

# Archaeology and the Old Testament

Chapter 6, Part 1

Syncretism

Dr. Gregg Wilkerson

The background of the slide is a solid blue color. In the lower right quadrant, there are several decorative elements consisting of concentric circles, resembling ripples in water. These circles are light blue and vary in size and opacity, creating a subtle pattern.

# What is “Syncretism”

- A mixture of “orthodox” and non-Israelite religious elements.



# Our Lady of \_\_\_\_\_

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- Mixing a local personality with the Virgin Mary



# Monoltery

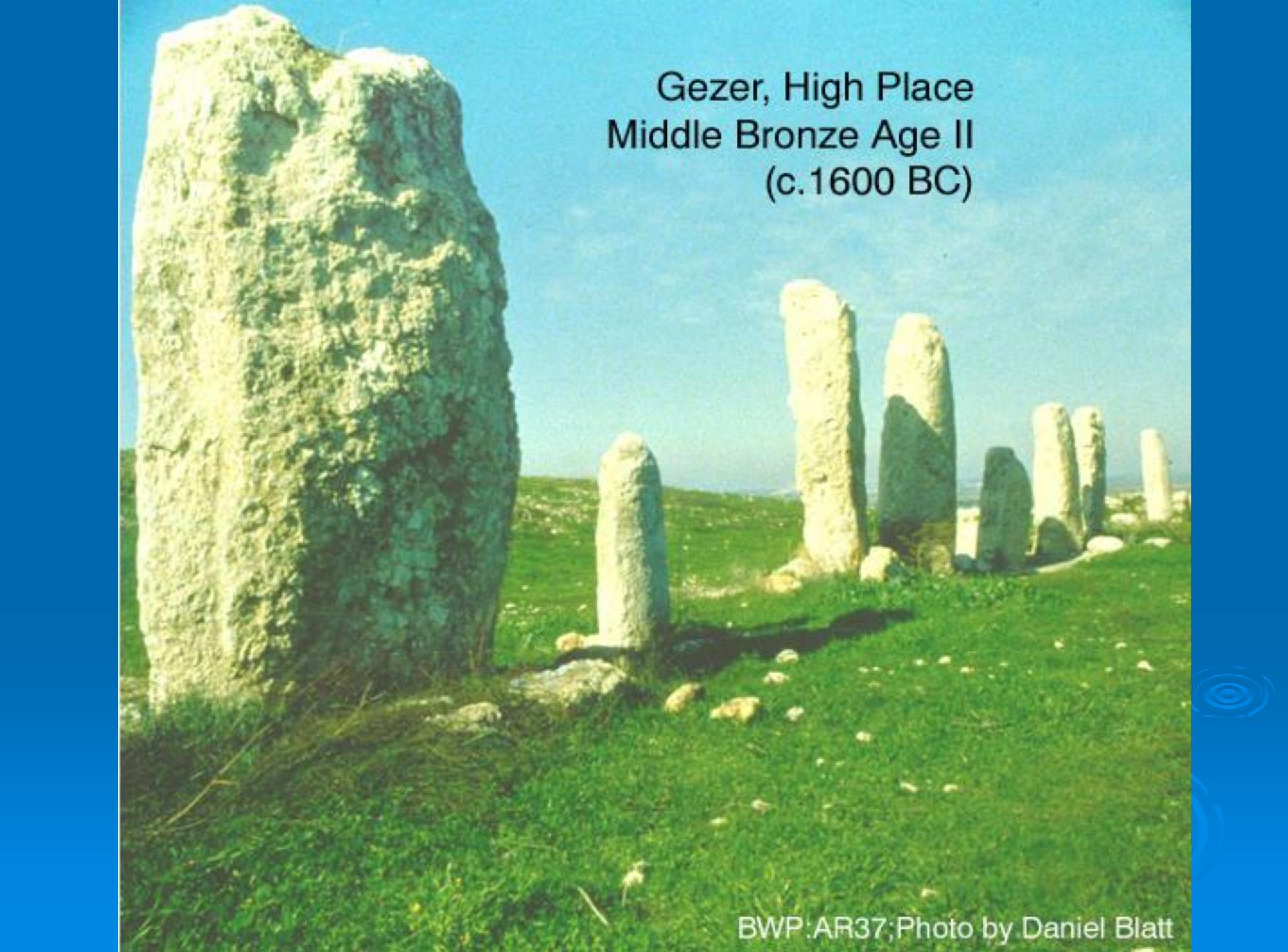
- A competing belief system to monotheism
- **Monoltery**, the *worship* of only one god, but recognition that others existed.
- Monoltery is heretical to Jews and Christians today.
- In ancient Israel those beliefs were **tolerated** and even **incorporated** into the religious and social practices of the community

# SHRINES AND SANCTUARIES

- **The Bamot**
- The *bamot* (plural, *bamah*,) is a sacred place or area translated as "high place" (KJV), "high shrine" (NEB) and "shrine" (NRSV)

# Types of Bamot

- 1) simple open-air facility on a natural hilltop with cult objects such as an *asherah* (sacred tree or pole), *masseboth* (standing stones) and alters (Gen. 13:18)



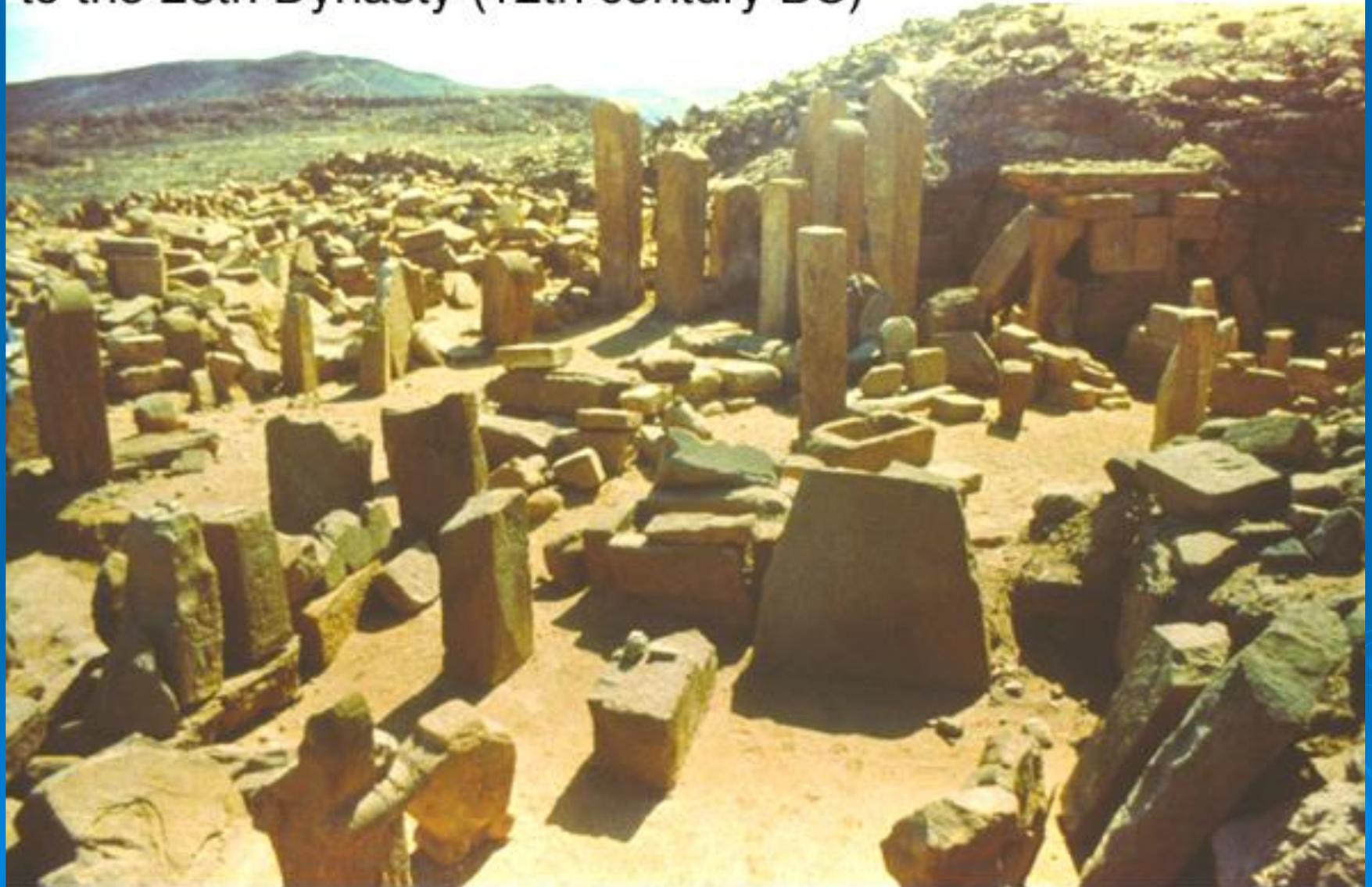
Gezer, High Place  
Middle Bronze Age II  
(c.1600 BC)

# Hazor, Shrine of the Stelae, Late Canaanite or Late Bronze II temple of the 13th century BC



BWP:GA23; Photo by David Harris/Israel Dept. of Antiquities and Museums

Serabit el-Khadem, Hathor Temple Standing Stones  
Middle Bronze Age; Egyptian 12th Dynasty (1991–1783 BC)  
to the 26th Dynasty (12th century BC)



BWP:AR39; Photo by Hershel Shanks

# Types of Bamot

- 2) artificially raised platform for religious activity



High Place at Tell Dan, 928-907 BC

Platform



Shanks, 1994, BAR, 20:2:34



**Cult statue or thone platform, Tell Dan, First Temple Period.**

# Types of Bamot

## ➤ 3) sacrificial alter

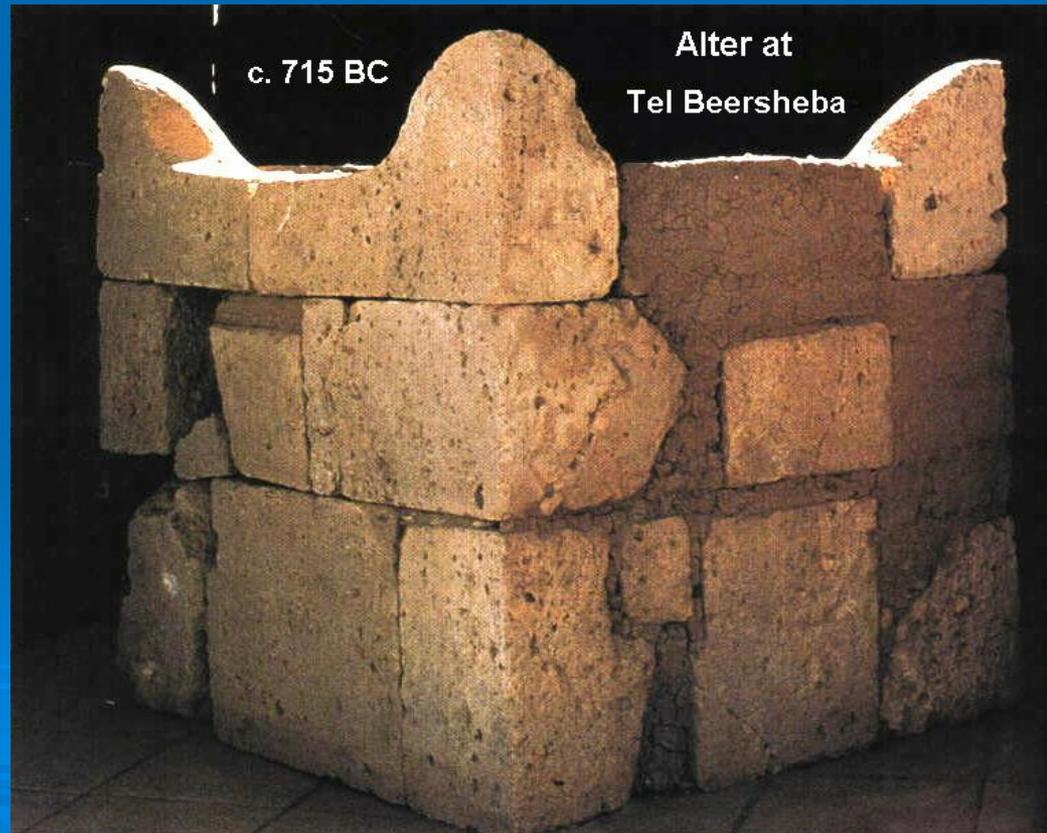
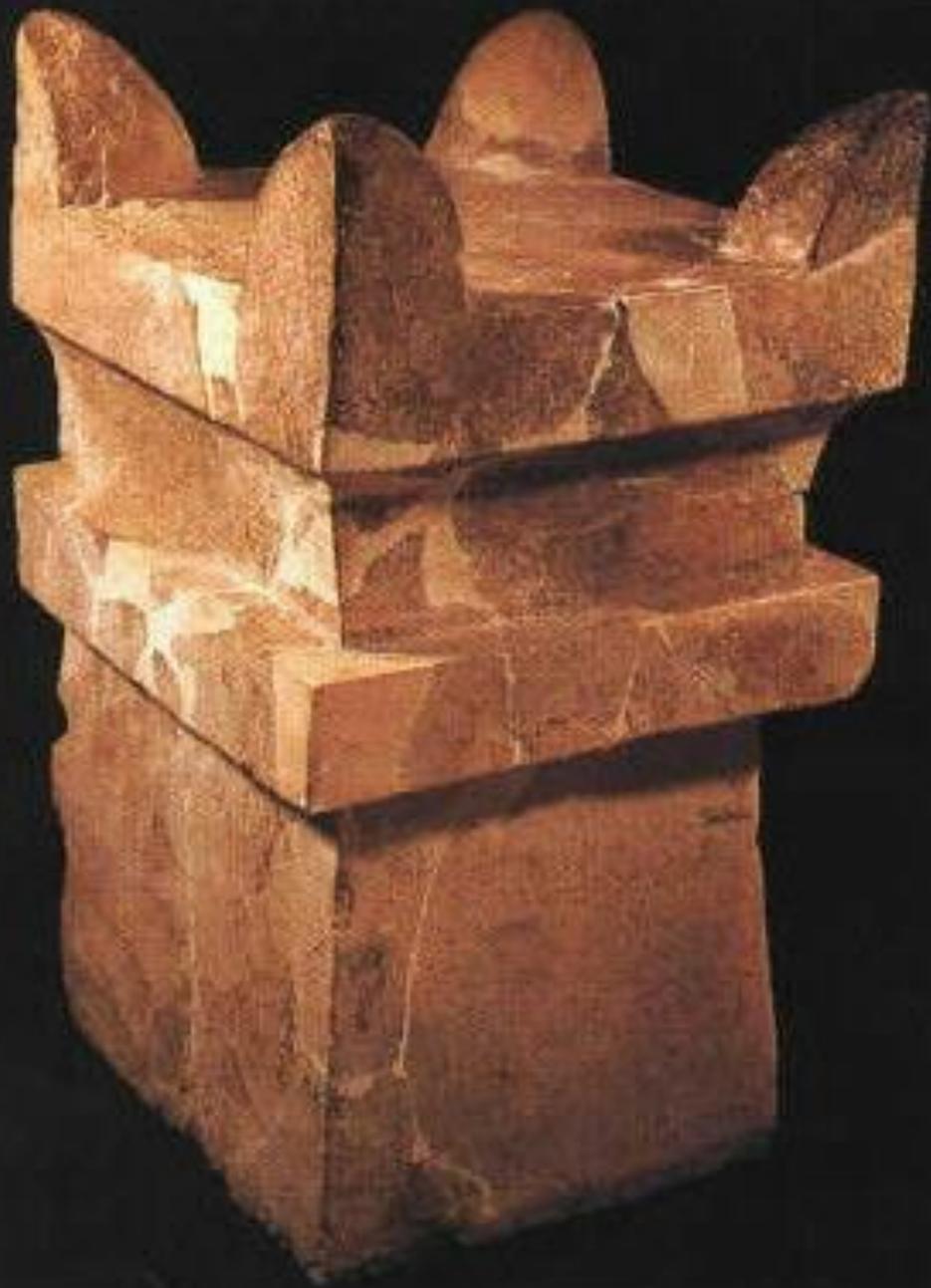


Photo by Y. Elitzur



ALTER AT ARAD, Elitzur and Nir-Zevi, 2004, BAR, 30:3:39

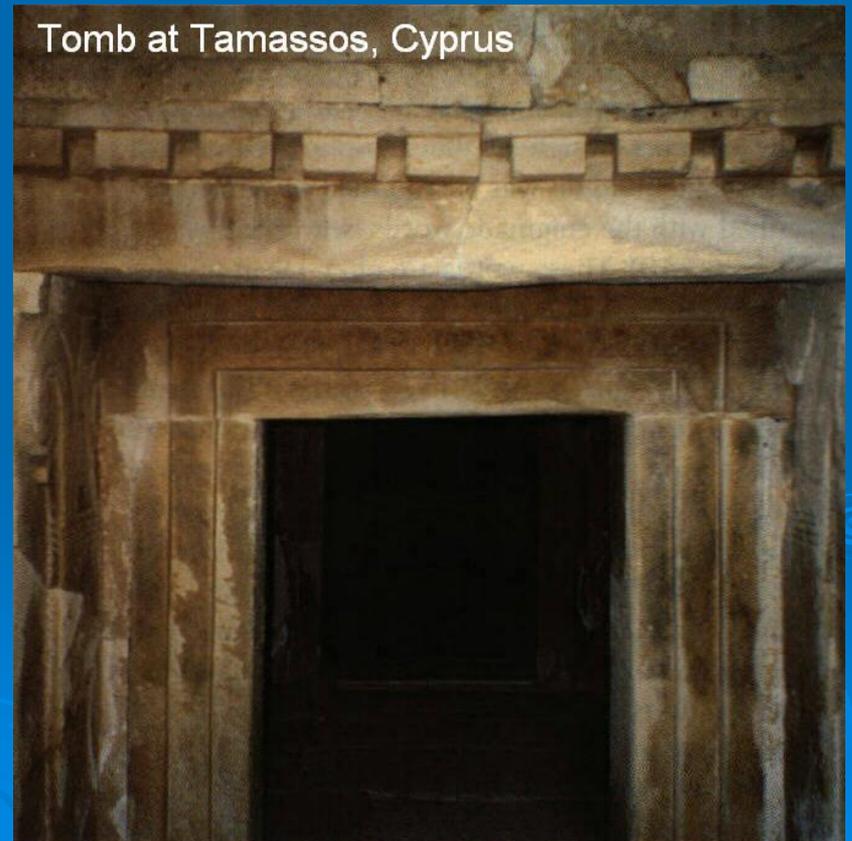


Nakhai, 1994, B&R, 20:3:28; Photo by David Harris

**Alter at Megiddo, 10th or 9th century BC**

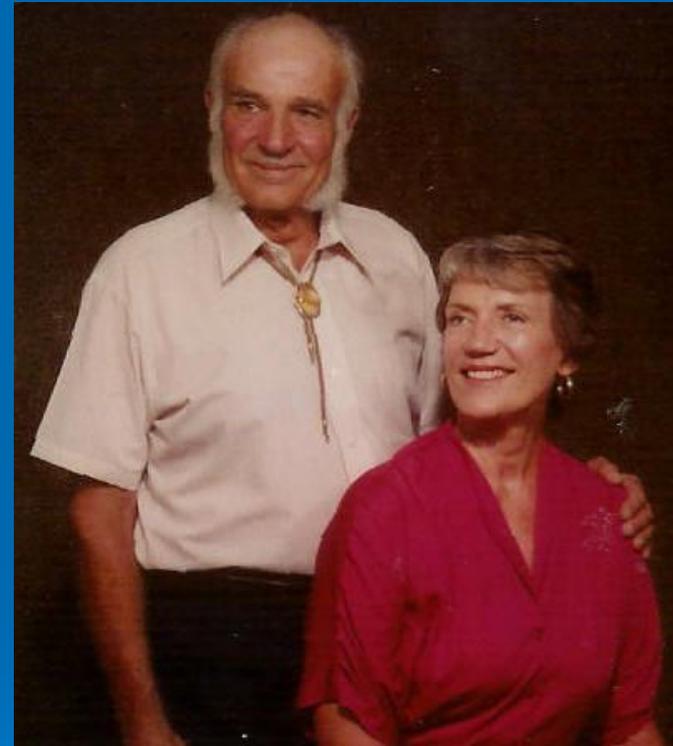
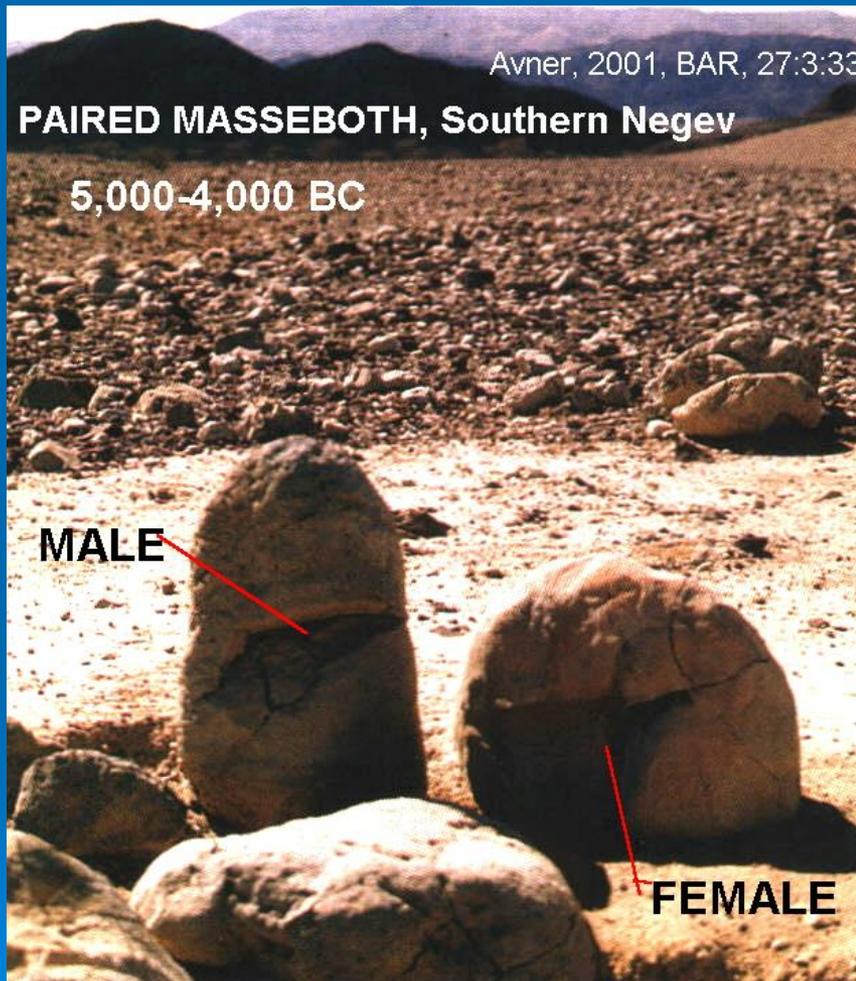
# Types of Bamot

- 4) a mortuary installation
- Abraham family burial plot at Mechmas



Tomb at Tamassos, Cyprus

# Female and Male Balmot



# Early Legitimacy of Bamot

- Joshua and the Sacred Oak and Pilla at Shechem (Joshua 24:26)



A GREAT WHITE SLAB, today only about half its original 10-foot-height, still meets visitors to Shechem's fortress-temple. The slab, or *maseba*, had two smaller counterparts, which flanked the temple entrance.

# Early Legitimacy of Bamot

- Samuel worshiped “on his way up to the *bamot*” when visiting the district of Zuph (1 Sam. 9:5, 14).
- Samuel met Saul and told him to “go ahead of me to the *bamot*” (1 Sam 9:19)
- Saul “came down from the *bamot* to the city” (1 Sam. 9:25).
- The next day Saul was anointed and was directed by Samuel to go to the “Hill of God” where Saul met a company of prophets “coming down from the *bamot*” (1 Sam. 10:5)

# Late Suppression of Bamot

- 7<sup>th</sup> century reforms
- Rejection of Canaanite practice
- “Goodness” of the Israelite kings was measured by how well they suppressed the countryside bamot (1 Kings 15:11-14, 22:43-44; 2 Kings 12:3-4, 14:3-4, 15:4-4, 34-35)

# Resistance to Ban of Bamot

- Use of *bamot* continued in Israelite-occupied territories of Moab and Ammon, often to the consternation of prophets like Isaiah (8th century BC, Isaiah 15:2, 16:12)
- *Bamot* were even in use at Jerusalem to appease visiting Ammonites and Moabites

# Bamot of the Divided Kingdom (Israel)

- Jeroboam of the northern kingdom of Israel set up royal sanctuaries with golden calves at Bethel (Amos 7:13)
- Jeroboam usurped a Levitical shrine at Dan (Judges 17-18).
- In addition to these two cult centers, Jeroboam built other *bamot* throughout his kingdom

# Bamot of the Divided Kingdom (Judah)

- Popular dissatisfaction with the forced centralized worship in Jerusalem
- Latter apostate Judean kings to constructed their own countryside *bamot*

# Anti-Bahmot Reforms

- Hezekiah (late 8th century BC, 2 Kings 18:1-8, 2 Chron 32:9-19)
- Josiah (late 7th cent BC, 2 Kings 23:4-20; 2 Chron 34-35)

# Anti-Bahmot Reforms

- The theological danger of the *bamot* was not that Yahweh was not being worshiped there, but that other gods might be too (monolatry).
- To avoid this possibility, the Jerusalem priesthood sought to have a monopoly on religious ritual.
- This strategy may have actually encouraged apostasy of the masses rather than reduce it

# Distribution of Bahmot

- *Bamot* are found throughout Israel and Judah.



# BAMOT OF THE LEVANT



Nakhai, 1994, BAR, 20:3:21

# Popularity of Bamot

- The presence of statues, bamot and masseboth suggest that, especially during the Assyrian Period (721-586 BC), syncretism was thriving in Judah. This mixture of Yahwism and pagan cult practices was called “Pagan Yahwism”

# Bamot and Alters



Alter of Manoah of Judges 13, near Zoar

Elitzur and Nir-Zevi, 2004, BAR, 30:3:38, Photo by Y. Elitzur

# Israelite Specifications Exodus 27:1-2

- The alter of the desert Tabernacle
- “...five cubits long and five cubits wide – the alter is to be square – and three cubits high. Make its horns on the four corners, the horns to be of one piece with it”

# Israelite Specifications Exodus 20:23-26

- The alter to Yahweh was to be built of “earth” or “stones”,
- But not of “hewn stones”. A chisel was not to be used in it’s construction
- It was not to be mounted by steps “in case your private parts be exposed on it”

Elitzur and Nir-Zevi, 2004

BAR, 30:3:36

Sea of Galilee

Samaria

Mt. Ebal

Shechem

Shiloh

Jordan River

Jerusalem

Zorah

Dead Sea

Arad

Beer-Sheva

ALTER SITES IN ISRAEL

ALTERS OF  
THE OLD  
TESTAMENT  
PERIODS



# Alter at Arad

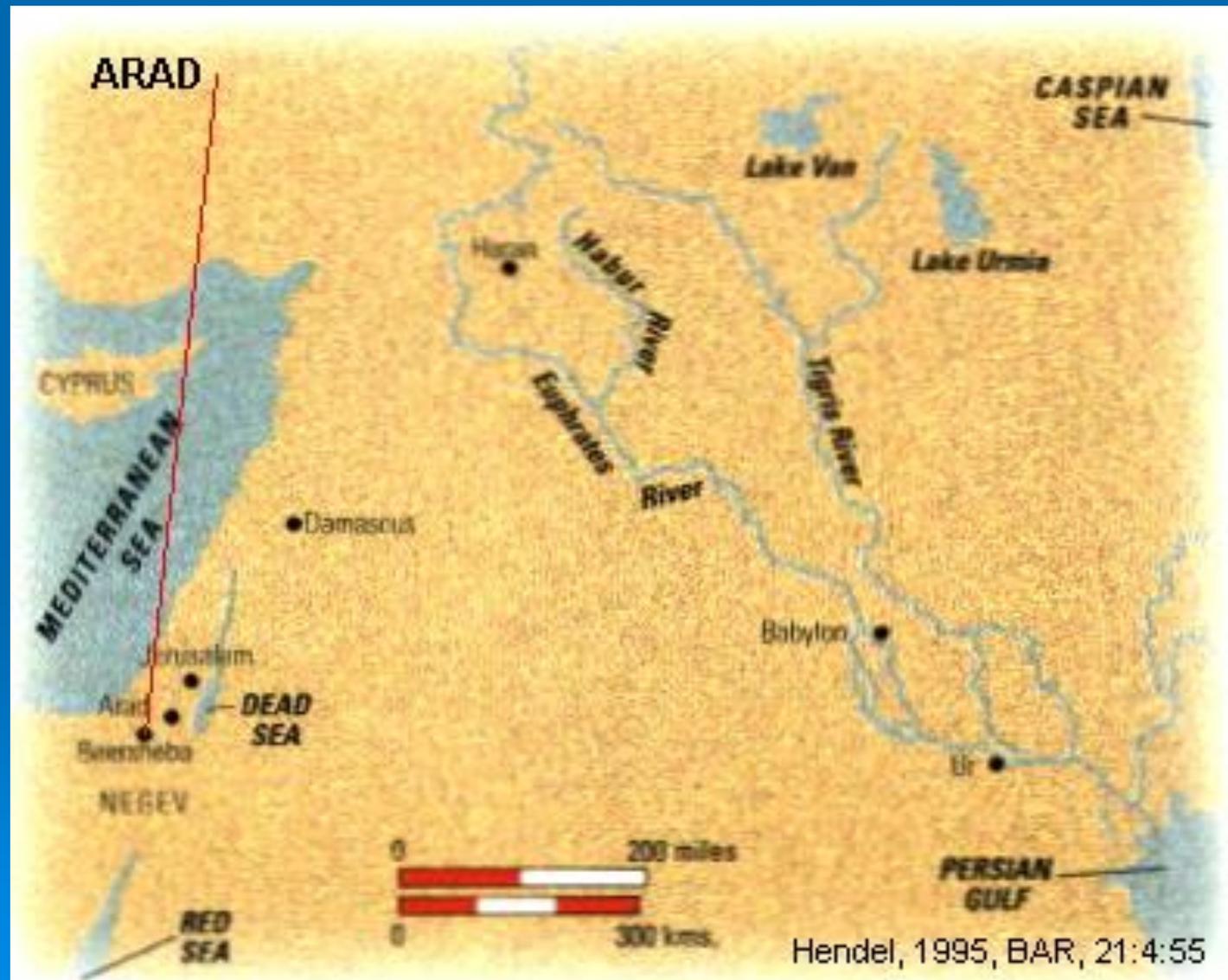


Photo by Y. Elitzur

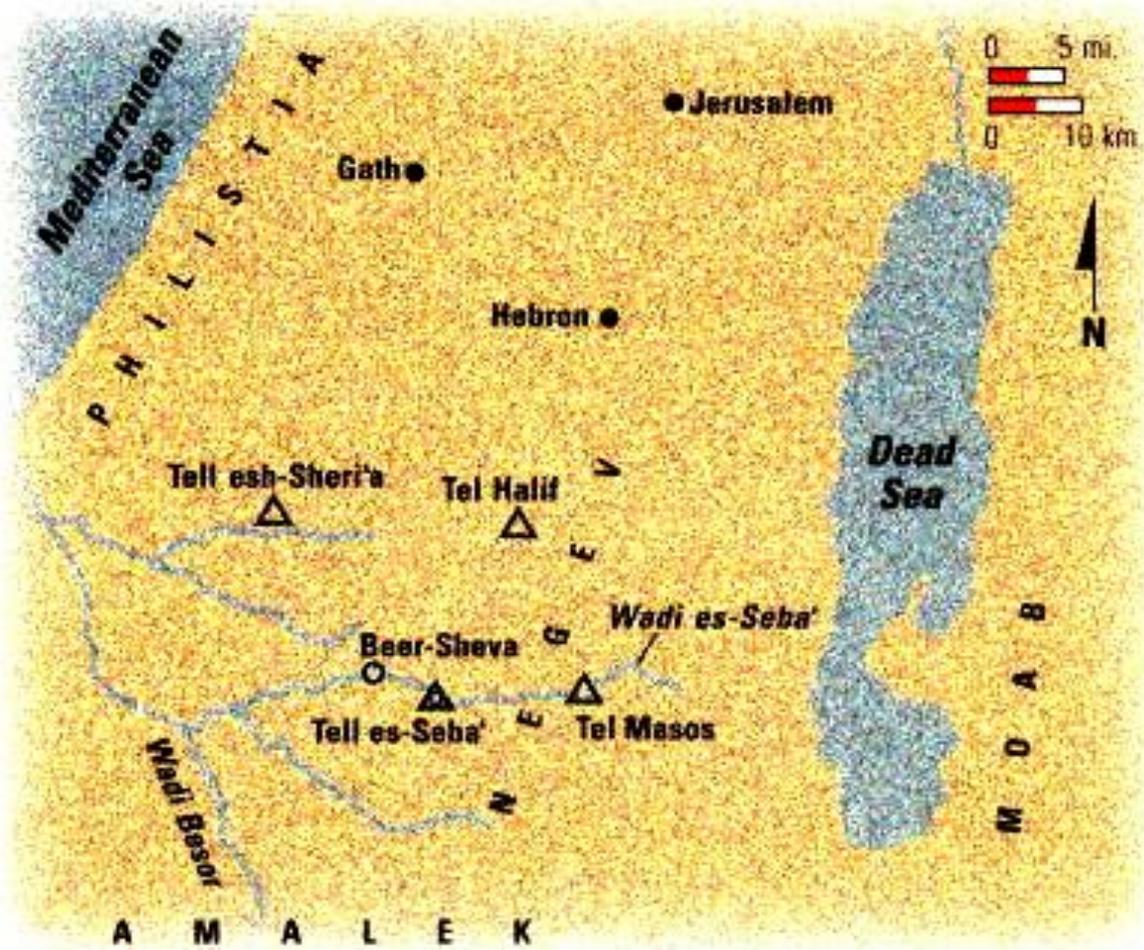


ALTER AT ARAD, Elitzur and Nir-Zevi, 2004, BAR, 30:3:39

# Alter at Arad

- Made of stone and bricks
- Larger than the prescription of Exodus 27:3.
- Has sides 8.2 feet long and it is 5 feet high. |
- Does not have horns

# Alter at Beer-Sheva



Sites identified as Beer-Sheva ○

Sites identified as Ziklag △

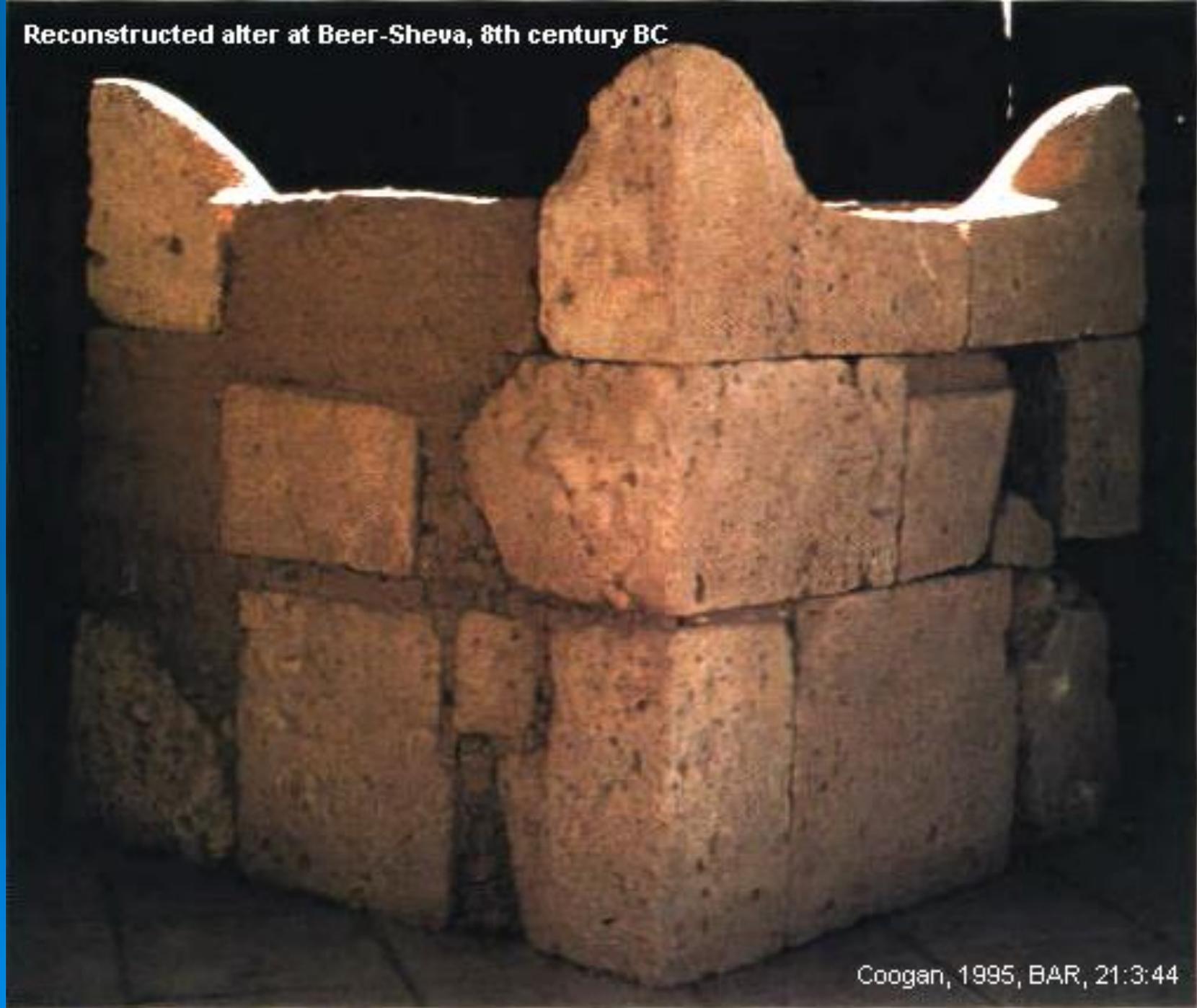
Site identified as both △



*Horned sacrificial altar excavated at Beer-sheba during the 1973 season.*

(from Wood, B.G., 1974, B&S, 3:1:26)

Reconstructed after at Beer-Sheva, 8th century BC



Coogan, 1995, BAR, 21:3:44

# Alter at Beer-Sheba

- built of hewn stones
- had horns
- Question: how can you “..make horns one piece with it” and not use a chisel?

# Alter on Mt. Ebal

- Site of Covenant  
of Joshua after  
completion of the  
Conquest



Zertal, 1991, BAR, 17:5:44; Photo by Richard Nowitz

Mt. Gerizim

Mt. Ebal



SHECHEM

Modern Palestinian  
town of Nablus



Zertal, 1991, BAR, 17:5:44; Photo by M. Weinberg

# Mt. Ebal, Altar, 12th and 11th centuries BC

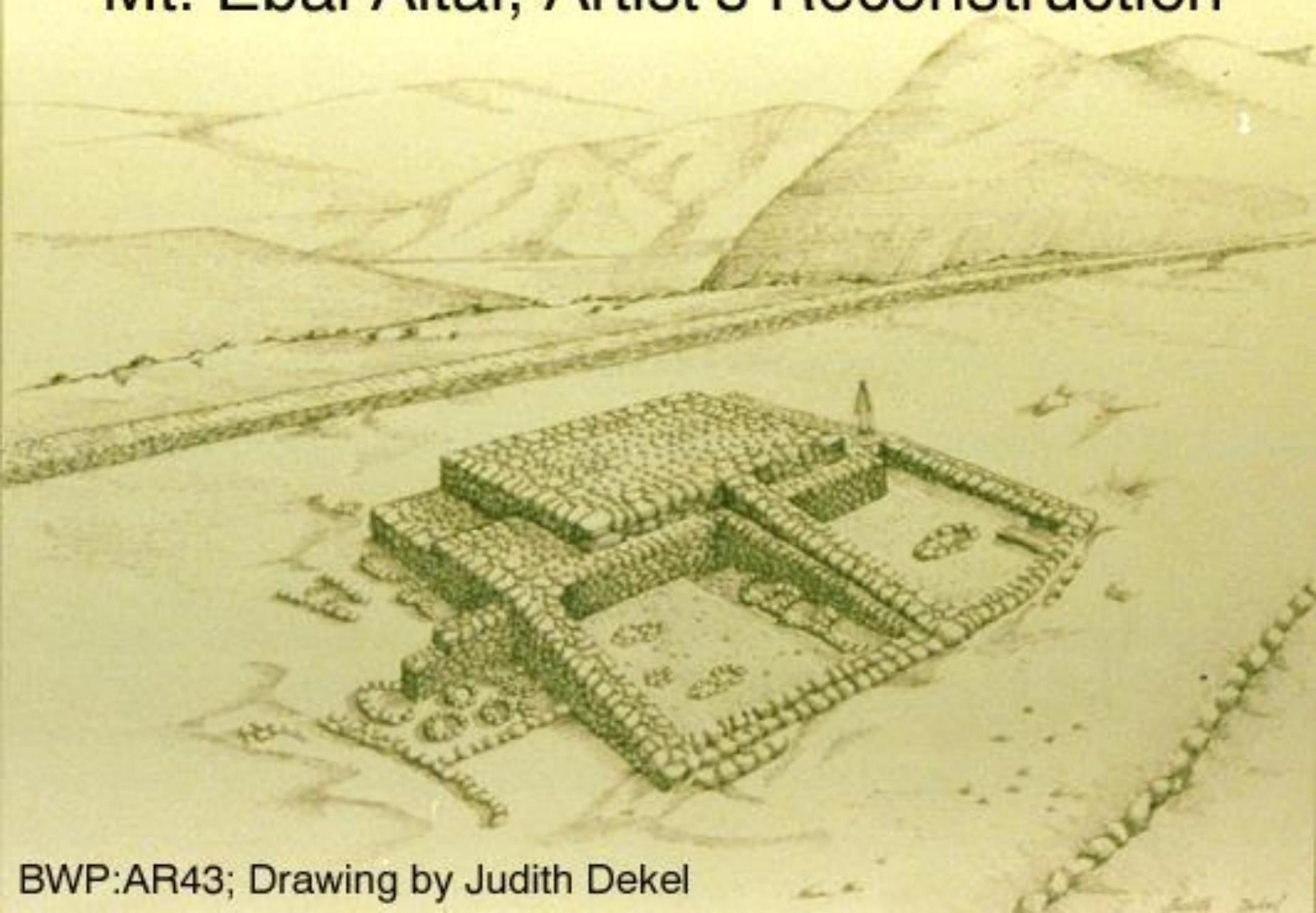
Deut. 27:1-10 and Joshua 8:30-35



BWP:AR42;

Photo from Adam Zertal

# Mt. Ebal Altar, Artist's Reconstruction



BWP:AR43; Drawing by Judith Dekel

# Alter on Mt. Ebal

- Controversial MB alter of Joshua 8:30
- Has corners that point to the four cardinal directions.
- Is made of squared stones
- Chisels must have been used to square them, another case of violation of Ex. 20:25



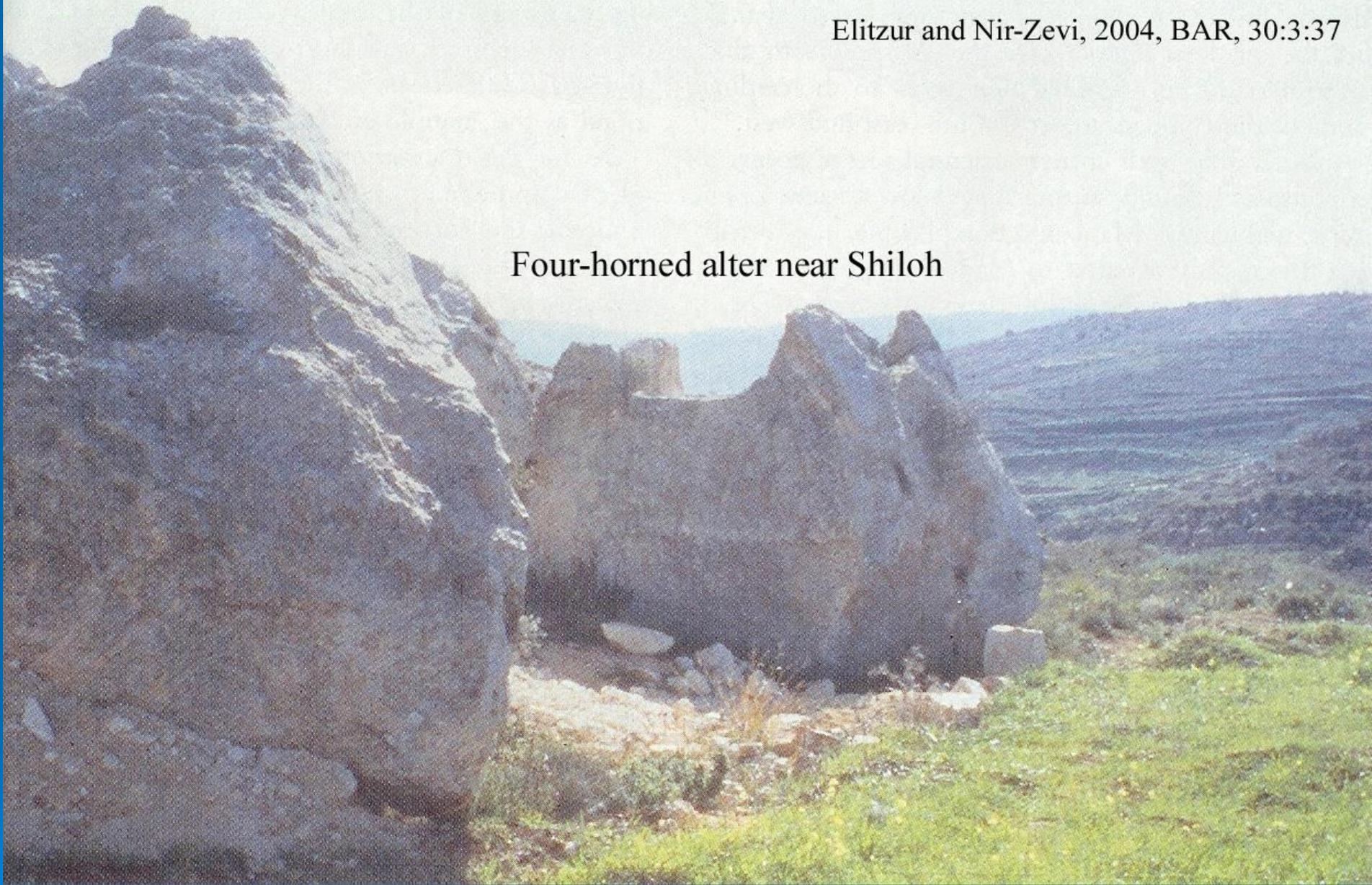


Ancient remains atop Tel Shiloh,  
central sanctuary of the Israelites  
in the time of the Judges



HORNED ALTER NEAR SHILOH, Elitzur and Nir-Zevi, 2004, BAR, 30:3:34

Four-horned alter near Shiloh

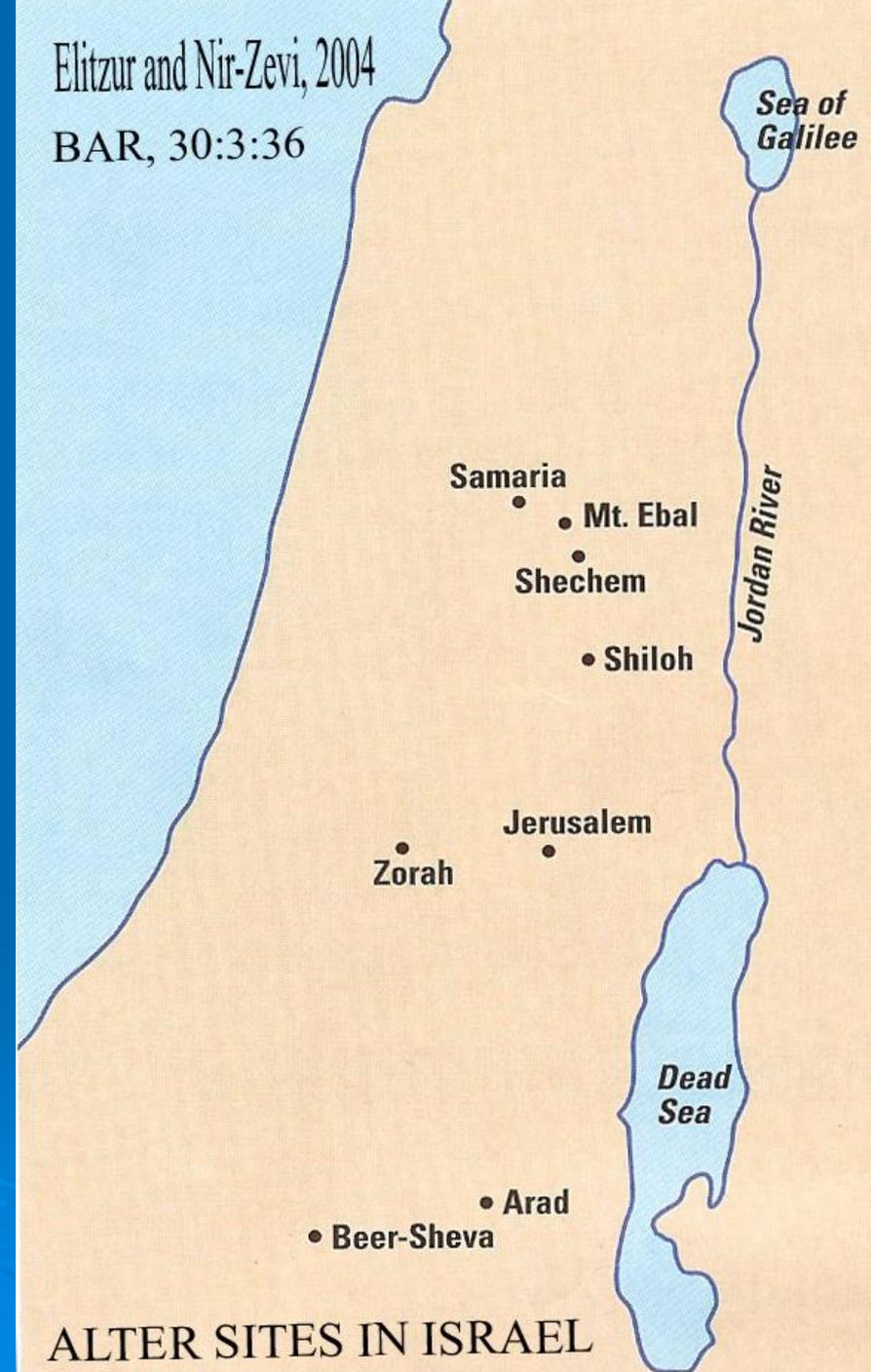


# Alter near Shiloh

- Has dimensions that match those of the desert Tabernacle.
- It is carved (chiseled) in soft Cenomanian limestone (violates Ex. 20:25)
- Corners are oriented toward the four cardinal directions

# Alter of Manoah near Zorah

Elitzur and Nir-Zevi, 2004  
BAR, 30:3:36



ALTER SITES IN ISRAEL



Alter of Manoah of Judges 13, near Zoar

Elitzur and Nir-Zevi, 2004, BAR, 30:3:38, Photo by Y. Elitzur

# Alter of Manoah near Zorah

- On the slope below ancient Zoar (Genesis 13:10)
- Has dimensions prescribed in Exodus 27 (5 x 5 x 3 cubits)
- It is named the Manoah alter because Judges 13 tells how Samson's father, Manoah, as made supplication to an angel there for his wife to have a successful pregnancy.

# Alter of Manoah near Zorah

- Carved from natural rock (a violation of Ex. 20:25)
- Has no horns



# Alter at Sebaste, Samaria



# Alter at Sebaste, Samaria

- Biblical city of Samaria re-named Sebaste by Herod the Great



# Alter at Sebaste, Samaria

- Made of solid rock
- Has no horns
- Sides aligned with the four cardinal directions
- Dimensions are unlike those prescribed in Exodus 27:1-2

# Alter at Tel Shechem

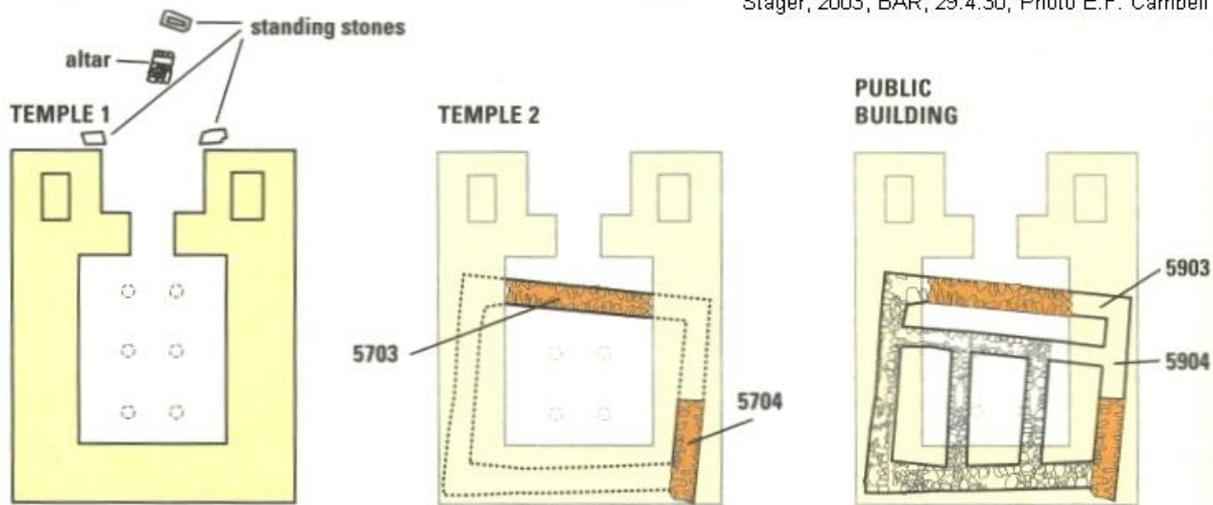
- Temple of Baal-Berit
- Described in the episode of Abimelech and the murder of his 70 brothers at Shechem in Judges 9. Abimelech had obtained “seventy pieces of silver from the temple of Baal-Berth’ (Judges 9:4) to pay for the murders



Stager, 2003, BAR, 19:4:28



Stager, 2003, BAR, 29:4:30; Photo E.F. Cambell



TEMPLES AT SHECHEM (Tell Balata)

# Alter at Tel Shechem

- Front of this alter is oriented 30 degrees north of west
- Is made of stones
- Incomplete, its dimensions are unknown
- Inside a city.

# NEXT TIME

- Male Warrior Gods



# Dagon

- Philistine chief god was at first Dagon, and later Ba'al (Judges 16:23; 2 Kings 1:2; Stern, 2001:22)
- God of vegetation



# Milkom/Molech

- The chief male warrior god of the Ammonites was Milkom
- Milkom was Canaanite Molech
- Hebrew is mlk, meaning “king”
- God of fire, children sacrificed to him
- Biblical “make children pass through fire”



# Chemosh

- The chief male warrior god the Moabites was Chemosh.
- Chemosh had many of the same attributes as Molech, and was an object of child sacrifice
- Denounced in Numbers 21:29 and Jeremiah 47:7,13,46.

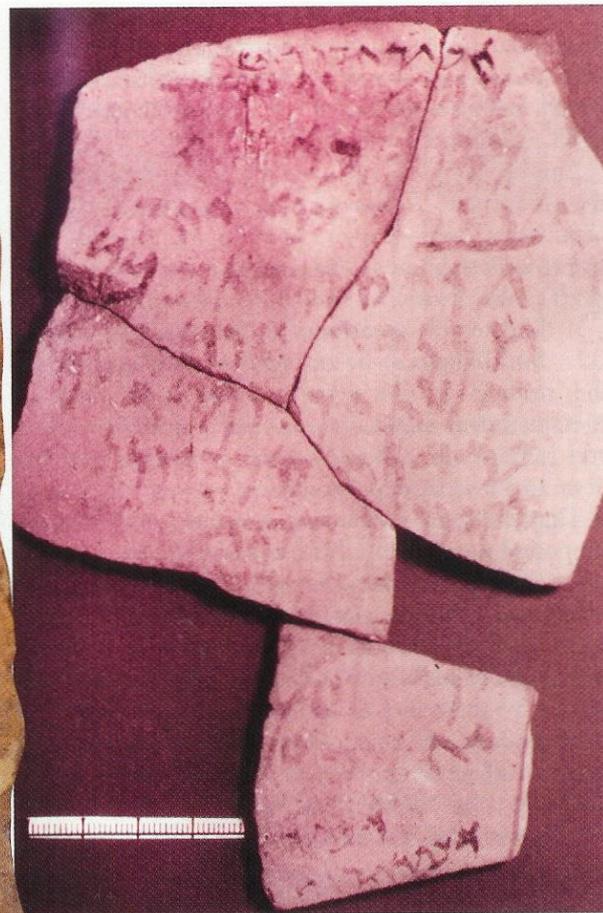
# Qos

- The chief male warrior god the Edomites was Qos



Figurine from Horvat Qitmit

6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century BC



QOS, THE EDMITE DEITY depicted on a late, Roman-era sandstone carving at left, is one of the names that appears frequently in the Aramaic ostraca as part of a person's name. For example, the ostrakon shown above mentions a man named Qosyatib ("Qos will answer/restore"), as well as his father, Hananyah ("Yah showed favor"). According author André Lemaire, the fact that someone with an Israelite name, Hananyah, which contains the name of the Israelite god (Yah), would have a son with a name containing the name of an Edomite god indicates a large degree of cultural, ethnic and religious mixing.

**Lemaire, 2004, BAR, 30:4:44**

Photo Cincinnati Art Museum

# Chemosh

- Solomon *introduced* the worship of Chemosh at Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:7)
- Josiah *abolished* the worship of Chemosh at Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:13).

# Yahweh and Sun Worship

- Taanach Cult Stand
- Yahweh as Sun God



# Taanach Cult Stand

- First Tier: Horse and Sun Disk = Yahweh
- Second Tier: Tree of Life and two Ibex = Asherah
- Third Tier: Empty Space and Cherubim = Yahweh
- Fourth Tier: Naked woman and two lions = Asherah



# Taanach Cult Stand: Horses and the Sun

- 2 Kings 23:11
- "He [Josiah] removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance of the house of the Lord...; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire"
- Two pillars of Tier 1 are representations of the large brazen pillars named Jachin and Boaz, which stood at the entrance of King Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 7:21).

# Taanach Cult Stand

- Israel had an abstract non-anthropomorphic and syncretistic ideas about Yahweh in the 10th century BC
- Both *henotheism* (belief in one god, not to the exclusion of other gods) and *monolatry* (worship of one god, although more than one may exist) were probably more the norm than the exception in pre-Exilic Israel

# Song of the Sea and Yahweh as Warrior God

- An amplification on the prologue to the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20:1 “I am the Lord...who brought you out of the House of Egypt.”
- Reflects contemporaneous Canaanite mythology about a Divine Warrior who marches with his chosen people to his mount of inheritance and builds a sanctuary

# Song of the Sea and Yahweh as Warrior God

- An adaptation of the Canaanite story of Ba'al's war with the Sea
- In Exodus 20 Yahweh does not defeat the sea, but creates a storm to drown the Egyptians.
- The Sea is a tool, not the enemy of Yahweh. The real foes are Pharaoh and his army, historical foes.
- This motif is also seen in Isaiah 51:9-11 where Yahweh overcomes the sea

# Song of the Sea: Isaiah 51:9-11

9: Was it not you who cut Rahab to pieces,  
who pierced that [sea] monster through?

10: Was it not you who dried up the sea, the  
waters of the great deep, who made a  
road in the depths of the sea so that the  
redeemed might cross over



# *FEMALE FERTILITY GODDESSES*

- **Asherah-Astoreth-Astarte**
- **Near East male deities have their own names and particularities**
- **There is only one female goddess. Her duties and personality are the same in all Near Eastern cultures**

Nahariya "Horned Goddess"  
(Asherah) Mold, Middle Bronze Age



BWP:GA21; Photo by Moshe Caine/  
Israel Dept. of Antiquities and Museums



Stone mold and modern bronze casting. Outdoor  
shrine (bamote), Mediterranean coast north of  
Haifa at Nahariya. 17th-16th century BC.  
BWP: AR5; Photo by Zev Radovan

# Female Fertility Gods

- Asherah
- Athirat
- Qudshu
- 'Athirat
- 'Elat
- Astarte
- Aphrodite
- Venus
- Freya
- Old Testament
- Ugaritic
- Egyptian
- Egyptian
- Egyptian
- Assyrian
- Greek
- Roman
- Norse

Canaanite figurines Late Bronze Age  
(14th-13th cent. BC)



BWP:AR7; Photo by Zev Radovan

Gezer, Middle Bronze Age female  
pendants with  
incised gold foil,  
c. 1550 BC



BWP:AR6  
Photo by  
Zev Radovan

Tel Halif

12th  
century  
BC



BWP:AR8; Photo by Patti O'Connor-Seger

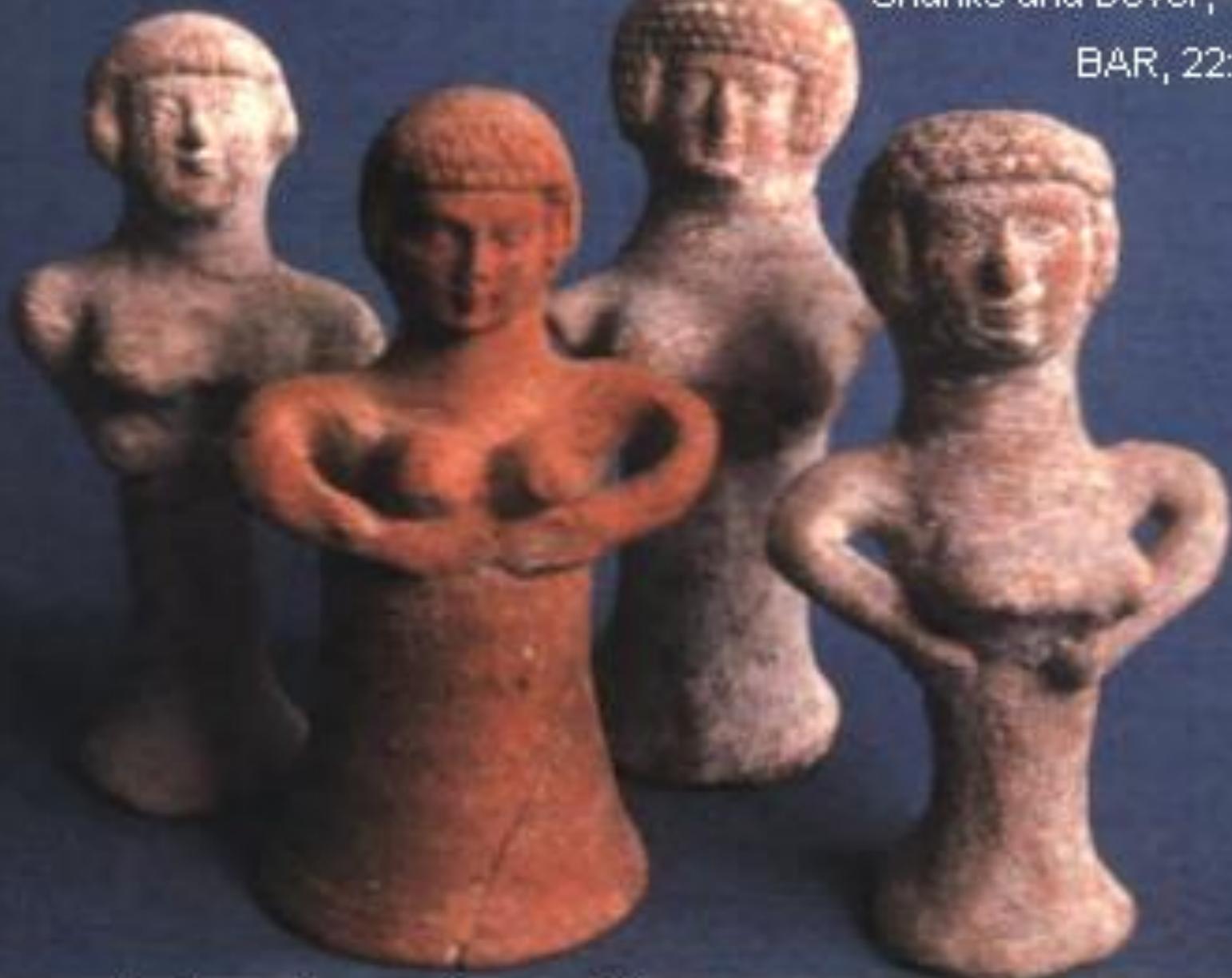
Dor, Persian-Period Phoenician  
Fertility Figurine Mold, 5th-4th  
centuries BC



BWP:AR25; Photo by Ephraim Stern

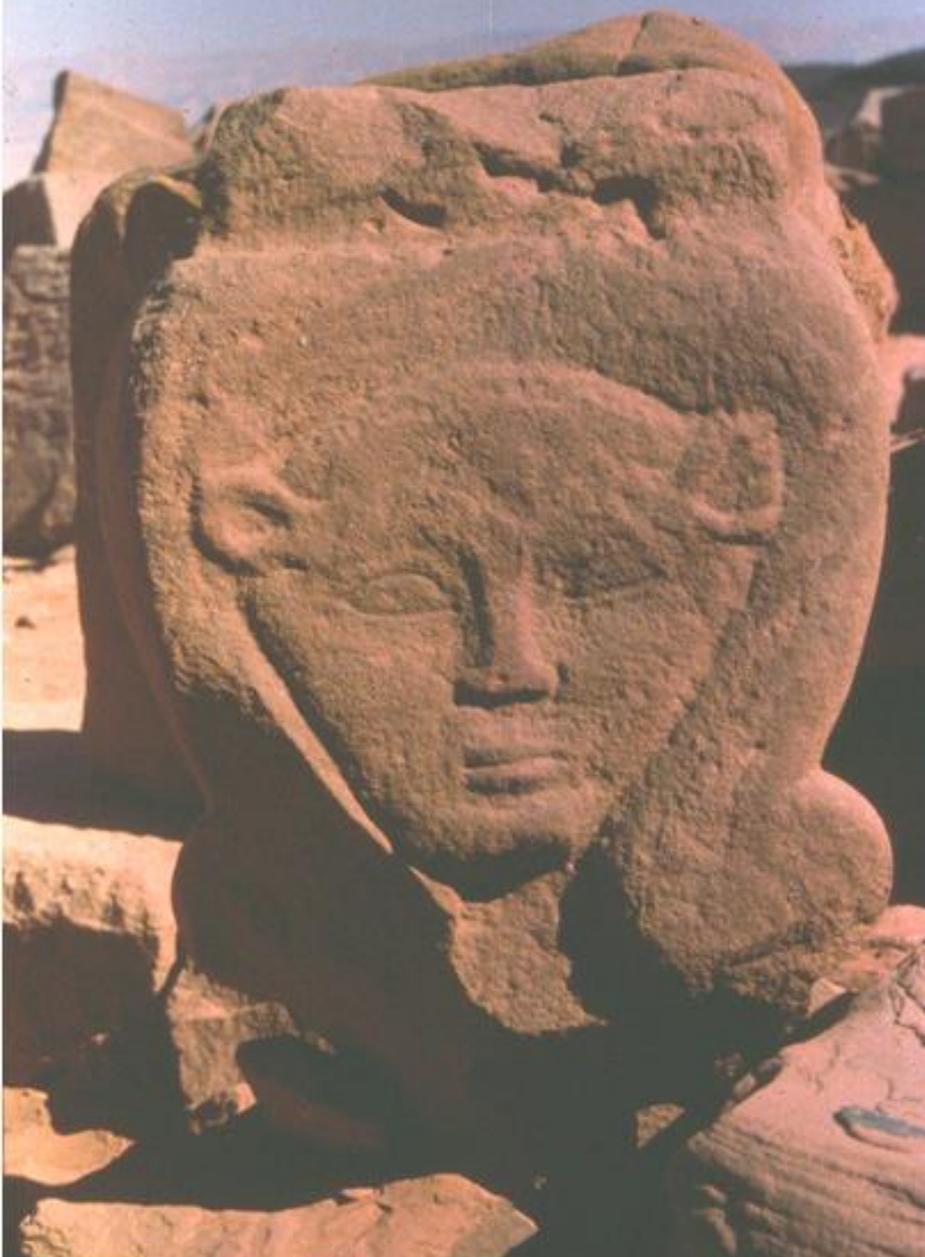
Shanks and Dever, 1996

BAR, 22:5:36



**Asherah figurines, Israelite.**

Egyptian Goddess Hathor Serabit el-Khadem



BWP:ESN20; Photo by Helfried Weyer

Late Bronze Age II



Egyptian  
Hathor

13th-14th  
century BC

BWP:BA92; Photo by Zev Radovan

Model of Shrine and "Pillar Astarte" Figurines, Pottery

Israelite  
Period



8th-7th centuries BC; BWP:BA100; Photo by Zev Radovan

CHALCOLITHIC FEMALE FIGURINE  
GILATH, 4000-3100 BC



BWP"BA90; Photo by Zev Radovan

Late Bronze Age Female Figurines



16th-13th centuries B.C.E

BWP:BA91; Photo by Zev Radovan

Babylonian  
Ishtar

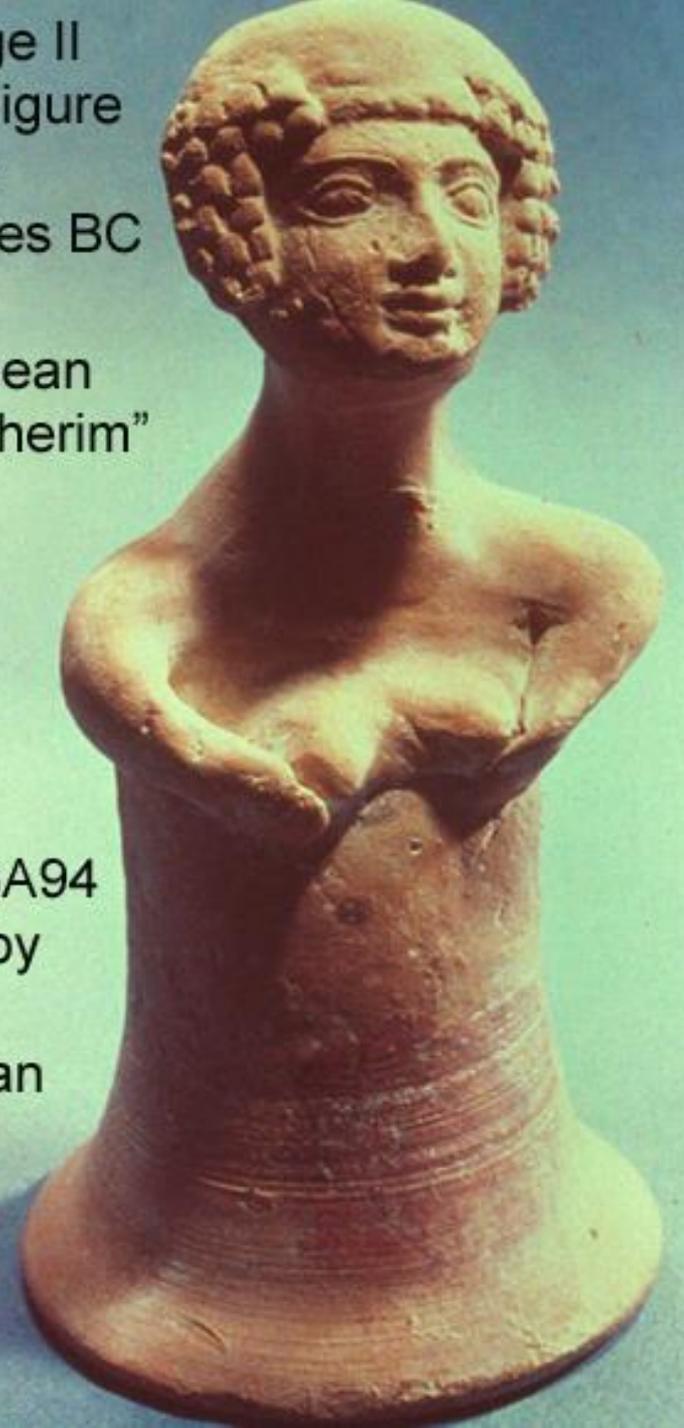


Babylonian Ishtar, 4th century BC. Hurowitz, 2001, BR, 17:4:33; Photo by Scala/Art Resource, NY.

Iron Age II  
Pillar Figure  
7th-9th  
centuries BC

Judean  
"Asherim"

BWP:BA94  
Photo by  
Zev  
Radovan



# Asherah Sycretism in Israel

- Statue of Asherah was set up in the Jerusalem Temple by apostate king Manasseh of Judah (696-6 BC, 2 King 21:7).
- Later removed by good king Josiah of Judah (639-608 BC, 2 King 23:6).
- Another good king, Asa of Judah (911-869 BC, 2 King 23:6) removed his mother for having an Asherah in her possession

# Representation of Asherah

- graven image
- holy place (bamah)
- a sacred tree
- a tree trunk
- cultic pole



# Asherah as Oak Tree

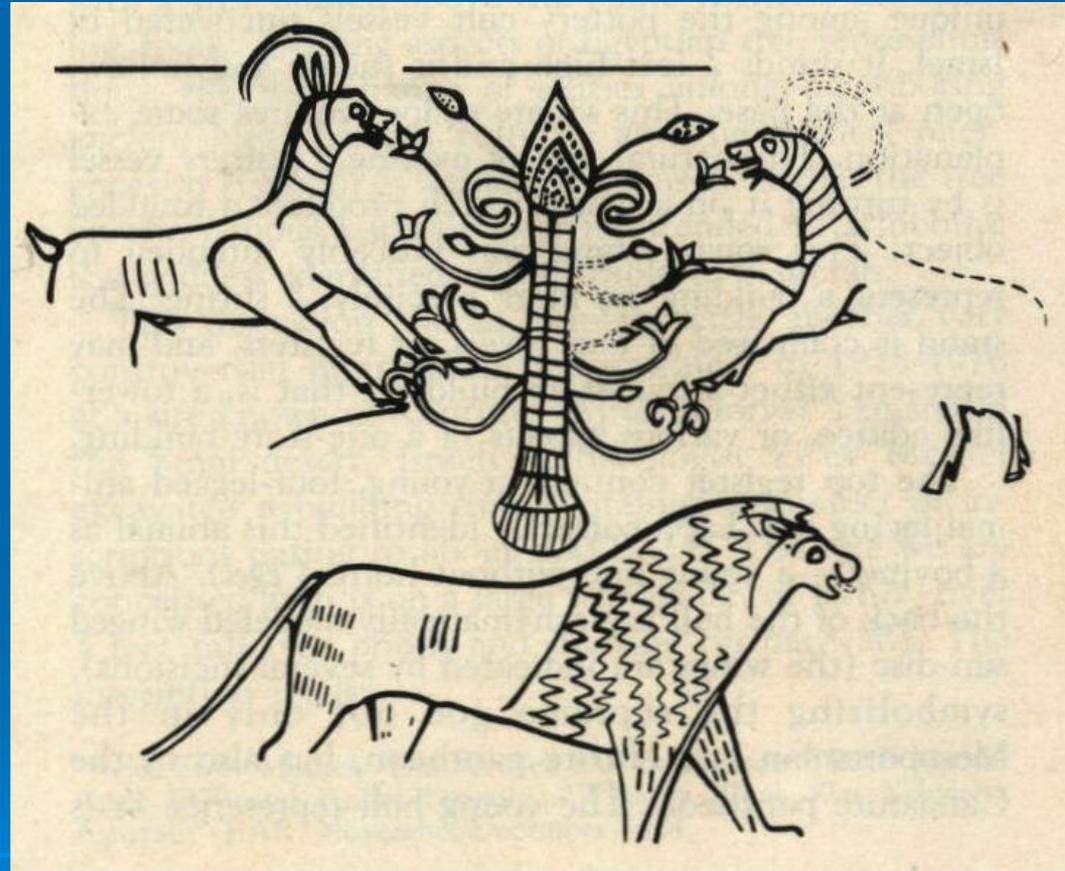
- Oak at Mamre (Gen, 13:18; 14:13,24; 18:1-15; 35:27)
- Oak at Shechem (Gen. 35:4; Joshua 24:26)
- Oak at Ophrah (Judges 6:19,24)
- Oak at Bethel (1 Kings 13:14-31)
- Oak at Tabor (1 Samuel 10:3)



# Asherah as Guardian Sprit

- Animals flanking a tree of life
- Compare Holy Spirit as Guardian
- Yahweh-Asherah-Guardian Spirit

Picture by [Pitt](#) on [DeviantArt](#)

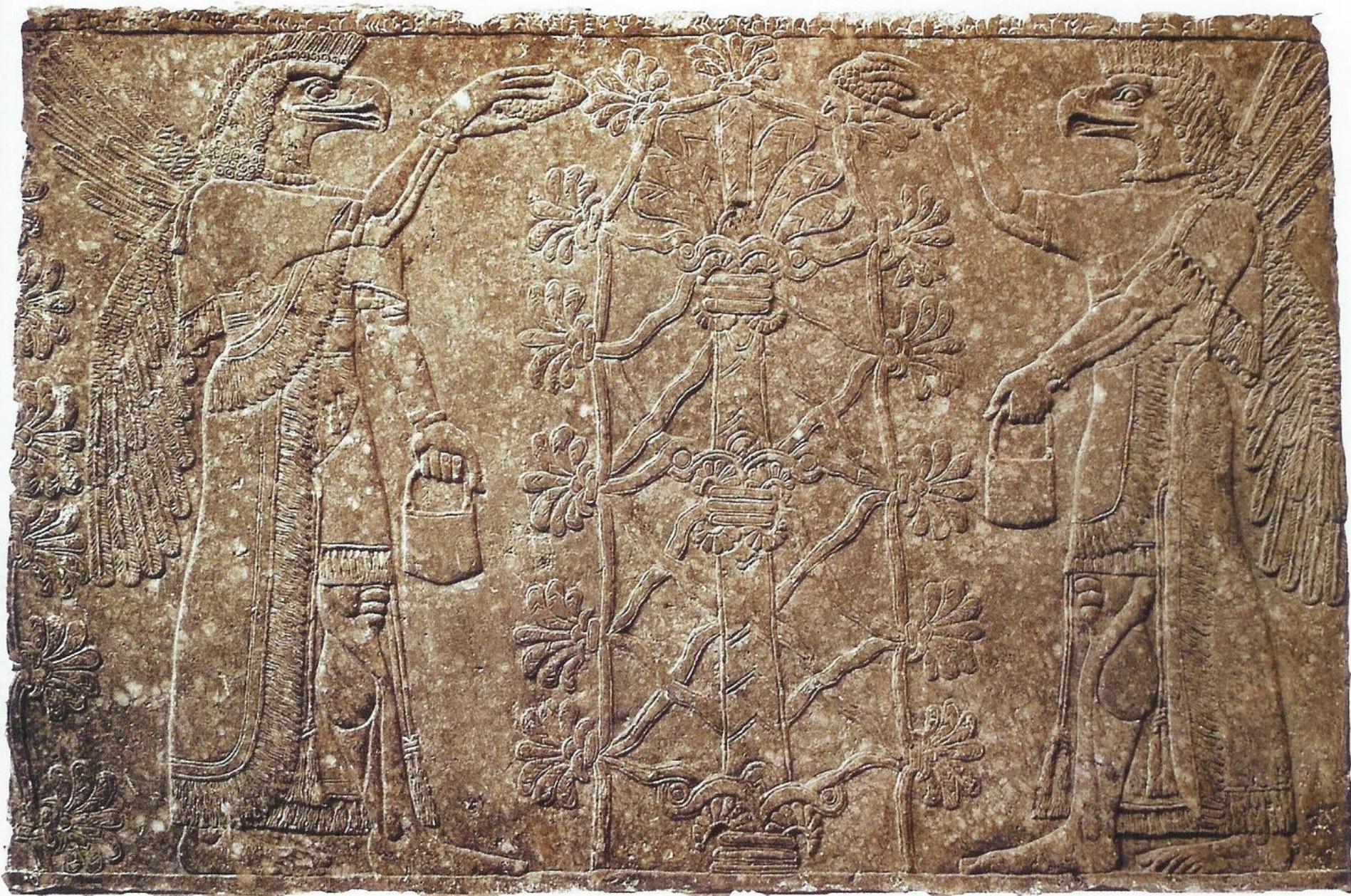


Hestrin, 1991, BAR, 17:5:38; Drawing by IEJ 37:4



Michael Luddeni

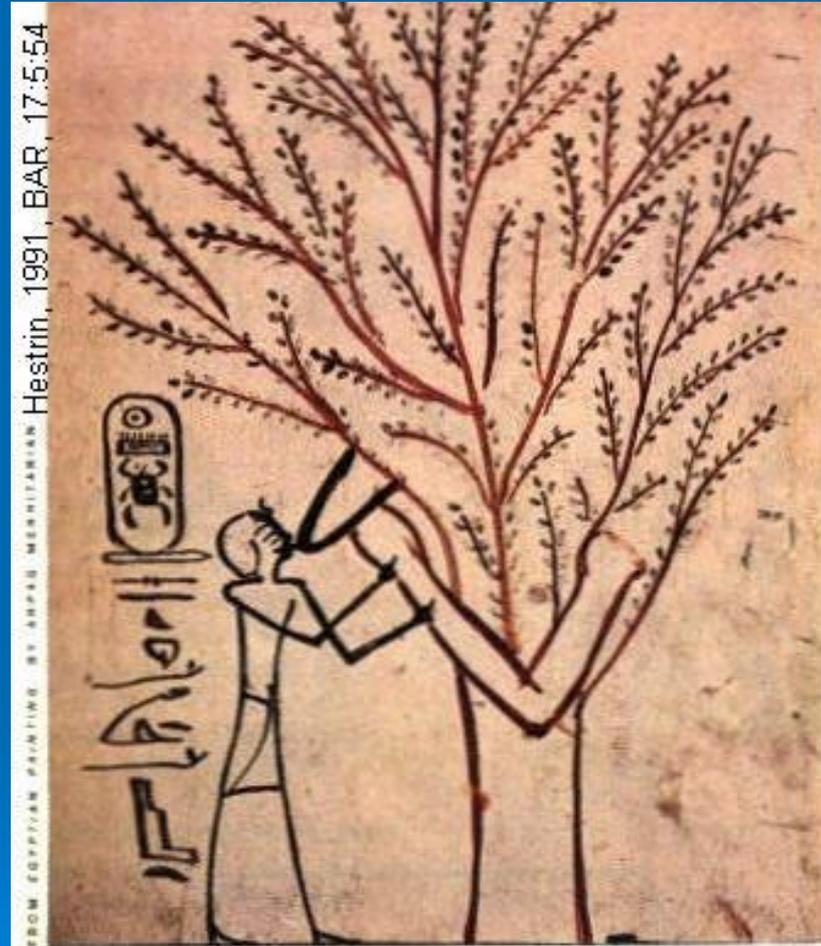
**Assyrian female protective spirits** on either side of a sacred tree. From the palace of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC) at Nimrud, Iraq, now in the British Museum, London Caesar, 2004, B&S, 16:4:114, photo M. Luddeni



**Assyrian eagle-headed protective spirits** on either side of a sacred tree. From the palace of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC) at Nimrud, Iraq, now in the British Museum, London. Caesar, 2003, B&S, 16:4:115. photo M. Luddeni

# Asherah as Life-Giving Tree

- Egypt
- Compare “Tree of Life” in Genesis 2



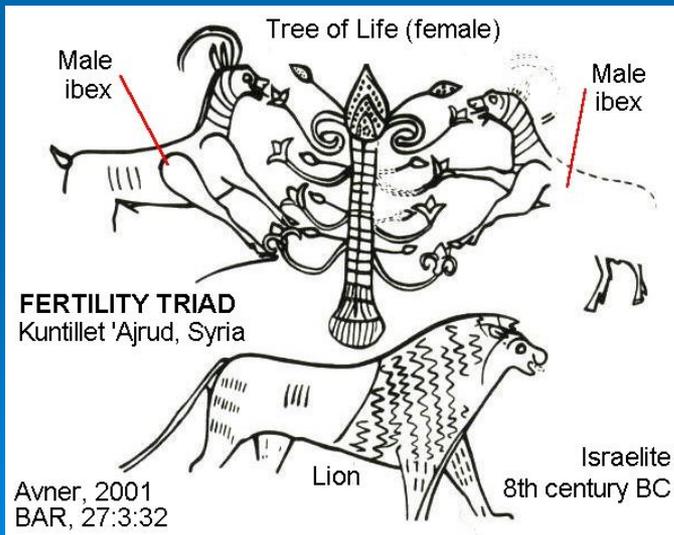
A life-giving tree. A wall painting from the burial chamber of Pharaoh Tuthmosis III illustrates the sustaining powers of trees: The ruler is suckled by a breast protruding from a sycamore tree (unrelated to the American sycamore); an arm extending from another part of the tree supports the breast.

# Egyptian Asherah: Qudshu

- Depicted as flanked by two male gods
- Min and Reshef



Hestrin, 1991, BAR, 17:5:55, Photo from British Museum



# Yahweh's Consort

## Two Models

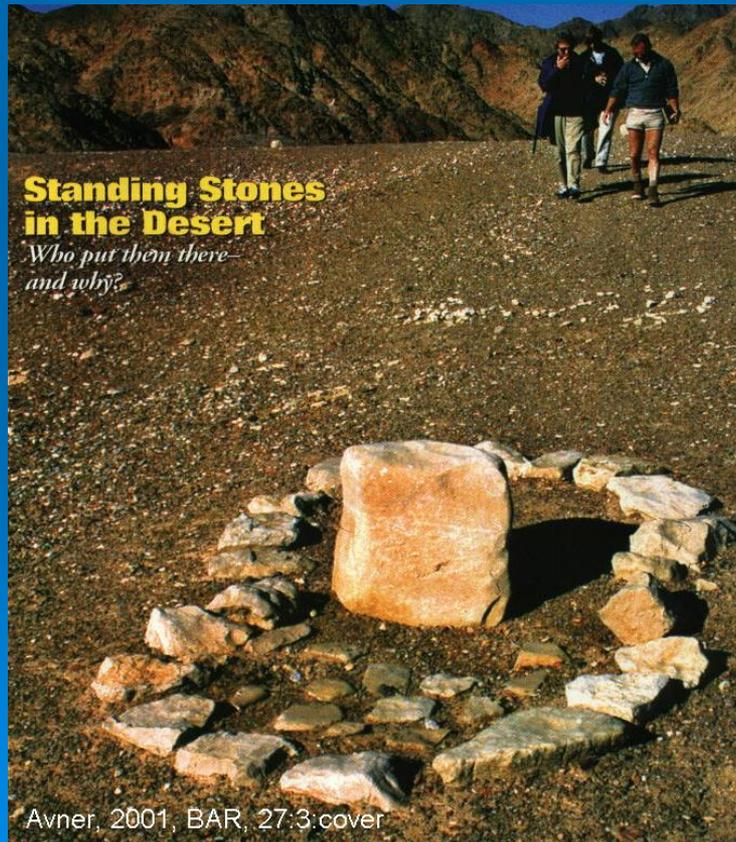
- Asherah as the female **consort** of Yahweh.
- Asherah as a **minor goddess** among many in the Canaanite pantheon

# Ba'al and Asherah Myth of the Seasons

- Ba'al: god of weather and vegetation
- Ba'al killed in the late spring in a great battle with forces of Death
- Rain stops, fertility fails, crops stop growing
- Ba'al returned to life again in the late fall
- Marriage of Ba'al and Asherah
- Spring, fertility renewed, crops grow, new life

# Ba'al-Asherah Myth

➤ Masseboth (standing stones)

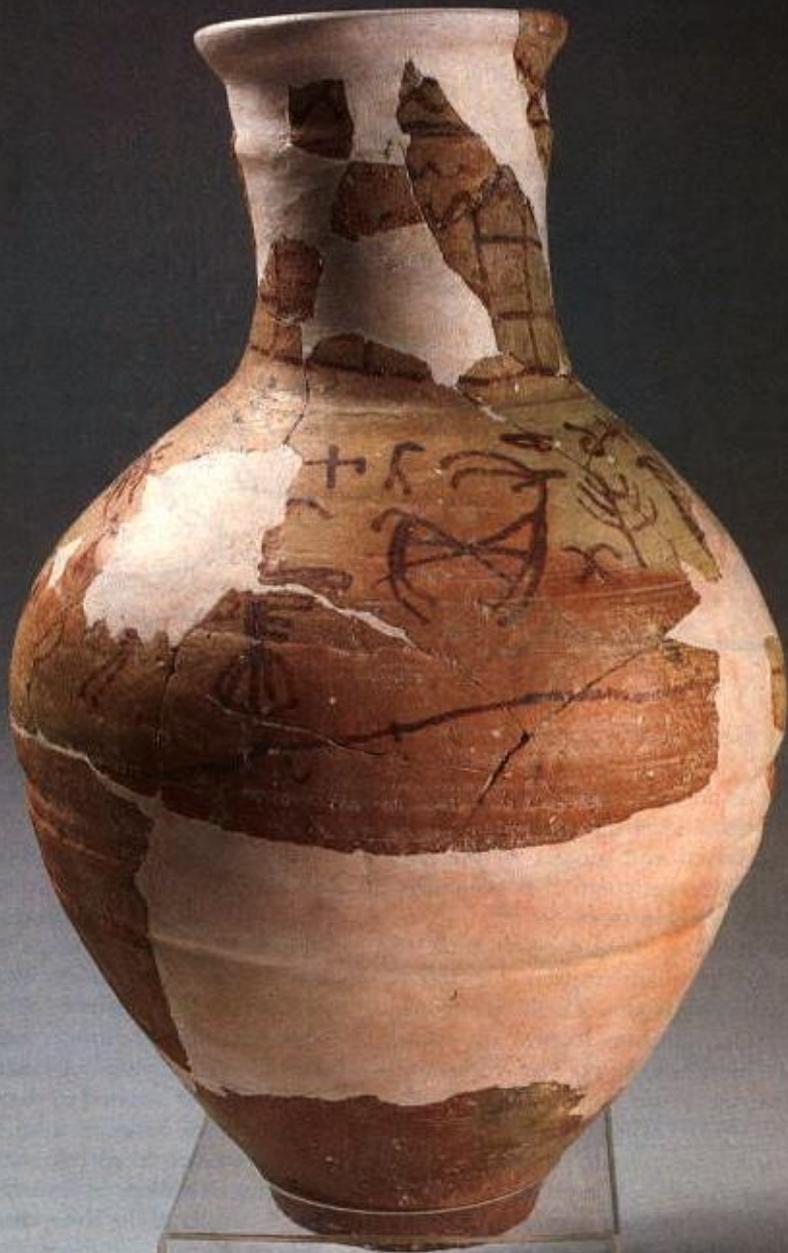


➤ Sacred Trees  
➤ Sacred Poles



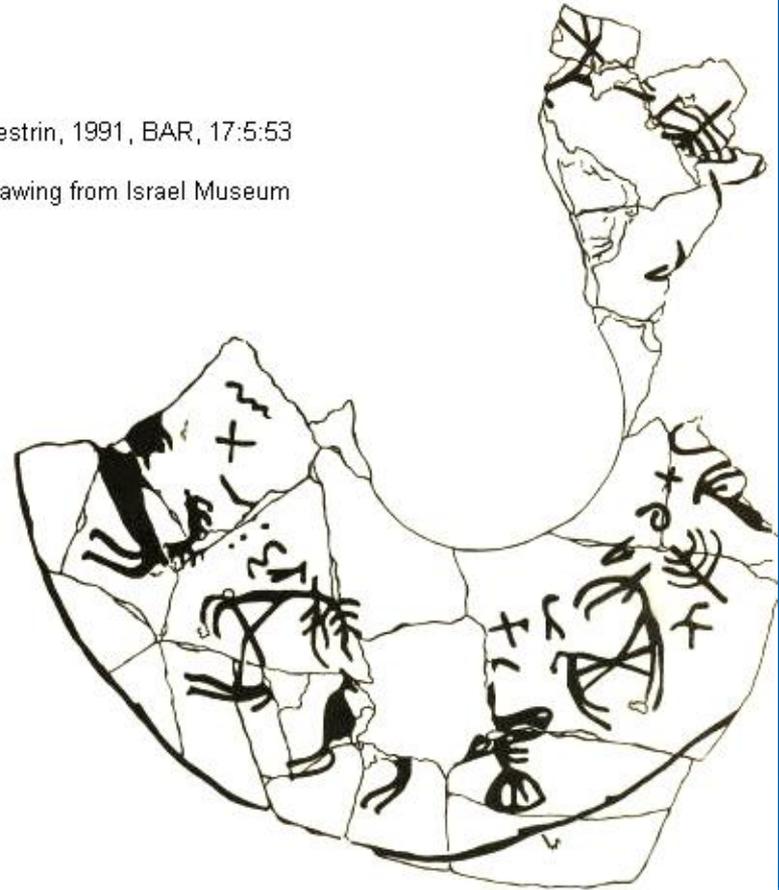
# Lachish Ewer

- Two ibex flanking tree of life
- 1220 BC
- Early Canaanite Inscription
- Important to theories of alphabet evolution



Hestrin, 1991, BAR, 17:5:53

Drawing from Israel Museum



## TWO IBEX FLANKING TREE OF LIFE

# Pithos of Kuntillet 'Ajrud

- 8th century BC caravan resting site in the Sinai desert
- Near turquoise mining operations
- Pithos A "I have blessed you by Yahweh of Shomron (Samaria) and his asherah"
- Pithos B "I bless you by Yahweh of Teman and by his asherah".

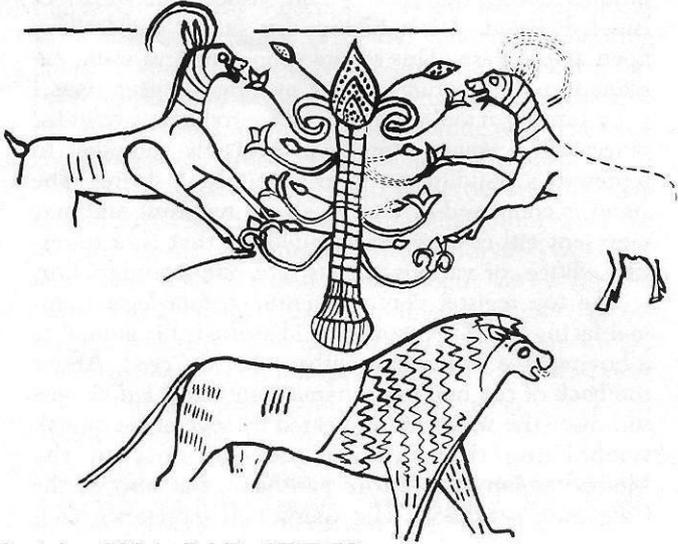


COURTESY DR. ZE'EV MESHEL

Reconstructed jar from Kuntillet 'Ajrud with tree of life and lion motifs. Dever, 2008, BAR, 34:2:60

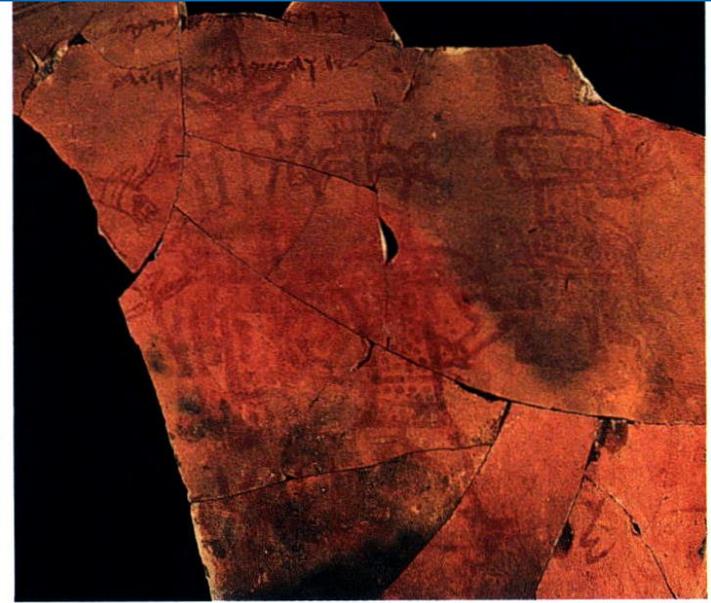
Tree of Life (Asherah) flanked by two ibexes

ISRAEL EXPLORATION JOURNAL, VOL. 37, NUMBER 4

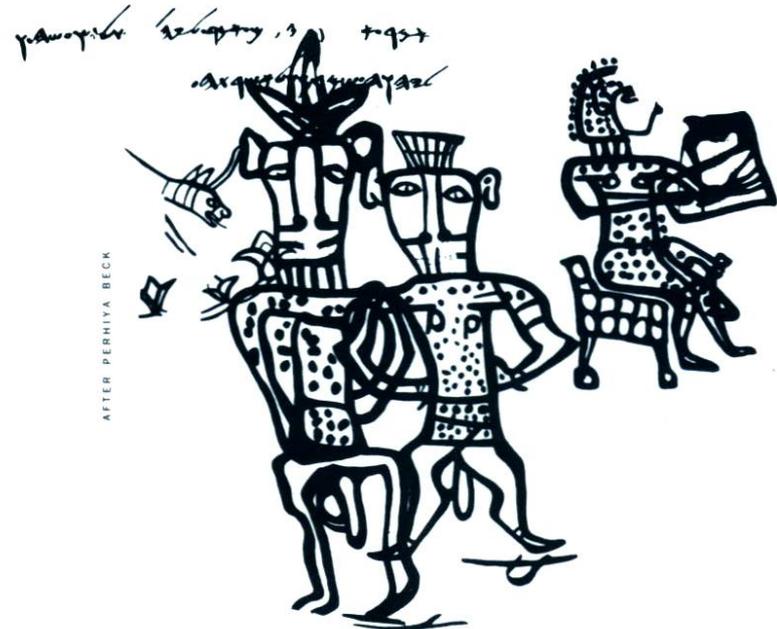


Hestrin, 1991, BAR, 17:5:58

## “Yahweh and his asherah”



ABRAHAM HAI



AFTER PERRHYA BECK

Hestrin, 1991, BAR, 17:5:58

## KUNTILLET 'AJRUD



AFTER PIRHIYA BECK

goddess Asherah, he says, wearing a cow mask that resembles the bull mask on the Yahweh figure on the left. Avner further suggests that the position of the male to the left of the female corresponds to the usual positioning of a taller *massebah* to the left of a shorter and wider *massebah* in pairs of *masseboth* found in the desert.

Avner, 2001

BAR,27:3:37



UZI AVNER

Now Uzi Avner, the author of this article, raises yet another point of contention, this time questioning the accuracy of the reconstruction itself. He argues that the middle figure in the drawing has been erroneously portrayed as male (left), especially in view of her obviously feminine breasts, and proposes a revised reconstruction of the drawing (below) that would allow the middle figure to be understood as female. That middle figure is the

New Reconstruction  
Middle Figure as Female  
No tail or penis  
Prominent breasts

“Yahweh and his asherah”

# House Shrines

- Miniature house shrines (*naos*).
- Sometimes indicate that they were occupied by a male and a female god

HOUSE SHRINE, 8TH OR 9TH CENTURY BC



Dever, 2008, BAR, 34:2:54



Dever, 2008, BAR, 34:2:58

# House Shrines

## Symbols of Asherah

- Women figurines
- Doves and Dovecotes
- Crescent Moon
- Tree of Life
- Lion (Ba'al, partner of Asherah)

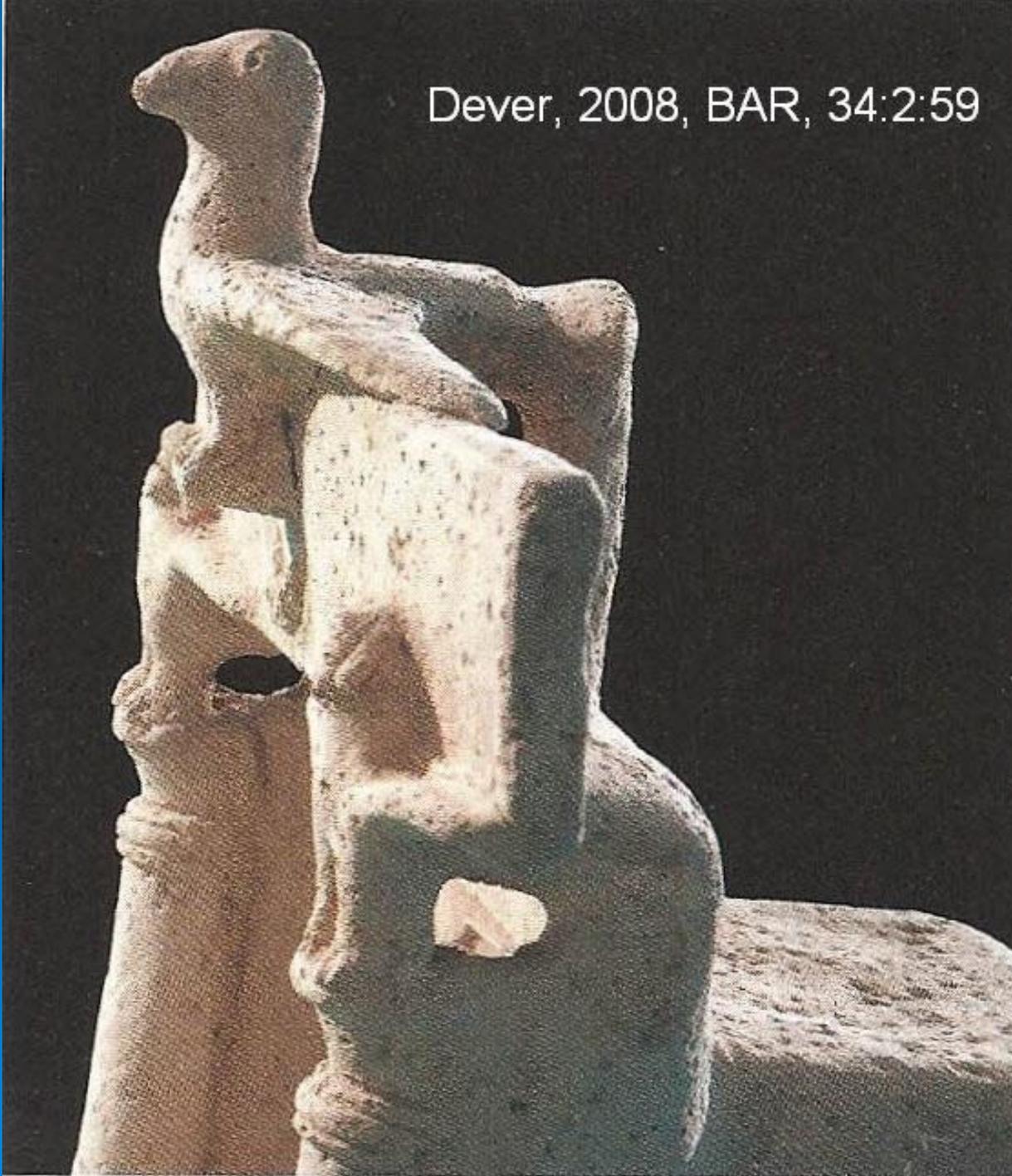
BECKONING TO DEVOTEES, the women who stand like columns in front of the house shrine from the Moussaieff collection (above) emphasize the relationship between the tree and the goddess. These figures most likely represent Asherah standing at her shrine, much like a Cypriot example (right) from Idalion, now in the Louvre.

Excavated from a grave in the Idalion necropolis, this house shrine dates to about the sixth century B.C.E. A female—probably the goddess Astarte—stands in the doorway and at the windows on either side of the *naos*. The hollows along the top are dovescotes, which house doves, a symbol



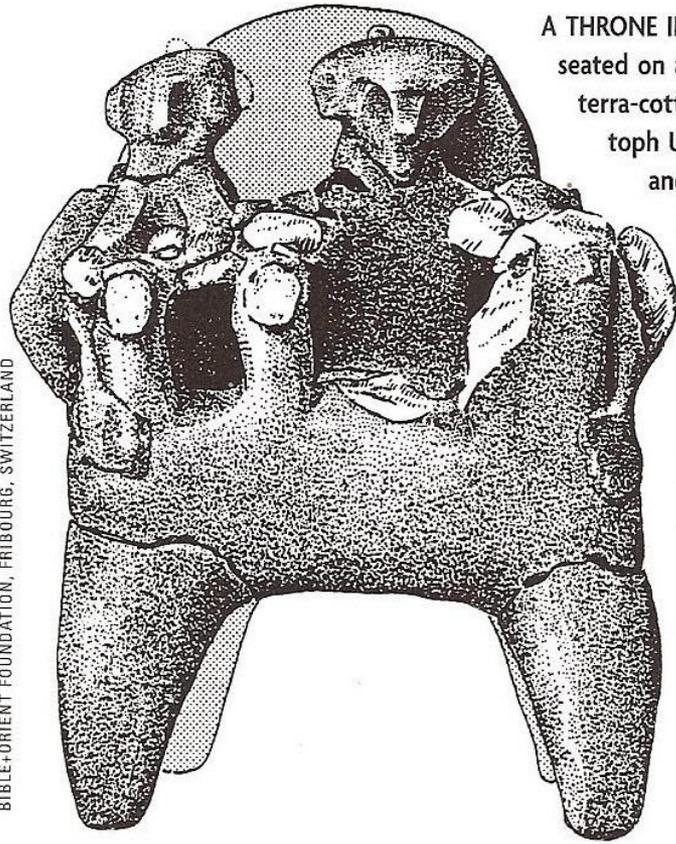
Dever, 2008, BAR, 34:2:58

Dever, 2008, BAR, 34:2:59



Dove,  
symbol of  
Asherah

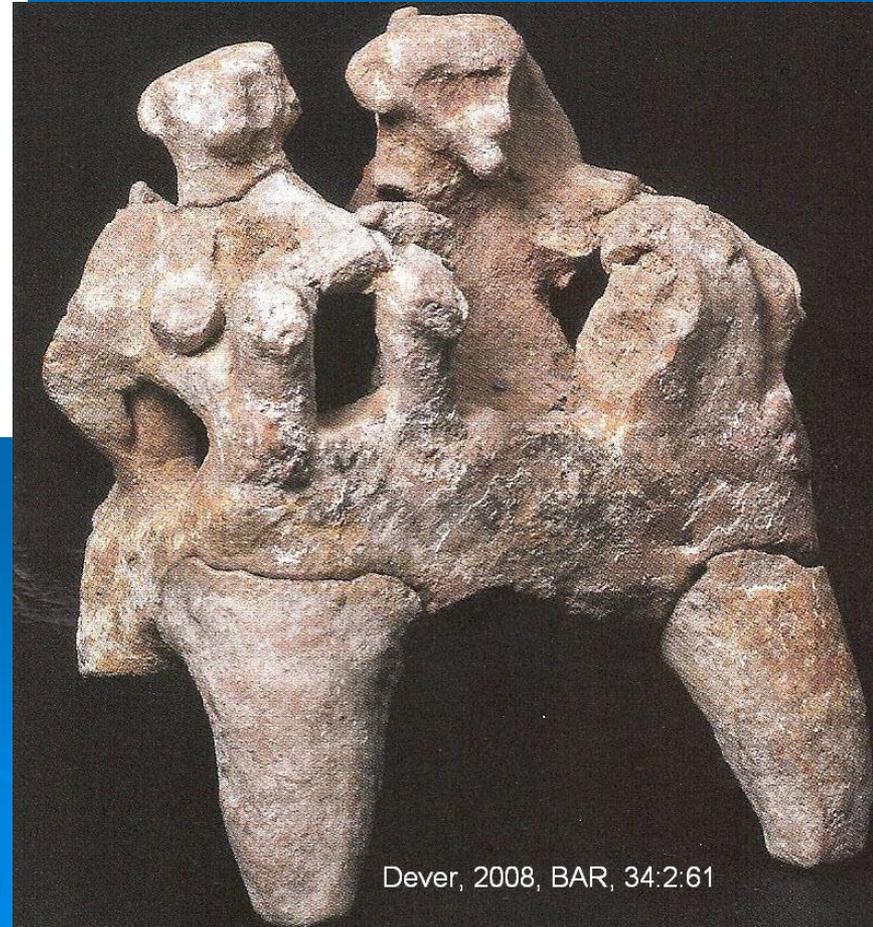




A THRONE IN 3-D. Two figures are seated on a double throne in this terra-cotta piece published by Christoph Uehlinger (see photo above and drawing at left). This gives some idea of what the throne in the BAR *naos* might have looked like if it had included the inhabitants of the throne. The absence of figures on the BAR *naos* throne is especially significant in an Israelite context, since graven images were prohibited by the Hebrew Bible.

Dever, 2008, BAR, 34:2:61

# Throne for Two



Dever, 2008, BAR, 34:2:61



Israelite  
House  
Shrine, Tell  
el-Far'ah,  
Sameria

# Did Yahweh have a Consort?

➤ Early Israel and Samaria

➤ YES

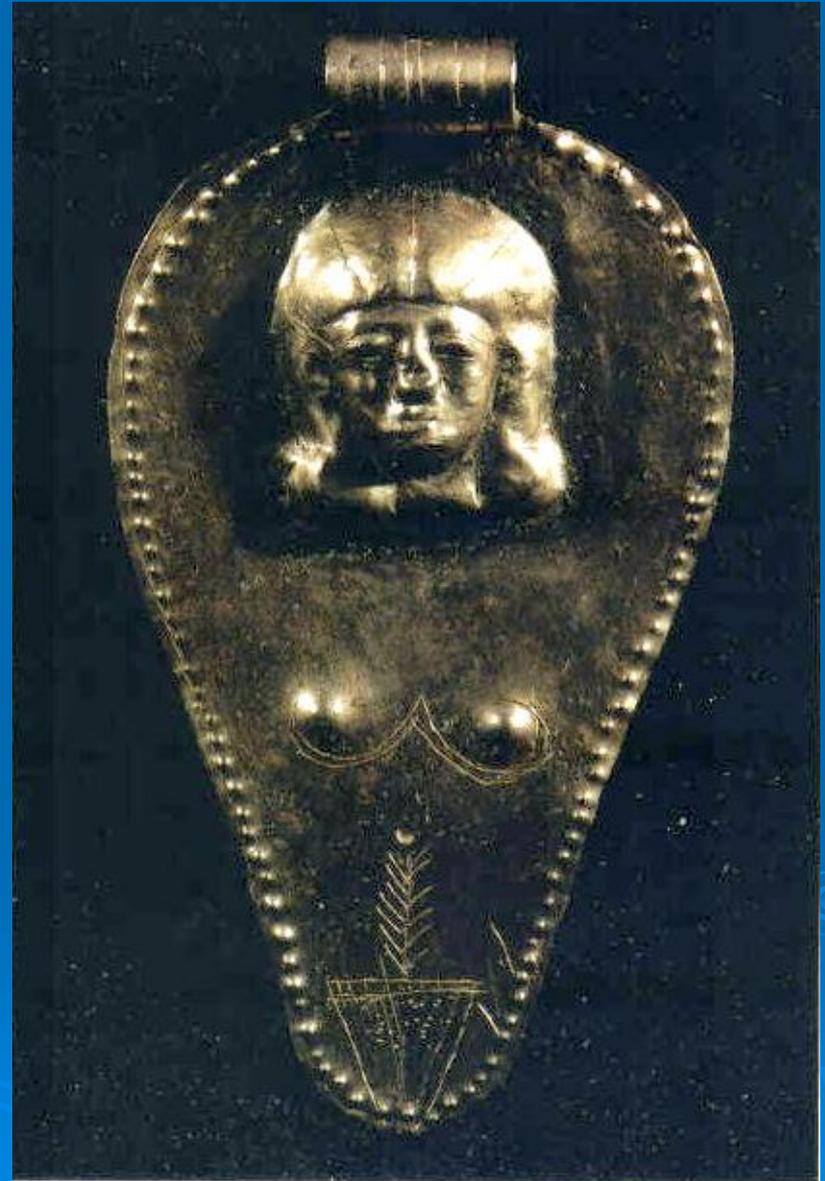
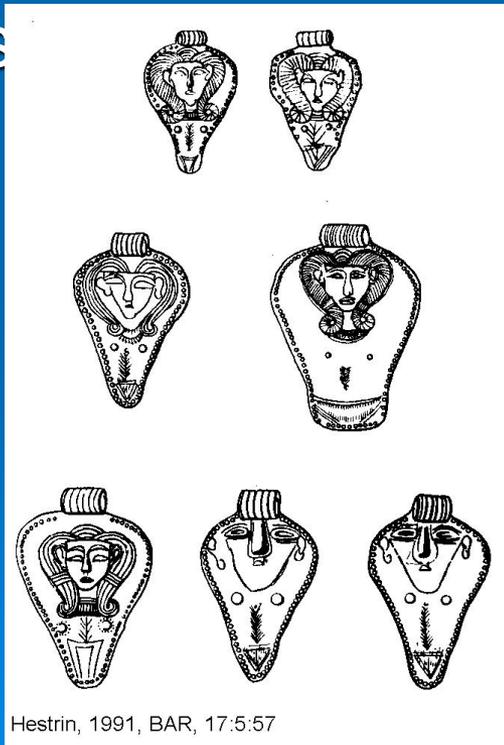
➤ Late Israel

➤ NO



# Asherah Depictions Pubic Triangles

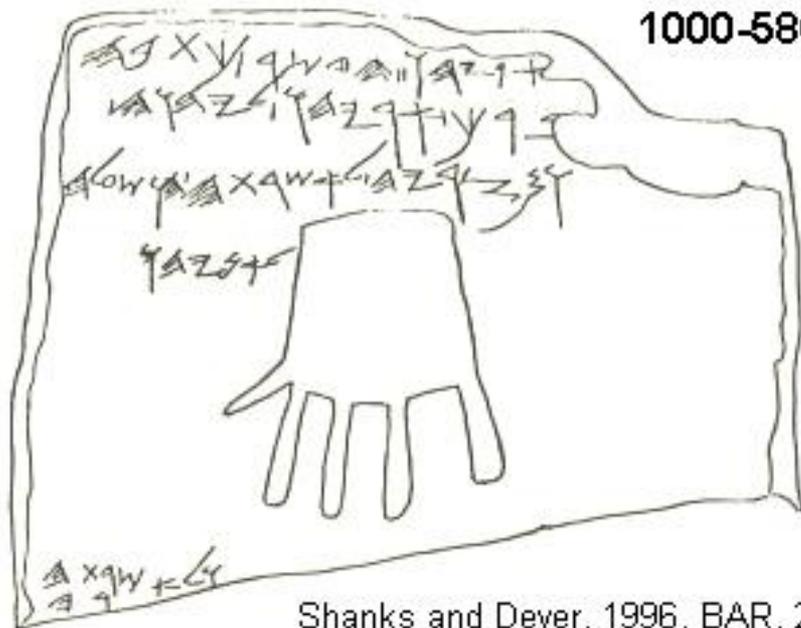
- These stylized triangles are interchangeable with as



# Asherah and “Hand of God” inscription

- Tomb inscription at Khirbet el-Kom
- 8th cent BC
- Near modern day Hebron
- “[tomb occupant be] blessed by Yahweh and his asherah”

1000-586 BC



Shanks and Dever, 1996, BAR, 22:5:37



HAND OF GOD? "Blessed..by Yahweh..and his asherah", Khirbet el-Kom, Iron Age II

AFTER PIRHIYA BECK

# Asherah and Israelite Theology

- Changing
- Suppressed during Divided Kingdom, Abolished in Post-Exile Judahism
- Asherah may be goddess, place, or thing
- Use of the impersonal pronoun “the” with asherah, as in Judges 6:25,26,30 and 1 Kings 16:33 suggests that the asherah is a kind or class of goddess, place or object, and NOT a proper name at all

# Syncretism and Divination

- **DIVINATION:** the attempt to obtain secret knowledge, especially of the future, either by inspiration or by the reading and interpreting of certain signs called **omens**.



# Types of Divination

- reading omens
- astrology (interpretation of behavior of astronomical bodies)
- belomancy (divination by use of arrows)
- hepatoscopy (divination by an examination of the liver of animals)
- hydromancy (foretelling from the appearance of water)
- libanomancy (interpretation of incense)
- necromancy (consulting the dead, see the story of Saul and the medium-witch of Endor in 1 Sam. 28:1-25)
- oneiromancy (dreams)

# Types of Divination

- psephomancy (interpretation of pebbles)
- rhabdomancy (use of the divining rod, Hos 4:12; Ezek 8:17)
- tetrascopy (interpretation of freak births among humans and animals)
- traphim (small household idols)
- the use of the lot
- sacrifice of children by burning
- interpretation of food ingredients in a food offering
  - aleuromancy (flour)
  - extispicy (entrails of sacrificed sheep)
  - lecanomancy (oil)

# Early Israelite Divination

- lecanomancy (interpretation by the shape of oil in water, see Gen 44:5)

*4They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, "Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid good with evil? 5Isn't this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.'*

# Early Israelite Divination

- cleidonomancy (divination by a chance word, see 1 Sam 14:10 and Gen. 24:12-14)
- Jonathan and his Armor Bearer
- *8Jonathan said, "Come, then; we will cross over toward the men and let them see us. 9If they say to us, 'Wait there until we come to you,' we will stay where we are and not go up to them. 10But if they say, 'Come up to us,' we will climb up, because that will be our sign that the LORD has given them into our hands."*

# Early Israelite Divination

- Urim (=”No) and Thummim (=”Yes). This was early Israel’s binary system of obtaining yes/no answers from YHWH.
- They consisted of two stones and were somehow associated with the 12 jewels of the High Priest’s ceremonial breastplate, the ephod.).



Hallo, 2005, BAR, 31:2:37

## HIGH PRIEST BREASTPLATE

Hallo, 2005, BAR, 31:2:37

The stones are inscribed as follows

<b>Bareket</b> (beryl) Levy	<b>Piteda</b> (topaz) Shimon	<b>Odem</b> (ruby) Reuven
<b>Yahalom</b> (diamond) Zebulun	<b>Sapir</b> (sapphire) Yissachar	<b>Nofech</b> (turquoise) Yehudah
<b>Achlama</b> (jasper) Gad	<b>Shevo</b> (agate) Naphtali	<b>Leshem</b> (jacinth) Dan
<b>Yashphe</b> (jade) Binyamin	<b>Shoham</b> (onyx) Joseph	<b>Tarshish</b> (emerald) Asher

CHART OF STONES IN HIGH PRIEST BREASTPLATE

# David and the Urim/Thummim

- David sought guidance from the ephod of Abiathar the priest in 1 Sam. 30:7.

*7Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Bring me the ephod." Abiathar brought it to him, 8and David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?"*

*"Pursue them," he answered. "You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue."*

# Saul and the Urim/Thummim

- Saul was driven to necromancy because of he could not determine the will of YHWH by dreams, prophecy or the Urim/Thummim (1 Sam. 28:6)

*6He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets*

# Divination and the Lot

- Primitive dice
- Astragali, the nuckle bones in the heels of small animals such as goats and pigs



Astragali “lots” (“dice”); the buckle bones in the heels of small animals such as goats and pigs

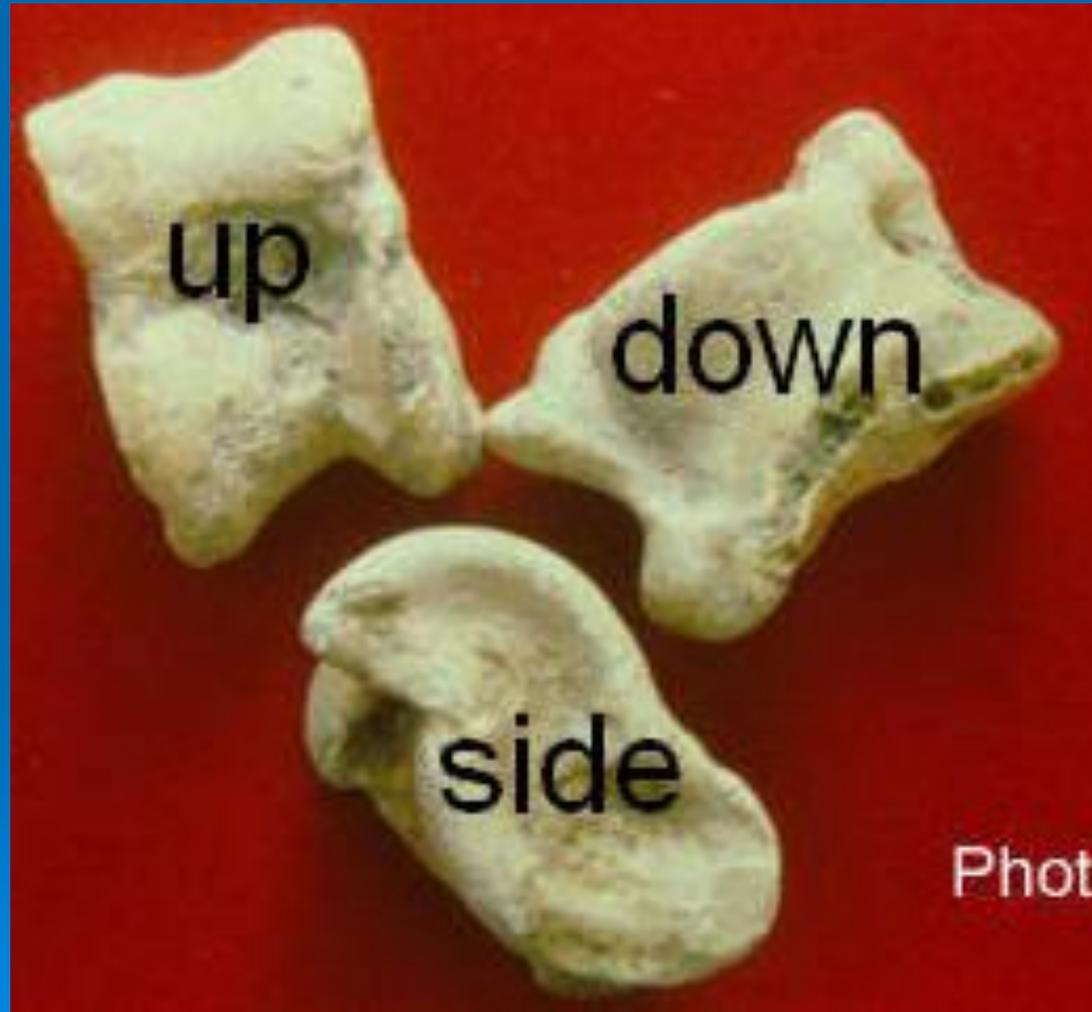
Leviticus 16:7–10  
Joshua 18:8–10  
1 Samuel 10:20–21  
Judges 1:1  
2 Samuel 2:1; 5:19  
Joshua 7:10–21



BWP:ar125  
Photo by Dan Cole

# Astragali: 3 positions

- Yes
- No
- Maybe



# Lots in Israelite history

- Selection of the “scapegoat” to be driven into the wilderness (Leviticus 16:7–10)



# Lots in Israelite History

- Apportioning of the territories for the Israelite tribes (Joshua 18:8–10)



# Lots in Israelite History

- Public selection of Saul as Israel's first king (1 Samuel 10:20–21).

# Theology of the Lot

- Proverbs 16:33, “The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly from Yahweh.”
- Divine control of how the lots fall



# Contemporary Assyrian Lot, the Purim

- The 1-inch cub
- Inscription in Akkadian cuneiform
- Belonging to lahali, the grand vizier of Assyria during the reign of Shalmaneser III (858–823 B.C.E.)
- Annual lottery held to determine the official whose name would be used to designate the next year of the king's reign

Assyrian Puru Lot  
9th century BC  
Akkadian cunieforn  
lahali, the grand vizier of  
Shalmaneser III (858–823 B.C.E.)



BWP:AR126; Photo by Jack Silver

# Divination by Hepatoscopy

- Examination of livers to foretell the future
  - Popular means of divination for the Babylonians and Assyrian kings.
  - Used by the wealthy and high government officials.
  - Rarely used among commoners.
  - Expensive
- 



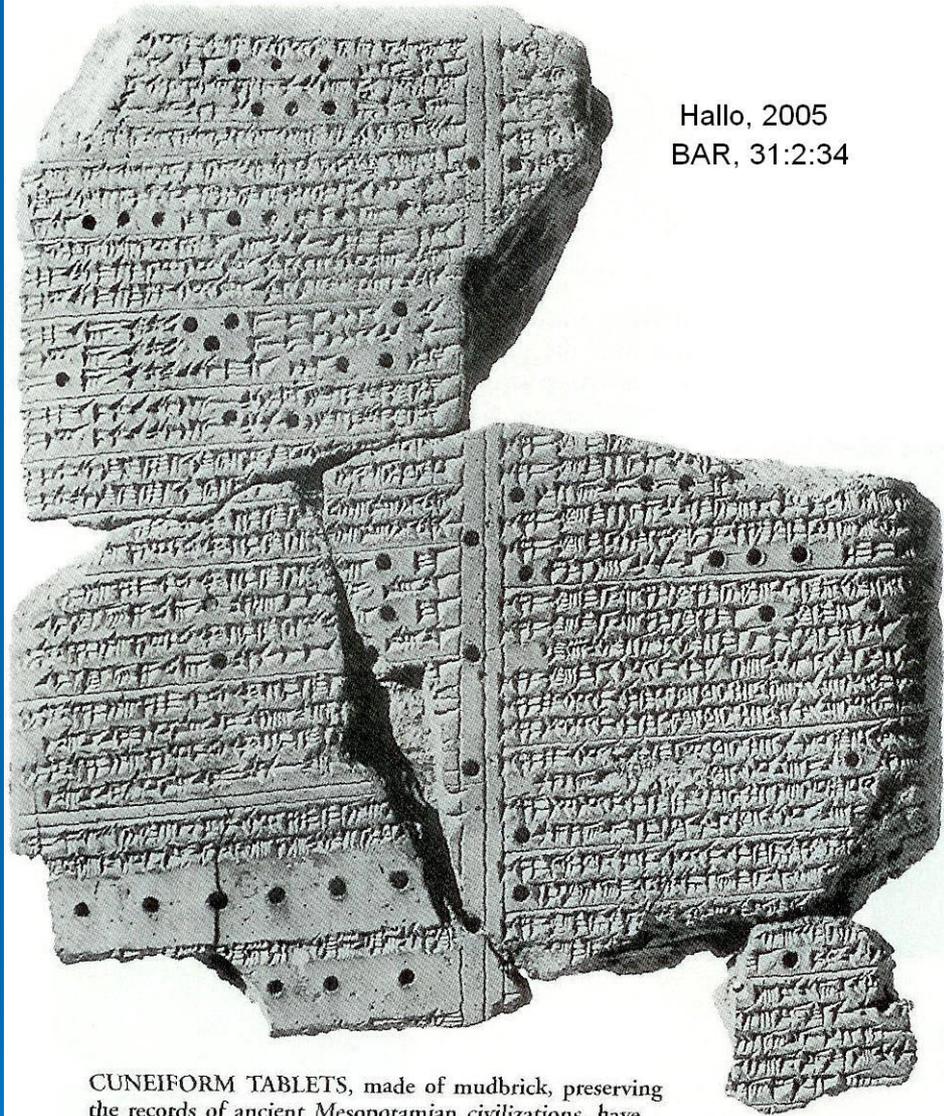
**SACRIFICE FOR DIVINATION, Temple of Shamash, Mari, Syria, 3rd millenium BC**

Hallo, 2005, BAR, 31:2:35, photo by Art Resource



MODEL OF SHEEP LIVER, southern Iraq, 1900-1600 BC  
Halla, 2005, BAR, 31:2:35

Hallo, 2005  
BAR, 31:2:34

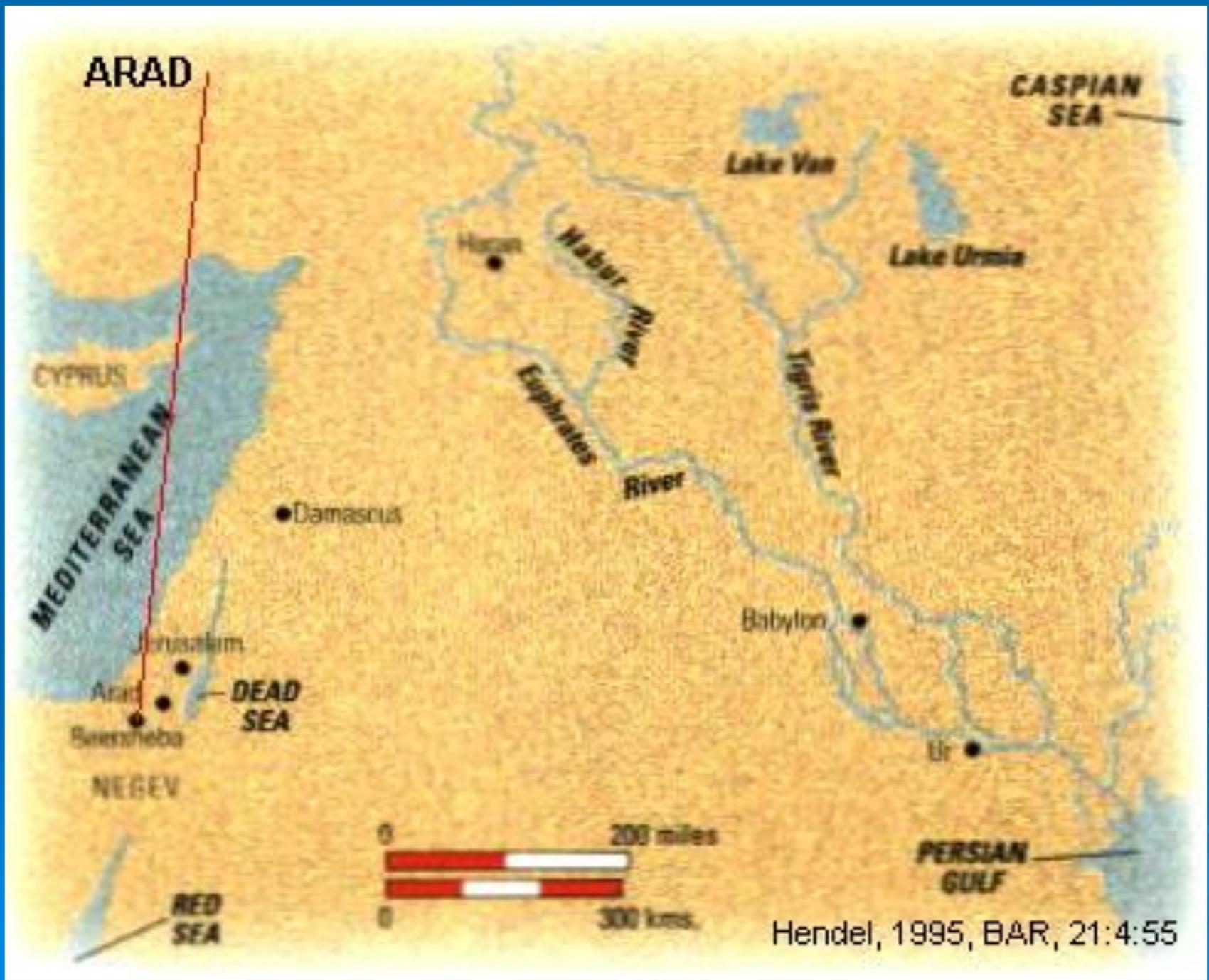


CUNEIFORM TABLETS, made of mudbrick, preserving the records of ancient Mesopotamian civilizations, have survived in vast quantities. Of the roughly half-million in the possession of museums and research institutions, only a fraction have been studied. The fragment shown here, part of the collection at the British Museum, is published in Assyriologist Ulla Koch-Westenholz's *Babylonian Liver Omens*, which examines a portion of ancient tablets dealing with the Babylonian practice of slaughtering sheep and studying their organs for portents of the future.

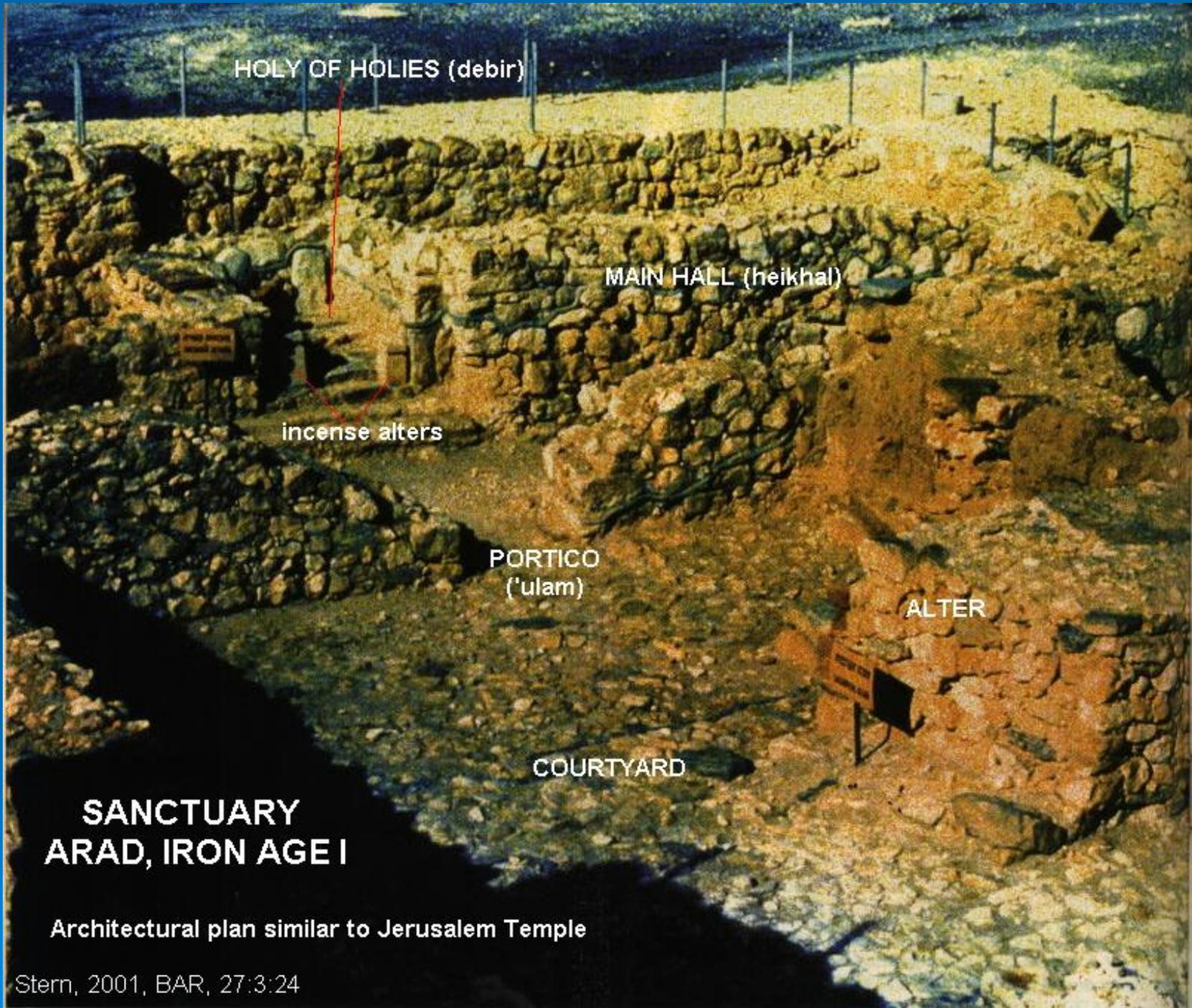
## INSTRUCTIONS FOR READING ENTRAILS

# Syncretism at the Arad Temple

- The sanctuary has the same general plan as the Jerusalem Temple.
- Excavations there found two stone pillars (*massebot*) in the Temple complex and two stone incense alters.
- Representations of Ba'al and Asherah
- Ostracon identifies temple as “House of Yahweh”



Hendel, 1995, BAR, 21:4:55



HOLY OF HOLIES (debir)

MAIN HALL (heikhal)

incense altars

PORTICO ('ulam)

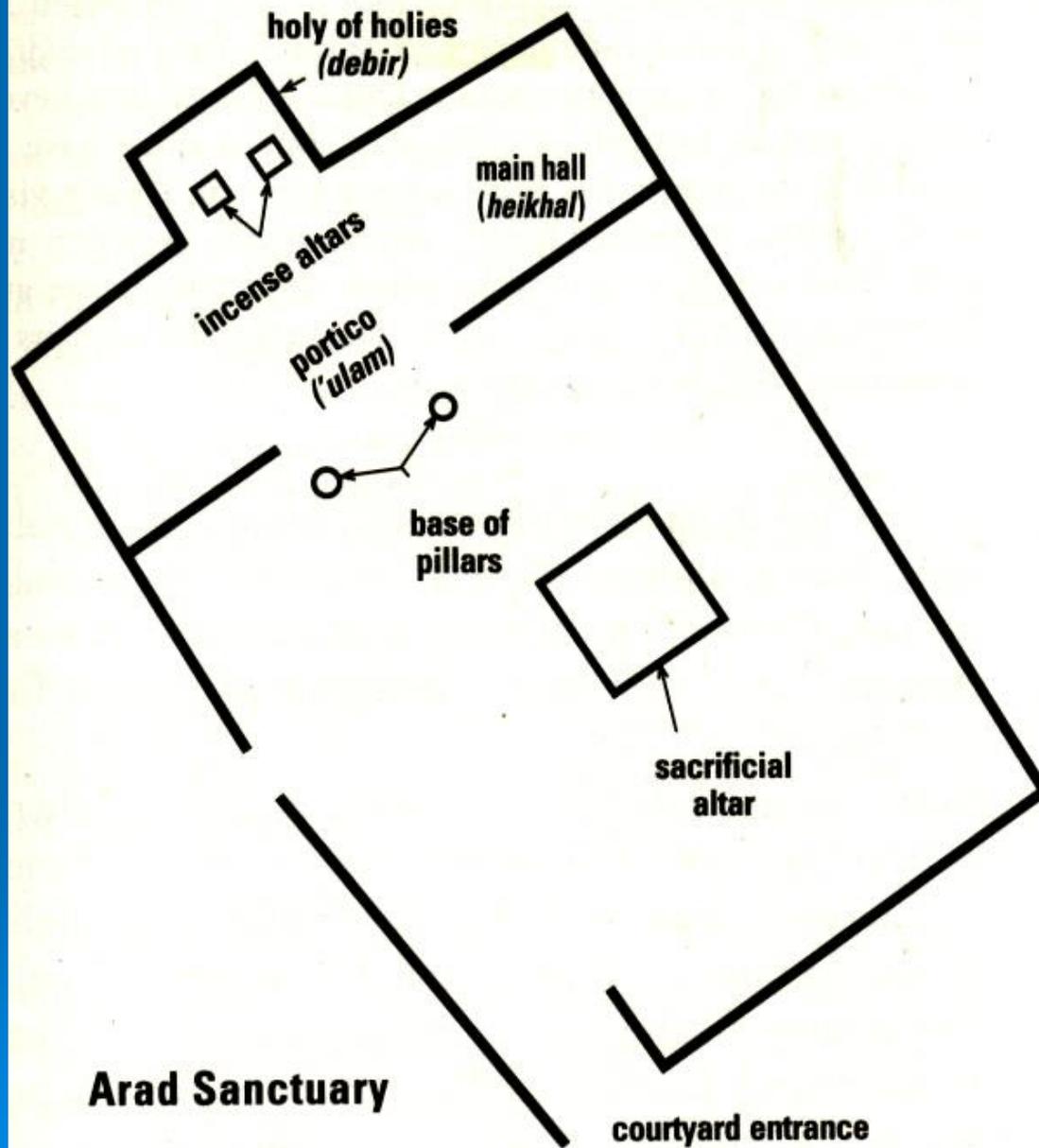
ALTER

COURTYARD

# SANCTUARY ARAD, IRON AGE I

Architectural plan similar to Jerusalem Temple

Stern, 2001, BAR, 27:3:24



**Arad Sanctuary**

Hurowitz, 1994, BR, 10:2:30; Photo by Hershel Shanks



**RECONSTRUCTED  
MASSEBOT  
AT ARAD  
REPRESENTATIONS  
OF YAHWEH OR  
BA'AL AND ASHERAH  
ORIGINALLY BURIED  
IN REFORMS OF  
HEZEKIAH**



Stern, 2001, BAR, 27:3:25

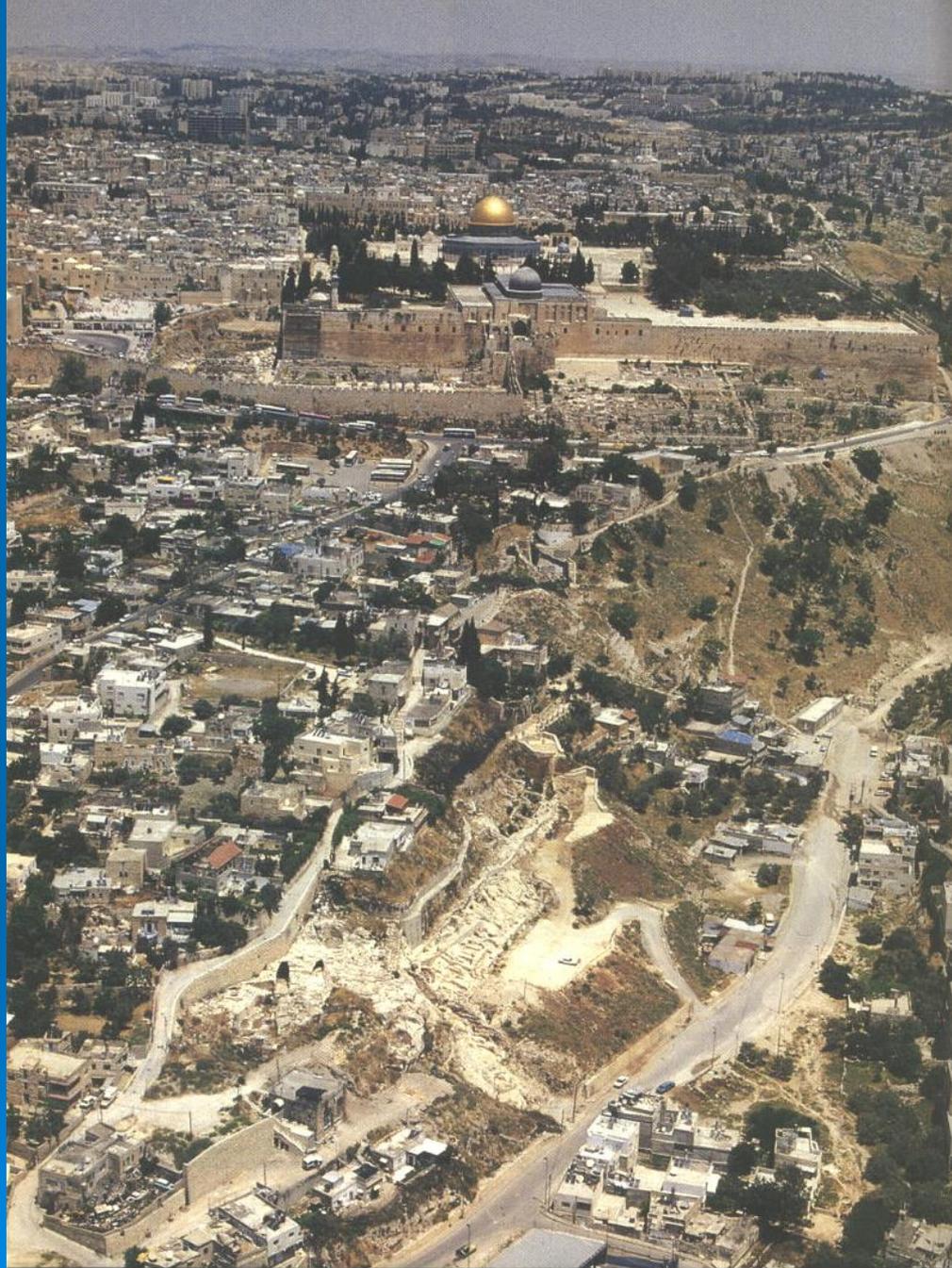
ISRAEL MUSEUM



**"the house of Yahweh" ostracon, Arad**

# Syncretism at Jerusalem

- Solomon fell into open syncretism and allowed false worship in the Temple itself (1 King 11:1-8).
- Asharoth (Asherah) (Phoenician goddess of Sidon)
- Molech (war god of Ammonites)
- Chemosh (god of Moabites)



**TEMPLE MOUNT AND CITY OF DAVID. Shanks, 1998, BAR, 14:4:24**

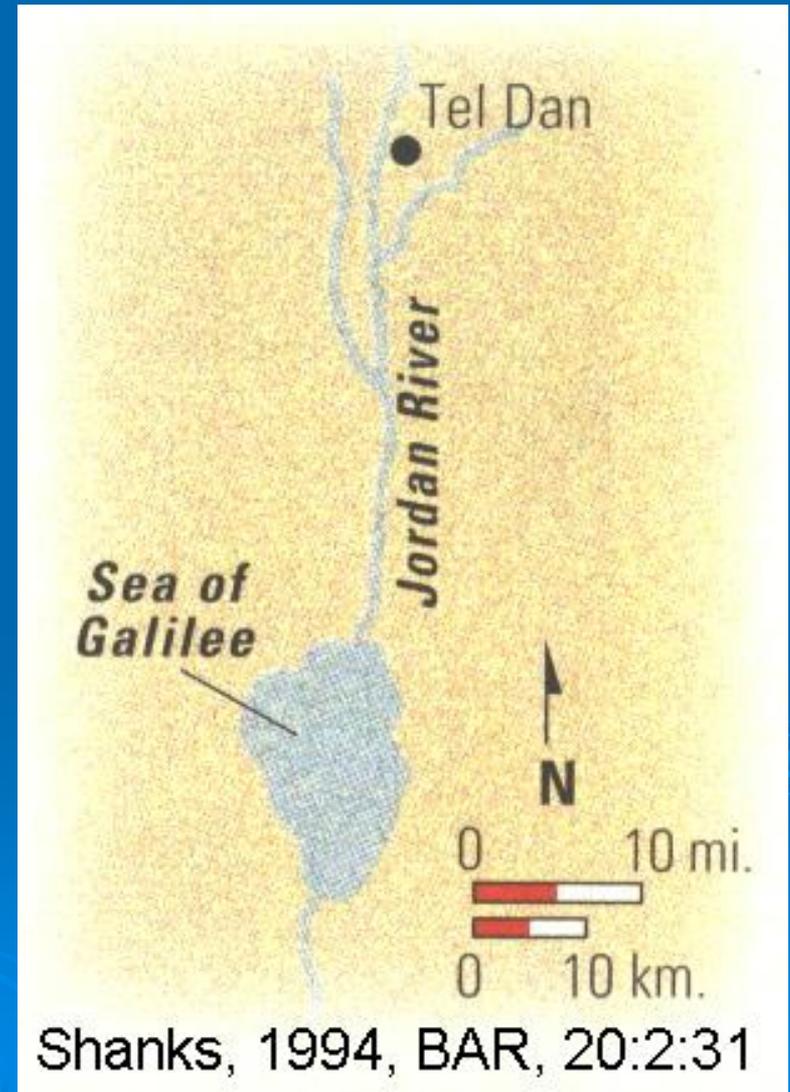
Photo by Zev Radovan

# Solomon's Syncretism

- 5He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and MolechA the detestable god of the Ammonites. 6So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.
- 7On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. 8He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods (1 Kings 11:5-7)

# Syncretism at Dan

- Micah's idols
- Silver calf for his own private worship
- Hired Levitical priest to run his private shrine.
- It was a time when “everyone did as they saw fit” (Judges 17:6).





Silver  
Calf  
of  
Ashkelon

Stager, 1991, BAR, 17:2:25

# Summary

- Paganistic Yahism was common throughout Israel from the Exodus through the Exile in 586 BC
- After the Babylonian Exile, cultic figurines are only found in Idumean (descendants of Edomites) and Phoenician settings. They are unknown from Jewish areas.
- For the Jews, the *Exile purified their religion and consolidated monotheism for the next 2,500 years*

# Contemporary Syncretism

- Jesus taught by followers of Buddha
- New Age
- God as She: Return to Asherah

