



Tell Dan - Israel (Mehling)

Yahweh and the Asherah: On Every High Hill and under Every Green Tree

Matriarchal Origins of the Patriarchs

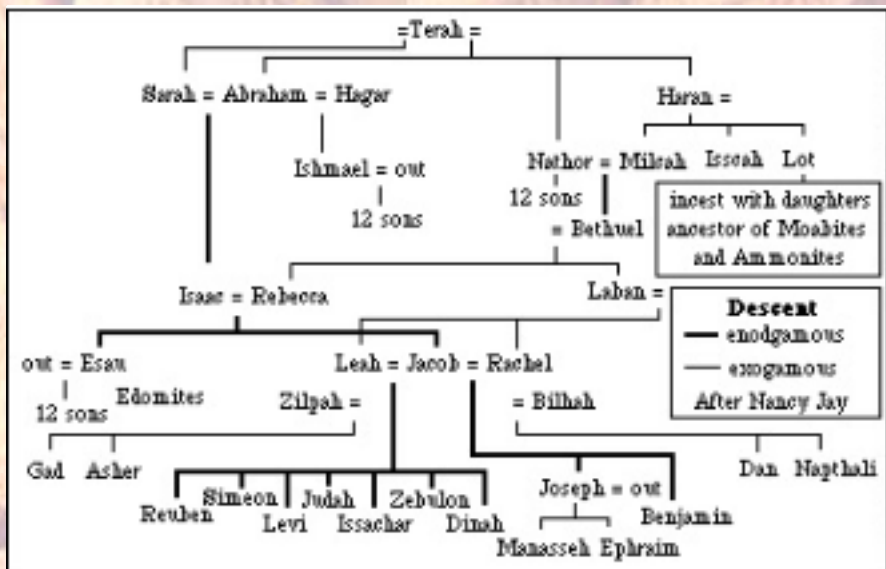
Despite the characterization of the Jews as archetypally patriarchal, the era of the patriarchs is noted for its strong independent women. The prominence and independence of Sarah the queen as well as Rebecca and Rachel and Leah is notable. Briffault (v1 372) comments: “the Jewish rabbis themselves, at a comparatively late date acknowledged that the four matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah had occupied a more important position than the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. According to Robertson Smith (1888) the tribe of Levi was originally metro-nymous (matrilineal), being the tribe of Leah.”

Sarah “queen” or “princess in Hebrew (Starbird 61) is portrayed as the concubine of both a pharaoh and a Philistine king, doubling as the sister and secret spouse of Abraham (Gen 12:13), as is Rebecca with Isaac (Gen 26:6). Cynical comment has often been made on the morality of Abraham’s deceit but ‘my sister, my spouse’ was also common to the ‘philadelphia’ of Egyptian pharaohs. Rachel and Leah stand as the founding matriarchs of the two tribes of Joseph and Judah which represented the exilic and wilderness Semites and their differing histories and became the dominant tribes Joseph of the North (Israel) and the South (Judah) (Spong 1994 165). The suggestion has also been made that the Yahwistic author J might have been female (Rosenberg and Bloom).

Jacob was Rebecca's boy and dwelt in tents, a symbol of the female, just as the

bridegroom moves to the tent of the bride on marriage. "And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Gen 25:27). Jacob is blessed over Esau by Rebecca's design (Gen 27:6) and journeys to Harran to seek a wife at Rebecca's insistence to avoid the daughters of Heth (Gen 27:46). One could thus say that the entire foundation of the twelve tribes stands under Rebecca's skirts. The theft by Rachel of Laban's Teraphim and her crafty hiding of them under her menstrual skirt illustrates the continuing significance of the matriarchy. Jacob "the artful dodger" accepts that she does not have to honour his pledge that "whoever is found" to have them must return them because she is not actually "found" with them (Fox R 405).

"The Jewish Patriarchs Isaac and Jacob, according to tradition, married into a family of strong women - the family of Rivkah, Rahel, and Leah. It was ... the family of Lavan - a name for the pale-white moon, as in *kiddush levana*, the ceremony of hallowing the moon (p 646). These women had strong associations with a well - and of Rivkah there is a traditional midrash that when she met Abraham's servant Eliezer at the well, the water rose to meet her.' When would water do this? When it is attracted by the moon. Is it possible that the household teraphim that Rahel took from Lavan's household when she left with Jacob were sacred moon-symbols, and it was no mere accident or trick that led her to conceal them from Lavan by explaining she was in the time of her menstrual flow? (Genesis 31:19, 31:30-35) Was it necessary for those women to become the mothers of Israel precisely because they carried a strong 'feminist,' moon-centered religious tradition, but were not moon worshippers?" (Waskow 263) This tradition continued with Moses (p 477).



The Genealogy of the Twelve Tribes

Although the three generations from Abraham to Joseph appear to have covered

700 years of history, making the genealogy of the 12 tribes mythological rather than historical, the peculiar tradition of frequent endogamous marriages which preserve both maternal and paternal lines is consistent with a slow transition from matriarchy (Jay 94). Rachel and Leah form an exception to the rule of patrilineality Gen 31:14 "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us?" The seven years Jacob spent with Laban for each wife indicates the line of Laban was matrilineal in a way which gave power to the brothers of the mother. Moving to the family of the wife is consistent with the injunction in Genesis to "leave your father and mother and cleave unto your wife" and with Jewish marriage practice to go into the wife's tent.

Nancy Jay (1992) in "Throughout your Generations Forever" captures a very penetrating analysis of the deep relationship of descent and sacrifice as part of a complex transition between matriarchal and patriarchal lines of descent, in which sacrifice or forgone sacrifice and the paternal blessing were all part of a way of recognizing the more ephemeral male line of descent through the father to the blessed son. The theme of the 'barren' woman in Sarah and Rachel is likewise significant:

"Israelite tradition did not deny descent from women and consequently faced the dilemma: How is a pure and eternal patriline to be maintained if descent from women is not denied? Endogamy appears to be a solution; marriage to a woman of the same patrilineage ensures the offsprings' patrilineage membership even if it is figured through the mother. Close agnatic endogamy (marriage within the patriline) is extremely rare except in Semitic traditions. In a way reminiscent of the Patriarchs, throughout the Arab world families have preferred men to marry their father's brother's daughters. The descent line of the Patriarchs continued only through endogamy: Isaac and Jacob (but not Ishmael) married endogamously. Joseph married exogamously but his sons were adopted by Jacob, correcting this, and other, irregularities of their descent". Note again the wandering sons (p 462).

"Biblical scholars, who are burdened with the requirement that the Patriarchs be respectable, have long wrestled with these embarrassing wife/sister accounts, which appear to portray the Patriarchs as either liars or incestuous. All three accounts tell of a Patriarch in a foreign land who, fearing that he would be killed by those coveting his beautiful wife, claimed she was his sister. The king of the country took her into his harem, was beset with catastrophes, recognized his error and restored her. E's account states that Sarah was an actual half sister of Abraham, having the same father but a different mother. Such a marriage would be impossible in any regular patrilineal descent system. Unless we reject E's account (thereby making the Patriarchs liars) we must see here a recognition of descent from women so pronounced as to be almost matrilineal, for if Abraham and Sarah had the same father but different mothers, it is only as their mothers' offspring that their marriage was not incestuous ... In Hurrian society the bonds of marriage were strongest and most solemn when the wife had simultaneously the juridical status of a sister, regardless of actual blood ties.... The practice was apparently a reflection of the underlying fraternal system, and it gave the adoptive brother greater authority than was granted the husband ... The patriarchal narratives tell the story of the resolution of this descent conflict, a resolution in which sacrifice plays a crucial role".

This transitional tradition is further elaborated in the story of Tamar. In Genesis 38 Judah's daughter-in-law Tamar is left to confront widowhood because none of her surviving brothers-in-law will perpetuate their brother's line (Fox 407). Judah had

children by the Canaanite Shuah, but his firstborn Er was wicked and slain. When asked to fertilize Tamar, Onan then spilled his seed on the ground to avoid 'giving it to his brother'. Judah then says Tamar can have his son Shelah, but fails to come to the party. Tamar discards her widows garments, covers her face with a veil and sits in a public place. "When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a harlot because she had covered her face." She then keeps his signet, bracelets and staff as security for his payment of a sheep. She conceives by Judah. He condemns her to be burned to death for being pregnant by harlotry, but when she reveals Judah's possessions he realizes "that the child is his and that she has gained a well-merited heir by trickery". He acknowledges "She is more righteous than I".

Carol Meyers (1988) in "Discovering Eve", following Rodgers notes that, despite the patriarchal and male-oriented nature of Yahwistic religion and ancient Israelite society in public matters, the counterpoint between public life and home life, which valued the home with its emphasis on the procreative role, even that role emphasized by the hardship imposed on woman from the Fall, gives rise to a centre of female power in the home and in intimate domestic matters. She then points to the Proverbs (p 210) and the Song of Songs (p 193) as depictions of the power of woman in this sphere, a sphere relatively concealed from the public utterances in much of biblical scripture.

However we can see in diverse patriarchal societies today just how much public repression of women can isolate and sequester them. Nehama Aschkenasy (1986) in "Eve's Journey" has a much bleaker picture of the situation facing women stemming right from the 'bitter waters' of Exodus (p 476): "And the spirit of jealousy came upon him and he be jealous of his wife, and she be defiled; ... or not. Then shall he bring his wife to the priest. ... And he shall cause the woman to drink the bitter water that causes the curse, and the water that causes the curse shall enter into her, and become bitter ... Then it shall come to pass, that, if she be defiled, and have done trespass against her husband, that the water that causes the curse shall enter into her and become bitter, and her belly shall swell, and her thigh shall fall away, and the woman shall be a curse among her people". (Num. 5:11-28).

"From that time she, the moon as a female figure has had no light of her own, but derives her light from the sun. At first they were on an equality, but afterwards she diminished herself; for a woman enjoys no honor save in conjunction with her husband". (Zohar 1, 20a)

She points out that this gives men the right to demand the curse of bitter waters on their wives whether or not they have erred, commenting: "a husband who suspects his wife of infidelity, but has no proof of it, may require her to submit to a humiliating ordeal. If she is found to be innocent, the husband will have to pay no penalty for his false accusation; the emotional scar that this incident might leave on the woman is not considered. Similarly, rape [for example the rape of Dinah] is not seen in terms of the emotional damage it may cause to a woman, especially the young girl, and the perpetrator is not regarded as a vicious criminal. He must simply marry the girl, and make the appropriate marriage gift to her father. In matters of the heart, too, only the male's point of view is considered. Isaac loved Rebecca, Jacob was fiercely in love with Rachel, and Elkanah loved his barren wife Hannah. But we are not told of the women's response, although a great part of the narratives about these men shows the women in various states of mental agony."

"Patriarchal structure provided the woman with protection and shelter. She was declared the sexual mate of one man only, not to be touched by the other males. At

the same time, the woman became the chattel of that male, part of his worldly possessions, and she lost her freedom to choose and decide for herself. Two types of feminine oppression come to the fore. ... As a minor and a dependent within the law, the woman found herself, in ancient times, within a legal system that was male-centered and designed to protect men's rights and interests. The woman also existed in a certain social and cultural ambience, not defined by the law, in which her femininity-her ability to arouse desire in man, and her reproductive powers-was regarded with a mixture of awe and jealousy. This resulted in a situation where the woman's sexuality was both guarded and exploited, and where she was often seen as a being tyrannized by her own anatomy, who had to pay the price not only for her own excesses but for those she may have aroused in the male”.

Paternity certainty and the transition to the Patriarchy

Paternity certainty is the probability that you are your children's father. At the critical figure of $1/3$ the following two calculations are equal:

- You are therefore related to your own children by $(1/2)(1/3) = 1/6$.
- Your relatedness to your “full” sister is at least $1/4$ (representing your common mother) plus $1/4$ (your putative common father) times the paternity certainty of $1/3$, totaling $1/4 + (1/4)(1/3) = 1/3$. Since you thus share $1/3$ of your genes with your sister and she provides $1/2$ the genes of her children, you are related to her Children by $(1/2)(1/3) = 1/6$.

In this situation, sociobiology predicts you will invest equally in both your sister's children and your own, all things being equal, since you are related to both sets of children by $1/6$. In societies in which paternity certainty falls under $1/3$, you should invest more heavily in your sister's children than your own; if paternity certainty is more than $1/3$, you should favor your wife's children (Thompson 57).

Histocompatibility and Sexual Preference: The Whoring ways of the Goddess

As a result of attempting to preserve the patriarchal familial line, Jewish patriarchs were encouraged into marriages with other members of the same tribe, often with cousins or other near-relatives. This is both illustrated in early myths and in groups such as the Samaritans: “Their adherence to strict marriage practices means that even within the Samaritans there are genetically distinct family lines which have avoided intermarriage for centuries. ... Such isolation and shared descent means inevitably that harmful recessive genes are likely to manifest themselves as those with common ancestry meet and have children. Among the Samaritans an inherited form of deaf-blindness is relatively frequent.” (Jones 133).

The fertility rites of goddess worshippers and the matriarchal family structure bears an interesting relation to MHC pheromone preferences among women. Ovulating women, like mice, prefer partners with complementary MHC genes who thus have different pheromones from their own. This may be in the interests of versatile tissue recognition and may also serve to encourage diverse recombination among individuals. Pregnant women (and women on the pill) by contrast prefer similar MHC, indicative of a supporting family environment of familial kin as the historical context for human families. The fertility rites of the goddess promote exogamic as opposed to familial sexual liaisons, while the matriarchal family, unlike the partners in a nuclear family consists of siblings with a common genetic endowment.

The Paradox of the Genetic Mother in Jewish Polygyny

Despite the rantings of prophets from Jeremiah to Ezra, historical realities have actually kept the Jewish mother perpetually at the centre of kinship. Despite Yahweh's pretence to hold the spiritual key to the male germ line, it is still the female line, despite the closeted shaved heads of some Jewish matriarchs which has perpetuated the Jewish genetic identity throughout history.

“Nearly all Jews claim symbolically or otherwise, the same ancient source, the patriarch Abraham, two hundred generations ago. ... Two and a half thousand years later the first chapter of a 1994 history of Judaism claimed that “A person is Jewish if he or she has a Jewish mother ... Biological descent rather than religious conviction is the crucial criterion.” Whether that descent is literal or figurative is at the heart of what it means to be Jewish. In spite of many episodes of exclusiveness (as when Ezra insisted that non-Jewish wives be banned) there is not much in ancient texts about the role of blood-line and the primacy of descent over conviction. In the early days Judaism was anxious to convert others and its boundaries were fairly porous. Since then a history of persecution and separation has made Judaism a more exclusive faith than it once was” (Jones 127).

Judaism is inherited down the female line - to be Jewish one's mother must be a Jew. The practice arose because in biblical times (and in Mesopotamia into the middle ages) some Jewish men had a Gentile wife (or concubine) in a polygamous family. Descent of faith hence had to be through the Jewish mother. Later in times of turmoil, whoever the father might have been (and it might be difficult to tell) the mother knew her children and could pass her heritage on to them. The extensive penetration of foreign Y chromosomes into the Jewish gene pool shows the value of this tradition. A history of conversion has also blurred the traditional boundaries of Judaism (Jones 154).

“The *Judische Lexikon* correctly notes that the ‘absence of adoption in Jewish law ... is probably traceable to the fact that the Law is not in principle oriented to monogamy, and only reckons with the child's natural ties, based on birth. The actual blood relationship is the basic criterion, regardless of any legal recognition on the side of the father.’ Putting it plainly, adoption wasn't necessary in Judaism, since the husband could always entrust several wives with maintaining his ancestral line. A good many civil rights were bound up with a flawless genealogy, as Joachim Jeremias points out, for example, in the chapter ‘The Civil Rights of the Full-Blooded Israelite’ in *Jerusalem zur Zeit Jesu* (1969, 332). The most important privilege was this: Such a person's daughters were allowed to marry priests. Furthermore, all important public offices of honor and trust were reserved to the full-blooded Israelite. That included membership in the higher courts of justice, that is, the Sanhedrin, as well as any one of the twenty-three-member criminal courts and the seven-member local executive boards of the Jewish communes, and so forth. In all these cases the genealogies were scrutinized before conferring an office on anyone. As part of this system, which placed such value on the noble chain of blood relationships, the choice of a wife played a major role. One of the main reasons for this was precisely the fact that any dubious birth could not, as it is in modern Western countries, be integrated into the ancestral succession by means of adoption” (Ranke-Heinmann 1992 65).

Twice every year, on the 5th of Ab (around August) and on the Day of Atonement,

there was a dance of the virgins of Jerusalem in the vineyards surrounding the city, a sort of bridal show. Only women took part in it (mixed dancing was unknown), including the daughters of the leading families, even the daughters of the high priest. The young girls wore borrowed white garments so that those who didn't have suitable dresses wouldn't be put to shame. Obviously wealth was not supposed to be the principle of selection-nor beauty either. Significantly, the song that the girls sang as they danced ran: 'Young man, lift up your eyes and look carefully to what you are choosing, turn your eyes to the family tree! Charm is mutable, beauty is a fleeting breath, a woman who fears the Lord will be praised'. Even a wife whose birth was as good as her husband's and who had a good pedigree could prove to be a blot on the escutcheon through external circumstances. If, for example, she became a prisoner of war (where rape was always a possibility), she could no longer guarantee a pure descent" (Ranke-Heinmann 1992 65-6).

"Jewish girls usually got engaged when they were twelve or twelve and a half years old. ... An engagement was the first phase of getting married, which was followed after somewhat more than a year by the bride's being taken to her fiancée's home. Engagement counted as marriage, not de facto but de jure: The fiancée was already the man's wife. If the man died before bringing her home, she was already his widow. Infidelity by the fiancée was considered adultery. If the husband demanded that she be taken before the court and punished, a harsh sentence loomed ahead: A girl between twelve years and a day up to twelve years and six months would be stoned along with her lover. An older girl would be strangled; a younger one was considered a minor and went unpunished" (ibid).

Deut 22:22 If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel. If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her; Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you.

"Fortunately, the scribes had added on so many conditions to the penal provisions for adultery by the fiancée that the punishment was scarcely possible anymore: At least two witnesses had to prove that they had warned the adulterous pair about the consequences facing them, and that the couple had nevertheless continued in their sin. .. Yet executions did take place. An engaged daughter of a priest - according to Lev 21:9 harsher penalties were in order for priests' daughters - was burned to death for adultery. Rabbi Eleazar ben Zadok (born shortly after A.D. 35) witnessed this scene as a young boy (Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem zur Zeit Jesu* [1969], 201). This execution occurred in the reign of King Herod Agrippa I (A.D. 41-44)" (Ranke-Heinmann 1992 35-6).

Although women were allowed to read the Torah at congregational services they were forbidden to read lessons in public in order to 'safeguard the honour of the congregation'. In the first century AD Rabbi Eliezer said 'Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman'. It was for much the same reason that in the Synagogue women were seated apart from men. ... Their exclusion from the priesthood was based on their supposed uncleanness during menstruation as defined in Leviticus 15, a taboo which extends into the Christian church. A priest in Lev 21,22 was to be clean and holy at all times to enter office (Haskins 12).

The Renaissance of the Queen of Heaven

In the previous chapter, we have discussed the questions of genocide and particularly the genocide and slavery of the Midianite women at Ba'al Peor in being made subject to the male paternity rights of the hapiru. This theme is provoked by images of 'whoring' yet in the end all the Midianite women who are not killed are seized as sexual possessions. This patriarchal theme now becomes an endless river of repression throughout the Old Testament.

In agricultural Canaan the Queen of Heaven eclipsed the male god. Adon, the Lord was the son of the Queen of Heaven, and a subordinate deity by her side. ... But to the more conservative elements among the Hebrew tribes those agricultural forms of the Semitic cult were an abomination. "So completely had Yahweh become assimilated to him that not only were the two cults confounded, the Jewish women celebrating the 'lamentations' for Tammuz in the national temple, but the very names had become inextricably blended; Yahweh was as often as not spoken of as 'The Lord,' Adon", or Adonai who is also the Syrian Adonis, born from a tree (Briffault 3 109).

"When the Hebrew tribes under the leadership of the votaries of the god of Sinai came out of the 'land of drought' into a land flowing with milk and honey of the Queen of Heaven, they found their own race there and their own religion but modified by the effects of agricultural civilization ... The Queen of Heaven, under whatever name, she may have been worshipped - possibly Miriam, ... the high-priestess among the Levites, - belonged from time immemorial to Jewish cult ... The Host of Heaven - the very Elohim of the astral deities was a notable component of this worship. ... The temple of Jerusalem was simultaneously dedicated to Yahweh and the Queen of Heaven. Before it stood the asherah, symbolic trees that are throughout Semitic lands associated with the female aspect of the deity" (Briffault 3 110)

The Period of the Judges

In the time of the Judges, the role of women was parallel in power and respect to that of men. Judges 4:4 "And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment."

The Song of Deborah, one of the oldest passages in the Bible, illustrates the continuing strength of women even in times of conflict. The passage also mentions Anath and rings with the echoes of Ba'al. Judges 5:1 "Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying, Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves. ... Lord, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchest out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water. The mountains melted from before the Lord, even that Sinai from before the Lord God of Israel. In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways. The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel."

There is also a severe warning in Judges 19 in the tale of the fate of the concubine of Bethlehem-Judah who 'whored' by going back to the father-in-law for four months. When the Levite returned to claim her, the father-in-law kept saying to stay

a little longer for six days. When they journeyed and turned in at Gibeath of the Benjaminites, men of Belial ask to 'know the man within'. The host offers his daughter to which they refuse. The Levite offers his concubine. She is raped and abused all night and dies on the doorstep. He then cuts her in 12 pieces and sends them to all the coasts of Israel. This story is a glaring affront to those matriarchal traditions which expected the son-in-law to stay with the wife's family as Jacob did.

The sacrifice of the daughter of Jeptah of Judges 11 (p 628), itself a tale of great irony, also seems to have led to an odd tradition of celebrating her fate by daughters of subsequent generations by visiting the high places: "And he sent her away for two months; and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains."

The Period of the Kings

During the era of the Kings, a period of syncretic integration with the settled agricultural Canaanites of the cities began. This was probably a consequence both of the unification of the agrarian and nomadic populations under one rule, and the somewhat more cosmopolitan perspective of the monarchs.



Idol with bull's head and phallus - Palestine (Zehren). Cake mould for the Queen of Heaven - Mari (Malamat).

The Jewish kings followed the tradition of ancient fertility kings. In his beginning as king David danced a naked phallic dance before the Ark of the Covenant in the eyes of all the women to Michal's bane and disgust (p 493). The above idol with bull's head and phallus is likewise consistent with this interpretation, as are the phallic teraphim from Timna.

Sacred kingship was fertility kingship as is evidenced again at the termination of the aged David's reign when he is unable to consort with Abishag 1 Kings 1:1 "Now king David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat. Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my Lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my Lord the king may get heat. So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag a Shunnamite, and brought her to the king. And the damsel was very fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him: but the king knew her not."... And Bathsheba went in unto the king into the chamber: and the king was very old; and Abishag the Shunnamite ministered unto the king. And Bathsheba bowed, and did obeisance unto the king. And the king said, What wouldst thou? And she said unto him, My Lord, thou swarest by the Lord thy God unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne. And now, behold, Adonijah reigneth; and now, my Lord the king, thou knowest it not" ensuring that the Queen Bathsheba's choice became king in his stead.



David watching Bathsheba (Uffizi)

This was the Bathsheba whom David had taken for himself after watching her in the bath 2 Sam 11:2 “And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house. And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child.” Uriah the Hittite, though faithful to David's military cause was then intentionally exposed

in battle and thus slaughtered at David's command.

David's son Absalom had already attempted to usurp the throne by the fertility route 2 Sam 16:22: “So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house; and Absalom went unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel” at the counsel of Ahitophel which was “as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God”. The principal competitors and their counsel were slain after failing to keep David's commands, Absalom by hanging in a tree in an aition of ritual sacrifice of the sacred king accursed, as Jesus was, under Deuteronomy 21:22..

Solomon (p 201), was also a sacred king who was renowned for building the Temple at Jerusalem, but equally reviled for also following the deities of his many wives and building sanctuaries to them on the high places round Jerusalem (p 205). “The temple of Jerusalem was simultaneously dedicated to Yahweh and to the Queen of Heaven. The pillars Jachim and Boaz were said to stand for the sun and moon (p 205). Before it stood the asherah, the symbolic tree [or post] that [was] throughout Semitic lands associated with the female aspect of the deity” (Briffault).

The son of Solomon, went further and moved the image of the goddess into the Temple itself. In Samaria, Jeroboam installed the golden calves at Bethel and Dan 1 Kings 12:28 “Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said “behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi.” As Gen 28:17 refers to Bethel as “the house of god” and “the Gate of Heaven”, this is consistent with the worship of Yahweh as much as any Ba'al.

Afterwards there was a partial removal of the idols, but it did not extend to the high

sanctuaries: 1 Kings 15:11 “And Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did David his father And he took away the sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made. And also Maachah his mother, even her he removed from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove; and Asa destroyed her idol, and burnt it by the brook Kidron. But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa’s heart was perfect with the Lord all his days.”

However Ahaz and returned the equilibrium to the syncretic worship of the nations: 2 Kings 16:2 “Ahaz ... did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord his God... But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel. And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.”



Top left: Bull 12th - 5th cent Palestine. Lower left: Fertility Goddess plaques, left one Hathor/Qadesh with characteristic headdress. Centre: Incense holder from Taanach, with symbols of God and Goddess. Bottom goddess with lions indicative of Inanna or Anath, 3rd tier void symbolic of Yahweh, 2nd tier goats nibbling Asherah tree, surmounted by a top sun-crowned 'golden' calf and volutes likened to Solomon's, but also akin to Inanna's. Right: Terra-cotta Asherah 11th - 6th cent BC. (Gadon, Pritchard 1954)

At Gezeh remains of sacrificed cows and bulls are found consistent with worship of Yaho and Hathor (Briffault 3/110). At Kuntillet in the eighth century BC Yhwh gives a blessing with his Asherah, identified with Canaanite Athirat (McCarter 143). Among the Jews of Elephantine as late as the fifth century B.C., Yahweh was associated with his goddess, and the names of the Elohim were blended, as Anath-Yahu (Kraeling 88).

The Strange Woman of Proverbs

Proverbs echo with the gentle voice of wisdom crying forth from everlasting as noted in “The Song and the Wisdom” (p 210) but there is another more worrying feminine face hovering beside wisdom in the proverbs, ‘folly’ the ‘strange woman’ who does not keep to her house and home:

*For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb,
and her mouth is smoother than oil:*

*But her end is bitter as wormwood,
sharp as a two-edged sword.
Her feet go down to death;
her steps take hold of Sheol.(Prov 5:3)*

*For at the window of my house I looked through my casement,
And beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths,
a young man void of understanding,....*

In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night:

And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart.

So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him,

I have peace offerings with me; this day have I payed my vows.

Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee.

I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt.

I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.

Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning; let us solace ourselves with loves.

For the goodman is not at home, he is gone a long journey: Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths.

For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her.

Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death (Prov 7:6).

The strange woman poses in iconic form the reaction of Jewish patriarchal society to the prospect of a married woman having an affair with a younger man while her husband is away. This is not a professional prostitute but simply a wife who is not staying at home like the good woman should. The implication is that any reproductive freedom for the woman is equivalent to prostitution, while the male may have wives aplenty. Nehama Aschkenasy (1986) compares her to Eve "The first female became the prototype of all women and her story a paradigm of female existence."

Regina Schwartz (1996) in "The Curse of Cain" notes "The laws collude with this metaphor of Israel as a subjugated and disobedient woman: in Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22, both the man and the woman who engage in adultery must die; in Deuteronomy 22:20-21, a bride who cannot prove her virginity must be stoned to death. "Adultery in this larger context is understood not only as an aberration of personal behavior, but also as a social disorder with religious implications: adultery is a disturbance of the order of social relations established by God." The "alien woman"-another man's wife-has forgotten the covenant of God (Prov 2:17), and the link between such faithlessness and landlessness is overt: Those who go to the foreign woman "delight in the perversities of the wicked whose paths are crooked" (Prov 2:14-15). ... For her house bows down to death, and her tracks to the departed. All going in to her do not return, nor do they reach the paths of life.... For the upright shall live (in) the land; and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth; and the transgressors shall be rooted up from it. (Prov 2:18-22) ...The biblical "alien woman" has been described succinctly: "she is an archetype of disorder at all levels of existence."

The Woman at the Window

Several Biblical episodes are aitions for ritual events in the worship of Adonis and the Queen of Heaven as Astarte or Aphrodite. One classic ritual image is that of the Lady at the Window 'prospiciens' who, according to Ovid is turned to stone while looking out at the funeral procession of her rejected lover. More traditionally she is a smiling Goddess Astarte with braided hair and jeweled headdress who may have appeared as a statue in an opened window as part of the ritual of the mourning for Adonis. However the same Aprodite was also described as a shooting star falling into the water and one who leapt from the Leucadian promontory after the death of Adonis (Smith R 373). There are also associated with this rite haunting images of

the death of the priestess of the Goddess. In the legend of the death of Dido who leaps from the palace heights into a funeral pyre (p 186). Two episodes in the Old Testament specifically portray women at windows who look out to their doom, Michal on David and Jezebel on Jehu (Robertson).



David Michaelangelo

2 Sam 6:13 “And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod. ... And as the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart. ... And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to day, who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth

himself! And David said unto Michal, It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel: therefore will I play before the Lord. And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight: and of the maidservants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour. Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death.”



Obelisk of Shalmaneser king of Assyria (828-814 BC) showing Jehu kissing his feet. This man who exterminated the seventy sons of Ahab, the forty-two sons of Ahaziah, a ‘great multitude’ of the followers of Ba'al, and had Jezebel thrown into the street from an upstairs window, trampled by horses and devoured by dogs did not protect Israel but bowed to the Assyrian yoke (Contineau). Josiah raped the sanctuaries and within two decades Israel was taken into exile in Babylon. Not a good track record for the Yahweh-only movement's fire-brand against the feminine.

2 Kings 9:30 “And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window. And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master? And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, Who is on my side? who? And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs. And he said, Throw her down. So they threw her down: and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses; and he trode her under foot. And when he was come in, he did eat and drink, and said, Go, see now

this cursed woman, and bury her: for she is a king's daughter. And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands." One should note that, Ahab Jezebel's husband was a strong king while Jehu is depicted fawning in tribute at the feet of the Assyrian king.

Hosea's Plight and Jeremiah's Lament

The first clear signs of sexual division of the prophets begin with Hosea in the eighth century BC. He took it upon himself to purchase an unfaithful wife who thus represented the archetype of Israel, the unfaithful wife of Yahweh. 3:1 "Then said the Lord unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine. So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley:"

He is clearly siding against the whoring of the Goddess which acts to disrupt the male inheritance lines of the patriarchal supporters of Yahweh 2:2 "Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born, and make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst. And I will not have mercy upon her children; for they be the children of whoredoms. For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink. Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths."

Regina Schwartz (1996) highlights the relation between pollution of the land and the image of the whore: "In the Book of Hosea, two completely contradictory images of Israel's relation to the land are elaborated. The land is depicted as both a prostitute and a wilderness: as a prostitute, because Israel worships foreign gods; as a wilderness, to reflect the nomadic ideal of wandering over land, rather than owning it. Both metaphors depict a margin-a social one in which a woman is not an exclusive possession and a territorial one in which land is outside the boundaries of possession. One image is reviled the land as a prostitute violates the contract that Israel is the exclusive possession of Yahweh-while one is celebrated-the land as a wilderness depicts a nostalgic return to the birth of Israel. Born in the wilderness, the hope is that Israel will be reborn there. But we cannot plausibly read Hosea as a ringing endorsement of an unlanded ideal, for in the end, the period in the wilderness is cast as an interim, a precondition to reentering the cultivated land-the owned land-and when the woman is sent into the wilderness, it is hardly to acknowledge that she is not an object of possession. Instead, it is to purge her so that she can be more completely possessed".

*That is why I am going to lure her
and bring her out into the wilderness
and speak to her heart.*

*I am going to give her back her vineyards,
and make the polluted valley a gateway of hope."
Then she will answer there, as in the days of her youth, and as
the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.*

*I will betroth you to me for ever.
Yes, I will betroth you with righteousness and in judgment,
with mercy and in compassion;
and I will betroth you to me in faithfulness,*

*and you shall know Yahweh.
And it shall be in that day-it is Yahweh who speaks-I will answer.
I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth,
and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and they shall answer jezeel.
I will sow her in the earth, I will love Unloved;
I will say to No-People-of-Mine, "You are my people,"
and he will answer, "You are my God." (Hos 2:14-23)*

Hosea 4 9 further laments the wine and whoredom of the high places and the good shade of the sacred groves”and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings. For they shall eat, and not have enough: they shall commit whoredom and not increase: because they have left of to take heed of the Lord. Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart. My people ask counsel to their stocks ... and they have gone a whoring from under their god. They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars and elms, because the shadow thereof is good: therefore your daughters shall commit whoredom and your spouses shall commit adultery. “Yet he has Yahweh yet be tolerant in a way which becomes lost later 4:14: “I will not punish your daughters when they commit whoredom, nor your spouses when they commit adultery: for themselves are separated with whores, and they sacrifice with harlots: therefore the people that doth not understand shall fall.”

Jeremiah likewise laments Israel as the unfaithful wife 2:1: “Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.” This refrain continues ... 3:1: “They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man’s, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord”.

Jeremiah at 3:8 makes a more specifically social warning of vengeance: “And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also. And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks. ... Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not keep anger for ever.”

Schwartz (1996) notes “The link between sexuality and land pollution reaches a frenzied pitch in the obsession with that most heinous of offenses, prostitution: “Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute; thus, the land will not be prostituted and rifled with incest” (Lev 19:29). A body/land analogy governs the rhetoric that describes women and land as possessions (of one man/deity), women and land as faithful or idolatrous, women and land as monogamous or adulterous, women and land as fertile or barren. But women and land are not only analogous; they become causes and effects in this system of monotheism/monogamy. When Israel worships a foreign deity, she is a harlot, the land is made barren, and she is ejected from the land. Yahweh speaks to Israel:

She then quotes Jer 3:2 a fascinating slant on bedouin life of the times, suggestive of Edom and Nabatea later:

“Lift up thine eyes unto the high places,

*and see where thou hast not been lien with.
In the ways hast thou sat for them,
as the Arabian in the wilderness;
and thou hast polluted the land
with thy whoredoms and with thy wickedness.”*

This acknowledges the involvement of Arabian culture in Israel's cultural life, something that should not be forgotten in the context of Jesus.

The second Isaiah echoes this theme again at 50:1: “Thus saith the Lord, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away”.



Supposed ivories from Ahab's time (Avi-Yonan)

The Revision of Hezekiah

The worship of the Queen of Heaven continued alongside that of Yahweh through the time of the Kings until the fall of the Kingdom of Israel to the Assyrians. The colonization of Samaria was perceived by the more conservative Judaeans as a sign that the ways of tolerance of the Northern Kingdom had led to disaster. Thus in about 720 Hezekiah led a fundamentalist revision: 2 Kings 18:4 “He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves [asherah], and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan”.

However Jeremiah 44:16 notes the continuing popularity of the Queen: “As for the word thou hast unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not harken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the Queen of Heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then we had plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the Queen of Heaven, and poured out drink offerings to her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword, and by the famine. And when we burned incense to the Queen of Heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, did we alone make her cakes or worship her or pour out drink offerings to her, without our menfolk?”

His next passage in 7:15 is prophetic of what is to come. “Seest thou not what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to

the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger. Do they provoke me to anger? saith the Lord: do they not provoke themselves to the confusion of their own faces? Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched.”

However again Manasseh brought the pendulum back: 2 Kings 21:1 “Manasseh ... did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel. For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Ba'al, and made a grove (Asherah), as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them (p 559). And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger. And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house, of which the Lord said ... will I put my name for ever”.

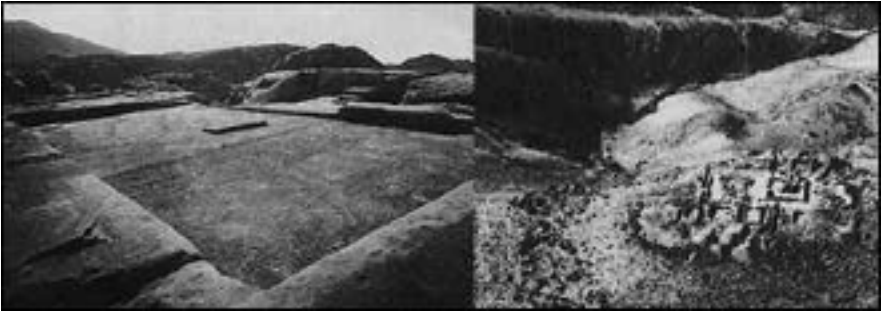
The Rape of the Sanctuaries

But it was with the destruction of the sanctuaries in 622 when Hilkiah persuaded King Josiah that a “hidden” text in the temple (Deuteronomy) revealed the “true faith” of the “Yahweh only” movement. that the principal devastation came. This is arguably the point where ‘no other gods before me’ became strict monotheism - no other gods at all! Much of the Old Testament has been subsequently recomposed to portray the earlier history as monotheistic. This leads on to stoning, and to repression of women for 2500 years. What is utterly significant is that a prophetess is made responsible for the judgement 2 Kings22:8: “And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord ... and Shaphan the scribe ... read it before the king. And ... when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiah and Shaphan the scribe ‘Go ye, enquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us’. So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, wife of Shallum, keeper of the wardrobe; in Jerusalem in the college; and communed with her. And she said ‘Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me ‘Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched”.

2 Chron 34 4-5 “... and in the twelfth year [Josiah] began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. And they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images, that were on high above them, he cut down; and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and made dust of them, and strowed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them. And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars”

Here is the complete episode from 2 Kings 23:3 as an epitaph to religious intolerance and the destruction of an entire cultural ecology on the basis of an apocryphal tract: “And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, ... to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. ... And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, ... to bring forth out of the temple all the vessels that were made for Ba'al, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel.

And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven. And he brought out the grove (asherah) from the house of the Lord, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burned it and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people. And he brake down the pavillions of the effeminate, which were in the house of the Lord, where the women wove hangings for the grove. And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba, and brake down the high places of the gates that were in the entering in of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on a man's left hand at the gate of the city. Nevertheless the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren.



Mensa Sacra at Petra and the great high place at Khirbet Tannur (p 618) (Browning, Glueck)

And he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech (p 627). And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, ... and burned the chariots of the sun with fire. And the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah and Manasseh had made, did the king beat down, and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron.

And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh [Shamash the sun god] the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom [Melkarth] the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile. And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men. [Yahveh was in his origins precisely such a local god of a people - not the only God, of reality, but a jealous one].

Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam had made he brake down, and burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove. And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount, and sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words.

Then he said, What title is that that I see? And the men of the city told him, It is the sepulchre of the man of God, which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that thou hast done against the altar of Bethel. And he said, Let him alone; let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria. And all the houses also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the Lord to anger, Josiah took away, and did to them according to all the acts that he had done in Bethel. And he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men's bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem.

Not only were the Ba'al destroyed, but so was Yahweh's own consort. Instead of the diverse natural forms of Yahweh worship as portrayed in Exodus 20:24: "In all places where I record my name I will come unto these and bless thee", there was only one legitimate form and one place of worship - the Temple at Jerusalem. Just as Marduk slew Tiamat, so the Yahweh movement attempted to destroy the Asherah of fertility.

Deut 12:1: "These are the statutes and judgements ... Ye shall utterly destroy all the places wherein the nations which ye possessed served their gods, upon the mountain and on the high hills and under every green tree. And ye shall overthrow their alters and break their pillars and burn their groves with fire ... But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes ... thither thou shalt come. Take heed of thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest, but in the place the Lord shall choose in any one of thy tribes."

What is significant here is that Deuteronomy 12 confirms its identity as the concealed text in its specific concurrence with these invectives against the Asherah. What is also clear is that it is this Yahweh-only tract which has declared Judaism in the ending of the Hebrew practice of small shrines and tabernacles dotted throughout the towns and countryside from time immemorial. It is thus clear that the Asherah was a Hebrew goddess of the many shrines and not simply an alien Canaanite entity as some modern Jewish commentators endeavor to make out.

This is echoed again in Exodus with specific undertones of feminine seduction of the sons of Israel 34:13 "But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves: For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God: Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice; And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods."

Although this would sound like the sad end of the story for the Queen of Heaven, it was only to be some 36 years later that Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians And the entire country was returned to being the vassal of a pagan civilization. Besides this Edom had continued to worship the Goddess and her consort, particularly in the high places such as Khirbet Tannur. With the emergence of the Nabateans, a whole stream

of worship of the Queen of Heaven and her consort Duchares rose again to prominence to the east of the Jordan.

The Separatist Sentiments of the Exile

The exile brought with it a new sense of alienation and separation, as is characteristic if a small people in another culture adopt exclusive ways to protect their separateness and maintain it against the greater flux of 'foreign' ideas and genetic influences. Effectively the exile thus cemented what was to become the separatist path.

Ezekiel writing during the exile laments at the things he suspects are going on back home in the temple: 8:1 "And I beheld and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire; from the appearance of his loins even downward fire; and from his loins even upward as the appearance of brightness, as the colour of amber. And behold the glory of the god of Israel was there. Then I lifted my eyes ... and behold at the gate of the altar was the image of jealousy. Son of man seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel do here that I should go far from my sanctuary? In the temple "he saw every form of creeping things and abominable beasts and the idols of the house of Israel portrayed on the wall round about... and there stood before them seventy men of the ancients... and a thick cloud of incense went up. At the north door 'there sat women weeping for Tammuz' ... and in between the porch and the altar 'five and twenty men with their backs toward the temple facing the east and they worshipped the sun ... Therefore shall I deal in fury : mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity."

His prescription is an elaboration of Deuteronomy: Exek 7:13 "Then shall thee know that I am the Lord when their slain men shall be among their idols round their altars, upon every high hill, in the tops of the mountains, and under every green tree and under every thick oak, , the place whwere they did offer sweet savour to their idols."

Schwartz (1996) has cutting comment: "Ezekiel 16, the extended allegory of Israel as a whore, brings the relation between whores, exile, and monotheism (adultery, defiled land, and idolatry) into sharp focus. It is the story of a child being born and growing up wild and unloved in the field, and when she matures into puberty, of her being owned, sexually and materially, by Yahweh."

"And I passed by you and I looked on you and behold, your time was the time of love. And I spread my skirt over you and I covered your nakedness. And I swore to you and I entered into a covenant with you and you became Mine. She is now washed, anointed, dressed, wrapped, covered, and adorned with silks, fine linen, embroidery, gold, and silver. And you were very beautiful and you advanced to regal estate. And your name went out among the nations, because of your beauty; for it was perfect, by My Splendor which I had set on you."

"But then young Israel commits adultery with the nations: with Egypt, Assyria, Canaan, Chaldea - with, not incidentally, all of Israel's enemies" (ibid).

"At every head of the highway you have built your high place and have made your beauty despised, and have parted your feet to all who passed by, and have multiplied your fornications. You have whored with the sons of Egypt. . . . You have whored with the sons of Assyria without being satisfied. You have multiplied your fornication in the land of Canaan."

"But this adulteress has not, strictly speaking, been a harlot, for she has not taken wages; instead, she has done all the giving, even paying her lovers for their services. "The adulterous wife: instead of her husband, she takes strangers. They give a gift to an harlots, but you give your gifts to all your lovers, and bribe them to come to you from all around, for your fornication." Presumably, Israel the harlot would be superior

to Israel the adulteress, for she would receive property instead of giving her property away, and that careful distinction offers a clue that, throughout this harangue against the adulteress, the issue is less sexual morality than ownership of property. The emphasis on property is underscored by the punishment of the adulteress. She will be stripped of her garments, of her wealth; Israel will be stripped naked and then brutally stoned and stabbed” (ibid)

“Because your lewdness was poured out and your nakedness was bared, in your fornications with your lovers and the idols of your abominations ... therefore I will gather all your lovers with whom you have been pleased, even all whom you have loved with aH whom you have hated, and I will uncover your nakedness to them, and they will see all your nakedness. . . . They shag also strip you of your clothes and shall take your beautiful things and leave you naked and bare ... and they shall stone you with stones and cut you with their swords.”

Schwartz sums up the whole situation: “Monotheism, then, is not simply a myth of one-ness, but a doctrine of possession, of a people by God, of a land by a people, of women by men”.

Ezekiel continues in this vein concerning cultural pollution 20:27: “Your fathers have blasphemed me...For when I had brought them into the land, for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to them, then they saw every high hill and all the thick trees, and they offered there their sacrifices, and there they presented the provocation of their offering; there they made also their sweet savour and poured out their drink offerings... Wherefore say unto the house of Israel Are ye polluted after the manner of your fathers? and commit ye whoredom after their abominations?”

Later in chapter 23 he relates the downfall of such women: “there were two women, the daughters of one mother [Aholah of Samaria and Aholibah of Jerusalem]: and they committed whoredoms in Egypt; they committed whoredoms in their youth: there were their breasts pressed and they bruised the teats of their virginity ... and poured their whoredom on her ... And Aholah played the harlot when she was mine; and she doted on her lovers, the assyrians and her neighbours, which were clothed with blue ... with all their idols she defiled herself, neither she left her whoredoms brought from Egypt ... And Aholibah sent messages unto them in Chaldea ... and the Babylonians came to her in the bed of love... therefore I will bring [thy lovers] against thee on every side ... because thou hast gone a whoring after the heathen and because thou art polluted with their idols... and with the men of a common sort were brought Sabeans from the wilderness, which put bracelets on their hands, and beautiful crowns on their heads ... and so they went in”.

Israel After the Rains

When the Jews returned from the exile they were dismayed to find those who had stayed in the Holy Land had reverted to their old ways and intermarried with Canaanite wives. Those returning disregarded the cultural accommodation of their compatriots and unilaterally imposed their own form of exilic separatism on Israel. Nevertheless the urban population was not so easily to be suppressed and invectives by Nehemiah indicate the post-exilic reforms were slow to take effect.

Ezra arrived in 397 BC and in the pouring rain delivered a diatribe that every man should sever his ties of love and marriage with the Canaanite women 10:9: “Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the

great rain. And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel. Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives. Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do.”

Miles (379) notes “There follows in this tenth and final chapter of Ezra a mass divorce and expulsion of children. Scores of Jewish man are listed by name, each of whom had married a non-Jewish woman and in some cases had children by her. All of these women and children are driven out.”

However Jonah, Ruth the Moabitess lover of Boaz and not least the second Isaiah opposed this move to separatism 56:3: “Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying, The Lord hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree.” Ben-Sira of Ecclesiasticus admits no distinction between Jew and Gentile as such 10:22: “sojourner and stranger, foreigner and poor man their glorifying is in the fear of the Lord.”

By contrast Tobit 4:12 declares “take first a wife of the seed of thy fathers, and take not a strange wife which is not of thy father's tribe: for we are all sons of the prophets”. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs echoes this “take therefore thyself a wife without blemish or pollution, while yet thou art young and not of the race of strange nations”. The Book of Jubilees goes so far as to proscribe death by stoning for an Israelite who would give his daughter or sister to a Gentile, and the woman is to be burned to death, indicating the conservative position of the Essenes in the face of Greek influence in Jerusalem. However the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs in the first century BC concedes a stem from which “shall grow a rod of righteousness to the Gentile to judge and save all that call upon the Lord” suggestive both of integration and Jesus' gentile mission.

Under Every Green Tree

Frazer 1918 “The Golden Bough” 3/30-61

“Among the sacred trees of the ancient Hebrews the oak and the terebinth seems to have held a foremost place. Scarcely any tree figures more largely in Biblical narrative and poetry than the oak although many commentators also identify these references with the terebinth. The Hebrew words *elah* and *allon* are indiscriminate and hard to identify precisely. The vowel differences appear to come from Masoretic scribes of the middle ages. Of the oaks the most abundant is *Quercus pseudo-coccifera*, the prickly evergreen oak, in Arabic *sindian*, which covers Mt. Carmel and the west flanks of Anti-Lebanon. The deciduous *Valonia* oak *Quercus aegilops* is scattered over Carmel, abounds on Tabor and in Bashan. *Quercus infectoria* also occurs in abundance near Kedes the ancient Kedesh Naphthalli. The terebinth *Pistacia terebinthus* is a deciduous tree from which a pure turpentine is made.”



Mt. Tabor, the supposed site of Jesus' sermon surrounded by small groves (Phaidon).

"In the nineteenth century many of the ancient oaks still remained. In the plain of Sharon were vast park-like oak glades, the largest and most impressive oak forest in western Palestine - the enchanted forest of Tasso. The strong arms of these trees spread out so near the ground that one cannot walk erect beneath them. Such forests also extended east of the Jordan. Of the ancient Batanea it was said "The mountains are well-wooded with forests of evergreen oaks, and the sides terraced". "The trees were often of great size ... somewhere a little to the east of us was fought the battle with the rebellious Absalom, and by just such an oak was he caught. "And Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth; and the mule that was under him went away. And a certain man saw it, and told Joab, and said, Behold, I saw Absalom hanged in an oak." How we realized the statement "For the battle was there scattered over the face of all the country: and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured."

"The oaks which thus abound ... are still often regarded with superstitious veneration ... almost every village in the wadys and on those mountains has one or more of such thick oaks which are believed to be inhabited by Benat Ya'kob - daughters of Jacob, seemingly an ancient pre-Islamic idolatry. In Syria there remained at Bludan an ancient temple of Ba'al with a grove of ancient oaks beneath it and at Barado two groves of evergreen oaks which are wishing places where the peasants will break a crock or lay up a new stean in the little cave beneath a rock. Connected is the custom of burying their holy men under those trees and erecting domed shrines Wely to them there. Many of these are ancient high places which have become groves of the saints, stations of Mukams. Wood of the sacred trees is not supposed to be burned for fuel."

"A similar association of tombs with trees is to be found at Tel el Kadi "the mound oft he judge" the ancient Dan where the springs of the Jordan take their rise (p 481). The place is a natural mound of limestone rock some eighty feet high and a half mile across. On the western side are an almost impenetrable thicket of reeds oaks and oleanders with the largest single fountain in the world. On the eastern side overhanging another feeder of the Jordan stand a noble holm oak and a terebinth, shading the graves of Moslem saints. Their branches are hung with rags and trumpery offerings.

At the site of ancient Shiloh is a large and noble oak tree called Balutat-Ibrahim - Abraham's oak - one of the 'inhabited trees' which the local inhabitants are afraid to sleep under."

"The terebinth is not in forests but in open spaces, relieving the monotony of the rolling downs in ancient Moab and Ammon. Many terebinths remain to this day objects of veneration in their neighbourhood, often covered in rags and age in a favourite burying place for local sheiks. In the warm dry climate of Moab the terebinth is the principal tree while in the cooler rainier districts of Gilead and Galilee the oak flourishes more."

"Trees may grow near a sanctuary or solitary near a spring or on a hill and are nevertheless revered as having a spirit who is in effect circumscribed by the grove or tree, unlike the saints in the shrines who can transport themselves to where they are invoked. "Woe to the Arab who would dare to cut a branch or even a leaf" Under its shade the sick go to be healed of their infirmities. The mere touch communicates to them the virtue of the tree. Fastening a cloth fastens the sickness from the patient to the tree. Hair may also be left shorn in veneration for the tree as in ancient worship of Astarte."

We have mentioned how Hosea, Ezekiel have denounced the sacred groves and high places. Isaiah is even more specific "For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired and ye shall be confounded for the gardens which ye have chosen" - perhaps the gardens of Adonis (ceremonial arrangements of flowers and herbs which sprouted and wilted). And the second Isaiah "Ye that inflame yourselves among the oaks under every green tree, that slay the children in the valleys under the clefts of the rocks" appears to refer to the sacrifice of children to Moloch which is simply 'king' with an ominous intonation. This has been variously identified with Yahweh himself at Topet, with king worship and with Astarte. Jeremiah says again "Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the soul of the innocent poor: I have not found it at the place of breaking in but on every oak" It thus appears that the blood of the sacrificed children was offered to or smeared on the oaks before they were burned in the fire (p 627).

"But if in later times of Israel, the worship of the oak or terebinth was denounced by the prophets as a heathenish rite, at an earlier time they played an important part in the history of the Hebrews and Yahweh himself was associated closely with them. In Genesis, His first recorded appearance to Abraham (12:6) is at the oracular oak or terebinth of Shechem where Abraham built him an altar. Abraham dwelt beside the oaks or more probably terebinths of Mamre at Hebron and also built an altar to the Lord and here in the heat of the day God appeared to him in the likeness of three men [like the son of man] who under their shade took sustenance with Abraham (13:18)".

"We similarly have an event with Gideon and an angel (Judg 6:11) and the oracular oak of the augurs also near Shechem (Jud 9:37) which may have been used in a druid-like way to interpret from the rustlings of the leaves and the bird calls. "The beautiful vale of Shechem, embosomed with olives, orange-groves and palms and watered by plenteous rills still presents perhaps the richest landscape in all Palestine and of old it would seem to have been a great seat of tree worship. At all events in its history we meet again and again the sacred oaks and terebinth. Thus Jacob took the "strange gods" of his household together with the amulet earrings and buried them under the oak or terebinth at Shechem (Gen 35:4). Under such an oak at Shechem Joshua set up the stone as a witness (24:26) and at the oak of the pillar in Shechem that Abimelech

was made king (Judg 9:6) and later in Joshua 19:26 we hear of the 'king's oak' on the border of Asher. Rebecca's nurse Deborah was buried under the oak of weeping (Gen 35:8) and Saul was buried under the oak at Jabesh (1 Chron 10:12). Saul shortly before his coronation also met three men with loaves (1 Sam 10:3) suggesting a ritual role akin to Abrahams three men and cementing his burial again as a sacred kingly cycle associated with the oak".

"Josephus tells us that in his day many monuments of Abraham were at Hebron and that six furlongs from the town grew a very large terebinth which was said to have stood there since the foundation of the world. Eusebius confirms this stood until the 4th century AD. The middle of Abraham's three guests Eusebius identified with Jesus himself. All three angels were worshipped by the local people. Constantine wrote to him stating "The place which is called 'at the oak of Mamre' where we learn that Abraham had his home is said to be polluted by certain superstitious persons in various ways; for it is reported that most damnable idols are set up beside it and an altar stands hard by and that unclean sacrifices are constantly offered". "There every year a famous festival is still held by the people of the neighbourhood as well as the inhabitants of the more distant parts of Palestine and by the Phoenicians and Arabians. Very many also assemble for trade, to buy and sell; for everyone sets great store on the festival. The Jews do so because they pride themselves in Abraham as their founder; the Greeks do so on account of the visit of the angels; the Christians do so because there appeared at that time to the pious man One who in after ages made himself manifest to the Virgin. ... and all of them here refrain from women ... although the women beautify and adorn their persons and show themselves freely ... for there is no lewd conduct though the sexes camp together and sleep promiscuously. No water is drawn from the well for some set lamps there, pour wine or cakes money, perfumes or incense". Thus it appears that at Hebron an old heathen worship of the sacred tree and the sacred well survived in full force down to the establishment of Christianity. After the second Jewish war and the last siege and destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under Hadrian in 119 AD a vast multitude of captive men and women were here sold into slavery here. The end at the same spot as the beginning.

"The tree, or its successor is still shown in a grassy field a mile and a half to the west of Hebron. It is a fine old evergreen oak. The trunk is 23 feet in girth, the span of its boughs is 90 feet. There is not a single terebinth in the neighbourhood of Hebron".

