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THE TREE OF LIFE



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## CHAPTER TWO

### THE CULT OF THE SACRED TREE AND STONES

So potent was the sacred tree that in becoming the centre of a cultus its powers were manifested in its branches and foliage and extended to groves and plantations, while the trunk of the leafless tree developed into a sacred pole or post familiar in the form of *asherabs* in Semitic sanctuaries, frequently in association with sacred pillars. It was this dual cult that became so conspicuous in Minoan-Mycenaean religion as was shown by Sir Arthur Evans in his pioneer article in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* in 1901. There, as will be considered in greater detail later in this chapter, he demonstrated that in Crete and the Aegean the two cult objects were so closely related to each other that they were virtually identical in their sacredness and functions, often in conjunction with libation jugs, the double axe, horns of consecration and the worship of the Mother-goddess. Indeed, the tree of life, the water of life and the sacred pillar were the most prominent features of Minoan-Mycenaean shrines, and the three most important and widespread objects of worship in them, extending over the greater part of the Ancient Middle East, Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean, and wherever the cultural influences of this region were felt. While their precise significance and interpretation are still a matter of debate, their recurrence in a cultic *milieu* is beyond dispute as is their sacredness, either on their own account as inherently divine, or as an integral part of a sacred grove, plantation, or sanctuary, or as the embodiment of a particular deity.

#### THE COLLOCATION OF THE SACRED TREE AND THE PILLAR

✓ That in many cases it was from the sacred tree that the posts and pillars emerged is very probable. As we have seen, the tree acquired its sacredness by virtue of its vitality manifest in its powers of growth and fruitfulness, by its numinous qualities in primeval forests and groves, and its early connexions with magic plants, the water of life, the omphalos and immortality. As the divine centre and source of life, around it and from it as the cultus developed a complex worship grew up in which were incorporated an increasing number of emblems symbols and manifestations. Of these, however, the sacred posts

and pillars had pride of place, especially in the Minoan-Mycenaean scenes and in the Semitic Canaanite sanctuaries, and to a greater or less extent wherever the tree was venerated. The tree, in fact, occupied a similiar position in relation to the pillar as it did to the water of life in Mesopotamia and elsewhere, though whereas water was itself a life-bestowing agent the post and the pillar usually derived their sanctity from the tree.

Among the trees there were degrees of sacredness, importance and significance. A large widespread tree towering above all the rest, or one associated with a supreme deity like the oak of Zeus, or with outstanding figures such as the Bodhi-tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment, stood out conspicuously as a centre of worship and attracted a considerable number of votaries. This also applied to trees which had gained a reputation for mantic and healing properties. Their presence enhanced the fame and status of the sanctuary or shrine in which they were venerated, especially when they were regarded as the Tree of Life or the Tree of Knowledge equipped with unique life-giving and oracular and divinatory powers. Sometimes, as for example the Chaldaean cedar associated with Enki(Ea), both these functions and qualities were combined, while the traditional sanctity of the Tree of Life in Greece connected with Demeter, Dionysus and the ficus ruminalis on the Palatine with Romulus, was firmly established in the later cult. In Hebrew tradition the tamarisk, the terebinth, the oak and the cypress were singled out as the scene of epiphanies and theophanies, often in conjunction with *mazzeboth* and *asherim*, either as living tress or as posts or poles.

#### ASHERIM AND MAZZEBOTH IN PALESTINE

This was most conspicuous in the Canaanite 'high places', or local sanctuaries, both "before and after their adoption" by the Hebrews, and they remained part of the cult equipment in the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem down to the time of the Josiah reformation in 621 B.C. <sup>1)</sup> Sometimes *asherim* were erected under living trees, <sup>2)</sup> and so prevalent were they that originally almost every sanctuary seems to have had either a sacred tree, a grove or post as symbols of the Mother-goddess, together with *mazzeboth* in the form of obelisks or votive stelae. All these sacred objects were regarded as impregnated with divine

<sup>1)</sup> II Kings xxiii. 6.  
<sup>2)</sup> II Kings xvii. 10.

life or as the abode of an indwelling divinity, often in the case of the menhir used as an altar,<sup>1)</sup> sometimes having possibly a phallic significance in a vegetation cult. They had, however, a variety of forms and purposes, though being originally derivatives of the sacred tree they were primarily and essentially bestowers of life.

While they were regarded with extreme disfavour in the pre-exilic period in Israel and definitely prohibited in the Deuteronomic code,<sup>2)</sup> previously they appear to have been generally accepted as the normal adjunct to worship, especially in the northern kingdom.<sup>3)</sup> On at least three occasions Jacob is said to have set up *maxzeboth* and to have had numinous experiences in association with them, and Joshua erected a *gilgal*, or stone circle, to commemorate the passage across the Jordan,<sup>4)</sup> doubtless to give an Israelite interpretation to a cromlech already in existence at a local sanctuary. It was at Gilgal that Saul incurred the displeasure of Samuel and the judgment of Yahweh, as it was alleged, when he offered sacrifice there to consecrate the battle against the Philistines,<sup>5)</sup> while Samuel had himself set up a baetylic pillar, 'Eben-ezer,' to commemorate a victory.<sup>6)</sup> At Shechem the stone attributed to Jacob was named God, the god of Israel,<sup>7)</sup> and during his lifetime Absalom reared a pillar to perpetuate his memory,<sup>8)</sup> while Laban and Jacob established the boundary between their respective territories by a 'cairn of witness'.<sup>9)</sup>

#### BETHEL

It was, however, chiefly to explain the origin of Hebrew high-places that the patriarchal legends grew up around sanctuaries at Bethel, Beersheba, Hebron, Mamre, Shechem and Ophrah in terms of theophanies vouchsafed by the god of Israel to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at their sacred trees, wells and stones. Thus, they were transformed into legitimate Israelite places of worship, Yahweh having appropriated them as the god of the land and put his seal upon them, notwithstanding their having been previously occupied by

<sup>1)</sup> E. B. Gray. *Sacrifice in the Old Testament* (1925) pp. 96ff.

<sup>2)</sup> II Kings xviii. 10; Lev. xxvi. 1.

<sup>3)</sup> Ex. xxiv. 4; Hos. iii. 4; x. 1ff.; Is. xix. 19.

<sup>4)</sup> Jos. iv.

<sup>5)</sup> I. Sam. xiii. 9ff.

<sup>6)</sup> I. Sam. vii. 12.

<sup>7)</sup> Gen. xxxiii. 20.

<sup>8)</sup> II. Sam. xviii. 18.

<sup>9)</sup> Gen. xxxi. 20, 45ff

other local divinities. The foundation of the great sanctuary at Bethel, for example, was attributed to an accidental incubation there by Jacob on his way to his ancestral home at Padan-Aram. Passing the night in this ancient megalithic shrine he became the recipient of a nocturnal vision in the form of a dream, and as a result of this incubational experience he is said to have set up one of the menhirs poured oil upon the top of it, and called it Bethel, 'a house of god', the original name of the place having been Luz. <sup>1)</sup> It was, in fact, according to the story, the ritual anointing of the stone that gave rise to the sanctuary.

Excavations at the site have revealed levels dating from about 2000 B.C. to the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age I (c. 1500-1000 B.C.), with four destructions by fire in the 11th and 12th. centuries B.C. At the beginning of the second millennium B.C. (2000-1700) in the sparsely populated hill country north of Jerusalem it seems to have been a settlement before it became a well-constructed town; one of the royal Canaanite cities doubtless having its own sanctuary like Shechem, Shiloh, Gezer south east of Jaffa, Megiddo at the entrance to the plain of Esdraelon, and Lachish, the modern Tell ed-Duweir. Indeed, throughout its checkered history it was essentially a cultic centre in which bull-worship occupied a prominent position, and in the time of the Judges the Ark of the Covenant was kept there. <sup>2)</sup> In the Hebrew monarchy after the separation of the northern kingdom it became the rival of Jerusalem, <sup>3)</sup> and both Elijah and Elisha had their abode there. <sup>4)</sup> In the eighth century it was a royal sanctuary and in it the prophet Amos denounced its sacrificial worship. <sup>5)</sup> Thus, the patriarchal tradition centred in the Jacob cult-legend was maintained in order to give a Yahwistic foundation to the establishment of the sanctuary in a megalithic setting.

#### GEZER

At Gezer on the lower slope of the Judaeen hills some five miles from Ramleh, between Jerusalem and Joppa, alignments of sacred pillars of unequal size and appearance were a conspicuous feature of the shrine excavated by Macalister from 1902 to 1908, <sup>6)</sup> though the absence of a courtyard, altar or *asherah* differentiated it from the

<sup>1)</sup> Gen. xxviii. 10-22; xxxi. 13; xxxv. 13.

<sup>2)</sup> Jud. xx. 18-28.

<sup>3)</sup> I Kings xii. 31ff; xiii. 2, 32ff.

<sup>4)</sup> II Kings ii. 3, 5, 23; v. 7.

<sup>5)</sup> Amos vii. 12ff.; II. Kgs xvii. 27; xxiii. 15, 19.

<sup>6)</sup> *The Excavation of Gezer* (1912) vol. i. pp. 193ff.

normal contents of Palestinian *bamabs*, or high-places, in the open air. Even the columns are not true to type as *mazzebahs*, and may have been merely memorials of the kings of the city, <sup>1)</sup> or mortuary monuments. <sup>2)</sup> That they had a sacred significance of some kind is evident from their occurrence within the sanctuary, founded according to Macalister in the second half of the third millennium B.C., or at any rate in the Late Bronze Age (1500-1200 B.C.). If it was a mortuary shrine they may have had much the same purpose and significance as those in the temple of Dagan at Ugarit, or perhaps as the funerary stele associated with Absolom. <sup>3)</sup>

#### PETRA

On the east of the northern end of the menhirs was the entrance to two natural caverns connected with each other by a narrow passage containing a burial, though originally they were inhabited by cave-dwellers. Similarly, at Petra in the mountains of southern Transjordan north of Aqabah, cave-tombs recur excavated in the rock by the Nabataeans of Edom, clearly intended for sacrificial rites. Situated on the caravan route from Africa, South Arabia and India, Petra came under a variety of influences, oriental, Syrian, Egyptian, Greek and Roman, which were reflected in the architecture, cult-equipment and adornment of its sanctuaries, shrines and tombs. Thus, a temple excavated by Nelson Glueck in 1937 on the hill called Jebel el-Tanur, south-east of the Dead Sea, was erected on a platform facing east, with a large courtyard in front, having a combination of Greek and Semitic traditions, and dedicated to Hadad, the Syrian Storm-and Weather-god, subsequently identified with Zeus and with his female partner Artemis, as at Hierapolis its goddess Atargatis fused with Astarte shared a temple with Zeus.

The latest construction at Petra was assigned to the reign of Aretas IV (9 B.C.-40 A.D.), and below it lay earlier phases which conformed to the general pattern of ancient Palestinian sanctuaries, as in the neighbouring Edomite royal high-place erected near the summit on a ridge above the Roman amphitheatre. <sup>4)</sup> This is the best example

<sup>1)</sup> C. Watzinger, *Denkmäler Palästinas*. I. 1933. pp. 63ff Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, 3rd, ed, i. 2, pp. 423ff.

<sup>2)</sup> Graham and May, *Culture and Conscience* (1936) pp. 45ff.

<sup>3)</sup> Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (1946) p. 106.

<sup>4)</sup> G. L. Robinson, *Biblical World* 1901, p. 6; S. R. Driver, *Modern Research illustrating the Bible* (1908) pp. 61ff.

of a *bamah* in excellent preservation approached by a rock-cut stairway from several directions. It consisted of a large court 47f., in length and 20ft. in breadth where the worshippers assembled to assist at the offering of the sacrifices on the altar facing the raised platform. Above on the brow of the hill stood two menhirs about 18ft. in height and 100ft. apart, the *bamah* itself standing on an oval rock dome some 300ft. in length and 100ft. broad. <sup>1)</sup>

#### JACHIN AND BOAZ PILLARS AT THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

After David had conquered the Jebusite stronghold at Jerusalem about 1000 B.C. and made it the new capital and cultic centre of Israel, installing the Ark on Mount Zion, his son Solomon erected the temple as an adjunct to his palace on the south side of the eastern hill called Ophel with the aid of skilled Phoenician craftsmen and workmen supplied by Hiram. <sup>2)</sup> The plan conformed to the Mesopotamian 'long house' temples with vestibules, broad room, nave and adytum, and in front two bronze columns, called Jachin and Boaz, adorned with pomegranate designs and capitals, measuring it is said 12 cubits in height and 4 in diameter, rather like those in the Neolithic temples in Malta. <sup>3)</sup> In Syrian temples the columns were often at the entrance to the vestibule whereas the Chronicler says that Solomon had them erected 'before the house', one on the right and the other on the left. <sup>4)</sup> The walls were lined with Phoenician cedar wood from Lebanon and decorated with carvings of palm-trees and open flowers with lily-work on the capitals of the pillars. <sup>5)</sup>

There can be little doubt that these two free-standing columns flanking the entrance were baetylic like those in the comparable Phoenician, Syrian, Assyrian, Cypriote and Maltese temples, originating in all probability as cult-posts of the *asherah* type and stylized sacred trees, though their origin and significance remain in debate, ranging from *mazzeboth* to cressets, or fire-altars, as Robertson Smith and Albright have conjectured. <sup>6)</sup> As in Assyria on the façades of the

<sup>1)</sup> W. H. Morton, *The Biblical Archaeologist*, XIX. 1956, pp. 25ff.; P. J. Parr, *Palestine Exploration Fund. Quarterly*, 1957. pp. 15ff.; Glueck, *The Other Side of Jordan* (New Haven, 1945).

<sup>2)</sup> I. Kgs. v. 1-12; vii. 2, 8; Micah, iv. 8.

<sup>3)</sup> I. Kgs. vii. 21; viii. 15-22; II Kgs. xxv. 17; II Chron. iii. 1-5 iv. 12f; Jer. lii. 17-33. cf. Chap. II. pp. 50ff.

<sup>4)</sup> II Chron. iii. 15, 17.

<sup>5)</sup> II Chron. iii. 5; I Kgs. vii. 15ff.

<sup>6)</sup> *Syria*. XVIII. 1937, Pl. xiii.

Khorsabad temples figures holding vases containing living water were depicted, so in the temple of Solomon the Sea of Bronze seems to have had a similar purpose suggesting that the columns had fertility associations in a mythological setting, in which the Tree of Life in all probability featured, as it did in the Palestinian local high-places, whatever other purposes the sanctuaries may have served.

#### THE DJED-COLUMN IN EGYPT

In Cyprus similar terra-cotta posts have occurred showing the transition from the tree to the sacred post <sup>1)</sup> while in Egypt the oldest emblem of Osiris, the *Djed*-column, has the appearance of the pillar, either as a tree with the branches lopped off, probably a conifer, or four lotus-blossoms standing one within the other. <sup>2)</sup> If Syria was the cradleland of the Osiris cult, <sup>3)</sup> it was there that the cedar was the most venerated and venerable sacred tree, being especially an object of worship at Byblos, the Phoenician port on the Syrian coast constantly visited by Egyptian ships trading in timber felled in the forest of Lebanon.

In the myth of Osiris as recorded by Plutarch <sup>4)</sup> when he was killed by his brother Seth his body was placed in a coffer and thrown into the Nile. Floating down the river and out to sea it came ashore at Byblos. Here an Erica-tree grew up round it and enclosed in its trunk the chest containing the corpse. Eventually it was cut down by the king and made into a pillar of his house. Like Demeter at Eleusis, when the sorrowing Isis came to Byblos in her search for the body of Osiris she was taken into the royal household as nurse to the queen's child whom she tried to make immortal by burning him in the fire. Revealing her identity Isis obtained the pillar, cut it open, and wrapped the trunk in fine linen, anointing it with ointment. She then gave it to the king and queen who placed it in the temple of Isis where henceforth it was worshipped by the people of the city. Meanwhile Isis sailed away with the coffer and its sacred contents, and although the body fell into the hands of Typhon at Buto, who dismembered it into fourteen pieces which he scattered abroad, they were collected

<sup>1)</sup> Ohnefatsch-Richter, *Kypros*. Pl. xvii.

<sup>2)</sup> Schaefer; 'Dyed-Pfeiler, Lebenszeichen Osiris, Isis', *Studies presented to F. L. Griffith* (Oxford, 1932) p. 424ff.

<sup>3)</sup> Moret, *The Nile and Egyptian Civilization* (1927) p. 81. Pyramid Texts 1756.

<sup>4)</sup> *Isis et Osiris*, 8, 18. 20.



by Isis and with the help of Anubis were restored and mummified, and ultimately revived by his posthumous son Horus.

The death and resurrection of Osiris was enacted at the autumnal feast in the fourth month of the Inundation known as Khoiak, on the first day of the first month of winter, when the Nile had reached its height and the obsequies of its personification, Osiris, appropriately were celebrated. As they were depicted in the Ptolemaic inscription on the walls of the Osirian temple at Denderah in Upper Egypt north of Thebes they occupied the last eighteen days of Khoiak, opening with the ploughing and sowing ceremony on the twelfth day. From then to the twenty-first the effigy of the dead Osiris, moulded in gold in the form of a mummy, was filled with a mixture of barley and sand, wrapped in rushes, laid in a shallow basin and watered daily. On the next day (22nd.) it was exposed to the sun before sunset and sent on a mysterious voyage with images illuminated by lights on the boats until the twenty-fourth. Then it was buried in a coffin of mulberry wood and laid in a grave, the effigy of the previous year having been removed and placed in a sycamore-tree. On the thirtieth day when the inundation was due to subside and the sowing of the grain to begin, the interment of Osiris was enacted in a subterranean chamber where the effigy in its coffin was placed on a bed of sand. <sup>1)</sup> In the bas-reliefs at Denderah he is represented as the ithyphallic dead god swathed as a mummy in the act of rising from his bier and being presented with the *crux ansata*, the sign of life, and on the tomb of Kheraf at Thebes and elsewhere the *Djed*-column is shown in process of being set up by the Pharaoh with the help of the high-priest of Memphis as a symbol of the renewal of vegetation at the approach of winter. <sup>2)</sup> At Abydos, the reputed home of the body of Osiris, Seti I and Isis are portrayed raising between them the pillar swathed in a cloth, <sup>3)</sup> while on the Denderah inscription it is said to have been erected in Busiris on 'the day of the interment of Osiris'. <sup>4)</sup>

The *Djed*-column unquestionably was a very ancient symbol of Osiris at Memphis before it was associated with Ptah there, or became

<sup>1)</sup> Brugsche, *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Alterthumskunde*. XIX. 1881. 71ff; Murray, *The Osireion at Abydos* (1902) pp. 27ff.

<sup>2)</sup> Brugsch, *Thesaurus*, V. 1891, p. 1190.

<sup>3)</sup> Murray *op. cit.* p. 28.

<sup>4)</sup> Brugsch, *Matériaux pour servir à la reconstruction du calendrier*, Pl. 9. *Recueil de Travaux relatifs*, vol. IV. 1882. pp. 32ff

the backbone of Osiris buried at Busiris. The probability is that originally it was a sacred tree devoid of its branches, and that its ceremonial raising at the autumnal festival indicated his restoration from the grave at 'the Season of Coming Forth' when the fructifying waters of the Nile were beginning their annual renewal of the soil and its products.<sup>1)</sup> Thus, notwithstanding the fact that he was regarded as the dead king, his mummy was portrayed in the Ptolemaic temple of Isis at Philae with stalks of wheat watered by a priest from a pitcher to symbolize the sprouting grain in the fields, just as Osirian figures of earth containing germinating seeds were watered for a week and placed in tombs in the Eighteenth Dynasty to give life to the dead.<sup>2)</sup>

Therefore, the *Djed*-column as the personification of Osiris and its cultic setting was comparable to the Tree of Life and its symbolism interpreted in terms of the rise and fall of the Nile and the annual renewal of nature. There is no reason to doubt that from the beginning it was associated with Osiris, probably before it took up its abode in the eastern Delta from Syria. It may be that it derived its name from the ensign of Busiris known as *Dedw*, the Egyptian word for town being *n.t.*, or in the feminine *dd*, Osiris being 'Lord of *Dd t*', and the town 'the house of Osiris', and the sacred pillar the *Djed* as his symbol and embodiment.<sup>3)</sup> Represented as the bare trunk of a tree stripped of its leaves the pillar might well be interpreted as the backbone of Osiris and its raising on New Year's eve the enactment of his resurrection. So closely was it associated with him, in fact, that it became the hieroglyphic symbol for his name.

#### SACRED TREES IN EGYPT

Although Osiris seems to have been the only Egyptian god who had a cultic post as his emblem or embodiment, in late temples each nome had one or more sacred trees, particularly sycomores, acacias and date-palms, in which a divinity dwelt, planted often in cemeteries near deep wells or pools, filled with earth from alluvium of the inundation in which the plants were grown.<sup>4)</sup> At El Amarna in the palace and the houses of the wealthy the wooden pillars were carved in the

<sup>1)</sup> Sethe, *Urkunden des aegyptischen Altertums* (Leipzig, 1908) IV. pp. 134ff.

<sup>2)</sup> Gardiner and Davies, *The Tomb of Amenemhet* (1915) p. 115.

<sup>3)</sup> Moret, *The Nile and Egyptian Civilization*, p. 80; Mercer, *The Religion of Ancient Egypt*, pp. 107.

<sup>4)</sup> Brugsch, *Dictionnaire géographique*, (Leipzig, 1879) p. 1358f.; Kees, *Der Gotterglaube im alten Aegypten* pl. 13a.

form of trunks of palm-trees, sometimes overlaid with coloured or gilded plaster. <sup>1)</sup> In a Nineteenth Dynasty stele of Tehuti-Hetep and Kayay is the representation of a goddess giving food and water to a man and woman kneeling before her. The tree has horizontal bands round the stem and stands in a cup-shaped depression into which the water fell when it was watered, as is shown by the goddess, bearing the name of Isis, holding a vase in her right hand from which four streams of water issued. On her left hand is a tray of food. Behind her is a small figure of a man with a shaven head carrying a papyrus-stem in his left hand. Above her 'Hathor Lady of the West' is depicted as the mistress of the sycamore and at the back is an inscription 'she gives water as is right'. <sup>2)</sup>

Hathor and Nut dwelt in the great tree of heaven and supplied the souls of the dead with celestial food while Nut appears in a vignette of the Book of the Dead in a sycamore. <sup>3)</sup> The olive-tree was the abode of Horus and the date-palm that of Nut designed on a Nineteenth Dynasty relief with human arms and breasts holding a jar from which two streams of water emerge and a tray of food. <sup>4)</sup> At Heliopolis the *Ished* tree of life arose when Re, the Sun-god, first appeared, and on its leaves the names and years of the Pharaoh in the new solar line were inscribed as their annals, <sup>5)</sup> while on the eastern edge of the world in the Fields of Reeds of the Blessed two sycomores from Turkis stood between which Re set forth on his course across the horizon. <sup>6)</sup> It was as the Lady of the Sycamore Tree growing on the edge of a stream that she was regarded as welcoming every new arrival in paradise from her beautiful and shady tree in the foliage of which she was half-hidden holding out to them food and water. On earth 'bouquets of life' were distributed in the New Kingdom from the *ished*-tree as tokens of the blessing and good wishes of the god of the locality from which they came. In the case of kings they might be bestowed on the anniversary of the coronation or on other festivals.

<sup>1)</sup> Petrie, *Tell el Amarna* (1894) pl. 6.

<sup>2)</sup> Murray, *Ancient Egypt* (1917) pp. 64. pl. 65; Petrie, *Ancient Egypt* (1914) p. 17. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* (Chicago, 1906), 71. par. 165.

<sup>3)</sup> Budge, *The Book of the Dead*, chaps. lii, lxiii. 4. lxviii, lxxxii. 71 III. pl. xvi.

<sup>4)</sup> Jeremias, *Das alte testament im Lichte des alten Orients* (Leipzig, 1930) pp. 90ff. Fig. 26.

<sup>5)</sup> *The Book of the Dead*, chap. xvii.

<sup>6)</sup> *op.cit.* chap. cix.

## THE ASSYRIAN SACRED TREE

In Babylonia and Assyria, again, the sacred tree, notably the date-palm, was the source of life and from its branches and leaves radiated its mystic power and virtue. Being the abode of the god the tree often portrayed the deity in anthropomorphic form with branches protruding from his body. The frequent occurrence in Mesopotamia, Palestine, Syria and the Aegean of two animals flanking a tree or plant probably has a symbolical fertility significance, but this has become apparent when, as on several Assyrian seals of the thirteenth century B.C., an artificial tree is the central feature of a rite. <sup>1)</sup> As at Khorsabad, to which reference has been made, ornamented cedar trunks stood on either side of the entrance of the temple <sup>2)</sup> and at the New Year Festival at Assur a bare tree-trunk round which bare bands or 'yokes' had been fastened and fillets attached. This, as Sidney Smith says, was 'a ritual act intended to promote the revival of nature in the New Year.' <sup>3)</sup>, comparable to that connected with the *asherah* in Syria and Palestine, whence it may have been introduced into Assyria, and also with the *Djed*-column in Egypt.

In Assyria the sacred tree treated in this ritual manner was associated with the god Ashur and his solar symbol the winged disk, the counterpart of Marduk in Babylon in the *Enuma eleish*. Therefore, like Osiris in Egypt, he was a dying and reviving god whose restoration to life at the New Year was enacted in the customary ritual and its emblems. The *Djed*-pillar and the ornamental Assyrian tree, indeed, may have had a common origin. Thus, the god portrayed in the winged disk is shown hovering over a tree in scenes illustrating the Assyrian Annual Festival, and on Assyrian cylinder seals, while the metal bands recur round the tree of Ashur and the Osirian *Djed*-column, pointing perhaps, as Sidney Smith suggests, to the equation of the two gods and their myth and ritual in their respective river valleys. <sup>4)</sup> If this were so, the cradleland must be sought in the west, and Byblos as the Osirian centre undoubtedly has claims to have been the original home; it is by no means improbable that it was around a sacred tree-trunk or pole that the common cultus arose.

<sup>1)</sup> Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals* (1939) pl. xxxiid.; xxxiiia.

<sup>2)</sup> Loud, *Khorsabad*. I. pp. 97, 104ff. Fig. 99. 111f

<sup>3)</sup> S. Smith, *Early History of Assyria* (1928) p. 123.

<sup>4)</sup> S. Smith, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*. VIII. 1922, pp. 43ff.

## THE PILLAR BAETYLIC

On Mitanni seals of the second millennium B.C. the Syrian and Egyptian features recur in the ritual scenes, together with the winged disk, sometimes supported by a sacred pillar or as an ornamental pole having an Indo-European cosmic significance and designated the 'pillar of heaven'.<sup>1)</sup> The outstretched wings supported on one or two pillars became a detached sacred tree in northern Syria and Ashur, the cosmic element having been eliminated when it was transformed into an *asherah*, although the winged disk continued to symbolize the sky left without its supporting columns. Posts, however, often were surmounted by a celestial or solar symbol, or that of the deity in some aspect. Gods conceived anthropomorphically not infrequently have been worshipped in relation to a baetyl, as, for example, in India where Shiva and Vishnu were pictured in quasi human shape though for cult purposes they were venerated aniconically in a phallic emblem or a *salagraamma* stone annually wedded to the tulsi (basil) plant as the embodiment of various deities (e.g. Vishnu and his consorts Lakshmi, Sita, Rukmini). From it Visvakarman, the creator of the universe fashioned heaven and earth, and in it Vishnu resides as does Shiva in the *linga*, though as a cult object it has been less prominent in the temples than the *linga* and *yoni*, and distinct from phallic symbols in general.

The immediate affinity of the baetylic pillar being with the Semitic *mazzebah* and *asherah* and, therefore, with the sacred tree, it is in this context that it has to be interpreted. While it may have had a phallic significance on occasions as a result of its intimate association with fertility rites, myths and festivals, nevertheless, as the life emblem *par excellence* it acquired a variety of connexions, conventionalizations, and purposes, ranging from those concerned with fecundity to the omphalos and the cosmic pillar. Thus, in its Indo-European guise the sacred tree, as we have seen,<sup>2)</sup> was very intimately associated with the Goddess cult from its appearance on the seals of Western Asia and the Harappa civilization to its later saivistic manifestations in Saktism. In Vedic India it was also conspicuous in the sacrificial posts in front of altars to which victims were bound, and which apparently were addressed as trees,<sup>3)</sup> or 'lord of the forest' (*vanaspati*), 'the pillar of

<sup>1)</sup> Frankfort, *op. cit.* pl. xliia and e, li(k).

<sup>2)</sup> Chap. I, pp. 22f

<sup>3)</sup> Rig veda I. 13. 11; V. 8. 10.

... the reeds of the river Sangarius in Phrygia. A  
... (the 22nd. of March) a sacred pine-tree was taken to  
... the temple by *dendrophori* under which Attis was alleged to  
... mutilated himself. His body, represented by a pine, was wrapped  
... in linen, garlanded with violets, said to have sprung from his blood,  
... and, therefore, duly venerated. After a day of mourning on the  
*Dies Sanguis* (24th.) when originally the neophytes castrated themsel-  
... ves, sorrow was turned into joy at the dawn of the following day with  
... the announcement that the god had risen, and 'after toils we also  
... shall find salvation.' The Hilaria was then celebrated with feasting,  
... merriment and saturnalian licence. <sup>1)</sup>

In this crude Easter drama with its life-giving tree symbolism the restoration of the Young god in all probability was regarded as the earnest of the resurrection of those who shared in his triumph over death. This is suggested both by the cult-legend and its ritual and the concluding words at the end of the *Dies Sanguis*. Attis was, in fact, essentially a tree-god embodied in the sacred pine whose death and resurrection were celebrated and enacted at the spring festival with the appropriate symbolism. In the Empire, however, he acquired a celestial and solar status and significance, but whether his tree imagery was retained in association with the happy afterlife his initiates hoped to enjoy cannot be determined in the absence of evidence on this aspect of the cult. Nevertheless, the Tree of Life theme was so fundamental in the background of the Mysteries of Attis, as in that of the Isaic, that those who had become so closely identified with the death and resurrection of the god may well have expected hereafter to be recipients of his regenerative gift of life immortal in the fields of Elysium, whatever precise form they may have thought they would take.

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<sup>1)</sup> Graillot, *Le Culte de Cybèle* (Paris, 1912) pp. 131; Arnobius, *Adversus Gentes*, V. 7, 16, 39, 167f.; Julian, *Orat*, V: 1680; Hepding, *Attis, seine Mythen und sein Kult* (Giessen, 1903) pp. 86, 92f. Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanarum religionum*, 227.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE TREE OF LIFE AND THE SACRAL KINGSHIP

As in paradise the Tree of Life was a central feature often carefully protected by supernatural beings, so on earth the sacral king not infrequently assumed the role of its guardian and priest. The king of Tyre, as we have seen, occupied this position as the priest-prophet of the Phoenician Garden of God, and exercised his functions accordingly, until iniquity was found in him, and having incurred divine wrath he was 'brought to ashes upon the earth'. Normally, however, the sacral king in the ancient Near East and the Fertile Crescent stood in such an intimate relationship with the gods that he was virtually, or, as in Egypt actually divine; or, as in Mesopotamia, the 'tenant farmer' responsible to the god for the use of the god's land, the administration of the community, and the right ordering of all things within his domain. In these capacities he was much more limited as a consolidating dynamic focus than was the Pharaoh in the Nile valley who was the official intermediary between the nation and its deities himself being regarded as the living embodiment of the gods he incarnated.

#### THE DIVINITY OF THE PHARAOH IN EGYPT

The Predynastic king Scorpion, who probably preceded the traditional founder of the Dynasty, Menes, about 3200 B.C., was thought to have inherited the divine attributes of the Sky-god Horus when his worshippers in the north conquered Upper Egypt and their rulers reigned as Horus kings with Edfu (Behdet) as the cult centre. Then Horus the Behdetite became the divine ancestor of the royal line and bestowed his own Horus name on the Pharaohs who embodied his nature. <sup>1)</sup> This, however, was only one source of Pharaonic divinity. When under the influence of the Heliopolitan priesthood the king became the son of the Sun-god Re, who was identified with Atum the self-existent Creator existing alone before the birth of the gods, <sup>1)</sup> the kingship acquired creative functions beyond human control. This was further enhanced when at death kings became Osiris, the lord

<sup>1)</sup> *Book of the Dead*, chap. xvii.

<sup>2)</sup> *P.T.* 1466b-d.

of the underworld, who was equated with the Nile and was manifest in the vegetation that came forth from the earth. Both from his own body and from the mummy of the deceased Pharaoh grain was represented as sprouting, personifying the resurgence of vitality, because in Egypt the kingship was the epitome of all that was divine and, therefore, the principle life-giving agent and instrument on earth as the centre of vitality.

Thus, after the incorporation of the Osiris myth in the solar cultus in the Sixth Dynasty every Pharaoh became at once Horus the Elder, the son of Re, and from the Osirian standpoint he reigned as Horus the posthumous son of Osiris. Moreover, Memphis its god Ptah, who was the creative power in the earth bringing all things into being by his divine utterance and thought, was also proclaimed in Upper Egypt as 'the King of the Two Lands', and for more than three thousand years the coronation was held there under the auspices of Ptah.<sup>1)</sup> It was he who installed the kings on the throne, and from him they also derived their attributes and functions.

With such a complex personality the Pharaoh constituted the totality of divinity on earth, in heaven and in the underworld, Horus, Re, Osiris and Ptah all having been represented as the first rulers in Egypt. To that extent the Pharaoh was the image of them all. He reigned as 'the shepherd of the land keeping the people alive', co-ordinating the natural and social forces under his control for the well-being of mankind, maintaining the divine order of society and championing justice (*Maat*), of which he was the source. In short, as was declared on the tomb of Rekhmi-Re, a vizier at Thebes in the Eighteenth Dynasty, 'the King of Upper and Lower Egypt is a god by whose dealings one lives, the father and mother of all men alone by himself, without equal.'<sup>2)</sup>

He was, in fact, the embodiment of the various manifestations and syncretisms of all the gods he incarnated. These included in addition to those already mentioned, Khnum, the 'fashioner of men' and 'maker of the gods', Bast, the solar goddess who protected the Two Land, Sekhmet the wife of Ptah, representing the destructive powers of the sun, and Thoth the god of wisdom, omniscient and the 'goodly shepherd watchful for all mankind whom their maker has placed under

<sup>1)</sup> Cf. Sethe, *Dramatische Texte zu altaegyptischen Mysterienspielen* (Leipzig, 1928) Frankfurt, *Kingship and the Gods*, pp. 25ff.

<sup>2)</sup> N de Garis Davies, *The Tomb of Rekh-mi-Re at Thebes* (New York, 1943). Pl. xi. 18; A.H. Gardiner, *Zeitschrift für aegyptische Sprache* (Leipzig, 1943) 60. p. 69.



his supervision,' giving food in abundance, creating and sustaining the entire land.<sup>1)</sup> Occupying such a unique position he fulfilled a role in the Nile valley comparable to that of the guardian of paradise and the Tree of Life in their various locations. He too was the connecting link between the earthly kingdom, the celestial and the underworld, the dispenser of life, health and prosperity, exercising control over natural forces and vegetation, and after death having power over the Nile, symbolized in the raising of the *Djed* column which, as we have seen, was an emblem of the Tree of Life,<sup>2)</sup> so intimately associated with the resurrection of Osiris, the inundation, the growing grain, and the fertility of the soil. In all these beneficent operations he was giving expression to the mysterious powers which the Tree of Life embodied and symbolized. For the Egyptians he was the bond between themselves, the natural order and its processes, and the gods, in striking contrast to the Mesopotamian king who never assumed or was accorded these functions and attributes.

#### THE KINGSHIP IN MESOPOTAMIA

Geographically and climatically Mesopotamia being so very different from the Nile valley it did not lend itself to a stable social structure unified under a single ruler exercising absolute divine sovereignty as the dynamic centre of the nation. The devastating drought in summer, the torrential rainfall and floods in winter and the uncertain behaviour of the Tigris and Euphrates fostered the formation of small city-states loosely bound together to meet recurrent emergencies under a secular ruler bearing the title of *lugal* (i.e. 'great man') and a high-priest (*sangu mah*), together with a local governor (*ensi*), jointly responsible for the conduct of civil, religious, military, economic and social affairs. In this organization the position of the king was not very clearly defined or exclusively maintained. In addition to the administration of the realm however, he was concerned with quasi-priestly functions, representing his subjects before the gods and interpreting their will. He appointed the high priest both in the gods and interpreting their will. He appointed the high-priest both in the Early Dynastic and Assyrian periods, and himself assumed the title and office of priest (*sangu*).<sup>3)</sup> In the King-Lists

<sup>1)</sup> Seth *op. cit.* IV. 1074.

<sup>2)</sup> Chap. II. pp. 38ff.

<sup>3)</sup> Labat, *Le caractère religieux de la Royauté Assyro-Babylonienne* (Paris. 1993) p. 132f.

the kingship is said to have 'descended from heaven' before the Flood in the third millennium B.C., and to have been bestowed by Enlil upon his city and cult-centre Nippur, though it never became the Dynastic capital in spite of the prestige it acquired from the Storm-god as the second highest of the deities in the Sumerian Triad.

It was not, in fact, until Hammurabi made Babylon the capital of southern Mesopotamia at the beginning of the second millennium, and the administrative functions of Enlil were transferred to its god Marduk, who had been declared head of the pantheon by Anu and Enlil, that a Babylonian monarch was entrusted by divine decree with supreme executive authority in Sumer and Akkad. <sup>1)</sup> But neither Enlil nor Marduk occupied the position in Mesopotamia that Osiris and Re held in the Nile valley, and Hammurabi and his successors never were comparable to the Egyptian Pharaohs as divine rulers. Marduk was not the creator and source of all the other gods like Re and Ptah, engaging in creative activities as the demiurge, and it now appears that even his long established Tammuz role is open to question. <sup>2)</sup>

As the hero of the Creation Epic Marduk was accorded supremacy in the pantheon as a reward for his victory over Tiamat and the powers of Chaos. This carried with it control over the processes of 'the creator of the grain and the plants, causing the grass to spring up', giving to the kingship its sacred character and significance. At the Annual Festival at Babylon on the ninth day of Nisan, after his reinstatement on the throne by the high-priest the king went in a triumphal procession to the Bit Akitu, the 'House of the New Year's Feast', in commemoration of the victory of Marduk and the gods over Tiamat and Chaos on the eve of creation. Holding the sceptre in his hand he proceeded to the great hall in the outskirts of the city across the Euphrates 'grasping the hand of the great lord Marduk', to receive a fresh outpouring of divine power. On its copper doors Sennacherib caused his own figure to be engraved in the chariot of Ashur, the Assyrian form of Marduk, in the representation of the conquest of the forces of evil in the primeval battle. <sup>3)</sup> Although exactly what took place is not recorded in the extant texts, there can be little doubt that it was this conflict that was ritually enacted, presumably by the king

<sup>1)</sup> Harper, *Code of Hammurabi* (1904) p. 3.

<sup>2)</sup> Gurney, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, vol. 7. no. 2. 1962. pp. 150ff

<sup>3)</sup> Zimmern, 'Zum babylonischen Neujahrsfest.' *Der Alte Orient*. xxv. 1926. p. 18.

in the role of Ashur (i.e. Marduk), Sennacherib describing himself in the design as 'the victorious prince standing in Ashur's chariot.'

The victory of Marduk having been duly celebrated a return was made to the Esagila on the tenth day of Nisan. There it is very likely a sacred marriage was enacted by the king and queen (or a priestess), apparently in a chamber decorated with greenery called *gigumu* Ninlil, the wife of Enlil, being known as 'she of the *gigumu*')<sup>1)</sup> and described as 'the seat of joy'<sup>2)</sup> situated in one of the stages in the ziqqer, or at any rate somewhere in the temple campus. The purpose of the union was the restoration of the fertility of the soil and its crops, of the flocks and herds and of man, after the period of aridity; the Bit Akitu where the *rites de passage* were performed being appropriately equipped with carefully watered extensive gardens surrounding the large cella.

Even if it be granted, as von Soden recently has contended, that Zimmern's Berlin Assyrian text<sup>3)</sup> does not refer to the death and resurrection of Marduk,<sup>4)</sup> the sacred marriage remains as an integral part of the festival. This goes back to the Sumerian celebration of the renewal of vegetation in the New Year by the marriage of Inanna (the counterpart of the Assyrian Ishtar) with the king of Isin, Iddin-Dagon, identified with Dumuzi, the shepherd-king, who incarnated the creative powers of spring, thereby arousing the vital forces in the dormant soil.<sup>5)</sup> These nuptials were held annually at the spring festival at Isin by the king who thereby played the role of the Young god as the husband of the Goddess, and all that this signified for the fecundity of the earth and its products at the spring equinox, whether of not his death was involved in the revival of nature

#### THE TREE OF LIFE ON MESOPOTAMIAN SEAL CYLINDERS

That Marduk and Ashur represented the hero of the fight with Tiamat is also beyond question in the later mythology, and on Assyrian cylinder seals and slabs from the palace of Ashurbanipal at Nimrud Ashur is frequently represented sitting in a winged disk and hovering over a tree.<sup>6)</sup> Around the trunk are bands of metal, as in many other

<sup>1)</sup> Cf. F. Nötscher, *Enlil in Sumer und Akkad* (Hanover, 1927) pp. 19f.

<sup>2)</sup> S. Smith, J.R.A.S. 1928. p. 850.

<sup>3)</sup> *Der Babylonische Gott Tammuz* (1909)

<sup>4)</sup> Gibt es ein Zeugnis dafür, daß die Babylonier an die Wiederaufstehung Marduks glaubten. *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* N.F. xvii. pp. 130ff.

<sup>5)</sup> Chiera, *Sumerian Religious Texts* No. 1.R.A. XLIV. 51-71; Soden *Sumerische Hymnen und Gebete*, (Stuttgart, 1953) pp. 90ff.

<sup>6)</sup> S. Smith J.E.A. VIII. 1922, pp. 43.

ichthyomorphic representations of gods half fish and half human.<sup>1)</sup> But everywhere, including the references to 'Dagon' in the Old Testament, he is assigned agricultural functions primarily concerned with the protection of the crops. Thus, when he was adopted by the non-Semitic Philistines as the god of Ashdod after their settlement in Palestine, his image is said to have been smitten by Yahweh when the Ark of the Covenant was lodged beside it in his temple there, and the crops were destroyed by a plague of mice, the god of Israel thereby attacking Dagan in his own domain.<sup>2)</sup>

From northern Palestine his worship spread to the south<sup>3)</sup> where it was taken over by the Philistines, and at Gaza games were held in his honour.<sup>4)</sup> But although he found a place in many pantheons in Western Asia it was especially among the Phoenicians and Canaanites, that he became a prominent figure in the Ugaritic cult legend and in all probability in the seasonal drama. His temple at Ras Shamra was prior to that of Baal, but, nevertheless, it does not appear to have been constructed for the performance of a public ritual comparable to that of the more virile Young Storm god Aleyan Baal. However, they both were essentially vegetation deities, and in their cultus in the Palestinian groves and high places, their designations and symbolism were so identical as to be inseparable. When a stele was set up to Dagan frequently he was addressed as Baal, and *vice versa*. As their functions coincided in relation to the perennial conflict between drought and sterility, and their assumption of the sacral kingship, the Tree of Life theme and its iconography were common to them both.

In the early days of the Hebrew settlement in Palestine this composite cult was readily assimilated, often with little or no adaptation, and was one of the primary reasons for the mono-Yahwist suspicion of and opposition to the institution of the monarchy. In his origin and traditional background Yahweh was essentially a desert deity rather than an agricultural vegetation god like Baal, Dagan, Hadad or Ramman, and their Mesopotamian and Egyptian counterparts. Therefore, when the Israelites established themselves in Canaan an almost inevitable conflict arose between the nomadic and the sedentary traditions and their respective cultus. Even before the monarchy

<sup>1)</sup> Wright, *The Pottery of Palestine from the Earliest Times to the end of the Bronze Age* (1937) p. 137; Jud. xvi; I Sam. v. 4.

<sup>2)</sup> I. Sam. v. 1-21

<sup>3)</sup> Jos. xix. 27; xv. 41.

<sup>4)</sup> Jud. xvi. 23-30

under Saul and his successors was set up in the tenth century B.C. Gideon in the turbulent days of the Judges had succeeded to a kind of hereditary kingship at Ophrah in the hill-country of Manasseh. <sup>1)</sup> The success of the local shrine he created there in place of that of the altar of Baal and its Asherah show that Yahweh had begun to make progress in Israelite Palestine in the previous century, though the indigenous vegetation myth and ritual were much too firmly rooted to be eradicated by an alien intrusion from the desert. Nor, indeed, was it by any means unacceptable to a considerable section among the invading or already settled Hebrew tribes.

If Yahweh was never a vegetation god, when Palestine officially became his land as the national deity he had to exercise much the same functions as the Canaanite divinities and their cults in the control of rain and fertility, as is shown by the Carmel conflict, <sup>2)</sup> and the manner in which the occurrence of the various theophanies are described, at sacred trees, springs and menhirs, on Horeb the Mount of God, and in ancient Canaanite sanctuaries like Bethel and Shechem. His sovereignty over nature and human affairs is represented as going back behind the monarchy to the Patriarchal period and its cult-legends. After the Exodus this was intensified when the might of Yahweh became the consolidating dynamic of the desert Hebrew tribes under the leadership of Moses, the traditional founder of Yahwism, as it found expression in due course in the ethical monotheism of the prophets and post-exilic Judaism. Moses, in fact, is depicted as combining the offices and functions of a quasi sacral king, being at once the cult leader, the ritual expert, the lawgiver and the ruler, endowed with supernatural power and the recipient of special divine self-disclosures. <sup>3)</sup> In these several capacities he was enabled to have direct intercourse with Yahweh at special times and places in a more intimate manner than was possible in the case of the ordinary prophetic instrument of the divine will.

#### THE ROD OF MOSES AND AARON

Moreover, like so many sacral kings he and the enigmatical Aaron are said to have exercised their functions with the aid of a 'sceptre' in the form of a rod which they were commanded by Yahweh to hold

<sup>1)</sup> Jud. vi. 25ff.

<sup>2)</sup> Chap. I. pp. 19f.

<sup>3)</sup> Ex, iii. 10f; iv. 2, 16; xviii. 12; xxv. 22; xxiii. 11, Dt, xxiii. 15.; Num. v. 3. vii, 89; xi. 25ff.; xii. 6ff.

In their hands when they performed their signs before Pharaoh. <sup>1)</sup> That this was regarded as a normal magical instrument is clear from the fact that the Egyptian magicians did the same as Moses in turning the rod into a serpent and back again into a rod. Both displayed as it were their credentials of being equipped with a cult-object endowed with supernatural powers which incidentally were closely associated with serpent magic, and, therefore, with the Hebrew Eden story as well as with the snake magic so prevalent in Egypt. Indeed, in later Judaeo-Christian tradition the rod of Moses became a branch of the Tree of Knowledge which Adam and Eve took with them when they were expelled from the garden, and was passed on to Noah and Abraham until eventually it came into the possession of Moses from his father-in-law Jethro.

The rod of Aaron, generally regarded as a rod of the almond-tree (i.e. the Hebrew *shakeab*, 'to watch': the 'tree of watchfulness') symbolizing the authority of the priesthood and of the sacred oracle under its care, as the messengers of Yahweh, <sup>2)</sup> and the harbingers of the light of the presence of God. <sup>3)</sup> It was the rod of the priestly tribe of Levi bearing Aaron's name which was alleged to have budded, blossomed and formed ripening almonds as a sign of the tribe having been selected by Yahweh to be the exclusive possessors of the priestly office. <sup>4)</sup> As a token of this divine choice the rod was replaced in its former position before the Ark. Whether this originally was identical with that of Moses is a matter of conjecture, <sup>5)</sup> but in any case in the present narrative both of them are assigned the same nature and properties pertaining directly or indirectly to those of the Tree of Life.

That they were branches or twigs of *living* trees is indicated by their being regarded as blossoming or becoming transformed into a snake. As a cult-object an artificial serpent set on a pole called *Nehustan* attributed to Moses continued to be venerated and to receive offerings until the eighth century B.C. <sup>6)</sup> because of its alleged healing and fertility powers. Whether the Mosaic story occurred in the JE narrative in the first instance or was a later interpolation is still in debate. Re-

<sup>1)</sup> Ex. iv. 2-9; vii. 8-13.

<sup>2)</sup> Mal. ii. 7. cf. Jer. i, 12.

<sup>3)</sup> Eccles. xii. 5f.

<sup>4)</sup> Num. xvii, 1-13.

<sup>5)</sup> Gressmann, *Mose und seine Zeit*, p. 280.

<sup>6)</sup> II. Kings xviii. 4; Num. xxi. 4-9

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presentations of a bronze serpent found at Gezer, Beth-shan and Taanach show that this cult was established in pre-Israelite Canaan. <sup>1)</sup> That it persisted in Israel is clear from the recurrence of the worship of Nehustan in Solomon's temple together with designs of palm-trees and cherubim on posts of olive-trees until it was destroyed by Hezekiah <sup>2)</sup> on account of its having been a Canaanite cult-object with idolatrous intent- probably a Jebusite symbol taken over by the Israelites when David captured Jerusalem. Its alleged Mosaic origin may have been introduced to justify its place in the Temple and in the Yahwistic cultus until eventually the story was allegorized by Philo, <sup>3)</sup> and given a typological significance in the Fourth Gospel in relation to the Tree of the Cross. <sup>4)</sup>

This is hardly surprising as from Eden to Calvary the serpent, the Tree of Life and the Kingship have been in such close conjunction in Judaeo-Christian Messianic theology and iconography. In the paradise lost and regained theme this has been a recurrent feature in which the figure of the dying and reviving god personified in the sacral king has been predominant, inherited very largely from its Mesopotamian and Egyptian background. In Israel it assumed a character of its Mesopotamian and Egyptian background. In Israel it assumed a character of its own because the bond between the nation and its god was dependent upon the observance of the covenant (*berith* or cultus) established with the house of David, who was regarded as the anointed son and servant of Yahweh. <sup>5)</sup> This gave him and his successor the status of sacred persons, and like Moses cult-leaders exercising priestly functions. Thus, David wore an ephod and danced ecstatically before the Ark when it was installed on Mount Zion. <sup>6)</sup> There he took over the priesthood of the god Zadok and Nathan as his *kohen* and *nabi* respectively. His son Solomon was called the son of Yahweh <sup>7)</sup> and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings three times annually on the altar of Yahweh in the Temple. <sup>8)</sup> But the Davidic covenant had a wider significance than the monarchy and was independent of the throne. This differentiated the Hebrew kingship

<sup>1)</sup> Cooke, *The Religion of Ancient Palestine in the light of Archaeology*. (1930) p. 98f.

<sup>2)</sup> I. Kings vi. 32-35; II Kings xviii. 4.

<sup>3)</sup> *De Allegro*, ii. 20.

<sup>4)</sup> St. Jn. iii. 14.

<sup>5)</sup> I. Kings xi. 36; Ps. lxxxix. 3ff.

<sup>6)</sup> II. Sam. vi. 14.

<sup>7)</sup> II Sam. vii. 14.

<sup>8)</sup> I. Kings ix. 25.

from that elsewhere in the ancient Near East and the Fertile Crescent. In Israel the king ruled only by divine permission and the will of his subjects, the Sinaitic covenant being thought to have been prior to the monarchy going back to the Mosaic confederacy in the desert and to its Abrahamic prototype. Indeed, as has been indicated, the institution was regarded with the gravest suspicion by the pre-exilic prophets both as an affront to Yahweh and because of its antecedents in the Canaanite cultus.<sup>1)</sup> Therefore, it lacked the stability as a unifying centre which the throne exercised in Egypt.

#### THE DAVIDIC KING A BRANCH OF YAHWEH

It was not until after the Exile when the Davidic King acquired a Messianic significance as 'the firstborn of many brethren walking in meakness and righteousness'<sup>2)</sup> that it formed the basis of the conception of the ideal ruler. Then the traditional covenant with Abraham ratified at Sinai and renewed with the House of David was interpreted in terms of a Messiah (*mashiakh*) and applied to kings, priests and rulers like Cyrus the Persian, Zerubbabel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak and Simon Maccabaeus. Jeremiah had foretold the rule of such a Saviour-King who would execute judgment and righteousness of the earth as the righteous shoot of David reigning as king-<sup>3)</sup> a title applied to the heir apparent of the king of Sidon.<sup>4)</sup> At length the office was given an eschatological connotation under the name of Melchizedek (*sedek* 'righteousness', and 'prosperity')<sup>5)</sup>. The mystical occupant was regarded as enthroned in triumph eternally on Mount Zion as the vicegerent of Yahweh, 'having neither beginning nor end of life'.<sup>6)</sup>

Zerubbabel having Davidic descent, on becoming governor of Jerusalem in 520 B.C. was, in fact, hailed as the deputy of Yahweh and occupied a position in the cultus comparable to that assigned to 'the Prince' by Ezekiel and his successors.<sup>7)</sup> When his mission came to an end the hierarchic organization was developed around the high-priest who became the guardian of the Temple and its worship as the

<sup>1)</sup> Hos. ii. 3-5; x. 9; xiii. 9-11; I Sam. viii. 7; x. 19.

<sup>2)</sup> Ps. lxxxix. 26f.

<sup>3)</sup> Jer. xxiii. 5; xxxiii. 15.

<sup>4)</sup> G. A. Cooke, *Text-book of North-Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford, 1903) pp. 83, 86.

<sup>5)</sup> *Test. Levi*. viii. 14; xviii. (2-14).

<sup>6)</sup> Heb. vii. 13; cf. Gen. xiv. 18f; Ps. ix. 4; Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (1955) pp. 32, 46f.

<sup>7)</sup> Ezek. xxiv. 24; xxxvii. 25; Micah. v. 2; Zech. vi. 9f; Hag. ii. 23.



descendant of Eleazer, the alleged son of Aaron. This has caused some confusion in the Hebrew text in the eighth night-vision in the book of Zechariah where the high-priest Jeshua as head of the theocratic kingdom later was substituted for Zerubbabel as the builder of the Temple and the 'Branch' or 'shoot' (*semah*), described as the Servant of Yahweh, is represented as the ruler of the Messiah Age. <sup>1)</sup>

Behold the man, the Branch(Shoot) is his name  
And he shall sprout up out of his place,  
And shall build the Temple of Yahweh.

It was Zerubbabel not Jeshua who would sit on his throne and rule as the anointed Messiah, crowned apparently with two crowns, one of which containing a stone bearing an inscription from Yahweh himself, made out of gifts from the exiles in Babylon and subsequently placed in the Temple. <sup>2)</sup>

Here the Davidic Messiah was identified with a historical ruler called the Shoot of Yahweh giving more precise definition to the earlier conception of the anointed servant as 'a rod out of the stem of Jesse and a Branch growing out of his roots' upon whom the spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the 'fear of the Lord' should rest, whose appearance and endowment would mark the return of the Golden Age. 'In that day there shall be a root of Jesse which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious.' <sup>3)</sup>

#### THE DAVIDIC AND PRIESTLY MESSIAHS

In this eschatological setting the Messianic 'Branch' or 'Shoot' symbolism recurred notably in *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* where the metaphor of a tree cut down to the stump and sending out fresh shoots was employed to illustrate the shining forth of the sceptre of his kingdom', and 'the rising of a stem from his root', from which should 'grow' a rod of righteousness and the Gentiles, to judge and to save all that call upon the Lord'. <sup>4)</sup> If the book was written by a Pharisee in the second century B.C. prior to the later Maccabees, <sup>5)</sup> the setting up of the Messianic kingdom may have been expected by

<sup>1)</sup> Zech. iii. 8; vi. 12.

<sup>2)</sup> Zech. vi. 11, 14.

<sup>3)</sup> Is. xi. 1-10.

<sup>4)</sup> *Testament of Judah*, xxiv. 416.

<sup>5)</sup> Charles, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, (1908) p. 7.

a prince of the reigning priestly house. In any case, in the apocalyptic literature the rule of an earthly Messiah was contrasted with that of a transcendental heavenly Son of Man as an eschatological angelic being enthroned beside the Ancient of Days,<sup>1)</sup> and heralding the new creation. There are also references to a Levitical as well as to a Davidic Messiah in *The Testaments of Twelve Patriarchs* arising probably from priestly sources over and above those of the civil administration. Doubtless there were Christian interpretations in the text but fragments of an earlier version of *The Testament of Levi* have been found in the Dead Sea Qumran caves, and there can be little doubt that the two Messianic figures were current in the pre-Christian apocalyptic period and its literature, in which, in all probability, the Tree of Life metaphorical symbolism was not without its influence on the delineation of the office, function and figure of the Messiah co-ordinated as king, priest and angelic being. Even the essentially human Son of David in *The Psalms of Solomon* (c. 63-37 B.C.), destined to reign in a restored Israel without supernatural power, was, nevertheless, to be raised up by God and to depend upon Him, ruling with wisdom, justice and holiness as His vicegerent.<sup>2)</sup>

#### ESCHATOLOGICAL AND MESSIANIC IMAGERY IN THE QUMRAN SECT AND IN CHRISTIANITY

Similarly, the Qumran sect at the north-western end of the Dead Sea looked for two Messiahs, one from Aaron representing the priesthood, and the other from Israel with Davidic descent as the anointed leader of the laity, corresponding more or less to the two figures in *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. The latter known as 'the Prince' of the congregation would be a tower of strength laying waste the earth with his rod 'for God hath raised him up as the sceptre of rulers', and 'all nations shall serve him, and by his holy name he will make him great'. It was, however, the priestly Messiah who would have precedence over the civic leader when they would meet at a sacred Messianic banquet,<sup>3)</sup> their respective status and functions, however, symbolized by the sceptre and star, were apparently complementary rather than those indicating superiority and inferiority

<sup>1)</sup> II Esdras xii. 32; Enoch, xxxvii-lxxi.

<sup>2)</sup> xvii. 23, 47; xviii. 6.

<sup>3)</sup> *Manual of Discipline*. I. ix. 10. 11; *Rule of the Community*; *Zadokite Work*, vi. 2, vii. 18-20.

both being concerned with the establishment of the kingdom of God, like the priest and ruler in post-exilic Judaism.

The discovery of these scrolls in and since 1949 certainly has had a profound effect on our knowledge of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, and of the milieu in which Christianity arose as they comprise the library of a Jewish sect from about 100 B.C. to A.D. 70, when it seems to have been implicated in the revolt against the Romans. It was either identical with or very closely related to the Essenes, an ascetic Jewish quasi monastic community prominent in Palestine at the turn of the era and having had close affinities with Iran and Mesopotamia about the time of the Maccabean revolt.<sup>1)</sup> There were, in fact, several allied sects having Jewish associations it would seem such as the so-called 'Damascus Covenanters' known through the *Zadokite Documents* and the Qumran group appear to be one of them, essentially Essenic but having not unimportant variations of its own. All stood outside orthodox Judaism but were united in the strict observance of the Torah, set against a wider Iranian and Mesopotamian background. Thus, in the *Manual of Discipline* of the Qumran sect an almost exact parallel occurs to the Zoroastrian dualistic interpretation of the origin of evil revealing unmistakable contacts with Iranian sources.<sup>2)</sup>

This is by no means an isolated example of direct borrowing by Judaism from Mazdaean, Mesopotamian and Phoenician literature especially in respect of eschatology, astrology, lustrations and Messianic ideas. Zoroastrian influence is apparent in the Qumran *Hymns of Thanksgiving* (iii. 14-26), and it was largely through the Essenic and kindred sects that swarmed in Jewry in and after the second millennium B.C. that eschatological and Messianic imagery acquired a close resemblance to the corresponding Tree of Life ancient framework of the Tammuz, Adonis, Attis and Osiris cults. Thus, according to Josephus the Essenes were interested in the virtues of magic plants and stones, and Pliny described them as 'companions of palm trees' and probably cultivated them for food.<sup>3)</sup> At Khirbet Qumran beams and charred trunks of palm-trees have been found and date palms

<sup>1)</sup> Albright A. J.S.L. XXXVI. 1920, p. 293; cf. Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (1952); - Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (1956); F. E. Bruce, *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea scrolls* (1956) pp. 119ff.; T. H. Gaster, *The Scriptures of the Dead Sea Sect* (1957); C. Radin, *Qumran Studies* (Oxford, 1957).

<sup>2)</sup> iii. 13-iv. 26.

<sup>3)</sup> *Historia Naturalis* v. 17, 73.

guarantees the validity of its visible symbolic manifestations. To partake of the sacred flesh of the totem, or a sacrificial victim, or to consume the fruit of the Tree of Life or the cereal symbol of a vegetation deity, is to imbibe its inherent vital potency, and to establish a bond of union with the sacred order. In this context no clear cut differentiation can be drawn between the inward power and the outward sign, the spiritual entity and the material instrument, because the sacred and the secular are so inextricably interwoven.

When the sacramental relationship is represented by a material symbol like the totem or the Tree of Life, the symbol is regarded and treated in the same way as the entity it symbolizes because it has acquired a magical or mystic quality without changing its outward and visible form. This does not contravene either the 'law of contradiction' or that of logic, as Lévy Bruhl argued, because the symbol and the thing symbolized belong to the one and the same integrated undifferentiated whole pervaded by an inherent vitality as a common life principle bestowed and imbibed by a ritual technique to establish and maintain right relations with its transcendental source through efficacious signs and actions. By a ritual representation of what is urgently required the desired results are believed to be obtained and accomplished, the wish discharging itself through the *dromenon*. Thus, a cultus has become established to effect the bond of union in which the ritual experts impersonate the sacred entity and to complete the identification they may wear amulets charged with the appropriate potency, partake of sacred food sacramentally having the same qualities, disguise themselves as the sacred objects or species, imitate its actions and impersonate its essential features, believing that for the time being they are what they are represented to be, dispensing its qualities and potency.

#### THE SACRED KING AND THE TREE OF LIFE

This is most apparent when the chief actor in the sacred drama assumes the role of the god or spiritual being on whom the community and the natural processes depend for their welfare and continuance. Thus, the sacral king is regarded as the embodiment of the forces he has inherited or acquired by virtue of his office and relationship with the divinity he incarnates. Therefore, he guarantees not only the social structure but also the fertility of the soil and its crops, and the regular sequence of the seasons he controls, and the proper functioning of the cosmic order. His person is carefully guarded by ritual

prohibitions to keep him free from profane contaminations thereby protecting his sacred person, priestly status and supra-mundane powers, especially in respect of virility, so intimately associated with the fertility of the crops and vegetation in general. Indeed, this sometimes has involved his being either actually put to death himself or in the person of a substitute, or undergoing periodic ritual rejuvenation, to prevent the loss or diminution of his fecundity having a reciprocal effect on that of man, beast and vegetation.

Regicide may have been exaggerated by Frazer,<sup>1)</sup> and the classic example from the Shilluk of the Nilotic Sudan recorded by the Seligman in 1909<sup>2)</sup> has been questioned by Professor Evans-Pritchard.<sup>3)</sup> Nevertheless, it has been practised elsewhere in Africa,<sup>4)</sup> and it may have been latent in the widespread royal revivification rites involving a ritual death and rebirth of the king in Egypt and the ancient Near East. In any case, as we have seen,<sup>5)</sup> the Pharaoh by virtue of his divine sonship and coronation enthronement rites was represented as 'he who gives life', making 'the Two Lands verdant more than a great Nile', filling them with strength and vigour.<sup>6)</sup> As the reigning Horus he was brought into relations with the Osirian vegetation symbolism personifying the resurgence of vitality in the sprouting grain. In the synthesis of these varying traditions under Heliopolitan influence Upper and Lower Egypt were consolidated as a single nation in the throne as its dynamic centre, though Memphis remained the capital with its own primeval hill, deities and high-priesthood of Thoth. It was not, however, until the middle of the second millennium B.C. that a permanent capital was established at Thebes and its god, Amon-Re, was raised to the supreme position in the pantheon that the kingship in the restored Theban royal line attained the height of its power in the great Eighteenth Dynasty (c. 1570 B.C.).

This gave stability to the New Kingdom after the political disintegration and anarchy of the Middle Kingdom, the Asian Hyksos invasion and the religious upheaval of the Akhnaton interlude. But

<sup>1)</sup> *Golden Bough*. Pt. iv. pp. 9ff.

<sup>2)</sup> *Report of the Wellcome Tropical Research Laboratories*, 1911, pp. 216ff.

<sup>3)</sup> *The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk of the Nilotic Sudan* (Camb. 1948) pp. 18.

<sup>4)</sup> Seligman, *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan* (1932) pp. 90ff.; *Egypt and Negro Africa* (1934) pp. 28ff.; Meek, *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria* (1925). vol. i. pp. 255ff, vol. ii. pp. 58ff.

<sup>5)</sup> Chap. IV. pp. 90ff.

<sup>6)</sup> Moret, *Le Rituel du Culte divin journalier* (1902) p. 101; Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* (I. sect. 747.)

during these disturbed conditions the throne remained the consolidating centre because the Pharaohs were the embodiment of all the life-producing and preserving gods they absorbed; at first they alone being endowed with immortality, and officially the sole priests in the cultus employing the hierarchy as their deputies. It was the retention of this unique position and all that it signified that gave the divine kingship its vitality in the Nile valley until the Saitic sacerdotal princesses became the real governors at Thebes, and the city was captured by Asur-bani-pal in 663 B.C., reducing Amon-Re to the status of a local god. But even so, when Alexander established his Macedonian Empire in Egypt in 332 B.C. he was deified as the son of Amon, and the Osirianized sacred bull Apis became the State-god as Serapis.

Throughout the long and checkered history of the kingship in Egypt the occupant of the throne was regarded as the dispenser of the life, health and prosperity of the nation, and the connecting link between it and the Osirianized celestial realms. By virtue of its transcendental foundations and significance the monarchy remained the unifying centre which even under the conditions of the Middle Kingdom was a stabilizing force in Egyptian civilization, and eventually became the rallying point when royal power was again able to assert itself as world power, cosmic in its range in the right ordering of nature as well as of justice (*maat*) by divine ordinance, as it was claimed.

This interpretation of the Life principle in terms of the sacral kingship never occupied the same position in Mesopotamia that it held in the Nile valley because, as has been considered, <sup>1)</sup> climatically the country did not lend itself to a social structure unified in a single ruler claiming absolute divine sovereignty. In its insecure environment Mesopotamia was divided up into a series of city-states loosely bound together for practical purposes under a threefold control in which no Sumerian king was a cohesive force in the entire realm like the Pharaoh in Egypt. Nevertheless, the ancient Sky-god Anu of Sumerian origin, while like other Supreme Beings a relatively abstract and remote deity, was enthroned in his heavenly palace with the symbols of sovereignty (e.g. the crown, sceptre, staff etc.) which the Mesopotamian kings adopted as the outward signs of the authority they claimed to derive from him. <sup>2)</sup>

<sup>1)</sup> Chap. IV. pp. 95f.

<sup>2)</sup> Labat, *Le caractère Religieux de la royauté assyro-babylonienne* (1939) pp. 30ff.

It was not, however, until the young dynamic Marduk was made head of the pantheon by Hammurabi, when he established the capital of the Empire at Babylon about 2150 B.C., that the vegetation cultus became a prominent feature in the Annual Festival. From the virile Storm-god Enlil of Nippur, the son of Anu, Marduk inherited the salient features of the Tree of Life theme thereby eventually bringing the Assyrian sacral kingship into a more direct relation with it. Already in the Sumerian background the monarchy seems to have been regarded as a divine institution since in the King Lists it is said to have 'descended from heaven before the Flood,' Enlil being originally responsible for sending the Deluge upon the land before he bestowed the kingship upon Nippur; whence it passed from city to city by force of arms. Closely associated with him was the Sumerian Goddess Ninhursaga, 'the Lady of the Mountain' and the 'fashioner of all wherein is the breath of life', manifesting her fecundity in the new vegetation in the spring as the goddess of plants, while Enki, or Ea, 'the Lord of the earth', was responsible for the life-giving waters and the cosmic *Kiskannu*-tree in the grove at Eridu.<sup>1)</sup> When Marduk became the dominant figure at the *Akitu* festival in Babylon and the hero of the *Enuma elish*, himself originally either an agricultural or a solar deity, the attributes and functions of Enlil, Ninhursaga and Enki were transferred to him in the middle of the second millennium B.C. Although subsequently he was replaced by Ashur when Assyria became predominant in the next millennium, and Sennacherib was succeeded by Esarhaddon he acknowledged that it was through the insight which Ashur and Marduk jointly 'opened up his understanding' that he set about the restoration of Babylon and of the images of the great gods and the Esagila,<sup>2)</sup> thereby maintaining the continuity of the cultus practised in the restored temple of Marduk in the former capital.

It is improbable, therefore, that any major changes were made in the New Year Festival, its setting and purposes in the Assyrian document as it now exists, and the re-enactment of its sacred drama culminating in the sacred marriage of the king and queen at the spring equinox as a fertility rite at the annual revival of nature. This, as we have seen,<sup>3)</sup> goes back to the Sumerian New Year celebration of the vegetation renewal by the marriage of Inanna-Ishtar with the King of Isin, Idin-

<sup>1)</sup> pp. 69, 212.

<sup>2)</sup> Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria* (Chicago, 1927) vol. ii. par. 670.

<sup>3)</sup> p. 97.

Dagon, who bore an epithet of Tammuz, and was addressed as Dumuzi, the Shepherd-king. <sup>1)</sup> In this capacity he played the role of the Young virile god in relation to the Goddess even though, as it would now appear from the revised Sumerian version, he was not released from the land of the dead. <sup>2)</sup> In the Semitic Assyrian recension of the myth of 'The Descent of Ishtar', on the other hand, she was sprinkled with the water of life, her regalia were returned to her while her lover-son Tammuz was similarly revived and restored to the land of the living. <sup>3)</sup> It may be that the resurrection theme was a later interpretation as the revised text suggests, but there can be little doubt that in the Assyrian narrative Tammuz was represented as the generative force in fecundity of plants and animals, just as in Egypt Osiris brought forth the grain. He was essentially the Young god whose sojourn in the underworld was bitterly lamented and whose release to newness of life was reflected in the renewal of nature and re-enacted in the sacred marriage of the king and queen at the Annual Festival. <sup>4)</sup>

In the Tammuz liturgies it was the wailing for the dead god that was the prominent feature. This was not confined to Mesopotamia. Thus, in Syria where Adonis personified the spring vegetation, lamentation for the dead god was practised and wilting seeds in the 'Adonis gardens', or pots, were thrown into wells or the sea, presumably to give expression to his decease. In Israel the ritual weeping for Tammuz had its counterpart in the 'lamentation psalms' and in Isaiah xxiv-xxvii, after the sacred marriage in the autumnal Feast of Booths <sup>5)</sup> when deliverance was sought from the evil influences rampant at the turn of the year requiring an annual expiation as part of the renewal rites, celebrated in Israel in connexion with the Day of Atonement observances. But it was primarily with the tree and plant life and flocks and herds that the Tammuz cult was related in the milieu of the dying and rising god. It was this which found expression in the Assyrian myth and ritual, and while this theme may not have recurred in the Dumuzi recension, nevertheless, it was predominant in the

<sup>1)</sup> Chiera, *Sumerian Religious Texts*, No. 1. col. v. 18ff.

<sup>2)</sup> Kramer, J.C.S.V. 1951, pp. 13f.; *Studia Biblica et Orientalia*. III. 1959, p. 198. nl.

<sup>3)</sup> Speiser, A.N.E.T. p. 198f.

<sup>4)</sup> E. Ebeling, *Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellungen der Babylonier* (1931) pp. 47. 1.5.

<sup>5)</sup> Neh. viii-ix; Hvidberg, *Graad og Latter i det Gauble Testamente* (Copenhagen 1936) p. 85f.



myths of the renewal of nature in the New Year as a seasonal and cosmic event centred in the vegetation gods Tammuz, Adonis, Attis, Osiris and their counterparts.

#### THE TREE OF LIFE AND COSMIC PHENOMENA

This death and resurrection motif as it appears in the myth and its ritual enactment is not confined to the seasonal cycle since it also symbolized the periodic renewals in the universe as a fundamental cosmological process. The decline, death and revival of vegetation is but one phase of a recurrent operation manifest in nature, the cosmos, and the life of man from the cradle to the grave and its aftermath, subject to constant ritual renewal by the due performance of the prescribed *dromenon*. The cult of natural phenomena is thereby readily transformed into that of cosmic events, the same death and resurrection sacred drama being operative in both spheres of creative activity.

Thus, Dr Pallis contends that originally the *Enuma elish* was simply a cult text of the agricultural drama of Babylon performed at the *Akitu* festival in which the creation and ordering of the universe, and the determination of its destiny were originally inseparably associated with the drama of the seasons.<sup>1)</sup> In its present Late Assyrian form, he maintains, it has been transformed into a literary epic, but this is to underestimate its liturgical character and purposes in the New Year Festival, where it has a cosmic significance in which the earlier theme and its imagery have been retained and interpreted in terms of the primordial conflict of Marduk and Tiamat out of which the universe emerged.<sup>2)</sup> Behind this lay the Sumerian cosmogonic myths and the *kiskanu* tree displaying all the characteristic features of the World-tree rooted in the omphalos. At every New Year Festival at the critical turn of the seasons the ancient struggle between the two opposing forces and the union of the god and the goddess were re-enacted in the *gigunu*, probably in the Esagila at Babylon, to preserve and facilitate the cosmic processes, to restore the fertility of the fields, flocks and herds, and to determine the destiny of mankind. Marduk in the guise of Tammuz is said to have 'hastened to the wedding'<sup>3)</sup> on which so much depended when all life was temporarily

<sup>1)</sup> *The Babylonian Akitu Festival*, pp. 299.

<sup>2)</sup> Cf. Chap. V, pp. 137f.

<sup>3)</sup> Zimmern, *Zum babylonischen Neujahrsfest* (Beitrag, Lpz. vol. LVIII, 1906, p. 152).  
(Beitrag, Lpz. vol. LVIII, 1906, p. 152)