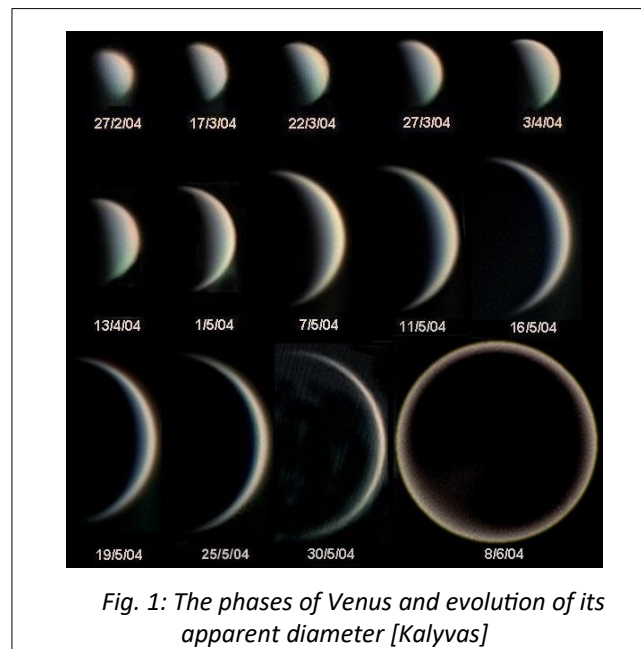




THE PLANET VENUS AND THE RELATED DEITIES

The Planet Venus

The planet Venus is the second planet nearest to the Sun. Also due to its reflecting ability, it reflects the Sun's light so intensely that it appears the brightest natural object in Earth's night sky after the Moon.



Moving around the Sun and with respect to the Earth, the portion of the planet that appears illuminated to an observer positioned onto the Earth surface changes cyclically with time. The *phases of Venus* are the variations of lighting seen on the planet's surface, similar to lunar phases (see fig. 1).

The first recorded observations of these phases are thought to have been telescopic observations by Galileo Galilei at the beginning of the 17.th century, but texts from cuneiform literature show that the crescent phases of Venus were also familiar to the early inhabitants of Mesopotamia¹. [Offord]

¹ Dr. Heinrich Gretsohel, *Lexikon der Astronomie*, says the crescent form of the illuminated part shows up beautifully at the time of greatest brilliance, and in the clear atmosphere of Persia and Peru it is said to be seen with the naked eye. [Offord]

The proof from cuneiform literature that it was so is decisive; for instance, Herr Ernst Weidner, reviewing Dr. Carl Bezold's *Astronomie Himmelsschau und Astrallehre bei den Babyloniern*, quotes an omen text of Assurbanipal's era as follows:

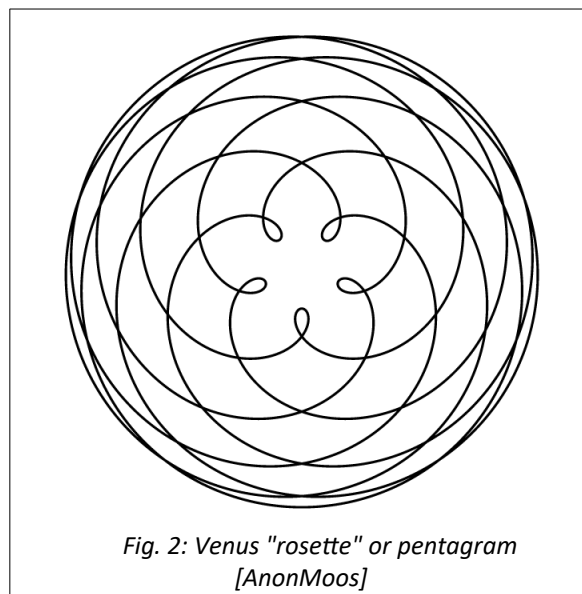
"If on the right horn of Venus a star is visible you will have good crops in the land. When upon the right horn of Venus a star is not visible the land will bear many misfortunes."²
[Offord]

In order for the Babylonians to derive omens from the planet's horns, they had surely to be familiar with the Venusian phases. This leads up to some important explanations of ancient Semitic mythology and astronomy. [Offord]

Because of its proximity to the sun, the movements of Venus appear to be discontinuous: it disappears for many days at a time, and then reappears on the other horizon. For this reason, the planet Venus is only visible sometimes shortly after the sunset, in the east, and other times before the sunrise, in the west. This natural phenomenon led some cultures to recognize not Venus as a single entity, but, instead, to assume it to be two separate objects on each horizon: the "morning star" and the "evening star".

The Pentagonam of Venus

Venus and the Earth have different orbital periods with respect to the Sun: the Earth orbits the Sun in 365.256 days, while Venus in 224.701. This means that in 8 Earth years Venus goes around the Sun about 13 times.³



During this period, Venus "kisses" the Earth⁴ 5 (i.e., $13 - 8$)⁵ times, that corresponds to once every (abt.) 584 terrestrial days, as it passes between us and the Sun.

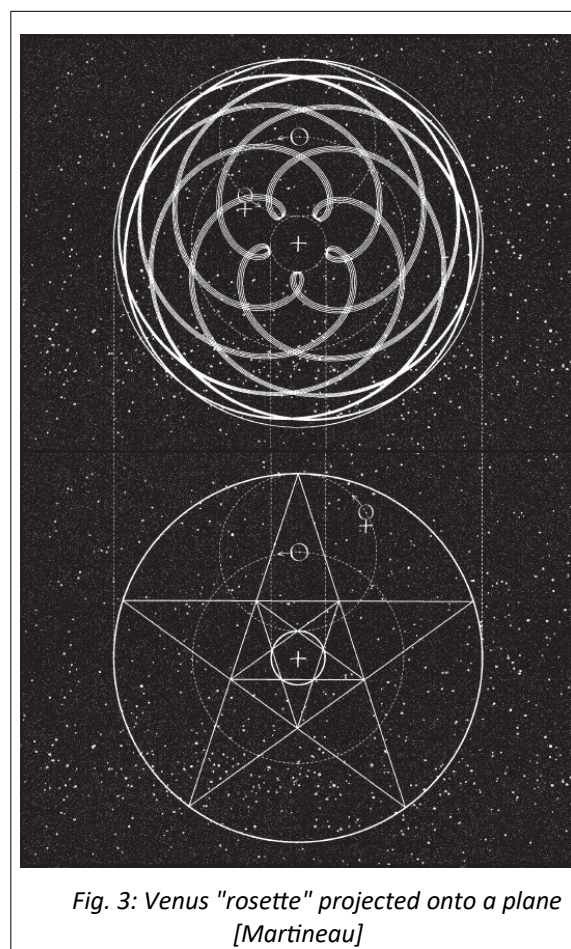
² *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, 1912, columns 318, 319: "Enuma Ishtar ina Kāmi imitti sa Kakkabu la innamir nuhsu mati (ibashshi)." [Offord]

³ Actually, 13.004 times. $224.701/365.256 \approx 0.615187$, while $8/13 \approx 0.615385$, so the Venusian/terrestrial orbital periods ratio corresponds to 8/13 for about 99.9%. Interesting enough, the inverse ratio, $365.256/224.701 \approx 1.625$, is loosely (~99.6%) related to $\varphi = 1,618...$

Seen from the Earth, the Sun appears to move around the zodiac while Venus whirls around the Sun, drawing, in 8 terrestrial years, the pattern shown in fig. 2.⁶ This figure is called “Venus rosette”, “rose of Venus” or “Venus pentagram” (because it has five “lobes”).

The innermost loops near the center corresponds to the “kisses” of Venus. When the planet reaches the “tip” of one of these loops, to an observer located on the Earth’s surface it seems that Venus changes direction in the sky and starts moving backward with respect to its normal direction of movement for a while (apparent retrograde motion). Each time Venus “exits” one of the loops, it starts moving toward another loop of the pentagram that is $8 - 5 = 3$ steps ahead of the last one.

If we project the crossing points of the Venus rosette onto a plane, we obtain the more “classic” pentagram, as shown in fig. 3.



4 That is, Venus gets as close as possible to the Earth. When this happens, the planet is exactly between the Sun and the Earth: this is called an *inferior conjunction*. It is a time when the planet gets invisible (at the naked eye) for about one week, because of the greater brightness of the Sun.

5 Notice that 5, 8 and 13 are Fibonacci numbers.

6 The figure shows a simplified plot of the position of Venus with respect to the Earth (i.e., geocentric perspective). For this graphic, Venus and the Earth are assumed to be in coplanar concentric perfect circular orbits around the Sun, and Venus’ and Earth’s orbital periods are assumed to be in an exact 8:13 ratio [AnonMoos].

The Divine Ladies of Venus

The planet Venus has been linked to more than one deity in the Near East, starting at least from the IV millennium B.C. onwards. The Sumerians and most of the ancient Semitic peoples possessed a Venus deity. It turns out that all these deities were interrelated and underwent, during the course of the time, a process of fusion and intermingling of the respective characteristics.

Anyhow, all these divinities derive from two different roots: a female Sumerian Venus deity and a male Semitic one (Semitic Venus deities outside Mesopotamia were male, as a rule). [Heimpel]

With very few exceptions, only one, female Venus deity survived in Mesopotamia, revered under the name of *Inanna* and, beginning with the Old Akkadian period, as *Ištar*. [Selz]

The recognition of the identity of the evening star with the morning star is prehistoric and precedes the fusion of the planetary and the anthropomorphic aspects of the Venus deities. [Heimpel]

Inanna

The foremost female deity in ancient Mesopotamia at any period was the Sumerian *Inanna* (also spelled *Inana(k)* or *Inana*). The oldest documents attesting Inanna's name are some clay tablets discovered in the Eanna (meaning "House of Heaven") sanctuary, in the Sumerian city of Uruk, but temples and sanctuaries are found in most Mesopotamian cities.

It seems that Inanna had the functions of a goddess of sex, love, and fertility already in the early stages of the proto-history. [Selz]

Also from proto-historical times, Inanna was conceived of as a female Venus deity. This is put beyond any reasonable doubt, for instance, by the interpretation of her name as "Lady of Heaven" or "Queen of Heaven" and from the existence of separate cults of an "evening Inanna" and a "morning Inanna" (from the different appearances of Venus as an evening and a morning star). [Selz]

In the Old Sumerian period (about 3000-2340 B.C.), the planet Venus was known as Ninsi'anna⁷. Ninsi'anna is first attested (primarily as ^dnin-^dsi₄-an-na) during the Ur III period⁸, but most of our evidence for this deity comes from the Old Babylonian period (about 2000-1600 BC).

Originally female, Ninsi'anna sometimes appears as male in later texts under the influence of Semitic theology where Venus deities were usually male. Ninsi'anna is associated with illumination and radiance, both in some etymologies of his/her name, and in titles such as "holy torch who fills the heavens", or "radiant god, whose light fills heaven and earth". [Heimpel, Stevens]

^dnin-si-an-na literally means "divine lady, illumination of heaven". However, early spellings of Ninsi'anna's name, written with the sign si₄ (= su, "to be red"), suggest that the original etymology may have been "divine lady of the redness of heaven" (sometimes rendered as "red lady of heaven"), referring not to the planet itself but to the redness of the morning and evening sky in which Venus is usually visible. [Heimpel, Stevens]

Ninsi'anna is linked to justice, being described by Rim-Sin, king of Larsa, as "judge, supreme advisor, who distinguishes between truth and falsehood". The same inscription also credits

⁷ It is written, ^dnin-si₄-an-na, ^dnin-si-an-na, and also ^dnin-an-si₄-an-na. [Heimpel, Stevens]

⁸ Ur III, or the third UR dynasty, was a royal dynasty that reigned over the city of UR during the last part of the III millennium B.C..

Ninsi'anna with delivering the king's enemies into his hands, perhaps an indication of war-like qualities. A temple to Ninsi'anna, é-eš-bar-zi-da, "House of True Decisions", is described in a building inscription of Rim-Sin found at Ur. [Stevens]

Ninsi'anna was syncretized with Inanna, becoming an aspect/name of the latter, probably by the end of the third millennium (an inscription of Amar-Su'en⁹ is addressed to ^dinana/ ^dnin-^dsi₄-an-na), and certainly by the early second, where she appears in Inanna/Ištar's circle in god lists. However, to some extent she retains a distinct identity; for instance, in Old Babylonian cultic texts she and Inanna are listed separately. [Stevens]

A hymn for Iddin-Dagan (1974-1954 B.C.) which celebrates the ruler's sacred marriage to Inana as Venus is labelled as "a warrior-song of Ninsi'anna". Here, Inanna's martial and sexual characteristics are combined with the astral aspect represented by Ninsi'anna. As the evening star Inanna rises "like a warrior", prompting all living creatures to make obeisance to her, and providing guidance for the traveller. Later in the text, her amorous traits come to the fore as Inanna beautifies herself and takes part in the sacred marriage with her beloved, Iddin-Dagan. At the end, the hymn returns us to the astral plane with the image of Inanna looking down joyfully from the heavens. [Stevens]

After the Old Babylonian period, Dilbat replaced Ninsi'anna as a name for Venus, becoming the regular term for the planet in astronomical tablets throughout the first millennium B.C. However, Ninsi'anna survives as the name for Venus in Neo-Babylonian copies of the Venus Tablet of Ammišaduqa and is invoked as one of the "gods of the night" in a Neo-Assyrian purification ritual. [Stevens]

Ištar

Ištar (also spelled Ishtar), the foremost Babylonian-Assyrian goddess, is a composite deity, partly Semitic and partly Sumerian. When the Akkadians settled in northern Babylonia, they assimilated the culture of the Sumerian inhabitants of the alluvium. While the latter worshipped the female goddess Inanna, the former brought with them the idea of a male deity, that finally merged with the Inanna, changing sex under Sumerian influence. Shortly thereafter, any clear differentiation between their original concepts was lost. [Heimpel, Selz] In this process, the divinity was also endowed with a more aggressive, war-oriented character, so much that in the following millennia the composite, resulting figure was worshipped as both a goddess of sex and war.

After a rather small number of attestations of the Semitic goddess Ištar/Aštar in the personal names of pre-Sargonic¹⁰ times, she gains increasingly popularity during the Old Akkadian period. [Selz]

Already in proto-history, the Venus deity was perceived as bi-partite, with both a male and a female aspect attributed to her appearance as the morning star and the evening star. [Selz]

It is generally agreed that the names Aštar and Ištar can be traced back to a Semitic 'Aštar, the name of the originally male deity, whose grammatical feminine form is 'Aṭtart or 'Aštart. It is

⁹ Or Amar-Sin, the third king of the Ur III dynasty (2046-2038 B.C.).

¹⁰ Sargon of Akkad, also known as Sargon the Great, was the first ruler of the Akkadian Empire. He was the founder of the "Sargonic" or "Old Akkadian" dynasty. His reign dated to ca. 2334 to ca. 2284 BC in the middle chronology.

possible that both deities were divine manifestations of Venus, differentiated as morning and evening star¹¹. [Selz]

In a list of pairs of gods consisting of an Eblaite¹² and a corresponding Babylonian deity, the Eblaite Aštar is paired with Ištar. Since Aštar is male and Ištar is female, the common characteristic they share and that links them together cannot be the anthropomorphic aspect, so it is most likely the representation of the planet Venus. [Heimpel]

The change of sex from Aštar to Ištar was complete, but residues of the male deity survived in Babylonia. Halfway between Ebla and Babylonia, in Mari, both deities, the male Syrian Aštar and the female Babylonian Ištar were venerated side by side. The former was called here “male Ištar”, the latter simply “Ištar”. In northern Babylonia and Assyria the male gender survived as an aspect of the goddess. [Heimpel] It’s worth noting, however, that the name Ištar is masculine, since it lacks the feminizing “-t” found in the regional Semitic dialects.

An Akkadian astrological text¹³ from the library of Assurbanipal, speaking of Ištar under the name of Dilbat (Δελέφατ, Delephat, in Greek) states that Venus is called male in the morning and female in the evening: at sunrise the star was Ištar of Akkad, a masculine, bearded¹⁴ goddess¹⁵ (*ziqarat Dilbat*), whilst at sunset she was Ištar of Erech¹⁶, a decidedly female goddess (*sinnišat Dilbat*). [Krappe, Offord]

In a bilingual hymn from 8th century Assyria, the goddess Nanay identifies herself with goddesses from various Assyrian and Babylonian cities, among them the “hierodule, Ištar of Uruk” and the “male”, “bearded Ištar of Babylon.” In a prayer of Assurbanipal the otherwise clearly female Ishtar of Ninive wears a beard. [Heimpel]

Even if these texts can give the impression that Ištar of Akkad and Ištar of Babylon were male, there is overwhelming evidence from numerous sources that they are decidedly female (also see note 15). The answer for the divergence lies in the connection of the northern Ištar with the morning star, and the southern Ištar with the evening star. The southern Ištar, that is, the female Inanna of Uruk, was typically venerated as the evening star, while the male Akkadian Venus deity was typically venerated as the morning star. The fact that Ištar is female and wears a beard does not mean the deity is androgynous¹⁷: Ištar wears the beard only within the planetary aspect, that is, when she stands in the morning sky. [Heimpel]

However, within the planetary aspect Ištar did actually change sex, a concept which may have spread. The Hurrian deity Šauška, for example, was identified with Ištar and appears as god and goddess in the rock carvings of Yazilikaya. Further, a clearly bisexual deity, Aphroditos, was venerated in Amathus (Cyprus): Aphroditos was female but wore a beard¹⁸. In ceremonies given in its honor, women were required to wear men’s clothes, and vice versa. [Heimpel]

11 The pre-Babylonian Akkadians were a prehistoric people, so we have no sources for their beliefs about Ištar. Any information on the subject must be presumed from the later Babylonian sources or from sources of the nearby peoples (see also [Heimpel]).

12 Ebla was a city located in the actual inland Syria.

13 See *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, iii, 53, 30-1:

“Kakkabu sinniṣat Dilbat ina ereb šamši i[zzaz].

Kakkabu zikarat Dilbat ina šit šamši izzaz.” [Offord]

14 As pointed by Morris Jastrow, *beard* is also an astronomical metaphor, transferred from the planet Venus to the goddess in order to emphasize either her strength or brilliancy or the blurred appearance of the star. [Krappe]

15 The statement Morris Jastrow points out is that the *star* is male and female. The scribe uses the form *zikarat*, “she is male,” not *zikaru*, “is male.” (Cf. Sayce in the *Trans. Soc. Bibl. Arch.*, iii, pp. 106-7, 1872.) [Offord]

16 *Uruk* in Sumerian.

17 Indeed, some authors support the explicitly androgynous character of Ištar. See, for instance [Offord].

So, the evening star was conceived as the goddess of love, she who awakens the mutual attraction of the sexes. The morning star, on the other hand, preferred war and battles: surely the morning star presided over the rising of soldiers in camp, but it was also the star aspect that was venerated by the more belligerent Akkadian. In this way arose the notion of an Ištar goddess both of love and of war. [Krappe]

As a result of being the goddess of love, Ištar was also the tutelary goddess of prostitutes and above all of the temple prostitutes (*hierodules*). The hierodules who served Ištar were almost always called *ishtaritûs*, i.e., the women who belong to Ištar. On the other hand, Ištar herself is called *qadishtû*, i.e., the sacred prostitute. In ancient Israel, the temple prostitutes were called *qedeshot*, i.e., “holy women”. Originally, the Hebrew word *q-d-sh* meant something like “isolated”, specifically from the profane sphere, and belonging to a sacral one¹⁹. Orgiastic ceremonies often took place in the service of Ištar. [Hurwitz]

The features of Inanna has been inherited, during the millennia, by several deities. One should, however, be very careful not to blur the concept of the various Venus deities too easily with the competing idea of the so-called *mother goddesses*, even though, according to some author(s), in late Mesopotamian theological texts these goddesses merge with Ištar. [Selz]

The “double side” of Inanna/Ištar

Inanna/Ištar personality appears complex, since she possesses divine qualities which are extremely difficult to characterize. First and foremost, she is was a liminal figure, characterized by an extreme ambivalence. Prayers, hymns, myths, festivals, and cultic personnel attest this distinctive aspect of the goddess who was far more than simply the goddess of fertility, of love and war, and the Venus star. [Harris]

Over the time, the Mesopotamian theologians developed an expanding pantheon and created family ties between individual gods. Originally independent deities were coupled in “theological” marriages, and other gods were associated to these couples. The case of Inanna/Ištar is somewhat different, since we can trace her ambivalent character to the beginning of the third millennium. Her bi-polarity is founded on the natural phenomenon that causes the planet Venus to appear twice in its course, as both the morning and the evening star. Inanna/Ištar was one divine entity, able to embody different, even opposing aspects. [Selz]

Inanna/Ištar has both female and male aspects. She combines male aggressiveness with the force of a superabundance of female sexuality, encompassing two forms of potential disorder and violence: sex and war. [Harris]

The texts reveal both the benign and the horrific sides of the goddess’s personality. Often, her myths reveal her capriciousness. Inanna/Ištar frequently acts in ways that disrupt the social order. She can be wild and savage, excessive in her sexuality and love of war. Her sexual encounters mingle eroticism with violence. [Harris]

The hymn of the *entu* priestess²⁰ Enheduanna, daughter of Sargon, to Inanna highlights the anomalies of the goddess: she is the “Lady (who) soothes the reins, the lady (who) gladdens the

18 This goddess corresponds to the Roman *Venus barbata*. In the 5th century BC, there also existed *hermae* of Aphroditos/Aphroditus, that is, phallic statues with a female head.

19 From this arises the secondary meaning of “holy” for the word *q-d-sh*.

20 A high priestess.

heart,” but also “Like a dragon you have deposited venom on the land.” She is both a loving spouse to Dumuzi and a hostile wife. [Harris]

In juxtaposing her masculine and feminine traits and behavior (she can be both compassionate, supportive, and nurturing and assertive, aggressive, and strong-willed), she breaks the boundaries between the sexes. Because of her bi-polar nature, Inanna/Ištar is above all things: she is who can reverse existing orders and yet unite them as a negative and positive pole of an ordered whole. [Harris]



Fig. 4: Land grant to *Hunnubab-Nanaya kudurru* [Jastrow]

Iconography

Iconographically, Inanna/Ištar was often depicted nude, or as a warrior-goddess, heavily armed. Her sacred animals were the lion and (often) the dove. Alongside these animals, her most prominent symbol was a star (called the “star of Inanna”, the “star of Ištar”, or sometimes the “star of Venus”). The number of its points varies, usually oscillating between six and eight, but most often it is an eight-pointed star, representing the planet Venus (8 is the number of terrestrial years that the planet takes to describe its full path in the sky).

On stones and cylinder seals, the eight-pointed star is often shown alongside a crescent moon, symbol of the god of the Moon (the Akkadic *Sin* or the Sumeric *Nanna*), father of Inanna/Ištar, and the solar disk, symbol of the god of the Sun (the Akkadic *Šamaš*²¹ or the Sumeric *Utu*), brother of Inanna/Ištar (see, for instance, fig. 4²² and fig. 5²³).

21 Also spelled *Shamash* in English.

22 This is a Kudurru (stele) representing the King Melishipak I (1186–1172 BC) while he presents his daughter to the goddess Nannaya (Kassite period).

23 Cylinder seal - Oriental Institute Museum, University of Chicago.



Fig. 5: A winged Ishtar, with an eight-pointed star at her left (extracted from [Sailko])

The rosette is another important symbol of Inanna first and then of Ištar. During the Neo-Assyrian Period, it may have actually eclipsed the eight-pointed star and become Ishtar's primary symbol. [BlackGreen]

Astarte

Astarte (from the ancient Greek Ασάρτη) was a goddess venerated in the North-Western Semitic area (mainly Phoenician and Canaanite). Her name appears written as *ttrt* in alphabetically written Ugaritic texts, to be compared with the Hebrew (and Phoenician) *Aštōret* (עשתרת).

In a couple of Ugaritic pantheon lists, Astarte (*ttrt*) appears grouped together with a number of major Ugaritic goddesses, the maiden warrior *Anat* (*'nt*), the sun-goddess *Šapaš* (*špš*), *Aršy* (*aršy*), the "One of the Earth", and *Ušhara* (*ušhry*, most likely corresponding to another goddess, Išhara). [Schmitt]

In the syllabic god list RS 20.24.24 Astarte is equated with Ištar, of which the former is usually considered the Canaanite counterpart, even if this correspondence is supported only by some contradicting evidence. For instance, it is contradicted by material from Ebla, from around 2500 B.C., where Ištar is identified with Aštar, and not with the Eblaite Aštarta. [Heimpel, Schmitt, Selz]

Surely, Astarte and Ištar have much in common, but it is clear, especially from Egyptian (but also Ugaritic) material, that the former, in analogy to her more prominent sister Anat, was mostly conceived as a goddess of war (being, in this aspect, similar to the "martial" Ištar), apotropaic magic, healing and hunting. [Heimpel, Selz, Schmitt]

Astarte is depicted as a beautiful goddess, and her physical appeal is indicated in her iconography, where emphasis is on breasts, genitalia and overall beauty. Even if she is considered by many a goddess of love and sex, traces of an explicit sexual role have scarcely been found for her, even in the Late Bronze Age. [Heimpel, Selz, Schmitt]

Moreover, unlike Ištar, Astarte has no clear connections with the Venus “star”. There is reason to believe that the Venus deity of Ugarit was not *’ttrt*, but rather a separate goddess, *’ftr*. Some indications seem even to suggest that Astarte had no planetary aspect at all. [Heimpel]

During the 1st millennium BC, Astarte’s character as a female warrior lost its importance in the homeland and was absorbed by the male deities of the local pantheon. In the same period, her figure evolved toward that of a goddess more closely associated with kingship, and she became the major female Syro-Phoenician deity. Nevertheless she merged during the Phoenician west-expansion in the second part of the 1st millennium with other goddesses of the Mediterranean, her function as a goddess of royalty and healing persisted. [Schmitt]

In the function of goddess of war and magic she was adopted into the pantheon of the Egyptian New Empire. The Egyptians called Astarte the “Lady of Heaven”. The same appellation is reported by Herodotus when he designates Astarte of Ascalon as *Aphrodite Ourania* (*Historiae*, i, 105). That the latter was Astarte is beyond doubt, and it is also confirmed by an inscription from Delos, dated after 160 B.C., which was authored by a citizen of Ascalon and addressed to “Aphrodite Ourania, Astarte Palaistine”²⁴. [Heimpel, Schmitt]

It is often stated that the figure of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of sex and love²⁵, derives from Astarte through some process of syncretization. Indeed, Aphrodite was believed to have come to Greece from the east, particularly from Cyprus (according to Herodotus, from Ascalon)²⁶. [Heimpel] As the author of the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite* describes her in Hymn V, she is the “golden-throned Aphrodite, of Cyprus, who in deities stirs up sweet desire and who subdues the race of mortal men.”

Rather than through a direct derivation from Astarte, more probably Aphrodite evolved on Cyprus during the Late Bronze Age through a mixing of indigenous Cypriot elements with Levantine divine figures, the most prominent of which being that of Inanna/Ištar (and possibly Išhara, represented in Syria by an iconography that is almost identical to that of Ištar). Only secondarily it was influenced by the Canaanite/Phoenician goddesses Astarte, Anat, and even Asherah. This process led to the birth of a Cyprian goddess, variously known from inscriptional sources as *Wanassa/Anassa*, *Kypria* or *Paphia*²⁷, that came to be worshipped throughout Cyprus, being venerated especially at Paphos. [Budin, Serwint]

24 The same Herodotus reports that Ascalon (also known as Ashkelon or Ashqelon) was a city “in the part of Syria called Palestine” (*Historiae*, i, 150)

25 Aphrodite’s dominion over love and sex are distinct from issues of fertility and maternity, in which categories Aphrodite plays minimal roles. [Budin]

26 It’s quite an interesting coincidence that Aphrodite/Venus was born in an island renowned, in the antiquity, for the abundant presence and extraction of copper, the Venusian metal *par excellence*. The name itself of the copper comes from Cyprus, starting from the Latin “Cyprium aes” (Cyprian ore) passing through the late Latin “cuprum”. The use of native copper goes back in time at least 10,000 years; anyhow, it took until about the 4th millennium BC before metal production really started. During the 4th millennium BC to the late Bronze Age, copper arsenic alloys were produced and used throughout the Near East. It is only more than a millennium later that the development of copper tin alloys (bronze) started. Around 1500 BC the tin bronze replaced the copper arsenic alloy completely. [De Ryck] So, the figures of the Venus-related deities (from which the figure of Aphrodite/Venus derived) developed during the (long) time when also the “core” of copper metallurgy developed, in a geographical area that has been considered one of the most important copper production places of the antiquity, and, together with Turkey, possibly the “birthplace” of the copper metallurgy itself.

27 These are mainly epithets rather than names: *Wanassa* means “Queen”; *Kypria* and *Paphia*, just like *Golgias* (from the name of Golgoi, an ancient settlement in the Larnaca district on Cyprus, near the modern Athienou), another epithet of the goddess, indicate the site of veneration. [Budin2]

When the Mycenaean Greeks settled at Maa-Palakastro and Paphos in the early 12th century, they came into contact with this Paphian goddess and eventually adopted her. During the Dark Age, contacts between Cyprus and Crete introduced this new goddess to the Aegean Greeks, who adopted her as their own goddess of sex. At some point during this process, the name “Aphrodite” was coined to represent the goddess (the first inscription with the name “Aphrodite” was found in Amathus in the 4th century BC), although, to date, the name has defied all attempts at defining a certain etymology. [Budin]

So, both Astarte and Aphrodite derived (primarily) from Inanna/Ištar, almost independently. By evolving separately, the goddesses developed their own, distinct characteristics: Astarte mainly maintained the belligerent aspects of Ištar, while Aphrodite inherited the more erotic traits of the Mesopotamian goddess (apart from some more militaristic qualities maintained only in Cyprus and very early Greece). [Budin]

In spite of their differences, Aphrodite and Astarte coexisted in Cyprus, both being considered queen goddesses of the island: the “Paphian” reigning over Greek and Cypriot populations, Astarte over the Phoenicians. A 3rd century BC Phoenician dedication to “Astarte from Paphos” indicate the culmination of the syncretism process between these two goddesses. [Budin]

There are several affinities between Aphrodite and Ištar, also reflected in the similar votive objects that have been found both in Cyprian and Mesopotamian temples, such as the temple of Ištar in Assur (1350-100 BC): for instance, wheat, objects reproducing sexual organs (both male and female), votive sea shells representing the vulva, and also copper objects²⁸. The Greeks pointed out in myth the strict affinity of the love goddess with metals: in the mythical tradition, indeed, Aphrodite was the wife of Hephaestus, god of metallurgy. When the betrayal of Aphrodite with Ares was discovered, the goddess took refuge in Paphos. [Roncelli]

It's worth noting that the Greeks did not originally possess a deity related to the Venus planet. Instead, they had two separate deities identified with the evening star and the morning star, *Hesperos* (corresponding to the Latin *Vesper*) and *Phosphoros* (the “bringer of light”, also called *Heosphoros*, the “bringer of dawn”) respectively. Parmenides, or Pythagoras, realized around 500 B.C. that the morning star and the evening star were, actually, one single celestial body²⁹. A little later, Aristotle called it the “star of Aphrodite”, but originally, the goddess Aphrodite had nothing to do with the planet: the link was probably a result of Babylonian influence in the field of astronomy. [Heimpel]

Long after the connection of Aphrodite with Venus by Aristotle, the planetary aspect of the Greek deity was also transferred to Astarte, her Phoenician counterpart, as it is documented by Byzantine writers like Lydos, and the lexicographer, Suidas. [Heimpel, Selz]

One of the iconographical attributes of Astarte was a horned head-dress. Because of the horns, and led astray by the misstatements of classic authors, such as Lucian and Herodian, many writers have called her a lunar deity. Due to the connection with Inanna/Ištar, a definitely Venus deity (even if Astarte had not a clear planetary aspect on her own), it is highly probable that this attribute either represents the crescent Venus (see also [Offord]), or rather it is a remnant of the representations of Inanna (i.e., see fig. 4) where the goddess was depicted together with the symbols of Utu (the solar disk) and Nanna (the Moon crescent, see fig. 6). Indeed, many Venus-related goddesses became lunar divinities at a later time (see also [Krappe]).

²⁸ Another connection between the red metal and Aphrodite.

²⁹ Indeed, in the Roman mythology, *Hesperos* and *Phosphoros* will be identified as a single persona, with the name of *Lucifer*, i.e., “bringer of light”.

Even if the biblical “queen of heaven”, whom the prophet Jeremia mentions, has been identified with Ištar (not to mention all the other identification proposed), in fact she was surely a Canaanite deity, most probably specifically Astarte, the “Lady of Heaven” of Merneptah, the “heavenly” Aphrodite of Herodotus. Ištar, in particular, was not even worshipped among the Canaanites, or the Arameans, outside of Mesopotamia. Another possible candidate was the goddess Anat [Heimpel, Selz], to which Astarte is so closely connected that the specific differences between the two goddesses are difficult to establish and are subject to much dispute. Indeed, at a later time, both Astarte and Anat goddesses fused into one, revered under the name Atagartis³⁰. ‘Atar’atah (also written ‘Athtar’ate) is a composition of two divine names: the first, *Atar*, is a form of the Ugaritic *ʾttrt* where the feminine ending *-t* has been omitted; the second, *atah*, may come from the divine Palmyrene name, *Athe*. [Selz]

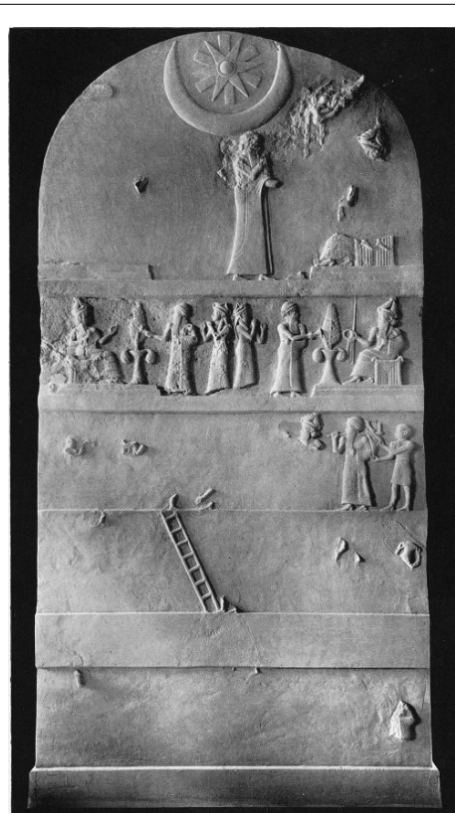


Fig. 6: Ur-Nammu stele (from [Legrain])

Other deities

The deity *In(n)in(a)* is also of Semitic origin, most probably a deity of war. The resemblance of her and Inanna’s names, as well as the conceptual similarity as deities of war furthered the confusion between her and Inanna-Ištar. *Innin/In(n)in(a)*, also spelled *I-nin*, that is never written with the divine determinative in Sumerian texts, is an (Old) Akkadian deity distinct from the Sumerian Inanna. The names *I-nin-la-ba*, “Inin is a lion”, and *I-nin-sa-tu*, “Inin is a mountain”, are also attested for Ištar/Aštar (*Aštar-laba*, “Aštar is a lion”, and *Aštar-šadû*, “Aštar is a mountain”).

³⁰ Perhaps with the further contribution of Asherah (see also [Budin]).

The existence of the same name-types for the two deities points strongly to conceptual overlaps. [Selz]

^d*INANA-An-nu-ni-tum*, “Ištar the skirmisher”, is a compound name that refers to the “martial Ištar”. The martial aspect of Ištar is not attested before Sargon of Akkad and can clearly be connected with the appearance of Ištar-Annunītum. It follows that it is doubtful that the Sumerian Inanna was ever a proper war-goddess. [Selz]

Annunītum, earlier merely the epithet of a female war-goddess presumably of west Semitic origin, became more and more the object of independent veneration. Thus, Annunītum developed from a *nomen appellativum* to a *nomen proprium*. In the cuneiform sources, the epithet was originally used to emphasize Ištar’s war-like aspect. By the meaning of her name and by context it is ascertained that the name of the goddess *Anūna* is merely a (grammatical) variation of the name An(n)unītum. [Selz]

Among the five of the goddesses mentioned so far – namely, Inanna, Ištar, In(n)in(a), Annunītum, ‘Anat – the last four display a particular affinity for battle and strife. In the case of In(n)in, Astarte and ‘Anat, their perception of epiphanies of the Venus star remains to be proven. Nevertheless, the sources indicate that all these goddesses contributed to the concept of the Levantine “Queen of Heaven”, which, however modified, is still alive in contemporary religion, [Selz], as well as to the figure of the most “modern” Greek-Roman goddess related to the Venus planet, Aphrodite/Venus.

Northern Arabian people, especially the Safaites, adored Venus as Allat, a female deity. That this was their name for Venus, Herodotus explains when he says (*Historiae*, i, 131) that the Arabs venerated Aphrodite-Ourania under the name of Alitta; and again (*Historiae*, iii, 8) he says her name was Alilat³¹. The Sabaeans, knowing Athtar as a male deity, sometimes united the two titles of the planet, speaking of *Allat-Athtar*. [Offord]

Allat is mentioned in Palmyrene inscriptions, but almost always called *Athene*. Thus Zenobia’s son *Wahballat* (“gift of Allat”) is called *Athenodoros*. A relief from Emesa, now at Brussels, shows Athene as Allat. Her robe, nimbus, and sceptre connect her with Astarte and Atargatis, and so we find Allat, as paredra of Melek-bel, sometimes called Astarte and sometimes Atargatis. [Offord]

31 Some scholars have confused Allat-Venus with the Arab female solar goddess, because the Arabs sometimes, when speaking of the sun as a supreme deity, called her *al-Ilahat*, “the goddess.” Herodotus does not refer to *al-Ilahat*, but to Alilat, later shortened to Allat. [Offord]

Lilith – the Dark Side of Venus?

Lilith is the name of a controversial mythical female being, sometimes depicted as a goddess, more often as a demoness, whose figure is present in several religious and cultural contexts, from the Mesopotamian mythology, through the Jewish religion and folklore and up to nowadays.

In myths there are essentially two distinct Liliths, each with her own distinctive characters. The first Lilith is the *lilitu* found in ancient Mesopotamian mythology, which refers to a *kind* of nocturnal female demon (therefore, it denotes a group of beings, rather than a single being) associated with sexual temptation, storms, disease, illness, and death that seduces men and is also believed to abduct and kill babies. The second Lilith (Hebrew לילית) is named for the very first time in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, an apocryphal Jewish text that describes her as the original first woman as well as the first wife of Adam (so a single person, not a group of entities). Both Liliths, however, tend to be strongly related to each other, so much that according to several authors (but not all of them), the Jewish Lilith derives from the figure of the Akkadian *lilitu*.

The Mesopotamian Lilith: lilitu and the lil-spirits

Many theories have been suggested about the origin of Lilith, some of them more or less accepted by scholarship than others, but the most likely seems to be that according to which the name Lilith has its roots in the Sumerian concept of *lil* (𒂊), also transliterated as *lil₂*.

The Sumerians believed that between heaven and earth there is a substance which they called *lil*, a word that approximately means “wind, air, breath” (therefore roughly corresponding to our “atmosphere”), but also “spirit, ghost”. Its most significant characteristics seem to be movement and expansion. [Kramer2]

The Mesopotamian mythology accounts for a vast number of demonic, ghostly figures, among which some specifically related to the *lil*.

A fragment of a Sumerian version of the Gilgamesh epic, based on copies which were prepared from an original draft coming from sometime during the Isin Larsa period³² (the original itself must be appreciably older, and it is believed today to date from the 40-th century B.C), reads as follows:

“After heaven and earth had been separated and mankind had been created, after Anû, Enlil and Ereskigal had taken possession of heaven, earth and the underworld; after Enki had set sail for the underworld and the sea ebbed and flowed in honor of its lord; on this day, a huluppu³³ tree, which had been planted on the bank of the Euphrates and nourished by its waters, was uprooted by the south wind and carried away by the Euphrates. A goddess, who was wandering along the bank seized the swaying tree and – at the behest of Anû and Enlil – brought it to Inanna’s garden in Uruk. Inanna tended the tree carefully and lovingly; she hoped to have a throne and a bed made for herself from its wood. After ten years, the tree had matured. But in the meantime, she found to her dismay that her hopes could not be fulfilled. Because during that time, a dragon had build its nest at the foot of the tree, the Zu-bird was raising its young in the crown, and the demon ki-sikil-lîl-lâ-ke₄ had built her house in the middle. But Gilgamesh, who had heard of Inanna’s plight, came to her rescue. He took his heavy shield, killed the dragon with his gigantic bronze axe, which weighed seven talents and seven minas. The the Zu-bird flew into the mountains with its

32 Ca. 1950-1700 B.C.

33 Probably a linden tree, according to [Hurwitz]. According to other authors, a willow or alder.

young, while *ki-sikil-líl-lá-ke₄*, petrified with fear, tore down her house and fled into the wilderness.”³⁴ [Hurwitz]

The name *ki-sikil-líl-lá-ke₄* refers to a female spirit figure, of which the text also says that is a “maiden who screeches constantly” and a “gladdener of all hearts.”³⁵

According to the Mesopotamian tradition, the ghosts of (unmarried) youngsters who died sexually unfulfilled become *lil*-spirits, a kind of “phantoms” or “apparitions” that try to satisfy their sexual need with the living, causing, in doing so, suffering and disease; the female ones are particularly aggressive. [Wiggermann]

According to the Akkadian tradition, there are some different *lil*-spirits: *ardat lilî/kiskilîlu*, “phantom-bride”, *eṭel lilî*, “phantom-bridegroom”, *lilîtu*, “female phantom”, *lilû*, “male phantom”, and, probably, *naššukîtu*, “(phantom-)kisser (demoness)”. [Wiggermann]

In Akkadian, *ardatû* (semantically corresponding to *ki-sikil*) means “young woman”, or “adolescent, nubile girl”, so a girl of marriageable age.³⁶ *Lilû* is said of him that he attempts to disturb or seduce women in their sleep by night, while *lilîtu* appears to men in their erotic dreams.

The Sumerian names of linguistically unrelated Akkadian demons or spirits reveal the earlier existence of a class of male and female demonic *dime* “figures”, summarized, in a late third millennium Sumerian incantation, as the “seven *dime*-demons”. Among these, ^ddim(-me) / Lamaštu (*dime*-demoness), and ^ddim(-me)-ĝi₆ / *lilîtu*, (“*dime*-demoness of the night”, a type of sexually unsatisfied demon active at night) are the only two members that are both *dime*-demons and *lil*-demons. [Wiggermann]

So, *ki-sikil-líl-lá-ke₄*, also written *ki-sikil-líl-lá(-en-na)*, is the Sumerian counterpart of the Akkadian phantom, *ardat lilî/kiskilîlu*, but she also corresponds somewhat to *lilîtu* [Wiggermann],³⁷ therefore being a sexually unfulfilled female (and so, particularly aggressive) spirit that appears to the living in order to satisfy her sexual needs, causing, in the process, suffering and disease³⁸.

In other Sumerian texts, a further female being, named *ki-sikil-ud-da-kar-ra*, is mentioned alongside *ki-sikil-lil-la-ke*. The two female figures are so similar to each other that they can be scarcely told apart. Probably, this is nothing more than an alternative designation for “the maiden” *ki-sikil-lil-la-ke*^{39 40}. [Hurwitz]

34 S. N. Kramer: “*Gilgamesh and the Huluppu-tree. A Reconstructed Sumerian text*” in *Assiriological Studies of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Chicago. 1938, p. 1f.

35 This name has been explicitly translated with “Lilith” by Kramer [Kramer], even if not all authors support such correspondence. Kramer was a Jewish author, so it possible that in this translation he was influenced by his religious background. Nevertheless the figure of *ki-sikil-líl-lá-ke₄* has a lot of characteristics in common with the figure of Lilith (see further in the text).

36 Occasionally, the temple prostitutes at the shrine of Ištar were called *ardatûs* (see below).

37 According to Langdon, *lilîtu* appeared in a later period after *ardat lilî*, and rapidly displaced the latter, passing into the other Semitic languages as a female demon of darkness and lust. [Langdon]

38 It is probable that the correspondences reported by Wiggermann have to be intended in the sense of the evolution of the myth in time, as it appears evident from the comparison of *ki-sikil-líl-lá-ke₄*, “gladdener of all hearts”, with the definitely more “dangerous” *ardat lilî/lilîtu* pair.

39 Wiggermann also reports the following Sumerian/Akkadian correspondences/translations: *líl(-lá)* “phantom”; *líl-lá(-en-na)*, *lilû*; *ki-sikil-ud-da-kar-ra*, “girl abducted by a day-demon” (*ud/ûmu* is the day-demon). [Wiggermann] Langdon also reports that *ud-da-kar-ra* means “suppression of light”, putting the *lilîtu* figure in connection with the idea of night and obscurity. [Langdon]

40 According to Langdon, when the Sumerian for *ki-el líl-lá* (*ki-sikil-líl-lá*) is employed for *lilîtu* and the scribe wished to write both *lilîtu* and *ardat lilî* in the same line he employed for the latter the Sumerian word *ki-el ud-da-kar-ra* (*ki-sikil-ud-da-kar-ra*). [Langdon]

Pazuzu (or *Pazuzû*), the personified West Wind, is the “king of the evil *lil*-spirits”, who, as such, had the power over his unsatisfied subjects, including *Lamaštu*⁴¹ (apparently in some respects an unsatisfied *lil*-demon too). [Wiggermann]

The remarkable and unexplained grouping of sexually unsatisfied spirits under a king cannot be independent from the king’s equally remarkable and unexplained serpentine penis. [Wiggermann]

Lilith, a dual-aspect figure

In the course of the development of the myth, the character of Lilith changed. By the time of the Talmudic-Rabbinic and Graeco-Byzantine traditions at the latest, the figure had acquired a dual aspect: a seductive *divine whore* (especially when interacting with a man) and a *terrible mother* (especially when interacting with a woman) who tries to harm pregnant women and to steal and kill their newborn children, in order to drink their blood and suck the marrow from their bones. This last aspect of Lilith is already conveyed in early texts, in which she is called “the strangler”⁴². [Hurwitz]

The figure of Lilith evolves over time through a process of syncretization between several related figures (in primis, *ki-sikil-lil-lá-ke₄*, */ki-sikil-ud-da-kar-ra*, *ardat lilî*, *lilîtu*, but also *Lamaštu* and *Inanna/Ištar*), polarizing around the two main “themes” of *seduction* and *danger*, both already present (at least in seed) in the original contributing characters.

From this process, Lilith emerges as a complex, bipolar, and liminal figure which, depending on the context, can be either “divine” or “demonic”; in any case, “more than human”⁴³ and powerfully, “darkly” feminine.

Since the two aspects of Lilith here described have been personified in Babylonian literature⁴⁴ in the two goddesses *Lamaštu* and *Ištar*, we can speak of a *Lamaštu* aspect and of an *Ištar* aspect of Lilith (see also [Hurwitz]).

Lamaštu share many features with Lilith: both watches the pregnant woman vigilantly, especially when she is in labor, trying not only to harm her personally, but also to steal her newborn child from her and to kill it. On amulets, both goddesses were named together and enjoined to leave mother and child alone. [Hurwitz]

The best sources for understanding *Lamaštu* are the so-called *Labartû* texts published by D. W. Myhrman⁴⁵. In these sources, *Lamaštu* is always invoked as a goddess. Her father is the Babylonian god of heaven, *Anû*, and thus she is generally called simply “daughter of *Anû*”. She is the “chosen confidante” of *Irnina*, a goddess who is related to the Sumerian *Inanna* and the Babylonian *Ištar*⁴⁶. [Hurwitz]

41 *Lamaštu* is much older than *Pazuzu*, but the absence of a corpus of bilingual incantations shows that the Akkadian exorcisms did not have a continuous history from the third millennium onwards. The original Sumerian *dim(-me)* is a member of the group of seven similar demons, and much less individualized than her Akkadian counterpart. Possibly the extant Sumerian material originates from the early second millennium, and was influenced by the Akkadian concept of the baby-snatching demoness. [Wiggermann]

42 See, for instance, the Arslan Tash amulet I [Hurwitz]

43 Even in the aspect of the first wife of Adam, she is endowed with wings and able to fly, and relate with demons.

44 The Babylonian was an Akkadian-Semitic civilization born in Mesopotamia between the 3rd and 2nd millennia B.C.

45 D.W. Myhrman: “*Die Labartû-Texte. Babylonische Beschwörungsformeln nebst Zauberverfahren gegen die Dämonin Labartu*”, in ZA, Strasbourg, 1902, Vol. XVI, p. 148ff. The texts have been corrected and expanded in certain respects over the last few decades.

46 Later in the text we will find that, similarly, Lilith, too, was called “the hand of *Inanna*”.

The Labartû texts say⁴⁷:

"Her abode is on the mountains, or in the reedbeds. Dreadful is her appearance. Her head and her face are those of a fearsome lion, white as clay is her countenance, she has the form of an ass, from her lips pours spittle, she roars like a lion, she howls like a jackal. A whore is she. Fearsome and savage is her nature. Raging, furious, fearsome, terrifying, violent, rapacious, rampaging, evil, malicious, she overthrows and destroys all that she approaches. Terrible are her deeds. Wherever she comes, wherever she appears, she brings evil and destruction. Men, beasts, trees, rivers, roads, buildings, she brings harm to them all. A flesh-eating, bloodsucking monster is she."

Other texts say that she watches the pregnant woman vigilantly and tries to snatch the newborn child from her. Some time before the birth, she appears in the maternity room so as to tear the child from the mother's body. Then she begins to torment the child *"now with heat and fire, then with fever and shivering"*. [Hurwitz]

Both the winged demonesses Lamaštu and Lilith are closely connected with darkness and night. For instance, Lamaštu is known as the "darkener of the daylight", and in one of the Aramaic magic texts, it is said of Lilith that she comes during the darkness. [Hurwitz]

It has even been suggested that the name Lilith is connected with the Hebrew word *laila* (לילה), that means "night", but, even if Lilith is regarded as a goddess or demon of the night and depicted from the Rabbis as either a seductive woman or a winged owl-like nightmare, the derivation from *laila* does not stand up. [Hurwitz]

The possible "phylogenetic" (in the mythic sense) derivation of Lilith from Lamaštu puts the former on the same level of the latter, that of a goddess-demoness, rather than simply of a demoness *strictu sensu*. Indeed, some authors maintain that Lilith can be considered as a former, archaic goddess devalued, at a later time, during the development of the myth, possibly with the advent of new religious convictions.⁴⁸ This aspect is emblematic of the overall liminal characteristic of Lilith/*lilitu*.

Within Jewish mythology, Lilith belongs to the group of demons or Shedim. According to some authors, the name Lilith existed in the 7th century B.C. and she retained her Shed-like characteristics throughout the entire Jewish tradition. The cult of Shedim came from the "surrounding area", i.e., it was taken over from the Canaanites, who for their part had learned from the Babylonians, who afforded the Shedim great reverence. [Hurwitz]

As well as the Lamaštu (i.e., child-stealing and child-killing demon and fearsome devouring mother) aspect, Lilith also exhibits a completely different characteristic. This other trait, which first appeared at a later date and which Lamaštu lacks almost completely, is her role as a seductress who leads men astray. This aspect is personified far more in the goddess Ištar, which, although having the bi-polar characteristic of being the goddess of both love and war, is virtually the prototype of the great seductress⁴⁹. [Hurwitz]

In contrast with Lamaštu, Ištar is not a clear-cut, sharply-defined personality. She is much vaguer, much more enigmatic, and has acquired different features depending on the region where

⁴⁷This text is a compilation of four different passages.

⁴⁸ Hurwitz, for instance, writes that, originally, Lilith was an archaic goddess who, on her very first appearance in the historico-religious tradition, presented just the single aspect of a terrible mother-goddess. With the advent of new religious convictions, she, as an "old" divine figure, was devalued. [Hurwitz]

⁴⁹ It is worth noting that even Inanna-Ištar inherits some traits from Lamaštu, the former being the lion goddess (i.e., the goddess who has the lions at her feet), and the latter being a lion-headed goddess.

she was worshipped. As the “Queen of Heaven”, she is totally the opposite of the chthonic Lamaštu. Above all, however, throughout the entire Orient, she is the goddess of sensual love, lust and seduction. As a result, she is the tutelary goddess of prostitutes and specially of the temple prostitutes – the *hierodules* – who serve her cult. Lilitu, too, is described in a Babylonian text as a divine harlot of Inanna. This particular characteristic is already to be found in older, Sumerian texts, according to which *Inanna* has sent the beautiful, unmarried and seductive prostitute Lilitu out into the streets and fields in order to lead men astray. This is why Lilith is also called “the hand of Inanna”⁵⁰. [Hurwitz, Langdon, Langdon2]

The Burney Relief

[Hurwitz]

The *Burney relief* (also known as “The Queen of the Night”) is a reproduction⁵¹ of a terra-cotta relief, whose iconographic interpretation has become the cause of numerous controversies among archaeologists and art historians.

The relief shows the erect figure of a beautiful naked female figure with two huge wings and two long bird’s feet with the talons of a bird of prey. She wears a three-horned crown (a divine attribute) and stands on two lions which face in opposite directions and is flanked by two night owls. Traces of red pigment still remain on the figure’s body that was originally painted red overall.

The relief is of Sumerian origin and appears to date from the so-called *Isin Larsa* period (i.e., around 1950 B.C.) A similar terra-cotta was discovered by *Elisabeth D. van Buren* in the Louvre. Here, the goddess is also naked, wears a similar crown on her head, and has the same wings as those on the Burney Relief. Here, too, she has the feet of a bird and her legs are feathered from the knees downwards, but the two owls are missing and the goddess stands on two ibexes (or wild goats), in place of the two lions, again facing in opposite directions.

Some authors maintain that the Burney relief represents a winged Inanna/Ištar, also because of the presence of the two lions which are known to belong – together with the dove – to the animals sacred to Inanna/Ištar.

Anyhow, lions do not belong exclusively among Inanna/Ištar’s cult animals. For instance, in the Babylonian-Assyrian culture group, lions are also sacred to other deities, such as Ningirsu and Šamaš. Moreover, in the Parisian fragment the goddess stands on two ibexes, which are not considered to be animals sacred to Inanna/Ištar. The night owls on the Burney relief, too, are not among Inanna/Ištar’s cult animals.

Incidentally, no Inanna/Ištar figures have so far been discovered in which the goddess has the feet of a bird with the talons of a bird of prey⁵².

50 Langdon explicitly writes “In the liturgies, as well as in the incantations, both Innini and the divine harlot *Lilitu* are expressly described as virgins, and both are constantly referred to as maidens.” [Langdon2]. Also see the “*Incantation in the ‘House of Light’, against the harlot of Innini*”, in “*Babylonian liturgies*” [Langdon].

51 It appeared for the first time in the *Illustrated London News* of 13th June 1936.

52 The author also writes: “Even if it is true that a series of winged male and female demons exists within the Sumerian-Babylonian culture group, pictorial representations of a winged Ishtar are not known.” Indeed, a cylinder seal of the Akkadian Period (reign of Naramsin or Sharkalishari, ca. 2254-2193 B.C.) dedicated to the little-known goddess Ninishkun and belonging to the Mesopotamia Collection of the Oriental Institute (University of Chicago) shows a winged Ishtar that places her right foot upon a roaring lion, which she restrains with a leash. The scimitar in her left hand and the weapons sprouting from her winged shoulders indicate her war-like nature. The real nature of

In the Babylonian-Assyrian culture group, most of the gods and demons – for example, the Uttuke group – do not only possess wings but also “Zu’s feet,” (that is, bird’s feet). Among the winged deities, we should mention Pazuzu and Lamaštu.

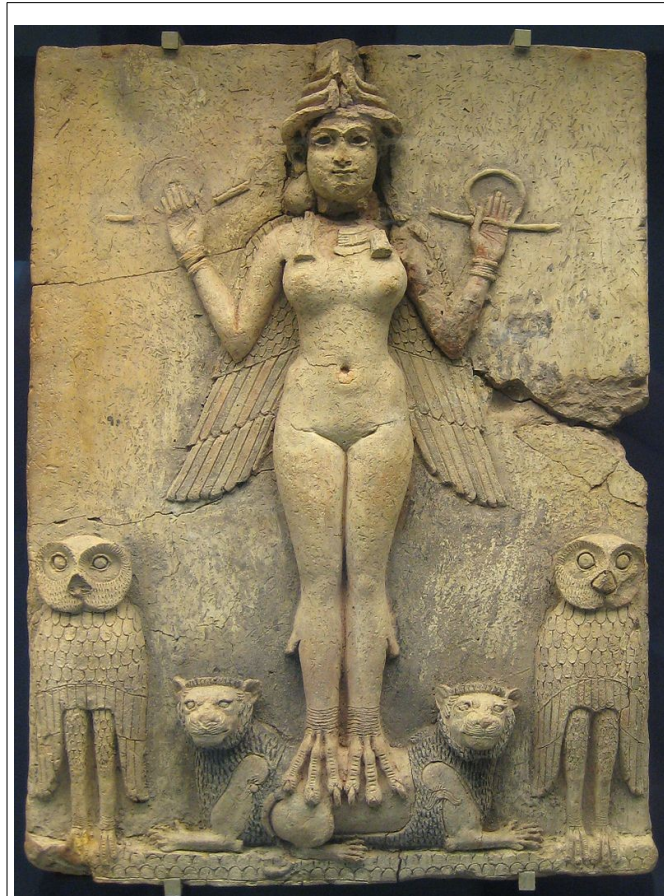


Fig. 7: The Burney relief [BabelStone]

Pazuzu is a half human, half animal creature, with a dog’s head and a man’s body. His feet are covered with birds’ feathers and end in the talons of a bird of prey. However, he has to be ruled out because he appears as a male god in almost all the texts.

Lamaštu, whose bird-like character emerges from the Labartû texts, is equipped with feathers and, according to a magic text, has also “eagle’s talons.” But even the assumption that Lamaštu is the goddess on the Burney Relief cannot be upheld, because Lamaštu is said to have the “head of a lion” and a “terrible appearance”, while the goddess on the relief has a human head which is not in the least terrifying but extremely attractive, even seductive.

Owls are most definitely night creatures and, therefore, their presence signifies that the figure of the Burney Relief must be a goddess of the darkness or the night. Although Ištar has connections with the evening star, she nevertheless has no links with owls.

All these reasons suggest the idea that the figure represented in the relief can actually be Lilith (who is, of course, a goddess of the night), even though the question is much disputed. The other possible candidates are the already cited Inanna/Ištar and Inanna’s sister Ereškigal.

the goddess is shown by an eight-pointed star at her left. See fig. 5.

Lilith, the first woman

Whereas the Mesopotamian *lilītu* referred, at least originally, to a *class* of wind-related demons, the Lilith of Judaism represents a singular entity, possibly following from later developments that brought to a singular Lilītu.

One passage in the Old Testament mentions Lilith. In the prophet Isaiah's vision of the destruction of the enemies of Zion – especially Edom – it says (Isaiah 34:14):

*“And thorns shall come up in her palaces,
nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof; and it shall be an habitation for jackals,
and a court for owls.
The wild wolves of the desert shall also meet with the hyenas,
And the Sa'ir shall cry to his fellow; Lilith also shall rest there,
And find for herself a place of rest.”*

The term *lilith* or *lilit* (לִילִית), here, has been variously translated as “night creatures”, “night monster”, “night hag”, or even “screech owl”, either in singular or plural form according to variations in the earliest manuscripts. In the Septuagint (also known as the Greek Old Testament), *lilith* is translated with “onocentaurs”, while in some Latin and English versions of the Bible has been translated with “lamia”. It's highly probable that in Isaiah's vision (and so in the whole Hebrew Bible) “Lilith” was not intended as a personal name but rather as a descriptor for a *kind* of creature. Beyond that, the Jewish myth of the first Adam's wife certainly does not appear in the original creation story of the Torah or the Tanakh, but comes from a non-canonical Jewish tradition.

The earliest reference to Lilith as the first Adam's wife comes from the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* (or *Alphabet of Ben Sirach*) an anonymous, pseudoepigraphical medieval composition written between 700 and 1000 AD, so certainly a late addition to the Judaic tradition. Even if the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* is generally considered to be a satirical work, the image of Lilith as the first wife of Adam has survived the centuries as a myth that is possibly linked to a pre-existing Jewish tradition in which Lilith was viewed as a prolific child-snatcher.

According to the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, Lilith was created at the same time and from the same clay as Adam, unlike Eve, who was created from one of Adam's ribs.

When God created the first man Adam alone, God said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” So God created a woman for him, from the earth like him, and called her Lilith. They promptly began to argue with each other: She said, “I will not lie below,” and he said, “I will not lie below, but above, since you are fit for being below and I for being above.” She told him, “The two of us are equal, since we are both from the earth.” And they would not listen to each other. Since Lilith saw this, she uttered God's ineffable name and flew away into the air. Adam stood in prayer before his Maker and said, “Lord of the Universe, the woman you gave me fled from me!”

The Holy Blessed one immediately dispatched the three angels Sanoy, Sansenoy, and Samangelof after her, to bring her back. God said, “If she wants to return, well and good. And if not, she must accept that a hundred of her children will die every day.” The angels pursued her and overtook her in the sea, in raging waters, (the same waters in which the Egyptians would one day drown), and told her God's orders. And yet she did not want to return. They told her they would drown her in the sea, and she replied. “Leave me alone! I was only created in order to sicken children: if they are male, from birth to day eight I will

have power over them; if they are female, from birth to day twenty.” When they heard her reply, they pleaded with her to come back. She swore to them in the name of the living God that whenever she would see them or their names or their images on an amulet, she would not overpower that baby, and she accepted that a hundred of her children would die every day. Therefore, a hundred of the demons die every day, and therefore, we write the names of the three angels on amulets of young children. When Lilith sees them, she remembers her oath and the child is healed. [JWA]

The legend of Lilith developed extensively during the Middle Ages, in the tradition of Aggadah, the Zohar, and Jewish mysticism. In the folk tradition that arose in the early Middle Ages, Lilith became sometimes identified with the female partner of Asmodeus, King of Demons.

Two primary characteristics are seen in these legends: Lilith as the incarnation of lust, causing men to be led astray, and Lilith as a child-killing being, who strangles neonates. These two aspects of the Lilith legends seemed to have evolved separately.

The astrological Lilith

Lilith has a bold presence even in astrology. There are three main astrological points associated with Lilith: an asteroid named ‘Lilith’; the controversial Dark Moon Lilith (also called *Waldemath Lilith* or *Sepharial’s Moon*), said to be the Earth’s second moon; and the Black Moon Lilith, an abstract point in space corresponding to the second focal point of the lunar quasi-elliptical orbit around the Earth (the first focal point corresponding with the Earth itself). The latter Lilith is also sometimes differentiated in two different points: the “True” or “Osculating” Black Moon Lilith, and the “Mean” Black Moon Lilith, according to which the moon orbit (that is not really describable as an ellipse non in terms of any simple geometric function) is approximated with an osculating, variable quasi-ellipse (that has a fairly good correspondence with the true lunar motion) or with a “mean” elliptic function (that is easier to handle but has the disadvantage of providing a poorer correspondence with the real moon position over time).

The asteroid Lilith, in fact, is named after a French composer, nicknamed ‘Lili’, so it has nothing really to do with the mythological Lilith, even though it is observed by astrologers as an “aspect” of the latter.

The Dark Moon Lilith is not a physical object like the asteroid Lilith, nor it is a calculated point in the space, like the Black Moon Lilith. The Dark Moon Lilith is, indeed, a hypothetical secondary Earth’s satellite that someone told could only be seen on rare dates when it is opposite the Sun or when its silhouette crosses in front of the Sun. Obviously, even if ephemerides have been calculated for this, it has no real correspondence with anything really existent.

Perhaps the most intriguing of the three Liliths, the Black Moon is an abstract, geometrical point, similar in this to a lunar node. It is related to the dark “aspects” of the Moon, the ones that “move” the Moon from behind the curtain of invisibility, influencing, without being seen, the rhythm of the relation between the Earth, the Moon and the Sun. According to modern astrologers, it is seen as a signifier of one’s hidden nature, the unconscious in which psychic demons breed in the darkness of the subliminal. Knowing Lilith’s position in the natal chart is considered to be important to understanding how one can become aware of one’s “dark side” and bring unconscious patterns of behavior to light. But obviously, it also carries with it the particular traits of feminine power and sexual freedom that belong to the mythological Lilith. So, the position

of the astrological Lilith in a woman's chart can be instructive in understanding her sexual power and the way that she comes to terms with the male influence. [RIKB]

The symbol of the Black Moon Lilith is ♁ (Unicode U+26B8), a black lunar crescent with the concavity orientated toward the right, surmounting a cross.

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