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THE FERTILITY CULT IN
MESOPOTAMIA, EGYPT, AND PHOENICIA

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ABSTRACT

One aspect of the primitive worship in the Near East was a series of devices intended to foster fertility and fecundity. Archaeological excavations have provided evidence for the study of the growth and development of these beliefs. Man's economic concern for his livelihood and his anxiety over his food-supply manifested itself in the various expressions and practices of the Fertility Cult. Essential elements in this cult range from a belief in the potency of amulets and charms to sympathetic magic, fertility dances, to a more sophisticated and elaborate mythology with gods and goddesses figuring in a drama of death and resurrection similar to what takes place in a world of nature--a languishing and then a revival of life and energy among plants and animals.

Female figurines, amulets and cave drawings are evident in the Palaeolithic period. In the Neolithic there is a wider conception of the male reproductive force--the bull. In the historic period a story common in the communities of the ancient world with local modifications is that of a goddess of love whose lover is killed every year at the beginning of the dead season. A period of lamentation is inaugurated supposedly for the lost lover but not less for the lack of vegetation in that season. In spring when new plants sprout and the earth becomes green again a period of rejoicing accompanies the return of the resuscitated young god.

This paper discusses the practices in Mesopotamia, Egypt and Phoenicia--and it specially treats the female principle which due to the abundance of female figurines beginning from the Upper Palaeolithic culture seems to have been the primary object of man's veneration.

THE ORIGIN AND SPREAD OF THE FERTILITY CULT

Outline

| <u>CHAPTER</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| II. PREHISTORIC EVIDENCES OF THE FERTILITY CULT | 14 |
| A. <u>The Palaeolithic Cultus</u> | |
| 1. Sculptured Female Statuettes | |
| 2. Shells and Amulets | |
| 3. The Fertility Dance. | |
| 4. The Male Element in Primitive Society. | |
| B. <u>The Neolithic and Chaleolithic Cultus</u> | |
| 1. The Arpachiyah Figurines. | |
| 2. The Halaf and Ubaid Periods. | |
| 3. The Warka and Jemdet Nasr Periods. | |
| 4. Egypt. | |
| III. THE FERTILITY CULT IN MESOPOTAMIA..... | 35 |
| A. Inanna - Ishtar and Dumuzi-Tammaz. | |
| B. The Sacred Marriage of the goddess and the king. | |
| C. The Akitu Festival at Babylon | |
| IV. THE FERTILITY CULT IN THE NILE VALLEY | 52 |
| A. Osiris and Isis | |
| B. The Holy Wedding: The Marriage of Hathor and Horus | |
| V. THE FERTILITY CULT IN PHOENICIA | 76 |
| A. The Baal-Anat Cycle | |
| B. Adonis and Ashtarte in Phoenicia | |
| C. Sacred Wedding. | |

CHAPTER

Page

| | |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| VI. CONCLUSION | 95 |
| A. Origin | |
| B. Economic Factor | |
| C. Magic and Religion | |
| D. The Persistence of the Cult. | |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 115 |

THE ORIGIN AND PROPAGATION OF THE FERTILITY CULT.

CHAPTER I.

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The ancients, like some of the backward tribes of the present day, saw man always as part of society, and society as embedded in nature and dependent upon cosmic forces. The world, to primitive man, appeared neither inanimate nor empty but redundant with life; life that had individuality in man, beast and plant and in every phenomenon which confronted man, such as the thunderclap, the sudden shadow, the stone upon which he stumbled while on a hunting trip, and so on. Natural phenomena was not explained or analysed, but told as an experience and an event in which man was involved to the extent of his very existence. For instance, when certain atmospheric changes broke a drought and brought rain, the Babylonians explained these changes as the intervention of the gigantic bird 'Imdugud' which came to their rescue. ¹ Imdugud is the lion-headed eagle, the mythical bird of the Lagashite god Ningursu, found in the Sumerian temple of Ninkhursag at Al-Ubaid by Hall and Woolley. It is a great relief of copper within a copper frame measuring 7 ft. 9½ in. long by 3 ft. 6 in. high, on a wood backing and it holds two stags by their tails. It dates to about 3100 B.C. Imdugud sometimes holds lions, sometimes ibexes, sometimes

1. H. A. Frankfort, Before Philosophy, pp. 12, 14, 15.

stags in his talons. On the Stele of Vultures the lion-headed eagle² occurs along held in the hand of Ningursu. In the above example, Imdugud, according to the Babylonians, was supposed to cover the sky with its wings which were explained as black storm clouds, and devour the Bull of Heaven, whose hot breath had scorched the crops. Therefore, the ancients experienced directly a conflict of powers, one hostile to the harvest upon which they depended, the other frightening but beneficial; the thunderstorm reprieved them in the nick of time by defeating and utterly destroying the drought. The elements were thus personified; hence, the fundamental difference between the attitudes of modern and ancient man as regards the surrounding world is this: for modern, scientific man the phenomenal world is primarily an 'It'; for ancient - and also for primitive man it is a 'Thou'. And so images were created - representational art - and they represented a personification of the elements. These representations became traditional and were met with in literature and in art. They were products of the imagination but they were not mere fantasy. They were carefully chosen cloaks for abstract thought. These representations revealed metaphysical and significant, though unverifiable, truths. They developed into myth. The ancients personified and then dramatized these myths not only for the sake of telling stories that conveyed information but because they believed that by personifying and dramatizing them, they acknowledged

2. H. R. Hall and C. L. Woolley, Ur Excavations, pp. 22, 23.

in them a special virtue which could be activated by incantations, invocations and sympathetic magic. An example of such dramatization is found in Babylonia. During each New Year's Festival the Babylonians re-enacted and recited the victory which Marduk had won over the powers of chaos on the first New Year's Day, when the world was created. The king of Babylonia impersonated the role of Marduk against Tiamat, the primeval water.³ Therefore, these myth symbols and rituals were not a series of actions performed for their own sake but because they had mythological and magical significance.⁴ Another main feature of some of these myths was the deification of the fertility and fecundity agents as expressed by the divine couple; sometimes a third agent was present in the form of a young god who had roughly the same attributes as his father.

Ceremonies and celebrations or ritualistic observances were carried out by primitive races, the exact dates of which varied according to the character of the community. Among tribes whose chief occupation was hunting, the opening of the hunting season, as a rule, was marked by a ceremony which had for its object a plentiful supply of game and the success of the hunters. In agriculture, the most critical season to the primitive mind was the time of sowing. This period of the year was marked by magical rites and practices intended to insure the growth and fertility of the crop. As the year went on, various means were employed to influence the course of natural phenomena or avert the

3. H. A. Frankfort, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

4. R. T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, p. 27.

evil consequences of untoward conditions, such as inadequate rainfall or floods. Harvest time was also attended by observances because to the primitive mind, harvest was not, as to a civilized community, the fruition of the labours of the preceding months, but depended on rites as did the earlier stages; and consequently the harvest was not simply an occasion for rejoicing but a time at which natural forces had still to be propitiated. Taking harvest rites as a whole, the essential elements resolved themselves into propitiatory rites, observances to secure fertility, communion, and the offering of firstfruits, usually accompanied by a feast, a period of license and rejoicing. These elements did not necessarily appear in all harvest practices, nor were they always clearly distinguishable. Propitiatory and cognate rites were necessary because of the belief that objects, organic or inorganic had a soul. The act of destruction involved in plucking fruit or killing an animal for human consumption was one of peculiar danger. In both cases the spirit of the animal or vegetable world had to be propitiated to avert the evil which would otherwise inevitably follow. In the case of corn, the feeling of danger was intensified by the organized and prolonged effort required to secure the crop. Among the ancient Egyptians, the reaper, after cutting the first few blades of corn, atoned for the impiety of his act by beating his breast and uttering the lament which the Greeks called the Linus song. In

5. Linus was a person, celebrated in song under different names in Egypt, Phoenicia, Cyprus and other places, but called Linus by the Greeks (Herodotus, ii. 79).

Babylonia the death of Tammuz (obviously from the legend, a personification of the corn) was bewailed by the women.⁶

After harvest firstfruits had to be sacrificed for the reason that it may be taken as an axiom of primitive thought that all which was new was sacred, tabu, and hence not to be touched by man until certain ceremonies were performed by which the tabu was removed and the whole was set free. This is analogous to the initiation of any act for the first time, or the first occasion of any series of events, or the entering upon a new state of life, such as manhood or womanhood, marriage, entrance into a mystery association. These states were sacred, dangerous, and involved a tabu condition, primarily because they were innovations. Therefore it is understandable why the new crops, the new vintage, the first catch of the season, the first-born of domestic animals and even of man, were regarded as tabu or sacred, for which reason they were accompanied by rites which served to remove the tabu and to carry off the danger with which the persons concerned were charged. The crops must not be cut or gathered or dug up or used until certain rites had been performed. The nature of these rites revealed another axiom of primitive thought--that the whole could be fully represented by the part--by setting aside a part, the whole was set free. In the case of the crops or the vintage, that part was known as the firstfruits. Similarly in the case of the chase or fishing.

6. E. N. Fallaize, "Harvest", Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, v.6, pp. 520, 521.

the first animal or fish, was also set apart in some specific way, as an offering to the gods, thus giving liberty for the hunter or fisher to continue his pursuit in safety. And the first-born of domestic animals was often sacrificed or set free, because it was invested with a peculiar sanctity, and by this act the future progeny was, as it were, made usable. The rites by which the corn or the vintage was set free for ordinary use were of different kinds. The firstfruits could be offered to a god or spirit, or to the dead. They were sometimes eaten in a solemn manner, or there would be a combination of sacrifice and ritual eating. Again, they could be made over to the king, chief or priest, who sometimes performed upon them certain ceremonies. Frequently the firstfruit ceremonies were very elaborate and lengthy. They often terminated with a feast or were the occasion of a kind of saturnalia, or they formed a kind of festival of beginnings, a New Year, when also new fire was kindled and distributed to the community. And, where the new food was solemnly eaten, it was sometimes prepared for by fasting or by swallowing emetics, in order to make the body ready for the reception of the new food.⁷

Another aspect of the fertility cult was the virtue attributed to trees. The power of fostering the growth of crops, and in general of cultivated plants, was ascribed to trees. The ascription is not unnatural, for the tree is the largest and most powerful member of the vegetable kingdom, and man is familiar with it before he takes to cultivating corn. Hence, he naturally places the feebler and, to him,

7. J. A. MacCulloch, "Firstfruits," The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, v.6, p. 41 f., (1913).

the newer plant under the protection of the older and more powerful. In classical art the sylvan deities are depicted in human shape, their woodland character being denoted by a branch or some equally obvious symbol. The tree soul immanent in a tree which is an animate being was supposed to exercise powers such as making the rain fall, the sun to shine, flocks and herds to multiply, and women to bring forth easily. In some places, to extort rain from the tree spirit a branch was dipped in water. In such cases the spirit was supposed to be immanent in the branch, and the water thus applied to the spirit produced rain by sympathetic magic.⁸

This idea led to another concept, which is the influence of the sexes on vegetation. The powers of vegetation were personified as male and female, and so ancient man attempted, on the principle of homeopathic or imitative magic, to quicken the growth of trees and plants by representing the wedding of the sylvan deities in the persons of a King and Queen of May. This is due to the fact that before the gods became anthropomorphic rulers of states and cities, when they were still directly the phenomena of nature, man's attitude was not merely one of passive obedience. It called for active intervention, as it does among many primitives today. It is one of the tenets of mythopoeic logic that similarity and identity merge; 'to be like' is as good as 'to be'. Therefore, by being like, or by enacting the role of a force in nature, a god, man could in the cult enter into and clothe himself

8. J. G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, v. 2, pp. 45, 47, 49, 50.

with the identity of these powers, with the identity of the gods, and through his own actions, when thus identified, cause the powers involved to act as he would have them act. When peoples achieved statehood, in Mesopotamia, for instance, when the king identified himself with Dumuzi (who incarnated the creative powers of spring) and the priestess with the goddess Inanna (who was an incarnation of the fertility of nature), and they celebrated a yearly marriage, it was considered the marriage of the creative powers of spring. Thus through a willed act of man a divine union was achieved wherein was the all pervading, life-giving re-creative potency upon which depended, the life of all lands and also the steady flow of days, the renewal of the new moon throughout the new year.⁹ And so it was natural to suppose (even up to recent customs) that the more closely the mock-marriage of the leaf-clad or flower-decked mummers aped the real marriage of the woodland sprites, the more effective would be the charm. These acts were charms intended to make the woods grow green, the fresh grass to sprout and the corn to shoot. Accordingly one can assume that the profligacy which attended these notorious ceremonies was an essential part of the rites, and that in the opinion of those who performed them the marriage of trees and plants could not be fertile without the real union of the human sexes.¹⁰ These practices led to the saturnalia and orgies connected with the fertility cult. It was sexual licentiousness sanctioned, so to speak by religion.

9. H. A. Frankfort et al., Before Philosophy, p. 214 f.
10. J. G. Frazer, op. cit., p. 97

On the other hand, some people practised continence in order to make the crops grow. The devious course of the human mind in its gropings after truth has led some people to indulge their passions as a means of fertilizing the earth, and others to seek the same end by directly opposite means, such as, living chastely, apart from their wives, from the moment that they sowed till the time they reaped. Illicit love was supposed to blight the fruits of the earth due to the sympathetic relation supposed to exist between the commerce of the sexes and the fertility of the earth which manifested itself in the belief that illicit love tended, directly or indirectly, to mar that fertility and to blight the crops. Hence, if the crops had been bad for a year, the villagers set down the dearth to secret sins of this kind, and said that the God of heaven and earth was angry and therefore had to be appeased.¹¹

The geographical area emphasized in this study is Western Asia or the Middle East, which will include mainly, Mesopotamia, Phoenicia and Egypt. As far back as one may care to inquire, traces are to be found in these areas of a religion based on fertility and fecundity. The sources available to us are of two kinds: written documents and representational art such as is found on the monuments. Sumerian and later Semitic texts give information about worship, liturgy and the pantheon. Prior to the 3rd millennium the principles of religion must have been a matter of oral transmission, therefore an exposition of such beliefs is on less sure ground. Monuments are the

11. Ibid., pp. 104, 105, 107.

second source; these are legion and the oldest antedate all written sources. Examples of such are cylinder seals which abound in Mesopotamia, and coins which form a principal source for the mythology of Phoenicia. Then there are innumerable statues of gods and goddesses from the whole area; for instance, the diorite statues of the goddess of Bau seated on a throne supported by geese and that of the goddess Ningal from Ur; then the granite statue of Isis protecting Osiris with her wings from Karnak in Egypt, also bronze statues of Amon from Thebes. Plaques and stelae also depict gods and their emblems, such as the goddess with two horns on a stela from Beth-shan, as well as a goddess with a sceptre engraved on a pendant from the same place. Vessels and vases are decorated with mythological scenes, such as the alabaster vase from Warka decorated with an offering scene for the goddess, and the fragment of a vase of Entemena of Lagash on which is depicted a date-goddess. Obelisks such as that of Ashurbanipal I from Nineveh contains an altar scene. Then temples and libraries which contain innumerable tablets such as those from Nippur and Ugarit and so on. But the fact must not be ignored that on many points our knowledge is only conjectural, and whatever we do, we can never penetrate thoroughly the thought of peoples separated from us by several thousands of years. As for the monuments, the soil of Western Asia, unlike Egypt, has not preserved all that was entrusted to it, which include ruined temples and decorations, small statues, numerous bas-reliefs, small religious objects and jewellery. Cylinder seals, as mentioned above, also have an essentially religious character, and it must be stressed that the art of ancient Western Asia, like Egyptian art, is

fundamentally religious, that is, representational art; it exists not for its own sake, but to serve religion. As for Phoenicia, until a few years ago, it was only known through the ancient authors, Herodotus and his successors, reference in the Old Testament, and the Homeric poems which described Phoenicia in its period of splendour. The writings of the Graeco-Roman period provided the basis of all our knowledge. Philo of Babylos, who lived at the beginning of the Christian era, has handed down Phoenician beliefs about the creation of the world according to one Sanchuniathon, a priest born at Beryta¹² (Beirut) during the eleventh century B.C. His work is lost, and Philo's is only partly preserved in the works of Eusebius of Caesarea, who wrote at the beginning of the 4th century A.D. All this information has been much discussed and sometimes doubted. In any case it offered a picture very different from what primitive religion must have been. Since 1919 the situation has changed by the successive excavations of Montet and Dunand at Byblos, and at Ras Shamra the excavation of Schaeffer where numerous tablets have been uncovered. The discoveries at Byblos and Ras Shamra provide information about the primitive¹³ religion of Phoenicia.

The Asianic religions are nature religions. The main features consist of worshipping the agents of fertility and fecundity as expressed by a divine couple, the High God of the Mountain and tempest

12. Some maintain that Sanchuniathon lived during the 6th century B.C.

13. Etienne Drioton, Religions of the Ancient East, pp. 63, 64, 65, 74, 76.

and the Mother Goddess; sometimes a third agent is present in the form of a young god, who has roughly the same attributes as the High God and is represented as the son of the couple; then feasts which fit into the cycle of seasons - the most important being the celebration of the sacred marriage, the hierogamy of the two deities, with all its repercussions on the earth, in the fertility and general fecundity of which it is the symbol. This state of mind leads to one basic premise: belief, in ancient societies, in the close dependence of the earth on heaven, not mainly in what heaven willed, but rather in its outward signs, that is, in the manifestation of the elements.¹⁴

A most salient feature that has its roots in the remote past is the cult of the mother goddess. The archaeological and documentary material now available concerning the myth and ritual of the Middle East has revealed the unique position occupied by the Goddess cult. It was an essential element very deeply laid in the long and complex history of the body of beliefs and practices which centered in and around the mysterious process of fecundity, birth and generation, alike in nature, the human species and in the animal kingdom. So significant is her position that although the Mother-goddess may not be the earliest manifestation of the concept of Deity, yet her symbolism unquestionably has been the most persistent feature in the archaeological record of the ancient world, from the sculptured Venuses of the Gravettian culture in the Upper Palaeolithic to the emblems and

14. Ibid., p. 66

inscriptions of the cult when it becomes established in the Fertile Crescent, between the 5th and 3rd millennia B.C. From its cradleland in the Southern Russian steppe and Western Asia, it was destined to have a widespread influence and to play a very significant role in the subsequent development of the Ancient Near Eastern religion from India to the Mediterranean from Neolithic times to the Christian era. The cradleland of the so-called Venuses (female figurines) appears to have been in the region of the Caspian Sea, where the goddess cult became most prominent. In its westerly extension in Europe it became sufficiently established to become a permanent tradition, especially in the Mediterranean phase, where it continued. With the rise of agriculture and the domestication of animals the figure of the Goddess became more defined, and with the growing consciousness of the duality of male and female in the generative process, from being the Unmarried Mother personifying the divine principle in maternity she became associated with the Young God as her son or consort.¹⁵

In the following chapter, the practices and symbols of the cult in the Upper Palaeolithic period will be discussed, and subsequently, the development and elaboration of such beliefs through the successive periods and in certain areas of the Near East.

15. E. O. James, The Cult of the Mother Goddess, pp. 11, 12, 20.

CHAPTER II.

II. PREHISTORIC EVIDENCES AND ASPECTS OF THE FERTILITY CULT

A. THE PALAEOLITHIC CULTUS

"An adequate supply of offspring and food being a necessary condition of human existence, the promotion and conservation of life have been a fundamental urge from Palaeolithic times to the present day which has found magico-religious expression in a very deeply laid and highly developed cultus. Exactly when and where it arose is still very obscure, but it was from Western Asia, the South Russian plain and the valley of the Don that female figurines, commonly called 'Venuses', in bone, ivory, stone and bas-relief, often with maternal organs grossly exaggerated, were introduced into Eastern and Central Europe at the beginning of the Upper Palaeolithic by an Asiatic migration in what is now known as the Gravettian culture; the former Upper Aurignacian. The diffusion-centre of the blade-tool, or gravette, from which it takes its name, was Western Asia and the Eurasiatic steppes. Thence it appears to have made its way into Europe through the loess-lands of the Danube to Moravia and Austria." ¹

1. Sculptured Female Statuettes.

It was essentially in Eastern Europe and Western Asia that bone and ivory were employed for tool-making and the fashioning of human figures of the steatopygic Venus variety with pendulous breasts, broad hips, round buttocks and excessive corpulency suggestive of pregnancy. Examples of this type have been found at Kostienski, Gagarino, Mezine, near Baikal in Siberia, and especially at Malta where

1. E.O. James, op. cit., p. 13.

their production was on a considerable scale and included a highly conventionalized figure. As the technique was diffused from the Southern Russian steppe to Central and Western Europe it tended to become cruder and more conventionalized. In the squat type the face was seldom portrayed though the ivory statuette of a girl from the Grotte du Pape, Brassempouy, in the Landes was an exception to this rule. It belongs to the Middle Aurignacian rather than to the Gravettian culture and stands at the beginning of the Palaeolithic art; it is without eyes and mouth which may have been indicated in colours which have since disappeared. Here the face was fashioned and, as in the example in oolitic limestone from Willendorf, near Vienna, the hair was braided. In the Willendorf Venus the arms are only slightly indicated and it has a bracelet on the forearm, but the abdomen is prominent and the buttocks are strongly developed. Traces of red ochre occur in the porous limestone, and the emphasis clearly was on the sexual organs of the nude figure. In the Haute Garonne a skilfully executed curious ivory figurine from Lespugne with the legs fused tapering to a point and huge breasts, has a short loin-cloth from the buttocks to the back of the calves of the legs. This represents another variety of the technique in contrast to the slim Magdalenian figure, called the 'immodest Venus', from Laugerie-Basse, Dordogne. The 'immodest Venus' is in ivory; it never had either head or arms but presents a groove in the region of the neck, and was² completed with pieces of wood or horn and pieces of skin.

2. E.O. James, op. cit., pp. 13, 14; G. H. Luquet, The Art and Religion of Fossil Man, pp. 13, 16, II.

To the north-east of Willendorf Dr. Absolon in 1929 brought to light a Venus near Unter Westernitz to the south of Brno in Moravia which occupies an intermediate position between the slim and grotesque varieties. This was followed by further discoveries at Westernitz (Vestonice) between 1934 and 1937 of a number of plastic anthropomorphic caricatures modelled in burnt and ground mammoth-bones mixed with loam and fat like the Venuses before mentioned, together with a small ivory head carved in the form of a sculptured portrait of a human being, which represents a woman showing a fine animated face, which seemed a work of art, in striking contrast to the crude plastic caricatures of the particular figurines which sufficed for cult purposes, and so seldom had a face portrayed. Because normally all that mattered in these cases was to emphasize the maternal organs, which were thus grossly exaggerated, as in the examples that have been cited. Similar statuettes have been recovered from Sireuil in the Dordogne, the Grimaldi caves on the Franco-Italian frontier near Mentone, and in Italy; they have been found in Emilia at Savignano sul Panaro. In a rock-shelter at Laussel in the valley of the Beune near Les Eyzies in the Dordogne, the well-known figure of a nude woman, apparently pregnant, holding in her right hand the horn of a bison, was carved in relief on a block of stone about eighteen inches high. The body has been coloured with red pigment which was so widely used in Palaeolithic ritual as a life-giving agent - the surrogate of blood. The face was featureless and egg-shaped, though the head in profile was turned towards the horn of the bison. On the ground there were four other similar reliefs, two of which had horns.

One of the reliefs was that of a male figure, apparently in the act of shooting with a bow and arrow, and another has been interpreted either as an accouchement or as copulation. E.O. James is not convinced that it is copulation although he admits that an erotic element may have been inherent in the tradition. His reason is that because the main purpose of the cultus having been the giving of life through the outward signs of maternal fecundity, therefore, childbirth rather than conception seemed to be the purpose of the representation.³ G.-H. Luquet thinking differently declares that the idea of the artist was much less the eventual prosperity of the social group but rather the memory or imagination of his own sensual satisfaction. It was not the generative but the voluptuous character of the woman which stimulated the author of the work. Although sometimes it is considered as picturing a confinement, in his opinion one must see there a copulation, because the body diametrically opposed to the female body could only be an adult, characterized as such by a clearly distinct beard with two points.⁴

2. Shells and Amulets.

Shells also appear to have been used in the Upper Palaeolithic as amulets, judging from their frequent occurrence in graves where they seem to have had a life-giving significance. The cowrie shell in particular was regarded as possessing some magic virtue because it resembles the vulva. To wear a cowrie shell therefore ensured

3. E.O. James, op. cit., pp. 14, 15.

4. G.-H. Luquet, op. cit., pp. 110, 85.

fertility. The shell became a charm. The sanctity thus earned for it has made cowrie shells substitutes for money in parts of Africa and Asia.⁵ In the Grimaldi burials in the Grotte des Enfants four rows of pierced shells - nassas (Cyclonassa neritea) were arranged round the head of a youth whose skeleton had been stained red with peroxide of iron. On the arms of the tightly flexed woman buried with him were shell bracelets, and between the skulls lay two pebbles of serpentine, and another against the jaw of the woman. The two children to whom this cave owes its name were found together with about a thousand perforated nassas belonging to a belt or loin-cloth composed of shells, extending in both cases from the umbilicus, and covering entirely the pelvis and the lumbar region. In the adjoining Grotte du Cavillon were no less than 7,868 marine shells (Nassa neritae) of which 875 were pierced which were doubtlessly necklaces, and 200 of them occurred near the head. At Barma Grande, the skeleton of a boy in a grave lined with red ochre was similarly adorned with Nassa shells and canine teeth, all perforated, together with ivory pendants, a necklace and two large cowrie shells (Cyprae millepunctata) at each side of the left tibia, which must have been strung as a sort of garter. The young woman in this interment had much the same ceremonial equipment, including a collar of shells, teeth and a perforated fish vertebrae. In the Baouso da Torre cave - a shell collar, a fillet and a grille with shell pendants recurred. In the rock-shelter known as Cro-Magnon at Les Eyzies, 300 sea-shells, mainly Littorina Littorea, and

5. V. Gordon Childe, Man Makes Himself, p. 93

perforated pendants, were among the bones, while a mile away on the opposite bank of the Vézère at Langerie-Basse, cowries had been carefully arranged in pairs on a corpse; two pairs on the forehead, one near the humerus, four in the region of the knees and thighs, and two upon each foot. Such a distribution could hardly have been other than for magico-religious purposes connected with the restoration of life to the deceased like the widespread practice of depositing ochreous powder in Palaeolithic interments, with which shells and necklaces are so closely associated as grave-goods. As blood, or its surrogate red ochre, was regarded apparently as a vitalizing agent, so certain shells, such as the cowrie shaped in the form of the portal through which a child enters the world, seem to have been connected with the female principle, and to have been employed as fertility charms. It is not improbable, therefore, that this widespread feature of Upper Palaeolithic mortuary ritual was in the nature of a life-giving rite closely connected with the female figurines and other symbols of what later became the Mother Goddess cult. It may have made its way into Europe from the East in association with the Venuses with the rest of the Gravettian culture and with the worship of the Goddess who was closely related to the cult of the dead in its later develop-⁶ments.

3. The Fertility Dance

This type of ritual, practised in Palaeolithic times was not only to make the human species fruitful but to revive the dead as well.

6. E. O. James, op. cit., pp. 15-17; G.-H. Luquet, op. cit., pp. 42-44.

It was employed, particularly by the Magdalenians, to stimulate fecundity among the animals on which Early Man depended for his food-supply. Thus, in the valley of the Beune lies a long tunnel-like cave, known as Combarelles, containing quantities of engravings of Pleistocene animals including the reindeer, the bison, the mammoth, the horse, the lion, the bear and the rhinoceros, together with a series of anthropomorphic figures on the wall of a recess which may perhaps be those of masked dancers clothed in skins and wearing tails. Elsewhere there is an obese man apparently following a woman, interpreted sometimes as having an erotic significance. But the main purpose of the scenes seems to have been to depict a fertility ritual dance, doubtless to render prolific the animals on which man depended for his subsistence, like the engraving on a stag-horn of the three masked figures masquerading in the skin of a chamois at Abri Mège, Dordogne, and those with animals' heads in the caves of Marsoulas, in the Haute Garonne. On a schist plaque at Lourdes a man with a long beard, the tail of a horse, and what may be the antlers of a stag is depicted, while similar anthropomorphic designs have been detected in the cave at Altamira and at that of Hornos de la Pena in Cantabria. That the dancers were held to promote fecundity is clearly shown in the clay models of a female bison followed by a male placed against a projecting rock in a small chamber at the end of a long narrow passage in the Tuc d'Audoubert. In a recess nearby were pieces of clay in the form of a phallus, and on the soft clay floor of the gallery were impressions of human feet and an incomplete bison 13 centimetres long. To the right were fifty small-sized heel-marks, thought to be those of young dancers engaged perhaps in a fertility dance round the small hillock

in the centre in the presence of the clay bison. Similarly, in the adjoining cave called after the three adventurous sons of the Count Begouen in Ariège, Les Trois Frères, who in 1918 first ventured into it and found there among an immense array of paintings and engravings a mysterious masked figure known as 'the Sorcerer' depicted in black on the wall of a small chamber at the end of a windling corridor in front of a kind of window. Exactly what was the meaning and purpose of this composite figure 75 centimetres high and 50 centimetres wide, 4 metres above the ground, can only be conjectured. The head is full face with round eyes like an owl and between them is a nose. The ears are those of a wolf and the two antlers above the forehead are those of a stag. The claws are those of a lion and the tail of a horse or wolf. The forearms are raised and joined horizontally, ending in two hands. The feet and toes are carefully designed to indicate a movement suggestive of dancing. Whether or not, as was first supposed, this masked figure represented the chief sorcerer or shaman embodying the attributes and functions of the animals, or, as is now suggested, portrayed the spirit controlling hunting expeditions and the multiplication of game, a cult is indicated in which animals and human beings were brought together in a joint effort to conserve and promote abundance of the species on which man depended for his means of subsistence. The mysterious forces of nutrition and propagation being among the chief centres of emotional interest and concern, nature being man's 'living larder.' To this end a ritual expert arrayed himself in the skin and antlers of a stag, or the feathers of a bird, and imitated the behaviour of the species he personified in the belief

that for the time being, he was what he represented himself to be. In that capacity he believed he made the copulation of male and female effective in the reproduction of offspring just as he was able, as he supposed, to control the fortunes of the chase by depicting animals wounded by spears and missiles, and uttering incantations over his designs and thereby catching and killing the prey. The figures of the masked dancers in animal disguises suggest a cult in which the ritual expert impersonated the spirits of the animals he embodied, and represented dramatically in a series of sacred actions what it was earnestly desired should be accomplished. It was not so much that like produces like as that a ritual which involved a realistic reproduction of a practical activity and a desired result established the idea of sympathetic causation. The purpose of the actions performed and of their representation in visible form was to secure the prey or to effect a successful birth of offspring through the ritual technique, and so to relieve the tension in a precarious situation on which human well-being and survival depended. The symbol was regarded and treated in the same way as the spiritual entity it symbolized by virtue of the supernatural quality it acquired. Hence the efficacy of the mimetic dances and of the amulets, designs and disguises employed to these ends in the cultus.⁷ Therefore under the name of sympathetic magic, the magical influence operates through figured representation. In making a painting, an engraving or a sculptured image of a being, one acquires a dominion over it, and compels it more or less to be inclined to that which is desired. The figured representation of these animals was a

7. E. O. James, op. cit., pp. 17-19

way of favouring their reproduction, of drawing them into, and holding them in the neighbourhood, and of facilitating the chase. Hence, the expression 'the magic of art' and at the epoch, the artists were⁸ sorcerers. These wizards and magicians⁹ later emerged as a corporation of priests in the historical period.

4. The Male Element in Primitive Society

Adjoining the village of Cogul in Catalonia, in a rock shelter, there is the famous dancing scene now so faded as to be hardly recognizable, but it seems to be connected with the Venus type of fertility cult. As it now appears, nine narrow-waisted women with long pendant breasts, clad in caps and in bell-shaped skirts reaching to the knees, but showing no facial features, are depicted in association with a small naked male figure which, since the penis is not erect, can hardly have had a phallic significance, as has been suggested. The scene seems to have been the work of several Palaeolithic artists, perhaps at different times, and the little dark brown male figure may have been added to the earlier black group of the women. Even so, it may be concluded that its insertion was connected with a fertility rite in which the women were grouped round a male emblem, perhaps that of a boy, to facilitate the production of life. However, at this early period, no male god played any part in the antecedents of the Mother-Goddess cult, which throughout this Palaeolithic phase found expression in

8. G.-H. Luquet, op. cit., pp. 182, 96.

9. V. Gordon Childe, Man Makes Himself, p. 118.

stylized female figures in clay or paint or bas-relief with hanging breasts, small rudimentary heads, wasp-waists, and sometimes clothed in bell-skirts. But under Neolithic conditions it acquired a new lease of life. With the transition from food-gathering to food-production the female principle continued to predominate the cultus that had grown up around the mysterious processes of birth and generation. Woman being the mother of the race, she was essentially the life producer and in that capacity she played the essential role in the production of offspring. Nevertheless, as agriculture and herding became the established modes of maintaining the food-supply, the two poles of creative energy, the one female and receptive, the other male and begettive, could hardly fail to be recognized and given their respective symbolic significance. But although phallic emblems became increasingly prominent from Neolithic times onwards, the maternal principle, in due course personified in the Mother-goddess, continued to assume the leading role in the cultus, especially in Western Asia, Crete and the Aegean, where the male god was subordinate to the Goddess. Essential in psychological fact as the conjunction of male and female is in the production of life, it seems that at first there was some uncertainty about the significance of paternity.¹⁰ This is brought out in Malinowski's book The Father in Primitive Psychology. In his study of the inhabitants of the Trobriand Islands, a coral archipelago to the north east of New Guinea, he describes a matrilineal society, where descent, kinship, and all social relations

10. E. O. James, op. cit., p. 21 f.

are reckoned by the mother only, and where women have a considerable share in tribal life, in which they take the leading part in certain economic, ceremonial and magical activities. The mother feeds the infant in her body. Then when it comes out, she feeds it with her milk. The mother makes the child out of her flesh. These natives are quite ignorant of the man's share in the begetting of children; the father of the Trobriander is the man married to the mother, who lives in the same house with her and forms part of the household. A father is a stranger or an outsider. The natives are ignorant of physiological paternity. To them the virgin cannot conceive, not because they know the value of the semen but because the orifice has to be perforated so that the spirits can enter and give the child. They recognize the necessity of mechanical opening up, but are ignorant of the real generative power of the sexual act.¹¹ Therefore, as the precise function of the male partner in relation to conception and birth was less obvious, and less clearly understood, it is not surprising that he should be regarded as supplementary rather than as the vital agent in the process. Consequently, the mother and her maternal organs and attributes were the life-giving symbols par excellence.

B. THE NEOLITHIC AND CHALCOLITHIC CULTUS

1. The Arpachiyah Figurines

In the Mosul district of Northern Iraq, within ten miles of the

11. Bronislaw Malinowski, The Father in Primitive Psychology, pp. 8-11, 44, 45, 47.

Tigris and the ancient city of Nineveh, in the Chalcolithic mound of Tell Arpachiyah, the beginnings of which go back before 4000 B.C., numerous headless clay female statuettes have been found of the Venus type. Some have been roughly modelled in the round, others are flat, but in all of them the breasts are pendulous, the navel is prominent, the waist slender and the buttocks highly developed. Most of them are represented in a squatting posture suggestive of childbirth, but some would seem to indicate a state of pregnancy. As in the Palaeolithic Venuses, the head is seldom shown and the steatopygous squatting variety exhibit a tendency towards conventionalization, the body in some cases having been reduced to a peg or cone, though retaining the legs in a sitting position in its simplest form. The painted type with bent head and pendulous breasts, belonging to the height of the Chalcolithic Halafian period, was adorned with a garment in red pigment and braces crossed between the breasts. The truncated fiddle-shaped flat forms in sun-dried clay, either painted or unpainted, have a high peg-shaped head, prominent breasts and navel, and sometimes they are perforated, suggesting that they had been worn as amulets. Some of those in terracotta, on the other hand, have hollow bodies, one of which probably had been intended to be used as a vase. These female figurines are of interest because they had affinities with the Palaeolithic emblems of the Mother Goddess, and they reveal that they were in use in Northern Iraq about the 5th millennium B.C. long before they appeared in the Eastern Mediterranean. Often these statuettes were inferior in design and technique to the Gravettian prototypes, and sometimes they were so badly modelled, showing only the maternal

organs, that they can have been employed merely as charms and amulets to increase fruitfulness and facilitate delivery of the offspring. Moreover, they were associated with the double axe and the dove, the bull's head and the serpent, as in Crete and the Aegean.¹² The dove, the lion and the serpent were the familiar animals of the mother goddess. The snake was her symbol because her power descended to the underworld.¹³ The dove was the sacred companion to Astarte - her peculiar emblem.¹⁴ And similarly, in Cnossus was found the Snake Room and a stone statuette of the Goddess as a Snake Mother where she appears grasping the neck and body of a serpent that is coiled about her as if it were her pet rather than the attribute of awesome powers.¹⁵ This Cretan goddess is also guarded by lions and is sometimes associated with doves, who symbolized the descent of a deity. Zeus was associated with the double axe, a thunder fetish in which the deity was supposed to dwell. This symbol was so frequently represented on the walls of the Cnossus palace that it might almost be called the Palace of the Double Axe.¹⁶ The axe was attached to the goddess at times, perhaps because of her union with the Thunder God.¹⁷

Once maternal principle had been personified it was either a single goddess, the Great Mother, with different functions and

12. E.O. James, op. cit., p. 23 f.

13. Lewis R. Farnell, Greece and Babylon, p. 109.

14. Lucian, The Syrian Goddess, p. 86.

15. Arthur Evans, The Palace of Minos, v.4, p. 193.

16. J.B. Bury, History of Greece, p. 19.

17. Lewis R. Farnell, op. cit., p. 109.

symbols, or a number of independent and separate deities exercising their several roles in the processes of birth, generation and fertility, in whom the cult was centred. At first it seems to have been concentrated upon the mystery of birth, fecundity and nutrition, food and children being the basic requirements at all times. Therefore fertility worship connected with a Mother Goddess cult must be one of the oldest and longest surviving religions of the ancient world. In the Chalcolithic period it became the dominating influence from the Middle Near East to Anatolia, the Aegean and Crete, to Persia, Baluchistan and India. In the earliest Neolithic sites, however, apart from Tell Arpachiyah it was not very prominent in Western Asia prior to the Halaf period when female figurines became abundant. At Tell Hassuna in North Iraq near Mosul west of the Tigris, in the pre-Halaf stratum a few clay female statuettes have been recovered from level IV resembling those found at Arpachiyah. In level V a squatting woman in red clay poorly preserved and unbaked is the largest figurine and is in many ways unique. There is an unexplained excrescence on the left thigh. The head or headdress was found in five fragments. Two of the fragments are suggestive of curved horns, each showing the impression of a reed which ran through the centre to strengthen it. They are of greenish clay, contrasting with the reddish clay of the body. In the post-Hassuna levels clay statuettes reappear, and in the Halaf deposits they become prevalent everywhere from the Syrian coast to the Zagros mountains where this Halafian culture flourished.

18. E. O. James, op. cit., pp. 23-25.

19. Seton Lloyd and Fuad Safar, Journal of Near Eastern Studies, v. 4, 1945, pp. 269 f.

2. The Halaf and Ubaid Periods.

At Tepe Gawra near Nineveh, northwest of Arpachiyah, the figurines are of common occurrence in the lower levels of the mound and conform to a standardized type. There are male figures which are rare, but they predominate on the pottery and seal designs. The female figurines are depicted usually in the squatting posture and holding their breasts. The heads are merely pinched out of the clay, but the facial features sometimes are painted without any attempt at modelling. The eyes are drawn in black paint, and horizontal lines on the shoulders, arms and feet may represent some form of ornamentation, or possibly articles of clothing. Painted terracotta types recur, similar to those at Arpachiyah, Tell Halaf and Chagar Bazar in North Syria, where in addition to details of dress or tattoo marks they are sometimes seated on circular stools as if in parturition, and wearing turbans. At Tepe Gawra a highly conventionalized fiddle-shaped torso with prominent breasts was found in level B of area A, in which all details of the lower part of the body are emphasized in contrast to those of the waist and hips. The mons veneris is marked by incised lines below the navel. The head is merely a short projection while the back is flat. It being at this site an isolated example of this kind of stylization, it may have been introduced specifically to serve the purpose of safe and speedy delivery. The stratified deposits of the mound have yielded identical figurines painted on the neck and shoulders in brown, red or black, and with the same kind of pinched heads, or with no heads at all. Some are without arms, and have prominent breasts and a painted skirt or kilt suspended from the shoulders by two straps between the breasts.

There are also painted strokes on the back and on the shins which may indicate tattoo marks or cicatrices, and horizontal lines on the lower part of the back, possibly representing the spinal column. Fattening of the buttocks, distention of the abdomen or protuberance of the navel do not occur at Gawra. Only one figurine has separate legs, and on this armless and headless specimen the breasts are not marked. Two others from the Ubaid period are so stylized that apart from the breasts there is little or nothing to suggest that they are human figures, and it is quite impossible to determine whether they are of the squatting or the erect type. But at Gawra the squatting posture is the invariable rule. The only male figure found in the mound has a spot painted at the end of the phallus, and came from near the temple²⁰ stratum X. In all probability this was a cult object.

In Southern Mesopotamia a series of clay figurines with elongated grotesque heads and reptilian features has been recovered from below the Flood deposits at Ur belonging to the first settlers in the marshes of the Euphrates delta (Ubaid I and II). The bodies are well modelled with feet together and hands at the waist, or holding a child to the breast, or sometimes resting on the hips. Bands and stripes are painted on the nude body to indicate ornaments or tattooing, and the pubes and division between the legs are depicted by linear incision. Some are greenish as a result of overfiring the clay; others are much lighter in colour. Both represent the slender type painted²¹ in red and black with wigs of bitumen applied to the head.

20. E. O. James, *op. cit.*, p. 25 f.

21. Hall and Woolley, *Ur Excavations*, v. 1, p. 153.

A few clay models survived the Al Ubaid period and became shapeless grotesque figures devoid of the skill in technique displayed in the earlier figurines. At Abu Shahrain (Eridu), 14 miles from Ur, the upper part of a similar figure was found by Dr. H. R. Hall having a monstrous head with beak-like profile and flattened shoulders.

Probably it was that of a male in much the same posture as the Al
22
Ubaid females.

3. The Warka and Jemdet Nasr Periods.

In the mound of Warka, Erech, the ancient Uruk in Mesopotamia, the female statuettes resemble those of Ur in form and ornamentation executed in black paint. One has a cylindrical body, a splayed base with the division between the legs marked by incision and wing-like arms. Nude women holding their breasts, with large hips and slender waists, recur on rectangular reliefs, with almond eyes and rounded face. Round the neck are necklaces, and incised lines on the wrists indicate bracelets. Sometimes the head is monstrous and provided with a snout and gashes for eyes, and having a peaked headdress. Others are small and devoid of features except for a large nose. In some of the examples a diagonal band had been painted across the shoulder and under the right arm. The hair is coiled round the head and locks frequently hang down on to the shoulders. Between the C and D levels of the Anu Ziqqurat the upper torso and arms of a very small nude female figure in light translucent stone, excellently modelled with arms bent

22. E. O. James, op. cit., p. 27.

at the elbow and clenched fists, was used probably as an amulet.

German excavations uncovered a stone vase just over three feet tall, decorated with a procession divided into four horizontal bands. The goddess in a long robe is standing before a sacred enclosure set aside for the offerings, marked by her symbol, two bunches of reeds, the knotted upper ends of which are left free to wave. A file of worshippers is approaching the goddess in a state of ritual nudity, and bearing presents. Unfortunately, opposite the goddess, the person leading the procession is missing through a breakage. There is only the bottom of his robe and the end of his girdle held by one of the porters. This must be the God, identified by the remaining piece of belt, one of his attributes. The god is introducing himself for the sacred marriage, the hierogamy, a rite essential to fertility cults. Of the last two bands one is filled with animals offered to the goddess, rams and sheep, the other with a frieze of stylized barley ears and palm branches, both divine symbols. There are contemporary replicas of this scene on the cylinder seals; either the god dressed in the same robe holding an ear (of barley), the goddess her symbolic curved staff; or the god may be coming forward between two porters, one bearing his collar, or a collar to be offered to the goddess, the other the same belt as the one on the vase. This theme with all its variations, is one of the
24
commonest on the carvings of this period.

23. Ibid., p. 27.

24. Etienne Drioton, Religions of the Ancient East, p. 83 f.

Clay figurines in Jemdet Nasr layers from Khafaje and Tell Asmar have breasts marked in the form of pellets and the usual emphasis on sexual features.²⁵

Therefore such a religion existed in Mesopotamia since the early prehistoric times. The recent excavations at Jarmo have produced, for the period dating to before 4000 B.C., statuettes of the mother goddess in rough clay, which foreshadow the statuettes of the goddess with snake-like heads, sometimes holding a child in her arms, found at Ur and belonging to the archaic period.²⁶

4. Egypt.

The early religion of Egypt like other primitive religions was concerned with the prosperity of the community in terms of fertility and success in war and hunting. The main cult of the prehistoric people was that of a mother goddess who was also the sky goddess Nut. This goddess worship seems to have been kept alive among the common people throughout the ages, reappearing in provincial centres and whenever the official religion lost its grip, until finally it almost ousted all the other gods in the great expansion of the Isis mysteries. Most of the ritual was a legacy from the prehistoric past, when it had been performed by semi-divine chieftains to ensure the continuation of the powers of nature.²⁷

25. Ann Louise Perkins, The Comparative Archaeology of Early Mesopotamia, p. 153.

26. Etienne Drioton, op. cit., p. 84 f.

27. R. T. Rundle Clark, Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt, p. 28.

In the Nile valley three small figures of women have been found in graves of the Badarian age. One is very narrow waisted and somewhat steatopygous, the breasts are small and pointed, the arms folded in front and a wide sexual triangle has horizontal lines. The second has little waist, no steatopygy, the breasts are long and pendulous, the triangle is narrow with some vertical lines, and the nipples are clearly marked, as are the nose and eyes. The third figure is very crudely fashioned without arms and legs, and the pendulous breasts are broken. The triangle is wide and shallow, having diagonal lines, the waist is defined, the buttocks are steatopygous, the head is small with a string of beads in front of the neck, and there are three chevrons in the centre of the back, resembling in several of these respects similar Amratian statuettes. Petrie links the so-called steatopygous type with the Palaeolithic
28
Brassempouy examples.

CHAPTER III.

III. THE FERTILITY CULT IN MESOPOTAMIA

When the tablets from Sumer were discovered a great deal of light was thrown on mythology and, consequently, on the development of the different aspects of the mother-goddess cult. These clay tablets in cuneiform date from approximately 2000 B.C. and involve a culture which belongs to the 3rd millennium B.C. Nippur, the largest and most important mound excavated by the University of Pennsylvania, and Lagash, where French archaeologists conducted excavations are two sites which have provided the bulk of the material from which Sumerian mythology can be reconstructed. The importance of these texts is that through them we can trace the influence of these Sumerian concepts on the spiritual and cultural development of the entire Near East. The Assyrians and Babylonians took them over almost in toto. The Hittites translated them into their own language and adopted them to a large extent. In Syria, Palestine and Phoenicia, shrines and temples were raised to the same kind of gods and goddesses and worshipped with much the same rituals. The ancient Greeks were profoundly influenced by them. As practically the oldest written literature ever uncovered, it furnishes new, rich and unexpected source material to the archaeologist and anthropologist, to the ethnologist and student of folklore, to the students of the history of religion and of the history of literature.¹

1. S. N. Kramer, Sumerian Mythology, p. viii

As for the deities in the pantheon they are the descendants of the union of the patrons of different cities. The goddess is often worshipped under different names: Inanna, the Lady of the Sky, Nintu, Ninhursag, Nidaba, grain goddess, Geshtina, celestial vine. The high god and young god preserve their identities under the forms of Ningirsu, who controls the flood of the town of Lagash; the god Shara, meaning greenness, of the town of Umma, and the god Abu, father of vegetation, Sumuqan, god of cattle, Ningizzida, lord of the wood of life, and Dumuzi-Apsu, legitimate son of the void, a shepherd who became king, then god, before the flood, whose father was Enki, the god of the abyss of sweet, fertilizing waters, on which the earth floats. The multiplicity of the divine names are but aspects of the great principle of fertility and fecundity which can be recognized in their emblems: the ear of corn, the vase whence water gushes out and the lion-headed eagle holding the caprids. Anu is father of the gods and supreme generator, Enki, lord of the soil and of the watery underground, Enlil, storm-god of wind and rain, Utu, the sun, not the midday sun which dries everything up, but the morning sun which aids plant growth. Nannar, the moon god, is lord of the sky. These gods are the sign of a broadening of the pantheon which must be due to the Semites. The cylinder seal carvings continue to represent fertility divinities, sometimes their bodies give birth to branches, sometimes they hold boughs as worshippers; among their symbols are the snake, achthonian animal, the bull, symbol of generation forces like the ram, the sheaf of corn, the plough; under the 3rd Dynasty of Ur the vase from which a cascade of water escapes,

known as 'the vase of gushing waters', becomes a characteristic emblem of the gods. The cylinder seal of Gudea shows Ningizzida, the patron god of Gudea, presenting him to Ningirsu, the chief god of the town; the latter's emblem is the vase of gushing waters and snakes issuing from the shoulders of Ningizzida.²

When the birth-cult was brought into relation with the seasonal cycle and its vegetation ritual in agricultural communities, the Earth-goddess was conceived as the generative power in nature as a whole, and so she became responsible for the yearly renewal of life in the spring after the blight of the winter or the summer drought. Therefore, she assumed the form of a many-sided goddess, both mother and bride, destined to be known by many names and epithets such as Ninhursag, Mah, Ninmah, Inanna-Ishtar, Nintu or Aruru. Thus in Sumerian mythology the goddess Ninhursag, 'the mother of the land,' was Ninsikil-la, 'the pure lady', until she was approached by Enki, the Water-god of wisdom, and gave birth to a number of deities. Then she became Nintu ama Kalamma, 'the lady who gives birth, the mother of the land.'³ When she had accepted him she was Dam-gal-nunna, 'the great spouse of the prince' i.e. Enki, and having conceived as the fertile soil and given birth to vegetation, she was Ninhursag, 'the lady of the mountain', where nature manifested its power of fecundity in the spring on its lush slopes.

2. Etienne Drioton, *op. cit.*, p. 85 f.

3. E. O. James, *op. cit.*, p. 48; Thorkild Jacobsen, "Sumerian Mythology", Journal of Near Eastern Studies, 1946, v. 5, p. 150.

A. Inanna-Ishtar and Dumuzi-Tammuz

Inanna, although as a marriageable girl she was represented as having accepted the divine farmer Enkidu for her husband and rejected the advances of the divine shepherd Dumuzi,⁴ nevertheless, as the Sumerian counterpart of Ishtar, her nuptials with Dumuzi-Tammuz were celebrated annually at the spring festival in Isin to awaken the vital forces in nature. Whatever may be the interpretation of the relative merits of the shepherd and the farmer as her respective wooers in the mythopoic tradition, the ritual situation required the union of the goddess who incarnated fertility in general with the god who incarnated the creative powers of spring in order to reawaken the dormant earth and the process of fecundity at this season. Therefore, it was her marriage with Dumuzi that gave expression to the vegetation cycle. As 'the faithful son of the waters that came forth from the earth' he was essentially the youthful suffering god who was dependent upon his spouse-mother, the goddess Inanna-Ishtar. Annually he died in the normal rotation of the seasons and passed into the land of darkness and death from which there was no return for ordinary mortals. Inanna, however, as queen of heaven (being among her many matrimonial alliances the wife of Anu, the Mesopotamian god of the sky), had determined to visit the netherworld in order to rescue her lover-son. Arraying herself in all her regalia, and equipped with the appropriate decrees, she set forth on

4. James B. Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, p. 52; E. O. James, op. cit., 48; Thorkild Jacobsen, Before Philosophy, pp. 180 ff.

her perilous quest instructing her messenger Ninshubur to raise the alarm in the assembly hall of the gods and in their principal cities on earth should she not return within three days. Arriving at the gate of the grim abode, she gained admittance on false pretences, that is, she stated to Neti, the chief gatekeeper, that as her sister Ereshkigal's husband had been killed, she came to attend his funeral rites; and so she was led through its seven gates, losing at each of them part of her robes, and jewels until on reaching the lapis-lazuli temple of Ereshkigal, queen of the underworld, she stood stark naked and was promptly turned into a corpse by 'the look of death' that was fastened upon her. On the fourth day Ninshubur followed his instructions, and Enki, the Water-god of wisdom, devised a plan to restore her to life. Fashioning two sexless creatures, he sent them to the nether regions with the 'food of life' and the 'water of life' to sprinkle them on the corpse. This they did and she revived. Accompanied by some of its shades, bogies and harpies, she left the land of the dead and ascended to the earth, where with her ghostly companions she wandered from city to city.⁵

Here the Sumerian version of the myth breaks off, but as it follows so closely the Semitic 'Descent of Ishtar to the Nether Regions' inscribed on Akkadian tablets dating from the first millennium B.C., of which clearly it is the prototype, there can be little doubt that the sequel was not very different from that in the later story. Thus,

5. James B. Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, p. 52;
E. O. James, op. cit., p. 48 f.

some new material indicates that Inanna did bring with her the shepherd-god Dumuzi on her return, but because he did not show any signs of mourning for her descent to rescue him, 'seating himself on a high seat', she handed him over to the demons, presumably to carry him back whence he had come. But here, again, the text breaks off at the crucial point.⁶ Nevertheless, it is clear that Inanna was essentially the counterpart of the Akkadian Ishtar, and in this capacity she stood in much the same relation to Dumuzi as did Ishtar to Tammuz, the embodiment of the creative powers of spring and the personification of the autumnal decline in the seasonal cycle. In the Semitic myth, although the precise purpose for which Ishtar visited her sister Ereshkigal in the nether regions is not specified, it would appear to have been to rescue the shepherd-god Tammuz, since it seems that it was their joint return that removed the blight that had fallen on the land during her absence.⁷

Thus in the Tammuz liturgies, and subsequently in the Annual Festival when Marduk had assumed a Tammuz role on replacing Enlil as head of the pantheon after the city of Babylon had become the capital (ca. 1792 B.C.), this theme of the suffering god and the sorrowing goddess was enacted, accompanied with bitter wailing and the singing of dirges over the effigy of the dead god, for the scorched earth of summer seemed to threaten a return of the desolation when Ishtar wandered in barren fields and empty sheep-folds while her lover-son

6. James B. Pritchard, *op. cit.*, pp. 52

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 107 ff.

was in the underworld. In the laments of the priests and people and the cry for the suffering youthful god was echoed until he was released by the Goddess and restored to the upper world as her 'resurrected child'. Then sorrow was turned into joy and defeat into victory which at the Annual Festival was celebrated by a dramatic re-enactment of the primeval cosmic battle between the beneficent powers led by Marduk and the hosts of chaos under Tiamat, the imprisonment of Marduk in a mountain (that is, the land of the dead), his subsequent release and reunion with the Goddess.

B. The sacred marriage of the Goddess and the King; Hierogamy.

In the following recreative ritual, that is, the enactment of a sacred marriage or hierogamy, Sumerian rulers played the part of Dumuzi-Tammuz, incarnating the life-giving forces of spring through union with Inanna-Ishtar, the source of all life, by engaging in a sacred wedding with the queen or a priestess (who plays the role of Inanna-Ishtar); and the purpose of this wedding is to restore fecundity in nature. Thus, in a hymn to Ishtar as the planet Venus written for the cult of the deified king of Isin Dagan as Tamuz, the third king of the Amorite dynasty (ca. the 19th cent. B.C.), there are references to his enjoying the love-embraces of the Mother-goddess at the season of her return from the land of the dead, bringing Tammuz

8. E. O. James, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

9. Stephen Langdon, "A Hymn to Ishtar as the Planet Venus and to Idin-Dagan as Tammuz", The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1926, pp. 16 ff.

with her. Images of the king and the Goddess lay side by side on a marble bed in the sanctuary, and when the union had been consummated the king became the symbol of life and death, having thereby acquired the status of the dying and reviving god. But throughout the Goddess is represented as taking the initiative. It was to her 'far-famed temple' that the king went, bringing to her cakes 'to set the table for the feast', and it was she who embraced her beloved husband who was subservient to her will and enjoyed the favours she was pleased to bestow upon him. The prosperity of the New Year and the bounty of the sacred wedding were vouchsafed by the Goddess, her consort being merely the instrument she employed to bestow her gifts. This has led Frankfort to conclude that it was only those kings who had been commanded by a goddess to share her couch that were deified.¹⁰ But whether or not this rule was universally or widely observed, unquestionably the sacred marriage of a local ruler to a goddess was of fundamental importance in the Sumerian New Year celebrations as a ritual observance to secure the revival of nature in the spring.¹¹

The sacred marriage was part of the fertility cult. And the place where such a marriage took place was on top of a ziqqurat, in a chamber called gigunu; the nature and religious meaning of the construction of the gigunu has been a subject of dispute. To Gadd,¹² its association with the ziqqurat or temple tower has led him to assume that the identity of the two was probably one. Because of its

10. Henri Frankfort, Kingship and the Gods, p. 297.

11. E. O. James, *op. cit.*, p. 50 f.

12. C. J. Gadd, "Samsu-iluna's Sippar Inscription", The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1925, p. 94. In translating the inscription of Samsuiluna when he rebuilt the wall of the ziqqurat at Sippar, Gadd says gigunu can have no other meaning than ziqqurat.

13

association with graves Hilprecht supposed it to be the tomb of the god, while Thureau-Dangin denied that gigunu signifies 'place of burial' and translates it simply as sanctuary. But in a hymn to Ishtar a verse reads: "They (Ishtar and Anu) abode together in the chapel, in the gigunu that is the seat of joy; before them the gods are standing, paying attention to their utterances." As to the nature of this chapel, Herodotus has some information. He says that the top stage of the great tower at Babylon had a large shrine in it, in which there was a bed ready for use, and a golden table, but no statue. The god spent the nights in the shrine with a woman chosen by a god and was the only person allowed to sleep there.¹⁴ Herodotus' statement can now be compared with facts known from Babylonian sources. A Nabonidus text gives a long account of Sin's desire for a particular kind of goddess, indicated by an eclipse, and the choice of the king's daughter as priestess by omens, to fulfil that desire. The chapel was forbidden to all except a specially chosen mortal, as a place of dalliance, though access was not necessarily debarred for other purposes, and the god took his pleasure there. Samsu-iluna spoke of bringing gods into the gigunu in glad procession; the kind of gladness indicated cannot be doubted. Gudea built a gigunu of cedar at Lagash. Hammurabi in the preamble to the Code calls himself "he who cloaks the gigunus of Ai, the consort of the Sun-god, in greenery."¹⁵ That would seem to

13. H.V. Hilprecht, Exploration in Bible Lands, p. 469.
He says that the Babylonians associated the idea of 'tomb' with their ziqqurats because on a barrel cylinder from the temple of Shamash and Ai at Larsa, Nabonidus unmistakably calls the god's stage-tower "his lofty tomb."

14. Herodotus, The Histories, 1.179, p. 86. The Penguin Classics.

15. James B. Pritchard, op. cit., p. 164.

indicate the treatment of the gigunu as a bower. The ziggurat was planted with trees on the lower stages at least; if the shrine forming the top stage was decorated like a bower with branches on certain festal occasions, it would be a suitable 'seat of joy' for the goddess.¹⁶

Information connected with the bower-like decoration, already noted, and the connubial character of the god's visit to the chapel is vouchsafed by Gudea on some of his statues. On one he says he placed in the tower the wedding presents of the goddess Bau, on another that he brought the wedding presents on New Year's Day; and on one of the cylinders, that the goddess lay down with Ningirsu to rest, and thereby the fertility of the city of Lagash was promoted. On yet another statue it is the god Ningirsu that brought the wedding gifts to Bau, his beloved wife. It is therefore inferred that Gudea, as the city governor, played the part of Ningirsu. Herodotus' Babylonian priestess played the same part as is assigned to the goddess Bau by Gudea. The same kind of human representation is indicated by Herodotus when he says that the woman in the temple is forbidden to have intercourse with men because she is chosen for the god. The gigunu therefore was a name applied to the lofty chapel on the ziggurat. But there were also gigunus below ground level which is certain from a text of Sennacherib, who, when explaining the changes he made in the old site of Nineveh, says that he altered the course of

16. Sidney Smith, "A Babylonian Fertility Cult", The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1928, pp. 849 ff.

17

the Tebiltu, a violent, raging stream, which, by its carrying away (soil), destroyed the gigunus in the middle of the city and revealed their piled tombs to the sun. The gigunus below ground level, therefore, in all probability had a sacred character, as the gigunu on the ziqqurat. But they are not the tombs of the dead of the city because excavations have shown that the Babylonians and Assyrians in the late period buried their dead under the floors of houses and of palaces; there is no proof that they buried the dead in temples, though tombs of later periods frequently occur on temple sites previously deserted. Therefore the lower gigunu must have been used for offerings. Blood offerings of such animals as deer require a very considerable space; it would hardly be possible to make the sacrifice near the gigunu on top of the ziqqurat, therefore the gigunu meant must have been an
18
underground one.

Poems concerning Ishtar indicate that sacrifice was made at the gigunu. Ishtar sitting in that chamber accepts the sacrifice, then the goddess turns to her husband and requests his permission to grant the king long life. Intercession by the goddess was a constant theme; it is a frequent subject on cylinder seals, and during the Amorite dynasty it was the most common. But the point to be considered is that due to the association of tombs with gigunus, did human sacrifice

17. Daniel David Luckenbill, Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia, v.2, p. 166 f.

18. Sidney Smith, "A Babylonian Fertility Cult", The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1928, pp. 853 ff.

play a part in these rites? In Babylonia and Assyria the whole question of human sacrifice is very obscure. At the New Year Festival at Babylon something was bound on the canopy of the Beltis, consort of Bel-Marduk of Babylon, which represented the head of 'a sinner', who appears to have accompanied Bel-Marduk into the 'mountain' of the underworld and to have been killed; but it is stated thereafter that 'the pig-sties which are in front of the route of Nabu as he comes from Borsippa and approaches (Babylon).... Nabu who comes and stands in front of them, those are the sinners who with Bel...'¹ It would seem, therefore, that the "sinner" who was slaughtered was in fact a pig. (There are amulets from the time of the Amorite dynasty in the form of a pig's head, presumably based on the principle that evil averts evil. On an elaborate frieze from Ur, a pig's head is carried on the table for the banquet?)¹⁹ The friezes from Ashurnasirpal's palace at Calah-Nimrud, show human figures wearing animal head-dresses, depicting incidents in the New Year Festival. The men who were so apparelled were sometimes, if not always, prisoners destined for slaughter,²⁰ probably by suicide, since they hold daggers to their throats. This may point to human sacrifice of men typifying daemonic beings, for the New Year Festival celebrated not only the annual grant of Sovereignty, the resurrection of the god and goddess from the underworld, but also the victory of the god over the powers below. If

19. *Ibid.*, p. 860 f.

20. Sidney Smith, "The Assyrian Religion", The Cambridge Ancient History, v. 3, p. 91.

there were such human sacrifices at the New Year Festival, then the tombs which were closely connected with gigunus may be the tombs of sacrificed human beings. This would account for these curious tombs. ²¹

The tombs excavated at Ur by Mr. Woolley, which have some very peculiar features, have no parallels elsewhere. There were sixteen of these tombs, called Royal Graves, and in this Royal Cemetery there is evidence of human sacrifice. The number of victims vary from six to seventy to eighty. ²² Woolley believes that these tombs are royal

tombs because of the fact that the kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur were deified after their death and even in their lifetime. Therefore if these rulers were gods and kings, and gods do not die but are translated, then he takes with him his chariots, his court and his

²³ guards. But Sidney Smith believes that they represent the aftermath of a hierogamy - festival kings sacrificed in connection with fertility rites. However, both arguments present problems which make it difficult to be conclusive. As we are dealing with the fertility cult we will adopt the latter assumption. There are numbers of human bodies which were found in these chambers. Outside the male chamber tomb there were soldiers in armour, wagons with complete teams, drivers and equipment, and several ladies in gala attire, a wreckless waste of gear and savage disregard of human life. Obviously there had been a procession to this place. There was a light vehicle of the sledge type outside the female burial chamber, and a large harp. The accompaniment of music may indicate joy or mourning, but processions to the

21. Sidney Smith, "A Babylonian Fertility Cult", JRAS, 1928, p.861
22. Leonard Woolley, Excavations at Ur, p. 59
23. Ibid., p. 80.

gigunu were joyful. The male attendants of the god would be armed. There were animal bones, apart from those of the asses, which prove that there were unusual sacrifices at these graves. Such animal sacrifices are to be expected in connexion with a gigunu. The female burial, found intact, revealed a lady lying on a bier, in such an array as would be expected in a hierogamy. The head-dress, which was of barbaric appearance, consisted of ribbons, leaves and rings, with a big gold pin which supported mosaic flowers, all of gold. Another head-dress was by her side, of a different kind, as though intended for the partner of her couch, who had left for another place before or during the slaughter; it consisted of a leather fillet from which hung amulets in the shape of rams, bulls, ibexes, and stags, as well as ears of corn, bunches of pomegranates (which signified love charms), and flowers, all of gold. That lady was lying in bridal state - much as a goddess bride must have lain on her consort's nuptial couch. In this tomb were magnificent gold and silver vessels, fit for goddesses. Fertility cults are often attended by bloodthirsty rites. It is difficult for the modern mind to explain every detail of such a cult when found in antiquity. The rites connected with the gigunu had many divagations; they involved the perpetuation of the life of the king by the god and goddess after a sacred connubium, enacted by a man and a woman representing the deities, a banquet, a setting forth as though to war, and the final result was a number of
24
tombs near the gigunus.

24. Sidney Smith, "A Babylonian Fertility Cult", JRAS, 1828, pp. 864-867.

C. The Akitu Festival at Babylon.

When Babylon became the capital and Marduk replaced Tammuz as the central male deity in the Annual Festival, known in Akkadian as the Akitu, held in spring during the first eleven days of the month of Nisan, the king played the leading role. This involved in addition to an elaborate series of purificatory rites and the recitation of the story of the creation (Enuma Elish), his abdication and reinstallation on the fifth day in the shrine of Marduk. There, before the statue of the god, he was stripped of his royal insignia and divested of all his regalia, struck on the cheek by the high-priest and forced to his knees and made to declare that he had not been negligent regarding the divinity of 'the lord of the lands,' or of having destroyed Babylon. He was then reestablished in his office, having made a negative confession ('I have not been negligent,' etc.) just as on the sixth or seventh day Marduk, his divine counterpart, was released by his son Nabu from the mountain (i.e., the underworld) in which he had been imprisoned. Thus, on seals of the Sargonid Age in the middle of the third millennium B.C. fighting groups are shown which may refer to the battle waged during the Festival to free the god. Similarly, the Goddess seated on a mountain from which the head, arms and legs of the imprisoned deity project, seems to depict Inanna-Ishtar seeking and leading forth Tammuz-Marduk from his mountain-grave. ²⁵ The god, who was miraculously revived,

25. Henri Frankfort, Cylinder Seals, p. 117

is shown emerging from the ground, assisted by the Goddess, while another god pulls up and destroys the vegetation upon the mountain, personifying the sun whose rays in summer are inimical to all life.²⁶

In the Akitu celebration after the release of Marduk and the reinstatement of the king, the statues of the various gods taking part in the Festival were assembled in the Chamber of Destinies on the eighth day to confer upon their leader (Marduk) their combined strength for the conquest of the forces of death and to determine the 'destinies' during the forthcoming year. The resuscitated sovereign having received a fresh outpouring of divine vitality, conducted the statue of Marduk in a triumphal procession to the Festival House (Bit Akitu) outside the city. At this point the statements in the liturgical texts and the inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian kings are confused, but it is not improbable that it was in the Festival House that the primeval battle was enacted between Marduk and Tiamat, depicted by Sennacherib on its copper doors, the king himself personifying the 'victorious prince' who had conquered the powers of evil at the turn of the year. Thus, at the conclusion of the rites in the Bit Akitu a banquet appears to have been held to celebrate the victory, and after the return to the Esagila on the 11th of Nisan a sacred marriage between the king and a priestess, probably of the royal blood, was consummated. For this purpose a shrine containing a sacred bridal chamber or chapel, called gigunu,

26. E. O. James, op. cit., p. 52.

was erected, apparently on one of the stages of the ziqurat, and decorated with greenery. In it the connubium was accomplished for the purpose of restoring the fertility of the fields, of the flocks and of mankind, through the intercourse of the human embodiments of the god and the goddess upon whom fecundity depended. But in this union, although the king in the capacity of Tammuz personified the generative force in nature as the husband-son of Ishtar, the Goddess was the active partner who summoned him to her couch and thereby gave him a divine but subservient status in the creative process.²⁷ Thus, Lipit-Ishtar was deified as a prelude to his sacred marriage with Ishtar by being fused with a fertility god Urash after he had been appointed king of Isin by Anu, the god of the sky; and the Isin texts²⁸ leave no doubt that the initiative was ascribed to the Goddess.

27. E. O. James, op. cit., p. 53.

28. Ibid., p. 53; Henri Frankfort, Kingship and the Gods, p.297

CHAPTER IV.

THE FERTILITY CULT IN THE NILE VALLEY

The chief sources from which the myths and beliefs of the Egyptians are taken are the following: The Pyramid Texts, which are inscribed on the walls of the inner rooms of the tombs of the pharaohs and queens of the Sixth Dynasty (2350-2250 B.C.), and the Coffin Texts which belong to the Eleventh Dynasty; they provide an additional source of material and are the earliest and most intelligible version of many sections of the famous Book of the Dead.¹

The Pyramid Texts are the earliest mortuary literature of Egypt - a series of texts supposed to be effective in securing for the deceased the enjoyment of a happy after-life, and especially the blessed future enjoyed by Osiris. They were engraved upon the passage ways of the pyramids of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasty, where they have been preserved in large numbers.² For example, in the pyramid of Unis, the last king of the Fifth Dynasty, a large number of ritualistic formulae are found.³ In view of their context, they are usually called the Pyramid Texts. Many of the texts grew up in the Predynastic age and some have been altered to accommodate them to the Osiris cult. A number of serpent charms in the Pyramid Texts are intended to render these foes harmless.⁴

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1. R. T. Rundle Clark, Myth and Symbol of Ancient Egypt, p. 14
 2. James Henry Breasted, A History of Egypt, p. 67.
 3. Ibid, p. 130
 4. Ibid, p. 174 f.

In the Middle Kingdom this priestly literature developed for the purpose of gain. The deceased was considered to be beset by innumerable dangers in the next world against which he had to be forward~~ed~~ and forearmed. Besides the serpents common in the Pyramid Texts, the most uncanny foes awaited him - the crocodile who could rob the deceased of all his potent charms, the foes of the air who could withdraw breath from his nostrils and water that could burst into flames as he would drink, and so on. These apprehensions which grew since the Old Kingdom; and they were written for the use of the deceased on the inside of his coffin, and then they formed the nucleus of what afterward became the Book of the Dead.⁵

Another important source for Egyptian religion is the Memphite Theology, a document which is sometimes called A Memphite Drama, that is, the drama of creation. The Theology of Memphis adopted the Great Ennead of Heliopolis, but made their god Ptah, the "Opener" the head of it - and he was concerned with that creation which was usually attributed to Atum, the cosmic All. Ptah took the place of Atum but was in a special way identified with him, for Atum became the heart (understanding) and tongue (word) of 'Ptah the Great' and so Ptah and Atum were considered identical as head of the Ennead. The rest of the document consists of a theological discourse containing the essentials of the teaching of the priests of Memphis. When Memphis was built by Menes as an imperial capital of United Egypt, the priests of the god Ptah of that city took the theological

5. James Henry Breasted, A History of Egypt, p. 175 f.

system of Heliopolis and revised it in order to enhance their position substituting Ptah for Atum as the head of the Ennead. Therefore, it was^a theological attempt to justify the political capital. This step was necessary in order to justify the sudden emergence of Memphis to great importance as the established capital of the First Dynasty. The Memphite god Ptah was therefore proclaimed to have been the First Principle, taking precedence over other recognized creator-gods and so mythological arguments were presented that the city of Memphis was the place where the Two Lands - Upper and Lower Egypt - were united. The document is extant on a black granite stone in the British Museum. A later copy exists written by order of the founder of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, Shabaka of Nubia (Ethiopia), "a work of the ancestors", and it is preserved in a worm eaten papyrus.⁶

In Egypt the fertility cult differed in some aspects from that of Mesopotamia. Here the Pharaoh rather than the Goddess was predominant because as he was the incarnation of the Sun-god and the living son of Osiris, from the Fifth Dynasty (ca. 2580 B.C.) when the solar theology was established by the Heliopolitan priesthood, therefore he exercised his life-giving functions in his own right by virtue of his divine origin and office. In all the converging traditions and mythologies handed down from remote prehistoric times, his divinity became so firmly established that he was the epitome of all that was divine in the Nile valley. In the prehistoric period - before ca. 3000 B.C. - the country was divided into a number of administrative names

6. A. B. Mercer, The Religion of Ancient Egypt, p. 278 f; James B. Pritchard, op. cit., p. 4; John A. Wilson, The Culture of Ancient Egypt, pp. 58-60.

ruled by local gods from whom the nomarchs derived their authority. When the nome became a kingdom and the nomarch a king he was regarded as the son of the god who exercised his rule and functions by virtue of his divine status. During the Predynastic civilization a group of Asiatic people (Gerzeans) arrived in the Nile valley, and they were worshippers of Horus, a sky deity of the falcon clan.⁷

In the Eastern Delta at Busiris, the capital of the 9th nome, the cult of Osiris, another ancient ruler who was thought to have been another deified human king, was established at an early date. This death and resurrection cultus also seems to have entered the Nile valley from the East and to have had very close affinities with that of Tammuz in Western Asia. In both the divine hero personified vegetation and water, and stood in a very intimate relationship with the Goddess associated with birth, with fertility and with kingship. Nevertheless, the relation of Osiris to his sister-spouse Isis was very different from that of Tammuz to Ishtar, as, indeed, it was to the reigning monarch in Egypt who occupied the throne as Horus, the living son of Osiris, as against the Mesopotamian conception of the

7. E. O. James, op. cit., p. 54. (Frankfort refutes the idea of totemistic clan worship. In his book, Ancient Egyptian Religion, pp. 9-13 he says that some scholars have considered the worship of animals as a survival from a primitive stratum of Egyptian religion and interpreted them as totems. But Henri Frankfort considers them a characteristic trait of Egyptian Religion. There are mummified cats, dogs, falcons, bulls, crocodiles and so forth, buried by the hundred in vast cemeteries - 'polytheism with a vengeance'. He thinks there was a religious awe felt before animals; animals as such possessed religious significance for the Egyptians. Their attitude might have arisen from a religious interpretation of the animals' otherness. Therefore it is assumed that the Egyptian interpreted the non-human as superhuman, in particular when he saw it in animals.

king as the instrument and servant of the Goddess. Exactly how and under what circumstances Horus the Elder became identified with the son of Osiris is still a matter of debate. It is possible that originally Osiris was the chief and leader of the wave of immigrants from the West (the Amratians) who subsequently was deified after he had introduced agriculture⁸ among the indigenous people in the northern part of the Delta. At first they may have regarded him as a brother of their own god Seth and of their goddess Isis of Sebennytes, who gave birth to the prototype of the living king in his Horus capacity.⁹

In the Fifth dynasty (ca. 2580 B.C.) the Heliopolitan priesthood equated the solar line of kings with their god Atum-Re and then associated him with Osiris in the elaboration of their Ennead in which the gods were grouped in pairs derived ultimately from Atum-Re, the head of the solar pantheon. Atum having emerged from Nun, the waters of Chaos, at the creation became an aspect of Re, the personification of the sun, appearing in the form of a phoenix on the top of the primordial sandhill.¹⁰

O Atum. When you came into being you rose up as a High Hill
You shone as the Benben Stone in the Temple of Phoenix in
Heliopolis.¹¹

Since the waters were in absolute darkness, the emergence of God meant the coming of light, the first morning. For the Heliopolitans morning was marked by the shining light on an erect pillar or pyramid on a support which could reflect the rays of the rising sun. At the

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8. Plutarch, *Moralia*, v. 5, p. 35.
9. E. O. James, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
11. R. T. Rundle Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

beginning a light-bird, the Phoenix, had alighted on the sacred stand,¹² known as the Benben, to initiate the great age of the visible God. In Egyptian religion the phoenix is a miraculous bird, the embodiment of the sun-god. The bird was fabled to live for 500 years, to be consumed in fire by its own act, and to rise in youthful freshness¹³ from its own ashes. Hence it is often an emblem of immortality. Atum-Re then impregnated himself and produced Shu, the god of the atmosphere, and his consort Tefnut, the goddess of moisture, from whom were born Geb, the Earth-god, and Nut, the Sky-goddess, the parents of Osiris and Isis and of Seth and Nephthys. When after the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt Re became the head of this Great Ennead of Heliopolis he combined in himself all the creative forces in nature and was absolute in his control of his government in the Nile valley; therefore, in the Pyramid age he was equated with Atum, the original Sun-god who created out of himself the rest of the gods standing on the Primeval Hill in the midst of the waters of Chaos (Nun). Thus Re was also credited with begetting the rest of the Heliopolitan Ennead. Consequently, he became the self-created Creator, the source of life and increase and the father of the gods as well as the personification of the sun in his manifold aspects. Thus, he assumed the role elsewhere played by the Mother-goddess, and like her he had many names. Unlike Mesopotamia, Western Asia and the Aegean, in the Nile valley the earth was not conceived in terms of the Goddess,

12. R. T. Rundle Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 39

13. Webster, Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 633.

'Mother-earth'. On the contrary, the earth was represented as a male god, Geb, or in the Memphite theology as hatched from an egg fashioned by Ptah, the Supreme Creator, who in the Ennead of Memphis was elevated above Atum. Similarly, from the dawn of Egyptian civilization it was the male god Min of Koptos who personified the generative force in nature as the bestower of precreative power, 'opening the clouds',¹⁴ and so giving life to vegetation.

In the Eighteenth dynasty the very ancient goddess Neith of Sais in the Western Delta was identified with Isis and Hathor, and so at once became the wife of Osiris, the mother of Horus and 'the great cow which gave birth to Re'. She was the 'great goddess', the mother of all the gods¹, and two of the queens of the First dynasty (eg. Neit-Hetep and Meryt-Neit) adopted her name, and 16 out of the 70 stelae round the tomb of Zer bore names compounded with Neith. Eventually, in the late Dynastic period, she was regarded merely as a form of Hathor, and represented various aspects of motherhood as a Cow-goddess, though originally she seems to have been a personification of the primeval watery chaos like Nun, with whom she may have been identified if her name Neith or Net was akin in meaning to Nut, as Brugsch has suggested. But her oldest symbols (i.e. arrows or a shield) connect her with hunting or war before she became a personification of the pre-cosmic waters and of the sky. In any case she combined a number of goddesses and their respective functions which eventually were brought together in a composite figure identified with¹⁵ Isis and Hathor.

14. E. O. James, *op. cit.*, pp. 56 ff.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 60; E.A. Wallis Budge, The Gods of the Egyptians, v. I, p. 450 ff.

As early as the Fourth dynasty Neith was regarded as at once the mother and daughter of Re, and possessed the power to conceive and give birth to the new Sun-god daily. Since she was called 'the opener of the ways' she was a kind of female counterpart of Anubis and protectress of the dead, giving rebirth to the deceased in the after-life. It was as Isis that she first gave birth to a god, and as Hathor she produced Re. As 'the Lady of Heaven' and 'Mistress of all the gods' she occupied a position in the pantheon comparable to that of Re or Ptah, or of Hathor, as the supreme goddess, and in the Twenty-sixth dynasty she rose to a position of pre-eminence when the pharaohs of Sais were at the height of their power, from which exalted status she declined after the fall of the Dynasty (663-525 B.C.). Till then she was the divine being par excellence, the creative and ruling power of heaven, earth and the underworld, and of every creature and thing in them.¹⁶ She was eternal and self-produced, personifying from very early times the female principle, self-existent, self-sustaining and all pervading. Thus, without the aid of a male partner she was believed to have brought forth the transcendent Sun-god Re very much as in the Memphite theology Ptah created all things virtually ex nihilo by thinking as the 'heart' and commanding as the 'tongue'. In her character of the universal mother she made the germ of gods and men, the mother of Re, who raised up Atum in primeval times, who existed when nothing else had been and who created that which exists after she had come into being.¹⁷

16. Budge, op.cit., v.1, p. 459.

17. Ibid., p. 463; E.O. James, op.cit., p. 61.

In Egypt the three great forms of the Mother-goddess are Hathor, Nut and Isis. Dendera, a town about 40 miles North of Thebes, was the centre of the cult of Hathor, the most attractive form of the great goddess for the Egyptians. Hathor is the face of the sky, the deep and the lady who dwells in a grove at the end of the world. Her son Ihy is the child who emerges every day at dawn as the new sun. In this case his mother is the sky - but she is also the Primeval Ocean as the all-mother, whether as Hathor, Nut,¹⁸ or Isis. In the Heliopolitan legends Geb, the earth, and Nut, the sky, were children of Shu and Tefnut and an important event in the mythology is the separation of Geb and Nut. Tales concerning the gestation of Nut show how she forced herself violently from her mother's womb thus becoming more important than her mother, Tefnut!

O Nut, You became a spirit,
You waxed mighty in the belly of your mother Tefnut
before you were born.
How mighty is your heart!
You stirred in the belly of your mother in your name of Nut,
you are indeed a daughter more powerful than her
mother...¹⁹

Ihy is the light-child, a symbol of the first emergence in his freshness and the chaos of the waters. Like Shu he has only one progenitor, for he is the offspring of the primordial god; in his case the Mother-goddess, while Shu had Atum as progenitor. The rosy hue of the dawn sky on the first morning or every day, is the blood emitted by Hathor or Isis - the names are interchangeable - when she bears her son.²⁰

18. R. T. Rundle Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, p. 84

The most popular and important of all the maternal goddesses, was Isis, the prototype of motherhood and the embodiment of wifely love and fidelity. Around her myths and legends have accumulated, together with a mysterious cultus which have given her a unique position in the Goddess cult, notwithstanding the fact that she was not herself a Mother-goddess comparable to Inanna-Ishtar, or Hathor and Neith. Since her name means 'seat' or 'throne' it is very probable that originally she was the deified throne, and since enthronement has long been an essential element in royal installation 'the throne which made the king' readily would become the Great Mother charged with the mysterious power of kingship. ²¹ Depicted in female form with a vulture head-dress, the horns of Hathor, and the solar disk with two plumes surmounted by the hieroglyphic symbol of her name (i.e. the throne), and sometimes wearing the double crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, adorned with the feather of truth (maat) and holding in her hands a papyrus sceptre and the crux ansata (sign of life) with the uraeus over her forehead showing her divine origin, she was unquestionably the greatest and most beneficent goddess in Egypt, personifying all that was most vital in the maternal principle, its attributes, functions and duties. Often she has been represented with her son Horus in her lap. In the later examples often she is crowned with either the crescent moon or lotus flowers, and holds in one hand a sistrum and in the other, the horn of plenty. A long veil covers her head, and she is clad

21. E. O. James, op. cit., p. 61; Frankfort, Before Philology, p. 26.

in a tunic with fringe reaching to her feet. In her various capacities not only was she identified in some way with almost every goddess in Egypt, as 'the Goddess of many Names', but eventually, in spite of her subservience to Osiris, she was equated with the Great Mother of Western Asia, Greece and Rome, as well as with the great indigenous goddesses of the Nile valley (eg. Hathor, Neith, Bast of Bubastis). Thus, her search for the mortal remains of her murdered husband (Osiris) at Byblos in the Delta, which will be considered later, was identical with that of Demeter for her daughter Kore (Persephone) at Eleusis, while in association with the Memphite cult of Serapis at Alexandria, the worship of Isis spread rapidly in the Hellenistic period until it became a predominant element in the welter of religions in the Roman empire before and after the Christian era.

22

A. Osiris and Isis.

Osiris was the most vivid achievement of the Egyptian imagination. He was also the most complex. Although not the Lord of the universe he was not a subordinate deity. The High God - Atum - creator and determiner of fate, was a theological concept, the supreme personification of power, will and wisdom, eternal and ineffable - to some extent beyond the power of the imagination to understand, to be apprehended in symbolic terms. Osiris was quite different; he demands sympathy. He was the completely helpless one, the essential victim. Yet he was avenged and his passion had an end at last, when justice and order were reestablished on earth. The

other gods were transcendent, distinct from their worshippers. Osiris, however, was immanent. He was the sufferer with all mortality but at the same time he was all the power of revival and fertility. He was the power of growth in plants and of reproduction in animals and human beings. He was both dead and the source of all living. Hence to become Osiris was to become one with the cosmic cycles of death and rebirth. Osiris was closely related to the dying and reborn divinities of the Near East, such as the Sumerian Dumuzi, the West Semitic Adonis, the Syrian Baal, the Hittite Telepinush or the Phrygian Attis. In Egypt Osiris lived in the hearts of the people as the symbol of the great human drama, the union of nature with the hope for survival after death. During the last millennium B.C. the popularity of Osiris grew steadily until, under the Ptolemies who ruled Egypt from 323 B.C. to the Roman conquest, he became Serapis, the Lord of the universe in all its aspects. Osiris appealed to the emotions; Re, Atum and the rest were there to account for the origin and maintenance of the world and to provide a rationale for political leadership. The drama of Osiris was a cycle of fertility rites and it always retained agricultural traits, but the cult was distinguished by its expenditure of emotion. At times the theme was more concerned with kingship than with the life of the fields, but fertility and kingship were integral parts of the cycle; but in the Osiris literature these themes were overshadowed by the profound sorrow and subsequent elation which was true of the litanies of the third millennium B.C.

as well as the late Ptolemaic texts.

Oriental man, and the Sumerians and Egyptians in particular, experienced the climatic changes of the seasons in a more dramatic form than did the peoples of the Western Europe. In the West the dead season is a mild one. The agricultural year is a round of tasks, each suitable in its proper season, and there is an unspoken confidence that there will be no absolute failure in the order of natural events. In the East, however, the heat and drought of summer reduce the country to something indistinguishable from the surrounding desert. The vegetation is almost completely burnt up, the animals grow listless from heat and lack of water. The desert has always been, to Eastern peasants, the abode of wild animals, evil spirits, terror and chaos. Moreover, there was the constant fear that the river floods would not return at all, or in insufficient quantity, and the land would be faced with famine and the consequent social disintegration. This fear was not groundless, for throughout Egyptian history there are graphic references to famines which find an echo in the story of Joseph. On the causeway leading up to the pyramid of King Wenis (Unis of the Fifth dynasty) at Sakkarah there is a particularly vivid scene in which the starving peasants are depicted with stark realism.²⁴ Such disasters were not a remote possibility but an all too frequent occurrence. Therefore, anxiety bit deep in the ancient mind. This is the reason for the extremely vivid imagery used to express the feeling when the flood waters return or the rain comes to

23. R. T. Rundle Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-99.

24. James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures*, p. 30.

the highlands:

Greetings to you, O Waters that Shu (i.e. the air) has brought
or the Twin Caverns have gushed forth
in which the earth (Geb) will bathe his limbs.
Now hearts can lose their fear and bosoms their terror. ²⁵

The coming of the new waters was more than a change of season, it meant the end of fear and terror, the rebirth of life in the hearts of men. Osiris was not the inundation itself but the life-force in plants and the reproductive power in animals and human beings which are stimulated when the waters come. As a Coffin Text tersely explains: "Osiris appears whenever there is an outflow (of water)." ²⁶ When the waters pour out over the earth they cause the seed to grow in the soil and this sprouting of the vegetation was the uprising of Osiris' soul. This is clearly seen in the relief from Philae in which the cow-headed goddess pours water from a vase into what is the symbol for a black (i.e. earth-filled) irrigation channel. This is the sign for irrigated land in general. Out of the top of the channel corn is sprouting. Above corn and obviously rising from it is a soul-bird with a human head. The cow-goddess is Isis-Hathor-Sothis - the great Mother-goddess in her star form as Sothis, the Dog Star, whose rising in the east just before dawn heralded the annual inundation. The water let loose by the coming of the flood fills the irrigation channels and so reaches the land where the corn has been sown. The moisture stimulates the growth of the seed into

25. R. T. Rundle Clark, op. cit., p. 100

26. Ibid., p. 101

corn-stalks which rise up from the earth. It is this 'rising up' that is the liberation of the 'soul'-form of Osiris.²⁷ In a Coffin Text the Nile Spirit says:

I am he who performs the service of gifts²⁸ (i.e. the harvest) for Osiris at the great inundation,
I raise up my Divine Command
at the rising of the Great God (i.e. Osiris),
I nourish the plants, I make green what was dried up.²⁹

The harvest is the peculiar property of Osiris. When Osiris rises in his soul-form the plants begin to grow; they are really the same thing.

One of the many mythological aspects of Osiris is that he was a king who ruled over Egypt and he taught the arts of civilization to his subjects. The reign of Osiris, then, was a golden age. But this idyllic 'order' of Osiris was destroyed by Seth, his younger brother. Plutarch writing in the second century after Christ, tells how, during a feast, Seth tempted Osiris to lie in a chest to see if it would fit him. Having Osiris at his mercy, Seth and his confederates threw the chest into the Nile. Plutarch says that Osiris' body was washed up upon the shore at Byblos. The chest containing the body was cast up into a tree which grew around it. The tree ultimately attained enormous size and attracted the notice of the king who had it felled to form the main column of his palace. Isis, meanwhile, had wandered everywhere seeking the body of her beloved. In some way Isis knew that Osiris' body was hidden within the tree-trunk. She

27. R. T. Rundle Clark, *op.cit.*, p. 100 f.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 274. (In Egyptian mythology the purpose of agriculture was to provide offerings at the altars of the gods and the dead).

29. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

ingratiated herself with the king and queen of Byblos, obtained possession of the tree column, extracted Osiris' body and brought it back to Egypt. As a fertility god, Osiris, like Dionysos and Tammuz, was sometimes regarded as a tree or as imprisoned within one. His soul perched on a tree which grew by his tomb. He was also symbolized by a column whose erection was the visible mark of his revival. Although the details differ, all sources agree that Seth tore up Osiris' body and scattered the pieces (according to the Pyramid Texts or Plutarch). (The cutting up of Osiris' body signified the harvest - the threshing of the corn.) And in every version, Isis is the seeker for her husband's body - a trait she shares with the Mesopotamian Ishtar, who seeks her beloved Tammuz who has been reft from her and is held a prisoner in the Underworld. It is generally admitted that Isis, helped by her sister Nephthys, collected the limbs together again, thus making the first and essential mummy. Isis was unable to bring her beloved back to life in the full sense, but she contrived to revive him sufficiently to be able to conceive a son by him. This was Horus. In her fear of the vengeance of Seth the goddess hid in the swamps of the Delta, where she gave birth to Osiris' heir and where she brought him up in secret. In due time Horus grew up and gathered together the supporters of his murdered father and, leaving his Delta fastness, attacked the usurper Seth and succeeded in overwhelming Seth and his confederates.

30

30. Ibid., pp. 103-106; Plutarch, Moralia, v. 5, pp. 39-43

The kingship in Egypt, consisted of a duality - it was based on a relationship between the living and the dead. The king exercised the supreme power in the world. He was the intermediary whereby the divine energies of the universe were made available for men. This power he derived from his ancestors, in particular from his father who for this reason was considered as himself divine. The deceased father in his tomb was the source of the power, called by the Egyptians the Ka, but he was in need of the care of his successor, his 'beloved son', in order to achieve beatification and to function as a 'spirit'. The living king was Horus, the son and heir of Osiris. The dead king was Osiris, the dweller in the West, or, as the Pyramid Texts have it, Ka hotep - 'the Ka at rest.' If the king carried out the required rites for his father, the latter could then become 'a soul', which meant that the powers of life and growth would begin again in nature. Osiris was nothing without Horus, just as the latter was no true king unless he was able to guarantee the fertility of his land. This mutual obligation between living son and dead father runs through Egyptian religion. It also exemplifies the essential difference between the cult of Osiris and that of the other fertility gods of the Ancient East. Tammuz is carried away to the Underworld by enemies and then brought back to earth and life by his consort-mother Ishtar. Osiris suffers death or discomfiture in the Underworld, but he is not brought back to life. It is Horus who fulfils the destiny for the present, undertaking the

role played in other religions by the resurrected god.

Although Seth had killed Osiris, this was not the end of his malevolence. He tore the body into pieces and left them lying on the ground or, in another version, threw them into the Nile. He remained a potential danger to Osiris until the latter was redeemed. Hence, in the rites Osiris had to be protected by Isis and her sister Nephthys until the coming of Horus. The goddesses found the fragments of his body either on the ground or fished them out of the Nile and then proceeded to put them together, mourning him all the while. They had to watch over him during the difficult time of his helplessness which was symbolized by the night watches. Meanwhile, Seth was reduced to a subordinate role. His confederates were slaughtered, but the great enemy himself was forced to become a bearer of Osiris. This was interpreted in the ritual as meaning that Seth was the boat which carried Osiris during the festal voyage on the Nile or temple lake. In mythological terms Seth's fate was probably connected with its power over the winds, an aspect of the god which he retained from his prehistoric past. Now Horus, the new master of the universe visits his father where he lies sleeping in the underworld. Horus has the power to revive Osiris or, at least, to rouse him from the state of unconsciousness. Osiris is to be revived - i.e. re-created - as a soul, in other words, is the reviving powers of the new year. Hence, Osiris has been reborn, not in his old form, but as the vegetation and reproductive activity

31. R. T. Rundle Clark, op. cit., p. 107 f.

of the ensuing period. The revival of Osiris affects all the powers of the earth, who are satisfied by the new order instituted by Horus. Osiris is requested to accept the offerings which, now that Horus has reestablished ordered government, can be made him on the altars of the major temples. Seth has been made to subserve the new order; the unregulated powers of the universe are now mastered and made to help in sustaining the revived god.³²

From the fragment of an Osiris hymn in the Pyramid Texts one knows that the god is bewailed by his sisters Isis and Nephthys, whose voices summon a group of ecstatic dancers, known as the 'souls' or 'gods' of Pe, the ancient capital of the predynastic northern community. A rout of dancers comes in with wild demeanour:

The gods of Pe bestir themselves, they come to Osiris
at the tearful voice of Isis, at the plaint of Nephthys,
at the wailing of those two mighty spirits,
The souls of Pe dance for you,
they strike their flesh,
they agitate their hands,
they loosen their hair,
they crouch down upon their knees,
they say to you:
'Osiris. You went away, but you have returned,
you fell asleep, but you have awakened,
you died, but you live again.
Arise. Behold this. Arise. Hear this,
what your son has done for you.
He has struck down him who struck you down,
He has bound him who bound you!...'³³

From Diodorus also one learns that when "Osiris passed through Ethiopia, a company of satyrs were presented to him, who as it is

32. Ibid., pp. 109-112

33. Ibid., p. 113

said, were all hairy down to their loins. For Osiris was a man given to mirth and jollity, and took great pleasure in music and dancing. He therefore carried with him a train of musicians, of whom nine were virgins, most excellent singers, and expert in many other things (whom the Greeks call Muses), of whom Apollo (i.e. Horus) was the captain, and was therefore called the Leader of the Muses. Therefore the satyrs, who are naturally inclined to skipping, dancing, singing, and all sorts of mirth, were taken in as part of the army.³⁴"

Osiris was all forms of growth. And mythologically, the result of Horus' ministrations is that Osiris can send out his soul or set himself in motion. The rising of Orion in the southern sky after the time of its invisibility is the sign for the beginning of a new season of growth, the revival of nature in all aspects. Death and the indignities of embalment represented for earthly bodies the passion of the god. Seth is the death that strikes one down; his confederates are the demons of decay and dissolution. The completion of the rites and the establishment of the ordered ritual at the tomb are the rescuing of the god. The interim period between death and revival was one of great danger. Just as the pieces of Osiris' body had been put together, and his corpse watched all through the night of his passion by his sisters Isis and Nephthys, so priestesses personifying them play the role of mourners and protectors of his body from spirit enemies during the funerary rituals. They are responsible for the safety of Osiris between his death and the coming of Horus. Isis

34. E. A. Wallis Budge, Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection, p. 230; Diodorus, Book I, p. 59.

and Nephthys know that the god in his helplessness is in the dead land waiting to be revived. The rescue of the god is the rising of the flood waters. On earth the flood flows down the Nile, even as far as Buto in the Delta. The great annual festival took place during the last month of the inundation when the waters were falling. There were three days and nights of lamentation - the period of the passion, when Osiris lay helpless and was bewailed by Isis and Nephthys. Next came the trial of Seth before the divine Tribunal. The final act was the erection of the Djed column - a fetish which was supposed to symbolize the backbone of the god and which was also a sign of manhood and virility. Its upright position was the final sign that Osiris had risen.

B. The Holy Wedding: The Marriage of Hathor and Horus.

On the 18th day of the tenth month (Payni) the image of Hathor was taken by ship by her priests from the temple at Denderah on the western bank of the Nile, about 40 miles north of Thebes, to Edfu (Behdet) to visit her husband Horus, with whom she consorted for a fortnight. On the eve of the festival in honour of the victory of Horus over Seth, Horus of Edfu and his retinue went forth in procession to meet the Goddess and embarked on her ship to make a triumphal entry into Edfu, pausing on the way to sacrifice to Geb, the wife of the Earth-god Nut. Arriving at their destination, the various gods and their followers passed the night near the temple at Edfu and then proceeded to an upper temple on the desert level. There

35. R. T. Rundle Clark, op. cit., pp. 121-123, 132.

they performed the prescribed rites to celebrate the victory of Horus in his combat to the satisfaction of Isis, who rejoiced because Horus had undertaken this charge with a glad heart. When all that had been commanded had been accomplished the procession broke up and went to the halls of the school to offer a goat and an ox as a burnt offering. Then offerings were made to Re, who was called upon to all his names. Loaves, jugs of beer, dates, milk, geese and wine were brought to him. Four geese were then released to fly to the four winds to inform the gods that king Horus of Edfu, the great god, the lord of heaven, had taken the white crown and had added the red crown thereto. Four arrows were shot to the four quarters of heaven to slay the enemies of the gods. An ox was killed and its right leg thrown to a man called Horus, and a number of ceremonies were performed for the purpose of destroying the enemies of the gods and the king. This accomplished, the ritual of the day ended and the evening was spent in revelry, drinking before the god, Horus of Edfu.³⁶

Since it was to consummate the pleasant embrace with her Horus that Hathor sailed from Danderah to Edfu, a ritual marriage must have occurred during the course of the festival. Thus, on the fourth day the young Horus is said to have been conceived to be born on the 28th of the eight month (Pharmuthi). This is confirmed by a similar marriage festival at Luxor in the latter half of the second

36. E. O. James, op. cit., p. 63 f.; Adolf Erman, Handbook of Egyptian Religion, p. 215 f.

month (Paophi), depicted on reliefs in the walls of the court of Amenhotep III in which is shown the image of Amon and his consort Nut and their son Khonsu being conveyed by river in barges escorted by the king and queen, the priests, musicians and nobles, from the temple at Karnak to his harim at Luxor. As the embodiment of Hathor, the queen as 'the God's Wife' and the musician priestesses as his concubines under her rule, exercised their functions at Luxor, and there the union of the god and the queen was supposed to take place when at the Theban festival of Opet the king visited the sanctuary in all his magnificence for this purpose. Therefore it was on these reliefs, that the conception and birth of the Pharaoh were depicted, just as in the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el Bahri the presentation of the infant-queen to her heavenly father Amon and the presiding goddesses is shown in the birth scenes.

37

Therefore, in Egypt instead of the king being invited to share the nuptial couch of the Mother-goddess as in Mesopotamia, he cohabited with the queen in his divine status as the incarnation of the Sun-god. As the 'Bull of Heaven' he was the dominant male, the embodiment of virile fertility, and in this capacity he impregnated the queen who was called 'the cow who bore the bull', as Re impregnated the body of Nut. Thus, the consort of the ancient king of Heliopolis was the wife of the Sun-god on earth, and so was identified with Hathor his celestial spouse to enable him to become the physical father of the

37. E. O. James, op. cit., p. 66 f.

Pharaoh. Since her husband was the high-priest of Re, from the Fifth dynasty in theory his wife was the high-priestess. Eventually Ahhotep, the mother of Ahmose I, the founder of the Eighteenth dynasty, was described as 'the God's wife' ³⁸. The title 'Divine Wife' was assumed by Queen Neferu in the Eleventh dynasty, but it was not until the Eighteenth dynasty that 'God's Wife' became the ³⁹ designation of the queens as the chief-priestesses of Amon-Re.

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38. James Henry Breasted, Ancient Records, v. 2, p. 150 f.
Adolf Erman, op. cit., p.73
39. E.O. James, op. cit., p. 67.

CHAPTER V.

THE FERTILITY CULT IN PHOENICIA.

The Ugaritic texts discovered in 1929 at Ras Shamra, ancient Ugarit, by C. F. A. Schaeffer on the North coast of Syria and deciphered by E. Dhorme, H. Bauer, Cyrus Gordon and Virolleaud, provide the main source for the Phoenician myths. A library belonging to king Nigmad¹ was found in which there were many clay tablets written in the alphabetic cuneiform, in an archaic Canaanite dialect akin to ancient Hebrew and Phoenician. These tablets date mainly from the 15th - 14th century B.C. and they contain myth and ritual which have much in common with that of Western Asia. For instance, the leading roles were played by Aleyan-Baal and the Goddess Anat, his consort and sister, who is called the 'Lady of the Mountain'. As elsewhere in the Near East and the Aegean, she was the principal consort of the Storm and Weather-god designated in the Ras Shamra texts Aleyan-Baal, who full of strength and vigour rose to pre-eminence in the Ugaritic mythology after he had eclipsed El, his father, the remote and shadowy Supreme Deity, the progenitor of the gods and of mankind. Thus, Baal occupied a position similar to that of Marduk in Babylonia when as the younger god he replaced Anu and Enlil at the head of the pantheon - a recurrence in both regions of the Older and Younger god themes. Once he was established as the

1. Claude F. A. Schaeffer, The Cuneiform Texts of Ras Shamra-Ugarit, p. 32 ff.

personification of the storm, the wind and the clouds, and the controller of the rainfall and the growth of the crops, Baal became the counterpart of Tammuz as the fertility god of vegetation whose descent into the nether regions caused the languishing of the earth.² For South Phoenicia we are concerned with the excavations at Byblos. The principal excavators have been P. Montet and M. Dunand. The former conducted four expeditions dating from 1921-1924, and the latter has been in charge since 1925.³

The cult of Adonis has come down to us from the pen of Greek and Latin writers such as Panyasis and Ovid. Panyasis was a poet who lived in the 5th century B.C. He was Carian, a native of Halicarnassus as Herodotus was, and it is said that he was a nephew or cousin of the latter. According to Panyasis Adonis was born of an Assyrian or Syrian princess as these two countries were often confused. Ovid, the Latin poet, living at the time of Augustus, in his book Metamorphoses believed that Adonis was the son of a king of Cyprus, which was an island near Syria anyway. From Alexandria, there exists a poem called Epitaphos Adonidos, and it is a funeral chant or lamentation over Adonis written by Bion originally a native of Smyrna.⁴

Lucian's De Dea Syria also gives an account of the Mother goddess contained in the story of Adonis in connection with the river Adonis, Nahr Ibrahim. Lucian was a Syrian, and Samosata, his native city was the capital of Commagene, situated on the Western bank of the

2. E. O. James, op. cit., p. 69 f.

3. G. Contenau, La Civilization Phénicienne, p. 18.

4. Charles Virolleaud, Légendes de Babylone et de Canaan, pp. 105-107.

Euphrates. He was born probably about the year A.D. 125 and his career extended over the greater part of the second century of the Christian era.⁵ Local coins ranging in date from the time of Alexander down to the third century A.D. amplify the description⁶ made by Lucian.

A. The Baal-Anat Cycle.

Baal was the giver of fertility and he exercised control over the vitalizing rain; he was the 'Rider of the Clouds'. In Syria rain was the primary source of fertility, unlike Egypt which depended on the Nile and Mesopotamia which was irrigated by the Tigris and Euphrates. Therefore Baal was equated with the rainfall which gave life to the earth and he was 'lord over the furrows of the field' and 'Prince, lord of the Earth'. Mot is Baal's adversary, the god of sterility and death - and in the struggle between Mot and Baal the former causes the latter to be killed and descend to the nether regions. Both deities could not reign upon the earth at the same time but represented alternate seasons. When Mot reigned it was the season when all vegetation languished and fecundity ceased and so there was universal lamentation. To remedy this devastating state of affairs Baal's sister-consort, Anat, with the help of the Sun-goddess Shapesh, goes in search of the god, hunting every mountain

5. Lucian, The Syrian Goddess, p. 29.

6. Ibid., p. 20.

in the land, lamenting bitterly, 'desiring him as doth a cow her calf or a ewe her lamb'.⁷ Baal was found dead in the pastures of Shlmmt, and although El was thereby rid of his rival, even he joined in sorrowing and mourning for his loss, and under the name of Ltpn, god of mercy, he went down from his exalted throne in heaven and sat on the earth in sackcloth and ashes, lacerating himself and crying:

Dead is Baal the Mighty,
Perished is the Prince, Lord of the Earth.
Then the Kindly El, the Merciful,
Comes down from his throne; he leaps to the footstool;
And from the footstool he leaps to the ground.
He letsdown his turban in grief;
On his head is the dust in which he wallows;
He tears asunder the knot of his girdle;
He makes the mountain reecho with his lamentation,
And his clamour to resound in the forest.
Cheeks and chin he rends,
His upper arm he scores,
His chest as a garden-plot,⁸
Even as a valley-bottom his back he lacerates.

Anat found the body and buried it on the heights of Sapon, Baal's former abode. At the same time Anat continued her search for Mot, whom she knew to be responsible for her lover's death. Having at length found him she ripped his garments, and demanded her brother-spouse. He admitted that he had killed him. Thereupon she performs what is described as the harvest rite:

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7. E. O. James, op. cit., p. 71; G. R. Driver, Canaanite Myths and Legends, p. 111; John Gray, The Legacy of Canaan, p. 56.
8. D. Winton, Thomas, Documents from Old Testament Times, p. 130.

She seizes Death, the son of El;
With a blade she cleaves him;
With a shovel she winnows him;
With fire she parches him;
With a millstone she grinds him;
In the field she sows him;
His remains the birds eat,
The wild creatures consume his portions;
Remains from remains are scattered.⁹

The scattered flesh is like the dismembered body of Osiris. In short she treated him as ripe grain.

Mot was the antithesis of Baal in the vegetation theme. As Baal was the god of rain and fertility, so his adversary Mot was the god of aridity and drought, wandering over every mountain to the heart of the earth, every hill to the earth's very bowels, turning them into desolation by robbing all living things of the breath of life. When he was treated by Anat as the harvested grain it was the slain corn-spirit dying at the ingathering of harvest that he was represented, ushering in the season of sterility until life was restored and renewed with the release of Baal from the nether regions, the land of death, whither he had taken the rain-producing clouds. Then 'the heavens rain oil and the wadies run with honey'. Since the theme was the perennial struggle between life and death in nature, neither of the contending forces could be ultimately destroyed. Therefore, notwithstanding Anat's drastic treatment of Mot, he survived to continue the combat when Baal returned to life. At their first encounter Baal had been completely paralysed with fear,

9. Ibid., p. 103 f; Claude F. A. Schaeffer, op. cit., p. 72.

and returned to his house weeping at the approach of his enemy, ready to become his slave without resistance. The loss of vigour typified the decline in vitality and the dying vegetation in the dry season, even though summer fruits may still ripen. With the return of the rains the renewal of the urge of life in its full strength found mythological expression in the energetic battle waged by Baal against Mot with the aid of the Sun-goddess, Shapesh; Baal attacking with all his might and resources. They bit like serpents, gored each other like wild bulls and kicked like chargers. Neither yielded, until at length the Sun-goddess intervened, urging Mot to give up the fight since he was vanquished, and return to the underworld because the season of his reign had come to an end. Now it was the turn of Baal to bring life out of the earth, and so it was useless to continue the struggle. Therefore, El overturned Mot's throne and broke the sceptre of his dominion, thereby forcing him to surrender and acknowledge the kingship of Baal. The drought then ended and fertility was reestablished on earth. Thus, the efforts of Anat on behalf of her brother-husband ultimately prevailed. Throughout Baal's varied and tumultuous career, Anat was always by his side in her dual capacity as his sister and consort. She did not hesitate to threaten her father El and to use all the violence in which she delighted if he did not comply with her wishes on behalf of Baal. Anat was the goddess of war and slaughter and so wallowed in blood; nevertheless, she was primarily concerned with love and fertility. As his consort she was his helper, but she never occupied the predominant position of Inanna-Ishtar in Mesopotamia. With her

Baal has passionate marital intercourse suggestive of the sacred marriage in the Annual Festival Cultus, but he is predominant in the fertility myth.¹⁰

Aliyan is the son of Baal. In the Ras Shamra texts Baal is often accompanied by his son who sometimes takes his place. Thus Baal is the god of storms and rains, and his son Aliyan watches over the maintenance of springs and underground waters. At the same time he represents the growth of plants that spring during the rainy season. The rule of Baal and Aliyan lasts only a part of the year, during autumn, winter and spring. In summer Mot rules over the dried up soil and he is the spirit of harvest. When summer arrives, the heat begins to beat down on the country, and Aliyan must go to join his father, to whom he takes his divine attributes, the winds, clouds and thunder that had remained behind in the temple. But before leaving the earth Aliyan, at his father's command, goes into the fields and performs a task described as follows in the Ras Shamra texts:

Aliyan-Baal obeys his father
He loves the heifer in the pasture,
The cow in the field,
He makes love seventy-seven times,
He makes love eighty-eight times.¹¹

The explanation of the god's union with a heifer is that according to the poems Baal fattens the cattle by fertilizing the pastures with rain, and is mindful also of their propagation. Although he has

10. E. O. James, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-74.

11. Claude Schaeffer, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

already disappeared into the earth, he charges his son with the care of assuring the increase of cattle. In fact it is in the spring after the rainy season that the herds become restless, and the poet represents these facts in the guise of a symbolic union between Aliyan and a heifer. The rest of the story makes it clear that this heifer is the hypostasis of the goddess Anat, Aliyan's own sister,¹² now become his mistress.

Another central theme connected with the Anat-Baal cycle is Baal's need for having a royal palace built for himself as the other gods had; this was necessary if he was to establish himself over them. This request was made after his victorious struggle with the dragon, Yam or Nahar.¹³ It resembles the theme in Mesopotamia when the gods built a palace for Marduk after his defeat of Tiamat and its completion was to be celebrated with a banquet.¹⁴ Concerning the building of the house of Baal the item pertinent to the fertility question is the fact that at first Baal refused to have any window in it as a precautionary measure lest one of his several enemies such as Yam, lord of the Sea, or Mot, the ruler of the underworld should attack him through them. But when these misgivings were dispelled he ordered the lattice to be made, presumably to allow the rain to fall on the earth when it was opened.¹⁵ He then puts the windows to the test by thundering out of them: the earth quakes and his enemies are terrified. Mockingly he asks them the cause of their fear and presumes that it

12. *Ibid.*, p. 70 f.

13. E. O. James, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

14. Driver, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

15. E. O. James, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

16

must be that he always hits the mark. Schaeffer suggests that the ritual opening of the skylight or the window in the middle of the roof of the temple is important because the moment Baal opened the clefts in the clouds the rain began. Moreover, Kousor, a sea-god with the title Son of the seas, is put in control of the seasons and has to ensure the regularity of the rains on which everything depends. And Schaeffer thinks that the rain, which was to begin to fall at Baal's word, was perhaps intended to descend through the skylight in the roof, on to the face of the god represented on the stele, which stood in the sanctuary, armed with lightning. Perhaps, also, it was often watered with libations, which, through the medium of sympathetic magic, were intended to encourage the god to open the flood-gates of heaven.¹⁷

To be mentioned in parenthesis are the following: First, "Gordon rightly protests against the view that the poem of Baal is a seasonal myth telling of the annual death and resurrection of that god as the cause of the destruction and rebirth of vegetation on earth. The texts nowhere speak of his death and resurrection as annual; and, although the death of Baal as god of fertility seems to be regarded as the reason why the earth languishes in the hot eastern summer, this is not in any way described as seasonal. Further, drought is

16. Driver, op. cit., p. 16.

17. Schaeffer, op. cit., p. 68.

often said to accompany or follow various events and to last for quite a different length of time; so droughts lasting seven years follow not only the discomfiture of Baal but also the death of Athtar in battle, the murder of Aqhat, and the sickness of Keret. The normal sequence of the seasons, too, did not hold any terrors for the people of Canaan; only abnormally bad years would be likely to become a serious cause of alarm."¹⁸

Another point to be considered concerns Aleyan. "Much of what has been said of Baal and his cult assumes the identity of 'Al'eyan with Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts. This is not universally accepted, and it is contended that 'Al'eyan Baal is not a composite title, but means 'Aleyan the son of Baal', a theory which really relies on the support of only one passage where the phrase 'Al'eyn bn B'l occurs. This at first sight seems to mean 'A. the son of Baal'. H. Bauer, however, as early as 1933 suspected that not two figures, but one, might be denoted. He would explain 'Al'eyan as a derivative of the verb l'y 'to be strong'. We agree with Bauer and take 'Al'eyan as an epithet with prosthetic aleph and final n meaning 'the Mighty'. The phrase 'Al'eyn bn b'l in the sense 'the Mighty Son, Baal' is unusual perhaps but not impossible."¹⁹

B. Adonis and Ashtarte in Phoenicia.

Adonis was a Phoenician god of great beauty; he was mortally wounded by a boar so Venus changed him into an anemone. Although

18. Driver, op. cit., p. 20.

19. John Gray, The Legacy of Canaan, p. 121.

Adonis is qualified as a Greek god with a Greek name yet he was adopted by the Greeks and the origin of his name is the Phoenician word adon, designating lord like the word baal. Thus, the Greek appellation Adonis is now generally applied to the god of adon whose cult migrated from Phoenicia to Greece.²⁰ Adonis was born of a Syrian princess called Myrrha. She enticed her father Theias while he was drunk. Realizing what happened when he became sober he loathed his daughter and decided to kill her. Ashtarte metamorphosed her into a tree, the myrrh. Nine months later the bark of the tree opened and gave birth to Adonis who was received by Ishtar. A cylinder seal represents Tammuz or Adonis being received by Ishtar while Theias, the father of Adonis as well as Myrrha attempts to destroy the tree which is his daughter. The tree figuring in the legend recalls Osiris who was hid in a tree and the sacredness of trees in general in primitive mythology, were objects of veneration as dwelling-places of the gods.²¹ The cult of Adonis was celebrated all over Phoenicia but with the greatest fervour in Byblus and also in the mountains at the source of the River Adonis which is called Afka. At Afka there used to be a temple in antiquity dedicated to the Venus of Afka. It was in her sanctuary that Ashtarte protected her lover Adonis. Today remains of the temple are still visible despite the vigorous crusade of John Chrysostom and his monks against the licentious

20. Charles Virolleaud, Légendes de Babylone et de Canaan, p. 104; Charles Vellay, Le Culte et les Fêtes d'Adonis-Thammouz, p. 21.

21. Virolleaud, op. cit., p. 105; Contenau, op. cit., p. 96.

22

practices that took place there. The name Afka etymologically means 'kiss'; therefore, it was concluded that in that place Adonis and the goddess exchanged their first kiss.

23

The story of Adonis-Tammuz and Ashtarte follows the same course as the Sumerian Inanna-Dumuzi and the Egyptian Osiris-Isis legends with local modifications. They are myths connected with the principle of fertility and Adonis is called 'the father of fruits'.²⁴ The death of the god is the languishing of life in plants and animals; the resurrection of the god is the returning fertility of the land. Adonis met his death while hunting in the mountain regions; hunting was his favourite occupation and he was mortally wounded by a boar.²⁵ It is his blood that flowed in such profusion that it coloured the river into red all along its bed until it pours into the sea. This is the signal for the inhabitants of Byblus that the period of mourning and lamentation must start. This was the time that many people, pilgrims and strangers flocked to Byblus to celebrate the feasts of Adonis and to commemorate his passion, death and resurrection.²⁶ The modern explanation of the colouring of the river is due to the rains and winds which carry Lebanon's soil, which is by nature red, along the bed of the river,²⁷ but to the ancients this phenomena fostered a mystic meaning.

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22. Virolleaud, *op. cit.*, p. 111 f.
 23. Vellay, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
 24. *Ibid.*, p. 79 f.
 25. Contenau, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
 26. Vellay, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 46 f.

The boar symbolized the evil force of destruction of the winter season, and to say that Adonis perished by the tooth of a boar was conceived to mean that summer succumbed to winter, which was as a murdered ushering in the cold and fog. ²⁸ After seven days mourning Adonis was resuscitated by the efforts of Ashtarte; the time for rejoicing was commemorated on the first of October. ²⁹ The date of the feast is not uniform in the documents. The events in the myth of Adonis should be celebrated twice a year with several months interval, i.e., his death in October, and his resurrection in spring, when he returns to life. ³⁰ But in reality there was one feast lasting several days.

Due to the early commercial relations between Byblus and Egypt, the cult of Adonis was closely linked with that of Osiris. The palm trees of Egypt are not fit for carpentry or the making of furniture, but the cedars of Lebanon, the pine trees and other species provided Egypt's supply of wood. ³¹ Excavations at Byblus revealed relations with Egypt since the beginning of the historic period. Archaeologically there is similarity between the cults of the two countries. On a cylinder seal M. Montet found the Lady of Byblus, belonging to the 3rd millennium B.C., represented with the traits of Isis-Hathor, seated and Horus project from her head-dress. Beside her is the Egyptian god Hay-Tau who is none other than Adonis. ³² Hay-Tau is

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28. Ibid., p. 121
29. Ibid., p. 125 f.
30. Virolleaud, op. cit., p. 112
31. Ibid., p. 108 f.
32. Contenau, op. cit., pp. 18, 95.

also likened to Osiris because he was metamorphosed into a fir tree. 33

On the morning of the eighth day the women of Byblus go to the port to receive the papyrus head thrown into the sea at Alexandria and which was brought by the current to the shores of Byblus punctually every year. This was an emblem belonging to Osiris whose cult was very soon mixed up with that of Adonis. Then it was that the inhabitants of Phoenicia knew that Adonis was revived and the women went about exclaiming 'Adon is alive', and the period of extreme rejoicing followed the seven days of frenzied mourning and lamentation. 34

C. Sacred Wedding.

Hierogamy in Phoenicia does not follow the same pattern as in Mesopotamia where a procession is conducted up the ziqqurat and where a ritual wedding is enacted, nor as in Egypt where the god cohabited with the queen to produce a line of kings in whom the god is incarnated. On the other hand, in the texts of Ras Shamra there are exotic passages and in the feasts of Adonis there are orgies which accompany the return of the god and in which the people on a large scale participate - the more devoted to the cult become priests or priestesses of the temple, some as eunuchs and some as temple prostitutes. "The mythical background of the ritual, however, was far cruder than anywhere else in the Near East at the time. The primitive

33. Drioton, op. cit., p. 75

34. Vellay, op. cit., p. 135; Virolleaud, op. cit., p. 114.

nature and the brutality of the mythology are surprising. In addition, there were cultic practices of an especially degrading nature, such as human sacrifices, long given up by the Egyptians and Babylonians, sacred prostitution of both sexes, the vogue of eunuch priests, who were much less popular in Mesopotamia and were not found in Egypt,³⁵ serpent worship to an extent unknown in other lands of Antiquity.

From Ras Shamra the 'Gracious Gods' text, first published by Virolleaud in 1933,³⁶ is considered the libretto of a sacred drama supposed to be performed at the Canaanite Spring Festival of the first-fruits, and there is an erotic scene between two girls who may be identified with Anat and Asherah, both of whom are characterized as at once the daughters and wives of El. The aged supreme god, having fully impressed his admirers by his agility in drawing water for cooking, and by his marksmanship in securing a bird for the pot, he then kissed and seduced them, with the result that they conceived and bore two sons, Shahru, the Dawn, and Shalma, the Sunset. This birth was duly announced to El, and they were called 'Gracious Gods' who 'suckled the breasts of Mistress Lady Queen' (Asherah).³⁷ The crude episode would seem to have been connected with the hieros gamos, probably when El was the principal deity in the fertility cultus before he had been replaced by Baal. In all probability it represents the climax of a sacred dance in a ritual marriage between the priests of

35. David Noel Freedman and G. Ernest Wright, ed. s, The Biblical Archaeologist Reader, p. 174.

36. H. L. Ginsberg, "Notes on the Birth of the Gracious and Beautiful Gods," The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1935, pp. 45 ff.

37. Ibid., p. 70.

El and the temple priestesses in order to produce symbolically the birth of the gods (e.g. Shahru and Shalma) and the promotion of fertility, very likely to secure abundance of bread and wine when the gathering of the first-fruits was celebrated at the beginning of summer. But whatever may have been the precise occasion of the ritual, the sacred marriage was an essential element in the underlying theme of the drama. However, in the sexual symbolism, El's old age is indicated by a score of couplets devoted to the theme of his impotence and rejuvenation.³⁸ Therefore, it is not surprising that Anat also became the wife of the virile younger god Baal, the Rider on the Clouds and when Baal-Aliyan made love to a heifer this was a mythological expression of his union with Anat. Nevertheless, since she, with Asherah, is alleged to have had sexual relations with El in his old age, it is not improbable that she was his consort when he was head of the pantheon before Baal became the dominant figure and the most potent force in nature. When the older god El became subservient to, or was eclipsed by, the younger divinity Baal, Anat assumed the status of Baal's wife and sister while El was regarded as her father. But notwithstanding her prominence in the texts, although she took her place by the side of Baal as the goddess of birth, and fought his battles as a warrior goddess, in some measure she receded into the background. It was Baal who was the supreme figure dwarfing all the other divinities, male and female alike. Although the

38. Marvin H. Pope, El in the Ugaritic Texts, pp. 39 ff.

original character of Anat is obscure, she was principally concerned with sex and war, sensuous and perennially fruitful, yet without losing her virginity.³⁹

In the feasts of Adonis we have two emotional aspects, the one that of extreme and violent lamentation connected with his death, and the other that of extreme joy and licentiousness connected with his return to life. The period of mourning is connected with the theme of the search for the dead god by a goddess, such as that of Anat for Baal, Isis for the dead Osiris, Ishtar for Tammuz and that of Aphrodite for Adonis. Citing Bion's Lament for Adonis is this relevant passage: "And Aphrodite unbinds her locks, and goes wandering through the woodlands, distraught, unkempt and barefoot. The thorns tear her as she goes, and gather her holy blood, but she sweeps through the long glades, shrieking aloud and calling on the lad, her Assyrian lord." (To the Greek Assyrian sometimes signified Syrian).⁴⁰ In the city of Byblus the mourning rites were incomparable. There was wailing, sobbing, and the women wept about the streets beating their chests; they searched for Adonis and called to him. In the seven days mourning they exhausted every form of woe and frenzy, sobbing disshevelled all the night on the thresholds of their houses or along the temple walls. It was weeping, not only for Adonis, but for the death of every force and that of fertility; for this reason conjugal relation was interrupted. Many women shaved their heads,

39. E.O. James, p. 74f.

40. John Gray, op. cit., p. 51.

sacrificing their hair to the god. Those who refused to have their heads shaved offered themselves for a whole day for prostitution to strangers who came to the city to participate in the feasts. This was the fine they paid and only strangers had right to their favours⁴¹ and the proceeds were offered to Venus.

The priests conducted funeral dances to the sound of Phoenician flutes. The exaltation of the masses reached a high pitch and the people drunk by the intoxicating perfumes, the chants, the music, got into such a frenzy that the men were so transported as to mutilate and castrate themselves.⁴² In memory of the death of the god who was supposed to have been wounded by the boar in his genitals⁴³. These priests became the Galli, they sometimes wore women's clothes, made up their faces and when they died they were buried with special rites.⁴⁴ These orgiastic feasts with their ardent sensuality not only led to the castration of the priests and of the devoted but the spilling of blood excited the populace so as to offer human sacrifices as evidenced in the tombs where infants abound and this custom, among the Semites was widely and tenaciously adhered to.⁴⁵ As castration recalled the victory of sterility over fertility, its opposite, the prostitution of virgins and women, indicated the triumph of life and love and it became a universal usage. All this sensual voluptuousness was sanctioned by religion, and prostitution in all its aspects

41. Vellay, op. cit., p. 129 f.

42. Ibid., p. 131.

43. Ibid., pp. 166 f.

44. Lucian, op. cit., p. 66.

45. Vellay, op. cit., p. 166

manifested the power of the goddess Aphrodite.⁴⁶ These feasts led to the phallic cult, based on the principle of deifying every force productive of life. In Chaldea and Assyria the phallus is a divine symbol. In Syria, the entrance to the temple of Hierapolis is adorned by two enormous phalli.⁴⁷ These orgies and prostitution took place in caves, such as that of St. George in Phoenicia, at Sarba, Mogharet el-Magdoura, in the caves of Casmie at Adloun, at Balat and in the high places. These practices are all symbolic of the vicissitudes of nature - castration and sterility, the barrenness of the ground, the cracked earth; then life and fertility as seen in the prostitution customs or what to them were sacred⁴⁸ weddings.

46. Ibid., p. 169

47. Ibid., p. 159 f.; Lucian, p. 67.

48. Vellay, pp. 174-176.

CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we shall review the origin and function of the cult and then discuss the importance of the economic factor which involves the cult basically and then consider the persistence of the cult.

Since Karl Marx, historians have become more aware of the economic interpretation of history and have come to realize that man's cultural history and ideologies, to a large extent, are influenced by geographical factors which shape and influence his thinking. The fertility cult may be a dramatic expression of man's ^{old} mode, emotions, anxieties and fears in an environment in which he tries to live in harmony with or struggles against adverse elements, to satisfy the hunger drive and to provide all that is necessary for survival.

A. Origin.

As a result of the archaeological evidence the cult must have originated in the Near East, now considered the cradle of civilization, - because of the warmer climate in the interglacial periods and other reasons. With regard to the fertility cult images of the Mother-goddess (indicative of the recognition and veneration of maternity as a divine principle) and amulets (such as shells and miniature celts or axes of stone, pierced for suspension, etc.) are most abundant in the West Asiatic sites of the Gravettian culture. Therefore, it is the Southern Russian loess plain that constitutes the most probable original diffusion centre of the cult, extending thence

to the Danube Basin, to Southern France and North-west Europe. Thus it was from this Eurasian cradleland that it was diffused, both in an easterly and westerly direction in the succeeding Chalcolithic period and the Bronze Age when the Mother-goddess and her cult had become a predominant feature of the culture from India to Britain. In the flourishing Neolithic civilization at Arpachiyah near Nineveh it had become firmly established in the 5th millennium B.C. There the squatting figurines are combined with bull's heads - the bucranium. But in the neolithic Age the male god personifying virility and paternity does not appear to have been in evidence; the Mother-goddess still retained her earlier status as the fertile Earth, the womb from which all life was born. Mixed farming, however, in which agriculture and domestication of animals were combined in the maintenance of the food-supply seems to have produced in due course the growing consciousness of the duality of male and female in the generative process. It was then that the Young God, embodied in man and the bull, became the son and consort of the goddess in the seasonal drama. Nevertheless, while Mother-earth retained her status and significance, and continued to reign supreme from Western Asia to Minoan Crete, it was in their dual capacities that they usually appeared when the cult in its developed form, was dispersed from its area of characterization through Cappadocia to the Eastern Mediterranean, and across the Iranian plateau and Baluchistan to India. In the background, however, there was also the shadowy cosmic figure of the Sky-father, the Supreme Being who controlled the weather and particularly the rainfall, and was manifest in the

thunder and lightning, and displayed his power in hurricanes and storms. As he came into greater prominence, as the personification of transcendence, he was destined to become in Greece the father of the gods and men. In Egypt, Re-Atum, the self-created Creator, made his first appearance alone in the primordial waters of Nun and began to rule that which he had created before heaven and earth were separated or the rest of the gods had been brought into being.¹

B. Economic Factor.

A major reason for the tenacious worship of the female principle in the Near East more than in the West is the difference in climate. Unlike the East, in the West there is an abundant rainfall and a more uniform climate so that to the European farmer a change of season often simply meant a change from one agricultural task to another and he was free from the anxiety of famine. But in the East, the riverine areas are surrounded by desert and the climate is extremely hot in summer, with a scorching sun in some areas. The Eastern farmer depends on rivers for his water-supply and these rivers have to be well managed to prevent flooding or he must preserve the waters from flowing wastefully. The great difference in the East between the sown and the desert is that the threat of famine was always present.

In the following paragraphs, it is intended to present some facts concerning the Fertile Crescent which is so called because of

1. E. O. James, op. cit., pp. 257 ff.

the two riverine areas that watered the two horns of the Crescent - the Nile in Egypt and the Tigris-Euphrates in Mesopotamia. The rivers provided the fertility that rendered possible the accumulation of surpluses of food which could be traded for other goods, but² at the same time these rivers necessitated control by irrigation. Thus Wilson describes the land of Egypt as "essentially rainless, confined closely to the banks of the Nile River, and thus restricted to a single North and South axis. There is the sharpest possible contrast between the riverside fertile black land and the red desert sands. And because of this dramatic contrast between the desert and the sown Herodotus said 'Egypt is the gift of the Nile'.³ Only the surging of waters makes the land cultivable, and the annual gifts of refreshing water and refertilizing soil in a semi-tropical climate give an agricultural richness which has been proverbial. With the proper use of the soil, two or three crops a year are a happy expectation. However, the Nile's gift lays heavy obligations upon the peasant. Without labour to make the most lasting and economic use of the waters, Egypt would be a much narrower country, snatching at a single crop immediately after inundation. Therefore the mending and clearing of canals is a constant occupation. In prehistoric times before men developed irrigation the inundation rushed through without restraint, spreading

2. Kathleen Kenyon, Archaeology of the Holy Land, p. 24.

3. Herodotus, The Histories, p. 104. The Penguin Classics.

thinly beyond the riverside marshes and draining off quickly, and so in late prehistoric times large-scale irrigation extended the arable land and produced the necessary food for a larger population. Another factor about the Nile is that the River is not precise in the timing of its inundation or in the volume of its waters. Man must be alert against its antic behaviour. In particular, its volume is a matter of serious concern. Only a few inches of maximum height separate the normal Nile from famine or riotous destruction. A drop of 60 inches meant a fatal famine, and one foot above normal meant damage to the earth embankments, sweeping away dykes and canal banks and bringing the mud brick villages tumbling down. The seven years of plenty and the seven lean years was no fantasy for Egypt; it was always a threatening possibility. The margin between abundant life and hollow death was a very narrow one."

In Mesopotamia, unlike the Nile in Egypt, there is no annual inundation of the rivers to depend on for irrigation and the winter rainfall is rarely sufficient to produce a crop. So it is left entirely to the labour and ingenuity of man to arrest the flow of the great rivers and to distribute their waters over the thirsting land. The Tigris flowing between high banks needed some sort of barrage to divert any considerable volume of water over the surrounding country. Iraq has six months of spring and winter and six months under a summer sun with a shade temperature of 120-125 degrees F.; so that "without artificial contrivances, human life is barely tolerable

4. John A. Wilson, The Culture of Ancient Egypt, pp. 8-11.

for one half of the year and may only be supported through the recollection and confident anticipation of the other half."⁵

In Palestine, the land can be divided geographically into four areas. One, the coastal plain which was well-watered and the rich brown soil invited agricultural development. But the one threat to the productivity of the area was the drifting sand, which tended to encroach upon the region near the coast. Second, the hill country which includes Judah. In this area, on the Western slope, clouds coming in from the Mediterranean, bring considerable rainfall and thus sustain plant life on a reasonably adequate level. To the East, however, is found the bleak 'Wilderness of Judah'⁶ deprived of adequate moisture, deeply cut by the valleys leading to the Dead Sea, and dropping down so sharply as to offer little opportunity for agricultural development. To the south, the hills of the Negeb - literally meaning the 'Dry or parched land',⁷ are semi-arid and people can only exist with the most careful water conservation and irrigation systems. Third, the Jordan valley which has one area which invited extensive cultivation and that was the fertile plain of Gennesaret. The Dead Sea is rather a desolate place due to its oppressive heat in summer, and its unnatural salinity. Fourth, the plateau of Transjordan, which has a limited rainfall. On the whole the year is divided into a dry season and a rainy season, the rains

5. Seton Lloyd, Foundations in the Dust, p. 34.

6. George Ernest Wright, ed., The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible, p. 19.

7. Jack Finnegan, Light from the Ancient Past, p. 137.

coming from the end of October to the middle of April.

C. Magic and Religion.

With these adverse economic factors man's religion was to resort to sympathetic magic. People thought that things accidentally like each other influenced each other. If one found a stone like a duck, and carried it about in a bag, a good duck-shooting was expected. In the same way the part influenced the whole; if some of man's hair was burned he was to catch a fever. Imitations worked also in the same manner. If one imitated the emergence of grubs from the larvae, one expected grubs to emerge.⁸

The Mousterian resorted to magic as a short cut to power. Man's faith in magic was the remedy for his helplessness in the face of crisis. When nature seemed alien man was afraid to omit anything that might help him in that menacing environment. Therefore, magic was the short cut which took the place of scientific experiment and thinking things out logically. As for results, negative instances and failures were simply ignored and objective judgment simply gave place to hope and fear. When the glacial climate improved, despite the cold, hunters were out to secure game. The plains of Russia and Central Europe were open tundras or steppes. Every summer bitter winds blowing off the glaciers and ice sheets covered these plains with a layer of fine dust (löss), through which young herbage sprouted each spring. Vast herds of mammoth, reindeer, bison, and wild horse ranged over the plains, browsing on the grass. Every year the herds migrated from

8. Andrew Lang, Magic and Religion, p. 46.

summer pastures in Russia and Siberia to winter grazing in the Danube valley and back again. The hunters pitched their camps along passes between ice-capped mountains that such herds must traverse and where tongues projecting from the northern ice sheet restricted the beasts' movements. The camp sites are still marked by immense middens discovered under the loess at Mezine near Kiev, at Predmost in Moravia, at Willendorf in Lower Austria, and elsewhere. The size of the bone heaps - remains of over 1000 mammoths were recognized at Predmost - attests the hunters' success in procuring mammoth meat.⁹

One of the most surprising and celebrated aspect of Upper Palaeolithic cultures is the artistic activities of the hunters. They carved figures in the round in stone or ivory, modeled animals in clay, decorated weapons with representations and formal designs, executed bas-reliefs on the rock walls of cave shelters, and engraved or painted scenes on the ceilings of caverns. Yet these Palaeolithic sculptures and drawings are not merely expressions of an artistic impulse but were executed for a serious economic motive. The pictures are generally situated in the deep recesses of limestone caves where no daylight can penetrate. No families have ever lived in these fastnesses; they are often very difficult of access. And in executing the drawings the artist had often to adopt most uncomfortable attitudes, lying on his back or standing on a comrade's shoulders in a narrow crevice. Stone lamps have been found which produced an artificial dim light; fat may be assumed as the fuel, with moss for a wick. All these considerations show that cave art had a magic purpose. To the logic of pre-scientific minds, as surely as

9. V. Gordon Childe, Man Makes Himself, pp. 51-53.

the artist drew a bison in the dark cavern, so surely would there be a living bison in the steppes outside for his fellows to kill and eat. To make sure of success, the artist occasionally drew his bison transfixed by a dart, as he desired to see it. Aurignacian and Magdalenian art was therefore practical in its aim, and designed to ensure a supply of those animals on which the tribe depended for its food. In regard to the artists, they were trained specialists. At Limeuil in the Dordogne a number of trial pieces executed on pebbles have been collected. They may be the copybooks of an art school; on some pieces, corrections, as if by a master's hand, have been noticed. Other products of palaeolithic art are the small figurines of women, carved out of stone or ivory, with excessively fat bodies, and the sexual features exaggerated, but the face left almost blank, and which were used as fertility charms. The generative powers of women would inhere in them and through them he canalized to provide food for the tribe by ensuring the fertility of game and vegetation.¹⁰ All magic of this kind, was wrought by material objects, sticks, stones, hair, and so forth; and sometimes they were charmed by songs being chanted over them. Thus primitive societies moulded female figurines because they imagined the earth as a Mother-goddess from whose bosom grain sprouted and she could be influenced like a woman by entreaties (prayers) and bribes (sacrifices) as well as

10. Ibid., p. 54 ff.

being controlled by imitative rites and incantations. And so Neolithic societies wore amulets. For instance, miniature stone axes were perforated for hanging on a necklace, presumably in the belief that such a model would confer upon its wearer something of the queer power inherent in a new tool. Later the importance of magical ceremonies developed. In particular, a ceremonial union of the sexes would symbolize and so cause the fertilization of nature. Among grain-growers the fertility drama had to assume a more individualized form. Ceremonial marriage became restricted to a selected pair. The male actor impersonated the grain (or vegetation in general) and assumed for a time a leader's role; he became a 'corn king.' But like the grain he had to be buried and rise again, that is, he had to be slain and replaced by a young and vigorous successor. In such actors the productive forces of nature assumed personal forms and they became goddesses and gods. Later when society was persuaded that the corn king's death could be replaced by the slaughter of a captive or his death made purely ~~purely~~ symbolical by magic rites, the corn king became a temporal king too. This is one way in which 'divine kings' such as is met with at the dawn of history may have arisen. In Egypt and Mesopotamia historical kings performed many of the functions in fertility rituals attributed to the hypothetical
11
corn king.

Thus, in Western Asia and India, in the Graeco Roman world, the Goddess cult was widely practised. The main purpose of the rites was to secure the union of the votary with the Great Mother in one or other of her forms, not infrequently by the aid of frenzied dancing,

11. V. Gordon Childe, What Happened in History, p. 64 f.

wild music and the sexual symbolism of the sacred marriage, in the hope that a condition of abandonment and communion with the source of life and vitality might be obtained. Whether or not this was prompted by some unconscious desire to return to the maternal womb, either of the actual mother or that of a symbolic womb of the earth, it would seem to have been an urge to return to a biocosmic unity inherent in the maternal principle in order thereby to acquire a renewal of life at its very source and centre. Therefore, the principal occasion of the cultus invariably was the spring when nature was in process of re-awaking from its nocturnal slumber during the long dark night of winter. Then mankind sought to be reborn to newness of life and vigour by a ritual orgy and a mystery regeneration and reintegration. Similarly, the ingathering of harvest at the autumnal turn of the year continued to be marked by so much debauchery that at the beginning of the Christian era harvest festivals were condemned altogether, and at the Council of Auxerre~~ria~~ in A.D. 590 were prohibited. Even so, the licence continued well into the Middle Ages, and still sur-¹²vives here and there in Central and Southern Europe.

D. The Persistence of the Cult.

Lucian of Samosata wrote his *Dea Syria* in the 2nd century A.D. The cult, he says, was introduced by slaves and traders into Syria from Phrygia, and by Attis himself. The goddess in Phrygia was called Rhea and Attis the Lydian was first taught the sacred mysteries of Rhea.

12. E. O. James, p. 253 f.

The ritual of the Phrygians and the Lydians and the Samothracians was entirely learnt from Attis. When Rhea deprived him of his powers, he put off his manly garb and assumed the appearance of a woman and her dress, and roaming over the whole earth he performed her mysterious rites, narrating his sufferings and chanting the praises of Rhea. In the course of his wanderings he passed also into Syria, and there he reared a temple to himself in Hierapolis. ¹³

Lucian leaves one in little doubt as to the licentious and debauched nature of the cult, equipped with its phallic symbols, eunuch-priests and ritual prostitutes, dedicated to the service of the Goddess. The worship of Atargatis as a fertility-goddess is the localized version of the Magna Mater throughout the region. In all its essential features, its priests, rites and sanctuaries differ little from the account of the worship of the Dea Syriae in the Roman world as described by Apuleius. These descriptions have been confirmed by the numismatic evidence from the time of Alexander to the third century A.D., and that of Macrobius, who wrote about A.D. 400. Thus, the local coins portray the Goddess seated on a lion or on a throne supported by a lion, while the male deity survives in his bull symbol as a counterpart of the lion-goddess on the obverse side. But sometimes the bull is shown in the grip of the lion, suggesting the ultimate triumph of the Goddess cult. Again, inscriptions in Delos, where Syrian slaves abounded and the cult was firmly established, on a number of votive inscriptions dating from just before the Christian

13. Lucian, Dea Syria, p. 55 f.

era the name of Atargatis and Hadad are combined, the Goddess being identified with Aphrodite, and her priests called Hierapolitans. Fish and doves were sacred to her, and she was said to have been changed into a fish and her daughter, Semiramis into a dove.¹⁴

Lucian and Apuleius describe the eunuchs as the most conspicuous features of the cult. The crowd of painted young men, who paraded the streets in female attire, with an ass bearing the image of the Goddess, were led by an old eunuch of dubious reputation. Under his guidance they worked themselves into a frenzy, aided by their Syrian flutes, and flagellated themselves before seeking lavish rewards from the wondering spectators. The gifts included jars of milk and wine, flour and cheeses, as well as bronze coins. Lucian regarded the orgies as having been borrowed from Attis, and an image called Ate was taken to the seashore twice each year when a procession went to bring jars of sea-water taken to the temple where water was poured into a hole in the precincts.¹⁵ So Phrygia was the reputed cradleland of the rites of the Magna Mater.

The syncretistic ecstatic cultus of the Mother of the Gods, originally indigenous in Phrygia, when subsequently it found expression in the Roman empire after the introduction of Kybele in 204 B.C., spread along the northern coast of Africa into Spain, and throughout Southern Gaul, along the Rhone valley to Aytun, into Germany and Mysia. But the highly emotional character of the orgiastic rites

14. E. O. James, p. 183 f.

15. Ibid., p. 185 f.

was considerably modified when they were given official recognition in Imperial times; in their Romanized form the story of Attis and Kybele was enacted as a sacred drama in the month of March at the Attis Spring Festival in Rome. It was presented from the 15th to the 27th of the month of March. The pattern was set down, which survived to modern times in Central and Northern Europe in folk tradition, but the date was transferred from the vernal equinox to May 1st, and carnivals were celebrated with rejoicings in the Christian era. It was then that Kybele reappeared in the guise of the May Queen with Attis as the Green Man, and the May-pole decorated with greenery as his symbol. Also the sacred pine-tree representing the emasculated god Attis was taken in procession by the dendrophori from Kybele's wood to the temple of the Magna Mater on the Palatine hill on March 22nd. Similarly, it has been a common and widespread custom in peasant Europe for youths to go out to the woods after midnight, cut down a tree, lop off the branches, leaving a few at the top, and after wrapping it round with purple bands to decorate it with violets like the figure of Attis. It was then taken back to the village at sunrise on May Day to the accompaniment of the blowing of flutes and horns, together with young trees or branches which were fastened over the doors and windows of the houses, while the May-pole was erected on the village green or in some central place, often near the church. Sometimes a doll was fixed to the tree, and carried in a basket or cradle from house to house by young girls, and decorated with flowers as the May Lady. The May-pole was often more than 60 feet high, and as Kybele was drawn in her car by a yoke of lions or oxen,

(car of Ashtarte also appears on the coins of Sidon) so the May-pole was conveyed in a wagon drawn by from 20 to 40 oxen, each adorned with garlands on the horns, followed by men and women and children, with great devotion. On its arrival at the selected spot in the village it was erected, and around it dances were held. Sometimes those taking part in them were confined to lovers, though frequently all the younger members of the community joined in the merry-making. In England long streamers are now attached to the top of the pole, each held by a child, and as they dance round it the ribbons are twined and when the dancers reverse they are untwined. These may be survivals of the bands of wool on the Attis tree. Not infrequently the May Queen herself has been taken in triumph to the village green in a decorated cart drawn by youths or maids of honour, and headed by the May-pole. After she was crowned and enthroned, the dances and revels were held before her rather than around the May-pole. Moreover, during her year of office she presided at all the gatherings and revels of the young people of the village. The May-king, who was often associated with her, was represented by a man, usually a chimney sweep, clad in a wooden framework covered with leaves in the guise of the Jack-in-the-Green. Sometimes he was taken to the village on a sledge, or on a horseback, surrounded by a cavalcade of young men. The leader might be a clown with coloured fringes and frills on his blouse, who amused the crowd by his gestures and hilarity. Sometimes the symbolism was that of a sacred wedding of the May Queen and the May King, united to each other as bride and bridegroom thereby unconsciously fulfilling the role of their prototypes, Kybele and

Attis. As Kybele was responsible for the flowering of the fields, so the May Queen sat in an arbour wreathed with flowers, or in the porch of the church, resembling Kybele seated at the entrance of her mountain abode and receiving floral offerings from her votaries. Her spouse, the Green Man, was treated in a similar manner because in him Attis, the beloved of the Goddess, lived on in undying folk tradition and its seasonal customs. Today May Day observances that have survived in the peasant cultures in Europe have lost their serious character and have become merely an occasion for merry-making and the collecting of tips from the houses visited by the processions, led by the May King and Queen and the May-pole. The principal roles now are often played by children, as, for example, in Warwickshire where the Queen is a small girl wheeled in a perambulator by an older girl. The May-pole, covered with flowers is borne by four boys, and a young girl carries a money-box as the children go from house to house singing their traditional songs and collecting money for their tea and treat in the afternoon. Nevertheless although the ancient rites have degenerated into little more than picturesque popular pastimes, clownish burlesques and children's diversions, they have retained their original figures and traits little changed through more than two thousand years during which they have persisted, however much their purposes and functions may have become desacralized. So ingrained in these customs and observances were the myth and ritual of the Phrygian Magna Mater and her consort that centred in the Spring Festival, known in Rome as the Hilaria, that the enactment of the theme has been handed down

throughout the ages. If in the meantime the annual rebirth of nature in the spring in the popular mind has become less dependent upon the performance of this ancient cultus, the May Queen and the Green Man have survived true to type in their respective roles, even though the fruitfulness of the earth may no longer be thought to rest upon the fulfilment of their time-honoured offices. Behind them and their symbol, the bedecked May-pole, are the shadowy forms of Kybele, Attis and the resurrection drama in Western Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean, and in the cultus of the Magna Mater so widely distributed and firmly laid in the Roman Empire.¹⁶

Such ideas penetrated into different countries as Frazer extensively describes in his book The Golden Bough and they form the core of the May Queen and King festivals and harvest customs. In Europe there are practices connected with cutting the last sheaf of corn which was known as the wheat mother, rye-mother or oats-mother. In the East, for instance, in the Malay Peninsula, the rice-mother and her child are represented by sheaves or bundles of ears in the harvest field. In Java the bride and bridegroom are represented by a number of ears picked by the priest, tied together, smeared with ointment and adorned with flowers. When the harvest is being carried in, they are provided with a bridal chamber in the barn. Also fertility charms to secure an adequate rainfall were practised in different countries. In Bulgaria, the corn effigy was

16. E. O. James, pp. 187 ff.

thrown into the river after it had been carried round the village. The 'gardens of Adonis' also which are small bowls of sprouting grain which the Athenian women planted with special care for eight days. These were thrown into the river to ensure rain at the time of the springing of corn.¹⁷

Later, as the missionary enterprise of the Early Church was particularly active from Apostolic times in Asia Minor, where the cult of the Magna Mater was so very deeply laid and very prominent, it is not surprising that the pagan conception of the Mother of the Gods influenced its Christian counterparts. This is most apparent among the more obscure Gnostic sects, such as the Naassenes, the Nicolaitans, the Collyridians and the Montanists, in which heretical groups the female principle was venerated.¹⁸ The cult of the Magna Mater was also well-rooted in the Roman Empire. Therefore, although the Mother-goddess cult was so fundamental in its fertility and sexual significance, nevertheless, the Romanists with modifications developed the worship of Mary among the masses, and established the Marian feasts. And so the Marian doctrine and piety emerged and developed within their own theological and historical context. To some extent their modes of expression represent the universal psychological reactions to the Great Mother archetype -

17. Fallaize, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics,
vol. VI, p. 522 f.

18. E. O. James, p. 192.

the archetypal Female - the symbolism of which in recent years has been the preoccupation of those engaged in psychoanalytical interpretation - an aspect of the phenomenon which lies outside the range of the present enquiry.¹⁹

"Such a persistent tradition surviving and reviving throughout the ages, continually undergoing innumerable transformation, accretions and abstractions, yet always retaining inherently a permanence of structure and content, can be explained only on the assumption that it has given expression to a vital element in religious experience and in the endeavour of mankind to go forth on life's pilgrimage with hope and confidence in a strenuous, precarious and often adverse environment. Its symbolism constitutes the earliest evidence available in the archaeological data of a concept of divinity with vaguely defined traits, going back to Palaeolithic times before agriculture and herding were practised and the archetypal Earth-mother or the Great goddess had emerged as a syncretistic personality. With the rise of husbandry and the development of the techniques of farming, agriculture and pastoral ways of life in their various aspects, the cult and its figures and symbols were adapted

19. Ibid., p. 202 f.

to the cultural conditions, just as with ever deepening spiritual perceptions and mysticisms in the religious consciousness they assumed corresponding qualities, attributes and modes of representation. The manifestations often may have been vastly different, but there has been no break in continuity from the earliest to the latest, the lowest to the highest attitudes to one and the same fundamental quest, be it in the material or in the spiritual sphere of operation, in which in an evolving world of human experience and understanding new modes of thought and perception, of empirical knowledge and philosophic and theological insight, were continually arising, making possible new ways of embracing reality. The factors in the process were many and various, cultural, technical, economic, social, intellectual, ethical and spiritual; but they one and all opened new vistas in which the generally benign but sometimes malign figure of the Mother-goddess in her manifold forms and phases, accretions and transformations, occupied a dominant position because she and her cult met certain of the vital needs of mankind at all times."²⁰

20. E. O. James, p. 259 f.

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