

# Section 7 – the Emerging Patriarchy

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## Inanna to Ishtar

Although the Sumerians, particularly after the early third millennium BCE, became capable warriors, the Akkadians, a Semitic people who took their name from Akkad in northwest Mesopotamia, seem to have been tougher and more aggressive from the very beginning, and this was reflected in their deities.

Ishtar is usually identified as the successor to Inanna within the Akkadian culture that overtook Sumer. The Akkadians drew on their own oral traditions, which differed somewhat from the Sumerian ones, in their depiction of her. Many different versions of the myths surrounding Ishtar exist, and this leads to contradictions. As we have discussed, this phenomenon is very common, and we will see other proliferation of myths in Greece and elsewhere.

Ishtar's mythology is similar to Inanna's but changed in important ways. Poems and hymns are truncated and Ishtar, for all her ferociousness, is less wilful and audacious than Inanna. She seems to be more controlled, at the behest of men or at least male deities. She is like a caricature of herself, an attenuated strain, and this fits with what we know of the warlike, patriarchal nature of Akkadian culture. While Ishtar's role as a fertility goddess remained important, her other one, of war-goddess, came to the fore in Akkadia and persisted in successor cultures.

Ishtar would become Eostre or Ostara, the goddess of fertility, from whose name we derive the word oestrogen, the female hormone, and the springtime festival Easter. This festival was tied into the life and death cycle of Ishtar's consort, Tammuz, who, while also a product of Akkadian culture, shared many characteristics with the Sumerian equivalent, Dumuzi.

Ishtar's relationship with Tammuz is a modified restatement of the bond between the pastoral and arable farming methods on which the culture was based. Tammuz was a mortal shepherd boy with whom Ishtar fell in love at first meeting.<sup>1</sup> This feeling was reciprocal; hardly surprising since Ishtar was the embodiment of female beauty and sexuality and Tammuz asked for her hand in marriage. Ishtar accepted. In this, the initiative is with Tammuz; in the earlier Sumerian versions, it was with Inanna.

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<sup>1</sup> This is subtly different from the earlier version, where Inanna is at first reluctant to accept Dumuzi the shepherd, preferring instead to marry a farmer.