

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX:

A STUDY INTO THE SEXUAL NATURE OF THE GODDESS INANNA

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examined the exact nature of the Sumerian goddess Inanna's relationship with love. Many academics refer to her as the 'Goddess of Love' but this is a misnomer: Inanna's actual function was more closely related to sexuality and sexual intercourse than romantic love. Through analysing Sumerian mythical and literary texts featuring the goddess with romantic or sexual themes, the study identifies that within the texts, Inanna is credited as the provider of sexuality, not of romantic feeling, by the Sumerians who wrote them. The thesis then analysed those academic works that portray Inanna as a love goddess, researching the scholarship behind the Sacred Marriage and the songs of Inanna. Commonly-held beliefs and practices maintained by researchers were questioned, such as the use of love as a euphemism to avoid discussing the sexual nature of source material and biases placed on the genders of the relevant players. This thesis used these conclusions to redefine the Sacred Marriage as a relationship between the king and Inanna and not an annual ritual and to clarify Inanna's role as a goddess of sexuality for the Sumerians. This new definition will allow us to better understand the Sumerian relationship with their own sexuality.

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INTRODUCTION

As a feminist scholar, my interest in Inanna is rather obvious. Inanna was the Sumerian goddess of war and love, who is closely associated with Ištar, a powerful goddess with similar functions in Babylonia and Assyria. The rulers of all three of these cultures believed themselves to be highly dependent on the support of this deity to lead and manage their respective countries successfully. A strong female presence in a largely patriarchal society is always of interest to those studying gender, especially because it often seems, at first glance, to be some form of anomaly. I was initially attempting to catalogue the various roles Inanna played in the lives of the Sumerian people and I had expected the Sumerians to be aware of the paradox of a warrior love goddess. And yet, as I started to read the ancient sources, I became aware that this was not at all how it was viewed by this ancient society. The literature pertaining to Inanna did not show any signs of a goddess with dual identities, but a single character with a wide range of skills that were related to different parts of the Sumerian world. In particular, I was surprised by the highly sexual content of what I had come to understand were 'love songs'. As I read the Dumuzi-Inanna songs, I came to realise that certain assumptions had been made during their translations that had affected the interpretations of the literature and on Inanna as a deity. Originally intended as a single chapter, I wanted to set the record straight, as it were, and re-evaluate the literature with less prejudice than had previously been used in interpretations of these and other Inanna texts. Soon enough, I realised that this was an issue that needed a far greater analysis than a single chapter, and as such, this thesis is a concerted effort to formally reclassify Inanna as a goddess of sexuality.

As I have mentioned, there are a great many assumptions about the character of Inanna that bias readings into her functions and the literature and rituals relating to her. First and foremost is the supposition Inanna is a goddess of love. This finds its foundations in her relationship with Dumuzi and repeated examples of their sexual union, which is documented in a large number of texts, as well as her union with the king. As I will discuss, this is a corruption of the Sumerian intention behind the texts and is often the result of censoring during translation, so that the sexual content seems more innocent than it originally appears. Another notion that permeates the interpretations is the madonna/whore complex, the idea that women can be either sexually innocent and supportive wives or sexually active prostitutes, who are independent with no support from a male guardian. We see this in the segregation of Inanna's role as the wife of Dumuzi and the king from her connection to prostitution and sexual exploration. This is a dangerous attitude, because it prevents cogent analysis of the deity as she was perceived by the Sumerians. We can also see the assumption that the feminine is automatically considered the inferior; either that women are inferior to men, or to be associated with the feminine as a man leads to inferiority. This is an attitude that is insulting to modern readers, but it is also poor scholarship, as it assumes a great deal about Sumerian attitudes for which we have no evidence. This in turn has an effect on how we interpret the ancient rite of Sacred Marriage. Many scholars will assume the importance of Dumuzi's role over that of Inanna, and will then find it difficult to answer their own questions as to why his temple and cult do not play a more prominent role in the rite. With Dumuzi's supposed importance comes the belief that this rite is an attempt to gain control of the fertility of the landscape. His role is solely that of agriculture, and as he is the man he must define the purpose of the ritual.

This ignores the many roles of Inanna; roles possibly relevant to this discussion are her role in fertility and agriculture, her role as a sexuality goddess and her ownership of the *me*¹ for kingship and the throne. By assuming her husband's dominance, scholars are failing to gain a deeper understanding of the purpose of the Sacred Marriage, and this leads to other flaws in their logic, as we shall discuss.

The intention of this thesis is twofold and as such it shall be split into two sections. Section A will focus on an analysis of the literature that concentrates on Inanna and her role in human sexuality. It will review the texts traditionally referred to as the 'love songs' as well as other myths, hymns and songs that appear to be significant in this field. It will review the content for indications of Inanna's perceived role within myth and daily life, as well as reviewing the epithets and functions ascribed to her in other literature. I will use this analysis to draw my own conclusions on the nature of Inanna, using my own perspective as a 21st century feminist. As a woman living where contraception is freely available and where cohabitation before marriage is common, I must make sure that modern attitudes of consequence-free intercourse and female independence do not warp my interpretations of the past. At the same time, a mind-set that does not place undue significance on the masculine and does not condemn freedom of sexual expression may benefit the study of Inanna particularly in this role of sexuality. What is most important is that any academic researching the past does so with an open mind and attempts to understand the contemporary attitudes towards the themes discussed, so that they may better understand the purpose and focus of that which they are studying. The translations I will use for this

¹ The '*me*' a divine powers of the universe that appear in several different Sumerian myths, most notably *Inanna and Enki* and *Inanna's Descent to the Underworld*. The *me* can refer to elements of humanity, such as craftsmanship.

study will be derived from the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature. As my own skills with the Sumerian language are not as strong as I believe any deep study of the literature requires, I have chosen to use translations from a single corpus to prevent confusion and to ensure that the texts have been translated uniformly. In some places I have reviewed these translations myself, to better understand the specific Sumerian word used and its particular meaning.

Section B will be a review of the historiography of Inanna, love songs and the Sacred Marriage. This will catalogue the various assumptions made about Inanna, with the hopes of understanding the reasons for them. One such issue is the levels of discomfort many of the leading scholars in the field have with discussing sexual content. In particular, naming the female genitals as either the vulva or the vagina is of particular difficulty for some historians, who choose to use what they see as euphemisms instead. Often these are the academics that prefer to censor the sexual content, either consciously or unconsciously, removing the true meaning of the text and Inanna's relationship with it. As mentioned above, issues surrounding the gender bias will also be discussed, including reasons for it and its impact on the field of study. I will also collect discussion on the Sacred Marriage. The aim of this will be to list the various different theories of its nature and intentions. Using the conclusions from the analysis of the ancient literature, I will attempt to create a clearer definition of what the Sacred Marriage is and the importance of Inanna's role in it. It is hoped that with this re-evaluation of Inanna's roles and functions, using both primary and secondary sources, I may be able to prove indisputably that Inanna was indeed a goddess of sexuality and that this was seen as a positive force in ancient Sumer.

Section A:

Analysis of the Literature
pertaining to the Sexual Role
of Inanna

A great deal of the Sumerian text corpus features the goddess Inanna in her various functions. The following is an analysis of the literature which features Inanna in the disputed love/sexuality role. The purpose of this analysis is to determine the validity of using the word 'love' as an umbrella term for the part that Inanna plays in human sexuality.

The texts have been divided into two categories: literature describing Inanna's nature and literature that discusses her functions as a deity. I have then subdivided them into groups that are of a similar nature and theme.

'Love Songs': Literature discussing Inanna's sexual nature

This category includes the songs, poems and hymns that feature Inanna as a lover or the subject of another's affections. Often these songs are referred to as 'Love Songs' and the majority of them are attributed to the Sacred Marriage ritual, but to describe all texts featuring Inanna partaking in sexual intercourse as 'Sacred Marriage' texts is, as Leick has observed, to fail to appreciate the complexity of the subject (Leick 1994: 66).² I have therefore reviewed this literature and organised the texts into the following groups: 'Sacred Marriage', 'Carnal Hymns' and 'Praise Poetry'. The aim of this review will be to ascertain Inanna's true nature as a goddess of love, of human fertility or of sexuality.

Sacred Marriage or Bridal Songs?

The phrase 'Sacred Marriage' has been most often used in Near Eastern studies to refer to the marriage of Inanna and Dumuzi (Sefati 1998: 30). The extent to which this union has

² For further discussion on the use of the word 'Love' see Chapter 4: Hiding from Sexuality.

been celebrated ritually has been discussed elsewhere at length and will also be discussed later in this thesis.³ However, while some of these texts do refer to the wedding of Inanna and Dumuzi, other texts involving Inanna by herself have also been classified as Sacred Marriage texts. As these texts do not feature the wedding, or sometimes even Dumuzi, it would be going too far to assume that Sumerians themselves would have considered these texts to be related.

What will feature in this section are those texts that exclusively deal with the relationship and wedding of Dumuzi and Inanna, and therefore can be attributed to the Sacred Marriage with confidence. This literature may be better suited to Leick's term 'Bridal Songs' and it deals with Inanna from the beginning of her puberty to the wedding ritual (Leick 1994: 66).

A balbale to Inanna (Dumuzi-Inanna A)⁴⁵

In this *balbale*, Inanna's brother Utu, the sun god, informs Inanna that she is ready to be married and that she will wed Dumuzi the Shepherd.⁶ This can be comfortably placed in the category of Bridal song because it seems to refer to a ritual of Utu preparing a length of linen for her bridal bed.

A balbale to Inanna (Dumuzi-Inanna B)

As a reader, I find this song the most intimate of the corpus.

³ See Chapter 2: What is the Sacred Marriage?

⁴ All texts and their translations are taken after the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>.

⁵ A *balbale* is a Sumerian name given to certain types of poetry. Others include 'tigi', 'kungar' and 'šir-namursaĝa'. It is as yet unknown what differentiates these types of poem.

⁶ For a discussion on the structure of Inanna-Dumuzi songs, see Sefati's chapter on 'The Dumuzi-Inanna Songs: Definition and Classification', in his 1998 book *Love Songs in Sumerian Literature*.

'The gazing of your eyes is pleasant to me; come my beloved sister. The speaking of your mouth is pleasant to me, my honey-mouthed of her mother. The kissing of your lips is pleasant to me; come my beloved sister.'" ⁷ (*Dumuzi-Inanna B*, 4-6)

These affection terms do suggest a more gentle attachment between the bride and groom.

"For as long as you live, as long as you live, you shall take an oath for me, brother of the countryside, for as long as you live you shall take an oath for me. You shall take an oath for me that you will not touch another. You shall take an oath for me that you will not [...] your head on anyone else.'" (*Dumuzi-Inanna B*, 13-16)

These lines seem very reminiscent of wedding vows. We do not know very much about the customs involved in the wedding rites of Sumerians and we assume much of it from the Sacred Marriage texts (Leick 1994: 66). Interestingly, this text is all spoken between a male and a female voice – neither Inanna nor Dumuzi are mentioned by name except for the subscript 'A *balbale* of Inanna' (*Dumuzi-Inanna B*, 33).⁸ It is possible, therefore, that this is a song based on the vows spoken between spouses on the wedding day or as some other part of the ritual.

"You are to place your right hand on my genitals while your left hand rests on my head, bringing your mouth close to my mouth, and taking my lips in your

⁷ Brother and sister are terms of endearment for lovers (Leick, 1994: 88).

⁸ The name Dumuzi does appear in the text, but as part of Dumuzi-abzu, as goddess in Lagaš, whom Gudea calls 'the Lady of Kinirsha' (Leick 1991: 34).

mouth: thus you shall take an oath for me. This is the oath of women, my brother of the beautiful eyes." (*Dumuzi-Inanna B*, 21-26)

The mentioning of oaths reinforces the possibility that this *balbale* may in some way represent the wedding vows. If so, it is intriguing that the oath is made through the act of kissing and touching the genitals. It is possible that an 'oath of women' is the wedding oath. If so, sexuality is clearly seen as an important part of the marriage itself to feature so prominently in the wedding.

Assigning this *balbale* to this group is difficult, as it is not certain that Dumuzi and Inanna are indeed the subject of this text, therefore making it a Sacred Marriage text. However, as it is assigned to Inanna and does seem to represent the wedding, I have put it here. It is worth pointing out that other scholars have read this text very differently; Jacobsen believed it to be an encounter between a drunkard and a barmaid (Jacobsen 1987: 97-98) and Alster thought it was an account of a woman taking a lover from outside of the city (Alster 1985: 143).

A *balbale* to Inanna (*Dumuzi-Inanna C*)

This *balbale* should perhaps feature earlier in the cycle, as it documents Inanna's approach to sexual maturity.

"See now, my breasts stand out; see now, hair has grown on my genitals, signifying (?) my progress to the embrace of a man. Let us be very glad! Dance, dance! O Bau, let us be very glad about my genitals! Dance, dance! Later on it will delight him, it will delight him!" (*Dumuzi-Inanna C*, 42-48)

She is very proud to be sexually appealing for whomever it is she will be married to and this suggests that sexual appeal is a valuable quality in a woman.

A tigi to Inanna (Dumuzi-Inanna H)

“Let me teach you, let me teach you! Inanna, let me teach you the deceit of women: "My girlfriend was dancing with me in the square. She ran around playfully with me, banging the drum. She sang her sweet songs for me. I passed the day there with her in pleasure and delight." Say this deceitfully to your mother who gave birth to you. As for us -- let me make love with you by moonlight! Let me loosen your hairgrip on the holy and luxuriant couch. May you pass a sweet day there with me in voluptuous pleasure.” (*Dumuzi-Inanna H*, Segment A 13-22)

So says Dumuzi to Inanna when they first meet. This courtship is extremely sexual. The text breaks off soon after and we do not know if Inanna takes Dumuzi up on his offer of sex. Scholars such as Sefati (1998: 189) believe it is unlikely she would ‘yield to him outside in the street like a prostitute’. Others have suggested that Inanna spent the night with her lover (Leick 1994: 70). If she did, this would play well into the notion of Inanna as a lover and if she did not it would work well with the idea that Inanna’s journey from pubescent girl to experienced lover is a theme of the mythology.

A song of Inanna and Dumuzi (Dumuzi-Inanna C1)

This song appears to depict scenes from the wedding day. Dumuzi arrives at the home of Inanna’s mother and asks to be let in. Inanna then bathes herself. Bathing appears to be a

rite that takes place before the Sacred Marriage (Sefati, 1998: 40) and appears frequently in other texts.⁹ After a break in the text, we then see Dumuzi assuring Inanna that she will not have to take on the usual roles of a housewife. Could this be a way to separate the goddess from roles of the wife other than the marriage bed? It would certainly explain her existence as an independent woman in a pantheon of gods and their wives.

Carnal Hymns

The following I have entitled ‘carnal hymns’ because they contain highly sexual content and I believe this to be the intention of the song. I have separated the majority of these from the Sacred Marriage text, despite their having been previously organised into that category, because I can see no evidence to guarantee their place in that ritual or myth cycle.¹⁰

Balbale to Inanna for Šu-Suen (Šu-Suen B)

I have placed this song first as it is one of the best preserved texts and it contains some of the more explicit content. Sefati argued that this text was a Sacred Marriage text, but that the wedding is not mentioned because Inanna is selectively recounting her memories (Sefati, 1998:40). However, differences between this song and the Sacred Marriage songs suggest that this is not a bridal song (Leick, 1994: 117; Alster 1985: 135) and as there is no mention of the wedding, my criteria dictate that it belongs in this section.

⁹ Including *Šulgi X*, *Iddin-Dagan A*, *Dumuzi-Inanna T* and *Dumuzi-Inanna E1*.

¹⁰ I will not discuss all of the relevant poems here, only those that provide particular insight beyond the obvious inclusion of intercourse.

‘You have seized me, of my own free will I shall come to you. Man, let me flee with you -- into the bedroom. You have seized me; of my own free will I shall come to you. Lad, let me flee with you -- into the bedroom.’ (*Šu-Suen B*, 5-8)

‘Seized me’ (dab₅ – to seize) (*Šu-Suen B*, 5) could suggest two meanings. Either it means that Šu-Suen has literally grabbed Inanna or that he has ‘seized’ her emotionally or sexually. This double meaning could be the intention of these choice of words, creating the image of Inanna being both literally taken by Šu-Suen to the bedroom and taken by a sexual attraction for him. The use of the phrase ‘of my own free will’ (*Šu-Suen B*, 5) compounds the second reading, as Inanna is clearly very willing to go with him to the bedroom. ‘Man, let me flee with you -- into the bedroom’ (*Šu-Suen B*, 6). Inanna is going straight to sexual intercourse. No suggestion of love or marriage, just sexual pleasure.

‘Man, let me do the sweetest things to you. My precious sweet, let me bring you honey. In the bedchamber dripping with honey, let us enjoy over and over your allure, the sweet thing’ (*Šu-Suen B*, 9-12).

There is emphasis on the physicality of the act, that the goddess is actively expressing herself rather than emotionally. ‘Honey’ here means, or is a metaphor for, Inanna’s vaginal lubrication from her arousal (Black et al, 2004: 89) and ‘in the bedchamber dripping with honey’ (*Balbale for Šu-Suen*, 11) is an extremely lascivious image that puts the reader in no doubt whatsoever of theme of the song: Inanna is sexually aroused and wants to have intercourse. ‘Enjoy over and over’ (*Balbale for Šu-Suen*, 12) this emphasises Inanna’s sexual appetite; she wants copious amounts of sex, as one might expect from a goddess of sexuality. In this capacity, Inanna knows how to give and receive pleasure. ‘I know where to

give physical pleasure to your body -- sleep, man, in our house till morning. I know how to bring heart's delight to your heart -- sleep, lad, in our house till morning.' (*Šu-Suen B*, 18-21). It is pleasure that is important in this union, not procreation or consummation. This is an important difference as it therefore identifies sexual intercourse in the Sumerian mind as something for pleasure and not just for children, meaning Inanna's relationship with sexuality may not just be about human and animal fertility.

The only use of the word love in this song is 'Since you have fallen in love with me, lad, if only you would do your sweet thing to me' (*Šu-Suen B*, 22-23). It is possible that 'ki-ag₂' does mean love in this context, but it could just as easily mean that he is attracted to her. Either way, that Inanna has not returned the sentiment and that she uses his love to get physical pleasure from him is very telling. 'Touch me like a cover does a measuring cup. Adorn (?) me like the cover on a cup of wood shavings (?).' (*Šu-Suen B*, 28-29) is an emphatic and graphic instruction from Inanna to Šu-Suen about manual manipulation of the vulva and clitoris or the vagina.¹¹ This emphasises the passion and erotic focus of this union. This song is not reminiscent of the meeting of minds often suggested with love. In reality, the tone is heavily erotic and if we look at the language used throughout we can see this. Furthermore, the song only focuses on the events taking place 'til morning' (*Balbale for Šu-Suen*, 21), which suggests that these are not acts committed by two people in the throes of the 'Heavenly Love' which focuses on a long life together, as discussed in the *Symposium* (181d), but instead are enjoying something more carnal, immediate and pleasure-seeking in nature.

¹¹ There is some confusion over the exact meaning of this section, and further translation is needed. The sexual content involving intimate touching of the female partner's genitals by her male lover is clearly indicated, however.

A šir-namursaĝa to Ninsiana for Iddin-Dagan (Iddin-Dagan A)

‘The king goes to her holy thighs with head held high, {(some mss. add:) she goes to the thighs of Iddin-Dagan,} he goes to the thighs of Inanna with head held high. Ama-ušumgal-ana lies down beside her and {caresses her holy thighs} {(some mss. have instead:) (says:) "O my holy thighs! O my holy Inanna!"}. After the lady has made him rejoice with her holy thighs on the bed, after holy Inanna has made him rejoice with her holy thighs on the bed, she relaxes (?) with him on her bed: "Iddin-Dagan, you are indeed my beloved!"' (*Iddin-Dagan A*, 187-194)

This is an example of a sexual union that is embedded as part of a larger text. Iddin-Dagan approaches Inanna with ‘head held high’ (*Iddin-Dagan A*, 187), which is more likely referring to an erection than to his actual head, and she makes him rejoice. After athletic intercourse, they rest a while on her bed. The focus that the bed is hers again stresses her independence as a lover and importance as a deity. The utterance “‘Iddin-Dagan, you are indeed my beloved!’” (*Iddin-Dagan A*, 194) seems to be a sweet nothing whispered as they rest, suggesting the king is a skilled lover and has earned Inanna’s affections.

A hymn to Inanna as Ninegala (Inanna D)

One of the few examples of Inanna being directly referred to as the wife of Dumuzi in a carnal hymn is the following: ‘As you hasten to the embrace of your spouse Dumuzi, Inanna, then the seven paranympths make the place of sleep with you.’ (*Inanna D*, 114-115). This is a very interesting statement as it may give us some insight into the marriage rituals of the Sumerians, or at least their gods. The Sumerian words used are ‘ki-nu₂ mu-e-

da-ak-e', which suggests that the bridegroom's friends are making the place that Inanna and Dumuzi will have their first night of intercourse. This highlights the lack of intimacy that takes place between the bride and groom on their wedding night and may give us some insight into Sumerian marriage traditions.

A balbale to Inanna as Nanaya (Inanna H)¹²

In this song we see an emphasis placed on the femininity of Inanna. "Your hand is womanly, your foot is womanly. Your conversing with a man is womanly... As you bend over, your hips are particularly pleasing." (*Inanna H Version A*, 16-20) This is presumably related to the idea of Inanna as 'The Woman'.¹³ Also, this is an example here of how important Inanna's physical presence is.

Inanna is clearly associated with prostitution in this hymn. 'My bending over is one and a half *giĝ*.'¹⁴ What we first notice here is that Inanna is playing the role of the prostitute, which suggests that Inanna's role in sexuality is not based solely on fertility. But if we look deeper into the meaning of this statement, we can see that this text is not about Inanna and Dumuzi or the king. Inanna is selling her body, so we can infer that this is not her husband, divine or otherwise, but an unknown man who finds her appealing. As such, this is certainly not a sacred marriage text, even though it has intercourse as a theme.

After this we appear to have a sexual invitation from Inanna to the male in the poem.

¹² Dumuzi-Inanna H is the only song to appear in both groups.

¹³ For more on this see 'Function of Inanna' in Chapter 2: Inanna's Roles and Functions .

¹⁴ The word *giĝ* can be rough translated as a shekel. One and a half shekels is a substantial sum, approximately fourteen grams of silver.

“Do not dig a canal, let me be your canal. Do not plough a field, let me be your field. Farmer, do not search for a wet place, my precious sweet, let this be your wet place. [...], let this be your furrow. [...], let this be your desire!”

(*Inanna H Version A*, 20B-26)

In another version of the text, it begins with the male listing the places, both geographically and anatomically, that he would like to have intercourse with her:

“[...] on your navel. My sweet illustrious sister, [...] On your back [...] My illustrious sister, [...] hand. In your vagina [...] the gardens. Nanaya, [...]. In your anus [...] the fields. My illustrious sister, [...] the acres. Come to me, my sister, [...]” (*Inanna H Version B*, 1-9).

Although the text is broken the intention is quite clear. This text is important to this study because it provides evidence that the Sumerians enjoyed sexual intercourse other than vaginal. As anal intercourse is not procreative, we can use this for evidence that the Sumerians viewed sexuality separate from procreation. Furthermore, as Inanna is also suggested to have enjoyed her sexuality in this way, it reinforces the notion that human fertility and human sexuality are considered separate from each other.

A *balbale* to Inanna (Dumuzi-Inanna D)

This *balbale* is intriguing because we do not truly know who is speaking in the song. Different opinions over the structure of this song have been discussed (Sefati, 1998: 154-157) with Dumuzi, Inanna and Geštinanna each having different amounts of dialogue, but

each of these interpretations has issues. It is not necessary to discuss this here, however, as it does not bear relevance to this particular interpretation of the source.

This is a third person description of Inanna having sexual intercourse with the narrator's 'brother'.

'When my sweet precious, my heart, had lain down too, each of them in turn kissing with the tongue, each in turn, then my brother of the beautiful eyes did it fifty times to her, exhaustedly waiting for her, as she throbbed beneath him, silent there for him. My dear precious passed the time with my brother laying his hands on her hips.' (*Dumuzi-Inanna D*, 12-18)

The scene depicted here is one of vigorous intercourse. The image of Inanna throbbing below is highly suggestive that she is experiencing an orgasm, a thought shared by Cooper (1997: 94).

The song of the lettuce: a balbale to Inanna (*Dumuzi-Inanna E*)

This song has a great deal of evocative sexual imagery.

The first line of this poem is often attributed to the male possessive 'He has sprouted, he has burgeoned,' (*Dumuzi-Inanna E*, 1) which would suggest a male lover with an erection. But does this fit into the context of the next few lines? 'My shaded garden of the desert, richly flourishing, he is well-watered lettuce, my grain lovely in beauty in its furrows, he is well-watered lettuce; my first-class fruitful apple tree, he is well-watered lettuce.' (*Dumuzi-Inanna E*, 2-4). It is more likely that this stanza is a discussion of Inanna's vagina as posited

by Leick (1994:123). As Sumerian pronouns have no gender 'he' could be a she and 'she' could be the vulva (Leick 1994:123).

The verse would then be

'She has sprouted, she has burgeoned, she is well-watered lettuce, my shaded garden of the desert, richly flourishing, she is well-watered lettuce, my grain lovely in beauty in its furrows, she is well-watered lettuce; my first-class fruitful apple tree, she is well-watered lettuce.' (*Dumuzi-Inanna E*, 1-4).

This is more logical in terms of the possession of the subject of the conversation and the idea of a 'well-watered lettuce' – a very vivid image of the vulva during female arousal, a 'shaded garden' which would only see light in private and a 'grain' in 'its furrows' is a clear description of the clitoris.

The song goes on to describe how the 'honey man' brings sweet pleasure to Inanna. Working on the foundations provided by Leick, I would suggest that the entire *balbale* is a celebration of Inanna's vagina and how it brings her sweet pleasure. If we think of the 'honey man' not as a literal man, but as a character or name for her vagina then this is a possible interpretation. 'Honey', as previously discussed, is used to reference the arousal fluid of women and would explain the imagery of a man covered in honey. It is also highly suggestive of female masturbation and of Inanna representing women giving themselves sexual satisfaction. Therefore, this poem for the vulva as a provider of pleasure is evidently a tribute to female sexuality. There is a problem with this theory, however, as the verse makes a reference to the hands and feet of the honey man. Could this be a reference to the different 'limbs' of the vagina? Could this refer to the labia or the opening of the vagina as

the hands and feet respectively? A further translation of the text is needed to better understand this.

Whether the poem is itself praise to the vulva or merely features such praise, it shows Inanna's preoccupation with her own sexual pleasure and the source of that pleasure. This does more to solidify the claim that the Inanna is a deity of sexuality.

A kungar to Inanna (Dumuzi-Inanna I)

In the opening to this song Inanna appears to have started a fight about how her family is more important than her husband, Dumuzi's. This ties in well with the idea that Inanna is a passionate and aggressive personality, as seen in her other function as a goddess of war. This could also explain why she is such an aggressive and athletic lover. Indeed, the fight itself appears to be what leads the two to intercourse. 'The words they speak are words towards desire; provoking a quarrel is the desire of his heart!' (*Dumuzi-Inanna I*, 23-24) Dumuzi appears to be enjoying the fight because the escalated passion leads to sexual intercourse. "Ploughing with the jewels, ... May the little jewels among his jewels be on our throat! May the large jewels among his jewels be on our holy breast!" (*Dumuzi-Inanna I*, 32-35) The term 'plough' is frequently used as a metaphor for sex in Sumerian compositions. Argument could be made for the 'šuba jewels' to be reference to testicles and penis. Perhaps the 'little jewels' are the testicles and the 'large jewel' is his penis, suggesting sex acts outside of penetration. Sefati argued that this could actually be a reference to Dumuzi creating a necklace for his wife-to-be (1998; 199). His argument for this is certainly strong, although it is in the very nature of metaphors to have dual

meanings, and it is just as likely that the second section of this poem means both of these readings.

A Divorce from Sacred Marriage

Having now reviewed all of the relevant poems that have previously been attributed to the Sacred Marriage rite, we can now assess the accuracy of this grouping. We have seen that while these texts do show instances of sex and marriage, they cannot all be ascribed to the marriage of Inanna and Dumuzi or the ritual marriage of Inanna and the king. Texts were added to the 'Dumuzi-Inanna' category merely because they displayed instances of courtship and intercourse. While the causes behind these suppositions will be discussed in a later chapter, it is important to recognise here the dangers of expecting sexual intercourse to only happen inside the confines of marriage.¹⁵ In the future we must avoid making such assumptions.

Love Song or Praise Poem?

The following three songs are also often referred to as 'love songs'. The author (or king who has claimed to be the author) dedicates a song to the goddess and waxes lyrical about Inanna and her position in the pantheon. I would argue that these are not 'love songs' at all, but are songs of praise or worship to a deity. As such, I have termed them 'Praise Poems' and discuss them below.

¹⁵ For further discussion of Inanna's relation with the king see Chapter 3: What is the Sacred Marriage?

A love song of Išme-Dagan (Išme-Dagan J)

Expressing love for a deity is not the same thing as expressing love for another human being. While Inanna is seemingly accessible to the kings, this does not mean that they would talk to her as a romantic interest over a goddess in dedication.¹⁶ ‘May the churn of Dumuzi sound’ (*Išme-Dagan J*, 7) ‘Inanna, may it thus make you joyous’ (*Išme-Dagan J*, 10). These quotations are good examples of how Išme-Dagan wishes good things for Inanna, perhaps as one might a sweetheart. But the context of god and king suggests that this is more placating speech than hopeful charity. Another example would be the following: ‘Inanna, the cattle-pen will indeed rejoice over you’ (*Išme-Dagan J*, 15-16). The cattle-pen would rejoice over Inanna because she is the goddess of animal fertility and ensures the continued existence of cattle. It is understandable how this might be considered a discussion of how wonderful she is, but it seems unlikely a partner would talk of how his love interest is also loved by cows. ‘May my spouse, a ewe cherishing its lamb, be praised with sweet admiration!’ (*Išme-Dagan J*, 25-26) The idea of praise brings us back again to the concept that Inanna is a deity worthy of praise. While the sentiment is very sweet and gentle, it is comparable in content to other praise poems for gods, such as Enlil and Bau, also found in the text corpus.¹⁷

¹⁶ For further discussion on this see ‘Validating Kingship’ later in Chapter 2: Inanna’s Functions and Roles.

¹⁷ Admittedly, there are a great deal more of these for Inanna in this corpus. This could be explained by her importance to the kingship (see Validating Kingship) or it could be down to the survival of material culture.

A balbale to Inanna

This is a very similar song with very similar themes to 'A love song of Išme-Dagan'. It wishes success in cattle and sheep produce for Inanna and Dumuzi and is also more likely to be piling on praise rather than expressing emotional sentiment.

A hymn to Inanna (Inanna C)

This hymn is one of three poems written by Enheduanna for the goddess Inanna. Why a high priestess of Nanna wrote so many hymns for another deity is still subject to debate, but it may have something to do with validating her father, King Sargon's, claim to the throne. In the hymn Enheduanna expresses a desperate affection for the goddess. '[...] I am yours! This will always be so! May your heart be soothed towards me!' (*Inanna C*, 246). It may be considered a 'love poem' because of its emphatic worship of Inanna and mentions of her heart. This, however, seems to only be a natural worship and passion for a deity and not a love song in the sense of expressing a romantic feeling for her.

The Dangers of Love

The tendency to use the word 'love' can actually be a very dangerous one, in academic terms. Certain assumptions and connotations surround the word that can lead a reader to misunderstand the subject and context. Moreover, using the word 'love' could be a lazy way of grouping a variety of thoughts that have different meanings. This is the case in Sumerian poetry. As can be seen by the above discussion, poems previously lumped together under the title of 'love songs' are of a wide variety and encompass a great many themes. To use the phrase 'love' in such a broad-brush manner where it is not warranted

can impact further research and lead to a misunderstanding of the Sumerian culture. As such, sumerologists should do their best to only use the term where it is observable within the text, and refrain from using it as a euphemism or a classification.

Roles and Functions: Literature describing Inanna's role

The following literature is different from that previously discussed because its purpose is not to feature Inanna as a lover. Instead, the following myths, songs and hymns allow us to see Inanna in context, through which we can infer her assumed roles and functions for the Sumerian people.

Functions of Inanna

Frequently in mythology and songs the roles of the gods are explained, either through direct discussion or as some form of epithet or title. The literature below is a list of instances where Inanna's function as a human fertility/sex/love goddess have been mentioned.

Enki and the World Order

In *Enki and the World Order*, Enki assigns universal roles for various gods, including childbirth and domain over fisheries. This would be a safe place to begin looking for Inanna's mythical functions. 'Inanna the mistress, the lady of the great powers who allows sexual intercourse in the open squares of Kulaba' (*Enki and the World Order*, 363-365). This comment is only made to clarify that Dumuzi is the spouse of Inanna. By using sexual intercourse as an epithet for Inanna, we can see that the Sumerians clearly associated her with sexuality in particular.

Unlike the other goddesses listed immediately before her, it is implied that Inanna already has some dominion over a particular realm.

'Enki answered his daughter "... Maiden Inanna, how have I disparaged you? How can I enhance you? I made you speak as a woman with pleasant voice. I made you go forth [...] I covered [...] with a garment. I made you exchange its right side and its left side. I clothed you in garments of women's power. I put women's speech in your mouth. I placed in your hands the spindle and the hairpin. I [...] to you women's adornment'" (*Enki and the World Order*, 424-435)

This list consistently repeats the idea of a woman's sphere – 'women's power' 'women's speech' 'woman's adornment' – and enforces the idea that Inanna is the goddess who has complete ownership of this realm. This is notable, as more traditionally feminine roles such as childbirth have already been attributed to other goddesses, yet the role of 'The Woman' lies firmly with Inanna.¹⁸ Instead, garments provide women with power, pleasant speech is that of a woman and the spindle and hair pin are also part of what it is to be a 'woman'. This would suggest appealing hair and looks are what it means to be a woman in Sumer, ideas closely related to physical attraction, which plays an essential role in lust, which we know Inanna is clearly considered responsible for. We can, therefore, see how physical attraction as a part of the woman's sphere fits neatly into Inanna's role of sexuality.

Inanna and Enki

In this myth, Inanna famously steals the *me* (universal and divine powers) from Enki by getting him drunk. The text holds a long list of very different roles, functions and offices

¹⁸ For more on 'The Woman', see 'Inanna in myth' later in this chapter.

that Inanna has new dominion over.¹⁹ ‘Me’ relevant to this discussion are sexual intercourse, kissing, prostitution, cultic prostitution, comforting and the attractiveness of women (*Inanna and Enki*, Segment I 1-108).²⁰ “Where are the standard, the quiver, sexual intercourse, kissing, prostitution, [...] running (?)?” “My master has given them to his daughter.” (*Inanna and Enki*, Segment F 29-30) As we can see, the ‘me’ are more focused on the sexual rather than the romantic, the physical over the emotional. It is important to note that if a deity is the goddess of prostitution, she cannot just be called the goddess of love, as prostitution does not involve love and so ‘love’ would not be a representative enough term.²¹

A hymn to Inanna for Išme-Dagan (Išme-Dagan K)

In this hymn, the idea of a woman’s sphere is repeated: ‘They bestowed on her the power to establish a woman's domain in [...]’ (*Išme-Dagan K*, 16) this line may be broken, but there is clear indication of Inanna’s control over a ‘woman’s’ domain.

Another interesting role that may not have an obvious association with sexuality, but is often repeated is Inanna’s apparent control of gender:

‘to turn a man into a woman and a woman into a man, to change one into the other, to make young women dress as men on their right side, to make young

¹⁹ This could either be an explanation for, or a product of, the fact that Inanna is, as Jacobsen calls her, ‘the many-faceted goddess’ (Jacobsen 1976: 135).

²⁰ Although much of the text is missing, the repetition of the list of me allows us some confidence that we have the majority of the list. Still, there could be some ‘me’ that do relate to more emotional offices, but this would be out of trend with the rest of the list.

²¹ There has been some debate on the exact meaning of the word ‘kar-kid’ which we translate as prostitute. For more on this discussion see Cooper, J. 2006-2008.

men dress as women on their left side, to put spindles into the hands of men
[...], and to give weapons to the women;' (*Išme-Dagan K*, 21-24)

Does this mean a literal changing of genders or a changing of gender roles? Is this an extension of sexuality or a separate power? Is this in part to do with her duality? These are interesting questions that need further study. It does not seem unlikely, however, that a goddess with such control over an act that relies heavily on gender could also have some control over gender itself.

A hymn to Inanna (Inanna C)

This hymn has been discussed above under 'Love Song or praise poem'. This time, however, we will focus on the roles that Enheduanna ascribes to Inanna.

In this hymn we see a repetition of the idea of Inanna's control over gender.

'To turn a man into a woman and a woman into a man are yours, Inanna.
Desirability and arousal, bringing goods into existence and establishing
properties and equipment are yours, Inanna.' (*Inanna C*, 120-124)

Desirability and arousal are an important part of feeling physical attraction and it is Inanna's role to make people feel it. This suggests that Inanna was considered to play a part in the start of sexual relationships. We have some evidence of Inanna's role within marriage in this hymn too. 'To have a favourite wife, [...], to love [...] are yours, Inanna' (*Inanna C*, 135). It is important to note that the idea of a 'favourite wife' implies that there

is more than one.²² How did one become the 'favourite wife'? Most likely through sexual prowess, which the wife could thank Inanna for. There is a mention of love here, and it is worth noting that seemingly few mentions of this survive in the material record in relation to Inanna. Perhaps this is because the association between love and Inanna is limited in comparison to sexuality. There is also a mention of the role 'to create a woman's chamber' (*Inanna C*, 138), the idea of a specific place of woman, the physical interpretation of the woman's sphere. Once again, Inanna's association with it highlights her relationship with the idea of 'The Woman'.

A hymn to Inanna as Ninegala (Inanna D)

This hymn describes Inanna's role as 'the prostitute'. 'As a prostitute you go down to the tavern' (*Inanna D*, 105), 'The pearls of a prostitute are placed around your neck, and you are likely to snatch a man from the tavern' (*Inanna D*, 112-113). This idea that Inanna is the patron of prostitutes and would herself be a prostitute (and a successful one too) is repeated frequently. Jacobsen uses this particular hymn to support the statement that Inanna is a 'harlot' in *Treasures of Darkness* (Jacobson, 1976: 140). The idea that a goddess of sex would be connected to prostitution implies that the sex is not acted out in love but for pleasure, leading us away from the romance angle. In his description of her as a divine figure, Jacobsen does not call Inanna a goddess of love. (Jacobson, 1976: 140).

²² We have some evidence to support this in royal households, but legal texts suggest that this is not commonplace.

A šir-namšub to Inanna (Inanna I)

In this song, Inanna is describing herself and her characteristics. She discusses her prowess as a warrior, before moving on to her sexually-orientated roles. 'When I sit by the gate of the tavern, I am a prostitute familiar with the penis' (*Inanna I*, Segment A 21). This is how the author believes Inanna would describe herself, and that is important when trying to learn the functions of a deity. Inanna is telling the reader that she is very sexually experienced and believes this to be as important as her role on the battlefield. There is no mention in the song of emotions or indeed, relationships.

A song of Inanna and Dumuzi (Dumuzi-Inanna B1)

In this song, Dumuzi leaves Inanna and then a sheep mounts its mother and a goat mounts his sister. Is this evidence of Inanna's unhappiness of being left for Geštinanna? It then says that Inanna was 'thrown into confusion as a flood wave' (*Dumuzi-Inanna B1*, 20). When Inanna is confused sexual norms become disturbed. This is highly suggestive of the importance of Inanna's role as goddess of sex.

A šir-namšub to Utu (Utu F)

Although this text does not refer to Inanna as a goddess of sexuality specifically, it is telling in other ways. Inanna is here depicted talking to her brother, presumably before her marriage to Dumuzi. She exclaims: "I am unfamiliar with womanly matters, with [...]. I am unfamiliar with womanly matters, with sexual intercourse! I am unfamiliar with womanly matters, with kissing! I am unfamiliar with sexual intercourse, I am unfamiliar with kissing!" Here Inanna links the ideas of sexual intercourse and kissing with womanly

matters, before she has experienced them. This could explain the emphasis on Inanna as 'The Woman' and the goddess of the woman's sphere. This passage is also linked to the idea that Inanna is depicted at various stages of womanhood, from inexperience to goddess of prostitutes.

Although the next two sources of literature are not fiction, they are very important for allowing us to see how Inanna was thought of in daily life.

Proverbs (01)

1.147 'May Inanna make a hot-limbed wife lie with you! May she bestow upon you broad-shouldered sons! May she seek out for you a happy place!'

(*Proverbs 01*, ll 15-17)

The phrase 'Hot limbed wife' (*Proverbs*, 15) suggests an eager lover. 'May she bestow upon you broad-shouldered sons!' (*Proverbs*, 16) is more reminiscent of good cattle rather than healthy children, which suggests to us that Inanna is a goddess of fertility and not a mother goddess/goddess of children. The last line, 'May she seek out for you a happy place', is highly suggestive of orgasm. This proverb is very heavily associated with the idea of Inanna as a sex goddess.

Proverbs (03)

3.128 'May Inanna pour oil on my heart that aches' (*Proverbs 03*, ll 231)

The idea of pouring oil over the heart may suggest curing heart ache. This does suggest that there is some way in which Inanna may cure unrequited emotion, either of love or lust.

3.145 'For him who is rejected by Inanna, his dream is to forget.' (*Proverbs 03*,
ll 262)

This suggests that being unable to be with Inanna or love the one you want leads to heart ache.

These last two proverbs are the most suggestive that Inanna had some authority over the sphere of love as well as lust. It is possible that there is some overlap, especially in the mind of the common Sumerian, but as the bulk of the corpus deals with Inanna's role with sexuality we can assume that the focus was more on this.

Validating Kingship

Inanna was often used to validate the position of the current king. This may be because Inanna has control over the 'me' for 'the royal throne' and 'kingship' (*Inanna and Enki*, Segment I 5-10). What is more important to this discussion is how the king's right to rule is authenticated by Inanna. This would be extremely useful in understanding the nature of the goddess and as such her role within the universe.²³ As with the carnal hymns, there are a great many instances of this, and so texts that allow development in the discussion have been selected.

Enmerkar and En-suhgir-ana

In this mythical retelling of a conflict between two kings, Enmerkar discusses how his relationship with Inanna is superior. 'He may dwell with Inanna within a walled enclosure (?), but I dwell with Inanna in the E-zagin of Aratta; he may lie with her on the splendid

²³ To understand how this relates to the Sacred Marriage, see Chapter 3: What is the Sacred Marriage?

bed, but I lie in sweet slumber with her on the adorned bed, he may see dreams with Inanna at night, but I converse with Inanna awake' (*Enmerkar and En-suhgir-ana*, 27-32). The two men are competing for Inanna's praise, because the king who is closer to Inanna has a stronger right to rule. It is intriguing that the kind of bed you lie on with Inanna is of importance.

A balbale to Inanna for Šu-Suen (Šu-Suen C)

In this common form of *balbale* the king will use Inanna to promote himself. In lines 1-8 of *Šu-Suen C*, the king praises how physically attractive Inanna looks. This reinforces the idea that role of Inanna is related more to the physical than the emotional. 'He is honey to my eyes' (*Šu-Suen C*, 21). This line suggest how the king is physically appealing to Inanna and therefore has the right to rule over Sumer. Again, aesthetics are used over any other more politically relevant information to validate his kingship. This is seen repeated in other hymns and songs for other kings, including:

A praise poem of Šulgi (Šulgi A): 'I am Šulgi, who has been chosen by Inanna for his attractiveness' (Šulgi A, 15)

A praise poem of Išme-Dagan (Išme-Dagan A + V): 'She put attractiveness in my waist-belt' (Išme-Dagan A + V, 102)

An adab to Inanna for Ur-Ninurta (Ur-Ninurta D): 'Nintur has created attractiveness for him, and has made him step forward to you for your admiration.' (Ur-Ninurta D, 15)

A šir-namgala (?) to Inanna for Ur-Ninurta (Ur-Ninurta A): ‘Youth with beautiful and well-formed limbs, ... radiantly and proudly lifting his head, full of charm and beauty, fitted for lordship, worthy of the holy dais’ (Ur-Ninurta A, 78-80)

A šir-namursaĝa to Ninsiana for Iddin-Dagan (Iddin-Dagan A)

As discussed above in the Carnal Hymns section, this is clearly an instance where Inanna and the King are depicted as having sex. The sexual union depicted here shows the king’s expertise as a lover. He has pleased Inanna with his skills and she has confirmed his status as her ‘beloved’. Essentially, the king has received support for Inanna because he has pleased her sexually. This can be used to support the claim that Inanna is a goddess of sexuality.

A praise poem of Šulgi (Šulgi X)

Another instance of the king being legitimised through intercourse with Inanna is this praise poem of Šulgi. As in other poetry, the king has been merged with the god Dumuzi, as the spouse of Inanna and the protector of agriculture.

“When I have bathed for the king, for the lord, when I have bathed for the shepherd Dumuzi, when I have adorned my flanks (?) with ointment (?), when I have anointed my mouth with balsamic oil (?), when I have painted my eyes with kohl, when he has [...] my hips with his fair hands, when the lord who lies down beside holy Inanna, the shepherd Dumuzi, has [...] on his lap, when he has relaxed (?) [...] in my pure (?) arms, when he has intercourse (?) with me [...] like choice beer, when he ruffles my pubic hair for me, when he plays with

the hair of my head, when he lays his hands on my holy genitals, when he lies
down in the [...] of my sweet womb,

2 lines unclear

when he treats me tenderly on the bed, then I will too treat my lord tenderly."

"I will decree a good fate for him! I will treat Šulgi, the good shepherd,
tenderly! I will decree a good fate for him! I will treat him tenderly in his [...]! I
will decree the shepherdship of all the lands as his destiny!"

(Šulgi X,14-41)

There is a description of the union that Inanna wants and the promise of support if he pleases her. She has to be happy with Šulgi's sexual proficiency before she will give him her blessing and support him as king. It seems important here to note that this is an example of Inanna bathing before sex that might not necessarily be part of the Sacred Marriage rite, which was Sefati's theory (Sefati, 1998: 315). It appears in similar texts to this one, suggesting that it may be a rite that was performed before intercourse, either by Inanna, female lovers or royal wives, but that was not exclusive to the Sacred Marriage rite.²⁴²⁵ 'Thus Inanna treated him tenderly.' (*Šulgi X, 73*) Although there is no mention in the text of the union then taking place, this ending suggests that Šulgi did as the Queen of Heaven commanded and as such she gave him what he had earned. This is a very unambiguous statement about Inanna's personality and function in society: to please a goddess of sexual intercourse you must provide her with pleasing sexual intercourse. This theme of sexual intercourse as an endorsement for rule can also be seen in the following:

²⁴Similar texts include *Dumuzi-Inanna E1*, *Dumuzi-Inanna T* and *Iddin-Dagan A*.

²⁵ Further research is needed.

An adab to Inanna for Ur-Ninurta (Ur-Ninurta D): ‘May he [...] with you on your flowery bed which is full of delight.’ (*Ur-Ninurta D*, 19)

A praise poem of Enlil-bāni (Enlil-bāni A): ‘has you brought grandly into her holy bedchamber to spend the night there.’ (Enlil-bāni A, 155-158)

A *balbale* to Inanna for Šu-Suen (Šu-Suen B): ‘Since you have fallen in love with me, lad, if only you would do your sweet thing to me’ (*Šu-Suen B*, 22-23).²⁶

Inanna in Myth

The focus of this section is to see how Inanna behaves and is identified within mythology. As with the validation of kings, how Inanna behaves is extremely telling to the personality of the deity and therefore the realms she governs.

Enki and the World Order

As discussed in Functions of Inanna, *Enki and the World Order* begins the idea of Inanna as ‘The Woman’. ‘Why did you treat me, the woman, in an exceptional manner?’ (*Enki and the World Order*, 393) ‘The woman’ here does not refer to the fact that she was left out because she was female. We know this because the statement follows immediately on from a list of roles assigned to various goddesses. ‘The Woman’ is a title used for Inanna with emphasis on the ‘The’, as though Inanna is the epitome of womanhood. ‘I made you speak as a woman with pleasant voice... I clothed you in garments of women's power. I put women's speech in your mouth... I [...] to you women's adornment.’ (*Enki and the World Order*, 428-435). This seems to suggest that Inanna is the epitome of womanhood and as

²⁶ As discussed above in Carnal Hymns

such represents women in the pantheon. Further to this is the question of what the woman's sphere could mean. Looking back at the *Šir-namšub to Utu*, we can see that 'womanly matters' and 'sexual intercourse' are considered synonyms within the song. As such, women have dominion over sexuality and intercourse and in turn, Inanna is the goddess of both.

Inanna and Enki

As well as being a source for the functions of Inanna, we can also use this myth as a classic example of how Inanna is represented. The story opens with 'her genitals were remarkable. [...] her genitals were remarkable. She praised herself, full of delight at her genitals, she praised herself, full of delight at her genitals' (*Inanna and Enki*, Segment A 4-7). As in 'The Song of the Lettuce' (*Dumuzi-Inanna E*), Inanna is finding glory in her vulva. This is logical, as she is goddess of sexuality and womanhood and her vagina is the source of both these identities. This also makes one realise how inextricably linked womanhood is with sexuality. This is not the only song that talks of Inanna's pride in her genitals. Another example would be *Inanna and Šu-kale-tuda*.

Inanna and Bilulu: an ulila to Inanna

In this composition, Inanna is mourning the loss of Dumuzi to the underworld, despite her being responsible for his predicament.

"O Dumuzi of the fair-spoken mouth, of the ever kind eyes," she sobs tearfully, "O you of the fair-spoken mouth, of the ever kind eyes," she sobs

tearfully. "Lad, husband, lord, sweet as the date, [...] O Dumuzi!" she sobs, she sobs tearfully.' (*Inanna and Bilulu*, 27-30)

This quote clearly shows the feelings that Inanna has for Dumuzi that may not really be highlighted elsewhere in the text. It certainly suggests that Inanna feels genuine affection for her husband, as well as the lust we have seen described elsewhere. In this text we can also see the passionate nature of Inanna that is more often associated with her as a warrior.

'That day what was in the lady's heart? What was in holy Inanna's heart? To kill old woman Bilulu was in her heart! To make good the resting place for her beloved young husband, for Dumuzi-ama-ušumgal-ana -- that was in her heart' (*Inanna and Bilulu*, 90-94)

The main subject of this myth is Inanna taking vengeance on Bilulu for the death of Dumuzi. Bilulu had given up Dumuzi to the demons looking for him and, as such, Inanna held her responsible for his death. Inanna's passionate nature as a warrior and her role as a love goddess are often seen as a yin and yang: opposites that make up the world. And yet, what is more likely than passionate person being a passionate lover and a passionate warrior. Both could be considered as extensions of the same idea. Her intense emotions depicted in myths without scenes of war would surely corroborate this.

Lugalbanda in the mountain cave

Lugalbanda and the Mountain Cave is part of an epic told of one of Sumer's semi-historical kings, in which Inanna plays a smaller role. She appears to Lugalbanda and is described in the following way:

'She who makes [...] for the poor, whose game (*i.e. battle*) is sweet, the prostitute who goes out to the inn, who makes the bedchamber delightful, who is food to the poor man – Inanna' (*Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave*, 173-175).

Here she is described her by her two defining roles: the goddess of war and the goddess of sexuality. It is done in such a way that you know which god is being discussed before her name is mentioned, thereby solidifying the claim that all readers would have known that prostitution and intercourse were her domain and that it would have been considered as important to the readers as her role in war. 'Who is food to the poor man' (*Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave*, 175) suggests that sexual intercourse as important to a person as food is to the poor, or that you can be nourished by sex, which explains Sumerian attitudes to sex and Inanna's significance.

Inanna, Goddess of Sexuality

The Sumerian goddess Inanna is a deity of human sexuality and sexual intercourse. The heavily sexualised content of the literature discussed shows us that Inanna was thought of in this way and not as a goddess of love. *Balbales* such as *Šu-Suen B*, *Dumuzi-Inanna D* and *Inanna D* show how comfortable the Sumerians were with placing Inanna in the role of

athletic lover, while myths such as *Enki and the world order*, *Inanna C* and *Inanna and Enki* demonstrate how the function of sexuality had been awarded to her in various ways. We have seen how the idea of Inanna as a love goddess was barely recognised by the Sumerians themselves. While mentions of love, either as an emotion felt by Inanna or as a function she possessed, are made in *Šu-Suen B*, *Inanna and Bilulu* and *Inanna C*, these are not explored to the same extent as her sexual nature is, which is the subject of a vast corpus. Songs that have been previously attributed to, or are assumed to be, love songs are more often poems praising an important deity. The idea that the Sumerian idea of love was different from ours and more focused on intercourse (Rubio, G 2001: 268) is contradicted by the associations with prostitution. As sexual intercourse with a prostitute is a monetary exchange, love would not have been part of the union. Inanna is the goddess of prostitution, frequently equated with one in the literature; therefore using the word love does not completely cover the realm that Inanna presides over and so this would be an insufficient description. This idea that Inanna is the goddess of sexuality would fit better with her other persona as the goddess of war. Her passionate nature, as revealed in *Dumuzi-Inanna I* and *Inanna and Bilulu*, is represented in two facets of her divinity, both as an aggressive lover and a vehement warrior. It would better explain how a deity came to represent these two different spheres; they are not two sides of the world, but two extensions of the same concept.

Other interesting conclusions can be drawn from the analysis. It is revealed within these texts that the Sumerians considered sexuality separate from human fertility. The main aim in all of the unions featured above is pleasure. This is compounded by cases such as in *Šu-Suen B*, *Inanna H* and *Dumuzi-Inanna I* where sex acts outside of vaginal penetration are

described, proving that sexual pleasure need not be reproductive. Other examples such as *Dumuzi-Inanna E*, 'The Song of the Lettuce', give us an indication that female masturbation was a source of pleasure and considered acceptable. A woman's independent sexuality, separate from intercourse with a man, is celebrated in this text. This leads us to another conclusion: that sexuality was considered to be within the 'woman's domain', as suggested in *Utu F*. Repeatedly in the featured corpus we see a discussion of womanly matters and womanly behaviour, even hands can be described as womanly. And the 'woman's domain' is assigned to Inanna: 'The Woman', as she is referred to regularly in myths. Inanna can therefore be considered to be the epitome of womanhood, and as Inanna is the goddess of sexuality and sexual intercourse falls under 'women's matters' the supposition is that women have some claim to the sphere of sexuality over men. Furthermore, this relationship between Inanna and womanhood may go some way to explaining the importance applied to documenting Inanna's journey from puberty, in *Dumuzi-Inanna C*, through to learning the ways of women, in *Dumuzi-Inanna H*, to becoming the sexually experienced deity who regularly rejoices in her own vulva.

A final observation to be made is the importance assigned to intercourse outside its most obvious territory of the bedroom. Because of Inanna's ownership of the throne, in the literature sexual prowess and attractiveness are considered important parts of a king's right to rule, and kings must demonstrate that they can please Inanna sexually in order to validate their authority. Another way sexuality enters culture outside of the physical act may possibly be in the wedding oath, as shown in *Dumuzi-Inanna B*. If sex can enter such mainstream and public realms, we can infer that the Sumerians were accepting of the

importance of sexuality and physical enjoyment, which would explain the need to have a deity devoted to sexuality.

Section B:

A STUDY OF THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE GODDESS INANNA

WHAT IS THE SACRED MARRIAGE?

The 'Sacred Marriage' was, as discussed above, a term originally placed on all texts concerning Dumuzi and Inanna, or sexual intercourse. The assumption that all carnal hymns are in some way related to Inanna and Dumuzi is the result of modern thematic organisation, rather than an intention of the ancient authors (Tinney 2000: 23). The first case of this can be found in Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough*, where the assumption that all texts and artefacts depicting sexual acts, or featuring Inanna and Dumuzi, were considered related to the Sacred Marriage, with a focus on fertility (Leick 1994: 6). Since then, a great many different ideas and philosophies about the Sacred Marriage and its purpose have been presented, and differing opinions exist simultaneously within Assyriology. The purpose of this chapter is to catalogue and evaluate these differing opinions, with a view to identifying the most likely possibility.

Fertility or Legitimacy

There are two main philosophies concerning the purpose of the Sacred Marriage. The first and earliest idea is that the Sacred Marriage is a method of ensuring the fertility of the land, with the gods Dumuzi and Inanna playing key roles because they are deities of agriculture and fertility. Jacobsen (1975: 70) and Kramer (1969b: 18) use *Šulgi Z* to support this where, they argue, Inanna complains about lack of vegetation and Šulgi wants Inanna to accompany him to the fields, presumably to fertilise them. Inanna then tells a farmer to plough the field for Šulgi in exchange for gifts and Šulgi then requests that the goddess follow him to another set of fields to do the same there (Kramer 1969b: 18). This is the best

evidence for this theory that the Sacred Marriage was a 'cosmic sexual act in which all nature is fertilised' (Jacobsen 1976:47). This is a view supported more recently by Sefati (Sefati 1998: 42). There are, of course, problems with this reading. A less conservative interpretation of the text would suggest an added sexual content for the poem, where the fertility of the land is a metaphor for arousal and intercourse. Furthermore, there are very infrequent references to fertility outside of this particular poem, suggesting perhaps that this was not a major interest for the Sumerian scribes. Despite this, however, the notion is persistent. Klein, supported by a great many others, surmises in his definition of Sacred Marriage in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* that the most logical conclusion is for the Sacred Marriage to be a fertility rite because this is what he believes the inclusion of Dumuzi and Inanna stresses.

The opposing argument is that Sacred Marriage was a way to legitimise the king's right to rule, through a relationship with the divine. As I argue in a previous chapter, this is a theme seen repeatedly in the carnal hymns, through the emphasis placed on the king being the spouse of Inanna in songs and royal inscriptions and the blessings of success and long life from Inanna to the king. It is also related to Inanna's ownership of the *me* for the throne and kingship. This theory finds support from more recent scholars. The idea centres on the assumption that the marriage to Inanna makes the king become divine (Wakeman 1982: 25), a predecessor to the 'divine right of Kings' that is seen regularly in monarchies throughout history. It is an extension of the royal ideology, which is represented in this sexual relationship with Inanna (Leick 1994: 102). If the king becomes the 'favoured sexual partner of the goddess Inanna' (Black et al 2004: 3), through proving his sexual prowess, she will reward him with the tools to rule a kingdom: success in battle and a long life. Leick

argues that this would be logical, as the king is relating to the goddess in a way that is appropriate to a deity of sexuality (Leick 1994: 109). In the texts we often see the king equated with Dumuzi, names are used interchangeably and the term spouse will often be seen. The significance of this may be debatable: is the king married to Inanna because he is Dumuzi, or does the king become Dumuzi because he is married to Inanna. In other words, is it more important that the king is Dumuzi the fertility god and former king of Sumer, or that he is rightfully married to Inanna? Those in favour of the fertility argument are likely to favour the former, because of the link to agriculture, while those that believe the marriage is more about legitimacy are liable to believe the latter. Given the need for the king to prove himself to Inanna in the songs, and the emphasis on Inanna providing the king with blessings, it seems likely that the king is Dumuzi so that he may rule as the spouse of Inanna.

Some scholars have put forward the view that at different times each of these theories was true. Wakeman believes that the Sacred Marriage began as a harvest festival in Uruk, where an *En*²⁷ married Inanna to thank her for the crop, and in doing so gained authority, but by the end of the Ur III period the king would 'use' Inanna to validate his claim to godliness (Wakeman 1985: 12-13). The shift away from the king's dependence on Inanna's approval can be seen in the *Epic of Gilgameš*, when he turns down Inanna's proposal (Wakeman 1985: 15), in other words, the Old Babylonians were shrugging off the idea that a king needed Inanna's support in order to rule. Almost in reverse to this, Jacobsen suggested that the older notion was that the male is the provider because it was a fertility rite and Dumuzi is a fertility god, whereas Inanna has several functions aside from fertility

²⁷ An *En* is a Sumerian word that can be translated as 'lord'.

(Jacobsen 1975: 70-71). As time goes by, the ritual leans more towards the male as the recipient because the king was less identified with Dumuzi at this time, so it makes more sense for the goddess to be the provider. This would have been enforced by Inanna's station in the pantheon. (Jacobsen 1975: 71). While I do not fully agree with either of these arguments, the possibility of the evolution of the Sacred Marriage is very appealing. If such a development did happen, it does seem possible it could have started as a festival of agricultural fertility or the harvest, and progressed into a legitimacy rite, but I would maintain that Inanna was always considered the divine provider and supporter of her male counterpart, due to her importance to both motives.

Symbolic or Physical

The other major debate concerning the Sacred Marriage is the extent to which it was celebrated in literal terms. Scholars argue whether the sex act took place, if it was an annual festival or a coronation ritual, or if it was entirely metaphorical. Those that believe in the annual festival often believe that it was a rite to promote fertility in the coming year (Klein 1992: 868; Sefati 1998: 40-41). The best evidence for this is found in *Iddin-Dagan A* (Sefati 1998: 40-41; Klein 1992: 868), which describes a festival that takes place on New Year's Day, featuring a procession for Inanna, an account of the sexual union between Inanna and Iddin-Dagan, followed the next day by a feast in the goddess' honour. A large number of questions are created by this interpretation. Can we be truly comfortable relying on one text for the date of the rite? Klein argues that as it is the only date that we have, this is the safest bet (Klein 1992: 868), but I would argue that if it was an important annual New Year's festival, we would have more evidence of it in administrative texts

documenting the months. But does this mean that it was held at the coronation? This is difficult to know. We do, however, have multiple accounts of a union with Inanna for some of the kings, so the idea that it only happened once, at the beginning of his rule, also seems unlikely. Was the sex act described in the text literal or symbolic of the marriage? Reade put forward the challenge that the burden of proof was on those who do not believe that the sexual act actually took place (Reade 2002: 551). This does not seem like particularly good scholarly practice. As with a court of law, it is always the duty of those who are arguing that something happened to prove that it did. She cites Herodotus as supporting evidence (Reade 2002: 551), but Herodotus is consistently unreliable in his accounts of foreign practices, and cannot be considered a dependable source (Roth, 2006: 22). The assumptions seems to be that if it was written down it must in some way have actually happened. This leads us to another question: If the king is playing the role of Dumuzi, who is portraying Inanna? Here is where the confusion begins. Suggestions include a Lukur priestess (Klein 1992: 867), the queen (Jacobsen, 1987: 87), or an En priestess (Sefati 1998: 44-45). The uncertainty that scholars have towards this subject can be summed up by this statement:

‘We do not have exact details about the cultic personnel who participated in the Sacred Marriage rite’ (Sefati 1998: 44)

And this is where much of the insecurity lies. We have no evidence beyond the texts themselves that such a rite took place, and as such will likely never know its details. That it took place at all is a huge assumption, given the lack of evidence. It also seems to go against many of the Sumerian attitudes that we as Sumerologists are aware of. Sumerians

believed that their gods were represented on earth by statues in their cult temples. These were not depictions of deities, but the divinities' physical presence on earth. They were washed, fed and tended to every day by priests as though they were caring for a sentient being, because this is what they believed they were. As such, it seems unlikely that a goddess would suddenly be represented by a living being, or that the king would be expected to enact the sex rite with a statue. Likewise, if the goddess is being represented by a human, presumably the king is representing the god for this ceremony. But as we have discussed before, it is more likely that the Sumerians believed their king to be a sort of reincarnation of Dumuzi, which supports his right to rule, and in turn means that he would have been Dumuzi all year round, not just on the day of the festival.

With these questions in mind, I would argue that there was no sex rite and that there was no specific time of year in which the Sacred Marriage was celebrated through a festival. Here I would like to draw attention to a point made by Leick. She describes how kings in the Ur III period would make frequent visits to the temples of important deities (Leick 1994: 109-110). Hyperbolic descriptions of the kings' skills would appear in the royal hymns to prove their worthiness as a ruler to that specific god (Leick 1994: 109-110). In the case of Inanna, this would be an exaggerated account of his skills as a lover, because she is a sexuality goddess with almost insatiable erotic demands (Leick 1994: 109-110). This might explain why we only have one reference to a date for the festival, because it might change according to when the king would visit Inanna and New Year's may have been the only significant date it was held on. It would explain the confusion of the players in the scene, because in all likelihood it would not have physically taken place, and this would also explain the absence of proof outside of the literary texts.

Wedding or Marriage

When referring to the Sacred Marriage, many different ideas of what this actually means are cited. A marriage or a sexual union between Dumuzi and Inanna (Klein 1992: 866), a rite based on a wedding (Jacobsen 1975: 65), a festival involving some form of intercourse (Leick 1994: 101) (be it literal or symbolic), a ritual involving the union of the king and Inanna (Alster 1985: 127); there seem to be so many different ideas for what the marriage actually is that this may be the source of the above disputes. A great deal of emphasis is placed on whether the rite itself mimics the Sumerian wedding. The wedding of Inanna and Dumuzi is best documented in *Dumuzi-Inanna C1* and some effort has been put into finding similarities between the wedding rite depicted here and the acts shown in the royal carnal hymns (Jacobsen 1975: 65). The best evidence for this is the frequent image of Inanna bathing and scenting herself (Sefati, 1998: 315), which is a rite shown at the beginning of the wedding in *D-I H* and is also seen in hymns *Iddin-Dagan A* and *Šulgi X*. However, whether this is a rite specifically for the wedding or whether it is a rite of Inanna is hard to say, as where it does and does not get references seems to follow no specific set of rules. In addition to this, whether it proves that the marriage rite has taken place is also difficult because it does not appear in all Dumuzi-Inanna and Inanna-king songs. This train of thought, that the rite is patterned after the wedding, would suggest that the 'Sacred Marriage rite' is more likely a sacred wedding that occurs whenever the king and Inanna must have intercourse. This does not fit well with the theory that the king is the constant spouse of Inanna through his divine right to rule as the re-embodiment of Dumuzi. In this sense, Sacred Marriage would refer both to the marriage of Inanna and Dumuzi and the

marriage of Inanna and the king. If the king is always Dumuzi, he is always married to Inanna. In this case there would be no need for a wedding when the king visited Inanna, because she was already his wife. This explains the lack of evidence for the wedding rites in texts such as *Šu-Suen B* and *Enmerkar and En-suĥgir-ana*. Other rites that could be interpreted as wedding rites, such as the bathing and feast in *Iddin-Dagan A*, would therefore be Inanna specific rituals, rather than practices seen at the wedding ceremonies.

By this new definition then, the Sacred Marriage is the term for the continuous relationship between Inanna and the king/Dumuzi and instances where these personas have intercourse, either in mythology or hymns, are merely sexual unions between two spouses, which are designed, in the king's case, to emphasise his legitimacy to rule the Sumerian people.

HIDING FROM SEXUALITY

The greatest obstacle in identifying Inanna as a goddess of sexuality over a goddess of love is the constant embarrassment scholars seem to feel in discussing sexual intercourse. What seems to be a particular issue is the idea of a woman holding a prominent role in intercourse without losing some sense of her virtue. While acknowledging that the Sumerians were an 'earthy' people, many scholars tend to avoid the issue of Inanna's clear relationship with sexual activity and its enjoyment. In order for us to fully embrace Inanna's true function, we must dismiss the reasons scholars have for denying an open conversation of sexuality.

Avoiding the Erotic

There seems to be a concerted effort being made on the part of some scholars to maintain the image of Inanna as a 'decent girl' (Jacobsen 1987: 10). Despite the several examples they themselves mention of Inanna's sexual appetite, the idea that Inanna should in some way be an appropriate and obedient wife to Dumuzi and the king persists in their readings of the texts. Within the Sacred Marriage, Jacobsen describes Inanna's role as that of the 'young wife' who requests fertility from her 'loving new husband' (Jacobsen 1975: 69). Jacobsen is placing the act of intercourse as a consummation of the marriage, rather than an exercise in sexual enjoyment. This is compounded by his strong reaction to Dumuzi's propositioning of Inanna before they are married in Dumuzi-Inanna H: 'She is a decent girl, not a slut from the alleys' (Jacobsen 1987: 10). In order to portray Inanna as an innocent young wife, Jacobsen has to ignore his own belief that Inanna is 'The Harlot' (Jacobsen 1976: 139), separating the two roles of the goddess so completely, he fails to see the

connection between her sexuality and her role in the Sacred Marriage. Another scholar who is guilty of this division of characteristics is Sefati. His belief in the passivity of women can be seen in his translations. In *Dumuzi-Inanna C* he translates 'lu₂ sig₉-ga-gin₇ mu-na-de₃-gub' as 'like a powerless person I stood there for him' (Sefati 1998: 153), while the ETSCS suggests 'exhaustedly waiting for her' (*Dumuzi-Inanna C*, 15). The difference here is stark; one suggests that the female role is submissive and weak, while the other suggests the male's interest in pleasing the woman as he continues until she climaxes. This inclination to assume the submissive role of the women may be related with the need to make Inanna into a goddess devoted to love and marriage. He believes that all of the songs in the Inanna cycle are devoted to these spheres (Sefati 1998: 23), which subverts Inanna's true intentions to focus more on the traditional ideal of women's identity being defined by her marriage. But why have Jacobsen and Sefati done this? In all likelihood, it is unintentional. While they have actively ignored certain elements of Inanna's character to come to this conclusion, it is probably not unusual for them to think of women within the two identities of 'girl' and 'harlot'; as a goddess Inanna represents a great deal of conflicting ideas, and so separating her into the two types of women would not, to their mind, be too far a leap. However, this rigid categorisation of women into 'girl' or 'whore' is certainly dangerous in an investigation into any female character, and should be disregarded in previous assessment of Inanna, and avoided in future ones.²⁸

While not all scholars accept a saint-like nature for Inanna, there is a sense of inventing a romance when discussing the texts of Inanna and Dumuzi's relationship. Cooper states that

²⁸ For further discussion on the gender bias seen in scholarly work, see chapter 5: The Dangers of Sexism in a Study of Inanna.

the compositions ‘tell of the couple’s tender love and its consummation’ (Cooper 1997: 86), while Sefati talks of how they ‘describe and celebrate the love, courtship, and “Sacred Marriage”’ of Inanna and Dumuzi (Sefati 1998: 13). Interpretations and translations speak volumes about the researchers’ attempts to maintain this account. In Sefati’s translations, he will often interpret the literal act described in the text, rather than what it is a metaphor for. An example of this is in *Dumuzi-Inanna I*, where he translates the ploughing of the šuba stones as either literally digging up jewels, or creating a necklace (Sefati 1998: 202), as opposed to the more commonly held belief that as a sexual act is being described, with the šuba stones representing either testicles or semen (Black et al 2004:84). Another example would be in his interpretation of *Šu-Sin B* where he claims the song ends with an invitation to a sexual act that is not clear to us (Sefati 1998: 355). In fact, it is quite clear that Inanna is asking her lover to massage her vulva. He also translates ‘ur₅-za (source: SA₆) ki ur₅ sag₉-ge-bi mu-zu’ as ‘Soothing the reins, how to sooth the reins, I know’ (Sefati 1998: 355), rather than ‘I know where to give physical pleasure to your body’ (*Šu-Sin B*, 18) as ETCSL has it, which suggests a much less erotic tone for the poem. Sefati’s choice of words is too tame and delicate, losing most of the erotic flavour of these texts (Rubio 2001: 271). It is debatable whether Sefati is doing this intentionally. As discussed above, it is entirely likely that Sefati’s world view makes it difficult for him to read the sexual undertones of the texts. Yet, he does acknowledge acts that are explicitly stated, such as in *Dumuzi-Inanna D*. He even goes so far as to criticise Jacobsen’s reading of the text as a conversation between Geštinanna and Inanna, because laying on a bed of honey, close to one another’s hearts is a sexual act, which could not take place between two women (Sefati 1998: 155). Sefati is not the only modern scholar who can be accused of ignoring the highly sexual content of

the texts, and what that means. Cooper argues that even when the texts become sexually explicit, 'they never lose the innocence of adolescent passion' (Cooper 1997: 87). While this may be argued for *Dumuzi-Inanna C*, where Inanna's excitement at reaching sexual maturity could come across as a little naïve, I would argue that the overall tone of these texts does not possess an adolescent innocence, but rather a fierce sexual appetite, that speaks of experience and confidence: 'I know where to give physical pleasure to your body' (*Šu-Sin B*, 18), 'Touch me like a cover does a measuring cup' (*Šu-Sin B*, 28), 'In your anus' (*Inanna H*, 7). Jacobsen behaves in a similar manner to Sefati; often he will avoid the erotic meanings in a text, almost to the point where his interpretation seems contrived, such as *Dumuzi-Inanna I* (Leick 1994: 72). On the other hand, some of his translations are a great deal more erotic. In *Dumuzi-Inanna B*, the mention of genitals leads Jacobsen to assume that the song is 'a bit of low-life' (Jacobsen, 1987:86), which differs greatly from my own interpretation as a romantic oath. However, this is not a text he translates as being related to the Dumuzi-Inanna Sacred Marriage, making it irrelevant (in his own mind) to his interpretation of Inanna's nature. His explanations of the Sacred Marriage texts constantly represent the couple as loving towards each other. In his reading of *Dumuzi-Inanna H*, he assumes that Dumuzi and Inanna must have fallen in love before the start of the text, because the text says they have met before. As Dumuzi goes on to proposition Inanna with intercourse very soon into the text, Jacobsen believes that they must have fallen in love before, as there is no other excuse for Dumuzi's behaviour. A more direct reading of this would be that Dumuzi is simply sexually attracted to Inanna and wishes to act upon it. Love is not an essential part of intercourse, and without evidence of it, it seems presumptive to

assume that this is what happened. Placing this modern notion of romanticism in some places misguided and in other places detrimental to our understanding of the texts.

Fear of the Female Body

Sefati and Jacobsen have together made the most significant contributions to our understanding of the carnal hymns. And yet, neither of them appears to be comfortable with all of the subject matter of these texts. Both scholars avoid referring to the female genitalia by name. In the place of vulva and vagina, Sefati uses 'nakedness' (Sefati 1998: 106) and Jacobsen calls them her 'private parts' (Jacobsen 1976: 44-45). This may be why both academics struggle to identify Inanna's innate sexuality, or perhaps it is a symptom of their inability to see women as sexual creatures. It could just be old fashioned puritanism. Whatever the reason for it, this censorship changes the meaning of the texts (Rubio 2001: 271). For example 'for my nakedness, let us rejoice' (Sefati 1998: 137) has a very different connotation to 'for my vulva, let us rejoice'. The former would imply a celebration of the female form, or Inanna's confidence in her own beauty, while the latter is more evocative of her having reached sexual maturity and her desire to have intercourse. Both euphemisms can also subvert the understanding of a new researcher into the field, or a researcher who does not read Sumerian. Many academics unfamiliar with Sumerian culture, or the work of either Sefati or Jacobsen, may assume that this is a direct translation and misunderstand the confidence of the Sumerian people in discussing the vulva. There is a stark contrast between a culture that refers to their genitals by name and a culture that feels the need to use a euphemism. While excuses of the time in which Jacobsen was writing can be made, no such excuse can be used for Sefati, writing in the

1990s. It is important, that in future works we as academics do our best to translate texts as closely to their intended meanings as possible, without allowing our own attitudes to influence academia.

Love as a Euphemism

Frequently, those assyriologists that do understand the role of Inanna as a sexuality goddess will refer to her as a 'love goddess'. This is also seen in the reference to the carnal hymns as love songs. One such example is Black et al's *Literature of Ancient Sumer*. When discussing *Enki and the World Order*, they point out that Inanna is 'a sexual goddess and a deity of warfare' (Black et al 2004: 215). In spite of this, when discussing *Šu-Sin B* they call her a 'goddess of love' (Black et al 2004: 88). This is even more startling, because as I have discussed, *Šu-Sin B* is one of the most sexual poems in the corpus. Yet here they refer to it as a love song (Black et al 2004: 88). Other compositions that they call 'love songs' include *Dumuzi-Inanna I* and *Iddin-Dagan A*, both of which I have highlighted for their carnal content. They do refer to the sexually explicit nature of these texts (Black et al 2004: 84; 89), but comment how this is common in 'love poetry' (Black et al 2004: 89). The inconsistency could be due to the high number of researchers working on the book; in all likelihood each academics wrote separate entries and as such different interpretations can be seen. In other instances where an interpretation seems to disagree with itself, it is possible that the author thought the words love and sexuality/carnal to be synonymous with one another.

While some sumerologists have attempted to acknowledge the fundamental sexuality of the carnal hymns, such as Tinney's *Notes on Sumerian Sexual Lyric* (2000), some have

argued in favour of using the word love. Rubio argues that we find it difficult to associate love in the Inanna-Dumuzi poetry because of our western bias (Rubio 2001: 268). He seems to be arguing that Sumerians would have viewed love and sex as the same thing, which we westerners do not. Yet, when we look at the texts, only a select few mention the word love at all. Usually it is the term 'beloved' we see, but this is the best guess translation of a word that means the object of affection, either romantically or sexually and as such cannot be proof of love. In fact, as I have discussed above, it seems to be that western scholars assume love because of the presence of sex in the texts and often they fail to identify the difference between sexuality and romance. Love is appropriate here, Rubio asserts, whether it is love full of carnal passion or suggestive of ritual (Rubio 2001: 268). This seems to be an example of what I highlighted in section A, when love is used as a banner term for all emotions between praise, romance and lust. However, one must think about the context for which they were written. Were they written to express love, or discuss the sexual, or to worship a deity, or to use sexuality to define kingship? This should be the main tool for deciding the name, not if the word love means sex or not.

The dangers of using the word love instead of sexuality can be found in Wolkstein's *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth*, in which Wolkstein calls Inanna the 'Love Goddess' (Wolkstein 1983: 155). As a scholar outside of the main discipline, she may not have known that this was not meant in the literal sense. Given Wolkstein's interpretation of the goddess as a representation of female power, it would probably have worked in her favour to discuss Inanna's role as a sexuality deity.²⁹ Instead her argument tends to depict Inanna in a more passive nature, and focuses on the intimacy between Inanna and Dumuzi (Wolkstein 1983:

²⁹ This interpretation is admittedly questionable.

151-155), rather than her independence and the pleasure she takes from intercourse. This is one example of the detrimental effects of using a colloquialism within a field. We must strive as an academic field to express ourselves in the clearest terms, so that as the field expands, new academics will not be faced with confusion about the nature of Sumerian sexuality.

THE DANGERS OF SEXISM IN THE STUDY OF INANNA

‘One problem is that much of the documentation was created by elite men, tends to reflect their concerns, and has been published by men with their own intellectual agenda.’

(Reade 2002: 551).

With any field of research, there is always a danger that a scholar will prejudice the research with their own opinions. With a subject such as sexuality and eroticism, the study ‘inevitably involves the researcher’s personal attitudes’ (Leick 1994:7-8). While to some extent this may be unavoidable, we historians must always be wary of projecting our personal views onto ancient societies, because often it can interfere with our interpretation of the past. While some scholars assume the dominance of the male and ascribe limited roles to female identity (Madonna/Whore), other researchers have placed undue emphasis on the importance of the female role and have impeded our understanding of the ancient world through a different prejudice. This chapter seeks to discuss instances of sexism and gender bias not to ‘call out’ or admonish ‘sexists’, but to identify those theories that may be hindering our insight into Sumer and the goddess Inanna by dint of their prejudiced assessments. Having said this, some criticism may be made of scholars who in more recent years, despite several ‘waves of feminism’, insist on placing gender biased readings on ancient texts.

Sexism before Gender Equality

By 'before gender equality', I am drawing an (admittedly arbitrary) line in the sand in 1975, when The Sex Discrimination Act (UK) prevented any legal restrictions against women.³⁰³¹ This is the point at which we will judge 'modern gender equality'.³² However, several of our historians will have been so active in the period before this that their ignorance on women's identity expressed after this date can be placed in this category. This is not meant to be a criticism of these scholars, but an acknowledgement that their upbringing and early adult life will have led to their biased views on women.

We find evidence for this gender bias in much of the discussions of the Sacred Marriage and Inanna because gender roles apparently play such an important part. Often assumptions can be made about the purpose of texts or rituals based on which gender they are associated with and nothing more. Jacobsen and Alster, for example, assumed that the so called 'love' songs were inconsequential because they were songs for women (Cooper 1997: 88). 'They [the love songs] are lightweight stuff, popular ditties such as would be sung by women to while away the time at spinning or weaving, or perhaps as songs to dance to' (Jacobsen 1976: 27). Here Jacobsen is demonstrating his opinion on the validity of the woman's sphere, suggesting that because it is a subject that he associates with women, i.e. love, it belongs to them and that it is therefore unimportant. Suppositions over

³⁰ Similar laws were brought in in Europe and the U.S. around this time.

³¹ This law was by no means perfect and did not enforce genderless thinking, but it is an acknowledgment from the predominantly male government that there was a problem with how women were perceived and treated. This in turn will have had a knock on effect – although it was a very long uphill trek, most academics entering the field at this time will have had less of the institutionalised image of women and would be more likely to view them as 'people'.

³² Admittedly there were still a great many social and political changes that were and still need to be made in order to attain true gender equality, but this can provide a useful bookend, because after this date gender discrimination is considered essentially illegal.

the importance of texts could have detrimental impacts on the understanding and further study of such articles, encouraging an attitude that could prevent deeper analysis of the work. Furthermore, Jacobsen is making the assumption that women were as important to the Sumerians as they were to him, which can lead to a skewed perception of the ancient world. In *Dumuzi-Inanna B* when Inanna asks her lover to state an oath, Alster was surprised: “[It] remains amazing that the oath is requested of the lover, and not of the girl” (Leick 1994: 128). It is intriguing that he should feel the need to point out this – in his mind – discrepancy, but this shows the extent to which he is certain that the female should be the subordinate, when clearly the Sumerian author did not view it in this way.

Jacobsen’s negative perception of woman can be seen frequently throughout his discourse of Inanna. The following are examples of particular note:

In *Enmerkar and En-suĝgir-ana* Jacobsen believes that ‘Enmerkar [had so] bewitched Inanna that she readily agreed to forsake her other husband’ (Jacobsen, 1987: 275). This is such a gendered reading of the text, because it imagines that Inanna is gullible and would have been thought of by the Sumerians as someone who should be deceived, when in actuality, the text suggests more that she makes the conscious decision to pick Enmerkar, her subordinate, because he sufficiently woos her.

When discussing her relationship with prostitution, he calls her ‘The Harlot’ (Jacobsen 1976: 139). The choice of the word ‘harlot’ over prostitute is very evocative, and it does not seem professional to choose such a powerful, leading word in an academic piece of writing.

‘[In myth] we see her as ...a worry to her elders because of her proclivity to act on her own impulses when they could have told her it would end in disaster’ (Jacobsen 1976: 141). This

is a very patronising statement. As a modern reader, one is inclined to see this desire for glory as a typical act of the protagonist, but to the reader in the 70s, a woman acting for herself is seen as 'impulsive' and is not thought of in the same terms as a male protagonist.

'The restraint and demureness that were considered good manners in a young girl did not come easy to Inanna' (Jacobsen 1976: 142). There is no evidence that a Sumerian girl should be demure, and this is a very presumptive argument that this is a failing of the goddess. It finds its basis in Jacobsen's own opinions of what a girl should be.

Jacobsen sees Inanna's sexual liberty as her 'wantonness and freedom of her favours' (Jacobsen 1976: 143). There are some very strong implications of this statement, implying a negative view of female sexuality in particular.

Finally, we will let Jacobsen sum up his own opinion of Inanna: 'She became [an] independent, wilful and spoiled young noble woman' (Jacobsen 1970: 28).

These highlighted statements demonstrate how tightly Jacobsen constrained women into particular roles: 'A young girl', 'a harlot', 'spoilt'. These comments are not meant to criticise Jacobsen himself. Indeed, in many ways it is the foundations that he laid down on which modern Sumerology stands today, for which I and many others are very appreciative. This is a concern, however, because Jacobsen's sexism has an impact on his interpretations of the evidence, many of which are still used in current study. In reference to *Dumuzi-Inanna H*, for example, where Dumuzi propositions Inanna, he calls her 'a decent girl, not a slut from the alleys' (Jacobsen 1987: 10). This shows us his view on female sexual liberty quite clearly. He then follows this with an assertion that the broken text will have documented Inanna's rejection of Dumuzi (Jacobsen 1987:11). Jacobsen believed that because Inanna is

playing a 'maiden' in this poem, and because she is a god, she will act in a so called 'appropriate' or 'lady-like' manner. This, however, is not in keeping with the spirit of Inanna at all, who by her very definition as a goddess of prostitution would not be opposed to sex in the street. Despite the fact that other scholars (Leick 1994:70; Wilcke 1970: 86) have also put forward this supposition, the majority of the field assumes Jacobsen's authority on the matter because of his fundamental role in the beginnings of Sumerology. Yet if modern Sumerology wishes to continue to find the most accurate reading of the past, it is essential for us to go back to the original sources and establish for ourselves our own interpretations, and not rely on those that were founded with so much prejudice.

Modern Gender Bias and its Detrimental Effects on Interpretation

While feminism has had great success in the Western world, there are still a great deal of ideals and preconceived notions about what it is to be either a man or a woman. This gender bias has regrettably made its way into the analysis of the ancient world; or perhaps it is more accurate to say that it never truly left. As such, there are several examples of flawed examination into the study of Inanna and the Sacred Marriage especially.

Occasionally, this bias appears in small, almost unimportant ways. In Klein's explanation of the Sacred Marriage in the Anchor Bible dictionary, he expresses his curiosity that the Sacred Marriage never took place in Dumuzi's cult centres of Ĝirsu and Bad-tibira: 'Surprisingly, there is no indication that the Sacred Marriage rite was practised in any of these two cultic centers' (Klein 1992: 868). This is a perfect example of placing more importance on the role of the man than the woman. Klein assumes that it is Dumuzi and his role as fertility god that dictates the Sacred Marriage, when a closer look at the evidence

suggests that it is Inanna and her relationship with legitimacy that enforces the importance on the rite. Although he does not go into great detail on this point, it suggests the latent assumption that Dumuzi is superior to Inanna, despite all evidence to the contrary, which fails to understand the significance of the role Inanna played in the Sumerian mind-set.

Unfortunately, not all gender biases are discussed in such little detail. In his 2003 article, *Embracing Inanna*, Jones discusses the 'feminisation' of the Sumerian king Iddin-Dagan during the Sacred Marriage. By comparing *Iddin-Dagan A* to *Enlil and Ninlil*, Jones puts forward the notion that the term 'to embrace', in Sumerian 'gu₂-da mu-ni-in-la₂', is an active masculine verb, and that '[Inanna] plays the dominant, masculinised role, as she embraces the king'... 'the king takes the role of the goddess, not the god' (Jones 2003: 299). This is an example of placing modern ideology on ancient sources. If there were to be male and female, dominant and submissive roles in sex in ancient Sumer (and to be submissive was female), and if it were stigmatised to be the submissive (and therefore associated with the feminine), it hardly seems likely the king would support and take part in this ritual. It is possible that as a god, or as a sexuality goddess, or even just as a woman, Inanna takes the dominant role in intercourse, but it doesn't appear to be a negative for the king, in fact it proves his own divinity. Moreover, the pleasure Inanna receives from this union suggests Iddin-Dagan did take an active role. Jones believes that taking a submissive part in the intercourse will have 'humiliated' him (Jones 2003: 300), and that subjugating himself to Inanna was an act of 'self-sacrifice', to prevent disaster befalling the Sumerian people (Jones 2003: 299). Further quotations prove how hazardous he considers it is to be associated with a feminine role:

'It is questionable, however, whether the feminised role the king had to adopt to achieve it elicited their admiration' (Jones 2003: 299)

'Inanna is praised as the goddess who can turn men into women... how secure would [Iddin-Dagan] have been feeling in his own masculinity?' (Jones 2003: 300)

Jones assumes that all men (both in the present and the past) judge their worth by their differences from women. This is a fairly controversial opinion to hold now, but we have no evidence, either in literary or material culture, to suggest that this is how Sumerians men felt about their own 'masculinity'. Instead, Jones has found a very questionable meaning for one simple action, and written an entire article demonstrating his own chauvinism.

Frequently, the modern sexism can be more subtle. This bias finds its foundations on the works of scholars such as Jacobsen, who held a now outdated view on specific gender roles for woman; the idea that a woman is either an 'angel' or a 'whore'.³³ Throughout Sefati's valuable collection, *Love Songs in Sumerian Literature*, we can see evidence that, as a woman, he believes Inanna must fall into either of these two stereotypes. We see this in his analysis of two passages that 'shed more light on the human, mundane aspect of Inanna' that are 'quite different' from the other Dumuzi-Inanna songs (Sefati 1998: 112). 'In these passages Inanna is not depicted as an innocent young girl, courting a suitable husband who will support her as his wife, but rather a treacherous whore with tremendous sexual urges, who courts many different lovers.' (Sefati 1998: 112). This is how Sefati sees Inanna, 'as an innocent young girl, courting a suitable husband who will support her as his

³³ In theory at least, although these characters can still be seen frequently in many modern works of fiction.

wife' (Sefati 1998: 112). This is very telling of Sefati and his reading of the so called 'love songs'. Even more telling is his naming of Inanna as a 'treacherous whore with tremendous sexual urges' (Sefati 1998: 112) because she displays aspects of sexual enjoyment. This is not the attitude one would expect of a modern scholar, but whatever the reason for his bias, be it cultural or religious, it explains his interpretations of this literature. His proof for this 'treachery' is *Inanna D*, where, in his translation, she grabs a man from a public place, 'creeps' into the lap of Dumuzi and lays with seven bridal attendants and in the Akkadian epic of *Gilgameš*, where she proposes to Gilgameš and he rebuffs her by describing her as unreliable, 'a shoe that hurts its owner's foot' (Sefati 1998: 112-113). Sefati's separation of the 'innocent' Inanna from the 'treacherous whore' shows how selective his readings of the texts are. He is happy to segregate certain texts from the main corpus if they do not fit with his argument, and suggest that we are seeing a different side to Inanna. Other readings, such as Leick's and my own, attempt to incorporate all aspects of a deity depicted into one unified personality that may better represent how a Sumerian person would have thought of that deity. This leads us to the conclusion that Inanna is not a 'whore' in the negative sense, and nor is she an 'angel'. She is instead, a complex woman (like any of us) who represents sexuality and sexual enjoyment, but without the negative connotations that are often associated with sexually active women today. There are other ways that we can see Sefati's prejudice against women, such as his constant reference to the 'lover and his beloved woman' (Sefati 1998: 156). The passivity of women in his mind is clear. A man is the lover and the woman is the recipient of his "love". With such a strong view on the submissive nature of women it is hardly surprising that he would not see the sexual nature of Inanna's role and that often she is the character who leads the intercourse. As such, it

can be damaging to our interpretation of Inanna and the Sacred Marriage, because he is not fully accepting of the roles each character is playing.

Another place we can see this unconscious gender bias is in the many translations of texts. Subconscious androcentric perceptions often influence the understanding of such texts (See Winkler 1990: 180ff; Leick 1994: 122), and the assumption is made that any pronouns are in the masculine. By the very nature of the Sumerian language, however, we can only be sure of this in the context. Further, sexual imagery is also frequently assumed to be of the male genitalia, rather than the female. A fruiting orchard, for example, was assumed to be a penis, as opposed to the image of the clitoris. Despite the fact that in our mind, a tree looks more phallic, the fact that Sumerian love poetry is almost wholly gynocentric, and that the references to male anatomy or enjoyment are almost totally absent, means that we should be careful of assigning the male over the female (Leick 1994: 129).

There have been attempts by some male scholars to view the texts to identify the mentality of the Sumerian woman. Cooper's research into the *Gendered Sexuality in Sumerian Love Poetry* sought to look for woman's sensibilities as they would have been expressed in life, and not to prove female authorship (Cooper 1997: 89), i.e. he was looking for what the Sumerian people thought was the attitude of Sumerian women; whether or not the texts themselves were written by women was unimportant, because the men were attempting to write in the style of women. However, Cooper tends to paint women with a very broad brush. Using a survey of modern women designed to evaluate what they enjoyed reading in romance novels, Cooper argues that the corpus of 'love' songs is designed to be written for women, who are offended by explicit sexual description, don't

like 'perversions' or promiscuity and enjoy the suggestion that the hero is emotionally aroused by an overpowering desire for the heroine (Cooper 1997: 95). This does not perfectly portray the corpus, as there are elements of promiscuity, *Inanna D*, the men are more likely to find Inanna physically attractive, rather than emotionally and there are some very explicit scenes of sexual activity, which may feature 'perversions' such as anal intercourse or oral intercourse. Furthermore, the notion that female sexuality has stayed the same for the last five thousand years is misguided, as we do not know the social context well enough to make that judgement. On top of that, the idea that female sexuality is so singular is short-sighted. Women are not a homogenous group in values, personality or sexuality, and to suggest that all women fall into the same category, then or now, is ill-considered. Moreover, if these texts, as he himself suggests (Cooper 1997:96), have some cultic value, why is what women find sexually arousing particularly relevant? If Inanna is representative of female sexuality, then of course there is some extent to which what arouses a woman can be seen in the texts, but as a cultic or religious corpus the subject need not be actually arousing to women. It tells a story if it is a myth, or celebrates sexuality if it is a hymn, but it is not pornography. It is representative, not stimulating.

Sexism in Reverse: How feminism can attribute too much importance on the female role

As a feminist scholar, often it is tempting to push back against assumptions of female subjugation. This can lead to its own misunderstandings of the culture. Researchers can be inclined to view their own 'battle' between the genders in the texts. In Wakeman's discussion of *Ancient Sumer and the Woman's Movement* she puts forward the idea that

Inanna's persona as a 'femme fatale' expresses fears associated with sexuality, change and death (Wakeman 1985: 19). While this shows a misinterpretation of Inanna's role as a war deity being intrinsically linked to her gender, it also assumes a male anxiety about powerful women – a popular idea in feminism at the time of writing. Both of these ideas presuppose the assumption that Sumerians placed an importance on gender and that the sexes were vying for power. Wakeman is just as guilty as the other scholars of placing her own world view on the Sumerian people.

Conclusions

While it is tempting to see the past through our modern eyes, historians must always try their best to look at the context of the culture before applying meaning. In the case of Sumer, this can sometimes be difficult to do because the majority of the evidence left to us is literary and not legal or philosophical. As a western feminist scholar in the 21st century, I must not assume that the Sumerians shared my views of female sexual liberation and gender equality, while also using these to my advantage to attempt to view the past with open eyes. While I do not assume the subjugation or inherent inferiority of women, I must also acknowledge that there was a perceived difference in the roles of men and women, and that Sumer was essentially a patriarchy. This does not mean, however, that the female population felt the need to 'fight' for their rights, or that Inanna represented the power of women as opposed to men in her role as a warrior goddess. But it is not just modern scholars who put their own views of gender on to interpretations of Inanna. In order to get the best reading of the ancient past, we must return to the commonly held suppositions that find their basis in research from before gender equality. Only when we remove the

cultural assumptions of the researchers can we truly learn what life was like for the ancient people of Sumer.

CONCLUSION

Study of Inanna is complex. As we have seen, there are a great many reasons why a modern review of her sexuality can be difficult. The majority of these lie in the history of Sumerology itself. Although occasionally in and out of the public eye, it has never enjoyed the consistent levels of interest found in the case of Classics and History. In a large field with few researchers, sumerologists rely heavily on work that was written decades ago, which means certain ideologies and attitudes have remained persistent. In the case of Inanna, attitudes towards gender roles and the role of women that were common in the 60s and 70s remain strong in modern interpretations, as the work of academics such as Jacobsen is often still relevant to the discussion. As such, we can see a categorisation of Inanna into two specific roles, under which the contemporary society was keen to place women: the roles of the 'good girl' and the 'slut'. We have seen evidence of how the acceptance of these attitudes has led to more modern stigmatisation of women, through Sefati's reinforcement of the madonna/whore idea, and Jones' analysis of the emasculation of the king Iddin-Dagan. We also see it in more subtle ways such as the assumption of male pronouns in Sumerian translation. As we have discussed, it is important to ensure that such assumptions and rigid characterisations of women are removed from the study of ancient Sumer as well as the study of Inanna, because of the inevitable distortions this creates in our understanding of their culture. Furthermore, we should become more accepting of the Sumerians' more uninhibited attitudes to the discussions of sexual intercourse and the female body. In order to better inform those outside the main discipline and to better educate every one on the ancient past we must have open and frank discussions about the

attitudes of the Sumerians towards intercourse and sexuality, especially as sexuality and intercourse play such an important role in nearly all aspects of wider society. We must use this new approach to re-evaluate the dynamic between sexuality, intercourse and love in the ancient world so that we may better understand ancient attitudes to each of these. In doing so, we will have a better idea of the role Inanna played in these spheres rather than defining her and the songs relating to her actions with a single, inappropriate word.

Moving forward with this attitude we can begin to draw conclusions about the function of the deity Inanna. Having reviewed the literature with an aim to define Inanna's functions, we can comfortably assign Inanna the role of goddess of sexuality. Sexuality clearly held importance in the minds of the Sumerian people, as can be seen in the content of *Inanna D* and *Dumuzi-Inanna E*, and Inanna was the personification of the desire for and the pleasure gained from intercourse. This can also be seen in the epithets and functions listed under her name in *Enki and the World Order* and *Inanna and Enki*. This does not mean that Inanna did not represent love in some way. We can see in *Proverbs 3* that Sumerians felt that she may have had some connection to the more romantic feelings associated with love. The bulk of the evidence, however, suggests that prominence was placed on her relationship with sexuality over her role in love, and as such it would be more prudent to refer to her by her role in sexuality, as the Sumerians do in their own texts (*Lugalbanda and the Mountain Cave*). Moreover, her close association with prostitution proves that sexuality was not confined to romantic relationships or marriages. We can also see in the texts that human sexuality is not limited to fertility. Several texts make reference to non-reproductive forms of intercourse and sexual pleasure between partners (*Inanna H*, *Šu-Sin B*) and instances of possible masturbation (*Dumuzi-Inanna E*). This separation of

intercourse and procreation can also be seen in the functions of Inanna. She is a goddess of sexuality, but never viewed as a mother goddess. This is particularly interesting given her epithet 'The Woman' (*Išme-Dagan J*). We have seen that to be womanly and the woman's sphere have been used synonymously by the Sumerians with intercourse and kissing (*Utu F*) and that Inanna is somehow the embodiment of this (*Enki and the World Order*). I have used this to put forward the theory that Inanna's journey from pubescent girl to sexually mature woman could be seen as a template that all women might follow. And yet, Inanna is kept separate from wifely duties and motherhood, which is most notable in *Dumuzi-Inanna C1*, where Dumuzi tells Inanna she will not be expected to perform these roles. What this means for our interpretation of Sumerian attitudes towards women and their connection to sexuality is as yet unclear and needs further research. Nevertheless, we can be certain that sexuality was considered 'The Woman's', i.e. Inanna's, role. With the security that Inanna's role was that of a sexuality goddess, new light can be shed on the relationship between this function and her other important function as a warrior goddess. Viewing Inanna as a passionate and proactive deity allows her two halves to unite more succinctly and explains why these were her two most prominent roles, mentioned together frequently in the corpus.

This new approach to Inanna's function creates a real impact on our interpretations of the wider Sumerian culture, most importantly the 'Sacred Marriage'. A new, more decisive definition can be placed on the purpose of this relationship to the Sumerian people and how it would have been acted out. The Sacred Marriage is the term for the continuous relationship between Inanna and the king, as the re-embodiment of Dumuzi and instances where these personas have intercourse, either in mythology or at her temple, were

considered sexual unions between spouses. These would have taken place, most likely, when the king would visit Inanna during his tours of the temples. He would demonstrate his sexual prowess to the goddess (as he would his intelligence to Enki, for example) and in receiving her admiration for his skills he legitimised his claim to rule all of Sumer. This reinforces to us how important sexuality was considered to be by the Sumerians and in turn, provides an explanation for Inanna's prominence in the Sumerian pantheon in the Neo-Sumerian period.

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