

# The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah

*Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess*

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# 1

## An introduction to asherah

In recent years archaeological discoveries have helped to shed some light on the goddess Asherah and her possible role in Israelite religion. Because of these discoveries, much has been written on what has become a quickly developing subject. In this introductory chapter, I shall first discuss the basic views about the meaning of the term ‘asherah’, followed by a brief summary of some of the relevant dissertations and monographs.

### **A. Who or what is asherah?**

Scholarly opinion differs widely concerning the identification of asherah, but can be broken down into two general categories: first, that the term ‘asherah’ in the Hebrew Bible did not refer to a goddess at all, but described solely an object (either some type of wooden image, a sanctuary, a grove or a living tree); and secondly, that asherah could indicate both a wooden image and the name of a specific goddess. These two basic positions will now be discussed briefly.

#### *(1) Asherah as merely an object*

Before the discovery of the Ugaritic material (see chapter 2), this interpretation was most prevalent. Admittedly, in most of the verses in the Hebrew Bible which mention asherah, it is clear that some sort of wooden object is meant (see chapter 3.A). In those few verses which appear to indicate a goddess, most scholars assumed that the goddess was Astarte, as a goddess Asherah was unknown at that time (although a few scholars, including Barton, Sayce, and Kuenen and his followers, held to (2) below; see Kuenen 1874; Barton 1891, pp. 82–3; and cf. Emerton 1993). W. Robertson Smith, on the other hand, believed that asherah always referred to a wooden pole, which had no divine associations whatsoever (1907, pp. 188–9; and cf. Hadley 1995a for a full discussion of Smith’s views concerning the asherah). Reed (1949) includes an excellent summary of this position up to the time of his writing, and so there is no need to discuss these older writers here. However, a few more recent scholars (notably Lipiński and Lemaire) have followed this position, and so a brief examination of their views is in order.

Lipiński (1972) mentions that a goddess Athirat/Asherah is known from Arabian, Babylonian, Akkadian and Ugaritic texts (see also chapter 2). However, in the Hebrew Bible, Lipiński believes that asherah refers rather to a sacred grove or shrine (1972, p. 112). He believes that Hebrew asherah is to be compared with the corresponding Akkadian, Phoenician and Aramaic terms which designate a shrine or sanctuary (1972, p. 116; cf. also chapter 2.B.2). He states (1972, p. 112) that in the earliest texts (Judg. vi 25–30 and Deut. xvi 21), as well as Ex. xxxiv 13; Deut. vii 5; xii 3; II Ki. xviii 4; xxiii 14, 15; II Chron. xiv 2 (v. 3 in Eng.); xxxi 1; and Mi. v 13 (v. 14 in Eng.), the asherah is a Canaanite sacred grove, whereas in the monarchic period, asherah could also denote a chapel or shrine (e.g. I Ki. xiv 15, 23; xv 13; xvi 33; II Ki. xiii 6; xvii 10, 16; xxi 3, 7; xxiii 6, 7; II Chron. xv 16; xix 3; xxiv 18; xxxiii 3, 19; xxxiv 4, 7 (although Lipiński erroneously cites the chapter as xxxiii); Isa. xvii 8; xxvii 9; and Jer. xvii 2). In Lipiński's opinion, the only texts which mention a goddess or her emblems are Judg. iii 7 and I Ki. xviii 19, both of which he considers textually dubious (1972, p. 114, and see the discussion of these verses in chapter 3.E.1, 3).

Emerton (1982), Winter (1983) and Day (1986) disagree with Lipiński's interpretation of asherah. Emerton notes that the verbs used with asherah in the Hebrew Bible seem to indicate that it is a wooden symbol of a goddess (1982, pp. 17–18; cf. U. Winter 1983, p. 556, and chapter 3.A). Emerton (1982, p. 18, and cf. Day 1986, p. 403) further disagrees with Lipiński's translation of 'grove' in II Ki. xviii 4 and xxiii 14, 15, as opposed to 'shrine' in I Ki. xiv 23 and II Ki. xvii 10. Emerton observes that all these verses contain a polemic against bamoṯ, masseboth, and asherah or asherim, and so asherah should probably have the same meaning in each verse. 'The former group of verses refers to the Asherah being cut down and Lipiński agrees that a shrine is not meant, and the latter says that the Asherah was found under a tree and tells against the view that it was a grove. If both groups of verses are taken together, they suggest that the Asherah was neither a shrine nor a grove' (1982, p. 18).

With regard to Judg. iii 7 and I Ki. xviii 19, Day believes that even if these two verses are textually dubious (which seems likely; see chapter 3.E.1, 3), the parallelism in both verses with Baalim (or Baal) still testifies that the term asherah carries with it some understanding of divinity (Day 1986, p. 400).

Furthermore, both Emerton and Day note that Lipiński fails to discuss II Ki. xxiii 4, which describes the vessels which were made for the Baal, the asherah and all the host of heaven (Lipiński merely dismisses this verse in a footnote, saying that it summarizes II Ki. xxi 3; 1972, p. 113 n. 77). As asherah is here mentioned between the god Baal and the heavenly deities, both Emerton and Day believe that asherah more likely refers to either the goddess or at least the symbol of a goddess, rather than a shrine (Emerton 1982, p. 18; Day 1986, p. 401).

Lemaire believes that the interpretation which fits the majority of the verses in the Hebrew Bible is that the asherah is a living tree. He believes that



‘asherah’ is the technical term for a sacred tree planted beside an altar, just as ‘massebah’ is the technical term for a standing stone (1977, p. 605). There are a few verses in which this interpretation is a little awkward, which he admits. In all the verses where the verb *‘sh* ‘to make’ is used (I Ki. xiv 15; xvi 33; II Ki. xvii 16; xxi 3, 7; and II Chron. xxxiii 3), he believes that the verb is used in a more general sense, and does not necessarily imply that the subject of the verb must be fabricated. He uses as a parallel I Ki. xii 32 (although he does not specify which of the four occurrences in this verse of *‘sh* he means). The first refers to a feast, and the second to an offering upon the altar. The third occurrence refers to the calves which Jeroboam had made, and is therefore straightforward. The last instance is in conjunction with the priests of the high place which he had made. In the previous verse, *‘sh* is used for both the high place and the priests, and so the verb could here refer to either. Although one cannot strictly interpret making a feast, offering or priest as a fabrication, nevertheless in all these instances the thing ‘made’ could not exist (or be instituted) without human action. A person needs to be made into a priest. However, this is not the case for a tree. It is possible that an ordinary tree needs to be ‘made’ into a sacred tree in some way, but that is far from proven. Besides, Lemaire has cited only one reference by means of explanation for six occurrences. On the basis of the information which we have, it is more likely that the verb in these instances refers to some sort of object which is constructed. He similarly explains the use of *bnh* ‘to build’ in I Ki. xiv 23 and *nšb* (Hiphil) ‘to set up’ in II Ki. xvii 10 as referring to the other objects mentioned (bamoth and masseboth) (1977, p. 606).

Lemaire admits that in certain texts it appears as though asherah represents a goddess. He attributes these verses to the deuteronomistic redactor who wanted to eradicate the cult of the asherahs (sacred trees) by associating them with Baal and hence idolatrous practices (1977, p. 606). Day is unconvinced by this argument, and views it as a ‘desperate attempt’ by Lemaire to explain away these passages which do not agree with his interpretation. Day further notes that ‘Lemaire nowhere comes to terms with the fact that it would be a remarkable coincidence for the Deuteronomic redactors to create a Canaanite goddess Asherah in such a haphazard way when there actually was a prominent Canaanite deity with the very same name, as we know from the Ugaritic texts’ (1986, p. 400). As Day observes, it is far more likely that any allusions to a goddess Asherah in the Hebrew Bible would refer to the Syro-Palestinian goddess of that name, despite the interval of a few hundred years.

Finally, the references to the *mīp̄lešet* which Maacah made for the asherah (I Ki. xv 13 and II Chron. xv 16) as well as the women who wove *bāttīm* for the asherah (II Ki. xxiii 7, not xxxiii 7 as cited by Lemaire), Lemaire dismisses as ‘enigmatic’. He states that the weavings could be hangings to be placed upon the sacred tree, but that the interpretation of these passages remains uncertain (1977, pp. 606–7, and see chapter 3.E.2, 5). It is true that these pas-

sages pose difficulties, but these problems are not so great if one supposes that either the goddess or her image is indicated here.

It therefore appears that the interpretation of ‘asherah’ as merely an object (whether sanctuary, grove, wooden pole or living tree) does not fully meet the requirements as presented in the Hebrew Bible. Let us now turn to the alternative position.

## (2) *Asherah as both a goddess and her image*

As mentioned above, this view has gained considerable popularity, especially after the discovery of the Ras Shamra material which definitely established the identity of a goddess Asherah. Indeed, most modern scholars hold this view, albeit with some differences (e.g. Cross, Day, Dever, Emerton, Freedman, Meshel, Patai and Reed, to mention but a few).

As will be seen in chapter 2, the identity of the Ugaritic goddess Athirat is in no doubt. Chapter 3 discusses the nature of asherah in the Hebrew Bible, where it is seen that most of the references indicate some sort of wooden object, whereas a few verses seem to refer to the goddess (see chapter 3.E for a full discussion of these verses). The idea that a cultic object can bear the same name as the deity which it represents is not necessarily a foreign concept to the people of the ancient Near East, to whom the worship of the symbol of a god or goddess was identical with the worship of the deity represented. This could lead to the hypostatization of certain attributes of the deity, which in turn became deified (cf. Olyan 1988). An example of a fertility goddess depicted with her symbol is given by Hartmann (Abb. 1). That the symbol represents that particular goddess is clear by the fact that they both have the same style of branches. Of course in this instance it is impossible to tell if the image and the deity are called by the same name. However, on an Egyptian seal, the goddess Nut is depicted standing next to a tree. That the tree represents the goddess is clear from the fact that the word ‘Nut’ is written above the head of the goddess as well as on the trunk of the tree (Keel 1978, fig. 255, and Winter 1983, Abb. 466; and see chapter 5.D for a fuller discussion). It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that the same term (asherah) can be used to describe both the goddess and the symbol of the goddess. This is similar to the view of M. S. Smith, who distinguishes between Asherah the goddess and asherah the cult object, but he believes that already by the time of the Judges the term asherah referred to a symbol that was a part of the Yahweh cult and did not symbolize a goddess (1990, p. 16), although passages such as Gen. xlix 22–6 may refer to worship of Asherah as a goddess (as El’s consort), but that did not persist into the monarchy period (1990, p. 19; although cf. Smith 1994, p. 206 where he says that Asherah *was* a goddess in Israel during the Iron Age). However, it will be suggested here that one can trace the ‘evolution’ of the term asherah in the Hebrew Bible from indicating both the goddess and her symbol to merely a designation of the object itself (see chapter 3).

A few scholars (notably Yamashita, Bernhardt and Spieckermann) agree that a goddess Asherah is mentioned in the Old Testament, but do not believe that she is to be associated in any way with the Ugaritic goddess of the same name. Yamashita's reasoning will be discussed below (chapter 1.B.2). Spieckermann believes that Asherah, Astarte and the host of heaven are Assyrian imports, forced upon the ancient Israelites by their Assyrian overlords. Asherah is therefore related to the Assyrian Ishtar (1982, pp. 212–21). This view will be discussed more fully in chapter 3.C. However, if the origin of Asherah was the Assyrian Ishtar, then why did the ancient Israelites call her Asherah and not Ishtar? If they called her by the name of Asherah (even if they considered her to be identical with Ishtar), it is reasonable to assume that there must have been a local goddess by the name of Asherah; otherwise why would they choose that particular name as opposed to the one she already had? As there was a Ugaritic goddess Athirat, it seems plausible that the local inhabitants would identify the new Assyrian goddess with their own similar indigenous one, if Spieckermann's theory is correct.

Bernhardt believes that the two goddesses are related in name only, and that the Ugaritic texts present a picture of the specific situation at Ugarit alone. He says that 'gewiß sind die Götter und Mythen Ugarits parallelen Größen in anderen Städten Phönikiens und Kanaans verwandt; aber sie tragen eben doch ein unverkennbares lokales Gepräge' (1967, p. 167), i.e. he assumes that the situation is similar at other sites, that one has collections of locally formed myths, which therefore reflect the relationship between the various cults on a local level. Bernhardt thus believes that the 'identity of name' between the various deities does not mean much. They may have had a common origin in antiquity, but the important consideration is their function and position in the local pantheon, which may differ widely among the different city-states (1967, pp. 168–9). However, it is also possible that gods of the same name were identical. This would be expected when one is talking about a god being sent out as a 'god-export' to found a subsidiary holy place. Bernhardt believes that the extent to which this similarity of name indicates similarity of function can be determined only in individual cases (1967, p. 169). In his opinion, the only Ugaritic deity for whom there is clear evidence of a 'god-export' situation is Baal, in the case of the Hittite Elkunirša myth (cf. chapter 2.B.2), although the god(s) Kothar (-and-) Khasis shows a case of 'god-import' (1967, p. 169 n. 29). Bernhardt therefore believes that one should exercise caution before identifying Hebrew Asherah with Ugaritic Athirat, especially since there is a gap of 400 years between the two accounts. He notes that Athirat is a goddess of the sea and a mother goddess, with no evidence that she is a vegetation goddess. Indeed, she is often portrayed as antagonistic towards the fertility god Baal (1967, p. 171, and cf. chapter 2). On the other hand, asherah is most frequently a cult object, and a special form of a fertility goddess in the shape of a tree goddess. Furthermore, in Bernhardt's opinion, Asherah is often associated with Baal instead of El, and therefore bears no similarity with the Ugaritic deity of the same name (1967, pp. 172–3).

The following arguments can be presented against Bernhardt. First, it is not unreasonable to assume that a deity will take over specific needs in the local pantheon. The origin of Athirat/Asherah will be discussed in chapter 2.B, but it may be that she came to Ugarit from Amurru, where she was the goddess of the steppe. Since the coastal city of Ugarit had no need for an inland goddess, she took on the attributes of a sea goddess, but her earlier inland associations may be seen in a donkey for her chosen mount (not a very typical choice for a sea goddess!), and a few myths which locate her in the desert lands or the fringes of settled society (cf. especially Shachar and Shalim). It may be that the Hebrew Asherah is a direct 'descendant' of Amorite Ašratum, and did not come to Israel by way of Ugarit, although that cannot be proved. However, given the fact that Athirat still retains some of her inland characteristics, despite her identity as a sea goddess, it is not surprising to find that these inland characteristics were modified to suit the specific needs of ancient Israel.

Bernhardt mentions (1967, p. 171) that there is no evidence at all that Athirat was a goddess of fertility or love. However, this may not be totally true. The myth of Shachar and Shalim (*CTA* 23) may show some erotic characteristics of Athirat. Additionally, in recent years scholars have been returning to the question of identifying the numerous female figurines which have been discovered in Palestine, dating from the Middle and Late Bronze Age. On the basis of the material from Ugarit, many scholars now associate at least some of these figurines with Athirat (cf. especially Tadmor 1981, 1982a, 1982b, and chapter 7). Furthermore, an Egyptian stele published by Edwards bears a depiction of a naked goddess, with an inscription which reads 'Qudshu-Astarte-Anath'. This stele, together with certain Ugaritic texts, has led many scholars to identify Qudshu with Athirat (cf. e.g. Cross 1973; Pettey 1985 and 1990; Maier 1986; Day 1986; and cf. chapter 2.B.1). This identification seems probable, thereby showing that Athirat did have fertility characteristics, although these were not fully exploited in the Ugaritic texts. It is possible that, as the Ugaritic pantheon already had a fertility goddess in Astarte, this aspect of Athirat's character did not need to be stressed. However this need was not fully met in the Palestinian region, and so these characteristics appear more prominent in the Hebrew Asherah. Furthermore, Schroer (1987b) discusses some Late Bronze Age pendants from Ugarit and Minet el-Beida, which depict a stylized 'twig goddess'. She is naked, and has a tree or branch carved beneath the navel or over the pubic area. On several plaques she wears a Hathor hairstyle. Similar plaques have been found in Palestine, and together with the Syrian ones probably represent Athirat/Asherah (although one must be cautious in identifying these depictions with any one goddess; cf. Winter 1983, pp. 192–9, and chapter 7). There is therefore little difficulty in admitting the fertility characteristics of both Athirat and Asherah, especially considering that in the ancient Near East the same attribute is often shared by more than one deity.

The apparent discrepancy between the alleged consorts of the two goddesses need not be worrisome either. In the Ugaritic literature, Athirat is the

consort of the chief god, El. However, some scholars believe that Asherah in the Old Testament is to be paired with Baal. Day says that the Hittite Elkunirša myth shows that Athirat is already leaning towards Baal (1986, p. 399, and chapter 2.B.2 where this myth is discussed more fully). This may be so. However, a sure connection between the deity Asherah (as opposed to the wooden symbol) and Baal in the Hebrew Bible has yet to be proved (see chapter 3). It may be that the deuteronomists tried to discredit Asherah's cult by associating her with Baal, when in actual fact during the period of the monarchy there was no such understanding. It is interesting that the only references which we have to asherah (whether goddess or cult object) in Hebrew from extra-biblical sources occur with Yahweh, and not Baal (see chapters 4 and 5). Although Baal occurs as well in inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Ajrud, he is not mentioned with asherah.

Bernhardt also mentions that Athirat was considered the mother of the gods, and that Asherah was not understood as such. He mentions the listing of the asherah with the host of heaven (II Ki. xvii 16; xxi 3; and xxiii 4), but states that there is no comment in any of these verses about the relationship between the host of heaven and Asherah. He admits that the Old Testament is somewhat ambiguous about the worship of the host of heaven in any case (1967, p. 173). On the basis of his admissions, to conclude that Asherah has no function as a mother goddess may be premature. We simply do not have enough evidence from the Hebrew Bible, about either the goddess Asherah or the host of heaven. The Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom material (as well as Deut. xvi 21) shows that either the goddess Asherah or her symbol is closely connected with the worship of Yahweh. It must be mentioned, however, that Bernhardt wrote before the discovery of this material. Day notes that 'the sons of God (deriving from the Ugaritic *bn 'il*) are clearly the sons of Yahweh in the OT, [and so] it follows that the sons of God were regarded as Asherah's offspring in syncretistic circles. Since the sons of God clearly correspond with the host of heaven (cf. Job 38:7), it appears that we may hold that the host of heaven were probably regarded as the offspring of Asherah' (1986, pp. 399–400). Day thus believes that there is evidence that Asherah was considered to be the mother of the gods in Israel, just as was Athirat at Ugarit. This view would be strengthened if one were to identify the pillar figurines of a woman holding her breasts with the goddess Asherah. These figurines date from the period of the monarchy, and are found at numerous sites throughout Judah, as well as a few sites in Israel (see chapter 7 for a full discussion).

Finally, there is no real difficulty with the gap of 400 years from the time of the Ugaritic texts until the earliest biblical records. The mere fact that the fourteenth-century BCE people at Ugarit sought to keep copies of their older legends seems to indicate that they still had some interest in them. It is far more likely that knowledge of the goddess Athirat/Asherah remained within the local cults, although not mentioned, than that her cult faded completely, and that when the ancient Israelites discovered their fertility goddess, they just

happened to give her the same name as the older Ugaritic goddess (and cf. Pardee 1988, who shows that the distribution of the names of deities in the various genres at Ugarit is not uniform). Furthermore, in his recent study of Amherst papyrus 63, Kottsieper mentions a reference to El and Asherah (1988, p. 58). This Aramaic document was written in demotic script, and its dating is disputed; some scholars place it in the fourth century BCE, whereas others give it a date in the late second century. Either way, if the reading is correct, we now have a reference from the Lebanese region to El and his consort, Asherah, dating from a time much later than the biblical period. It therefore seems likely that knowledge of these two deities as a pair continued within the cult for many centuries. Additionally, some archaeological finds may help to fill in the gap. Discoveries such as some Palestinian Late Bronze Age seals which depict a 'twig goddess', who is naked and has a stylized tree carved beneath the navel or over the pubic area (Schroer 1987b), as well as the plaque figurines found in Palestine (Tadmor 1981, 1982a, 1982b; and cf. chapter 7), may bear silent witness to the worship of Asherah during the period between the Ugaritic texts and the beginning of the Iron Age. Other discoveries from Lachish, Pella, Taanach, Ekron and Jerusalem will be discussed in chapter 6.

Therefore the most natural assumption is that Hebrew Asherah can be identified with Ugaritic Athirat, and that both are closely related to Amorite Ašratum (see chapter 2.B.1). Furthermore, it may be determined that 'asherah' in the Hebrew Bible usually refers to the wooden symbol of this goddess, but may also refer to the goddess herself. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3. What follows first, however, will be a brief overview of previous dissertations and major studies on the subject of asherah.

## **B. A brief survey of previous research**

During recent years, there have been several PhD dissertations which have been devoted to some aspect of the cult of Asherah. Six of these (those of Reed, Maier, Olyan, Pettey, Wiggins and Frevel) have been published as books. Reed and Yamashita wrote before the discovery of the Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom material. Perlman and Engle wrote just as the significance of this material was beginning to be realized, and so they did not have time to assimilate the material fully. Only later works have had a chance to examine closely the implications of the startling inscriptions from 'Ajrud and el-Qom. In addition to these dissertations, there are three more which relate to Asherah, albeit within a much larger work. These are Holland, Winter and Schroer (1987a). Winter's and Schroer's dissertations have also been published as books (OBO 53 and 74 respectively).

These studies will all be discussed within the present work at those places where they are directly relevant to the discussion. What follows here is only a brief overview of their work.

(1) *W. L. Reed*

Reed's book, *The Asherah in the Old Testament*, published in 1949 is basically a reordering of his 1942 dissertation. All references to Reed in this section are to his book. His is the first major treatment of the problem of the interpretation of Asherah in the Old Testament to have been written after the discovery of the Ugaritic texts. It is considered a classic on the topic, and any serious student of the problem would be wise to read his treatment at some time in the course of research.

As his title suggests, Reed focuses on the interpretation of Asherah in the Old Testament. He examines the translation of the various versions, and provides an excellent summary of the previous scholarship on the question. He then studies the verbs which are used in connection with the asherah, and concludes that 'the type of object which best fits the limitations laid down by the verbs used with it is a wooden image of the goddess' (p. 37). He then includes an extensive discussion of the various cultic objects which are mentioned with the asherah (altars, high places, masseboth, *p<sup>e</sup>sîlîm*, incense altars, idols, molten images, and other selected objects), from which he concludes that the asherah was associated with many pagan cult objects, and was never completely assimilated by Yahwism. Furthermore, he believes the wooden symbol of the goddess to be an image of the goddess herself (p. 53). He also examines the occurrences of asherah with other deities, and concludes that Asherah was a goddess who was worshipped as a consort at the shrines of both Yahweh and Baal (p. 58). Reed then attempts to fix the worship of Asherah in a chronological framework. He believes that the asherah was not a Hebrew invention, but was rather adopted from neighbouring peoples, and existed in Palestine from at least the tenth to the beginning of the sixth century BCE (p. 68).

Reed next examines the extra-biblical evidence, discussing both material remains (which prove inconclusive), and literary texts from the surrounding nations. In his final chapter, Reed compares the Old Testament and extra-biblical evidence, and finds that both bear witness to a popular female deity called Asherah. He then suggests various possibilities about her origin, and concludes that Asherah was not only a goddess, but also her wooden symbol. This object was not merely a wooden pole, but was an image of the goddess herself. Finally, he includes, by way of an appendix, some representations which in his opinion have been erroneously identified as asherahs.

As mentioned above, Reed wrote before the discovery of the el-Qom and 'Ajrud inscriptions. However, his book is not as dated as one may expect. It is true that on the basis of recent study into the iconography of Asherah, many scholars now believe that the symbol of the goddess Asherah was some sort of stylized tree (see chapters 6 and 7). Nevertheless, it may be that in certain cases the object was an image of the goddess (see chapter 3). Reed's study of the verbs used and objects occurring with the asherah is exhaustive, and remains a fine source of material. His book, despite its age, is a valuable contribution to the study of asherah in the Old Testament.

(2) *T. Yamashita*

Yamashita's dissertation, 'The Goddess Asherah', was completed in 1963. He attempts to determine the 'characteristic features' of the goddess Asherah within the mythological and religious contexts of the ancient Near East. He concentrates on the inscriptional material and mythological texts, but also examines iconographical representations in cylinder seals and stelae when possible (p. i).

The bulk of Yamashita's work is concerned with the inscriptional sources of the ancient Near Eastern lands other than Palestine. He begins with an examination of the Sumero-Akkadian sources, and discusses them at length (pp. 3–30), concluding that Ašratum was a late-comer to the Babylonian pantheon, who was distinct from Ishtar. Furthermore, she was probably originally an Amorite deity (cf. chapter 2.B). He then turns to the Hittite inscriptions, including the Elkunirša text (cf. Otten 1953a and 1953b, and chapter 2.B). He includes a good summary of the previous interpretations of this myth. Yamashita also discusses the *huwaši* stone, which plays an important part in the Hittite cult. Following Goetze, he notes that the gods are often brought to the temple to dwell in the *huwaši* 'stones', which are sometimes made of wood, or even precious metal such as silver (pp. 41–2). He notes that in Akkadian, *aširtu* has two meanings: (1) a sanctuary; and (2) a gift to a temple. He believes that the meaning has shifted from the first to the second definition, and suggests that the biblical pictures of asherah are like these *huwaši* stones, especially the ones made of wood (pp. 43–4). He therefore concludes that the Hittite material indicates that Asherah is the consort of the chief deity, as well as a kind of cultic furniture. He concludes that 'these two facts do not seem to have any connection with each other, except that deities can dwell in temple furniture. Asherah as goddess and asherah as temple furniture may have developed from two totally different mythological ideas and cults' (pp. 44–5).

Yamashita next turns to other inscriptional sources which may mention Asherah as a goddess, including the Tema inscription (which it is now known refers to Ashima and not Asherah; cf. Cross 1986, p. 393; Healey 1989, p. 170; among others), a Qatabanian inscription (although some scholars read *ʔirt* here as a structure and not a deity), and other South Arabian inscriptions. He also includes an inscription from Arslan Tash, in which Albright adds a *t* to find a reference to Asherah (but which makes perfect sense as the name of the god Aššur; cf. Gaster 1942, p. 58; and see Teixidor and Amiet 1983, who raise serious doubts as to the authenticity of these amulets on the basis of epigraphy (Teixidor) and iconography (Amiet); cf. Vance 1994, pp. 112 and 119 n. 6), and a third-century BCE inscription from Ma'sub, which reads *l'šrt b'šrt ʔl hmn* 'For Ashtart in asherah the deity of Hammon'. Obviously here *ʔrt* cannot refer to the goddess, and may rather mean 'sanctuary', although this interpretation is not well attested in West Semitic (but see Dothan 1985a, who supports the meaning of 'shrine', and cf. Hoffmann 1889, pp. 20–30, who



interprets asherah in this inscription to be a 'signpost' for the presence of the *numen* of the divinity Astarte (p. 26)).

Yamashita also discusses the Ugaritic material, examining Asherah's role in the Ugaritic texts as the consort of El, her epithets and attributes, and her possible identification with Qudshu. His comments on this section are discussed more fully in chapter 2.B.1.

In his final chapter, Yamashita briefly discusses the Old Testament sources. He raises the question whether the Asherah in the Old Testament is the same as Athirat in the Ugaritic texts. He tends to think not, because of the following. (1) There is no parallel of Asherah with El in the Old Testament. (2) Asherah, as a deity, is paired with Baal in Judg. iii 7, I Ki. xviii 17ff, and II Ki. xxiii 4. (3) Only these three passages out of forty definitely refer to a deity. (4) There are passages where not Baal but the altar of Baal is coupled with Asherah, and therefore the asherah must be an object that may or may not represent a deity. (5) In some instances Asherah seems to have been coupled with Yahweh. (6) In *CTA* 14.iv.197–8 it states that Asherah is the goddess of the Tyrians and the Sidonians, but in I Ki. xi 5, 33 and II Ki. xxiii 13 it appears that Ashtoreth is the goddess of the Sidonians. And lastly, (7) Ashtoreth seems to be clearly distinguished from Asherah in the Old Testament, and has nothing to do with a sacred object, but is often paired with Baal. Yamashita thus concludes that the Old Testament writers understand asherah as more of a cultic object than a goddess (pp. 126–9). He concludes with three Old Testament passages which may have originally mentioned Asherah, but are now obscured (Hos. xiv 9 (Eng. 8); Gen. xxx 13; and Amos viii 14; for a discussion of these passages see chapter 3).

Most of these objections (nos. 1, 2, 3 and 5) have already been answered above in the discussion on Bernhardt, and will not be repeated. However, a few more points are in order. The fact that asherah seems to be a cultic object in more cases than a goddess has no bearing on the fact that the object may represent the goddess. Indeed, the Old Testament texts may retain some evidence of an evolution of thought about the asherah, from a goddess and her image to merely a cultic emblem. Yamashita himself suspects that this may be the case (p. 137), but has not considered the possibility in detail (cf. chapter 3). His explanation for the apparent confusion between Asherah and Ashtoreth is that Asherah as a goddess is being forgotten by the Israelites. This may be true, but his conclusion then that the Hebrew Asherah has no connection with the Ugaritic Athirat does not necessarily follow, for the reasons given above. Furthermore, the fact that Ashtoreth does not appear as a cultic symbol does not make any difference to our interpretation of asherah. However, the term 'ashtoreth' is sometimes used as a description of the fertility of the flock (Deut. vii 13; xxviii 4, 18, 51). Is it possible that this deity as well was losing her identification as a goddess and becoming merely a designation of fertility? The question is an enticing one, and has been taken up elsewhere (cf. Hadley 1996 and the references there).

Yamashita's work on the extra-biblical material is well done. Although he wrote before the el-Qom and 'Ajrud material, he has brought together much valuable information, and has cleared the way for subsequent scholars. His examination of the biblical material is relatively brief (15 pages, but after all Reed's study preceded his), and yet he asks some pertinent questions and provides some valuable insights. For anyone who wishes to write upon the extra-biblical inscriptional material on Asherah, his dissertation can provide much valuable groundwork.

(3) *T. A. Holland*

Holland's thesis, 'A Typological and Archaeological Study of Human and Animal Representations in the Plastic Art of Palestine During the Iron Age', was finished in 1975. One chapter from it, on the finds from Jerusalem's Cave 1, was published in *Levant* in 1977. The thesis is in two volumes: text, and catalogue and illustrations. He includes as many terracotta figurines, both human and animal, found in Palestine and dating from the Iron Age, as he could find, in excavation reports, museums and private collections, or by word of mouth. For those which are unpublished, he provides a drawing as well as a photograph, if possible. The catalogue includes some 2711 objects.

After providing maps of all the sites in Israel, Judah and Trans-Jordan which appear in his study, Holland delineates his typological scheme. The basic categories are: A. Human Pillar Figurines with Solid, Hand-Modelled Bodies; B. Human Pillar Figurines with Hollow Bodies; C. Female Plaque Figurines; D. Solid Hand-Modelled Horses and Riders; E. Solid Hand-Modelled Birds; F. Solid Hand-Modelled Bovinae; G. Solid Hand-Modelled Miscellaneous Animals; H. Hollow Hand-Modelled Animal Figurines Not Spouted; I. Hollow Wheel-Made Figurines Not Spouted; J. Zoomorphic Spouted Vessels; K. Vessels with Human Motifs; L. Vessels with Animal Motifs; M. Vessels or Objects with Human and Animal Motifs; N. Moulds; O. Moulded Animals; and P. Miscellaneous. Within each of these categories are many subdivisions, depending on the specific characteristics of each piece. Having established his general typological categories, Holland turns to a discussion of every site known to have yielded any figurines. He lists the eighty-eight different sites in alphabetical order, followed by those figurines of unknown provenance. For each site he briefly discusses each figurine by catalogue number in its archaeological context, along with a likely dating for the objects, where possible. Following this analysis, he examines each type in turn, grouping together all the figurines from each type, whatever the provenance, and describes them as a group. He then attempts to draw some brief, general statistical conclusions from this analysis. Then follows his discussion on the finds from Jerusalem's Cave 1, excavated by Dame Kathleen Kenyon, and which include a deposit of numerous human and animal figurines. This chapter was the one published in *Levant*.

The second volume contains a catalogue of each object by type, and including the site where it was discovered, publication in which it can be found, if applicable, or else Holland's own figure or plate number. Then he gives a catalogue of his figures and plates of the unpublished figurines, followed by the pictures themselves.

The sheer quantity of material collected in these two volumes is enormous. His study is not for the casual reader; his section on general statistical conclusions is only seven pages long. But for anyone who wishes to examine any Palestinian plastic art of the Iron Age, this work is invaluable. Holland has tirelessly catalogued each piece with its type and place of origin. Some scholars may disagree with his categories, and at times it is difficult to sift through the vast quantity of material, but nevertheless, the information is all there if one has the patience to look for it. The value of his study to chapter 7 below is obvious. Holland's greatest contribution does not lie in his analysis of the material, although he has many worthwhile observations, but rather comes from his painstaking collection of these 2711 objects into one place (unfortunately, one is required to go to Oxford in order to examine it).

(4) *A. L. Perlman*

Perlman's dissertation, 'Asherah and Astarte in the Old Testament and Ugaritic Literatures', was completed in 1978. Her first chapter deals with Asherah in the Old Testament. She makes a distinction between the root *ʔsr* found in most Semitic lexica meaning either 'place' in general or else 'holy place', and the goddess *ʔsrh* or *ʔtrt*. She states that 'at least superficially' [*sic*], the two terms are derived from the same root, but whether the goddess is the deity or deification of the holy place, or whether the two terms are homonyms is unknown (p. 7). She believes that with only two exceptions (Deut. xvi 21 and II Ki. xvii 16), the singular form *ʔsrh* 'refers to man-made objects established by apostate kings or to the goddess Asherah of the Ahab-Jezebel pericopes . . . At this point there is no conclusive evidence to associate the goddess Asherah with all occurrences of either *ʔsrh* or *ʔsrym*' (p. 11).

On the other hand, Perlman believes that the plural *ʔsrym* is more general in its application, which in the legal codes of Exodus and Deuteronomy refers to the objects or perhaps structures belonging to foreigners who do not worship the god of Israel (p. 8). She therefore examines the biblical material in detail, and isolates a 'formulaic expression' used by the deuteronomist in his description of the religious reforms of the Judaeen kings. She says that 'the formula describes the action taken against foreign cult objects, specifically the *mzbbh*, *mšbwt* and *ʔsrym*' (p. 11). She believes that the expression is stable but the composition can alter somewhat (!), and that the action verbs used to destroy the objects are also stable, and are always associated with one item and not another (p. 12). For example, *šbr* is always used with *mšbh* and not *mzbbh*, whereas *krt* and *gd'* are used with *ʔsrh* and not *mzbbh* or *mšbh* (p. 12). Perlman

believes that her formula is found in Ex. xxxiv 13; Deut. vii 5; xii 3; Judg. vi 25ff; II Ki. xviii 4ff; xxiii 12; II Chron. xiii 1 [*sic?*]; xiv 3; xv 16ff; and xxxiv 4ff. In her opinion, Ex. xxxiv 13 ‘represents the earliest and purest form of the expression. The formula was subsequently expanded in Dt and Dtr to include an enlarged list of cult objects not found in J or E strands’ (p. 12). Ex. xxxiv 13 reads: *kī ʿet-mizbēhōtām tittōšūn wē ʿet-maššēbōtām tēšabbērūn wē ʿet-ʾāšērāw tikrōtūn*.

Perlman observes that, outside this ‘formulaic expression’, the use of asherah is limited to two areas. (1) It is used (usually in the singular) to describe the setting up of asherim, which she takes to be the converse of the destruction formula. In I Ki. xvi 33; II Ki. xvii 9ff; xxi 3ff; II Chron. xxxiii 19; and xxxiv 3, it is used as proof of a particular king’s apostasy, and in Isa. xvii 8; Jer. xvii 2; and II Chron. xxiv 18, it is used of the people’s apostasy. (2) ‘It is otherwise considered by itself as an object of disgust. In all other cases ʾšrhlym is found in contexts directly related to the formula’ (pp. 12–13).

Having established her formula, Perlman then examines Exodus xxxiv and Deuteronomy vii and xii in detail, in an effort to justify her belief that Ex. xxxiv 13 is the original, and the others are derived from it. She believes that the expression changes through time, with new objects added to the list and others removed (pp. 13–21). She then discusses the vocabulary of the formula, and attempts to identify the cultic terminology of J, E, D and P. She notes that the formula is absent from P, and is scarce in the early strands of J and E, but occurs with monotonous repetition in dtr (pp. 21–30). In her discussion of historical perspectives, Perlman notes that the Chronicler uses the expression ‘asherim’ liberally. ‘Why the Dtr and especially the Chronicler took such a fancy to the expression is a question that cannot be answered. The destruction of the foreign cult became the symbol for purity and its expression in the formulaic phrases was applied generously in I and II Kings and II Chronicles’ (p. 32). She further notes that some of the pericopes containing asherah in the singular belong to the destruction formula (Judg. vi 25–30; II Ki. xviii 4; part of II Ki. xxiii 4–7; and especially vv. 14ff). In these passages Perlman believes the asherah to be a sanctuary. She finds support for this theory in Judg. vi 25, which states that the asherah stood ‘over’ the altar, and that the altar was destroyed before the asherah (pp. 32–3). (However, the Hebrew word used here is *al*, and can mean not only ‘over’, but also ‘on’ or ‘beside’. See also the argument against the translation of sanctuary above, in section 1.A.1.) Perlman believes that the mention of Asherah in the Maacah and Manasseh accounts, however, refers to the goddess. She further wishes to distinguish between the Asherah image mentioned in the account of the cleansing of the temple in II Ki. xxiii 4–7 and the asherim mentioned later in v. 14, which occurs in the formulaic expression. She notes, ‘the ʾšrh mentioned so frequently in the Dtr texts really refers to a few known objects set up by a few kings. Alongside the actual removal of said objects by the zealous kings of Judah we hear of all the other ʾšrym throughout the countryside that were hacked down, burned or

pulverized. The purges were cultic and aimed at cleaning up cult practices' (p. 31). Since these asherim of the formula 'are listed with other cult objects and installations and were to be found not in buildings but in the countryside, in the valleys and on hills, there is no reason, in view of comparative Semitic lexicography, not to assume these to have been a type of sanctuary' (p. 34). Therefore, since in other Semitic languages one finds both a goddess Asherah and a place or sanctuary called *ʾšrh/t*, Perlman concludes that the same is true for Hebrew, and that these two items should remain lexically distinct.

There is no reason to consider Asherah the goddess and asherah the cultic object as two terms which are lexically separate. Basically, Perlman's view is that when a single asherah is set up, its destruction is later explained as that of a single object. However, when the plural is used, the objects intended are not several single objects, but rather something totally different; which in her opinion are sanctuaries. This conclusion does not necessarily follow from the given text. There is no clear evidence that, when the Chronicler uses the plural form of asherah, the Chronicler is using a term which has any lexical difference in meaning from the parallel verses in Kings. It may be that the Chronicler no longer understands exactly what (or whom) the asherah represented, but that does not mean that the Chronicler used the plural *ʾšrym* to denote a sanctuary, whereas the Kings account used the singular to refer to a specific cultic object. In general, the reforms relate the purging of several cultic sites, and so several (single) asherahs are involved. One does not need to separate the two terms to gain an understanding of the text (and see chapter 3.D). Furthermore, as mentioned above, in Mesopotamia and Egypt one finds depictions of a vegetation goddess and her symbol, and so it is possible that the word asherah refers to both the goddess and her symbol (cf. chapter 5.D). Additionally, as the term *ʾšrh* as a sanctuary is nowhere else attested in Hebrew, it is more likely that it referred to some type of wooden object, in the light of what is done to it (see chapter 3.A). Perlman says that the asherim (sanctuaries) may have either been located in groves or symbolically represented groves by means of wooden poles (p. 34), but that is pressing the issue too far. If that were the case, why not simply allow the asherim to be wooden objects placed in the sanctuary?

In her second chapter, Perlman discusses Athirat at Ugarit. After a brief introduction, she presents and translates the Ugaritic texts in which Athirat plays a major role, and supplies notes for her translations. She then discusses some of Athirat's attributes and epithets. Her treatment of this chapter will be discussed where applicable in chapter 2.

Perlman deals with Astarte in the Bible in her chapter 3, and at Ugarit in chapter 4. There then follows an excursus on 'Astarte in Egypt'. As these chapters do not relate specifically to this study, they will not be discussed here.

On the whole, Perlman's examination of the biblical and Ugaritic texts mentioning asherah is thorough and well researched, although in my opinion some of her conclusions are incorrect. Her attempt at isolating the cultic vocabulary

relating to asherah in the various strata is the most thorough to date. Therefore, a careful examination of her hard work and research can be most helpful.

(5) *J. R. Engle*

Engle's dissertation on 'Pillar Figurines of Iron Age Israel and Asherah/Asherim' was finished in 1979. In this work, Engle describes and catalogues the pillar figurines found in Palestine dating to the Iron Age. He begins with a discussion of the prior work done on the topic, which of necessity includes Holland's thesis. Engle chooses the 'most characteristic' figurines from Holland's larger corpus. This bias of Engle's will be discussed more fully in chapter 7.B, but right from the beginning this makes one suspicious of Engle's conclusions. One gets a clear impression that he is arranging the evidence to get the desired result. Engle uses different criteria for his study of these figurines (the shape of the eyes, as opposed to Holland's technique of using the number of rows of curls). Engle believes that since the eyes are closer to the middle of the head, they are less likely to be distorted by the moulding process (p. 10). Nevertheless, he is forced to name one of his groups 'curls predominating' (p. 12). Within this process, he eliminates a whole group of 146 pillar figurines, because they have a 'pinched face', and so he considers them to be 'too featureless'. Engle is thus left with a total of 159 figurines.

After this classification, Engle examines the geographical distribution of the figurines, and discovers that most of the figurines are from Judah. However, one type, his 'related but foreign', occurs mostly in the north or east (only seven of forty are found in Judah). He also notes that some figurines were carried out of Judah (but never states how he knows that this has happened), and he does not include the headless examples, as they cannot be classified according to his system. There are therefore numerous headless figurines from both Israel and Judah which have not been considered. From his examination of this selection of the evidence, Engle concludes that the pillar form of figurine was peculiar to Judah (p. 17).

He next considers the dating of these figurines, and determines that this type of figurine begins to appear in the early ninth century BCE, and becomes popular during the eighth century and on into the early seventh, before gradually disappearing by about the early sixth century BCE (p. 21).

Engle then attempts to interpret these figurines. He mentions that Patai (1967, p. 35) believes that they are small clay counterparts of the larger wooden asherah poles dedicated to the goddess. This is a possible interpretation (see chapter 7.B), but Engle goes further than this. He believes that he is able to prove the religious significance of the figurines by an examination of their provenance. He also compares these figurines with third-century Greek protomes (partially hollow terracotta busts, suspended in shrines), and then

retrojects this religious significance of the Greek pieces to incorporate the Palestinian ones (p. 32).

Whereas it is possible that these pillar figurines were of religious significance, and may have been housed in small shrines, it is dangerous to base this identification on much later Greek parallels. And yet Engle carries this a step further. After a brief review of previous research on the subject, he turns to a discussion of the Hebrew text. He believes that ‘the figurine evidence pointing to the veneration of a female deity within Judah during the Divided Monarchy certainly adds credence, if not proof, to the long held notion that Asherah was a deity during, at least part of, the OT period’ (p. 52). He then begins an examination of the Old Testament references to asherah, ‘this time with the assumption that those passages which imply the worship of a deity Asherah or statue are perhaps more authentic, or reflect a greater antiquity, than passages which do not suggest a close relationship between the deity and her likeness’ (p. 53). Engle’s whole approach seems questionable. Time after time he appears to distort the evidence in order to support his own conclusions.

In the course of his study of the biblical texts, Engle notes that most of the references to asherah in the Books of Kings are singular. He believes that one should see these as ‘authentic references to specific images, probably large monumental statues, of the goddess Asherah’ (p. 62). The plural, however, occurs in sermons. Furthermore, the Chronicler uses the plural almost exclusively. From this he concludes that the Chronicler has a different view of the asherim entirely, as:

apparently images far more numerous and probably smaller than the monumental ones that the royal court dealt with. The Chronicler may have been reading his contemporary presuppositions into the older references of several centuries earlier; but he could just as well be reflecting an alternate and also ancient idea of asherim which shows up in the prophetic, sermonizing, etc. material which surrounds the wooden outline of Kings. The pillar figurines not only bolster the idea of the use of statues of Asherah during the days of the kings of the Divided Monarchy, but they also suggest a type of popular, inexpensive figurine, which could themselves have been called asherim. (p. 71)

Engle’s remarks will be discussed fully in chapter 7.B. However, I shall make a few brief comments here. There is absolutely no basis for the belief that the Chronicler had in mind these pillar figurines when writing about the asherim. By Engle’s own admission, the use of pillar figurines gradually died out during the sixth century BCE. As the Chronicler probably did not write until the mid-fourth century (Williamson 1982, p. 16), the figurines would not have been used for some 200 years, and so it is highly unlikely that the Chronicler would have any ‘contemporary presuppositions’ about them. Furthermore, we have no indication that the Chronicler possessed an ‘alternate and ancient idea’ of asherim, which has not been noted in any other ancient texts. Finally, the verbs which the Chronicler uses to describe the elimination of the asherim (cf. chapters 3.A and 7.B) are consistent with the destruction of wooden objects, but not with small pottery figurines.

Engle next examines briefly some extra-biblical inscriptions which may mention asherah, including el-Qom and 'Ajrud (two pages on each). These inscriptions will be discussed fully in chapters 4 and 5. The other inscriptions which he includes are those from Arslan Tash, Tema (*KAI* 228), Pyrgi (*KAI* 277), Carthage and Ma'sub (*KAI* 19). These latter inscriptions will be mentioned briefly in passing (and cf. section 1.B.2 above), when they are relevant to the discussion.

On the basis of his study of the inscriptions, Engle concludes that there is a goddess Asherah, who is periodically paired with Yahweh (cf. el-Qom and 'Ajrud). As she is called 'his asherah' in these inscriptions, Engle believes that the goddess is placed in a subordinate position to Yahweh, and this may help to explain how her worship was able to infiltrate Yahwism. 'Asherah could be accepted then, not as Asherah versus Yahweh, perhaps not even as Asherah and Yahweh, but merely as Yahweh plus also his Asherah. In this case the asherim, pillar figurines, would be tolerated, not so much as a hostile influence rivalling Yahweh, but camouflaged as aids to the worship of Yahweh through his goddess Asherah' (p. 102). As seen above, it is highly unlikely that the pillar figurines are to be identified with the biblical asherim. However, even if this were the case, it would not be plausible to view them as aids to the worship of Yahweh. It is far more reasonable to assume that, in the period of the monarchy, the worship of Asherah was a fully accepted practice. The pillar figurines may have had a place in her cult, but it is certain that these objects were not what the Chronicler referred to as 'asherim' (cf. chapter 7.B).

Engle completes his dissertation with chapters on 'The Character of Asherah in Ugarit and Mesopotamia' and 'Theological Considerations'. His conclusions in these chapters are more traditional, and are not relevant to this study.

Engle gives one the impression of deciding what his conclusions are to be, and then selecting the evidence to agree with this preconceived notion. This is a pity, for he makes some interesting observations. However, the way in which he defends his statements undermines any confidence in his conclusions.

#### (6) U. Winter

Winter's book, *Frau und Göttin: Exegetische und ikonographische Studien zum weiblichen Gottesbild im Alten Israel und in dessen Umwelt* (OBO 53, 1983), is a publication of his doctoral dissertation which was finished in the same year (all references to Winter in this section are to Winter 1983). It is a massive work of 928 pages, including 520 drawings. Chapter I introduces the problem, and begins with questions which have been raised by modern feminists about the Old Testament attitudes towards women, followed by an examination of the place of women in ancient Israel. He also includes an excursus into the social position of women, and compares the figure of the goddess in the ancient Near East with Yahwism. Chapter II discusses depictions of naked



goddesses from throughout the ancient Near East, and concludes that the representation originated in Syria. Furthermore, Winter believes that the figure does not depict any particular goddess (pp. 192–9). Chapter III researches woman and goddess in ancient oriental iconography. Winter examines the warlike goddess; the protective goddess; the cycle of the sacred wedding; the Syrian ‘great goddess’; and the distant goddess.

Chapter IV turns to woman and goddess in Ancient Israel. It is in this chapter that we find the most relevant material to this study. Winter first examines the integration of the goddess, and raises the question, ‘Did Yahweh ever have a consort?’ In this section he discusses the duality in the ark; Yahweh and his asherah; El in female company; and the ‘composite deities’ from Elephantine. Under Yahweh and his asherah, Winter takes a cursory look at the inscriptions from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom (see chapters 4 and 5). He concludes that the inscriptional material gives no certain evidence that Yahweh ever had a consort (p. 491). Winter concludes this section of the chapter with discussions on wisdom and the goddess; and aspects of the goddess as feminine characteristics of Yahweh. His next section deals with the elimination of the goddess and the demonization of her worshippers. Winter notes that the gods of the surrounding nations do not appear to have consorts, especially Moabite Chemosh and Ammonite Milcom (p. 539). He examines the goddess in Baal’s entourage, treating Anat; Astarte; Asherah and the asherahs in the Old Testament; and the Queen of Heaven. In the subsection on Asherah and the asherahs in the Old Testament, Winter discusses the etymology of asherah (cf. chapter 2.B.2), and the nature of the cult object (cf. chapter 3.A). He concludes that the word asherah in most cases refers to an artificial wooden cultic object (p. 557). Winter admits that there is not much evidence for a goddess Asherah in the Old Testament, but that a comparison of verses such as II Ki. xxi 3 with xxi 7, and xxiii 4 with xxiii 6, indicates that the goddess cannot be distinguished from her image, and that the goddess and the cult image originally belonged together (pp. 558–9; cf. chapter 3). His next subsection he playfully entitles ‘Alles ist “Hurerei”, “Ehebruch” und “Zauberei”’, and here he discusses the role of Jezebel and such foreign worship as fornication and adultery. Sections on the return of the outcast goddess (in the view that Israel or Judah was the bride of Yahweh) and the desacralization of the erotic in the Song of Songs, followed by his conclusions, complete the chapter. He attempts to discover the attractions of the goddess for women in the ancient Near East, and concludes that Yahweh had many feminine aspects in order to compensate for his lack of a consort. Winter then expresses his opinions on this concerning the feminist movement. He includes a lengthy bibliography, followed by the pictures.

Winter’s work is well done, and provides an excellent overview to the consideration of women in ancient Near Eastern society. His collection of various representations of women and goddesses has been painstaking, and is most useful. He has laid the groundwork for many scholarly discussions to come (for additional comments and criticisms, cf. Frevel 1989, pp. 74–8).

(7) *S. M. Olyan*

Olyan's dissertation, entitled 'Problems in the History of the Cult and Priesthood in Ancient Israel', was finished in 1985. It consists of three chapters which discuss different aspects of the Israelite cult. The first chapter, 'Your Kinsman Lives, Beersheba', is concerned with Amos viii 14 and the pilgrimage traditions of Beersheba and Dan. Chapter 2, 'Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel', considers the role of Asherah and her cult symbol in Yahwistic religion of the first millennium. The final chapter is on 'Ben Sira's Relationship to the Priesthood'.

A revision of the second chapter of Olyan's dissertation has been published as a monograph (Olyan 1988). All references to Olyan in this section pertain to this 1988 monograph, unless otherwise noted. In the first chapter, he examines asherah in the Hebrew Bible. He notes that one group of conservative Yahwists (the deuteronomists) oppose the asherah, while other conservative circles do not appear to do so (e.g. the Elijah/Elisha school; pp. 3ff). He suggests that the asherah was not borrowed by the Israelites from the Canaanites, and was not originally foreign to the cult of Yahweh, observing that the sacred tree and masebah were legitimate in the Yahweh cult early on, as indicated by the patriarchal narratives (pp. 5-6). This assumption may not necessarily follow from the evidence. Not all sacred trees are asherahs. Furthermore, in the Patriarchal narratives the sacred trees are not called asherahs, although the goddess and her symbol were apparently known in Canaan at that time (cf. chapters 2.B.1 and 6.A.1; and Schroer 1987b). On the basis of his examination of the biblical material, Olyan argues that 'the asherah was a legitimate part of the cult of Yahweh both in the north and in the south, in state religion and in popular religion, finding opposition in deuteronomistic circles . . . [He suggests] that the association of Asherah and her symbol with Baal is the result of a deuteronomistic polemic against the asherah in Yahweh's cult. What better way to give the cult symbol the stamp of Yahwistic illegitimacy than to associate it with Baal and his cult?' (pp. 13-14). His survey of the four occurrences of asherah in the prophetic literature brings him to the conclusion that the texts either are of deuteronomistic provenance (Jer. xvii 2 and Isa. xvii 8), or else are influenced by deuteronomistic language and theology (Isa. xxvii 9 and Mi. v 13 (Eng. 14)). He also observes that 'no prophet (whose traditions are extant) opposed the asherah, except for those subject to deuteronomistic influence. It is equally worth noting that . . . [in these four passages], nowhere is Baal mentioned. The cults under criticism are all Yahwistic, probably those of the outlying sanctuaries' (p. 17). It is odd that the asherah is not widely condemned in the prophetic literature, especially if her worship was so closely connected to that of Baal. This question will be discussed more fully in chapter 3.G.

In his second chapter, 'Epigraphic sources pertaining to the cult of Asherah', Olyan briefly considers the Khirbet el-Qom and Kuntillet 'Ajrud material. He devotes three pages to the el-Qom inscription, and basically