resurrected. She was released from the Kur, but not without cost...as she would have to choose someone to take her place. Upon returning to her temple and finding her beloved husband, Dumuzi, arrogantly sitting on her throne, Inanna, in a fit of rage at him, condemned him to the underworld. However, later in her remorse, although she couldn't undo what she had done, she was able to decree that his willing sister could take his place for half the year and Dumuzi could return to be by Inanna's side for the other half.

The Descent myth, along with other hymns and tales, including the erotic love hymns of Inanna's courtship with Dumuzi, have come to us now through a great collection of recovered tablets. Inscribed in cuneiform around 1750 B.C.E., by the first civilization from which we have written texts, these tablets were excavated from the ruins of Nippur, Sumer's spiritual and cultural center, between the years 1889 and 1900, but it took many years for the translations to begin.

The Descent story consists of more than four hundred lines of text in almost perfect condition that were pieced together from thirty tablets and fragments requiring the cooperation of numerous scholars and museums. The first partial translations began to be published in 1937, with updates and revisions in 1942, and again in 1963. And in 1983, Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer published "Inanna Queen of Heaven and Earth" which offered a very thorough scholarly account as well as a beautifully crafted narrative of Inanna's stories and hymns.



A Winged Inanna with Lions

*Right Illustration: Rain goddess, possibly Inanna-Ishtar, holding streams of rain and standing on the storm god's lion-bird. Shell cylinder seal. Akkadian, ca. 2334-2154 BCE. S. Beaulieu, after Wolkstein & Kramer 1983: 94*



## Why knowing the Story of Inanna is important now...

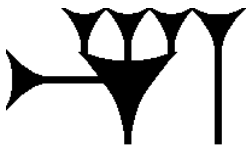


Inanna with Snakes... humm... very similar to the Creten Snake Goddesses!!

Rediscovering this story is a significant validation of the Sacred Feminine. In order for humanity and women particularly to heal and regain a deeper appreciation of the lost and forgotten divine female, we need to reclaim and acknowledge these ancient accounts of the Goddess. In so doing we can empower our lives with the knowledge and faith of our women ancestors and we can validate our life's passages allowing the ancient wisdom and symbolism of the Heroine's Journey to impart greater meaning to our contemporary experiences.

The Descent of Inanna is a metaphor for the experience of being stripped to one's core—of facing loss or depression—of relinquishing the outer symbols of one's ego power and attachments to gain one's true unadorned inner strength. Inanna's descent is a story of the Goddess searching for the meaning of Life, love and death. Her tale is one of courage, curiosity and conviction, love, passion, pride and anger, sacrifice and loss, remorse, and determination. It is the story of a maturing woman—the maiden, mother and leader—learning about her power.

Hers is the primal, archetypal Heroine's journey. The Descent myth, in particular, is the metaphor or enactment of the origins of the cycle of life—from death, resurrection, to rebirth. And in a larger context of "herstory," the Descent of Inanna can also be seen as symbolic of the loss (or descent) of the Sacred Feminine principle in the consciousness of human evolution! But in a more personal view, it is the story of a woman's journey to know and love herself ...to honor her shadow self, (her dark, frightful, lamenting, jealous, merciless sister of the underworld), to gain wisdom from loss, to discover the mystery of death, despair or depression—and return transformed.



Inanna in Cuneiform writing. (I think)

*Triumphant Inanna-Ishtar, winged, with foot on her roaring lion and star symbol, being worshipped by a lesser goddess. Black-stone cylinder seal. Akkadian, ca. 2334-2154 BCE.*

S. Beaulieu, after Wolkstein & Kramer 1983:92





The Rosette of Inanna



## The Descent of Inanna—The Story...

Below is an abridged version of the "Descent" myth of Inanna—summarized by Amy Peck. (Text in brackets are my interpretations. Indented and Italicized text is excerpted from the original poem, translated by Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer's book, "Inanna Queen of Heaven and Earth, Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer", © 1983, Harper & Row, NY.)

*Illustration Above Right: Between mountains containing monsters and deities and perhaps representing the underworld, a goddess (Inanna?) holds a ring. Could it be the one taken from Inanna at a gate of the underworld? Mesopotamian cylinder seal. Hematite. Around 2330-2150 BCE.*

© S. Beaulieu, after Wolkstein and Kramer 1983:57.

*"From the Great Above she 'opened her ear' to the Great Below" ... Inanna chose to "abandon Heaven and Earth to descend to the underworld".*

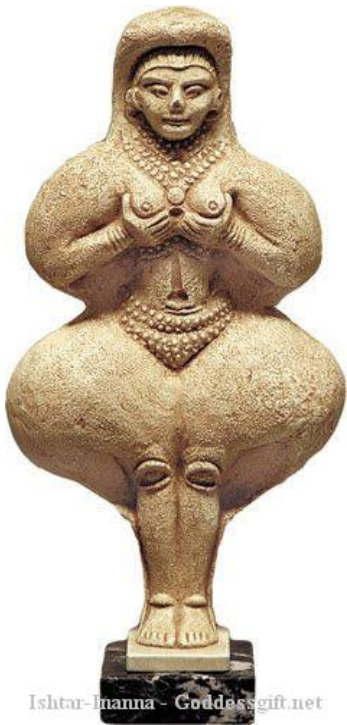
[In Sumerian the word for "ear" and "wisdom" is the same and connotes mind...so this first line of the descent poem could be interpreted that Inanna 'opened her mind' to 'receive the wisdom' of the underworld. Or perhaps something about the underworld 'called to her'... perhaps Inanna was summoned to gain the knowledge of life, death and rebirth.]

In any respect, she was determined to visit her dark, older sister, Ereshkigal, Queen of the Underworld, to ostensibly pay her respects and witness the funeral rites of Ereshkigal's husband. [Little did she realize that her neglected and jealous sister would not divulge the mysteries of death simply by allowing Inanna to observe the rites of another—Inanna would have to learn the ways of the underworld by dying herself and by giving up more than just her own life.]

The Holy Priestess, abandoned her seven temples and prepared herself for her journey. She gathered up the seven "me" (Divine Laws) and adorned herself with the seven accouterments/vestments of her earthly Queenship. [Note: in Akkadian, seven means "wholeness.]"

*"She placed the shugurra, the crown of the steppe, on her head. She arranged the dark locks of hair across her forehead. She tied the small lapis beads around her neck, let the double strand of beads fall to her breast, and wrapped the royal robe around her body. She daubed her eyes with ointment called "Let him come, Let him come," bound the breastplate called "Come, man, come!" around her chest, slipped the gold ring over her wrist, and took the lapis measuring rod and line in her hand."*

Then she set out for the underworld with her faithful maid-servant, Ninshubur. Before Inanna arrived at the gates of the underworld, she instructed



Ishtar-Inanna - Goddessgift.net



Contemporary illustration of Ereshkigal

Ninshubur what to do in case she could not return on her own from the underworld.

*"She spoke to her saying: "Ninshubur, my constant support, if I do not return, set up a lament for me by the ruins. Beat the drum for me in the assembly places. Tear at your eyes, at your mouth, at your thighs...[and go to the temples of my fathers to ask for help]."*

Inanna told her servant to enlist the aid of the God Enlil, her Father's Father, then to ask her Father, Nanna, and finally, if they refused to help, to ask her Mother's Father, Enki, the God of Wisdom, to secure her release from the underworld.

At last the Queen of Heaven arrived at the gates to the underworld, the entrance to the Kur.

*"She cried out in a fierce voice: "Open the door, gatekeeper! I alone would enter!"*

The gatekeeper told Inanna to wait while he sought the reply of his Queen of the Underworld, Ereshkigal.

*"Ereshkigal commanded her gatekeeper..."Come, Neti, my chief gatekeeper of the Kur, heed my words: Bolt the seven gates of the underworld. Then, one by one, open each gate a crack. Let Inanna enter. As she enters, remove her royal garments. Let the holy priestess of heaven enter bowed low."*

And thus so, at each of the seven gates, Inanna was ordered to relinquish her adornments. At the First gate she gave up her crown, next her small lapis beads, then the double strand of beads, then her breastplate. At the fifth gate she surrendered her gold ring from her wrist, at the sixth gate she gave up her lapis measuring rod and line. Then, finally at the seventh gate, from her body the royal robe was removed.

At each gate, when commanded to surrender her royal garments Inanna objected, *"What is this?"* but she was only told, *"Quiet, Inanna, the ways of the underworld are perfect. They may not be questioned."*

*"Naked and bowed low, Inanna entered the throne room. Ereshkigal rose from her throne. Inanna started toward the throne. The Annuana, the judges of the underworld, surrounded her. They passed judgment against her."*

*"Then Ereshkigal fastened on Inanna the eye of death. She spoke against her the word of wrath. She uttered against her the cry of guilt. She struck her. Inanna was turned into a corpse, a piece of rotting meat, and was hung from a hook on the wall."*



Possible Sumerian depiction of Ereshkigal giving birth in the Underworld.



Contemporary illustration of Inanna

Three days and three nights passed and when Inanna did not return, her faithful servant, Ninshubur began her lament and her quest to aid her lost Queen. She went to each father with her plea for help. But only Enki, the God of Wisdom, would listen.

He created two creatures, the Kurgarra and the Galatur, neither male nor female, fashioned from the dirt of his fingernails and instructed them to enter the underworld like flies. He gave the food of life to the Kurgarra and the water of life to the Galatur. He told them to approach Ereshkigal. He said to them, "*Ereshkigal, the Queen of the underworld, is moaning with the cries of a woman about to give birth.*" He instructed the creatures to moan and cry along with Ereshkigal, and told them that as they did so, Ereshkigal would be pleased and offer them a gift.



The Kurgarra and the Galatur did as bade. They entered the throne room, and moaned and groaned with the laboring Queen of the Underworld until the Queen stopped and looked at them. She asked them:

*"Who are you, moaning-groaning-sighing with me? If you are gods, I will bless you. If you are mortals, I will give you a gift."*

The creatures then requested they be given the corpse that hangs from the hook on the wall. The corpse was given to them. And the Kurgarra sprinkled the food of life on the corpse, and the Galatur sprinkled the water of life on the corpse. And Inanna arose...

[But her journey was not over yet, nor had she learned that the ways of the underworld are perfect.] As she was about to ascend, the Annuana, the judges of the underworld seized the Queen of Heaven and Earth and said,

*"No one ascends from the underworld unmarked. If Inanna wishes to return from the underworld, she must provide someone in her place."*



Contemporary illustration of Inanna

To insure this order was fulfilled, two demons, called Galla, armed with a scepter and mace, returned with Inanna to the upperworld to capture Inanna's replacement. They first tried to take Ninshubur, but Inanna cried "*No! Ninshubur is my constant support...because of her my life was saved. I will never give Ninshubur to you.*" Then they came upon her sons, first Shara then Lulal but each had shown their devotion to Inanna and she refused to allow the Galla to take them either. Finally they met up with Inanna's husband, Dumuzi. But when Inanna found him sitting arrogantly on his throne without signs of lament for his missing wife, she "*spoke against him the word of wrath*" and the Galla attacked him. Dumuzi fled and tried to evade the Galla with the help of a friend and his de-



Sumerian Depiction of winged Inanna with her foot on a lion & weapons on her back. Her Rosette is also visible in upper left corner.

voted sister, Geshtinanna, who hid him in the ditches.

The Galla tried to bribe Geshtinanna to tell them where Dumuzi hid, but she would not speak. They raped her—"they tore her clothes and poured pitch into her vulva"—but still she would not speak. So the Galla left her and went on to Dumuzi's friend. The friend betrayed Dumuzi and the Galla found the hiding King. Yet Dumuzi escaped again and yet again until at last the demons overpowered him while he hid in the sheepfold of his sister.

When at last Inanna realized that Dumuzi was captured and doomed to the underworld, she became remorseful and lamented the loss of her beloved bridegroom, her sweet husband. And when she saw the grief of Geshtinanna who was wandering about the city weeping, "I would find my brother! I would comfort him! I would share his fate!", Inanna felt compassion.

Together, aided by a holy fly, Inanna and Geshtinanna found Dumuzi weeping at the edges of the steppe.



A famous frieze of either Inanna or Lilith. She has all of Inanna's usual symbols...lions, owls, wings, and crown. Now in British Museum.

*Inanna took Dumuzi by the hand and said: "You will go to the underworld half the year. Your sister, since she has asked, will go the other half. On the day you are called, that day you will be taken. On the day Geshtinanna is called, that day you will be set free."*

*"Inanna placed Dumuzi in the hands of the eternal."*

*"Holy Ereshkigal! Great is your renown! Holy Ereshkigal! I sing your praises!"*



***[And thus Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth, came to respect the ways of the underworld.]***



The Sacred Marriage Bed. Perhaps Inanna & Dumuzi.



*A winged goddess wearing a multi-horned crown stands with her head in the realm of the deities and their devotees. Her bird-clawed feet rest in a place, likely the underworld, inhabited by strange and demonic creatures. Some think her to be Lilith, but the crown shows her to be a great goddess, almost certainly Inanna. Mesopotamian cylinder seal. Hematite. 2000-1600 BCE.*

© S. Beaulieu, after Wolkstein and Kramer 1983: 51.