

# A Maidenly Inanna

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The text BM 23631, published by S. N. Kramer,<sup>1</sup> has in its fourth column the last two thirds of a šir-nam-šub composition dealing with Utu and his young sister, Inanna. The beginning of the composition is lost, but Kramer estimates the length of the lost portion at some sixteen lines on the basis of remaining traces. The preserved part may be transliterated and translated as follows.

## Transliteration

- 120    šul-<sup>d</sup>Utu giri<sub>4</sub> (GIR<sub>4</sub>GANĀtenū)-dè amar-sú[n-na-ke<sub>4</sub>]  
          amar-sún-na-ke<sub>4</sub> amar-tur-zi-da-ke<sub>4</sub>  
          <sup>d</sup>Utu šeš kaššeba <sup>d</sup>Inanna-ke<sub>4</sub>  
          en me en DU-DU sila-sud<sub>4</sub> (GIB)-ra-ke<sub>4</sub>  
          <sup>d</sup>Utu kaš-mu-unu<sub>4</sub>-màl é-kaš-tin-ka-ke<sub>4</sub>
- 125    šul <sup>d</sup>Utu kaš-mu-unu<sub>4</sub>-màl é-kaš-tin-ka-ke<sub>4</sub>  
          šeš-mu ù-mu-un ní-gùr-ru kur-šè ga-ba-e-da-u<sub>5</sub>  
          ù-mu-un-an-na ù-mu-un ní-gùr-ru ù-mu-un kur-šè ga-ba-e-da-u<sub>5</sub>  
          kur-šim-ma-šè kur-<sup>Bis</sup>erin-na-šè kur-šè (ga-ba-e-da-u<sub>5</sub>)  
          kur-<sup>Bis</sup>erin-na kur-<sup>Bis</sup>ha-šu-úr-ra-šè kur-šè (ga-ba-e-da-u<sub>5</sub>)
- 130    kur-kù-ga kur-za-gìn-na-šè kur-šè (ga-ba-e-da-u<sub>5</sub>)  
          kur-gakkul -aman (MU-UNU<sub>4</sub>MÚ-MÚ) [šè kur-šè (ga-ba-e-da-u<sub>5</sub>)]  
          íd-hal-hal-la a ki-ta su-ud-bi [...]  
          šeš-mu gub-a ga-[ba-e-da-u<sub>5</sub>]  
          šeš-mu ab-šà-ga IG<sub>1</sub>-mu dè-[ni-du<sub>8</sub>]
- 135    šeš-mu munus-e-ne mu-[zu-me-eš]  
          <sup>d</sup>Utu munus-e-ne mu-[du<sub>4</sub>me-eš]  
          ém-munus-e-ne mu nu-zu-mèn  
          ém-munus-e-ne mu-du<sub>4</sub>nu-zu-mèn  
          ém munus-e-ne še-su-ub nu-zu-mèn
- 140    mu-du<sub>4</sub>nu-zu-mèn še-su-ub-nu-zu-mèn  
          kur-ra a-na mu-un-ma-al a-na ga-kú-un-dè-en  
          hur-sa<sub>12</sub>-mà a-na mu-un-ma-al a-na ga-kú-un-dè-en  
          kur-šim-ma-šè kur-<sup>Bis</sup>erin-na-šè  
          kur-<sup>Bis</sup>erin-na kur-ha-šu-úr-ra-šè
- 145    kur-ra a-na mu-un-ma-al a-na ga-kú-un-dè-en  
          šim mu-un-kú-a-ta <sup>Bis</sup>erin mu-un-kú-a-ta  
          šu-mu šu ù-bí-dù é-mu-šè gi<sub>4</sub>-mù  
          é-mu-šè gi<sub>4</sub>-mu é-mu Zabala<sup>ki</sup>-a-ra

\* *Editors' Note:* We deeply regret that Professor Jacobsen did not live to see this article into print. The editors of *JANES* have taken responsibility for correcting the proofs of the article, based primarily on the author's manuscript.

1. S. N. Kramer, "Bread for Enlil, Sex for Inanna," *Or.* 54 (1985), 117-32 with tab. II-IV.

- ama-mu-šè gi<sub>4</sub>-mu ama-mu Ga-ša-an-gal-ra  
 150 ušbar-mu-šè gi<sub>4</sub>-mu Ga-ša-an-sún-na-ra  
 e-rib-bi-mu gi<sub>4</sub>-mu <sup>d</sup>Mu-tin-an-na-ra  
 šu-dili-è-da-ke<sub>4</sub> é-lú-è-da-ke<sub>4</sub>  
 é-lú-è-da-ke<sub>4</sub> šu-dili-è-da-ke<sub>4</sub>  
<sup>d</sup>Utu ama-bi-me-en <sup>d</sup>Utu a-a-bi-me-en  
 155 <sup>d</sup>Utu nu-sik-ke<sub>4</sub> <sup>d</sup>Utu nu-mu-su-e  
<sup>d</sup>Utu nu-sik-ke<sub>4</sub> a-a-ni-gim i<sub>6</sub>-bi ma-ra-pàd  
<sup>d</sup>Utu nu-mu-su-e ama-bi-gim šu-gi<sub>4</sub>-gi<sub>4</sub>?-bi-me-en  
 a-dib za-da a-dib-di<sub>6</sub>-di<sub>6</sub>  
 min-sìr-nam-šub-<sup>d</sup>Utu-kam

### Translation

- 120 O Hero Utu, beer keg bringer, calf fed on mash,  
 calf of a wild cow, calf of a good byre,  
 Utu, brother and provider for Inanna,  
 lord with an office, lord, wanderer of faraway roads,  
 Utu, producer of beer and malt for the alehouse,  
 125 hero Utu, producer of beer and malt for the alehouse,  
 My brother, lord laden with fearsome glory, let me  
 climb up with you onto the highlands,  
 lord of the sky, lord laden with fearsome glory, let me  
 climb up with you onto the highlands  
 Onto the highlands of herbs, onto the highlands of cedars,  
 let me climb up with you onto the highlands,  
 unto the highlands of cedars and highlands of hašur cedars,  
 let me climb up with you onto the highlands,  
 130 unto the highlands of the silver, and highlands of the lapis lazuli,  
 let me climb up with you onto the highlands,  
 unto the highlands of fermenting vats and maltsters,  
 let me climb up with you onto the highlands  
 so that I may see the waters of the Tigris spurting out of the earth.  
 My brother, wait! Let me climb up with you onto the highlands!  
 My brother, so that mine eyes may gaze at mid-ocean!  
 135 My brother, the women know the male member;  
 Utu, the women are copulating with men;  
 the thing of the women—the male member, I know not;  
 the thing of the women—copulating with men, I know not;  
 the thing of the women, kissing, I know not,  
 140 copulating with men I know not, kissing, I know not.  
 In the highlands let us feed on anything there is, anything!  
 In the foothills let us feed on anything there is, anything!—  
 onto the highlands of herbs, onto the highlands of cedars,  
 onto the highlands of cedars and hašur cedars,  
 145 in the highlands let us feed on anything there is, anything!  
 After we have fed on herbs, after we have fed on cedars,  
 when you have put the hand in my hand, take me back to my home,  
 take me back to my home, to my home Zabala,  
 take me back to my mother, to my mother Ningal,  
 150 take me back to my mother-in-law, to Ninsuna,  
 take me back to my sister-in-law, to Gestinanna.  
 Of the dependents of the single man who has left home,  
 and of the household of the householder who has left home,

of the household of the householder who has left home,  
 and of the dependents of the single man who has left home,  
 Utu, you are their mother, Utu, you are their father!  
 155 Utu, the waif, Utu, the widow,  
 Utu, the waif looks to you as her father,  
 Utu, for the widow you are like her mother bringing her again into custody.  
 To channel water is your speciality, to channel water for malting.

It is two šir-na m-šub compositions for Utu.

### Commentary

As mentioned, the beginning of this composition is lost in a lacuna which Kramer estimated at sixteen lines with the proviso<sup>2</sup> that due to the difficulty of recognizing indented lines in the damaged part of the tablet which held the text of the lacuna, the figure sixteen may be off by one, two, or three lines.

Of help here may be the observation that unities of content in the text show a pattern of descending and rising numbers of the lines composing them so that the units of the preserved parts form a curve  $8^7_6_56^7$ . Assuming that corresponding

numerical relations governed the lost section one could imagine either (5) 6 7 at the beginning or 8 9. The former alternative would call for either thirteen or eighteen lost lines, three less or two more than what Kramer thought most likely. The latter alternative would come closer with seventeen lines, only one more than Kramer's estimate. To this comes the further consideration that it would produce a complete curve for the text that is repeatable *ad libitum*, forming a section of a potentially endless curve:

$$8^9_8^7_6_56^7$$

We therefore prefer it and estimate the lacuna at seventeen lines.

*Line 120:* The reading of the third sign in the line as GİR×GANÁtenû seems reasonably clear on the photo. Most of GANÁtenû is visible. For the value giri<sub>x</sub> = kirru "beer keg" see CAD K, 408 s.v. kirru. A meaning "beer keg" fits well the alehouse orientation of this composition. The close connection of Utu with beer, and the alehouse which it assumes, is singular indeed and looks forced. It may be due to a personal commitment of the composer of the song.

The sign DÈ should represent a participle and so is likely to be a phonetic rendering of dé = bābilu "bringer."

For amar-sú[n-na-ke<sub>4</sub>] "calf of (= fed on) mash" compare amar-ga "calf of (fed on) milk." For sún = narṭabu "mash" see M. Civil in *Studies Oppenheim* (Chicago, 1964), 76 and 79 to lines 25–28. The e of the final -ke<sub>4</sub> may be a mark of vocative; -ke<sub>4</sub> is restored from the parallel in the following line.

*Line 121:* tur of amar-tur-zi-da-ke<sub>4</sub> is a prophetic rendering of tur<sub>4</sub> tarbašu "byre." The lines 120–21 exemplify a metrical scheme in which the second hemistich of a line is repeated to form the first hemistich of the following one.

2. Ibid., n. 2.

Other examples are found in lines 128–29, 143–44, and 152–53. Here it implies a play on the two different meanings of *sún*, (1) “mash,” (2) “wild cow.”

*Line 122:* The sign LUGAL can be read as Kaššeba, a name listed in An:Anum as a name of Utu. It is there written with the sign ALAM which also has this value (CT 25, 25:14 and 46, 80–7–19, 131 rev. 3' where em.MU to kaš!).

The value kaššeba for the sign is given in PBS 5, 105 ob. ii.6' kaš-še-ba = LUGAL = d[Šamaš]. The name means “beer (kaš)-and-grain-rations(še-ba)” where še-ba = *ipru* stands for food rations generally. The name implies that Utu provides subsistence, livelihood, is one's “mealticket,” presumably in terms of a “just wage” since he was the god of justice.

*Line 130:* Sumerian expresses the relation of a thing to the substance of which it consists through apposition. The genitive always indicates a less total relation. Here it refers to mines and quarries for silver and lapis lazuli found in these mountainous areas.

*Line 131:* For gakkul “fermenting vat” see Civil, *Studies Oppenheim*, 83f. It is the vessel from which beer was served. For aman (MU-UNU<sub>4</sub>-MÚ-MÚ) “maltster” see *ibid.*, 78. The two terms cover the process of brewing from the beginning—malting the barley—to the finished beer ready to serve at its end.

The idea that there was a locality known as the highland of fermentation vats and malsters is, of course, an odd one. One can only imagine that the author of the composition had heard of Mount Amanus (Ama-a-núm hur-sağ-eren-ta “from Amanus, the hills of cedars” Gudea St. B.v.28); and, obsessed as he was with alehouses and beer, connected its name with aman “maltster.”

*Lines 137–38:* Kramer translates ém-munus-e-ne as “that which is womanly,” assuming that an abstract with niġ/ém can be formed from a personal plural rather than from the bare root. I do not think that is possible.

*Line 147:* We analyze the form gi<sub>4</sub>-mu as a causative imperative with 1 sg. agent object, parallel to indicative perfective construction with mu-. See AS 16, 93, n. 16.

*Line 148:* On the city-name Zabala and its variant Zabalam, see Steinkeller, *Acta Sumerologica* 7 (1985), 195f. It is the present Tell Bzeikh. See the map in my *Towards the Image of Tammuz*, 230.

Puzzling is the use of the casemarks -ra and -šè in this and the following lines. Normally -ra is used with words for persons only, while -šè is possible with words of both genders, personal and nonpersonal. Here, rather, -šè seems to be used with common nouns, -ra with proper nouns whether personal or nonpersonal. Whether this is due to an idiosyncrasy of the writer or represents a dialectal variant usage is not clear.

*Line 151:* As noted by Kramer *op.cit.* p. 132 the -bi after e-rib seems unjustified. It may have been influenced by gi<sub>4</sub>-mu. Next, apparently, the scribe repeated the -mu of e-rib-bi-mu, discovered this error and erased the second -mu but forgot to write its correct replacement, -šè.

*Line 152:* One expects here and in the following line double genitives to be resumed by -bi in line 154, but instead of -ka for -ak.a(k) the text has ke<sub>4</sub>. Pre-

sumably, therefore, it represents the stage of grammatical and orthographical development treated by Poebel in *GSG* §373 and §376 in which double genitive is not marked and final single genitive is rendered by  $-ke_4$ . The single unmarried man has no household, but he may well have people in his charge ( $\check{s}u$ ). They will be left unprotected if he goes on a journey.

*Line 156:* The frequent occurrence of Emegir wordsigns in Emesal context makes one wonder whether they must all be considered to be scribal errors, or whether perhaps they were simply to be read with the equivalent Emesal values, so that, e.g.,  $igi$  in an Emesal context would automatically be read  $ibi$ .

*Line 157:* A mother often arranged marriages for her sons or daughters, so the meaning of this line is presumably that Utu is to arrange a re-marriage for the widow to put her again in someone's "hand," that is, under someone's authority and protection.

### *Interpretation*

The preserved part of the text consists, as will be seen, of a plea by Inanna to Utu to be taken away from where she is and escorted home to Zabala.

To get home involves climbing mountains with Utu, and since the only mountains Utu climbs are those east of Mesopotamia, she must be in regions behind them farther eastward.

The character of the place from which she wants to get away is suggested by the reference to Utu as bringer of beer to the alehouse and the presence there of women engaging in sexual intercourse with men. Apparently she is in the  $\check{e}s-dam$  mentioned, an alehouse cum bordello.

That she addresses Utu both as "brother" and as bringer of beer to the alehouse would seem to stress both his duty to protect her and his power over the alehouse as its sole supplier, which will enable him to take her away.

The urgency of Inanna's plea, which makes her willing to brave the rigors of travel in high mountains with no assured supply of food, is not one of simple homesickness only. She is clearly feeling unprotected and afraid, which comes out clearly at the end of her plea where she stresses Utu's rôle as helper of those with no other protector, widows and waifs, families whose protector is absent.

The specific thing she fears is, it would seem, to be made to share the life of the women. She stresses that she is a virgin and clearly wants to get away as such.<sup>3</sup> Her negative attitude to sexuality raises the question of what age the writer of the composition imagined her to be. Most likely he saw her as a mere child, not yet nubile. The fact that she has a mother-in-law and a sister-in-law does not militate against this; rather, her virginity suggests that she is only a betrothed

3. The would-be translator of Sumerian must live with the fact that writing and language at our present stage of knowledge is laden with ambiguities, and to choose the right meanings, strangers as we are to the culture and its values, is not easy and in fact will necessarily be subjective. Thus the interpretation of a single passage after a single line may determine the meaning given to a complete composition while a different possible interpretation would lead to something entirely different. One can therefore offer translations and interpretations only diffidently; however right one thinks one is, one may well be wrong.

child-bride,<sup>4</sup> so her desire for protection envisions it as by a mother or mother-in-law, not a husband. Also, only a very young child would readily fancy cedars to be edible. We would thus guess her to be around eight or nine.

That Inanna in BM 23631 should be pictured as a child frightened of sexuality may at first glance seem odd since the traditional image of her is that of an adult young woman who is, among other things, a harlot and the goddess of harlots. Actually, however, things are not that simple. Contradictions are so much a part of her character that in hymns to her glory, in which one finds the comprehensiveness of her powers, and in texts aiming solely at entertainment, it would seem that her name might be given to any young woman the author wished to tell about. It is used for a lovesick teenager in the ditty I have called "The Sister's Message," for a very proper young girl who refuses an amorous tryst and insists on marriage in "The Wiles of Women," and as a younger sister persuading her brother to marry her off to a farmer and not to a shepherd, to mention a few such cases.

In the present text Utu, the god of justice, is central. The text is a plea to him in his traditional rôle as protector of the weak and defenseless in society, waifs and widows. It is put in the mouth of just such a person—a child far away from the protection of home and family—and the child is given the identity of Inanna as one of her many forms.

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In the present case our differences from the pioneer translation and interpretation by Kramer derive clearly from the different views we take of lines 136–37 in which Inanna states that she is a virgin and knows nothing of sexual matters. Kramer assumes she feels that as a lack, and so he sees her desire to be taken to the mountains as an attempt to remedy it, which leads him to assume further that her eating herbs and cedar would somehow give her the desired knowledge so that she could go home to a marriage which she had been unable to consummate because of her ignorance.

We take a radically different view and assume that the lines render a child's aversion to and fear of sexuality, leading to a much different interpretation. If Inanna had wanted sexual knowledge, we do not see how she could have obtained it by eating herbs and cedar nor, having obtained it, why she would wish to go back to her mother, mother-in-law, and sister-in-law, rather than to her husband Dumuzi, a point already made by Kramer.

4. On betrothal see R. Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, *AfO* Beiheft 23 (Horn, Austria, 1988), 29ff.