

MYTHS, CULTS AND LIVESTOCK BREEDING

That religion has a geographic dimension has long been recognized. Men like Alexander von Humboldt, C. Ritter, F. von Richthofen, F. Ratzel, V. de la Blache, and de Martonne repeatedly pointed to the interaction of landscape and religion. It must be admitted that in many cases the geography of religion became a study in the influence of environment upon religious conceptions, essentially of concern to the student of religion rather than to the geographer. On the whole, however, the geography of religion has concerned itself with the way in which religious conceptions work so as to modify the landscape, either directly or indirectly.

During the last fifty years relevant studies, not all of them by geographers, have tended to fall into four groups. There have been studies of the effect of religion upon specifically delimited cultural landscapes or upon the greatly variegated mosaic of regions affected by a single religion. Or there have been studies organized not in terms of specific landscapes but of religious structures, their location, sites, orientations, design, stylistic relationships, distribution, etc. Other studies have been properly demographic, dealing with the distribution of religious groups, such studies, of course, providing an indispensable preparatory

tool for the study of the geography of religion.¹ Finally there have been a few theoretical explorations seeking to define the concerns and the scope of the geography of religion, notably by G. Le Bras, P. Fickler and H. Hahn. An attempt, not very successful, to systematize types of religious landscape phenomena, was made by P. Deffontaines.

The province of the geography of religion is properly to study those landscape or distribution phenomena which cannot be explained adequately without reference to pressure of religious belief. In some cases the religious impact has shaped an entire cultural landscape. The pilgrimage cities of many European Catholic countries, the holy cities of Israel and Jordan, of Pakistan/India, of Tibet and of Japan all grew up around shrines, sanctuaries and holy sites. Sometimes the religious influence has had more limited effects—a certain sacred forest has remained in a denuded region, certain areas have been left uncultivated, certain rivers, lakes or mountains have been shunned, while the holy attributes of others have attracted dense settlement. The religious influence, moreover, may be crucial without being in any sense obvious. The towns that have grown up along routes to pilgrimage centers are essentially the product of religious forces. Religious movements of population, whether established pilgrim flows or extraordinary population movements such as the Crusades or the enforced migration of Europe's Jewish population, have had enormous impact in bringing about cultural interchanges of far-reaching import. Transmission of technology, plants, animals, and settlement forms have all come in the wake of such religious movements. Sometimes migrations, occurring for whatever reason, have led to transmission of plants and animals which the migrants carry with them because of their religious significance. In a previous study the author has shown how the citron was transferred from a tropical to a summer-dry environment and how the varied orchard landscapes of the European Mediterranean can ultimately be explained with re-

¹ Le Bras, G., "La Géographie Religieuse," *Annales d'Histoire Sociale*, (1945), 87-112; Fickler, P., "Grundfragen der Religionsgeographie," *Erdkunde*, 1:4-6, (December 1947), 121-144; Hahn, H., "Konfession und Sozialstruktur," *Erdkunde*, 12:4, (December 1958); Isaac, E., "Religion, Landscape and Space," *Landscape*, 9:2, (Winter '59-'60), 14-18.

ference to the migration of Jews from Palestine.² The purpose of this paper is to show a similar instance of the obscure but nonetheless significant workings of religious forces in bringing cattle to Europe and Africa—as indeed in originally bringing them into the domestic state.

Cattle, perhaps the first herd animal to enter into the domestic state, present a special problem in the study of domestication, for unlike the ancestral sheep and goat, their ancestor, the wild urus of Eurasia and North Africa, was a powerful and intractable animal. A number of views have been advanced on the method of and reasons for the original domestication of cattle. Wilhelm Schmidt, the foremost recent exponent of one view, argues that cattle were domesticated by nomadic hunters who thereafter became pastoral nomads. According to Schmidt, reindeer were the first herd animal domesticated and the techniques learned were then applied to the domestication of horses, cattle, etc.³ Schmidt selected reindeer because the animal is attracted by salt residues on camping grounds and virtually domesticates itself. Curwen and Hart support the notion of a hunter-herdsman sequence, and suggest the earliest domestication of cattle and other ungulata may have been to provide decoys in the hunt. Even the first milking of animals, they argue, may have been performed by hunters who, as the Chuckchi and the Koryak do even today, drank directly from the animal.⁴ That cattle might have been domesticated like the reindeer through salt is not impossible, for in Assam, the Gaur, a large wild bovine, is attracted by suitably placed salt licks.⁵

The other major view is that cattle were domesticated first by sedentary seed and plow agriculturists. This view has been cogently presented by the geographer Eduard Hahn and his

² Isaac, E., "Influence of Religion on the Spread of Citrus," *Science*, 129: 3343, (January 1959), 179-186, and "The Citron in the Mediterranean," *Economic Geography*, 35:1, (January 1959), 71-78.

³ Schmidt, W., "Zu den Anfängen der Herdentierzucht," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 76, (1951), 1-41.

⁴ Curwen, E. C. and Hart G., *Plow and Pasture* (New York, 1953), 277-278.

⁵ Zeuner F. E., "Domestication of Animals," in *A History of Technology*, C. Singer, edit., I (Oxford, 1954), 337.

students at the turn of the century, and is supported today by prehistorians such as Karl J. Narr, geographers such as Carl O. Sauer and Hermann von Wissmann, and agricultural historians—preeminently Emil Werth.⁶ The postulate here is that domestication takes time and only in a sedentary agricultural society would long enough be spent in one place for the process to occur. The experience of current domesticators bears this out, for although taming of individual animals occurs in nomadic groups, attempts at true domestication, such as have been made with the Ukrainian bison, and the Rhodesian and South African eland, show that much time, effort and skill are required. Furthermore supplementary feedings are required for domesticated animals, which could be provided with regularity only by cultivators.

The existing archaeological evidence, which has been summarized by Max Hilzheimer, Robert H. Dyson Jr., Franz Hancar, and Charles A. Reed among others, supports an agricultural origin for domestication, since the first evidence for domestic cattle comes from the earliest known agricultural societies—from southwest and southcentral Asia, from Anatolia, Palestine-Syria-Armenia, Iran, Turkestan, Afghanistan, India-Pakistan. Of course the fact that domestic cattle are first found in a sedentary culture is not in itself conclusive proof that they were first domesticated there, since if cattle had been domesticated earlier by nomads the chances of archaeological exploration of the sites of transient camps would obviously be remote. But the archaeological evidence becomes more conclusive when combined with the fact that only in the southwest Asian area we have delineated have all wild bovines been drawn upon as parent stock for domestic strains, while none of the wild bovines peculiar to Africa, Europe or North America have been domesticated.

Moreover, as has already been pointed out by Alexander von Humboldt, the father of modern geography, neither the Australian desert-

⁶ Hahn, E., *Die Entstehung der Pflugkultur* (Heidelberg, 1909); *Von der Hacke zum Pflug* (Leipzig, 1914). Narr, K. J., "Hirten, Pflanzer, Bauern: Produktionsstufe" in F. Valjavec, edit. *Historia Mundi*, II (Bern, 1953), 60-100. Sauer, C. O., *Agricultural Origins and Dispersals*, American Geog. Soc. (New York, 1952). Wissmann, H. von, "Ursprungsherde und Ausbreitungswege von Pflanzen- und Tierzucht und ihre Abhängigkeit von der Klimageschichte," *Erdkunde*, 11:2 (May 1957), 81-84, and 11:3, pp. 81-94. Werth, Emil, *Grabstock, Hacke, Pflug* (Ludwigsburg, 1954).

Myths, Cults and Livestock Breeding

steppes nor the North American prairies nor the South American llanos and pampas have produced pastoral nomadic societies. The pastoral nomadic realms of the world have all historically been in contact with the realm of seed and plow agriculture; indeed the ancient West Asian agricultural area is encompassed by large nomadic complexes—the cattle nomads of eastern Africa—and southern Arabia, the camel and fat tailed sheep nomads of North Africa, the nomadic buffalo herders of southern India, the yak sheep and horse nomads of Tibet, the yak and sheep nomads of Pamirs, the camel, dromedary and horse nomads of central Asia, and the reindeer nomads of North Eurasia are all peripheral to the western Asian agricultural area. Suggestive too is that the harnessing methods of nomadic societies are developed from harnessing methods originally used for joining cattle to the plow. In fact the very notion of uniting animal and man in a joint endeavor has proved peculiar to the agriculturist, even the use of animals in the hunt being characteristic only of areas that have agriculture. (E. Werth, *Grabstock, Hacke, Pflug*, Ludwigsburg, 1954, pp. 90-2). Thus the falcon and cheetah hunts, and cormorant fishing are accomplishments of peasant civilizations, while pygmy and Bushmen hunters do not even utilize their dogs in the hunt.

In part, the argument for initial domestication of herd animals by nomadic groups has been a psychological one. In the great pastoral complexes, man's involvement with the animal is total from both the psychological and economic point of view, nor are there traces of earlier non-pastoral pursuits of nomads. Surely the men to whom herd animals are absolutely indispensable must have been the men to domesticate them. But this argument has been shown to be more tempting than true; there are cases of total involvement with an animal although the animal itself is known to be a comparatively recent introduction. Thus, for example, the horse, a Spanish introduction, quickly became the central concern of many Indian cultures in North America, and H. Aschmann, in his study of the Indians of the Guajira Peninsula of Columbia and Venezuela, has shown how in recent times one farming group has turned into pastoralists. ("Indian Pastoralists of the Guajira Peninsula," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 50 : 4, December, 1960, 408-18).

Why peasant peoples of West Asia should have domesticated cattle is, of course, another question. It is agreed today that the ancestor of domestic cattle was the wild urus (*Bos primigenius* Bojanus in Europe, *Bos nomadicus* Falconer and Cauthey in Asia, and *Bos opisthonomus* Pomel in North Africa, the different names

denoting only geographic range) which formerly ranged from the Pacific to the Atlantic coasts of Eurasia and from the tundras to India and North Africa. Gigantic specimens of the urus have been found in the Neolithic period of Europe where the withers stand at two meters high. It was formerly thought that a smaller race of wild cattle must have existed, but recent work by such men as O. von Leithner, W. LaBaume, G. Nobis and others has shown that the sexual differences account for size discrepancies.⁷ Despite the great geographic range of the urus no more than three (and these very similar) varieties have been determined.

In view of the size and fierceness of the animal, the original domesticators must have had a strong motive for overcoming the difficulties of the task. That this motive was economic is unlikely since it would not have been possible to foresee the uses to which the animal might be put, and the only obvious use, that of the animal as meat, would not have warranted the effort of capturing the animal, keeping him alive in captivity and taming him. Young animals would have been easier to capture than the adult, but the problem of providing milk would have been insurmountable unless a mother should be captured along with the calf or unless a gravid female were captured. The most sensible explanation remains that of Eduard Hahn, who argued that the urus was domesticated for religious, not for economic reasons. Although the reason for the religious significance of the urus is not certain, it probably lay in the animal's horns which were considered to correspond to the horns of the moon, which in turn was identified with the mother goddess worshipped by primitive cultivators.⁸

Of course if cattle were domesticated because of the resemblance of the horns of the urus to the moon's crescent, other animals ought to have entered domestication in the same manner. Significant in this light is the archaeological evidence that attempts were made, unsuccessfully,

⁷ Leithner, O. Freiherr von, *Der Ur*, Bericht der Internationalen Gesellschaft zur Erhaltung des Wisent, II (Berlin, 1927), 1-140. La Baume, W., "Zur Abstammung des Hausrindes," *Forschung und Fortschritte*, 26 (Berlin, 1950), 43-45. Nobis, G., "Zur Kenntnis der ur- und frühgeschichtlichen Rinder Nord- und Mitteldeutschlands," *Zeitschrift für Tierzüchtung und Züchtungsbiologie*, 63 (1954).

⁸ See Werth, *op. cit.*, footnote 6.

Myths, Cults and Livestock Breeding

to domesticate crescent horned antelope species. Conversely, an animal known from recent experiment to be easily domesticable, but lacking crescent shaped horns, the bison, was not domesticated. In the case of one domestic animal, the cat, there is clear proof of the religious origins of its domestication: the cat was the holy animal of the Egyptian goddess Bast. Other animals may also have been domesticated for religious reasons. Indeed the wide distribution of ram cults where the ram was the sacrificial personification of the deity is suggestive of a religious origin for sheep domestication. The point is not that cattle are unique in personifying the deity, but that in the case of cattle, where domestication was a difficult and hazardous undertaking, the accidental explanation for domestication becomes obviously untenable, the religious motive emerging as the only probable one.

The process by which the wild urus was transformed into domestic cattle may be postulated to have been somewhat as follows: The captured urus was kept on enclosed meadows waiting to be drawn upon for sacrificial use. Types different from the original strains of captured urus developed since the sacrificial stock, protected from predators and free to multiply, would have been, as H. Spurway has pointed out, either more inbred or more outbred than would be the case under natural conditions. As every zoo keeper knows, this factor alone would suffice to produce a strain different from the wild parent stock.⁹ The selection of mature animals for sacrificial purposes encouraged the survival of individuals with infantile characteristics such as foreshortened heads, long legs, and relatively straight backs as against the high withered and massively built wild cattle known to us from West Asian art. The greater chance possessed by these animals for escape from choice as sacrificial stock gave them longer life and more numerous offspring than the heavy long-horned beasts which more properly expressed the deity's nature. Another outcome of the new breeding conditions was the development of pied coats. There is ample ethnological evidence that ritual importance is generally attached to the marking of animals, and the desire to produce more animals with a particular type of coat color pattern must have led to directional breeding.

⁹ Spurway, H., "Can Wild Animals be kept in Captivity?," *New Biology*, 13 (Penguin Books, London, 1952), 11-30.

The development of an infantile appearing strain of sacred cattle who were more tractable than the parent stock made it possible to use cattle for ritual purposes other than sacrifice. Representations indicate that the first known harnessing of cattle was to sleighs or wagons in religious processions. In such cattle-drawn wagons the image or symbol of the deity was carried. The notion of using cattle for secular labor probably arose from experience with the animal as source of traction in the religious procession. The sleigh or wagon of the procession would have been modified for profane use.¹⁰ Moreover, according to a majority of scholars the plow is from its earliest development associated with cattle in ritual usage. The plow itself has often been regarded as a direct gift from the gods: the Egyptians ascribed its origin to Osiris, the Vedic Indians to Asvin who is supposed to have taught mankind its use, the Greeks variously imputed the invention to Zeus, Dionysus, Pallas and Demeter, while the Chinese attributed its origin both to Shen-nung, the "Divine Husbandman," and to a mythical grandson of Hou Chi, "Ruler of the Millet." Areas in Greece such as the Rarian field near Eleusis were set aside for ceremonial plowing, and the Chinese emperors every spring ceremonially plowed a sacred field. In Mesopotamia cylinder seals show the plowman as a priest, and the plow is associated with the lunar deity or her symbols on early Mesopotamian clay seals.

¹⁰ Hahn, E., "Die Entstehung des Rades und des Wagens," *Internationales Zentralblatt für Anthropologie*, 8 (1903), 1-3; "Heilige Wagen," *Verhandlungen der Berliner anthropologischen Gesellschaft* (1895), 342-347. Moetefind, H., "Der Wagen im nordischen Kulturkreis zur vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Zeit," *Festschrift Eduard Hahn* (Stuttgart, 1917), 209-240. Childe, V. G., in his article "The Diffusion of Wheeled Vehicles," *Ethnographisch-Archaeologische Forschungen*, 2 (1954), 14, and in "The First Waggons and Carts—From the Tigris to the Severn," *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 17:2 (1951), 177-194, regards carts as a conscious development to aid in the harvest. Haudricourt, A. G., in "Contribution à la géographie et à l'ethnologie de la voiture," *Revue de géog. humaine et d'ethnologie*, 1, (Paris, 1948) and Hancar, F., *Das Pferd in prähistorischer und früher historischer Zeit*, Wiener Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte und Linguistik, (Vienna, 1955) 408-49, argue that wheel and wagon can be explained best by regarding them as technological advances based on previously developed methods and principles. The argument, intended to refute Hahn, Moetefind and others, patently does not do so. Recently S. Foltiny, "The Oldest Representations of Wheeled Vehicles in Central and Southeastern Europe," *Am. Jour. of Archaeol.*, 63:1 (January, 1959), 55, presents both sides of the argument, but leaves the question open.

The earliest indication for the differentiation of a domestic type distinct from the wild urus lies in representational art as well as in the osteological record. From these we find that the earliest strains of domestic cattle strongly resembled the urus (*Bos primigenius* Bojanus). The heavy horns of the urus caused the development of wide and flat frontal bones so that the skull between the horns when seen *en face* appears almost horizontal. Domestic cattle which retained a urus conformation of skull and body are called primigenius cattle, descendants of *Bos taurus primigenius*, the earliest domesticated cattle. When shorter horned domestic cattle developed, the frontal bones, released from the excessive weight of horns, assumed a domed shape, which is of course most prominent in the case of polled cattle. Such cattle, because of their characteristic long and upward convex frontals, are called *Bos taurus longifrons*.¹¹

The pattern of development from the original urus to primigenius to longifrons was probably something like this. The urus, enclosed for ritual purposes, developed along two lines: into primigenius cattle, almost exactly conforming to the urus, and into longifrons, an infantile variation encouraged by the new conditions of survival.¹² Primigenius cattle, crescent horned, pied colored and formidable, continued to be the most appropriate epiphany for the deity. On the other hand, the tractable longifrons, its docility increased by ritual castration, became obviously more desirable for secular uses.

The first clear representation of longifrons is on a bowl dated to the Jemdet Nasr period (2800-2600 B.C.) in Mesopotamia, although isolated figurines of what may be short horned cattle are dated in Mesopotamia to the beginning of

¹¹ The terminology used by the present author for domestic varieties of cattle derived from the urus has been used by others with different meaning. Former students have postulated different ancestral stocks in order to account for brachyceros cattle. Notably C. Keller, J. U. Duerst, L. Adamez, O. Antonius and A. Schmid defend the case for a separate wild ancestor of brachyceros. Current work (see note 7) rejects the conclusions of the earlier studies.

¹² That short horned longifrons did indeed develop from urus and not from a separate wild strain is borne out by anatomical studies. Mature longifrons skulls correspond anatomically to the skulls of primigenius calves. Boettger, C. R., *Die Haustiere Afrikas* (Jena, 1958), 50.

the fourth millennium. Subsequent to the Jemdet Nasr bowl longifrons representations become more frequent in Mesopotamian art, although primigenius continues to be the favorite subject. Of course the mere fact that primigenius is most often depicted does not mean that it was most often used, since artistic convention may have dictated the continuance of a style, especially in the case of ritual objects. In Austrian churches, until recently peasants offered little statuettes of bulls with long horns to the church on St. Leonhard's Day, statuettes almost identical to those of the Hallstatt age, although longhorned cattle had been unknown in Austria for many centuries.¹³

Although primigenius cattle are unquestionably the first domesticated type in West Asia, in the earliest domestic cattle finds outside this region longifrons precedes primigenius cattle in the stratigraphic levels. The explanation is that the tameness of longifrons as well as its economic importance led to its rapid spread through trade and migration into Eurasia, while the difficulty of moving primigenius over large distances retarded its spread. The earlier presence of longifrons in North Africa, Crete, southeastern, Alpine and Central Europe, southern Russia and the Caucasus is strong, evidence that neither was the art of domestication arrived at independently outside West Asia (although the wild urus is found throughout these areas), nor was it simply the technique of domestication that was transmitted, for in that event too primigenius, the oldest domestic cattle, should be found first.¹⁴ As it is, primigenius cattle eventually appear in subsequent layers.

In order to understand why the spread of the cultural complex from West Asia brought with it domesticated cattle, and how the presence of the culture outside this area can

¹³ Antonius, O., *Grundzüge einer Stammesgeschichte der Haustiere*, (Jena, 1922), 184.

¹⁴ In some instances primigenius cattle appears earlier than longifrons. This is the case at Anau in Turkestan and that find has been interpreted to mean that Anau lies in proximity to the ancestral center of domestication. Archaeological strata that precede the bone find show that Anau was influenced for a lengthy period by Mesopotamia, which may mean that the technique of domestication, if not the actual cattle itself were derived from Mesopotamia. Boettger, *op. cit.*, 45.

be documented, it is necessary to understand something of the nature of the religious order in whose context we assert that domestication took place. The most ancient religion of West Asia centered around Palaeolithic female figurines with pronounced sex characteristics. The best known of these figurines, outside western Asia, are the Venuses of Willendorf, Brassenpouy, Lespugne, and Wisternitz. Since the female "idol" is found in a sequence of Palaeolithic cultures and is found over a vast area in association with ceremonial burials, hunting rites, increase ritual and sacred dances, the assumption is that it played a central role in the religious order.¹⁵ In Jericho, for the first time, cultic figurines in groups of three occur, each containing man, woman and child. The appearance of the male along with the female at the beginning of the Jericho Neolithic must have marked a radical departure in view of the long tradition of the single human figurine.¹⁶ Of course, the idea of a male god may have existed along with the most ancient female figurines, but the need felt to present him in plastic form, if not conclusive proof for a religious revolution, does indicate that his status had significantly changed. The cultic groups of Jericho suggest that the later divine triads of the Near East, consisting of father, mother and son, as for example, the Egyptian Osiris, Isis and Horus, the Babylonian Sin, Shamash and Yarakh, the southern Arabian Athtar, Shams and Khaul and even the early Persian Ahura-Mazda, Anahita and Mithra were foreshadowed in the sixth millennium B.C.¹⁷

The female diety does not lose her predominant position with the advent of the triad of Jericho. In the Halafian of

¹⁵ E. van Buren, *Clay Figurines of Babylonia and Assyria* (New Haven, 1930); Passemard, L., *Les statuettes féminines paléolithiques dites Vénus Stéatopyges* (Nîmes, 1938); Albright, W. F., *From Stone Age to Christianity* (Garden City, N. Y., 1957), 132-133. Levy, G. R., *The Gate of Horn: A Study of the Religious Conceptions of the Stone Age etc.* (London, 1947), 79-96.

¹⁶ Albright, *op. cit.* (note 15), 173.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, and Nielsen D., *Die altarabische Kultur*, Handbuch der altarabischen Altertumskunde, I (Kopenhagen, 1927) 197-243; also Nielsen D., *Der Dreieimige Gott in religionshistorischer Beleuchtung*, vol. I (Kopenhagen, 1922), vol. II (Kopenhagen, 1942).

Mesopotamia, which began ca. 4000 B.C., the female diety continues to appear alone or sometimes with a consort. At Arpachiyah, a non-fortified town (indicative of its cultic character) near Nineveh, great numbers of nude, painted female figurines with an exaggerated portrayal of their sexual characteristics were found around circular cultic structures (tholoi). A Palestinian fresco of the same period gives evidence of a cult including goddess and god, the former taking precedence.¹⁸ The association of the Halafian figurines with animal statuary, mainly cattle and doves, as well as with the double axe motif, all three symbols of the mother goddess as soon as documentary records are available, suggests that not only did the nude females of neolithic and chalcolithic western Asia depict a mother goddess, but the very early Aurignacian and subsequent Palaeolithic "Venuses" also represented the mother goddess.¹⁹

The subsequent Obeidian culture of Mesopotamia (ca. 3700-3200) which ushers in the period upon which documentary material casts light, underlies most of the oldest cities of Mesopotamia. In El Obeid, the association of dove and goddess is unmistakable—the goddess is represented with a dove's head. Moreover, the goddess received descriptive epithets. According to the tablets of Erech, dating from before 3000 B.C. Ninanna, Inanna or Ninni, as the mother goddess was called in Sumer, ruled the pantheon together with En-Lil, and her appellations, known from the ancient Uttu myth, define her nature: Nintud is "the Lady who gives Birth;" Damgalnunna is "the great Spouse of the Prince;" Nin-Ghursag is the "Lady of the Mountain;" and Nintinugga is "the Lady who gives Life to the Dead."²⁰ Thus Inanna is goddess of life, of fertility, and of death. Of course, her powers are complemented by those of her consort, En-Lil.

By the time of our earliest acquaintance with the West Asian myths, the divine family had become associated with

¹⁸ Albright, *op. cit.*, 138-139, 144.

¹⁹ Levy, *Gate of Horn* (see note 15), 81-94.

²⁰ Albright, *op. cit.*, 191.

an astral mythology, so that the figures of the myth were equated with celestial bodies. Inanna, a lunar deity, later became goddess of Venus, the morning star, and her exact role was assumed by the Accadian Ishtar about 1900 B.C. The association of Inanna with the morning star corresponds to similar associations of the Canaanite Astarte, the Assyrian Ashirat, and the Canaanite Ashera (all forerunners of the Greek Aphrodite) with the planet Venus. The original lunar identification of the goddess is retained by some goddesses, as, for example, the Sumero-Accadian Nikkal, the Egyptian Nekhbet. Often, however, the male deity, with his assumption of increased importance, takes on the lunar association formerly characterizing the goddess, e.g. Sin, the moon god of Babylon, Nannar, the moon god of Ur, Eshmun-Melcarth, the moon god of Phoenicia, Osiris and Min, moon gods of Egypt.

The consort, son, or lover of the mother goddess became in Neolithic times the central figure in the basic myth of Near Eastern religion—the myth of the dying and resurrected fertility god. The earliest formulation of the myth is probably in the Ishtar (Inanna)-Tammuz cycle, but the cycle is omnipresent with suffering deities of different names, e.g. Ninurta or Ningircu, Abu, Ninazu, Ningiszida and Tishpak (Sumer), Marduk (Babylon), Assur (Assyria), Aliyan Baal (at Ugarit), Hadad Rimmon (at Meggido), Adonis of Byblus and Cyprus, and Melcarth of Tyre. Similarly the mother goddess appears in many forms in the cycles, in Mesopotamia appearing as Ninhursaga Mah, Ninmah, Nintu, and Aruru. Eventually in various sub-regions certain formulations became the dominant ones. Thus the Tammuz cycle in Mesopotamia, the Osiris cycle in Egypt, the Baal cycle in Palestine, the Adonis cycle in Syria, and the Attis cycle in Asia Minor eclipsed other variations of the myth.

In all cases, wherever the cycle is found and whatever the names of the *dramatis personae*, the close astral association is paralleled by an equally important cattle association. Inanna was described as "cow" and her consort Enlil, the storm god, addressed as "Bull." At Ur, Nannar was called "powerful young bull of the sky... most wonderful son of Enlil, and the Babylonian Sin is also the powerful "calf of Enlil." The

mother goddess of Babylonia *Umum Rabatum* was presented as a "cow" while her consort Bel was called *gu*, the ox. In India cow and bull were venerated by the pre-Dravidian and Indo-Aryans.²¹ The cosmic cow *Prisini* or *Sabardugha* mated with Indra "the bull of the world," whose predecessor *Rudra* was also known as "bull." *Visvarupa* is the cow who gives life to all, and *Aditi*, the mother of the supreme beings, is represented as a cow. In Iran *Vrthraghna* appeared as a bull; in Egypt Min-Horus was called Kamutef or "bull of his mother" as well as "the great bull."²² Min-Horus was shown in statuary with a "white bull" and his shrine was crowned with a pair of bull's horns. Horus was consort to the mother goddess Hathor, a cow of cosmic dimensions, in the earliest period represented entirely in cow's form, later like the "Lady of Byblos" with a cow's head, still later only with cow's ears and cow's horns, and finally with a celestial disc cradled between two horns which she wore upon her head. Parallel examples in Egypt involved Geb, "bull of his spouse Nut," and Amon "the bull of his mother, who rejoices in the cow." Osiris is "the bull of the west" or "the bull of Abydos," and the ferryman of the underworld "the bull of the gods."²³ In Canaan, Baal or Hadad (Haddu), the great figure of the Canaanite (Phoenician) pantheon, storm god and king of gods, was also invariably associated with a bull while his female consort was identified with a cow. The Hurrians praised the bull-like nature of Teshub whose image was supported by two bulls, Khurri and Sheri. The Great Mother of Asia Minor, Meter Oreia, known in Phrygia as Mater Kubile and best known as Cybele was associated with cattle. Cows pulled her chariot and in Phrygia her votaries were bathed in the blood of bulls.

The myth of the dying fertility god, whatever the cycle in which it appears, essentially involves the murder or brutal maiming of a deity whose death and/or resurrection result

²¹ Eliade, M., *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York, 1958), 85-87.

²² Frankfort, H., *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago, 1948), 45, 180.

²³ *Ibid.*, 168-171.

Myths, Cults and Livestock Breeding

in the emergence of plant life. In the most ancient celebration of the myth, the being who suffered the first death was probably the mother goddess. In the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh epos, for example, the hero, with his friend Enkidu, killed the monster Humbaba, an equivalent for the Hurrian mother goddess,²⁴ and both Ashtar and Anath, according to Mesopotamian mythology, descended to the underworld. The highly developed agricultural and animal domesticating society of the Near East, however, aware of the fundamental importance of sex distinctions, elaborated the cult by giving the mother goddess consorts and making them, rather than the goddess herself, victims of the first death. In fact, the goddess becomes in many cases the agent of the murder.

She seized Mot, son of El;
With the sword she cut him up, with the sieve she winnowed him
In the fire she burned him, in the mill she ground him
In the field she sowed him.²⁵

All the major aspects of the myth—the brutality, the murder resulting in the resurrection in plant life, and the idea of the continuity of human and plant life are illustrated here, in the Canaanite Baal cycle, in classic fashion. The brutality of the slayer, Anath, corresponds closely to that of Astarte, both preeminently goddesses of war in Egyptian sources.

In all versions, the association of the slaying of the god with plant life is emphasized. In the myth of Adonis, the relation of god and plant is clear from the story of his birth, as well as the tale of his death and rebirth. Adonis is born from a myrrh tree, which in turn is his mother Myrrha, transformed into a tree by the god. On his death, his blood gives rise to anemones. Attis is sired by the fruit of a pomegranete or almond tree (itself sired by a deity), and his violent death gives rise to fir tree and violets. According to the Ugaritic tablets, the name of Ball's father was Dagon, a deity whose worship had spread all through Mesopotamia by

²⁴ Matous, L., "Die Entstehung des Gilgamesh-Epos," *Das Altertum*, 4:4 (1958), 195-208.

²⁵ Albright, *op. cit.*, 232.

the twenty-fifth century B.C., and a word meaning in Hebrew "grain." Suggestive too of the agricultural association is the Hebrew meaning of "Ashtarot," the plural of Ashtart (Astarte)—"sheep breeding."

But it is in the myths of Osiris that we have the most detailed and varied evidence for the link between god and plant. In the Memphite theology, it is the burial of the slain or drowned Osiris at Memphis which makes the surrounding region into a granary of Egypt. In the so-called Mystery Play of the Succession (our script dates to ca. 2000 B.C. and was performed at the accession of Sennert I, but presumably is only one example of a type of performance repeated at every accession of a king), the fate of Osiris and the revenge taken for his death by his son Horus are dramatized.²⁶ The dead Osiris appears as barley, and Horus forbids the animals to trample the grain. The animals disobey, and Horus avenges his father by beating the disobedient animals. Horus speaks to the followers of Seth: "Do not beat this my father...Beating Osiris: cutting up the god-barley." In the "Contendings of Horus and Seth," Osiris speaks.

It is I who make you strong, and it is I who made the barley, and the emmer to nourish the gods, and even so the living creatures after the gods, and no (other) god nor any goddess found himself (able) to do it.²⁷

In many coffin texts and spells of the Book of the Dead, Osiris is identified with the corn god, Nepri. In the Ptolemaic temple of Denderah, it is said of Osiris that he "made the corn from the liquid that is in him to nourish the nobles and the commoners."²⁸ In the Ptolemaic temple of Philae, ears of grain, watered by a priest, were shown growing from the supine body of Osiris. One ritual celebration of the Osiris myth was performed in the tombs of the 18th dynasty; it

²⁶ Sethe, K. H., *Dramatische Texte zu altägyptischen Mysterienspielen* (Leipzig, 1928), vol. 2.

²⁷ Frankfort, *op. cit.*, 127.

²⁸ Blackman, A. M., "Studia Aegyptiaca," *Analecta Orientalia*, 17 (Rome, 1938), 2.

Myths, Cults and Livestock Breeding

consisted of placing the body of Osiris, made of soil and seeds, upon a bier, and watering it so that the seed germinated. Thus the resurrection of the god in plant life literally occurred within the place of death. How important the notion of the murder of Osiris was in the popular mind is reported by Plutarch, who writes of the Egyptians in his *On Isis and Osiris*:²⁹

When they hack up the earth with their hands and cover it up again after having scattered the seeds, wondering wheter these will grow and ripen, then they behave like those who bury and mourn.

At harvest time again, according to Plutarch, the first ears were cut with wailing. As in the Baal cycle, moreover, there is the idea of winnowing the god, for the limbs of Osiris, according to late classical authors, were gathered into a winnowing basket by Isis.³⁰ (The same notion is found later in the myth of Adonis, who was "awakened" as he lay in a winnowing basket.)

A slight softening of the myth is evident in versions where the god does not lose his life, but loses his procreative organs, which are destroyed with all imaginary gruesomeness. In the Cybele-Attis myth, Agdistis, the original bi-sexual monster, is tricked into self-castration. Attis, driven mad, castrates himself as well.³¹ Not only in the cycles of the fertility gods, but also in associated myth, castration is responsible for the emergence of a new order. In Canaanite mythology, El, who castrates himself, subsequently becomes the father of the gods. In the Greek realm Kronos castrates his father Uranos with a giant sickle on the instigation of the mother goddess, and from his blood a hardy race emerged.³²

All the myths of the dying fertility gods are ritual myths, which means that as myths expressing what the culture conceives

²⁹ *On Isis and Osiris* (70).

³⁰ Frankfort, *op. cit.*, 186.

³¹ Hepding, H., *Attis, seine Mythen und sein Kult* (Giessen, 1903), 105-110.

³² Kerényi, K., *Die Mythologie der Griechen, Die Götter und Menschheitsgeschichten* (Zürich, 1951), 27.

as its central truth—the key to its origin and meaning—they must be reenacted to ensure the maintenance of the present order of the world which rests upon that truth. The human sacrifices of Sumer and the Semitic realm reenacted in obvious form the initial slaying. Equally obvious as *imitatio dei* is the ritual castration which occurs in many of the rites of the dying gods, or the mythical death suffered by participants in the Mysteries. The castrated servant of Attis became one with Attis—was, in fact, called Attis. Eunuchs played a leading role in the cults of Bronze Age Syria and Asia Minor, and in certain periods, in Mesopotamia itself. In Cappadocia, Assyrian tablets dated at approximately the nineteenth century B.C. use the name “Kumrum” or “Kumra” (eunuch), as the conventional title for priests. “Pasisu,” also meaning eunuch, was a term applied to Tammuz.³³ In the Mysteries, initiation turned around the experience of death and rebirth. A Bacchant through his orgiastic rites imitated the drama of the suffering Dionysus, and an Orphic, through his initiation ceremonies, repeated the original gestures of Orpheus. Great joy greeted the Myste of Attis on his appearance from the tomb to which he descended, and where he was immersed in the blood of a bull, for he was considered to have returned from death.

In so far as kingship in Western Asia was a sacral institution, its rites provide the most dramatic reenactment of the myth of the slain and resurrected god. Despite the important differences between Mesopotamian and Egyptian kingship, differences which have been clarified by Henri Frankfort, there remains a fundamental similarity—all of society and nature depends upon the reenactment of the myth of the beginning by the king. Like the god whom he represents on earth, the king must die. In Egypt, in the early history of the kingship, the king, who incarnated a god in both life and death, was killed after a generation of rule to sustain crops as well as human and animal reproduction. The identification of the Egyptian king with Osiris was complete: each king at death became Osiris, just as each king in life who appeared “on the throne of Horus” was considered to be

³³ Albright, *op. cit.*, note 15, pp. 234-235.

Myths, Cults and Livestock Breeding

Horus. But although Osiris, the inventor of agriculture, was slain by Set, according to the myth he was resurrected after his death in plant life.³⁴ Thus a modification was possible through which the king's resurrection was assured—in the later period, ritual reenactment of Osiris' fate required that the king die, not an actual but a mythical death, thirty years after his accession. Every third year thereafter, the occasion of the Sed festival celebrated the king's death and resurrection. After the festival the king was addressed:

Thou beginnest thy renewal, beginnest to flourish again like the infant god of the Moon thou art young again year by year... thou art reborn by renewing thy festival of Sed.³⁵

When the king did in fact die, his death was not recognized; he was held to die only to come to life again with Horus. The Mesopotamian king, too, in times of crisis, was called upon to reenact the myth of the dying god. The king was temporarily deposed, and a substitute king took his place for a brief period. The substitute was invested with all the powers of the king, and even given a substitute court. At the end of his brief reign he was killed, often together with his entire court.³⁶

The domestication of cattle then can be understood in the context of the myth. Cattle, an epiphany for both the lunar goddess and her consort, became a favored substitute for the god in the reenactment of the myth, and the necessity for a permanent supply of sacrificial stock led to cattle domestication. The evidence for the antiquity and frequency of cattle sacrifice is so overwhelming that it need not be detailed. Ritual castration of cattle also served as a reenactment of the myth, for as we have seen, in some myths the deity was not slain but lost his sexual organs which gave rise to the first plants. That practical considerations could not have led to the original castration of the bull and hence to one of the most significant agricultural inventions—the ox—is obvious, since

³⁴ Frankfort, *op. cit.*, note 22, pp. 24-35.

³⁵ James, E. O., *The Beginnings of Religion*, Arrow Books (Hutchinson, London 1958) 65.

³⁶ Frankfort, *op. cit.*, 400.

neither the taming effect of castration nor its effect of improving meat texture could have been foreseen. The Iberian bull fight is a surviving example of the ritual use of the bull in enacting the god's life and death. The bull game was very common throughout the ancient Near East; there is evidence for its existence both in Mesopotamia and Egypt, where we find representations of the cultic race of the Apis bull over the fields in spring. The seal of Chauhudaro ca. 2500 B.C. offers evidence of bull games in India—they are still held today in the Deccan.³⁷

From a very early period there are a number of symbols associated first with the mother goddess and then with the dying fertility gods of the cycles. In both Mesopotamia and Egypt, the birth, death and resurrection of the god are ritually reenacted on or in some representation of a hill, which is considered to be the Primeval Hill, the actual place of the god's birth, death, and rebirth. In ritual, the primeval hill appears in various forms—as temple, tomb or throne. It was the universal Egyptian belief that creation started with the emergence of a mound, the Primeval Hill, above the waters of Chaos. Since the Primeval Hill was the place of birth and resurrection, the waters that surrounded it were the waters of death, which separate in many mythologies the world of the living from the world of the dead. Thus, in a pyramid text, King Pepi calls on the ferryman to ferry him “to that Eastern side of Heaven, where the gods are born, when comes that hour of labor.” According to Frankfort, “It is clear that this water, which the dead must cross, is also the water in which they are purified, and in which Re bathes before each sunrise, repeating his pristine emergence from the waters of chaos.”³⁸

The place, par excellence, for the reenactment of the myth of creation was the temple, and each god was associated with a temple considered to stand on a Primeval Hill. All temples were supposed to be situated on Primeval Hills, even those

³⁷ Hrozný, B., *Ancient History of Western Asia, India and Crete*, J. Procházka, trans. (Prague, s.d.), 49, 192. Eliade, *Patterns* (see note 21), 87.

³⁸ Frankfort, *op. cit.*, 154.

built quite late. The Ptolemaic temple of Philae was inscribed: "This [*temple*] came into being when nothing at all had yet come into being..." and Hatshepsut stated in an inscription: "I know that Karnak is the Light Mountain upon earth, the venerable hill of primeval beginning." The identity of temple and hill was made manifest in the architectural features of the temple, whose ramps or steps were modelled on the appearance of the Primeval Hill as originally conceived. Even the names of temples and their cities bears out the relationship to the hill. Memphis was called "the divine emerging primeval island," and Thebes "the island emerging in Nun which first came into being when all other places were in obscurity."³⁹

Funerary architecture also was modelled upon the Primeval Hill—for this reason funerary figurines were shown at the top of a flight of stairs. But the clearest as well as the most imposing expression of the equation of tomb and Primeval Hill was found in the pyramids, tombs of the god king.

The throne was the third ritual symbol for the Primeval Hill, and was personified by Isis, whose name indicated her origin as "deified throne."⁴⁰ The king's throne, (Isis), was reached by steps, and was sometimes placed upon a double stairway. In writing, symbols for the Primeval Hill were single or double flights of stairs. The notion of the Primeval Hill was not confined to Mesopotamia and Egypt. The Canaanite Koshar, god of music and poetry, and archetypal blacksmith, was born on an island—Crete. Phoenician gods too are usually enthroned upon an island in the seas; it is to the island of the gods that King Pepi wishes to be ferried.

The serpent as symbol of moon goddess or god is one of the most ancient symbols, and appears prominently in Mesopotamian, serpent and deity can be deduced. From very ancient times the Egyptian, and Palestinian sites. The reason for the association of serpent has been seen a possessor of everlasting life, for it renews

³⁹ The equation of primeval hill and Memphis is of particular significance in kingship ritual, for the burial place of Osiris is specifically located in the royal castle of Memphis. Frankfort, *Kingship, op. cit.*, 25-27.

⁴⁰ Sethe, K. H., *Urgeschichte und älteste Religion der Aegypter* (Leipzig, 1930); 185.

itself by sloughing off its skin. Perhaps the earliest documentary evidence for this belief occurs in the earliest segments of the Gilgamesh epos where Gilgamesh loses the plant of life and is swallowed by a serpent who thus gains the gift of everlasting life, henceforward sloughing off its skin.⁴¹ The Canaanite god Shalmon and the derived Phoenician Eshmun are at one and the same time gods of the underworld and gods of healing whose symbol is the serpent; the Greco-Roman Aesculapius grows, of course, from the same tradition. Shaddai, of the early Mosaic period, also used the serpent in his capacity as god of healing.

And Moses made a serpent of brass, and set it upon the standard...any man, when he looked unto the serpent of brass, he lived. (*Numbers*, 21: 8-9)

In the West Asian myths, the being who is slain to give rise to the world order is often a primordial serpent deity. In the Rig Veda (II, 12, 1) the serpent Vritra was slain by Indra who smote him in his lair and cut off his head with a thunderbolt, thereby establishing the world.⁴² In the Mesopotamian epos, Marduk, and in different versions other gods, after having overcome in titanic struggle Tiamat, mistress of the primordial sea, mother goddess and gargantuan serpent, clove her with his sword lengthwise. With her upper half he created the heavens, and with her lower half the earth.⁴³ In the Canaanite Baal cycle, Anath slew Yam (the sea serpent). In Egypt a similar theme is found: Re, the sun god, slew Apophis, the snake of darkness. There are traces of an ancient Hebrew epic in which the primordial serpent is slain by God in the act of creation:

Art thou not it that cut the Lord of the Sea in pieces that pierced the dragon? Art thou not it which tied up the sea, the waters of the great deep? (*Isaiah*, 51: 9)

A symbol closely associated with the serpent is the plant of

⁴¹ Matous, *op. cit.* (see note 24), 203.

⁴² Eliade, M., *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Bollingen series no. 46 (New York, 1954), 19.

⁴³ Deimel A., *Enuma elish und Hexaemeron*, Sacra Scriptura Antiquitatibus Orientalibus Illustrata, 5 (Rome, 1934), 53.

life, which in the Gilgamesh epos was swallowed by the serpent. In representations from Palestine, a plant was associated with the nude goddess, generally in conjunction with a serpent.⁴⁴ Genesis offers one variation of the pattern, although a "tree" replaces the plant and the serpent never eats of the tree.

The sacred ship is a major symbol in West Asian mythology and is commonly found in conjunction with serpent and plant. The ship is the means by which the god sails from the mountain in the sea where he is born to the world of man, and the means by which he returns from that world over the waters of death to his resting place on the island. In Sumer the sacred voyage of the mother goddess was depicted on cylinder seals dating at least to 3200 B.C. as the voyage of a divine cow upon a boat. Boat models were prominent in tombs throughout early Mesopotamia: a silver boat model was found in the royal cemetery at Ur dating to about 3000 B.C. and clay models of similar boats were placed in the tombs at Ur of the Sargonite period (ca. 2250 B.C.)⁴⁵ Gudea of Lagash reported in an inscription (ca. 2000 B.C.) that he had constructed a most expensive ship for Ningirsu (the mother goddess) and named it "Ship of the god who arises from the abyss."⁴⁶ The Canaanite goddess Ashera preserved in her Ugaritic name Athiratu-Yami (she who walks across the waters) the tradition of the voyage of the goddess from the primeval mountain-island to the world. The "solar" ships of Egypt, which are found as actual boats in pyramids, were the boats in which the god makes the voyage through the waters of death. In their holy of holies, Egyptian temples preserved the sacred ship.

Other major symbols associated with the West Asian cycles include the double axe, the ear of barley, the hour glass shield, the pithos, and lunar and astral symbols such as crescents, simple or concentric lunar discs and stars. Several of the major symbols were usually associated with the deity in representations and on a few representations virtually the entire complex of symbols appear together.

⁴⁴ Albright, *op. cit.*, 235.

⁴⁵ Barnett, R. D., "Early Shipping in the Near East," *Antiquity*, 128 (Dec., 1958) pp. 220-221.

⁴⁶ Kühn, H., *Die Felsbilder Europas* (Stuttgart, 1952), 173.

The presence of the symbol complex just outlined in conjunction with the presence of cattle breeds offers fairly conclusive evidence for the presence of the myth of the slain and resurrected deity, and when these appear outside the West Asian area in which they first appear, we can be reasonably certain that a migration of West Asian peoples has been responsible for the transference of the distinctive cultural complex evolved by them. A study of the areas in which these symbols appear then should offer a key to the spread of West Asian culture and to the spread of the domestic cattle that were a part of that culture. The archetypal analysis of symbols made popular by psychoanalysis, and which would assume the appearance of similar symbols in diverse areas as due to a basic universal endowment of the human psyche, is, we believe, wrong. Where similar symbols appear they can be shown to have spread through migration. Let us assume for the sake of argument that there was an archetypal mother goddess. Let us assume that she is universally identified with the moon, the parallel between the moon's phases and female fertility making a universally drawn analogy not unlikely. The archetypal argument runs into trouble when we inquire why in areas remote from one another a murder must be performed in which the goddess (or later the god) is killed always according to a similar pattern. Why should the same network of symbols everywhere surround the myth? On close analysis the archetype breaks down into individual insights arrived at in a given area at a given time and spread, sometimes to receive an extremely wide currency.