

Inana's descent to the nether world

(Sumerian text, 3rd Millennium BC, University of Oxford translation, The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature)

From the great heaven she set her mind on the great below. From the great heaven the goddess set her mind on the great below. From the great heaven Inana set her mind on the great below. My mistress abandoned heaven, abandoned earth, and descended to the underworld. Inana abandoned heaven, abandoned earth, and descended to the underworld.

She abandoned the office of *en*, abandoned the office of *lagar*, and descended to the underworld. She abandoned the E-ana in Unug, and descended to the underworld. She abandoned the E-muš-kalama in Bad-tibira, and descended to the underworld. She abandoned the Giguna in Zabalam, and descended to the underworld. She abandoned the E-šara in Adab, and descended to the underworld. She abandoned the Barag-dur-ĝara in Nibru, and descended to the underworld. She abandoned the Ĥursaĝ-kalama in Kiš, and descended to the underworld. She abandoned the E-Ulmaš in Agade, and descended to the underworld.

She abandoned the Ibgal in Umma, and descended to the underworld. She abandoned the E-Dilmuna in Urim, and descended to the underworld. She abandoned the Amaš-e-kug in Kisiga, and descended to the underworld. She abandoned the E-ešdam-kug in Ĝirsu, and descended to the underworld. She abandoned the E-šeg-meše-du in Isin, and descended to the underworld. She abandoned the Anzagar in Akšak, and descended to the underworld. She abandoned the Niĝin-ĝar-kug in Šuruppag, and descended to the underworld. She abandoned the E-šag-ĥula in Kazallu, and descended to the underworld.}

She took the seven divine powers. She collected the divine powers and grasped them in her hand. With the good divine powers, she went on her way. She put a turban, headgear for the open country, on her head. She took a wig for her forehead. She hung small lapis-lazuli beads around her neck.

She placed twin egg-shaped beads on her breast. She covered her body with a *pala* dress, the garment of ladyship. She placed mascara which is called "Let a man come, let him come" on her eyes. She pulled the pectoral which is called "Come, man, come" over her breast. She placed a golden ring on her hand. She held the lapis-lazuli measuring rod and measuring line in her hand.

Inana travelled towards the underworld. Her minister Ninšubur travelled behind her.

Holy Inana said to Ninšubur: "Come my faithful minister of E-ana. I am going to give you instructions: my instructions must be followed; I am going to say something to you: it must be observed."

"On this day I will descend to the underworld. When I have arrived in the underworld, make a lament for me on the ruin mounds. Beat the drum for me in the sanctuary. Make the rounds of the houses of the gods for me."

"Lacerate your eyes for me, lacerate your nose for me. Lacerate your ears for me, in public. In private, lacerate your buttocks for me. Like a pauper, clothe yourself in a single garment and all alone set your foot in the E-kur, the house of Enlil."

"When you have entered the E-kur, the house of Enlil, lament before Enlil: "Father Enlil, don't let anyone kill your daughter in the underworld. Don't let your precious metal be alloyed there with the dirt of the underworld. Don't let your precious lapis lazuli be split there with the mason's stone. Don't let your

boxwood be chopped up there with the carpenter's wood. Don't let young lady Inana be killed in the underworld. ""

"If Enlil does not help you in this matter, go to Urim. In the E-mud-kura at Urim, when you have entered the E-kiš-nu-ĝal, the house of Nanna, lament before Nanna: "Father Nanna, don't let anyone kill your daughter in the underworld. Don't let your precious metal be alloyed there with the dirt of the underworld. Don't let your precious lapis lazuli be split there with the mason's stone. Don't let your boxwood be chopped up there with the carpenter's wood. Don't let young lady Inana be killed in the underworld.""

"And if Nanna does not help you in this matter, go to Eridug. In Eridug, when you have entered the house of Enki, lament before Enki: "Father Enki, don't let anyone kill your daughter in the underworld. Don't let your precious metal be alloyed there with the dirt of the underworld. Don't let your precious lapis lazuli be split there with the mason's stone. Don't let your boxwood be chopped up there with the carpenter's wood. Don't let young lady Inana be killed in the underworld.""

"Father Enki, the lord of great wisdom, knows about the life-giving plant and the life-giving water. He is the one who will restore me to life."

When Inana travelled on towards the underworld, her minister Ninšubur travelled on behind her. She said to her minister Ninšubur: "Go now, my Ninšubur, and pay attention. Don't neglect the instructions I gave you."

When Inana arrived at the palace Ganzer, she pushed aggressively on the door of the underworld. She shouted aggressively at the gate of the underworld: "Open up, doorman, open up. Open up, Neti, open up. I am all alone and I want to come in."

Neti, the chief doorman of the underworld, answered holy Inana: "Who are you?" "I am Inana going to the east." "If you are Inana going to the east, why have you travelled to the land of no return? How did you set your heart on the road whose traveller never returns?"

Holy Inana answered him: "Because Lord Gud-gal-ana, the husband of my elder sister holy Ereškigala, has died; in order to have his funeral rites observed, she offers generous libations at his wake, that is the reason."

Neti, the chief doorman of the underworld, answered holy Inana: "Stay here, Inana. I will speak to my mistress. I will speak to my mistress Ereškigala and tell her what you have said."

Neti, the chief doorman of the underworld, entered the house of his mistress Ereškigala and said: "My mistress, there is a lone girl outside. It is Inana, your sister, and she has arrived at the palace Ganzer. She pushed aggressively on the door of the underworld. She shouted aggressively at the gate of the underworld. She has abandoned E-ana and has descended to the underworld."

"She has taken the seven divine powers. She has collected the divine powers and grasped them in her hand. She has come on her way with all the good divine powers. She has put a turban, headgear for the open country, on her head. She has taken a wig for her forehead. She has hung small lapis-lazuli beads around her neck."

"She has placed twin egg-shaped beads on her breast. She has covered her body with the *pala* dress of ladyship. She has placed mascara which is called "Let a man come" on her eyes. She has pulled the pectoral which is called "Come, man, come" over her breast. She has placed a golden ring on her hand. She is holding the lapis-lazuli measuring rod and measuring line in her hand."

When she heard this, Ereškigala slapped the side of her thigh. She bit her lip and took the words to heart. She said to Neti, her chief doorman: "Come Neti, my chief doorman of the underworld, don't neglect the instructions I will give you. Let the seven gates of the underworld be bolted. Then let each door of the palace Ganzer be opened separately. As for her, after she has entered, and crouched down and had her clothes removed, they will be carried away."

Neti, the chief doorman of the underworld, paid attention to the instructions of his mistress. He bolted the seven gates of the underworld. Then he opened each of the doors of the palace Ganzer separately. He said to holy Inana: "Come on, Inana, and enter."

And when Inana entered, the lapis-lazuli measuring rod and measuring line were removed from her hand, when she entered the first gate, the turban, headgear for the open country, was removed from her head. "What is this?" "Be silent, Inana, a divine power of the underworld has been fulfilled. Inana, you must not open your mouth against the rites of the underworld."

134-138. When she entered the second gate, the small lapis-lazuli beads were removed from her neck. "What is this?" "Be silent, Inana, a divine power of the underworld has been fulfilled. Inana, you must not open your mouth against the rites of the underworld."

139-143. When she entered the third gate, the twin egg-shaped beads were removed from her breast. "What is this?" "Be silent, Inana, a divine power of the underworld has been fulfilled. Inana, you must not open your mouth against the rites of the underworld."

When she entered the fourth gate, the "Come, man, come" pectoral was removed from her breast. "What is this?" "Be silent, Inana, a divine power of the underworld has been fulfilled. Inana, you must not open your mouth against the rites of the underworld."

When she entered the fifth gate, the golden ring was removed from her hand. "What is this?" "Be silent, Inana, a divine power of the underworld has been fulfilled. Inana, you must not open your mouth against the rites of the underworld."

When she entered the sixth gate, the lapis-lazuli measuring rod and measuring line were removed from her hand. "What is this?" "Be silent, Inana, a divine power of the underworld has been fulfilled. Inana, you must not open your mouth against the rites of the underworld."

When she entered the seventh gate, the *pala* dress, the garment of ladyship, was removed from her body. "What is this?" "Be silent, Inana, a divine power of the underworld has been fulfilled. Inana, you must not open your mouth against the rites of the underworld."

After she had crouched down and had her clothes removed, they were carried away. Then she made her sister Ereškigala rise from her throne, and instead she sat on her throne. The Anuna, the seven judges, rendered their decision against her. They looked at her, it was the look of death. They spoke to her, it was the speech of anger. They shouted at her, it was the shout of heavy guilt. The afflicted woman was turned into a corpse. And the corpse was hung on a hook.

After three days and three nights had passed, her minister Ninšubur, her minister who speaks fair words, her escort who speaks trustworthy words, carried out the instructions of her mistress, he did not forget her orders, she did not neglect her instructions.

She made a lament for her in her ruined houses. She beat the drum for her in the sanctuaries. She made the rounds of the houses of the gods for her. She lacerated her eyes for her, she lacerated her nose. In private she lacerated her buttocks for her. Like a pauper, she clothed herself in a single garment, and all alone she set her foot in the E-kur, the house of Enlil.

When she had entered the E-kur, the house of Enlil, she lamented before Enlil: "Father Enlil, don't let anyone kill your daughter in the underworld. Don't let your precious metal be alloyed there with the dirt of the underworld. Don't let your precious lapis lazuli be split there with the mason's stone. Don't let your boxwood be chopped up there with the carpenter's wood. Don't let young lady Inana be killed in the underworld."

In his rage Father Enlil answered Ninšubur: "My daughter craved the great heaven and she craved the great below as well. Inana craved the great heaven and she craved the great below as well. The divine powers of the underworld are divine powers which should not be craved, for whoever gets them must remain in the underworld. Who, having got to that place, could then expect to come up again?"

Thus Father Enlil did not help in this matter, so she went to Urim. In the E-mud-kura at Urim, when she had entered the E-kiš-nu-ĝal, the house of Nanna, she lamented before Nanna: "Father Nanna, don't let your daughter be killed in the underworld. Don't let your precious metal be alloyed there with the dirt of the underworld. Don't let your precious lapis lazuli be split there with the mason's stone. Don't let your boxwood be chopped up there with the carpenter's wood. Don't let young lady Inana be killed in the underworld."

In his rage Father Nanna answered Ninšubur: "My daughter craved the great heaven and she craved the great below as well. Inana craved the great heaven and she craved the great below as well. The divine powers of the underworld are divine powers which should not be craved, for whoever gets them must remain in the underworld. Who, having got to that place, could then expect to come up again?"

Thus Father Nanna did not help her in this matter, so she went to Eridug. In Eridug, when she had entered the house of Enki, she lamented before Enki: "Father Enki, don't let anyone kill your daughter in the underworld. Don't let your precious metal be alloyed there with the dirt of the underworld. Don't let your precious lapis lazuli be split there with the mason's stone. Don't let your boxwood be chopped up there with the carpenter's wood. Don't let young lady Inana be killed in the underworld."

Father Enki answered Ninšubur: "What has my daughter done? She has me worried. What has Inana done? She has me worried. What has the mistress of all the lands done? She has me worried. What has the mistress of heaven done? She has me worried." Thus Father Enki helped her in this matter. He removed some dirt from the tip of his fingernail and created the *kur-ĝara*. He removed some dirt from the tip of his other fingernail and created the *gala-tura*. To the *kur-ĝara* he gave the life-giving plant. To the *gala-tura* he gave the life-giving water.

Then Father Enki spoke out to the *gala-tura* and the *kur-ĝara*: "One of you sprinkle the life-giving plant over her, and the other the life-giving water. Go and direct your steps to the underworld. Flit past the door like flies. Slip through the door pivots like phantoms. The mother who gave birth, Ereškigala, on account of her children, is lying there. Her holy shoulders are not covered by a linen cloth. Her breasts are not full like

a *šagan* vessel. Her nails are like a pickaxe upon her. The hair on her head is bunched up as if it were leeks."

"When she says "Oh my heart", you are to say "You are troubled, our mistress, oh your heart". When she says "Oh my body", you are to say "You are troubled, our mistress, oh your body". She will then ask: "Who are you? Speaking to you from my heart to your heart, from my body to your body, if you are gods, let me talk with you; if you are mortals, may a destiny be decreed for you." Make her swear this by heaven and earth.

1 line fragmentary"

"They will offer you a riverful of water, don't accept it. They will offer you a field with its grain, don't accept it. But say to her: "Give us the corpse hanging on the hook." She will answer: "That is the corpse of your queen." Say to her: "Whether it is that of our king, whether it is that of our queen, give it to us." She will give you the corpse hanging on the hook. One of you sprinkle on it the life-giving plant and the other the life-giving water. Thus let Inana arise."

The *gala-tura* and the *kur-ĝara* paid attention to the instructions of Enki. They flitted through the door like flies. They slipped through the door pivots like phantoms. The mother who gave birth, Ereškigala, because of her children, was lying there. Her holy shoulders were not covered by a linen cloth. Her breasts were not full like a *šagan* vessel. Her nails were like a pickaxe upon her. The hair on her head was bunched up as if it were leeks.

When she said "Oh my heart", they said to her "You are troubled, our mistress, oh your heart". When she said "Oh my body", they said to her "You are troubled, our mistress, oh your body". Then she asked: "Who are you? I tell you from my heart to your heart, from my body to your body, if you are gods, I will talk with you; if you are mortals, may a destiny be decreed for you." They made her swear this by heaven and earth. They

They were offered a river with its water, they did not accept it. They were offered a field with its grain, they did not accept it. They said to her: "Give us the corpse hanging on the hook." Holy Ereškigala answered the *gala-tura* and the *kur-ĝara*: "The corpse is that of your queen." They said to her: "Whether it is that of our king or that of our queen, give it to us." They were given the corpse hanging on the hook. One of them sprinkled on it the life-giving plant and the other the life-giving water. And thus Inana arose.

Ereškigala said to the *gala-tura* and the *kur-ĝara*: "Bring your queen, your has been seized." Inana, because of Enki's instructions, was about to ascend from the underworld. But as Inana was about to ascend from the underworld, the Anuna seized her: "Who has ever ascended from the underworld, has ascended unscathed from the underworld? If Inana is to ascend from the underworld, let her provide a substitute for herself."

So when Inana left the underworld, the one in front of her, though not a minister, held a sceptre in his hand; the one behind her, though not an escort, carried a mace at his hip, while the small demons, like a reed enclosure, and the big demons, like the reeds of a fence, restrained her on all sides.

Those who accompanied her, those who accompanied Inana, know no food, know no drink, eat no flour offering and drink no libation. They accept no pleasant gifts. They never enjoy the pleasures of the marital embrace, never have any sweet children to kiss. They tear away the wife from a man's embrace. They take the wife away from a man's embrace. They snatch the son from a man's knee. They take away the child

hanging on a wet-nurse's breasts They make the bride leave the house of her father-in-law. They crush no bitter garlic. They eat no fish, they eat no leeks. They, it was, who accompanied Inana.

After Inana had ascended from the underworld, Ninšubur threw herself at her feet at the door of the Ganzer. She had sat in the dust and clothed herself in a filthy garment. The demons said to holy Inana: "Inana, proceed to your city, we will take her back."

Holy Inana answered the demons: "This is my minister of fair words, my escort of trustworthy words. She did not forget my instructions. She did not neglect the orders I gave her. She made a lament for me on the ruin mounds. She beat the drum for me in the sanctuaries. She made the rounds of the gods' houses for me. She lacerated her eyes for me, lacerated her nose for me. She lacerated her ears for me in public. In private, she lacerated her buttocks for me. Like a pauper, she clothed herself in a single garment."

"All alone she directed her steps to the E-kur, to the house of Enlil, and to Urim, to the house of Nanna, and to Eridug, to the house of Enki. She wept before Enki. She brought me back to life. How could I turn her over to you? Let us go on. Let us go on to the Šeg-kuršaga in Umma."

At the Šeg-kuršaga in Umma, Šara, in his own city, threw himself at her feet. He had sat in the dust and dressed himself in a filthy garment. The demons said to holy Inana: "Inana, proceed to your city, we will take him back."

Holy Inana answered the demons: "Šara is my singer, my manicurist and my hairdresser. How could I turn him over to you? Let us go on. Let us go on to the E-muš-kalama in Bad-tibira."

At the E-muš-kalama in Bad-tibira, Lulal, in his own city, threw himself at her feet. He had sat in the dust and clothed himself in a filthy garment. The demons said to holy Inana: "Inana, proceed to your city, we will take him back."

Holy Inana answered the demons: "Outstanding Lulal follows me at my right and my left. How could I turn him over to you? Let us go on. Let us go on to the great apple tree in the plain of Kulaba."

They followed her to the great apple tree in the plain of Kulaba. There was Dumuzid clothed in a magnificent garment and seated magnificently on a throne. The demons seized him there by his thighs. The seven of them poured the milk from his churns. The seven of them shook their heads like They would not let the shepherd play the pipe and flute before he.

She looked at him, it was the look of death. She spoke to him, it was the speech of anger. She shouted at him, it was the shout of heavy guilt: "How much longer? Take him away." Holy Inana gave Dumuzid the shepherd into their hands.

Those who had accompanied her, who had come for Dumuzid, know no food, know no drink, eat no flour offering, drink no libation. They never enjoy the pleasures of the marital embrace, never have any sweet children to kiss. They snatch the son from a man's knee. They make the bride leave the house of her father-in-law.

Dumuzid let out a wail and wept. The lad raised his hands to heaven, to Utu: "Utu, you are my brother-in-law. I am your relation by marriage. I brought butter to your mother's house. I brought milk to Ningal's house. Turn my hands into snake's hands and turn my feet into snake's feet, so I can escape my demons, let them not keep hold of me."

Utu accepted his tears. Dumuzid's demons could not keep hold of him. Utu turned Dumuzid's hands into snake's hands. He turned his feet into snake's feet. Dumuzid escaped his demons. Like a *saĝkal* snake he} They seized

2 lines fragmentary

Holy Inana her heart.

Holy Inana wept bitterly for her husband.

4 lines fragmentary

She tore at her hair like esparto grass, she ripped it out like esparto grass. "You wives who lie in your men's embrace, where is my precious husband? You children who lie in your men's embrace, where is my precious child? Where is my man? Where? Where is my man? Where?"

A fly spoke to holy Inana: "If I show you where your man is, what will be my reward?" Holy Inana answered the fly: "If you show me where my man is, I will give you this gift: I will cover"

The fly helped (?) holy Inana. Young lady Inana decreed the destiny of the fly: "In the beer-house, may bronze vessels for you. You will live like the sons of the wise." Now Inana decreed this fate and thus it came to be.

..... was weeping. She came up to the sister and by the hand: "Now, alas, my You for half the year and your sister for half the year: when you are demanded, on that day you will stay, when your sister is demanded, on that day you will be released." Thus holy Inana gave Dumuzid as a substitute

Holy Ereškigala -- sweet is your praise.