

# Dumuzi's Dream: Dream Analysis in Ancient Mesopotamia

**Curtiss Hoffman**

*Bridgewater State College*

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*Mesopotamian civilization was the first to develop writing and the first from which literary texts remain, dating back to the late 3rd millennium B.C. Some of these texts contain accounts of dreams, especially of royal figures. The earliest of these texts, evidently the earliest recorded dream in history, is the dream of Dumuzi of Uruk. This dream is embedded within the framework of the larger epic of the Descent of Inanna, and not only is the dream text itself included but also its interpretation, by Dumuzi's sister Geshtin-anna. She appears to have played the role of a professional dream interpreter. There are also several cylinder seals that appear to depict the motifs of Dumuzi's dream. This article examines this dream and its interpretation within the Mesopotamian cultural context. It also compares the dream with several other well-known dream texts from Mesopotamia.*

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One of the benefits of exploring the texts of ancient dreams is that this kind of study can show quite clearly the way dream narratives are embedded within the realities of the culture in question, much in the same way that we as modern dreamers dream in a style influenced by our culture. This point is not always clearly acknowledged by psychological and neurological dream researchers, who at times describe dreams as if they belonged solely to the dreamer's consciousness, independent of influences beyond their personal experiences, or represent that they derive from the physical structures of the brain's architecture. The influence of cultural conditioning should not be overlooked in dream interpretation, no matter what the time and place of the dream may be. As well, through a study of dream texts we can obtain glimpses of earlier methods of dream interpretation, which were also necessarily situated within a cultural context different from our own. In some cases these are only implicit in the texts, whereas in others the methodology is laid out for us to examine in detail. And sometimes the contemplation of an ancient dream can bring a *frisson* of recognition across the millennia, especially when the culture in question is closely related to our own.

The Sumerians were the first people in the world to create an urban civilization, economically based on a vast surplus of wheat and barley grown in the fertile floodplains of the Tigris and Euphrates valleys in what is today southern Iraq. Their population grew quickly from small towns to city-states and eventually to larger political units. As the volume of surplus goods increased, the need for inventorying them and identifying their ownership

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Curtiss Hoffman, Department of Anthropology, Bridgewater State College, Bridgewater, MA 02325. E-mail: [curtiss.hoffman@bridgew.edu](mailto:curtiss.hoffman@bridgew.edu)

resulted in the development of the cuneiform script, written on clay tablets with a reed stylus, and also the development of cylindrical seals with engraved designs, which could be rolled over the surface of the tablets to mark an owner's identity. Although the earliest texts, from around 3100 B.C., appear to be strictly economic in nature, the cuneiform script was eventually adapted for use in dedicatory inscriptions for temples, historical accounts, official correspondence, and, as early as the last quarter of the 3rd millennium B.C., for literary works of considerable sophistication, no doubt transcribed from an earlier oral tradition (Kramer, 1963). Among the latter texts is what appears to be the first written account of a dream in human history.

### THE TEXT

A dream! My sister, listen to my dream: Rushes are torn out for me; rushes keep growing for me. A single growing reed shakes its head for me. A twin reed, one is removed from me. Tall trees in the forest are uprooted by themselves for me. Water is poured over my pure hearth. The bottom of my pure churn drops away. My pure drinking cup is torn down from the peg where it hung. My shepherd's crook has disappeared from me. An eagle seizes a lamb from the sheepfold. A falcon catches a sparrow on the reed fence. My goats drag their lapis lazuli beards in the dust for me. My male sheep scratch the earth with thick legs for me. The churn lies on its side, no milk is poured. The cup lies on its side; Dumuzi lives no more. The sheepfold is given to the winds.<sup>1</sup> (Alster, 1972, pp. 55–57; Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983, pp. 75–76)

It is not possible to determine absolutely the age of this account. Dumuzi's name appears in the Sumerian King List as king of the city of Uruk just before that of the more famous Gilgamesh, who is thought to have reigned around 2500 B.C. (Kramer, 1963). The copies of the text we have date to around 1800–1700 B.C., but it was obviously a popular and much-recopied text, as at least 63 copies of it are known from a number of ancient school libraries (Alster, 1972). These copies most likely derive from earlier originals and ultimately from an even earlier oral tradition.

When we examine this dream text, we should certainly follow Kelly Bulkeley's (2001) admonition not to treat a literary dream as a literal dream recollection. Bendt Alster (1972), who published the first critical edition of this text, has provided ample evidence that the text of Dumuzi's dream has a formulaic quality that derives from poetic rather than oneirocritic demands. As he indicated,

The use of formulas is a characteristic mark of oral poetry, although we should not be allowed to assume that literature, which is composed by means of formulas, necessarily is oral, but narrative inconsistencies . . . are, I believe, best explained as reflections of an oral technique, in which traditionally fixed elements can be combined in numerous ways, when a poem is created in quick oral composition. (Alster, 1972, p. 43)

Nevertheless, the dream and its interpretation reveal a great deal about Mesopotamian culture at the time of its earliest florescence.

The text of Dumuzi's dream is part of a large cycle of Sumerian myths, the stories of Inanna (later, Ishtar) and Dumuzi (Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983). In the frame story, the goddess Inanna, the Queen of Heaven, decides to attend the funeral ceremonies for

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<sup>1</sup>This translation and the translation of the dream interpretation that follows it are a combination of the translations of Alster (1972) and Wolkstein and Kramer (1983), with my own translation of Alster's Sumerian transcription providing the basis for the selection where they differ. The synopsis of the myth into which it fits is also a combination of several texts in both Sumerian and Akkadian that I have compiled (see Hoffman, 1999).

Gugalanna, the consort of her sister Ereshkigal, Queen of the Underworld. Because she knows that this is a dangerous venture, she orders her chief minister, Ninshubur, to seek the aid of the great gods if she has not returned in 3 days. As Inanna passes through each of the seven gates of the Underworld, the gatekeeper removes an item of her clothing in descending order, so that when she appears before Ereshkigal she is naked—and powerless. Ereshkigal orders her servants to direct the 60 miseries against Inanna. She then orders them to hang Inanna's corpse on a stake.

Meanwhile, the departure and death of Inanna has caused the earth's fertility to cease. Ninshubur views this with alarm, and after 3 days she seeks the aid of the great gods: first Enlil, the king of the gods; then Nannar, the moon god and Inanna's father; and finally Enki, the god of wisdom and of the subterranean sweet waters. The first two will not help, but Enki creates two sexless beings out of clay and dispatches them to the Underworld with the bread of life and the water of life. Ereshkigal grants their request for access to Inanna's corpse. They sprinkle Inanna with the water of life and feed her the bread of life; she is revived and reclothed and returns to the upper world.

But before this, no one had ever returned from death. Ereshkigal releases Inanna only if someone will take her place, and a crowd of *galla* demons accompanies her on her return to carry off the one whom she will select. She travels to the cities of Sumer, where the kings, her lovers, are reigning. When each king observes the approach of the demons from the city walls, he puts on coarse clothing and grovels in the dust before the city gate. Inanna honors his humility and orders the demons to pass on—until she comes to Uruk, where the young king Dumuzi is the ruler. When he hears of her approach, instead of abasing himself, he throws a party and gets drunk. The next morning, in a state of depression (and perhaps nursing a royal hangover), he wanders out into his sheepfold, lies down to sleep, and has the dream.

In this case, we have not only the text of the dream itself but an equally ancient commentary on it, for Dumuzi asks his sister, Geshtin-anna, to interpret the dream for him. She replies,

The rushes which keep growing thick about you, are your demons, who will rise against you and ambush you. The single growing reed shaking its head for you is your mother who bore you; she will shake her head for you. The twin reed, from which one is removed from you, is I and you; one will be taken away from you. The tall trees in the forest being uprooted by themselves for you are the *galla*; they will descend on you in the sheepfold. When the water is poured in your pure hearth, the sheepfold will become a house of silence. When the bottom of your pure churn is removed from you, you will be held by the *galla* in his hand. When your drinking cup falls from its peg, you will fall down from the knees of the mother who bore you. When your shepherd's crook disappears, the little *galla* will set fire to it. The eagle who seizes a lamb in the sheepfold is the *galla* who will smite your cheek. The falcon who catches a sparrow in the reed fence is the big *galla* who will climb the fence against you. That the churns are lying, no milk is poured; the drinking cup lies, Dumuzi is no more; that the sheepfold is given to the wind, means your hands will be bound in handcuffs, your arms will be bound in fetters. That your goats drag their lapis beards in the dust for you means, my hair will swirl around in heaven for you. That your male sheep scratch the earth with thick feet means, I will tear at my cheeks with my fingernails for you. (Alster, 1972, pp. 59–61; Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983, pp. 76–77)

Geshtin-anna advises Dumuzi to hide, and she and a male companion take an oath not to reveal his hiding place; if they should, they ask that Dumuzi's dogs pursue and eat them.

When Inanna learns of Dumuzi's behavior, she is enraged, and she directs the demons to carry him off to the Underworld. Geshtin-anna's companion betrays Dumuzi's hiding place, and he flees. Because he cannot outrun the *galla* demons, he appeals to Utu, the sun god and Inanna's brother, to transform him into a gazelle. In this form, he outruns his

pursuers, but only during the day, when Utu is in the sky. Each night, he must seek shelter in his human form, while the demons regain lost ground. On the third morning he returns to his sister's sheepfold, where he is surrounded by the *galla* demons, who smite him on the cheek as the dream's interpretation had predicted and carry him off to the Underworld.

Although this is the end of the text of Dumuzi's dream, the story goes on further. From other tablets we learn that Inanna loves Dumuzi and that she repents of her anger and weeps for him. After she and Geshtin-anna locate Dumuzi's corpse, he is brought back to life. Ereshkigal still requires a substitute, so a compromise is effected: Dumuzi will have to spend 6 months of each year in the Underworld, but his sister offers to replace him for the other 6 months.

### PICTORIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF DUMUZI'S DREAM

Several cylinder seals of the Akkadian period (ca. 2350–2200 B.C.) appear to depict the events of Dumuzi's dream (see Figure 1). The central image is of a man carried aloft by an eagle while his sheep and goats watch from below, directed by a man with a shepherd's crook. A reed fence, a milk churn, and several milk cups are present in the design. In front of the churn, a man with a weapon (the betraying friend?) gazes up at the figure borne aloft by the eagle. Just beneath the eagle are two dogs, and between them in some seals there is a supplicating female figure (Geshtin-anna?). This scene is usually interpreted to depict the flight of Etana, the mythical first king of Kish, to heaven on the back of an eagle (Hansen, 2003a). However, that myth does not include any of the detailed motifs present in both Dumuzi's dream and the seal designs, nor are there extant copies of the portion of this text that includes Etana's flight earlier than the Middle Assyrian period (ca. 1200–1000 B.C.; Speiser, 1950). Etana is wandering about alone in the empty wilderness, while Dumuzi keeps returning to his sheepfold, as depicted in the seals. Etana had released the eagle from the clutches of serpent, which had trapped it using a bull's carcass as bait; neither a bull nor a serpent ever appear on these seals. If these seals from the last quarter of the 3rd millennium B.C. really do depict Dumuzi's dream, then they are surely the earliest direct records of



**Figure 1.** Mesopotamian cylinder seal showing the symbols of Dumuzi's dream. Permission to reproduce this image was graciously provided by the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. CORPUS No. 236.

dream imagery we have, far older than the dreams of Joseph in the Old Testament (Genesis 41:1–36), than the Egyptian Dream Book (Gardiner, 1935), or than the later dreams attributed to Gilgamesh in Mesopotamia itself (Speiser, 1958).

### THE RITUAL CALENDAR

The myth of Inanna and Dumuzi fits into a significant ritual context. For at least 2.5 millennia, the Sumerians and their successors in Mesopotamia celebrated the death and burial of Dumuzi and the start of the new year at the Spring Equinox, and a celebration of his resurrection was held at every Fall Equinox. The traditional weeping and wailing of the women for Dumuzi (or Tammuz) was widespread throughout the ancient Middle East, so popular even in Israel that the Biblical prophets inveighed against it (Ezekiel 8:14). Indeed, Dumuzi's springtime ritual endures today in the Christian observances around Good Friday and Easter, as well as in the annual ritual mourning for the martyred Imam Hussein among Iraqi Muslims of the Shi'a sect at the site of the battle of Karbala (Fernea, 1969). This ritual was only allowed to resume in the spring of 2003 after a 20-year lapse, because the central Sunni government in Baghdad feared that it was a focus for political opposition to its regime. The extraordinary popularity of the Karbala pilgrimage and mourning rituals in post-Saddam Iraq attests to the deep resonance of this mythic imagery among the people of the region.

Iraqi farmers plant wheat and barley in the fall, as it is too hot to grow grain in the summer, and they harvest in the spring. The date harvest is on the opposite schedule from barley: Dates ripen in the fall and are planted in the spring. Dumuzi, in addition to being a shepherd, is a god of barley, and Geshtin-anna's name means "date wine of heaven." Barley beer and date wine were the principal alcoholic beverages for the Sumerians. It is not surprising that they should have been personified as gods, given their power to transform consciousness and to allow the freer expression of repressed emotions. In the text, Dumuzi gets drunk, and this sets the stage for his dream, another expression of repressed emotions.

Ereshkigal's name means "The Harvest of the Great Earth," linking the spring grain harvest with the gathering of the dead. This leads to an apparent contradiction, as the harvest is under the supervision of Inanna, the ruler of the granary. It suggests that the Sumerians in some sense understood Inanna, the Queen of Heaven, and her elder sister Ereshkigal, the Queen of the Underworld, to be the same goddess. This is further suggested by the reason given for Inanna's descent in the first place: to witness the funeral of Ereshkigal's husband, Gugalanna. Gugalanna's name means "The Great Bull of Heaven," and this is the Sumerian name for the spring constellation Taurus, the bull (for further information on the relation of the Dumuzi myth to Mesopotamian astrology, see Hoffman, 1999). In many texts, the king in his role as Dumuzi is referred to as "virile bull" (Heimpel, 1968). If the consort of the Queen of the Underworld, the virile bull, who has died and is being buried, is Dumuzi himself, then it follows that the brilliantly shining goddess of the morning and evening star is also the Queen of the dark and gloomy Underworld.

### THE SACRED MARRIAGE

In Sumerian civilization, one of the ways the priesthood sought to retain control over the emerging institution of kingship was to oblige the king to participate in an annual

ceremony known as the Sacred Marriage (Kramer, 1969; Van Buren, 1944). In this 5-day ritual scheduled at the time of the New Year's Festival, the king impersonated Dumuzi, while a priestess of Inanna impersonated the goddess, and they cohabited in a temple at the base of the city ziggurat while the goddess and the god were thought to do likewise in a temple at its summit (Hansen, 2003a). Unlike Dumuzi but like the other kings in the myth, the king was expected to behave with humility toward the goddess, to abase himself before her to obtain her favor. If she approved of his behavior, she would reward him with the symbols of kingship, the Ring and the Rod (for examples, see Hansen, 2003b; Parrot, 1961). While Freudians might interpret the Ring and Rod in sexual terms, when represented in close detail they appear to have derived from the surveyor's line and measuring stick (Pritchard, 1958), the essential tools for dividing property in the flat, featureless landscape of the southern Mesopotamian plain. This was an essential part of the king's role as the dispenser of justice and order, and it needed to be done annually each spring after the rivers had flooded and erased property boundaries.

The goddess, through her priestess, could potentially refuse the king and transfer her favor to another man, and the signal of this could come through dreams. The most famous example of this is the legend of Sargon of Agade. The young Sargon was cupbearer to the king of Kish, who had committed a cultic offense and had lost the favor of Inanna. She appeared to Sargon in a dream as a woman as high as heaven and as broad as the earth who drowned the king of Kish for him in a river of blood (Cooper & Heimpel, 1983). Sargon left Kish to found a new city and dynasty, which soon claimed hegemony through conquest, not only over Kish but over all of Mesopotamia. Later authors attributed this success to Sargon's having obtained the goddess's favor. Dumuzi, by contrast, attempted to challenge the power of the goddess, and he paid a heavy price for it. It is not impossible that the text of Dumuzi's dream itself contains a political subtext in reaction to this cultic offense.

### INTERPRETING DUMUZI'S DREAM

How might a modern interpreter read Dumuzi's dream? Well, if it were my dream, I would think that it carries a clear warning of danger. My place within the protective reeds of my homeland is threatened, and the reeds shake in the winds of change. The trees of my sacred grove, further symbols of my connection to the earth, are being uprooted around me. My spark of creativity, my sacred hearth, is doused by water—another motif suggestive of the flood emerging from my uncontrolled (drunken?) unconscious. My protected herd animals, representing my instinctual nature, have lost the guidance of my ego—my shepherd's crook—and are in mourning. The eagle's flight might be viewed as a premonition of capture and death. I might think of the inverted cup and bottomless churn as injured feminine symbols. Both are containers for milk, and the Sumerian kings prided themselves on being nourished by the "right milk of the goddess" (Kramer, 1963, p. 309). That these vessels are in an inverted or broken state may suggest that there is something inappropriate about the dreamer's relationship to the feminine, especially because the dream follows Dumuzi's affront to the goddess. They also suggest that, like Inanna at the beginning of the story, he is about to be broken and to undergo a downward journey into the land of death. Wolkstein and Kramer (1983) considered the fact that the goats have lapis lazuli beards to be a hopeful sign, as they regard lapis lazuli as a symbol for resurrection. However, lapis-bearded goats usually have a funerary context in Mesopotamian art, as in the famous pair of examples from the Royal Tombs of Ur (Hansen, 2003b).

The imagery of reed enclosures and thickets is a prominent part of Dumuzi's dream. The Sumerians' name for their country was KI.EN.GIR, corrupted by later peoples into Shinar and Shumeru. It originally meant "the land of the noble reed" (Hallo & Simpson, 1971, p. 28). Reeds were used for building construction, for boats, and as styluses for inscribing clay tablets. A ruler who wished to obtain guidance from dreams would go to a special incubation hut made of reeds to sleep. The walls of the hut were permeable, so as to receive dream messages from the gods. These reed huts may be analogous to the reed enclosure from which Dumuzi dreamed he was abducted.

The earliest Sumerian Flood hero, Ziusudra, enters such a hut for incubation. Ziusudra is a model of piety: "humbly obedient, reverent, attending daily, constantly, bringing forth all kinds of dreams, uttering the name of heaven and earth" (Kramer, 1958, p. 29), though the text does not reveal what the contents of these dreams were. His reward for behaving like a good king approaching the Sacred Marriage is a dream from his god, Enki, warning him of the coming Flood. His later counterpart in the Gilgamesh epic, Utnapishtim, receives the same message through the wall of the reed hut in his dream, so that Enki might not violate the restriction he is under not to give anyone a direct warning of the Flood. These dreams are unambiguous messages that do not require much interpretation, though Utnapishtim's dream contains a number of deliberately obscure statements that he is supposed to convey to the elders of his city when they ask him why he is building a boat on dry land, words that mean both abundance and destruction (Noegel, 2001; Speiser, 1958). Evidently, the Sumerians made a distinction between clear dreams, which usually come only to people who have observed the proper ritual preparations, and obscure or symbolic dreams, which come to everyone else. The latter type of dreams is described in a text as "a closed archive basket of the gods" (Noegel, 2001, p. 47). This links the idea of interpretation with the act of reading a cuneiform tablet, as archival documents were stored in baskets. Literacy was very limited in Sumer; only a special class of scribes drawn mostly from the upper classes received training in the difficult cuneiform script (Kramer, 1963).

Geshtin-anna's professional role indicates that even as early as the middle of the 3rd millennium B.C. dreams (especially those of monarchs) were taken seriously and acted on. Dumuzi refers to his sister in the text as "my tablet-knowing scribe, my song-knowing singer, my skillful girl, who knows the meaning of words, my wise woman, who knows the portent of dreams" (Alster, 1972, p. 55). She correctly interprets all of the symbols in Dumuzi's dream as representing a danger to her brother and urges him to flee. But flight is never a very useful option, especially when Geshtin-anna's male companion (Dumuzi's Shadow) is ready to betray him. Perhaps a modern analyst would advise Dumuzi to stand his ground and to accept the transformation that is inevitably going to overtake him, with the understanding that it is an opportunity for the expansion of his consciousness in a new direction, even though it is at first fraught with terror.

The fact that the role of interpretation is assigned to a female figure is of some interest, and it is certainly not unique to Mesopotamia. In later times, a special class of priests and priestesses called *sha'ilu*, questioners, were called on to interpret dreams by asking specific questions of the dreamer from long lists of dream symbols and their correspondences provided on archival tablets (Saggs, 1962). The correspondences included many mechanisms for dream insight on which we still rely today: analogy, punning references, free association, and inversion. Their goal was to "solve" the dream, image by image, almost as if it were a cryptic equation with but a single solution, and Noegel (2001) commented that "in this sense dream interpretation in Mesopotamia represents less a preoccupation with ambiguity than an attempt at rendering ambiguity into a projected and authoritative reality" (p. 53).

### DREAMS IN THE GILGAMESH EPIC

In the later Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, we have another example of dream interpretation by a female figure. Gilgamesh, the young king of Uruk, has angered the elders of the town by his appropriation of the young men and women for his own purposes. They complain to the gods, who create Enkidu, a wild man who combines human and bull characteristics. As Enkidu approaches Uruk, Gilgamesh has two significant dreams that he brings to his mother, the goddess Nin-sun, "Lady Wild-Cow," for interpretation. The first dream is as follows:

My mother, in the time of night I felt joyful and walked about in the midst of the nobles. The stars appeared in the heavens. The essence of Anu descended towards me. I sought to lift it; it was too heavy for me! I sought to move it; move it I could not! Uruk-land was gathered about it, while the nobles kissed its feet. As I set my forehead to the carrying strap, they gave me support. I raised it and brought it to thee. (Speiser, 1958, p. 46)

The second dream is as follows:

In the street of broad-marted Uruk there lay an axe, and they were gathered round it. That axe, strange was its shape. As soon as I saw it, I rejoiced. I loved it, and as though to a woman I was drawn to it. I took it and placed it at my side. (Speiser, 1958, p. 46)

Nin-sun, called like Geshtin-anna "she who knows all," interprets these dreams, symbol for symbol, as follows:

Forsooth, Gilgamesh, one like thee was born on the steppe, and the hills have reared him. When thou seest him, as over a woman thou wilt rejoice. The nobles will kiss his feet, thou wilt embrace him. . . . Thou wilt lead him to me. (Speiser, 1958, p. 46)

After a brief wrestling match, the two men bond together and set off in search of adventure—thereby getting them out of the hair of the city elders. After they return to Uruk victorious, Ishtar offers herself to Gilgamesh in the Sacred Marriage. But he rejects her advances and reminds her of the dire fate that each of her lovers (including Dumuzi) has met. Outraged, she appeals to her father An to release the Bull of Heaven to attack Gilgamesh. When Gilgamesh and Enkidu kill the bull and then add insult to injury by throwing its thigh in Ishtar's face, she and her priestesses set up the traditional Dumuzi lament over it—for, as we have seen, Dumuzi is equivalent to the Great Bull of Heaven, Gugalanna. Following this incident, Enkidu also has two portentous dreams, which he relates to Gilgamesh:

Hear the dream which I had last night: Anu, Enlil, Ea, and heavenly Shamash were in council, and Anu said to Enlil, "Because the Bull of Heaven they have slain, and Huwawa they have slain, therefore"—said Anu—"the one of them who stripped the mountains of the cedar must die!" But Enlil said, "Enkidu must die; Gilgamesh, however, shall not die." Then heavenly Shamash answered valiant Enlil: "Was it not at my command that they slew the Bull of Heaven and Huwawa? Should now innocent Enkidu die?" But Enlil turned in anger to heavenly Shamash: "Because, much like one of their comrades, thou didst daily go down to them." (Speiser, 1958, p. 56)

This dream, like Utnapishtim's, does not appear to require any interpretation; it is a straightforward and accurate premonition of death. Only the sun god Shamash, the protector of heroes, stands up for the pair, and he gets chided by Enlil for it. In his earlier guise as Utu, the sun god also attempted, unsuccessfully, to aid Dumuzi.

Enkidu's second dream is more recondite:

My friend, a dream I saw last night: The heavens moaned and the earth responded; I stood alone. . . . His face was darkened; like unto . . . was his face; like the talons of an eagle were

his claws. He overpowered me; he leaped, he submerged me. He transformed me so that my arms were like those of a bird. Looking at me, he led me to the House of Darkness, the abode of Irkalla, to the house which none leave who have entered it, on the road from which there is no way back, to the house wherein the dwellers are bereft of light, where dust is their fare and clay their food; they are clothed like birds, with wings for garments, and see no light, residing in darkness. In the House of Dust, which I entered, I looked at rulers, their crowns put away; I saw princes, those born to the crown, who had ruled the land from days of yore. These doubles of Anu and Enlil were serving meat roasts; they were serving baked meats and pouring cool water from the water skins. In the House of Dust, which I entered, reside high priest and acolyte, reside incantatory and ecstatic, reside the laver-anointers of the great gods, resides Etana, resides Sumuqan. Ereshkigal lives there, Queen of the Underworld, and Belit-Seri, the recorder of the Underworld, kneels before her. She holds a tablet, and reads out to her. Lifting up her head, she beheld me, saying "Who has brought this one hither?" (Speiser, 1958, pp. 58–59)

Like Dumuzi, Enkidu is abducted by a raptor and taken to the gloomy Land of No Return. Ereshkigal remains its queen, and she is accompanied by a court official whose name means "The Lady of the Steppe," who appears to have taken on Geshtin-anna's role as "tablet-knowing scribe." As in the previous dream, the ultimate meaning is clear: Death is the great leveler, obliterating all distinctions of social class, and Enkidu is fated to die. Yet for the more obscure symbols, no interpretation is offered in the text. Some of the description of the Underworld is borrowed, word for word, from the Akkadian text of the Descent of Ishtar—so, once again, we may suspect that this text is at least partly a poetic expression rather than an actual dream text. But the rest of it has the ring of verisimilitude, as a real nightmare.

### THE DREAM OF GUDEA

Another well-known dream text from Mesopotamia is the account of Gudea, the city governor of Lagash, who ruled around 2100 B.C. Unlike the other dream accounts in this article, which are mythological, Gudea's first-person narrative is fully historical:

In my dream, there appeared a man of tremendous stature with a divine crown on his head, the wings of a lion-headed bird, and a flood wave as the lower part of his body; lions crouched to his right and to his left. He commanded me to build his temple, but I could not grasp the meaning of his words. Day broke, and a woman appeared holding a gold stylus and studying a clay tablet on which the starry heaven was depicted. Then a hero appeared holding a tablet of lapis lazuli on which he drew the plan of a house; he also placed bricks in a brick mold which stood before me together with a carrying basket. At the same time, a specially bred male donkey was impatiently pawing the ground. (Kramer, 1963, p. 138)

Gudea was perplexed by this series of dream images, so he brought the dream to a priestess of the goddess Nanshe, a daughter of Enki, whose emblem is the fish. Speaking as the goddess, the priestess interpreted the dream as follows, using the same image-for-image method as Geshtin-anna did for Dumuzi:

The man of tremendous stature with a divine crown on his head, the wings of a lion-headed bird, and a flood wave as the lower part of his body, lions crouching to his right and to his left, is my brother Ningirsu, who commanded you to build the temple E-ninnu. The breaking of day over the horizon, that is Ningishzida, your patron god, rising like the sun. The woman holding the gold stylus and studying a clay tablet on which the starry heaven was depicted—that is Nidaba, the goddess of writing, who directs you to build the house in accordance with the holy stars. The hero holding a tablet of lapis lazuli—that is the architect god Nindub drawing the temple plan. The carrying basket and brick mold in which the brick of fate was placed—these betoken the bricks for the E-ninnu temple. The

male donkey pawing the ground impatiently—that is you, Gudea, impatient to carry out your task. (Kramer, 1963, pp. 138–139)

Gudea honored his dream by building the temple, and he had himself depicted in statuary with the temple plan on his lap. He also dedicated another statue of himself to Geshtin-anna, in thanks “for granting his prayer” (Evans, 2003, pp. 430–431). Evidently, in this period Geshtin-anna was regarded as a patroness of dream interpretation, or perhaps as the sender of the dream itself. She was also known as the wife of Ningishzida, Gudea’s patron. What we know of this god is that he is depicted with snakes emerging from his shoulders, leading Gudea before Ningirsu, and that he, along with Dumuzi, is the guardian of the gates of heaven (Speiser, 1950), the eastern and western horizons at which sunrise and sunset may be observed at the equinoxes. As a Mesopotamian representation of the Serpent Power (Hoffman, 1999) and the husband of the dream-interpretation goddess, Ningishzida has an important association with dreaming. His name, usually translated as “Lord of the Right Tree,” may equally well be translated “Lord of the Erect Phallus.” No doubt the Sumerians were familiar with the phenomenon of sexual arousal in dreams, especially dreams of flying.

### THE DREAM OF THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFERER

In later times, the New Year’s Festival celebrated the triumph of order over chaos, symbolized by conflict between the four-faced storm god Marduk, a son of Enki, and the mother goddess Tiamat, a great sea serpent. This indicates a change toward a more patriarchal, solar mythology, as Marduk’s name appears to mean “Son of the Sun,” whereas Tiamat’s name means “Mother of Life.” Unlike Dumuzi, Marduk is never carried off to the Underworld by a superior feminine power. Instead, in the Babylonian creation epic *Enuma Elish*, Marduk vanquishes Tiamat by the power of the storm wind and then splits her like an oyster and places her upper half in the sky; her lower half forms the earth (Speiser, 1958). By Neo-Assyrian times (ca. 900–600 B.C.), Marduk has taken over some of the functions of Enki as a healer, as in the famous case of the dream of the Righteous Sufferer, Shubshi-Meshre-Shakan:

In the dream I had at night, a remarkable young woman of shining countenance, equal to a god, a queen of the peoples, entered and sat down; she spoke my deliverance. “Fear not,” she said, “I will deliver you from your very wretched state, whoever has had a vision during the night.” In the dream, Urnindinlugga, a bearded young man wearing a head covering, an exorcist, carrying a cuneiform tablet, spoke: “Marduk has sent me; to Shubshi-meshre-shakan I have brought prosperity, from Marduk’s pure hands I have brought prosperity.” (Biggs, 1975, p. 155)

The young woman who announces the turn in the sufferer’s fortunes could be Belit-seri, or Geshtin-anna, or perhaps Inanna herself, but the healing is accomplished by one of Marduk’s exorcist priests. These priests have appropriated another of Dumuzi’s roles, for the costume with head covering that they wear is a huge fish with its head above that of the ritualist (for a depiction, see Pritchard, 1950, p. 233). Fish are emblematic of Enki; he is characteristically shown with the same streams of water containing fish emanating from his shoulders (Hansen, 2003a). In the Sumerian King List, Dumuzi—also a son of Enki—is referred to as a “fisherman” or, perhaps more likely, a fish-man, and his city is given as Kua, which means “fish” (Kramer, 1963).

## ROYALTY AND DREAMS

To conclude, we need to consider why almost all of the dreams recorded in Mesopotamian literature are those of kings or high officials. There are several possible explanations for this. Anthropologists have observed that in all urban societies there is a need for permanent political authority to be vested in prominent leaders. These individuals are the focus of public attention, and the more power they wield, the more attention is directed to them. This allows people's collective fears and aspirations to be projected onto a single individual who receives both credit and blame for whatever happens to the society. The Bronze Age societies of the Near East, starting with the Sumerians, created and greatly expanded the institution of kingship, so it is natural for the dream accounts to focus on the person of the ruler.

In a deeper psychological sense, the figure of the ruler represents a highly marked and empowered version of the inner core of personality, which Jung (1969) referred to as the Self. In a sense, each of us, if we are able to function from the Self, has both the authority and the responsibility to be the ruler over our own psyche. However, such *lèse majesté* carries with it the danger of mythic inflation if we attempt to dominate the psyche from the more limited standpoint of the conscious ego, and even more so if we project our domination outward onto others. Then we will begin to get warnings in our dreams, like Dumuzi did, that all is not well in the inner realm.

Under normal circumstances, as celebrated in the richly erotic imagery of the Sacred Marriage texts, the relationship between the goddess and her king is harmonious and loving, and the land prospers. However, if the ruler displeases the goddess, the land will go to waste. This is a powerful idea, and it brings us home to the modern situation, in which the massive pollution of the earth's ecosystems threatens the survival of our civilization. If we ask who is responsible for all this, our natural reaction is to blame it on our political leaders, who have often colluded with private industry to encourage short-term profits at the expense of environmental sustainability. Or, if we wish to indulge in nationalistic projection, we might blame it on the leaders of other countries—the notorious Axis of Evil. Yet if we fall prey to either of these simplistic strategies, we cede our own personal responsibility in this vital matter. Our leaders are a projection of our individual will, and though it is true that a corrupt leader stimulates the Shadow archetype in each of us, it is also true that our projection of our personal Shadows onto our leaders empowers them to embody the same corrupt qualities that we possess within ourselves. In the final analysis, the Axis of Evil runs through every human heart, where it meets with the Axis of Good. It is at their intersection that we are capable of being transformed, like Dumuzi and Geshtin-anna, into something new. In this way, the most ancient of all recorded dreams can still speak to us today.

And this brings us, at last, to the current collective dream of humanity—the nightmare of history, from which, according to James Joyce (1922/1990), we are attempting to awaken. Once again, because of the cultic offenses of a figure in power, the people of Mesopotamia have been abducted by an eagle, at the time of the 2003 Spring Equinox. It remains to be seen what compromises will be effected to allow their release from this metaphorical state of bondage in the Underworld.

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