Dying and Rising Deities of the Ancient Near East

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Acknowledgements and Declaration of Authorship

My primary gratitude regarding this thesis is to my family, both old and new, for their kindness and support throughout this degree. I appreciate their help in proof-reading various parts of this work. I particularly wish to thank my brother Jeff and my father-in-law Bill for reading over drafts of this thesis and for their helpful comments.

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I hereby state that this entire thesis was composed by me and that all of the research that went into its composition was my own. Any mistakes, either in proof-reading or content are mine and do not reflect the contributions of the people named above.

Abstract

This thesis is an examination of four myths of dying and rising deities of the ancient Near East and the question to be addressed is whether there is any connection between these four myths. The myths of dying and rising deities includes the Egyptian myth of Osiris, the myth of Inanna from Mesopotamia, the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone, and the Ugaritic myth of Baal and Mot.

This comparative analysis will centre on both previous theories on links between these myths and a theory as to one viable solution. Of major importance is the suggestion of James Frazer in his work The Golden Bough that the dying and rising deities were dying gods of vegetation.

The conclusion that is eventually reached as to a connection between these myths is more related to psychology than anthropology. Specifically, the aspect of mourning and the nature symbolism found in these myths suggests that they are a psychological response to the age-old human fear of death.

Abreviations

ANET- Pritchard, James, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, Princeton:1969.

ARTU- DeMoor, An Anthology of Religious Texts From Ugarit, Leiden:1987.

BASOR- Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research.

BD- Faulkner, R.O., The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead, London:1985.

CML- Gibson, J.C.L., Canaanite Myths and Legends, Edinburgh:1970.

CT- Faulkner, R.O., The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts Vol.1-3, Warminster:1973.

CTA- Herdner, Andree, Corpus des Tablets en Cuneiformes Alphabetiques Decouvertes a Ras Shamra de 1929 a 1939, Paris:1963.

DMes- Alster, Bendt, Death in Mesopotamia, Copenhagen:1980.

HDem- Athanassakis, Apostlos, "Homeric Hymn to Demeter" from The Homeric Hymns, Baltimore:1976.

IEJ- Israel Exploration Journal

IN- Kramer, Samuel Noah & Wolkstein, Diane, Inanna, New York:1983.

JEA- Journal of Egyptian Archaeology

JNES- Journal of Near Eastern Studies

KTU- Dietrich, M., Loretz, O., Sanmartin, J., Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit, Neukirchen:1976.

MMes- Dalley, Stephanie, Myths from Mesopotamia, Oxford:1991.

Plu- Griffiths, John, Plutarch's De Iside Et Osiride, Cambridge:1970.

PT- Faulkner, R.O., The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts, Oxford:1969.

T- Gaster, Theodore, Thespis, New York:1950.

UF- Ugarit-Forschunngen

Citation Note- When original sources are quoted, line numbers will be cited where possible. If line numbers are not clearly given, only page numbers will be cited.

Introduction

Gods who Die but Return

There are four key geographical areas in the ancient Near East which produced myths about gods who die and come back to existence. These myths are fairly well known to students of ancient western history and are often mentioned in scholarly works without much explanation. The most famous of these myths is perhaps the myth of Osiris from ancient Egypt. It is remarkable to remember, when one puts this myth into historical perspective, that Osiris was worshipped in one form or another for over three thousand years. Very few other religious traditions could make any such claim.

One that could possibly be made is the Mesopotamian myth of Inanna, or Ishtar. The texts regarding this story go back probably well into prehistory. Among the more interesting aspects of this narrative is the fact that it survived, in apparently intact fashion, several cultural shifts within Mesopotamian history. This myth also has the advantage of coming from comparatively well-preserved sources.

The city of Ugarit on the coast of modern Syria possessed archives that have yielded up the myth of Baal and Mot. Due to its fragmentary nature, the myth of Baal and Mot is one of the most elusive of the myths of dying

and rising deities. Ugarit disappeared from history around 1200 B.C., but the worship of Baal survived long after that in the Levantine region, notably attested to in the Old Testament.

Finally, there is the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone. Its inclusion is justified on two points. Firstly, from early times Greece was closely related culturally to Western Asia and Egypt. Secondly, from the point of view of comparative mythology, the story of Demeter and Persephone is a prime example of the genre of dying and rising myths, and much would be lost by excluding it. Moreover, the primary source of the myth of Demeter and Persephone comes from a single early and coherent literary account. The "Homeric Hymn to Demeter" is a delight to read after having to piece together the other myths from less than perfect remains.

These are the four myths which will be analyzed within this study. Other myths from within each of these cultures will also be looked at from time to time to illuminate various topics that arise. For example, when analyzing Mesopotamian views on mortality, one can hardly ignore the Epic of Gilgamesh. Likewise, the works of Homer can be used to shed some light on similar Greek concepts.

Of course, the entire point of a comparative analysis is to establish whether there is any connection between these myths. Previous attempts to analyze such myths have usually focused upon the vegetation aspect of

the deities who die. Specifically, James Frazer in his work The Golden Bough interpreted these dying and rising deities as being "dying gods of vegetation". One major purpose of this study is to re-analyze this particular claim.

But from a wider perspective, the desire to prove or disprove a link between these myths is important to our understanding of ancient Near Eastern religion. For example, if the link between the myths of dying and rising deities really is vegetation, then this would indicate that the religions of the ancient Near East were nearly unanimous in their religious reaction to the agricultural activities in which they indulged. On the other hand, if vegetation is not an underlying theme of all of these myths, then perhaps many of the statements regarding the importance of matters like fertility and the seasonal cycle in ancient Near Eastern religion are called into question.

The study of mythology cannot be described as entirely scientific. However, the importance of finding some order in what can only be described as chaotic sources cannot be underestimated, and it is my belief that a rational study can be made of the material in question. The key to answering the question of whether the myths of dying and rising deities are connected lies in looking for an element or elements in each myth that is or are present in the other three myths.

As in any academic study, importance will be laid on

looking at previous attempts to study the myths of dying and rising deities. It is the small number of studies of these myths in the last half century that attracted me to the subject. Virtually no comparative studies have been done on this subject in recent years, though there are quite a few concerning single cultures. It is to the late part of the last century and the early part of this century to which we must turn to find large scale treatments covering several cultures.

The most famous study related to the topic of dying and rising deities is James Frazer's The Golden Bough. In its final, third, edition, it numbered twelve volumes, though the version this analysis will use is the abridged one volume edition. The abridgement was carried out by Frazer himself and reads more cogently than the twelve volume set.

It is to Frazer that we owe the theory of dying gods of vegetation. Frazer argued that the gods who died represented the seasonal cycle of agriculture, and that this annual "drama" was mythologized by ancient man. Frazer cited as evidence gods such as Osiris, Tammuz and Dionysos.

Frazer may have been one of the first to explain these myths as being related to agriculture, but he was hardly the last. A powerful example of a recent similar line of reasoning can be found in the works of the Ugaritic scholar J.C. DeMoor, though it is restricted to Ugarit. In his study of the myths relating to the

Ugaritic god Baal, he sees those myths as reflecting alternating seasons.

Surrounded by adulation in his own day, Frazer now suffers from a consensus against him, and his views are often airily dismissed as if they no longer merit serious attention. He is not the first scholar to undergo such a fate.[1] But a close examination of Frazer's work will show that while he may have been wrong in some of his conclusions, he was in other ways on the right track. In any case, it is time that his insights were given a fresh scrutiny, a conclusion that could equally be applied to the work of DeMoor.

This study holds that Frazer was, at least in essentials correct in his theorizing that the myths of dying and rising deities originated from of a mythologizing of the agricultural cycle. Closely related to this is the idea that resurrection was an inherent element in all of the myths of dying and rising deities. The following model was drawn up.

In Egypt there was not only a myth about a dying and rising deity, but the myth was linked with practised religion, especially the funerary cult. Could it be that the myth of Osiris' death and return supplied the

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[1]. For strong statements criticizing especially those elements of his theories which concern this study in particular, see G. Wagner, Pauline Baptism and the Pagan Mysteries, and J.Z. Smith, "Dying and Rising Gods", Encyclopedia of Religion Vol. 4, 1987, pp..521-52. Indeed, if Smith were to be believed, we would have no subject; he has consigned it to academic oblivion. This is hardly a position for open-minded scholarship to adopt.

theoretical framework for understanding the seasonal cycle, and that beyond this, Osiris was also a personification of the forces of life and death in the human sphere? The concept of human resurrection will then, in the thinking of ancient man, be derived by analogy from what they perceived going on in the natural world.

The chief question then becomes the extent to which these notions are to be found in the other myths we study. In this enquiry it will be useful to distinguish, in the agricultural sphere, whether the god concerned is connected with the growing grain or whether he is simply responsible for the conditions under which it grows. It will also be useful, in the human sphere, to distinguish between a belief in a real afterlife and one in which the dead simply end up in a shadowy underworld with no genuine hope for the future. It will not be surprising to find that there are differences between the four myths on these issues, and that matters with which we are concerned are not treated in the same way within them. That is to be expected when myths with similar purposes appear across the boundaries of quite different cultures. Part I of this study will be spent on defining the individual myths. Part II will examine the key elements and motifs which, in a sense, they share, however differently they are conceived. Sources other than the four myths mentioned in Part I will be drawn upon in this part. Part III will concern the conclusions that can be

drawn from the evidence presented in the earlier sections.

Several terms need to be defined at this point. A complete glossary can be found in the back of this study that contains a variety of terms and lists any associated problems. One of the most confusing is **resurrection**. For the purposes of this study, resurrection means the return to a meaningful existence after death. In the case of Osiris, this may be though to stretch the definition since Osiris never comes back to full life, but goes on to rule in the afterlife. But even with Osiris, a form of positive life is re-achieved and Osiris comes back to a conscious existence.

Another important term is the **seasonal cycle** which occurs in reference to the agricultural associations of the dying and rising deities. In this study, the seasonal cycle will refer to the progress of the agricultural year and attempts made to link myths with the dying gods of vegetation.

When it comes to the question of where human beings go after death, terms such as **afterlife**, **netherworld**, or **underworld** are commonly employed. In general, the netherworld and underworld are used to describe places where the dead are supposed to go and where they remain dead, like the Greek or Mesopotamian underworld. In contrast, the afterlife is used to describe the location where the "dead" go and live in a blissful state, as most obviously in the case of the Egyptian afterlife. On

closer examination, however, it will be found that there are some negative associations attached to Egyptian ideas of the afterlife, and even some positive associations attached to the underworld.

The term **Dying Gods of Vegetation** refers to the theory that the dying and rising deities were related to the growing process or the agricultural year. In the context of this study, the definition given by James Frazer in The Golden Bough will suffice (see glossary).

Immortality is a concept that bears frequently on the myths of dying and rising deities and related myths. For the purposes if this study, immortality can be defined as a state of existence where death never occurs. The primary example of this is Ut-Napistim from the Epic of Gilgamesh, who is given immortality by the gods and does not die.

The conclusion reached by this study will take us into the area of modern psychology. Given the important aspect of mourning which is present in each of the four myths, is it possible that there is a psychological link between the myths of dying and rising deities and is this to be traced to the perennial fear of mortality which pervades them beneath the surface?

It is therefore to the nightmarish realm of the underworld that we will in the end turn to find a link between the myths of dying and rising deities. Throughout all of the myths of dying and rising deities and even in related mythology, we find a morbid fascination with the

underworld. More significantly, it is the entity who presides over the realm of the dead, the ruler of the underworld, on whom we will eventually centre our attention. Sometimes threatening, always to be feared, the ruler of the underworld figures substantially in the myths of dying and rising deities and perhaps it is time to give him or her credit due. But the key link between the myths of dying and rising deities is the psychological fear of death and this fear is found in the images associated with the underworld.

The theme of life and death pervades the myths of dying and rising deities. If James Frazer and others saw a link between this theme and the cycle of the seasons, they can be forgiven. In some respects we will find that they were right. The myths of dying and rising deities were in essence about the ordering of the cosmos and specifically, give a glimpse of what man might face after death. Be it the realm of the Greek god Hades or the underworld of the Epic of Gilgamesh, it was the underworld to which the ancients who created these myths looked. This vision of death as a geographical location long outlived the ancient world, as Hamlet Act 3, scene 1, memorably puts it:

> "But that the dread of something after death,
> The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
> No traveller returns, puzzles the will..."

It is this "undiscover'd country" that the composers of the myths of dying and rising deities were fascinated by. But in the case of these myths, the entities who die

return, and in some of them a hope is held out to mankind that they, too, may escape death.

Chapter One

The Myth of Osiris

Egypt has a pre-eminent place in the story of antiquity and there are several reasons for this. The most obvious one is that Egypt left behind three thousand years' worth of visible and impressive monuments. Due to the unique climate of Egypt, the level of archaeological survival has been high and the civilization uncovered proved, moreover, to be not only impressive, but significant.

From Classical times onwards Egypt has been a land associated with mystery and the supernatural. The gods of ancient Egypt have an almost alien quality about them, yet appeal to us on a primal level. The religion of ancient Egypt, despite the volumes of archaeological reports and religious commentaries, has remained something of an enigma. Part of the reason for this is that unlike Greece or Rome, the Egyptians left behind no corpus of what we now consider mythological texts. The stories about their gods must be gleaned from a variety of non-narrative religious sources.

The very name of Egypt with its pyramids conveys pictures of a civilization which sought to evade death. It has been said of the ancient Egyptians that they were

obsessed with death and dying. It has also been stated in opposition to this that the archaeological record merely reflects what has survived, which is generally funerary, rather than a specifically ideological or theological. It is probable that there is a degree of truth in both of these statements. But regardless of this, there can be no doubt that Egypt has left the remains of a civilization more involved with the problem of death than most others in the history of mankind.

One of the key elements in the funerary cult of ancient Egypt was the myth of Osiris. The relationship between the myth and the funerary cult needs to be examined. Therefore, we should begin our analysis of the myth of Osiris with an examination of the funerary cult of ancient Egypt.

The evolution of the funerary cult in Egypt can be divided into three stages corresponding with the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms. Each of these three stages, while generally based on the same religious ideas, had its own distinctive characteristics. These differences are reflected in the tomb structures, funerary goods and funerary literature of the three periods.

The Old Kingdom is perhaps the best known for its funerary architecture. The spectacular pyramids of the Old Kingdom bear testimony to the amount of effort put into funerary architecture during that period. The technique of pyramid building began during the Third Dynasty with the construction of the Step Pyramid of

Djoser.[1] The Step Pyramid was actually a variation on another form of funerary architecture, the mastaba tomb. This consisted of a squat rectangular shaped structure placed over a tomb.[2] Although the pyramids were meant for members of the royal family, mastaba tombs were also built by individuals with wealth. This democratization of funerary beliefs progressed down the social scale as time went on.

The Old Kingdom did not leave behind an enormous amount of funerary goods, due largely to the fact that so many graves were plundered at the close of the Old Kingdom. However, something is known of what some of the grave goods would have been. Among the more prominent items discovered were stone vessels. In addition to these, it is clear that food offerings played a major role in the funerary cult.[3] Canopic jars, which contained the viscera of the mummy, are known from the Fourth Dynasty burial of Queen Hetepheres.[4]

The funerary literature of the Old Kingdom was the Pyramid Texts. As their name implies, these were a series of spells written on the walls of the pyramids. These spells were designed to help and protect the king in the afterlife. They date from the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties.[5]

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[1]. A.J. Spencer, Death in Ancient Egypt, p.233.

[2]. A.J. Spencer, Death in Ancient Egypt, pp.220-221.

[3]. A.J. Spencer, Death in Ancient Egypt, pp.48-49.

[4]. Ange Pierre Leca, The Cult of the Immortal, p.154.

[5]. PT, p.v.

There was a fair degree of variation in these spells and many of their meanings are quite unclear to us today. The following is an example of a Pyramid Text spell:

"Nu has commended the king to Atum, the Open-armed has commended the king to Shu, that he may cause yonder doors of the sky to be opened for the king, barring (ordinary) folk who have no name. Grasp the king by his hand and take the king to the sky, that he may not die on earth among men."[6]

The king is the only individual with whose name Osiris is associated in the Pyramid Texts, showing that at this stage the death of the divinized king was the main problem confronting them.[7] The identification of Osiris with kingship is fairly obvious. The king is addressed as Osiris in many of the Pyramid Text spells: "O Horus who is Osiris the king".[8] This is in sharp contrast to later periods such as the New Kingdom when the dead in general were associated with Osiris, as is shown in spells from the Book of the Dead which were meant for general use by all segments of Egyptian society:

"....I am Osiris, the firstborn of the company of the gods, eldest of the gods, heir to my father Geb; I am Osiris, Lord of Persons..."[9]

The Middle Kingdom in Egypt saw funerary literature of the same genre become more widespread in Egyptian society in the form of the Coffin Texts. In general, the

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[6]. PT, p.117, spell 361, line 604.

[7].John Gwyn Griffiths, The Origins of Osiris and his Cult, pp.44-47.

[8]. PT, p.5, Spell 26, line 19.

[9]. BD, p.70, Spell 69.

funerary literature and material remains of the Middle Kingdom reflect a growing spread of what had previously been royal iconography into the rest of Egyptian society.

Tomb architecture of the Middle Kingdom varied. Kings and members of the royal family were still buried in pyramids, but these pyramids were different in construction from those of the Old Kingdom. The most significant difference was that they were often built of mudbrick with stone casings.[10] The nobility of the Middle Kingdom were buried in rock-cut tombs.[11]

Grave goods, such as canopic jars, still played a major role. But one group of funerary items played a significant role during the Middle Kingdom. Wooden models, representing everything from servants to boats, were placed in Middle Kingdom tombs.[12] The purpose of these models was to serve as symbolic representations of the servants and items which the deceased wished to have with him in the afterlife.

The Coffin Texts of the Middle Kingdom were spells which were written on coffins. Their purpose was similar to that of the Pyramid Texts. The main difference was that the Coffin Texts were available to anyone who could afford a coffin. The following is an example of a Coffin Text spell:

"...I am powerful with this very great magic, within

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[10]. A.J. Spencer, Death in Ancient Egypt, p.236.

[11]. A.J. Spencer, Death in Ancient Egypt, p.228.

[12]. A.J. Spencer, Death in Ancient Egypt, p.62.

this my body and my place. I am one who recalls to himself what he had forgotten."[13]

It is the New Kingdom that presents us with most of the items which we commonly associate with ancient Egypt. The tomb of Tutankhamen alone produced a vast quantity of funerary items. The New Kingdom also produced a number of royal mummies which lay untouched until their discovery in modern times.

Rock-cut tombs were the norm for the New Kingdom. The most obvious examples of this type are the royal burials in the Valley of the Kings.[14] Nobles of wealth also had rock cut tombs. As in any age, the poor were buried in simple graves.

The grave goods of the New Kingdom were numerous. The tomb of Tutankhamen gives a fairly representative idea of what might have been in a royal tomb. One item that appears frequently in New Kingdom burials is the Ushabti figure. These were mummiform figures and were often accompanied with little tools. Like the wooden models of the Middle Kingdom, they were designed to do work for the deceased in the afterlife.[15] A specific chapter of the Book of the Dead was written on the Ushabti figures:

"O Shabti, allotted to me, if I be summoned or if I be detailed to do any work which has to be done in the

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[13]. R.B. Parkinson, Voices from Ancient Egypt, p.136.

[14]. A.J. Spencer, Death in Ancient Egypt, p.99.

[15]. Manfred Lurker, The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt, pp.125-126.

realm of the dead.....'Here I am,' you shall say."[16]

The Book of the Dead represents the evolution of the royal Pyramid Texts to common public use. Written often on scrolls, they consisted of spells designed to help the deceased in the afterlife. Although not the only form of funerary literature to exist in the New Kingdom, the spells of the Book of the Dead were the most common:

> "O Sole One, who shines in the Moon, O Sole One, who glows in the Sun, may N go forth from among those multitudes of yours who are outside, may those who are in sunshine release him, may the Netherworld be opened to him when N goes out into the day in order to do what he wishes on earth among the living."[17]

Key to the Egyptian concept of the afterlife is the myth of Osiris. Although the myth is known in a connected form only from the Greek version in Plutarch, the deity Osiris appears consistently throughout all of the funerary literature of ancient Egypt. The myth of Osiris' dying and revivication clearly provided a framework for Egyptian ideas on the afterlife.

However, a problem exists when trying to interpret the myth of Osiris. Like most Egyptian gods, Osiris had many roles and attributes and among them was his role as god of the corn. Was Osiris, as James Frazer claimed, a dying god of vegetation? Were his roles as funerary divinity and corn-god completely separate, or were they in some way connected?

In addition to this problem, the role of Osiris must

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[16]. BD. p.36, spell 16.

[17]. BD, p.36, spell 2.

be placed in perspective when regarding the funerary practices of the ancient Egyptians. Osiris was by no means the only funerary divinity in Egypt, and it is unclear how or when the myth of Osiris became connected to these practices. The funerary cult of ancient Egypt varied throughout its very long history and, as we have seen in its gradual democratization, it is clear that Egyptian funerary theology varied as well. But by examining the structure of the Osiris myth, some idea about what role that myth played in Egyptian religious thought may be determined.

The basic problem that confronts any analysis of the Osiris myth is its sources. Unfortunately, the main source for the Osiris myth is Plutarch. Although this version is very detailed in nature, it shows strong Greek influence and is separated enough in time from Pharaonic Egypt to raise the question of how far it can be trusted. An example of a major difference is in names, particularly the substitution of Typhon for Seth, presumably because he pursued Zeus as Seth pursued Osiris. Throughout much of Plutarch's work, there is an attempt to show how the Egyptian gods fitted into Greek mythology. This form of syncretism must be regarded with caution.[18]

Fortunately, Plutarch's account of the myth of Osiris can be at least partially cross-checked against Egyptian sources. Although no standard story of Osiris

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[18]. Plu, pp.137-145.

survives from Egyptian records, there are a multitude of references to the Osiris myth in the Pyramid Texts, the Coffin Texts, the Book of the Dead, and a few other texts. In addition to these, Egyptian art provides material regarding the myth of Osiris.

The most complete account of the myth of Osiris occurs on a stela from the 18th Dynasty.[19] Although it is in the form of a hymn rather than a story, it provides a number of significant references to the myth and confirms much of Plutarch's account. Less valuable is the Ikher-Nefrat stela in that it gives a few extra details.[20] With these sources, a fairly clear picture emerges of the basic myth of Osiris.

The myth of Osiris, as recounted by Plutarch, can be divided into several sections. After a preamble, the births of Osiris, Typhon, Isis and Nephthys are recounted as well as the unions amongst themselves:

"They say that Nepthys married Typhon, and that Isis and Osiris being in love, were united in the darkness of the womb."[21]

The myth goes on to describe Osiris as king and tells how he showed the Egyptians how to grow crops.

"It is said that Osiris when he was king, at once freed the Egyptians from their primitive and brutish manner of life; he showed them how to grow crops...."[22]

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[19]. Miriam Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Vol.2, p.81-85.

[20]. ANET, p.329f.

[21]. Plu, p.137, lines 11-13.

[22]. Plu, p.137, line 16.

In the next stage of the myth, Osiris' brother Typhon decides to usurp the throne of Osiris. Typhon and his fellow conspirators entrap Osiris in a chest during a feast and cast it into the sea.

"Then the conspirators ran and slammed the lid on, and after securing it with bolts from the outside and also with molten lead poured on, they took it out to the river and let it go to the sea..."[23]

Plutarch does not deal with the actual death of Osiris. Egyptian tradition suggests that he was drowned and this is mentioned in the Pyramid Texts with reference to Osiris:

"Horus has mustered the gods for you, and they will never escape from you in the place where you drowned."[24]

The chest containing Osiris is washed out to sea and eventually comes ashore at Byblos. Isis learns of this and returns the body to Egypt. During a time when Isis is not present, Typhon finds the body of Osiris and cuts it into fourteen pieces:

"...Typhon, when he was hunting by night in the moonlight, came upon it. He recognized the body and having cut it into fourteen parts, he scattered them."[25]

Isis searches for the dismembered parts of Osiris and finds all of them but his penis. She then puts him back together and revives him. This resuscitation is referred to in the Pyramid Texts:

"Your two sisters, Isis and Nepthys come to you that

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[23]. Plu, p.139, lines 9-12.

[24]. PT, p.119, spell 364, line 615.

[25]. Plu, p.145, lines 9-12.

they may make you hale, and you are complete."[26]

A resuscitated Osiris helps his son Horus to battle Typhon from the underworld:

"Afterwards, Osiris came to Horus it is said, from the underworld, and equipped and trained him for battle."[27]

On the whole then, the Egyptian evidence essentially confirms Plutarch's account. The primary difference, aside from names, regards the birth of Horus. In Plutarch's version, Horus is born before the murder of Osiris. In Egyptian sources, Horus is born after the death and dismemberment of Osiris who is resuscitated to father him on Isis. Part of the problem regarding the birth of Horus is that there appear to have been several Horus figures.[28] There is, for instance, "Horus, the son of Isis" who is the figure who is in conflict with Seth. However, the character of "Horus the child" is the individual whom Isis raises after the death of Osiris. This particular dichotomy may have originated out of the adding of the Horus myth onto the myth of Osiris.[29] Nevertheless, the conception of Horus is described in the stela from the 18th Dynasty:

"Mighty Isis who protected her brother....raised the

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[26]. PT, p.120, spell 366, line 628.

[27]. Plu. p.145, line 26.

[28]. S.A. Mercer, Horus, Royal God of Egypt, p.117.

[29]. John Gwyn Griffiths, The Conflict of Horus and Seth, p.15. See also S. Mercer, Horus, Royal God of Egypt, pp. 117-129.

weary one's inertness, received the seed, bore the heir."[30]

There is also, in The Pyramid Texts, a slightly different version of the death of Osiris which is distinct from drowning:

"Remember, Seth, and put in your heart this word which Geb spoke, this threat which the gods made against you in the Mansion of the Prince in On because you threw Osiris to the earth..."[31]

And, in general, there is less emphasis in the Egyptian sources than in Plutarch on the dismemberment of Osiris' body. Can Osiris be described as having under gone resurrection? In the strictest sense of the word, no. From a literal point of view, Osiris is a resuscitated, or indeed reconstructed corpse, who remains thereafter in the realm of the dead. Yet he dies, and does return to some sort of life, and to move in an existence in the underworld; he is called the lord of eternity. If this idea of entering a new life, in which he exercises a beneficent influence, unlike a god of death awaiting his victims, is stressed, then resurrection is a meaningful term to use. We might compare this to the Christian idea of a resurrection of the dead to eternal life.

The physical rites of Egypt's funerary beliefs are striking. The most obvious of these was, of course, mummification. It is generally believed that some

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[30]. Miriam Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Vol 2, p.83.

[31]. PT, p.164, spell 477, line 957.

connection existed between the myth of Osiris and mummification. Osiris had to have his body put back together by Isis before he could become lord of the afterlife. It is possible that the Egyptian desire to emulate this and enter the underworld as intact as possible led to, or at any rate was the rationale behind the science of mummification.

One of the most important parts of the rites of mummification was the ritual of "Opening the Mouth". This was meant to bring the body back to life.[32] However, there seem to be more than one explanation for this rite. On the one hand, it might be seen as symbolic of bringing the dead body back to a state of existence as in the case of Isis resuscitating Osiris. But in the early form of this rite from the Old Kingdom, the rite of "Opening the mouth" was performed upon a statue. This would suggest that the rite was originally meant to bring an inanimate object to life. It might have been later that the rite of "Opening the Mouth" was related to the myth of Osiris.[33]

An example of this rite comes from the tomb of Tutankhamen. King Ay is shown holding an adze and is about to touch the mouth of Tutankhamen with it. What is important is that Tutankhamen is shown in the iconography

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[32]. Ange-Pierre Leca, The Cult of the Immortal, pp.184-185.

[33]. John Gwyn Griffiths, The Origins of Osiris and his Cult, pp.71-72

of Osiris.[34] Another funerary scene shows Isis and Nephthys conducting this ritual on a mummy, again shown in the iconography of Osiris.[35] Clearly, this ritual of reviving the body had some connection with the myth of Osiris, since the iconography of the scenes indicates the symbolic link between the dead and Osiris. In the example from the tomb of Tutankhamen, it should be noted that Tutankhamen is being associated with Osiris in his royal context.

One of the most controversial aspects of Osiris is as a god of vegetation. James Frazer, in his book The Golden Bough, identified Osiris as a corn-god and a dying god of vegetation.[36] Osiris was identified with the grain-god Neper in the Coffin Texts:

"I am Osiris...I live and grow as Neper...I live and I die, for I am emmer and I will not perish."[37]

There are a limited number of references to Osiris and corn in the Pyramid Texts, generally in connection with food offerings:

"may you cause me to eat of the grain, which grew there, like Osiris..."[38]

Connected with this fertility role were the so-called corn mummies. An example of these was found in the tomb

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[34]. Eberhard Otto, Egyptian Art and the Cults of Osiris and Amon, Colourplate IV.

[35]. Ange-Pierre Leca, The Cult of the Immortal, p.185.

[36]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.377.

[37]. CT vol. 1, pp.254-255, spell 330, line 169.

[38]. PT, p.175, spell 493, line 1059.

of Tutankhamen. It consisted of a wooden frame moulded into the form of Osiris, lined with linen, and filled with Nile silt. Corn was planted in the mould and allowed to grow. It was life-sized and was bandaged like a mummy.[39]

The corn-mummies are interesting because they may not necessarily point to Osiris being related to the corn. It is far more likely that the corn-mummies were meant as a symbolic representation of life. The key to the corn mummies seems to be that they were an association between the dead and the corn, not between the corn and Osiris.[40]

How did the myth of Osiris fit into the funerary cult of ancient Egypt? The myth of Osiris is a myth about resurrection or, if it is preferred, new life. Any religious belief that included this idea would have needed a story to form its basis, nor should we forget that behind such a cult and such a belief is a confrontation of the ancient Egyptians with the problem of human mortality. The Egyptians seem to have circumvented this threat by setting forth a pleasant life after death, the revived Osiris being identified first with the king, but ultimately with everyone who performed the proper ceremonies. The practice of mummification is also important. The corn-mummies, mentioned earlier,

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[39]. Howard Carter, The Tomb of Tutankamen, p.61.

[40]. John Gwyn Griffiths, The Origins of Osiris and his Cult, pp.167-168.

gives us our clue, since they were fashioned in the form of Osiris. It appears that mummification is mimicking the process by which Isis put Osiris back together after his mutilation by Seth. The mortals who underwent it were being prepared for the life of eternity.

What was the connection between Osiris as a corn-god and Osiris as a funerary god? Were they two separate ideas, that merged when needed, or were they interconnected? The myth of Osiris as presented by Plutarch does show Osiris helping mankind by teaching them about agriculture. Is it possible that the Egyptians, at an early stage in their history, made a connection between the agricultural cycle and ideas about human mortality? Did the myth of Osiris provide the bridge upon which such a connection was built?

A model of how the myth of Osiris operated in Egyptian religious thought can now perhaps be proposed. Egypt was an agrarian society dependent on the seasonal cycle, and the origin of a myth of death and rebirth night have had its origins in the cycle of the agricultural year. The ancient Egyptians may have made the theological "jump" whereby agricultural rebirth became symbolic for human rebirth.

The primary problem with this model is that it is overly simple. Any attempt to impose like James Frazer, an agricultural corn-god explanation upon the myth of Osiris risks ignoring other important elements of the myth, especially when, as we have seen, references in the

funerary literature where Osiris is associated with corn are limited and are not early.

This does not mean, however, that the agricultural aspects of the myth of Osiris should be ignored. The elements of fertility do exist. Rather, the agricultural parts of the myth should be seen in perspective and in connection with the other themes that occur in it.

Two prevalent themes in the myth of Osiris, found throughout the Egyptian sources, are kingship and justice. The Egyptian concepts of kingship are underlined in the myth of Osiris. Osiris was a king of Egypt who was murdered and eventually avenged by his son, Horus.

Equally important in this myth, and closely connected with kingship, were Egyptian ideas on righteousness. In the Pyramid Texts there are many references to the unjust murder of Osiris by Seth. Also, Osiris, as a god of the afterlife, played a major role in the judgement which all had to face when dead.

The transfer of power from Osiris to Horus is also important for kingship. Horus, as the son of the deceased Osiris, is the one who avenges his father's murder. In Egyptian religion, the deceased king was identified with Osiris and the new king with Horus. Eventually, when that king died he became personified with Osiris and his successor with Horus. The myth of Osiris provided a continuous framework for kingship in Egypt.[41] This idea

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[41]. Henri Frankfort, Kingship and the Gods, pp.110-122.

of mythic succession is clearly stated in the so-called Memphite Theology:

"Thus Osiris came into the earth at the Royal Fortress, to the north of the land to which he had come. His son Horus arose as king of Upper Egypt, as king of Lower Egypt, in the embrace of his father Osiris and the gods in front of him and behind him."[42]

The role of Horus as avenger is well described in a spell from the Book of the Dead:

"Ho Osiris! I am your son Horus; I have come, having felled your enemies for you.
Ho Osiris!...I have come that I may remove all evil which is on you.
Ho Osiris!.....I have come that I may slay for you him who mutilated you.
Ho Osiris.....I have come having brought to you the confederacy of Seth with their bonds on them."[43]

So in addition to being a myth involving resurrection and fertility, the myth of Osiris was a myth about kingship. Specifically, kingship as described by the Egyptian references to the Osiris myth involved the concepts of succession and dispensing justice. Presumably, the role of the king as Horus implied a requirement by the king to uphold justice.

This brief survey of the myth of Osiris and the funerary cult in Egypt reveals how complex an issue any analysis of the material can be. Clearly, the myth of Osiris operated on several levels at different times. The myth was related to the funerary cult and to Egyptian concepts of kingship. But also involved somewhere, is the relationship between the myth of Osiris and agricultural

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[42]. Miriam Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Vol.1, p.56, line 64.

[43]. BD, p.172, spell 173.

fertility.

Taking all this into consideration, some statements can be made regarding the myth of Osiris. The most important observation is the connection between the myth of Osiris and the funerary cult in ancient Egypt. This relationship cannot be denied. The iconography of funerary art is full of representations of Osiris and are obviously scenes taken from the myth of Osiris, specifically, Osiris being tended by Isis and Nephthys.[44] Osiris was a god of the afterlife both in the myth and in the funerary cult. All of this is well documented in the funerary literature of ancient Egypt.

The myth of Osiris also provided a framework for kingship. Since the funerary cult was at first oriented essentially to the king, it is hardly surprising that a myth about funerary beliefs would be closely connected with kingship.

Finally, as stated before, there is the agricultural element of the myth of Osiris and its implications for the funerary cult. Although the agricultural cycle may or may not have been a driving principle behind the myth of Osiris and Egyptian concepts of the afterlife, its crucial role should not be underestimated. It added to the idea of a divinized and resuscitated king that of a new birth in nature, and may have thus assisted in the process by which a blessed future once held out for a

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[44]. Ange-Pierre Leca, The Cult of the Immortal, p.185.

deceased king became available to all.

Therefore, the three major themes that are apparent in the myth of Osiris are funerary, agricultural, and royalty (and perhaps we can include justice within the category of kingship). Yet perhaps it is incorrect of us to make a distinction between the three. Quite probably, the ancient Egyptians saw these three roles as merging into one another. For example, as an aspect of kingship, would not the king have been responsible for overseeing the fertility of the land?

This analysis of the myth of Osiris points to several things which must be considered throughout this study. The first is that there may be many layers to a myth, and these may need to be sifted through in order to make any coherent sense of it. But perhaps more importantly, the myth of Osiris is an appropriate choice to examine first. It exhibits many of the characteristics that will be found in the myths dealt with later. For example, the role of the ruler of the underworld and the underworld itself will require far more attention than was given here.

Finally, the purpose behind all funerary cults should not be forgotten. The human factor in the myth of Osiris is crucial. The lament of Isis and her search for Osiris is a very elemental aspect of this myth. This is described in a text from the papyrus Bremner-Rhind:

"Raise thee up, O Osiris! Raise thee, raise thee up in peace: Isis comes to thee, O Lord of the Horizon, inasmuch as (?) she begat the Unique One(?), the guide of the gods, she will protect thee, she will guard thee, she

will guard Horus."[45]

One must not divorce the human element from the mythic narrative. As will be seen in virtually all of the myths of dying and rising deities, it is the poignant sense of loss by a female relative for the dying deity that makes an emotional appeal to the reader. The perennial problem of death cries out for a solution.

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[45]. R.O Faulkner, "The Lamentations of Isis and Nephtys", JEA 22,1936, pp.121-140, lines 17:1-17:6.

Chapter 2

The Myth of Inanna

On a superficial level, any comparison between Egypt and Mesopotamia seems doomed from the start. Differences in language, history, religion and geography abound between the two regions. The myth of Inanna is a case in point. It has long been recognized that the myth of Inanna and Dumuzi looks superficially similar to the Egyptian myth of Osiris. Once again, it was James Frazer in his The Golden Bough who proposed that Dumuzi, or Tammuz, belonged to the same category of a dying god of vegetation.[1]

This view is no longer universally held. As seen in the analysis of Osiris, Frazer was probably guilty of oversimplification. Others have made more direct criticisms of this theory. Henri Frankfort stated in his work, Kingship and the Gods:

> "But even if a few features in cult or myth - a designation, an animal symbol - should be survivals from a distant common past, the gods as they confront us in the religions of the Ancient Near East express profoundly different mentalities."[2]

Although it is quite probable that Frazer's

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[1]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, pp.325-326.

[2]. Henri Frankfort, Kingship and the Gods, p.294.

identification of Dumuzi/Tammuz as a dying god of vegetation is not convincing, this does not mean that there is no point of comparison between the myth of Osiris and that of Inanna. As in the case of the myths of Osiris, there may be several themes existing in the myth of Inanna. The seasonal cycle and the grain may or may not be one of these themes.

Having looked at the factors that played an important role in the Egyptian myth of Osiris, we can now analyze several elements in the myth of Inanna. Obviously, Mesopotamia did not produce evidence of any kind of funerary beliefs on the scale found in Egypt. Yet this is not to say that funerary beliefs do not exist in the archaeological records of Mesopotamia.

For example, a text in the Lowie Museum at UC Berkeley, probably from the city of Adab in Mesopotamia, lists a number of grave goods. This list includes such items as clothing, jewelry, tools, and furniture.[3] While this is not on the same scale as Egypt, it does point to a similar trend since grave goods would suggest some form of a belief in a life after death.

In addition to grave goods, Mesopotamia also produced evidence for sacrifices to the dead. A tablet from Lagash indicates that cow and sheep butter were items which were sacrificed by family funerary cults.[4]

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[3]. Daniel Foxvog, "Funerary Furnishings", DMes, p.70.

[4]. Boris Perlov, "The Families of the Ensi Urbau and Gudea and their funerary cult",Dmes, pp.77-81.

The possibility of the existence of ancestor worship will emerge again when examining the tombs of Isin-Larsa Ur. The site of Ur, excavated by Leonard Woolley, may provide the key to the tantalizing question of whether any funerary beliefs were held by the Mesopotamians.

When compared with the incomplete nature of the myth of Osiris, the sources for the myth of Inanna are almost embarrassingly rich. Although the sources do not exist in a complete form from any period, this myth can be pieced together far more easily and safely than the myth of Osiris. The result is a myth that comes across in a more comprehensible form and produces a coherent story. Furthermore, this story existed in both Sumerian and Akkadian cultures and this continuity strengthens any argument supporting its importance in Mesopotamian culture.

The "Descent of Inanna" is one among many Sumerian myths regarding the relationship between Inanna and Dumuzi and needs to be put in context. How can the "Descent of Inanna" be placed among texts dealing with elements of these myths? For example, it is not an unsafe supposition that the so-called marriage texts of Inanna and Dumuzi take place prior to Inanna's descent; Dumuzi is already her husband when Inanna returns from the underworld. The text where Dumuzi is chased by demons can, on the other hand, only be placed after her ascent. It would not be understandable in any other place.

In his book, <u>The Treasures of Darkness</u>, Thorkild

Jacobsen not unreasonably places the courtship texts of Inanna and Dumuzi at the beginning of the cycle. Following this is the so-called wedding of Dumuzi.[5]

Next, before the "Descent of Inanna", Jacobsen also puts the so-called "Dream of Dumuzi" which ends in the death of Dumuzi. Connected with this text are the laments of Inanna and Dumuzi's sister Geshtinanna for the dead Dumuzi.[6]

Jacobsen then deals with the "Descent of Inanna", which he describes as embodying "a curiously deviant attitude."[7] He considers this as a possible but not necessary element of the myths of Inanna and Dumuzi.[8] He probably thought of this as deviant since it is Inanna who decrees the death of Dumuzi. Jacobsen places as the final text of this cycle the text where Inanna rules on Dumuzi and Geshtinanna spending alternating times of the year in the underworld.[9]

Samuel Kramer, a Sumeriologist, and Diane Wolkenstein, a folklorist, have placed the myths of Inanna and Dumuzi in a slightly different order in their book, Inanna. The primary difference between their approach and Jacobsen's is that they place the "Descent

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[5]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, pp.27-32.

[6]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, p.47.

[7]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, p.55.

[8]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, p.55.

[9]. Thorkild, Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, p.61.

of Inanna" before the return of Dumuzi and see this text as not deviant to but as the key to the overall cycle.[10]

The interpretation followed here is that of Kramer and Wolkenstein. The problem with any contextual analysis is that we are not really certain how the various texts were originally ordered. It is quite possible that the Sumerians may have varied the order themselves. But the placement of the texts by Kramer and Wolkenstein make sense, as long as we remember that it is only one among several which are viable.

The derivation of the Akkadian Ishtar myth from the Sumerian Inanna myth appears certain. The Sumerian text of the "Descent of Inanna" dates from 1750 B.C. from the Sumerian city of Nippur.[11] The Akkadian sources for the "Descent of Ishtar" come from Ashur at the end of the Second Millennium B.C. and Nineveh a few centuries later.[12] It would appear given this chronological progression, that the later Akkadian myth was derived from the earlier Sumerian material.

It is of course the "Descent of Inanna to the Netherworld" that chiefly concerns us. The first part of the myth is where Inanna prepares for her journey:

"In Uruk she abandoned her temple to descend to the underworld."[13]

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[10]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, p.52-89.

[11]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, p.127.

[12]. ANET p.107.

[13]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, p.52.

Other preparations include grooming herself and instructing her servant Ninshubur about what to do if she does not return.[14]

Finally, Inanna begins her journey to the underworld. She dismisses her servant Ninshubur, arrives at the gate of the underworld to confronts the doorkeeper Neti:

"Open the door, gatekeeper! Open the door, Neti! I alone would enter!"[15]

The gatekeeper consults with the queen of the underworld, Ereshkigal, about what to do. Ereshkigal instructs Neti to allow Inanna through all seven gates of the underworld, but to have her remove a piece of her clothing at each gate. This is done until Inanna stands in front of Ereshkigal naked.[16]

For her presumption in entering the underworld, Inanna is judged and found guilty. The result is not pleasant for Inanna:

"The Annuna, the judges of the underworld surrounded her. They passed judgement against her. Then Ereshkigal fastened on Inanna the eye of death...Inanna was turned into a corpse, a piece of rotting meat, and was hung from a hook on the wall."[17]

When Inanna does not return from the netherworld, Ninshubur begins to petition the gods for the release of Inanna from the underworld. However, the first few gods

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[14]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, p.53.

[15]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, p.55.

[16]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, pp.55-60.

[17]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, p.60.

petitioned by Ninshubur tell her that it is Inanna's own fault and that she got what she deserved. The god Enki, as always, is more sympathetic and induces Ereshkigal to release Inanna.[18] However, there is a catch to Ereshkigal's reprieve. Inanna may leave the underworld but must in return provide a replacement:

"Inanna was about to ascend from the underworld when the Annuna, the judges of the underworld seized her. They said 'no-one ascends from the underworld unmarked. If Inanna wishes to return from the underworld, she must provide someone in her place'".[19]

These underworld demons continue to "cling" to Inanna and want to carry off a variety of the people who come out to greet her and rejoice at her return. These include Ninshubur and several of Inanna's sons. Inanna refuses to hand them over since they have stayed loyal to her.[20]

Things change considerably when Inanna and the demons arrive in her city of Uruk. There, they find the husband of Inanna, Dumuzi, not only failing to mourn for her, but actually celebrating. Inanna now has no qualms about whom the demons may take:

"Inanna fastened on Dumuzi the eye of death. She spoke against him the word of wrath. She uttered against him the cry of guilt: 'Take him! Take Dumuzi away!'"[21]

This phase of the myth ends with Dumuzi attempting

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[18]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, pp.63-67.

[19]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, p.68.

[20]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, p.69-70.

[21]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, p.71.

to elude the demons.[22]

The description of the end of Dumuzi comes from a composition which has been entitled "Dumuzi's Dream". In it, Dumuzi recounts a dream where demons are chasing him to his sister Geshtinanna. Very soon, this dream turns into reality. There follows the efforts of Geshtinanna to save her brother.[23] Unfortunately for Dumuzi, nothing can save him from his fate:

"The galla seized Dumuzi. They surrounded him. They bound his hands. They bound his neck.
The churn was silent. No milk was poured. The cup was shattered. Dumuzi was no more..."[24]

In addition to "Dumuzi's Dream", there exist some texts where Inanna mourns the loss of Dumuzi:

"A lament was raised in the city: my lady weeps bitterly for her young husband. Inanna weeps bitterly for her young husband."[25]

Although this is assumed to be related to the "Descent of Inanna", it should be noted that this is not absolutely certain. As in the case of "Dumuzi's Dream", it is modern scholarship which has imposed these texts on the "Descent of Inanna"in building up the cycle.[26]

A final end to the story may lie in a text that seems to indicate a solution to the dilemma of who should

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[22]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, pp.71-84.

[23]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, pp.74-84.

[24]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, p.84.

[25]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, p.85.

[26]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, pp.200-203.

be in the underworld. Inanna makes a pronouncement on the final fate of Dumuzi:

"You half a year, your sister half a year:while you are walking around (alive), she will lie prostrate, while your sister is walking around (alive), you will lie prostrate."[27]

A compromise is in effect reached between the demands of life and death. This appears to be the end of the story. Inanna, while initiating the trouble, has made Dumuzi and his sister Geshtinanna pay. The solution hit upon by Inanna is significant because it is similar to that found in the Greek myth of Persephone and Demeter.

One interesting study of the "Descent of Inanna" concentrates on the possible cultic element in the myth; specifically, the idea that the "Descent of Inanna" into the netherworld is symbolic for the ritual journey of the cult statue of Inanna.[28] This would explain the significance of the seven gates of the underworld since the statue would travel from the Mesopotamian city of Uruk to Kutha. This would require travelling through the seven cities of Uruk, Badtibira, Zabalam, Adab, Nippur, Kish and Akkad.[29] In this way, the myth of the "Descent of Inanna" might symbolically represent a ritual procession through Mesopotamia.

This theory might be enhanced by the lament of

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[27]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, p.61.

[28]. Giorgio Buccellati, "The Descent of Inanna as a Ritual Journey to Kutha", Syro-Mesopotamian Studies 4, 1982, pp.3-7.

[29]. Giorgio Buccellati, Syro-Mesopotamian Studies 4, 1982, p.4.

Ninshubur to the gods over the fate of Inanna. Repeated several times, Ninshubur's lament describes Inanna in terms of jewelry.[30] This would make sense if Inanna is being symbolically identified with a cult statue and has to be undressed at each of the seven gates. However, it should be noted that the myth is probably made up of several strands and the cultic element should not be exaggerated.[31]

Finally, before leaving the area of the Sumerian version of the myth of Inanna and Dumuzi, it is worth noting a series of ritual texts on the marriage between the two: Kramer and Wolkenstein placed these texts as occurring prior to the "Descent of Inanna". They are poems about the courtship and eventual marriage of Inanna and Dumuzi.

Composed of extremely repetitive lines, an example of this poetry comes from the courtship of Inanna by Dumuzi:

"He brought the maid Inanna, he brought her a heap of (precious) stones to pick from..."[32]

The actual purpose of these compositions remains

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[30]. A.R. George, "Observations on a Passage of Inanna's Descent", Journal of Cuneiform Studies 37, 1985, pp.109-1113.

[31]. Buccellati states this view himself on p.5 of his article "The Descent of Inanna as a Ritual Journey to Kutha":

"I do not intend to suggest here that the text as we now have it, should be interpreted as a cultic libretto....The myth is essentially narrative and cannot be understood simply in terms of an unfolding ritual."

[32]. ANET, p.638, line 7.

obscure, but it is quite probable that there was a relationship between them and the myth of the "Descent of Inanna". Particular emphasis was laid upon the consummation of the marriage. This will be addressed later when looking at the possible interaction between the courtship poems, the "Descent of Inanna", and themes of fertility.

In the Semitic Akkadian version of the myth of Inanna there is not the preparation seen in the Sumerian version, Ishtar simply sets out for the underworld. As in the Sumerian version, she confronts the gatekeeper of the netherworld:

"Here gatekeeper, open your gate for me, open your gate for me to come in!"[33]

Quite unlike the Sumerian story, Ishtar backs up her demand with some very alarming threats of what she will do if ignored:

"I shall raise up the dead and they shall eat the living: the dead shall outnumber the living."[34]

The following scenes are essentially the same as the Sumerian version. Ereshkigal gives instructions to the gatekeeper and Ishtar is allowed to enter the underworld, but is slowly stripped naked as she passes through the gates. Ereshkigal then strikes her dead.[35]

At this point, there is a significant deviation from the Sumerian version of the myth. A description is given

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[33]. MMes, p.155.

[34]. MMes, p.155.

[35]. MMes, pp.156-157.

of the effect Ishtar's loss means to the world, and it concerns a loss of fertility:

"After the lady Ishtar [had descended to the netherworld], the bull springs not upon the cow.....In the street [the man impregnates not] the maiden."[36]

However, the god Ea (the Akkadian name for Enki) intervenes and Ereshkigal relents and allows Ishtar to leave. Quite a few lines are devoted to the description of Ishtar retrieving her clothing at the gates. Finally, there is the arrangement whereby Dumuzi (or Tammuz) is exchanged for her.[37]

The reasons for the differences between the two myths may be fairly simple. The two versions are separated both by time and by culture. The Akkadian version may simply be the Sumerian version abridged. Yet the essential part of the myth is the same. Inanna/Ishtar descends to the netherworld and eventually ascends back to the world to be replaced by Dumuzi/Tammuz.

In the myth of Osiris, there were several themes which were evident. These included fertility, funerary practices, justice, and kingship. Are any of these themes evident in the myth of Inanna? Since an examination of the issue of funerary beliefs, which will be made later on, requires a look at fertility, it would be wise to begin a thematic analysis with that topic.

Certainly, it has not been in doubt that the myth of Inanna and Dumuzi reflects the life cycle. As one writer

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[36]. ANET, p.108, obverse, lines 76-79.

[37]. MMes, pp.258-160.

describes Dumuzi, he is the one:

"Whose life from wooing to wedding to early death expresses the annual cycle of fertility and yield."[38]

From the Sumerian sources, the poems describing the courtship between Inanna and Dumuzi contain numerous allusions to agricultural practices:

"Young lady, the flax in its fullness is lovely. Inanna, the grain is glistening in the furrow. I will hoe it for you. I will bring it to you."[39]

Again, there are references to the general prosperity of the land in these poems, brought about by Dumuzi:

"May he make productive the fields like a farmer.... Under his reign may there be plants, may there be grain. At the river, may there be overflow. In the field may there be late grain. In the marshland may the fish (and) birds make much chatter."[40]

Finally from the Sumerian sources, there is the crossover whereby agricultural fertility merges metaphorically with sexual fertility. In this case, it is Inanna who is the narrator:

"As for me, Inanna, who will plough my vulva? Who will plough my high ground? Who will plough my wet ground?
As for me, the young woman, who will plough my vulva? Who will station the ox there? Who will plough my vulva?"[41]

The Akkadian version of the myth also has some curious references to fertility, and they refer to sexual fertility:

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[38]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, p.73.

[39]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, p.30.

[40]. ANET, p.641, col.II, lines 19-24.

[41]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, p.37.

"As soon as Ishtar went down to Kurnugi, no bull mounted a cow, no donkey impregnated a jenny, no young man impregnated a girl in the street."[42]

This passage would suggest that Ishtar is connected to fertility and that her disappearance results in some problems in the lands of the living. Although one should not overstate that case, it would appear that Ishtar's descent into the netherworld results in some kind of negative impact on the fertility of the land. But it should be observed that what is being referred to here is chiefly sexual fertility, not agricultural fertility.

The myth of Osiris played a direct role in Egyptian religious thought by providing a mythological background for that culture's funerary cult. It is quite probable that at least in a limited way, the Egyptians made a connection between the life cycle in nature and funerary beliefs. Could the myth of Inanna have played a similar role in Mesopotamian society?

Several problems emerge when confronting this question. The most obvious one is the lack of funerary literature from Mesopotamia. In Egypt, compositions such as the Book of the Dead provided a definitive link between the myth of Osiris and the funerary cult. Without such a link, it is hard to prove that the myth of Inanna provided an similar framework for concepts of resurrection and an afterlife.

The other problem is the very real lack of archaeological evidence to indicate any funerary cult in

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[42]. MMes, p.158.

Mesopotamia or anything comparable to the Egyptian concept of an afterlife. However, there are a number of glaring exceptions to this.

The image of the afterlife, as described in Mesopotamian mythology, is distinctly unpleasant. An excellent description of this "afterlife" occurs in Enkidu's description of it from the Epic of Gilgamesh. Enkidu details what life is like for the inhabitants of this netherworld:

> "Dust is their food, and clay their bread. They are clothed like birds, with feathers, and they see no light, and they dwell in darkness."[43]

It has generally been accepted that there was no belief in an afterlife in Mesopotamia. Henri Frankfort summed up this view when he stated:

> "Resurrection, finally, was not even a tenet of Mesopotamian religion, which held that man's inescapable fate was death - at best a quasi-annihilation or a wraithlike lingering in limbo, otherwise torture through thirst and dust and evil demons."[44]

Certainly within the "Descent of Inanna" this statement is not valid. Inanna threatens to raise the dead and unleash them on the living. This sounds like a form of resurrection. It might depend upon whether the dead who are raised are meant to be living corpses or actually individuals who have come back to life. But at the very least, the situation in Mesopotamia is perhaps not as simple as Frankfort would suggest.

Frankfort's view is also seriously compromised by

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[43]. MMes, p.89.

[44]. Henri Frankfort, Kingship and the Gods, p.281.

the evidence found in the Royal Tombs at Ur.

The tombs at Ur, excavated by Leonard Woolley, date to the Early Dynastic Period, around 2600-2450 B.C. The Royal Cemetery was first discovered in 1922 by Woolley during excavations meant to uncover the southern limit of the Temenos at Ur.[45]

Woolley divided the tombs into two types: those of the wealthy, and those of the poor. Around two thousand tombs of the poor were discovered and these burials consisted of a rectangular shaft. The body was placed in the burial either wrapped in some kind of matting or in a coffin. Personal items such as jewelry were buried with the body. In the grave itself, items such as weapons and vessels were placed. The bodies of the deceased were positioned in a manner as if the person was asleep. This was a change from the burial practices in the preceding Ubaid and Jemdet Nasr periods.[46]

An example of a rich grave was tomb PG755, the tomb of Meskalamdug. This grave was unique because Woolley did not consider it as technically "royal", due to the fact that it had been placed in a shaft of one of the "royal" tombs. However, it was not the tomb of an ordinary person. It contained an enormous amount of rich burial goods, many of which were made of gold, silver, and lapis-lazuli. The finest object found in this burial was

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[45]. Leonard Woolley, Ur Excavations II:The Royal Cemetery, p.5.

[46]. Leonard Woolley, The Royal Cemetery, pp.33-42.

the famous gold helmet of Meskalamdug. The name of "Meskalamdug" was found on two bowls made of gold.[47]

An example of a royal tomb is tomb PG800, the tomb of Queen Puabi. This contained a large number of valuable objects, including her famous headdress. Connected with this burial was that of PG789, the "King's Grave". Among the items found in this burial were decorated sledges and a gaming board.[48]

It is also a significant feature of the burial practices from this time that many of the deceased royal personages took their servants with them.

An example of a so-called death pit comes from tomb PG1237. It contained the bodies of six male servants, who were found near the entrance. Four women found nearby were believed to have been harpists. In addition to these servants, bodies of sixty-four other women were found.[49]

In the tombs of PG800 and PG789, the bodies were found with little cups. Woolley theorized that the servants went down into the tomb in a procession, and a religious rite was then conducted. The servants (or victims?) then drank whatever they had been given, which was presumably a poison.[50] This scenario theorized by Woolley does not seem to be an unreasonable one.

The only similar occurrence of buried servants comes

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47. Leonard Woolley, The Royal Cemetery, pp.155-160.

48. Leonard Woolley, The Royal Cemetery, pp.62-91.

49. Leonard Woolley, The Royal Cemetery, pp.113-124.

50. Leonard Woolley, The Royal Cemetery, pp.35-36.

from the tombs of the early Old Kingdom in Egypt. As at Ur, the servants apparently accompanied their masters to their death. Unlike at Ur, it is unclear whether this was done willingly or unwillingly.[51]

Obviously, the inhabitants of the Royal Tombs at Ur possessed some kind of funerary belief. As the excavator himself stated about the Royal Tombs and their contents:

"This provision made for the dead seems clearly to prove a belief in a future life of some sort."[52]

How do the Royal Tombs at Ur contradict the generally held notion that Mesopotamia did not have a belief in an afterlife? The Mesopotamian view of what came after death, as depicted in the Epic of Gilgamesh, suggests a very dreary existence. Yet the archaeological evidence from the Royal Tombs indicates a set of beliefs that comes undoubtedly close to being a funerary cult promising a better life in the beyond.

The wealth and nature of the grave goods provide the solid evidence to support the claim of a funerary cult. Would one really have needed servants or grave goods in an afterlife where one eats dust and looks like a bird? There may be a possibility that the deceased from the Royal Tombs at Ur held a belief in a life after death which was different from that described by Enkidu.

An argument could quite rationally be made that the tombs at Ur were some kind of anomaly. Although nothing

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[51]. W.B. Emery, Archaic Egypt, p.135.

[52]. Leonard Woolley, Excavations at Ur, p.55.

quite as impressive as the Royal Tombs has been found at Ur from later periods, there do exist some other equally suggestive burials.

From the Larsa period, a later and Semitic period, comes evidence of some kind of funerary beliefs at Ur. Woolley excavated urban remains from this period and underneath many of the houses were burial vaults. Evidently, they were meant for the inhabitants of the houses and were used as family burial vaults. Clay pots were found in these vaults.[53] Is it possible that the burial practice indicated here was ancestor worship? At the very least, it appears that some sort of belief was in force here that, like its Sumerian predecessor, was at odds with the shadowy afterlife described by Enkidu. It is unlikely that people would have put so much thought into being buried with their family if they thought that there was no meaningful life after death.

How can the archaeological evidence be brought into agreement with the evidence from Mesopotamian mythology? On the one hand, we have descriptions of the underworld, from the Epic of Gilgamesh, which indicate a gloomy and shadowy existence after death. On the other hand, we have archaeological evidence from Ur which indicates that a belief in some sort of life after death was possible. The grave goods found at Ur are more in keeping with the Egyptian idea of the afterlife rather than that described

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[53]. Leonard Woolley, Ur Excavations VII:The Old Babylonian Period, pp.33-39.

in the Epic of Gilgamesh.

The key to this problem might lie in the myth of Inanna. In the most general sense, it is a myth about a dying and rising god since Inanna, Dumuzi, and Geshtinanna all spend some time in the underworld but come out again. Leaving aside the many differences, the myth of Osiris is also a myth of a dying and rising god. In Egypt, the myth of Osiris played a role in that country's funerary cult. Could the myth of Inanna have played a similar role in Mesopotamian society?

Without any funerary literature from Mesopotamia of the kind that existed in Egypt, this argument is difficult and perhaps impossible to prove. But the very existence of the tombs at Ur prove that Mesopotamia was not entirely devoid of complex funerary beliefs. Since Mesopotamia had a myth of a dying and rising god as in Egypt, it would not be unreasonable to see a connection between the two myths. In the end, the theory that resurrection might have been a belief held at Ur must be considered. It may not have been the norm, but it was there.

An obvious problem with making a comparison between Egyptian and Mesopotamian myths is the question of who is the dying god in the myth of Inanna:Inanna, Dumuzi, or both? In the myth of Osiris, only Osiris dies.

The answer must be that the "dying god" from Mesopotamia is Inanna as well as Dumuzi and, indeed, his sister Geshtinanna. However, it is the death of Inanna

which the myth of the "Descent of Inanna" focused upon. Both the Sumerian and Akkadian myths describe the death and return of Inanna at length. In the Akkadian myth, Dumuzi's death is only briefly referred to. In the Sumerian myth, Dumuzi's death has only a short description compared with that of Inanna's death.

The deaths of Inanna and Osiris have, then, points in common. The most obvious one is their struggle against their sibling and their deaths at the hands of that sibling. Osiris is killed by his brother Seth, and Inanna is killed by her sister Ereshkigal.

But certain elements of Dumuzi's part in the myth can also compare with the myth of Osiris. As Osiris is helped by his sister, Dumuzi is aided by his sister. Likewise, the lament of Isis for Osiris bears a similarity to the lament of Inanna and Geshtinanna for Dumuzi. Could this lament have played some sort of role in rituals related to either myth? The weeping for Tammuz in Ezekiel 8:14, which must in some way be connected with the myth of Inanna, though much later, strongly suggests that it did.

Finally, there are the agricultural and human fertility elements, which cannot be eradicated from an analysis of the myth. The effects, negative as brought about by Inanna's disappearance and positive as brought about by Dumuzi's return, impart to both deities something of the character of dying and rising deities, though there is nothing, as in the case of Osiris, to

suggest any link between the deity and the grain. The link is rather with the seasonal cycle, a link suggested too with reference on earth of Dumuzi and his sister for half the year each. But behind these links lurks the perennial problem of death and how it may be circumvented, though there is no evidence for the dead king or later dead human beings, as in the Osiris myth, being identified with the deity. I suspect, from the prominence of lamentation for the dead Dumuzi/Tammuz, that this dimension is the more important one and that, as in the Osiris myth, the concern with the agricultural cycle is secondary. But it is still there.

Chapter 3

The Myth of Demeter and Persephone

Although not strictly speaking within the geographic boundaries of the ancient Near East, the myth of Demeter and Persephone is often linked with myths of dying and rising deities. Persephone goes into the underworld and returns, as Osiris and Inanna do. Her descent into the netherworld can at least be taken as symbolic of dying, on a metaphoric level if nothing else.

The myth of Demeter and Persephone is unusual for several reasons. The first reason is that, unlike most myths of the ancient world, it is well documented early in a complete version. The second reason why this myth stands out is its lengthy time frame. The worship of Demeter, and the Eleusinian mysteries, which arose out of it, lasted from pre-history to the decades following the official adoption of Christianity by the failing Roman Empire.

The myth of Demeter and Persephone has been the subject of a number of major studies. These include, in addition to Frazer's The Golden Bough, George Mylonas' Eleusis, which describes the archaeological remains of Eleusis with reference to the myth of Demeter and

Persephone. From a psychological perspective, Carl Kerenyi's Eleusis and Erich Neumann's The Great Mother examine the psychological elements in the myth.

Finally, the relationship between the myth of Demeter and Persephone and the cult at Eleusis is fairly clear. The "Homeric Hymn to Demeter", which provides a detailed description of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, formed the core of the beliefs that were held at Eleusis.

Regardless of the level of understanding about Demeter and Persephone and Eleusis, some questions still remain regarding the relationship of the myth and cult. Was the myth of Demeter and Persephone about a dying goddess of vegetation as James Frazer claimed in his The Golden Bough? Exactly how close was the relationship of the myth to the cult? Finally, what does the myth of Demeter and Persephone tell us about the cult, and equally, what does the evidence from the cult at Eleusis tell us about the myth? The "Eleusinian Mysteries" was a cult which kept its secrets to itself and these were not meant to be revealed to non-initiates. But by piecing together evidence from Classical sources and from archaeology, we are able to understand some of what occurred. As Carl Kerenyi stated in his psychological analysis of the cult at Eleusis:

> "Many scholars still adhere to the commonplace that the secret of the Eleusinian Mysteries was so well kept that we can know nothing about them. This is not true. Our knowledge cannot be complete, but it is perhaps more

than a mere beginning."[1]

Before entering into a detailed examination of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, it might be useful to look at a previous interpretation. Although The Golden Bough is often considered dated, James Frazer's interpretation of the myth of Demeter and Persephone remains one of his more well thought out theories, and in my opinion, remains potentially viable.

Frazer begins his discourse on Demeter and Persephone by first identifying the myth with myths from the Near East comparable to it:

> "In the Greek fable, as in its Asiatic and Egyptian counterparts, a goddess mourns the loss of a loved one, who personifies the vegetation, more especially the corn, which dies in winter to revive in spring..."[2]

Having stated that the myth of Demeter and Persephone is a myth about a dying and rising deity, Frazer goes on to make three claims about the myth. The first claim, which our analysis considers reasonable, is that the myth of Demeter and Persephone provided the theological framework for the cult at Eleusis. Frazer bases this claim on the fact that the myth itself describes Demeter at Eleusis instructing the princes there into her mysteries. Frazer also points out that this is how the ancients saw it, as in Clement of Alexandria's description.[3]

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[1]. Carl Kerenyi, Eleusis, p.xxxvi.

[2]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.393.

[3]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, pp.394-395.

The second claim by Frazer regards the personifications of the two goddesses. Frazer considered the option that Demeter was an earth goddess but concluded that she was a corn goddess, as was Persephone. He based this claim both on the archaeological evidence and on the myth itself.[4]

Frazer's conclusion was that the cult of Eleusis, which had its theological base in the myth of Demeter and Persephone, was a cult dealing with fertility and the corn. But Frazer went a step further and speculated that the Eleusinian mysteries were connected with views on the afterlife. By connecting the agricultural cycle with the human life cycle, the Eleusinian mysteries may have been directly related to concepts of resurrection:

> "Above all, the thought of the seed buried in the earth in order to spring up new and higher life readily suggested a comparison with human destiny, and strengthened the hope that for man too the grave may be but the beginning of a better and happier existence in some brighter world unknown."[5]

In his analysis of the myth of Demeter and Persephone described in the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter", N.J. Richardson plays down the fertility approach taken by Frazer. Richardson points out that the return of Persephone and the restoration of the fields are inseparable from the myth, but that one element is not derived from another. Richardson rejects the idea of vegetation being the element of primary importance in the

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[4]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, pp.395-397.

[5]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.398.

myth of Demeter and Persephone.[6]

Unlike the other myths of dying and rising gods from the ancient world, particularly from the Near East, the myth of Demeter and Persephone is well documented from an early complete version. As mentioned above, the so-called "Homeric Hymn to Demeter" gives a lengthy and detailed account of the myth. Although it is uncertain when it was composed, the absence of a reference to Athens indicates that it may have been composed when Eleusis was still independent, around 650-600 B.C. However, it was a tradition recorded by Aristotle that the Eleusinian mysteries dated back to around 1300 B.C.[7]

Another important classical source for the myth of Persephone is Ovid's Metamorphoses. Although it is believed that Ovid knew of the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter", this was not the only source for his account. This is worth noting and may be illustrated by a number of discrepancies between the two accounts, most notably the absence of Eleusis and the location of Sicily in Ovid's account. Nevertheless, Ovid's account of Persephone in Book V of the Metamorphoses indicates the continuity of a mytho-literary tradition.[8]

The myth begins with Persephone out in the field gathering flowers. Unknown to her, Zeus has conspired

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[6]. N.J. Richardson, The Homeric Hymn to Demeter, pp.15-16.

[7]. HDem, p.73.

[8]. Stephen Hinds, The Metamorphosis of Persephone, pp.72-98.

with his brother Hades and consented to have Persephone given as a bride to Hades. Attracted by a narcissus which Zeus made beautiful for that very purpose, Persephone is lured into the trap and is seized by Hades:

"Earth with its wide roads gaped and then over the Nysian field the lord and All-receiver, the many-named son of Kronos, sprang out upon her with his immortal horses. Against her will he seized her and on his golden chariot carried her away as she wailed."[9]

Persephone's mother, Demeter, is told of the abduction by the only immortal to have heard her cries, Hekate. Demeter then proceeds to question Helios who sees all. He tells her the truth:

"Lady Demeter, daughter of lovely-haired Rhea, you shall know...no other immortal is to be blamed save cloud-gathering Zeus who gave her to Hades, his own brother, to become his buxom bride. He seized her and with his horses carried her crying loud down to misty darkness."[10]

The next section of the myth is a lengthy description about Demeter leaving the company of the gods and going to the city of Eleusis. Disguised as an old woman, she is welcomed into the royal house and becomes a nurse to Demophoon, the son of Metaneira. Demeter places Demophoon in a special fire every night to make him immortal. When the horrified mother discovers this, she confronts Demeter who then reveals who she really is.[11]

This is a similar story to one which occurs in the myth of Osiris as recounted by Plutarch. While searching

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[9]. HDem, p.2, lines 16-20.

[10]. HDem, pp.3-4, lines 75-81.

[11]. HDem, p.8, lines 225-249.

for the body of Osiris, Isis goes to Byblos and becomes the nurse of the son of the queen. The queen finds Isis burning the child to make him immortal and cries out, thus stopping Isis from her task.[12]

This leads to the question of whether Plutarch was aware of the "Hymn to Demeter". While opinion differs on this, it has been suggested that this Greek mythological element was grafted on to the myth of Osiris prior to Plutarch's account.[13] While this might not add anything to our understanding of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, it does show how motifs from various myths of dying and rising deities might have become mixed in later times.

After the episode with Demophoon, Demeter instructs the people of Eleusis on how to worship her, and the king of Eleusis hurries to comply:

"He then called to the assembly the people of every district and bade them build an opulent temple to lovely-haired Demeter."[14]

Following the establishment of her temple at Eleusis, Demeter takes definitive steps to recover her daughter. This is done in a harsh way, by withholding her fertility attributes and causing a famine. By this means, Demeter effectively obtains the undivided attention of her fellow immortals:

"Onto the much-nourishing earth she brought a year

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[12]. Plu, p.143, lines 3-5.

[13]. Plu, p.320-325.

[14]. HDem, p.10, lines 296-297.

most dreadful and harsh for men; no seed in the earth sprouted, for fair-wreathed Demeter concealed it."[15]

Ovid also stresses the anger of Demeter and underlines Demeter's revenge on fertility:

"The whole wide world, ungrateful, not deserving, her gift of grain....where she found traces of her loss, so there with angry hands she broke the ploughs."[16]

Zeus and his compatriots understand this threat. They entreat Demeter to return to their company and relent on the famine. However, Demeter remains firm:

"She would never set foot on fragrant Olympos and never allow the grain in the earth to sprout forth before seeing with her eyes her fair-faced daughter."[17]

Zeus gives in to Demeter's pressure and orders Hades to allow Persephone to leave the underworld. But prior to her departure, Hades seeks to entrap her:

"Wise Persephone rejoiced and swiftly sprang up for joy, but he himself gave her to eat a honey-sweet pomegranate seed, contriving secretly about her, so that she might not spend all her days again with dark-robed, revered Demeter."[18]

Persephone leaves the underworld and is reunited with Demeter. But Demeter correctly discerns that there has been a trick played and carefully questioning Persephone, learns that her daughter has eaten a pomegranate seed given to her by Hades. Demeter understands the implications of this act, whereby Persephone must return to the underworld. In this way, a

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[15]. HDem, p.10, lines 305-307.

[16]. Ovid, Metamorphoses, Book V, p.113.

[17]. HDem, p.11, lines 331-333.

[18]. HDem, p.12, lines 370-374.

compromise is reached:

"You shall fly and go to the depths of the earth to dwell there a third of the seasons of the year, spending two seasons with me, and the other immortals."[19]

In Ovid's Metamorphoses, Zeus (called Jove in the Latin pantheon), also finds a seasonal solution to the conflict between Demeter and Hades:

"Then Jove, to hold the balance between his brother and sister in her grief, portioned the rolling year in equal parts. Now Proserpine, of two empires alike great deity, spends with her mother half..."[20]

At the request of the gods, Demeter then relents and ends the famine:

"Fair-wreathed Demeter did not disobey, but swiftly made the seed sprout out of the fertile fields. The whole broad earth teemed with leaves and flowers...."[21]

The hymn to Demeter closes with Demeter teaching the "holy rites" to the princes of Eleusis.[22]

In essence, the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter" contains two main themes. The first is Persephone's abduction by Hades and Demeter's efforts to get her daughter back. The second is the establishment of the cult of Demeter at Eleusis, where much of the myth actually occurred.

Demeter is clearly a goddess connected with the fertility of the fields. As the goddess of the fields, Demeter has it in her power to cause a famine. Carl Kerenyi describes the fertility aspect of Demeter:

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[19]. HDem, p.12, lines 398-400.

[20]. Ovid, Metamorphoses, Book V, p.116.

[21]. HDem, p.14, lines 470-472.

[22]. HDem, pp.14-15, lines 474-482.

"Demeter differed from Gaia or Ge, the Earth; Earth she was, too; not, however, in its quality of universal mother but as mother of the grain..."[23]

But what can be said of Persephone? At least in the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter", Persephone does not specifically appear to be a corn goddess. Yet her disappearance from the earth into the underworld has a direct impact on the fertility of the fields. Therefore, Persephone too can be seen as a fertility goddess, if not in her own right then in association with her mother Demeter.

The second topic in the Hymn to Demeter regards the founding of the cult of Demeter at Eleusis. On one level, the myth explains how the cult came to be associated with Eleusis. But on another level, the myth of Demeter and Persephone provides the theological framework for the Eleusinian mysteries of Demeter at Eleusis.

Unlike so many other myths, the myth of Demeter and Persephone was directly connected with a known cultic site, namely Eleusis. The "Homeric Hymn to Demeter" specifically describes the establishment of the cult at Eleusis since Eleusis was where Demeter lived in exile before Persephone was returned to her. Fortunately Eleusis has been excavated and the archaeological evidence can be used to augment what little is known of the actual worship of Demeter.

The excavations at Eleusis give some indication of the time frame we can give to the worship of Demeter

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[23]. Carl Kerenyi, Eleusis, p.29.

which occurred there. The written evidence, namely from the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter", comes from the seventh century B.C. or later. But archaeology indicates that the mysteries of Eleusis go back much further.

One of the excavators of the site of Eleusis, George Mylonas, in his work Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries, points out that there really is no written or artistic evidence to prove either the worship of either Persephone or Demeter at Eleusis during the Mycenaean age.[24] However, the circumstantial evidence is suggestive.

Mylonas felt that the temple identified in the excavations as Megaron B at Eleusis from the Mycenaean age was a temple to Demeter. For one thing, it was found below what was later the known temple of Demeter. Also, Mylonas points out that there was a strong tendency in ancient Greece for continuity in places of worship. Finally, Megaron B fits the description of the temple of Demeter as described in the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter", specifically in its location outside the fortification walls.[25]

Finally, Mylonas thought that a well from the Mycenaean period was the prototype of the well where Demeter was found by the court women of Eleusis. He theorized that after the Persian destruction of Eleusis and the subsequent rebuilding, this well was filled in

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[24]. George Mylonas, Eleusis, pp.53-54.

[25]. George Mylonas, Eleusis, pp.38-44.

and its name transferred to another location.[26]

The archaeological evidence from the Mycenaean period indicates that Eleusis was a cult centre of some sort. The lack of written or artistic evidence should not be seen as negative evidence against a cult of Demeter at Eleusis during the Bronze Age. Mylonas' argument for continuity is a reasonable one and it seems safe to conclude that some kind of cult activity related to Demeter occurred this early at Eleusis.

Eleusis began to receive international attention during the sixth century B.C. when the mysteries were opened up to non-Athenians. This was a period of major reconstruction and the temple was improved and enlarged.[27] Unfortunately for Eleusis, the entire precinct was sacked and burned during the Persian wars, but it was later rebuilt and improved by succeeding generations.[28]

Eleusis managed to survive the Peloponnesian war and flourished during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. During the reign of Marcus Aurelius, the sanctuary was again destroyed by a barbarian invasion. Marcus Aurelius rebuilt the temple of Demeter and became an initiate into the mysteries.[29] It is perhaps interesting to note that when Eleusis finally succumbed to Christianity, burials

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[26]. George Mylonas, Eleusis, pp.45-48.

[27]. George Mylonas, Eleusis, pp.77-78.

[28]. George Mylonas, Eleusis, pp.106-107.

[29]. George Mylonas, Eleusis, p.161.

took place in the sanctuary, indicating some kind of continuation of the popularity of Eleusis as a centre of belief.[30]

Although the worship of Demeter at Eleusis took place over a huge period of time dating from the Bronze age to the onset of Christianity, and though the site of Eleusis itself can be described archaeologically, the actual rites performed at Eleusis remain, for the most part, beyond recovery.

Such knowledge as we have of the Eleusinian mysteries comes from contemporary hints and Christian sources.[31] The Christian sources must be viewed with scepticism and the other contemporary sources were understandably reticent about divulging any details of the rites at Eleusis. As a last resort, a degree of intelligent speculation must be used.

Some of the actual structure of the cult is known. Two families traditionally provided the priests of the cult, the Eumolpidai and the Kerkes. The rites themselves were open to anyone, regardless of sex or social class.[32] This in itself would suggest a religious belief that was very widespread.

The initiation was largely concerned with ritual purification. In addition, each initiate had to bring

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[30]. George Mylonas, Eleusis, p.186.

[31]. Carl Kerenyi, Eleusis, pp.116-117.

[32]. Walter Burkert, Ancient Greek Mystery Cults, p.286.

along a piglet for sacrifice. It has been suggested that the pig was meant as a substitute for the initiate and represented Persephone going into the underworld.[33]

As in any ancient religion, ritual processions and dances would have played a major part. In addition, it is known that symbolic representations of an ear of corn were displayed during the rituals. This confirms the presence of a fertility element in the myth of Demeter and Persephone.[34]

The theology behind the cult at Eleusis appears to have been solidly based on the myth of Demeter and Persephone. The fertility of the fields played, as can be imagined, a considerable role. But the cult at Eleusis took this a step further. Some form of promise of a better life after death appears to have been given. This would not mean immortality, but some other kind of life after death. We know this because it is hinted at in the end of the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter".[35] It can be speculated that the cycle of the seasons was equated with the life cycle of mankind and that the cult at Eleusis drew some conclusions from this. It is unfortunate that more is not known about this aspect of the cult at Eleusis.

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[33]. Walter Burkert, Ancient Greek Mystery Cults, p.286.

[34]. Walter Burkert, Ancient Greek Mystery Cults, pp.287-288.

[35]. Walter Burkert, Ancient Greek Mystery Cults, p.289.

Finally in regard to the myth of Demeter and Persephone and their cult, it may be useful to look at the festivals to Demeter in Attica. Two such festivals occurred during the Autumn and were related to one another. These were the festivals of Stenia and Thesmophoria. Both were celebrated only by female worshippers.

A few days before the festival of Thesmophoria took place, the festival of Stenia was held. This was a festival that took place at night and involved the sacrifice of piglets, but possibly also dogs. In addition, the participants insulted each other in a ritual manner recalling the method used by the women of Eleusis to divert Demeter from her grief.[36]

The festival of Thesmophoria was for the fertility of both the crops and mankind. The sacrifice of piglets also played a part (although this may have been carried over from the festival of Stenia). The name of the festival was taken from the Thesmoi, the ritual cakes that were made during the festival and were used in the ritual sowing of the crops.[37]

Another fertility festival dedicated to Demeter was the festival of Skira. Skira took place when the grain was harvested and like the Thesmophoria and Stenia, was celebrated only by women. It is possible that, as in the other two festivals, piglets were involved. One can only

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[36]. Erika Simon, Festivals of Attica, p.20.

[37]. Erika Simon, Festivals of Attica, pp.18-22.

wonder why piglets played such a prominent role in the rituals of Demeter.[38]

The yearly festival of the Eleusinian mysteries occurred in the Autumn and lasted over a week. Two sets of "mysteries" occurred, the greater and lesser. Unlike the festivals to Demeter herself, this one was open to anyone of either sex or any social class. The ritual included a procession from Athens to Eleusis. Otherwise, not a great deal is known about the rituals during this festival, but they do seem to have been connected with the fertility of the fields.[39]

The festivals connected with Demeter had a direct link with the myth of Demeter and Persephone. This is indicated by the fact that all of the festivals mentioned were related to fertility and the seasonal cycle.

In his psychological analysis of the Eleusinian Mysteries, Carl Kerenyi argues for an emphasis on the mystical nature of both the myth of Demeter and Persephone and the myth's relationship with the Eleusinian Mysteries. This psychological aspect of the myth of Demeter and Persephone will need to be examined more fully later, but it is worth mentioning here in relation to the cult at Eleusis. To Kerenyi, the cult at Eleusis was a mystical experience for the initiates who went there:

"Uniqueness is an important characteristic of the

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[38]. Erika Simon, Festivals of Attica, pp.22-24.

[39]. Erika Simon, Festivals of Attica, pp.24-35.

Eleusinian Mysteries. Their extraordinary religious significance resided in the belief that here alone did a pious encounter between the living and the queen of the underworld become possible."[40]

How can the myth of Demeter and Persephone be interpreted? Was James Frazer correct in identifying Demeter and Persephone as goddesses of the corn? Was the myth of Demeter and Persephone a myth with the dual themes of agricultural fertility and the human life cycle? As Frazer himself indicated:

"We do no indignity to the myth of Demeter and Persephone - one of the few myths in which the sunshine and clarity of the Greek genius are crossed by the shadow and mystery of death - when we trace its origin to some of the most familiar, yet eternally affecting aspects of nature, to the melancholy gloom and decay of autumn and to the freshness, the brightness, and the verdure of spring."[41]

As stated earlier, Demeter and Persephone are clearly goddesses who deal with fertility. But were they the same kind, as was claimed by Frazer? Obviously, Demeter is a goddess of fertility who when angered, makes her displeasure known:

"In vain the oxen drew many curved plows over the fields, and in vain did much white barley fall into the ground."[42]

If Demeter was a goddess of the corn, then was Persephone also one? At least in the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter", the answer must be no. Persephone's abduction does not result in the failure of the crops, but rather in a negative impact on her mother. Likewise, her return

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[40]. Carl Kerenyi, Eleusis, p.120.

[41]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.399.

[42]. HDem, p.10, lines 308-309.

to her mother is not what stops the famine; rather it is the appeasement of Demeter that stops the famine.

It is probable, rather, that Persephone personified the seasons. The final settlement of Zeus with Hades involves Persephone spending part of the year with Hades:

> "With a nod of his head he promised that, as the year revolved, her daughter could spend one portion of it in the misty darkness and the other two with her mother and the other immortals."[43]

The two goddesses are closely connected to one another and it might be wise to see Persephone as a type of Demeter who, as the child of Demeter, also represents fertility. When Persephone "dies", Demeter's fertility also dies. When Persephone leaves the underworld, Demeter's fertility is restored and the crops grow. In his study on the Great Mother, Erich Neumann describes the relationship between Demeter and Persephone (Kore):

> "Kore's resurrection from the earth-the archetypal spring motif - signifies her finding by Demeter, for whom Kore had "died", and her reunion with her. But the true mystery, through which the primordial situation is restored on a new plane, is this: the daughter becomes identical with the mother; she becomes a mother and is transformed into Demeter."[44]

The other main issue in the myth of Demeter and Persephone is the establishment of the cult of Demeter at Eleusis. It is impossible to tell which came first, the myth or the cult. In the end, it probably doesn't matter. It is enough to know that Eleusis was a cultic site as early as the late Bronze age. It is also probably

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[43]. HDem, p.11, lines 445-447.

[44]. Erich Neumann, The Great Mother, pp.308-309.

significant that the earliest version of the myth of Demeter and Persephone (the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter") makes it clear that the writer of the hymn felt that there was a close connection between the myth and the cult.

The establishment of the mysteries at Eleusis by Demeter is alluded to by her actions at the end of the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter":

> "The whole broad earth teemed with leaves and flowers; and she went to the kings who administer the laws, Triptolemos and Diokles...and showed them the celebration of holy rites...the awful mysteries not to be transgressed, violated, or divulged."[45]

Despite the cultic nature of the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter", the myth in this version should not be seen solely as a cultic document. Rather, it is a story wherein is embodied a theological framework. The myth of Demeter and Persephone and the Eleusinian mysteries represent a religious belief that went well beyond a mythological explanation of the seasons and the fertility of the crops. James Frazer alludes to the theory that the Eleusinian mysteries promised some sort of hope for an existence beyond human mortality.[46] This view is supported by evidence from within the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter:"

> "Whoever on this earth has seen these is blessed, but he who has no part in these holy rites has another lot as he wastes away in dank darkness."[47]

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[45]. HDem, pp.14-15, lines 472-479.

[46]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.398.

[47]. HDem, p.15, lines 480-482.

In the end, there is a limit to what can be said about Demeter, Persephone, and the Eleusinian mysteries. Like many of the other so-called mystery religions, the secret of these mysteries was well kept in antiquity and it perished when the religion gave way to a new religion which also promised an afterlife, Christianity. We know that the myth of Demeter and Persephone was a myth about agriculture and the seasonal cycle. But there is more; it is easy to forget the more human side of the myth. One of the foremost themes that appears in this myth is the sorrow and anger of a mother whose child is stolen away in her youth by death. Demeter's anguish over the loss of Persephone reverberates throughout the myth:

> "A sharp pain gripped her heart, and she tore the headband round her divine hair with her own hands. From both of her shoulders she cast down her dark veil and rushed like a bird over the nourishing land and sea, searching..."[48]

We have returned to the enigma of death, and how it may be overcome. To the ancient Greeks, an agricultural people who lived a life determined by the seasonal cycle, the merging of the human life cycle and the agricultural cycle could have seemed a normal association. By personifying the gods as aspects of life, death and agriculture, these two themes were effectively embodied in the myth of Demeter and the seasonal death and resurrection of her daughter, Persephone.

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[48]. HDem, pp.2-3, lines 40-44.

Chapter 4

The Myth of Baal and Mot

The excavations at ancient Ugarit, the present day Ras Shamra, on the northern Syrian coast, uncovered a host of cuneiform tablets within an unknown Semitic language, whose closest affinities turned out to be with the Canaanite sub-group of the Northwest Semitic family. These included a fair number of literary, mythical, and legendary texts, the better preserved of which were quickly made available during the 1930's in preliminary editions. An official edition of all known Ugaritic texts, mythical, legendary, and otherwise, was published in 1963 by Mlle. Herner (CTA) and was followed in 1976 by a fuller edition by Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartin (KTU), now usually used in citing references.[1] The chief mythological and legendary texts are numbered the same in these two editions, though two earlier editions, those of Virolleaud and Gordon, employ different systems which are sometimes still used. There have also been many smaller editions, translations and studies of the texts.[2] Of these the one by Gibson (CML) is generally used

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[1]. Andree Herdner, Corpus des Tablets en Cuneiformes Alphabetiques Decouvertes a Ras-Shamra de 1929 a 1939.

M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, J. Sanmartin, Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit.

[2]. Theodore Gaster, Thespis; C.H. Gordon, Ugarit and Minoan Crete; U. Cassuto, The Goddess Anath; J.C. DeMoor, The Seasonal Pattern; A. Caquot, M. Szrycer, Andrée Herdner, Textes Ougaritiques, Mythes et Legendes; J.C.L. Gibson, CML; J.C. DeMoor, ARTU, G. del Olmo Lete, Mitos y Leyendas de Canaan.

More general studies consulted are: C.H. Gordon, "Canaanite

these the one by Gibson (CML) is generally used in this chapter; it follows Herner's numbering.

With few exceptions (notably DeMoor), the ordering of the first six tablets in CTA and KTU, dealing with the cycle of Baal myths edited by the scribe Ilimilku, is nowadays followed, and is accepted here. This places the myth of Baal and Mot last in the cycle (tablets 5 and 6) after the myth of Baal and Yam (tablets 1 and 2) and the building of Baal's palace (tablets 3 and 4). With a conflict between Baal and Yam beginning the cycle and one between Baal and Mot ending it, and with the title "King" being, with the supreme god El's approval, conferred on Baal after each of them, it is clear that the main thrust of the cycle is theomachic. It settles in Baal's favour the issue of who should be king over the earth (the microcosm), under El, the king of the universe (the macrocosm). It is within the parameters set by this broad purpose that the question of whether Baal can be regarded as a dying and rising deity has to be seen. The same is true of attempts to link the myth of Baal and Mot with agriculture and the seasonal cycle, as in Hvidberg's early study, and as why DeMoor in his book entitled The Seasonal Pattern, extended the attempt to the whole Baal cycle. These aspects may be there, but they cannot be

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"Canaanite Mythology", in S.N. Kramer's Mythologies of the Ancient World;
J. Gray, The Legacy of Canaan; J.C.L. Gibson, "The Theology of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle", Orientalia 53 (1984); F.F. Hvidberg, Weeping and Laughter in the Old Testament.

allowed to dominate the interpretation of this cycle.

The myth of Baal and Mot begins with an invitation to Mot from Baal (presumably to celebrate with him the building of his palace, the subject of tablet 4), which Mot refuses. He is unimpressed by Baal's winning of the kingship and threatens him instead. He has been invited to eat bread and drink wine, but he wants much more than this; in particular he wants to swallow Baal himself and undo his work:

"'Have you then forgotten Baal, that I can surely transfix you...for all that you smote [Leviathan the slippery serpent] (and) made an end of [the wriggling serpent], the tyrant [with seven heads]? [The heavens] will burn up [(and) droop (helpless)], [for I myself will crush] you [in pieces], [I will eat (you)...(and) forearms]. [Indeed you must come down into ther throat of divine Mot], [into the miry depths of the hero beloved of El].'"[3]

Baal, strangely and cravenly, immediately submits to this threat:

"Hail O divine Mot, I am your servant, yes, yours for ever."[4]

Much of the following text is very broken. Eventually, Baal is advised to go into the underworld by an unnamed speaker, probably Shapash:

"Then of a truth do you set your face towards the rocks (at the entrance) of my grave. Lift up a rock on (your) two hands, a wooded height on to (your) two palms, and go down (into) the house of freedom (in) the earth, be counted among those who go down into the earth; and do you know inanition like mortal men."[5]

Included in the message seems to have been

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[3]. CML, p.69,5,i, lines 26-35.

[4]. CML, p.69,5,ii, lines 11-12.

[5]. CML, p.72,5,v, lines 11-17.

instructions about procuring a substitute for Baal, for Baal goes on to have sexual intercourse with a heifer:

"Mightiest Baal obeyed...He love a heifer in the pasture(s), a cow in the fields by the shore of the realm of death; he did lie with her seven and seventy times; and she conceived and gave birth to a boy."[6]

It is a pity that the text in the middle of tablet 5 is so damaged. If the mating with a heifer is to provide a substitute victim, Baal, who is presumably at this point proceeding to the underworld to surrender to Mot, eludes death, and can hardly be thought of as a dying and rising deity. But there is disagreement about this, and Gaster and many other scholars think that Baal is rather planning a substitute who can take his place should he fail to return from the underworld. The subterfuge is not mentioned again, and this seems a more reasonable suggestion.

After a short gap, servants of Baal arrive at El's mountainous abode at the source of the rivers, and announce that they have found Baal's dead body. El mourns for Baal:

"He poured straw of mourning on his head, dust of wallowing on his crown; for clothing he covered himself with sackcloth; he scraped (his skin) with a stone, with a flint for a razor he shaved (his) side whiskers and beard; he harrowed his collarbone, he ploughed (his) chest like a garden, he harrowed (his) waist like a valley. He lifted up his voice and cried' Baal is dead.'"[7]

Baal's sister Anat also eventually finds the body of Baal with the help of the sun-goddess Shapash, and

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[6]. CML, p.72,5,v, lines 17-22.

[7]. CML, p.73,5,vi, lines 14-23.

retrieves it:

"She surely put him on to the shoulder of Anat, (and) she took him up to the recesses of Zephon; she wept for him and buried him, she put him in a hole of the earth gods."[8]

Following Baal's burial, the gods must decide who is to follow Baal in his kingship. Eventually, Athtar, the son of Athirat is chosen for king. However, it is found that Athtar is too small to fit onto Baal's throne so he cannot replace Baal.[9] The implication is that Baal must be brought back.

Anat then goes to the underworld to search for her brother's shade, and eventually confronts Mot who rashly describes how he destroyed Baal. In a rage, Anat annihilates Mot:

"She seized divine Mot, with a sword whe split him, with a sieve she winnowed him, with fire she burnt him, with mill-stones she ground him, in a field she scattered him; his flesh indeed the birds ate, his limbs indeed the sparrows consumed."[10]

Anat returns to El and announces that Mot is dead, inviting the supreme god to dream a dream and discover whether Baal is alive. El in the dream sees the heavens raining down oil and the wadis running with honey, and rejoices at these signs of Baal returning to life. But the fields are still dry and cracked, and El sends Shapash to find Baal, which she does, and Baal reoccupies his throne.

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[8]. CML, p.74,6,i, lines 14-18.

[9]. CML, pp.75-76,6,i, lines 40-63.

[10]. CML, p.77,6,ii, lines 30-37.

At this point there is a sudden change in the narrative and a reference to the framing of the seven years, after which Mot reappears and protests at his destruction by Anat, and demands one of Baal's brothers on whom he may feed. If Baal does not give him up, he will consume all mankind. There follows a gap in the text. When it resumes, Mot is back in the underworld, and it is there that he hears of Baal's refusal. In anger, he goes to Baal's abode on Sapanu, where the two engage in battle:

"They eyed each other like burning coals; Mot was strong, Baal was strong. They gored like wild oxen; Mot was strong, Baal was strong."[11]

This battle ends inconclusively, and Shapash has to intervene to pronounce El's verdict in favour of Baal. Mot acknowledges El's verdict very reluctantly, and the cycle concludes with his cry:

"'Let them seat Baal [on the throne] of his kingdom, on [the cushion on the seat] of his dominion!'"[12]

Who are the three great deities who do battle with each other in this mythical cycle? Yam is the god of the sea, as the name suggests, and of the rivers, as his other name (Nahar) suggests, but also of the waters which surround the universe and to which, in the ancient view of the cosmos, these were connected. He is the equivalent of the Biblical Leviathan defeated by Yahweh at the beginning of time, but whose fierce floods have to be

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[11]. CML, p.80,6,vi, lines 16-19.

[12]. CML, p.81,6,vi, lines 33-35.

contained by him many times thereafter. Mot is the god of death, and all mankind have eventually to submit to him and go to his underworld domain; but he is also, as several of the passages quoted above strongly suggest, the god of summer drought. It is against these two primordial forces that Baal is opposed as the weather-god of ancient Ugarit, the deity responsibly for thunder and rain. He could be dangerous in the storm, but not so dangerous in the eyes of the people of Ugarit as the unruly waters of Yam and the drought and death caused by Mot. The cycle of Baal confirms this estimate of Baal; in it he defeats Yam, gains the kingship over the earth and defends it successfully against an attempt by Mot to usurp it; and the seal is set on his victory by the approval of the supreme god, El.

However, though this contest for leadership among the gods may be the chief theme of the cycle as a whole, are there features, especially of the part where Baal and Mot are the main antagonists, which link the cycle with the other myths of dying and rising deities, with the grain and the growing process, for example, or with the seasonal cycle, or with beliefs about death?

There is no evidence that Baal is connected with the growing grain, but in the opinion of some scholars, one passage, already mentioned above, identifies not Baal, but Mot with it.[13] They see in this passage the

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[13]. The text where Anat destroys Mot. See F.F. Hvidberg, Weeping and Laughter in the Old Testament, .34-35, 64ff.; H, Ringgren, Religions of the Ancient Near

reflection of a ritual in which Mot represents a corn-sheaf, and suggest also that this ritual was part of a larger dramatic performance, the progress of which may be traced in other passages of the cycle. One's reaction to this interpretation depends on how closely one assumes that myth and ritual were related to one another. In general nowadays, the link is not considered to be very great, and myths are no longer regarded, as they used to be, as the librettos for cultic performances.[14] Certainly, in the case of the passage we are dealing with, there is, since the article of Loewenstamm, a consensus that there is no ritual behind it, but rather it uses the agricultural imagery of threshing to express metaphorically the idea of complete annihilation.[15] Anat destroys Mot thoroughly; that is all there is to it.

There are several passages in the Old Testament which use similar imagery and in these there is nothing pointing to any agricultural process or ritual.[16]

The myth of Baal and Mot gives us, then, no evidence of a dying deity who in his dying is associated with the grain. However, what mileage is there in the

East, pp.162ff.

[14]. See G.S. Kirk, Myth:Its Meaning and Functions; Joseph Fontenrose, The Ritual Theory of Myth.

[15]. See S.E. Loewenstamm, "The Ugaritic Fertility Myth-the Result of a Mistranslation", IEJ 12, 1962; pp.87-88.

[16]. See Jeremiah 15:7; Deuteronomy 28:2; and Exodus 32:20. Compare also the account of how the Assyrian king Ashuubanipal destroyed those who blasphemed against the god Ashur: ANET, p.288.

interpretation of the myth as referring in some way to the seasonal cycle, a rather wider notion? Here we must consider DeMoor's valiant attempt to associate, each part of the cycle, including the myth of Baal and Mot, with the onward progression of the seasons of the year.

In general, DeMoor's thesis cannot stand. For one thing, he has in order to accommodate it, changed the widely accepted order of the tablets (1-6 in both CTA and KTU) to 3-1-2-4-5-6. This allows him to begin with the Levantine New Year in autumn and to follow this with the concerns of winter (he places the battle between Baal and Yam in this season), and thereafter those of spring (4) and summer (5-6). The theme of theomachy which, in ordering 1-6, clearly the leading one, is disrupted and replaced by the theme of the seasonal cycle. Too much that is important in the myth is discarded for his theory to be viable.

Apart from this, his treatment of many individual passages is angled and highly questionable, as is shown in Grabbe's critique.[17] But there are important elements of a seasonal interpretation which should be considered. In the myth of Baal and Mot, there are many passages not only connecting Mot with the drought of summer, but making it clear that he caused it. Some were mentioned earlier in this chapter. Other referring to Mot are:

"'Because he has scorched the olive(s), the produce of the earth and the fruit of the trees, mightiest Baal

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[17]. L.L. Grabbe, "The Seasonal Pattern and the Baal Cycle", UF 8, 1976: pp.57-63.

is afraid of him.'"[18]

Another example is where Mot's dominance over the sun-goddess Shapash is stressed:

"Shapash the luminary of the gods did glow hot, the heavens were wearied by the hand of divine Mot."[19]

See also the passage in the next column where El has his dream which convinces him that Baal is still alive:

"in a vision of the creator of creatures, the heavens rained oil, the ravines ran with honey."[20]

If not the whole Baal cycle, then this one myth at any rate has clear seasonal implications. The death of Baal in early summer means the disappearance of the rains and the turning over of the earth's surface to drought and the withering of vegetation as Mot gains mastery over it. This mastery is only broken with Mot's destruction by Anat which leads to the return of Baal with his fructifying rains in autumn. In the Baal cycle as a whole this myth signifies the collapse of Mot's challenge to Baal's kingship over the earth; but it is also patently a myth about the coming of the rains to bring to an end the drought of summer. In this respect, at least, DeMoor is on the right track.

On the basis of a reference to the passing of seven years between the slaying of Mot by Anat and his reappearance to do battle with Baal[21], some scholars,

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[18]. CML, p.69,5,ii, lines 5-6.

[19]. CML, p.77,6,ii, lines 24-25.

[20]. CML, p.77,6,iii, lines 11-13.

[21]. CML, p.79,6,v, lines 7-9.

notably Driver (in the first edition of CML)[22] and Gordon[23], argue that the events related in the myth of Baal and Mot do not allude to the yearly coming of the summer drought and the rains, but to more occasional periods of succeeding drought and plenty. This interpretation, if correct, would fatally damage DeMoor's whole thesis. But it need not be accepted. Apart from the reference in the myth of Baal and Mot, there is only one other reference in a text dealing with Baal to the naming of the seven years, and that is the very damaged text KTU 12, which concerns a battle between Baal and some creatures called "the devourers". It does not belong to the cycle of Ilimilku, and should not therefore be called in to illumine it. But there is another explanation of the second encounter between Baal and Mot, namely that Mot is there presented under another aspect. In the first encounter he is patently the god of drought who dries up the vegetation; but in the second encounter there is no direct reference to Mot's affect on the vegetation, and he is there mankind's perennial enemy, the god of death to whom they all some day are to be subject to. Mot threatens Baal that if he does not meet his request, he will attack and swallow all human beings. This archetypal aspect of the god of the underworld is alluded to in the first encounter:

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[22]. G.R. Driver, Canaanite Myths and Legends.

[23]. C.H. Gordon, "Canaanite Mythology", in S.N. Kramer's Mythologies of the Ancient World.

"'My appetite did lack humans, my appetite (did lack) the multitudes of earth.'"[24]

But in the second encounter the archetypal aspect alone survives, showing that to the people of ancient Ugarit his yearly disruption of Baal's rains was a constant matter of concern, but that what more than anything else they feared about him was that all of them were doomed, when the time came, to become his subjects.

It remains to look at the problem of the afterlife according to the Ugaritic texts. The myth of Baal and Mot presents the god of death as a fearful monster, the "swallower" par excellence, who eats up both the summer vegetation and human beings. His gaping jaws reach to heaven.[25] The underworld where he gathers his victims is no less frightening; his city is called "Miry"[26], it is vast and full of filth, the lands near its entrance are called in what is clearly a euphemism, "Pleasure and Delight"[27], and it itself is called "the house of freedom in the earth."[28] In the very fragmentary myth of the Rephaim (KTU 20-22) its inhabitants are called "shades". The picture reminds us in every respect of the Hebrew Sheol and the Mesopotamian abode of the dead alluded to by Enkidu.

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[24]. CML, p.76,6,ii, lines 17-19.

[25]. CML, p.69,5,ii, line 2.

[26]. CML,p.66, 4,viii, line 12.

[27]. CML, p.74,5,vi, lines 28-30.

[28]. CML, p.72,5,v, lines 15-16.

One incident in the Baal and Mot myth has been considered relevant to the topic of a belief in an afterlife at Ugarit. At the end of the myth an invocation is made to Shapash which refers to a funerary feast possibly meant for a communion with the dead.[29] But this is not a necessary condition. The lines may simply be speaking of an invitation to the sun-goddess, who has played a not inconsiderable role as emissary of El in the cycle, to share a feast in her honour. It is going beyond the evidence to conclude that the passage is at all related to Ugaritic views on the afterlife.

The archaeological evidence from Ugarit is unclear. Like Isin-Larsa period Ur, Ugarit contained tombs which were built under the houses of the wealthy. It is possible that these were meant to be family burial vaults as has been suggested for the houses at Ur. The Ugaritic tombs were vaulted and were evidently built at the same time as the houses themselves.[30]

The archaeological evidence also suggests that ritual offerings were made to the dead. These included libations and vases and were placed outside the tombs. It is also possible that there were offering tables for the dead.[31] But the evidence is not extensive. The text of

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[29]. Meindert Dijkstra, "Once Again: The Closing Lines of the Ba'al Cycle", UF 17, 1985:pp.145-152.

[30]. Klaas Von Spronk, Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East, pp.142-143.

[31]. Klaas Von Spronk, Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East, p.143 notes 1-8, and p.144 notes 1-8.

the Rapiuma (KTU 20-22) may supply additional evidence of ancestral worship, if the shades whose convocation in the underworld is, as some have thought, of divinised kings or heroes. And there is the reference in the Aqhat legend to the ancestral god of Danel or Daniel.[32] But there is little else. One commentator has rightly stated:

"It would go too far to speak of a cult of the dead on the basis of these facts alone."[33]

It is quite probable that the archaeological evidence at Ugarit indicates common Near Eastern beliefs in appeasing the dead rather than a complex funerary cult. Nor is there compelling evidence to remove the impression given by the Baal and Mot myth that, whatever might happen to the gods, the general fate of mankind when the end of life came was to enter the realm of Mot and disappear. This conclusion is confirmed not only by the beliefs of the surrounding cultures of Mesopotamia and Israel that death marked the end of life, but also by the discussion in the Aqhat tale between the goddess Anat and Aqhat, and the mourning in the Keret legend by the king's daughter. Aqhat refuses Anat's offer of immortality in exchange for his magic bow and acknowledges that he must "die the death of all men."[34] Keret's daughter asks when he is seriously ill:

"How can it be said (that) Keret is a son of El, the

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[32]. CML, p.104,17,i, line 27.

[33]. Klaas Von Spronk, Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East, pp.144-145.

[34]. CML, p.109,17,vi, lines 25-38.

progeny of the Latipan and the Holy one? Or shall gods die? Shall the progeny of Latipan not live?"[35]

At Ugarit Kings are regarded as divine, but this seems to be largely rhetorical (as in neighbouring Israel), for when it comes to it, they too are as mortal as other men. Baal's resurrection concerns him alone, and is not, at Ugarit, a hopeful sign for mortals. As regards the seasons he may each year conquer Mot, but he cannot prevent mankind from eventually falling victim to the god of death. All of this is in concordance with the will of El, the paramount King who created the universe, and his providence sees to it that all of the lesser gods, even the most important among them like Baal and Mot, keep their place and fulfil their allotted tasks.

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[35]. CML, p.95,16,i, lines 20-23.

Chapter 5

Dying Gods of Vegetation

One of the most persistent claims regarding dying and rising deities of the ancient Near East is that they were dying gods of vegetation. James Frazer stated this concept clearly in his book The Golden Bough:

> "Under the names of Osiris, Tammuz, Adonis, and Attis, the peoples of Egypt and Western Asia represented the yearly decay and revival of life, especially of vegetable life, which they personified as a god who annually died and rose again from the dead. In name and detail the rites varies from place to place: in substance they were the same."[1]

Were Osiris, Inanna, Dumuzi, and Persephone dying gods of vegetation? And was Baal, whom Frazer knew nothing about?

Frazer speaks of the rites surrounding these deities differing from culture to culture, but of their substance remaining the same. Our analysis of the individual myths in part I hardly supports such a conclusion. In Frazer's quote there are two matters where he in effect begs to be questioned. One is his use of the word "rites", which he regards as a source supplying extra evidence to that found in the myths. This assumes a close relationship between ritual and myth, which was widely held in his day but which is seriously questioned in more recent scholarship. But even more important is Frazer's failure to distinguish between deities who are embodied in the

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[1]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.325.

growing vegetation and deities whose dying and rising simply affects the vegetation, whether for good or ill. This is a vital distinction which is reflected in this study by giving each of these kinds of deities a separate chapter.

The following quotes from Frazer's book serve as good examples of how he connects deity and vegetation. The first is from the Greek myth of Adonis whom, as a borrowing from further east, Frazer identifies with the Mesopotamian god Tammuz/Dumuzi.[2] Adonis is directly linked to the corn as it is being reaped in the early summer:

"Thus interpreted the death of Adonis is not the natural decay of vegetation in general under the summer heat or the winter cold; it is the violent destruction of the corn by man."[3]

This does not prevent Frazer, because of the god's disappearance into the underworld for part of the year, elsewhere placing his death at the onset of winter. Frazer likewise made a connection between the Egyptian Osiris and the corn:

"The foregoing survey of the myth and ritual of Osiris may suffice to prove that in one of his aspects the god was the personification of the corn, which may be said to die and come to life every year."[4]

It is interesting to note that Frazer makes allowance here for the fact that this personification with the corn was only "one of his aspects". His approach to mythology

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[2]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.325.

[3]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.339.

[4]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.377.

does take into account, at least sometimes, its complexity.[5] For this he is not always given the credit he merits.

Again, in dealing with the myth of Demeter and Persephone, Frazer makes the claim that the deity Persephone personifies the corn:

"In the Greek fable, as in its Asiatic and Egyptian counterparts, a goddess mourns the loss of a loved one, who personifies the vegetation, more especially the corn, which dies in winter to revive in spring."[6]

One can only wonder what Frazer would have made of the Ugaritic material. He allows for the multiple roles played by each deity, yet they are primarily deities of vegetation and he does not seem to allow for the possibility that the vegetation link may be secondary:

"...the view that the essence of all of these rites was to mimic death and revival of vegetation, explains them separately and collectively in an easy and natural way, and harmonises with the general testimony born by the Ancients to their substantial similarity."[7]

A more recent work, Thorkild Jacobsen's The Treasures of Darkness also makes much of the myths being linked with vegetation. An entire chapter is entitled "The Gods as Providers: Dying Gods of Fertility". This chapter is devoted to the Sumerian myth of Inanna and Dumuzi.[8]

Jacobsen, with a more restrained and careful

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[5]. Peter Munz, When the Golden Bough Breaks, pp.1-2.

[6]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.393.

[7]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.385.

[8]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, pp.25-73.

analysis, makes a reasoned argument for seeing the myth of Inanna and Dumuzi as a metaphor for fertility. Jacobsen states his case when describing the myth of Dumuzi:

> "The dominant figure is the son and provider, whose life from wooing to wedding to early death expresses the annual cycle of fertility and yield."[9]

It is interesting to note that Jacobsen employs the term "fertility" rather than Frazer's "vegetation". It is a wider term, and can include the idea of a cycle of growth as well as that of the treatment of the grain. Jacobsen in fact does not lay much stress on the deity being embodied in the grain, and his book rather points forward to the issues raised in the next chapter, where the seasonal cycle is examined.

One rather crucial subject that is generally glossed over or ignored in studies like Frazer's is that of agricultural times and procedures. This is surprising since the claims that the dying and rising deities are vegetation deities is based upon their alleged association with agriculture. Any analysis of "dying gods of vegetation" or indeed the seasonal cycle should therefore include some consideration of what agriculture meant to an ancient society.

Ancient agriculture may be broken down into the three areas of sowing, harvesting and storage. Also, the climate and land use and other variables need to be taken

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[9]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, p.73.

into account; these are unlikely to have been greatly different in the four areas in question.

Ancient Israel can be used an example. This is made possible both by information found in the Bible and that obtained from archaeology. There seems to have been only one major difference between ancient Israel and the four areas from which our myths come: the use of the iron plough for sowing in iron-age Israel.

The first step in agriculture was the preparation of the fields. In the case of a country with a warm climate such as Israel, this would have been done after the rains had moistened the ground allowing it to be ploughed.[10] The fields were then ploughed and this created furrows where the seed would eventually be placed. This was usually done with a metal plough-point. Prior to the introduction of the iron plough-point into Israel during the twelfth century B.C., bronze plough-points were used.[11] In ancient Israel, the plough was drawn by a team of oxen.[12]

After the fields had been prepared the next step was to sow the seed. This was done by two methods. Probably the most common method was simply spreading the seed by hand. A more involved method was the use of the so-called seed-drill. The seed-drill was a device that consisted of

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[10]. David Hopkins, The Highlands of Canaan, p.215.

[11]. Oded Borowski, Agriculture in Ancient Israel, p.49.

[12]. Oded Borowski, Agriculture in Ancient Israel, p.51.

a pipe and funnel and was placed behind an oxen-drawn plough. By this method, the seed was placed in the ground at the same time as the ground was ploughed, thus saving time. This method was known to have been employed in Mesopotamia.[13]

The next major process in agriculture was the harvesting of the crop. This was done when the crops were ripe and the ear of the stalk had dried thoroughly allowing the grain to be separated from the stalk. Reaping was the separation of the stalk from the rest of the plant, achieved by means of a sickle. In Israel prior to the advent of iron sickles, flint sickles were used.[14]

Threshing was the means by which the grain was separated from the stalk. In ancient Israel, threshing involved a stick, animals, a threshing sledge, and a wheel-thresher.[15]

Winnowing was the separation of the grain from the straw. This involved a fork upon which the threshed material would be thrown up, and the heavier grain would fall back down while the straw blew away.[16]

This method is described well by Homer in Book V of the Iliad, with a mythical allusion thrown in:

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[13]. Oded Borowski, Agriculture in Ancient Israel, pp.53-56.

[14]. Oded Borowski, Agriculture in Ancient Israel, pp.57-62.

[15]. Oded Borowski, Agriculture in Ancient Israel, p.63.

[16]. Oded Borowski, Agriculture in Ancient Israel, pp.63-66.

"See in the mind's eye wind blowing chaff on ancient threshing-floors when men with fans toss up the trodden sheaves, and yellow-haired Demeter, puff by puff, divides the chaff and the grain..."[17]

The importance of these processes was not underestimated by the people who depended on agriculture:

"People of Zion, rejoice, be glad in the Lord your God who gives you food in due measure by sending you rain, the autumn and spring rains as of old.
The threshing-floors will be heaped with grain, the vats will overflow with new wine and oil."(Joel 2:23-24)

The last element in the grain harvest was the storage of the finished product. The storage of the grain had to take into account such factors as dampness and vermin. Prior to being placed into storage, the grain had to be heated in order to kill the germ and prevent germination.[18]

The storage facilities of ancient Israel have been divided into two categories; those above and those below ground. Below ground facilities included grain-pits, silos and cellars. Above ground facilities included granaries and storehouses. In all cases, the grain would have been put into containers prior to being placed in any storage facility.[19]

An example of storage facilities comes from excavations at the city of Beer-Sheba. This type of city is described in II Chronicles and refers to king

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[17]. Homer, The Iliad, Book V, p.86.

[18]. Oded Borowski, Agriculture in Ancient Israel, p.71.

[19]. Oded Borowski, Agriculture in Ancient Israel, p.72.

Rehoboam, although this practice had begun under Solomon:

"He strengthened the defenses of these fortified towns, and put governers in them, as well as supplies of food, oil, and wine."(II Chronicles 11:11)

The storehouses of Beer-Sheba consisted of long rectangular shaped rooms. These buildings were used not only for storage, but also for the grinding of the grain. Also, there is evidence to suggest that animals were tethered in these buildings. Presumably the animals would have carried the grain to and from these storage facilities.[20]

Finally, there was the fruit harvest. The grain in eastern Mediterranean lands was cut and harvested in late spring or early summer, and was followed by the picking of the fruits in the autumn, especially the grapes, which were first laid out to dry, then crushed, often by foot, and made into new wine. But viticulture was a year-round activity, involving the careful preparation of the ground, the shaping of the trees, and in spring the pruning of the branches. The harvesting of the grapes concluded the farming year, which then began again after the coming of the rains and the softening of the ground with the ploughing and preparation and sowing for next year's crops.

An example of where a knowledge of agricultural practices is useful for the understanding of mythological texts, comes in the Ugaritic story of Keret. When the

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[20]. Yohanan Aharoni, The Archaeology of the Land of Israel, pp.222-223.

army of Keret is preparing to march against the city of Udm, provisions are prepared:

"...he did make ready corn for the city, wheat for Beth Khubur."[21]

The Lamedh used as the preposition "for" can, however, also mean "from".[22] It is far more likely that an army preparing to march out would take provisions "from" the storehouses rather than preparing them "for" the city. In this instance, it is not Ugarit which is being laid under siege.

Having examined what has been said about the myths of dying and rising deities with regard to agriculture, as well as what agriculture was, it remains to see what the myths themselves say about vegetation. This will be looked at following the order of part I and start with the myth of Osiris.

When attempting to build a case for Osiris' connection with agriculture, a spell from one of the funerary compositions, such as the Coffin Texts is often quoted. In this example, it should be noted that "neper" is the Egyptian word for grain.

"Becoming Neper - I am Osiris... I live and grow as Neper...I live and I die, for I am emmer and I will not perish.."[23]

Another element that is often called upon to bear witness to Osiris as a vegetation god is the cult of

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[21]. CML, p.87,14,iv, lines 172-173.

[22]. CML, p.149.

[23]. CT Vol.1, pp.254-255, spell 330, line 169.

Osiris. Yet much of what is known about the cult of Osiris, which is described in detail in Frazer's The Golden Bough, dates from Classical times.[24]

A persuasive argument for Osiris as a vegetation god comes from a 21st Dynasty coffin. Among other scenes, it depicts Osiris with corn growing from him. What is significant is that it is the earliest artistic representation of vegetation sprouting from Osiris.[25] The 21st Dynasty is, however, fairly late in Pharaonic Egypt's history and it is surprising that claims regarding Osiris as a vegetation god should have to employ such late evidence. It will also be remembered from chapter 1 that this form of imagery was found in the tomb of Tutankhamen in the form of a corn mummy. Can we project this late evidence backwards and assume that the link between Osiris and vegetation is original to the myth? It may be wiser to conclude that at this stage of the funerary cult the link was imported and used as a simple and well known metaphor of vegetation.

The only real element of fertility within the myth of Osiris remains the section where Isis has sexual intercourse with the revived Osiris. Isis is described as the one:

"Who jubilated, joined her brother, raised the weary

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[24]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, pp.373-376.

[25]. T. Rundle Clark, Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt, p.255 & plate 18.

ones' inertness, received the seed, bore the heir."[26]

But is it likely that this one incident would be taken by those who read it as prefiguring the recovery of fertility, including presumably the fertility of the vegetation, on Osiris' resuscitation? It is more likely simply to be describing in rather physical terms the steps taken to supply Osiris with a divine heir to succeed him. To regard Osiris primarily as a deity who personified the grain on the basis of such slender evidence is to miss the thrust of the great bulk of our sources. This is to set before the Egyptians a hope, first for the Pharaoh but as time passed for all of them, that death may be eluded. As R.T. Rundle Clark stated of Osiris:

"He is the prototype of the liberation of the human soul from the helplessness of death..."[27]

What then of the Mesopotamian myth of Inanna and Dumuzi? Beginning with the Sumerian material, Thorkild Jacobsen in his The Treasures of Darkness bases his identification of Dumuzi as a god of fertility upon his identification of Dumuzi with the god Damu. While allowing for the fact that they originally may have been separate deities, Jacobsen feels that they can be considered synonymous.[28]

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[26]. Miriam Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Vol. 2, p.83.

[27]. T. Rundle Clark, Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt, p.180.

[28]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, p.27.

Jacobsen's examples from the Damu texts point, quite arguably, to elements of fertility:

"(O You) my Tamarisk, (fated) to drink water in its garden bed, whose top formed no foliage in the plain."[29]

But it is perhaps too convenient to equate these texts so readily with the Dumuzi myths. In the myth of Inanna and Dumuzi there may be seasonal implications in the split residence of Dumuzi and Geshtinanna in the underworld. This matter will be looked at further in the next chapter. For the present it is hard to see the myths of the Sumerian Inanna and Dumuzi as being myths about dying gods of vegetation.

The Akkadian version of the "Descent of Inanna" is rather more straightforward. After Ishtar has gone down into the netherworld, there is a loss of fertility. In this case, it is a loss of sexual fertility:

"As soon as Ishtar went down to Kurnugi, no bull mounted a cow, no donkey impregnated a jenny. No young man impregnated a girl in the street, the young man slept in his private room, the girl slept in the company of her friends."[30]

This clearly presents us with some interesting questions. The "Descent of Ishtar" is like the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone insofar as when both Persephone and Ishtar enter the underworld, the earth experiences a loss of fertility. However, in Greek mythology, Demeter is a corn-goddess and as such can be regarded as in control of fertility, so she is able in her anger at

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[29]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, p.64.

[30]. MMes, p.158.

Persephone's disappearance to disrupt fertility on earth. There is no such unambiguous evidence in the case of the Akkadian Ishtar, and therefore nothing to lead us to think either of her or her consort as vegetation deities.

The situation is, as we saw, clearer in the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone. Demeter is a corn-goddess but, in this myth as in Greek mythology as a whole, only in the sense of withdrawing and restoring the fertility of the fields, and not as far as we can tell, as herself embodying the grain. Persephone may have been equated with her mother in this regard, but all that we know for certain is that she spent a period of each year in the hands of Hades; and this, like Dumuzi's partial residence in the underworld, is a matter for the next chapter.

Ovid's Metamorphoses points in the same direction. Demeter induces a famine:

"The young crops died in the first blade, destroyed by the rain too violent, now by the sun too strong."[31]

Later, Demeter stops the famine, and teaches the sacred rites of Eleusis to its leaders:

"Thus she spoke and fair-wreathed Demeter did not disobey, but swiftly made the seed sprout out of the fertile fields. The whole broad earth teemed with leaves and flowers; and she went to the kings who administer the laws... and showed them the celebration of the holy rites..."[32]

Finally, the Ugaritic myth of Baal presents a somewhat confused picture of Baal's relationship to the

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[31]. Ovid, The Metamorphoses, Book V, p.113.

[32]. HDem, pp.14-15, lines 470-476.

subject of fertility. There are at least three points in the myth where references to fertility seem to occur.

The first one is when Baal has sexual intercourse with a heifer. The imagery is relatively blunt:

"Mightiest Baal obeyed. He loved a heifer in the pastures...he did lie with her seven and seventy times, she allowed (him) to mount eight and eighty times."[33]

But this passage, as we concluded in chapter 4, is probably about supplying an heir in case he should not return from the underworld. As in the case of the revivified Osiris mating with Isis to bring about the birth of Horus, no conclusion can be drawn on its potential bearing on human fertility. It is simply describing a sexual union.

Another problematic is that, also mentioned in chapter 4, where Anat destroys Mot. Although the language used in this scene is full of agrarian images, when taken in conjunction with other similar passages it suggests destruction rather than anything to do with the crops. Mot is being utterly wiped from the face of the earth. One could almost make an argument, using Frazer as a guide, that it is Mot rather than Baal who is Ugarit's dying god of vegetation. Mot is the god of death and summer drought, who can damage vegetation; but nowhere else is it remotely hinted at that he is present within it.

Perhaps the most impressive argument for Baal as a dying god of vegetation is the effect of his death on the

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[33]. CML, p.72,5,v, lines 17-21.

fertility of the land. One can easily see a comparison between Baal's absence and either Demeter's famine or Inanna's effect on sexual fertility:

"The furrows in the fields are cracked O Shapash, the furrows in the fields of El are cracked. Baal should be occupying the furrows in the plough land."[34]

But again we have to distinguish between deities who personify the grain and deities who merely affect it. Baal is at Ugarit the god associated with the life-bringing rain. It is Baal's rain, not his presence in the vegetation, that the furrows are missing. The dry ground of summer is under Mot's dominance and needs the rains so that the vegetation may grow to harvest.

Can Baal be thought of as a god of fertility? In the strictest sense, the answer must be no. Baal is a weather deity who has a conflict with the god of death. But perhaps in a very broad sense, Baal is connected with fertility since his absence or death does cause a drought which would have had dire consequences on the crops.

To repeat the question raised earlier in this chapter, are Osiris, Inanna, Dumuzi, Baal and Persephone dying deities of vegetation? The only relatively clear-cut connection is in the myth of Demeter and Persephone. In the myths of Osiris and Inanna and Dumuzi, the loss of fertility is a sexual loss, not an agrarian one. The myth of Baal has potentially ambiguous references to both sexual and vegetable fertility.

But looking at the problem from the other direction,

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[34]. CML, p.78,6,iv, lines 25-27.

can the dying and rising deities be seen as not being connected to fertility? This in itself would present a problem. All of these myths, it can be argued, contain some elements of fertility. It is surely likely that to ancient farmers, agriculture and animal husbandry went hand in hand. Even in today's mechanized society, the mention of the word "farm" gives rise to images both of animals and vegetation.

Certainly in the case of ancient Israel, agriculture and pastoralism occurred side by side. A rather obvious benefit from employing these two forms of food production would have been the use of manure for the fields.[35]

But if animal husbandry did play a role in all of these agricultural societies, could the loss of sexual fertility described in both the Egyptian and Mesopotamian myths be connected to livestock? Certainly in the Egyptian myth, it is very specifically human sexuality which is referred to. The Mesopotamian myth refers to both.

Perhaps no complete accommodation can be made to place all of these myths into easy categories. In a specific sense, the term "dying god of vegetation" cannot be used in any of the myths. Arguments that Osiris was connected to the grain god Neper (see chapter one) or that Dumuzi was connected with the alleged vegetation god Damu seem unlikely. In myths about divinities, it would be somewhat surprising if grain, sex, and death didn't

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[35]. David Hopkin, The Highlands of Canaan, p.246.

show up at some point since these are common mythological motifs. The following quote is one that mythographers who look for vegetation everywhere would be very pleased to find in a myth:

"Harvest-hands were swinging whetted scythes to mow the grain, and stalks were falling along the swath..."[36]

But this passage comes from the Iliad and has nothing to do with dying and rising deities. The Iliad also contains a lot about death, and even some sex, in both cases without any implications for the fertility of either nature or humans. Why must myths be looked at in such a way as to artificially define their character?

Frazer's central tenet must therefore be abandoned. Any connection between Osiris and the grain is late and secondary. Demeter is a corn-goddess, but seemingly in the sense of controlling the vegetation, not residing in it. Persephone is best regarded as a seasonal goddess, as is Baal, who is a god of rain, not of the grain. The implications of the myth of Inanna and Dumuzi are also seasonal, and there is nothing to link them, Dumuzi in particular, with the growing grain. The title vegetation deity cannot with honesty be used any longer for any of these deities, and must give way to the wider term fertility, which can be applied to deities who effect the growing vegetation but are not necessarily embodied in it. These can still be regarded as dying and rising deities in so far as they represent the changing seasons

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[36]. Homer, The Iliad, Book XVIII, p.335.

of the year but not, we have found out, as reflecting the processes of planting, growing, and reaping. If Frazer had adopted this distinction, what is important in his thesis would have been clearer; for he has a lot to say about the seasons. It is to the cycle of the seasons that we turn our attention in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

The Validity of the Seasonal Cycle

Our conclusion in the last chapter was that Osiris and the other deities are not dying and rising deities of vegetation, but that they may still be regarded as fertility deities if they can be shown to have a connection with the seasonal cycle. It has often been argued that the myth of dying and rising deities are metaphors for the seasonal agricultural year. Simply put, the deity's death represents the onset of winter and his (or her) resurrection represents the onset of spring or, alternatively, they represent the onset of summer and the coming of the rainy season in autumn.

That the proper ordering of the seasons was a matter of great concern to ancient man is shown by their widespread habit of naming the months of the year after the agricultural activities associated with them. The question to be addressed here is whether this concern is also found in the myths of dying and rising deities.

As in the last chapter the myths will have to be considered individually and previous scholarly opinion taken into account. A particular problem concerns the links which are so often found not only between the

deities and agricultural practices, but between the deities and the rites associated with these practices. This raises again the myth/ritual issue.

Again Sir James Frazer and The Golden Bough provides a good starting point. Frazer was connected with a group of scholars from the late 19th and early 20th century who are known today as the Cambridge ritualists. These included scholars such as Jane Harrison and A.B. Cook.[1] Frazer's biographer Robert Ackerman describes their work:

> "They attempted at the turn of this century to use anthropology to elucidate the old and vexed problem of the origin of tragedy. They proposed that the source of the structure of tragedy was to be found in the rituals of agricultural fertility magic common to the cultures of the eastern Mediterranean in prehistoric times."[2]

Contrary to popular tradition, James Frazer's The Golden Bough is not just about dying gods of vegetation. Rather, Frazer was trying to answer some problems regarding the priesthood of the grove of Nemi in Classical Italy. Frazer had questions regarding this institution:

> "The questions which we have set ourselves to answer are mainly two: first, why had Diana's priest at Nemi, the king of the wood, to slay his predecessor? Second, why before doing so had he to pluck the branch of a certain tree which the public opinion of the ancients identified with Virgil's golden bough?"[3]

James Frazer deals with a variety of topics in The Golden Bough. In particular, Frazer associates deities

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[1]. Robert Ackerman, J.G. Frazer: His Life and Work, p.3.

[2]. Robert Ackerman, J.G. Frazer: His Life and Works, p.3

[3]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.3.

like Diana and Persephone and Osiris with the Norse god Baldur. Frazer at the end of The Golden Bough gives an answer to his questions regarding the priesthood of Nemi in the following observation:

"And what we have said of Baldur in the oak forests of Scandinavia may perhaps, with all due diffidence in a question so obscure and uncertain, be applied to the priest of Diana, the king of the wood, at Aricia in the oak forests of Italy. He may have personated in flesh and blood the great Italian god of the sky, Jupiter, who had kindly come down from heaven in the lightening flash to dwell among men in the mistletoe...the golden bough, growing on the sacred oak in the dells of Nemi."[4]

In other words, these deities when they come to earth take up residence in natural things. We have had cause to reject an easy equation between the dying and rising and the corn or grain, but it soon becomes obvious that Frazer does not distinguish this from the seasonal cycle. In the grain or in other vegetable entity, they are also in the changing seasons which the growing process of these entities mark.

Frazer's association of the dying deity with the seasons is not an unattractive one. It makes sense. One can easily envisage a myth of a deity who dies and comes back to life as being metaphorical for the onset and eventual return of the seasons. James Frazer stated this idea in his usual straightforward manner:

"...men now attributed the annual cycle of change primarily to corresponding changes in their deities."[5]

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[4]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.710. For further discussion of the relevance of the Norse myth of Baldur, see chapter 10.

[5]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.324.

Attractive though it is, can we accept this? What do the myths themselves say about the seasonal cycle? Is the association of ritual and cult valid as a parameter for analyzing mythology? We do well to remember that nicely crafted arguments are often not all that they seem.

In The Golden Bough, Frazer makes a detailed case for comparing the story of Osiris with the seasons of the year, but he draws his evidence largely from temple carvings of the Ptolemaic period, not from the myth itself. An example of these reliefs, depicting funerary rites associated with Osiris, were found on the walls of the Ptolemaic temple at Denderah.

These rites were alleged to have taken place during the Egyptian month of Khoiak. Many of the rites involved corn, such as the making of corn mummies. Curiously enough, Frazer admits that the ceremony describes Osiris' death rather than his resurrection, ignoring the fact that the sprouting and ripening of the shoots does not take place in the winter and therefore this death cannot be associated with the onset of winter. He goes on to claim that accompanying bas-reliefs describe Osiris' resurrection. In this way, Frazer obtains both the death and resurrection of Osiris from the perspective of Egyptian art rather than Egyptian myth.[6]

Again, Frazer draws on as evidence for the seasonal cycle a representation from the Ptolemaic temple of Isis at Philae of a scene of Osiris with corn growing out of

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[6]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, pp.375-376.

him. Frazer immediately makes a direct connection between such a representation and the Eleusinian rites of Demeter and Persephone:

> "So in the rites of Demeter at Eleusis a reaped ear of corn was exhibited to the worshippers as the central mystery of their religion. We can now fully understand why at the great festival of sowing in the month of Khoiak the priests used to bury effigies of Osiris made of earth and corn."[7]

The method of argumentation is clever. Frazer begins by directly associating the myth of Osiris with the rituals of the alleged cult of Osiris. Next, an association is made between the rituals of Osiris and the calendar year. In this way a connection is formed between the myth and the seasonal cycle. Frazer is able to conclude his argument with a definitive statement:

> "The foregoing survey of the myth and ritual of Osiris may suffice to prove that in one of his aspects the god was the personification of the corn, which may be said to die and come to life again every year."[8]

Frazer typifies what has been called the ritualist school of mythology. While he deals with a great variety of mythological topics in The Golden Bough, all of these are ultimately connected with cult and ritual in his analysis. He was followed, as will be shown shortly, by Theodore Gaster in his book Thespis and, as mentioned in chapter 4, by J.C. DeMoor, a noted Ugaritic scholar.

An example of a (moderate) ritualist interpretation of mythology can be found in the work of Joseph Fontenrose's book Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and its

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[7]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.376.

[8]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.377.

Origins. Fontenrose deals with a variety of topics in Classical and Near Eastern mythology. But what is of particular interest here is his attitude toward the link between mythology and ritual. Fontenrose states:

"It is undeniable that myths are closely attached to rituals. In fact, if a story has not been associated with cult or ritual, explicitly or implicitly, it is better not to call it myth, but legend or folklore."[9]

Joseph Fontenrose was by no means a ritualist like Gaster or Frazer. He was noted for attacking some of the more uncritical methods of Frazer and indeed, later modified his view cited above into a frontal assault on their basic theory.[10]

It is probably impossible to answer this question in any detail, due to the ambiguity of our understanding of the relationship between myth and ritual. In this chapter we will not accept that there is necessarily a direct causal relation between myth and ritual. Our main task is to find if we can, a connection between the myths of dying and rising deities and the seasonal cycle. It is not essential to find a ritual to back up our claims, but where a connection is likely, it will be acknowledged.

Perhaps the best rejection of a singular approach toward mythology can be found in G.S. Kirk's Myth:Its Meaning and Functions where he states of the argument about ritual and myth:

"The classing of all myths with rituals, then, is a

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[9]. Joseph Fontenrose, Python, p.434.

[10]. See Joseph Fontenrose, The Ritual Theory of Myth, Berkeley:1966.

special and no more attractive manifestation of the widespread opinion that myths are about gods, or are associated with religion, or are necessarily sacred."[11]

A notable attempt to link the myth of Osiris with the seasonal cycle was made by Theodore Gaster in his book Thespis. Gaster identified some texts engraved in stone upon temple walls which he thinks concern rituals related to the seasonal cycle. These reliefs are, not surprisingly, from the Ptolemaic temple of Edfu and from a 25th Dynasty stone.[12] Is it significant that most of this evidence comes from post-Pharaonic Egypt? Gaster makes a definitive statement regarding the nature of these texts:

"It is not difficult to recognize in these texts all the characteristic marks of the seasonal cycle."[13]

Essentially, Gaster explains these texts as not only being rituals, but dramatic texts meant to be acted out. Although the Edfu and 25th Dynasty texts are supposed to be related to the king dying, a ritual lamentation, combat, and the instalment of a new king, Gaster sees behind all of these metaphors for the seasonal cycle.[14]

One text which cannot be easily dismissed by age is a text found in the Ramesseum of Thebes and alleged to be dated to the 12th Dynasty, in the Middle Kingdom, though

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[11]. G.S. Kirk, Myth:Its Meaning and Functions, p.19

[12]. Theodore Gaster, Thespis, p.61-62.

[13]. Theodore Gaster, Thespis, p.63.

[14]. Theodore Gaster, Thespis, p.62

Gaster argues that it is in fact much older.[15]

The Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus or The Egyptian Coronation Drama, as Gaster names it, is presented (allegedly) in the form of a drama. It largely depicts the conflict between Horus and Seth. Osiris is already dead in this drama and Horus is fighting Seth. In the end, Seth is defeated and Horus becomes King while Osiris his father goes into the netherworld.[16]

Gaster then interprets these "ritual" texts as being related to the seasonal cycle. Following Frazer, he assumes that ritual and myth were completely interwoven. But he then goes a step further by translating these texts as not only ritualistic, but also dramatic. He in fact says little about the connection between the Osiris and kingship which, as we argued in chapter 1, is fundamental to it, especially in the earliest sources. Most significantly, almost all of Frazer's evidence and most of Gaster's comes from post-Pharaonic times. This completely undermines any attempt to link the seasonal cycle with a myth that went back to the very dawn of Egyptian civilization. The association of the Ramesseum document of the 12th Dynasty with the seasonal cycle is in particular tenuous. Gaster is probably right in regarding it as older still, but it could equally be associated with kingship and or justice. On the basis of this document, James, another scholar associated with the

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[15]. Theodore Gaster, Thespis, p.52.

[16]. Theodore Gaster, Thespis, p.403.

myth and ritual school, concludes:

"Therefore, from the Dynastic period to Roman times belief in the resuscitation and life-giving power of Osiris persisted in the Nile valley."[17]

But why must this conclusion presuppose a seasonal cycle? The earliest references to Osiris identify him with the king, not with the seasons. Even in their association of the myth of Osiris, or rather some rituals concerning Osiris, with the seasonal cycle, James and scholars like him get it wrong. The post inundation period was indeed the time for the sowing of wheat, barley, beans, and chickpeas.[18] This would correspond with the Osirian festival in the month of Khoiak.[19] But in looking at other seasons of the year, it is evident that crops were grown in Egypt almost year-round.

During the summer months, prior to the flood period, crops such as onions, lentils and saffron were sown.[20] Aside from the time when the Nile was at high flood point, most of Egypt's agricultural year was devoted to one crop or another. To say that Osiris was the deity who represented the death of the land and its crops is not really valid since Egypt did not have any substantial period of non-productivity. When considered along with the questionable practice of associating myth and ritual

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[17]. E.O. James, Seasonal Feasts and Festivals, p.59.

[18]. Carl Butzer, Early Hydraulic Civilization in Egypt, p.49.

[19]. E.O. James, Seasonal Feasts and Festivals, p.55.

[20]. Carl Butzer, Early Hydraulic Civilization in Egypt, pp.42-50.

at every turn with the fact that most of the evidence in this case is late, the argument for the myth of Osiris being a metaphor for the seasonal cycle is untenable. Osiris was, at any rate in the beginning, neither a vegetation deity, nor was he associated with the seasonal cycle.

Although the Mesopotamian material is slightly more comprehensible in analysis, the same cannot be said about the linking of the myths of dying and rising deities from Mesopotamia with the seasonal cycle. This is not to say that there is absolutely no validity to such claims, but is rather a comment on the curious reasoning that is often employed to support the seasonal cycle theory.

James Frazer is surprisingly sparing in his comments regarding Tammuz. His rationale perhaps expresses more caution than he is generally credited with:

> "The references to their connection with each other in myth and ritual are both fragmentary and obscure, but we gather from them that every year Tammuz was believed to die, passing away from the cheerful earth to the gloomy subterranean world."[21]

Frazer goes on to make the important link between Tammuz and the Greek myth of Adonis.[22] But perhaps the most crucial thing to note is Frazer's assertion that Tammuz died every year, as this is a direct link between the myth of Tammuz/Dumuzi and the seasonal cycle.

Gaster bases his argument for the seasonal cycle in Mesopotamia not on the myths of Inanna/Ishtar, but rather

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[21]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, pp.325-326.

[22]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.325.

on the Babylonian creation story of the Enuma Elish. This myth involves the defeat of the primeval creature of the deep, Tiamat, by the Babylonian god Marduk. Related to this myth were ritual texts that were supposed to have been used in relationship with the New Year festival in Babylon.[23] The rather obvious question presents itself: what does the Babylonian myth of Marduk have to do with dying and rising deities such as Inanna and Dumuzi?

Gaster plausibly assumes that the Enuma Elish has been derived from Sumerian material.[24] Others go further, suggesting that Marduk may have actually supplanted Tammuz in this story.[25] Even supposing that Gaster is right, what he does not do is to lead to the actual myth of Inanna/Ishtar, although it does contain some elements that might very well be related to the seasonal cycle.

The myth of Inanna and Dumuzi distinctly indicates the passage of time in two places. The first of these is the period when Inanna is in the underworld. Inanna's servant waits three days before approaching the gods for help in obtaining the release of Inanna:

"When, after three days and three nights, Inanna had not returned, Ninshubar set up a lament for her by the ruins."[26]

The next interval of time is far more interesting. This is the reference to Dumuzi and his sister

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[23]. Theodore Gaster, Thespis, pp.60-61.

[24]. Theodore Gaster, Thespis, p.61.

[25]. E.O. James, Seasonal Feasts and Festivals, p.82.

[26]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, p.61.

Geshtinanna spending alternating times of the year in the underworld. With almost ironic humour, it is Inanna who pronounces this judgement on the two deities:

"Inanna took Dumuzi by the hand and said:'You will go to the underworld half the year. Your sister, since she has asked, will go the other half. On the day you are called, that day you will be taken. On the day Geshtinanna is called, that day will you be set free.'"[27]

The Akkadian version of this myth makes no real mention of a time period or of an alternation of Dumuzi/Tammuz with his sister in the underworld. However, at the end of the myth there is the reference to Dumuzi/Tammuz coming out of the underworld and, significantly, it is spoken by his sister, called Belili in the Akkadian version:

"You shall not rob me (forever) of my only brother! On the day when Dumuzi comes back up..."[28]

It is hard to say what one can make of the three day wait by Ninshuber before acting upon Inanna's instructions to seek help from the Sumerian pantheon. This could possibly refer to a three day mourning period. Ritualists such as Frazer or Gaster might see a connection with the New Year festival. But it may simply be an arbitrary number.

The alternation of Dumuzi and Geshtinanna in the underworld has, however, a tangible association with the progress of the seasons. Thorkild Jacobsen has proposed an interesting and plausible interpretation. He suggests

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[27]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, p.89.

[28]. MMes, p.160.

that Dumuzi represents the cutting of the grain. This identification is based upon Dumuzi being found in a brewery. Geshtinanna represents wine since her name means "leafy grapevine". Their deaths would represent the times when their consecutive crops were harvested and stored underground. Grain was harvested in spring, and grapes in Autumn.[29]

The environmental evidence would in a general sense support the idea of deities in the underworld being representative of a negative period for agriculture. The summers in Mesopotamia are severe and rain is virtually non-existent between May and October. Equally significant are the severe frosts that occur in the period around February. These frosts, depending upon severity, might have had a negative impact on an agricultural year.[30] The environmental evidence therefore indicates two periods in the year that are dire times for agriculture. But which is Jacobsen referring to, the death of the deity in winter or his death in the early summer? He never makes this clear. Allowing for this hiccup, his theory is at least plausible. The disappearance of the deity accords with a period when agriculture suffers.

The relationship of the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone with the seasonal cycle is fairly well established, though Frazer's description brings in a

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[29]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, p.62.

[30]. Robert Adams, Heartland of Cities, pp.11-13.

connection with the vegetation, which we have considered very questionable. It is a good example of how consistently Frazer confuses the two:

"...this goddess can surely be nothing else than the mythical embodiment of the vegetation, and particularly the corn, which is buried under the soil for some months of every winter and comes to life again."[31]

Gaster has little to say about the myth of Demeter and Persephone. This is surprising given its relevance to the seasonal cycle. Perhaps Gaster's most interesting point on this subject is his identification of the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter" as being a ritual text related to the Athenian festival of the Thesmophoria. Although one can argue for a ritual "aspect" in the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter" (see chapter three), Gaster is going too far. For example, he sees the reference to Demeter searching for her daughter with torches as being related to the torchlight procession of the Thesmophoria.[32] This may be related to ritual, but it may equally be a simple poetic description. Any nighttime ceremony would have required the use of torches.

The "Homeric Hymn to Demeter" is fairly straightforward in its description of Persephone's sojourn in the underworld. In the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter", the year is divided into thirds by Zeus:

"...with a nod of his head he promised that, as the year revolved, her daughter could spend one portion of it in misty darkness and the other two with her mother and

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[31]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.395.

[32]. Theodore Gaster, Thespis, pp.97-98.

the other immortals."[33]

By Roman times, this division had evidently changed. Ovid in his Metamorphoses divides Persephone' time in two as Jove:

"...portioned the rolling year in equal parts. Now Proserpine, of two empires alike, great deity, spends with her mother half the year's twelve months, with her husband half."[34]

The Greek festivals are well attested enough to provide some information regarding the agricultural year. In Attica, as in the Eastern Mediterranean as a whole, the grain was sowed in the Autumn after the rains had arrived. Prior to this was a period of summer drought.[35] The crop was harvested in May.[36]

It is not unreasonable to see Persephone as a deity related to the seasonal cycle. Yet a rather important objection has been raised by one interpreter. If Persephone is queen of the underworld, how can she leave the underworld for any period of time? Carl Kerenyi has rightly pointed out this discrepancy and has come up with the simple solution that Persephone possessed dual aspects. One aspect has Persephone leave the underworld and join her mother annually. In her other aspect she is constantly in the netherworld.[37] This seems a fair enough

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[33]. HDem, p.14, lines 445-447.

[34]. Ovid, The Metamorphosis, Book V, p.116.

[35]. E.O. James, Seasonal Feasts and Festivals, p.137.

[36]. E.O. James, Seasonal Feasts and Festivals, p.139.

[37]. Carl Kerenyi, Eleusis, p.148f.

way of resolving the discrepancy, though it makes one wonder which aspect is the dominant one, and to that extent loosens the myth's attachment to the seasonal cycle. It is clearly talking about other things as well. We get a similar double picture of Mot in the Ugaritic myth.[38]

The subject of the seasonal cycle in the myths of Baal was discussed at length in chapter 4 and need not be repeated here. On the whole, DeMoor's thesis collapses; he plays fast and loose with the ordering of the tablets, and is simply wrong in many of his detailed conclusions. The cycle of Baal is not concerned with the seasonal cycle, but the central theme of the Baal and Mot myth, that concerning the contest between Baal and Mot is; the concern with the seasons even in that myth is not the primary one. It is a pity that his book was not more carefully conceived, but that does not mean that there is nothing in his thesis. Mot in one of his aspects represents the summer drought, and Baal in one of his

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[38]. A myth like that of Demeter and Persephone has sometimes been called a myth of a disappearing and reappearing deity, since the death of Persephone is nowhere actually described. If the other two myths (those of Inanna and Baal) which are here connected with the seasonal cycle, are of the same kind, we can hardly describe any of the three as myths of dying and rising deities. But the deaths of Dumuzi (and Inanna) and Baal are both related in the myths about them, and if they return, we can only assume some kind of resurrection. Death and resurrection cannot be so easily removed from these two myths, and it would seem more natural to interpret the Persephone myth on their analogy, rather than the other way round. Those scholars who, like Smith, prefer calling the deities concerned disappearing and reappearing rather than dying and rising deities are in danger of twisting the evidence.

aspects the life giving rains. But note that a careful distinction must be made between the myth of Baal and Mot and the other two myths in which the seasonal element is detected. In these the seasons of dying and rising are probably those of winter and spring. In the case of Baal, they are those of summer, when Baal's rains are absent and Autumn, when they return. Perhaps the most that can be said is that while vegetation and the seasonal cycle are not the primary elements in the Baal cycle, it is impossible to eliminate this theory completely.

Several important issues arise when examining the theory of the seasonal cycle in mythology. Perhaps the most crucial question is the nature and role of ritual and cult in regard to mythology. How can one, for example, refuse to take account of cult in Egypt while allowing for its relevance in the interpretation of the myth of Demeter and Persephone? Although on the face of it this might seem to be ambiguous reasoning, a rational argument for this does exist. In the case of the cultic evidence for the seasonal cycle in Egypt, most if not all of the evidence comes from post-Pharaonic times. It is very questionable practice to make sweeping statements about the whole of Egyptian religion based upon such late evidence.

In the case of Greece, much of the evidence for the relationship between cult and myth comes from contemporary evidence. For example, most of what is known about the cultic festival of Thesmophoria comes from the

writings of Aristophanes.[39] No such contemporary material exists from Egypt. Gaster's attempt to turn Egyptian material into religious drama simply is unconvincing.

Which of the four myths of dying and rising deities can be linked to the seasonal cycle other than in a general sense? For a start, the myth of Demeter and Persephone is very clearly related to agriculture and the agrarian year. However, this does not rule out the presence of other aspects in this myth.

The case for the seasonal cycle in the myth of Osiris remains much more questionable. It is not that the seasonal cycle does not show up in the myth or its associated cultic activities; it is merely that the evidence for the seasonal cycle is scarce enough that it cannot be considered a primary aspect of the myth.

Although the evidence is not overwhelming, the other myth which might well be related to the seasonal cycle is the Sumerian myth of Inanna and Dumuzi. While Jacobsen's hypothesis of the vegetation aspects of Dumuzi and Geshtinanna appears implausible, the specific reference to an annual aspect of the disappearances and returns lends credibility to at least part of his theory. The seasons in which agricultural activity ceases and resumes must surely in some way reflect the dying and rising of Dumuzi.

Finally, the myth of Baal and Mot has clear seasonal

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[39]. Jane Harrison, Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion, p.124.

associations. DeMoor and others vastly overstate the evidence that the whole cycle in tablets 1-6 has such associations, but there are too many other passages where the influence of Baal and Mot on the changing seasons is set forth for us to be able to deny the link in the final myth of the cycle. And so, it is clear that a seasonal element can be detected in three of the four myths examined here. The Greek and Mesopotamian myths mirror the anxiety of ancient man that after the inactivity of winter the grain harvest will come, that of Baal and Mot the anxiety of ancient man that after the drought of summer the rains will arrive to soften the earth so that a new agricultural year may begin. The myth of Osiris does not turn our thoughts in either of these directions.

The grandiose theories of Frazer and those who follow him must be severely modified. None of the four myths are about gods of vegetation who reside within the grain. But three of them connect the gods with the ongoing seasons of the agricultural year, though in the sense of providing fertility. In that sense alone they may be called gods of fertility. But present in all the myths, that of Osiris included, are features which take us well beyond the cycle of the seasons, important as the maintenance of this was to ancient man, and direct us to the even greater fear which he had of death; which so disrupted the cycle, not of agrarian, but of human life. It is likely that the consideration of these features will give an insight into the most important aspect of

the myths of dying and rising deities.

Chapter 7

The Gods of the Underworld

In our analysis of four myths of dying and rising deities, attention has usually been focused on the deity who dies. Yet this form of analysis often ignores the very active role played by the other characters in these myths. By their very nature, dying and rising deities play a rather passive role. It has been noted for example, that the female mourner for the dead deity often takes a direct part in achieving the return of the dead god. But the individual who is most frequently overlooked is the antagonist of the myth, the god who opposes the deity who dies and returns. In three out of the four myths, the antagonist in the character of the god of the underworld, plays a prominent role in the myth.

In the myth of "Descent of Inanna/Ishtar" into the netherworld, Inanna's sister Ereshkigal is ruler of the underworld. What kind of an individual is Ereshkigal? What role does she play in the myth? What is the source, if known, of the conflict between Ereshkigal and Inanna? To answer these questions about the Mesopotamian ruler of the underworld, it will be necessary to look not only at the myth in question, but other myths from Mesopotamia which contain the character of Ereshkigal.

The Ugaritic Myth of Baal is written in such a manner that Baal is viewed as the hero and Mot as the

villain. But what about the character of Mot himself? What are his actions within Ugaritic mythology and what do they say about the Ugaritic god of the underworld?

Equally so, the Greek god of the underworld, Hades, is often perceived of as the "bad guy". Yet most of Demeter's wrath is directed towards Zeus rather than Hades. What is Hades' relationship to his wife Persephone and how does he fit into the triad of deities that include himself, Zeus, and Poseidon?

The exception in this chapter is the Egyptian god Osiris. Osiris differs from the other underworld deities in that he is both the dying and rising deity and the god of the underworld. Seth is the antagonist in the myth of Osiris, but he is not the god of the underworld. In this chapter Osiris will be examined in his role as an underworld deity.

Having identified the relevant character from each of the four myths, and some related questions to be addressed in this chapter, each underworld deity will now be examined in some detail, beginning with the Mesopotamian myth of Inanna/Ishtar. In the Mesopotamian myth of Inanna/Ishtar, an often disregarded figure is the queen of the netherworld, Inanna's sister Ereshkigal. However, it is not she, but Inanna who upsets the order of the cosmos by going down into the netherworld. Therefore, it is Inanna who instigates any wrongdoing, not Ereshkigal. Throughout the myth of Inanna's descent into the netherworld, Ereshkigal is merely playing out

her role as ruler of the underworld.

In the Sumerian version of the myth of Inanna, Ereshkigal is first encountered when her doorkeeper Neti informs her that Inanna is at the gates and wants to be let in. Inanna's alleged reason for requesting entry into the underworld is that she wants to perform burial rites for Ereshkigal's husband who is supposed to have died (a reason that does not make contextual sense, at least to modern readers). Ereshkigal is not pleased with this news:

"When Ereshkigal heard this, she slapped her thigh and bit her lip, she took the matter into her heart and dwelt on it."[1]

Ereshkigal, in order to maintain her position and let Inanna know who is in charge of the underworld, orders Neti to let Inanna into the underworld but remove a piece of her clothing at each of the seven gates of the underworld. In this way, she will appear naked in front of her sister. Neti's orders are specific:

"Let Inanna enter. As she enters, remove her royal garments. Let the holy priestess of heaven enter bowed low."[2]

When Inanna appears before Ereshkigal, who is seated on her throne, the ensuing meeting is not what one would normally expect between two sisters. The resulting fracas does not indicate deep love between them. After Inanna is surrounded by the judges (and demons) of the underworld,

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[1]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, p.56.

[2]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, p.57.

the Annunaki, Ereshkigal deals harshly with her:

"Then Ereshkigal fastened on Inanna the eye of death. She spoke against her the word of wrath. She uttered against her the cry of guilt."[3]

Ereshkigal only relents when she is confronted by the two messengers from the god Enki sent to obtain Inanna's release. The following sequence can only be described as bizarre and cryptic. Presumably the ancient Sumerians knew what it meant.

Ereshkigal is described as suffering what sound like birth pains. The description of the state in which the two messengers of Enki find her is vivid:

"They entered the throne room of the Queen of the Underworld. No linen was spread over her body. Her breasts were uncovered. Her hair swirled around her head like leeks."[4]

A rather strange groaning session begins with the messengers of Enki groaning in tandem and sympathy with Ereshkigal.[5] She is very pleased with their sympathy and offers them gifts:

"If you are gods, I will bless you. If you are mortals, I will give you a gift. I will give you the water-gift, the river in its fullness."[6]

The messengers of Enki courteously decline these gifts and instead ask for the release of Inanna.

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[3]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, p.60.

[4]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, pp.64-65.

[5]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, p.65.

[6]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, p.66.

Ereshkigal relents and Inanna is allowed to leave the netherworld.

The Sumerian version of the myth of Inanna points to several aspects of the character of Ereshkigal. The most important of these is her determination to remain ruler of the underworld. This she achieves by tricking Inanna into stripping off her clothes and arriving in front of her as naked as any other corpse that goes into the underworld.

But at the same time, Ereshkigal cannot be seen as an offensive character. This conflict is brought about by Inanna's determination to enter the underworld. Without stretching the point, Ereshkigal shows a certain magnanimity in her release of Inanna at the behest of the envoys of Enki; she did not have to do that.

As noted previously, the Akkadian "Descent of Ishtar" does contain some differences from its Sumerian counterpart. Certainly the conflict between Ishtar and Ereshkigal is laid out in a more straightforward and fiercer fashion. Ishtar demands entry into the netherworld and makes her curious and threatening speech about what will happen if she is not let into the underworld:

"I shall raise up the dead and they shall eat the living."[7]

The reaction of Ereshkigal upon hearing this threat is described in vivid terms:

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[7]. MMes, p.155.

"When Ereshkigal heard this her face grew livid as cut tamarisk."[8]

Soon after this passage, there is a curious section where Ereshkigal ponders over what she has done to deserve this intrusion by Ishtar. There follows a touching sequence on how emotionally difficult it is to be queen of the underworld. Ereshkigal describes the heartbreak she must suffer:

"I have to weep for young men forced to abandon sweethearts. I have to weep for girls wrenched from their lovers laps. For the infant child I have to weep, expelled before its time."[9]

These lines may be alternatively translated as questions.[10] Yet even in that case, there is a recognition by Ereshkigal of the human aspect of being ruler of the netherworld.

Ishtar is eventually let into the underworld, is stripped naked as in the Sumerian version and Ereshkigal strikes her dead.[11] Ereshkigal is outwitted by the representative of Ea(Enki) although in this Akkadian version, there is just one envoy. She is swayed by the messenger's good looks and the Sumerian birthing sequence is absent. Ereshkigal expresses anger at being tricked:

"When Ereshkigal heard this, she struck her thigh and bit her finger."[12]

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[8]. MMes, p.155.

[9]. MMes, p.156.

[10]. ANET, p.107, lines 33-35.

[11]. MMes, p.157.

[12]. MMes, p.158.

She goes on to curse the representative of Ea(Enki):

"I shall curse you with a great curse. I shall decree for you a fate that shall never be forgotten."[13]

It is clear that in the Akkadian "Descent of Ishtar", Ereshkigal comes across much as she did in the Sumerian myth. As queen of the netherworld, she is determined to maintain her position and fend off any intrusion. Yet it is possible to detect a note of anger in the Akkadian version that is missing in the Sumerian version. Certainly her anger towards Ishtar and the messenger of Ea cannot be described as mild!

The other major Mesopotamian myth about Ereshkigal is the Akkadian myth of "Nergal and Ereshkigal". This also gives an important insight into the character of Ereshkigal. Two versions exist; the older and much shorter version was found in the collection of tablets from Tell El-Amarna in Egypt dating to around 1500-1400 B.C. The later and longer version comes from both seventh century B.C. Sultantepe and Neo-Babylonian Uruk.[14] Due to its more complete form, the later version will be referred to here.

In the basic outline of the story, Nergal is sent down into the netherworld with a chair for Ereshkigal. Nergal does this on the orders of Ea to placate Ereshkigal. Ereshkigal is furious at the treatment of her servant Nantara at a feast for the gods given by Nergal.

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[13]. MMes, p.159.

[14]. MMes, p.163.

Nergal is warned by Ea not to sleep with Ereshkigal.[15]

However Nergal is unable to resist. He goes down into the netherworld and after seeing Ereshkigal, does exactly what he was warned not to do:

"The two embraced each other and went passionately to bed."[16]

Nergal leaves the netherworld and Ereshkigal is devastated by his absence. She sends a plea to Ea to have Nergal return to her. In this entreaty, she touches upon how difficult it is to be queen of the netherworld:

"...ever since I was a child and a daughter, I have not known the playing of other girls, I have not known the romping of children."[17]

But at the end of this supplication we see the return of a more dominant queen of the netherworld. Strangely enough, the language used by Ereshkigal in her threat about what she will do if Nergal is not returned is similar to that of the threat Ishtar made when attempting to gain access to the underworld:

"According to the rites of Erkalla and the great Earth, I shall raise up the dead, and they will eat the living. I shall make the dead outnumber the living."[18]

Eventually, Nergal returns to the underworld to Ereshkigal's embrace.[19]

Two important matters become apparent in the myth of

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[15]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, p.229.

[16]. MMes, p.171.

[17]. MMes, p.173.

[18]. MMes, p.173.

[19]. MMes, p.176.

Nergal and Ereshkigal. Ereshkigal appears almost human in terms of her emotions. She is lonely as queen of the underworld and wants the comforts of having a man about. But just as in the "Descent of Ishtar", Ereshkigal is determined to be in charge of her domain. Her threat to loose the dead upon the living demonstrates the strong position from which she is bargaining. But equally so, Ereshkigal is demonstrating the same flash of anger that she shows when Ishtar attempts to usurp her. The author of this composition catches a fine balance between an almost sympathetic deity and the queen of the underworld who is unused to being thwarted.

Turning to the Ugaritic god of the underworld, we encounter a personality who is very different from Ereshkigal. Mot first appears in the myth of Baal and Mot in a very threatening manner. His message to Baal, found in two sections, is menacing and violent:

"Have you forgotten Baal, that I can surely transfix you...for I myself will crush you in pieces."[20]

Also at the beginning of the myth is the vivid imagery of the hunger of Mot that occurs throughout:

"But my appetite is an appetite of lions (in) the waste."[21]

When Baal's sister Anat confronts Mot after the "death" of Baal, Mot describes his hunger prior to his killing of Baal:

"My appetite did lack humans, my appetite (did lack)

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[20]. CML, p.68,5,i, lines 2.

[21]. CML, p.68,5,i, lines 14-15.

the multitudes of the earth."[22]

Mot's description of how he destroys Baal, also employs the imagery of hunger and swallowing. It is a little puzzling that Mot describes the consuming of Baal, since the myth says that Anat has by this time buried the remains of Baal. Perhaps Mot is referring, not to Baal's physical remains, but to his shade. At any rate, the description is chilling:

"I it was who confronted mightiest Baal, I who made him (like) a lamb in my mouth, (and) he was carried away like a kid in the breach of my windpipe."[23]

After both Baal and Mot have come back to life, Mot is aggrieved at the injuries he has suffered at the hands of Anat:

"Because of you, Baal, I have suffered abasement, because of you I have suffered splitting with the sword, because of you I have suffered burning with fire."[24]

As compensation for his "injuries", Mot makes a demand that links his anger with the image of hunger:

"Give one of your brothers that I may be fed, and the anger that I feel will turn back."[25]

But in the end, as in all of the myths of dying and rising deities, it is the god of resurrection who is victorious. After a second and apparently indecisive battle, this time between Baal and Mot, on the instructions of the deity Shapash (acting for El), Mot

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[22]. CML, p.76,6,ii, lines 17-19.

[23]. CML, pp.76-77,6,ii, lines 21-23.

[24]. CML, p.79,6,v, lines 11-14.

[25]. CML, p.79,6,v, lines 19-21.

submits and is now in fear of Baal, or at least of those who defend him. This is in sharp contrast to Mot's belligerence and confidence at the beginning of the myth:

"Divine Mot was afraid, the hero the beloved of El was in dread."[26]

The imagery surrounding Mot is closely linked to physical sensation and emotion when he shows anger towards Baal at the beginning and at the end of the myth. First, Mot is angry in an arrogant sort of way when reminding Baal of powerful he is. Mot is furious at the fate he suffers through Anat acting on Baal's behalf. Yet at the very end of the myth, Mot experiences a fear of Baal. Mot comes across as a deity who is emotionally unstable and not as self-assured as Ereshkigal.

But more noticeable than his emotions, is the hunger Mot feels for Baal and indeed for human life itself. Taken in the context of a lord of the underworld, Mot comes across as a far more sinister and frightening individual than Ereshkigal does.

In the Greek myth of Persephone the god of the underworld, Hades is also portrayed as the antagonist. Certainly, his first appearance in the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter" does not suggest a friendly image when he carries off Persephone:

"Against her will he seized her and on his golden chariot carried her away as she wailed; and she raised a shrill cry..."[27]

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[26]. CML, p.81,6,vi, lines 30-31.

[27]. HDem, p.2, lines 19-20.

In the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter", it is Zeus who seems to have brought this trouble about. It is Zeus who gives Hades permission to carry Persephone off without her consent:

"By Zeus' counsels his brother, the All-receiver and Ruler of Many, Kronos' son of many names, was carrying her away with his immortal horses, against her will."[28]

Hades appears to differ from Ereshkigal in his rule of the underworld. Whereas the Mesopotamian pantheon had to trick Ereshkigal into releasing Inanna, Zeus directly orders Hades to yield Persephone up. Perhaps Mesopotamian deities are simply a little more diplomatic than their Greek counterparts. At any rate, Hades complies with surprising speed and good will:

"Aidoneous, lord of the netherworld, with smiling brows obeyed the behests of Zeus the king, and speedily gave his command to prudent-minded Persephone."[29]

But behind all of this seeming goodwill, Hades is not to be put off so lightly. With a cunning plan, he tricks Persephone into having to return to the underworld:

"He himself gave her to eat a honey-sweet pomegranate seed, contriving secretly about her, so that she might not spend all her days again with dark-robed Demeter."[30]

Turning to Homer himself as a source, we find a little additional information about Hades. The Iliad contains a reference to Herakles descending into the

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[28]. HDem, p.2, lines 30-33.

[29]. HDem, p.11, lines 357-359.

[30]. HDem, p.12, lines 371-374.

underworld and shooting Hades with an arrow. Although this story is intended to exhibit the recklessness of Herakles, it also points to Hades being somewhat vulnerable. After being hit by the arrow, Hades ascends to Olympos and requires the healing aid of the other deities.[31]

A more conventional image of Hades appears later in the Iliad. Hades is seen for what he is, ruler of the underworld and a deity whom most people would like to forego meeting:

"Lord Death indeed is deaf to appeal, implacable; of all gods therefore he is most abhorrent to mortal men."[32]

It is less easy to get an idea of Hades from these Greek myths than of his Mesopotamian or Ugaritic counterparts. Ereshkigal may be emotional, and Mot may be threatening, but no clear image emerges of Hades. It is worth noting that in the myth of Demeter and Persephone, it appears to be Zeus who is the primary antagonist, not Hades.

In the end, it seems to be sensible not to see Hades as threatening, like Mot, but rather as merely lord of the underworld. H.J. Rose summed up this view rather neatly when he stated about Hades:

"...he is no enemy of mankind...and can reward the good as well as punishing sinners. He is a terrible, not an evil god."[33]

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[31]. Homer, The Iliad, Book V, p.83.

[32]. Homer, The Iliad, Book IX, p.147.

[33]. H.J. Rose, A Handbook of Greek Mythology, p.78.

Osiris is very different from these three deities. He is both the lord of the underworld and a dying and rising deity. Osiris is unique since he does not literally come back to life as Dumuzi, Inanna, Persephone, and Baal do. Those deities entered the underworld, but came out of it to rejoin the company of the gods. Osiris' revival takes place in the underworld itself. Osiris becomes king of eternity. The other dying and rising deities simply die and come back to life. Osiris dies and is reborn, translated into a new and more blessed existence.

In the Egyptian Book of the Dead, Osiris fulfils essentially two roles. The first role is that of the dead individual who is identified with Osiris. In this role, Osiris is a passive figure who encounters the dangers of the underworld.[34] From a mythological perspective, the deceased will experience what Osiris had to experience. This role is described in a spell from the Book of the Dead:

"I am the Radiant One, brother of the Radiant Goddess, Osiris the brother of Isis; my son and his mother Isis have saved me from my enemies who would harm me."[35]

But in another aspect, Osiris is also a ruler of the underworld. In this capacity, he is named "Lord of remembrance in the Hall of Justice" on a stela of the

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[34]. T. Rundle Clark, Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt, pp.166-167.

[35]. BD, p.70, Spell 69.

18th Dynasty.[36] In his aspect of ruler of the underworld, Osiris is as much a judge of the dead as a ruler. Unique to Egyptian belief, the dead were judged for their actions during their lives. Many of the spells from the Book of the Dead deal with protecting the dead from judgement. These spells were often in a form of a declaration of innocence:

"Behold, I have come to you, I have brought you truth...I have done no wrong in the Place of Truth...I have not done what the gods detest."[37]

But even more specifically, the dead would expect to be judged by Osiris himself. Spells existed for this eventuality too:

"I have come to you, O Lord of the Sacred Land, Osiris Foremost of the Westerners...My heart is true, my hands are clean..."[38]

Thus a moral factor occurs in the Egyptian context that does not exist within the other myths. The inhabitants of the of the Egyptian underworld or afterlife are held responsible for their actions in life.

Another crucial difference between Osiris and the other lords of the underworld is his close association with the dead. It is inconceivable that anyone would want to be associated with Ereshkigal, Mot, or Hades. The gradual evolution of the funerary cult in Egypt must have

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[36]. Miriam Lictheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Vol. 2, p.81.

[37]. BD, p.29, Spell 125.

[38]. BD, p.181, Spell 181.

something to do with this. Rather than anything else, it is the enigma of death that the myth of Osiris, inseparable in the beginning from the funerary cult, is concerned to penetrate. Osiris becomes the mythical model by following whom, the pharaoh and later on, any Egyptian believed they might escape the evils of death and gain entrance into a beatific new life beyond the grave.

In examining the rulers of the underworlds from the myths of dying and rising deities, we find that a variety of personalities occur. The next question to be addressed is whether these underworld deities represented death personified or merely ruler of the underworld?

In the Mesopotamian myths of Inanna/Ishtar and Nergal, Ereshkigal is only a ruler of the underworld. Ereshkigal has very distinct limits to her power. In the myth of Inanna, it is unclear whether Ereshkigal could have prevented her sister from entering the netherworld. By allowing Inanna to enter under her terms, Ereshkigal is able to deceive Inanna and still retain her command of the underworld. Likewise, in the myth of "Nergal and Ereshkigal", Ereshkigal must send a representative to the feast of the gods because presumably she cannot leave the underworld. Her only effective threat against the gods is to release the dead which once again, is within her sphere of authority.[39]

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[39]. Note that a similar threat is used by Inanna in the Epic of Gilgamesh. Perhaps this is a major threat that the gods potentially possessed in Mesopotamia. However, it is quite reasonable to expect this threat from Ereshkigal since she is the ruler of the underworld.

Ereshkigal does not approach the frightening image one gets of the Ugaritic Mot. In the myths concerning Ereshkigal, it is Inanna and Nergal who are responsible for causing any trouble, not Ereshkigal. Finally, the emotional aspects of Ereshkigal give her an almost human quality. Whether it is the bizarre birthing sequence from the Sumerian "Descent of Inanna" or her sexual desire for Nergal, Ereshkigal can almost be viewed in a sympathetic light. Although Ereshkigal might be feared in her role as queen of the underworld, she is in no sense a personification of death.

A similar conclusion can be reached in the case of Hades, the Greek lord of the underworld. He is a deity to be avoided rather than one to be loathed. Grim in personality, it is nevertheless curious that the only major story about him is one where he obtains a wife, regardless of the manner in which he obtains her.

In the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone, it is not so much Hades who is the villain as Zeus. Zeus is the one who gives Hades permission to steal Persephone. It is Zeus that Demeter concentrates her anger upon. In many respects, the myth of Demeter and Persephone is not so much about Persephone and Hades as it is about the conflict between Demeter and Zeus.

In the Ugaritic myth of Baal and Mot, Mot is depicted as the aggressor who challenges Baal's power. Mot can apparently leave the underworld to obtain his victims and this is in sharp contrast to Ereshkigal who

does not leave the underworld or Hades who does so only rarely. Both in imagery and name, Mot is much more in keeping with a personification of death. Even the supreme god El calls him "beloved son", recognising that in the constitution of the universe, all human beings are destined to be swallowed by him and remain thereafter in his domain. All El can do is prevent Mot exceeding his role.

Osiris is more like the underworld deities insofar as he is perceived as a ruler over the land of the dead. Osiris is unique from Ereshkigal or Hades in that he regularly judges the dead. Hades does so, but only infrequently. Judging the dead on a regular basis appears to have been part of Osiris' role as a god of the underworld. But in his aspect as a dying and rising deity, the dead are also personified as Osiris. It is this element that makes Osiris stand out from the characters in the other myths.

The concept of a god of the underworld would at first consideration appear a frightening thought. An image comes to mind of a stern and grim deity (of either sex) on a throne in an almost Dante-like atmosphere of hell. This image finds confirmation in the picture given of the Ugaritic Mot. But in the case of the other three deities, it is inaccurate.

The gods of the underworld in Mesopotamia, Greece, and Egypt, were in no sense evil satan-like figures. Rather, the deities of the underworld are the gods

responsible for the ordering and rule of the underworld. Possibly only in the case of the Ugaritic Mot is there any sense of real menace. But elements of these myths about underworld deities, such as Ereshkigal's and Hades' attempts to find mates makes the entire image a more familiar one. By equating elements of what came after death with human life, these myths were quite possibly intended to make death seem a little less terrifying.

But in discussing the deities of the underworld, it becomes evident that the need exists to more fully examine the underworld/afterlives of the myths in question. Perhaps the differences noted between the deities of the underworld was caused by the physical structure of the netherworld as envisaged by each society. It is to that subject we must now turn.

Chapter 8

The Nature of Underworlds

Perhaps the most fascinating topic related to the subject of dying and rising deities is the concept each of the four societies in question had of a place people went to after death. It is all very well to employ terms such as "afterlife", "netherworld" and "underworld", but these terms have a degree of ambiguity and interchangeability which is not conducive to the more precise definition necessary in a study such as this.

The term "afterlife" is often used to describe Egyptian concepts of where the dead go after death, and roughly equivalent to "paradise", which conveys at least in modern English images of a place which is not only benevolent, but is desirable.

In contrast to the term "afterlife", are the terms "netherworld" and "underworld". These terms give the impression of places that are dark and to be feared. Particularly to an interpreter from a Christian background, it is all too easy to replace these terms with the familiar concept of Hell. But how valid are these common interpretations of the terms "afterlife", and "netherword"/"underworld"?

To begin with, the terms "underworld" and "netherworld" should not be looked upon in such a

negative fashion; they are not the equivalent of the Christian idea of Hell. As for the "afterlife", it should be remembered that one of the more significant places where one was judged for one's activities in life was the Egyptian afterlife. If the terms of "underworld" or "netherworld" are not entirely fraught with unpleasantness, the Egyptian afterlife, as will be seen, is not exactly a blissful place.

A number of questions arise out of the consideration of this subject. What was "existence" like for the inhabitants of such nether regions? In what manner did the ancient Egyptians physically (or perhaps one should say metaphysically) reach the underworld? How common in Mesopotamian mythology was Enkidu's dire description of the dead in the realm of Ereshkigal? Likewise, how was the realm of Hades and Persephone ordered? Who was punished and who was not punished? Finally, there remains the question of who or what were the rephaim of Ugarit? The answers to these and other questions will be found by examining the evidence from each of the four societies in turn.

The ancient Egyptian concept of what occurred after death is perhaps the most involved, ambiguous, and well attested. Compared to Mesopotamia, Greece, and especially Ugarit, the amount of written funerary material is enormous. This includes not only the Pyramid Texts, the Coffin Texts, and the Book of the Dead, but other books of spells regarding the nature of the underworld.

These "books" include compositions such as the Amduat, the Book of Gates, and the Book of Two Ways.[1] Similar in intent to the other books of funerary material, these books give very detailed accounts of the actual structure of the underworld. They were apparently meant as manuals to give the deceased some idea of what they would encounter in the afterlife and the magic words which would be needed to get them into the right part of the netherworld.

If the terms "afterlife", "underworld" or "netherworld" can be misleading when attempting to understand Egyptian concepts of what occurred after death, there is an equal difficulty due to the lack of consensus as to what occurred after death in these texts. This degree of ambiguity is perhaps what makes these texts so interesting and human.

Prior to examining the bulk of Egypt's funerary literature which dates from the New Kingdom, it would be best to look at a Middle Kingdom composition and remember that all of the material from the New Kingdom had its origins in earlier material. Like all of its related material, the Middle Kingdom Book of Two Ways was meant as a guide book of spells to help the deceased to get into the underworld. The Book of Two Ways was written on the bottom of coffins and these were found in the

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[1]. Alan Gardiner, Egyptian Grammar, pp.13-14.

vicinity of Hermopolis.[2]

Like the Book of the Dead, the Book of Two Ways contains spells which, if originally meant to help the deceased, are now rather difficult to comprehend even in translation. But of interest to understanding the nature of the Egyptian afterlife, there is specific reference to the concept of gates or portals which must be passed in order to gain entry into the netherworld. Each of these portals is guarded by entities and it is a bit dubious as to whether modern terms like gods or demons are an accurate description. An example of such comes from a description of the warder of the first gate who is supposed to be addressed by the deceased as:

"The one who stretches out the prow rope, the keeper of the outside gate."[3]

The basic purpose of the spell which follows is to avoid conflict with the gate-keeper and get through the gate. This is done by an odd combination of pleading and threatening.[4]

Other spells in the Book of Two Ways are similar to all the other funerary literature insofar as they concern the basic questions of survival after death:

"Spell for existing in Rosetaw and living on the

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[2]. Leonard Lesko, The Book of Two Ways, p.3, Spell 1100.

[3]. Leonard Lesko, The Book of Two Ways, p.109.

[4]. Leonard Lesko, The Book of Two Ways, p.109, Spell 1100.

abundance of offerings beside Osiris."[5]

Perhaps the most well known of Egypt's funerary literature was the New Kingdom composition the Book of the Dead, already mentioned in Chapter one. In one sense, the Book of the Dead was a more sophisticated version of works such as the Pyramid Texts and the Book of Two Ways.

In attempting to glean information regarding the Egyptian afterlife/underworld from the Book of the Dead, the information can be divided into four categories. The first category regards the spells needed to protect and provide sustenance for the inhabitants of the netherworld. The next category involves the judgement of the dead. Next are the spells which, echoing the Book of Two Ways and previous funerary literature, allow the deceased to actually enter the underworld. Finally and perhaps of the most interest in this study, are the spells that give information about the actual geography of the underworld.

Directly regarding the inhabitants of the Egyptian afterlife, the deceased requires sustenance according to the Book of the Dead. Closely related to this was the need to stay physically intact; an obvious relationship to the practice of mummification can be seen here.

The most obvious example of sustenance required by the deceased would of course be food. This is found in a variety of places throughout the Book of the Dead:

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[5]. Leonard Lesko, The Book of Two Ways, p.88, Spell 1082.

"I will live on bread of white emmer and beer of red barley."[6]

In addition to requiring sustenance in the Egyptian afterlife, it was important for the deceased to be as physically intact as when the individual was alive. Understandably, some spells were designed to prevent a corpse from putrefying. Given the warm climate of Egypt, this requirement is hardly unreasonable. But other things could happen to the body and there were spells to prevent a variety of mishaps, including decapitation:

"The head of Osiris shall not be taken from him, and my head shall not be taken from me."[7]

In the myth of Osiris is the eventual victory of Horus over Seth.[8] This was seen as a victory for justice. It is hardly surprising that in the Egyptian underworld, the dead were judged for the wrongdoing that they had done while alive. This should not be seen as the equivalent of what the Christians call sin, since sin implies a wrong done against God. In the Egyptian context, the wrong was against the natural order of the universe.

The so-called "declaration of innocence" from the Book of the Dead covers an extremely large variety of wrongdoing. This concept is interesting since it shows how developed the moral leanings of Egyptian religion had become by the New Kingdom. An example of a few of the

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[6]. BD, p.185, Spell 189.

[7]. BD, p.63, Spell 43.

[8]. See Chapter 1

statements from this declaration underlines its intent:

"I have not caused pain, I have not made hungry, I have not made to weep, I have not killed, I have not commanded to kill, I have not made suffering for anyone."[9]

Although this moral aspect shows up in the Greek underworld, punishment is meted out only to a few and only to those who offend the gods. The concept of judging the dead was unique to ancient Egypt.

The underworld of the Book of the Dead resembles the underworld of the Book of Two Ways. For the deceased to successfully enter the underworld, they must pass through gates and portals. Since nothing is easy in either life or afterlife, each gate has a guardian who must be appeased/pacified by the deceased using spells from the Book of the Dead. The gates are called the portals of Osiris:

"What is to be said by N when arriving at the first portal of Osiris: 'make a way for me, for I know you, I know your name, and I know the name of the god who guards you."[10]

In all, there are twenty-one portals of Osiris in the underworld according to the Book of the Dead. It should be remembered that this number varies throughout Egyptian funerary literature and is different in, for example, the Book of Gates. Each portal from the Book of the Dead, has a door keeper and a god who is the guardian of the gate. In all cases, both the guardian of the gate and the deity are identified by epithets. An example of

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[9]. BD, pp.29-31, Spell 146.

[10]. BD, pp.135-136, Spell 146.

such are generic terms such as "Mistress of Darkness" or "The Terrible One".[11] From the indication of these epithets, these entities do not sound exactly friendly. This sort of evidence should help dispel the "myth" that the Egyptian afterlife was entirely friendly and benevolent.

The Book of the Dead also provides a physical description of the Egyptian afterlife/netherworld. The underworld is described as containing fourteen mounds. The description of them in English does not present a very clear picture although they undoubtedly made more sense to the ancient Egyptians. An example of a "mound" that seems incomprehensible is the sixth mound:

> "As for this cavern sacred to the gods, secret from spirits and inaccessible to the dead, the god who is in it is called 'Feller of adju-fish', 'Hail to you, you cavern.'"[12]

A slightly more friendly and possibly more understandable "mound" is the first mound which is described:

> "As for this mound of the west in which men live on shen-loaves and jugs of beer, doff your head-clothes at meeting me as at the likeness of the greatest among you."[13]

The physical details of the underworld according to the Book of the Dead should perhaps not be pondered over too literally. It is important enough to know that it contained numerous gates and portals and was divided up

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[11]. BD, p.136, Spell 149.

[12]. BD, p.140, Spell 149.

[13]. BD, p.137, Spell 137.

into different segments.

Finally with regard to the ancient Egyptian concept of an afterlife, there is a series of texts that specifically describe the underworld. These texts are: The Book of Caverns, The Book of Gates, and The Book of the Amduat. They occur in a variety of forms throughout the royal tombs of the New Kingdom, but are perhaps best represented in the tomb of Ramses VI.

The Book of Caverns, like the other two books, is a combination of texts and drawings. The subject matter is the descent of the sun-god into the underworld. It is divided into six segments which are further subdivided into additional segments.[14]

Most of the text of the Book of Caverns concerns Re addressing a variety of gods, including Osiris. This is made clear at the beginning of the text:

"O gods who are in the Netherworld (in the) first cavern of the west, guardians of the districts of the silent region, Ennead of the Regent of the West, I am Re who is in the heavens..."[15]

The effect of the sun-god Re passing through the netherworld is to re-animate for a time some of its inhabitants. The denizens of the underworld rejoice at the appearance of Re:

"O Re, our eyes have come to being...turn thy visage toward us, thou who passest through the Netherworld. We are powerful, we perceive thy rays."[16]

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[14]. A. Piankoff, The Tomb of Ramesses VI, pp.45-47.

[15]. A. Piankoff, The Tomb of Ramesses VI, p.49.

[16]. A. Piankoff, The Tomb of Ramesses VI, p.126.

The text of the Book of Caverns ends with Re being praised by a variety of gods including Horus. Re apparently leaves the caverns and goes into the east.[17] Perhaps the overall image one gets from the Book of Caverns is of darkness which needs to be illuminated by the emanations of Re in order for the dead to be revitalized. This is a far cry from the perception of the blessed afterlife which one normally associates with ancient Egypt.

A similar composition is the so-called Book of Gates. This also deals with the progression of the sun-god Re through the twelve divisions of night in his solar barge.[18] The primary difference between the Book of Gates and the Book of Caverns is the difference in division: six caverns versus twelve hours. In this, the Book of Gates is similar to the Book of the Amduat.

The text of the Book of Gates begins with a general adoration to Re. The attributes of Re are praised.[19] The text begins in earnest in the first of the twelve sections as Re enters the underworld:

"Open the Netherworld for Re, throw open thy door for the One of the Horizon."[20]

As in the Book of Caverns, Re travels through the

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[17]. A. Piankoff, The Tomb of Ramesses VI, pp.134-135.

[18]. E.A. Budge, The Egyptian Heaven and Hell, p.86.

[19]. A. Piankoff, The Tomb of Ramesses VI, pp.141-143.

[20]. A. Piankoff, The Tomb of Ramesses VI, p.144.

netherworld in his barge. The barge is towed by four gods.[21] Each of the gates through which the barge of Re must pass are heavily defended by deities and serpents.[22]

In the end at the twelfth division, Re leaves the underworld behind:

"Mind (says to) the One of Morning: 'Open thy door for Re, throw open thy door for the One of the Horizon, he comes out of the mysterious region'...Then the door is closed."[23]

The gates are clearly significant. The netherworld is portrayed as a place full of obstacles that must be overcome. Indeed, one could describe the Egyptian underworld as a metaphysical obstacle course only to be surmounted through the use of spells.

The Book of the Amduat, or "What is in the Netherworld", is less concerned with gates and more related to the hours of night and what is in them. Once again, Re sails on through the twelve divisions of the night but this time on the river "Urnes". Each of the twelve hours of night has guardian deities and entities. An example of this comes from the end of the first section:

"The hour who is the guide of this gate is She who cleaves the brow of the enemies of Re. This Hour is the First Hour of the night."[24]

As in all of the other funerary literature of Egypt,

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[21]. A. Piankoff, The Tomb of Ramesses VI, p.145.

[22]. A. Piankoff, The Tomb of Ramesses VI, p.149.

[23]. A. Piankoff, The Tomb of Ramesses VI, p.223.

[24]. A. Piankoff, The Tomb of Ramesses VI, p.239.

Osiris is the supreme deity of the netherworld. This is a crucial point to consider when attempting to link the myth of Osiris to Egyptian concepts of the afterlife. At the end of the Book of the Amduat, Osiris is addressed in these terms:

> "Live! Live!, Thou who residest in darkness...Lord of Life, Regent of the West, Osiris, He at the Head of the Westerners."[25]

The picture which emerges of the Egyptian afterlife/netherworld is neither clear or concise. The varied funerary literature of Egypt is both ambiguous and lacks consistency. Yet several general points may be observed about the Egyptian afterlife.

The overwhelming impression one gets from the ancient Egyptian funerary "books" is of a region that is protected by barriers or gates. The key to passing these gates lies in the knowledge of the names of the gatewardens and their guardian deities.

As to the nature of the underworld itself, the inhabitants were obviously meant to exist in some fashion as they had during life. They need both air and food and do not physically decay. The emanations of Re can help animate the dead as Re passes through the netherworld. On a higher theological plane, the dead of ancient Egypt faced judgement before Osiris. This rudimentary form of cosmic justice is fascinating and essentially unique to ancient Egypt.

The impression which emerges is not one of a dark

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[25]. A. Piankoff, The Tomb of Rameses VI, p.317.

nebulous hell, but rather as a place full of dangers which might be overcome using spells from the various funerary compositions. Although the afterlife of the ancient Egyptians might appear nightmarish to modern eyes, at the very least it promised something to the Egyptians other than oblivion after death. It was still something devoutly to be desired.

The underworld of Mesopotamia is described in various myths. These include the "Descent of Inanna/Ishtar", The Epic of Gilgamesh, and "Nergal and Ereshkigal". Although a great deal less detailed than Egyptian sources, the Mesopotamian sources give some idea of both the geography of the underworld and the nature of its inhabitants.

It is worth taking another look at Enkidu's description of the inhabitants of the netherworld from the Epic of Gilgamesh. As commented upon earlier, this description is far from a cheerful one:

> "He seized me, drove me down to the dark house, dwelling of Erkalla's god...where dust is their food, and clay their bread. They are clothed like birds, with feathers, and they see no light, and they dwell in darkness."[26]

In the somewhat odd tablet 12, Enkidu descends into the netherworld to recover for Gilgamesh his Pukku and Mekku (whatever they are!). Enkidu returns and gives a harrowing account of what he has seen. Apparently, burial rites are important for the peace of the dead. The deceased who are not properly tended do not rest:

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[26]. MMes, p.89.

"I saw him, whose corpse you saw abandoned in the open country: His ghost does not sleep in the earth. I saw him whom you saw, whose ghost has nobody to supply it: He feeds on dregs from dishes, and bits of bread that lie abandoned in the street."[27]

The Sumerian "Descent of Inanna" and the Akkadian "Descent of Ishtar" provide some additional information regarding the nature of the Mesopotamian underworld. As has already been seen, entities that we identify as demons inhabit the underworld and do the bidding of its queen, Ereshkigal. But like the Egyptian netherworld, the underworld of Mesopotamia is guarded by gates, though in the Mesopotamian netherworld there is only one gate-warden mentioned.

What may or may not be significant is that Inanna/Ishtar has a specific item of clothing or jewelry removed at each gate. Although the specific passages are too long to quote in full, it is worth noting the gate and what item was associated with it.

	Inanna[28]	Ishtar[29]
gate 1	crown	crown
2	necklace	earrings
3	beads from breast	necklace
4	breastplate	toggle-pins of breast
5	bracelet	girdle of birth stones
6	measuring rod & line from hand	bangles from wrist and ankles
7	robe	robe

It is interesting to note a level of similarity,

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[27]. MMes, pp.124-125.

[28]. Thorkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, pp.57-60.

[29]. MMes, pp.156-157.

both at the beginning and at the end of the list. It would be useful to know if some or all of the dead are stripped metaphorically or metaphysically of their clothes prior to entering the Mesopotamian underworld.

Finally, in the myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal, the underworld is also described as having seven gates. This is made clear when Anu sends a messenger to Ereshkigal at the beginning of the myth.[30] Seven is a fairly common number in ancient religion and it is probable that the emphasis was on multiple gates rather than on any given number. One gate would be bad enough for a place like the underworld. Seven gates gives one the impression of a place one does not leave easily.

What is remarkable about the Mesopotamian underworld is the consistency of belief regarding it. In a collection of fairly scattered texts, both in time and space, there is agreement on the number of gates and the name of its queen, Ereshkigal. This is in marked contrast to the jumble of ideas from Egypt.

Another important factor is the necessity of the burial rites for the dead. If the proper burial procedures are not enacted, the spirit or shade of the deceased will not be at rest. Although this is a far cry from resurrection of the spirit or body, it points to a belief that the dead need to be cared for by the living and this in itself might indicate a belief related to ancestor worship. The idea of the dead not resting until

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[30]. MMes, p.165.

properly buried is a very universal one ranging in time backwards from today's popular horror movies to Sophocles' Antigone burying her brother. It is interesting to find this concept going as far back as ancient Mesopotamia. Could there be some psychological factor at work here?

The underworld as conceived of by the ancient Greeks is in many ways less problematical to analyze than in the other cultures. This is largely due to the way it is well attested to in Greek mythology. While not without its own problems of interpretation, the Greek concept of the netherworld is comparatively clear cut.

Much of what is known about the Greek underworld, both in its geography and its inhabitants comes from Homer. Book 10 of The Odyssey gives a physical description of the realm of Hades and Persephone. It is Circe who gives a fairly detailed description of how to reach the underworld.

Upon beaching his ship at the end of the ocean, Circe tells Odysseus that he will first encounter the groves of Persephone. These consist of willows and poplars. Proceeding forward, Odysseus is told that he will come upon the branches of the rivers Acheron, Pyriphlegethon, Styx and Cocytus.[31] It is only after Homer's time that the river Lethe is mentioned by Aristophanes. Lethe is the river where those who drink

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[31]. Homer, The Odyssey, Book X, p.126.

from it lose their memories.[32]

Later in The Odyssey, another description is given of how to reach the underworld. After Odysseus has killed his wife's suitors, their shades are collected by Hermes and led down into the underworld:

"They passed the streams of Ocean, the White Rock, the Gates of the Sun, and the Land of Dreams, and soon they came to the Field of Asphodel, where the souls, the phantoms of the dead, have their habitation."[33]

The actual fate of those that died and went to the underworld was not entirely pleasant. One can indeed hear an echo of Enkidu in the glimpses one gets of the Greek underworld. The shade of Achilles makes a straightforward point when questioned by Odysseus:

"I would rather be above ground still and laboring for some poor portionless man than be lord over all the lifeless dead."[34]

As in the case of Mesopotamia, burial rites were a crucial part of entering the underworld. In the Iliad, the shade of Patroc lus begs Achilles to perform burial rites, or he will be unable to enter the underworld.[35]

It is appropriate to call the deceased of Hades shades rather than ghosts. In a very literal sense, they are a mere shadow of their former existence. To obtain access to the inhabitants of the underworld, Odysseus sacrifices a ram and a black ewe. Odysseus is also

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[32]. Aristophanes, The Frogs, p.9.

[33]. Homer, The Odyssey, Book XXIV, p.286.

[34]. Homer, The Odyssey, Book, XI, p.139.

[35]. Homer, The Iliad, Book XXIII, p.398.

instructed to pour libations to the dead consisting of milk, honey, wine, and water.[36] In this way, the dead will come up to him an answer his questions.

That the dead need sustenance to draw strength from is clear from what follows. The seer Teiresias, from whom Odysseus seeks advice, arrives at the site of the sacrifice and drinks the blood of the sacrificial victims.[37]

The entire episode of Odysseus questioning the dead is chilling. Odysseus learns information both about the past and present from the dead. He also sees some notable cases of those who have defied the gods and have been punished, such as Sisyphus.[38] It should be remembered that those who are punished have in essence offended the gods, not an order of morality. This is in contrast to the Egyptian afterlife where the dead are judged for their actions in life.

Finally, Odysseus is overcome by fear and is forced to flee:

"I feared that august Persephone might send against me from Hades' house the gorgon head of some grisly monster."[39]

The picture which emerges of the Greek underworld can best be described by the word "gloom". The realm of Hades is the place where all the dead go and no real

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[36]. Homer, The Odyssey, Book X, p.126.

[37]. Homer, The Odyssey, Book XI, p.130.

[38]. Homer, The Odyssey, Book XI, p.141.

[39]. Homer, The Odyssey, Book XI, p.142.

concept of justice exists. Although not forced into the Mesopotamian indignity of being clothed in feathers, the Greek underworld is in many respects similar to the Mesopotamian netherworld described by Enkidu.

The Ugaritic underworld is not as well documented as its ancient counterparts since there are no long descriptions of it similar to Enkidu or Odysseus' view of their netherworlds. However, a number of observations may be made about the underworld based upon Ugaritic sources.

There were fields, euphemistically called "Pleasure" and "Delight" around its entrance, which was guarded by rocks and dense trees. It was, again euphemistically, called "the house of freedom in the earth", and Baal on reaching it had to experience "inanition" like mortal man.[40] The goddess Anat had to traverse vast regions before confronting and destroying Mot. The god of death himself occupied a city called "Miry", and his throne was covered with filth. Entering his territory is often compared with going down into his "throat".

Perhaps the most notable element of the Ugaritic underworld which has engendered much discussion is that of the rephaim. Scholars have interpreted the rephaim in a variety of ways such as seeing them as dead heroes[41] or

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[40]. CML, p.72,5,v, lines 15-17.

[41]. Theodore Lewis, Cults of the Dead, p.14.

as a warrior elite, or simply as shades.[42]

The rephaim texts are numbers 20-22 in CTA and KTU.[43] Do they indicate a cult of the dead at Ugarit? There are not many funerary texts from Ugarit, but one of these is translated as:

"The liturgy (book) of the nocturnal sacrifices: You are summoned, O "heroes" of the underworld."[44]

Not everyone would agree that the rephaim should be rendered "heroes".[45] But the text just quoted indicates that there were sacrifices to the dead. There is a sense from the Ugaritic texts that the dead are summoned to a convocation and that libations and offerings are made to them.[46]

At the moment it is unsafe to say more. It is probably best to think of the dead of Ugarit as being similar to the shades of either Mesopotamia or Greece. Certainly death meant death for the people of Ugarit as one modern commentator has observed:

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[42]. L'Heureux, "The Ugaritic and Biblical Rephaim", Harvard Theological Review 67, 1974, p.272.

[43]. For the most recent publication, see W.T. Pitard, "A new Edition of the Rapiuma Texts", Basor 285, pp.33-77.

[44]. Theodore Lewis, Cults of the Dead, p.7, lines 1-2.

[45]. For just some of the differing views on what the rephaim were and how to translate them, see J.N. Ford, "The Living Rephaim of Ugarit", UF 24, 1992, pp.73-101; Del Olmo Lete, "The Divine Names of the Ugaritic Kings", UF 18, 1986, pp.83-95; C. L'Heureux, Rank Among the Canaanite Gods; S.B. Parker, "The Ugaritic Deity Rapiu", UF 4, 1970, pp. 97-104.

[46]. Theodore Lewis, Cults of the Dead, pp.95-96.

"...the perspective of becoming a ghost of the nether world consoled the Ugaritians as little as it did the Babylonians or the Homeric Greeks."[47]

The nature of the underworlds of the four cultures in question is not irrelevant to the myths of dying and rising deities. In at least two of these myths, the Mesopotamian and Greek myths, the deities in question definitely enter the underworld. Baal seems also to have gone into the underworld. Osiris was a deity directly connected to the underworld and became ruler of the underworld as a direct result of what occurs in his myth.

The cultures of Mesopotamia, Greece and Ugarit saw existence after death as merely being a pale reflection of human life. Although the dead could be animated by libations or sacrifices, existence after death was a shadowy one.

Egypt tells a different story. The underworld of Egypt is a complex place. Life after death for the ancient Egyptians meant a great deal more than a shadowy life. It was looked forward to positively and lasted, it seems, for ever. But at the same time, the Egyptian netherworld as described by Egyptian funerary texts, was hardly the blissful paradise it is often portrayed as; and it was also regarded with some apprehension.

The next matter to be dealt with is immortality and resurrection. Here also Egypt stands aside from the other three cultures. Answering the question of why this

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[47]. Michael Astour, "The Netherworld and its Denizens", p.234.

difference should exist leads us to the very heart of what was the real causative factor in the myths of dying and rising deities.

Chapter 9

Immortality Versus Resurrection

Since the beginning of human civilization man has been fascinated with the concept of immortality. Even in more recent times, from the medieval story of the Wandering Jew to the elves of J.R.R. Tolkein's Middle Earth, stories about immortal beings have been among the most popular genre of literature.

The myths of dying and rising deities of the ancient Near East do not have a great deal to do specifically with the subject of immortality. Immortality differs from resurrection in that death never occurs. Since the gods of the myths of dying and rising deities are by definition technically immortal, there is a distinct tension between the concept of immortality and the concept of returning from the dead and it is worth examining this subject. As one commentator has written:

> "While the proverbially immortal gods could not die a natural death, they could perish through violence."[1]

So why consider the subject of immortality with reference to the myths of dying and rising deities? The reason is that in three out of the four cultures that possess a myth about dying and rising deities, myths about immortality also occur. A rather obvious example is the quest of Gilgamesh for immortality from the

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[1]. Alexander Heidel, The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels, p.137.

Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh. Egypt, which is the one culture which did not have any notable example of the quest for immortality, believed in the physical resurrection of the body. Although I have suggested that the other cultures might have had rudimentary ideas on resurrection, only Egypt worked it into their practical religion.

What is the relationship between resurrection and immortality? Is it mere coincidence that of the four cultures in question, three had myths about immortality and the fourth, Egypt, believed in resurrection? Are immortality, where death never occurs, and resurrection, where death and rebirth occur, opposites, or are they merely two very similar ways of looking at the problem of death?

The evidence of a desire for immortality in Mesopotamia, Greece, and Ugarit is good. In addition to the Epic of Gilgamesh, Mesopotamia produced other mythological works which mention the subject. Both in Homer and Pindar, there are references to the Greek conception of immortality. Finally, in the Ugaritic myth of Aqhat, there is a rather dramatic offer of immortality to a mortal.

In a modern context, vampires or the elves of J.R.R. Tolkein are perhaps the best known examples of immortal beings. However, vampires are in a class by themselves and the elves were never human to begin with. But in either case, modern writers often point out the

difficulties of achieving immortality and of how difficult it is to exist for centuries or millennium.

To the author(s) of the Epic of Gilgamesh, or the story of Aqhat, the difficulty facing the protagonists is achieving immortality. Since the alternative was the netherworld, one suspects that the protagonists were not overly concerned with the ramifications of living forever. Rather, their concern was for what position this transformation placed them in with regard to their gods.

The concept of immortality requires some imagination. How is it achieved? Under what circumstances will it be given and by whom? Some of these questions were dealt with by the authors of these myths. It was only later writers, who could comprehend of an alternative to a shadowy netherworld, who considered the negative implications of living forever.

It is surprising that the Mesopotamian sources provide such excellent examples of a longing for immortality. These beliefs are well attested to both in Akkadian as well as Sumerian sources. Rather than start with the usual order of Sumerian material first, from a literary standpoint it would be best to begin with the Epic of Gilgamesh from Akkadian sources as this myth provides one of the best and most famous examples of a quest for immortality.

It is hard to overstate the timeless appeal of the Epic of Gilgamesh. The story of a man who is forced to confront the death of a friend, and to therefore face the

reality of his own mortality, is a story that has remained relevant throughout the millennia. But it is Gilgamesh's refusal to accept his mortality and his ensuing quest for immortality that places this myth in an almost archetypal class.

The Epic of Gilgamesh is a surprisingly long story. Much of it consists of Gilgamesh meeting his friend Enkidu and of the adventures which these two inseparable friends have together. This part of the story need not concern this analysis. When Enkidu dies by the decree of the gods, the great crisis of the epic occurs. Gilgamesh must not only face grief over the death of his friend, but he must also deal with the fact that he too will eventually die. Unable to accept this situation, Gilgamesh resorts to a dramatic solution:

"Gilgamesh mourned bitterly for Enkidu his friend, and roamed open country. 'Shall I die too? Am I not like Enkidu? Grief has entered my innermost being, I am afraid of death and so I roam open country. I shall take the road, and go quickly to see Ut-Napishtim, son of Ubaru-Tutu.'"[2]

Ut-Napishtim as Gilgamesh well knows, is the Mesopotamian equivalent of Noah. When the gods decide to destroy mankind, Ut-Napishtim builds an ark on the directions of the god Enki. As a reward for his deeds, Ut-Napishtim and his wife are given the "gift" of immortality by the gods:

"Until now Ut-Napishtim was mortal, but henceforth Ut-Napishtim and his woman shall be as we gods are."[3]

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[2]. MMes, p.95.

[3]. MMes, p.116.

This is an important point. Ut-Napishtim and his wife have essentially become gods. That is how they have achieved immortality. Ut-Napishtim tries to explain to Gilgamesh that death is man's fate as decreed by the gods. The gods have set a limit to the amount of time man may live.[4] Gilgamesh refuses to listen and fails the rather inexplicable test of sleep imposed upon him by Ut-Napishtim. One gets the general impression that regardless of what Gilgamesh does, Ut-Napishtim is the one exception to the rule of mortality and that Gilgamesh cannot achieve what he so badly desires.

The Epic of Gilgamesh is not merely a tale of an individual seeking immortality. A much deeper meaning can be found in the Epic of Gilgamesh contradicting views that myths are just elaborate stories about polytheistic beliefs. Particular attention has been drawn between certain passages of the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Book of Ecclesiastes.[5]

In the fragments from the Old Babylonian version of Gilgamesh, the alewife gives Gilgamesh some straightforward advice:

"You will not find the eternal life you seek. When the gods created mankind, they appointed death for mankind, kept eternal life in their own hands."[6]

The alewife goes on to suggest in some somewhat broken lines, that all man can do is to enjoy life.

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[4]. MMes, p.109.

[5]. Michael Eaton, Ecclesiastes, p.35.

[6]. MMes, p.150.

Certainly, this is very similar to the message found in Ecclesiastes 3:19-22.

Two points about Mesopotamian views on mortality and immortality are made abundantly clear in the Epic of Gilgamesh. The first point is that the gods and only the gods are immortal. Second, mankind is mortal and Ut-Napishtim and his wife were the sole exception and were not just made immortal, but made like gods. To achieve immortality, one must become like a god. Understandably, this is not a regular occurrence.

The Epic of Gilgamesh contains a large degree of ironic humour. The hero of the myth, the mighty Gilgamesh is obviously doomed to fail. Even the somewhat bizarre episode with the rejuvenation plant ends in failure.[7] For Gilgamesh, immortality remains an unattainable dream.

These views on mortality as expressed in the Akkadian Epic of Gilgamesh date back to Sumerian times. This is well attested to in Sumerian mythology. In one sense, the concept of immortality was well established during the Sumerian period and contained one significant factor.

The Sumerian story of the flood confirms much of the general story told by Ut-Napishtim to Gilgamesh. The crucial aspect, which concerns us here, is the reward the Sumerian Noah, Ziusudra receives from the gods. It is exactly the same reward that Ut-Napishtim received - immortality:

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[7]. MMes, p.119.

"Anu and Enlil cherished Ziusudra, Life like (that of) a god they gave to him, Breath eternal like (that of) a god they bring down for him."[8]

But the Sumerian myth of the deluge has another very crucial element, which is elaborated in other Sumerian myths. This is where Ziusudra goes to live after becoming immortal. A specific physical location is mentioned where the gods send Ziusudra to live:

"In the land of crossing, the land of Dilmun, the place where the sun rises, they caused to dwell."[9]

The land of Dilmun is a fascinating topic in itself. Dilmun is mentioned in both mythological and historical texts, although in all fairness, Mesopotamian historical texts should not always be taken at face value. In the Neo-Assyrian version of the Legend of Sargon, Sargon is described as having captured Dilmun.[10] This requires the question of whether Dilmun was an actual historical geographical location or whether this was a formulaic way of saying that Sargon captured a lot of places? At any rate, it shows that Dilmun was a locality recognized by the Mesopotamian mytho-consciousness.

The land of Dilmun, where Ziusudra went to live, was the Mesopotamian equivalent to the Arthurian Avalon. It was a land where no sickness occurred and more importantly, where people did not die. The description of Dilmun in the Sumerian myth of Enki and Ninhursag

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[8]. ANET, p.44, lines 255-257.

[9]. ANET, p.44, line 260.

[10]. ANET, p.38, line 29.

describes an almost idyllic place:

"The land of Dilmun is pure, the land of Dilmun is clean...the land of Dilmun is most bright."[11]

But it is the element of immortality that is strongly associated with Dilmun. It should be noted that this is implied by the following lines, whose translation into English leaves at least some doubt at to its meaning:

"In Dilmun the raven utters no cries, the Ittidu-bird utters not the cry of the Ittidu-bird, the lion kills not...The sick-eyed (says) not 'I am sick-eyed'; the sick-headed (says) not 'I am sick-headed'..."[12]

Mesopotamian views of immortality as a whole are very interesting to compare with similar views from other cultures. It should perhaps be remembered that this synthesis of views on Mesopotamian beliefs is artificial. Yet a degree of continuity appears to exist between Sumerian and later periods.

Two concepts become very clear about Mesopotamian views on immortality. The first one is that they actually possessed quite early on the concept of not dying. Although different from resurrection, which implies living after death, ideas on immortality at least imply that the Mesopotamians were thinking very hard on the subject of death, and of avoiding it. Closely linked to this was the idea that only the gods possessed the gift of immortality. But at a very basic level, if the gods made an exception and gave Ut-Napishtim immortality,

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[11]. ANET, p.38, lines 4-8.

[12]. ANET, p.38, lines 13-21.

might they not do it again? The Epic of Gilgamesh makes it quite clear that the gods will never give the gift of immortality again. However, there must have been the lingering thought to any audience of this myth that under some special individual circumstance the gods who had the power to grant immortality could potentially do so again.

The second very important point is the idea of a mytho-geographic location inhabited by the gods where death and illness does not occur. Would such a place have been thought to have been reachable by some? With regard to certain Greek concepts that run along similar lines, a merging can be seen between Mesopotamian views on mortality and a more "developed", if this word can be used, ideas on an afterlife.

Greek ideas regarding immortality bear a distinct similarity to Mesopotamian concepts on the dead. Although it would be unwise to draw too close of a cultural connection between Mesopotamia and Greece, Greece had both the concept of divine immortality and of a special place where people did not die.

An excellent example of a Greek myth about immortality is the myth concerning the hero Polydeukes. Polydeukes is the brother of Kastor and of Helen of Troy. The two brothers are called the Dioskuroi.[13] When the mortal brother Kastor dies, the immortal Polydeukes asks Zeus to let Kastor share his immortality. Polydeukes is

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[13]. H.J. Rose, A Handbook of Greek Mythology, pp.230-231.

immortal because he is the son of Zeus whereas Kastor had a mortal father. Zeus explains this to Polydeukes:

"Thou art my son, whereas Castor was begotten by thy mother's husband, of mortal seed, after thine own conception."[14]

This is a major sticking point. Like Ut-Napishtim, Polydeukes is immortal due to his divine association, not by a process of the metaphorical flick of a metaphysical wand. In the case of a hero like Polydeukes, immortality is inexorably linked with divinity.

The Greek idea of a deathless place was similar to the Mesopotamian Dilmun. But, depending on how far one interprets the Mesopotamian sources, the Greeks took things one step further. While Dilmun is merely a place where death and sickness did not occur, the Elysian Fields of Greek mythology is where some fortunate few are allowed to go. The Elysian Fields are a bit like the netherworld in terms of being a geographical (in a metaphysical sense) location. Yet the Elysian Fields are very unlike anything that has thus far been encountered. The Elysian Fields are described in Pindar's II Olympian Ode:

"The ocean-breezes blow around the Islands of the Blest, and flowers of gold are blazing, some on the shore from radiant trees."[15]

To get to the Elysian Fields, according to Pindar, one must have a special characteristic such as being courageous and or pure. Among those who have been allowed

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[14]. Pindar, p.425, "Nemean Ode X", lines 80-85.

[15]. Pindar, p.25, "Olympian Ode II", lines 74-75.

in to the Elysian Fields are Peleus, Cadmos and Achilles.[16]

Perhaps the best example of someone going to the Elysian Fields is from Book IV of the Odyssey. Menelaus will be allowed to go there and is given a description of it by the Sea-god:

> "As for you yourself, King Menelaus, it is not your fate to die in Argos...The Deathless Ones will waft you instead to the world's end, the Elysian Fields where yellow-haired Rhadamanthus is. There indeed men live unlaborious days. Snow and tempest and thunderstorms never enter there, but for men's refreshment Ocean sends out continually the high-singing breezes of the West."[17]

What is described here is immortality, because death never occurs. Menelaus will be taken by the gods to the Elysian Fields prior to dying. If an individual went to the Elysian Fields after death, that would be true resurrection.

Yet in many respects, the idea of the Elysian Fields comes very close to an idea of a blessed afterlife. More importantly, for the first time, immortality is not dependent on an individual becoming divine. The removal of the divine prerequisite for immortality and the very imagery of a "paradise" suggests that the Greeks were heading towards more involved concepts of mortality and an afterlife than the Mesopotamians.

On the topic of immortality, the Ugaritic sources are for once reasonably clear. In a passage from the myth of Aqhat, Ugaritic views on immortality are expressed.

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[16]. Pindar, p.27, "Olympian Ode II", lines 79-80.

[17]. Homer, The Odyssey, Book IV, p.48.

The goddess Anat offers the hero Aqhat immortality in exchange for a bow given to him by the craftsman-god:

"Ask life, O hero Aqhat, ask life and I will give (it) you, immortality and I will bestow (it) on you."[18]

Aqhat is not in the least convinced and suspects, if not accuses Anat of offering something she cannot deliver. Aqhat states the accepted view on the mortality of mankind:

"Do not lie, O virgin; for to a hero your lying is unseemly. As (his) ultimate fate what does a man get? What does a man get as (his) final lot?...the death of all men I shall die."[19]

The term used in the above passage for immortality is "blmt", which can simply be translated as "not death".[20] Ugarit obviously possessed the concept of immortality but quite significantly did not believe in it for mortal man. This level of scepticism is reminiscent of the view on immortality expressed in the Epic of Gilgamesh.

The question of immortality also appears in the Ugaritic myth of Keret. Keret lies dying and his son asks the question of how can Keret, the son of El, die: "Shall gods die?"[21] In this case, the linking of divinity and immortality is made. Keret, as part mortal and yet the son of El is somewhat in limbo regarding his status. If

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[18]. CML, p.109,17,vi, lines 26-27.

[19]. CML, p.109,17,vi, lines 34-38.

[20]. S.Segert, A Grammar of the Ugaritic Language, p.181.

[21]. CML, p.95,16,i, line 22.

he is divine, he is immortal. If he is mortal, he will eventually die. But it becomes clear that he must die. The belief in his divinity collapses in the face of his mortality. For the rest of the inhabitants of Ugarit there was no problem; they had to face the clear cut fate of mortality.

There does not seem to be much relationship between the concept of immortality and the myths of dying and rising deities. Immortality by definition does not involve the process of dying, which occurs in these myths. Yet at least three out of the four cultures in question had concepts of immortality.

One can easily imagine the concept of immortality arising as a reaction against death. From there it is simple to make the next assumption of a special place where the gods and immortality exist side by side, like the Mesopotamian island of Dilmun. When looking at the Greek Elysian Fields, a similar concept to the Mesopotamian Dilmun, one can begin to see the merging of the idea of immortality with that of a blessed afterlife.

Of course, there was probably not a step by step evolution from the concept of immortality to resurrection and the above scenario is too simple. But at the very least, it is safe to comment that immortality and resurrection were in some sense the opposite sides of the same coin.

In Greece, Mesopotamia, and Ugarit the netherworld awaited and death for mortals was the end. Yet they

longed for the immortality which only the gods enjoyed, and at any rate Greece and Mesopotamia had notions of a blessed place where the immortal gods lived and into which occasionally selected humans were given entrance. This is important. Implicit in it is the hope of by-passing the usual place to which the dead went and of entering another place where humans may live forever. It is only a faint hope piercing through the gloom of man's usual expectation of the end of life in Hades and its counterparts. But it is there. The Egyptians reached this hope much sooner. It is this stage that the myths of the dying and rising deities and the idea of resurrection come in. In Egypt, first the king, and then the people share in the resurrection of the god and enter a new life. The two ideas of resurrection and immortality become one. Dilmun and the Elysian fields become not the place where one evades death, but where one goes after death. Only in Egypt do we have a full-blown belief of this kind; in the other three cultures it remains as a distant and unattainable hope. But even in them it is present, and cannot be extinguished. The enigma of death cries out for a solution, even in modern times.

Chapter 10

Death, Renewal and The Golden Bough

Earlier chapters have indicated the link that has often been perceived between myth and cult in the form of personifications of agriculture or the seasonal cycle. Deities such as Demeter or Osiris have been labelled so-called "dying gods of vegetation". Having determined that this appellation is simplistic, it would be useful to examine the vegetation and seasonal aspects of the myths of dying and rising deities in more detail. What is the significance of the continued, if inconsistent appearance of vegetation and seasonal symbolism within these myths?

Once again, it is to James Frazer's The Golden Bough that we turn to if not for conclusive answers, then for at least a starting point for a discussion on this topic. Specifically, the discussion will be concentrated on the symbolism shared by agriculture and concepts of death and renewal. It has often been forgotten that behind Frazer's discussion on ritual, myth, and the seasonal cycle, lay an awareness of basic ideas on mortality as symbolized in the seasonal cycle. The Golden Bough can provide some direction as to how this topic may be approached.

Throughout this study, reference has often been made to Frazer's observations regarding dying and rising deities, such as Osiris and Persephone. But as mentioned in chapter six, Frazer began with the interpretation of

the cult at the grove of Nemi in Italy in Roman times. Central to Frazer's theme is the myth of Artemis and Hippolytos and the Norse myth of Baldur. While these myths are not particularly related to those of Near Eastern dying and rising deities, they are excellent examples of the link between myth and the symbolism of vegetation and the seasonal cycle.

In this chapter, a look at some of the other myths which Frazer interpreted can provide a useful insight into the way Frazer developed his theories. Central to Frazer's The Golden Bough is the theme of death and renewal, as symbolized by vegetation and the seasonal cycle. It is my theory that this is a key element in the myths of dying and rising deities and is worth brief analysis. By examining this link between the symbolism of death and renewal and nature, it may be possible to further explore the psychological aspects of the myths of dying and rising deities.

The entire theme of James Frazer's The Golden Bough hinges on the priesthood of the grove of Nemi dedicated to the goddess Diana, and key to Frazer's theme of death and renewal is the mythology surrounding this grove.[1] In Roman times, the myth associated with Nemi was that of Diana and the god Virbius. This in turn was based upon the Greek myth of Artemis and Hippolytos. While Diana and Artemis are essentially the same deity, one being Roman and the other Greek, there are some slight differences

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[1]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, pp.1-9.

between the earlier and later myths. However, in order to understand the primary theory found in Frazer's The Golden Bough, it is worth examining what Frazer said about these myths and what the myths themselves indicate.

Before looking at the myth of Diana and Virbius, it is advisable to examine the earlier Greek version of this myth. While there are a variety of sources for this myth, one of the main sources comes from Euripides' play Hippolytos. Hippolytos was the son of Theseus, king of Athens, and was the companion but not the lover of the goddess of the Hunt, Artemis. In order to be her companion, Hippolytos shunned sexual relations.[2] Hippolytos' abstinence offends the goddess Aphrodite who makes Phaedra, the wife of Theseus, fall in love with Hippolytos. When Phaedra is spurned by Hippolytos and accuses him of rape, Theseus calls upon Poseidon who causes Hippolytos to have a terminal chariot accident. Dying, Hippolytos is comforted by his companion, Artemis.[3]

There are passages from Euripides's Hippolytos which link Artemis with nature as she is described at the beginning of the play:

> "I have brought you this green crown, goddess, fresh from the scene where I spliced its flowers together, a meadow as virginal as you are, where no shepherd would think it wise to pasture his animals, a perfect field no iron blade has yet cut down."[4]

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[2]. Joseph Fontenrose, Orion, p.162.

[3]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, pp.4-5.

[4]. Euripides, Hippolytos, p.20, lines 112-118.

This passage has several elements within it including references to virginity and agriculture. It is abundantly clear that Hippolytos perceives Artemis as a goddess representing nature. But turning to the end of the Greek myth, Artemis merely consoles Hippolytos, unlike in the later version where he is brought back to life. Artemis promises Hippolytos a form of immortality which if not literal, is meant to show his importance to the goddess:

"I will try to redeem your sorrows, brave lad, by making you forever a hero in this town of Troizen."[5]

Also important is Artemis' role as a goddess capable of violence. In revenge for Aphrodite's crime, Artemis promises:

"I will choose some great favorite of hers and drop him with the flex of this bow, a shower of arrows no man can dodge."[6]

We see in these passages that Artemis fits very well into mythology concerned with the theme of death and renewal. Like nature, Artemis can represent the softer elements, but elsewhere, she embodies the lingering threat of death by violence to Hippolytos and to whomever she eventually takes her revenge upon those who offend her.[7]

James Frazer's main concern was with the Latin myth of Diana and Virbius. But it is interesting to note his

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[5]. Euripides, Hippolytos, p.83, lines 2151-2153.

[6]. Euripides, Hippolytos, p.83, lines 2146-2148.

[7]. For an examination of the various loves and conflicts of Artemis, see Joseph Fontenrose's Orion.

analysis of the myth of Artemis and Hippolytos and the link he made between mythology and the theme of death and renewal:

"In the story of the tragic death of the youthful Hippolytus we may discern an analogy with similar tales of other fair but mortal youths who paid with their lives for the brief rapture of the love of an immortal goddess...such fables contain a deeper philosophy of the relation of the life of man to the life of nature."[8]

The later version of the myth of Artemis and Hippolytos is what Frazer was primarily concerned with, since it was the Latin forms of these gods, Diana and Virbius, who were worshipped in the grove of Nemi:

"The other of the minor deities at Nemi was Virbius. Legend had it that Virbius was the young Greek hero Hippolytos..."[9]

One of the strangest elements of the priesthood of Nemi was that each priest was king of the grove until he himself was slain by an individual who in turn, became the priest. Frazer argued that the king of the wood, as he called this priest, was a human personification of Virbius:

"In his character of the founder of the sacred grove and the first king of Nemi, Virbius is clearly the mythical predecessor or archetype of the line of priests who served Diana under the title of Kings of the Wood, and who came, like him, one after another, to a violent end."[10]

Diana herself as described by Frazer is very much a goddess of nature. But he does not assert that she was only a goddess of the corn. Frazer describes Diana as:

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[8]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.7.

[9]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.4.

[10]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.8

"We may conclude that the worship of Diana in her sacred grove at Nemi was of great importance and immemorial antiquity; that she was revered as the goddess of woodlands and of wild creatures, probably also of domestic cattle and the fruits of the earth..."[11]

One can see very rapidly where the image that is emerging of the deities at Nemi might lead. First of all, we have a goddess figure linked with a deity who is, at least in imagery, her consort.[12] It is therefore very easy to see a similarity between these two deities and divine couples such as Inanna and Dumuzi or Osiris and Isis.[13] But there is an even closer similarity in the later myth as we find that in the Latin version, Hippolytos is brought back to life at the intercession of Diana. Diana achieves this with the help of the healer god Asklepius, called the son of Coronis in this passage from the Fasti of Ovid:

"'There is no need for grief', said the son of Coronis, 'for I will restore the pious youth to life.'"[14]

Ovid goes on to explain how Hippolytos came to be at Nemi after his name was changed to Virbius:

"He found a hiding place in the sacred grove and in the depths of Dictynna's own woodland; he became Virbius of the Arician lake."[15]

From this later version of the myth of Artemis and Hippolytos we would almost be justified in calling

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[11]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.8.

[12]. Joseph Fontenrose, Orion, p.164.

[13]. Joseph Fontenrose, Orion, pp.225-240.

[14]. Ovid, Fasti, p.377,VI, lines 746-747.

[15]. Ovid, Fasti, p.377,VI, lines 755-756.

Virbius a dying and rising deity. Perhaps the most significant difference between this myth and others is that Virbius was originally, in his role as Hippolytos, a human and therefore a mortal. Yet it is not unusual in Greek mythology to find human heroes becoming gods. Perhaps the most notable example being Herakles who after his death becomes a god. The resurrection of Hippolytos is described by Virgil in the Aeneid:

> "For they tell how that Hippolytos, when he fell by his stepdame's craft, and slaked a sire's vengeance in blood, torn asunder by frightened steeds - came again to the starry firmament and heaven's upper air, recalled by the healer's herbs and Diana's love."[16]

Certain elements in the myth of Artemis and Hippolytos are consistent with parts of the myths of dying and rising deities. A standard mythological motif is the hapless mortal caught in a conflict between warring deities. In this instance, it is Hippolytos being caught between the goddess' Aphrodite and Artemis. By shunning sexual activity, Hippolytos offends Aphrodite but if he had not, his relationship with Artemis would not have been possible.[17]

This is not entirely different to the situation in which Dumuzi finds himself. The basic conflict in the myth of Inanna is between Inanna and Ereshkigal. Dumuzi becomes merely a pawn in their struggle. Likewise, Persephone is caught up in a battle amongst the divine siblings, Zeus, Demeter and Hades.

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[16]. Virgil, Aeneid VII-XII, p.57,VII, lines 764-768.

[17]. Joseph Fontenrose, Orion, pp.161-164.

This discussion does not indicate that the myth of Artemis and Hippolytos is directly connected to the myths of dying and rising deities. Rather, it suggests a common mythological motif where deities quarrel like children. Yet it is important to acknowledge this element since the family relationships found in the myths of dying and rising deities add a human quality to myths about death and the life cycle.

Turning to another key element in The Golden Bough, another interesting question arises. Although James Frazer is often associated with the term "dying gods of vegetation", what is the significance of the title? What exactly is the "Golden Bough?" The answer to this lies in part in some passages in Book VI of Virgil's Aeneid. Aeneas travels to the underworld and in order to do this seeks advice from the oracular Sibyl at Cumae, where an entrance to the underworld is located. Aeneas is told that in order to enter the underworld, he must first obtain a plant:

> "There lurks in a shady tree a bough, golden in leaf and pliant stem, held consecrate to nether Juno...But tis not given to pass beneath earth's hidden places, save to him who hath plucked from the tree the golden-tressed fruitage."[18]

The bough described here is a sort of pass that allows Aeneas to travel in the underworld. Dedicated to the goddess of the underworld Proserpina (or Persephone),

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[18]. Virgil, Aeneid I-VI, p.519,VI, lines 136-141.

it is a potent symbol of the underworld.[19] But overwhelming imagery of nature is found in the picture of the golden bough and the underworld as it is described when Aeneas finally plucks it:

> "As in winter's cold, amid the woods, the mistletoe, sown of an alien tree, is wont to bloom with strange leafage, and with yellow fruit embrace the shapely stems; such was the vision of the leafy gold on the shadowy ilex, so rustled the foil in the gentle breeze."[20]

One interpretation of the scene of Aeneas obtaining the golden bough for entrance into the netherworld is its symbolism for a mystery cult. This is another attempt to link ritual and myth and may very well be plausible. The initiate would have had to obtain a branch of the golden bough prior to entering into the mysteries. The Sibyl, in a sense, would represent the guide for the initiate. Regardless of how realistic this theory is, it points to the potent connection between an element of nature and the underworld.[21]

The identification of the golden bough as mistletoe is made by James Frazer. Although he acknowledges that Virgil only compared the golden bough to mistletoe, he feels that there is a strong enough of a connection:

> "It is not a new opinion that the Golden Bough was the mistletoe. But this may be only a potential device to cast a mystic glamour over the humble plant. Or, more probably, his description was based upon a popular superstition that at certain times the mistletoe blazed

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[19]. R.D. Williams, "Virgil's Underworld", Proceedings of the Virgil Society 10, 1970, pp.1-7.

[20]. Virgil, Aeneid I-VI, p.521,VI, lines 205-209.

[21]. Phillip Hardie, Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium, p.42.

out into a supernatural glory."[22]

One interesting question Frazer asked was why call the mistletoe golden? He points to an example from Brittany where the peasants hang the mistletoe over doors as a form of protection against evil. As the mistletoe withers, it is supposed to turn to a slightly yellow tint.[23]

Frazer also raises the question of why the mistletoe provided such a potent ticket for entrance into the netherworld. He argues that the "old Aryans" believed that the oak, upon which the mistletoe grows, provided a storehouse for fire, presumably in connection to some sort of worship of the sun.[24] This might explain how the golden bough helped Aeneas to enter the netherworld:

> "If the mistletoe, as a yellow withered bough in the sad autumn woods, was conceived to contain the seed of fire, what better companion could a forlorn wanderer in the nether shades take with him that a bough, that would be a lamp to his feet as well as a rod and staff to his hands."[25]

This is an interesting association between the world of death and vegetation. Quite probably, the golden bough, as a living thing, might have some kind of power in the world of Hades and Persephone. Clearly it acts as some kind of emblem of protection for Aeneas as he descends into the underworld.

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[22]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.703.

[23]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.704.

[24]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.706.

[25]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.707.

The Sibyl emerges as a sort of link between the world of the living and the world of the dead and this was not an uncommon link in the Classical world. On the west coast of Greece is the site of Ephyra where an oracle for the dead was located. This is by tradition the site where Odysseus went into the underworld. Mycenaean pottery indicates that the site goes well back into the Bronze Age. The deities worshipped at this site are Hades and Persephone and statuettes of Persephone were found there. Sacrifices were offered and libations were poured to these deities of the underworld. Curiously enough, there is evidence that some sort of dramatic apparitions were staged, since blocks and pulleys were found in a pit underneath the inner sanctum.[26]

Frazer's association of the golden bough with mistletoe is of course speculative, since Virgil does not say that one is the other. Nevertheless, it is not an unreasonable speculation. Frazer also points out the association between the mistletoe and the Druids.[27] It is not beyond the bounds of possibility to see a general trend in western religious tradition and view mistletoe as some kind of divine plant. Frazer, in his association with mistletoe and the Druids points out that mistletoe grows on oak and that the ancients might have perceived a link between lightening strikes and the mistletoe.

Before concluding this examination of James Frazer

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[26]. John Ferguson, Among the Gods, pp.78-79.

[27]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, pp.709-710.

and the themes of vegetation, death and renewal, it is worth an excursion to another set of Frazer's compositions. Although Frazer is best known for The Golden Bough, this was just one, albeit the major one, of the projects which he worked upon. A very significant contribution to the field of Classical scholarship was Frazer's translation of the Fasti of Ovid. The Fasti was a work about the Roman calender and related mythology. It contained six books for each of the first six months of the Roman calendar. It is not known whether the remaining six months were ever written up or were merely lost.[28]

The Fasti contains mythological works about, among a great deal of other things, the myth of Demeter and Persephone, the myth of Artemis and Hippolytos, and the priesthood at Nemi. This area is worth a brief examination, since it shows that Frazer was a scholar with very wide interests and whose academic legacy is not confined to The Golden Bough.

In his commentary on Ovid's work, Frazer notes the importance of certain vegetation elements in the Fasti. Frazer comments about the following line from Book 1 with regard to the god Jupiter:

"May he augment our prince's empire and augment his years, and may an oaken crown protect your doors."[29]

Frazer sees in this passage that the symbolism of the oak indicates that the oaken crown is meant for

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[28]. Ovid, Fasti, pp.xvii-xxiv.

[29]. Ovid, Fasti, p.45,I, line 614.

apotropaic purposes; the oaken crown will drive away evil:

"No doubt the custom of hanging a crown of oak or laurel over the door of the palace was instituted simply as a mark of honour for the Emperor; but originally such customs were probably practised from magical motives for the purpose of preventing evil spirits or sorcerers from entering the house and injuring the inmates."[30]

In addition to this link between nature and supernatural forces, this demonstrates Frazer's consistent image of the symbolism of nature within mythology. Underlying all of his arguments, Frazer perceives that elements of nature are an inherent part of mythology. Where Frazer went wrong was in seeing vegetation and seasonal aspects as the prime element in some myths.

Some of the theme of The Golden Bough, the priesthood at Nemi, has as its primary source the Fasti of Ovid. Ovid describes some of the elements of the cult at Nemi:

"In the Arician vale there is a lake begirt by shady woods and hallowed by religion from of old. Here Hippolytos lied hid...The long fence is draped with hanging threads, and many a tablet there attests the merit of the goddess."[31]

In his commentary on the Fasti, Frazer largely repeats much of what was said in The Golden Bough, although he does add in a great deal of comparative anthropology to back up his claims regarding the priesthood at Nemi. Once again, he centres his argument

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[30]. James Frazer, Fasti Vol. 2 Commentary on Books 1-2, p.230.

[31]. Ovid, Fasti, p.139,III, lines 263-267.

on the symbolism of nature and its effect upon a priest who would always end his tenure by being slain:

"We may suppose that the priest of Diana at Nemi...was credited of old with possessing the same quickening powers over the fecundity of wild beasts, cattle, and women...and that consequently any failure of his bodily strength was supposed to entail barrenness alike on man and beast, probably also on the fields, its orchards, and the vineyards."[32]

It is easy to see where this line of argumentation might lead; in the direction of explaining the killing of divine kings. If the health and fertility of the land is personified in the king, then when his human incarnation, be it king or priest of Nemi fails, then he will have to be killed to allow a new and more vigorous individual to take the job. Thus, the cultic cycle of the priesthood at Nemi mirrors the life cycle found in the natural world. This is at least how it is perceived by Frazer, and his interpretation of the priesthood at Nemi is consistent in this fashion.

Finally, before leaving Frazer's analysis of Ovid's Fasti, it is worth noting that in the Fasti there is yet another version of the myth of Demeter and Persephone. In his commentary on the Fasti, Frazer examines among other elements in the myth of Demeter and Persephone, the eating the pomegranate seed. While acknowledging the various associations between the pomegranate and the dead, Frazer makes an important observation:

"For it is a common and widespread belief that if a living person visits the world of the dead and there

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[32]. James Frazer, Fasti Vol.3 Commentary on Books 3-4, p.86.

partakes of food, he cannot return to the land of the living. Such a belief would explain why Proserpine, after tasting the pomegranate seed in the nether regions, could not return permanently to the upper world."[33]

It is not therefore so much the type of seed Persephone ate, as the fact that she ate something in the realm of the dead. The act of eating, an activity associated with life, in the underworld, begins to blur the distinction between the two realms. The end result is that Persephone will exist in the future in both the realm of the dead and the realm of the living.

To conclude this study of Frazer's view of death, renewal, and The Golden Bough, it remains to finally link Virgil's "golden bough" with the priesthood at Nemi. One very major consideration of Frazer's was the Norse myth of the death of the god Baldur. As we have already seen, Frazer theorized that the golden bough was mistletoe based upon in part Virgil's association of the golden bough with mistletoe, and the Druidic connection. But it is the myth of Baldur which played a major part of Frazer's overall argument.

In the myth of Baldur, the god Baldur dreams that he will soon die. The alarmed deities of the Norse pantheon have the goddess Frigg obtain an oath from all elements of nature, animal, vegetable and mineral, that they will do nothing to harm Baldur. However, Frigg ignores the mistletoe plant on the basis that it is too young to swear an oath. The god Loki, noted for being evil-minded,

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[33]. James Frazer, Fasti Vol.3 Commentary on Books 3-4, p.302.

learns of this omission and arranges for Baldur to be shot with a mistletoe projectile. This is done and Baldur dies.[34]

Frazer, for what it is worth, explains the death of Baldur as being symbolic of an oak-tree struck by lightening. But more importantly, he sees Baldur's life as being linked to the mistletoe:

> "To conclude these enquiries we may say that if Baldur was indeed, as I have conjectured, a personification of a mistletoe-bearing oak, his death by a blow of the mistletoe might on the new theory be explained as a death by a stroke of lightening."[35]

The Golden Bough remains an important source for the study of religion, magic and mythology. That is not to say that it does not have some inherent flaws within it. As has been observed by a recent commentator: "The Golden Bough is a work of many tensions and contradictions."[36]

In the end, it was as much Frazer's anthropological method as anything which led to his downfall in the academic world.[37] At the very least, following the thread of Frazer's argument from Nemi through endless morass of anthropology and mythology back to Nemi is confusing if enjoyable. But while one may disagree with elements of it, Frazer's The Golden Bough still poses some

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[34]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, pp.607-609.

[35]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.710.

[36]. Sabine MacCormack, "Magic and the Human Mind: A Reconsideration of Frazer's Golden Bough," Arethusa 17, 1984 #2, p.151.

[37]. Mary Douglas, "Judgements on James Frazer", Daedalus 107, 1978 #4, pp.151-164.

interesting questions with some viable answers.

One of the significant problems that one encounters with The Golden Bough is Frazer's attitude toward deities. In essence, Frazer looked at the vegetation aspects of many gods and saw them only in terms of plant-life and fertility. Hence, the term dying gods of vegetation was born.

But perhaps Frazer was in general correct in his link between the human life cycle and the cycle of the natural world. The most useful element of Frazer's work may well be his recognition of the nature symbolism in these myths and how they can appear throughout mythology.

One of the overwhelming elements in the myths of dying and rising deities and indeed, much of ancient mythology, is the consistent appearance of nature symbolism. This in itself suggests that if these gods associated with vegetation are not "gods of the corn", then perhaps there is another point to consider. If vegetation is not the overwhelming drive in the myths of gods who die, then perhaps the symbolism of vegetation and fertility suggests something else.

I would theorize that much of the vegetation and fertility symbolism found in the myths of dying and rising deities is the result of a fixation on the natural cycle of death and renewal. The myths of dying and rising deities might very well originate out of a human fixation on human mortality.

Such a fixation need not be confined to the myths of dying and rising deities. But the overwhelming emotion that emerges from this genre of mythology is of mourning for the dead deity. When one links this motif of mourning to the symbolism of the cycle of nature, it seems clear that the evidencepoints to a psychological link between the myths of dying and rising deities.

James Frazer has often been accused of being simplistic and seeing things only in terms of vegetation. While I think that he was wrong in taking this narrow view, I would argue that Frazer was aware of more subtle elements in mythology than just vegetation. This can be seen in his interpretation of the myth of Artemis and Hippolytos and its connection with the golden bough:

> "And what we have said of Baldur in the oak forests of Scandinavia may perhaps, with all due diffidence in a question so obscure and uncertain, be applied to the priest of Diana, the King of the Wood, at Aricia in the oak forests of Italy. He may have personated in flesh and blood the great Italian god of the sky, Jupiter, who had kindly come down from heaven in the lightening flash to dwell among men in the mistletoe -the thunderbesom - the Golden Bough- growing on the sacred oak in the dells of Nemi."[38]

At the very least, one must admire Frazer's literary mind and his ability to see a wider mythological perspective. But Frazer's real genius may have been his ability to discern elements of human and natural life in Classical mythology and the significance of vegetation on myths of gods who die and rise.

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[38]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.710.

Chapter 11

Psychology and the Myths of Dying and Rising Deities

One of the main purposes of this study was to determine whether a link could be found between four myths of dying and rising deities. Although there is a general similarity between these myths, it is not so easy to find specific connections between them. One potential outcome of this study might have been to state that the only tangible link is in fact the concept of a god who dies and rises. But perhaps there is something more behind this general similarity.

In the preceding chapters the theory that the myths were related to the seasonal cycle was discussed. This is the most popular, but contested theory regarding the common elements of these myths. Although some scholars, such as James Frazer, noted some interesting links between vegetation and mythology, his thesis of dying gods of vegetation is simplistic if not incorrect. Where Frazer failed in his analysis was in not realizing that the vegetation elements in mythology might underlie a basic symbolism connecting the human life cycle with the seasonal/vegetation cycle. Underlying the myths of dying and rising deities was not just a concern about the agricultural year, but also a psychological fear of death.

It is clear, therefore, that there are psychological aspects to the myths which should be investigated further. To do this it will be useful to look at some of the literature regarding mythology and psychology. Then the psychological aspects in the myths will be identified and discussed.

The field of the psychological interpretation of mythology is a fairly narrow one. It has within the field of psychology been largely studied in the sub-field of psychoanalysis. Perhaps the most famous exponent of this method was Carl Jung, although he was a psychologist looking at mythology and not an expert on mythology, as he clearly admits. In addition to Jung's analysis of elements of mythology, there have been a number of other scholars in this field. The most notable of these is Carl Kerenyi whose analysis of Greek mythology examined a number of mythological motifs with reference to psychology. Specifically, it is Kerenyi's work on Eleusis that primarily attracts out attention. It is to scholars such as these that we may turn in order to analyze the psychological elements of the myths of dying and rising deities.

One of the inherent elements that occurs in most discussions relating psychology to mythology is the need to recognize basic symbols. There are a number of theories regarding these symbols such as Jung's archetypes of the collective unconscious, yet it is generally recognized that basic symbols occurring in

myths tell us something about these myths. In many respects, the cultures that produced these myths used the myths to define their vision of the cosmos. Mircea Eliade describes this view in The Myth of the Eternal Return:

"Obviously, the metaphysical concepts of the archaic world were not always formulated in theoretical language: but the symbol, the myth, the rite, express, on different planes and through the means proper to them, a complex system of coherent affirmations about the ultimate reality of things...It is, however, essential to understand the deep meaning of all these symbols, myths, and rites, in order to transform them into our habitual language."[1]

Carl Jung called these basic symbols archetypes. Jungian analysis describes archetypes as an elemental part of each human being:

"Because of the many parallels existing between mythological, religious, artistic and poetic motifs, Jung deduced the presence of basic structural elements, which he calls archetypes, within the psyche."[2]

What basically emerges from this union of psychology and mythology is a quest for basic symbols. By obtaining these symbols, it allows us to examine a potential language of mythology. While one may ponder some of the aspects of Jung's theories, this area of scholarship provides a useful tool for a comparative examination of mythology. As Jung himself states, the two fields have much to offer one another:

"an expert in mythology and comparative religion is as a rule no psychiatrist and consequently does not know that his mythogems are still fresh and living...The archetypal material is therefore the great unknown, and it requires special study and preparation even to collect

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[1]. Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.3.

[2]. Verena Kast, The Dynamics of Symbols, p.90.

such material."[3]

Before discussing the relevance of such an approach to our study, it is worth examining a related topic. One myth which invites a psychological explanation is the myth of Demeter and Persephone. On the face of it, ancient Greek society might appear to be rational. But underneath the apparently calm surface of Greek mythology lies an insight to the human mind.[4] While the myth of Demeter and Persephone might appear to be cultic and related to the seasonal cycle, there is a psychological aspect which should not be underrated.

While not necessarily arguing for a "feminist" interpretation of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, a psychological interpretation suggests that this story is more than just a fable meant to amuse. Much of what occurs in this myth is symbolic for elements of human, particularly female existence. Persephone and Demeter represent two stages of female life. In the myth, Persephone undergoes the change between being a child of Demeter to becoming a woman after her rape by Hades. Much of the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter" is concerned with Demeter's attempt to cope with the loss of her daughter.[5] Carl Kerenyi states this idea in his book Eleusis:

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[3]. Carl Jung, Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, p.189.

[4]. See E.R. Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational.

[5]. Marilyn Arthur, "Politics and Pomegranates: An Interpretation of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter", Arethusa 10 #1, 1977, pp.14-15.

"The separation of the Mother and Daughter, with all its anguish, may in itself be termed archetypal; characteristic of the destiny of women."[6]

This is something to seriously consider when analyzing the myth of Demeter and Persephone. Since in an almost universal sense, a daughter is at some point in her life separated from her mother and marries (at least this is a common view), the abduction of Persephone by Hades can in part be seen as a reflection of this human condition. From a psychological point of view, when Persephone goes into the underworld, a part of Demeter also dies:

"Demeter and Kore, mother and daughter, extend the feminine consciousness both upward and downwards...we can hardly suppose that myth and mystery were inverted for any conscious purpose; it seems much more likely that they were the involuntary relation of a psychic, but unconscious, pre-condition."[7]

This then, is an example of the application of psychology to the analysis of mythology. Yet how may this be applied to the myths of dying and rising deities? It has already been noted that the theme of mourning is strongly present in each of the four myths. If one looks at these myths from a psychological point of view, might this element of mourning be considered a key link between the myths?

Although there is a strong element of mourning in all of these myths, perhaps one of the more extensive accounts of mourning is the grief of Isis and her sister

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[6]. Carl Kerenyi, Eleusis, p.145.

[7]. Carl Jung, Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, p.188.

Nephthys for the slain Osiris. This element is well documented in the pyramid texts in a variety of spells:

"Thus said Isis and Nephthys: The 'Screecher' comes, the Kite comes, namely Isis and Nephthys; they have come seeking their brother Osiris...weep for your brother, O Isis; weep for your brother, O Nephthys; weep for your brother!"[8]

Although the emphasis is usually on Isis and Nephthys, the Pyramid Texts indicate that they are not alone in their grief. The greater element of the Egyptian pantheon mourn for the death of Osiris:

"the gods who are in Pe are full of sorrow, and they come to Osiris the king at the sound of the weeping of Isis, at the cry of Nephthys, at the wailing of these two spirits...Osiris the king, you have gone, but you will return, you have slept, [but you will wake], you have died, but you will live."[9]

The main drama still centres upon the characters of Isis and Nephthys who are crucial in the eventual resurrection of the slain Osiris. As his sisters, it is their element of mourning and assistance that makes this myth so emotional and compelling. The Pyramid Texts describe how they assist Osiris as Nephthys helps restore him:

"I am Nephthys, and I have come that I may lay hold of you and give to you your heart for your body."[10]

Likewise, Isis helps in the resurrection of Osiris in the form of the king:

"I am Isis, I have come that I may lay hold of you

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[8]. PT, p.203, spell 535, lines 1280-1281.

[9]. PT, p.285, spell 670, lines 1972-1976.

[10]. PT, p.273, spell 628, line 1786.

and give you your heart for your body."[11]

Both the Sumerian and Akkadian versions of the myth of Inanna contain an element of mourning. An excellent example from the Sumerian version is the mourning of Inanna and Geshtinanna for the slain Dumuzi. Ritualistic though it may sound, there is a genuine sense of loss for Dumuzi. Initially, it is Inanna who mourns for Dumuzi:

"Gone is my husband, my sweet husband. Gone is my love, my sweet love. My beloved has been taken from the city. O, you flies of the steppe, My beloved bridegroom has been taken from me before I could wrap him in a shroud."[12]

But in addition to Inanna, Geshtinanna, Dumuzi's sister, adds her voice to the chorus of lament:

"The sister wandered about the city, weeping for her brother. Geshtinanna wandered about the city, weeping for Dumuzi."[13]

In the Akkadian version of the myth of Inanna, the emphasis of the mourning is on Inanna, rather than solely on Dumuzi. However, there is a sense of loss among the gods and this adds a note of familiarity with the other myths of dying and rising deities. Inanna is mourned for by the vizier of the gods:

"Then Papsukkal, vizier of the great gods hung his head, his face [became gloomy]...His tears flowed freely before king Ea. 'Ishtar has gone down to the Earth and has not come up again.'"[14]

This mourning is not just a ritualistic formula. It

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[11]. PT, p.273, spell 664, lines 1884-1885.

[12]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, pp.85-86.

[13]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, p.87.

[14]. MMes, p.158.

sounds like a genuine sense of loss for someone. Perhaps there is an echo of the human wish for a loved one to return from the dead. However, in the case of this myth, the dead do return from the underworld.

In the Ugaritic myth of Baal and Mot, there is also a dichotomy between the general mourning for the dead deity and that of a relative. In the first instance, Baal is mourned for by the head of the pantheon, El:

> "He poured straw of mourning on his head, dust of wallowing on his crown...He lifted up his voice and cried: 'Baal is dead.'"[15]

El is not alone in his mourning for Baal as Baal's sister Anat demonstrates in her lament for her dead brother:

> "Baal is dead! What (will become) of the people of Dagon's son...After Baal we would go down into the Earth."[16]

This is an important point. Both El and Anat mention in their mourning that since Baal has died, they will have to go down into the earth. This might reflect a common element in mourning where grief stricken people wish to join the deceased.

Of all of the myths of dying and rising deities, perhaps the most touching element of mourning is that of the goddess Demeter for her daughter Persephone. This element of mourning might even be described as more poignant than the others since it is a mother mourning the loss of a daughter. Perhaps even more than in the

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[15]. CML, p.73,15,vi, lines 14-23.

[16]. CML, p.74,6,i, lines 6-8.

"Homeric Hymn to Demeter", Ovid describes in lurid detail Demeter's loss in the Fasti:

"Distraught she hurried along, even as we hear that Thracian Maenads rush with streaming hair. As a cow, whose calf has been torn from her udder, bellows and seeks her offspring through every grove, so the goddess did not stifle her groans and ran at speed."[17]

Finally, Demeter is overcome with grief and disguised as an old woman, is comforted by a young woman and an old man:

"She spoke, and like a tear (for gods can never weep) a crystal drop fell on her bosom warm. They wept with her, the old man and the maid."[18]

Having established that there is a strong element of mourning in all of the myths of dying and rising deities, what can be done with such information? What is indicated by this psychological element in these myths? Is this link strong enough to be considered the link between these myths?

I have suggested that the myths of dying and rising deities were in part a psychological response to human fears regarding mortality. The strong element of mourning found in the myths provides very good evidence for such a view. This interpretation need in no way impair any views that these myths, individually or collectively, were also related to other themes such as the seasonal cycle, kingship, or judgement. I have also suggested that much of the imagery of vegetation and fertility which occurs in some way in all of the myths is symbolic for the human

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[17]. Ovid, Fasti, p.223, book IV, lines 455-465.

[18]. Ovid, Fasti, p.227, book IV, lines 521-525.

life cycle. In many respects, this makes a link between some of Frazer's scholarship and that of the later school of psychology and mythology. As I have argued all along, Frazer, despite his insistence upon his "dying gods of vegetation" model, was aware of the more subtle psychological elements of mythology.

The dangers of a unitary approach can be illustrated using a myth which Frazer never knew, the Ugaritic myth of Baal and Mot. Several scholars like Gaster or DeMoor have laboured hard, in a Frazerian mode, to make all that happens in it (or even in the Baal cycle as a whole) mirror the changing seasons, and we accepted earlier that there is something in their argument. But we rejected their detailed episode by episode approach as doing violence to the story line. In particular, the second confrontation between Baal and Mot, where there is no obvious seasonal connection, was ignored by them. But this second confrontation was, as we have argued, one between the forces of death and life represented by these two deities, and through the intervention of the supreme god El it was resolved in favour of life. Indeed, at least the first confrontation, which has clear seasonal implications, is also regarded as metaphorical for the battle between death and life, that battle becomes by far the deepest meaning of the myth of Baal and Mot, and fits in better with the thrust of the cycle as a whole, in which the main question faced is which deity impinged most directly on the hopes and fears of men in that

culture. What is essentially a psychological insight into the purpose of existence takes precedence over the other concerns of Ugaritic culture, and gives coherence to the whole cycle.

This is not to deny that there is any vegetation or seasonal element in these myths. It is possible that allusions to vegetation and the seasonal cycle were meant to be both symbolic and literal. In the myth of Demeter and Persephone, few would argue that there is not a strong link between this myth and agriculture. Yet, there should be no real reason not to also see a language of symbols linking this agricultural myth to the theme of life versus death. Certainly, the description of the blight put on the crops by Demeter's wrath contrasts to the idyllic growth of the fields after she relents.

This is also true in the case of Osiris. While Osiris might very well have been a god with some link with agriculture, it is also quite likely that images of corn found in corn mummies or elsewhere were symbolic for regeneration. Likewise, the sexual elements in the myth of Inanna might very well have had both a literal and symbolic meaning. But perhaps the most nagging similarity between Osiris and Inanna is the underlying theme of a conflict between the realm of life and the realm of death. The symbolism of fertility and vegetation might on one level have been a way of expressing this concept.

It is quite noticeable that characters such as Ereshkigal, Mot, and Hades play a very prominent role in

each myth. The role of the underworld as part of the human unconscious has long been known.[19] Since the underworld as a source of final death should be defeated by gods who escape its clutches, it seems logical to explain these myths in terms of the theme of life versus death. Even in the myth of Osiris where the underworld plays a less substantial role, there is no denying this tension between life and death.

The theory that the link between the myths of dying and rising deities is a psychological reaction to human mortality is not a particularly original idea. Previous scholarship on these myths such as James Frazer or Carl Kerenyi imply if not generally state such an idea. The Golden Bough is full of comments regarding the psychological elements of these myths, particularly the element of mourning. While acknowledging the link between the symbolism of vegetation and the seasons with the theme of the life cycle, Frazer failed to draw this together into a theory instead stressing the ritual and seasonal elements. But if one can begin to see both the literal and the symbolic elements of vegetation and fertility and the human life cycle in the these myths, it is not hard to see a general psychological link between the myths of dying and rising deities.

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[19]. James Hillman, "The Dream and the Underworld", Eranos 42, 1973, pp.237-321.

Chapter 12

Return to Nemi

"Once more we take the road to Nemi...The temple of the sylvan goddess, indeed, has vanished and the king of the wood no longer stands sentinel over the Golden Bough. But Nemi's woods are still green, and as sunset fades above them in the west, there comes to us, borne on the swell of the wind, the sound of church bells of Rome ringing the Angelus. Ave Maria! Sweet and solemn they chime and die lingeringly away across the wide campagnan marshes. Le roi est mort, vive le roi! Ave Maria!"[1]

The subject that James Frazer dealt with in The Golden Bough was not initially dying and rising deities, but the cult which existed around the sacred grove of Nemi in Italy. This involved the joint worship of the Goddess Diana and her consort Virbius. The priest at Nemi was an individual who slew his predecessor until he himself was slain by his successor. The picture which Frazer paints is that of a priest who stalked the grove at Nemi waiting for his killer to arrive.[2]

But Frazer went a step further and equated the Diana-Virbius relationship with that of Adonis to Venus or Attis to Cybele.[3] In this way, the priest represented a living (and dying) reminder of the god who dies before his time. Since Frazer's identified Adonis with Tammuz,

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[1]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.714.

[2]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, pp.1-5.

[3]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.8.

it is easy to proceed to the subject of dying and rising deities.

This brings us back to the subject that this study was meant to examine. What now remains of the theory of "dying gods of vegetation"? We have seen its status of primary importance reduced to a more measured level and the old dying god of vegetation model has been metamorphized into the less comprehensible field of psychology. Instead of seeing the dying and rising deities as gods of the field and the seasonal cycle, they have been explained as symbolic for human reactions against death. Is this the end of that alluring epithet "dying gods of vegetation"?

It now remains to place the subject of gods who die but come back into proper perspective. This does not mean a retreat from the conclusion that the link between dying and rising deities was psychological. Rather, it is the need to come to terms with some of the diverse theories that have been proposed.

The image of a dying god of vegetation is a powerful one and it is not out of pure fancy that Frazer wrote The Golden Bough. Despite his arguably questionable (although not unusual for the time) anthropological methodology, Frazer was a scholar grounded in the classics and as has been seen, by Classical times, the dying god of vegetation was an archetype beginning to emerge. As noted throughout this study, many of Frazer's original sources were from Classical times. Frazer's major fault was

ascribing earlier attributes to myths and deities based upon much later material. This is not to say that Frazer might not have been right in his image of a dying god of vegetation. He merely got his sequence wrong.

But returning to the discipline of psychology, might not the image of a dying god of vegetation be closely associated symbolically, if nothing else, with ideas on death and regeneration. As a casual perusal of literature will show, the association of a dying god of vegetation/tree god continued well past the Classical period. It would not be unreasonable to speculate on a psychological link between this image and the psychology of death and mourning.

Frazer concentrated much of his discussion of dying gods of vegetation upon the Greek myth of Adonis. The first thing that needs to be mentioned is Frazer's identification of Adonis with Tammuz/Dumuzi:

> "the true name of the deity was Tammuz: the appellation of Adonis is merely the Semitic Adon, "Lord", a title of honour by which his worshippers addressed him."[4]

Frazer felt confident in his identification of Adonis with Tammuz. Does the Classical myth of Adonis have anything to do with the Sumerian myth of Dumuzi? It is worth looking at the Classical myth of Adonis.

One of the best accounts of Adonis comes from book X of Ovid's Metamorphosis. Simply put, the myth of Adonis concerns the love affair between Venus and Adonis.

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[4]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.325.

Ignoring the warnings of Venus concerning such matters, Adonis attempts to spear a boar. Instead of Adonis killing the boar, the boar charges Adonis and rams his tusk into Adonis' groin with fatal results for Adonis.[5]

What probably set Frazer into rapture was the way in which Venus immortalized Adonis. Using the blood of Adonis, she changed the blood into flowers. Ovid makes specific reference to the seasonal element of this memorial by Venus:

> "Adonis shall endure; each passing year your death repeated in the hearts of men shall re-enact my grief and my lament. But now your blood shall change into a flower..."[6]

In a general sense, Frazer cannot be faulted for seeing a degree of similarity between the two myths. As a Classicist, Frazer would have taken the Classical material and the reference from Ezekiel into account when comparing against the Mesopotamian Tammuz. It should be remembered that the so-called "Dumuzi's Dream" did not make its appearance until the 1960's.[7]

Given this lack of knowledge of the later material, Frazer might not be faulted for thinking that there was a relationship between the Venus/Adonis myth and the Ishtar/Tammuz myth. It might even be speculated that the Greek myth might have evolved from the earlier material.

But one rather obvious and significant problem

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[5]. Ovid, The Metamorphoses, Book X, p.248.

[6]. Ovid, The Metamorphoses, Book X, p.248.

[7]. ANET, p.52.

exists between the association of Adonis with Tammuz. First, Tammuz is a deity who enters the underworld and comes back. In contrast, Adonis dies and his blood in the form of flowers comes back annually. Secondly, the myth as described by Ovid emphasizes the annual element. As was described earlier, the seasonal cycle in the myth of Inanna/Dumuzi is only a minor part of the story and only occurs in a brief Sumerian fragment.

In light of later evidence of which Frazer was unaware, it is probably best to look upon the association between Adonis and Tammuz with some hesitation. Although it is easy to see how Frazer came to his conclusions, one wonders if he would have made the same ones fifty years later.

Another Classical deity that Frazer fixed upon was the god Attis. Frazer made a very rapid association between Attis and Adonis:

"Like Adonis, he appears to have been a god of vegetation, and his death and resurrection were annually mourned and rejoiced over at a festival in spring."[8]

A close look at the original material reveals that like Adonis, one of the major sources of the myth was Ovid, although this time from the Fasti.

The myth of Attis as described by Ovid is fairly straightforward. The goddess Cybele falls in love with the youth Attis and orders him to stay away from any other female. Attis fails to do so with the nymph Sagaritis. Cybele takes her vengeance on the pair by

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[8]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.347.

cutting down the tree of the Naiad thus killing Sagaritis. Attis is driven mad and cuts off his genitals and eventually dies.[9] Like Adonis, flowers spring up from the blood that has spilled from his wound.[10]

The association can be easily seen between the myth of Adonis and Attis. Sex appears to be the ruling passion as both deities die from groin injuries. Both of the deities have flowers spring up from their blood. Both Attis and Adonis were loved by goddesses whom they disobeyed.

But like the myth of Adonis, it is a bit hard to see how the myth of Attis was related to the earlier material. There really is no element of return from the underworld in this myth. Yet like the myth of Adonis, the seasonal cycle aspect of the flowers adds a distinct vegetation element to the myth. It is easy to see how Frazer came up with his dying god of vegetation theory when looking at these two myths. He obviously saw the male/female aspect coupled with the violent death element. In a general sense, this is similar to the Isis/Osiris and Inanna/Dumuzi motif. But what Frazer failed to differentiate between was this motif and the actual storyline of the myths. In the earlier myths, the god dies and comes back. Adonis and Attis do so only in a symbolic sense.

Turning to the god Dionysos, we hit upon the crux of

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[9]. Ovid, Fasti, pp.205-207, Book IV, lines 215-246.

[10]. Ovid, Fasti, p.277, Book V, lines 210-235.

the matter. Dionysos is very much a dying god of vegetation and Frazer is quite safe in his description of him:

"Like other gods of vegetation, Dionysus was believed to have died a violent death, but to have been brought to life again..."[11]

In Dionysos virtually all the elements thus encountered are brought together. As stated earlier, Dionysos was a god connected with the underworld.[12] But equally so, Dionysos was a god connected with vegetation as a fragment from Pindar indicates:

"May the field of fruit-trees receive increase from gladsome Dionysus, the pure sunshine of the fruit-time."[13]

Dionysos is, in many respects, a deity who combines the elements of the underworld, vegetation and resurrection. Although he does not come out and state it, one wonders whether Dionysos was the image upon which Frazer largely based his image of a dying god of vegetation. It is clear when reading The Golden Bough that Frazer saw a link between Dionysos, Adonis, Attis, Osiris and Persephone. Although Frazer was probably in error due to his reliance on Classical sources for earlier material, is it possible that this image of a vegetation deity is linked to the earlier dying and rising deities?

One of the major attractions of the theory of a

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[11]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.388.

[12]. Carl Kerenyi, Eleusis, p.35.

[13]. Pindar, Odes, p.601, Fragment 153.

dying god of vegetation is its familiarity. The very image of an entity with its vegetation iconography has enormous appeal. Could it be that this very image is in some way linked to myths largely concerned with the theme of death and renewal? If one looks beneath the superficial seasonal cycle aspect of the dying god of vegetation, a deeper psychological element emerges. Since vegetation and the life cycle are connected to concepts of renewal, this leads us back to where we began.

Adonis, Attis, and Dionysos were not dying and rising deities in the sense that Osiris, Dumuzi, Persephone and Baal were. The earlier gods actually went into the underworld. Adonis and Attis are yearly revived in the form of flowers, but do not actually physically resurrect. But this is not to say that there is not a link between Frazer's dying gods of vegetation and the earlier dying and rising deities.

As has already been noted, the connection between the dying and rising deities and vegetation did exist, if not on a scale envisaged by Frazer. It is easy to see how Frazer began to view vegetation aspects occurring everywhere. Even the Gospels are not devoid of such allusions. In the book of John, Jesus makes reference to vegetation after the last supper:

"I am the vine; you are the branches."(John 15:5)

When read in context, even the most vegetation fixated commentator would probably not ascribe this to a vegetation deity. Yet the symbolism is potent. Having

degraded the vegetation aspects of the dying and rising deities in order to reduce the theory of dying gods of vegetation to their proper level, it is now necessary to re-examine the vegetation aspect to see if a deeper meaning can be found.

I would propose that an accommodation can be made between the theory that the myths of dying and rising deities were psychologically connected and James Frazer's dying god of vegetation. In many respects, Frazer's theory is quite correct when looking at the Classical material. Adonis and Attis, the two gods upon whom Frazer concentrates, die and come back annually. They can quite easily be called dying gods of vegetation.

Frazer next looked at Osiris who, in many respects, did not return from the dead like Dumuzi, Persephone, and Baal. It is easy to see the direction in which Frazer's thinking began to go.

The link between Frazer's dying gods of vegetation and the theme of death and renewal is that they are thematically intertwined. The primary example of this in mythology is Dionysos who combines the three elements of underworld deity, vegetation and dying god. The key to understanding this link is seeing vegetation as being integral to the view of death as part of the life cycle. Vegetation is part of that process that includes not only life but death. Aside from the fact that Frazer predated Jung, Frazer failed to completely appreciate the death aspect of his myths as well as the vegetation/life

aspects.

The image which emerges is of a Dionysos-like figure who is ruler of the underworld but is also a vegetation deity. This image, as will shortly be seen, is really like that of the European Green Man. He is an image that portrays vegetation, but also represents a much darker (although not sinister) aspect.

To examine this linkage between the myths of dying and rising deities Frazer's dying gods of vegetation, it is not necessary to comb the ancient myths for evidence. It is an archetype that has probably always existed and even has survived in literature to the twentieth century. One need only to look at post-Classical literature to find this archetype in abundance. Even in the modern twentieth century, the image of the Green Man connected with death and the underworld survives in our contemporary literature.

A recently published book, The Green Man: The Archetype of Our Oneness with the Earth, deals with the subject of the green man in post-classical Europe.[14] Despite its rather prosaic new-age title, it documents rather well the survival of this image in the iconography of Christian Europe.

The description of the green man presented in this book gives a rather Frazerian view of the subject:

"The Green Man signifies irrepressible life...He is an image from the depths of prehistory:he appears and

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[14]. William Anderson & Clive Hicks, The Green Man.

seems to die and then comes again..."[15]

This, in many ways, is a nice linking up of Frazer's dying gods of vegetation and Jung's archetypes. The question remains: is there any validity in such an image? To answer this, a casual perusal through post-Classical literature suggests an answer.

Before proceeding to the very rich literary scene of the twentieth century, a very necessary stop is needed in the fourteenth century. The Middle English poem Gawain and the Green Knight is an excellent example of a fusion between Christian symbolism and pagan iconography. Without going into any detail of the storyline, the figure of the Green Knight is interesting because of his vegetation imagery. He first makes his appearance at the court of King Arthur at Christmas and his appearance is immediately noted:

"All of green were they made, both garments and man."[16]

But in addition to his "green" aspect, the Green Knight is associated symbolically with the underworld. When Gawain goes to confront the Green Knight at the end of the poem, an almost Hades-like atmosphere is unveiled as Gawain approaches the abode of the Green Knight:

"a mound as it might be near the marge of a green, a

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[15]. William Anderson & Clive Hicks, The Green Man, p.14.

[16]. J.R.R. Tolkien, Gawain and the Green Knight, p.18.

worn barrow on a brae by the brink of a water."[17]

This is a description that any student of the Greek underworld might recognize. The very image of a "Green Knight" living in a barrow suggests an association between a vegetation deity and the underworld. Be it cultural diffusion or Jung's archetypes, Dionysos was alive and well in the iconography of fourteenth century England.

It is not within the realm of this study to do a complete analysis of the green man imagery throughout the post-Classical periods. A mere glance at twentieth century literature shows that this figure lives on. Starting with the novelist Kingsley Amis in his book The Green Man, we encounter a somewhat sinister version of this image. At the command of a disembodied seventeenth-century scholar, the Green Man is a creature who commits murders. The most important thing to note is the association of a vegetation entity with death. The narrator of the story, Maurice, gives a graphic description of the Green Man:

> "I saw its face now for the first time, an almost flat surface of smooth dusty bark like the trunk of a scotch pine....and a wide grinning mouth that showed more than a dozen teeth made of jagged stumps of rotting wood."[18]

The sinister element of Kingsley Amis' Green Man is not entirely incongruent with the character of Dionysos.

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[17]. J.R.R. Tolkien, Gawain and the Green Knight, p.71.

[18]. Kingsley Amis, The Green Man, p.215.

Any doubts one may have on this issue can easily be cured by reading of the fate of Pentheus in Euripides' play, The Bacchae.

A slightly more gentle linkage between death and vegetation occurs in John Steinbeck's novel To a God Unknown. The novel begins with the main character, Joseph, leaving his dying father in Vermont to start a ranch in California at the turn of the century. What is interesting about this novel concerning vegetation deities is that after his father dies, Joseph perceives that his father's spirit animates the oak tree that the new ranch is built around:

> "the great tree stirred to life under the wind. Joseph raised his head and looked at its old, wrinkled limbs. His eyes lighted with recognition and welcome, for his father's strong and simple being...had entered the tree."[19]

In many respects, Joseph's father resembles Frazer's dying god of vegetation rather than a dying and rising deity. He dies and comes back in a visible yet vegetable state. But the link between death, vegetation and the return still remains. As the novel progresses, the failure of Joseph's brothers to recognize this metamorphosis results in a drought. An element of deification and ancestor worship exists within Steinbeck's portrayal.

Finally from the classic work of fantasy of the twentieth century, J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, there also comes a character who is reminiscent of

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[19]. John Steinbeck, To a God Unknown, p.25.

the Dionysian image. At the beginning of the epic, as the hobbits escape from the Shire through the Old Forest, they come across the eccentric figure of Tom Bombadil. Their ensuing sojourn in his house is marked by an abundance of food and well-being. But Tom Bombadil is more than just an eccentric recluse as his wife describes him to Frodo the hobbit:

"He is Master of wood, water, and hill."[20]

Tom Bombadil exhibits his powers in two circumstances that fit in perfectly with the image of a vegetation deity linked with and underworld deity. The first instance is when Tom meets the hobbits and saves them from a rather unfriendly sentient willow tree.[21]

But perhaps more impressively, Tom Bombadil saves the hobbits later on from a barrow-wight, a creature/demon who inhabits the barrows among which the hobbits unwittingly wander. Tom Bombadil exhibits an ability to command not only the powers of life (as in the case of the willow tree), but also the powers of death when he destroys the barrow-wight:

"Get out, you old wight! Vanish in the sunlight! Shrivel like the cold mist, like the winds go wailing, out into the barren lands far beyond the mountains!"[22]

It would be interesting to know how clearly these twentieth century writers were aware of the image that they were writing about. One suspects that John Steinbeck

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[20]. J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings, p.139.

[21]. J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings, p.135.

[22]. J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings, p.157.

was aware of it since the whole atmosphere of To a God Unknown deliberately points to an awareness of religion that is pre-Christian and linked to the earth and the seasonal cycle. But one suspects that J.R.R. Tolkien would have been horrified to know that Tom Bombadil was reminiscent of a Dionysos-type figure.

As this study of dying and rising deities is brought to an end, it is time to come to some conclusions regarding these myths. The entire purpose of this study was to attempt to find a link between the myths of dying and rising deities. In the last chapter, I discussed the relevance of psychology to these myths and suggested that they were in part a psychological reaction to human mortality and the life cycle. It is now time to elaborate upon this observation and bring this study to a close.

Simply put, I wish to make two proposals which are interlinked with one another. The first one is that the myths of dying and rising deities were in origin a psychological attempt by the human mind to deal with the emotional trauma of human mortality. In a psychological attempt to deal with death, sex, vegetation and mortality all play a role. Vegetation, as many have commented upon, can represent life. But the other side of the coin is death and this occurs to vegetation as well. To the agricultural people of the ancient Near East, life and death were inseparable parts of existence and it is hardly surprising that these elements should occur in their mythology.

Second, I would suggest that James Frazer was in many respects correct in his appellation of "dying gods of vegetation" to some of the gods of antiquity, specifically, the Classical gods Adonis and Attis. Where Frazer was incorrect was in seeing older deities such as Osiris and Tammuz only in terms of vegetation. As I have argued all along, vegetation may have played a role in their myths, but not necessarily the primary one. In the end, Frazer's main fault was that he was a Classicist and could not deal with the earlier material, some of which was not available until after his death. Frazer was unaware of some of the Mesopotamian material and all of the Ugaritic texts.

So what we are left with is the symbolism of vegetation linked with the theme of life versus death. While allowing for other aspects of these myths due to cultural or other influences, it is this theme that links these four myths together. The myths of dying and rising deities provide a useful insight into the views of mortality of the cultures of the ancient Near East.

Mythology is not an esoteric study in psychology, but has produced some of the most favoured stories of man, be they written or oral. Returning to the twentieth century to end this study, we can find a surprising aspect to J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings. At a first glance, it would seem ludicrous to associate anything in this tale with either Frazer's dying gods of vegetation or dying and rising deities of the ancient

Near East. But look again.

The Lord of the Rings is primarily the story of Frodo the hobbit who takes the ring of power of Sauron the Dark Lord into the land of Mordor, Sauron's realm, and throws the ring into the volcano of Mount Doom. Thus, Sauron's power is destroyed and Sauron is defeated. But what is Mordor but a land of death, an underworld? Sauron, as lord of Mordor, is in one aspect a lord of death, or the underworld. In his manifestation of ruler of the underworld, we find a more sinister aspect to Sauron than any of the other deities encountered in this study. But Sauron, the product of a Christian mind, is equated with evil in a story that concerns the struggle between good and evil. Frodo, like Baal before him, struggles with this personification of death and eventually defeats him. By going into Mordor, Frodo metaphorically enters the underworld, faces "Death", and returns.

But even more compelling, Frodo, like Osiris, can no longer exist in mortal lands. In the end, Frodo must leave the mortal lands of Middle Earth and sail to the undying land of Valinor in the west.

The final image we have from The Lord of the Rings is one that would be familiar to any Mesopotamian with visions of Dilmun or a Greek with thoughts of the Elysian fields. Stories, whether one calls them myths or not, where a divine entity enters the underworld and defeats or compromises with the ruler of the underworld,

symbolize man's eternal quest for a life beyond death. The final paragraphs of The Lord of the Rings present an image that any ancient Egyptian dreaming of the blessed afterlife in the west would empathize with:

> "And the ship went out into the High Sea and passed on into the west, until at last on a night of rain Frodo smelled a sweet fragrance on the air and heard the sound of singing that came over the water. And then it seemed to him that as in his dream in the house of Bombadil, the grey rain-curtain turned all to silver glass and was rolled back, and he beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise."[23]

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[23]. J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings, pp.1068-1069.

Appendix 1:

Ancestor Worship

One rather important topic which has been alluded to but not really analyzed in this study is the relevance of ancestor worship to the myths of dying and rising deities. The curious archaeological phenomenon of burial vaults underneath houses in both Ugarit and Isin-Larsa Ur has already been remarked upon. Yet what do the texts themselves have to say on this issue?

One aspect which might be considered is that the characters in the myths of dying and rising deities represent ancestor worship. At a psychological level, this is not improbable. However one must hesitate in suggesting that deities like Osiris and Persephone were once real individuals, although this is the kind of reasoning that Jane Harrison employed in her book, Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion.

But the myths of dying and rising deities do contain in a couple of places references to ancestor worship. Certainly the most notable example comes from the myth of Baal and Mot. Anat's burial of Baal is very ritualistic in nature:

> "She wept for him and buried him, she put him in a hole of the earth gods. She slew seventy wild oxen as a....for mightiest Baal."[1]

Slightly before this, the god El also responds in a

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[1]. CML, p.74,6,i, lines 17-19.

ritualistic way to Baal's death:

"He poured straw of mourning on his head, dust of wallowing on his crown; for clothing he covered himself with sackcloth..."[2]

The question which needs to be raised is whether these examples actually indicate ancestor worship, or are merely mourning rites. Indeed, a distinction may not even be possible. At the very least, these passages suggest something about the ritual mourning for the dead in Ugarit.

Far more typical is the lament for the dead deity which occurs in all of these myths. An excellent example of this is from a text in which Inanna mourns for Dumuzi:

"Gone is my husband, my sweet husband. Gone is my love, my sweet love. My beloved has been taken from the city."[3]

That the dead needed to be cared for is very clearly underlined throughout the mythology of the ancient world. Indeed, one of the most famous plays of antiquity, Antigone by Sophocles, is about this topic. Antigone is insistent that her brother be properly buried, as she proclaims to her uncle Creon who has forbidden it:

"...if I had allowed my mother's son to rot, an unburied corpse, that would have been an agony.[4]

Earlier in the play, Antigone discusses the matter with her sister Ismene. In this discussion, Antigone gives a very illuminating reason for risking the wrath of

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[2]. CML, p.73,5,vi, lines 14-17.

[3]. Samuel Kramer & Diane Wolkenstein, Inanna, p.86.

[4]. Sophocles, Antigone, p.82.

Creon over the burial of her brother:

"And even if I die in the act, that death will be a glory. I will lie with the one I love and loved by him...I have longer to please the dead than please the living here: in the kingdom down below I'll lie forever."[5]

One can almost detect a note of fear throughout Antigone and the other mythology covered in this study. Along with normal mourning and respect for the dead, a sense that the dead must be appeased is in evidence. This was found in Mesopotamian mythology in Inanna and Ereshkigal's threats to let loose the dead. For whatever reason, psychological, social or other, the care for the dead was an important element in the religious beliefs of these peoples and this occasionally comes through in mythology.

A final aspect to be considered is a text from the XI dynasty in Egypt and which contains absolutely no reference to Osiris.[6] This is an important point to note when making sweeping statements about Osiris being pivotal to the funerary cult of Pharaonic Egypt. As this text would indicate, mythology is rarely so simple and a text such as this may be a genuine glimpse of more "popular" religion. The first few lines of the hieroglyphic text are taken from E.A. Wallis Budge's The Egyptian Heaven and Hell Vol. 3.[7] The translation is mine.

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[5]. Sophocles, Antigone, p.62.

[6]. E.A. Wallis Budge, The Egyptian Heaven and Hell Vol.3, pp.67-73.

[7]. E.A. Wallis Budge, The Egyptian Heaven and Hell Vol.3, pp.75-79.

"The assembly of the family of the man that is in the necropolis. O Ra, O Atum, O Geb, O Nut. Behold you to this Sepa, he travels to the heavens, he travels to the earth, he travels to the waters. May he meet his family, may he meet his father, may he meet his children..."

The relationship between ancestor worship and the myths of dying and rising deities is unclear. Topics such as the rephaim from Ugarit may have to remain an enigma for the time being. Yet in stressing the aspect of mourning for the dead so strongly as a key link between these myths, one cannot exclude the possibility that ancestor worship is also a relevant factor.

Appendix 2:

The Later Aspects of the Myth of Osiris

One of the most interesting aspects of the myth of Osiris was its development over the millennia. Even after the collapse of Pharaonic Egypt, this myth still played and important if not growing importance in the ancient world. The accession of the Ptolomies to the throne of Egypt after the death of Alexander led to a fusion between Greek and Egyptian ideals. It has been theorized that the cult of Sarapis, the major fusion between Osiris and Greek ideas, may have gone back to Alexander's reign rather than Ptolemy I.[1]

The cult of Sarapis was, in simple terms (perhaps too simple), the combining of the Egyptian god Osiris with the personification of some Greek deities. This should not be seen as the elimination of Osiris as a deity, but rather as a composite deity which could be worshipped by the Hellenized Egyptians. For example, in inscriptions which contain Isis and her husband, references are almost entirely to Osiris rather than Sarapis. Osiris is the god generally associated with the myth. On the other hand, Sarapis was generally associated with prayers and intercessions, including dreams.[2]

Sarapis was identified with a number of Greek

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[1]. John E. Stambaugh, Sarapis under the Early Ptolemies, p.6.

[2]. John E. Stambaugh, Sarapis under the Early Ptolemies, pp.44-47.

deities. The most obvious one is Pluto (or Hades). This is hardly surprising given the underworld nature of Pluto and Osiris. But curiously enough, a major association was made between Sarapis and Dionysos. This may have been due to Dionysos' death at the hands of the Titans. Significantly, fertility played a role in this aspect of Sarapis.[3]

The Graeco-Roman-Egyptian deity Sarapis is a difficult deity to describe. The associations and connections mentioned above illustrate very well the assimilation made by the Greeks and the Egyptians at the time. It is for this reason that the later mythological material concerning the myths of dying and rising deities cannot be trusted as being representative of the earlier periods. Regardless of the origin of the myths, by the Graeco-Roman period, the ancients themselves were beginning to come up with a defacto theory on archetypes.

Curiously enough, Osiris' wife and consort Isis went in the other direction. Rather than have the Greeks and other foreigners go to her in Egypt, Isis went abroad to them. Despite the almost opposite direction of movement, the cult of Isis showed as much if not more of a shift towards syncretism than Sarapis. James Frazer comments about the cult of Isis:

"In that welter of religions which accompanied the decline of national life in antiquity her worship was one

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[3]. John E. Stambaugh, Sarapis under the Early Ptolemies, pp.53-55.

of the most popular at Rome and throughout the empire."[4]

This is made clear in The Golden Ass of Apuleius. In her speech to Lucius, Isis identifies herself with a rather large number of deities which include major female deities such as Diana and Hecate:

"Thus the Phrygians, earliest of all races, call me Pessinuntia, Mother of the Gods; thus the Athenians, sprung from their own soil, call me Cecropeian Minerva; and the sea-tossed Cyprians call me Paphian Venus, the archer Cretans Diana Dictynna, and the trilingual Sicilians Ortygian Proserpine; to the Eleusinians I am Ceres, the ancient goddess, to others Juno, to others Bellona and Hecate and Rhamnusia. But the Ethiopians, who are illumined by the first rays of the sun-god as he is born every day together with the Africans and the Egyptians who excel through having the original doctrine honour me with my distinctive rites and true name of Queen Isis."[5]

Whether one looks upon this as a shift towards monotheism or an expression of a Jungian archetype (or possibly both), it is clear that Isis was being associated with a dominant Goddess cult.

One significant factor in the progression of the Egyptian goddess Isis to the international deity Isis was her early association with the Greek goddess Demeter. Demeter, as an earth goddess, would have been a perfect match for Isis, who was likewise concerned with fertility.[6] It was probably observed and noted that in the original myths (if they could be called such), both Demeter and Isis were the mourning female relative who

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[4]. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p.383.

[5]. John Gwyn Griffiths, The Isis Book, p.75, XI:5.

[6]. Friedrich Solmsen, Isis among the Greeks and Romans, pp.9-10.

was directly responsible for the return of the dead deity.

This very brief look at two aspects of the evolution of the deities Osiris and Isis points to two things. The first thing is that during the Classical period, as international boundaries tended to collapse, religious ideas from different cultures met and were assimilated and integrated.

But perhaps more importantly, this Graeco-Roman syncretism underlines the danger of using material from this period for explaining earlier mythic phenomena. In many respects, the individual gods and their cults have by this time become "contaminated" by foreign influences. But in addition, regardless of how sceptically one views Carl Jung's archetypes, it is clear that the people from this period were making associations for themselves. One suspects, however, that they might have described such associations not as archetypes from the collective unconscious, but rather as primal truths.

Glossary

The original purpose for this glossary was to provide an easy access directory of the numerous deities mentioned in this study. However, it soon became evident that there were quite a few terms that needed not only explanation, but some discussion and occasionally further citation. Since I intentionally left out endnotes to bring up several issues, it seems appropriate to bring up some of these topics here. The end result is I hope, a glossary that will illuminate the main body of this study.

Adonis A Classical deity who dies as a result of an injury to the groin inflicted by a boar. Aphrodite uses his blood to create flowers. James Frazer considered Adonis a dying god of vegetation.

Afterlife Term used to describe a metaphysical geographical location where the dead go to exist in a better than mortal life. I have often used this term throughout this study to describe the Egyptian "heaven" in order to make a distinction between the underworlds of Greece or Mesopotamia. This is a bit of an exaggeration since Egyptian sources, when looked at critically, reveal that the Egyptian afterlife was hardly a blissful and peaceful realm. However, it is still one of the best terms in English to describe a place where the resurrected dead could go as opposed to the shades of Greece, Mesopotamia and Ugarit.

Artemis/Diana Virgin goddess of the hunt and the

sister of Apollo. There are a number of myths where mortal men fall afoul of this deity. Hippolytos was her companion but was killed due to the wrath of Aphrodite. Artemis was worshipped at Nemi.

Anat Ugaritic goddess who is sister of Baal. Anat is instrumental in the recovery of Baal and is noted for her violent attack on Mot.

Archetype Specifically, the term used by Carl Jung to describe a basic psychological response to a symbol from the collective unconscious. Jung used as examples such archetypes as that of the mother or of rebirth. An excellent modern description of archetypes can be found in Verena Kast's book The Dynamics of Symbols, 1992. The term "archetype" has unfortunately come to be used in a far too general sense by both psychologists and mythologists. An example of a less than satisfactory explanation of mythology with regard to archetypes can be found in the works of Joseph Campbell.

Attis A Classical deity who like Adonis, dies as a result of a groin injury. In this case, it is the goddess Cybele who creates flowers from the blood of the groin of Attis, after he has castrated himself. Like Adonis, James Frazer described him as a dying god of vegetation.

Baal Ugaritic storm god who opposes the Ugaritic god

of death, Mot. After having died and probably entering the underworld, Baal comes back and defeats Mot in combat. The myth of Baal is noted for having several crucial missing segments. Baal may be the deity who appears in the Old Testament story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal in I Kings 18.

Baldur Norse god who is killed by a sprig of mistletoe in the form of a projectile. Frazer linked this myth to other myths such a Virgil's descent into the netherworld with the aid of a golden bough. The myth of the death of Baldur provided for Frazer the clue for the identification of the golden bough as mistletoe.

Collective Unconscious One of the most difficult of the theories of Carl Jung to either understand or accept. Jung made a distinction between the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The personal unconscious would be made up by each individual's memory and experience. On the other hand, the collective unconscious would be something common to all mankind. At times, it sounds like Jung is proposing something like a genetic memory. I would be more inclined to accept the term "cultural collective unconscious". However, there can be no denying that certain archetypes, like that of the mother, appear to be common to all of mankind. As far as the association between archetypes and mythology is concerned, this is an area which requires more study.

Demeter Greek goddess of fertility and vegetation and the mother of Persephone. After Persephone's abduction by Hades, Demeter leaves Mount Olympos and goes to the city of Eleusis. There, she inflicts a famine on the gods and forces them to persuade Hades to return her daughter. Demeter and the myth of Persephone is detailed in the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter". It is fairly evident that elements of this myth intruded into the other myths of dying and rising deities in the Classical period as is evidenced by James Frazer's assertion that many of the Classical deities were dying gods of vegetation.

The Descent of Inanna Sumerian myth of the descent of the goddess Inanna into the underworld. Although this title often refers to a specific text which describes the actual descent and return of Inanna, it also refers in a more broad sense to the overall myth which includes the death and return of Dumuzi. For the best study of this version, see Kramer and Wolkesnstein's Inanna,1983.

The Descent of Ishtar The semitic Akkadian version of the Sumerian descent of Inanna. This text dates from the Assyrian period and is a shorter version of the earlier myth. Although there are a few differences between the two myths (see chapter 2), it is remarkable in many respects on the lack of change between the two versions over such a long period of time. The most recent translation is in Stephanie Dalley's Myths from

Mesopotamia, 1991.

Dilmun Mesopotamian land of paradise where death does not occur. Mentioned in a variety of texts (see chapter 10), it is curious that it is described both in what we would describe as mythological texts and in historic texts.

Dionysos Classical god of wine who also had a connection to the underworld. Dionysos was part of a triad found at Eleusis in connection with Demeter and Persephone. Dionysos was another deity whom James Frazer identified as a dying god of vegetation. In many respects, Dionysos is the ideal of a dying and rising deity insofar as he represents both vegetation and the underworld. Perhaps the best description of Dionysos occurs in The Bacchae of Euripides.

Dumuzi Sumerian dying and rising deity. As a result of being caught in the act of feasting over his wife's death by Inanna herself, he is chased by demons and carried off into the underworld. Eventually, he is allowed to leave for a half year at a time and is replaced for that time by his sister Geshtinanna. In Akkadian, Dumuzi is called Tammuz and it is Tammuz that is mentioned in the Book of Ezekial in connection with the women mourning.

Dying Gods of Vegetation Term used to describe deities thought to be linked to the seasonal cycle. The most popular theorizer of this idea was James Frazer in his work The Golden Bough. Frazer thought that deities such as Dionysos and Osiris were gods related to the annual cycle of vegetation and the seasons. This theory has persisted and although often discounted by modern scholarship, it still has some validity in a few cases.

Egyptian Chronology Although constantly alluded to but never really mentioned in this study, is the chronology of the four regions in question. An excellent example of why this has been done is the difficulty of assigning dates to the various periods and Egypt demonstrates this problem very effectively. Although the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms undoubtedly had actual dates, these dates vary from source to source. For the purposes of citation, the chronology found in Stephen Quirke's Book Ancient Egyptian Religion, 1992, on Page 186 will suffice. Any illusions that the reader may have as to the correctness of such a dating chart can easily be dispelled by looking at Peter James' Centuries of Darkness, 1991.

El God who is the head of the Ugaritic pantheon. In the myth of Baal and Mot, El is noted for his mourning for Baal and his dream whereby it is realized that Baal is alive once more.

Elysian Fields Location in Greek mythology where only a few are allowed to go and where no-one dies. Described in flowing imagery on both Pindar and Homer (see chapter 10). The Elysian fields is where King Meneleus ends up according to Homer.

Enki The most humanistic of the deities of the Sumerian pantheon who is responsible for interceding on behalf of Inanna. Enki is perhaps the most famous for his warning to Ut-Napishtim about the Flood in the Epic of Gilgamesh.

Enkidu The beloved companion of Gilgamesh who dies as a result of insults to Inanna. Prior to his death, Enkidu relates to Gilgamesh a vision of the underworld and his description of the underworld is intrinsic to our understanding of Mesopotamian views on the netherworld.

The Epic of Gilgamesh Mesopotamian myth about Gilgamesh, king of the city-state of Uruk. To put this in its proper perspective, it should be remembered that this story was a popular myth of the ancient Near East for probably thousands of years and is known not only from Sumerian and Akkadian literature, but also from Hittite fragments. The quest of Gilgamesh for immortality has seen something of a revival in the twentieth century following the translation of the text into English. An excellent example of such popularity is the contemporary

novel Gilgamesh the King, by Robert Silverberg. The best overall translation of the Gilgamesh texts is the somewhat outdated but still useful James Pritchard's Ancient Near Eastern Texts (third edition, 1969).

Ereshkigal Goddess of the underworld who is one of the key deities mentioned in "Inanna's Descent into the Netherworld". Ereshkigal is also the sister of Inanna. Ereshkigal also features in the somewhat amusing myth of Nergal where the god Nergal becomes the consort of Ereshkigal.

Funerary Books Ancient Egyptian collection of spells designed to help the deceased overcome obstacles and enter the underworld. The first such "edition" was known as the Pyramid Texts and these date from the Old Kingdom and were inscribed on the walls of the pyramids starting in the 5th dynasty. During the Middle Kingdom, these texts were altered and amended for more general non-royal usage and were inscribed on coffins, hence the name Coffin Texts. Finally, during the New Kingdom, these texts were written on papyrus rolls and were used by the entire population. The Book of the Dead remained in use in one form or another for the rest of Egyptian history. The best current translations into English of all three of these compositions remains R.O. Faulkner's translations.

Geshtinanna The sister of Dumuzi who exchanges places with him in the netherworld for part of the year. Geshtinanna is noted for her attempt to stop the demons from getting to Dumuzi and for mourning for him after his seizure.

Gilgamesh The hero of one of the greatest compositions of the ancient world, the Epic of Gilgamesh. In deep despair at the death of his beloved companion Enkidu, Gilgamesh goes on a quest for Ut-Napishtim, the immortal survivor of the Flood. Much of what is known on Mesopotamian views on the underworld and immortality comes to us from the Epic of Gilgamesh.

The Golden Bough In its final third edition form, The Golden Bough of James Frazer numbered some twelve volumes. Frazer was in essence concerned with the priesthood of Nemi in Roman Italy and the symbolism of the golden bough. Frazer not only looked at Classical and Near Eastern religions, but he also used comparative anthropology. It is for his dubious anthropological connections that he is often criticized for although it should be remembered that such methodology was common for the time. An excellent biography of Frazer can be found in Robert Ackerman's J.G. Frazer: His Life and Work, 1987.

Golden Bough The branch which Aeneas carried on the

order of the Sibyl into the netherworld. James Frazer identified the golden bough with mistletoe, in part because it is described like mistletoe by Virgil. Frazer felt that this was backed up by the use of mistletoe in the myth of Baldur and by the apparent reverence that was felt for misteltoe by the Druids as described by Pliny.

Hades Greek god of the underworld who abducts Persephone to be his consort. Hades presides over the underworld more as its ruler than as a judge. Unlike the Ugaritic Mot, Hades cannot be seen as a personification of death.

Hippolytos/Virbius The mortal companion of Artemis who in the play Hippolytos by Euripides is only allowed to be her companion on the condition that he shun sex. Aphrodite is offended by this and arranges his death. Elsewhere in mythology, there is the sense that Hippolytos might have been the more literal lover of Artemis (see chapt. 10). Hippolytos was worshipped at Nemi.

Immortality Term used to describe a state of existence where death never occurs. In an ancient Near Eastern context, this usually refers to divine figures such a gods or divine heroes. Gilgamesh, although part god, is still mortal enough to die. His failure in his quest for immortality highlights the common theme found

throughout the ancient Near East that man is doomed to mortality.

Inanna Sumerian goddess who goes into the underworld and eventually returns. Inanna is noted for being the cause of all of the trouble within this myth since she infringes on the underworld realm of her sister, Ereshkigal. Inanna is the Sumerian name for the Akkadian Ishtar.

Isis Egyptian goddess responsible for the recovery and re-animation of Osiris after his murder by Seth. The key deity in the myth of Osiris, Isis figured prominently in Egyptian funerary literature and iconography. In Classical times, Isis became an important deity in her own right.

Mystery Cults During the later Graeco-Roman period, a series of religions developed based upon known gods or religions that have been given the title "Mystery Cults" due to the very real lack of knowledge regarding them. Among the most popular of these was the Mithraic mysteries. Dying and rising gods played no small part in these cults and deities such as Demeter, Osiris and Isis appeared in a variety of these religions. The best description of these cults can be found in Walter Burkert's Ancient Mystery Cults, 1987.

Mot Ugaritic god of death who opposes the storm god Baal. Mot is in many ways a far more threatening figure than either Hades or Ereshkigal and there are constant references to his hunger. In some respects, Mot is as much a personification of death as he is a ruler of the underworld.

Nemi Grove in Italy where the deities Artemis/Diana and Hippolytos/Virbius were worshipped. The priest at Nemi was always a killer, since he had to win the position by killing his predessesor. Frazer's study The Golden Bough was based upon the examination of this cult.

Nergal A somewhat unfortunate Mesopotamian deity who makes some unforgivable comments about Ereshkigal's servant at a feast. As a result of Ereshkigal's anger, Nergal is sent to the underworld by the other gods to apologize. After an erotic encounter with Ereshkigal, Nergal becomes her consort.

Ninshubur The loyal servant of Inanna who petitions the gods for help in obtaining Inanna's release from the underworld. Inanna later has to prevent the demons from carrying her off.

Osiris The Egyptian ruler of the afterlife who is also the dying and rising deity. The myth of Osiris' death and eventual return was the theological basis for

the Egyptian funerary cult although it really is uncertain which came first, the myth or the cult. Osiris as such was worshipped for over three thousand years.

Persephone Greek goddess who is the daughter of Demeter and a dying and rising deity. After being abducted by Hades, Persephone is forced to become his consort. Eventually, a compromise is reached whereby Persephone spends part of the year with Hades, and the other part of the year with her mother Demeter.

Resurrection Concept wherein the dead rise from the state of being dead to some new form of existence. Jung described such a process as entailing some kind of change. Of the dying and rising deities, only Osiris really comes into this category. Throughout this study, the term resurrection has been used in a very broad sense and does not strictly refer to the image of resurrection found in Christian belief.

Seth The brother and murderer of Osiris. Ironically, Seth is also the brother of Isis. The myth of Osiris largely concerns a divine conflict between this incestuous family.

The Soul Although there is really no textual evidence to suggest any metaphysical issues are brought up in the myths of dying and rising deities, there are at

least a few questions on this subject to be raised. As was noted before, there seems to be a contradiction in the Baal and Mot myth. How can the physical remains of Baal be buried if he is in the underworld? Yet the implication is made that Baal actually goes into the underworld. Could it be that only Baal's soul is taken into the underworld? Although this is really stretching the evidence, it is something to consider.

When Inanna goes into the underworld and is hung up like a piece of meat on a hook, what happens to her consciousness? How exactly did the Mesopotamians view the "shades" of the dead and could these "shades" be seen as synonymous with the concept of the soul.

Finally, the Egyptians clearly had fairly complex ideas on the soul as is evidenced by such terms as "Ba" and "Ka". I will not attempt to define such terms since their definition varies depending upon which source you read from. In the end, although it may be unclear what ideas these cultures had on the soul, it is a fair bet that they actually possessed some kind of theory on them.

Underworld/Netherworld These two terms are used to describe places where the dead are supposed to go in the cultures of Ugarit, Greece, and Mesopotamia. Unlike their cousins in Egypt, the dead from these regions exist in a shadowy world and can very aptly be called "shades". It should be noted that neither of these terms refers in any sense to a Christian hell. However, it was not a place

where one could look forward to going to. Perhaps the best descriptions of this concept can be found in Enkidu's description of the underworld in the Epic of Gilgamesh (see also chapter 9).

Underworld Books Ancient Egyptian compositions often written on the walls of the royal tombs. So-named here due to their description of the underworld. Unlike the funerary books, these texts had more to do with the physical layout of the underworld (see chapter 9). They included such texts such as the Amduat, the Book of Caverns and the Book of Gates. Characteristic of these books is the description of the barriers or gates found in the underworld. The best translation of these into English can be found in Alexandre Piankoff's The Tomb of Ramses VI, Vol.I, (1954). However, a still valuable text in both English and Egyptian hieroglyphs can be found in E.A Wallis Budge's The Egyptian Heaven and Hell Vol.I-III, (1905)

Zeus The chief god of the Greek pantheon. Zeus gives his brother Hades permission to abduct their niece Persephone. Zeus later regrets this when Persephone's mother and Zeus' sister Demeter turns her wrath directly on Zeus. Zeus is forced to eventually make concessions and allow Persephone to leave the underworld for a time.

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