

Faces of the Gods:  
Baal, Asherah and Molek  
and  
Studies of the Hebrew Scriptures

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Thesis Submitted for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
November 1996

University of Sheffield  
Department of Biblical Studies

For my grandfather and grandmother  
Dr George Tallman Jones and Mary Burwell Jones  
Oberlin College  
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An author who claims lasting merit for his productions just cannot tell the difference between dream and reality: the example to follow is the man who believes that every written book contains much triviality, and that nothing ever written in verse or prose is worth much serious attention (Plato).<sup>†</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> Summarised from "Phaedrus" 275-76 by W.K.C. Guthrie in *A History of Philosophy. Plato, the Man and His Dialogues: Earlier Period* Vol IV (Cambridge University Press 1986) 57.

Abstract of

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by  
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The religion of ancient cultures has been captured in stone, clay, ink, gold and ivory. Huge wall reliefs down to tiny golden earrings or amulets have presented us with the faces of the gods. And which god is which, and what god did what, and who worshipped whom are questions that have fuelled the fires of many a scholar's imagination. As scholars have attempted the task of describing their chosen area, they have painted pictures for us. Unfortunately, in doing this they have often created portraits that are no more than pastiches. "The baal" of the Hebrew scriptures is described with the characteristics of Baal of Ugarit. "The molek" of II Kings and Jeremiah is accused of being a chthonic deity by virtue of association with gods of the underworld in Babylon, Mari and Ugarit. "Lady Asherah of the Sea" is cut down by the pens of those who equate her with the wooden thing burnt upon the altar by Gideon.

This thesis presents isolated portraits of three deities, baal, asherah, and molek, from three different venues. The first chapter discusses "baal"; Baal at Ugarit, Baal from the iconographic/epigraphic material and thirdly, "the baal" from the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts. The second chapter presents "asherah" in similar fashion. The third chapter addresses the question "who is molek?" in three sections; firstly, *MLK* from the iconographic/epigraphic material, secondly, "molek" from the Hebrew scriptures and thirdly, a discussion of how the scholars engage with the evidence. The final chapter of this thesis compares and contrasts the different pictures that are presented by the different venues of each of these deities, drawing attention to the perils of mixing these venues in order to produce composite pictures. This thesis argues that methodologically it is sounder to be left with minimal portraits of the faces of these gods from the venues studied intra-textually, than to make vast assumptions about cultural diffusion and uniformity for which there is no evidence.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Several people in the Department of Biblical Studies have made significant contributions to my time here. My thanks go especially to: John W. Rogerson for unceasing patience and care in reading and making suggestions regarding drafts and re-drafts of my work, who also challenged me to think carefully and critically in areas which I had never before explored; John Jarick who read a first draft and made valuable comments, and with whom I enjoyed the privilege of shared teaching; the departmental secretaries Gill Fogg and Alison Bygrave who over the years became both friends and allies; and the rest of the staff and students who have been friends and colleagues.

The ORS Award granted by the Chancellors and Vice-Chancellors of the University of Sheffield provided not only substantial financial assistance for my first two years study, but also the incentive to come to Sheffield for this research. The Petrie Watson Award that I received in 1993 provided support for a language course in Ilmenau, Thüringen, Germany, in order that I may progress in my research which needed to be read in German.

Tyndale House Library offered resources in the form of books which I could find nowhere else. My thanks to Tyndale Fellowship for their support and encouragement through Study Groups, times around the coffee table and on the croquet lawn. There have also been friends in Cambridge who have offered a place to rest my heart and soul after a hard day's work at Tyndale; thanks to the Wylies and to the Corbetts.

My thanks also extends to those of my instructors from years past and in previous study who have encouraged me to continue and pursue this education to this end, especially; Tony Cassurella, Joseph Coleson, James Field and Marvin Wilson. There are many more (too many to name) who helped me to believe in myself and the gifts that I have had to use to do this research, thank you.

I share my deep appreciation to the Free Methodist Church, Scholars Fund who were generous and through whom several friends encouraged and supported this work financially. There are many friends who have been faithful over the several years of this project. My sincere gratitude for the faithfulness and generosity of Fran Mohler Tippery, Sandy and Dennis Meili, Frances Wise, Rosa and Mackey Hill, and Roz and Steve Edwards. Thanks to ChangSung Antioch Missions Fellowship who sponsored my last year of study here. Also my thanks to FIC at Portland Chinese Free Methodist Church for helping me to stay in touch with friends all over the world during this five+ year arduous journey. Here in Sheffield my gratitude goes to Sheffield Chinese Christian Church for a place to call home, body, spirit and soul, and to "2Tim2.2" during the last months of this work for reassuring me and having faith in me.

I express my affection for those friends who have seen me through this: Byron and Pearl Jacobson for a home from home, RAR as house mate and friend, E. Sue Campbell-Samuel for inspiration and laughter, K.Heim for holding my hand and listening, and Seyed; where would I be without you?

Finally, my gratitude extends to those from my church and family who have been waiting patiently for me, and for all those who have been praying for me and who have often reminded me that all this is worth it for the glory of the Redeeming LORD. He has graciously supplied my every need. To Him be the glory and praise.



## INTRODUCTION

The field of archaeology and the arts of interpreting archaeological finds have given us rich and varied pictures of the gods of Ugarit, Egypt, Babylon, Sumer, Akkad etc. These ancient kingdoms have left us traces of their history, religion, laws and business practices in stone, ivory, gold and clay. Some artefacts are quite whole and detailed, others fragmentary. Some information comes to us in written form. This includes deity lists (sometimes in polyglot-parallel lists), ritual texts, offering texts, and myths<sup>1</sup> and epics of the pantheons of kingdoms or groups of people. We have these in Egyptian hieroglyphs; Ugaritic, Sumerian, Akkadian, Hurrian, and Babylonian cuneiform, and Aramaic, and Hebrew or proto-hebraic scripts. Other witness comes from figurines, plaques, cult stands or altars, and bits of pottery, some with inscriptions, some without. The Hebrew scriptures can not be excluded from the list of ancient witnesses.

The religion of these ancient cultures has been a fascinating field for discovery. The clay tablets in cuneiform have presented challenges for translators, and cultic stands and figurines have teased and tested scholars for identification. Huge wall reliefs down to tiny golden earrings or amulets have presented us with the faces of the gods. And which god is which, and what god did what, and who worshipped whom are questions that have fuelled the fires of many a scholar's imagination. As scholars have attempted to undertake the task of describing their chosen area, they have painted pictures for us. Unfortunately, in doing this they have often created portraits that are no more than pastiches. "The baal"<sup>2</sup> of the Hebrew scriptures is described with the characteristics of Baal of Ugarit. "The molek" of II Kings and Jeremiah is accused of being a chthonic deity by virtue of association with gods of the underworld in Babylon, Mari and Ugarit. "Lady Asherah of the Sea" is cut down by the pens of those who equate her with the wooden thing burnt upon the altar by Gideon.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Smith in "Mythology and Myth-making in Ugaritic and Israelite Literatures" (1994b) has given a nice concise definition for myth. He states: "A minimum view may begin therefore with the circumscribed definition of myth as traditional narratives centering on divine beings, but without excluding narratives with only one deity such as Yahweh" (1994b:299). This thesis uses the word within this general definition and makes the distinction between the Hebrew scriptures and other literature by using the titles "Ugaritic texts", "Ugaritic myths" or "Hebrew scriptures" to identify specific corpora. As Smith defines and discusses "myth", it is clear that the Hebrew scriptures include some "mythic material". This issue however is not central to the discussion of this thesis, so "myth" will be used to indicate "stories" from the locations that are specified.

<sup>2</sup> The convention of writing the names of these three deities in lower case letters is explained in sec. 1.3.4.3, "Sense and Reference". Only when a nominal sense is beyond doubt will they be written with upper case letters, i.e. Asherah, Baal and Molek.



Interest in the topic of this thesis began with the question “who were the gods against whom Jeremiah the prophet spoke?”, and in addition “who were the worshippers of those gods?”. This was precipitated by a desire to try to construct a picture of the nature of the worship of those to whom Jeremiah spoke. The thought was to describe three possible segments of the 7th century milieu: official Yahwism, popular Yahwism and an unabashed Canaanite faction. In reading material in preparation for this, two issues became apparent. Firstly, as research with the scholarly literature progressed it became more and more apparent that many assumptions, even considerable liberties were being made about the nature and personalities of the gods in question.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, most scholars begin with the Hebrew scriptures and then move to Canaanite material. It seemed that most scholars did/do not separate the Canaanite from the Hebrew material. In addition, they assume a homogeneity or an equation of the personalities in question. So the decision for this thesis was made to try to read the other way; to read the Canaanite material first then to turn to the Hebrew scriptures.

Because of the complexities raised by the above issues, the scope of material used to tease out the identities of these gods needed to be restricted. Restrictions were placed in two areas. Firstly, the number of gods was limited to three, acknowledging however that there were other gods that could and possibly should be researched in the same way. So this is a test case, and may set some parameters for later research. Secondly, the material/texts researched was limited to representatives from a vast array of possibilities. These texts/material were chosen to represent the sources used by the scholars to produce their depictions of the gods in question.

Because this research began with questions regarding worship and worshippers in the book of Jeremiah, the gods researched were limited to three mentioned by name in the book of Jeremiah.<sup>4</sup> However the characters of the deities that this book names (specifically baal, asherah, and molek) are not very well developed in Jeremiah; they have been erased by the polemic of the book. The book of Jeremiah owes its present form to the deuteronomistic circles that were probably involved in Josiah’s reform and the theology which it articulated. This “deuteronomistic school” is said to have crystallised the “prophetic monotheism” that dominates the period. Deuteronomy,

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<sup>3</sup> The plan of describing the possible tri-segmented Israelite/Canaanite religious milieu was abandoned because the issue of “who were the gods” became too great an issue to ignore and needed to be fleshed out before the rest could be attempted. So in the end this is only one section of the originally attempted thesis.

<sup>4</sup> On occasion there is the necessity of including some discussion about gods other than the three chosen for this thesis (eg. YHWH, Anat, Yamm). This is the case, because understanding the personalities or characters of deities (and also humans) is enhanced, if not dependent, on understanding their interactions or lack of interaction with other beings.



Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings are considered a product of this school of thought and called the “deuteronomistic writings”.<sup>5</sup> This set of writings was therefore combed for further information as to who baal, asherah and molek were thought to have been in the sixth century BCE. But the polemic of these deuteronomistic texts has also obliterated the faces of these gods, which is one reason why scholars have appealed to other material to fill in the gaps created by the polemic of the “prophetic monotheists”.

Since the early 1900’s<sup>6</sup> the vast collection of material that is available from the myths of Ras Shamra and the iconography and epigraphy of Near Eastern excavations have drowned us with evidence of Baal and Asherah to name only two deities. But in the wave of such discoveries there have also come speculations that have crystallised into assumptions that have been treated as accurate portraits of these deities. However, can we assume that a god named Baal from one place and time is the same as one called “the baal” from another place and time? Can we be sure that in every context (outside Ugarit) in which Baal was believed to be a storm-god that he had the same divine associations in those contexts that he had with the other gods of the Ugaritic pantheon?

What is presented here is an attempt to isolate the portraits of each of these deities (baal, asherah, and molek) from within the different venues chosen<sup>7</sup> and then to consider the similarities or differences in the portraits that each of the venues portray. The first chapter discusses baal; Baal at Ugarit,<sup>8</sup> Baal from the iconographic/epigraphic material<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Hebrew scriptures are rich with allusions to the worship of gods other than YHWH. However, as is mentioned above, restrictions needed to be placed in order to keep the scope of the research to a manageable level, especially considering the breadth of the material. The deuteronomistic writings represents a manageable block within the Hebrew scriptures as a whole. If what is presented in this thesis is upheld, it would be interesting to take this research beyond this test case to the rest of the Hebrew scriptures that fall outside the “deuteronomistic material” itself. Even so there are a couple of occasions when a dip is taken into the non-deuteronomistic texts of the Hebrew scriptures for the sake of illustration.

<sup>6</sup> Sec. 4.4.1 will contrast scholarship from before the turn of the century with modern scholarship to illustrate some of the differences in the assumptions made based on the evidence that is available.

<sup>7</sup> Something of similar nature but for different reasons and with different results has been done by Steve Wiggins. He explains in his conclusions that his:

method of considering the references separately was partially in response to the past studies on ‘asherah.’ The method of understanding this goddess has frequently been to gather the information from diverse sources and to compile it into a dossier on Asherah. This was a necessary step to initiate studies on the goddess. I believe it is now time to consider the pieces of the puzzle individually, and to see if they actually fit together (Wiggins 1993:189).

<sup>8</sup> Again at this point, mention needs to be made of the necessity of setting limitations on the breadth of material used for this research. The Ugaritic mythic texts also form a corpus



and thirdly, the baal from the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts.<sup>10</sup> The second chapter presents asherah in similar fashion. The third chapter addresses the question “who is molek?”. This third chapter first presents molek from the iconographic/epigraphic material, secondly from the Hebrew scriptures and a third section follows with a discussion of how the scholars engage with the evidence. The fourth and final chapter compares and contrasts the different pictures that are presented by the different venues of each of these deities, drawing attention to the perils of mixing these venues in order to produce composite pictures. This thesis makes a proposal for a corrective in the area of “comparative ancient Semitic religions” (if I may coin a phrase). It also points out the latent assumptions that are revealed in the way that we translate from the Hebrew scriptures into English. Further, if the Hebrew texts are studied for their own sake, they will be seen to employ considerable irony in the way they deal with the “other gods”, not least by showing the faces of the worshippers of these “other gods” while obliterating the faces of the deities. Most fundamentally, this thesis argues that methodologically it is sounder to be left with minimal portraits of the faces of these gods from the venues studied intra-textually, than to make vast assumptions about cultural diffusion and uniformity for which there is no evidence.

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that is manageable. There are other texts from Ugarit, such as ritual and incantation texts, that could be explored and used to create an even fuller description of the gods of the Ugaritic pantheon. These ritual texts could possibly also open an avenue of discussion on the worshippers (cf. de Moor 1987).

<sup>9</sup> Three separate sections of this thesis (1.2, 2.2 and 3.1) review the epigraphic and iconographic materials that are used to describe baal, asherah and molek. In those sections, the epigraphic/iconographic material has been gleaned for citations which are mentioned by the scholars in their portrayals of the respective divinities. Simply by virtue of the vastness of this endeavour, there are bound to be citations that will not be treated. No attempt has been made to be comprehensive at this point. Rather use of this material is made to illustrate the depictions that are created by the different scholars which are determined by the different epigraphic and iconographic bits and pieces that they use and by the connections that they make with other available material.

<sup>10</sup> Translation of the Hebrew is my own work unless otherwise stated. BHS is used for the Hebrew text which will be obvious from the cantillation marks that are present in those sections that are taken directly from the Hebrew text.



## 1. Baal

We will begin with Baal at Ugarit. From this material comes the Baal Cycle, a set of poems, myths and epics that have given us glimpses into the interactions between the gods of the Ugaritic pantheon. Even though some tablets from the collection are fragmentary or damaged and difficult and some sections of the stories are missing, his portrait and character are clear.

In using the Ugaritic material, *ANET* 1969 has been used as a base text for these discussions, as it provides a possible assemblage and an accessible translation of the Ugaritic mythic tablets. However, *ANET* is only one of the possible reconstructions of the arrangement of these tablets. Of course, the storyline created by alternative arrangements of the tablets would differ, consider Aistleitner 1964; Caquot 1970; Cassuto 1971; de Moor 1987; Gibson 1978 (also cf. Smith 1994b:2-3 and Handy 1994:21 n.3).<sup>11</sup> However this thesis is not concerned with which tablet comes first or second or last (that could be a thesis in itself), but rather with the personalities of the deities that are created by the interactions of the gods with each other.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.1. Baal from Ugarit

The Ugaritic Baal Cycle gives a fairly complete picture of Baal, Son of El, the most high god (or Son of Dagon), who is a main character in the stories at Ugarit. He shows his face in Egypt and in correspondence from Phoenicia and Palestine to Egyptian kings.<sup>13</sup>

Lowell Handy, in *Among the Host of Heaven* (1994), makes note of the fact that the identity of “Baal” as a god was not confirmed until the Ras Shamra texts were deciphered.<sup>14</sup> In light of this, the story of the god Baal will first of all be drawn from the stories of the Baal Cycle. Pritchard’s *Ancient Near Eastern Texts (ANET)* gives us

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<sup>11</sup> Smith 1994b includes a comparative table of the different arrangements which has been produced by del Olmo Lete (1981). Appendix 2 presents several different arrangements of the tablets in comparison to the *ANET* arrangement, using KTU citation system.

<sup>12</sup> Discussion related to issues of translation will refer to Cyrus Gordon’s UT. A chart of alternative citation systems is presented as a concordance in an appendix at the end of this thesis. In addition where possible, alternative citation systems to *ANET* are given in the footnotes.

<sup>13</sup> These letters, on cuneiform tablets, were found at el ‘Amarna in Middle Egypt from the early 14th century. Amarna was Akh-en-Aton’s capital and here some 300 letters of correspondence to the king were stored/ found, the earliest being found in 1887. Some may belong to Amen-hetop III during the end of his reign.

<sup>14</sup> He gives a simple yet comprehensive history of the scholarship of how “Baal” was understood throughout his book; note especially pages 99-102. Smith states “Early in the twentieth century it was generally believed that *baal* was only a title and not a name given to a particular deity (1994:99). More will be made of “baal” as a title in sec. 1.3.



an outline of how these different texts of the Baal Cycle could fit together.<sup>15</sup> The different systems for categorizing these texts made by various scholars can be confusing. To help sort through the different systems, a chart of the texts used in this thesis and their designations by the various scholars or publications is presented in an appendix.<sup>16</sup>

### 1.1.1. His Story:

In this set of stories Baal is one of the main actors. He has to fight with his peers in order to maintain his status. He has to ask permission for a palace of his own. He has a compatriot and friend in Anat, the goddess who shows herself to be militant and ruthless. Baal is called the “Rider of the Clouds”, “Puissant Baal” and “Dagon’s Son”. He has a strong character and may well be the most interactive of the Ugaritic pantheon as portrayed in the Baal Cycle, as it was named after him.

#### 1.1.1.1. Baal’s Battle with Yamm

The story begins, according to *ANET*, with UT 68 (*ANET* 1969:130-31 III AB A-B). Baal had no palace even though he vanquished Yamm (*ANET* 1969:130-131 III AB A-B).<sup>17</sup> Ashtoreth plays a part in this story. She rebukes Baal for threatening Yamm’s messengers. Baal is assisted in the battle against Yamm by Kothar wa-Khasis,<sup>18</sup> the craftsman, who provides him with a cudgel. There seem to be two bouts, for the second of which Kothar wa-Khasis<sup>19</sup> gives Baal two bludgeons which provide the

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<sup>15</sup> Clifford gives a quick synopsis of the arrangement of the texts in this Baal Cycle giving attention to the political nuances of the stories. The four stages which he identifies move from 1) Baal having no power, represented by the lack of a palace; 2) having to request a palace of El, he needs help to do this; 3) giving permission for a palace and having it built; and 4) giving a feast in recognition of Baal’s position (Clifford 1979:138). One of the questions posed by Handy and other scholars is whether or not these stories are Canaanite in origin either by virtue of Ugarit being a “Canaanite” city (but this is questioned, cf. Smith 1994a:301 n.38), or whether they may have been imported from Canaan to Ugarit and absorbed into their pantheon (Handy 1994:21-22; cf. Smith 1994a:300-02). An excursus (p. 43) treats the issue, “What is Canaanite?”.

<sup>16</sup> Smith has given a good explanation of how the KTU tablet, column and line system works (1994b:xxii n. 2).

<sup>17</sup> UT 68 & 137/CTA 2.I or IV (Bordreuil’s index is unclear at this point)/KTU 1.2.I and CTA 2.IV or I/KTU 1.2.IV. Ginsberg is the translator for the Baal Cycle.

<sup>18</sup> Though this seems to be a compound name, *wa* probably meaning “and”, it seems fairly certain from the way the translator has treated the text that Kothar wa-Khasis is a single individual rather than two. Cf. *ANET* 1969:III: 130 AB A.6 ff.; “Quoth Kothar wa-Khasis: ‘I tell thee, O Prince Baal . . .’” The verb here is *lrgmt*, from the Ugaritic verb *rgm* “to say”. Also note that C.H. Gordon has made special mention of this line in the grammatical section on verbs in UT; “1 sg. . . . ‘I heard’, *rgmt* (68: 7)”, (UT p. 70).

<sup>19</sup> Kothar wa-Khasis assists gods and men (royalty) with building, weapons or tools as they are needed, e.g. builds the palace for Baal, and creates a bow for Daniel. Handy has a section on the “artisan deities”, in which Kothar-wa-Khasis has several pages of discussion (Handy 1994:133 ff.).



means of Baal's success; "Yamm collapses, he falls to the ground" (*ANET* 1969:131 III AB A.25).<sup>20</sup> Pritchard includes Ginsberg's (the translator) note at the end of this column:

The rest is too defective for any meaning to be extracted, except that Yamm seems to say twice "I am dying, Baal will reign." But apparently Yamm does not die, but is only confined to his proper sphere, the seas. Hence there is still talk of him, e.g. at the end of col. ii of episode e (*ANET* 1969:131).

Taking account of the parallelism in the text, Yamm is also called Judge Nahar.

Strike the back of Prince Yamm  
Between the arms of [J]udge Nahar  
(*ANET* 1969:131 III AB A.15)<sup>21</sup>

and

Baal would rend, would smash Yamm,  
Would annihilate Judge Nahar.  
(*ANET* 1969:131 III AB A.27)<sup>22</sup>

A line or two spoken by Ashtoreth follows the same parallelism (*ANET* 1969:131 III AB B),<sup>23</sup> as well as the section that describes building Yamm's palace (*ANET* 1969:129 III AB C.6 & 8).<sup>24</sup> Yamm is understood as meaning "sea", "ocean" and Nahar as meaning "river". In the light of this, it could be understood that Baal's victory accomplished the limitation of Yamm to his boundaries, e.g. water at the coastlines and banks of the rivers.

#### 1.1.1.2. Request for a Palace

As will be mentioned in the section on Asherah, Anat and Baal approach Asherah for assistance in procuring permission to build a palace for Baal. In two separate texts (*ANET* 1969:131 III AB A fragment b and II AB),<sup>25</sup> messengers from Baal to Anat

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<sup>20</sup> UT 68.25-6/CTA 2 IV or I (Bordreuil's index is again unclear at this point)/KTU 1.2 IV.

<sup>21</sup> UT 68.14-15/CTA 2.IV or I (Bordreuil's index is again unclear at this point)/KTU 1.2 IV.

<sup>22</sup> UT 68.27/CTA 2.IV or I (Bordreuil's index is again unclear at this point)/KTU 1.2 IV.

<sup>23</sup> UT 137.40 ff./CTA 2.I or IV/KTU 1.2.I

<sup>24</sup> UT 129.7-9/CTA 2.III/KTU 1.2.III

<sup>25</sup> The UT index suggests that this (published in *Syria* 13, 1932) is possibly part of UT 51. In the attempt to produce a coherent thread to the stories of Baal and Anat, tablets III AB A (UT 68/CTA 2.I, II & IV/KTU 1.2.IV), III AB A fragment b (UT 51/CTA 8/KTU 1.8), and II AB (UT 51/CTA 4/KTU 1.4) are placed one after another in this order.



were dispatched and received with the plan to approach Asherah. III AB A fragment b. reads:

“ . . . Homage to Lady Asherah of [the Sea],  
Obeisance to the Progenitress of the gods,  
(So) [she] will give a house to Baal like the [g]ods’,  
And a court like [A]sherah’s sons’.” —  
Loudly to his lads Baal cries:  
“Look ye, Gapn and Ugar sons of Ghulumat,  
‘Amamis twain, sons of Zulumat (*Zlmt*)  
The stately, win[g]-spreading, . . . ;  
Winged ones twain, flock of clouds, (10)<sup>26</sup>  
’Neath [. . .];’  
Birdlike ones twain, *fl*[ock of . . . snow].  
. . . .”  
(obscure beginnings of 5 more lines)  
(ANET 1969:131 III AB fragment b)

Gapn and Ugar are Baal’s messengers<sup>27</sup> throughout the stories. He dispatches them with several of his messages. Baal wants Anat’s company for making the request, just quoted in this section, of Asherah to use her special privileges before the high god El. When Baal and Anat come to Asherah to ask for her assistance, however, the messengers are missing.

As Baal and Anat come to Asherah (ANET 1969:132 II AB.ii),<sup>28</sup> she seems to be preparing food at the water’s edge. She has a fire started and seems to be attending to a net flung to the sea. Baal and Anat have a serious affect on Asherah when they approach; she goes weak in the knees.<sup>29</sup> Asherah asks why they come and if her children (she is the mother of 70 sons) have been slain. It is not certain whether her reaction is because she *expects* them simply to be the bearers of bad news, or *suspects* them to be the perpetrators of something terrible. She is reassured and rejoices at the sight of the gold and silver that Anat and Baal have brought as tribute, and it seems<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>These numbers in brackets represent the line numbers as given by Ginsberg in *ANET*, and so throughout all quotations from *ANET*.

<sup>27</sup> Handy suggests that the work of messengers was “highly restricted . . . to conveyance of divine communication” (1994:159).

<sup>28</sup> UT 51.ii/CTA 4/KTU 1.4.

<sup>29</sup> cf. sec. 2.1.1.1 for further discussion noting this reaction. Cf. Anat’s reaction to Baal’s messages ANET 1969:137 D.30/UT<sup>ent</sup> III.29-32. Note Anat’s rebuttal of challenging language, UT<sup>ent</sup> III.33 ff. Also, note Thitmanet’s reaction to her brother’s advance in ANET 1969:147 KRT C i.55/UT 125.53 ff., but Ut 125 from line 54 ff. is quite fragmented. This is mentioned in sec. 1.1.2.3.

<sup>30</sup> The tablets are badly damaged at this point. This suggestion comes from the translator, (ANET 1969:132).



that she prepares a feast for her guests. At the beginning of the next column Baal enters a feast or at least speaks of one:

C[ome]s Puissant Baal, (10)  
Advances the Rider of the Clouds.  
Lo, he takes his stand and *cries defiance*,  
He stands erect and spits  
In the midst of the *as[sem]bly* of the divine beings:  
“*Ab[omination]* has been placed upon my table,  
Filth in the cup I drink.  
For two [kinds of] banquets Baal hates,  
Three the Rider of the Clouds:  
A banquet {banquet}\* of baseness, (20)  
And a banquet of handmaid’s *lewdness*.  
Yet herein is flagrant shamefulness,  
And herein is handmaid’s *lewdness*.” —  
After this goes Puissant Baal,  
Also goes the Maiden Anath.

\* Dittography  
(ANET 1969:132 II AB.iii)<sup>31</sup>

Where they go is not certain, but in the next few lines Asherah asks why they have come to her to do homage; have they gone to El? It seems<sup>32</sup> that Baal and Anat prevail upon Asherah to go to El on their (ostensibly Baal’s) behalf and after this she prepares to go to El’s abode followed by Anat. As they leave Baal returns to his home on “Zaphon’s summit”. Asherah meets with success. El says:

Let a house be built for Baal like the gods’, (61)  
And a court like the children of Asherah’s!”  
(ANET 1969:133 II AB.v)<sup>33</sup>

Asherah then replies:

Quoth Lady Asherah of the Sea:  
“Art great indeed, O El, and wise,  
Thy beard’s gray hair instructs thee,  
. . . , [ . . . ] to thy breast.  
Now, too, the *seasons* of his rains will Baal *observe*,  
the *seasons* of . . . with *snow*;

<sup>31</sup> UT 51 III.9-24/CTA 4/KTU 1.4. The asterix (\*) in line 20 of these verses is a footnote in ANET. I have substituted the asterix for the number and included the footnote at the end of the section quoted also marked with an asterix (\*), and so throughout the quotes from ANET 1969.

<sup>32</sup> Again lines are missing.

<sup>33</sup> UT 51 IV.62-3/CTA 4/KTU 1.4. Note that this begins a column. It has been quoted exactly here. It begins with no quotation mark, assuming that it is a continuation of El’s remarks from the end of the column before. Rather than amend Ginsberg’s translation, the punctuation has been reproduced exactly.



And <he will> peal his thunder in the clouds, (70)  
 Flashing his lightnings to the earth.  
 The house of cedar—*let him burn it*;  
 Yea, the house of brick—*remove it*.  
 Be it told to Puissant Baal:  
 Summon *weeds* into thy house,  
*Herbs* into the midst of thy palace. . . .”  
 (ANET 1969:133 II AB.v)<sup>34</sup>

Here is the first connection of Baal to his status as storm-god. He has seasons of rains and snow. He will peal thunder and flash lightning. When Anat hears the good news she is off immediately to Zaphon<sup>35</sup> to tell Baal.

The maiden Anath rejoices, (81)  
*Stamps* with her foot so the earth *quakes*.  
 There, she is off on her way  
 Unto Baal upon Zaphon’s summit,  
 O’er a thousand fields, then thousand acres.  
 Laughing, the Maiden Anath  
 Lifts up her voice and cries:  
 “Receive, Baal, the glad tidings I bring thee.  
 They will build thee a house like thy brethren’s . . .” (90)  
 (ANET 1969:133 II AB.v)<sup>36</sup>

Here follows Anat’s recitation of what Baal’s palace will be like. Baal rejoices and once again a description of the new palace is given. Baal summons Kothar wa-Khasis, and a feast is given with him seated at Baal’s right hand (ANET 1969:134 II AB.v).<sup>37</sup> Kothar wa-Khasis accepts the job of building the palace. They quibble over whether to have a window built. Baal refuses the window, which has something to do with Padriya daughter of Ar, Talliya daughter of Rabb, and Yamm. The palace is built with cedars and through fire they become gold and silver. Then a feast is set for the gods and Asherah’s 70 children and he sates them all. The name Baal is used in parallel with the name Hadd in this section (e.g. line 40). So ends the column.

Baal dwells in his house and then asks Kothar wa-Khasis for a window (ANET 1969:134-5 II AB.vii).<sup>38</sup> Kothar says, “I told you so”<sup>39</sup> and makes a window, which

<sup>34</sup> UT 51 V.64-76/CTA 4/KTU 1.4.

<sup>35</sup> Zaphon in Ugaritic transliteration, *spn*, translated to Hebrew ( צפן ) means north. Zaphon in these texts is most certainly a mountain and may well be in the north as the translation of Zaphon would indicate. Cf. Dearman, who identifies Mount Zaphon as modern day “Jebel el Aqra” (1992:42).

<sup>36</sup> UT 51.V.82-91/CTA 4/KTU 1.4.

<sup>37</sup> UT 51.V.109-110/CTA 4/KTU 1.4.

<sup>38</sup> UT 51.VII/CTA 4/KTU 1.4.

<sup>39</sup> UT 51 VII.23-4/CTA 4/KTU 1.4.



is likened to “a *rift in the clouds*” (UT 51 VII.28).<sup>40</sup> Baal takes pride in the palace and the position that it gives him and he sends his messengers off to Mot to declare that his palace is built.

### 1.1.1.3. Battle with Mot

*ANET* presents the next tablet as V AB A-F.<sup>41</sup> The position of this in the Baal Cycle is not clear. Mot is favoured over Baal in this text; Yamm was favoured in the previous set. Column B gives the account of Anat’s blood bath, at the end of which she washes with “Sky-dew, fatness of earth, Spray of the Rider of the Clouds”, meaning that which comes from Baal. Column C<sup>42</sup> includes a message from Baal to Anat, in which Baal asks Anat to “take away war”, “banish strife”, and “pour peace” and “amity” on the earth (*ANET* 1969:136 V AB C 9 ff.).<sup>43</sup> Anat entertains Baal’s messengers and then she is off to see Baal. Baal greets her and gives her special treatment. He dismisses his wives and sets before her a fattened ox. This also happens in other instances where the company is treated with special deference (cf. reference to Kothar wa-Khasis, *ANET* 1969:133 II AB.v).<sup>44</sup>

This tablet, V AB, seems to telescope several sections of the Baal Cycle; e.g. in E. 5-19<sup>45</sup> Anat promises to help secure a palace for Baal. In this text, Anat uses violent language to describe how she will approach El and force his hand to give Baal a palace. In fact, El is persuaded in a different text (UT 51) by Asherah. It would be tempting to set this pericope in the midst of the texts which deal with Baal’s palace, but V AB is a single tablet with continuous text. Also, apparently, the end of column E is a repeat of Asherah’s speech to Baal when she approached El on Baal’s behalf (*ANET* 1969:133 II AB iv-v.41 ff.).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Possibly meaning rain in the clouds, cf. UT p. 409 of the glossary for *ydq*.

<sup>41</sup> UT <sup>cnt</sup> /CTA 1&3/KTU 1.1&3. Margalit (1980) uses CTA 4-6 to study line by line what he has called the “Baal-Mot Epic”. Since he has chosen different texts for this his storyline is also different.

<sup>42</sup> UT <sup>cnt</sup> III/CTA 3/KTU 1.3.

<sup>43</sup> UT <sup>cnt</sup> III.9-15/CTA 3/KTU 1.3. It would be interesting to consider the issues of transcendence and imminence that seem to be residual in this line. Transcendence being linked to the issues of justice and purity. However, there may not be much to make of it especially since this is not El who is the one granting the blessings. This thought came in private conversation with Professor John W. Rogerson.

<sup>44</sup> UT 51 V.106-8/CTA 4/KTU 1.4.

<sup>45</sup> UT 67 IV.1-V.9/CTA 5 Ginsberg has included the last lines of column iv as the beginning of v. These are listed in UT as “<sup>cnt</sup>.pl.vii IV.1-8” and V begins with line number 9.

<sup>46</sup> UT 51.V.40 ff./CTA 4/KTU 1.4.







[ . . . ] . . . times eighty-eight.  
She [conc]eives and gives birth to Math.  
(fragments of 3 more lines; another 11 missing)  
(ANET 1969:139 I\* AB.v)<sup>51</sup>

Several scholars want to make the assumption at this point in the story that Anat is the heifer.<sup>52</sup> But the text here only mentions Baal's two wives and not Anat at all. How this section connects to the message regarding Mot is lost with the missing lines at the end of the previous column and the beginning of this — *if* there was any original connection.

#### 1.1.1.4. Lament for El and Anat

The top of the next column (vi) has approximately 30 lines missing. It begins, "They penetrate El's field . . ." The "they" is assumed to be Baal's messengers. They come with the news that Baal is dead. These messengers tell their story; thereupon follows El's reaction:

"We went [ . . . ]'  
. . .  
We [ca]me to the pleasance of Dabr-land,  
To the beauty of Shihlmemat-field.  
We came upon Baal  
Fallen on the ground:  
Puissant Baal is dead,  
The Prince, Lord of Earth, is perished." (10)  
Straightway Kindly El Benign  
Descends from the throne,  
Sits on the footstool;  
From the footstool,  
And sits on the ground;  
(ANET 1969:139 I\* AB.vi)<sup>53</sup>

Following this El grieves and engages in demonstrative lament. He puts on sackcloth, gashes himself, "plows his chest like a garden", and "he lifts up his voice and cries". The end of the tablet describes Anat searching and finding Baal in Shihlmemat-field. She, too, puts on sackcloth.

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<sup>51</sup> UT 67.V.17-22/CTA 5/KTU 1.5.

<sup>52</sup> Walls cites C. Gordon (1977: 117-8) as using the alliance of Baal with a heifer as evidence for "bestiality" in the Baal cult (Walls 1992:123 & 125 n. 49).

<sup>53</sup> UT 67.VI.5-14/CTA 5/KTU 1.5.



The next tablet, I AB,<sup>54</sup> is supposedly the bottom fragment of the previous tablet. The translator's notes say, this tablet "constitutes the top of col. i and the bottom of col. vi and fits exactly onto the former" (ANET 1969:139). It begins with Anat's lament. She weeps and drinks her tears "like wine". She recruits helpers to lift Baal onto her back and she carries him back to his palace, where she offers a great tribute to him. With this done she goes to El:

[The]re, she is off on her way  
 To [E]l of the Sources of the Floods,  
 In the midst of [the Hea]dwaters of the Two Deeps.  
 She penetrates El's Field and enters  
 The pavilion of King Father Shunem  
 At El's feet she bows and falls down,  
 Prostrates her and does him honor.  
 She lifts up her voice and cries:  
 "Now let Asherah rejoice and her sons, (40)  
 Elath and the band of her kinsmen;  
 For dead is Puissant Baal,  
 Perished the Prince, Lord of Earth."\*

\*Now a son of Asherah can rule the earth. In col. v Asherah's sons are Baal's enemies. His epithet "Dagon's Son" may echo a stage of tradition in which he was not a son of El, either.

(ANET 1969:140 I AB.i)<sup>55</sup>

The next voice is El's. He asks for a replacement on Baal's throne. Asherah (the "mother of 70 children", the "Progenitress of the Gods") offers Ashtar, who refuses to "reign in Zaphon's Fastness" (I AB i.61).<sup>56</sup> The implication of the text is that Ashtar is not up to the task. Baal's throne is too big, and none is able to replace him. In the next column, ii, Anat apprehends Mot and he admits, "I did *masticate* Puissant Baal". Again about 40 significant lines are missing at the beginning of the next column, iii. It begins:

[That Puissant Baal had died], (2)  
 That the Prince [Lord of Earth] had perished.  
 And behold, alive is [Puissant Baal]!  
 And behold, existent the Prince, Lo[rd of Earth]!  
 In a dream, O Kindly El Benign, . . .  
 (ANET 1969:140 I AB.iii)<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> The index in UT suggests that texts no. 49 and 62 are from the same tablet: "Ba<sup>c</sup>l (sic) and <sup>c</sup>Anat Cycle; + 49 (62 obv. is the opening of col. I, and 62 rev. is the end of col. VI; some authors call this text 'I AB')" (UT p. 260).

<sup>55</sup> UT 49.4/CTA 6/KTU 1.6.

<sup>56</sup> I found it very difficult to follow the text from UT to identify this piece of text with UT line numbers. It is either UT 49 or UT 62.

<sup>57</sup> UT 49 III.1-4/CTA 6/KTU 1.6.



This seems to be a recounting of Anat's dream that Baal lives. She is dispatched by El to find him. At the top of column iv, El accuses Baal of neglecting his duties:

‘Parch’d is the furrow of Soil, O Shapsh;  
 Parched is El’s furrow:  
 Baal neglects the furrow of his tillage. (28)  
 Where is Puissant Baal?  
 Where is the Prince, Lord of Earth?’”  
 (ANET 1969:141 I AB.iv)<sup>58</sup>

#### 1.1.1.5. Reascendance of Baal

The top of column v finds Baal striking Asherah's many (*rbm*) sons and mounting his throne. Here, as well as several other places, the name of Baal is set in parallel with his “other name”, Dagon's Son. It seems that El is not Baal's father, but El, as the head of the pantheon, is the father of all the gods. El grieves Baal's death and celebrates his return from the land of Mot. Here in I AB.v, Baal denounces Mot and the next column (vi) seems to be another battle scene. Line 21 reads, “Mot falls, Baal falls”.<sup>59</sup> Shapsh comes back into the picture:

Above Shapsh cries to Mot: (22)  
 “Hearken, now, godly Mot!  
 Why striv’st thou with Puissant Baal? Why?  
 Should Bull El thy father hear thee,  
 He’ll pull out thy dwelling’s *pillars*.  
 Overtum thy throne of kingship,  
 Break thy staff of dominion!”  
 Sore afraid was Godly Mot, (30)  
 Filled with dread El’s Belovèd Ghazir  
 Mot . . .  
 . . [. . . .]  
 Baal seats him [on] his kingdom’s [throne],  
 Upon his dominion’s [seat].  
 (36-42 missing, defective, or unintelligible)  
 (ANET 1969:141 I AB.vi)<sup>60</sup>

Who is seated by Baal is not clear. But Shapsh and Kothar come back into the picture here in lines 46-50 (ANET 1969:141 I AB.vi).<sup>61</sup> The colophon reads: “Written by Elimelech the Shabnite. Dictated by Attani-puruleni, Chief of Priest, Chief of (Temple)-herdsmen. Donated by Niqmadd, King of Ugarit, Master of Yargub, Lord of

<sup>58</sup> UT 49 IV.25-29/CTA 6/KTU 1.6.

<sup>59</sup> UT 49 VI.21-2/CTA 6/KTU 1.6.

<sup>60</sup> UT 49 VI.22-35/CTA 6/KTU 1.6.

<sup>61</sup> UT 62.42-52/CTA 6.VI/KTU 1.6.



Tharumeni” (*ANET* 1969:141 IAB.vi).<sup>62</sup> This colophon is long and has more in it than the other colophon mentioned for UT 51.VIII.edge (following line 48),<sup>63</sup> which mentions only Elimelech and Niqmadd.

#### 1.1.1.6. The Last Scene: Baal and Anat

The next tablets (IV AB+RŠ 319)<sup>64</sup> have no colophon, and are written only on one side and have a distinctly different flavour than the other texts. Ginsberg, the translator of the Baal Cycle in *ANET*, makes this introduction to these tablets:

There exist a large (IV AB) and a very small piece (RŠ 319) of a tablet with three columns of writing on only one side. That they both belong to the same tablet is not certain but very probable. That only one side of the tablet is written on is probably due to the fact that it contained the whole of the composition in question, which was quite short. It has no colophon. It is distinct from the Baal epic which we have been following in the preceding pieces. RŠ 319, which is apparently the missing top right-hand corner of IV AB, contains a graphic account of sexual intercourse between Baal and Anath; and IV AB itself is suggestive of something more than platonic relations between the two. This is entirely at variance with the epic, as everyone will realize who has read the former without reading into it (*ANET* 1969:141-2).

Erotic it is, with Baal rising and falling before Anat. A wild-ox is born in the end to Baal, the Rider of the Clouds. Throughout Anat is called “sister” and “Maiden”. Baal is called “brother”. RŠ 319, which the translator has placed between columns ii and iii of tablet IV AB (to fill out the column), is very provocative:

(8 or 9 badly damaged lines at the bottom)

He seizes and holds [her] womb;  
                   [She] seizes and holds [his] stones.  
 Baal . . . *to an ox.*  
 [. . . the Mai]den Anath  
                   [. . .] to conceive and bear.  
(another 14 lines very fragmentary)  
 (*ANET* 1969:142 RŠ 319)<sup>65</sup>

This is the most blatant language in any of the texts of the Baal Cycle. The rest of the cycle, if erotic or provocative, is in much more euphemistic language. Very few

<sup>62</sup> UT 62.53-57/CTA 6.VI.54-57/KTU 1.6. Ginsberg’s notes mention that Niqmadd was king of Ugarit in the 14th century.

<sup>63</sup> *ANET* 1969:135 IIAB.viii-end of column/CTA 4/KTU 1.4.

<sup>64</sup> *ANET* 1969:141-42/UT 76 & 132/CTA 10 & 11/KTU 1.10 & 11.

<sup>65</sup> UT 132.2-5/CTA 10/KTU 1.10. The next line may have something to do with a choir; *ḡm.ḡbl.ktrt(?)* “a band of songstresses”, (UT: 394; 832 s.v. *ḡbl* ).



scholars who make comment on the Baal Cycle do not read the texts of these tablets (IV AB+RS 319)<sup>66</sup> back into the rest of the story. The attempt is to make a cohesive unit of what we have. How much of the story has gone astray between the lost lines or on lost tablets is left for speculation.

### 1.1.2. The Legend of King Keret

Whereas in the Baal Cycle Baal is a major figure in the foreground of the stories/legends, in this set of texts Baal is in the background, one to whom sacrifice is made and who speaks up on the king's behalf. The Legend of King Keret is presented in *ANET* translated by H.L. Ginsberg. The colophon for this set of myths again mentions Elimelech and King Niqmadd.

#### 1.1.2.1. The King's Lament

In KRT A.i,<sup>67</sup> King Keret is distressed for he has no heir. He soaks his bed with tears and El approaches him in a dream. It seems in some of the lost or damaged lines between the end of one column (i) and the beginning of the next (ii)<sup>68</sup> that El offers gifts to assuage the king's anguish. King Keret wants nothing but an heir, whereupon El gives instruction for sacrifice and preparation (KRT A ii).<sup>69</sup> Honouring Baal is part of that preparation:

And go up to the top of a [to]wer; (76)  
     Bestride the top of the wal[l];  
 Lift up thy hands to heaven,  
     Sacrifice to Bull, thy father El;  
*Honor* Baal with thy sacrifice,  
     Dagon's Son with thine oblation.  
 Then descend, Keret, from the housetops. (80)  
 Prepare thou corn for the city,  
     Wheat for Bet Khubur.  
(*ANET* 1969:143 KRT A.ii)<sup>70</sup>

The preparations suggested by El are lengthy; they continue through to *ANET* KRT A.iii.154.<sup>71</sup> Toward the end of Keret's dream, El describes a handmaid, Lady Hurriya, whose fairness/beauty is likened to Anat and Ashtoreth (*ANET* KRT

<sup>66</sup> UT 76/CTA 10/KTU 1.10 and UT 132/CTA 11/KTU 1.11.

<sup>67</sup> UT Krt/CTA 14/KTU 1.14. In UT, this tablet is continuously numbered line following line with no column numbers identified. Ginsberg (*ANET*) however does give column numbers and continuous numbering between them.

<sup>68</sup> UT Krt lines 44-53 are missing from the text.

<sup>69</sup> UT Krt.59 ff./CTA 14/KTU 1.14.

<sup>70</sup> UT Krt.74-82/CTA 14/KTU 1.14.

<sup>71</sup> UT Krt.154/CTA 14/KTU 1.14.



A.iii.145).<sup>72</sup> Keret wakes and takes a lamb and turtledove for sacrifice. The top of the next column (iv) continues with his preparation for sacrifice:

In a bowl of silver he poured wine,  
Honey in a bowl of gold.  
He went up to the top of a tower,  
Bestrode the top of the wall;  
Lifted up his [han]ds to heaven,  
Sacrificed to Bull, his father El;  
*Honored* Baal with his sacrifice, (170)  
Dagon's Son with his [ob]lation.  
(ANET 1969:144 KRT A.iv)<sup>73</sup>

Much of the rest of the column is a repeat of the preparations that El had instructed him to make during the dream. There follows here the sacrifice and the “consequences” of giving the sacrifice. Mention is made of Asherah of Tyre and Elath of Sidon.<sup>74</sup> Columns v and vi<sup>75</sup> seem to be the story of Keret bringing tribute to King Pabel, the father of the bride to be. Gold and silver are mentioned. These two tablets have much missing or unintelligible.

#### 1.1.2.2. The Gods Arrive

The translator's notes for the next tablet (ANET 1969:145 KRT B)<sup>76</sup> read:

All but the bottom, or some 35 lines, missing. They repeated Keret's message more or less verbatim. Then they related that Pabel said, in effect, “Return and say unto Keret:—All right, you may have her. But we shall miss her sorely. Everybody loves her because she is the embodiment of virtue” (ANET 1969:145).

This first column describes her great virtues. Several lines are missing at the beginning of the next column, ii.<sup>77</sup> It seems that Keret makes preparation for the coming of some gods. The translator's notes read, “The defective lines tell that some of the leading gods are about to visit Keret and that Keret makes some obscure preparations” (ANET 1969:146). Baal is among the gods that arrive. He speaks up on Keret's behalf:

[The]n came the companies of the gods. (11)  
And Puissant Baal spake up:  
“[Now] come, O Kindly One [El Be]nign!

<sup>72</sup> UT Krt.145-6/CTA 14/KTU 1.14.

<sup>73</sup> UT Krt.164-171/CTA 14/KTU 1.14.

<sup>74</sup> UT Krt.198-201/CTA 14/KTU 1.14.

<sup>75</sup> UT Krt.216 ff./CTA 14/KTU 1.14.

<sup>76</sup> UT 128/CTA 15/KTU 1.15.

<sup>77</sup> UT 128 II/CTA 15/KTU 1.15.



Wilt thou not bless [Keret] the Noble,  
 Not beatify the Beloved, Lad of El?" —  
 A cup [El] takes [in] (his) hand,  
 A flagon in (his) [right hand].  
 Indeed he blesses [*his servant*].  
 (ANET 1969:146 KRT B.ii)<sup>78</sup>

Thus Baal becomes an active part of the story. El is moved to bless King Keret. He shall have a wife and heirs, seven or even eight. These sons will suck at the breasts of Asherah and Anat, “the two wet nurs[es of the gods]” (ANET 1969:146 KRT B.ii).<sup>79</sup> In column iii, Keret is exalted and his wife presents him with sons, as promised, and daughters. Then Asherah, “even Elath”,<sup>80</sup> remembers Keret’s vows. Mention is made of broken vows and it seems that Keret has not paid his. In column iv, Lady Hurriya is told to prepare a feast and call the barons and peers. Keret’s feet are up on a stool,<sup>81</sup> which seems to mean that he is ill.<sup>82</sup> The translator’s notes<sup>83</sup> make it fairly certain that in the end of column vi<sup>84</sup> this is the case. Forty lines are missing at the end of this column which forms the end of the tablet.

### 1.1.2.3. The King’s Illness

KRT C<sup>85</sup> is assumed to be the continuation of the story. It opens with dialogue between Keret and one of his sons, Elhau:

([Pertaining to] “Keret.”) “Like [a do]g thine aspect is  
 changed,  
 Like a cur thy joyous countenance.  
 Wilt thou die, then, father, like the mortals,  
 Or thy joy change to mourning,  
 To a woman’s dirge, O father, *my song*?  
 For thee, father, weeps the mount of Baal,  
 Zaphon, the sacred circuit.  
 The mighty circuit laments,  
 The circuit broad of span:  
 ‘Is, then, [Ke]ret a son of El, (10)

<sup>78</sup> UT 128 II.11-18/CTA 15/KTU 1.15.

<sup>79</sup> UT 128 II.26-7/CTA 15/KTU 1.15. Asherah fits this profile without difficulty, however Anat is not said to have children in any of the texts that mention her. It is possible that her maternal nature is captured in the one or two allusions of her mothering a calf, if indeed she is to be equated with a cow or a heifer.

<sup>80</sup> ANET 1969:146 KRT B.iii.26/UT 128 II.26/CTA 15/KTU 1.15.

<sup>81</sup> ANET 1969:KRT B.iv.1/UT 128. IV.1/CTA 15/KTU 1.15.

<sup>82</sup> ANET 1969:KRT B.v.12 ff./UT 128 V.10-15/CTA 15/KTU 1.15.

<sup>83</sup> ANET 1969:147.

<sup>84</sup> UT 128.VI/CTA 15/KTU 1.15..

<sup>85</sup> UT 125-127/CTA 16/KTU 1.16.



An offspring<sup>86</sup> of the Kindly One, and a holy  
being?” — (ANET 1969:147 KRT C.i)<sup>87</sup>

The story continues with Keret telling his son to prepare for a sacrifice and to tell his sister that her father requests her presence. The end of column i has Elhau waiting for his sister when she returns from drawing water; “As soon as she sees her brother, Her [loins] do break” (ANET 1969:147 KRT C i.55).<sup>88</sup> This is the same sort of reaction that Asherah has upon seeing Anath and Baal approach to request her assistance in procuring a palace for Baal. In the next column (ii), Thitmanet, the sister, plies her brother for what has happened to their father. As she enters her father’s chamber, she repeats the lines quoted above, with the addition of, “Shall, then, a god die, An offspring of the Kindly One not live?” (ANET 1969:148-9 KRT C.ii.105-06).<sup>89</sup> These are inserted just before the lines, “for thee, father . . .”. Mention is made in the next piece of the rains of Baal and that these rains are “Sweet to the earth” (ANET 1969:148 KRT C.iii.7),<sup>90</sup> to the field and wheat. There are more lines missing at the bottom of this column and the top of the next. The connection between this set of verses (ANET 1969:148 KRT C.iii)<sup>91</sup> and the Keret story is unclear. It could be assumed that Keret’s daughter is reciting them as she enters her father’s chamber. The last few lines allude to famine or drought:

The plowmen raise their heads,  
Upward the growers of corn.\*  
Spent is the bread corn [from] their jars,  
Spent the wine from their skin-bottles,  
Spent the oil from [their] jugs.  
Keret’s house . . .  
(ANET 1969:148 KRT C.iii)<sup>92</sup>

The translator’s note that I have marked in the above quote with an asterisk (\*) mentions:

All this certainly sounds more like the end of a drought (or dry season) than the beginning or middle of one, yet Keret is still ill. It

<sup>86</sup> *šph* could be translated “scion”, cf. UT p. 493.

<sup>87</sup> UT 125.1-11/CTA 16/KTU 1.16.

<sup>88</sup> UT 125.53 ff., but Ut 125 from line 54 ff. are quite fragmented. Cf. secs. 1.1.1.2 and 2.1.1.1 for discussions re: Asherah’s reactions to the approach of a visitor. Cf. Anat’s reaction to Baal’s messages ANET 1969:137 D.30/UT<sup>c</sup>nt III.29-32. Note Anat’s rebuttal of challenging language, UT<sup>c</sup>nt III.33 ff.

<sup>89</sup> UT 125.105-6/CTA 16/KTU 1.16.

<sup>90</sup> UT 126 III.7/CTA 16/KTU 1.16.

<sup>91</sup> UT 126.III/CTA 16/KTU 1.16.

<sup>92</sup>UT 126 III.12-7/CTA 16/KTU 1.16.



is therefore anything but obvious that the drought is considered to be a consequence of the king's illness (*ANET* 1969:148, n. 31).

The connection to the king's illness is lost along with those lines which also may have illuminated why Baal's rains are mentioned. The one connection is that Baal is "the lord" of the rains and he could be responsible, directly or indirectly, for the lack of "bread corn", wine and oil. It may be that Baal has also remembered King Keret's vows and has responded with a deprivation of the land. This could be considered as Thitmanet's call for Baal's blessing in these dire straits.

#### 1.1.2.4. The King's Cure

KRT C columns iv-vi continue the story with Ilish the "carpenter-god of the house of Baal" being summoned, but the loss of 25 lines between iv and v obscures the reason (*ANET* 1969:148).<sup>93</sup> El calls on the gods to find one who can cure Keret's malady; after the seventh call still none comes forward in the lines that are missing, so El creates Sha<sup>c</sup>taqat to perform the healing (*ANET* 1969:148 KRT C.vi.2).<sup>94</sup> The healing is effective. Keret mounts his throne; however his son, Yassib, accuses his father of neglecting his duties while he was ill. The Legend of Keret comes to an end with the last conversation between King Keret and his son, Yassib, who seems to be hungry for the power of the throne, albeit at the expense of his father. The argument is somewhat akin to themes in Job: Keret must have done wrong to deserve this and because he is ill should no longer reign. Keret rather than step down replies:

And [K]eret the Noble makes answer:  
"May Horon\* break, O my son,  
    May Horon break thy head,  
    Ashtoreth name of Baal thy pate.  
May'st thou fall into . . ."  
(last line unintelligible)  
\*God of the nether world.

(*ANET* 1969:149 KRT C.vi.54 ff.)<sup>95</sup>

This is followed with a colophon: "Written by Elimelech; donated by <Niqmadd, king of Ugarit>". Baal, in these last lines, is given passing mention. Ashtoreth and the god of the nether world are mentioned in parallel in a curse upon Yassib. So ends this story.

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<sup>93</sup> UT 126 IV-V & UT 127/CTA 16/KTU 1.16.

<sup>94</sup> UT 127.1/CTA 16/KTU 1.16.

<sup>95</sup> UT 127.54-57/CTA 16/KTU 1.16. DDD would seem to confirm that Horon may have had connections with the underworld, (DDD:806-7 s.v. Horon).







cults for the dead is not clear.<sup>101</sup> It is possible that the natural processes of life and death as part of the general temple practices is reflected here and no particular connection should be made to a death cult or necromancy.

### 1.1.3.2. A Tragic Bow for the Heir

In AQHT A ii,<sup>102</sup> Daniel receives news that he will be blessed with a son. Columns iii-iv are missing. Column v<sup>103</sup> begins with a conversation of the craftsman Kothar wa-Khasis promising Daniel a bow. Kothar wa-Khasis delivers the bow which is given to Daniel's son, named Aqhat. The bow is coveted by the goddess Anat (*ANET* 1969:151 AQHT A.vi),<sup>104</sup> who tries to talk the youth Aqhat into giving it to her:

Then quoth the Maiden Anath:  
 "Ask for life, O Aqhat the Youth.  
 Ask for life and I'll give it thee,  
 For deathlessness, and I'll bestow't on thee.  
 I'll make thee count years with Baal,  
 With the sons of El shalt thou count months.  
 And Baal when he gives life gives a feast, (30)  
 Gives a feast to the life-given and bids him drink; . . ."  
 (*ANET* 1969:150 AQHT A.vi)<sup>105</sup>

She is promising Aqhat immortality. Basically, he refuses her by saying that she could not do it if she wanted to. And besides, bows are for warriors anyway; what does *she* know about that? She takes offence and goes off to El and condemns Aqhat before the father of the gods. The next tablet, AQHT B,<sup>106</sup> has only parts of two columns that are readable, the rest being abraded or missing. From what is left, we find that Anat has received El's permission to take revenge for the youth's insult. Anat secures the help of Yatpan and other vultures to kill Aqhat. AQHT C begins with what seems to be a confession, "I smote him for his bow".<sup>107</sup> The "I" seems most likely to be Anat. The first few lines are difficult to read. The end of this column has Paghat, Aqhat's sister,

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<sup>101</sup> Diana Edelman wants to make a point that Baal's death and resurrection (UT 67/CTA 5/KTU 1.5) may very well point toward a chthonic connection for both Baal and El. This is presented in her critique of Heider's thesis, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*. She laments "that he [Heider] did not choose to explore this issue in more depth" (Edelman 1987:731). If indeed Edelman is on the right track here, this would seem to be another piece of evidence to that effect.

<sup>102</sup> UT 2 Aqht II/CTA 17/KTU 1.17.

<sup>103</sup> UT 2 Aqht V/CTA 17/KTU 1.17.

<sup>104</sup> UT 2 Aqht VI/CTA 17/KTU 1.17.

<sup>105</sup> UT 2 Aqht VI.25-31/CTA 17/KTU 1.17.

<sup>106</sup> UT 3 Aqht/CTA 18/KTU 1.18.

<sup>107</sup> *ANET* 1969:153: AQHT C.i.14/UT 1 Aqht I.14/CTA 19/KTU 1.19.



weeping seemingly because of a drought. Baal comes back into the picture as Rider of the Clouds. He is connected to the dew and the rain:

Paghat weeps in her heart,  
 Cries in her inward parts.  
 She rends the garment of Daniel the Rapha-man,  
 The vest<ment> of Ghazir the Harnamiyy-man.  
 Straightway Daniel the Rapha-man,  
 . . . s a cloud in the heat of the *season*; (40)  
 . . . s a cloud raining upon the grapes.  
 “Seven years shall Baal fail,  
 Eight the Rider of the Clouds.  
 No dew,  
 No rain;  
 No welling-up of the deeps,<sup>108</sup>  
 No sweetness of Baal’s voice.  
 For rent  
 Is the garment of Daniel the Rapha-man,  
 The vestment of Ghazir [the Harnamiyy-man].” —  
 Loudly to h[is] daughter he doth cry: . . .  
 (ANET 1969:153 AQHT C.i)<sup>109</sup>

<sup>108</sup> This same phrasing, ironically, shows up in the RSV translation of II Sam. 1:21: “Ye mountains of Gilboa, *let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor upsurging of the deep!* For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil”. However, the NRSV translates this same verse, “You mountains of Gilboa, *let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor bounteous fields!* For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, anointed with oil no more”. There are two things to note in the italicised sections (my emphasis). Note, the last phrase of the italicised sections are translated differently. The RSV notes, “Cn: Heb. fields of offerings”. The NRSV notes, “Hebrew uncertain”. The RSV has chosen to use a phrasing used in the Ugaritic text to supply a translation for the uncertain Hebrew. It seems that the RSV assumes an equation between the Ugaritic and Hebrew material. The RSV explains the translation of this phrase, “Cn”

indicates a correction made where the text has suffered in transmission and the versions provide no satisfactory restoration but the Committee agrees with the judgement of competent scholars as to the most probable reconstruction of the original text (RSV 1971:vii).

Compare the Ugaritic and the Hebrew for these phrases:

UT:245 I Aqhat 45/UT 19

(44) .bl.tl.bl.rbb

21 תָּרִי בַגְּלֶבַע אֶל-טַל וְאֶל-מָטָר עֲלֵיכֶם וְשָׁרִי תְרוּמָת

(45) bl.šr<sup>c</sup>.thmtm.bl

(46) tbn ql.b<sup>c</sup>l.ktmz<sup>c</sup>

כִּי שֵׁם נִגְעַל מִגַּן גְּבוּרִים מִגַּן שְׂאוּל בְּלִי מְשִׁיחַ בְּשִׁמּוֹן:

(47) kst.duil.mt.rpi

This issue came up in a private discussion Professor Rogerson, who pointed out this verse as an illustration of the way that Ugaritic studies has affected the way the Bible is translated and therefore read.

<sup>109</sup> UT 1 Aqht I.34-49/CTA 19/KTU 1.19.







The section from 107-113 is repeated line for line in lines 119-128 with the object being Hargab. The action is completed by Baal in lines 129-131. No fat and no bone is found in Hargab, and Daniel lifts his eyes to find Samal in the sky. Samal was Anat's accomplice and the vultures' mother. Daniel calls out the same imprecation upon Samal as on the others and she falls.

Samal's wings [Ba]a[l doth break],  
                   Baal doth break the pinions of her.  
 She doth fa[ll down at] at his feet.  
                   So he splits her belly and gazes.  
 There is fat,  
                   There is bone.  
*Taking them for Aqhat he <we>eps,*  
                   Weeps and inters him.  
(ANET 1969:154 AQHT C.iii)<sup>115</sup>

Then follows Daniel's lament, calling once again for Baal to break the wings of the vultures (ANET 1969:154 AQHT C.iii.150), and woe on Qiru-mayim (water sources?) and Marurat-taghullal-banir (Blessed one Harnessed with Yoke)<sup>116</sup> upon whom rests the blood of Aqhat. Curses are called down upon the city of Abelim (column iv):

He lifts up his voice and cries:  
 "Woe to thee, city of Abelim,  
                   On which rests the blood-guilt of Aqhat the Youth!  
 May Baal make thee blind  
 From now for evermore,  
                   From now unto all generations!"  
*Again he waves the staff of his hand.*  
                   Daniel goes to his house, . . . (170)  
(ANET 1969:155 AQHT C.iv)<sup>117</sup>

Baal is called upon to perform part of the curse. And the lament continues with Daniel and all his house involved. Sacrifices are made to the gods, and the clan-offering is made. Paghat swears to avenge her brother's death. Missing tablets may tell of her success and Aqhat's restoration to life. Here ends this tale.

#### 1.1.4. Baal at Ugarit

In these stories from Ugarit we see that Baal features as a main figure in the pantheon. In the "Poems about Baal and Anat", he wrestles with the gods that represent chaos and the unknown, Yamm (the sea) and Mot (death). Baal is victorious in these battles with

<sup>115</sup> UT 1 Aqht I.142-7/CTA 19/KTU 1.19.

<sup>116</sup> UT 1 Aqht I.156/CTA 19/KTU 1.19. Ginsberg's notes for these two names suggest that these are localities "near the scene of the murder" (ANET 1969:154, notes 40 & 41).

<sup>117</sup> UT 1 AQHT I.165-170/CTA 19/KTU 1.19.



the help of Kothar wa-Khasis and Anat. He is granted permission to build a palace. Asherah is also instrumental in this. At the point of his death and before his resurrection,<sup>118</sup> no god is found to take his place. There is none like him; none swifter, stronger, nor bigger. He is called, “Puissant Baal”, “Dagon’s Son”,<sup>119</sup> “Prince Baal”, “Rider of the Clouds”, “Hadd”,<sup>120</sup> “Mighty Warrior”,<sup>121</sup> “Prince, Lord of Earth”, “Powerful Hero”,<sup>122</sup> “Baal of the Summit of Zaphon”, “Puissant Son Baal”,<sup>123</sup> and “God Hadd”.<sup>124</sup> These are all titles befitting a lord par excellence. The name, Baal, translated simply means “lord”.<sup>125</sup> He is associated with rain, snow, storms, thunder, lightning, and dew. Though his status is given to him by El,<sup>126</sup> the father of the gods, Baal features as the more prominent character in these stories.

<sup>118</sup> If a death and resurrection is indeed what the text does imply.

<sup>119</sup> Allusion is also made to Baal being El’s son; “He cries to Bull El [his father, To El] the King [his begetter” (*ANET* 1969:133 II AB.iv/UT 51 IV.47-8/CTA 4/KTU 1.4). This makes little sense when he is called “Dagon’s Son” unless consideration is made that El is the father of all the gods by virtue of his position in the pantheon (cf. Handy 1994:78). Dagon (*dgn*) means grain when used as a noun. Would “Son of Dagon” then mean “Son of Grain”? Or an alternative is to read *dg* as “fish”. Handy notes; “The god *Dagon* was long thought of as a fish-god (from the resemblance of the name to 𐤃𐤂 ‘fish’)” (Handy 1994:109). Arvid S. Kapelrud speaking in regard to Asherah’s reaction at the approach of Baal and Anat to request her assistance in procuring a palace for Baal, suggests that Anat and Baal “were known as fighters, and the words of Asherah show that they were in opposition to other gods, to the whole family of El and Asherah. It is no coincidence that Baal was the son of Dagon, not El, as the other gods were” (Kapelrud 1969:67).

<sup>120</sup> This is given in parallel as many of the other names of Baal are given, e.g.: “Baal’s enemies take to the woods, Hadd’s foes to the sides of the mountain” (*ANET* 1969:135 II AB vii.35/UT 51.VII.35-6/CTA 4/KTU 1.4). This particular phrase is set in the context of opening a window in Baal’s palace.

<sup>121</sup> Kapelrud, makes a note that Anat is also considered a warrior, but she is fierce, cruel, and bloodthirsty. “Baal was a terrible fighter, hard and wild, but he did not exult in blood, he did not shout for joy when heads and limbs were cut off. Anat seems to represent cruelty and violence, in a way unlike that of Baal” (Kapelrud 1969:53).

<sup>122</sup> *ANET* 1969:137: V AB C.10 & D.52/UT <sup>ent</sup> III.11 & IV.51 (*aliy.qrdm*)/CTA 3/KTU 1.3.

<sup>123</sup> *ANET* 1969:138: I\*AB.ii.18/UT 67 II.17-8 (*aliynbn.b<sup>c</sup>l*)/CTA 5/KTU 1.5.

<sup>124</sup> *ANET* 1969:142: IV AB.ii.21 & 25/UT 76 II.2 & 5/CTA 10/KTU 1.10.

<sup>125</sup> Handy mentions that; “both *il* and *b<sup>c</sup>l* may designate two distinct deities, but they are also used as the generic word for ‘god’ and the common noun ‘lord’ respectively. How to know whether the common noun or the proper noun is intended remains, in too many cases, an area of scholarly conjecture” (Handy 1994:25). The names that are compounded with “Baal”, such as Baal-Hamon or Baal Shamem, are not necessarily to be identified with the Baal of Ugarit. For instance Baal-Hamon, from Egypt is associated with child sacrifice, which is of a distinctly different flavour from the Baal of the Ugaritic material. The Baal of Ugarit is a distinct deity with this name, where as Baal-Hamon may be understood as “Lord Hamon”. Baal Shamem (Shamayim) could be “Lord of Heaven”. And who is the “lord of heaven”, El or Baal? (cf. Handy 1994:30-31)

<sup>126</sup> Jonas C. Greenfield wants to emphasize that Baal is a “warrior god” and “more aggressive than El” (Greenfield 1987:548).



The other two stories mentioned above, *The Legend of King Keret* and *The Tale of Aqhat*, add only a few details to the portrait of Baal that we already have. Baal comes before El, the king of the pantheon, on behalf of people. In both of these stories Baal requests that El bless these families with an heir. Drought and lack of rain is accounted to Baal, as is the presence of rain and sustenance to the earth. Baal is called upon to perform a curse in KRT C.vi<sup>127</sup> and in the very end of the Aqhat story. In AQHT, Baal brings down the vultures and heals them. And a cycle of years is attributed to the drought: “Seven years shall Baal fail, Eight the Rider of the Clouds” (ANET 1969:153 AQHT C.i.42).<sup>128</sup> Also, in AQHT, Anat credits Baal with giving life. However Aqhat is not convinced by her suggestion. In these two stories, three gods feature: El, Anat and Baal. El, as the Creator God, holds the ultimate power. Anat has shown herself no better than a spoiled child that will use all the power available to get her own way. Baal acts as a liaison and has the most beneficent role to play with humans. He is the most interactive of the gods with and on behalf of the people in both *The Legend of King Keret* and *The Tale of Aqhat*.

There are various ways of interpreting these stories. Each interpretation focuses on different characters or themes of the stories.<sup>129</sup> Some scholars are concerned with their cosmological interest, such as Gibson (Gibson 1978). He draws attention to the fact that in the Baal Cycle, Baal was the dominant character rather than El. It was El who was the “creator god”. So, it goes according to reason that in the Baal Cycle, “it is not surprising to find that specific references to creation are absent from the Ugaritic version” (Gibson 1978:7). “Cosmogonic” interest is another focus noted by Mark Smith. He defines this as an interplay between the forces for life, Baal, and the forces

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<sup>127</sup> UT 127.55 ff./CTA 16/KTU 1.16.

<sup>128</sup> UT 1 Aqht I.42-44/CTA 19/KTU 1.19.

<sup>129</sup> Each interpretation is also undergirded by the assumptions of the interpreter. Handy, for example, identifies his assumption:

I assume here that, given similar hierarchical structures and a chain of authority, people would act toward each other in similar fashion, whether in modern corporations or ancient city-states. I acknowledge from the start that this is a leap of faith; it nevertheless provides another perspective from which to view the actions of the divine realm in Syria-Palestine (Handy 1994:16).

This set of assumptions is evident as he speaks of the scribe and of the Baal Cycle;

It must be assumed that any author writing for a religious cult was under some restraint to keep the actions of the deities portrayed in the myths consistent with the beliefs of the cult and the wider culture . . . It is therefore possible to accept the presentation of the gods in these tablets as a reflection of contemporary Syro-Palestinian understanding of the structure of divine control and behavior, regardless of the literary finesse of a particular author (Handy 1994:24).



of chaos and death, Mot and Yamm (Smith 1994b:75). As the storm-god, Baal brings blessings and life to the world. "The means of providing blessings are his rains, which the seasonal interpretation has emphasized" (Smith 1994b:96).

Walls offers a caution in regard to some of the simple assumptions made about who these gods and goddesses are. He argues against their reduction to "Frazierian types". He states:

Anat is often classified as a "virgin-warrior type" and Baal is defined simply as a "storm god" or "dying-rising god," as though these were well established categories capable of explaining the mythic identity of these deities. While these typologies are easily systematized for comparative use, they misrepresent the complexity of the divine symbols and structural relations within the mythic pantheon (Walls 1992:3).

Even so, Day for instance, has referred to Baal as a dying and rising god. He cites the Ugaritic myths as giving evidence to the fact (Day 1994:42). Others assume that these stories are cultic or ritual in nature. For instance, Kapelrud in *The Violent Goddess: Anat in the Ras Shamra Texts* states,

I tried to show that the Baal texts (as well as the Anat texts) were cultic texts which had been used regularly in ancient Ugaritic cult life. Some scholars seem to think that religious cult was some kind of luxury, far from daily life. Nothing is more wrong than this supposition. In Ugarit the cult was integrated into daily life and part of it, and the myths were the backbone of the cult (Kapelrud 1969:9).<sup>130</sup>

Walls also warns against a reductionistic approach, in a comment about the ritual use of the Cycle. He notes,

There is no evidence that the death and resurrection of Baal or its ritual celebration was an annual occurrence in Ugaritic religion. The interpretation that Baal personifies natural vegetation is itself methodologically flawed in its assumption that Ugaritic gods can be reduced to natural phenomena (Walls 1992:6).

Closely allied to the ritual/cultic interpretation is that they are seasonal or fertility cycles. Soggin (1984:8-9) and Gibson (1978:18-9), on the one hand, assume a seasonal cycle

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<sup>130</sup> Again speaking of Anat, he says, "What is really relevant in the story, is her constant interplay with Baal and the leading part she takes in the cultic performances. . . . These performances again had their root in the constant change in the surrounding nature, and in the fear and hope of man, in all his reactions to that which happened around him" (Kapelrud 1969:91).



as the proper interpretation; and on the other, Curtis (1985:86) questions whether that is appropriate. Smith says the seasonal “approach”,

falls heavily on explaining the setting and therefore the origins of the cycle. . . . In sum, although seasonal or ritual settings or patterns explain neither the overall diachronic formation nor the larger synchronic narrative of the Baal Cycle, it would appear the Baal Cycle used and assumed a wide range of seasonal and ritual information on the part of its audience (Smith 1994b:74-5).

Walls argues against the assumption of a ritual use of the Cycle (Walls 1992:162) and takes a different tangent in his treatise on Anat. His could be called a sociological approach. He suggests that Anat and Baal are both liminal characters:

This ambivalence concerning the character of Baal suggests his liminal status among the Ugaritic deities in general. . . . The vigorous and occasionally brutal Baal has not been tamed by his association with Ugarit and its human culture, even though he is its patron deity (Walls 1992:126).

By liminal, he means “just outside socially acceptable or expected”. Much consideration is given to the nature of the relationship of Baal and Anat. Kapelrud (1969), Greenfield (1987), Perlman (1978) and Dever (1990) all assume that Anat is Baal’s consort or lover.<sup>131</sup> Walls goes to great lengths to discuss the issue of a consort relationship for Baal. He points out that, “While Anat is intimately associated with Baal and his mythic actions, she is never formally described as anything other than his sister” (Walls 1992:122; cf. 157). He suggests, and rightly so, that most of the assumption about an amorous relationship between Anat and Baal is based on her identification with the heifer in UT 67 V.18 (Walls 1992:143) and the splicing of UT 132 into the UT 76 text (Walls 1992:123). He wants to warn against reading Anat as the heifer in UT 132, 76 and 67:

But only through an overly-circular and hypothetical argument can Anat be identified as the sexual partner of Baal. . . . While none of this information necessitates that Anat is not the spouse or consort of Baal, neither does it contribute to the description of Anat as a sexually active goddess in Ugaritic myth (Walls 1992:144).

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<sup>131</sup> Greenfield seems to feel the need to justify the consort relationship by saying that though Baal and Anat are siblings it “would not have to be constituted taboo (cf. Abraham and Sarah, Gen 20:12)” (Greenfield 1987:549). Perlman calls Baal “brother/consort” of Anat (Perlman 1985:186). Kapelrud calls Anat, “the young and wild consort of Baal, the goddess who was as active in love as she was in battle” (Kapelrud 1969:105, cf. 112). Dever makes the observation that Anat is Baal’s consort in Ugarit, but Asherah was assumed to be Baal’s consort in Isreal (at least according to the biblical text) (Dever 1990:164). John Day (1986) could also be added to this list, cf. p. 393.



He also discounts, on the basis of the Ras Shamra texts, that Asherah was ever paired as Baal's consort (Walls 1992:116-7) and goes as far as suggesting that maybe Baal is "presented in Ugaritic myth as a bachelor figure" (Walls 1992:122). Day claims that "no extra-biblical text actually attests Asherah as Baal's consort" (1994:41).

Another line of study, closely aligned with a social theme, has been along the lines of the political aspects of the stories. The key issue here is power and especially kingship. Dearman, in *Religion and Culture in Ancient Israel*, suggests that, "The Ugaritic Ba'al is no mere local deity or limited to the fertility cycle; Ba'al is a cosmic lord" (Dearman 1992:42). Walls points out that the goddess Anat takes an active part in establishing "Baal as the king of the gods" (Walls 1992:1). Maier makes the point that "'El is sometimes called 'king'" but "he appears more as the grand patriarchal judge, the father of gods and men, head of the pantheon" (Maier 1986:32, cf. Handy 1994:75). He goes on to say that of those other gods available to fill the position of "king", under 'El's authority, Yamm and Baal stand as the most likely candidates. Rainey offers the suggestion, "A cardinal virtue of the ideal ruler in Ugaritic literature was his attention to the weak and oppressed" (Rainey 1965:115). He points out the necessity of attending to justice in "The Tale of Aqhat" (UT II Aqht V.6-8)<sup>132</sup> and in "The Legend of King Keret" (UT 127:33-4, 45-8).<sup>133</sup> He continues, "the administration of justice upon earth had its counterpart among the gods" (Rainey 1965:115). Baal was not exempt.

An issue in the kingship of Baal is the nature of his relationship with El, the high god. This train of thought is put forth by Gordon, when he suggests that Baal as a younger god "eclipses" El, an older god. He makes this point on the foundation that Baal and Anat are the "main deities" of the Baal Cycle.

It often happens in the history of pantheons that younger gods eclipse the older ones as objects of adoration. . . . Baal and Anath are young gods who outshine the older El and Asherah in the mythological texts. Baal and Anath are the main deities (in role, though not in rank) in the bulk of the myths (Gordon 1966:21).

Greenfield would add to the argument that it was done without antipathy (Greenfield 1987:547). Walls and Smith both make the point that El remains the chief executive of the Ugaritic pantheon (Smith 1994b:95, 96, Walls 1992:109). El does not abdicate his position even though Baal is a more dominant or active character in the stories.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> ANET 1969:AQHT A.

<sup>133</sup> ANET 1969:KRT C.

<sup>134</sup> Handy gives a fuller rendition of the nature of this debate (1994:70-72).



Mark Smith suggests that Baal's political position was mimicked by the authorities of state.

As Baal's palace is located terrestrially at Mount Sapan, his kingship at Ugarit is identified with his kingship over the cosmos. The political ramifications were presumably immense. The cycle was developed under the royal aegis of the dynasty of Niqmaddu at Ugarit (Miller 1982:125). Divine kingship not infrequently paralleled human kinship in the Near East (Mann 1977), and the association between divine and human kingship sometimes involves expressions of the storm-god's support for the monarch (Smith 1994b:105-6).

Smith asserts that the central theme of the Cycle, as a whole, is the kingship and "exaltation" of Baal. "All of these different sets of material have been shaped to contribute to the story of Baal's rise to power and thereby magnify him" (Smith 1994b:103). He compares this "exaltation" over the cosmos and the gods of the pantheon to Marduk of the *Enuma Elish* and YHWH of the Hebrew scriptures. Clifford presents the necessity of the temple in the establishment of Baal's independence: "The logic is simple. Having his own temple would enable Baal to move out of El's household and to establish his harem independently" (Clifford 1979:141). In his description of the nature of the hierarchy of the offices of the deities of the Ugaritic pantheon, Handy concludes his treatise with:

This view of the divine world is based on a scribal view of bureaucratic rule from the schools of Syria-Palestine. This bureaucratic vision of the cosmos must be considered in any attempt to understand the position and the behavior of deities described in the mythology of the Syro-Palestinian world (Handy 1994:177).

Handy gives a somewhat eccentric appraisal of Baal based on these texts. Baal may be "victorious", "mighty" and "virile", but he is stupid. He does exactly as he has warned his messengers not to and gets swallowed up by Mot, and, as Handy also notes, he begs a fight with Mot that he was not sure to win. He concludes:

Because these narratives were found near the Baal temple, it must be assumed that the portrayal of Baal in the texts is in accord with the cult's accepted character for him, namely, as a somewhat virile lummo, hardly as an ideal of strength and wisdom (Handy 1994:102).

These differing interpretations are not mutually exclusive, however. Mark Smith offers this as a synopsis of the various interpretations:



Six and a half decades of Ugaritic studies have witnessed numerous views of the Baal Cycle which in the words of Walls (1992:185) “remains largely impervious to comprehensive interpretation.” Approaches to the cycle include seasonal and ritual interpretations, historical and political views and cosmogonic theories. These views have been prominent for decades and continue to exert considerable influence on how the Baal Cycle is understood. They have also guided the interpretation of details in the Baal Cycle. Each one illuminates various aspects of the Baal Cycle and each has significantly advanced its understanding as a whole. Indeed, the most serious interpretations offer profound syntheses integrating the themes of kingship, temple building and divine conflict within the Baal Cycle (Smith 1994b:58-9).

It should be mentioned here that not only do each of the interpretations influence the understandings of the Baal Cycle itself, but also the interpretations of those other stories that are compared to/contrasted with it, and especially crucial to this thesis, accounts in the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> More will be made of this point at another point in this thesis.



## 1.2. Baal elsewhere in the ANE

Stories of a storm-god and a god named Baal are found in several places in the ANE in addition to the Ugaritic material examined above. Attribution is made to a god Baal in the epigraphic as well as iconographic archives over many years of archaeological endeavor. Consideration will be given to early manifestations of Baal and then iconographic depictions in this next section.

### 1.2.1. His Influence

Mention can be made at this point that *ba<sup>c</sup>al* has been found as an element in personal names at Ugarit; e.g. *ba<sup>c</sup>ala(dU)-si*, *ba<sup>c</sup>al-mat-te-ni*, and *abdi-ba<sup>c</sup>al(dIM/U)* (Gröndahl 1967:114-17). This is not surprising considering Baal featured as a main deity in the Ugaritic pantheon. In these next sections we will consider his influence in Ebla and Egypt, in a Hittite Myth, at Amarna, and in Mesopotamia and Samaria.

#### 1.2.1.1. Ebla and Egypt

As early as the third millennium BCE, Baal is mentioned as one deity of four for whom the gates of Ebla were dedicated (Pettinato 1981:44; Handy 1994:62). While Baal was known as the “patron deity of Ugarit”, Dagon may also have been a “patron deity” there, “but little is known of his cult at Ugarit” (Handy 1994:114; cf. n. 103). *ANET* includes a section called “The Egyptians and the Gods of Asia” in the “Egyptian Historical Texts”. “Baal-Zaphon, the great god” is mentioned in an Egyptian mortuary prayer in the 13th century BCE. The translator of these texts, John A. Wilson, mentions that Baal-Zaphon was “a being with the Asiatic conical cap with streamers” (*ANET* 1969:249). He goes on to say that in the fourteenth century BCE:

The most frequently mentioned deity was Baal. As the god of the heavens, the mountain tops, and of thunder —the Semitic Baal-Shamaim — he was the counterpart of the Egyptian god Seth, and his name was used in figures of speech relating to the pharaoh in battle (*ANET* 1969:249).

There are occasions that Baal and Seth are used interchangeably. “Storms were the provenance of the god Seth, who also represented chaos, evil, and confusion, among other negative qualities” (Shafer 1991:34). The connection with storms makes the exchange or substitution apt.<sup>136</sup> There is also a god called Baal-Shamaim, Lord of the Heavens. But is this a title referring to Baal or El (cf. Handy 1994:30-31)? In a poem

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<sup>136</sup> Handy gives the impression that he is not convinced by this argument; “The other Egyptian story that deals with Syro-Palestinian deities is about Anat and Seth. It is argued that the god called Seth is actually Baal and that the work may reflect the myths of Syria-Palestine; however, it appears more likely that the tale is totally Egyptian in origin” (Handy 1994:57).



from a Luxor text, Baal is credited with great power: “Baal smites thee with the cedar tree which is in his hand” (*ANET* 1969:249). Wilson, the translator, identifies this as coming from a magical text. Baal is apparently wielding power, and for the purpose of warding off (or attacking) someone, but it is not clear who or why. The translator also mentions, “Baal had his own priesthood in Egypt from the late Eighteenth Dynasty on” (*ANET* 1969:250). He mentions in his notes that during the time of Akh-en-Aton there was a “Prophet of Baal” and a “Prophet of Astarte” from Memphis (*ANET* 1969:250 n.13).

#### 1.2.1.2. A Hittite Myth

At about the same time, Late Bronze age by Albright’s reckoning, a Hittite myth is told. As *ANET* presents the story, the storm-god is seduced by the high god’s wife, Ashertu. The storm-god complains to El-kunirsha (the high god) and the high god tells the storm-god to go humiliate her. He sleeps with her and then tells her that he slew 77 and/or 88 of her sons. Ashertu mourns her loss with wailing women. Then after a gap a conversation between El-kunirsha and his wife is overheard by Ishtar about how Ashertu may deal with the storm-god. Ishtar then flies off to do what is lost in missing lines from the tablet. The story is confusing as it seems that El-kunirsha is taking both sides. He tells the storm-god to humiliate his wife and then tells his wife to do as she pleases with the storm-god. Albright assumes the storm-god is Baal (Albright 1968:107). Goetze, the translator in *ANET*, calls this a “Canaanite Myth” (1969:519).<sup>137</sup> Handy suggests that the use of the Hittite material to elucidate the nature of the “Syria-Palestine” deities is far from concrete evidence (Handy 1994:36-37).

#### 1.2.1.3. Amarna

Mention is also made of Baal in the Amarna Texts. In EA No. 147, the king is being extolled as the sun-god “who sets the whole land at peace by his might, who utters his battle-cry in heaven like Baal, so that the whole land quakes at his cry” (*ANET* 1969:484 EA No. 147.10f.). “Baal, king of Tyre”, is mentioned in the Treaty of Esharhaddon with Baal of Tyre. Throughout this treaty it seems clear that Baal is the name of the king of the city of Tyre. In the fourth column, Ishtar, Gula, the Seven gods, Bethel and Anath-Bethel, the gods of Assyria, the gods of Akkad and the gods of Eber-nari, Baal-sameme, Baal-malage and Baal-saphon, Melqart, Eshmun, and Astarte are all called to witness and wreak destruction at the breaking of the treaty (*ANET* 1969:534 iv). <sup>1</sup>Ba<sup>c</sup>lu-mehr “Baal is a warrior” is read in EA Nos.245.44, 258.2 and

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<sup>137</sup> Cf. sec. 2.2.1 for more discussion of this relating to the name of Asherah.



possibly 260.2 according to Rainey (Rainey:88; cf. Knudtzon 1964:794, 818). This name in 260.2 is transliterated as Balumiir by Knudtzon (1964:820-1).

#### 1.2.1.4. Mesopotamia and Samaria

Ashurbanipal (668-663 BCE) also mentions the king of Tyre;

Ba<sup>c</sup> al, king of Tyre, Manasseh (*Mi-in-si-e*), king of Judah (*la-ú-di*), Quashgabri, king of Edom . . . [*list includes kings from Moab, Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, etc.*]; servants who belong to me, brought heavy gifts (*támartu*) to me and kissed my feet. I made these kings accompany my army over the land . . . (ANET 1969:294, Ashurbanipal i.24-46).<sup>138</sup>

The text continues with a recounting of Ashurbanipal's exploits and campaign against Egypt, Syria and Palestine. The time frame fits with 7th century Judahite kings; note that Manasseh is mentioned among the list. Also broadly within the same time frame are the ostraca found at Samaria dated to "about 778-770 B.C." (ANET 1969:321).

These bits of potsherds mention Baal as elements within personal names; e.g. "Baala (son of) Elisha" (ANET 1969:321 Samaria Ostrakon, No. 1) and "Abibaal" (ANET 1969:321 Samaria Ostrakon, No. 2). In fact G.I. Davies records at least six different names with בעל as an element and ten different occurrences among the Samaria Ostraca. One of the names, בעלא, is found five times. Scholars of onomastica cite these as evidence of the deity "Baal" as the one worthy of such honour in a Palestinian site.

#### 1.2.2. His Fragments

Attention will be given in these next sections (1.2.2.1-4) to the different bits and pieces from among archaeological artifacts which are used to construct Baal's portrait.

##### 1.2.2.1. His Stance

In archaeological digs, depictions of masculine divine beings are found consistently. Origins and influences are traced through garb or stance of the figures and of course through any inscription that may accompany them. Keel and Uehlinger caution against always naming the seated (enthroned) figures as El (e.g. Dearman 1992:31) and the striding figures as Baal (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:66). They suggest that some Baal figures are enthroned, such as the victorious Baal. Occasionally it is difficult to separate the representations of El and Baal from each other. From Keel and Uehlinger's remarks, one can deduce that El is usually bearded and Baal is beardless (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:132). It seems that many of the depictions associated with Baal (in statuette forms as well as carved or inscribed on stone or pottery) are of a

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<sup>138</sup> This italicised section in square brackets is my abbreviation of the list from ANET.



masculine figure with a conical cap, striding, with an arm raised, possibly also holding a lance or spear above his head (Dearman 1992:30-31; Keel and Uehlinger 1993:132). These are more or less militant in nature (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:132). They suggest that the literary traditions presume the “national high gods” to be militant/martial (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:156).

#### 1.2.2.2. The Weather God

Other representations attributed to Baal (and Baal-Hadad) have him holding a blossom (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:66 Abb.56.). This connection relates him to vegetation and so to the weather-god in the Middle Bronze Age. The weather god of Assyria, *Adad*, is depicted with lightning or arrows, which could be symbols of lightning (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:331). The Baal-Hadad depictions, according to Keel and Uehlinger, also seem to have some continuity with Baal-Seth figures which would be in line with the Egyptian influences reflected in Iron Age I (1250-1000 BCE), which also included association with Reshep.<sup>139</sup> But these combinations seem to have lessened by Iron Age II A, 1000-900 BCE (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:156). This may also indicate a tendency to separate Egyptian influences from the “nationalstaatliche Religionen Palästina/Israels” (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:156).

Another association with Baal are the depictions already evident in the Late Bronze Age of the weather god. These representations include a juvenile divinity with one or two pairs of wings. Keel and Uehlinger suggest that by Iron Age II B the duplication of the wings indicated the omnipresence of the god (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:220).

Associations with trees, blossoms and other vegetation are made with the weather god or the “Himmelsherr” as early as the Middle Bronze Age. This association with the “Lord of the Heavens” also progressed to an association with the sun-god (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:223). But in Judah, solar-symbolism has not been associated with Baal, say Keel and Uehlinger: “In Juda sind solche Darstellungen dagegen bislang noch nicht gefunden worden (zur judäischen Solarsymbolik, die nicht mit Baal verbunden zu sein scheint)” (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:223). This may be due to a move away from Egyptian influence in the eighth century BCE (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:310).

There are some figures of riders, horses and horse drawn chariots with a driver that are also attributed to Baal or to the weather god. However, they may also represent the sun

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<sup>139</sup> Reshep is a chthonic god “known as a demon or god of disease and pestilence. From Egyptian inscriptions it has been determined that Reshep was worshiped there as a god of war” (Handy 1994:109). He is a foreign god to Egypt but more is known of him from Egyptian texts than from texts of his origin, Syria-Palestine (Handy 1994:55, 109).



god. This suggestion is oftentimes founded on the passage of 2 Kings 23:11.<sup>140</sup> The Assyrians seemed to make some distinctions between the sun god and the weather god. Horses and divine chariots were part of the iconography during the 8/7th century BCE in the time of Sargon. They seemed to play a key role in divination and worship of the sun god (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:394). But the sun god of the Assyrians at that time was not a rider of horses, nor apparently was the martial Baal, “kriegerischer Ba<sup>c</sup>al” (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:395). Keel and Uehlinger do mention that the weather god, on the other hand, was depicted as a rider of horses. It seems that quite often the weather god was imagined as a chariot driver. This could also be true of the god of heaven. The word *rkb* can be translated as either “ride”, as of a horse, or “drive”, as of a chariot. Keel and Uehlinger mention, “Auch der im 9. und 8. Jh. im nordsyrischen Zinçirli bezeugte *rākib<sup>ʿ</sup>īl*, der als Schutzgott der dortigen Dynastie gilt . . . , kann ebenso gut ein Wagenfahrer wie ein Reiter gewesen sein. Direkte Bindeglieder von *rākib<sup>ʿ</sup>īl* zu den palästinischen Reitern gibt es nicht” (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:395). The gleanings from this would seem to be that Baal, the weather god, the god of heaven and the sun god all have associations with horses and chariots. But in Assyrian iconography of the seventh and eighth centuries, distinction was made between Baal and the weather god as one rode horses and the other did not.

#### 1.2.2.3. Taanach Stands

On one stand found at Taanach, a youth strangling a snake is on the right side of the stand situated on the level below the middle sphinx. This may testify to an association of Baal with the worship of the goddess Asherah (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:177 Abb. 182c).<sup>141</sup> There are a few seals attributed to Baal (or Baal-Seth), which have a divine being and a horned snake (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:86-7 Abb. 87a-c). To confirm this connection, allusion is made to the Baal Cycle, which tells of the battle between Baal and Yamm (who is sometimes depicted as a sea monster or Leviathan). About the orientation of the youth with the snake on the Taanach stand, Keel and Uehlinger comment: “Die Darstellung an der Seite läßt ihn allerdings nicht direkt als Adressaten des Kults erscheinen; sie weist zumindest auf eine gewisse Unterordnung des Gottes” (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:176). In other words, the use of this cult stand would have been for the main divinity depicted (whom he assumes to be Asherah), and only incidently Baal, if the youth with the snake does represent a juvenile Baal.

<sup>140</sup> “He destroyed the horses which the kings of Judah gave to the sun, at the entrance (מִבְּנֵי) of the house of Judah by the room of Nathan-melek the eunuch which was by the passageway (פֶּתַח־רִמָּה), and the chariots of the sun he burnt in the fire” (2 Kings 23:11).

<sup>141</sup> Cf. sec. 2.2.2.2 on the Taanach stands and Asherah.



The second and more elaborate cult stand found at Taanach<sup>142</sup> has a bovine or equine creature supporting a winged sun disk in the top level of the four-sided, four-tiered stand. Several scholars have suggested that this is bovine and is a representation of Baal, and then made reference to a consort relationship between Baal and Asherah with whom the naked goddess with lions is identified (Dever 1994:153; cf. Keel and Uehlinger 1993:180). The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* article states: “In the top panel above a bovine form, the winged sundisk has been interpreted as a symbol for Ba<sup>c</sup>al, while the nude female leading two lions on the bottom panel is read as his consort, Asherah” (Glock 1992:290). On the other hand, Hadley (1989:219) prefers to take Taylor’s (1988:562-3; cf. n. 15) suggestion, interpreting this representation as an equine figure and equating this with the horses given to the sun in 2 Kings 23:11 and to YHWH by virtue that the horses were found in the temple of YHWH. Hadley is concerned about the relationship between YHWH and Asherah.

#### 1.2.2.4. Kuntillet <sup>c</sup>Ajrud

Keel and Uehlinger mention an inscription that Meshel has made an attempt to translate. This comes from the entrance to the storeroom at Kuntillet <sup>c</sup>Ajrud.<sup>143</sup> Dearman and Meshel date this site as late ninth or early eighth century (Dearman 1992:79; cf. Meshel 1992:109), which has recently been confirmed by radio carbon dating (cf. Shanks 1996a:12). It mentions Baal, but gives us little information, except that it seems to be a blessing for the day in the name of Baal and El. Keel and Uehlinger present Meshel’s transcription and their own translation:

W. 2	Z. 1’	. . . ]wb <sup>2</sup> rh. <sup>2</sup> l.b[ . . .
	Z. 2’	. . . ]brk.b <sup>c</sup> l.bym.ml[ . . .
	Z. 3’	. . . ]šm. <sup>2</sup> l.bym.ml[ . . .
	Z. 1’	. . . ] und wenn El aufbricht am [Tage des/der <sup>?</sup> . . .
	Z. 2’	. . . ] gesegnet sei Ba <sup>c</sup> al am Tage des/der [ . . .
	Z. 3’	. . . ] der Name <sup>?</sup> Els am Tage des/der [ . . .

(Keel and Uehlinger 1993:277)

Weinfeld has also made an attempt to transcribe this, with a fuller text (especially of Z.1) and again Keel and Uehlinger offer a translation:

W. 2	Z. 1’	. . . ]wbzrh. . . . <sup>?</sup> <sup>2</sup> l.b[ . . .
	Z. 2’	. . . ]brk.b <sup>c</sup> l.bym.ml[ <sup>hmt</sup> ?
	Z. 3’	. . . ]lšm. <sup>2</sup> l.bym.ml[ <sup>hmt</sup>
	Z. 1’	. . . ] und wenn El erstrahlt, schmelzen die Berge [ . . .

<sup>142</sup> Also mentioned 2.2.2.2 with a more complete description.

<sup>143</sup> Inscription number 8.023.2 in G.I. Davies 1991.



Z. 2' . . . ] gesegnet sei Ba<sup>c</sup>al am Tage der Schl[acht . . .  
 Z. 3' . . . ] dem Namen<sup>?</sup> Els am Tage der Schl[acht . . .“  
 (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:277)

Keel and Uehlinger compare this with a more fragmentary text, also from Kuntillet <sup>c</sup>Ajrud. This time it comes from the doorway of the so-called “Bench Room” and has been reconstructed from where it was found in the rubble. This again is Meshel’s transcription and Keel and Uehlinger’s translation:<sup>144</sup>

W. 1    Z. 1' . . .]brk (oder <sup>ʔrk</sup>?).ymm.wyšb<sup>c</sup>w[...  
           Z. 2' . . .]hytb.yhwh[. . .  
           Z. ? . . .[ytnw.l[ . . . ]<sup>ʔšrt</sup>[h . . .<sup>145</sup>

Z. 1'    „. . .] Gesegnet (bzw. lang<sup>ʔ</sup>) sei ihr Tag,  
           und sie sollen reich gemacht werden? [. . .  
 Z. 2'    . . .] Jahwe wird Gutes tun [. . .  
 Z. ?    . . .] sie mögen geben [. . . seiner<sup>ʔ</sup>] Aschera . . .“  
           (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:276-7)

Keel and Uehlinger’s point of discussion, regarding W. 1 and W. 2, is that, although they were both found in the same building and both are texts with “Segensthema”, *and* both are written in old Hebrew using old Phoenician script, nevertheless they do not give us enough context to talk about syncretism between Phoenician and Israelite religion (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:278).

### 1.2.3. Baal: The Shards and Graffiti

There are occasions that when piecing together the shards of a broken pot the images of the pot’s decoration come out clearly but often the images are incomplete. This seems to be the case for the fragments of Baal’s picture. We only get glimpses of who, where and when he was.

The name Baal is found in several contexts throughout the ANE, from Ebla and Egypt, including Amarna, and from Mesopotamia to Samaria. He is known as the patron deity of Ugarit. This is no surprise considering his prominence in the Baal Cycle from Ras Shamra, see the review in the previous section, 1.1. His palace, in the Baal Cycle, was built in Zaphon’s summit and so the name Baal-zaphon in a 13th century Egyptian

<sup>144</sup> At that point in the discussion two different transcriptions of this text were presented; Meshel’s presentation in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* published in 1992 and this from an older publication, 1978. The transcription offered by Meshel in the 1992 presentation included two references to “YHWH and his Asherah”. However, this point does not seem to be relevant for this present discussion. This inscription is mentioned again in sec. 2.2.2.1.1 with discussion regarding Asherah.

<sup>145</sup> The first bracket of this line is turned this direction in Keel and Uehlinger’s text.



mortuary statue is not unexpected, even though it seems a bit far afield from Ugarit. He is presented as a god of some power and might in texts such as the Luxor poem and EA No. 147 from Amarna where he “smites with a tree in his hand” and “utters a battle cry to make the earth shake”, respectively. In Egypt, Baal may well have been equated with Seth and thereby had a chthonic or negative constellation of characteristics. This seems to be localized to Egypt itself however. Seth was associated with storms, which may have been the first attraction to the equation between Seth and Baal, the storm-god. Though the snippet from the Hittite texts speaks of a storm-god, the name Baal is not specifically used. Names such as Baal-shamayim and Baal-zaphon do not actually give us much help in understanding who Baal is as they may be understood to mean simply, “Lord of the heavens” and “Lord of the north”, respectively. Baal is also a popular, at least not an uncommon, element in personal names, e.g. the king of Tyre, and names from the Samaria Ostrakon. Again, though scholars would cite these names as evidence for a deity Baal in their respective places, the question comes as to when one chooses to understand it as a common noun meaning “lord” or a divine name.

Depictions of gods come on seals, in statuettes, in terracotta and in stone. There is some debate as to which god is which, dependent on the presentation. The gods are seated or standing, holding a machete, a blossom, arrows or lightning or a horned snake, represented as bovine or equine, and as a rider of horses or driver of chariots. All of these have been attributed to Baal and refuted on occasion. There is the general assumption among the scholars that Baal is a storm-god and the elements of symbolism that can be attributed to storm-godliness must point to him. Keel and Uehlinger seem to be the most inclusive of the imagery that they attribute to the “Himmelsherr”, “the Lord of the Heavens”, Baal. The inscriptions from Kuntillet ʿAjrud are a bit more helpful. In these, Baal blesses the day (day of battle, according to one reconstruction). As the combination in this case is El with Baal, his divinity seems clear. The inscriptions at Kuntillet ʿAjrud are only a hint of Baal’s advocacy for someone, since we do not know the purpose of the structure at Kuntillet ʿAjrud, nor who used it; let alone who that someone may have been.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> A fuller description of Kuntillet ʿAjrud and its significance is given in sec. 2.2.2.1.1 as these inscriptions and others found there concern Asherah to a greater degree.



## An Excursus: What is Canaanite?

Most scholars cannot resist at least dipping into the Hebrew scriptures to construct pictures of “Canaanite deities”, and even if they say “extra-biblical” it is a concession to where much of the evidence seems to lie. The issue of “what is Canaanite” is one that draws some debate. The boundaries of “Canaan” may or may not have included Ugarit. Those of Ugarit may and may not have considered themselves “Canaanite” (cf. Rainey 1963; 1964; Lemche 1991:25-52). The Hebrew scriptures identify the “Canaanites” as “other”, i.e. not of themselves. Lester Grabbe (1994) has written an article that calls for a tightening up of how the term “Canaanite” is used.<sup>147</sup> He asks the question who is “Canaanite” and makes some suggestions about how to answer the question. He is mainly concerned about the methodology used in doing research based on the interface between Ugaritic literature and the Hebrew scriptures. The issue of who is Canaanite and who is not is very complex as demonstrated by Grabbe. Grabbe states as his final point in his conclusion:

(4) The contrast of “Canaanite” and “Israelite” should also be eliminated from scholarly discussion. Granted, this usage stems from the OT itself, but the context is a polemical rather than an academic one. Academic discussions are skewed by such usage unless they are focussing [sic] specifically on what the OT writers themselves stated. Historically, there are good arguments to say that the Israelites were a Canaanite people and that the OT is the best preserved piece of Canaanite literature extant (Grabbe 1994:121-22).

Indeed the Hebrew scriptures chronicle stories and history of one group of people who lived in the land of Canaan. The term “Canaanite” is used in this thesis by this author in the polemical sense that the Hebrew scriptures uses it: the people of the land of Canaan who did not worship the Hebrew deity, YHWH. In this sense it is also used as an adjective to describe the deities that these people did worship; e.g. “Canaanite god”. This does not contradict Grabbe’s suggestion above, as in the end, this thesis does deal with the polemic of the Hebrew scriptures as in contrast to the supposedly non-polemical nature of both the Ugaritic literature and the epigraphic/iconographic corpus. Furthermore care has been taken to avoid calling Ugarit, the city, its people or its religion, “Canaanite”.

Rainey suggested back in 1963, “Perhaps we should henceforth refrain from calling the people of Ugarit Canaanites since they did not consider themselves such (1963:43; cf. 1964:101). Grabbe recently reminds us of the same thing in the last comment of his article ‘Ugaritic and “Canaanite”: Some Methodological Observations’, he states:

Misuse of the term “Canaanite” has distorted too much writing and too many debates. It is time to stop assuming “Ugaritic is Canaanite and Canaanite is Ugaritic.” Clarity in this case is for the advance of the field, not a goal in itself (1994:122).

It seems that after thirty years scholarship is still debating the same issue.

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<sup>147</sup> The term West Semitic is sometimes used to avoid the conflict in the debate (cf. Smith 1994a:300ff.). It would be fascinating to take up this debate, but time and space, not to mention the purpose of this thesis do not allow it here.



### 1.3 הַבְּעַל of the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic Texts

Consideration will be given here to the text of Jeremiah and the combined texts of the “deuteronomistic<sup>148</sup> writings” (Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, I & II Samuel and I & II Kings). Even though this group of texts or corpus,<sup>149</sup> together with Jeremiah and probably other texts from the same circles, reached its final form in the exilic or post-exilic period, and there is therefore a synchronic dimension, this does not rule out the possibility that the material can also be used diachronically. In the next six sections place names, personal names and divine names will be discussed. Following that the way that הַבְּעַל is used in the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts will be covered in detail. Since there are many occurrences of הַבְּעַל in both the deuteronomistic and the Jeremiah texts, they will be presented separately; i.e. the verbs and nouns from Jeremiah and then the verbs and nouns from the deuteronomistic texts.

#### 1.3.1. Place names

Often in the deuteronomistic material, בַּעַל is used as part of a place name: Baal-gad (Jos 11:17; 13:5; cf. Aharoni 1979:108); Bamoth-baal (Jos 13:17); Beth-baal-meon (Jos 13:17); Bealoth (Jos 15:24; I Kg 4:16); Baal-hermon (Jdg 3:3); Baale-judah<sup>150</sup> (II Sam 6:2), to mention a few instances. Fifteen names with בַּעַל as part of the construct name or root of the name are mentioned in the deuteronomistic material as place names. The majority of those are found in the book of Joshua. Outside of that, there are two in Judges, three in II Samuel, and three in the books of Kings. Yohanan Aharoni’s classic *The Land of the Bible* has a section on toponymy. Regarding the meaning of place names, he says,

It is not always possible to arrive at a conclusive interpretation of geographical names. One can, however, explain many of them with reasonable certainty. These latter fall into the following categories according to their meaning and origin . . . (Aharoni 1979:108).

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<sup>148</sup> “Deuteronomistic” rather than “deuteronomic” is used by Steven L. McKenzie in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* article (McKenzie 1992:160). He suggests that this better preserves M. Noth’s title for this corpus (Noth 1967).

<sup>149</sup> Though there are several differing views on the nature of these texts, (their dating, their purpose of composition, their author(s) etc.), the general consensus is that they form a literary unit accounting for the history of early Israel to the exile; (cf. Noth 1967; G. von Rad 1953; M. Weinfeld 1972; F.M. Cross 1973; P.K. McCarter 1980; A. Campbell 1986; and J. Van Seters 1983). Cf. McKenzie 1992:160-168 for a concise appraisal.

<sup>150</sup> One could be tempted to read this as “the lords of Judah” as a place name, or with the understanding that David and his men got up and left “that group of men, the lords of Judah”. However, consider the parallel in I Chr 13:6 (בַּעַל־יְהוּדָה).



His first category is pertinent here: Divine names.

Most of the ancient names containing the word *beth* (“house”) are related to the temple of some god which gave its name to the locale, e.g. Bethel, Beth-dagon . . . Likewise, many names consist of various descriptive combinations concerning Baal, e.g. Baal-gad, Baal-hazor, Baal-peor . . . (Aharoni 1979:108).

*Beth* (בֵּית) can be translated “house of” or “temple of” depending on whose house it is. If it is a god’s house then “temple” is more appropriate. This gives us a clue as to how to understand Beth-baal-meon of Jos 13:17. Consider Jer 48:23 which seems to be an abbreviation for this name. This also seems to be confirmed by the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*’s article on בעל מעון (DCH2 240 s.v.). This name is also mentioned by Aharoni; “Beth-baal-meon also appears in the form Baal-meon, and thus it is possible that some or all of the other theophoric place names originally stood in combination with the word *beth*, e.g. Jericho, Anathoth, Ashtaroth” (Aharoni 1979:108). It seems from Aharoni’s comments that ascertaining the meanings of place names is a little more straightforward than with divine names, which will be discussed presently.

### 1.3.2. Personal names

Two personal names incorporating בעל are recorded in the deuteronomistic material:<sup>151</sup> Jerubbaal “let baal contend” from ריב + בעל, Jdg 6-9 and I Sam 12:11; and Ethbaal “with baal” from את + בעל, I Kg 16:31. The name Jerubbaal is given to Gideon in the story in which he pulls down the altar of הבעל, the people want to take reprisal for the act and come to his father with that demand. Gideon’s father than says, “who of you will contend (ריב) for הבעל, if you can deliver him? He who will contend (ריב) for him will be put to death before the morning; if he is a god let him contend (ריב) for himself because he (Gideon) broke down his altar” (Jg 6:31). In the next verse, 6:32, it mentions, from that day Gideon was named ירבעל, “because he contended against הבעל”. And Ethbaal was king of Sidon as well as the father of Jezebel, who is accused of leading Ahab in the worship of בעל. The assumption that

<sup>151</sup> Mention could also be made of alternate spellings for three names: Eliada, Ishbosheth, and Mephibosheth. Thrice the names of David’s sons are given, once in II Sam 5:16 and twice in I Chr (3:8; 14:7). In II Sam 5:16 and I Chr 3:8, it is written Eliada אלידע “God knows”; however in the third passage I Chr 14:7 it is written בעל־ידע “Baal knows”. Note could also be made of Saul’s son mentioned in 2 Sam 2:8 as Ish-bosheth (איש בשת). In the parallel passage, I Chr 8:33, it seems to be written as Eshbaal (אשבעל). Also note Meribbaal (מרִיב בעל I Chr 8:34) that is written as Mephibosheth in II Sam 4:4 (מפיבשת). Tigay has some discussion of בעל in Hebrew names. He mentions, rightly so, that the translation or understanding of the meaning of בעל in the onomastica material is difficult. He suggests that it may possibly point to Baal the “Canaanite storm god who bore that title, but may refer to YHWH as ‘Lord’” (Tigay 1986:14).



seems to be natural at this point is that the **בעל** which Jezebel brought with her to the marriage with Ahab was a Sidonian Baal.

### 1.3.3. **בעל** in Divine Names

#### 1.3.3.1. Baal-peor

Dt 4:3 presents us with one of the first problems with **בעל** as a proper noun. Is it a place name, a personal name or a divine name? Gesenius notes that without the article **בעל** is to be understood as “lord” and not as a divine name (GKC 405)<sup>152</sup>. If so, then the two occurrences in Dt 4:3 are best translated as “lord of Peor” and not the god (Baal) of Peor. Note that the first instance here is **בְּבַעַל פְּעוֹר**, without the article; and the second is **בְּעַל־פְּעוֹר**, with a maqqeph indicating a construct relationship. Gesenius mentions that names can not be set in construct, nor can they take an article. He states,

It is to be taken as a fundamental rule, that the determination can only be effected in *one* of the ways here mentioned; the article cannot be prefixed to a proper name, nor to a noun followed by the genitive, nor can a proper name be used in a construct state. Deviations from this rule are either only apparent or have arisen from a corruption of the text (GKC 401).

It would be of interest here to look at the way that **בעל־פְּעוֹר** is used in its various occurrences.<sup>153</sup> Baal-peor is used six times<sup>154</sup> in the Hebrew scriptures and each time it is used as a symbol of the apostasy of YHWH’s chosen people. Firstly, we turn to Numbers 25:

And Israel stayed in Shittim, and the people began to be a harlot to the daughters of Moab. And they called to the people to sacrifice to their gods, and the people ate and they bowed down to their gods and Israel joined themselves (**צמד** Ni) to Baal-peor (**לְבַעַל פְּעוֹר**), and the anger of YHWH was kindled with Israel. . . . And Moses said to the judges of Israel, “Slaughter (mp) the man of his men *who* joined themselves to Baal-peor” (**לְבַעַל פְּעוֹר**, Num 25:1-3 & 5).

This is the first time that **בעל־פְּעוֹר** appears in the Torah. It places the sons of Israel in Moab. Baal-peor was apparently one of the gods of the people of Shittim. The

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<sup>152</sup> See following discussion in sec. 1.3.4.1 regarding the significance of the article with **בעל**.

<sup>153</sup> There does not seem to be much help on how these names are constructed or how to work with them from either GKC or Waltke and O’Connor 1990. Jeffrey Tigay’s material is dealing with onomastica of personal names, not divine or place names (Tigay 1986). We will turn to Paul Joüon’s (1991) article and Gibson’s (1994) argument presently.

<sup>154</sup> Num 25:3 & 5, Ps 106:28, Hos 9:10 and the twice in Dt 4:3.



word translated “join themselves” (צמד) is used in niph'al form in this passage and in Ps 106:28 only. The simple translation that BDB gives (855 s.v.) suggests “bind, join”. For the niph'al BDB gives “join, attach, oneself to (ל) Baal Peor, i.e. adopt his worship” (p. 855). Ps 106 uses the same verb, also in niph'al; it will be discussed presently.

Baal-peor occurs twice in Dt 4:3 as briefly mentioned above. The people are reminded of what YHWH did concerning Baal-peor, “for each man who followed Baal-peor”, כִּי כָל-הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הָלַךְ אַחֲרַי בְּעַל-פְּעֹר. YHWH’s reaction to their following after Baal-peor was their destruction. Baal-peor in this case must be more than just a place name as one would not follow after a place. To compound this with צמד from above, it would be odd “to join” or “to attach” oneself to a place. The inference in Dt 4:3 is that YHWH did not confront Baal-peor directly but brought punishment on the followers. This word comes to Israel nested in the midst of a reminder to follow the commands of YHWH. Baal-Peor, an allusion to the Num 25 passage, is an obvious infraction of those commands.

Psalm 106:28 adds a slight twist,

They joined themselves also to Baal-Peor (לְבַעַל פְּעֹר),  
And ate sacrifices of the dead.

(Ps 106:28)

As mentioned above Ps 106 has used the same verb as is found in the first telling of this story, Num 25:1-5. In this case the verb is written as a 3mp where as in Num 25 it is written 3ms. Neither Numbers nor Deuteronomy mention sacrifices to the dead in relation to Baal-peor. Again, צמד is not used elsewhere so there is not help based on the verb “to join” that helps us to understand if joining or attaching oneself to Baal necessarily involved a cult of the dead.<sup>155</sup> Hosea leaves the meaning of Baal-peor open to question. Do the people come to a place or come before a god?

As grapes in the wilderness I found Israel,  
As an early fig on a fig-tree in its first season<sup>156</sup> I saw your  
fathers,  
They, they came to Baal-peor, (הָמָּה בָּאוּ בְּעַל-פְּעֹר)

<sup>155</sup> The phrase used here in Ps 106:28, זבחי מתים is unusual. It is not used elsewhere. The majority of the times that זבחי is used it is used with the word for peace, “sacrifices of peace”.

<sup>156</sup> BDB 912 ראשית s.v. 1.



And they consecrated themselves to shame, ( וַיִּזְרְוּ לַבִּשְׁת׃ )  
 And they became as detestable as their beloved  
 ( וַיִּהְיוּ שְׂקוּצִים כְּאַהֲבָם ).

(Hos 9:10)

As there is no preposition with בעל it is left open to question, but Baal-peor is equated with shame ( בִּשְׁת׃ ) and a detestable thing ( שְׂקוּצִים ),<sup>157</sup> which feels like an accusation of apostasy. So, assuming that Baal-peor can be read as a divine name in Hosea, then it would seem that all the instances of the name could be read as a divine name rather than as a place name.

### 1.3.3.2. Baal-berith

The reading of Baal-peor as divine seems to be confirmed by two other instances in the deuteronomistic material. Twice בעל is used in a compound name of a god: בעל ברית (Jdg 8:33; 9:4) and בבֵּעַל זְבוּב (II Kg 1:2, 3, 6, 16). However, these two names are slightly different in that *berith* and *zebub* are not place names as Peor of Baal-peor is. The beginning of Gideon's ministry as a Judge in Israel began with the pulling down of the altar of בעל (ms). Gideon's death is mentioned in Jdg 8:32. Judges 8:33 then says,

And it came to pass, when Gideon was dead that the sons of Israel returned and they were harlots after the baalim and they set for themselves Baal-berith for a god (mp) ( וַיִּשְׁמְרוּ לָהֶם בַּעַל בְּרִית ) ( לְאֱלֹהִים, Jdg 8:33).

It is interesting that בעל (ms) appears earlier in the story and בעלים (mp) in this part. The statement in 8:33 seems to indicate that Baal-berith ( בַּעַל בְּרִית ) is one of the בעלים with whom they played the harlot.<sup>158</sup> In Jdg 9:4, it is also quite obvious that Baal-berith is the name of a specific god when it mentions the house (temple) of Baal-berith. It is on account of their worship of the בעלים and Baal-berith ( ברית meaning "covenant"), that the sons of Israel forgot YHWH (Jdg 8:34). In Jdg 2:2 the angel of YHWH reminded the people that they were not to make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land. They failed at that time, and then in 8:33 and 9:4 they make a god named "lord of a covenant" their god. There seems to be a fair amount of irony in this.

<sup>157</sup> BDB 1055, "si vera lectio; not elsewhere before Dt".

<sup>158</sup> Theodore Lewis has made an attempt to identify Baal-berith. He appeals to evidence that El-berith may be the deity in question and that "Baal-berith" may be his epithet (Lewis 1996:401-23).



### 1.3.3.3. Baal-zebub

In II Kg 1, we clearly have the name of a god, Baal-zebub. In each of the four times that his name is mentioned, the construction **בְּבַעַל זְבוּב** + **דָּרַשׁ** (“to inquire of” Baal-zebub) is used. Ahaziah sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub. Elijah challenges the messengers (and later the king, II Kg 1:16) saying, “Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to enquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron?” (II Kg 1:3b). Baal-zebub (**זְבוּב**) is probably best translated as “flies”<sup>159</sup> is identified as the god of the Philistines by the text. Ekron is almost due east and slightly north of Jerusalem in Philistine territory. The ark of YHWH was sent to Ekron after it was captured by the Philistines and found to be dangerous by the Ashdodites (I Sam 5:10). Ekron was also denounced by God in Jer 25:20<sup>160</sup> as one of five Philistine cities among a long list of foreign nations. Readers of the Hebrew text can hardly miss the irony of Ahaziah’s sending to inquire of a “lord of the flies”, the god of Ekron. Flies are a nuisance.<sup>161</sup> Ahaziah seems to have missed the point.

### 1.3.3.4. Syntax of names

That a proper noun cannot nor needs to take a mark of determination (i.e. an article), as it is already specific, has a strong consensus. However that a name cannot be used in construct has at least one major and significant example to the contrary. Consider **יְהוָה** in **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת**, where **יְהוָה** is most certainly a proper name. However, one of the other fundamental rules governing constructs and genitives is that the first noun in the set does not take an accent, which falls to the second noun (or last noun, if it is a construct set of three or more nouns, e.g. I Sam 23:14; 26:2, 14). In each of the constructs here under question, Baal-peor (**בְּבַעַל פְּעֹר**), Baal-berith (**בְּבַעַל בְּרִית**), Baal-zebub (**בְּבַעַל זְבוּב**), and YHWH-hosts (**יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת** YHWH of hosts) the first word in the construction is accented.<sup>162</sup> Are these then constructs, or apparent

<sup>159</sup> Cf. John Gray, who mentions, “The element Zebub, . . . , is more probably a parody by the orothodox on *zēbūl* (‘Prince’), now known from the Ras Shamra myths as the stock epithet of the Canaanite Baal, . . .” (Gray 1970:463). In which case it reads, Princely Baal not Baal of flies. This note was not changed between the first and second editions of his commentary. Professor Rogerson suggests that this may well have also come from G.R. Driver’s lectures in Oxford, based on the Ugaritic *zbl* (private correspondence). Day notes that this name is ‘literally “Baal of the fly.” No fly Baal is otherwise attested . . . it is plausible to suppose that this is a deliberate corruption of Baal-zebul for polemical reasons’ (1994:44-5).

<sup>160</sup> Cf. Amos 1:9, Zep 2:4 and Zec 9:5 for similar denunciations or pronouncements of judgement on Ekron.

<sup>161</sup> **זְבוּב** is used in only two other passages of the Hebrew Scriptures: Isa 7:18, “YHWH will whistle for the fly (**זְבוּב**) which are in the delta of the Nile of Egypt . . .” and Ecc 10:1, “Dead flies (**זְבוּבֵי מוֹת**) make oil of a perfumer stink . . .”.

<sup>162</sup> In private conversation, John Elwolde suggested that with such a strong accent it was likely to be retained even in a construct state. I looked at **נֶעַר** as an example. It is a segholate noun and the syllable generally stays on the first syllable in the construct state. Do we then take **בְּבַעַל** to be a segholate and the issue of accents does not apply? But then



deviations, as Gesenius has mentioned (GKC 401)? Paul Joüon has a possible answer for us. He mentions **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת** under a section on apposition, which is

the simple juxtaposition of a noun to a preceding noun. Whereas the noun in the genitive or in the attributive accusative is subordinated to the preceding noun, the noun in apposition is coordinate to the first noun; it is therefore in the same case as the first noun. There subsists a relationship of identity between the two components, which can be transformed into a nominal clause. The one component usually also agrees with the other in determination or indetermination (Joüon 1991:477).<sup>163</sup>

He wants to maintain that “a proper noun cannot be constructed on the second. Therefore there is apposition: *Yahweh (the) hosts* or if, as is likely, **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת** was felt to be a proper noun, *Yahweh-šva’ot*” (Joüon 1991:481; cf. Mettinger 1982). Gibson takes issue with this position, saying;

*Rem. 6.* Place names may be put in constr., as Ur of the Chaldees, Gen 11. 31, Aram of the two rivers, 24. 10, Mizpeh of Gilead, Jud. 11. 29. So divine names before a place, Nu. 25. 3 **בַּעַל פְּעוֹר** *Baal of Peor*, cf. in an inscr. from Kuntillet Ajrud **יְהוָה שֶׁמֶרן** *Y. of Samaria*. Unique are [. . .] and the frequent title **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת** *Y. of hosts* . . . Attempts to explain the latter phrase as appositional, *Y. (who is, belongs among) the hosts* (sc. of heaven) or as deriving from an old liturgical formula *He who creates the hosts* (of heaven) (Hiph. from **הָיָה** = **הָיָה**) are not convincing; nor, as the *lectio difficilior*, should it be regarded as breviloquence for the gramm. regular **אֱלֹהֵי צְבָאוֹת** *Y., the God of hosts*, 2 S. 5. 10 etc. (Gibson 1994:34).

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what to do with the accent on **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת**? Even though the accent is intended to indicate the word **אֱלֹהֵי**, does this fall in a different category? Cf. Mettinger 1982 for an extensive discussion on this name/compound name. Unfortunately he does not discuss the issue of accents and names.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Waltke and O’Connor 1990:70, 4.4.1b(a). They state; “frequently the Hebrew does not permit one to decide whether the specifying substantive is an accusative, a genitive, or an appositive” (Waltke and O’Connor 1990:173, 10.2.2e). In the section on apposition, they explain,

An appositional phrase is differentiated from an adjectival phrase in that substantives and adjectives have distinct sorts of reference. In an appositional phrase the parts have similar or identical reference; as “gold” examples show, this differentiation can be problematic. Another differentiation is even more problematic: if two nouns juxtaposed in a phrase are indefinite, is the phrase appositional or an accusative of specification? Since accusatives of specification *may* disagree in definiteness, the indefinite phrase is usually best taken as appositional (1990:227).

At another point they state: “The appositive after a *name* (usually a *personal name*) serves to identify the bearer of the name, by *office* or *relationship*” (1990:231).



This last comment in Gibson seems to be directed at Gesenius' explanation of יהוה צבאות (cf. GKC 403 § 125 h). Here we have entered the Hebraist's knot.<sup>164</sup> Are these sets of nouns in construct or apposition? Teasing this out may help us understand these divine names. First, if they are in construct then why are בעל and יהוה accented?<sup>165</sup> And if in apposition then why the maqqeph with Baal-peor? For either apposition or construct the rule of thumb is that both are determinate or both indeterminate. If so, then with Baal-zebub and with Baal-berith we would read “a lord of a fly (flies)” and “a lord of a covenant”, while neither *berith*, *zebub* nor בעל has an article.<sup>166</sup> Some would just simply say that names break all the rules, thus feeding into their own circle of logic.

#### 1.3.4. Grammar of הבעל, a divine name

In this section three things will be considered: the significance of the article with the word בעל; what separates the common noun from the divine name; and lastly, how “sense” and “reference” may help us with the meaning of הבעל.

##### 1.3.4.1. The Article, ה

Generally in the deuteronomistic-Jeremiah texts, הבעל acts as a foil. YHWH is the protagonist and verbs of active tense are used for him. הבעל is the receiver of action (the object of verbal action, most often following a preposition, e.g. אחרי הבעלים, Jer 2:23; or נבאו בבעל, Jer 2:8). In all but one case,<sup>167</sup> בעל (as a noun) is

<sup>164</sup> Thanks to Dr John Elwolde for some discussion on this topic, 23 May 1996. In Joüon's article on apposition of nouns this footnote is included:

(4) A recently discovered 8th century B.C. inscription from Kuntillet 'Ajrud in Sinai with יהוה שמרון “Yhwh of Samaria” and “Yhwh of Teman” suggests that יהוה could have been used as a *nomen regens*: see a discussion by J.A. Emerton, “New light on Israelite religion: the implications of the inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud,” *ZAW* 94 (1982) 2-20 (Joüon 1991:481; caps as found).

*Nomen regens* is a way of talking about construct relationships. *Nomen regens* is the second word. The first, according to Waltke and O'Connor (1990: 227), is simply *regens*. They call the second noun *rectum* and calls the “modified-modifier type” of structure *regens-rectum* (Waltke and O'Connor 1990:693). One of the other strands that would lead in some interesting directions would be; how does Baal-peor compare with YHWH of Teman/Samaria of the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions. However it would be too a lengthy detour.

<sup>165</sup> As a *segholate* noun בעל would be accented, but that does not explain why יהוה retains the accent in the same kind of construction. Of course the vowels, accents and other diacritics are an invention of the Masoretes, as Professor Rogerson has reminded me.

<sup>166</sup> Consider Exo 32:1, where Moses, an unquestionably proper noun, is used with a demonstrative pronoun, זה (בִּיְיָהּ | בַּנְּשִׂאָה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר). The same construction with a common noun would read differently (e.g. הַיְיָהּ הָאִישׁ).

<sup>167</sup> בעל as a verb is used twice in Jeremiah. Jer 3:14 כִּי אֲנֹכִי בָעַלְתִּי בְכֶם “For I am a master to you” (NASB) or “For I am married to you” (NKJV); and Jer 31:32 וְאֲנֹכִי בָעַלְתִּי בָם “although I was a husband to them” (NASB). The one case where בעל as no article



preceded implicitly or explicitly by the article (·ָ or ·ֿ). Gesenius suggests that in Classical Hebrew this הַבַּעַל should be understood as “Baal”:

§ 125. *Determination of Nouns in General. Determination of Proper Names.* 1. A noun may either be determinate in itself, as a proper name or pronoun . . . § 126. *Determination by Means of the Article* . . . 2. The article is, generally speaking, employed to determine a substantive wherever it is required by Greek and English, thus: . . . (d) When terms applying to whole classes are restricted (simply by usage) to particular individuals (like ὁ ποιητής, meaning Homer) or things, e.g. אֲדִיבָרְךָ adversary, הַשָּׂטָן the adversary, Satan; בַּעַל lord, הַבַּעַל Baal as proper name of the god . . . (GKC 401, 404, 405).<sup>168</sup>

So, rather than reading that the people were “following the lord”, they were “following Baal”.

#### 1.3.4.2. הַבַּעַל as Common Noun vs Divine Name

It is important to consider the way בַּעַל can be translated. As pointed out by Waltke and O’Connor, and Gesenius בַּעַל can be understood as “lord”, “possessor”, or “master” and הַבַּעַל understood as a divine name, Baal. The significance of the presence of the article or lack thereof can be carried to the plural forms, it seems: בַּעַלִּים meaning “lords” or “masters” and הַבַּעַלִּים as “the Baals”. Baal(s) occurs over 50 times in the deuteronomistic material. Eight of these are written הַבַּעַלִּים, plural with the article. Only two of these occur without the object marker (אֵת). The object marker is used with determinate nouns to identify the relationship of those nouns to the verb, as accusative. It is not used with indeterminate nouns. So to use בַּעַל without the article with אֵת would assume that this is a determinate noun and therefore a

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(37:13), it is used in construct with פְּקֻדָּה which is used only once in this form. It is translated by BDB 824 as “oversight”, rendering בַּעַל פְּקֻדָּה as “lord of oversight” or “captain of the guard” (NASB).

<sup>168</sup> For a more readable presentation of this subject, cf. Waltke and O’Connor:

The article is chiefly used with common nouns according to the patterns outlined in 13.5. Normally words that are definite in themselves do not take the article since the article would be redundant. But there is one major class of exceptions. Sometimes, through usage, the article not only points out a particular person or thing, but it also elevates it to such a position of uniqueness that the *noun + article* combination becomes the equivalent of a *proper name* (13.4b). Among English speakers, for example, in some communities “the city” no longer designates one city out of many, but through usage denotes “The City,” the only city in that area. In such constructions it is not that the article is added to a name; rather the article makes the combination a name. Such combinations make up toponyms. 1. הַגִּבְעָה the hill Gibeah . . . They are also used to name individuals. . . . 8. הַבַּעַל the lord Baal (Waltke and O’Connor 1990:249).



name. This argument is more crucial for the discussion on אֲשֶׁרָה,<sup>169</sup> but is also helpful here to point out the way that the author(s) of these texts viewed בַּעַל. Each of the six times that אֵת הַבְּעָלִים occurs it is used in the phrase “serve the baalim”. Once, הַבְּעָלִים are put away, i.e. not served. Waltke and O’Connor only mention בַּעַלִּים as an honorific plural referring to humans, meaning “master” (Waltke and O’Connor 1990:118-124: Section 7.4). However, the reading of master as human in most of these cases seems to be strained. The entry for בַּעַל in *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* mentions that הַבְּעָלִים – plural with the article – is understood as “**the lords, (the) baalim**, in ref. to deities regarded as enemies of Y” (DCH2 239).<sup>170</sup> Reading “the baalim,” meaning deities, fits the contexts better than Waltke and O’Connor’s “honorific plural”.

### 1.3.4.3. Reference and Sense

There may be one more avenue of approach that could assist with understanding the way that these words are used regardless of the syntaxonomy that is still tightly knotted. The distinction between reference and sense<sup>171</sup> may help here. It seems fairly clear from the passages in Jdg and II Kgs that Baal-zebub and Baal-berith are being used as divine names, so they refer to something in particular (reference, naming). However, the titles given to these gods have a meaning (sense) that is certainly ironic in each case. In both of these cases, both reference and sense seem to be at play. Baal-peor, on the other hand, is without a doubt a case of reference only. It has little sense, as “peor” has no independent meaning aside from a place name.

How does this impinge on הַבְּעָלִים? As mentioned earlier, according to Gesenius’ presentation, proper nouns do not take an article. So, properly speaking this is not a name, but a title<sup>172</sup> being used as a reference. John Rogerson made the comment:

<sup>169</sup> Cf. sec. 2.3.3 regarding Asherah as a name or an object.

<sup>170</sup> The DCH2 article also mentions that once Baal is written without the article (in Hebrew); that is at Kuntillet <sup>ע</sup>Ajrud (cf. sec. 1.2.2.4).

<sup>171</sup> Consider Robin; as a proper name it would refer to a specific person or to the name of a person, or the make of an English car. This use would be referential or as a reference. But the word robin could also be understood to mean a small bird with a red breast (sense). In written form the upper case or lower case of the first letter would give some indication of its use as reference or sense. Hebrew does not give us the distinction in written form and so allows for some ambiguity between sense and reference. This crucial perspective and Frege (a 19th century German philosopher to whom “sense and reference” is credited) were mentioned in private conversation with Professor Rogerson.

<sup>172</sup> Noel Bailey deals with הַשֵּׁטָן in a chapter on “David and *sātān*”. He is not convinced by Gesenius’ explanation that הַשֵּׁטָן is more than a title. He points out that in one section Gesenius says that this word and a few others have “assumed the character of real proper names” (Bailey 1995:76; cf. GKC 402) and then Gesenius calls it an appellative as noted in



הַבַּעַל is a reference to a Canaanite god but the route that it takes by using a title and a definite article yields a sense open to the possibility for the presence of irony in the reference. . . and by virtue of using the article with בַּעַל the author(s) of the text has (have) refused to recognize בַּעַל as a proper name (personal correspondence, 21 May, 1996).

As with Baal-berith and Baal-zebub, it can be demonstrated that הַבַּעַל is used as a reference to a Canaanite deity and also the more ironic use of the same word in the sense of “the lord” as a pejorative title. Consider Jdg 6:31:

Joash said to all who stood before him, ‘who of you will contend for *the lord* ( הַבַּעַל ), if you can deliver him? He who will contend for him will be put to death before ( עַד ) the morning; if he is a god (mp) let him contend for himself because he (Gideon) broke down his altar’ (italics for emphasis).

Joash as Gideon’s father is poking fun at הַבַּעַל, the god for whom the people had built an altar. The same sense comes across in the following text:

Elijah drew near to all the people, and he said, “how long will you go limping on two divided opinions ( פְּסָחִים עַל־שְׁתֵּי )<sup>173</sup> ( הַסַּעֲפִים ), if YHWH is the God follow after him, or if *the lord* ( וְאִם־הַבַּעַל ) follow after him?” And the people did not answer him a word (I Kg 18:21; italics for emphasis).

The people were called to declare who was god/God. They had no answer to the question, so it was pushed to a contest. Another passage that gives an interesting reading, if read tongue in cheek, is II Kg 10. Jehu addresses the people to say, “Ahab served *the lord* ( אֶת־הַבַּעַל ) a little; Jehu will serve us greatly” ( יְהוּא יַעֲבֹדֵנוּ ) ( הַרְבֵּה , II Kg 10:18; italics for emphasis). Ultimately what did Jehu offer הַבַּעַל, but a sacrifice of all of his own worshippers?

From this point it will be helpful to make a distinction in the way that the word בַּעַל is presented in the texts under discussion. Notwithstanding Waltke and O’Connor’s and Gesenius’s arguments for the translation of הַבַּעַל as “Baal”, the rest of this section will assume a simple convention to make a distinction in the way that the word is written. When (if) בַּעַל is written anarthrously (i.e. “lacking the article”, Waltke and O’Connor 1990: 689) and *with* the direct object marker it will be translated as “Baal”. When found anarthrously and also without the object marker it will be translated as

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my previous citation of GKC 405. My thanks to Professor Rogerson for reminding me of Dr Bailey’s work with שָׁטַן.

<sup>173</sup> BDB indicates that סַעֲפָה is a hapax logemna; 704 s.v..



“baal”. When presented with the article it will be translated as “the baal”. This convention is adopted in part to allow the reader of this text more easily to identify some of the irony that is inherent in the Hebrew author’s deliberate use of **בעל** as a title rather than a name, Baal. Secondly, in the cases where **בעל** is written in the plural, “baalim” will be translated, with the same consideration for the article and direct object marker.

### 1.3.5. **הַבַּעַל** in Jeremiah

#### 1.3.5.1. Verbs

The people deny that they have been “defiled in walking after the baalim” (Jer 2:23). However, people **הלך** (or are accused of “walking”) after **הַבַּעַלִּים** (2:23; 9:14E), and also after other gods (7:9; 11:12). Jeremiah claims that the prophets “prophesied” by the baal (2:8; 23:13<sup>174</sup>). “Incense was burned” to the baal (7:9; 11:13, 17; 32:29). The people “swear” by the baal (12:16). High places (**בְּמִזְבְּחֵי**) have been “built” for the baal (19:5; 32:35). On these high places, the people are accused of “burning” their sons and daughters as **עֲלוֹת** (Jer 19:5) to the baal, but Jer 32:35 explains that the high places of the baal are built for **הַעֲבִיר**, “passing”, (**עבר** Hi.)<sup>175</sup> sons and daughter through the fire to the molek. In one case, the fathers are said to have “taught” the people to go after the baalim (9:13H). In another instance, the nations are said to have “taught” the people “to swear” by the baal (12:14-16). According to this text, it seems apparent that the baal or the worship of the baal is something that was learned. “Burning incense” to the baal is closely linked to stealing, murder, committing adultery, and swearing falsely:

Behold you are trusting for yourselves upon the words of the deceitful to no profit. To stealing and murdering, do you add adultery, false testimony (**הַשְּׁבַע לַשֶּׁקֶר**), and burn incense to the baal and walk after other gods which you did not know? And you come and you stand before me in this house which I call by my name and you say, “We have been delivered”; in order to keep doing all these abominations (Jer 7:8-10)<sup>176</sup>

<sup>174</sup> Waltke and O’Connor notes that **הַנִּבְּאָן** is an unusual form for a verb—a Hippael—which has doubled the initial *mm*. Maybe it is a Hithpael form “in which the infixed *-t-* has been assimilated to the root’s initial radical” (Waltke and O’Connor 1990: 360), GKC notes that assimilation of **ת** does happen for words beginning with *-d-* or *-t-* sounds and for some words beginning with **נ** and **כ**. The word **נכא** is especially mentioned as a case in point (GKC 149 § 54.2.6). Gesenius does not use Hippael as a special name for this form.

<sup>175</sup> More is made of this verb in sec. 3.2.4.1 in the discussion on **הַמִּלְךָ**. Also note that Jer 19:5 is the only case in which the burning of children for the baal is described. This accusation of this practice is usually reserved for **הַמִּלְךָ**.

<sup>176</sup> This verse, Jer 7:9, in the Hebrew is a fascinating string of infinitives:

9 הַנִּבְּאָן וְנָאֵף וְהִשְׁבַּע לַשֶּׁקֶר וְקָטַר לְבַעַל וְהָלַךְ אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יְדַעְתֶּם:



They are accused of shameless insolence, “burning incense” is only one of the charges brought against them. “Burning incense” to the baal ( לְקַטֵּר לְבַעַל ) provokes YHWH’s anger (11:17; 32:29).

Jeremiah 23:27 presents a problem for translation. In BHS it reads:

הַחֹשְׁבִים לְהִשְׁכִּיחַ אֶת־עַמִּי שְׁמִי בַחֲלוֹמֹתָם אֲשֶׁר יִסְפְּרוּ אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ  
כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁכַחוּ אֲבוֹתָם אֶת־שְׁמִי בַבַּעַל:

The NRSV translates: “They plan to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, just as their ancestors forgot my name for Baal”. Compare this with the NASB: “who intend to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they relate to one another, just as their fathers forgot My name because of Baal”. The difficulty lies with how to treat the last phrase, especially the last word בַּבַּעַל. The NRSV translates it “for Baal”; the NASB “because of Baal”.<sup>177</sup> In either case, the baal is seen as the cause of the amnesia of God’s name. The NASB translation gives the sense that the baal comes close to actually doing something, but even so, he is still the object of the verbal action, the patient. The action is only imputed to him. It seems also from this passage that dreams too are a part of activities involving the baal. BDB suggests that חֲלוֹמוֹת in Jeremiah (four times in chapter 23) are attributed to “false prophets” (BDB 321).

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Note that a conjunction is not used until the third word. An alternative way to translate this may be: “Do you steal, murder and commit adultery, and swear falsely and burn incense . . . ?” Cf. Waltke and O’Connor 1990:595.

<sup>177</sup> The NRSV may have the stronger argument according to Ernst Jenni. He sees it as a ך of exchange under the main heading of *beth pretii*; the sense of the NRSV translation. He states it this way,

184 Vertauschen (7mal). In dieser Rubrik geht es um Transaktionen, bei denen ein einziger Handelnder die beiden Akte des Gebens und Nehmens ausführt. Die lokale Auffassung, etwa mit der Präposition תַּחַת “anstelle von”, liegt natürlich bei Verben des Ersetzens nahe, doch kann die Reziprozität gerade auch durch das instrumentale ך betont werden, mit dem das Ersatzmittel eingeführt wird. Bei den sechs Stellen mit dem Verbum מִוֹר H “vertauschen” werden jeweils (in theologischen Zusammenhängen) Besitz- und Zugehörigkeitsansprüche tangiert, so daß eine dem Beth pretii ähnliche Funktion ohne weiteres angenommen werden darf. Dasselbe gilt im Beispiel für שָׁכַח “vergessen”, wo im übertragenen Sinn der eine Name mit dem andern vertauscht wird. 1841 Tauschen (6mal) . . . 1842 Vergessen (1mal) שָׁכַח “vergessen”: Jer 23,27 “wie ihre Väter meines Namens über dem Baal ( בַּבַּעַל ) vergessen haben” (Jenni 1992: 155).

My attention was drawn to Jenni’s work by Professor Rogerson. Also cf. DCH2 239 s.v. “ך of cause, because of, through . . .”



### 1.3.5.2. Nouns

Besides what the baal and his worshippers may have been doing, we can consider with whom or what **הַבַּעַל** was associated. In Jer 2:8b the baal is associated with prophets: “the prophets prophesied by the baal, and after those that do not benefit they follow”.<sup>178</sup> Jer 23:13 identifies the prophets as “prophets of Samaria”;<sup>179</sup> they also prophesied by the baal, “and misled the people”. Further on in chapter 23, the prophets of Jerusalem are said to have “prophesied deception”, and told dreams, which cause the people to forget the name of YHWH, “as their fathers forgot my name by the baal” (Jer 23:25-27). Does this action of prophesying by the baal in effect assume that the baal communicated something to be prophesied and therefore did something (became an actor)? Or were the prophets using the name of the baal to further their own purposes, and the baal remains a static figure in the background?<sup>180</sup>

Fathers are also accused of going after the baalim and teaching the people to do the same in Jer 9:13H.<sup>181</sup> **הַבַּעַלִּים** is used only twice in Jeremiah, in this verse and 2:23. “Other gods” are associated with the baal in three of the twelve times that the baal is mentioned in Jeremiah (7:9; 11:13; 32:29). This set of verses, as well as 11:17, also mentions the burning of incense to the baal.<sup>182</sup> They burnt incense on the rooftops, Jer 32:29. Jeremiah 11:13 also mentions setting up an altar to **בַּשֶּׁת**.<sup>183</sup> It also includes the baal as one of the “gods that are as many as their cities”. This phrase, “your gods are as many . . .”, is also mentioned in 2:28, which follows the charge of Israel’s denial of defilement by the baal in 2:23. Incense is not the only thing that is burned to/for the baal; sons (Jer 19:5; 32:35) and daughters (32:35) are offered ( . . . **לְשָׂרָף** , 32:35) **לְהַעֲבִיר אֶת־בְּנֵיהֶם וְאֶת־בְּנוֹתֵיהֶם לַמֶּלֶךְ**; 19:5, **בְּאֵשׁ עֲלוֹת לַבַּעַל**

<sup>178</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor mention Jer 2:8 as an example of Asyndetic Relative Clauses. In particular the phrase at the end of the verse, **וְאַחֲרֵי לֹא־יִזְעָלוּ הָלְכוּ**: “They followed (*those who*) cannot help. Jer 2:8” he calls, an “Asyndetic ‘independent relative’ clause” which is used as a “prepositional object” (Waltke and O’Connor 1990:338, cf. 156).

<sup>179</sup> Cf. I Kg 16:32, “And he [Ahab] set up an altar for the baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria”.

<sup>180</sup> This question was raised in private conversation with Professor Rogerson. Interesting answers for either senerio could be painted, and at this point, time and space do not allow for conjecture to be entertained.

<sup>181</sup> Note that for Jer 3:24, the BHS amends **הַבַּשֶּׁת** of the text to read **הַבַּעַל**, which would read “Baal ate all that the fathers laboured for . . .”. This blames **הַבַּשֶּׁת** or **הַבַּעַל** for the fathers’ losses. Cf. DCH2 239 under the heading «Subj.». Cf. Jer 11:13, which mentions “altars to **הַבַּשֶּׁת**”.

<sup>182</sup> Incense is also burnt to other gods, (Jer 1:16; 11:12; 19:4; 44:3, 5, 8, 15); to the host of heaven (19:13); to the queen of heaven (44:17, 18, 19, 25) and to vanity (**שׂוּא** 18:15).

<sup>183</sup> BHS notes that both the masora and *textus Graecus originalis* omit the phrase, **מִזְבְּחוֹת לַבַּשֶּׁת**.



and **בְּמֹת**<sup>184</sup> were built for the purpose. The sites for the offerings in both of these verses are also in the valley (cf. 19:6; 32:35). Jeremiah 2:23 also connects the baal to the valley. Of these three verses only 19:6 and 32:35 specify the Valley of Ben-Hinnom. Molek is also part of the equation in 32:35.<sup>185</sup>

Some general remarks can be made at this point regarding the baal in Jeremiah. The baal is consistently associated with Judah's acts of apostasy. Imagery of storms (such as rain) and fertility (such as famine) are not associated with the baal but exclusively with YHWH. Famine is part of a formula that epitomises punishment: "sword, famine and pestilence" (Jer 5:12; 11:22; 14:13-18; 27:8 etc.). False gods are rejected as a source of rain, which is given by YHWH alone, (5:24; 10:13; 51:16). Jer 14:22, a passage in the midst of a pericope which contains God's utter rejection of the apostates, includes this line of argument:

Are there idols of the nations causing rain?  
 Or if the heavens give copious showers,  
 Are you not YHWH, our God, and we wait for you?  
 For you, you have done all these.

הֲיֵשׁ בְּהַבְלֵי הַגּוֹיִם מַגְשָׁמִים וְאִם־הַשָּׁמַיִם יִתְּנוּ רֶבֶבִים  
 הֲלֹא אַתָּה־הוּא יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנִקְוֶה־לְךָ  
 כִּי־אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־כָּל־אֱלֹהִים: פ  
 (Jer 14:22)

The word translated idols, **הַבְּלִים** (BDB s.v. **הֶבֶל** I.), means "vapour" or "breath". And even though this statement does not mention any particular gods or idols by name, the implication here is that someone may well have looked to idols or other gods for rain and showers. YHWH claims the exclusive rights in this provision throughout the book of Jeremiah.

### 1.3.6. **הַבְּעַל** in the Deuteronomistic Texts

Let us turn from here and consider how the deuteronomistic material treats the baal and some of these same issues that we have seen in Jeremiah. The baal from the deuteronomistic material has little more to show us than the material from Jeremiah, though he gets special attention within four stories involving Gideon (Jdg 6-9), Ahab (I Kg 16), Elijah (I Kg 18), and Jehu (II Kg 10).

<sup>184</sup> Verse 32:35 suggests that the "sons and daughters may be offered to the molek" on the **בְּמֹת** that was built for the baal. Note also the **בְּמֹת** mentioned in 7:31; "And they built the high places of the topheth, which is in the valley of Ben-Hinnom . . .".

<sup>185</sup> Molek's connection with the valley is mentioned in another section of this thesis.



Thus alongside a discussion about the form of the word (presence of the article or not), the general use of **בעל** needs be considered. Only once is **הבעל** the subject of the verb in the deuteronomistic texts. This one case, Jdg 6:32, is in the midst of a dialogue taunting the worshippers of the baal in Gideon's home town. Also, only once is **הבעל** directly addressed (I Kg 18:28). In all other cases, **הבעל**, with the article, is the object of the verb, of verbal action, or in construct with the object of the verb (e.g. "altar of the baal", Jdg 6:25; "name of the baal", I Kg 18:26 etc.). This is consistent with the way that we saw that **הבעל** was used in Jeremiah as the divine name "the baal". **בעל** without the article, on the other hand, is usually in the form of a construct noun (e.g. **בעלי שכם** "baals of Shechem", **בעל הבית** "the baal of the house", **אשת בעלת אוב**, "a woman, a mistress of necromancy"; cf. Gibson 1994:34) and is often the subject of the sentence (e.g. "the baals of Jericho fought", Jos 24:11; "the baal of the house went out", Jdg 19:23).<sup>186</sup> However, **הבעל** is only once given the opportunity by the text to be active. He fails to show; he is on a journey or sleeping (I Kg 18:26) — hardly an active stance for him to take. This distinction (subject or object of the verb, active or passive agent) neatly divides the men from the gods, at least as far as the text is concerned.

### 1.3.6.1. Verbs

Considering that this paper is concerned with the god **בעל** and not so much with the use of **בעל** as a common noun, we can concentrate on the way that **הבעל** and **הבעלים** are used in the deuteronomistic texts. The baal as a masculine singular noun with the article is used 41 times. As already mentioned, only twice is the baal the subject of the verb (**ריב**, Jdg 6:32;<sup>187</sup> and **ענה**, I Kg 18:26). In all other cases, the baal is the object of the verb. In Elijah's showdown, he calls the people to follow

<sup>186</sup> In most cases, English translations of **בעל** (without the article, in construct or not) has been "master" or "possessor" and **בעלים** (usually found in construct form) is consistently, (in modern translations), translated as "men" or "people". These instances could, in most cases, be translated as "leaders" or "lords". Words such as **אנשים** or **עם** are often used for a generic group of people. It seems likely that using **בעלים** rather than **אנשים** is significant. Reading "the lords/leaders of Shechem" throughout Judges 9 lends a different sense than "the men/people of Shechem". Consider Judges 9:57 where it does mention the "men of Shechem" **אנשי שכם** rather than "leaders/lords of Shechem" **בעלי שכם** Jdg 9:39.

<sup>187</sup> In this case, it is a sentence spoken as an explanation as to why Gideon's name was thereafter called Jerubbaal (**בעל + ריב**). Also note that Baal is the subject of a jussive: **יִרְבּוּ בּוֹ הַבְּעַל כִּי נִתַּן אֶת־מִזְבְּחוֹ**. Someone else is speaking about him. Waltke and O'Connor suggest that jussives: "Third-person expressions of volition are found in a variety of discourse settings. If the jussive is used with its ordinary pragmatic force, it may be directed from a superior to an inferior or vice versa. A special case of the former situation is presented by divine jussives; these have the force of a command. A jussive directed to the divine realm (explicit or implicitly) may be a benediction or a malediction. The jussive may also be used rhetorically, conveying a distinctive pragmatic force" (Waltke and O'Connor 1990:568).



YHWH or the baal (I Kg 18:22). There are those who apparently have bowed the knee to and/or kissed the baal. In I Kg 19:18 YHWH assures Elijah, “I have left in Israel 7,000 of the knees (BDB 139 s.v. **כָּרְעוּ**) which have not bowed down to the baal and every mouth which has not kissed him”. The word here, **נִשָּׁק**, “to kiss” is used only one other time in the Hebrew scriptures in connection with idols (Hos 13:2).<sup>188</sup> “Bow to” or “bow down to” (**כָּרַע**) is used in I Kg 8:54 where Solomon bowed before YHWH in prayer. Sacrifice and burnt offerings are prepared for and made to the baal (II Kg 10:19, 24, 25). II Kg 23:5 picks up the refrain from Jeremiah and speaks of idolatrous priests and others who burn incense to the baal. But by far, the most common verb is “serve”. Ahab worshipped and served the baal (I Kg 16:31). Ahaziah (Ahab’s son) served the baal (I Kg 22:53), and Jehu pretended to serve and executed those who did serve the baal (II Kg 10). Serving the baal was one of the reasons given in II Kg 17 for Israel’s tragic defeat before the Assyrians. YHWH finally meted out the judgement that he had promised. However, Manasseh did not learn from the lessons of judgement on the Northern kings.

For he (Manasseh) returned and he built (or he rebuilt) the high places which his father Hezekiah destroyed and he set up altars to the baal and he made an asherah according to what Ahab the king of Israel had done and they bowed down to all the host of the heavens and he served them (II Kg 21:3).

Learning about the baal and the worship of gods or even YHWH is quite naturally handed down from one generation to another. In several instances, a new king is introduced in contrast to the kings following or preceding by mentioning whether they followed YHWH or served the baalim, the baal or other gods. I Kg 22:54H suggests that Ahaziah “served the baal and he bowed down to him and he provoked YHWH, the God of Israel to anger according to all which his father had done”. Jehoram looks only slightly better; he also “did evil in the eyes of YHWH, only not as his father and as his mother, and he put away the pillar of the baal which his father made” (II Kg 3:2). The mother here was none other than Jezebel. Learning about the baal is also mentioned in Jeremiah 9:13H and 12:14-16.

The verbs surveyed so far, which are associated with the worship of the baal (and which seem to be typical of worshipping any god) include; “serve”, “worship”, “follow”, “sacrifice to”, “burn incense to”, “bow down to”, and “kiss”. However, in Judges a couple of other verbs are used. Joash defended his son, Gideon, by saying, “who of you will contend for the baal (**הַבַּעַל**), if you can deliver him? . . .: if he is a

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<sup>188</sup> Hos 13:2, “They say of them, ‘Let the men who sacrifice, kiss the calves!’”



god (mp) let him contend for himself. . .” (Jdg 6:31). The word “contend” ( **רָיַב** ) is part of the name that is associated with Gideon later in the story: Jerubbaal (Jdg 6:32; 7:1; 8:29 etc.). The second verb is **יָשַׁע** (deliver, save in Hiphil). Neither of these verbs is usually associated with worship and the tone of this piece of discourse is certainly sarcastic. One is left asking, “Why would a god need rescue?”

#### 1.3.6.1.1. With **הִבְעֵלִים**

The verbs used with **הִבְעֵלִים** fall into the range of verbs generally associated with worship of false gods; “follow” (I Kg 18:18), “play harlot after” (Jdg 8:33), and “serve”, (Jdg 2:11; 3:7; 10:6, 10; I Sam 12:10). One other set of verbs is of interest here: first, “putting away”, “removing” ( **סָרַח** in Hiphil, I Sam 7:4, **בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּסְרוּ אֶת־הַבְּעָלִים** ). This verb is also used twice in Joshua (24:14, 23) in reference to removing foreign gods, and in II Kg 18:4 referring to Hezekiah’s removal of the high places. Also in this same sense, in II Kg 10:28, Jehu destroyed the baal from Israel, ( **שָׁמַד** in Hiphil, “of extirpating Baal-worship **מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל**”, BDB 1029). **שָׁמַד** seems most often to be used in the context of destroying land or people. There are a couple of times in the deuteronomistic material that **שָׁמַד** is used to describe the action that the children of Israel are to take against the gods of the nations and also the consequences of following false gods or the gods of the nations (Dt 7:24-25 and 6:14-15, respectively).<sup>189</sup>

The children of Israel are accused of (or admit to) forsaking YHWH for the baal(im) and the ashtaroth (Jdg 2:13; 10:6; I Sam 12:10). They forgot YHWH and served the baalim and the asheroth (Jdg 3:7).<sup>190</sup> The commandments of YHWH are forsaken for the worship of the baal (I Kg 18:18; II Kg 17:16).

#### 1.3.6.2. “The baal” and “the baalim”

One more observation is of interest. Three times in the deuteronomistic material **הִבְעֵל** and **הִבְעֵלִים** are used in the same passages. Only once does **בַּעַל** (ms) occur in the same verse with **הִבְעֵלִים** (Jdg 8:33). As mentioned before, it seems that Baal-berith is

<sup>189</sup> Dt 7:24-25; “And he will give their kings into your hand and you shall destroy ( **הִאֲבִדְתֶם** ) their name from under heaven; no man will stand before you until you have destroyed ( **הִשְׁמַדְתֶּם** ) them. The graven images of their gods you are to burn with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold on them, or take it for yourself, lest you are ensnared by it, for it is an abomination of YHWH your God”. Dt 6:14-15; “Do not follow other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who surround you, for God is jealous, YHWH your God is in your midst; lest the anger of YHWH burns against you, and He annihilate ( **הִשְׁמִידֶךָ** ) you from the face of the earth”. If the people do not **שָׁמַד** the gods in the land that YHWH gives them, then YHWH will **שָׁמַד** them.

<sup>190</sup> BHS apparatus notes the Syriac and Vulgate texts read “the ashtaroth”.



one of “the baalim” with whom the Israelites play the harlot. However, I Kg 18 starts off Elijah’s confrontation with the king of Israel by accusing Ahab of following “the baalim” (I Kg 18:18). The rest of the story focuses on the prophets of “the baal” without once referring back to “the baalim”. Another occasion where we see this same pattern is in the early chapters of Judges:

And the sons of Israel did evil in the eyes of YHWH, and they served the baalim and they forsook the God of their fathers, the ones who brought them out from Egypt, and they walked after other gods, gods from among the people who surrounded them, and they bowed down to them, and they vexed YHWH. And they forsook YHWH and served for the baal and for the astaroth ( **וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ לַבַּעַל**<sup>191</sup> **וְלַעֲשָׂתְרוֹת**, Jdg 2:11-13).

By this record, they worshipped “the baalim” and other gods and then in the final verse of this quote they served **הַבַּעַל**. The pattern seems consistent in these three cases; the people follow or serve **הַבַּעַלִּים** and then the focus shifts to **הַבַּעַל**. Is **הַבַּעַל** one of “the baalim” that the people choose as they chose Baal-berith among “the baalim”? Does this give evidence to a tradition that made distinctions?<sup>192</sup> One question left unresolved is whether we understand, as sense rather than reference, Baal-berith (**בַּעַל בְּרִית**) or Baal-zebub (**בַּבְּעַל זְבוּב**) as “lord” of a covenant and “lord” of flies (respectively) or “Baal” of a covenant and “Baal” of flies (respectively). The sense is clear and ironic for both of these, but the reference is not certain, even though they are clearly used as divine names. The same confusion follows **הַבַּעַל**.

### 1.3.6.3. Nouns

#### 1.3.6.3.1. **הַבַּעַל** in Genitive Relationship

We can also consider the range of verbs that occur with those objects or people that stand in a genitive relationship with the baal; e.g. altar of the baal, house of the baal, prophets of the baal, name of the baal, pillar of the baal, or worshippers and priests of the baal. It is interesting to note that objects and people are found in construct only with the singular form of **הַבַּעַל**.

##### 1.3.6.3.1.1. Altar(s) and Pillar(s) of “the baal”

Altars of the baal are pulled down (Jdg 6:25, 30) and broken down (Jdg 6:28) along with the asherah that was beside it in the Gideon stories. An altar was made to YHWH in its place and the wood of the asherah was used as fuel for a burnt offering to

<sup>191</sup> This word is translated “Astartes” in the NRSV.

<sup>192</sup> This could be understood as both an emic and etic question.



YHWH. Another altar for the baal is erected in Samaria<sup>193</sup> in the house of the baal by Ahab (I Kg 16:32). In II Kg 3:2, Ahab's son, Jehoram, "did evil in the eyes of YHWH, only not as his father and as his mother, and he put away (BDB 693-4 s.v. **סֹד**) the pillar of the baal (**מִצְבַּת הַבַּעַל**)<sup>194</sup> which his father made". Pillars (**מִצְבוֹת בֵּית הַבַּעַל**) were brought out, burned, and broken down by Jehu when he "eradicated the baal out of Israel" (II Kg 10:26-28). "Pillar(s) of the baal" are mentioned only in II Kg 3:2 and 10:26-7.

#### 1.3.6.3.1.2. House of "the baal"

The house of the baal is spoken of several times in II Kg 10. The house of the baal was filled with worshippers (10:21). Jehu and his assistants went into the house of the baal (10:23), even into its inner room (10:25). Jehu and his helpers are said to have demolished and made a latrine of the house of the baal (10:27). However, either the job was not as complete as the story relates, or the house of the baal was resurrected, for in chapter 11 it says,

All the people of the land came to the house of the baal and they tore it down, the altars and his carved images they shattered thoroughly (**שָׁבְרוּ הַיִּטָּב**); and Mattan, the priest of the baal they slew before the altars; and the priest set officers over the house of YHWH (II Kg 11:18; BDB 406 s.v. **יָטַב**, as an adverb).

Note that the people broke down not only the altars (plural) but also his images. There is no specific identification as to what those images may have been, but they were breakable. This all came about as the people and priest, Jehoiada, were cleaning up after Athaliah was removed from the throne. II Kg 23:4 mentions vessels that were made for the baal and the asherah that were brought out of the temple. The vessels were "burned outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron" and the ashes were carried to Bethel (II Kg 23:24).

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Jer 23:13, "In the prophets of Samaria I saw unsavouriness, they prophesy (**הִנְבְּאוּ** Hth) by the baal, and they mislead my people Israel"

<sup>194</sup> Dt 16:22 instructs the children of Israel not to set up (**מִצְבָּה**) "which YHWH your God hates". Absalom set up a memorial and called it by his name (**וַיִּקְרָא לַמִּצְבֶּה עַל-שְׁמוֹ**) II Sam 18:18). Jdg 9:6, "And all the lords of Shechem and all Beth-millo gathered, and they came and they caused Abimelek to reign as king by the oak of the pillar which was in Shechem (**עִם-אֵלֹן מִצְבָּה אֲשֶׁר בְּשֵׁכֶם**)" (Jdg 9:6). The BHS text notes suggest an LXX emendation for **מִצְבָּה** that would render this translation. II Kg 23:3 mentions that Josiah, the king, stood by the pillar (**וַיַּעֲמֵד הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל-הָעַמֹּד**) in the temple "and made a covenant before YHWH". This pillar seems to be an architectural support for a building. Pillars may have had special significance. Consider that Solomon named the two pillars in the temple, I Kg 7:21. By contrast, **מִצְבָּה** is used as a memorial or in worship. The confusion comes with the lack of English vocabulary to translate these two words, **מִצְבָּה** and **עַמֹּד**. Once is **מִצְבָּה** used in Jer 43:13; "He will also shatter pillars of the house of the sun" (**מִצְבוֹת בֵּית שֶׁמֶשׁ**) or "the obelisks of Heliopolis" (NASB).



1.3.6.3.1.3. The Name, Prophets, Worshippers, and Priests of “the baal”.

The name of the baal is called out by the priests of the baal in I Kg 18:26.

They called on the name of the baal from the morning until the noontime saying, “the baal answer us”, and there was no voice and there was no answer and they limped about the altar which was made. And it happened in the noon time and Elijah mocked ( וַיִּזְהַקוּ ) them and he said, “call out in a great voice, because he is a god, is musing or moved away or he is on a journey, perhaps he is sleeping and will awaken” (I Kg 18:26b-27; BDB 251 s.v. הָתַל, hapax legomena possibly from הַתַּל).

Elijah taunts the prophets to call out in an even greater voice;<sup>195</sup> this adds to even more irony to the whole nature of this affair. The baal (the lord) can not even hear his name being called. During a confrontation with Ahab, Elijah invited these prophets ( עֲתָה שְׁלַח קִבְץ אֵלַי )<sup>196</sup> to this showdown on Mt Carmel (I Kg 18:19). The word “limped” ( יִפְסְחוּ ) is translated as “leaped” by the NASB.<sup>197</sup> The prophets also received an invitation ( קְרְאוּ , Qal mp imperative) from Jehu (II Kg 10:18-9), to their ill fortune in the end. Only once in the story of Jehu’s part in destroying the worship of the baal are the prophets of the baal mentioned. Most of the references are to the worshippers of the baal. But with the story of Elijah and the baal the contest is between Elijah (allied with YHWH) and the prophets. Four hundred and fifty prophets of the baal and 400 prophets of the asherah were instructed about the rules of the contest and then at the point of their failure the prophets of the baal were seized and killed ( יִשְׁחָטוּם )<sup>198</sup> II Kg 10:27 uses the word נָכַה ( Hiphil, “to smite fatally”; BDB 646) to describe Jehu’s removal of the the baal worshippers and prophets from the house of the baal. II Kg 11:18 gives Jehoiada and the people the credit for הָרַגוּ מַטָּן, the priest of the baal. Considering that the deuteronomistic material progresses from Dt through II Kg in chronological order,<sup>199</sup> I Kg 18 is the first mention of priests or prophets of the baal. This would be well after the time of the judges and the United Monarchy and well into the Divided Kingdom, somewhere in the ninth century. In II Kg 23:5, the idolatrous priests ( הַכֹּהֲנִים ) are removed from the temple. This

<sup>195</sup> Or “more loudly”, so Waltke and O’Connor 1990:264. Note here also that כִּי is repeated in the following phrase four times, this makes for a bit of awkward translation;

כִּי־אֱלֹהִים הוּא כִּי שָׁיחַ וְכִי־שָׁיַג לוֹ וְכִי־יָרַד לוֹ אֱוִלִי יִשָּׁן הוּא וַיִּקְרַע  
<sup>196</sup> עֲתָה שְׁלַח קִבְץ אֵלַי (Qal imperatives), perhaps “invite” is too soft a force considering these are imperatives.

<sup>197</sup> This conforms to BDB 820 פִּסַּח. It allows for a different ethos in the scene portrayed. Another thing to note briefly is that this was a daytime affair, morning to noon ( וְעַד־הַצְּהָרִים מִהַבֶּקֶר ).

<sup>198</sup> I Kg 18:40 The prophets of the asherah are not mentioned again in this story. Cf. sec. 2.3.3.2.3 Asherah, and Nouns – Individuals.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. note on the diachronic/synchronic dimension of this material in sec. 1.3.



comes shortly after the removal of the vessels that were made for the baal and the asherah from the temple, but does not specifically identify the priests as priests of the baal. The title **הַכֹּהֲנִים** seems to be closely allied to the word for “snare” or “net” (cf. BDB 485 s.v. **כְּמַר**). These were priests that had been appointed by the previous kings to burn incense on the high places.<sup>200</sup>

An assembly is arranged for the worshippers of the baal (**קִדְּשׁוּ עֵצְרָה לְבַעַל**) in II Kg 10. Jehu has arranged the assembly deliberately to include all the worshippers<sup>201</sup> of the baal, specifically to destroy them (**הִאֲבִיד**, Hiphil infinitive, II Kg 10:19). The worshippers came; they filled the house of the baal; vestments were brought out for them; they sacrificed to the baal and gave burnt offerings to him; and they were slain by the 80 guards that Jehu had stationed outside the temple.<sup>202</sup>

#### 1.3.6.3.2. **הַבַּעַל** with Other Deities

This next section will treat **הַבַּעַל** with the asherah, Ashtaroth and the host of heaven, each in turn.

##### 1.3.6.3.2.1. “The asherah/asherah” and “the baal”

Another interesting thing to note here is how **אֲשֵׁרָה** and the baal are mentioned together (often in parallel) in these stories. In Judges 6, the altar of the baal is torn down along with the asherah that was next to it (Jdg 6:25, 28, 30). The wood of the asherah is used to fuel the fire for the sacrifice to YHWH (Jdg 6:26). Elijah called together the 450 prophets of the baal and the 400 prophets of the asherah. Neither the asherah nor the prophets of the asherah are mentioned again, leading some to suggest that the asherah is added at a later date to discredit her worship by association with the worship of the baal (cf. Hadley 1989:97; Day 1994:41-2). YHWH’s indictment against

<sup>200</sup> **קָטַר** is used in Piel and Hiphil, translated “make sacrifices smoke, send them up in smoke” (BDB 882). It can be used both in legitimate worship of YHWH (I Kg 9:25) and in worship of other gods (e.g. I Kg 11:18, II Kg 22:17). II Kg 23:5 mentions burning incense to the baal, the hosts of heaven, and also the sun, moon and stars. Sacrifice and burning incense on the highest places are mentioned almost as a refrain between the stories of Jehoshaphat (I Kg 22:44), Jehu (II Kg 12:3), Joash (II Kg 14:4), Jeroboam II (II Kg 15:4), Pekah (II Kg 15:35) and Ahaz (II Kg 16:4): “only the high places were not removed, still the people sacrificed and burned incense on the high places”. This coupling of **קָטַר** and **בְּמוֹת** is found several times throughout I and II Kings (I Kg 11:7, 12:31-33, II Kg 17:11, etc.).

<sup>201</sup> BDB 2 translates **עֲבָדֵי הַבַּעַל** as “servants of Baal” rather than “worshippers of Baal”.

<sup>202</sup> G. del Olmo Lete uses this passage to reconstruct the Canaanite worship of Baal. He focuses on who was involved, giving each part of the story particular attention and possible identities for those mentioned. Also the “structure of the Baalistic cult of the first millennium” is given some shape in this discussion (1994:266-273). Unfortunately, although it was the original intention of this research to pursue these issues, the final form of this thesis has taken a different tack which has allowed neither time nor space for such pursuance.



Ahaz and the kings preceding him suggests that the kings and the people built Asherim ( אֲשֵׁרִים, II Kg 17:10) and then,

And they forsook all the commandments of YHWH their God and they made for themselves a molten image, two calves, and they made an asherah, and they bowed down to all the host of the heavens and they served the baal. And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire and they practised divination, and observed signs, and they sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of YHWH to provoke him (II Kg 17:16-17).

This comes as the justification as to why יהוה allows Assyria to conquer the Northern Kingdom of Israel; “And YHWH was very angry with Israel and he removed them from before his face, none remained except the tribe of Judah alone” (II Kg 17:18). An asherah and the baal are paired in II Kg 21:3 in the description of the sin of Manasseh, who “did evil in the sight of YHWH, according to the abominations of the nations whom YHWH dispossessed before the sons of Israel” (II Kg 21:2). He rebuilt what Hezekiah, his father, had removed of Ahab’s idolatry. This indictment of Ahab suggests that he “worshiped all the host of heaven and served them”. The *them* would seem to include the baal and the asherah as well as the host of heaven. The vessels that Hilkiah removed from the temple belonged to both the baal and the asherah, II Kg 23:4.

This discussion can include the way that the plural forms of the baal and the asherah are used together. In Judges, at the beginning of the cycle, “the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of YHWH”. It mentions that they “forgot YHWH their God and served the baalim and the asheroth” ( אֶת־הַבְּעָלִים וְאֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרוֹת, Jdg 3:7).

#### 1.3.6.3.2.2. “The baalim” and Ashtaroth

In Judges 10, again,

The sons of Israel again did evil in the eyes of YHWH and they served the baalim and the ashtaroth ( הָעַשְׁתָּרוֹת ), and the gods of Aram and the gods of Sidon and the gods of Moab and the gods of Ammon and the gods of the Philistines, and they forsook YHWH and did not serve him (Jdg 10:6).

After Samuel instructed the people to remove the baalim and the ashtaroth from among them and serve YHWH (in order that he might deliver them from the Philistines), “And the sons of Israel removed the baalim and the ashtaroth ( אֶת־הַבְּעָלִים וְאֶת־ הָעַשְׁתָּרוֹת ) and they served YHWH alone” (I Sam 7:4). This was early in Samuel’s ministry as prophet to Israel. Later during his retirement speech, he reminds them that their forefathers “cried out to YHWH and said ‘we have sinned because we have



forsaken YHWH and we have served the baalim and the ashtaroth ( וַנַּעֲבֹד אֶת־ ( הַבְּעָלִים וְאֶת־הָעֲשֵׁתָרוֹת ) and now deliver us from the hand of our enemies and we will serve you” (I Sam 12:10); “you” meaning YHWH.

The interesting thing to note here is that when the baal is used as a masculine singular noun, אֲשֵׁרָה is also used in the singular. When baalim is used then עֲשֵׁתָרוֹת (the plural form) is used, except in one case. The NASB reads, “So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth” (Jdg 2:13). The RSV, however, reads “they forsook the LORD, and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth”. The RSV seems to be taking a liberty here to create some consistency with other texts. The Hebrew is unquestionably masculine singular with a feminine plural in parallelism. Neither הַבְּעָלִים nor הָעֲשֵׁתָרוֹת are mentioned in the textual apparatus in BHS.<sup>203</sup> Only once is the preferred reading of the asherah as a feminine plural written with an א (Jdg 3:7), but the Syriac and Vulgate want to emend it to read הָעֲשֵׁתָרוֹת rather than הָאֲשֵׁרוֹת.<sup>204</sup>

#### 1.3.6.3.2.3. Host of heaven

The baal is also associated with the “host of heaven” in three different texts, II Kg 17:16; 21:3; and 23:4-5. The text of II Kg 17 has already been mentioned as an explanation for Assyria’s victory over the Northern Kingdom. Verse 16 reads:

And they forsook all the commandments of YHWH their God and they made for themselves a molten image, two calves, and they made an asherah, and they bowed down to all the host of the heavens and they served the baal.

Note the trio of the asherah, the “host of heaven” and the baal. Again the three are presented as a set in II Kg 21:3, “He [Manasseh] set up an altar for the baal and he made an asherah . . . And they bowed down to all the host of the heavens and he served them.” Vessels had been made for these three and incense was burned to these three, as well as “to the sun and to the moon and to the constellations” (II Kg 23:4-5).

#### 1.3.7. “The lord” in the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic Texts

Based on place names used in the deuteronomistic texts it is apparent that temples or high places were raised to a deity named בַּעַל. Place names have long histories and so to identify who named them after Baal is very difficult, and beyond the scope of this

<sup>203</sup> However, a masora notation suggests that this is a hapax: “non exstat (indicat hoc verbum vel hanc conjunctionem verborum non occurrere nisi hoc loco) = לית”.

<sup>204</sup> This is mentioned again in the notes of sec. 2.3.3.1.2 on Asherah and Verbs of Construction.



thesis. The review of **בַּעַל פְּעוֹר**, **בַּעַל בְּרִית**, and **בַּעַל זְבוּב** has left us without doubt that **בַּעַל** can be used as a divine name. But the word **בַּעַל** can also be translated simply as “lord”, “master” or “possessor”. A main question addressed in the above discussion was whether **בַּעַל** was actually used as a divine name in the deuteronomistic-Jeremiah texts. Two things are crucial to the debate. First of all how is the name of the deity presented in the text, i.e. with or without the article. In all the cases in which a deity was intended **הַבַּעַל** was written. Classical Hebrew grammarians agree that names do not take an article, and then go on to explain that the article in this case makes the name. The second point concerns how this form, **הַבַּעַל**, may be understood in the texts in which it is used. **בַּעַל** with an article is not a true name but rather a title. And it is a pejorative title that has been used with a consistent sense of irony. It is not until some survey of the nouns and verbs used with the title/name is done, that some understanding of who **הַבַּעַל** is can be obtained. Even as a survey of nouns and verbs is done, attention can be given not only to the referent (who is he?) but also to the sense of the title and the irony that the authors produced (who is he not).

Through the study of the verbs used with **הַבַּעַל** it is obvious that the baal is a static figure in both the deuteronomistic material as well as in Jeremiah. In neither set of texts is “the baal” the active agent of a verb. The contrast between **הַבַּעַל** and YHWH is not as striking in the deuteronomistic material as was seen in Jeremiah partly because of the breadth of material and its varied contents. Jeremiah is more obviously a polemic against the worship of other gods and the apostasy of the children of Israel. However, deuteronomistic writings seem more interested in presenting the history of an apostate nation. In the deuteronomistic material, individuals rise up in the battle against the worship of the baal (e.g. Gideon, Elijah and Jehu). The verbs that are used with both **הַבַּעַל** and **הַבַּעַלִּים** fall into a pattern that is almost formulaic: “serve”, “play the harlot after”, “sacrifice to”, “follow”, and “burn incense to”. From Jeremiah the verbs include: “following after”, “burning incense to”, “swearing by”, “burning” children, “teaching” to follow, and “dreaming” dreams. In Jeremiah, the baal again is the object of action and not the actor. The combined corpus of the deuteronomistic and Jeremiah texts have several items and classes of individuals associated with the worship of the baal: “altars”, “pillars”, “houses”, “rooftops”, “the house of the baal”, “prophets”, “priests”, “worshippers” and “dreams”. The children of Israel are indicted for their faithlessness to YHWH in following **הַבַּעַל** and other gods, and for this the Northern Kingdom of Israel was given up to Assyria (II Kg 17) and the Southern Kingdom of Judah sent off in exile to Babylon (Jer).



## 2. Asherah

### 2.1. Asherah in the Ugaritic Myths

The Ugaritic Baal Cycle fills in the stories of Asherah as well as it does for Baal. She is a goddess of some authority and status. Though she does not feature as often in the Ugaritic tales, she is obviously an important member of the pantheon at Ugarit. Her name in Ugaritic, *ʾatrt* (𐎠𐎢𐎣𐎠𐎫𐎢𐎣𐎠), is generally transliterated as “Athirat” and translated as “Asherah”. Her story at Ugarit has been used by biblical scholars far and wide to understand Asherah of the Hebrew scriptures. She too, as with Baal, was an enigma to the world of biblical scholarship until the discoveries at Ras Shamra (cf. Handy 1994:72-5). Again *ANET* will help to give a storyline for this discussion.

#### 2.1.1. Her Story

##### 2.1.1.1. Baal’s Palace

As mentioned above Asherah is understood to be the consort of El, and it is in this capacity that we first see her in the stories included in the Baal Cycle. She is approached by Baal and Anat to help in procuring a palace for Baal. It is obvious from the story that her position with the chief of the gods is special and powerful and Baal and Anat want her to use her persuasion to convince El to allow Baal to build a palace of his own. When Baal and Anat come to Asherah, we notice a couple of interesting and significant things. First, on sight of Baal and Anat, Asherah displays her fear,

Lifting up her eyes she beholds.  
The advance of Baal Asherah doth espy,  
The advance of Maiden Anath,  
The onrush of Yabamat [Liimmim].  
Thereat her feet [do stumble];  
Her loins [do crack be]hind her,  
Her [face breaks out in s]weat [above her].  
Bent are the [joints of her loins],  
Weakened those of [her] back (20)  
(*ANET* 1969:132 II AB.ii)<sup>205</sup>

In the footnote marked at the end of this passage in *ANET*, Ginsberg (the translator of this set of texts) notes, “Because she fears the unexpected visitors bring bad news (cf. Ezek. 21:11-12). This is the standard reaction of a female character to an unexpected visit” (*ANET* 1969:132 n.18).<sup>206</sup> There is another possible explanation. Anat’s

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<sup>205</sup>UT 51.ii.12-20/ CTA 4/KTU 1.4. *ANET* uses H.L. Ginsberg’s translation and Virolleaud’s citation system; Tablet II AB column ii lines 12-20.

<sup>206</sup> cf. sec. 1.1.1.2 for brief discussion noting this reaction; also Anat’s reaction to Baal’s messages: *ANET* 1969:137 D.30/UT <sup>c</sup>nt III.29-32. Note Anat’s rebuttal of challenging language, UT <sup>c</sup>nt III.33 ff. In sec. 1.1.2.3, Thitmanet’s reaction to her brother’s advance in



attitude in approaching El may present us with another possible reason for Asherah's fearful reaction. Anat displays belligerence and is quite militant when she approaches El on a couple of occasions. Also, in another part of the story, Baal threatens Asherah's children. There is also a scene where Anat is wading in blood and she is depicted as a bloodthirsty warrior. So there may have been more to Asherah's reaction than seems to be assumed by Ginsberg's note here.

Secondly, another thing to notice is that she must travel to El's abode at the source of the two rivers. There is no mention in the texts of a special place for Asherah's abode. This story (UT 51)<sup>207</sup> finds her at the water's edge, possibly getting ready to cook some fish. She is addressed here, and in most places throughout the Baal Cycle, as "Lady Asherah of the Sea". It may be assumed then that she lives near the sea, or that she has some power or authority over the sea.<sup>208</sup> The sea god, Yamm, may be her son,<sup>209</sup> but this is not stated specifically in the stories that we have. Her travel to El's palace takes some time. She has her "lad", "Qadesh wa-Amrur, Fisherman of Lady Asherah of the Sea" (ANET 1969:133), saddle a donkey or a jackass for the journey. Alice L. Perlman wants to make the point that this reference is quite in keeping with the desert imagery of Ashratum as "The Lady of the Steppe" and is a carry over of the desert imagery that comes from there (Perlman 1978:72-3). If this is so, we see a holdover of some older stories here in the Ugaritic literature.<sup>210</sup>

The story continues when Asherah approaches El with the request for Baal's palace.

She penetrates El's field and enters  
The pavilion of King Father Shunem.  
At El's feet she bows and falls down,  
Prostrates her and does him reverence.  
As soon as El espies her,  
He *parts his jaws* and laughs.  
His feet upon the footstool he puts

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ANET 1969:147 KRT C i.55/UT 125.53 ff., (Ut 125 from line 54 ff. are quite fragmented) is mentioned.

<sup>207</sup> CTA 4/KTU 1.4.

<sup>208</sup> Watson reviews several different possible connections with the sea, as he tries to trace and etymology for her name, *rbt atrt ym* (Watson 1993b:51-2). In a second article, Watson suggests that the translation of *ym* may not be "sea" but rather "day", so "authority over the sea" may not be appropriate (1993a:432-3).

<sup>209</sup> Wiggins (1993:29-35) discusses Asherah's association with Yamm in relation to his possible coronation and renaming in KTU 1.1.IV.14-15. He only briefly entertains the idea of Yamm being the son of the goddess *ʿlt*, for which he assumes an equation with Asherah (1993:34).

<sup>210</sup> Perlman (1978) and Hadley (1989:65 ff.) have traced the name Ashratum to the Amorites. More discussion following.



(30)

And doth twiddle his fingers.  
 He lifts up his voice and [cri]es:  
 “Why is come Lady Asher[ah of the S]ea?  
     Why hither the Progenitress of the G[ods]?  
 Art thou become hungry and *fa[int]*,  
 Or art become thirsty and *pa[rched]*?  
 Eat, pray, yea drink.  
 Ea[t] thou from the tables bread;  
     drink from the flagons wine,  
     From the golden gob<lets> blood of vines.  
 See, El the King’s love stirs thee,  
     Bull’s affection arouses thee”  
(ANET 1969:133 II AB.iv).<sup>211</sup>

El seems pleased to see Asherah at this point. He offers her drink and food and assumes that she is aroused by his love. Most scholars take this as an erotic allusion. From here the story progresses with El granting Asherah’s request and a palace being built for Baal.

#### 2.1.1.2. Baal’s Death

Asherah drops out of the story at this point until after Baal’s death at the hand of Mot (the god of death). We pick up from where Anat approaches El with the news of Baal’s death; she says,

(40)

“Now let Asherah rejoice and her sons,  
     Elath and the band of her kinsmen;  
 For dead is Puissant Baal,  
     Perished the Prince, Lord of Earth.”  
 Loudly El doth cry  
     To Lady Asherah of the Sea:  
 “Hark, Lady A[sherah of the S]ea,  
     Give one of thy s[ons] I’ll make king”  
(ANET 1969:140 I AB.i).<sup>212</sup>

Lady Asherah of the Sea is the mother of the 70 sons of the gods and it makes the most sense that it would be one of her sons that should take the throne. It is not necessarily so that Baal was her son in the first instance, but El being the chief god is exercising his authority in replacing the dead storm god. The first suggestion that Asherah makes is rejected because he is too “weakly.” So Asherah suggests Ashtar the Tyrant, but he is not big enough:

(60)

(But) his feet reach not down to the footstool,  
     Nor his head reaches up to the top.

<sup>211</sup> UT 51.iv-v.24-39/CTA 4/KTU 1.4.

<sup>212</sup> UT 49.i.12-18/CTA 6/KTU 1.6.



So Ashtar the Tyrant declares:  
 “I’ll not reign in Zaphon’s *Fastness!*”  
 Down goes Ashtar the Tyrant,  
 Down from the throne of Baal Puissant  
 And reigns in El’s Earth, all of it. [...]...  
 (ANET 1969:140 I AB.ii).<sup>213</sup>

This seems to be the end of the column and thirty lines are missing at the top of the next column, so we are left here. We do not know if another god is offered or what Ashtar does on “El’s Earth”. But from what we do see here Asherah’s suggestions of a replacement for Baal are inadequate. There is no god like Baal.

### 2.1.1.3. Ashtoreth

Asherah does not feature in the stories again except as the mother of the 70 sons that both Baal or Anat threaten.<sup>214</sup> The only other allusion is possibly as Ashtoreth during Baal’s fight with Yamm (the god of the sea) at the beginning of the cycle (according to Pritchard’s arrangements of the texts). First, Baal threatens Yamm with cudgels and in the name of Ashtoreth (UT 137.7-8),<sup>215</sup> then Baal is reprimanded by Ashtoreth for threatening the messengers of Yamm (UT 137.40-41),<sup>216</sup> and in the third place, Baal is reprimanded by Ashtoreth once again for doing Yamm damage (UT 68.28-31).<sup>217</sup> The translations of these texts add to the confusion in that <sup>ʿ</sup>*ttrt* is not always translated consistently. <sup>ʿ</sup>*ttrt* is translated as Ashtoreth (עֲשְׁתֹרֶת) and as Astarte, and not too infrequently as Asherah (אֲשֵׁרָה), even though there is the difference between the initial ʾ (א) and ʿ (ע) of ʾ*ttrt* and <sup>ʿ</sup>*ttrt*. We have no more than these three vignettes of Ashtoreth in these stories and so who she is at Ugarit and what place she has are purely speculation. She does have some rank, it would seem, in that, at her rebuke, Baal is ashamed of his actions. Asherah’s position as consort of the high god, El, would seem to make her one of the few goddesses in a position to put Baal in his place in such a way. So do we understand Ashtoreth to be Asherah in this text?

<sup>213</sup> UT 49.i.31-36/CTA 6/KTU 1.6.

<sup>214</sup> e.g. UT 49.v.1-6/CTA 6/KTU 1.6, “Baal seizes the sons of Asherah . . .” and UT 51.vi.45-46/CTA 4/KTU 1.4, “. . . summons Ashera’s 70 sons”.


<sup>215</sup> CTA 2 I or IV (Bordreuil and Pardee’s index is unclear at this point)/KTU 1.2.I. This seems to be Yamm from the consensus of the reconstructions. Cf. ANET:130 III AB B.5-12 compare with UT 137 where Yamm’s name is not reconstructed but “Judge Nahar” seems to be the parallel with the lacuna the may well have included Yamm.

<sup>216</sup> *ibid.* Anat may be a restoration for Asherah/Ashtoreth in line 40.

<sup>217</sup> CTA 2 IV or I (Bordreuil and Pardee’s index is again unclear at this point)/KTU 1.2 IV.



### 2.1.2. Asherah at Ugarit

It was an exciting find, in 1929, to discover the name <sup>ʾ</sup>*ṯrt* in the myths of the pantheons. As mentioned earlier in brief, until the Ras Shamra texts were discovered the identity of asherah/Asherah was at question. Many were sure that Asherah was only an object. Handy puts the situation this way; “Prior to the discovery of the tablets at Ras Shamra, in fact, there was a fairly widely-held position that *asherah* referred only to some kind of religious object and not to a goddess at all” (1994:72). And considering the plausible evolution of the name from cuneiform ( , Athirat) to Hebrew script ( אֲשֵׁרָה ),<sup>218</sup> doubt was erased as to whether the name Asherah represented an object or a goddess. Indeed, <sup>ʾ</sup>*ṯrt* was not only a goddess but the chief goddess at Ugarit; and attendant with her name came a set of myths that gives us a description of her activities and personality. She was consort of El and the Creatress of the Gods; the mother of 70 sons (gods themselves). She wielded influence before the chief god, El, on behalf of other gods. She responds in fear and respect in accordance with various situations. She seems to be a fairly passive character in the stories in which she takes part, as she takes little initiative apart from what she is asked to do by others. The tablets upon which the myths were inscribed were found in strata which can be dated with fair certainty to 16th-12th centuries.<sup>219</sup> Myths are often stories that have been carried through many generations and we can suspect that the stories of the Ugaritic pantheon had origins before even the 16th century. In the end we can say that there is a goddess named Athirat (<sup>ʾ</sup>*ṯrt*), or Asherah (as translated by *ANET*) at Ugarit.

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<sup>218</sup> This is discussed in some more detail in sec. 2.2.1 “Her Name”.

<sup>219</sup> J.C.L. Gibson gives this synopsis of the dating of the tablets:

All (*the tablets*) apparently were discovered in a level which was dated archaeologically between the sixteenth or fifteenth and the twelfth centuries B.C. Objects bearing the names of the Egyptian kings Thutmos IV (*ca.* 1425-1417 B.C.) and Amenophis III (*ca.* 1417-1379 B.C.) found alongside the tablets reduce the period to which they may be assigned; such a date, too, agrees well enough with the fact that certain letters of Niqmad, King of Ugarit, who is named in the colophons of several of the literary tablets, are addressed to the Hittite king Shuppiluliumash (*ca.* 1380-1336 B.C.). The literary texts must therefore like the other documents have been written down between *ca.* 1400 and 1350 B.C., though it should be emphasized that the legends and myths themselves are not necessarily contemporary with the tablets but not improbably go back in some form or other to a much remoter antiquity” (Gibson 1978:1).



## 2.2. Asherah elsewhere in the ANE and Palestine

In the next set of inquiries the iconographic/epigraphic material will be reviewed as a source for understanding Asherah in the localities surrounding and in Palestine. The material for this is as diverse as pottery and graffiti. Attention is also given to the symbolism that is associated with the study of the goddess Asherah.

### 2.2.1. Her Name

Several sources are appealed to for the etymology of Asherah's name. Richard Hess notes that "no form of Ashartu or Ashirtu" appears at Ebla, which suggests "that the deity was not present in Syria before the appearance of the Amorites" (1996:209), a West Semitic people of the second millennium. Judith Hadley has given a quick and cogent summation of the possible sources of this name and the personage of this deity. Her first suggestion is that the goddess Ashratum, the consort of the god Amurru, may be the earliest reference to Asherah. The texts mentioning Ashratum are from Babylon ca. 1830-1531 BCE (Hadley 1989:65),<sup>220</sup> where she usually bears the title "Lady of the Steppe" (Hadley 1989:65). This name may have come to Babylon from the Amorites, a nomadic group that inhabited upper Mesopotamia. This would nicely account for the desert imagery in this name. Hess also mentions Ashratum from Babylonia. He suggests that "Ashratum is my mother" appears as a name "on two documents from Babylon's first dynasty" (Hess 1996:209). He also suggests that the deity is mentioned in three other seal impressions from Old Babylon (1996:209).

Another source for the name may possibly come from a fragmentary story where Elkunirsha, the chief of the Hittite pantheon, tells the storm god to humiliate his wife, Ashertu, in retaliation for an offensive remark (KUB XII, 61).<sup>221</sup> Albright mentions this same story and assumes Asherah as equal to *Ašertum* (1968:107). Goetze, the translator of this story for *ANET*, calls it a "Canaanite Myth" (*ANET* 1969:519). This is again a name that is very close to Asherah in the way it is written. Another commonality is that both of these goddesses are consorts/wives of the chief god of their respective pantheons.

The Amarna correspondence has also offered evidence of Asherah from a West Semitic origin in the Late Bronze Age according to Hess (1996). The onomastica there reveals

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<sup>220</sup> cf. Hadley 1989:65. I thank Dr Judith M. Hadley for her kind permission to use her dissertation transcript which forms the basis for much of what is said in this section.

<sup>221</sup> KUB = *Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi* (Berlin: n.p.; n.d.) This bit of myth is presented in *ANET* (1969:519) translated by Albrecht Goetze. The original articles were published by H. Otten (1953:125-50), and H.A. Hoffner (1975:5-16). Cf. Hoffner and Beckman 1990:69-70.



the name with several different spellings. Hess discusses several different spellings of the name *abdi-a-ši-ir-te*, a correspondant of a set of letters that were excavated at Amarna (1996:210-14). He comes to the conclusion that *abdi-a-ši-ir-te*,

is a West Semitic name that includes the name of the West Semitic deity, Asherah, as its second element. The occurrences of this name in the Amarna correspondence suggest that the name of the goddess was vocalised as *aširata*, but written with the omission of either the second or third vowel (Hess 1996:214).

From the Ugaritic material the name is vocalised as Athirat. In the Ugaritic pantheon Athirat is the consort of the Chief god, El, and appears as a major character in the stories that make up the Baal Cycle.<sup>222</sup> Hadley suggests that, in the transition from the Ugaritic material to Hebrew texts, the name takes the form Asherah. She explains the philological shifts this way:

It is commonly accepted that <sup>ʿ</sup>*šrh* is the Hebrew form of the Ugaritic <sup>ʿ</sup>*atrt*. The transformation of the early “th” (*t*) to the later “sh” (*š*) is a well attested change (cf. e.g. Cross 1973, pp. 52-3 n.36). Similarly, the final *h* is a typical Hebrew feminine singular suffix, and is to be considered a normal adaptation of the Ugaritic feminine name (Hadley 1989:74).

So, in the Hebrew scriptures the name is Asherah (אֲשֵׁרָה) or the feminine plural Asherot (אֲשֵׁרוֹת) or masculine Asherim (אֲשֵׁרִים). One other name that is occasionally confused with Asherah will be mentioned here. The name Ashtoreth (עֲשְׁתֹרֶת) is on occasion used in situations when Asherah is expected. The notes in English biblical translations of these two names often give similar translations/meanings such as “wooden symbol of fertility goddess”. The name Ashtoreth is sometimes translated as Astarte and understood to be the goddess of the Sidonians, a kingdom/state near Israel during biblical times. The name Ashtoreth is translated as Astarte for the Ugaritic material by some scholars.<sup>223</sup>

### 2.2.2. Her Fragments

I wish to treat here some fairly significant archaeological discoveries. These include pithoi found at Kuntillet ʿAjrud and Khirbet el-Qom and a cult stand found at Taanach. Fragments of a ewer were found at Lachish that also have some relevance to this study of Asherah.

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<sup>222</sup> Asherah at Ugarit is discussed at length in sec. 2.1.

<sup>223</sup> Cf. Ginsberg’s translation of Baal Cycle in *ANET*



## 2.2.2.1. Inscriptions

### 2.2.2.1.1. Kuntillet 'Ajrud

Let us turn to the pithoi found at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. This site, which is about 50 km southeast of Kadesh Barnea, was excavated from 1975-76 by Zeev Meshel. It was first assumed to be a wayside shrine (Meshel 1992:108; Smith 1990:88), based on the inscriptions found there. This identification has since been questioned by several scholars (Dearman 1992:179-80; Hadley 1989:157, 165, 170; Keel and Uehlinger 1993:281). Judith Hadley puts her argument this way, calling on A. Rainey for support:

The architecture of the site is more indicative of a way station, and has little to identify it as a shrine or religious centre. In fact, Rainey (1987) has expressed the opinion that, had it not been for the inscriptions discovered there, no-one would have considered the site to have had any religious function whatsoever. The mere presence of inscriptions invoking the blessing of a deity is not enough to constitute a shrine (Hadley 1989:157).

An alternative identification of a caravanserai has been suggested (Dearman 1992: 79-80; Keel and Uehlinger 1993:281; and Hadley 1989:157, 165, 170). Hadley makes the most detailed attempt to identify the site as a shelter for travellers on the way to/from Elat on the Gulf of Aqaba from/to the southern coast of Israel at Raphia, Gaza or Askelon. Meshel identifies the route that travellers used for this trip as the Darb el-Ghazza (Meshel 1992:103). Oswald Loretz (1990:71) suggests that the pithoi were located in a sacred room in the caravanserai.

Most scholars date the site to the 8th or 9th centuries. The most precise attempt to date the site was made by Meshel who based his dating on his translation of one of the inscriptions to include the name of Joash a king of Israel “who reigned from Samaria (ca. 801-786 BCE)” (Meshel 1992:107). Meshel seems to be singular in this translation and in this precision of dating, but the dating yet falls within the range of most dates given. Loretz sets the pithoi and site between 850-750 BCE (1990:71).<sup>224</sup>

The archaeological finds that concern us here are pieces of pottery and a bit of wall mural with inscriptions and drawings on them. The first considered here are the two large pieces of pottery found, one in what has been called the bench room (because it is surrounded by benches on three sides), the second on the other side of the wall to the bench room. The second room was larger and ovens as well as stairs leading to other

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<sup>224</sup> This is interesting in light of the note from *Biblical Archaeology Review* by Hershel Shanks (1996a:12), which notes that radio carbon dating on wood from the site confirms Meshel's dating to 830-760 BCE.



rooms were excavated there. To use Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, and Judith Hadley's designations, they will be called Pithos A and B (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:255; Hadley 1989:159), and given a brief description of them. A fuller description and discussion can be found in Keel and Uehlinger, Hadley, and Meshel's articles (Meshel 1992:103-109; Hadley 1989:143-201; Keel and Uehlinger 1993:237-270).

Pithos A was found in the bench room with an inscription on one side and drawings on both sides. The drawing on the one side includes what has been called a "stylised tree" flanked by caprids<sup>225</sup> above a "striding lion" (Hadley 1989:200). There seem to be other animals on what looks to be the shoulder of the vessel from which the piece of pottery was broken (at least according to the drawings presented by Keel and Uehlinger 1993:239 Abb. 219, and Hadley 1989: fig. 5). On the other side of Pithos A are three figures, two standing, one seated with a lyre, and assorted animals or fragments of animal drawings. Both Keel and Uehlinger, and Hadley take pains to discuss the identity of these figures. I am fairly convinced that the standing figures are Bes figures, as Keel and Uehlinger, Hadley and Meshel all agree, here. Of great interest is the inscription, that is written across and through the head-dress of the taller of the two figures. Some discussion has been offered that one or more of the figures may represent the deities mentioned in the inscription (Dever 1984:22, 30-31). The consensus, in the end, seems to be that the inscriptions are independent of the drawings. The transcriptions of Keel and Uehlinger, and Hadley are very similar:

*ʔmr. ʔ...h...k. ʔmr. lyhl[ʔl] wlyw<sup>c</sup>śh. w... brkt. ʔtkm. lyhwh.  
šmrn. wʔšrth* (Hadley 1989:160; Keel and Uehlinger 1993:255, 257; cf. Maier 1986:169).

Hadley's translation:

"X says: say to Yehal[lel<sup>ʔ</sup>el] and to Yo<sup>c</sup>ashah and [to Z]: I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and by his asherah" (Hadley 1989:160).<sup>226</sup>

<sup>225</sup> This term, *caprid*, is one that Keel and Uehlinger (1993) have used throughout their book to indicate the group of animals that include deer, antelope, goats, ibex, steinbok, etc. This group of animals are ruminants but does not include cows or sheep. This term has come from the Latin *caper*, meaning "he goat". I have not found *caprid* in any German or English dictionary, but have decided to use it as an inclusive term to describe deer-like animals as exclusive of bovine. I am not in a position to defend whether one animal is an ibex as against an antelope, but do think that distinction needs to be made in general between cows and deer, because they seem to have different functions in the symbolism of the gods/pantheons treated in this paper.

<sup>226</sup> Hadley includes these quote marks.



Meshel, in the Anchor Bible Dictionary, transcribes the first three words,  $\text{ʔmr ʔ[šy]w hm[l]k}$  (Meshel 1992:107). From this reconstruction he then understands  $\text{ʔšyw}$  and  $\text{hmlk}$  (according to his reconstruction) as the king Joash of Israel in order to date the site during his reign in Samaria, 801-786 BCE.

But this is the least problematic of the issues that the translation presents. Yahweh and “his asherah” has had much attention in the discussion among scholars. Before we turn to that discussion in full, let us turn to the other finds on the site, then we will consider what can be said about them all together.

Pithos B, found in the larger room on the other side of the wall from Pithos A, has five “worshippers” drawn on it; a possible sixth “worshipper” may be behind them and incompletely drawn. They have been called worshippers because they seem to be gazing with arms bent or raised in the same direction. William G. Dever (1984:29) includes a short discussion regarding procession scenes in the ANE. The worshippers are accompanied by several animals and an archer. The animals seem to be caprid and bovine. Two inscriptions are recorded from this pithos. Keel and Uehlinger describe the orientation only of the first of the two inscriptions (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:256). Hadley does not mention the orientation of either of the inscriptions that she ascribes to Pithos B. In any case, the inscriptions are interesting for the same reason that the inscriptions on Pithos A have called attention to themselves. The first inscription on Pithos B has been numbered Inscription No. 2 by both Keel and Uehlinger (1993:256-7) and Hadley (1989:165-171). Her transcription and translation read:

$\text{ʔmr ʔmryw ʔmr l.ʔdny hšlm. ʔt brktk lyhwh tmn wlʔšrth. ybrk. wyšmrk wyhy ʕm. ʔd[n]y...k}$

“Amaryau says: say to my lord: Is it well with you? I bless you by Yahweh of Teman and by his asherah. May he bless you and keep you and be with you my lord” (Hadley 1989:165).<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Loretz has a much freer translation in his text than Keel and Uehlinger. I present them here for comparison:

“Es sagt Amarjau:  
Sage zu meinem Herrn:  
Geht es dir gut?  
Ich segne dich (hiermit bzw. habe dich gesegnet)  
bei/vor Jahwe von Teman und seiner Aschera.  
Er (d.h. Jahwe) möge (dich) segnen  
und dich behüten  
und mit meinem Herrn sein . . .” (Keel and Uehlinger 1990:256).

and

“Amarju sagte zu seinem Herrn . . .



The third inscription, again from Pithos B for which neither Keel and Uehlinger, Hadley nor Meshel include a discussion of orientation to the worshippers or the other drawings on the fragment, reads this way, according to Keel and Uehlinger:

...[brkt=...] lyhwh htmn wl<sup>2</sup>šrth  
 ...kl<sup>2</sup>šr yš<sup>2</sup>l m<sup>2</sup>š ḥnn ...wntn lh yhw klbbh

“... bei/von Jahweh von Teman und seiner Aschera... Was immer er von jemandem erbitten wird, er (d.h. Jahwe) gewährt es ... und Jahwe gibt ihm nach seiner Absicht ...”  
 (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:257)

Keel and Uehlinger include a first line here while Hadley (1993:107) and Meshel (1989:171) begin with what is Keel and Uehlinger’s second line.

Before we go on to a discussion of what these translations may mean for the study of Asherah at hand, there is one more piece of evidence from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud. Meshel identifies a fourth inscription on the wall of a small room at the entrance way to the main and largest structure on site. This was found, apparently, on the doorpost to the room identified as the bench room, written in Hebrew using Phoenician script. He transcribes:

[. . .y]Ṗrk(w).ym(y)m.wyšb<sup>c</sup>w[. . .]tnw.l[y]hwh[ ]tymn.wl  
 [ Ṗšrt[h]  
 [. . .]hyt(y)b.yhwh.hty[mn.w<sup>2</sup>šrth. . .]  
 (Meshel 1992:107)

Meshel does not give a full translation here.<sup>228</sup> He only notes, “This is a blessing or prayer addressed to ‘Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah (sic)’” (1992:107). In fact, “Yahweh and his Asherah” are mentioned twice in this particular inscription. This inscription is omitted by Hadley. However, Keel and Uehlinger mention Meshel’s

mögest du gesegnet sein durch Jahe von Teman  
 und seine Aschera. Jahwe segne dich  
 und erhalte dich und sei mit dir” (Loretz 1990:71).

<sup>228</sup>I will here offer my own rough translation of this transcription, based on the transliteration that Meshel offers and based on the consensus of the translations of texts similar to this, mentioned above:

(They) will lengthen da(y)s and dwell re[fuge . . . g]ive to [Y]HWH [of] Teman  
 and to [his] Asherah  
 [. . .] May YHWH of Te[man and his Asherah] cause to be good

This text has also been discussed in sec. 1.2.2.4 on Baal/Kuntillet ‘Ajrud. At that point, Keel and Uehlinger’s presentation of the text was given and discussed. I will not attempt to make a comparison between Meshel’s different transcriptions of this inscription.



1978 transcription, seemingly of the same text. Here is Meshel's older transcription (as Keel and Uehlinger present it) and Keel and Uehlinger's translation:

W. 1    Z. 1'    . . .]brk (oder ʾrk??).ymm.wyšb<sup>c</sup>w[...  
           Z. 2'    . . .]hytb.yhwh[. . .  
           Z. ?    . . .[ytnw.l[ . . . ]ʾšrt[h . . .<sup>229</sup>

          Z. 1'    „. . .] Gesegnet (bzw. lang??,  
                   und sie sollen reich gemacht werden? [. . .  
           Z. 2'    . . .] Jahwe wird Gutes tun [. . .  
           Z. ?    . . .] sie mögen geben [. . . seiner?] Aschera . . . “  
                   ( Keel and Uehlinger 1993:276-7)

Meshel's 1992 *Anchor Bible Dictionary* rendition includes a bit more than Keel and Uehlinger's quote of Meshel's 1978 version.

This is discussed in a recent article by Tilde Binger (1995). Binger explains (1995:12-13) that the difficulties with this inscription lie in the fact that the fragments are sufficiently confused for there to be no general consensus as to exactly how they fit together or how to read the pieces we have. Judging from Binger's description, Meshel seems quite bold here in the way that he has put it together, in either case. S. Aḥitur suggests that this has not had proper publication; the publication that has been produced is

lacking in the most important details. Only a photograph of a small portion of this text has been published. I am not actually able to do very much with it in its importance (Aḥitur 1992:158).<sup>230</sup>

#### 2.2.2.1.2. Khirbet el-Qom

We need to consider an inscription from another archaeological site in the light of the current discussion, that of Khirbet el-Qom. According to John Gearty's article in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992:98), excavation of this site began in 1970 by Dever and continued in 1971 by himself. These excavations were triggered when the discovery of some artefacts, which were being sold in 1967 in the market, were traced back to the Khirbet el-Qom. Khirbet el-Qom is located in the Shephelah, "12 km. west of Hebron (grid ref. 1465-1045)" (Hadley 1989:121). From their excavations, a fairly long and sustained occupation seemed to have been established on the site. Holladay and Gearty make this observation of its earliest occupation:

<sup>229</sup> The first bracket of this line is turned this direction in Keel and Uehlinger's text. This inscription was also mentioned in sec. 1.2.2.4.

<sup>230</sup> This has been kindly translated for me by Professor J. W. Rogerson.



Kh. el-Kôm's significance in the EB II-IV has yet to be worked out. However, during the Iron Age II, probably beginning already in the late 10th/early 9th century (Holladay 1970:176-77 [sic]),<sup>231</sup> the strongly fortified site probably formed part of the overall defensive network guarding the approaches to Hebron and then to Jerusalem (Holladay and Gearty 1992:97).

Found at these excavations was a tomb inscription that Keel and Uehlinger date from the 8th century (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:270). Hadley suggests that most of the debate regarding this inscription lies in the fact that it is difficult to read. Even so, both Keel and Uehlinger, and Hadley agree on the transcription, short of the last line. Keel and Uehlinger have included Hadley's drawing of the inscription in their compendium of illustrations in *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole* (1993:269, Abb. 236). Here is Hadley's rendition of the transcription and translation:

ʔryhw.h<sup>c</sup>šr.ktbh  
brk.ʔryhw.lyhwh  
wmsryh ʔšrth hwš<sup>c</sup>lh  
ʔnyhw  
ʔšrth  
wʔ??rth

Uriyahu the rich wrote it.  
Blessed be Uriyahu by Yahweh [sic]  
for from his enemies by his (YHWH's) asherah he (YHWH)  
has saved him.\*  
by Oniyahu  
by his asherah  
and by his asherah

\*Alternatively, if we consider *lyhwh* and *ʔšrth* a compound linguistic stereotype (see below), this line would read "(and) by his asherah, for from his enemies he has saved him" (Hadley 1989:122-3, cf. Keel and Uehlinger 1993:270-1).

Keel and Uehlinger's transcription has supplied a š in the 6th line to complete the word *asherah*. The first four lines sprawl across the piece of wall or pillar that had been extracted, as Hadley has said, "illegally" (Hadley 1989:121). Incised (note Zevit 1984:45) below these lines of inscription is an inverted hand.<sup>232</sup> It is somewhat misshapen with the thumb being pointed (rather than rounded) and smaller than expected in proportion to the fingers. The significance of the hand has not been decided, though Hadley offers some suggestions in her discussion (Hadley 1989:139-

<sup>231</sup> I found this reference in 1971 *IEJ* News and Notes p. 175-177 and not the 1970 volume.

<sup>232</sup> From looking at Zevit's (1984) photograph on p. 45 I would like to suggest that the hand was an impression rather than an incision. But having only a photograph to go by gives me no grounds to make this as a definite affirmation. In a private conversation, Professor A. Millard assured me that it was an incision and not an impression.



141). Below the hand and in the left hand lower corner are the last two lines, 5 and 6. They look as if they have been squeezed into the corner. It is no wonder that these two lines present a problem for deciphering.

Binger (1995) has offered an alternative to Hadley, and Keel and Uehlinger's readings. Binger suggests that line three might be called "a Rorschach test of scholars' views on Israelite religion" and that this line in particular "looks like doodles made by an illiterate attempting to imitate writing" (Binger 1995:4). After suggesting some possible reconstructions of the "doodles", Binger offers this translation (with all the consensus transliterations in notes):

Uryahu, <qualification of Uryahu>, his writing (inscription)  
 Blessed be Uryahu by Yahweh  
 his light, by Ashera, she who holds her hand over him  
 by his rpy, who . . .

(Binger 1995:5).

Binger has offered notes for lines 2, 3 and 4 with possible alternative readings, but they do not essentially alter the vocabulary chosen, only different syntax for the words chosen for translation. As one can see from the first transcription taken from Ziony Zevit's "authograph" [sic] published in 1984 (Binger 1995:4-5; cf. 4 n.5),<sup>233</sup> Binger has considered many more letters as questionable than are marked in Hadley's inscription (noted above). Binger reminds us that the inscription is very difficult to read and decipher as some letters seem to be duplicated or overwritten. In Binger's proposed transcription (reconstructing the missing letters) and translation (using that reconstruction) lines 1 and 2 have little notable difference with the consensus that Hadley's transliteration and translation represent. However, when Binger deals with line 3, much is left for discussion. Beginning with the first word, Binger reconstructs *wh<sup>3</sup>wryh* where Hadley has *wmsryh*. From this Binger reads "his light" dependent on the root *ʿwr* ( אָר ) for "light", and Hadley reads, "his enemies", dependent on the root *šr* ( שָׂר ) for "show hostility toward" (BDB p. 865). Richard Hess offers "Mašaryahu" (for this first word), suggesting at this point in the inscription a parallel with the name "Uriyahu". This is his "solution ... without textual emendation" (Hess 1992:32) for the word *wmsryh*.

The second distinction in Binger's transcription is the lack of a suffix on *l'šrth* ( לְאִשְׁרֵתָהּ ). Binger, at this point, makes the statement, "Here it should only be mentioned, that unless one wants to read several letters on top of each other, thus

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<sup>233</sup> Binger explains that she has not seen the stone itself, but has been able to use only Zevit's authograph and others' observations (Binger 1995:4 n.5).



mingling this word with the next, then it is highly improbable that the word has a final *He*” (Binger 1995:8). The third and final word in this line Binger transcribes the same as Hadley but offers an alternative translation based on the root  $\text{š}^{\text{c}}l$  (  $\text{שׁעַל}$  ) meaning “‘a handful’ or the open hand including what can be held in it” (Binger 1995:8). Using this as a translation conveniently gives an explanation of the hand incised on the chunk of pillar in question.

No matter which of the above possibilities one chooses, we must be dealing with a qualification of  $\text{ʔšrt}$ . She is someone who protects Uryahu. This reading could then explain the open hand that is depicted on the stone. It has previously been read as a symbol for Ashera in her function as a protective goddess (Binger 1995:9).

The fourth line also presents Binger with the opportunity to give us a novel transcription and translation. *lʔnyhw* is how Hadley (1989:122, line 4) has transcribed this line. By suggesting some alternatives to the  $\text{N}$  and  $\text{J}$ , Binger renders this word *lrpyh* understanding it to refer to the Rephaim (Binger 1995:9), giving it a nice tie-in to the nature of the inscription, being found in a tomb. The Rephaim were associated with the cult of the dead and funerary rites.<sup>234</sup>

The reasons for which this inscription are of interest parallel the inscriptions from Kuntillet ʿAjrud. One difference here from the above inscriptions is the lack of a place name (Samaria and Teman as mentioned in the ʿAjrud inscriptions). We have rather a testimony that YHWH and his *asherah* have saved Uriyahu from his enemies or “harassers”, as both Keel and Uehlinger, and Hadley translate *wmsryh* (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:270-1; Hadley 1989:122-3). Keel and Uehlinger make the point that Samaria does not need to be mentioned, “da Jahwe nun nur noch Nationalgott eines einzigen Staates war” (Keel and Uehlinger 1992:217-2).

The great controversy raised by these inscriptions rests on the phrase, “YHWH of Teman/Samaria and his asherah”, from the ʿAjrud inscription, and the close connection of YHWH and asherah in the blessing from Khirbet el-Qom. What does this mean and what implications does it have for an understanding of the cults of asherah and YHWH during the 9th-8th centuries BCE and even later?

One of the important and seemingly obvious observations is that there is a close association between YHWH and *asherah*. This YHWH, it is assumed by most

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<sup>234</sup> This seems to be a common understanding as noted by most encyclopaedias, including *Encyclopedia Judaica* (cf. Sperling 1972:79). Pope 1981 has a fairly extensive discussion of the cult of the dead and funerary rites from Ugaritic.



scholars, is the deity of the Hebrews worshipped in both Judah (the Southern Kingdom) and Israel (the Northern Kingdom). But why does this inscription use the phrase “YHWH of Samaria”? Meshel’s reconstruction of the text to include the name of an Israelite king is attractive here. However, it is hard to put much weight in it, because the nature of his reconstruction seems tenuous.

The other designation, “YHWH of Teman”,<sup>235</sup> is even more difficult to work out. Teman is in Edom, a neighbouring country to Judah, the southern kingdom. Hadley carries some discussion about where and what Teman might be, such as a city or a region of Edom (Hadley 1989:168-171). There is not, as far as I know, a particular god definitely identified with Edom, such as Milcom being Ammon’s god, or Chemosh being the god of Moab. Possibly, *qws/Quas* is Edom’s god, but little evidence exists regarding *qws/Quas*.<sup>236</sup> It may be possible that Moab worshipped YHWH, and “YHWH of Teman” may be evidence to that effect. Hadley wants to suggest that YHWH may even be a local god of Teman (Hadley 1989:149). Or, as Hadley has suggested, this inscription may be simply a traveller’s blessing; in her words:

. . . whether there was a specific southern cult here during this period with its own priests . . ., or whether the blessing of Yahweh of Teman was simply seen to be propitious for travellers through the southern region, it is reasonable to conclude from the ‘Ajrud inscriptions that wayfarers invoked Yahweh’s special protection for

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<sup>235</sup> Note that one of Job’s friends is from Teman (Eliphaz the Temanite, Job 22:1), possibly so is Job himself. Also note Habakkuk 3:3ff..

<sup>236</sup> Cf. John R. Bartlett 1989. Chapter 11 is a discussion of the religion of Edom. He makes this statement at the beginning of this chapter,

It is always difficult to describe the place and importance of religion in a society, particularly when that society belongs to the distant past. It is never easy to present accurately the religious practices and beliefs of a society, even with the help of extant historical records, for the written record does not always manage to convey the depths of inner commitment and devotion shared by the faithful. It is practically impossible to give an adequate account of the religion of a people who have left no literature and for whom the architectural and artefactual evidence is hitherto so limited. It is almost inevitable that any attempt to portray Edom’s religion will draw on assumed ancient near eastern common religious heritage; on present evidence, for example, it is hard to say how Edom’s religion may have differed very much from that of her neighbours in north-west Arabia, Transjordan, or even in Israel and Judah. In fact, Edom’s religion may not have differed very much from that of Israel and Judah, for various Old Testament texts present Edom and Seir as the homeland of Israel’s god Yahweh, and Doeg the Edomite as worshipping at a Yahwistic shrine. The point is perhaps strengthened by the fact that the biblical writers neither condemn the Edomite god or gods nor identify him or them by any proper name, though they name and strongly condemn Milchom and Chemosh, the gods of the Ammonites and Moabites respectively (Bartlett 1989:187).



their journey as they travelled through this potentially hostile region (Hadley, 1989:170).

#### 2.2.2.1.3. Asherah Who?

Another question to ask is, “Who or what is *asherah*?” First let us look at the form of the word אֲשֶׁרֶתְהָ. One explanation proceeds in this manner: Asherah is a feminine word and when a pronominal suffix is attached to a word with a feminine ending ( הַ of אֲשֶׁרֶתְהָ), the הַ becomes a הָ in the construct form (Kautsch 1985:277 § 95b). The final הַ (of אֲשֶׁרֶתְהָ) is then identified by most scholars, as well as by the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Clines 1993:436), as a 3ms pronominal suffix. This would render a translation, “his asherah”.<sup>237</sup>

This pronominal suffix presents a problem only if *asherah* is understood to be the name of a goddess. On the grounds that this is the name of a goddess, the suggestion has been made that this goddess is the consort of YHWH. This makes sense to some (cf. Olyan 1988: xiv)<sup>238</sup> based on the grounds that in Ugarit Asherah is the consort of the chief god, El, and so if she were to be worshipped in Israel or Judah, then it would follow that she would be the consort of the chief god, YHWH. However, there is no occurrence elsewhere in Hebrew, where a pronominal suffix is attached to a name (Dever 1984:22; Zevit 1984:25; Day 1992:484; Dearman 1992:79-80; Gibson 1994:34;<sup>239</sup> Hadley 1994:5; Hess 1996:216-17). And so, as reasonable as this logic may seem, the lack of evidence of a pronominal suffix attached to a name in Hebrew (cf. Hess 1992)<sup>240</sup> would militate against “YHWH and his asherah” meaning “YHWH and his consort, the goddess”. However, Binger (1995) challenges this by putting the typical grammatical rules aside. Binger presents the argument this way:

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<sup>237</sup> GKC has this “holem he” ( הַ ) listed under “rare or incorrect forms” for 3ms (GKC 256 § 91e li 9ff). Bruce Waltke and M. O’Connor (1990:302) simply list the “holem he” as a possible 3ms suffix without further comment. Professor Rogerson identifies it as an ancient form (private correspondence).

<sup>238</sup> Olyan’s thesis is that Asherah was El’s consort and not Baal’s and by transfer then into the Hebrew religion Asherah was YHWH’s consort.

<sup>239</sup> Gibson makes note regarding the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscription;

Finally, it should be noted that no proper names, place, divine or personal take a suff. in Hebr.; this suggests that in the above inscr. from Kuntillet Ajrud אֲשֶׁרֶתְהָ cannot mean *his* (Y.’s) *Ashera*, i.e. his consort, but *his* (or better, *its*, i.e. Samaria’s) *sacred place, pole*, cf. Is. 10. 11, Am. 8. 14 (Gibson 1994:34).

<sup>240</sup> Hess offers this comment regarding the grammar of Hebrew, “No one denies that exceptions to any grammatical rule can appear, but the best interpretation should be the one which follows the conventions of the language in which the text is written with a minimum of departures” (Hess 1992:24). He continues, “The absence of pronominal suffixes on personal names is a distinctive feature of Classical Hebrew grammar” (Hess 1992:25).



As argued above,<sup>241</sup> nothing apart from “old” grammatical insights into the grammar of classical Hebrew, and possibly the personal piety of the individual scholar, prevents one from reading the final *h* in <sup>ʾ</sup>*šrth* as anything but a suffix on a personal name. This would indubitably connect <sup>ʾ</sup>*šrt* [sic] to Yahweh. This explanation seems to be the one that covers most of the occurrences of the final *h*, and this is valid even when one understands <sup>ʾ</sup>*šrt* as a goddess, and not a thing. The only question left is then, who was Asherah? (Binger 1995:16)

Binger cites Julius Wellhausen and Tryggve Mettinger as scholars who have identified names with suffixes. Wellhausen’s ideas depend on a reconstruction of Hosea 14:9 to give us, “I am his Anat and his Ashera” (Wellhausen 1963:134;<sup>242</sup> Binger 1995:15; Weinfeld 1984:122). Binger cites Mettinger as using the Mesha-stela as witness that the tetragrammaton may rather be *yhw* with a suffixed *h* than *YHWH*, a name in itself (cf. Binger 1995:15; Mettinger 1982:127 n.70).<sup>243</sup> So, though it goes against the stream of most scholars to say that a name can not take a pronominal suffix, Binger seems satisfied that there is enough possibility in this to rest the case on this evidence to confirm that the Kuntillet ʿAjrud and Khirbet el-Qom material speaks specifically of a goddess Asherah. Binger ends her article, “Thus we may conclude, that the goddess Asherah was a goddess who in the 8th and 7th century BCE was seen as part of the officially acceptable Yahwism that was dominant in both Israel and Juda [sic] at that time” (Binger 1995:18).

There is yet another option based on how to read <sup>ʾ</sup>*šrth*. Zevit has suggested that this is the name of the goddess with a double feminization to read Asherata. First proposed by Zevit in 1984, this has recently been revived by Hess (1992). In response to Zevit’s suggestion, Saul M. Olyan strongly cautions against using this “unattested” form of a

<sup>241</sup> The argument “above” refers to the suggestion that the final *h* ה on YHWH is a “*h* locale” or even a possessive; cf. Binger 1995:15-16.

<sup>242</sup> Wellhausen’s commentary for Hosea 14:9 reads; “Für עִיִּי וְאֲשֻׁרָנוּ לוֹ; für וְאֲשֻׁרָנוּ לִי möglicher Weise וְאֲשֻׁרָתוֹ וְעִיִּתוֹ. Dass der Prophet die Anath, eine Göttin, und die Aschera, einen heiligen Pfahl, auf gleiche Linie stellt, fällt nicht auf; nennt er doch auch die Bilder Jahves Baale, und sind doch עֲצָבִים (labores) eigentlich weiter nichts als Kunstwerke” (1963:134). W.H. Wolff says of Wellhausen’s reconstruction, “Allzu kühn schlug Wellhausen vor: עִיִּי וְאֲשֻׁרָתוֹ ‘(ich bin) seine Anat und seine Ascherah’ (dazu Sellin: ‘mehr geistvoll als richtig’)” (Wolff 1965:302).

<sup>243</sup> The citation that Binger seems to be using here is in the midst of a note to a discussion as to whether YHWH is a “causative stem + an object, with a noun clause, or with a noun + appositive” (Mettinger 1982:127). Mettinger remarks that “the Moabite stone lines 17-18, is to be analyzed as יהוה + suffix as is demonstrated by line 12. In recent research the lengthening in יהוה is placed in the deuteronomic era” (1982:127 n. 70). There is, however, as Professor Rogerson has pointed out to me, only one occurrence of YHWH in the Mesha inscription and this is preceded by a small lacuna; surely a fragile basis for constructing a theory.



“common word/name in Biblical Hebrew and other Canaanite dialects” (Olyan 1988:25). Hess, however, points out that Hebrew is prone to using parallelism. He offers, “I bless you to Yahweh of Samaria and to Asherata” (Hess 1992:29), for the ‘Ajrud inscription. Hess suggests that this would fit the grammar for both the ‘Ajrud and the el-Qom inscriptions (Hess 1992:29, 33) Speaking of the el-Qom inscription he states,

As at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, the possibility exists of translating *Pšrth* as asherah/Asherah followed by a pronomal [sic] suffix. However, once again the word appears in parallel with the deity, Yahweh. Thus one would expect another deity to be named, rather than a cult object (Hess 1992:33).

This then maintains Asherah/Asherata as a goddess and eliminates the problem of having to explain a pronominal suffix attached to a Hebrew name. Hess has continued investigation of the possible spelling of this divine name as Asherata in the article written in 1996. He appeals to “two names from pharaoh Shishak’s list” that end in a *ta* suffix (1996:217) having made the point that “orthography in the eighth and seventh centuries can indicate final *-a* vowels by means of a *h*” (1996:217). Regarding the Egyptian names, he then makes the remark:

The latter example [the two names from pharaoh Shishak’s list] is geographically near to the sites of Khirbet el Qom and Kuntillet Ajrud. Both names demonstrate the preservation of a final *-ta* on a feminine form. Thus a final *-a* continued to be used into the first millennium B.C. Its preservation on a divine name such as Asherata would not have been unusual. Nor would its Hebrew orthographic form with a final *-h* have been unexpected (Hess 1996:217).

This suggestion would then leave us with the divine name spelled אֲשֶׁר־תָּהָא which fits Hess’ previous suggestion that the el-Qom and ‘Ajrud inscriptions would be translated, “YHWH and Asherata”, the goddess.

But, if not the goddess, then what alternative proposals have been made? The alternatives come in a range of possibilities: that this is some symbol of the goddess, Asherah (Day 1992:484; Smith 1987:335); or a symbol of the cult that worshipped an *asherah* (Dearman 1992:80; Hadley 1989:252; 1994:6, 8; Smith 1987:334; 1990: xxvi; Maier 1986:171); or that the meaning is too obscure to make a guess (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:263; cf. Smith 1990:88).<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Mark Smith wants to make an appeal to the biblical record as a source to help with interpreting these texts.



This idea of a “cult symbol” seems to be closely tied to an understanding of *asherah* of the Hebrew scriptures. A discussion of *asherah* of the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts does not belong here in this section, but suffice it to say at this point, that most scholars appeal to the Hebrew scriptures for descriptions of what this cult symbol might be and then apply that understanding to the iconography that archaeology presents.

#### 2.2.2.2. Iconography

Wiggins (1993) begins a section on the iconography of Asherah with this statement:

A note must be included on the issue of the iconography of Athirat. In this study I limit myself to the textual resources concerning Athirat. The reason for not exploring the iconography stems from two basic considerations. The first is the uncertainty involved in iconographic representations of goddesses. No female figurine or relief has come to light which has been explicitly identified by an inscription to be Athirat . . . (Wiggins 1993:19).

In other words, there is no iconographic artefact that is labeled “Asherah”. There are, however, several artefacts that have been associated with Asherah by virtue of inscriptions that include the name “Asherah” or something assumed to be a form of her name or an epithet. Wiggins follows the quotation above with his second point, that the description of Asherah’s supposed iconography is already discussed by many. It is those discussions which will be engaged in this section. Consideration will be given to some artefacts that have received attention in relation to the iconography for Asherah. First, we will return to Pithos A from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud as described by Keel and Uehlinger, and Hadley.

##### 2.2.2.2.1. Kuntillet ‘Ajrud

The drawings (Bes figures) and inscriptions of Pithos A from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, that have already been mentioned, were inscribed on the pottery after the vessel was broken. The drawings on the reverse (from inspection of figures presented by Hadley 1989: Fig. 5; Keel and Uehlinger 1993:239 Abb. 219) are squarely set on what has been left of the vessel and from this observation I would assume that they were original to the vessel. These drawings have generated much discussion. A “stylised tree” (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:263; Hadley 1989:200) flanked by gazelles is set above a “striding lion” (Hadley 1989:200, 252). Parts of other animals remain on what was the shoulder of the vessel. They include a horse, boar, lion and gazelle. Keel and Uehlinger mention that the tree is decorated with lotus blossoms. The gazelles seem to be eating the blossoms with their front legs off the ground braced against the bottom branches. The interpretation of this drawing has been based on an understanding that each of the



elements in the drawing has a symbolic significance. Lotus blossoms, gazelles, trees, and lions all are identified as having divine attributes.

#### 2.2.2.2.2. Tanaach

There are also two cultic stands from Taanach that we include here in this discussion. A.E. Glock identifies Taanach as, “A Canaanite royal town founded ca. 2700 B.C., usually identified with Tell Ti<sup>c</sup>innik (M.R. 171214), a pear-shaped mound 320 m N-S, 137 m E-W at its widest. (sic) Strategically located in the upper Cenomanian-Turonian foothills ca. 150 m above the Plain of Jezreel” (Glock 1992:287). The first stand, described as being 90 cm high and in 36 fragments (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:175), was found by Sellin in the early 1900’s. Keel and Uehlinger describe this tenth century stand as having five zones (Glock 1992:290; cf. Maier 1986:168) or levels of alternating animals presented in pairs (the pairs being on the left and right sides of the stand on the same level; cf. Hadley 1989: fig. 14; Keel and Uehlinger 1993:177 Abb. 182a). Each level of pairs alternates between winged sphinxes and lions. The heads of the animals face full forward to the front of the stand and the bodies of each freely form the outside of the stand (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:175). The forms of the animals’ bodies and faces seem to be free form as against made in a mould. The arrangement of the animals one upon another as viewed from the side also seems casual.

Keel and Uehlinger point out, on the bottom register of the stand between the sphinx’s faces, a palm tree flanked by two gazelles (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:175-6; 177 Abb. 182b). To my eye the gazelles, once again, seem to be eating the top branches with their front feet braced against the lower branches. Keel and Uehlinger also point out a youth handling a snake on the right side of the stand between the middle registers of animals (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:176; 177 Abb. 182c).

The second cult stand, unearthed by Lapp’s team in 1968, was found in a cistern (Hadley 1989:253). Walter Maier suggests that the fragments of this stand were found in “a tenth century B.C. silt layer of a collapsed cistern” (Maier 1986:168). It is 60 cm high with four panels (Glock 1992:290). From inspection of the drawings and photos presented (Hadley 1989: fig. 13; Keel and Uehlinger 1993:179 Abb. 184; Glock 1992:289), the designs and animals seem to be quite symmetrical, in contrast to the first stand found by Sellin. Each register is quite distinct from the register above and below. Again, the bodies of the animals form the sides of the stand and the faces of the animals are full to the front.



The bottom register has a naked female in the centre touching or holding the ears of the lions that flank her, “with each of her hands resting on the heads of the lions (or lionesses) flanking her”, as Mark S. Smith says (1990:19). The second register from the bottom has two winged sphinxes with Hathor head-dresses (Hadley 1989:217) flanking a hole. Hadley points out that, “It appears that the edges of the clay around the hole have been smoothed, and so it may be that a hole was intended to be in this position, with no other symbol” (Hadley 1989:217). The third register again has flanking lions, and in the centre between their heads is a “stylised” tree (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:177-8). The tree is again flanked by gazelles that seem to be eating the top branches with their forelegs balanced against the lower branches. The top register has caused some discussion. An animal supports a “winged sun disk” says Glock; furthermore, he identifies the animal in the middle of the front as a “bovine form” (Glock 1992:290). Hadley appeals to J. Glen Taylor’s (1988: 561-63)<sup>245</sup> description that the animal is actually a horse (Hadley 1989:219). The animals or forms that make up the sides of this tier are indistinct and difficult to identify, nor do they enter the discussions that I have read. The very top of the stand seems to have been flat with a raised edge. The stand is hollow, and as for this stand and the previous stand described, it is generally agreed that they were incense altars rather than ovens or altars for animal sacrifice.

#### 2.2.2.2.3. Symbolic Elements

The interpretations of these drawings and sculptured articles have been based on an understanding that each of their elements has a symbolic significance. Lions, gazelles, sphinxes, naked female figurines, head-dresses, and trees are all identified as significant and having divine or royal attributes. We will briefly treat some of these elements here. They are featured on scarabs, seals, amulets and various pottery or clay vessels.

##### 2.2.2.2.3.1. Lions

Keel and Uehlinger (1993:24; 37) mention that as early as the 12th Dynasty of Egypt lions had magical or apotropaic functions. They are majestic creatures and most often shown in a victorious stance when combined with other animals. Lions are pictured with gazelles, nursing cows, naked female figures, branches, trees and vultures. In the second Taanach stand previously mentioned lions are mixed with sphinxes, which may very well be understood to have lion’s bodies and the face of a man or god. Lions are

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<sup>245</sup> Taylor explains that he has had “two experts in animal biology” examine the animal. One of these experts is a Professor of Zoology, the other is a Professor in a Veterinary College. Both Hadley and Taylor make the suggestion that the top tier represents YHWH based on the equine factor and II Kings 23:11 regarding the “horses of the sun” (Hadley 1989:219-20; Taylor 1988:564-5).



shown in domination over humans as well as animals. Keel and Uehlinger suggest; when a lion is being threatened (by, say, an archer) that the lion is to be taken, “wohl als Metapher für die feindlichen Fremdvölker” (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:92). Lions paired with naked female figurines have often been understood as support to the females represented. In most cases, the female figurine is thought to represent a goddess. I.E.S. Edwards mentions “a class of sculpture in which the dominant feature is a goddess standing on a lion” (Edwards 1955:49). Some of these sculptures name the goddess Qudshu, which seems to be mostly of Egyptian origin (Edwards 1955:49; Beck 1994:368). Keel and Uehlinger want to associate the lion with the “Herrin der Löwen”<sup>246</sup> as they call her; or alternatively with, possibly in addition to, “Herrin der Tiere”. They suggest that “Herrin der Tiere” had influence on the iconography as late as the Davidic monarchy (Iron Age II A; Keel and Uehlinger 1993:160), which “phönizischem Einfluß verdankt” (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:160). They explain that the lion is a main theme in her iconography. And Maier wants to associate lions with Asherah among others, saying,

The Lion Lady is best identified with a war goddess and Milik understands her to be either <sup>c</sup>Astart or <sup>c</sup>Anat, while Cross holds that labi<sup>ʾ</sup>t(u) was an old epithet of <sup>ʾ</sup>Ašerah. . . . Yet the goddess having the strongest links with lions in Syria-Palestine was <sup>ʾ</sup>Asherah/<sup>ʾ</sup>Elat/Qudšu (Maier 1986:167).

Many scholars associate the lions and the nude female of the bottom tier of the larger cultic stand from Taanach with Asherah (Hadley 1989:218). Smith puts the argument this way:

The bottom level depicts a naked figure with each of her hands resting on the heads of lions (or lionesses) flanking her. This figure could be Anat, Asherah, or Astarte, but the attestation of Asherah’s cult in this period and her iconography with the lion in Egypt might favor the identification of the female figure here with her (Smith 1990:19).

#### 2.2.2.2.3.2. Caprids

These animals include antelope, gazelle, deer, steinbock, wild goats and sheep, according to Keel and Uehlinger’s index. They are found in much the same sorts of situation as the lions and often in combination with the lion. Their history goes equally as far back in Egypt, where they may well have been a symbol of regeneration (Keel

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<sup>246</sup> Knudtzon comments on a name in two letters from Amarna (EA 273 and 274). The name is transliterated *bêlit-Ur.Mah.meš*; “Demnach würde der Name der Frau ‘Herrin (Besitzerin) von Löwen’ bedeuten” (Knudtzon 1964:839 n.e). Hess suggests that she may have been a “female leader of a (Jordan Valley or Transjordan?) place and author of Amarna letters 273 and 274” (Hess, private correspondence).



and Uehlinger 1993:53). When the caprid is pictured with the lion, often the lion is in a dominant stance over and above the deer or actually attacking it. On Egyptian scarabs, they quite often seem to be associated with branches or twigs, and therefore with prosperity or fertility. On occasion caprids are shown suckling young. In such cases, they are paired with scorpions or trees. Keel and Uehlinger call them “Muttertiere” (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:142). In Iron Age II B there are scarabs with a single deer and a human figure (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:170ff.). These seem to be fairly simple representations and no gender can be identified for the human figures. Keel and Uehlinger have also dedicated a section of their discussions to one whom they call “Herr der Capride” (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:206). In the amulets that they include here, a male figure holds one or two deer by the horns or by the back legs suspended upside down. A couple of these also include representations of trees. Keel and Uehlinger cite Erik Hornung and Elisabeth Staehelin (1976) as saying that the caprids are often associated with vitality and victory over the underworld. Keel and Uehlinger make a response to this by saying,

In Vorderasien mögen allerdings andere Vorstellungen im Vordergrund gestanden haben. Wildschafe, Wildziegen, Steinböcke, Gazellen und Hirsche gehören hier zur Sphäre der Göttin. Liegende Capriden mit geradeaus gerichtetem oder rückwärts gewendetem Kopf erscheinen auf altsyrischen Rollsiegeln oft im Umfeld der Göttin (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:22).

Even so, here again we see the association with a goddess. The caprids are often found flanking a tree (a stylised or sacred tree, so Keel and Uehlinger 1993:62, 142, etc.; or a palm tree 1993:64, 80, etc.). On many occasions deer are pictured with their faces in the tree or even eating it (cf. Keel and Uehlinger 1993:63 Abb. 52-53, 143 Abb. 154, 171 Abb. 177a-c, etc.) Keel and Uehlinger are quite convinced of the connection between caprids and a goddess, “deren Darstellung eines von Capriden flankierten stilisierten Baumes klar auf die Göttin zu beziehen war” (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:244).<sup>247</sup> Their many citations also mention a connection with Qudshu (cf. Keel and Uehlinger 1993:144, 317). On occasion they have made this association by virtue of the caprid’s pairing with trees and/or lions (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:244). As late as Israel’s Assyrian vassalship caprids may also have had astral connections (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:368).

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<sup>247</sup> Keel and Uehlinger cite Hestrin (1987) and the Taanach cultic stands as pieces of evidence for this statement.



### 2.2.2.2.3.3. Trees

Trees, twigs and branches are well represented in the iconography of scarabs, amulets and pottery. The representations of twigs or branches are found on scarabs as early as the Middle Bronze Age II B (2000-1750 BCE according to Keel and Uehlinger 1993:21 ff.). These seem to be quite simple combinations of an animal or a naked figure (usually feminine) with a branch or twig or two. The animals include caprids, lions, and a griffin. These branches in the line drawings presented by Keel and Uehlinger (1993:21 ff.) are a single line with several shorter lines set either perpendicular or slightly at an angle from true perpendicular. These shorter lines could represent leaves or branches and number anywhere from six to twenty-five. When these are paired with a naked feminine figurine, usually flanking the figure, Keel and Uehlinger call her “*Zweig Göttin*”, a branch goddess (1993: 30, 44, 61 etc.; Schroer 1987; Hadley 1989:231). But, when this sort of representation or a slightly more elaborate form takes a dominant position and is flanked by worshippers, humanoid or zoomorphic, it is assumed to be a tree, and is called by most scholars a “stylised tree” or sometimes a “sacred tree”. Ruth Hestrin quotes E.D. van Buren, to say,

that “a tree may be defined as ‘sacred’ when it is set upon a base or elevation or placed in a position of prominence, even if it does not actually form the central motif of the composition. Two human beings, animals or birds are often placed on each side of the tree” (1987:214).<sup>248</sup>

The animals that are pictured with these trees include: caprids, with and without suckling young; lions; birds, vultures, griffins and doves; bulls, steer and cows with or without suckling young; horses; a rabbit; and scorpions. There are a few instances where cherubim or sphinxes are part of the entourage. On occasion, a figure, human or winged, appears alongside the tree holding a caprid suspended by the horns or by a back leg upside down. On Pithos A at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud the tree has blossoms. Keel and Uehlinger (1993:239 Abb. 219) call them lotus blossoms, and in a couple of places where a blossom appears at the edge of a broken sherd, they assume a tree in the void (e.g. 1993:298-9 cf. Abb. 262b). Lotus blossoms in Egyptian iconography are understood as symbols of regeneration. This form of the tree seems to be fairly unusual and a simple “stick figure” or a stylised palm seems to be more common.

Most animals and the humanoid figures that flank the trees face the tree. This certainly seems to indicate that they are giving it attention, if not actually adoring or worshipping it. In those cases where humanoid figures face the tree, their arms may well be raised,

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<sup>248</sup> This has not been available to look at it for myself. It is: E.D. Van Buren, *Symbols of the Gods in Mesopotamian Art*. (Rome; 1945) 22, as cited by Hestrin.



possibly as an act of worship. On several occasions the caprids that flank the trees seem to be either climbing them with their forelegs in the tree and noses in the top of the tree or even to be eating the top branches. From Akko there is a seal that is dated from the Babylonian period (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:435, cf. p. 436 Abb. 362), that includes a sundisk with the tree and caprids. Keel and Uehlinger describe it thus: “Sie zeigt zwei Capriden, die einen stilisierten Palmettbaum flankieren, der auf einer bergähnlichen Erhöhung steht; überwölbt wird die Konstellation von der Flügelsonne” (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:435).<sup>249</sup>

An association with the tree, that seems to be fairly common, is one of fertility or fruitfulness. Moshe Weinfeld makes the comment, “The tree, specifically the palm tree, has symbolised fertility since ancient times. The Sumerian Goddess Inanna married Dumuzi (Tamuz) during the date harvest, and she guards the date storehouses” (Weinfeld 1984:128 n.12). And Hestrin notes, in the midst of a discussion on the goddess Hathor, “In Egypt the tree is clearly depicted as a woman providing food and symbolising the source of life” (Hestrin 1987:219). The idea of fruitfulness and fertility in relation to the tree is often alluded to by Keel and Uehlinger in their discussion of trees, twigs, and “*Zweig Göttin*” (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:29ff. § 15, 146ff § 79, etc.) When these symbols are then applied to the goddess for which they stand, then the associations of fertility and fruitfulness and life giving are assumed of the goddess herself.

Both Keel and Uehlinger (1993:80; cf. 83 Abb. 80, 81) and Hestrin (1987) point out two ewers from Lachish that are very similar with one very striking difference. Both sets of ewers have ibexes flanking and facing an object. In the first (Hestrin 1987:213 fig. 1), the schematic drawings include a “stylised tree”. In the second (Hestrin 1987:215-6 figs. 2, 3) the ibexes are drawn somewhat more carefully and flank a triangular shape that itself is decorated with dots.<sup>250</sup> This kind of triangle is often found in the pubic area of naked figurines on amulets or pendants. On occasion the triangle is accompanied by a twig or branch from the area of the bellybutton of the figurine (e.g. Keel and Uehlinger 1993:63 Abb. 49; Hestrin 1987:217). So, both Keel and Uehlinger, and Hestrin have made the assumption that, in the cases of these two ewers from Lachish, the ibexes are flanking a pubic triangle. Keel and Uehlinger, and

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<sup>249</sup> Keel and Uehlinger take it for granted that the seals are Canaanite but relatively few in number and that the Egyptian or egyptianized seals are better and more numerous than the Persian and Babylonian ones (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:435).

<sup>250</sup> This is treated in a bit more detail in two other sections; first, in the section on naked figurines (the next section 2.2.2.2.3.4), and secondly in the section on the Lachish ewer, 2.2.2.2.3.6.



Hestrin have taken it even a step further to say that the triangle itself is used as a representation of a goddess and where we see the substitution of the tree for the triangle on the first of the ewers there can also be an understanding of the tree as a representation of a goddess. The goddesses that are thought to be connected with the tree are Qudshu, Athirat, ʿElat (cf. Hestrin 1987), Inanna, Astarte and pertinent to this section, Asherah.

#### 2.2.2.2.3.4. Naked Feminine Figures

Naked figures are found in many of the differing iconographic forms available. These include: metal, clay, and terracotta figurines, pictures on stone or gem seals (including cylinder seals), and pottery vessels. In metal they are found on amulets or pendants as well as on gold leaf or possibly as bronze leaf objects (cf. Keel and Uehlinger 1993:75 Abb. 69-71). Found in clay they have distinct categories, as described by James Pritchard in 1943 and more recently by Miriam Tadmor (1982). These clay figures are sometimes free standing and often designated as “pillar figurines”. Keel and Uehlinger (1993:226-230) give an extensive coverage of what they call “Pfeilerfigurinen”. They may also be found in high relief on the face of a plaque. According to Tadmor’s discussion (Tadmor 1982), these plaque figures, often called “Astarte plaques”, can be divided into those plaques which include divine attributes with a standing, feminine, naked figure, as against, those in which the naked figure is recumbent on a bed devoid of divine attributes. She has made a cogent argument that the latter are mortuary or funerary artefacts. The archaeological context (e.g. tombs) and the consistency in the form (e.g. elongated arms placed at sides and feet facing forward) of the figures lends great weight to her suggestions.

On scarabs/seals of the Middle Bronze Age IIB, a naked feminine figure with the pubic area (or possibly a pair of underpants) distinctly marked out is often combined with one or two branches or twigs, hence Keel and Uehlinger’s (1993) naming her “*Zweig Göttin*”, or Branch Goddess, a name coined by Silvia Schroer (1987: 201-225).<sup>251</sup> Cylinder seals, also dating back as far as MB IIB picture a naked figurine with divine symbols (cf. Keel and Uehlinger 1993:45 Abb. 30-31). Keel and Uehlinger include a cylinder seal (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:63 Abb. 52) of Late Bronze Age Meggido in which they identify a naked feminine figure among several “divine symbols” to be “die ‘nackte Göttin’” (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:62). However, later, in the Iron Age (the 9th-7th centuries) the iconography on seals inscribed in Hebrew make

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<sup>251</sup> Schroer works very hard to tie the “under every green tree” passages of the Old Testament (Hos 4:13, Jer 2:20, 3:6, Isa 1:29, 57:5, Eze 6:13, 20:28, Dtn 12:2, I Kgs 14:23, II Kgs 16:4 17:10) into the discussion of the “*Zweig Göttin*”, including the nuances of fertility and eroticism that she grants to the “*Zweig Göttin*” (Schroer 1987:215 ff.). In this same section, she also assumes an association of Asherah with this “twig/branch goddess”.



a shift away from anthropomorphic and divine symbols. On these seals, according to Dever, “The favourite themes are scarabeus beetles, uraeus serpents, the tree of life, lions and other animals; human representations are rare on Hebrew seals, and deities are unknown” (Dever 1990:160, cf. Figure 59 p. 161).<sup>252</sup> He suggests in this discussion, that those with “pictorial representations . . . are almost without exception in the Phoenician style” (Dever 1990:160). Most of those Hebrew seals without pictorial motifs fall into a general category called “Hebrew name seals” (cf. Keel and Uehlinger 1993:228).

There is a set of amulets/pendants, mentioned in the previous section on trees, that are of interest here. These amulets/pendants have a face surrounded by a hathor wig, two circles (generally understood to be breasts), a belly button and a triangle (usually decorated with dots). A “twig” may rise from the belly button. Keel and Uehlinger illustrate two from LB Age Megiddo (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:63, Abb. 48, 49). Hestrin presents eight from Ugarit and Minet el-Beida (Hestrin 1987:217, Fig. 4; ).<sup>253</sup> Whether in bronze, gold or electrum the elements of these depictions are fairly consistent. The one element that is variable is that the “twig” is not present in all cases. The point of interest here is the triangle, which is very similar to what is found in the pubic area on many naked figurines of the MB II seals (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:31, Abb. 10-12b). Regarding the “twig” from the navel or the pubic area, Keel and Uehlinger mention, “In diesem Punkt knüpfen die Anhänger der beginnenden SB-Zeit also an die Ikonographie der ‘Zweig Göttin’ der Skarabäen der MB II B an, bei der mit der Scham gelegentlich ein Zweig verbunden ist” (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:61). Tadmor also mentions that one of the plaques which she studied was painted: “The body of the girl is covered with red paint, but for the wig, necklace and the pubic triangle, which are painted in black” (Tadmor 1982:144). Because of these associations the pubic triangle has taken on a significance of its own and is assumed to represent a naked female, or a naked goddess. More will be said about this in the discussion of the Lachish Ewer later.

Keel and Uehlinger treat most of the occurrences of naked feminine figurines as “die ‘nackte Göttin’”. Their index does not treat naked female figurines outside of this category and so assumes a divine aspect to all these figures whether in clay, metal, stone; on amulets, scarabs, cultic stands or otherwise. Tadmor’s article seems to have given evidence of at least one kind of presentation that is not divine and therefore I

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<sup>252</sup> Smith makes reference to the “tree of life,” which recalls the “tree of the asherah” in his discussion on Asherah and the “female personification of Wisdom” (1994b:327).

<sup>253</sup> Cf. Schaffer 1938:322. Hestrin has simply reproduced Claude Schaffer’s fig. 49.



would want to be a bit more circumspect in assuming divinity of all naked feminine figures. Keel and Uehlinger do discuss Tadmor's article, yet continue throughout their book to identify naked female figures as "die 'nackte Göttin'".

There are also a few unusual vessels that are in the shape of naked, perhaps pregnant and certainly full busted females (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:120-21). These may have been vessels for oil as votive offerings or possibly used apotropaically in rituals concerned with a woman's life cycle.

Naked figures are presented with various other elements, some recognised as divine. Those considered divine include: trees, twigs and branches, as already mentioned; blossoms or flowers, possibly lotus; papyrus; caprids, snake, lions (Beck 1994:368), and horses (the last two, on occasion, as pedestals on which the figurine stands or places her feet when seated). The earliest that Keel and Uehlinger present in their compendium, *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole*, with pedestals are in bronze, gold leaf and clay from Akko, Lachish and near Beth Shan (respectively) from the Late Bronze Age (1992:75 Abb. 70-72). Naked feminine figures are also pictured or sculpted with a child or children (sometimes nursing). An unusual and complicated MB Age statuette from Aphek is presented by Keel and Uehlinger (1993:82, p. 85 Abb. 82) with long hair that slightly curls at the tips of the two locks that hang in front. This style is sometimes called a Hathor wig. Keel and Uehlinger mention (1993:82) that her necklace is in an omega (  $\Omega$  ) symbol which "den Mutterschoß evozierende Symbol erinnert" (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:82). Incidentally, the form of this hairstyle mimics the omega symbol itself. Two children each nurse from a breast. The bellybutton is marked. Bracelets hang three on each arm. The figure's hands seem to be holding the inside of each thigh (just beside the pubic area) and caprids (one not too clearly drawn) are carved on her thighs. Keel and Uehlinger suggest that each deer flanks a palm tree on each thigh (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:82). Keel and Uehlinger want to draw correlations between this statuette and the Creatress Goddess of Ugarit, Asherah, based on the mythological literature of that ancient civilisation.

#### 2.2.2.2.3.5. Astarte Plaques

"Astarte plaques" and "Qudshu type figures" are two ways that these female naked figurines have been classified. "Qudshu type" seems to be coined as a title based on the Winchester Stela which cites "Qudshu-Astarte-Anat" in Egyptian hieroglyphs, and others like it, which mention Qudshu. Edwards describes the significance of the Winchester Stela thus:

If it were not for the inscription, nothing would suggest that the goddess was not Qudshu. Her identity is, however, revealed in the



two columns of hieroglyphs painted in black and arranged vertically on each side of her body, which read: . . .<sup>254</sup> “Qudshu-Astarte-Anath,” thus merging into one deity three of the most important goddesses of western Asia (Edwards 1955:50-51).

Tadmor explains the use of the title *Astarte plaques*: “Later research often associated the nude female with fruitfulness and fertility. Once the term ‘Astarte figurines’ had been coined, the identification became popularly known and the divine connotation widely accepted for all types of the clay plaque-figurines of Late Bronze Canaan” (Tadmor 1982:170).<sup>255</sup>

Hairstyle (Hathor wig), nakedness, marked pubic areas, frontal presentation, possibly with hands presenting or held under full breasts, holding flowers, or snakes, standing on a lion or horse, or presence of other divine symbols are all part of the distinguishing characteristics that set these figures apart from any other. These are interpreted to have fertility, sex, sexuality or erotic meanings and therefore are associated with the goddesses that are credited with these qualities, these being Astarte, Anat, Hathor, Qudshu and Asherah (e.g. Dearman 1992:31). However, Tadmor (1982:161, 164) makes a hearty call for caution about the definite identification of these plaques with any particular goddess based on the varieties of possibilities from such a site as Nariyah of the MB Age, where

over twenty female figurines, mostly made of silver, were found, but, surprisingly, no two of them are iconographically identical; each figure is different and the well-known image carved in a stone-mold differs from all the actual figurines found in the temple (Tadmor 1982:164).

We also find the same sort of shift away from divine manifestations with figurines and plaques that was mentioned above concerning pictures on seals. Tadmor points out,

The images of women, standing upright and bearing symbols of Canaanite religion, so common in the Late Bronze Age, are not encountered among the finds of the Early Iron Age, the period of the Judges; they seem to have been discontinued from the era of the Israelite conquest on (Tadmor 1982:171).

She goes on to say in the following discussion that the recumbent figures without divine symbols do continue into the Early Iron Age. Jeffrey Tigay comments in his appendix, titled, “Iconographic Evidence” (1986:91), in general agreement with

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<sup>254</sup> Heiroglyphs in this space.

<sup>255</sup> Unfortunately Tadmor does not indicate who originally “coined” this name for these statues.



Tadmor's conclusions, that goddesses are not represented in Israelite iconography. Keel and Uehlinger also mention the scarcity of "die 'nackte Göttin'" in Israel;

Insgesamt scheint die 'nackte Göttin' im Israel und Juda der EZ II B nur sehr marginal vertreten gewesen zu sein. Besonders gilt dies für die Zeit von ca. 850-753, aus der die für die Paredros bzw. Aschera-Problematik sensiblen Inschriften stammen (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:228).<sup>256</sup>

They re-echo this in a later chapter devoted to Iron Age II C material. They say that the lack of iconographic evidence among Israelite artefacts for this period parallels the literature of the time and adds weight to the feeling that "die 'nackte Göttin'" seems to have had little significance in Judah (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:385).<sup>257</sup>

#### 2.2.2.2.3.6. Lachish Ewer

Another artefact is interesting in light of the preceding discussions; this is called the Lachish Ewer. This 13th century BCE vessel was found in a deposit of rubbish outside the temple in Lachish. It was described as being blackened and broken into several fragments (Hestrin 1987:212). Hadley suggests that the "temple was most likely destroyed during the reign of Ramses III or a little later, probably early to mid 12th century BC" (Hadley 1989:202).<sup>258</sup> On the sherds are both inscriptions and drawings. Beginning from the far left of the drawings, we first have a lion with an odd tail (possibly a flying tail). The head of the lion is facing the broken edge and is missing in part. Behind and facing the lion's tail is a gazelle or antelope with branched antlers and behind this are the feet, fore and aft of an animal. The body of the animal is missing because part of the vessel is missing. At the other edge of the same hole is what Hadley wants to identify as a hoopoe bird (Hadley 1989:206); however I am not convinced. There is not enough of the drawing to lend a clear identification. The next animal is facing what we could call the middle of the vessel and in the opposite direction of the animals already mentioned. This is an antelope or gazelle but with simple (not branched) horns; the next animal appears to be the same. These two are facing each other and flank (facing) a simple tree. The tree is made of three concentric half circles with a line through the middle and extending just a bit above and some below to form a tree. The drawing that Keel and Uehlinger offer for this vessel ends here (Keel and Uehlinger 1993:83 Abb. 81). The drawings that Hestrin (1987:213)

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<sup>256</sup> My thanks to Professor Rogerson for working through some of the rougher parts of this German text.

<sup>257</sup> But there is the possibility that the more crude, clay model, naked figurines were used for house cult and are useful for understanding popular religion. This would be interesting to pursue in a paper on popular religion.

<sup>258</sup> Hadley cites Tufnell, Inge and Harding as well as Ussishkin for these dates.



and Hadley (1989: fig. 8) have presented include another tree and possibly the midriff of another gazelle/antelope, on a piece that extends beyond a bit of missing pottery. Hestrin suggests that it has the same pattern as the other gazelles, with the apexes of two triangles meeting and a line drawn from tail to chest through the join; perhaps also there is an extension of a neck. Hestrin's drawing makes it a little more clear at this point (Hestrin 1987:213).

Returning to the first ewer, the inscriptions that go with this set of drawings are spread word by word between the animals with the antlers of the deer conveniently acting as word separators (Hadley 1989:203). The transcriptions are very similar when comparing those of Hestrin and Hadley. Keel and Uehlinger follow Hadley's version. This is her transliteration and translation:

*mtn.šy [l][rb]ty ʾlt*

“Mattan. An offering to my Lady ʾElat” (Hadley 1989:203).

Hestrin is more certain of the *l* (𐤋) and does not include it in brackets. Hestrin's comment regarding the ewer/vessel and inscription reads, “According to this reading the ewer, and probably its contents, were presented as an offering to the goddess ʾElat” (Hestrin 1987:214). A reading of this inscription as given by both Hestrin and Hadley reads *mtn* as a personal name. It could also possibly be a form of the word “to give”, *ntn* (𐤍).<sup>259</sup> The word that they have translated as “gift”, *šy* (𐤑), is used in the Hebrew scriptures only three times and has a dubious etymology. It is listed in BDB (p. 1009) without other cognates nor under any other lemma.<sup>260</sup>

Hestrin makes the comment that the name ʾElat is positioned over the tree by no coincidence (Hestrin 1987:220). ʾElat, the feminine form for the word “god” or the name of the “head” goddess, has been used in parallel with the name Asherah in the Ugaritic texts.<sup>261</sup> With the association that Hestrin has made between the tree and Asherah, this is just one more piece of evidence to clinch her argument for Asherah's representation on this ewer.

<sup>259</sup> This possibility was suggested during a conversation with Professor Rogerson.

<sup>260</sup> There are four instances of *šy* in G.I. Davies *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions. Corpus and Concordance* and all are dubious, as well. Two are Tell Arad Ostraca, one from Mešad Ḥashavyahu Ostrakon, which is a little more certain as *šy* is the first choice for transliteration. But all four are presented as reconstructions; the fourth one being the last two letters after a lacuna (Davies, et. al. 1991:493).

<sup>261</sup> Her name is in parallel with ʾElat; *ANET* 1969:131 II AB.i.7; 133 II AB.iv.49/UT 51 I.7; IV.49/CTA 4/KTU 1.4. Though it should be noted that for UT 51 I.4-12 the lines are all marked with major lacunae. It looks as though UT 51 I.4-12 has been reconstructed in *ANET*



But Hestrin does not finish her discussion here; she also compares this ewer with one other, also from Lachish. This was briefly mentioned earlier in the sections on trees and naked figurines. This ewer has a very similar pattern of caprids/ibexes flanking an object. However, in this instance the object is not a tree but what has been called a pubic triangle. Hestrin describes, it saying that the vessel

is of special interest, as it bears a drawing of two ibexes facing each other, repeated four times. However, instead of the usual tree, the pubic triangle appears here . . . The triangles are outlined in red paint, while the dots which represent the hair are black. This interchange of tree and pubic triangle proves, in my opinion, that the tree indeed symbolizes the fertility goddess, whom I believe to be ʾAsherah, as I shall try to show below (Hestrin 1987:215).

She then goes on to talk about representations of Qudshu, the Winchester stela, Egyptian representations of the goddess as the tree of life, one of the cultic stands from Taanach, drawings from Kuntillet ʿAjrud, and the literature of the Hebrew scriptures, which, in her opinion, confirm Asherah as the fertility goddess mentioned in the above quote. This coupled with the comparisons of the two ewers and the conjunction of the divine motifs of trees, gazelles, lions, and pubic triangles confirms (for her) her suggestion that ʾElat written above the tree on the Lachish ewer points quite definitely to a cult of Asherah at Lachish.

### 2.2.3. Asherah: A Composite Picture

The fragments from Kuntillet ʿAjrud (9th-8th cent.), Khirbet el-Qom (10th-9th cent.), Taanach (10th cent.) and Lachish (13th cent.) have provided us with evidence that there was an ʾšrh associated with YHWH in Iron Age Palestine. This set of connections has come to us from inscriptions found at a “caravanserai” and a tomb. These inscriptions include blessings either for travelers or for the dead. And further connections are made by way of the iconography of altars and vessels. Juxtapositions of symbols and interpretations of those symbols have led to postulations that ʾšrh was present in Judah/Israel as early as the 13th century BCE.<sup>262</sup> Most of those scholars who use these fragments as part of their evidence argue for ʾšrh as a goddess.

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from UT 51 IV.47-52. This parallel was also noted in section 1.1.2.1 from ANET 1969:146 KRT B.iii.26/UT 128 II.26/CTA 15/KTU 1.15.

<sup>262</sup> One paragraph of the letter titled *Taanach, No 1* reads; “Further, and if (20) there is a wizard of Asherah, let him *tell your fortunes* and let me hear *quickly*, and the omen and the interpretation send to me. (25)” (ANET 1969:490; italics and line numbers as written). According to the footnote given by Ginsberg, the translator, this letter predates the Amarna Tablets by about three generations and goes back as far as possibly the 15th century. The letter is addressed to Rewashsha the prince of Taanach, who may have been Egyptian, judging by his name. However, Hess points out that the reading is difficult and



And a question looms before us: if a goddess, who is she? The asherah of the Palestinian archaeological digs has very little to mediate who she was. We only know that there is an *ʾšrh*. We have no story to give her a personality. By association she possibly has a place in the worship of YHWH. If not the outright worship, then at least *ʾšrh* has powers alongside YHWH to bless, watch over or to provide goodness for the dead or for those travelling. By postulation she is associated with trees, lions, caprids and other divine symbols. Some scholars use the symbols associated with her to suggest that she served as the focus of a fertility cult. But we do not know what she did, or even who may have worshipped her or how they may have done so. She is a goddess without a face.

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idiosyncratic. It differs from all the other West Semitic spellings of Asherah of the second millennium BCE. He states, "The unusual spelling of Asherah's name, the difficulties involved in reading the context in which the name occurs, and the dispute about whether the name appears at all, argue against recognising this occurrence. Therefore, the text should not be used as evidence for the spelling of the divine name" (Hess 1996:215).



### 2.3. עֲשֵׂתְרֹת/אֲשֵׁרָה of the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic Texts

The issues that Asherah presents, in reading the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts, revolve around “what an asherah” or “who Asherah” is. The way that the word אֲשֵׁרָה is used, the contexts in which it is found, and the meanings that are appropriate to those contexts will be discussed in this section.

There are at least five observations to make about how the name of this goddess/object is presented in the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts.<sup>263</sup> First, the word (אֲשֵׁרָה) is written with (הָאֲשֵׁרָה) and without the article. In the following discussion we will look at what significance the presence or the absence of the article may have (“anarthrous”, so Waltke and O’Connor 1990:689). Then, observation will be made regarding the presence or absence of the direct object marker (אֶת), and its significance. Thirdly, אֲשֵׁרָה is pluralized with both customary masculine and feminine endings, אֲשֵׁרִים and אֲשֵׁרוֹת. The customary feminine plural is used only once in the combined Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts (Jdg 3:7).<sup>264</sup> Fourthly, the masculine plural form takes a pronominal suffix several times; e.g. אֲשֵׁירֵהֶם (Dt 7:5) and אֲשֵׁירֵיהֶם (Jer 17:2).<sup>265</sup> Lastly, עֲשֵׂתְרֹת seems to be used in the same kinds of contexts as אֲשֵׁרָה. עֲשֵׂתְרֹת<sup>266</sup> is presented in the feminine plural, עֲשֵׂתְרוֹת (with and without the ם in the final syllable), and is also written only once without the article, but several times with ם. Attention will also be given to the presence of אֶת (or lack thereof) with עֲשֵׂתְרֹת. However, consideration will be given first to עֲשֵׂתְרֹת as a place name and as a common noun.

#### 2.3.1. Ashtaroth the Place Name

Ashtaroth is a place name five<sup>267</sup> out of the eighteen times that עֲשֵׂתְרֹת(ו) is used. Aharoni suggests that

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<sup>263</sup> Since Asherah is used only once in Jeremiah this book will be dealt with along with the other occurrences found in the deuteronomistic texts rather than separately, as was done in the section on Baal.

<sup>264</sup> This form is also used in II Chr 19:3; 33:3. Note that the Syriac and Vulgate want to read הָעֲשֵׁתְרוֹת rather than הָאֲשֵׁרוֹת.

<sup>265</sup> The pronominal suffix is 3mp in the Deut and Jer texts but 2ms in Mic 5:13 and 3ms in Ex 34:13. However this Ex passage has a strong case for textual emendation to the 3mp ending; LXX, Syriac and two targums, (though these are relatively late, they point to a tendency to fit the text to the context).

<sup>266</sup> Because of the similarity in contexts the use of עֲשֵׂתְרֹת will be reviewed along with אֲשֵׁרָה, and treated as a variation in spelling. At a later stage in the discussion, consideration will be given as to whether this is appropriate or not. Also note that this word does not occur in any masculine form, singular or plural.

<sup>267</sup> Dt 1:4; Jos 9:10; 12:4; 13:12, 31. Also note that *mlk* <sup>c</sup>*ttrth* appears in “snake bite” texts found in Ugarit which are discussed in sec. 4.3.3.



most of the ancient names containing the word *beth* (“house”) are related to the temple of some god which gave its name to the locale, e.g. Bethel, Beth-dagon . . . Beth-baal-meon also appears in the form Baal-meon, and thus it is possible that some or all of the other theophoric place names originally stood in combination with the word *beth*, e.g. Jericho, Anathoth, Ashtaroth (Aharoni 1979:108).<sup>268</sup>

Aharoni’s comment has some plausibility. This may be reflected in the parallel texts of Jos 21:28 and I Chr 6:71E (6:56H). These are lists of the levitical cities (cf. Aharoni 1979:116). Joshua uses the name **בְּעִשְׂתָּרוֹתָהּ** and I Chronicles uses **עִשְׂתָּרוֹת**. The BHS textual notes for I Chr 6:56H suggest **בֵּית עִשְׂתָּרוֹת** based on the Joshua text. Having *beth* before Ashtaroth would possibly confirm an origin for **עִשְׂתָּרוֹת** as a place name. Four of the texts (Dt 1:4; Jos 12:4; 13:12, 31) pair Ashtaroth with another place name, Edre-i (**בְּעִשְׂתָּרוֹת וּבְאֶדְרֵי**). Aharoni locates Ashtaroth on the King’s Highway in northern Transjordan due east of the sea of Galilee. He also identifies it as the capital of Bashan (Aharoni 1979:38, 44 [map], 53, 54 etc.). According to Aharoni (1979:144-5) it was used as a place name as early as the 18th century in the Egyptian Excretion Texts. Would this then lead us to posit a goddess in the Transjordan with the name Ashtaroth? This certainly has been suggested in dictionary type articles about Ashtaroth (cf. Banton 1902:205; Gray 1962a:254-55; Mitchell 1980:133-34; William R. Smith 1927:310).

### 2.3.2. Ashtoreth the Common Noun

Four times in Dt,<sup>269</sup> **עִשְׂתָּר(וֹ)ת** is used as a common noun (usually translated “young”), and each time in the same phrase, **שְׁגֵרֶיךָ וְעִשְׂתָּרְתְּ צֹאנְךָ**, “your herd and the *young* of your flock”. BDB notes that W.R. Smith suggests, in *The Religion of the Semites*, that this word may refer to Astarte who, as a goddess of fecundity, may have “had the form of a sheep”.<sup>270</sup> As mentioned in the section on

<sup>268</sup> This quote and some of these names were also mentioned in sec. 1.3.1 Baal/Place names.

<sup>269</sup> Dt 7:13; 28:4, 18, 51. These are the only verses in which this form of the word is found.

<sup>270</sup> Translating **עִשְׂתָּר(וֹ)ת** (fs) as Astarte or as Ashtoreth is an issue briefly mentioned in sec. 2.1.1.3 Asherah/Ashteroth. BDB records these notes regarding **עִשְׂתָּר(וֹ)ת**; “b.=young (cf. *veneres gregis*; in either case with ref. to <sup>c</sup>*Astarte* as goddess of fecundity; RS Sem. i, 292, 457 f., 2nd ed. 310, 476 f., adopting b, thinks one type of; Ast. in Canaan had form of sheep, so Dr Dt 7,13); cf also . . . as name of land fertilized by dew and rain We<sup>Skizzen</sup> iii. 170” (BDB 800 s.v.). Astarte is mentioned in W.R. Smith’s index as “Astarte, goddess of herds and flocks” (Smith 1927:702). Astarte and Aphrodite are equated with each other and are each mentioned as a “sheep goddess” (Smith 1927:310, 477).



Asherah from the Ugaritic texts, the distinction between Astarte and Asherah is not always clear.<sup>271</sup>

### 2.3.3. Asherah the Name/Object

Assuming that the same kinds of rules would apply to אֲשֵׁרָה as did to בַּעַל, regarding the use of the article,<sup>272</sup> there seem to be times when עֲשֵׂתֵרֶת/אֲשֵׁרָה are definitely not names and other times when they are possibly so. The greater evidence, however, lies with the nature of the verbs and nouns used with this word which also seem to confirm that in many instances an artefact of some sort is intended. Another avenue of investigation, the direct object marker (אֶת) in conjunction with the lack of הַ, would help to separate name from object/artefact (or title). For the sake of simplicity and avoidance of redundancy, the presence of an article (and direct object marker) or lack thereof will be dealt with as individual words/phrases are examined. For the sake of establishing some distinctions in this section, when אֲשֵׁרָה is written with an object marker (אֶת) it will be translated as “Asherah”; when it is אֲשֵׁרָה without an object marker it will be translated as “an asherah”, and when הָאֲשֵׁרָה is written in the text, “the asherah” will be translated;<sup>273</sup> similarly, עֲשֵׂתֵרוֹת as “Ashtaroth” with a direct object marker, without as “an ashtaroth”, and הָעֲשֵׂתֵרוֹת as “the ashtaroth”.

The first three times that אֲשֵׁרָה is mentioned in Dt, it comes within a set of instructions to the Israelites about what to do and not do in the “new land”; “You shall . . . hew down their asherim”, Dt 7:5; “burn their asherim”, Dt 12:3; and “not plant an asherah”,

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<sup>271</sup> In her thesis “Asherah and Astarte in the O.T. and Ugaritic Literature”, Alice Perlman has made the argument that at Ugarit Asherah (<sup>?</sup>*trt*) and Astarte (<sup>c</sup>*ttrt*) are distinct. However, she mentions that Astarte makes very brief appearances in the mythological texts, where her name may be “substituted for another; she is not integral to the story” (Perlman 1978:167). Cf. sec 2.1.1.3 and UT 137, 67.

<sup>272</sup> Cf. previous discussion sec. 1.3.4.1 Baal/The Article and discussion on Waltke and O’Connor and GKC 405 in the same section.

<sup>273</sup> The same convention will be followed when plural forms are used. When forms occur with a suffix a determinate nature will be assumed, so, אֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם (Jer 17:2) is translated *their asherim*. Also, in this section, for the sake of parallel, הַבַּעַל will be translated *the baal*. In private discussion Professor Rogerson noted that the definite object marker is crucial in this discussion. Both Waltke and O’Connor, and Muraoka assume that אֶת, (the direct object marker) is used with transitive verbs and determined nouns (Waltke and O’Connor 1990:162; Muraoka 1985:146). It functions to identify a noun as an accusative in relation to the verb. They both also suggest that there are occasions when אֶת may be used with a nominative, i.e. “a noun in the function of subject” (Muraoka 1985:146). Muraoka suggests that some debate regarding this issue rests on the nature of the question regarding transitivity of verbs (1985:146). In any case, for our discussion of אֲשֵׁרָה, the issue of determinacy is important. The direct object marker is used with determined objects in the accusative (with a few exceptions, where אֶת is missing, cf. Muraoka 1985:150). If אֶת is used with אֲשֵׁרָה, without the article, then a determined nature of the word would be assumed and it would be read as a name, Asherah. But the translation for those six occurrences of אֲשֵׁרָה with neither an article nor an object marker *an asherah* will be given.



Dt 16:21.<sup>274</sup> The next mention of asherah comes in Jdg 3:7, “And the children of Israel did evil in the eyes of YHWH and they forgot YHWH, their God, and they served the baalim and the asheroth”. From a diachronic perspective, this would seem to set the tenor for the rest of the stories which include עֲשֵׂתֵת אֲשֵׁרָה.

### 2.3.3.1. Verbs

First of all we will turn to a discussion of the kinds of verbs that are used with עֲשֵׂתֵת אֲשֵׁרָה (and their plural forms). For the sake of some sort of organization, the verbs will be dealt with in four general categories: verbs that describe destruction (“to cut down”, “burn”, “pulverize” etc.), verbs that describe construction (“to plant”, “make”, “build”, “weave for”, etc.), verbs that describe cultic actions (“to serve”, “walk after”, “remember”, etc.), and miscellaneous verbs (prophets of the asherah are “summoned” and they “eat”).

#### 2.3.3.1.1. Verbs of Destruction

כרת is the most commonly used verb of destruction.<sup>275</sup> Two things are relatively consistent with אֲשֵׁרָה and this verb. אֲשֵׁרָה has the article each time it is used with the verb כרת, and it is singular in all but one case (II Kg 23:14). עֲשֵׂתֵת is not “cut down”. Gideon is told “to cut down” the asherah which stood next to the altar of the baal ( וְאֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרָה אֲשֶׁר־עָלָיו תִּכְרֹת , Jdg 6:25). And having built an altar to YHWH (to replace the altar of the baal that has been torn down), he was to offer a second<sup>276</sup> bull with the wood of the asherah that he “cut down” (תִּכְרֹת). כרת is used twice more in Judges 6, rehearsing what Gideon had done. The syntax of Jdg 6:30 is odd. The last phrase reads, וְכִי כָרַת הָאֲשֵׁרָה אֲשֶׁר־עָלָיו. The question arises as to why there is no direct object marker following the verb and before a definite direct object. The textual apparatus in BHS gives us no suggestion as to any variants or alternative readings to account for the absence of אֶת before הָאֲשֵׁרָה. Hezekiah

<sup>274</sup> Ex 34:13 also mentions אֲשֵׁרָה and in the same kind of context; “You shall cut down their asherim”. It seems that these four (including Ex 34:13) cases of instruction would fit into what Waltke and O’Connor calls *Volitional Uses of the Non-Perfective*. They suggest that this use of the verb is like a modal and is used when

the speaker imposes an obligation on the subject addressed. . . . The force with which the speaker is able to make the imposition depends on the social distance between speaker and addressee. If an inferior addresses a superior the obligation takes the force of a request, but if the communication proceeds from a superior to an inferior it has the force of a command (Waltke and O’Connor 1990:509-10, 31.5).

So these four verses are translated as *shall* instead of *will* because they are instructions from YHWH.

<sup>275</sup> This is true partly because it is used repeatedly in the Gideon story; Jdg 6:25, 26, 28, 30.

<sup>276</sup> Or *scarlet*, according to a possible rendering from the LXX of verse 25, so BHS.



and Josiah, both “good kings”, both “cut down” the asherah/the asherim (II Kg 18:4 and 23:14 respectively).

Burning אֲשֵׁרָה is often mentioned. In Deuteronomy the Israelites are instructed that upon entering the land, they are to tear down altars, smash pillars, cut down images and שָׂרָף the asherim (Dt 12:3) of the people who live there. Note that אֲשֵׁרָה is in the plural and has a pronominal 3mp suffix appended. The antecedent for this suffix refers to the peoples of the nations of the new land that the children of Israel are to enter. Dt 7:5 mentions “burning” their images. This is most likely the images that belong to the people. Four times, אֲשֵׁרָה with שָׂרָף is singular and has the article in three cases; the fourth is singular without the article (II Kg 23:15). John Rogerson suggests “It reads oddly without the article, and the last two words look like a gloss to me. For example I would expect an אֵת before אֲשֵׁרָה if it were a proper name” (private correspondence 27 June, 1996). II Kg 23 describes Josiah’s reform. II Kg 23:4 states that the vessels, that were made for the baal, the asherah and the host of heaven were “burned” and the ashes carried to Bethel. Verse 6 says that the asherah was carried out of the house of YHWH, “burned” at the brook of Kidron, “ground” (דָּקַק “pulverize”) to dust, and the dust “thrown” (שָׁלַךְ) on the graves. This seems an attempt at a very thorough destruction. Verse 15 recounts that an asherah was “burned” at Bethel. I Kg 15:13 mentions that the image that was made for the asherah was “cut down” (כָּרַת) and “burned” (שָׂרָף) by Asa.

The list of verbs of destruction (or at least a negative or derogatory action) also includes יָצָא (Hi “to cause to go”, “bring out”) of II Kg 23:4, 6, סָרַח (Hi “to cause to depart”) of I Sam 7:3-4, and טָמַא (“to defile”) of II Kg 23:13. The verb יָצָא occurs in the story of Josiah’s reform. He “brought out” the vessels of the baal, the asherah and the host of heaven, and he “brought out” the asherah to burn it (II Kg 23:4 and 6 respectively). The other two verbs are used with עֲשֵׂתָרָת. Samuel instructs the children of Israel to return to YHWH and, “remove (סָרַח Hi) your foreign gods from your midst and the ashtaroth” (הִסִּירוּ אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי הַנֹּכְרִים מִתּוֹכְכֶם וְהַעֲשִׂתְרוֹת), I Sam 7:3).<sup>277</sup> “So the sons of Israel put away the baalim and the ashtaroth and they served YHWH alone” (I Sam 7:4). Note here that in both of these verses in I Sam, עֲשֵׂתָרָת is both plural and written with an article. When the other verb mentioned

<sup>277</sup> There is a direct object written marker with אֱלֹהֵי which is definite by virtue of being in construct with *foreign*, so it is accusative. However, there is no accompanying אֵת with וְהַעֲשִׂתְרוֹת. We have here another anomaly in Hebrew grammar, the direct object (accusative), when definite, is supposed to be written with a direct object marker. The LXX does not help us much; it reads, “καὶ τὰ ἄλση” or *and the sacred groves*. ἄλση is neuter and so the accusative and nominative cases are identical. Note that the following verse 7:4 writes baalim and ashtaroth each with an object marker; (אֵת־הַבְּעָלִים וְאֵת־הַעֲשִׂתְרוֹת).



above, **טִבָּא**, is used with **עֲשֵׂתָרָה**, the noun again has no article, is plural and falls in the midst of the discussion of Josiah's reform. Josiah cleans up the temple of YHWH in Jerusalem by getting rid of the idolatrous priests, the houses of the cult prostitutes, and the vessels of the asherah, the baal and the host of heaven (II Kg 23:4-7) and by "defiling" (**טִבָּא**) the high places from Geba to Beersheba (II Kg 23:8). And in Jerusalem he "defiled" (**טִבָּא**) Ashtoreth, the abomination of the Sidonians (II Kg 23:13). Three items of interest can be mentioned in regard to this use of **עֲשֵׂתָרָה** in II Kg 23:13. It is both the only singular use of **עֲשֵׂתָרָה** with the verbs of destruction, and secondly, it is the only time that either **אֲשֵׁרָהּ** or **עֲשֵׂרֶתֶר** is written without an article in this class of verbs. However, since **עֲשֵׂתָרָה** is qualified by "Sidon", then it is determined. Also, II Kg 23:13 is set in the context of Josiah's reform. Josiah is actively eradicating the articles that pertain to the worship of the baal and the host of the heavens and the asherah and the asherim and an asherah; and here we have Ashtoreth mentioned. Does II Kg 23 then assume that each of these are different from each other and so gives them each different names? Or is it that all of these are one thing in the sight of the writer, who for some reason uses a variety of spellings of the same word? This seems unlikely, as none of the other forms of **אֲשֵׁרָהּ** are qualified by a place name as Ashtoreth is.

#### 2.3.3.1.2. Verbs of Construction

The next set of verbs has been loosely grouped and titled constructive verbs. The most common of these is **עָשָׂה**, which is not used for **עֲשֵׂתָרָה**; but with **אֲשֵׁרָהּ**, the noun is written once in the plural and a few times with the article. **עָשָׂה** is used only in the books of Kings.<sup>278</sup> I Kg 14:15 presents us with **אֲשֵׁרָהּ** in the masculine plural form with a suffix, "because that they made their asherim" (**יַעַן אֲשֵׁר עָשׂוּ אֶת־ (אֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם**). This is the only time among the constructive verbs that **אֲשֵׁרָהּ** is written with a suffix. I Kg 15:13 reports that Maacah, Asa's mother, had an image "made" for the asherah. Ahab, in I Kg 16:33, "made" the asherah, or in biblical translations; "And Ahab made an Asherah" (RSV); "And Ahab also made the Asherah" (NASB).<sup>279</sup> Compare these translations of **וַיַּעַשׂ אַחָאֵב אֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרָהּ** with the NRSV, "Ahab also made a sacred pole". The NRSV assumes the meaning of the word **הָאֲשֵׁרָהּ** for the reader. In the explanation that the author of II Kings gives for the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to the Assyrians, he accuses the children of Israel of "making" an

<sup>278</sup> Remembering that the scope of this inquiry is Jeremiah and the books previously identified as deuteronomistic.

<sup>279</sup> I will later argue that there is an implicit assumption made in translating and writing the words **אֲשֵׁרָהּ** and **עֲשֵׂתָרָה** with a capital letter as if it were a name. This would also be true of **מֶלֶךְ** and **בַּעַל**.



asherah<sup>280</sup> ( וַיַּעֲשׂוּ אֲשֵׁרָהּ, II Kg 17:16), among other abominable things.

Manasseh also “makes” an asherah<sup>281</sup> (II Kg 21:3); however, in verse 7 it says that he “sets up” an image of the asherah which he had “made” ( וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת־פְּסַל־הָאֲשֵׁרָה (אֲשֵׁר עָשָׂה)). The last time that עָשָׂה is used in II Kgs is in reference to the vessels that were made for the host of heaven, the baal, and the asherah (II Kg 23:4), which Josiah removes from the temple.

Among other verbs of the constructive nature, the children of Israel are instructed not to “plant ( נָטַע ) for yourself an asherah” ( לֹא־תַטֵּעַ לְךָ אֲשֵׁרָה, Dt 16:21) next to the altar of YHWH which they are to make. High places are “built” לְעִשְׂתָּרֶת in II Kg 23:13. High places, pillars and Asherim are “built” ( בָּנָה ) in I Kg 14:23 “upon every high hill and under every green tree”. II Kg 17:10<sup>283</sup> repeats the last part of this sentence (“upon every high . . .”) with the exchange of נָצַב (Hi “to cause to stand”) for the verb. In both cases (I Kg 14, II Kg 17) Asherim is without the article and written in masculine plural. עָמַד (“to stand”) is presented with אֲשֵׁרָה in the singular and with

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<sup>280</sup> Note that this is a peculiar spelling of אֲשֵׁרָה, (אֲשֵׁרָהּ). Only in Micah 5:13 is there a similar spelling with a ’ in the middle of the word.

<sup>281</sup> Cf. II Ch 33:3 where the parallel text reads אֲשֵׁרוֹת. Neither II Kg 21:3 nor II Ch 33:3 have direct object markers before אֲשֵׁרָה or אֲשֵׁרוֹת (respectively) and are translated *an asherah* and *asheroth* (no indefinite article is offered in the translation as this is assumed to be plural). The BHS notes suggest that the parallel for II Ch 33:3, II Kg 21:3, is “sg”. And conversely the II Kg 21:3 notes read that LXX, Syriac and Vulgate all read “pl”. But these notes for II Kg 21:3 do not mention what sort of plural. Is it feminine or masculine? This form in II Ch 33:3, אֲשֵׁרוֹת (fp), is found in only two other texts, Jdg 3:7 and II Ch 19:3. So, II Ch 33:3 would read, “And Manasseh returned and he built the high places which Hezekiah his father destroyed and he (Manasseh) raised up altars for the baal and made *asheroth* as Ahab king of Israel did, and he (Manasseh) bowed down to all the host of the heavens and he (Manasseh) served them (the host of heaven only, or inclusive also of those he made or for whom he raised up an altar)”. But the text speaking of Hezekiah’s reform II Kg 18:4 uses the singular form in the text with notes to suggest that the LXX, Syriac, a Targum codex manuscript and the Vulgate *all* write a feminine plural ending – “-וֹת”. And I Kg 16:33, without any textual emendations, says that Ahab made *the asherah* (fs). It seems quite obvious that there was some back and forth reading in this section.

<sup>282</sup> Professor Rogerson suggests (private conversation 27 June, 1996) that this should probably be read as an epexegetical genitive, which Waltke and O’Connor explain this way, “In an attributive genitive, C is characterized by G; the opposite relation is also found, in the *epexegetical genitive*, wherein G; is characterized by C. Many epexegetical phrases can be rendered by English *of*-genitives; note the phrase ‘hard of heart,’ cf. ‘hard-hearted.’ The sense can also be conveyed by the gloss ‘as to’ or ‘with regard to,’ for example, ‘stiff with regard to their necks’; this is the meaning of the term ‘epexegetical’ (sic)” (1990:151 9.5.3.c). However, Rogerson suggests (personal correspondence) that this phrase should then be read as “the image, that is the asherah”. The only problem with this is that Waltke and O’Connor place epexegetical genitives as adjectival and פְּסַל is a segholate noun. Understanding it as an appositional construction would give it Rogerson’s translation.

<sup>283</sup> Again, this comes in the list of infractions levied against the children of Israel as good reason for the Assyrian invasion and triumph.



the article. Jehoahaz makes some reparation with YHWH, in II Kg 13:6, but the text accuses him of leaving the the asherah “standing” (עמד) in Samaria. In II Kg 23:7, the women “weave” (ארג) something for the asherah. This group of verbs does not seem to have a particular pattern regarding how אַשְׁרָה is written: four times anarthrous, nine times with ׀, once with a suffix (3mp), three times plural (mp),<sup>284</sup> and once written as עֲשֵׂתָרָת (fs).

### 2.3.3.1.3. Cultic Verbs

For the third category of verbs, what was previously called “cultic” actions, עבד appears most often. In Judges 3:7, the children of Israel are accused of “serving” the baalim and the asheroth (וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֶת־הַבַּעֲלִים וְאֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרוֹת, Jdg 3:7). Earlier in Judges, Joshua dies and the children of Israel forsake the God of their fathers and “served for” the baal and for the ashtarothe (וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ לְבַעַל וְלְעֲשֵׂתָרוֹת, Jdg 2:13).<sup>285</sup> Jdg 10:6 levels the same basic accusation, “they served the baalim and the ashtarothe”. As Samuel reviews these stories with the Israelites, he puts the words in the mouths of the previous generations, saying, “We have sinned because we forsook YHWH and we served the baalim and the ashtarothe” (I Sam 12:10). II Kg 21:3 is the only case where עבד is used with אַשְׁרָה in the singular and without the article, though it may be a question whether Manasseh actually worshipped an asherah, which he had made, or rather all the host of heaven. The antecedent of אֱתָם, at the end of this verse, is not completely clear, but it seems safe to say that Manasseh worshipped the host of heaven, as well as the baal (for whom he made an altar) and an asherah, which he made. I Kg 11:5 suggests that Solomon “went” (הלך) after Ashtoreth (fs), verse 33 says that he “bowed down” (שחד) to Ashtoreth. Both of these verses identify Ashtoreth (fs) as the goddess of the Sidonians.

Vaguely connected with cultic actions are the verbs “to remember” (זכר) and “to forget” (שכח). Jeremiah 17:2 charges that the sins of Judah are recorded “as/while the remembering (כִּזְכֹּר) of their children (as their children remember) their altars and their asherim with a green tree upon high hills” (כִּזְכֹּר בְּנֵיהֶם מִזְבְּחוֹתָם וְאֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם).

<sup>284</sup> Also, one possible feminine plural. Cf. sec. 2.3.3.1.2. n. 281 regarding II Kg 21:3 and II Ch 33:3.

<sup>285</sup> This is the only occurrence of such a construction with a “deity” in the texts considered. It does however occur in three other texts: I Sam 4:9, “you will serve for the Hebrews as they served for you” (פֶּן תַּעֲבֹדוּ לְעַבְדֵי כְּאֲשֶׁר עָבְדוּ לָכֶם); II Sam 9:10, “you serve for him” (וְעַבְדְּתָ לּוֹ); and II Sam 16:19, “I serve before . . .” (עַבְדְּתִי לְפָנָי). These usually seem to be translated simply as *serve someone*, e.g. I Sam 4:9, “you will serve the Hebrews”. The ל is not given special attention in the translation. The NASB and NRSV say “become slaves to the Hebrews”. BDB notes that Jud 2:13 and Jer 44:3 are the only two uses of עבד with the preposition ל (BDB 713 עבד 4b).



Jer 17:2).<sup>286</sup> This is the only text in Jeremiah that explicitly mentions either אֲשֵׁרָה or עֲשֵׂתֵרֶת. And in this case, אֲשֵׁרָה is masculine plural with 3mp suffix. Dt 8:19 explicitly warns the children of Israel against “forgetting” (שָׁכַח) YHWH and serving other gods. Judges 3:7 levels the accusation that that is just what they did: וַיִּשְׁכַּחוּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם וַיַּעֲבְדוּ אֶת־הַבְּעָלִים וְאֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרוֹתִי.

Generally summarizing the way that אֲשֵׁרָה is presented with these “cultic verbs”, we see that four of the verses cited write עֲשֵׂתֵרֶת/אֲשֵׁרָה with the article (these are all with the verb עָבַד); five verses use the form עֲשֵׂתֵרֶת (two of these in the singular); once, אֲשֵׁרָה is written masculine plural with a 3mp suffix; once, one of the possible antecedents to the pronoun אֲתָם is an asherah (singular, anarthrous); and once the feminine plural הָאֲשֵׁרוֹת is written.

#### 2.3.3.1.4. Miscellaneous Verbs

The last group of verbs to be dealt with are all found in one verse. In Elijah’s showdown with the prophets of the baal and the asherah, they and all Israel are “summoned” (וְעַתָּה שְׁלַח קַבֵּץ אֵלַי, “now send, gather to me”, I Kg 18:19) to Mt Carmel. This text also says that the prophets eat (אָכַל) at Jezebel’s table. This verse does not say much about the asherah, but we can assume that the prophets of the asherah<sup>287</sup> must have been in some particular location to be sent for, and they must have had some sort of custom to be indicted with eating at Jezebel’s table.

#### 2.3.3.2. Nouns

Another perspective may be gained by considering the objects, places, people and deities associated with אֲשֵׁרָה.

##### 2.3.3.2.1. Objects

“Pillars” (מִצְבֵּה),<sup>288</sup> “trees/wood” (עֵץ), and “altars” (מִזְבֵּחַ) are the most common objects (nouns) used with אֲשֵׁרָה. Of the six times that “pillars” are associated with אֲשֵׁרָה, only one rendering of the word is singular with the article; two are plural written with a suffix; two are plural without the article; and one plural with the article. In each case מִצְבֵּה is written in the plural. עֲשֵׂתֵרֶת is not associated with מִצְבֵּה in the deuteronomistic texts or Jeremiah. “Pillars” (וּמִצְבֹּתָם “and their pillars”) are to be shattered (שָׁבַר Pi) in Dt 7:5 and burned in both 7:5 and 12:3 along

<sup>286</sup>My translation seems quite stiff.

<sup>287</sup> This phrase, “the prophets of the asherah” are dealt with in the section 2.3.3.2.3. n. 308 on nouns associated with אֲשֵׁרָה. There it is mentioned that this phrase may be a gloss.

<sup>288</sup> BDB proposes מִצַּב as a root, for which *pillars* is used, primarily in Niphal meaning *to take one’s stand, stand*, so BDB s.v. 662-3.



with their asherim. Hezekiah was given credit for shattering (שבר Pi) the “pillars” as well as cutting down the asherah (II Kg 18:4). Josiah is also given credit for shattering “pillars” and cutting down the asherim (II Kg 23:14). The children of Israel set up (נצב) “pillars” (מצבה) and asherim according to the idictment written in II Kg 17:10. “Pillars” and asherim are built during the reign of Rehoboam, Solomon’s son (I Kg 14:23).

Several times אַשְׁרָה is associated with “wood” or “trees” (עץ). In the Gideon stories the asherah is to be cut down, then the “wood” of the asherah<sup>289</sup> is to be used to make an offering upon the altar built for YHWH (וְהֵעֲלִיתָ עֹלָה בְעֵצֵי הָאֲשֵׁרָה) (אֲשֵׁר הִכְרִיתָ, Jdg 6:26). This is the only time that עץ is written in the plural. Was the asherah cut up into many pieces, or was it several pieces of wood, or the many branches as of a bush? All other occurrences of עץ are presented in the singular. The only time that עץ and אַשְׁרָה are both singular comes in Dt 16:21. The children of Israel are told, “not to plant for yourself an asherah (as) any tree (אֲשֵׁרָה כָּל־עֵץ)<sup>290</sup> beside the altar of YHWH”. Green “trees” (עץ רֶעֵנָן) are linked with pillars, high hills, and אַשְׁרָה in three other passages. In two of these, the phrasing is the same: I Kg 14:23 says, “they built high places and pillars and asherim . . .”; II Kg 17:10 says, “they caused to stand for themselves pillars and asherim *upon every high hill and under every green tree*”.<sup>291</sup> Jeremiah in the midst of a poetic line makes a transposition: “As their children remember their altars and their asherim *with a green tree upon high hills*” (וְאֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם עַל־עֵץ רֶעֵנָן עַל גְּבַעוֹת הַגְּבוּהוֹת), Jer 17:2).<sup>292</sup>

<sup>289</sup> Smith mentions the “‘tree of life,’ which recalls the tree of the asherah” in his discussion on Asherah and the “female personification of Wisdom” (1994a:327). However, he does not explain what he means by the “tree of the asherah”. It is fairly certain that this is not the reference that he would cite for this.

<sup>290</sup> The syntax is interesting here. Note there is no אֵת. This same sort of construction is repeated in II Kg 17:10 with two nouns, neither of which has אֵת. Do we read לָהֶם before the object as a marker for the accusative?

<sup>291</sup> II Kg 14:23 וַיִּבְנוּ גְּמֻדָּהּ לָהֶם בְּמֹזוֹת וּמִצְבּוֹת וְאֲשֵׁרִים עַל כָּל־גְּבֻעָה גְּבוּהָ וְתַחַת כָּל־עֵץ רֶעֵנָן:  
II Kg 17:10 וַיִּצְבּוּ לָהֶם מִצְבּוֹת וְאֲשֵׁרִים עַל כָּל־גְּבֻעָה גְּבוּהָ וְתַחַת כָּל־עֵץ רֶעֵנָן:

A pattern can be seen from these two verses. This (עַל כָּל־גְּבֻעָה גְּבוּהָ וְתַחַת כָּל־עֵץ רֶעֵנָן) is repeated in Dt 12:2, I Kg 14:23, II Kg 16:4, 17:10, Jer 2:20 and 3:6. Dt 12:2 uses mountains (עַל־הַהָרִים הַרְּמִים) in addition to hills and Jer 3:6 exchanges mountain (גְּבוּהָ) for hills. Two other verses use similar phrases: Jer 3:13 uses only “under every green tree” and Jer 17:2 transposes the regular pattern used in the above mentioned verses. Twice *high places* (בְּמֹזוֹת) is associated with this phrase (I Kg 14:23; II Kg 16:4); twice *pillars* (מִצְבּוֹת) (I Kg 14:23; II Kg 17:10) and three times *asherim* (I Kg 14:23; II Kg 17:10; Jer 17:2).

<sup>292</sup> The textual notes make two suggestions regarding this phrase. First, the עַל of עַל־עֵץ be read as כָּל, and the Syriac and an Arabic version of the Targum read תַּחַת כָּל. This seems to be an attempt to make the phrase agree with the general formula of “green tree” as used elsewhere, cf. n. 291.



In only one verse is altar (מִזְבֵּחַ) used with אֲשֵׁרָה (fs), but it appears twice in this verse, II Kg 23:15. There was a מִזְבֵּחַ in Bethel. It was torn down with the high place that was also there, then Josiah “burned<sup>293</sup> the high place and pulverized (it) to dust and burned Asherah”. The other two times that “altars” are mentioned are with the masculine plural form of אֲשֵׁרָה with a 3mp suffix, Dt 7:5 and Jer 17:2. The Deuteronomy passage comes in the midst of instruction; the Israelites were to tear down the *altars* of the people of the land (מִזְבְּחֵיהֶם “their altars”), and destroy other cultic objects, including hewing down their asherim. Jeremiah accuses the children of remembering “their altars” (מִזְבְּחֹתָם) and their asherim.

The asherah is associated with the “altars of the baal” and “YHWH” in the Gideon stories of Judges 6. Verse 25 mentions that the asherah was beside the “altar of the baal” (מִזְבֵּחַ הַבַּעַל) which was to be torn down (הָרַס) and replaced with an “altar for YHWH” (מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה 6:26). An offering was to be made on the “altar of YHWH” using the wood of the asherah. Twice more (6:28, 30), this story mentions that the asherah was beside the “altar of the baal” which was torn down (נָתַן Qal 6:28 and Pual 6:30). Manasseh rebuilt the “altars for the baal”, which Hezekiah destroyed (אָבַד), and he made an asherah (II Kg 21:3).

The other items associated with the asherah are the “vessels” (כֵּלִים) that were made for the baal and the asherah, and the host of heaven (כָּל־הַכְּלִים הָעֲשׂוּיִם לַבַּעַל) and the “ashes” or “dust” (עֶפֶר) to which they were burned, II Kg 23:4. The asherah was carried out of the temple and pulverized (דָּקַק) to “dust” (עֶפֶר) which was thrown on the graves of the sons of the people in II Kg 23:6. Something in the form of “houses”, “hangings”, or “tent-shrines” (בָּתִּים BDB 109 s.v. בֵּית)<sup>294</sup> were woven by the women for the asherah in the next verse, 23:7. As a further act of the reform and cleansing by Josiah, II Kg 23:14 records that he not only shattered the pillars, as previously mentioned, and cut down the asherim but filled their places with “human bones” (וַיִּמְלֵא אֶת־מְקוֹמָם עֲצָמוֹת אָדָם).

<sup>293</sup> The NASB translates from the LXX; “the high place he broke down. Then he demolished its stones, ground them to dust . . .” (cf. BHS textual apparatus “καὶ συνέτριψεν [pulverized] τοὺς λίθους αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐλέπτυνεν [thrashed]”). However, the NRSV translates the masoretic text; “he pulled down that altar along with the high place. He burned the high place, crushing it to dust . . .” (גַּם אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ הַהוּא וְאֶת־הַבְּמִזָּה הַהִיא לְעֶפֶר וְשָׂרַף אֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרָה: II Kg 23:15 BHS).

<sup>294</sup> Cf. Nadav Na'aman 1996:17-18.



Deuteronomy 7:5 instructs the children of Israel to hew down (גרע) their asherim and to burn their “images” with fire (וּפְסִילֵיהֶם תִּשְׂרֹפוּן בְּאֵשׁ).<sup>295</sup> Does the antecedent for the pronominal suffix on “images” refer to the peoples of the new land or to the asherim? The antecedent for the 3mp suffix on פְּסִילֵיהֶם in Dt 7:5 is naturally the same as for the other three words with suffixes in this verse – their altars, their pillars, and their asherim. But reading this against Dt 12:3 where it says “hewn down (גרע) the images of their gods” (cf. Dt 12:2), it is easy to read back into Dt 7:5 “the images of their asherim”.<sup>296</sup> II Kg 21:7 reports that Manasseh set the “image” of the asherah (וַיַּשֶׂם אֶת־פֶּסֶל הָאֲשֵׁרָה)<sup>297</sup> which he made in the house/temple. Maacah made a “horrid thing” for the asherah (מִפְּלֶצֶת לְאֲשֵׁרָה I Kg 15:13). The second time “horrid image” is used in this verse, it is written with a 3fs suffix, “her horrid image” (מִפְּלֶצֶתָהּ).<sup>298</sup> II Kg 17:16 accuses the children of Israel of making a “molten image” (וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם מַסְכָּה), and an asherah. The next two words, שְׁנַיִם עֲגֻלִים (“two calves”; Qere: שְׁנַיִ, II Kg 17:16), would seem to explain what the מַסְכָּה was. However, שְׁנַיִ is a dual and therefore its plural form does not seem to fit with the singular form of מַסְכָּה. The BHS textual apparatus suggests that these two words were probably added to the text. In any case here, both a “molten image” and an asherah were made.

#### 2.3.3.2.2. Places

I Kg 11:5, 33 both identify Ashtoreth as a Sidonian goddess (עֲשֵׁתֶרֶת אֱלֹהֵי) (צִדְוִיָּן, I Kg 11:5; 11:33 uses the form צִדְוִיָּן). An interesting point here is that עֲשֵׁתֶרֶת, a feminine noun, is paired with a masculine noun אֱלֹהֵי.<sup>299</sup> II Kg 23:13 calls “Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians” (עֲשֵׁתֶרֶת אֱלֹהֵי צִדְוִיָּן).<sup>300</sup>

<sup>295</sup> As mentioned earlier in discussion on verb שָׂרַף, sec. 2.3.3.1.1.

<sup>296</sup> It seems possible to read this either way. So not too much can be made of it for the sake of argument.

<sup>297</sup> Note that there is an object marker in this phrase whereas in 21:3 there is none. Do we have here an object made definite by virtue of having been mentioned previously? So, the first time it is mentioned (21:3) it is *an asherah*, but the second time it already has a referant/an antecedent and so it is *the asherah* (21:7). In 21:3, he made an asherah and 21:7 says that he set up the image of the asherah that he made. If so, we then read 21:3 to mean that when he made an asherah that he was making the image that is mentioned in 21:7.

<sup>298</sup> BDB (814 s.v.) suggests that this comes from פִּלַּץ, to *shudder* and therefore מִפְּלֶצֶת, a *thing to shudder at*. The antecedent of the 3fs suffix on אֶת־מִפְּלֶצֶתָהּ may refer by agreement with either לְאֲשֵׁרָה or with Maacah, Asa’s mother; it was she who made the image.

<sup>299</sup> I assume here that the pluralizing of אֱלֹהֵי is what Waltke and O’Connor would call an honorific plural. (Waltke and O’Connor 1990:122 ff, 7.4). In his section on honorific plurals, Waltke and O’Connor mentions אֱלֹהֵי as honorific of the god of Israel and as usually taking a singular agreement and for other gods, a plural agreement. However, for 11:5 and 33, the word in apposition to אֱלֹהֵי is without doubt singular and feminine, עֲשֵׁתֶרֶת; (Waltke and O’Connor 1990:122).

<sup>300</sup> A question arises as to why there is a *paseq* between עֲשֵׁתֶרֶת and שְׁקִין. GKC suggests,



All three of these verses (I Kg 11:5, 33 and II Kg 23:13) set עשתרת in apposition to goddess or abomination of the צִיְדֹתִים.<sup>301</sup> There was a house/temple of Ashtaroth in “Beth Shean” (I Sam 31:10).<sup>302</sup> In I Kg 15:13, Asa cut down the horrid image of the asherah and burned it at the brook “Kidron”. Elijah calls an assembly of all Israel, and the prophets of the asherah and the baal to “Mt Carmel”, not far south of the Phoenicians (I Kg 18:19). Jehoahaz left the asherah standing in “Samaria” (II Kg 13:6). The ashes of the vessels made for the baal, the host of heaven and for the asherah (those that were burned in “Kidron”, outside “Jerusalem”) were carried to “Bethel” (II Kg 23:4). The asherah that was in the temple of YHWH in “Jerusalem” was taken out to the “Kidron” and burned. The ashes were then cast on the graves of the common people there (II Kg 23:6). There was also an altar at “Bethel”, where Josiah burned an asherah that was there (II Kg 23:15). From this collection of verses it can be seen that Ashtoreth is associated with “Sidon” and Ashtaroth with “Beth Shean”, the asherah with “Jerusalem” (the brook “Kidron”), “Samaria” and “Bethel”, and an asherah with “Bethel”. The connection is made for us between Jezebel, the “Sidonian” princess and the 400 prophets of the asherah<sup>303</sup> who eat at her table (I Kg 18:19). Did these prophets come from “Sidon” with her? Is this a way to say that she supported them? She must have had a big table.

Five verses, all from the books of the Kings, make a connection between אֲשֵׁרָה and “high place” (בְּמִזְבֵּחַ). II Kg 23:15 cites the singular form of בְּמִזְבֵּחַ thrice. Jeroboam built the “high place” that was at Bethel and it was Josiah who “broke the altar down (נִתְּן), he burned the altar, pulverized it to dust and burnt an asherah”, (וְאֶת־הַבְּמִזְבֵּחַ), II Kg 23:15).<sup>304</sup> Each of the

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This stroke is commonly confused with *Paseq*, which has the same form. But *Paseq* . . . is neither an independent accent, nor a constituent part of other accents, but is used as a mark for various purposes. . . The purpose of *Paseq* is clearly recognizable in the five old rules: as a divider between identical letters at the end and beginning of two words; between identical or very similar words; between words which are absolutely contradictory (as *God* and *evil-doer*); between words which are liable to be wrongly connected; and lastly, between heterogeneous terms, as ‘Eleazar, the High Priest, and Joshua’. But the assumption of a far-reaching critical importance in *Paseq* is at least doubtful (GKC 59-60 n. 2).

From GKC’s discussion on accents this seems to be part of the accent (L<sup>e</sup>garmēh) and not a proper punctuation mark (*Paseq*).

<sup>301</sup> I Kg 11:33 has a variation in the spelling of Sidon (צִדְנִיָּן). The final ך in 11:33 looks like an Aramaic plural; cf. Waltke and O’Connor 1990:118, 7.4b.

<sup>302</sup> This city is identified as one of the unconquered Philistine cities of the Israelite conquest in Manasseh’s territory (Jdg 1:27). Cf. Aharoni 1979:236.

<sup>303</sup> Cf. following discussion on these prophets, sec. 2.3.3.2.3 and n. 308

<sup>304</sup> See note at the end of sec 2.3.3 re: the absence of אֶת at the end of this phrase before אֲשֵׁרָה. By the reckoning of most Classical Hebrew grammarians, a direct object that is



other four times that אֲשֵׁרָה is mentioned with high places, it is written in the plural form (בְּמִזְבֵּחַ). Upon the ascension of Rehoboam to the throne, Judah did evil in the eyes of YHWH. They built “high places”, pillars and asherim (I Kg 14:22-3). Hezekiah removed (סֹרַח Hi) the “high places”, shattered the pillars and cut down the asherah (II Kg 18:4). Manasseh returned and built (rebuilt, so NASB)<sup>305</sup> the “high places” that his father, Hezekiah had destroyed (אֲבָד Pi, II Kg 21:3) and he made an asherah. II Kg 23:13 gives Solomon credit for building “high places” for Ashtoreth outside Jerusalem. I Kg 14:23 is the only time that אֲשֵׁרָה and “high places” are both plural. To summarize: asherah, the asherah, asherim and Ashtoreth are all associated with בְּמִזְבֵּחַ/בְּמִזְבְּחֵי.

“High hills” (גְּבֻעָה גְּבֻחָה) and אֲשֵׁרָה are found together in three verses. In each instance אֲשֵׁרָה is plural; once it has a 3mp suffix appended. Also each time that “high hills” and אֲשֵׁרָה are found together, עֵץ is also part of the equation. Pillars (מִצְבֹּת) are twice included. The parallels between these three verses, I Kg 14:23 and II Kg 17:10 and Jer 7:2, have already been discussed in the section on trees (עֵץ).<sup>306</sup>

בַּיִת is mentioned with עֲשֵׂתָרֹת/אֲשֵׁרָה in three different instances. The armour and dead body of Saul and Jonathan are hung (in) the “house of an ashtaroth /Ashtaroth” (בַּיִת עֲשֵׂתָרֹת)<sup>307</sup> in Beth Shean (I Sam 31:10). “Houses of the male cult prostitutes” (בֵּתֵי הַקְּדֻשִׁים) are also mentioned in II Kg 23:7. The “house of YHWH” is referred to twice in the passage about Josiah’s reform, II Kg 23. The “temple of YHWH” also finds mention. The asherah was carried out of the “house of YHWH” (בַּיִת יְהוָה II Kg 23:6). בְּרִימִים were woven for the asherah in the “house of YHWH” (בַּיִת יְהוָה II Kg 23:7). What these בְּרִימִים, which are woven, are is uncertain. However, the first mention of the asherah in this pericope suggests that אֲשֵׁרָה was carried out of the “temple of YHWH” (הַיְכָל יְהוָה II Kg 23:4).

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determined requires a direct object marker. So, if אֲשֵׁרָה is to be understood as a name then, the grammarians would require אֶת before it. The absence of the direct object marker at this point has rendered a translation, *and he burnt an asherah*.

<sup>305</sup> וַיֵּשֶׁב וַיִּבֶן אֶת-הַמִּזְבֹּחַ אֲשֶׁר אָבָד חִזְקִיָּהוּ אָבִיו (II Kg 21:3), cf. BDB 998 שׁוּב no. 8, “denoting repetition”.

<sup>306</sup> Cf. sec. 2.3.3.2.1.

<sup>307</sup> This is an awkward text, וַיִּשְׂמוּ אֶת-כְּלָיו בַּיִת עֲשֵׂתָרֹת. First of all, there is no preposition before בַּיִת to indicate the relation of כְּלָיו (*his armour*) to שִׁים (*to place*). It is usually translated as *in the house*. Secondly, the construction of בַּיִת עֲשֵׂתָרֹת leaves the translation of עֲשֵׂתָרֹת open. It neither has an article, to identify it as a title/object, nor an object marker to identify its determination as a name. So stands the translation *house of an ashtaroth/Ashtaroth*.



### 2.3.3.2.3. Individuals

Individuals that are associated with אֲשֵׁרָה include “women” (II Kg 23:7), “children” (Jer 17:2), “prophets of the baal” and “the prophets of the asherah”<sup>308</sup> (I Kg 18:19). The “women” weave for the asherah, the “children” remember their asherim and the “prophets” represent the baal and the asherah on Mt Carmel. “Israel” is indicted with making their asherim in I Kg 14:15, and then in verse 23, “Judah” is also accused of building pillars and asherim. The “children of Israel” are accused of making an asherah (II Kg 17:16), setting up pillars and asherim (II Kg 17:10), and serving (עָבַד) the asheroth (Jdg 3:7) and the ashtaroth (Jdg 2:13, 10:6 and I Sam 12:10). But the “children of Israel” do remove the ashtaroth in I Sam 7:4.

The specific individuals that are named in these texts as having some sort of association with אֲשֵׁרָה can be neatly divided according to their actions regarding אֲשֵׁרָה. For lack of a better dividing line they will be called “the good guys” and “the bad guys” (though not all are masculine personalities). For “the bad guys”, the use of constructive and cultic verbs are consistent. For “the good guys”, destructive verbs are uniform. In Judges 6, “Gideon” cuts down (כָּרַת) the asherah, and uses the wood of the asherah to make an offering to YHWH. “His father”, though not actively involved with destroying the asherah or the altar of the baal, defends “Gideon’s” actions and ridicules the baal. In the book of I Samuel, “Samuel” instructs the house of Israel to put away (סָר) foreign gods and the ashtaroth (I Sam 7:3, 4). “Asa” cuts down (כָּרַת) and burns (שָׂרַף) the image for the asherah which his mother made (I Kg 15:13). “Elijah” challenged all Israel (including king Ahab and his wife, Jezebel) and the prophets of the baal and the asherah to a showdown on Mt Carmel. “Hezekiah” (II Kg 18:4) cut down (כָּרַת) the asherah and destroyed other cultic paraphernalia. “Josiah” is the most active in his campaign against asherah, the asherah, the asherim, and Ashtoreth. Under the actions of his reform, the asherah is carried out (צָא) of the house of YHWH, burnt (שָׂרַף), beaten (דָּקַק) to ashes, and the ashes strewn (שָׁלַךְ) on graves in the Kidron. The vessels of the asherah meet the same demise. The asherim that were outside Jerusalem were also cut down (כָּרַת), and the high places that were there for the abominations of the “nations” (including Ashtoreth) were defiled (טָמֵא). He pursued the campaign as far as Bethel and burned (שָׂרַף) an asherah that was there (II Kg 23:4-15).

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<sup>308</sup> Note that the prophets of the asherah are not mentioned again, leaving some to surmise that the phrase “400 prophets of the asherah” was added in order to discredit the worship of the asherah, (cf. Hadley 1989:97 ff.). C.F. Burney points to Wellhausen’s “calling attention to the absence of אֲשֵׁרָה before אֲנִי and to the omission of any mention in *v v.* 22 and 40, regards these words as a gloss, upon the ground that אֲשֵׁרָה was not confused with the goddess עֲשֵׂתֵרֶת until much later times” (Burney 1903:222). Thanks to Professor Rogerson for calling my attention to this reference.



“The bad guys”, on the other hand, make (עשה), cause to stand (נצב Hi), set up (שי), build (בנה), and worship (עבד) asherah/the asherah. “Maacah” made a horrible image for the asherah (I Kg 15:13). “Ahab” made the asherah (I Kg 16:33). “Jezebel,” his wife, is not directly involved with אַשְׁרָה. However “Ahab’s” marriage to her is followed by the comment that he erected an altar for the baal and made the asherah (I Kg 16:32-33). The prophets of the asherah and the baal are said to eat at her table (I Kg 18:19). She threatens Elijah’s life when she hears that he had the prophets of the baal killed (I Kg 19:2). “Jehoahaz” left the asherah standing (עמד) in Samaria (II Kg 13:6). II Kg 21:3 suggests that both “Manasseh” and “Ahab”, before him, set up altars for the baal and made an asherah,<sup>309</sup> and “Manasseh” also bowed down to the host of the heavens and served (עבד) them.

#### 2.3.3.2.4. Deities

Attention can also be given to the deities with whom אַשְׁרָה is associated. The “host of heaven” is mentioned in three passages, which include אַשְׁרָה: II Kg 17:16, 21:3, 23:4. According to the report given in II Kg 17:16 the children of Israel made an asherah and bowed down to the “host of heaven” and served the baal (וַיַּעֲשׂוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֶת־הַבַּעַל אֲשִׁירָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ לְכָל־צְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֶת־הַבַּעַל, II Kg 17:16). Manasseh also made an asherah, bowed to the “host of heaven” and served them (II Kg 21:3). Assumedly the “them” here includes the baal, for whom he had built an altar, and an asherah. II Kg 23:4 suggests that the vessels that were made for the baal and the asherah were also made for the “host of heaven”. Four other verses speak of deities in general. All of these refer to עַשְׂתָּרֹת with and without the article.

Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel saying, “If with all your heart you return to YHWH and remove (סור Hi) your *foreign gods* (אֱלֹהֵי הַנֹּכְרִי) from your midst and the ashtaroth, and direct (כון Hi) your hearts to YHWH and serve him alone then he will deliver (נצל Pi) you from the hand of the Philistines” (I Sam 7:3).

The condition for deliverence was putting away the “foreign gods” and the ashtaroth. So, in the next verse (I Sam 7:4) they removed them — the foreign gods being identified with the baalim and the ashtaroth. “The children of Israel . . . served the gods” of the Syrians, Sidonians, Moabites, Ammonites and the Philistines in conjunction with the baalim and the ashtaroth in Judges 10:6. Jdg 2:11-13 has the same sort of pattern only that the name first mentioned is the baalim (2:11). They followed after other gods (2:12) and then forsook YHWH and served “the baal” and the ashtaroth (2:13). By this rendition “the ashtaroth” is identified as one of “the other

<sup>309</sup> But the intertexts for these are not consistent in the forms of אַשְׁרָה that they use; I Kg 16:33 *the asherah*, II Kg 18:4 *the asherah*, II Ch 33:3 *ashtaroth*, cf. sec. 2.3.3.1.2. n. 281.



gods”, and possibly also one of “the baalim”. Again the Sidonians are mentioned in I Kg 11 in reference to Solomon’s apostasy. He “went after Ashtoreth the *goddess* of the Sidonians” (עֲשֵׂתָרֶת) (אֱלֹהֵי צִדְוֹנִים I Kg 11:5) and bowed down to Ashtoreth the “goddess” of the Sidonians (וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ לְעֲשֵׂתָרֶת אֱלֹהֵי צִדְוֹנִין, I Kg 11:33). As noted before, in both cases here the word translated as “goddess”<sup>310</sup> is customarily masculine plural and in apposition to עֲשֵׂתָרֶת.

Specific deities mentioned with אֲשֵׁרָה include “Nehushtan”, “Milcom”, “Chemosh”, and “the baal”. II Kg 18:4 says that Hezekiah cut down the asherah and beat or hammered fine (כַּתַּת Pi) “Nehushtan”, the bronze serpent that Moses had made<sup>311</sup> and to which the children of Israel were burning incense. Both “Milcom”, the god of the Ammonites, and “Chemosh”, the god of Moab, are mentioned in I Kg 11:33 and II Kg 23:13. I Kg 11:33 calls Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians whereas II Kg 23:13 labels her as the abomination of the Sidonians. I Kg 11:5 mixes these two terms: “Solomon went after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom, the detested thing (שִׂקִּין), of the Ammonites” (I Kg 11:5). I Kg 11:4 mentions that when Solomon was old, his many foreign wives turned his heart toward their gods. “Milcom” and Ashtoreth are especially singled out here. The I Kg 11 and II Kg 23 passages both mention עֲשֵׂתָרֶת (anarthrous) rather than אֲשֵׁרָה. Note that all the “names” of these gods (“Nehushtan”, “Milchom”, and “Chemosh”) are written without the article.

“The baal” is mentioned seven times in total, each time with the article. Four of those times בַּעַל appears in the masculine plural form. Once אֲשֵׁרֹת is used; twice אֲשֵׁרָה appears; and for the rest of the five occurrences, עֲשֵׂתָרֶת is the form. The book of Judges records that the children of Israel served “the baalim” and the asheroth (וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֶת־הַבְּעָלִים וְאֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרוֹת, Jdg 3:7). The children of Israel worshipped the host of heaven, served “the baal” and made an asherah, according to II Kg 17:16. II Kg 23:4 also records the same combination of divine characters. On the other hand, Jdg 2:13 combines the ashtaroah and “the baal”. Jdg 10:6 uses the plural form of בַּעַל, (וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֶת־הַבְּעָלִים וְאֶת־הָעֲשֵׂתָרוֹת, “they served the baalim and the ashtaroah”). While I Sam 7:3 has Samuel instructing the children of Israel to remove the ashtaroah and the foreign gods, 7:4 suggests that they put away “the baalim” and the

<sup>310</sup> To avoid the confusion of gender here it may be well to translate אֱלֹהִים as “deity” (a note made in private correspondence with Dr. John Jarick).

<sup>311</sup> Diachronically speaking this could give evidence of a very old custom of divination. The verb נִחַשׁ is also translated *divination*. The noun simply means copper or copper alloy, bronze. BDB (639 s.v.) suggests that נִחַשְׁתָּן may mean “bronze god”.



ashtaroth. As mentioned before, the text here leads one to assume that “the baalim” and ashtaroth are foreign gods. Samuel puts the words in the mouths of the children of Israel saying, “we have served the baalim and the ashtaroth, now save us from the hands of our enemies and we will serve you” (I Sam 12:10) — the “you” being their saviour, YHWH. Note that in each of the last four verses mentioned (Jdg 2:13, 10:6 and I Sam 7:4, 12:10) עשתרת was written with the article.

#### 2.3.4. The Forms

Toward a summary of the way that אֲשֵׁרָה and עֲשֵׁתֶרֶת appear, it would help to consider the way that these two words and their plural forms are used in the 35 verses in which they appear in the deuteronomistic-Jeremiah texts. There are nine forms in which these words appear; they and their attendant verbs and nouns will be reviewed briefly<sup>312</sup> in this order: אֲשֵׁרָה, אֲשֵׁרִים, הָאֲשֵׁרָה, הָאֲשֵׁרוֹת, הָאֲשֵׁרִים, אֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם, הָעֲשֵׁתֶרֶת, עֲשֵׁתֶרֶת, הָעֲשֵׁתֶרֶת.

##### 2.3.4.1. אֲשֵׁרָה

Asherah is used in five different verses. Asherah is to be burnt (שָׂרַף), is made (עָשָׂה), is not to be planted (לֹא נִטַע), and is served (עָבַד). Those objects that are found in association with אֲשֵׁרָה include: an altar (מִזְבֵּחַ) at Bethel that was broken down; altars of the baal (מִזְבְּחֵי לְבַעַל) that were erected; a tree (עֵץ) that was not to be planted; molten images (מִסְכָּה) and calves (עֲגֻלִּים) that were made; high places (בְּמִזֵּה) that were broken down, demolished, and ground to dust; and the baal (הַבַּעַל) and the host of the heavens (צְבֹאֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם) who are worshipped. Four times this word follows the verb of the sentence without אֶת, the direct object marker. It is not found with אֶת following the verb.

##### 2.3.4.2. אֲשֵׁרִים

This form is used in only two verses. Asherim are: set up (נָצַב) and built (בָּנָה). Pillars (מִצְבֵּת) are set up and built, pillars and Asherim are under green trees (עֵץ רֵעֵן) and on high hills (גְּבֵעָה גְבוּהָה); high places (בְּמִזֵּה) are also built. Twice this form of the word is found as an item in a series; none of the items in the series have אֶת for either verse. It is not found with אֶת following the verb.

##### 2.3.4.3. הָאֲשֵׁרָה

With its appearance in thirteen verses, this is the most common form of this word. The asherah is cut down (כָּרַת), burned (שָׂרַף), pulverised (דָּקַק), the dust/ashes of

<sup>312</sup> The chapter and verse references for these will not be repeated here as this is a review of the previous discussion. Cf. secs. 2.3.3.1.3 and 2.3.3.2.1.



the asherah were thrown (שֶׁלַךְ) on the graves. The asherah was made (עֲשָׂה); set up (שִׁים); stood (עָמַד) in Samaria; and hangings were woven (אָרַג) for the asherah. The prophets of the asherah were summoned (קָבַץ, שָׁלַח; both in imperative form) to Mt Carmel and they ate (אָכַל) at Jezebel's table. Those objects that were associated with the asherah include: pillars (מִצְבּוֹת) that were shattered; trees (עֲצֵי) that were cut and burnt; the altars of the baal and YHWH (מִזְבֵּחַ הַבַּעַל, מִזְבֵּחַ יְהוָה) that are torn down and built, respectively; Nehushtan (נְחֻשְׁתָּן) that was hammered fine; vessels (כֵּלִים), that were made for the asherah, the baal and the host of the heavens, and that were removed from the temple of YHWH (הַכֵּל יְהוָה); the ashes (עֹפָר) of those vessels that were burnt outside Jerusalem at the brook Kidron and carried to Bethel; the ashes/dust (עֹפָר) of the asherah that was also burnt at Kidron and thrown on the graves (קָבַר) nearby; hangings/"tent shrines" (בָּתִּים) that were made for the asherah; a carved image of the asherah (פֶּסֶל הָאֲשֵׁרָה) that is made and set up; a horrid image (מַפְלֵצַת) that is made for the asherah, cut down and burned, and high places (בָּמוֹת) that are removed. The asherah is carried out of the house of YHWH (בֵּית יְהוָה); the houses of the male prostitutes (בְּתֵי הַקְּדֻשִׁים) were also removed from the house of YHWH. Women (נָשִׁים) weave something for the asherah; and the prophets of the asherah and the baal (נְבִיאֵי הָאֲשֵׁרָה, נְבִיאֵי הַבַּעַל) were summoned. Seven times הָאֲשֵׁרָה is the object of the verb; four times with אֶת, three times without.

#### 2.3.4.4. הָאֲשֵׁרוֹת

The asheroth appears in only one verse. Seemingly in the same breath YHWH is forgotten (שָׁכַח) and the baalim and the asheroth are served (עָבַד). The one time that this word is found in the texts under investigation it is used with אֶת, the direct object marker.

#### 2.3.4.5. הָאֲשֵׁרִים

The asherim also appears in only one verse. The asherim are cut down (כָּרַת), the pillars (מִצְבּוֹת) are shattered and human bones (עֲצָמוֹת אָדָם) are used to fill in the places of the asherim. This form is used with אֶת to designate it as the object of the verb.

#### 2.3.4.6. אֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם

This form is found in three different verses with two different spellings (אֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם and אֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם). The asherim of the peoples of the nations of the new land (their asherim) are to be hewn down (גָּדַע) and burned (שָׂרַף). The items that accompany them are to be destroyed; their pillars (מִצְבּוֹתָם) shattered, their altars (מִצְבְּחֹתָם) pulled and torn down; their carved images (פְּסִלֵיהֶם) burned; and images of their gods



(פסלי אלהים) hewn down. The children of Israel make their asherim. Alternatively, the asherim of the children<sup>313</sup> are remembered (זכר) with green trees (עץ רענן) upon high hills (גבעות הגבהות). Of the three times this form is used it is marked with the direct object marker only once, and the word order of the verb and object are reversed once. The other occurrence is in a poetic line and in a series.

#### 2.3.4.7. עֲשֵׂתֶרֶת

Ashtoreth appears in three verses. עֲשֵׂתֶרֶת is defiled (טמא), followed after (הולך), and high places (במות) are built (בנה) for Ashtoreth. Ashtoreth is also bowed down to (שחזה). Ashtoreth is called an abomination (שקץ) and goddess (אלהי), specifically of Sidon, and is listed with the gods (אלהי) and abominations (שקץ) of Ammon and Moab. This word is anarthrous in each instance and found only in conjunction with a preposition and so not as a direct object of the verb.

#### 2.3.4.8. עֲשֵׂתָרוֹת

This form occurs only in one verse. Armour is put in the house of Ashtaroth (בית עשתרות) which is located in Beth Shan, where the dead bodies of Saul and Jonathan are hung upon a wall. The armour is set off by a direct object marker (את־כִּלָּיו), however the house of ashtaroth/Ashtaroth is not marked by preposition or a direct object marker.

#### 2.3.4.9. הַעֲשֵׂתָרוֹת

The ashtaroth is found in five verses. הַעֲשֵׂתָרוֹת is removed (סור Hi) and served (עבד). The baal(im) (בעל, בעלים) is/are also removed and served along with the ashtaroth. In one of these texts it is mentioned that they serve *for* the baal and the ashtaroth (ועבדו לבעל ולעשתרות). Foreign gods (אלהי הנכר) are also to be removed, and they along with the gods of (אלהי) Syria, Sidon, Moab, Ammon and Philistia are also served with the baal and the ashtaroth. Four times this word is the direct object of the verb. Three times it is marked by a direct object marker and the one case where it not, it is in a series governed by את with the first noun (cf. Waltke and O'Connor 1990: 179, 10.3.1 no. 5).

#### 2.3.5. “The asherah” of the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic Texts

The pattern of the article with אֲשֵׁרָה is not as clear cut as with בעל.<sup>314</sup> In texts adjacent to one another, this word is used with and without the article (e.g. II Kg

<sup>313</sup> This is an awkward text and these are assumedly Judah's children, cf. Jer 17:2 and previous discussion in secs. 2.3.3.1.3 and 2.3.3.2.1.

<sup>314</sup> Cf. previous discussion on “the baal” in sec. 1.3.4.1 The Article, • 7.



21:3,<sup>315</sup> 7; 23:7, 14, 15). Therefore using the presence of an article to determine the nature of who or what **אשרה** was seems somewhat futile because of the lack of a consistent picture. Of greater assistance would be the syntactic structures surrounding **אשרה**. However, mention could also be made here, as was in section on the baal, that the deliberate use of an article relegates the “name” to a title. The force of this does not seem as strong for the asherah, **האשרה**, as for the baal, **הבעל**, partly because of the difference in the nature of the words themselves. **בעל** has a clear and distinct meaning of its own outside of a divine connection. **אשרה** does not. Even so, there may well be some irony at play behind the narratives of the texts that we have examined.<sup>316</sup>

First of all the majority of the verbs used with **אשרה** (and its various forms) are either destructive ( **שרף** or **כרת** ) or constructive ( **עשה** or **בנה** ). This would seem to indicate that when used with these classes of verbs, an object of some sort was intended. The association with things ( **במה**, **מצבות** ) which are without question objects that can be either destroyed or made also leads us to understand **אשרה** as some sort of artefact. Dt 16:21 (“the planting of a tree as an asherah”) and Jdg 6 (“the wood of the asherah is to be used to fuel the fires of sacrifice for YHWH”) indicate quite clearly that a wooden object (living or dead) is meant.

The “cultic” verbs are not so clear in regard to identity. One can worship before an object as a representation of a deity or worship the object as a deity. The way the verbs are presented in these texts do not help us discern between these two things. So, “serve” or “worship” ( **עבד** or **שחז** ) do not give us particular clues at this point. Emically the authors of the Hebrew scriptures wrote with an understanding of the meaning of “worshipping”, “bowing down to”, and “serving” **אשרה** that has left us unable to decipher what their emic understanding of **אשרה** was.

As with the baal, **אשרה** in none of its forms is the subject of the verb. Action is taken “against” or “for” **אשרה**. And again, no face is to be seen. Maybe we have a hint of shape. **אשרה** is something that can be carried and something that burns; something that can be set up or left to stand. It/she is something that can be found in houses, in temples, on high hills and under green trees. But this does not give us much more information than to say that **אשרה** was probably bigger than a bread box.

<sup>315</sup> Note that this is also without an object marker, as discussed previously, secs. 2.3.3.1.2. n. 281 and 2.3.3.2.1. n. 297.

<sup>316</sup> I am not sure that there is much mileage in this comment. It may be an avenue of inquiry at a later date.



However there may be some distinctions that can be made between **אשרה** and **עשתרת** both by virtue of the verbs used with these words and by the contexts in which they appear. There is much more aggressive action taken against **אשרה**. It is cut down, hewn down, burnt and pulverised. On the contrary, **עשתרת** is removed and the high places built for **עשתרת** are only defiled. Also of interest here is that constructive verbs are not used with **עשתרת** as an object. High places were built for Ashtoreth, as mentioned in II Kg 23:13, but never is **עשה** or **בה** used to describe the creation of **עשתרת**, as is of **אשרה**. The objects associated with them are also as distinct in nature. Though both are associated with high places, other artefacts like pillars, altars, and trees are not found with **עשתרת**. From this it seems that between these two, **עשתרת** was more likely understood as a divine figure. One more shred of evidence leaning in this direction is that **עשתרת** is associated with other gods of other nations and is “herself” identified by apposition as the goddess and abomination of Sidon. Not so with **אשרה**.

The clinching bit of evidence lies with the use of the direct object marker (**את**). The absence of an object marker is of no direct help as it is not consistent in its presence or absence. The more piercing evidence would be in the presence of the object marker with an anarthrous form of **אשרה** or **עשתרת** as this would assume the determinate nature of the word and point toward it as a name rather than a title. The forms **אשרה** and **אשרים** are not represented as anarthrous with the direct object marker. So, using **את** as a marker of a name by virtue of its determinate nature, we find that neither **אשרה** nor **אשרים** is found in the form of a name as the object of the verb. And as was mentioned earlier, nor are they found as subjects of verbs. The feminine plural form of this word (**אשרות**) is found only once, and with the article. Considering **עשתרת** in its singular and plural forms, the singular anarthrous forms are found only with prepositions rather than an object marker, and each time in apposition with a place name and in association with other divine names. As for the plural form (**עשתרות**), the only time that it occurs without the article it is in a construct relationship that presents a bit of awkwardness for translation (**בית עשתרת**); because it is lacking a preposition. So translating these texts with this in mind, we have no Asherah, Asherim, or Ashtaroth. We have instead, asherah, asherim, asheroth, and ashtaroth, sometimes of determinate nature, sometimes not. But we may well have Ashtoreth of Sidon.

In some instances, **אשרה** may have been understood to be a deity in “her” own right (e.g. Jdg 3:7 where only a cultic verb is used with **האשרות**; II Kg 21:3 may also be an indication of **אשרה** as a deity, but the fact **אשרה** is only a possible antecedent of



אֱלֹהִים does not give us conclusive evidence). The Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts testify to the fact that the people were involved in making images, setting up pillars and even weaving things for אֱלֹהִים. There was a cult of some sort established, as evidenced by the persistent attempts to eradicate the worship of עֲשֵׂתֵי אֱלֹהִים from the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.



### 3. Molek

#### 3.1. MLK of the ANE

An appeal can and has been made (notably by George Heider in *The Cult of Molek* [1985])<sup>317</sup> to the archaeological evidence that points to the material cultures of the surrounding nations for evidence that would describe and/or explain the nature and character of Molek in the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts. According to the evidence Molek is a chthonic god, a god of the underworld/netherworld receiving/requiring child sacrifice. Gods of the netherworld and child sacrifice were known in the ancient world. The nations, kingdoms and cities that have been cited for evidence bearing on these topics are Ebla, Mari, Babylon, Assyria, Phoenicia, Ugarit and Punic colonies. Each of these will be reviewed individually.

##### 3.1.1. Ebla

In the material from Ebla there is a god Malik, whose nature or character cannot be discerned from the evidence available. What is known from the epigraphical material describes his relationship to/with the people who worshipped him.<sup>318</sup> Giovanni Pettinato used an analysis of names which included theophoric elements (elements that could be understood as divine names) to identify gods who were popular among the peoples of Ebla. Pettinato notes, “These names grant an insight into the intimate relationship between common man and his god” (Pettinato 1981:261).<sup>319</sup> He then continues to explain the characteristics of the god(s) as the names depict them: “he [the one named] is the servant of the god but in recompense the god watches over him, indeed, he is like a father who protects, provides, and listens” (Pettinato 1981:261).<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> Heider’s main thesis in this book is to refute Paul Mosca’s (1975) defense of Otto Eissfeldt’s (1935) conclusions regarding the *molk* sacrifice.

<sup>318</sup> Heider mentions in a footnote that there are several examples in *Archivi Reali di Ebla Testi and Materiali Epigrafici Ebla* of names and places with *mlk* as an element. But little is known of them, so “the occurrence of names with *ma-lik* at Abu Salabikh remains the best evidence that Malik was not a local Eblaite deity” (Heider 1985:97 n. 174). However, it must be noted that Ebla (Tell Mardikh) and Abu Salabikh are two different cities, though they were contemporary cultures.

<sup>319</sup> Heider has mentioned that the four names that Pettinato has used; Malik, Damu, Il and Ya were all analyzed in lump sum. Heider (Heider 1985: 99) has wrongly cited Pettinato here as page 260.

<sup>320</sup> As an excursus, it is interesting, that Pettinato wants to make a distinction between a popular cult and an official cult at Ebla.

The only means to pinpoint the differences between official and popular religion is furnished by the lists of personal names. The first observation concerns the divine elements in the personal names: some gods are witnessed here but are absent from the cultic texts. The most glaring cases are those of Malik and Damu, the two most popular gods at Ebla, if we credit the enormous number of personal names composed with these divine elements,



This is all quite helpful. However, as Heider points out, the analysis included four different theophoric elements, *mlk* being only one of them. He comments, “it is impossible to say that his [Pettinato’s] analysis revealed anything about the popular conception of Malik *in particular*” (Heider 1985:99; brackets and italics mine).

What this evidence does establish is that there was a god for whom the radicals *mlk* were used as a divine name in a community neighbouring Israel. The evidence from Ebla situates Malik as a god in this area through the second half of the second millennium BCE. Heider suggests that this is the oldest evidence available (Heider 1985:153). The distance of this, chronologically, from the Hebrew scriptures presents difficulties in using it for application to the Israelite milieu. Its usefulness lies only in the fact that *mlk* is used as a theophoric element in a name.

### 3.1.2. Mari

Mari, located on the Euphrates to the south and east of Ebla, may have shared some of the same heritage. Their kingdoms were at their heights at approximately the same time. In the archives discovered at Mari, Akkadian texts with the name Muluk were deciphered. Again theophoric names have been the source for the information we have. *ANET* records the name of Malik-Dagan in a letter from Itur-Asdu:

Speak to my lord: This Itur-Asdu your servant. (5) The day I dispatched this tablet of mine to my lord, Malik-Dagan, a man from Shakka . . . (*ANET* 1969:623).

According to the notes of the translator, William Moran, this letter was one that was supposedly sent to Zimri-Lim “who must have been absent from Mari. Hence our tablet, unless it was never sent, must be a copy” (1969:623). The element *mlk* has been found in the vocalized form Malik (as at Ebla and above) and also as Muluk. There have been several scholars who have seen this as a variation on an Eblaite theme (Heider 1985:45-46; Green 1975:181).<sup>321</sup> But since the information comes from

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and of the pair Il and Ya, equally frequent among the names of Eblaïtes (Pettinato 1981:260).

<sup>321</sup> Both cite G. Dossin (1938) and A. Bea (1939) in this category. Green also includes P. Jensen (1934) which I find difficult to follow as Jensen does not appeal to the Mari text in his article. Gordon Young has recently (1992) edited a book titled *Mari in Retrospect. Fifty Years of Mari and Mari Studies*. Though it is a substantial volume with several articles written by as many authors, only three personal names and no divine names with the element *malik* is listed in the index. None of these three names are discussed. Gelb translates *malkum* and *maliktum* of Mari as “king” and “queen”, respectively (1992:129, 148). Cf. Heider 1985:102-113 for further discussion of what he calls “Amorite Evidence” of *malik* and *malki/u* in personal names and as a divine name.



names it is difficult, once again, to gain any specific information as to the nature of this god or his cult.

### 3.1.3. Babylon

Nergal of Babylon may provide us with some more specific information. He is a god of the netherworld, which Molek is also said to have been. Although Nergal is traced as far back as the 3rd millennium BCE at Abu Salabikh and Fara (Shuruppak)<sup>322</sup> (Steinkeller 1987:164), his popularity as a god in Babylon extends into the first millennium BCE. Steinkeller also mentions that Nergal is equated with “*Ra-sa-ap*” at Ebla (1987:164; cf. Pettinato 1981:251). This would place the evidence in closer chronological proximity to the time of the Hebrew scriptures.

Connections have been made with Nergal of Babylon and the divine name *mlk* (Day 1989:84; Heider 1985:32-34,155,163). Heider cites Peter Jensen (1934) and gives a synopsis of Jensen’s equation of Malik and Nergal:

The proposed equation of Molek and Nergal was approached from the other side in 1934, when the Assyriologist Peter Jensen offered evidence that the O.T. Melek, Ammon’s Milkom and Moab’s Kemoš were all equivalent to one another and to Nergal (Heider 1985:33)

The character of Nergal and the nature of the cult of Nergal are fairly well known. Jensen suggests that Nergal is the god of hell and that N-e-r G-a-l means king in Sumerian (Jensen 1934:237). This would further suggest that *mlk* is an equivalent of Nergal, identifying Malik (of Akkad) with a deity of East Semitic origin (Jensen 1934:237; Heider 1985:34).

As to Nergal’s character, the reference is often made to “Nergal, the god of the dead”, “god of death” or “god of the underworld”. A.D.H. Bivar in an article on “Mithraism and Mesopotamia” gives a description of the Babylonian Nergal:

Nergal was god of death and the underworld. When propitiated he was able to save from death. He was god of vegetation and the palm tree;<sup>323</sup> hunting, war and the plague, which populate his kingdom. In certain aspects he was regarded as a sun god, perhaps in connection with the sun’s daily journey beneath the earth, or with the lethal properties of the desert sun. Nergal, like Gibil, was a god

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<sup>322</sup> Piotr Steinkeller only uses the name Fara, which Fara is unclear. I have made a guess at Fara Shuruppak as the likely location out of a few that Professor Rogerson kindly suggested.

<sup>323</sup> John B. Curtis 1957:155, as cited by Bivar 1975.



of fire. He is identified with Malik,<sup>324</sup> the biblical Moloch, the deity who, amongst the Ammonites, near Jerusalem, and in Phoenicia and elsewhere, received the sacrifice of infants by fire. His attribute is the lion (Bivar 1975:284).

McKay adds to this description that Nergal “was associated with the planet Mars” (1973:69). Both John Day (1989:48-9)<sup>325</sup> and Jensen (1934:236) present the equations, from the Akkadian god-lists, of Malik=Nergal, which provide us with connections with deities in both Ebla and Mari. Again, note here that *mlk* and “*ner-gal*” in Sumerian (as suggested by Jensen 1934:237) can be understood as “king”, so the equation seems quite natural.

#### 3.1.4. Ugarit

Ugarit was unearthed on the coast in Syria due east of Cyprus. Of great interest to many scholars are the findings at Ras Shamra, because the material found there has opened the discussion in many different areas. The Ugaritic and Akkadian tablets, found in the archives, shed some light on *mlk* as a god of those cultures that used those languages. Heider explains the relevance of these texts to the study of a god named *mlk* in this way:

The Ugaritic material is written in two ways, alphabetic cuneiform (Ugaritic) and syllabic cuneiform (“Akkadian”),<sup>326</sup> with a few tablets containing parallel lists of words in both. The texts written in Ugaritic are at the same time the most interesting and the most challenging: interesting, because for the first time they provide us with literary evidence of a god MLK per se (not pluralized) in a context which allows us to know something of the god’s nature; challenging, because they are unvocalized and thus open to greater ambiguity at the most fundamental level of interpretation, the establishment of the correct reading. Thus, the name of the god under study is written in the same way as the relatively common word for “king,” mlk (Heider, 1985:114).

The texts cited for evidence at Ugarit are snake-bite texts or “serpent charms” (Astour 1968) that indicate *mlk* from a place called Ashtaroth (*mlk* <sup>ᶜ</sup>*ttrth*). There is a town called Astharoth in Bashan to the east of the Sea of Galilee. Astour has understood <sup>ᶜ</sup>*ttrt* in the two occurrences (*mlk* <sup>ᶜ</sup>*ttrth*, RS 24.244.41 and *mlk* *b*<sup>ᶜ</sup>*ttrt*, RS 24.251

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<sup>324</sup> Curtis 1957:149, again, as cited by Bivar.

<sup>325</sup> Day also mentions Ashur (a city state/capital of Assyria) as another source for this equation (1989:48-9).

<sup>326</sup> Heider places the quotations marks, as he says: “We place ‘Akkadian’ in quotation marks, because texts written in syllabic cuneiform at Ugarit were not necessarily read in Akkadian (any more than the tablets at Ebla were read in Sumerian)” (Heider 1985:114, n. 216).



obverse.17) as Ashtaroth “the very ancient Canaanite city in Bashan” (Astour 1968:21). But Charles Virolleaud in an early publication of this material (1968:570), suggests *ʿttrth* is a divine name rather than a place name:

*MLk ʿttrth* “(le dieu) *MLk* (tourné) vers (la déesse) *ʿAštart*”. En RS 24.251,17, on lit *MLk b ʿttrth* = “M. (est assis) à côté de (*b*) *ʿAštart*”, à rapprocher de *il ytb b ʿttrth* : “Il est assis à côté de . . .”, en RS 24.252, 2.

Virolleaud (1968:578) presents a parallel list of the gods mentioned in these snake bite texts (*Ugaritica* V.7.41; 8.17).<sup>327</sup> *MLk (b) ʿttrth* is listed toward the end of each of the two sets of gods mentioned. Astour translates *mlk* as “Milk” for the RS 24.251 occurrence (1968:32). He comments on his translation saying, “This arrangement leaves one god, Milk, without a mate, but for the sake of symmetry the poet has included in the stich the god’s residence *Ašartu*” (Astour 1968:32).<sup>328</sup> Whether *ʿttrth* in this context is a goddess or a place name is as yet an unresolved question. There are several names with the element *mlk* at Ugarit, but this tells us very little about the god *mlk*.

The suggestion is also made that *mlk* of Ugarit is connected to the *Rpu* and *Rephesh* (well known chthonic gods), possibly also of *Ashtaroth* (Heider 1985:119, 124; Pope 1981:172-74). If this were the case, Heider’s choice of translating *ʿttrt* as a place name would be strengthened. This connection is made by way of the *Rephaim* that were to reside at Bashan, *Ashtaroth*<sup>329</sup> and *mlk ʿttrth* as mentioned above. Pope also mentions a *ršp ʿttrt* in the snake bite texts (1981:173). Another association here is *mlk*=*Mot*, the god of death (Heider 1985:137 ff.).<sup>330</sup> But these conclusions may be too thin to rely on. The finds at Ugarit were especially exciting to biblical scholars because of Ugarit’s supposed continuity with the culture and chronology of the Hebrew scriptures. It is disappointing that the Ugaritic literature offers us no more concrete help with the character of the god in question.

<sup>327</sup> RS 24.244.41/KTU 1.100 and RS 24.251.17/KTU 1.107, respectively.

<sup>328</sup> This translation seems warranted in that it is the only time that *b*, a preposition, is used with the name rather than *w*, the conjunction among the list of names. Time does not allow for further discussion on this issue.

<sup>329</sup> King *Og* of Bashan was called the last of the *Rephaim*, *Dtn* 3:11; and note also the *Rephaim* of *Ashteroth-karnaim* *Gen* 14:5. BDB has 𐤀𐤓𐤏𐤕 listed twice, once translated as “shades, ghosts” and the second time “n.pr.gent. old race of giants” (952 s.v.).

<sup>330</sup> Heider credits this to Pope, but does not give a citation for which of Pope’s works from which the idea comes. The connection of *mlk*=*Mot* is not overtly mentioned in Pope 1981.



### 3.1.5. Turkey

“Molech” is identified as the god who receives human sacrifice in Turkey. This comes from a stela recently discovered in Turkey which supposedly mentions human sacrifices that were made before a battle. The excavation and findings have yet to be published in full. The first publication is to be in Turkish. H. Shanks, who mentions this in the *Biblical Archaeology Review*, starts his article with; “The earliest reference to human sacrifice has been found in Turkey and is expected to illuminate several puzzling Biblical passages regarding Molech, whoever he or it was” (Shanks 1996b:13). Note should be made here that it is Shanks and not the stela that mentions “Molech”. Furthermore, he dates this evidence to the eighth century BCE.<sup>331</sup>

### 3.1.6. Phoenicia

The Phoenician civilization, along the northern coast of the eastern Mediterranean seaboard, also was flourishing during the time of the kings of Israel. Tyre and Sidon, of Phoenicia, are mentioned as trading cities in the Hebrew scriptures (I Kings 5:1ff; Ezekiel 27:1ff).

In the evidence from Phoenicia proper, precious little is known of a god with the elements *mlk* but a great deal has been uncovered regarding burnt sacrifices of children. It is generally assumed that Phoenician influence in Israel was greatest during the eighth to the seventh centuries BCE. This was also the height of Phoenician religious practices involving child sacrifice. Phoenician trade extended throughout the Mediterranean: as far west as Spain (Kennedy 1981:209-216; Kempinski 1996:56ff.); ports were established in North Africa; and Phoenician religious centers have been uncovered in Sicily, Sardinia, and Tunis (Stager and Wolff 1984:32).

Carthage, modern-day Tunis, founded in the ninth century BCE by the Phoenicians, had a reputation for practising child sacrifice even among the Roman and Greek writers of the first century CE.<sup>332</sup> Carthage will be discussed as an often cited archaeological site regarding the debate over child sacrifice and its relevance to the Hebrew scriptures.

### 3.1.7. Carthage and Punic Evidence

It is when we turn to the Punic<sup>333</sup> evidence that we begin to see something of the nature of the cultus that has been ascribed to Molek. Many connections have been made

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<sup>331</sup> Forthcoming publication of this should come from Prof. E. Carter, Prof. S. Kaufman and/or possibly B. Zuckerman.

<sup>332</sup> Day cites these sources, with translations in his appendix (Day 1989:86-91).

<sup>333</sup> In writing the article on “Languages, Phoenician”, Krahmalkov gives this synopsis of “Punic”:



between the Carthaginian practice of human sacrifice, child sacrifice, and the worship of Molek. Several levels of urns with the calcinated bones of infants, young children and animals were found at the site of what is called a Tophet in Carthage. The first excavations began in the 1920's and were continued in the 1970's. Stager and Wolff (1984) describe the excavations and give some background to the site, as well as some discussion on the interest it holds for scholars of the ANE. They mention that the urns were marked with monuments, some of which were marked with names of the receivers or the givers of the offerings that were set in the urns beneath the monuments. Some of these monuments included the word *mlk* (Stager and Wolff 1984:45). It is unfortunate that Stager and Wolff do not give us a date for these particular monuments, but they do mention that the burial of urns dated from 750 BCE to 146 BCE (1984:44). One seemingly significant comparison has been made between these and other Punic inscriptions (in Phoenician script)<sup>334</sup> with the name of Molek. The radicals *mlk* may have been used in the Punic inscriptions to describe different elements of sacrifice. *Mlk ʾmr* has been understood to mean "sacrifice of a lamb" (as a substitute) (Day 1989:8-9; cf. Heider 1985:34 ff.; and for an opposing view cf. Weinfeld 1972b:135-37). Another expression, *mlk ʾdm*, has been translated as "human sacrifice" or "sacrifice of a man/blood" (cf. Day 1989:5-9).<sup>335</sup> Stager and Wolff suggest that *mlk* "refers to a live sacrifice of a child or animal" (1984:39). Taken together these two expressions give a gruesome picture of the cult at Carthage; if indeed, this is the way to understand *mlk ʾmr* and *mlk ʾdm*. Eissfeldt, in 1935, was one of the first to suggest that *mlk*, of the Punic evidence, was to be vocalized *molk* and to be understood to be a type of sacrifice.

On the other hand, Heider's "reassessment" of the research on Molek, in 1985, tries to draw a connection between the Punic evidence and the Hebrew scriptures from a different perspective; from his book, *The Cult of Molek*:

It remains true, as we shall see, that the Punic archaeological evidence provides the closest parallel to the cult of which the OT appears to speak. In both cases children were sacrificed by fire to a deity in a specific sacred precinct. Moreover, such elements as a

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Western Phoenician (Punic), the language of the Carthaginian state and its vast empire, rivaled in importance Greek and Latin in classical antiquity; it survived in N Africa well into the Christian period . . . (Krahmalkov 192:222).

<sup>334</sup> Heider mentions "KAI 61A and B" a 6th or 7th century stela from Malta as the oldest example of *mlk* in Punic (Heider 1985:199).

<sup>335</sup> Weinfeld does not agree with *mlk ʾmr* as the sacrifice of a lamb as a substitute for a child, for several reasons; one of them being that he is not certain that *ʾmr* means lamb (1972b:135-36). He translates *mlk ʾdm* as "king of mankind", an epithet for El (1972b:137; cf. Day 1989:5, who refutes these suggestions).



strong mixture of the popular and official cults<sup>336</sup> and, as we now know, periods of increased observance of the practice appear to be shared. While we shall take care not to assume that the two cults are identical in every respect (including their divine recipient!), there is no question that the Punic evidence provides rich confirmation that cultic child sacrifice by fire was known among the Iron Age Semities whose home land was Syria-Palestine (Heider 1985:203).

Stager and Wolff name several sites that are identified as places of child sacrifice: “Phoenician Carthage, as well as similar precincts at other Phoenician sites in Sicily, Sardinia and Tunisia” (1984:32). Heider adds to these cities “Tharros, Sulcis, Monte Sirai, Bythia and Nova (Sardina)” (1985:196). He also gives a description of the similarities of the different sites that are credited with child sacrifice:

In sum, the Punic archeological evidence provides ample physical proof that a cult of child sacrifice was practiced [sic] from the earliest times of Phoenician colonization in the West. The cult was practised in walled, roofless precincts, sometimes outside of the city walls, and entailed the burning of babies and young children (or young animals) in acts of individual devotion which were, after a time, commemorated by stelae (Heider 1985:202-03 ).

Green also cites the Phoenicians as the source for the cult in Carthage and suggests that, “the reasons for such sacrifices are said to be national emergencies which are brought about by wars, drought, and plagues, at which time children would be sacrificed” (Green 1975:183).<sup>337</sup>

### 3.1.8. Molek in the ANE

The stories in the Baal Cycle have greatly enlarged the understanding of Baal and Asherah as deities in the ANE, but nothing of the like has been discovered at Ugarit or elsewhere for Molek. We have only two snake bite texts of Ugarit, where *mlk* <sup>c</sup>*trth* has been understood as either a compound divine name or as “*mlk* of Ashtaroth,” a city

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<sup>336</sup> Diana Edelman in her review of Heider’s book notes that Heider is somewhat obtuse in his “*distinction between ‘official’ and ‘popular’ cult*” (Edelman 1987: 731).

<sup>337</sup> We could note the sacrifice of Meshah’s son in II Kings 3:27 as being of this type. Green firmly places a Molek cult in Carthage with this statement:

The cremation of infants has thus been clearly established as the primary characteristic of the Molek sacrifice in the Punic world and, therefore, it has often been assumed that these sacrifices were a heritage of the country of origin, namely Phoenician. If this is an accurate assumption then it places the source of a religion that practiced child sacrifices at the back door or even next door to the nation of Israel (Green 1975:183).

Green mentions Philo of Byblos as an ancient source for this information for Charthagean religious practices. Philo in his *Phoenician History* is quoted by Eusebius and said to have used Sanchuniathon as a source. There is some debate as to whether Sanchuniathon was Philo’s invention or an authentic individual of the first millennium BCE.



in Bashan in the Transjordan. And conspicuous by its absence is molek from Keel and Uehlinger's compendium (1993). In their thoroughness to cover all the iconographic/epigraphic occurrences of gods, goddesses and symbols of gods, not once is *mlk* or Molek mentioned as a divine name. One possible explanation for Keel and Uehlinger's omission is that we don't know what iconography for Molek would be, because we don't know in what activity Molek may have been employed in the ANE.<sup>338</sup>

However, at Ebla and Mari, *mlk* has been found in names that have been used to identify what gods may have been in the pantheons of those ancient nations.<sup>339</sup> At Ebla, "Malik" is identified as a god. This is also true of Mari with the addition of a god "Muluk". The Akkadian god-lists also equate Malik and Nergal. Nergal is known from Babylon as a chthonic deity whose name may mean "king". Nergal at Babylon brings the associations with Malik up to the first millennium BCE. The evidence from Phoenician civilizations brings *mlk* closer in time and proximity to Palestine. Punic inscriptions include *mlk* on steleae that were set as monuments. Eissfeldt suggests that *mlk* is a kind of offering. In the Punic city of Carthage, a large precinct with several layers of buried urns of cremated remains of young children, infants and animals has been uncovered. Some of the burials were marked with stelae which include *mlk* in their inscriptions. But these inscriptions are not necessarily indicative of a cult of *mlk* associated with a deity by that name. Rather Baal-hamon and Tanit are the deities named as recipients of these offerings when identified. Taken all together, this points to *mlk* as a divine name in the ANE. In addition, the radicals *mlk* have been found in relation to evidence of a cult of child sacrifice. However, nothing has been discovered in the vein of the stories at Ugarit that would give a more complete picture of who *mlk* in the ANE was. Nor has any evidence of a cult of Molek or a cult of *mlk* been discovered among the archives of epigraphic or iconographic materials of the ANE. The evidence we have rests solely in the Hebrew material and that is sketchy at best.

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<sup>338</sup> This thought was kindly pointed out by Dr. R. Hess (private correspondence).

<sup>339</sup> Heider includes three appendixes with his treatise; "Appendix A: Catalog of Personal Names Containing MA-LIK", "Appendix B: Catalog of Amorite Divine and Personal Names Containing M-L-K Forms", and "Appendix C: Catalog of Personal Names from Ugarit Containing M-L-K Forms" (Heider 1985:409-19).



### 3.2. מֹלֵךְ of the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic Texts

Based on the elements of II Kg 23:10 and Jer 32:35 this discussion of מֹלֵךְ will centre on these elements: “ben-hinnom”, “the tophet”, עֵבֶר [Hi] “through the fire” (and by association “burn in the fire”), and “sons and daughters”. These elements are chosen because they are present in these two verses which specifically name מֹלֵךְ and because patterns or combinations of these elements seem to be consistent in other verses which seem to allude to the worship of מֹלֵךְ. Of the eighteen verses that are used for this survey, six of them mention that a son or sons and daughters or children are caused to pass (הֵעִבִיר) through the fire, and four of them burn (שָׂרַף) the same. All of the other references but one<sup>340</sup> refer to the tophet. Allusions to Molek are dependent on these elements or combinations thereof. These allusions are found only in Jeremiah 7, 19 and 32, Deuteronomy 12 and 18 and several times in I and II Kings; they are not found in Joshua, Judges or the books of Samuel. Other elements will also be mentioned which show consistency in their association with those elements found in II Kg 23:10 and Jer 32:35. First we will look at the name מֹלֵךְ.

#### 3.2.1. מֹלֵךְ

מֹלֵךְ is mentioned three times in the combined deuteronomistic-Jeremiah texts: II Kg 23:10 and Jer 32:35, and also in I Kg 11:7. I Kings 11:7 reports that “Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab at the mountain which faces (i.e. east of) Jerusalem, and to Molek, the abomination of the sons of Ammon” (I Kg 11:7). This is the only occasion in which Molek is identified with Ammon. The textual notes mention that the Lucianic recension of the Septuagint reads “Milchom”. Milchom is identified on numerous occasions with Ammon, so this correction by the LXX is not surprising. II Kg 23:10 and Jer 32:35 both write מֹלֵךְ with an article; I Kg 11:7 does not. In the discussions of אֲשֵׁרָה and בַּעַל, this was identified as something of significance. It was noted there, that names do not take an article as it would cause a double or redundant determinacy. To place an article before מֹלֵךְ then creates a title of what could be understood as a name. I Kings 11:7, however, writes it anarthrously (וּלְמֹלֵךְ שֶׁקֵן) which fits a pattern used when naming the gods of the neighbouring nations; e.g. II Kg 23:13 where not one of the three divine names given takes an article (לְעִשְׂתָּרַת | שֶׁקֵן צִדְוֹנִים וְלִכְמוֹשׁ שֶׁקֵן מוֹאָב וְלִמְלֶכֶם תוֹעֲבַת בְּנֵי-עַמּוֹן, II Kg 23:13). None of the elements of II Kg 23:10 or Jer 32:35 are mentioned in I Kg 11:7, so Molek in this verse seems to fall out of the general discussion of מֹלֵךְ as outlined above. To follow the convention set for the sections on אֲשֵׁרָה and בַּעַל, when מֹלֵךְ is written with an article it will be translated *the molek*.

<sup>340</sup> I Kg 11:7 which will be discussed presently.



### 3.2.2. Four Phrases

Four phrases that seem significant in this discussion will be considered before individual elements are taken in turn. They are found with those elements that are identified from Jer 32:35 and II Kg 23:10 as relating to the molek.

#### 3.2.2.1. “Doing evil in the eyes of YHWH to provoke him to anger”

The first phrase occurs twice in II Kings. This phrase is repeated three times in Deuteronomy outside of the context of cultic rites to the molek (Dt 4:25, 9:18 and 31:29). But in II Kg 17:17 and 21:6 causing children to pass through the fire, practising divination, and sorcery and the like are all considered, “doing evil in the eyes of YHWH to provoke [him] to anger”. II K 17:17 comes toward the end of the justification for Assyria’s conquest of the Northern Kingdom and removal of Israel from the land. Following the phrase, “to provoke him to anger” comes the next verse, “and YHWH was very angry with Israel and he caused them to depart from before his face” (II Kg 17:18; cf. BDB 694 s.v. סור [Hi]). The other occurrence of this phrase (as a divine reaction to causing children to pass through the fire) comes in II Kg 21:6 and its parallel in II Ch 33:6. Manasseh is accused of causing his son to pass through the fire and indulging in illegal practices of divination. Then it says, “he did great evil in the eyes of YHWH to provoke *him*” (II Kg 21:6). The parallel in II Ch 33:6 supplies the location, Ben-Hinnom, and an accusative in the form of a pronominal suffix at the end of the verse, הַרְבָּה לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה לְהַכְעִיסוֹ (II Ch 33:6; BDB 495 s.v. כעס).

#### 3.2.2.2. “I did not command it, nor did it not come upon my heart”

“I did not command it, nor did it not come upon my heart” is repeated in six similar phrases in Jeremiah, Jer 7:21-3, 31; 14:14; 19:5; 23:32 and 32:35. Two of these are directly connected to the imagery associated with burning children; one other with causing children to pass to the molek. Jer 7:31 (אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוִּיתִי וְלֹא עֲלִתָּהּ (שָׂרֵף) עַל-לִבִּי follows directly after the accusation of the sons of Judah burning (שָׂרֵף) their sons and daughters in the fire. The second time, in Jer 19:5, the word דְּבַרְתִּי (*I decree*) is added: “they built the high place of the baal to burn (שָׂרֵף) their sons in the fire, whole burnt offerings to the baal which I did not command nor did I *decree* nor did it come upon my mind”. In Jer 32:35 high places are built for the baal, and “the sons and daughters are caused to pass over to the molek, which I did not command them nor did it come upon my heart to do this abomination” (וְאֵת בְּנוֹתֵיהֶם לַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוִּיתִים וְלֹא עֲלִתָּהּ עַל-לִבִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת הַתּוֹעֵבָה הַזֹּאת Jer 32:35). Three other times the book of Jeremiah asserts that the people/prophets were doing things that YHWH did not command. Jer 7:21-3 points to



the issue of offering sacrifices which YHWH did not command; the command was rather to obey his voice. Jer 14:14 draws attention to false prophets that were not sent, commanded, nor spoken to by YHWH. Jer 23:32 addresses the same problem, false prophets prophesying, not having been commanded by YHWH to do so.

### 3.2.2.3. “No longer be called the tophet”

The third phrase which will be discussed again in the following section on Ben-Hinnom, reads, “it will no longer be called ( **בְּנֵי־הִנּוֹם** [Ni]) the tophet, or the valley of Ben-Hinnom but rather the valley of the slaughter” (Jer 7:32; cf. BDB 475 s.v. **בְּנֵי־הִנּוֹם** 2.b); and very similarly, “and this place will no longer be called ( **בְּנֵי־הִנּוֹם** [Ni]) the tophet and the valley of Ben-Hinnom but rather the valley of the slaughter” (Jer 19:6). Both of these phrases appear in the context of defiling the house of YHWH, of building high places (in 7:31 it is a high place of the tophet; in 19:6 it is the high place of the baal), and of burning ( **שָׂרְפוּ** ) children in the fire.

### 3.2.2.4. “They will bury in Tophet”

Jeremiah 7:32 and 19:11 present us with the fourth phrase that is repeated: “They will bury in Tophet, there is lack of ( **בְּאֵרֹתֶיךָ** ) *another* place” (Jer 7:32; italics supplied, cf. BDB 35 s.v. **בְּאֵרֹתֶיךָ** 6.d). This phrase comes directly after the one mentioned in the previous paragraph, so that it reads: “it will no longer be called the tophet, or the valley of Ben-Hinnom but rather the valley of slaughter; they will bury in Tophet, there is lack of *another* place”. The second time that this phrase is used there is more narrative between “it will no longer be called . . .” (Jer 19:6) and “and in Tophet they will bury, there is no *other* place to bury” (Jer 19:11). In chapter 19, a pronouncement of judgement against Judah and the city of Jerusalem, and the illustration of the broken earthenware vessel is interjected between these two phrases.

## 3.2.3. Places

Two places are discussed in this next section, Ben Hinnom and the tophet. These are mentioned as the location of offerings made to the molek.

### 3.2.3.1. Ben-Hinnom, **בֶּן־הִנּוֹם**

**בֶּן** is translated as “son”, but the meaning of **הִנּוֹם** escapes us. We can only say what it has come to mean rather than give a plausible etymology. Most of the cultic references to the valley of Ben-Hinnom are in the book of Jeremiah. The valley of Ben-Hinnom is mentioned by Joshua as one the landmarks for the boundary of the tribe of Judah: “extend the boundary to the valley of Ben-Hinnom to the slope of the Jebusites off on the south (which is Jerusalem) and extend the boundary to the top of the mountain which is upon the face of the valley of Hinnom seaward (west) . . .” (Jos 15:8). In Jos 18:16



it is again mentioned, naming the tribe on the other side of the border as Benjamin. The Jebusites and Jerusalem were close to the border between Benjamin and Judah on the Judah side.<sup>341</sup> Jeremiah is sent to the valley of Ben-Hinnom near the Potsherd Gate in Jerusalem (Jer 19:2) and in the next paragraph (19:14) he returns from the tophet. This equation, Ben-Hinnom with tophet, is echoed in the phrases, “it will no longer be called the tophet and/or the valley of Ben-Hinnom but” will be renamed the valley of slaughter (Jer 7:32 and 19:6). Not only is the high place of the tophet built in the valley of Ben-Hinnom (Jer 7:31), but the high places of the baal have been built there (Jer 19:5 and 32:35). The parallel text to II Kg 16:3, in which Ahaz is accused of “causing his son to pass (העביר) through the fire like the abomination of the nations”, adds a few details. It reads, Ahaz “burned incense (קטר) in the valley of Ben-Hinnom and he burned (בער [Hi]) his sons in the fire like the abomination of the nations” (II Ch 28:3).<sup>342</sup> Note that reference to Ben-Hinnom is missing from II Kg 16:3. Sons and daughters are caused to pass (העביר) through the fire in this valley in Jer 7:31, 32:35 and II Kg 23:10. Only in one case in the deuteronomistic texts is Ben-Hinnom associated with מלך, II Kg 23:10.

### 3.2.3.2. “The tophet”, תִּפֶּת

In the combined deuteronomistic-Jeremiah texts, תִּפֶּת is written six times with an article and twice without.<sup>343</sup> Most of the occurrences are in Jeremiah. It is a place in the valley of Ben-Hinnom; Jer 7:31, 7:32, 19:6, II Kg 23:10. Jeremiah returns from “the tophet” where he prophesied (Jer 19:14). The city of Jerusalem will be made *like* Tophet (וְלָתֵת אֶת־הָעִיר הַזֹּאת כְּתִפֶּת, Jer 19:12; cf. BDB 681 s.v. נתן 3.b), and the houses of the city will be “*like* the place of the defiled tophet” (כַּמְקוֹם הַתִּפֶּת הַטְּבֵאִים, Jer 19:13). These two similes come in the midst of an illustration from the beginning of chapter 19: Jeremiah is to purchase a vessel made of earthenware. In verse 10, the jar is to be broken and the next verse says, “thus<sup>344</sup> I will shatter (שבר) this people and this city as he will shatter (שבר) the potter’s vessel” (Jer 19:11). As previously mentioned, twice this place “will no longer be called the tophet

<sup>341</sup> Nehemiah mentions that the sons of Judah: “they settled (encamped) from Beersheba as far as the valley of Hinnom” (Neh 11:30).

<sup>342</sup> Both בער and sons are corrected in the textual apparatus of II Ch 28:3 to read עבר and son (ms), respectively.

<sup>343</sup> The same convention will be used for this section on תִּפֶּת as was used for בעל and is being used for מלך; if the word is written in the Hebrew with an article it is translated as “the tophet” and if anarthrously as “Tophet”. This convention is adopted in order to establish some consistency in the form of translation, but the issue of the presence or lack of an article with תִּפֶּת is not as crucial as for those names for which the problem of divinity is in question.

<sup>344</sup> כִּכָּה “Somewhat more emph. than כִּה, usu. prefixed to word which it qualifies” (BDB 462 s.v.).



(ולא יקרא למקום הזה עוד התפת, Jer 19:6) and Ben-Hinnom but the valley of slaughter” is written. Another phrase is used twice: “they will bury in Tophet, there is no room *elsewhere*” (Jer 7:32 and 19:11).<sup>345</sup> A high place (במה) of “the tophet” is built (בנה) in the valley of Ben-Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire (התפת אשר בגיא בן השורף) (את בנייהם ואת בנותיהם באש, Jer 7:31). In another verse, “the tophet” is defiled (טמא) to circumvent sons and daughters being passed through the fire to the molek (לבלתי להעביר איש את בנו ואת בתו באש למלך, II Kg 23:10). Only in II Kg 23:10 is the molek directly associated with “the tophet”.

One other verse is of some interest here. It is not from the chosen texts,<sup>346</sup> however it may give an additional description of the tophet. Isaiah 30:33 reads,

For already from yesterday, Tophteh (תפתה) has been arranged,  
also for the king it (fs) is prepared,  
he has made it deep, he has it made wide.

Its (fs) heap is a fire and wood excessive;  
the breath of YHWH as a torrent of brimstone kindling it (fs).

כִּי עָרוּךְ מֵאֲתֹמֹל תִּפְתָּה גַם־הוּא [הִיא] לְמֶלֶךְ הַיּוֹכֵן הָעֵמִיק הַרְחִב  
מִדְרָתָה אֵשׁ וְעֵצִים הֲרִיבָה  
נִשְׁמַת יְהוָה כְּנַחַל גַּפְרִית בַּעֲרָה בָּהּ: ס  
(Isa 30:33)

The spelling for תפת, with the final ה, is unusual here; BDB records it as a hapax legomenon and suggests it is “a place of burning, in fig. of א’s judgement on Assyria” (BDB 1075 s.v. תפתה). Though there are many allusions to fire in other verses that are associated with the tophet, this verse alone places fire in the tophet. מדרתה אש is translated by NASB as a pyre, which is confirmed by BDB. Only in Jer 7:31 and II Kg 23:10 are fire and the tophet mentioned in the same verse. The majority of other verses mention either fire or the tophet. It would be tempting to read this verse as “Tophteh (Tophet) has been arranged for the molek”. This would only require an adjustment of vowels for the word translated “king”. In any case, this verse offers us a powerful image of YHWH using the tophet as an illustration for the punishment due Assyria (cf. Isa 30:31).

Some other observations concerning the tophet seem warranted here. First, in none of the texts surveyed is the “passing” of children or the “burning” of children actually said

<sup>345</sup> Both times תפת is used in this phrase it is written without the article, however in the other phrase just mentioned in Jer 7:32 it is written התפת.

<sup>346</sup> Deuteronomistic-Jeremiah texts.



to happen in the tophet. Jer 7:31 hints in that direction, saying, “the high place of the tophet is built . . . for the burning. . .”. Secondly, the tophet must have been a place of some size as it was going to be the location of a burial (Jer 7:32 and 19:11). Also burying in the tophet must have been unusual for this threat to have had any import. From the several verses which mention the tophet, it must have been a specific place, e.g. Jeremiah returned from prophesying there (Jer 19:14). Add to this Isaiah 30:33, if we accept its spelling of the word as a variant, which mentions that it is to be made wide and deep, full of wood and fire. All of this added together gives one the sense that this tophet is different from an altar built of stone and placed somewhere, but rather that a place in Ben-Hinnom was made into a tophet.

### 3.2.4. Verbs

Two verbs are treated in this section. They are used in each case as action that is done with children as the object. עבר is used in each of these cases in the Hiphil [Hi] form and שרף in a simple Qal form.

#### 3.2.4.1. To Cause to Pass ( עבר [Hi]) through the Fire

The phrase באש . . . עבר [Hi] is used five times in these texts; once in Deuteronomy and the rest in II Kings. In each case, children are “passed” through<sup>347</sup> the fire. The passage in Dt 18:10 uses a participial form of עבר ( מַעֲבִיר בְּנוֹ-וּבָתוֹ בַאֲשׁ ). This verse comes as an injunction against allowing those who practice passing children through the fire, or any who practice divination, fortune telling or the like, to be a part of the community (cf. 18:9-13). The pairing of illegal practices, such as “divination” ( נַחֲשׁ / קַסָּם ), “soothsaying” ( עֵינַן ) and “necromancy” ( אוֹב ), and “passing children through the fire” also occurs in II Kg 17:17 and 21:6. II Kg 16:3 likens causing children to pass through the fire to the abominable practices of the nations ( כְּתַעֲבוֹת הַגּוֹיִם ). Only in II Kg 23:10 is this practice linked specifically to the molek: בַּאֲשׁ לַמֹּלֵךְ . . . לְהַעֲבִיר ( II Kg 23:10). Also, II Kg 23:10 is the only verse which mentions both the tophet and עבר [Hi] together. Jer 32:35, alone, uses הַעֲבִיר without following it up with באש. It translates, “to cause the sons and daughters to pass to the molek” (Jer 32:35). “To the molek” seems to stand as a substitute for “in the fire”, which is missing in this phrase. What this fire is in these passages or what it means “to cause someone to pass through the fire” is not certain. The previous discussion of Isa 30:33 gives us some clues, but that passage does not use עבר, but only אֵשׁ with the tophet.

<sup>347</sup> of instrumentality with עבר, cf. BDB 89 s.v. 2.a.



### 3.2.4.2. Burn ( שָׂרַף ) in the Fire

The phrases using שָׂרַף are very similar to those which use עָבַר. It is not unusual that these phrases use אֵשׁ because שָׂרַף is obviously connected with fire. There are four verses, in the current passages under discussion, which speak of “burning” in the fire (Jer 7:31, 19:5, Dt 12:31 and II Kg 17:31). There are many other verses which speak of burning and fire together; however, these four verses are of concern here because they are in a cultic context that includes the elements mentioned above. Jer 7:31 mentions that the sons of Judah built a high place of the tophet “to burn ( שָׂרַף ) their sons and daughters in the fire”. Jer 19:5 says essentially the same thing, only that daughters are not mentioned, and the high places are built for the baal. Dt 12:31 gives the injunction against not doing as the nations have done for their gods, “for even their sons and their daughters they burned in the fire to their gods”; ( כִּי גַם אֶת־בְּנֵיהֶם ) ( וְאֶת־בְּנֹתֵיהֶם יִשְׂרְפוּ בְּאֵשׁ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶם , Dt 12:31). Nations are mentioned by name in II Kg 17:31. This verse comes in the midst of the explanation of the way Assyria dealt with the Northern Kingdom of Israel after its conquest. YHWH is given credit for sending wild animals among those peoples displaced to Israel. Priests of the land, i.e. Jewish priests, are sent to teach the ways of the god of the land, but after some time the people who are displaced there took up their own gods and worshiped them. The Sepharvites are accused of “burning their children/sons in the fire ( שָׂרְפִים אֶת־ ) ( בְּנֵיהֶם בְּאֵשׁ ) to Adrammelech and Anammelech the gods of Sepharvaim” (II Kg 17:31).<sup>348</sup> Often, discussion about these verses draws attention to the מִלֵּךְ element of these divine names. The tophet is mentioned in the context of the Jeremiah and the Deuteronomy passages, but not for II Kg 17:31.

### 3.2.5. The Victims

The victims of this burning or passing through the fire are consistently “sons”, “children”, or “sons and daughters”. There seems to be a clear distinction between the use of the previously mentioned verbs and the imagery that goes with them and the rite of the “first-born”. Both הֶעֱבִיר and שָׂרַף of children is presented as an abomination by the texts under study. Each of these issues are covered in this next section.

#### 3.2.5.1. Sons and Daughters

These “sons and daughters” are identified as the children of the nation Israel, of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and of the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Various combinations of בֶּן and בַּת with pronominal suffixes are used: “their sons and their daughters” (II Kg 17:17), “his son and his daughter” (II Kg 23:10), “their sons” (Jer

<sup>348</sup> The location of this place is under some speculation, cf. “Sepharvaim” by Hector Avalos 1992:1090-91. There is it seems a bit of play in the sound between שָׂרַף and the first three consonants of סְפָרַיִם.



19:5), or “his son” (II Kg 16:3). These seem to follow a general pattern: when the noun ( בֵּן or בַּת ) is singular the pronominal suffix is also singular; or both noun and suffix are plural. This may indicate some formulaic pattern in their presentation. All the occurrences of son(s) and daughter(s) in these verses are written with pronominal suffixes, none without. “Sons/children” or “son” is presented without “daughter(s)”, but not vice versa. Six times, “son(s) and daughter(s)” are (or are presented as being) burned or caused to pass through fire (Jer 7:31, 32:35, Dt 12:31, 18:10, II Kg 17:17, and 23:10); Dt 18:10 is the only case of “son *and* daughter” in the singular. The presentation of “son(s)”, without “daughter(s)”, happens four times, twice plural (Jer 19:5 and II Kg 17:31) and twice singular (II Kg 16:3 and 21:6). The singular “son” is used to describe the activity of Ahaz and Manasseh respectively. “Sons *and* daughters” are more often found with the verb הֶעֱבִיר; four times (Jer 32:35, Dt 18:10, II Kg 17:17 and 32:10), as against twice with שָׂרַף (Jer 7:31 and Dt 12:31). The presentation is equally split between these two verbs for “son(s)” (without “daughter[s]”): שָׂרַף, Jer 19:5 and II Kg 17:31; הֶעֱבִיר, II Kg 16:3 and 21:6. Again these last two references speak of Ahaz and Manasseh respectively.

### 3.2.5.1.1. First-born בְּכוֹר

Nowhere in these passages is the word for “first-born”, בְּכוֹר, used to describe the children of the cultic rite of “burning” or “passing” children through the fire. The issues of the first born revolve around two different foci in the Pentateuch and the deuteronomistic texts; firstly, inheritance<sup>349</sup> and secondly, deidication to YHWH. Inheritance is outside the present discussion, but the rites of dedication are of interest. The book of Exodus sets the stage for the dedication of the first-born with the release of the people of Israel from slavery under the Pharoah (Ex 4-12). Exodus 13 explains the reasoning behind the “dedication” (קִדְּשׁ, Ex 13:2) of the “first-born” (בְּכוֹר) as YHWH’s right of redemption for sparing all the “first-born” of Israel. All the “first-born” of man and beast were slain among all of Pharoah’s country except for those of the sons of Israel. Exodus 13:14 -15 give a synopsis of the story,

And it shall be when your son asks you in the future, saying, “What is this?”, then you will say to him, “By the strength of his hand YHWH led us from Egypt from the house of slavery. And it was that Phaorah made it hard to send us out and YHWH slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of man and even the first-born of beast; thus I sacrifice to YHWH all the males who open the womb but all the *first-born* of my sons I redeem”

14 וְהָיָה כִּי־יִשְׁאַלְךָ בְּנֶךָ מָחָר לֵאמֹר מַה־זֹּאת וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ יְהוָה מֵמִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים: 15 וַיְהִי כִּי־הִקְשָׁה פַרְעֹה לְשַׁלְּחָנוּ

<sup>349</sup> Cf. Gen 25-27; 48:8-22 and Dt 21:15-17.



וַיְהִיג יְהוָה כָּל־בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּכֹר אָדָם וְעַד־בְּכוֹר בְּהֵמָה עַל־  
כֵּן אֲנִי זֹבַח לַיהוָה כָּל־פֶּטֶר רַחֵם הַזְּכָרִים וְכָל־בְּכוֹר בְּנֵי אִפְדָּה:  
(Ex 13:14-15).

The word בְּכוֹר can be used for either humans that are first-born or for animals (e.g. Ex 12:12; 13:2, 15; 34:20). And פֶּטֶר רַחֵם (“open the womb”) is used only in the context of בְּכוֹר, and often in a parallel construction (cf. Ex 13:2, 15; 34:19; Num 3:12; 18:15). From the Pentateuch and the deuteronomistic texts, the suggestion of “sacrifice” (זֹבַח) of the first-born is mentioned only in Ex 13:15. “Dedication” (קָדַשׁ) is often used, (Ex 13:2; Lev 27:20; Num 3:13; 8:17; Dt 15:19). “Give” (נָתַן) is used once as a description of offering the first-born (בְּכוֹר בְּנֵיךָ תִתֶּן־לִי) (Ex 22:28H). This phrase follows the injunction that they shall give the wine from their presses without delay and then following this is the instruction that they are to do the same (give) with their oxen and sheep. These oxen and sheep are to be “given” (נָתַן) on the eighth day. Exodus 13:12 reads, “you shall pass each one which opens the womb to YHWH” (וְהַעֲבַרְתָּ כָל־פֶּטֶר־רַחֵם לַיהוָה). This is the only case of the use of the verb עָבַר is used with the noun בְּכוֹר. It is as obscure in its meaning here as elsewhere. It lacks the mention of fire which is common with the “Molek verses”.

The theme of “redemption” (פָּדוּהוּ) is repeated in the context of the first born several times (Ex 13:13, 15; 34:20; Num 3:46; 18:15, 17). Twice in Numbers (3:40; 43) and once in Deuteronomy (15:19) are “males” (זָכָר) specified as those to be set aside to YHWH. Nowhere in the texts that mention “dedication” (or “sacrifice” or “giving”) of the first-born is a method of “dedication” or “sacrifice” mentioned. “Redemption” is a common theme with first-born but never used with Molek imagery. Nor is a particular place mentioned. And of these texts, YHWH is the only recipient of the “first-born” by “sacrifice”, “giving” or “dedication”.

One passage is often brought into the discussion of the molek which does use בְּכוֹר. II Kg 3:27 reads, “and he took his son, the first-born who was to reign instead of him, and raised<sup>350</sup> him up, a whole burnt offering upon the wall” (וַיִּקַּח אֶת־בְּנוֹ הַבְּכוֹר וַיִּקַּח אֹתוֹ וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ עַל־הַחֲמָה, II Kg 3:27). Neither שָׂרַף nor הָעֵבִיר are used in this pericope. It is not situated in or near the Ben-Hinnom. And although עָלָה is translated as “whole” or “burnt offering” and fire is assumed as part of the rite, the imagery here is different than in the passages which allude to the molek. Instead of the tophet or Ben-Hinnom as the place of sacrifice it is the “wall”, חֲמָה, of

<sup>350</sup> BDB 749 עָלָה s.v. Hi 8. “cause to ascend (in flame; Thes al. to go up on altar), offer sacrifice”. This has been translated as Hi impf 3ms + 3ms suffix, rather than 3mp, which does not fit the context.



the city. Among the deuteronomistic-Jeremiah texts, only Jer 19:5 mentions the burning of their sons as whole/burnt offerings, לְשָׂרֵף אֶת־בְּנֵיהֶם בְּאֵשׁ עֲלֹת לַבַּעַל . This seems to be the only link in the imagery between II Kg 3:27 and the elements of the deuteronomistic-Jeremiah texts mentioned above.<sup>351</sup>

### 3.2.5.2. הַעֲבִיר and שָׂרֵף of Children as an Abomination

Both הַעֲבִיר and שָׂרֵף of children are identified as “abominations” (תועבה). Jeremiah 32:35 links the practice to causing Judah to sin (לַעֲשׂוֹת הַתּוֹעֵבָה הַזֹּאת) (לְמַעַן הַחֲטִי אֶת־יְהוּדָה (הַחֲטִיָּא Qere)). Dt 12:31 and II Kg 16:3 both identify the practice with the “abomination of the nations”. Dt 12:31 reads, “for every abomination of YHWH which he hates, they do for their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they burn in the fire to their gods”. On the other hand, II Kings 16:3 and the parallel, II Ch 28:2-3 tell the same basic story of Ahaz with slightly different vocabulary, e.g. וַיִּבְעֵר instead of הַעֲבִיר, and some embellishment from the Chronicler, but the phrase כְּתוֹעֵמוֹת הַגּוֹיִם (“abomination of the nations”) is identical between them. The only particular nation mentioned in the deuteronomistic-Jeremiah texts as burning children in the fire is the Sepharvites, (II Kg 17:31). The tophet, Jerusalem and Ben-Hinnom are not mentioned here, thus, the connection that the rite of the Sepharvites has to a molek cult in Jerusalem is not certain. The Sepharvites were displaced to Samaria of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians in the eighth century, so any earlier practice of burning or הַעֲבִיר of children can not be attributed to their arrival in the land, e.g. II Kg 17:17.

### 3.2.6. “The molek” in the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic Texts

We find that the rites and imagery associated with מִלְכָּדַי —in the deuteronomistic-Jeremiah texts — are like Jeremiah’s shattered earthenware vessel (Jer 19). There are gaps, because of the fragmentary evidence and the antiquity of the material, that can only be filled with guesses. They may be fitted together like this. The molek is associated only with Ben-Hinnom or the tophet, and the tophet only with Ben-Hinnom and Jerusalem — nowhere else. Ben-Hinnom is near the Jebusites and Jerusalem. The Jebusite tradition is pre-Davidic and so gives the impression of being an old tradition. שָׂרֵף and עֲבֵר seem to mean the same thing and may well be understood as interchangeable. Both are found in verses with the tophet, Ben-Hinnom, son(s) and daughter(s), and son(s) (without daughters). Both are used with בְּאֵשׁ, quite naturally for שָׂרֵף but not so with עֲבֵר. Both activities are called an abomination; YHWH commanded neither. Of the three times מִלְכָּדַי is mentioned, it is used only with עֲבֵר. עֲבֵר and any form of divination are regarded as enough to provoke YHWH to anger.

<sup>351</sup> This issue is again mentioned in section 3.3.5 regarding the “Scholars and Molek”.



עֵבֶר, not שָׂרָף, is associated with divination in several verses. The hiphil form of עֵבֶר gives an odd sense of responsibility to the parents or the leaders of the communities engaged in this rite. The children are given no voice; they are victims of something sinister, as presented by these texts. Twice the sacrifice of children is mentioned outside of Ben-Hinnom (II Kg 3:27 and II Kg 17:31 — neither of these references include the imagery common to other allusions of the molek). There is a distinction between the cultic rites of the molek and the rites that concern the first-born. The passages that present instruction about the first-born (Pentateuch and deuteronomistic) give neither place nor mode of dedication. In addition, I Kg 11:7 does not mention עֵבֶר, שָׂרָף, son(s) or daughter(s). However, this verse does write מִלְּךָ without the article and so it can be read as a divine name only in this one case.

It appears that Jeremiah wants to put to rest the idea that receiving child sacrifice was part of worship of YHWH; this, Jeremiah says, is the apostate worship of another god. Three times Jeremiah speaks for YHWH, saying, “this burning of children, I did not command it nor did it come upon my mind” (Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5; 32:35). Jeremiah 7:31 reads, “And they built high places in the tophet which is in the valley of Ben-Hinnom to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire which I did not command nor did it come upon my mind”. Jeremiah 19:5 writes, they “built the high places of the baal to burn their sons in the fire . . .”. It is debated whether Jeremiah 19:5 is a scribal mistake or a deliberate choice to name the baal as the receiver of the sacrifice of children. This is the only time that הַבַּעַל is directly associated with the tophet or Ben-Hinnom (cf. 19:6). In the Punic evidence, Baal-Hamon is named as the recipient of child sacrifices at the Tophet in Carthage. And this may well have been a current event in Carthage at the time of Jeremiah. Lawrence Stager and Samuel Wolff (1984:35) date the first level of the archaeological site at the Tophet in Carthage, Tanit I, as 750/725 to 600 BCE. Was Jeremiah using the name current in Carthage? Would he have known anything about Carthage? Or did he (or some scribe) get confused with the names? Only one other time in the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts are any gods, other than Molek, named in relation to child sacrifice: Adramemelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvites, who were displaced to Samaria of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians in the eighth century BCE (II Kings 17:31). Focus has been given to the “melek” elements of these two names as evidence for a possible a Molek syncretism. Jeremiah 32:35 names Molek as the deity connected with sacrificing of children, but Baal with the high places. This is one of the few places where Molek is mentioned in relation to another god; there is not enough evidence, here, to make any clear suggestions regarding Baal’s relation to child sacrifice or Molek’s relation to Baal.



### 3.3. The Scholars and Molek

Much ink and paper has been used to discuss the subject of Molek<sup>352</sup> in the Hebrew scriptures. This is, in part, because the texts of scripture that deal with Molek are not explicit and they are few, and, also in part, because there is little or nothing in the way of archaeological evidence of a cult or the worship of Molek. It is just this lack of evidence that has allowed for so much speculation.

מֶלֶךְ as a simple Semitic root can be vocalized in classical Hebrew as מֶלֶךְ=“king” or מָלַךְ=“he ruled” (Jos 13:10) or מֹלֵךְ (Jer 22:11) in participial form. Those that have attempted to identify who מֹלֵךְ of the Hebrew scriptures is, are separated into at least two groups. There are those who take the position that מֹלֵךְ is a title of some sort. The most extreme members of this group claim that there was no god with a name מֹלֵךְ; that the radicals מֶלֶךְ should be vocalized as מֶלֶךְ=“king”. In the other group are those who will go as far as to say that מֹלֵךְ was not only a god of Canaan, but that he was confused with YHWH, and may even have been worshipped as part of Yahwism.

#### 3.3.1. A Very Brief History of the Scholarship

The Rabbis assumed that Molek, as vocalized by the Masoretes in the first or second century CE,<sup>353</sup> was an idol, the name of which derived from the word translated as “king” (Heider 1985:2). Up to the turn of the present century, many different views were proposed incorporating this view of Molek as an idol. Suggestions were made that human sacrifice was normative in the days of Moses and Abraham, and was excluded from Yahwism at a later date. A modern variation of this theme is that child sacrifice was legitimate in Israelite religion (Ackerman 1992:126). Another suggestion was that Baal was the god of fortune and Molek the god of misfortune in a dualistic pattern (cf. Heider 1985:7-9, for a review of these proposals).

But, with the turn of the century, the nature of the debate on Molek underwent some distinct changes. One significant change, proposed by Eissfeldt (1935), as mentioned above, was that *mlk* in the Phoenician script on the Punic stelae was to be understood as a *type of sacrifice* and not a god. He then applied this argument to his interpretations of Molek in the scriptures. Another argument was that *mlk* was a title or epithet,

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<sup>352</sup> Note in this section, “The Scholars and Molek”, “Molek” will be used rather than “molek”, as we are not translating specific passages that would be determined by the presence or lack of an article. Another factor to take into consideration here is that since the scholars themselves use “Molek” as a name as against *molk* as a type of sacrifice, it would follow form to use the same spelling. So, unless a specific passage is being translated Molek will be the form used here.

<sup>353</sup> Cf. *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992:s.v.) for articles on the work of the Masoretes.



meaning “king”, rather than an actual divine name (Buber 1967). These ideas have since formed the basic watersheds of the debate. The scholars have either tried to refute or confirm *mlk* as the name of a particular god, an epithet, or as a type of sacrifice.

Notable in the periphery of the debate is Jeffrey Tigay. He has written a treatise on the onomastic evidence of divine names (theophoric names) in the Hebrew epigraphic material presently available. His conclusion is that there was little or no polytheism in Israel, because there is very little evidence of personal names with theophoric elements of pagan gods. However, he has made the previous assumption (following the arguments of Martin Noth 1928, Roland de Vaux 1964, and Otto Eissfeldt 1935) that מֶלֶךְ is not a theophoric element, and so discounted from his research the names including these radicals (Tigay 1986:77 n. 18). This seems to be the assumption of his conclusion in his premise.<sup>354</sup>

### 3.3.2. Divine Name, Title, or Epithet?

Heider, in his review of the classical studies of the understanding of the way מֶלֶךְ is used, has cited Martin Buber (1967) as one who contends that מֶלֶךְ was not a divine name. He summarizes Buber: “it was a title (*melek*) used by syncretists who advocated child sacrifice to Yahweh” (Heider 1985:50-51). Heider indicates that the Hebrew scriptures’s use of מֶלֶךְ in personal names does not make it clear as to whether these radicals are used as a title or a divine name (Heider 1985:231-32). For instance, does *ʿbymlk* (אֲבִי־מֶלֶךְ) read as “Molek, my father” or as “the king, my father”? Heider sides with those that consider מֶלֶךְ to be a divine name. And since this is the major contention in Heider’s thesis, and because of the inconclusive nature of the evidence, he has decided not to rely on personal names with the radicals מֶלֶךְ in his research. John Day makes the suggestion that an epithet מֶלֶךְ־יְהוָה would challenge the status of Yahweh:

Everything suggests that *mlk* was the actual name of the god to whom human sacrifice was offered, since there was every reason for the Old Testament to avoid using *mlk* as the epithet of any god but Yahweh, as the word, which means ‘king,’ might appear to question Yahweh’s sovereignty. It is consistent with this that the Massoretes [sic] felt constrained to bowdlerize the name (presumably originally Melek) to Molech, with the vowels of the word *bōšet* ‘shame’ (Day 1989:41).

While Buber suggests מֶלֶךְ as a title, Heider maintains that מֶלֶךְ actually is a divine name but concedes that the evidence is not clear, and Day remarks that מֶלֶךְ as a title

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<sup>354</sup> This thought was noted in private conversation with Professor Rogerson.



would be unlikely because of the trouble that it would create for the monotheists. This brings us to the next set of arguments regarding Molek's identity.

### 3.3.3. Dyphemism (Geiger)

It was Abraham Geiger (1857; cf. Day 1989:56) who proposed that the Masoretes, when pointing the text, used the vowels of the word בִּשְׁתָּה, "shame" to point the radicals מִלֵּךְ when they understood them to be used as a divine name. This substitution of vowels in words (dyphemism) that were detested by the scribes seems to be apparent for words such as: Baal (Bosheth), Astarte (Ashtoreth) and Tophet.

Following Geiger (1875) and Roland de Vaux (1936), A.R.W. Green, in *The Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East* (1975) suggests that,

"Moloch" [sic] comes from the Greek versions and appears as "Molek" in the Hebrew, which was an epithet Hebrews applied to Yahweh, . . . According to the theory which tries to account for the change, the Jews considered it inappropriate to refer to a pagan god by the same epithet used for Yahweh. Hence, instead of "Melek," the designation "Molek," an apparent derogatory distortion which took the vowels *o* and *e* from *bōseth* [sic] (shame) was used (1975:179-180).<sup>355</sup>

This theory is still assumed among most of the scholars on both sides of the argument. But מִלֵּךְ can be vocalized in several different ways, as was seen in the material from Ebla and Mari. So do we understand who מִלֵּךְ is? Do we trust the Masoretes to give us his name? Did they even know his name?

### 3.3.4. Tophet

Tophet is another word subject to "bowdlerizing", as Day calls it. There is no alternative form for this word, as with מִלֵּךְ, but the assumption is still generally made that it has taken the vowels of the word בִּשְׁתָּה, as given by the Masoretes. The origin of the word, Tophet, is in dispute, so the meaning is hard to ascertain. It is most commonly suggested that *tophet* means "oven" or "fire pit". This has nicely lent itself to the impression of cremation or sacrifice by burning. Add to this Isa 30:33, as mentioned in section 3.2.3.2, where fire and the breath of YHWH as brimstone lend to the impression of fiery destruction. Note there however that the spelling of the word is תַּפְתֵּה. Tophet (תַּפְתֵּה) is mentioned solely in relation to passing children through the fire, with Ben-Hinnom, or with the molek. This singularity in use has only served to compound the confusion of its meaning. The scholars have borrowed the name Tophet

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<sup>355</sup> He cites Pss. 5:2, 10:16, etc for this thought and also mentions Molek was the god to whom children were sacrificed.



from the Hebrew scriptures to describe sites where evidence of child sacrifice has been uncovered by archaeologists (cf. Stager and Wolff 1984:32).

### 3.3.5. הָעֵבִיר: Dedication, or Holocaust?

Another issue in the debate is the nature of the sacrifice given to Molek. Is this a dedication, as Weinfeld suggests? His proposal is that “pass through” (הָעֵבִיר) is to be understood as to pass between a set of fires as a ritual dedication or an initiation. He resists believing in the actual slaughter of the children by fire (cremation). From his article, “Burning Babies in Ancient Israel”:

Indeed, the problem of the very existence of child sacrifices in ancient Israel and neighboring peoples was not my concern. The main purpose of my study [his first article, “The Worship of Molech and the Queen of Heaven”, 1972] was to show that the Molech ritual, as presented in the legal and historical literature of the Old Testament, had to do with initiation and dedication to foreign cult (Hadad) rather than with slaying and burning babies (Weinfeld 1978:411; square brackets mine).

This is Day’s response to such a suggestion:

With regard to the question whether the Molech cult involved human sacrifice or simply dedication in the fire, some scholars deny that even the Old Testament itself speaks of sacrifice. But this is to overlook the evidence of the text itself, which clearly speaks of burning (Jer. 7.31, 19.5. cf. 32.35) (Day 1989:82-3).

The passages which use הָעֵבִיר could possibly be understood as Weinfeld suggests—a dedication by passing between two fires. But taken on the whole with other verses which use the same imagery (i.e. the tophet, Ben-Hinnom, YHWH’s rejection of the action, children and fire) the meaning seems quite clear. Jeremiah and Deuteronomy’s use of שָׂרַף (Jer 7:31; 19:5; cf. Dt 12:31) leaves no doubt that holocaust was intended. Brian P. Irwin, in his essay on Molek imagery in Ezekiel 38 and 39, concurs with Day (1989:82-3 as noted above) in the opinion that the Molek cult involved complete annihilation, not simply a dedication (Irwin 1995:110-11).

### 3.3.6. Origins

As the section on “MLK of the ANE” (3.1) demonstrates, the search for the origins of a Molek cult have lead the scholars far and wide. These next three sections have been saved to this point in the discussion because they are so intimately intertwined with the Hebrew scriptures themselves. This next section will look to the Israelites’ claim to



Palestine, then a site in Amman and Phoenician, Assyrian and Canaanite origins will be considered.

### 3.3.6.1. Palestine

The Israelites occupied Palestine and claimed it as their own by virtue of divine gift (Genesis 12:7). This land was given with the stipulation that the people of God would not practise the religions of the people of Canaan (Ex 20; Dt 12-13). Dt 12:31 remarks specifically about what YHWH hates; “You shall not do thus to YHWH your God, for all the abomination which YHWH hates they do for their gods, even their sons and daughters they burn in the fire to their gods”. Since there is no extra-biblical material from Palestine that describes the cult of Molek in this land, we do not have any definite answers to the questions of the origins of a cult of child sacrifice to Molek at the tophet in Ben-Hinnom. It is just this paucity of evidence that leads to great speculation.

### 3.3.6.2. Phoenician origins

It was mentioned earlier that there is substantial evidence that the Phoenicians during the time of the divided monarchy of Israel and Judah practised child sacrifice. The proximity of time and cultures has lead many scholars to look to Phoenicia as a source for a cult of child sacrifice. However, Weinfeld wants to put to rest the idea that there was a Phoenician influence in Israelite religion. His argument states:

The most decisive argument against the theory that it was due to Phoenician influence that Molech was introduced into Judah is the fact that no hint of this cult is to be found in the Northern Kingdom. If Molech worship originated in Phoenicia, we would expect to find it specifically in the Northern Kingdom, which maintained ties with Tyre, particularly under the dynasty of Omri (Weinfeld 1972b:140).

Weinfeld seems to have missed the reference to child sacrifice and the Sepharvites in II Kings 17:31. Would he argue that this is 8th century BCE (Assyrian) whereas Omri was 9th century (Israel)? The Hebrew scriptures alone are our only source of information that there was an institution of child sacrifice in Palestine and without material evidence, it is impossible to apportion origin for certain.

Both Heider (1985) and Kempinski (1995) mention a memorial stela (ca. 500 BCE) from the Iberian Peninsula as an instance of the Punic practice of child sacrifice. The stela was first published in Spanish by Martin Almagro-Gorbea (1980; 1983) as the Pozo Moro monument. The consensus is that a frieze from the reconstructed stela depicts the god of death (Mot according to Kempinski) enjoying a feast. The scene includes a pig set on a table in front of a seated god and a “small person” (Heider



1985:190) offered in a bowl, to this same god, by an attendant standing behind the table. Heider cites Kennedy (1983:8; Heider 1985:190) as assuming that there is a second “small person” which, as Kennedy states in different publication, is “on the top of a low altar located alongside the banquet table itself” (Kennedy 1981:212).<sup>356</sup> Kempinski comes to the independent conclusion that this “second small person” is rather “an animal head, a jar and what may be a loaf of bread” (Kempinski 1995:63). Heider is the one who suggests the connection between this stela and the god Molek (cf. Heider 1985:188-194) on the basis of its depiction of child sacrifice.<sup>357</sup>

### 3.3.6.3. Amman

The excavations near the airport in Amman by J.B. Hennessy (1966), where altars of a fire cult were found containing human bones mixed with animal bones offer evidence not too far afield. Hennessy renders a description of the use of the site thus:

There can be little doubt that a major concern of the ritual at the Amman airport temple was the burning of human bodies and the scattering of the remains within the building and possibly outside. There appear to be two possible explanations for the site. It was either a mortuary temple or a temple associated with human sacrifice (Hennessy 1985:99).

The site has been dated from the 15th-13th centuries (Hennessy 1966:162). He makes the connection of this site with Phoenicia by association, noting the combinations of the human and animal bones that have been found “in the tophets of Phoenicia” (1985:100) are similar to those found at Amman. It is interesting that in the final sentence where Hennessy suggests “to which god or goddess the sacrifices were made” he does not list Molek (1985:104).

### 3.3.6.4. Assyria (Weinfeld)

For understanding the origins of a Molek cult in Palestine, appeal is made to information regarding Assyrian deities, because Ahaz King of Israel is the first to be noted as having passed his son through the fire (II Kings 16:3) during the period of

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<sup>356</sup> These two publications by Kennedy (1981 and 1983) must be very similar, at least according to the quotations that Heider cites.

<sup>357</sup> Kempinski's article offers the first photos of this stela that I have seen. The figures are stylised and difficult to interpret. The “first small person” could possibly be interpreted in non-human terms just as the “second small person” has been interpreted by Kempinski, at least from the photos. Kempinski offers a line drawing with the photo to allay any question regarding his interpretation.



Assyrian influence.<sup>358</sup> This seems to be the first instance in the historical texts of an Israelite performing child sacrifice.<sup>359</sup>

Assyrian culture and history predate earliest Israel by several centuries, and extended to the time of the Hebrew kings. Its proximity to Israel (locally as well as chronologically) is not just at the back door. Assyria (possibly with its gods) has barged its way in.<sup>360</sup> II Kings 17:29-31 mentions an Assyrian policy of re-populating the conquered nation of Israel with peoples from other nations after the fall of Samaria in 721 BCE. Verse 31 notes in particular the Sepharvites, who sacrificed their children to Adrammelech and Anammelech. There is not much known about these two gods, but the assumption is often made that they are a product of a syncretism between Molek of Canaan/Phoenicia and Adad of Assyria (McKay 1973:106 n.98; de Vaux 1964:89; Weinfeld 1972b:148).

Moshe Weinfeld in his article, "The Worship of Molech and the Queen of Heaven and its Background", suggested that it was Ahaz that imported the cult of child sacrifice from Assyria (1972b:140). Weinfeld was not the first to make this inference. Abraham Kuenen (1874) made these statements:

It was not until Ahaz connected himself with the worshippers of Molech, that the sacrificing of children in honour of that deity was mentioned in their annals. . . . Perhaps his contact with the Assyrians, who sacrificed human beings, may have incited him to follow their example (Kuenen 1874:377).

Although Kuenen only wants to put the case that Ahaz practised what he learned from the Assyrians, there are others that have suggested that the Assyrians forced their religious system on the conquered Israelite nation as part of their military strategy. J.W. McKay (1973) presented a dissertation refuting Theodor Östreicher's (1923) proposal that the Assyrians imposed the Assyrian religious system as part of their programme of military occupation.

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<sup>358</sup> Following this passage in II Kings 16:10-14, it is mentioned that Ahaz built an altar according to the design of one in Damascus. Damascus was in the centre of the Aramean population which was also under Assyrian rule at the time (cf. Weinfeld 1972b:146 ff. for more along this line). Ahaz is also credited for introducing several other foreign gods: the Host of Heaven, the Queen of Heaven, astral deities, and star gods; possibly also astrology was revived.

<sup>359</sup> More discussion on this point is discussed in sec. 3.3.7.3. "Stories which Do Not Fit".

<sup>360</sup> To borrow Green's analogy, 1975:183; cf. sec. 3.1.6 n. 17.



### 3.3.6.5. Canaanite Origins

Suggestion is made that we do not have to go so far afield as Assyria. In the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts, the sacrifices of children and the cult of Molek are associated with no other place than the Hinnom Valley. And the tophet is always mentioned in relation to Jerusalem or the Hinnom Valley (Ben-Hinnom or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom). The tophet has reference to either the location of the sacrifice or the altar of sacrifice itself. Based on these associations, the tophet is assumed to be the very locus of the cult of Molek. It is also this singularity of reference to the Hinnom Valley which John Day uses to put forward his thesis that the Molek cult is Jebusite. Jebus was the pre-Israelite name of Jerusalem (cf. Jos 15:8; 18:16). He suggests that a cult of Molek was, in the first instance, Canaanite in origin. In other words, the cult of Molek needed neither to be imposed on, nor imported by the Israelites. He has made the boldest statement regarding a Canaanite source for a Molek cult. He turns to several passages to establish a theme of Mt Zion, and Jerusalem, being “equated with the mountain of Paradise (cf. Ps. 46.5 [ET4]; Isa. 8:6; Ezek. 47.1-12 . . .) . . . Accordingly, it was only natural for the deep valley below it to be associated with the underworld” (Day 1989:54). His reasoning is as follows:

Since the association of paradisaical language [language identifying Mt. Zion with paradise] with Jerusalem is probably Jebusite in origin, it therefore seems plausible to suppose that the connection of the adjacent valley of Hinnom with Sheol is also Jebusite, and consequently that the god Molech was derived by the Israelites from pre-Israelite inhabitants of Jerusalem. Quite apart from this particular argument, which has never previously been put forward, even by those who have supposed Molech to be Jebusite, the fact that Molech is never mentioned in the Old Testament in association with any place other than the valley of Hinnom, and that the cult is clearly Canaanite, indicates that it may have been appropriated from the local Canaanite inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Jebusites (Day 1989:55, brackets mine).

It is mystifying as to why, even though the location of the Tophet, according to the Hebrew scriptures is in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom, as yet, no trace has been located through archaeological search.<sup>361</sup>

### 3.3.7. Three Excursuses

Three other issues will be considered that are often brought into the discussion of Molek, the Canaanite god. These are the questions, firstly, of sacrifice of children

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<sup>361</sup> The “Tophet” of Carthage was found in an area of Tunis that has had little occupation on the site to eradicate the evidence left of a cult of child sacrifice there. On the other hand, Jerusalem has been heavily occupied which may account for the tophet’s disappearance. My thanks to Dr R. Hess for bringing this to my attention.



being an extension of the dedication of the first-born, and secondly the viability of the argument that the cult of Molek is associated with a cult of the dead. And thirdly the stories that do not fit into the rubric of Molek cult, as defined by Jer 32:35 and II Kg 23:10, will also get some coverage.

#### 3.3.7.1. First-born

There are some who have suggested that the sacrifice of children is a carry over of the divine command to offer the first-born, as given in Exodus 22:29. However, the commandment is to offer the first-born son/s, and the references in the Hebrew scriptures to a cultic ritual are usually written, “offered his sons and *daughters* to Molek” or “passed their sons and *daughters* through the fire”. There is a distinction here in the nature of the sacrifice that is noteworthy. If there was an equation between the sacrifices of Molek and the offering of the first-born, then it would seem that more would have been said regarding the inclusion of “daughters” in the injunctions forbidding the practice of child sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:29-31 & 18:9-10; Jeremiah 32:35). The commandment to set aside the first-born was specifically regarding the first-born “son”. Sexist as it may seem to us, there was an implicit distinction made in the giving of the commandment.

Day expresses his discomfiture with the equation of Molek sacrifices and the commandment to offer the first-born when he writes:

it may be confidently asserted that the Molech sacrifices are not to be equated with the offering of the first-born to Yahweh, and in any case, Molech was not equated with Yahweh, though there were those who worshipped both gods, and so may well have believed that Yahweh approved of the Molech sacrifices (Day 1989:71).

To the contrary, Susan Ackerman, using basically the same evidence, comes to the conclusion, “In short, no Semitic deity Molech or Melek received child sacrifices in the Hebrew Bible in lieu of the god of Israel. Rather, the cult of child sacrifice was felt in some circles to be a legitimate expression of Yahwistic faith” (Ackerman 1992:137).<sup>362</sup> One decisive question for this line of argument, as evidenced in the differing conclusions of Day and Ackerman, is whether or not YHWH and Molek were equated in the minds of the Hebrew worshippers.

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<sup>362</sup> It would be interesting to have a discussion between Ackerman and Day. It seems that they are using the same kind of evidence but their conclusions are vastly different. Personally, I am more convinced by Day’s argument. He allows for both an understanding of the molk sacrifice and Molek as a divine name. Ackerman has accepted Eissfeldt’s argument hook, line and sinker.



### 3.3.7.2. Cult of the Dead

There seems to be an automatic equation of Molek with a cult of the dead or with the nether world or with a chthonic nature.<sup>363</sup> Heider is helpful in defining and describing a “cult of the dead”. Here are his synopsis of John W. Ribar’s (1973:10) definition and his own personal description. He says that he joins Ribar

in defining a “cult of the dead” according to the following “formal criteria”: “activities (especially offerings) which (1) are oriented toward the dead, (2) periodically conducted, [and] (3) at sites specially associated with the dead” (Heider 1985:385-86 square brackets in the text).

Heider’s description:

A “cult of the dead” is established in response to the belief that the dead have a continuing claim upon the living, either because of the deplorable state of the dead without care, or because the dead are perceived as having some power to influence events in the world of the living, for good or ill (or out of both piety and fear) (Heider 1985:385).

Heider gives a very brief synopsis of Ribar’s study of tombs which have evidence of repeated offerings made through holes cut into their roofs or walls (Heider 1985:384 n. 764). The suggestion is then made that some sort of “cult of the dead” was practised in Palestine. Elizabeth Bloch-Smith describes the dilemma created by the lack of clarity in the Israelite laws:

On the one hand, a cult of the dead appears to have been a significant and on going component of Israelite and Judahite society. The dead lay claim to the patrimony, counselled descendants and invoked fertility for offspring. On the other hand, the Bible includes legislation restricting contact with the dead through purity laws and prohibitions against offering tithed commodities to the dead. Necromancers were condemned to death, their clients banished and proponents of the cult were ridiculed (Bloch-Smith 1992:127).

Nonetheless, she takes some extended time to discuss the nature of a cult of the dead in Judah, which she assumes to be equated with divination, sorcery consulting omens and the like (cf. Deuteronomy 18:10-11, Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27; also Psalm 106:28). Certainly there was a sense of the gravity of consulting the dead in the story of King Saul and the “woman who was a medium” at Endor (I Samuel 28). Bloch-Smith has

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<sup>363</sup> Consider Brian P. Irwin’s comment in passing that “the worship of Molek may indeed have been connected with the veneration of departed ancestors” (Irwin 1995:103, 105 n. 35). My thanks to Albert Miao for directing me to this article.



little to say of Molek's involvement in such. The closest association is in Deuteronomy 18:10-11, where divination, sorcery and consulting omens is condemned along with "passing children through the fire". One wonders, if Molek was a significant part of a cult of the dead in Judah, why more has not been made of it in the Hebrew scriptures.

The connections that have been made seem to come as secondary equations based on previous connections or equations with the gods Rpu and Rephesh or Nergal and possibly Mot (cf. previous section 3.1.5 Ugarit; Pope 1981). These connections seem to be enough for Heider to confirm Molek's association with a cult of the dead (cf. Heider 1985:383-400; 1995:1903). Another possible connection with the underworld is the proximity of the Valley of Ben-Hinnom to the Valley of Rephaim (cf. Joshua 15:8; Aharoni 1979:155; Day 1989:54). The Rephaim have been identified as "shades" or "departed spirits" (cf. Psalm 88:10E; Isaiah 26:14 where **רְפָיִם** is the word translated; cf. Pope 1981:169), or conversely as "giants" (cf. Smith 1992:674-75). The confluence of Jebusite, Rephaim (as "shades"), the Valley of Ben-Hinnom, and the Tophet are enough for Day to make the above suggestion (cf. sec. 3.6.4 Tophet), that Molek is a Canaanite god of the underworld/Sheol located in or near Jerusalem; but even he does not mention a cult of the dead. Some significant questions could be asked at this point: Does involvement in sacrificing infants necessarily mean involvement with a cult of the dead? Or does the chthonic logically necessitate equation with a cult of the dead or with sacrificing children? With all due respect to Heider, it does not seem that enough evidence is available to connect Molek of the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts with a cult of the dead, at least not by his definition of such.

### 3.3.7.3. Stories which Do not Fit

A word needs to be said about three passages which do not fit into the study of Molek, but which are occasionally included in the discussion. King Mesha (II Kings 3:27), Abraham and Isaac (Gen 22), and Jephthah and his daughter (Judges 11:29-40; de Vaux 1964: 64, 74-5; Weinfeld 1972b:134) present issues of a different sort. Firstly, King Mesha was not Israelite, and was offering a child in a crisis situation as an appeasement to an angry god (Kemosh?). II Kg 3:27 reads, "and he took his son, the first-born who was to reign instead of him, and raised him up, a whole burnt offering upon the wall". This is the Moabite king in distress about losing a strategic battle against Israel. In his desperation he sacrifices his first-born, and in horror over the action the Israelite army retreats. An excuse is given for the king's action; his desperation. None is given for those who burn or **העבירו** their children. As previously mentioned in section 3.2.5.1.1 the imagery used in this pericope does not fit with the other passages that have been identified as regarding Molek. The location is



specified as on the wall of his city; no mention is made of a tophet or a valley. The occasion is also very specifically at a difficult point in a battle; battles and crisis situations are not mentioned in any of the other verses attributed to Molek.

In the second story that does not fit, Abraham was instructed by YHWH to offer his first-born. Abraham was tested; he was told to take his son, his only son and offer him up to YHWH. The word **בְּכוֹר** is not used in this case. However, a couple of things can be noted here. The child was not actually sacrificed, but a substitution was supplied. This is presented, in Gen 22, as a test of Abraham's faith and not as an issue of child sacrifice, the near sacrifice of Isaac is almost incidental to the story. Some cite this as the cessation of child sacrifice and the institution of a substitution of a lamb instead of a child (cf. Heider 1985:273-77). There are several ways to understand this story but pertinent to this discussion is that Gen 22 does not reflect the same sort of imagery that the Molek cult uses in other passages. The sacrifices made to Molek are only children, not substituted rams.

Lastly, Jephthah and his daughter, another story that is sometimes included in the discussions of Molek, is a case of fulfilment of a vow. Location (as Tophet, Hinnom or Jerusalem) is not mentioned and the daughter was more than a child, having passed her puberty (in my opinion). She also participated in the process, which would seem to indicate her maturity. Another part of this story that does not fit a Molek or molk sacrifice is that there is no mention of how the sacrifice was to be performed, i.e. no mention of fire, nor is it in the context of idols or a specific god (other than YHWH). In all three of these cases, though they involve human sacrifice, they do not conform to the imagery that is associated with the cult of Molek.

### 3.3.8. "The molek" and the Scholars

A variety of issues present themselves when Molek is considered. According to some scholars **הַמֹּלֵךְ** is a mistakenly pointed/vocalised form of the name of a type of sacrifice, e.g. Eissfeldt 1935. Others maintain that **הַמֹּלֵךְ** is the title, meaning "king", for YHWH used by syncretists, so Buber 1967, but this would require a change in the vowel pointing. Still others regard **הַמֹּלֵךְ** as the name of a Canaanite god. The worship of **הַמֹּלֵךְ**, according to each perspective, assumes child sacrifice to be one of its main tenants. The radicals **מֹלֵךְ** could take a variety of vowel points, so explanation as to why it has the particular vowels that are thrice used in the Hebrew scriptures led to Geiger's theory of dyphemism in 1875, which has also been used by most scholars from every venue to explain the spellings of such words as Boshet, Ashtoreth, Tophet, etc. These are words which are assumed to have idolatrous



connections and so Geigers's theory tries to explain the consistency in the vowel pointing of this category of words.

In addition, the meaning of the word **הֶעֱבִיר** has come into question. Does this mean holocaust (Day 1989) or simply some sort of dedication (Weinfeld 1978)? Day cites Jer 7:31 and 19:5 which use the verb **שָׂרַף** with reference to Jer 32:35 which uses **הֶעֱבִיר** to make the point that a simple dedication is not a satisfactory explanation. Note could also be made of the comparison between Dt 12:31 which uses **שָׂרַף**, and Dt 18:10 which uses **הֶעֱבִיר**. All five of these verses mention fire, except one (Jer 32:35); and four of the five mention sons and daughters, the other uses only sons (Jer 19:5). Favour would seem to stand with the argument that **הֶעֱבִיר** and **שָׂרַף** were being used interchangeably, unless some sort of logic could be presented to suggest that these two verbs represented two different rituals. Even so, there is enough witness just by using the verses that use only **שָׂרַף** to point toward sacrificing of children by fire. Of interest also is the source of a cult of child sacrifice. Day suggests that it was Canaanite from the beginning, even Jebusite. Others are quick to point to Carthage as a contemporary community that practised it. Still others are sure that Ahaz brought it back from Assyria. The Sepharvites may even have had Assyrian connections and they burned their children. One thing that can be ascertained for certain from the discussion of the scholars is that there is enough room for a difference of opinion as to who Molek is and where he may have come from.



## 4. Conclusions

In this set of conclusions several things will be attempted, each in turn. This thesis has presented the evidence for the identities of three different deities (Baal, Asherah and Molek) from three different sources of information (iconographic/epigraphic material, Ugaritic literature, and the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts). The attempt was made in those presentations to paint the pictures of each of the deities with as much individual integrity as possible. In doing so it was necessary to not only indulge in some redundancy in telling their stories, but also to avoid a natural tendency to appeal to all possible sources of information at once. In the first part of this conclusion, the discussion will turn to the deities within each corpus. They will be discussed in relation to each other, which was deliberately avoided in earlier discussions. How the different sources inform each other will be explored in a second section. The enormous amount of information that we have to hand makes it crucial that we are aware of how it all inter-relates or does not. Thirdly, each corpus of material presents different pictures of each deity and these different presentations are considered against each other. Finally comes a plea for caution in the approach to the scholarly endeavour of painting the faces of Baal, Asherah and Molek.

### 4.1. Comparison of Deities within each Corpus

I have been building the case for *intra-* rather than *inter-* textual attention to the issues of the asherah, Asherah, an asherah, Baal, the baal, etc. The Ugaritic texts and the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts are doing different things and so have not only a different context but also different audiences and polemic (purpose). The imagery is different in these two sets of texts for the “gods” of the same name. Texts usually are formed over time, and so within a corpus of texts there can be distance caused by the vintage of the stories within the corpus itself. However, it can be assumed that there is also a final form of a corpus/text and that those who were reading it at any point in time, could have used it as a whole to inform the interpretations of that text for the time that it was read. This is the assumption that has been made in choosing the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts from the Hebrew scriptures. It is assumed for the sake of this thesis that they reached some sort of final form in the 6th century. As well, the tablets of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle were found together in an archive or library dated to the 13th century. They are generally taken as a whole and assumed to have formed some sort of background for a religious cult at Ugarit up until the time of the fall of Ugarit (cf. Handy 1994:22). So, for the Ugaritic literature as well as for the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts homogeneity is assumed of the characters within their stories, deities included. However for the iconographic/epigraphic material no such assumption can be made. The dating of finds and artefacts is a fine art and on occasion the dates



are challenged or not available. By nature, the corpus of iconographic/epigraphic material is fragmentary and so homogeneity is an impossibility. A multi-faceted picture is produced when the artefacts for the epigraphic and iconographic material are compared with or used to interpret each other. With this all of this in view, this section will look at each of the gods within each corpus, beginning with the Ugaritic literature.

#### 4.1.1. Baal, Asherah and Molek in Ugarit Literature

One of the first things that can be mentioned here is that Molek is not a character in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle. The one time that the radicals *mlk* do present themselves at Ugarit, the presentation is more of the ilk of an epigraphic finding than a myth. There have been attempts to find Molek in the Baal Cycle by equating him with Mot. But no deity *mlk* has been deciphered from the Ugaritic myths. On the other hand, Baal features in a major way and Asherah is a goddess of stature in her own right. Both of these deities have active parts in the stories. Their relationship to one another is of interest for this study. Baal seeks help from Asherah in procuring a palace. He does not do it alone; but rather has an ally in Anat with whom he approaches Asherah. There is at least some social distance between Asherah and Baal. He threatens her children. She is called upon to supply a nomination for his replacement at the point of his death. There seems to be no particular love lost between them. They both answer to El, the high god. However, it seems that she has a slightly higher position illustrated by El's invitation to her to enjoy his banquet table; and by contrast, Baal must request permission to build a palace from El. Based on the conversation at the banquet table between Asherah and El, also considering Asherah's title, "Progenitress of the gods" it is assumed that Asherah is El's consort. Baal on the other hand, is not particularly paired with any goddess besides Anat. Anat takes the title, "Maiden Anat" or "Virgin Anat" and is addressed as Baal's sister. If Baal has a consort in the Baal Cycle, it is most likely Anat however Anat as consort is based on fragmentary texts (UT 76; 132) that leave much to the imagination, possibly too much. There is no such proposition of a consort relationship between Asherah and Baal at Ugarit.

#### 4.1.2. Baal, Asherah and Molek in Epigraphic/Iconographic Material

The name Baal is found in early Egyptian letters, a poem and inscriptions. He is a god of some might and may have been equated with Seth the god of chaos. Many of the scholars who read the inscriptions and texts, or interpret the seals and sketches of the ANE, assume that Baal is the storm god. They then use that assumption to interpret those images that have weather, storms, rain (and by extrapolation, fertility) to be of Baal. These kinds of correlations are what Keel and Uehlinger call a "Symbolsystem" (1993:7ff.). Several sorts of symbols are used to identify Asherah as the goddess in



iconography, such as: trees, hairstyle, lions, caprids. When these symbols are combined with a naked figure or even with each other, Asherah is the goddess that is named as the one pictured. But in this area of “symbols” Molek is completely lacking. The scholars have not ascribed any particular symbols from extant iconography to him.<sup>364</sup>

The names of Asherah and Baal both occur in Kuntillet ʿAjrud, but not in the same inscription. Baal’s name is found in an inscription which includes a “blessing on the day of . . .”, but this inscription does not include the name of Asherah. This particular inscription (cf. sec. 1.2.2.4; Keel and Uehlinger 1993:277-78) was found in a separate location from those that included the names of YHWH and ʾšrth. It has been proposed that Kuntillet ʿAjrud was either a shrine or a “caravanserai”. Not enough information is available to know whether these two inscriptions were concurrent during the site’s use, or whether the individual(s) who wrote them were one and the same or at the site at the same time. The combination of the names of YHWH and ʾšrth are also found at Khirbet el-Qom, but the name of Baal is missing. Baal is called upon to bless at Kuntillet ʿAjrud, as are YHWH and ʾšrth. This last pair are also encouraged to bless in several other inscriptions found at the same site. The same is true for YHWH and ʾšrth in the tomb inscription found at Khirbet el-Qom.

The inscriptions that have been attributed to Molek present a problem. The radicals *mlk*, whether from Ugaritic, Punic, or Hebrew could be translated simply as “king” or in a verbal rendition, “to make a king”. There are occasions where a divine name is obviously intended (e.g. the god lists of Ebla and Mari). At Ugarit *mlk* shows up in pantheon lists but the actual meaning of the name (i.e. whether it is a compound divine name or a place name) is in dispute. The name, *mlk* ʿttrth, if understood as a divine name, gives no clue as to who this god was, what his/her/its function may have been, or what kind of relation between *mlk* and ʿttrth may have created such a compound. At Carthage the radicals *mlk* are found on commemoration stelae in a burial precinct that includes many urns with cremated/calcinated bones of infants, young children and animals. Some of the inscriptions found at this site also include mention of the goddess Tanit and the god Baal-Hamon as the recipients of offerings. Except for these few occurrences Molek, Asherah and Baal seemed to have been quite separate; they do not appear pictured together in iconography or mentioned together in the inscriptions that have been found.

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<sup>364</sup> The possible exception is the Pozo Moro tower in Spain from 500 BCE which depicts a “monster” and “small persons” at what has been called a “cremation furnace” (cf. sec. 3.1.5.; Kennedy 1980:210; Heider 1985:189-92; Kempinski 1995).



#### 4.1.3. “The baal”, “the asherah” and “the molek” in the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic Texts

Each of these deities brings a unique problem to the study of the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts. Concerning Baal: what does **הַבַּעַל** actually mean in the text? The convention of writing it with an article separates its use as a divine name or epithet from the use of the same word, written anarthrously, as a common noun. The meaning of the word **בַּעַל** takes an ironic twist when the article is attached to it and used to designate a deity who is rejected as a false god. That a deity is intended by this name/title is certain by virtue of the accusations that the people of Israel built altars for, served, followed after, bowed down to, and forsook YHWH for **הַבַּעַל**, “the lord”.

However that a deity is intended by **אֲשֵׁרָה** is not so certain. In instances where the same sort of verbs as noted above are catalogued to **אֲשֵׁרָה**'s account, a deity seems logical. However, when the verbs that are used to describe activity with **אֲשֵׁרָה** include cut down, destroy, burn, carry out, defile, build, make, plant and leave standing, then the weight of the evidence points toward **אֲשֵׁרָה** being an object, most likely of wood and larger than a bread box.

Molek presents an even more complicated picture. **הַמֹּלֵךְ** is mentioned only twice in the chosen texts and **מֹלֵךְ** only once. The one occurrence of the word written anarthrously is suspect to corruption because the name of the god Milchom would be expected, based on the context and the similarity of the same sort of phrase in other passages. From the other two verses that mention **הַמֹּלֵךְ**, burning children, passing children through the fire, tophet, and the valley of Ben-Hinnom are all associated together. The name **הַמֹּלֵךְ** presents the same sort of issue that **הַבַּעַל** presents. With an article it is a title rather than a name. The title “the king” could be used of anyone in an exalted position, including a deity. **מֹלֵךְ** translates as “king” but the vowels *holem* and *seghol* cloud the translation of the word **הַמֹּלֵךְ**. “The molek” is used less often than “the lord” and so there is less opportunity to ascertain the ironic sense of this “name” as a title. Once the name **הַבַּעַל** is used with the elements (e.g. **הָעֵבִיר**) that are associated with **הַמֹּלֵךְ**, but **אֲשֵׁרָה** is never used with these elements. The closest that **אֲשֵׁרָה** comes to being used in the same context with **הַמֹּלֵךְ** is in the record of Josiah's reform. The asherah is removed from the temple and the tophet is defiled to prevent children from being passed through the fire to “the molek” (II Kg 23:6, 10).

On the other hand, **הַבַּעַל** and **אֲשֵׁרָה** are paired together three times, and **עֲשֵׂתֵרֶת** and **הַבַּעַל** are found together four times. Also, once, the prophets of “the baal” with the prophets of “the asherah” are summoned together to a showdown. The verbs used in the contexts of “the baal with the asherah” are generally “to serve” and “to forsake”, as



in “to forsake YHWH for other gods”; עשתרת/אשרה and הבעל being specifically named from among the “other gods”. One other thing that הבעל and אשרה have in common is the nature of the verbal action that is granted them. They are consistently in a passive position to the action. Not once is action actually ascribed to either of these deities. When given the opportunity “the baal” does not appear. Neither “the asherah” nor “the molek” is given an opportunity.

To recap, “the baal” is a god with a pejorative title, “the asherah” is sometimes cast as a goddess and sometimes as an object, and “the molek” may be a god or not at all but rather a kind of offering or dedication involving fire and children. The association of the sons of Israel with any of these is rejected by the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts as false worship and apostasy before YHWH.

## 4.2. Comparison of Corpora

For the most satisfactory results, the need is to compare like with like. The common denominator in these inquiries is three particular “deities” from three different venues. This next section will consider how those three venues compare with each other and how they have been used to inform each other.

### 4.2.1. Comparison of Epigraphic/Iconographic Material with Ugaritic Literature

They say that “a picture is worth a thousand words”. In this study it does not prove true. This may be in part because the pictures (iconographic sources) that we have are partial, broken, or indistinct. Rarely do they come with a label identifying who the pictures represent. The more information that is gathered from each excavation regarding the types of pottery, metals, jewellery or other artefacts that are found, the more help we have with placing its iconography in a temporal and cultural frame. Comparisons of one figure with like figures from other areas also help to isolate differences and similarities which can be used to set categories for what we find. The work by Tadmor (1982) separates deity from mortuary statues. Keel and Uehlinger (1993) have produced a five-hundred page compendium with almost four-hundred sketches of seals, cultic stands, wall murals, stelae etc. Both of these works and many like them are based on catalogues and categories of work that has accumulated from years of digging and researching. Catalogues of symbols are used to decipher some of the more obtuse artefacts found.

The epigraphic material (inscriptions) is no more complete and sometimes even more frustrating to work with for it tantalises the curious and serious student alike with meanings that are lost to our etic understandings. Names are mentioned. We ask: “Is it a divine name? Is it a personal name? Does this name have a theophoric element”?



Blessings and curses are given, to whom, by whom? When the shard has been broken or the engraving of the stone abraded the answers can allude us. The brevity of the epigraphic material compounds the problem. Is *lmlk* to be understood as “to the king” or “to Molek” or “for a *molk* sacrifice”?

The myths, on the other hand, paint pictures for us of activity and purpose. The characters are described for us often in detail. We know their habits and their abodes. We know their status and weaknesses. The characters speak to each other. They love, hate, challenge, fight, die and sometimes come back to life. The deciphering and translating of these is aided by their length and often repetitive nature. But unless some form of iconography is found that can be identified with specific characters of the myth, the pictures painted by the stories remain open to the interpretation of the reader. Was Baal of the Ugaritic text bearded? Was Anat a diminutive figure? Was El usually understood by the worshippers in Ugarit as a seated deity? The statues and paintings are often obscure as to whether a divine depiction is one god or another, but the symbolism gleaned from the iconography and the pictures painted by the stories can be used to inform each other. For instance, in explaining a naked feminine statuette from Late Bronze Age Aphek which is over-rich in symbolic elements (cf. sec. 2.2.2.2.3.4; and Keel and Uehlinger 1993:82-3 and Abb. 82), Keel and Uehlinger mention that this iconographic artefact and the Ugaritic literature can be correlated to produce a picture of Asherah of the Ugaritic tale as the “Progenitress of the gods” (1993:82).

So the myths of the ANE have been used to fill in the missing information from the iconographic artefacts. Much the same can happen between the epigraphic and iconographic sources; consider Binger’s discussion of the 8th century inscription with the incised hand from Khirbet el-Qom (cf. 2.2.2.1.2; Binger 1995:8). She uses the presence of the hand to interpret a line in the inscription. Also consider Hestrin’s article on the Lachish Ewer from the 13th century (cf. sec. 2.2.2.2.3.3; Hestrin 1987). She uses the combination of the word <sup>ʿ</sup>*elat* set above a stylised tree and caprids on the ewer, and the name <sup>ʿ</sup>Elat that is used in parallel with Asherah of the Ugaritic text (e.g. UT 49.i.12-3) to posit that there was an Asherah cult at Lachish. Keel and Uehlinger use the Ugaritic description of Anat as a militant goddess to explain *bn ʿnt* inscribed on an 11th century spearhead from el-Hadr (1993:144; Abb. 156).

One of the things that needs to be taken into consideration when comparisons, correlations and connections are made is the vintage of the things compared. The production and use of the Ugaritic myths came to an abrupt end approximately 1200 BCE. From that time, the city of Ugarit was no longer available for commerce and their library was unavailable for viewing until the excavations in 1929. The iconographic



and epigraphic material, on the other hand, comes from a variety of places, in a variety of languages (indicating the diversity of cultures represented), and it comes from across a spread of the centuries. How do we compare something that is from 1200 BCE with something that is from 700 BCE or 8th century Egyptian with 13th century Ugaritic? Certainly we can make comparisons of similarities and we need to heed the correlations that are brought to mind. However, the distance in time, venue, and culture should give us caution in making equations. Do deities with the same names or pictures with the same sort of symbolism necessarily represent one and the same personalities?

#### 4.2.2. Comparison of Ugaritic Literature with the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic Texts

There is an advantage to the comparisons that can be made between these two kinds of texts in that they both fall into the category, literature. The Ugaritic Baal Cycle is a set of stories, so are the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts. Working with Jeremiah, and possibly with any text from the Hebrew scriptures, is quite different from working with mythic texts. In the mythic texts of Ugarit, Egypt and Mesopotamia, the gods as the main characters are foregrounded and it is not difficult to see their faces. However in the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts, only YHWH is foregrounded and “the gods” are backgrounded to the main character YHWH. These gods in the background rarely take an active part and so are difficult to describe. From the Ugaritic material and other mythic texts like it, the activity and character of the gods can be described. However, the activities of those who worshipped the gods of these texts get minimal coverage.<sup>365</sup> The Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts focus attention on the activity of YHWH as “the one and only god” of the text and therefore his activities can be clearly discerned, as can the activities of those who did or did not worship him. Both YHWH and his chosen people are foregrounded. By following the activities of the “apostate worshippers”, only glimpses of the gods/idols can be seen. However, because of the nature of the polemic of the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts, these glimpses are incomplete and tell more of the worshippers than the gods/idols they served. From our vantage point, the activities of some of these gods can easily be guessed, but others are left to greater conjecture. The less said, the more can be postulated about the worshippers on the one hand, and about the gods/idols on the other.

Again the question of vintage can be mentioned here. The Ugaritic texts that have informed two chapters of this thesis (1.1 and 2.1) were found in an archive or library of the city Ugarit which was destroyed approximately 1200 BCE. How does one use these texts to inform the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts which probably reached a final

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<sup>365</sup> Unfortunately, the scope of this thesis has not been able to focus on who these worshippers were or what they were doing.



form years later in a different culture some distance away? Yet as has been mentioned earlier, the myths of Ugarit have helped to confirm that there was a god Baal and goddess Asherah in the ANE. And this has helped to see certain Hebrew texts from a different perspective; one that was not available before the Ras Shamra excavations.

#### 4.2.3. Comparison of Epigraphic/Iconographic Material with the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic Texts

The touchstone between the epigraphic materials and the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts is the similarity of names or phrases that can be found in both. Witness the inscriptions from Khirbet el-Qom and Kuntillet 'Ajrud which mention YHWH, *ba'al*, and *'asherata* (cf. secs. 1.2.2.4; 2.2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1.2). Also consider the interpretation of the cultic stand of Taanach (cf. sec. 2.2.2.2 where this particular stand has been called the "second cult stand"; Hadley 1989:219; Taylor 1988:562-3) in which the top register has an animal that has been identified as bovine or equine. Taylor suggests equine and appeals to the removal of "horses which the kings of Judah gave to the sun" (II Kg 23:11) as an explanation for this interpretation of that symbol. Again relative times should be considered. The Taanach cultic stand was found in a tenth century layer of silt in a cistern (Maier 1986:168). The II Kg 23 passage is concerned with Josiah's reform, 7th century. In order to use these two pieces of evidence to inform each other we need to reconcile the approximate 200 years difference between them. Another point for consideration is the fragmentary nature of the epigraphic and iconographic material and the necessity of guess-work in their interpretation, which on the one hand gives room for creativity but on the other must be done with assent to the conjecture involved.

#### 4.3. The Deities Across the Boundaries

One of the problems with the comparison of different venues is that the information is not equally complete within their own corpus. Complete is a relative term. There is no real completeness in any corpus. There are missing pieces of information that, if we had access to them, would make the process of guess work less difficult. The Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts present YHWH as the "one and only god". He has a very distinct portrait. The worshippers of YHWH are also clearly defined; at least, what they are *supposed* to be is clearly defined. By way of attending to the polemic of the texts, we can describe what the worshippers of the "other gods" (the baal, the asherah, the molek, the queen of heaven, etc.) were doing. We can guess who the worshippers were with a certain degree of confidence, but we learn very little about their "gods". From the Ugaritic texts the portraits of the gods are clearly in focus. But there are two holes in the database; first, the worshippers of the gods of the Ugaritic



pantheon and secondly, the faces of the “other gods” of the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts. This thesis asks, “who were those gods?” The Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts have deliberately obliterated their faces by moving them into a passive position (passive objects of verbal action). And when their faces are shown they are vandalised or deliberately uglified by the Hebrew authors. And the Ugaritic texts give us very little clue as to who the worshippers of the Ugaritic pantheon were or what they did. When there is a dearth of information in one area or another, scholars tend to fill in the gaps with what they have from other sources. Often descriptions of the gods of the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts (the “other gods” from the perspective of the Hebrew scriptures) are supplied from the Ugaritic material and/or the ancient Near Eastern iconography and epigraphy. And the worshippers of the Hebrew scriptures might be used to supply a possible match for the faceless worshippers of the Ugaritic pantheon or for those who produced the artefacts found by the archaeologists.<sup>366</sup> One of the things that makes this difficult is the nature of the polemic in the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts and the apparent lack of it in the Ugaritic stories or in any of the iconographic/epigraphic artefacts.

#### 4.3.1. Baal Across the Boundaries

Baal of Ugarit is without question a proper name for a specific deity. But as mentioned before, the Hebrew author has obscured the identity of **הַבַּעַל** in two significant ways. First by using the title with an article, and in so doing refusing to concede to his actual reality. Secondly, the range of verbs used with **הַבַּעַל**, for the most part, fall into a formulaic pattern. Also, all of the verbs so employed put him into a passive role. Things are done to him or to things that belong to him. Another point to make here is regarding the polemic of the text; irony is rife in the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts (regarding the presentation of the “other gods”) and absent in the Ugaritic texts (in presenting the gods of the pantheon). The gods of the Ugaritic pantheon do have titles; however, they are used in parallel with the names as a description of status, dominant activity, locale, etc. (e.g. Baal, Rider of the Clouds; Puissant Baal; Yamm, Judge Nahar; Lady Asherah of the Sea; Maiden Anat).

As both the Baal Cycle and the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts are made up of sets of stories, it is easier to compare the portrayal of Baal and “the baal”. The Ugaritic material tells us much about the character of Baal; however the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts tell us next to nothing, yet as pieces of literature they are both descriptive. The epigraphic material gives us a name, a blessing, a fling with the high

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<sup>366</sup> It has to be admitted here that this may not actually happen very often, because the agenda for doing so does not seem to be so strong.



god's wife, and a namesake or two. The aforementioned "fling" (from a Hittite myth) only names the "Storm-god"; Albright suggests that Baal fits the description (1969:107: cf. sec. 1.2.1.2). And based on the assumption that Baal was a weather god, those iconographic artefacts that have symbolism of this nature are ascribed to him. The connections proceed in a somewhat logical fashion, from militant, masculine deities with conical caps to representations of the "weather-god" with lightning or arrows, or with a blossom in hand. The deity with the blossom or some other plant is said to be related to fertility and care over vegetation; a weather-godly occupation. And as "weather-god" he is also titled "lord of the heavens" and so Baal-Shamaim. The story of Baal's battle with Yamm from Ugarit, which has supposedly been immortalised in Canaanite stories of Leviathan,<sup>367</sup> informs Keel and Uehlinger's interpretation of the youth with the snake on the bottom of one of the Taanach stands (cf. sec. 1.2.2.3; Keel and Uehlinger 1993:86-7 Abb. 87a-c; 177 Abb 182c). On the other Taanach stand, a winged sun disk has been attributed to Baal (Glock 1992:290).

The portraits of Baal are quite distinct from each other in the three different venues chosen. From Ugarit a strong character of great activity is portrayed. From the iconography and epigraphy elsewhere in the ANE a collage is created that gives us an impression only, more ethereal than concrete. The Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts refuse to paint a picture, but only trace the footsteps left behind.

#### 4.3.2. Asherah Across the Boundaries

It seems unwise to assume that ʾtṛt of the Ugaritic texts is the same as ʾšrh from the inscriptions of Kuntillet ʿAjrud or Khirbet el-Qom. There are, at the least, two centuries separating those who told/wrote the Ugaritic myths and those who left inscriptions on walls, on broken vessels and on ewers. Distance mitigates against an equation, even though Ugarit is considered by some to be a Canaanite culture and the language is similar (cf. Excursus p. 41; Smith 1994a:301ff, Grabbe 1994). Caution needs to be taken when making comparisons between places that are kingdoms and miles distant. The goddess of Ugarit is not associated with trees, lions, caprids or pubic triangles in any part of the myths where she features, whereas the scholars who have used the inscriptions and iconography mentioned in sec. 2.2.2.2.3, "Symbolic Elements", have argued that ʾšrh/ʾšrth is a goddess in Iron Age Palestine with these associations. The ʾšrh of Palestine may well be, as Hestrin put forward, the ʾElat of the Lachish Ewer (and this seems to be the first bit of evidence that the scholars use for claiming Asherah's presence in Palestine). However the equation is unsupported that

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<sup>367</sup> Day (1994:43-4) also presents a similar connection between Yamm and Leviathan. He includes Isa 27:1, KTU 1.5.1.1.1-2 and Ps 74:14-17 in his discussion .



ʾElat of Ugarit is one and the same as ʾšrh/ʾšrth of Palestine as Hestrin has suggested, for the ʾElat of Ugarit (a title used in parallel with Asherah; cf. UT 49.I.12-13; 51.I.7; 128.II.26) has only those associations that Asherah has and none of those assumed by Hestrin.

It seems that the equation of the Ugaritic goddess and the goddess of the Palestinian inscriptions is only as strong as the evolution of a name from a Semitic alphabetic cuneiform to a few inscriptions that have been deciphered from a Hebrew script. Though the scholars seemed to have confirmed the identification of the Palestinian goddess with trees, lions, naked figurines, etc., it is still open to discussion and postulation. We do not yet have a particular figurine, moulded or inscribed, and identified without question as the goddess herself. The closest that we have is the Winchester Stela which writes in hieroglyphics “Qudshu-Astarte-Anat”. It has been argued by several scholars that “Qudshu” is none other than Asherah herself (cf. Hadley 1989:69-73; Keel and Uehlinger 1993:76 n. 28). However, Keel and Uehlinger also mention that the identification is not absolutely certain: “Umgekehrt läßt sich aber eine Identifikation mit Aschera . . . ʿAnat oder ʿAstarte . . . auch nicht ausschließen” (1993:118-9). The nature of the worship of either the Ugaritic goddess or the Palestinian goddess by the name of Asherah is left to the interpretation of cryptic messages left on votive offerings, on tomb inscriptions, in letters between officials of Taanach and Egypt, and the like.

Who is Asherah? And is she the same in all places or do we have multiple individuals (things) with the same name? Even though Hadley has given a cogent explanation for how the name evolved from Ugaritic cuneiform to Hebrew script, we are still left to ascertain if there is any connection between who or what these names represent. Hadley is quite convinced of the connections prior to Asherah’s introduction to Palestine, which is illustrated by this conclusion of a section in the second chapter of her thesis:

Thus the worship of Athirat appears to have spread throughout the ancient Near East in the centuries before the Israelite monarchy. Athirat (as Ašratum), is known in Mesopotamia as early as the second millennium BC. Her worship may have been brought by the nomadic Amorites, who inhabited “the western lands”. There she was known as “the Lady of the Steppe”. In the light of her connection with the desert and the inland regions (as well as the sea) at Ugarit, it is possible that Athirat came there from the steppes of Northern Syria with the Amorites. She then took her place in the Canaanite pantheon as consort of El, and goddess of the coastal city of Tyre (and perhaps Sidon) (Hadley 1989:73).



Hadley's next section is titled "Etymology". With the assumption that Asherah is the goddess that she has traced through all of the centuries mentioned in the quote above, she then explains the process of how the name Athirat changed from Ugaritic cuneiform to classical Hebrew and states at the end of this section: "The next chapter will deal with the biblical texts themselves, in an attempt to determine how the ancient Israelites adopted (or adapted) this Canaanite goddess to their own purposes" (1989:78). But lack of other evidence beyond the name seems to mitigate against such a smooth transition (even through multiple stages) from Ašratum to Asherah of the Hebrew scriptures. The names may be similar but the symbolism and other attributes assumed of her are not so easily reconciled. She too is a goddess (as is Baal a god) of activity and character at Ugarit with a composite picture created from the bits and pieces gleaned from the iconography and epigraphy of the ANE, who is rejected as a faceless abomination of the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts.

#### 4.3.3. Molek Across the Boundaries

There has been a hunt for Molek. The search has gone far and wide looking for a god with a name that could be understood as a forerunner to "the molek" of the Hebrew scriptures. The search has taken two forms, first to seek a divine name with the same radicals, *mlk*. Secondly, to seek a god who has the same reputation for requiring child sacrifice.

At Carthage there is something that is tantalisingly suggestive of both the name and the reputation; calcinated bones of infants in a large burial precinct and Punic inscriptions reading *lmlk*, *mlk ʿmr*, and *mlk ʿdm*. In this case, however, *mlk* seems to indicate a kind of sacrifice, rather than a divine name. The pattern of child sacrifice is seen as deeply horrible and belonging to the underworld and so associations with chthonic deities have been made, e.g. Nergal (of Babylon), Malik (of Ebla and Mari) and possibly Mot (of Ugarit). That Nergal may be understood to mean "king" also adds to the circumstantial evidence. But none of these divine names are specifically linked to child sacrifice. It needs to be remembered that "child sacrifice" is not necessarily connected to the underworld or a chthonic nature or vice versa.

The search for information about Molek has been significantly lacking in one crucial area. Unlike Baal and Asherah, the name Molek (or one similar) has not been found in the myths of the Baal Cycle or in literature similar to it. The names Malik, Muluk, and *mlk ʿtrth* are found only in name lists that assure us of a divine nature, but very little indeed of the character of the deities so named. The Hebrew scriptures have themselves set the parameters for this search, for they alone link child sacrifice and a divine name, מֹלֵךְ together. But in the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts "the molek"



has been as thoroughly defaced as either “the baal” or “the asherah”, though the manner of defacing may be slightly different. For one, if we accept Geiger’s (1857) thesis that the name has been pointed with the vowels of the word translated “shame”, בִּשְׁתָּה, then the name itself has been vandalised. But this pointing was done by the Masoretes at a late point in the history of the Hebrew scriptures as a text. The questions left to us are: was this an attempt by the Masoretes to record accurately the way it was pronounced at the time of pointing, or conversely, was this the Masoretes’ attempt to register their disapproval of the rites associated with הַמֶּלֶךְ? II Kg 23:10 has no note in BHS as to any alternative readings for לַמֶּלֶךְ. The LXX translates this as τῶ Μολοχ, possibly indicating that their pronunciation was similar to the way that the Masoretes pointed it. However, Jer 23:35 records that the “textus Graecus originalis” translates לַמֶּלֶךְ as τῶ βασιλεῖ; indicating that the LXX translators understood this word (which at that time would have had no vowel points to assist) as meaning “king”. Secondly regarding the name, הַמֶּלֶךְ faces the same stigma as הַבַּעַל in that it is rendered as a title by virtue of the article attached. And may well have met with the same sort of ironic rendering by the readers of the ancient text, as “the lord” may have done.

הַמֶּלֶךְ is used only two times in the texts chosen for this research which gives little opportunity to observe the character behind the name. The Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts at this juncture give more clues to the activity that was accorded the worship of this deity than for “the baal” or “the asherah”. For the latter, altars were built and incense burnt. Also a ritual that includes calling out the name of the deities and flogging oneself can be gathered from I Kg 18. II Kg 10 mentions garments for worshippers of the baal (cf. Olmo Lete 1994:266-73). However, for “the molek”, a permanent place with a specific name was the location of a significant type of sacrifice given on his behalf. The Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts afford more information on הַמֶּלֶךְ, or on this deity with the radicals *mlk*, than does the information from the rest of the ANE; mythic, literary, iconographic or epigraphic. One thing that can be ascertained for certain from the discussion of the scholars is that there is enough room for a difference of opinion as to who הַמֶּלֶךְ is and where he may have come from. There is no representation of him. There is no archaeological evidence to piece together a picture. There are no stories, even from outside the Hebrew scriptures, to help us with a description. And the polemic of the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts have left הַמֶּלֶךְ as faceless as הַבַּעַל and אֲשֵׁרָה.

#### 4.4. The Necessary Caution

Academia is in the business of looking at evidence and postulating plausible suggestions as to how things may have been, at least in the area of ancient texts and



their respective cultures. Secondly, one of the things that is needed is a correction to those postulations that may have fallen short of what seems to be the truth or which may have been proposed on less information than is available at a later date. It also stands true that patterns or schools of scholarship tend to follow one another. As mentioned earlier, this thesis amounts to a proposal for some correctives in the area of “comparative ancient Semitic religions”.

#### 4.4.1. Early Scholarship: Kitto and Smith

John Kitto and William Smith commissioned articles on the deities in question before the Ugaritic libraries were uncovered. Kitto published his *A Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature for the People* in 1851, and Smith published a three volume set titled, *A Dictionary of the Bible. Comprising its Antiquities, Biography, Geography, and Natural History* in 1863. A quick synopsis of their articles will be included here as a foil to modern scholarship which is so dependent on Ugarit and other recent archaeological finds for descriptions of the gods as they are mentioned in the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts.

##### 4.4.1.1. Baal

Both articles in Kitto and Smith consider Baal a Phoenician god. He is chief god of Tyre according to Kitto (1851:119) and “Canaanitish” according to Smith (1863 Vol 1:145). They both pair him with Ashtoreth, who is, according to both articles, the chief goddess of the Phoenicians. Concerning the name Baal, Smith says: “The name of the god, whether singular or plural, is always distinguished from the common noun by the presence of the article (הַבַּעַלִּים, הַבַּעַל), except when it stands in connexion with some other word which designates a peculiar modification of Baal” (Smith 1863 Vol 1:145). By “modification” he means the occasions when “baal” is used as part of a compound name for a place or a deity. By both accounts Baal is associated with astral worship. However, Smith also mentions that this may not always have been the case.

It is quite likely that in the case of Baal as well as of Ashtoreth the symbol of the god varied at different times and in different localities. Indeed the great number of adjuncts with which the name of Baal is found is a sufficient proof of the diversity of characters in [sic] which he was regarded, and there must no doubt have existed a corresponding diversity in the worship. It may even be a question whether in the original notion of Baal there was reference to any of the heavenly bodies, since the derivation of the name does not in this instance, as it does in the case of Ashtoreth, point directly to them. If we separate the name Baal from idolatry, we seem, according to its meaning, to obtain simply the notion of Lord and Proprietor of all. With this the idea of productive power is naturally associated, and that power is as naturally symbolized by the sun, whilst on the



other hand the ideas of providential arrangement and rule, and so of prosperity, are a naturally suggested by the word, and in the astral mythology these ideas are associated with the planet jupiter (Smith 1863 Vol 1:145-46).

Kitto is content to mention only the sun in connection with Baal's astral worship (1851:119).

#### 4.4.1.2. Asherah/Ashtoreth

These articles have more trouble presenting a picture of asherah. Kitto (1851) does not include an article on "Asherah", but includes notes on "Asherah" in an article on "Ashtoreth". According to Kitto, Ashtoreth is the goddess of the Sidonians and also the Philistines (I Kg 11:5, 33; I Sm 31:10 respectively) who is the "corresponding female divinity" to Baal (1851:105). He continues:

It is probable that she represented one of the celestial bodies. There is also reason to believe that she is meant by the "queen of heaven," in Jer. vii. 18; xliv. 17; whose worship is there said to have been solemnised by burning of incense, pouring libations, and offering cakes (Kitto 1851:105; cf. II Kg 23:4).

Smith equates the name of Ashtoreth with "Astarte"; Kitto does not explicitly do so. However, they both associate Ashtoreth with the Queen of Heaven. Smith parallels Kitto's remarks quoted above and also adds that Asherah was probably the name of the idol or image of Ashtoreth. He begins his article saying, Asherah is "the name of a Phoenician goddess, or rather of the idol itself" (Smith 1863 Vol 1:120). They both suggest that the LXX translation of either of these names (Ashtoreth or Asherah) as "groves" is inaccurate (Kitto 1851:105; Smith 1863 Vol 1:120). They are also in agreement that Asherah was a thing made or something wooden used in the worship of Ashtoreth. Smith makes these suggestions:

The view maintained by Bertheau . . . appears to be the more correct one, that Ashtoreth is the proper name of the goddess, whilst Asherah is the name of the image or symbol of the goddess. This symbol seems in all cases to have been of wood (see *e.g.* Judg. vi.25-30; 2 K. xxii. 14[sic]), and the most probable etymology of the term (אֲשֵׁרָה = אֲשֵׁרָה, *to be straight, direct*) indicates that it was formed of the straight stem of a tree, whether living or set up for the purpose, and this points us to the phallic rites with which no doubt the worship of Astarte was connected (Smith 1863 Vol 1:120).

Astarte is mentioned only in this quote which comprises the last paragraph of Smith's short article on Asherah. His article on Ashtoreth, on the other hand, is a longer and more involved discussion.



#### 4.4.1.3. Molek

Molek gets very little discussion from either of these dictionaries. Molek as presented by Kitto was the chief god of the Ammonites to whom children were sacrificed. He cites I Kg 11:7 as the first time that Molek is mentioned in the history of the Jews as recorded in the Hebrew scriptures. His article on “MÓLOCH” is short and he does very little to extrapolate as to who Molek may have been. He mentions in brief the issue of what it means “to pass children through the fire”. His last note confirms that he is of the opinion that according to the text children were actually sacrificed (Kitto 1851:590). Smith, on the other hand, has more to add:

The fire-god Molech was the tutelary deity of the children of Ammon, and essentially identical with the Moabitish Chemosh. Fire-gods appear to have been common to all the Canaanite, Syrian, and Arab tribes, who worshipped the destructive element under an outward symbol, with the most inhuman rites. Among these were human sacrifices, purifications and ordeals by fire, devoting of the first-born, mutilation, and vows of perpetual celibacy and virginity. To this class of divinities belonged the old Canaanitish Molech, against whose worship the Israelites were warned by threats of the severest punishment. . . . (Smith 1863 Vol 2:402).

Smith suggests that there are times when the worship of Molek is obscured by the texts that use the word מִלְכָּה instead of מִלְכָּה (e.g. II Sam 12:30; Am 5:26; Isa 30:33).

The worship of Molech is evidently alluded to, though not expressly mentioned, in connection with star-worship and the worship of Baal in 2 K. xvii. 16, 17, xxi. 5, 6 which seems to shew that Molech, the flame-god, and Baal, the sun-god, whatever their distinctive attributes, and whether or not the latter is a general appellation including the former, were worshipped with the same rites. The sacrifice of children is said by Movers to have been not so much an expiatory as a purificatory rite, by which the victims were purged from the dross of the body and attained union with the deity. . . . (Smith 1863 Vol 2:403).

#### 4.4.1.4. Astral Connections

Both Kitto and Smith mention astral connections for these gods for which they appeal to the classicists for information. Greek authors offer connections between these gods and the sun and moon or Jupiter and Venus. Augustine and Eusebius supply information regarding worship at Carthage and human sacrifices.

The articles in Kitto and Smith offer us a helpful reminder of how recent discoveries have affected our understandings of each of the gods in question. The astral connections that Kitto and Smith mention are made according to information that they



had from very early scholars, the Greek authors et al. However the allusions from the Hebrew scriptures to this end are speculative based on their supposed characteristics, as illustrated by Smith's attempt to describe Ashtoreth/Astarte:

If now we seek to ascertain the character and attributes of this goddess we find ourselves involved in considerable perplexity. There can be no doubt that the general notion symbolized is that of productive power, as Baal symbolizes that of generative power, and it would be natural to conclude that as the sun is the great symbol of the latter, and therefore to be identified with Baal, so the moon is the symbol of the former and must be identified with Astarte. That this goddess was so typified can scarcely be doubted. . . . On the whole it seems most likely that both the moon and the planet [Venus] were looked upon as symbols, under different aspects and perhaps at different periods, of the goddess, just as each of them may in different aspects of the heavens be regarded as the "queen of heaven" (Smith 1863 Vol 1:123).

Ashtoreth and asherah's identity with the queen of heaven in the Hebrew scriptures is not for certain, nowhere else in the Hebrew scriptures is baking cakes and pouring out libations attributed to the worship of either Ashtoreth or asherah.<sup>368</sup>

#### 4.4.1.5. In Sum

It can be said that these two dictionaries (Kitto 1851 and Smith 1863) used the best information that they had to describe **הַבַּעַל**, **אֲשֵׁרָה** and **הַמִּלְכָּה**. Their interest in these gods was based on their contexts in the Hebrew scriptures and Kitto and Smith had little besides the Hebrew scriptures for information. And to that end their descriptions of each of these gods is very similar to secs. 1.3 and 2.3 in this thesis for Baal and Asherah/Ashtoreth respectively. Molek on the other hand is more dissimilar from the description given in sec. 3.2 on Molek because Kitto and Smith have read I Kg 11:7 more literally than it was in sec. 3.2. They have assumed an equation between Milchom the Ammonite god and Molek which was discounted in sec. 3.2. Smith has been bolder in regard to Molek's identity than Kitto in that he has made appeal to sources and connections that go farther afield, for instance fire-gods and vows of celibacy and virginity.

#### 4.4.2. Mistakes Scholars Make

It goes without saying that much of scholarly debate is full of correctives. Most scholars would appeal to the plethora of information that is available now that neither

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<sup>368</sup> The persual of who the queen of heaven might be, would be interesting in the light of the research done for this thesis. However for sake of time and space it has been left for another time.



Kitto (1851) nor Smith (1863) had at the time that they wrote their articles. In that light it would undoubtedly be true that modern scholars would see themselves as correcting or even filling in the gaps that Kitto and Smith display. However, revision of earlier scholarship is not the only area for correctives to be made. Modern scholars enter into the debate with each other. Weinfeld (1978) makes a proposal to read **העביר** of the Hebrew scriptures as a type of dedication, and Day (1989) and others insist that more than “passing between fires” is meant; that actual sacrifice is intended. Tadmor (1982) writes an article as a corrective to calling all naked feminine figures “Astarte figurines”. They are not all intended to model divine figures, she says. Heider titles his thesis, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment* (1985). Wiggins follows that in 1993 with *A Reassessment of ‘Asherah’. A Study According to the Textual Sources of the First Two Millennia B.C.E.* Handy (1994:36-7) insists on caution in the use of Hittite material to describe “Syria Palestine” deities (cf. sec. 1.2.1.2). The list goes on of those who endeavour to set the record straight. There are pleas for caution riddled throughout the articles and books that have flourished since the Ugaritic material was available to the scholars.

#### 4.4.2.1. Distinct Portraits

Each of the three gods surveyed above brought their own unique issues to the fore. They have each interested the scholars for distinctly different reasons. Baal has been understood as the storm-god. And for those interested in fertility, production of rain and crops, Baal offers the inroads to the inquiry. Asherah is the consort of El at Ugarit and so her consort relationship with other gods seems to be of the greatest interest; whether consort of Baal or of YHWH. Molek is tagged as chthonic and the demander of human sacrifice; so those interested in either of these ventures (and often these are equated) search for sources to unite the name with the activity. As has been demonstrated by the way that the three chapters and sub-sections of this thesis were divided, there are distinctions between the gods themselves, and also between the ways that they are presented in their respective venues. However, many scholars blur those distinctions creating composite portraits of the god Baal or of the goddess Asherah presenting them as being individually comprehensive. For instance there is often an assumption made, that the god with the name Baal in one place was the same as a deity with the same name found elsewhere. And so the discovery of Baal in one place has been read against (or with) Baal of another location and vice versa. Masculine figurines with elements of storm-god symbolism are also applied to the character sketch of Baal. All of these together then create a pastiche of Baal’s face. This same thing has happened with the other two deities surveyed, namely Asherah and Molek. It has become somewhat of a circular chase: Baal is called a storm-god, so storm-god images



are called Baal. And when Baal is read in the text, images of storm-godliness are attributed to the name.

Baal indeed may have been worshipped by the apostate Israelites as a storm-god; however the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts do not name him as such. Asherah may well have been recognised by the worshippers as a consort of YHWH, but again the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic material does not give אֲשֶׁרָה that credit. Molek may have been widely understood as a chthonic deity; however no more information is granted by the polemical texts of the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic material than to postulate in this direction. Reading these characteristics into the Hebrew texts may help to give perspective and body to the personalities of these faceless deities, but this should not be done with the foregone conclusion that this is the true nature of the individuals being described.

The fondness that scholars have for creating a pastiche of a deity is epitomised in this pericope from Day in an article titled, “Ugarit and the Bible: Do they Presuppose the Same Canaanite Religion?”:

The Hebrew word שֶׁשׁ is both masculine and feminine, although the masculine form is more frequent, which perhaps suggests that both masculine and feminine forms of the sun deity were known. . . . Although the gender of the Canaanite sun deity is nowhere explicitly stated in the Bible, there are indications that it was masculine . . . The reason for saying that this is that the figure of Samson appears to have been influenced by traditions about the sun god. His name means “sunny,” many of his actions take place near Beth-Shemesh, where we know there was a Canaanite sun cult, his strength resided in his hair (which was often a symbol of the sun’s rays in the ancient world), which was cut off by Delilah (cf. לַיְלָה, “night”), and so on. Furthermore, Samson is pre-eminently a frolicking strong man, and this was clearly a feature of the sun mythology known to the Israelites, as we know from Ps 19:7 (ET 6), . . . If the line of argument pursued here is correct, we have discovered a point of discontinuity between the Canaanite religion attested at Ugarit and that known to the biblical writers, for the sun at Ugarit is always a goddess (Day 1994:47-8).

The line of logic here is more convoluted than what most scholars would follow, but the “Symbolsystem” that is assumed by Keel and Uehlinger in their compendium (cf. sec. 4.1.2) can amount to the same sort of thing. When artefacts are placed in a category they assume the label of the category, e.g. “Astarte figurines”. Discussion about the items in that category tends also to assume a homogeneity within the category, until a corrective is offered. Tadmor’s (1982) work is such a corrective (cf. sec. 2.2.2.2.3.4; also mentioned briefly at the end of the previous sec. 4.4.2). There



needs to be a constant vigilance in refining the definitions of the categories which we use.

#### 4.4.2.2. The Gap

Another area of necessary caution that has been mentioned a few times previously should be clarified here. There is a significant gap between the Ugaritic literature and the material of the Jeremiah-deuteronomistic texts. This same gap also exists between some of the iconographic/epigraphic material and the Ugaritic literature, as well as between the iconographic/epigraphic material and the Hebrew texts. This gap exists because of the different chronologies, the distance between locations, and the differences in cultures of the artefacts or the corpora of writings which are being used to interpret each other. John Day points out a couple of problems with the equation of Ugaritic and Hebrew texts: “The biblical writers did not envisage it as their duty to inform us of the details of Canaanite religion and mythology. On the other side, the Ugaritic texts are often fragmentary and therefore do not give us a total picture” (Day 1994:35). In a discussion on the methodology of the comparison of the Ugaritic material with the Hebrew scriptures, G. del Olmo Lete proposes a shift in the way that these two sets of texts are used with each other, i.e. the Hebrew scriptures might be used to reconstruct a Canaanite milieu for Israelite religion instead of vice versa as has been done to the present (Olmo Lete 1994:266). He prefaces these remarks with a note on the weakness of using “Ugaritic Literature . . . to clarify the text and context of the Hebrew Bible” (1994:259). He speaks of “clarification” on three levels; “lexicographical, literary and thematic-institutional”. He continues with further detail:

The studies of *lexicographical* correlation, holding that the Ugaritic lexicon either makes precise or simply unravels the semantic value of a certain Hebrew lexeme . . . are abundant . . . This has already been assumed by the latest dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew,<sup>369</sup> sometimes in a rather uncritical way. Such proposals, useful in certain cases, suffer frequently from the weakness inherent in any comparative and etymological transposition: between the northern Canaanite of the Late Bronze Age and the southern Canaanite of the Iron Age there is a temporal, spatial and cultural *décalage* that calls for caution in such correlations, taking into account the semantic *glissement* (sliding) that linguistic ambits, apparently homogeneous, suffer in such circumstances (Olmo Lete 1994:260-61).

He further comments that “*ideological* allusions” also suffer from the same weakness (Olmo Lete 1994:262-63). Day, ironically,<sup>370</sup> presents a similar caution: “Since. . .

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<sup>369</sup> Appropriately he fails to list *The Classical Hebrew Dictionary* published at Sheffield among those who make this infraction.

<sup>370</sup> Ironically, considering his penchant for intertextuality.



several hundred years separate the Ugaritic texts from the Bible and there is a geographical difference too, we cannot simply assume without question that the Canaanite mythology and religion presupposed were identical” (Day 1994:35). The concern of these two writers is with the use of the Ugaritic texts to explain, interpret or illustrate different passages, words, ideas or the background of the Hebrew scriptures. The same sort of caution needs also to be voiced regarding the other body of information mentioned in this thesis, namely the iconographic/epigraphic material. The same issues regarding the differences in provenience, chronology and respective cultures would certainly apply with the comparisons of this body of material with either the Ugaritic or the Hebrew corpora.

#### 4.4.2.3. The Way We Translate

An additional concern here is the implicit assumption made in writing the words אֲשֶׁרָה and עֲשֶׁתֶרֶת with a capital letter as if it were a name. The English translations of the Hebrew scriptures are not always consistent with how they treat these words. The NRSV writes “sacred pole” footnoting “Heb Asherah”. The NASB translates “the Asherah” with a footnote reading, “I.e., wooden symbol of a female deity”. The NRSV translates עֲשֶׁתֶרֶת of II Kg 23:13 as Astarte; NASB as Ashtoreth. NIV holds a similar convention as the NASB for עֲשֶׁתֶרֶת. All of these translations assume a name (nominal) status by using a capital letter, even if it is only in the footnotes. הַבַּעַל and הַמֹּלֵךְ suffer from the same confusion when translated “Baal” and “Molek”. This is also true of those who choose to discuss the deities of the Hebrew texts in commentaries or in other scholarly debate. In those texts which write בַּעַל, אֲשֶׁרָה, or מֹלֵךְ with the article, the deliberate choice of the Hebrew authors needs to somehow be registered in the way that the Hebrew is rendered into English.

#### 4.4.2.4. Finally

The presentations of Baal, Asherah and Molek have shown distinctly different characteristics from within the three sets of material used as sources for this thesis. A plea for caution in reading the different presentations of these deities as equivalent to each other has been made. There are significant differences in the ways that the Ugaritic literature and the Hebrew texts present these deities. Those distinctions stem from the difference in the purpose of the texts (polemic and non-polemic), in the difference created by the gap in time and by the distance spatially and culturally. The artefacts collected by archaeologists also present their own portraits of the gods. They also suffer the same distance temporally, spatially and culturally. In addition, the fragmentary nature of the archaeological finds further jumbles the pictures they paint. It must also be said that those corpora of texts are closer to each other in proximity of



time, provenience and culture than to our modern world. Smith suggests that between Ugaritic and “Canaanite” literary material there is not an equivalence, but they can not be neatly divided:

Appeal to BH vocabulary found in Israel’s oldest poems and the Ugaritic texts might be made in order to suggest continuity in the literary tradition between these sources. Furthermore, the literary tradition between the Late Bronze Age Levant and biblical material involves material other than the Ugaritic texts. . . . None of these points of contact between Ugaritic literature and what has been taken as “Canaanite” culture should be construed as suggesting a simple equation between them. By the same token, their complex literary traditions cannot be entirely separated. (Smith 1994a:302).

There is much that ANE literature and artefacts illuminate regarding each other and in time there will no doubt be new pieces of evidence which will present a new perspectives. However, connections and assumptions of equivalence must be made with great caution. Even the way that **הַבַּעַל**, **הַאֲשֵׁרָה** and **הַמֶּלֶךְ** are translated from the Hebrew scriptures betrays some of the assumptions that we make about the faces of the gods.



## Appendix 1

Collated tables of ANET/CTA/KTU/UT/RS

ANET/Virolleaud <sup>371</sup>	UT	CTA	RS	KTU
AQHT A	UT II Aqht	CTA 17	RS 2.[004]	KTU 1.17
AQHT B	UT III Aqht	CTA 18	RS 3.340	KTU 1.18
AQHT C	UT I Aqht	CTA 19	RS 3.322+	KTU 1.19
I AB	UT 49	CTA 6	RS 2.[009]+	KTU 1.6
I AB	UT 62 <sup>372</sup>	CTA 6 ?	RS 2.[009]+ ?	KTU 1.6?
I* AB	UT 67	CTA 5	RS 2.[022]+	KTU 1.5
II AB	UT 51	CTA 4	RS 2.[008]+	KTU 1.4
III AB A	UT 68	CTA 2.I, II & IV	RS 3.367	KTU 1.2.IV
III AB A frag. b	UT 51	CTA 8	RS 3.364	KTU 1.8
III AB B	UT 137	CTA 2.I, II & IV	RS 3.367	KTU 1.2.I
III AB C	UT 129	CTA 2.III	RS 3.346	KTU 1.2.III
IV AB	UT 76	CTA 10	RS 3.364	KTU 1.10
IV AB.III <sup>373</sup>	UT 132 <sup>374</sup>	CTA 10	RS 3.362+	KTU 1.10
KRT A (I K)	UT Krt	CTA 14	RS 3.362+	KTU 1.14
KRT B (III K)	UT 128	CTA 15	RS [003]+	KTU 1.15
KRT C.i-ii (II K.I-II)	UT 125	CTA 16	RS 3.343+	KTU 1.16
KRT C.iii-v (II K.III-V)	UT 126	CTA 16	RS 3.325+	KTU 1.16
KRT C.vi (II K.VI)	UT 127	CTA 16	RS 3.325+	KTU 1.16
RŠ 319	UT 132 <sup>375</sup>	CTA 11	RS 3.319	KTU 1.11
V AB A-F	UT cnt I-VI	CTA 3	RS 2.[014]+	KTU 1.3
V AB A-F	UT cnt pl.IX-X	CTA 1	RS 3.361	KTU 1.1

UT	ANET/Virolleaud	CTA	RS	KTU
UT 49	I AB	CTA 6	RS 2.[009]+	KTU 1.6
UT 51	II AB	CTA 4	RS 2.[008]+	KTU 1.4
UT 51	III AB A frag. b	CTA 8	RS 3.364	KTU 1.8
UT 62	I AB	CTA 6 ?	RS 2.[009]+ ?	KTU 1.6?
UT 67	I* AB	CTA 5	RS 2.[022]+	KTU 1.5
UT 68	III AB A	CTA 2.I, II & IV	RS 3.367	KTU 1.2.IV
UT 76	IV AB	CTA 10	RS 3.364	KTU 1.10
UT 125	KRT C.i-ii (II K.I-II)	CTA 16	RS 3.343+	KTU 1.16
UT 126	KRT C.iii-v (II K.III-V)	CTA 16	RS 3.325+	KTU 1.16
UT 127	KRT C.vi (II K.VI)	CTA 16	RS 3.325+	KTU 1.16
UT 128	KRT B (III K)	CTA 15	RS [003]+	KTU 1.15
UT 129	III AB C	CTA 2.III	RS 3.346	KTU 1.2.III
UT 132	RŠ 319	CTA 11	RS 3.319	KTU 1.11
UT 132	IV AB.III	CTA 10	RS 3.362+	KTU 1.10
UT 137	III AB B	CTA 2.I, II & IV	RS 3.367	KTU 1.2.I
UT cnt I-VI	V AB A-F	CTA 3	RS 2.[014]+	KTU 1.3
UT cnt pl.IX-X	V AB A-F	CTA 1	RS 3.361	KTU 1.1
UT I Aqht	AQHT C	CTA 19	RS 3.322+	KTU 1.19
UT II Aqht	AQHT A	CTA 17	RS 2.[004]	KTU 1.17
UT III Aqht	AQHT B	CTA 18	RS 3.340	KTU 1.18
UT Krt	KRT A (I K)	CTA 14	RS 3.362+	KTU 1.14

<sup>371</sup> Virolleaud's texts were published at different stages of his excavation campaigns. Hence there is no year noted here for where these tablets as a whole corpus are published, however, ANET gives notes with each of the tablets that it presents.

<sup>372</sup> Bordreuil's concordance notes Syria 15, (1934) pp. 226-43=RS 2.[009]+ which confirms notes from UT p. 260 UT 62.

<sup>373</sup> This is not actually marked in ANET this way but is the same system that ANET uses and gives an identification that can be correlated with the RS numbering system.

<sup>374</sup> Ditto, but that this is an artificial split in order to accommodate the RS numbering system.

<sup>375</sup> This is so noted in UT notes this as "otherwise known as IV AB.III.1\*-18\*".



<b>CTA</b>	<b>ANET/Virolleaud</b>	<b>UT</b>	<b>RS</b>	<b>KTU</b>
CTA 1	V AB A-F	UT <sup>c</sup> nt pl.IX-X	RS 3.361	KTU 1.1
CTA 2.I, II & IV	III AB A	UT 68	RS 3.367	KTU 1.2.IV
CTA 2.I, II & IV	III AB B	UT 137	RS 3.367	KTU 1.2.I
CTA 2.III	III AB C	UT 129	RS 3.346	KTU 1.2.III
CTA 3	V AB A-F	UT <sup>c</sup> nt I-VI	RS 2.[014]+	KTU 1.3
CTA 4	II AB	UT 51	RS 2.[008]+	KTU 1.4
CTA 5	I* AB	UT 67	RS 2.[022]+	KTU 1.5
CTA 6	I AB	UT 49	RS 2.[009]+	KTU 1.6
CTA 6 ?	I AB	UT 62	RS 2.[009]+ ?	KTU 1.6?
CTA 8	III AB A frag. b	UT 51	RS 3.364	KTU 1.8
CTA 10	IV AB	UT 76	RS 3.364	KTU 1.10
CTA 10	IV AB.III	UT 132	RS 3.362+	KTU 1.10
CTA 11	RŠ 319	UT 132	RS 3.319	KTU 1.11
CTA 14	KRT A (I K)	UT Krt	RS 3.362+	KTU 1.14
CTA 15	KRT B (III K)	UT 128	RS [003]+	KTU 1.15
CTA 16	KRT C.i-ii (II K.I-II)	UT 125	RS 3.343+	KTU 1.16
CTA 16	KRT C.iii-v (II K.III-V)	UT 126	RS 3.325+	KTU 1.16
CTA 16	KRT C.vi (II K.VI)	UT 127	RS 3.325+	KTU 1.16
CTA 17	AQHT A	UT II Aqht	RS 2.[004]	KTU 1.17
CTA 18	AQHT B	UT III Aqht	RS 3.340	KTU 1.18
CTA 19	AQHT C	UT I Aqht	RS 3.322+	KTU 1.19



## Appendix 2

Comparative table of arrangements of tablets for the Baal Cycle using KTU citation system.

<i>ANET</i> (1989)	Caquot (1970)	Aistleitner (1964)	de Moor (1987)	Walls (1992)	Cassuto (1971)	Gibson (1978)	Wiggins (1993) <sup>376</sup>
1.1	1.2.III	1.5	1.01	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1-2
1.2.III	1.2.I	1.6	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.2.iii,i,iv	1.3-4
1.2.I	1.2.IV	1.3	1.1	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.5.6
1.2.IV	1.3	1.1	1.2	1.4	1.2	1.4	
1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.5	1.5	
1.3	1.5	1.2.III	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.6	
1.5	1.6	1.2	1.6				
1.6	1.10	1.2.IV	1.96				
	1.1	1.10	1.10				
			1.11				

<sup>376</sup> Wiggins (1993) is most concerned with the "Baal/Mot Epic". He first considers the Legend of Keret and then the rest of the six tablets. In as much as not all these authors include the Legend of Keret or the Tale of Aqhat, these two parts of the Ugaritic myths are not included in this table. Those who do include these two stories generally do not differ in their arrangement of tablets 1.14-19, though some include tablets 1.20-22 (e.g. de Moor and Gibson).



## ABBREVIATIONS

ANE	Ancient Near East
ANET	<i>The Ancient Near East. Supplementary Texts and Pictures Relating to the Old Testament.</i> Third Edition with Supplement. Ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; 1969).
BDB	<i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, & Charles A. Briggs (Oxford: The Clarendon Press; 1907).
BH	Biblical Hebrew
BHS	<i>Biblia hebraica stuttgartensia</i>
CTA	<i>Corpus des tablettes en cunéformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939.</i> Mission de Ras Shamra 10 by A. Herdner (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale et Librairie P. Geuthner; 1963).
DCH1	Clines, David J.A., (Ed.) and John Elwolde (Exec. Ed.) <i>The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> , Vol. I א, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press; 1993).
DCH2	Clines, David J.A., (Ed.) and John Elwolde (Exec. Ed.) <i>The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> , Vol. II א-י, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press; 1995).
DDD	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> . Ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking and Peiter W. van der Horst (Leiden: E.J. Brill; 1995).
E	English text: chapter and/or verse as different from Hebrew.
fp	feminine plural
fs	feminine singular
GKC	Kautzsch, E. <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> , (revised in accordance with the twenty eighth German edition [1909] by A.E. Cowley), nineteenth impression, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press; 1988).
H	Hebrew text: chapter and/or verse as different from English.
Hi	Hiphil, Hebrew verb form
KTU	<i>Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit und einschliesslich der Keilalphabetischen Texte ausserhalb Ugarits. Teil I. Transkription.</i> Alter Orient und Altes Testament 24/1 by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, & J. Sanmartín (Kevelaer: Butzon und Bercher; 1976).
LB	Late Bronze Age
LXX	Septuagint
MB	Middle Bronze Age
mp	masculine plural
ms	masculine singular
NASB	<i>New American Standard Bible</i>
Ni	Niphal, Hebrew verb form
NKJV	<i>New King James Version</i>
NRSV	<i>New Revised Standard Version</i>
Pi	Piel, Hebrew verb form
Pu	Pual, Hebrew verb form
RSV	<i>Revised Standard Version</i>
UT	<i>Ugaritic Textbook</i> by Cyrus H. Gordon, (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute; 1965).



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