CULTIC CLUES IN CANTICLES?

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The book of Canticles, or the Song of Solomon, is a most fascinating book. As Morris Jastrow has said:

> The Song of Songs is one of the smallest books of the Old Testament. It consists in the conventional subdivision of the text of eight chapters with a total of only 117 verses. And yet this little book has been the subject of more controversy than perhaps any other production of similar size.[1]

Canticles is not only an intriguing and controversial book, it is also a difficult book to interpret. The first dominant school of interpretation was the *allegorical.* This view represented the book as picturing the love of God for mankind, and justified its representation from explicit references, such as in Hosea, where Jehovah's love for Israel is plainly stated in terms of marital affection. The allegorical view was for many centuries the "orthodox" view of Jews, Roman Catholics, and Protestants.

Opposed to any spiritualizing of the text, the *literal* schools of interpretation take Canticles as a description of love on the human plane, between man and maid rather than between God and man. The earliest proponent of such a view was Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 429 A.D.), who was condemned a century after his death by the Second Council of Constantinople for proposing such a view. In modern times literal interpretations began with Chatellon in 1544.

There are two major schools of literal interpreters, which are each in turn further subdivided into two sub-groups. The first group of interpreters views Canticles as a single dramatic piece, with either two major characters (Delitzsch, 1875), or three major characters (Ibn Ezra; Jacobi, 1771; Ewald, 1826), depending on whether Solomon is identified with the shepherd lover or distinquished from him. This view of Canticles as a single drama prevailed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The second and later group of literal interpreters denies the unity of the book and regards it as a collection of love songs. The view of those who held Canticles to be a collection of wedding songs (Wetzstein, 1873; Budde, 1894) prevailed for the first twenty-five years of this century. Others (Theodore of Mopsuestia; Herder, 1778; Jastrow; Gordis; Haupt; Baumgartner) have regarded it as a collection of secular or popular love songs.

A more novel attempt to unravel the meaning of the Song as non-unified is the *liturgical* (Tammuz-cult) school of interpretation.[2] The liturgical view sees Canticles as the Yahwistic modification of the liturgies of a pre-Israelite fertility cult, similar to those of the so-called Tammuz cult of Babylon (cf. Ezekiel 8:14). In the words of Theophile Meek, the chief proponent of such a view, the liturgical interpretation is as follows:

> According to this theory, the Song of Songs is the survival in conventionalized form of ancient Hebrew New Year liturgies that celebrated the reunion and marriage of the sun god with the mother goddess, which in the ancient world typified the revival of life in nature that came with the return of the growing season. It is the literary residue of a myth, a liturgy of life; it harks back to the ancient fertility cult which in its many forms was found throughout the whole world and is not without its survivals even in our own day, as witness features in our Easter celebration.[3]

Meek's presentation has captured the allegiance or partial allegiance of a considerable body of scholars. Among these may be numbered Snaith, Minnocchi, Oesterley, Wittekind, Margoliouth, Ranston, Haller, Ebeling, Waterman, Graham and May. The view has been criticized by Cassuto, Schmidt, Rowley and Kramer though even these admit some influence of the fertility cult.

Furthermore, this view is now being cited as evidence of the influence of Babylonian practices in Hebrew life and thought by such writers as E. O. James in *Myth and Ritual in the Ancient Near East,* and David R. Mace in *Hebrew Marriage.* Thus, whether one agrees with the liturgical view or not, its significance in current studies, not only in the area of the interpretation of a single Old Testament book but also in the broader field of comparative religions, is such that one cannot afford to ignore it.

What originally led Meek to set forth this view was an Akkadian text—a catalogue of the first lines of a number of hymns—which struck him (1) as being most appropriate as liturgies for a fertility cult; and (2) as closely resembling the Song of Solomon. Cited below are a few lines from the Akkadian text.[4] Translated by Meek with his interpretive comments in parentheses:

> I beheld thee (masc.) and . . . . . .
> Shine out like a star of the sky!
> In a dirge over thy (masc.) death. (The reference here is to the death of **Tammuz.**)
> This is the desire that rejoiceth my heart. (lit. liver)
> The utterance of thy (masc.) mouth is the word of my life; prosper thou me! (Clearly a reference to Tammuz, the life-giving god.)
> . . . . . .
> By the name of the son I revive the vegetation.
> Ah, I behold the fat of the land.
> The day bringeth gladness, even joy of the heart.
> (A sentiment frequent in the Tammuz liturgies and in Canticles. The reference is to the joy occasioned by the revival of life and vegetation in the world.)
> Upon me may the sunbeam; come thou in!
> Not a rival (fem.) equal led me.
> My Nippurite is a jar of sweetness. (i.e. Ishtar)
> Be joyous, be happy!
> . . . . . .
> Thou hast caressed me; be thou my lord!
> The fragrance of cedar is thy love, O lord.
> (The cedar is everywhere connected with the fertility cult and appears in Cant. 1:17)
> To the door of the lord she did come. (i.e. in the nether-world where the goddess, Ishtar, was thought to go in search of her lord, Tammuz.)
> For this night, for these evenings.
> (A total of 17 *irtu*-songs for the *kitmu*-instrument.)

Meek goes on to conclude:

> Even a casual perusal of the lines of the hymns listed above must convince the most skeptical of two things: (1) that these hymns were taken from the liturgy of the Tammuz-Ishtar cult, and (2) that the similarity between them and the songs in the book of Canticles is so close that both must belong together . . . . Both are liturgies of the fertility cult. The only difference is that

one group has come from Babylonia and the other from Palestine, where numerous influences tended to obscure and efface its original character.[5]

Some thirty years later Meek was entrusted with the introduction and the exegesis of the Song of Solomon for the *Interpreter's Bible* (1956), a highly publicized Protestant commentary. In his exegesis Meek perceives allusions to fertility cults in almost every line, as it were, of Canticles.

We should note that the liturgical theory is based upon several assumptions:

First, the Akkadian text cited by Meek as primary evidence[6] is assumed to be a catalogue of *liturgical* texts. In contrast with the many *ritual* texts in Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* which explicitly indicate themselves to be such by their many directions to priests, the text—part of which is cited above—is assumed from internal evidence to be a list of songs as might be used by the participants of a "sacred wedding" of a fertility cult.

Secondly, the text is held to represent liturgies of the Tammuz cult. Now we do not mean to deny that there was probably a Tammuz (Dumuzi)-Ishtar (Inanna) fertility cult of some nature in Mesopotamia. Kramer notes that we have texts from about 2100 B.C., showing that the kings of Sumer were identified with Dumuzi, the prehistoric king of Sumer, and texts from 2400 B.C., showing that the kings of Sumer were to be "married" to the goddess Inanna. There is a hymn which contains a description of a *hieros gamos* ("sacred marriage") ceremony on the New Year between the king Iddin-Dagan (about 1900 B.C.) and the goddess Inanna, who was probably represented by a hierodule.[7]

But what is usually meant by references to the Tammuz cult is something more than this. The Tammuz cult is assumed to be a seasonal fertility cult, based upon the search by Ishtar (Inanna) for Tammuz (Dumuzi) in the netherworld. It is felt that the absence of Tammuz from the face of the earth coincided with and symbolized the barren fields and withered growth of summer and that his subsequent resurrection from the netherworld by Ishtar heralded the revived vegetation of the spring.[8]

Meek, for example, in his exegesis of the Song of Solomon in the *Interpreter's Bible* says:

> 7:12 "On the cultic interpretation the verse would refer to the revival of life in nature on the reunion of god and goddess."
>
> 8:5a "According to the cultic interpretation, this would refer to the *coming up* of the god and goddess from the underworld."
>
> 3:1 "Here and in vss. 2-4 we have once again the motif of seeking and finding as well as the reference to watchmen impeding the way . . . reminding us of the watchmen that Ishtar had to pass to get into the underworld to bring back her dead lord to life and thus bring new life into the world."[9]

But since there are no cuneiform documents which state clearly that the Akkadian Tammuz, or his Sumerian prototype, Dumuzi, ever rose from the dead, we see that the idea of the resurrection of Tammuz has been based on a *third* assumption. The career of the Mesopotamian Tammuz has been identified with that of the Hellenic Adonis on the basis of some similarities of character. Sir James Frazer declared:

> The worship of Adonis was practiced by the Semitic peoples of Babylonia and Syria, and the Greeks borrowed it from them as early as the seventh century before Christ. The true name of the deity was Tammuz: the appellation of Adonis is merely the Semitic *Adon*, "lord" a title of honour by which his worshippers addressed him.[10]

Writing back in 1911, Farnell was aware that this identification of Adonis with Tammuz was a tenuous one. Farnell wrote:

> But such a reconstruction of the old Tammuz ritual rests at present only on indirect evidence of the later records of Attis-Adonis cult and of the Tammuz-worship among the heathen Syrians of Harran in the tenth century of our era.
>
> We have no surety, then, for a belief that Tammuz, or any shadow of Tammuz, was borne to the western shores of the Aegean in the days before Homer. And we know that Adonis, his nearest Anatolian representative, only arrived late in the post-Homeric period.[11]

The propensity or seeing similarities and ignoring distinctions has led to a *fourth* assumption: namely, the identification of Adonis-Tammuz with the newly discovered fertility god of Ugaritic literature.

Baumgartner, for example, says:

> The signifiance of the vegetation god's cult in the ancient orient has become more and more apparent in the past twenty or thirty years, particularly through the Ugaritic texts. It is now generally recognized that the Israelite cultus was strongly Canaanite in character, and that the Old Testament is riddled with traces of Adonis worship.[12]

Having traced the course of four successive assumptions in the development and transmission of the fertility cult theory, identified with the Hellenistic Adonis tradition, and with the Canaanite Baal tradition—we are ready to outline a *fifth* assumption. The fertility cult was transmitted to Israel when the prophets exalted Yahweh as being indeed the god of the sacred marriage, rather than Baal. The cult was then later ethicized and transformed beyond recognition. So James maintains:

> Indeed, in the northern kingdom of Israel at any rate Yahweh was a fertility Baal as late as the eighth century B.C. (Hosea 2:5,8) and the prophetic polemic against the national religion very largely was based upon the transferrence of the control of vegetation to Yahweh in the traditional seasonal ritual. (Isa.-28:23 ff.)
>
> Yahweh was acknowledged as supreme by right of conquest after the settlement, but as Meek says, "his department was the large one of the state and not the affairs of ordinary everyday agricultural and commercial life." Therefore, if he was to secure and retain the allegiance of the masses, it was essential that he should be presented and worshipped in the appropriate manner of a fertility god rather than in that of a desert god.[13]

Note the factors of this transference in the order of their importance: 1) Yahew as a fertility god; 2) and as such, the god represented in the sacred marriage; and 3) a liturgy for the sacred marriage. Now if we are willing to assume that Yahweh has become a fertility god, we shall not quibble about assuming that Yahweh also accepted the sacred marriage rite that went with his new position, much less would we protest the adoption of a liturgy for such a rite.

Meek employs a curious, negative logic when he argues for the acceptance of Canticles as a ritual survival by asserting the existence in Israel of such a sacred marriage rite:

> The frequent description in the prophetic writings of the relation between Yahweh and his people as that of husband and wife indicates the existence of the sacred marriage as a feature of ancient Hebrew ritual. If this was not so,

the prophetic reformers would scarcely have used so persistently a symbolic pattern which was connected in the minds of the people only with an alien cult. In trying to stamp out Baalism the prophets would surely have avoided mention of the nations marriage to Yahweh if that concept originated in and belonged only to the Baalized forms of the Hebrew religion.[14]

A *sixth* assumption follows the fifth. After we have assumed the existence of a sacred marriage of Yahweh, who is now a fertility god and have assumed the original employment of Canticles as a liturgical text for that rite, it will not be difficult for us to find cultic references in the text, even though it has been transformed. For we shall assume that any word which is used elsewhere with a cultic association must also have a similar cultic significance if used here. Hence, in his exegesis of Canticles, it is possible for Meek to see cultic allusions in almost every passage. It is also possible for Schoff to list the material allusions in the Song and assert that 134 instances point to the Ishtar cult.[15]

Rowley roundly criticizes this particular assumption. He says:

> Again, the ingenuity with which Tammuz is imported at every point by the advocates of this new theory can only create grave doubts as to the soundness of the theory. If a writer cannot mention such common things or experience as *shepherd, vine, vineyard, dove, gazelle, apple, cedar, palmtree, garden* or *hyacinth,* to name some things from Meek's list of alleged allusions to the Tammuz cult, without being held to be writing of that cult, the way of letters for all but devotees of Tammuz is made very hard, and when to these we add some further terms from Schoff's list, *flock, kids, king couch, fruit, flowers, blossoms, bed, lions, leopard, sister, bride, honey, milk, spring, fountain, waters, dew, maidens, moon, sun, nuts,* and *dance,* the poet's case becomes desperate indeed. For how could one write a love lyric in any language if such terms must be excluded from his vocabulary? The fact that these terms occur in relation to the Tammuz cult is no proof that they only had relation to that cult or Tammuz is everywhere.
>
> If the method of this theory should be applied to the whole of the Old Testament . . . there would soon be little of it left without connection with the Tammuz cult. (The process has, indeed, already begun, for W. E. Staples now resolves the book of Ruth into a Tammuz liturgy, *American Journal of Semitic Languages,* liii [1936-37], 145-157).[16]

Similarly, Baumgartner remarks: "The allegedly mythical references are often sought out as if there were no such thing as ordinary love-making and love-words, or are obtained by doubtful textural emendations . . . ."[17]

A *seventh* assumption seems to run contrary to the sixth: that is, having all of these numerous cultic allusions, we must nevertheless assume that they were suppressed, sublimated, or ethicized so that there was no objection to the acceptance of a former Tammuz liturgy into the canon. Perhaps this last feature of the liturgical view looms as the greatest marvel of all.

Commenting on the alleged revision which made the book eligible for election to the canon, Rowley observes:

> Meek, however, supposes that in the Song we have not the Tammuz liturgy in its original and offensive form, but that it has been revised to render it innocuous, and to harmonize it with the Yahweh cultus. . . . in truth, we look in vain in the Song for any real indication of the Yahweh cult. Indeed, Meek himself somewhat naively remarks, "Rather strikingly Yahweh never once appears in the book. When the liturgy was incorporated into the Yahweh cult, it was deemed sufficient to transfer the titles to him without adding his name." Surely this was a strange revision, which left traces of the rejected cult everywhere in the book, but which left the new cult unmentioned.[18]

These then are seven assumptions which undergird the liturgical view. A hypothesis that is dependent upon so many assumptions as the liturgical hypothesis must remain a very weakly supported hypothesis at best. Furthermore, the very nature of such an elaborate edifice of conjecture compounded upon hypothesis resting upon theory renders its vulnerable when a supporting presupposition must be abandoned. This is exactly the fate which is facing the liturgical view. For as matters turn out, not only is the hypothesis based on a large number of assumptions, but a most basic assumption has recently been shown to be completely false.

In August, 1960, Samuel Noah Kramer—Professor of Assyriology at the Universtiy of Pennsylvania and curator of the tablet collection of the University Museum—disclosed at the Congress of Orientalists in Moscow that belief in the resurrection of Dumuzi or Tammuz is no longer possible—*Dumuzi never rose from the dead!* This momentuous disclosure, the importance of which is comparable to that of the "Piltdown Hoax" in anthropology, is based upon newly discovered and translated Sumerian tablets.[19]

In the introduction to the recently published *Mythologies of the Ancient World,* which he edited, Kramer says:

> A concrete illustration of one of the major goals of the collection of essays presented in this volume . . . is provided by the hitherto largely unknown Sumerian myth concerned with the death of the god Dumuzi, or to use the modified form of his name known from Biblical and post-Biblical sources, Tammuz. For when taken together with the myth "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World" with which it is intimately related, its contents demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that Dumuzi dies and "*stays dead*"; *indeed he must not under any circumstances leave the Nether World and return to the upper regions, since in that case Inanna would have no substitute and would therefore be forced to return to the Nether World.*
>
> It is for this reason, too, that we find only laments for Dumuzi's death; there are no songs of rejoicing to celebrate his resurrection. But for more than half a century now, students of mythology . . . have taken Dumuzi to be the original prototype of the dying god, who rises annually from the dead, the very archetype of the deity who dies every summer and is revived every spring. *In an effort to get at the reasons for this erroneous but well-nigh universal view of the Dumuzi myth, I combed the relevant cuneiform literature patiently and carefully, but could find no supporting evidence whatever from the texts; it is based on nothing but inference and surmise, guess and conjecture.*[20]

This disclosure is disastrous to the standing of many theories in the area of comparative religions, for it rudely knocks away the very keystone of the Tammuz-Adonis tradition.

Looking back from the vantage point of this new truth, we can note several things: 1) the so called Tammuz liturgies will have to be abandoned or, at least completely reassessed;[21] 2) the Tammuz-Adonis identification can no longer be maintained; nor for that matter should 3) the Tammuz-Adonis-Baal identification; 4) the Tammuz cult does not lend itself to the representation of seasonal renewal as formerly supposed; 5) no longer can references to spring, to two persons rising from the underworld, to a goddess seeking a lost lover, etc. be understood as allusions

to Tammuz. As a corollary to this, the fertility-god concept of Yahweh must either be abandoned, or drastically revised by those who still wish to maintain it. There will be no end of repercussions from this single, epochal disclosure.

Cyrus Gordon corroborates the suspicion, that the entire picture of seasonal fertility in the Near East, as it has been visualized in traditional scholarly circles, is an artificial one. In his book, *The World of the Old Testament*, Gordon says:

> Never in Semitic ideology is there any desire to strive for seasonal perfection, whereby the best time of the year should prevail all the time.
>
> This is overlooked by those who assume that in the ancient Near East the normal advent of the dry season was received with weeping for a god of fertility who died yearly at that season and who came back to life yearly with the return of the rains. It must be borne in mind that rain out of season was as disturbing as drought out of season (I Samuel 12:17-20). Moreover, the god in control of life-giving water (Baal or Yahweh) is the god of summer dew no less than of winter rain.[22]

Again in the introduction to his volume, *Ugaritic Literature*, Gordon deals at length with the same subject with special reference to Ugaritic literature:

> When literal meaning is brushed aside as poetic license in order to make room for predilection, prejudice, theory or outside parallels, the results are bad, although they may gain wide credence for a long time. As an object lesson, we may turn to the accepted view of the fertility god Baal who is incorrectly identified with a mixture of real and imaginary motifs including the Dying God of Frazer's *Golden Bough*. Every year with the onslaught of the summer drought, Baal is supposed to be killed by Mot, the god of death, and every year Baal is revived with the return of the rains and fertility. (Tammuz is said to die and revive *annually:* a generally accepted idea for which I can find no support in the Mesopotamian mythological texts.) The evidence for this is of the most specious character. The Adonis myth has an embellishment, known from Greek sources, to the effect that Zeus settled the rivalry of Persephone and Aphrodite over Adonis, by assigning the beautiful god part of every year to Persephone in the underworld, and the other part of the year to Aphrodite above. Before the discovery of the Ugaritic texts, this Greek version was read back into Phoenician mythology and now it is read still further back into Ugaritic mythology in clear opposition to the plain meaning of the Ugaritic texts. The texts tell us nothing of any annual death and revival of Baal. Indeed the widespread notion that the year in Canaan is divided into a fertile and a sterile season is false. No part of the year is sterile; thus, figs and grapes ripen toward the end, and hence worst part, of the long summer drought; and much is made of the summer fruits in Ugaritic (77) and in other sources from Canaan such as the Gezer Calendar, to say nothing of many biblical passages.[23]

We conclude then that the liturgical view of the Song of Solomon is untenable, and that the so-called cultic clues in Canticles as discovered by Meek are assumed, and not proven.

We agree with Gordon's dictum that, "It cannot be overemphasized that the discoveries of archaeology tend to justify the literal meaning of the text as against scholarly and traditional interpretation."[24]

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NOTES

1. Morris Jastrow, Jr. *The Song of Songs.* Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1921. p. 7.

2. Meek presented this view in the *American Journal of Semitic Languages*, vol. xxxix, 1922-23, pp. 1-14; in "Babylonian Parallels to the Song of Songs," in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. xliii, 1924, pp. 242-252; and in "The Song of Songs and the Fertility Cult," pp. 48-79 of the symposium, *The Song of Songs* edited by Wilfred Schoff and published by the Oriental Club of Philadelphia in 1924.

Before Meek there had been two abortive attempts at a cultic interpretation of Canticles. In 1906 Erbt had sought without success to interpret it in terms of the astral theory of the Pan-Babylonian school. Then in 1914 Neuschotz de Jassy, resolved the book into a liturgy of the Osiris cult.

Commenting on Meek's interpretation, H. H. Rowley in his article, "The Song of Songs: an Examination of Recent Theory," in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, April*, 1938, p. 256, said:

> "There is, indeed, today a growing tendency to find in various parts of the Old Testament ritual survivals. Mowinckel explains many of the Psalms as ritual texts, particularly associated with magic arts; Humbert explains the book of Nahum as a ritual for the autumn festival in Jerusalem in 612 B. C., when the fall of Nineveh was celebrated; Balla explains the book of Habakkuk as a ritual text. It is therefore in full harmony with this tendency, though preceding all these theories in its first presentation, that the Song of Songs should be ritually interpreted."

3. Theophile J. Meek. "The Song of Songs," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. v., N.Y.: Abingdon Press, 1956. p. 94.

4. The text is no. 158 in Ebeling's *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiosen Inhalts*, Heft iv. Meek's translation and comments appeared in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. xliii, 1924, pp. 245-252.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. It was probably a hierodule chosen to be a bride of Shu-Sin (about 2000 B.C.), who sang the rhapsodic love songs cited in chapter 25 of Kramer's *History Begins at Sumer*. These songs are remarkably reminiscent of portions of Canticles, as are love songs from other areas of the Near East. For other Sumerian love songs, see "Love, Hate, and Fear—Psychological Aspects of Sumerian Culture," by Samuel Kramer in *Eretz-Israel*, vol. 5, 1958, pp. 66-74.

For Arabic love songs see the extracts in English translation from Gustav Dalman's *Palaestinischer Diwan* in Morris Jastrow's *The Song of Songs*. For Egyptian love songs see the English translations from Max Muller's *Liebpoesie der alten Agypter* in George A. Barton's *Archaeology and the Bible;* see also Adolf Erman's *The Literature of the Ancient Egyptians*. For Greek love idylls 18 and 27 of *Theocritus*.

8. Maurice H. Farbridge. *Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1923, p. 165.

9. Meek. *The Interpreter's Bible, op. cit., in loc.*

10. James George Frazer. *The Golden Bough*, abridged edition. London: MacMillan and Co., 1922. p. 325.

11. Lewis R. Farnell. *Greece and Babylon*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911. p. 242.

12. W. Baumgartner. "The Wisdom Literature," in *The Old Testament and Modern Study*, edited by H. H. Rowley, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952. p. 233.

13. James. *op. cit.*, pp. 63-65.

14. Meek. "The Song of Songs," in the *Interpreter's Bible*. p. 95.

15. Wilfred H. Schoff. "The Offering Lists in the Song of Songs," pp. 80-120, in *The Song of Songs; a symposium*, edited by Wilfred H. Schoff. Philadelphia: Commercial Museum, 1924.

16. H. H. Rowley. "The Song of Songs: an Examination of Recent Theory," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, April, 1938. pp. 265-6.

17. Baumgartner. *op. cit.*, p. 233.

18. Rowley. *op. cit.*, pp. 260-1.

19. As in the case of the "Piltdown Hoax" scholars suspected the validity of the theory before its decisive refutation came. Albright, reviewing E. O. James, *The Cult of the Mother Goddess* in *The Classical World*, vol. 53, no. 9, June, 1960, p. 287, remarked in passing, "There is no concrete evidence for details of the alleged Tammuz cult."

In the article, "Sumerian Mythology" in the *Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 21, 1944, Kramer had said, "Only the Tammuz myths dealing with the dying deity and his resurrection will be omitted; the contents are still too obscure for reasonably safe interpretation." p. 13. "It is not too much to hope, however, that some day in the not too distant future the pieces on which the conclusion of the story (of Inanna's Descent) is inscribed will be discovered and deciphered." p. 87.

cf. also Kramer's articles "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World," in the *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, vol. iv, no. 4, 1950, pp. 199-214; and vol. v., no. 1, 1951, pp. 1-17.

20. Samuel Noah Kramer, ed. *Mythologies of the Ancient World*. N. Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1961. p. 10. (This is an original paperback Anchor book, A-229.)

Before his formal announcement of this new interpretation of Dumuzi's death at the Congress of Orientalists at Moscow in August, 1960, Dr. Kramer allowed the students in his course on "Sumero-Akkadian Literature and the Bible" at the Summer Institute of Archaeology at Brandeis University to preview the paper which he was to read them. With his permission I quote from that article, "The Death of Dumzi," the following extracts:

> "Inanna the goddess whom Dumuzi had wooed and won for wife, decides to leave heaven and earth and to descend to the Nether World in order to make herself its mistress, and thus, to give an idea of its plot and to translate several passages in the *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, vol. xii, pages 165-66, and in Leo Oppenheim's *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East*, p. 246. Since then I have identified nineteen additional tablets and fragments . . . . As a result of all these new documents it was possible, at long last, to restore the text of the poem almost in full and to prepare the tentative translation on which the following sketch of its contents is based."

21. A translation and full description of the myth is being prepared for publication by Dr. Kramer. Kramer reasseses the Tammuz cult by ridding it of the notion of any resurrection. The marriage was therefore between a living king—not a resurrected god—and Inanna. The laments associated with Tammuz, as in Ezekiel 8:14, were made during royal funerals or on days of mourning set aside annually to mark some major calamity. On the other hand, there were "sacred marriages" between th king of Sumer and a hierodule annually to insure the fertility of the land, which were characterized by songs of love and rejoicing.

Kramer (in a personal communication, August 2, 1961) maintains the cultic interpretation of Canticles with modifications by assuming: 1) that the Hebrew scribes would not spend their time transcribing secular love songs, therefore the songs that were transcribed were probably ritual in character; 2) that since the lover is designated as both king and

shepherd, his beloved was possibly an Astarte votary (with Solomon's partiality for the cult of Astarte); 3) that the Hebrew love songs, which are similar to the Sumerian ones used in "sacred marriage" rites, were probably used in similar Hebrew "sacred marriages," 4) that such a "sacred marriage" would not likely have arisen independently but would probably have been derived from Mesopotamia; and 5) that it was the king—Solomon—not Yahweh, who married the goddess Astarte.

Though Kramer's reasoning is less speculative than that of Meek's, we would raise the following questions as to his assumptions: 1) Even less likely to me than the notion of the Hebrew scribes transcribing secular love songs, is the notion of them transcribing pagan cultic songs to be preserved in the canon. 2) The designation of the lover as a king and as a shepherd does not constitute strong evidence that his beloved was an Astarte votary. 3) The striking similarity of the Sumerian love songs to Canticles does not prove the latter's derivation from the former any more than the striking similarity of Canticles to Arabic, and Egyptian love songs. 4) The "sacred marriage" in Israel is a pure hypothecation. There is no explicit, unambiguous reference to the *hieros gamos* in the Bible. Meek's reference to the marriage allusions in Hosea is curious, not convincing. If it be argued that these references were "sublimated," it may be asked why all the other explicit references to Moloch, to Baal, to idolatry, etc., were not also suppressed.

My own view of Canticles is the two-character, literal interpretation of the book without Delitzsch's conception of it as a drama.

22. Cyrus H. Gordon. *In the World of the Old Testament*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1958. p. 40.

23. Cyrus H. Gordon. *Ugaritic Literature*. Rome: Pontifical Bible Institute, 1949. pp. 4-5.

24. Gordon. *op. cit.*, p. 120.