

EARLY MESOPOTAMIAN ASTRAL SCIENCE
AND DIVINATION IN THE MYTH OF *INANA*
AND *ŠUKALETUDA*¹

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Abstract

The Sumerian tale of *Inana and Shukaletuda* recounts how the goddess Inana is raped by a homely gardener upon whom she seeks and ultimately finds revenge. Though this general plot has long been understood, certain elements of the story have remained largely unexplored. Previous scholarship has often suggested that within *Inana and Shukaletuda*, the goddess Inana is often described in her astral manifestation (e.g. S. Kramer 1961, 117; K. Volk 1995, 177-179 and 182-183; B. Alster 1999, 687; J. Cooper 2001, 142-144). Nevertheless, to date there has been no systematic treatment of this assumption and this study seeks to fill this gap. It is my thesis that certain events of the story (i.e. Inana's movements) can be related to a series of observable celestial phenomena, specifically the synodic activity of the planet Venus. This also explains the heretofore enigmatic climax of the story, in which Inana crosses the entire sky in order to finally locate her attacker, as a celestial miracle required by the planet Venus' peculiar celestial limitations. Furthermore, since in ancient Iraq the observation of astronomical phenomena was often done for the purpose of celestial divination, I suggest that certain events within the story may be illuminated if situated within that undertaking.

Introduction

Finding and explicating celestial content in the mythology of ancient Iraq has traditionally been a troublesome undertaking. As was the case in other ancient pantheons, many of the gods of Mesopotamia

¹ I wish to offer my sincere thanks to Jerrold Cooper for properly introducing me to this fascinating myth and, moreover, for his outstanding advice and generous encouragement on this project. I would also like to express my gratitude to Piotr Michalowski and Christopher Woods for their insightful critical comments. Naturally, I am responsible for the contents, including any errors.

Throughout this article, translations and transliterations of Sumerian texts follow various editions (e.g. VOLK 1995, EDZARD 1997, etc.), while references and citations of Sumerian texts follow ETCSL (<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>). Abbreviations follow the CAD unless otherwise noted.

had both celestial as well as mundane manifestations. At the beginning of modern Assyriology, this ambiguity led to a remarkable amount of creative speculation regarding the celestial underpinnings of Mesopotamian myth among scholars of the Pan-babylonianist school. The journey of the hero in the Gilgamesh Epic, for example, was understood as a mytho-poetic metaphor for the sun's journey through the signs of the zodiac.² Such imaginative interpretations were the result, in large part, of radically inaccurate reconstructions of the history and antiquity of Mesopotamian celestial sciences. Since the Pan-Babylonianists' astral approaches were shown to be faulty,³ scholars, by and large, have warily avoided interpreting Mesopotamian literature in such a manner. Nevertheless, it is clear that many Mesopotamian myths have considerable astral content. One of these myths is the Sumerian story of *Inana and Šukaletuda*.

The story of *Inana and Šukaletuda* begins with a brief, hymnic introduction, which praises Inana (1-41). In this prologue the goddess is described as departing from the sky and the earth, arriving in the mountains to dispense justice. Following the prologue is a diversionary tale involving Enki and a raven (42-88). This story, whose relation with the rest of *Inana and Šukaletuda* is a bit problematic, relates how Enki commissioned a raven to undertake various agricultural chores, such as watering a field with a *shadouf* and cultivating a plant which will become the very first palm tree.

After this diversion, the story proper begins. We are introduced to a gardener named Šukaletuda who is perfectly wretched at his task (91-96). Virtually all the plants in the garden plots for which he is responsible are uprooted or die under his care, with the notable exception of a broad, shade-providing poplar tree. Lamenting his obvious agricultural inadequacies and partially blinded by a storm, he looks to the gods in the sky for solace and perhaps guidance (97-102). There he sees Inana, who is thoroughly exhausted by her many travels (103-115). The goddess spots the inviting poplar tree in one of the plots in Šukaletuda's care, and she decides to rest her weary eyes beneath its welcoming branches (116). Šukaletuda is amazed at the goddess' presence in his very own garden. While she is sleeping he removes her divine garments, and has intercourse with her in some sort of darkly comedic parody of the *hieros gamos*

² JENSEN 1906, 77-116.

³ See, enjoyably, KUGLER 1910.

(117-125). When Inana wakes up, she senses immediately that something has happened. She inspects herself and determines that she has been violated (126-127). Infuriated, she sets out to determine who has perpetrated this horrendous crime.

In her wrath, Inana strikes the land with a series of plagues, designed to punish and force the country into revealing the person responsible for the heinous act. She first turns the water in the wells of the land to blood, so that it is unfit for consumption, but this fails to reveal her attacker (129-136). Witnessing the fury of the wronged goddess spilled out over the land and aware that her net is slowly hemming him in, Šukaletuda goes to his father for advice, recounting the events of the story up to that point (137-176). His father tells him to hide within the city, where he will disappear among the teeming throng of humanity and the goddess will be unable to find him (177-184). This is an effective strategy: Inana searches for him in the mountains and is unable to locate him. Inana is not deterred by her failure and she sets a second plague in the land—this time it is a vicious cluster of storms (185-191). Once again, the collective punishment fails to expose her attacker (192-193). Šukaletuda again recounts the situation to his father, who gives the same advice he did previously, to hide in the city (194-210). Once again, Inana is unable to find him by searching in the mountains (211-213). So the goddess plagues the land a third time, in this instance blocking the roads so that all traffic comes to a standstill, but this too falls short of producing the culprit (214-220). For a third time, Šukaletuda relates these events to his father, who yet again advises him to vanish in the anonymous masses of the city (221-235), and the goddess, again looking in the wrong place, is unable to find him in the mountains (236-238).

Reminding herself of the wrong committed against her and frustrated with the failure of her previous attempts, Inana travels to the city of Eridu, where she descends into the *apsu* to seek aid from the ever-wise Enki (239-245). Threatening permanent absence from her own sanctuary, the E-ana temple in Uruk, she demands to be allowed to bring her attacker to justice (246-249). Enki consents (250) and Inana spans across the entire sky like a rainbow and, with this spy-satellite-like purview, finally locates the terrified gardener (251-255). Šukaletuda attempts to explain himself and his actions to Inana, by detailing the events that led up to his wicked offence (256-289). Not surprisingly, she is utterly unmoved and she sets his fate. He is to die, though his name will live on in the musical

whimsy of the palace and pasture, in songs sung by court bards and lonely shepherds (296-310).

Since a critical edition of the complete text was not accomplished until 1995 by Konrad Volk,⁴ there has been very little in the way of comprehensive interpretation of the story. The tale was first brought to light by Samuel Noah Kramer, whose initial publication primarily discussed the obvious parallels between the second plague in the story, in which the wells turn to blood, with the biblical account of the blood plague in Exod 7:14-24.⁵ Kramer returned to the text a number of times in the following decades, finally publishing a translation of a nearly completely reconstructed text in 1989.⁶ Claus Wilcke⁷ followed by Volk,⁸ both offered political interpretations of the myth which argued, among other things, that the story was an attempt to express the tensions between traditional Sumerian society and the rise of Akkadian power during the Sargonic Dynasty. For Bendt Alster, the story is what it is: a darkly amusing tale about a sorry gardener who rapes a goddess, almost gets away with it, who in the end dies but whose name lives on in song.⁹ Finally, Jerrold Cooper, in his critique of historical interpretations of Sumerian myth, suggested that the story is *primarily* astral in nature, though he does not exclude other mythological motifs.¹⁰ This study, obviously, builds on Cooper's astute proposal.

The primary divine character in the story is Inana, a divinity who is associated with the planet Venus.¹¹ Previous scholarship on the text has recognized that Inana, at several points, is described in her astral manifestation.¹² Kramer in particular understood Šukaletuda's gazing into the sky after his garden fails to be an obvious act of celestial divination.¹³ It follows that not only is the description of Inana's divinity astral, but also to some degree her actions and movements within the story might be related to her (i.e. Venus')

⁴ For a more thorough history of scholarship, see VOLK 1995, 9-14.

⁵ KRAMER 1949.

⁶ KRAMER 1956, 66-70; 1981, 70-74; BOTTÉRO and KRAMER 1989, 257-271.

⁷ WILCKE 1973a, 62-63.

⁸ VOLK 1995, 25-40.

⁹ ALSTER 1999, 687-688. See also ALSTER 1974, 30-32 in which he examines the myth, though cursorily, within a structuralist framework.

¹⁰ COOPER 2001, 142-144.

¹¹ See BROWN 2000, 67, as well as LITKE 1998, 161 (IV 181).

¹² VOLK 1995, 177-179 and 182-183; ALSTER 1999, 687.

¹³ KRAMER 1961, 117.

actual celestial activities, an idea which Volk proposed, though did not explore fully.¹⁴ Furthermore, the interest the story places on celestial matters, specifically observing Inana, could indicate some sort of relationship not merely with general celestial observation, but rather with celestial divination in particular. This paper will explore, then, whether the Inana and Šukaletuda narrative can be illuminated by means of the Mesopotamian of celestial tradition. I understand that tradition in its broadest terms, including not only the methods and concepts of ancient Mesopotamian astronomy, but also that astronomy's primary motivation—divination. Thus, I will proceed with two separate but related theses. The first is that certain events of the story (i.e. Inana's movements) can be related to a specific series of observable celestial phenomena, specifically the synodic activity of the planet Venus. The second is that certain events within the story may be illuminated if situated within the tradition of Mesopotamian celestial divination.

I do not hesitate to admit that both of these approaches are fraught with speculations and assumptions. A general caveat is that Mesopotamian astral myths are often difficult to identify with certainty, because, unlike the classical collections such as Hyginus' *Poeticon Astronomicum* or the *Katasterismoi* of Pseudo-Eratosthenes, astral mythology from ancient Iraq was never assembled in a single collection in antiquity. So, though I believe the general theses of this study are valid, I consider the specifics to be tenuous by definition.

Another consideration specific to *Inana and Šukaletuda* is that for the purposes of this study, I am not including the story of Enki and the Raven in the overall narrative arc. The main narrative and the subplot do have certain features in common, such as a general agricultural context, important trees, and roles for Enki. Both Enki and a raven can be associated with celestial features in later periods.¹⁵ But within the pericope in *Inana and Šukaletuda*, the raven's activities are confined to the ground and a tree; it does not interact with either Inana or Šukaletuda. Furthermore, the connection between Enki's minor, though crucial, later appearance in the narrative (245-250) to his first appearance is difficult to determine. If the crucial lines linking this passage with the introductory

¹⁴ This is a question proposed but left open by VOLK 1995, 21, 39 (see especially note 249).

¹⁵ E.g. HUNGER and PINGREE 1989, (for Enki/Ea) I ii 19-20, 26-27, II ii 7, (for the Raven) I ii 9, I iii 20, II B 3.

hymn (23-38, 41-46) had been better preserved the connection would no doubt have been clearer. For my purposes here, since the subplot has no effect on Inana's movements in the story, the larger narrative can be analyzed without it.¹⁶

Inana and Šukaletuda and Venus Phenomena

Many scholars accept that the related Sumerian tale of *Inana's Descent to the Underworld* at least in part describes the setting of the planet Venus in the west followed by her journey through the underworld and eventual rising in the east.¹⁷ There is, therefore, precedent for astral aspects in the interpretation of Sumerian Inana mythology. Assuming the association of Inana with the planet Venus within *Inana and Šukaletuda*, the goddess' movements within this story also should be the peculiar movements of Venus. The planet, which is the second brightest object in the night sky, is erratic in comparison to the stars and most of the other planets due to its inferior positioning between the earth and the sun. To earthly observers, most other celestial bodies rise in the east and move across the dome of the sky until they set on the western horizon. When Venus, on the other hand, rises in the east just before sunrise (Γ), it never visibly crosses the entire sky. Each night, the time interval between the planet's rising and sunrise increases because the planet's distance from the sun increases. The length of its nightly visibility increases commensurately. But the planet never really escapes from the horizon (no more than 46 degrees from the sun), at one point becoming stationary, after which the time interval between its rising and the sun's decreases, until it seems to disappear from the eastern horizon (Σ), whence it came. During this period of visibility, it can be seen nightly before sunrise for about eight months. Because it moves behind the sun (i.e. superior conjunction), it is subsequently not visible in the sky at all for around eighty days. Venus then reappears, but this time on the western horizon just

¹⁶ I will not speculate here as to the origin of the Enki and the Raven story or its role in the overall narrative. For this, perhaps, see VOLK 1995, 29 (especially note 171), 37.

¹⁷ See, for example, WILCKE 1976, 83; HOSTETTER 1979; HEIMPEL 1982, 59; VOLK 1995, 21. Cf. BUCCELLATI 1982, who takes a myth-and-ritual approach to *Inana's Descent*.

after sunset (Ξ). Its western movements are similar to those in the east. Venus is visible after sunset for about eight months in the west as well, again no more than 46 degrees from the sun, at one point becoming stationary and returning to the western horizon (Ω). This second period of invisibility, which is due to Venus' passing in front of the sun (i.e. inferior conjunction) can last anywhere from three days (in the winter) to over two weeks (in the summer). Venus then rises again in the east (Γ) before sunrise and the whole cycle, which lasts 584 days, begins again (= synodic interval). Furthermore, after five repetitions (about eight years) this cycle starts at about the same time of the year (= characteristic period). It is crucial to remember that, unlike the stars, Jupiter, Saturn or Mars, Venus never appears high overhead.

Venus' movements are indeed odd, and it takes some cultures time to come to the realization that the eastern and western manifestations are in fact the same celestial body. The Greeks, for example, originally identified the morning and evening stars with two separate deities, Phosphoros and Hesperos respectively. In Mesopotamia, it seems that this was recognized prehistorically. Assuming its authenticity, a cylinder seal from the Erlenmeyer collection attests to this knowledge in southern Iraq as early as the Late Uruk/ Jemdet Nasr Period,¹⁸ as do the archaic texts of the period.¹⁹ Thus, the understanding that the morning and evening appearances of Venus are the same celestial body dates at least to the beginning of the fourth millennium.²⁰ Whether or not one accepts the seal as authentic, the fact that there is no epithetical distinction between the morning and evening appearances of Venus in any later Mesopotamian literature attests to a very, very early recognition of the phenomenon.

¹⁸ NISSEN et al. 1993, figure 18. Depicted on the seal is a bull over which are three stars (or DINGIR signs). In front of this (or behind) is Inana's characteristic reed bundle, grouped together with several signs, including: EZEN, 'festival'; UTU, 'sun, i.e. morning'; SIG (Akk. *šaplu*), 'lower, western; i.e. evening'; DINGIR which is taken as representing simply a star, normally MUL (written as three DINGIR signs). The whole group seems to indicate 'the festival of the morning and evening Inana/Venus' (NISSEN et al. 1993, 17; see also briefly BROWN 2000, 246).

¹⁹ For the festivals of Inana as evening and morning stars in archaic texts, see GREEN 1980, note 34, SZARZYŃSKA 1997, 115-153, and ENGLUND 1998, 127.

²⁰ Contra KURTIK 1999, places the identification of Inana with the planet Venus in the mid-third millennium.

It is less certain, however, when an understanding of the specificities of Venus' movements were realized. Most likely originating in the Old Babylonian Period, the so-called Venus Tablets of Ammišaduqa describe not only Venus' synodic 584-day cycle, but also the eight-year characteristic period.²¹ If the observations on which the Venus Tablets are based do indeed date to the Old Babylonian Period, then certainly we can assume some knowledge of Venus' synodic period before these long-term sightings were made and recorded. Since the requisite knowledge of Venus' movements was probably in place at the time *Inana and Šukaletuda* was composed, it does appear as if Inana's movements within the story could be related to regular Venus phenomena, specifically referring to Venus' celestial movements over a single synodic period.²²

In the introductory hymn to Inana, the goddess is described as departing the sky and the earth in order to head to the kur:

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|----|--|--|
| 15 | u ₁ -ba [...]-e an mu-un-šub | Then the left heaven, left the |
| | ki mu-un-šub kur-ra ba-e-a-il ₂ | earth and climbed up into the kur. |
| 16 | *inana-[ke ₁] [an m]u-un-šub | Inana left heaven, left the earth and |
| | ki mu-un-šub kur-ra ba-e-a-il ₂ | climbed up into the mountains. ²³ |

Inana's departure from the sky and the earth (i.e. places where she would be visible) and her entering the kur, must be understood as a setting. If kur is to be understood as 'mountain', from the perspective of the plains of southern Iraq, the mountains which Inana is climbing lie in the east. Thus, Inana's movement here could be understood as her disappearance in the east (i.e. last visibility in the east, S). But the semantic spectrum of the term kur is quite wide, ranging from 'mountain' to simply 'land', and even 'underworld'. Indeed, both the east and west are referred to in the story as kur (i.e. 101-102). Alster took kur in the passage to refer to the underworld in accordance with its usage in *Inana's Descent to the Underworld*—in fact, 15-16 in *Inana and Šukaletuda* are nearly identical to 4-5 in that myth.²⁴ Wilcke asserted that the term here is being used in parallel with the two locations Subir and Elam (113), both of which are mountainous from the perspective of southern

²¹ REINER and PINGREE 1975 (hereafter, BPO 1).

²² Here, I diverge from VOLK 1995, 21, who assumes that all of the events take place while Inana/Venus is visible.

²³ Transliterations and translations of *Inana and Šukaletuda* follow VOLK 1995.

²⁴ ALSTER 1974, 30. For a full discussion of the parallels, see VOLK 1995, 20-12, 142.

Iraq.²⁵ Volk further strengthened this understanding by noting that Inana is very clearly said to ‘ascend’ ($il_2 = elū$)²⁶ and ‘descend/ascend’ ($e_{11} = warādu, elū$) the kur in *Inana and Šukaletuda* (4-5, 8, 15-18), as opposed to simply ‘descend/ascend’ (e_{11}) as she does in *Inana’s Descent to the Underworld* (4-5).²⁷ Such reciprocally vertical movements might seem to indicate actual mountains, but it is unclear whether the description of Inana’s movements in the introductory hymn (15-20) and those which take place at around the time Šukaletuda spots her (112-115) are referring to the same event. The text remains ambiguous. Nevertheless, as Cooper notes, regardless of how we understand kur in this passage, it is clear that Inana, though not necessarily entering the underworld or the mountains per se, is nevertheless leaving the sky and is no longer visible.²⁸ Given the fact that her next appearance is probably in the east (see below), it seems likely that Inana’s movements in the prologue are describing the interval between her last appearance in the west (Ω) to just before her first eastern visibility (Γ). It is at this time that the story of Enki and the Raven is inserted.

When the main story resumes, Šukaletuda, who has been working on his land, gets his first glimpse of the goddess:

101	[sig-še ₃ igi mu-un-il ₂ diġir] un ₃ -na kur utu e ₃ -ke ₄ -ne igi bi ₂ -in-du ₈ -ru	He looked down and saw the exalted gods of the land where the sun rises.
102	[nim-še ₃ igi mu-un-il ₂ diġir un ₃]-na kur utu šu ₂ -ke ₄ -ne igi bi ₂ -in-du ₈ -ru	He looked up and saw the exalted gods of the land where the sun sets. ²⁹
103	[ġidim dili du-ra igi] mu-ni-[in-du ₈]	He saw a lone traveling ghost.

Here, Šukaletuda is scanning the heavens. Perhaps he is looking first to the east, where the sun rises, then to the west, where it

²⁵ WILCKE 1973b.

²⁶ Normally, il_2 is the equivalent of Akk. *našū*, ‘to raise’, but in this context it seems to mean ‘ascend’.

²⁷ VOLK 1995, 20-21.

²⁸ COOPER 2001, 143 note 58.

²⁹ VOLK 1995, 177 and BLACK et al. 2004, 200, take sig, ‘lower, below’, and nim, ‘upper, above’, as referring to ‘lowlands’ and ‘respectively’, with Volk arguing that one cannot raise look below to search for high gods (i.e. $igi\ il_2 = \bar{im}i\ našū$) downward (though Enki, presumably one of the high gods resides within the earth in the *apsu!*). Consequently, Volk understands the two pairs sig ↔ nim and kur ud e₃ ↔ kur ud šu₂ in poetic opposition rather than assuming that the highlands are to the east and the lowlands are to the west.

sets. But more likely, he is simply scrutinizing the entire sky. During this inspection, he sees what appears to be a *gidim*, ‘ghost’. It is Inana, who, with her eerie, ghost-like form, seems to be returning from the underworld.³⁰ If the goddess is returning from the underworld, she must be in the process of rising. In the story, her appearance is described as a sign, perhaps an oracular one:³¹

104	[diġir dili] du-ra [ġiškim mu-ni-in-zu]	He recognised the lone travelling god and her sign. ³²
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After seeing her in the sky, Šukaletuda is astounded to see her, tired from her journey, land in his field and lie down to rest under his own tree:

112	u ₄ - ^r ba nin-ġu ₁₀ an ¹ mu-un-niġin ₂ - na-ta ki mu-un-niġin ₂ -[na-t]a	Once, my lady had roamed the heaven, she roamed the earth,
113	^d inana an mu-un-niġin ₂ -na-ta ki mu-un-niġin ₂ -n[a-]ta	Inana roamed the heaven, roamed the earth,
114	^r elam ^{ki1} su-bir ₄ ^{ki} -a mu-un-niġin ₂ - na-ta	she roamed Elam and Subir,
115	^r dubur ¹ a[n] ġi ₁₆ -ġi ₁₆ -il-la mu-un- niġin ₂ -na-ta	she roamed the stretching horizon of heaven,
116	nu-ġiġ kuš ₂ -a-ni-ta im-ma-te dur ₂ -bi-š ₃ ba-nu ₂	she became tired, she approached and at its roots she lay down.

Cooper suggests that since Inana is described as moving from Elam to Subir the text is actually describing Venus’ northward movement as it follows the sun between the winter and summer solstices.³³ This would only take place after the winter solstice when the sun changes its course and begins its slow six-month journey to its northernmost point at the summer solstice. This could be the case, especially since Šukaletuda’s responsibilities include watering (a sig₁₀; 93, 141, 263) and ‘building wells’ near the plants (pu₂ ak; 94, 142, 264), both of which indicate summer activities. But there are few other seasonal indicators in the story. In any case, Elam and Subir lie east and north of southern Iraq, and so her brief appearance in the night sky (104) followed by her resting on earth

³⁰ VOLK 1995, 178-179. Cf. *Inana’s Descent* 78-84.

³¹ The mantic significance is to be discussed below.

³² The idiom *ġiškim zu* most obviously means ‘to recognise an omen’ (e.g. Šulgi C A 98; UET 6/2 234 [=Proverbs from Urim]; and Gudea A xii 11), but, *ġiškim* also occurs in various idioms meaning ‘to recognise, identify’ (e.g. Nungal A 54; Lu-diġira to his Mother 9, 21, 32, 40, 47, 53; Curse of Agade 216; Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld, 85, 207).

³³ COOPER 2001, 143.

(116) describe Venus' brief celestial appearance before sunrise in the east (Γ) and her quick disappearance shortly after when the planet is lost in the light of dawn just before sunrise.

Inana, as the story goes, spends some time on earth, sleeping under a poplar tree exhausted from her travels. The gardener sexually assaults the goddess in the brief period after she disappears in the light of dawn and when the sun actually rises. The goddess discovers this terrible fact after sunrise:

126	u ₄ im-zal ^d utu im-ta ^r e ₃ -a ^l -[ra]	When the day came and Utu had risen
127	munus-e ni ₂ -te-a-ni igi im-kar ₂ -ka[r ₂]	The woman carefully examined herself,
128	ku ₃ ^d inana-ke ₄ ni ₂ -te-a-ni igi im-kar ₂ -kar ₂	Shining Inana carefully examined herself.

Enraged, Inana searches for Šukaletuda three times unsuccessfully. She searches for him in the mountains, but his father cleverly advises him to hide himself in the city, where he would disappear in the anonymous urban mass. The goddess consequently is unable to locate her attacker:

184	[munus-e ša ₃ kur-kur]-ra-ka nu ^r -um ^l -ma-ni-in-[p]a ₃	The woman did not find him among the mountains. ³⁴
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For her investigation, Inana searches the kur-kur, 'lands, mountains'. As previously noted, the term kur is a broad one. It could simply be indicating the borders of the land in general, the eastern kur where the sun rises and the western kur, where it sets (as in 101-102)—the two places where astral Inana's celestial activities are confined. The previous episodes in which Inana is said to have entered the kur in some way (4-5, 8, 15-18) were understood as periods of Venus' invisibility. Here, however (181, 184, 210, 213, 235, 238) she is simply searching the mountains and is not necessarily entering them. Indeed, the second plague, which is comprised of a cluster of meteorological activities, assumes her presence in the sky. In these passages then, in which Inana searches for Šukaletuda and launches her series of plagues, the kur-kur might refer to actual mountains in the east over which the goddess is hovering. From there she is able to hunt for her attacker and instigate the plagues. If this is the case, the mountain searches and the three plague

³⁴ Also 210, 235.

episodes would be referring to Venus' eight month period of visibility in the east (Γ to Σ). This is an appealing option, since, having failed in her attempts to bring her attacker to justice, Inana inspects herself yet again by the morning light (239-241). Previously (126-128) this temporal designation seemed to indicate her first visibility in the east just before sunrise (Γ). Now it seems to be indicating her last visibility in the east (Σ), also just before sunrise.

Irritated by her inability to discover her attacker, Inana travels to Eridu, the home of the wise god Enki, for advice:

245	abzu ^r eridug ^{ki} - ^r ga ¹ ^d en-ki-ka ₃ -še ₃ ku ₃ [^d inana-k] _{e₄} ' ^g iri ₃ im-ma-an-gu[b]	Pure Inana directed her steps to the <i>apsu</i> of Enki's Eridu.
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If she is visiting Enki in the *apsu* in Eridu, she must no longer be visible in the sky, since Eridu is, of course, an actual city and the *apsu* is Enki's freshwater abode located *within* the earth. Following Inana's appearance over the eastern mountains, this descent and consultation with Enki may refer to an 80-day period of invisibility (superior conjunction) following her disappearance in the east (Σ - Ξ). But Inana's visit to Enki is fairly brief in the narrative and it does not seem long enough to indicate the ca. 80-day absence from the sky that a superior conjunction necessitates. Perhaps she is simply visiting Enki during the day when she is always invisible.

Enki agrees to Inana's demands that she be allowed to locate the perpetrator. Inana departs Eridu and the *apsu* and, in an impossible celestial event, crosses the entire sky like rainbow:

251	[k]u ₃ ^d inana abzu eridu ^{ki} -ta im-ma-da-ra-ta-e ₃	With that holy Inana rose from the <i>apsu</i> of Eridu.
252	[n]i ₂ -te-a-ni ^d tir-an-na-gim an-na ba-an-gi ₁₆ -ib ki ba-da-an-us ₂	She stretched herself like a rainbow across the sky and reached thereby as far as the earth.
253	^r ulu ₃ ' i ₃ '-dib-be ₂ me-er i ₃ -dib-be ₂	She let the south wind pass across; she let the north wind pass across.

Inana's path spans from east to west, such that both the north and south winds are able to cross it. Since it is not feasible for Inana as the planet Venus to cross the entire sky this must be understood as a miraculous event.³⁵ Most translators reconstruct the lacuna in 255 to read:

³⁵ A rainbow, of course, does not actually span the entire sky, and the simile could simply be referring to an arc-like movement of Venus which is other than

255 munus-e š[a₃² kur-kur]-ra¹-ka But the woman found him
im-ma-na-ni-in-pa₃ among the mountains.³⁶

Alternatively, Jerrold Cooper suggests we reconstruct the line thusly:

255 munus-e š[a₃² ki-en-gir]-ra-ka But the woman found him in
im-ma-na-ni-in-pa₃ the heart of [Sumer].³⁷

Inana is able to move away from both horizons, which lie to the east and west of Sumer respectively and, with Enki's help, position herself directly over the city-dense region in which the culprit is hiding. By describing Inana's movements in such a manner, the ancient author has revealed his knowledge of the normal movements of the planet. In the context of the story, the wondrous phenomenon's corresponding event within Venus' synodic cycle is the planet's eight month period of visibility in the west (Ξ-Ω). Inana's extraordinary ability to cross the entire sky becomes the fulcrum event in the story, a true *deus ex machina*, which allows the goddess to find her attacker. Thus, Šukaletuda can be brought to justice, his name can go down in song and legend, and the story can be resolved.

Inana and Šukaletuda *and Mesopotamian Celestial Divination*

Assuming the validity of correlating Inana's actions within the story with the celestial movements of Venus leads us to a second interesting possibility. We know that the primary motivation for celestial observation in later periods of Mesopotamian history was celestial divination. In celestial divination the movements of the heavenly bodies, as well as other astral phenomena, were understood as preceding mundane events that had an impact on the entire land, rather than individuals.³⁸ Could it be that Inana's/Venus' movements within the story relate to celestial divination in that they portend events which are to happen later in the story, such as the three plagues?

her normal, horizon-bound motion. In that case, the novel movement is still to be considered miraculous within the context of the story.

³⁶ BLACK et al., 2000, 204. But cf. VOLK 1995, 132 ('Die Frau hatte ihn [doch] innerhalb [aller Länder²] gefunden) and 206, who expresses his doubts regarding this restoration.

³⁷ Personal communication.

³⁸ In Sach's terminology, this is *judicial* divination rather than *personal*. See SACHS 1952, 49-75.

There are certain admitted difficulties with this, however. The first is that there are no known Sumerian celestial divination texts. There are, in fact, no known Sumerian divination texts in general. Nevertheless, the circumstantial textual evidence strongly indicates that celestial divination was indeed practiced before the Old Babylonian Period.³⁹ Since there is no extant Sumerian celestial divination literature, we are then left to consult the later written tradition, epitomized in the celestial divination series *Enūma Anu Enlil* (EAE) as well as other supporting texts, such as the Neo-Assyrian reports and letters which draw on that series.⁴⁰ It will be granted that, if the earliest celestial divination traditions were oral,

³⁹ While the titles of diviners are preserved in Sumerian professions lists (celestial diviners do not seem to be mentioned) and no less an individual than Šulgi of Ur claims to have been a skilled practitioner (CASTELLINO 1972, Šulgi B 131-149) it seems that these professionals operated without texts. (For mantic series before the Old Babylonian Period, see MICHALOWSKI 2006, 249; for a contrasting view, see RICHARDSON 2007.) KOCH-WESTENHOLZ 1995, 33, has questioned the likelihood of celestial divination before the Old Babylonian Period altogether. Nevertheless, the density of mantic references in Gudea Cylinder A would suggest otherwise (EDZARD 1997, 69-88). The specific practices include dream interpretation (Gudea Cylinder A ii 1, III 26, iv 12) and extispicy (Gudea Cylinder A vii 16-17, xiii 16-17). In addition to these references, and more important for celestial divination, is Ningirsu's response to Gudea's request for a *ĝiškim*, 'sign, omen' (Gudea Cylinder A ix 9-10):

gu₃-de₂-a e₂-ĝu₁₀ du₃-da ĝiškim-bi
ga-ra-ab-sum

ĝarza-ĝa₂ mul-an ku₃-ba gu₃
ga-mu-ra-a-de

Gudea, let me inform you of
the sign for the construction of
my house,
let me tell you the bright star(s)
of heaven indicating my cultic
rites.

Ningirsu's sign cannot be a simple-to-interpret indicator, marking a propitious time or site for construction. Rather, *ĝarza*, 'rite, ordinance, cultic regulation', implies something more specific and elaborate requiring professional knowledge for its proper interpretation. The act, as indicated in this text, of observing the sky for signs and interpreting them for the proper service to the gods and the general well being of the land is nothing less than celestial divination in the Mesopotamian tradition.

For a brief synthesis of pre-Old Babylonian astronomical materials, see BROWN 2000, 246-247, as well as ROCHBERG 2006, 337-339. In addition to these references indicating human participation in celestial divination are the several references to a lapis lazuli star tablet that is consulted by the gods themselves in Sumerian texts. See HOROWITZ 1998, 166-168 for references.

⁴⁰ For a discussion of *Enūma Anu Enlil* and bibliography see ROCHBERG 2004, 66-78. To this, add REINER and PINGREE 2005, AL-RAWI and GEORGE 2006, and RUTZ 2007. For the Neo-Assyrian reports and letters, see HUNGER 1992 (hereafter SAA 8) and PARPOLA 1993.

then it is an assumption that when those traditions were in fact committed to tablet, they carried forth the *general tendencies* of the former. Thus, I do not propose that the omens which I cite below actually existed in such a form at the time of the story's composition. Rather these later omens exhibit a point on a hermeneutical trajectory which has its roots in the earliest, oral stages of the celestial divination tradition.

Šukaletuda is a lousy farmer. It appears as if everything in the land under his care has either died or has been pulled up. The only thing that remains is ^{gis}asal₂, 'a poplar tree'.⁴¹ Though not important in the celestial omen tradition, the poplar tree is relevant in another Mesopotamian mantic tradition:

[DIŠ ^{gis} ASÁL KIMIN (= A.ŠÀ ŠÀ	"If he plants a poplar in a
URU ^{gis} ASÁL GUB) DINGIR NA BI	field in the city, god will lead
ana mi-ig-ri-šú UŠ.UŠ-šú	that man voluntarily(?)." ⁴²

Mantically speaking, a field with a poplar in it is considered good luck.⁴³ It may come as no surprise, then, that Šukaletuda turned his gaze toward the skies, awaiting some indication, in spite of his agricultural failure, of divine favour. According to the Sumerian *Farmer's Instruction*, it was good agricultural practice for a farmer to pay attention to the sky:

u ₄ mul an-na šu im-ma-ab-du ₇ -a-ta	When the heavenly star(s) are
10-am ₃ a ₂ gud a-ša ₃ zi-zi-i-da-še ₃ igi-zu	right, do not be reluctant to
nam-ba-e-gid ₂ -i ⁴⁴	take the oxen force to the field
	many times.

This kind of celestial observation was undoubtedly targeted at determining the proper agricultural seasons by noting the positions of certain fixed stars. Nevertheless, other portents were expected.

⁴¹ Normally understood as a *Populus euphratica*, or Euphrates Poplar (Akk. *šar-batu*) the tree does not produce any fruit and is known for its rapid growth and shade; see CAD § 108-109 and VOLK 1995, 182 for discussion.

⁴² CT 39 3:25. The tablet is from the series *Šumma ālu*.

⁴³ Though in *Inana and Šukaletuda*, the specific plot is not called A.ŠÀ (= *eqū*), 'field', but rather a MÚ.SAR (93) or simply SAR (107) (= *mūšaru*), 'garden plot', which measures 144 square cubits—Šukaletuda is presumably responsible for a number of these plots. See discussion in VOLK 1995, 153. Furthermore, there is no indication that Šukaletuda's plot is in the city, despite his father's advice to hide there.

⁴⁴ CIVIL 1994, 1:38-39. See also VOLK 1995, 179 note 842.

Indeed, in the story a sign of favour does arrive. Šukaletuda, observing the western sky, sees Inana:

104 [diġir dili] du-ra [ġiškim mu-ni-in-zu]	He recognised the lone travelling god and (her) sign.
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Her appearance is labelled explicitly as a *ġiškim*, ‘omen’, and most commentators have understood it as such.⁴⁵ Most celestial omens regarding Venus’ appearance are generally positive. For example:

[DIŠ ^{mul} dil-bat ina EN.TE.N]A ina dUTU.È	[If Venus] rises [in winter] in the east, [at harvest time in the west]: enemy kings
[ina BURU ₁₄ ina dUTU.ŠÚ.A] nap-hat LUGAL-MEŠ KÚR-MEŠ	[will be reconciled; the harvest of the land will prosper; the land] will eat good
[SILIM-MEŠ BURU ₁₄ KUR SI.SÁ KUR NINDA-HI].A DÛG.GA KÚ [taš-mu-ú u sa-li-mu k]a-liš GAR-an	[bread; reconciliation and peace] will take place everywhere. ⁴⁶

Within the portions of EAE which deal specifically with Venus’ regular cycle, the so called ‘Venus Tablets of Ammišaduqa,’ Venus rising in the east was generally associated with positive apodoses. These were often agriculturally related:

ina ⁱⁿ ÁŠ UD.28.KAM ina dUTU.È IGI-ir EBUR KUR SI.SÁ	On the 28th day of Šebet, (Venus = Ninsianna) appears in the east: the harvest of the land will do well. ⁴⁷
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This association between Venus’ appearance and the success of agriculture is undoubtedly due to Inana/Ištar’s patronage of fecundity and reproduction. In contrast, when Venus is not visible, it is generally ominous. For example:

DIŠ ^{mul} dil-bat ina AN NU IGI-ir HA.A [KUR]	If Venus is not visible in the sky, destruction of the land. ⁴⁸
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⁴⁵ BOTTÉRO and KRAMER 1989, 260 and VOLK 1995, 179. But note BLACK et al. 2004, 200 ‘He recognised a solitary god by her appearance.’

⁴⁶ SAA 8 247:2-3 (= 536:2-4). See also REINER and PINGREE 1999 (hereafter BPO 3), 48-49: 94. Cf. BPO 3, 48-49: 95.

⁴⁷ BPO 1, #55. For agricultural prosperity corresponding to sightings in the east, see also BPO 1, #1, 3, 5, 9, 13, 15, 19, 21, 23, 26, 29-32, 34-35, 39-41, 45, 47-48, 50, 55, 57, 59-60. In fact, of the thirty-eight omens associated with eastern sightings of Venus, twenty-five of them are agriculturally positive.

⁴⁸ BPO 3, 72-72:15’.

Thus, Inana's celestial appearance, particularly after a period of invisibility, is a propitious omen for the agricultural state of the entire land, including our pathetic gardener. But when the goddess enters one of his plots, this is an even greater and more specific blessing. Her presence there can only portend Šukaletuda's own personal success. This attitude is reflected in another omen, when the planet Venus enters the constellation known as the Field, it bodes very well:

DIŠ ^{mul} <i>dil-bat</i> <i>ina</i> ŠÀ ^{mul} AŠ.GÁN IGI- <i>ir</i> ŠÈŠ.ME <i>ina</i> AN- <i>e</i> A.KAL.ME <i>ina</i> ID[IM] BURU ₁₄ ^{kur} MAR.TU ^{ki} S.I.SÁ <i>na-mu-ú</i> ŠUB.ME TUŠ-[MEŠ] ⁴⁹	If Venus appears inside the Field: there will be rains from If Venus appears inside the the sky and floods from the springs; the harvest of the Westland will prosper; abandoned pastures will be resettled.
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Inana's entering Šukaletuda's plot is this very event transposed to a mundane plane. This is precisely what Šukaletuda needs since the storms have brought no rain to his plot; they have only blown dust into his eyes (97-98).⁵⁰

Mantically speaking, Inana's presence on his land can only mean a bright future for Šukaletuda. Unfortunately for him and his fellow countrymen, he reverses the propitious significance of Inana's manifestation by his unwelcome sexual act. The following three plagues descend not on the perpetrator, whose identity Inana seeks, but on the entire country. They sound like they might be typical omen apodoses: wells turn to blood, there is a vicious storm, and traffic ceases on the roads. Here, however, the celestial divination corpus leaves us wanting. Though similar to celestial divination apodoses in that they all apply to the land as a whole rather than to individuals, none of these specific plagues appear in the extant literature.⁵¹ As Volk notes, the motif of water appearing as blood does occur in the protases of other mantic literature, but these are

⁴⁹ SAA 8 357:6-r2 = BPO 3, 210-211:11, 214, 221:14.

⁵⁰ The same issue here remains as with the comparison with CT 39 3:25, that the terms for the celestial parcel of land in the omen (^{mul}AŠ.GÁN, *ikū*, 'field') and in the story are not the same, though the agricultural parcel in the story, (MU).SAR is a subdivision of an *ikū* (1/100th).

⁵¹ Despite this, one of the details of the second plague might provide a link to the celestial divination tradition. While she is whipping the land with a furious storm, Inana is aided by others:

not illuminating in this study.⁵² Nevertheless, the general pattern is what we find in celestial divination: a particular celestial phenomenon occurs and the result affects the entire land.

While her plagues are ineffective, Inana determines a method of apprehending her culprit by appealing to Enki. Enki is, of course, well regarded for his sagacity and his consultation is not an uncommon

200	^{um} ₉ u ₁₈ -lu mar-uru ₅ huš igi-še ₃ [mu-un-ši-ġen]	The south wind and a vicious storm wind preceded her.
201	pi-li-pi-li dal-ha-mun eġer-ra-ni-[še ₃ in-us ₂]	The <i>pilipili</i> and a dust storm followed behind her.
202	ab-ba-šu ₂ -šu ₂ inim-kur ₂ -dug ₄ -dug ₄ ad [ġi ₄ -ġi ₄ . . .]	Abba-šušu, Inim-kur-dugdug, counsellor
203	7 a-ra ₂ 7 an-edin-na mu-un-[da-sug ₂ -sug ₂ -ge-eš]	Seven times seven helpers (?) stood beside her in the steppe.

“Seven times seven” does not seem here to actually refer to forty-nine individuals, but is rather hyperbole for seven who are particularly powerful. As Volk notes, only six of the seven are named; two of these, Abba-šušu and Inim-kur-dugdug, are known deities from the god list AN = ^d*a-nu-um*, where they are described as Inana’s *kiġga* ‘messengers’ (Volk 1995, 196; Litke 1998, 160-162 [IV 143, 145, 161]). Another individual in her entourage is a *pilipili*, a kind of functionary that seems to be particular to Inana’s cult, while the remainder are meteorological phenomena: *ulu*, ‘south wind’; *marru huš*, ‘vicious stormwind’; *dalhamun*, ‘dust storm’. The seventh could have been mentioned in the lacuna at the end of lines 202 (=190), but it does not seem to be large enough nor correctly placed to contain another name. While this hodgepodge of helpers looks as if it was simply thrown together, it could be that the emphasis on the number seven was a deliberate reference to the constellation MUL.MUL, ‘the Stars’ (our Pleiades), who are later equated with the collective deity *Sebitti* (literally, ‘the Seven’). See, e.g., Hunger and Pingree 1989, I i 44: DIŠ MUL.MUL ^d7.BI DINGER.MEŠ GALMEŠ, ‘The Stars, the Seven, the great gods’. The Stars are a particularly malevolent constellation in celestial divination. When they are seen together with Venus, they can cancel her normally benevolent nature (SAA 8 282:r1-3):

1 <i>ina</i> SAG MU MUL.MUL	If at the beginning of the year
<i>ina</i> KAB [?] ^{mul} <i>dil-bat</i> GUB	Pleiades stand on the <i>left</i> of
LÚ.KÛR : A.KAL BURU ₁₄ <i>ú-tál-lal</i>	Venus: the enemy, variant: a flood will <i>disrupt</i> the harvest.

See also SAA 8 536:3-4: DIŠ ^{mul}A.EDIN MUL.MUL KUR-*ud* ^d[IM RA] / ^{mul}*dil-bat ina* ŠĀ MUL.MUL [GUB-*mā*], ‘If the Frond reaches the Stars: [Adad will devastate.—] Venus [stands] in the Stars.’ Here, the original omen has the constellation the Frond approaching another constellation, which is, of course, impossible, and so the diviner has equated the Frond constellation with the planet Venus, thus generating possible, applicable omens. The result of this conjunction, as in *Inana and Šukaletuda*, is devastating storms. Thus, the story might be relating Venus’ conjunction with a malevolent asterism, here deliberately co-opted by the goddess in order to bring disaster to the land.

⁵² Volk 1995, 48-49.

motif in Sumerian⁵³ and Akkadian literature.⁵⁴ However this plea is understood in the context of ancient Mesopotamian literature, it should be noted that, in *Inana and Šukaletuda*, Inana does not appeal to Enki for advice *per se*. Rather, she demands that he expose her attacker and Enki reluctantly grants her request (250). This consultation seems to be less for the sake of Enki's sage counsel and more for the sake of his permission. Though Enki is one of the high gods, it is nevertheless awkward that Enki, a chthonic god of the freshwater in the earth, should have any dominion over events in the sky—which is the place from which Inana finds her solution. It is *possible* that Inana's request of Enki is in regard to his sovereignty over a particular stretch of the sky known in celestial divination literature as *harrān šūt* ^d*Ea*, 'the Path of Ea'.⁵⁵ This path was one of three celestial divisions, the other two being *harrān šūt* ^d*Anu* and *harrān šūt* ^d*Enlil*. The exact delineation of these three paths seemed to have fluctuated somewhat over time, but in general they each covered a swath of the sky from the eastern to western horizons and were respectively arranged from the north to south: the Path of Anu, the Path of Enlil and the Path of Ea. Enki's path might have seemed the closest in proximity to southern Iraq, the locus of the crime and its perpetrator. Inana needed permission to enter this section of the sky and to span it in its entirety.

Inana, with Enki's help, is finally able to discover the culprit by a miraculous act of spanning the entire sky:

252 [n] ₂ -te-a-ni ^d tir-an-na-gim an-na ba-an-gi ₁₆ -ib ki ba-da-an-us ₂	She stretched herself like a rainbow across the sky and reached thereby as far as the earth.
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Within the Mesopotamian scholarly tradition in general, as well as the celestial divination tradition in particular, Inana/Ištar/Venus was equated with ^dTIR.AN.NA, 'the rainbow'. As Volk noted, for example, Inana/Ištar is associated with the divine Rainbow in the god list AN: ^d*a-nu-um*.⁵⁶ There is also a specific star called

⁵³ E.g. *Inana and Enki*, FARBER 1973; *Enki and the World Order* 387-450, BENITO 1969; *Debate between Sheep and Grain* 181-191, ALSTER and VANSTIPHOUT 1987.

⁵⁴ E.g. *Adapa* Fragment B 14'-15, IZRE'el 2001, 16-17; *Atrahasis* I 99-100, LAMBERT and MILLARD 1969, 49.

⁵⁵ For a description of the three celestial paths, see KOCH 1989, 14-22.

⁵⁶ CT 25 31 Rev ii 8: [^dTIR.AN.NA : MIN (*ma-an-za-at*) ^dMIN (*ištar*). See VOLK 1995, 202. See also LITKE 1998, 166-167 (IV 288, 291).

^{mul}TIR.AN.NA,⁵⁷ which is related specifically to the planet Venus in celestial divination practice, at least in the Late Babylonian Period.⁵⁸ And there are several omens in which Venus appears with a rainbow. While most of these are too fragmentary to offer useful comparisons,⁵⁹ one Neo-Assyrian report mentions an interesting assemblage of celestial phenomena:

A.AN GÛ ^d IM ʾan-ni ⁷ -[u]	This rain and thunder concerns the appointed time of the sighting of Venus.
<i>ša a-dan-ni ša ta-mar-t[i]</i>	
<i>ša ^ddil-bat šu-u</i>	
DIŠ <i>ina</i> ITI.NE ^d IM GÛ-šú ŠUB- <i>ma</i>	If in Ab, Adad thunders, the day becomes cloudy, it rains, a rainbow arches, lightning
UD ŠÚ AN ŠUR- <i>mun</i>	flashes: the floodings will
^d TIR.AN.NA GIL	become scarce at the source. ⁶⁰
NIM.GÍR <i>ib-ri-iq</i>	
A.KAL-MEŠ <i>ina</i> IDIM LÁ-MEŠ	

Here, the diviner notes that stormy weather, seen with a rainbow at the time that the planet Venus is supposed to be sighted, indicates (contrary to what one may assume) that water will be scarce.⁶¹ This could be related to the events in *Inana and Šukaletuda* in that in both the omen and in the story, all signs (in both cases involving Venus' appearance, storms, and a rainbow) seem to point to agricultural prosperity, and yet result in the exact opposite.

While this is an appealing proposition, it must be remembered that Inana is *not* equated with the rainbow in *Inana and Šukaletuda*, rather she is said to be *like* a rainbow, ^dtir-an-na-gim. As previously stated, this must mean that Inana was able to span the entire sky in contrast to her normal movements which would otherwise keep her close to the eastern and western horizons. This is obviously impossible and within the context of the story this event is to be taken as a miracle. It is hardly unusual for the celestial omen material to describe celestially-impossible situations in its protases, such as fixed stars approaching each other or lunar eclipses occurring

⁵⁷ See HUNGER and PINGREE 1989, 27 (I i 33).

⁵⁸ PINCHES et al. 1955 (= LBAT), #1576 ii 7: ^{mul}TIR.AN.NA ^dMIN (= ^ddil-bat).

⁵⁹ BPO 3, 43-44:18; 140-141: r ii 35-37.

⁶⁰ SAA 8 31:1-8 (Cf. 33:3; 43:2; 45:3:4).

⁶¹ Alternatively, we have an explanation followed by an omen citation. Rain and thunder occurring at the same time that Venus is sighted is equated with rain and thunder together with a rainbow. In either case, the practical upshot is the same: there will be an unexpected lack of water.

at the beginning or end of a month. Nevertheless omens describing Venus breaking out of her normal course are not common:

DIŠ ^{mul} <i>dil-bat</i> GIM MUL- <i>ha ir-ta-naq-qi</i>	If Venus as soon as she rises
ŠĒG.MEŠ <i>ina AN-e A.KAL.MEŠ ina</i>	goes progressively higher: rains
IDIM TAR.MEŠ GIM ^d <i>sal-bat-a-nu</i>	in the sky, floods in the
<i>ma-2-diš i-š[aq-qam-ma]</i>	springs will cease—like Mars
	she goes very high. ⁶²

Another, later omen expresses a similar idea:

[DIŠ ^{mul} <i>dil-bat ana ziq]-pi iš-ta-naq-qa-a</i>	If Venus keeps going higher to
ŠĒG.MEŠ TAR.MEŠ. ⁶³	the zenith, rains will cease.

As a general principle with most celestial omens, when a celestial body does not act according to certain expected ideals it generates a negative apodosis.⁶⁴ In this case, Venus rises high in the sky just as Mars which, as a superior planet, is able to do. The outcome is commensurately negative. In *Inana and Šukaletuda*, Inana's irregular and altogether impossible celestial movement bodes ill, though in this instance it is not for the land in general as one would expect in celestial divination, but only for Šukaletuda. He will, of course, be killed by the understandably vengeful goddess.

Conclusion

The story of *Inana and Šukaletuda* depicts the goddess Inana in her astral manifestation, not only in regard to her appearance, but also her particular movements. Specifically, in the story Inana is seen bound to the eastern and western horizons. Furthermore, the fulcrum takes place when Inana receives permission to miraculously step out of these prescribed movements, freeing herself from the shackles of her normal celestial course. By doing so she is able to discover her attacker and bring him to justice. *Inana and Šukaletuda* is an astral myth, which exploits the accepted celestial phenomena of the planet Venus as inspiration for its narrative. Moreover, though there are no extant Sumerian celestial divination texts, *Inana and Šukaletuda* possibly demonstrates the antiquity of the later written

⁶² BPO 3, 100-101:12; cf. the variant interpretation BPO 3, 219, 224:40.

⁶³ BPO 3 236, 240:7; 218, 222:23.

⁶⁴ For these ideal celestial schemes, see BROWN 2000, 113-122.

celestial divination tradition. In the story, Inana's celestial, and indeed, earthly appearance is first equated with possible agricultural fecundity. This propitious possibility is quickly reversed by Šukaletuda's actions, however, and the result brings ruination on the entire land, as is typical in Mesopotamian celestial divination.

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