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THE MOTHER OF THE MESSIAH

In a recent ecumenical colloquy at St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, the discussion turned to that perennial area of debate, Catholic devotion to Mary. The prime factor in the Protestant criticism was the lack of scriptural evidence to support veneration of the Mother of Jesus. One of the Catholic participants questioned the validity of the objection by calling attention to the words of Elizabeth, "How have I deserved this, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (*Lk.* 1, 43)

Father David Stanley has already emphasized the paramount importance of this Lukan text. "The title, 'the mother of my Lord,'" he writes, "provides the clearest and probably the most ancient evidence we possess of the form which devotion to the Mother of God assumed in apostolic Christianity. These words indicate that it was the queenship of Mary which was honored in the primitive Christian Church."¹

This esteem of Mary in the early Christian community was the immediate emergent of the role she played in the life and destiny of her divine Son. At the Annunciation Gabriel promised the birth of a king. Every phrase and title in his message identify Jesus as the long expected Son of David who is the Messiah, the anointed king par excellence. In Him Nathan's promise of God's special solicitude over the kings of the Davidic dynasty (2 *Sm.* 7, 12-16) achieves consummate fulfillment; "He shall be king over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (*Lk.* 1, 32-33).

Mary, too, will have her office to fill—as Mother of the Messiah. Whatever "great things" God does for her are privileges and prerogatives of this all important role. Whatever veneration is paid her, whether by the angel of the Annuncia-

¹ D. M. Stanley, S.J., *The Mother of My Lord*, in *Wbp* 34 (1960) 330.

tion or by generations yet to come, rests on her unique relationship with the holy and anointed Son of David. In her presence all must bow low with Elizabeth and exclaim, "How have I deserved this, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

This title, "Mother of my Lord," bears a wealth of meaning for those who are familiar with the Old Testament. In the court language of the ancient Near East it designated the mother of the reigning monarch who was addressed as "my Lord" (cf. 2 Sm. 24, 21). The dignity accorded to the royal widow when her son ascended the throne was no mere token honor. It reflected the high privilege and influential office of a dowager queen who exerted real power both in her son's rise to kingship and in his rule of the kingdom.

This Old Testament concept gives rich significance to Mary's role as Mother of the Messiah. When this title is studied in the light of the queen-mother tradition in Israel, it provides a key not only to several important Old Testament passages but also to Mary's share in the life and dominion of her royal Son.²

Motherhood in the Period Before Monarchy

Even the earliest traditions of Israel ascribe a major role to the mothers of its great men. Sara, Rebecca, Rachel, Jochabed, the mother of Samson, and Anna are singled out for the marked influence which each exerted in the life of her son. This maternal power derives from nature itself.³ In the ancient Near East, moreover, the very structure of social life

² Henri Cazelles, *La Mère du Roi-Messie dans l'Ancien Testament*, in *MEcl* 5 (1959) 39 "Il y a là implicitement toute une théologie mariale car les croyants de l'époque savaient bien par l'Ancien Testament que la mère du Roi n'était pas comme de nos jours une veuve plus ou moins mise à l'écart, elle avait au contraire une position privilégiée, elle était associée à l'élévation et au gouvernement du roi son fils"

was bound to strengthen the natural tie between mother and child. The chieftain, as a man of many wives, would naturally leave to each one the care and upbringing of the children whom she had borne. Women of the harem, therefore, plied their arts not only to gain the affection of their mutual husband but also to win favor and preferment for their own children.

Scripture, moreover, sees in the mothers if its great men an essential religious factor which lifts them above the natural level of a mother's important role in the Near East. The maternity of the women of the Bible is often presented as a vehicle of God's salvific activity. Time and again He acts through a mother (often in a miraculous way) to give birth to a predestined child and to guard this savior of Israel during the days of his infancy.

This natural and supernatural function of the mother often created for the son a debt of deep gratitude. Jacob, for instance, could never forget the good offices and fearless solicitude of his mother Rebecca, to her he owed his full share in the blessings of Isaac (*Gen* 25, 19; 27, 46). Neither could Samuel forget the prayerful and beneficent influence of his mother Anna to whom he owed not only his life but also his consecration to God (*1 Sm* 1, 1, 2, 21).

It is not surprising, then, that the same Jahwist traditions which describe the influence of the mothers of the patriarchs should emphasize also (in *Gen*. 3, 15) the role of motherhood in Israel's dream of the future. In this period prior to the origin of monarchy, the people of God centered their hope on the deliverance and victory which God provides in the here and now. Even in these early days, however, they cherished vague and general aspirations toward a definitive salvation and peered hopefully into the future to glimpse a beneficent change. Thus in *Gen*. 3, 15 soteriology is tinted with the coloring of the "end-time." It is noteworthy that, wholly in

accord with the scriptural concept of God's salvific action through motherhood, this prophecy, born of nascent faith and hope, envisions the future in terms of a mother and her offspring. Both are joined—for weal and for woe—in this significant blueprint of salvation history.

Monarchy and Royal Messianism

With the coming of monarchy Israel entered on a new phase of political and social life. To understand the change one must keep in mind that the people of God borrowed the institution of kingship from foreign nations. It was when the Israelites cowered under the pressure of external attack and chafed under the stern exactions of God's personal rule through inspired leaders that they turned an admiring gaze toward the nations round about and yearned for the pomp and prestige of their earthly glory. Spontaneously the cry arose, "There shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go forth before us and fight our battles" (*1 Sm.* 8:19-20; *Osee* 8:4).³ This choice meant inevitably the borrowing of foreign customs, as Samuel foretold in the warning which he codified in his "law of the king" (*1 Sm.* 8:11-18; 10:25), and as the Deuteronomist described in his anachronistic code of kingship (*Dt.* 17:14-20).

Monarchy serves as something of a parenthesis in the story of Israel, the nation which was to have only God as its ruler. An early view represented kingship as designed by Yahweh Himself for the well-being of the tribal confederation

³R. De Vaux, O.P., *Les institutions de l'Ancien Testament*, 1 (Paris, 1958) 145-146, presents the view that the "other nations" which Israel imitates were the Aramean states recently settled in Transjordan and Syria and related by blood to the Israelites. Reviewing S. Mowinckel's *He That Cometh*, in *RB* 65 (1958) 104, De Vaux takes exception to the suggestion of M. that the "other nations" were the Canaanite states.

which owed allegiance to Him. The fact is, however, that Israelite monarchy was a man-made interruption of the divine plan for theocracy. It came into being, precipitated by the need for a united front against the Ammonite oppression and the Philistine menace.⁴

Whatever one may say of this historical interlude, the truth remains that it served the noble purpose of keeping alive earlier soteriological aspirations. Monarchy provided a training ground where thought patterns were forged and expectations enkindled to create the royal messianism which became the carrier of Israel's bright hopes. Joseph Klausner has described this messianic expectation as "the prophetic hope for the end of this age, in which a strong Redeemer, by His power and His spirit, will bring complete redemption, political and spiritual, to the people of Israel, and along with this, earthly bliss and moral perfection to the entire human race."⁵

Not all will agree with this description of the messianic hope. So eminent a scholar as Sigmund Mowinckel,⁶ following in the steps of Wellhausen, Duhm and Marti, would restrict the concept of messiah to an eschatological king who is to manifest his glory in an "other-world" ambient outside the ken of earthly vision and beyond the pale of history. Since this rarified concept of a transcendent messiah cannot be identified with certainty in scriptural texts preceding the exile, these authors conclude that the expectation of an eschatological messiah is the creation of post-exilic theology

⁴ There are two traditions on the origin of kingship in Israel. Cf. De Vaux, *op. cit.*, 145-146; A. R. Johnson, *Hebrew Conceptions of Kingship*, in *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship* (ed. S. H. Hooke, Oxford, 1958) 204-205.

⁵ J. Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel*, tr. William Stinespring (New York, 1955) 9.

⁶ S. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, tr. G. W. Anderson (Oxford, 1956) 3. "To use the word 'Messiah' is to imply eschatology, the last things. It is, therefore, a misuse of the words 'Messiah' and 'Messianic' to apply them, for instance, to those ideas which were associated in Israel or in the ancient east with kings who were actually reigning." Cf. 124-125, 261-263.

This restriction of the messianic concept is hardly warranted by the literature of Israel. Scholars like J. Coppens,⁷ R. De Vaux,⁸ and J. McKenzie⁹ think that Mowinckel has misread the Old Testament data in limiting messianism to a hope for an "other-world" salvation in the "end-time." A better founded emergent of scriptural teaching is the postulate that messianism lived for a long while in an earth-bound concept which evolved through its own inward principle of life into the transcendent notion of a strictly eschatological king and savior.

This inward principle of life was contained in God's word to David:

When your days are finished,
 And you are laid with your fathers,
 I will raise up your heir after you,
 Who shall be born of your body;
 And I will establish his kingdom . .
 I will be his father,
 And he shall be my son; . . .
 Your house and your kingdom shall be confirmed before me
 forever;
 For all time your throne shall be established
 (2 Sm 7, 12-16).

The people of God knew, therefore, that God would act in a special way through the dynasty of David. During the period of monarchy faith and hope centered on the royal anointed one. Earlier aspirations toward a roseate future were intimately merged in the national hopes which rose high with the accession of each new king. The people lived with

⁷ J. Coppens, *Les origines du messianisme*, in *L'attente du Messie* (ed B Rigaut, Paris, 1954) 35

⁸ R. De Vaux, review of S Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, in *RB* 65 (1958) 106.

⁹ J. L. McKenzie, *Royal Messianism*, in *CBQ* 19 (1957) 46-52

constant hope that the new monarch would be the ideal son of David, the perfect sovereign through whom Yahweh the King would save and rule them.¹⁰ The Bible, therefore, never uses the word "messiah" of a king in the distant future but only of an historic king within the scope of Israel's present vision.¹¹ Before becoming the king of the eschatological age the Messiah ("the anointed one") was long thought of as the kingly son of David who would fulfill every hope during the days of his present rule.

The hope which surged in the heart of Israel with the accession of each new king and found expression in the royal messianic psalms does not imply that the nation regarded its monarchy as divine. The neighboring Aramean nations from whom Israel borrowed its institution of kingship made no such claim for their monarch. Moreover, the documentation from Syria and Palestine bears no evidence of widespread belief in divinized kingship.¹² Much less, then, shall we find

¹⁰ R. De Vaux, *op cit*, 169 "Il est plus raisonnable d'admettre que ces psaumes, comme la prophétie de Natân et comme l'autres textes du messianisme royal, sont bivalents dès leur composition chaque roi de la lignée davidique est une image et une annonce du roi idéal de l'avenir."

¹¹ It is only in the last century before the Christian era that the word "messiah" is applied to the long awaited savior-king, cf *Ps Sol* 17, 32-36, 18, 35-41, *1 En* 48, 10, 1, 4; *2 Esd* 7, 48ff, etc Cf S. Mowinckel, *op cit*, 291-292

¹² The Near Eastern texts do not all show the same attitude toward the divinization of royalty. In Egypt, Pharaoh was regarded as the incarnation of the great sky-god Horus, cf H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago, 1948) 36-47. As for Mesopotamia, the divine character of the king is suggested only rarely, as during the 3rd dynasty of Ur. In the later Assyrian-Babylonian texts the king is divine not in person but only in function and by participation; cf R. Labat, *Le caractère religieux de la royauté assyro-babylonienne* (Paris, 1939) 32-66. Among the Hittites the king became divine only after death; cf O. R. Gurney, *Hittite Kingship*, in *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship*, 115-121.

The documentation from Syria and Palestine does not evidence any practice of divinizing the king. The Amarna letters, in calling Pharaoh "my God" (cf J. B. Pritchard, in *ANET* 483-484), merely conform to Egyptian

signs of such belief in Israel where the religion of Yahweh the King excluded absolutely the divinization of a mere man.¹³ The prophets never found any need to castigate their people for such a fault, it was non-existent in Israel.

Henri Frankfort sums up Israel's position in his thorough study on kingship and the gods

If kingship counted in Egypt as a function of the gods, and in Mesopotamia as a divinely ordained political order, the Hebrews knew that they had introduced it on their own initiative. . . . Hence the Hebrew king did not become a necessary bond between the people and the divine powers.¹⁴

At the same time, however, Israel like the nations round about viewed its king as one who enjoyed special divine favor and discharged divine functions even though he was not a divine person. He lived on a level superior to that of man; yet he was by no means on a par with God (cf. 2 *Kgs* 5, 7; *Ez.* 28, 29). His very coronation served to make him the adopted son of God. Thus the affirmation of divine sonship for the king in *Pss.* 2, 7, and 109, 3 (Greek) represent formulas of adoption which, in accordance with widespread practice and also the promise of Nathan in 2 *Sm.* 7, 14, were predicated of each sovereign at the time of his accession to the throne, just as they were first spoken of Solomon (1 *Par.* 22, 10; 28, 6).

phraseology The Aramean inscriptions seem to exclude the divine character of the king. As for Ras Shamra, the historical and ritual texts say nothing of a divinization of the king, and the mythological poems testify to it only by forced interpretation, cf R de Langhe, *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship in the Ras Shamra Tablets*, in *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship*, 142ff. We may conclude, therefore, with R De Vaux, *op cit*, 172 "Il n'est donc pas exact que l'idée du roi-dieu ait été partagée par tous les peuples du Proche-Orient ancien."

¹³ S Mowinckel, *op cit*, 87

¹⁴ H Frankfort, *op cit*, 339, cf H Cazelles, *Mito, rituale e regalità*, in *BO* 2 (1960) 121-127.

The anointing of the king, therefore, was a religious rite which bestowed on him a share of God's spirit, so that his office had a definite religious character (1 Sm. 10, 10, 16, 13). This consecration gave the king a share in God's holiness; his person, therefore, was inviolable. For this reason David refused to touch Saul lest he be guilty of irreverence against the anointed of the Lord (1 Sm. 24, 6-7; 10-11; 26, 9, 11, 23; cf. 2 Sm. 1, 14-16).

History, however, inevitably shifted Israel's hope from the present to the future. The glaring infidelities of the Davidic kings and their marked failure to realize the hopes centered in them proved to the prophets that God Himself would have to intervene to save and glorify His chosen people.

Men, however, remained confident that God would still act through a king, a Messiah. For His promises are without repentance. Through Nathan He had promised a "kingdom forever" for David's son. Sometime in the future, then, a king would come—a Messiah—to fulfill all of Israel's hope. Even as early as Isaias men dreamed of this future Son of David (Is. 9-11).

The Queen Mother in the Non-Israelite Nations

The same foreign influences and the same divine interventions which bring light to bear on the origin and character of monarchy in Israel help to explain also the important role of the queen-mother in the scriptural story of kingship.¹⁶

In the nations round about, monarchs practised polygamy, a social anomaly which often resulted in the conflicting claims of rival wives. Accordingly, when a favorite royal son succeeded to the throne, he frequently owed his kingship to the

¹⁶ R. De Vaux, *op. cit.*, 180-182, H. Cazelles, *La Mère du Roi-Messie dans l'Ancien Testament*, in *MEcl* 5 (1959) 39-56.

influence of his mother, so that the dowager queen was wont to occupy a position of preeminence at court, sharing the glory and prerogatives of her son's rule.

The prestige of such a mother rested on her official influence over the king rather than on the supposed divine character of the king himself. The divinization of the son did not of itself heighten the glory of the queen-mother. In the ancient Mesopotamian literature, for instance, the king is represented as a member of a divine race, born of a goddess and nursed by her.¹⁶ This fact, however, did not reflect any exceptional glory on the queen-mother. In Egypt, on the other hand, there were periods in which the glory of the individual king did radiate bright light on the brow of the "mother of the god."¹⁷ All her life long she benefited from the prestige of a maternity which was vital with divine power and beneficence.

In other kingdoms, however, as among the Hittites, the queen-mother enjoyed an equal measure of glory, even though the king himself was not looked upon as divine until after his death.¹⁸ The prestige of this maternity, therefore, seems to have been independent of the divinization of the king.

The queen-mother is honored most often precisely as mother of the reigning monarch. To this fact many Near Eastern texts bear eloquent witness

1. *Texts from Mesopotamia*

One of the earliest evidences of the honor paid to the queen-mother is found in a love song composed during the third dynasty of Ur. Directed to King Shu-sin who reigned

¹⁶ H Frankfort, *op cit*, 296-299

¹⁷ C J Bleeker, *The Position of the Queen in Ancient Egypt*, in *La Regalità Sacra*, Proceedings of the 8th International Congress for the History of the Religions (Leiden, 1959) 261-268

¹⁸ O R Gurney, *art. cit*, 119-120

sometime around 2000 BC, it opens with a salutation to the queen-mother Abisimti:

She gave birth to him who is pure,
The queen gave birth to him who is pure,
Abisimti gave birth to him who is pure¹⁹

The Gilgamesh epic, both in its Akkadian and Assyrian versions contains a much more ample testimony to the power and influence of the dowager queen Nin-Sun, mother of the hero, is hailed by her son as "versed in all knowledge."²⁰ He humbly defers to her and openly confesses his dependence upon her. He begs her to explain to him his dreams, to counsel him, to intercede for him by her prayers and sacrifices when he decides to set out on a dangerous expedition to Syria.²¹ Nin-Sun herself acts with full awareness of her power, for when she appeals to the god Shamash for her son, she speaks with the tone of authority:

Why, having given me Gilgamesh for a son,
With a restless heart didst thou endow him? . . .
May Aya, thy bride, fearlessly remind thee,
And may she commend him to the watchmen of the night!²²

Our documentation is meager for the later Assyrian and Babylonian kingdoms, though the Greek legends of Semiramis and Nitokris preserve the memory of the two famous queens, Sammuramat (Semiramis) and Naqui'a ("The Pure"—Nitokris). Sammuramat was most effective in helping her son, Adad-Nirari III, maintain successfully the power of Assyria. Naqui'a, a Syro-Palestinian by birth, was the wife of Senna-

¹⁹ J. B. Pritchard, *ANET* 496.

²⁰ J. B. Pritchard, *ANET* 76, 81

²¹ J. B. Pritchard, *ANET* 75-76

²² J. B. Pritchard, *ANET* 81

cherib. She it was who intervened to secure the throne for her son Asarhaddon when her husband was assassinated (2 Kgs. 19, 37). When Asarhaddon died she was instrumental in naming Ashurbanipal his successor.²³

The Scripture itself bears witness to the influence of the queen-mother in the Persian period. It attests to her power and prestige in describing the incident which took place during Belshazzar's feast after a mysterious hand had written a cryptic message on the palace wall

At the cries of king and courtiers, the queen-mother entered the banquet hall, and the queen-mother addressed him. "Long live the king. Do not be disturbed in mind. Do not turn pale. There is a man in your kingdom in whom the spirit of the holy God dwells . . . Let Daniel be summoned, he will provide the interpretation" (*Dn.* 5, 10-12)

It is noteworthy that the queen-mother dominates the whole scene. She it is who takes charge of the critical situation and gives the counsel which is immediately carried out.

2. Texts from Egypt

It is in Egypt that we find the most explicit texts on the role of the queen-mother and her functions. Here the birth of the sovereign is ascribed to a union between his mother and a god. The birth scenes in the New Kingdom temples at Luxor (for Amenhotep III) and at Deir-elBahri (for Hatshepsut) show the deity embodying himself in the Pharaoh father and visiting the queen to beget a successor. In one such scene the god Amun-re gives an oracle to the queen concerning the child (Hatshepsut) to be born of her:

²³ These facts are not mentioned in the prisms of Sennacherib, Asarhaddon, or Ashurbanipal. Cf. J. B. Pritchard, *ANET* 287-300.

Utterance of Amun, Lord of the Two Lands:
Khnemet-Amun-Hatshepsut shall be the name of this thy
daughter, whom I have deposited in thy body. . . .
She shall exercise this excellent kingship in this whole land.
My soul shall be hers, my power hers,
My authority shall be hers, my crown hers.²⁴

It was principally in the 18th dynasty (1570-1343) that the queen-mother emerged into the foreground, due both to the striking personality of the queens of this dynasty and to the progressive ideas of the time. In the other periods, "Pharaoh's human mother does not seem to have played any part in the theology of kingship. She was no more than the vehicle of the incarnation."²⁵ In this dynasty, however, as C. E. Sander-Hansen²⁶ has shown, the function of the queen-mother acquired theological significance. The ancestress of the dynasty, Aahotep, mother of Ahmose, its first king, was given the title "spouse of the god." This is why she wore a headdress consisting of the skin of the vulture, the typical headgear of Mut, wife of the god Amun. The title, "spouse of the god," descended from mother to daughter, and the princess thus distinguished, married the future king, her brother. When an heir was born she received the title, "mother of the god."

It was during this dynasty that several queens gained a prominence greater than that of any other women of antiquity. These were all connected with the founder of the dynasty, Ahmose: Tetisheri his grandmother, Aahotep his mother who kept her own court and wielded great influence, and his wife Ahmose Nofretete.²⁷

²⁴ Cf H Frankfort, *op. cit.*, 45

²⁵ H Frankfort, *op. cit.*, 44

²⁶ C E Sander-Hansen, *Das Gottesweib des Amun* (Copenhagen, 1940) 20, 177-80

²⁷ It is noteworthy that this 18th dynasty (1570-1343) had many contacts with the descendants of Jacob

No queen, however, exerted as much influence on affairs of state as Tiye, wife of Amenhotep III.²⁸ When her son, Amenhotep IV (Ikhnaton) came to power, her father, Dush-ratta, king of the Mitanni, seemed to know how deeply Tiye was initiated in the secrets of government, for he wrote to her son, "Apply to your mother, who is completely informed."²⁹

3. *Texts from Ugarit*

It is significant that in the Ras Shamra tablets from 12th century Ugarit, the queen-mother is called 'Adat ("my Lady"), a title bestowed on the goddesses not only at Ugarit but also at Byblos.³⁰ Three official letters have been found which are addressed to a woman with this title.³¹ The king Tlmyn himself hails her as "the Queen, my Mother." He says that he falls at her feet in a gesture of respect and supplication, an attitude which closely resembles the reverence which Solomon showed to Bathsheba. In letter 117:10 Tlmyn asks the queen-mother for full information on the state of affairs at home.

In these same tablets the queen-mother stands out prominently in the cycles of Baal, Aqhat, and Keret. In the Baal cycle the queen-mother Anat is the goddess who brings young Baal to besiege the kingdom of his father. In the Keret cycle the queen-mother is chosen for Keret by El that she may give birth to Yassib, the future divine king "who shall draw the milk of Asherah."³²

²⁸ She is not to be confused with Tiye, wife of Ramses III, this queen was involved in a plot to supplant her aging husband by one of her sons Cf J B Pritchard, *ANET* 215

²⁹ Quoted from C J Bleeker, *op cit*, 264.

³⁰ 'Adat is the feminine of 'adon, and so is equivalent to the Hebrew *gebirah*

³¹ Epistles 89, 95, 117 Cf C H Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature* (Rome, 1949) 116-117

³² J B. Pritchard, *ANET* 146

4. *Texts from the Hittite Kingdom*

Inscriptions from the empire of the Hittites give evidence of the prestige of the queen-mother in that kingdom.³³ One of the clay tablets from Boghazkoy presents a prayer of Hattusilis III who traces the anger of the god to the crimes which Mursilis had committed in banishing the queen-mother, widow of Suppiluliumas, on charges of embezzlement and sorcery.³⁴ There is some evidence also that, after death, the queen may have shared the divinization of deceased kings. The ritual of the nuntariyas festival indicates that dead queens were in some way identified with the sun-goddess of Arinna.³⁵ This belief may be the reason why Hittite queens took the name of Tawannannas, wife of the founder of the royal line, just as their husbands took the name of Laharnas, the founder himself.³⁶

The Queen-Mother in Israel

The rise of monarchy in Israel brought to the nation the institution of the queen-mother haloed with the aura of glory which was hers in the nations whom Israel strove to imitate.

The prestige of this great lady stands out clearly when one compares the insignificance of Achinoam, mother of Jonathan, with the all compelling influence of Bethsabee, mother of Solomon. When Saul inaugurated monarchy in Israel, the nation had not yet begun to imitate the manners of foreign courts. The mind of Saul was still confined within the limits of his nation's previous history in which leadership was a charismatic office; the tribal chief was a *nagid* (1 Sm. 9, 16,

³³ O R. Gurney, *op cit*, 105-121. It is noteworthy that Tiy (Taduheka) who figured so largely in Egyptian history as the all-powerful queen-mother of Amenhotep IV (Ikhnaton) was the daughter of Dushratta, king of the Mitanni and a member of the new Hittite kingdom.

³⁴ *Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi* 21, 19, 14, 7. Quoted in O R. Gurney, *op cit*, 112.

³⁵ *Keilschrifturkunden* 25, 14, in Gurney, *op cit*, 120.

³⁶ O R. Gurney, *op cit*, 114-115.

10, 1). Therefore, though he himself was truly a king (*melek*—1 Sm. 11, 15), he assigns no place of prominence to his mother. Moreover, though he intended to transfer his power at death to his son Jonathan, this did not prevent him from speaking of his son's mother Achinoam with contempt (cf 1 Sm. 20, 30).

A marked difference is to be noted in the reign of Solomon. With a court which was thoroughly cosmopolitan, he went out of his way to imitate the customs and manners of other nations. He brought into his harem women of all nations with their entourage of courtiers, priests, and wise men thoroughly versed in the royal manners of their own people. Bethsabée herself, the mother of Solomon, probably needed little instruction in the ways of the world, like her husband, Uriah, she too was of Hittite descent. It is significant that her status at the court of Solomon has a close parallel in the *tavannana*, the queen-mother in the Hittite kingdom.

Whatever may have been the cause, the fact is certain that Bethsabée played a special role in the life and rule of her son. It is true, he had received his life from her, to her, too, he owed his throne, for only her timely intervention saved it for him. This natural tie, however, does not provide the full explanation of the prestige of Bethsabée during the reign of Solomon. She is outstanding and plays an unprecedented role in Israel because, following the pattern of the foreign nations, she occupies the role of the *gebirah* ("the powerful lady"—2 Kgs. 10, 13; Jer. 13, 18; 29, 2) who has given birth to the *geber*, the king (2 Sm. 23, 1).

Her dignity as mother of the king far excels her position as spouse of the king. In this regard it is interesting to compare the humble attitude of Bethsabée when she appeared before David her husband (1 Kgs. 1, 16-17, 31) and the glory of her reception when she appeared before Solomon her son (1 Kgs. 2, 19-20):

So Bethsabee sought an audience with King Solomon to speak to him of Adonia. The king rose to meet her and did her obeisance. Then he took his seat upon his throne. A chair was placed for the mother of the king, and she sat at his right.³⁷

The incident reveals the power and privileged role of the mother of the king. The fact that she sits at her son's right hand symbolizes her sharing in his power and authority. For the Psalmist uses the same expression when he wants to express the Messiah's share in the dominion of God: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for you'" (Ps. 109, 1).

This prominence of Bethsabee as queen-mother is renewed in the subsequent history of Juda's monarchy. Certain women continued to occupy a first place at court simply because they had mothered the reigning sovereign. Like the king, the queen-mother, too, wore a diadem (*Jer.* 13, 18) and appeared publicly at royal functions. The importance of this woman is easy to understand. In the kingdom of Juda national prosperity and the fulfillment of God's promise through Nathan (2 Sm. 7) depended on the dynastic stability of the house of David. The queen-mother, therefore, deserved to be honored as one who had played an all-important role in the dynastic succession.³⁸

This was no token honor. The *gebirak* held an actual court office which was probably bestowed upon her at the enthronization of her son. This official role of the dowager queen explains why the author of the Books of Kings cites the mother's name as he introduces each new king of Juda,

³⁷ This scene closely resembles the texts in the Gilgamesh epic which describe the deference of the hero to his mother.

³⁸ The institution of the *gebirak* supposes stability in dynastic succession. The lack of such stability in the north probably accounts for the absence of the *gebirak*, since the name of the mother is never cited in the list of Israelite kings.

except in the case of Joram and Achaz (1 Kgs. 14, 21; 15, 2, 10; 22, 42; 2 Kgs. 8, 26; 12, 2; 14, 2; 15, 2, 33; 18, 2; 21, 1, 19; 22, 1; 23, 31, 36; 28, 18).

The official character of this role explains also how Asa could actually depose his grandmother, Maacha, from the function of *gebirah* when she abused the power of this office (1 Kgs. 15, 13). There is also the interesting case of Hamital, wife of Josias. This woman was queen-mother at the time of Joachaz, was relieved of her office under Joachim and Joachin, and then reassumed it during the reign of Sedecias (2 Kgs. 23, 31, 36; 24, 8, 18).

This pre-eminence of the *gebirah* continued until the very end of the monarchy. Time and again the queen-mother is mentioned as a woman of power wielding influence for all to see (cf. Jer. 13, 18; 22, 26; 29, 2; 2 Par. 15, 16; 2 Kgs. 10, 13; 24, 15, 12). Perhaps the most outstanding example of the role and might of a queen-mother is found in Athalia who was able to use her office as *gebirah* to secure for herself full royal authority at the death of Ochozias (2 Kgs. 11).

We can speak, therefore, of a definite queen-mother tradition in Israel. The author of *Daniel*, in writing of the power and prestige of the mother of Belshazzar (*Dn* 5, 10-11), really pens an authentic profile of the influential queen-mother of Israel. She who begot the nation's king was recognized by everyone as a woman of power in dealing with the king. This power, moreover, did not depend merely on the influence of her person. It belonged to her by office.

The Queen-Mother and the Messiah

This recognized official character of the queen-mother must be kept in mind when one seeks a scientific explanation of the difficult messianic texts of the Old Testament in which the Mother of the Messiah comes to the fore.

It is not easy to determine at what point of time or under what circumstances Israel began dreaming of the Messiah as the ideal savior king of the eschatological future. Some are of the opinion that the change did not come until the parenthesis of kingship had passed. Mowinckel, as we have said, recognizes an eschatological messianism only in the period after the exile. Others, however, think that long before the exile, even in the period of Isaias, men became sufficiently disappointed in the kings of the present to dream of an ideal king of the future.

In either case, however, the role of the queen-mother is of paramount importance in studying the full meaning of texts like *Is.* 7, 14 and *Mich.* 5, 2, which feature the pregnancy of a woman at the very heart of a dynastic sign. These prophecies which center in a son of David pass over all mention of his father to focus attention on the mother whose role must be interpreted with an eye to the queen-mother tradition.

Then, too, there is *Gen.* 3, 15. When one remembers that this text, like all the Jahwist traditions, received definite literary form during the time of Ezechias and Isaias, it does not seem altogether unlikely that the editor has seen the motherhood of the "woman" in the light of the queen-mother tradition of Juda.

These texts, however, are to be discussed at length in later papers of the symposium.

It may strike some as strange that the concept of the queen-mother exerts so little influence on the portrait of the messiah which developed after the exile.

In this regard it is well to recall Mowinckel's remark that in later Judaism even the Messiah himself "is not an indispensable part of the future hope or of eschatology"³⁹ There is a whole series of religious writings which develop post-

³⁹ S. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 280

exilic religious themes without making any allusion to the messianic king, e.g., *1-2 Mach.*, *Tob.*, *Wis.*, *Judith*, *Sir.*, *Jubilees*, *the Assumption of Moses*, *1 Bar.*, etc. In other writings the Messiah appears only occasionally without playing an important role.

These omissions are not difficult to understand. The complete failure of the Davidic dynasty plus the fact that the land was no longer ruled by kings would lessen in some quarters the tendency to think of the future salvation in terms of kingship. With all the more reason the concept of a queen-mother co-operating in the rule of her messianic son would have little appeal or meaning for a people who had never experienced in real life the power of the historic *gebirah*. At the same time, however, the LXX refinement of *'almah* to *parthenos* in *Is.* 7, 14 and the portrayal of the community as mother of the messiah in the Qumran hymn (1 QH 3) show clearly that earlier traditions were treasured and, at times, rethought.

The Queen-Mother Mary

When at last the messianic hope came to complete fulfillment in Jesus, the Christian community came alive to the truth that God has wrought His saving work through a kingly Son of David. To express their faith in the divine messiahship of Jesus, the founders of the Church spoke of Him and prayed to Him as *Kyrios* ("Lord"). Lucien Cerfaux⁴⁰ has shown definitively that this title manifests the divinity of Christ, with special reference to His kingship and perfect sovereignty.

The early Church had to devise also a fitting title for Mary. Historically she was the Mother of Jesus. Theologically, then, she was the *gebirah*, the Queen-Mother of Christ's kingdom. The Church expressed this faith through the title

⁴⁰ L. Cerfaux, *Le titre Kyrios et la dignité royale de Jésus*, in *RSPT* 11 (1922) 40-71, 12 (1923) 125-153, cf. 20 (1931) 27-51, 417-452.

which she gave to Mary in the words of Elizabeth, "the Mother of my Lord."

Whether Elizabeth herself uttered these words we do not know. The real value of the phrase consists in the evidence it offers that, prior to the composition of Luke's gospel (ca. 80 AD), the Church was already giving to Mary a veneration which was next in importance to that of her divine Son. In the light of Israel's queen-mother tradition she was looked upon as the Sovereign Lady who shares in some way the glory of her Son's kingship

The salutation of Elizabeth, therefore, may be regarded as "the first step in the development of the doctrine of Mary's Queenship."⁴¹

It is true there is no explicit reference to the queenship of Mary until the fifth century.⁴² There are, however, significant allusions to it in earlier patristic commentaries on the Visitation.⁴³ The words and attitude of Elizabeth in the Lukan text did not pass unnoticed. As Barré observes, "An idea was on the march; it was not slow to move out into clear light."⁴⁴

A text, probably Origen's, paraphrases Elizabeth's words and turns them into a praise of Mary as Sovereign Lady:

Why are you first to speak the word of greeting? Is it I who have begotten the Savior? I should have gone to you, for you are blessed above all women. You are the Mother of my Lord You are my Lady⁴⁵

⁴¹ F M Schmidt, OFM Cap, *The Universal Queenship of Mary*, in *Mariology 2* (ed. J B Carol, OFM, Milwaukee, 1957) 526.

⁴² H Barré, C.S.Sp., *La Royauté de Marie pendant les neuf premiers siècles*, in *RSR* 29 (1929) 145

⁴³ Angel Luis, CSSR, *La Realeza de Maria* (Madrid, 1942) 34ff.

⁴⁴ H Barré, *art cit*, 135

⁴⁵ *Fragmenta Origenis, ex Macarii Chrysocephali orationibus in Lucam*; PG 13, 1902

This title, "Mother of the Lord," recurs in Clement of Alexandria, Origen, St. Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine. The thought of Mary as Mother of the Lord and Sovereign Lady is much to the fore in texts from St. Ephraem of Syria. In a noteworthy passage he places the following words on the lips of Mary:

On the day when Gabriel descended to my lowliness, he made the handmaid a Sovereign Lady. I who was the handmaid of Thy Divinity have become the Mother of Thy Humanity, O Lord and Son ⁴⁶

As Father Donnelly has remarked, it was but a short and natural step from Elizabeth's "Mother of my Lord" to St. Ephraem's "Sovereign Lady" ⁴⁷

The step is even more easy and natural when one studies Elizabeth's words in the light of Israel's queen-mother tradition.

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⁴⁶ *Sermo 4, in natalem Domini, Opera omnia, Syr et Lat*, 2, 415

⁴⁷ M. J. Donnelly, S.J., *The Queenship of Mary During the Patristic Period*, in *MS 4* (1953) 88.