

STUDIES
IN THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS
(SUPPLEMENTS TO *NUMEN*)

VII

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THE SACRED BRIDGE



LEIDEN
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THE DIVINE LADY

It is a wellknown fact, that religious people always have conceived of the deity in different ways. One of the most significant points of variance is whether God or the gods are pictured as male or as female. In certain religions of antiquity the gods dominate to such a degree that the goddesses are pushed into the background and have become pale and bloodless figures. In some worldreligions, i.e. in Judaism, in Christianity and in Islam, the conception of God shows a masculine style. God is known and adored as the sovereign Lord or as the merciful Father. In both cases there have been symbols used in order to express that God rules the world and man as a true king according to His inscrutable will or bestows His mercy on His creatures by His paternal love. Here the masculine conception of God is taken as the most adequate expression of His nature.

There have always been religious people who did not conceive of the deity as the Lord or as the heavenly Father, but as the Great Mother or the Divine Lady. Not all female gods belong to this type. There are many goddesses who keep a modest position as partners of a god, living in the shadow of his mighty personality. However in the religions of antiquity a series of goddesses occur who appear as impressive personalities, endowed as they are by an outspoken character and by strong will power. No wonder that they are both loved and feared by their adherents. Many times they may be counted in the category of the great Mother-Goddess. However some of them are not only mothers, but at the same time virgins. Sometimes the virginal nature is even strongly or wholly predominant. Frequently their chthonic nature clearly appears. Therefore it is not surprising, that the goddess is sometimes connected with the realm of death and that she is thought to provide oracles. For the people of antiquity were convinced that wisdom given by oracles goes forth from the netherworld.

There is no danger of confounding the goddesses in question because all of them show individual features. Nevertheless they belong to the same category, i.e. that of the Divine Lady. She is an exalted goddess, the personification of divine creative life, who is served by her followers in deep awe and with warm affection. It is therefore mis-

leading to contend that the goddess is nothing more than the personification of nature, which never stops creating life in pluriformity. There certainly exists a relation between the Divine Lady and the incessantly creating nature. But they are not identical. The character of the Divine Lady represents a religious idea, which has its value in itself. It is equally wrong to believe that she is less remote from her adorers than God, the Lord, because the latter is the divine king, the heavenly lord, over against whom man is merely a slave or dust of the earth, whereas the relation to these female gods is supposed to be characterized by the intimacy of the connection between a mother and her child. This conception is not right. This type of goddess can also be inaccessible. She is the Divine Lady who keeps her adorers at a reasonable distance. Her nature is impenetrable. This is particularly manifest when she is called the Virgin-Mother. This term indicates the mystery of birth which she causes to take place. The heavenly Lord creates out of nothing. The Virgin-Mother brings forth without impregnation. Both occurrences are equally mysterious: the origin of the world and of life is a secret. The people of antiquity realized that woman is inscrutable by nature and virtually inaccessible. Even when she has become mother she remains virgin in a certain sense. No wonder that there have been religious people who conceived of the deity as the Divine Lady. In their eyes the divinity was a mighty goddess, inaccessible and yet benignant, demanding strict obedience from her adherents, in reward lavishing upon them the blessings of an intensified, renewed and free life.

There can easily arise differences of opinion about the question which goddesses must be reckoned to this type. In a study in Dutch, entitled "De Moedergodin in de oudheid", I have treated nine goddesses who in my opinion belong to this category. In that book I was able to go into details. As this treatise necessarily has a more modest extent, I have chosen another manner of approach to the subject. I am going to characterize succinctly a number of goddesses in order to shed new light both on their individual nature and on their function as Divine Lady. After having made a few remarks about the prehistoric female statuettes, I shall present the following goddesses: Mother Earth, Ishtar, Isis, Anāhitā, Athene, Freya and Kybele.

The Divine Lady represents a primeval force, awe-inspiring and beneficial to such a high degree that nobody would be surprised if it could be proved, that already primeval man has adored her. There have

actually been made some discoveries, seemingly at first sight warranting the meaning that this goddess dates from the early prehistory of mankind. However it is advisable to evaluate these facts very critically. For they are capable of different explanations. The expert understands that a great number of so called "Venus"-statuettes are meant, of which the oldest specimens date from the end of the Palaeolithic Period. They have been found in several caves in the South of France¹⁾, in the basins of the Don and of the Dnieper and at Malta, in the neighbourhood of Irkoetsk in Siberia.²⁾ These statuettes, made of bone, ivory or stone, represent a naked woman, with pendulant breasts, broad hips, rotund buttocks, sometimes excessive corpulency suggestive of pregnancy and accentuated sexual organs. However several varieties of this type occur. Some statuettes are not naked, but dressed. In others the human shape is hardly recognizable. They are roughly modelled. Besides the corpulent type there also occurs a slender female figurine which seems to represent a virgin and not the matron, the pregnant woman. Some statuettes have such a small size—they measure ten to fifteen centimeters—, that they cannot possibly have been statues of gods, as objects of worship. They are rather a kind of amulet, possessing magical significance. The circumstances in which some Russian statuettes have been found, point in this direction. These statuettes have legs missing and have a pointed lower end. They have been detected along the walls of the remnants of prehistoric houses, put down in the soft earth. Even when the dwarfish and roughly modelled statuettes are excluded, it is dubious whether these female figurines represent the Divine Lady.

However this may be, it is at any rate striking that neither among the carved work of this age nor among the cave-pictures are images of men frequent. Apparently woman has captured the imagination of prehistoric man and also of the artists. In which quality? That is difficult to say. The number of explanations of these statuettes is considerable.³⁾ In my opinion the least acceptable interpretation is that, which stresses the sexual-erotic significance of the statuettes. For not all

¹⁾ J. Maringer and H. G. Bandi, *Art in the Ice Age* 1953; Th. Mainage, *Les Religions de la Préhistoire. L'Âge paléolithique*, 1921; C. Clemen, *Urgeschichtliche Religion* (Untersuchungen zur allgemeinen Religionsgeschichte, Heft 4), 1932.

²⁾ Fr. Hančar, *Zum Problem der Venusstatuetten im eurasiatischen Jungpaläolithikum* (Prachistorisches Zeitschrift XXX-XXXI, Band 1939/40).

³⁾ Clemen, *op. cit.* p. 77; Hančar, *op. cit.* p. 144; Mainage, *op. cit.* p. 286; E. O. James, *Prehistoric Religion*, 1957, p. 145; J. Maringer, *The Gods of Prehistoric Man*, 1960, p. 108.

figurines are naked and moreover we are badly informed about the part which sexual life played in the cultural level of prehistory. Prehistoric man likely evaluated woman in the first place in her function as creatress of new life. Because man's role in the process of procreation was probably not clearly understood, the full attention was directed on woman's creative function. In general the prehistoric female statuettes are too small for them to have served as images of a goddess. They are rather a kind of amulet, meant to further fertility. They are not pictures of women who once lived, but rather images of woman as such, in whom creative life reveals itself. Further, attention should be paid to the fact that two types of female figurines occur: besides the statuettes of the mother, of the stout, pregnant woman there is also that of the slender girl, the virgin. Apparently the two aspects of womanhood have been clearly recognized.

The female images from the Neolithic Period show a greater variety of form, but contribute little to a further explanation of the prehistoric "Venus"-statuettes. In Egypt a number of statuettes of ivory and of earthenware have been found, representing the two said types: the abdominous and the slim female figure. In Mesopotamia the booty of archeological research is richer. On quite a number of excavation fields—at El-Obeid, Ur, Uruk, Hassuna, Arpachiyah, Tepe Gawra—female statuettes have appeared. In general they lack artistic refinement. They are clumsy figures, with heavy breasts, held by crossed arms and with an indication of pregnancy.¹⁾ Special attention should be devoted to the female figurines, which the excavations at Mohenjo-Daro in the valley of the Indus have yielded. These statuettes are nude, except for a small skirt. They have a large fan-shaped hair-dress and pannier-like side projections. As stains of smoke are present thereon, the inference is that the statuettes were used as lamps or incenseburners, perhaps in the cult of the Mother-Goddess. It seems, that religious life in ancient Mohenjo-Daro was dominated by the female elements. So, artists made many models of doves on small pedestals. The dove is dedicated to the Mother-Goddess as e.g. the monuments found on Crete clearly show.²⁾ Analogous female statuettes were discovered in Asia Minor, i.e. Syria, in Canaan, also in Cyprus and in the islands of the Aegean Sea³⁾. Apparently the typological dual occurs also here:

¹⁾ E. O. James, *The Cult of the Mother Goddess*, 1959, p. 22 ff.

²⁾ E. Mackay, *The Indus Civilization*, 1935.

³⁾ W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, 1946; H. Haas, *Bilderatlas zur Religionsgeschichte 7, Religion des ägäischen Kreises*, 1925; R. v. Lichtenberg, *Die ägäische Kultur*, 1918.

been 2:3
"Bring forth
children"

the form with the motherly features and the elegant type. This species of female figurines has also spread to the West, as is proved by finds in the isle of Malta, in Spain, in France and in the British Isles.¹⁾ Special mention must be made of the Cretan facts. Crete is often considered as the cradle of the cult of the Mother-Goddess. Quite unjustly. For this goddess probably came from Asia Minor, together with the dove and the double axe, the three characteristics of the Minoan culture. This does not prevent Crete offering interesting varieties of this type of statuettes. In the first place nude female figurines have been found, showing similarity with the said statuettes from Asia Minor. Typically Cretan is the image of a goddess dressed in a long hoop, standing on a mountain, in a martial attitude, with a staff or spear in hand, flanked by two lions. She is the mistress of the mountains, of the trees, and of the wild animals. Sometimes she is represented as huntress, or armed, also engaged in a ritual dance. Moreover she is the snake-goddess, pictured with two snakes, twisted round her body and her arms. The snake was in antiquity considered to have special relations with the earth and the netherworld. There are other indications that the goddess was connected with the realm of the dead. It seems that she was also related to the water, to the sea: she is represented in a boat, sailing to a mountainous shore, where her shrine apparently is standing. One gets the impression that she primarily is conceived of as virgin. In short, she is an impressive and colourful figure.²⁾

In conclusion one can say that our knowledge of the prehistoric religion is too small to define the function of the said female statuettes. Yet they raise by their form and by their characteristics, yea precisely by their typological varieties, the surmise that they are the first fumbling attempt to picture the divine power, which later on is called the Divine Lady. Thus in prehistory the first morning-light of a religious idea, which has had a firm grip on mankind, seems to be visible.

Since time immemorial the earth was considered as the Great Mother, who produces and feeds all living beings. One easily understands that the earth was conceived of as a motherly being. The earth makes the impression of being passive and patient in a womanly way. It brings forth vegetation in abundance, it feeds the animals and it binds man with ties, which are as primary, irrational and indissoluble as the bond

¹⁾ James, *Prehistoric Religion*, p. 162 ff.

²⁾ H. Haas, *op. cit.*; A. Evans, *The Palace of Minos*, 1921, *passim*; R. v. Lichtenberg, *op. cit.*, *Zweiter Abschnitt*.

with his mother. Thus the cult of Mother Earth is part of the religion of many nations.¹⁾ However the most characteristic facts are provided by Greek religion. To the ancient Greeks the earth was the primeval mother, i.e. the oldest deity. Sophocles celebrates "the Earth, the oldest of the gods, the imperishable, the indefatigable." Euripides honours her "who duly is called the All-Mother", because she has brought forth all creatures. In one of the works of Aeschylus the passionate prayer to Gaia starts with the words: Ma Ga, Ma Ga. It sounds like the stammering words of a baby who cries for his mother. It is especially Hesiod, who in his *Theogony* has given mythological form to this conviction, this idea. He says that in the beginning only Chaos was present. Thereafter Gaia, the earth and Eros, love, came into being. The Earth is therefore the primeval mother in the literal sense of the word. She brought forth Uranos, the heaven, who was her equal and thereupon the high mountains and Pontos, the sea. Together with Uranos she gave birth to the male and female Titans. Moreover she engendered three cyclops, who possessed only one eye, and three monsters with a hundred arms. The youngest of the Titans was Kronos, who from his youth hated his father. Thus Gaia easily incited Kronos to put his father out of the way. Kronos supplanted Uranos. In his turn Kronos was later on ruled out by his son Zeus. Also in this rebellion against fatherly authority Gaia played her part. She hid the newly born Zeus so that Kronos could not devour him, as he had done with previous children of his wife Rhea. Later on Gaia advised Zeus to loosen the Cyclops, who had been fettered by him, and to charge them to drive the Titans from Olympus. When this had happened, Gaia apparently began to hate Zeus. For she brought forth Typhoeus, a real monster, who nearly succeeded in dethroning Zeus.²⁾ In these three cases Gaia plays a double game. This reveals a demoniacal trait in her nature. The character of the goddess of the earth actually is double-sided. The earth gives, but also takes back. In the earth the forces reside, which can destroy the cosmic order. The Titans and the other monstrous children of Gaia are the proof thereof. To these forces also death belongs. The earth gathers the dead in her fold. The realm of the dead is mostly located under the earth. The fate

¹⁾ A. Dieterich, *Mutter Erde*, 1913.

²⁾ *Theogonia*, 116 ff.; Roscher, *Lexikon* I:2, 1566-1586; G. van der Leeuw, *Goden en mensen in Hellas*, 1955, p. 19/20.

of these dead is not to be envied. Their only hope is that they will be reborn from the womb of Mother Earth.¹⁾

From the earth not only creative life arises, but also true wisdom. ^{→ oracles} These two goods, eagerly desired and highly praised by mankind, are

^{Doc 120. 31} a closely connected. Divine life springs from death, sprouts forth from the earth, which harbours the realm of the dead. True wisdom comes from the netherworld, the domain where another orders reigns, than in the world of mortal beings. The goddess of the earth presents her gift of wisdom in the form of an oracle. Gaia was the oracle-goddess in several Greek cities. Before Apollo conquered the temple of Delphi, Gaia was there and gave oracles. In Delphi the Pythia was seated on the tripod above a cleft from which intoxicating vapours arose, which brought her into a state of ecstasy. In this state of mind she spoke the oracles—wisdom, which was prompted to her by the goddess of the earth.²⁾ The oracle-giving function of the goddess of the earth is exemplified in a remarkable way by Themis. Themis is both a goddess and a notion. In the last case themis means: right, law, justice. It seems that the name Themis is connected with verbs which mean: to put down and to raise. This suggests the idea of a mound, a hill, being the residence of the oracle-giving goddess of the earth. As goddess Themis is the daughter of Gaia and thus herself a goddess of the earth. She is related to the Moires, the goddesses of fate. She represents the divine order according to which the Moires carry out their destiny and which is maintained by Zeus together with Dike, the goddess of justice and Nemesis, the goddess of requital. Being the goddess of the oracle of the earth Themis proclaims a wisdom, which nobody can disdain, who wants to survive, to be happy and to live a virtuous life.³⁾

Keeper of
Temple
Secrets
(S. Election)

Actually the goddess of the earth is a formless divine being. Therefore she can hardly be depicted and she is seldom the object of worship. The consequence of her indefinite and manysided nature is that she can take on different shapes and that she appears in different figures. The goddess of the earth is not only present on the fertile fields but also on the high mountains, in the inhospitable wood and on the flower-clad meadow. Greek mythology gives striking proofs thereof.

¹⁾ M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, 1958, p. 250 ff.; Dieterich, op. cit., p. 53.

²⁾ E. Rohde, Psyche, Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen, 1921, II, p. 607.

³⁾ V. Ehrenberg, Die Rechtsidee im frühen Griechentum, 1921.

On the mountains and in the wood this goddess is called "the mistress of the wild animals" and as such Artemis is her representative. At the well the Nymphs stay, i.e. the divine young ladies, who symbolize the new, awakening life. On the meadow Kore (the virgin) plays with her comrades till Hades robs her. Several times the daughters of the earth appear in a triad. Thus the Charites, the bearers of new, festival life and the models of grace. Further, the Hores who take care of the regularity in the course of the seasons. And next the Muses, the patronesses of music and song. But also the Moires, the spinners of the thread of fate. And even the Fumenids, behind whose euphemistic name the Erinyes hide themselves, i.e. the goddesses of revenge, the spirits of the blood of the murdered, which the earth has drunk.¹⁾

It is important and significant that the goddess of the earth changes her shape. This proves that one has not fully understood her nature by calling her the mother, who brings forth. She appears also as the gracious virgin and as the respectable matron. By calling her merely mother one makes her too human. Finally she is the Divine Lady.

The famous Babylonian goddess Ishtar has a few predecessors, who are less known and who yet highly deserve attention. These are a nameless Mother Goddess, Ki and Inanna. They prove that the worship of the Divine Lady in Mesopotamia dates from time immemorial. It cannot be questioned that the oldest inhabitants of the plains of the Euphrates and the Tigris venerated the great Mother Goddess, the representative of the fertility of the earth. In the oldest archeological layers painted clay-figurines of women with snake-heads, who keep babies with or without snake-heads in their arms, have been found. The snake is the typical animal of the earth. The snake-head characterizes the goddess in question as the goddess of the earth. The baby on her arm points to her function as Mother Goddess. Terra-cotta statuettes from a later epoch represent her in the same function, but now in a fully human shape. Moreover elsewhere a great number of the "Venus" statuettes, already described, have been detected.²⁾ All these facts bear a clear testimony to the presence of the cult of the Mother Goddess in prehistoric Mesopotamia.

In the Sumerian myth of creation the earth is called Ki. It is said

¹⁾ G. van der Leeuw, *Griekse Religie* (De Godsdiensten der Wereld, 1956, II) p. 392/3.

²⁾ F. M. Th. de Liagre Böhl, *De Babylonisch-Assyrische Godsdienst* (De Godsdiensten der Wereld, 1956, II) p. 54; James, *The Cult of the Mother Goddess*, p. 23 ff.

Why?
All life comes from the ♀.
A goddess to call it a cult. - the veneration of female aspect of ♀.
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that from the primeval ocean, named Nammu, a mountain arose, which was a union of An, the heaven and Ki, the earth. They became the parents of Enlil, the god of the air and of Enki, the god of the waters and of wisdom. Enlil separated An and Ki. Compared to the lofty, but somewhat passive An the goddess Ki is an energetic and colourful figure. This appears from the names, which she bears. She is alternatively called: Ninmach = the exalted woman, Ninchursag = the lady of the mountain of the world, Nintud = the woman, who brings forth. Being the goddess of the earth she produces all life. From her marriage with Enki Utu, the goddess of vegetation, was born. It is also said that she created man together with Enki.¹⁾

Secondly the goddess Inanna plays an important part in Sumerian mythology. Her name means: the lady of heaven. She appears in the planet Venus, the morning- and the evening-star. Her place in the sky must be understood as a result of the typical Sumerian idea, that there is a correspondence between heaven and earth, i.e. between the revelation of the divine will in the constellations on the one hand and the happenings on earth on the other side. It is surely not by mere accident, that she was identified with the planet Venus. Originally she was a goddess of fertility, apparently the patroness of the (vine) and of the (herds) and the (flocks). She is also connected with the (snake), a feature characteristic of her nature.²⁾ It is not quite clear how the relation between Ki and Inanna must be conceived. Their relation is probably like this: Ki is a somewhat formless primeval force. Inanna makes the impression of being a more pronounced personality, who particularly represents the fertility of the earth. She steps so to say out of her natural substratum and thereby becomes an independent divine figure. This appears from two Sumerian myths, depicting Inanna as a highly attractive beauty, who knows what she likes. The first myth tells, how both Dumuzi, the god of the herds and Enkimdu, the god of agriculture, propose to her. Apparently Dumuzi finally manages to obtain her favour. The second myth describes, how she under many difficulties fetches the divine ordinations, on which culture is founded, from Eridu, the residence of Enki, the god of wisdom. She undertakes this hazardous journey in order to increase the prosperity of Erech, her own city.³⁾

CRITICAL
ST. ANGELO

¹⁾ S. N. Kramer, Sumerian Mythology, 1944, p. 30 ff.; J. B. Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament, 1955, p. 99 ff.

²⁾ S. Langdon, Tammuz and Ishtar, 1914, p. 114; E. Dhorme, Les religions de Babylonie et d'Assyrie (Mana II), p. 67, 89 ff.

³⁾ Kramer, op. cit. pg. 101 ff. 64 ff.

Inanna reveals her true nature in the company of Tammuz. This god is the Lord of all new life, appearing on the field and born in the herd. He is also the god of the new light of the sun, which shines forth each morning and particularly in spring. Together with her partner Inanna celebrates "the holy marriage" which is the source of all life in the universe. Many facts prove that of old this mythical marriage was enacted in Mesopotamia by a series of rites of great dramatic fervour. In order to actualize the myth a holy marriage was celebrated in the temple cult, in which different actors were engaged: either the god and the goddess, or the goddess and king-high priest or the god and the priestess. These rites strike a highly moving tone, when the moment of the death of the god draws near. For Tammuz is a god, who dies and revives. He symbolizes the circular course of divine life which, through death, time and again attains to resurrection. His death aroused deep sorrow, as can be understood from the hymns in which he was lamented. Grief gave way to overflowing gladness, as soon as his resurrection could be celebrated. Apparently people linked their hope for a renewed and immortal life to the vicissitudes of the god. In the holy marriage Inanna is the sister, the bride, or the wife of Tammuz. She can also function as his mother. Moreover she is represented as virgin. She is the Virgin-Mother, i.e. the goddess, who brings forth life spontaneously, out of herself. It is therefore perhaps not too hazardous to suppose, that Tammuz must be regarded as the personification of one aspect of this mighty goddess, i.e. of the dying and reviving life, which wells forth from the mysterious depths of her nature.

It was obviously for the sake of Tammuz that Inanna descended to the netherworld. When the gate-keeper asks her for what reason she wants to visit "the land without return", she replies: in order to get informations about the burial rites of the lord Gugalanda, who is killed. Gugalanda must be a figuration of Tammuz. However, Inanna's behaviour towards Tammuz after her return from the netherworld is rather queer. When Tammuz awaits her, dressed in a stately garment, seated on his throne in all his dignity, she flares up and charges the beings from the netherworld, following her, to drag him with them,

¹ de Liagre Böhl, op. cit., p. 63 ff.; H. Frankfort, Gods and Myths on Sargonid seals, p. 8 ff.

² E. Douglas van Buren, The Sacred Marriage in Early Times in Mesopotamia (Orientalia 13, 1944).

³ A. Falkenstein and W. von Soden, Sumerische und Akkadische Hymnen und Gebete, 1953.

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i.e. to carry him off to the realm of the dead.¹⁾ It is strange that Inanna finally ruins her lover, about whose fate she was so concerned. This behaviour must be explained by her demoniacal nature: on the one hand she is faithful to her lover. On the other side she leaves him and makes him die. She revives him, but she also causes his death. For she is the power which disposes thereof in a sovereign way. This conception is corroborated by the violent reproofs which Gilgamesh flings at Ishtar after he has refused the love which she offered him. He demonstrates by a number of instances that she brings all her lovers into misery.²⁾ And yet neither Gilgamesh would deny that without the favour of Ishtar nobody fares well in the long run.

Compared with Inanna, Ishtar is livelier in her gestures and more free in her appearance. So the tale of her descent to her sister Ereshkigal, the queen of the dead, has more colour and greater dramatic effect than the myth about Inanna's journey to the netherworld.³⁾ At each of the seven gates, leading to the residence of Ereshkigal, Ishtar has to take off part of her clothes and ornaments, till she stands nude before her sister, who infuriated lets loose upon her sixty illnesses, so that she dies. As soon as Ishtar has disappeared from the earth, the life-process stops in the world of men and animals. Ishtar revives, when Ereshkigal concedes that the water of life be sprinkled on her. Thereupon she returns to the upperworld. It is clear that the narrative of Ishtar's descent to the netherworld is a dramatization of the death and the resurrection of the divine life of which this goddess is the patron.

Ishtar possesses a pronounced character. Therein a curious tension is present. Ishtar is both the goddess of love and of war. It is evident that she, who furthers fertility, also is expected to kindle the flame of love. This type of eros surely was not deprived of spiritual quality, for it inspired poets to write beautiful and sensitive love poems, but the sexual instinct expresses itself therein unconcealed. It even has a side which is objectionable to modern ethical and religious value judgment. That is the temple prostitution, performed in the service of Ishtar, i.e. the custom that priestesses and ordinary, honourable women gave themselves for the sake of Ishtar to temple visitors, primarily foreigners, who apparently represented the divine partner of Ishtar. This is no

¹⁾ Kramer, op. cit., p. 86 ff.; Pritchard, op. cit., p. 52 ff.; Langdon, op. cit., p. 85.

²⁾ F. M. Th. de Liagre Böhl, *Het Gilgamesj Epos*, 1951, p. 48 ff.

³⁾ A. Ungnad, *Die Religion der Babylonier und Assyrer*, 1921, p. 142 ff.; Pritchard, op. cit., p. 106 ff.

disguised lasciviousness. Classic authors, e.g. Herodotus, inform us, that temple prostitution was considered to be a sacrifice, a heavy duty. Secondly Ishtar was the goddess of war, especially for the Assyrians. She is called "the lady of the battles", "the brave in the fight, she who does not spare the enemies of Assur". Love and war can according to our value judgment hardly be combined. How to explain the combination of these contradictory functions? This problem is perhaps partly solved, when we realize that Ishtar is androgynous by nature. Thereby no sexual abnormality is meant, but an old mythological idea is expressed, i.e. the conviction, that the deity, who possesses life in its totality, must encompass both the male and the female element. This is again an instance of the religious significance of ancient sexual symbolism. So, besides the veiled virginal Ishtar, a goddess with a beard occurs.¹⁾ Starting from this fact one can understand that, in the opinion of the ancient Babylonians, the relation of love and war consisted in the creative function of both activities. The creative force of love is manifest. Also war had, at least to the taste of the people of antiquity, the same effect, because it was considered as a fight against demoniacal forces and therefore as a victory on death. Ishtar, the goddess of triumphal life, could be the patron of these contrasting functions. No wonder that Ishtar inspired awe. At the same time she was highly beloved, to which hymns and prayers bear witness. Ishtar is frequently invoked, because she takes care of man in his extremity. She is called the merciful mother, who hears prayers and who calms the anger of the gods. She cures the sick and she liberates from suffering.²⁾

It cannot be doubted that Isis belongs to the category of the Divine Lady. Though she is connected with cosmic life, her original substratum is not situated in an aspect of the universe, but in the domain of the regalia. This goes forth from her name and from the emblem which she usually wears on her head. In the Egyptian language she is called *ś.t*, a word that means *seat, throne*. On her head she wears an emblem, which represents a simple high seat with a short straight back and a small footstool. Apparently Isis is the goddess of the sacred seat of the king.³⁾ The throne is a highly important sacral piece of furniture. The king received his dignity by ascending the throne. The throne

¹⁾ Böhl, *op. cit.*, p. 77/8.

²⁾ Falkenstein and von Soden, *op. cit.*; Pritchard, *op. cit.*, p. 383 ff.; Ungnad, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

³⁾ H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 1948, p. 43 ff.

"makes" the king. The throne is so to say his mother. The ancient Egyptians understood this idea not symbolically, but literally. This appears e.g. from a relief representing King Seti I seated on the lap of Isis, who in her turn is sitting on the typical royal seat.¹⁾ Since the first dynasty the Egyptian pharaohs called themselves sons of Isis.²⁾ This expression has several implications. It alludes e.g. to the assistance which Isis gave to her son Horus, so that he was recognized as heir of Osiris and could ascend the throne. What Isis once did for Horus, she thereafter would do for each king. For the king, being offspring of the sun-god, is called Horus. By this title the so called elder Horus is meant, a sky-god, who differs characteristically from Horus, the son of Isis.³⁾ As these two gods already in ancient times were mixed, it is no wonder that Isis, the goddess of the royal seat, acted as mother of the pharaoh, who bears the Horusname.

A typical feature of Isis is her wisdom. The Egyptians called her "great in magic power". That means the same. For, in the opinion of the people of antiquity, true wisdom consists in insight into the secret of life and death. This knowledge is creative; it conjures life up from death. Thus wisdom is identical with having (magic power) Isis possesses this capacity to a high degree, as appears from different myths, the most explicitly from the myth dealing with the death and the resurrection of Osiris. In this famous tale Isis appears at the side of Osiris, her respectable, but somewhat passive husband and compared with Horus, her minor son, as a dynamic figure. Actually she dominates the mythical stage. As soon as she has heard that Seth killed her husband, she displays great activity. A beautiful hymn describes how she wanders in deep sorrow through the country in order to find the murdered one.⁴⁾ When she has found him,—in this version of the myth Osiris is drowned—she takes care of his badly mutilated corpse, assisted by her sister Nephthys and by Anubis, the god of the dead. Naturally she weeps over him. Apparently this lamentation fulfilled such an important function, that it made a significant feature of the myth and it became a separate rite in the cult of Osiris. It is a well-known fact that the vicissitudes of Osiris have been dramatized in a kind of passion-play, in which the Egyptians took part in the hope of sharing in the power of the resurrection of Osiris. In the cult of Osiris

¹⁾ H. Frankfort, Ancient Egyptian Religion, 1948, picture opposite title-page.

²⁾ Pyramidtexts 371, 379, 556, 734, 1154, 1375, 1703.

³⁾ C. J. Bleeker, Die Geburt eines Gottes, 1956, p. 15 ff.

⁴⁾ E. Lehmann and H. Haas, Textbuch der Religionsgeschichte, 1922, p. 256/7.

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the ritual wailing formed a separate element.¹⁾ Already the pyramid-texts say: "it is his sister, the lady of Buto, who laments over him". In the Book of the Dead it is spoken of "the night, in which Isis lay down, to wake, weeping over her brother". Two papyri, entitled "The songs of Isis and Nephthys" and "The lamentations of Isis and Nephthys" contain the litanies of the cult of Osiris. The lamentations are also an important element in the liturgy of the service of the hours of day and night in the cult of Osiris. This liturgy provides indications for the rites to be performed at the twenty-four hours of day and night.²⁾ Therein the wailing of Osiris is a recurring factor. These texts had to be recited by two official wailing women, who imitate Isis and Nephthys. It is important to note that both in myth and in rite the lamentations were not only an expression of sorrow and dismay, but also had the purpose of reviving Osiris. The lamentations have the power of the magical word. Therefore the wailing women exclaim: "rise up, Osiris, thou art risen, thou must not die, thine soul will live". The chorus runs: "Thou triumphest, Osiris, Lord of the Westerners (the dead)". Isis, wise and great in magical power knew how to raise Osiris. Aided by Nephthys she purified the corpse of Osiris, re-integrated it and by her wings—both she and her sister are winged in this instance—wave to her brother the fresh air, which helped to revive him. Moreover she provided him with offspring. She erected his phallus and made herself pregnant of Horus, the future revenger of his father.

*The wife of Osiris is Isis
in the great Temple of Abydos*

*By posterity
MAN & GOD LOVES
FOREVER - D.C. 1922*

The Egyptians did not take the trouble of explaining the meaning of the death and the resurrection of Osiris, because it was evident to them. Fortunately some classic authors shed their light on this question. They connect the death of Osiris with the harvest and with the decline of the Nile-water.³⁾ It is beyond the scope of this article to tackle the intricate problem of the nature of Osiris. However it can be stated without contradiction, that his vicissitudes reflect the death and the resurrection of cosmic life.

Isis also must have been involved in this process. This means that she too is related to the forces, regulating the course of the seasons. Gradually this side of her nature becomes more visible. In later times

she is his wife.

¹⁾ See chapter on "Isis and Nephthys as wailing women".

²⁾ H. Junker, Die Stundenwachen in den Osirismysterien nach den Inschriften von Dendera, Edfu und Philae (Denkschriften d. Kais. Ak. der Wiss. in Wien, phil.-hist. Klasse, Band LIV, 1910).

³⁾ See chapter on "Isis and Nephthys as wailing women".

her figure grows in importance. She becomes a merciful goddess of nature. She is identified with Thermouthis, the goddess of the harvest and with Hathor, the great Mother Goddess of Dendera, the patron of fertility and of love. She was also related to Sothis, the goddess of the star Sirius. Moreover she was regarded as the eye of Re, the sun-god. In the last phase of the Egyptian culture, when the communications with the neighbouring countries started to become frequent, she became popular in the countries round the Mediterranean Sea. Already in the fourth century B.C. she possessed a sanctuary in Piraeus, near Athens.¹⁾ Thereupon her cult spread over the Greek islands. Next she conquered the Western part of the Roman empire.²⁾ Being the goddess of the port of Alexandria, she became the patron of the sailors, in whose honour yearly a small boat was launched in order to open the season of the sea voyages and to make them successful. Her images gradually show Greek style.³⁾ She was identified with similar goddesses, such as Demeter and Kybele. Meanwhile she grew out into a goddess of universal character. In the famous book of Apuleius on "The Golden Ass" she declares: "I am she that is the natural mother of all things, mistress and governess of all the elements, the initial progeny of worlds, chief of the powers divine, queen of all that are in hell, the principal of them that dwell in heaven... my name, my divinity is adored throughout all the world in divers manners, in variable customs and by many names".⁴⁾

This book of Apuleius also provides valuable information about the mysteries which from the fourth century before Christ were celebrated in the honour of Isis.⁵⁾ It was said that Isis herself founded these mysteries. In a hymn she declares: "I taught the mysteries to men".⁶⁾ Plutarch is able to tell what were her motives in founding the mysteries. She did not wish, so he says, that the struggle, which she passed through as wife of Osiris, and the acts of courage and wisdom which she performed as the adversary of Seth, should fall into oblivion. Therefore she wove allusions to her sufferings into the secret rites of initiation, in order to comfort men and women, who found themselves

¹⁾ A. Erman, *Die Religion der Ägypter*, 1934, chapter 22.

²⁾ Roscher, *Ausführliches Lexikon*, II:1:359-457.

³⁾ H. Haas, *Bilderatlas zur Religionsgeschichte* 9-11, *Die Religionen in der Umwelt des Urchristentums*, 23 ff.

⁴⁾ Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, Book XI:5.

⁵⁾ J. Leipoldt, *Die Mysterien. E: Isis* (*Handbuch der Religionswissenschaft* 1948).

⁶⁾ W. Peek, *Hymnus in Isim Andrius*.

in the same misfortune and to teach them piety.¹⁾ However one surely is not far astray in supposing, that Timotheus from Eleusis, who together with the Egyptian Manetho gave advice to King Ptolemaeus I concerning the cult of Sarapis, introduced the sociological form of the mysteries, which he knew from his birthplace, into Egypt. In the ancient Egyptian religion the notion "mystery" is not unknown. It indicates a religious truth, too holy to be expressed by word or picture, but it does not mean a closed society to which one should be initiated in order to understand the esoteric truth.

As mystery cult in this Hellenistic sense the worship of Isis met with great success in the Roman Empire, like the cult of Mithras and of Kybele. We are quite well informed about the daily service and about some festivals, celebrated in honour of Isis. Naturally our knowledge of what happened during the mystery cult is poor. So much the greater is the value of the tale of Apuleius in his "Golden Ass", relating the initiation of Lucius into these mysteries. Lucius alludes to what he underwent during the initiation in the famous words: "I approached near unto hell, even to the gates of Proserpine, and after that I was ravished throughout all the elements, I returned to my proper place: about midnight I saw the sun rightly shine, I saw likewise the gods celestial and the gods infernal, before whom I presented myself and worshipped them".²⁾ All attempts to reconstruct the course of the drama of initiation from these mysterious words are likely to be in vain. However the significance of these ceremonies is clear. The author says that the initiation was "like a voluntary death and like salvation obtained by grace". By the mercy of the goddess the initiated was "in a certain sense reborn and brought back on a road of a new blessing". It is related that the initiation was preceded by long preparations. Lucius had to wait till Isis was willing to admit him. There is no reason to question the seriousness of the initiated. Isis made high demands and admitted to the initiation only those, whom she called. For, Isis was the Divine Lady. She knew how to awaken affection, but she also asked strict obedience.

On the Iranian plateau also a mother-goddess of the wellknown archaic type was venerated in prehistoric times. Female figurines have been found, apparently representing the goddess of fertility.³⁾ This

¹⁾ Caput 27, 35.

²⁾ Book XI:23.

³⁾ R. Ghirshmann, Iran, 1954, p. 102 ff.; James, The Cult of the Mother Goddess, p. 93/4.

time formed part of a triad together with Ahura Mazda and Mithra. There have even been made images of Anāhitā and temples were erected in her honour. This was an unheard novelty, because the ancient Persians did not have images of gods nor temples. The style of the worship of Anāhitā was at that time presumably influenced by the luxurious cult of the nations of Mesopotamia. S. Wikander has tried to prove in a deeply penetrating argument that a fire-cult was connected with Anāhitā, primarily in the Western regions.¹⁾ However it is dubious whether the temples, which are considered to be centres of fire-cult, can be ascribed to Anāhitā.²⁾ Also outside the borders of Persia, namely in the countries of Asia Minor and in Armenia, Anāhitā became popular in later days.³⁾ She is then called Anaītis. In these regions her cult is accompanied by temple-prostitution, an institution apparently introduced in imitation of the cult of the Babylonian Ishtar, with whom she actually has some affinity. However the Avesta never mentions a lover, who accompanies her or sacral prostitution performed in her service. In the Avestan religion she is the typical virgin.

A clear and nice description of Anāhitā is to be found in the fifth Yasht. This hymn praises her as a beautiful young lady, with a handsome and tall stature, high-born and of noble appearance. Her feet are clad in shining shoes with golden laces. She wears a dress of beaver-fur and a cloak richly embroidered with golden thread. Jewels embellish her beautiful neck. A golden head-gear with a hundred stars crowns her hair. She drives a carriage with four stallions created for her by Ahura Mazda; these horses are the wind, the rain, the snow and the hail. Her relation to Ahura Mazda is double-sided. On the one hand it is said that she originated from him. On the other side Ahura Mazda worships her, i.e. he celebrates her in order to win her assistance. Besides Ahura Mazda a number of famous heroes have glorified her and have sacrificed to her, praying for success in the adventure which they were going to undertake. Anāhitā shows herself kindly disposed to them. But she refused her help to the representatives of falsehood and wickedness. This means that Anāhitā took a clear position in the cosmic and historical struggle between truth and falsehood—the typical doctrine of the religion of Zarathustra. On the other hand it is curious that the purity, which she advocated, was partly of a ritual nature. From her cult the sick, the blind, the deaf, the dwarfs

¹⁾ S. Wikander, *Feuerpriester in Kleinasien und Iran*, 1946.

²⁾ J. H. Kramers, *Iranian Fire-Worship* (*Analecta Orientalia* I).

³⁾ Chantepie de la Saussaye, *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte*, 1925, II, p. 228.

and the people with eczema were excluded. A striking proof that purity on this religious level is a complicated notion. In conclusion one can say that Anāhitā is the goddess of fertility, of prosperity, of the "kingly glory" and of the victory in the struggle for the truth. It can duly be stated that she explicitly was the Divine Lady.

Athena is a typical Greek goddess. For good reasons she acted as patroness of Athens, the principal Greek city, the focus of the old Hellenic culture. She is also Greek when taking the lead of the purely Greek attempt of harmoniously binding together the creative forces. The Greeks loved the pure line, self-control and keeping measure. Apollo was the divine patron of that ideal. But in ancient Greece also Dionysos, the god of enthusiasm and of inebriation was venerated. The greatness of the ancient Greeks consisted in their endeavour to find the right equilibrium between stylish form and creative life. Therein Athena was the right advisor: aristocratic, utterly self-controlled, inwardly highly moved, endowed with the discernment that easily detects and can show the way of life.

Yet Athena is of pre-Greek origin. This is proved by the non-Greek ending of the name. There are good reasons to assume that she reaches back to a Minoan-Mycenaean goddess.¹⁾ Behind the Greek Athena a goddess is hidden, who protected the castle of the Minoan and Mycenaean princes. Thus a palace-goddess, often conceived of as a serpent, preserving the house from calamity.²⁾ The direct prototype of Athena is likely to be found on a lime-stone slab, discovered in Mycenae, showing a female figure behind a big shield.³⁾ This figure already displays the martial character typical of Athena. However it is dubious whether the pre-Greek goddess possessed a pronounced soldierly character.⁴⁾ At any rate the Greeks had at an early date accentuated the warlike features in Athena, without erasing the traces of her origin from an older layer of religious thought. To the Minoan-Mycenaean background point, beside the serpent twisted behind her shield, also the owl, her companion and the olive-tree, her gift to Athens. It seems that the owl was not connected with Athena from the beginning. In the *Odyssey* the goddess appears as a sea-gull, sometimes as a swallow. Such appearances of the deity in the form of a bird were

¹⁾ James, *The Cult of the Mother Goddess*, p. 145 ff.

²⁾ M. P. Nilson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion II:I*, 1955, p. 346, 348.

³⁾ Nilson, *Geschichte*, Taf. 24:1.

⁴⁾ W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods*, 1950, p. 106.

wellknown on ancient Crete. Also the olive-tree points to Crete, i.e. to the local tree-cult.¹⁾)

The martial character of Athena clearly appears from the tale of her birth, described in the twenty eighth Homeric hymn. This song depicts how Athena in full armour jumped forth from the head of her father Zeus. The sight of this brilliant figure filled the immortal gods with awe. Olympus trembled, the earth groaned, the sea foamed. But Zeus rejoiced. For Athena is the very daughter of her father. Another myth tells that Hephaestus cleft the skull of Zeus in order to bring about the birth of Athena. This unusual birth has raised the question, whether this myth perhaps means that the goddess was born from the top of the holy mountain. This conception is supported by the scholars who think that Athena originally was the divine mother of the mountain, more specially of the Athenian acropolis.²⁾) However it is dubious whether this can be proved. In the nature of Athena there are hardly any points of connection with a holy mountain. The myths about her birth have another tendency. They express on the one hand the idea that Athena was the personification of the far-seeing wisdom characteristic for the father of the Greek gods, and they stress on the other hand her martial character.

In regard to the last point, there is a marked difference between Ares and Athena. Ares the god of war par excellence merely displays blind, furious aggression. Athena is the goddess of strategy. The Iliad tells how the two gods frequently came into collision. Their attitude towards war is totally different. Athena never wages war blindly. She is versed in strategy. She knows how to use stratagem. She hits on the ingenious idea by which the menacing defeat changes to a victory. Pheidias not without good reason placed the figure of Nike, the goddess of triumph, on her extended right hand.

This strategy can take the form of prudence and of statecraft, when it is not the question of winning the victory by weapons but of solving intricate problems by tact. Athena is the counsellor of men, of warriors, and of statesmen. She presents her assistance to elected heroes, like Heracles, Jason, Diomedes, and Achilles. Sometimes this protection passes from father to son, as in the case of Odysseus and Telemachus. The Iliad and the Odyssey give many striking examples of the strategic abilities which Athena displays in war and peace.

¹⁾ Nilsson, *Geschichte*, p. 349.

²⁾ K. Kerényi, *Die Jungfrau und Mutter der griechischen Religion, eine Studie über Pallas Athene*, 1952, p. 117/8 ff.; Guthrie, *Op. cit.*, p. 106 ff.

The full name of the goddess is Pallas Athena. Pallas means girl. This name indicates the virginal nature of the goddess. She is the parthenos. The fifth Homeric hymn, in celebrating the might of Aphrodite, mentions three goddesses whose heart is irresponsive to the flame of love. The first of this triad is Athena. She chose the side of men, not as mistress, but as counsellor in the manly business of war and of government of the city. Besides she is interested in artistic handicrafts, especially in the art of weaving. So she became the patroness of workmen, of artists, and of physicians. Though she is the typical virgin, she is also named mother. In Elis the women called her after this manner.¹⁾ There is a queer myth, telling that she had been forced to contract a marriage with Hephaestus, but that she withdrew from motherhood. Gaia the goddess of the earth, is supposed to have brought forth her child, namely Erechtheus.²⁾ Athena was entrusted with the education of this young hero. Athena is the virgin-mother, i.e. the goddess, who represents divine life, arising spontaneously out of itself. Therefore it is not astonishing that she acted as patroness of marriage.³⁾

Neither is it amazing that she shows some features revealing her chthonic nature. First of all the serpent, behind her shield, gives evidence of her relation to the earth, from which all life originates, also the place, where the dead are dwelling. The same holds true of the head of Medusa, adorning her shield. Medusa is the genius of the netherworld, whom nobody can behold without stiffening, i.e. without dying. The owl points in the same direction. For it is the bird of death. When keeping these facts in mind, one understands what the Athenians meant, when they called her Korè.⁴⁾ This word reminds of the typical bearer of the name, i.e. Persephone, the daughter of Demeter. She yearly celebrated her "anodos". Korè who returns from the netherworld, is the symbol of the divine life arising periodically. Also Athena was called Korè, with a similar meaning. An old image of Athena bears a pomegranate in one hand.⁵⁾ This stresses again her relation to fertility. Therefore in Athens two festivals were celebrated on the occasion of the anodos of Korè, namely Athena. Moreover with the cult of Athena some rites were connected, making the impression of being mystery acts⁶⁾ At the beginning of the Panathenaea two virgins, being in the service

¹⁾ Nilsson, Geschichte, p. 442/3.

²⁾ K. Kerényi, Die Mythologie der Griechen, p. 121.

³⁾ Kerényi, Die Jungfrau, p. 20; Die Mythologie, p. 126.

⁴⁾ Kerényi, Mythologie, p. 125.

⁵⁾ Kerényi, Mythologie, p. 125.

⁶⁾ Kerényi, Die Jungfrau, p. 41.

of Athena, had to bear some objects, of which they did not know the nature, at night to a subterranean corridor on a holy site. There they deposited their burden and they received other objects without knowing what they were. Thereafter they were relieved from the office of Athena.¹⁾ Presumably the load of these girls contained symbols of the divine life of the earth. This rite proves, that the Greeks were conscious of the mysterious nature of Athena: she possessed insight into and control over inscrutable life.

Athena was famous for her wisdom. Thereby the ancient Greeks did not mean scientific research or philosophy, inquiry in the modern sense of the word, but insight into the mysterious course of life. It was wisdom, capable of solving at one sweep an oppressive problem and giving good advice. Athena possessed this vision. The penetrating light of this insight flashed from her eyes. Her "serene blue" eyes made, as the Iliad tells, Achilles recover his senses, when he in his anger wanted to assault Agamemnon. Athena personifies the intuitive knowledge of the right way which man should take. Athena is a dynamic figure: wise and energetic.

Freya is an interesting, yet somewhat pale divine figure. In the German pantheon the gods push so strongly into the front, that the goddesses are moved into the shadows. They can sometimes hardly be distinguished from each other. So Freya is highly akin to Frigg, the consort of Odin.²⁾ However the scanty information enables us to draw a picture of Freya, proving that she once was a mighty goddess. Freya can undoubtedly be traced back to a type of mother-goddess, whom the people of antiquity worshipped.³⁾ Already in the bronze-age there are traces of the cult of a goddess of fertility.⁴⁾ Moreover the ancient Germans conceived of the earth as a life producing mother. The female divine element could also be regarded as a collectivity. Thus in the Roman age the Matres or Matronae are mentioned. They are doubtless older. The centre of the cult of "the Mothers" was situated on the left border of the Rhine, to the West of Cologne and Bonn. They bear German names, testifying to their autochthonic character. Frequently they appear in a triad. The Matres were invoked in the hope that they

¹⁾ M. P. Nilsson, *Die Religion der Griechen* (Religionsgeschichtliches Lesebuch 4), p. 16.

²⁾ J. de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 1957, II par., 531 ff.

³⁾ R. Derolez, *De godsdienst der Germanen*, 1959, p. 159.

⁴⁾ Derolez, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

would grant prosperity or shield people from calamity.¹⁾ There is no direct relation between the Matres and Freya. However the cult of the Matres proves, that there must have been room in the German religion for the worship of goddesses. Their character makes it at the same time clear that Freya would be wronged, if she were merely taken for an ordinary goddess of fertility.

Freya was only worshipped by the North Germans. With the South Germans a goddess is to be found whom Tacitus calls Nerthus. From the information in his "Germania" and from other data it appears, that she was not only a goddess of fertility, but also the giver of prosperity and grace, whilst she at the same time seems to have been connected with the realm of the dead. The name Nerthus directly corresponds to that of the wellknown god Njord. Was Tacitus mistaken in the sex of this deity? Or was Nerthus-Njord originally a hermaphrodite god, from whom later on a male and a female divine element branched out? However this may be, it is important to state that the South Germans worshipped a goddess, who was analogous to Freya.

Freya was the daughter of Njord. Her brother was called Freyr. He was a typical god of fertility. His name means: Lord. Accordingly Freya is the mistress, i.e. the Divine Lady.²⁾ Though Njord, Freyr and Freya belonged to the Wanæs, they kept company with the Ases. A myth tells that they, during a treaty arranging the dispute between the two groups of gods, had been exchanged as hostages for Hoenir and Mimir. Because Freya was accepted in the company of the Ases, it may be assumed that she had other functions than the furtherance of fertility. This is actually the fact. It appears from the description of Freya, offered by the Islandic author and scholar Snorri Sturluson. He calls Freya the most famous of the goddesses. In heaven she possesses an abode, called Folkwang (plain of the soldiers), where she assembles the heroes whom she is allowed to choose on the battle-field. The other half falls to the share of Odin. Freya travels in a carriage, to which cats are joked. She is kindly disposed to men who invoke her. She takes delight in love-poetry and it is advisable to pray to her in case of love.

In consequence of her descent from the generation of the Wanæs, Freya is a goddess, who furthers growth. A series of mythological data point to this activity of the goddess. The "Song of Hyndla" records that she rides on a wild boar, the animal devoted to the gods of fecundity. Perhaps the cats have the same significance. It is fully in

¹⁾ Derolez, op. cit., p. 150 ff.

²⁾ Derolez, op. cit., p. 126, 159.

accord with her character, that women in travail hope for her assistance. Perhaps her typical ornament, the *Brisingamen*, is also related to this function. It is supposed to be a birth-amulet, borne in a girdle.¹⁾ As her husband *Odr* is mentioned. He is a badly known god, who seems to have affinity to *Odin*. The myth narrates that after he had disappeared, *Freya* wandered over the earth weeping golden tears. One gets the impression that this is a fragment of a myth about a dying and rising god of fertility. There are other indications that *Freya* herself went through a time of disappearance—probably periodical—which is characteristic for the gods of fertility. In the “prophecy of the *Volva*” allusion is made to the fact that *Freya* was handed over to the giants. When *Freya* forcibly stays with the giants fertility is at its zero-point. Apparently this idea also lies at the background of the “*Song of Thrym*” This song tells in an amusing way how *Thor*, clad as a bride, pretends to be *Freya* in order to get back his hammer, stolen by *Thrym*. For *Thrym* declared himself ready to give back the hammer on the condition that *Freya* would become his wife, a proposal which the goddess rejected with indignation. The gist of the song is seemingly the forced temporary stay of the goddess of fertility or her representative with the giants. *Freya* is not only the personification of fecundity in nature and mankind. She is also the giver of wealth and of prosperity. To this function points e.g. her surname “*Gefn*”, derived from a verb, which means to give.²⁾

Secondly *Snorri Sturluson* characterizes *Freya* as goddess of love. Like all such goddesses she was extremely good looking. Her beauty made her a desirable bride. Giants also fell under her fascination. The myths tell how these amorous gods were deceived.³⁾ A goddess who so strongly rouses desire can hardly escape the suspicion that she is somewhat dissipated. It is true that the cult of goddesses of fertility and love is generally connected with a certain sexual dissoluteness. Actually *Freya* is now and then accused of dissolute behaviour.⁴⁾ However these calumnies come from the evil tongues of her enemies, such as *Loki*. The myths contain no valid justification for such accusations.

Thanks to *Snorri Sturluson* we also know that *Freya* introduced

¹⁾ de Vries, op. cit., par. 536.

²⁾ Derolez, op. cit., p. 161.

³⁾ F. R. Schröder, *Die Germanen* (Religionsgeschichtliches Lesebuch 12), p. 47/8.

⁴⁾ Schröder, op. cit., p. 72; G. Dumézil, *Les dieux des Germains*, 1959, p. 119.

magic art, wellknown to the Wanæs, into the world of the Ases. The "Song of Thrym" tells how Loki borrowed the featherskirt from Freya in order to fly from the castle of the Ases to the domain of the giants. For the magic art of Freya the word "seidr" is used. By a series of informations it is known that practising seidr means singing a magic chant for the purpose of exerting magical coercion on people or of acquiring higher wisdom.¹⁾ Apparently Freya practised this type of magic.

In the Edda of Snorri Sturluson and in the "Song of Grimnir" Freya acts as a goddess who determines the destiny of people. In both songs it is said, that she chooses half of the warriors and Odin the other half. Thus she has affinity with the Nornes, the goddesses of fate. Her activity as the disposer of the hour of death is to be understood in the light of the belief in fate, so typical of German religion. The ancient German was convinced that he must go under as soon as his "luck" had left him. It is not surprising that Freya also was considered to be the goddess of the dead. In Folkwang she assembled her chosen heroes. But even women nourished the hope of dwelling with her after death. This appears from the saga of Egil Skallagrimsson, in which his daughter Torgerd expresses the expectation that she will soon be with Freya.²⁾

Kybele originally was a Phrygian goddess of fertility, at home on the tops of the mountains and in the wild woods, connected with wells and rivers which further fertility, moreover the mistress of the wild animals, among which the lion was her favoured mount. She clearly belongs to the category of the mother-goddesses, who represent procreative life. She has affinity with a number of goddesses, who of old were worshipped in Asia Minor and in Syria, like Astarte, Asherah and Anath.³⁾ Astarte and Asherah are the Syrian counterparts to the Babylonian Ishtar. Anath plays an important part in a series of myths about Baal, highly important texts, which have been discovered at Ras Shamra, the ancient Ugarit.⁴⁾ These myths symbolize the death and the renewal of vegetation. Anath is the energetic, martial partner of Baal. On receiving the news that Baal was murdered, she flew into a furious passion and she took vengeance on Moth, the murderer, in a gruesome way.

These goddesses indicate the religious level, where Kybele is to be

¹⁾ Dag Strömbäck, *Sejd, Textstudier i nordisk religionshistoria*, p. 111.

²⁾ *Isländska Sagor*, översatta av Hj. Alving, *Egil Skallagrimssons Saga*, p. 216.

³⁾ W. F. Albright, *Archeology and the Religion of Israel*, 1946, p. 71 ff.

⁴⁾ Th. H. Gaster, *Thespis, Myth and Drama in Ancient Near East*, 1950.

located. Notwithstanding striking likenesses, they each possess an individual character. So the question arises: which features are characteristic for Kybele? In the first place she is not subordinate to a male principal deity, as in the case of the Syrian goddesses. Apparently she is herself the highest deity in myth and cult. Secondly she shows a passionate temper. Her cult had an orgiastic nature. Her followers wandered through the mountains to the tones of the flute, under the roll of the drum, the rattling of the castanets and the roaring of the cymbals, whilst they exclaimed: Ma, Ammat, Nana, thereby using names of the goddess, sounding like the stammering words by which the child calls for its mother.¹⁾ The exstasy, roused by Kybele, involuntarily reminds one of the holy madness which now and then took hold of the adherents of Dionysos. It seems that this conformity is based on a historic event. In all probability Dionysos is from Thracian origin. From Thrace also the Phrygians originated. Undoubtedly they took with them from their native country a type of cult, which could ignite the human heart into violent passions. Moreover the climate of Phrygia obviously stimulated the sudden explosions of religious emotions. The contrast between the long, raw winter and the luxury of the rapidly flowering vegetation, produced by the spring rains and thereupon scorched by the summer heat, furthered the outbursts of religious feeling.²⁾ This frenzy led to an action abhorred by all outsiders, primarily by the selfcontrolled Romans, who in 204 B.C. introduced Kybele, the Magna Mater from Pessinus, into Rome. In their exaltation those people, who wanted to dedicate themselves fully to the service of Kybele, castrated themselves. They sacrificed their masculine organ to the goddess. They performed this sacral self-mutilation after the example of Attis. In the third place it is characteristic of Kybele, that she is accompanied by a partner, called Attis, a god who dies and revives, thereby alternatively rousing deep sorrow and excessive joy.

The myth of Attis in its wellknown form clearly shows signs of being influenced by Greek mythology. Apparently an archaic myth has been adapted to the taste of the civilized people of that age. The myth exists in two versions.³⁾ According to one conception Attis was

¹⁾ E. Rohde, *Psyche*, 1921, II, p. ff.

²⁾ F. Cumont, *Die orientalischen Religionen im römischen Heidentum*, 1914, p. 58 ff.

³⁾ Pausanias 7, 17; Arnobius, *Adversus nationes* 515; J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* IV.

a young shepherd, of rare beauty, of whom Kybele was enamoured. She made her lover promise, that he should remain chaste. However Attis broke this promise, because he fell in love with a nymph. In her anger Kybele killed the nymph. Deeply afflicted by the loss of his beloved Attis emasculated himself under a pine-tree and died. His death plunged Kybele into bottomless sorrow. She wandered desperate through the mountains, making them echo with her lamentations. However Attis revived. The reunited gods made thereupon their triumphal entry, an event which often has been pictured. The second version shows a still stronger Greek adaptation and at the same time the influence of the myth of Adonis.¹⁾ The interest which Kybele took in Attis raised the jealousy of Zeus, her legal husband. Zeus made a boar attack Attis, so that he died. It is also told how Attis by his death changed into a pine-tree. This information is important, because Attis both in myth and cult is nearly related to the pine-tree, which is evergreen.

Behind the myth in its Hellenistic shape there is an older mythological tale to be found, connected with Pessinus, the original centre of the worship of Kybele. Therein a monster appears, called Agdistis, born from the marriage between the Magna Mater and the god of heaven. Indirectly Agdistis impregnates Nana, who thereby becomes the mother of Attis. In the course of certain events, analogous to those told in the Hellenistic myth, Attis is forced to commit castration. But he keeps his creative force.²⁾ Agdistis makes the impression of being a double of Attis and Nana is another name for the Magna Mater. This means that one is here confronted with a specimen of the sexual symbolism by which the people of antiquity tried to express the nature of the deity. The archaic myth of Pessinus actually tells this: Attis is his own father and Kybele is the virgin-mother. Both mythological expressions are meant to indicate the mysterious nature of a deity, who exists and lives in, by and out of himself. Perhaps this peculiar myth has still another significance. There are indications that Kybele originally was conceived of as a hermaphroditic being.³⁾ This mythological idea does not represent a sexual abnormality, but it is a symbol of divine life, in the sense that the deity, being a totality, according to this archaic conception can best be indicated by the combination of the male and

¹⁾ W. W. Grafen Baudissin, *Adonis und Esmun*, 1911, p. 156 ff.

²⁾ K. Kerényi, *Die Mythologie der Griechen*, 1951, p. 88 ff.; Frazer, *Golden Bough* IV.

³⁾ J. Halley des Fontaines, *La notion d'androgynie*, 1938.

the female element. It could even be that the figure of Attis came about by segregation of the male element from the originally bisexual Kybele. If this is true new light would be shed on the function of Attis. His vicissitudes expressly dramatize the dynamics of divine life, of which Kybele is the personification.

Frazer strongly advocated the idea that Attis has affinity with Adonis, Osiris and Tammuz. Actually there is a striking likeness between these gods. Yet they each show their typical features. It is worth while to pay attention to this point. As for Attis his characteristics are best understood by comparison with Adonis. The cult of Adonis strikes a minor key. The accent lies on the mourning of his death. Adonis represents the vegetation which dies under the scorching summer heat. On the contrary Attis is a god of spring, who is dead during winter and whose resurrection occurs in springtime. All spring festivals strike a cheerful tone. The Attis festival was characterized by such a strong elation that the joy easily overruled the lamentations of the death of the god.¹⁾

In Rome Attis retreats into the background. The Romans introduced the Magna Mater into their pantheon during the precarious struggle with Hannibal, after having consulted the Sibylline books. They soon discovered to their alarm how orgiastic the cult of Kybele was. Therefore they took measures to moderate this impetuosity. They disliked Attis. He was more or less silenced. However gradually the cult of Kybele was generally accepted in a shape adapted to Roman taste. Thus Kybele, an unknown Phrygian goddess, making her entry in Rome by fortune, was placed into the light of history. This circumstance hampers research into her true nature. For the most reliable informations date from later times, namely from the age of the emperors. In that period the cult of Kybele had already been remodelled after the Greek patron of the mystery religion. This means that a twofold transposition of the image of Kybele and of her cult has taken place, namely firstly the mutation of the original Phrygian goddess into a Kybele in Hellenistic style and secondly the adaptation of the last figure to Roman religious ideals. However, it may be assumed that Kybele has not lost her very nature, notwithstanding these changes of costume.

When the cult of Kybele arrived in Rome, it possessed already the sociological form of the mystery religion. There are indications, that some Hellenistic theologians had taken a great interest in the Magna

¹⁾ Baudissin, op. cit., p. 370, 384, 508, 525.

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Mater of Pessinus. One of them was Timotheus from Eleusis, who played an important part in the creation of the cult and the mysteries of Sarapis and Isis. Probably this expert gave his advice in regard to the organisation of the mysteries of Kybele. It is evident that we are badly informed about the celebration of these mysteries. Only a few formulae have been preserved, probably pointing to a symbolic marriage of the initiated with the goddess and to a sacral meal.¹⁾ The public ceremonies are better known. There are descriptions of a baptismal of blood, the "taurobolium", by which the baptised were "reborn in eternity". By the festival cycle of emperor Claudius we are informed about a spring festival, apparently dramatizing the death and the resurrection of Attis.²⁾

All these facts teach us that Kybele was a remarkable goddess. Her oldest image was the black stone of Pessinus. This stone was for the adherents of Kybele the incarnation of the strong, everlasting divine life. Kybele was the patron of the unrestrained, exploding forces of nature and of the creative energy of eros. She brought her followers into a state of ecstasy. Such a rapture can take its course in two directions. It is well known, that the cult of the Mother Goddess often urged people to abandon themselves to erotic joy. The worship of Kybele moved the adherents into another direction. In her service people sacrificed their sexuality in order to be liberated from tyrannic passions. This must have been the motive of the self castration. Gradually the cult of Kybele was spiritualized. The accent was put on ethical purification and spiritual renewal. However, Kybele would never have won the popularity which she actually possessed, if she from the beginning had not been able to touch the deepest motives of the human heart. These are the longing for liberation from the fetters of human existence and the strong desire for freedom of the spirit.

¹⁾ A. Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie*, 1910.

²⁾ H. Graillet, *Le culte de Cybèle, mère des dieux, à Rome et dans l'empire romain*, 1912.