

Section 5 – The Advent of Agriculture

The Underworld: Ereshkigal

The Goddess is both light and dark, day and night, life and death.

When the Goddess became anthropomorphic, she required two forms to convey this. In Sumer, the dark is Ereshkigal, the Queen of the Underworld, and the light is Inanna, the Queen of Heaven. They are the light and dark aspects of the Goddess; they are the same being, two halves of one whole. Inanna is concerned with the world of the living and life and Ereshkigal with the dead and death. One cannot exist without the other because this is a cyclical conception. An understanding of Ereshkigal depends on knowing Inanna.

Inanna, alongside Ereshkigal, was the most important anthropomorphic deity of Mesopotamia. In Assyro-Babylonian culture, Inanna became Ishtar, who is cognate to the Northwest Semitic goddess Astarte, the Greek Aphrodite (and Roman Venus) or Athena, Egyptian Aset, also known as Isis or Hathor and the Etruscan Turan. She is Eve and she is Mary. She is Asherah, the consort of Yahweh, the Hebrew god. She is the sacred Earth-Mother of the Celts. She is Kali. She is Cytherea and Cyprus.

Inanna and Ereshkigal, life and death together as an inseparable concept, appear everywhere. When we are not alive, we are inside the Underworld, in the great void which is metaphorically the Goddess' womb. We are born from women and when we die we return to the Earth. Since women are one physical manifestation of the Goddess, and the Earth is another, this is a cycle. The portal between life and death is the vulva, in both divine and material forms. The entrance to life is through women's material birth canals and the exit from it is through the opening of the grave or tomb, into the body of the Goddess, the Earth itself.

Ereshkigal is the Underworld; she is the oblivion after death and also that before life. Therefore, she symbolises not only death but also the route to rebirth. This idea of reincarnation is so central to Goddess culture that we will come across it many times.