The Passion for the Goddess; a Comparative Study on the Reverence of the Goddess in Contemporary America and Ancient Mesopotamia

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The Passion for the Goddess; a Comparative Study on the Reverence of the Goddess in Contemporary America and Ancient Mesopotamia.

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May 6, 2011
Signature Page

Thesis Title: The Passion for the Goddess; a Comparative Study of the Reverence of the Goddess in Contemporary America and Ancient Mesopotamia.

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Abstract

Through a comparative study of contemporary America and ancient Mesopotamia, the devotional practices directed towards the goddess Inanna in ancient Mesopotamia and towards celebrities in present-day America are analyzed. Celebrities have replaced Inanna in terms of representing exceptional figures exemplifying certain qualities—qualities of motherhood, fertility, sexual appeal, wisdom, intelligence, and even that of the warrior—once associated with the ancient goddess. The position of women within these cultures is an important aspect of the research. In ancient Mesopotamia, the position of women decreased over the millennia, from 4000 BCE to 1000 BCE, in which the people of Sumer, Akkadia, Assyria, and Canaan existed. In the United States, on the other hand, the position of women has increased within society in the past few decades. These changing factors within each respective time-period is reflective of the devotional practices performed, and the popularity felt, towards their respective goddess figures. Further research to include more cultures is needed in order to clarify as to whether societies need to create these figures in some way.
Introduction

The world of the goddess is an intensely interesting and much studied topic, fascinating a great range of scholarly fields, including history, religious studies, art history, the classics, anthropology, and even gender studies. The word goddess is uniquely different from the word god, and not only because of the gender difference it implies. In addition to referring to a female deity, the word goddess has also garnered a much more generalized and secular use. This is the result of the fact that in much of the present-day Western World, goddesses no longer exist in a religious sense, replaced by monotheistic religions dedicated to the almighty God. As a result, the word has acquired a much broader usage while the male counterpart has remained linked to the original use of the word, that of an almighty and immortal being. An example of this expanded use of the word goddess is the way it can refer to the mysterious and powerful side of a woman, such as the way it is used in the Gillette advertisement slogan for their feminine razors: “Reveal the Goddess in You.”¹ The original religious-based goddesses exist now only in the past, and Inanna is one of the oldest.

Inanna is a goddess of ancient Sumer, 4000 BCE-2300 BCE, one of the first civilizations to emerge from the Neolithic ages, in the Mesopotamian Valley, the Cradle of Civilization. What kind of connection exists between the modern sense of a goddess and the goddesses of ages past? Why is it acceptable now to refer to women as goddesses when once the title was reserved for immortals? The answers to these questions may lie in the unique and diametrically opposite social trends in both the American society and the ancient Mesopotamian society. This research is based on the comparison of goddess figures from the United States and from ancient

Mesopotamia with the intend to discover if a correlation exists between the way these figures were and are worshipped by their respective societies in order to investigate the important connection between society and the female figures they create--of sorts--to reflect their aspirations and desires.

The study of the goddess is not a new one. Feminist scholars, such as Marija Gimbutas, author of *When God Was a Woman* and *The Civilization of the Goddess*, have eagerly delved into the past to research the many goddesses that have existed over time. Philological scholars--scholars who base research on literary sources or classical scholarship--have criticized many of the feminist approaches to the study of goddesses, claiming that feminist scholars lack objectivity when analyzing the goddess.\(^2\) According to scholar Marcia Dobson, a common criticism on feminist studies claims that feminist scholars are too concerned with finding what they wanted to find to strengthen their position on women rather than the truth of the matter. In addition, philological scholars claim that feminist scholars tend to lack an attention to the linguistics of the texts relating to the goddesses, as well as the cultural subtleties that illustrate the goddesses affect on the people. On the flip side of this argument, philologists have been accused of being oblivious to the notion of destructive patriarchy in relation to the surviving evidence on the topic of the goddess.\(^3\) Whether or not these allegations are true is not certain, but it illustrates the keen differences between these two groups in the study of the goddess.

Many psychological studies have also been conducted on the topic of the goddess, most notably by Jungian psychologists. Jungian scholars like Sylvia Perera approach the surviving


\(^3\) Ibid, p. 43.
texts and attempt to analyze the psychological patterns that exists in these earlier societies. Once again, philologists have rejected these studies on the basis that psychological paradigms cannot be relevant to ancient cultures. More recently, post-Jungian feminists have emerged to look at the goddess in new relational terms of identity and the self. This new movement combines the psychological implications from the Jungian scholars with the feminist drive, in a sense bringing the goddess to the present in order to better understand women.

The methodology of this essay comes not from just one of these fields of study, but from a unique blend. Relating the ancient goddess Inanna to the contemporary world naturally requires a look into the psyche of the individuals of modern-day America, and how these individuals might look at the contemporary goddess-figures that rekindle the spirit of Inanna--most obviously, the celebrities whose faces have become common place to the general public. Naturally, this same investigation into the psyche of the ancient Mesopotamians will be conducted, but it must be understood that there is no definite way to understand the psyche or mentality of ancient humans. By studying the relics left behind, only educated guesses on the matter can be made.

Through an understanding of the roles of women in society and how these roles are ever expanding in American society, a feminist outlook is an appropriate methodology of study, but a philological analysis is key for balance. The result, with any luck, is a well-rounded analysis of the goddesses of the past and the present that is not biased on any foundation of study, but on a sincere desire to understand, objectively, the relationship between Inanna and the American goddess-equivalents and how they influence and are viewed by the society which birthed them.

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This study is a focused study of a broad topic. In order to truly understand if societies consistently project goddess figures of some kind, a broader comparative study of different cultures must be conducted. Since that is not possible at an undergraduate level, the comparison will be limited to one culture from each of the modern and the past, that is, America and ancient Mesopotamia. Inanna was a broad cultural phenomena in Mesopotamia. Several cultures within ancient Mesopotamia absorbed Inanna, and her whole religion, into their own, and for this reason Sumer, Akkad, Assyria, and even Canaan are all cultures that illustrate the influences of Inanna and will be analyzed in this essay. It is important to look at the full breadth of her influence--from her instigation as a goddess in Neolithic times to the fall of her empires at the end of the Assyrian and Canaanite cultures--in order to understand her influence on the people in order to make a proper comparison to American society. In doing so, an understanding of the importance of the goddess to society can be formulated. Perhaps a future, more involved study, analyzing goddesses from other ancient cultures and more varied contemporary nations, might provide insight into the very important connection that exists between the women of a society and the goddess figures that reflect them.
Mesopotamia and the Modern World

The power of the goddess existed in many cultures in the early ages of human existence. She was the Mother, the bringer of life, the mighty force which made the world, and the thriving life in it, possible. Out of the many cultures which worshipped her, those in the Mesopotamian region offer a unique perspective of different societies with a shared religious system in which the goddess was eventually eclipsed by male patriarchal gods. The opposite is occurring today in a shift in American society. Women in Mesopotamian culture, according to Dr. Samuel Noah Kramer, were once viewed on more equal footing with man prior to the third millennium BCE. Eventually, the position of women was demoted in society, a trend to continue through most of the Western world until more recently. This subversion of the position of women is in opposition to the progression of the place of women in the present-day United States. As a result of newly developed technology--machinery which make the use of physical strength less necessary--and a number of other human rights movements, there is a re-emergence of the power of women, their role in society, and the way they are viewed by the male half of the population. With the position of women on the rise, female idols are also recently popular.

The goddess of the ancient world used to enjoy a prominent place until she was cast out by male counterparts, around the third millennium BCE. Possibly synchronistic to this trend of an increasingly powerful patriarchy is the slow subversion of the goddess in these early, Mesopotamian cultures, where they became replaced by male gods. This trend continued until, eventually, she was completely dismissed altogether as seen in the Judeo-Christian religions, and goddesses became the imaginings of the crazed world of pagans and hedonists. Today, the goddess has re-emerged in American culture, though perhaps not in the most recognizable way.
Rather than being worshiped at temples and shrines, these modern goddesses are worshiped at concerts and award shows. No longer are the stories of their daring and often illicit feats told over fire and meal, but now they are watched on television or tracked on the internet. In American society, these new goddesses have taken the form of superstars, sports stars, musicians, actresses, and even political icons. The multi-faceted, complex deities of ages past have manifested themselves in the secular drama of the silver screen, and have become the most-watched people of American society.

Though certainly popular, often fabulously wealthy, and many men’s fantasy women, female superstars are definitely not gods, at least in the religious sense. Yet the way American society follows these celebrities is remarkably similar to the way the gods were viewed by ancient Sumerians, Akkadians, Assyrians, and even the Canaanites. Naturally, disparities exist between celebrities and gods; individuals like George Clooney and Julia Roberts have neither superhuman abilities, nor the ability to create the world. They also would not be personally offended if offerings and prayers are not provided for them. However, unlike the God of the Christian religion, the gods of the people of Mesopotamia had very human-like attributes. They ate, drank, slept, loved, reproduced, felt emotions like jealousy and anger, were compassionate and wise on one hand, and petty and hateful on the other. The dramas that occurred between the gods and goddesses of these ancient courts were none too different than the dramas that occur today in the lives of these superstars, whether on or off the screen.

It is how the masses regard contemporary celebrities that makes them comparable to the way ancient Mesopotamian gods were worshipped. The eagerness with which people today

follow the stories of these present-day superstars has a devotional quality which harkens back to ancient times. There are hundreds, even thousands, of websites dedicated to following, discussing, and even creating stories about famous people in American society. Some even literally refer to their favorite pop icon as a goddess. Likewise, the ancient Sumerians enjoyed telling the tales of their gods and boasted of the wonderful feats their own city-god had accomplished. In the U.S., there are countless magazines that exclusively cover not only the daily lives of these superstars, but also the roles they play in movies and any and all drama that occurs between various pop icons, whether in their personal or professional lives.

People eagerly crowd streets just to get a glimpse of a superstar, willing to pay inordinate amounts of money to attend concerts and football games. Ancient Mesopotamians also craved closeness with their gods, but in those strictly hierarchical societies, only the most important individuals, such as the high priest, priestess, and the King, held this privilege. Physical proximity was enabled at the top of the ziggurats, where the gods were closest to man.6 Other interpersonal means by which one could come nearer to the gods were devised through

intermediaries such as oracles and diviners of local gods, who were positioned within most of the temple complexes. They could interpret the will of the deities and provide predictions of what must be done. Just as these seers facilitated ancient Mesopotamians’ desires to obtain information from their gods’ actions and biddings, so have contemporary “paparazzi”--celebrity journalist and commentators--taken up this role to provide a liaison and give insights into celebrities’ lives, by following them around, desperate for the latest tidbit about their lives. American social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook enable people to follow these famous individuals’ personal thoughts on every and any matter.

Contemporary infatuation with celebrities takes many forms. While many fans are fascinated by many celebrities, some are fanatically obsessed with one particular star. There are even cults, each dedicated either to a single star, a group of stars, or even to a specific kind of star. This phenomenon is very similar to a form of worship called henotheism, the belief that only one “god”--among many--should be worshiped. This was a common practice in Mesopotamia and in many societies around the world. Cults to a single god have likely existed in most pantheistic religions, and one of the most famous is the Eleusinian Cult dedicated to Demeter and the mysterious cult rituals performed in her honor.

The similarities between the worship of ancient Mesopotamian gods and the obsession with cultural icons in the U.S. is uncanny. The hero-worshipping rampant in the United States can never completely be compared with the forms of devotion elaborated around ancient Mesopotamian deities. A major distinction between religious and secular worship is that people do not feel that their salvation or the fate of their souls are dependent on figures like Lady Gaga.

or Sarah Palin. The absence of this religious fervor, however, does not detract from the strength with which many people devote their time to following their preferred celebrities, be they actresses or favorite politicians. The knowledge that they are out there, out of reach but still present, a constant factor in the daily lives of their fans, is similar in nature to the way the ancient Sumerians, Akkadians, Assyrians, and Canaanite people felt about their gods. These gods were all-powerful, but had lives of their own and were not necessarily concerned with the lives of individual humans. Their adventures and interactions always took place in a far off regions, either in the heavens, distant places on earth, or in the dark and damp bowels of the underworld.

This feeling of remoteness from the gods is also mirrored in the way most American feel about how the lives of their celebrities seem to transpire in distant locations and privileged sites, such as Hollywood sets or a foreign land. Despite the fact that they may seem to consistently be in far-off places, celebrities do intermingle with their fans through concerts and other events. Just as the superstars of America play a role in the daily lives of their fans through movies and discussions of them, etc, so too did the gods have a continuous presence in Mesopotamian life. The gods were called upon to oversee the healing of things as minor as toothaches or as major as child birth with incantations such as: “As the Bearing One gives birth, May the mother of the child bring forth by herself.”

Ancient Mesopotamians composed poetry to these gods, and those written by the daughter of Sargon the Great, the High Priestess Enheduanna, are particularly beautiful and famous. Composing poetry to a figure of devotion is something commonly done by many Americans to the pop icon of their hearts.

Occasionally interacting with people and taking part in their daily lives characterizes both the ancient gods and contemporary celebrities. A most well-known ancient example is the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, following the adventures of King Gilgamesh. Though a demi-god himself, the hero interacted closely with the gods in his many adventures, such as when he sought the sun-god Shamash for advice. Similarly, today’s celebrities take part in social functions such as charity events, concerts, or award shows, where they might intermingle with their fans.

Regional preference is another concept relevant to both Mesopotamian deities and contemporary celebrities. Most of the ancient Mesopotamian people were divided into separate and distinct city-states, each one of which was the property of a different deity, and while all of the gods are still worshipped, their power is significantly less in a city that is not theirs.9 These city-states were, therefore, organized as great Temple complexes, where all of the land theoretically belonged to the god or goddess of that city, and the king was the head of the cult to that god or goddess.10

In the United States, different regions also favor specific superstars above others. For example, country music is more popular in the south, and as a result, more country pop icons are “worshipped” in the south than might be the case up in Vermont or Pennsylvania, where the music is less common. Regional loyalties are even more important in the world of sports. Fans tend to support sports teams from their own region above others, creating great rivalries like the Boston Red Sox fans against the New York Yankee fans. In a sense, both the gods of ancient


10 Gray, p. 13.
Mesopotamia and the actors, singers, political icons, and other figures in popular culture are both the celebrities of their respective cultures.

While the above observations hold true for both the male and female “celebrities” of American and ancient Mesopotamian cultures, the focus of this research on female deities and celebrities is due to the burgeoning power and public influence of female icons in the present-day United States. In the past few decades, women's rights movements have significantly changed the status of women in modern society. While there are still lingering signs of sexism, great strides had been made to put women on equal footing with the men of America. Women now have the power to vote, to work, own property, to educate themselves, and much more. In fact, by all intents and purposes, women are equal to man in modern-day America, and only lingering, residual sexism is evident in decreasing examples like difference in pay for doing the same job. This is opposite of the trend which occurred within ancient Mesopotamia.

In early Bronze Age Mesopotamia, the cultures that eventually became known as the great kingdoms of Mesopotamia were once peaceful, agriculturally-oriented people. This agricultural civilization relied on the bounties of the earth to provide for them, and they had a very special relationship with the land through the goddess of the earth, the great Mother. Eventually, however, there were invasions and an introduction to brutal warfare from Semitic tribes from the north and Aryans to the south. These tribes introduced more patriarchal customs, and also introduced the worship of male sky gods over female earth deities. As the political and military situations in these cultures became more complex, and more violent, the position of

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11 Baring, p. 158.

12 Ibid, p. 155
women, unfortunately, decreased. Prior to this, women enjoyed a prominent place in the public life of ancient Mesopotamians. Priestesses of the goddess held significant power, not only religiously, but also politically. Women used to be able to own property, transact business, and even inherited land and property on equal grounds with their brothers. Evidence indicates this shift was around 2300 BCE, and the position of women suffered. At first, women could still own property, but had to consult their father or husband before doing anything with it. This change was more drastic in the north than in southern cities, since many of the invasions came from the north, and women quickly became possessions of men in those areas, a custom learned from the invading Semites.\footnote{Ibid, p. 159.} In addition to these customs, new forms of warfare, such as the mounted warrior and war chariots, were also introduced in the third millennium BCE, increasing the devastation a single man can inflict on others.\footnote{Ibid, p. 183.}

Therefore, it is possible, that with the introduction of increased violence and warfare among the ancient Mesopotamians, the position of women declined. The need for physical strength in order to survive led to a patriarchal system. The effects of warfare spread to include social, political, and economic repercussions for women. It is also possible that the inverse is happening now. With the development of new technology, violence and warfare dependent on the strength of individual soldiers has decreased, at least within the U.S., and there is less emphasis on the necessity of physical strength. Because of this decreasing need for physical strength and mandatory military duty, the American culture has allowed women to obtain equal standing with men, just as it might once have been. Even more advanced than early Mesopotamians, due to the
Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948, women may even join the ranks of male soldiers in the US military. Synchronized with this rise in power of the everyday woman, those “goddesses” of the modern world have also flourished.

Mesopotamian history and the development of different cultures is key to better understanding the position of women over time. The origin of the earliest people, the Sumerians, is still unknown. Evidence indicates that they first appeared around the second half of the fourth millennium BCE. Small agricultural villages eventually grew into larger urban centers, and the height of urban dwelling came in the mid third millennium BCE. This shift is attributed to several factors, including ecological problems with farming, the influence of northern tribes, and even increased commercial and administrative benefits. This congregation of people not only created new technologies, ranging from metal, copper-working, glass, textile weaving, flood control, water storage, and even irrigation, but it also led to the first example of written language in the ancient world, developed around 3300 BCE, called cuneiform. The development of these technologies and of writing was considered a gift from the gods. Like the Greeks, the Sumerians were divided into independent city states, and during the height of the Sumerian civilization, the cities of Kish, Uruk, and Ur were dominant and key cities in Southern Mesopotamia. Inanna was the deity who ruled over Uruk, and was Queen of that city. Eventually, King Lugalzagesi

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16 Gray, p. 13.

17 Holland, p. 100.
conquered Ur and Uruk in the early third millennium BCE and claimed dominion over Southern Mesopotamia, shifting the power to the Akkadians.\textsuperscript{18}

The Akkadians adopted much of Sumerian culture and religion, much as the Romans adopted cultures of those they had conquered. The people of Akkad were part of a Semitic tribe that migrated into central Mesopotamia in the early fourth millennium BCE, and eventually conquered south to absorb the Sumerians.\textsuperscript{19} Also like the Romans, the Akkadians adopted many of the gods that existed in the Sumerian pantheon and renamed them, but maintained the same principles and mythologies related to them. Most famous of the Akkadians is King Sargon the Great, whose daughter became one of the most important figures in the study of Inanna/Ishtar as the most vocative of the priestesses of the goddess.\textsuperscript{20} Sargon was important for also having the first standing army, and united many different city states under one rule. Eventually, however, the Sumerians re-established supremacy for a time around 2000 BCE through King Ur-Nammu, known for his ziggurat-building, the term used for the stepped temples of Sumer.\textsuperscript{21} The Dynasty of Ur ended with the invasions of Amorites from the west and Elamites from the east.

By the second millennium BCE, the two main powers in Mesopotamia were the Babylonians in the south, who adopted much of the culture and religion like the Akkadians, and the Assyrians in the north. The Assyrians were a Semitic kingdom that was established in the upper Tigris Valley, and the Babylonians were Amorites who eventually adopted Sumerian and Akkadian customs and religions, preferring the Akkadian names for the gods over the Sumerian

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, p. 101.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, p. 101.

\textsuperscript{20} Gadon, p. 119.

\textsuperscript{21} Holland, p. 102.
The Babylonians are most popularly known for their Tower of Babel, and perhaps also for the famous code of laws created by Hammurabi. Closely related, the Assyrians also assimilated many of the Sumerian gods.

The final culture to play a part in the evolution of the goddess in ancient Mesopotamia were the Canaanites. Their tribe appeared between 2850 and 2200 BCE, settling in the region of what is modern-day Jordan. The location of the Canaanites created a unique situation where both Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures mixed and interacted. Their gods showed a clear influence from the mythologies and deities of ancient Sumer and Akkadia, but retained unique names and attributes that are more closely influenced by the Egyptians. For example, to the Canaanites, Anath was their version of Inanna/Ishtar, and played a role in Canaanite mythology that mirrors the stories of Inanna/Ishtar. However, when the Egyptians assimilated Canaan, she became known as the daughter of Ra, and given to Seth in marriage, rather than to her brother Baal in earlier Canaanite mythology. The Canaanites managed to hold strong against the Sumerian, and later Akkadian, military campaigns, but their society later fell to internal problems related to a political and economic collapse around 2300 BCE. This was not the last of the Canaanites, but they were weakened as a result, and by 1650 BCE, the Egyptians claimed dominion over Canaan.

The cultures of Mesopotamia were varied, unique, and each contributed to history in different ways. However, there is one thing they all had in common: the goddess. Her presence in

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22 Ibid, p. 105
23 Ibid, p. 106
human existence is very old. In ancient times, even earlier than the birth of civilizations like Sumer, the only evidence remaining of what might have been religiously worshipped are images of women, presumably fertility goddesses. To go back as far as evidence permits, in the Stone Age rather than the Bronze Age, examples such as the Venus of Willendorf suggest just how powerful the goddess might have been, especially considering that there are few, if any, remaining male figurines. Almost all of the early statuary and carvings comprised of abstracted and well-rounded female figures. Considering the importance placed on fertility and reproduction at a time when infant mortality rates were high and labor could be fatal, it comes as no surprise that voluptuous, fertile goddesses, featuring ripe and ample breasts and birthing hips, were revered.

Mesopotamian cultures stand as a transition in the shift from predominant worshipping of the goddesses, the earth, the natural cycles of life and death and rebirth, to cultures which worshipped the male sky gods, the heat of battle, and feared death as unnatural and horrifying. As Mesopotamian inhabitants progressed through the ages, the increasing need for physical strength and dominance over wide regions forced women to be superseded by the generally
stronger sex. However, it is important to note that the subversion of women would have occurred much earlier than is evident in the mythologies about Inanna/Ishtar; it takes much longer for the religious texts to reflect the subversion of women.26

Today the tides seem to be turning, and powerful female figures are asserting themselves in the US and also globally. Is the worship of contemporary “goddesses” similar in nature to the devotion of those ancient goddesses? Careful interpretation of records of ancient Mesopotamia, analysis of the artwork and tablets left behind, and even beautiful poetry and epic tales can lead to a true comparison. While these objects of study are now considered art or literary texts, much of what remains is an example of the popular culture of the societies from ancient Mesopotamia. Therefore, the popular culture of today is a relevant comparison to make concerning the ‘goddesses’ of each society. To see what similarities, analogously speaking, exist between the popular cultures of both societies will provide valuable insight in this research.

Due to the many, varied, and often ambiguous and minimally important goddesses in ancient Mesopotamian cultures, only a select few will be used to compare to the contemporary examples. Inanna, also known as Ishtar, is the most diverse and, arguably, important goddess in the Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian cultures. Likewise, Anath assumes her role in the Canaanite mythologies. For this essay, Inanna/Ishtar will simply be referred to as Inanna unless explicitly specified. She is often described as one of the most complex deities of the Mesopotamian religion due to her bipolar and diverse personality and traits. She “represents the irrational notions within Sumerian society”27 and stands as a paradox, a symbol of both order and

26 Gadon, p. 142.

disorder, structure and anti-structure. As the breaker of boundaries--between the sexes, status, etc.--she displays a wide variety of attributes that can be compared to those same attributes displayed by various celebrities in the United States. These attributes can certainly exist in the average American or the peasant Sumerian, but it is the extreme level to which these celebrities, and Inanna, have taken these attributes that make them exemplary and worthy of worship.

Inanna’s diverse, and extreme, nature allows for a comparison of her many divine traits with several different American celebrities, marking her a great single example of a female deity from the ancient Mesopotamian culture. By comparing the existence of these extreme qualities in both Inanna and specific celebrities, an understanding of what drives Americans to be so obsessed with their superstars may become clear.
The Maternal Goddess: A Comparison

Sumerian goddess sitting with her child in her lap while attendants present offerings.

Though this first depiction more likely features Ninhursag, the goddess who created mankind, more rare cylinder seals depict a similar scene with a star above the figures to symbolize Inanna, since she is the goddess of the morning and evening star. In this cylinder seal, a goddess, denoted by her horned headdress, sits before her attendants with a child on her lap. She sits before the tree of life, a symbol of her great fertility. The offerings being made to her by her attendants illustrate the importance of the occasion, a reverence paid to the creation of new life. The child extends his or her hand towards the attendants, and perhaps signifies the role of the son as a mediator between humanity and his mother goddess.

The second image depicts Angelina Jolie, her significant other Brad Pitt, and the six children they raise together. The scene illustrates a similar adoration of a “goddess’” children; smiling proudly, both parents, intentionally or otherwise, showcase the children to adoring fans. Rather than a Tree of Life to illustrate Jolie’s fertility, the sheer number of children is equally compelling, even though they are not all directly birthed by her. Just as worshippers eagerly presented offerings to the mother goddess above, fans eagerly crowd around Jolie and her family, fascinated by the maternal aspect of her life, especially at an age when two, perhaps three, children is more common in an average household. Similar to the depiction of Inanna, the image conveys the sense of power and importance that a mother wields, illustrating that no matter how disconnected humans might get from nature, there will always be a fascination with new life.
Out of the many and diverse attributes gifted to Inanna, the maternal ones are perhaps the least prominent, however it is the attribute that ancient goddesses were first known for. Inanna was a youthful goddess, and thus shone more radiantly in war or in the beds of her lovers than on the throne of motherhood, but the role of the mother is an old--and important--part of early goddesses. The great goddess, worshipped in those early Bronze Age days, was first and foremost, a mother. Mothers, to the ancient Mesopotamians, brought all life into the world and thus made everything possible. Without women, and mothers, there would be no more people, no more life. The earth, too, was revered as a great Mother. She provided grain and grass, beasts to hunt and eat, materials to construct shelter, and water to quench the thirst. Ninhursag was the generally accepted Mother Goddess of the Sumerian culture, but as a goddess of fertility, Inanna also played a role in the act of creation. As a goddess ingrained in the concept of the cycle of life, Inanna’s motherly aspects were unique and interesting, and call to mind several different celebrities in the modern age.

Inanna was not credited with creating man; this role was designated to Enlil in one mythology, and to Ninhursag in another. In Enlil’s myth, he threw his mighty pick-axe into the earth and man sprang out from within. In the other, Ninhursag compounded man out of clay and the blood of a slain god, giving him the spark of life, and a touch of divinity that separates man from the common animal. The most commonly perceived attribute of the mother, that of a nurturing and caring parent, was a rare facet of Inanna’s personality, but it was there. Although Inanna is generally depicted in a negative light in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, one of the few who

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28 Gray, p. 37.
were, there is one instance where she shows genuine concern and affection. In the event of the Great Flood, Inanna is described as “crying out like a woman in labor,” horrified by the destruction being wrought on mankind. Such a display of affection, with such a clear reference to motherhood, was rare and provides insight into the often not actively prominent mother aspect within Inanna. Her actions seem to liken all of humanity as her children, and her despair for their destruction is great.

Did her role among the gods once hold a more nurturing side? Another clue lies in an early myth about Inanna: the Huluppu Tree. As described in the myth, Inanna found a single huluppu tree after the waters receded from the World Flood, and took it back to her garden in order to fashion her bed and throne from it. However, when she went to use the tree, she found that three things were impeding her: a serpent, an Anzu bird, and the Dark Maid Lilith, all residing within the tree and refusing to leave. It is only with the hero-king Gilgamesh’s help that she fashion for herself a bed and throne. The majority of the hymns that have survived to today date from the Akkadian period, and these versions are copied from earlier Sumerian hymns, but they might also have deviated from the earlier versions.

Speculation on the symbology behind the three items in the tree suggests that they might have originally stood as representations of Inanna. While the Anzu bird is referred to as male within the myth, it is possible that it once represented the more motherly aspect of Inanna, as a bird is often the creature associated with creation and mothering, caring for its youth in a

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29 Harris, “Inanna-Ishtar as a Paradox…” p. 125

30 Gadon, p. 122.
protected nest. This notion, that the stories have changed over time, can be supported by the notion that earlier interpretations of the goddess would have her working with the natural world, and thus living within the tree due to the benevolent relationship with nature earlier Sumerians enjoyed as compared to later periods, after the third millennium BCE. It makes sense that in later periods, the more patriarchally-oriented Akkadians and Assyrians, more concerned with dominating nature rather than living with it, would deviate from the Sumerian version and have Inanna cast the residents out of the tree and cut it down. The other two symbols, therefore, would also have been important to Inanna. The snake would represent the chthonic, or earth-centered, aspect of Inanna, and Lilith, the Dark Maid, would represent her darker aspects, also chthonic, but of the area below the earth rather than on it. Furthermore, since Inanna was often given the title “Queen of Heaven and Earth,” the three entities stood for the three regional representations

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32 Holland, p. 115.
dominated by the goddess; the bird illustrates her rule over the heavens and the sky, the snake represents her rule over the earth, and lastly, the Dark Maid Lilith represents her connection with the underworld that might later have emerged as her sister, Ereshkigal.

This theory is only further supported by another myth, the Descent of Inanna to the Underworld, in which Inanna desires to have knowledge of the one realm she had not dominated. Having been born and raised in the realm of the gods, she had already gained mastery of the sky. She then married a king on Earth, gaining mastery of the middle realm, and finally desired to travel to the underworld, a land ruled by her sister. If these speculations are accurate, then Inanna might have originally possessed a more motherly side in earlier times due to the mothersymbology of the anzu bird in the huluppu tree.

In addition to these speculations about a mother-goddess facet, Inanna was, herself, a mother. In the myth of Inanna’s Descent to the Underworld, Inanna’s sister Ereshkigal, Queen of the Underworld, demanded a sacrifice for having to free Inanna after having captured her. The spiteful Queen, jealous of Inanna after she had been relegated to the Underworld, proposed that Inanna’s son Shara take the goddess’ place in the underworld. The gallu demons escorted Inanna out of the underworld to take her to Inanna’s temple where her son Shara was praying for his mother. The demons, at Ereshkigal’s requestion, declared that Shara would be taken back with them. Inanna then cried out,

No! Not Shara!
He is my son who sings hymns to me.
He is my son who cuts my nails and smooths my hair.

I will never give Shara to you.\textsuperscript{34}

The \textit{gallu} relented and passed Shara on. They then took Inanna to where her other son, Lula, awaited her, and demanded his life in her stead. Again, Inanna cried out,

\begin{quote}
Not Lula! He is my son.  
He is a leader among men.  
He is my right arm. He is my left arm  
I will never give Lula to you.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

This adamant reaction illustrates Inanna’s love and devotion to her children. In some Sumerian and Akkadian cylinder seals, Inanna is represented with her traditional horned headdress, seated before attendants who are presenting offerings. Sitting on her lap is a child, presumably either Shara or Lula [see figure above]. In some of these more rare seals, Inanna’s identity is further confirmed by the presence of a star over her head, the morning or evening star, both symbols of

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure.png}
\caption{Sumerian goddess with a horn head-dress, holding her child on her lap with offerings before her and the tree of life behind her.}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, p. 71.
Inanna.\textsuperscript{36} In addition to depicting a side of Inanna’s ability to show affection and care with her child, it might also be the very first Adoration scene made famous by Christ and Mother Mary. Does this suggest, perhaps, that Inanna’s image and the necessity for her image survived into the Christian era in millennia to follow? It is an intriguing idea that requires further investigation to ascertain such a claim.

Returning to the hymn of Inanna’s Descent to the Underworld, Inanna’s reaction to the threat to her children was exceptional, and the viciousness with which she went to protect them is congruent with her war-goddess nature. When the \textit{gallu} passed Lula at Inanna’s request, they took her then to Inanna’s husband, Dumuzi. Inanna not only allowed them to take him, she adamantly demanded it be done upon seeing how lavishly he had lived since her entrapment in the underworld.\textsuperscript{37} Inanna’s reaction was a vicious betrayal of her husband to save her children, which is certainly motherly, but it is also unique when compared to the more tranquil persona normally seen in mother goddesses. Her fierce and protective personality is a common theme in Inanna’s hymns when things she holds dear are being threatened, bringing a “mama bear” persona to the normally tranquil and gentle mother goddess. Appropriately, in addition to being the Sumerian love goddess, Inanna was also the Sumerian goddess of War.

This mama bear or warrior goddess also has correlations in modern society in the form of Angelina Jolie, one of the most coveted American actresses of our times. She has been ranked as the world’s second highest-paid actress,\textsuperscript{38} and has found a unique niche in Hollywood as a

\textsuperscript{36} Baring, p. 177.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, p. 73.

female action star. She is, perhaps, the closest example of a modern-day Inanna in many ways. Like Inanna, she is a caring mother. In addition to the three children that are the result of her union to Brad Pitt, another elite actor, she has also adopted three others from various third-world countries. She adopted Maddox first, from Cambodia. She then adopted her daughter Zahara from Africa. Her biological daughter Shiloh was also born in Africa, in Namibia, and her other two biological children, twins Knox and Vivienne, were born in France. She adopted Pax between the birth of Shiloh and the twins, finding him in an orphanage in Vietnam. The diversity of nations from which her children come only highlights the universality of her maternal goddess aspect. Jolie’s many children are frequently in the news, as are Jolie and her husband, and the general consensus is that both absolutely adore their children. There are even rumors that they are looking to adopt more children, and Jolie has been quoted as saying that she and her husband might want up to fourteen children. Her drive to be a mother is certainly impressive. When this aspect of her persona is combined with the fact that Jolie is most famous for her role in action movies, which is unusual for a female star, it only increases the


similarity between Jolie and Inanna.

Jolie is often portrayed as a fierce and skilled heroine in her movies, a persona that is furthered in real life by the many humanitarian missions in which she has taken part, which comprises the adoption of her children from third-world countries. She was made a Goodwill Ambassador for the UN Refugee Agency in 2001, and is often reported in the news as being in some far-away third world country providing humanitarian relief, a true warrior of justice persona. As a result of these combined attributes, Jolie has certainly acquired a warrior-mother image that suits her very well as a reincarnation of Inanna.

In addition to the warrior-mother persona, Inanna also exudes a strongly sexual presence, befitting a goddess of love and fertility. Angelina Jolie has been called the most beautiful woman in the world on many accounts, and certainly fits the description of a sexy mother. One of the current icons of sexuality popular in the United States is called “the cougar,” which typically denotes an older woman, generally over thirty-five years of age, who has maintained a generous sex appeal aimed towards, and popular with, younger men. These cougar characters are becoming increasingly common in television, which increases and spreads the appeal. Women who are mothers have also received special attention and are in their own category of sexiness. This could be seen as a reemergence of the mother/whore archetype that is consistently present in history. Inanna most probably embodies the very first mother/whore archetype, being the goddess of prostitutes, fertility, and love in addition to her other many and varied attributes. She

41 “Angelina Jolie Biography.”

is even referred to as the Harlot of Heaven, reflecting her role among the gods as the embodiment of sex in all of its forms, including the paid kind.

While Jolie can certainly pull off the sexy mother look, another star who excels even more at the mother/whore archetype is Madonna. Madonna was a singing sensation from the 80s onwards. She became one of the biggest stars in the history of pop music. Still popular today, even at the age of fifty-two, her image and her sexuality have always been features of debate and controversy, as she is often slandered as a whore. This, ironically, links her intimately with Inanna, both famous for being seen as harlots. Madonna became an icon of sex during her career, and even released a book called *Sex*, published in 1992, featuring adult content and soft-core pornographic images of herself in many different situations with many different individuals. In addition to Madonna’s kinship with Inanna with regards to sexuality, both women are also mothers. Madonna has two biological children, and two adopted children. The fame of Madonna as a mother extends beyond her role with her own children, however, to mean something more vast.

Her very name is a tribute to, perhaps, the most famous mother of all times, the Virgin Mary.

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43 Harris, “Inanna-Ishtar as a Paradox…”, p. 271.
Being one of the most famous and sexualized celebrities of America, it is ironic that her holy namesake was a virgin. This contradiction, fueled by the release of songs such as, “Like a Virgin,” has led her to become known as the sinful, sexy mother of all humankind, strikingly similar to how Inanna was viewed in her own times. If the theory of Inanna’s representation with her child was indeed an early example of an adoration scene, then Madonna is the modern-world equivalent, re-injecting sexuality into the image first embodied by Inanna, but lost in the Christian Mary, mother of Christ. Again, a whole study in itself could be conducted on this fascinating concept.

Inanna is a unique and multi-faceted goddess, and the maternal aspects associated with her are some of the least predominant of her various aspects. Nevertheless, her brand of maternity does have modern-day equivalents in Angelina Jolie and Madonna. They are famous for their roles as mothers, and both represent a different aspect of Inanna’s mothering tendencies; one being the fierce and protective warrior mother, and the other, a sexy and appealing mother goddess. Does this consistent presence of the protective mother or mother/whore archetype suggest that societies naturally relegate a figure to that role? It is possible to say that the biblical figures Mary Magdalene and Mother Mary satisfied that requirement during much of the Christian dominant historical societies, satisfying the need for figurative representations of the Whore and the Mother. In modern-day American society, the separation of Church and state has naturally led to the idolization of secular figures as opposed to religious one. Whether or not this is a societal need in all cultures would require a broader study. Still, the similarities between Inanna, Jolie, and Madonna is very compelling; the great goddess of old has risen again in the

46 “Madonna Biography.”
present, and just as Inanna often pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable for women in her culture, so too do these two women in our modern society, a trend that is sure to continue.
The Goddess of Love: A Comparison

Clay Plaque, Isin-Larsa Old Babylonian Period, c. 2000-1600 BCE. Basel, Erlenmeyer Collection

The first image is a clay plaque from ancient Mesopotamia illustrating two lovers on a bed, tenderly gazing into one another’s eyes. The identity of the two figures is unknown; however, it was common to depict the romance between Dumuzi and Inanna, and the goddess offering her breast to her husband is a symbol both of her nourishing and motherly roles that she stands for. This further illustrates the importance of the mother-son-lover cycle of life theme common to Inanna. The image of John Lennon and Yoko Ono is one of the best examples of a congruent depiction to Inanna and Dumuzi. John Lennon was a member of the band The Beatles and then later an independent singer and songwriter. Yoko Ono was his wife. Just as in the ancient example, the contemporary couple are illustrating their love for one another. Both are nude, consistent with the Mesopotamian example, and their entwined bodies mimic the figures of Inanna and Dumuzi. The nudity of the figures, both in the ancient and contemporary examples, illustrate a basic and natural form of reproduction, with tender love introduced by way of tender gestures. Rather than gazing at one another and the female offering her breast, Lennon and Ono convey their love in the way they are embracing one another and laughing. Interestingly enough, reception of these images between John Lennon and Yoko Ono shocked the society of their time. Inanna did not necessarily shock her worshippers, since the goddess was conceived of being able to do anything, but her attributes and character was extremely uncharacteristic of women of her day. Both images illustrate the importance of love and affection, and people’s fascination with it, that has not changed in millennia.
Nature Goddess: a Comparison

Inanna and a Date Cluster, Akkad Period, c. 2300-2150 BCE, London, British Museum

Summer Rayne Oakes by photographer Gilles Bensimon, for ABOVE magazine.
The Goddess Inanna is denoted by her horned headdress in the first image. In her hands is a cluster of dates, illustrating her affinity with nature. Her husband, Dumuzi, is sometimes referred to as the Date Cluster, and this image then confirms Inanna’s association as the Tree of Life. The depiction is an example of Inanna’s pivotal role in the cycle of life, containing imagery and symbols of both her fertility and nature roles of the early goddess. Her beautiful face is framed by wild and luscious hair that resembles vegetation of some kind, furthering the image of a fertile and perhaps even sexual goddess surrounded by nature. A similar feeling--of a sexy goddess intrinsic within nature--is exuded from the picture of Summer Rayne Oakes, who is a contemporary Eco Model. She is more commonly known for modeling eco-friendly clothing. In this photo, Oakes is submerged in water next to the slogan “Into Nature” for ABOVE magazine, a magazine that promotes the environment and green lifestyles. Her expression and lack of clothing as she emerges from the water truly looks like she is a nature goddess, reveling in her primal environment. Both of the goddesses stare right out at the viewer, as if communicating the importance of their relationship with nature, and encouraging viewers to feel the same. Like the image of Inanna, it promotes the idea that humans, or goddesses, are a part of nature, rather than separate from it.
The Goddess of Love and Fertility

The role of the mother and the ability to create life became sacred for ancient female deities, but this naturally led to another position of importance: the lover, the strong female who takes the initiative to bring a man to her bed to bring forth the next generation. As the Sumerian goddess of love and fertility, Inanna represents both the aspects of birthing new life, as well as the act of creating new life. She was a voracious lover whose very nature encouraged the continued cycle of life; her love is the instinctive kind. She is the goddess who imbues all organisms with the desire to copulate and reproduce. This base form of love, the first kind on the evolutionary scale of love, introduces a nature-oriented aspect to Inanna. Her first responsibility is to stimulate fertilization and abundance in the land. It is important to understand the nature goddess aspect of Inanna because it is intricately tied with her role as a goddess of fertility and love. Love is the result of the emotional involvement in the biological need to procreate, and Inanna exemplified the many stages of this process.

As far as contemporary counterparts go, no single celebrity of the United States truly encompasses the totality of Inanna’s incredibly diverse facets comprising nature, fertility, and love; rather, several different celebrities embody them. Although love and sex are the most popular themes celebrities are generally associated with, more recently, matters regarding nature and its conservation have also begun to take place among the attributes of superstars. This is consistent with the trend of opposites between America and Mesopotamia. Whereas nature went from being sacred to conquered, American culture is now moving from dominating nature to conserving and protecting it.
It is important to understand the importance of nature gods in order to understand how this influenced the ancient Mesopotamian’s view of love gods. Originally emerging as a culture of small agricultural villages, the Sumerians were very conscientious about the natural world, and well aware that they needed to work with the land in order to obtain the food necessary for survival. It is perhaps for this reason that nature and animal gods were worshipped in earlier periods of history, a form of investment by the people to obtain a measure of protection from the uncontrollable forces of nature. By appeasing the gods, considered the originators of weather-related disasters, it was hoped that through prayer, the damage might be lightened. Even Inanna could be responsible for a hurricane or a rash storm.\(^{47}\) Though her wrath seemed cruel, her actions also fertilized the soil. The ancient reverence of nature is most evident in the way animals were viewed, as illustrated by the half animal, half human gods of ancient Egypt, and even ancient Mesopotamia as seen in a few sculptures. While the identity of the Babylonian deity on the famous Burney

\(^{47}\) Baring, p. 201.
Relief represented below is unclear, many speculate it might be Lilith, a darker aspect of Inanna, whose symbols are the lion for her fierceness and the owl for her reign over the night.\textsuperscript{48} She is portrayed with bird’s wings and feet, and wearing the multi-tiered horned crown of a goddess.

Even if a god or goddess were not depicted with animal attributes in Mesopotamian art, many of them, Inanna included, were associated with certain animals and often portrayed with them nearby. These animals came to symbolize the gods quite literally. Inanna was most famously known for her relationship with lions, earning herself the title of \textit{Labbatu}, the Lioness.\textsuperscript{49} For the ancients, Lions were the kings and queens of the animal kingdom, much as how Inanna was the Queen of Heaven and Earth, and lions were also held in awe for their ferocity and prowess, all qualities Inanna with which was imbued by her worshippers. Lions on the Gate of Ishtar [See Figure Above] symbolize that the gate is guarded by Inanna’s lions.

While the lion stood predominantly as a symbol for Inanna, other animals have also been connected with her. The scorpion, for example, often represented Inanna’s power to both create and destroy life.\textsuperscript{50} In some rarer depictions of the Sacred Marriage between Inanna and her

\textsuperscript{48} Gadon, p. 123.

\textsuperscript{49} Baring, p. 204.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, p. 211.
husband Dumuzi, the scorpion appears under the bed of the pair. This may foreshadow the eventual demise of Dumuzi when in the hymn, “Inanna’s Descent to the Underworld,” Inanna chooses him as a substitute for her in the underworld. The use of animals to symbolically represent superhuman aspects of the gods is an indicator of how much respect the ancients might have had for these creatures.

Animals, equipped with claws, fur, teeth, incredible agility and speed, certainly seemed superior to humans, who lacked these innate defenses and natural tools. Although man eventually rose above animals with the invention and use of tools in ancient Sumer, even these could not level the playing field when the speed and strength of these animals were taken into consideration. A similar token of admiration for animals continues to be observed in present times in the various mascots of sports teams in the United States, wanting to channel the strength and power of these

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51 Ibid, p. 211.
creatures to win their games. The important elaboration of nature-oriented themes around Inanna indicates the original intent of her role as a fertility and love goddess. Through symbolism she is constantly tied to the realities of the natural world. It is out of nature that she has emerged.

Fertility and love of the animal kind, that is, reproduction, is not primarily about emotions and affection, or even pleasure, though these qualities can exist between animals. Likewise, Inanna’s role as a fertility and love icon is tinged with these basic necessities of nature in order to continue the human species, in addition to the more tender love.

Environmental awareness has grown into a new rage in recent years. Increasing levels of pollution and signs of human induced stress on the natural environment have raised the possibility that humans are damaging the planet. Since the prospect of moving to another planet is, not as yet, plausible, concerns have been raised about the topic of planetary pollution starting in the 1960s and 70s. Gradually, this scientific and philosophical movement has been turned into a mainstream and fashionable obsession by certain celebrities, who have morphed themselves into quasi-nature goddess personas as they promote green living. Pamela Anderson is a famous actress most well known for her roles in movies and shows, as a buxom blond with a sexy body, which she showed off most often in her role as a lifeguard on the hit TV series, Baywatch. In more recent years, her face and name have appeared in the tabloids in the context of more nature-oriented initiatives. She now has become one of the most prominent stars in the animal rights movement and a self-Pamela Anderson
proclaimed animal lover.

Anderson channels multiple levels of Inanna’s persona through her active and protective stance towards nature, her bombshell fertility-inspiring body, and her independent and provocative attitude. But like Inanna, she too is a paradox. The roles she plays on television as well as the many Playboy layouts in which she has appeared over the years52 have certainly not helped forge her image as someone particularly interested in the environmental movement. But like Inanna, she has other surprises up her sleeve. In addition to her role as an actress, Anderson is also a mother, a PETA spokesperson, an AIDS activist, and a dog caretaker.53 As a result of this shift to green living in the collective consciousness, celebrities like Pamela Anderson have taken on an active role in promoting the movement, and through the mediation of their persona have even made it look sexy. Like all the best gods and goddesses, she stands today as an environmentally responsible role model to her worshippers.

Consistent with the trend of opposites between ancient Mesopotamia and American culture, while ecological awareness and living with nature become more popular in the U.S., this way of life dissipated in ancient Sumer. The peaceful coexistence with nature which defined life for ancient Mesopotamian people, in the fourth and early third millennia, slowly gave way to a trend of dominance over nature which became more apparent in later periods of Sumerian rule, and during the Akkadian and Assyrian dynasties. Inanna’s hymn, “The Huluppu Tree,” has already illustrated this possible shift in mentality towards nature. In the hymn, Inanna took the huluppu tree after the World Flood and planted it in her own garden, which correlates with the


53 Nosek.
domestication of nature. She then asked Gilgamesh to cut the tree down, uncaring that other creatures were already living in it, in order to fashion a marriage bed and throne with its wood.\(^\text{54}\) This final act illustrates the next level of control imposed on nature; that is, to use the material in nature to benefit man, regardless of the consequences, on other beings. This hymn reveals the development of a human-centric environmental trend that will continue to develop into the modern age.

Yet this shift towards controlling nature, rather than holding it sacred in ancient Sumer, was not as drastic and destructive as it eventually came to be. Rather than being worshipped and protected, in its untouched and pristine form, nature became something that could be controlled, but in their age, it nonetheless still remained important and worthy of reverence. The shift went from a hunter-gatherer way of life, which operates in tandem with nature, without the physical domination and control of it, to an agricultural mentality, where nature is still vital and sacred, but can be controlled to suit man’s needs. In more recent times, from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, this attitude was echoed in the industrial revolution occurring in the west, whereby nature’s sacred quality way stripped away and replaced with a mentality of being a resource for manufacturing goods, a resource to plunder as a gift from God. In the hymn of the Huluppu tree, after Inanna cuts down the tree to fashion her bed and throne out of its wood, she becomes Queen of Sumer, responsible for ensuring the continued fertility of the land for her people.\(^\text{55}\) This is a shift from a way of life which promoted the interdependence of people with all other beings in the biosphere to one where one uses nature for human subsistence with less

\(^{54}\) Gadon, p. 125  
\(^{55}\) Ibid, p. 125.
regard for the environment. This becomes Inanna’s primary function as a vegetation and nature goddess, to encourage and ensure the continued fertility of the land for her people. Coupled with this aspect is her function as a source of the desire to procreate in all life, including humans. For this reason, she is the goddess of love in all its forms, especially the carnal kind.

The story continued after Inanna successfully created her marriage bed and throne. In addition to her responsibility to fertilize the land, she also had to fertilize herself, and drive the people of Sumer to reproduce. After completing her marriage bed, Inanna wanted to become wise in the ways of a man and a woman, and so desired to acquire a husband. Inanna searched and found a farmer she desired to become married to, but her brother, Uttu, pressed upon her to take a shepherd instead. At first, Inanna ignored her brother and chose the farmer, but her brother
urged her mother to step in. Her mother persuaded Inanna that the shepherd would better provide for her, and give her love and protection. As a result, she married the shepherd Dumuzi. 

Speculations on this particular mythology suggest that an earlier version might have existed where Inanna married the farmer. The surviving hymn dates mostly to the Akkadian period, when the invading Semites from the north, who were predominantly pastoralists, dominated Mesopotamia. Earlier periods, during the early third and fourth millennia BCE Sumer, consisted predominantly of farmers in southern Mesopotamia. An earlier version might have existed from this earlier period, and the Akkadian passage alludes to this shift in the perception of nature between the two periods. While both shepherds and farmers manipulate nature and the elements to get their way, shepherding can be construed as more dominating of nature than farming. The role of the goddess was made to shift to adapt to these changes in the culture.

Inanna’s husband was Dumuzi, to the Sumerians, and Tammuz to the Akkadians and Assyrians. For the sake of practicality he will simply be referred to as Dumuzi. It is important to note that the Akkadian versions of the *Huluppu* tree hymn in existence today, were copied

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57 Ibid, p. 127.
58 Ibid, p. 128.
59 Gray, p. 33.
from the more ancient Sumerian ones from which they might have deviated somewhat. Dumuzi became king of Uruk upon marrying Inanna, and consequently assumed a tradition of responsibilities, which stood as an example for many kings to come. He was a vegetation god,\(^\text{60}\) and as a result future kings became identified with, and responsible for, the harvest of the land. While Inanna was sometimes personified as the Tree of Life, Dumuzi became personified as the date cluster, the fruit of the Tree of life. He was at one time Inanna’s son, metaphorically speaking, and her lover, both of which are parts of the entire cycle of life. For this reason, the relationship between the Kings of Sumer and the goddess Inanna was an important one.

As the first King of Sumer, Dumuzi set the stage for all kingly expectations to come; all rulers were expected to be the husbands of Inanna, and copulate with her yearly in the tradition of \textit{heiros gamos}, or the Sacred Marriage Ritual.\(^\text{61}\) In doing so, the fertility ritual first begun by

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Inanna and Dumuzi was symbolically renewed annually. This ritual was performed at the very top of the ziggurat, where the king received divine investiture, whereby his right to rule was sanctioned by the gods. The very top of the ziggurat was considered closest to the deities, and only very highly ranked individuals of Mesopotamian society were admitted to these higher levels, and solely the king and the high priestess were allowed at the very top. The copulation between the king and the high priestess of Inanna’s temple, who stood in for the goddess, represented the renewed fertilization of the land for the next year. The concepts of fertility of the land and love between a man and a woman become fused, metaphorically speaking, into one, and Inanna represented the embodiment of that oneness.

Performing rituals to ensure that the coming year would be fertile and fruitful was a common occurrence in early periods; bloodletting—the act of purposefully bleeding a person for medical or ritual reasons—was performed in Canaan for the very same reason, following the belief that allowing blood, the source of all life, to flow into the earth would imbue it with the fertile properties desired. Anath, the Canaanite equivalent to Inanna, also illustrated this belief as

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she celebrated her vitality and fertility by inviting soldiers into her temple before indulging in a blood bath, slaughtering the men and rubbing their blood over her genitalia, highlighting her great fertility.63

Such intense preoccupation with the health and fertility of the land can be compared to more recently popular “Green Fads” in modern-day American Society. Sensations like Eco-Model Summer Rayne Oakes (See The Nature Goddess; A Comparison)64 and the many other celebrities and politicians supporting environmental awareness have again made “Going Green” acquire a sexual appeal, in the way that the eroticism of Inanna had been associated with nature. Fans, who are the modern day worshippers of ancient times, have taken notice of the laudable actions performed by attractive female celebrities like Rachel McAdams, who launched the website “Green is Sexy” at <www.greenissexy.com> to encourage her fans to go green, or Natalie Portman, a long-time environmental and animal rights activist who even flew to Rwanda

63 Ibid, p. 81.

to aid zoologist Jack Hanna in filming gorillas.65 These sensual stars are today’s nature goddesses who have inherited Inanna’s role of encouraging the health of the land for her own subjects. The carnal Inanna was created by the ancients as a symbol which embodied life’s regenerative forces to enhance and fertilize nature. In our own monotheistic culture where god is asexual, our own desires to create anthropomorphic allegories for such concepts have resulted in enlisting voluptuous celebrities who have responded to this collective need by endorsing the green movement. Through their physically appealing personas they have sexualized the movement to such a point that it is possible to even find “Sexy Environmentalist” halloween costumes.66 In a sense, fans can be just like their environmental goddesses as they support Mother Earth in a mini skirt.

It is only natural that Inanna’s stance as a fertility goddess encouraged love of the carnal kind. Pivotal in the cycle of procreation, Inanna was more interested in the lusty love that created future generations as opposed to the tender love more generally associated with a Goddess of Love, though both facets of the goddess exist. As the very source of all drive for procreation, Inanna was known for her insatiable desire, which could be consuming and even fatal.67 Upon


67 Gray, p. 22.
finally marrying Dumuzi, the goddess secluded herself and her new husband in her bedroom, and made love to him fifty times before the vegetation god begged to be set free.68 Having finally explored her newfound womanhood, Inanna exulted in her sexual prowess, often to a voracious level.69 Like all goddesses, and similarly many celebrities of our times, she took everything to the extreme. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Inanna made a marriage proposal to the demi-god King Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh rejected the goddess’ wishes, which was unusual in mortal to god relationships. After rejecting her advances, he voiced several of Inanna’s sexual exploits, and the tragic fates which had befallen many of her lovers as a result of her voracious sexual appetite and aggressive nature. He reminded her of when she had loved a shepherd, and how after having bedded him, she had turned him into a wolf for having offended her, whereby he was killed by his own hunting dogs. In another example, Gilgamesh related of how she loved the horse, and then doomed it into serving mankind for eternity.70 In these instances, Inanna was depicted as having acquired the persona of a selfish and cruel woman.

By exuding aggressive and voracious behavior, in bed and outside of it, Inanna broke the boundaries between men and women of the time period.71 She exemplified not only the sexual allure often employed by females, but also the male aggressiveness and blatant expression of desire toward her lovers.72 Such an attitude toward sex from a female goddess suggests that there may have once been a more open acceptance of female sexuality prior to the third millennium

68 Ibid, p. 22.
69 Wolkstein, p. 146.
70 Gray, p. 43.
71 Harris, “Inanna-Ishtar as a Paradox…” p. 268.
72 Harris, *Gender*, p. 163.
and indeed, evidence suggests that Mesopotamian men, from both the Sumerian and Akkadian periods, hoped for a passionate response from their wives in bed. A woman’s erotic feelings were regarded as the basis for strong nuptial ties.

Luckily for women of the modern age, a similar expectation has been developed in the United States. Sexual intercourse has become an act meant to give pleasure both to the man and the woman, and the draw of a woman in power can be quite the aphrodisiac to some men. In this regard Angelina Jolie stands out as a mirror to Inanna. She also breaks the boundaries between men and women, both for her recurring position in more male-dominated movie genres such as action films, and also in terms of her earnings. As a result of the lingering sexism in American society, a pay gap generally exists between men and women, but Jolie is unique in that both her own and her lover’s incomes are roughly equal, even though Brad Pitt is one of the highest paid male actors. This is unusual in differently-gendered individuals of the same caliber in the same profession, a persistent gender unequally. Jolie exudes nothing but confidence and strength in herself and her sexuality, mirroring the same sexual confidence that Inanna once exemplified in ancient Mesopotamia.

73 Gadon, p. 141.

74 Harris, *Gender*, p. 144.

The voracious love goddess also exists in modern-day America in the form of porn stars. One of the most well-known of these celebrities is Jenna Jameson. Jameson is the world’s most famous porn star,\(^{76}\) and her analogy with Inanna is undeniable. Inanna was the goddess of prostitution and the patron goddess of harlots;\(^{77}\) in fact, the very word originates from her priestesses, known as *hierodule*, or sacred prostitutes.\(^{78}\) These priestesses would act on behalf of the goddess, herself known as the Heirodule of Heaven. The priestesses exchanged sexual favors in return for donations to the temple of Inanna.\(^{79}\) Jenna Jameson is not a prostitute, she is a pornography star. She still sells her body for money, but through videos which record her copulations which are then sold to all of Jameson’s adoring fans. Although Jameson is now retired from making pornographic films, she continues to pull in a hefty profit from the copyrights to her movies, membership fees from her website <www.ClubJenna.com>, and even merchandise such as sex toys modeled after the celebrity’s own assets that are sold for upwards

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\(^{77}\) Harris, *Gender*, p.166

\(^{78}\) Baring, p. 197.

\(^{79}\) Holland, p. 173.
of $200!\textsuperscript{80} If there ever was a sex goddess in the modern age, it certainly would be her. Like
Inanna, her realm is the realm of the night, and carnal interactions between men and women.

The sex goddess is to be found even among prominent politicians. In a poll and article
summarizing the top ten sexiest politicians in 2008, American politician Sarah Palin made the
list.\textsuperscript{81} She corresponds to the warrior and sex icon Inanna. Palin has professed to enjoy killing
animals through hunting, which she enjoys in her home state of Alaska, but she is also a
powerful movement in politics, and has a powerful sexual appeal to be reckoned with. Women
on this list were also selected from countries other than the United States, and include women in
various political positions such as the Prime Minister of the
Ukraine, a member of the
Russian political party, and even
the Italian Minister of Equal
Opportunity. These latter two
women particularly exude the
presence of a sex star. Alina
Kabaeva is a retired gymnast, and now a member of the Russian Pro-Kremlin United Russia
party. There are photos of her in the nude wrapped in fur as well as in negligee, and a rumor in
early 2008 spread that the Russian Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin, might leave his wife to marry

\textsuperscript{80} Miller.

\textsuperscript{81} “Top 10 Sexiest Female Politicians in the World,” SPIKE TV Official Website, 18 Sept. 2008, Web. 13 Apr. 2011,
Kabaeve. She is listed as number two on the world’s sexiest list.\(^{82}\) Number one is Italian Minister of Equal Opportunity Mara Carfagna, a former showgirl, model, and TV presenter. She also is rumored to be in an illicit affair with the Prime Minister of her country, Silvio Berlusconi.\(^{83}\)

These two ladies are Inanna in the flesh; they are politically powerful, sexy, and not afraid to jump in bed with a man for carnal pleasure.

The image of Inanna as an independent and powerful woman, like these women of the present, is further illustrated in the hymn recounting the events which occur after Inanna’s marriage to Dumuzi. Having embraced womanhood and instituted her rule over earth, Inanna became curious about the underworld, the last remaining realm she had yet to discover and master. After informing her priestesses and attendants, Inanna clad herself in mystical and magical clothing and adornments, each symbolizing different divine powers. However, as she descended to the underworld, she was only granted entrance after she was forced to shed an adornment or garment at each of the seven gates that led to the realm of her sister, Ereshkigal. As a result, she was stripped of her powers, her carcass hung from a peg—a symbolic death, since she is immortal—and her jealous sister was loath to release her.\(^{84}\) This is a symbolic death for Inanna,\(^{85}\) but it does not last long. In Inanna’s absence, the drive to procreate in the world of the living fades. As described in the hymn, “The bull springs not upon the cow, the ass impregnates not the jenny, in the street the man impregnates not the maiden.”\(^{86}\) Her role as the fertility

\(^{82}\) “Top 10 Sexiest…”

\(^{83}\) “Top 10 Sexiest…”

\(^{84}\) Holland, p. 155.

\(^{85}\) Gadon, p. 130.

\(^{86}\) Gray, p. 34.
goddess was necessary for any life, or civilization of mankind, to continue, and so Ereshkigal was commanded to set Inanna free by Enki, a god of wisdom who recognized the plight that would befall mankind should Inanna remain trapped in the underworld. Ereshkigal demanded an alternate to stay in her place, and after seeing how Dumuzi continued to live in luxury and excess in her absence, Inanna chose him. Luckily for Dumuzi however, his sister Geshtinanna offered to take his place for half of the year. Since Dumuzi was the god of vegetation, during the six months out of the year when he was in the underworld, the vegetation on earth died; thus, the seasons were explained, and once again, Inanna was intimately involved in nature oriented themes. In this single hymn, Inanna’s nature and fertility qualities come together.

Though the banishment of her husband to the underworld was harsh and cruel, there were also instances of tender affection from Inanna. The courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi was considered the world’s first love story, and the various different poems that exist describing the courtship between the pair are some of the loveliest of Sumerian literature:

Like a moonbeam she came forth to him,
Out of the house,
He looked at her, rejoiced in her,
Took her in his arms and kissed her.

This tender literature is an indicator of the types of relationships that existed between the men and women of Mesopotamia. Even with the increasingly subversive attitudes towards women,

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87 Gadon, p. 131.
88 Holland, p. 158.
89 Gray, p. 21.
men still hoped for a passionate response from them in bed, and counted their wives as a source of happiness for them.\footnote{Harris, Gender, p. 143.} A Sumerian proverb highlights these notions about Sumerian wives:

\begin{quote}
May Inanna cause a hot-limbed wife to lie down for you. May she bestow upon you broad-armed sons. May she seek out for you a place of happiness.\footnote{Ibid, p. 143.}
\end{quote}

These women may not have had the highest position in society, but they were cared for and coveted, and violence towards women was strictly unacceptable.\footnote{Ibid, p. 143.} Inanna’s love story was romantic and full of affection, and might have been a favored story among young girls in their teens, hoping to find a man and experience a similar romance. Similarly many young American girls look at celebrity romances and often envy their experience, hoping one day to be able to taste similar passions.

In the U.S., a sizable number of celebrities generate the perception of being “that girl-next-door.” Sandra Bullock has been labelled as America’s Sweetheart for many years.\footnote{Nancy Dillon and Bill Hutchinson, "America's Sweetheart Is Back! Sandra Bullock Gets MTV Generation Award, Kisses Scarlett Johansson," The New York Daily News, 6 June 2010, Web. 15 Apr. 2011, <http://articles.nydailynews.com/2010-06-06/gossip/27066500_1_jesse-james-kisses-red-carpet>.} She is the celebrity woman type that one would want to take home to the parents, so to speak. This isn’t to say that she could not, and does not, exude sexiness, but that the general perception of her is one of softness, with more focus on her romantic aspects rather than her sexual ones. This is because people crave the romantic aspects of love as well as the sexual, and Bullock provides that girl-next-door, perfect romantic persona for her fans, and so she has become popular for that. More recently as her dreamy life has become uprooted by a nasty divorce, she continues to be
praised and adored as America’s Sweetheart, years after having earned the title. Inanna also represented this type of tender love in many of the poems that were written about her and Dumuzi. Perhaps if she had not thrown her husband in the underworld, she, too, might have stood a chance to become Sumeria’s Sweetheart.

The development of romantic love is the final stage in the different levels of relationships between men and women, and Inanna represents aspects from each level. The first level is the primal type of love, the one most intrinsic with nature. This is the need to reproduce and populate the planet with humanity. From this first level, and mostly only in humans, the second level develops; that is, sexual relationships for pleasure and not necessarily for reproduction. At this level, Inanna emerges as the voracious lover, the goddess who takes pleasure for herself, sparing little thought for her partner. From this intimate act, emotional involvement is inevitable, and thus leads to the third level: love of the tender kind. Inanna also stands as an example of this final evolution, uniquely embodying them all at once. Likewise, the celebrities of Hollywood, and their personal relationships, cover a vast range of the ways love and fertility are expressed between two people. Their fans are fascinated by the stories of these interactions between their favorite celebrities. The overt amount of drama that goes into these relationships is what makes them so fascinating and alluring to hear and read about to their respective fans. Love and sex have always been and always will be a topic of intense interest to people, and while the forms they take will inevitably change from culture to culture, the very basic aspects of them will always remain the same in all ages.

96 Dillon.
The Wise Goddess

Wisdom, and intelligence, are qualities which we believe separate us from animals. In ancient Sumer, they were considered a gift from the gods, and the giver of this gift was Inanna. Her role as a goddess of wisdom is less prominent than her other roles, but it is an important one; the very existence of civilization was due to Inanna’s generous gift, of the ordering principles of civilization, to her people. It is interesting that she be attributed with these roles when a god of wisdom, Enki, already exists, but perhaps the fact that she is a woman is key. One might say that Sumerian women epitomized the wisdom of humanity; in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Gilgamesh brings a prostitute, Shamhat, to his friend Enkidu, who he found in the wild. He instructed Shamhat to make love to Enkidu, after which she declared Enkidu to be wise like a man and ready to join civilization.\(^97\) Interestingly, being with a woman in a carnal manner made Enkidu wise. Inanna could be intelligent, cunning, and even deceptive, but she could also represent a wise, compassionate goddess.

There are many goddess-figures of the contemporary world who have inspired devotion because of their brain power as well. Women have flourished in the educational systems of America, exhibiting that the female brain can be just as good as the male one, and have thus allowed them to excel in other business and governmental positions. In some cases, women have even risen above their fellow male classmates. While popular perception holds that females are the weaker sex in terms of sheer physical strength, female valedictorians have proven that there is no mental disadvantage.

\(^97\) Holland, p. 140.
When Inanna is first encountered in the ancient hymns that praise her, she is described as being anxious about her awakening sexuality and responsibilities as Queen of Uruk.\(^98\) Once her marriage bed and throne are constructed and her marriage to Dumuzi is consummated, Inanna still has a responsibility to the people of Uruk, and to herself. She journeys to see Enki, the god of water and wisdom, out of the desire to be fertilized, not only sexually, but also mentally, magically, culturally, and spiritually.\(^99\) The god and goddess celebrate her newly acquired Queendom, and in the process, Inanna encourages him to imbibe until the god is so drunk that he offers to Inanna the gifts of *me*, the ordering principles of civilization; with these, Inanna can better rule her kingdom, and the citizens can better govern themselves.\(^100\) The exact concept of what the *mes* are is difficult to understand from the few remaining fragments describing them. A few examples of *me* include:

*The rights and privileges, duties, and trappings of priesthood and kingship, the arts of warfare and statesmanship, the arts of lovemaking, procreation, and family, the arts of prostitution, sacred and profane, of the temple and tavern, the arts of music and the artisan.*\(^101\) *The art of forthright speech, the art of slanderous speech, the art of treachery, the art of straightforwardness, the art of plundering of cities, the art of deceit, the art of kindness, fear, consternation, the art of kindling the strife, counseling, heart soothing.*\(^102\)

Having acquired these gifts, and bestowing them upon her people, Inanna becomes associated with the incarnation of social justice. While not her primary role, many people

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\(^98\) Gadon, p. 122.

\(^99\) Wolkstein, p. 147.

\(^100\) Gadon, p. 122.

\(^101\) Ibid, p. 142.

\(^102\) Harris, *Gender*, p. 162.
appealed to Inanna for compassion; though Inanna could be harsh and cruel, she was also considered just and patient in order to lead wrong-doers in the right direction.\textsuperscript{103} Enki, however, might not have agreed. When the god finally sobered up, he demanded his gifts back from Inanna, angered by her treachery. However, with the aid of her loyal priestesses, Inanna managed to get the \textit{me} back to Uruk safely, and gifted it to her King and the people for the prosperity of humankind.\textsuperscript{104} Inanna combined the male prerogative and aggression with the female cunning, a combination that could be devastatingly effective, as Enki himself discovered.\textsuperscript{105} From this story, it becomes apparent that Inanna was highly intelligent, and not afraid of using this intelligence in order to get what she wanted and needed.

Contemporary women have succeeded beautifully in the educational system of the United States. There is no longer a general stigma that men are smarter than women; in fact, many people would argue that women are better students, whether because of the structure of the education system or otherwise. In the realm of the modern-day goddesses, being famous for a great intelligence is far less common than being famous for political activism, acting talent,
athletic talent, or even dashing good looks. Natalie Portman is a unique individual who shines in many of these categories, and intelligence is one of them. Portman began acting at a young age, and when the time came for most American to attend college, Portman walked away from the glory and fame of Hollywood to attend Harvard University; she is quoted as saying, “I don’t care if it ruins my career. I’d rather be smart than a movie star.”\textsuperscript{106} The decision to go to college when one is already a successful actress is less common, but perhaps this is changing. Emma Watson, a British actress famous for her role in the movie franchise \textit{Harry Potter}, has also chosen to take a break from acting to receive higher education, this time at Brown University.\textsuperscript{107}

The decision to be educated, even when a wealthy lifestyle is readily available, is a smart and mature decision. Portman has a B.A. in psychology from Harvard, attended the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the city of her birth, and has even given guest lectures at Columbia University in 2007.


Natalie Portman giving a guest lecture at Harvard University in 2007
University on terrorism and counterterrorism. In addition to these impressive achievements, Portman is also fluent in Hebrew and has studied French, German, Japanese, and Arabic, and she was even been published, twice, in scientific journals in tandem with her fellow students and professors. Coupled with her fame, acting talent, and good looks, Portman has demonstrated great success in everything she does. She is a true and powerful goddess figure, a figure whose education in languages has made her an inter-cultural goddess, just as Inanna was. She stands as an excellent model to any young American girl.

Intelligence is not exactly the same as wisdom, though they might often be confused. To be wise is to be more than intelligent; it is to be intuitive, understanding, and knowledgeable in topics ranging from philosophy to common sense. In the contemporary world, there is one figure, well-known to all through her televised programs, who single-handedly provides wisdom, advise, and counsel on a wide range of topics to much of the entire world: Oprah Winfrey. Her story is a true rags to riches tale: born into poverty and misfortune and abused in her youth, Winfrey eventually rose to America’s
wealthiest self-made woman.\textsuperscript{110} Her past has shaped her into an incredibly devoted and wise woman who sincerely desires to make the world a better place. Her television show, \textit{The Oprah Winfrey Show}, airs in over 140 countries worldwide, providing advice to people on health, work, love, and on many other diverse topics, and encouraging fellow philanthropists and humanitarians to talk on her show.\textsuperscript{111} Her influence is great and far reaching, and she has been called the “most powerful woman in the world.”\textsuperscript{112} She mirrors Inanna’s compassionate side as a woman eager to help the world become a better place, and like Inanna, she has the money and clout to do so. If Inanna was considered the Queen of Heaven and Earth for the Sumern people, then Winfrey might rightly be called the Queen of America.

This kind of wisdom, as opposed to cunning intelligence, is not directly found from Inanna’s hymns, but exists in another manner altogether. In the \textit{Epic of Gilgamesh}, a woman is consulted for advice by King Gilgamesh himself when he is faced with the possibility of death. Gilgamesh, being only a demi-god, is not immortal, and even if he is divine, he must one day face Queen Ereshkigal in the underworld.\textsuperscript{113} Despairing the end, he seeks advice first from the sun god Shamash, and then the alewife Siduri. Both tell him that he must die, just as all things save gods must, but Siduri provides him the counsel that gives him the courage to face the rest of his life, knowing it will end one day. She tells him that he must live each day to the fullest, and that while death is inevitable, there are also love and family and many experiences he must have

\textsuperscript{110} "Oprah Winfrey Biography," \textit{Academy of Achievement}, October 21, 2010, Web. 22 Apr. 2011, \texttt{<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/win0bio-1>}

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{113} Holland, p. 154.
before he dies.114 One who lives their life to the fullest will face death with a smile. On an Akkadian list of names describing figures in the epic, Siduri is listed as the “Ishtar of Wisdom,” indicating that she is a manifestation of the goddess herself.115 Just like Oprah Winfrey of today, the wise words of a woman in the ancient world brought peace of mind to a soul in need.

It is difficult to compare ancient Mesopotamia and contemporary America when so much about intelligence and wisdom has changed over the millennia. The concept of school as we know it today did not even exist in ancient Mesopotamia, and the concept of being educated simply for the accumulation of knowledge was a luxury in which few individuals could indulge. To worship someone for their intelligence or wisdom, however, is not a new concept. Individuals with greater knowledge naturally drew people, perhaps because in ancient times, these individuals might provide the means by which to live more happily, and even a little longer. This attraction towards intelligent individuals is just as strong, if not stronger, today. In contemporary times, all of the advances in technology are the result of intelligent individuals dedicated to making a difference in the world. Inanna did the same for her own people, introducing the “technology” of civilization to her people. It is possible to say that the concept of the Wise Goddess is perhaps even more prominent today than in Inanna’s time because of the emphasis on education in the modern age. As the education of women spreads to more countries around the world, even more goddesses of wisdom can rise to better the lives of those people around them.


The Goddess of War: A Comparison

Cylinder seal, Akkad period, 2334-2154 BCE, Oriental Institute, University of Chicago.

Promotional Poster for Tomb Raider II, starring Angelina Jolie
Inanna is a fierce goddess of war, depicted in the first image in full battle regalia. The star between the two figures is a symbol of Inanna, being the goddess of the morning and evening star. Weapons of varying kinds protrude from her shoulder blades and from one hand. Wings, increasing the power and devastation she can inflict on her enemies, spread out from her strong shoulders. In her other hand, she holds the leash to her beast of war, the lion, with one leg propped on the animal’s back as a symbol of her domination over the beast. Standing before her is a minor deity—as denoted by the single-tiered horned headdress—with her hands up in reverence and fear before Inanna. The strength that is clearly visible in her leg and arms is strikingly similar to the toned body that Angelina Jolie shows off in her Tomb Raider movies. Just as the star is a symbol of Inanna, a symbol related to the movie is visible behind Jolie. Both figures are physically fit and strong, and their poses convey a sense of utter confidence in their abilities and skills. In the promotional poster, one might say that Inanna’s lion is replaced with a motorcycle, which is appropriate since Inanna is said to ride into battle on the back of her lions. Both Inanna and Jolie are staring straight at the viewer, and their body language—both dominating their respective beasts, one of flesh and blood, the other of steel and rubber—is aggressive and powerful. Each stands as a symbol of the ferocity and strength of warrior goddesses, and each exude a presence that makes them as fearsome and capable as any male warrior.
The Goddess of War

“All’s fair in love and war,” and as the goddess of both, Inanna levels the playing field. War was an increasingly common phenomenon in Mesopotamia, especially after the invading Semites introduced greater war technology, like the mounted warrior or war chariots during the third millennium BCE. The presence of a war god or goddess was necessary, for it was believed that these gods could ensure victories for their people; in fact, the king’s relationship with the god or goddess was considered to be a deeply-felt spiritual connection due to the belief that this close relationship would encourage the god or goddess to fight harder for the sovereign. If this is the case, then it seems odd that a goddess of love might also be considered the goddess of war, but her deeply-rooted connection with death has led to this transformation. Uniquely, as a result of this association with war, Inanna’s position remained that of a powerful and feared goddess well after her mortal equivalents were suppressed under patriarchy. Luckily, the belief, that only goddesses could thrive in man’s realm of warfare in ancient Sumer and Akkad, is not shared in the present, and the role of the soldier is becoming increasingly available and common for the average woman.

How is it that a goddess of fertility and love became the goddess of war as well? There are several theories, but the events which led to the subversion of women previously discussed may be key. With the introduction of more sophisticated warfare and violence by the invading Semites, new attitudes of life and death were developed in Sumer around 2500 BCE. Rather than death being a natural part of the cycle of life, death became something unnatural and

116 Baring, p. 182.
117 Holland, p. 135.
118 Baring, p. 159.
horrifying, especially since violent deaths became much more likely with the increase in warfare.119 Whereas once death and rebirth went hand in hand, now death became viewed as the absolute end, and everything about it became regarded as the opposite of everything which happened in life.120 Life was light, warm, and joyful, and death was dark, cold, and terrible. Since Inanna was a goddess of life as well as of death, a warrior aspect also became incorporated with her identity, thus making her a goddess of war. Inanna’s image mutated; in earlier times, Inanna’s death-related role was pivotal and necessary to the course of life, and not feared since rebirth was an important part of the life cycle; however in later times, she came to represent this aspect of life by acquiring a violent and warring side.121 As military conflict became more frequent in Sumerian and Akkadian lifestyles, the warring aspects of Inanna were glorified and revered. The goddess evolved from a deity upholding the cycle of life and death to one who brought death to others.122

In addition to this change in the perception of death, there might also have been a psychological shift for the people of Sumer and Akkadia as a result of new concepts introduced by the invading Semitic and Aryan peoples. As sky gods became more important than the previously-dominant earth deities, the concept of the whole was disturbed. Scholar Anne Baring describes this phenomenon as a difference in moral order between the earlier--fourth to early third millennia BCE--goddess culture and the later sky god culture introduced by the Semites and

120 Ibid, p. 168.
121 Ibid, p. 169.
the Aryans. In goddess oriented cultures, the moral order was inherited from the Neolithic age, and was based on the principle of the relationship of the manifest with the unmanifest, where the manifest was the epiphany of the unmanifest, and all human, plant, and animal life was a part of this epiphany. The unmanifest was the spiritual, godly powers, the manifest was the earth and the world, and the epiphany was the creations put on the world. This is the concept of the whole, that all is connected. On the other hand, the sky god cultural manifest was based on the paradigm of opposites and conquest; nature, animals, and even other humans were conquerable and very separate from the unmanifest world. This latter realm used to be seen as one and the same with the manifest world, since mother earth was the goddess of creation. In the sky god cultures, the sacred was relocated from the earth up to the heavens, and separated from the earth, the plane of human existence. It is possible that because of this psychological shift in human understanding, war become more acceptable when the fellow humans being slain in war were perceived as part of a manifest different from one’s own. The need for a war goddess naturally emerged from the goddess already intimately associated with death. Since Ereshkigal was bound to the underworld, Inanna was a more suitable deity, being already linked to the realm of the passions, from which both war and sex are spawned.

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123 Ibid, p. 158.

124 Ibid, p. 158.
Whether adapted to suit these changes in philosophies of the times, or to be a part of the original stories as illustrations of Inanna’s fierce and passionate personality, several examples of Inanna’s warring nature are observable in her hymns, most of which were written in the Akkadian times. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Inanna displays her fury and wrath in the form of a seven-year draught in response to being repulsed by Gilgamesh. This draught was represented as the Bull of Heaven, a monstrous form of the plague-god Nergal, Inanna’s sister Ereshkigal’s husband.\(^{125}\) In the hymn of Inanna’s Descent to the Underworld, her war-like tendencies make another appearance. Upon Inanna’s arrival at the first of seven gates leading to the underworld, Ereshkigal refuses to allow her sister, who has access to every realm, to enter the underworld. In addition to the jealousy that had festered since Ereshkigal had been bound to the underworld, she was also angry with Inanna for causing her husband to be slain. Inanna, however, bedecked in all of her powerful adornments, threatened to break down all of the gates and storm the underworld.

\(^{125}\) Gray, p. 44.
if she were not permitted inside. Since she was the goddess of war, her threat was no bluff, and
Ereshkigal eventually conceded and allowed her through each gate, with the condition that she
discard one of her adornments at each gate.\textsuperscript{126} In both of these stories though, Inanna’s prowess
as a goddess of war is not absolute; Gilgamesh eventually slays the Bull of Heaven and throws a
leg in Inanna’s face, further infuriating the goddess.\textsuperscript{127} Queen Ereshkigal, upon capturing Inanna
powerless and stripped of her adornments, kills her and hangs her carcass up for all to see as a
symbol of her victory.\textsuperscript{128}

Inanna’s new aggressive but fallible warrior aspect likens her quite a bit to contemporary
female athlete stars in the world of sports. Very rarely is an athlete perfect; almost every athlete
will fail at least once, if not several times. These contemporary goddesses are strong, fierce,
physically fit, well trained, and very often just as confident in their field as their male
counterparts. Women have only just begun to flourish in the field of sports, made possible only
as the oppressive hand of sexism began to be lifted. Women began competing in the Olympics in
1900, in Paris, but only in what was considered more “feminine” sports such as tennis, golf, and
croquet.\textsuperscript{129} In the U.S., another step to equality was made with the passing of Title IX in 1972,
prohibiting any discrimination based on sex in sports at educational facilities that receive federal
funding.\textsuperscript{130} These advancements have allowed female athletes to flourish in more recent years,

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid, p. 34.
gtresearchnews.gatech.edu/reshor/rh-win96/timeline.htm>.
www.womenssportsfoundation.org/Issues-And-Research/Title-IX/What-is-Title-IX.aspx>.
and some have even become famous, not only for their skills, but also for their sexy athletic bodies, thus channeling the warrior Inanna by combining sex appeal with physical prowess. The internet is filled with surveys and opinions on the sexiest athletes in the world. Some of the more well-known athletes include Danica Patrick, the most famous female Indy Car driver, and tennis stars Serena Williams and Ashley Harkleroad. All three of these women sport pin-up quality figures easily viewed online, and Harkleroad even appeared on a cover of Playboy magazine, which is geared towards men, featuring nude women in tandem with relevant journalism and fiction. Like the Sumerian goddess of war, these women could beat the average male in their sports and look great while doing it.

Thanks to the magical workings of Hollywood, one figure has truly become a warrior goddess in the minds of many Americans. Angelina Jolie consistently recalls Inanna in many of

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133 Ibid.
her deeds and actions, and her role as an action actress is perhaps one of the most compelling comparisons. Action movies are what Jolie has become famous for as an actress; in the past ten years, she has starred in five action-dominated movies that have earned an average of 124 million dollars in domestic gross.\textsuperscript{134} Her fans have seen her wielding guns that can shoot around corners, throwing knives as well as, if not better than, any man, and even using a giant spear in one of her Tomb Raider movies. She is an incredibly versatile and strong action figure, thriving as one of the highest paid action stars in a male-dominated field. In one of her latest movies, \textit{Salt}, the entire script was originally written for a man, Tom Cruise in fact, and then was completely re-written for Jolie for which she was paid a salary just as high as what Cruise, one of the highest paid action stars in Hollywood, would have been paid.

\begin{quote}
It's definitely unusual that a female has become an action star. But it's a funny thing. She's not a female action star; she's an action star. She's really the first female to transcend gender. I don't think it's occurred before.\textsuperscript{135}
\end{quote}

\textit{Salt} producer Lorenzo di Bonaventura

Jolie revives the warlike Inanna wonderfully in our times, and her great success in her acting career speaks to the resurgence of the female fighter deity that Inanna represented in ancient Mesopotamia. Besides the fact that Jolie is inspiring, strong, ambitious, and has the will to

\textsuperscript{134} Fernandez.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
succeed, her breathtaking beauty also speaks to the appeal of the sexy warrior diva in American society.

In the turbulent times of the Akkadian and Assyrian expansions and conquests, the role of the war goddess became even more important. Sumerians called battle the “Dance of Inanna,” and represented her as a cut-throat goddess, riding onto the battlefield either straddling lions or standing in a chariot pulled by lions. What remains of Sumerian writings describes Inanna as reveling in the expression of passionate emotions, including anger, hate, fear, and lust; Inanna is the goddess of all passions, both of the candle-lit and the battlefield kind. While the immortal gods were naturally feared by average humans, even the gods themselves were thought to be afraid of Inanna; Enki believed that Inanna took male aggression and prerogatives and added

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136 Holland, p. 121.

137 Baring, p. 204.

138 Ibid, p. 121.
female cunning to them to make Inanna all the more devastating. Enki would know, since Inanna had gotten him drunk in order to steal his wisdom to keep for herself and to give to her people.

Understanding that females can be just as dangerous as men becomes important in the relationship between modern-day women and an institution like the military. In the modern age, Americans are beginning to understand the value and resources that women can bring to the military as soldiers. Women have been a part of the American military for a long time, serving as nurses, water bearers, cooks, laundresses and even saboteurs in older wars like the Revolutionary and the Civil Wars. However, it has been, and will continue to be, a slow struggle for complete equality for women. In 1948, the Women's Armed Services Integration Act allowed women to join the regular and reserve forces of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and the newly created Air Force with certain restrictions, such as being banned from combat

139 Ibid, p. 122.

140 Gadon, p. 126.

situations. The progress of integrating women into the military has gone through many baby steps between occasional breakthroughs that have been continually supported by new achievements made by women in the military every day. However, still to this day, women cannot serve in combat situations; military policy forbids women from serving in combat situations below brigade level. However, in 1992, the combat exclusion for women was repealed for the Navy and Air Forces, and in 1993 Bill Clinton repealed the banning of women on combatant ships. Though it may be slow, women’s progress in the military will continue to flourish, especially if the Military Leadership Diversity Commission continues to push for repealing the ban on combat duty for women, as it has been in recent months. It is only a matter of time before women will be able to glorify themselves on the battlefield and fight for their country.

If progress continues for women in the military, the warrior goddess will become much more common in modern-day America. While the development of wartime technology in ancient Sumer decreased the position of women, it is having the opposite affect today. Recently developed wartime technology such as long-range sniper bombs, have made much of the person-to-person combat unnecessary, since the current ban "ignores the reality of current war-fighting doctrine," according to one Marine Corps Captain. This essentially allows women to fight in

142 Ibid.


144 “Highlights…”

145 Picard.

146 Ibid.
the current war in the same way as their male counterparts of their division. Should this trend continue, women’s ability to excel in the military can only increase.

The topic is a sensitive one, but the Era of Women has begun, and gender norms will continue to be challenged in the future, in the military and otherwise. The goddess Inanna is a strong and independent female in the midst of a male-dominated pantheon, and should stand as a role model for women everywhere who aspire to break the boundaries between men and women. While Inanna can at times be cruel and ruthless, to survive in a world like her own while maintaining the level of power and respect she held might have been necessary; similarly, many women who are aggressive and ambitious are often labeled as unwomanly. Yet if the inequality between women and men is ever to be rectified, many norms are going to be challenged, and perhaps one day, the preconceived notions of what is masculine and what is feminine might be completely different, or the differences may be eradicated altogether.
Conclusion

The power of the goddess, of Inanna, was formidable. She was worshiped in Sumer for 3000 years, from 4000 BCE to around 1000 BCE, and then as Ishtar for another 1000 years beyond that. That is an extremely long time for one deity to be worshipped considering the Christian God has only been prominent for a little over 2000 years. Inanna’s longevity speaks therefore to her hitherto unrivaled presence in the lives of the people of ancient Mesopotamia. She was an integral part of the daily lives of ancient Sumerians, Akkadians, and Assyrians; her images and stories and were recalled often as a means of renewing faith in the goddess. In many ways, these stories and artworks show striking parallels to contemporary ones through which present day pop culture promotes female celebrities of our modern times. Just as Inanna was popular across cultures and ages, so too have many of the celebrities, becoming icons and gathering a fan-base in countries across the world. It is quite remarkable to note how magazine pictures, wall posters, printed T shirts, and a myriad of fan paraphernalia of the star, collected and displayed by devoted American followers, are in many ways a reenactment of the manner of which diverse representations of Inanna were displayed in temples, rituals and in cult processions by her worshippers. The movies and sports games that illustrate the daring stories of American Celebrities are analogous to the cylinder seals and stelae depicting the exciting, and some times harrowing, adventures of Inanna’s life.

Popular culture, as described in the dictionary, is the “contemporary lifestyle and items that are well known, and generally accepted, cultural patterns that are widespread within a

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147 Holland, p. 118.

148 Gray, p. 36.
population.” This definition applies accurately to the ways in which the general public adhered to the worship of Inanna through hymns that were written and sung, the creation of devotional images, and festivals honoring her that were celebrated by the populations of Sumer, and then later by those of Akkad and Assyria, where she was renamed Ishtar. What is more, there is an important distinction between the way modern societies and ancient Mesopotamians viewed the gods which makes today’s celebrities and the personality cults built around them in contemporary popular culture even more like Inanna and the devotional practices that were developed around her. In ancient Mesopotamia, the line that distinguished divine beings from exceptional human beings remains unclear. Great sages and epic heroes, even if they lacked divine parentage, could still be described as “god-like” or divine. The only distinction, from what can be understood from remaining texts and depictions of these individuals, is that gods were immortal and heroes and sages were not. Similarly, in American culture, celebrities are rarely considered divine, and certainly not looked upon as gods, but the status they have garnered creates the sensation that they are certainly exceptional, and sometimes even mythical, to many of their fans. Both the sages and heroes of old and contemporary celebrities of today are certainly not immortal, but their status is near divine.

There is a reason as to why the “goddess” figures of the present are not religious in nature. Firstly, the dominant religion in the United States is Christianity, a religion based on a God who is asexual and does not have a specific physical form, unless represented as incarnate in the body of Christ. He therefore cannot stand as a visual icon to his worshippers. He is


150 Holland, p. 111.
considered the creator of humans and superior to them in every way, making it difficult to relate to Him. Other religious icons that might similarly stand as an icon like Inanna would be biblical figures, prophets, and saints who are holy, but not gods. Furthermore, separation of church from state created a greater secular world, where science became an important reference to explain the workings of nature previously attributed to the powers of gods. In such a heavily secular society, many Americans have become less religious, and icons like Hollywood celebrities have flourished. The disregard of moral restrictions on women instilled by the Church, allows for them to explore their sexuality and assertiveness like never before. This new climate of liberation for women has led to their looking up to pop icons as role models for self assertion and sexual appeal. In ancient times it was the goddess who incarnated and stood for many of these feminine traits features of womanhood.

Present day pop icons, however, are not gods. Celebrities have become role models in a fashion that is distinctly different from the way gods the ancient gods did. In ancient Mesopotamia, one did not aspire to be a god, but learned lessons about life from them, and where venerated for this instruction. In our times, celebrities, too, are looked up to, but since they are flesh and blood, many of their fans try to emulate and be like them. Although there has been a shift in reverence from religious deities to secular stars since the Neolithic and Bronze ages of Mesopotamia, these celebrities continue to exercise an important influence in the lives of their fans just as Inanna did for the people of ancient Mesopotamia.

The cylinder scrolls, beautiful mosaics, intricately carved figurines, and other artifacts of ancient Mesopotamia were not created solely out of the drive for art and beauty, but primarily for more important functions. They helped to illustrate her stories to a people who were mostly
illiterate, and the mosaics, figurines, of Inanna and the creatures who symbolize her, held mystical, and maybe even protective qualities imbued into them by their goddess. Similarly objects of popular culture, such as photos of celebrities in magazines, music and song lyrics, or movies are not always viewed as art by the general public. Popular culture is a term which better describes these artifacts in terms of how the general public might define art as compared to popular culture. One must remember, however, that there is no way to truly know how these artifacts were actually received or thought of by ancient Mesopotamians, but educated guess still point to this idea. By these accounts, then, both the depictions of Inanna and the stories told about her, as well as the many ways that information about celebrities are conveyed to their fans, are both the results of popular culture that reflect the cultural patterns of their respective societies.

There are even corresponding extollers of these goddesses. The priestesses of Inanna, and most importantly the daughter of Sargon the Great, Enheduanna, famously created beautiful poetry and hymns to the goddess, so much so that she helped to smooth the process of political unions between Sumer and Akkadia by fusing the Sumerian Inanna and the Akkadian Ishtar in a more understandable way.\textsuperscript{151} Her devotion to the goddess is legendary, and she even went so far as to say that the power and rank of Inanna was equal to that of the god An, the head of the Sumerian pantheon\textsuperscript{152}--despite the fact that she lived in a time when patriarchy had already started to subvert the goddess against her fellow male gods. Such a devotion to spreading the influence of Inanna is echoed in television shows like Entertainment Tonight which highlights

\textsuperscript{151} Gadon, p. 119.

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid, p. 120.
the lives of the stars in the entertainment world. They cover topics as diverse as who is going to jail for what, which movies made money or lost it, and even which celebrities are expectant mothers. Their sole purpose is to keep the public updated on the daily lives of celebrities. Both Enheduanna and E.T., talk hosts served as disseminators of information or story tellers to the general public about the goddess figures of their times, and without them, neither the goddess Inanna nor many of today’s celebrities could be quite as famous or popular in their respective societies. One cannot love a goddess if one hears nothing about her.

The goddess Inanna and the way her people adored and followed her is truly comparable to the fan worship of contemporary celebrities in America. Comparing attitudes of the two societies is exciting, even though it is truly impossible to understand and know exactly the way average Sumerian, Akkadians, or Assyrians felt about their gods. It is difficult to perceive their mental understanding of the matter, since modern psyches are so very different from those of the ancient world, where cultural differences affect the mental and emotional perceptions. We can, however, make informed inferences based on the fragments of texts and artifacts uncovered by art historians and archaeologists. Judging from these observations, the striking resemblances between the ancient goddess and her modern equivalents is compelling and interesting. The comparison begs the question as to whether a society needs goddess figures, and thus projects these exaggerated character-types--the mother, the warrior, the lover, the wise woman-- onto a human figure of some kind, either imagined and mythical or flesh and blood? A much grander study, to include more cultures of both the past and the present, would be necessary to shed light onto this question.
Whether or not this need is true, Inanna was undeniably a powerful influence on her people. She stands as a symbol of an independent, empowered, and confident female figure at a time when the perception and position of women was eroding, starting around the third millennium BCE. American female celebrities also exude these same attributes the Mesopotamian Inanna used to, and stand as role models for young American girls to become more independent and confident in themselves as women in a society that is increasingly equalizing the position between men and women. As the whole world begins to recognize the power and resources that women could provide for their societies, even more goddess figures will emerge, and reincarnate the trend that Inanna started eons ago.
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