

ISHTAR (THE CEDAR-TREE) AND THE DEFEAT OF GILGAMESH

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Before there was representational art and long before history started, early man found in nature the figure of a Great Mother. This mother goddess appeared as a dominant figure *ca.* 30,000 years ago. The primordial image was identified in the form of a woman because the female is the only one who can give birth; she is a creator. The concept of the mother was often personified as a tree or plant. This personification was an integral part of the first religions. It started as a simple image that a plant grows and nourishes all living things. Soon, she became the power who dominated productivity on this earth and only through her can we become eternal; this can be accomplished through a sacred (asexual) marriage, something which happens in the kingdom of plants. The result of this marriage is the fruit that ripens and falls into the netherworld. The seed will be resurrected in the spring as a new plant—a renewal of both the mother and father who became eternal, i.e., gods. This imagery dominated early religion and is reflected later in representational art. The cedar tree is one of her embodiments. The mother goddess is known later under different names in different places: Innana, Ishtar, Hathor, Isis, Aphrodite, etc.; her consorts are Tammuzi, Osiris, Adonis, etc. This dominance of the Great Mother Goddess started to be challenged at the beginning of the 4th. millennium B.C. when the male god started to appear as a competitor.

In this article we look at the impact of trees on ancient Near Eastern religions and mythology. We can see an early phase in representational art that goes back to prehistoric times. The cult continues its influence in historical times where texts are also available. The mythology of trees developed very early and by the historical period, it had suffered some loss of its original meaning, but a careful examination of the development of the religions of the Near East reveals a picture in which the tree, particularly the Cedar from the mountains of Lebanon, was a major element.

It is necessary to take seriously the ecological background to understand this. Most western

scholars (e.g., Albright 1957: 245-46) mention that there is a "mountain element" in Near Eastern religions, but it is possible that this element is more important than is generally acknowledged. Many of the gods are "of the mountain," such as Shaddai of the Old Testament (Albright 1957: 247).

Thutmosis III (1504-1450 B.C.), Barkal Stela: *When my majesty crossed over to the marshes of Asia, I had many ships of cedar built on the mountain of God's Land near the Lady of Byblos ...* (ANET³: 240).

Thutmosis III (1504-1450 B.C.), an official's trip to Lebanon: *... I entered the forest-[preserve] ... [break] ... in Byblos, that I might give them to her lord for her [heart's] satisfactiongave ... of the choicest thereof ... I [brought] them [down] from the high land of God's Land.* (ANET³: 243).

Amenophis III (1417-1379 B.C.): *... making for him a great barge . . . of new cedar which his majesty cut in the countries of God's Land. It was dragged over the mountains of Retenu ... by the princes of all countries* (AR 2.888).

Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 B.C.): *At that time, the Lebanon ... the [Cedar] Mountain, the luxurious forest of Marduk ... I made the Arahtu flo[at] (down) and carry ... the abundant yield of the Lebanon* (ANET³: 307).

The mountain of Lebanon, while not unique in the world, is in stark contrast to its ecological setting in the Near East, much of which is arid and tree-less. Thus this great mountain with its peaks capped by snow most of the year, its trees and its cascades of water was a natural "sacred place"; its waters and especially its trees became numinous.

This majestic setting has received the attention it deserves from the few modern scholars who have actually seen it (e.g., Brown, Meiggs); it must also have captured the imagination of ancient people. The biblical Song of Songs is regarded by Brown (1969: 21) to have "some claim to be descended from a Phoenician wedding-song". His translation (1969: 21-22) includes the following:

*With me from Lebanon my
promised, with me from
Lebanon come look from the
summit of Amana, from the
summit of Senir and Hermon
from the caves of lions, from
the mountains of leopards ...*

*a garden locked is my sister my
promised, a garden locked, a fountain sealed your
buds are a paradise of pomegranates, with all fruit
of excellence cyperus with spikenards, nard with
saffron of crocus, calamus and cinnamon, with
every tree of libanosmyrrh and aloes, with all chief
balsams, a fountain of gardens, a well of
waters living and brooks flowing from Lebanon,
(Song of Songs 4:8, 12-15).*

Trees became the embodiment of the numinous power of gods and goddesses: a symbol of eternity, rebirth after death, and continuity. Ancient man found in the tree an answer to the drama of death. So in plants, gods were manifest and the most notable of the evergreens, the mountain trees of Lebanon, particularly the cedar, had a special place, and this can be seen in the mythology. Indeed, the name for heaven is a derivative from the word tree, *Gannah* (Semitic) and *paradisios* (Persian).

Whether or not Inanna's (Ishtar's) name should be taken to have been "Lady of the date clusters" (as opposed to the usual "Queen of Heaven"), Inanna's numinous power can be seen to have been embodied in different sorts of natural forms such as reeds, grass, the wild cow and, most especially, in the tree. In some contexts, the tree was expressed as the date palm, but in others it may have been the cedar tree, as Inanna also belongs to the mountains like many other gods and goddesses. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, Ishtar (Irnini) is seated on the mountain throne.

*They beheld the cedar mountain, abode of
the gods, throne-seat of Irnini. From the
face of the mountain, the cedars raise aloft
their luxuriance.* (ANET³: 82).

She is also called Irnini in a Prayer of Lamentation to Ishtar:

*O exalted Irnini, fierce lion, let thy heart be
at rest.* (ANET³: 384).

Jacobsen (1976: 68) gives a text about Dumuzi, the husband of Ishtar, in which Dumuzi's mother laments:

*For my Damu of the faraway -
for my anointed one of the faraway -
from the holy cedar where I, (his) mother,
bore (him) ...*

*The wailing is verily for the reed thicket;
the old reeds may not give birth to new reeds.*

*...
I put Ishtaran, Igishuba, to dwell with you.
I put a child to dwell with you - ...
my forearms I have adorned with cedar per-
fume for him. ...*

*My sides are cedar, my breast is cypress,
O nurse, my limbs are sappy cedar,
are sappy cedar, are of the Hashur (moun-
tains),
are black wood of (the island) Tilmun. ...
he was lying in the tamarisk
and the tamarisk sang lullabies to him
(Jacobsen 1976: 68-70).*

Jacobsen (1976: 72) , cites a text about Eanna (heaven): "*...Which began with laments sung at a sacred cedar tree growing in the compound of the temple Eanna in Uruk. ... This sacred cedar not only marked the god's birthplace but was itself considered his mother ...*" In a magical papyrus concerning Geb, the Egyptian earth god, it is stated that, "*the blood of Geb fell upon the ground, and grew; and ... thus came into existence the cedar ... and from its water the cedar oil*" (Gardiner 1909: 33). While the Egyptian texts connected with trees and vegetation are not as diverse as those from Mesopotamia, representational art is abundant in Egypt. In one of the many representations that show the goddess Nut, the goddess of heaven, spread as the sky over the earth-god Geb, Geb's body is covered with the sign for the reed (Gardiner 1973: 48). On the right, Osiris is rising from the ground (Fig. 1). In this case, we can say that as the

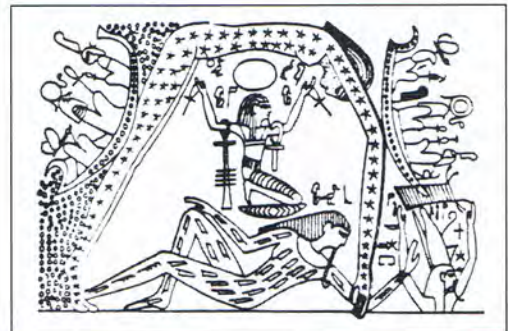


Fig. 1. The sky over the earth-god Geb (Schaffer 1928:105).

sky is studded with stars, Geb is adorned with reeds. The scene is explained by one of the *Coffin Texts*:

I am Osiris. I have come forth and entered into thee, I have flourished in thee, I have grown in thee, I have fallen

into thee, I have fallen on my side. The gods live by me. I live and grow as Neper, whom the august gods (?) bring forth that I may cover Geb (i.e., the land), whether I be alive or dead. I am barley, I am not destroyed.

(Griffiths 1980: 165).

The association of birds, bulls, water, fire and snakes with trees is an important feature of ancient mythology. Some combinations of these elements tend to appear in texts, hymns or songs on the one hand, and in representational artwork, such as that which is found on cylinder seals, wall paintings and reliefs, on the other hand. Some of the gods, in particular those who represent fertility, derive their names from the trees and are in some other way associated with trees. Dumuzi, the Sumerian fertility god is, for example, the son of Ningishzida, 'Lord of the good tree' who:

... represented the numinous power in trees to draw nourishment and to grow, had as his basic form that of the tree's trunk and roots; however, the winding roots, embodiments of living supernatural power, free themselves from the trunk and become live serpents entwined around it. (Jacobsen 1976: 7).

The tree is an important element in Egyptian mythology. For example, in Plutarch's (A.D. 45-120) version of the story of Isis and Osiris, Geb, the earth-god, and Nut, the goddess of heaven, had four children: Osiris, the husband of his sister Isis, and Seth (the desert), the husband of his sister Nephthys. In a conspiracy, Seth made his brother Osiris get into a beautiful wooden chest. Seth then closed the chest with nails, poured hot lead over it, and launched it into the river. Osiris died. The current carried the chest downstream to the Delta and then to the open sea. Isis, the consort of Osiris, cut off her hair, tore her robes, and went to search for Osiris.

The chest with the body of Osiris washed up on the Phoenician coast at Byblos. There it was

stranded near an *erica* tree which grew around the chest (Fig. 2). Later the tree was felled by the king

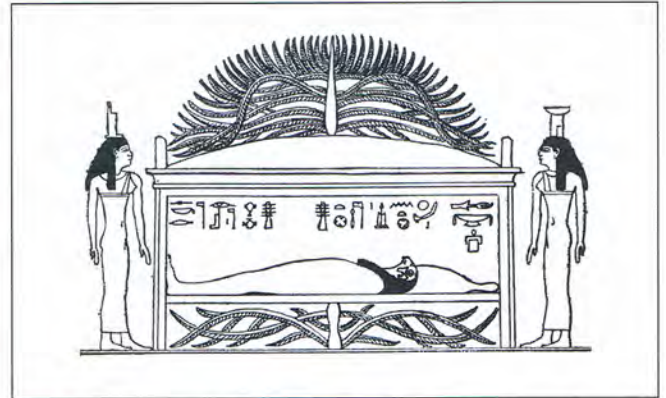


Fig. 2. The chest with the body of Osiris with an *erica* tree growing around it. Ptolemaic era from Denderah (Budge 1911: vol. 1, 5).

of Byblos who made it a pillar in his house. Isis subsequently came to Byblos and became friendly with the maidservants and "impart[ed] to their persons a wondrous fragrance from her own body". (Plutarch 357). The queen of Byblos asked her to nurse her own baby,

... and in the night she would burn away the mortal portions of its body. She herself would turn into a swallow and flit about the pillar with a wailing lament (Plutarch 357).

Here Isis knew that Osiris was in the pillar; she revealed herself and was given the pillar with the chest in it, and:

When she removed it with the greatest ease and cut away the wood of the heather [erica] which surrounded the chest; then, when she had wrapped up the wood in a linen cloth and had poured perfume upon it, she entrusted it to the car of the kings; and even to this day the people of Byblos venerate this wood which is preserved in the shrine of Isis (Plutarch 357).

This myth is depicted in Egyptian art as a tree above a coffin representing the chest and a bird on the branch representing the soul of Osiris as the bird Benu (Erman 1894: 271-72).

Rosen (1929: 160, n. 38) saw Osiris as the cedar-god of Lebanon, but Brown (1969: 165) questioned this: "I do not see on what evidence". The story above associates Osiris with the transformation of tamarisk (*erica*) into an aromatic wood, just as the tears of Isis or Hathor turned into a resinous oil, i.e., cedar, and the evidence supports Rosen.

This story of Isis and Osiris reflects details from Plutarch's



Fig. 3. Djed with an Osiris head (Budge 1911: vol. 1, 52).

own time as he heard them. By that period Osiris was identified as the trunk of a tree or as a *djed*-pillar (Fig. 3). How ancient is this mythology? This is not a simple question because our information comes mainly from mortuary texts.

This, in turn, reflects one aspect of the mythology, an aspect related to the dead. However, there are more than hints which can be found in these texts, in addition to the archaeological and iconographic evidence, which can provide a picture of an Osirian mythology which is closely related to trees, particularly the cedar.

Firminus Maternus ... says that in the mysteries of Isis a pine tree was cut down and hollowed out, and that with the pith of the tree a figure of Osiris was made, which was then buried and, having been kept for a year, was burned (Budge 1911: v. 1, 15).

In looking for the origin and age of this part of the myth of Osiris, Weill (1940) pointed to the close trade relations between Egypt and Byblos from a very early date. Breasted (1912: 26) said that Nedyet, where Osiris drowned, may be in the region of Byblos. Hermann (1958: 48-55) put the origin of the story in Byblos. Helck (1962) said the name "Osiris" was not Egyptian and its origin was possibly from the Eastern Mediterranean. He also saw a close connection to Adonis and Tammuz and to sprouting vegetation. Brunner (1975) thinks that Spell 125 of the *Book of the Dead* (Budge 1899: 374-75) shows a connection between Osiris and Byblos.

Griffiths (1980), who has done much of the recent work on the myth of Osiris, sees him only in a funerary milieu and does not believe that this myth as given by Plutarch is early. He thinks that the connection of the Osiris story to Byblos became part of Egyptian belief at a late period. As

he sees it, the Greek historians were being given a recent theology by the monks in the Egyptian temples. In a single paragraph, Griffiths dismisses six scholars, including Weill (1940), Montet (1928), and Morenz (1960):

None of these arguments is conclusive ... nor did Sethe [1908] succeed in establishing the Old Kingdom origin of the episode ... still less acceptable is Breasted's suggestion that Nedyet ... 'may be indeed ... an ancient name for the region of Byblos' (Griffiths 1980: 28).

Helck's theory that "the name Osiris is un-Egyptian ... [and] that the origins of Osiris should be sought in the ... Eastern Mediterranean," Griffiths (1980: 29) finds "surprising." He concludes the paragraph (1980: 29) with:

"It is perfectly possible, though not demonstrable, that Osiris is an Egyptian name; and his first cult-center is not indubitably in the Eastern Delta".

In a tale called the *Story of the Two Brothers* from the Papyrus d'Orbeiny (ca. 1225 B.C.), a peasant called Bata is falsely accused of adultery by his brother Anup. To demonstrate his innocence and his sorrow, Bata cuts off his phallus and throws it in the water. He then takes refuge in the [C] forest near the sea by Byblos. There he hides his heart in the [C] flower. Bata changes from a cow herdsman to a hero. The gods fashion a wife for him who has a "wandering eye," and:

The king of Egypt, to whom the sea has carried a lock of her hair, sends his messenger to her, and she allows herself to be carried off. She betrays to the king the secret on which the life of her husband depends; the [C] tree] is felled and Bata sinks to the ground dead. Now there happens what Bata had foretold. Anup at home recognises by the frothing of the beer in his jug, that something has happened to his brother; he goes to the [C] valley and finds his body. Then for seven long years he seeks his heart; when at last he finds it, Bata awakes from the dead. But he is immediately transformed into a sacred bull, which Anup has to lead to the king. When this bull approaches the queen, he causes her to recognise him as her husband. She causes him to be slaughtered, but from his blood there spring two sycamores; she causes these to be cut down, but a splinter of the

wood enters her mouth. Then she bears a son, whom the king acknowledges as his heir. The boy, however, is Bata himself, who when he has grown up causes the queen to be killed and reigns as king with his brother. (Erman 1894: 379).

Erman (1894: 379) felt that the Tale of Two Brothers is made up of a confused grouping of other legends and that in this part there is a connection to the legend of Osiris, particularly with the site of Byblos. The main elements in this story, the bull, the tree, and Lebanon, are similar to the elements of the Osiris story of Plutarch and are closely paralleled in Near Eastern iconography. The question is, how far back in time can we trace this association between Osiris and trees as an element in Egyptian mythology? In *Pyramid Text* 699-700 (Faulkner 1969: 131-32) we have:

O you whose ˁ...b-tree is green, who are upon your field:

O opener of the Flower who are upon your sycamore:

O Gleaming of Banks who are upon you i-m...-tree,

O Lord of Green Fields, Today (?) is joyous shouting (!) The King will always be among you ...

As the dead king is identified with Osiris, the fact that Osiris is addressed is understood. In this spell Osiris is compared to the sycamore tree (*Ficus sycomorus* which is usually identified with the goddess Hathor) - "Nut and Hathor were deities associated especially with trees ... " says Griffiths (1980: 171). A primitive sanctuary at Medamoud is characterized as a sanctuary to Osiris by Vandier (Vol. II.2: 575-81). It is a temple mound which the excavation showed to have been associated with trees. Vandier compares this mound to representations in art work such as the vaulted tomb with trees from Saite times. On this the name of Osiris is inscribed on a vault and trees are shown growing on a dome. In another representation from the Taharqa period there is also the name of Osiris and a dome or mound with a tree sprouting from it.

As the gods of Egypt were associated with trees, so too were the kings. In a funerary repre-

sentation, Thutmose III is shown in his tomb suckled by Isis who is in a tree form. Rameses II is also portrayed as coming out of a tree or seated by a tree. On these representations of trees, the name of the Pharaoh and their years of reign are portrayed. An association of the Pharaoh with trees, especially the cedar, is clear in Ezekiel 31:2-9:

Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to all his subjects:

To what shall I compare you in your greatness?

Surely, to a cedar of Lebanon with noble branches ...

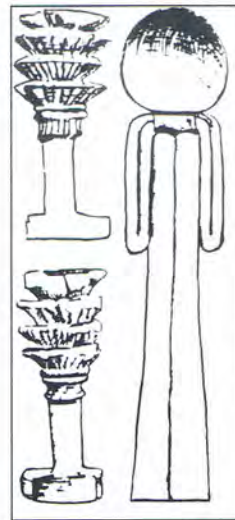


Fig. 4. Thinite or Early Dynastic Djed-pillars (Vandier 1952: vol. I.1, fig. 528).

Funerary objects from early Thinite tombs (Fig. 4) of ca. 3000 B.C. (Vandier, vol. I.2: 775-826) include a Hathor head on a box and a *djet*-pillar found in association with the "nut" or Isis.

The Epic of Gilgamesh survives in different fragments belonging to various periods, the earliest of which goes back to the time of Sumerian revival. A part of this, the Sumerian version of a tale entitled "Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld" can be reconstructed from fragments (Dalley 1989: 42). In it, Inanna,

the Sumerian fertility goddess (who became Ishtar for the Akkadians) was wandering along the Euphrates when the south wind (caused by the motion of Enki's divine boat) uprooted a *huluppu* (tree) planted on the bank of the river. The *huluppu* tree has not yet been identified. It may be that the tree involved is the *hallab* which still grows in Iraq. It is highly praised by the shepherds. Today it is becoming rare, but it is favoured for its aromatic wood, and as a shepherd's stick, it is twice as expensive as any other type. Historically, it was coupled with the cedar. In a text called the Blessing of the Bridegroom, it says:

From sunrise to sunset, from south to north, the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea, from (where grows the huluppu-tree, from where grows the cedar-tree ... (Jacobsen 1976: 42).

Returning to the story of the tree in the epic,

Inanna was terrified, but picked up the tree and replanted it in her cultic garden at Uruk. The "Eanna" (heaven), temple or the house of An (the heaven god) is similar to the cathedral in that it reflects the heavens and the house of god.

This performance by Inanna is one of the oldest examples in which a god plants a tree. Brown (1969: 170) says that "*Seleucus I planted cypresses at Daphne near Antioch following the example of Heracles who had originally planted them there*". Thus in Genesis 2:8, "*Yahweh God planted a garden in Eden which is in the east*". Psalm 104 is about creation and in it the cedars are planted by the creator (trans., Brown 1969: 25):

The trees of [Shaddai] are satiated, the cedars of Lebanon which he planted. (Psalm 104:16-18).

Psalm 80:10 also mentions the "Cedars of God." The planting of trees by a god is a possible vestige of tree worship (Brown 1969: 170) and this seems clear in the text in Genesis 21:33: "*Abraham planted a tamarisk [esel] at Beersheba and there he invoked Yahweh.*"

In the Epic of Gilgamesh, Inanna may have planned to make a chair and a bed from the wood of the tree. When it matured, Inanna wanted to fell it, but already a snake who "knows no charm" (Kramer 1963: 198) was nestled in its roots, the *imdugud* (bird) nested in its crown and, in the trunk, "the vampire Lilith" (Kramer 1963: 198) or the "demoness Kiskillilla" (Jacobsen 1976: 212) had built her house. The *imdugud* bird is usually associated with Ishkur and Ninurta as storm and war, but Inanna also had the power of the thunderstorm. Equally, in one of the hymns, she calls herself a falcon:

My father gave me the heavens, gave me the earth ... waging of battle he gave me, the attack he gave me, the floodstorm he gave me, the hurricane he gave me! ... The gods are sparrows - I am a falcon ... (Jacobsen 1976: 138).

In this story Inanna controls *imdugud* but in the Epic of Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld, Inanna is frightened when she finds it in her tree. This shows that the writer of the epic was able to dress his players with the appropriate

psychological appearance. In this case, Inanna was a beautiful young girl looking for a strong groom, so she feigns fear of *imdugud* so Gilgamesh can be a hero.

Inanna went to her brother, the sun-god Utu, with tears in her eyes and asked for help, but he would not help. Inanna then went to Gilgamesh. With his axe, "In its roots he smote the snake" (Shaffer 1963: 105), the bird took its young to the mountains, and Lilith fled. Then Inanna, or Gilgamesh himself, made a *pukku* and a *mekku*; these are a drum and drumstick according to Kramer (1963: 198) or more probably something like a puck and hockey stick according to Shaffer (1963: 31). Gilgamesh uses these in a way that brings suffering to Uruk and because of that he loses them to the Netherworld. Why this happens is not clear. As Shaffer (1963: 31) says, "Part of the difficulty lies in the elliptical style used to delineate action." As, for example, the hint that the earth will not produce crops and women will not give new birth. It is also possible that the *pukku* and *mekku* are somehow related to the marriage ceremony, used in a "game played in connection with weddings" (Kilmer 1982: 129-130). The suggestion here is that before the wedding ceremony, the bridegroom had to bring the *pukku* and *mekku* to the home of the bride. In Uruk something went wrong with the ceremonial game and it ended, symbolized by the loss of the *pukku* and the *mekku*. This is explained when Gilgamesh wishes that he had left them with the carpenter's wife who is like his mother or the carpenter's daughter who is like his sister (Shaffer 1963: 107). If he had left them there, everything would have gone well, but he lost them to the Netherworld. As with his companion Enkidu who went down to the underworld and was seized by the earth, i.e., they will never return to life.

Through his relationship with Inanna, Dumuzi becomes the symbol of rejuvenation, birth after death, and continuity. He represents the answer of an agricultural society, the assurance of life in the spring after the drama of death in winter. Through Inanna and the sacred marriage, Dumuzi reaches eternity and divinity. This was not an easy task. He had to compete for Inanna against Enkimdu, the farmer god who is peaceful and loving. He is the favorite of Inanna despite her brother the sun god Utu's advice that Inanna should

marry the shepherd Dumuzi. The tale of Dumuzi and Enkimdu is brought to an end with Inanna's eventual agreement to be wedded to Dumuzi. In a gesture of peace, Enkimdu brings a wedding gift from the produce of the farm (ANET³:41).

The basic story of the tale may be shown on the famed "Uruk Vase" (Jacobsen 1976: 24), dated to the end of the 4th millennium B.C. It depicts a procession headed by a leader, a king or a priest, bringing the produce of the land and that of the flock. Fruits, grains, milk and butter are carried in containers or jars while different animals and plants decorate the lower frieze.

According to Jacobsen, Inanna and her bridegroom are represented by the symbol of the gatepost emblems. One recalls the text in Deut. 7:13 in which the Israelites are given instruction about Yahweh:

He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers; he will bless the fruit of your body and the produce of your soil, your corn, your wine, your oil, the issue of your cattle, the young of your flock ...

Another text which may help us to understand the scene on the vase from Uruk can be found in a restored Assyrian version of the Epic of Gilgamesh which dates to about 1000 B.C. In this:

*When Gilgamesh had put on his tiara,
Glorious Istar raised an eye at the beauty of
Gilgamesh:*

"Come, Gilgamesh, be thou (my) lover!

Do but grant me of thy fruit.

*Thou shalt be my husband and I will be thy
wife.*

*I will harness for thee a chariot of lapis and
gold,*

*Whose wheels are gold and whose horns are
brass.*

*Thou shalt have storm-demons to hitch on
for mighty mules.*

*In the fragrance of cedars thou shalt enter
our house.*

When our house thou enterest,

Threshold (and) dais shall kiss thy feet!

*Humbled before thee shall be kings, lords,
and princes!*

The yield of hills and plain they shall bring

thee as tribute.

*Thy goats shall cast triplets, thy sheep twins,
Thy he-ass in lading shall be famed for ra-
cing,*

*[Thine ox] under yoke shall not have a
rival!" (ANET³: 83-84).*

Notice the close association between this episode, the vase from Uruk and Mesopotamian cylinder seal impressions which may also contain representations of festivities connected with the marriage ceremony. Jacobsen (1976: 7) suggests the underlying meaning of these scenes:

*To some extent, of course, the form given to
numinous encounter may adjust to the con-
tent revealed in it. It may be abbreviated to
a single salient feature, as when Inanna, the
numinous power in the storehouse,
assumes the form of the characteristic
gatepost emblem of the storehouse, rather
than the storehouse as a whole. Sometimes
the form-giving imagination reads details
and meaning into a form beyond what is
given in simple observation:*

*We suggest that the original derivation of the
gate post in this scene may be the nature of
Inanna as the tree which is here shown to
represent a house in which her power dwells.
By entering the house in marriage, the
leader becomes victorious and prosperous;
his crop will multiply and he is guaranteed
eternal life. Stocking the storehouse is an
important obligation and usually gifts are
received by Inanna and her bridegroom
standing at the gate like gateposts. The
house is often represented by a hut which
has high poles flanking the entrance. This
recalls a text in the Epic of Gilgamesh:
He built the town wall of Uruk, (city) of
sheepfolds,
of the sacred precinct Eanna, the holy store
house. ...
approach Eanna, the seat of Ishtar
(Jacobsen 1976: 196).*

The interpretation by Jacobsen [*supra*] that the power of the numinous encounter can be "abbreviated to a single salient feature" is attractive. Thus either the house itself or the pole represents Inanna. The *huluppu* tree episode can be the first symbol of trinity, she is the bird, the trunk and the snake in one element, the tree. In many

instances the art of Egypt depicts the king or the god Osiris as being guarded by a snake and the bird Horus on their crown. Osiris is depicted as the *djet*-pillar or trunk of a tree.

Geshtinanna ("the leaf grapevine";

Jacobsen 1976: 62), the sister of Dumuzi, interprets his dream:

Rushes rise up all about you, rushes sprout all about you.

(This means) outlaws will rise up to attack you.

One reed standing all alone bows its head for you,

(This means) your mother who bore you will lower her head for you,

Of the reeds standing in pairs, one is removed,

(This means) I and you - one of us will be removed (Kramer 1963: 158).

The picture we can draw from this episode is that the pair of reeds represent Dumuzi and Geshtinanna. Their bowed heads are similar to the looped bundles of reeds which are standing at the gate of the storage house.

Dumuzi must die. Like all mortals, he is to be lamented at his death but, like a god, he will return to life. To fill his place, Geshtinanna will alternate with him in the Netherworld every six months, as was decided by the gods. This explains her saying, "*I and you - one of us will be removed...*".

The reeds standing in pairs recall the gateposts and indicate that they are male and female. As discussed before, if Inanna is one of the gateposts, then Dumuzi must be represented by the other one. In this tale, there is confusion between Dumuzi's mother and his sister and Inanna. This is similar to Hathor, Isis and Nephthys in their relation to Osiris. In several legends of the Near East, the virgin-mother goddess is married to her brother. Symbolized by the king ceremonially wedded to his sister, etc. She then has three aspects: mother, sister and wife. "And this deity who fostered all life was conceived of as a mother, unbegotten, genderless, producing animal and vegetable life as a virgin" (Langdon 1914: 43). Langdon goes on (1914: 43) to say that this aspect was manifest not as an

abstract but, "In the case of this people the grape vine appears to have been the plant which appealed to them as most efficiently manifesting the power of the great mother". Langdon (1914: 50) even thinks that this Mesopotamian idea originated in Byblos.

The multiple roles of the goddess are suggested in a Sumerian text:

'O brother fruit of my eyes, lifting up of my eyes,

Who is thy sister? I am thy sister.

Who is thy mother? I am thy mother.

In the sunrise when thou risest, rise!

At the dawn when thou appearest, appear.'

'The queen of Eanna who cries, "Alas! my husband, alas! my son"' (Langdon 1914: 53).

The tales of Gilgamesh portray the figure of a hero who rejected Inanna, the most powerful and most feared among the gods. "A hymn addresses Inanna in these words: "... *O Inanna mistress of myriad offices, no god rivals you ...* ." (Jacobsen 1976: 140). On more than one occasion, Inanna offered to marry Gilgamesh, but he refused her. He misused the *pukku* and the *mekku*; he showed no respect, and by insolence, he confronted Inanna. He killed the Bull of Heaven together with Huwawa (Assyrian Humbaba), who was "To safeguard [the Cedar forest], as a terror to [mortals has Enlil appointed him]" (*ANET*³: 79).

In the Akkadian epic of Gilgamesh (in the Assyrian texts found at Nineveh) entitled "He Who Saw Everything" (*ANET*³: 72), the longest and most complete text, Gilgamesh challenged Ishtar to the end. He prepared an expedition to the Cedar forest intending to cut the Cedar trees, the numinous embodiment of Inanna-Ishtar. The importance of this part of the story is shown in biblical texts about cutting the trees. In Ezekiel 31:1-18, the "*... cutting of the tree ... is seen as the destruction of world-empires - really, as the end of history*" (Brown 1969: 167).

Whom do you look like in your greatness?

*see I will compare you to a cedar in Lebanon
fair in its branches, a mountain grove giving
shade ...*

*strangers, terrible ones of the nations
have cut it down and abandoned it
on the hills and in all the ravines ...*

*On the day it goes down to Sheol
I shall make the abyss mourn for it*

**ISHTAR
(THE CEDAR-TREE)
AND THE DEFEAT
OF GILGAMESH**

(Ezekiel 31:2-3, 12, 15).
Gilgamesh kills Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven and fells the Cedar trees, but the story ends with lamentations and sorrow when Enkidu is condemned to die,
... "therefore" - said Anu - "the one of them

*Who stripped the mountains of the cedar
[Must die!]" (ANET³: 85).*

Gilgamesh, who is three-quarters divine, saw his end coming, but his drive for eternity never ceased. He sought and found plant of life:

"Its name shall be 'Man Becomes Young in Old Age.'

I myself shall eat (it)

And thus return to the state of my youth"

(ANET³: 96).

With Utnapishtim's help, Gilgamesh found the plant of life and renewal but, after a long journey, on his way home, the plant was eaten by a snake. Now Gilgamesh saw his end. The snake, among all creatures, must bring to mind the *huluppu*-tree episode in which a snake nestles in the roots of the tree.

*Thereupon Gilgamesh sits down and weeps,
His tears running down over his face*

(ANET³: 96).

The Epic of Gilgamesh is often interpreted as reflecting a period of heroism and wars. This may not be the only possible interpretation. Is this a story of Gilgamesh the hero in an age of war or is it really a story about Inanna? By portraying Gilgamesh as a great hero, a semi-god, and an invincible king, was the writer showing how Inanna-Istar could not be successfully challenged? Only through her can victory, prosperity, eternity, fertility, and true power be achieved. Gilgamesh in the story is being mocked by the writer; he is elevated to great heights only to be dropped. This myth explains allegorically the intention of Inanna to marry Gilgamesh and his refusal to accept, a refusal which ended in sorrow.

Inanna was swift in her retaliation; shortly thereafter the *pukku* and the *mekku* fall into the Netherworld. Enkidu follows, and the fate of Gilgamesh is death. Only through Inanna (Ishtar the cedar tree), the life giver, can one obtain eternal life and rise again in the spring, reborn after death.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANET³ = Pritchard 1969
AR = Breasted 1906-7

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