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# “Lady of battle, his beloved spouse”: The relationship between the body of Inana/Ištar and her spheres of war and love from the Jemdet Nasr to the old Babylonian period

Renate Marian van Dijk-Coombes

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## Abstract

Inana/Ištar is the Mesopotamian goddess of war and sexual love. These spheres are both fundamentally physical and corporeal, with the body playing an intrinsic role in both. This paper looks at how the body of Inana/Ištar manifests and is manifested by her two main spheres of influence from the Jemdet Nasr until the Old Babylonian Period. This is done by examining textual evidence, specifically royal inscriptions and mythological and religious compositions, and the visual repertoire. Similarities and differences in how these two types of sources expressed the role of the goddess's body in relation to both spheres will be identified and analysed.

## 1. Introduction

War and sexual love, the goddess Inana/Ištar's two major spheres of influence, are both intrinsically physical. War is a physical display of power and strength, while sexual love is physically expressed through sexual intercourse. Both are also corporeal in that the body is a fundamental part of both. In war, bodies are thrown into battle, and bodies suffer the consequences. The physical pain, the blood and the violence of battle are all experienced corporeally, by the body. On the other hand, in sexual love, desire and pleasure are felt physically by the body. Indeed, as Frymer-Kensky (1992:68) states, “[b]oth sex and violence lead to changes in body metabolism and blood flow. Pulse and respiration change similarly in response to either stimulus; blood flow is modified, genital arousal is experienced. Such responses are inherent in our very concept of lust, and this is true whether the stimulus is sexual lust or blood lust.” Despite these biological functions and reactions, the concept of ‘The Body’ is not immutable. According to Leick (2012:399), “[a]lthough human bodies are anatomically given to little variation in comparison with other species, the many different ways of conceptualising ‘The Body’ demonstrates that it is as much a cultural construct as a physical entity”. That Inana/Ištar herself was conceptualised as being a physical, corporeal being is made clear in her mythology and depictions of her. In lines 171–172 of *Inana's Descent to*

*the Nether World* after the Anuna have killed the goddess, she is turned into a corpse and the corpse is hung on a hook<sup>1</sup>. Even in her death, her corporeality is a fundamental part of her being.

This paper will then look at how the body of Inana/Ištar expresses and is expressed by her two main spheres of influence, war and sexual love. How are war and sexual love manifested physically and corporeally in and by her body? This will be done by examining specific textual and visual evidence from the early periods of Mesopotamian history – from the Jemdet Nasr Period until the Old Babylonian Period<sup>2</sup>. Visual culture and the textual record serve as two types of primary sources, and the information which they provide can be “in parallel or complementary with, occasionally even quite distinct from” each other (Winter 2010:72), and when studied together can provide a clearer and more nuanced “mental background” (Suter 2000:8) than if either is studied alone. Royal inscriptions record events during a ruler’s life, but in these inscriptions deities are also credited with being involved in the action. For this reason they form part of what Steinkeller (2017:176) describes as “mythical history” in that the events described can only have taken place in a mythical reality. With regards to information about deities, royal inscriptions can therefore be studied together with mythological and religious compositions to provide a clearer image. These categories of texts – royal inscriptions and mythological and religious compositions – will therefore be analysed. In the visual repertoire the goddess is one of a handful of deities who has a clear and consistent iconography. These sources can therefore provide a cohesive corpus for studying the goddess. Each of the goddess’s two main spheres, war and sexual love, will be examined in turn. The textual and visual sources will be examined separately, and then synthesised.

## 2. Goddess of war

Inana/Ištar was the goddess of war, particularly from the Akkadian Period when she was the imperial goddess of the Akkadian Empire. During this period Ištar in her warlike aspect was known as Aštar-Annunitum, and she was, as Salaberger and Westenholz (1999:31) state, “a most fitting figurehead for the militaristic Akkadian Empire”.

1 See Sladek (1974) for a full treatment of this text. See also ETCSL 1.4.1 for a transliteration and English translation.

2 The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is included despite the Standard Version being traditionally credited to the scribe Sin-leqe-unninni in the late second millennium BCE. This is because the Standard Version expanded on the Old Babylonian Version, which incorporated earlier Sumerian narratives focussing on the hero Gilgames. The assumption is therefore that the Standard Version of the *Epic* relayed a conception of the goddess found in the earlier versions.

## 2.1 Textual evidence

### 2.1.1 Royal inscriptions

Inana/Ištar's role as goddess of war is reflected in her epithet "lady of battle", which appears to have been particularly popular in royal inscriptions during the Neo-Sumerian and Isin-Larsa Periods when it was used, for example, during the reigns of Gudea of Lagaš (Edzard 1997:37 RIME E3/1.1.7.StB viii:60), Amar-Sin of Ur (Frayne 1997:259 RIME E3/2.1.3.13 2) and Rim-Sin of Larsa, the latter referring to Inana as "lady of my battle" (Frayne 1990:285 RIME E4.2.14.10 31). Šū-Sîn expands on this epithet, stressing Inana's combat prowess by calling her "[Lady of battle (and)] combat, butting [l]ike a [bull], [Inn]in, [b]orn to be a warrior" (Frayne 1997:26 E3/2.1.4.1 i:28–29). Another variation is Utu-ḫegal's reference to her as his "lady, lioness of battle, who butts the foreign lands" (Frayne 1993:285 RIME E2.13.6.4 27–28), where his likening her to a lioness symbolises her fearsome power and ties in with other imagery associating her with this beast<sup>3</sup>.

In royal inscriptions the goddess's sphere of warfare is not only reflected in her epithets, but also in her actions. During the Early Dynastic Period Eannatum of Lagaš claims that "the goddess Inanna, because she loved him [Eannatum] so, gave the kingdom of Kiš to him in addition to the rulership of Lagaš" (Frayne 2008:148 RIME E1.9.3.5 v:26–vi:5). A similar idea is repeated by Naram-Sin who states that "through the love which the goddess Aštar [Ištar] showed him [Naram-Sin], he was victorious in nine battles in one year" (Frayne 1993:113 RIME E3.1.4.10). These rulers therefore considered Inana/Ištar to be closely related to their victories in warfare. In other inscriptions she is more directly involved in various aspects of battle. For example, she orders rulers to battle, as in another of Naram-Sîn's royal inscriptions which states that the ruler was "on a mission for the goddess Aštar" (Frayne 1993:96 RIME E2.1.4.3 18–19). She was also involved in the deployment of troops in an inscription of Gutian ruler Erridu-pizir which states that "the goddess Aštar had stationed troops in Agade" (Frayne 1993:224 RIME E2.2.1.2 v:2–5). Additionally, she decided the outcome of the conflict, as for example a Naram-Sîn inscription which states that, "[b]y the verdict of the goddess Aštar-Annunitum, Narām-Sîn, the mighty, [was vic]torious over the Kišite in battle at TiWA" (Frayne 1993:105 RIME E2.1.4.6 ii:14–22). Because she could thus grant victory in battle, rulers would want her aid in battle. Utu-ḫegal beseeched Inana to be his ally against the Gutians (Frayne 1993:285 RIME E2.13.6.4 32), while Samsu-iluna of the First Dynasty of Babylon claimed that "Inanna gave him [Samsu-iluna] her favourable omen and help" (Frayne 1990:389 RIME E4.3.7.8 12–14). This help granted by the goddess could take on a variety of forms. For example, Šū-Sîn

3 See below.

records that Inana presented him with weapons including a mace and arrows and a quiver

“in order to sweep like a huge onrushing flood over its population – (namely) the enemy country which in disobedience to him, engages in battle (and) hostilities

in order to smite its powerful ones, mischievous (and) inimical,  
in order to destroy the memory of its famous black-headed people,  
in order to subdue its great far-reaching mountain ranges”

(Frayne 1997:26 RIME E3/2.1.4.1 i:32-ii:6)

On the other hand, Hammurabi states that Inana “entrusted their [i. e. the lands of Sumer and Akkad] nose-rope in his [Hammurabi’s] hands” (Frayne 1990:354 RIME E4.3.6.16 21–28). In these examples, Inana appears to be physically involved with helping the rulers by giving them weapons or means by which to subjugate their enemies. She herself though is not presented as being physically engaged in the conflict.

This physical aspect of the goddess of war is rather manifested in the curses which rulers placed on anyone who would destroy or remove their inscriptions. Sargon, in two separate inscriptions places curses on such a person stating that “Aštar tear out his foundations and destroy his progeny” (Frayne 1993:23 RIME E2.1.1.8 14–19) and “the goddess Inanna cut of his ... *offspring*” (Frayne 1993:29 RIME E2.1.1.11 46–48). Rīm-Sîn urges that “Inanna, lady of the foreign lands, with her angry heart and wrathful mood utter a terrible curse” against them (Frayne 1990:303 RIME E4.2.14.23 48–50), but this includes no physical activity by the goddess. On the other hand, in the curse formulae of Hammurabi’s codex, Ištar is called upon to physically intervene,

“May the goddess Ishtar, mistress of battle and warfare, who bares my weapon, my benevolent protective spirit, who loves my reign, curse his kingship with her angry heart and great fury; may she turn his auspicious omens into calamities; may she smash his weapon on the field of war and battle, plunge him into confusion and rebellion, strike down his warriors, drench the earth with their blood, make a heap of the corpses of his soldiers upon the plain, and may she show his soldiers no mercy; as for him, may she deliver him into the hand of his enemies, and may she lead him bound captive to the land of his enemy.”

(lines l:92-li:23) (Roth 1995:139)

This curse formula incorporates the ways in which Inana/Ištar and her body are associated with warfare in the royal inscriptions. She is called “mistress of battle and warfare”, she supports Hammurabi’s reign and curses his adversaries, and she physically inflicts violence. However, while references and allusions

to Inana/Ištar's role as goddess of war are quite frequent in royal inscriptions, the goddess herself is seldom represented as being physically involved in any of the conflict. She may offer support by stationing troops, giving weapons or deciding the outcomes of battles, but she herself appears to remain aloof from the fighting except in the curse formulae. While some mythological and religious compositions represent the goddess in a similar way, there are examples where she is more overtly and physically engaged in conflict.

### 2.1.2 Mythological and religious compositions

The assertions by Eannatum and Naram-Sin that they were victorious in battles due to the love of Inana/Ištar (Frayne 2008:148 RIME E1.9.3.5 v:26-vi:5; Frayne 1993:113 RIME E3.1.4.10) finds resonance in the mythological narrative *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave*<sup>4</sup> in which the lines 462, 470 and 479 repeat the refrain, “[t]hey are favoured by Inana's heart, steadfast in battle” (Vanstiphout 2003:129–131). In line 14 of the same narrative, battle is called “Inana's game” (Vanstiphout 2003:105). Similarly, in the Akkadian *Agušaya Hymn*<sup>5</sup> Ištar's “celebration is the melee, staging the dance of battle” (Tablet 1, column iii, line 11) (Foster 2005:98).

In other mythological texts focusing on the deities rather than on heroes, Inana/Ištar is relatively seldom, particularly for a deity associated with war, represented as actually physically engaging in battle herself. While she is impetuous and ambitious, she more regularly employs manipulation and more indirect means to achieve her goals – methods in which she herself does not “get her hands dirty”. For example, in *Inana and Enki*<sup>6</sup>, she acquires the MEs, or divine powers, from Enki after she gets him drunk. The same holds true in situations where violence is expected and is present. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, she herself does not attack Uruk in retribution after Gilgamesh rejects her offer of marriage and insults her, but rather she demands the Bull of Heaven from Anu to do so for her (George 2003:625–227 VI:92–123). Her punishments of Šukaletuda and Bilulu are also surprisingly non-violent. In *Inana and Šukale-*

4 Also called *Lugalbanda in the Wilderness* (e.g. Vanstiphout 2003) and *Lugalbanda in (or and) Hurrunkurra* (e.g. Hallo 1983:165), and in German as *Lugalbanda im Finstersten des Gebirges* (e.g. Wilcke 1969:67). Also identified as LB (Lugalbanda) I, while the *Lugalbanda Epic* (Hallo 1983), *Das Lugalbandaepos* in German (Wilcke 1969) or *Lugalpanda and the Imdugud Bird* (Vanstiphout 2002) is identified as LB II. Vanstiphout (2002; 2003:97) argues that these two narratives form one composition. See also ETCSL 1.8.2.1 for a transliteration and English translation.

5 For a transliteration, German translation and discussion of this narrative, see Groneberg (1997:55–93). For an English translation, see Foster (2005:96–106). See also Lewis (2011:31–55, 106–115) for a treatment of this poem.

6 See Faber-Flügge (1973) for a German translation and treatment of this narrative, and see Kramer and Maier (1989:57–68) for an English translation. See also ETCSL 1.3.1 for a transliteration and English translation.

*tuda*<sup>7</sup>, the gardener Šukaletuda rapes Inana while she is asleep in the garden he tends. Inana is furious at this violation and vows to punish her rapist, but he hides from her. She therefore fills the wells of the land with blood, brings a storm and a dust storm to ravage the land, and blocks the highways until he is found. When Šukaletuda is finally brought before Inana, she curses him to die, but she also says that his name will be remembered in song. A similar fate befalls Bilulu, an old bandit, who has beaten and killed Dumuzi in *Inana and Bilulu*<sup>8</sup>. After Dumuzi’s death, “[t]o kill the provider<sup>9</sup> Bilulu, (that) was in her [Inana’s] heart” (line 99) (Jacobsen & Kramer 1953:175), but when Inana finds Bilulu, she cries, “Begone! I have killed you, so it is verily, and with you I destroy (also) your name: May you become the water skin for cold water that (men carry) in the desert!” (lines 109–110) (Jacobsen & Kramer 1953:177). Therefore, although Inana curses both Šukaletuda and Bilulu to die, it does not appear that she physically kills them herself, but rather that they go from a state of living to a state of death. As Jacobsen and Kramer (1953:164) state, “Inanna’s curse takes effect immediately and all becomes as she said.” In this regard it is notable that in *The Sumerian Sargon Legend*<sup>10</sup> the violence caused by this goddess occurs in a dream in which “Holy Inana, in the dream, was drowning him (Urababa) in a river of blood” (line 14) (Cooper and Heimpel 1983:77). The dream here serves as an omen, and while Inana again brings about the violence, she does not appear to inflict it herself.

Although the goddess herself does not actively engage in physical punishment and violence in the above narratives, there are examples where she does appear to be more directly and physically involved. In *Inana E* Inana is praised as having “wielded the šita mace and the mitum mace”<sup>11</sup> since being in her mother’s womb (ETCSL 4.07.5 line 10), which suggests she physically used these weapons. In *Ur-Nammu A*<sup>12</sup> Inana, in retaliation for Ur-Nammu’s death and not being

7 See Volk (1995) for a full German treatment of this narrative, and Bottéro & Kramer (1989) for a French translation and commentary. See also ETCSL 1.3.3 for a transliteration and English translation.

8 For a full treatment of this text, see Jacobsen & Kramer (1953). For a transliteration and English translation see ETCSL 1.4.4.

9 According to Jacobsen and Kramer (1953:184 n. 64) the word translated here as “provider,” ù-mu-un, is likely a scribal error for um-ma, and as such, the ETCSL translates it as “old woman Bilulu” (line 92), and Kramer (1969:131) translates it merely as “Old Bilulu.”

10 Also known as *Sargon and Ur-Zababa*. See Cooper and Heimpel (1983) for more on this narrative. See also ETCSL 2.1.4 for a transliteration and English translation.

11 For a German translation of this *tigi*, see Falkenstein and von Soden (1953:73–76) and for a transliteration and English translation, see ETCSL 4.07.5. Falkenstein and von Soden (1953:73) translate this line as “vom Leibe deiner Mutter an Wehr und Waffen ergriffen”. The Sumerian transliteration on the ETCSL though clearly includes “šita, mi-tum-ma”, and the ePSD translates šita as “a weapon” and mitum as “a divine weapon”. The ETCSL’s translation in this case is therefore a more accurate rendering of the Sumerian than that of Falkenstein and von Soden.

12 Also known as *The death of Ur-Nammu*. See Flückiger-Hawker (1999:93–182) for a transliteration, English translation and commentary on the text. See also ETCSL 2.4.1.1 for a transliteration and English translation.



present at the judgement, “[m]akes heaven tremble, earth shake, Inana destroys the cattle pen, devastates the sheepfold” (lines 205–206) (Flückiger-Hawker 1999:137). The destruction that she wreaks here is on buildings, she does not directly harm any humans. This theme is repeated in *Inana and Ebih*<sup>13</sup>, the narrative which most presents her as a violent and intimidating war goddess. In this myth, Inana fights and destroys not a human or a deity, but the mountain Ebih for having challenged her authority,

“The mistress, in her rage and anger, opened the arsenal and pushed on the lapis lazuli gate. She brought out magnificent battle and called up a great storm. Holy Inana reached for the quiver. She raised a towering flood with evil silt. She stirred up an evil raging wind with potsherds. My lady confronted the mountain range, she advanced step by step. She sharpened both edges of her dagger. She grabbed Ebih’s neck as if ripping up esparto grass. She pressed the dagger’s teeth into its interior. She roared like thunder. The rocks forming the body of Ebih clattered down its flanks. From its sides and crevices great serpents spat venom. She damned its forests and cursed its trees. She killed oak trees with drought. She poured fire on its flanks and made its smoke dense. The goddess established authority over the mountain. Holy Inana did as she wished.”  
(ETCSL 1.3.2 lines 131–151)<sup>14</sup>

*Inana and Ebih* is a rare example of the Inana/Ištar having an adversary whom she deems worthy to physically confront. In the *Agušaya Hymn*, when Ištar’s militaristic actions and aggressiveness threaten even Ea’s own home, he creates a double of the goddess, named Šaltu, or Discord, to fight against Ištar. When Ištar learns about Šaltu she is furious and asks Ea to destroy Šaltu, which he does. Considering how aggressively Ištar is portrayed in this hymn, and with her warlike tendencies being praised, it is surprising that Ištar doesn’t fight against Šaltu. This may be because Šaltu appears to be a “double” (Lewis 2011:31) or a “likeness” (Foster 2005:96) of Ištar, and as such, Ištar’s equal in battle. The *Agušaya Hymn* therefore depicts Ištar as warlike in broad terms, but not as actually physically engaging in battle, as she did in *Inana and Ebih*. However, if Šaltu is a double of Ištar, then the description of Šaltu, “her flesh is battle, the melee her hair” (Foster 2005:100) would fit Ištar as well. If this is the case, then the very makeup of Ištar’s physical being and body are reflective of her domain of war.

The fearsome, battle-ready nature of the goddess, physically engaging in combat is referenced in other texts. For example, in *Inana G*<sup>15</sup> Inana states

13 See Bottéro and Kramer (1989) for a French translation and commentary of this narrative. See also ETCSL 1.3.2 for a transliteration and English translation.

14 See also Limet (1971:19–20) for a French translation of these lines.

15 For a transliteration, English translation and commentary on this poem, see Kramer (1963:503–505), and for a transliteration and English translation, see ETCSL 4.07.7.



that “[w]hen I proceeded to the “mouth” of the battle, As one who brings forth its brightest light, I come. When I proceeded to the front of the battle, As one who brings for its bright light, I come” (lines 23–26) (Kramer 1963:504). In *Inana B*<sup>16</sup>, composed by Enheduanna, Inana is praised, “[o]h my lady, at the sound of you the lands bow down. ... In the van of battle everything is struck down by you. Oh my lady, (propelled) on your own wings, you peck away (at the land). In the guise of a charging storm you charge. With a roaring storm you roar. With Thunder [i. e. the storm god Iškur] you continually thunder.” (lines 20–30) (Hallo and van Dijk 1969:17–19). *Inana C*<sup>17</sup>, also composed by Enheduanna, expands on this,

The gods of the land are panic-stricken by her heavy roar,  
 At her uproar the Anunna-gods tremble like a solitary reed,  
 At her shrieking they hide all together,  
 Without Inanna the great An has not made a decision, Enlil has not determined the destiny,  
 The Mistress who raises (her) head, who resides in the mountain, who opposes her?  
 Wherever she has spoken, the cities become mounds, a haunted place, the shrine becomes wasteland,  
 When her wrath makes (people) tremble, the burning of the body and the misfortune (she causes) are (like that of) an ulu-demon who ensnares a man,  
 She ... confusion and rebellion against those who are disobedient to her,  
 She ... battle, she lets a devastating flood come fast, she is clothed in awe-inspiring radiance,  
 Her(!?) joy (is) the fight, to ... battle, untiring, strapping on her sandals,  
 A furious stormwind(?), prepared for battle, ..., a whirlwind(?) ...,  
 When she touches ... (there is) despair, a south wind which has covered(?) ...,  
 Inanna sits on harnessed(?) lions, she cuts into pieces him who shows no fear,  
 A leopard of the mountain, entering(?) the roads, raging(?) ...”  
 (lines 11–24) (Sjöberg 1975:179–181)

This hymn reveals a number of ways in which Inana/Ištar was believed to be associated with battle, and with how she was physically involved in destruction. Many of the lines recall other compositions associated with her role as goddess of war. The reference to her being “supreme over the mountains” appears to reference *Inana and Ebih*, particularly when it is taken into consideration

16 Often called *The Exaltation of Inana*. This text is also sometimes referred to by its opening line, nin-me-šár-ra, as for example Wilcke (1976). For a full treatment of this text in English, see Hallo & van Dijk (1968), and in German see Zgoll (1997). See also ETCSL 4.07.2 for a transliteration and English translation.

17 For a transliteration and English translation of this text, see ETCSL 4.07.3. See also Sjöberg (1975) for a full treatment of this poem.

that both were composed by Enheduanna. This line then would have brought to mind Inana's violent victory over Ebih, further extolling her supreme wrath and power as the lady of battles, the goddess of war. That she could reduce cities to mounds of ruins recalls her destruction of the cattle pens and sheepfolds in *Ur-Nammu A*. Her sitting on lions is repeated in *Inana D*<sup>18</sup>, "auf Löwe (und) Leopard ist dein Sitz"<sup>19</sup> (line 30) (Behrens 1998:29) and further recalls various references to her association with the lion. These include Utu-ḫegal's reference of her as "pirig-mè", "lioness of battle" (Frayne 1993:285 RIME E2.13.6.4 27), her epithet in *Inana D* as "pirig-an-na", "Löwin des Himmels"<sup>20</sup> (line 1) (Behrens 1998:28–29), and the lion with which she is so often associated in the visual repertoire<sup>21</sup>. Her association with and control over the lion is revealed in texts such as *Inana G* in which Inana states that when she travels she "brought along a lion" (line 16) (Kramer 1963:503) and *Inana A* which praises how "you (Inana) make a lion's body and lion's muscles rise up" (ETCSL 4.07.1 line 4<sup>22</sup>). Her battle-cry, presented as a roar, recalls both the lion with which she is associated, as well as her roaring in *Inana B*. The awe-inspiring destruction caused by the goddess is also found in the Akkadian *Self-Praise of Ištar*<sup>23</sup>,

I rain battle down like flames in the fighting,  
I make heaven and earth shake (?) with my cries,  
The mountains lie low when I tread on the earth.  
(lines 5–7)

I cross heaven, back and forth, as I trample the earth,  
I destroy what remains of the inhabited world,  
I devastate(?) the lands hostile to Shamash.  
(lines 10–12) (Foster 2005:95)

While these references clearly signify her awe-inspiring ferocity, and depict her as causing violence, she is not actually represented as engaging in battle. Indeed, the representations of Inana/Ištar taking part directly and physically in battle are comparatively rare. Furthermore, her violent attacks were never explicitly directed at humans or deities. In *Inana and Ebih*, the one narrative in which she actively battles and defeats an opponent, she overpowers an immovable mountain, which is an even greater display of her power and strength than combat-

18 Also called the *Ninegalla Hymn* or *A hymn to Inana as Ninegala*. For a full treatment of this hymn in German, see Behrens (1998), and for a transliteration and English translation, see ETCSL 4.07.4.

19 "on a lion and a leopard is your seat".

20 "Lioness of Heaven". Translated in the ETCSL as "heavenly lioness".

21 See below.

22 For a transliteration and English translation, see ETCSL 4.07.1.

23 For an English translation of this poem, see Foster (2005:95).

ting a human or god. The only time she is confronted with an equal in battle is in the *Agušaya Hymn* where her opponent is a double of herself. As such she doesn't fight Šaltu. Her only match in battle is herself, no other being is strong enough to oppose her. As stated in line 30 of *Inana E*, Inana is the “Herrin, der niemand im Kampfe standhält”<sup>24</sup> (Falkenstein and von Soden 1953:74). This explains why the Anunna gods tremble and hide at the sound of her battle-cry in *Inana B*. Still, she is seldom represented physically engaging in battle. While war and violence are inextricably physical activities, the goddess of war is not generally physically involved in these activities. In most cases her corporeality – her body – does not appear to be an essential component in her expression of her domain. While not often engaging in battle, in the *Agušaya Hymn* as a double of Šaltu, her body is formed of battle and melee, intrinsically linking her physical form to war. In comparison to the textual evidence, the way her body and battle are associated is considerably different in the visual depictions of her as a goddess of war.

## 2.2 The visual repertoire

From the Akkadian Period Inana/Ištar's role as goddess of war is represented in the visual repertoire. In most of these depictions, the goddess is represented *en face*<sup>25</sup> and with weapons emerging from her shoulders. These weapons are clear references to her militaristic and warlike nature, and, as they usually take on the form of maces, may represent the šita mace and mitum mace mentioned in *Inana E*. She is also often depicted holding a weapon in one hand. Sometimes she is represented with wings, and in these cases she may have stars emerging from her shoulders as well as weapons (Amiet 1976:53), perhaps as reference to some astral aspect of the goddess. This battle-ready goddess is referred to by Colbow (1991) as the “kriegerische Ištar” (martial Ištar)<sup>26</sup>, and is the most common way in which the goddess is represented in the visual repertoire during this period. During the Early Dynastic Period, there are depictions of *en face* goddesses with maces emerging from their shoulders, and Colbow (1991:95) suggests that these are the forerunners of the Akkadian depictions, although in these earlier depictions the goddess is usually depicted seated and not in a threatening pose. Early Dynastic examples include a fragment of a vessel

24 “Lady whom nobody can withstand in battle”.

25 When a figure is depicted “frontally”, this figure is represented facing forward with a full frontal body and face. “*En face*” refers to a figure who is depicted partially frontally, usually with the head and upper body facing forward and the lower body in profile (Asher-Greve & Westenholtz 2013:166 n.680).

26 See Colbow (1991) for a full discussion on the iconography of Ištar in her martial aspect from the middle of the third millennium until the middle of the second millennium. See also Cornelius (2009) for the iconography of Ištar as a warrior goddess, particularly in the later periods.

now in the Vorderasiatisches Museum (VA 7248; Moortgat 1969:Pl. 115) and a relief plaque from Telloh now in the Louvre (AO 276; Moortgat 1969:Pl. 114). From the Akkadian Period, the kriegerische Ištar is depicted, for example, on a cylinder seal now in a private collection in New York (Boehmer 1965: Taf. XXXII.384), where she is seated on a decorated seat with two crossed lions, with maces and axes emerging from her shoulders. The two crossed lions are indicative of her awesome power and, being feared predators, also of her warlike nature. She is also associated with the lion on a cylinder seal now in the Oriental Institute in Chicago (A 27903; Boehmer 1965: Taf. XXXII.382). On this seal the goddess is depicted again with maces and axes emerging from her shoulders. Her foot rests upon a lion. In one hand she holds the leash of this lion, while in the other she holds another weapon. The armed goddess resting her foot on a lion becomes more popular by the Old Babylonian Period, as for example on terracotta plaques<sup>27</sup> and models of chariots<sup>28</sup>. The latter places more emphasis on the goddess's role as a goddess of war, as the chariot was a prime instrument of war. The goddess's association with the lion in the visual repertoire recalls her link to the lion in texts<sup>29</sup>, and it is possible that the image of the lion would have brought these references to the mind of the viewer, further reminding the viewer of the great might of the goddess.

On a cylinder seal now in the Louvre (AO 2485; Boehmer 1965: Taf. XXVI.300), the goddess is depicted between two groups of battling gods, the scalloped pattern representing either mountain terrain or perhaps the nether world<sup>30</sup>. In her hand she holds a ring, which usually depicted with a rod is a symbol of authority and divine justice (Wiggerman 2006–2008:414). On this cylinder seal she is clearly associated with battle, although she herself does not take part in it. She is more directly involved in combat on another cylinder seal now in the Louvre (AO 11569; Boehmer 1965: Taf. XXXII.379) [Fig. 1]. This seal has two scenes divided by a palm tree. The goddess is depicted in the scene to the right of the palm tree. Boehmer (1965:67) describes this scene as the goddess trampling a mountain, while a god flees from beneath it. Volk (1995:65–68) suggests that the scene on this seal represents Inana and Šukaletuda, but the male figure can be identified as a god by his horned headdress, and the scene therefore should not depict this myth. Barrelet (1955:223) discusses the scene at greater length, finding various possibilities – such as the god represented beneath the mountain as being a vanquished god or a mountain god – uncon-

27 See for example AO 12456 (Barrelet 1968:397 Nr. 790, Pl. LXXVII.790), AO 6779 (Barrelet 1968:397 Nr. 791, Pl. LXXVIII.791) and AO 6502 (Barrelet 1968:397–398 Nr. 792, Pl. LXXVIII.792).

28 See for example AO 10479 (Barrelet 1968:332 Nr. 623, Pl. LIX.623).

29 See above.

30 The Sumerian *kur* means both mountain and nether world (Horowitz 1998:272) and in some iconographic examples such as this one, there appears to be some ambiguity as to which is represented.

vincing. She suggests rather that this god supports the mountain, or that he is a “génie assimilé à la montagne elle-même”<sup>31</sup>. It is possible though that this mountain-god pairing is meant to represent Ebih, which would fit with the evidence from the textual repertoire – the goddess is only represented physically engaged in battle against a mountain or mountain deity.



*Fig. 1. The goddess fighting a mountain/mountain-god (Barellet 1955: Pl. XXI.1)*

The goddess’s victorious nature after battle is also represented in the visual repertoire. A stele excavated at Susa and now in the Louvre (Sb 2; Amiet 1976:12 Fig. 7, Pl. 6.a-d) dating to the reign of Sargon depicts two figures on either side of a net which holds seven prisoners. The stele is badly damaged, and little remains of the two figures on either side of the net. Nigro (1998:85) identifies the figure on the left as royal due to the cloak which he wears, and figure on the right as Ištar due to the rays and mace which emerge from her shoulders. The figure on the left smites the head of one of the enemies in the net with a mace. According to Colbow (1991:107), this is the earliest Akkadian depiction of Ištar as “Kriegsgöttin”, goddess of war. This scene recalls motifs found in the textual repertoire. It appears that the ruler has entered into, and been victorious in, battle with the support of the goddess. The victory and subjugating power of the ruler, pronounced by the goddess, is portrayed through his captive enemies in the net, a motif known already during the Early Dynastic Period where it is found on Eannatum’s Stele of the Vultures (AO 16109, 50, 2346, 2348)<sup>32</sup>. A similar idea is represented on a roundel dating from the reign of Naram-Sin, now in the collection of Jeanette and Jonathan Rosen (Aruz and Wallenfels 2003:206–207 Catalogue No. 133) [Fig. 2]. Naram-Sin is seated facing Ištar who is seated

31 “a genius assimilated to the mountain itself”.

32 See recently van Dijk-Coombes (2017) for more on the Stele of the Vultures and for previous literature.

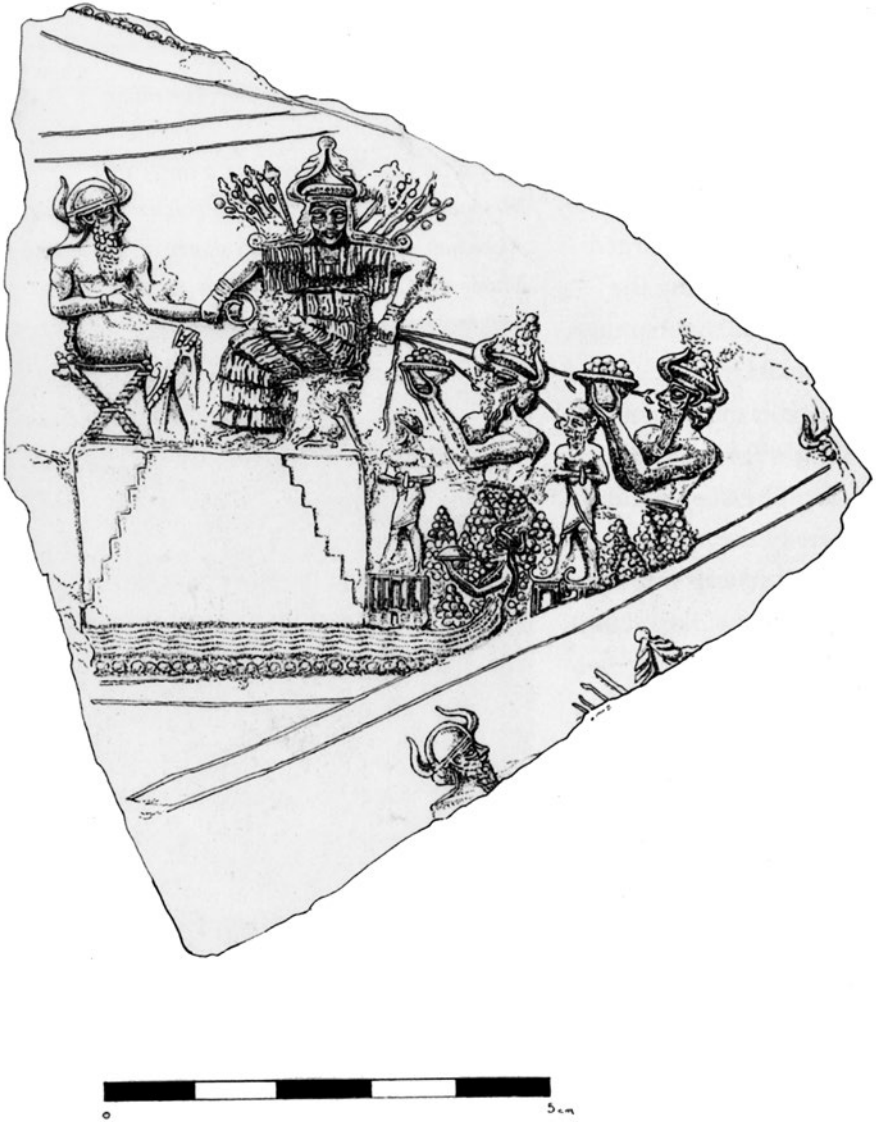


Fig. 2. The roundel of Naram-Sin (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003: 207, Fig. 62)

on a throne decorated with a lion and who is depicted *en face* with an array of weapons and rays emerging from her shoulders. Istar grasps Naram-Sin's arm with one hand and in the other she holds four nose-ropes which are attached to four captives. These captives represent both mortals and deities. The nose-



ropes terminate in a ring which is held by Naram-Sîn<sup>33</sup>. Steinkeller (2017:161–162) argues that the scene represents Naram-Sîn’s victory over Elam and Marhaši. Naram-Sîn’s victory though is clearly through the support and guidance, and by the decision, of Ištar. This is physically shown on the roundel by her holding Naram-Sîn’s arm and the nose-ropes of the conquered foes which terminate in the ring held by Naram-Sîn. Some of the motifs found in the Naram-Sîn roundel are repeated on the rock relief of Anubanini of the Lullubi near Sar-i-pūl-i-Zohāb (Börker-Klähn 1982:138–139, No. 31). On this relief, Anubanini and Ištar face each other. Anubanini holds an axe and a bow and arrow and has a dagger in his skirt. He tramples on a defeated enemy while Ištar appears to stand on this enemy’s head. With weapons emerging from her shoulders, she holds a ring in one hand, while with the other she holds a nose-rope which is attached to two kneeling captives who are naked and bound. An unusual feature of this depiction of the goddess though is that she is shown in profile. More commonly, as with her representations on cylinder seals and on the Sargon stele and Naram-Sîn roundel, she is depicted *en face*. Faces depicted frontally like this are unusual in Mesopotamian art, and according to Asher-Greve and Westenholz (2013:166), when found in “two-dimensional images, the frontal or *en face* figure emphasizes high status and importance of a goddess as patroness of a city and kingmaker.” The role of kingmaker may certainly apply to the examples in which Inana/Ištar is depicted in association with Naram-Sîn, and the role of patroness of a city may apply to her being the patron goddess of Agade and the Akkadian Empire. The goddess may also be represented in her role of city patroness in cylinder seals with presentation or audience scenes, but this role does not explain her representation on cylinder seals in which she is depicted in scenes of a mythological nature. In this *en face* position, Inana/Ištar is seldom engaged in battle, but her frontal face does engage the viewer. Her corporeality here is a fundamental part of the depictions associated with her function as goddess of war.

In the visual repertoire, she is represented with attributes which are suggestive of a physical relationship with her sphere of war. The weapons emerging from her shoulders, perhaps the šita mace and the mitum mace, clearly link her with battle, as does the weapon which she holds in one hand. When she is depicted alongside a victorious ruler after battle, as on the Sargon stele, Naram-Sîn roundel and Anubanini rock relief, she is physically involved in the rituals after the battle, either next to the net filled with defeated enemies, or holding nose-ropes attached to defeated enemies. This may be linked to the texts which proclaim the victories of various rulers due to the aid and support of the goddess. She is also depicted as actively inflicting violence on a mountain god.

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33 This recalls the Hammurabi inscription mentioned above in which the goddess entrusts the nose-rope in Hammurabi’s hands.



The textual and visual evidence for the role of Inana/Ištar's body as a manifestation of her domain as goddess of war appears to be complementary, although there are marked differences. She is seldom depicted as physically engaged in battle in either type of source. In both sources she is represented as being fundamentally involved in securing victories. Royal inscriptions speak of her helping rulers by giving them weapons and granting them successes. The mythological and religious compositions praise her awe-inspiring ferocity and mark her as unequalled in combat. In the visual repertoire she is shown victorious next to rulers. While the physicality of her involvement may be alluded to, it is not overtly or explicitly demonstrated. On the other hand, while corporeality does not seem fundamental in most textual examples, in the visual repertoire, the attributes such as the weapons emerging from her shoulders are essential in identifying her as the goddess of war, and therefore as Inana/Ištar. While both textual and visual sources generally don't explicitly detail how she is physically engaged in battle and warfare, the manner in which she is represented may assume such an involvement. In *Inana and Ebih*, she is explicitly involved in battle, as she is on the cylinder seal with the mountain deity. In the *Agušaya Hymn* her body is war. In the visual sources, the manner in which she is physically and corporeally represented is a fundamental expression of her sphere of warfare.

### 3. Goddess of sexual love

Inana/Ištar was the goddess of sexual love, and according to Black, Cunningham, Robson and Zólyomi (2004:63), much of her power was derived from this role.

#### 3.1 Textual evidence

##### 3.1.1 Royal inscriptions

Inana/Ištar's role as goddess of sexual love is expressed by various Mesopotamian rulers through their royal inscriptions. For example, the First Dynasty of Lagaš ruler Eannatum claimed that "the goddess Inanna, because she loved him [Eannatum] so" had allowed him to conquer the kingdom of Kiš (Frayne 2008:148 RIME E1.9.3.5 v:23-vi:5), while the Old Babylonian ruler Hammurabi referred to himself as "beloved of the heart of the goddess Inanna" (Frayne 1990:353 RIME E4.3.6.16 11–12). However, these instances may refer to a type of love which is more platonic or parental in nature – the love of a superior goddess to a subordinate ruler. A more sexual, and therefore physical, idea of being loved by the goddess is suggested by rulers who claimed marriage to the goddess, a position which assumes sexual intimacy. For example, the Akkadian ruler Naram-Sin refers to himself as the "spouse of the goddess Aštar-Annunī-tum" (Frayne 1993:88 RIME E2.1.4 ii:8–9), and during the First Dynasty of

Isin Lipit-Ištar refers to himself as the “spouse of the goddess Inanna” (Frayne 1990:59 RIME E4.1.5.7 9) and Ur-Ninurta claimed to be the “spouse chosen by the goddess Inanna” (Frayne 1990:66 RIME E4.1.6.1 12–13). The idea of an even more intimate relationship is suggested by the First Dynasty of Lagaš ruler Eannatum who refers to himself as the “beloved spouse of the goddess Inanna” (Frayne 2008: 139 RIME E1.9.3.1 vi:8–9). The Third Dynasty of Ur rulers Amar-Sîn and Šu-Sîn also refer to themselves as the “beloved spouse” of the goddess (Frayne 1997:259 RIME E3/2.1.3.13:3; 296 RIME E3/2.1.4.1 i:39), as does Išme-Dagān of the First Dynasty of Isin (Frayne 1990:27 RIME E4.1.4.1 10–11; 29 RIME E4.1.4.2 11–12; 42 RIME E4.1.4.11 10–11; 43 RIME E4.1.4.12 14–15)<sup>34</sup>. More flowery terms are used by other kings of the First Dynasty of Isin. Būr-Sîn describes himself as the “spouse suitable for the shining knee of the goddess Inanna” (Frayne 1990:70 RIME E4.1.7.1 10), while Enlil-bāni claims to be the “spouse chosen by the heart of the goddess Inanna” (Frayne 1990: 78 RIME E4.1.10.1 12–13; 79 RIME E4.1.10.2 7–8). Sîn-māgir explicitly references Inana’s function of the goddess of sexual love when he claims to be the “spouse beloved of the heart of the goddess Inanna, suitable for the flowery bed” (Frayne 1990:98 RIME E4.1.14.1 16–17), alluding to the sexual activity which would have taken place on this bed.

### 3.1.2. Mythological and religious compositions

Sîn-māgir’s assertion that he is “suitable for the flowery bed” of the goddess (Frayne 1990:98 RIME E4.1.14.1 17) finds resonance in the Sumerian narrative *Enmerkar and En-suĝgir-ana*<sup>35</sup>. This text is a sequel to *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*<sup>36</sup> and describes a battle of words between Enmerkar of Unug (Uruk) and En-suĝgir-ana, the lord of Aratta, in which they argue, amongst other things, over which is a better lover to Inana. En-suĝgir-ana states that he has a superior rela-

34 There are variations on this idea of having a particularly close relationship with the goddess which do not use the term “spouse”. For example, Lipit-Ištar of the First Dynasty of Isin claims to be the “favourite of the goddess Inanna” in texts written in Sumerian (Frayne 1990:48 RIME 4.1.5.1 12–13; 49 RIME E4.1.5.2 12–13; 54 RIME E4.1.5.4 12–13; 55 RIME E4.1.5.5 12–13; 58 RIME E4.1.5.6 12–13) and the “favourite of the goddess Eštar [Ištar]” in a text written in Akkadian (Frayne 1990:51 RIME E4.1.5.3 18). The Early Dynastic ruler of Uruk Lugal-kiĝine-dudu refers to Inana as “his mistress” (Frayne 2008:415 RIME E1.14.14.2 20), while Ur-Nammu, the founder of the Third Dynasty of Ur, refers to Inana as “his lady” (Frayne 1997:38 RIME E3/2.1.1.15 1–3; 63 RIME E2.1.1.27 1–3; 71 RIME E3/2.1.1.33 1–2; 72 RIME E3/2.1.1.34 1–3), an epithet also used for the goddess by his son and successor, Šulgi (Frayne 1997:116 RIME E3/2.1.2.6 1–3; 129 RIME E3/2.1.2.20 1–2; 130 RIME E3/2.1.2.21 1–2), and by later rulers such as Būr-Sîn of the First Dynasty of Isin (Frayne 1990:70 RIME E4.1.7.2 1–2), Sümû-El and Warad-Sîn of the First Dynasty of Larsa (Frayne 1990:131 RIME E4.2.7.1 1–2; 252 RIME E4.2.13.27), and of Hammurabi of Babylon (Frayne 1990:353 RIME E4.3.6.16 4).

35 See Vanstiphout (2003:23–48) for a transliteration, English translation and brief discussion on this text. See also ETCSL 1.8.2.4.

36 See Cohen (1973) for a full treatment of this text. See also Vanstiphout (2003:49–96) and ETCSL 1.8.2.3.

tionship with Inana because he lies “in sweet slumber with her on a bejewelled couch” (line 29) (Vanstiphout 2003:31). The term <sup>gi</sup>nu, girin-a is here translated by Vanstiphout as “bejewelled couch”, while in the ETCSL translation it is “splendid bed”, and the ePSD translates girin as “carnelian”. Vanstiphout (2003:46–47 n.18) argues that “flowery” or “blossoming” is probably a better translation, and that the term is “also a transparent metaphor for Inana’s vulva”. Enmerkar retorts that he lies “in Inana’s flowery bed strewn with glistening plants” (line 81) (Vanstiphout 2003:33), with the flowery bed again being a metaphor for Inana’s vulva, and suggestive of sexual union. Enmerkar further highlights his and the goddess’s sexual relationship by stating that, “[w]hen I go up to the great shrine, The nu-gig<sup>37</sup> cries out like Anzud to his chick; And when I go there again, She coos like a young bird, though she is not” (lines 96–99) (Vanstiphout 2003:33–35). Here the goddess’s cries and coos are references to her “cries of desire and delight when Enmerkar enters the great shrine, which here may also stand for her sexual parts” (Vanstiphout 2003:47 n.29). In the end, En-suḫgir-ana submits to Enmerkar, and concedes that he (Enmerkar) is “indeed the beloved on Inana; you alone are the greatest; Inana has truly chosen you for her holy loins; you are her lover” (lines 276–277) (Vanstiphout 2003:45). *Enmerkar and En-suḫgir-ana* is therefore replete with metaphor and symbolic language which associates Inana’s interactions with the rulers with sexuality and sexual intercourse.

Symbolic or metaphoric language may similarly be found in an Akkadian *Old Babylonian Hymn to Ištar*<sup>38</sup> from the reign of Ammī-ditāna in which the goddess is praised,

In her lips she is sweetness, vitality her mouth,  
While on her features laughter bursts to bloom.  
She is proud of the love-charms set on her head,  
Fair her hues, full-ranging, and lustrous her eyes.  
(lines 9–12) (Foster 2005:85)

Here Lenzi (2011:114) notes that the mention of the goddess’s lips and mouth in line 9 are probably meant to be understood as double entendres. This line then not only is suggestive of the sweet kissing of the goddess, but also of the sweetness of her genitals.

Inana’s sexual nature is further highlighted in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* VI:6–79 (George 2003:619–623) when she offers herself to Gilgamesh as his wife and he rejects her, listing her past lovers and the ways she mistreated them. Amongst these, the most explicit is her relationship with the gardener Išullānu, whom

37 The ePSD translates nugig as “a priestess; a divine epithet; a profession for women”, and the ETCSL translates it here as “Mistress”.

38 For a full discussion on this hymn, see Lenzi (2011:111–130. For a transliteration, German translation and short discussion, see Charpin, Edzard and Stol (2004:510–515), and for an English translation, see Foster (2005:85–88).

Gilgamesh says Inana propositioned by saying, “Oh my Išullānu, let us taste your power! Put out your hand and stroke our vulva!” (VI:68–69) (George 2003:623). Here Inana’s physical body is mentioned explicitly, specifically her sexual organs. This reference then reflects her sphere as goddess of sexual love. Similar sexually explicit references are found in the many literary works which speak of her love for Dumuzi<sup>39</sup>. These narratives, hymns and religious compositions detail the preparations she makes before seeing Dumuzi, as well as their sexual encounter(s). Her natural beauty and desirability are praised in *Dumuzid-Inana R*<sup>40</sup>, “[Maiden, spar]kling mane, perfect beauty, [Inan]na, sparkling mane, perfect beauty ... *abounding in charms*” (lines 1–8) (Sefati 1998:238). Here her beauty is praised in rather general terms. In comparison, in Version A of *Inana H*<sup>41</sup> a variety of her physical features are praised as “womanly”, becoming increasingly more overtly sexual,

“Your hand is womanly, your foot is womanly,  
 When you converse with a man it is womanly,  
 When you look at a man it is womanly,  
 When you [...] (your) hand towards a man it is womanly,  
 [When] you [...] (your) foot it is womanly,  
 When you [...] (your) fore[arm] it makes my heart rejoice!  
 When you.. [...] (your) foot it makes me very happy,  
 When you bow down (your) hips are pleasing”  
 (Text C lines 3–10) (Sjöberg 1977:23)

Her physical features and the way she carries herself are therefore most desirable, and the reference to her hips appears to be particularly erotic and suggestive of her sexuality and sexual intercourse. It is specifically her body which is sexually attractive and appealing, and which can therefore be intrinsically linked to her domain of sexual love. Despite already being physically enticing, she enhances her features with various lotions, clothing and jewellery to make herself even more alluring before seeing Dumuzi. These preparations are quite extensively recounted in *Dumuzi-Inana T*<sup>42</sup>,

“She finds the buttocks-beads, puts them on her buttocks,  
 Inanna finds the head-beads, puts them on her head,  
 She finds the greenish lapis lazuli blocks, puts them on her nape,

39 Dumuzi in Sumerian, Tammuz in Akkadian.

40 See Sefati (1998:236–246) for a transliteration, English translation and discussion on this text. See also ETCSL 4.08.18.

41 For a transliteration, English translation, and discussion on the different versions and manuscripts of this text, see Sjöberg (1977:16–27). See also ETCSL 4.07.8.

42 See Sefati (1998:247–256) for a transliteration, English translation and discussion on this text. See also ETCSL 4.08.20.

She finds the jewel of gold (in the form of) nakedness, puts it on the hair of her head,  
 She finds the narrow gold *earring*, puts them on her ears,  
 She finds the bronze burnished (eardrops), puts them on her ear-lobes,  
 She finds the jewel “which drips with honey;” puts it on her eyes,  
 She finds the jewel “the *outer* shrine,” puts it on her nose,  
 She finds the ..., puts it on her mouth,  
 She finds the beautiful dove(-like) *ring*, puts it on her navel,  
 She finds the “flask of honey and sweet water;” puts I (on) her hips,  
 She finds the bright alabaster, puts it on her thighs,  
 She finds the willow(-like jewel), with its black lofty foliage, puts it on her nakedness,  
 She finds the adorned shoes, puts them on her big toes.”  
 (lines 11–24) (Sefati 1998:249–250)

In line 23 Sefati (1998:248–250) has translated *gal<sub>4</sub>-la* as “nakedness”, but, as Rubio (2001:271) states, the actual translation should be “vulva”, and Sefati’s translation therefore loses some of the eroticism of the original Sumerian text. In *Dumuzi-Inana T* the references to Inana decorating and anointing her buttocks, hips, thighs and genitals in particular reference her sexuality, and it may be somewhat surprising that there is no mention in this text of her breasts. There are, however, few references to breasts in a sexual context during this period<sup>43</sup>, and the focus of female sexuality and the sexual experience appear to have focused around the vulva and vagina. According to Black, Cunningham, Robson and Zólyomi (2004:188), honey was a metaphor for female sexual arousal, and Inana anointing her face and hips with honey therefore takes on particular significance, further highlighting her sexuality and the manner in which her body is involved in her sexual experience. The beautifying of almost her entire body is detailed in *Dumuzi-Inana T*. This is not the case in all the compositions, as the extent and details of her preparations vary in the different texts. For example, while *Dumuzi-Inana T* does not mention how she applies makeup and styles her hair, these are described in Segment B of *Dumuzi-Inana E1*<sup>44</sup>,

She blends, she *blends* ... [*for her*] ey[es],  
 She *ble[nds]* kohl,  
 She loosened (her locks) which were tightened,  
 Bathed, [*scrubbed*] herself with soap,  
 [*Scrubbed*] herself with soap of the bright bowl,  
 [*Bathed*] with water of the pure were,

43 See below for a reference of Inana’s breasts as a mark of her sexual maturity.

44 See Sefati (1998:312–319) for a transliteration, English translation and discussion on this text. See also ETCSL 4.08.31.

Anointed herself with the good oil of the stone bowl,  
 [put] on her clean garment,  
 Tightened (her locks) which were loosened,  
 [Painted] her eyes with kohl  
 (reverse lines 3–12) (Sefati 1998:314)

Her makeup is similarly described in *Inana’s Descent to the Nether World*, although in this case she does not beautify herself for Dumuzi, but in preparation for her descent to the nether world, “She placed mascara (which is called) “Let a man come, let him come” on her eyes; She pulled the pectoral (which is called) “Come man, come” over her breast” (lines 22–23) (Sladek 1974:155). The name of the mascara and the pectoral explicitly refer to their ability to make her natural physical features more appealing to men, highlighting her sexuality and sexual desirability. This sexuality, particularly its physical nature, is further expressed in other works celebrating her and Dumuzi’s love. *Dumuzid-Inana C*<sup>45</sup> recounts how Inana washes herself, anoints herself with oil, circles her eyes with kohl, styles her hair, dresses herself, and puts on jewellery. Thereafter, her secondary sexual characteristics are celebrated, signifying her sexual maturity and therefore readiness for sexual intercourse,

“Now my breasts are standing out,<sup>46</sup>  
 Now the hair on my vulva has grown,  
 Going to the lap of my spouse, ..., let us rejoice,  
 Let us dance! Let us dance!  
 Baba, let us rejoice because of my vulva”  
 (lines 39–43<sup>47</sup>) (Tinney 1999:35)

Sefati (1998:137) notes a variation of lines 39–40, which reads “our breasts” and “our vulva”. Paul (2005:240) argues that this is due to the so-called erotic plural or plural of ecstasy, in which “when a female lover gives ardent expression to her highly charged emotional state, she at times articulates her sensuous feelings in the *personal pluralis*.” Lapinkivi (2004:72) notes that this form appears

45 For transliterations, English translations and discussions on this text, see Alster (1985:146–152) and Sefati (1998:132–150). See also ETCSL 4.08.03.

46 While here Inana is presented as having reached sexual maturity, with her breasts recently having developed, in the first millennium bilingual *Hymn to Nanaya*, this goddess, identified in the hymn with Inana, praises herself, “I am a hierodule in Uruk, I have heavy breasts in Daduni” (line 3) (Reiner 1974:233). This suggests a more biologically developed and perhaps therefore a more sexually experienced goddess.

47 According to Tinney (1999:35), these are lines 40–44. However, no transliteration or line numbers are given in his translation, and in Alster (1985:151–152) and Sefati (1998:137), both of which provide transliterations and line numbers in the translations, these are lines 39–43. In ETCSL 4.08.03 they are lines 42–46. Tinney’s translation has been used here for its translation of gal<sub>4</sub>-la as vulva and gaba as breast.

to be used particularly by women “when referring to their body parts, perhaps in the sense of sharing them with her lover.” In this way, Inana is delighted and excited about her own sexual organs, and is sharing these feelings as well as her body with Dumuzi prior to the consummation of their sexual relationship.

Segment B of *Dumuzid-Inana C1*<sup>48</sup> tells how after Inana has prepared herself by washing herself, anointing herself with oil, and dressing herself in a robe and jewellery, “[t]he young lady stood (waiting). Dumuzi pushed open the door, Came forth into the house like the moonlight, He gazed at her, rejoiced in her, Embraced her, *kissed her*” (col. ii lines 18–22) (Sefati 1998:292). Couto-Ferreira (2018:45–46) argues that in such cases the imagery of entering the door and house is a metaphor for sexual intercourse, with the entering of the house through the door symbolising the penetration of the vagina by the penis. Sexual intercourse though is not only symbolised or suggested, but is described in various degrees of explicitness in different compositions. It is merely implied in *Dumuzid-Inana G*<sup>49</sup> when Inana says to Dumuzi, “Your coming hither – is life, Your entering the house – is abundance, Lying at (your) side – is my greatest joy, My sweet, let us delight ourselves on the couch!” (lines 13–16) (Sefati 1998:180). Similarly, in *Dumuzid-Inana Z*<sup>50</sup> Inana requests of Dumuzi, “My bridegroom, let us embrace! On the luxuriant couch let us lie together! My Amašum, let [us] embrace! On the luxuriant couch let [us lie] together!” (reverse lines 16–19) (Sefati 1998:283). In these examples, the bed is suggestive of the sexual activity which will take place upon it. Moreover, according to Assante (2002:38), lying side by side is a euphemism for sexual intercourse, and, as discussed above, the luxuriant or flowering couch is a metaphor for the goddess’s vulva. Sexual intercourse is therefore not only suggested in these passages, but also described metaphorically. In comparison, in *Dumuzid-Inana B*<sup>51</sup> the references to various types of sexual foreplay are more overt. Dumuzi praises Inana, “The gazing of your eye is pleasant to me ... The greeting of your mouth is pleasant to me ... Your lips’ kissing (my) breast is pleasant to me” (lines 4–6) (Alster 1985:144). Later in *Dumuzid-Inana B*, Inana tells Dumuzi, “Your right hand on my nakedness [i. e. Inana’s vulva, see above] should be placed, Your left on my head should be laid; When you have brought your mouth close to my mouth, When you have seized my lips in your mouth” (lines 21–24) (Sefati 1998:130). Here two types

48 For a transliteration, English translation and discussion of this text, see Sefati (1998:286–300). See also ETCSL 4.08.29.

49 For a transliteration, English translation and discussion of this text, see Sefati (1998:177–184). See also ETCSL 4.08.7.

50 For a transliteration, English translation and discussion of this text, see Sefati (1998:281–285). See also ETCSL 4.08.26.

51 For transliterations, English translations and discussions, see Alster (1985:142–146) and Sefati (1998:128–131), and see Kramer (1969:104–106) for a partial English translation and interpretation. See also ETCSL 4.08.02.



of sexual foreplay – kissing and manual stimulation – are described. The culmination in sexual intercourse is described in *Dumuzid-Inana D*<sup>52</sup>,

“My precious sweet, when lying next to my heart,  
Time after time, ‘making tongue,’ time after time,  
My brother of beautiful eyes, did so fifty (times),  
Like a powerless person I stood there for him,  
Trembling from below, I was dumb silent for him there.  
With my brother, placing (my) hands upon his hips,  
With my precious sweet, I spent the day there with him”  
(lines 12–18) (Sefati 1998:153)

The meaning of *eme-ak*, literally “making tongue” in line 13 is obscure. ETCSL 4.08.04 translates it as “kissing with the tongue”, but Sefati (1998:161) suggests that it is a euphemism for sexual intercourse. Similarly, ETCSL 4.08.04 translates line 16 as “she trembled underneath him, dumbly silent for him”, highlighting the eroticism of the sexual yearning of Inana, culminating in her putting her hands on Dumuzi’s hips “as an intimate act in making love to him” (Sefati 1998:162), and culminating in orgasm (Assante 2002:42).

In these compositions Inana is physically involved in the sexual activity. Her corporeality and physicality manifest and are manifested by her sphere of sexual love. Without her body, she would be unable to fulfil this role. As Frymer-Kensky (1992:57) puts it, she “is important precisely because she is female, because she possesses female sexual organs and can participate in the sexual act ... these hymns are a celebration of Inanna as vulva, of the goddess as “cosmic cunt.”” Her sphere of sexual love and her physicality and corporeality are therefore intrinsically linked, and this link is well expressed in the textual evidence. This is further manifested in symbolic and metaphoric language in which her genitals are alluded to under various guises. This relationship between her body and her sphere of sexual love are represented completely differently in the visual repertoire.

### 3.2 The visual repertoire

The earliest possible depictions of Inana/Ištar are from the Jemdet Nasr Period where she may be depicted on the Warka Vase<sup>53</sup> [Fig. 3] and a series of five cylinder seals depicting an abbreviated version of the same scene<sup>54</sup>. A proces-

52 See Sefati (1998:151–164) for a transliteration, English translation and discussion of this text, and see Kramer (1969:104) for a partial English translation. See also ETCSL 4.08.04.

53 IM 19606. For photographs of the Vase, see Heinrich (1936: Taf. 2–3), and for a line drawing of the entire scene depicted on the Vase, see Heinrich (1936: Taf. 38).

54 BM 116721, VA 11041, VA 11042, IM 18830 and IM 18831. See Heinrich (1936: Taf. 17.d and Taf. 18.a-d) for photographs of impressions of these seals.



Fig. 3. The upper register of the Warka Vase (Schroer & Keel 2005: 291, Abb. 192 detail)

sion led by the Priest-King figure approaches a female figure. This female figure can be associated with Inana by the two ring-posts with streamers which on the Vase stand behind her and which on the seals she holds. The identity of the female figure has been much debated, but she most likely represents either Inana herself or a priestess of this goddess. This identification is based on the traditional interpretation of the scene representing the so-called sacred marriage<sup>55</sup>. Cooper (2013:54) describes the sacred marriage as “the sexual union between the king, playing the role of the god Dumuzi, and the goddess Inanna”, or, rather, a priestess acting the role of this goddess<sup>56</sup>. For this reason, Bahrani (2002:20–21) argues that if the scene does depict the sacred marriage, it is irrelevant whether the female figure represents Inana herself or a priestess, because the figure would represent both goddess *and* priestess. However, Steinkeller (2017:82) contends that there is little evidence for the sacred marriage at this early period and that the Warka Vase and related seals therefore cannot depict this ritual. However, he also suggests that the relationship between the priest-king and Inana may have been “symbolically spousal” (Steinkeller 2017:89), which would further be suggestive of some type of intimate sexual relationship. Still, the scene on the Warka Vase and related seals may not depict such a sacred marriage ritual, and if it does, it would represent the events leading up to the actual sacred marriage ritual, rather than the ritual, or ritual sex, itself. However, the female figure of the Warka Vase and related seals may still represent both goddess and priestess – the uncertainty or ambiguity which we perceive today may not have been relevant when the scenes were produced. Furthermore, it is also still likely that the scene represents some kind of ritual associated with fertility, even if it doesn’t represent the sacred marriage. This would then associate the female with Inana and with fertility, although she is not shown physically doing anything except receiving the procession.

55 See for example van Buren (1935:334), Jacobsen (1976:24), and Schmandt-Besserat (2007:43–4).

56 For more on the sacred marriage, see for example Cooper (1972–75; 2013), Kramer (1969), Lapinkivi (2004), and Teppo (2008).

A more physical display of affection is represented on an Early Dynastic statue of a couple from Nippur (IM 661163; Hansen & Dales 1962:81 Fig. 10 centre) in which the seated figures hold hands. Similar displays of affection are represented on terracotta plaques from the Isin-Larsa and Old Babylonian Periods. These couples may be either seated<sup>57</sup> or standing<sup>58</sup> next to each other, or facing each other<sup>59</sup>, and often have their arms around each other in an embrace. Some terracotta plaques show more explicit scenes. On some plaques couples can be shown in a variety of sexual positions<sup>60</sup>, and on models of beds the couples are shown lying down kissing<sup>61</sup> and engaged in sexual intercourse<sup>62</sup>. While many of these illustrate Wolkenstein and Kramer’s anthology on Inana (1983), particularly the sections on Inana and Dumuzi, the figures do not have divine attributes or any other type of identifying attributes<sup>63</sup>. It is therefore unlikely that these loving couples represent Inana/Ištar and Dumuzi/Tammuz. Still, Assante (2002) identifies some types of these scenes as depicting Inana/Ištar or the goddess in her guise as Nanaya. These scenes include those in which a couple performs *coitus a tergo* drinking scenes, bed scenes, including couples involved in sexual activity and single females, and spread-legged female figures. However, as Bahrani (2001:51) states, the scenes on most of these plaques “appear to be images of sexual intercourse that make no attempt at narrativising the act. Rather it is simply the act itself which is the focus of these plaques.” It is therefore possible, but unlikely that these scenes represent the goddess in her sphere of sexual love.

Other types of depictions of single nude females who are represented frontally are also found on terracotta plaques. These females either clasp their hands before them at their waist<sup>64</sup>, use their hands to support their breasts<sup>65</sup>, or hold a disc which has been interpreted as a drum<sup>66</sup> (Barrelet 1968:237). These frontal nude female figures are also represented on cylinder seals, where they invariably clasp their hands at their waists<sup>67</sup>. While these frontal nude females are tra-

57 See for example AO12745 (Barrelet 1968:294 Nr. 515, Pl. XLIX.515).

58 See for example AO 15178 (Barrelet 1968:295 Nr. 519, Pl. XLIX.519) and AO 14465 (Barrelet 1968:295 Nr. 520, Pl. XLIX.520).

59 See for example AO 16676 (Barrelet 1968:296 Nr. 523, Pl. XLIX.523).

60 See for example AO 16681 (Barrelet 1968:297 Nr. 527, Pl. L.527).

61 See for example BM 113181 (Wolkenstein & Kramer 1983:108).

62 See AO 8662 (Barrelet 1968:382 Nr. 744, Pl. LXXI.744) and a terracotta in the Erlenmeyer Collection in Basel (Wolkenstein & Kramer 1983:43).

63 It should also be noted that Wolkenstein and Kramer themselves identify these figures as “Man and Women” (1983:184), “Lovers” (1983:187) or “Husband and Wife” (1983:199) and not as deities.

64 See for example AO 16736 (Barrelet 1968:260 Nr. 386, Pl. XXXVII.386), AO 16737 (Barrelet 1968:260 Nr. 387, Pl. XXXVII.387) and AO 4594 (Barrelet 1968:262 Nr. 395, Pl. XXVIII.395).

65 See for example AO 1910 (Barrelet 1968:402 Nr. 807, Pl. LXXX.807) and AO 6781 (Barrelet 1968:402 Nr. 809, Pl. LXXX.809).

66 See for example AO 16758 (Barrelet 1968:257 Nr. 371, Pl. XXXIV.371) and AO 15067 (Barrelet 1968:258 Nr. 372, Pl. XXXIV.372).

67 See Collon (1986:131–132, Pls. XXII–XXIII).

ditionally called “nude goddesses”<sup>68</sup>, there is little evidence that they represent deities, and the term “nude female”<sup>69</sup> is better suited. The typical nude female has no divine or identifying attributes other than her nudity, and she cannot be identified with any of the major goddesses (Wiggermann 1998–2001:52). Indeed, when a “nude goddess” clasps her hands before her, it may indicate that she is a worshipper rather than a goddess (Collon 1986:132). Asher-Greve and Sweeney (2006:160) suggest that these figures represent “ideally ‘beautiful’ young women, whose erotic attraction may also have been sexual non-aggressiveness, or even inexperience.” In this regard, Blocher (1987:231–232) argues that this frontal nude female represents a symbol of Ištar, but not the goddess herself. Similarly, Wiggermann (1998–2001:52) suggests that these figures are associated with “personality (soul), good luck, prosperity and (sexual) emotions” and may therefore be linked to the cult of Inana/Ištar “whose domain is private life”<sup>70</sup>. There are some rare examples in which the figure does have a divine attribute, such as the horned headdress. In these cases, she was likely the object of a popular cult, rather than of the official pantheon (Collon 1986:132). The “nude goddesses” and “nude females” may therefore be associated with the cult of the Inana/Ištar, but they do not necessarily represent the goddess herself.

Visually related to these nude females may be the Burney Relief, or the so-called Queen of the Night (BM 2003,0718.1; Collon 2005:6 Fig. 1. See 8 Fig. 2 for a colour reconstruction) and related depictions. The Queen of the Night, also shown frontally, wears a horned headdress which is topped by a disc, marking her as a deity, and a necklace and bracelets. She has wings which hang downwards<sup>71</sup>, associating her with the nether world (Collon 2005:31), and talon feet. She stands on two crossed recumbent lions and is flanked by two owls. This grouping is placed on the scalloped design which may represent either mountains or the nether world. In each upraised hand she holds a ring and rod. The iconography is less complex in the related depictions, for example she does not stand on lions and is not flanked by owls. In these examples, the figure may either raise her hands<sup>72</sup>, clasp her hands together before her<sup>73</sup>, or use them to hold or cover her breasts<sup>74</sup>. The identity of this goddess has been much debated<sup>75</sup>. Frankfort (1937–1939:134–135) identified the Queen

68 See for example Collon (1986:131–132) and the entries in the *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, Wiggermann (1998–2001) and Uehlinger (1998–2001).

69 See for example Seidl (1976–1980:89) and Assante (2006:195) where she is referred to in German as the “Nackte Frau”.

70 Wiggermann (1986:28) previously identified this nude female with the personification *baštu*, or “Dignity”, an interpretation also supported by Assante (2006:201–202).

71 Albenda (2005:182–184) contends that this represents a cape rather than wings, but see Collon (2007:47–48) for problems with Albenda’s argument.

72 See for example AO 6501 (Barrelet 1968:398 Nr. 793, Pl. LXXVIII.793). On this example the figure stands not on a pair of crossed lions, but on a pair of crossed ibex.

73 See for example BM 1994,1001.1 (Collon 2005:15 Fig. 5.b).

74 See for example BM 103226 (Collon 2005:14 Fig. 5.a).

75 See Albenda (2005:176–178) for more on this debate.

of the Night as Lilith. Jacobsen (1987) built on Frankfort’s identification, suggesting that the Queen of the Night is an aspect of Inana/Ištar in her aspect as Kilili, and demoness and goddess of prostitutes, and that the plaque was originally displayed in a brothel. He bases his argument on a few points – the lions upon which the Queen stands are Inana’s sacred animal, and Inana took the ring and rod with her in her descent to the nether world. If the Queen does represent Inana, her nudity may reflect Inana’s nudity when she has descended to the nether world. Kilili’s name also associates her with the owl (Lambert 1976–1980:591), one of which stands on either side of the Queen of the Night. Lapinkivi (2004:141, 234–236) also argues that the Queen of the Night represents Ištar in her guise as Kilili, and argues that the lower part of her body is demonic, while the upper part is divine, and that this duality fits well with Ištar “whose upper, divine part of the body is used as a reference to life, whereas the demonic, lower part of the body is used as a reference to death, both of which are found among her aspects. As goddess of love, she is life, as a goddess of war, she is death” (Lapinkivi 2004:141). However, other evidence suggests that the Queen of the Night can be identified with Ereškigal, the queen of the nether world. The lowered wings of the goddess, as well as the owls, the original black background of the relief, and the scalloped pattern at the base of the image associate the goddess with the nether world. Furthermore, the Queen of the Night holds two ring and rods, where deities were usually depicted with only one. Because Ereškigal took Inana’s ring and rod from her when she (Inana) visited the nether world, the Queen of the Night could therefore plausibly be Ereškigal holding both her own original ring and rod, and that of Inana. Furthermore, Ereškigal is described in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* XII:29–30 as being nude, “her gleaming shoulders are not draped in a garment, her breast, uncovered, (is) like a jar of stone” (George 2003:729), and the Queen of the Night’s nudity may therefore be better associated with Ereškigal than with Inana. However, as Collon (2005:45) warns, there is no known iconography of Ereškigal, and no definite connection can therefore be made.

The visual evidence for Inana/Ištar as the goddess of love therefore appears quite ambiguous. If the Warka Vase and related seals depict the sacred marriage or some other fertility rite, and if the female figure does represent Inana, the goddess is not actually represented physically involved in such activity. The terracotta plaques similarly appear to be related to her cult, but do not appear to depict the goddess herself. There are therefore no known definite visual representations of Inana/Ištar as physically or corporeally manifesting her sphere of sexual love. This is markedly different to the numerous and varied representations in the textual sources. Some royal inscriptions allude to a sexual relationship between ruler and goddess. This relationship is more overt and explicit in mythological and religious compositions such as *Enmerkar and En-suhgir-ana* and the texts relating the love(s) of Inana and Dumuzi. In the latter she is represented as physically engaging in sexual activity, with her body being a fun-

damental part of this experience. Therefore, while the visual repertoire is all but silent on her sphere of sexual love, the textual evidence is overwhelming and graphic.

#### 4. Conclusions

Both of Inana/Ištar's spheres, war and sexual love, reflect and are reflected in her physicality and corporeality. However, these are perhaps not as overtly displayed as could be expected for spheres which themselves are so inextricably physical and for which the body is a fundamental part.

The relationship between her body and her sphere of sexual love is consistently and graphically portrayed in the mythological and religious compositions, particularly those relating her love for Dumuzi. It is only alluded to in the royal inscriptions, and appears to be missing from the visual repertoire. Inana/Ištar does not appear to be depicted actually engaging in any sexual activity. If the scenes on the Warka Vase and related seals do depict some type of fertility ritual, they do not show the goddess as physically engaged in any type of sexual activity. Similarly, the depictions of nude females and couples engaged in sexual intercourse appear to be related to the cult of the goddess, but not to represent her. The textual sources, particularly the mythological and religious compositions, on the other hand, depict her in various stages of sexual encounter. She beautifies herself, increasing her sexual allure in anticipation of seeing her lover, she meets her lover, and she engages in sexual intercourse with him. In some of these texts, such as *Enmerkar and En-suĥgir-ana* and *Dumuzid-Inana D*, this encounter is obviously enjoyed by the goddess, and results in orgasm. These texts are graphic and overt in their representation of Inana/Ištar in her love-making, and make obvious the relation of her body to her experience. The way in which her body is central to her sexual experience is additionally revealed through symbolic language and metaphor. For example, the couch is symbolic of her vulva and of sexual intercourse, and her lover entering her doorway is symbolic of his penis penetrating her vagina. Indeed, her vulva and vagina are the focus of her sexual experience, while her breasts demonstrate her sexual maturity and readiness for sexual intercourse. Particularly in the textual sources, her body expresses her domain of sexual love, and is an intrinsic part of it.

The manner in which her body is related to her sphere of war is manifested more consistently in the two types of sources, textual and visual, although there are differences. In textual sources she is seldom represented as being actively engaged in battle, but there are many references in the royal inscriptions to her supporting and aiding rulers, and in deciding battles in their favour. She is also portrayed physically as victorious over her enemies, as for example when she holds the nose-ropes of the defeated enemies – a motif found in both textual and visual sources. This is suggestive of her being more actively and physically

involved than is expressly relayed by the sources. Her physicality and corporeality in war is more obvious in the visual repertoire than it is in textual sources. Many texts allude to her function as goddess of war, but only in *Inana and Ebih* does she actively engage in battle. In the visual repertoire, she has a clear and consistent iconography which from the Akkadian Period shows her with martial attributes – with weapons emerging from her shoulders and wielding a weapon in one hand. While visual depictions of her engaged in battle are as rare as the textual references, she is depicted trampling on a mountain-god, perhaps a reference to *Inana and Ebih*. She is also depicted with her foot on a lion, showing her fearsome might. It is only in the *Agušaya Hymn* that her body is explicitly described in terms of war, or rather as war, with her body being battle and her hair melee. In other sources, her physicality and corporeality in war are alluded to or suggested, rather than being graphically depicted.

There are explicit references to Inana/Ištar’s physical and corporeal experiences in her domains of sexual love and war. This is particularly the case for textual references to her role as goddess of sexual love. These though are rare, and predominantly, in text and image, the manner in which her body is involved in these spheres is alluded to or suggested. The manner in which the relationship between Inana/Ištar’s body and her two domains of war and sexual love is portrayed is therefore perhaps not as overt as may be expected for such physical domains.

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