

**FERTILITY GODDESSES FROM THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST**

by

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### **Fertility Goddesses from the Ancient Near East**

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## Summary

The purpose of this study is to illustrate the role of fertility goddesses in the lives and beliefs of the people of the Ancient Near East. Artefacts from the late Paleolithic period were crude female figures of pregnant women representing fertility. A mother goddess was specified as the giver and taker of life and vegetation. The polytheism of pre-exilic Israel that existed proves that not only Yahweh but also other gods existed.

In the creation stories of the Ancient Near East, creation myths played a major role; in the Ugaritic myths the universe was ruled by powerful deities, and their presence could be felt in rain, vegetation and crops. Fertility cults were the force in their worship. Cultic sites associated with deities were often located in groves of trees, which made them sacred to the people. There was a close relationship between tree and tree figures, as well as gods and goddess images.

Key terms:

Fertility, Goddesses, Temples, Anat, Asherah, Astarte, Inanna, Ishtar, Isis, Hathor.

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## Abbreviations

AMP	The Amplified Bible
BAR	Biblical Archaeology Review
GNB	Good News Bible
KJV	King James Version
Nat Geo	National Geographic

# Chapter 1

## The fertility cults and rites of the Ancient Near Eastern people

### 1.1 Introduction

Fertility goddesses in almost all polytheistic cultures are the female deities who must promote and watch over fertility, pregnancy and birth. Deities were also closely associated with sex or in others they embodied related attributes. As fertility goddesses were present in almost all ancient cultures, they played a big role in the daily activities and the beliefs of the ancient peoples. (Walls 1992:17)

Fertility goddesses also represent one of the main aspects of the mother archetype goddess. Sometimes depicted with large breasts and swollen belly, she usually represents fertility of both the people and land. Fertility goddesses embodied the fertile nature of the earth; they are usually mothers of other gods, and therefore seem matrons of motherhood. Fertility goddesses changed over time to represent the earth, fertility, pregnancy and childbirth. Because the moon is linked to a female's menstrual cycle, she can also be depicted as a moon goddess. (Walls 1992:17)

Civilizations in the Ancient Near East were deeply influenced by the people's spiritual beliefs, which did not always distinguish between heaven and earth. The people believed that divine action influenced all matters, and they believed in divination. Omens were often inscribed in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, as well as records of major events. (Walls 1992:17)

People who referred to the land as "ca-na-na-um" as early as the mid-third millennium BCE inhabited the Levant region. It was suggested that the name comes from Hebrew "cana'ani" meaning merchant, for which the Phoenicians and Canaanites became famous. An Akkadian word "kinahhu" referred to the red-coloured wool, dyed from the Murex mollusks of the coast, which was a key export of the region, when the Greeks traded with the Canaanites. The Phoenikes or "Phoenicians" may be derived from the Greek word "Phoenix" meaning crimson or purple, describing the cloth which the Greeks also traded. (Walls 1992:17)

Their neighbors, who showed Mesopotamian and Egyptian influences, also influenced the Canaanite religion. Near East Canaanite religious beliefs were polytheistic, and the focus was on ancestral household gods and goddesses while acknowledging the existence of other deities, such as Baal and El. Kings even played an important role. In certain ceremonies, such as the sacred marriage of the New Year festival, they may have been seen as gods, for example in the practiced sacred marriage rite of Inanna and Dumuzi/Tammuz in the Mesopotamian region. (Walls 1992:17)

The mythologies of ancient Greece and the Near East represented a social ideology in which the primary role models were men. Because of this, goddesses had less authority and power than gods had in Ancient Near Eastern myths. Even the social ideology reflected in the Ugaritic literature had social ideologies emphasizing male activities and female passivity. (Walls 1992:17)

One of the examples of mythic social structure and ideology representing the male perception of women's role in society was the ancient Greek model. The ancient Greek patriarchal social institutions restricted social authority to males, limiting females to more domestic roles. Patriarchal ideology often identified women with the animalistic and irrational aspects of humanity while portraying men as the guardians of rational, structured civilization. (Walls 1992:18)

The polytheistic religion of Egypt came from different sources. There were several creator gods and creation myths. Temples maintained their independence and had their own traditions and interests. Depending on the political climate their influence rose and fell. Religious life relied on ritual and cult rather than on ordered religious thought. The rulers often used faith and superstition, and magic ruled; priests had the jurisdiction to determine truths. (Mojsov 2005:76)

The Egyptian mythological texts are the oldest known religious literature, the earliest texts dating from about the middle of the third millennium BCE. The earliest representations of Egyptian deities appear to be dated from about the middle of the fourth millennium, long before the first hieroglyphs. The god of each tribe seemed to have been seen in the form of an animal, a bird or a simple image. (Hamlyn 1965:15)

These animal deities gradually gave way to gods in human-like form, and at the end of this anthropomorphic evolution nothing of the primitive animal was left, except the head on the body of a man or woman. Sometimes the head became human only with remaining vestigial ears or horns. (Hamlyn 1965:15)

In Egypt the gods of the historical epoch were dressed in short loin-cloths ornamented by animals tails, the goddesses, like great ladies, wore narrow robes, held at the shoulders by shoulder straps and draping nearly to their ankles. Although these gods and goddesses acquired new and more sophisticated attributes with the passage of time, they often retained the head of the animal form, from which they originated. (Hamlyn 1965:15)

The deities wore heavy wigs, or their heads were human; even the shaven heads of the gods were adorned with artificial plaited beards. This was similar to the beards of the first Egyptians. The gods carried scepters with one end forked and the other decorated for example with the head of a greyhound. Goddesses had in their hand a simple stalk of papyrus. (Hamlyn 1965:15)

Like many ancient societies, the ancient Egyptians seemed early on to have worshipped a universal mother goddess. She had many forms and this tradition can be seen in the many goddesses who survived the pantheon of historical times. The tradition could be explained in the form of myths in which the goddesses were involved. One of the deities may have been the creator of the world. Nut or Hathor was said to have been the mother of Ra. Geb, was her bull and Ra, their son; men were sometimes called the "cattle of Ra". (Hamlyn 1965:38)

Hathor's son Ihy, was called the "bull of confusion". He was also a symbol of fresh beginnings. Isis, the consort of Osiris was the mother of Horus, from which descended all the pharaohs. From them in turn, the lives of all their subjects depended. Neith, a goddess of Sais in the Delta was also such a deity, although she was a warlike goddess. She was referred to as the oldest of the deities because the gods went to her for judgment during the great quarrel between Set and Horus. (Hamlyn 1965:38)

Khnum, an independent deity in Elephantine, near the first Cataract of the Nile,

was said to have created men from clay and to have fashioned them on a potter's wheel. This would mean that all humankind and animals were created from the mud of the Nile, in this way bypassing the gods of the Ennead, which was a group of nine deities in Egyptian mythology, worshipped at Heliopolis. (Hamlyn 1965:38)

Ancient people existing under extraordinarily difficult conditions knew that they lived in a mysterious, unpredictable, dangerous world. Because of famine, disease and natural man-made disasters, they lived under the threat that the world was dangerous, chaotic and fundamentally evil. (Dever 2005:3)

Human life was filled with "religious" ideas, which meant they could identify with gods who could assist people with order, wisdom, and power over evil and dignity, meaning purpose. Ancient religions were a savage brutal life-and-death struggle with an uncertain outcome. The gods could grant prosperity or could also take it away. It made sense to calm and pacify the gods, to give back a portion of what had been given. Sacrifices were gifts of food to the gods, and they seemed to have worked. (Dever 2005:4)

The myths of the Canaanite gods and goddesses and the folk tales of their loves, wars, and even misadventures continued through the Iron Age in Canaan. Their oral traditions, remembered in poem and song, continued in Israelite religious thought and practice. (Dever 2005:186)

The words of Moses to the people came as a warning:

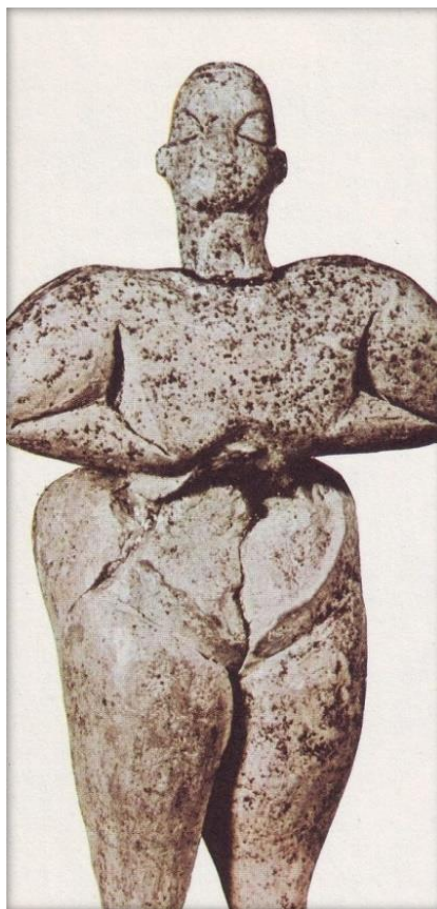
*"When you come into the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one who burns his son or his daughter as an offering. For these nations which you are about to possess give heed to soothsayers and to diviners: but as for you the Lord your God has not allowed you to." (Dt 18:9-14)*  
AMP

## 1.2 THE UNIVERSAL MOTHER GODDESS

*"Concerning earth, the mother of all, shall I sing: firm earth, eldest of gods, that nourishes all things in the world... Thine it is to give or to take life from mortal men."*

These words from the Homeric Hymn to Earth, typify a religious belief that is as old as history. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:32)

Among the earliest artefacts dating from the late Palaeolithic period are crude female figurines of pregnant women, with large breasts and hips. This supposedly represented fertility in human form. These figurines were seldom more than approximately human, not even showing their faces or other personal characteristics. They were also found in Bronze Age peasant cultures and in many of the earliest urban cultures. (Encyclopaedia of World Mythology 1975:33)



**Figure 1.1 Standing woman figurine from Catal Huyuk in Anatolia.  
6000 BCE (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:32)**

The most authoritative evidence concerning the worship of mother goddesses comes from the Mediterranean area, from Iran in the east to Rome in the west, covering Mesopotamia, Egypt and Greece. In these areas the names and functions of the goddesses were even interchangeable. The goddesses were associated with fertility and the earth, but they also had an involvement with the

celestial elements, combined with the underworld; this emphasized the complexity of the Great Mother. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:33)

The mother goddess was believed to be the giver of vegetation; according to the World Mythology, a hymn praises her in the following words:

“In the heavens I take my place and send rain, in the earth I take my place and cause the green to spring forth.”

In another hymn it was said that she was the creator of animals, and the goddess of sexual love, marriage and maternity. And in another hymn it was said:

“I turn the male to the female, I turn the female to the male, I am she who adorns the male for the female, and I am she who adorns the female for the male. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:33)

The Semitic mother goddess was always connected with a male figure that could be described as her son, brother or husband. In the myths she descended into the land of the dead, looking for her dead consort. This temporary loss of fertility is marked by winter and is restored by spring, when her consort joins her on earth. The Semitic names for the greater mother goddess were Inanna in Sumeria, Ishtar in Babylon, and Astarte or Anat in Canaan. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:33)

The mother goddess cult moved westwards through Cyprus, Crete and into Anatolia and Greece. Venus, the Greek Aphrodite, shows her emerging from the sea on the coast of Cyprus, and her consort is Adonis, a Semitic figure. In Greece she was Aphrodite, and Corinth practiced sacred prostitution. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:34)

In Iran she was Anahita, described as a beautiful maiden, powerful and tall, a goddess who “purifies the seed of males, and the womb and milk of females”. Her cult spread through the Persian Empire; here she gradually evolved into Athene, Aphrodite, and the Anatolian Cybele. In the Roman Empire, Cybele was honored as the great mother of the gods; her temple was on the Palatine Hill in Rome in 204 BCE (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:34)



The Mysteries of Eleusis incorporated most of the elements, a dying and rising pattern linked with vegetation and fertility, and the rhythm of the seasons. The rites of Eleusis were celebrated in honor of Demeter, the mother goddess, and in honor of Persephone her daughter. Another form of worshipping the mother goddess in the Roman Empire was of Isis the Egyptian goddess. One of her representations is that of a mother suckling her son Horus. The universal mother was known by many names in the ancient world, Artemis or Diana, the Anatolian goddess Ma, whose priests were known as “fanatici”, servants of the fanum temple. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:35)

Powers of the goddesses were desired to ward off evil influences by using charms and amulets. Prophylactic charms in Aramaic are known and one excerpt of the Baal myth of Ras Shamra was probably used as an aphrodisiac charm. Figurines of nude fertility goddesses were probably also used to promote fertility and childbirth. A great number of Egyptian amulets have been found in the form of an upright female, a beneficent patroness of mothers, particularly in childbirth. A popular god was Bes, a dwarf, the protector of children and pregnant women. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:110)



**Figure 1.2 Babylonian mother goddess (van Reeth 1994:167)**

### 1.3 FERTILITY RITES AS SYMBOLICALLY RE-ENACTED ACTS

Fertility rites were religious rituals and acts that were used to reenact symbolically sexual acts or reproductive processes, or rituals where the forces of nature were influenced by the ritual acts. Many traditional societies believed that an effect on one object could have an analogous effect on another object, even without any apparent link between two objects. (Mweemba 2010:128)

The gods of the peoples were practical participants in the daily lives of the worshippers. They were idolized in the people's daily lives and needs. Their fertility cults were deeply rooted in paganism. In most creation stories, the gods reproduced. Their world views, lives and seasons revolved around fertility. Their fertility concepts were interlinked with the divine intervention of their gods, to induce or stimulate nature, to reproduce, for humans, animals or crops. (Mweemba 2010:128)

To please their gods, the people would go all the way in performing their sacred acts, because their existence was usually under extraordinarily difficult conditions for example, death by famine, diseases and natural or man-made disasters. The people concluded that their universe was not "friendly", it was chaotic and dangerous. Their gods were rooted in the universal realm and were subjected to its laws. The gods did not rule their world. They had pantheons, and organized the cosmos. (Mweemba 2010:128)

Female deities were often known as consorts, complementing their companion's aspects more than a strict wife would. The Gilgamesh Epic describes how the mother goddess made a man named Enkidu from clay. He was a savage and wild man who lived among the wild animals. He was the "noble savage", man in his natural primitive state. A temple prostitute seduced him and through her charms, he was tamed and civilised. (Mweemba 2010:128)

The prostitute taught him the delights of sex, instructed him in civilized behaviour and lured him away from his peaceful life with the animals. She took him to the city, and ultimately to his doom. When Enkidu was dying, he cursed her for luring him away from his simple life. Prostitution had therefore been a desirable and

noble practice among the Ancient Near Eastern people. (Encyclopedia of World Methodology 1975:31)

Fertility rites and cults were evident in many Near Eastern creation stories, evident in Egypt from the Egyptian Empire to the Ptolemaic period. Egyptian records proved to be a valuable source of information about the lives and practices of the Ancient Near Eastern people. Because the fertility concept was common in Egypt, it was a generally accepted belief system in many ancient Near Eastern kingdoms. (Keel et al 1998:14)

We must remember that the material culture of a region would always be affected by those new influences, but a region does not suddenly reject its former practices; it adapts gradually to the new circumstances. “Rarely does political and cultural development process synchronically: kings come and kings go, but the cooking pots remain.” (Keel et al 1998:14)

### 1.3.1 Seasonal Ceremonies: “Death and Rebirth”



**Figure 1.3 A procession of gift bearers climbs one of the ceremonial staircases at Persepolis. Iran. Persepolis was constructed by Darius I in 509 BCE. (Cole 2007:41)**

In many cultures, the timing of a particular festival is dictated by a story or myth, often with a seasonal theme. The main dates in a year were also dedicated to the celebration of certain saints or deities, and the dates may overlap between cultures. For example, December 25, on which Christians celebrate the birth of Christ, is also the time at which ancient Romans celebrated the birth of the sun and the god Mithras. There are many correspondences of similar dates from different cultures. (Cole 2007:11)

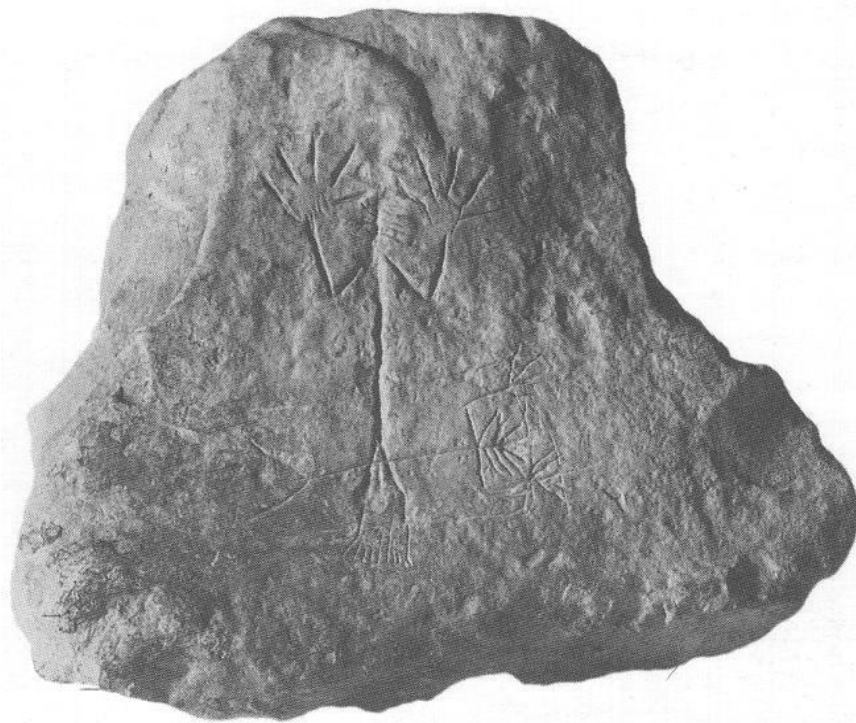
### **1.3.2 The mythological struggle of birth and rebirth**

The Sumerians who settled in southern Mesopotamia in about 3400 BCE found themselves in a land of great fertility but which was susceptible to unpredictable flooding from the Tigris and Euphrates and parching sun and winds. Their survival was to order the destructive forces of nature, and the main theme of their mythology became the struggle between order and chaos. The Mesopotamian pantheon was huge and many-faceted, reflecting every aspect of life, but in real life, a highest hierarchy administered it. At its head was Anu, god of the sky, home of sun and rain, clouds and supreme king, source of order. Enki, god of water, had a dual character; his consort was Ninhursag, mother earth or cosmic mountain. This union produced agriculture and all its benefits. (Ions 1987:10)

These benefits were threatened when Ninhursag cursed her husband for his incestuous affairs with his daughters. He descended to the underworld with various mother goddesses, leaving the earth with drought. The council of heaven had to intervene and persuade Ninhursag to forgive him and in so doing, the seasonal cycle was created. (Ions 1987:10)

The mother goddess was a very important figure in all civilisations based mainly on agriculture and herds. The Sumerian form of mother goddess was Inanna, later identified with the Semitic Ishtar. The celebration of her sacred marriage with the spring vegetation god Tammuz assured the Sumerians of crop, animal and human fertility. Ishtar's violence could also be seen in her role as warrior goddess, whose cult animal was the lion and whom the warlike Assyrians with their national god Ashur associated. (Ions 1987:11)

The theme of rebirth is illustrated by the story of Ishtar, the Sumerian goddess of love and war and her lover Tammuz, the god of vegetation. In one version of the theme Ishtar goes down into the underworld, while Tammuz mourns for her, animals do not mate and crops do not grow, until her return to the surface. In another version, Tammuz is called Dumuzi and he is the one who dies at harvest time, and descends into the underworld; Inanna saves him, but he is only allowed to remain on earth for six months at a time. When Dumuzi visits the earth it corresponds with summer, when Inanna is happy and Mother Earth flourished; when he is gone winter rules once more. (Cole 2007:97)



**Figure 1.4 Found in Arad, the Mesopotamian god Tammuz shown in two positions of the endless cycle of nature. (Geva 2000:49)**

The myth of creation related how the primordial forces of chaos, Apsu and Tiamat, had the other active gods of the Mesopotamian pantheon, who named and created the heaven and earth, parting the waters and creating dry land. Another deity was Marduk: originally he was the city god of Babylon under the Amorites. In the spring, the crisis point of the Mesopotamian agricultural year, the New Year festival of “Enuma Elish” reflected man’s awareness of his limitations against nature, and by upholding the divine god’s royal representatives on earth, would ensure control of the forces of chaos. The cosmic forces of disorder in the

underworld confined Marduk or Enlil. Rites of atonement by all the people followed his release by Nebo. These rites included Marduk's reinstatement as king by the council of gods, his ceremonial union with the fertility goddess, and the reestablishment of the order in nature under the guidance of Marduk's earthly representative. (Ions 1987:12)

Some kings may have claimed divine power to themselves to be able to rule, especially when the kings inherited their thrones from their predecessors, and not because of military or political choice. The king was not considered divine himself, and he had to prove himself before the gods. At the head of the Canaanite pantheon held on the Mount of Assembly "Armageddon" was El the creator, also known as the "Bull", the compassionate, supreme fount of justice who was called the father of the king. This refers to his devolution of power to Baal, "He who mounts the Clouds" the executive of heaven, especially in the workings of nature. Baal's relationship to El was the prototype for that of the earthy king to the gods. (Ions 1987:15)

The New Year festival in Canaan took place in the autumn. It corresponded with the crisis point in Canaanite agriculture when, after five months of summer drought, with the final harvesting completed, there was a necessity of heavy rains to soften the ground for early sowing. Without the rain, there could be no prosperity next year; fertility and order in nature would turn into famine. Baal, as prototype king, was the chief protagonist in the mythological struggle between these forces, and the human king in rites designed to ensure fertility portrayed his role. (Ions 1987:15)

In this mythological struggle, as described in the texts discovered at Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit), the authority of El and his heavenly council challenged the primordial chaos. Baal as the challenger conquered Yam in an epic combat. With this battle, Baal returned nature to fertility. The goddess Athtart, Astarte the Canaanite counterpart of Ishtar, celebrated his victory. By this deed, Baal had subjected nature to fertility, and he proved himself worthy as king for another year. Fertility must never be taken for granted, in agriculture or in human life. (Ions 1987:15)



**Figure 1.5 Mithras, sacrificing a bull. Featured in a sculpture from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century. (Cole 2007:51)**

### **1.3.3 The festival of Noruz**

In pre-Zoastrian Persia, Mithras was known as Mithra. He became Mithras in ancient Rome where he was popular with the military. He was associated with light and the changing of the seasons, and celebrated at the festival of Noruz. Symbols of Mithras were taken into underground temples during the autumn rites and brought out again at the spring equinox, symbolically resurrecting the god. The spring theme of new life was central to Mithraic mythology. In a main episode the sun ordered Mithras to sacrifice a white bull. He unwillingly did so, and was often depicted turning his head away from his knife. However, at the moment of sacrifice a miracle occurred: the bull's body transformed into the moon, and Mithras' cloak became the night sky. Plants and trees grew from the bull's blood and the first ears of grain grew from his tail. (Cole 2007:51)

Mithras was also miraculously born on December 25. His birth coincided with the birth of the sun at the winter solstice. Followers of Mithras ate bread and water: this represented the body and blood of the bull at communal meals, and like Jesus, Mithras was resurrected in spring. (Cole 2007:50). The Achamenians, a dynasty of kings who ruled Persia from 648 to 330 BCE, celebrated their spring equinox at Persepolis with the festival of Noruz. Stone carvings from this period

depict subjects, governors and ambassadors carrying gifts to present to the Persian king. Noruz, which means “new day”, is a celebration of hope and renewal, which is still recognized in Turkey, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. Today Noruz is celebrated over a period of thirteen days. (Cole 2007:40)

## 1.4 CULTIC SITES IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

### 1.4.1 The bull site near Dothan

Recently excavated sites in Israel have produced materials that are clearly cultic in nature. Some of these sites had “bamot” or high places which were condemned in the Bible e.g. 2 Kings 23:8, from the period of the Judges to the monarchy, from north to south, from Iron Age I (1200-1000 BCE) to Iron Age II (1000-586 BCE). In 1981 Amihai Mazar excavated a small open-air hilltop sanctuary in the tribal territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, dating to the 12<sup>th</sup> century BCE. It had a central paved area with a large standing stone, a biblical “masebah” and an altar-like installation, enclosed by a wall. It was named the “Bull Site” because of the principal find, a well-preserved bronze bull of Anatolian “zebu” type. (Dever 2005:136)

The material recovered also consisted of a few Iron Age I shards, some fragments of metal fragments of a terracotta incense burner or offering stand, some pieces of bronze and silver jewellery, cooking pots and bowls, animal bones and flints, and a terracotta stand. The bull which was possibly a votive statue is almost identical to a bronze bull found by Yigael Yadin, at Hazor in a Late Bronze age (1550-1200 BCE) context. El, the chief male deity of the Canaanite pantheon’s title was “Bull”. In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE texts from Ugarit in Syria describe “Bull El”, the bull as being a symbol of ferocity and fertility in the ancient Mediterranean world. This could mean that the Manasseh shrine or sanctuary, the only clear Israelite cultic installation from the Judges period, was probably associated with El the old Canaanite deity and not with Yahweh. (Dever 2005:136)

### 1.4.2 Dan, capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel

At Tel Dan, one of the early capitals of the northern kingdom of Israel, excavated since 1966 by Avraham Biran, is an impressive installation at the highest point on



the northern end of the mound, from the tenth or ninth centuries BCE. It consists of a large “podium” (altar) with “ashlar” (chisel-dressed) masonry steps, and a connecting three-room structure, probably an example of the biblical sanctuary. In one room of the sanctuary, archaeologists found a low stone altar, an ash pit and three iron shovels. This installation could have been an example of a Canaanite-style high place, or “bamah” that is condemned in the Hebrew Bible. It could even be the “house (or temple) on a high place” mentioned in 1 Kings 12:31. (Dever 2005:139)

Other artefacts found in this surrounding area include an olive oil press, used for ceremonial purposes; two large basalt slabs serving as the pressing floor; a central sunken plastered basin and two flanking store jars set into the floor serving to collect the pressed oil; large and small four-horned altars, which are mentioned in several biblical passages; a bronze working installation; a priestly scepter; seven-spouted lamps; a “naos” (a household temple model or shrine); several dice; male and female figurines; and a “spring pool” in the outer courtyard. In the area of the olive press were found the faience head of a Phoenician-style male figurine, another male figurine in Egyptian style, seated and holding a lotus blossom, and fragmentary painted offering stands. (Dever 2005: 140)

Evidence of the Dan cultic installations can, according to Dever, be linked to biblical texts. Dan is prominent in the biblical tradition in connection with the cult. The shrine of Micah and his priestly sons was transferred to Dan when the city came under Israelite control, and was rebuilt in the period of Judges (Jdg 18): a “graven image” set up by the Danites and priests of the Mosaic line that served there “until the captivity of the Land”, the fall of the northern kingdom in 722/721 BCE. Amos predicts the destruction of those who swear by Ashimah:

*“Ashimah or the sin of Samaria, and say, By the life of your god (the golden calf), O Dan! and swear, by the life of the way of (idolatrous) Beersheba, they shall fall and rise no more.” (Am 13-14) AMP*

According to Dever, “Ashimah” obviously a goddess, may have been “Asherah” the well-known goddess. On an inscription from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE shrine at Kuntillet Ajrud the phrase “Asherah of Samaria” is inscribed. This cult centre lasted

until the seventh century BCE, indicating that cults did exist in the early monarchy as well as throughout Israel's and Judah's history, although these cults were condemned by the southern Israelite writers and editors of the Bible, who were loyal to the "Temple in Jerusalem". (Dever 2005:150)

Seeing the Dan high place as a whole, a person can clearly see the religious rites typically carried out at this sanctuary. The large horned altar in the forecourt may have been used for food offerings or animal sacrifices. Ashes, burnt bones, and shovels that were found next to the low stone altar in the central room may mean that it was used for animal sacrifices. The small horned altar found near the large one was used for burning incense. This evidence for sacrifice is according to the biblical ideal, as described in 1 Kings 7:40, 45; 2 Kings 25:14, and Jeremiah 52:18. Although none of this should have been in Dan, only in the Temple in Jerusalem, they are mentioned in the Dan installation, 1 Kings 12:30, 31. (Dever 2005:145)

The large cylindrical offering stands could have been used for both incense and food offerings. The Dan stands are painted, but that may have reflected a Phoenician influence. If there were local priests serving at the Dan sanctuary, an olive oil production facility on the premises would be very practical. Ritual rites of purification were part of the rites of worship. This could possibly have been the purpose of the "spring pool" in the outer courtyard, as Dan is situated near powerful springs that fed the Jordan River. (Dever 2005:146)

Sanctuaries in the ancient Near East were often located near springs, and the gods were often connected with either the depth of the sea, or fresh water sources. El, the Canaanite high god, is said to be enthroned at the foot of Mount Saphron at the "Source of the Floods". Ritual purity, or "washing with water", was also crucial to the idea of holiness in the Hebrew Bible. Several Biblical prescriptions mention specific purifications that should be made with fresh or running water, for example, people who came into contact with a corpse (Nm 19:16-19) or lepers who must cleanse themselves in running water. (Lv 14:1-9) (Dever 2005:146)

The faience die found in the south room could have been used to cast lots, to decide something or to create an omen. It is found in “magic” which was found in the fundamental aspects in all ancient religions. It is uncertain whether priests were consulted for these rites, or whether ordinary people came to the sanctuary to perform these rites themselves. (Dever 2005:148)

At Dan, Dever suggests that the protection and blessing of the “Phoenician” deities were sought when pressing olives, especially when the product was intended for ceremonial use, because four male figurines were found in the sanctuary, near the olive-pressing installation. At neo-Philistine Ekron, nearly every one of the olive presses found in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE town had a small horned altar in the same room, or placed in a small niche. At Ekron it is obvious that “religion and commerce” went hand in hand. (Dever 2005:148)

#### **1.4.3 Tell el-Far’ah, the temporary capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel**

Called Tirzah in the Bible, Tell el Far’ah in the northern Samaria hills was the temporary capital of the northern kingdom of Israel in the early ninth century BCE. The site was excavated by Père Roland de Vaux from 1946 to 1960. Inside the city gate is a “masebah” and olive press, which could have been part of the “gate-shrine” referred to in the Bible. Numerous tenth and ninth-century BCE female figures were found by de Vaux. These were some of the earliest known Asherah figurines, as well as terracotta “naos”. These “naos” (household temple model or shrine) as indicated by other concurrent examples, would have a deity, or pair of deities standing in the doorway. One of them would have been Asherah, the Canaanite mother goddess. Tell el-Far-ah (North)’s Canaanite temple was in use during the very period of the Solomonic Temple in Jerusalem, where according to the biblical writers all worship was centralized. (Dever 2001:176)

#### **1.4.4 Megiddo, a Solomonic regional capital**

An example of supposedly prohibited local object of worship is a household shrine found at tenth-century BCE Megiddo, a Solomonic regional capital in the north. In the age of the United Monarchy, 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE Canaanite style shrines continued being in use even though worship was to have been centralized in Jerusalem under priestly authority. “Cult corners” of two buildings at Megiddo are

very well preserved. "Shrine 2048" was in the entrance hall of a large well-constructed building. A four-horned altar once stood in the adjoining room; other objects from the main room included two other horned altars, a stone offering table, stand tripod, mortar and pestles, ceramic offering stands, juglets and other vessels, an amount of burned grain, and a bowl containing sheep and goat "astragali" (knucklebones). "Shrine 228" had an offering basin, table and bench, several standing stones, stone mortars and pestles, horned altars, and a male figurine. (Dever 2005:115)

## 1.5 SUMMARY

From prehistoric times, people reflected on the Earth which nourished their families, tribes and animals. As long as man has felt dependant on Earth, he personified and worshipped it as a mother image. The history of religion reveals a panorama of deities or spiritual beings, who personified Earth. The goddesses had all the attributes of female sexuality and motherhood. Often they had the combined attributes of generosity, grace and even horror and destruction. The mother goddess of history was a figure where the opposites were combined as the giver and taker of life. The great mother was the giver of vegetation.

Excavated sites in Israel produced evidence of a cultic kind, e.g. Dothan, Dan, Tell el-Far'ah and Megiddo. This suggests that the polytheism of pre-exilic Israel was strictly at a theoretical level. Psalms 82, 89 and Deuteronomy 32:8 assumed that not only Yahweh, but also other gods existed. The Israelites idolized their own protector god, who was there to provide for their health and family, but they revered Yahweh as well, their national god, and they worshipped those gods who performed specific functions and who were required for various needs, e.g. weather, rain or women's fertility.

## Chapter 2

### The Origins of Idol Worship

#### 2.1 Creation Stories and New Year Rituals

Yahweh was not believed to be the creator of the Universe in Ancient Near Eastern stories; their worship was more based on creation stories like the “Epic of Gilgamesh”. Some scholars also developed the “Chaoskampf motif” which implicated a divine conflict between God and a sea monster, as described in the following Bible texts. (Mweemba 2010:32)

*“But you have been our king from the beginning, O God; you have saved us many times. With your mighty strength you divided the sea and smashed the heads of the sea monsters. You crushed the heads of the monster Leviathan and fed his body to desert animals.” (Ps 74:12-14) GNB*

*“You crushed the monster Rahab and killed it. With your mighty strength you defeated your enemies. Heaven is yours, the earth also; you made the world and everything in it.” (Ps 89:10-11) GNB*

The Old Testament allusion to a sea monster was Canaanite in origin, (Mweemba 2010:32)

*“When he threatens the pillars that hold up the sky,  
They shake and tremble with fear.  
It is his strength that conquered the sea.  
By his skill, he destroyed the monster Rahab.  
It is his breath that made the sky clear,  
and his hand that killed the escaping monster.” (Job 26:11-13) GNB*

The Ugaritic texts contained not only the account of Baal’s defeat of Yam the sea god, in order for Baal to become king, but Baal defeated the leviathan “itu-litan” (the twisting one), as well. Job 26:13 refers to the leviathan as the flying serpent. (Mweemba 2010:32)



**Figure 2.1 A stylized figure of a horned bull, armed with a dagger, found at Bethsaida. In the Mesopotamian pantheon the bull represents the moon god. It was adopted by the Arameans, as the symbol of their main deity, Haddad. (Geva 1999:13)**

Because the “chaoskampf” motif was strong among the Canaanites, they influenced various people to worship their gods and goddesses. Yahweh promised the Israelites that he would drive out the Canaanites from Canaan, and the Israelites were forbidden to worship other idols. (Mweemba 2010:32)

*My angel will go ahead of you and take you into the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Pezizites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and I will destroy them.*

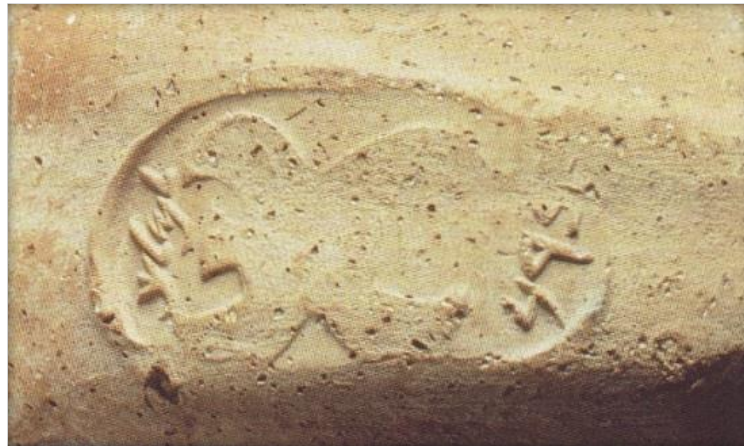
*Do not bow down to their gods and worship them and do not adopt their religious practices. Destroy their gods and break down their sacred stone pillars.*

*If you worship me, the lord your God, I will bless you with food and water and take away all your illnesses.*

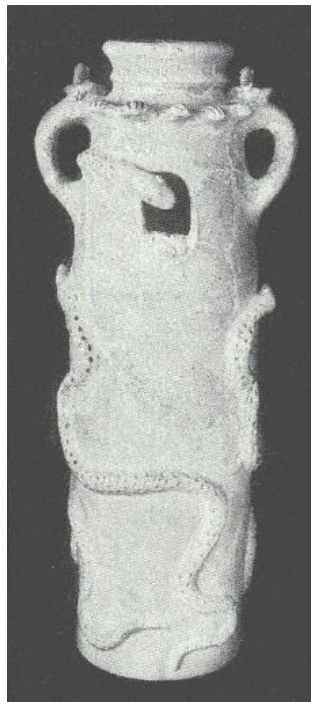
*In your land no woman will have a miscarriage or be without children. I will give you long lives. (Ex 23:23-26) GNB*

We must keep in mind that different types of artefacts have different functions when we interpret iconic material e.g. figurines, cultic stands, jewellery, even ivory

decorations on furniture. We must also note that different types of artefacts performed unique functions. A cylinder seal that is the same size as a stamp seal, can offer three or four times more surface for the engraver than the corresponding seal. Depicting scenes on stamp seals could have been because of these factors. By contrast, bronze statues, as found in museums, are not able to tell a story. Since the image that it represented, e.g. a deity, king, or goddess was isolated, it does not appear in a descriptive context, and it was usually not accompanied by the attributes that made it unique. (Keel et al 1998:13)



**Figure 2.2 Seal impression “To the King” on a jar handle (Geva 2000:38)**



**Figure 2.3 Ceramic cultic stand found in Beit Sh’ean from the end of the 12th and during the 11th century BCE period. (Geva 2001:14)**



**Figure 2.4 Bronze cultic stand from Megiddo (Geva 2000:20)**

According to Keel, the Heidelberg Egyptologist, Assman, made a statement that mythological chronicles are not to be indicated in the background of texts that seem to use mythical language. However, they do not themselves retell the narrative. Assman, uses the term “mythic speech” to refer to the ideas from different dimensions of reality, for instance, when someone believed that there was a connection between the fertility of the earth and a divine couple copulating, or associated a conflict that took place in the setting of politics, or in a military action, with the battle against the chaos dragon. (Keel et al 1998:13)

These ideas from different dimensions of reality do not initially produce the myth itself, but appeared first at the stage where the ideas took shape. This usually happened when the relationship between husband and wife or god and goddess was first seen as symbolic, or when serpent dragons were shown in combat with military heroes. (Keel et al 1998:13)

The “icons” as images are reference points that could be seen from a retold sequence. They provided a place where the mythical expression could take on a real form. They are related to relationships and basic situations that have their own meaning, and do not take their meaning from the way a story shaped the narrative. (Keel et al 1998:13)

Priority and the regularity of a motif are portrayed in a few basic themes that survived, in the depiction of Mary with the child, as the nursing mother of God, and



the way Jesus is shown as the victor in His resurrection, as well as that of Isis, with her baby Horus. (Keel et al 1998:13)

The deity Marduk, Babylon's patron deity, was established as the head of the divine assembly when Hammurabi made Babylon the most important city in Mesopotamia, between 1792 and 1750 BCE Hammurabi published "The Enuma Elish Story" (a revised edition of Mesopotamia's classic creation story). A. H. Layard, a collector of artefacts, recovered a copy from Ashur, for the British Museum. Ashurbanipal (668-626 BCE) made the copy for the Assyrian imperial library. It was written in cuneiform script on baked clay tablets in the Akkadian language. Parallels of "The Enuma Elish Story" appear in the Book of Genesis as well as in Exodus and Psalms (Ps 8, 19, 50, 104) and in "The Enuma Elish Story". These stories may have been part of a ritual about the creation at New Year. (Matthews et al 1991:7)

Mythical texts are events that were presented in story format; they can interpret or change the story line without losing their initial identity. The symbolic war against a dragon can be interpreted as a symbolic struggle of good against evil, and the saviour that must intervene. (Keel et al 1998:13)



**Figure 2.5 The fertility god Baal, with a typical cone shaped headdress (Van Reeth 1994:38)**

This theme appeared in many myths and stories with a variety of different names, e.g. in the myths of Baal and Yam or Mot, Marduk and Tiamat, Isis and Seth. A culture or one aspect of culture, such as its religion, was made out of various visible and audible signs that form a framework or network. In addition, to understand a culture, attention must be paid to the complex constellations of the culture. (Mweemba 2010:32)

The birth of the gods of Mesopotamia out of a watery chaos through the merging of Apsu, the god of fresh water, and Tiamat the goddess of salt water, is described in “The Enuma Elish” creation story. Parallels of this story appear in (Gn 1:1-2). The increasing number of younger gods, and their noise, interrupted Apsu’s rest and he planned to destroy them, and to change the order of the universe back to its original chaotic state. His son Ea prevented this by killing Apsu and took his place as the reigning monarch. After this crisis another group of gods was born, including Marduk. (Matthews et al 1991:10)



**Figure 2.6 The mighty god Ea, depicted with water flowing out of his shoulders. Cylinder seal from the Akkad era 2300 BCE. (Van Reeth 1994:70)**

When Kingu replaced Apsu as Tiamat’s consort, he persuaded her to destroy the gods responsible for the death of Apsu. He created monsters to help her defeat the gods. Ea and the gods were afraid to encounter Tiamat and her allies. Marduk, the god of the storm and god of Babylon, agreed to serve as the divine warrior for the gods, but as a price, he demands that when he defeats Tiamat the divine assembly must declare him as the supreme ruler. (Matthews et al 1991:10)

*“If I agree to serve as your avenger and am successful...*

*Let my word and not yours, determine all things.*

*What I create shall not change.*

*What I command shall not be revoked or altered.”*

*(Matthews et al 1991:10)*

The gods agreed. Tiamat, in the form of a dragon, tried to provoke Marduk as he came onto the battlefield. Marduk responded to her provocation with his acknowledgement. Provocation and acknowledgement were a customary part of military strategy in the Ancient Near East. Parallels can be found in the Hebrew Bible (1 Sm 17:8-10, 2 Sm 5:6-8, 1 Ki 20:1-2). A respondent can only rephrase the provocation by reversing the insult. New meanings but no new words were permitted. When Tiamat heard Marduk's challenge, she moved away from her bodyguard, and attacked Marduk herself. When she opened her mouth to roar, Marduk inflated her with the storm winds, and killed her by piercing her heart with a bolt of lightning. Marduk stood triumphantly on her dying body. This is a parallel of 2 Samuel 8:2. (Matthews et al 1991:12)

Marduk as the divine warrior went to the sacred mountain to be proclaimed king. In addition, he built the holy city outside the gate of the city. Marduk erected Tiamat's monsters as statues to remind everybody of his great victory. After Marduk redesigned his own temple, he used Tiamat's body to build the New World: he divided her body into two parts. From the one half he created the earth and from the other half he created the sky. He scattered her blood in the wind, and the constellations were formed by placing gods in the sky. This is similar to the parallel of Genesis 1:6-7, the moon was selected to mark the month with its phases and to guard the night, and this is similar to Genesis 1:15-16. Marduk and Ea then decided how to create humans. (Matthews et al 1991:13)

Ea, suggested that Marduk used one of Tiamat's allies as the material for the savage, man. When Marduk requested that the divine assembly must indicate who advised Tiamat to rebel and revolt, they implicated Kingu. The gods killed Kingu and used his blood to mold the first humans. The gods built The Esagila, the city of Babylon, to celebrate Marduk's coronation and they transferred all their divine titles to Marduk. They announced that the Akitu would be an annual

celebration of Marduk as The Divine Warrior and then “The Enuma Elish Story” must be told. (Matthews et al 1991:15)

In Ugaritic myths the universe was conceived in several major realms or spheres; powerful deities ruled the realms. They represented an important aspect of their cosmos, and each was described as a royal kingdom or province in their cosmic empire. Some of the deities are listed in the Bible, e.g. Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians (1 Ki 11:33). What the deities have in common is that they were attached to nature, and the changing of seasons is a sign of their activities as well as their presence. Their presence could be felt in the abundance of rain, grain, livestock, vegetation, and the fertility of people, livestock and healthy crops. (Mweemba 2010:33)

Green trees were considered holy, because of the places where they grew, and they were considered to have a special life force. The Ashtoreth pole and Baal were some of the cultic practices of the Canaanites. (Mweemba 2010:33)

*“They broke all the laws of the Lord their God and made two metal bull-calves to worship; they also made an image of the goddess Asherah, worshipped the stars, and served the god Baal.” (2 Ki 17:16) GNB*

The fertility cults were a driving force in the worshipping of deities. Public idols or deities were worshipped under trees and in temples, and there were “household” gods e.g. Laban pursued Jacob because he has taken the household gods. (Mweemba 2010:33)

*“And Laban went to shear his sheep: and Ra’-chel had stolen the images that were her fathers.” (Gn 31:19) KJV*

*“Now Ra’-chel had taken the images and Put them in the camel’s furniture, and sat upon them... And Laban searched all the tent, but found them not.” (Gn 31:34) KJV*



**Figure 2.7 A “bama” (altar) found at Megiddo, dated the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE. This could be an example of the cultic “bamot” (altars) mentioned in (1 Samuel 9:12-15). (Geva 2000:19)**

## 2.2 GODDESS IMAGES AND TREES

Sites associated with cults were often situated in groves of trees. Soon the groves were regarded as sacred and according to various local traditions, gods were believed to shelter under, or even live in particular trees. Trees were also important in the cemetery regions on the edge of the desert. There are two ways of finding out which trees were considered sacred in each of the “nomes” (administrative districts) of Ancient Egypt. One is that the emblems of the “nomes” often include trees, or there are lists inscribed on the walls of Ptolomaic temples that describe the trees in each of the sacred groves around the country. The most common trees were the sycamore, the persea (a sacred fruit-bearing tree), date palms and acacia trees. (Gahlin 2014:82)

Both real and artificial trees were items used for worship in Syria and Palestine for centuries, because they were seen as symbols of a particular female deity, or several different deities. There was a close relationship between tree and tree figures, and gods’ and goddesses’ images. The relation between trees and goddesses in the Ancient Near East dated from at least the third millennium. (Keel et al 1998:16)

At the end of the third millennium, and during the first quarter of the second millennium (Middle Bronze I or IIA) in Syria, images of trees were used in images of goddesses, as their materialization. Goddesses could appear as the trunk or root of a tree, flanked by fishes, or fishes and “caprids”, (a goat antelope, with very long horns, held almost horizontally) or even standing in a human-like figure next to her tree. A goddess with a flowing vase represented a connection between a goddess, water and plants. Similar images, e.g. the flowing vase, disappeared from the iconography in the second quarter of the second millennium, and appeared again in the Middle Bronze Age IIB, in the late Bronze Age and in the Egyptian New Empire. (Keel et al 1998:24)

In Syria-Palestine towards the end of the Middle Bronze Age, as well into the late Bronze Age, the image of a goddess served as an amulet which was idolized as a creator of vegetation if not of life itself. As described in many biblical texts, without the growth of plants no animal and no human life was possible; this was evident in the Levant which often had drought and famine. On a metal pendant found at Kamid el-Loz in Lebanon, the head of a deity was shaped like a branch or a tree. This is similar to the Egyptian custom of displaying the appearance form of a deity, for example a scarab, on a human figure as a head. Clearly this indicated a connection with a goddess who manifests herself through the earth, which produces vegetation and trees. (Keel et al 1998:26)

Scarabs typical of Palestine, were used at the same time as the metal pendants, displaying a naked goddess, often depicted with strongly emphasized sexual features; sometimes she is flanked by branches or holding branches. According to Keel et al (1998:26) this motif should be interpreted in connection with the iconography of the metal pendants. Scarabs are a less elegant medium for images than pendants of gold, silver or bronze, but since the beetle form and the technical knowledge needed for their production were borrowed from the Egyptian culture, they were much admired in Palestine at that time, and because the material had to be imported, scarabs must have had a special reputation. Usually the goddess was presented in profile or simply flanked by two branches or trees. (Keel et al 1998:26)

Precious objects like metal sheets, scarabs and cylinder seals of the Middle Bronze Age IIB showed a human-like goddess who revealed herself in a stylised tree or trees, sprouting from her pudenda or navel, or forming her head, or flanking her. Related to this goddess is a tree worshipped by one or two persons. The tree can also be replaced by an Egyptian sign, or flanked by “caprids”, indicating the life-giving quality of this tree (Keel et al 1998:30)

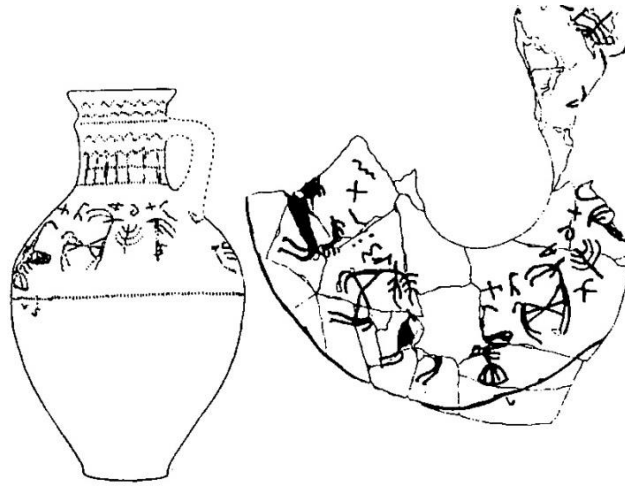
The erotically attractive goddess of the earth, producer of plants, and who may be represented by a plant, was very important during the Middle Bronze Age. She appeared on metal pendants, haematite cylinder seals, and scarabs. During the Late Bronze Age the images increased but then appeared on cheaper materials, composite seals, cheaply produced terracotta moulded figures, and painted on earthenware containers. (Keel et al 1998:30)

At Tel Qashish, in Lachish and Megiddo strata dated from the Late Bronze Age II, (c. 1400-1150 BCE) the goddess was represented on pottery paintings, showing a more or less stylized date palm flanked by “caprids” or on which “caprids” climb. The date palm had long been associated with goddesses in the art from the period. A combination of date palm and “caprids” is not a “natural picture” but a cultural product, as the trunks of date palms are too high for “caprids” to be able to reach the palm fronds and date clusters. (Keel et al 1998:31)

The tradition history of this date palm motif suggests an interpretation of the goddess. At Tell el Far’a in southern Palestine, fish not only flank the stylized tree, but are also linked with the tree by a water line. Tree goddesses and well goddesses were probably intermixed in the Middle Bronze Age. The meaning of the fish on Late Bronze Age vase paintings probable meant that the goddess that feeds the “caprids” also assisted in life the fish and all animals. Even bird images are occasionally seen on sacred trees. (Keel et al 1998:31)

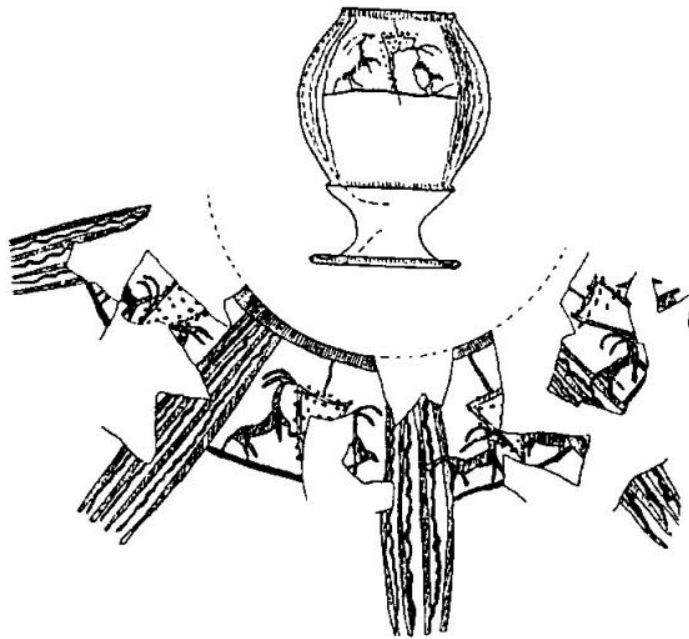
The decoration found on a jug in the Fosse temple at Lachish offers a different kind of interpretation of goddess and tree. The vessel dated from the thirteenth century BCE and went out of use in the twelfth century BCE. A row of animals is seen on the shoulder of the jug. From left to right there are a lion, a stag, a deer, a huge bird with spread wings, and a stylized tree flanked by “caprids”. Above the

animals and the tree is an inscription which reads: “A gift a tribute for my mistress, Elat”. According to Keel this refers to the goddess Asherah. (Keel et al 1998:31)



**Figure 2.8** Written on a Fosse temple jug. “A gift a tribute for my mistress, Elat”.  
(Keel et al 1998:33)

On a vessel from Lachish, which four times shows two rampant “caprids” facing each other; they flank an inverted triangle strewn with dots. Indicted by Keel, Hestrin identified the triangle as pudenda. The triangles are outlined in red paint, while the dots which represent the hair are black. This interchange of tree and pubic triangles suggests that the tree symbolizes the fertility goddess. (Keel et al 1998:34)



**Figure 2.9** The tree symbolising the fertility goddess on a Lachish vessel (Keel et al 1998:34)



Fragments of terracotta plaques, one almost intact, have been uncovered at three different places in Israel. It could have been made from the same mould. It showed the frontal view of a naked woman, decorated with a pendant and six bangles. Her head is framed by two long drawn-out locks. She has two suckling babies below her breasts. She was clearly a great mother. Her hands are holding open her pudenda. On both her thighs facing the pudenda a caprid can be seen climbing a stylized tree. The pudenda demonstratively held open play an important role with the “twig goddess: on metal pendants and scarabs. (Keel et al 1998:35)

In the Late Bronze Age the goddess appeared on less expensive materials, i.e. on vase paintings and terracotta figures. The human-like goddess is replaced by the tree flanked by “caprids”, the tree still is the same palm tree related to the goddess from the third millennium, and the “caprids” which are not connected to palm trees hinted to the life-giving power of this sacred tree. The goddess can appear immediately above the tree flanked by “caprids”, or the tree can be replaced by the pudenda of the goddess, or the tree and goat can flank the pudenda. On Middle Bronze IIB metal sheets, trees are shown coming from the goddess’s human-like body. (Keel et al 1998:36)

In Egyptian paintings and reliefs of the Late Bronze Age, the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties (c 1530-1292 BCE and 1292-1190 BCE) as well as the Early Iron Age, the twentieth and twenty-first dynasties (1190-1075 BCE and 1075-945 BCE), dozens of images are known of a goddess visible in a tree, usually a sycamore tree or sometimes even a date palm. The goddess is depicted differently, sometimes two human arms and in some cases a human breast can stick out of the tree, in some cases the breasts, upper torso or the entire body of a woman can protrude. Sometimes it seems as if the body grows from the trunk of the tree, or she can be partly visible in the tree, a human-like figure can carry a tree on her head, the human-like figure of the goddess can be fully visible standing in front of the tree, or she stands beside the tree fully visible. (Keel et al 1998:37)

In contrast to the Syrian and Palestinian images of the goddess and tree, the Egyptian pictures usually carry an inscription. The oldest image inscription shows “Men-cheper-re” (the throne name of Thutmose III) sucking on his mother Isis, but

it is unknown if it implies the goddess Isis or a mortal woman. In Theban tomb paintings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the name of Nut, the goddess of the sky, is most prominent. At Abydos and tomb reliefs of Saqqara, Isis the divine mother is dominant and Hathor is depicted later on as a tree goddess, and then in her role as “Mistress of the West” The tree goddess can carry the sign of Isis or Neith on her head, Maat can also be found as a tree goddess. Because Asherah was the only major goddess in Palestine in the seventh and sixth centuries, it could be assumed that the tree, natural or stylized and named after her, was connected with her. (Keel et al 1998:38)

### **2.2.1 Iron Age tree cults**

In the Iron Age I (c. 1200-1000 BCE) a stylized tree is sometimes found as a single motif on stamp seal amulets from Palestine. By the end of the Late Bronze Age there were stamp seal amulets found of the sacred tree flanked by “caprids”. One traditional motif on items from Tell el-Fara’h (South) and Taanach is seals showing animals suckling their young, clearly indicating the connection of the composition with the sphere of the goddess. Another motif from Iron Age I is a stylized tree flanked by two human figures which became very widespread in the next phase, Iron Age IIA (c. 1000-900) (Keel et al 1998:39)

On a vessel from Megiddo is a painting showing a procession consisting mainly of a lion, a caprid, a lyre player and a horse with fish and birds above moving towards a huge stylized lotus blossom, which could be a substitute for an artificial sacred tree. A rectangular bronze stand from Cyprus probably from Kurion, shows a small palm tree on the four sides. In one image, fish are brought to the tree, in another a length of cloth. A third image shows a copper ingot. These could have been sacrifices and gifts for a goddess or her temple. The fourth side shows a sitting harp player. This could have been a harp that was played for the goddess. (Keel et al 1998:40)

A bronze plaque from Susa has figures dedicated by the Elamite king Shilhak-Inshushinak (c. 1150-1130 BCE). According to the inscription the king had approved the bronze plaque for a depiction of a ritual meaning “sunrise”. Although

these objects are not from Palestine they show elements of the cult represented on objects from Palestine. (Keel et al 1998:40)

The motif of “caprids” at a stylized tree can be found in the Iron Age II A (tenth century) on a cult stand from Taanach. The lowest of the four friezes shows the “Mistress of the Wilderness” between two lions. Two cherubs in the second frieze are guarding the entrance to the shrine in the third frieze; the stylized tree is shown, guarded by lions and flanked by “caprids”. In the upper and inner most areas, heaven and earth come together with the horse of Astarte and the winged disc, as is suitable for a temple area. “Caprids” at a palm tree are shown on another cult stand from Taanach. During Iron Age I and Iron Age II the relation of the tree to the human-like goddess became less explicit, and it paved the way for an association of the sacred tree to Yahweh and similar gods like Kemosh and Milkom as indications of their favour. (Keel et al 1998:42)

Some scarabs were found showing a single worshipping figure standing before a stylized tree. This image was found on different types of image-bearing artefacts not only on scarabs but also on Middle Bronze Age artefacts. The combination of a “naked goddess” and the head of a goddess with leaves and branches, or with a stylized tree, were seen as a symbol of the “branch goddess”. (Keel et al 1998:28)



**Figure 2.10** The “branch goddess” standing on a horse instead of a lion, can be seen on a gold-leaf piece that was found in the temple at Tel Harashim. (Keel et al 1998:67)

### 2.2.2 Biblical texts mentioning tree cults

Yahweh appeared to Moses in a bush or tree in (Ex 3:1-5), and Elijah finds bread and water beside him, (1 Ki 19:5-6); this recalls the gifts of the Egyptian tree goddesses. Early leaders like Deborah and King Saul sit below the palm tree, the pomegranate tree and the tamarisk tree (Jdg 4:5) (1 Sm 22:6). The dead were also buried under trees, e.g. Rebecca's nurse Deborah (Gn 35:8), Saul and Jonathan (1 Sm 31:13) as the Bible mentions that the dead shall return to the wombs where they came from (Job 1:21, Ps 90:3, Gn 1:11-12). Here the trees can be related to mother earth. Trees and standing stones are an indication of holy places (Jos 24:26). These trees were living trees which produced fruit and still had a distinct religious importance. (Keel et al 1998:50)

In Hosea 2:4-14 Yahweh, the God of Israel is referred to as the weather god who bestows water and all kinds of plants and plant products on his wife. (Ps 65:10, Job 5:10-11). The wife, not aware of this, attributes these gifts to her lovers, the Be'alim. In Jeremiah (Jr 2:3) the biblical tradition identifies her as Israel, although Jerusalem is addressed by the speech. In Jer. 2:23, Yahweh refers to his people as his unfaithful wife. Palestinian iconographic evidence suggests a person described as a mother earth figure, and it is reflected by some Biblical texts (Gn 1:12, 24; Is 45:8, Job 1:21, Ps 139:15, Gn 3:20) (Keel et al 1998:52)

Hosea 4:12-13 is the oldest example of criticism against the tree cult. The first was asking a tree or wood for advice and then receiving orders from a staff. Oracle giving trees are mentioned in 2 Samuel 5:24, Genesis 12:6. The second problem was that the people may leave Yahweh in favour of the tree cults. The shadows of trees favoured sexuality and eroticism, since trees in Palestine suggested an intense presence of the mother earth's blessings, and to have sex under a tree meant to participate in her blessings. (Keel et al 1998:54)

Deuteronomy 16:21-22 suggest that at holy places for Yahweh there used to be a tree as well as a "massebah" near the altar. (Jos 24:26) The altar of Baal was probably built under an Asherah tree. Three Deuteronomium texts are about altars, masseboth and asherim (in the plural) and demands that the asherim must be cut down. (Ex 34:13, Dt 7:5, 12:13) The famous inscriptions of Kuntillet Agrud

and Hjrabet el-Quom suggest that around 800 BCE the Asherah tree or pole could be considered as being the manifestations of Yahweh. In a similar way the Astartes of the sheep and goat become part of the blessings of Yahweh. (Dt 7:13, 28:4). However the Asherah tree or pole remained related to the goddess Asherah. In early Judaism, the Feast of Tabernacles which is based on Leviticus 23:40 and Psalm 118:27 may be interpreted as the remains of ancient fertility rites connected to tree cults. (Keel et al 1998:54)

### 2.3 SACRIFICES, “GIFTS PRESENTED TO THE GODS”

A universal human instinct to present offerings to the gods is found in some of the oldest written records. (Dever 2005:103) The Bible recognises some acceptable forms of sacrifice, for example:

“Burnt offering”: in this type of offering, the “kosher” animal was killed and its blood poured around the altar. The carcass or parts of it were burned on the altar. The smell was said to be a “pleasing odour to the Lord”. There was priestly supervision of the whole ceremony. The animal’s blood was not eaten, as the Leviticus principle was that life is in the blood and all life belongs to God. The “cereal” or grain offerings were wheat or barley or flour mixed with olive oil and frankincense and burned on the altar. Leaven, yeast and honey were forbidden. Honey could be offered separately as “first fruits”. (Dever 2005:104)

The “Shelem” offering could be in combination with other offerings: it was to bring health, prosperity and good fortune. The meat of these offerings could be eaten, and purification offerings were to atone for one’s sins, which could be sin to a deity, sinful acts or a bodily condition, for example menstruation, nocturnal emissions, or encountering impure discharges such as a corpse. If somebody was offended, “reparation” offerings could be made, as a symbolic gift to God, and the person could be compensated with gifts of money or other items. Other offerings could include “farewell offerings”, first fruit of the harvest, thanksgiving, votive gifts etc. Child sacrifice could have been made in Israel. (Dever 2005:104)

According to Dever, the prophetic protest against sacrifice may be understood in a context of rejection, not of the sacrificial system, but of the dependence the sacrifices can bring, as stated in Amos:

*"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will not smell a savour or take delight in your solemn assemblies."*

*"Though you offer me burnt offerings and your cereal offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I look upon the peace or thank offerings of your fatted beasts."*

*"Take away from me the noise of your songs; for I will not listen to the melody of your harps." (Amos 5:21-23) AMP (Dever 2005:101)*

Before the building of the temple in Jerusalem there must have been many household and private shrines. In the period of the Judges (12<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> Century BCE) there are many references of cultic activities. Judges 17:4-6 (AMP) is a reference to an ephod, graven and molten images and "teraphim" (images) in a shrine in the house of Micah. (Dever 2005:96)

In the story of Gideon (Jdg 6:11-33) Gideon meets and speaks to an angel sitting under the "oak at Ophrah". He brings offerings of roasted lamb and unleavened cakes, and he places them on an altar where they are devoured by fire. Then he builds a large altar on the holy place. Later that night God instructed Gideon to pull down his father's altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah beside it (Jdg 6:25). Then he must build a new altar, and sacrifice a bull. Judges also mentions various religious activities e.g. feasting, dancing, and marriages at Shiloh (Jdg 21:16-24), animal and grain offerings, and vows made by Manoah (Jdg 13:2-7), and the death of Jephtah's daughter (Jdg 11:34-40). (Dever 2005:96)

### **2.3.1 Child sacrifices in Ancient Israel**

Because the priests saw child sacrifices as a violation of the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before, or beside me", they were considered evil and even more evil, when they were done in the name of foreign gods. (Ex 20:3) AMP

Even though sacrifices to other gods were forbidden to the Israelites in ancient Israel, there were numerous evidences of sacrifices in the Bible, such as sacrifices to "other gods" as well as child sacrifices and even cannibalism. When there was famine in Samaria, a woman complained to the King of Israel, when he was passing on a wall, of being tricked by another woman. The two women agreed to

eat their sons. After they had boiled and eaten the first woman's son, the second woman refused to give up her son, and hid him away. (2 Ki 6:26-29) AMP

Child sacrifices were practised throughout the world in ancient times. In Jeremiah 7:30-31, it is noted that the sons of Judah burnt their sons and daughters without approval from Jahweh. King Ahaz reigned for 16 years in Jerusalem, and he burned his son as an offering according to the abominable practices of the nations, whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. (2 Ki 16:2-3) AMP

Joshua gave an oath to the people that any man who rises up and rebuilds the city Jericho, would be cursed. Here Joshua is warning the people against foundation sacrifice, where in order to protect a structure from evil, a person was killed and buried, at the foundation of the city or building.

*“With the loss of his firstborn son shall he lay the foundation, and with the loss of his youngest son shall he set up its gates.” (Jos 6:26-27) AMP*

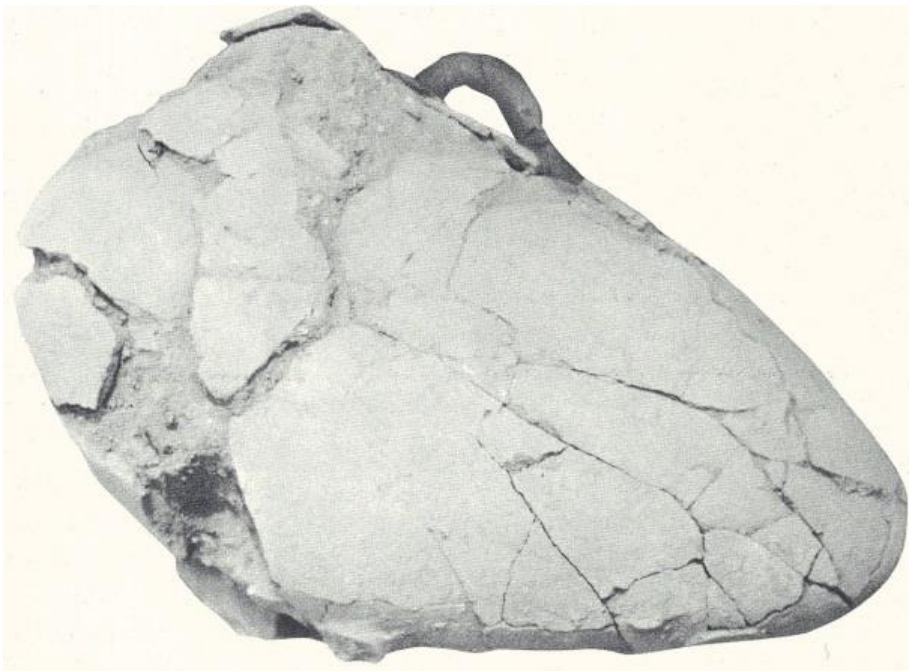
*“In his days Hiel the Bethlehite built Jericho, he laid its foundation at the cost of the life of Abirahim his first-born, and set up its gates with the loss of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which He spoke by Joshua the son of Nun.” (1 Ki 16:34) AMP*

In 2 Samuel 21:7-9, King David picked two of Saul's sons and five of his grandsons. They were hanged on the mountain before God, at the beginning of the barley harvest. In 1 Kings 3:16 Solomon settled a maternity dispute before two women. The two women, who had become mothers out of wedlock, were in one house. One of the women's babies died at night because she lay on it; she then changed babies with the other woman. Solomon's solution was to divide the living baby in half, and to give each woman a half. When the baby's real mother pleads for the baby's life, Solomon gives the baby to her. (AMP)

In 1 Kings II:7-8 Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, as well as for Molech, the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain East of Jerusalem. Therefore, he did for “all his foreign wives”, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. (AMP)

Exodus 12:24-27 states, and you shall say, "It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover" for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel and Egypt, when he slew the Egyptians but spared our houses" And the people bowed their heads and worshipped. (AMP)

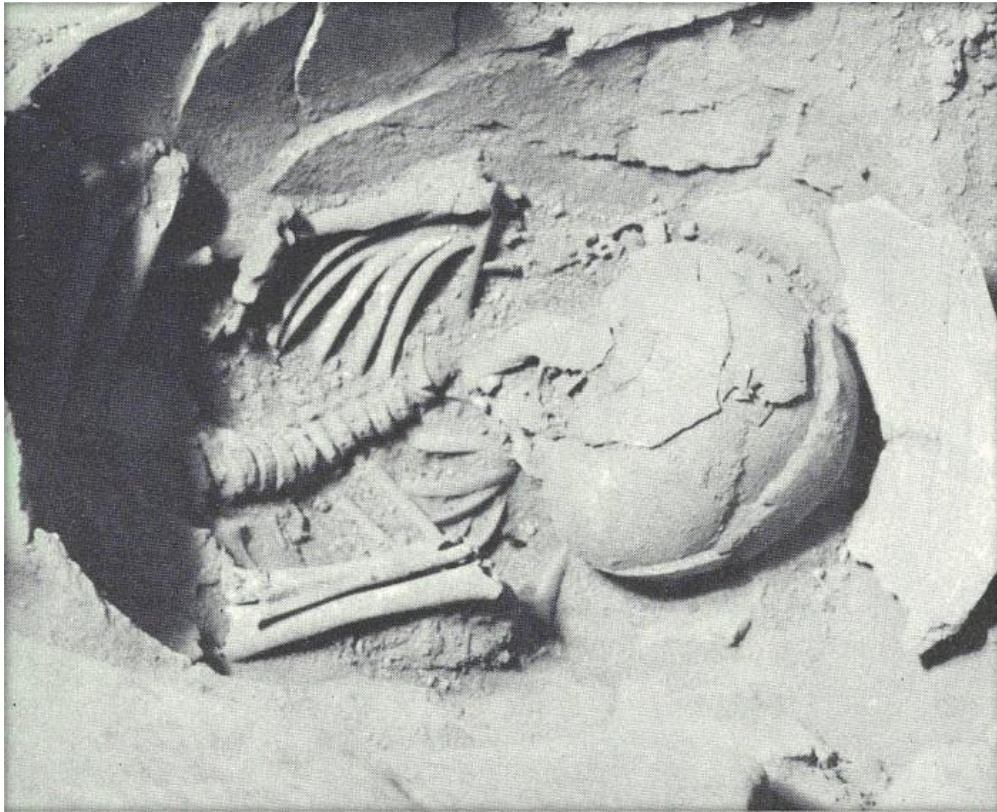
Discoveries at Hazor dating between the middle of the eighteenth century BCE and 1150 BCE contained infants buried in jars under the earth beaten floors of homes. Scores of burials were found, some of which were twins. Most of the jars contained juglets placed next to the skeletons, probably offerings of food and milk for the dead. According to Yadin, it was common practice, particularly in the Middle Bronze period, to bury infants under the floor of their homes, so that they could continue to live near their families. (Yadin 1975:39)



**Figure 2.11 Hazor: An infant burial jar found under the floor. (Yadin 1975:38)**

If they were child sacrifices, it must be concluded that almost all the infants of those homes were sacrificed as offerings, which to Yadin seemed not possible. A large number of burials under some of the houses could mean a high rate of infant mortality, even an epidemic. Similar burials were found in other areas. Some jars contained scarabs, but not so many scarabs were found in graves of the same period in other areas. (Yadin 1975:39)





**Figure 2.12 An opened jar showing the crouching skeleton. (Yadin 1975:38)**



**Figure 2.13 A similar jar showing a juglet for liquids near the head (Yadin 1975:38)**

## 2.4 VOWS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

### 2.4.1 The wife of Manoah

A woman's "failure" to have children was often interpreted as "punishment" from god. A woman's standing in society was largely related to the birth of her first child, especially if it was a boy. Genesis 16:4, 29:31 (AMP) A man could divorce his wife if he discovered that she was barren. (Dt 24:1-4) (Le Roux 2016:554)

The wife of Manoah, "a barren woman", was sitting alone in a field when the Angel of the Lord appeared to her. The Angel announces that she will become pregnant and give birth to a son. He gives his instructions how she should take care of herself. Then he confirms that she is already pregnant and proclaims how the son that will be born should live. (Jdg 13:4-5) The Israelites had been delivered into the hands of the Philistines for 40 years, when god declares that a child will be born who will "begin to save the Israelites from the Philistines". (Le Roux 2016:225)

The Angel warns the woman to take good care of herself during her pregnancy. In addition, he gives her a list of instructions to follow. (Jdg 13:4, 5) She must create Nazarite conditions for the child by abstaining from wine or strong alcohol and not eating anything unclean, as her child would do. The vow is then repeated. The Nazarite instruction that would rule Samson's life is that he may not cut his hair. This was the only instruction Samson keeps until Delilah cut off his hair. (Le Roux 2016:559)

After the Angel appeared to Manoah's wife, and she told her husband what happened, she describes the man as "An Angel of the Lord" and like somebody with authority. Manoah later treats the angel as a special visitor. (Jdg 13:15) Manoah's wife repeats everything to her husband except that Samson's hair may not be shaved, and that he would deliver the Israelites from the Philistines (Jdg 13:7) Manoah does not believe his wife's story and wants more information. He would like to hear it from the Lord Himself. (Le Roux 2016:561)

In Judges, 13:8 Manoah prayed to ask the Lord to send the "man of God" again to both of them so that they must know what they must do with their son. The Angel

appears again to Manoah's wife in the field; she then called her husband. When Manoah meets him, he asks more questions about their "special" child, how he will live and what his work would be. This relates in his request when he prayed to God to send the "man" again. (Le Roux 2016:562)

The Angel, who later appears to be the Lord Himself, (Le Roux 2016:563), declines Manoah's offer to eat with them, but suggests that he must make a "burnt offering" to the Lord. (Jdg 13:16) When Manoah asks Him His name he ignores his request, and say that His name is "wonderful". It was believed that if someone knew your name he could control you, or have authority over you. (Le Roux 2016:564)

When Manoah takes the angel's advice and presents a "burnt offering", the second miracle occurs.

*"For when the flame went up towards the heavens from off the altar, the Angel of the Lord ascended in the altar flame, and Manoah and his wife looked on, and they fell to their faces on the ground." (Jdg 13:20) AMP*

A burnt offering means that everything on the altar was consumed with fire. Presenting an offering was a sign of honour, respect and worship, a symbol of the power and presence of the Divinity. (Gn 13:17, Ex 3:1-6, Jdg 6:19-23) (Le Roux 2016:564)

Samson breaks all the vows his mother made: he drinks wine at parties, and he makes himself unclean by touching dead bodies and carcasses. He is also constantly in contact with other people, which was forbidden. The only time when God's spirit appears to leave him was when his hair was shaved off. (Le Roux 2016:551) The only way that God's spirit was shown in Samson's life was in his strength. (Jdg 14:6, 14:19, 15:14) However, Samson used this power only for personal gain. (Le Roux 2016:567)

#### **2.4.2 And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord**

Jephthah was a Gileadite warrior, his father was Gilead and his mother a harlot. He was the leader of Gilead, appointed by the elders to fight the Ammonites, and to be head over all the citizens of Gilead.

*And they said to Jephthah: "The Lord will witness between us, if we do not what you say." (Jdg 11:10) AMP*

Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and asked that if the Lord gives the Ammonites in his hand, then whatever or whoever comes from the doors of his house to meet him when he returns in peace from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's, and he will offer it to Him as a "burn offering." (Judges 11:30, 31) AMP

When he came back to his home at Mizpah, his only daughter came out to meet him with "timbrels", cymbals and dances.

*"And when he saw her, he rent his clothes, and said, Alas my daughter! You have brought me very low, and are the cause of great trouble to me: for I have opened my mouth (in a vow) to the lord, and I cannot take it back." (Jdg 11:35) AMP*

She agreed that he must fulfil the vow, but asked that she and her companions go to the mountains for two months to "bemoan her virginity" before her father fulfils his vow. (Jdg 11:37) AMP

When she arrived back home. Her father Jephthah, "did with her according to his vow". (Jdg 11:39, 40) reveals that she has never "mated with a man", and that it became a custom in Israel that the "daughters of Israel" went for four days every year to mourn the daughter of Jephthah. The statement that "he did with her according to his vow" could imply her actual sacrifice. Although human sacrifice was strictly forbidden to all Israelites, we must remember that Jephthah had half-Canaanite ancestors. (Jdg 11:40 Commentary) AMP

Even though Jephthah had time to consider his decision after his daughter went away for two months, he still fulfilled his vow. However, because it never really stated in the Bible that she was offered, her death is still disputed by some scholars. The fact that the maidens mourned her virginity, and not her death, could be seen as a sign that she did not die. (Jdg 11:40 Commentary) AMP

## 2.5 SUMMARY

In the creation stories of the Ancient Near East, Yahweh was not stipulated as the creator of the universe. Some scholars developed the “Chaoskampf motif” which depicts the divine conflict between God and a sea monster. The “Enuma Elish” story is a revised edition of Mesopotamia’s classic story. Parallels of creation myths appear in Genesis and Exodus. Mythical texts are events presented in story format; they can interpret or change the story line without losing their meaning. The theme of myths may be similar but with different names, e.g. the myths of Baal and Yam or Mot, Marduk and Tiamat, Isis and Seth. In Ugaritic myths the universe was conceived in several realms, ruled by powerful deities. The deities were attached to nature and their presence could be felt in rain, vegetation and health crops.

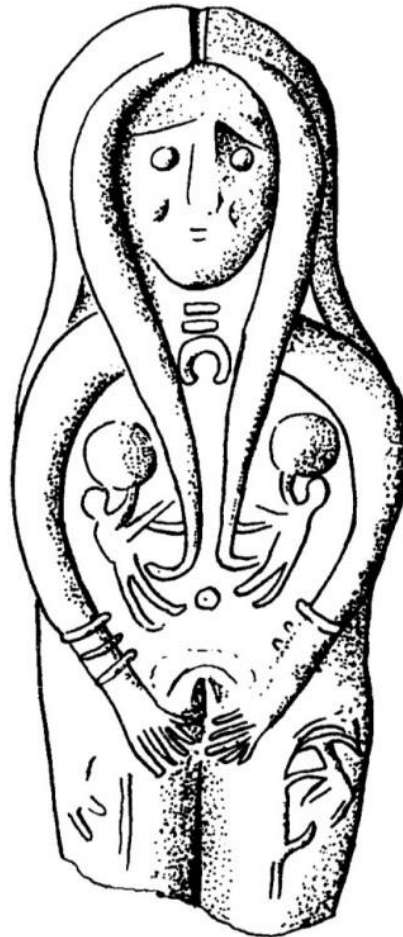
Fertility cults were the force in the worshipping of deities. The cultic sites were often in or near groves of trees. Images of the fertility “tree” goddess was portrayed on pendants, scarabs and cylinder seals. At Tel Qashish, Lachish and Megiddo the goddess was represented on pottery paintings. She was also represented on terracotta plaques. In the Iron Age I period, stamp seal amulets were found of a sacred tree flanked by “caprids”, (goat antelope). On a cult stand from Taanach, she is portrayed between two lions as “Mistress of the Wilderness”.

Biblical texts mentioning tree cults can be found in Genesis, Exodus, Judges, Samuel, and Job. A universal instinct to present offerings to the gods is found in some of the oldest written records, e.g. burnt offerings, cereal or grain offerings and shelem offerings. According to Dever, the prophetic protest against sacrifices must be understood in the context of the dependence sacrifices can bring. Vows made to Angels, signified in the story of the wife of Manoah, and the vow Jephthah made to the Lord, must be kept, as they were made with God.

## Chapter 3

### The Mother Goddess and Feminine Images

#### 3.1 THE “MOTHER GODDESS” AS EARTH MOTHER



**Figure 3.1** A figure of a “naked goddess” manufactured from a pressed mould.  
(Keel et al 1998:75)

Figurines of a “naked goddess” manufactured from a pressed mould were found at Aphek and Revadim. These nearly complete figures show a goddess with a pendant round her neck in the form of a ring that opens downwards, in the form of the  $\Omega$ -shaped symbol that represents the womb. A palmetto tree flanked by “caprids” is shown on each thigh and positioned near her exposed genitalia. On each breast, a nursing infant is depicted. Within one individual deity, this goddess combines the secret powers of Mother Earth, giving birth to humans and animals, nourishing them and caring for them. In mythical texts Atirat or Asherah appears as a nurturing mother, and she was called creator of the gods, and her role was

one who gives birth and nourishes. (Keel et al 1998:74)

The mother goddess was often depicted as the earth mother, who served as a general fertility deity, the embodiment of the earth. All goddesses could also be seen as manifestations of the “mother goddess”. The earth mother appeared in many mythologies. She was a fertile goddess embodying the fertile earth itself and typically the mother of other deities, as well as the personification of motherhood. This may have been because the earth was seen as being the mother from which all life originated. A goddess is a female deity, in contrast with a male deity known as “god”. Pantheons in various cultures included both goddesses and gods, and in some cases hermaphroditic deities. (Walls 1992:15)

Myths usually depicted goddesses with female sexual characteristics as well as female traits. This provides a fundamental symbolic identity by reference to human sexuality and gender. Gender roles were socially created expectations for masculine and feminine behavior. Gender was a socially constructed behavior based on sexual identity. Aggressive and courageous roles were normally masculine attributes. (Walls 1992:15)

Female qualities were identified as passivity, irrationality, emotional sensitivity and nurturance. This module of gender specification held femininity as a descriptive category, based on psychological and behavioral traits. The gender imagery concerning the “femininity” of goddesses and the “masculinity” of gods must be understood in order to appreciate a “goddess’s” full identity. (Walls 1992:15)

Sexual orientation frequently proved the metaphor by which mythological traditions defined female characters. Goddesses were more explicitly related with their sexual role as wife, erotic lover, or virgin. Some modern mythographers unfortunately often portrayed feminine imagery as “female equal’s fertility” with the presumption that the dominant role for women in ancient traditional societies was maternal. (Walls 1992:15) To reduce all feminine deities as “mother” or “fertility” goddesses illustrated the fact that all females, including virgins, must have had maternal affiliations. There must have been a distinction between goddesses associated with maternal imagery and ones associated with sexual activity. (Walls 1992:15)

In the Ancient Near East, many temples used devotional objects to introduce and extend the faith they promoted. Some cults could exist without a central shrine, with activities taking place at many cultic installations or even in private homes, and this influence could extend to great distances. We must note that ancient cults in rural areas survived for long periods. New cults made their appearance in the cities at the same time and could dominate the religious symbol system at these sites. We must assume that there was considerable overlap in such situations. Some cults may have survived from one cultural epoch and remained an active force when another influence arrived on the scene. (Keel et al 1998:9)

The goddess was depicted on seals and precious metals. She appeared much more frequently than male deities did. When a goddess lifted up her clothing or pushed it aside, it emphasized the significance of her sexuality and it accentuated the fact that she was female. The Canaanite weather god and the royal god were often characterized with the head of a falcon, in this way identifying him with the Egyptian god Horus. Incorporating Canaanite motifs with Egyptian motifs made it easier for the rulers of foreign lands (Hyksos) to acculturate themselves in Egypt. (Keel et al 1998:48)

Male and female worshippers are found on seals professing their faith to either a male or female deity, by means of dancing, or carrying branches in their hands. Couples were portrayed on cylinder seals while drinking from the same vessel; another couple is shown on a seal, wrapped in each other's arms. This can signify the intimacy between god and goddess on a human level. In addition to these erotic themes we see a ruler wearing a garment with thick fringes pictured on large and small objects. This could be a portrayal of the king who ruled the city states. (Keel et al 1998:48)

### **3.1.1 The “mother goddess” depicted on seal amulets**

Some Egyptian scarab imports are linked to experiences that are associated with females. They depict a “Hippopotamus Goddess” so named because in her hybrid form she has aspects of both a crocodile and a lion. In the New Kingdom period, this deity was usually called “Thoeris” or the big one, and her main duty was to keep all types of evil from mothers and small children. She is also depicted on a



fragment of a “magic knife” from Tell el-Ajjul. This fragment could be dated to 1750 BCE. A larger fragment of this type found at Megiddo dated to 1900 BCE, although the fragment does not include the Hippopotamus Goddess. (Keel et al 1998:24)



Figure 3.2



Figure 3.3



Figure 3.4

**Figures 3.2 and 3.3 Seal amulets indicating the Ω symbol.**

**Figure 3.4 At Beth Shemesh an image of a naked woman was found instead of the Ω shaped-sign. Her position and hairstyle were the same as those found on Old Syrian cylinder seals. (Keel et al 1998:25)**

The most image-bearing artefacts and their iconographical motifs were probably Egyptian imports, but not the Hippopotamus Goddess. The scarabs that depicted “caprids” and lions might have been produced in Palestine. In the Middle Bronze III Age, a group of scarabs appears that was definitely produced in the Near East. A production facility was in operation about 1750 BCE and it produced faience for export. The distribution pattern for their products is evidence that it was located either in northern Syria or in southeast Anatolia. Their products included small seal amulets with the Ω symbol. (Keel et al 1998:24)

An image-bearing artefact is the Ω symbol. The symbol appeared on very small seal amulets with the Ω-shaped mark decorated on the base that was primary in raised relief, as its principal motif. This was found on a group of scarabs appearing at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age IIB. It seems to have been manufactured in the Near East, and seal amulets were probably used for export. It also meant that a production facility was in operation about 1750, and it produced faience for export. (Keel et al 1998:24)

The Ω-shaped mark originated in Babylonia, and may have symbolized a mother’s

womb. This sign could have been associated with ancient Mother Goddesses such as Ninhursag or Nintu. A small old Babylonian terracotta plaque depicts a Mother Goddess positioned between two miscarried infants. The  $\Omega$  shape was placed above each one. (Keel et al 1998:26)

This sign above miscarried infants is in line with the practice of placing seal amulets with the  $\Omega$ -shaped symbol in the graves of children. This symbol was still used on a pendant around the neck of a “Mother Goddess” in the Late Bronze Age, and it even appeared in Judean graves dating to Iron Age IIC, where its function might have been to represent the grave as a mother’s womb. On one seal form, the  $\Omega$  group found in Beth Shemesh, a realistic image of a naked woman was depicted instead of the symbol. Her posture and hairstyle were identical to those found on Old Syrian cylinder seals. (Keel et al 1998:26)

There was a merging of creative themes during the Middle Bronze Age IIB, which was unique to Egypt or the Near East. Older motifs like “caprids” and lions were easily absorbed with the outside influences. The caprid is a goat antelope, with very long horns, held almost horizontally, and they appeared even more frequently than the lion on seal amulets. For the Egyptians, the caprid was a symbol of regeneration, and the lion as a metaphor for the Pharaoh, but both creatures were used to draw a person into the sphere of “goddess” in her role as the “mistress of the animals”. (Keel et al 1998:47)

### **3.1.2 The “naked goddess” indicated on scarabs**

A “naked goddess” which was adopted from Old Syrian cylinder seal glyptic art, appears on 44 Middle Bronze Age IIB scarabs that were discovered in Palestine. 22 scarabs were recovered in controlled excavations or surface finds in Palestine and others were bought in Jerusalem. Two of the scarabs were recovered in Petrie’s excavations at Tell el-Yehudiyah in the eastern Nile Delta. (Keel et al 1998:26)



**Figure 3.5** A “Qudshu”-type (naked goddess) found at Lachish, with shoulder length hair, holding her arms in a bent position with a papyrus or lotus-stem in each hand. This could suggest an Egyptian style of the Middle Bronze Age “Branch Goddess”. (Keel et al 1998:67)

These scarabs either were produced in Egypt for export to Canaan or may have been manufactured in Canaan itself. The “Naked Goddess” was typical of the Near East. On cylinder seals, she holds her arms across her abdomen in a bent position, or she holds her breasts. However, these positions were not commonly used on scarabs. (Keel et al 1998:26)



**Figure 3.6** Scarab from the Middle Bronze Age IIB indicating a caprid with a branch. This combination symbolizes fertility and prosperity. (Keel et al 1998:21)

Elements that distinguished depictions of the goddess, on the scarabs, or from her portrayal on the cylinder seals, are that on cylinder seals she is surrounded by worshippers, or shown opposite a partner, e.g. the weather god. However, on scarabs she is represented by herself. This could have been because the space was very limited, but her image was used in a positive way. She was usually portrayed frontally facing the person who looked at her. The direct frontal view was very rare in the Ancient Near East. She was also portrayed with large ears, and this may be interpreted as her willingness to hear the worshippers who appealed to her. (Keel et al 1998:28)



**Figure 3.7** Some pieces include a uraeus with the caprid, by depicting the caprid's tail in the shape of a uraeus. The uraeus signifies defence and protection. (Keel et al 1998:21)



**Figure 3.8** The "Naked Goddess" with the horns of a ram appears on a scarab from Jericho. She is the source of the power of life in plants and animals. (Keel et al 1998:21)



Figure 3.9



Figure 3.10



Figure 3.11



Figure 3.12

**Figures 3.9-12 The “Naked Goddess” depicted on scarabs that were found in the Eastern Nile Delta at Tell el-Yehudiyeh by Petrie, were probably manufactured in Canaan. (Keel et al 1998:27)**

The figures that are displayed on the scarabs are unique because they are accompanied by hieroglyphic good luck signs. However, the “naked goddess” was fringed by two branches or small trees and may therefore be known as the “branch goddess”. Her position between the branches and her frontal view could mean that she was making an “appearance” and this may have comparisons with vegetation. Her genitalia were frequently emphasized; this may have meant that the genitalia of the goddess were associated with vegetation. Fertility and prosperity are emphasized on the scarabs, not the sexuality and eroticism associated with palace life. The “naked goddess” depicted during the Middle Bronze Age therefore personified the power of the earth to produce its fruits. (Keel et al 1998:28)

On scarabs dating to the Middle Bronze Age IIB, in addition to the “naked

goddess”, there are many examples that only depicted the head of a goddess. The image was frequently identified in the past as a Hathor figure. The way this image was represented was based on an Egyptian model that shows a human head with cow’s ears. The cow’s ears may sometimes be changed to huge human ears, and horns changed into palm leaves on other images. (Keel et al 1998:28)

### 3.2 "GODDESSES IN CLAY"

A certain type of nude female figurines was found in many sites throughout the Ancient Near East. These Astarte figurines fall into two basic categories, plaque figurines and pillar figurines. Plaque figurines were mostly found in the Late Bronze period, although some may date from the Early Iron Age, but the pillar figurines date from the Iron Age II period. (Hadley 2000:188)

#### 3.2.1 Plaque figurines from the Levant

Plaque figurines were formed by pressing a lump of clay in an open mould, thereby forming a plaque-type figurine. They are also called “relief figurines”. W. F. Albright made the first significant study of these figurines in his book “The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible” (1935) and identified them with the goddess Astarte. J. B. Pritchard, did the next major study of Plaque figurines in “Palestinian Figurines in Relation to Certain Goddesses Known through Literature” (1943), in which he catalogued 294 figurines and divided them into seven types, based on the representation of the nude female figure. He gathered that there was no evidence connecting these figurines with any well-known goddess. (Hadley 2000:188)

Pritchard suggested two general types of plaques. His “Quadesh type” was identified by its symbolism with a goddess, although he did not determine which one, whether it was the goddess herself, a prostitute of the cult of the goddess, or a talisman used in sympathetic magic to imitate the reproductive processes of nature. Some other types of figurines may have been associated with childbirth. (Hadley 2000:188)

In “Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays” (1982), Miriam Tadmore suggested that the figurines could be divided into two different types,

those with and those without divine symbols. T Holland studied the plastic art of Palestine and he wrote an article in "Levant" (1977) about the finds from Jerusalem Cave 1. Ora Negbi studied the metal statuettes and artefacts representing Levantine deities. (Hadley 2000:189)

"Fertility figurines" were misunderstood until Tadmor's study. Some plaques appear to represent goddesses as they seem to include divine symbols. These figures could hold lotus plants or stand on a lion. The fertility goddess of the Levant was Astarte, especially before the Ras Shamra texts. These goddesses were identified with her, and called "Astarte figurines". Any plaque of a nude figurine came to be accepted as an Astarte figurine. (Hadley 2000:189)

Tadmore suggested two categories of female plaque figurines, even with a similarity of both groups, nude frontal figurines often portrayed with huge breasts and genital areas. She observed that the figures with symbols of divinity appeared to be standing while other figurines seemed to be reclining on some sort of bed. (Hadley 2000:189)

### **3.2.2 "Pillar figurines"**

Hundreds of pillar figurines from Lachish and Jerusalem that date to the end of the eighth century and to the entire seventh century were found. Some of these figurines have anthropomorphic human-like breasts, arms, and a female head. These figurines appear in different varieties. Most of them had a hand-formed pedestal, they were rarely turned on a wheel and they were hollow. Above the pedestal, the female upper torso was always shaped by hand and a moulded head was inserted at the top. (Keel et al 1998:325)

Even though the various types of heads made from moulds can be identified, they are very similar in some ways. They usually have large almond shaped eyes and a hairstyle with tightly twisted teardrop curls. At least a third of the pieces were handmade, and the nose and eyes were made only by pinch marks, which gave them an almost birdlike appearance. Emphasis was placed on their full breasts often hanging down, supported by thick arms. Some examples had traces of paint, which could have been emphasized the hair or eyes, or it may have been for decorative purpose, like jewelry. (Keel et al 1998:325)



**Figure 3.13 Female mould-made terracotta figurine of the “Tambourine” style, Ta’anach 10<sup>th</sup> century. (Dever 2001:194)**

The cruder and less expensive type with pinched faces was locally produced, based on the location where they were found. Few of the moulds that would have been used in the production of the heads have been found. Two moulds found at Lachish and Beth-Shemesh, and four moulds dated from 600 BCE, were found at Megiddo. The suggestion that it could mean that the figures were exported cannot be ruled out. It could mean that moulds were in a potter’s atelier: very few ateliers were found, or these heads might have been imported and were inserted into the locally produced figurine bodies. Many moulded heads were found in excavations without their corresponding bodies. The heads may have been made separately or even sold without their bodies. A unique discovery at Hazor shows that a head could be used in a different way, as a pendant or amulet. (Keel et al 1998:327)

We may assume that production of the bodies as well as the assembly of the pillar figurines was carried out in Palestine, and in Judah. This is important for the interpretation of the figurines in the context of Israelite or Judean religious history. Differently shaped Pillar figurines have been found in Phoenician, Northern Israelite, Philistine and Trans Jordanian areas as well. Pillar figurines and their fragments were found in significant numbers in the north as well as the south



during the eighth century in Beth-Shemesh, Samaria Jerusalem Cave I, and they were still in use in the second half of the seventh century. (Keel et al 1998:328)

### **3.2.3 The Galjub bronzes: “How do you want your goddess?”**

If a customer came to a silversmith shop in Hellenistic Egypt and for example wanted a clothespin crowned with a statuette of a divinity the silversmith would have had many examples to choose from. He would show him examples of Isis, special Kybeles or even nice Afrodites. (For such a pin, see Greek or Roman jewelry Berkeley 1980.) If a customer decided on Isis he would be presented with a few choices. The silversmith could reply with “This is our stock what would you like to have? Alternatively, how do you want your goddess?” Because he would have several “Isides” in his collection, standing, sitting, reclining, some stylistically “Greek” some “Egyptian” even some crossovers. (Bricault and Versluys 2010:55)

In about 1912-1913 a large collection of small bronzes was found buried at Galjub, (Qalgub) amongst ancient house ruins 16 km north of Cairo. A local farmer made the discovery. The bronzes were found together sealed in a big vessel. Dr. Wilhelm Pelizaeus, a German executive and collector of antiques brought all the bronzes (except one) from the dealer Tano in Cairo in Nov 2013. The 106 bronzes as well as a set of tools is now in the Roemer Museum in Hildesheim. (Bricault and Versluys 2010:56)

The Galjub hoard consists of a range of different objects: small statuettes intended to crown pins, relief plaques, mainly medallion shaped etc. The bronzes and tools have their original patina and are in an exceptionally good condition. They were dated from 200BCE or earlier by Albert Ippel, who published the bronzes in 1922. The outcome of his research was that the objects in the hoard are mostly cast in bronze or wax models, which gave them permanency, and it helped them to be easily transported. (Bricault and Versluys 2010:56)

The interesting part is the modular nature of the material; there are bodies, heads, and bits of dress that could easily be re-assembled into new creations. It also has traditionally Greek motifs as well as those of a traditionally Egyptian character. These items probably belonged to a silversmith who could provide his clients with Isis and Afrodite, Horus and Hercules. (Bricault and Versluys 2010:57)

Plaster moulds and casts found at Mit-Rahine (Memphis), bought by Pelizaeus in 1907 and 1912, even some later finds are more or less the same. They are dated from the early 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BCE to the Roman period. Amongst these many Greek style moulds are found, traditionally Egyptian sphinxes (two were found, one with a double crown), Isis, Pta and Hopi and a female head with a huge headdress consisting of a kalathos and a uraeus, identified as Afrodite-Isis, very Egyptinizing. (Bricault and Versluys 2010:59)

In the British Museum catalogue, Don Barly addresses the issue that the same workshop can produce both styles, e.g. Greek and Egyptian style terracotta figures will come from the same workshop. Hailey states: "The terracotta figures of deities in this chapter are products of workshops that had Greek and Egyptian clients." (Bricault and Versluys 2010:60)

We will never know the cultural background, ethnicity, or religious connection of the producers and sellers of terracotta figures or the silversmiths. However, we know they had a variety of clients. There is evidence of different contents and styles being offered by single vendors e.g. the silversmiths of Galjub and the workshop at Mit Rahine who catered for their multicultural clients. (Bricault and Versluys 2010:73)

### **3.2.4 Terracotta doves**

On painted vessels from Tell el-Far'ah (north), birds (doves) flank a stylized palm tree, and this scene is similar to the portrayal of the Ishtar temple at Mari, in which two palm trees flank the sanctuary with a large white dove sitting on each palm. The goddess, palms, doves and lions appeared in depictions for the goddess in Palestine as well. (Keel et al 1998:29)

Representations of doves have been found at Lachish in Tomb 1002, which was used during the seventh century. Three-dimensional terracotta's, moulded by hand, depicted doves with outspread wings, and positioned above a cylinder-shaped pedestal. The figures were dated to the middle or to the second half of the seventh century. Middle Bronze Age votive doves from the shrines at Nahariyah and Megiddo were connected with doves that were used as messengers of love between the goddesses and gods as they appear on Old Syrian cylinder seals.

The doves could be seen as “a final statement of love to the one who died”. (Keel et al 1998:325)

Doves were also found in private homes, but they never appeared together with pillar goddess figurines. The presumption may be that an attribute creature of the goddess, the dove, may appear in place of the goddess. As a messenger, the dove would communicate messages of the goddess’s blessing or love to be buried, or bringing a message from the loved ones to the dead. (Keel et al 1998:325)

### 3.3 SUMMARY

Figurines found at Aphek and Revadim showing a “naked” goddess with a pendant around her neck and nursing infants, may represent the secret powers of mother earth. The goddess was represented on seals and precious metals. Seal amulets were found at Beth Shemesh showing the  $\Omega$  shaped-sign instead of a naked woman. The  $\Omega$ -shaped symbol represents the womb. Seal amulets with this symbol were placed on the graves of children. Goddesses were more explicitly related with their sexual roles as wife, lover or virgin. Many temples in the Ancient Near East used devotional objects to extend the faith they promoted.

Male and female worshippers are found on seals professing their faith to either a male or female deity. Most image-bearing artefacts and their iconographical motifs were probably Egyptian imports. Scarabs from the Middle Bronze Age IIB were found showing “caprids” with a branch. A caprid was a symbol of regeneration for the Egyptians. The “naked goddess” portrayed on cylinder seals are surrounded by worshippers, and when represented on scarabs she was alone. When the “naked goddess” is fringed by branches or small trees on scarabs, she may represent the “branch goddess”.

Fertility and prosperity are emphasized on the scarabs, not sexuality and eroticism. The genitalia of the goddess were associated with vegetation and therefore frequently emphasized. The figurines found at sites throughout the Ancient Near East were in two categories, plaque and pillar figurines. Plaque figurines were formed by pressing a lump of clay in an open mould, and forming a

plaque-type figurine, and pillar figurines have human-like breasts, arms and female heads, and most had a hand-formed pedestal. The upper torsos were shaped and they had moulded heads. Representations of doves were found at Lachish: three-dimensional terracotta doves moulded by hand dated to the seventh century. The doves could be seen as a statement of love to one who had died.

## Chapter 4

### Green Trees and Temples, Cult Prostitution in Ancient Israel

#### 4.1 AND UNDER EVERY GREEN TREE YOU HAVE LAIN DOWN AS AN HARLOT

According to Canaanite mythology of the Canaanite Baal cult, the incestuous sexual relationship was usually between the storm god Hadad or Baal, and his sister Anat or Asherah. Since the lands were fertilized by the rain or “sperm” of Baal, it is important that this sexual activity must be stimulated in order to “fertilize” the earth. (Mweemba 2010:141)

In the Canaanite fertility cult theology, the places of worship were usually on high places, hills or altars. These activities must have been stimulated by additional “magic” as well. The male “quades” (holy men) and female “quadesha” (holy women) were among the holy personnel who engaged in sacred prostitution or ritual sex, thus male and female prostitutes. Devotees were encouraged to engage in ritual intercourse with the shrine devotees to emulate and stimulate the sexual activities of the gods. (Jr 2:20, Is 57:5) (Mweemba 2010:141)



Figure 4.1a

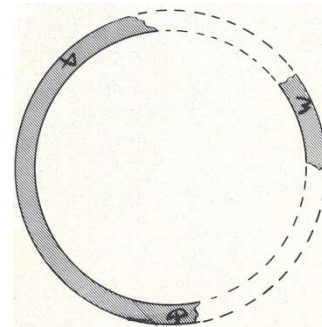


Figure 4.1b



Figure 4.1c

Figures 4.1a-c The word “qodesh” (holy) incised on the side of a bowl, and repeated on the rim. (Yadin 1975:182)

*“Do not profane your daughter by making her a harlot so that the land may not fall into harlotry, and then become full of lewdness.” (Lv 19:29) GNB*

*“None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any of the sons of Israel be a cult prostitute.*

*You shall not bring the hire of a harlot nor the wages of a dog in the house of the Lord your God for a votive offering, for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God.” (Dt 23:17) GNB*

*“Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the LORD.” (Dt 23:18) KJV*

The text implies that there could have been people who owned prostitutes for hire for the practices of sacred prostitution. Worshippers would have owned brothels around the temple area. It could refer to the contributions and offerings they received, and in this way they returned to the temple. It is possible that the Canaanites used the proceeds of temple prostitution as offerings to their gods. The restriction mentioned in Leviticus could have been used in this context of these Canaanite practices. (Mweemba 2010:151)

*“Do not defile yourselves by any of these things for by all these, the nations by which I am casting out before you have become defiled... The land has become defiled therefore I have visited its punishment upon it so that the land has spewed its inhabitants.” (Lv 18:24-28) KJV*

*“But as for you, you are to keep My Judgements and My statutes, and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native or the alien who sojourns among you, (for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these things); so that the land may not spew you out should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you.” (Lv 18:24-28) KJV*

The apparent prosperity of the Canaanites, whose worship practices and fertility cults made the land a land of “milk and honey”, could have been a temptation to the Israelites to abandon their God, and to follow their cults. (Ezr 9:1, Neh 13:23, MI 2:11) (Mweemba 2010:151)



**Figure 4.2 Ancient Arad, a Canaanite city located in the Negev 30 km northeast of Be'er Sheva. (Geva 2000:47)**

It would be appropriate to closely examine the cult prostitutes of the Baal fertility cult. The Bible uses three words to denote prostitutes. The Old Testament word is “zonah”, (harlot) this described a secular prostitute who offered herself for money, who was a prostitute and who had sex for a price. This term may have included cult prostitutes as well. The word “deity” i.e. “holy” as a feminine form had a masculine counterpart, “sodomite” (KJV) cult prostitute. The “quadesha” was probably a sacred prostitute who had sex as part of her temple duties. Originally “quadesha” referred to a “consecrated maiden” but Biblical authors used it in the sense of “harlot” (Mweemba 2010:145)

*“All her idols shall be broken in pieces  
 All her earnings (from her idolatry) shall be burned with fire,  
 And all her images I shall make desolate:  
 For from the earnings of a prostitute she collected them,  
 And to the earnings of a prostitute they shall return.” (Mi 1:7) AMP*

The fertility ritual of the Canaanites was one of sympathetic magic, in which the “quedeshoth” (holy women) functioned as surrogates of the deity, prostituting

themselves to the effect of the fertility of the soil. (Jr 2:20) (Mweemba 2010:151)

For the covenant people, the “Israelites”, this paganism of prostitution could have been hard to resist if it had not been for their strict laws; the fact that the Canaanites who indulged in these practices seemed wealthy; and that the people who carried out the services were referred to in sacred terminology. The persons were known as “quadesh” (male) and “quadesha” (female), they were devotees of various gods, they served those who came to worship the gods and the services involved immorality. (Mweemba 2010:151)

*“And he tore down the houses of the (male) cult prostitutes, which were at the house (temple) of the Lord, where the women were weaving (tent) hangings for the Asherah (shrines).” (1 Ki 23:7) AMP*

Quadesh also means “holy one” and was originally a title of Ishtar. Sometimes Quadesh wore the headdress of the goddess Hathor, revealing that her holiness was a sacramental indication to sexuality as a divine force. (Monaghan 1990:292)

In Genesis 38 Judah mistook Tamar for a veiled “prostitute” (Hebrew, zonah) sitting beside the road.

*“And he turned unto her by the way, and said,  
Go to, I pray thee, let me come into thee;  
(for he knew not that she was his daughter in law.)  
And she said, What wilt thou give me, that thou mayest come in unto me?”  
(Gn 38:16) KJV*

For her “services”, Judah promised Tamar a sheep from his flock, and gave her his seal and staff as assurance that his promise would be kept. When his friend returned to reclaim the seal and staff, he enquired in the local village where he could find the “quadeshah” but the townspeople informed him “there has been no “quadeshah” here”.

*“Then he asked the men of that place, saying,  
Where is the harlot, that was openly by the way side?  
And they said, there was no harlot in this place.” (Gn 38:21) KJV*





**Figure 4.3 The fateful encounter between Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar. Painted by Dutch artist Gerbrand van den Eekhout.**  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Rembrandt's\\_school\\_Tamar.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Rembrandt's_school_Tamar.JPG)

#### 4.2 FOR HAZOR... THE HEAD OF ALL THOSE KINGDOMS (Joshua 11:10)

Temples in antiquity were the houses of the deity, not the setting in which sacrifices took place. Therefore, the large square or open area in front of and around these temples where the sacrifices were performed was a very important element. (Yadin 1975:112)

At Hazor, (Jos 15:25, 11:1, 11:10, 11:13, 19:36, Jdg 4:2, Nm 11:33, Jr 49:33, Jdg 4:17) important cult installations were found in front of the stratum two temple, as well as in considerable parts of the open court. The court had an inner yard near the temple and an outer yard further south, separated by a freestanding entrance gate. The slanting floor of the inner yard was paved with cobblestones, creating a shallow trough, a low guiding line, to drain away any liquids from the sacrifices and offerings. It appeared that the main cult activities took place in this inner yard. (Yadin 1975:112)



**Figure 4.4** A general view (overlooking south east) of the holy of holies with cult furniture as found at Hazor. (Yadin 1975:86)



**Figure 4.5** A basalt pillar-like incense altar from Hazor, with the emblem of the weather god, Hadad, four rays within a disc. (Yadin 1975:82)

The entire inner yard area was littered with animal bones and ashes. It was evidently the main sacrifice area. In the middle of the inner court area a “bamah” (large rectangular platform) was found, and a drainage canal was discovered beneath the court floor, built by unused incense stands. The origin of the drainage

was a semi-circular installation found to the right of the temple entrance, in which two basalt pillar-bases were incorporated in secondary use. This canal seems to have drained the blood and water of the sacrifices. (Yadin 1975:113)

Within a great heap of discarded vessels in the southern part of the court, the “favissa” (a place to discard cultic items that must not be defiled by ordinary use) was a small clay model of a cow’s liver found with omens inscribed on it in cuneiform script. Temple diviners usually used these types of clay models, and it is the only one found in Israel with such inscriptions. Liver divinations were customary in Babylon and this is further evidence of the links between Hazor and Mesopotamia.

Translated the inscription means:

*“One king will bend down another.  
An enemy will attack my country.  
Forgiveness (will be granted) by the god to the men.  
A servant will rebel against his lord.”*

On the other fragment are the inscriptions:

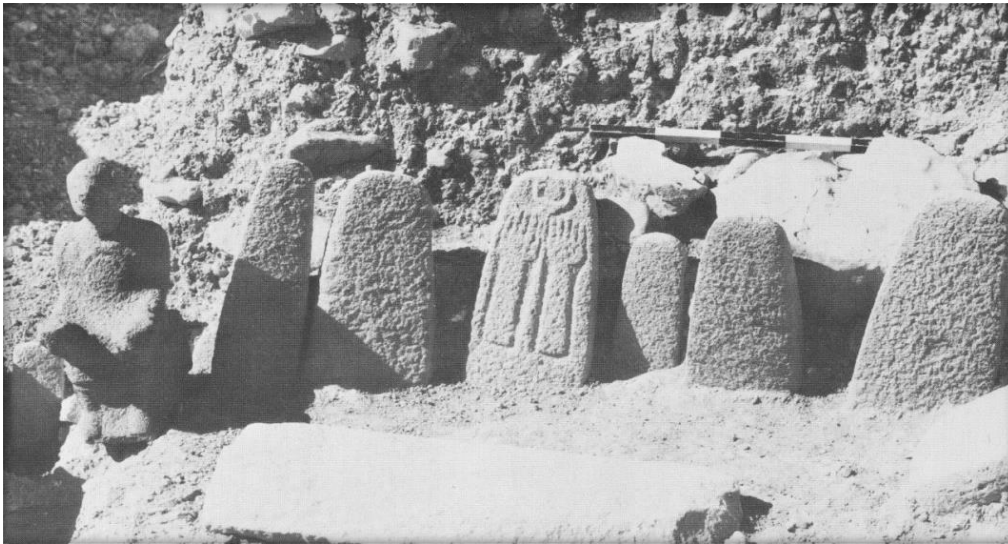
*“Istar will eat the land  
Nergal will...  
The gods of the city will come back.” (Yadin 1975:115)*

The most prominent features of Yigael Yadin’s discoveries at Hazor were that although temples dating from the same time existed in the various areas of Hazor, not one compares with another, not referring to temples built one on top of another in the same area, but for example comparing a temple of area C to one in area H. According to Yadin an explanation for the difference in layout could be from the different deities worshipped in the temples, each deity with his own temple tradition. (Yadin 1975:119)

Alternatively, it could even suggest that the population of Hazor consisted of a variety of ethnic people, with each group keeping its own tradition. The orientation of the temples, describing the position of their entrance, compared with their holy of holies was very interesting. The orientation of a temple follows a certain aspect of the cult of a specific deity. An east-west orientation had a direct bearing on the

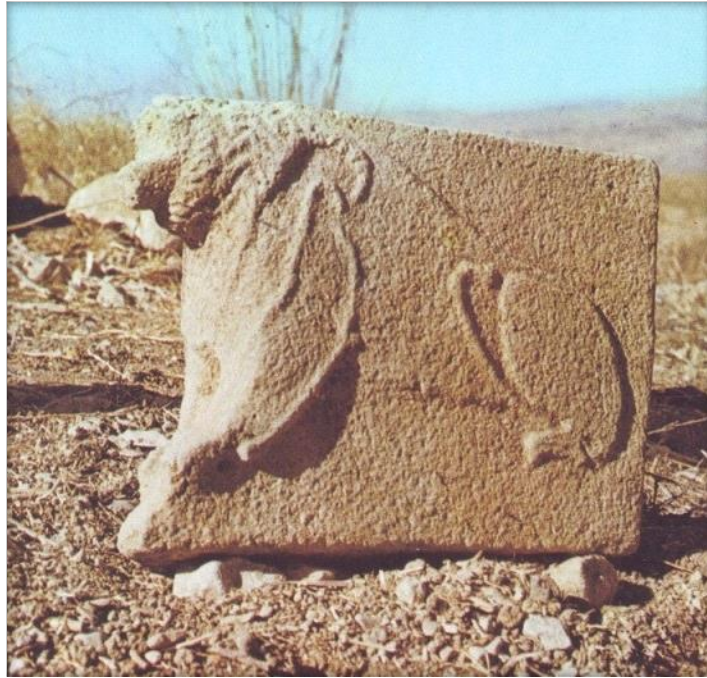
importance of the sun in the cult. (Yadin 1975:119)

At Hazor, Yigael Yadin found a miniature sanctuary featuring “Mazzeboth” or “stelae”, (upright stones) a statue and offering table in area C. Below the “stelae” was a headless torso with his head nearby. The small objects were erected on a high semi-circular platform, while the floor was on a lower level. The statue depicts a man seated on a low stool holding a cup-like object in one hand, while the other hand rests on his knee. This could suggest a deity or king. The upper part of his tunic has a curved neckline and an inverted crescent is suspended onto his chest. This emblem is typical of the moon-god. (Yadin 1975:46)



**Figure 4.6 Hazor, the “stelae” temple showing the “stelae”, the deity statue and offering table. (Yadin 1975:46)**

“Stelae” were found right and left behind the statue. Some were found on a higher level, and others at the bottom of a slope. The center “stelae” depicts two hands stretched upwards in a gesture of prayer or invocation, and above them the symbol of a deity, which is composed of three elements: a crescent disk within the crescent and two small tassel-like circles suspended in the center. The symbols are those of the moon god, and they represent the moon’s two phases, the crescent and the full moon. A slab of basalt depicting a crouching lion was found in secondary use, probably used as a door jamb “orthostat” (upright, standing stone). It was clear from this temple building that objects found in the upper stratum originally belonged to an earlier phase and was in secondary use by the people of 1A when they rebuilt the temple. (Yadin 1975:48)



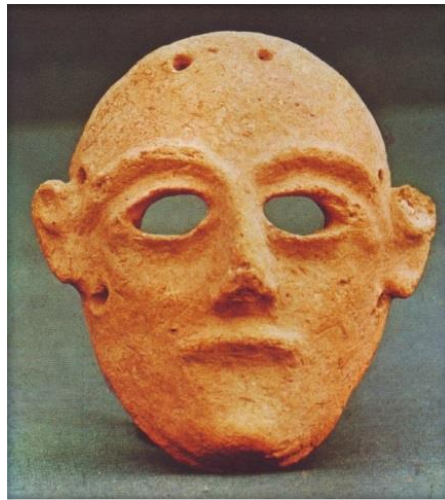
**Figure 4.7 A small lion “orthostat” found at Hazor, suggests that it had served as a door jamb. (Yadin 1975:48)**

In the vicinity of the temple were a number of complexes structured around central courts. It seemed that they were connected with the temple, its cult or function. In a potter's workshop connected to the temple with potter's wheels was a little clay mask. The mask was first made as a bowl, then the eyes were cut out and it had long eyebrows joined to the upper end of the straight slender nose, with moulded ears. (Yadin 1975:55)

Two perforated holes at the upper end and two more on each side, one above and one below the ear were for threading a string to attach the mask either to the head of its wearer or to another object. The mask was small, 14 cm high and beardless. A similar mask was found in area D thrown in a cistern. Beneath three bowls in a potter's workshop, a rectangular silver standard was found. It is 12.5cm long x 7cm wide, with a tang at one end. The surface is covered with a thin sheet of silver pressed tightly onto it. (Yadin 1975:55)

On the standard is a face of a woman holding a snake in each hand, and wearing a pendant shaped like a stylized snake. On the upper end of the standard, above the woman's head, is a crescent and a stylized image of the snake is repeated. This depiction is similar to other Near Eastern representations of a snake goddess. Yadin describes the woman on the standard as the deity of the temple,

the consort of the moon god. According to Yadin the hands on the “stelae” were the emblem of Ba’al Hamman’s consort. The only goddess mentioned in similar “stelae” resembles deities worshipped in Zinjirli in the south-eastern part of Turkey and at Carthage and Sardinia in North Africa. Ba’al Hamman could also mean “Lord of the Amanus”. (Yadin 1975:55)



**Figure 4.8 Hazor find: Clay mask with holes for attaching strings. (Yadin 1975:51)**

The goddess Tanit or Tinnith was the only goddess mentioned in all these “stelae” in conjunction with Ba’al Hamman or even sometimes independent of him. She is always shown with both hands raised upwards sometimes holding snakes. She is also illustrated in a schematic manner, a triangle with a circle on top, as well as the two hands, which is known as the symbol of Tanit. These hands could be the emblem of the consort of Hazor’s moon god. On many of Carthage monuments Tanit is called the “face of Ba’al” and this could even be her official title. The area of the Punic culture also had masks similar to those at Hazor. In some Punic monuments the sanctuaries of Ba’al Hamman and Tanit are depicted with “stelae” above a platform, similar to the ones found in Hazor. This is a clear indication that the Punic culture had elements of the Phoenician culture, and they were influenced by Canaanite elements similar to the ones at Hazor. (Yadin 1975:57)

Hazor temples had different positions. The “stelae” temples are orientated east-west, the “orthostatic” temples are orientated south-north, the double temple is orientated west-east and another “orthostatic” temple found on the tell-proper is orientated east-west. All the temples were built, irrespective of the orientation of

the corners of the buildings, in the points of the compass indicating a definite Mesopotamian or northern feature. Some temples of other Palestinian sites, like Lachish Megiddo and Beth-shan correspond to wall orientation, meaning that if they are orientated south-north then the walls are south-north and east-west. This could imply an Egyptian influence. (Yadin 1975:119)



**Figure 4.9 A Punic votive “stelae” showing the emblem of Ba’al Hamman (crescent and disk) and his consort, the goddess Tanit illustrated as a woman with raised hands. (Yadin 1975:56)**

### 4.3 TEMPLES, HOMES OF DEITIES

A large Canaanite settlement was found on the western slopes of At Tel Burna, a large Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 BCE) settlement, possibly the Biblical Libnah, (Jos 21:13, 1 Ki 8:22, Is 37:8, 2 Ki 24:17-18). These excavations provided insights into the Canaanites and their religious world. There was a large building with walls from medium sized rocks, while the floor was mostly exposed bedrock. There was a courtyard of approximately 4.8m<sup>2</sup>. Temple type finds suggest that the building had been a temple, and that some religious activities took place in the courtyard. Two complete “tabuns” (ovens), as well as many animal bones and pottery, suggest religious activity, confirmed by several chalices, goblets and cup and

saucers. This could imply eating and drinking rituals. (BAR 2015 Vol 41 No 5p 30)

Inside the building, two nose fragments were discovered from two ceramic masks, which could have been used for ceremonial purposes. These masks had openings for a mouth and eyes, they were sized and shaped to fit a human face, instead of adorning an idol. Several figurines were found in the building, one a fragment of a Canaanite plaque depicting a standing nude figurine holding two small infants, and the infant's hands grasping the woman's breast. The head of a locally made horse figurine with incised facial figures was also found in the building. In the courtyard, many Cypriot imports were discovered, including bull figurines. Three unique Cypriot votive vessels found on top of a carved flat stone clearly illustrate cult and ritual activities. Economic and administrative activities also took place here as implied by the large Cypriot "pithoi" (large earthenware storage jar) and seals. (BAR 2015 Vol 41 No 5p 30)



**Figure 4.10 The figurine remains of a naked woman holding two small infants. (BAR 2015:30)**

Apparently some kind of cultic activity is suggested, as it could have been a temple which also collected taxes, or an administrative building with cultic



affiliations. Clearly some kind of ceremonial drinking and feasting took place judging by the goblets and animal bones that were found. A ceremonial procession could even have ended in the building, as seen by the mask fragments found. (BAR 2015 Vol 41 No 5 p31). Further excavation will reveal the exact nature of the building.

Excavations in the Ammonite heartland at the Ammon Citadel have unearthed monumental architectural remains from Iron Age II, (1000-580 BCE) including portions of the city's defence walls and water systems. A large building complex was also exposed resembling an Assyrian palace on the lower terrace. Beneath a later Roman-period Hercules temple are the remains of an Iron Age megalithic building of limestone boulders containing several votive figurines, possibly the Ammonite kingdom's main temple to its leading deity.

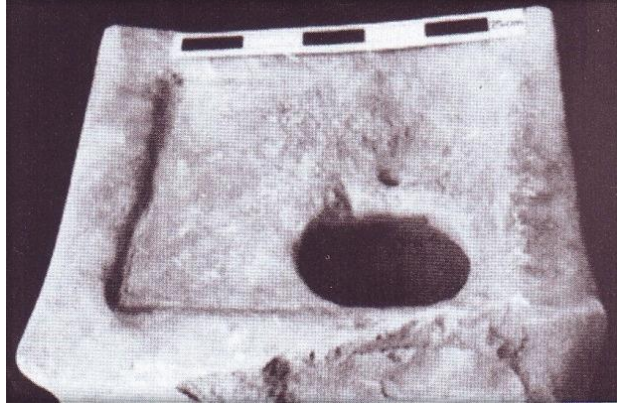
(BAR 2016 Vol 42 No 6 p31)

References to building and architectural terms in the first-person speech of a king or god make up the apparent focus of the Amman Citadel inscription, dating to the late ninth century BCE. It begins with a mention of Milcom, also named in the Hebrew Bible as the leading god of the Ammonites (1 Ki 11:5, 33). A collection of some double-faced female sculpted heads in limestone from the Amman Citadel might represent a goddess or a group of Ammonite goddesses within an architectural design. (BAR 2016 Vol 42 No 6 p31)

At Moab, (Dt 23:3-6, Ezr 9:1-3) archaeological discoveries added important religious evidence for the Iron Age. These include limestone altars from the fortified outpost of Khirbet al-Mudayna (Mudeiniyeh). Here in a small temple just inside the town's six-chambered fortified gate, three limestone altars were discovered ranging in height from 19.5 to 37.5 inches, one that is a rectangular shaft altar with a draining hole for pouring libations. The archaeological site Khirbet 'Ataruz about seven miles east of the Dead Sea has been identified with Ataroth which is mentioned in the Mesha Stele as a town of Israelite Gad, which the king of Moab conquered and from which he pillaged an important cultic item. Many cultic artefacts were found in this Iron Age temple, including a ceramic bull statue, and a terracotta shrine model dating to the ninth century. (BAR 2016 Vol 42 No 6 p37)



**Figure 4.11**



**Figure 4.12**

**Figures 4.11 and 4.12 A rectangular shaft Moabite altar from Khirbat al-Mudayna (Mudeineyeh) showing the drainage hole. (BAR 2016:35)**

Edom reflects primarily as a territorial designation in Late Bronze Age Egyptian texts and the Hebrew Bible (Gn 32:4, 1 Ki 11:14-16). As reflected in the Biblical Stories of Esau, Edom refers to the mountainous “red” land of sandstone, granite and soil east of the Arabah, extending south of the Zered (modern Wadi Hasa) to the Gulf of Aqaba. In Egyptian texts, Edom was associated with the teno-dwelling pastoralists Shasu. They could be associated with the affinity population known from an enormous cemetery called Wadi Fidan 40, at the entrance to the Fanyan wadi systems in the northeast Arabah. (BAR 2016 Vol 42 No 6 p37)

Edom’s leading deity was Qos. Evidence of this is found in the names of Edomite kings mentioned in the Assyrian sources. The best-preserved Edomite worship places have been excavated west of the Arabah in the south-eastern Negev, where Qos is invoked during the late 7<sup>th</sup> or early 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, in a blessing in the Horvat “Uza ostrakon” inscription, and in dedication inscriptions engraved on vessel rims at the sanctuary site of Horvat Qitmit. Among this collection is an Edomite goddess figurine wearing a three-horned headdress, dated to the late seventh or early sixth century BCE as well as a sphinx. Distinctive characteristics of Edomite figures are large eyes and protruding noses. (BAR 2016 Vol 42 No 6 p38)



**Figure 4.13 Found at Horvat Uza, an Edomite description reading: “I bless you by Qaus” written on this ostracon and dated to the early 6th century BCE. This inscription opens with a salutation and invokes a blessing by Qos. (BAR 2016:37)**

At Qitmit the most evidence for Edomite worship was found, including Edomite pottery, ceramic cylindrical statuettes, stands, figurines and cultic vessels. At Ein Hazeva, located about fourteen miles south of the Dead Sea may be the Biblical site of Tamar, at the southern boundary of King Solomon’s empire. A similar find of ceramic statues and other objects were found. This includes ceramic incense stands, statues, and stone altars, which were used in the site’s open-air Edomite shrine from the seventh century BCE. Some of the incense stands have human limbs and faces. (BAR 2016 Vol 42 No 6 p40)



**Figure 4.14 Edomite goddess figurine wearing a three horned headdress uncovered at Horvat Qitmit in Southern Judah, dated to the late 7th or early 6th century BCE. (BAR 2016:39)**

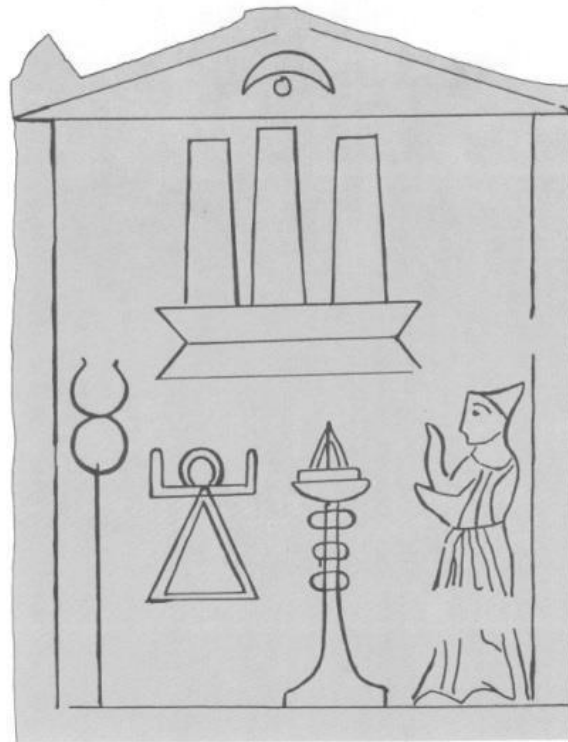


**Figure 4.15 The massive architecture of Hazor's Late Bronze Age palace and unique finds promise even more discoveries. (BAR 2017:56)**

Israel, Judah and the Trans Jordanian kingdoms are similar in many aspects. Each had its own national god, each was a tribal kingdom, and they battled each other over territory and boundaries. Israel even claimed territory east of the Jordan. However, we do not have a monumental sculpture from Israel comparable with those from Ammon and Moab. The great inscriptions confirming the history of Israel and Judah and shedding light on national and international religious life come from kings and kingdoms other than Judah and Israel, e.g. the Mesha Stele, the Tel Dan Stele and the Baalam inscription from Deir 'Alla. (BAR 2016 Vol 42 No 6 p40)

#### 4.4 HIERAPOLIS, THE "HOLY CITY" (Colossians 4:13)

Lucian, a second-century satirist and rhetorician, describes in his manuscript "The Syrian Goddess" the city Hierapolis, (Pammukale / Cotton Castle in South Central Turkey). According to Lucian, ancient Mabbug, and modern Mambij, he describes in detail the cults, temples and myths of the people. He gives a reliable account of an important pilgrimage site in the Hellenistic Near East. The basic truthfulness of this work is supported by evidence and parallel descriptions given by Aelian and Macrobius as well as coins from Hierapolis. The fourth century BCE coinage portrays priests with their dress as described in "The Syrian Goddess". (Attridge and Oden 1976:3)



**Figure 4.16** A Punic “stelae” dedicated to Ba’al Hamman and Tanit, showing a representation of their sanctuary with “stelae” erected above a platform. (Yadin 1975:57)

According to Lucian, “no temples were more sacred nor any region more holy”, than those in the “Holy city” Hierapolis. The temple had many expensive artefacts, ancient offerings, and statues of the gods. According to him, the statues could sweat and move about, and they give oracles. In addition, people often shouted in the temple, even when it was locked. Many treasures from Arabia, Phoenicia, Babylon, Cappadocia, Assyria, were brought to the temple. (Attridge and Oden 1976:17)

According to Greek legends, the sanctuary was founded by Deucalion in whose lifetime the flood occurred. He built an ark and when he and his family boarded, different kinds of domestic and wild animals and every kind of creature that grazes the earth came to him, all in pairs. He welcomed them and all the animals were saved. The inhabitants of the “Holy City” had a different version of the story. They said that in their land a great cavity was formed, and all the water from the deluge flowed into it. (Attridge and Oden 1976:21)

After this happened, Deucalion erected altars and built a temple sacred to Hera, over the cavity. Twice yearly, water was carried from the sea to the temple, not only by the priests, but also by all the people from Syria and Arabia. The water

was poured out in the temple, and flowed into the cavity. According to the people, this custom served as a memorial of the great flood, and to get divine favor from the gods. (Attridge and Oden 1976:21)

Another version of the legend is that it was Semiramis the Babylonian who founded it for her mother Dekerto. Dekerto was depicted as a woman with a fish's tail. (Sometimes she was even portrayed without a fish tail). Some people in Hierapolis considered the fish as a sacred animal, and some considered the dove a holy animal, because Semiramis changed into a dove. Another sacred account was that the sanctuary was established by Attis for the goddess Rhea, (Asherah). Some descriptions suggest that Dionysus, son of Symele, founded the sanctuary, and he dedicated it to Hera. Dionysus son of Symele even brought foreign clothes, Indian gems, and elephant tusks from Ethiopia to the temple. (Attridge and Oden 1976:25)

Another legend has it that Hera requested Stratonice, the wife of the king of Syria to build the temple. With the help of one of the king's friends, Combabus, the temple was built. The site of the sanctuary was on a hill, double walls surrounded it, the entryway of the temple faced north, and its height was 182.8 meters. In the gateway were phalli, which were built by Dionysus. The phalli were 548.6 meters long. Twice yearly, a man climbed up one of the phalli, and lived on the tip of the phallus for a period of seven days. The people believed that he communicated with the gods when he was perched at the top, and he asked the gods to bless Syria, and to grant their prayers, because they were close at hand. (Attridge and Oden 1976:43)

Combabus first begged the king not to send him to the Holy City (Hierapolis) to assist Stratonice to build a temple, because he knew that there may be repercussions, but when the king insisted, he dreaded that at some later time he would be the victim of jealousy because of Stratonice. Combabus then unmanned himself before they left, because he felt he would remove every cause of misbehavior that may happen. When he cut off his genitals he put them in a small container with myrrh, honey and other fragrances and entrusted this "great treasure" to the king. He asked the king to keep it until his return. (Attridge and Oden 1976:31)

After three years of building the temple, Stratonice began to desire Combabus. Some people in the Holy City blamed Hera for causing all the trouble. Stratonice planned in what manner she would confess her love. She became drunk on wine and after they came from dinner Stratonice went to Combabus's home. She begged him, grabbed his knees and confessed her love for him. He accused her of drunkenness, but only when she threatened to kill herself, he confessed what he did. Afterwards Stratonice was always in his company as a consolation to him and as an illustration of her unfulfilled love. (Attridge and Oden 1976:33)

When the king heard of the affairs of Stratonice and Combabus in the Holy City, because many people accused them of having an affair, he recalled Combabus from the unfinished task. Another version of the story is that Stratonice, when she failed to get what she wanted, wrote to the king and accused Combabus of making amorous advances. Combabus went back confident because he knew he had a method of defence. As soon as he arrived the king had him taken into custody, but only when Combabus was lead off to his execution he called for his treasure which the king had. Combabus broke the seal and revealed what was in the box, and told him how he had suffered. The king pardoned Combabus and executed the accusers, and he gave many gifts to Combabus. Later Combabus asked to return to the temple, as it was unfinished and remained at the Holy City for the rest of his life. (Attridge and Oden 1976:37)

A wise man told Lucian a few sacred stories. One sacred account was about Attis, a Lydian from birth. Attis first taught rites connected to the goddess Rhea. All the rites which the Phrygians, Lydians and inhabitants from Samothrace performed they learned from Attis. When Attis was castrated by Rhea he took a feminine form and dressed in female clothing and ceased his male lifestyle. He praised Rhea and performed the rites related to his sufferings in every land. Since the men beyond the Euphrates did not accept him or his rites he established this sanctuary in Syria. The goddess in the temple of the Holy City is similar to Rhea as she was carried by lions, she holds a "tympanum", (a stretched membrane) forming a drumhead, and wore a tower on her head. According to the wise man, Galli (certain Eunuch priests) never castrate themselves for Hera, but only for Rhea, and in so doing they imitated Attis. (Attridge and Oden 1976:23)

The temple faced the rising sun, and its form and structure was similar to the temples in Ionia. The temple was built on a large platform 3.65 meters high, and it had a ramp made out of stone. The front hall of the temple had doors and a roof of gold, and the temple emitted an ambrosial fragrance. If people approached the temple, even from a distance, they could smell the scent. Even if they left, the smell would cling on to their clothes, and everyone would remember it for a long time. The temple had a second interior antechamber with a short ramp. Everyone could enter the large part of the temple, but only priests were allowed in the smaller antechamber part of the temple. In this room were the statues of the gods. (Attridge and Oden 1976:45)

One of the statues was Hera and the other was Zeus. Hera was supported by lions and Zeus (Baal) was sitting on bulls; both had overlays of gold. The statue of Hera had characteristics of Athena, Aphrodite Artemis and Rhea. In her one hand she held a scepter and in the other hand a spindle. On her head she had a crown of rays and a tower, and she had a belt similar to celestial Aphrodite. She was covered with gold and different gems, sapphires and emeralds, and on her head was a ruby. At night the ruby would shine as a great light, and the whole temple was illuminated by this light, as if it were lit by lamps. A wonderful feature of the statue was that when a person was in the room, it seemed that her eyes followed them. (Attridge and Oden 1976:45)

Between the statues was a golden image of a deity called "Sign", by the Assyrians. On its head was a golden dove, and because of the dove it could have been Semiramis. Twice a year the statue journeyed to the sea to fetch the water for the flood ceremony. Statues of Helios and Selene were not placed in the temple, because the people believed that they (Helios and Selene) were visible, and because of this there was no reason to make statues of gods, who appear in the open air. (Attridge and Oden 1976:47)

There was a statue of a bearded Apollo (Ei) with clothing. Apollo (Ei) took the initiative to deliver an oracle himself, without priests or prophets. He moved on his throne when he wanted to deliver an oracle, and if the priests did not immediately lift him up, he began to sweat and move. Then the priests would take him on their shoulders and carry him around, and he would lead them in various directions.



Finally the head priest would meet him and ask him all sorts of questions. He moved backwards if he did not want something done, and he would lean forward, like a charioteer, if he approved of something. He would also signal when the “sign” must make the journey to fetch water. (Attridge and Oden 1976:49)



**Figure 4.17 King Shulumeli offering a libation to the Hittite weather god. Stone relief ±1050 to 850 BCE. (Van Zandt and Stemman 1978:31)**

There were statues of many gods in the temple; there were statues of Helen, Hecabe, Andromache, Paris, Hector and Achilles, Semiramis, Combabus, Stratonice and even Alexander. In the courtyard were lots of sacred and tame animals, large bulls, horses, eagles, bears and lions. Many priests were appointed to work in the temple, to serve the residents of the town. There were priests to slaughter the sacrificial animals, some to pour libations, there were fire bearers and altar attendants. A different high priest was in office each year, and he wore purple clothes and a golden tiara. There were flute players, pipers, Galli (the title of certain eunuch priests) and some frenzied and deranged women. (Attridge and Oden 1976:51)

Outside the temple was a large bronze altar. Sacrifices were conducted twice daily, and there was a lake full of sacred fish near the temple. There were festivals called “Descents to the Lake” when all the sacred objects were carried to the lake. One festival was when every person brought a sealed vessel filled with water: a priest dressed as a bird inspected the seal, and when he received a fee he would break the seal, the water would be carried to the temple, and libations would be poured. Once they had completed their sacrifices, the people returned home. (Attridge and Oden 1976:53)



**Figure 4.18 Stone relief of a goddess sprinkling the water of life, beneath a previously unexplored seventh-century BCE. Assyrian palace discovered at Mosul. (Nat Geo History July/August 2017:4)**

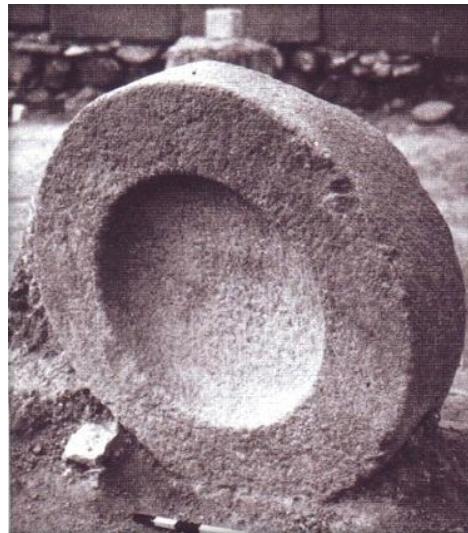
Pilgrims would travel to the “Holy City” Hierapolis from all over the country. They had to shave their heads and eyebrows for this occasion. In the city they were received by a host: there were specific hosts for each city. The hosts inherited their family duty, and they were called “Instructors” by the Assyrians, because they had to assist and describe everything to the pilgrims. At Hierapolis were fire festivals, also called lamp festivals, where live animals as well as sacred objects, clothes, gold and silver objects were hung from large trees and set alight. Bulls, cows, goats and sheep were sacrificed, pigs were considered unholy and not sacrificed or eaten. The most holy animals were doves, and the people did not even touch them. Doves came into their homes and ate from the floor. (Attridge and Oden 1976:59)

The people had various rituals before they sacrificed their animals. One form of sacrifice was that after putting a garland on the sacrificial animals, they would be thrown alive from the gateway of the temple, or from the platform of the gateway, and they would die from the fall. Some people threw their children, but not in the same manner. The children were laid in a pallet, and lowered down by hand, while they were ridiculed for being like oxen and not children. (It is not clear if the children were killed). All the people were marked, some on their wrists and some on their necks: according to Lucian all Assyrians carried marks.

(Attridge and Oden 1976:59)



**Figure 4.19** Miniature votive vessels found in the kiln of a temple's potter at Hazor. (Yadin 1975:115)



**Figure 4.20** A basalt, basin-like, cultic vessel found neat the altar at Hazor. (Yadin 1975:86)

#### 4.5 TEMPLE OF ARTEMISIUM: ONE OF THE SEVEN WONDERS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

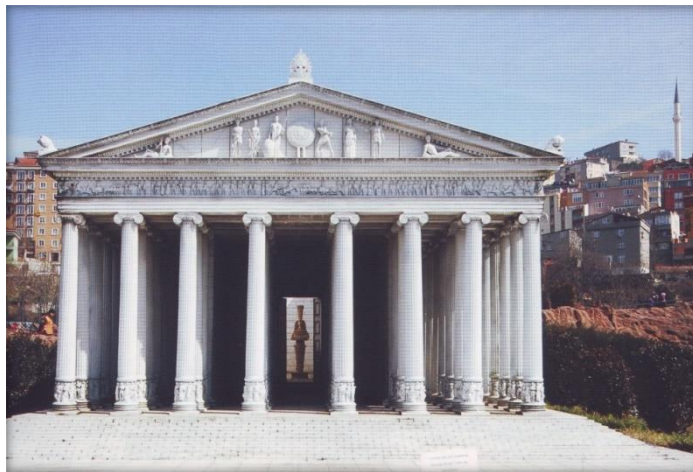
The first excavations of the Artemisia temple (Acts 19:35) (located in Ephesus, near Celcuk in modern day Turkey) was started by J. T. Wood from the British Museum in 1863. In 1895 systematic digs at the Artemision were assigned to the Austrian Archaeological Institute, and since 1965 Dr Anton Bammer has been the head of the excavations. During the last years, remnants of an ancient temple

dated from the Archaic Period which was believed until now to be the time of its first construction, have been found. (Erdemgil 2017:35)



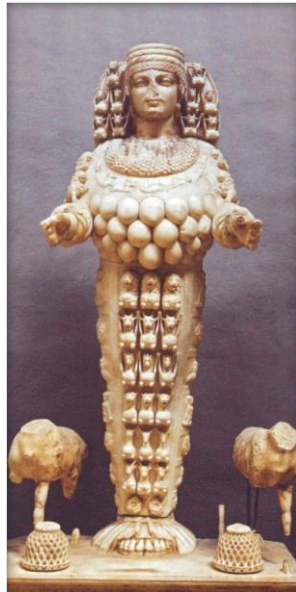
**Figure 4.21 The Temple of Artemisia. (Erdemgil 2017:37)**

According to Strabo this sanctuary was built and destroyed seven times, and he claimed that it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. During antiquity the temple was located near the sea but today its location is five kilometers from the coast. The oldest traces of the existing temple date from the fourteenth century BCE Mycenaean ceramic cups were found in the temple which could mean that a sanctuary dedicated to Cybele existed earlier, and that the archaic temple dated from the seventh century BCE from which terracotta's with geometrical design, jewels and some ivory artefacts have been used in secondary use. Some capitals of the ionic columns of that temple, probably destroyed by the Cimmerians, can be seen in the British Museum. (Erdemgil 2017:36)



**Figure 4.22 Drawing of the Temple of Artemisia. (Erdemgil 2017:35)**

In 570 BCE after the erection of the temple of Hera in Samos, the Ephesians decided to build a new temple to Artemis. The original temple was built by Croesus, king of Lydia. The architects of the new temple were Chersiphron, his son Metagenes, and Theodore who also built the temple of Hera. Because the ground in Samos was marshy like Ephesus, Theodore spread a layer of coal covered by animal hides, under the foundations. The temple, of dipteral design, was 115,14m by 55,10m. It clearly demonstrates the knowledge of the Cretans of Egyptian, Hittite and Assyrian architecture. It was the largest marble temple ever built. (Erdemgil 2017:36)



**Figure 4.23 Beautiful Artemis, Lady of Ephesus. It is 1.7m tall and dates to the Hadrianic-early Antioine periods. Her dress has real and mythological creatures carved into it. Zodiac signs appear on her upper chest. The rows of oval pendants possibly representing bulls scrota or breasts hanging from her chest. (C.117-150 C.E.) (BAR 2016 Vol 42 No 4 p29)**

On the sides of the temple was a double row of columns 19m high and with a diameter of 1,21m which gave depth to the construction. According to Pliny the Younger, there were 127 columns, but that is debatable. The façade at the front and back of the temple shows that it had a double colonnade. Pliny the Younger claimed that the façade had 36 sculptured columns, but he must have been referring to ancient texts as he lived in the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. Because the Hellenistic temple was built on the archaic temple his descriptions are valid. The 36 sculpted columns came from Croesus king of Lydia; there is a dedication on one of the drums of the columns exhibited in London. The blocks of the architrave, which rested on the columns, weighed 24 tons. The altar which stood in front of the

temple (destroyed by the Cimmerians), was rebuilt on a podium situated at the base to give the illusion of steps. (Erdemgil 2017:36)



**Figure 4.24 King Croesus of Lydia (Nat Geo 2016:87)**

According to the Greek historian Hierodotus, Croesus met Solon the wise Athenian ruler, and asked if wealth did not ensure happiness, Solon replied, “He who possesses great stores of riches is no nearer happiness than he who has what suffices for his daily needs”. (Nat.Geo.2016:22)

According to Strabo, a Greek philosopher and historian, Alexander the Great offered freedom to the population of Ephesus, because the Artemision was set on fire in 356 BCE by a crazy man, Herostrate, on the same night as the birth of Alexander the Great. The Ephesians started to construct their new temple, which by its magnificence was to be greater than the previous one. When Alexander the Great visited Ephesus, the temple was not finished. He wanted to participate in the reconstruction of the new Artemision, but the Ephesians refused politely on the grounds that a god (the Ephesians considered Alexander a demigod) could not present offerings to another god. (Erdemgil 2017:36)

One of the many privileges which the temple had was the right of shelter, giving immunity to all who took refuge in the temple. Alexander the Great enlarged that limit to the area outside the temple. The King Mithridates even extended the vicinity to the distance where an arrow shot from the pediment would fall. The

Emperor Marc Anthony doubled the perimeter of the asylum area as Julius Caesar did for the temple of Didyma. This privilege, which included a section of the city, resulted in a gathering of outlaws around the sanctuary. (Erdemgil 2017:36)



**Figure 4.25 Alexander depicted on an ancient coin. (Nat Geo 2016:87)**

The Artemision was managed by priests. The high priest called “Megabysos” was castrated. According to Strabo, it seemed that the priest was specially chosen among priests from Asia Minor origins. His position was an honorary title. The sanctuary also functioned like a bank: gifts or valuable objects were left as a deposit, and the opening of credit for the budget of the temple was the primary responsibility of the “Megabysos”. (Erdemgil 2017:38)

#### 4.6 SUMMARY

In the Canaanite fertility cult the places of worship were usually in high places, hills, altars or temples. There were male and female prostitutes in the temples. The apparent prosperity of the Canaanites, and their fertility cults, could have been a temptation to the Israelites, to abandon their God. Fertility rituals of the Canaanites were one of sympathetic magic, and the “quedeshoth” (holy women) were surrogates of the deities, prostituting themselves for the “fertility” of the soil. In Genesis 38, Judah mistook Tamar for a veiled prostitute.

In antiquity, temples were the homes of the deities, and the sacrifices took place in the large square or open area in front and around them. Large temples were found at Hazor, Lachish, Megiddo, Beth-Shan and Tel Burna. Yigael Yadin suggested that although temples dating from the same time existed in various areas of Hazor, they do not compare with each other. At Tel Burna, a large Late Bronze Age

settlement, possibly the Biblical Libnah, was found, with a large temple, clearly indicating cultic activities. At Moab limestone altars were found. As Khirbet al-Mudayna, and at Khirbet 'Ataruz, identified with the Israelite Gad, many cultic artefacts were found.

The best-preserved Edomite worship places have been excavated west of the Arabah, in the Negev. Among the artefacts was an Edomite goddess wearing a three-horned headdress and a sphinx. Inscriptions confirming the history of Israel and Judah and shedding light on their religious life are from the Mesha Stele, the Tel Dan Stele and the Baalam inscription from Deir 'Alla.

Lucian, a second-century satirist describes in his manuscript "The Syrian Goddess", the cults, temples and myths of the people of the great city Hirapolis, (Pammukale), according to Lucian "no temples were more sacred nor any regions more holy" than those in Hierapolis. He describes the Greek legends about the city and how the sanctuary was founded. J. T. Wood from the British Museum excavated the temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, located in Ephesus, in 1863.

The architects Chersiphron, Metagenes and Theodore for the Ephesians built the new temple of Artemis in 570 BCE. It demonstrates the knowledge the Greeks had of Egyptian, Hittite and Assyrian architecture. According to Strabo, Alexander the Great offered freedom to the people of Ephesus because a crazy man set the Artemision on fire on the same night as the birth of Alexander.



## Chapter 5

### The Nile, the great earth mother

#### 5.1 EGYPT, A GIFT OF THE RIVER

According to Egyptian mythology, in the beginning there was a primordial ocean called Nun, the “father of the gods”, a great expanse of water that surrounded the universe. A primordial hilltop rose out of Nun when the Nile floodwaters receded, leaving behind fertile land. Each cult center claimed to be founded on this hill. As declared by the creation mythology at Heliopolis in support of Ra, the sun climbed to its summit and Atum (a pre-dynastic sun-god, later depicted as an old man, also identified with the setting sun) was the hill or created it. Merged at Heliopolis as Ra-Atum, he was depicted as a Bennu-bird or Phoenix, who alighted on the benben stone, represented as an obelisk, to scatter the darkness of Nun. (Ions 1987:28)



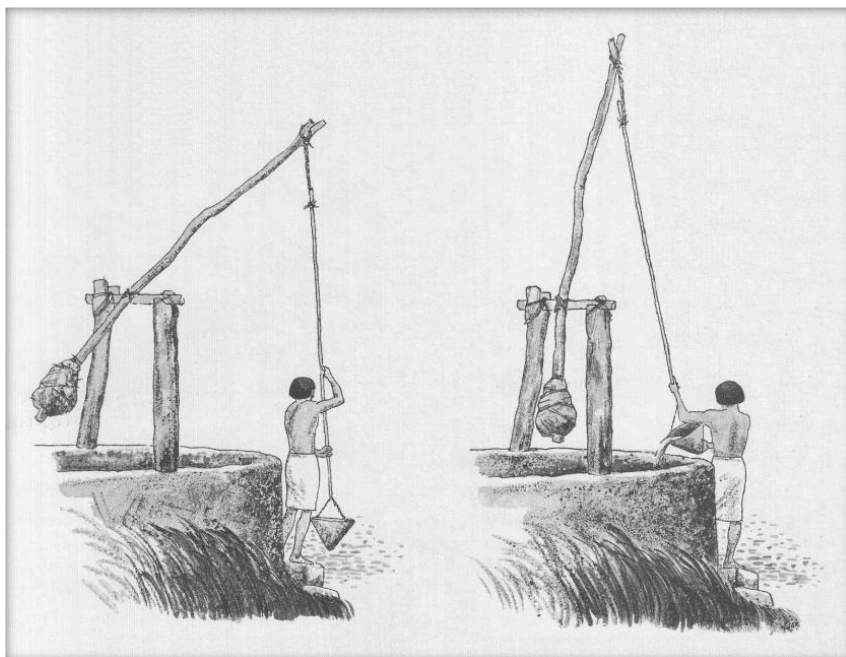
**Figure 5.1 Crossing a Nile canal at dusk, a procession of cattle, camels and herdsman, reflecting the way of Egyptian life. (Casson 1969:37)**

“Kemet” meaning the “black land” was the ancient name for Egypt, referring to the rich and productive soil along the riverbanks, contrasting it with the desolate “red land” of the desert. According to Herodotus Egypt was a “gift of the river”. Herodotus wrote: “I was particularly anxious to learn why the Nile, at the beginning of the summer solstice begins to rise and continues to increase... and why? It forthwith retires and contracts its stream, continuing low during the whole of the

winter until the summer solstice comes round again. On none of these points could I obtain any information from the inhabitants. They could not tell me what special virtue the Nile has which makes it so opposite in nature to all the other streams.” (Mojsov 2015:1)

Due to the low rainfall in Egypt, the successful growing of crops depended on irrigation from the Nile. Consequently, the position of a canal digger was highly regarded. Water was collected from the Nile and dropped into huge ditches dug into the soil. They used an ingenious crane-like mechanism, called a shaduf, to scoop water from the Nile. The shaduf consisted of a long pole with a bucket on a rope at one end and a counter-weight at the other end, while the pole was balanced on a cross beam. (Casson 1969:33)

The building of the Aswan Dam in 1965 made the old system obsolete and also ended the annual flooding. (Mojsov 2005:xiii)



**Figure 5.2 A shaduf was used to fill a walled irrigation ditch. (Casson 1969:33)**

The Nile floods, indispensable for farming, were an aspect of midsummer, linking this season with water imagery in Egypt’s mythology. The appearance of the constellation of Leo in the night sky was an indication that the inundation was about to happen. Today Leo appears in the night sky in the spring in the northern hemisphere, because the earth wobbled on its axis over millennia. Leo and Lions became symbolically connected with water, even though Leo is a fire sign. Lion

heads were carved on canal gates in ancient Egypt, and Greek and Roman architects adopted this decoration for their fountains. (Cole 2007:74)

The constellation of Leo was related to the idea of water, and it was linked with the sun in Mesopotamian and Egypt. The star, Regulus, meaning “little king” is located at the Lion’s heart, and Regulus was used by the Mesopotamians to mark the summer solstice. The Egyptian god Aker, the god of the horizon, who opened the gates of the underworld, appears in ancient manuscripts as two lions, one looking east and the other west. “With the sun between them, from Aker to Aslam”. The lion has been associated with strength, energy and kingship. Jacob’s son Judah is described as being “like a lion” and his tribe’s symbol was a lion. The sphynx was a lion’s body and human head. Exodus received its name from the Egyptian Sheshep-ankh, which translates as “the living image of the sun-like god” (Casson 1969:47)



**Figure 5.3 The Egyptian god Aker, appears in ancient manuscripts as two lions, one looking east, and the other west. (Cole 2007:75)**

If the annual Nile flood was too high, the rising water meant drowned villages; if it was too low, then there was less to sow and food was scarce. If a low flood happened for several consecutive years there was famine. Abraham sought refuge in the land of Egypt because of the rich soil and Joseph’s prediction in the Old Testament (Gn 41:25) of seven fat years and seven lean years reflected what could happen along the Nile. Grain was the chief product of Egypt; another product produced by the Nile was papyrus, the bulrushes with which Moses’ mother made the “basket” for her baby. (Ex 2:3) Paper was made from the papyrus plant, and it was the most convenient writing material available in the ancient world. (Casson 1969:32)

Human success corresponded to the rise and fall of the flooding of the Nile. Nile metres were deep wells that measured the flood rise of the Nile. When the Nile measured twelve cubits it meant famine, 13 cubits meant that there would be hunger, 14 cubits, (the number of the severed parts of the body of Osiris) brought joy and 15 brought confidence and 16 cubits delight. A low flood meant that one of Seth's curses, "droughts", would bring starvation and plagues. Another curse was "high water" and this meant that torrents of water would destroy villages. (Mojsov 2005:2)

The fertile land, the river and the sea were the source of life for ancient Egypt. The occupations of most of the population of Egypt were agriculture and power, both in politics and religion, and it was based on the ownership of the land. The first pharaohs were cultivators of the land. Amenhemhet I (1991-1962 BCE) stated the fact in the presence of his son: "I cultivated wheat, I worshipped the god of wheat in every valley of the Nile. No one suffered the pangs of hunger or thirst during my reign."

When it was their turn to appear before the divine judge for entrance into the heaven of Osiris, among other things the nobles would number the irrigation works they had carried out to improve the conditions of the fields, and the well-being of the farmers. (Carpiceci 1989:32)

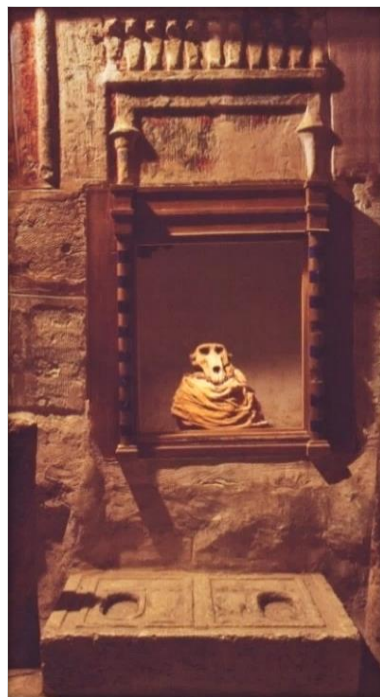
## 5.2 THE GODS OF THE NILE

An Egyptian year was one-fourth day behind the Julian calendar. Toth, as a lunar deity, scanned the heavens, planned the seasons and regulated time. Toth divided the year into three seasons, the inundation (summer) ploughing (autumn) and harvest (spring). There were twelve months of 30 days each, and a week was ten days long. According to the legend of Toth, he challenged the moon goddess to a game of draughts. He won the seventieth part of each of her illuminations, and from this he assembled five days and added them at the beginning of the year to the 360 days. These five days were celebrated as the birthdays of Osiris, Horus, Seth, Isis and Nephthys. The birthday of Seth on the third day was seen as an unlucky day. (Mojsov 2005:3)



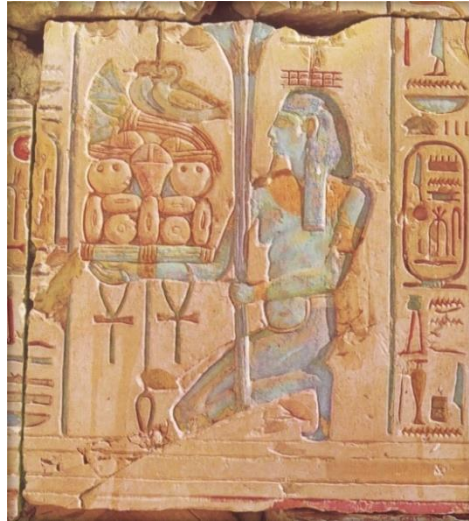
**Figure 5.4** Another bird which was said to have laid the cosmic egg, was the ibis. It was worshipped at Hermopolis. The god represented by the ibis was Toth. Toth was also a god of Heliopolis. Bronze statue of Toth in his ibis form. Tuna Gebel (Patrick 1972:23)

Toth was also a god of Heliopolis. Another tradition attributed by the Hermopolitans indicates that Toth was self-made and appeared at the beginning of time in a lotus flower. Toth was portrayed as a god of wisdom, god of the moon, inventor of speech, patron god of scribes, as well as the Divine Recorder. He was incorporated in a variety of gods from various parts of Egypt who in their own region fulfilled these functions. Toth was frequently represented as Asten the ancient moon god, who was shown in the form of a baboon. He was also depicted as an ibis or a man with the head of an ibis. (Patrick 1972:14)



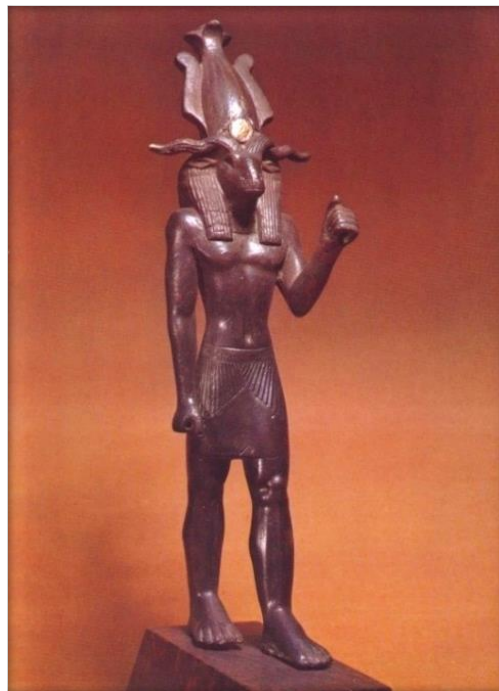
**Figure 5.5** Holy Baboon. During the Greek and Roman period certain animals were considered sacred to a particular divinity, and were also mummified. A baboon mummy from Tuna el Gebel near Amarna represents Toth, the god of writing. (Nat Geo March/April 2017:23)

The Nile had acquired the status of a god. He was Hapi, a portly figure, portrayed with rolls of fat and heavy breasts, bringing offerings to the land. He lived in a cave from which the waters of the Nile flowed. He was summoned to make sure the floods of the Nile would take place. He combined both male and female aspects of fertility. The annual flood was known as the arrival of Hapi. (Mojsov 2005:4)



**Figure 5.6 The Nile god Hapi with an offering tray for the gods (Ions 1987:44)**

By providing the fertilizing floodwaters of the Nile, Hapi maintained creation and divine order. He helped resurrect Osiris by suckling him, and is represented on a sandstone pillar relief from the temple of Rameses II at Abydos. (Ions 1987:44)



**Figure 5.7 Khnum, bronze statuette, in the British Museum. (Patrick 1972:20)**

Khnum was an ancient deity, the ram-headed god of the first cataract, the gatekeeper of the flood. His chief cult center was on the Island of Elephantine. Khnum was one of the several ram-headed gods of Egyptian mythology. He had strange curling horns with a horizontal projection, and this belonged to an extinct species. With the recurrence of this image in Egyptian iconography, it is suggested that the ram-headed gods, with the exception of Amun, date back to the beginning of recorded history. In some traditions, Khnum was self-created, the creator of earth, water and the underworld. As creator of man, he made men from clay on a potter's wheel, and every child born was formed in his hands. The "festival of the potter's wheel" in his honor was celebrated each year at Esna. (Patrick 1972:26)

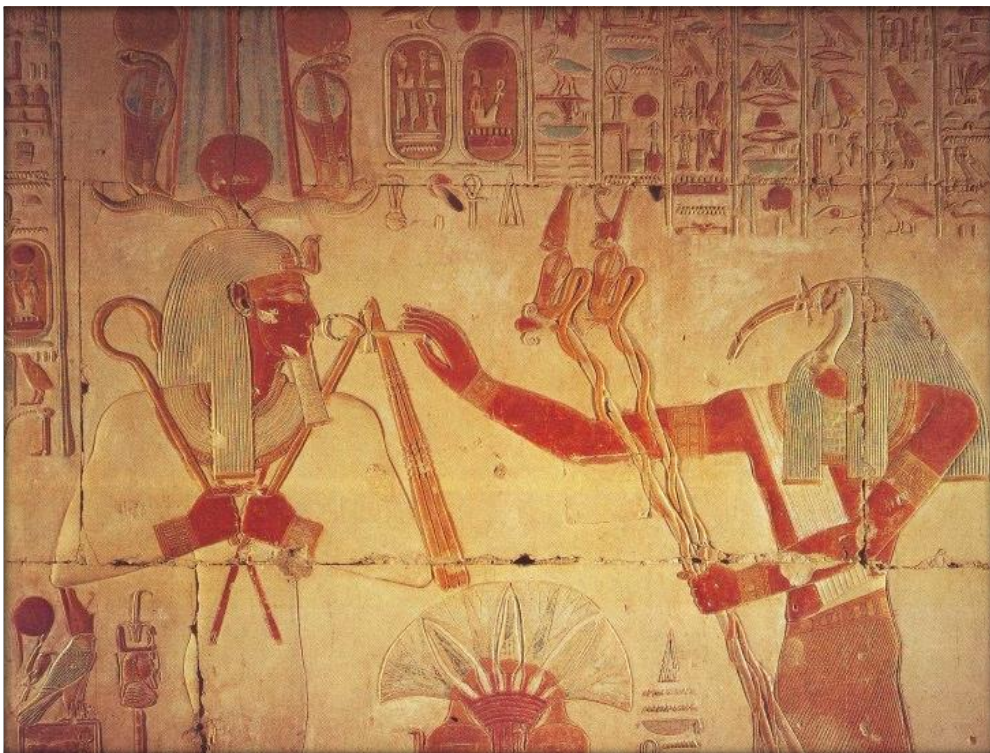


**Figure 5.8 Hapi, depicted as two gods; the figure on the left wears a crown of lotus plants, and he represents the Nile in Lower Egypt. The one on the right is wearing a crown illustrating the union of the two parts of Egypt. The two Hapi's are also binding the ties of lotus and papyrus. The carving is from the pedestal beneath the statues of Rameses II in front of the great temple at Abu Simbel. 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. (Patrick 1972:16)**

Because the Nile River was the main thoroughfare through Egypt, boats were essential in daily life. Boats were so highly valued that they were incorporated into the rituals and beliefs of the afterlife. Boat-shaped pits and buried boats were found in the vicinity of the pyramids. They could have been symbolic or connected to the journey of a king to the heavens after his death. It was believed that he needed to join the circumpolar stars in the northern sky but he was also thought to

journey with the sun and then he represented the sun god. (Gahlin 2014:181)

Egypt had a deep seated belief of duality. This can be seen in the conflict of Osiris and Seth, or the battle to rescue fertile land from the desert. Duality was seen in day and night, life and death, the world above the horizon and the netherworld below. Images of the Egyptian gods could also be seen in animal form: Wepwewet, the jackal, was the opener of ways to the other world; the goddess Taweret was seen as a pregnant hippopotamus, an image of fertility; and the ibis was a symbol of intelligence. (Mojsov 2005:5)



**Figure 5.9 Sety I, given life by the ibis-headed god Thoth. The painted relief detail on the shrine of Sety I. In the temple of Sety I, Abydos. (Mallakh and Bianchi 1980:44)**

The gods and goddesses of ancient Egypt were divine personifications of what was important to the Egyptian people, in maintaining a sense of order and wellbeing in this life and the next, and in the fertility of the soil. The myths that evolved around the gods were their means of explaining the unknown. Worshipping the gods often included offerings and invocations to ensure their presence in the lives of the people. (Gahlin 2014:17)

Every village had its own heraldic sign, Hieraconpolis worshipped Horus the falcon, and Naqada worshipped Seth the dog. Plutarch wrote:

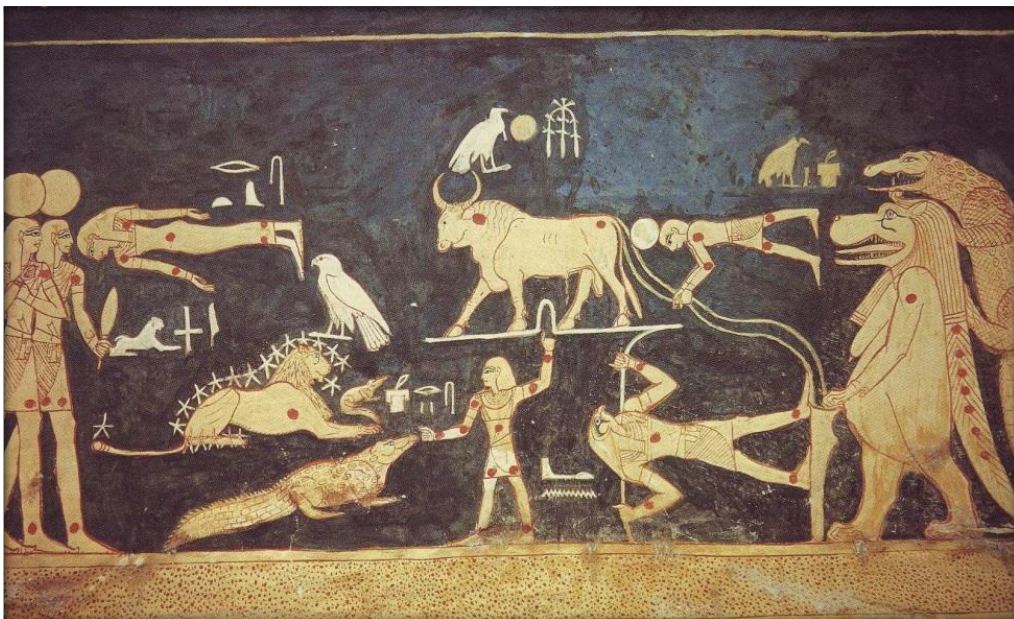


*“Osiris in his great expedition divided his force into many parts and gave them all animal-shaped standards, each one of which became sacred and precious to the whole clan of people thus associated.”*

Hathor, the cow, the earthly symbol of the mother goddess, the Great Earth Mother, was worshipped everywhere. (Mojsov 2005:5)



**Figure 5.10** Horus, the falcon god, and son of Osiris standing in front of scenes from the book of the dead, portrayed in the tomb of Queen Tauseret of the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty. (Nat Geo History Jan/Feb 2016:38)



**Figure 5.11** The Northern Constellations. Ceiling Sarcophagus Chamber C, Tomb of Sety I. Valley of the Kings (No 17) Dynasty XIX (1305-1290 BCE) (Mallakh and Bianchi 1980.64)

The mutilation of the body of Osiris, and its scattering all over Egypt, brings messages of ritual fertilizing of the land. The red colour of the Nile, because of oxide sediments during the inundation of the river, was compared with blood, but it was the tears of Isis over the dead Osiris that caused the river to rise.

(Mojsov 2005:7)

### 5.3 FESTIVALS FOR THE GODS

During “Opet” (The Feast of the Valley) festival, the god Amen was brought from Karnak in the form of a shrouded statue carried on a golden bark, and transported across the Nile to the west bank, to Thebe’s necropolis. There Amen supposedly gave life to the dead. Next to the processional route, people turned out to greet him, and in the evenings the wealthy people would cross the river and feast until the morning hours at the tombs of their ancestors. While the poor people as well as the surrounding countryside had their own celebrations, one hymn to Amen tells how they had to stay awake “in the beauty of the night”. Drinking was encouraged as drunkenness was seen as a way of overcoming any barriers between the living and the dead. (Papanek et al 1993:67)



**Figure 5.12 Osiris god of the underworld flanked by his son Horus (left) and his wife Isis (right) in this ninth century sculpture. (Nat Geo History Jan/Feb 2016:40)**

The “Opet” festival traditionally began when statues of Mut and Khons, the wife and son of Amen, joined him in his temple at Karnak. After being put aboard a

gilded luxurious river barge, the three statues were towed to the Temple of Luxor. The gods stayed there for three weeks, and in that time Amen performed through oracles, and his divinity of the kingship was confirmed. The festival journeys to and from the temples gathered singers, musicians and ordinary people all getting drunk. One “Opet” song clearly states: “The whole land is in festivity”. During one “Opet” at Rameses II’s mortuary temple it was known that the priests handed out 385 free jugs of beer and 11,400 cakes and loaves of bread during one festival. (Papanek et al 1993:67)

Ancient Egyptian farmers sang a song called “Maneros” or “Ailinus” meaning “woe to us”. This song had a double meaning, it was a lament for the death of the corn spirit as well as a prayer for its safe return. Effigies of Osiris made of paste and barley were watered until the grain sprouted, they were lit with candles and floated down the Nile as part of the seasonal ceremonies. (Cole 2007:69)

#### 5.4 THE EGYPTIAN COSMOLOGY



**Figure 5.13** The mystical “Ka” said to dwell in every man standing with upraised arms, with a goddess standing on its head. (Casson 1969:81)

Three important words which are frequently used in the ancient Egyptian funerary texts can be translated as “spirit” and “soul” are “ka”, “ba” and “akh”. The hieroglyph used to write “ka” was a pair of arms, but the “ka” was also represented

as a person's smaller double. The "ka" was thought to come into being at the birth of a person. Dying was sometimes described as "joining one's ka". "Ka" can be translated as a "spirit" or "vital force" as the creative force of a person. The word "ka" can also mean sustenance and it was believed that the "ka" requires food, so offerings were made to it long after the death of a person. (Gahlin 2014:143)

The hieroglyph for "ba" was a Jabiru stork represented in funerary art as a bird with a human head, or sometimes with human arms. According to Gahlin, the Egyptian idea of "ba" was the attributes that are unique to a person, similar to our idea of personality. It was more mobile than the "ka" and enabled a dead person to move about in the afterlife. The hieroglyph for "akh" was a crested ibis, or it could be portrayed as a "shabti"-like mummiform figure. It may be the result of a successful reunion of the "ba" and "ka" at death. Other important elements of a person's being in life and death were their name and shadow. They were very important and had to be protected after death in order for the deceased to survive in the afterlife. (Gahlin 2014:143)



**Figure 5.14 The winged "Ba", symbolizing the physical survival of the dead. Through the "Ba" a dead person could return to the material world. (Casson 1969:89)**

The Egyptian cosmology was cyclical and ever-repeating. The cycles of death and renewal occurred in indefinite time. The idea of stability and constancy wanted people to attempt to preserve their bodies forever. St Augustine wrote: "The Egyptians alone believe in the resurrection, as they carefully preserve their bodies.

They have a custom of drying up their bodies and making them as durable as brass”.

According to Mojsov, cremation was only reserved for criminals, and therefore non-existent. (Mojsov 2005:17)

## 5.5 BOOKS OF THE AFTERLIFE

### 5.5.1 Pyramid texts, foundations of the Egyptian cosmology

Pyramid texts carved on the inner walls of the late 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> dynasty pyramids were the first literary foundations of the Egyptian cosmology. The texts were a group of 759 chapters of different lengths. It seemed that the texts had their roots in the religion of prehistoric Egypt and could have been recited during the kings' burial. Some scholars see them as a collection of documents, where others see them as magical texts. Spells were usually introduced with the phrase “recitation”. (Mojsov 2005:30)

Spoken and written words were the ideal way for covering the distance between the real and mythical worlds. Reciting religious texts and writing texts inside a tomb ensured that they were heard, seen and assisted in the afterlife. The pyramid texts contributed in supporting the king's transfiguration. They were mystical by nature, and not meant for mortals but written for the gods who lived in the “duat” (the realm of the dead). Their magic appealed to the timeless world of the primitive period. Verses from the pyramid texts were handed down through the entire Egyptian history in some form. Reinterpreted as the oldest religious texts, they were always held as having spiritual and mystical meaning. (Mojsov 2005:30)

### 5.5.2 “Stepping forth into daylight”: The Book of the Dead

The Book of The Dead helped Egyptians prepare for the afterlife where Osiris, god of the underworld, would judge them. Objects and personal belongings could even accompany the dead on their journey. (Nat Geo 2016:31)

Through ritual, mortals and immortals were transformed. “Stepping forth into daylight” was the name of the Egyptian Book of the Dead. The belief was that in death people could still follow the same way of life. Phalluses and concubine

figures were found in tomb offerings. (Mojsov 2005:19)

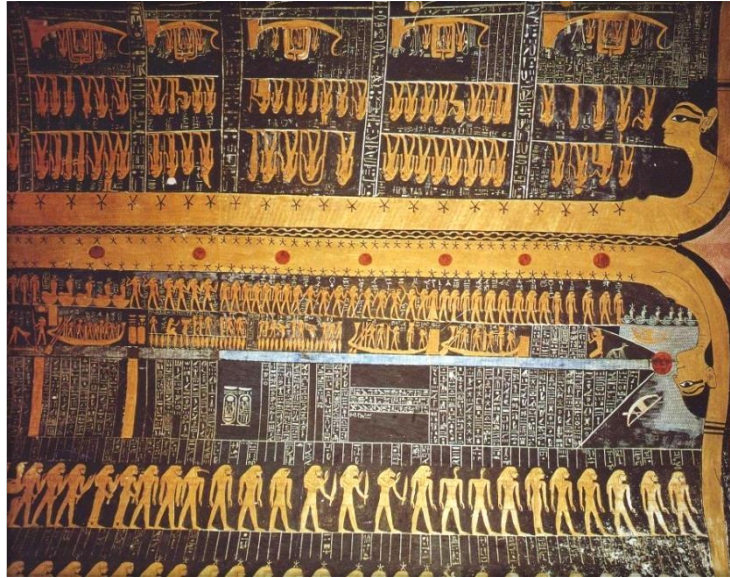
A New Kingdom funeral papyrus contains the following spell:

*“A spell for going out into the day,  
Of coming and going in the realms of the dead,  
Of entering the field of reeds...  
Having power there,  
Being glorious there,  
Ploughing there and reaping,  
Eating there, drinking there, making love there,  
Doing everything that used to be done on earth.” (Mojsov 2005:19)*

Since Karl Richard Lepsius used the term “Book of the Dead” in 1842, this funeral text has been a very important research source for Egyptologists. The journey through the underworld was complex, and it was reflected in the diversity of the texts. Some copies are longer than others and not all the chapters are included in each copy. The most complete extant text is known as the Ani Papyrus, dating from Thebes at the time of the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty, around the year 1275 BCE. It has about 200 chapters. The number of chapters included in a papyrus usually depended on what the person who commissioned the papyrus could pay. (Nat Geo History Jan/Feb 2016:39)

Coffin texts from wooden coffins of the Middle Kingdom had similarities to the pyramid texts. Coffin texts were re-used in the book of “Stepping forth into daylight” also known as the “Book of the Dead”, and many were written on temple walls. The judgment ceremony was called the “weighing of the heart”. It is commonly recorded and illustrated in the “Book of the Dead” describing the judgment of the soul after death in great detail. (Mojsov 2005:47)

By the time the Book of the Dead was circulated in the New Kingdom it was written for mass production. The content was the same, and the place for an individual’s name was left empty to be filled in by the person who bought the “book”. Everyone could write his name on the designated space between the names of “Osiris” and “Justified in Ma’at”. These ready-made books were then placed in the tomb of the deceased. (Mojsov 2005:83)



**Figure 5.15 The Sky Goddess Nut, ceiling Tomb of Rameses VI, Valley of the Kings (No 9) Dynasty XX (1150-1140 BCE) (Mallakh and Bianchi 1980:72)**

For centuries, ancient Egyptian royalty kept the magic spells and sacred rituals that guaranteed the favour of the gods after death, a secret. Over time, however, access to these funeral texts and ceremonies expanded. All Egyptians could possess this inside guide to the underworld, with all its risks and dangers. In 1842 Lepsius published a collection of ancient mortuary texts, known in Egypt as “The Chapters of Going Forth by Day”. Lepsius changed it to the “Book of the Dead”. This gives us an insight into beliefs about the trials, joys, and fears in the journey into death. Although scholars had known of the magical content of the writings before Lepidius’s publication, his ordering of the spells and allocating a chapter number to each is the system still used to study them today. (Nat Geo History Jan/Feb 2016:32)

Of the many versions of the spells that have been found, the text construction is not the same. The arrangement of Lepidius’s publication helped scholars to see these texts as a whole. Passages were found inscribed on rolls of papyrus, on the bandages used in mummification, on tombs on sarcophagi, as well as on grave goods of the dead. Originally only intended for royalty, the oldest parts of the Book of the Dead were drawn from funerary writings known as the pyramid texts. This dates back to the Egyptian Old Kingdom, to 2300 BCE From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries the custom of placing papyri of the Book of the Dead in tombs spread to all the people. Some copies were beautifully illustrated and expensive, while

others seem to have been produced cheaply for not so wealthy clients. The function was the same for royalty or non-royalty, to assist with the passage through the underworld. (Nat Geo History Jan/Feb 2016:32)

### 5.5.3 The voyage beyond the tomb

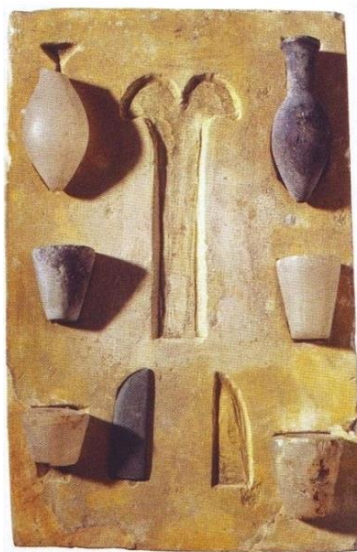
Life after death was the expectation of all Egyptians, not only Pharaohs. They prepared for a hereafter in which according to one Egyptologist said: “The dead man is at one and the same time in heaven, in the god’s boat, under the earth, working the Elysian Fields, and in his tomb enjoying his sustenance.”

(Casson 1969:81)

Excerpts of the Book of the Dead were recited by a priest during the funeral ceremony at the tomb. Next was a series of rituals to prepare the dead for their journey. One of these rites was “the opening of the mouth” in which an “adze”, a knife-sharp tool was used, symbolically to open the mummy’s mouth, and to restore the body’s vital functions for the afterlife. This was also the moment of hope, as mentioned in the ninth chapter:

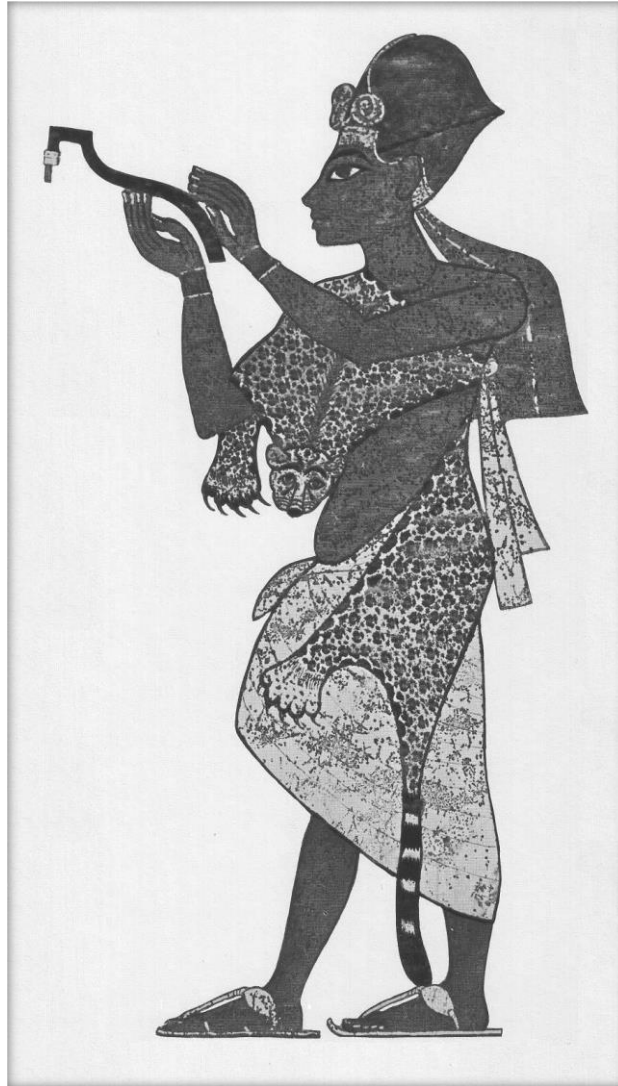
*“I have opened every path which is in the sky and which is on earth, for I am the well-beloved son of my father Osiris, I am noble, I am spirit, I am equipped; O all you gods and all you spirits prepare a path for me.”*

(Nat Geo History Jan/Feb 2016:34)



**Figure 5.16** An offering consisting of miniature copies of tools, used in the ritual of the Opening of the Mouth. Louvre Museum Paris. (Nat Geo History 2017:28)



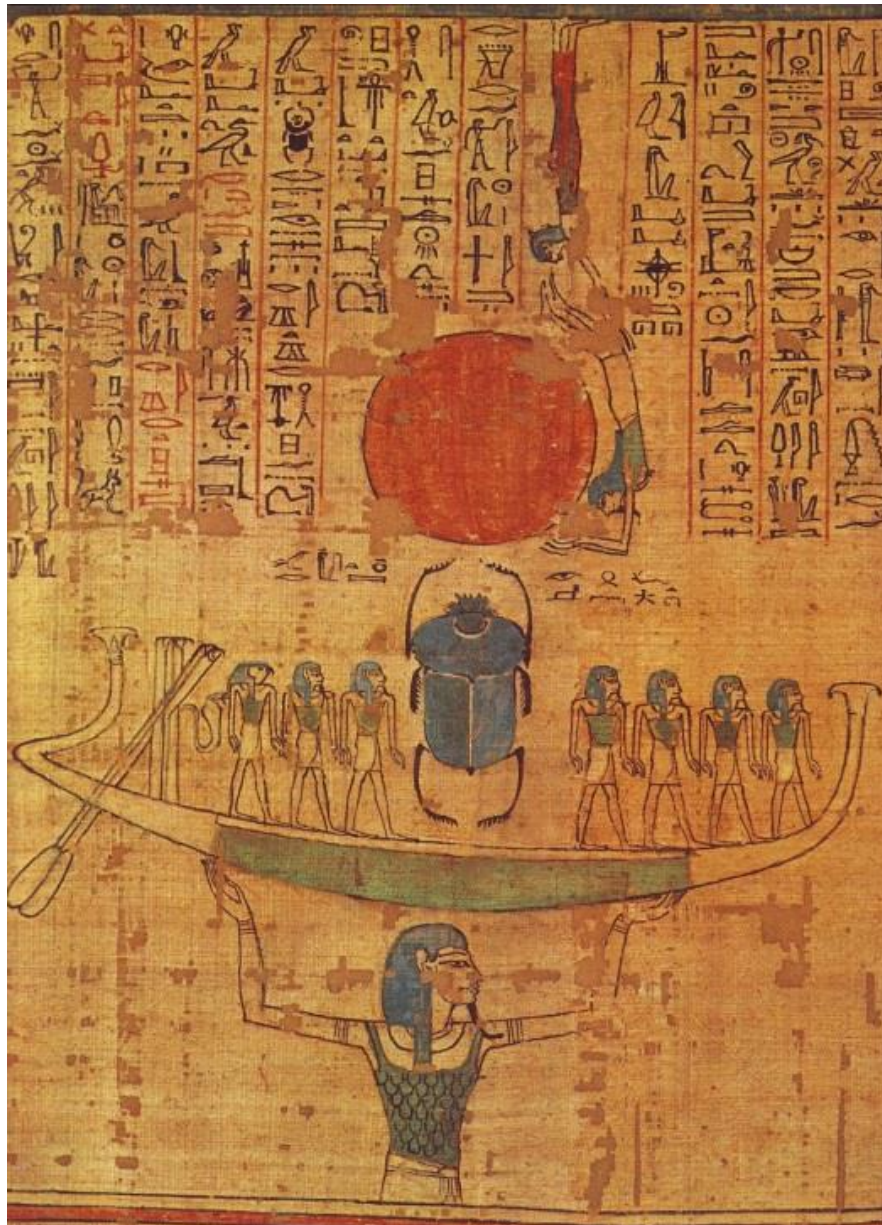


**Figure 5.17 King Ay dressed as a high priest, in ritual clothes, of leopard skin over linen, holding an adze. Portrayed on a wall in of his predecessor Tutankhamun.  
(Casson 1969:78)**

The Egyptians believed that the dead person would take a subterranean journey, tracing the route of Re, the sun god. Re would disappear with the setting sun in the west. He would pass under the world in a boat, and return to his starting point in the east. On this journey the deceased would travel in Re's boat and have to challenge various creatures who try to stop them on the way to their new life. One of the creatures is Apep, a serpent intent on stopping Re's boat and bringing chaos to the world. Apep would threaten Re every night, but the deceased had chapter seven of the "Book of the Dead", with him to assist:

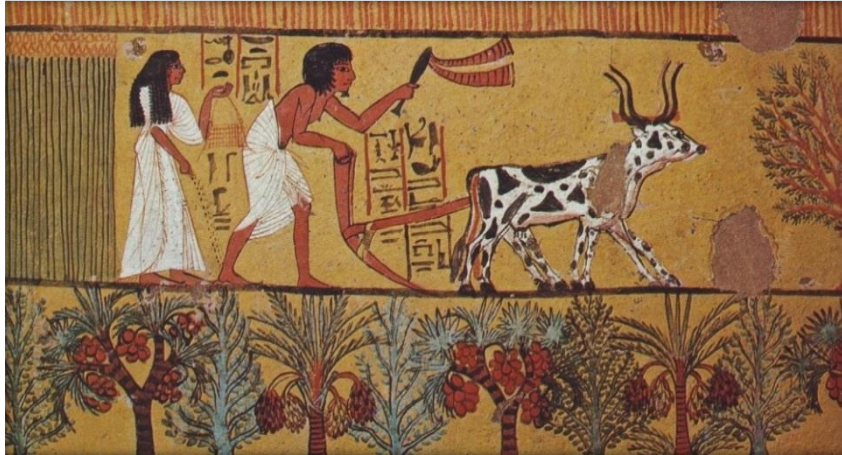
*"I will not be inert for you, I will not be weak for you, your poison shall not enter my members, for my members are the members of Atum."*

*(Nat Geo History Jan/Feb 2016:34)*

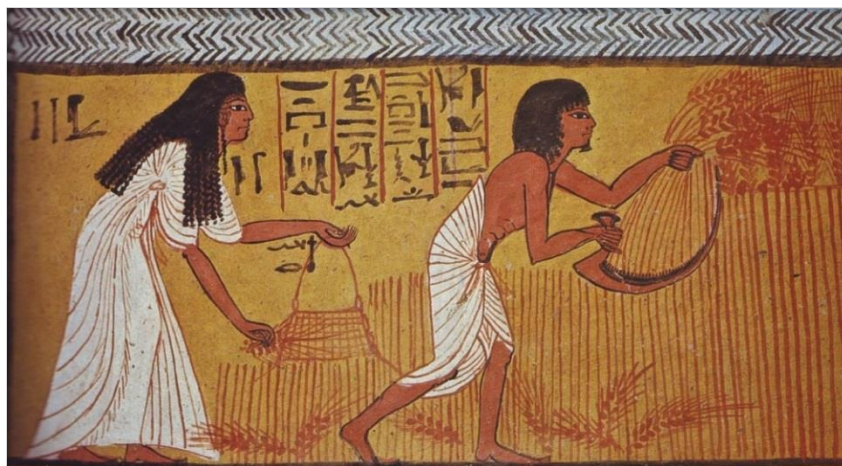


**Figure 5.18** The rising sun supported by air, depicted as Khepri in the solar barque supported on the arms of Shu, while the sun itself is received by the sky goddess Nut. Illustration from a copy of the Egyptian Book of the Dead, in the British Museum. (Patrick 1972:19)

After Apep, the deceased would arrive at a labyrinth protected by a series of gates. To enter the gates, he had to recite a specific text and call out the name of the gate. If the correct prayer was given, the gate would say: "Pass you are pure". At the "Hall of Two Truths", the next stop, the deceased would be judged by 42 judges conducted by Osiris the god of the underworld. The defendant would swear that he is innocent. Chapter 125 of the "Book of the Dead" includes many examples, i.e. "I have not slain people, I have not stolen the god's property, I have not caused anyone to weep." (Nat Geo History Jan/Feb 2016:34)



**Figure 5.19** On details taken from the large scene of life in the Fields of “Yalu” (the Egyptian Paradise) painted in the tomb of Sennedjem in Deir el-Medina (Carpiceci 2000:33)



**Figure 5.20** Husband and wife busy ploughing, sowing, reaping and gleaning the grain. (Carpiceci 2000:33)

After the confessional was the final trial, the weighing of the heart. Anubis the jackal god of mummification held up a pair of scales; in one bowl was an ostrich feather, like that worn by the goddess of justice Maat, and regarded as the symbol of truth. In the other dish was the heart of the dead person. If the feather and the heart balanced the scales, the dead person would pass the test. Those whose hearts weighed too much were impure, and they were condemned to horrible fates. (Nat Geo History Jan/Feb 2016:34)

In Chapter 53 of the Book of the Dead the eternal punishments are mentioned: “I detest what is detestable, I will not eat faeces, I will not drink urine, and other dreaded sentences are hunger and thirst, being boiled or devoured by a wild beast”. If a person was worthy, the way of paradise will be opened, and they could

look forward to the plains of Yalu, “the fields of reeds” a happy land of the dead, with rivers, mountains, fertile fields where barley would grow five cubits high.” (Nat Geo History Jan/Feb 2016:34)

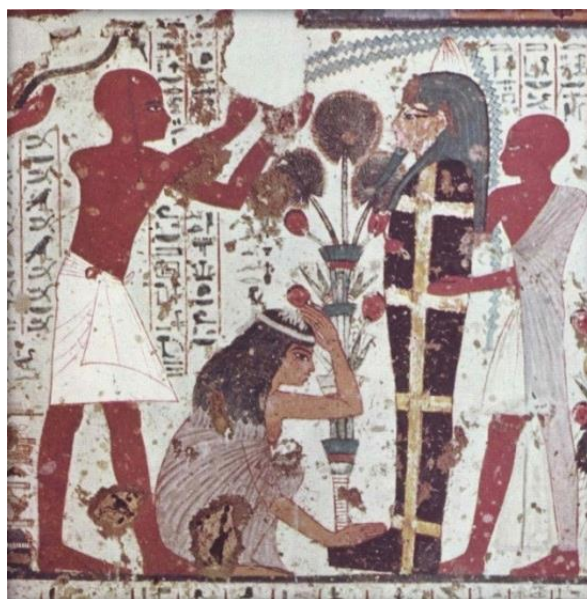
Chapter 110 of the Book of the Dead mentions that their needs and pleasures would be looked after. Eating, drinking and copulating existed. Meals are mentioned and the dead are expected to work in the afterlife. They must plant and reap crops, but they would be assisted by servants, the statues “ushabtis” that were entombed with them. Once they started to appear, the number of “ushabtis” placed in a tomb steadily increased. (Nat Geo History Jan/Feb 2016:38)

Each “ushabti” figurine had its arms crossed and held farming implements. On the lower part of each figurine was inscribed a chapter from the Book of the Dead:

*“If (name of the deceased) is accounted to do any work in the God’s Domain ... the irrigation of the fields, or to water the banks, or to row sand of the east to the west, I will do it, Here I am.”*

The reward that the dead could expect if they made correct use of the text is mentioned:

*“He shall flourish and his children shall flourish... he shall be ushered in with the kings of Upper Egypt and the kings of Lower Egypt. And he shall be in the suite of Osiris, a matter a million times true.”* (Nat Geo History Jan/Feb 2016:38)



**Figure 5.21 A burial scene: a weeping widow crouches at her mummified husband’s feet, assisted by attending priests. (Casson 1969:82)**

### 5.5.4 A guide to the afterlife: the Ani papyrus

The Ani Papyrus, the most complete surviving version of the Book of the Dead, was produced for Ani, the royal scribe of Thebes and his wife Tutu, priestess of Amun. It was bought by Wallis Budge, an agent of the British Museum in Luxor in 1888. He cut it into 37 sections to transport it to England. Budge published a translation in 1895, and another translation was published in 1994 by R.O. Faulkner. The Ani Papyrus is still in the British Museum. (Nat Geo History Jan/Feb 2016:40)

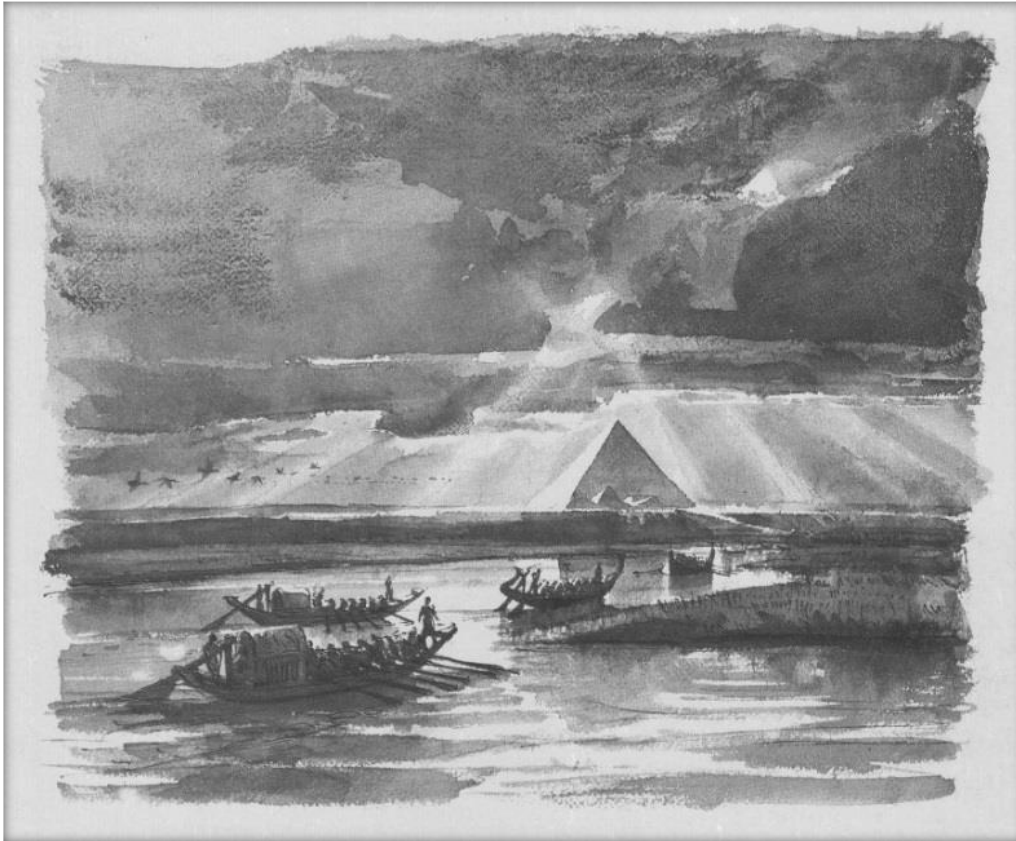
On the “Trial before the Gods” in the Ani Papyrus, Ani and his wife are shown entering the hall. With them is a manifestation of Ani’s soul, his “ba” represented as a bird with a human head, as well as a male figure representing his destiny. Anubis holds the dishes of the heart of Ani and the feather of Maat, symbol of justice. If Ani was righteous, his heart and feather must weigh the same. Toth, the god of writing, records the proceedings, and behind him is Ammit a hybrid of crocodile, hippopotamus and lion, ready to consume Ani’s heart if it fails the test. (Nat Geo History Jan/Feb 2016:40)



**Figure 5.22 Weighing of the heart of a priestess (pictured on the left). The jackal-headed Anubis balances her heart against a figure representing truth. Toth, sitting on top of the scales, records the result. (Casson 1969:78)**

On the “Eternity among the Righteous” scene, Ani approaches the land where the righteous dwell, he makes offering to three of the gods of Ennead (a grouping of

nine deities). Afterwards Ani rows across the Lake of Offerings, and worships the falcon representing the west. In another scene, he carries out agricultural tasks, and he pays homage to the bird Benu, the symbol of rebirth. In the final picture, the boat of Wennefer (one of the names of Osiris) is shown moored on the lake, and Ani is shown paying respect to Sokar Osiris, the funerary god. (Nat Geo History Jan/Feb 2016:40)



**Figure 5.23** Illustration of funeral barges of a royal cortege as a dead Pharaoh is transported up a canal from the Nile towards his Great Pyramid. (Casson 1969:129)

## 5.6 SUMMARY

Successful harvests depended of the flooding of the Nile, and the floods were seen as a trial or blessing. Because Egypt was “given life” by the Nile, it played an important part in the Eastern Mediterranean world. The rising of the Nile was a festive occasion celebrated as a symbolic wedding ceremony between the Nile and his bride.

Egyptians believed in life after death. Survival after death depended on the preservation of the earthly body in the tomb. Every person has a spiritual double

or “Ka”, and they believed that the preserving of bodies was necessary in the wellbeing of the “Ka”. The winged “Ba” symbolized the physical survival of the dead, and the “akh” was the enlightened spirit in its supreme state. They were influenced by the daily rebirth of the sun. A cosmic order was established at the time of creation: certain animals were seen as the divine powers of the deities, and seen as sacred animals. “Stepping forth into daylight” was the name of the Egyptian “Book of the Dead”. The passages assisted Egyptians to prepare for their afterlife. The function was the same for royalty and common people, assisting with their passage through the underworld. Coffin texts were re-used in the “Book of the Dead”. Excerpts from the “Book of the Dead” were recited by a priest during the funeral ceremony at the tomb.

## Chapter 6

### Sumero-Akkadian Deities

#### 6.1 ANAT, DEITY OF LOVE AND WAR

The stories of Ba'al and Anat are preserved on six broken clay tablets from Ugarit. These versions of the stories were written in Ugaritic language cuneiform script about 1400 BCE. A French team headed by Claude FA Schaeffer (1898-1982) recovered the clay tablets with hundreds of other tablets. He dug at the Tell of Ugarit (Ras Shamra), in 1929-1939 and after 1950. Hans Bauer (1878-1937) initiated the Ugaritic translation, an alphabetic language with 32 letters. (Matthews et al 1991:157)



**Figure 6.1** Palace of Ahab, King of Israel during the early ninth-century BCE, when the capital was Samaria in northern Palestine. His Phoenician wife Jezebel introduced Ba'al-worship to Israel. (Ions 1987:27)

Most of the texts of “The stories of Ba'al and Anat” are fragmentary and it is difficult to determine the exact order of the stories, or their original purpose. The stories could have been told during seasonal festivals in Ugarit. On their New Year's Eve, the people of Ugarit celebrated a festival to mourn the death of Ba'al



during the dry season which was ending, (Ezk 8:14) and his resurrection to life, which was during the rainy season which was beginning. “The Story of Ba’al and Anat” reflects the power and place of the couple in Ugarit’s divine assembly. Parallels of “The Stories of Ba’al and Anat” appear mostly in the Book of Psalms. (Matthews et al 1991:157)

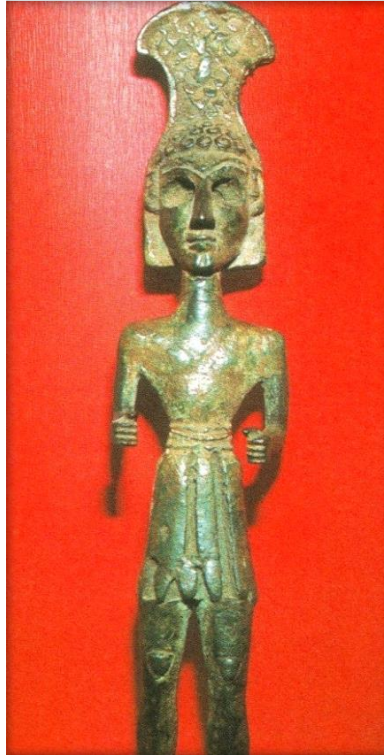
Anat was the chief West Semitic goddess of love and war, and the consort of Ba’al. She was a daughter of Asherah and El. Anat means “the merciful”, and one of her titles was even “Anat the Destroyer” or “the one in the womb” (also appropriate for Athirat, the mother of the gods) signifying a maternal goddess or “the compassionate one”. Her naming as compassionate deity was in view of her deep mourning for Ba’al her brother. Anat was a “virgin warrior” goddess from the ancient Syrian mythology. (Walls 1992:3)

In the Ugaritic texts, she is the sister and consort of Ba’al, the couple being the younger West Semitic deities of El and Asherah. Anat had various roles, and her title was “maiden Anat” although she was also known as Ba’al’s consort and lover. She was understood as a “fertility goddess”, a giver of life, but she was also a warrior, rounding up Ba’al’s enemies and slaughtering them, and she was described as a huntress (Dever 2005:270).

In the Bible she is named once in the personal name “Shangat ben Anat” (Jdg 3:31) and twice in a place name “Beth Anat”. (Jos 19:38 and Jdg 1:33) (Dever 2005:166)

As part of the divine realm, she played an active role in the Ugaritic myths. Also known as Hanat, she was a distinct goddess, rather than a western manifestation of Ishtar. In the Egyptian and Syria-Palestine traditions, the goddess Anat was described as a young nubile female with small breasts and a thin body; she also engaged in the masculine duties of hunting and warfare. (Walls 1992:1)

She was of marriageable age, (according to the Ancient Near East customs), an adolescent, and did not have any children. This gender and young age may have given her a mythic character, and it made her a member of a definite social category; she was clearly in contrast to the other more mature goddesses in the Ugaritic Pantheon. (Walls 1992:83)



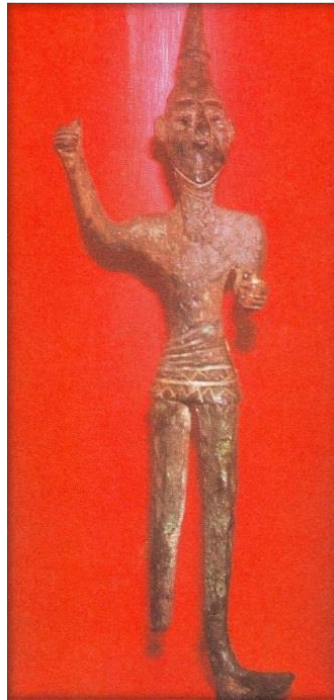
**Figure 6.2 Bronze figure of a Canaanite god, thought to be El, the chief deity, father of gods and men. Also called the kind and compassionate, associated with the bull. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:107)**

While the descriptive representation and epithets of Anat seemed to give her female attributes, some reviewers conclude that Anat was an androgynous or bisexual figure. Some scholars interpret certain Ugaritic texts to depict Anat as having a beard, and being described by El as being “like a man”. (Walls 1992:83)

Anat’s relationship to Ba’al (Hadad) as his sister was based on her relationship to the storm god and their relationship to El. (Walls 1992:89). The term “sister” does not have to mean any sexual or martial relationship. It may mean their similar warrior-like natures. (Walls 1992:1)

Anat had a fierce and violent temperament. She was shown as a ruthless warrior who glorified in bloodshed and slaughter; she even threatened Ba’al with physical violence if he did not grant her requests. Depicted by Ugaritic (the modern Ras Shamra) myths, once when her brother participated in a victorious battle, Anat arranged that a huge celebration feast be prepared in the honour of Ba’al, on the heavenly mountain Zaphron, (modern day Jebel Aqra), and she invited the defeated people. (Walls 1992:1)

“Anat then painted herself with rouge and henna. Then she entered the hall, closed the doors and killed everyone in sight. She waded knee-deep in their blood. She beheaded the people, and cut off their hands. Then she adorned herself with the decapitated heads and severed limbs of her defeated enemies, by binding the heads to her torso and the hands to her sash” (Walls 1992:1)



**Figure 6.3 Ba'al, god of storms and winter rains, linked with the seasonal death and rebirth of vegetation. (Encyclopaedia of World Methodology 1975:109)**

On a piece of fragment from Ugarit in cuneiform script, Anat appeared as a fierce and wild warrior. It gave her pleasure to cast out old men and townsfolk with her arrows. This made her a fearsome and aggressive character. One of her more positive functions was that she contributed to the balance of cosmic power and assisted in establishing Ba'al as the king of the gods. (Walls 1992:1)

She could be compassionate as well, as she grieved over the death of Ba'al, her brother. As a young girl, the “maiden” Anat served as a wet nurse to humans of royal descent. Walls (1992:1) she was also identified as a goddess of love and fertility. Anat's rejection of the feminine identity demonstrated the importance of gender to her symbolic identity. Scholars sometimes reduced gods and goddesses to Frazerian types without any reference to the varying roles they played in the actual texts. (Walls 1992:3)

### 6.1.1 Ba-al and Anat battle Mot

Ba'al dies when the growing season comes to an end. Ba'al's death was mourned by the Divine Assembly especially El his father and Anat his wife. They performed typical Ancient Near Eastern mourning rituals, slashing their bodies with knives and putting ash on their heads (Jr 16:6, Ezk 27:30). Anat arranged a huge funeral and sacrificed hundreds of animals. As a childless widow, Anat appeals to Asherah, the wife of El, for a son to succeed Ba'al as king. Parallel stories are mentioned in (Gn 38, Dt 25:5-10, Ruth 4). Asherah nominated two candidates to take Ba'al's place: Yadi Yalhan and Athar the Awesome, but they were not able to rule in Ba'al's place. (Matthews et al 1991:166)

Anat's mourning for her brother Ba'al was an important element of her character and story tale function in the Ugaritic myth. Anat searched for Ba'al's corpse and with the aid of Shapsh, mourned him, and provided sacrificial offerings at his burial. (Walls 1992:84)

Anat had an elaborate rite of mourning for the dead Ba'al. De Moor mentioned that Anat shaved her side-whiskers and her beard. Loewenstamm indicated that she gashed her cheeks and her chin. (Walls 1992:84).

She then avenged his death by annihilating Mot, Ba'al's supposed slayer. By mourning Ba'al it may also demonstrate her primary function in Ugaritic religion as a goddess of mourning. Similarities could be seen in other goddesses mourning their companions. Similarities are in the search and mourning of Inanna and Geshtinanna by Dumuzi, as well as the mourning of Isis and Nephtys by Osiris. (Walls 1992:67)

Mot or Mavet was a god of sterility and death. He also represented the intense heat of the dry season, which causes drought. Mot triumphed against Ba'al, sending him to the land of the dead. The "east wind" was identified with Mot's attacks on Ba'al. The siroccos in late spring coincided with Mot's devouring of Ba'al. The siroccos of early fall represented the climatic struggle between Ba'al and Mot, which resulted in Ba'al's victory over Mot and the return of the rains. It is likely that it is mentioned in Hosea as well as in Jeremiah. (Watson 1971:252)

*“Though he be fruitful among his brethren, an east wind shall come,  
the wind of the Lord shall come up from the wilderness,  
and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up:  
he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels.” (Hos. 13:15) KJV*

*“At that time shall it be said to this people and to Jerusalem,  
A dry wind of the high places in the wilderness toward the daughter of my  
people, not to fan, nor to cleanse.” (Jer. 4:11) KJV*

Here the figure of the “east wind” was used as a metaphor, not only because of the destructive properties of the siroccos, but also to affirm that it is Yahweh, not Mot, who is present in the wind. (Walls 1992:85)

Anat, with the help of the goddess Shapash (Shapsu) who had access to the underworld, brought Ba'al back to life. Anat took vengeance on Mot by cutting him into tiny pieces, grinding him up, and sowing him in the fields. Ba'al and Mot were symbolic figures of the alternating seasons of rain, drought and death. By scattering the remains of Mot, Anat allowed the wheat to grow in a new season. (Walls 1992:85)

Anat then appealed to El and asked him to generate a dream to determine whether Ba'al has really died. El had a vision and began to laugh and celebrate when he realized that Ba-al was alive and that the crops would grow again. El told Anat to talk with Shapsu, goddess of the sun, and to ask her to assist to find Ba'al. Shapsu agreed, and began by pouring wine into the dry furrows of the fields. Ba'al defeated both Yam and Mot to retrieve his title as king of the gods. (Matthews et al 1991:167)

Anat was also described as wearing masculine clothes, according to Walls, an Egyptian incantation reads: “Anat, the victorious goddess, the woman who acts like a warrior, who wears a skirt like men and a sash like woman.” Walls (1992:85) This portrayed her as having masculine and female clothing. In Egyptian texts, she was given explicitly feminine titles, such as mistress, queen, and woman. Clearly, she was represented as female. (Walls 1992:85)

No Ugaritic texts described her clothes. The description of her male and female clothing can be seen as she avenged the death of her brother Ba'al. Her

portrayals depicted her in feminine clothing, sometimes even with an exposed breast. There is also no indication that the combination of her warrior characteristics was offensive. The identification of her as a hunter, warrior and desire of Aqhat's bow suggested that she had masculine traits. She was female, but her gender ambiguous. (Walls 1992:85)

Anat was independent, and she did not appear to be under any direct influence of any god in the Ugaritic texts. She constantly acted on her own desires, and was not submissive to anyone. Her independence was in contrast with the goddess Athirat's role as El's wife. (Walls 1992:85)

Anat did not have any sexual intercourse in the Ugaritic myths according to Walls. However, she was described as an erotic goddess. She was called the patron of love by the modern interpreters of her myth. She was also identified as one of the "naughty daughters of El", a "patroness of wanton love, the harlot of the world". Here was clearly a huge contradiction of Anat's traits of virginity and sexual activity. (Walls 1992:112)

While a combination of the characteristics as goddess of love and war was not unusual, it was more difficult to combine the qualities for a sexually active and virginal goddess. However, she could have been compared with Athtart and Anat. They both were fruitful mother goddesses and divine courtesans, even without losing their virginity. (Walls 1992:114)

There were two instances within the mythological stories from Ugarit, which illustrated the interaction of Anat and El. In one story, she requested permission to have a palace built for Ba'al, and in the other, she asked to punish Aqhat for his impudence. In each of these episodes Anat began her speech to El with warnings: He must not rejoice in his own mansion lest she destroy it before assaulting him. She warned El that she would cause his grey hair to run with blood and his grey beard with gore if he did not grant her request. (Walls 1992:85)

The response she got from El was that she was stubborn, and that there was no restraining of her among the goddesses, and then he grudgingly did as she requested. Anat was called the daughter of El, when she is most rebellious against the patriarch. However, she still needed his permission, before doing what

she desired. (Walls 1992:85)

### 6.1.2 Ba-al builds a house

Unlike other gods, Ba-al did not have a house of his own. Parallels in the Hebrew Bible are (1 Sm 7:1-17, 1 Ki 5:3-6, 1 Chr 17 1-14). When he complained about these arrangements to Anat, she offered to negotiate with El on his behalf.

*"I have no house like other gods.  
No temple like the other sons of Asherah!"*

Anat then swears to Ba-al:

*"El God of the Bull, will listen to me  
I will make sure that he answers me.  
I shall lead him like a lamb to slaughter  
I shall cover his old grey head with blood"*

Parallels in the Hebrew Bible are (Zch 1:3, Jr 11:19, 1 Ki 2:9).

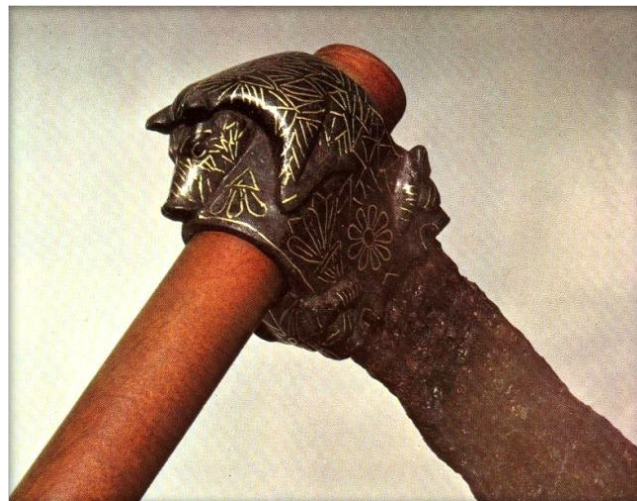
*She "stamped her foot and the earth trembled", she headed straight for El.  
Through her threats and flattery, she requested El to build a temple for Ba'al and  
Kothar-wa-Hasis the Divine Craftsman was commissioned to build the house of  
Ba'al. (Matthews et al 1991:161)*

Other gods, especially Yam the sea god and Nahar the river of judgement, disputed Ba-al's right to have his own house. A battle between them began. Yam the sea god and Nahar the river of judgement sent envoys to the mountain of El, to the divine assembly. When the convoys arrived, they demanded that El must deliver Ba'al and his followers.

*"... Father of Yam answered  
Ba'al is your slave, o Yam.  
Ba'al is your slave, o Nahar  
The Son of Dagan is your prisoner.  
He will be turned over to you as a gift from The Gods,  
... as a present from The Holy Ones."  
(Matthews et al 1991:162)*

Ba'al becomes so angry that he took out his battle axe and wanted to kill the envoys when Asherah reminded him that messengers have diplomatic immunity and cannot be killed because of the message they deliver. It is parallel with (Jr 26:16-19). Yam drove Ba'al off Mount Zaphon and then tried to get permission to build a house of his own. Athtaru the god of irrigation argued that Yam should not have a house because he has no wife. (Matthews et al 1991:164)

Yam then demands that El gives him a wife and house. Ba'al intervenes and with the help of Kothar-wa-Hasis found a solution to the problem. Kothar-wa-Hasis forged a battle axe and named it "Chaser" and said Ba'al must use it to kill or chase Yam and Nahar away. However, Yam was too strong, and Kothar-wa-Hasis made another battle axe and named it "Expeller" to expel Yam and Nahar. This second axe defeated Yam, but did not destroy him. Ba'al's victory gave him authority and he was declared "king of the gods". (Matthews et al 1991:164)



**Figure 6.4** Axe found at Ras Shamra (Ugarit) adorned by a boar. In his descent to the underworld Ba'al was accompanied by seven boar hunters. In ancient Semitic mythology the boar was cursed for killing Tammuz, (the Greek Adonis). Probably Mitannian, 1600 BCE. National Museum Aleppo. (Ions 1987:24)

### 6.1.3 The story of Aqhat, the divine hunter

The story of Aqhat was among the works of art and literature recovered at Ugarit by a French excavation directed by CA Scheffler, during twenty-two seasons between 1929 and 1960. It was written on fifteen baked clay tablets in Ugaritic, a Hebrew-like Semitic language. (Matthews et al 1991:55)



In the story of Aqhat, Danil a king and a judge, Aquat's father, and his wife Danatiya his mother, were unable to conceive until Ba'al their divine god helped them to conceive, and gave birth to Aquat. He had a sister named Paghat. Kothar-wa-Khasis, the divine armorer, made the boy a unique and powerful bow and arrows. (Matthews et al 1991:85)

"The story of Aqhat" opens with Danil involved in a seven-day ritual in order to please the gods so that he and his wife Danatiya will be able to have a son and heir. After feasting for seven days at an elaborate banquet, Ba'al stands up on the seventh day and address the god El who is king of the gods in Ugarit.

*El, God of the Bull bless him with a son.*

*My Father our Father, fill his house with a child...*

*A son ... to erect a stele for his ancestral gods...*

*To drive away those who revolt against Danil...*

*To take Danil's hand when he is drunk...*

*A son ... to eat a funeral meal in the temple of Ba'al...*

*(Matthews et al 1991:85)*

El agreed with Ba'al, and sent a messenger to Danil with the promise of a son. For seven more days Danil entertained the midwives of his court who would assist him with the birth of his son. At a prearranged time, the guests leave Danil and Danatiya and the couple have intercourse to conceive their child. The divine armorer Kothar-wa-Hasis decided to make a bow and arrows for Aqhat, and delivered them himself. Aqhat used his divine bow and arrows to become a mighty hunter; parallel stories are in (Gn 10:9, Gn 21:20-21). The goddess Anat envied his skill and wanted his bow. (Matthews et al 1991:88)

When Aqhat grew to be a young man, Anat wanted to buy his bow; she even offered him immortality, which he refused, calling her a liar and stated that old age and death are the lot of all men. He even insulted her by asking why she needed a bow. Anat complained to El, and threatened him. She sent her attendant Yatpan, a soldier of fortune, in a hawk form against Aqhat to steal the bow, but unfortunately, Aqhat was killed, Yatpan ran away, and the bow and arrows fell into the sea. (Walls 1992:114)

Anat mourned Aqhat, and the curse that the loss of the bow would bring to the

land. Paghat, the sister of Aqhat, revenged her brother's death, and tried to restore the land. She then discovered that the person she hired to help avenge her brother's death was Yatpan, her brother's murderer. Here was a parallel between the story of Anat and her revenge of Mot, for killing Ba'al.

(Walls 1992:114)



**Figure 6.5 A statue of Gilgamesh holding a lion cub (Matthews et al 1991:40)**

The deity Anat appeared in Egypt in the 16<sup>th</sup> dynasty, along with other Semitic deities; here she was worshipped as the war goddess. In the contest between Horus and Seth, she was given in marriage to Seth, also identified with the Semitic god Hadad. (Walls 1992:114)

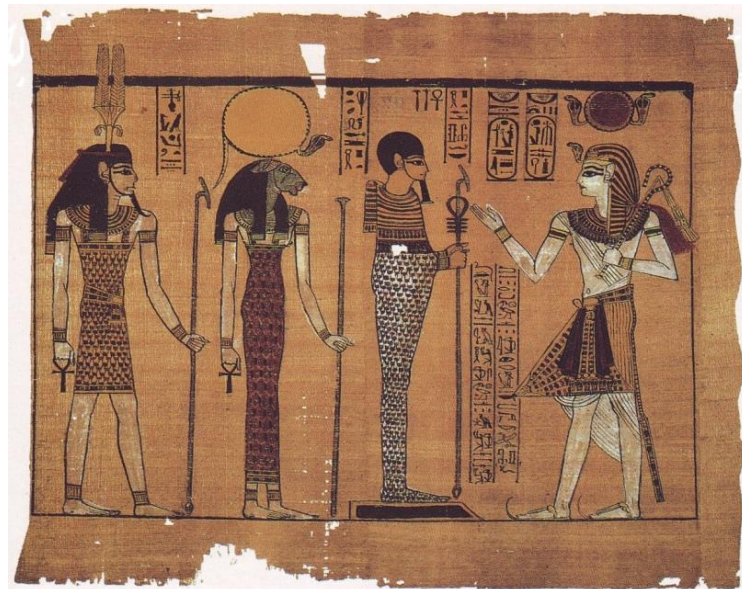
The story of Aqhat was very popular in the Ancient Near East and in ancient Israel. Anat's meeting with El, and her plot to assassinate Aqhat, is similar to the story of Ishtar's meeting with Gilgamesh and her decision to assassinate Enkidu in tablet six of "The story of Gilgamesh". The "barren wife" story in "The Story of Aqhat" is similar to ancestor stories like Genesis 15:1-4, 16:1-15, 18:9-15 as well as Judges 13:2-3,1 and 2 Kings 4:8-17. (Matthews et al 1991:85)

### 6.1.4 Anat in Egypt

Anat had temples in Avaris, the Hyksos capital and in Beth-Shan (Palestine). In the 15th to 12th centuries BCE, Anat was called “Bin-Ptah” the daughter of Ptah. The name of Anat-her, an Egyptian ruler in this time, could have been derived from Anat. (Walls 1992:145)

Ramases II made Anat his personal guardian in battle, and enlarged the temple in Pi-Rameses. His daughter was named “Bint-Anat” meaning (Daughter of Anat), his dog named “Anat-in-vigor” appears in a carving in the Beit el Wali temple, and one of his horses was named “Ana-herte”, meaning (Anat is satisfied). Anat appeared frequently in Egyptian records; she was incorporated in the Egyptian pantheon under the Ramesside pharaohs in the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. (Walls 1992:145)

In Egyptian myths, Anat was associated with military images; she also appeared in mythological incantations of the New Kingdom, where her role was different from her “warrior” role. Anat was mostly associated with Seth, but she was also described as the daughter of Re, and even daughter of Ptah. Anat also appeared in an Egyptian magic spell against crocodiles, and she was paired with Astarte, as “those who conceived but do not bear”. (Walls 1992:149)

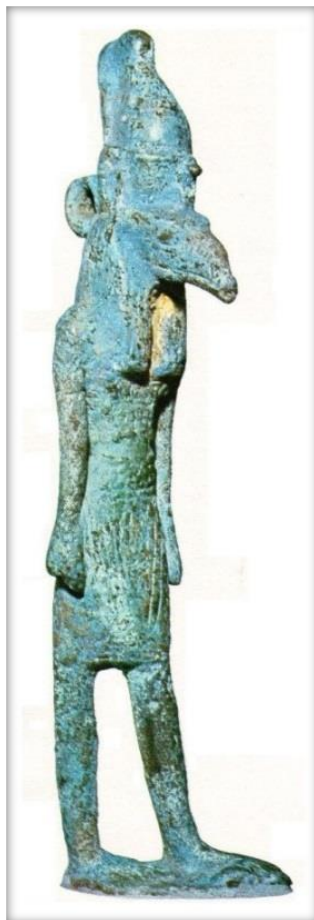


**Figure 6.6** In this illustration from the great Harris Papyrus, Rameses III greets the main deities (from right to left) Ptah, god of creativity, Sekhmet, Ptah’s wife and protector and Nefertem their son. The holy staffs held by the deities may be “gnomons” (yardsticks) for determining the height of the sun, the time of day, even the season. (Lost Civilisations 1993:122)

The spell against crocodiles was to keep the crocodiles' mouth shut, as the mouths of the wombs of Anat and Astarte were shut. In the spell, the God Horus closed the mouths of the wombs of Anath and Astarte, the two great goddesses, so that they could become pregnant, but could not bear, and their mouths were only opened by the chaos god, Seth. This could mean that Horus also identified with the Canaanite Horon, who was keeping the pregnant goddesses from giving birth while Seth assisted with their delivery.

(Walls 1992:150)

This "opening" and "closing" of the wombs could also be references made to the vagina rather than the actual 'womb' and the closing of the vagina implied the virginity of Anat and Astarte or their sexual inactivity, and Seth's attempt to open them could imply rape. But these interpretations do not bear any reference to the pregnancy of the goddesses. (Walls 1992:151)



**Figure 6.7 Seth, one of the major gods of ancient Egypt. He has a prominent role in representations of symbolic rites relating to the pharaonic state. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:98)**

A different interpretation by te Velde, referred to the role of Seth in causing unwanted abortions. In closing the wombs of the goddesses, Horus was assisting effective pregnancy through the cessation of the menses, while Seth's "opening" could mean abnormal pregnancy menorrhagia and miscarriage. The implication of this passage is confusing, as there was no clear evidence presenting Anat as being sexually active with Seth. (Walls 1992:151)

The goddess Anat was never mentioned in Hebrew Scriptures, but her name was preserved in city names like Beth Anat, and Anathoth. Anathoth could have been a plural form of the name, a reference to many shrines or a plural form of her name. (Walls 1992:151)

In Judges 3:31; 5:6 (KJV) the ancient hero Shamgar son of Anat is mentioned.

*"And after him was Sham'-gar the son of A'nath,  
which slew of the Phi-lis'-tines six hundred men with an ox goad:  
and he also delivered Israel." (Jdg 3:31) KJV*

*"In the days of Sham'-gar the son of A'nath in the days of Ja-el,  
the highways were unoccupied and the travelers walked through byways."  
(Jdg 5:6) KJV*

This could have meant that he was under Anat's protection. Asenath, "holy to Anath", was the wife of Joseph. (Walls 1992:151)

Elephantine papyri (the modern Aswan) mentioned a goddess called Anat-Yathu, or Anat-Yahweh, worshipped in the temple to Yahweh built by Jewish refugees from the Babylonian conquest of Judah. The papyri described the Jews as worshipping Anat-Yahu, described as either the wife or consort of Yahweh. (Walls 1992:151)

Evidence to support the equation of Anat with Ba'al's heifer (cow) could be compared with Anat's epithet of (milk) cow of Seth in Egyptian sources. The mourning Anat had also been compared as one whose heart is "like the heart of a cow for her calf". As Ba'al was sometimes described as copulating with a heifer, in order to get a son or heir, it could not include Anat as being a "cow". (Walls 1992:124)

This could have meant that Ba'al's behaviour and sexual encounters must not be taken as a romantic arrangement, but rather as a more traditional encounter. It could reflect his association with nature, and natural drives in contrast with the values of human culture. (Walls 1992:124)

The intermixing of the divine and animals may have been seen as contrary to normal activities in the Ancient Near East. But the image of Anat could have been a parallel of the "cow of Ba'al". Anat could be identified as blessing the cow and calf, rather than being identified as Ba'al's heifer. (Walls 1992:143)

Scholars have interpreted the identification of Anat as a wet nurse in Ugaritic myth as evidence of the function as a fertility or mother goddess. It could also be explained as Anat's association with royalty. All Near Eastern deities have some association with the powers of nature and her fertilizing and life-sustaining forces. (Walls 1992:153)

Bowman, suggested that the Egyptian evidence for Anat as a wet nurse was mentioned in the inscriptions in the temple of Anat at Tanit. Here Ramses II referred to Anat as his mother and patron. He referred to himself as the "suckling of Anat". Anat could also be identified as the pharaoh's patron and protector rather than a fertility goddess. There she was perceived as having royal status to her human devotee, and Ramses' depicted his dependent relationship to the warrior goddess. (Walls 1992:153)

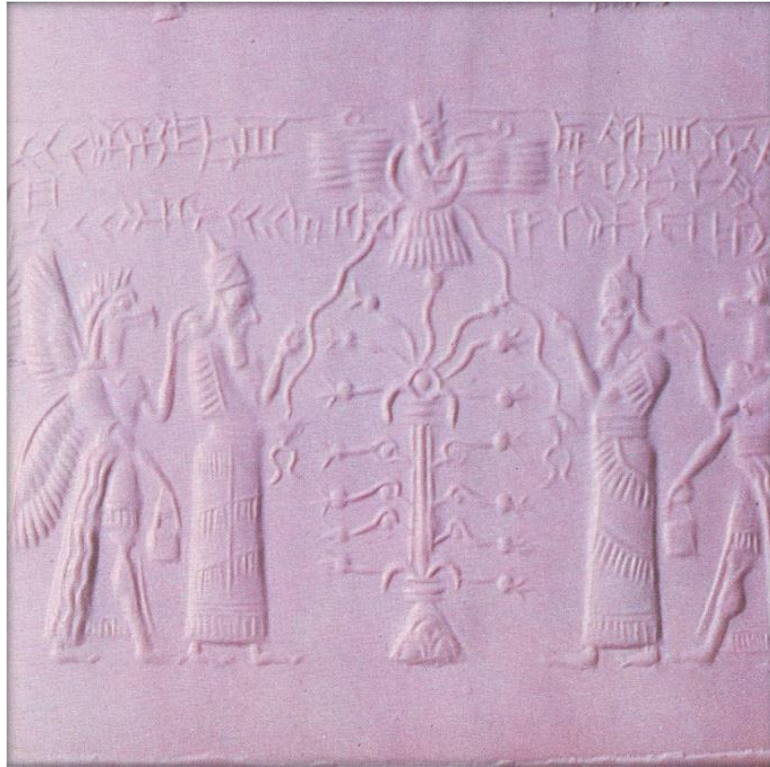
The famous ivory panel from Ugarit depicting the winged goddess suckling two male youths is frequently identified with Anat. Here the influence of Egyptian royal ideology is demonstrated on the artistic motif in this scene. The ivory panel is one of a series of panels depicting the life of the Ugaritic king. This could mean that kings symbolically suckle the divine milk at their enthronement, rather than in their infancy. (Walls 1992:153)

When Anat was often depicted as a wet nurse, she was depicted as wet nurse to the divine heir. In a parallel tradition, Ishtar was portrayed as the divine wet nurse of Neo-Assyrian kings. The meaning of the Assyrian king having divine milk, demonstrated his divine favour and royal status without attributing maternal characteristics to the erotic and martial Ishtar. Similarly, a virginal Athena was

described as wet nurse of warriors in the Greek tradition. (Walls 1992:154)

## 6.2 ASHERAH, THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN

According to Dever, Asherah the goddess in Ancient Israel was the supreme goddess of the Ancient Levant and associated with living trees and hilltop forest sanctuaries, symbolized by a wooden pole or image of a tree. (Dever 2005:103)



**Figure 6.8 Asherah, the Canaanite mother goddess, also named Athirat or Asherah, was a form of the Mesopotamian goddess Istar, shown with a palm tree on this Assyrian seal. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:108)**

The goddess Asherah specifically was a divine figure generally in the Ancient Near East. The name “Asherah” occurs over 40 times in the Bible and this suggests to scholars connections with the Canaanite mother goddess. In the Asherah cult she was the consort of the main deity of the pantheon and the mother of the gods. (Dever 2005:101)

In Ugaritic texts Atirat was also called “Lady Asherah of the Sea” or “Atirat of the Sea” meaning “She who treads on the sea” the name associated with the Ugaritic word “stride”. The sacred sea on which Asherah walked was known as Yam Kinneret, now called Lake Galilee. (Perlman 1981:10)



Figure 6.9



Figure 6.10



Figure 6.11

Figurines portraying a female holding a round disk in front of her upper body are typical of Iron Age II A-B. The round disk could have been a tambourine or a sacrificial cake or loaf. The figurines are pictured naked or clothed. Figurine 6.9 is from Hazor, figurine 6.10 is from Tell el Far'ah and she wears a skirt wrapped around her body. Clothing can also be seen in the figurine 6.11 from Gezer. (Keel et al 1998:165)

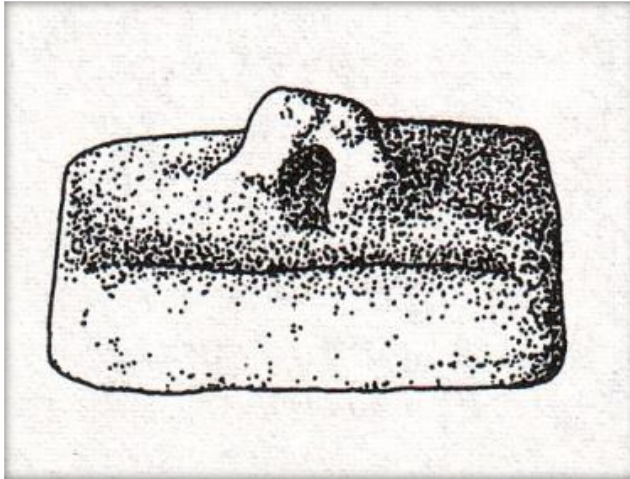
Iconic evidence for an Asherah with heavenly features that might support her identification with the “queen of heaven” is limited. Jeremiah 44:19 mentions that the Judean women who fled to Egypt baked ash cakes for the “queen of heaven” in order to “copy her image”. Baking moulds from Mari dating to the eighteenth century have been known to illustrate a cake with the picture of the goddess. They portray a “naked goddess” sitting on a bench. A Ramat Rahel find of a seal could mean that it was made as an Asherah seal, but because of the seal’s material and crude engraving, it is not possible to determine whether the piece is a stamp or mould for terracotta appliques or for little terracotta hands. It could be a stamp for dough, as this stamp reproduces only the head of a goddess.

(Keel et al 1998:340)

*“Seest thou not what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?*

*The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire,  
and the woman knead their dough,  
to make cakes to the queen of heaven,  
and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods,  
that they may provoke me to anger.” (Jr 7:17-18) KJV*





**Figure 6.12**

**A stamp found at Ramat Rahel, could function as a mould for dough.  
(Keel et al 1998:337)**



**Figure 6.13**

According to Perlman, if the God of the Jews evolved gradually from the Canaanite El, who was probably the “God of Abraham”, Asherah, popular at the time of the Babylon exile, was portrayed as being his wife or consort. Figurines of Asherah were common in archaeological records, and it seemed that her cult was very popular. (Perlman 1981:10)

Inscriptions linking Yahweh and Asherah have been discovered at Kuntillet’Ajrud (the Hebrew “Horvat Teman”) in the Sinai Desert in 1975, and translated it means “I have blessed you by JHVH of Samaria and His Asherah”, or “... by our guardian and his Asherah”. Another inscription from Khirbet el-Quom near Hebron reads: “Blessed by Uriyahu by Yahweh and by his Asherah; from his enemies he saved him!” (Dever 2001:186)

The word Asherah could mean a wooden pole or living tree. It could be cut down, chopped into pieces, and burned. It is clear that Asherim were prohibited cult symbols associated with Canaanite practices. “The Asherah” could mean a symbol of the goddess, and “Asherah” the name of the goddess herself. (Dever 2005:101)

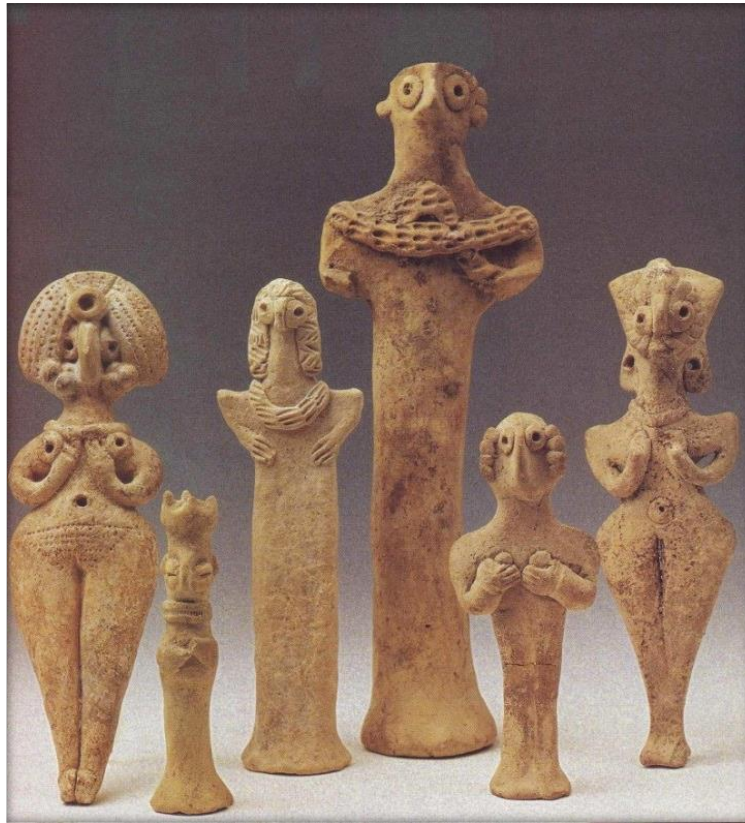


**Figure 6.14 Found at Tel Rehov in the northern Jordan Valley, a clay head which may represent the goddess Asherah or Astarte. Other finds from the Tel are dated to the tenth century BCE (BAR March/April 2000, Vol 26 No 2 p45)**

The word Asherah comes from a root meaning “straight”. It also referred to a sacred tree or pole that stood near shrines to honour the goddess. Among the Phoenicians, tall standing stone pillars signified the numinous presence of a deity, and the wooden Asherahs may have been reflections of it. Asherah may have meant a living tree or grove of trees and therefore meant a shrine. The term appeared as Asherah, and was translated as “groves” in the King James Version, and “poles” in the New Revised Standard Version. However, no indication that it may be translated as “poles” appears in the text. (Perlman 1981:7)

A crudely carved wooden statue planted on the ground of the house was Asherah’s symbol. Sometimes she was illustrated as a clay figurine and, instead of legs, she had a base for insertion in the soft earthen floor of the home. Many cult images of her were found in forests or carved on living trees, Asherah poles are mentioned in the books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, (Dt 16:21) Judges, the

Books of Kings (1 Ki 18:19, 2 Ki 21:7, 2 Ki 18:4) the second Book of Chronicles, and the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Micah. (Perlman 1981:10)



**Figure 6.15** Figurines or “teraphim” that could depict the goddess Asherah. Exhibit from the Bible Lands Museum. (BAR Sept/Oct 2000 Vol 25 No 5 p22)

“Teraphim” are portrayed in the Bible as the “idols” or “household gods” that Rachel stole from her father, Laban, when she left for Canaan, in the caravan of her husband Jacob. (Gn 31:19, 35) (BAR Sept/Oct 2000 Vol 25 No 5 p22)

Scholars mentioned that using the plural term Asherahs, as Asherim or Asherot suggests that reference was being made to objects of worship rather than a superior figure. Asherah was a unique entity within her particular milieu as referred to in Ugaritic and Old Testament literatures. We need to understand how she functioned in a certain period. (Perlman 1981:10)

### **6.2.1 El, Ashera’s consort**

The goddess Anat was a daughter of Asherah and El, the supreme god of the Canaanites. El was also known as Dagon (El, Dagnu). He had many children, the most important three being Hadad or Haddu (Ba’al), Yam (the sea god) and Mot

(god of death). They all share the same attributes as the Greco-Roman gods, Zeus, Poseidon and Hades. El was also known as the bull god; he and his son Baal wore bullhorns on their headdresses. El is a generic word meaning god, and included Baal, Moloch or Yahweh. El was also known as the grey-bearded ancient one, being full of wisdom, or as El the warrior. In patriarchal times the name El mentioned a single god, and the form El appeared in Israelite names from every period, including the name Yisra'el (Israel) meaning "El strives" or "struggled with El". (Walls 1992:83)



**Figure 6.16 A small bronze bull associated with Iron Age I Israelite worship. Discovered at Samaria, it suggests connections with the Canaanite cult of El, the bull god. (BAR March/April 2000, Vol 26 No 2 p33)**

Exodus 6:2-3 mentions:

*"I revealed myself to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shaddai, but was not known to them by my name, Yahweh." (GNB)*

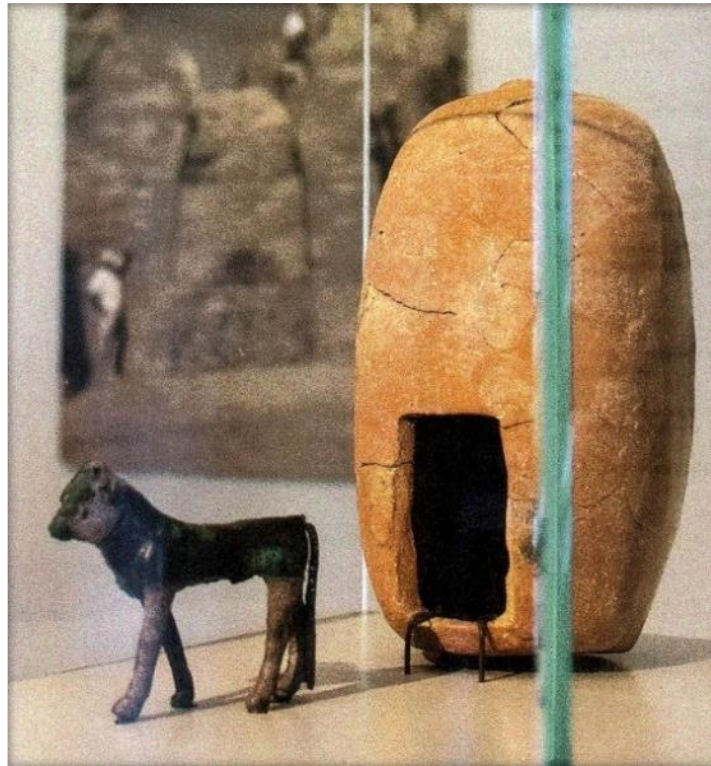
El was mentioned in (Gn 14:18-20) KJV

*"And Mel-chiz'-e-dek king of Sa'-lem brought forth bread and wine:  
and he was the priest of the most high God.  
And he blessed him, and said,  
Blessed be Abraham of the highest God,  
possessor of heaven and earth."*

In 1958 Yigael Yadin excavated at Hazor in upper Galilee. They found a small

outdoor “bamah” (shrine) from the 11th century BCE in an Israelite “squatter occupation” above the ruins of the Canaanite city. The shrine was a small rectangular structure in an open area with benches around the walls adjoining a stone pavement with four standing stones. These finds included offering stands, bronze implements and a jug, a sword, two javelin heads and butts and an arrowhead, as well as a seated figure of the deity El. Yadin interpreted the “bamah” as Israelite, and noted that the objects could be Canaanite. (Dever 2005:138)

*“Hazor... the head of all those Kingdoms.” (Jos 11:10) AMP*



**Figure 6.17 A Canaanite silver calf found in a shrine next to Ashkelon’s middle Bronze Age gate, the oldest arched gate in the world. (BAR July/August 2017 Vol 43 No 4 p12)**

### **6.2.2 Evidence of Asherah in the Bible**

1 Kings 15:13 (KJV) describes when King Jeroboam was king of Israel, and Asa reigned over Judah, (he reigned for 41 years in Jerusalem). He removed his mother Maacha, the daughter of Absalom from being Queen, because she had made an idol in a grove. He destroyed her idol, and burned it by the Kidron brook. However, the high places were not removed. (Dever 2005:101)

In 1 Kings 18:19 (GNB) it is mentioned that 400 Asherah prophets sat at Jezebel's table:

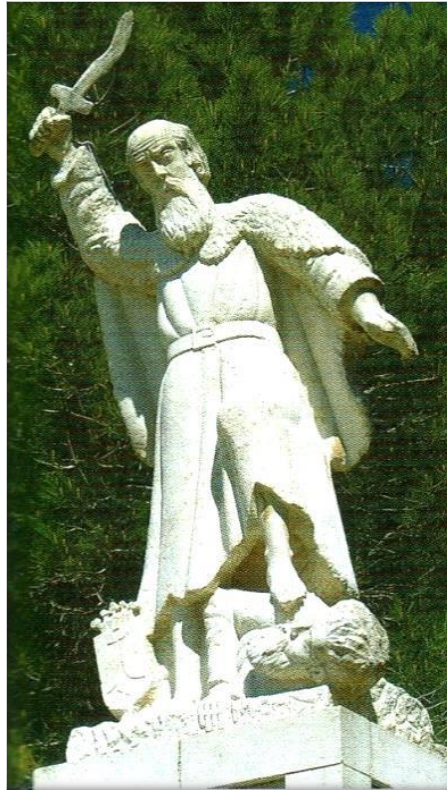
*“Now order all the people of Israel to meet me at Mount Carmel.  
Bring along the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of the goddess  
Asherah who are supported by Queen Jezebel.”*

In addition, as shown from 1 Kings 16:33, it seems that Ahab and his wife Jezebel (who was a Sidonian) could have been Baal and Asherah worshippers. In Deuteronomy 7:5, 12:3 and Exodus 34:13 it is stated that the conquering Israelites were required to destroy the cult objects and sites of the inhabitants of the land. Deuteronomy 16:21 mentions that it is a transgression to set up monuments to other gods. (Perlman 1981:19)

Why were the 400 prophets of Asherah not killed? (1 Ki 18:20-40) KJV Dever argued that if Elijah killed Asherah's prophets like the 450 prophets of Baal at the Kishon brook, the biblical writers would have included it in the story. Their lives could have been spared because her cult was tolerated even in the “official religion” in the North. (Dever 2005:211:8)

The Israelites were warned not to make covenants with the inhabitants of the land, because it meant that they would be invited to partake in the sacrifices to other gods. The result could be intermarriage and the observance of the cult practices. It is crucial for the Israelite religion and their social and religious integrity to refrain from the covenants of the Canaanites and to destroy their cult objects. (Perlman 1981:14)

The foreign wives of Israel's kings were directly held responsible and blamed for being responsible for worshipping the deities and inducing their husbands to stray from Yahweh, according to the author of Kings. Solomon built installations for the worshippers of foreign deities (1 Ki 11:4-6) but it must be mentioned that Jeroboam was responsible for the original sin of the northern kingdom. He established cult places, even though he did not have a foreign wife, and did not worship other gods. (Perlman 1981:14)



**Figure 6.18 The statue of Elijah on Mount Carmel recalls the great victory of Elijah over the prophets of Baal at this location. (Knight 2007:95)**

Jezebel, Ahab's wife, was accused of introducing Asherah worshipping, presumably with his consent, and of persecuting the Yahweh prophets. Queen Maaca, mother of Asa and Jezebel, publicly worshipped her. Hebrew zealots, however, killed Jezebel on the charge of "harlotry" during festivals of the goddess. (Monaghan 1990:36)

*"There was no one else who had devoted himself so completely to doing wrong in the Lord's sight as Ahab – all at the urging of his wife Jezebel. He committed the most shameful sins by worshipping idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the Lord had driven out of the land as the people of Israel advanced." (1 Ki 21:25) GNB*

This cultic deviation was also accredited to Athaliah and Ahaziah (Monaghan 1990:36)

*"In the seventeenth year of the reign of King Jehoshaphat of Judah, Ahaziah son of Ahab became king of Israel, and he ruled in Samaria for two years. He sinned against the Lord, following the wicked example of his father Ahab, his mother Jezebel, and King Jeroboam, who had led Israel into sin. He*

*worshipped and served Baal, and like his father before him, he aroused the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel.” (1 Ki 22:51) GNB*

The predictions of Exodus 34 and Deuteronomy 7 (KJV) were that if Israel intermarried with the inhabitants of the land, they would be led astray by their foreign wives, and forget Yahweh, and then Yahweh would destroy Israel.

*“When the Lord your God places these people in your power and you defeat them, you must put them all to death. Do not make an alliance with them or show them any mercy. Do not marry any of them, and do not let your children marry them, because then they would lead your children away from the lord to worship other gods. If that happen the lord will be angry with you and destroy you at once. So then tear down their altars break their sacred stone pillars in pieces, cut down the symbols of their goddess Asherah, and burn their idols.” (Dt 7:2-5) GNB*

It is noteworthy that Manasseh and Maacha made an image of Asherah, which Asa removed. (1 Ki 15:13) and (2 Chr 15:16) GNB

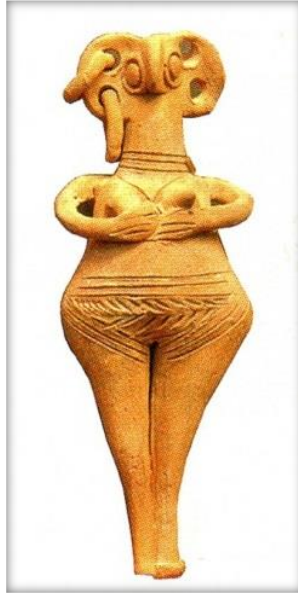
*“King Asa removed his grandmother Maacha from her position as queen mother because she made an obscene idol of the fertility goddess Asherah.” (2 Chr 15:16) GNB*

In the Canaanite mythological texts from Ugarit on the coast of Syria, dating from 1400-1300 BCE, Asherah was referred to as the principal female deity of the Canaanite pantheon in pre-Israelite times. In Ugarit she was mentioned as the consort of El, the “father of years”. (Dever 2005:210)

In Kings 16:32, 33 (AMP), it is recounted how Ahab married Jezebel a Phoenician princess. He built a temple for Ba'al the chief Canaanite Phoenician deity in Samaria, and he constructed an altar for Ba'al and made an “Asherah”, a cult image of some sort which stood in a Canaanite-style temple. (Dever 2005:211)

During the reign of Hezekiah in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and Josiah in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century is further evidence of the cult of Asherah. In 2 Kings 18:4 Hezekiah removed the “bamot” (high places), broke the “massebot” (pillars) and cut down the Asherah. (Dever 2005:2013) AMP





**Figure 6.19 Asherah figure. Asherah was a mother god of the Canaanite pantheon. (Knight 2007:71)**

A graven image of Asherah was set up by Manasseh in Solomon's Temple in 2 Kings 21:1-7 and in 2 Kings 23:4 (AMP). King Josiah demolished all the high places, removed "the Asherah" from the temple and burned it. According to Dever, the elements of folk religion are clearly exhibited in the idolatrous priests and the "bamot" (high places) in all the cities of Judah and around Jerusalem, even at the gates of the city, the incense burned to Ba'al, the "massebot" or standing stones, worshipping of the hosts of heavens in the temple, the sun, moon and all the constellations. (Dever 2005:212)



**Figure 6.20 The capture of a wild bull, depicted on a Greek god cup, instead of the Mesopotamian and Hittite stag. The Canaanites and other Mediterranean peoples chose the bull as a fertility symbol. El and Baal were associated with a bull. From 1500 BCE National Museum Athens. (Ions 1987:25)**

There were horses and chariots dedicated to the sun at the entrance to the temple, and vessels were made for Ba'al, and Asherah. Cult prostitution was practised in the temple, as well as child sacrifice in the Kidron Valley below. Women "weaved hangings" for Asherah for the "houses of the male cult prostitutes" in the temple (2 Ki 23:7) (Dever 2005:213) AMP

In Deuteronomy 16:21,22 when the Israelites were about to inherit Canaan, Yahweh instructs them not to plant any tree as an Asherah beside the altar of Yahweh, and they must not set up a pillar "massebah" which Yahweh hates. (Dever 2005:215) AMP

### **6.2.3 Evidence of Asherah in biblical times**

The 10<sup>th</sup> century "cultic structure" at Ta'anach is an example of a "high place" or "bamah". There is a large square terracotta offering stand three feet high, excavated by Paul Whapp in the 1960s. Around the bottom of the stand is a nude figure wearing the Hathor wig standing between two lions, holding them by the ears. According to Dever the figure depicts Asherah, based on the following: the new kingdom (1500-1200) BC Egyptian Goddess Qudshu, the "Holy One", who was the equivalent of the Canaanite Asherah, regularly wore the wig of Hathor the cow goddess. (Dever 2005:220)

On the Winchester plaque, an Egyptian New Kingdom plaque now in the Winchester museum, the goddess is depicted riding on a lion and all three of her names are mentioned. "Qudshu, (Holy one) or (Asherah-Hathor), Anat and Astarte. (Dever 2005:178).

More iconic evidence of Asherah is from small terracotta model temples "naoi" singular "naos" from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, and one from tell el-Far'ah, the Biblical Tirzah. This stand is about 0.3m tall, has a temple façade featuring two palm tree columns. Over the doorway appear the moon crescent and stars of the Pleiades. (In ancient Greek the Pleiades were the seven daughters of the titan Atlas). The Pleiades was often also associated with Tanit, the Phoenician version of Astarte. Although Asherah is not "at home" here, because she is not standing in the door of her house or temple, she can be seen in other "naoi". (Dever 2005:221)



**Figure 6.21 Terracotta cult stand from Ta'anach c.a. 10<sup>th</sup> century showing Asherah the "Lion Lady" on the bottom register. (Dever 2001:179)**

On a Phoenician statue (7<sup>th</sup> century BC) from Cyprus, Asherah is seen wearing a Hathor headdress and carries a "naos" on her head. Another "naos" from Cyprus shows the nude goddess standing in the doorway. (Dever 2005:222)

#### **6.2.4 Asherah, hilltop shrines and groves of trees**

There is iconographic evidence of the close association that Asherah and her cult had with trees. There is also much evidence in the biblical texts. According to Dever, Asherah is mentioned more than 40 times in the Bible, and the term can mean either a wooden pole, stylized tree or a living tree. (Dever 2005:222)

In Jeremiah 10:3-5, (KJV) Jeremiah said to the people not to be afraid of idols because they are made by men and have to be carried. They cannot do evil, or good. (Dever 2005:224) The phrase describing Israel's "whoring after other gods" appears time after time. In King's, Rehoboam, Solomon's son said:

*"For they also built themselves (idolatrous) high places,  
pillars and (Asherim) groves, on every high hill and under every green tree."  
(1Ki 14:23) AMP*

This showed that high places or hilltops included "asherim" and living trees. The prophets reported the same words, Ahaz in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, (2 Ki 16:4) Hoshea (2 Ki 17:30), Isaiah 57:5, Jeremiah 2:20, 3:6, 17:2, Ezekiel 16:13 and

Hosea 4:12, 13. In Deuteronomy 12:2, 3 the same words describe Moses “warning before Israel’s entry into the land”. (Dever 2005:224)

From Moses to Ezekiel (+ 600 years of Israel’s history in Canaan), the folk religion had rites associated with “green trees”. The tree represented Asherah who gave life to the land. The ridges and hilltops were where the people felt closer to the gods; they could lift their eyes to the heavens. “Hilltop shrines” flourished throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages up to the classical era in the Mediterranean world. (Dever 2005:205)

According to Dever, in an article by Ruth Hestrin under the title “The Lachish Ewer and the Asherah”, she pointed out that at Lachish the Jordanian site a “ewer” or dedicatory vase was found showing two wild goats nibbling at the lower branches of a tree. In Old Canaanite script around the top of the “ewer” or vase was a dedicatory formula:

*“Mattan: An offering for my Lady Elat”*

Mattan could be the worshipper’s name or even translated as “a gift”. “Elat” was the feminine form for El, the Canaanite deity, and one of the names of the “Great Mother Goddess of Canaan” used parallel with Asherah. This could be shown as an offering to Asherah because a mutton bone was found in the vase.

(Dever 2005:226)

At another offering pit at the Lachish temple, a goblet was found with a similar scene: the two wild goats with a tree, but now the tree were substituted with the female pubic triangle. This could mean that the tree and the pubic triangle, an ancient symbol of birth and life, were interchangeable. Hestrin observed that on gold or electrum pendants, the goddess Asherah was depicted in another way, as only a torso but with prominent breasts and vulva. This was definitely Asherah because of her Hathor wig. On the Canaanite pendants, a tree was growing out of her vulva. (Dever 2005:228)

Ashera’s symbols could have been interchangeable in Canaanite cultic iconography: Hestrin compares several Egyptian second millennium BCE tomb paintings as a “tree nursing an infant”. A tomb painting depicting a son of Pharaoh

Thutmose III complete with an inscription shows the boy nursed by a fully branched tree. The tree was offering her breast with an outstretched hand, and suckling an infant. (Dever 2005:228)

According to Dever (2005:229), Othmar Keel mentioned that a tree, natural or stylized, could be connected with and named after the goddess Asherah.

### 6.2.5 Yahweh and his Asherah at Kuntillet'Arjud

Ze-ev Meshel excavated the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE cult complex at Kuntillet'Arjud in the eastern Sinai desert in 1975-1976. This site is a Middle Eastern "caravanserai" or stopover station on one of the desert routes of the eastern Sinai, between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea. This is an Israelite site occupied from the mid-9<sup>th</sup> to mid-8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and had both northern and southern (Judean) contacts. The main structure is an Iron Age Judean desert fort. At the lower level are found storage and cooking facilities. According to Dever the fort also served as an "inn" and has a "gate shrine". (Dever 2005:160)

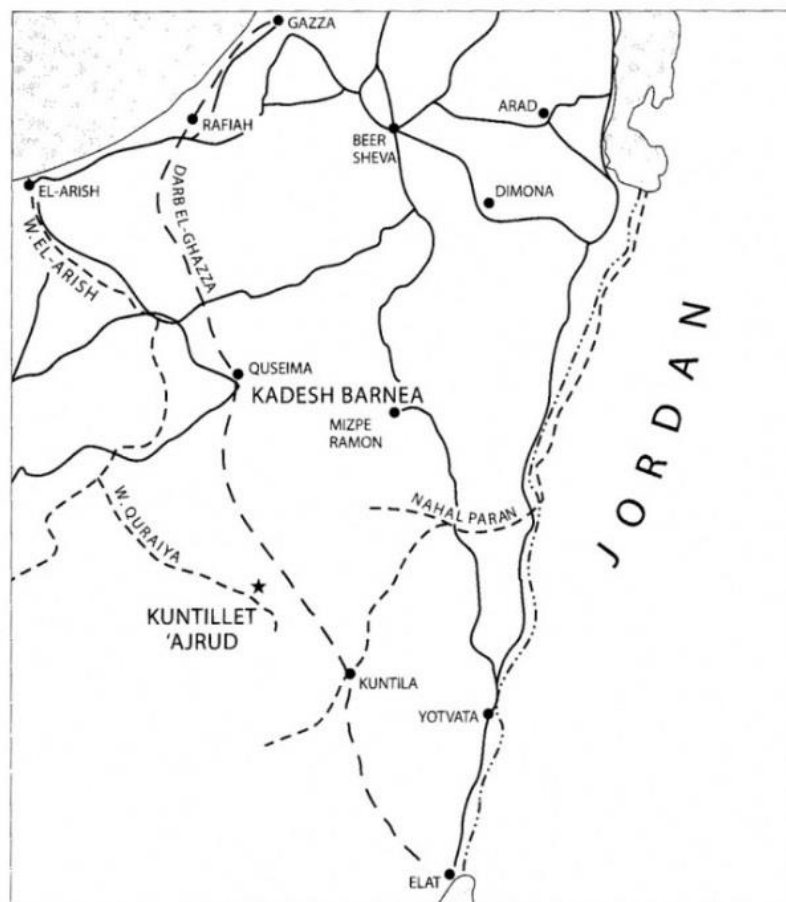


Figure 6.22 Kuntillet 'Arjud shown in the eastern Sinai. (Dever 2001:185)

In two bench rooms in the “favissae” and in the courtyard nearby, were found several fragmentary Hebrew inscriptions. These inscriptions gave a clear reference to four deities, Yahweh, El, Ba’al and Asherah. The name of “Yahweh” and “Asherah” are paired on several inscriptions. An inscription on a wall in one of the bench rooms of the shrine reads:

To (Y)ahweh (of) Teiman (Yemen) and his Ashera(h). (Dever 2005:162)

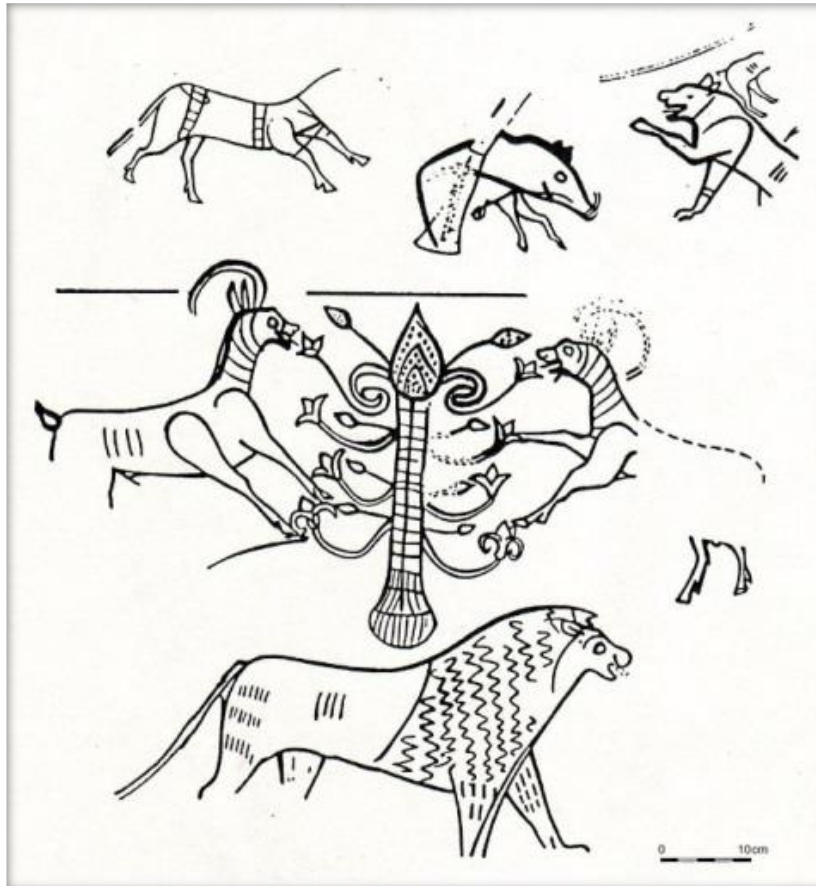
On a large store jar (pithos A) is an inscription that ends:

*“I (b)lessed you by (or to) Yahweh of Samaria and by his Asherah”*

Pithos A, also show a scene of a well-known Phoenician motif of a cow suckling her calf, and stylized palm tree flanked by wild goats, a large lion or bull, and a scene showing two standing male figures with their arms linked, and a seated female goddess. According to Dever some scholars identified the two linked figures as “Yahweh and his Asherah”. (Dever 2005:164)



**Figure 6.23 “Pithos” A scenes: Depicting two standing male figures with their arms linked and a seated female goddess. (Hadley 2000:115)**



**Figure 6.24 “Pithos” A: Scene of a stylized palm tree, flanked by wild goats. (Hadley 2000:117)**

Dever proposed to identify the seated figure as the goddess Asherah, because she sits on a “Lion” throne, very common in ancient Near Eastern Art, and always associated with deities or kings. Her name is written on the inscription above her. Dever suggests that the inscription means that she is “Yahweh’s lady” or consort, like Asherah the consort of El in the Canaanite religion. In the older Canaanite pantheon, Anat is the younger god Baal’s consort, while Asherah is El’s consort or the “mother of the gods”. (Dever 2005:167)

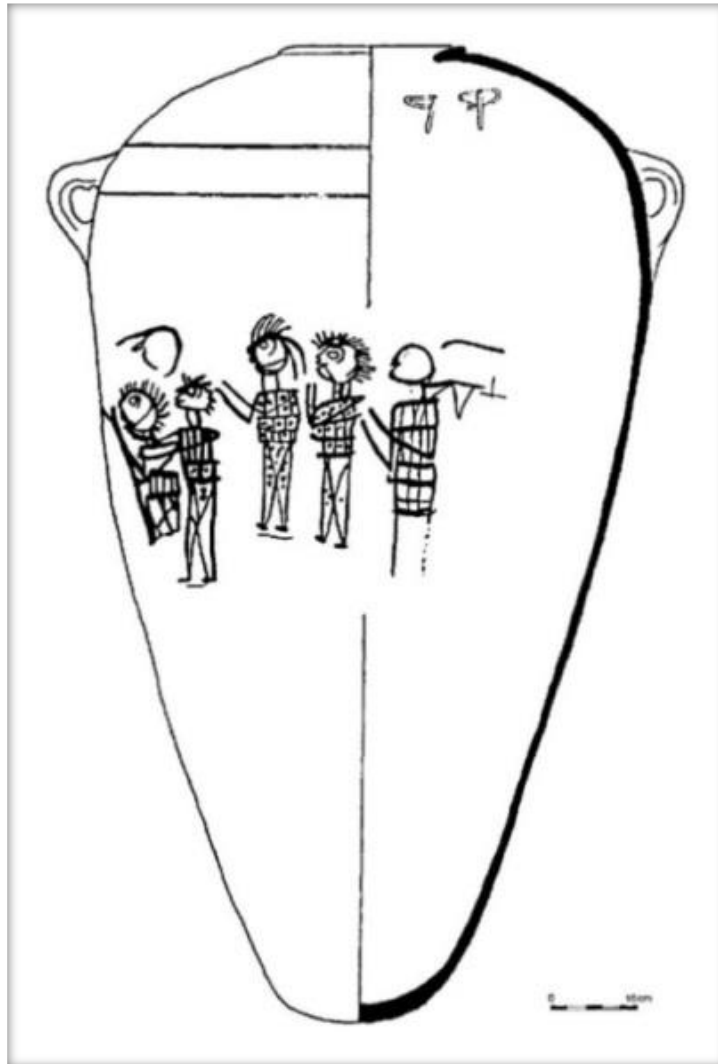
Dever admits that not all scholars share his viewpoint of the name of “Asherah”. In addition, many suggest that this could mean the tree-like symbol of the goddess. The scholars read the meaning as:

*“May X be blessed by Yahweh and his “tree”.*

Dever contests that idea, by stating that if all the major deities in the ancient Near East were paired why can “Asherah” not be pictured as Yahweh’s consort. (Dever 2005:167)

A second stone jar, “pithos” B reads:

*“Yahweh of Teiman and his Asherah”*



**Figure 6.25 “Pithos” B: general view showing the procession of worshippers. (Hadley 2000:118)**

At one of the dozens of bench tombs in the Iron Age commentary at Kh El-Qom was found a four-line Hebrew inscription.

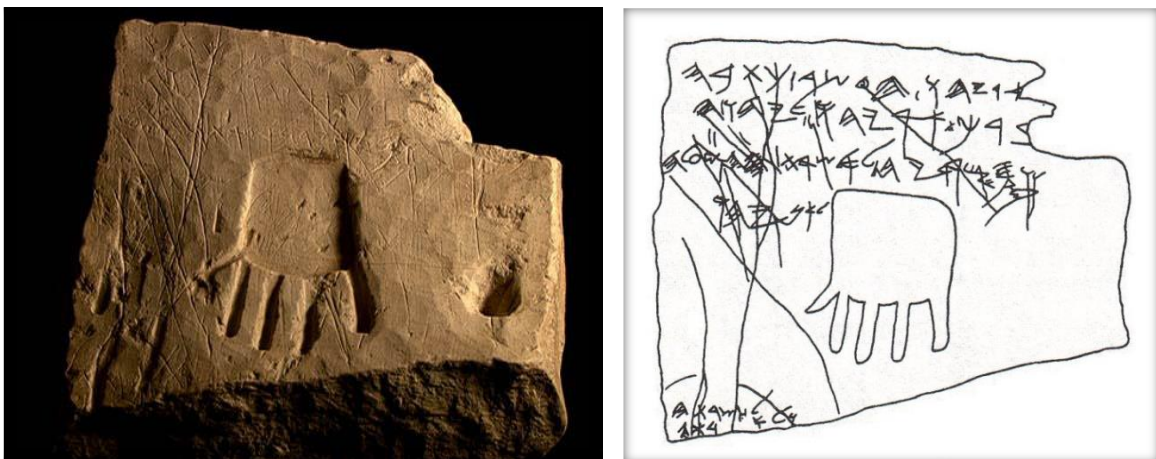
*“For Uriyahu the governor (or the rich), his inscription  
Blessed is the “Uriyahu by Yahweh:  
From his enemies he has been saved  
By his a/Ashrah. (Written) by Oniyahu (Dever 2005:132)*

Dever explained that he does not take the word Asherah as an object of blessing i.e. a tree or pole, but that it means the name of the goddess Asherah. On the



inscription is an engraved human hand, resembling the much later Islamic “Hamze” or “Hand of Fatima”. The hand sign was a kind of graffiti, written on walls, amulets and doorways. An open hand can even be held up as a “good luck” sign. Its purpose was to ward off the “evil eye”, it was a magic symbol. (Dever 2005:132)

The el-Qom hand from an undisturbed 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE tomb is Israelite. The meaning is unclear, but because it was found with a “blessing formula”, the same person probably drew it. It could even be a wish for fortune from “the hand of Yahweh”. The expression as a “blessing” occurs numerous times in the Bible, but in the countryside the people drew it. The sign of the evil eye was also very Jewish, the “eyin ha-ra” which in later Judaism was warded off by the “eye-amulets”. (Dever 2005:133)



**Figure 6.26** Inscription no III from Khirbet el-Qom, 8th century. (Dever 2001:187)

According to Keel two aspects of the inscription are very important. First, that the Judean Uriyahu does not say that he is blessed by “Yahweh of Jerusalem” but simply by “Yahweh”. The second is that line three of the inscription is singular and not plural, which means that only one divine power is considered, namely “Yahweh” as the entity who provides freedom from enemies, and that “Yahweh’s Asherah” is the medium through which it happens. This evidence corresponds with the pithos inscription from Kuntillet’Ajrud. Keel came to the conclusion that the Asherahs in eighth-century Israel and Judah were thought of not as partners of Yahweh, but as cult objects in the form of a tree, and as a medium that delivered “His” blessing. (Keel et al 1998:240)

### 6.3 ASTARTE, GODDESS OF LOVE

Astarte meaning “womb” or “she of the womb”, was the Greek and Roman name of Ashtoreth, the supreme female deity of the Phoenician nation, the goddess of love. Astarte was also known as Astarat and as Ashtoreth, in the Old Testament. She was an incarnation of Ishtar and Inanna, and she was worshipped by the Syrians, Canaanites, (Palestinians) and Phoenicians. Her identity as the Canaanite version of Ishtar became clear because in the ancient eastern Mediterranean the spirit of sexuality was the goddess who ruled the planet Venus. (Perlman 1981:2)

Astarte is referred to in the Bible as Ashtaroth in Genesis 14:5 and Joshua 9:10, 12:4. (GNB) Ashtaroth (the name of a Sidonian god) is a city of Bashan on the eastern shore of the Jordan River. King Og reigned in Ashtaroth and the book of Josua reports that giants lived there. Menasseh’s son Machir inherited the city. It is also one of the fortified cities given to the Levites as commanded by God. Ashteroth-Karnaim (meaning, Ashteroth of the double horns) mentioned in Genesis 14:5, is a city in Rephaims that was attacked by king Chedorlaomjer of Elam. (Mc Quade 2014:56)



**Figure 6.27** The “Lion Lady” Egyptian new kingdom plaque, shown with all three of her names: Qudiu, Astarte and Anat. (Dever 2001:179)

Astarte was connected with fertility, sexuality and war. Her symbols were the lion, the horse, the sphinx, the dove, and a star within a circle indicating the planet Venus. She was also shown naked in some pictorial representations. As a morning star she was a fierce war goddess, and as the evening star she descended to the underworld, searching for her lover. (Perlman 1981:2)

The Acacia tree became her emblem, and because it carried red and white flowers, they became her colours. She loved cypresses, stallions, the first fruits of the harvest, the firstborn from the womb, and all bloodless sacrifices. (Monaghan 1990:38)

Astarte was also displayed as standing on the back of a lioness, small-breasted and naked with a lotus and a mirror in one hand and two snakes in the other. Or she was described to have a fierce nature. Then she was shown with the head of a lioness. (Perlman 1981:2)

According to Perlman, scholars have different opinions about Astarte. Albright calls her a war goddess, JJM Roberts agrees, John Gray claims her to be a goddess of love and war, and W Hermann claims her to have attributes of war and to be the upholder of human justice. (Perlman 1981:2)

### **6.3.1 Astarte idolized in other cultures**

In Syria and Palestine, clay plaques representing her have been found, dating from 1700 to 1100 BCE. They could have been worn as charms to promote fertility. Ashtart was chief goddess of the Phoenicians at Tyre and Sidon. There was a temple in their colony at Memphis in Egypt, and temples in Carthage. (Encyclopaedia of World Mythology 1975:118)

A Phoenician alabaster statuette of her sitting on a throne with a bowl of milk under her breasts was found at Galera, near Grenada in Spain. When milk was poured into the head of the statue it flowed into the bowl through holes pierced in the goddess breast. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:118)

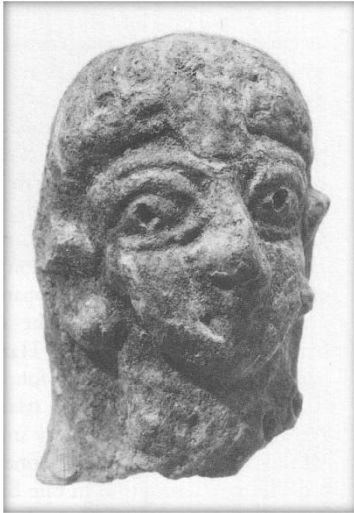


Figure 6.28

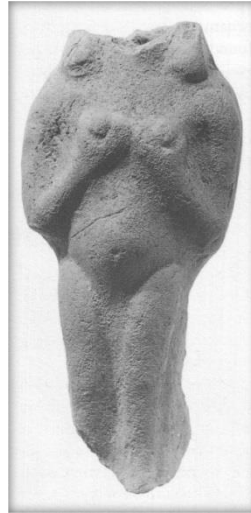


Figure 6.29

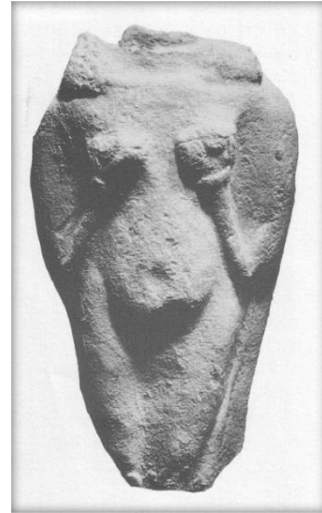


Figure 6.30

Figures 6.28 – 6.30 Tel Dor, a clay head of Astarte, and clay plaques with representation of Astarte. (Stern 1994:125)



Figure 6.31 This early Greek pectoral plaque depicting the goddess Astarte, was found in the Camirus cemetery on Rhodes, demonstrating the widespread influence of the Near Eastern goddess. (Gahlin 2014:33)

In Greek culture she was known as Aphrodite. Major centres of Astarte's worship were in Sidon, Tyre and Byblos. In Sidon, her temple was shared with Eshmun. Coins portrayed a chariot in which a globe appears, probably a stone representing Astarte. Beirut coins showed Poseidon, Astarte and Eshmun being worshipped together. (Perlman 1981:2)

In Ugarit texts Astarte appears under the name "Astart". She was also called the "face of Ba'al". Astarte, or "Ashtoret" in Hebrew, was the principal goddess of the Phoenicians, representing the productive power of nature. As a lunar goddess she was adopted by the Egyptians as a daughter of Ra or Pta. Herodotus wrote that the religious community of Aphrodite originated in Phoenicia and then came to Greece. He also wrote about the world's largest temple of Aphrodite in one of the Phoenician cities. (Perlman 1981:2)



**Figure 6.32** Canaanite coins were identified with classical deities in the Greco-Roman period. Coins from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE depict Baal, (top let) who is portrayed as Hercules. Eshmun, with two serpents (top left) the god of healing, shown as Asclepius. The sea (bottom left) was pictured as Poseidon. The city god of Beirut was displayed as the sanctuary of Byblos (bottom right). (Encyclopaedia of World Mythology 1957:110)

Astarte and Anat appear to have been almost interchangeable. Astarte was also associated with horses and chariots, and it was thought that the king would be protected by her in battle. She was of Syrian origin, and no evidence of her cult could be found in Egypt before the Eighteenth Dynasty. (c.1150 - c.1295 BCE) (Gahlin 2014:32)

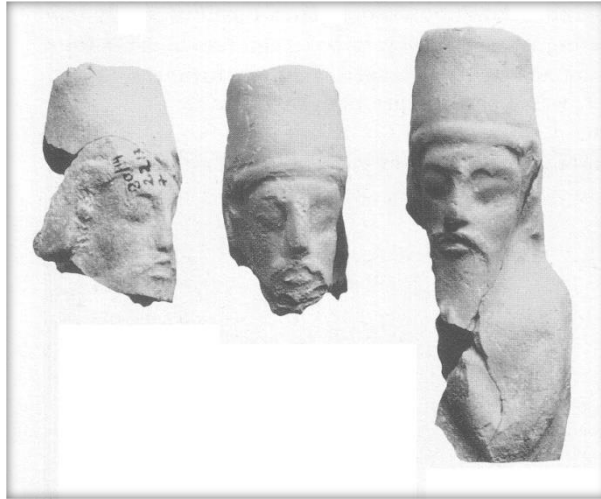


Figure 6.33



Figure 6.34

**Figurines 6.33-34 Oriental-style clay figurines, from Tel Dor. Persian period representations of Baal in Phoenician style, and of Astarte pregnant or carrying her child. (Stern 1994:99)**

In the myth of the contest between Horus and Seth for the rightful claim to the throne of Egypt, and in the episode that followed, after the death of the reigning king Osiris, Astarte played a key role. Osiris's brother Seth wanted to seize the throne, but because Osiris died, leaving a son and heir Horus, they had to fight for the throne. The divine court decided to turn for advice and wisdom to the ancient goddess of warfare, Neith, whose home was at Sais in the Delta. (Gahlin 2014:64)

Astarte was in favour of Horus, but because she was believed to be fair and just she believed that Seth should be compensated with treasure and two Syrian

goddesses Anat and Astarte. Her decision had a threat that if Horus were not allowed to succeed to the throne, the sky would fall on the Egyptian people. The outcome of this contest was that Osiris sent a threatening message from the land of the dead and declared Horus as the rightful heir to the throne. Seth, however, was employed by the sun god; he created thunder and kept evil away.

(Gahlin 2014:64)

### 6.3.2 Astarte as the “Naked Goddess”

The Old Testament, in the majority of cases, portrayed her as a physical object, man-made and probably made of wood. The Hebrew redactors of the Old Testament seem to have conceived of her as an object, but there is evidence that in certain periods and at certain places a goddess Asherah was worshipped. It is therefore unknown if the goddess is the holy place or the deification of the place. Or if the two places are the same in meaning “groves” or “poles”. This could mean that the objects that were set up or built had to be related to Asherah. (Perlman 1981:6)

As a goddess of fertility, Astarte had the reproductive powers of nature and woman. Associated with the moon, she was often pictured with the horns of the crescent moon. The moon, as it waxed and waned in the sky, was believed to dominate the growth, decay and rebirth of all things. Animals like doves and fishes were sacred to her and at Ashcalon in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE a visitor saw “an impossible number of doves” in the streets and houses because they were “sacred” and nobody killed them. (Encyclopaedia of World Mythology 1975:118)

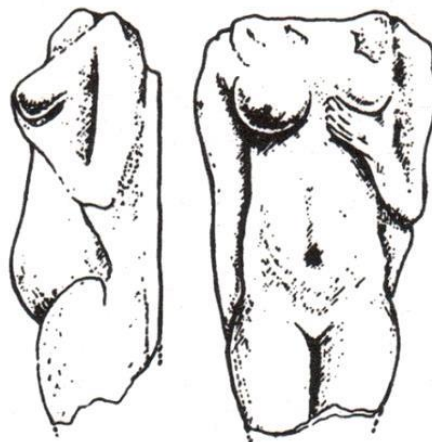


Figure 6.35 Fragmentary terracotta plaque from Ashdod in Philistia showing a “Naked Goddess” Astarte. (Keel et al 1998:337)

Astarte worship was condemned by Jewish prophets, not only because they believed in Yahweh, but because of the sacred prostitution and sexual rituals associated with her. Their earnings not only financed the goddess cult, but the sexuality of Astarte's worship was imitative magic intended to assist the fertility of nature. Greek and Roman writers were also repulsed by the worship of the Middle Eastern goddesses, whose rituals keep spreading westwards, with their phallic symbols, sacred prostitutes, and painted priests in women's clothes. (Encyclopaedia of World Mythology 1975:118)

The "naked goddess" shown on a fragmentary terracotta plaque from Ashdod in Philistia, also appears naked on a plaque from the cultic site at Samaria. Because the "naked goddess" appears on two name seals found in Iron Age IIC, it suggests that she could be identified as Astarte, being in contrast with the clothed Asherah. The absence of naked images depicted in Judah confirms the literary evidence which shows that Astarte was widely worshipped especially in the coastal regions. (Keel et al 1998:337)

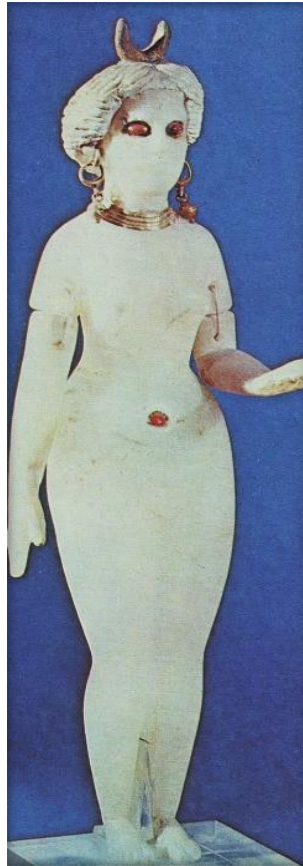


**Figure 6.36** Found at Nimrud, female head depicting Astarte-Attharat. Her cult centre was the timber port of Byblos, also known as Anat, avenger of Baal or Asherah, the fountain of life. This is a fine example of Phoenician workmanship. (Ions 1987:23)

In "The Golden Ass", Apuleios (born 123 CE) describes the priests with "their cheeks smeared with rouge" and "their eyes painted to bring out the brightness of



their eyes” who carried the image of “The Syrian goddess” about on an ass dancing to the sound of castanets and cymbals, cutting themselves with knives and whipping themselves for the spectators, before going round with an collecting box. (See chapter 4.4 Hierapolis, the Holy City). (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:118)



**Figure 6.37 Astarte in alabaster, a Mesopotamian statue of Astarte, 2000 BCE.  
(Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:118)**

#### **6.4 Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth**

Inanna was the great goddess of the Sumerian pantheon in ancient Mesopotamia. She was worshipped in Sumer from the beginning of the third millennium BCE to the beginning of the first millennium BCE. Inanna was worshipped in the form of Ishtar in Babylonia, until the end of the first millennium BCE. As a popular deity she played a central role in Sumerian mythology, theology and cult. Inanna never played a maternal or matronly role in the Mesopotamian pantheon. Her relationship with Dumuzi was never restrained by matrimonial duties or responsibilities; here Inanna was depicted more as a maiden or bride than a wifely figure. (Kinsley 1989:119)



**Figure 6.38 Inanna's symbol is an eight-pointed star or rosette.  
Here she is seen standing on the backs of two lionesses.**

<https://goddessinspired.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/inanna-descent.jpg>

One of Inanna's dominant characteristics is her royal status, and she is called "queen of Heaven and earth" (Jr 7:16). She was the goddess of love, fertility, and war. She was called Ishtar by the Acadians. Like many goddesses she had many names which represented aspects of their power and glory. She ensured the fertility of the womb. (Kinsley 1989:124)

Inanna was portrayed as the daughter of the sky-god An, but also of the moon-god Nanna, and seen as the daughter of the moon-goddess Ningal and her consort Nanna. She was the sister of Ereschkial the underworld goddess and of the sun god Utu. (Kinsley 1989:119)

Inanna was portrayed as an unpredictable person who first seduced men and then rejected them. As a "lady of myriad offices" she acted as a mediator of differences. Some of her duties were to make and put out fires and to cause tears and joy. As the "lady of the palace" she ruled as queen. As "mother of all" she was the goddess of fertility, birth and nature. (Kinsley 1989:137)

Her symbol was the moon, the planet Venus and the serpent. Her worship

included sacred prostitution because she was a goddess of sexuality and fertility. She had wings, and with serpents adorning her shoulders, we find traces of the ancient neolithic bird and snake goddess. She was associated with prostitutes and with the rising evening star, which “raises its head” in the early evening and spreads its soft light to provide the proper setting for erotic evening activities. (Kinsley 1989:119)

She was described as a prostitute or harlot who set out in the early evening to seduce men. In Ugaritic materials, it is described that in Canaanite religion, a year’s festival was noted when a holy marriage took place between the king representing the god Dumuzi and one of the priestesses representing Inanna. This act was to effect fertility and prosperity. Inanna was one of the most developed Mesopotamian goddesses of love and war. The Sumerian Inanna had a prominent role in Ancient Near Eastern mythology. Inanna was granted the attribute of a great deity: “queen of heaven”, “compassionate protector” and “most worthy of praise”; she was also identified with warfare and erotic delight. (Walls 1992:41)

One of the bloodiest characterizations was given to her in the still unedited text of Inanna and Ebih. Here Inanna was portrayed as attacking the rebellious people of the mountainous area (kur) of Ebih for not worshipping her enough. (Walls 1992:42)

In the epilogue to the Code of Hammurabi, the Babylonian king requests various gods to protect his stela and punish any who would alter it. He describes Inanna as the “Lady of battle and conflict” and included her in cursing his enemies. In contrast with her martial manifestations, the Sumerian Inanna was depicted as a young girl involved with the mortal Dumuzi. Inanna was actually portrayed as being sexually inexperienced and innocent, but then she was usually referred to as being sexually active. She represented sexual desire, without which creation could not proceed; the flocks would not multiply and without her humankind would cease to reproduce. (Walls 1992:42)

A particular text, (Ni 9602) called the “herder wedding text” by Jacobsen, includes Inanna’s hymn where she compares her vulva to the “boat of heaven”, and a

crescent moon. (Walls 1992:45)

Inanna was surrounded by fertility connotations, because of the personification of her physical desires, in the human and animal realms. She was depicted as an erotic or procreative goddess. Inanna's association with abundance was explained by the secondary relation of all important ancient Mesopotamian deities with fertility. The deities were associated with the inherent power and ability of the divine, to give or withhold the rains and fertility necessary for human survival. (Walls 1992:47)

In early references Inanna has been linked with Dumuzi-Amaushumgalanna, whose name means "the one great source of the date clusters". Dumuzi represented the vitality of the date palm by which it produced a large cluster of fruit each year. Inanna seemed to have been associated with the storehouses in which the date harvest had been kept. An earlier name for Inanna was Ninanna, meaning "lady of the date clusters" and her early emblem was a gatepost with a rolled-up mat to serve as a door. In an early hymn from Uruk, Inanna and Dumuzi were married. (Walls 1992:47)

This hymn may have been part of the celebration of the sacred marriage rite, in which the king united with Inanna to promote fertility in the world. It also identified Inanna with the divine power of the date storehouse. Inanna's identity was associated with abundance of crops. In a hymn that may have been used in the sacred marriage rite Inanna speaks of meeting Dumuzi and having food pouring from her. (Kinsley 1989:114)

"I pour out before him legumes from my womb, I bring into being legumes before him, I pour out legumes before him" (Kinsley 1989:114)

In another hymn Inanna praises her body, and compares herself to a field that is ready to be ploughed. In another song she compares her hair to lettuce. In this way Inanna would be compared to the earth itself, and the power within the earth that causes vegetation to grow in abundance. Inanna's control and power of growth and fertility is explicitly explained in a hymn that describes the destruction she causes to her enemies, and in the lands where she is not honoured. (Kinsley 1989:114)

*“In the mountain where homage is withheld from you vegetation is accursed.”*  
*(Kinsley 1989:115)*

In that land even sexual attraction is absent; the woman no longer speaks of love for her husband, and at night they no longer have intercourse. The Babylonian account of Ishtar’s descent to the underworld can be compared with the Sumerian story of Inanna’s descent to the land of the dead, because sexuality and fertility vanish from the world when the goddess leaves it. (Kinsley 1989:115)



**Figure 6.39 Inanna from the second half of third millennium BCE  
 from the Musee du Louvre. (Kinsley 1989:125)**

From the earliest times Inanna’s presence was seen in the full storehouses of the people, and in the power of the earth to produce crops and in life. Inanna was therefore associated with sex and fertility. Her presence is also revealed in the attraction between the sexes; many hymns describe her as sexually active. In a hymn entitled “The sisters message”, Geshtinanna tells of meeting Inanna and how Inanna confessed her longing for Dumuzi, Geshtinanna’s brother. In her later form as Ishtar she is described as beautiful and charming. (Kinsley 1989:115)

#### **6.4.1 The Sacred Marriage Rite of Inanna**

In the Mesopotamian culture the central concern was the vigour and fertility of life, especially the fertility of the soil, and flocks were very important. The growth pattern of vegetation was not constant, and a pattern could be seen in which they periodically waned and seemed to disappear. This also happened with the flocks of birds. It may have seemed that sexual desire was not constant or at times absent. The sacred marriage rite could be partly understood against this background of uncertainty concerning the changing of sexual power and fertility. (Kinsley 1989:121)

The sacred marriage rite seems to have been an attempt to help the sexuality of the people and animals by uniting a king with Inanna who personified these powers. The sacred marriage rite was practised for about two thousand years in the Mesopotamian religion. The rite may have been to sanction the ruler in question by ritually signifying that he had a productive relationship with the powers of fertility, implying Inanna, and that the country would progress under his rule. (Kinsley 1989:121)

If this was true, then the rites may have formed part of an inauguration or coronation ceremony. Or the rite may have been celebrated annually at some places or certain periods. It is not clear when the rites took place but according to some texts, it is mentioned that the rites took place in the harvest time or after the harvest. Sometimes the sacred marriage rite seems to have been part of the New Year's festivities. The rite usually marked the end of one cycle and the beginning of another, more potentially fruitful cycle. Dumuzi and Inanna were the central players in this ceremony. The king portrayed Dumuzi and Inanna was impersonated by a priestess. (Kinsley 1989:122)

The specific details of the rite are not known, but the ritual involved sexual intercourse of the two on a specially prepared bed, which may have been set up in Inanna's shrine. A few hymns describe the way the preparations were made. In some hymns the emphasis is on Inanna's awakening sexual vigour and fertility in Dumuzi, or the king representing him. In other hymns the roles seem to be reversed. The intention of the rite was clear, to ensure the future fertility and

productivity of the kingdom, by uniting the two people that symbolize the powers of sexual vigour and fertility. In the sacred marriage rite hymns, in order for fertility to take place, a fruitful union must occur between a male and female. (Kinsley 1989:122)



**Figure 6.40** Inanna depicted on a cylinder seal impression. (Kinsley 1989:132)

#### **6.4.2 Inanna and Enki**

In many myths she was seen as a strong, wilful regent who stays in heaven from where she ruled the people on the earth. She was always depicted as an earthly queen in her temples. In one story she tries to obtain the powers of order from the god Enki. He was sometimes described as being her father. In the first scene she was seen as putting on her crown and leaning against a tree, while she admired herself. (Kinsley 1989:126)

Arriving at Enki's kingdom she was graciously received and treated with respect, she was given water to wash, and beer and cake to eat. Enki became drunk and tried to impress her by offering her different powers, such as the "divine me" with which he ruled the world. (Kinsley 1989:126)

*“Enki swaying with drink toasted Inanna: In the name of my power! In the name of my holy shrine! To my daughter Inanna I shall give the high priesthood! Godship! The noble, enduring crown! The throne of kingship!”*

Inanna then replied:

*“I take them!” (Kinsley 1989:126)*

When Enki gave Inanna all of the “me”, the set of rules which had to be obeyed by everybody and everything, she had the power of making decisions, lovemaking, and descending to the underworld. Part of the “me” are powers associated with the priesthood, kingship, weapons, eroticism, fertility and the arts of culture like carpentry, metalworking, leather making and reed weaving. (Kinsley 1989:126)

When Enki sobered up he regretted giving her the powers, and set an army after her to gain back the “me” but Inanna resisted them and kept the “me” for herself. Inanna’s position as heavenly queen also associated her with certain celestial bodies, especially the evening star Venus, the sun and moon. The regularity of the movements of the heavenly bodies could be associated with Inanna’s control of the rhythms of nature. Inanna was also associated with the predictable rhythms of the natural world, and she was associated with the regularity of the social order on earth. (Kinsley 1989:126)

Inanna had a violent side; her violent nature is mentioned in the context of a natural calamity or battle. There were excerpts from the hymn of Enheduanna, a high priestess of Inanna, showing the vengeful aspect of Inanna. She lays waste the land through floods and storms.

*“Thunder, no vegetation can stand up to you.” (Kinsley 1989:130)*

In another hymn, Inanna is spoken of as having a “troubled heart” and described as being restless; she was here associated with the extremes of nature, storms and heat. Inanna’s violent nature can also be seen in her love of battle. She was more attracted by the emotion and blood lust of war than by the skills. The Sumerians described battle as “the dance of Inanna”; there are hymns where she described herself as someone who leads the battle. (Kinsley 1989:130)





**Figure 6.41** Eagle with a lion's head, in the "Tree of Life" pose between two stags, the symbols of fertility. The lion was the cult animal of the mother goddess Inanna or Ishtar. Detail of a temple lintel from al-Ubaid, near Ur. Early second millennium BCE British Museum. (Ions 1987:10)

### 6.4.3 Inanna's descent into the underworld

According to the Sumerians the legend started when Inanna the queen of heaven had two suitors, the farmer Enkiddu and the shepherd Dumuzi. Both brought her gifts and tried to win her attention and love. Her brother encouraged her to choose Enkiddu, but the soft woollens Dumuzi brought her made him her favourite. This legend is similar to the Cain and Abel story, and describes the disputes between the farmers and the nomadic culture of the cattle and sheep herders. This is when Inanna decided to visit the underworld. (Monaghan 1990:168)

Her most famous myth is where she descended into the underworld. She dressed in her best royal clothes and jewellery, and with her faithful servant and Prime Minister Ninshubur approached the underworld. She instructed Ninshubur what to do if she did not return in three days and three nights. If she did not return he must start her mourning ceremonies and must appeal to the highest deities to rescue her. Leaving Ninshubur in the upper world, Inanna arrived at the gates of the underworld and hammered on them to let her in. (Kinsley 1989:135)

The gatekeeper was instructed by Ereshkigal the queen of the underworld to let her in. As Inanna passed through the seven gates of Ereshkigal's domain she was gradually stripped of all her clothes. The gatekeeper Neti demanded some of her clothes, and it was the same at each gate. When she came before Ereshkigal's

throne, the naked black-haired goddess of death, she was instructed to crouch down; for Inanna this was complete humiliation. Then Inanna dragged Ereshkigal from her throne and sat upon it. (Kinsley 1989:135)

The Anunnaki gods, the companions of Ereshkigal, sentenced Inanna to death, and she died with Ereshkigal looking on with the eye of death. Inanna was hung on a peg and turned into a piece of rotten meat. After three days and three nights, her servant Ninshubur started her mourning ceremonies, and asked the help of Enlil and Nanna. They could not help her, but when Enki, the goddess father, was asked he agreed to help. (Kinsley 1989:135)

Enki made two expert mourners Kurgurra and Kalaturra from the dirt under his fingernails, and instructed them to enter the underworld without being seen. He told them how to please Ereshkigal and he gave them the waters of life, with which they might revive Inanna. Ereshkigal, flattered by the mourners, offered them a blessing, and they then asked for the body of Inanna. They then revived her with the waters of life. But before Inanna could leave the underworld she had to leave a substitute of herself, because no one can leave the underworld unless a substitute is found. (Kinsley 1989:135)

Inanna returned to the upper world with some guardians or messengers of death of the underworld, a very unruly wild group, to find a substitute for her. The guardians suggested every person they met as substitute, but when Inanna found out that the person has mourned her recent death, she refused to use them. (Kinsley 1989:135)

When she discovered that her husband/lover Dumuzi had not mourned her, but had set himself up as ruler in her holy city Erech, she agreed to have him as substitute in her place in the underworld. Geshtinanna, Dumuzi's sister, out of sympathy for her brother, followed him to the underworld, and asked Ereshkigal for her brother's life for half of each year. She would spend the other half of the year there in his place. Dumuzi therefore spent half of the year in the underworld and the other half in the land of the living. (Kinsley 1989:135)

A likely meaning of this myth could be the cycles of vegetation, and Inanna's disappearance from the world was the beginning of the drying of the crops by the

summer heat of Mesopotamia. In the Babylonian version of this myth, where Ishtar descended into the underworld, all sexual desire and fertility left the world. The disrobing and stripping of Inanna could have symbolized the gradual emptying of the storehouses during the months between harvests. The revival of Inanna with the waters could have been an allusion to the returning of the cool weather, and the restoration of the crops. (Kinsley 1989:135)

The necessity of Inanna to find her a substitute suggested that the Mesopotamian cultures had a clear understanding of the powers of fertility that produced food and the reality of death. When Inanna returned to the land of the living, a sacrifice or substitution had to be made. The powers of fertility had to be fed by the earth of a powerful being, Dumuzi. This could also suggest the connection of death, burial, and new life. In order for the “new” crops to appear the seeds of the “old” crops had to be buried. (Kinsley 1989:135)

Her descending to the underworld could also be interpreted as a self-discovery on the part of the goddess. Her quest to leave her known world and to enter the unknown could be understood as a quest of self-knowledge. Here were similarities to a kind of death and rebirth. (Kinsley 1989:135)

As an individual, Inanna was initiated into the mysteries of the unconscious world.

Inanna was also approached by her devotees for help in their daily affairs. In a poem Inanna’s kindly response to the pleas of King Ishme-Dagan is explained. (Kinsley 1989:135)

*“The queen of the searching eye, the guide of the land, the all compassionate, removed from that man the bruising that had been laid upon him.” (Kinsley 1989:136)*

Her motherly role was depicted in several examples of Ishtar’s roles. She told King Esarhaddon in an oracle that she was the midwife at his birth. When Ashurnipal was frightened at the prospect of being attacked by the king of Elam he sought her help, and she appeared to him saying that he must stay where he was, eat food, drink dark beer, and make merry, and she would do what he had to do. She held him and protected them. She is clearly a kind and compassionate deity. (Kinsley 1989:136)

“The lament for Ur” story mourns the city of the Ur destroyed by the Elamites and Subarians during the Ur III Period between 2200-2100 BCE. The lament could be assembled from over twenty separate clay tablets excavated at Nippur in southern Mesopotamia which is in today’s Iraq. It was composed during the Old Babylonian Period between 2000-1500 BCE. “The Lament for Ur” contains four hundred and thirty-six lines which are divided into eleven songs. A similar manner appears in The Book of Psalms. Parallels to “A Lament for Ur” appear in The Book of Lamentations, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and in Psalm 22 and 137 which are laments for Jerusalem destroyed by the Babylonians from 587 BCE. (Matthews et al 1991:172)

The first song in “The Lament for Ur” is a list naming Enlil, Inanna, Ningal, Enki and all the gods who have abandoned Ur and all the other cities in the urban alliance, which were then destroyed. In the third song Ningal laments the destruction of Ur in the ruins of the temple of Nanna, her husband who is god of the moon and guardian of Ur. She uses the term “The Day of the Storm” in the same way that the Hebrew Bible uses “The Day of The Lord” (Am 5:18-20). In the fourth song, Ningal, like the widow of Tekoa (2 Sm 14:1-20) went to the divine assembly and pleaded with Anu and Enlil not to destroy Ur, but they refused. The fifth song describes “The Storm” which Enlil used to destroy Ur. The song uses metaphors like drought, earthquakes and tidal waves to describe the invasion of Ur by its enemies. (Matthews et al 1991:173)

The sixth song describes the aftermath of “The Storm”, bodies piled high in the gate and the walls and buildings of the city in ruins. In the seventh song Ningal wails and weeps for the destruction of Ur by naming every person, place and thing destroyed. After each entry the congregation chants “Alas!” or “Gone!” or “Woe!” Parallel verses in the Hebrew Bible are (Jr 11:19, Is 5:8-23). The eighth song catalogues the misfortunes which have happened to Ur, and Ningal who no longer enjoys the offerings Ur made to her as its goddess. The conclusion of “The Lament for Ur” echoes the petitions to Nanna mentioned in the fourth song. They ask that Ur be spared from “The Storm” or rebuilt after its destruction. (Matthews et al 1991:175)



**Figure 6.42 King Sargon of Akkad, founder of the first empire.  
(Nat Geo The most influential figures of Ancient History 2016:10)**

#### **6.4.4 Inanna and King Sargon of Akkad**

After conquering Sumer, Sargon made his daughter Enheduanna (2285 - 2250 BCE) the high priestess of the goddess Inanna in Ur. This was a very important position; Nanna, the moon god, was the patron deity of that city-state, and his daughter Inanna, called by the Akkadians Ishtar, was the goddess of sexual love and war. Like other Mesopotamian deities she brought fertility as well as death and destruction. (Nat Geo The most Influential Figures in Ancient History 2016:16)

Enheduanna composed hymns to Ishtar, making her the first author whose name is known in history. One of her hymns praises the goddess as:

*“That singular woman, the unique one who speaks hateful words to the wicked who moves among the bright shining things, who goes against rebel lands, and at twilight makes the firmament beautiful all on her own.” (Nat Geo 2016:13)*



**Figure 6.43** A calcite disk depicts Sargon's daughter, Enheduanna, high priestess of the temple in Ur. (Nat Geo The most Influential Figures of Ancient History 2016:13)

Inanna's place as queen of heaven was also associated with her identification with certain celestial bodies, especially the evening star, the sun, and the moon. It could be that the regularity of the movements of the heavenly bodies was associated with Inanna's control of the rhythms of nature. In possession of the "me", in her possession of authority over nature and culture, over life and death, Inanna celebrated herself in the following hymn:

*"My father gave me heaven, gave me earth,  
I, the Queen of Heaven am I,  
Is there a god who can vie with me?  
Enlil gave me heaven gave me earth,  
I, the Queen of Heaven am I!  
He has given me lordship,  
He has given me battle, he has given me combat,  
He has given me the Flood, he has given me the Tempest,  
He has placed heaven as a crown on my head,  
He has tied earth as a sandal at my foot,  
He has fastened the holy garment of the "me" about my body,  
He has placed the holy scepter in my hand." (Kinsley 1989:127)*

## 6.5 ISHTAR, PERSONIFICATION OF VENUS

Ishtar was the Semitic name for the old Sumerian goddess Inanna, the most powerful goddess in Mesopotamia. Worshipped for more than 2000 years, she represented the full potency of womanhood and maidenhood, and also possessed subtle powers to shape the fortunes of man. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:122)

As the process of assimilation of goddesses took place in the Ancient Near East, Ishtar emerged from lesser divinities (Anatu, Anunit, Gumshea, Irnini, Ishara) to become a complex image of the possibilities of womanhood. She was the mother holding her breasts, the symbol of compassion and goodness. She was the ever-virgin warrior. She also represented a promiscuous woman, constantly trying to find a new lover, divine, human or bestial. She was also a judge and counsellor, the old wise one, whom women imitated in the courts and homes of her lands. (Monaghan 1990:174)

Ishtar was the goddess of fertility, sexual love, and war, the great mother, the goddess of fertility and the queen of heaven. As a goddess of hunting and war, she was portrayed, with sword, bow and a quiver of arrows. She was associated with sexuality, her cult involved sacred prostitution, and her holy city was called the "town of the sacred courtesans". She herself was the courtesan of the gods, and she had many lovers. (Kinsley 1989:136)

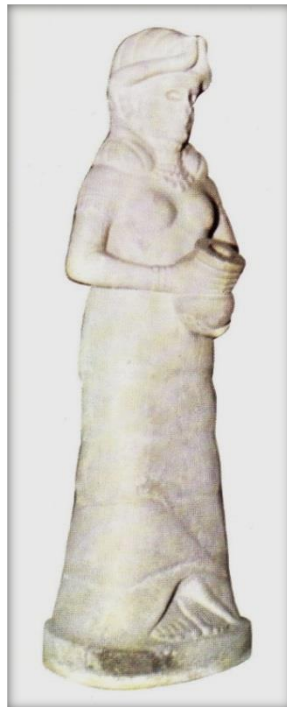


**Figure 6.44 Ishtar, terracotta. (Van Reeth 1994:121)**

Ishtar was also invoked as a healer. In 1375 BCE she made a memorable journey from Nineveh to Thebes in Egypt, to lay hands on an aged and sick King Amenophis III. This was not according to her mythology, where her powers had been used. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:122)

Among the Babylonians she was a mother goddess, and shown naked with prominent breasts or as a mother with a child at her breast. As a goddess of love she brought destruction to many of her lovers, for instance her consort Tammuz, the Babylonian counterpart of Adonis. (Kinsley 1989:136)

Ancient Mesopotamians worshipped hundreds of gods. Some were connected with specific occupations. Each city had its patron deity, who was honoured at a temple in the city centre. Major deities in addition to Shamash, were An or Anu, father of the gods, Enlil god of the air, and Inanna, also known as Ishtar, goddess of love and war. Offerings were made to the gods to divert the forces of evil and chaos. Carved stone figures, eyes wide and hands clasped in prayer were placed in temples to pay homage to the deities. (Nat Geo The most Influential Figures in Ancient History 2016:16)



**Figure 6.45 Semitic form of Ishtar the fertility goddess, Sculpture from Mari, of the early Amorite period, showing the goddess with a jar, her womb the never-ending source of the water of life. National Museum, Aleppo. (Ions 1987:12)**



### **6.5.1 “Ishtar of Nineveh”**

Ishtar was also worshipped as the “Ishtar of Nineveh” but it was a local form, not national, as there was a great temple dedicated to her in Nineveh. At the head of each list of the deities whose images stood in the temples of Assur at Assur and Nineveh, the name of Assur is named three times, and once his name is followed by that of Ishtar. (Sayce 1888:127)

Ishtar was often thought of as an erotic goddess, involved with sexual intercourse, and later in history her hierodules or prostitutes had a promiscuous reputation, especially in Uruk, where there was a college of priestesses of Ishtar, controlled by the high priestess. This cult expanded and changed to the obscene practices of the Phoenician Astarte and Hebrew Astaroth, condemned by the Old Testament prophets. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:122)

There is evidence that similar temples existed, first in Ashur, the religious capital of Assyria, and then in Babylonia. In Ashur the remains of a temple which belonged to Ishtar “dinitu” the (lady of the dawn) or the “lighting up” were excavated. Lead disks and tokens found elsewhere in the city implied what might have happened in these temples. These plaques showed men and women who were probably hierodules in the service of the goddess, enjoying sexual intercourse on the brick pillars of the temple, and other figures are doing erotic dances. This practice had a counterpart in Hierodotus’s account of a strange marriage practice in Babylonia where married women sat in the temple and intending clients will throw a coin in their laps, invoking the name of the goddess in settlement and to witness the marriage contract. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:122)

### **6.5.2 Ishtar’s descent into the underworld**

The Babylonian Ishtar was a later more complex form of the Sumerian Inanna, and their myths were similar in many aspects. Both loved a vegetation god who died constantly and was constantly reborn. Both were responsible for the death as well as the rebirth of their beloved. Like Inanna, Ishtar descended into the underworld in search of Tammuz, her lover, whose death she had caused, but unlike the timid Inanna, the moon goddess Ishtar “light giving” demanded entry at

the gate of death, and threatened to smash it open and set the dead loose on the earth if her request were denied. (Monaghan 1990:174)

One of the main legends of the Babylonians recounts how the goddess Ishtar once left the earth, and descended into the underworld. This poem enables us to understand the description of the dead, as understood by the Babylonians. The poem describing the descent of Ishtar begins as follows: (Sayce 1888:227)

*“To the land whence none return, the place of darkness,  
Ishtar the daughter of Sin inclined her ear  
To the house of darkness, the seat of the god Irkalla,  
To the house from which none who enter come forth again...”*  
(Sayce 1888:227)

In the poem, it is described how Ishtar was admitted to the underworld, gradually stripped of her clothing, and made to pass through the seven gates of the underworld. At every gate an article of her clothing was removed, as this was the law of Allatu. Then Allatu commanded Namtr the demon of the plague to strike her with disease. Because of Ishtar’s absence from earth, disaster strikes the earth; the news was brought to Shamash the sun god by Pap-sukal, the minister of the gods. (Sayce 1888:227)

Shamash consulted Sin and Ea on how to bring Ishtar back to the world. Ea created a being Uddushu-namir, and sent him down to the underworld to help with the release of Ishtar. With his intervention Ishtar was sprinkled with the waters of life and led back through the gates of the underworld, her clothes were returned, and she was brought back to earth. (Sayce 1888:227)

The motive of the goddess’s descent into the underworld could be to search for the healing waters to bring back her youthful husband Tammuz, the sun god, from the dead. He was killed by the cruel hand of night and winter. (Sayce 1888:221)

The poem could have been recited at the annual festival held in commemoration of the death of Tammuz, when woman mourned for the dead god in Babylonia, as they mourned for him in Jerusalem in the time of the prophet Ezekiel.  
(Sayce 1888:227)

*“Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord’s house which was towards the north; and, behold there sat women weeping for Tam’muz.”*  
(Ezek 8:14 KJV)

The mythical figures of Tammuz and Ishtar are similar to the myths of Adonis and Aphrodite of Greek mythology. Like Tammuz, Adonis is killed by the boar’s tusk of winter, but rescued from hades by the prayers of the goddess. (Sayce 1888:227)

Clay tablets have been found among the religious works of the Babylonians and Assyrians, which served as service-books for the use of priests and remorseful persons when they had entered the presence of an offended deity. Sometimes the god or goddess to whom the prayer is addressed is mentioned by name, or he makes an appeal to her as follows:

*“... O mother Ishtar, whose side no god can approach, O exalted lady, whose command is mighty, a prayer will I utter.”* (King 1976:213)

A remorseful person usually tried to get pity out of a god or goddess, so that his sins could be forgiven, and he was pardoned and restored to health and prosperity. (King 1976:213)



**Figure 6.46** A stone relief depicting a majestic deity. It could be Assur, the city’s patron, or a fertility god, wearing a high headdress and holding long-stalked plants that are nibbled on by a pair of goats. At the god’s side are two women, possible goddesses holding fertility jugs from which pour streams of water. Fragments found in a major temple at Assur. (Papanek et al 1995:67)

### 6.5.3 Ishtar and King Sargon of Akkad

In the story of Sargon of Akkad's birth, Ishtar played a great part. Akkad was founded after 3000 BCE near the present city of Baghdad. It was a great city, known for its agriculture, trade and war. Sargon of Akkad (2371-2316 BCE) was one of its greatest rulers. Three copies of "The story of Sargon's birth" were discovered by archaeologists. It celebrated the humble beginnings of Sargon, and is a parallel to Moses, as one of Israel's leaders. (Exod. 1:22-2:10) (Matthews et al 1991:55)

Sargon was the child of a priestess, and because his mother was expected to offer her children as sacrifices, she did not want anyone in the city of Asupiranu to know that she had conceived and given birth. She hid him along the bank of the Euphrates River in a basket woven from rushes and waterproofed with tar. His basket floated to an irrigation canal and he was raised by Akki the royal gardener, who found him. He became Akki's assistant in the royal gardens. (Matthews et al 1991:55)

In his youth Sargon was visited by Ishtar, the goddess of love, war, desire, fertility, storms and warfare, who loved him. Because of her inspiration and help, Sargon rose to the position of king of the black-headed people, in just over four years. This story seemed to confirm that Sargon was entitled to rule Mesopotamia, even if he were not from royal lineage. He had military operations in every land from the Armenian mountains west to the Mediterranean Sea, from the land of Dilmum on the Persian Gulf to the port of Dor on the Mediterranean coast. Three times he marched from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean, opening trails through the mountains with bronze-headed axes, crossing valleys and conquering ports like Dor and cities like Kazallu. (Matthews et al 1991:56)

The Sumerian hymn, "the exaltation of Inanna" was composed in 2350 BCE by Enheduanna, the daughter of Sargon of Agade in Akkad, in the north of Babylonia. It describes her supremacy over Nanna, the moon god in the southern city of Ur, and her final acceptance in the city of Uruk, (Erech) also in the south, by the high god An. Here it can be clearly seen how King Sargon, a usurper, enforces the divine seal to his empire over Sumer and Akkad, by comparing the Sumerian

Inanna with the Akkadian Ishtar. This kind of religious struggle was frequently found in ancient Egypt history, but rarely revealed in the history of Mesopotamia. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:122)

For the people of Agade, (Akkad) Ishtar was an incarnation of the planet Venus, which was known in Dilbar. In military history, Ishtar of Nineveh and Ishtar of Arabela were prominent in battle and this confirmed victory for the Assyrian armies. A famous war poem of Tukulti-Ninurta I referred to a 13th century BCE event where Ishtar intervened at a critical point in a battle and as result the Assyrians defeated Kashtiliash, the king of Babylon. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:122)

#### **6.5.4 Inanna-Ishtar, “the lady mounted on a beast”**

Inanna-Ishtar was a feared goddess, who could curse vegetation, and bring fear to mankind. She had the sexual potency to control both fertility and sterility, and she was a mighty goddess in battle. In the Sumerian hymn, she is described as “the lady mounted on a beast” and as “lent wings by the storm”. In art she is depicted mounted on a lion or lioness, or even leading both together. On the high rock carvings of Maltai in Assyria, she had a prominent place in the procession of the gods. She was mounted on a lioness and probably gave her blessing to the Assyrian armies as they marched through the land which separated Assyria from Iran on their campaigns. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:122)

The description of her as having been “lent wings by the storm” brings to mind some of her many sinister images, one of which is the great terracotta, known as the Burney relief, in which the naked winged goddess, usually called “Lillith”, with feathered legs and bird’s talons mounted on lions, appears as a seductive woman. And here she is seen according to the poem as having a “terrible countenance”. In early poems another side of Inanna-Ishtar’s character is revealed, a goddess who presided over divination, incubation and the interpretation of dreams. Because she had all the powers of womankind, and because of her great beauty and charm, she could even turn rivers into blood. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:122)

Inanna-Ishtar also introduced one of the most important ceremonies of the year, the ritual marriage of the god. Here the king was married to the high priestess, and

in this way introduced to the people the promise of agricultural prosperity. According to A.L. Oppenheim, Ishtar becomes the carrier and the fountainhead of the king's power and prestige. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:122)

### **6.5.5 Ishtar and Gilgamesh**

The deeds of Gilgamesh are recorded in an epic poem as adventurous as the Odyssey, and put into written form not more than a century after the Greek poem. The different texts of the Gilgamesh epic were written down on a series of twelve clay tablets in cuneiform script, used by the Sumerians, the Babylonians and the people of Assyria. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:121)

According to the story of Gilgamesh, the great hero of Sumerian and Babylonian mythology, snubbed Ishtar, when she fell in love with him, by claiming that the love of a goddess destroys a mortal man, and that her love had killed the god Tammuz, "for all who live, who love, will die". (Ions 1987:12)

Ishtar requested the high god Anu to send a seven-year drought and famine in the form of an avenging bull from heaven, to trample the city of Erech, as well as the destructive power of Nergal, and threatened to release the dead from the underworld to consume the living. But Gilgamesh demonstrated his power as king to ensure fertility for his kingdom and with Enkidu, a Sumerian wild man who lived with the animals, and Gilgamesh's friend, killed the bull and dismembered it. Eabani, Gilgamesh's comrade also rejected Ishtar and was killed. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:121)

## **6.6 SUMMARY**

Events to mark the beginning of spring and the flowering of trees and plants were held all across the world. This was the beginning of myths about nature goddesses such as Anat, Inanna and Ishtar who died at harvest time in autumn, and were reborn in the spring equinox. They celebrated the seasonal themes of brightness, blossoming of new life and the arrival of summer. Late spring and early summer festivities center on traditions and deities associated with the blossoming of nature.

The theme of rebirth was illustrated by the tale of Ishtar, the Sumerian deity of love and war, and her lover Tammuz, the god of vegetation. According to the myth when Ishtar goes down to the underworld the world mourns for her until she returns. In another version Tammuz is called Dumuzi; he descends to the underworld and Inanna (Ishtar) rescues him. His time on earth corresponds with the months of summer when Inanna is happy, and when he returns to the underworld she mourns, and winter returns.

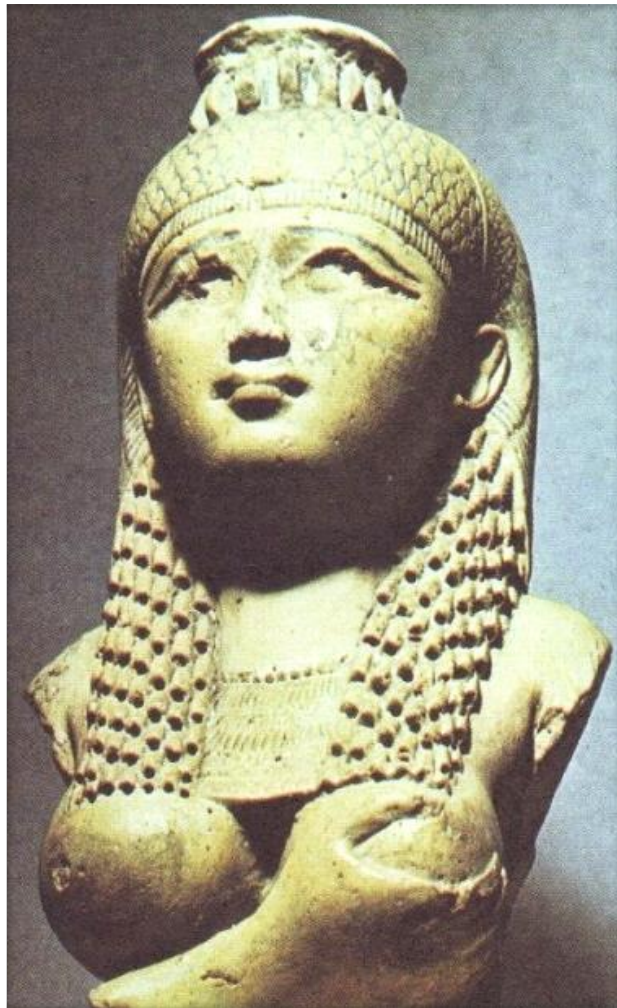
## Chapter 7

### Egyptian Deities

#### 7.1 “THE GREAT ISIS, THE MOTHER OF THE GODS”

Isis (a Greek form of Aset or Eset) was in the Egyptian mythology the goddess of fertility and parenthood. Her name meant “Throne” and she was portrayed as a woman wearing a throne-like headdress with an ankh in her hand.

(Hamlyn 1965:57)



**Figure 7.1 Glazed porcelain bust of Isis. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:94)**

Isis was also called “the myriad number”, her names were unlimited. The name of Isis was written with the sign of the throne. Isis represented the seat of power. (Mojsov 2005:33)

The star “Sopdet” (Sirius) was associated with Isis. The appearance of Sirius in



the night sky signified the beginning of a new year, and Isis was considered the goddess of rebirth and reincarnation, as well as protector of the dead. The rose was used in her rites, probably because she was assimilated with the goddess Aphrodite (Venus) during the Roman period. (Hamlyn 1965:57)

Horus, the archetype of the pharaohs was the son of Isis and Osiris, sometimes called the son of Nut. These five deities could have been incorporated in the Heliopolitan cosmogony by the priests, who wished to subordinate them to their own original gods. (Hamlyn 1965:31)

Isis was widely worshipped in Egypt, as well as throughout the Mediterranean area. Her most important temples were at Behbeit el-Hagar in the Nile delta and in the beginning of the reign with Nectanebo (380-362 BCE) on the Island of Philae in Upper Egypt. The origins of her cult are uncertain, but she could originally have been an independent and popular pre-dynastic deity prior to 3100 BCE at Sebennytos in the Nile delta. Her cult was worshipped for a variety of reasons, for health, fertility, family security as well as immortality. She was as popular among the nobility as well as among the lower classes and especially among women. (Hamlyn 1965:31)

The throne on Isis's head represented a hieroglyph of her name. Later her head-dress was a disk set between cow's horns. She was sometimes represented with a cow's head set on a human body. This could mean that she was identified with Hathor. Another explanation could be that Isis wanted to mediate on behalf of Seth who was her brother, as well as her husband's murderer. She tried to trick Horus of his revenge on Seth, but Horus, cut off her head in anger. The god Toth restored it through a spell, and gave her the head of a cow. (Hamlyn 1965:63)

Isis was born in the Iseum of Dendera of Apt, the great one, of the temple of Apt, of a woman in a black and red form, meaning Hathor. This could mean that she was from southern origin, as the Punites are coloured dark red, and the neighboring people black, Asiatic yellow, and Libyans fair. According to Hamlyn, she was a divinity of the Delta, and a protective deity of Perehbet, north of Busiris, where she had a renowned temple. (Hamlyn 1965:63) Her sacred animal was the cow. (Petrie 1972:60)

Isis was the owner of a magic object the “Tyet” (magic knot) called “the Knot of Isis” meaning welfare of life, as well as the “sistrum” (a music instrument), the emblem of Hathor. Hamlyn (1965:63)

The “tyet” resembled an “ankh”, except that its arms point downward and this seems to represent the idea of eternal life or resurrection. The “tyet” was often used as a funerary amulet, and was made of wood or stone. A “sistrum” is a musical instrument, a rattle made of small disks on prongs set loosely in a frame on a handle. Many “sistras” were made of bronze and had an ornament on the loop, usually of a lotus flower, and the prongs were sometimes in the shape of snakes. (Petrie 1972:60)

Isis was the wife of Osiris, and her name was thought to mean “seat”, which could be interpreted as personifying the royal throne of Osiris. With Horus her son they formed a holy trinity. According to her legend as told by Plutarch, she was the first daughter of Geb and Nut, born on the fourth intercalary day, in the swamps of the Delta. Her eldest brother Osiris chose her as his consort, and she helped him to educate Egypt, teaching woman to grind corn, spin flax and to weave cloth. (Hamlyn 1965:57)

Her cult spread until it absorbed that of nearly all other goddesses. With the increase of the Osiris cult, Isis was often represented as a mourner over a mummy (Osiris). Isis was so popular in her later days that she assimilated the qualities of other goddesses. She could enter the realm of the living with Osiris. She also taught people how to cure disease and, by instituting marriage, accustomed them to domestic life. (Hamlyn 1965:57)

Isis was represented as the mother of the “four sons of Horus”, the four deities protecting the canopic jars containing the pharaoh’s internal organs. She was also the protector of the liver-jar deity. In the middle kingdom period when the funeral texts were used by other members of the Egyptian society and not only by the royal family, her role as protector grew. (Hamlyn 1965:57)



**Figure 7.2** Details of the ceiling in the burial chamber of Rameses VI, where the gigantic figure of Nut, the goddess of the sky, predominates, enclosing the western and the eastern spheres. The two hemispheres are filled with a great procession of stellar gods following the sun boats as they sail on the celestial Nile. (Carpiceci 2000:99)

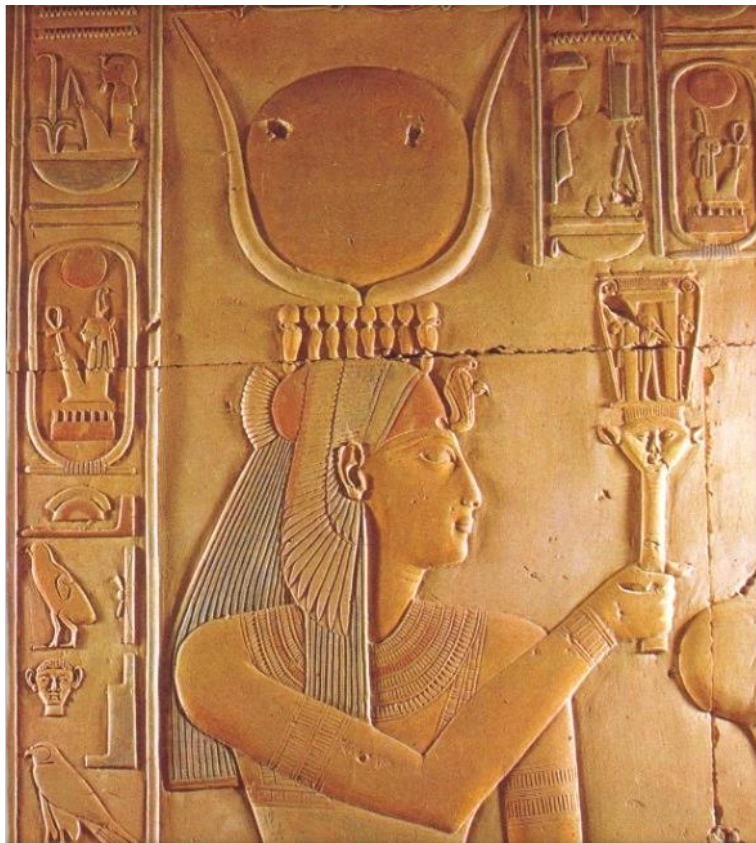
### **7.1.1 Isis mythology: “Mine is yesterday and I know tomorrow, it means Osiris.” Coffin texts (Mojsov 2005:xix)**

As claimed by the myths of Isis, the hill of creation rose out of the primeval waters. On it was Atum, the all. He spoke his name and created a couple, a male Shu “the air” and female Tefnet “the moisture”. After their creation he cried, and mortal men and woman appeared from his tears. Shu and Tefnet had a son Geb, “the earth”, and Nut, a daughter “the sky”. Geb and Nut had two sons and two daughters, Osiris, Seth, Isis and Nephthys. When Osiris was born a voice called out of the heavens announcing that the Lord of all was coming to the light of day. Osiris married Isis and Seth married Nephthys. Seth was ruler of the desert and Osiris ruled the Nile valley. He instructed them in various arts and crafts, and converted them to a state of civilization. (Mojsov 2005:12)

The mysteries of Isis were considered holy and honorable. But according to Mojsov, these mysteries were simply the lost reproductive organ of Osiris which Isis “she of the seven stoles and black robes” searched for. The theme of the

mysteries was the eternal resurrection of life from death and once established the festival persevered for thousands of years. (Mojsov 2005:50)

As noted by Plutarch: “It is not therefore without reason that they relate in their myth that the soul of Osiris is eternal and indestructible, but that his body is frequently dismembered and destroyed by Typhon (Seth), whereupon Isis in her wanderings searches for it and puts it together again. For what is spiritually intelligible and is good prevails over destruction and change.” (Mojsov 2005:53)



**Figure 7.3** The goddess Isis holding a sistrum. Painted relief from Abydos. (Patrick 1972:33)

### **7.1.2 The death and resurrection of Osiris**

The mystery of creation was presented every year. This was: “the form of him whom one may not name, Osiris of the Mysteries, who springs from the returning waters.” (Mojsov 2005:8)

In the Isis myths, when Osiris left on his exploration of the world, she remained in Egypt as Queen, waiting his return. In Plutarch’s Greek description written in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, also known under its Latin title “De Iside et Osiride”, the most

extensive account of the Isis-Osiris story is known. (Erman 1977:34)

One of the versions of the Osiris myths was that prompted by jealousy, Seth wanted to kill Osiris. According to Plutarch the murder was committed by a cunning trick. Seth prepared a banquet to honor his brother's return to Egypt from a foreign land, and he invited his friends to attend as guests. During the banquet, a chest of lovely workmanship was brought into the hall, and offered by Seth as a gift to anyone who would fit in the chest. When the guests tried it they were not the right size, but when Osiris climbed into it, it fit perfectly. Seth had measured Osiris in his sleep and made sure that he was the only one that could fit into the chest. Seth closed the lid and flung the chest in the Nile, so that it would drift away. Isis was overwhelmed with grief when she heard that Osiris had been killed by Seth, and she went looking for the chest or coffin in which Osiris was enclosed. (Erman 1977:34)



**Figure 7.4** A bronze statuette in the British Museum depicting Seth, the brother of Osiris, and the agent of his destruction. Seth, one of the oldest gods of Egypt, kept his position as a deity while the myths implicated him as being responsible for all the evil deeds. (Patrick 1972:34)

The chest was carried out to the sea by the Nile, to the Phoenician coast, and came to rest at the base of a tamarisk tree. The tree grew rapidly enclosing the chest with its trunk. Malcandre the King of Byblos had ordered the tree to be cut down and be used as a pillar of his palace. When Isis heard about the scent the tree gave off, she went to Phoenicia. There Astarte entrusted to her care her newly born son. Isis adopted the baby, but when she wanted to confer immortality on it, by bathing the baby in purification flames, Astarte saw her and was terrified of her. To reassure her Isis revealed who she was and the reason for her presence. (This episode bears a strong resemblance to the legend of Demeter and Demophon in Greek mythology). Isis also transformed herself into a swallow every night and flew about the pillar containing the dead Osiris crying loudly. (Erman 1977:34)

In another myth, Isis was presented with the trunk of the tree. She retrieved the chest containing Osiris's body, soaked it in tears and took it back to Egypt. She hid it in the swamps of Buto. Seth discovered the coffin, removed the body, cut it up into fourteen pieces and scattered the different parts over the country. Isis went in search of the dismembered body and found all of the pieces except the phallus which was devoured by a Nile crab, the Oxyrhynchid, which was forever cursed for the crime. (Erman 1977:34)

Still another version relates that after Isis had found the body, Ra ordered Anubis to embalm it. Isis restored life to Osiris when she fluttered her wings over him. Isis reconstituted the body of Osiris by joining the pieces together. She performed for the first time the rites of embalmment, and in this way restored Osiris to life. Isis was assisted by her sister Nephthys (Seth's wife), her nephew Anubis, Toth, Osiris's grand vizier, or highest official, and by Horus, her posthumous son, conceived with her union with Osiris's body, to perform the embalming rites. Osiris was miraculously restored by her charms. He raised his arm, turned himself on one side, and lifted up his head. Although he could not return to his formal life on earth, he started his second existence, and became the king of the dead. (Erman 1977:34)

Abydos is the name given by the Greeks to This (or Thinis), one of the oldest cities in history and seat of the principal sanctuary of Osiris. It was here that the head of

Osiris, the most important relic, was preserved. Every Egyptian had to make a pilgrimage to Abydos at least once in their lifetime. It was a Holy City where everyone hoped to have a mortuary temple or at least a commemorative stela. Almost nothing of the ancient city remains, and a few ruins mark the site of the sanctuary. (Carpiceci 2000:159)

The ruins of the temple of Rameses II further south give a precise idea of the Abydos temple: two pylons and two courts, set before two hypostyle halls each of which has eight pillars, and three sanctuary cells. In the rooms are scenes of battles and religious ceremonies. Further south is the temple of Seti I. It was built to commemorate the pilgrimage of the pharaoh to Abydos. It was still famous in Greek times and Strabo praised its “marvellous construction”. His son Rameses II completed the decoration that continued up to the time of Rameses IV. (Carpiceci 2000:159)



**Figure 7.5** Portrayed on a Fresco at Abydos, the pharaoh is shown offering a feathered Zed to the goddess Isis. The Zed pillar is the symbol of the backbone of Osiris, and symbolizes stability. (Carpiceci 2000:161)

In Egypt It was considered that eternal life for the soul of a body depended on the intact preservation of the physical body. In the early days, a body was preserved by the drying effects of sand and wind. But under the influence of the Osiris cult embalming became the way of preserving bodies. (Erman 1977:34)



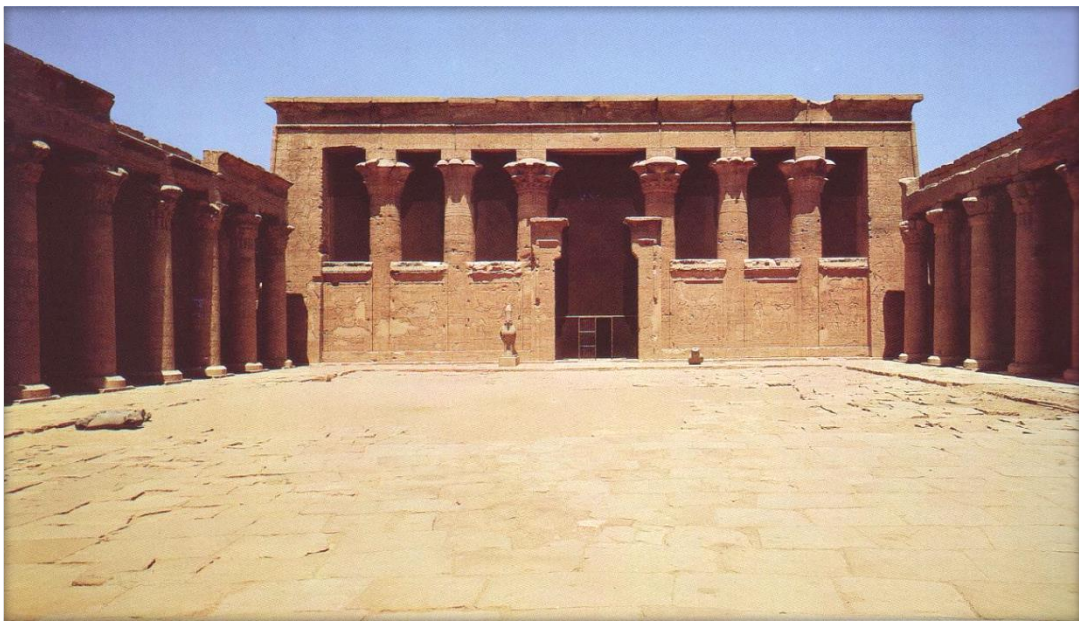
**Figure 7.6** The picture is a detail from the painted coffin of Seti (c. 2000 BCE) in the British Museum, showing Isis in the form of a swallow. (Patrick 1972:34)



**Figure 7.7** A varnished jackal with silver claws, represented a god known as “he who belongs to the mummy wrappings”. The jackal represents Anubis, god of embalming and protector of the dead. (Casson 1969:175)



The cult of Osiris grew in popularity. In the Middle Kingdom (2055-1650 BCE) Osiris was the great judge of souls in the netherworld, who gave bread and beer to deserving souls. His death and resurrection after three days were celebrated in Abydos in a publicly enacted passion play called the “Mysteries of Osiris”. In the New Kingdom (1550-1069 BCE) when Pharaoh Akhenathon introduced the monotheistic religion, the cult of Osiris merged with the cult of Ra, and Osiris became a savior god. By the late period (1069-332 BCE) his cult had spread around the Mediterranean. Isis came to be worshipped as the primordial virgin and their child Horus as the savior of the world. (Mojsov 2005:xii)



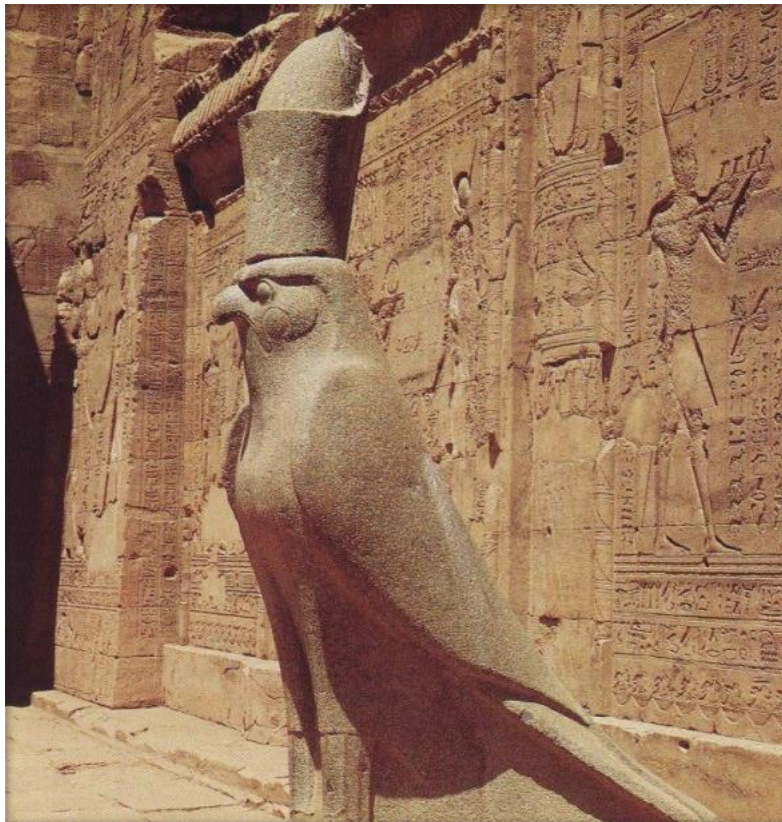
**Figure 7.8 Temple of Horus, the court before the vestibule. In Edfu.  
(Mallakh and Bianchi 1980:146)**

The conflict of Horus and Seth was a popular play. The company of characters was called “the followers of Horus” possibly because the ancestor spirits of the ancient tribes helped the king against his struggle with Seth. At Edfu this battle was said to have begun during the 363<sup>rd</sup> year of Ra’s rule upon the earth and lasted for decades. In the story, Ra had launched an attack on Seth who had rebelled against him. (Mojsov 2005:13)

Horus had resolved to slay his uncle and avenge his father’s death. Horus had the power given to him by Toth, to transform into a solar disk with golden wings. Horus and Seth fought in three battles in the south, and six battles in the north. They even changed into crocodiles and hippopotami. (Mojsov 2005:13)

Horus challenged Seth to a single combat. During the three-day battle, Seth disguised himself as a black pig and plucked Horus's left eye from his head. Horus pulled off Seth's testicles. Finally, Horus killed Seth by hitting him in the head with a harpoon, and thereby revenged his father's death. Ra restored his eye, which the people worn as an amulet against enemies. The story of the restored eye of Horus demonstrated how the child of Osiris and Isis was integrated with Horus the King. The symbol of the savior child was the eye of the sun, newly born every year at the winter solstice. (Mojsov 2005:13)

Both Diodorus and Plutarch considered the sign of the eye to be an important element. To them it meant that Osiris was the all-seeing eye. He was the force of the solar eye, reborn at dawn every day. The eye of the sun was the living image of the soul of Osiris. (Mojsov 2005:33)



**Figure 7.9 Horus as the falcon. Statue with the double crown in the entrance to the vestibule. Temple of Horus. Edfu. (Mallakh and Bianchi 1980:147)**

Mystical initiation in Egypt was well documented by the Greeks. Herodotus mentioned being initiated in the mysteries of a god whom he refused to name during a nighttime passion play. Plutarch confirmed that the mysteries of Osiris

involved secret initiation. In Roman times the secret ceremony of the resurrection of Osiris was celebrated by a select group of priests in rooms where only the initiated were allowed. According to Hippolytus, a 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE writer, the ceremony had a sexual basis. (Mojsov 2005:50)

### 7.1.3 Isis and Horus, the divine Mother and Child



**Figure 7.10 Isis and Horus. Isis is wearing the cow horns and the sun disk is suckling the infant Horus, represented as an adult pharaoh. Statues of Isis were generally portraits of the reigning queen, which is why the goddess is shown wearing the uraeus. The infant Horus was sometimes shown as a child wearing the pharaonic crown and with a finger to his lips. This bronze statue is of the Nineteenth Dynasty. It is in the Abbey Museum, New Barnet. (Patrick 1972:37)**

Isis became pregnant with Horus by hovering in the form of a sparrow hawk over

the body of Osiris. Isis then hid in the swamps of Buto to escape the anger of Seth, who occupied the throne. But because she had to support herself she had to go out and beg. One day on returning to where she had hidden his baby Horus in the reeds, she found him half dead. Seth in the form of a poisonous snake had bitten Horus. In despair Isis appealed for help to all mankind. (Hamlyn 1965:62)

Although the marsh dwellers and fishermen all came to offer their help, none of them knew a magical spell which would cure Horus of the poison. Isis guessed that it was Seth, and this is the earliest manifestation of the great struggle between Horus and Seth. Isis called upon the high god for aid. Her cry was heard in the "Boat of Millions of Years" which when it drew level with her interrupted its course. Thoth descended from the boat to speak to her, and after expressing surprise that Isis cannot heal Horus with her magical powers, assures her that the power of Ra is at her disposal. (Hamlyn 1965:62)

When the sun's boat stopped, the light stopped with it, and Thoth told Isis that darkness would persist until Horus was cured. Although Isis could hardly believe that Thoth was able to help her on behalf of Ra, they both realized the importance of the sun's stopping until Horus was healed. It meant that if Horus died the whole creation (world) would be destroyed, and Seth would reign. (Hamlyn 1965:62)

Thoth exorcised the poison from Horus's body in the name of the sun, saying that until Horus was cured, if the boat of Ra stood still, there would be no food, the temples would be closed, there would be misery on earth, eternal darkness would reign, wells would be dry and there will be no crops or vegetation. When Horus was healed, Thoth gave the child back to the care of Isis and all the marsh dwellers. Ra and Osiris would watch over him and Isis would spread his cult. (Hamlyn 1965:62)

This story was also symbolic of the relation of the pharaoh to the people. Horus was considered the archetype of the pharaohs; the meaning could be that Ra protected Horus against all attacks by his enemies. And it was the duty of the people to love, respect and protect him, because if the Pharaoh came to any harm all the people could die. Isis could protect Horus against all other evil which could harm him, as she was a great magician. (Hamlyn 1965:62)

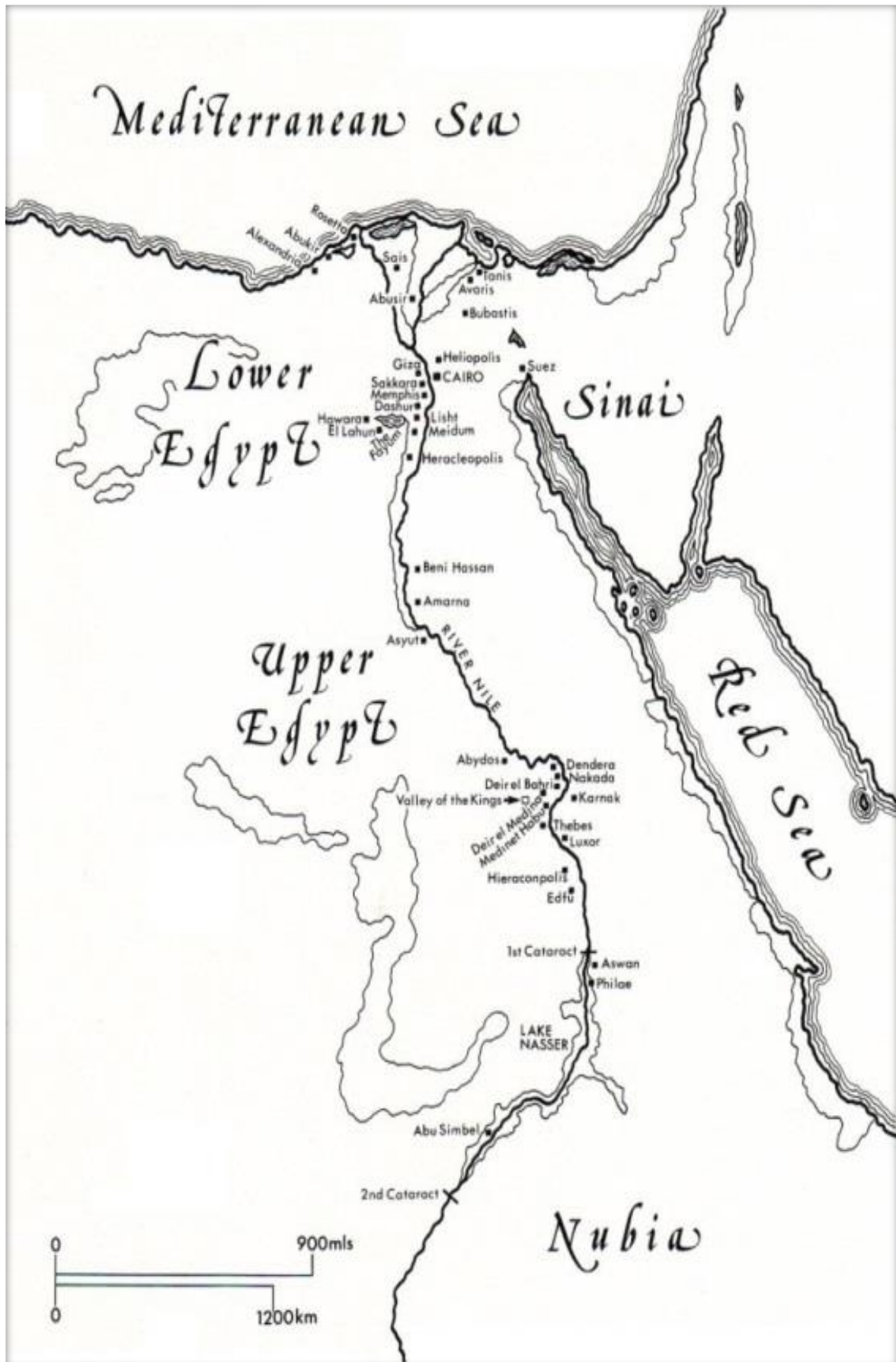


Figure 7.11 The principal sites of ancient Egypt (Jordan 1976:19)

#### **7.1.4 How Isis obtained the secret name of Ra**

Another one of the myths of Isis was when she was still in the service of Ra, she persuaded him to confide his secret name to her. The Egyptians believed in incantations and spells, as well as the belief that the knowledge of a person's name gave somebody power over that person, either because it revealed the way to his identity or because it made it possible to recite spells against the person. When Ra was an old man, Isis took advantage of the fact and with earth moistened with her spit she made a venomous snake which bit Ra. Ra appealed to all the gods to help him but got no help. (Hamlyn 1965:62)

When Isis approached Ra, asking him if a snake had poisoned him, he explained how he had been attacked by a serpent, and how painful it was: "It is not fire, it is not water. For I am colder than water and I am hotter than fire, and all my body sweats. My eyes tremble so that I cannot see the sky." (Hamlyn 1965:62)

She offered to help him only if he disclosed his name to her. "Tell me your name, divine father, for a man lives when his name is pronounced." Because Ra did not tell her his real name, Isis refused to heal him and she insisted that he must tell her his real name. Ra then revealed his name to Isis, asking her to only tell it to Horus. (Hamlyn 1956:62)

In this myth, an attempt could have been made to illustrate how the supreme power was transmitted to the Osirian triad, and in particular how the sun's power was given to Horus or to his early counterpart, the pharaoh. Isis in the Osirian myth represented the annual fertilizing of the Egyptian plains by the flooding of the Nile which was represented by Osiris, and who was separated from her by Seth the drought-scourged desert. (Hamlyn 1965:62)

A fundamental meaning of the myth of Osiris and Isis in the context of ancient Egyptian religion concerned the periodic death and rebirth of the pharaohs. In Egyptian mythology when a pharaoh died he was identified with Osiris, and a new and inexperienced pharaoh was identified with Osiris. (Hamlyn 1965:62)



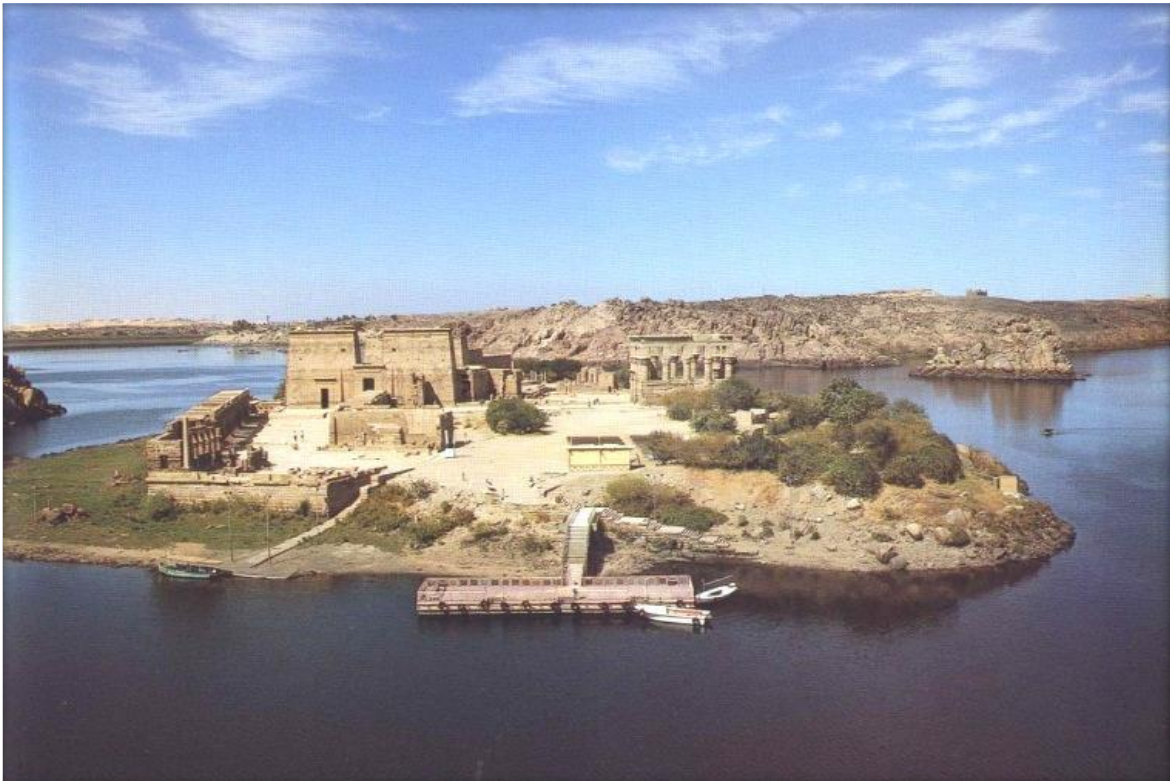
**Figure 7.12 Ra, the sun god of Heliopolis, seen in an inlaid bronze aegis of the Ptolomaic period. Also called the Father of the Gods, Ra ruled on earth during a golden age, when men and gods had a peaceful co-existence. He was often shown as a disk, borne on a boat, the solar barque, but his most familiar representation was as a man with a falcon's head or as a falcon. (Patrick 1972:28)**

### **7.1.5 Isis worship**

Isis was so popular in her later days that she absorbed the qualities of other goddesses. After the end of the Late Period in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE the center of her worship was on Philae, an island in the Nile, where a great temple was built to her during the 30<sup>th</sup> dynasty. She was represented in human form and described as having magical skills. She was sometimes depicted as wearing the horns of a cow. Her personality also resembled that of Athor, or Hathor the goddess of love and gaiety. (Hamlyn 1965:63)

Philae was the largest of three islands at the south end of the group of rocks that comprise the First Cataract, and is 400 meters long and 135 meters wide. It was called Pilak in the ancient texts meaning “the corner island” or “the end island”.

Originally Philae was on the east bank of the Nile in the corner of a small bay and also at the tip of the First Cataract. Bigeh, (today partially submerged) one of the other two islets was particularly sacred, for it was the place of the eternal sleep for Osiris and out of bounds for all people. Only the priests who came by boat from Philae were allowed there where they celebrated their sacred rites on the 360 offering tables which indicated where Osiris was buried. The temples of Philae were dedicated to Isis who with the force of her love for Osiris found his scattered limbs and revived him. (Carpiceci 2000:179)



**Figure 7.13 Philae, the sacred island dedicated to Isis. It is one of the three best-preserved Ptolemaic temples. The other two are those of Edfu and Dendera. (Carpiceci 2000:179)**

During the Old Kingdom period Isis was portrayed as the wife of the deceased pharaoh. She also had a funerary association. Her name appeared over 80 times in the Pyramid Texts, also called the funeral texts. Isis was also represented as the mother of the “four sons of Horus”, the four deities protecting the canopic jars containing the pharaoh’s internal organs. Her role as protector grew in the Middle Kingdom period, to protect nobles and even commoners, when the funeral texts began to spread to other members of Egyptian society. (Hamlyn 1965:63)





**Figure 7.14** In one of the two tombs commissioned by Inherka, the “vice president of the double land in the place of truth” in the time of Ramses III and Ramses IV. The goddess Isis is shown on one of the solar barques. Here she is followed by Toth and Khepri, the scarab-headed god. (Carpiceci 2000:125)

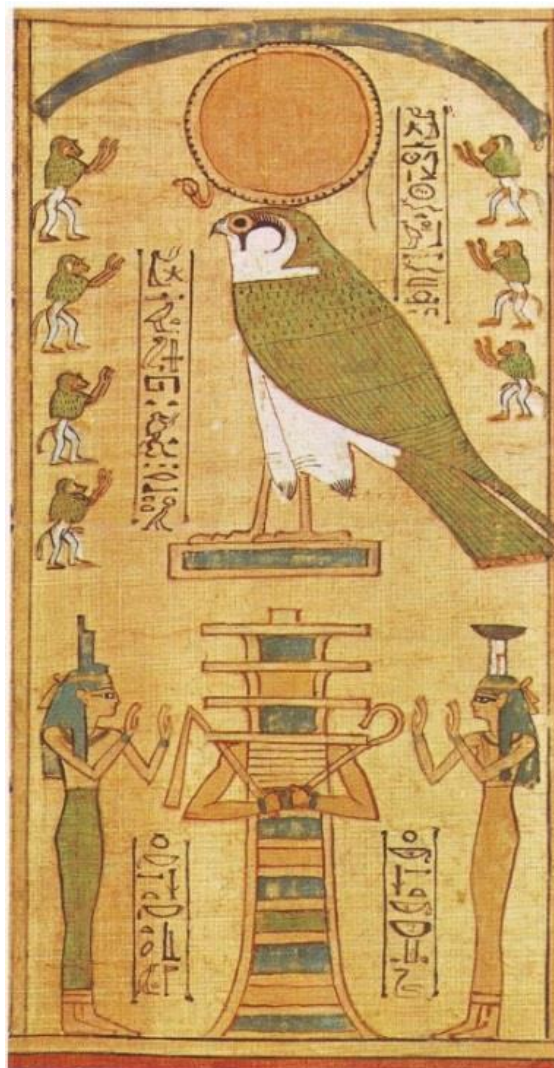
Sculptures and paintings often represented her beside Osiris, whom she helped and protected, with winged arms, as she does with the dead. She was also seen mourning at the foot of sarcophagi or watching over Canopic jars in the form of a kite. She was often accompanied by Nephthys in the same form. Isis appeared in her mother role, suckling the baby Horus or joining him in his struggle against Seth. (Hamlyn 1965:63)

According to Hamlyn, when the cult of Ra became more prominent with its cult center at Heliopolis, Ra was identified with Horus. But in some regions Hathor had been paired with Ra, as mother of the god, and then Isis began to be merged with Hathor as Isis-Hathor. By merging with Hathor, Isis became the mother of Horus as well as his wife. Her mother role was therefore changed into a spouse role. (Hamlyn 1965:63)

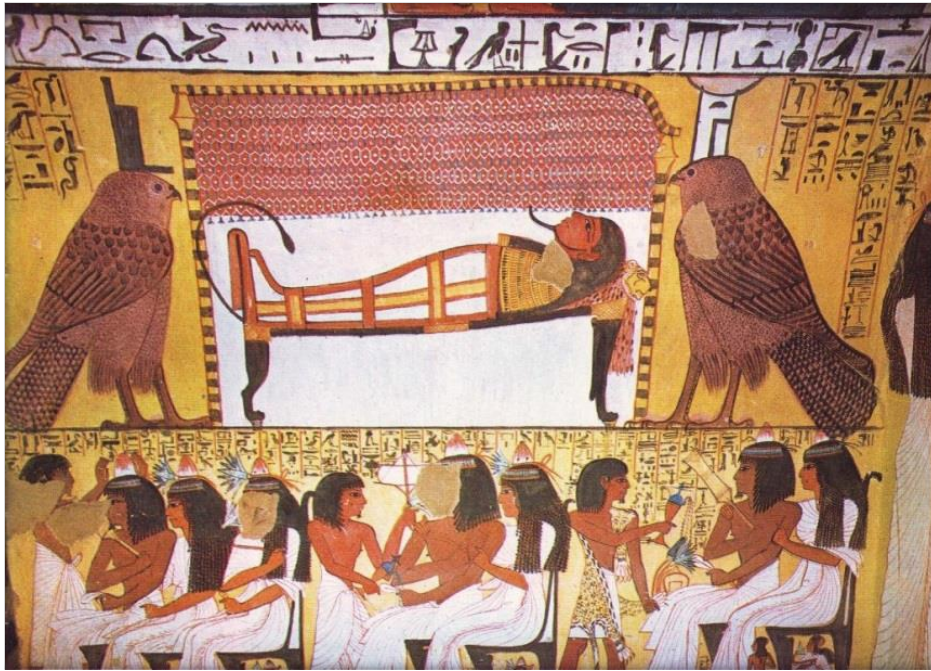
The cult of Isis appeared in Greece in combination with the cults of Horus and Serapis. Herodotus compared Isis with Demeter, the Greek goddess of earth,

agriculture and fertility. The cult of Isis, Horus and Serapis was introduced into Rome in 86 BCE, and became one of the most popular parts of Roman religion. (Hamlyn 1965:63)

In the later part of the Dynastic period, the mythical history of the cult of Isis became specialized. Dramas and miracle plays of her life on earth were abundant. The “Mysteries of Isis” became very popular in Egypt and neighboring countries. This gave her priests the opportunities they needed for their religious instruction to their people. (Budge 1988:202)



**Figure 7.15 The adoration of Ra. From the Book of the Dead of Hunefer, now in the British Museum. The sun god appears over the eastern horizon and is received by seven figures of Toth, in his baboon form. On his head is the solar disk with the uraeus symbol, the emblem of all the pharaohs' power. In the lower half of the picture is the djed-column which represents Osiris. On the left is Isis and on the right is Nephthys. From the Early Nineteenth Dynasty. (Patrick 1972:29)**



**Figure 7.16** Painting from the tomb of Sennutem. A member of the royal household during the nineteenth Dynasty. Showing the part of the Osiris myth where Seth discovered the chest with the body of Osiris in the marshes of the Delta. Seth smashed the chest and cut the body to pieces. But Isis with the goddess Nephthys, Seth's wife, roamed over the land, collected the pieces and made the first mummy. (Patrick 1972:35)

The Isis cult spread to many countries to the north of Egypt, and representations and drawings of Isis are found in Phoenicia as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Isis was represented on coins of Tyre, and figures of Serapis on the coins of Gaza and Bostra. (Budge 1988:203)

Osiris was worshipped at Tema in Arabia as early as 500 BCE. The cult of Serapis and Isis passed into Asia Minor as well as several islands in the Mediterranean e.g. Cyprus, Rhodes, Samos, Chios, Lesbos, and Crete. Osiris, Isis, Nephthys, Harpokrates and Anubis were well known in Malta in the second century BCE and Catania in Sicily was a center for the cult of Egyptian Gods. (Budge 1988:203)

There were many Isis temples in southern Italy, and because many remains of temples and statues of Egyptian gods were found in Reggio, Puteoli, Pompeii and Herculaneum, it shows that Egyptian gods were worshipped in these cities. In the first century BCE, Isis was one of the most popular goddesses in Rome. Her temples were filled with altars, statues, lavers and obelisks brought from Egypt. The "Mysteries of Isis" and other Egyptian miracle plays were performed in Rome. (Budge 1988:203)



**Figure 7.17** The pectoral above was found on the mummy of a sacred bull. Under Ramses' cartouche, a ram-headed falcon signifies the sun god Re, also identified with the pharaoh. Below the falcon, a winged vulture, the symbol of Upper Egypt, grasps a red "shen", a sign of rebirth and protection, while the cobra, the emblem of Lower Egypt, represents power. In the lower corners are "djed"-pillars representing stability. (Papanek et al 1993:23)

In the "Golden Ass" of Apuleius of Madaura, Isis says to Lucius:

*"The whole earth worships my godhead, one and individual, under many a changing shape, with varied rites, and by many divine names. There are Phrygians, first-born of men, call me "mother of the gods that dwell in Pessinus"; there are the Athenians, sprung from the soil. They still know me as Cecropian Minerva; the Ari and the Ethiopians and the Egyptians mighty in ancient lore, honour me with peculiar rites, and call me by my true name of "Isis the queen." (Budge 1988:204)*

In Greek inscriptions found in duplicate on the island of Ios, as well as on Andros, Isis describes her own power and attributes. The inscription was dedicated to Isis, Serapis and Anubis by an unknown person. (Budge 1988:205)

In this inscription, Isis describes her own attributes and power:

*I am Isis, the mistress of every land.*

*I was taught by Hermes and by his aid I found our demotic letters, so that all things should not be written with the same letters.*

*I laid down laws for mankind, and I ordained things which no one hath the power to change.*

*I am the eldest daughter of Kronos. (Egyptian god Geb)*

*I am the wife and sister of Osiris the king ...*

*For me was built the city of Bubastis.  
 I divided the earth from the sky.  
 I marked out clearly the paths of the stars.  
 I prescribed out clearly the course of the sun and the moon. (In Egyptian Maat  
 the female Toth) ...  
 I brought together woman and man.  
 I made women carry their babes into the tenth month.  
 I ordained that parents should be loved by their children.  
 I punish those who feel no love for their parents.  
 I, by my brother Osiris put an end to anthropophagy...  
 I taught men to honour the statues of the gods ...  
 I compelled women to accept the love of men ...  
 I found marriage contracts for women. (Budge 1988:205)*

The cult of Isis was succeeded in Egypt and its neighboring countries by that of Christianity, and pictures of the Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus. Figures of both are said to have been made in Egypt in the fifth century CE. (Budge 1988:205)

#### **7.1.6 Isis in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: Isis-Sothis “The Great Isis, the Mother of the Gods”**

Isis appears frequently and prominently in Graeco-Roman tombs. In the Alexandria and Egyptian myths, she had a major role in the negotiation of the afterlife. The Hellenized Isis of the Graeco-Roman period differs from the Isis of the Pharaonic period. The Isis found in Graeco-Roman tombs of the Egyptian myths that is set in the Egyptian tradition, does not necessarily mean the same Isis found in the Hellenized Alexandria, although she has the same name. The deity in one cultural context does not always mean the deity of another. (Bricault and Versluys 2008:89)

Marjorie Venit states that mysteries like those performed for Isis in the Graeco-Roman period are not a universal ancient phenomenon. Greek mystery cults differ from those secret Egyptian cults though they both shared a sense of secrecy. Greek mysteries are “initiation rituals of a voluntary, personal and secret character that aim to change the mind through experience of the sacred”. Pharaonic Egyptian cults also included secret things. In traditional Egyptian cults, the divine could only

be encountered at a festival, in prayer, and upon death. It might be expected that the “Isaic” (Isis) mysteries known through the Greek and Roman world had their origin in Ptolemaic Egypt. (Bricault and Versluys 2008:90)

In Alexandria and the tomb of the Egyptian myths, Isis performed the traditional role inherited from her function in Pharaonic Egypt. In Alexandria her role was generally unimaginative and her imagery restricted to her most traditional Pharaonic role. (Bricault and Versluys 2008:91)

In Alexandria Isis is encountered in almost every tomb. Isis appears three times in the Hall at Carcalla at Kom el-Shoqafa next to the Great Catacomb. In a common Pharaonic motif, she is shown standing with her wings outstretched on the near wall of tomb H. Similar images show her protecting the bier of the mummified deceased. In the upper frieze of the rear wall of Persephone tombs one and two she also extends the feathers of Ma’at in her lowered hand. In the Sieglin Tomb from the Alexandrian western cemetery at Gabbari, Isis embraces a frontal image of Osiris. Isis appears in three other tombs at Alexandria. (Bricault and Versluys 2008:92)

At Tuna el-Gebel in the early-Ptolemaic tomb of Petosiris, a priest of Toth, dated to 300 BCE, Isis had a minor role. In the “naos” (shrine) of the tomb Isis has a traditional role. She appears in a procession of deities; she is also seen kneeling at the head of a shrine containing the mummy of the deceased “Neshu” on a funerary cart, in a relief dedicated to Petosiris’s father. On the rear wall of the “naos” Isis appears behind the throne of Osiris, and she twice takes the form of “tyed” (knots). (Bricault and Versluys 2008:93)

From the Old Kingdom on, the “tyed” was fused with the bovine face of the goddess Hathor, and in the Late Period it was associated with Hathor, Isis and Nephtys and it also formed the garment for the goddess Nut. (Bricault and Versluys 2008:94)

In Roman period tombs, the status of Isis as a goddess is lower than male deities. In a Roman period woman’s house-tomb 21 at Tuna el-Gebel, Isis is more frequently found than in the tomb of Petosiris. At the Siwa oasis, Isis appears in the decoration of the tomb of Siamun. There she has a place at the head of the

bier. She is seen with Nephtys in one of the solar boats that flank Nut on the tomb's ceiling, honouring the morning sun. (Bricault and Versluys 2008:95)

Isis appears in one of the most highly decorated and best preserved Roman-period tombs in Egypt, the tombs of Petubastis and Petosiris. The tombs are dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE. The tombs are situated in the Dachla Oasis, in the cemetery site of el-Muzawwaqa of the Roman city of Trimith's (modern Amheida). Here she appears in her traditional roles. In the tomb of Petobastis, in the lower frieze of the west wall of the tomb, she is grouped with Nephtys, Anubis and Horus to stand behind a mummified figure of Osiris. In the tomb of Petosiris, Isis is shown in her most frequent representation, mourning at or protecting the bier. In both tombs of Petubastis and Petosiris, Isis is not always the focal point. In the tomb of Petubastis she is one of the many deities and in the tomb of Petosiris she is always submissive to another deity. (Bricault and Versluys 2008:98)

In the hill tombs above Achmim is "von Bissing's tomb" from 1897. The tomb is distinguished by its exceptional iconographic style that mixes Greek and Egyptian conceptual elements, suggesting that Isis played a significant role at Achmim. The tomb was seen by Frederich Wilhelm von Bissing in 1887, but only published by him 50 years later. Von Bissing's tomb is built with an anteroom and a burial chamber. The burial room shows at least three scenes showing Isis. In the antechamber Marjorie Venit saw evidence of the initiary cult of Isis. (Bricault and Versluys 2008:100)

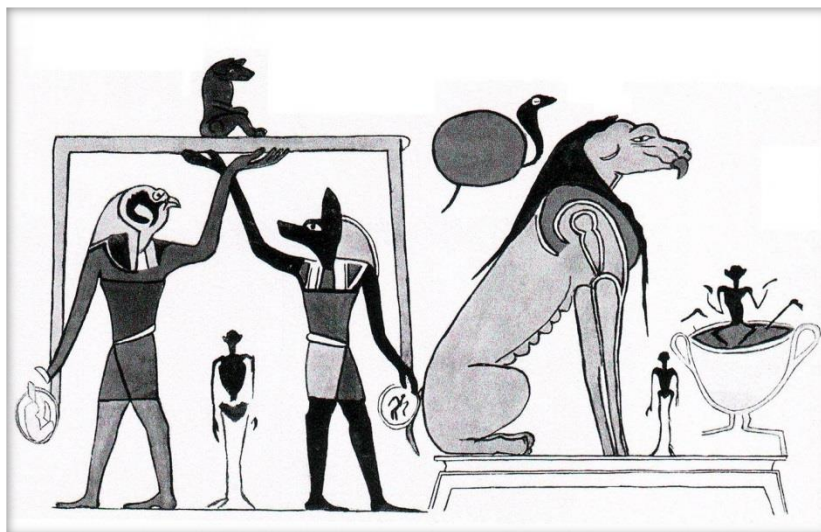
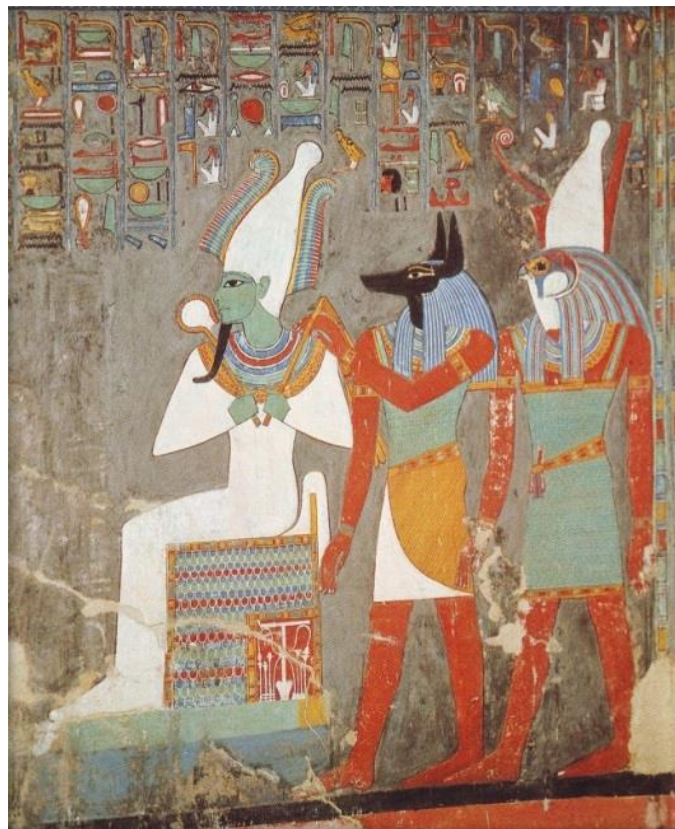


Figure 7.18 The judgments scene from the von Bissing's 1897 tomb. (Bricault and Versluys 2010:Illus. 5)

Ceiling decorations in the anteroom of von Bissing's tomb is the great zodiac, and centers on Isis-Sothis riding side-saddle on her dog. The earliest example of Isis seated side-saddle on a dog is the pediment of the Temple of Isis in the Campus Marinus in Rome, rebuilt by Caligula (37-41 CE). The Dog Star, Sirius was called Sopdet by Egyptians and Sothis by the Greeks. Sirius was associated in Egypt with Isis as early as the pyramid texts. The Egyptian New Year which coincided with the Nile flood was marked by the first appearance of the star. The image of Isis-Sothis in the center of the ring of constellations of the Zodiac in von Bissing's tomb 1987 symbolizes the flooding of the Nile. (Bricault and Versluys 2008:101)

Known from coins of Vespasian minted in 71CE according to Gisele Clerc, Isis-Sothis appears for the first time in Egypt on Alexandrian coinage struck in years 13 and 16 of Trajan's reign. The motif continues to appear on Roman coins and elsewhere in Egypt until + 400CE. In the words of Rutilius Lupis, who wrote in the time of Tiberius, Isis-Sothis acts as "the Great Isis, the mother of the heavens, of the earth, and of the underworld." (Bricault and Versluys 2008:101)



**Figure 7.19 Osiris enthroned, attended by Anubis and Harsiese. Painted on the well room, north wall in the tomb of Horenheb. Valley of the Kings (No 57) Dynasty XVIII (1330-1305 BCE) (Mallakh and Bianchi 1980:59)**



Laszlo Castiglione observed about 50 years ago that when a deceased person is portrayed in a Graeco-Roman style, and set among Egyptian deities, represented in an Egyptian manner, the intention is to imply two realms: one “real” realm and the other a “spiritual” realm, with the distinction marking a physical separation between “gods and men”. (Bricault and Versluys 2008:105)

The Tigrane Tomb in Alexandria, within or after the Hadrianic period, is a modest two-roomed tomb in the eastern cemetery. The Tigrane burial room is covered by a shallow dome and this provides the date of the tomb, as the emperor Hadrian started the building of domes and many variations on this theme. The left niche of the tomb shows a frontal male holding palm branches, as well as the two goddesses in the central niche, which is directly connected with the cult of Isis. A similar branch is carried by a priest in an Isaic (Isis) procession on a fragment from a wooden sarcophagus. A priest of Isis painted in the Temple of Isis in Pompeii holds a palm branch even closer to her body. A young child, characterized by the lock of Horus, holds a palm branch on a grave stone from the necropolis of Ostia. These branches can mean victory over death. (Bricault and Versluys 2008:112)

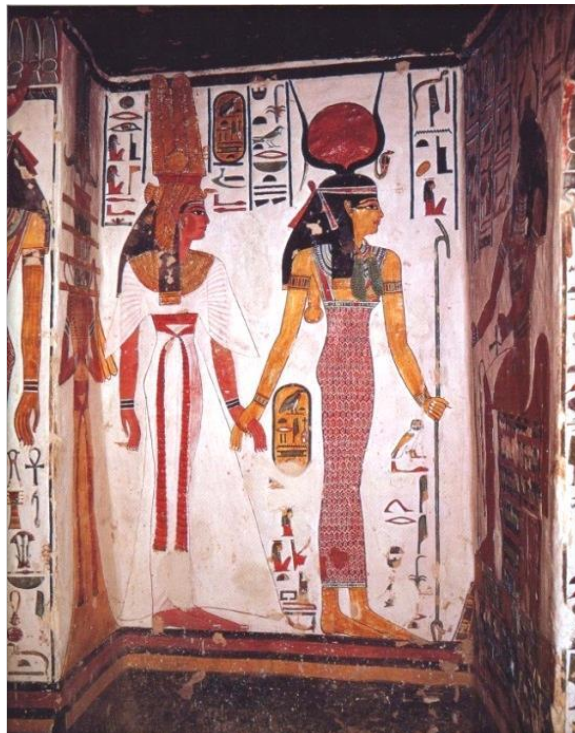
According to Marjorie Venit the entire description of the Tigrane Tomb must be considered to interpret its meaning, but this description is unique. The only explanation can mean an indication for initiation into the Isis cult. The artists of the Tigrane tomb went against tradition and created an entirely authentic description in order to express their meaning of Isis. (Bricault and Versluys 2008:113)

In Greece altars were the place of sacrifice, either of animals or humans. In Euripides’ “Andromache” (lines 1100-1160), Neoptolemos seeks sanctuary at Apollo’s altar at Delphi, and on this altar he was murdered. In Euripides’ lost Telephos, the Telephos threatens to kill the infant Orestes as he kneels on an altar in the sanctuary of the Lycion Apollo. Cassandra was killed on an altar in the Agamemnon. Seated on an altar, Priam mourned the fall of Troy and the dead Astyanax and he is killed there by Neoptolemos. On an altar Orestes substitutes his stepfather Aigisthos for the sacrificial calf. (Euripides Electra 774-843). Killing a human on an altar in Greece is unusual. An altar is a sacred space and the murder of Aigistos, Cassandra, Neoptolemos and Priam on an altar was described as an offensive act. (Bricault and Versluys 2008:118)

As suggested by Venit the suffering of physical death can be overcome by those who worship Isis, or have been accepted into her mysteries, and the large image of the deceased tomb owner of the Achmim von Bissing's tomb with his laurel branch confirms the interpretation. In the Achmim tomb the image of Isis-Sothis centering the Zodiac gives another layer to the Isis imagery. It suggests the heavenly realm, and it recalls Isis as the "mistress" of the heavens, of the earth, and of the underworld. In his "Metamorphoses" (X1.6, 270-271) Alupeius had Isis speak to the zoomorphic Lucius, and say, in Griffiths' translation:

*"...you shall live indeed a happy man, and when you have completed the span of your lifetime...you shall dwell in the Elysian Fields" (Bricault and Versluys 2008:119)*

Nupeius gives the Greek version of the goodwill of Isis. The designer of the Tigane tomb relied on a false Egyptian style to note the Egyptian Isis afterlife, but the designer of the Achmim tomb balanced Egyptian and Hellenistic elements to represent the same message. Von Bissing's Achmim tomb and the Alexandrian Tigane Tomb were different from the other tombs of the period, because they disclose the mysteries of Isis. (Bricault and Versluys 2008:119)

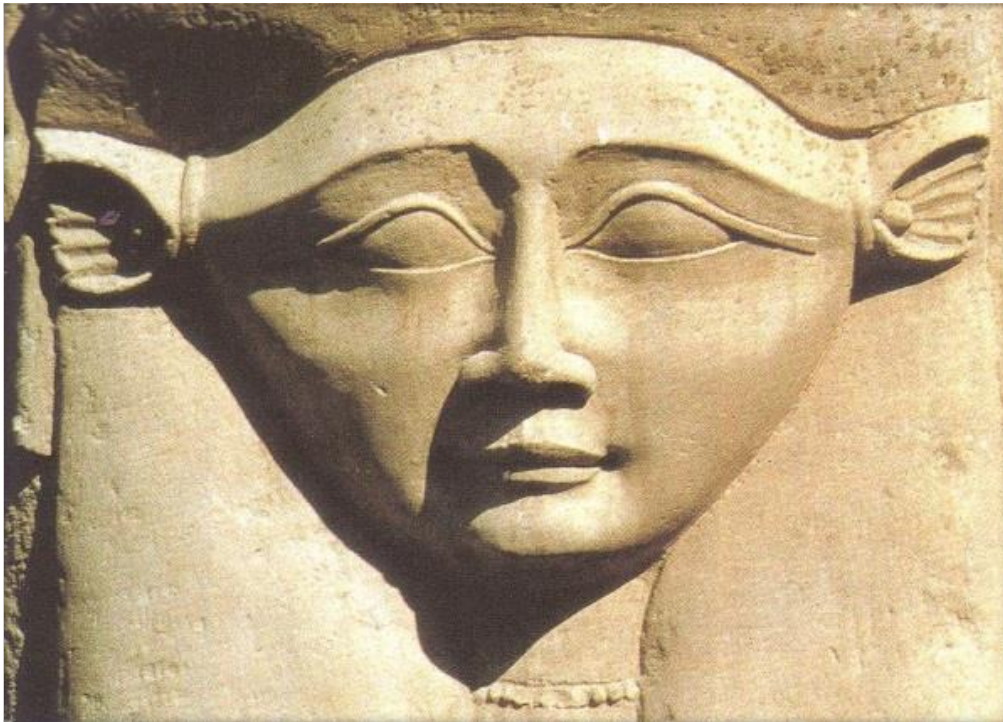


**Figure 7.20** The goddess Isis leading Queen Nefertari. Tomb of Nefertari. Deir el Medineh. (No 66) Dynasty XIX (1290-1220BCE) (Mallakh and Bianchi 1980:77)

## 7.2 HATHOR, “LADY OF THE WEST”

As a mother goddess, the goddess Hathor, an ancient sky goddess, was associated with light-hearted pleasure and love, fertility, sexuality and with music, dancing and alcohol. She was first represented as a cow. Later she was shown as a woman with a cow’s head, and also as simply a goddess. In the myths, Hathor was often confused with Isis. (Patrick 1972:31)

Hathor was shown as having a human face with cow’s ears, with modified cow’s horns, the cow and the “sistrum” (rattle) were her only emblems. In ceremonial scenes, priestess-musicians in the cult of Hathor shook the metal “sistra”, instruments whose handles were often decorated with the carved head of Hathor, and rattled their broad bead necklaces with long counterpoises called “menat” (necklaces), sacred to the deity of love, who was also the patron of music and dancing. She was identified with other goddesses, or even a female form of some god. The gods, Sekhmet, Neith, Lusaas, Best, Uazit, Mut, Hekt and Aset were all identified with her at different places. She also appeared as female forms of Sopd, Behudt, Anpu, and Tanen. Her colouring was black and red. Hathor protected but also had a terrible temper. (Petrie 1972:60)



**Figure 7.21** At Dendera, the cow goddess Hathor, was often represented on column capitals as having a human face and cow’s ears. (Gahlin 2014:34)

Hathor is a co-relative mother god, “she in whom dwells the son Hor”. She also had the role of Universal Mother in line with Min as the great father. She was worshipped in Upper and Lower Egypt, and easily modified and combined with other deities. Hathor was a deity of Punt, (The Punite race) Mafekt (Sinai) as well as Kapna and was introduced into Egypt. She was also a deity of Wawat on the Upper Nile. Her supreme center was at Dendera opposite Koptos, the seat of Min, and on the line of any invaders from the Red Sea into the Nile valley. (Petrie 1972:60)

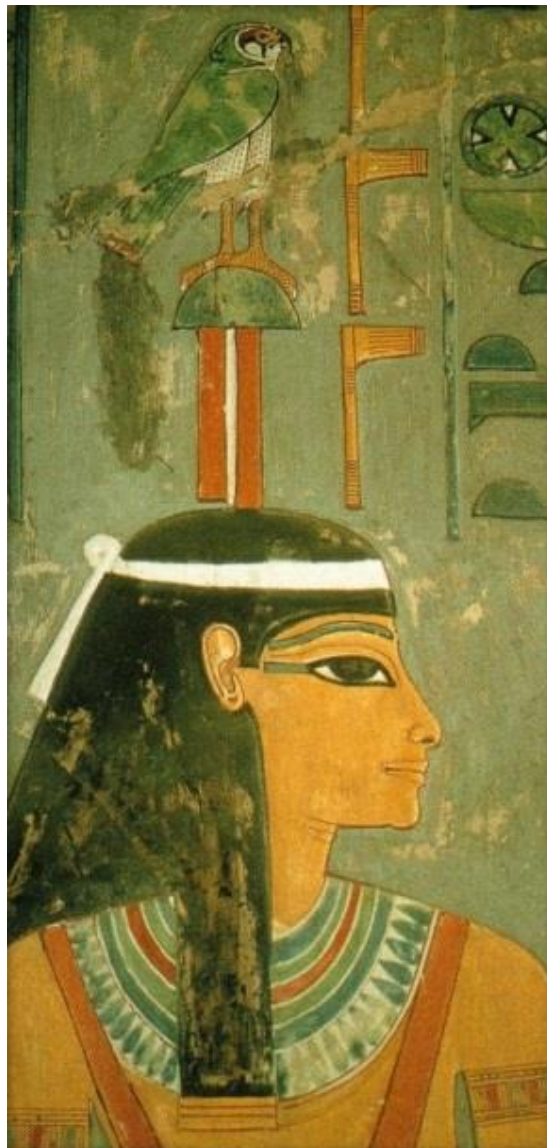
According to Petrie, Hathor was brought in by the Punites at the beginning of the dynastic history, after the establishment of various other deities. The Punites founded the dynastic history. They also established her worship as a local Hathor in every home, and the Punites called her the “princess of the gods”. Petrie suggested that she was introduced as goddess. (Petrie 1972:61)



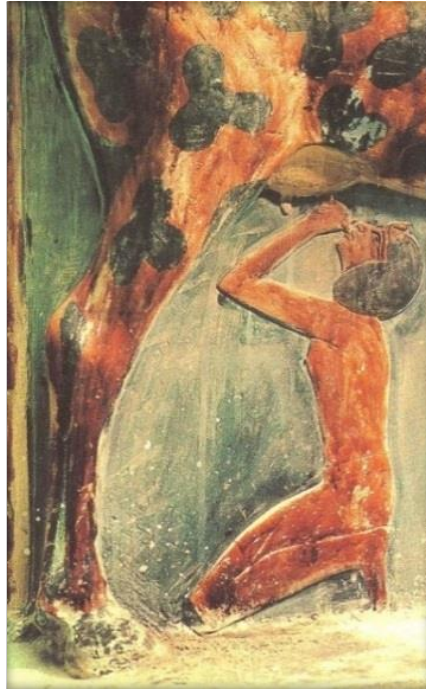
**Figure 7.22 The design of the hooped sistrum or ceremonial rattle often incorporated in the face of Hathor. Image from the tomb of Sennefer. (Gahlin 2014:116)**

Hathor was a popular goddess, who could manifest herself in various forms. As a beautiful woman she was the divine patron of music and dancing, symbolizing the

joy in life. In a bas relief at Karnak, recording the divine birth of the pharaoh Amenhotep III, Hathor is represented as reuniting the infant king and his “ka”, (or other self) with the “ankh”, (the symbol of life). Hathor was also thought of as a cow and was sometimes illustrated suckling the king. She also represented the sky, and is often represented as a cow receiving the setting sun. She was regarded as a guardian of the dead, whom she transported to the next world. The other side of Hathor identifies her with the destructive “Eye of Re” and as the “Lady of Punt” she was a divine lioness. Closely associated with Horus, her name “Het Hor” means “House of Horus”. Hathor’s character is also similar to that of the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar. (Encyclopedia of World Mythology 1975:88)

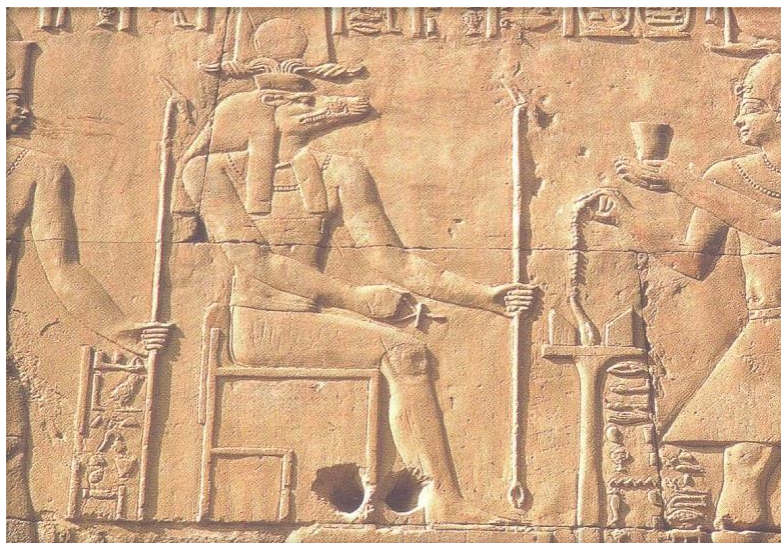


**Figure 7.23** Hathor’s customary headdress was a sun disc sitting between two cow’s horns, but she was also shown wearing a falcon on a perch. Painted relief from the tomb of Horemheb. Valley of the Kings, Thebes. (Gahlin 2014:71)



**Figure 7.24 The support and protection given to the king by the divine world is seen in the image of the cow goddess Hathor suckling the king, Amenhotep II. (18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty) (Gahlin 2014:34)**

Sobek, the crocodile god, was signified as the consort of Hathor. Khonsu, their son, was also regarded as the son of Amun and Mut. Sobek was represented either as the reptile itself, or as a man with the head of a crocodile. Sobek was worshipped in the Faiyum and at the temple of Kom Obo, and was associated with the strength of the Pharaoh, and in the form of Sobek-Re he was worshipped as a manifestation of the solar deity. (Gahlin 2014:45)

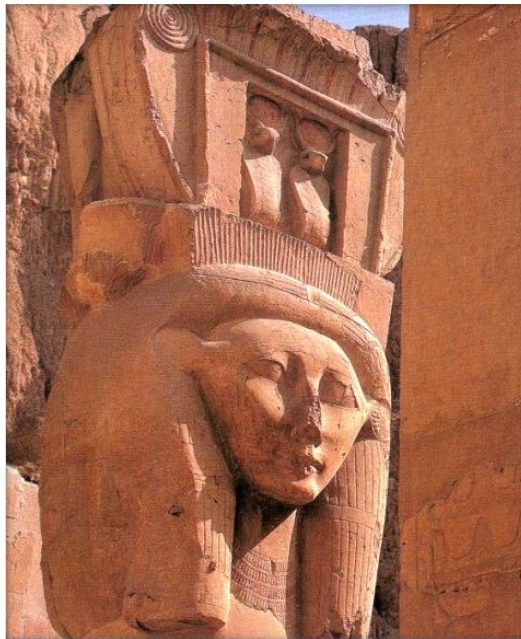


**Figure 7.25 Sobek the crocodile god, represented either as the reptile itself or as a man with the head of a crocodile. (Gahlin 2014:45)**

The worship of animals and nature is common in early societies. As man learned to understand nature, the gods changed from zoomorphic to anthropomorphic concepts. Hathor was one of the earliest deities to change to anthropomorphism, (the conception of gods in human form), fusing the three ideas of nature, animals and man. Hathor was given a human body and head, but kept her animal manifestation, a pair of cow's horns. Another deity was Toth, who had a human body but kept the head of the ibis. Later it was Anubis the judge of the dead and guardian of the tombs who had a human body but jackal's head.

(Casson 1969:72)

Hathor was also linked to the goddess Nut, the sky goddess. As a mother goddess she was given the epithet "great cow" (as the goddesses Neith and Nut). Because she was a goddess of the heavens, she was also the dominant deity, the divine representative of women. In early paintings she was shown with a broad woman's face, surrounded by thick plaits of hair and only maintaining her cow's ears. She was even portrayed wearing a headdress consisting of two horns between which appears the sun disk, or a falcon on a perch on her head. (Erman 1977:12) As a sky goddess, she was regarded as a huge cow who straddled the heavens, with her four legs marking the four cardinal points. (Gahlin 2014:33)

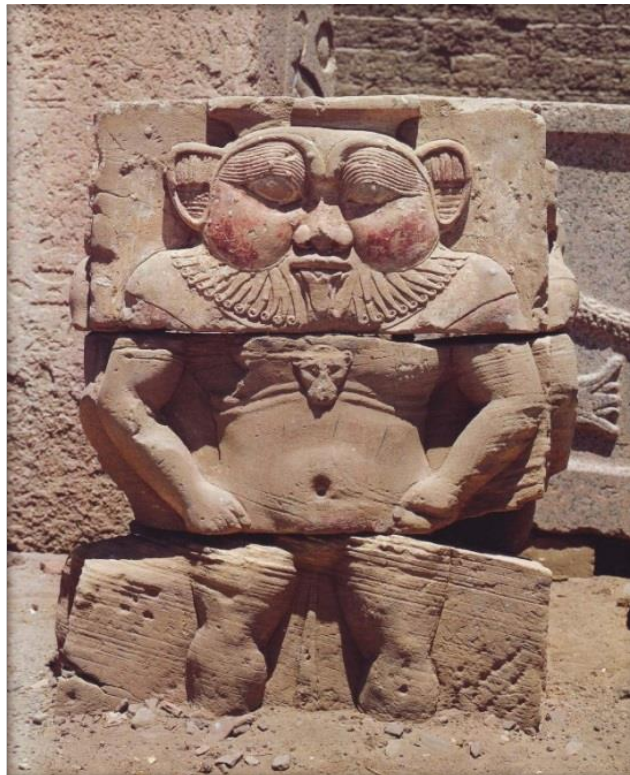


**Figure 7.26** As "Lady of the West", Hathor was the protectress of the west Theban necropolis. She was depicted on "stelae" and funerary papyri as a cow, leaving the desert to come down into the papyrus marshes as she acted as a link between the tombs and life in the Nile Valley. (Gahlin 2014:219)

In various contexts she was known as “Lady of the West” or “Lady of the Western Mountain”, “Lady of Byblos”, “Lady of Turquoise” and “Lady of Faience”. The “west” or “Western Mountain” also refers to the realm of the dead, as it is the place of the setting sun. Byblos was a port on the Lebanese coast, and played an important role in Egyptian trade and the importing of cedar wood, as Egypt had no native timber that could be used for the construction of boats or large buildings. Egypt had turquoise mines from the Predynastic times in the Sinai Peninsula: a temple of Hathor was found at the mining site of Serabit el-Khadim. Faience was a glazed ceramic material composed of crushed quartz or quartz sand and usually blue or green in colour. (Gahlin 2014:34)

### 7.2.1 Rituals and Sympathetic Magic

When a child was born, seven Hathors came to his bedside to decide his future life. The Hathors were like fairy godmothers that appeared at the birth of a young Egyptian to prophesy his destiny. They appeared in the form of young women at the births of Ahmes Deir ek Bahri, Mutemuia at Luxor and of Cleopatra at Armant. (Hamlyn 1965:111)



**Figure 7.27 The god Bes, on a coloured relief at the temple of Hathor, Dendera. (Mallakh and Bianchi 1980:49)**



The god Bes was one of the divinities associated with the rites of the divine birth. He was also regarded as the protective spirit of childbirth, and recent studies showed that he could have been an Egyptian priest in the guise of a lion. Bes is usually represented with the head of a lion and the body of a dwarf. Bes was a protector of those who invoked his help. His image was frequently carved on beds and chairs. (Mallakh and Bianchi 1980:48)

Amulets were miniature devices believed to assist the owner or wearer with powers of magical protection. Miniature representations of Bes, Taweret and Hathor were acquired to ensure the protection and influences of the divine world. Other popular amulets were the scarab, with its solar associations, the protective “udjat” or Eye of Horus associated with wholeness and healing, and the “tyet”. The “tyet” amulet was important for the protection of women during pregnancy and childbirth. Certain spells had to be recited over specific amulets, spell 30 of the magical text on Papyrus Leiden 1,348 had to be recited four times over a “dwarf of clay” placed on the forehead of a woman, to assist in a difficult labour. (Gahlin 2014:204)

Evidence of fertility rituals was evident in the homes, involving imagery of Bes, and Taweret and also at sacred places such as tombs, temples and shrines involving votive offerings such as fertility figurines. The goddess Hathor and the ithyphallic god Min, were closely associated with fertility. During or even earlier in the Graeco-Roman period, women seem to have exposed their genitals before the cult statue of Hathor in an attempt to assimilate the goddess’s fertility. They wore amulets, and sympathetic magic was also used during childbirth. Spell 28 of the magical text written on the Papyrus Leiden 1.348 declares:

“Hathor, the Lady of Dendera, is the one giving birth.” (Gahlin 2014:208)

This meant that Hathor would give birth, and then suffer on behalf of the woman who is actually in labour. A transfer of pain was believed to take place. The playing of musical instruments, singing and dancing also appear to have been important during the time of childbirth. (Gahlin 2014:207)

At Deir el-Medina, on fragments of wall paintings, the period of confinement and celebration following a successful birth was described. The scenes include parts of

figures of the household spirit deity Bes, a dancing female flute player with a Bes tattoo on her thigh, the convolvulus plant which was associated with fertility, a child, the lower part of a kneeling woman with convolvulus, and a servant girl. From the Tales of Wonder, a collection of stories composed during the middle Kingdom (c.2055-1650BCE) and found on Papyrus Westcar, it was noted that beer drinking was considered compulsory after childbirth, but only after the period of 14 days of cleansing, and also eating honey cake that kept the demons away, and to assist with the strength of the mother. (Gahlin 2014:208)

During the first millennium BCE, a practice known as incubation became popular. People went to sleep in structures known as sanatoria or healing sanctuaries, built specifically for this purpose inside the precincts of temples, in order to have healing or helpful dreams, and even to help solve infertility problems. Part of the eighteenth-dynasty ruler Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri was converted into a sanatorium. There were occasions where the gods appeared to people in dreams and in this way assisted the sleeper to form a particular decision, a type of oracular consultation. During the New Kingdom (c.1550-c.1069 BCE) a Theban official was said to have been inspired by the goddess Hathor in a dream to build his tomb in a certain place. (Gahlin 2014:220)



**Figure 7.28** The columns for hieroglyphs above the heads of Nebamun's guests have been left blank, but one Theban tomb has the words: "Give me 18 measures of wine: Behold I should love to drink to drunkenness, my insides are as dry as straw" (Gahlin 2014:229)

### 7.2.2 Hathor, “the House of Horus”

Inscriptions on the temple of Horus at Edfu (ancient Mesen) refer to Hathor marrying Horus. Her name also means “the House of Horus”. The Pharaoh was sometimes depicted as suckled by the goddess in cow form, as shown by a statue of Pharaoh Amenhotep II (c.1427-1400 BCE) in the Cairo Museum from Deir el-Bahri of the Eighteenth-Dynasty. She was also sometimes identified with the Eye of Re, and she appeared on occasions as the sun god’s daughter. (Gahlin 2014:34)

In some traditions Hathor is the mother of Horus the falcon deity, and also of the Pharaoh, (which is closely associated with Horus), although the myth of Isis and Osiris suggests Isis to be Horus’s mother. Some iconographers portrayed Isis with cow’s horns, although the cow is originally Hathor’s, and she was also often described as the nurse of Horus, which led to the pictures of her as a cow suckling the pharaoh. Hathor was also believed to suckle the dead, and to sustain them on their journey to the netherworld. (Patrick 1972:31)



**Figure 7.29** Details from the wall of the corridor of the tomb of Ramses IX illustrate the sun boat of Khnum, guided by the benign serpents, the ancestors, and the gods Hathor and Horus. (Carpiceci 2000:98)

In the Horus mythology, Horus, as a child, narrowly escaped being destroyed by Seth, who had murdered his father Osiris. When Horus, as a man, wanted to claim his father's rank and further the leadership of the gods when Ra, as Ra-Harakhte grew old, Seth contested his claim, and demanded that Horus should justify it in battle. Ra wanted Seth to be his successor, but most of the gods favored Horus. When some gods pointed out to Ra that his shrines were empty, he left the debate in a bad temper. Hathor lured him out of his bad mood by performing a striptease. This cheered Ra up and he returned to the meeting where he demanded that Seth and Horus should resolve their dispute. (Patrick 1972:40)

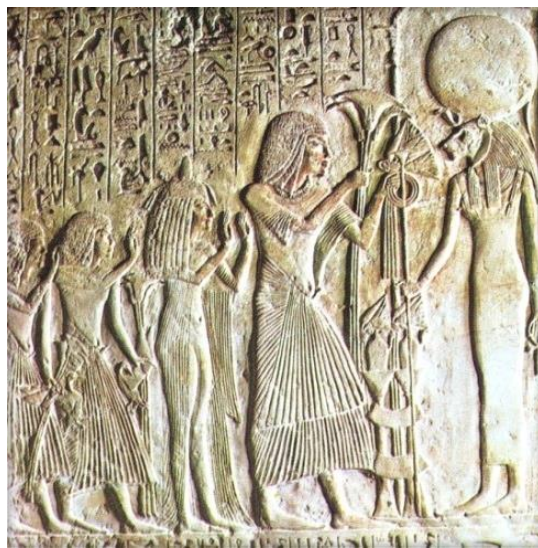
Horus was associated as one of the divine triad at the cult center of Abydos. He is mostly associated with the temple at Edfu, where he was worshipped as part of a triad with his consort Hathor, and their child Harsomtus. He was also closely associated with Hierakonpolis (Town of the Hawk, the ancient Nekhen) in the south, and Behdet in the Delta. As "Horus of Behdet" he was represented as a winged sun disk. (Gahlin 2014:35)

Sympathetic magic was an important aspect of ancient Egyptian magic. According to the Horus mythology, Horus had survived the threat of snakes and scorpions in the marshes of the Delta, and if children were identified with the young god, they could be protected from harm. Depending on the texts, Hathor or Isis had successfully given birth to Horus, and so women having a difficult labour might transfer the pain by identifying themselves with that goddess. (Gahlin 2014:191)

### 7.2.3: The lioness Sekhmet and the Destruction of Humankind

Hathor was also feared as the Eye of Ra. She had taken the form of the lioness deity Sekhmet, the lion-headed goddess of epidemics, to punish rebellious mankind. In the myth of the destruction of humankind, Re the sun god was king of both the divine and the mortal worlds. He was described as elderly, with bones made of silver, flesh of gold and hair of lapis lazuli. When Re learnt that humankind was plotting a rebellion against him he wanted to destroy all humans. He felt that he must first get advice from other deities. The gods had to arrive secretly so that the human beings would not discover that their plans were discovered. (Gahlin 2014:71)

Among the deities that were summoned were Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Nut, Nun and a goddess referred to as the “Eye of Ra”. This was Hathor in her peaceful manifestation: she changed into Sekhmet when she became wild. The gods suggested that Re should send his “Eye” to slaughter the humans as they tried to escape into the desert. Re took their advice, and the goddess Hathor in the form of Sekhmet, obliged. After a day of slaughter, Re was compassionate and felt that there was enough slaughter. He wanted Sekhmet as the Eye of Re to stop the killing, but Sekhmet was out of control and ready to wipe out the human race. (Gahlin 2014:71)



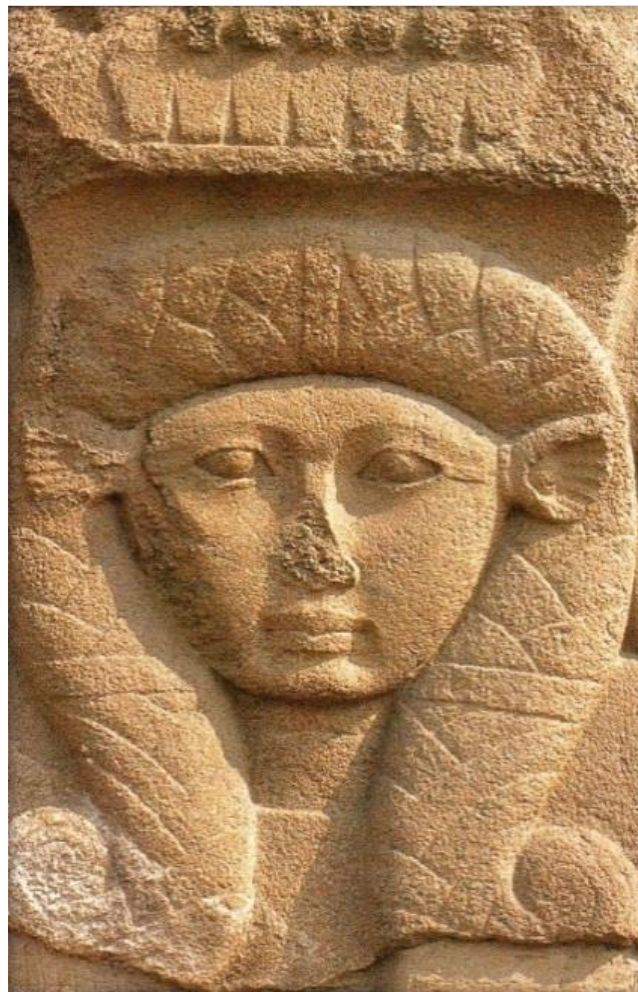
**Figure 7.30** The lion-headed Sekhmet receives offerings of lotus flowers from Imen-m-hebra and family; a family tomb relief carving, now in the Cairo Museum. This shows Sekhmet as a chosen deity of a family, and the offering of lotus flowers personifies her son Nefertum, who completes the Memphis triad of gods. (Ptah, Sekhmet and Nefertum). (Patrick 1987:32)

Re tried to stop her. He sent his messengers to Aswan in the south to fetch a large amount of red ochre, and take it to his temple at Heliopolis, where the high priest was instructed to grind the hematite. Maid servants were ordered to crush enough barley to make 7,000 jars of beer; mixed with the red ochre it looked like blood. (Gahlin 2014:71)

The next morning Re ordered the fields where Sekhmet was to resume her killing to be flooded with the red beer. The goddess, thinking that it was human blood, drank all the beer. This stopped her slaughter, and she changed back to the goddess Hathor. (Gahlin 2014:71)

### 7.2.4 Hathor, the lady of the Sycamore

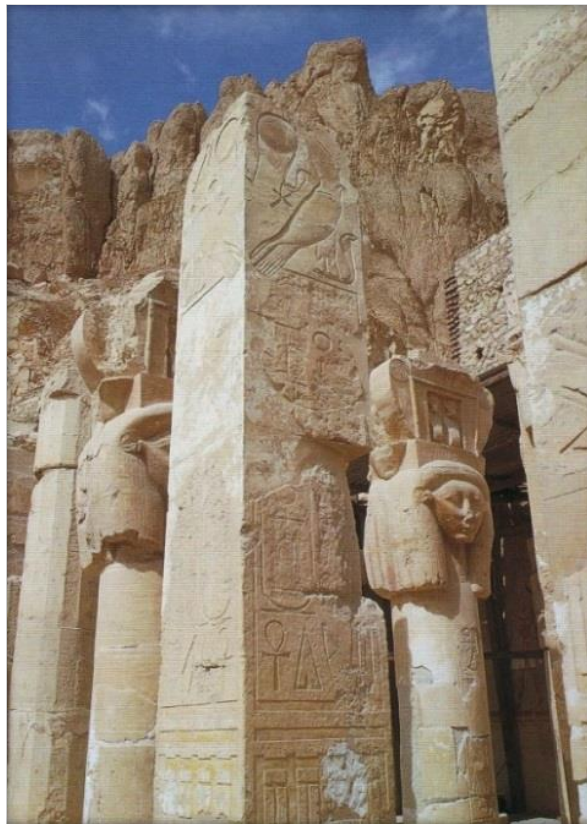
Possibly because of the shade and the fruit provided by trees, goddesses associated with protection, mothering and nurturing were associated with them. Hathor, Nut and Isis appear frequently in religious imagery and literature as a woman with a tree on her head, as a tree with the upper half of a woman growing out of it, or as a semi-personified tree with arms. Hathor was sometimes referred to as “mistress of the date palm” (this refers to the male palm, imaw) and in the Book of the Dead the goddess was occasionally portrayed in front of this tree. She could also be called “the lady of the sycamore” (the “nehet”, which also means refuge) or even “The lady of the southern sycamore” meaning the actual tree that grew in Memphis during the Old Kingdom (c.2686-c.2181 BCE) at the temple of Ptah. (Gahlin 2014:83)



**Figure 7.31 Hathor, lady of Dendera, retains a reputation for helping women who have fertility problems. Even today, women who want to conceive still visit her temple. (Gahlin 2014:207)**

According to the Book of the Dead two “sycamores of turquoise” grew on the eastern horizon at the place where the sun rises each morning. This meant that the sycamore also had a male aspect, as a manifestation of the solar deity Re-Horakhty. Gods were thought to live in the branches of the sycamores on the eastern horizon. The goddesses Hathor and Nut appear in a funerary context as tree goddesses offering shade, food and water to the souls of the dead, who in the form of human-headed birds “bas” enjoyed the food. The “bas” of the dead might be seen sitting on the branches of a tree, as the gods were imagined on the eastern horizon. Sycamores were often planted near tombs and modules of leaves of this tree were used as funerary amulets. (Gahlin 2014:83)

The papyrus plant symbolized freshness, flourishing youth and joy to the ancient Egyptians. They would wear or carry a tiny amulet in the shape of a single stem and umbel of papyrus. This had to be made of green or blue-green faience, and it was referred to as “wadj”, meaning green. Goddesses such as Hathor, Bastet and Neith were often shown holding a papyriform scepter. (Gahlin 2014:84)

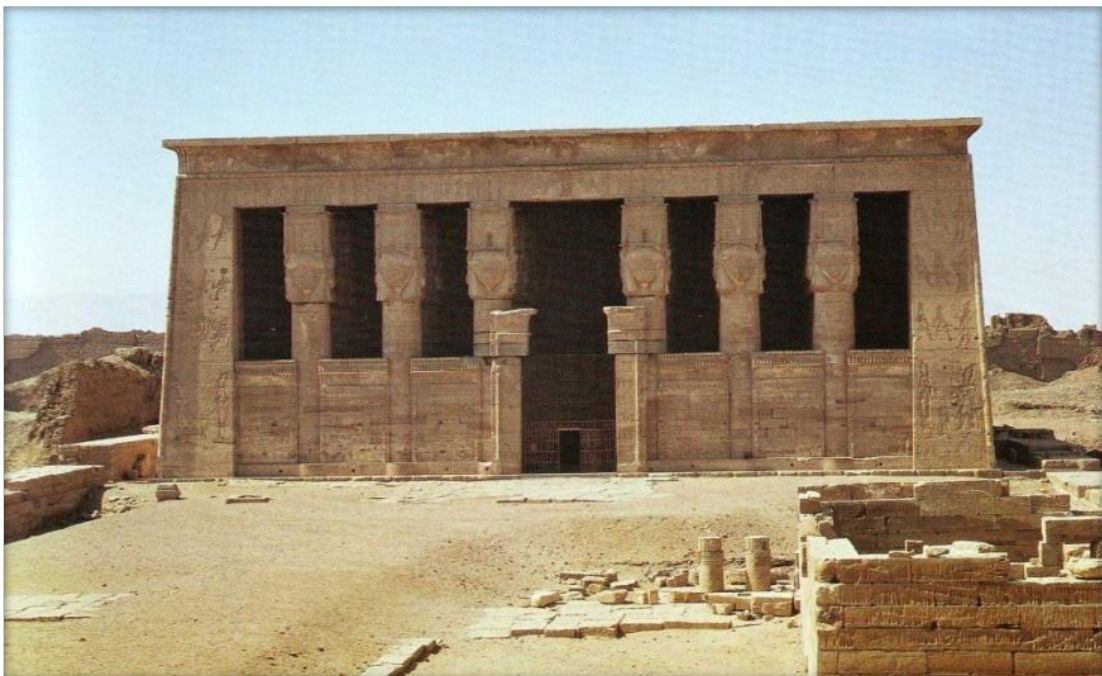


**Figure 7.32** The capitals of the Hathor temple at Philae, with the details of the volutes around the shrine, with the sun cobras. They seem to precede the Ionian capital by a thousand years. (Carpiceci 2000:109)

### 7.3 TEMPLES DEDICATED TO HATHOR

During the Dynastic Period of Egyptian history, from the formation of the state of Egypt in c.3100 BCE, to the conquest of Alexander the Great in 332 BC, Egypt was divided into administrative districts, called “nomes” (or districts), each with its own capital. There were 22 “nomes” in the Nile Valley in Upper Egypt, and 20 in the Delta region of Lower Egypt. Each “nome” had its own cult center, and priesthood to service the needs of the local deity or “njwty”, derived from the ancient Egyptian word “niwt” (city), and a temple with a shrine for the home of the god or goddess. (Gahlin 2014:20)

Each cult center tended not only to have only one deity, but a whole divine family or triad, such as Ptah, Sekhmet and Nefertem at Memphis or Osiris, Isis and Horus at Abydos. There might even be a mythological link between deities associated with temples some distance apart; for example, Hathor of Dendera and Horus of Edfu were united when Hathor was said to make an annual voyage to Edfu on certain festival days, or for the Feast of the Beautiful Meeting, to be united with Horus. (Gahlin 2014:20)



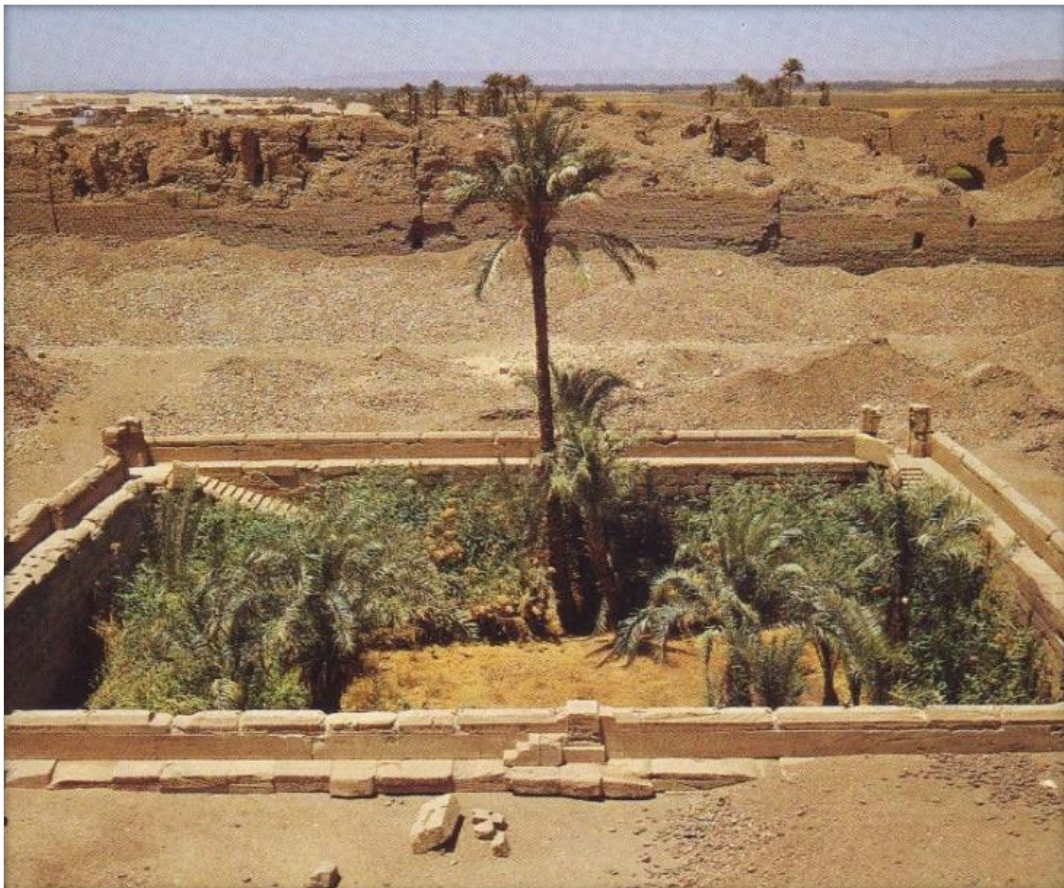
**Figure 7.33 Temple of Hathor, Dendera. (Mallakh and Bianchi 1980:45)**

One of the temples built for Hathor was Abu Simbel in Nubia. Here Ramses ordered the construction of two massive rock-cut temples, the first dedicated to



himself and the official gods of the Egyptian state, and the second to Hathor, the patroness of motherhood and goddess of love, and to queen Neftari. On the façade of this second shrine stands a row of colossal statues, four images of Rameses and two of Neftari. When the great works were completed, about 1266 BCE the royal couple and their daughter Meryetamen sailed up the Nile to inaugurate the shrine. (Papanek et al 1993:92)

The viceroy of Nubia Hekanakht, as well as an entourage of courtiers and attendants accompanied them. To record this event the viceroy commissioned a stele to be carved into the rock nearby. Here the Pharaoh and his daughter are seen performing the appropriate rituals for the dedication of two temples. (Papanek et al 1993:92)



**Figure 7.34** The sacred lake. Temple of Hathor. Dendera. Dynasty XXX to Roman period. (380BCE-100C.E) (Mallakh and Bianchi 1980:47)

Hathor's main cult center was at Dendera, from the old Kingdom, (c.2686-c.2181 BCE). It was the name given to the ruins of Tentyra, the sacred city, which contained three sanctuaries: the sanctuary of Ihy, son of Horus, of which nothing

remains but one of the monumental gates; the sanctuary of Horus, almost completely vanished; and the temple sanctuary of Hathor, with distinct ruins and an almost intact temple. (Carpiceci 2000:163)

The origins of the temple, which was restored by the Ptolomies and partially reconstructed by the Romans, are dated to the time of Khufu and Pepy I. The buildings of the sanctuary for the goddess Hathor are aligned along an axis from the main entrance. The temple complex at Philae included the pavilion of Nactanebo, the monumental temple of Isis with its annexes of the pavilion of Trajan, and a small Hathor temple. (Carpiceci 2000:163)

Egyptian temples were seldom constructed in isolation. They usually formed one unit within a precinct, shared by subsidiary buildings used in the cult. The main sanctuary of Hathor at Dendera had ancillary structures, including the “Mammisi” (Birth House) of Augustus and the Sacred Lake. A “Mammisi” is a structure which the mysteries associated with the birth of the so-called deity’s offspring. Usually a child god was celebrated. They were enclosed within a wall of mud brick erected around the perimeter of the precinct to shield the gods and their priests from the outside world. At Dendera, Hathor and her consort Horus were the parents of Ihy, also known as Harsomtous. The best preserved of the three structures was dedicated to Ihy by the Roman Emperor Augustus who added Egypt to his territory after defeating Anthony and Cleopatra. (Mallakh and Bianchi 1980:47)

### **7.3.1 Site plan of the Dendera complex** (Carpiceci 2000:162)

Legend:

1. The paved avenue, leading from the Nile to the Sanctuary.
2. Monumental Roman fountains.
3. Massive wall and North Gate.
4. The “Mammisi of August” a small temple on the border of the complex, with Hathor columns. The head of Bes is included in the decoration. Birth scenes of the divine infant Horus, modelled on those in the Mammisi of Nectanebo, appear everywhere. The building was begun by Nero and decorated by Trajan, Hadrian and Antonius.
5. The remains of a fifth-century Christian-Coptic Church.

6. "The Mammisi of Nectanebo". Here are scenes of the gods and Amon creating Hathor's Divine Child. The goddess may also be interpreted as Isis and the child as Horus.
7. The sacred enclosure of the temple of Horus.
8. Hypostyle Hall, opening on the court. Measuring 25m x 42.50m, 18m high and with 24 Hathor-headed columns. Celestial figures decorate the ceiling dominated by the goddess Nut, creator of the sun.
9. "Hall of Appearances". Various rooms for storage and the preparations of offerings with recipes for perfumes and lotions.
10. Hall of Offerings.
11. "Venerable Seat" or sanctuary of the temple, decorated with scenes of Nile processions.
12. "Corridor of Mysteries" with eleven chapels, decorated with initiation scenes into the Hathoric mysteries.
13. "Chapel of Sanctity".
14. A stairway leading to the terrace. With the kiosk of twelve Hathor columns, and the "Tomb of Osiris" consisting of two chapels. Behind the stairs, a narrow gallery in the walls leads to twelve small crypts decorated with themes of a religious nature concerning the Hathor mysteries.
15. Temple of Isis-Hathor. It has two buildings, one with columns and pillars on a cross axis, the other with a small cell dedicated to the birth of Isis.
16. Sacred Lake (28m x 34m) still almost complete.
17. "Sanatorium" with a basin for the "miraculous water" used for divine healing, with baths and small dressing rooms.



## 7.4 SUMMARY

The transitional stages of the human life cycle were vulnerable times, also coinciding with the fundamental changes from non-pregnant to pregnant, from fetus to child, and from child to adult. The ancient Egyptians believed that rituals were necessary to help them through the various difficult phases of pregnancy, childbirth, early childhood and puberty. If this happened without mishap, they thanked the gods, because a woman's ability to conceive was very important to the security of her marriage, her social standing, and the comfort of her spirit after death. That is why many childless women consulted the divine spirits, or spirit world for assistance.

## Conclusion

Ancient civilizations like the Babylonians and Egyptians recognized the need for a national system of worship. A wide variety of local beliefs and practices were eventually combined into common foundation myths. In these myths the world was ruled by gods and goddesses, each with their own characters. Kings recognized that a national worship could unify their people under their rule, and could establish them as divinely appointed rulers. In Mesopotamia and Egypt, the king became the chief intermediary between the gods and humankind. In Rome each emperor was anointed a god upon his death. (Nat Geo Secret Societies 2017:9)

Some of the earliest of man's archaeological artefacts and mythologies, from Western Asia, the South Russian plain and the valley of the Don, were very primitive forms of female earth mother figurines. These figurines, known as "Venuses", portrayed women with large breasts and distended bellies, emphasizing the characteristics of womanhood and pregnancy. Later in the Chalcolithic (Bronze-Stone) and Bronze Age period the cult of the mother goddess became a dominant feature of the religious cultures from India to Britain. (Allegro 1977:123)

Between the fifth and third millennia BCE the cult developed in the Fertile Crescent, in Western Asia, the Indus Valley, the Aegean and Crete. It had a vital role in the development of the religions of the Ancient Near East. With the domestication of flocks and herds, the concept of earth and heaven joined in union, reflected the beginning of myths and rituals of the "sacred marriage" between the sky father and the earth mother. Sometimes the male deity was identified with the sun, as the fertilizer of earth, and the great mother was identified with the moon, with her cycle of 28 days reflecting her menstrual period. (Allegro 1977:124)

In the myths, the mother goddess's husband or son was represented as symbolizing the vegetation appearing in the spring, dying in summer and dormant during the winter. In Ancient Mesopotamia it was the Sumerian Dumuzi or Akkadian Tammuz who was reunited with Inanna, or the Semitic Ishtar, in the spring. He was symbolised as a youthful god of nature, as a symbol of fertility that

died annually with the changing of the seasons. He had to be rescued from the underworld by his wife or lover for spring to arrive. (Allegro 1977:125)

To re-create the ritual return of life to the upper world, the part of the “dead” god was enacted by the rulers or kings, who were joined in a “sacred marriage” ceremony with their queens or cult-priestesses in the role of the mother goddess. This union gave the king the status of the dying god, the symbol of life and death. The Babylonian spring-festival of “Akitu” was celebrated by the ceremonial abdication of the king and his installation in the shrine of Marduk.

(Allegro 1977:126)

This deity replaced Tammuz, but preserved many of the characteristics of the consort of Ishtar. On the eleventh of the month of Nisan, a “marriage” ceremony was performed between the king, now incarnated with the god’s power, and a priestess, probably of royal blood. This symbolized the fertilization of the earth by the god. The goddess’s consort was a secondary figure at first, reflecting the male’s inferior role in the creative process; later it became a more dominant role. (Allegro 1977:126)

When the cult of the mother goddess spread through Anatolia to the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean areas in 3000 BCE, it brought with it all her cult objects, the dove, snake, double axe, horns of consecration, phalli, and female figurines. The goddess was represented by sacred pillars and trees. From 2100-1700 BCE the goddess changed into an individualized anthropomorphic figure which had the functions of earth mother, mistress of trees, and lady of wild beasts. These various aspects and attributes became divided among a variety of different goddesses. (Allegro 1977:130)

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