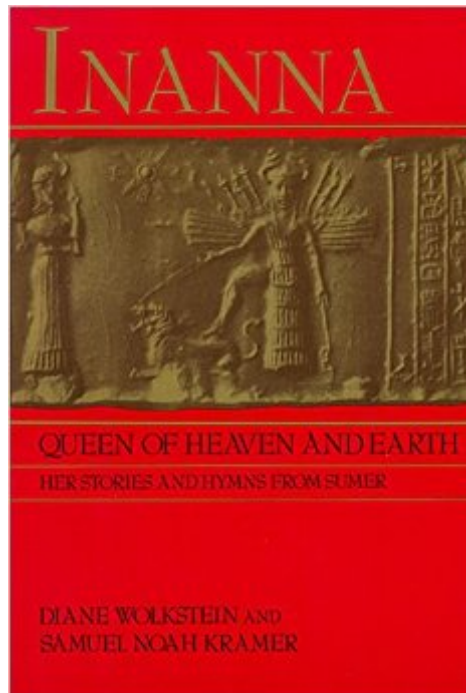


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Inanna, Queen Of Heaven And Earth: Her Stories And Hymns From Sumer



Synopsis

A fresh retelling of the ancient texts about Ishtar, the world's first goddess. Illustrated with visual artifacts of the period. "A great masterpiece of universal literature."--Mircea Eliade

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The result of a collaboration between Sumerian scholar Noah Kramer and folklorist Diane Wolkstein, this book is a thoughtfully annotated translation of the major Sumerian cuneiform texts devoted to the goddess Inanna-among the oldest religious texts in the world. It is illustrated with black-and-white reproductions of ancient Sumerian art, mostly on clay tablets. Our understanding of Sumerian culture continues to grow as new texts are found and our perceptions change. This book was published in 1983, and included material unknown to the general public at the time. There are four major stories of Inanna told here: "The Huluppu Tree," "Inanna and the God Of Wisdom," "The Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi," and the extended epic "The Descent of Inanna." Seven hymns to the goddess round out the collection. In "The Huluppu Tree," we meet the adolescent Inanna, expectantly awaiting the attainment of her queenship. The Huluppu tree, which she has planted and tended as a symbol of her hopeful authority, becomes infested with evil creatures, like personal demons, that will not depart and bring her to despair. She eventually appeals to Gilgamesh to vanquish the demons, and they exchange gifts made from the wood of the tree, bringing them both to greater power. In "Inanna and the God of Wisdom," Inanna, now sexually mature but still youthful and unproven, is welcomed by Enki, God of Wisdom, who acts the role of proud grandfather, giving

a feast in her honor. Enki's magnanimity increases as he drinks, and he ends up offering Inanna all the magical keys to human civilization. Inanna, with enthusiastic politeness, accepts the gifts, and then makes a quick exit, getting a head start before Enki thinks better of his generosity and sends his monsters in pursuit of the errant goddess.

Diane Wolkenstein revives ancient poetry that reminds us of a Goddess tradition, long lost to the Western world. In conjunction with Samuel Noah Kramer, a noted scholar on Sumer, she works with the subtleties and ambiguities of the texts to reveal experiences long ago pressed into clay and forgotten. This book is a collection of stories & hymns, translated from the cuneiform by Kramer. Wolkenstein, an expert in folktales, mythology, & storytelling, worked with his translations to craft an essence of the myths that reads coherently; confronting the reader with stories that are at once archaic and contemporary. Numerous relief images from ancient Sumer enhance the "otherness" of the text. Rhythms and repetitive lineation loudly proclaim the exotic nature of this sacred poetry. And yet, at the heart of these stories, lie essential & archetypal material, which underlies the lives of each of us. I like this feature of the book best--I can read these ancient hymns and find a resonance within my modern soul. Wolkenstein and Kramer have well accomplished what they set out to do. One notable feature of this poetry is the erotic content. Whether veiled in metaphor: "At the king's lap stood the rising cedar." or explicit: "As for me, Inanna, / Who will plow my vulva? / Who will plow my high field? / Who will plow my wet ground?" this erotic sacred literature of a vanished people stands in stark contrast to the purified verses of the canonical Judeo-Christian scriptures. Long before religion villified sexuality, we read--we experience in this poetry--that it was an honored sacrament, inseparable from spirituality.

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